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Planners look at new parks for center city

Urban sites more flexible than their suburban equals.

By Nichole Monroe Bell
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Charlotte's Frazier Park is an urban gathering spot. FILE

A team of consultants and city and county planners is close to presenting a 10-year plan for bringing more parks to the center city and South End.

The plan, scheduled to be presented to the public on Nov. 29, will include urban parks that are smaller, yet more diverse, than their suburban counterparts. The plan also aims to connect the parks with a network of green spaces.

"We have parks, but to create a memorable city, you have to have a park system – one with greenways and boulevards," said Cheryl Myers, senior vice president of planning and development for Center City Partners. "People who move to an urban area give up their front yards, and their front yards become the parks."

Parks are the No. 1 public amenity center-city residents ask for, Myers said. That request has become more persistent as more people move to the area.

The population living roughly inside the Interstate 277 loop is expected to rise nearly 50 percent, to 19,000, by 2012, according to Center City Partners. Just south of that, along the light rail line, the population is expected to triple in the next two years, reaching a population of about 7,000 residents.

A former industrial hub, South End has no county parks. Center city has about 33 acres of parks with another 13 acres already planned.

Officials with Indiana-based Pros Consulting, which is working with the city, said the best urban parks provide a sense of comfort, are readily accessible and have a variety of uses and a sociability factor.

For example, while a suburban park might feature one primary use such as a soccer or baseball field, an urban park would be flexible enough to host citywide festivals or just a small gathering of friends.

Urban parks might include snack carts or campfires or even feature a place for pets – like a dog park – to encourage social interaction between neighbors, said Phil Myrick, vice president of New York-based Project for Public Spaces.

Such parks also typically stay open much later to accommodate a city-that-never-sleeps lifestyle common among center-city dwellers.

"The vision is very much to have a city within a park," said Myrick, who is helping Charlotte's park-planning efforts. "Center city would have livable, comfortable streets that were part of the park system."



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Whytewulf wrote on 11/09/2008 05:24:51 PM:

About time. I also like the fact that they would be open later. Uptown parks and such should be open later, it's another part of the night life. Outdoor bands, picnics, etc.

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