

Walker Square Park

Site Framework Document

January 2026



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
PARKS

Purpose

Implementing Milwaukee County's 2050 Park and Open Space Plan and Milwaukee County Parks' Strategic Plan begins with a *Park Site Framework Document*.

This Walker Square Park *Site Framework Document* is a formal statement of the Walker Square Park mission. The development of this document integrates and coordinates various levels of planning from a single, shared understanding of what is most important about the park, and how it relates to the overall Milwaukee County Parks (MCP) System, to the neighborhood's practical understanding and use of the park on a day-to-day basis.

The park framework document was developed as a collaborative effort between MCP staff and in this case, through input received from the Walker Square Neighborhood Association (WSNA), local residents and park users. The multidisciplinary approach provides the opportunity for a variety of sources and hierarchies of information about a park to be compiled and integrated.

Information within this document has been collected through existing long-range plans, historical records, boots on the ground evaluations, and stakeholder discussions. It has been refined to determine the most important attributes of the park and presents an assessment of planning and data needs that will be needed to guide future planning efforts for Walker Square Park.

This document and the recommendations synthesize data and ideas from several sources including existing park planning documents, other related plans, community engagement, staff input, and design practitioners.

Park Typology and Related Definition

Neighborhood Park

A neighborhood park, typically of a size and scale that blends into the surrounding neighborhood, should feature safe pedestrian access for nearby residents. A neighborhood park may be defined by its use and facilities and may serve as the recreational and social focus of adjoining neighborhoods, contributing to their distinct identity.

Attribute	Details	Walker Square Park Existing Conditions
Size of site	Three to 10 acres; occasionally smaller. Preferably eight acres.	2.07 acres
Service radius	0.5 mile.	82% of MCP survey respondents live within 0.25 miles
Location	On a local or collector street. Preferably next to a school and linked by trails to other parks.	Mineral St: Principal Arterial Washington St: Collector 9th St & 10th St: Collector Adjacent to I-43 on and off ramps Across from Bruce-Guadalupe School
Duration of visit	One hour or less.	73% of Milwaukee County Parks survey respondents spend less than one hour at Walker Square Park ¹
Amenities	Features one signature amenity (e.g., major playground, splash pad/wading pool, or sport court); no public restrooms unless necessary for signature amenity. May include one non-programmed sports field, playgrounds for ages 2 to 5 and 5 to 12 with some shaded elements, loop trails, and benches and small picnic shelters next to play areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground facility for ages 5 - 12 • Wading Pool • Gathering Area • Signage • Benches • Shaded Elements • Pavilion with Restrooms
Landscape Design	Appropriate design to enhance the park theme/use/experience. Should feature natural/artificial barrier with consideration for sight lines and vision corners if on an arterial street.	Square layout with internal sidewalk in shape of an X, stamped concrete center "plaza"
Land Usage	Approximately 85 percent active/15 percent passive ² .	Approximately 15% active/ 85% passive Total active space (playground & wading pool) – 0.27 acres
Programming	Typically, none, but a signature amenity may be programmed.	Limited programming by United Community Center and other neighborhood groups
Maintenance standards	Aim for Level 2; some amenities may require Level 1.	Level 1 & 2
Signage	Directional signage and facility/amenity regulations to enhance user experience.	Park sign at SE corner, other signage throughout the park
Parking	Include on-street parking adjacent to park to maximize usable space. As necessary, provide 5 to 10 spaces including handicap spaces within park. Traffic calming devices encouraged next to park.	Ample street parking on all sides
Lighting	Security or amenity only. Lighting on dual system with 50 percent of lights off at a set time and 50 percent on all night for security with attention to lighting park paths.	Milwaukee signature harp style pole and fixtures along walkways.
Other	Customized to demographics of neighborhood.	Neighborhood context is present in signage and traditional neighborhood square

¹ Survey conducted between August – October 2024.

² A passive recreation area is defined as an area within an outdoor recreation site that provides an opportunity for such leisurely recreational activities as walking, rest and relaxation, and informal picnicking. These areas are generally located in parks or in urban open space sites, and usually consist of a landscaped area with mowed lawn, shade trees, and benches.

Walker Square Neighborhood Map



Park Purpose Statement

Walker Square Park serves as a vital community hub within the Walker Square Neighborhood, providing a welcoming green space for relaxation, recreation, and social interaction. This park aims to enhance the quality of life for local residents by offering a safe and well-maintained environment where individuals and families can gather, engage in physical activities, and enjoy the natural surroundings.

The park's benefits to the community are multifaceted, including promoting physical health through exercise and active play, fostering community connections, and offering a calm escape from urban life.

Walker Square Park's central plaza enhances the park, acting as a node for community events and activities. The central plaza square is similar in style to the traditional town square design found in many Latin American countries. This aspect of the park is highly valued by the surrounding Hispanic community and serves as a gathering space for socialization and community events.

Ongoing community engagement is crucial to the park's success, with strong partnerships established with nearby residents, neighborhood groups like the WSNA and Friends of Walker Square and local businesses. These collaborations ensure that the park continues to meet the evolving needs of the community and remains a vibrant and inclusive space for all. It also ensures there are eyes on the space and accountability at the neighborhood level for both use and maintenance.

Milwaukee County Parks is committed to upholding and advancing the sustainable practices implemented across the MCP System in Walker Square Park.

Walker Square Park serves as a cornerstone of community well-being, fostering social ties, promoting health, and engaging residents in the stewardship of their neighborhood.



Figure 1: Walker Square Park Historical Plaque.



Figure 2: Pavilion within Walker Square Park.

Existing Data and Plans

History of the Park

Walker Square Park, originally referred to as Walker Square, was created after being donated to the City of Milwaukee in 1837 by George H. Walker. Initially unimproved forest land, it underwent significant enhancements in the 1880s, including the addition of a large fountain, flower beds, and gravel paths. In the 1930s, the park saw further developments with modern play facilities and a small pavilion as well as the removal of the fountain. The pavilion was constructed in 1941. In 1995, a modern playground replaced the northeast path.³

Existing Plans

Milwaukee County Parks Long-Range Park and Open Space Plan

The Milwaukee County Parks Long-Range Park and Open Space Plan is the overarching vision for the County Parks System. This plan discusses the past, present and future of the system, with a planning horizon of 2050 and serves as a guide for park and open space planning for the region. While the plan does not give specific details for individual parks, the priorities of the plan and the goals outlined can be applied to Walker Square Park. For an in-depth analysis of how Walker Square Park meets the amenities and conditions of a neighborhood park as defined in the Parks and Open Space Plan, see the Typology section on page 3.



Figure 3: Walker Square Park, 1914. Wisconsin Historical Society. Note the monumental fountain, acting as a major attraction.

1. The Role of Public Input

Walker Square Park is an excellent representation of how to effectively gather and implement public input. MCP conducted an online public survey to better understand who the park users are, what amenities/facilities at the park are most valued by the community, and how the park can be improved. Additionally, the County's open dialogue with the neighborhood association and Walker Square Park Friends Group continues to be beneficial in understanding the role the park plays in the neighborhood and how the future of the park can be molded through community partnership.

2. Maintain and Improve as Necessary Existing County-Owned Parks and Outdoor Recreation Sites

This recommendation from the plan focuses on enhancing the quality of existing parks. Smaller Neighborhood Parks and Mini Parks can sometimes be overlooked compared to the County's larger Regional Parks. Walker Square Park is well-suited for this recommendation as basic repairs and maintenance could improve the user experience. The plan also emphasizes the importance of partnering with local municipalities and community organizations. Walker Square Park has both partnerships in place, supported by financial assistance from the City of Milwaukee's tax incremental financing district and community engagement from the WSNA and UCC. Improvements to the park are backed by more than just the County Parks System.

³ [Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory](#), State Historic Preservation Office, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin

Milwaukee County Parks Strategic Plan

The Milwaukee County Parks Strategic Plan does not go into detail about specific parks. However, individual parks play a key role in realizing the strategic goals and priorities of the Plan. Three of the plan's identified priority actions can be applied to Walker Square Park.

1. Develop Long-Range Plans for Individual Parks

This document is the first step in long-range planning for the system's individual parks. The objective of this document is to establish a record of existing conditions and to apply park best practices and community and stakeholder input to plan for future improvements. These improvements will work to better serve the park's users, increase safety and foster a community space that reflects the neighborhood's cultural character.

2. Transition to more natural areas - reinvest in forestry, tree canopy, and non-maintained areas; use environmentally sustainable techniques

Walker Square Park can integrate these priorities by increasing future tree plantings to build upon the existing tree canopy. Additionally, as park facilities are replaced, like the playground, wading pool and pavilion, future facilities can be constructed using environmentally sustainable techniques.

3. Provide multi-lingual signage in targeted areas and multi-lingual options for external communications and processes

This is a priority that Walker Square Park has already integrated. Many of the signs within the park are in English and Spanish. With the large Hispanic/Latino population within the service area, it is critical that Park signage is in Spanish. This should continue and the Parks System should consider undertaking an audit of all signage in the park to ensure all critical signage is multilingual. Currently the playground in Walker Square Park has bi-lingual sign panels.

Milwaukee County Parks Natural Areas Strategic Plan

The Natural Areas Strategic Plan goes deeper into the needs for restoration, management and preservation of the natural areas within the County Park System. The plan explores the priorities of plant and wildlife diversity and ecological resilience. Many of the parks in the County Park System preserve and maintain natural areas that provide habitat for plants and wildlife. This plan also highlights some of the special designations of natural areas in the Park system.

Walker Square Park does not currently have any designated natural areas.

Walker Square Action Plan

The City of Milwaukee created the Walker Square Action Plan in December of 2015. This neighborhood plan includes specific references and recommendations for Walker Square Park. The City's plan was created independently from Milwaukee County Parks and gives valuable insight into the needs and desires of the neighborhood of what it would like to see improved at Walker Square Park. It is recognized as a complementary effort.

The Action Plan describes the park as a central and defining public square for the neighborhood. It provides a crucial open space for play, relaxation, reflection, and community events, enhancing the urban environment for nearby residents and schools.



Figure 4: Walker Square Park

The Action Plan lists investing in Walker Square Park as the #1 key action related to improving the public realm. The Action Plan goes into great detail outlining specific improvements. These improvements include:

- **Playground and Wading Pool Maintenance:** The plan emphasizes the importance of maintaining the playground and wading pool, ensuring play opportunities for children of all ages, and considering community input for future upgrades or replacements.
- **Pavilion Restoration and Modernization:** It suggests restoring the pavilion, modernizing facilities, and enhancing the surrounding area with additional programming and possible architectural changes to improve usability and aesthetics.
- **Green Space Utilization:** The plan recommends maintaining different sections of the park for passive recreation, flexible play, and picnic areas, incorporating amenities like grilling stations and picnic shelters.
- **Central Plaza Functionality:** The plan highlights the need for an open central plaza that accommodates various public events, suggesting the use of movable furniture and high-quality materials to enhance the space's functionality and appeal.

The plan also suggests adding a Bublr bike station, which was completed in 2016.



Figure 5: The central plaza in Walker Square Park stamped pavement in a decorative pattern, but little other permanent programming.

Service Area Demographics

Equity Index

Milwaukee County Parks System is focused on creating safe and inclusive spaces that reflect the community. They work to promote racial equity through investments in parks that rank high on Milwaukee County Park's Equity Index, which assesses parks based on factors like socio-economic status, crime rates, population demographics, and tree canopy coverage. This tool helps inform decisions related to park development and is reviewed annually to ensure alignment with Milwaukee County's vision of achieving racial equity. The Equity Score Index is on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest equity need.

Walker Square Park's 2025 Equity Index Score is a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10. Walker Square Park ranks 5th in the entire system, indicating a higher equity need, and more targeted investments in this space is needed.

Demographics		
Population	Walker Square Park Service Area*	Milwaukee County
Total Population	18,108	916,205
Age		
Under 5 years	7.27%	6.26%
5 to 9 years	8.66%	6.74%
10 to 14 years	9.04%	6.37%
15 to 17 years	5.17%	6.84%
Race		
White alone	25.24%	51.96%
Black or African American alone	13.02%	26.17%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	2.51%	0.80%
Asian alone	2.63%	4.94%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.08%	0.04%
Some Other Race alone	32.79%	6.80%
Population of two or more races	23.72%	9.28%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino	69.26%	17.21%
Not Hispanic or Latino	30.74%	82.79%
Income		
Median Household Income	\$41,336	\$63,185

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2023

* U.S. Census Tracts within 0.5 miles of Walker Square Park

Site Assessment: Fundamental Structures, Features, & Resources

This section provides an independent analysis (in this case, a third-party consultant) of current conditions in Walker Square Park based on a site visit conducted in April 2025. This Site Assessment was conducted for approximately one hour during the middle of the day on a weekday. Only two park users (two children) were present during the duration of the assessment.

Park Layout/Design

The design of this space is formal. It is a one square block square with crossing walkways leading from the corners of the block to a central plaza. Programming for the park is broken into four areas, defined by the pavilion to the east, water feature and playground to the north, a picnic area to the south, and an open play field to the west.

Amenities

Playground

The playground, situated at the northeast corner of the park, caters to children aged 5-12. First constructed in the early 1960's and last replaced in 2012, the playground includes various climbing structures, a poured-in-place rubber surfacing, and seating areas. The playground was frequently utilized by schools affiliated with the neighboring United Community Center. Additionally, bilingual signage is provided in both English and Spanish.

- Condition – Fair
 - Last Inspection (by MCP staff): February 14, 2025 (Low frequency inspection – quarterly/semiannually)
 - Issues identified:
 - Metal surfaces have paint chipping.
 - Belt swing chain showed excessive wear. 1 was replaced on inspection date.
 - Belt swing hangers showed excessive wear. 2 were replaced on inspection date.
 - Rubber ground – scheduled for replacement in August 2025.
 - Equipment – in fair condition. 13 years into the 23 years expected service life.
 - Size: Playground is 5,765 Square Feet, or approximately 0.13 Acres
 - Exercise equipment in good condition (separate from playground)
 - Significant drainage concerns
 - Drainage in the playground area has been noted as a concern by Milwaukee County Parks staff. Walker Square Park has a high point of approximately 620 ft (North American Vertical Datum 1988) in the northwest corner and slopes very gradually to an elevation of approximately 615 ft along the eastern and southern park boundaries. Water does not move quickly off this relatively flat site, which can lead to ponding during heavy rain events.



Figure 6: Walker Square Park Playground. April 2025.

Wading Pool

The wading pool is situated at the north of the park. Approximately 60' by 40', the wading pool is intended for younger children to use during warmer months. A fence encloses the wading pool and numerous benches provide seating. The wading pool is operated by Milwaukee County Parks personnel in the summers. Parks anticipates an Aquatics Study with site-specific recommendations will be completed in late summer of 2025. Any recommendation for Walker Square Park would be considered an amending appendix to this framework document.

- Condition – Poor
 - Last recorded site assessment (by MCP staff): July 26, 2017
 - Issues identified:
 - Good condition at the time.
 - Minor maintenance needed in the mechanical room.
 - Wading pool – due to be replaced. Pending Aquatics Plan findings (June 2025)
 - Fence – Fair condition.
 - Seating – Good condition
 - Size: Wading pool area is 6,031 Square Feet, or approximately 0.14 Acres



Figure 7: Walker Square Park Wading Pool. April 2025.

Plaza

Walker Square Park is unique in the County Parks System as it features one of the County's only examples of a traditional neighborhood square. There is a strong desire to maintain the traditional neighborhood square design. Future improvements to the park should prioritize retaining this design. The plaza has looked different throughout the park's history but is currently at the center of the park denoted by stamped concrete. The Walker Square community hosts events on the plaza including farmer's markets and festivals.

- Condition – Good
 - Evidence of cracking and prior sealing
 - Stamped areas do not stand out and are in poor condition.
 - Size: Functional plaza space is 7,837.6 Square Feet or approximately 0.17 Acres
 - Plaza functions as a community gathering space or communal back patio and is used for various activities such as festivals and farmer's markets. Community feedback indicates a desire for more seating options and improved 'back patio' functionality for informal gatherings.



Figure 8: Walker Square Park Plaza. April 2025.

Pavilion

The pavilion is situated at the eastern end of the park. Constructed in 1941, it features restrooms and a central gathering area. The pavilion faces the central plaza area. Currently, the operation of the pavilion is limited, only opening when Milwaukee County Parks personnel are present to manage the wading pool during the warmer months. The pavilion's community room is also periodically used by the Walker Square Neighborhood Association for community meetings.

- Building components listed as Currently Critical in asset assessment completed in March 2023:
 - Ceilings
 - Exterior doors
 - Interior doors
 - Fireplace stone
 - Flooring
 - Asphalt shingles
 - Wood fascia on roof
 - Both restrooms
 - Windows
- Operation Concerns
 - Not open consistently
 - Outdated facilities
 - Restrooms can be accessed from exterior. However, a locked interior door could provide access for patrons to access unauthorized areas if left open and unsupervised.
 - Vehicular access to the shelter comes from a curb cut along S. 9th Street
 - Lack of adequate ADA accessibility



Figure 9: Walker Square Park Pavilion. April 2025

Landscape

Greenspace

The park's greenspace takes up the south and west quadrants. This area is unprogrammed and is dotted with established trees offering shade.

- Condition – Fair
 - Grassy areas are worn in places due to heavy use.
 - Size: Greenspace consists of two roughly equal triangular areas; a shaded picnic area in the south part of the square (20,309 SF), and a more open unprogrammed play area in the western portion of the square (21,498 SF). Total greenspace is approximately 41,806 square feet or approximately 0.96 acres.



Figure 10: Large open grass play space. April 2025

Picnic Area

The picnic area is comprised of the greenspace at the south end of the park. This area is dotted with picnic tables during warm months.

- Condition – Good
 - Well maintained.
 - Picnic tables are in good condition.

Shade/Tree Canopy

- Condition: Good
- Walker Square Park is home to 34 mature trees, not counting street trees.
- Tree species include:
 - Maple, Silver / Norway
 - Ash, White / Green
 - Common hackberry
 - Crab apple
 - Spruce
- The picnic area is almost entirely shaded by mature deciduous trees. This is a highly desirable park feature. Succession planting should be considered as trees age to preserve as much canopy cover as possible in this area.
- The open play field is lined with trees along the walkways. This planting pattern provides shades walking conditions and unobstructed space for play.

Site Landscaping

Condition - Fair

- Landscaping in this park is minimal and consists primarily of:
 - Mowed Grass. Grass has average wear throughout with bare spots from heavy use in certain locations. Assessment completed prior to growing season.
 - Park Trees. Numerous mature trees exist.
- No ornamental plantings or seasonal containers are present.
- Current landscaping is functional and appropriate for the current maintenance standard.

Site Seating

Condition – Fair

- Benches are present in the park along the paths, flanking the main plaza and in the wading pool area.
- Benches vary from all metal construction to wood and metal construction.

Pathway Pavement

- Condition – Good
 - Pavement rating report in 2024
 - Surface rating out of 10: 5.5
 - Drainage rating out of 10: 7.0.
 - Total condition rating: 58 – Good Condition
 - Prior rating: 2017: 67 - Good Condition

Exercise Equipment Pavement

- Condition – Good
- Installed in 2015

Utilities

Power/Electrical/Lighting

- Access to outdoor electrical outlets, such as pole mounted or in-ground pedestals, is limited in Walker Square Park for vendors, or daily use.
- Traditional Milwaukee Harp style lighting fixtures and poles are present along the walkways and plaza.

Signage

- One large standard park flag sign exists in the southeast corner of the park.
- Condition – Good
- The last site assessment in 2017 indicated signage was in excellent condition at the time.

Parking

Parking is on-street and is located on all four sides of the square. Parking competes with residential and institutional land uses surrounding the park. During daytime site visits, parking was readily available within the immediate block of the park.

Fence

The playground and wading pool are enclosed by black chain-link fencing, which is observed to be in fair condition. While there are visible areas of disrepair, the fence remains upright and fulfills its intended function.

Summary

The condition of park components ranges from poor to good. Overall, the tree canopy offers ample shade for park users and the unprogrammed greenspaces and picnic area are true park strengths at the time of assessment. Programmed spaces such as the plaza, playground, and wading pool are exhibiting various levels of wear which will need to be addressed to preserve the function of Walker Square Park as a vibrant neighborhood park.

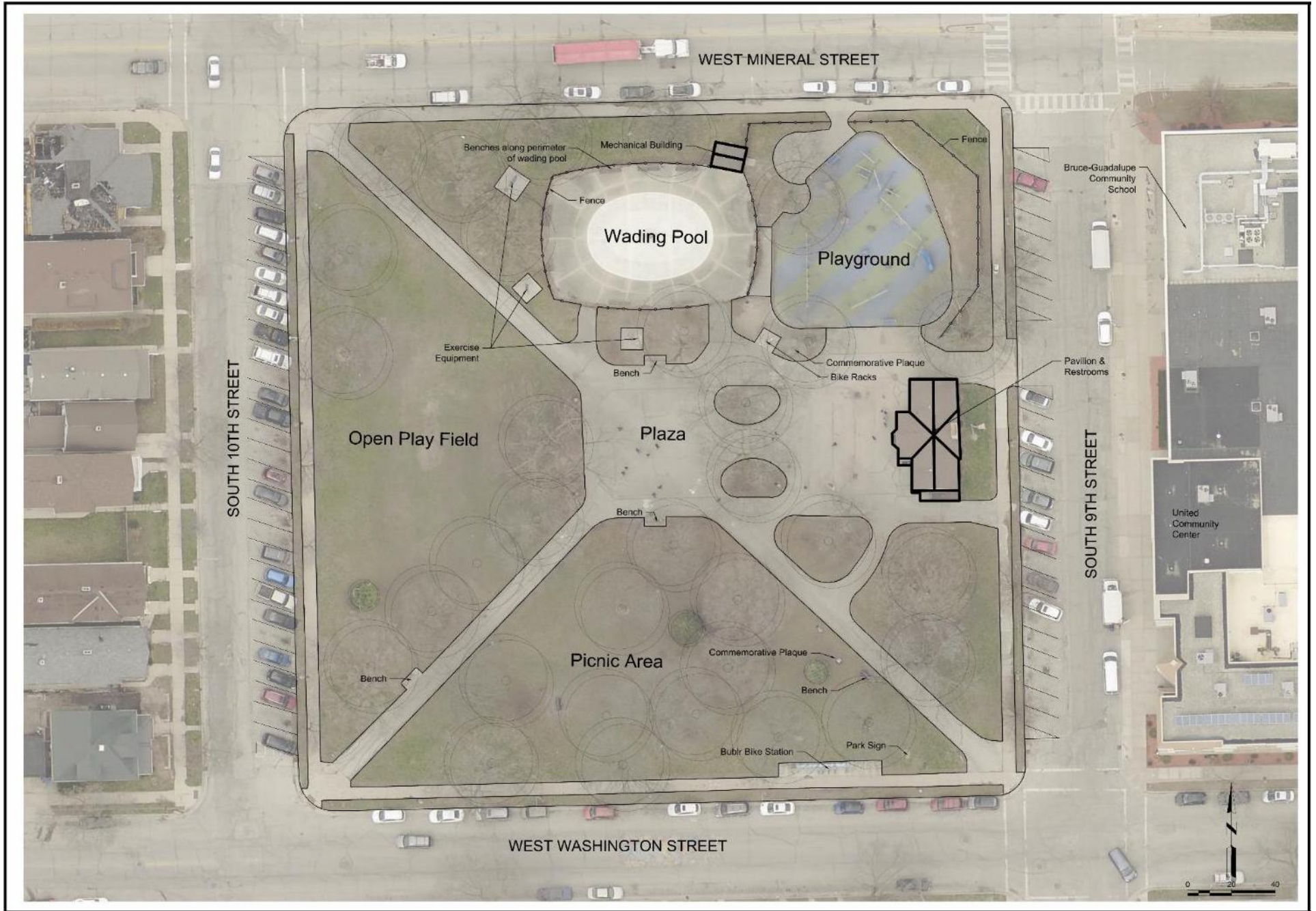


Figure 11: Existing Conditions.

Other Important Resources & Values

The following is taken from the 2015 Walker Square Action Plan. The information below outlines the various functions that the park serves for the neighborhood and the reasons for its current and future importance to the community.

Community Gathering Space

- **Events:** Neighborhood meetings where community members can learn new skills, discuss important topics, or plan local initiatives. Performances such as concerts, plays, or dance shows that showcase local talent.
- **Markets:** Farmers' markets where local producers can sell fresh fruits, vegetables, and homemade goods. Flea markets or craft fairs where artisans and vendors offer unique handmade items and antiques.
- **Festivals:** Cultural festivals celebrating the diversity and heritage of the community. Seasonal festivals, like summer fairs or winter holiday celebrations, featuring activities for all ages.

Walker Square Neighborhood

The Walker Square Neighborhood is situated on Milwaukee's near south side. Originally home to Polish, German and Ukrainian immigrants, Walker Square today is a diverse neighborhood with a large Hispanic/Latino community. The neighborhood is densely populated with a mix of land uses.

Access to Greenspace

- Walker Square Park contains the only unobstructed, publicly accessible 0.25 acres of green field space within the service area.
- Greenspace in densely populated urban environments like the Walker Square Neighborhood is essential for improving the overall quality of life for residents. These green areas provide a tranquil escape from the constant activity of city life, offering opportunities for relaxation, recreation, and social interaction. They play a significant role in enhancing physical and mental well-being by reducing stress, promoting physical activity, and fostering community connections.

Educational and Interactive Elements

- **Interactive exhibits:** Walker Square Park currently has exercise equipment in the northwest corner of the park. These stations have instructions that you can follow to learn how to effectively do the exercise, promoting moving our bodies and practicing healthy lifestyles.
- **Educational programs and workshops:** Community groups could begin to organize regular educational programs and workshops that focus on topics such as gardening, birdwatching, local history, and environmental conservation. These programs can be tailored to different age groups and interests, making education accessible and fun for the entire community.
- **Art installations:** Art installations could be added to Walker Square Park that contain an education element. These can include sculptures, murals, and mosaics that depict historical events, cultural stories, or representations of local wildlife.

Historical Markers and Monuments

- There are two monuments in the park, one is a commemorative tree plaque, and the other is a historical plaque about the park.
- **Informational plaques and signage:** Plaques and signs provide information about the history of the area, and the cultural significance of the park. These can offer educational opportunities for visitors of all ages.

Areas of Shade

- Provide relief from the sun and reduce the risk of heat-related illnesses.
- Create comfortable spaces for outdoor activities and gatherings.
- Enhance the usability of parks and recreational areas during hot weather.
- Contribute to cooler temperatures, mitigate urban heat islands, and improve air quality.

Connection to Cultural Heritage

- As identified in the Walker Square Action Plan from 2015: “the importance of the “paseo culture” in the neighborhood, or the act of taking a leisurely evening stroll ending at the plaza and people watching.”
- Walker Square Park is similar to traditional neighborhood squares found in many Latin American countries.



Figure 12: Conceptual Site Plan, Walker Square Strategic Action Plan, 2015

Trends, Threats & Opportunities

Trends, Threats, and Opportunities are derived as a result of the Site Assessment. These items have been identified both as elements that apply within Walker Square Park as well as larger trends in Park and Recreation Planning over the last several years that relate to Walker Square Park. The following are based on the public engagement survey, staff input interviews, and project team observations. These are shaped by a range of inputs and sources referenced throughout this document.

Trends

The following Trends in Park and Recreation that have emerged or are related to Walker Square Park include:

Behavior

- Social distancing in parks, meaning people are using neighborhood parks independently and interacting less with strangers than in the past.
- Trips to neighborhood parks are shorter but return visits may be more numerous throughout the day.
- Visitors have an expectation of programming when they go to parks, they want some reason to go there, not to discover friends, neighbors, or opportunities once they arrive. They want to know what they are going there for.
- Several attempts to lure “snap chatters” have emerged like large block letters or sculptures to lure patrons to spaces or given identity. Incorporation of cultural identity/regional/local significance – defining the place – for example – local art on the pavement or other structures.

Features/Programming

- Nationwide, there has been a trend to convert pools to (splash) pads, primarily to lower staff and maintenance costs.
- There has been a trend in programming for markets, beer gardens, and neighborhood gatherings. However, all these items tend to rely on the efforts of the few for the benefit of the whole.
- A rise in certain sport courts has emerged including multi-sport courts, pickleball or futsal courts.

Usage

- There has been an emergence in urban spaces to attract social capital both at night and during winter through various programs like markets or ice-skating rinks.

Threats

The following conditions/situations have been identified as potentially threatening the continued success of Walker Square Park:

Unintended Uses

- Criminal Activity
 - The community survey indicated that fighting and drug use is sometimes present at the park after dark. This behavior threatens the safety of other park users and will make users avoid the park.
- Unhoused Population
 - The community survey indicated that the unhoused community sometimes sleeps in the park. Conflicts with members of the unhoused community can create an unsafe or hostile environment.
- Overuse of the Playground
 - The park is intended for all users. However, the former consistent high intensity use of the playground by the neighborhood schools has caused the service life of the playground to be less than anticipated. The community survey indicated that overuse by the school has caused damage to the playground and greenspaces beyond what would normally be expected.

Environmental or Climate Change Impacts

- Severe heat

- With warming global temperatures, there will continue to be a demand for both shade and access to clean water within parks.
- Severe precipitation and flooding
 - Flooding can immediately damage facilities, but it can also cause permanent changes to facilities and programming long-term. If drainage continues to be an issue in the park, funding will need to be allocated to address it.
- Facilities staff and patrons
 - Access to restrooms in parks continues to be in high demand. However, both short and long-term maintenance of restrooms for the general public is beginning to outweigh its value over a more portable or temporary service.

Maintenance Issues

- Park cleanliness (litter, pet droppings)
 - The community survey indicated that the park sometimes had pet droppings in the greenspaces and litter in the playground and wading pool. Continued cleanliness issues make the park less desirable and will negatively impact user experience.
- Reoccurring facility closures
 - The wading pool, while well used when open, is sometimes restricted to limited hours due to Parks staff availability. Similarly, the restroom facilities are only available when the wading pool is operating, meaning that all users of the park are limited to the wading pools hours to use the restroom. While it is impractical to believe that the wading pool and restrooms will always be available, increasing the hours of operation would positively impact the user experience.

Opportunities

There are many opportunities unique to Walker Square Park that could be used to improve the park conditions and the user experience.

Community Engagement/Partnership(s)

- As stated several times throughout this document, the role of community engagement and partnership is critical to the ongoing success of any park. Walker Square Park is fortunate to have organizations like the Walker Square Neighborhood Association, the United Community Center⁴, and the Friends of Walker Square invest time and resources to bettering the park.

Partnering with Local Municipalities

- Walker Square Park is in the City of Milwaukee and the relationship between the Milwaukee County Park System and the City has proven beneficial to many of the parks in city limits. While not done in partnership with the Park System, the City of Milwaukee did update their Walker Square Neighborhood Plan in 2015. The City outlined the role of the Park and its importance to the neighborhood both for cultural context and recreational use. The neighborhood plan also offered in depth recommendations as to how the park could be improved.

Site Specific Funding Opportunities

- Through the partnership with the City of Milwaukee, a unique funding opportunity has arisen that would not have been available from the County Parks System alone. Through the amendment to Tax Incremental Financing District (TID) #85, \$750,000 has been made available for improvements specific to Walker Square Park.

⁴ Previous partnership with the Milwaukee County Park System

Stakeholder & Community Input

Stakeholder and Community Input was received during a community survey conducted by MCP and subsequent conversations with the WSNA.

Issues identified

Maintenance/cleanliness

- Trash scattered throughout the park.
- Broken infrastructure including damaged benches and play structures.

Amenities

- Poor condition of seating with many benches being uncomfortable or broken.
- Lack of picnic tables limiting opportunities for family gatherings.
- Broken playground equipment, posing a risk to children.

Safety/Security

- Concerns about crime and drug use in the park, especially at night.
- General insecurity felt by park users due to poor lighting and visibility.

Park Users/User Activities

- Significant use of the park by unhoused individuals, leading to an overburdened space.
- Unwelcome behavior such as smoking and fighting, disrupting the peace and family-friendly atmosphere.
- Overuse of park facilities leading to wear and tear, particularly due to events from the United Community Center.

Other

- Infrequent access to restroom facilities, causing inconvenience to visitors.
- Lack of separation from the city street, making the park feel less safe and secluded.

Desired Improvements

- Improve safety through better lighting and enhanced security measures.
- Add more seating options to accommodate visitors.
- Increase plantings to beautify the park and offer more greenspace.
- Renovate existing plantings to ensure they are well-maintained and healthy.
- Upgrade the playground with modern, safe equipment.
- Repair sidewalks to provide smooth and safe walkways.
- Add art installations to enrich the cultural experience of the park.
- Improve and better define picnic areas with more tables and shelter options.
- Convert the wading pool to a splash pad to better serve children and families.
- Enhance lighting to improve visibility and safety during evening hours.
- Opportunities for farmers/craft markets.
- Emphasis on the uniqueness of the park – central plaza design. Reflective of Latin American communities that comprise the neighborhood demographics.
- Create central programming – like fountain.

Additional Planning Considerations

The following are data or additional studies that may be needed to help define the goals for Walker Square Park.

Aquatics Study

An in-depth aquatics study is essential to evaluate the wading pool's usage and popularity. This study should analyze the cost of operation, including personnel and maintenance expenses. Understanding these factors will help inform decision-makers about whether the wading pool should remain as it is or be replaced with a more suitable aquatic facility, such as a splash pad or another interactive water feature.

Accessibility Study

An evaluation focused on accessibility will ensure that the park is welcoming and usable for all visitors, including those with disabilities. This study should identify existing barriers that may impede access and propose modifications to pathways, seating, and facilities to enhance accessibility. Recommendations could include installing ramps, improving signage, and ensuring compliant restroom facilities.

Recommended Park Improvements

The following recommendations are based on the additional considerations, public input, and site assessment.

Additional Seating in the Central Plaza

The central plaza will benefit from increased seating. The proposed seating arrangements should encourage social interaction by grouping benches together rather than spreading them along the walkways. This design fosters social capital through proximity, making the park a more community-oriented space. A ratio of one linear foot of seating for every 30 square feet of the plaza is recommended to balance comfort and space.



Figure 13: Seating within proximity of other seating attracts sitters. Reynolds Square, Savannah, Georgia.

Cross-Axial Pathways

Walker Square Park has a strong existing intersection of the pathways, or cross-axial design, and this may be an ideal building block for any future design.

Cross-axial design in landscape architecture is a technique where two or more axial lines (like paths or rows of trees) intersect to create a structured, often symmetrical layout. This design creates a clear focal point at the intersection and divides the space into distinct areas, frequently used to guide the eye, organize layouts, and create focal points.

Focalization is the technique used to make "order out of chaos" by giving the eyes a point their line of sight can be funneled towards. These focal points can be as simple as a planter filled with colorful blooms or as extravagant as a statue or a one-of-a-kind fountain. Focalization can also be used to frame a view and is almost always included in axial and cross-axial designs.

Lighting

Installing adequate lighting throughout the park is essential for enhancing night-time usability and addressing safety concerns. Effective lighting solutions will ensure that the park remains accessible and inviting after sunset, encouraging evening and night-time activities while providing a secure environment for all visitors.

Effective screening for this lighting would be crucial to mitigate neighbor concerns about light pollution into their homes and on their property.

Water Feature

Transforming the existing wading pool into a new water feature, such as a play fountain, will greatly enhance the park's appeal and usability. A play fountain offers an interactive and fun water play area that can be enjoyed by children and adults alike. This feature will also modernize the park, creating more central programming and reducing the need for fencing and other barriers on the north, making it a vibrant destination for families and community members.



Figure 14: Play Fountains can draw a crowd of all ages and can be more formal in appearance while less formal in use than a traditional wading pool. They also don't require fencing.

Power Supply

Providing a reliable power supply in the park is crucial for supporting various activities, including markets and neighborhood gatherings. Access to electricity transforms the park into a versatile social space that can host events, offer charging stations for visitors, and support lighting and other electrical needs for planned activities. It also allows the park to operate autonomously, as WSNA desires. Access and restrictions on usage may be warranted.



Figure 15: Pedestal power provides the ability to run lighting, food trucks, and supports other uses like markets. Ten Club Park, Waterford, Wisconsin.

Park Improvement Concept

Three improvement concepts were evaluated for Walker Square Park, each providing a slightly different take on reimagining the space. During design, each component was reviewed by departments within Milwaukee County Parks. The resulting preferred concept (#3) combines a redesign of the park while retaining many of its essential features. Proposed improvements may be implemented using a range of funding sources, including City capital funds for work within the public right-of-way, TID resources, support from community partners (WSNA and Friends Group), external fundraising opportunities and Milwaukee County capital funds.

The idea for Concept 1 retained the original pavilion but explored modifications to make it more accessible. One modification was to remove the central meeting room and convert it to an outdoor pass-through space to open the east side of the park to 9th Street. Evaluated by architectural staff, this ultimately proved too costly to explore beyond concept.

Concept 2 explored removal of the original pavilion and replacement with a centrally located, 40'x 40' open air shelter. This type of shelter would act as a central gather space and mimic the layout of the square. A concentric path would also be provided between the existing sidewalk and the shelter to formalize the center of the space and provide another paseo opportunity.

The idea for Concept 3, the preferred concept, builds upon the park's cross-axial design and opens the edge treatment around the park by moving the large building facade that interrupts the plaza from the street grid. This also aligns with active uses both in and out of the park, while the passive space provides separation from the residential uses to the south and west. A play fountain is added as the central feature of the square, drawing in visitors from all sides while allowing activity as the focal point from each corner of the park.

Central Plaza⁵

The preferred concept proposes the creation of an expanded central plaza featuring an expansive mural. The plaza extends from the park's center across 9th Street, orienting the space towards the east. To facilitate this orientation, the original restroom pavilion building will be removed. This larger and more prominent plaza is designed to accommodate future markets, providing ample room for vendor tents. Funding for the central plaza is planned through the first phase of TID funding distribution.

Comfort Station/Restroom

A new open-air shelter enhances the northern end of the plaza, expanding the picnic area and inviting those living north of the park into the space. The northern location was chosen for its proximity to both the playground and central plaza. Similar comfort station-covered picnic areas have proven successful at other parks, including Kern, McGovern, and Doctor's Parks. The existing restroom structure and wading pool



Figure 16: During design development, removal of the central core of the pavilion was explored as Concept 1 to create a pass through to 9th Street. It was eliminated due to cost.



Figure 17: One option to bring a large open-air shelter was considered in Concept 2, but eliminated because it does not support the need for restrooms.

mechanical building would be removed as modernization of these facilities to current design and accessibility standards would be more costly than replacement. This shelter would be designed to reflect the character of the existing structure but be built with modern materials. Example shelters are provided in the Character Images on following pages. Funding for a new open-air shelter is yet to be secured.

More Seating⁵

The increased seating within the main plaza area is designed to encourage social interaction. This area serves as a central gathering space within the park, offering diverse seating options that complement the existing benches distributed throughout the park. Additionally, seating is provided flanking the play fountain and walkway to the restrooms to again take advantage of social capital (where people are) and provide an informal view of the playground area, giving children some autonomy from parents. A portion of the seating improvements will be funded during phase one of the TID funding distribution. The remaining funding will likely come from alternative sources.

Game Tables⁵

An open, crushed limestone game table area is strategically placed at the southeast of the park to provide more complementary programming for the playground but for an older demographic (e.g. those that may come from Olga Village). This space will be a destination on its own, and act as a "living room" for the park, where interaction is omnipresent. Funding for the game tables is planned through the first phase of TID funding distribution.

Play Fountain⁵

With the removal of the wading pool, a new water feature is needed for use during warmer months. A play fountain, situated in the center of the park, fulfills the neighborhood's expectation for water play while offering lower maintenance and less formal play options. Lighting can be added for dusk-time activation and programmed for various activities or times of day. Due to the lack of standing water, it would be expected that this fountain would not require a fence, allowing more design around the space and integration with other park amenities. When not in use, the play fountain area is an extension of the plaza as decorative pavement may be added to attract interest, even when the fountain is idle. Funding for the play fountain is planned through the first phase of TID funding distribution.

Mini Murals⁵

Mini murals are proposed at the corners of the park to better establish the park's entrances. These vibrant and artistic murals would serve as welcoming landmarks, guiding visitors into the park and enhancing the overall aesthetic appeal. The designs of these murals would complement the central plaza mural and reflect the community's history, values, and cultural diversity. These murals are planned as a part of the first phase of the TID funding. Future funding opportunities for these are possible, including maintenance intervals.

Pedestrian Improvements at 9th Street

Due to the frequent use of the park by neighboring schools, pedestrian safety improvements are necessary. Often it is most desirable to cross at the corners of a block, at the intersection. However, given the context of the school and community center, as well as their main access points meeting at the sidewalk along 9th Street, implementing a table-top style intersection would establish a mid-block crossing and reduce traffic speed, aligning with the planned redevelopment of 9th Street to the south. This would draw pedestrians to cross at the mid-block rather than the intersection to the north where an interstate on-and off-ramp cater to high-speed traffic movements. Given that the majority of visitors to Walker Square Park access the area on foot, the

⁵ TID Funding Items

existence of interstate ramps underscores the continuing need to improve pedestrian safety measures. To enhance visibility of the crossing, a mural could be applied, similar to those used throughout the park. This tabletop would also reconnect the school and community center to the park, allowing the park to act as an extension of the facility campus. Additional traffic calming may be needed, but since these are ROW improvements (including 9th Street), they fall under the City of Milwaukee's jurisdiction for approval and implementation.

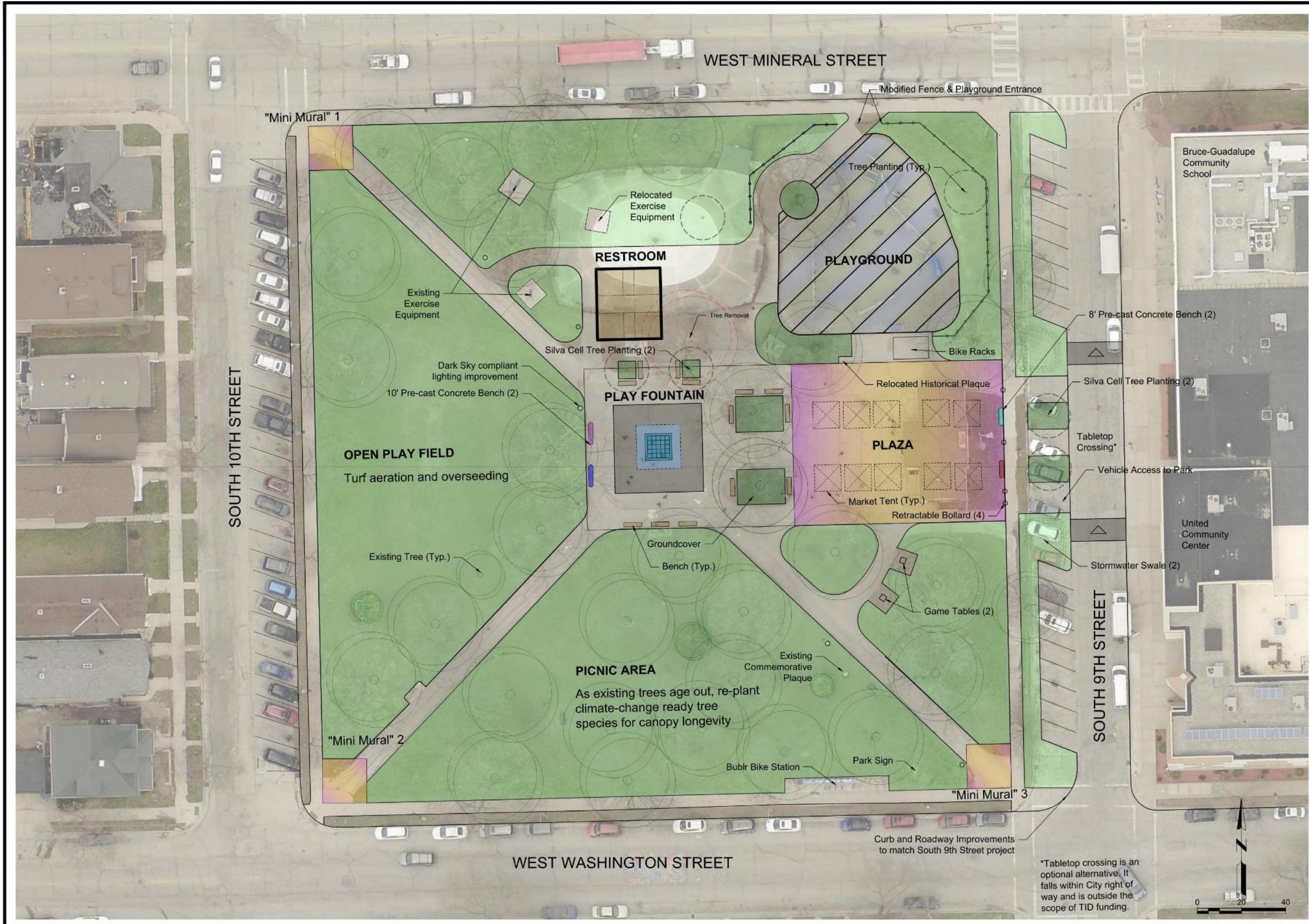
These improvements would build upon the recent reconstruction of Washington Street which included improved pedestrian crossings and a roundabout at Washington Street and 10th Street.

Opinion of Cost

An opinion of cost was developed for the preferred concept. A sub-total cost is \$1.4 million while a final opinion, which includes a 20% contingency, reached \$1.7 million. This cost excludes lighting and power improvements expected to be undertaken separately.

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*Tabletop crossing is an optional alternative. It falls within City right of way and is outside the scope of TID funding.

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WALKER SQUARE PARK
Alternative Concept 3
Milwaukee County Parks
9480 W. Watertown Rd.
Wauwatosa, WI 53226

ISSUED
NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

WALKING: 2842100-250697.01
DATE: August 15, 2025
DESIGNED BY: MJS
DRAWN BY: EJK
CHECKED BY: BAC
DO NOT SCALE DRAWINGS

SHEET CONTENTS
Alternative Concept

SHEET NO.
3

Note: The concept plan is illustrative only and reflects ideas and priorities identified through the framework process. Final configuration, materials and features will be refined through subsequent design phases and additional stakeholder engagement.



PLAZA MURAL



PLAZA MURAL



MINI MURAL OR
PLAZA MURAL



AMBIENT GLOW (STONE)
TECHNOLOGY (ADDITIVE)



RESTROOM SHELTER (~60' x 32')



SHELTER MATERIAL DETAIL



PLAY FOUNTAIN

PLAY FOUNTAIN - NIGHT



GAME TABLES / CONCRETE BENCHES

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ISSUES

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MSH NO: 2842100-250697.01
DATE: JUNE 20, 2025
DESIGNED BY: MSS
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SHEET CONTENTS
Character Images

SHEET NO.

3

Community Comments on Park Improvement Concept

Community feedback on an early iteration of the preferred concept was gathered at the Walker Square Park farmer's market and was used to make final adjustments to the concept. Feedback included:

- Investigating other funding options for pedestrian improvements in neighborhood streets.
- Consider having different artists work on each mural and/or allowing different art styles for each.
- The neighborhood group appreciates the existing meeting room for their meetings. Explore ways to incorporate this type of indoor space into the park.
- A desire was expressed for indoor storage space to accommodate equipment for markets.
- Interest was expressed in tile or other art elements that would have more permanence than a mural.
- The play fountain and its placement were generally well-received, and residents were happy about the addition of a fun playscape element.
- Residents liked the addition of trees in the plaza to provide more shade and make the space more welcoming. The neighborhood group asked that tree canopy loss be minimized as much as possible.
- Additional park signage was suggested for each park entrance.

Some community members shared concerns with the proposed concept:

- Opposition was expressed regarding a large open picnic pavilion as it could attract large unplanned gatherings and nuisance activity.
- The placement of the play fountain in the center of the plaza has the potential for conflicts between play fountain users and other activities such as the farmer's market.
- There is a strong preference to not re-orient the park toward 9th street, stating that this alters the existing cross-axial layout and turns the focal point of the park toward a private entity that is not a primary user of the park, rather than to the points of entry that neighbors use to access the park or toward a central plaza in the center of the park.
- Concerns were expressed related to demolition of the pavilion. Some neighbors suggested updating or renovating the existing pavilion.
- Opposition to a new structure/bathrooms being relocated to the north side of the park was expressed.
- There is a preference to hold markets along pathways rather than a concentrated plaza that connects to the street. Preference was also given to defining and beautifying the central plaza.

The feedback received has been integrated into the preferred alternative. Although this option reflects input from the public and local organizations, it is not possible to accommodate every individual comment in the final design. Instead, the design of Walker Square Park aims to serve the broader community while recognizing the park's historical and cultural importance.

Planning Services Provided by:

