

PHOTOS

The Park at the Forefront of Cincinnati's Revitalization

KAID BENFIELD JUL 12, 2012 COMMENTS



Last week, Cincinnati mayor Mark Mallory and a bevy of festive accomplices re-opened beautiful, 150-year-old Washington Park, in the heart of the city's revitalizing Over-the-Rhine district. It had been closed for 20 months' worth of renovations and, judging by the spectacular photos, it has been worth the wait. Wow.

Longtime readers may know that Over-the-Rhine is [one of my favorite city neighborhoods](#). (I wrote [a series about it](#) three years ago.) It has a very troubled recent past, at one time being saddled with the dubious distinction of being called the most crime-ridden neighborhood in the country. High rates of building vacancy, poverty, and crime have indeed been alarming.



Courtesy of Randy Simes/Urban Cincy

But that's changing, due to an impressive set of assets as Cincinnati, like other American cities, is rediscovering downtown neighborhoods. Over-the-Rhine has the country's largest intact collection of 19th-century Italianate architecture (nearly a thousand properties), is home to the wonderful, baroque Cincinnati Music Hall, hosts the thriving Findlay Market (Ohio's oldest), and is within easy walking distance of downtown. It is also [getting a new streetcar](#). It is now revitalizing fast, in no small measure due to the ambition of the Central City Cincinnati Development Corporation (or 3CDC), a nonprofit that has acquired abandoned properties and has been leading their rehabilitation. The entire, 362-acre neighborhood is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

It does still have a long way to go. As I wrote three years ago, Over-the-Rhine's (there's a colorful history behind the name) social, cultural, and physical stock deteriorated badly over time. In 2006, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named OTR [one of its "eleven most endangered" historic sites](#) because of a combination of "deterioration, neglect, and poor public policy." The ongoing challenge is to find enough capital, along with sensitive planners and builders, not just to do revitalization, but to do it in an inclusive way that respects the current residents, maintains affordability, respects the historic character of the building stock, and [takes maximum advantage of green development practices](#). The neighborhood does seem to be on its way.



Courtesy of [3CDC](#)



Courtesy of [James Jenkins/Over the Rhine blog](#)

The new Washington Park should help tremendously. The green space has been expanded from six to eight acres, and the amenities include a dog park, interactive water fountains, refreshed public restrooms, a concession building, a “civic lawn” that will host concerts and events, shade from the summer sun, and a kids’ section, according to friends at the [Over-the-Rhine blog](#), which is also the source of the new photos accompanying this post.

As Stephen Leeper, president of 3CDC [said to Lisa Bernhard-Kuhn of the Cincinnati Enquirer](#), “every neighborhood needs a center – a civic space where its residents and visitors can come together, enjoy well-maintained amenities and feel safe.” That’s the same point that I have been making [in various ways lately](#): cities and neighborhoods with great public spaces are the ones we enjoy and remember most, the ones that foster community. That the refurbished Washington Park in its first week of renewal hosted both

something called the [World Choir Games](#) and [at least one marriage proposal](#) is a very encouraging sign.



Courtesy of [Christy Samad/Over The Rhine blog](#)



Courtesy of [Over the Rhine blog](#)

For many more great photos, start [here](#).

This post originally appeared on the NRDC's [Switchboard](#) blog.