

Washington Park

Cincinnati, Ohio

Project Owner: Cincinnati Park Board • Designer: Human Nature Inc.



A performance stage and civic lawn that form the roof of the underground parking garage.

WASHINGTON PARK LIES AT THE HEART OF Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, which was built by German immigrants who affectionately referred to the Miami-Erie Canal that divided the neighborhood from the business district as the "Rhine." What followed was a series of well-known historic factors: anti-German sentiment after World War II, increasing popularity of automobiles, a subsidized housing boom, the federal voucher system, and, ultimately, decaying buildings, high vacancy rates, and crime. Washington Park followed suit, suffering through decades of disinvestment and criminal activity.

Recognizing the value of the neighborhood's historic buildings and the negative impact of crime on the business district, the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) and the city of Cincinnati began to turn the neighborhood around, ultimately leading Washington Park through a \$48 million renovation that would transform the neighborhood.

Today the eight-acre (3.2 ha) park attracts people with its varied features, including a grand civic lawn the size of a football field that

can accommodate 10,000 people, a 30-by-22-foot (9 by 7 m) open-air performance stage at the north end of the green that overlooks the entire park, a 7,000-square-foot (650 sq m) water feature with 130 pop jets, a renovated Civil War-era bandstand, and a fenced dog park. A half-acre (0.2 ha) fenced playground has features based on historic Cincinnati structures symbolizing the city's rich heritage, including a play castle, a climbing wall, a sandbox, dual slides, a canal boat in a stream, and musical instruments.

The park is programmed daily throughout the year, attracting an estimated 750,000 visitors annually. Reports of crime in the area have been cut in half since 2004, and the surrounding neighborhood has experienced a renaissance over the same period, with 500 new residential units and 130,000 square feet (12,000 sq m) of commercial space either built or under construction.

Renovation of Washington Park included the excavation/construction of a 450-space, two-deck, underground parking garage beneath its northern two acres (0.8 ha), acces-

Lounging around the new fenced-in dog park at Washington Park.





Above: an aerial view facing southeast depicts Washington Park in relation to the rest of the city.

Top right: An aerial view of the completed park, facing southwest.



The historic bandstand has not been moved from its original location in the center of the park.



Left: An entrance on the northwest corner of the park, with a garage portal seen in the left foreground.

Below: The 7,000-square-foot (650 sq m) interactive water feature is a main attraction in the summer months.



sible by vehicle ramps as well as three pedestrian portals with both elevators and stairs.

Revenue for the work included \$14 million from the city in the form of tax increment financing and grants, a \$5 million state urban redevelopment loan, a \$2.85 million grant from the state, a \$4.5 million loan from the Cincinnati Equity Fund, plus federal new markets tax credit equity from PNC Bank and philanthropic grants. 3CDC operates and manages the parking garage, which generates revenue to pay down the debt created by the renovation. 3CDC also raises sponsorship dollars to program and manage the park with support from the city and the Cincinnati Park Board. **UL**