



NATIONAL RECREATION  
AND PARK ASSOCIATION

# **Five-Year Evaluation of the 2019 NRPA Parks Build Community Project in Baltimore**

## **Summary**

October

**2023**



# Five-Year Evaluation of the 2019 Parks Build Community Project in Baltimore

## SUMMARY REPORT

The renovation of Baltimore’s ABC/Catherine Street Park (ABC Park) through NRPA’s Parks Build Community program resulted in several bright spots for the community. Parents were highly satisfied with the new amenities, and children and families more frequently visited the park to take advantage of the upgraded playground and exercise equipment. Economic and safety improvements in the surrounding neighborhood coincided with the revitalization of the park and outshone those for the matched comparison park in the vicinity. While the timing of the renovation and data collection led to necessary but frustrating delays and adjustments, and associated programming and events to build a sense of belonging and community centered at ABC Park were lacking, park and playground renovations continue to show positive outcomes for communities. Combining these physical park renovations with programs, services and maintenance can extend these community benefits and bolster thriving gathering places for diverse communities.

## PROJECT FACTS

Park Name: Catherine Street/ABC Park

Park Location: Baltimore

Broke Ground/Baseline Data Collected: 2018

Grand Opening: September 22, 2019

Post-Renovation Data Collected: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Comparison Park: Harlem Park

Included Renovations:

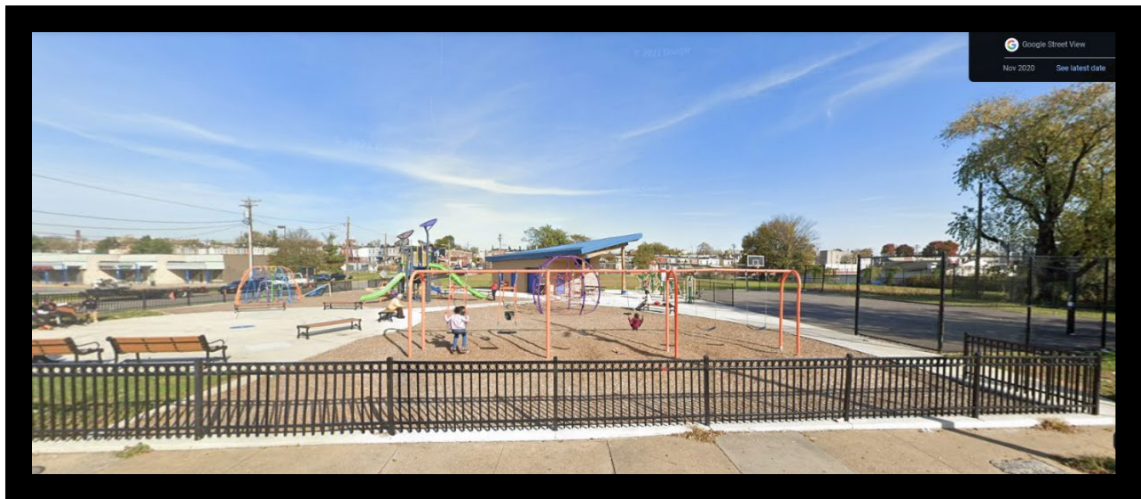
- Resurfaced basketball court
- New swing sets
- Various new play equipment
- New exercise equipment
- New spray pad
- New benches
- New building for restrooms, a water fountain and a small storage closet
- Green Infrastructure for stormwater



**ABC Park – July 2018 (Pre-Revitalization)**

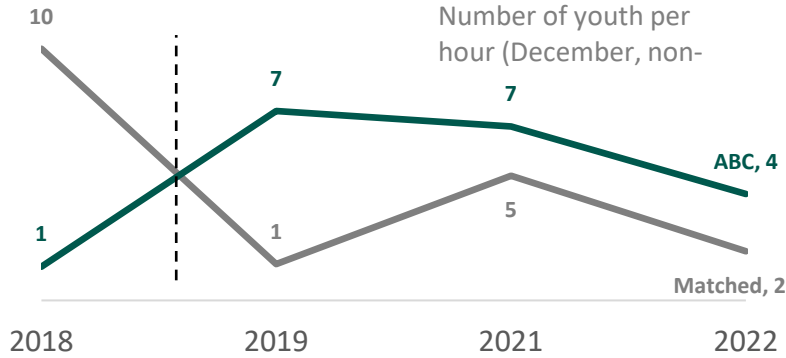


**ABC Park – November 2020 (Post-Revitalization)**



## KEY FINDINGS

Youth users per hour on playgrounds, swings, basketball courts increased and sustained post-revitalization.

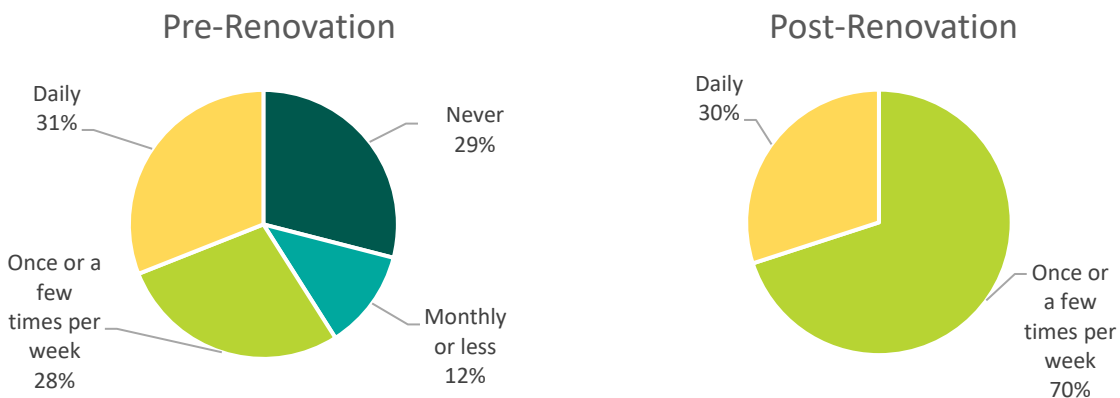


### Bright Spots

The new playground equipment appears to have encouraged park usage at ABC Park among youth ages 18 and under. Using 372 observations of 9,620 individuals at both ABC Park and the matched control park, evaluators found a **notable increase in play space use per hour by youth** immediately following the revitalization that was generally sustained four years post-renovation.

Surveys of adults within a 10-minute walk from the park both before and after the park revitalization indicated that self-reported park use frequency improved post-revitalization and that **the renovations are drawing community members to the park more often**. Specifically, results indicated a 41-percentage-point increase in those reporting visiting the park at least once, or a few times, per week.

### ABC Park Visit Frequency (% Adults Surveyed)



In addition, surveyed adults indicated **increased social engagement and/or encouragement** through a 29-percentage-point increase in reports of visiting the park with a friend after the park renovation (pre: 21 percent; post: 50 percent).

Surveys of adults in the immediate community indicated improved perceptions of opportunities for children to learn or experience something new and meet, interact and play with somebody new. In total, about **two-thirds of respondents stated that learning and playing opportunities existed within ABC Park, supporting the positive benefits of the community play space in this area.**

Clearly, **the playground equipment upgrades in ABC Park are enjoyed by community members**, as indicated by the park observations and a 37-percentage-point increase in adult satisfaction ratings (100 percent post-revitalization).

The addition of **adult fitness equipment next to the playground equipment and the relocation of the restroom and storage facility** from the middle of the play space to the outer edge both allowed for **full sightlines across the playground**, and were of great benefit to parents, who could supervise their children at the park more effectively.

Surveys revealed **improved ratings of the condition of sidewalks** around the park, **improved perceptions of crime-related safety**, and **reduced concern about traffic around the park.**

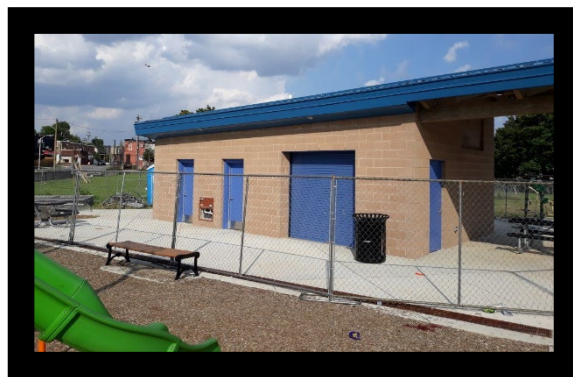
## Concerns

The community expressed a few concerns related to bathrooms, relaxation areas and programming that contrasted with the enthusiasm about this new and well-used park equipment.

Park visitors were frustrated about **locked restrooms that did not open until 2022, non-working water fountains and spray pads that were not activated.**

Many respondents expressed disappointment in the **lack of programming and events** in the newly revitalized park to date.

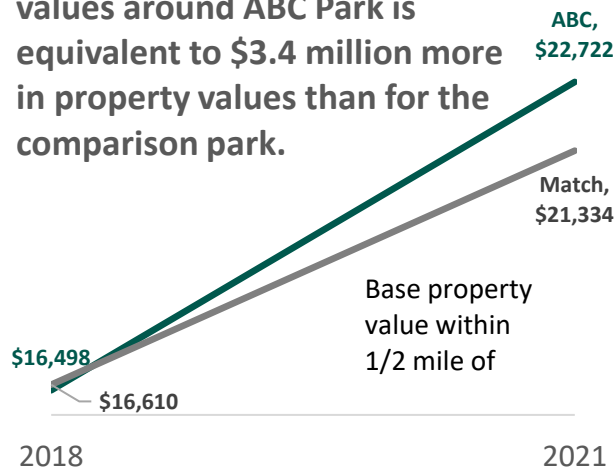
The **removal of two old-growth oak trees** to make room for expanded play spaces and the basketball court disappointed some residents, despite the addition of a covered picnic table. Community members were disappointed in the reduced areas to picnic and relax after the renovation. While this change was costly in some ways (elimination of shade, relaxation/picnic areas), it also had benefits for park users (sightlines, safety within and exterior to park), as previously mentioned.





## Surrounding Property Values

**A greater increase in property values around ABC Park is equivalent to \$3.4 million more in property values than for the comparison park.**



It is well known that proximity to park and recreation areas is correlated with increases in property values, especially in areas with limited green space. Property values in the neighborhood surrounding ABC Park increased an average of \$6,227 (38 percent) from \$16,498 to \$22,722, representing about a \$14 million property value increase for all properties within one-half mile.

In comparison, average property values in the neighborhood surrounding the matched comparison park increased an average of \$4,724 (32 percent) from \$16,610 to \$21,334 — \$1,503 less than in the ABC Park

neighborhood. In sum, **the greater increase in property values around ABC Park compared to the matched comparison park neighborhood is equivalent to \$3.4 million more in property values.**

## Reported Crime

**ABC Park also experienced decreases in reported crime against persons and property post-renovation to a greater extent than the matched comparison park.** The neighborhood surrounding the park within one-half mile experienced a reduction of 67 reported crimes against persons per year from pre- to post-renovation (21 reported crimes per year reduction in the matched comparison park). Crimes against property also reduced by 150 reported crimes per year in the area surrounding ABC Park (a reduction of 70 crimes per year in the matched comparison park). While establishing this crime reduction as a direct result of the park renovation is not possible, this trend shows positive improvement in objective safety metrics post-revitalization.

## Challenges and Limitations

In part resulting from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, necessary adjustments to this evaluation plan and limitations of results are important to note. First, data collection was not always at the same time of year because of public health restrictions and resulting necessary adjustments. Also, some parts of the renovation, including restroom facilities, the spray pad and stormwater infrastructure, were extended and caused some frustration among community park users. Finally, data collection was difficult because of high turnover in neighborhood residents over the course of the evaluation — it was difficult to find community members in 2021 and 2022 who remembered the park pre-renovation.

Overall, however, the Baltimore Parks Build Community project led to higher community satisfaction with the park amenities, particularly with respect to the refreshed new playground equipment. With some intentional park activation through programming and services, community members around ABC Park could experience even more benefits from this park revitalization.

### Pre-Revitalization Photos





## Post-Revitalization Photos



*All photos and visualizations were produced by the evaluation team except: architectural renderings were provided by Baltimore City Parks and Recreation, and Google Street View images are from maps.google.com.*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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