Green/Blue Space in a 10 Minute Walk

Plan to have 90% or more of residents are within a 10-minute walk, or within one-half mile of, a park, outdoor recreation or other protected green/blue space.

WHAT IS IT?

Open spaces are undeveloped land areas that are accessible to the public, such as schoolyards, playgrounds, recreational facilities, public seating areas, and green spaces. Green spaces are also undeveloped and have partial or complete vegetative coverage, including grass, trees, shrubs, or other vegetation. Similarly, blue spaces describe manmade or natural bodies of water, including coastline, lakes, rivers, reservoirs, canals, and fountains.

These spaces provide environmental benefits, especially to urban areas. Green spaces can reduce the urban heat island effect; it is estimated that green spaces are up to 1°C cooler than built urban spaces. Additionally, there is approximately 75 million tons of carbon stored in urban trees and 102 million tons stored in soils of urban parks. Annually, urban trees remove 2.4 million tons of carbon from the atmosphere. Green spaces can also reduce the amount of ground-level ozone, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen oxides (NOx). Both green and blue spaces have also been linked to improvements in mental and physical health, citing that access to outdoor spaces can provide stress relief and encourage physical activity.

Approximately 69% of Americans living in the 100 largest cities live within a 10-minute walk of an urban park. Leading this effort in Ohio is Columbus; in 2019, the City's Sustainable Columbus Advisory Committee announced new goals to increase access to green spaces within a 10-minute walk. Goals include increasing the number of city parks from 380 to 400 and increasing green space access within a 10-minute walk from 52% to 100%.

Ohio also has a number of natural blue space assets. The state has approximately 312 m of coastline, with major rivers and lakes including Lake Erie along the northern coast, the Cuyahoga River, and Grand Lake St. Marys.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Annual air pollution removal and economic value of urban trees is estimated to be 80 pounds or $300 per acre of tree cover.
- Urban parks have carbon storage potential of:
  - Carbon storage = 40 tons or $800 per acre of tree cover
  - Carbon storage = 32 tons or $650 per acre of soil
  - Annual carbon removal = 1.2 tons or $25 per acre of tree cover
- Green spaces can be up to 1°C cooler than built urban spaces.

BENEFITS

Reduced air pollution

Reduced urban heat island effect

Increased carbon storage

Improved mental and physical health

HOW CAN COMMUNITIES IMPLEMENT THIS POLICY?

Cities can utilize effective planning tools to increase community participation and optimize the benefits of creating green/blue spaces in their neighborhoods.

- **Integrate green/blue space considerations into all city design and planning processes.** In all new city initiatives for design and planning, cities should consider opportunities to increase green/blue spaces. By integrating green/blue spaces into other planning projects, cities can make the expansion of open spaces more efficient.

- **Identify local stakeholders as potential partners.** Community green and blue spaces can significantly improve outcomes for mental health, obesity, and general physical health. Additionally, green/blue space can create community centers that attract residents, local businesses, and development. With these benefits in mind, cities can engage local stakeholders, including healthcare institutions, businesses, and community-based organizations, to attract investment and partners in creating the vision for new green/blue spaces.

- **Engage community leaders and residents to create equitable, accessible green/blue space.** By engaging community leaders and residents, cities can ensure that they are proactively considering equity in the creation of new green spaces, including location selection and equitable outcomes.

- **Employ economic evaluation tools to identify economic benefits and potential impacts.** By evaluating the economic benefits of community parks, cities can encourage development and investment in traditionally underserved areas. However, prior to development, cities should align green/blue space development with housing projects in neighboring areas to ensure that new green spaces do not accelerate green gentrification.

- **Consider reuse of less productive land as sites for potential green/blue space.** Cities have converted brownfields – polluted industrial land – into green/blue spaces. By transforming these areas, cities generate co-benefits of pollution reduction and environmental justice. Conversion of these spaces can also increase funding from other organizations, since brownfield conversion is funded through national organizations and state/federal initiatives.