



“Discovery Green” Park

Houston, Texas (2005 - 2008)

Client: Houston Downtown Park Conservancy



Top image: PPS' concept plan for the new park.
Second image: The site of the park consisted of parking lots and underused greenspace.
Third and fourth images: Discovery Green on its Opening Day, April 13, 2008.

The new Discovery Green park is on the eastern edge of Houston's downtown core - the downtown's first major park. It is surrounded by a convention center, hotel, and a number of sports arenas. The project transformed 12 acres of underused green space and parking lots into an active oasis.

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) helped the Houston Downtown Park Conservancy, a group of leading local foundations, philanthropists and civic officials, to facilitate a community process to develop a vision and program for the new park, with the idea that this would become Houston's "Backyard."

The PPS program plan was used as a jumping off point for the design (by Hargreaves Associates), which meant that on opening day the park's destinations were already very well-developed. The park opened in April 2008, and has been phenomenally successful - visitation has exceeded all expectations.

As soon as the park was announced, a new highrise residential building was proposed by a local developer, which is now nearing completion. In March 2008, Discovery Tower, a new 30-story office building with ground floor retail, broke ground on the north side of the park. According to an article in the Houston Chronicle:

The park is attracting development that's bringing energy to east downtown. And the city's \$41 million investment in Discovery

Green, coupled with twice that sum in private funding, has set a standard for parks that will influence public officials and donors for generations, park advocates say.

The Process

PPS facilitated a series of meetings and workshops, during which participants worked together to develop a vision for the park, and recommend what attractions would entice different people to it. Stakeholders meetings were also held, with downtown workers, residents of the second ward, representatives of cultural and environmental organizations, the Mexican community, youth, and others.

The process revealed a number of common concerns and elements that were integrated into the concept for the park that PPS ultimately developed for the Conservancy, including: linkages to other downtown institutions; the desire and need for activities at all times of the day, week, and year; multi-functional spaces that can serve different purposes; preservation of certain existing landscape features (mature oak trees); and children's activities to attract families.

The Conservancy held a contest to name the new park and "Discovery Green" was chosen from over 6,000 entries.