



**CITY OF ATLANTA**  
City Auditor's Office  
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### ***Why We Did This Audit***

We undertook this project because the Office of Parks scored relatively high in our 2015 risk assessment. Primary risk factors included size and complexity, spending on capital outlay and commodities, budget-to-actual variances, and relatively high overtime, injury on the job, and sick leave hours.

### ***What We Recommended***

To ensure city parks are maintained to performance and safety standards, Parks should:

- Review safety conditions and promptly initiate repairs according to procedures.
- Compare annual inspections year-to-year and report carryover issues to management.
- Develop a maintenance classification system that outlines how each park type will be maintained according to size and amenities.
- Assign all parks maintained by city crews to a park district.
- Clearly identify all decommissioned parks.
- Annually inspect parks maintained by partnerships.
- Formally document present and future partnership agreements and update the list annually.
- Clarify the operations manual to require that supervisors and district managers inspect parks throughout the year and report their findings year-round.
- Monitor inspection results to assess whether staffing levels are adequate to meet performance standards.
- Clarify expectations regarding cleanliness of natural areas.
- Update the standards and inspection forms to include pest management.

For more information regarding this report, please use the "contact" link on our website at [www.atlaudit.org](http://www.atlaudit.org)

## ***Performance Audit:***

### **Parks Maintenance**

#### ***What We Found***

We inspected a sample of 40 parks using the Department of Parks and Recreation's quality assessment form, which establishes a high standards rubric. The average score for the parks we inspected was 73%. Fifteen of the 40 parks we inspected scored below 70%, indicating the park was in poor condition. Ten parks scored between 70% and 80%, indicating the park needed improvement, and fifteen parks scored 80% or better, indicating the park was in good or excellent condition. We observed cleanliness and tree maintenance problems at most parks we inspected. Most play surfaces were in good to excellent condition.

Small parks—those of one acre or less—in our sample scored higher than larger parks. While the parks' condition varied by six percentage points among maintenance districts, parks in our sample that are maintained by third parties scored an average of 15 percentage points better than the sample parks maintained by city crews.

The department's annual quality inspection scores were generally higher and showed less variation than our inspection scores. Differences in results could relate to the timing of inspections. We didn't assess turf and bed maintenance because we visited parks during the off-season. Also, accumulated leaves, which were a problem at nearly all parks we visited, are less likely to be present during mowing season when the department conducts its annual inspections.

Supervisors attributed poor park conditions to the lack of staff. The department increases parks maintenance staffing during mowing season, but staffing during the off-season may not keep up with year-round needs. Most parks in our sample had few inspections documented during the off-seasons in 2015 and 2016. The Office of Parks collected about half as many inspections as would be expected on a ten-day cycle. The department paid parks maintenance employees over \$540,000 in overtime in 2015 and 2016. Park supervisors were paid about half of the overtime. The department added 12 full-time parks maintenance positions in the fiscal year 2017 budget, but filled the positions in March, after we conducted our inspections.

## Summary of Management Responses

**Recommendation #1:** We recommend the Commissioner of Parks ensure that employees are following procedures to review safety conditions and promptly initiate repairs.

**Proposed Action:** During the Crew Supervisor training during the Spring of 2017, employees received additional training on the Department's work order procedures to be effective in reporting and completing all service requests. Staff will continue to have the ability to contact Parks Customer Service to report service requests either by telephone or email. Our Management Services Office (MSO) will implement an additional review of the Department's performance as it relates to service request completion by tasks and districts. **Agree**

**Timeframe:** November 2017

**Recommendation #2:** We recommend the Commissioner of Parks compare annual inspections year-to-year and develop a report for department management reflecting the status of carryover issues.

**Proposed Action:** Once annual inspections are completed, the Management Services Office (MSO) will provide the Department's senior leadership team with a year-to-year comparison report to reflect status of carryover issues. **Agree**

**Timeframe:** December 2017

**Recommendation #3:** We recommend the Commissioner of Parks develop a maintenance classification system that outlines how each park type will be maintained according to size and amenities.

**Proposed Action:** The Department recognizes that our current park inspection tool and maintenance schedule does not account for the varying inventory of our park system (including size and types of amenities) and our typical season (April through October). The Department is currently piloting a revised approach of our ten (10) day maintenance cycle. We will evaluate the success of the pilot to develop a maintenance classification system that outlines park type and considers seasonal nature of our work. **Agree**

**Timeframe:** February 2018

<b>Recommendation #4:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks assign all parks maintained by city crews to a park district to ensure routine maintenance is performed consistently and to the department's standards.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	All parks maintained by city crews are currently assigned to a park district. Crews are organized by districts: Northwest Parks, Northeast Parks, Southwest Parks, Southeast Parks, Oakland Cemetery, Greenhouse, BeltLine, and Ballfields. The Office of Park Design will work with Office of Parks to ensure the current list of maintained parks is accurate and reflective of any changes made as a result of implementing recommendation #3.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	February 2018	
<b>Recommendation #5:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks clearly identify all decommissioned parks.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	The Office of Park Design maintains a master list with a full inventory of all city parks. This list includes parks which are not developed yet, decommissioned for active use, maintained through partners and other city agencies, and/or serve as conservation easements and/or forested properties. As we implement changes based on recommendation #3, we will incorporate an appropriate maintenance schedule for these types of properties.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	February 2018	
<b>Recommendation #6:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks annually inspect parks that are maintained by partnerships.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	The Department works with a variety of partners to help maintain many of the City's parks. Many of those parks are part of our annual inspection program. However, several beauty spots maintained by neighborhoods are too numerous and underutilized to necessitate an annual inspection. The Department will audit a sample size of these properties for an annual inspection.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	December 2017	
<b>Recommendation #7:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks formally document present and future agreements between all entities and persons who maintain city parks and update the list annually.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	The Department has compiled a list of MOUs, partnerships, and lease agreements established between the City and its conservancies, friends of park groups, and organizations. The Management Services Office (MSO) will update the list to include timeline for renewals to ensure compliance with the terms of each contract.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	November 2017	

<b>Recommendation #8:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks ensure that supervisors and district managers inspect parks throughout the year.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	Crew Supervisors currently inspect parks during the Department's typical season. A schedule will be created for off-season inspections that will include a different inspection schedule and park inspection tool/evaluation.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	November 2017	
<b>Recommendation #9:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks clarify the operations manual to require park supervisors to report routine inspections year-round.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	The Department will update all park policies and procedures to reflect current operations and include the appropriate standard regarding year-round inspections.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	February 2018	
<b>Recommendation #10:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks monitor inspection results throughout the year to assess whether staffing levels are adequate to meet performance standards.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	The Department will update its policies and inspection standards and tools to reflect the seasonal nature of our work flow.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	February 2018	
<b>Recommendation #11:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks clarify expectations regarding cleanliness of natural areas.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	This recommendation will be assessed in conjunction with recommendation #3.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	February 2018	
<b>Recommendation #12:</b>	We recommend the Commissioner of Parks include pest management expectations on the inspection form and the standards used by park staff to evaluate the condition during the routine inspections.	
<b>Proposed Action:</b>	Pest and herbicide control is currently performed on all ballfields. In addition, pest control management is responded to as service requests received by the Department. Our policies and inspection tool will be updated to include current pest control management practices.	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Timeframe:</b>	March 2018	