

OVERTON PARK

notes

spring 2016

Priceless, whatever the cost

Overton Park is in the spotlight.

Recently, a national audience tuned in to see the park featured in the PBS documentary “Ten Parks That Changed America.” The story of the “little old ladies in tennis shoes” who stopped an interstate from being built through a park resonates decades after the United States Supreme Court ruled in their favor. It’s a testament to the way public space and community help each other to thrive.

In praise of public spaces, city planner and writer William (Holly) Whyte said, “It is not just the number of people using them, but the larger number who pass by and enjoy them vicariously, or even the larger number who feel better about the city center for knowledge of them. For a city, such places are priceless, whatever the cost.” Whyte researched human behavior in public spaces and concluded that cities “have a moral responsibility to create physical places that facilitate civic engagement and community interaction.”

In Memphis, Overton Park has served that function for well over 100 years. At Overton Park Conservancy, we have a front-row seat every day to the vital role the park plays in creating community.

On days like May 7, it seems like all of Memphis is coming together right here: to celebrate Brooks



Hula hooping at the Latino Memphis Festival on May 7

Museum’s 100th birthday, to dance and play at the Latino Memphis Festival, to buy original pieces from Memphis College of Art students, to raise money for the Dorothy Day House of Hospitality at Café du Memphis, and to see the Memphis Zoo’s hippos in their new home. Nowhere else can you find such a variety of ways to celebrate who we are as a city.

But a great public space like Overton Park doesn’t just happen—it’s created from great investment.

What is a conservancy worth?

Measured purely in dollars, Overton Park Conservancy has been worth \$6 million to Overton Park over the last four years. That’s how much we’ve raised from the community and invested into projects like Overton Bark, Rainbow Lake Playground, Bike Gate, and the upcoming Old Forest welcome gateways.

The projects are a highly visible symbol of the community’s investment in the park. But it’s the day-to-day management, the feeling that “someone’s home in the park,” where Overton Park Conservancy makes the biggest impact. Here’s a glimpse into the everyday reality of park operations:

- Once a year, we spread a new layer of mulch safety surfacing in both Rainbow Lake Playground and

Overton Bark. Ideally we'd do it twice per year, but the material alone costs \$3,000 each time.

- We use 3,000 dog-waste bags every month (which Hollywood Feed generously donates). Occasionally we have to replace the dispensers themselves because they get knocked over with baseball bats.
- Sections of our playground fence were recently torn down by vandals and must be replaced. The gate handles at Rainbow Lake Playground and Overton Bark are regularly broken or removed.
- Landscaping plants at Bike Gate were stolen, and the bollards separating the plaza from the street were knocked down and had to be re-installed.
- The restrooms are regular targets for vandalism and have to be cleaned and re-stocked multiple times a day during busy seasons. The massive maintenance commitment is why many parks only have port-a-johns.
- Trash cans fill up quickly when events pick up on weekends, and occasionally vandals dump the contents of the cans all over the ground in the middle of the night. On May 7, our cleaning crew filled three dumpsters and that still didn't accommodate all the trash from overflowing cans throughout the park.
- The Conservancy spent weeks developing a modified traffic flow plan for May 7, meeting with partners to make sure the plan worked for everyone, and publicizing the changes and available shuttle service. Plus, our Executive Director Tina Sullivan directed traffic in the park from sunup to sundown!

These are the realities park managers face every day, everywhere. Our goal is to make sure that issues are resolved before you arrive at the park each day—and if they aren't, to tell you what we're doing to fix them.

Next-level park maintenance

While public-private partnerships have become a popular model across the country to reverse the decline of public spaces, Overton Park enjoys a special level of care. At many conservancies, the city retains responsibility for mowing, trash collection, litter pickup, and pavilion rentals. Even with those extra private funds raised by conservancies, city staffs are still stretched thin and can't visit any particular park more than once a week.

When Overton Park Conservancy began in 2012, we adopted a different model. All those functions that would normally be performed by the City are instead performed by the Conservancy and our contractors. Pavilion rentals are handled by our Visitor Services Coordinators, Rose Baker and Andrew Weda, who assist with everything from scheduling to advice on setup to on-site support.



Ron Teamer and Spencer Whitley, Jr. of Pinnacle Perpetual Services



The team from Echo Systems removes a tree that crushed part of the playground fence.

A Winning Team

Our park contractors are so much more than that word suggests. Jeff Edelstein and his crew at Echo Systems have been our landscaping professionals since the beginning, and their familiar red-uniformed employees are a reliable presence in the park almost every day. They keep a frequent mowing schedule in the summer months, make sure the landscaping looks beautiful, remove leaves and debris from trails and sidewalks, and so much more.

This year, we began working with Ron Teamer and Pinnacle Perpetual Services to handle restroom cleaning, trash pickup, and litter removal. Ron and his team go above and beyond their job descriptions on a regular basis, and like the Echo crew, they take tremendous pride in their work.

We also have strong relationships with the crews from our partner institutions, the City of Memphis, Memphis City Beautiful, and friends like Wes Hopper of Urban Forestry. Wes is just as likely to engage a visitor on the subject of wildflowers as he is to expertly clear a fallen oak from a trail.

That's what makes Overton Park so special. Everyone who works in the park is an ambassador, invested in the space and the relationships they've built here. They're always eager to have a conversation.

Investment makes a difference

Students at local universities in the 1990s remember being told not to go to Overton Park because it wasn't safe. Regardless of actual crime levels, a public space where repairs aren't made and facilities are neglected creates a perception of blight and danger. People stop visiting, and a space meant to bring people together instead keeps them apart.

Today, Overton Park is thriving. Our university students are involved in the park in every way, from track teams running the trails, to research on the Old Forest's flora and fauna, to regular university volunteer events. The Greensward is Memphis College of Art's front yard and has inspired countless works of art. Slowly but surely, the community is re-embracing the Old Forest as the incredible gift it is, rather than an intimidating barrier between two sides of the park.

Your investment matters. While the Overton Park of today faces challenges due to its popularity, there's no doubt that it once again plays a central role in the life of our community. And that is absolutely priceless.

Creating the future together

To continue this positive momentum, we need to plan well for the future. With four years of completed projects and experience with day-to-day management, the Conservancy is eager to continue leading the park forward. Your contributions to the Transportation and Traffic Report were invaluable in helping us understand the needs of park users and identify ways to improve your experience. (Read it at www.overtonpark.org/plan.)

Now it's time to look at the big picture. The last Overton Park Master Plan was completed in 1988, and a lot has changed since then. It's time for our community to come together again and set goals and standards for what we want the park to be. That means working with each park institution and our visitors to set priorities. As we launch the planning process in the coming months, we'll need your input at every step.

We're grateful to everyone who has contributed to the fabric of Overton Park, and we can't wait to work with you to make its future even brighter.



Rhodes College's investment in the park includes a farmers market on Thursdays at East Parkway Pavilion.

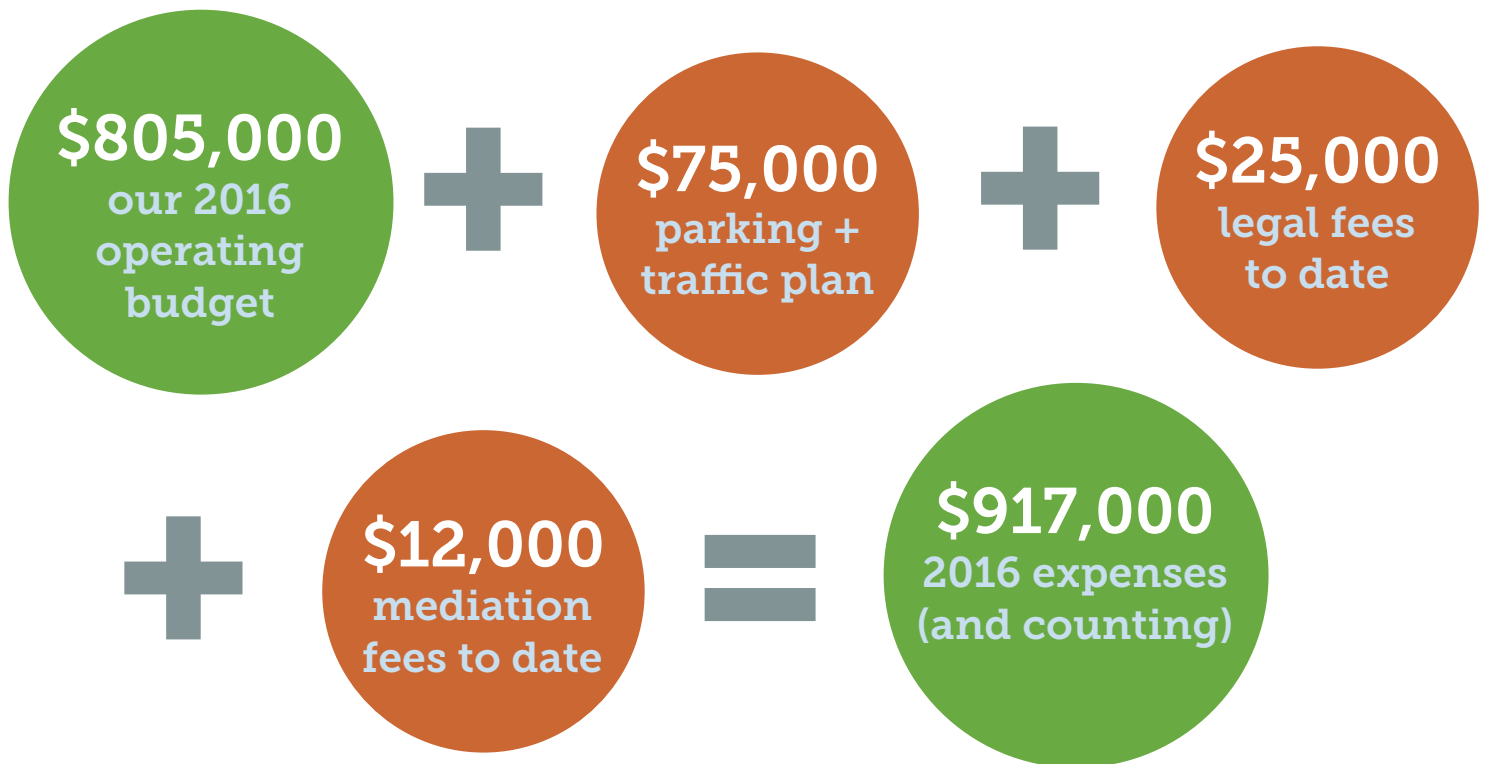


Making new friends at Overton Bark; the Literacy Mid-South Reading Flash Mob on the Greensward

The Conservancy needs your help

2016 has brought many unanticipated expenses at Overton Park Conservancy. We created our operating budget for this year late in 2015, prior to the escalation of the Greensward parking controversy. That budget reflected our regular costs such as landscaping, cleaning, repairs, project maintenance, and salaries for our lean staff of four full-time and two part-time employees. We also build in costs for things like emergency maintenance, but those expenses can soar in seasons when weather has a particularly big impact in the park, such as the recent storms that have brought numerous trees down.

When Mayor Jim Strickland asked that a plan for parking and traffic be developed by June 30, Overton Park Conservancy stepped up and funded a report and public input process led by expert consultants at Looney Ricks Kiss, Alta Planning + Design, and Kimley-Horn & Associates. Mayor Strickland also asked that we participate in a mediation process with the Memphis Zoo. Combined with pending litigation, our expenses for this issue are piling up, even as we strive to maintain a high level of care for the park.



That adds 14%* to our anticipated expenses.

* Mediation is ongoing, so these costs will increase.

Your support is more crucial than ever. It's important to note that **the only way to defer these costs is to contribute directly to Overton Park Conservancy.** We're grateful to Kathy and Kelly Fish and everyone who attended March's Cocktails for a Cause event, which raised \$15,000 toward this process. Please continue to support the Conservancy through your donations, memberships, and attendance at fundraisers like our Day of Merrymaking family festival.



You can donate or become a member using the envelope included here, or visit www.overtonpark.org/support to contribute online.

OPC adds two Visitor Services Coordinators

It's clear to Overton Park Conservancy that the most important part of managing a park is creating an excellent visitor experience. That means that from the time you arrive at the park until you leave, you should encounter a clean, beautiful, safe space. You should feel welcome, and your concerns should be heard. Ideally, you should leave feeling better than you did when you got here.

That's why we've hired two Visitor Services Coordinators, Rose Baker and Andrew Weda. Rose and Andrew are ambassadors for the park, here to assist with everything from answering questions on your walk to making sure your birthday party at the pavilion goes smoothly.

Rose has a degree in Art History and Italian from the University of Memphis, and also works in visitor services at the Brooks Museum of Art. Her interest in art and her work at the museum cultivated a love for events, and she has been putting her creativity to use in planning this year's Day of Merrymaking festival.

Rose lived near Overton Park in college, and it has been close to her heart ever since. "I love helping



other people make that same connection," she says. "When I work with someone on a family reunion or a birthday party, I'm helping them build memories in a beautiful, green, safe place."

Andrew recently graduated from the University of Memphis with a degree in Professional Studies, minoring in Nonprofit Management. He started working with the Conservancy last year as an intern via the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance, and we were thrilled to bring him on as an employee when he completed the program.

"Overton Park is beautiful and peaceful, and it's amazing that you can find this in the middle of Memphis," Andrew says. He recalls a time when

he was speaking to a park visitor who was practicing cartooning when a member of the park cleaning crew approached. They discovered they shared the same interest, and agreed to get together to help each other out. "That's what parks should be," Andrew says. "People from different walks of life coming together to build relationships."

If you see Andrew or Rose in the park, stop and say hello. You never know who they'll connect you with!

Dozens of volunteers joined us on a rainy, windy Saturday in April for Comcast Cares Day, a national day of service with more than 100,000 participants. For every volunteer who contributes, Comcast makes a donation to the nonprofit organization hosting the work day.

We were thrilled to have so many dedicated volunteers from Comcast, Latino Memphis, ROTC, Memphis City Beautiful, Park Friends, and the community. The group did trail work, spread safety surfacing in Overton Park and Rainbow Lake Playground, and completed spring landscaping at the Abe Goodman Golf Clubhouse.

Thanks to everyone who braved the elements to help beautify Overton Park!



Know your phlox from your poppies



Field Guide to Overton Park's Old Forest, Memphis, TN

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There are 350 species (and counting) of plants in the Old Forest, and now you can identify them! Browse the field guide, or use the tags on the left to search by bloom time, establishment, flower color, plant type, or taxonomy. Click each entry for more photos and information about each plant.

Most of these plants were documented as part of a 2009 floristic study conducted by Tom Heineke. This field guide represents the final species list of that inventory, as well as additional flora and fauna recorded by Overton Park Conservancy's team. Many of the photos in this guide were taken right here in the Old Forest by OPC's Melissa McMasters.

You can submit your own observations from the Old Forest to our project here: <http://www.inaturalist.org/projects/field-guide-to-overton-park-old-forest-memphis-tn> [less](#) ↑

All 350

Search

Sort Grid Card

BLOOMS

(01) January 2

(02) February 6

(03) March 51

(04) April 121

(05) May 145

(06) June 139

(07) July 117

(08) August 120

(09) September 91

(10) October 56

(11) November 7

(12) December 1

ESTABLISHMENT

native 259

non-native 78

Redbud¹
Cercis canadensis

Common vetch¹
Vicia sativa

Field madder¹
Sherardia arvensis

Spring beauty¹
Claytonia virginica

American hazelnut¹
Corylus americana

Henbit¹
Lamium amplexicaule

Japanese mazus¹
Mazus pumilus

Carolina briarflower²
Modiola caroliniana

Until recently, if you wanted to know what pink flowers would be the first to burst into bloom in Overton Park's Old Forest, you were at the mercy of a Google search or a guidebook, both of which focus on areas much larger than our backyard forest. That's all changed, as we've debuted an **online field guide** that includes only plants that grow within the park.

The free photographic guide is based on a 2009 floristic study of the Old Forest conducted by botanist Tom Heineke. That study identified nearly 350 flowering plants, an impressive amount for a small forest completely bounded by an urban area. That data has been locked up in a PDF until now, making it difficult for park users to connect the names on the page with the flowers at their feet.

Using the citizen science web platform iNaturalist, the Conservancy has created a page dedicated to each of these plants. Users can filter the list by bloom month, flower color, type of plant, and whether or not it's native to the Memphis area. This makes the process of finding those March-blooming pink flowers much less daunting—instead of searching the Internet for “pink flowers in Tennessee,” two clicks will narrow down the field guide to a manageable nine options.

Many of the photographs that illustrate the guide were taken right here in the Old Forest by the

Conservancy's Communications Director Melissa McMasters. Because so many plants have local variations in appearance, we wanted to illustrate the guide with photos that look exactly like what our visitors will see. This guide is as hyper-local as it gets!

Identifying plants can be a daunting and time-consuming task. By narrowing it down to our forest, we hope to help you learn the names of what's in your backyard. From there, you can learn to distinguish between the native plants that make up a healthy forest, and the introduced plants that can starve out those natives. Then it's just a matter of time before you're joining a Conservancy volunteer day and helping us combat kudzu and Chinese privet!

The iNaturalist platform is valuable in other ways. As you spot plants, birds, and insects, you can submit observations to the program. The site's user community will help you crowdsource an identification. All the named species contribute to an overall Overton Park checklist, helping the Conservancy understand what's happening in the forest.

The Field Guide to Overton Park's Old Forest is located at www.inaturalist.org/guides/1860. On your mobile device, download the free iNaturalist app, tap “Guides,” and either type “Overton Park” or Search Nearby Guides to populate the Old Forest guide.

What's in the woods?

Thanks to the 2009 study that serves as the basis for our Field Guide to Plants, we know there are about 350 species of flowering plants in the Old Forest. But the plants are only a fraction of the treasures to be found in the woods. For example, did you know that for every plant species described in the United States, there are **six** species of insects? That suggests we have a lot of six-legged friends just waiting to be identified in the forest.

We got a big assist at April's Memphis-Wide Urban BioBlitz, a 24-hour event whose goal was to identify as many different species as possible in several Memphis parks. The event also engaged the community by bringing middle and high school students and members of the public to learn from naturalists leading tours of each site.

At Overton Park, we kicked off the exploration with a nighttime "owl prowl." Although we didn't spot any barred owls in the dark (they came out the next morning!), we did collect a number of insects. Among our finds were a huge wolf spider, the largest species of millipede found in North America, and a footlong earthworm. We released them all back into the night and got ready to find even more species the next morning.



In all, the BioBlitz identified more than 100 species (and counting), many of them insects. We're grateful to our partners at Tennessee Geographic Alliance, University of Memphis, Clean Memphis, Lichterman Nature Center, and Shelby Farms Park Conservancy for collaborating on this event. Special thanks to Jonathan Carpenter, Spencer Kaaz, Joshua Doby, Paula Cravens, Laurie Johnson, and National Geographic photographer Kevin FitzPatrick for all their work before and during the BioBlitz.

You don't need a formal excuse to learn more about what's in the forest. You can turn every day into a BioBlitz! Just photograph anything that interests you, submit your photos to iNaturalist, and let the community help you learn. You may just discover something no one's seen here before.



You can see photos of everything we found at www.inaturalist.org/projects/overton-park-bioblitz-april-2016.



Above: Kevin FitzPatrick took hundreds of insect photos and shared his technique with park visitors. Left: An American giant millipede. Below: Mr. Overton takes a terrarium break.

During the daytime, we discovered purple finches, a beautiful white baneberry plant, baby red-eared slider turtles at Rainbow Lake, and many more insects. The unquestioned star of the show was an Eastern garter snake who was discovered by a nine-year-old naturalist and dubbed "Mr. Overton." Under the guidance of our BioBlitz coordinator Jonathan Carpenter, the non-venomous Mr. Overton made lots of friends throughout the day before being released back into the woods.



Overton Park Conservancy gratefully acknowledges the individuals and organizations who made donations and in-kind (noted with an asterisk) gifts from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015. If we have inadvertently omitted the name of one of our supporters, we sincerely apologize.

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Your guide to A Day of Merrymaking

Missed your chance to get a bird's-eye-view of Overton Park last year? You're in luck, because this year's fourth annual Day of Merrymaking brings back last year's popular hot air balloon floats (and so much more!)

Join us on the Greensward on **Saturday, June 4** from 10 AM - 3 PM for a family festival that celebrates everything Overton Park has to offer. There will be games and activities for kids, a water slide, bounce houses, an art tent hosted by The Art Project, and tons of fun for dogs provided by Hollywood Feed. The event is **FREE**, with a suggested \$5 donation to Overton Park Conservancy.

This year, for the first time, A Day of Merrymaking will host its very own beer garden! Built by our awesome park landscaping contractors at Echo Systems, the beer garden provides a little something extra for the grown-ups. Memphis Made Brewing Co. is generously providing the beer, and your tips and donations benefit Overton Park Conservancy.

A full entertainment lineup will be announced soon, but we're excited to present Memphis' premier reggae rockers, Chinese Connection Dub Embassy, as our headlining performers.

You can grab lunch and snacks at one of Memphis' many great food trucks, including Bakes No Mistakes, Cariflavor, DJ&S Hero Movement, El Mero Taco, The Jamaican Jerk Pit, JoyRide, Kona Ice of Memphis, Meekie's Munchies, MemPopS, Memphis Mojo Cafe, Parker's Concessions, Say Cheese, and StaMar's Concessions and Catering.

Awesome local vendors include African Business Expert Solutions, Aunt Key's Apothecary, Babycreeper, Backyard Bird Boutique, Barefoot Books, Brenda Chic Vintage Plunder Jewelry, Bridgman Pottery, Camp Bow Wow, Choices Memphis, Cosgrove & Lewis Luxury Handmade Soaps, Michelle Duckworth, Ekata Designs, Feywild, The Hammered Pear, Hands of Mothers (Manos de Madres), It Works Global, Let's Go Memphis, Livable Memphis Mobile Front Porch, Marokel Industrial Design, McCarter Coasters, Misty's Miracle Jewelry, MLC Pottery and Mosaics, Normal



Things LLC, Old House Glass Works, PuppyUp Foundation, Russell's WoodShed, Sarah Terry, Scentral Blends, Trinity Missionary Baptist Church, Usborne Books and More, and Wootton Family Chiropractic. More vendors to come!

We will have shuttles to carry visitors to and from the event. Parking in the park will be limited, so we encourage you to shuttle, bike, or walk to the event. Details on location are still being finalized, so check our website for details.

A huge thanks to this year's sponsors, including our presenting sponsor, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare. Major sponsorship is provided by Echo Systems, The Commercial Appeal, The Daily News, Hollywood Feed, and Hyde Family Foundations.

Additional sponsorship is provided by A2H, The Art Project, BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, Boscos Cycling, Central Gardens Association, The Curb Market, Ecco on Overton Park, The Eclectic Eye, Evergreen Historic District Association, Evergreen Yoga Center, Hein Park Neighborhood Association, Huey's, inbalance FITNESS, InCity Realty, Independent Bank, Memphis Made Brewing Co., MLGW, Regional One Health, Teresa Sloyan, SunTrust Bank, Utopia Animal Hospital, Wagner General Contractors, and West Cancer Center.



Visit www.overtonpark.org/merrymaking for a schedule of events and shuttle info.



2015 Day of Merrymaking (photo by Phillip Van Zandt)



VERTON PARK

CONSERVANCY

1914 Poplar Avenue, Suite 202
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New wayfinding markers are going in
on the Old Forest Loop trail!
Visit overtonpark.org/trails later
this month for an interactive map.