Attracting Adolescents through Park Design

An Honors Thesis (LA 404)

by

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Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May, 2010

Graduation Date
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Abstract

This research explores the ability of public parks to meet the needs and wants of adolescents in regards to park design. Adolescence is the stage of life during which individuals are forming their adult personalities. They have different needs and wants than children and adults, but their needs are not being met. Across the nation, they are often seen as a "special" and undesirable age group, and therefore they do not receive the attention and support from the community that they need. This study reveals that adolescents need community involvement, and the community would benefit from including adolescents in public parks. This proposal is to redesign Westside Park in Muncie, Indiana to attract adolescents by providing amenities for their needs and wants.
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I. Introduction

This research explores the ability of public parks to meet the needs and wants of adolescents in regards to park design. Adolescence is the stage of life during which individuals are forming their adult personalities. They have different needs and wants than children and adults, these qualities are not being met. Teenagers are often seen as a "special" and undesirable age group across the nation, and therefore they do not receive the attention and support from the community that they need and deserve. This study reveals that not only do adolescents need community involvement, but also that the community would benefit from including adolescents in public parks. Studies show that today's teenagers are much more likely to participate in community volunteer work than the previous generation. They are less likely to commit violent crimes or use harmful drugs.

During the daytime hours, school acts as a safe construct for adolescents providing them with mental stimulation and social interaction. They also offer many after-school activities such as sport teams, academic clubs, and music groups. However, not all adolescents appreciate the school environment and many of these individuals rebel against the educational system. These teenagers need a safe place to be with peers outside of school, both for their own safety and for the sake of community peace. Lack of outlets for constructive energies often results in destructive behavior.

Muncie parks have been deteriorating for the past few decades and are in great need of attention and repair, which significantly diminishes their ability to attract visitors. Amenities for adolescents are notably lacking in the park system.

This proposal is to design Westside Park in Muncie, Indiana to attract adolescents by providing amenities for their needs and wants, which will in turn improve the park, reduce the crime rate, and activate the huge reserves of adolescent energy into community endeavors.
II. Statement of the Problem

Public park designs should attract American teenagers to the landscape for healthy social and recreational enjoyment, and Westside Park in Muncie, Indiana should be redesigned according to the needs of local teenagers and to enhance the current state of Muncie Parks.

a. Subproblems/ Subquestions

What are the attributes of urban parks that satisfy the needs and wants of users?

What values do public park users today desire in a park?

What amenities and facilities are included in modern and historical “good” parks?

What facilities or equipment in urban parks are designed for adolescents?

What facilities or aspects of public parks meet social and recreational needs?

What is valued by adolescents in public parks?

How do public parks actively integrate adolescents into communities?

What do Muncie parks offer specifically for local adolescents?

What facilities or aspects of public park design are available in Muncie’s public parks that meet social and recreation needs for adolescents?

What is valued by adolescents in Muncie’s public parks?

How do Muncie parks actively integrate adolescents into the community?

What do Muncie parks need?

What facilities for social and recreational needs are missing?

Which valued aspects of public parks are not represented in Muncie parks?

How can Muncie actively integrate adolescents into the community through public park design?
b. Hypothesis

Muncie Parks offer few public amenities or facilities that specifically attract teenagers, engaging them with the outdoor landscape and meeting their recreational and social needs. Redesigning a local community park with emphasis on both ‘good park design’ and meeting teenagers’ needs will give adolescents the opportunity for healthy outdoor recreation and a new social context, consequently attracting their presence in that public park.

c. Delimitations

Adolescents or teenagers as a user group will not be separated into categories according to socioeconomic status, race, physical or mental abilities to determine needs.

The research about available recreation for teenagers in Muncie does not include mini parks or small neighborhood parks, since they are much less accessible and often do not have facilities that are designed to accommodate more than the immediate vicinity. It also does not include the amenities that are found in Muncie’s one and only regional park, since it is outside the city limits and adolescents without a driver’s license cannot safely visit the site.

This study does not investigate the needs and wants of adolescents who are attending a college or university, since continued education typically provides more resources than are available to the majority of adolescents.

d. Definitions

“Good” park design: Good park design is defined by how well a park satisfies the needs of the site and the needs of its users. Many award-winning park designs are well-known for being ‘favorite’ places for locals to frequently visit. They are aesthetically pleasing, offer sufficient amenities for passive and active recreation, and provide opportunities for interaction between visitors.

Teenager/Adolescent: A person in the stage of life between childhood and adulthood, during which the individual develops their adult personalities. The person is typically between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, dependent on an adult for support, and enrolled in school.
e. Assumptions

1. The park will be easy to access for all community members.
2. All main circulation routes are ADA accessible.
3. The site is ecologically and environmentally predictable, with typical floodplain qualities.

f. Significance of the Problem

This research is significant to adolescents, landscape architecture, and communities because teens are an important group in society. A person’s adolescent years are often the time during which their adult personality and identity is formed. Adolescents need a place in society where they feel competent and valued if their energy is to be directed towards positive goals. (Medoff and Sklar)

The study is significant to landscape architecture because there is little emphasis on including this particular user group in design goals. Adolescents are often left out of the planning process for public spaces. In fact, they are referred to as a “special population” subgroup along with the “mentally ill” and the “elderly and handicapped.” Adolescents have little power to influence their environment, but they are users of public spaces and their social behaviors and values are affected by their environment. (Passon, 74) They are often an ‘undesirable’ sub-group as well. They are perceived by adults as “rude, irresponsible, and wild.” (Medoff and Sklar) Minority and low-income teens have even worse stereotypes and are called “welfare mothers, gang members, and drug users who reject mainstream values,” according to survey research. (Medoff and Sklar)

The research is significant to communities because teenagers possess a largely untapped energy potential that can accomplish great things when given opportunities, ownership, and guidance. Although perceptions of adolescents are quite negative, the reality is that teens are less likely than older generations to smoke, use hard drugs, drive drunk, and commit violent crimes. They are also more likely to participate in community service. (Passon, 75)
III. Review of the Literature

a. Attributes of urban parks that satisfy the needs and wants of users

The most important want or need in park design is that the park needs to be, as Michael Van Valkenburgh states, "the ultimate form of democracy," made for the benefit of all citizens. (21st Century, 65) He stresses that Frederick Law Olmsted, the first landscape architect and the designer of Central Park in New York City, is a good example of this in the past. He was very good at collaborating between multiple disciplines while designing Central Park, which is the first example of a public park in American history. Olmsted understood the importance of social content and its role in the city, the need for the park to meet needs and wants of everyone, not just portions of the population. (21st Century, 64)

In the past few decades, parks have been deteriorating. They lack appropriate maintenance. Many have broken and dated equipment, chipped paint, amenities with pieces missing, etc. The importance of their presence was undermined and their quality in the public realm fell too. This deterioration has led to the renewed interest in using park design to revitalize urban areas. The new user demands for parks include the necessity for singular park identity, which means that each park must be unique, but create strong connections to other parks. In general, parks without these qualities are likely to be abandoned. (21st Century, 65)

Two parks stand out as good examples of places that meet today's need for singular identity in public spaces: the Washington Highway Overpass, Washington State, and Ocean County Public Library's small outdoor park with a bar code theme in Toms River, New Jersey. The Washington Highway Overpass is a complex project that connects people to their history. Many of the people in the area have Native American backgrounds and that connection shows in the design. Petroglyphs are carved into metal decorations in the center of nodes along the path. Paddles and other Native American cultural objects create an identifying theme. (Enlow, 90-95) The library example is highlighted in the article, "Illuminating Knowledge." The space is a pavilion outside a library that was themed after barcodes, which gives the space a very unique identity. The lighting, the paving, the seating, and even the layout were designed to celebrate that little portion of American culture. (Carlock, 96-101)

Only one of these designs is entirely public and celebrates the people's identity, but they are both good examples of creating singular identity. The themes that set these spaces apart make them memorable and exciting, which is important to today's public, including teenagers.
Another park that sets a great example of meeting the need for singular identity is Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord in the Ruhrgebiet portion of Germany by Latz + Partner, which meets the needs of singular identity in such a way that it also has unique link to every age group. (Weilacher, 102-134) This park also meets needs on many other levels, and will therefore be mentioned again in this review.

Since the elderly and teenage populations are considered the ‘undesirables’ whose ‘special’ needs are much less likely to be met (Medoff and Sklar), the focus should be on how the park meets their needs. Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord was built on an industrial site, and rather than tearing the industrial ‘waste’ out, much of the factory’s structure was left in place to celebrate the site’s history. (Weilacher, 102-134) Site history caters specifically to the elderly of the city, who take their families or friends to the park and revisit spaces in which they once worked. The park brings back memories, and the elderly have a feeling of ownership because they relate to its history. (Weilacher, 102-134) See the next section for information about how Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord meets the needs of adolescents.

Mark Francis, the author of *Urban Open Space: Designing for User Needs*, lists necessary basic principles for creating urban spaces that meet user needs. These are important to include in any park, regardless of age: (Francis, 41)

- Design and management should address user needs for ANY open space.
- Programming is critical to addressing user needs.
- People’s rights for access, appropriation, and use must be protected in the design and management of open spaces.
- Users and even some non-users (such as adjacent residents) should be directly involved in the management of open spaces.
- User and stakeholder participation should be real, not token.
- Design and management should incorporate the visions of the designer(s) and users.
- Adaptability and flexibility should be designed into projects.
- Ongoing evaluation and redesign are critical to the life of any open space.
b. Facilities in Public Parks that are Specifically for Teenagers

National Level

The National Recreation and Park Association website lists these national programs that endorse outdoor recreation in American communities. The issue with this list is that the endorsed programs are not directed toward benefitting teenagers. Most are designed for young children. The small number that do include teenagers are directed toward family involvement. This is typically not very appealing to adolescents, since they want and need recreational opportunities to “hang out” with peers in the absence of adult supervision. (Coontz) (Passon, 76)

National services are not only lacking support for teenagers, but they are also not necessarily for the general public. Often, as the National and Recreational Park Association, NRPA, website says, these programmatic elements are part of the YMCA rather than a public facility, which means that only members and paying visitors can participate. The following is the national list that shows what activities are considered valuable for communities. To the right is the target age group that corresponds to the activities. (NRPA)

- AARP Walking Program  
  age 50+
- Archery  
  “youth”
- Baseball  
  “youth”
- Basketball  
  children
- Boating and Fishing  
  children
- Football: training for youth football coaches  
  “youth” (males only)
- Golf: Sticks for Kids, PGA Family Course  
  children, families
- Paralympics Sports  
  disabled people only
- Partnership for Play  
  children
- Playground Safety  
  children
- Tennis  
  all ages
- Track and Field  
  ages 9-14

Only four of these are specifically for “youth” which typically includes programs for children and pre-teens, but not for teenagers. Only two groups, golf and tennis, are targeted for all ages and one is specifically for families. (NRPA)

This is important to note because many of these activities could be enjoyed by teenagers if the opportunity were provided. Another important observation is that all of them are team sports except golf which includes close adult supervision. (NRPA)

These activities that are specified for other age groups above would also be useful for teenagers: walking, archery, boating and fishing, and play structures designed for adolescents rather
than children. Team sports are great for adolescents, but there is ample opportunity in Muncie school programs.

Muncie's 5-year master plan includes a list of activities and spaces that represent a national 'checklist' of recommended amenities for cities based on population. Each item on the list is accompanied by the suggested quantity for each unit of population, the actual quantity available in Muncie, and Muncie's deficit. It highlights more national recreational expectations and values. This can be seen in the next section, "Muncie Parks' Amenities for Adolescents." (City of Muncie, Quantitative Data) The same issues that were seen on the National Recreation and Parks Association website are seen on this document, which is further discussed in the section, "What Muncie Parks Offer Specifically for Adolescents."

**International Level**

Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord also caters specifically to the adolescent user group because of the unique opportunities that the industrial structures provide. As mentioned previously, adolescents favor an urban atmosphere. They also need places for safe, unsupervised recreation and activities to enjoy with peers. (Medoff and Sklar)

To meet these needs, the park features many climbable amenities, some intentional, others not. There is a portion of structure that is specifically for climbing, with a belaying system and grips that have been attached to the structures. There is also a relatively new sport for adolescents called Parkour, which can be found in Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord and in Gas Works Park in Seattle. This sport is a highly energized individual or group sport (but not a team sport) in which the athletes pull stunts by jumping between structures, over them, and around. The athlete essentially challenges his or her body to accomplish feats that seem quite impossible. The sport somewhat resembles gymnastics, except that it is performed in an outdoor, urban setting. Visit americanparkour.com for links to videos of the sport. (americanparkour.com)

Skateboard parks are a popular answer to meeting teenage outdoor recreational needs, partially because it is recognized as an adolescent activity. There are two major problems with this. Skateboarding is partly popular among adolescents because it is a form of transportation as well as recreation. Adolescents often feel that public transportation is limiting and unreliable, but until they get a license, personal transportation like bikes and skateboards offer the freedom they want. Unfortunately, the parks offer space for skateboard recreation, but they typically do not change the regulations against skateboarding 'to' the park. The second problem is that adolescents are often
very excited about visiting in the beginning, but get bored of the layout and eventually stop attending. (Passon, 81) This does not eliminate skate board parks, but it suggests that perhaps the design needs to include the opportunity for the features to evolve or change over time, and it needs to be well connected to skateboard-friendly routes. (For more information about skate parks, see the interview with Matt Lunsford in the Appendices.)

Computer lounge- Study of 1,000 teenagers between the ages of 12-17, who were “contacted randomly by phone” shows that 90% of those people have online access. It is used as both entertainment, and as a resource. In addition, 87% of the teens surveyed use the internet regularly. (Buzzle) Internet is difficult to monitor, but can effectively be regulated with appropriate staff and software. Since Computers themselves are quite expensive and internet can contain explicit/inappropriate material, the option of excluding internet is also a viable one. Perhaps donated computers without internet access could be used to provide appropriate entertainment and basic computer operations, such as word processing and individual gaming. Networking computers to one another for gaming, without connecting to the internet is also an option.

Cafés or refreshment stands with reasonable prices are important to today’s teenagers. The places in town that teenagers enjoy most are ‘hang-out’ places, which are places that allow teens to loiter with peers and entertain each other, with the freedom to act as they please. Many places that become regular ‘hang-outs’ require the teenagers to purchase expensive refreshment or unnecessary items, simply to avoid being shooed off the premise. In the publication, "Implication of Adolescents' Perceptions and Values for Planning and Design," teenagers reported that they prefer places with affordable refreshment and space for both sitting and standing while ‘hanging out’ with peers. (Passon)

Today’s parks need to provide teenagers with the ability to be constructively creative. The Tipping Point, by Malcolm Gladwell, points out a common problem that relates directly to teenagers using destructive outlets for their creativity, which is a common concern for park users, park maintenance, and longevity of park property. The best example in the text was that of negative vandalism in the form of graffiti that was consistently repainted overnight. The book carefully points out that the teenagers committing the creative crimes chose places that seemed to be abandoned, places that appeared to have no value, or places that provided ideal conditions, such as a consistent supply of ideal surfaces. In the specific example, the teenagers used train cars waiting in layover. Graffiti expression on train cars was a three night process, a major investment of time. To eliminate the crime, officials waited until the vandalism was complete and then painted over it in
white so that the artwork would never see the light of day. Adolescents were in tears over their hard work. (Gladwell, 143) The vandalism could not stay on the trains, however, because negative graffiti is an indicator, and an invitation, for more serious crimes. Eliminating signs of public destruction such as negative graffiti, turns people into better citizens. (Gladwell, 259) But elimination of vandalism needs to be followed up with the opportunity for positive artwork, or those artists will simply find another place for their destructive behavior. There are two good ways to deal with these negative creative expressions.

The first is to provide appropriate guidelines to make the activity a constructive outlet for creativity and then make these expressions legal. A graffiti park in Germany is a good example of providing such a creative outlet. Sudgelande Natur Park in Berlin allows local artists to decorate the unsightly concrete walls left-over by architects and engineers. (Turner) The second is to give teenagers a reason to respect the property. This can be accomplished with good site maintenance and by giving teenagers the opportunity to invest time, energy, or talents into the park design.

A good way to encourage adolescent investment includes employment opportunities on park grounds and event programming that showcases adolescent talents, provides entertainment, and presents ample opportunity for volunteer work. (Coontz)

Some amenities that are directed less specifically towards adolescents, but still effectively attract them, are dog parks, adventure parks, and education centers, all of which encourage healthy physical and social activity within communities.

c. Muncie Parks’ Amenities for Adolescents

Muncie’s 5-year Park and Recreation Master Plan, released in 2009, is a great resource for determining what is already offered for teenagers in Muncie. Under the Inventory and Classification category is a large-scale inventory of park size, location, and general use. GIS maps indicate the existence of 23 parks in Muncie, ranging in size from Mini Parks to Community Parks to Muncie’s one Large Urban Park. Of these 23 parks, 6 are particularly of interest when identifying the available amenities for teenagers (See Delimitations). These six include:

- 2 large urban parks: Heekin Park and McCulloch Park
- 1 small community park: Westside Park
- 2 large neighborhood parks: Thomas Park and Ball Corporation Park (also called Ball Community Park in the anecdotal section)
- 1 linear park: White River Greenway
(City of Muncie, Inventory and Classification)
Another part of the master plan has a list of features that are found in Muncie’s parks. The features and amenities in the above-mentioned parks are of main concern when determining what features are already available for adolescents in Muncie. On a list of 96 features that are marked in the anecdotal data for the Muncie park system, only 14 of those apply to teenagers, and only 6 of those 14 relate directly and specifically to adolescent needs. Below is the list of the 14 features. The six that apply directly to adolescents are in italic, bold type. (City of Muncie, Anecdotal Data)

Baseball Diamond  
Basketball Court  
**Beach/ Pool/ Interactive Water Feature**  
**Bike racks**  
**Community Center**  
**Concession Stand**  
**Grill**  
Memorial  
Picnic Shelter  
Permanent Restroom  
Sculpture  
Swings  
Tennis  
**Disk Golf**

So how many of these teenager-friendly features are found in the specified parks? The following analysis of each park shows what features are available in each of the six parks:

*Ball Community Park* (also called Ball Corporation Park) features none of the six features that relate directly to adolescents. It has poorly maintained baseball and basketball features, no permanent restrooms, and a broken water fountain. (City of Muncie, Anecdotal Data)

*Heekin Park* also shows no record of any of the bold, italic features above. It does have neglected and unused tennis courts, permanent restrooms that are dated and lack privacy, broken water fountains, two war memorials, and a sculpture built for people and their pets that was relocated from another area. The entire park is dated. (City of Muncie, Anecdotal Data)

*McCulloch Park* features bike racks, a concession stand (although it is not clear if it is open regularly or only for special occasions), grills, and disk golf. The permanent restroom facilities are locked. There are broken water fountains and traces of the park’s rich history, but no form of communicating that history. The park is highly accessible because it is linked into the Greenway and the city bus routes. There is adequate parking space, and bike racks are available as well. It also features a token sledding hill and a derby track. Although the park has these attractive features, it is underused. (City of Muncie, Anecdotal Data)
Thomas Park, like the first two parks, has none of the bold, italic six features. It has a baseball field exclusively for leagues, locked permanent restrooms, basketball courts, and tennis courts. (City of Muncie, Anecdotal Data)

Tubey Park has pool facilities but they do not meet current safety codes and for the second summer will be closed. When open, the pool has an entrance fee, and a pool house including bathrooms and showers in good repair. The water pump broke and no longer meets code, which elevates the cost of fixing the problem beyond city funding capabilities. The pool was closed during the summer of 2009, rather than repaired. Two memorials can be found on the grounds. Across the street is a children’s playground with a picnic structure and swings. There was a temporary installation of a wooden skate park, which was well-used for a short time and then abandoned because of poor quality and damage from use. The installation was removed in 2008. (City of Muncie, Anecdotal Data)

Westside Park has a grill in poor condition. It also has baseball and basketball features, picnic shelters, permanent restrooms, swings, and under-used electric model airplane rings. The White River provides interest and attracts passive recreation. The park is very well connected because of the new greenway construction and ample parking space. It is not clear whether the bus route satisfactorily links Westside Park into its system. (City of Muncie, Anecdotal Data)

Not only do these analyses show that Muncie lacks features for adolescents, but they also reflect other important aspects that tend to turn people away. All of these parks have outdated equipment and organization. (City of Muncie, Anecdotal Data) This fact lowers the perceptual property values and increases the chances of criminal activity along with the perception of potential danger to visitors. (Gladwell) The memorials located in the parks are not ones to which today’s adolescents relate and the disrepair and disorganization of the properties fail to meet today’s users’ need to have unique parks.

Also included in the Inventory and Analysis are Muncie attractions that are not city park property. These include attractions such as: bowling alleys, roller skating arenas, cultural centers, natural resource areas, public golf courses, sports complexes, putt-putt golf, the YWCA, and YMCA. Most of these activities charge an entry fee or participation fee, but the majority are reasonably priced and open to adolescent participation. (City of Muncie, Inventory and Classification)

Included in the cultural center category is Minnetrista, the properties of the city founders and their maintained historical gardens. Portions of Minnetrista Cultural Center are protected from the general public and are accessible through guided tours for a fee. Minnetrista Center hosts
community attractions in its museums to paying customers as well. The majority of the grounds, however, are open to the general public at all hours. Open attractions that are regularly hosted on the grounds include concerts, theatrical plays, holiday and seasonal celebrations, and regular farmer's markets. (Minnetrista) Minnetrista is fairly accessible via various transportation modes, including non-vehicular because of its connection with the linear greenway, and is therefore a good resource for adolescents.

d. Muncie Parks’ Needs

The Muncie park inventory affirms that the community currently has no public park that offers education for fishing or boating to adolescents, no age appropriate playground or climbing facilities, and no programs for walking and archery. All of these activities have been identified as valuable for the community, but they exclude adolescents. Muncie parks need to provide these services for the teenage user group.

Although new construction has recently made Westside park more accessible by alternative transportation, such as biking, walking, and skateboarding, the park needs on-site accommodation for the activities. This includes bike racks and the opportunity to lock up skates or skateboards during site visits. This also includes the need for “in-park” opportunities to use such modes of transportation. For example, skate parks or bike maintenance stations provide reason for a park to become a destination.

The inventory also affirms that there is a significant lack of unique identities in the parks. They just look like American plots of land with mown lawn, a few memorial statues, trees, insufficient lighting, and faded and broken equipment. The inventory may show that there is little history with which today’s adolescents identify themselves. They are also, on the whole, dated. Adolescents need to be able to relate to the history and function of the parks. Many of the successful international play opportunities meet this need as well as the need for active recreation. For example, Muncie Parks have plenty of open space for ‘spontaneous play,’ but they do not meet the needs of Free Running, or Parkour, which is a rising popular sport among adolescents around the world. To accommodate for this sport, parks should include built structures that will enhance the site’s singular identity, as well as providing an informal obstacle course for active recreation.

The need for a creative outlet is strong in Muncie. Organized and positive graffiti is a great opportunity to meet this need. Programming events is also important for meeting this need. Examples of good programming that provides creative outlets includes hosting concerts for young
local bands for minimal to no cost, hosting artistic or cultural events on site, and providing “stations” that are open during after-school hours for artistic crafts.

Education centers and electronic entertainment centers are also lacking in the community. Education centers are needed for teaching appropriate use of the park’s equipment, teaching about local culture, or for instructing skills such as fishing or archery. Electronic entertainment can be provided with computer gaming or internet access. It can also be provided via programming such as on-site movie projection, which is currently an activity that Muncie endorses during the summer months, but it does not currently have a permanent location. The “Friday Night Movies” showing of “The Incredible Hulk” in late summer of 2009 was held on Walnut Street (literally on the asphalt street pavement), which was blocked off by police cars on one end and a large white truck on other. The movie was projected onto the side of the white truck. Although the night was quite cold, many people including adolescents attended the free entertainment. Providing a place for this opportunity in Muncie Parks would assist in meeting the need for electronic entertainment.

The following are the categories of needs that must be met by Muncie Parks:

- Unique Park Identity
  - Art, style, history, lighting
- Connections to city and other parks for access
  - Greenway: pedestrian and non-motor vehicular transportation
  - Vehicular parking
  - Bus route access
- Reinforcement of destination
  - Biking, walking, and skate boarding “stations”
    - Lockers or cubbies for travel equipment
    - Repair stations for bikes and skateboards
    - Recreational opportunities on-site
      - Adolescent walking program
      - Skate park
      - Programmed events
- Management and maintenance
  - Direct adolescent involvement in park design, maintenance, and management
  - Programmed maintenance events for adolescent volunteers
  - Adolescent employees on site, working refreshment stand and performing maintenance tasks.
- Facilities/ Amenities
  - Educational
    - Educational center: instructions for fishing, boating, and archery
    - Programmed events
  - Entertainment
Focus groups and site history will assist in determining which of these adolescent needs will best fit Westside Park.

In conclusion, Muncie Parks need to meet several categories of adolescent needs in order to attract them into the public park environment and give them reason to return. While redesigning Westside Park, the goal is to use the categories to guide design decisions, with an emphasis on including portions of each category in the design solution to provide for a variety of needs. These are the main categories: park identity, connections, reinforcement of destinations, management and maintenance, facilities for education, entertainment, creative outlets, and refreshment. Westside Park may not be able to meet all of these needs, or accommodate all of the specific ideas proposed to meet needs, but it can accommodate for targeted needs.
IV. Methodology

a. Case studies: explore what amenities or facilities for teenagers currently function successfully today in parks around the world.

b. Site Observational Studies

c. Interviews:

   a. Select adolescents of the community

      i. Matt Lunsford
         909 N. Woodruff Place W.
         Indianapolis, IN 46201
         765-740-8631

   b. On-site Interviews

      i. Several site visits asking many open-ended questions to many unnamed adolescents.

      ii. I asked about safety, what they enjoy while on site, and whether it is it worth the trip to visit. I also asked what kind of activities they would like to be able to do on site.

   c. Open-ended discussions

      i. During the design process, I spoke with teenagers outside schools about my design and asked for their input. These were informal meetings, mostly at bus stops, just after school dismissals. Adolescent input impacted the design, but due to the informality of the discussions, notes were not recorded.
V. Site

a. Vicinity Map

Westside Park is located along the White River in Muncie, Indiana.
b. Vicinity Analysis Map

Westside Park is highlighted in yellow, with the surrounding relevant schools marked with red circles. The White River Trail and the White River Greenway are both highlighted in purple to show the best paved routes for alternative transportation.

c. Site Summary

Westside Park has an ideal location. Westside Park is on the corner of White River Boulevard and Tillotson, which is not geographically central to the city, but it is located on a main axis: it sits on the north-south dividing line as well as a needs-based, frequented route. The White River divides the city, which means that since the park is located on the river, it can be an asset to both the northern and southern portions of town. Tillotson Avenue is a major north-to-south route that connects State Road 32 to McGalliard Road and it is well frequented partially because of this connection, and partly because of the commercial area that meets many needs, including basic needs such as groceries and health care. The greenway also connects to Westside park, which allows for alternative modes of transportation to the site. This locational analysis shows the centrality of access to the park, as opposed to geographic centrality.
Westside Park is a good site because the scale of the park is large enough to accommodate various uses, but not so large that it cannot be used as a model for other communities who are facing similar issues. As mentioned previously, it is the only “community park” in Muncie as determined by the NRPA and the Muncie Parks Plan.

Existing Conditions

Introduction:

West Side Park is located on the White River, where Tillotson Avenue meets White River Boulevard in Muncie, IN. Although the park was initially built as a privately owned and managed amusement park with exciting rides, little of that identity remains. It has transformed into a public park with several different land uses, from children’s play structures to model airplane flying rings. Today, the park’s surroundings include adjacent commercial property and nearby neighborhoods, but users from all over Muncie regularly enjoy the equipment. Although small portions of the site are wooded, most is clear. The southern terrace by White River floods regularly and often, but the higher terrace floods very rarely. This section will discuss the existing conditions of West Side Park.

The following assets will be discussed:

- Spatial Organization, Land Patterns, and Land Use
- Landscape Areas
- Visual Relationships
- Topography and Natural Systems
- Vegetation
- Circulation
- Hydrology and Water Features
- Structures, Site Furnishings, and Objects

Spatial Organization, Land Patterns, and Land Use:

- Natural Systems and Features – Westside Park is sited directly along the White River, and as such, there is a terrace (about 50’ wide) along the river that is lower than the rest of the park. This area provides a space where water can flow in the event of flooding or high water. The
site's topography, soil content, and relation to the river had a large impact on the shaping of this vernacular park. Rather than designing a layout for land use, the structures seem to have been placed in the 'path of least resistance.' For example, the recently added bathroom stalls were placed in position simply because that was the best plot of land to hold a bathroom.

- Spatial Organization – The playground serves as the central focus of the park, with shelters located around it. To the west end, there are asphalt circles that were used by remote-controlled airplane enthusiasts. On the east end of the park, there is a baseball field. It appears as though the park elements are built on a levy because it is 4-5 feet higher than the level of the White River. Likewise, White River Boulevard, the road directly to the north of the park, appears to be built on a continuation of (or another) levy, because it is about 5-6 feet higher than the level of the park.

- Buildings and Structures- the picnic structures and the large metal playset are exemplary of vernacular character. They give West Side Park its identity.

Landscape Areas

- Flood Plane
  - This includes all the land directly adjacent to the river. The northern boundary is defined by the park's topographical character. The land begins higher at White River Boulevard and remains somewhat level until the elevation drops at a decisive gradient along the flood-plain boundary. This land includes a section of the Cardinal Greenway Trail that connects Yorktown and Muncie, IN. It includes very little built structure because of the flooding nature.

- Flying Circles
  - These look peculiar from the road. Its purpose defines its aesthetic quality and readily sets it apart from the other landscape areas.

- High Use Area
  - This area is the most likely to be in use at any time of the day. It includes the parking lot, the rest area, and the play structures. The users of this area are often very well supervised and accompanied by family members or other close familial units. The few hours after grade schools close on sunny weekdays are almost guaranteed to harbor visitors of all ages who participate in active or passive
recreation in this area. Nice weekends also attract many users to the site. Although the equipment is outdated and somewhat unsightly, it is also very amusing equipment. Perhaps the allure to West Side Park is due partly to unique attractions that are no longer added to playgrounds today, like the merry-go-round.

- Ball courts
  - There are two areas that fit this category: the baseball diamond and the basketball courts. They both include very tall chain-link fences and are often empty. When they aren't empty, they are occupied mostly by young adults who play in tournaments or start pick-up games for leisure.
- 'Buffer' or undeveloped land

**Visual Relationships:**
- North of park- parking lot and recessed shops. There is, however, a lot of included park land that serves as a buffer from the traffic and unsightly parking lots.
- East of park- A bridge marks the end of the park, visually and functionally. The Cardinal Greenway runs East and West along the White River. Under the bridge is a mural painted by Muncie’s children.

**Topography, Hydrology, and Natural Systems:**
- The hydrology of this site has a great impact. The White River, which runs along the south border of the park, manipulates soils and vegetation. It dictates the type of wildlife that can be found on-site and provides unique recreation opportunities such as fishing.
- The topography is highest by White River Boulevard. It slopes down at the edge of the street and becomes relatively flat. This flat area is referred to as the ‘upper tier’ in this text. It holds all of the built structures. About one-third of the park, the portion nearest the river, is a lower tier. It is a flood-plane and an ideal place for fishing or passive recreation. The Cardinal Greenway is found on the ‘lower tier.’
- The White River flows from East to West, which shows that the lower tier slopes in that direction. The upper tier behaves similarly, but its edges slope ever so slightly from West to East. The land was probably originally maneuvered to accommodate the theme park.
Today, one can see that the street levels have greatly influenced the edges of the site's topography.

- There are no man-made water features on park grounds.

**Vegetation:**

- West Side park has a very open quality. The ground cover is mowed grass, which covers almost the whole site. On the park's upper tier, large street trees line White River Boulevard. Some older trees on the site may or may not have been purposefully planted. Trees located by the play area have beautiful spring blossoms and may have been selected to grace the area. They do not, however, serve a higher organizational design goal. The site has a heavily planted 'screen' between the westerly use areas and the river. The vegetation was deliberately planted on a grid and creates spatial definition on the site.

- The lower tier of the park has a slightly different ecology, but has the same visual and experiential quality as the upper tier. The trees by the river are very large and, likely, very old. It is highly unlikely that these giants were the result of human intervention. Rather, they were probably healthy and promising specimens that were simply not cleared when the bank was established for use.

**Circulation:**

- Automotive: Originally, the site was visited by way of street cars. It was at the end of the line and visitor parking was not necessary. Today, there is a small and sufficient gravel parking lot adjacent to the children's play area. There is ample room to turn the vehicle around, and there is also a road that extends toward an entry to the Cardinal Greenway Trail.

- Pedestrian: Pedestrians often use the afore-mentioned road, but not the parking lot, except to cross back and forth. The play area has a 'play' surface, which is easily walkable. The rest of the site has maintained grass and no paths, with the exception of the Cardinal Greenway. A new section of the trail was just installed over the summer of 2009. The project is still under construction.

**Structures, Site Furnishings, and Objects:**

- Picnic Structures
There are four picnic structures. The construction dates are not known for three of the four. The structure nearest the play equipment was built in 80's by the Psi Iota Xi Sorority. They are all of matching construction style.

- **Play Structures**
  - The construction date(s) of the play structures remains unclear. Judging by the character and peeling paint, however, they seem to have originated in the 1970's.

- **Bathroom structure**
  - Built in 1980's
  - 'vandalism resistant'
    - The bathroom has two separate rooms, one for each gender. The furnishings are all made of stainless steel. There are a total of two toilets, two sinks, and one small drinking fountain.

- **Baseball Diamond**
  - The diamond has a sand circle with grass outfield. There are six lamps to light the diamond, a set of wooden benches, and a set of metal benches. It is surrounded by a typical tall chain-link fence. A wooden structure stands outside the fence that could be used for ticket sales.

- **Basketball Court**
  - The court is a typical asphalt-paved court, except that the asphalt is cracked and in disrepair. It is also surrounded by a tall chain-link fence.

- **Flying Circles**
  - Asphalt paved loops on the west end of the park serve as flying circles for users with toy airplanes. They are in good repair.

- **Signs**
  - A sign announces the Park's existence on the corner of Tillotson and White River Boulevard, away from the areas of highest use.
  - A Cardinal Greenway sign on South-East corner marks the connection to this trail.
  - A plaque on the picnic structure nearest the play structures displays the benefactors of that structure.

- **Seating**
Various seating is located near the play structures, including two benches and a swinging bench between the picnic structure and the play structure.

- Bollards between parking and play
- Lighting
  - The majority of West Side Park has no built-in lighting, but there are a few lamps.
  - Six lamps adorn the baseball diamond. One lamp is near the bathrooms.

Summary Paragraph:

West Side Park is located on the White River, where Tillotson Avenue meets White River Boulevard in Muncie, Indiana. Although the park was initially built as a privately owned and managed amusement park with exciting rides, little of that identity remains. It has transformed into a public park with several different land uses, from children’s play structures to model airplane flying rings. Today, the park’s surroundings include adjacent commercial property and nearby neighborhoods, but users from all over Muncie regularly enjoy the equipment. Although small portions of the site are wooded, most is clear. The southern terrace by White River floods regularly and often, but the higher terrace floods very rarely.
Children’s Play Structure

Seating Adjacent to Structure
Whirl

Permanent Restroom Facilities
Park Users

Adolescent Using the Greenway Trail to Walk her Dog

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Adults Enjoying the White River Shore (above)

Child Riding his Bicycle on the Greenway

Children Playing with Tire Swing
Existing Roads and Pedestrian Paths

Tree Cover

Intensity of use: a very limited portion of the site is regularly used.
e. Analysis

User groups: Mostly adults and children

Main access points: Vehicular access from White River Boulevard, pedestrian access from Greenway trail.

Off-site and on-site opportunities: Park is naturally beautiful and has an excellent location. A very small portion of the site is used regularly, which illustrates the potential for improvement. The illustration to the left shows particular portions of the site, from the model airplane flying rings on the lower left, which are very rarely used, to the children’s play area, which is the area of highest use. Opportunities for adolescents are very rare on- and off-site.
VI. Case Studies

a. Site History:

- Westside Park was immensely popular, but short-lived
- It began as a private park for Citizens State Railway Company: Early 1900's
- Pedestrians accessed both sides of the park by way of a swinging bridge over the river.
- Access to the park from the Westside streetcar line ran from 12pm until late at night from downtown Muncie
- The Muncie Press reported in 1937 that "Westside had the largest open air and only circular roller skating rink in the world at the time, it was said."
- Maintained and operated for only a few years, then abandoned for more than 20 years
- Streetcar service was cancelled in the 1920's
- During WWII, it was repurposed for victory gardens
- During the late 60's, plans for a “modern park” were put into action. This constitutes much of what still exists on-site today.
b. International Parks

*Parque de Juventude:* The Park of Youth was placed in the ruins of a jail after inmates escaped in 1992 and 102 of them were killed by military police.

There are three main portions of the park, the sports center, the leisure center, and the center of culture and education. It is specifically for adolescents and is extremely popular. Activities range from Taekwondo lessons and skating facilities to picnicking, computer lounging, and performances.
Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord: Very popular park for all ages in the Ruhrgebiet, Germany. Teens specifically enjoy climbing facilities, parkour opportunities, plenty of "unsupervised" space where they safely exercise freedom, and programmatic guided tours specifically for teens.

Sudgelande Natur Park: Graffiti park in Berlin that is very popular among teenagers.

c. Louisville Skate Park

This 40,000 square foot park in Louisville, Kentucky was finished in 2002 and is almost entirely concrete surface. The shop is open from 6-11pm every day of the week and is used by skateboarders, BMX bikers, and in-line skaters at all times.
d. Current Teen “Hang-outs” in Muncie

Currently, the places that adolescents regularly visit are: school and school related activities, home/friends’ homes, the Muncie Mall, coffee shops (the MT CUP), and entertainment activities at cost.
VII. Design Concepts

a. Concept One: Low-Impact

This concept is based on keeping the overall site intact. The existing road will be re-used, the picnic structures will be relocated on-site, and a significant portion of the existing trees and river bank will not be damaged. Specific facilities and amenities that meet the categories of needs are arranged on-site. Programmatic events play an important role in this design concept.

This first diagram shows that although the entire site will be re-designed for adolescent use, a large portion is set aside for use by other ages as well. (above)
The final site plan for Concept One includes amenities for:

- Roller skating
- Minimal skate boarding
- Climbing
- Concerts
- Leisure activities
- Interaction with river
- Indoor activities
- Running/walking/bicycling
- Dog run
- Picnicking
- Parking

All of the vegetation that is rendered gray is existing vegetation. Where the existing topography changes, minimal impact occurs.
b. Concept Two:

Concept two focuses on the search for unique park identity, unsupervised play, and unique attractions. The first few sketches include brainstorming ideas that begin to address those topics. (Below)

The sketches include topography changes, large landmark graffiti structures that announce the park's name, and gigantic tunnel slides that visitors must climb to enter.
The next set of sketches shows the search for a unique pattern to structure the site and make connections so that the awkward liner shape of the site no longer creates unwanted boundaries and prevents use. (below)

These concept ideas may seem to be cut off short before being fully developed. The exploration of the ideas for this concept led me to realize that the creative endeavors of adolescents can really be harnessed through graffiti, which can also be used as a theme to connect areas of the park and “pull the site together.”

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c. Concept Three:

This concept focuses on the need for unique site identity and the need for creative expression. The major theme uses graffiti as both artistic expression and as architectural form. Within that form, the site will be able to meet needs from the necessary categories, as outlined in the goals and objectives.

The following images illustrate the inspiration behind this theme. All of these works of art were done by adolescents. (below)

To show the basic concept, I downloaded fonts from [www.graffitibox.com](http://www.graffitibox.com) that were designed by graffiti artists and placed them on the site to show that the graffiti itself can be used as a landform. (right)
To better illustrate the concept, I added bold color to the forms. This is not a site plan, but a graphical concept that shows the importance of art on and around the spaces formed by the letters.

A unique type of circulation can be defined within the concept: strong linear paths that travel the linear site, with smaller north-south circulation patterns crossing the site.

To develop the concept further, I chose certain portions of the site for certain levels of activity or purposes. The diagram below illustrates an option for use of space.
The preliminary site plan shows the forms creating spaces, and the purposes that they represent, but the plan is certainly not a solid rendering of what is to come. (Below) It does not, for example, include site vegetation and topography. A large portion of the concept does not show well in plan because some of the letters themselves function as separate planes that are not congruent with the ground plane. They bend, weave, and curve dynamically creating a sense of movement in solid, three-dimensional form for the user. A section shows the intended use of multiple surfaces that the users can traverse. (Middle) A very rough study model begins to show the concept. (Bottom)
VIII. Master Plan
• Unique Park Identity
  - Graffiti as form and theme
  - Unique attractions: climbing and skateboard facilities, graffiti

• Connections to city and other parks for access
  - Connection to Greenway trails
  - Proposed bus or carpool route after school hours
  - Opportunities for alternative transportation

• Reinforcement of destination
  - Reasons to stop at the park if travelling by:
    - Recreational opportunities involving mode of transportation: skateboarding facilities, walking programs, bike stations
    - Dog Run
    - Refreshment

• Management and maintenance
  - Direct adolescent involvement in park design, maintenance, and management
  - Adolescent volunteers and employees assist in building and maintaining the site

• Education
  - Instructions for fishing, boating, archery, graffiti, etc.
  - Programmed events

• Entertainment
  - Movie projection wall with programmed events
  - Computer lounge
  - Concert stage for performances by local and popular bands
  - Climbing facilities
  - Adolescent walking program
  - Skate park

• Creative Outlets
  - Artistic: graffiti
  - Musical: performance opportunities for adolescent bands
  - Programmed events

• Affordable Refreshment
  - Concessions/café regularly available after school hours
  - “Hang-out” space

This list directly corresponds to the categories of needs, as identified on pages 20 and 21, except that the listed needs under each category has been replaced by the new opportunities available on site. The goal of this project was to touch each category of needs. As shown in the above list, that goal was met. The final proposed site design includes all of the above activities.

Adolescent contribution to the implementation of this design is imperative, if they are to benefit from the final design. They must also be actively included in the maintenance, and have employment opportunities on site. Since many teenagers are below the legal age of employment, I propose that they be allowed to exchange approved community service hours for admission to programmed events and refreshment on-site. The following sketches illustrate Westside Park's opportunities. They are to be read as potential advertisements once the design has been installed. They would be posted in schools and around the community.

Programmatic events are essential to the design as well. Popular and local band performances, free Friday night movies, and educational opportunities such as obtaining a fishing license and cultural or artistic lessons are all examples of programmatic events that contribute to the success of the proposed design.
Westside Park Landscape Architecture

Free Friday Night Movie

Dog Run
Fresh Air = Best Gift for Your Best Friend

Westside Park

Local Band Performance
Sign-Up
May 15 6 p.m.
June 7Judge Club Night
July 12 Main Stage

Graffiti Extravaganza
Math of May: Reserve Now

Painting $1.25 per hour for Community Service

Suggested Service Programs:
- Westside Maintenance
- Harvest Soup Kitchen
- Habitat for Humanity

Now Hiring

- Maintenance Crew
- Grounds Surveillance
- Computer Lab Tech
- Lifeguards

Preference will be given to those ages 16-25

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LINKIN PARK
LIVE CONCERT
SAT JUNE 10
WESTSIDE PARK
VOLUNTEERS
FREE ADMISSION

WESTSIDE PARK

COMPUTER LAB
HOURS:
M-F: Noon - 8 pm
S-S: 8 am - 8 pm
*GROUP RESERVATION AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST*

WESTSIDE PARK
Stars: locations for permanent security stations. Officers currently patrol the site during daylight hours. In several informal, open-ended interviews, park users expressed that the presence of law enforcement makes them feel more secure. The new design features two security posts for the patrolling officers.

The red-outlined rectangle shows the borders of the detail plan on the next page.
IX. Design Renderings
Section Through "D" by the Pool: Shows lighting along the path where vegetation is more dense.

Perspective showing a portion of the climbing facilities with graffiti in the background.
Sketch of Tillotson Bridge, shows graffiti surfaces, lighting under the bridge, and two types of pavement, one smooth for non-motor vehicular travel and one that is rugged, for walking. The skateboard sketch shows that the large aggregate in the walking paths will make skateboarding uncomfortable.
This diagram shows that recycled boxcars will be used on-site as canvases for adolescent artists. There is already incredible, but illegal, artwork throughout the city.

The raised concrete platforms proposed for walkways, climbing surfaces, and skateboarding may be constructed in a fashion similar to highways, though they need not support such heavy vehicular traffic. Images below show some facets of highway construction.
X. Construction Documentation

(See attached pages)
WESTSIDE PARK DESIGN
SECTION THROUGH CLIMBING WALL
DETAIL: TYP. PLANTING BED

- BOXCAR FENCE
- REBAR REINFORCEMENT 1' O.C.
- GROUND COVER
- LIGHTWEIGHT STYROFOAM FILLER
- ORNAMENTAL TREE
- ROOT BALL (TYP)
- SAND BED
- FILTER FABRIC (TYP)
- STAINLESS STEEL CABLE
- PLANTING BED SOIL
XI. Conclusion

The Muncie community needs a park with a unique identity, one that is memorable and worth re-visiting and Westside Park provides a beautiful and accessible location that has much under-utilized space with great potential to meet the needs of community members. Currently, adults and children regularly use a very small percentage of the park’s land. This project redefines Westside Park for the community. While still providing for the current park users, it focuses on meeting the needs of adolescents. Its new unique facilities will improve their opportunities, giving them a constructive and safe outlet for their vast amounts of “untapped energy.” As the research shows, when the appropriate opportunities are presented, they will largely exchange destructive activities for constructive ones. For example, they will participate in community service in exchange for positive experiences or refreshment, and they will use constructive outlets for their creativity. Because the new design for Westside Park meets each category of needs, it will improve the quality of the Muncie park system, the lives of adolescents, and the community as a whole.
XII. Appendix A

These are site photographs that were not included in the "existing Conditions" section. Left is a view towards the site, from the northern parking lot.
XIII. Appendix B

a. Timeline

January:
- *Weeks 1 and 2* Complete site analysis and identify focus group
- *Weeks 3 and 4* Complete interviews, continue observational site studies

February:
- *Weeks 1 and 2* Begin 3 preliminary design concepts
- *Weeks 3 and 4* Finish 3 preliminary design concepts. Meet with focus group by 26th

March:
- *Weeks 1 and 2* Choose design concept of choice. Develop concept.
- *Weeks 3 and 4* Begin final renderings and text.

April:
- *Weeks 1 and 2* Complete creative project, including final layout.
- *Weeks 3 and 4* Complete variation of project for the Honors College by the 20th. Have both proofread and edited by the 26th. Bind and submit.

b. Goals and Objectives

1. Identify needs and wants of adolescents in regards to public parks.
   a. Collect information from literature about adolescents, families, and their role in society.

2. Identify what Muncie’s park system needs in order to meet the needs and wants of adolescents.
   a. Compare the facilities and amenities in select parks around the world to the parks in Muncie, Indiana by looking at case studies and the Muncie’s 5-year Parks Plan.

3. Attract Muncie adolescents into Westside Park, thereby allowing the adolescents to enhance the community and allowing the community to enhance the lives of adolescents.
   a. Design the site according to previously identified needs and wants of adolescents, and of Muncie’s Parks.
   b. Include amenities that accommodate a portion of each category of previously identified needs.
XV. Works Cited


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XVI. Bibliography


