

V. The Public Realm

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5.0 Introduction

**“Provide a public realm that is safe, vibrant, and evokes a sense of place.”
- North Shore Plan Principle #9**

5.01 What is the public realm?

The public realm includes publicly owned streets, sidewalks, rights-of-ways, parks and other publicly accessible open spaces, public and civic buildings and facilities, and the facades of private buildings.

Public spaces come in all shapes and sizes to meet the needs of the communities in which they are built; in Chattanooga they vary from large regional parks (Harrison Bay State Park) to linear parks (the Tennessee Riverpark) to plazas (Miller Plaza) to small neighborhood parks.

The North Shore is fortunate to be home to two large urban parks: Coolidge Park and Renaissance Park. Just as the North Shore is a neighborhood with a regional draw, the North Shore’s parks serve both the neighborhood and greater Chattanooga simultaneously.



Public facilities are those facilities operated by local, state, or federal government. They may include schools; police, fire, and EMS stations; libraries, and the like.

5.02 The importance of a quality public realm

The public realm is owned and used by everyone. We all use public streets and sidewalks to go from place to place; most of us spend time enjoying our public parks and open space. Perhaps fewer of us spend time in line appreciating the interiors of public buildings. The *Downtown Plan* conveys well the importance of the public realm:

“The streets, sidewalks and parks, the buildings serving the public, and the facades of private buildings – the areas that constitute the **public realm** – should have physical and psychological appeal. They should be places in which we want to be, inspiring feelings of comfort and belonging, and accordingly, attracting a lot of people. The first floors of buildings should be active and animated and, therefore, interesting to walk past and look into. Storefronts should attract our attention and invite us along. Art – both visual and performance – should animate the space, giving it color and texture, sound and movement. The public realm is where the city’s various parts – built, natural, transportation and public space – integrate into one overarching urban system.” –*Downtown Plan 2025*

5.1 The Street

5.11 What is the street?

“The street” is that part of the public realm encompassing publicly-owned streets and sidewalks and the facades of buildings that frame the street. The street is where the life of cities has traditionally occurred; where diverse people and activities are brought together. While the nature of suburban development has resulted in the decline of this traditional definition of the street in many areas, many North Shore streets are vibrant and active: this plan seeks to further promote the life of the street.

5.12 The life of the street

Part of what makes the North Shore a great place is the life of the street. Active and open storefronts built to the street, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, sidewalk dining, public art and other attributes promote pedestrian activity and interaction. While some of these attributes were present historically on the North Shore, others have required conscious decisions on the part of developers, the neighborhood, and city government to seek design and development that promotes the life of the



street. The C-7 North Shore Commercial/Mixed-Use Zone is the City's key tool in encouraging the implementation of those principles.

Recommendations:

- Encourage development that addresses and interacts with the street through sidewalk dining, open and transparent facades, and other measures.
- Examine the feasibility of encouraging sidewalk vending at appropriate locations. Sidewalk vending is part of the street life of many cities. Already successful on the downtown riverfront and in Coolidge Park, a well-managed sidewalk vending program could be an asset to the remainder of the North Shore.
- Provide public spaces on and near the street to encourage citizen interaction.
- As development occurs request or require that public amenities (i.e. street furniture, public plaza or square, bike racks) be included as part of the development.

5.13 Safety & security

Growth is never without its challenges, and the North Shore as an area is no exception. Stakeholders have expressed concerns about a variety of safety and security issues, including panhandling, vandalism, and security in Coolidge Park. The following recommendations are not intended to be all inclusive but to be a starting point for enhancing and maintaining safety and security on the North Shore.

The Chattanooga Police Department, the Department of Neighborhood Services, merchants organizations and neighborhood associations will need to work in concert to successfully implement these recommendations.

Recommendations:

- Educate property owners and residents to be “eyes on the street” to reduce vandalism and crime.
The concept of “eyes on the street” can be traced to the well-known urban sociologist Jane Jacobs and her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. The idea is that active street life and buildings with 24-hour activity and residents help deter criminal activity. A foundational concept for neighborhood watch programs, promoting “eyes on the street” is an effective way to involve neighborhood stakeholders in improving the safety and security of their neighborhoods.
- Study panhandling issues on the North Shore and determine appropriate courses of action, if any.
- Implement an effective graffiti-removal program.
Whether or not one views graffiti as art, some graffiti forms, including tagging, are entry-level crimes with ties to gang activity. Left uncontrolled, graffiti, like broken windows, vacant houses, and uncollected refuse, can be a sign of disorder that indicates decline or negative change to citizens and neighborhoods. Allowing graffiti to remain visible may encourage further vandalism and can be interpreted as a signal that such behavior is acceptable. Graffiti hotlines and government resources directed to remove graffiti are some ways to effectively combat this problem.
- Establish a citizen patrol program for the North Shore.
The term “citizen patrol” has different connotations in different jurisdictions. In some

jurisdictions citizen patrol groups may be uniformed, volunteer police auxiliaries who watch for suspicious activity, assist in traffic control, complete citizen safety checks, and the like. In other areas citizen patrol groups may be less formal but still organized, tasked with organizing volunteers to patrol regularly, working with the police to watch for suspicious activity. Some form of these programs could benefit the North Shore and help direct police resources where they are needed most.

- Provide office space or a mini-precinct for police officers patrolling the North Shore, preferably in a planned facility such as the new Outdoor Chattanooga center or a possible consolidated recreation center.

5.2 Public Spaces

5.21 Introduction

Public spaces come in all shapes and sizes to meet the needs of the communities in which they are built; in Chattanooga they vary from large regional parks (Harrison Bay State Park) to linear parks (the Tennessee Riverpark) to plazas (Miller Plaza) to small neighborhood parks. The North Shore is fortunate to be home to two large urban parks: Coolidge Park and Renaissance Park. Just as the North Shore is a neighborhood with a regional draw, the North Shore’s parks serve both the neighborhood and greater Chattanooga simultaneously.



Every public space, whether designed for passive or active recreation, should further the building of a community by acting as a community focal point. The importance of public spaces as community focal points cannot be understated. In an age of inwardness, where entertainment (and nearly anything else we desire) is delivered directly to our homes and we often do not know our next-door neighbors, too frequently “community focal point” becomes synonymous with “big-box retail.” But private retail developments are created first and foremost for the express purpose of selling people goods; they are not substitutes for quality public spaces. What are the traits of a quality public space? Below is a partial list. However, one common denominator in every successful, quality public space is also the most important: the presence of people.

Principles for Quality Public Spaces (from Comprehensive Plan 2030):

- Quality public spaces can operate in concert with other civic uses to create centers of critical mass: new town centers, for example.
- Quality public spaces promote a sense of ownership, comfort and identity.
- Quality public spaces are for people; they should be planned by the people who will use them.
- Quality public spaces provide for a diverse range of activities important to the life of communities. The role of public spaces is not truly filled by the private spaces that take their place in the suburban environment: malls and shopping centers, mandated open space in subdivisions, and individual yards.
- Quality public spaces must be accessible and linked to the surrounding community.

- Quality public space should support a wide variety of uses and activities.
- Quality public spaces promote a sense of community by drawing people into the community life they promote.

5.22 Recommendations

The North Shore is home to Coolidge Park, the jewel of the Chattanooga park system, and the adjacent Renaissance Park, which caps a former industrial site and is built on land that is rich with Chattanooga history. These parks are uncommon assets for a neighborhood to have; the pending opening of Outdoor Chattanooga in Coolidge Park in 2008 will be a further asset to Coolidge Park, adding activities and programming. This plan recognizes that these parks are great assets to the community that do not need to be reinvented.

Recommendations

- Examine possible consolidation of North Chattanooga recreation centers.
The *Recreate 2008* Plan recommended consolidation of the North Chattanooga (May St) and Frances B. Wyatt (Colville St) recreation centers. This would result in the construction of a new larger recreation center, similar to centers in South Chattanooga and Brainerd. Any future center should be located centrally, with good access to sidewalks and transit.
- New neighborhood parks
If recreation center consolidation occurs, City Parks & Recreation should convert the two former recreation center sites to neighborhood parks to provide neighborhood green space and activities for outdoor recreation.

5.3 Moccasin Bend

5.31 What is Moccasin Bend National Archaeological District?

Moccasin Bend, shown at right, lies west and southwest of downtown. Native Americans occupied the Bend for more than 10,000 years, leaving behind evidence of their villages, burial sites, and way of life. During the Civil War, Union forces occupied the Bend and played a pivotal role in the Battle of Lookout Mountain.



Long looted by artifact seekers, the Bend has long been in need of protection. Efforts to preserve Moccasin Bend began as early as 1919, but have only found purchase in recent years through the efforts of many organizations and volunteers, including the Friends of Moccasin Bend National Park, the Trust for Public Land, the City of Chattanooga, Hamilton County government, the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, U.S. Representative Zach Wamp, Senator Lamar Alexander, and former senator Bill Frist and others. Currently, over 600 acres on the Bend are now designated as the Moccasin Bend National Archaeological District, a unit of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park.

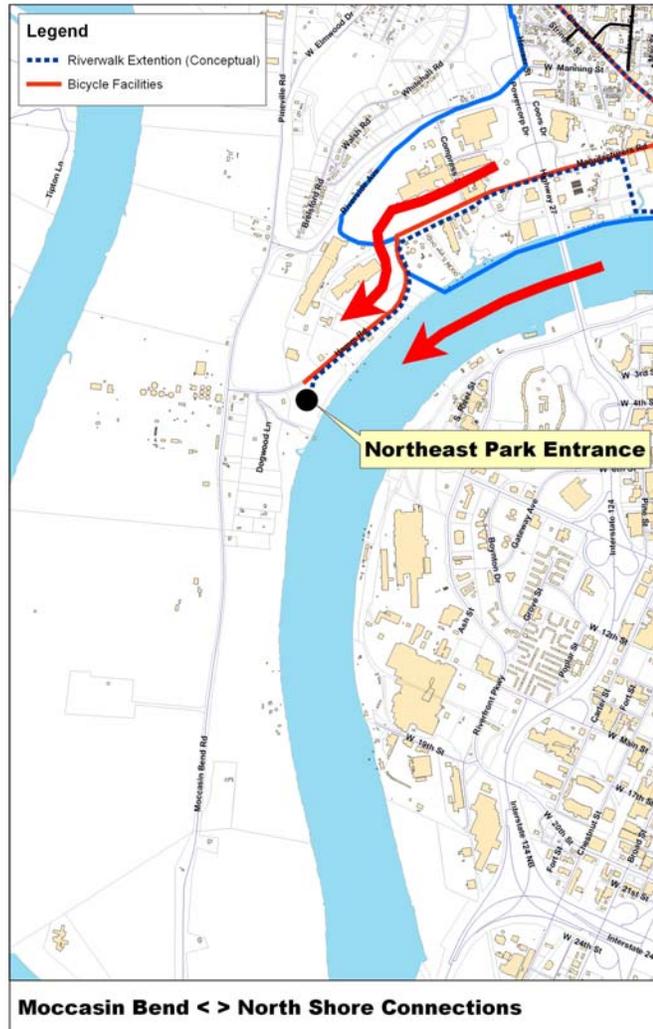
Planning efforts are currently underway to determine the location of the park’s interpretive center, how the park will be accessed, and what the programming and interpretive features of the park will be.

5.32 Connecting Moccasin Bend to the North Shore

To get to Moccasin Bend by land, one must pass through the North Shore. Manufacturers Road is *the* gateway to Moccasin Bend, so it is imperative that the plan and area stakeholders begin to think of Manufacturers Road as an important gateway, and how that gateway should function. Moccasin Bend holds a great concentration of historic resources as well as burial grounds sacred to Native Americans. Improving the North Shore’s vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian connections with Moccasin Bend while taking care to protect and preserve that which makes the Bend so precious is challenging.

Recommendations:

- Work with the Trust for Public Land and the National Park Service to provide a greenway connection between Renaissance Park and Moccasin Bend.
- Explore mass transit opportunities to Moccasin Bend to reduce the impact of increased numbers of visitors.
- As access plans for Moccasin Bend develop provide appropriate wayfinding signage.
- Develop Manufacturers Road as a gateway to Moccasin Bend
 - Work with existing property owners on measures to improve the gateway, such as enhanced landscaping.
- Work with area stakeholders to determine how to most effectively utilize the following transportation modes to connect Moccasin Bend with the North Shore and downtown:
 - Canoe/kayak (via existing blueway)
 - On-street bicycle facilities
 - Riverwalk extension
 - Sidewalks
 - Transit (Shuttle)
 - Vehicle
 - Water taxi



5.4 Other Public Facilities

5.41 Walnut Street Bridge

The Walnut Street Bridge, completed in 1891, was the first non-military highway bridge to span the Tennessee River. Closed to automobile traffic in 1978, the bridge sat unused and faced demolition until local citizens banded together and asked the City of Chattanooga to consider preserving it. With renovations completed in 1993, the Walnut Street Bridge is now one of the longest-pedestrian bridges in the world, serving as a key pedestrian and bicycle link between downtown and the North Shore.

Recommendation:

- Continue a regular maintenance cycle for the Walnut Street Bridge.

5.42 Outdoor Chattanooga Center

Outdoor Chattanooga is a division of the City of Chattanooga Parks & Recreation Department, tasked with promoting outdoor recreation, education, and stewardship. Outdoor Chattanooga's new facility near Coolidge Park (in the former floorcoverings building) should be complete by the end of 2007. It will include an information center for visitors and residents seeking information on outdoor opportunities, meeting space for outdoor groups, and may include outdoor gear rental and some retail in the future.

Recommendation:

- Support the work of Outdoor Chattanooga in promoting outdoor recreation as an attractive, healthy, and distinguishing lifestyle for its resident and visitor populations.

5.43 Business Development Center

Located at 100 Cherokee Boulevard, the Business Development Center (BDC), formerly the American Lava Technical Ceramics manufacturing facility, is a highly-successful business incubator owned by Hamilton County and operated by the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce. Fifty-three (53) tenants currently occupy the facility. In operation for many years, there are currently no formal plans to relocate the center, though county officials have indicated relocation is a possibility in the future.

Recommendation:

- If facility relocation is proposed, work closely with Hamilton County government on the future of the BDC site.
- The Business Development Center's building has historic value, and preservation is encouraged.