New Haven ParkScore Analysis
September 2021

Overview
The ParkScore® index is the most comprehensive rating system developed to measure how well the 100 largest U.S. cities are meeting the need for parks. Across the country, more than 100 million people—including 28 million kids—don’t have a park within a 10-minute walk of home. Among the 100 largest U.S. cities, residents in neighborhoods of color have access to 44% less park space than those in white neighborhoods. In partnership with the Urban Resources Initiative, the Trust for Public Land applied the ParkScore Index® methodology to New Haven’s park system to identify its strengths and weaknesses relative to both the 100 most populous U.S. cities as well as selected cities of similar size and location. This analysis reflects all park and recreation facilities within the city of New Haven including those owned and/or managed by New Haven Parks & Recreation, Urban Resources Initiative, Gather New Haven, the State of Connecticut and publicly accessible community schoolyards.

The ParkScore index measures how well New Haven compares against the nation’s most populous cities on measures across 5 categories reflective of an excellent city park system: Acreage, Access, Investment, Amenities, and Equity. The Acreage and Access categories reflect the importance of both large ‘destination’ parks as well as ensuring all residents have access to a public park within a short 10-minute walk of their home. The Investment and Amenities categories reflect the importance of high-quality parks—the spending needed to maintain them and a wide range of activities available for multi-generational user groups. The Equity category reflects the importance of ensuring park resources are fairly distributed between neighborhoods within a city.

For each measure, points are awarded on a relative basis, based on how a city compares to the 100 most populous cities. For example, a score of 90 can be interpreted that New Haven is among the top 10% of cities for that measure. The score for each of the five categories is an average of its measures; a city’s overall rating is an average of the five categories. The measures are selected to facilitate comparison across a wide-range of cities; more information can be found in the methodology section (Appendix C).

In addition to the ParkScore analysis, we have provided a summary of the park acreage per capita statistics by city neighborhood (Appendix A) and additional benchmarks where data are available for each of the five categories (Appendix B).

Overall Score
Based on our analysis, New Haven’s park system received a ParkScore rating of 60.4 out of a possible 100 points, indicating that it ranks slightly above average when compared to the most populous cities in the country. A strength of New Haven’s park system is that 96% of its residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park (see Access Map). The city ranks among the middle of the pack in terms of its amenities and park acreage, indicating that although most residents live within a walkable half-mile, there is room to increase the range of activities and space for residents to enjoy once they get to their nearby parks. This is particularly true when analyzing the city’s equity metrics. In New Haven, residents who identify as Black, Hispanic and Latinx, Indigenous and Native American, or Asian Americans and Pacific Islander are equally likely to live within a 10-minute walk of a park as white residents. However, residents in neighborhoods of color have access to 47% less park space per person than those in white neighborhoods; a similar gap exists when comparing by income (see Equity Map). Perhaps the biggest opportunity to improve New Haven’s park system is to increase the total investment in park and recreation facilities. After aggregating across all park agencies and organizations in the city, New Haven ranks among the lowest third of the country’s most populated cities in terms of spending per resident.
Acreage

1,469 acres of parkland (12% of city area), median park size of 1.53 acres (~size of a schoolyard)

The acreage score indicates the relative abundance of large ‘destination’ parks, which include large natural areas that provide critical mental health as well as climate and conservation benefits. This category is scored as an average of two metrics, parkland as percentage of city area and median park size. New Haven scores above average in overall acreage (12% of city area, 62 / 100 points) while scoring among the lowest in the country in terms of median park size (1.53 acres, 10 / 100 points). This suggests that while New Haven has a significant amount of park acreage, its overall mix of parks heavily skews towards smaller parks.

Access

96% of New Haven residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park

The access score indicates the percentage of a city’s residents that live within a walkable half-mile of a park – the average distance that most people are willing to walk to reach a destination. In New Haven, 96% of its residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, making the city one of the best in the nation in ensuring residents have access to at least one close-to-home park. This strong network of parks throughout the city provides a strong foundation in which to provide high-quality park activities.

Investment

An average of $77 per person is spent on parks and recreation in New Haven each year

The investment score indicates the relative financial health of a city’s park system, which is essential to ensuring parks are maintained at a high level for all to enjoy. This category is scored based on the total parks and recreation spending per person across all agencies and organizations, including monetized volunteer hours. With a score of 35 points ($77 per resident per year), New Haven ranks below most cities in terms of sufficient spending to maintain its parks at a high level. Of the $77 per resident spending, 98% reflects spending from the city’s park and recreation department, with the remainder reflecting volunteers and non-profits.

Amenities

71 basketball hoops, 4 dog parks, 78 playgrounds, 5 senior and rec centers, 2 restrooms, and 14 splashpads

The amenities score indicates the relative abundance of six park activities popular among a multi-generational cross-section of user groups (playgrounds, basketball hoops, dog parks, senior and rec centers, splashpads, and permanent restrooms). With a score of 71 points, New Haven ranks above average in terms of providing key amenities that drive the park usage necessary for residents to enjoy the full range of benefits parks can offer. Of the six amenities, New Haven ranks among the nation’s best in terms of splashpads, playgrounds, and dog parks (100/ 100 points each) and one of the lowest for permanent restrooms (2 / 100 points).

Equity

In New Haven, 97% of people of color live within a 10-minute walk of a park; 98% of low-income households

When comparing park space per person, neighborhoods of color have 47% less than white neighborhoods and low-income neighborhoods have 47% less than high-income neighborhoods.

The equity score indicates how fairly parks and park space are distributed within a city. This category is an average of two types of metrics: 1) the percentage of people of color and low-income households within a 10-minute walk of a park and 2) a comparison of the amount of park space between neighborhoods by race and income. Similar to most cities with strong Access scores, New Haven scores well on the access component of the equity category. However, New Haven scores among the lowest in the country when comparing the amount of park space between neighborhoods – residents in neighborhoods of color have access to 47% less park space per person than those in white neighborhoods.
This park access analysis is provided via the ParkServe® mapping application, which identifies the population living within a 10-minute walk of a park by creating dynamic 1/2-mile walkable service areas for all public parks. In this analysis, service areas use the street network to determine walkable distance (streets such as highways, freeways, and interstates are considered barriers).

In New Haven, CT, 96% of the population lives within a 10-minute walk of a park. Among the remaining 5,117 people without access to a nearby park, The Trust for Public Land suggests where to prioritize the development of new parks to reduce this gap. This prioritization is based on a comprehensive index of six equally-weighted demographic and environmental metrics:

- Population density
- Density of low income households (households with income less than 75% of the urban area median income; less than $30,000 in New Haven)
- Density of people of color
- Community health (a combined index based on the rate of poor mental health and low physical activity from the 2020 CDC PLACES census tract dataset)
- Urban heat islands (surface temperature at least 1.25 degrees greater than city mean surface temperature from The Trust for Public Land, based on Landsat 8 satellite imagery)
- Pollution burden (air toxics respiratory hazard index from 2020 EPA EJScreen)

Priority areas for new parks:
- Very high priority
- High priority
- Moderate priority
- Park with public access (might include only partial representation of a park with public access along the city’s border)
- Private open space (no public access)
- 10-minute walk (half-mile) service area of park with public access
- Cemetery
- University
- Vacant zero population area
- City boundary

*Based on 2020 Forecast block groups provided by ESRI.
Park space per person effectively measures the available park space within a 10-minute walk of each Census block group in the City of New Haven. Areas shown in dark orange have the highest amount of accessible park space per person relative to other block groups in New Haven.

Demographic profiles are based on 2020 Forecast block groups provided by Esri.
In New Haven, residents in neighborhoods of color have access to 47% less park space per person than those in white neighborhoods. Residents in low-income neighborhoods have access to 47% less than those in high-income neighborhoods.

Park space per person effectively measures the available park space within a 10-minute walk of a micro-neighborhood, identified as those with the highest concentrations (top 20% of all census block groups in a city) of people of color or white population and high-income or low-income households. Households with income less than 75% of city median income (less than $30,000 in New Haven) are considered low-income; households with income greater than 125% of city median income (greater than $50,000 in New Haven) are high-income.

The metrics for people of color reflect each of the Census-designated race/ethnicity groups: Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous and Native American, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, multiple races, and other communities of color.

Demographic profiles are based on 2020 Forecast block groups provided by Esri.

Park equity
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

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