

GREEN SPACES

Science Facts and Analysis from Science for Georgia

What is Green Space?

According to the EPA, [open space](#) is any open piece of land that is undeveloped (has no buildings or other built structures) and is accessible to the public.¹ Some examples include schoolyards, public seating areas, public plazas, and vacant lots. These lands offer intrinsic value to communities by serving as hubs for local commerce and recreation. Green spaces—plots that are partly or completely covered by vegetation, including parks, community gardens, and cemeteries—are part of these important community spaces.

Green spaces are beneficial for the community in which they are located. They serve as recreational areas for relaxation and exercise, as well as enhancing the environmental beauty within a neighborhood.² These spaces present economic benefits for communities, such as the preservation of natural marshlands, swamps, flatlands, or mountain ranges can attract visitors or new businesses. Green spaces are also positive for human well-being, improving both physical and mental health by providing public access for public recreation³.

As the population continues to grow, developers are realizing the importance of greenspace when designing new housing developments, but the creation of new green spaces on existing developed land can bring challenges to the community. In Los Angeles, CA, policies like the Displacement Avoidance Plan have been established to connect open and green spaces with the neighboring communities to avoid the displacement of long-time, lower-income residents as a result of gentrification. In particular, the Los Angeles County WHAM taskforce invests in clean and safe water, housing and homeless services, parks and open space, transportation, and climate resilience⁴—a plan that could greatly benefit Georgian communities, if adapted to this state.

In response to climate change, green space can be thoughtfully designed to capture carbon dioxide, balance water use and movement, and reduce heat islands in urban areas⁵. These promote the maintenance of clean water and air, as well as reduce the chance for public health epidemics from poor environmental quality. These measures can also protect from soil erosion, inland flooding, and include spaces for urban agriculture for the ever-increasing food demand⁶. Groups like the Atlanta Heat Island Project have mapped extreme heat in underserved communities of the city and have established guidelines that could be reduced with the incorporation of green spaces⁷.

Facts and Analysis- FAQ

How does green space benefit humans?

- Room for walking, exercising, recreation, or simply enjoying nature is shown to have positive effects on mental health⁸

How do green spaces tie into gentrification?

- Gentrification is the process whereby the character of a poor urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in, improving housing, and attracting new businesses, typically displacing current inhabitants in the process⁹
- Modifications to add local parks or more green space costs money, further raising property values for existing residents, making their surrounding areas too expensive to continue to live¹⁰

Why should we care?

- Gentrification of green spaces further contributes to the social, economic, and racial divide between classes by allowing people of means to live in clean areas while poor and underserved communities are pushed to environmentally degraded areas. People in low-income communities typically have contributed the least to climate change but are exposed to the most climate hazards¹¹. While green spaces can improve the effects of climate change, this type of planning merely pushes the effects onto low-income communities outside of the green areas and do not consider the environmental risks posed by the development of these green areas.

Recommendations

- Keep EQUITY in the forefront of all future planning
 - Push for more affordable housing agreements with green spaces in their design; ensure green space will not be accompanied by outrageous property value/rent increases
- Follow/adopt the **Displacement Avoidance Policy** strategies, created in Los Angeles county, California⁴
 - Incentivizes grant applicants to incorporate displacement avoidance strategies in their project applications and throughout the planning and implementation phases by providing additional points in the scoring criteria;
 - Encourages park agencies and nonprofit park developers to collaborate with affordable-housing developers. Collaborations can include project design, connective infrastructure, outreach and community engagement, and site selection;
 - Establishes a technical assistance program that could support project applicants to create and implement displacement avoidance strategies as a component of their projects;
 - Creates the first-of-its-kind data collection and evaluation system to track the impacts of park investment over time, including potential effects on housing stability and displacement;
 - Establishes a Displacement Avoidance Task Force, which would include housing rights organizations and affordable housing developers, academics, and county staffers to provide support and oversight to Regional Park and Open Space District (RPOSD) in its efforts to implement the Displacement Avoidance Policy; and
 - Allows Measure A funds (those that promote the preservation and protecting and enriching natural beauty in parks) to be used for relocation costs if the project results in the displacement of any person or business.

About Science for Georgia

Science for Georgia is a 501c3 dedicated to bridging the gap between scientists and the public through training, outreach opportunities, and direct contact with the public, policymakers, and the press. Science for Georgia highlights how science can impact people's lives and advocates for the responsible use of science in public policy.

Please reach out with any questions or comments info@sci4ga.org

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