

# Metro

## City Parks Department accredited

**'A long, long road':**  
Franklin lauds agency's  
achievement.

By **ERIC STIRGUS**  
estirgus@ajc.com

An Atlanta city department derided by some civic activists as "dysfunctional" only a few years ago celebrated a major accolade Wednesday.

The city's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Department passed accreditation guidelines set by the Commission for Accreditation of Park & Recreation Agencies. The commission measured Atlanta in 155 categories, such as programming, park acquisition, fiscal management and security.

"It is a huge accomplishment," Mayor

Shirley Franklin said Wednesday as she announced the achievement.

Franklin said the accreditation is important primarily because it shows the department is on the right track, but she acknowledged it could result in more money from philanthropic foundations who believe in the city agency.

The department has been working toward accreditation for about four years. Several officials had tears in their eyes as they spoke Wednesday.

"This has been a long, long road," said the department's commissioner, Dianne Harnell Cohen.

Eight years ago, the Trust for Public Land ranked Atlanta among the nation's worst cities for parks. The city turned down green space, recalled Franklin, who worked in city government before she

was elected mayor in 2001.

In 2002, Franklin created a task force to find ways to make the department more effective.

Since then, the city has purchased more than 1,000 acres of parkland and green space. The city also increased its tree canopy from 23 percent in 2001 to 27 percent by 2005, according to Park Pride, an Atlanta-based park advocacy group.

But city officials acknowledge there is work to be done. Atlanta is last among 25 big cities in terms of the proportion of land dedicated to parks, according to Park Pride.

Still, the group's executive director says the department is "a far cry" from where it was in 2001.

"It's just amazing how far you've come," George Dusenbury said.