

SECTIONS

- MAIN NEWS A
- BUSINESS B
- METRO C
- SPORTS D
- LIVING E

VOL. 61, NO. 48
38 PAGES, 5 SECTIONS

For home
delivery, call
404-522-4141,
1-800-933-9771



The AJC
uses recycled
newsprint.



Report faults Atlanta for lack of park space



HYOSUB SHIN / hshin@ajc.com

It took a community's insistence to get Vine City Park. Ed Castro Landscape workers **Nicolas Pena** (from left), **Jauier Palacios** and **Gerardo Perez** install a bench at the park at Magnolia and Walnut streets, not far from the Georgia Dome. **Article, C3**

By **STACY SHELTON**
sshelton@ajc.com

Eight years after Atlanta was named among the nation's worst cities for parks, a report released today says the city is still park-poor.

That leaves Atlanta in the same league as Las Vegas, where the action is indoors. The city looks just as bad when compared with some of its suburban neighbors, particularly Gwinnett County.

Park Pride, an Atlanta-based park advocacy group

► See **GREEN SPACE, A6**

Green space: Acreage per resident almost flat due to lack of spending

► Continued from A1

that issued the 77-page report, cites money as the biggest reason. Apparently, it takes green to be green.

"We've lacked the long-term commitment to adequately fund parks," Park Pride Executive Director George Dusenbury said. "Any momentum we had has been killed by recent budget cuts."

Since 2001, when the Trust for Public Land first ranked America's largest cities based on their parks, Atlanta has purchased more than 1,000 acres for parks and green space.

But the city population continues to grow, so the ratio of park acreage to residents has not significantly increased.

Last November, voters in Cherokee, Cobb and Gwinnett counties agreed to tax themselves a combined \$264 million for new parks. Atlanta voters have not had



HYOSUB SHIN / hshin@ajc.com

Byron Amos (left) talks with **Walt Ray**, the landscape architect from Park Pride, at the corner of Magnolia and Walnut streets near the Georgia World Congress Center. Amos is a citizen activist who helped identify the 2-acre piece of land for Vine City's park, still taking shape. The neighborhood raised money for it privately.

that option since 2001, when they voted yes to spend \$27 million for public plazas and green space as part of a larger bond package. Atlantans have been opening their wallets for additional sales tax to fund other infrastructure needs: a mandatory sewer overhaul and school construction projects.

Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, whose tenure spans much of the time since the Trust's first ranking, agrees Atlanta has more work to do.

But the mayor, who inherited a budget deficit in 2002 and now is working to close a similar budget gap in her last year in office, said the city "turned a corner" under her stewardship to invest in "clean water, clean air, parks and green space. Not to make the list of cities doing so, but because it's the best investment to ground a healthy and livable city."

Since Franklin took office, Atlanta launched the Beltline proposal, a 22-mile transit loop with about 1,400 acres of connected green space that a special tax district is paying for. The city also borrowed \$105 million for parks and spent \$25 million to protect wetlands and stream buffers as part of its sewer work.

Park Pride's report, called the "State of Atlanta's Parks," also praises the city for turning around its previously dysfunctional parks

GREEN SPACE

Atlanta ranks among the worst in the nation for parks and green space. Here's a comparison showing how much land is dedicated to public green space and the acreage per capita.

	Percentage of total land	Acres of parks and greenspace per 1,000 residents
City of Atlanta*	4.5%	7.7
City of Marietta	3%	6.88
City of Roswell	4%	13.5
Cobb County	2.5%	7.2
DeKalb County**	3.8%	9.2
Gwinnett County	4.21%	15.3

*2007 data **Does not include Stone Mountain, Vaughters farm or city parks

Nationally

Cities comparable to Atlanta in population density, 2007:

Atlanta	4.5%	7.7
Cincinnati	13.8%	20.8
Houston	14.2%	24.3
Phoenix	12.5%	25.2
Portland, Ore.	15.6%	25
Raleigh	16.5%	34.2

Sources: City of Roswell, City of Marietta, DeKalb County, Gwinnett County, Park Pride, Trust for Public Land

ELIZABETH LANDT / Staff

working toward national accreditation. The nonprofit group recruits park volunteers and lobbies for more money for Atlanta parks.

Most of the report's criticism centers on lack of spending, both for new parkland and for the parks' staff and maintenance equipment.

Since 2001, Atlanta improved incrementally in the amount of parkland for every 1,000 residents, from 7.6 acres to 7.7 acres, according to the Trust for Public Land. The median amount for the nation's largest cities

forecast for Atlanta's population of about 477,000, increasing that ratio will be even more challenging. Not even the Beltline parks could close the gap entirely.

According to the report, Atlanta would do well to model itself after Gwinnett, which has raised nearly half a billion dollars since 1997 to buy and develop parks. Gwinnett is just starting to raise another \$135 million with a penny sales tax. Gwinnett and Atlanta are among the few local governments in Georgia that set aside property taxes for

ty's park system was named the nation's best large park system by the National Recreation and Park Association.

Other report highlights: ► Buckhead and southwest Atlanta are the most "under-parked" neighborhoods in Atlanta.

► The city increased park and green space acreage by nearly one-third, to 4,576 acres. That's about 4.5 percent of the city's total land area. Park Pride's goal is to increase that by 1 percentage point a year.

► Half of Atlanta residents live within a half-mile of a park. The goal is for all residents to live that close.

Barbara Faga, a principal with EDAA Inc. in Atlanta, an architecture and environment consulting firm, said the Beltline is going to solve much of the city's park deficit.

"This is the newest, biggest, best idea as far as open space and the public realm in Atlanta," said Faga, who chaired Franklin's green space task force in 2002 that called for doubling the city's park acreage. The Beltline has acquired 221 acres of parks for \$76.9 million, most of it public money.

But the Beltline is in limbo, with the state insisting on the right to run heavy rail where the city wants a light rail system.

ON AJC.COM