Everything to Know About Public Work You Were Afraid to Ask
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Learning Objectives

1. Hear from the nation’s top government professionals and a successful design consultant on how to design of public parks happens—what works and what fails.

2. Understand the current local and national context for funding for public process, park design, construction, community participation, and politics influence design, program, and construction of parks.

3. Understand the specific roles of landscape architects in the public park design process, and how to avoid the pitfalls that can plague public projects and consultants.

4. Examine how the various parties—public, private, non-profit—often come together in complicated but ultimately successful and dynamic ways.
Partnering with civic agencies on a public works project often involves navigating a complex regulatory environment, including several layers of review and approval, an extensive public outreach process and compliance requirements. Here’s an overview of what it takes to see a project through from beginning to end.

**Total Project Time, Depending on Scale and Complexity:**
Minimum of 18 to 36 months

**Source:** Project Compliance and Approval Process Benchmarking Study prepared for Citizens’ General Obligation Bond Oversight Committee in 2013
San Francisco Review and Approval Bodies

**CEQA and NEPA** Every project undertaken by a public agency or private developer in California is subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which requires a series of procedures to document the environmental impact. In San Francisco, the Planning Department is the CEQA Lead Agency for projects sponsored by City and County of San Francisco (CCSF) agencies. The CEQA process can take between one and nine months for outcomes resulting in less than a full Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and a minimum of 24 to 30 months when an EIR is required. In addition to CEQA compliance, the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) requires review if a project is significantly funded or administered by a federal agency. The relevant federal agency manages the required NEPA process in collaboration with the project sponsor.

**Resource Agencies and Regional Bodies** Some projects are subject to additional State and Federal statutes that lay out protections for specific natural resources, such as air, water, wetlands, or wildlife. These statutes require that designated regional, state, and federal review entities issue permits to verify that a proposed project is in compliance with whatever environmental protections apply. Some of these statutes are enforced by a series of state and federal agencies commonly referred to as “resource agencies” and others are administered by regional bodies established by state law. These permitting processes vary widely and can take a minimum of between six weeks and nine months to complete.

**Civic Design Review Committee** All projects involving the construction or major renovation of a structure located on City property are reviewed by this Committee of the San Francisco Arts Commission. The Committee reviews each project at least three times during the course of its monthly public meeting schedule: Schematic (Phase 1), Design Development (Phase 2), and Construction Documents (Phase 3). Projects are presented to the Committee a minimum of two to four times. If modifications are requested by the Committee, the project is then modified and resubmitted for Committee review. This process takes a minimum of two to four months to complete, based on the Committee’s monthly meeting schedule.

**Department of Building Inspections (DBI)** Every construction or major renovation project in San Francisco, except those on Port of San Francisco property, must obtain building and other permits from DBI before demolition or construction begins. Permits can only be issued after construction documents are finalized. DBI permits take a minimum of three to six months for most new free-standing structures (permitting for some small pre-fabricated structures can be approved in two weeks or less).

**Planning Department** Every major project in San Francisco undergoes a General Plan Referral from Planning, to evaluate the proposed project’s consistency with General Plan goals. The timeframe for a General Plan Referral is tied to whatever level of CEQA review is required of the project, in most cases.

**Human Rights Commission and Civil Service Commission** The Human Rights Commission (HRC) reviews all contracts advertised for outside services by CCSF, and can modify or block contracting if not in compliance with CCSF’s nondiscrimination and other laws. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) ensures that professional consultant services are procured in a manner that is complementary with the City’s in-house capacity to perform the same work at agencies such as the Department of Public Works (DPW). The CSC must approve contracts for outside services when the scope of work could be provided by a City agency. The HRC and CSC review, when required, occur within the overall contract approval timeframe, which typically lasts a minimum of three to six months.

**Additional Permitting and Review Agencies** Historic Preservation Commission; Mayor’s Office on Disability (ADA Compliance); Recreation and Parks Commission; Planning Commission; Public Health Department (Soil Characterization Study); SF Public Works; Bay Area Air Quality Management District; BCDC (Permits and Design Review); California Coastal Commission; California Department of Fish and Wildlife; National Parks Service; Regulatory Water Quality Control Board; State Historic Preservation Officer; US Army Corps of Engineers; US Fish and Wildlife.

**Civic Engagement and Public Process** Most bond-funded projects will generate public interest and ample time is often needed to manage a robust civic engagement process during project delivery. Parks, schools and libraries, in particular, are frequently the focus of intense public scrutiny and involvement, which can lead to delays and/or longer project delivery time-frames than originally anticipated by project sponsor agencies. There is no fixed timeframe or procedure for public engagement, though the CEQA process does require time for receiving public comments at each stage of the environmental review process. Generally, public engagement parallels the planning and design phases of a project, with public input solicited at the beginning, middle, and near the end of the design process. In some cases, usually for particularly high-profile projects, extensive community engagement may take place before the design phase begins.
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Chicago, Illinois
Trust for Public Land

ALLEGHENY RIVERFRONT PARK
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh Cultural Trust

BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK
Brooklyn, New York
Brooklyn Bridge Park

CITYARCHRIVER
St. Louis, Missouri
CityArchRiver Foundation

HUDSON PARK & BOULEVARD
New York, New York
Hudson Yards Development Corp.

HUDSON RIVER PARK
New York, New York
Hudson River Park Trust

MAGGIE DALEY PARK
Chicago, Illinois
Chicago Park District

TULSA WATERFRONT PARK
Tulsa, Oklahoma
George Kaiser Family Foundation

WALLER CREEK
Austin, Texas
Waller Creek Conservancy
Urban waterfronts accumulate complexity. The Brooklyn Bridge Park site has to accommodate both the program needs of the PARK CONSTITUENCY and maintain a comprehensive amount of INFRASTRUCTURAL FUNCTIONS for the city as a whole; while engaging in jurisdictions that extend well beyond the site boundaries.