

Urban Matters: A Collaborative Path to Relevancy

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AT THE GEORGE WRIGHT SOCIETY CONFERENCE I found out that the Urban Agenda is its own group of people who work on the National Park Service (NPS) outreach to urban centers. Whether that is creating parks inside cities, or figuring out how to get less privileged families out to the parks, there's a lot going on. After all, the first parks were sandboxes inside cities! In this session we talked at great length discussing possible ways to involve different groups in the national parks. This meant we talked about cultural relevance and connection to parks. The Urban Agenda speakers gave us a good illustration of what they were really dealing with at the time of the conference. For example, they are working with the mayor of Detroit to create a model city for America's future. Among all the other cities, Detroit was presented as the hardest task since it is becoming an abandoned sprawl of homes. The Mayor, Mike Duggan, and the Urban Agenda are looking to open opportunities for the remaining homeowners in Detroit by bulldozing the abandoned property. This property is then sold to neighbors in the area. The idea is to create open greenspace so the homeowners can grow gardens there. This idea follows the Homestead Act of 1862. Instead of an acre going for \$1.25 it would go for \$100. The model cities for America's future are supposed to be the cleanest cities around. These cities will promote alternative fuels to cut down on greenhouse gasses and curb dependence on petroleum. Through teaching the public healthier ways to live eco-friendly, they compliment the NPS Climate Friendly Parks program.

We also discussed how we need to be relevant to all Americans. The Urban Agenda illuminated the need for the NPS to reach out to different members of the American community. They did this by talking about the idea of "One NPS." One NPS was broken down into three different ideas: Parks and programs together, connection to meet needs of communities, and nurturing a culture of collaboration. The idea of parks and programs is to combine the histories of groups involved in the park with educational programs. Much like the interpretive Buffalo Soldier walk through Yosemite Valley. Connection of parks to communities was the second idea of One NPS. This means that the parks need to become more accessible to low income families. President Barack Obama took steps towards this goal by launching the Every Kid in a Park initiative. This initiative allows every American fourth grader to bring their family to a national park for free. The third idea was to nurture a culture of collaboration. This idea is all about connecting different groups to each other. At the George Wright Society, they had several sessions geared towards the reaching the youth. I happened to catch a bit of one of these sessions and they discussed everything from the

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classroom environment to actually planting the seed in kid's minds that the National Park Service is a career option.

Reflection

My attendance at the Urban Agenda session held at the George Wright Society was eye opening. For many, like me, urban parks and city land never really seemed like something on the NPS radar. Now they seem very connected. While the vast western national parks are the icons of the Service, places like the forgotten neighborhoods in Detroit appear to be their battleground. I already knew about cultural uniformity park goers seem to have, and I believe the issue to be bigger than what the Urban Agenda can do. I took in so much more information on the struggles of Detroit. Some parts of Detroit have gone to the dogs because the industry and people left. However, the mayor Mike Duggan wants to bring people back into the Motor City. I think his idea of creating open space to be sold to residents is a good idea. In addition, I think that sectioning off an area of abandoned houses to become an adventure playground for kids would be a positive use for the land. It would be a modern ghost town, which if I were a kid, would sound awesome.