

ALL WHEELS *Welcome*



**AUSTIN'S MUELLER DEVELOPMENT INTEGRATES
GREENSPACE AND A SKATE PARK TO CREATE
A ONE-OF-A-KIND NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITY**

BY DREW CARMAN AND AMY WESTERMEYER



Access to greenspace is a defining feature of the Mueller development, an award-winning urban village constructed on the site of a former municipal airport in Austin, Texas. This is entirely by design.

“Before the first map of Mueller’s redevelopment was drawn, the surrounding citizens of the former airport and the city insisted this community have an abundance of parks and open space for Mueller

property owners, their families, and their employees, and the surrounding community to enjoy,” says Greg Weaver, executive vice president of Catellus, Mueller’s master developer.



SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Two decades in the making, Mueller is now a thriving hub of residential, retail,



and office uses integrated with abundant greenspace. With 20 percent of the neighborhood dedicated to parkland and open space, every resident lives within 600 feet of a community greenspace. As the project's prime consultant, RVi Planning and Landscape Architecture led the design team for the community's 144 acres of parkland, more than four miles of trails, and four greenway parks, which act as a "front yard" for residents, offering passive and active recreational opportunities and providing critical environmental functions.

The Southeast Greenway, the fourth of five greenway parks, is part naturalized habitat and part active-use park, with a large retention pond that also creates a thriving wetland habitat to support aquatic plants and habitats for birds, amphibians, and other aquatic wildlife. Its embankment is planted with restored Texas Blackland prairie that retains floodwaters, and buffers the pond from activity on the street above.

This parcel of land abuts a historically mixed, vibrant neighborhood of both Mexican-American and



Black residents; it was essential to gather input from neighbors about the development's uses and planning. There was substantial neighborhood support for a skate park. With a new middle school now under construction on an adjacent site, the skate park has gained additional appeal as a place to potentially attract kids who are too old for traditional playgrounds but still need safe places for recreation. Weaver says Catellus was fully on board.

"When Austin's Parks and Recreation Department shared with us a skate park and pump track were needed to serve this part of town, the Mueller team was happy and proud to deliver another valuable asset to the community at large," he says.

MADE IN THE SHADE

As the architectural plan unfolded, shade became the primary consideration for the entertainment and gathering area, which was built to welcome all park users.

A mott of 80-year-old post oak trees provided some shade as well as a gentle transition marker that extended from the naturalized wetland area to the pump track and skate plaza at the park's eastern end. For the design of the structures, Studio8 Architects took inspiration from the brightly colored, overlapping canopies of Mexican street markets. Three simple shade pavilions are staggered along a linear axis that guides circulation, organizes the space,



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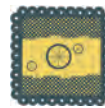
and helps anchor the fluid, swooping lines of the pump track and skate plaza. The pathways linking the park's features flow through the pavilion canopies, creating a sense of seamlessness among the park amenities. Visitors can comfortably watch the action but can also pass through, pause, and then continue along the trails.

The dominant presence of concrete was a design asset. The Studio8 team focused on using a shade structure to create dynamic patterning on the ground that connects visually to the dappled shade of the oak trees and is reminiscent of traditional Mexican *papel picados*—decorative paper garlands with intricate cutouts. The shadows follow the sun's movement, making visible the natural rhythm of the day and quietly mirroring the site's activity without creating any obstructions or distractions. A curving, nine-foot wall—also concrete—not only acts as a defining boundary around the plaza and helps integrate all the park's elements, but also provides a canvas for a future mural that will add another vibrant layer to the park, further connecting the space to the community. Residents will have a say in the style of mural they would like to see.



While the shade patterning defines the park experience on the ground, the overlapping patches of the canopies' oranges, reds, and yellows are identifiable from near and far, and even from flights approaching the Austin airport. The architects collaborated with a sign fabricator on the custom canopies of shaped, coated aluminum, which were produced through a turnkey process that saved both time and money. With safety as a major consideration, as well as a

desire to allow users (especially young ones) free run of the park without leaning too heavily on "Do Not" signage, the structural engineer devised a Y-phalange for each canopy support to discourage climbing on the structures.



A PARK FOR THE PEOPLE

Boasting the first all-concrete pump track in Texas, the park is fully accessible for





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all wheels, including skateboards, bikes, and modified wheelchairs. Kanten Russell, director of design for New Line Skateparks, the firm that designed the track and plaza, says this trend has been in the making for the last 5 to 10 years and that replacing traditional dirt with concrete ensures inclusivity and equity for users.

The track's multi-looped design provides fun and challenging options for visitors of all skill levels, from beginners to advanced users. Access points were carefully considered, allowing all users to safely participate or to bail out if needed. Enabling everyone to access the facility and understanding each person's experience is key to the process, Russell says.

"After spending time with these users, they want

to have the challenge of going up and down transition elements and different obstacles, just like everyone else. They just want to have access to the facility and to the area."

Installing the track was an exercise in protecting the sensitive—and notoriously finicky—oaks as much as the natural qualities of the land. The team took special care to understand how water would move through the site and designed drainage systems that not only prevented water from pooling but also kept the oaks' existing drainage pattern intact. Safety considerations drove the placement of light poles and the varying heights of concrete berms and walls.

Collaboration among RVI, Studio8, New Line, and



the entire construction team ensured that “every aspect of this facility is top-notch,” Weaver says.

Two years after its opening, the park continues to draw a vibrant mix of people. It offers something for all age groups and interests in a thriving, native habitat, in a dense, urban development less than two miles from downtown.

For Russell, having a place to get out of the sun, to gather, or just rest makes a big difference in how people experience the park and sets it apart from others. “It’s a park first, and then the rideable element is second,” he says. “Having a nice place to sit out of the sun makes it feel like it’s a part of the park. I think that makes it really special.” **PRB+**

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