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CONTACT:

Chicago Places 10th on 2026 ParkScore® Index, Returning to Top 10 after One-Year Absence on Improved Park Equity and Investment

Accompanying Research Report Concludes Parks Are a Winning Investment: Economic Analysis Shows City Parks Deliver \$3 in Economic Benefits For Every Dollar Invested

Chicago—Trust for Public Land announced today that Chicago placed 10th on the 2026 ParkScore® index, returning to the top 10 after falling to 11th last year. The city’s rebound was caused by improved marks for park equity and investment. Chicago is biggest city in the United States to rank inside the top 10.

Atop the rankings, Washington, DC, retained the ParkScore title, outpacing Irvine (2nd), Minneapolis (3rd) and St. Paul (4th). The annual ParkScore® index ranks park systems in the 100 most populous U.S. cities and is widely considered the gold standard for park evaluation.

Chicago’s ParkScore ranking was lifted by exceptionally strong marks for park access. Ninety-eight percent of Chicago residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, far above the national ParkScore average of 76 percent. The city also received above-average scores for park amenities, scoring among the national leaders for sports fields, playgrounds, and “splashpads” and other water features.

Continued improvement in park investment lifted Chicago’s ranking. The city spent \$252 per person on its park system this year, above last year’s \$227 and well above the national ParkScore average of \$154. Chicago also scored highly on ParkScore’s equity metric. It offers roughly the same access to parks in low-income neighborhoods, high-income neighborhoods, White neighborhoods and neighborhoods with a majority of people of color—one of relatively few ParkScore cities to achieve that goal. However, Chicago’s ParkScore ranking was limited by its small average park size, which is a common challenge facing many older cities. According to Trust for Public Land, the median park size in Chicago is 2.2 acres, less than half the national ParkScore average of 5.4 acres.

“The Chicago Park District is thrilled to return to the top 10 cities ranked by the Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore index,” **said Chicago Park District General Superintendent and CEO Carlos Ramirez-Rosa.** “This advancement reflects our commitment, over the past year, to

prioritize access and equity, particularly in neighborhoods where historic disinvestment has occurred. We look forward to continuing the important work of elevating our parks and serving as a model for other large cities across the country.”

Accompanying the annual ratings list, Trust for Public Land released a new economic analysis, [*The Undeniable ROI of Parks*](#), which found that city parks deliver \$3 in benefits for every \$1 invested. These benefits reach residents in many ways. For example, parks facilitate physical activity, which improves physical and mental health while reducing health care costs. Parks also serve as “green infrastructure,” which saves cities money on flood control and other public works. Finally, park facilities and activities offer direct savings to consumers, who might otherwise pay out-of-pocket for similar services.

The research report cites many innovative examples of high-ROI park investments. For example, New York City recently opened several “Fitness Zones” in public parks, providing access to free strength training equipment. Chicago’s Night Out in the Parks offers free cultural events in all areas of the city, including theater, concert, and dance programs. These initiatives save residents money on gym memberships and entertainment costs. Other examples described in the report yield substantial savings to city governments. For example, Los Angeles’ “Green Alleys” program recently replaced several trash-strewn asphalt alleys with landscaped pedestrian walkways. These green spaces absorb water during rainstorms, instead of pushing additional runoff into already overstretched storm drain networks. Green alleys and other natural spaces save Los Angeles an estimated \$8 million annually in stormwater treatment costs.

Trust for Public Land also released a new public opinion survey confirming that residents throughout the United States use parks regularly, value them highly, and consider parks and other public open spaces essential pieces of community infrastructure. Survey results were consistent across demographic and ideological lines.

The research found that 88% of US residents visited a public park at least once during the past year, and more than half (54%) want to spend more time outside. Survey respondents reported that they use parks to increase physical activity and improve physical health (71%), de-stress and improve mental health (61%), and spend time with family and friends (46%). The survey found that people visited parks more frequently than any other publicly accessible venue, including bars and restaurants. Also, an overwhelming majority of respondents (88%) support continued community investment in outdoor recreation. The public opinion survey, *National Survey on Outdoor Public Spaces*, was conducted by national pollster YouGov in March, 2026 (N=4,000). Additional details about the survey are available upon request.

“Americans from all walks of life love their local parks, and they want leaders to invest in them,” **said Dr. Carrie Besnette Hauser, President and CEO of Trust for Public Land.** “The 2026 ParkScore rankings and results show why: parks deliver real returns, generating \$3 in economic benefits for every \$1 invested, while improving physical and mental health and strengthening communities. TPL is committed to working with cities nationwide to expand access to high-quality parks and unlock their multitude of benefits for everyone.”

PARKSCORE RANKINGS FOR 2026

Washington, DC, was rated the best big-city park system in the United States for the sixth consecutive year. The city scored well on all ParkScore rating factors. More than twenty-one percent of land in the District of Columbia is reserved for parks, among the highest in the United States. The District also outperformed on ParkScore's park access and park equity metrics.

Irvine retained its 2nd place ranking, powered by continued progress on its Great Park, one of the most ambitious public park projects in the United States. Boise defended its title as the best park system for dogs, with a nation-leading 9.1 dog parks per 100,000 residents, outscoring Portland, Oregon, and Henderson, Nevada. St. Paul received top marks for basketball hoops, Cincinnati scored best for playgrounds, and Boston ranked first for splashpads and other water features. Chicago placed fourth nationally for splashpads.

ParkScore also reported good news for The Lone Star State, as several Texas cities climbed up the ParkScore list. Irving, Texas, located between Fort Worth and Dallas, was ParkScore's biggest mover, surging 28 spots, from 99th to 71st. Fort Worth jumped 14 places from 72nd to 58th. Austin climbed 7 spots to 47th, Frisco jumped from 37th to 30th, and Plano improved four positions to 13th and claimed the title of Texas' highest-ranked ParkScore city. Texas cities achieved these results mostly through new park openings and increased park investment.

PARKSCORE METHODOLOGY AND RANKINGS

The annual ParkScore[®] index ranks park systems in the 100 most populous U.S. cities and is widely considered the gold standard for park evaluation. ParkScore rankings are based equally on five factors:

- **Park access** measures the percentage of residents living within a 10-minute walk of a park.
- **Park equity** compares per capita park space and 10-minute-walk park access in communities of color vs. white communities and in low-income neighborhoods vs. high-income neighborhoods. Park systems score higher if disparities are minimal or non-existent.
- **Park acreage** is based on a city's median park size and the percentage of city area dedicated to parks.
- **Park investment** measures park spending per resident.
- **Park amenities** assesses the availability of seven popular park features: basketball hoops; off-leash dog parks; playgrounds; splashpads and other water-play structures; sports fields; recreation and senior centers; and restrooms.

According to Trust for Public Land, the 10 highest-ranking park systems in the United States are:

Rank	City	ParkScore (Max 100)
1.	Washington, DC	85.1
2.	Irvine, CA	84.1
3.	Minneapolis, MN	83.4

4.	St, Paul, MN	83.2
5.	Cincinnati, OH	81.2
6.	San Francisco, CA	80.0
7.	Arlington, VA	76.1
8.	Seattle, WA	75.4
9.	Portland, OR	75.1
10.	Chicago, IL	74.3

The ParkScore index uses advanced GIS (Geographic Information Systems) and spatial analysis to evaluate park accessibility. Instead of measuring distance to a local park, the rating system's GIS technology considers the location of park entrances and physical obstacles to access. For example, if residents are separated from a nearby park by a major highway, the ParkScore index does not count the park as accessible to those residents, unless there is a bridge, underpass, or easy access point across the highway.

Municipal leaders use ParkScore information to guide park improvement efforts, studying park access on a block-by-block basis and pinpointing the areas where new parks are needed most. The ParkScore website, [is](#) free and available to the public, empowering residents to hold their elected leaders accountable for achieving equitable access to quality parks for all.

About Trust for Public Land

Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, TPL works with communities to create parks and protect public land where they are needed most. Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 4 million acres of public land, created more than 5,504 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places, and raised \$112 billion in public funding for parks and public lands, and connected nearly 10 million people to the outdoors. To learn more, visit tpl.org.