

BUILDING A NEW CENTRAL PARK THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE LEARNING: FALLING RUN GREENSPACE, MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA

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1 ABSTRACT

Service learning, university-community partnerships and volunteers' civic engagement activities created a new urban forest park, Falling Run Greenspace, from sixty acres of steeply forested university property in downtown Morgantown, West Virginia. Developing the master plan involved a complex process of administrative approvals and committees for engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders. The project catalyzed greenspace partnerships between the University and the community, and promoted civic engagement among students. This paper reports on the collaborative process through which this new park was created. Landscape architecture majors at West Virginia University participated in site analysis and master planning through service learning in class assignments typically over two semesters; community members and students, staff and faculty volunteered to construct trails. The University provided a construction budget for bridges and a universally accessible trail. In 2016, Falling Run was the first Welcome Week trail-building project and attracted 495 incoming freshmen who volunteered to clear brush and build trails. Falling Run's volunteer structure hinged on a handful of experienced trail crew leaders providing training sessions, and a dedicated volunteer coordinator. Within eighteen months, volunteers built 2.4 miles of trail, utilizing 4,693 worker-hours. A West Virginia Land Trust representative called this project "the most important development for Morgantown green space since the Rail Trail." With few new large parks being established in central urban areas today, the service learning and volunteer organization strategies used to establish Falling Run provide useful planning insights for universities working within the constraints of limited design and construction budgets, and for landscape architecture programs considering multi-year service learning design-build projects.

1.1 Keywords

Service Learning, Urban Parks, Trail Planning, Appalachia, Volunteers