

Bridge on the east side of Prairie Meadow Park



2



The Prairie Meadow central lawn area is surrounded by a raised circular walkway.

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Bridge on the west side of Prairie Meadow Park



2

(continued from page 1) aside public park land, with big parks like these intended for use by all Denver residents.

On September 16, landscape architects, planners and builders who had worked on the parks came out to celebrate their completion and share their vision with the community. Craig Vickers, landscape architect with Civitas, gazes over the big circle at Prairie Meadow with the enthusiasm and wonder of a child who has just received the grandest gift ever. Vickers, who works on national and international projects, says, "The whole thing is pretty remarkable. I'm trying to think of anywhere else in the country that has this. Not like this. Not to this degree. I mean there are great parks and park systems everywhere, but, associated with one community, having so much diverse park space as Stapleton has, let's put it this way, there are not many."

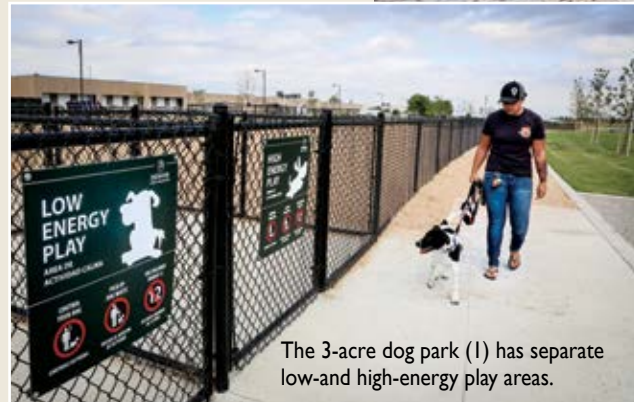
Colorado's prairies were the inspiration for these grand parks. "The prairie is at its most beautiful when it's untouched by humans. Where you just see beautiful vegetation that meets the sky on the horizon line. Uninterrupted," says Vickers. So how did that inspiration lead to this grand circle we're looking at? He explains how the wind from the Rocky Mountains pushes around the sand and silt and it piles up in a series of crescent shapes.

The architects' idea was to take the curve of the crescent, "purify the form" (into a circle), and build it at a giant scale. "We thought if we created that, it would be a really interesting grand scale gesture that would enframe a big public lawn for all the festivals and informal soccer and play... This was meant to be the livingroom space."

The circular walkway atop the mounds (and over the bridges) offers a beautiful, wide-open view of the city and the mountains. But there was a hidden objective to those mounds. "We thought if we made the



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The 3-acre dog park (1) has separate low-and high-energy play areas.

landform large enough that there would be places where you could see the sky at the top of the landform—and it would be a prairie-like experience," says Vickers. "And so when we were originally conceiving this, we thought, maybe in the middle you couldn't see any houses. Then we started thinking about the accessibility of it and we had to lower it. But you can get that experience in places, and that's a really neat thing."

The parks were engineered to serve as a stormwater drainage system, but the drainage area was also designed as an amenity. "We're trying to vegetate this with natural wetlands species and grass species, where our intent is that this is as fun for kids to play in as these kinds of environments were to play in when I was a kid. Playing in water and messing around with stones and catching frogs and stuff," noting that there will probably be a trickle most of the time.

Vickers adds that it took countless exceptional designers, constructors and development leaders to build all the parks in Stapleton—and all were teams that brought the same level of enthusiasm and attention to a vision as what he described for Prairie Meadow.

Most of these new parks and paths are open, but some will be roped off through November while new plantings take hold. Please enjoy what's open and respect what's closed off.

Conservatory Green



7

Uplands Pavilion (5) provides custom ping pong tables in addition to the shaded gathering place with picnic tables. In the 14.4-acre Uplands Park (6), paths and plantings were designed to create a feel of "garden-like outdoor rooms." Lawns and crusher fines define informal gathering spaces. As with the other parks, the long east-west configuration and native plantings evoke a feeling of walking through the prairie where the natural environment meets the sky in the distance.

Conservatory Green (7) has a grassy amphitheatre and performance stage (the arc shade structure is visible in the background) that are managed by the Master Community Association and used for many free and open-to-the-public performances. In the foreground (the south end of the Green) are a water feature, shaded seating, a firepit, and raised planters that double as seating. A number of informal restaurants are located right near the green.



5

Uplands Pavilion

Uplands Park



6



To visit the parks, exit I-70 and go north on Central Park Blvd. and west on Prairie Meadow Drive. Or exit I-70 and go north on Quebec, east on Northfield Blvd., and north on Uinta or Verberna Street.

Above right: Sandhills Prairie Park (3), was inspired by the crescent-shaped sand dune landforms that existed in the windswept plains. The 14.7-acre park contains the highest landform in all of the Stapleton parks, offering views of the mountains and downtown—and a seating area at the high point offers a quiet place to reflect, read or watch the sunset. The view from the high point also shows the repeating theme of crescent-shaped landforms within that park. Park amenities include picnic areas, a nature playground with boulders and logs, and strolling paths. At the northeast end of the park, the path crosses under Central Park Blvd., where the public art pictured on the front cover and on page 27 is displayed.

# Introducing Denver's Newest Parks

Prairie Meadow Park (2), at 14.5 acres, has a 1/4 mile inner loop at ground level and a 1/3 mile raised loop walkway. From the central lawn, the raised slopes give park visitors a direct horizon-to-sky view with none of the surrounding homes in sight. The upper loop offers views of the mountains and downtown. The drainage channel that flows through the park was built to accommodate storm water, but for the time it's not filled with rushing storm water, it was designed to be a kid-friendly creek bed. Due to new plantings, this park won't open until November.

Sandhills Prairie Park



3

Cottonwood Gallery



4

Cottonwood Gallery (4), a 15.7-acre park, has something for everyone. Three separate playgrounds are designed to meet the needs of different age groups. A large shade pavilion with multiple picnic tables provides a gathering place for family or group picnics. Rows of turf mounds invite the young and young at heart to invent games on the grassy slopes. And mounds that shield the path from the road are covered with colorful cosmos that go on for blocks.



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