Once a maze of walls, stairs, and sunken courtyards, the design for Dilworth Park restored the entire site to street level and incorporated new transit gateways, a café, a lawn, and a dynamic, flexible plaza and scrim fountain.
Dilworth Park, at the foot of Philadelphia’s City Hall, now serves fittingly as a 21st century transit hub and a vibrant urban oasis, welcoming all people to the heart of the city.
Before the Dilworth Park revitalization, stairs, walls, and cavernous sunken plazas with non-functioning fountains dominated the space. Overshadowed by dense poorly-tended trees and site furnishings it was an environment widely regarded as harsh, inhospitable, and unsafe, particularly during evening commutes.
Dilworth Park is now universally accessible. Within this 2.5 acre green roof, artful bands of granite paving reach out into the streets, and gracefully curved planting beds welcome visitors, direct pedestrian circulation, and provide comfortable seating.
Transparent glass pavilions, counterpoised to the north and south of the central artery, appear to emerge from underground in a single arcing gesture, framing views of City Hall and allowing light and air to filter into the concourse below.
Lush plantings of mostly native species greet visitors at every edge of the park, providing seasonal interest year-round. The design reduced the impervious surface area onsite by 38%, and 100% of stormwater is now captured on-site for reuse.
The park’s design is deceptively simple, yet an intricate network of transit infrastructure sits just below the site. In many places, fountain elements, paving, and planting needed to be sandwiched within a structural slab depth of three feet or less.
Generous and gracefully graded walkways create a comfortable and safe buffer between pedestrians and vehicular traffic. An artful combination of lush shrubs and herbaceous plantings and lightly shading tree canopy make Dilworth Park comfortable for all pedestrians.
The park’s signature scrim fountain was designed with flexibility in mind. During daily commutes, the jets gently bubble, creating a relaxing environment.
The Dilworth fountain has quickly become one of the most popular summertime hangouts in the city. Specific areas of the fountain can be turned on and off independently, allowing space for both play and other programs, like this farmer’s market.
In the winter, a portion of the fountain is transformed into a winter ice skating rink. Crowds gather well into the night to skate and socialize.
The fountain is also designed to include a kinetic art piece. Illuminated ribbons of atomized fog will billow in real time sequence with the transit lines below. People already enjoy the ribbons as secret pathways through the fountain jets.
With its level, infinitely flexible surface, the park can host events like never before, including this free, pop-up concert, which drew more than 10,000 spectators—a powerful testament to the value of accessible, democratizing urban design.
The park deftly balances scale and function, creating comfortable areas not just for large gatherings but for individuals and small groups.
120,000 people live and work within a five-minute walk of Dilworth Park, making it an ideal location for a myriad of neighborhood activities, from markets and performances to intramural sports and fitness classes.
The transformation of Dilworth Park has left an indelible impact on the city, and at once feels like it has always been a part of the urban fabric—a place that is undeniably Philadelphian.
DILWORTH PARK PLANT LIST

TREES
Thornless Honeylocust
London Plane Tree
Red Maple

SHRUBS
Summer Sweet Clethra
Variegated Tartarian Dogwood
Oakleaf Hydrangea
Virginia Sweetspire
Mountain Laurel
Bayberry
Cherrylaurel
Fragrant Sumac
Ural False Spirea
Nippon Spirea
Koreanspice Viburnum

GROUNDCOVER
Bearberry
Canby Paxistima

GRASSES
Purple Love Grass
Switch grass