

BROWN

Socio-Environmental Succession of Providence Greenspace

Investigating Historical Trends in Providence Parks and Playgrounds

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Introduction

The development of greenspace in Providence has culminated in a present-day parks system that includes over 100 parks and playgrounds, but these sites have not developed in isolation. As the Providence parks system has grown and changed over time, the city has concurrently undergone processes of industrialization and deindustrialization. Our team seeks to understand the relationship between greenspace and industrial development and the impact of this relationship on socio-environmental succession in the city. As part of our ongoing research, we seek to address the following questions through a rigorous analysis of historical data on Providence greenspaces:

- 1) What types of land use precede and follow public greenspace over time?
- 2) At what rate do greenspace sites enter and leave the Providence landscape?
- 3) What socio-environmental implications do these dynamics have for neighborhoods and for the city?

Goals

- 1) Use historical sources to develop a comprehensive database of greenspace in 20th century Providence
- 2) Locate and map all relevant sites
- 3) Interpret data to determine the turnover rate of greenspace in Providence



Figure 1: Peace & Plenty Park, Elmwood

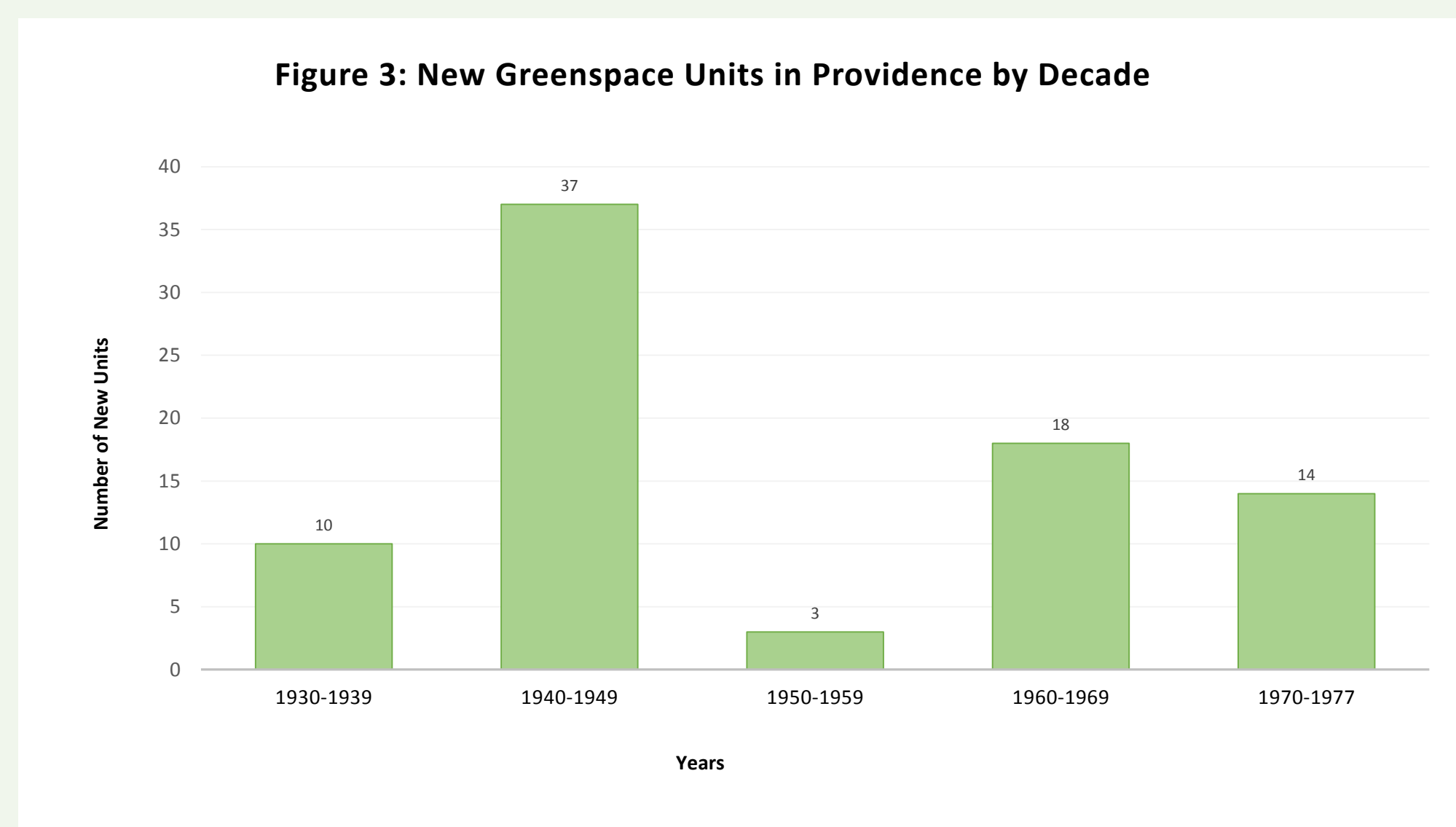
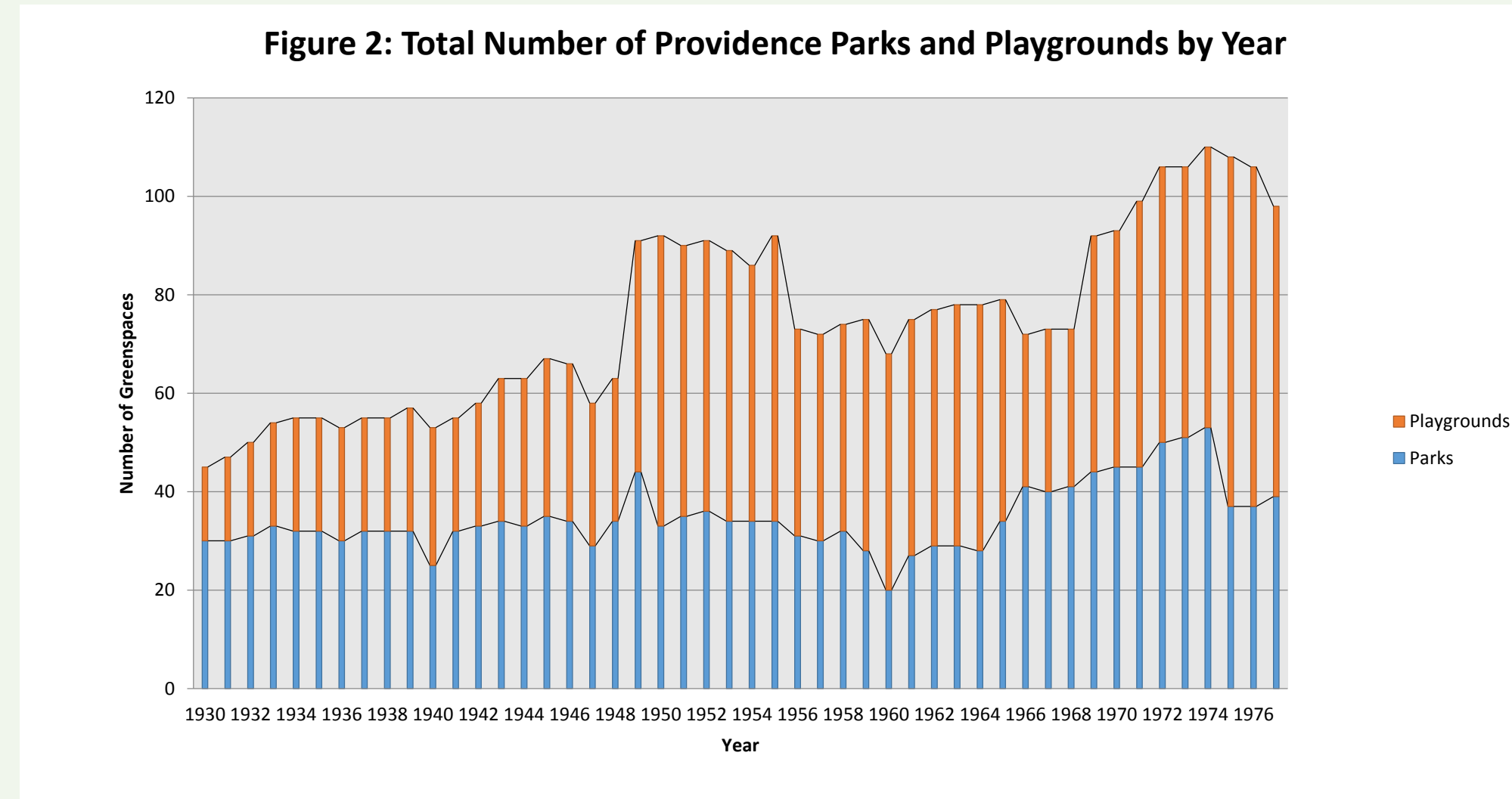
Methods

Our team utilized Providence Journal Almanacs¹ from 1930 to 1977 to compile a comprehensive yearly list of all playgrounds, parks, cemeteries, recreation centers, wharves, public pools, and public baths in Providence.

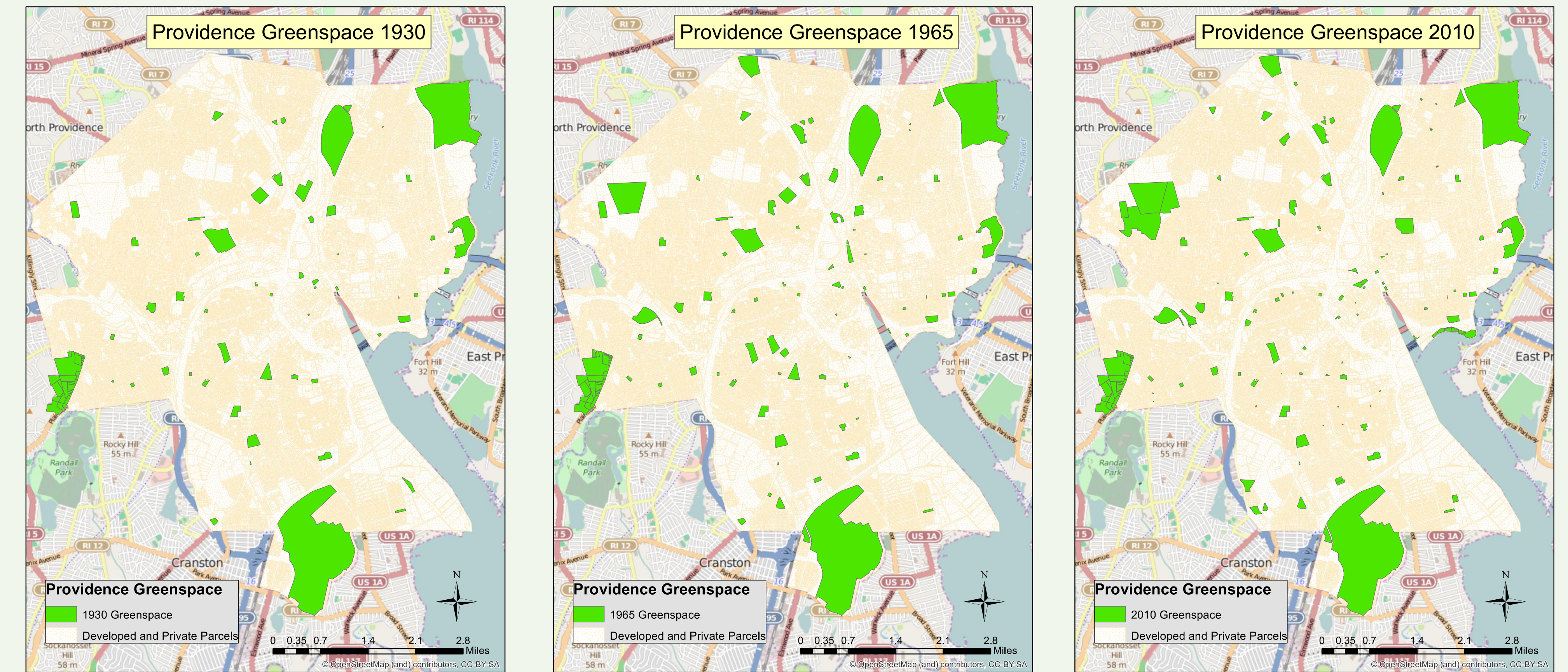
We determined the exact locations of sites that no longer exist using visual guides including historical Providence plat books² and Sanborn fire insurance maps.³ Parks that still exist today were located using maps and lists published by the City of Providence Parks and Recreation⁴ and the city's Department of Planning and Development.^{5,6} We found the latitude, longitude, and approximate addresses of the sites using Google Maps.

We have assumed that any inconsistencies in the almanacs are random and have created preliminary maps and graphs to visualize our data.

Results



Results (continued)



Figures 4, 5, 6: Providence greenspace parcel succession from 1930 to 2010

Conclusions

The data-gathering and analysis that our team has done so far has allowed us to draw preliminary conclusions regarding the changing presence of greenspace in Providence. Figure 2 and our historical maps of Providence reveal a general upward trend in the number of parks and playgrounds in Providence from 1930 to 1977. However, Figure 3, which includes not only parks and playgrounds but also parkways, fields, and reservations, does not reveal a particular trend in the rate at which greenspace has increased.

The data used in Figure 3 also reveal shortcomings in the almanacs. Of the 37 new greenspace units in the 1940s, 25 appear in 1949, indicating that some trends may be attributable not to an actual increase in Providence greenspace but to a change in the record-keeping policy of the almanacs. Similarly, the appearance in 1969 of 5 playgrounds within housing projects and in 1972 of 4 "sitting parks" may be due to actual trends in the construction of these sites or to changes in recording policy of the almanacs.

Future Directions

The almanacs provide a broad overview of the presence of greenspace in Providence throughout the mid-20th century, but they are not always perfect in their recordkeeping. At times, parks disappear from records and appear several years later. As such, our team plans to seek out additional sources of data as we move forward to confirm the accuracy of our parks database, such as city directories and other records.

Once our team is satisfied with the extent and quality of our data, we will delve further into the historical uses of greenspace sites to learn more about the types of land that are chosen to become greenspace, and the current uses of land that was once used as greenspace. We also plan to analyze further the rates at which sites leave and enter the system of greenspace in Providence.

References

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- 4) City of Providence Parks + Recreation. (2010, October 10). *Listing of Neighborhood Parks Assets as of 10/2010* [Government publication]. <http://www.providenceri.com/sites/default/files/file/Parks_and_Recreation/CoP_NeighborhoodParksList_10-2010.pdf> Accessed 29 July 2015.
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