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'UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY'

City selects Park Hill Park designer, who will base work on 'vision plan'

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates has office in Denver, worked on Obama center

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An aerial view of Park Hill Park in Denver on Tuesday. HYOUNG CHANG — THE DENVER POST

By Elliott Wenzler

The firm that designed Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York and the landscaping around the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago will work out plans for Denver's new Park Hill Park, the city announced Tuesday.

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, a landscape architecture firm with offices in Denver, Brooklyn, Cambridge and Los Angeles, also has done work in Austin, Texas; Tulsa, Okla.; and Dallas.

"These 155 acres are an unparalleled opportunity to create a landscape for gathering and exploration that forges connections across community," said founder Michael Van Valkenburgh in a news release. "We look forward to creating a park that uniquely belongs to Denver."

Denver Mayor Mike Johnston, whose administration acquired the park in 2025, announced the firm's hiring during a news conference at the park Tuesday afternoon. For decades, the park had been a golf course, and the city's acquisition came after voters rejected a ballot measure that would've allowed a plan to redevelop parts of the land to proceed.

"Parks capture the magical moments in people's lives, and this space has captured millions of such moments and will continue to do so," Johnston said in the release.

The parkland, which doesn't have many amenities yet, opened to the public last October. Johnston's administration swapped 165 acres of empty city-owned land by Denver International Airport to get the land from Westside Investment Partners.

The firm will work based off of a "framework vision plan" that the city developed after a public outreach process. The vision plan calls for a park packed full of amenities, including athletic fields and courts, a field house, a playground, a mini golf course, an off-leash dog park and a bike and pedestrian path. The city and the design firm plan to continue working with the community on the vision for the park in 2027, according to the release.

The city also will officially designate the land as a park, according to the release.

"Designating the site as a park will legally protect its use as a park. Designated parkland in Denver cannot be sold or disposed of without approval of voters," according to the release.

"This moment is about so much more than just a park," said council member Shontel Lewis, whose district includes the new park and who is running for mayor against Johnston in next year's election. "For decades, this land has been part of the fabric of Park Hill. It has been a place of gathering and connection. The best design doesn't just transform a landscape; it honors the people within it."

The Vibrant Denver Bond, which voters approved in 2025, included a \$70 million fund for the park buildout.

The city of Denver makes plans to protect Park Hill Park from development.

The Denver Gazette · 14 Oct 2026 · A5 · BY NICOLE C. BRAMBILA The Denver Gazette Denver Gazette Reporter Deborah Grigsby contributed to this report.

Denver has selected a design firm for the 155-acre Park Hill Park and plans to formally designate the property as parkland, inoculating it from future development without voter approval.



Mayor Mike Johnston announced Tuesday the selection of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates as the lead designer for the project.

“Park Hill Park is an extraordinary opportunity to create something lasting for Denver — a place where people from every neighborhood can come together, connect with nature, celebrate our community and enjoy the outdoors for generations to come,” Johnston said in a statement.

“By selecting a world-class design team and taking steps to permanently protect this land as a park, we’re honoring the years of community advocacy that brought us here and ensuring that the future of these 155 acres is shaped by the people of Denver. This is about more than building a park; it’s about creating a legacy for our city,” he added.

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates has worked on some of the nation’s most prominent public spaces, including Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York City and the landscape surrounding the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago.

The firm also redesigned the grounds surrounding the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, reconnecting the national landmark to downtown, and transformed a former Chicago rail corridor into The 606, an elevated trail and park system.

Denver acquired the 155-acre site last year in an exchange with Westside Investment Partners. The move marked the largest acquisition of private property for an urban park in Denver, city officials said. “These 155 acres are an unparalleled opportunity to create a landscape for gathering and exploration that forges connections across community,” Michael Van Valkenburgh, founder and creative director for MVVA, said in a statement. “We look forward to creating a park that uniquely belongs to Denver.” City officials said Denver Parks & Recreation developed a plan with public input that outlines the amenities and desired experiences for the regional park that seeks to balance open space with being a cultural hub and a path system with easy access throughout the park.

The park’s design is expected to be completed next year, with shovels in the ground the following year, said Jon Ewing, a Johnston spokesperson.

The public could be enjoying the park by 2029, officials said. Designating Park Hill as a park will protect its use, officials said, as it cannot be sold or disposed of without approval of voters.

The park has been managed as an open space for the public by Denver Parks & Recreation.

The Park Hill Park project received \$70 million from the \$950 million bond approved by Denver voters last year. The “Vibrant Denver Bond” program is expected to deliver 58 projects by 2031, including libraries, parks and cultural facilities, affordable housing, traffic safety improvements and a family health clinic.

Denver voters have approved \$2.1 billion in general obligation bonds — repaid through property taxes — since 2017.

Located in northeast Denver, Park Hill was originally a golf course that opened in the 1930s. It closed in 2018. With a conservation easement in place since the late '90s, the site could only be used for a golf course.

The City Council last year unanimously approved a land swap deal with Andy Klein of Westside Investments, which owned the former golf course, to make Park Hill Park, which is the city’s fourth-largest park. Westside had bought the Park Hill parcel for \$24 million in 2019. Klein originally had plans to develop Park Hill into a mixed-use development but, because of the conservation easement, it required voter approval. In 2023, voters rejected a measure 58.8% to 42.2%. Under the land swap agreement, Denver traded 145 acres of city-owned industrial property in Adams County near Denver International Airport for the Park Hill property. The deal cost the city \$12.7 million, which came from the Parks Legacy Fund.

“This is more than a land deal,” Councilmember Shontel Lewis said at the time. “It is recognition that the city must invest not only in creating an incredible park, but also in the residents who have made the neighborhood home for generations.”

The Denver City Council is expected to consider approving a design contract later this year.

City officials declined to specify how much the contract with Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates is expected to cost.