The recently completed Metropolitan is the first mixed-use, multifamily development implemented in the master plan for Downtown Columbia, Maryland, signifying the start of the renaissance to create a vibrant, walkable downtown that will eventually replace an inwardly-focused mall.

As part of the process, the design team was tasked with:

» Conceptualizing a public art component and seeing it through design & fabrication;
» Accommodating Howard County's requirement for a playground within an urban, linear open space per the masterplan;
» Maryland's rigorous stormwater regulations.
» Creating an iconic open space that serves as the core of Columbia, as both a destination amenity and a new vision for the area.

To accomplish the project goals, the designers focused on integrating the program requirements as part of the landscape design:

» Interactive art and environmental education influenced by local ecology would be the framework for the design of the site. The brightly-colored and oversized interactive sculptures emulate the life cycle of the native tulip poplar tree and provide an engaging environmental narrative and experience for children.
» Adjacent building uses, such as ground floor retail and walk-up residential units, influenced the framework of the open space design.
» Horticultural Design, through stormwater management, provided another element to educate all site visitors using unique earth forms, planting, and signage. The majority of all planting on site acts as micro-bioretention for treatment of stormwater.
» Together, these elements encourage playful discovery, science education, experiential learning, and curiosity.
The Metropolitan is part of the larger Warfield Neighborhood. The design team was responsible for site planning, design guidelines for the Warfield Neighborhood, and site design of the first redevelopment parcels. This directs land use, building heights, street framework, circulation, stormwater management, sustainable practices and landscape character.
DOWNTOWN COLUMBIA MASTER PLAN- WARFIELD DESIGN GUIDELINES

The amenity spaces within downtown Columbia are integral components of the overall master plan. The Warfield Design Guidelines, developed by the team, required a linear green and directed form, circulation and programming of the space. As the blocks developed, the linear green later became known as “The Promenade.”
STORMWATER & OPEN SPACE AS FRAMEWORK - THE PROMENADE

Stormwater was an integral element to the Warfield Design Guidelines. On the parcel of the Promenade, roof water is directed to surface bioretention in the Promenade and courtyards, in addition to large cisterns under the Promenade’s lawn that provide water for the limited irrigation system.
ARTFUL AND FUNCTIONAL STORMWATER

The linear shape of the open space informed the layout and scale of the planting. A large bioretention unit that runs along the lawn captures significant runoff from the surrounding sidewalks and streets. This system created an opportunity to combine a creative play space with environmental education.
ARTFUL AND FUNCTIONAL STORMWATER

The lawn serves as an open area for children to play, while the bioretention parallels the main walkway, doubling as a barrier to protect children from mall traffic. The tall, iconic sculptures provide a visual landmark in the community, anchoring the North and South corners of the site.
ARTFUL AND FUNCTIONAL STORMWATER

The edge of the lawn transitions to the retail core of The Promenade. Micro-bioretention planters help to separate the semi-private outdoor areas in front of the storefronts from the main circulation between the building and the lawn. This arrangement allows parents to dine while children play safely nearby within sight.
ART AND PLAY
The 1% for the Arts program coupled with the guidelines' prerequisite for a public art component resulted in the development of a park with integrated playground elements. The landscape architect shaped the park vision, including the development of an art RFP and engagement of a local sculptor.

LOCAL ENVIRONMENT
Inspirational Movement Of Water And Growth Of The Tulip Tree

The Tulip Tree can grow to be over 100 feet tall and is known to be one of the tallest hardwood trees native to the eastern United States. The average life span is between 200 and 250 years, with some living as long as 300 years. According to a tree survey conducted by Biohabitats, Inc. (2006) the Tulip Tree is the dominating canopy tree in the Crescent and Merriweather neighborhoods.

LIRIODENDRON TULIPIFERA, Tulip Tree

ARTFUL NARRATIVE
The sculptures seen in the previous images were central to the local art requirement and creating a sense of place. The Landscape Architect served a key role in establishing the art and play narrative. The proposed sculptures abstract the unique features of the tulip poplar, a locally significant native tree.

STORMWATER CYCLE

Curiosity, exploration, discovery are the magical and essential tools of childhood. Through every human sense, children meet the world and begin to create meaning and understanding. The seemingly mundane is instantly new and exciting, unknown and untasted... From the exhilaration of climbing to the top of a hill and running down the other side to the mystery of a secret hiding place, playful discovery is where children's stories begin.

SCIENCE OF LEARNING
the use of space to create enriched environments for learning

THE PROMENADE AT THE METROPOLITAN

Stormwater is continuously recycled through a dynamic process that has existed for millions of years. This hydrologic cycle moves rainfall from the atmosphere to land, through surface and groundwater systems, to the ocean, and back into the atmosphere.
SCULPTURE DESIGN PROCESS

The design team included an early-learning education expert and a local artist who refined the initial concepts from the landscape architects. Several rounds of mock-ups were completed to ensure the design intent, functionality, and quality were accurate. Here you can see the full process from inception to installation.
ABSTRACT FORMS

The over-sized, simple forms and shapes create an “Alice in Wonderland” experience that allows children to use their imagination. Play can occur individually or in a group setting. Some spaces were designed for shade, shelter, or the occasional game of hide and seek. Below, our client takes a test run.
**INTERPRETIVE EDUCATION**

Signage for all ages known as “Petals of Thought” were included throughout the site. Questions and phrases placed on colorful plaques engage children and spark curiosity. Text was designed to engage a wide age range of children and promote critical thinking, creative interpretation, and to inform users of environmental processes.
The owner requested a fountain to provide children an opportunity to cool off on warm days, however, they expressed concerns with children becoming soaked and unable to visit adjacent retailers. An interactive misting fountain was the ideal solution. Children can activate the misters by pushing buttons on an adjacent seatwall.
Native plantings are critical to the narrative of the site and success of the bioretention unit as they must be able to adapt to both drought and inundation conditions. Penstemon digitalis (left) is one of the selected plants that provides seasonal interest and creates habitat for pollinators.
To evaluate the true success of the bioretention basins, our team visits the site throughout the year to monitor the success rate of different species. This has allowed the team to gain a deeper understanding of ideal species for this type of designed green infrastructure.