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**Penn to Convert Post-Office Parking Lots into Park**

A 14-acre stretch of former U.S. Postal Service parking lots in West Philadelphia is set to get a green makeover, transforming it to open space and athletic fields.

The University of Pennsylvania announced today that it would spend $40 million to convert the asphalt lots into Penn Park, consisting of open space, four athletic fields, a dozen tennis courts, and other features. Combined with existing athletic fields, the park will total 24 acres, officials said.

The area - bounded by Walnut Street, South Street, the Schuylkill, and the university's main campus - will be designed by landscape architects Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, officials said.

"This is the first time that Penn, by design, has acquired land that will remain as open space," university president Amy Gutmann said in a statement, "which has tremendous environmental benefits for our campus and the city."

The project will also feature tree-topped berms, seating, and native species of meadow grasses.

The park will be open to the public, and the athletic fields will be used for regulation, club and intramural competition, practices, and public access at specific times, officials said.

Anne Papageorge, the university's vice president for facilities and real estate, hailed the project as innovative.

"It's not every day that an urban campus has the opportunity to expand adjacent to its campus and add 14 acres of open space and athletic fields," Papageorge said.

She added that the project, which is scheduled to begin this spring and is to be completed in spring 2011, would not displace any residents or businesses.