



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2007, Pierce County Parks & Recreation Services (P&RS) began updating its Park, Recreation & Open Space (PROS) Plan to identify opportunities to enhance the County's extensive park and recreation system. This Plan creates a vision for an innovative, inclusive, and interconnected system of parks, recreation facilities, programs, and services that promotes recreation, health, and environmental conservation as integral elements of a livable community. It addresses the recreation needs of residents County-wide, while reflecting diverse community priorities within Pierce County. As an update to the 2002 PROS Plan, this Plan establishes specific goals, objectives, recommendations, and actions for developing, conserving, and maintaining quality parks, trails, facilities, and open space. The adopted Plan recommends a strategy for the implementation of capital and non-capital projects that will most benefit the community. Following the adoption of the PROS Plan, P&RS began further work on regional trails, one of the highest community priorities identified in the PROS planning process.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

To develop a solid foundation for the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan and to understand the recreation preferences and needs of County residents, the planning process incorporated community input, which was obtained through several public involvement activities. These activities, which are described in Chapter 4, included:

- **Web Questionnaire:** Youth and adult questionnaires were administered online through the Pierce County website to obtain feedback from County residents on recreation patterns, needs, and priorities.
- **Jurisdictional Partners Meeting:** Representatives from several different parks and recreation agencies met to explore the relationships between recreation providers at different governmental levels and geographic areas.
- **Community Visioning Workshops:** Three public visioning workshops solicited comments from residents in different geographic areas in Pierce County.
- **Stakeholder Contacts:** Throughout the project, key stakeholders were contacted for additional information regarding specific aspects of the project.



- **Youth Focus Groups:** Three focus group meetings were held at two high schools and one middle school in Pierce County to talk about youth needs and priorities for parks and recreation.

Throughout the planning process, the following advisory groups also played a key role in the plan update. Committee members reviewed and provided feedback regarding key documents and chapters in support of the Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan:

- **Technical Advisory Group (TAG):** Made up of P&RS and County staff, TAG members provided technical knowledge and guidance to the planning process.
- **Planning Advisory Committee (PAC):** Representing different communities throughout Pierce County, the PAC provided local knowledge to ensure that the updated Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan would effectively meet the needs of County residents.
- **Parks and Recreation Citizens' Advisory Board (PRCAB):** This nine-member board (with two current vacancies) received regular updates on the planning process to ensure that the Plan was on track. The PRCAB also reviewed critical documents throughout the planning process.
- **Technical Working Group (TWG):** The Regional Trails Plan TWG included County staff and representatives of other agencies, trail advocates and community leaders and is described in greater detail in Chapter 7.1.

During the planning process, extensive public input was also sought to develop master plans for specific sites in underserved areas. Pierce County residents participated in several community meetings to voice their preferences and discuss the design and development of each of the following sites:

- Frontier Park
- Cross Property
- Oranegate Park
- Meridian Habitat Park; and
- Buckley-Bonney Lake Park

In addition, residents are being consulted in the management planning effort for the Carbon River Valley region and in the master planning for Lake Spanaway Golf Course. All of these efforts are designed to ensure

that P&RS plans reflect the needs and preferences of a diverse community.

PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan involved four phases, which are noted in Figure 1:

- Phase I: Asset & Opportunity Identification.** The purpose of Phase I was to take inventory of the current recreation resources in Pierce County, focusing on P&RS’s parks, facilities, and programs. Tasks in this phase included an analysis of the planning context, including a review of the geographic, historical, and cultural context, local government and park providers, demographics and anticipated population growth, land use and development, and natural resources. This phase also included a review of related planning efforts, a park evaluation and condition assessment, a park operations review, and an assessment of recreation programming. Recreation resources within Pierce County were identified and mapped to evaluate the parks and facilities provided by Parks and Recreation Services. Results were summarized in two discussion papers: the Planning Context; and the Park, Facility, and Program Analysis.



Figure 1: Planning Process

- **Phase II: Vision Formulation and Needs Assessment.** Phase I provided a foundation for the identification and refinement of the community’s vision for parks and recreation. In Phase II, public involvement activities helped identify public preferences, core values, and community needs for parks and recreation. This information, along with staff and committee feedback, was used to refine P&RS’s mission and vision for the future park system. Additionally, this information was incorporated into a Needs Assessment Scenario Review, where three different approaches to the provision of parks, facilities, and programs were evaluated. Based on the scenario that fit best with the community’s vision, standards and guidelines for parks and facilities were developed to determine an appropriate level of service for P&RS and to identify specific needs for parks, facilities, and programs.
- **Phase III: Development of Strategies and Actions.** Based on the vision identified in Phase II, Phase III involved the development of specific strategies and actions for improving the park and recreation system. This required the identification of specific goals and objectives to support the community’s vision and to create a strategy for implementation. Recommendations for the park system were developed, to set up a list of capital projects that are needed within a 15-year planning horizon. This long-term list supports a Capital Improvement Plan with prioritized projects. A Baseline Financial Analysis was completed to assist in the development of funding strategies to implement these projects. Data from all three phases were summarized and refined in an Administrative Draft Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan.
- **Phase IV: Plan Adoption and Implementation.** Staff, committee, and public comments are important components in the review of all Plan materials, and feedback was sought in preparation of the Final Plan. In addition to an internal review by key staff, review sessions were held with the TAG, PAC, PRCAB, Planning Commission, and County residents, before presenting the Plan to the County Executive and County Council. The Final Plan will reflect and incorporate the views of each of these groups, in order to acknowledge and support the role that Parks & Recreation Services plays in Pierce County. Implementation of the Plan will be further guided by the development of supplemental materials to ensure the Plan’s success.

PLAN ORGANIZATION

The updated Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan is organized into seven chapters and ten appendices:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** describes the purpose of the Plan, the involvement of County residents in the Plan update, phases in the planning process, the organization of the Plan, and the relationship between this Plan and other planning documents.
- **Chapter 2: Planning Context** provides an overview of Pierce County, including background relevant to the plan, such as the County's geographic context, population and development patterns, land use, natural resources, and park agencies and jurisdictions.
- **Chapter 3: Existing Resources** defines the current inventory of P&RS parks and recreation facilities in the context of a park classification system that will facilitate park planning in the future. The chapter also describes opportunities and challenges related to recreation programming within the current park system.
- **Chapter 4: Recreation Needs** presents key findings from the public involvement process and summarizes community needs for parks, recreation facilities, and programs based on a desired level of service and the community's vision for their ideal, future park system.
- **Chapter 5: Mission, Values, Vision, Goals, and Objectives** states the mission P&RS has in providing parks and recreation services. Based on a set of community core values, this chapter presents residents' vision for parks, open space, and recreation services, along with the primary goals and objectives for this Plan.
- **Chapter 6: Implementation** notes the strategies that will be used to implement improvements for the P&RS park system. It also identifies specific capital projects for new park development, renovation of existing sites, conservation of natural areas, the development of trails and pathways, and improvements for recreation facilities.
- **Chapter 7.1 through 7.3: Regional Trails** provides an update to the adopted 2008 PROS Plan and puts forth the goals, policies and planning framework for the development of a regional trails network throughout Pierce County. As of October 29, 2009 the County adopted the Pierce County Regional Trails Plan as part of the 2008 PROS Plan, incorporating it as Chapter 7 of this document.



- **Appendix A: Existing Resources Section Maps** illustrates parks and recreation facilities in Pierce County in a series of nine maps.
- **Appendix B: Park and Facility Inventory** includes the inventory of P&RS parks by classification, including the facilities within those parks, based on information current as of January 2008.
- **Appendix C: Park and Facility Condition Assessment** presents the ratings from the Spring 2007 evaluation of parks and facilities owned and managed by Parks & Recreation Services.
- **Appendix D: Proposed Park System Classification** lists each park according to its proposed classification, noting its current classification, management zone, and assigned maintenance area.
- **Appendix E: Trails Inventory** lists each existing and proposed trail alignment according to its jurisdiction and classification.
- **Appendix F: Trail Providers, Advocates and Plans** lists each trail provider, advocate and plan by jurisdiction, planning area and organization.
- **Appendix G: Trail Planning Framework** provides an overview of multiple planning efforts within the Washington and the County related to trails.
- **Appendix H: Trail Permitting Process** provides an overview of planning considerations and types of regulatory review that may be involved in the planning and development of trails.
- **Appendix I: Trail Design Guidelines** provides design guidelines for regional trails, trailheads and trail amenities.
- **Appendix J: Public Involvement** presents some decision support tools for involving the public in the process of planning and developing trails.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

This Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan provides a 15-year vision for parks and recreation in Pierce County as provided by Parks & Recreation Services. This Plan is an update of the 2002 Plan of the same name, although substantial revisions have been made to the original document. This update is required every six years to maintain eligibility for grants administered by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). RCO requires jurisdictional applicants to have a current park, recreation, and open space plan as a criterion for grant applications. This Plan update is intended to comply with all RCO requirements.

The adopted Plan is also designed to meet the requirements of the State of Washington Growth Management Act (GMA), which is codified as Chapter 36.70A Revised Code of Washington. GMA requires counties to:

- Designate the general location and extent of land uses including recreation and open space lands;
- Identify lands useful for recreation, including wildlife habitat, trails and connection of critical areas; and
- Develop a capital facilities plan (CFP) identifying funds necessary to implement the plan over a six-year period.

The GMA also specifies that adopted plans should ensure that strategies for maintaining adopted levels of service are put in place to accommodate planned future development. This concept is known as “concurrency.” At current rates of expected growth and development, it is anticipated that Pierce County Parks & Recreation Services will maintain concurrency for the provision of parks and recreation services under the current Plan. Strategies to maintain and enhance the current level of service are addressed in Chapters 4 and 6 of this document.

The Pierce County Comprehensive (Land Use) Plan discusses park, recreation, and open space issues in objectives 54 through 61, codified as Sections 19A.030.160 and 19A.030.170 of the Pierce County Code (PCC). This Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan does not propose changes to the Comprehensive Plan. Instead, this Plan is submitted as an element of the Comprehensive Plan to enhance and supplement the information provided therein. Specifically, the goals, objectives, and policies presented in this Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan amplify the goals, objectives, and policies that are referenced in the Comprehensive Plan.



The Pierce County Comprehensive Plan has been amended since its adoption in 1994. Adopted Community Plans are considered to be amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. No paragraph or chapter of this Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan should be considered outside the context of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan and adopted Community Plans.

The objectives and policies of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan and adopted Community Plans take precedence over text written in this document. However, it is not the sole responsibility of Parks &

Recreation Services to oversee the implementation of the parks and recreation facilities element of the Community Plans. The implementation of varied local and regional park strategies and diverse level of service recommendations, as presented in the Community Plans, will require long-term collaboration between the local jurisdictions and several other departments and divisions within Pierce County. While this PROS Plan incorporates some of the policies and objectives of the Community Plans, it only includes those that are consistent with P&RS's role in providing services, which is defined within the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan.

As noted in the Comprehensive Plan (Title 19A.30.160 Recreation, LU-Rc Objective 55):

- a. The County should only assume direct responsibility for the development, operation, and maintenance of facilities that have a regional benefit
- b. The County should not assume responsibility for new local park sites. Pierce County should continue to land-bank local park sites and move the properties to local control when feasible.
- c. The County should provide technical assistance to local jurisdictions and the citizens of Pierce County for the development, operation, and maintenance of local parks and facilities. Such assistance may include technical planning, help in the formation of local recreation service areas, service districts, city/county service area agreements (joint ventures) and self-help agreements with other user organizations.

Therefore, this Plan is intended to establish a mechanism for the development of local parks *within a regional vision* for the park system that *can be implemented* by Parks & Recreation Services. The role that P&RS plays in achieving the actions and policies that are recommended in Community Plans should be *prioritized based on the County-wide vision* for parks and recreation facilities as presented in this Plan. Until the time when local jurisdictions have the capacity to implement their proposed standards and guidelines, Parks & Recreation Services should acquire parks, provide recreation facilities, and conserve open space and natural resources in a manner that provides the greatest benefit to residents County-wide as well as in individual communities. This benefits-based approach is recommended to ensure that P&RS can achieve the innovative, inclusive, and interconnected system of parks, recreation facilities, programs, and services that residents desire.