

# Parks and Open Space

## Introduction

Seattle's parks and open space help make this city a great place to live, play and raise families. These places contribute to Seattle's physical, mental, and environmental health, and support the City's economic vitality. Access to open space and recreation areas can improve peoples' health by giving them places to exercise their bodies and refresh their minds. Open spaces also provide valuable wildlife and vegetation habitat that might otherwise be scarce in the city.

The City-owned park and recreation system comprises about 11 percent of the total city land area and includes gardens, community centers, boating facilities and environmental education centers. From the magnificent views off the bluffs of Discovery Park to the boulevard system and the most intimate pocket park, these areas provide opportunities for residents and visitors to relax, enjoy competitive games, jog or meet with friends and neighbors.

Developed parks are not the only sources of open space that people in the city enjoy. There are also open spaces and recreation opportunities in public rights-of-way, such as the Cheasty and Ravenna Boulevards and Bell Street Park. Off-road bike trails, including the Burke-Gilman Trail and Alki Beach Park provide a different kind of active recreation. There is an extensive system of P-patches and community gardens throughout the city offering gardening spaces for residents to grow their own fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Seattle Center, which is not part of the City parks system is a unique urban amenity that offers both open space and a wide variety of cultural activities.

Other agencies also provide open spaces in the city, such as the federal Chittenden Locks, several waterfront access points provided by the Port of Seattle, and the open spaces on the University of Washington campus. Numerous private developments provide plazas and other open areas, such as Waterfall Park in Pioneer Square, that are often available to the public.

In addition, there are many private open spaces in the city, such as yards that provide usable space for residents in single-family and multifamily areas. Those spaces also provide light, air, and breathing room that benefit everyone in the city.

Puget Sound and the city's lakes provide another form of open space as areas open to the sky that offer visual relief from the urban environment, as well as visual connections across wide expanses. In 2014 voters in Seattle approved the formation of the Seattle Park District, which establishes a new taxing authority and funding source for the maintenance and improvement of City parks. The City uses several mechanisms to help obtain new parkland, including leveraging of state funds, acquisition of surplus federal land, zoning requirements, incentives for developers, and the creative use of public rights-of-way.

## Access to Open Space

### Discussion

The City of Seattle has a robust citywide park and open space system that is available and accessible for use by all of the City's residents. However, the City also continues to look for ways to improve this system. . Given that Seattle is already highly developed, creating the system that we desire will require new strategies that take advantage of limited opportunities for new land and to improve the capacity of existing parks. This section addresses the design and distribution of our citywide park and open space system, including the acquisition and development of new parks and open space. The Parks Development Plan also contains specific goals for parks, open space and facility distribution such as community centers, athletic fields, and playgrounds.

#### GOAL

PG1 Provide a variety of outdoor and indoor spaces throughout the city for all people to play, learn, contemplate, and build community.

#### POLICIES

- P1.1 Continue to expand the City's park holdings, with special emphasis on serving urban centers and urban villages and areas that have been traditionally under-served.
- P1.2 Identify goals for the City's future open space system that are realistic about the quantity of land that could be acquired, consider land managed by other agencies, and that drive improvements in the quality and usability of those spaces.
- P1.3 Provide urban trails, green streets, and boulevards in public rights-of-way as recreation and transportation options and as ways to connect open spaces and parks to each other, to urban centers and villages, and to the regional open space system.
- P1.4 Make rights-of-way available on a temporary basis to provide space for community events, such as street fairs, farmers' markets, or neighborhood celebrations.
- P1.5 Provide natural areas to preserve important natural or ecological features in public ownership and allow people access to these spaces.
- P1.6 Provide public access to shorelines by using street ends, regulation, or acquisition.

- P1.7 Encourage or require private developers to incorporate on-site publicly accessible open space or to provide appropriate recreation opportunities for building tenants within new developments.
- P1.8 Use cooperative agreements with the Seattle School District and other public agencies to provide access to open spaces they control.
- P1.9 Create healthy places for children and adults to play, as well as areas for more passive strolling, viewing, and picnicking.
- P1.10 Design open spaces that protect the natural environment and provide light, air, and visual relief within the built environment.
- P1.11 Make the most of the limited available land by developing parks and open spaces so that they can accommodate a variety of active and passive recreational uses.
- P1.12 Consider access by transit, bicycle, and on foot when acquiring new park facilities or improving existing ones.

## Park Activities

### Discussion

Seattle Parks and Recreation provides programs and facilities where people can play, learn, and lead healthy, active lives. People gather, take classes, exercise, and play sports at community centers, pools and lakes. The City also has numerous facilities, such as golf courses, boating centers, and tennis courts. Parks also offers programs for teens and classes that provide opportunities for life-long learning and recreation for those with disabilities.

### GOAL

- PG2 Continue to provide opportunities for all people across Seattle to participate in a variety of recreational activities.

### POLICIES

- P2.1 Develop activities at community centers that make them focal points for the neighborhoods they serve and where people can enhance their individual health and well-being and strengthen a sense of community.

- P2.2 Promote the use of open spaces and park facilities in the city for events that celebrate the many cultures of our community.
- P2.3 Provide recreation and social programs that allow older adults to remain healthy and actively involved in their community.
- P2.4 Provide athletic fields that can serve as places where people of diverse ages, backgrounds, and interests can engage in a variety of sports.
- P2.5 Offer fun and safe water experiences through a diverse range of healthy and accessible aquatic programs at outdoor and indoor venues throughout the city.
- P2.6 Provide welcoming, accessible, and affordable recreation and social programs for people with disabilities and their families.
- P2.7 Engage teens with activities that help them to build their identity and to acquire skills that will lead to healthy and productive lives.
- P2.8 Develop programs that foster awareness and appreciation of nature from the neighborhood scale to the regional scale and provide activities for residents to help protect or restore the environment.
- P2.9 Provide programs that are accessible and welcoming to communities of color and to immigrant and refugee communities.
- P2.10 Develop partnerships with organizations that include race and social justice as fundamental to their operations and business practices.

## Maintaining Park Facilities

### Discussion

The City's park system constitutes a significant land holding in the city, and that land contains many types of buildings, swimming pools, trails, landscaped and natural areas, and urban forests. Keeping these facilities safe and enjoyable requires constant attention.

#### GOAL

- PG3 Manage the City's park facilities to provide safe and welcoming places.

## POLICIES

- P3.1 Maintain the long-term viability of parks facilities by regularly addressing major maintenance needs.
- P3.2 Look for innovative ways to approach construction and major maintenance activities to limit water and energy use and to maximize environmental sustainability.
- P3.3 Enhance wildlife habitat by restoring forests and expanding the tree canopy on City-owned land.
- P3.4 Protect habitat and wildlife areas through education, interpretation, and wildlife management programs.
- P3.5 Increase access to public land by assessing, managing, and cleaning up contaminated sites.
- P3.6 Preserve and reclaim Parks' property for public use and benefit and ensure continued access to parkland for the growing population.

## Major Open Space Attractions

### Discussion

Some of the facilities maintained by Seattle Parks and Recreation and certain other open spaces in the city attract many visitors from outside the immediate neighborhood. Washington Park Arboretum, Woodland Park Zoo, Kubota Garden, Seattle Aquarium, Magnuson Park, the Olympic Sculpture Park, and Seattle Center are examples of facilities that offer natural and cultural attractions and bring users from across the region into Seattle neighborhoods.

### GOAL

- PG4 Plan and maintain regional parks and facilities to accommodate the people who will want to visit them, while respecting the facilities' neighbors.

## POLICIES

- P4.1 Develop plans for regional and special-use parks to take advantage of unique natural and cultural features in the city, enhance visitors' experiences, and nurture partnerships with other public agencies and private organizations.

- P4.2 Design parks and program activities in downtown in ways that create a welcoming and safe environment.
- P4.3 Integrate the proposed Central Waterfront Park with existing nearby parks, trails and open spaces.
- P4.4 Recognize that visitors to major regional attractions can impact the neighborhoods surrounding those facilities and look for ways to limit those impacts, including through enhanced walking, biking, and transit connections