

CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION



Changes in the City of Gresham over the last ten years have positioned the Parks and Recreation Division at a crossroads. In one direction, the path toward the future is bleak. Shrinking funding sources will force the City to limit the development of parks, trails, and natural areas that offer residents basic active and passive recreation opportunities. Deferred maintenance will slowly eat away at City assets until unsafe facilities must be removed. Few recreation programs will be offered to residents. The parks system will limp along in this unsustainable manner until traditional funding sources rebound. At that time, a huge investment will be needed to restore the existing park system.

In the other direction, however, is a different path that leads toward an innovative and sustainable future. Based on dynamic efforts to strengthen community through parks and programs, this pathway leads toward the development of interconnected system of parks and trail corridors, programs and services, and social gathering places for sport, civic, and cultural events. This community vision takes into account the geographic, social, cultural, and economic context of the City, in order to provide better parks and recreation services. As City leaders and residents look toward the future, they have to ask themselves how to make this preferred future for parks and recreation more affordable, achievable, and marketable in order to rally support for its implementation. The Comprehensive Parks & Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas Plan provides the City with the necessary directions to pursue this sustainable system.

PLAN PURPOSE

In the winter of 2006, Gresham Parks and Recreation Division began updating its *Parks & Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas Master Plan* to identify opportunities to enhance the City's park and recreation system. This Plan creates a vision for a sustainable and interconnected system of parks, recreation facilities, programs, and services that promote

recreation, health, and environmental conservation as integral elements of a livable community. It addresses the recreation needs of residents city-wide, while reflecting diverse community priorities. As an update to the 1996 Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan, this report establishes specific goals, objectives, recommendations, and actions for developing, conserving, and maintaining quality parks, trails, facilities, and natural areas. In addition, the Plan recommends an implementation strategy that will most benefit the community now and in the future.

BENEFITS OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks, natural areas, and recreation facilities provide individuals and communities with personal, social, economic, and environmental benefits that contribute to a higher quality of life. Some of these are quantifiable economic benefits, such as the revenue generated through rentals and classes, the impact of fairs and festivals on tourism dollars, or the capacity of parks and natural area to store stormwater and reduce flooding. Other benefits are harder to quantify but are still important when considering the value of parks and recreation. These benefits include the importance of parks, natural areas, and trails in attracting businesses, improving individual physical health, or reducing crime. Still other benefits are more intangible and difficult to quantify, such as the sense of community derived through public spaces and community events, or the value of nearby nature in enhancing learning and the well-being of children.

The National Recreation and Parks Association developed a comprehensive list of the benefits provided by parks and recreation. Adapted for the City of Gresham, these are summarized below.

Personal Benefits

- Physical recreation, fitness, life-long learning, social opportunities and other forms of recreation contribute to a full and meaningful life.



- Regular physical activity is one of the very best forms of health insurance for individuals, which leads to a reduction in health insurance costs.
- Relaxation, rest and revitalization through leisure are essential to stress reduction and relief in today's busy and demanding world.
- Meaningful leisure activity enhances self-esteem and the development of a positive self-image.
- Leisure provides the opportunity to lead balanced lives, achieve our full potential and gain life satisfaction.
- Children's play is essential to human development.
- Leisure opportunities for youth provide positive lifestyle choices and alternatives to self-destructive behavior.
- Parks and open spaces bring beauty to an area, while giving people satisfaction and improving their quality of life.

Social Benefits

- Recreation and leisure provides leadership opportunities that build strong communities.
- Community recreation reduces alienation, loneliness, and anti-social behaviors.
- Community recreation promotes ethnic and cultural harmony.
- Recreating together builds strong families, the foundation of a stronger society.
- Leisure provides opportunities for community involvement, and shared management and ownership of resources.
- Integrated and accessible leisure services are critical to the quality of life for all people, but especially for disabled, disadvantaged, and mobility-impaired individuals.
- Parks, recreation facilities, natural areas and programs are a source of community pride.

- Leisure services enrich and complement protective services for latchkey children through afterschool and other recreational services.

Economic Benefits

- Pay now or pay more later! Investment in recreation as a preventative health service makes sense.
- A fit work force is a strong work force.
- Parks and recreation, along with other community assets, assists in employee retention, which reduces recruitment and training costs.
- Small investments in recreation yield big economic returns.
- Parks and recreation services motivate business relocation and expansion in your community.
- Meaningful leisure services reduce the high cost of vandalism and criminal activity.
- Recreation and park services are often the catalyst for tourism, a growing sector of the economy.
- Increases in the use of non-motorized transportation reduces the costs of maintaining and operating a car, including costs to the community for energy, accidents, road construction and repair, parking, air pollution, noise, water pollution, etc.
- Investments in environmental protection through the provision of parks and open spaces pay for themselves.

Environmental Benefits

- Through the provision of parks, open spaces, and protected natural areas, recreation can contribute to the environmental health of our communities. This is an essential life-sustaining role.
- The public is often prepared to pay for environmental protection and rehabilitation in their communities, supporting parks and recreation organizations that play a lead role in that protection.

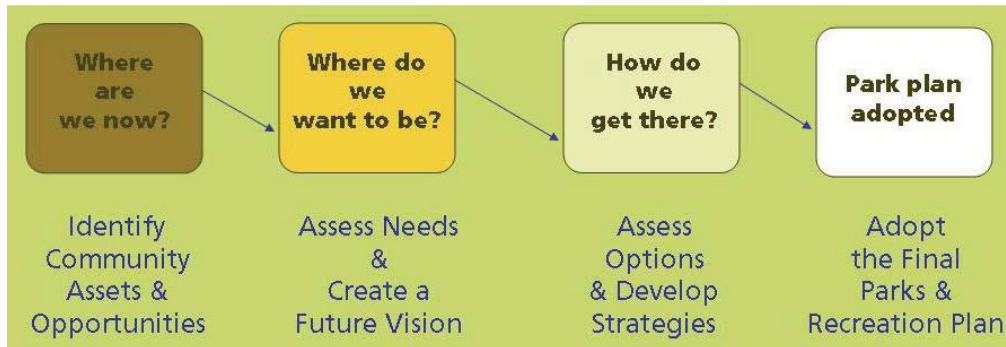
- The provision of parks, green space, and trails in residential areas increases property values by improving accessibility to environmentally-friendly places and associated recreation opportunities.
- Outdoor leisure and environmental activities encourage environmental stewardship and provide insurance for a new and improved environmental future.

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process included four major phases, beginning in December 2006 and concluding with the adoption of the *Parks & Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas Master Plan* in the summer of 2009. Figure 1 illustrates the planning process, which is described below.

- *Phase I: Where are we now?* Phase I included a review of existing parks and facilities, as well as applicable background information, to provide a foundation for the planning process. In this phase, City parks and facilities were inventoried, mapped, and evaluated to document their condition. All Phase 1 efforts were summarized in the Existing Conditions Summary Report, which is available under a separate cover.
- *Phase II: Where do we want to be?* In Phase II, a variety of public involvement efforts were initiated to solicit feedback from City residents regarding the planning process. This outreach was combined with the technical analysis of park land to assess park access and distribution in relation to a variety of demographic factors, including population density, growth, household income, and poverty levels. Park, facility, and programming needs were documented in the Community Needs Assessment Report.

FIGURE 1-1: PLANNING PROCESS



- *Phase III: How do we get there?* Elements of the plan were developed in Phase III to provide direction and a roadmap to achieve the community’s vision for parks and recreation. This phase included the development of a list of potential capital projects, recommendations for maintenance and programming, a financing plan and strategies for implementation. These elements were refined in preparation of a full draft of the Parks & Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas Plan.
- *Phase IV: Adoption.* Phase IV includes plan refinement and adoption to create a successful and sustainable plan to preserve City assets and the community’s interest in parks and recreation in Gresham.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

To develop a solid foundation for the Plan, the City of Gresham solicited feedback from a broad spectrum of residents regarding their needs, preferences, attitudes, and vision for parks and recreation services. A variety of activities were conducted throughout the planning process to ensure participation from a cross-section of the community, including various age groups, language groups, and diverse special interests.

Nearly 1,800 residents participated in the planning process (Table 1). Each of these community engagement opportunities is described in Chapter 4. Key findings are presented in Appendix E.

TABLE 1-1: PLANNING PROCESS PARTICIPANTS

ACTIVITY	PARTICIPANTS
Community Recreation Survey	429
Adult Questionnaire	494
Youth Questionnaire	252
Sports Group Questionnaire	11
Community Open House	226
Key Stakeholder Interviews	23
Focus Groups (Youth, Seniors, Spanish-speakers)	30
Staff Interviews	8
Technical Advisory Committee	15
Community Advisory Committee	11
Planning Advisory Committee	7
Community Presentations	287
TOTAL	1,793

PLAN ORGANIZATION

This plan is organized into seven chapters and ten appendices:

- *Chapter 1: Introduction* describes the purpose of the plan, the benefits of parks and recreation, the planning process, the public involvement process, and the organization of this report.
- *Chapter 2: Existing Park System* describes the planning area, notes key demographic data, presents the refined park classification, and summarizes the park and facility inventory.

- *Chapter 3: Community Vision and Priorities* presents the vision for future parks and recreation in Gresham and outlines the community priorities that will guide the core of the Parks and Recreation Division’s business for the future.
- *Chapter 4: Park and Facility Needs* summarizes the results of the needs assessment, highlighting needs for maintenance, renovations, acquisition and development, and recreation programs and services.
- *Chapter 5: Park System Costs* describes the future park system, its cost, and its value to the community.
- *Chapter 6: Implementation Strategy* describes two alternative approaches to future park system management, as well as the method for prioritizing projects to create a sustainable park system.
- *Chapter 7: Strategic Decisions* addresses the critical decisions the City will need to make to implement Plan recommendations, such as the potential formation of a park district. This chapter also notes performance measures that can be used to measure successful outcomes.

Appendices include the following:

- *Appendix A: Park and Facility Inventory by Classification* contains a complete inventories of parks, recreation facilities, natural areas, and trails within the Gresham planning area.
- *Appendix B: Park Evaluations* notes the condition of each park based on the 2007 park evaluation, focusing on developed park sites owned and managed by the City of Gresham Parks and Recreation Division.
- *Appendix C: Design Guidelines Analysis* provides a set of design guidelines for each park type, noting park definitions, benefits, size and access, examples, minimum resources, additional resources, and conflicting uses. It also evaluates the City’s existing neighborhood and community parks against these guidelines.

- *Appendix D: Needs Assessment Maps* presents the series of analysis maps for park service based on park access, park capacity, population density, median income, poverty levels, sport field access, and picnic facility and playground access.
- *Appendix E: Public Involvement Summary* summarizes all findings from public involvement activities.
- *Appendix F: Park System Costs* presents costs estimates for all existing and proposed parks in the following areas: maintenance, annual capital reinvestment, minor renovation, major renovation, major facility addition, park acquisition, and park development.
- *Appendix G: Potential Funding Sources* includes a description of all potential sources for operations and maintenance funding, as well as funding for capital projects.
- *Appendix H: PRAS Options Analysis* summarizes the committee's discussion of park funding options to determine the best approach for implementation.
- *Appendix I: City Tax Comparison* provides a comparison of property tax rates for the City of Gresham and 14 other Oregon cities.
- *Appendix J: Trail Master Plan* includes a trail map noting potential corridors and linkages to enhance connectivity in Gresham. These proposed routes should be investigated and potentially added to the City's capital improvement plan and list of projects.

Several other reports were completed in development of this Plan. Key documents include the PRC Gresham Parks Report – Demographic & Parks Access Analyses, Existing Conditions Summary Report, Community Needs Assessment Report, and the Baseline Financial Analysis for Gresham Parks, which are available under separate covers.