



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan is a six-year guide and strategic plan for managing and enhancing park and recreation services in Gig Harbor. It establishes a path forward for providing high quality, community-driven parks, trails, open spaces and recreational opportunities. The Plan proposes updates to service standards for parks and trails and addresses goals, objectives and other management considerations toward the continuation of quality recreation opportunities to benefit the residents of Gig Harbor.

This Plan was developed with the input and direction of Gig Harbor residents. The Plan inventories and evaluates existing park and recreation areas, assesses the needs for acquisition, site development and operations and offers specific policies and recommendations to achieve the community's goals.

experiences. In addition, the City provides water access, athletic fields, sport courts, a skate park and approximately 10 miles of trails. Gig Harbor residents also can access additional parks, trails, open spaces and recreational facilities provided by Pierce County, the Peninsula School District and the PenMet Parks District.

The City does not directly provide traditional recreation services such as youth sports and senior services. Recreational programs are not directly run by the City and are instead provided by non-profit organizations that serve not only the residents of the City, but also the citizens and visitors to the peninsula at large. While the City is not a formal provider of programming, the City does partner with other organizations, especially the Peninsula School District, to leverage recreational opportunities for those living in Gig Harbor.

Gig Harbor is preparing for continued growth, noting current population already exceeds an earlier forecast of 11,700 for the year 2040. New investments in parks and recreation will be necessary to meet the needs of the community, support youth development, provide options for residents to lead healthy, active lives and foster greater social and community connections.

GIG HARBOR'S PARK SYSTEM

The City of Gig Harbor currently provides nearly 160 acres of public parkland and recreation facilities distributed among 28 park sites and numerous open space parcels. This system of parks supports a range of active and passive recreation

GOALS AND POLICIES

This Plan includes goals and objectives intended to guide City decision-making to ensure the parks and recreation system meets the needs of the Gig Harbor community for years to come. These goals and objectives were based on community input and technical analysis. They include:

- Recreational Facilities: Develop a quality, diversified recreation system that provides for all age and interest groups.
- Open Space Preservation & Wildlife Resources: Provide a diversified park system that preserves and enhances significant environmental resources and facilitates the protection of threatened species, preservation habitat, and retention of migration corridors that are unique and important to local wildlife.
- Trail & Corridor Access Systems: Develop a high quality system of park trails and corridors that provide alternative transportation options and low impact recreational opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities in coordination with the City's Comprehensive Plan.
- Park Design Standards: Design and develop facilities that are accessible, safe, and easy to maintain while providing a full range of facilities for all age groups both inside the present city limits and in the urban growth area. Parks facilities and equipment should have life cycle features that account for long-term costs and benefits.
- Urban Growth Preserves & Set-Asides: Coordinate with other public and private agencies, and with private landowners, to set aside land and resources necessary to provide high-quality, convenient park and recreation facilities before the most suitable sites are lost to development.
- Recreation Programs: Coordinate with and encourage the efforts of other agencies and non-profit recreational providers to assure that the recreational needs of the Gig Harbor residents are met.

- Historic Resources: Develop a high quality, diversified park system that preserves significant historic opportunity areas and features.
- Cultural Art Programs & Resources: Encourage fine and performing arts partnerships and programs that reflect the community's vision and culture.
- Financial Resources & Coordination: Create effective and efficient methods of acquiring, developing, operating and maintaining facilities and programs that accurately distribute costs and benefits to the general public and private development.

SERVICE STANDARDS FOR PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS

Building on the strong foundation of the 2016 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan, this 2022 Plan re-evaluated the current service standards for parks, open space and trails and proposes adjustments to the City's standards to achieve community goals within projected resources. A more comprehensive approach to level of service assessments and standards expands beyond a quantity-based framework (e.g., acres of parks per 1,000 residents). It includes the distribution of recreational resources and public satisfaction about recreation opportunities. Additionally, these different ways to measure park system performance relate to grant agency criteria, state recreation plans and non-profit organization interests for quality of life and health metrics. The revisions to standards include the following:

- Neighborhood and Community Parks: The City currently is close to meeting the existing standard for neighborhood and community parks, and this Plan maintains the existing standard. The Plan also includes additional level of service metrics to add a more rich snapshot of the current Gig Harbor park system. Recommended metrics include public satisfaction of the facilities and amenities, quality and condition of existing amenities, parkland access and distribution, and visitation data.



- **Waterfront Facilities:** Waterfront facilities are special and unique in what they are, where they are and what they offer (i.e., Ancich Park). In place of an acres per capita numeric standard, this Plan relies on goals and objectives to guide the planning and provision for special use facilities, which in turn provides more flexibility to the City in how it meets the community needs for such facilities.
- **Open Space:** The City has been a strong leader in the conservation of critical lands. The existing service standard for natural areas relies on a numeric acres per capita metric, and this Plan recommends adjusting the approach to this standard. Open space conservation focuses on the need to protect special lands and/or unique habitat, yet an acreage measurement places an arbitrary quantitative target on the demand for conservation. This Plan recommends the elimination of an acreage standard for open space lands and recommends the development of Land Acquisition Strategy to proactively acquire high-quality natural areas for future land conservation and corridor linkages.
- **Trails:** The City is close to meeting previously adopted per capita mileage standard for trails, but a mileage standard does not adequately address the distribution and connectivity of the trail system. This Plan recommends the elimination of the recreational trail mileage standard in favor of a connectivity goal that re-states and reinforces the desire to improve overall connections across the City and enhance off-street linkages between parks and major destinations, as feasible.

FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Serving existing and future residents will require improvements to existing parks and expansion of the park, trail and recreation system. To ensure existing parks provide desired recreational amenities and offer safe and accessible opportunities to play and gather, the Plan includes investments in the development and improvement

of waterfront and active-use parks. For example, the phased development of the Gig Harbor Sports Complex will provide a significant expansion of outdoor recreation amenities and sport fields for community enjoyment for decades to come. The Plan also proposes smaller improvements throughout the park system to enhance accessibility, safety and usability of park features.

To connect Gig Harbor's residents to destinations throughout the City and provide healthy and safe options for walking and bicycling, the Plan proposes development of additional trail corridors, including the extension of the Cushman Trail and connections between the Cushman Trail and the waterfront.

FUNDING

The general fund supports Park Development, both within the Administration and the Parks Operations division. Funds are transferred out of the general fund into the capital budget through the annual budget, adopted by City Council. The City of Gig Harbor currently relies on Park Impact Fees (PIF), Real Estate Excise Taxes (REET), grants, donations, and then general and special revenue funds to finance individual projects. Dedicated, new funding may be required to finance upgrades to and growth in the parks system to meet community needs. Updating the existing PIF program, which assesses fees on new development to meet the increased demand for parks, will allow the City to obtain future acquisition and development funding from residential development. A short-term bond or levy could also augment PIF revenue to support parkland acquisitions and development, trail development, waterfront opportunities and general park element upgrades. Such mechanisms would require both political and public support. State and federal grant programs offer additional potential opportunities to leverage available local revenues to fund specific projects.