

11 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

11.1 Introduction

The 2022 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROS Plan) for Gig Harbor was approved by the City Council on February 28, 2022. The PROS Plan represents the city's vision and provides goals and objectives for the development of parks, recreation, and open spaces in Gig Harbor for the next six years and beyond and establishes a road map for providing high quality, community-driven parks, trails, natural areas and recreational opportunities for Gig Harbor. Only key elements of the PROS Plan are incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter includes the goals and policies adopted in the PROS Plan, while the inventory, levels of service and 6-year capital facilities projects are included in the Capital Facilities Element.

The planning area for this Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan includes the city's existing incorporated area and the city's Urban Growth Area as defined in the Comprehensive Plan. Implementation of the PROS Plan will focus on the city limits with an eye toward serving the residents of the Urban Growth Area as annexations occur over the next 15 years.

The continued high growth in the Gig Harbor peninsula's population has resulted in an increased use of the city's community parks and recreational facilities, which will continue over the foreseeable future. The demographics of Gig Harbor are also changing as a younger demographic is moving into the area. The increase in demand coupled with a changing demographic mean new challenges and opportunities for the city.

To provide quality parks and recreational opportunities for today's residents as well as for future generations, the city initiated a planning process in conjunction with the overall update of the city's Comprehensive Plan. The PROS Plan is a stand-alone document which meets the requirements of the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office guidelines. It is also compliant with the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). Part or all of the PROS Plan may be incorporated into future updates of the Gig Harbor Comprehensive Plan. The planning horizon for both plans is 2044, consistent with buildable lands projections for Pierce County and under the GMA requirements for long range planning.

The GMA requires a park and recreation element within the Comprehensive Plan that implements, and is consistent with, the capital facilities plan element as it relates to park and recreation facilities. This element includes estimates of park and recreation demand for at least a fifteen-year period; an evaluation of facilities and service needs; and an evaluation of intergovernmental coordination opportunities to provide regional approaches for meeting park and recreational demand.³

³ RCW 36.70A.070(8) GMA

During the PROS Plan public outreach effort, the community expressed many ideas for improving parks and recreational opportunities in Gig Harbor including:

- Providing a balance of active and passive activities within the city's parks;
- Seeking dedicated funding to support park management and maintenance responsibilities and costs;
- Providing trail connectivity between parks and connecting residential and commercial neighborhoods to the city's park system; and
- Providing a park system that offers something for all ages and types of users.

This Plan considers today's and tomorrow's needs and is a community-driven plan that has broad-based support and is implementable over the 15-year plan horizon. This update:

- Identifies the anticipated types of activities and the population that the city's parks and recreation facilities will serve,
- Defines the city's vision of the future of the city's park and recreational facilities,
- Identifies the estimated cost to achieve the community's vision, and
- Provides goals and policies to act as a guide for getting there.

The 2022 Gig Harbor Park Recreation and Open Space Plan will help guide the city staff, park commission and city council in meeting identified gaps in services and park development to meet the need and support the quality of life for our citizens in the coming years.

11.2 Vision

Gig Harbor's vision for parks is to create an exceptional and cohesive system of parks, trails and open spaces that enhance the city's history, environmental features, and sense of place to encourage both active and passive forms of recreation popular on the peninsula.

11.3 Goals and Policies

- **PR-1 Develop a quality, diversified recreational system that provides for all age and interest groups.**
 - PR-1.1 Acquire and develop sites for passive and active recreation opportunities that accommodate formal and informal activities that meet the needs of various age groups, recreational interests and abilities.
 - PR-1.2 Prioritize facility development based on demonstrated demand, population served, geographic distribution, system gaps, regional appeal, fiscal opportunity, and revenue-generating potential.
 - PR-1.3 Pursue accessible, adaptive recreation facilities and services for users with disabilities or health or mobility challenges.

- PR-1.4 Collaborate with a wide range of public and private agencies to acquire and preserve additional shoreline access for waterfront fishing, wading, swimming, viewing and other related recreational activities and pursuits, while respecting the rights of property owners.
- PR-1.5 Develop and encourage waterfront and watercraft access opportunities, especially for human-powered boating and board activities on Gig Harbor and along the Puget Sound shoreline.
- PR-1.6 Facilitate field and court activities like soccer, football, baseball, basketball, tennis, pickleball and volleyball to meet the needs of the community.
- PR-1.7 Coordinate a calendar of special events throughout the year in partnership with responsible providers of recreational programming and special events.

► **PR-2 Preserve and enhance the natural environment and support habitat and other resources for local wildlife as part of park and open space acquisition and management.**

- PR-2.1 Preserve and protect open space and park land areas with significant environmental features such as wetlands, riparian corridors, forests, steep slopes, plant and animal habitats that support threatened or endangered species.
- PR-2.2 Develop an interlinked system of open space corridors along natural riparian and wetlands.
- PR-2.3 Provide appropriate public access and nearby parking where appropriate and feasible for open space areas to support passive recreation.
- PR-2.4 Provide opportunities for environmental education in open space areas through creative and interactive interpretation strategies, such as hands-on displays, self-guided walks, and other experiences.
- PR-2.5 Maintain and improve the environmental quality of city-owned parks, trails, and open space areas through invasive species removal, planting of native species, and restoration of urban forests, creeks, wetlands, and other habitat areas.
- PR-2.6 Foster climate-resilient landscapes in parks and open space areas to manage expected impacts from climate change.
- PR-2.7 Improve tree management policies and practices in parks and open space in line with an Urban Forestry Management Plan to promote tree retention, tree succession, and more effective wildfire prevention practices.
- PR-2.8 Map and evaluate riparian areas within salmon-bearing stream corridors on public lands as part of planning for land acquisition, climate change adaptation, and ongoing management.

- **PR-3 Provide alternative transportation options and low impact recreational opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities through a high-quality system of park trails and corridors in coordination with the Gig Harbor Active Transportation Plan.**

Trail and Corridor Planning

- PR-3.1 Create a comprehensive system of shared-use off-road trails using the Cushman Trail as the backbone of the system.
- PR-3.2 Develop trails to provide access to significant environmental features, public facilities, neighborhoods, and business districts to promote physical activities and a health-conscious community.
- PR-3.3 Coordinate with public and private agencies to construct pedestrian crossing for SR-16 and other highways that improve trail system connections.
- PR-3.4 Connect trails to nearby sidewalk facilities where possible to improve the functionality of the off-street trail systems for non-motorized transportation and recreation.
- PR-3.5 Consider the siting of proposed trail segments as part of the development review process.
- PR-3.6 Work with public and private organizations in the region to link and extend Gig Harbor trails to other regional trail facilities.
- PR-3.7 Support broader pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements, in conjunction with planning under the Transportation Element to improve safety and utilization of the system.
- PR-3.8 Ensure bicycle parking and electric bike charging stations are provided at trails, parks, and other corridors to improve accessibility.

Trail Development and Amenities

- PR-3.9 Develop trails consistent with the park development goals and policies that reach a wide variety of users.
- PR-3.10 Provide trailhead improvements such as interpretive and directory signage systems, rest stops, drinking fountains, restrooms, parking and loading areas, water and other services.
- PR-3.11 Where appropriate, locate trailheads to consider park sites, schools, and other community facilities to increase local access to the trail system, local businesses, and integrate supporting improvements.
- PR-3.12 Consider needs for maintenance, security, and access by appropriate personnel, equipment, and vehicles in park design and construction.
- PR-3.13 Develop and implement branded signage (e.g. trailhead, etiquette, directional, mile markers, emergency location markers, etc.) to mark trails and non-motorized routes that is consistent with broader signage and design standards in the city.

- **PR-4 Ensure that park, open space, and recreational facilities are accessible, safe, easy to maintain, cost efficient, and meet the diverse needs of the residents of the city and Urban Growth Area.**

Planning and Design

- PR-4.1 Maintain park master plans, management plans, and adopted strategies to ensure parks reflect local needs, community input, recreational and conservation goals and available financial resources.
- PR-4.2 Consider unique features and other characteristics in the design of new parks and upgraded/renovated facilities to enhance the local sense of place, ensure quality of facilities, and minimize maintenance and operations costs.
- PR-4.3 Provide playgrounds that have a community draw and offer unique opportunities for all city residents in a multi-use, multi-generational setting.

Community Accessibility

- PR-4.4 Design, convert, and maintain parks and facilities to offer universal accessibility for residents of all physical capabilities, skill levels, and ages in accordance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design.
- PR-4.5 Eliminate accessibility barriers at existing parks and facilities and address other related actions as identified in the city ADA Transition Plan.
- PR-4.6 Reduce barriers to access and expand inclusive opportunities related to other characteristics of users, such as socioeconomic background, language fluency, physical or mental health considerations, geographic location, and transportation access.
- PR-4.7 Implement policies to address service gaps for historically underserved communities and provide a priority matrix to guide the allocation of resources to address known gaps.

Engagement

- PR-4.8 Involve residents and stakeholders in the planning and design of park and recreation facilities and program to incorporate community input and considerations, provide information, and meet public needs.
- PR-4.9 Partner with representative groups of users of specialized facilities, such as sport fields, off-leash areas, disc golf course, skatepark, BMX pump track, community gardens, etc., to plan the development and management of these facilities.

Branding

- PR-4.10 Provide comprehensive, well-designed maps to identify park and trail opportunities and provide relevant information for users.
- PR-4.11 Standardize the use of graphics and signage to establish a consistent identity and aesthetic for all parks and facilities, and ensure all signage is accessible, inclusive, universally

understandable, and designed to meet the diverse needs of the community. Note that all signage should provide clear, multilingual, and understandable information, incorporating formats such as braille and visual contrast for accessibility.

- PR-4.12 Standardize park furniture and improvements such as trash cans, tables, benches, and fencing to reduce maintenance and replacement costs and provide for a more consistent aesthetic for city facilities.

Maintenance

- PR-4.13 Design and develop facilities to reduce overall facility maintenance and operation costs, while providing for adequate and aesthetically appealing facilities and amenities.
- PR-4.14 Incorporate sustainable, low impact design practices into the development of new facilities and rehabilitation of existing facilities.
- PR-4.15 Consider native vegetation for landscaping in parks to conserve native wildlife habitat and limit maintenance requirements.

Security and Safety

- PR-4.16 Maintain parks, trails and open spaces to protect public property, preserve the value of these facilities, and ensure their intended functions, uses, safety, and security over their entire life cycle.
- PR-4.17 Implement adopt-a-park programs, neighborhood park watches, police patrols, and other programs to increase safety, security, awareness and visibility.

► PR-5 Provide for long-term banking of potential sites for park and recreation facilities in coordination with other public and private agencies, private landowners, and other organizations.

- PR-5.1 Review needs for parks, recreation and open space prior to the approval of an annexation to determine potential impacts to adopted levels of service and identify land requirements for new facilities.
- PR-5.2 Identify and reserve lands to meet long-term demands for parks, recreation, and open space, especially in developing areas and potential sites with healthy tree canopies, minimal development, or critical areas.

► PR-6 Coordinate with other agencies and non-profit recreational providers to help meet the recreational needs of local residents.

- PR-6.1 Leverage city resources by maintaining and developing partnerships with public and private agencies such as school districts to deliver recreation services and secure access to existing facilities for community recreation.
- PR-6.2 Look for opportunities to partner with other organizations to provide support for indoor recreational facilities.

- PR-6.3 Endorse the efforts of local non-profit providers such as organized sports leagues to plan for projects to expand facilities for athletic fields, and provide city support as needed.
- PR-6.4 Coordinate and collaborate with Pierce County, PenMet Parks and the Peninsula School District about the planning, acquisition, design and operation of parks and recreational facilities in the UGA and unincorporated service area.

► **PR-7 Support and protect historical resources through planning and management of the park and open space system.**

- PR-7.1 Identify, enhance and incorporate Gig Harbor's heritage, indigenous history and cultural features into the park system to preserve these interests and provide a holistic social experience.
- PR-7.2 Identify parks, structures and spaces eligible for designation as historic places to ensure they are preserved for the future and planned for long-term preservation and maintenance by the city.
- PR-7.3 Assist historical and cultural societies to develop and display artifacts, reports, and exhibits to the community and conduct lectures, classes, and other programs to promote awareness of Gig Harbor's heritage.
- PR-7.4 Collaborate with the Harbor History Museum, Gig Harbor BoatShop, Gig Harbor Fisherman's Civic Club and other organizations to provide cultural programs and activities for the public, including offering space, assistance with publicity and promotion, and streamlining permit requirements.
- PR-7.5 Encourage the owners of historic sites and structures to provide full or limited public access, by providing incentives such as expedited permitting, public recognition, and flexible use of public space.

► **PR-8 Acquire, develop, operate, and maintain facilities and programs to be cost efficient and to equitably distribute costs and benefits to the public.**

- PR-8.1 Provide the financial and staff resources necessary to maintain the high quality of the city's park and recreation system.
- PR-8.2 Support methods to finance facility development, maintenance, and operations which can supplement city budget allocations while reducing costs, improving flexibility, and better meeting user needs.
- PR-8.3 Pursue traditional and alternative funding sources for parks, facilities, and programs, which may include private donations, partnerships, sponsorships, state and federal grant sources, dedicated local taxes and local bonds or levies.
- PR-8.4 Apply for recreational system grants, potentially with partner agencies as appropriate.
- PR-8.5 Consider joint ventures for projects and programming with other public agencies such as PenMet Parks, Pierce County, Peninsula School District, regional, state, and federal agencies, local tribes, and private agencies including for-profit concessionaries.

- PR-8.6 Use sponsorships to offset costs of special events and seasonal activities.
- PR-8.7 Regularly review and update Park Impact Fee rates and methodologies to support the expansion of the parks system to meet growth in demand.
- PR-8.8 Periodically monitor and review level of service (LOS) metrics and revise park and recreational capital project priorities.
- PR-8.9 Define naming conventions and conversions to include an on-going evaluation of the names of city parks and public recreational facilities.
- PR-8.10 Regularly update GIS data to ensure park, open space, trail, and recreational facility information such as names, classifications, acreages, and ownership are correctly identified.