

Renew the Legacy... Fulfill the Vision



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developed through a collaborative and interactive process, this Plan builds on the unique character of Renton and the opportunities created by Lake Washington, the Cedar and other rivers that flow through the City. The City's location is at a crossroads in the Puget Sound region. For the first time, this plan integrates evaluation of and planning for recreation programming, as well as the many acres of natural area lands that augment the City's long-standing developed park system, to create a path forward that reflects the community's ambitions and potential.

This plan presents a 20-year vision for parks, recreation facilities and programming and natural areas; describes current and future needs; and identifies policies, implementation strategies and an investment program to enhance and sustain parks, recreation and natural areas as critical elements of a livable community. One of the important roles of this plan is to fulfill the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office requirements, maintaining eligibility for State and Federal grant funding for a six-year period.

Parks, Recreation and Natural Resource Areas provide the opportunity for the community to connect to, participate in, support and encourage a healthy environment and active lifestyle.



PLANNING PROCESS

The Parks, Recreation and Natural Areas Plan was developed through the active participation of more than 1,500 people, including Renton residents, businesses, interest groups, focus groups, stakeholders, park users, City staff and public and non-profit agency representatives. The planning process included use of many different types of public involvement activities to ensure that different cultural groups, ages and interests all provided valuable feedback. The Visioning Workshop, project website and email blasts, focus group meetings, community workshops, community-wide questionnaire and telephone survey all aided in the development of this Plan. The layering of results and the analysis of key themes ensures that this plan reflects the diverse priorities and interests of the Renton community.

In addition to the outreach events and activities, several key groups met regularly during the planning process to provide direction and multiple perspectives as the plan was being developed. These groups included a project Steering Committee, an Interdepartmental Team (with representation from all of the related City departments), the Parks Commission, Planning Commission and the Renton City Council Committee of the Whole. The final version of this plan was adopted on November 7, 2011.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Parks, Recreation and Natural Areas Plan includes recommendations for parks and facilities across the entire City, as well as details for each of the ten Community Planning Areas established by the Renton City Council. These ten areas reflect distinct communities, in terms of identity, character, physical features, existing infrastructure, services and access. Consequently, community needs for



parks, recreation opportunities and natural areas also vary within these areas. The Plan also draws from existing adopted plans for related systems, such as the Trails and Bicycle Master Plan, Shoreline Master Plan and the Arts and Culture Master Plan, and master plans for specific sites, such as the Tri-Park Master Plan, the Renton History Museum Master Plan, the Sunset Planned Action EIS and the City Center Plan.



PARK LAND

Parks create opportunities for recreation, connecting people and building community, protecting natural resources, and offering places for quiet reflection and experiencing nature. The City of Renton strives to provide access to developed parks within a half-mile of home—the distance most pedestrians are willing to walk to reach a destination. This Plan refines how that half-mile is measured and targets providing parks within a quarter-mile within higher-density residential areas to recognize the increased demand for facilities created by the increased population. In addition, recommendations and conceptual designs highlight how to make the most out of several key publicly owned park sites, some in need of renovation and others as yet undeveloped. Based on the results of the analysis, the Plan recommends adding several new neighborhood and community parks to distribute the benefits of the system to Renton residents who have limited access to parks, including those in areas added to the community through annexation.



RECREATION FACILITIES

Renton’s parks offer a wide range of outdoor recreation facilities, adding recreational variety to the park system and supporting the vision for healthy and active lifestyles. The Plan recommends more recreation facilities, including additional sports fields, trails, indoor programmable space and other specialized features,

especially within existing parks. Children’s play areas, a staple of neighborhood and community parks, need increased variety to include traditional and thematic playgrounds, along with creative play and nature play areas. To support user groups and ongoing initiatives, the Plan discusses amenities such as water access facilities, skate parks, dog parks, community gardens, large group venues and interpretive facilities. The focus on developing unique and varied facilities will help parks support the distinct character of each community planning area. At the same time, upgrades to the City’s most popular parks, such as Cedar River Park, are also recommended to increase site capacity and use, while supporting Renton’s most valued park assets.

NATURAL AREAS

Natural areas provide a variety of public benefits including natural resource education and volunteer opportunities. City residents feel strongly about balancing public access to natural areas with the need to protect and conserve natural resources. The Parks, Recreation and Natural Areas Plan recommends continuing to protect natural areas to enhance salmon habitat, the urban tree canopy and other natural resources, while improving access to these areas. Fundamentally, the community expressed a desire to have access to natural areas wherever environmentally appropriate. Renton’s natural areas are a critical link between people and their environment, building a stewardship ethic and attracting residents and businesses. Some natural areas are protected based on the underlying resources, such as salmon habitat or steep hillsides, and others are important because they are within walking distance of residents. Adding to existing corridors, such as the Cedar River Natural Area, May Creek Greenway and Panther Creek Wetlands, as well as reserving or creating natural areas within new and existing parks, are





recommendations. Enhanced natural area management, with updated natural resource inventories and new management plans, will address invasive species, dumping, encroachments, vandalism and other challenges that natural areas in Renton now face.

PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Renton has a long history of providing a full-service recreation program to the community. Recreation programming connects people, builds community, fosters volunteerism and creates long term partnerships. Collaborations with public and private entities have allowed Renton to expand and enhance recreation services and programming. The Plan recommends building and strengthening these relationships to sustain existing facilities and expand recreational opportunities. A key element of this strategy includes expanding the agreement with the Renton School District to increase facility use and maximize the resources available for maintenance. In the spirit of continuous improvement, Community Services can use the Plan’s Recreation Program Evaluation tool to develop recreational programming for activities that support the Plan’s vision and goals.



PLAN OF ACTION

Each of the recommended projects in this Plan will play an important role in creating the parks, recreation and natural areas system envisioned by the community. To successfully carry out these recommendations, the Parks, Recreation and Natural Areas Plan includes a series of implementation tools and strategies to help focus and prioritize City efforts while allowing Renton to be flexible in responding to opportunities as they emerge.

DECISION MAKING TOOLS

Several decision making tools were included in the Plan to provide guidance for parks and recreation services and programming, the design of new parks and renovations, the prioritization of projects and the cost of building and maintaining improvements. These tools include:

- **Recreation Program Evaluation Tool:** Built around nine target outcomes for programming, this worksheet can be used to evaluate new and existing programs and determine where community resources should be invested.
- **Design Guidelines:** The Plan includes new park design guidelines that update and expand the descriptions of what should, what could and what should not be included in the design and development of parks in the city.



- **Prioritization Criteria:** Drawing from the extensive public input, seven criteria have been developed to evaluate how well a specific project supports the Plan’s vision and goals.
- **Capital Project and Operating Cost Model:** The Capital and Operations Cost Model presents “planning level” costs to be identified for each project recommended in this Plan. Applying per-unit or per-acre cost assumptions, the model identifies both capital and operations costs to develop a new project and operate and maintain it in the future.

CAPITAL PROJECTS AND COSTS

Looking at the system as a whole, the total capital investment needed to implement all of the recommended projects is estimated at nearly \$214,000,000 (in 2011 dollars). Of this total, 16% of funds are for land acquisition totaling \$34 million, 18% is for the development of new parks totaling \$39 million and 11% of funds are for new recreation buildings totaling \$24 million. These are very large, long-term investments and it is important to create methods to break this cost down into more manageable pieces. Recommended projects in this Plan are summarized by park site; planning level costs have been rolled up by park classification and community planning area. Additionally, each of the projects has been evaluated against the seven prioritization criteria. By applying the Prioritization Criteria tool, the Plan includes a ranked list of projects as they align with the plan goals, providing an order of priority for projects that can help determine what projects to pursue first. The prioritization is dynamic, intended to be revisited periodically to reflect changing circumstances and conditions.

As improvements are made, the cost of operating the park system will also increase. The cost model created for this Plan includes an operating cost element that estimates the additional operating funds needed for each additional project. The impact of individual

recommendations varies, but the complete system build out will require approximately \$6,000,000 in additional operating investment. Over half of this additional total will be the result of new or expanded major recreation facilities, such as a multi-generational community center and an expanded aquatic center.

PROGRAMMING PROJECTS

The programs and services recommended in the Plan were prioritized separately based on the same set of prioritization criteria used for capital projects. Rather than developing an exhaustive list of ongoing Renton recreation programs, these projects represent areas of programming that received special interest from the community and that represent promising future directions. Recreation programs are a driving force underpinning the recreation facility recommendations. As new facilities are developed, new or additional programs may need to be added to maximize their use. Support for and increased participation in recreation programs leads to increased use of park facilities which is a major community goal. The primary programming emphasis outlined in this Plan is to evaluate existing and future recreation program offerings against the outcomes and benefits. Through this assessment, the City of Renton can focus on recreation programs that provide the greatest benefit to the community, while meeting identified need.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The Plan notes specific strategies to ensure that new development contributes their fair share to improvements in the park system and that future initiatives are supported by the community. Additional strategies discuss ways in which park projects can be combined with other public services or development projects, such as transportation and stormwater, to maximize community benefits. Additionally, recreation programming serves as a





community-building resource. Similarly, programs build City partnerships, especially with other major community resources such as the School District.

As a final part of its action plan, the Parks, Recreation and Natural Areas Plan includes a series of concept plans to illustrate how recommended facilities can fit into existing and proposed parks. These concepts were created to show one vision of how these parks can be designed, informed by the general community input of this plan.



NEXT STEPS

The community's vision for the future of parks, recreation facilities and programs and natural areas has been the foundation for this entire planning effort. Consequently, the recommendations, tools and strategies built on the vision should serve Renton well, providing guidance to the end of this decade and beyond.

The document is designed to be an informative guide to the park system, a reference for future projects and a tool box for implementing recommendations and taking advantage of unique opportunities as they arise. These projects will help the City to renew the investment in these critical community assets, and achieve the vision laid out by the community.

