

# Mercer Island PROS

## Goals & Objectives

### Chapter 4

**READER'S NOTE:** This chapter was drafted prior to the September 28, 2021 Virtual Public Meeting and prior to receiving results from the second community survey. With support from the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Arts Council, and the Open Space Conservancy Trust, the staff will review outcomes of both public engagement opportunities and further refine the goals and objectives in this chapter.

The following section provides the overarching strategic goals and objectives for the Mercer Island parks and recreation system. The goals and objectives from past plans have been reorganized, enhanced, and arranged to align with the common themes noted by the community during the planning process. These goals and objectives will guide the delivery of parks and recreation services for the next six years and beyond.

### Goals & Objectives

The Growth Management Act (GMA), adopted by the Washington State Legislature in 1990, provided a foundation for land use planning in selected cities and counties throughout the state, including King County and the City of Mercer Island. The GMA's purpose is to help communities deal efficiently with growth challenges to ensure long-term sustainability and a high quality of life. The GMA identifies 14 planning goals to guide the creation of comprehensive plans and development regulations (codified in Chapter 36.70A of the Revised Code of Washington). Four of these goals directly affect the development and implementation of this plan.

- "Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks." RCW 36.70A.020(9)
- "Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water." RCW 36.70A.020(10)
- "Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures, that have historical or archaeological significance." RCW 36.70A.020(13)
- "Carry-out the goals of the Shoreline Management Act with regards to shorelines and critical areas." RCW 36.70A.020(14)

Furthermore, the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan, previous parks and recreation plans, and county-wide planning policies provide a framework for this PROS Plan.

A goal is a general statement describing an outcome the City wishes to provide. Objectives are more specific, measurable statements that describe a means to achieve the stated goals. Recommendations

are specific actions intended to implement and achieve the goals and objectives and are contained in the Needs Assessment and Capital Planning chapters of the Plan.

## Community Engagement & Partnerships

Goal 1: Encourage and support community engagement and pursue collaborative partnerships to strengthen and grow parks and recreation programs and services.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Involve a variety of community members, including stakeholders and park and facility users, in system-wide planning and site design. Use a diverse set of communication and outreach strategies to solicit community input, facilitate project understanding, and build community support.
- 1.2 Enhance and strengthen the Mercer Island School District partnership, seeking opportunities to collaborate on facility use, maintenance, programs, and other services. Review and update existing Interlocal Agreements regularly, approximately every two years.
- 1.3 Identify opportunities for partnerships with other public, private, and non-profit organizations to support capital projects, community events, programs, and other special initiatives.
- 1.4 Support the Parks & Recreation Commission as the forum for public discussion of parks and recreation issues and ensure collaboration with the Open Space Conservancy Trust and the Arts Council. Conduct periodic joint sessions between the Parks & Recreation Commission, other standing City boards, and the City Council to improve coordination and discuss policy matters of mutual interest.
- 1.5 Provide informative, timely and consistent communication, informational materials, and signage to help community members connect with and fully utilize the many parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services. Maintain a consistent brand identity through marketing campaigns, social media presence, and other communication mediums. Adapt community outreach efforts to ensure a broad reach.
- 1.6 Understand recreation trends, park use patterns, and park user needs through objective analytical tools such as statistical surveys, customer surveys, and user counts.

## Planning, Acquisition & Access

Goal 2: Plan for and develop a parks and recreation system that meets community needs now and in the future.

Objectives:

- 2.1. Retain publicly owned parks and open spaces in perpetuity. Consider options to permanently protect parks and open space areas through conservation easements, zoning changes, or other strategies.
- 2.2 Update the Parks, Recreation & Open Space (PROS) Plan periodically and approximately every six years to ensure facilities and services meet current and future community needs and maintain eligibility for State grants. Incorporate the PROS Plan as an appendix to the Citywide Comprehensive Plan during the next update process.
- 2.3 Periodically review and update level of service standards for parks, trails, open space areas, playgrounds, and athletic fields. Include accompanying standards for maintenance and operations.
- 2.4 Establish, adopt, or update master plans for park sites to guide all significant park development projects, achieve cohesive design, and ensure phasing of projects is efficient and in alignment with community needs and priorities. Utilize management plans or other adopted strategies to guide the stewardship and maintenance of parks, open space areas, and trails.
- 2.5 Update the six-year Capital Improvement Plan at least every two years and use prioritization criteria, financial guidelines, and other factors to sequence projects. Maintain a companion twenty-year capital project list to capture long-term capital project needs and to guide the development of long-term funding strategies.
- 2.6 Design and maintain parks and facilities to offer universal accessibility for residents of all physical capabilities, skill levels, and ages as appropriate and in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design. Seek opportunities to eliminate barriers at existing facilities and address goals identified in the Citywide ADA Transition Plan.
- 2.7 Strive to provide a distributed network of parks, such that all Mercer Island residents live within one-half mile of a developed neighborhood or community park and seek to offer safe walking and biking routes to those locations.
- 2.8 Pursue and implement strategies to maximize use of existing park and recreation assets. Evaluate opportunities to convert natural grass to synthetic turf to expand athletic field use and capacity. Consider upgrading tennis courts for multi-sport use or conversion of existing tennis courts for dedicated pickleball use.
- 2.9 Prepare a Land Acquisition Strategy to prioritize property acquisition to meet the future parks, trails, open space, and facility needs of the Mercer Island community. Maintain a minimum standard of XX acres of developed neighborhood or community park land per 1,000 residents. Include guiding factors such as level of service standards, connectivity, geographic distribution, preservation, and recreation needs.
- 2.10 Utilize the resources of national, regional, state, and local conservation organizations, corporations, non-profit organizations, benevolent entities, and private donors to partner in acquiring land for park and recreation needs.

- 2.11 When evaluating the vacation of any right-of-way, consider its appropriateness for use as public park or open space.
- 2.12 Develop a Playground Plan to guide the replacement of the City's playgrounds, many of which are approaching the end of their useful life. Plan for a range of play types, universal access, a phasing plan, and equitable geographic distribution of facilities. Identify partnerships, grants, sponsorships, and other funding opportunities for playground replacement projects.
- 2.13 Improve and upgrade developed and undeveloped street ends where appropriate to enhance public access to waterfront facilities. Identify opportunities where achieving ADA access is feasible and improve parking options.
- 2.14 Consider development, expansion, or replacement of special use facilities such as athletic fields, splash pads, skate parks, bike skills areas, and off-leash dog areas based on community needs and priorities. Utilize the master planning process for siting and scoping these facilities. Explore opportunities to partner with user groups to sponsor, build, and maintain special use facilities.
- 2.13 Ensure public safety is included in all development and planning projects by coordinating with police and fire services and applying crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) techniques.
- 2.14 Integrate public art and park design from the onset of facility planning to create compelling, engaging, and captivating public places. Prioritize experiences that are interactive and allow for dynamic sensory exploration.

## Maintenance & Operations

Goal 3: Provide the Mercer Island community with safe, well-maintained parks and recreation facilities.

Objectives:

- 3.1 Maintain all parks and facilities in a manner that keeps them in a safe and attractive condition. Establish park maintenance standards and a routine preventative maintenance program to ensure all assets are in good working order and to protect the public investment.
- 3.2 Continue to improve the City's comprehensive risk management program to ensure regular safety inspections and assess the likelihood and consequence of the failure of its assets in terms of financial, community, and environmental impact.
- 3.3 Track and monitor costs of maintaining parks and recreation facilities, including quantity, location, condition, and expected useful life. Utilize data to inform maintenance and capital investment decisions, including the timing of asset replacement.

- 3.4 Estimate the maintenance costs and staffing levels associated with land acquisition, development, or renovation of facilities, parks, open space areas, or trails, and ensure adequate ongoing funding is available prior to action.
- 3.5 Provide amenities at parks, trails, open space areas, and facilities such as restrooms, adequate lighting, seating, drinking fountains, trash and recycling receptacles, bike racks, and covered picnic areas. When feasible and appropriate, extend the hours of use and improve user experiences and access.
- 3.6 Continue to assess the feasibility of replacing or upgrading the existing maintenance facility behind City Hall.

## Environment & Sustainability

Goal 4: Provide a high quality, diversified open space system that preserves and enhances urban forests, critical habitat, and other environmental resources. Incorporate sustainability practices into operations, maintenance, and planning.

### Objectives:

- 4.1 Preserve and protect open space areas with significant environmental features such as wetlands, forests, steep slopes, and plant and animal habitats from development impacts.
- 4.2 Provide appropriate public access (e.g., trails, viewpoints, and wildlife viewing areas) within open space areas to support passive recreation. Provide environmental education opportunities in open space areas with creative and interactive interpretation strategies, such as hands-on displays, self-guided walks, and other engaging experiences.  
4.3 Incorporate sustainable practices into management, maintenance, and operations activities. Maintain equipment in good working order, purchase green equipment when feasible (e.g., battery-powered or low-emissions), replace existing lighting with high-efficiency fixtures, and keep systems (irrigation, lighting, HVAC, etc.) updated and fully functional for maximum performance. Launch a pilot program to field test sustainable alternatives and to implement demonstration projects.
- 4.4 Include sustainable best practices in construction and major maintenance activities to limit water and energy use and request that bids on City projects address sustainability.
- 4.5 Continue to support the Open Space Conservancy Trust and the planning, development, and management of Pioneer Park and Engstrom Open Space.
- 4.6 Actively work to improve the condition 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. Anticipate climate trends and foster climate-resilient landscapes in parks and open space areas. Seek opportunities for community education on invasive species and their safe removal to help reduce their

spread on Mercer Island. Maintain an Integrated Pest Management Program that maximizes ecological benefits while minimizing environmental, social, and economic impacts.

- 4.7 Develop a Citywide Urban Forestry Management Plan to articulate a long-term strategy for tree protection, urban forestry management, and public education and outreach. Include forest health, canopy replacement, wildfire, climate change, and general risk planning for City parks and open space areas as part of the overall strategy. Continue to gather and maintain Island-wide data on tree canopy coverage.
- 4.8 Encourage conservation opportunities to buffer and enhance the built environment. Pursue low-cost and non-purchase options to preserve open space, including the use of conservation easements and development covenants. Promote and encourage private property owners to enroll in the King County Current Use taxation programs, special emphasizing properties contiguous to existing open space areas.
- 4.9 Promote and expand recycling opportunities at all park facilities and in association with all public and private special events. Include composting options at special events when food vendors are present.
- 4.10 Conserve and reduce water use through landscape design and maintenance practices, minimize vast expanses of green lawn to reduce irrigation needs, allowing grass to “brownout” in the summer months, and exploring use of gray-water recycling methods where safely appropriate.
- 4.11 Design and restore parks, trails, and open space areas to naturally capture and filter stormwater to improve water quality, increase water infiltration and recharge, and promote a healthy watershed and lake environment. Where feasible, coordinate park, trail, and open space projects with stormwater and utility projects for efficiency and to reduce environmental impacts.
- 4.12 Steward waterfront and shoreline properties with the goal of protecting and enhancing critical shoreline habitat while preserving safe water access for recreational use.
- 4.13 Maintain Tree City USA designation with continued review of tree policy and management.
- 4.14 Continue to facilitate volunteer programs that enhance park improvement and restoration efforts, promote environmental education, support ongoing maintenance efforts, and engage the community in stewardship opportunities.

## Trails

Goal 5: Develop and promote an interconnected community through safe, accessible, and attractive trails and pathways easily accessed by a variety of trail users.

### Objectives:

- 5.1 Develop and implement a trail system hierarchy to accommodate different user types and different user experiences. Publish an Island-wide map of City trails.
- 5.2 Support the planning and prioritization of Transportation Improvement Program projects for pedestrian and bicycle connections and improvements that safely link parks to other city destinations including other parks, schools, neighborhoods, the library, transit stops, the Eastlink Light Rail Station, commercial areas, and regional trail networks.
- 5.3 Expand and link the pedestrian and bicycle circulation system by acquiring rights-of-way and easements for trails and trail connections. Prioritize project implementation to address gaps between existing paths, create longer, more usable connections, improve safety, and coordinate trail projects with utility and transportation projects.
- 5.4 Integrate the siting of proposed trail segments into the development review process; require development projects along designated trail routes to be incorporated as part of the development project.
- 5.5 Utilize and implement park or open space site master plans to guide the development of trails within existing properties to provide maintenance and recreational access and to connect to external trail networks.
- 5.6 Design and construct new trails with consideration of and attention to users' safety and a priority to accommodate multiple trail uses.
- 5.7 Provide trailhead accommodations, where feasible, to include parking (automobile and bicycle), wayfinding and accessibility, signage, benches, restrooms, and other amenities.
- 5.8 Develop clear and consistent wayfinding signage and information materials for trails and associated facilities.
- 5.9 Continue to support use of non-motorized small craft along the Mercer Island shoreline via the "water trail." Seek opportunities to integrate and enhance water trail use through upgrades to access points, including at street ends.

## Recreation Facilities & Programming

Goal 6: Provide a variety of recreation programs, services, and facilities that promote the health and well-being of residents of all ages and abilities.

### Objectives:

- 6.1 Refine the City's role as a provider of recreation programs and services by implementing the Recreation Reset Strategy's cost recovery and resource allocation philosophy. Revisit and update business planning goals at least every six years to address changing community needs and to revisit performance goals.
- 6.2 Enhance the diversity of recreation programs offered, focusing on programs that are in high demand or serve a wide range of users. Expand service offerings for water-oriented and outdoor programs to include boating, fishing, and similar programs.
- 6.3 Continue work to restore and expand youth and teen programs to provide engaging, affordable, enriching, inclusive, and safe options for children on Mercer Island. Identify programs and activities that provide for whole-family participation.
- 6.4 Identify and address recreation and service accessibility barriers (socio-economic, language, physical, geographic, transportation). Seek to reduce access barriers and expand inclusive opportunities. Implement diversity, equity and inclusion policies and a priority matrix to guide the allocation of resources to address known service gaps over time.
- 6.5 Work to restore and expand opportunities for seniors to engage in social, recreational, educational, nutritional, and health programs designed to encourage social connections, independence, physical fitness, and overall well-being.
- 6.6 Review and establish a funding strategy for the Mercer Island Community and Event Center to sustain annual operating needs to include periodic review of the fee policy for programs, indoor facility uses, and rental rates to meet operational requirements and cost recovery goals.
- 6.7 Maintain and enhance program scholarships and other mechanisms to support and promote recreation access for low-income community members.
- 6.8 Evaluate the City's role and function in community events and pursue sponsorships, partnerships, and outside funding to support existing or additional events and festivals.
- 6.9 Leverage City resources by forming and maintaining partnerships with other public, non-profit, and private recreation providers to deliver recreation programs and services and secure access to existing facilities for community recreation.
- 6.10 Conduct periodic evaluations of program offerings including assessing persons served, customer satisfaction, cost recovery, local and regional recreation trends, and availability of similar programs via other providers. Utilize data to inform program and service planning decisions.

- 6.11 Coordinate facility scheduling, in partnership with other public and private organizations, to maximize usage and programming of limited recreational assets (e.g., athletic fields, gymnasiums, sport courts, etc.) Develop and implement indoor and outdoor facility use and scheduling protocols and policies based on principles of fairness and equity, supporting diverse and emerging uses, reflecting good stewardship and sustainability principles, and adhering to cost recovery goals.
- 6.13 Assess the financial feasibility of renovating or replacing the North Annex building at the Mercer Island Community and Event Center to meet indoor recreation needs and continue to support the provision of early learning partnership programs.
- 6.14 Assess the financial feasibility of completing the renovations and seismic retrofits to the Luther Burbank Boiler Building to meet the community demand for expanded water-oriented recreation programs and classes.

## Arts and Culture

Goal 7: Facilitate and promote comprehensive and engaging arts and culture experiences.

### Objectives:

- 7.1 Foster the City's role as a convener of artists, arts organizations, and community groups to facilitate collaboration and efficiently serve the community through arts and culture programs and experiences.
- 7.2 Support the priorities of the Mercer Island Arts Council and the goals and initiatives of the Comprehensive Arts & Culture Plan.
- 7.3 Identify and implement opportunities for integrating arts and culture into parks and open space areas, including through permanent and temporary public art installations, interpretive strategies, and other dynamic expressions. Collaborate with diverse groups to ensure incorporation of any art in public space occurs through a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- 7.4 Partner with the community and local organizations to foster a variety of cultural events and support community cultural celebrations.
- 7.5 Develop a long-range project plan for the 1% for Art in Public Places Fund that articulates the City's vision for the public art program and includes integration with the Capital Improvement Program, strategies for engaging the community in public art acquisition, and updated policies for public art acquisition, siting, security, maintenance, and deaccession.
- 7.6 Encourage private contributions and donations for the arts, consistent with City gift and donation policies, and the City's pursuit of grant funding to enhance widespread public access to arts, culture, and heritage.

- 7.7 Encourage the collaboration of arts and culture marketing and communication efforts through shared event calendars, social media management, and other cohesive strategies.

## Administration & Fiscal Sustainability

Goal 8: Provide leadership and sufficient resources to maintain and operation a welcoming, efficient, safe, and sustainable parks and recreation system.

### Objectives:

- 8.1 Provide a high quality, diversified parks and recreation system that serves all ages and abilities. Promote a welcoming and inclusive environment, seeking opportunities to address barriers and expand program and service offerings to meet a diverse audience. Provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training opportunities for staff, volunteers, and appointed officials.
- 8.2 Plan for and recommend sufficient resources to maintain, preserve, and protect the parks and recreation system consistent with best practices and established levels of service and to protect the public investment.
- 8.3 Pursue alternative funding options and dedicated revenues for the acquisition and development of parks and facilities, such as private donations, sponsorships, partnerships, and state and federal grant sources, as well as partnerships with service organizations, volunteer groups, businesses, and other public agencies.
- 8.4 Periodically review and update the Park Impact Fee rates and methodology and utilize impact fees to accommodate growth through the expansion of the parks system.
- 8.5 Consider the potential benefits of voter-approved initiatives, such as bonds and levies, to fund and manage certain park and recreation programs and services. Pursue voter support to renew the Parks Maintenance and Operations Levy, scheduled to end in 2023.
- 8.6 Collaborate with the Community Planning and Development Department on economic development initiatives and other opportunities to support local businesses. Seek opportunities to buy-local when procuring services and other opportunities to partner with Mercer Island small businesses in the delivery of programs and services.
- 8.7 Stay abreast of best practices in technology and implement systems and tools to improve customer service and support efficient operations.
- 8.8 Continue to use part-time, seasonal, and contract employees for select functions to meet peak demands and respond to specialized or urgent needs. Maintain flexibility in the staffing structure to address changing program and service needs.
- 8.9 Promote volunteerism to involve individuals, groups, organizations, and businesses in the development and stewardship of the park and recreation system. In collaboration with

other City Departments, assess the feasibility of adding a dedicated staff position to support volunteer programs.

- 8.9 Promote professional development opportunities that strengthen the core skills and engender greater commitment from staff, advisory board members, and volunteers. Include trainings, materials, and/or affiliation with the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA), Washington Recreation & Park Association (WRPA), and others.