

# Mercer Island 2021 PROS Plan

## Parks Conditions Assessment

The overall condition of park infrastructure and amenities is one measure of park adequacy and a required assurance of public safety. Proper stewardship of parks infrastructure requires the development of a long-term maintenance and capital plan to ensure the safety of park users, to align with community need, and to properly allocate limited funding resources.

In 2019 the existing conditions of the Mercer Island parks system was assessed to identify current site maintenance issues and opportunities for future capital improvements. The parks infrastructure assessment included walkways, parking lots, park furniture, drainage and irrigation, lighting systems, vegetation, and other amenities. The conditions assessment matrices (see attached) summarize the results of these assessments and will be used to inform the PROS Plan update including developing the project prioritization strategy for park improvements, identifying funding strategies, and updating the recommended parks six-year Capital Improvement Program.

### Ratings

Park infrastructure and amenities were ranked based on the following scale:

- 1 – Good Condition:** In general, amenities in good condition offer full functionality and do not need repairs. Good facilities have playable sports surfaces and equipment, working fixtures, and fully intact safety features (railings, fences, etc.). Good facilities may have minor cosmetic defects. Good facilities encourage area residents to use the park.
- 2 – Fair:** In general, amenities in fair condition are largely functional, but need minor or moderate repairs. Fair facilities have play surfaces, equipment, fixtures, and safety features that are operational and allow play, but have deficiencies or time periods where they are unusable. Fair facilities remain important amenities for the community but may slightly discourage use of the park by residents given the current condition.
- 3 – Poor:** In general, amenities in poor condition are largely or completely unusable. They need major repairs to be functional. Some examples include athletic fields that are too uneven for ball games, features are irreparably broken, buildings that need structural retrofitting, etc. Poor facilities discourage residents from using the park and may present safety issues if left open or operational.

In general, good conditions should be the goal for management and stewardship of park facilities. Where infrastructure or amenities are rated as “fair” strategies should be developed to repair or restore the amenity. Park features, structures, amenities, or landscapes that are rated as “poor” should receive immediate attention and be prioritized for near-term maintenance, capital repairs, or as a new capital project. Facilities in “poor” condition should also be evaluated and taken out of operation if they are deemed unsafe.

## Overall Considerations

### Developed Parks

Overall, the condition rating for the Mercer Island parks system is 1.34, with most amenities receiving a “good” rating.

General grounds maintenance, restoration areas, arboricultural care and trail maintenance look good throughout the park system, which is a clear indication of good stewardship.\*

Aging infrastructure, particularly storage buildings, play equipment, restroom buildings, piers and docks, pathway pavement and sport court surfaces are ready for significant repairs and/or replacement and largely rated at “fair” or below.

The natural grass at most of the parks with open mown grass areas is in great condition, with only a few parks having patchy or worn areas in high traffic locations or in partially or fully shaded areas.

Many of the play structures in playgrounds are older and have traditional features supporting prescribed activities. More abstract and open-ended play structures and designs, that also comply with ADA requirements, should be considered when replacing existing play structures.

Many parks do not have bike racks. Bike racks should be a standard amenity at every park.

*\*Maintenance conditions observed in 2021, two years after the original park conditions assessment was performed, reflect a reduced level of service. This is the result of temporary service reductions that occurred in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but plans are underway to “catch-up” on planter bed maintenance, general weeding, pruning, etc.*



Figure 1: Overall Condition of Regional, Community & Neighborhood Parks

### Other Parklands & Open Space

The rating for Mercer Island open space areas and trails is 1.5, halfway between “good” and “fair” and reflects a good condition where publicly accessible, though many are not ADA-compliant.

Ongoing restoration activities and trail maintenance convey a sense of safety for public natural areas and provide an opportunity to “get away” from the more active uses in other parks. Community members clearly enjoy the open space areas and trails networks in Mercer Island and care should be taken to preserve maintenance of these assets.



Figure 2: Overall Open Space Conditions

Most of the trails within open spaces areas are well-maintained, have good surfacing and appear to be structurally sound. While some open spaces have trails with timber steps that are in excellent condition, others have timber steps that are degraded and extremely slippery when wet. Many of the handrails associated with these steps are also degraded and may not meet code.

The thoroughness of the *2018 Trail Structure & Maintenance Inventory Report* illustrates the City’s comprehensive grasp of the needs for upkeep and safety on the extensive (30+ mile) trail network. The report prioritizes trail repair and replacement needs and remains a valid tool to guide trail system enhancements. This report, along with the information in the conditions assessment, will be used to inform project prioritization and future capital planning decisions.

## Wayfinding & Signage

The overall rating for park signage is 1.4 to 1.5, halfway between “good” and “fair.” Park signage gaps, particularly at open space areas, landings, and street ends, resulted in a “fair” rating. The trail networks will also benefit from improved signage.

With a few exceptions, every park and open space area has at least one primary park name sign that is in good condition. Many of the sites will also benefit from having additional park signs at secondary entries. Currently, most of the secondary park entry points only have "Trail" signs on timber posts, or no signs at all. Identifying parks by name at each entrance will improve the identity of each park and also provide critical information to public safety personnel that may be responding to an emergency.

Most trails and trail intersections within parks are identified with the generic "Trail" signs or not identified at all. Parks with complex trail networks will benefit from signage that identifies the different trails or loops within the park. All trail junctions should provide navigation aids that identify trails and destination options.

Numerous water-oriented parks, street-end parks, and landings are designated as water trailheads. The City should consider park signage that is oriented to the water at these locations for water-based wayfinding. Additional signage should be considered for water trail users to assist them in identifying the route from the water to desired amenities such as park restrooms or parking lots.



Figure 3: Average Signage Evaluation



Figure 4: Specific Gaps in Park Signage

## Pavement & Amenities Conditions

Generally, the pavement in most parks is in good condition; however, some parks have older asphalt paths that are cracking, or succumbing to root heave. Slumping of outside edges at cross slopes is also occurring. The average pavement rating is 1.7 for parking areas, trails, and paved sport courts. Cracked or buckled pavement, particularly where paved paths go through natural areas, needs to be repaired to eliminate tripping hazards and address ADA accessibility barriers. A pavement maintenance program should be considered to seal pavement (similar to public roadway management) when cracks appear to extend the useful life of the pavement.

Aging docks and swim piers, with an overall rating of 2.25, need significant repair and/or replacement. Some over-water structures should be redesigned and replaced. In some locations over-water structures should be evaluated for removal if they are part of a natural shoreline restoration effort. The redesign and planning for the pier system for Luther Burbank Park is already underway.



Figure 5: Docks, Piers and Boat Ramp Conditions

Sports court surfacing at tennis courts and basketball courts show cracks and aging that affects play conditions. Repairs, resurfacing or complete replacement may be called for. As part of this planning process, an evaluation about current use and future trends may warrant converting some court sites into another type of recreational amenity (such as converting tennis to pickleball) to provide broader public recreational value and use.



Figure 6: Evaluation of Surface Conditions for Sports Courts

Many of the free-standing bleachers at sport fields do not have safety railings on the backs or sides. According to the International Building Code, any seating with two or more tiers should have safety rails. Existing bleachers should have railings retrofitted or be replaced with compliant (railed) bleachers.

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### Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance

ADA compliance is further described in the attached memo.

The overall rating for ADA compliance is 2.3, partway between “fair” and “poor.” Numerous minor barriers are present in the parks system where different surfaces meet unevenly. ADA barriers also exist at play areas, exercise stations, and park entries. ADA parking stalls should be adequately signed, travel aisles marked, and tactile warning strips installed.



Figure 7: Universal Access and Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

Most parks are deficient to some degree in compliance with the ADA guidelines. Commonly observed barriers include lack of an accessible route between the parking area and park amenities due to lips, lack of curb ramps, and lack of detectable warnings.

As older parks and amenities are upgraded, renovated, or redeveloped, a focused effort to improve universal access and remove architectural barriers to achieve ADA compliance in park sites is needed.

### Planning Needs

Several parks are notably aging and require a comprehensive planning approach to address multiple needs. An example of this is Clarke Beach Park where numerous systems and amenities are due for major repairs or replacements. It is often most efficient, both in terms of planning time and the public engagement process, to approach major system upgrades using the master planning tool. Park master plans incorporate public comment, community-wide needs, parks goals and policies (identified in the PROS Plan and other documents), funding considerations, safety standards, and a variety of other inputs to inform a 15 to 20-year plan for phased improvements at the park facility.

In addition to the planning needs for park sites, the City should engage in a planning effort to develop unified wayfinding signage, park entry signage, and trail signage and maps.