



**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND, WASHINGTON**

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DATE: January XX, 2022

TO: City Council

FROM: Parks and Recreation Commission
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SUBJECT: Final Draft of the 2022 PROS Plan

The Mercer Island Parks and Recreation Commission is pleased to present the complete draft of the 2022 Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan.

As we contemplated the PROS Plan update and developed our final recommendation, the importance of the parks and recreation system to the Mercer Island Community was at the forefront. Without a doubt, Mercer Islanders love their parks and recreation system and these resources sustained many of us during the most difficult months of the COVID-19 pandemic. We treasure our open space, our trail networks, the active spaces, the beaches, the arts programs, the special events, and more. In developing the plan, we focused on the importance of sustaining and maintaining our current system, identifying areas for improvement, and looking down the road to ensure that our future actions result in a quality parks and recreation system for generations to come.

At the core of the 2022 PROS Plan update is a recommended \$41.7 Million Parks Capital Improvement Program (2023-2028 Parks CIP), guiding parks, facilities, trails, and open space capital investments through 2028. This is the largest Parks CIP in City history and reflects the urgent need to address many near-term critical infrastructure projects. Without swift action, our existing park system is at risk of losing existing amenities (overwater dock structures, for example).

We recognize the magnitude of this recommendation and acknowledge the challenges ahead in identifying the funding to support this plan. We feel strongly that the solutions to address our parks capital infrastructure challenges starts with a plan and a vision. We are also committed to working with the City Council, the staff, and the community on implementation of the 2023-2028 Parks CIP and anticipate that it will be the primary focus of our work in the coming years.

The Parks and Recreation Commission is passionate about our parks system and the opportunities the parks system provides our community members. We recognize that parks and open spaces improve public health, reduce stress and diseases, and make people happy. We have incorporated these themes into the proposed goals and objectives of the PROS Plan to guide future operations, programming, and services over the next six to ten years.

Finally, the Parks and Recreation Commission wishes to acknowledge and thank the members of the community, the Open Space Conservancy Trust Board, and the Arts Council, who have taken part in this important planning process. Thank you for your time, commitment, energy, vision, and ideas.

The Parks & Recreation Commission now presents the draft 2022 PROS Plan to the City Council for its consideration.

What is a PROS Plan?

The PROS Plan is a six-year plan that anticipates the programming and capital infrastructure investments necessary to meet the community's needs for parks, recreation, open space, trails, arts, and cultural events.

The PROS Plan is a guiding tool. Its recommendations are made actionable when staff looks to the Plan as they develop annual work plans, as they bring forward policy recommendations for the Commission and City Council consideration, as biennial budgets are shaped, and as capital projects are pursued.

The Plan is strategic in focus and will guide long-term investments to improve and enhance the parks and recreation system. The 2022 PROS Plan:

- Is based on community input.
- Includes goals and objectives to guide future decisions.
- Includes facility-specific evaluations and assessments.
- Includes recommendations on future capital funding, programming, and other potential initiatives.
- Is the foundation for pursuing capital funding, state grants, and other sources of revenue.

The City is required to adopt a PROS Plan every six years to maintain eligibility for grants through the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). The City's current PROS Plan expired at the end of 2019. The components of this plan were developed to comply with RCO requirements and upon adoption by the City Council, will be submitted to RCO for approval. The City Council needs to adopt the 2022 PROS Plan by the end of March to ensure the City is eligible for the next RCO grant cycle and available funding opportunities.

Background & Overview of Planning Process

As directed by the City Council in September 2019, the Parks & Recreation staff team, in collaboration with the Parks & Recreation Commission (PRC), began the process of updating the PROS Plan.

Conservation Technix was selected as the consultant to manage the process, including providing a baseline analysis of existing conditions and community needs, facilitating a community engagement process, and developing a draft framework for the final PROS Plan.

Work was suspended on the PROS Plan update in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the end of 2020, the staff and consulting team resumed the planning process for the PROS Plan, with an initial focus on assessing the work that was already completed, adjusting the project timeline, and modifying the scope of work to reflect the need for virtual engagement strategies.

Public Engagement

The Parks & Recreation Commission served as the lead advisory board on this planning process and was supported by the Arts Council and the Open Space Conservancy Trust.

The PROS Plan public engagement process was modified at the end of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic to include virtual engagements. A second community survey was added to the planning process in 2021 to address the gap in time between the first survey and re-starting the plan, and to drill down on several focus areas. Here are a few highlights of the public engagement process, further detailed in Chapter 3 and in the appendices:

- Two statistically significant mail-in surveys to Mercer Island residents with concurrent versions available to the public online (February 2020 and August 2021).
- Two virtual open houses that included project presentations, live polling, and facilitated discussions in breakout groups (March 2021 and September 2021).
- A project webpage maintained throughout the planning process to provide access to key dates and milestones, background data, and draft materials.
- Numerous meetings of the Parks & Recreation Commission, Arts Council, and the Open Space Conservancy Trust Board dedicated to the development of the PROS Plan.

The Parks and Recreation Commission, as the lead advisory board, dedicated a considerable amount of meeting time to this planning process in 2021, covering the topic at nearly every meeting and often working late into the evening.

2022 PROS Plan: Key Recommendations

The recommendations provided in the PROS Plan reflect the key themes and community priorities that emerged during the planning process. There are two primary chapters of the 2022 PROS Plan to focus on for your review – Chapter 4 (Goals and Objectives) and Chapter 11 (Capital Planning and Implementation).

Chapter 4: PROS Plan Goals & Objectives

At the heart of the 2022 PROS Plan is the establishment of goals and objectives to provide strategic direction for the Mercer Island Parks and Recreation system. The goals and objectives are included in Chapter 4 of the Plan and once adopted, will be appended to the Citywide Comprehensive Plan during the next update process.

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. PROS Plan goals and objectives align with other plans and guiding documents including the Washington State Growth Management Act, the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan, existing Park Master Plans, the Mercer Island Arts and Culture Plan, and open space planning documents, among others.

The 2022 PROS Plan includes eight strategic goals:

Goal 1 – Planning, Acquisition & Access: Provide a high quality, welcoming, and inclusive parks and recreation system that meets community needs now and in the future.

Goal 2 – Maintenance & Operations: Provide the Mercer Island community with safe, well-maintained parks and recreation facilities.

Goal 3 – Environment & Sustainability: 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.

Goal 4 – Trails: Develop and promote an interconnected community through safe, accessible, and attractive trails and pathways easily accessed by a variety of trail users.

Goal 5 – Recreation Facilities & Programming: Provide a variety of recreation programs, services, and facilities that promote the health and well-being of residents of all ages and abilities.

Goal 6 – Arts & Culture: Facilitate and promote comprehensive and engaging arts and culture experiences.

Goal 7 – Community Engagement & Partnerships: Encourage and support community engagement and pursue collaborative partnerships to strengthen and grow parks and recreation programs and services.

Goal 8 – Administration & Fiscal Sustainability: Provide leadership and sufficient resources to maintain and operate a welcoming, efficient, safe, and sustainable parks and recreation system.

Accompanying each goal in Chapter 4 is a list of objectives that identify desired outcomes, some of which are aspirational, to be achieved upon implementation of the PROS Plan.

Chapter 11: Capital Planning & Implementation

As already mentioned, the 2022 PROS Plan includes a \$41.7 million 2023-2028 Parks CIP recommendation, further described in Chapter 11. The Parks CIP covers a wide range of projects focusing on the following project areas:

- **Trail connections and linkages:** Mercer Island community members are actively using the existing trail system, and walking is the top outdoor recreational activity on Mercer Island, aligning with regional and national trends. During the community engagement process, completing trail system connections and building new walking and biking paths was identified as one of the highest capital project priorities. Proposed trail projects include completing missing links, new trail projects, and ongoing maintenance of existing trail infrastructure.

- **Waterfronts and in-water infrastructure:** The City has made significant investments in waterfront and water-oriented infrastructure over the past fifty years. Much of this infrastructure, including docks, piers, and shorelines, is aging and needs to be replaced. The community indicated a high degree of support for waterfront parks, amenities, and programs through the recent engagement process and these types of projects are a key feature of the proposed 2023-2028 Parks CIP. Recommendations include shoreline projects at Luther Burbank Park, Groveland Beach Park, and Clarke Beach Park.
- **ADA/Universal Access at Parks Facilities:** An assessment conducted in the fall of 2019 revealed that each park, trail, and open space area in the City of Mercer Island had some aspect of non-compliance with the ADA guidelines. This finding is not a surprise as many of the facilities and amenities were constructed before the passage of the ADA in 1990 and the development of the ADA Standards in 2010. Most of the 2023-2028 Parks CIP projects include consideration of needed improvements to address ADA accessibility including removing barriers such as curbs around playgrounds, improved access to amenities such as trails and parking modifications and constructing new access where appropriate.
- **Athletic Fields:** One of the other important areas of capital investment in the 2023-2028 Parks CIP is in the category of athletic fields. The projects fall into two primary categories – safety enhancements and synthetic turf replacements.
- **Playgrounds:** Of the 18 playgrounds in the parks system, ten are nearing the end of their useful life and will need replacement within ten years. The 2023-2028 Parks CIP includes five playground replacement projects.
- **Restrooms:** Supporting park use through the provision of restrooms is a critical element in any park system and restroom facilities were identified as a top priority in the community engagement process. The 2023-2028 Parks CIP includes a new restroom at Aubrey Davis Park (Lid B). Several other projects anticipate restroom replacements or upgrades.
- **Property Acquisition Reserve:** The 2023-2028 Parks CIP proposes the establishment of a property acquisition reserve to provide resources for the acquisition of property to support all types of park system needs in the future – trails, open space, active uses, and more. Setting aside a small amount of dedicated funding each year will ensure the reserve grows over time and can be used to support expansion of the parks system to meet future needs.

Chapter 11 also includes an overview of the potential funding options to support the 2023-2028 Parks CIP, which are also described in detail in Appendix K.

And finally, Chapter 11 concludes with an overview of areas of focus and other potential work items for City Council consideration in future years.

Recommended 2022 Work Items:

The Parks and Recreation Commission recommends the following Parks CIP projects be accelerated to start in 2022:

- **Groveland Beach Park and Clarke Beach Park Joint Master Plan:** Both of these facilities have aging waterfront infrastructure including docks and bulkheads that are at the end of their useful life. They will need to be replaced in the next five to seven years. A master plan is needed to set the vision for the future facilities and to begin planning for the replacement.
- **Synthetic Turf and Backstop Replacement:** Several athletic projects are proposed for 2023 including infield turf and a backstop replacement at the North Island Crest Park Field, replacement of the backstop at the South Island Crest Park Field, and infield turf replacement and backstop replacements at the South Mercer Playfields. Completion of these projects in 2023, requires design and permitting to commence in 2022. These projects are recommended to be combined into one project for design and implementation efficiencies.

Conclusion

As a Parks and Recreation Commission, we [unanimously] endorse the draft 2022 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan and we look forward to discussing our recommendations with the City Council at our upcoming joint meeting.