



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

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DATE: January 7, 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 transmit the complete draft of the 2022 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan.

We would like to commend the efforts of City staff, led by City Manager Jessi Bon and Consultant Steve Duh of Conservation Technix, for their hard work and guidance to the Commission, and give grateful acknowledgement to the hundreds of community members who responded to surveys, provided online comments, and presented ideas at commission meetings.

One conclusion is absolutely clear - Mercer Islanders love their parks and recreation! We treasure our open spaces, our trails, playgrounds, ball fields, beaches, arts programs, and special events. In developing the PROS plan, we focused on the importance of sustaining and maintaining our current system, while also identifying areas for improvement, all in the interest of ensuring that our future actions result in a quality parks and recreation system for generations to come.

As noted in the plan, Mercer Island has an aging park system. Many of the waterfront and shoreline facilities are nearing 50 years old. Additionally, many facilities were constructed before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Consequently, 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. While this is the largest Parks CIP in City history, it addresses the need to tackle many near-term critical infrastructure projects. The Commission believes that without a strong capital improvement program we risk losing the use of existing unique amenities, such as overwater dock structures.

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 start 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 recognizes that parks and open spaces improve public health, reduce stress and diseases, make people happy, and generate many positive impacts on the environment and climate. 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. Indeed, the success of the Plan can be judged by these themes.

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 intended to guide staff as they develop annual work plans, as they bring forward policy recommendations for 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.
- Provides a complete inventory of all City park- and open space-related assets.
- 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 with support provided 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.

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. A number of chapters provide background information on the community and existing park amenities. They also provide valuable background for the two Chapters highlighted below, 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:** Athletic fields are another important area of capital investment in the 2023-2028 Parks CIP. 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 modest 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.

The table below summarizes the six-year CIP. Obviously, the cost estimates are subject to change, and the initial revenue estimates represent reasonably certain funding sources. At this time, there is an unfunded project need of about \$24 million (difference between cost and revenue totals).

Summary of 2023 - 2028 CIP						
Project Type	COST Estimate (\$ millions)	Share Of Total	REVENUE Estimate (\$ millions)	% Funded	# of Projects	Avg. Cost
Athletic Fields	\$ 5.136	12%	\$ 3.979	77%	5	\$ 1.027
Beaches & Shorelines	\$ 11.990	29%	\$ 4.780	40%	4	\$ 2.998
Open Space & Trails	\$ 7.078	17%	\$ 3.942	56%	11	\$ 0.643
Parks	\$ 8.518	20%	\$ 2.066	24%	18	\$ 0.473
Recreation Facilities	\$ 5.748	14%	\$ 1.420	25%	6	\$ 0.958
Park Planning	\$ 0.700	2%	\$ 0.700	100%	3	\$ 0.233
Park Property Acq	\$ 2.000	5%	\$ -	0%	1	\$ 2.000
Other	\$ 0.545	1%	\$ 0.545	100%	2	\$ 0.273
TOTAL	\$ 41.715	100%	\$ 17.432	42%	50	\$ 0.834
	Estimated Funding Need		\$ 24.283			

Note: The 20-yr CFP identifies 90 projects that, based on the avg. cost of the 6-yr CIP, would cost approximately \$75 million

Accountability

A key element of any plan is accountability, and the ability to monitor progress, and measure success. The Commission believes an over-arching metric is the community’s overall satisfaction level with our park system as measured by the biennial survey (most recently at 93% - the average of the mail and online surveys).

To that end, we propose that the PROS Plan be reviewed annually by the Commission, and our conclusions be reported to the City Council.

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, the installation of synthetic turf and the 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.
- **Bike Skills Area Improvements:** The existing footprint of the Bike Skills Area (formerly known as the BMX facility) has been evaluated by a consultant who determined that it could be accommodated in this area under specific design guidelines. A safety and site restoration and rehabilitation project is anticipated to occur at this site in the Upper Luther Burbank Park Open Space in 2022. The Commission supports moving forward with further planning and evaluation of improvements to the current Bike Skills Area identified in the consultant's final report and recommended by staff, and in consideration of additional public input.

The Commission discussed and will continue to consider whether or not this location is optimal for such use. The Commission suggests evaluating other locations for a bike skills area in the future.

Conclusion

The Parks and Recreation Commission unanimously endorses the Final Draft of the 2022 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan and we look forward to discussing our recommendations with the City Council at our upcoming joint meeting.