



## Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element

NOTE: With the Parks Recreation and Open Space Plan process running concurrently with the Comprehensive Plan update, this element is very draft with many potential changes to come from public input.

### Vision

The County's vision for parks is to create a thriving and accessible park system that meets the diverse needs and interests of the community. The park system offers recreational opportunities and the preservation and stewardship of natural resources. This vision recognizes the County's vital role in providing outdoor recreation areas and facilities that contribute to the overall quality of life for its residents and aims to ensure equitable access to parks for all community members.

In partnership with other agencies and organizations, the County envisions enhancing its park facilities, developing new parks, and creating multi-functional corridors that integrate recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat connectivity, while emphasizing the importance of sustainable land management that promotes environmental protection and climate resilience within the park system.

### Intent

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan serves as a reference and foundation for future updates of the County's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan. This chapter provides an outlook for the County's park system, identifying areas for improvement and presenting innovative approaches based on public input and community engagement. To make these aspirations actionable, the next update of PROS Plan (anticipated to be complete in 2024) will implement the goals, policies, and strategies in this

chapter, detailing specific projects, initiatives, and timelines for park development and enhancement. It will identify opportunities for partnerships and funding and foster collaboration with stakeholders to ensure equitable access, environmental stewardship, and diverse recreational opportunities for the community.

The goals and policies in this element recognize County residents' interests in promoting pedestrian use, bicycling, and accessibility through the provision of trails in park system as well as the desire to institute management programs for habitat value, forest health, groundwater recharge, water quality, climate resiliency, and safety.

Technical documents used in development of this Element include an inventory of current parks facilities, level of service standards, and other requirements outlined in the Capital Facilities Plan, the Environmental Impact Statement, the Washington State Growth Management Act, and the Washington Administrative Code.

### **Growth Management Act and Regional Coordination**

The Washington State Growth Management Act is the framework for all land use planning in the state and lays out the requirements for comprehensive plans and development regulations that implement the plans. The Parks and Recreation Element is a required element and must include:

- Estimates of park and recreation demand for at least a ten-year period;
- Evaluation of facilities and service needs;
- Evaluation of tree canopy coverage within the urban growth area; and
- Evaluation of intergovernmental coordination opportunities to provide regional approaches for meeting park and recreational demand.

By aligning with the Growth Management Act (GMA) and the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), this chapter will provide a comprehensive and visionary framework for the parks, recreation, and open space system. In some cases, the County's PROS plan provides additional information related to GMA requirements for this chapter.

This work must also align with regional strategies including Vision 2050 and the Regional Open Space Conservation Plan. These plans aim to protect and enhance a diverse range of public and private open spaces, including urban and rural areas, to provide essential economic, recreational, cultural, aesthetic, and ecological services. These plans emphasize equitable access to open spaces and, to achieve this, propose strategies like integrating open space conservation into planning at all levels, protecting critical habitats, enhancing urban open spaces, building a regional trail network, and restoring high-value habitat areas.

Additionally, the plans emphasize the need for coordination among agencies and organizations and the promotion of the many benefits of green infrastructure to support mental and physical health, recreational opportunities, habitat preservation, and stormwater management.

### **Relationship to Other Elements**

The goals and policies in this chapter are an integral part of other elements including *Land Use*,

*Economic Development, Environment, Housing and Human Services, Transportation, Climate Change and Capital Facilities and Utilities.*

Focusing on the inter-related nature of Parks, Recreation, and Open Space to other Comprehensive Plan elements, this Chapter provides the guidance to do the following:

- Provide parks, recreation, and open space facilities and services in an efficient and economical manner;
- Manage and maintain parks, recreation facilities, and open space lands;
- Work with cities and other communities for park and open space acquisition projects;
- Incorporate a network of trails and greenways throughout the County to connect population and employment centers, schools, and public facilities;
- Manage parks when in proximity to new and existing housing;
- Manage parks and open space properties for environmental values;
- Establish and maintain level of service standards for parkland acreage, equitable access, distribution, function, and maintenance and operations;
- Engage underrepresented communities, including historically underserved groups, low-income populations, and individuals with disabilities, to ensure their access and meaningful participation in park activities;
- Move towards identifying and categorizing lands within Kitsap County Parks for potential future development and restoration efforts;
- Attempt to segregate natural resource protection lands from active/passive recreation elements within each park facility; and
- Ensure park, recreation, and open space acquisition, facility development, and management is balanced with the required funding and operational budget.

### **Background Information**

Kitsap County is known for its many distinctive features including its glacier-carved rolling topography, evergreen forests, freshwater lakes, inlets, bays, and Puget Sound. Kitsap County's nature-oriented park system reflects this diversity of settings and provides for developed recreation facilities to serve a population of diverse ages, ethnicities, abilities, and outdoor interests.

Kitsap County's Park system is a comprehensive network comprised of various park types, collectively totaling 10,843 acres. This diverse range of parks includes heritage parks, waterways and waterfront parks, community recreation complexes, legacy parks, special use parks, and open spaces and greenbelts. Each park type offers distinct recreational opportunities, such as natural landscapes, access to water bodies, community gathering spaces, and areas of historical and cultural significance. The inclusion of this wide variety of park types ensures that the park system caters to the diverse interests and needs of the community while promoting equitable access to nature, recreation, and cultural experiences throughout Kitsap County.

Nearly three quarters of all park and open space acreage lies within six heritage parks that have become the cornerstone of Kitsap County's Park system. A balanced approach that takes into consideration established levels of service, protection of critical areas, historic and cultural values, equitable and inclusive access, and recreation services for the public will be critical to the success of these heritage parks and the park system overall.

Equally critical is both the long- and short-term stewardship of these lands by the community and County staff, promoting landscapes that endure as legacies for future generations. Through responsible management and preservation practices, these landscapes will remain vibrant and sustainable over time. This stewardship entails adopting strategies that promote health and wellness for the community, recognizing the role of parks in fostering physical activity, mental well-being, and connection with nature.

As the challenges posed by climate change increase, it becomes imperative to adapt parks to the changing climate conditions. This includes integrating resilient design principles, implementing sustainable green infrastructure, and supporting habitats that can withstand the impacts of climate change.

## Key Terms

**ADA Standards:** Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards ensure that public facilities and amenities are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

**Climate Resilience:** the capacity of natural areas and recreational facilities to withstand, adapt to, and recover from the impacts of climate change including the ability to withstand extreme weather events, rising temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, and other climate-related challenges while maintaining functionality and benefits for the community.

**Critical Areas:** areas identified as: (a) wetlands; (b) areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers; (c) fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas; (d) geologically hazardous areas; and (e) frequently flooded areas.

**Equitable Access:** ensuring that all members of a community, regardless of their background, socioeconomic status, age, ability, or location, have fair and inclusive opportunities to access and enjoy parks and recreational facilities. It involves providing equal access to safe, well-maintained, and culturally relevant park spaces, programs, and amenities, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting social, physical, and mental well-being for all individuals within the community.

**Green Infrastructure:** includes a wide array of natural assets and built structures, such as parks and stormwater management facilities, at multiple scales that manage wet weather and that maintain and restore natural hydrology.

**Level of service (LOS):** the specific criteria and standards used to measure and evaluate the adequacy and quality of park facilities, services, and amenities provided to the community. It is a measurable representation of the level of recreational opportunities and resources available to residents and visitors within a defined area and time frame.

**Public Private Partnership:** a collaborative arrangement between a government and private entities to jointly plan, develop, operate, or manage parks and recreational facilities. These partnerships leverage the resources, expertise, and capabilities of both sectors to enhance the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of parks and recreational amenities for the community's benefit.

**Transfer of Development Rights (TDR):** a land use planning strategy that allows for the transfer of development rights from one area (typically rural or environmentally sensitive) to another area (usually urban or designated for higher-density development). In this program, landowners in the sending areas, where development is restricted or limited, can sell their development rights to developers or landowners in the receiving areas, where increased development density or intensity is desired.

**Universal Design Principles:** a set of seven principles and associated guidelines developed in 1997 by a working group of architects, product designers, engineers, and environmental design researchers. These principles are, in brief: equitable use; flexibility in use; simple and intuitive use; perceptible information; tolerance for error; low physical effort; and size and space for approach and use.



## Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Goals, Policies and Strategies

### Parks Goal 1. Equity

*Provide equitable access to regional parks and open space to meet the recreational and diverse user needs for active healthy communities.*

**Parks Policy 1.1.** Develop Park facilities to accommodate specialized activities, large special events, and athletic tournaments to meet current and future demand.

**Parks Policy 1.2.** Develop and upgrade sport field complexes to meet the needs of organized recreation activities, using public and private partnerships where possible.

**Parks Policy 1.3.** Restore, manage, and protect the natural and cultural resources within Kitsap County Parks for the benefit of the greater community and for future generations to safely enjoy.

**Parks Policy 1.4.** Ensure geographic distribution and equitable access to park facilities.

**Parks Policy 1.5.** Develop and redevelop County parks to provide equity of service and activities offered for all demographics and accessibility levels.

**Parks Policy 1.6.** Limit impacts to vulnerable and underserved populations when locating park facilities.

**Parks Policy 1.7.** Maintain and enhance a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the local quality of life.

**Parks Policy 1.8.** Design and develop facilities that will encourage tourism.

**Parks Policy 1.9.** Develop and redevelop certain County parks and the Fairgrounds and Events Center to become “destination facilities”.

**Parks Policy 1.10.** Coordinate regional parks development and operation with regional trails and other trail systems.

**Parks Policy 1.11.** Implement universal design principles in park planning and development to ensure that park amenities and facilities are accessible to individuals of all ages and abilities.

**Parks Policy 1.12.** Offer a diverse range of cultural programming and events within parks that celebrate the community's various cultural traditions and preferences, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural appreciation.

**Parks Strategy 1.a.** Carefully consider the acquisition of lands with characteristics that offer opportunities for diverse recreational uses while ensuring adequate resources are available to maintain and operate these facilities into the future.

**Parks Strategy 1.b.** Create new and foster current partnerships with local, state, and federal government agencies and organizations.

**Parks Strategy 1.c.** Continue to support and maintain the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board to include community involvement and conduct public outreach.

**Parks Strategy 1.d.** Work with qualified tourism and business entities to consider and identify current and future opportunities for public access to natural recreation assets and potential economic benefits that align with County goals and policies.

**Parks Strategy 1.e.** Continue discussions of projects and strategies included in the recommendations of the Port Gamble Forest Heritage Park Framework.

**Parks Strategy 1.f.** Implement strategies from the Non-Motorized Facility Plan when investing in the development and maintenance of the park system.

**Parks Strategy 1.g.** Collaborate with transportation agencies to improve public transportation connections to parks, ensuring that individuals without private vehicles have safe and reliable access to recreational opportunities.

**Parks Strategy 1.h.** Develop Park funding allocation criteria in a manner that prioritizes and supports projects aimed at enhancing park accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring equitable distribution of resources throughout the community.

## **Parks Goal 2. Funding**

*Provide appropriate and necessary funding and resources to support the management and maintenance of parks, facilities, and open space lands of the highest quality possible.*

**Parks Policy 2.1.** Establish stable funding sources to support the County's parks system.

**Parks Policy 2.2.** Facilitate partnerships with community organizations, businesses, non-profits, and other government organizations to promote and maintain parks facilities and open space to help offset expense burdens.

**Parks Policy 2.3.** Encourage the development of multi-use indoor activity centers, through public/private partnerships where possible, to provide year-round recreational opportunities, meeting the needs of the population.

**Parks Policy 2.4.** Design and develop recreational facilities that require limited maintenance.

**Parks Policy 2.5.** Explore and implement innovative funding and operational methodologies to effectively manage, provide, and enhance quality parks, recreation, and open space experiences, opportunities, and facilities.

**Parks Policy 2.6.** Establish necessary staffing levels to support the growing needs of the Parks Department.

**Parks Policy 2.7.** Invest in upgrades to existing facilities to bring them up to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

**Parks Policy 2.8.** Develop and redevelop County parks to accommodate the preferences and needs of all visitors and residents with particular attention to historically marginalized, elderly, persons with disabilities, young, and low-income populations.

**Parks Policy 2.9.** Develop and redevelop County parks in a manner that allows all-weather activity where feasible.

**Parks Policy 2.10.** Provide visitor accommodations including trailheads, parking, and restrooms where needed, appropriate, and as funds allow.

**Parks Policy 2.11.** Recognize parks as an important component of Kitsap County's economy, climate resiliency, and quality of life.

**Parks Policy 2.12.** Integrate sustainable practices in park management and maintenance to reduce operational costs and minimize the environmental impact of park facilities.

**Parks Strategy 2.a.** Implement the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan to strategically acquire and develop open space, greenways, and wildlife habitat using allocated funds to ensure responsible and sustainable growth.

**Parks Strategy 2.b.** Provide dedicated funding to establish a formal, ongoing capital maintenance and improvement program (e.g., countywide metropolitan parks district).

**Parks Strategy 2.c.** Form partnerships with community groups to maintain natural areas and trails collaboratively and effectively.

**Parks Strategy 2.d.** Encourage homeowner associations and property owners to work with parks agencies and land trusts to effectively maintain buffers and open space within and around developments.

**Parks Strategy 2.e.** Prioritize sustainability in all aspects of park planning, development, and maintenance, emphasizing resource efficiency, water conservation, carbon reduction, waste reduction, and environmental awareness.

**Parks Strategy 2.f.** Explore a countywide Metropolitan Parks District to establish secure long-term funding for parks projects and efforts.

### **Parks Goal 3. Efficiency**

*Establish a land acquisition strategy, including the necessary funding, that will facilitate a more efficient service delivery model.*

**Parks Policy 3.1.** Prioritize the acquisition of trail corridors that connect parks, schools, residential, and urban areas where financially feasible.



**Parks Policy 3.2.** Integrate reusable grey water in parks, golf courses, and other high use public facilities when feasible.

**Parks Policy 3.3.** Utilize low impact development techniques within Kitsap County Parks when practical.

**Parks Policy 3.4.** Coordinate with Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program, as needed, for the development of trails in rural areas through acquisitions or easements under the TDR program.

**Parks Strategy 3.a.** Develop a land acquisition evaluation method to ensure new properties meet specific criteria such as proximity to urban growth areas, multi-functional corridors, climate resilience, cultural significance, equitable access, and achieve desired goals.

**Parks Strategy 3.b.** Purchase lands along the lower main stem of Chico Creek Watershed as recommended in the Chico Creek Main Stem Restoration Plan.

## **Parks Goal 4. Access**

*Provide physical and visual public access opportunities and space for diverse forms of water-oriented recreation in such a way that private property rights, public safety, and shoreline ecological functions and processes are protected in accordance with existing laws and statutes.*

**Parks Policy 4.1.** Support and promote the Kitsap Peninsula Water Trail.

**Parks Policy 4.2.** Prioritize acquisition of properties that provide access to public tidelands to maximize public access.

**Parks Policy 4.3.** Ensure waterfront facilities and infrastructure are designed to accommodate people of all ages, abilities, and mobility levels.

**Parks Policy 4.4.** Consider ranges of compatible uses in our regional parks.

**Parks Strategy 4.a.** Identify and consider opportunities to increase public access and foster environmental and economic benefits associated with Kitsap Peninsula Water Trails and designation as part of the National Water Trails System.

**Parks Strategy 4.b.** Conduct accessibility assessments of waterfront facilities and implement improvements, such as accessible pathways, ramps, and seating areas, to ensure equitable access for individuals with diverse mobility needs.

**Parks Strategy 4.c.** Prioritize ecological restoration efforts and adopt best management practices to protect shoreline ecosystems and promote habitat conservation while accommodating water-oriented recreation.

## **Parks Goal 5. Environmental Compatibility**

*Provide regional parks and open space for passive recreation that preserves the ecological needs of wildlife.*

**Parks Policy 5.1.** Support development of a regional trail system throughout the County and recognize that trails, when built, must be sensitive to the impact on the natural environment.

**Parks Policy 5.2.** Incorporate the Local Habitat Assessment completed by Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife to assist in identifying crucial corridor areas that may not necessarily be identified in the Shoreline Master Program or the Critical Areas Ordinance.

**Parks Policy 5.3.** When implementing the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, ensure that coordination with Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, local Tribes, and other relevant stakeholders occurs to ensure protection of treaty reserved natural and cultural resources.

**Parks Policy 5.4.** Kitsap County's Parks Department will strive to limit conflict between wildlife and humans and decrease impact on habitat by improving identification of protected areas using the Kitsap Natural Resource Asset Management Program as an information source.

**Parks Policy 5.5.** Prioritize redevelopment of existing impacted areas over disturbing undeveloped areas.

**Parks Policy 5.6.** Kitsap County Parks Department will continue to improve educational efforts and signage regarding the importance of limiting contact with wildlife and the value of habitat preservation.

**Parks Policy 5.7.** Mitigate tree canopy cover loss due to increased development while striving to utilize best forest management practices in restoring areas to maintain green space, enhance carbon sequestration, and mitigate GHG emissions within Kitsap County Parks.

**Parks Policy 5.8.** Locate and design trail corridors to also serve wildlife when possible.

**Parks Policy 5.9.** Ensure that the County's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan is consistent with habitat inventories, habitat protection, restoration programs, natural resource management policies, and County code.

**Parks Policy 5.10.** Incorporate climate resilience principles into park and open space management plans, using adaptive management strategies to monitor and respond to climate-related changes.

**Parks Strategy 5.a.** Educate citizens on natural resources, forest stewardship, wildlife, and forest ecology, including native flora and fauna indigenous to the Pacific Northwest.

**Parks Strategy 5.b.** Identify both acquisition and preservation opportunities for open space in rural areas.

**Parks Strategy 5.c.** Identify, assess, and prioritize parks resource areas for their suitability for recreational uses and needs for habitat restoration or preservation, utilizing the Kitsap Natural Resource Asset Management Program as a tool.

**Parks Strategy 5.d.** Develop individual forest management plans for regional and heritage parks.

**Parks Strategy 5.e.** Develop a climate sustainability and resiliency management plan for Parks-owned properties.

**Parks Strategy 5.f.** Identify and designate specific areas within regional parks and open spaces that serve as multi-functional corridors, integrating both recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat connectivity.