



CITY OF MERCER ISLAND PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE PLAN

Final Draft - January 2022



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Luther Burbank Docks and Boiler Building

Message from the Chief of Operations

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1

INTRODUCTION

The City of Mercer Island Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan creates a vision for an innovative, inclusive, and interconnected system of parks, trails, and open spaces that promotes recreation, health, environmental conservation, and fiscal responsibility as integral elements of a thriving, livable Mercer Island.

Aubrey Davis Park Picnic Shelter

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The City of Mercer Island Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan, (PROS Plan), is an update to the 2014 Plan that builds on the previously completed planning work and incorporates the feedback from an extensive community engagement process conducted in 2020 and throughout 2021. This Plan creates a vision for an innovative, inclusive, and interconnected system of parks, trails, and open space that promotes recreation, health, environmental conservation, and fiscal responsibility as integral elements of a thriving, livable Mercer Island.

The PROS Plan serves as a blueprint for the growth, enhancement, and management of the City of Mercer

Island parks and recreation system and assists in guiding decisions related to planning, acquiring, developing, and maintaining parks, open space, trails, and recreational facilities. This plan also identifies priorities for recreation programs, special events, and arts and cultural activities.

The 2021 PROS Plan provides updated system inventories, demographic conditions, needs analyses, and a comprehensive capital project list. The Plan identifies parks and recreation goals and establishes a long-range capital plan for the Mercer Island parks and recreation system, including action items and strategies for implementation over the next six to 10 years. The recommendations in this Plan are based on community input, evaluations of the existing park system, operating conditions, and fiscal considerations.

The PROS Plan is part of the City's broader Comprehensive Plan and is consistent with the guidelines established by the Growth Management Act. The PROS Plan, updated approximately every six years, allows Mercer Island to remain current with community interests and retain eligibility for state grants through the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), which administers various grant programs for outdoor recreation and conservation efforts.

PLANNING PROCESS

This PROS Plan represents the culmination of a two-year planning effort, and reflects the community's interests and needs for parks, open space, trails, facilities, and programming - balanced with the realities of budget considerations. The planning process, which included a variety of public outreach activities, encouraged public engagement to inform the development of the priorities and future direction of Mercer Island's park and recreation system. Community members expressed their interests through surveys, public meetings, online outreach, and Parks and Recreation Commission meetings.

In addition to community engagement, the actions identified in this Plan are based on:

- An inventory and assessment of the City's existing parks and recreation facilities to establish the system's current performance and to identify needed maintenance and capital repair and replacement projects.
- Service level and walkability assessments to quantify the system's ability to serve current and future residents.

The Plan's capital facilities section and accompanying implementation and funding strategies are intended to sustain and enhance, preserve, and steward the City's critical parks and recreation infrastructure.

GUIDED BY VALUES

The City of Mercer Island adheres to a collection of values to help shape its future and provide the foundation for a host of community actions. The following seven values are among the community's most essential and have framed the development of the City's recent Comprehensive Plan:

- Residential Community
- Quality Municipal Services
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Education is the Key
- Livability is Paramount
- Cherish the Environment
- Sustainable Community

The City's mission statement also provides a framework for the future planning of Mercer Island, and it reads as follows:

We provide outstanding municipal services that enhance and protect the environment, the quality of life, and the community health, safety, and welfare on Mercer Island.

Many of the City's values and the heart of its mission statement are reflected, in part, through the provision of parks, open space, trails, facilities, and recreation services.

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

The Mercer Island Parks & Recreation Department significantly contributes to a sense of community and an enhanced quality of life for Mercer Island residents by providing recreation and social opportunities to people of all ages.

The Department is responsible for the administration, planning, marketing, management, and maintenance of parks, trails, open space, facilities, and recreation programs. The Department manages the 42,000 square foot Mercer Island Community and Event Center, 481 acres of parks and open space, and 28 miles of trails.

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic considerably impacted the Parks & Recreation Department. The Community & Event Center closed in March 2020, and all recreation programs, special events, and facility rentals were canceled, which eliminated a critical funding source for the Department. Athletic field reservations and picnic shelter/area reservations were also canceled but resumed on a limited basis in the summer of 2020. When this PROS Plan update was developed, the Recreation Transition Team was focused on re-establishing operations for the Mercer Island Community and Event Center and rebuilding the Recreation division. Pre-pandemic, the Department offered nearly 200 recreation programs and events annually and hosted

BENEFITS OF PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE

A number of organizations and non-profits have documented the overall health and wellness benefits provided by parks, open space and trails. The Trust for Public Land published a report called *The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space*. This report makes the following observations about the health, economic, environmental and social benefits of parks and open space:

- Physical activity makes people healthier.
- Physical activity increases with access to parks.
- Contact with the natural world improves physical and psychological health.
- Value is added to community and economic development sustainability.
- Benefits of tourism are enhanced.
- Trees are effective in improving air quality and assisting with stormwater control.
- Recreational opportunities for all ages are provided.



Aubrey Davis Park Area B basketball court



Volunteers planting native plants at Luther Burbank Park



Spectators at a Summer Celebration fireworks show at Luther Burbank Park

Physical Activity Benefits

Residents in communities with increased access to parks, recreation, natural areas and trails have more opportunities for physical activity, both through recreation and active transportation. By participating in physical activity, residents can reduce their risk of being or becoming overweight or obese, decrease their likelihood of suffering from chronic diseases, such as heart disease and type-2 diabetes, and improve their levels of stress and anxiety. Nearby access to parks has been shown to increase levels of physical activity. According to studies cited in a 2010 report by the National Park and Recreation Association, the majority of people of all ages who visit parks are physically active during their visit. Also, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that greater access to parks leads to 25% more people exercising three or more days per week.

Social & Community Benefits

Park and recreation facilities provide opportunities to engage with family, friends, and neighbors, thereby increasing social capital and community cohesion, which can improve residents' mental health and overall well-being. People who feel that they are connected to their community and those who participate in recreational, community and other activities are more likely to have better mental and physical health and to live longer lives. Access to parks and recreational facilities has also been linked to reductions in crime, particularly juvenile delinquency.

Economic Benefits

Parks and recreation facilities can bring positive economic impacts through increased property values, increased attractiveness for businesses and workers (quality of life), and through direct increases in employment opportunities. In Washington, outdoor recreation generates \$10.2 billion in total outdoor recreation value added and \$5.8 billion in wages and salaries. Preserving access to outdoor recreation protects the economy, the businesses, the communities and the people who depend on the ability to play outside. According to the 2020 Outdoor Recreation Economy Report published by the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation can grow jobs and drive the economy through management and investment in parks, waters and trails as an interconnected system designed to sustain economic dividends for citizens.

over 125,000 annual visitors to the Mercer Island Community and Event Center.

The Park Maintenance and Natural Resources teams were also significantly impacted by the pandemic and are now housed within the Public Works/Operations Department, one of many organizational changes made in 2020. Workforce reductions due to budget cuts significantly scaled back park maintenance functions through most of 2020 and were gradually restored in 2021. In addition, natural resource stewardship programs were reduced due to pandemic guidelines that significantly limited group gatherings. At the time this plan was developed, recovery work was underway to catch up on systemwide vegetation and landscaping maintenance.

Accomplishments Since the 2014 PROS Plan

The 2014 PROS Plan guided City officials, management, and staff in making decisions about planning, operating, and implementing various parks and recreation services. The following represents some of the major accomplishments realized following the adoption of the previous Plan.

- Luther Burbank North Wetland Boardwalk Extension (2014)
- Open Space Vegetation Plan 10-year Update (2015)
- Calkins Landing Street End Improvements (2015)
- Luther Burbank Park Calkins Point Shoreline Improvements (2016)

- Luther Burbank Hawthorn Trail Installation (2017)
- Luther Burbank Park Boiler Building Study (2017)
- Island Crest Park North Field Synthetic Turf and LED Lights (2018)
- South Mercer Playfields playground replacement (2018)
- Groveland Beach Pier Repairs and Shoreline Improvements (2018)
- Adoption of the Comprehensive Arts & Culture Plan (2018)
- Mercer Island Tree Canopy Assessment (2018)
- Aubrey Davis Park Master Plan adopted (2019)
- Parks and Recreation Commission established (2019)
- Development of a Recreation Restart Plan to guide post-pandemic recovery (2021)

The Parks and Recreation Department also faced multiple challenges since the 2014 PROS Plan was adopted. In 2019 several recreation services and programs were reduced as a result of Citywide fiscal challenges. The lifeguard program was eliminated and a number of special events, including the Summer Celebration, were canceled. Operating hours were scaled back at the Community and Event Center, and programming was reduced. As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operations of the Parks and Recreation Department in 2020 and 2021.



Young athletes at Island Crest Park north field



Commissions & Boards

Parks & Recreation Commission

In January 2019, the City Council created the seven-member Parks & Recreation Commission to serve in a policy advisory capacity to the City Council. The responsibilities of the Commission include:

- Providing a forum for the community to express their views on parks, recreation, and other community services, including serving as a liaison to the Mercer Island Library and the King County Library System.
- Supporting inclusivity and embracing cultural diversity in all policy recommendations.
- Serving as community ambassadors and helping to promote parks and recreation activities within the City of Mercer Island, including support for cooperative relationships with community partners and other organizations.
- Providing recommendations on park master plans, potential property acquisitions, certain budget items, grant funding, and other policy matters, as assigned by the City Council.
- Collaborating with staff on developing and updating the PROS Plan as a component of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The Parks and Recreation Commission collaborates with other City boards and commissions in performing their work, particularly the Arts Council and the Open Space Conservancy Trust.

Arts Council

The Arts Council was established in 1985 with a mission to nurture, promote, and support high-quality arts and cultural activities for the Mercer Island community. The goals of the Arts Council include:

- Advocating for the arts, artists, and arts organizations of Mercer Island.
- Stimulating and promoting community awareness, education, and enjoyment of the fine arts.
- Supporting performing, visual, and literary arts programs, projects, and events.

The Arts Council is supported by the Parks and Recreation Department staff.

Open Space Conservancy Trust

The Mercer Island Open Space Conservancy Trust is appointed to oversee the passive, low-impact, recreational open space properties placed in the Trust. Currently, the Trust owns and oversees the management

of Pioneer Park and Engstrom Open Space. The Trust was established by ordinance on February 10, 1992 (amended May 6, 1996). The ordinance defines open space as a property of potential natural or scenic resources that the City has reserved for passive and low impact forms of use, such as walking, jogging, and picnicking. The seven-member Trust meets quarterly and is supported by the Parks and Recreation Department staff.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Public engagement during a pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and the health mandates for social distancing have transformed the way municipalities plan for and conduct public engagement. While hope remains for a safe return to some semblance of normalcy, the City of Mercer Island implemented public processes that were COVID-sensitive and utilized a range of tools to optimize its use of online engagement for communications and community feedback.

Balancing the visions for the future with current fiscal realities

For the past several years, strains on the City's operating and capital budgets have led to the re-assessment of the Parks and Recreation Department's structure, necessitating the evaluation of all programs and services. The framework of the PROS Plan acknowledges the fiscal challenges of the City, while providing a community-based foundation to shape future project priorities and inform implementation strategies. This includes consideration of future maintenance and operations impacts and potential development costs for proposed projects.

Deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure

The City of Mercer Island's parks, trails, and open space system is facing numerous challenges related to aging infrastructure. Deferred maintenance and changing demands translate to the need for up-to-date assessments of the condition, function, and quality of park system assets, in addition to understanding where deficiencies may exist. Park aesthetics and amenities are important to usage patterns. Also, a user's perception of personal safety is a determining factor in how one uses and feels in and around parks, trails, and open spaces.

The conditions assessment of the parks, trails, and open spaces included in this PROS Plan provided a baseline of current conditions to inform the development of

the capital improvement program and implementation strategies. The fiscal needs of the parks system are significant and long-term funding strategies are needed.

Equity, inclusivity and accessibility

The City of Mercer Island parks, trails, and open space system were primarily developed before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was implemented. The conditions assessment identified several deficiencies related to ADA compliance. The City must continue to find ways to provide safe and equitable access to parks, trails, open space, facilities, recreation programs, and other services. The social contexts of disability rights, LGBTQ+ advocacy, and racial justice have led the City to reexamine its responsibility in addressing these issues.

Balancing passive and active uses

Mercer Island residents have worked to preserve and maintain the Island's greenspaces over many decades. The park system currently includes nearly 300 acres of open space. These areas serve a critical environmental purpose, including sustaining a robust tree canopy, supporting wildlife, clean air, and reducing pollutants in stormwater runoff. Some open spaces include passive use trails and provide much-needed natural respite, while other open spaces (like steep slopes) function solely as conservation areas.

From accessible playgrounds to spray parks to natural play areas, the types of play experiences provided are changing and diversifying, and the population of Mercer Island has increased over time. The demand for new amenities must be balanced against preserving and maintaining open space and natural areas. New amenities may require the use or re-use of existing parkland, or more parkland may be required to support the community's future needs.

GUIDING DOCUMENTS

This PROS Plan is one of several documents that comprise Mercer Island's long-range planning and policy framework. Past community plans and other relevant documents were reviewed for policy direction and goals as they relate to parks, open space, trails, recreation, and arts and cultural opportunities across Mercer Island. The following list of plans was reviewed, and summaries for each appear in Appendix H.

- Pedestrian & Bicycle Facilities Plan (2010)
- Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan (2014)
- City of Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan (2015)
- Open Space Vegetation Management Plan (2015)

- Comprehensive Arts & Culture Plan (2018)
- Trail Structure & Maintenance Inventory Report (2018)
- Site Specific Park Master Plans, including Aubrey Davis Park Master Plan (2019), Luther Burbank Park Master Plan (2006), Pioneer Park Master Plan (2001), and others

CONTENTS OF THE PLAN

The remainder of the Mercer Island PROS Plan is organized as follows:

- Chapter 2: Community Profile – provides an overview of the City of Mercer Island and its demographics.
- Chapter 3: Community Engagement – highlights the methods used to engage the Mercer Island community in developing the Plan.
- Chapter 4: Goals & Objectives – provides a policy framework for the parks and recreation system grouped by major functional or program area.
- Chapter 5: Classification & Inventory – describes the existing park and recreation system.
- Chapter 6: Parks & Active Use Spaces
- Chapter 7: Recreation, Arts & Culture
- Chapter 8: Trails
- Chapter 9: Open Space, Land Conservation & Stewardship
- Chapter 10: Operations & Maintenance
- Chapter 11: Capital Planning & Implementation – details a 6-year program for addressing park and recreation facility enhancements, maintenance, or expansion projects, and describes a range of strategies and alternatives to consider in implementing the Plan.
- Appendices: Provides technical or supporting information to the planning effort and includes survey summaries, focus group notes, recreation trends, and funding options, among others.

2 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Mercer Island is a full-service city dedicated to quality public service. Parks, open spaces, and recreational opportunities are highly valued. The Island has 481 acres of park and open space including neighborhood parks and trails, as well as several larger recreational areas, including Luther Burbank Park and Aubrey Davis Park surrounding the Interstate 90 corridor.

Paddleboard camp off the east shoreline of Luther Burbank Park

The City of Mercer Island is located on an island of the same name in Lake Washington and consists of high-quality residential areas, conserved open space, parks, and miles of shoreline. Mercer Island, which was formerly part of East Seattle, was incorporated in 1960 and has a population of just over 25,000.

Mercer Island, nestled between the large population centers of Seattle and Bellevue, has its own distinct identity. Most of Mercer Island's 6.2 square miles of land area (just over five miles long and two miles wide) is developed with single family homes. Mercer Island is served by a town center and two other commercial areas that provide a range of business and service opportunities for the community.

Mercer Island is a full-service city dedicated to quality public service. Parks, open spaces, and recreational

opportunities are highly valued. Mercer Island has 481 acres of park and open space, including neighborhood parks and trails, and several larger recreational areas, including Luther Burbank Park and Aubrey Davis Park surrounding the Interstate 90 corridor. The park system currently includes nearly 300 acres of open space. These areas serve a critical purpose, including preservation of the tree canopy, supporting wildlife, clean air, and reducing pollutants in stormwater runoff.

Note: This chapter was prepared prior to obtaining the full report from the 2020 United States Census. The total population of Mercer Island had been released at the time the draft was prepared, but the remaining census data had not. This chapter reflects demographic data from pre-2020 sources.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The population of Mercer Island is 25,748 according to the 2020 Census and has grown slowly over the past 60 years, see Figure 2.1. Mercer Island prides itself on being a residential community and is home to many families with children as well as older adults. The City’s residents are generally very well educated and many have higher incomes than other county and state residents. Mercer Island has limited employment and commercial centers. Most employed residents commute to other areas of the Seattle metropolitan region for jobs in the education, technology, health care, professional, and finance sectors, although commuting patterns have shifted dramatically due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2.1. Population Characteristics: Mercer Island, King County, and Washington

Demographics	Mercer Island	King County	Washington	Source
Population Characteristics				
Population (2020)	25,748	2,269,675	7,705,281	A
Population (2010)	22,699	1,931,249	6,724,540	B
Population (2000)	22,036	1,737,034	5,894,121	C
Percent Change (2000-20)	16.85%	30.66%	30.73%	D
Persons w/ Disabilities (%)	10.1%%	9.5%%	12.7%%	D
Household Characteristics				
Households	10,570	969,234	3,202,241	A
Percent with children	33.9%	28.8%	30.6%	D
Median Household Income	\$147,566	\$94,974	\$73,775	D
Average Household Size	2.50	2.45	2.55	D
Average Family Size	2.99	3.06	3.09	D
Owner Occupancy Rate	68.7%	56.9%	63.0%	D
Age Groups				
Median Age	46.0	37.0	37.7	D
Population < 5 years of age	3.8%	5.8%	6.1%	D
Population < 18 years of age	23.2%	20.4%	22.2%	D
Population 25 - 64 years of age	56.4%	66.6%%	62.7%%	D
Population > 65 years of age	20.4%	13.0%	15.1%	D

Sources

- A. U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census Redistricting Data Summary File, accessed August 2021.
- B. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census
- C. U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census
- D. U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

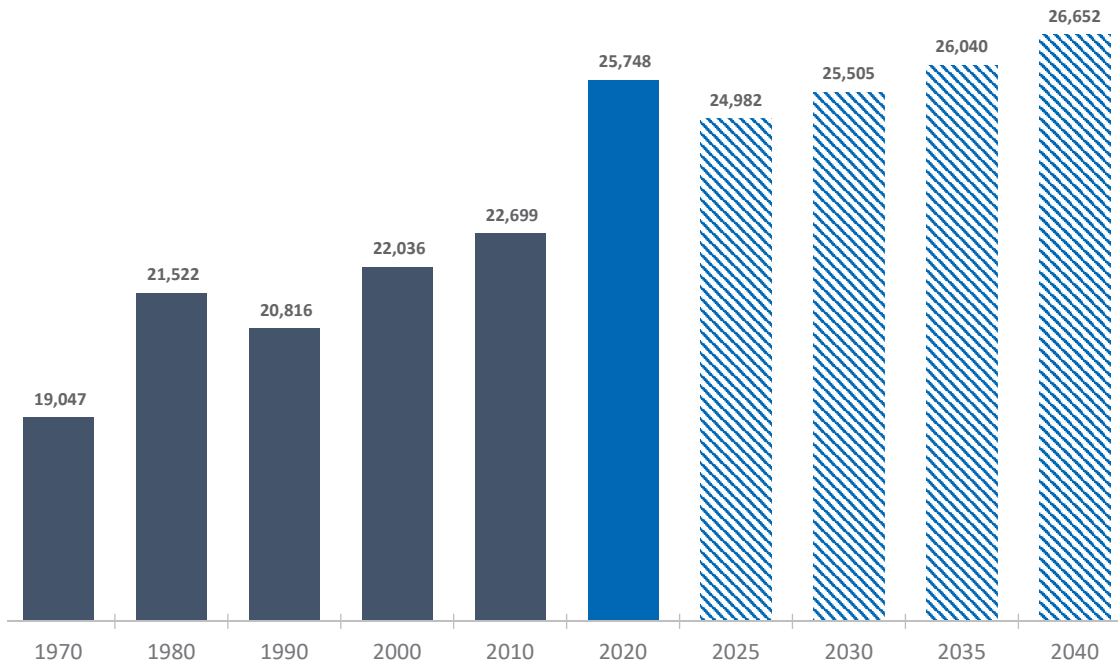
Population

The City of Mercer Island has generally grown at a slow but steady rate since its incorporation in 1960, see Figure 2.2. The City is currently home to 25,748 residents (2020), and its population is expected to grow by approximately 8% by 2040, to 26,652 people.

Annual population growth has averaged about 0.5% per year over the past forty years but is expected to slow to less than 0.25% per year over the coming decades. Mercer Island currently makes up about 1% of the combined population of King County. Population forecasts are provided by the Puget Sound Regional Council.



Figure 2.2. Population – Actual and Projected: 1970-2040



Sources: US Census; Puget Sound Regional Council

Age Group Distribution

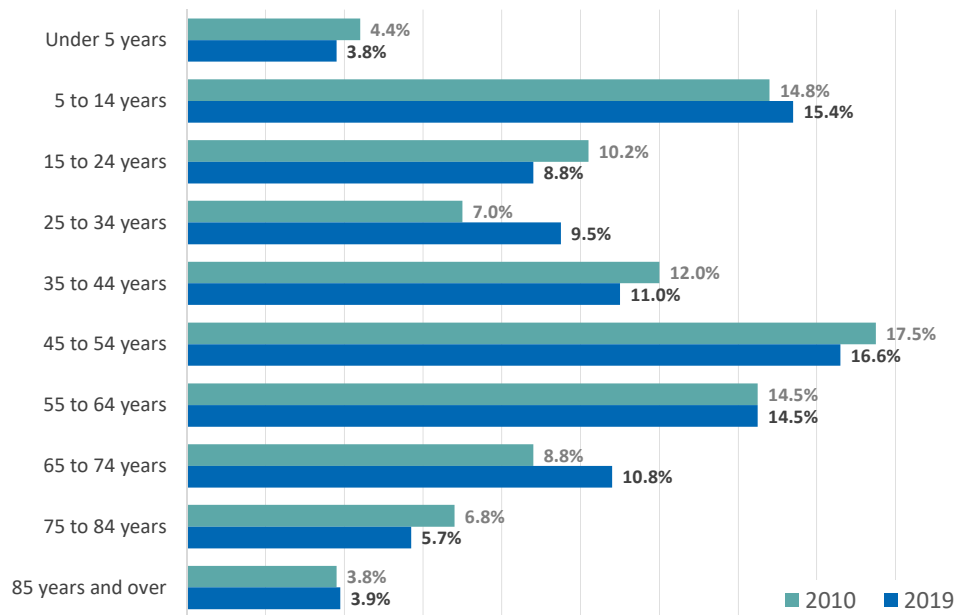
Mercer Island has a median age of 46 (2019) and a relatively high population of families with children (34%). This distinction has significant implications for parks and recreation needs. Adults between 40 to 59 years old make up the City’s largest 20-year population group, comprising 31% of the overall population in 2019, see Figure 2.3.

- Youth under 5 years of age make up 4% of Mercer Island’s population (see Figure 3). This group represents preschool and tot programs and facilities users, and, as trails and open space users, are often in strollers. These individuals are the future participants in youth activities.
- Children, ages 5 to 14 years, make up 15% of Mercer Island’s population. This group represents users of current youth programs, family programs, and event participants.
- Teens and young adults, ages 15 to 24 years make up 9% of Mercer Island’s population. This group represents users that are in transition from youth programs to adult programs and participate in teen/young adult programs where available. Members of this age group are often seasonal employment seekers.
- While approximately 28% of residents are youth and young adults up to 24 years of age, 37% are 25 to 54 years old, and 35% are 55 and older.

- Adults, ages 25 to 34, make up 10% of Mercer Island’s population. These residents may be entering long-term relationships and establishing families and are users of fitness and athletic programs, and park facilities.
- Adults between 35 and 54 years of age represent users of a wide range of adult programs and park facilities. Their characteristics extend from having children attending preschool and youth programs to becoming empty nesters. They participate in a variety of recreation programs and utilize many types of park facilities. This age group makes up 28% of the Island’s population.
- Older adults, age 55 and over, make up approximately 35% of Mercer Island’s population. This group represents users of adult and senior programs who also extensively use park facilities. These residents may be approaching retirement or already retired and potentially spending time with grandchildren. This group also ranges from very healthy, active seniors to more physically inactive seniors.

The City’s median age (46) has remained stable since 2010 and is significantly older than that of King County (37.2) and Washington State (37.6).

Figure 2.3. Age Group Distributions: 2010 & 2019



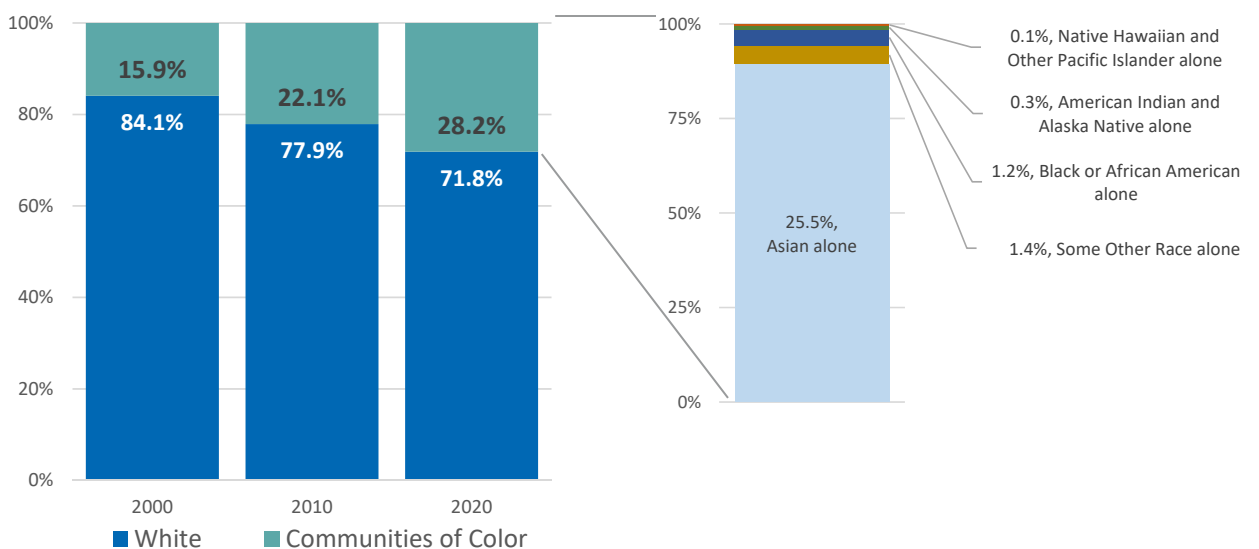
Source: 2010 Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey

Race and Ethnicity

According to the 2020 US Census Redistricting Data, the City was 72% White, 25% Asian, 1.2% African American, less than 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native or Pacific Islander, and 1.4% other some other race alone (see Figure 2.4). Approximately 4.5% of people identified as Hispanic or Latino of any race. In King County, communities of color make up a significantly larger portion of the population (35% compared to 28% on Mercer Island).

In 2019, approximately 20% of Mercer Island’s population spoke a language other than English at home. Asian and Pacific Island languages and other Indo-European languages comprise most non-English language groups. Mercer Island has a lower percentage of people who speak a language other than English at home compared to King County as a whole (27%). The City should consider how it could best provide recreational opportunities, programs, and information that is accessible and able to meet the language needs of all community members.

Figure 2.4. Changes in Racial Composition - 2000 - 2020



Sources: 2000, 2010, 2020 US Census



Household Characteristics

The 2019 average household size on Mercer Island was 2.5 people, slightly lower than the state (2.55) average. The average family size is larger, at 2.99 people. Of the 9,867 households in the City, 34% were families with children under 18, and 23% were individuals living alone. According to Puget Sound Regional Council projections, the number of households on Mercer Island is anticipated to grow by 1,239 to approximately 11,106 by 2044.

Employment & Education

The 2019 work force population (16 years and over) of Mercer Island was 20,473 (80%). Of this population, 63% is in the labor force, 4% is unemployed, and 33% is not in the labor force. Over seven in ten employed residents work in management, business, science, or arts occupations. One in two work in either the education/health care industries or the professional/management industries. The finance and insurance sector also employs a large percentage of local workers (approximately 13%).

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, approximately 81% of Mercer Island residents over age 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 94% have at least some college education. This level of education attainment is higher than that of King County and the state (in which 77% and 68% of residents have some college, respectively). Additionally, 99% of City residents have a high school degree or higher, approximately 8 percentage points higher than the statewide average.

Income & Poverty

A community's level of household income can impact the types of recreational services prioritized by community members, as well as their willingness and ability to pay for recreational services. Perhaps more importantly, household income is closely linked with levels of physical activity. According to an analysis of national data by the Active Living by Design organization, low-income households are three times more likely to live a sedentary lifestyle than middle- and upper-income households.

In 2019, the median household income on Mercer Island was \$136,644. This income level was more than double the median income for Washington households (\$66,174) and significantly higher than that of King County households (\$83,571).

Higher-income households have an increased ability and willingness to pay for recreation and leisure services,

and they often face fewer barriers to participation. Approximately 67% of Mercer Island households have incomes in the higher income brackets (\$100,000 and greater), significantly more than across the state (30%).

At the lower end of the household income scale, approximately 8% percent of Mercer Island households earn less than \$25,000 annually, significantly fewer than households in King County (13%), Washington State (17%), and across the United States (23%). In 2019, 2.5% of Mercer Island's families were living below the poverty level. The poverty threshold was an income of \$24,600 for a family of four. This percentage is also significantly lower than the countywide (approximately 6%) and statewide (8%) levels. On Mercer Island, poverty affects 2.8% of youth under 18 and 4.6% of those 65 and older.

Generally, lower-income residents may face barriers to physical activity, including reduced access to parks and recreational facilities, a lack of transportation options, a lack of time, and poor health. Low-income residents may also be less financially able to afford recreational service fees or to pay for services, such as childcare, that can make physical activity possible.

Persons with Disabilities

The 2019 American Community Survey reported 10.1% (2,571 persons) of Mercer Island's population 5 years and older as having a disability that interferes with life activities. This number is lower than county and state averages (both about 12%). Approximately 6% of residents between 18 and 64 have a disability. Among residents 65 and older, the percentage rises to 30%, which is slightly lower than the percentage found in the general senior population of Washington State (36%).

Planning, designing, and operating a park system that facilitates participation by residents of all abilities will help ensure compliance with Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition to ADA, there are other accommodations that people with disabilities may need to access parks and participate in recreation programs.

Health Status

Residents of Mercer Island tend to be in better health than residents of King County and Washington State, according to the King County City Health Profile, developed by Seattle/King County Public Health in 2019. Mercer Island residents have high life expectancies (86 years), and fewer residents experience poor mental or physical health as compared to the county and state. Residents also have a lower prevalence of many health risk factors, including obesity, lack of

exercise, diabetes, asthma, and hypertension, compared to King County residents, who have fewer risk factors than residents of Washington State as a whole.

In addition, King County residents rank as some of the healthiest residents in Washington State (2nd out of 39 counties), according to the County Health Rankings. Approximately 16% of Mercer Island and 22% of King County adults are overweight or obese, compared to 27% of Washington State adults.

Approximately 9% of Mercer Island and 15% of King County adults ages 20 and older report getting no leisure-time physical activity – lower than the statewide average of 18%. This figure may be due, in part, to the large number of places to participate in physical activity,

including parks and public or private community centers, gyms, or other recreational facilities. Over 95% of residents in King County have access to adequate physical activity opportunities, which is slightly higher than the 88% average for all Washington State residents.

According to the County Health Rankings, King County also ranks in the top tier of Washington State counties for health outcomes, including length and quality of life, and health factors, such as health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and the physical environment.



Skate Park at Mercerdale Park

3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Community engagement played an essential role in developing the PROS Plan. Although the planning process occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous efforts were made to connect with the community, seek their input and provide information about the project.

City staff during public engagement for the Aubrey Davis Park Master Plan process

Public outreach methods were varied and extensive, including:

- Three community-wide surveys.
- Two virtual public meetings for general public participation and discussion
- Meetings with the Park and Recreation Commission, Arts Council, Open Space Conservancy Trust, and City Council
- Mercer Island City website and online engagement forum (Let's Talk) with plan information and contact opportunities
- Multiple social media postings, email blasts, and city newsletter articles

Community Survey

In early 2020, a community-wide, mail and online survey was conducted to assess the recreational needs and priorities of Mercer Island residents. On February 4, 2020, the survey was mailed to a random sample (statistically valid) of 2,500 households within the City of Mercer Island boundaries. An online version of the survey was posted to the City's website several days later to allow the mail recipients to receive first notice about the survey. Overall, 525 responses were completed from the random sample mail survey (21% response rate), and 1,238 responses were generated via the online link published on the City's website. In total, 1,763 survey responses were recorded.

The survey measured current levels of satisfaction and

which facilities were primarily being used by residents. Residents were asked about future improvements and the types of recreational amenities they would like to see considered for the park system. Survey respondents were asked about:

- Performance and quality of programs and parks
- Usage of City parks and recreation facilities
- Overall satisfaction with the value of services being delivered by the City
- Opinions about the need for various park, recreation, and trail improvements
- Priorities for future park and recreation services and facilities

Significant survey findings are noted below, and a more detailed discussion of results can be found in the needs assessment chapters covering parks, open space, recreation, and trails (Chapters 6 - 9).

Major Survey Findings:

- **Livability:** Nearly all respondents (99%) feel that public parks and recreation opportunities are important or essential to the quality of life on Mercer Island.
- **Overall Satisfaction:** A large majority (94%) of respondents indicated that they are very or somewhat satisfied with the overall value they receive from Mercer Island Parks & Recreation for parks, facilities, and open space.
- **Usage:** Park visitation is high, with 68% of mail survey respondents visiting at least once a week and another 25% visiting one to three times per month.
- **Park Amenity Priorities:** Trails for walking ranked as the amenity of highest need. The second tier of need included bike trails, indoor fitness facilities, picnic shelters, and off-leash dog areas.
- **Programming:** Respondents indicated a higher interest in seeing more performing arts, educational and boating classes, and programs.

The survey summary is provided in Appendix A.

Recreation Reset Survey

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City canceled and suspended recreation services and closed facilities in March 2020 due to ongoing public health and safety concerns. In late 2020, a planning process was initiated to assess the scope and function of recreation programming to prepare for summer 2021. An online survey was conducted in January and February 2021 to focus on needs and priorities for recreation programs and operations of the Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC). A short, five-question survey was promoted via the City's Let's Talk online forum and social media platforms, and 565 responses were collected.

Major Survey Findings:

- **Balancing benefit:** The highest positive scores were for programs or services that balance individual and community benefits or where the community benefits considerably (examples: providing summer camp opportunities for youth, and programs that provide scholarships to increase accessibility).
- **Private rentals to support public programs:** There was consensus that maximizing private evening and weekend use to support lower-cost public programs and services was "really important."
- **Use of space:** Respondents stated that the MICEC's space should be prioritized for seniors, youth, adaptive recreation, school break/after school programs, and fitness.

The survey summary is provided in Appendix B.

Parks & Recreation System Priorities Survey

A third survey was administered to gain insights on priority projects and improvements. As with the first community survey, a random-sample of 2,500 households received a print version with a QR code and URL access to an online portal (statistically valid), plus the broader community was encouraged to participate through an identical online-only version of the survey. The 15-question survey was used to compare priorities from the 2020 survey and gauge community interest in park, trail and program enhancements. The survey was promoted via the Let's Talk online forum and social media postings. In all, the survey collected 1,329 responses, with 505 from the random-sample mail



version (20 % response rate) and 824 from the online-only, community-wide survey.

Major Survey Findings:

- Most needed park system improvements: A strong plurality of respondents (44%) noted connecting gaps in the trail system as a top priority, which was also 13 points higher than the next highest ranked option provided. The next top three improvements were expanding maintenance and restoration of open space (31%), repairing or upgrading waterfront areas (29%), and improving restroom facilities (25%).
- Outdoor recreation amenities: Strong majorities of respondents indicated an interest in walking or jogging trails (93% very or somewhat important) and open space and natural areas (90% very or somewhat important). A second tier of amenities of strong interest include restrooms (84%), bike lanes (68%), pocket parks (70%), parking (70%) and playgrounds (61%).
- Water-oriented programs or activities: A majority of respondents (67%) were either very or somewhat interested in access to kayak or paddleboard rentals.

A survey summary is provided in Appendix C.

Virtual Public Meeting #1

On March 23, 2021, the City hosted a virtual public meeting using Zoom technology. The public meeting included a number of ways for the public to provide input, including live polling and topic-oriented breakout rooms. The meeting started with a presentation to inform participants about the PROS Plan process and purpose, highlight some of the current challenges facing the City’s parks and recreation system, and provide an overview of the structure and format of the virtual meeting. Community members were asked to share their ideas and comments and help identify priorities for future programs and investments through in-session live polling questions, live chat, and three distinct breakout room discussions. Participants were assigned to breakout rooms that a City staff member or project consultant facilitated. Breakout room topics included waterfront and water-oriented recreation, trails, and balancing active and passive park uses.

Key themes from the March 23, 2021 meeting:

- Community: A majority of participants in the meeting noted that they missed events and festivals most during the pandemic, concluding that community gatherings remain firmly in demand on Mercer Island.

- Aging park amenities: Most felt that addressing aging park amenities and extending the useful life of existing facilities was the most pressing need in the City’s park system.
- Future programming: Boating and performing arts programming had the highest interest when considering expansion or enhancement of certain kinds of programming.
- Hot Topic: BMX or mountain biking facility access was a popular topic at the meeting, with much discussion on both sides of the issue. Some participants felt that expanded bike facilities are needed while others expressed concern that open space and natural forest areas should not accommodate these types of active park uses.

More than 70 people participated in the meeting. A meeting summary from the virtual public meeting is provided in Appendix D.

Virtual Public Meeting #2

On September 28, 2021, the City hosted a second virtual public meeting using Zoom technology. The virtual meeting was structured in a manner similar to the first virtual public meeting and included an introductory presentation, live polling, topic-oriented breakout rooms, and a question-and-answer period. The breakout room topics focused on the challenges related to balancing existing park amenities with community interest for new or different recreation opportunities, as well as exploring community interests related to system-wide playground equipment replacements.

Key themes from the September 28, 2021 meeting:

- The majority of respondents indicated that prioritizing dock repair and replacement at parks is very important (49%) or somewhat important (37%).
- Regarding trails, the two top priorities noted were to improve maintenance and upkeep of existing trails (44%) and to acquire and build new trail connections through the purchase of land, easements, or rights-of-way (31%).
- Regarding the installation of new recreational amenities, participants noted interest to accommodate new uses at existing popular and accessible parks (29%) and to add amenities to the areas currently underserved by active play areas (28%).
- A majority of participants favored either converting some existing tennis courts as multi-sport courts by adding pickleball lines (48%) or replacing some tennis courts with dedicated pickleball courts (34%).

Fifty-five people participated in the meeting. A summary from the second virtual public meeting is provided in Appendix E.

Parks & Recreation Commission Meetings

The Parks and Recreation Commission provided feedback on the development of the PROS Plan during nine regularly scheduled public sessions. The first session occurred in January 2020 in a joint session with the Arts Council. Following a pause in the PROS Plan project due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission resumed discussions of the plan in January 2021 and provided guidance and insight as the project progressed through the end of 2021. The Commission spent significant effort reviewing and commenting on the PROS Plan public process, project priorities, and system-wide goals and strategies to implement future projects.

Other Public Sessions

Other commissions and boards were engaged as best as possible with the development of the PROS Plan, including the Arts Council and the Open Space Conservancy Trust. City Council provided feedback, guidance and direction on the draft PROS Plan, prior to final adoption.

Other Outreach

In addition to the direct outreach opportunities described above, the Mercer Island community was informed about the planning process through a variety of media platforms. The following methods were used to share information about the project and provide opportunities to participate and offer their comments:

- City website home page
- City newsletter: MI Weekly
- Let's Talk project website and online forum
- Email blasts
- Social media: Twitter, Instagram & Facebook

Figure 3.1 provides samples of some media posts.

Figure 3.1. Samples of Community Outreach Postings

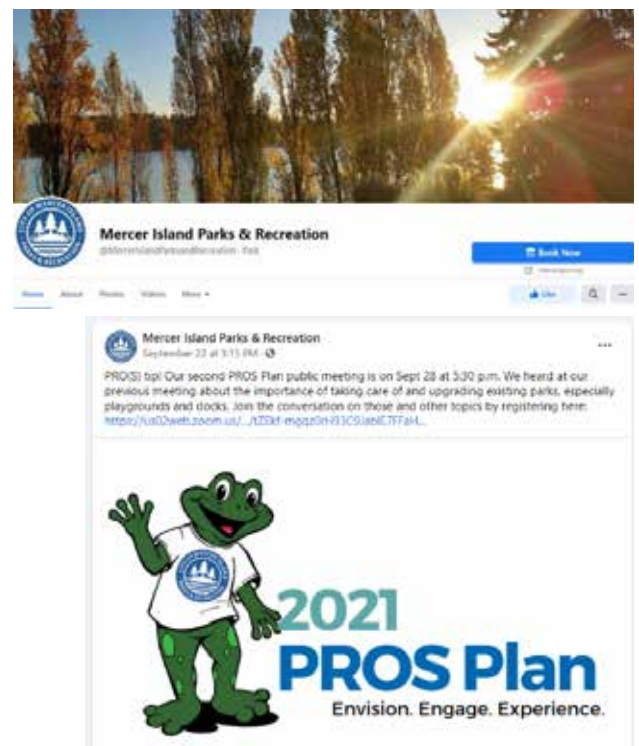
Public Meeting #1 Posting on Let's Talk



Community Survey Posting on Let's Talk



Public Meeting #2 Posting on Facebook



4 GOALS & OBJECTIVES



Included in this chapter and at the heart of the PROS Plan is the establishment of goals and objectives that provide strategic direction for the Mercer Island Parks and Recreation system.

Summer camp fun at the Island Crest Park ballfields.

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.”
- “Protect the environment and enhance the state’s high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.”

- “Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures, that have historical or archaeological significance.”
- “Carry-out the goals of the Shoreline Management Act with regards to shorelines and critical areas.”

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

A goal is a general statement that describes the overarching direction for the parks and recreation system. Objectives are more specific and describe an outcome or a means to achieve the stated goals. Recommendations are specific and measurable actions intended to implement and achieve the goals and objectives and are contained in the Needs Assessment and Capital Planning chapters of the PROS Plan. Action items not related directly to capital projects are prioritized and adopted as part of the City of Mercer Island biennial budget.

A summary of the PROS Plan goals is provided below:

- 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.



Pergola area at Mercerdale Park

PLANNING, ACQUISITION & ACCESS

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

Objectives:

- 1.1. Retain publicly owned parks and open spaces in perpetuity. Actively pursue options to permanently protect parks and open space through conservation easements, zoning changes, or other strategies. Evaluate the transfer of some or all open space to the Open Space Conservancy Trust.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. Periodically review and update level of service standards for parks, trails, open space, playgrounds, and athletic fields. Include accompanying standards for maintenance, operations, and safety.
- 1.4. Identify and prioritize the need for master plans to guide all significant park development projects, achieve cohesive designs, and ensure project phasing 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, and trails.
- 1.5. 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 and publish a companion twenty-year capital project list at least every two years to capture long-term capital project needs and to guide the development of long-term funding strategies.
- 1.6. 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.
- 1.7. 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.
- 1.8. Pursue and implement strategies to maximize use of existing park and recreation assets.
- 1.9. 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.
- 1.10. Maintain a minimum overall satisfaction level for the parks system above 90% as measured through the community-wide survey, normally conducted every other year.



Luther Burbank Park

- 1.11 Partner with public, private, and non-profit organizations and donors to acquire land for park and recreation needs.
- 1.12 When evaluating the vacation of any right-of-way, consider its appropriateness for use as public park or open space.
- 1.13 Plan for a range of play types, universal access, and a phasing plan when replacing or upgrading playground equipment. Identify partnerships, grants, sponsorships, and other funding opportunities for playground replacement projects.
- 1.14 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.
- 1.15 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.
- 1.16 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.
- 1.17 Ensure that the allocation and use of athletic facilities, amenities, and field space aligns with Title IX provisions prohibiting discrimination or disparity in sports, recreation, and athletic facilities.



Volunteers planting native plants at Luther Burbank Park

MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

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

Objectives:

- 2.1 Maintain all parks and facilities in a manner that keeps them in a safe and attractive condition.
- 2.2 Continue to improve the City's comprehensive risk management program to ensure regular safety inspections are completed and assess the likelihood and consequence of the failure of its assets in terms of financial, community, and environmental impacts.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 Estimate the maintenance costs and staffing levels associated with land acquisition, development, or renovation of facilities, parks, open space, or trails, and ensure adequate ongoing funding is available prior to action.
- 2.5 Provide amenities at parks, trails, open space, and facilities where appropriate and when feasible to improve the user experience and access.



Native plantings at Luther Burbank Park

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Goal 3: 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:

- 3.1 Preserve and protect open space and park land areas with significant environmental features such as wetlands, forests, steep slopes, and plant and animal habitats from development impacts.
- 3.2 Provide appropriate public access (e.g. trails, viewpoints, and wildlife viewing areas) within open space to support passive recreation, and parking, where appropriate and feasible. Provide environmental education opportunities in open space with creative and interactive interpretation strategies, such as hands-on displays, self-guided walks, and other engaging experiences.
- 3.3 Incorporate cost-effective 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. Pursue pilot programs to field test sustainable alternatives and to implement demonstration projects.
- 3.4 Pursue cost-effective sustainable design alternatives and include in the project scope of work for construction projects and major maintenance activities, when feasible and appropriate.
- 3.5 Continue to support the Open Space Conservancy Trust and the planning, development, and management of Pioneer Park and Engstrom Open Space. Promote Pioneer Park as a demonstration site for best practices in forest management and environmental education.
- 3.6 Actively work to improve the condition of City-owned parks, trails, and open space 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. 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.
- 3.7 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 as part of the overall strategy. Continue to gather and maintain Island-wide data on tree canopy coverage.



Trail at Upper Luther Burbank Park

- 3.8 Encourage conservation opportunities to buffer and enhance the built environment. Pursue low-cost and non-purchase options to preserve open space and park land, 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, emphasizing properties contiguous to existing open space.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 Conserve and reduce water use through sustainable landscape design and maintenance practices.
- 3.11 Design and restore parks, trails, and open space 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.
- 3.12 Steward waterfront and shoreline properties with the goal of protecting and enhancing critical shoreline habitat while preserving safe water access for recreational use.
- 3.13 Maintain the Tree City USA designation with continued review of tree policy and management. Ensure that City-owned properties are viewed as leading proponents of the Tree City USA designation.
- 3.14 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.
- 3.15 Within city-owned open space, prevent the encroachment of active-use areas and minimize the installation of hardscape (e.g., paved, non-permeable, compacted) park amenities through low-impact design solutions to maintain the natural conditions of open space. Evaluate opportunities to reduce or decommission existing hardscape surfaces that are no longer needed or in use.



Luther Burbank Park north wetland boardwalk

TRAILS

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

Objectives:

- 4.1 Develop and implement a trail system hierarchy to accommodate different user types and experiences.
- 4.2 Prioritize trail projects that address gaps between existing paths, create longer, more usable connections, and improve safety. Promote trail connections to parks, schools, neighborhoods, the library, transit stops, the Eastlink Light Rail Station, commercial areas, and regional trail networks.
- 4.3 Coordinate construction of trail projects with other capital improvement projects including utility and transportation projects.
- 4.4 Expand and link the pedestrian and bicycle circulation system by acquiring rights-of-way and easements for trails and trail connections.
- 4.5 Integrate the siting of proposed trail segments into the development review process; require designated trail routes to be incorporated as part of the development project.
- 4.6 Utilize and implement park or open space site master plans to guide the development of trails within existing properties and to promote connections to external trail networks.
- 4.7 Develop clear and consistent wayfinding signage and information materials for trails and associated facilities.
- 4.8 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.



Young athletes at Island Crest Park north field

RECREATION FACILITIES & PROGRAMMING

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

Objectives:

- 5.1 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. Provide annual updates on work progress and implementation.
- 5.2 Enhance the diversity of recreation programs offered, focusing on programs that are in high demand or serve a wide range of users and adhere to the guidelines established in the Recreation Reset Strategy.
 - a. Expand service offerings for water-oriented recreation programs.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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.
- 5.5 Identify and address recreation and service accessibility barriers (socio-economic, language, physical, mental health, 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.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 Maintain and enhance program scholarships and other mechanisms to support and promote recreation access for low-income community members.
- 5.8 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.
- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 Conduct periodic evaluations of program offerings. Utilize data to inform program and service planning decisions.
- 5.12 Manage and coordinate recreation facility uses to serve a variety of programs, activities, events, and rentals. Develop and implement protocols and policies to ensure efficient and cost-effective scheduling.



Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery (Aubrey Davis Park)

ARTS & CULTURE

Goal 6: Facilitate and promote comprehensive and engaging arts and culture experiences.

Objectives:

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 Support the priorities of the Mercer Island Arts Council and the goals and initiatives of the Comprehensive Arts & Culture Plan.
- 6.3 Identify and implement opportunities for integrating arts and culture into parks and open space, including, where feasible and appropriate, through permanent and temporary public art installations, arts performance and events, interpretive strategies, and other dynamic expressions. Collaborate with diverse groups to ensure incorporation of art in public space occurs through a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- 6.4 Partner with the community and local organizations to foster a variety of cultural events and support community cultural celebrations.
- 6.5 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.
- 6.6 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.
- 6.7 Encourage the collaboration of arts and culture marketing and communication efforts through shared event calendars, social media management, and other cohesive strategies.



Community Campout at Luther Burbank Park

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

Goal 7: Encourage and support community engagement and pursue collaborative partnerships to strengthen and grow parks and recreation programs and services.

Objectives:

- 7.1 Involve the community in system-wide planning and site design. Use a variety of communication tools and engagement strategies to solicit community input, facilitate project understanding, and build community support.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 Identify and implement partnerships with other public, private, non-profit, and community organizations to support capital projects, community events, programs, and other special initiatives.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 Communicate the value of the City's investment in parks, open spaces, and recreational opportunities by highlighting the benefits such as better human health, increased community interaction, favorable environmental conditions, increased revenue, and higher property values.
- 7.6 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.
- 7.7 Track and evaluate recreation trends, park use patterns, and park user needs.



Leap the Frog at Leap For Green, the City's community sustainability fair

ADMINISTRATION & FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

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

Objectives:

- 8.1 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 Pursue sufficient financial resources to ensure a vibrant and well-maintained parks and recreation system.
- 8.3 Pursue alternative funding options and dedicated revenues for the acquisition and development of parks and facilities.
- 8.4 Periodically review and update the Park Impact Fee rates and methodology approximately every 5 to 7 years and utilize impact fees to accommodate growth through the expansion of the parks system.
- 8.5 Develop a recommendation for City Council consideration 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 related to parks, recreation, and cultural arts programs and services. Seek opportunities to buy-local when procuring products and services and identify other opportunities to partner with Mercer Island small businesses in the delivery of programs, events, and other 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.
- 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.

5 CLASSIFICATIONS & INVENTORY

The City of Mercer Island manages 481 acres of parks and open space lands, providing numerous public waterfront access sites, active recreational facilities for team sports, playground equipment at 11 parks, 28 miles of walking paths and trails, picnic areas, and hundreds of acres of natural forest lands. Parklands cover about 12% of the Island.

Calkins Landing

City of Mercer Island parks are defined as “all city parks, public squares, public drives, parkways, boulevards, golf courses, park museums, pools, bathing beaches and play and recreation grounds under the management and control of the park and recreation department.” (Ord. A-91 § 1, 1991).

Some parks and recreation facilities have been developed and are managed in collaboration with the Mercer Island School District, providing high-quality sports fields and developed recreational amenities. The School District also owns and manages more than 100 acres of property, allowing scheduled public recreation programming of indoor gyms and shared public access to outdoor playgrounds and sports fields when feasible. Additionally, in coordination with the Open Space Conservancy Trust, the City manages Pioneer Park and Engstrom Open Space.

The public parklands and shared school facilities create a wide range of active and passive recreational opportunities for the Mercer Island community.

Parkland Classifications

Parkland is classified to assist in planning for the community’s recreational needs. The classifications also reflect standards that inform development decisions during site planning, in addition to operations and maintenance expectations for the level of developed facilities or natural lands. The Mercer Island park system is composed of a hierarchy of various park types, each offering recreational opportunities and natural environmental functions. Collectively, the park system is intended to serve the full range of community needs.

CLASSIFICATIONS & INVENTORY

Each park classification defines the site's function and expected amenities and recreational uses. The classification characteristics serve as general guidelines addressing the size and use of each park type. The following six classifications are used in Mercer Island's park system:

- Regional Parks
- Community Parks
- Neighborhood Parks
- Mini Parks
- Special Facilities
- Open Space

Regional Parks

Regional parks have a mix of recreational amenities for both active sports and passive play. These parks provide parking, restrooms, picnic areas, large open lawn areas for informal gathering, and outdoor play activities. Special features such as community gardens, amphitheaters, trail networks, natural areas, public art, and community centers may be located in regional parks.

Often provided by county park systems, regional parks are much larger compared to community parks, typically greater than 50 acres and draw users from a larger geographic area. Luther Burbank Park, once owned by King County, is one of two regional parks on Mercer Island. Aubrey Davis Park, constructed as 92 acres of highway lids and landscape buffers surrounding I-90, is the other. Both regional parks provide many outdoor recreational opportunities and connect to a regional bike trail and water trail. They also provide developed public access to Lake Washington, including swim beaches and a boat launch.

Community Parks

Community parks are larger sites, typically between 10 and 49 acres, containing a wider array of facilities and, as a result, appealing to a more diverse group of users. Community parks often include recreational amenities, such as sports fields or waterfront beaches, that draw park users from beyond the immediate neighborhood. They also frequently include open space with trails that connect to adjacent neighborhoods, schools, or retail areas. One example is Homestead Park, which is 10.5 acres and provides a mix of active opportunities including athletic fields, a playground, a basketball court, and tennis courts, in addition to a network of trails. At nearly 36 acres, Island Crest Park is also a

community park and includes athletic fields and open spaces areas with an extensive trail network.

While active areas of community parks are designed for more organized or intensive recreational activities and sports, natural areas provide passive options for outdoor recreation. Community parks typically provide parking, restrooms, paved pathways, picnic tables, and benches to support outdoor recreation uses. Community parks may also serve as local neighborhood parks and they may be connected to schools or other community facilities.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are intended to serve residential areas within close proximity (generally up to a half-mile walking or biking distance). They are 2 to 9 acres in size, depending on a variety of factors, including neighborhood need, physical location, and opportunity. One example of a neighborhood park is Roanoke Park. At 3.76 acres this park provides a playground and tennis courts.

Ideally, neighborhood parks are geographically distributed throughout the community. Developed neighborhood parks typically include amenities such as paved pathways, picnic tables, benches, play equipment, a multi-use open field for informal play, sport courts, and/or multi-purpose paved areas and landscaping. Except for waterfront sites, parking areas are generally not required or provided. During non-school hours, public elementary school properties function very similarly to neighborhood parks.

Mini Parks

Mini parks are small pocket parks, typically under one acre, offering outdoor experiences ranging from playgrounds to waterfront access.

Mini parks are the smallest park classification and serve a limited radius (generally up to a quarter-mile) from the site and provide passive and play-oriented recreational opportunities. Mini parks are distinguished from neighborhood parks primarily by their smaller size. Amenities are usually limited to small playground facilities, small open grass areas, and minimal site furnishings such as picnic tables or benches. Parking is not typically provided at mini parks; however, in some cases, limited parking is available at some street end mini-parks that include access to Lake Washington. At 0.72 acres, Secret Park is one example of a mini park and includes a playground and small open grass area. Many of the waterfront street end parks are also considered mini parks due to their size.



Special Facilities

Special facilities include single-purpose recreational areas or stand-alone sites designed to support a specific, specialized use. Special facilities include community recreation centers, swimming pools, sports complexes, community gardens, indoor gyms, and fitness centers. Some special facilities may be included in park acreage and not listed as stand-alone amenities, such as the Mercer Island Boat Launch and the Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery in Aubrey Davis Park and the P-Patch in Luther Burbank Park. No standards exist for special facilities since the facility size is a function of the special use.

Open Space

Open space is managed in their natural condition and may or may not provide public access. This type of conserved land often includes wetlands, wildlife corridors, shorelines, rivers and streams, steep hillsides, or other natural or environmentally sensitive spaces. These lands provide ecosystem benefits, such as improved water quality, forest canopy, and wildlife habitat, and are usually managed for their ecological function or natural resource value. Where appropriate, open spaces may provide areas for trail corridors and low-impact or passive activities, such as walking, nature observation, or fishing. At more than 110 acres, Pioneer Park is the largest open space on Mercer Island. Open space lands are primarily forested and may include stream corridors and steep slopes that cannot be developed for other land uses.

Parkland Inventory

The City of Mercer Island provides 481 acres of parkland including 27 developed parks. Open space totals just under 286 acres across 25 different sites. Figure 5.1 lists the existing city-owned park and open space. An inventory of trails is provided in Chapter 8.

Mercer Island provides and maintains an extensive inventory of developed parks, special facilities, natural open space lands, and trails. Larger developed parks with regional significance include Aubrey Davis Park, which follows the I-90 corridor, and Luther Burbank Park, which covers the northeast waterfront of Mercer Island. Pioneer Park is maintained and operationally managed by the City at the direction of the Open Space Conservancy Trust, which owns and oversees the land offers more than 110 acres of public preserved open space.

In addition to the boat launch in Aubrey Davis Park and boat moorage at Luther Burbank Park, the City provides numerous public access points to the Lake Washington waterfront and the Lakes to Locks Water Trail through two community parks and developed street ends.

Developed sports fields, including baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse, and football, are provided by the City of Mercer Island and the Mercer Island School District. The South Mercer Playfields were developed in a shared agreement between the District and the City to provide synthetic turf fields to support school athletic programs and public recreation. The City also owns and operates the Mercer Island Community and Event Center offering recreational programming, special events, arts and culture activities, private rental opportunities, and community activities adjacent to Luther Burbank Park.



Mercerdale Skate Park



Calkins Point – Luther Burbank Park

Figure 5.1. Parkland Inventory by Type

City-owned Parklands	Type	Acres
Aubrey Davis Park	Regional	91.81
Luther Burbank Park †	Regional	54.56
Subtotal		146.37
Clarke Beach Park †	Community	8.66
Groveland Beach Park †	Community	3.03
Homestead Park †	Community	10.46
Island Crest Park †	Community	35.94
Mercerdale Park †	Community	12.01
South Mercer Playfields	Community	28.09
Subtotal		98.19
Deane's Children's Park	Neighborhood	3.04
First Hill Park	Neighborhood	0.68
Roanoke Park	Neighborhood	0.98
Rotary Park	Neighborhood	3.76
Wildwood Park †	Neighborhood	2.84
Subtotal		11.30
77th Ave SE Landing	Mini	0.29
Bicentennial Park	Mini	0.16
Calkins Landing	Mini	0.48
Forest Landing	Mini	0.05
Franklin Landing	Mini	0.10
Fruitland Landing	Mini	0.14
Garfield Landing	Mini	0.44
Lincoln Landing	Mini	0.23
Miller Landing	Mini	0.24
Proctor Landing	Mini	0.42
Roanoke Landing	Mini	0.15
SE 28th Street Mini Park	Mini	0.06
Secret Park †	Mini	0.72
Slater Park	Mini	0.59
Subtotal		4.07

Cayhill Open Space	Open Space	1.08
Clise Park	Open Space	1.47
Ellis Pond	Open Space	4.13
Engstrom Open Space	Open Space	8.51
Gallagher Hill	Open Space	11.29
Hollerbach Open Space	Open Space	5.23
Mercerdale Hillside	Open Space	18.14
N Mercerdale Hillside	Open Space	5.11
Parkwood Ridge Open Space	Open Space	3.79
Pioneer Park	Open Space	113.67
Salem Woods	Open Space	0.32
SE 47th Street Open Space	Open Space	1.27
SE 50th Street Open Space	Open Space	1.78
SE 53rd Place Open Space	Open Space	24.01
Upper Luther Burbank Park	Open Space	18.05
Subtotal		217.85
Mercer Island Community & Event Center		2.90
TOTAL ACREAGE		480.7

† NOTE: Portion of these parks contain open space



Pioneer Park trail



Facilities

The Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC) began providing recreation and event programming in 2005. The 42,000 square-foot facility includes a 10,500 square-foot gymnasium, dance room, game room, library, catering kitchen, large multi-purpose room, fitness room, and five additional program rooms. The lobby also features the Mercer Island Gallery, an indoor gallery space hosting rotating art exhibits.

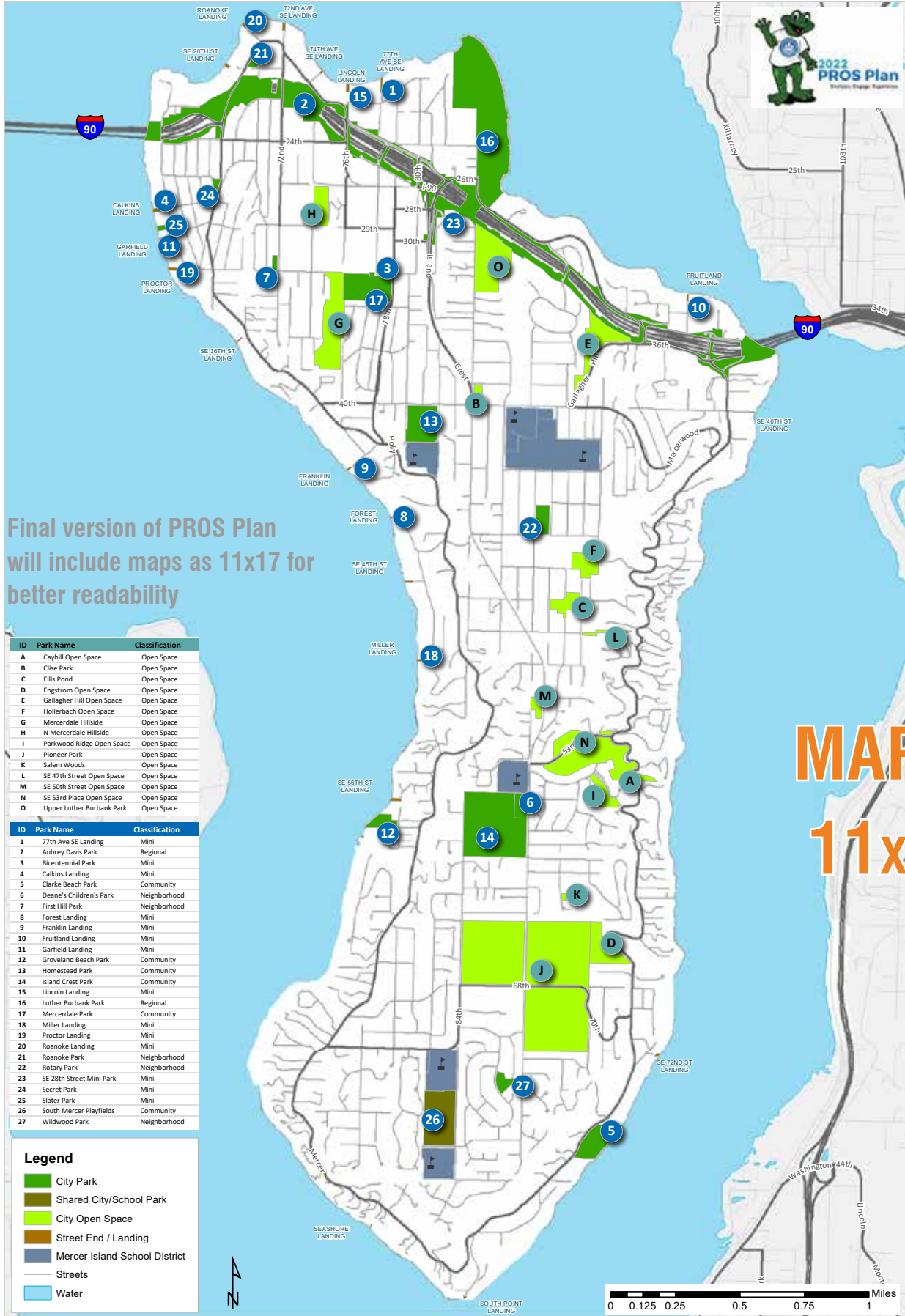
The MICEC closed in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and re-opened in June 2021 for programming. Under normal conditions and prior to the pandemic, the MICEC offered various rental spaces for events, activities, and celebrations. The North Annex, which includes leased daycare facilities and an outdoor playground, is located next to the main MICEC building. The MICEC and its amenities also serve to provide the community with various emergency services. These include serving as a “cooling or warming” site, an emergency shelter, and a reunification location.

In addition to the MICEC, a variety of special facilities are available to Mercer Island residents through shared agreements, school facilities, non-profit organizations, and private organizations, see Figure 5.2. The City and Mercer Island School District collaborate to provide outdoor sports fields, playgrounds, tennis courts, and indoor gyms. Some parks and sports fields are adjacent to schools and offer expanded amenities for the community, such as the South Mercer Playfields located between Islander Middle School and Lakeridge Elementary School.

The Mary Wayte Pool is a public pool owned by the Mercer Island School District and operated by Olympic Cascade Aquatics (OCA), a coach-owned competitive USA swimming program. The pool offers swimming lessons, lap swimming, water aerobics, swim team programs, and facility rentals. The City provides funding support for the operation of the pool through an Interlocal Agreement with the Mercer Island School District.

Figure 5.2. Multi-Jurisdictional Special Facilities Inventory

Alphabetical Facility List		Owner			
		City	School District	Private	Non-Profit
Facility Name	Park Type				
Island Park Elementary School	Special Facility		X		
Islander Middle School/South Mercer Playfields	Special Facility	X	X		
Lakeridge Elementary School	Special Facility		X		X
M.I. High School/North Mercer Campus	Special Facility		X		
Mary Wayte Pool	Special Facility				X
Mercer Island Boat Launch (part of Aubrey Davis Park)	Special Facility	X			
Mercer Island Boys & Girls Club (PEAK)	Special Facility		X		X
Mercer Island Community & Event Center	Special Facility	X			
Stroum Jewish Community Center	Special Facility				X
West Mercer Elementary School	Special Facility		X		



Final version of PROS Plan will include maps as 11x17 for better readability

ID	Park Name	Classification
A	Cayhill Open Space	Open Space
B	Clise Park	Open Space
C	Ellis Pond	Open Space
D	Engstrom Open Space	Open Space
E	Gallagher Hill Open Space	Open Space
F	Hollerbach Open Space	Open Space
G	Mercedale Hillside	Open Space
H	N Mercedale Hillside	Open Space
I	Parkwood Ridge Open Space	Open Space
J	Pioneer Park	Open Space
K	Salem Woods	Open Space
L	SE 47th Street Open Space	Open Space
M	SE 50th Street Open Space	Open Space
N	SE 53rd Place Open Space	Open Space
O	Upper Luther Burbank Park	Open Space

ID	Park Name	Classification
1	77th Ave SE Landing	Mini
2	Aubrey Davis Park	Regional
3	Bicentennial Park	Mini
4	Calkins Landing	Mini
5	Clarke Beach Park	Community
6	Deane's Children's Park	Neighborhood
7	First Hill Park	Neighborhood
8	Forest Landing	Mini
9	Franklin Landing	Mini
10	Fruitland Landing	Mini
11	Garfield Landing	Mini
12	Groveland Beach Park	Community
13	Homestead Park	Community
14	Island Crest Park	Community
15	Lincoln Landing	Mini
16	Luther Burbank Park	Regional
17	Mercedale Park	Community
18	Miller Landing	Mini
19	Proctor Landing	Mini
20	Roanoke Landing	Mini
21	Roanoke Park	Neighborhood
22	Rotary Park	Neighborhood
23	SE 28th Street Mini Park	Mini
24	Secret Park	Mini
25	Slater Park	Mini
26	South Mercer Playfields	Community
27	Wildwood Park	Neighborhood

Legend

- City Park
- Shared City/School Park
- City Open Space
- Street End / Landing
- Mercer Island School District
- Streets
- Water

Map 1: Existing Parks & Open Spaces

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Sports Fields

Various sports fields support football, baseball, softball, soccer, ultimate frisbee, and lacrosse and offer natural grass, synthetic infields, and multi-purpose synthetic-turf fields, see Figure 5.3. For non-school sports programs, the City coordinates field reservations for multiple sports leagues and clubs, including facilities at Aubrey Davis Park, Island Crest Park, Homestead Park, and the South Mercer Playfields. A 2007 Ballfield Analysis indicated that the number of sports fields was adequate to meet programming needs, as long as fields were maintained in good condition and all scheduling was coordinated for equal distribution and access.

Twenty public tennis courts are provided in public parks and school sites, and the tennis courts at Luther Burbank Park also include pickleball lines. Three basketball courts are provided in public parks.



Island Crest Park north field


Figure 5.3. Sports Field and Sports Courts Inventory

Facility Name	Field Type*					Courts		
	Football	Baseball	Softball	Soccer	Lacrosse	Tennis	Pickleball	Basketball
Aubrey Davis Park			2	1	1	4		2
Homestead Park			2	1		4		1
Island Crest Park	1	2		1		2		
Island Park Elementary School		1		1				
Islander Middle School	1							
Lakeridge Elementary School		1		1				
Luther Burbank Park						3		
Mercer Island Community & Event Center							6**	
M.I. High School/North Mercer Campus	2			1	1	6		
Roanoke Park						1		
South Mercer Playfields			4	3	1			
West Mercer Elementary School				1				
Totals	4	4	8	10	3	20	6**	3

* Note: Fields may be multi-purpose and counted as both ballfield and soccer/lacrosse

** Note: MICEC offers up to six indoor pickleball courts during dedicated times only

6 PARKS & ACTIVE USE SPACES



The PROS planning process assesses recreational needs and priorities for park facilities and active use areas on Mercer Island. The park assessment included a discussion of specific local needs with consideration given to the City’s broader parks system. Public input and information on park inventory conditions were also heavily relied upon in the planning process.

Playground at South Mercer Playfields

By considering the location, size, and the number of park facilities by type and use, along with community interests and priorities, the PROS Plan evaluates the existing and future demand for park and recreation amenities and provides recommendations for future initiatives. The six-year Capital Improvement Program, which identifies and prioritizes crucial upgrades, improvements, and expansions, is based on the needs assessment and the recreational interests expressed by residents and is further detailed in Chapter 11.

PARK USE TRENDS

Various resources have been assembled and summarized to provide an overview of current trends, market

demands, and agency comparisons in the provision of parks and recreation services. This information is helpful when balanced with local insights and feedback from the community in guiding future initiatives.

The following national and state data highlights some of the current park use trends and may help frame future considerations for Mercer Island’s park system. Additional trend data and summaries are provided in Appendix J.

- Nationwide, 82% of U.S. adults believe that parks and recreation are essential according to the American Engagement with Parks Survey from 2020. ⁽¹⁾
- 77% of those survey respondents indicate that having a high-quality park, playground, public

PARKS & ACTIVE USE SPACES

open space, or a recreation center nearby is an important factor in deciding where they want to live. ⁽¹⁾

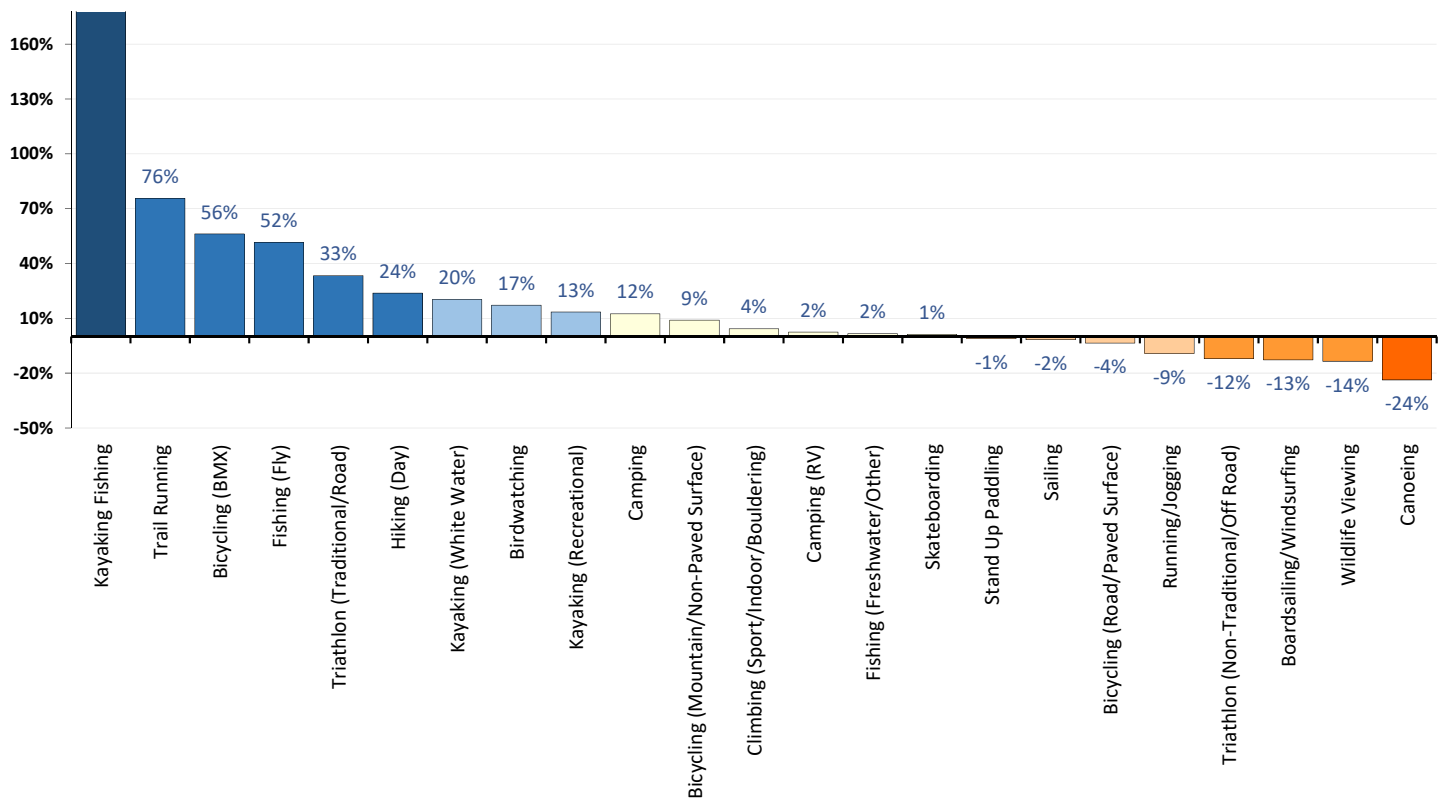
- Just over half of Americans ages six and older participated in outdoor recreation at least once in 2019, the highest participation rate in five years. However, the number of outings per participant declined – continuing a decade-long trend – resulting in fewer total recreational outings. ⁽²⁾
- Running, jogging, and trail running are the most popular outdoor activities across the nation, based on levels of participation, followed by fishing, hiking, biking, and camping. ⁽²⁾
- Walking ranked as the top activity by participation rate (94%) in Washington State. ⁽⁴⁾
- Trail running, day hiking, and recreational kayaking are rapidly increasing in popularity – participation in each increased more than 5% per year between 2014 and 2019. ⁽³⁾

- Walking, running, hiking, and cycling saw significant increases in participation in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic (March to June 2020). ⁽²⁾
- People of all ages and income levels are interested in outdoor activities like fishing, camping, hiking, biking, bicycling, and swimming. Younger people are more interested in participating in team sports, such as soccer, basketball, and volleyball. Older adults are more likely to aspire to individual activities like swimming for fitness, bird and nature viewing, and canoeing. ⁽³⁾

Sources:

- (1) 2020 American Engagement with Parks Survey, NRPA
- (2) 2020 Outdoor Participation Report, Outdoor Foundation
- (3) 2020 Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report, Sports & Fitness Industry Association
- (4) 2018-2022 Recreation and Conservation Plan for Washington State

Figure 6.1. 5-Year Change in Outdoor Recreation Participation by Major Activity (2020 Outdoor Participation Report)





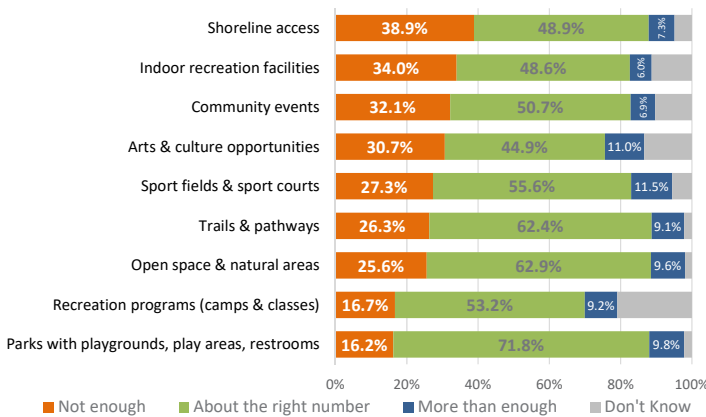
LOCAL INSIGHTS

Local recreation demands and needs were explored through various community engagements to gather feedback on the strengths and limitations of existing recreational resources and parks available to Mercer Island residents. Public outreach included two community surveys and two virtual public meetings to explore project priorities and opportunities to enhance the City’s park system (see Appendices A, C, D & E). Through this outreach, nearly 3,200 responses were recorded.

Both iterations of the community survey confirmed that local parks, recreation options, and open space opportunities are important or essential to the quality of life on Mercer Island. A strong majority of respondents (93%) were satisfied with the value they receive from Mercer Island for parks, facilities, and open space.

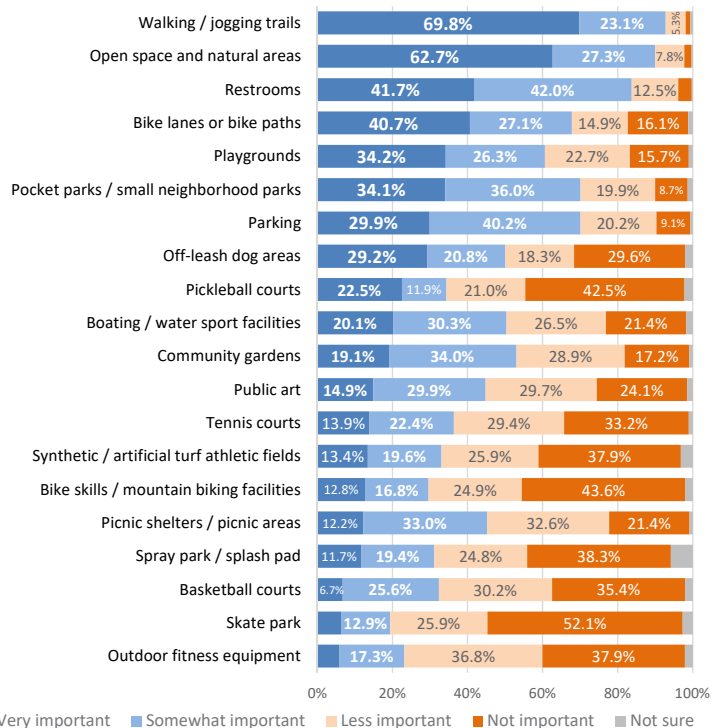
Survey respondents were generally satisfied with the number of park and recreation amenities on Mercer Island; over half said there are more than enough or about the correct number amenities, see Figure 6.2. Respondents were most satisfied with the number of parks with playgrounds and restrooms (81% think there is an adequate number or more than enough), sports fields and courts (67%), trails and pathways (73%), and open space and natural areas (73%). However, between one-quarter and one-third of respondents felt there is not enough shoreline access (39%), community events (32%), indoor facilities (34%), arts and culture opportunities (31%), and open space (26%).

Figure 6.2. Needs Expressed for Parks, Trails, and Recreation Facilities



The survey provided a list of outdoor recreation amenities and asked respondents to identify those important to their household, see Figure 6.3. A strong majority indicated an interest in walking or jogging trails (93% very or somewhat important) and open space and natural areas (90% very or somewhat important). The second tier of amenities of substantial interest included restrooms (84% very or somewhat important), bike lanes (68% very or somewhat important), pocket parks (70% very or somewhat important), parking (70% very or somewhat important) and playgrounds (61% very or somewhat important). Additionally, approximately half of the respondents identified community gardens, boating and water sport facilities, and off-leash dog areas as either very or somewhat important.

Figure 6.3. Relative Importance of Various Recreation Amenities



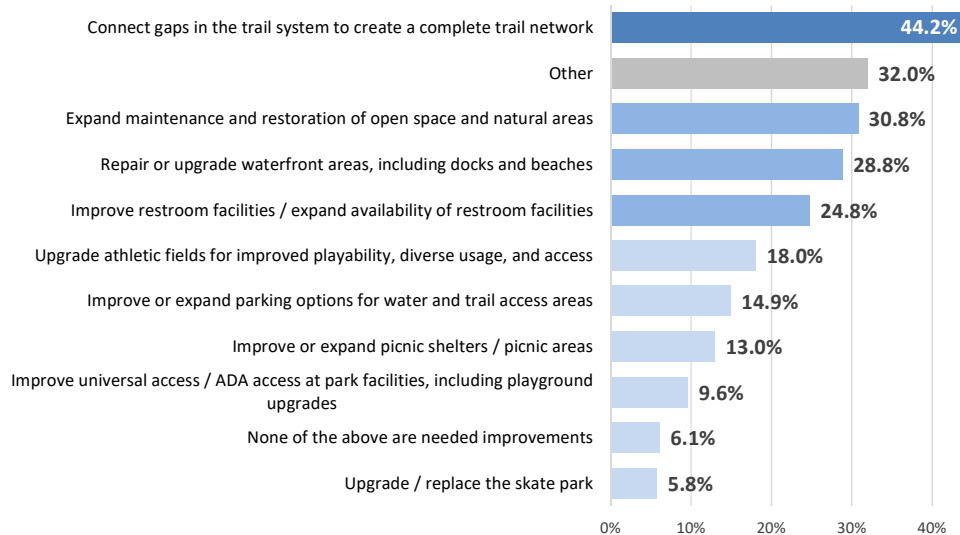
To further distinguish community priorities from those noted in the 2020 community survey, respondents of the second survey were provided a range of options related to specific potential improvements to the Mercer Island park system and were asked to select their top three choices, see Figure 6.4.

A strong plurality of respondents (44%) noted connecting gaps in the trail system as a top priority, which was also 13 points higher than the next highest ranked option provided. Between one-quarter and one-third of respondents identified the following as the next top three options: expanding maintenance and restoration of open space (31%), repairing or upgrading waterfront areas (29%), and improving restroom facilities (25%). With the write-in 'other' option

provided, over 400 respondents provided comments, and the most common responses among these included:

- Add pickleball courts; convert tennis and/or basketball courts to pickleball
- Enhance maintenance, to include playground replacements, trail maintenance, pathway repaving, and invasive plant management
- Off-leash dog management and leash law enforcement
- Enhanced trash management, such as adding more trash cans and more frequent waste hauling
- Security and safety management, including managing for homeless encampments

Figure 6.4. Priority System Improvements



Common Themes from Community Outreach

Waterfront Infrastructure

- There is consistent, strong support for replacing docks and piers as part of maintaining waterfront infrastructure.
- Repairing and upgrading waterfront infrastructure is a top-tier community priority – supported by survey data and validated via virtual public meetings.
- There is strong interest in improved and additional waterfront access, including street ends and water-oriented programming, such as boating classes, watercraft equipment rental, and swimming/water safety programs.

Parks & Open Space

- Playground renovations and replacements that include inclusive play opportunities are strongly supported, including larger and different playgrounds.
- There is strong interest in expanding recreational options in the park system that include the installation of a splash pad and pickleball courts.

Groveland Beach Park



Pickleball Courts (example)



- If the City were to pursue additional acquisitions for the park and open space system, local priorities indicated a preference toward purchases to preserve habitat and open space, accommodate additional waterfront access and active-use parklands, and secure pocket parks to fill gaps.
- Some community members shared concerns and frustrations about topics that will require additional effort and attention by the City. These include off-leash dogs in parks and on trails and leash law enforcement, in addition to site management of the Bike Skills Area at Upper Luther Burbank Park.



User Convenience & Support Amenities

- Maintenance of existing parks and open spaces remains a key priority.
- Upgraded and expanded access to restrooms is the highest-rated user convenience improvement.
- The community supports appropriate system-wide signage and wayfinding improvements.



Facility map at Luther Burbank Park


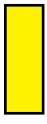
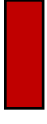
PARK SYSTEM CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

The overall condition of park infrastructure and amenities is one measure of park adequacy and assurance of public safety. Proper stewardship of parks infrastructure requires developing a long-term maintenance and capital plan to ensure the safety of park users that aligns with community needs and allocates limited funding resources properly.

The current conditions of the Mercer Island park system were assessed, by an outside consultant, to identify existing site maintenance issues and opportunities for future capital improvements, see Technical Appendix: Volume II. The assessment included walkways, parking lots, park furniture, drainage and irrigation, lighting systems, vegetation, and other amenities. The following conditions assessment matrices summarize the results of these assessments. They will inform the PROS Plan, including developing the project prioritization strategy for park improvements, identifying funding strategies, and updating the recommended parks six-year Capital Improvement Program.

Ratings Approach

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

-  1 – Good Condition: Generally, 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 and encourage area residents to use the park.
-  2 – Fair: In general, amenities in fair condition are mainly functional, but need minor or moderate repairs. Play surfaces, equipment, fixtures, and safety features that are operational and allow play, but have deficiencies or periods where they are unusable. Fair facilities remain essential amenities for the community but may slightly discourage the 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 significant repairs to be functional. Some examples include athletic fields that are too uneven for ball games, irreparably broken features, 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 the management and stewardship of park facilities. Where infrastructure or amenities are rated as “fair,” strategies should be developed for repair or restoration. Park features, structures, amenities, or landscapes rated as “poor” should receive immediate attention and be prioritized for near-term maintenance, capital repairs, or a new capital project. Facilities in “poor” condition should also be evaluated and taken out of operation if they are deemed unsafe.

Final version of PROS Plan will include maps as 11x17 for better readability

Mercer Island Parks Master Plan
Park & Facility Condition Assessment Matrix

Figure 6.5. Parks Conditions Assessment Matrix

Site Name	Address	Acreage*	Park Type	Recreation Amenities										Site Amenities					Park Structures					Vegetation			ADA Compliance							
				Playgrounds	Paved Courts: Basketball	Paved Courts: Tennis	Volleyball	Soccer Fields	Baseball / Softball Fields	Pathways/Trails	Skate Park / Spray Park	Off-Leash Area	Waterfront / Beach	Site Furnishings	Lighting (Y/N)	Signage	Parking Areas	Public Art	Restrooms	Picnic Shelters	Amphitheater/Stage	Boat Dock / Ramp	Concession Building	Turf	Park Trees	Landscaped Beds		Natural Areas						
PARKS																																		
Aubrey Davis Park	72nd SE & SE 22nd	91.81	Regional	3	2	2	-	3	1	2	2	2	Y	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
Bicentennial Park	77th SE & SE 22nd	0.16	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	Y	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	
Clarke Beach Park	7700 Mercer Way	9.05	Community	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	Y	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	-	2	3	3	
Deane's Children's Park	5500 Island Crest Way	3.04	Neighborhood	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	N	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	2	2	2	2	
First Hill Park	SE 32nd & 72nd SE	0.83	Neighborhood	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	N	1	1	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	-	1	1	2	2	
Groveland Beach Park	SE 58th & 80th Ave SE	3.07	Community	1	2	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	N	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	
Homestead Park	SE 40th & 82nd	11.09	Community	1	2	1	-	1	2	1	-	-	N	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Island Crest Park	5500 Island Crest Way	38.91	Community	1	2	2	-	2	1	1	1	1	Y	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Luther Burbank Park	2040 84th Ave SE	54.52	Regional	1	-	3	-	-	-	2	-	2	Y	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	2
Mercerdale Park	77th SE & SE 32nd	12.17	Community	3	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	Y	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Roanoke Park	70th Ave SE & W Mercer Way	1.46	Neighborhood	3	2	2	-	2	2	2	2	2	N	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
Rotary Park	88th SE & SE 44th	4.83	Neighborhood	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	N	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
SE 28th Street Mini Park	SE 28th Street	0.06	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	3	
Secret Park	SE 27th & W Mercer Way	0.86	Mini	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	N	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Slater Park	2835 60th Place SE	0.68	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	N	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
South Mercer Playfields	SE 78th & 84th SE	17.31	School/Park/OS	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	Y	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Wildwood Park	7400 86th Ave SE	2.84	Park/OS	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	N	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Averages:				1.70	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.67	1.25	1.71	1.00	1.00	1.44	1.50	1.18	1.38	1.11	1.00	2.00	2.25	1.67	1.19	1.29	1.56	1.50	1.57	1.29	1.00	1.57	1.29	1.56	1.50	2.29	
STREET ENDS - DEVELOPED																																		
77th Ave SE Landing	7670 SE 22nd St	0.29	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	N	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	1	-	1	2	
Calkins Landing	SE 28th St & 60th Ave SE	0.31	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	N	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Forest Landing	SE 43rd St & Forest Ave SE	0.03	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Franklin Landing	78th Ave SE & SE 42nd St	0.03	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	N	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	1	-	1	2	2
Fruitland Landing	97th Ave SE & SE 34th St	0.15	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Y	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	1	2	2
Garfield Landing	SE 30th St & 60th Ave SE	0.34	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	N	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
Lincoln Landing	76th Ave SE & SE 22nd St	0.23	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	Y	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	1	-	3	2	2
Miller Landing	Forest Ave SE & SE 48th St	0.30	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	3
Proctor Landing	SE 32nd St & 60th Ave SE	0.30	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Y	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Roanoke Landing	W/WV & Roanoke Way	0.18	Mini	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	N	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Averages:				1.87						2.00		1.80	1.25	1.43	1.50						1.00	1.57	1.29	1.00	1.86	1.57	1.29	1.00	1.57	1.29	1.56	1.50	2.29	

Rating Scale: 1 = Good 2 = Fair 3 = Poor



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Overall Considerations

Developed Parks

Overall, the condition rating for the Mercer Island park system averages as 1.34, with most amenities receiving a “good” rating.

General grounds maintenance, restoration areas, arboricultural care, and trail maintenance appear to be in good condition throughout the park system, indicating 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 or replacement and largely rated at “fair” or below.

The natural grass at most parks with open mown grass areas is in very good 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 standard features supporting prescribed activities. More abstract and open-ended play structures and designs that 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 resulted from 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.



Other Parklands & Open Space

The rating for Mercer Island open spaces and trails averages 1.5 on the 3-point scale, which is halfway between “good” and “fair” and reflects a good condition where publicly accessible, though many are not ADA-compliant.

Most of the trails within open spaces are well-maintained, have suitable surfacing, and appear 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 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 1.44, also halfway between “good” and “fair.” Park signage gaps, particularly at open spaces, landings, and street ends, resulted in a “fair” rating. The overall trail network could be improved with enhanced wayfinding and signage.

With some exceptions, every park and open space has at least one primary park identification sign in good condition. Many sites can be improved with additional park signs at secondary entries and provide





route and distance information for bicyclists. 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 each park’s identity and 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 appropriate as to type, scale, and number, that identifies the different trails or loops within the park. As appropriate, trail junctions should provide low-impact navigation aids that identify trails, connections, 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 toward the water at these locations for water-based wayfinding. Additional signage should be considered for water trail users to assist them in identifying routes from the water to desired amenities, such as park restrooms or parking lots.

Pavement 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 open spaces, 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.



Docks & Piers

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



Sport Courts & Amenities

Sport court surfacing at tennis courts and basketball courts shows cracks and aging that affects playability. Repairs, resurfacing, or complete replacement may be necessary. As part of this planning process, an evaluation about current use and future trends may warrant converting certain courts into another type of recreational amenity (such as converting tennis to pickleball) to provide broader public recreational value and use.



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.

Accessibility Overview

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provides comprehensive civil rights protections to persons with disabilities in the areas of employment, state and local government services, and access to public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. The City of Mercer Island is required to comply with ADA Title II and Title III requirements, which are specific to local governments.

The PROS Plan process included identifying obvious ADA compliance issues. Still, it does not record or evaluate every item or detail that should be remediated to provide reasonable universal access and meet ADA standards. However, this general parks conditions assessment will be used to support the development of the comprehensive Citywide ADA Transition Plan, which is currently in the early stages of development.

ADA Transition Plan

The City is required to complete a Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan (ADA Transition Plan) that will address the requirements of ADA Title II. The Transition Plan will be used to identify obstacles limiting accessibility, describe and identify methods to make these obstacles accessible, and plan a schedule to bring City facilities and operations into compliance. Funding for ADA Transition planning work was included in the 2021-2022 biennial budget and will incorporate findings and recommendations from this PROS Plan.

Universal Access and Parks & Recreation

Under federal regulations, when parks and recreation facilities are built or altered, they must comply with the ADA Standards for Accessible Design (ADA Standards), which require the inclusion of features such as accessible parking spaces, routes, toilet facilities, public telephones, and spectator seating areas. For parks and facilities built or altered before the ADA Standards took effect, local governments must devise ways to make the programs and activities in those parks and facilities accessible to people with disabilities. If local government decides to modify facilities to provide access to a recreation program or activity with more than one facility available (such as when several ball fields are provided), only some facilities may need to be accessible.

Outdoor Developed Areas Accessibility Guidelines (Architectural Barriers Act – ABA) have been established for many of the common elements in public parks. Picnic areas, outdoor access routes, outdoor constructed features, and trails are described to ensure accessibility standards are met in parks, viewing areas, and trailheads. These standards allow for somewhat

more flexibility compared to the ADA Standards for public buildings and public spaces.

Eliminating barriers is a fundamental premise of the ADA to ensure that individuals with disabilities are provided an equal opportunity to access and use a public facility. Barriers include any obstacles that prevent or restrict the entrance to or use of a facility. Alterations to older buildings and infrastructure may be needed to ensure accessibility; however, there is a greater obligation to first remedy “readily achievable barrier removal” at public facilities.

A local government is not required to take any actions that will result in a fundamental alteration to the nature of the facility, will create a hazardous condition resulting in a direct threat to the participant or others, or create an undue financial and administrative burden. If a particular course of action is deemed unduly burdensome, other options should be explored to provide reasonable access to similar benefits.

Existing Conditions

All parks, trails, and open spaces in the City of Mercer Island assessed during the fall of 2019 had some aspect of non-compliance with the ADA guidelines. This is not a surprise, as many of the facilities and amenities were constructed prior to the passage of the ADA in 1990 and the development of the ADA Standards in 2010. Based on the conditions assessment, the overall score for ADA compliance for the Mercer Island parks system is rated as “fair” to “poor.” Additional details and recommendations regarding ADA compliance issues are described below.

Parking & Entrances

The conditions assessment evaluated park entrances, including the availability and accessibility of ADA parking, marked travel aisles, curb cuts or ramps, tactile warning strips, and designated signage. Issues related to these requirements were noted at several parks, including improper installation or the absence of these features altogether. ADA access and parking are feasible in several developed street-end public spaces, but no designated parking space was provided. The total number of ADA parking spaces at each facility was not evaluated, but this should be reviewed as part of the Citywide ADA Transition Plan.

Accessible Routes

Within each park, paved and unpaved pathways connect different park features and amenities. Pathways provide perimeter routes for walking and links to shelters, tables, benches, sports courts, playgrounds, and other park resources. A significant quantity of pavement cracks, caused mainly by tree root upheavals, was noted in many parks. Gaps between pavement surface

changes, such as asphalt pathway to decking, occurred in parks where boardwalks or docks were aging. The need for detectible warning strips was observed at some park and trail facilities where paved pathways enter traffic or parking areas.

Site Furnishings

Site furnishings, such as picnic tables, benches, trash receptacles, dog waste dispensers, and drinking fountains, need to have accessible routes. The ADA guidelines recommend that at least 50% of each amenity type should be located on an accessible path and designed as ADA-compliant. Many picnic tables and benches in Mercer Island parks are not accessible. The degree of compliance varied from park to park, and most parks will require some retrofitting to provide consistent access to picnic tables via paved routes and to wheelchair seating and benches with proper back and armrests. Older drinking fountains often lack universal access and should be phased out with ADA-compliant fixtures as they are replaced.

Playgrounds

Most Mercer Island playgrounds do not meet ADA or universal accessibility requirements. Containment methods, such as timber edging or safety surfacing like engineered wood fiber, present barriers to individuals with mobility or wheelchair use needs. The timbers used to retain the wood chips interfered with a smooth transition from pathways, or the curbs containing wood chips created drop-off heights that were access barriers. Additionally, most of the playground equipment itself is not accessible. At the time the PROS Plan was being developed, the Merderdale Park playground was undergoing renovation. The playground, scheduled to open in early 2022, will be the first fully-accessible playground on Mercer Island.



Playground at Aubrey Davis Park Area A

Parkland Distribution – Gap Analysis

Mercer Island residents are fortunate to have great access to great parks; however, not all areas of the Island are equally served by access to parks and open space. Understanding the known gaps in the park system and evaluating the City’s existing levels of service for parks will provide a foundation for strategic planning as a basis for a balanced distribution of parks, trails, and recreation amenities in the future.

A gap analysis of the park and open space system was conducted to examine and assess the current distribution of parks across the City. Park ‘travelsheds’ (the adjacent region to a park where users can gain easy access) were defined for each major parkland classification to acknowledge that different park types draw users depending on the park’s scale or uniqueness of the park or open space. The following travelshed service areas were used in crafting the maps listed below. The travelsheds represent catchment areas for each park and open space based on the road network and by the indicated travel distances starting from known and accessible access points at each park:

- Mini parks: ¼-mile service area
- Neighborhood parks: ¼-mile primary and ½-mile secondary service area
- Community parks: ¼-mile, ½-mile, and 1-mile service areas
- Regional parks: ¼-mile, ½-mile, 1-mile, and 3-mile service areas
- Water access sites: ¼-mile, ½-mile, and 1-mile service areas
- Open space: ¼-mile, ½-mile, and 1-mile service areas

Maps 2 through 9 illustrate the application of the distribution criteria from existing parks, open space, and water access sites. Areas on the maps in “white” represent those areas where residents do not have a public park or open space within reasonable travel distance of their home. The illustrated travelshed for each existing Mercer Island park and open space highlights that certain areas within the city do not have the desired proximity to a local park.

Striving to provide a mini-park or neighborhood park within a reasonable walking distance (e.g., ½-mile) may require acquiring new properties in currently underserved locations. Improving multi-modal transportation connections will allow local residents to safely and conveniently reach their local park, and evaluating the potential for use agreements of other lands to serve as

proxies for local neighborhood parks would also aid this endeavor. The results from this assessment reveal potential parkland distribution gaps exist in two regions of the island:

- Central Mercer Island between Rotary Park and Island Crest Park, and
- Southwest Mercer Island, west of Pioneer Park and South Mercer Playfields.

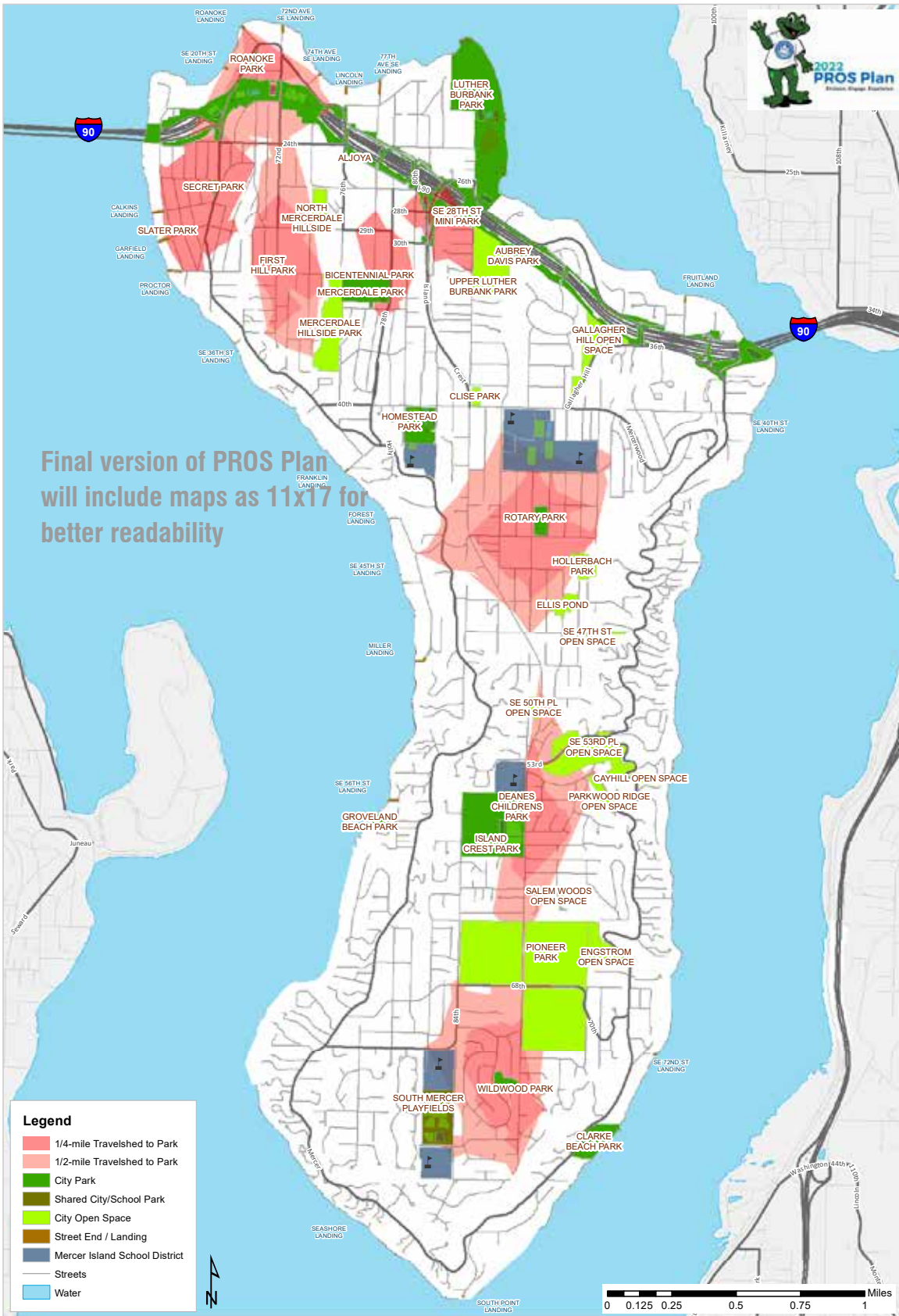
Additionally, opportunities may exist to enhance some street ends for better distribution of water access points around the City. The development of these street ends might afford physical water access, such as small beach areas or human-powered watercraft launches. Still, some might only accommodate passive uses, such as picnicking, respite, or waterfront viewing. These sites include:

- 77th Avenue SE Landing
- Forest Landing
- Roanoke Landing
- SE 56th Street Landing
- South Point Landing

Mercer Island is effectively built out, and acquisition opportunities are limited now and will likely diminish in the future. The City should consider taking advantage of acquisition opportunities in strategic locations and as funding allows to fill known gaps. Recognizing the high land valuations on Mercer Island, the City should conduct a more in-depth analysis of candidate acquisitions as part of a future Property Acquisition Strategy to guide future investments. Such a planning effort should also explore the potential of accumulating adjoining waterfront parcels to accommodate a future waterfront park akin to Clarke Beach or Groveland Beach.



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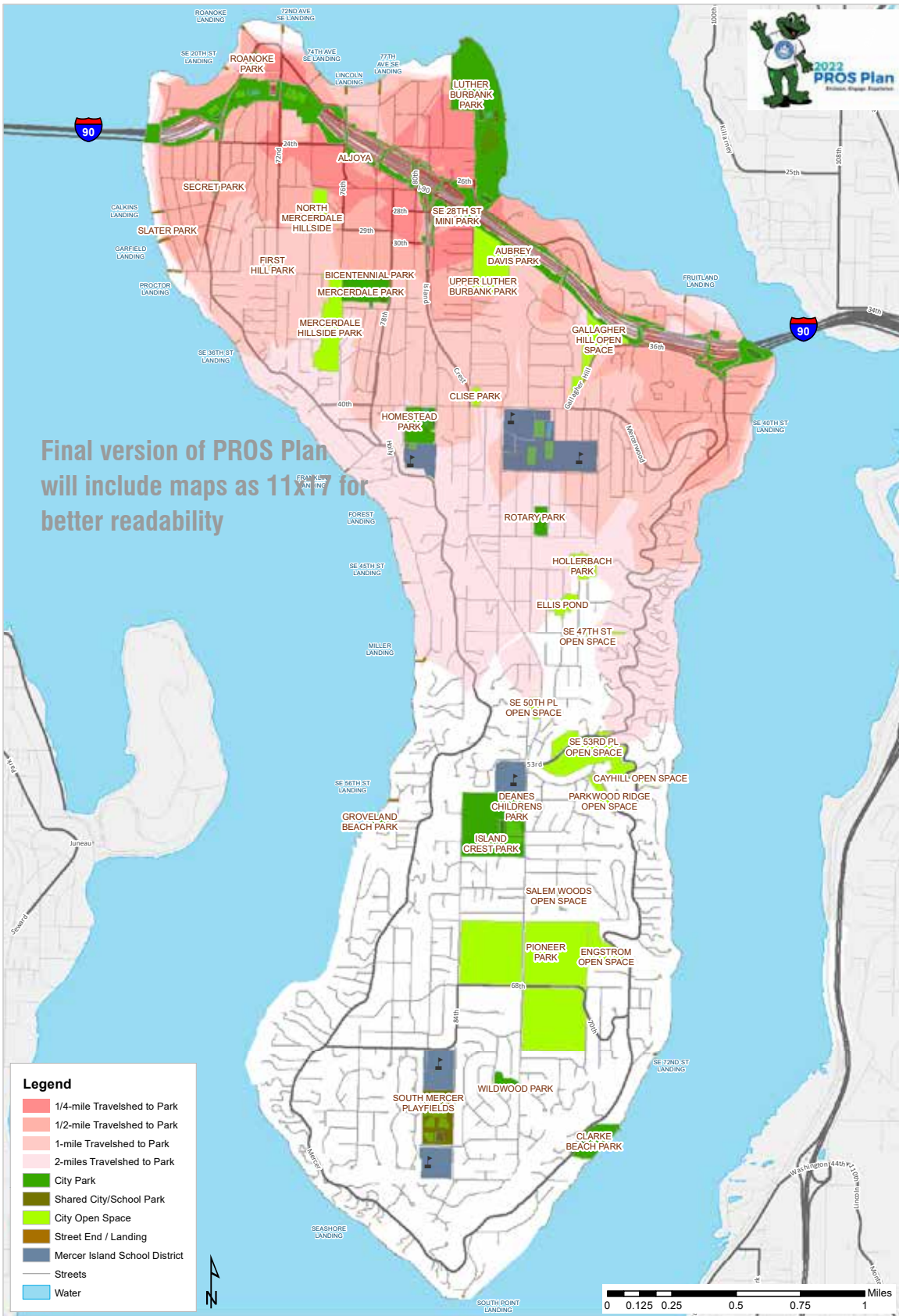
Map 2: Travelsheds for Small Parks (Mini & Neighborhood to 1/2-mile)



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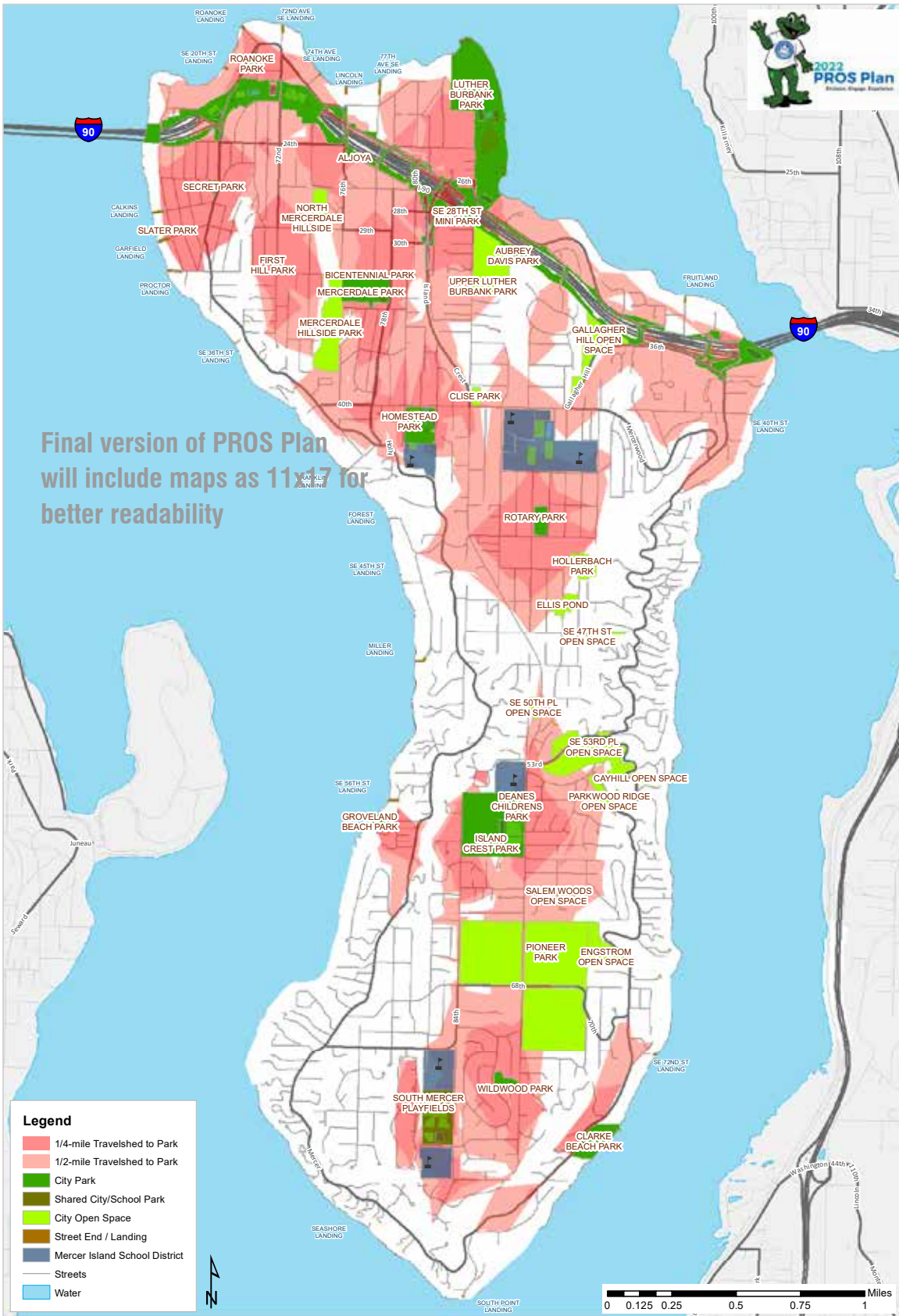
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Map 4: Travelsheds for Regional Parks (3-miles)



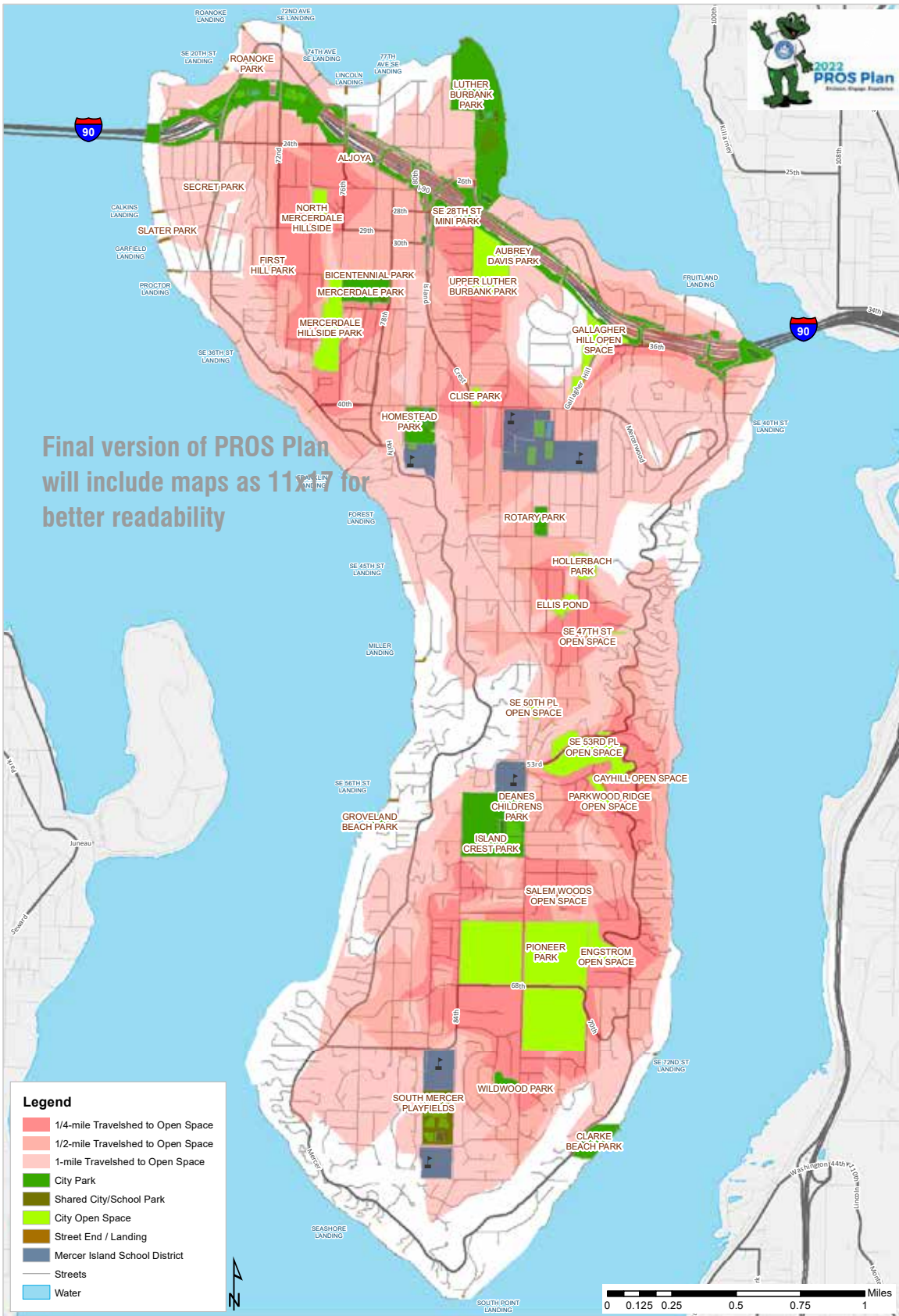
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Map 5: Travelsheds Areas - All Parks (1/2-mile)



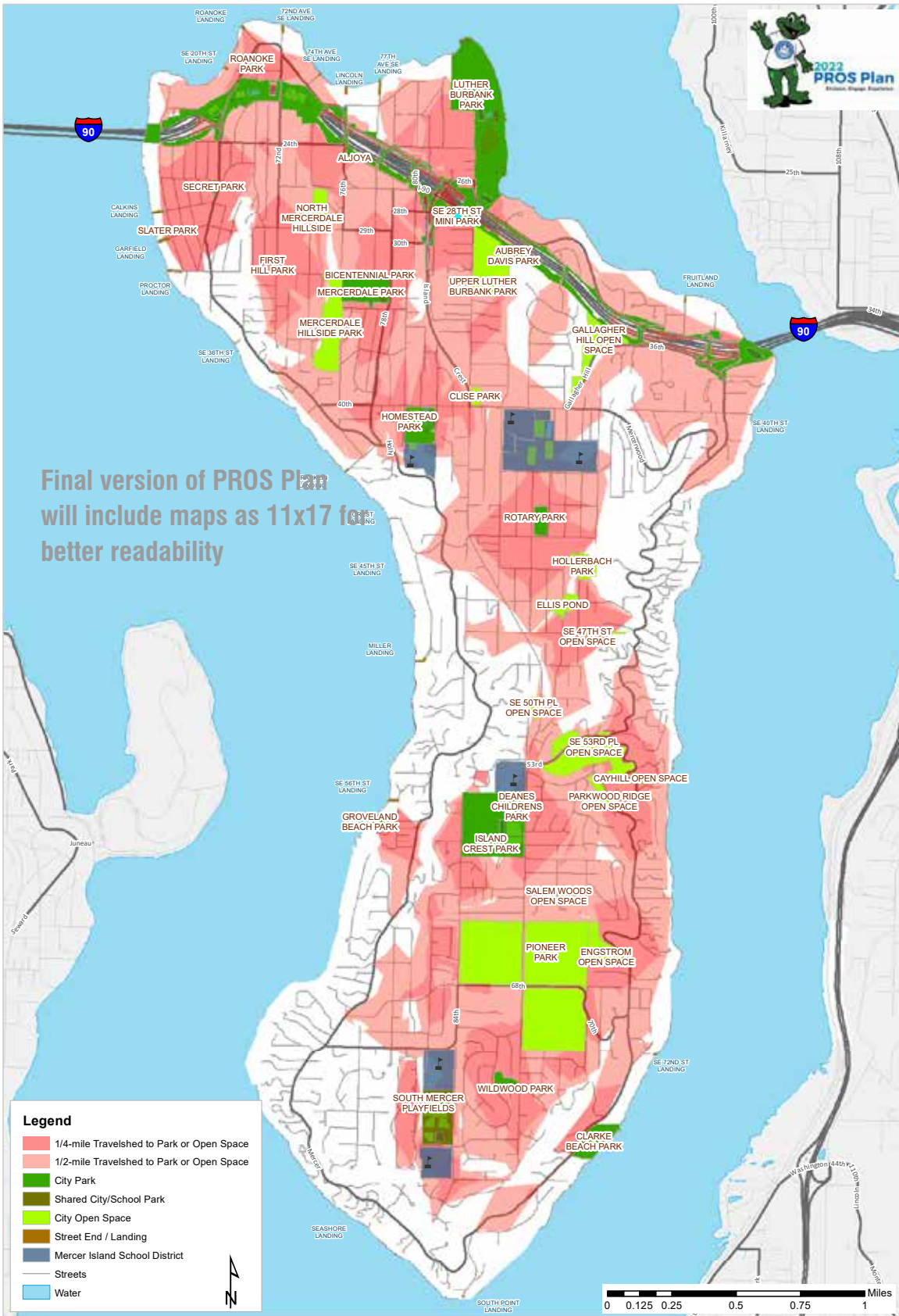
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Map 6: Travelsheds Areas - Open Spaces (1-mile)



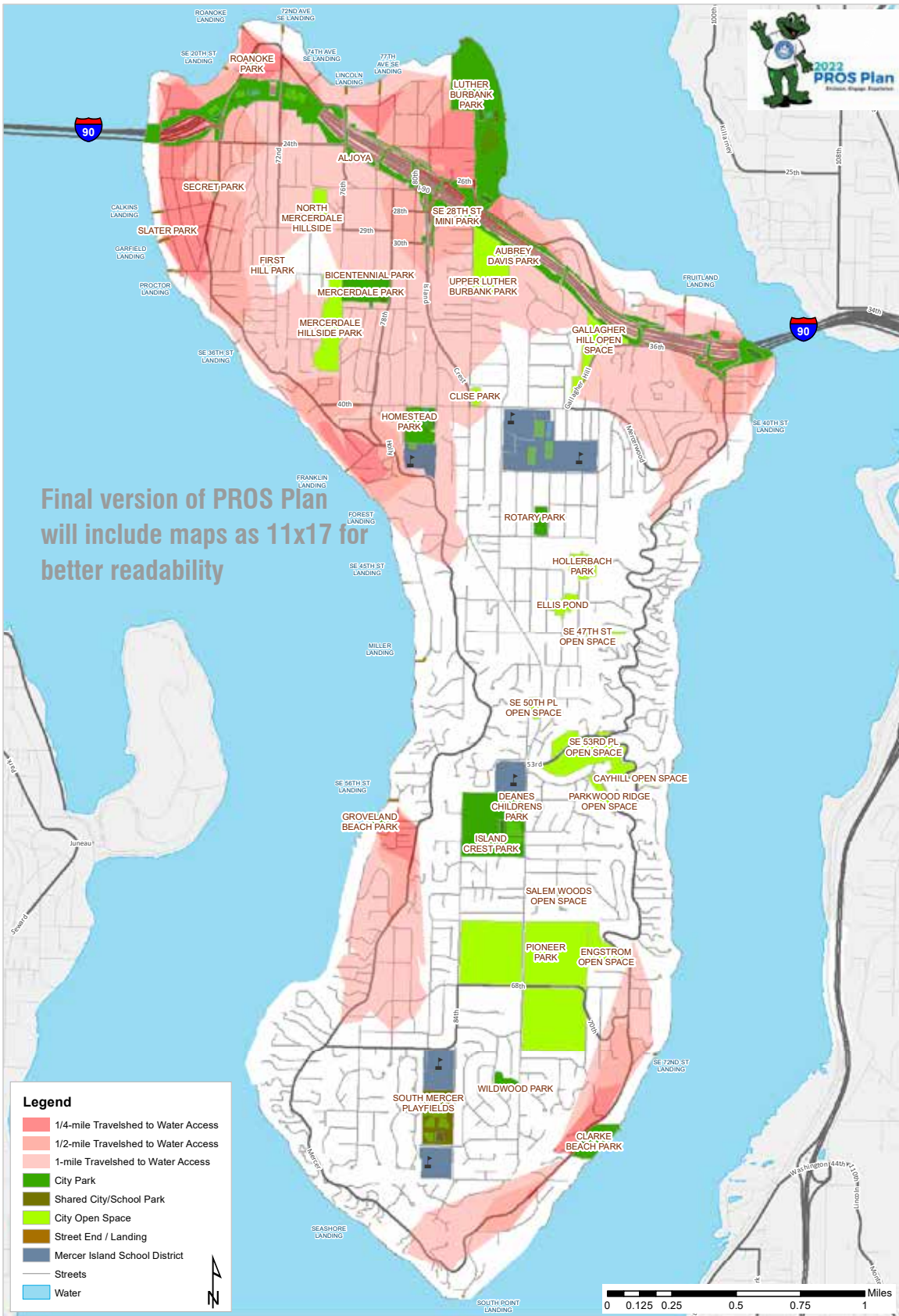
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Map 7: Travelsheds - All Parks & Open Space (1/2-mile)



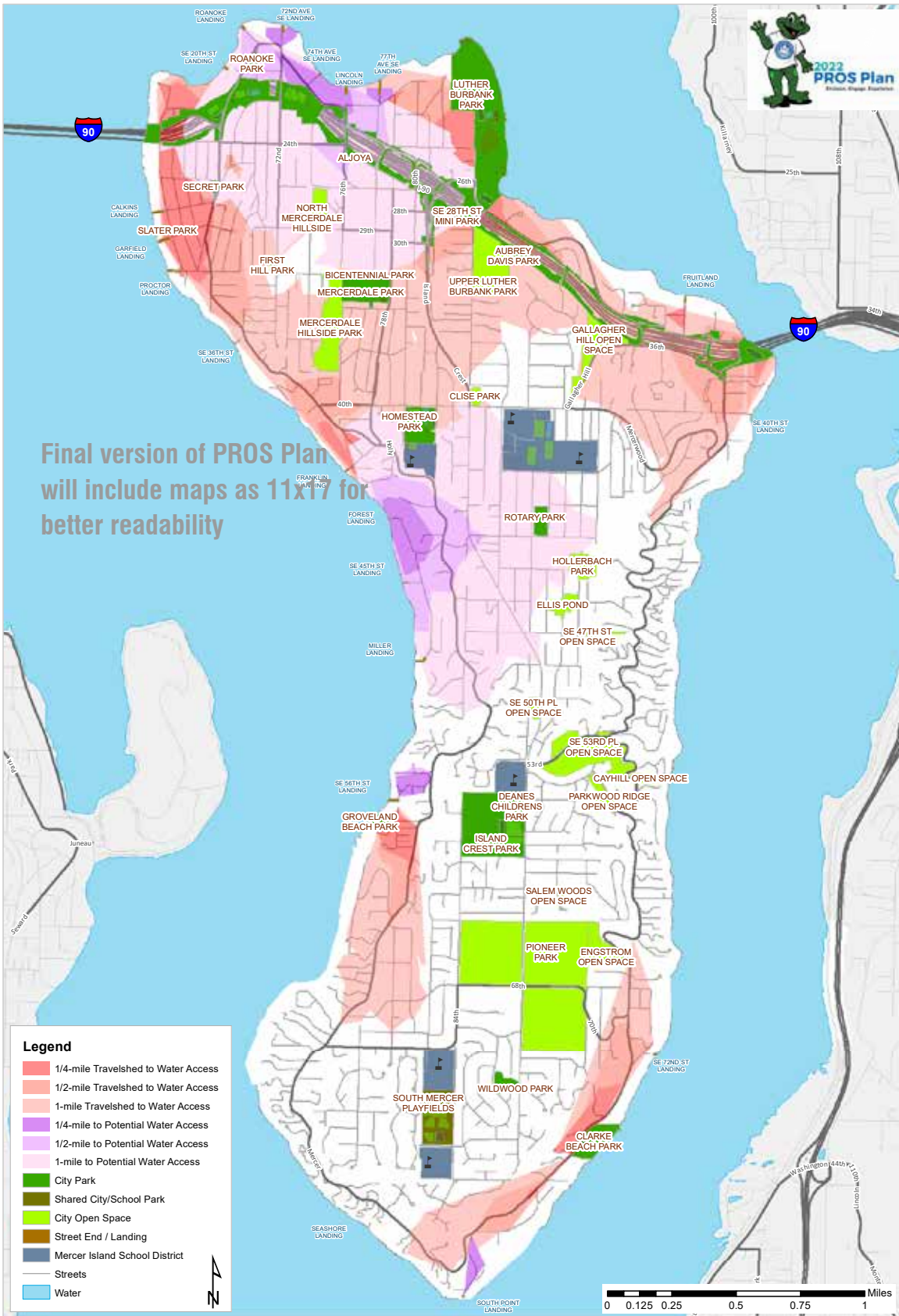
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Map 8: Travelsheds - Existing Water Access Sites (1-mile)



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Final version of PROS Plan will include maps as 11x17 for better readability

Map 9: Travelsheds - Potential Water Access (1-mile)



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Levels of Service

A level of service (LOS) review was conducted in addition to and in support of the gap analysis as a means to understand the distribution of parkland acreage by classification and for a broader measure of how well the City is serving its residents with access to parks, trails, and open spaces. Service standards are the adopted guidelines or benchmarks the City is trying to attain with the park system; the level of service is a snapshot in time of how well the City is meeting its adopted standards.

Many jurisdictions are developing guidelines customized to their community and its unique and often changing park and recreation demands, rather than solely applying the historic National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) published park standards that focus on parkland acreage per resident. The use and application of standards continue to evolve and develop diverse approaches. This Plan evaluates the City’s current parkland level of service through a variety of characteristics, including acreage per capita, as a snapshot in time and means to describe the performance of the park system.

NRPA conducts annual surveys to generate a Park Metrics database (formerly known as PRORAGIS) that reflects the current levels of service of park agencies across the country based on a variety of factors: population size, population density, number of full-time equivalent employees, number of park facilities, acres of parkland, and more. The Park Metrics survey data compares different park and recreation providers from different communities across the country; however,

the Park Metrics database relies on self-reporting by municipalities. Some agencies only include developed, active parks, while others include natural lands with little or no improvements, amenities, or access. The comparative standards in the table below should be viewed with this variability in mind. Also, Mercer Island is unique because it has two City-provided regional parks and significant waterfront access in a densely populated metropolitan region.

A few highlights from the NRPA agency comparison provide perspectives on Mercer Island’s park system. Figure 6.6 compares jurisdictional populations served by park and recreation agencies against certain performance metrics. The number of residents per park and acres of parkland per 1,000 residents implicate the potential wear and tear on park facilities.

Compared with similar population sizes, Mercer Island provides considerably more parkland acreage (18.5 acres, including open space) per 1,000 residents. Comparing just developed park properties, the City has 10.1 acres per 1,000 residents. Looking at the numbers of residents per playground, Mercer Island has more playgrounds (at 1,430 residents per playground) than similar-sized jurisdictions (at 3,157 residents per playground). Those favorable comparisons are even more dramatic when evaluating the number of tennis courts provided for public use. With 14 outdoor tennis courts in five different parks, Mercer Island provides one court for every 1,839 residents compared to other similar-sized jurisdictions who provide one court for 4,347 residents. That comparison does not consider the six high school tennis courts and the 25 tennis courts at the three private community clubs on Mercer Island.

Figure 6.6. Service Levels Comparing Park Metric (NRPA) Data

Metric	Median Value		
	All Agencies	Pop. Range 20-50,000	Mercer Island
Residents per Park	2,281	1,963	954
Acres of Parkland per 1,000 population	9.9	9.6	18.5
Miles of Trails	11	8.5	29
Number of Residents per Playground	3,750	3,157	1,430
Number of Residents per Tennis Court (public-outdoor)	5,004	4,347	1,839
Number of Residents per Rec Center	31,141	25,716	25,748



Numeric standards are a blunt and limited tool to assess how well the City delivers park and recreation services. The numeric values alone neglect any recognition of the facilities' quality or distribution (i.e., the ease which residents have reasonable, proximate access to park sites). While public ownership of a broad range of recreation lands is crucial to the City's well-being, the simple use of an overall acreage standard does not match the community input received during this planning process. Residents were particularly interested in the availability of trails, waterfronts, and open spaces within a reasonable distance from their homes.

The City's park system also was assessed using the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office's (RCO) level of service metrics provided in their planning manual. In reviewing the park system as a whole, Figure 6.7 illustrates the current levels of service across different performance measurements. From the community survey results, public satisfaction of the facilities and amenities that Mercer Island provides ranked as the strongest indicator for the park system.

Figure 6.7. Levels of Service with RCO Metrics (System-wide)

Quality Criteria	
Public Satisfaction	
Overall Satisfaction (rated as Very or Somewhat Satisfied)	92.5%
LOS Grade	A
Agency-based Assessment	
Condition Assessment Rating of Existing Parks (3-point scale)	1.54
LOS Grade	C
Distribution Criteria	
Parkland Access (within 1/2-mile travelshed)	
Percent Service Area with Access to Parks & Open Space	73.2%
LOS Grade	B
Trail System Access (within 1/2-mile travelshed)	
Percent Service Area with Access to Recreational Trails	68.5%
LOS Grade	C
Usage / Visitation Criteria	
Frequency of Park or Trail Usage	
Percent Visiting Parks at Least Multiple Times per Month	87.7%
LOS Grade	A

* Note: The percentage of land area covered by service area walksheds is a proxy for the population within the residential portion of the City.

No numeric standards are recommended or proposed for open spaces. While numerical planning standards are common for helping to determine a desirable number of neighborhood parks per thousand residents, they do not translate easily to open space because of the uniqueness of the land base itself. Rather than being guided by numerical standards for open space, the priority for future open space acquisitions should be focused on those lands that expand ownership of adjacent City-owned properties or to ensure sufficient property is available to accommodate public access, to address future trail connections, and to enhance environmental functions.

Other Considerations

While this Plan uses total parkland acreage and parkland access as primary indicators of parkland need, the City may consider other factors as its population grows, including:

- Park pressure, or the potential user demand on a park: residents are most likely to use the park closest to their home. This measure uses GIS analysis to assign all households to their nearest respective park. It calculates the level of service (in acres of parkland per 1,000 residents) based on the acreage of the park and the number of residents in the 'travelshed'. Areas with lower levels of service are more likely to be underserved by parkland and to see higher degrees of use and wear and tear on park amenities.
- Availability of park amenities: Park systems should include an equitable distribution and quantity of the most common amenities like playgrounds, picnic shelters, sport courts, sports fields, and trails to meet local needs and help distribute the potential usage of individual parks. Providing well-distributed basic park amenities, while also offering unique outdoor experiences, will result in a varied park system with various recreational opportunities for residents.

FUTURE INITIATIVES

Waterfronts & In-Water Infrastructure

Mercer Island's location on Lake Washington and the numerous waterfront parks and street-ends provides countless water-based recreation opportunities, including motorized and non-motorized boating, fishing, paddle sports, wildlife watching, and other beach activities. The City's waterfront parks connect residents to the water and reinforce the uniqueness of Mercer Island's park system.

- The City has made significant investments in waterfront and water-oriented infrastructure over the past decades. This infrastructure, which includes docks, piers, and other water access amenities, is aging and needs to be replaced. Specifically, the City should initiate a joint master planning process for Groveland Beach Park and Clarke Beach Park to establish a long-term plan to address aging infrastructure at both parks. Potential outcomes may include replacing the docks at both parks and considering rehabilitating the shoreline to enhance habitat.

Playgrounds

Similar manufacturers built the existing playgrounds on Mercer Island for a style of play, mainly intended for 2-5 year olds and 5-10 year olds. A review of play equipment installation dates guided the need for and timing of future replacements. Manufactured play equipment has a typical useful service life of 15 to 20 years, depending on play equipment condition, wear, and usage. Of the 18 playgrounds in the parks system, 10 are nearing the end of their useful life and will require replacement within ten years.

- As playground replacements are planned, Mercer Island should consider opportunities for fully-accessible all-inclusive play areas to provide for users of all abilities.

Another significant, recent trend is that of the relationship between child development and access to nature or nature play. Stemming from Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods*, a network of organizations and agencies have come together to discuss the impacts of nature play and seek funding and partnerships to facilitate ways to connect kids to their local environment. According to the Children & Nature Network, a national non-profit organization working to reconnect children with nature, which Louv co-founded, recent studies show that children are smarter, more cooperative, happier, and healthier when they have frequent and varied opportunities for free and unstructured play outside.

- In developing future park sites, the City should consider installing nature play features and look for ways to optimize nature play opportunities.

Sport Fields

The City currently provides significant infrastructure in the way of athletic fields, specifically with synthetic turf fields at Island Crest Park and the South Mercer Playfields, which will require replacement in the coming years.

- Turf replacement projects at both sites should include replacing the existing backstops with higher structures since foul balls currently fall into spectator areas and parking lots. Future field lighting projects should include conversion to energy-saving LEDs.

Sport Courts

A limited variety of sport courts exists within Mercer Island. Fourteen tennis courts are provided at five parks, and three basketball courts are provided at two parks. Several school sites do provide limited access to outdoor basketball and tennis courts. Mercer Island currently has no outdoor, dedicated pickleball courts available within public parks. Still, the tennis court and basketball court at Luther Burbank Park has been used by pickleball players for games.

- Pickleball continues to rank as one of the fastest-growing sports and has seen significant jumps in participation over the past decade, attracting a wide range of age groups. As an interim step, the City should plan to convert some tennis courts to multi-sport courts through striping and plan for a grouping of new, dedicated pickleball courts. Outdoor pickleball courts are most successful if clustered rather than spread individually throughout the park system. Such a grouping promotes leagues, pick-up tournaments, and related social interaction. Courts are best located in groups (at least two, but preferably six to eight to accommodate the social aspects of the sport) to provide for the regular league activity that grows as the sport is adopted within a community.

Expanding Recreation Options

Spray Parks

Spray parks are water play features that are very popular and provide a means of integrating aquatics into parks at a relatively low cost. Mercer Island currently does not have a spray park in the park system, and strong public support exists for this feature.

- The City should consider at least one spray park to serve residents as an option for summertime water play that doesn't require lifeguarding. This special use amenity typically is supported by parking and restrooms since it draws users from a wider area. Any spray park facility should be designed to recycle water if possible.

Bike Skills

Engaging older youth, teens, and adults in more intense physical activity within parks requires amenities that support challenging active movement.

- The existing Bike Skills Area at Upper Luther Burbank Park has been a source of local tension in recent months. At the time the PROS Plan was under development, the City had retained a consultant to assess the Bike Skills Area.

Street End Development

- As noted earlier, expanded access to water-oriented sites and related recreation options is a strong interest of the Mercer Island community. Several street-ends can be improved to provide small spaces for picnicking, human-powered watercraft access, and waterfront viewing.

Spray Park (example)



Other Amenities

Recreation options that require large land areas to accommodate large, dedicated facilities are not recommended for Mercer Island. These include a golf course, disc golf course, and dedicated, single-track mountain bike courses. Each of these types of facilities are available off-island and within reasonable proximity to Mercer Island.

User Conveniences

Providing a range of outdoor sports facilities is a critical element in fostering a healthy and active community. Support for activities and for facilities that can accommodate less physically active park users must also be prioritized. While parking and restrooms provide basic necessities for supporting accessible outdoor recreation, the value of shelters and gathering places should not be underrated.

Restrooms

- Supporting park and trail use through the provision of restrooms is a critical element in any park system. A new restroom is proposed at Aubrey Davis Park, and several other parks should have the restrooms replaced or upgraded. These sites include Clarke Beach Park, Groveland Beach Park, Luther Burbank Park, and Island Crest Park. For Clarke Beach and Groveland Beach, new site master plans for those parks should guide the future decisions about the need and location of restroom facilities.

Picnic Areas & Shelters

- Improving access to existing picnic areas and shelters for ADA compliance should be a core focus. Additionally, the City should replace the recently burned shelter at Aubrey Davis Park and install a new shelter at Luther Burbank Park. As with restrooms, new site master plans for Clarke and Groveland Beach Parks should guide the future decisions about the need and location of picnic areas and shelter facilities.

Wayfinding

- The City of Mercer Island can benefit from enhanced wayfinding and signage supporting its overall park and trail system. Opportunities exist to help visitors navigate and inform them about the public spaces they are entering. A clear need was identified for small identification signs at side entrances to parks and open spaces and 'share the trail' hierarchy-of-uses signs to reinforce user

etiquette. A good wayfinding system can provide a consistent identity and display valuable and accessible information to orient the user. This guidance system ensures efficient use of the trail, park, or other public space and conveys safety to the user by translating the environment into a known geography. Signs, symbols, mapping, color, and standardized site amenities combined with good design of the physical environment (i.e., trail or park) help the user navigate the space and stay comfortably oriented. The use of consistent graphics and a coordinated hierarchy of sign types and sizes can provide park and trail users with wayfinding information, as appropriate, to enhance their access and knowledge of the recreational system available for their enjoyment.

Information on Recreational Opportunities

- The City should continue to enhance its website to provide information on local and regional park and recreation opportunities. The City should continue strengthening existing partnerships with local businesses, athletic leagues, the Mercer Island School District, and other community organizations to facilitate the promotion and distribution of information to residents. Promotional and marketing materials should include an updated parks guide, online maps and amenity lists, and print materials.



SUSTAINABILITY

The Sustainability staff team researches and implements projects, programs, and policies within the city organization and across the community to advance sustainability in Mercer Island, demonstrate climate leadership, and serve as a model for environmental collaboration and innovation. The vision presented in the 2006 City Comprehensive Plan stated, “Mercer Island strives to be a sustainable community...”. With an initial target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the City joined ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability, a non-profit, global network of more than 2,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Since then, the City has become a founding partner in the local policy collective, King County—Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C). Continuing efforts to fulfill sustainable policies have included waste reduction, energy conservation, solar installations, public outreach and education about sustainable practices, electric vehicles, green building requirements, and climate impact mitigation. In late 2020, the City reported that 100 percent of its government operations were now powered by clean, renewable energy from a new turbine windfarm in Western Washington. The City is currently in the process of drafting a Climate Action Plan.

A Role in Shaping a Successful City

Recognizing the potential of parks to shape cities, the National Recreation and Parks Association and the American Planning Association collaborated to address the challenges of creating and enhancing parks in cities. The joint effort concluded that the role of parks is no longer simply relegated to places for recreation or the preservation of open space. Parks in town centers and urban areas increasingly influence the quality of life, economic development, and the connectivity of civic spaces. Parks can also improve stormwater management as green infrastructure, provide flood management benefits, preserve habitat, protect and enhance the tree canopy, and more.

The City recognizes the importance of its parks in shaping a livable Mercer Island and the contribution that parks and recreation provide to the community’s character and quality of life. Partnerships and coordination between City departments (such as planning and parks and water/stormwater) and across other governmental agencies (county, regional, state & federal) connect broader resources and provide multiple benefits for proactively integrating parks in the urban fabric.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure

Green stormwater infrastructure investments to reduce and treat stormwater flooding and pollutants have been on the rise across the country. These nature-based methods apply permeable pavements to reduce runoff, bioswales to slow and treat draining waters, stream restorations to stabilize banks and improve aquatic resources and tree canopy cover to alleviate heat impacts and reduce stormwater quantity. Many cities and towns fail to coordinate their stormwater management efforts with their park system operations, missing a valuable opportunity to improve surface water resources and inform the community about the importance of stormwater management and the value of green infrastructure applications.

Relating city-wide environmental stewardship and the regulatory requirements of stormwater planning, Mercer Island’s park and open space system plays a key role in helping to manage surface water resources and its stormwater runoff control program. Through the City’s Stormwater Management Program, which includes public education and outreach, the City’s parks and open space provide the venues





for opportunities to illustrate best practices for managing rainwater runoff and reducing stormwater impacts. In the park system today, interpretive signs about reducing runoff, installing rain gardens, and using native and naturalized plantings are located in several parks. Park maintenance practices and restoration activities help mitigate runoff volumes and improve water quality. Forest management within parks and open space help reduce stormwater impacts. The Stormwater Management Program outlines the monthly interdepartmental workgroup coordination to help ensure practices and projects that help meet water quality goals. In City parks, the stormwater educational effort includes encouraging pet owners to collect pet waste and properly dispose of it.

Volunteer restoration events in parks and open spaces incorporate information about the importance of restoring and conserving the health of forests, wetlands, and watercourses. Mercer Island's Arbor Day celebration helps promote the importance of trees and their contribution to water quality and a healthy lake environment. The role of urban forestry in contributing to stormwater management is also highlighted in Arbor Day events. The Stormwater Management Program also targets ongoing training for City employees whose operations may impact stormwater quality. New park capital projects should be designed to incorporate green infrastructure techniques that improve rather than adversely impact existing stormwater runoff quality.

As part of its stormwater management, the City seeks to upgrade and improve the aesthetics of its planter beds located in right-of-way roadside and median locations and at individual park entrances. There are 18 different median/roadside sites and 12 park entrance planter beds that are part of a spring 2021 improvement project to optimize visual appeal, provide year-round interest, and incorporate sustainable designs. While these new plantings eventually should consist of "low maintenance" and drought-tolerant plantings, the establishment of new landscape plantings should be expected to increase both monitoring and maintenance to ensure successful growth. In addition, these planting designs may provide a sample palette for future landscape plantings with parks.

Green stormwater infrastructure should become a standard park design practice to ensure that future park projects, upgrades, and ongoing restoration activities continue to promote a healthy lake environment, conserve and protect natural ecosystems, and maintain low-impact park environments. Park planning and management should continue routine collaboration with stormwater utility planning to capture opportunities for financing and implementing coordinated projects and programs.

Advocacy Partnerships

Many park and recreation agencies have supportive local non-profit organizations that provide advocacy and fundraising capacity to park and recreation programming and operations. These relationships can be highly beneficial in capturing local resources to support needed programming and capital improvements that cannot be fully funded solely through tax or program revenues. As non-governmental agencies, non-profit park foundations and open space conservancies can advocate on political issues such as bond initiatives or proposed levies and have more flexibility to publicly lobby local leaders for park, recreation, and conservation causes. Expanding on the community's legacy of supporting philanthropic ventures, creating a park and recreation foundation can be a critical element in future fundraising, marketing, volunteer organization, planning, and strategy.

7

RECREATION, ARTS & CULTURE



The City's recreation, arts, and cultural programs enhance physical and mental health, provide educational value, build social connectedness, and are highly valued by the community.

Tai Chi course at the MICEC

Recreation, arts, and cultural programming assume many forms such as classes, athletics, camps, gymnasium, drop-in programs, performances, special events, social groups, and more. The City is fortunate to host these activities in a variety of indoor and outdoor venues, including the Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC), which is an important facility to support delivery of recreation programs and services. This facility provides active recreational space, community gathering opportunities, and serves as a local and regional venue for private events, meetings, and athletic rentals.

Recreation and Arts Trends

Various resources have been assembled and summarized to offer a comprehensive overview of current recreation trends, market demands, and agency comparisons.

The following national and state data highlights some of the current trends in recreation and arts and may frame future considerations in program and activity development. Additional trend data is provided in Appendix I.

- 77% of respondents to the American Engagement with Parks Survey indicate that having a high-quality park, playground, public open space, or recreation center nearby is an essential factor in deciding where they want to live.⁽¹⁾
- Nearly all (93%) of park and recreation agencies provide recreation programs and services. The top five most commonly offered programs include holiday or other special events (65%), educational programs (59%), group exercise (59%), fitness programs (58%), and day or summer camps (57%).⁽²⁾

- Just over half of Americans ages 6 and older participated in outdoor recreation at least once in 2019, the highest participation rate in five years. (Note: This trend may be higher in 2020 and 2021 given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.) The number of outings per participant declined, however, in 2019 continuing a decade-long trend and resulting in fewer total recreational outings. ⁽³⁾
- Youth aged 6 to 17 were active outside far less in 2019 than in previous years; the average number of outings per child dropped 15% between 2012 and 2019. ⁽³⁾
- Nearly all park and recreation providers in the U.S. experienced declines in revenue in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As early as May 2020, most providers had to close facilities temporarily in accordance with health and safety directives. Nearly half of the providers also furloughed or laid off staff due to the funding and facility impacts of the pandemic. ⁽⁴⁾
- When it comes to costs and revenues, the percentage of costs recovered depends on the type of organization. On average, respondents to the 2020 Managed Recreation Industry survey said they recovered nearly 50% of their operating costs. Only a few facilities reported that they covered more than 75% of their operating costs via revenue. For public organizations, 45% of costs are recovered, up slightly from 42% in 2019. ⁽⁴⁾
- Research from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis shows that arts and culture drive 4.2% of the US gross domestic product (GDP), generating \$736.6 Billion in 2015. In Washington State, this sector beats the national GDP, providing 7.8% of the State's GDP. Both in Washington and nationally, arts and culture surpass construction and education services in contribution to GDP. ⁽⁵⁾
- 28% of the nation's approximately 4,500 Local Arts Agencies (LAAs) are government agencies, departments, programs, facilities, or other associations. Of those LAAs, 80% are affiliated with municipalities. LAAs promote, support, and develop the arts at the local level, ensuring a vital presence for arts and culture throughout America's communities. ⁽⁶⁾
- 84% of LAAs present their own cultural programming to their community. These programs include after-school arts education programs, public art, free concerts in the park, exhibitions, heritage and preservation efforts, festivals, and special events. ⁽⁶⁾
- 53% of LAAs said the general public's perceived value of the arts has increased since the onset of the pandemic. ⁽⁶⁾
- The pandemic disproportionately impacted the cultural sector. It will be among the last sectors to fully reopen, in part due to social distancing requirements. ⁽⁷⁾
- After eight consecutive years of increases, the average size of the LAAs budget (income/revenue) declined 10.0% in 2020 and is anticipated to decline another 10.6% in 2021. ⁽⁸⁾
- People who say their neighborhood has easy access to quality arts and cultural activities tend to be more satisfied, identify more with local lifestyle and culture, and invest more time and resources in their communities. ⁽⁹⁾
- Arts activities increase residents' interest in getting involved in local issues and projects. 86% of civic engagement participants want to be involved in future projects. After their involvement, people living where projects occurred were more than twice as likely to be civically engaged as those whose blocks did not have projects. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Sources:

- (1) American Engagement with Parks Survey (2021)
- (2) 2020 NRPA Agency Performance Review
- (3) 2020 Outdoor Participation Report, Outdoor Foundation
- (4) 2020 State of the Industry Report, Recreation Management magazine
- (5) US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2015
- (6) AFTA 2020 LAA Profile http://surveys.americansforthearts.org/r/391676_60549cd4741a42.54488835
- (7) ArtsWA <https://www.arts.wa.gov/wa-covid-recovery-survey/>
- (8) AFTA LAA COVID-19 Impacts https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/2Pager_ImpactOfCOVIDPandemicOnLAAs_WithBudgetHistory.pdf
- (9) Knight Foundation Community Ties survey Community-Ties-Final-pg.pdf (knightfoundation.org). Builds off Soul of Community Longitudinal Study (2008-2010) conducted by the Knight Foundation found key drivers of community attachment to be social offerings, openness, and aesthetics. <https://knightfoundation.org/sotc/overall-findings/>
- (10) Nicodemus, A., Engh, R., & Mascaro, C. (2016). Adding it Up: 52 Projects by 30+ Artists in 4 Neighborhoods. Metris Arts



Recreation Reset Strategy

The City of Mercer Island’s recreation, arts and cultural programs were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as facilities were closed, revenues declined, and staffing was reduced in March 2020. The City’s leadership took the opportunity during the pandemic to think strategically about how to “reset” the Recreation Division for a successful future. The pause in the provision of most services led to the development of a new strategic approach for delivering recreation and services. The adopted Reset Strategy, which is included as Appendix E, provides guidance for the purposeful allocation or investment of City resources into recreation, arts and cultural programs and services. The Reset Strategy also guides the long-term work and offerings of the Recreation Division, targeting resources and efforts toward:

- Service and program offerings that are aligned with community values and goals.
- Financial sustainability that ensures stewardship and accessibility that benefits all.
- A purposefully planned balance between community investment and individual benefits.

As the City moves forward with implementing the Reset Strategy, it will focus on balancing competing needs and priorities, and determining the best way to maximize or optimize benefits using limited resources. The Reset Strategy’s cost recovery framework (where some programs receive a greater share of tax dollars, and some programs subsidize others) will help the City be deliberate about offering services where it is the best or most appropriate and concentrate support toward core services and programs of the Recreation Division. Core and desirable services are defined below.

Social Good or Public Good Core Services

These programs and services are those that may benefit all members of the community, are typically offered through tax support (rather than user/participant fees), and may focus on health, safety, equity, or access. These programs and services will receive the greatest share of community investment.

Business Sustainability Core Services

These programs and services meet community needs and produce revenue for the City that covers some of the indirect costs of programs or reduces the need for tax support for other programs. These programs and services are designed to meet the market’s needs and are offered with market rates in mind. These programs typically benefit individuals or specific groups. They are financially supported by the beneficiaries of the service.

Desirable Services

Many programs and services could be labeled as desirable, and this categorization includes those programs and services that simply do not fall into either the social/public good core or the business sustainability core. Desirable programs offered by the City should meet these criteria:

- The program is likely to generate sufficient revenues to offset its costs and meet cost recovery targets.
- Hosting the program at a City facility will not adversely affect the City’s ability to offer social/public good or business sustainability core services.
- High demand exists.
- The program will serve a large population or significant, identified community need.

Recreation and Arts Programs

The City has, in the past and will continue to offer in the future, a wide range of programs and activities to diverse participants in a multitude of settings. This commitment is consistent with residents’ stated desire for the City to offer programs for various ages and abilities. As the Reset Strategy is implemented, the Recreation Division will initially focus on providing programs and services categorized as “core” and expand offerings in response to community needs and as resources allow. The strongest demand for recreation programs has been for:

- Youth summer camps.
- Drop-in sports, such as pickleball.
- Field and gymnasium rentals for sports programs and leagues.
- Meeting and event room rentals.
- Organized, instructor-led fitness programs.

In addition to advocating for popular, recurring programs, residents have expressed interest in the City offering more of the following:

- Outdoor classes and activities.
- Aquatics programming such as swimming, water safety, and boating.
- Educational classes.

Going forward, recreation staff will pilot new programs to explore the demand for trends such as e-sports, intergenerational activities, and other outdoor activities. As an island community the demand is high for water-oriented activities, and the Recreation staff will pursue

enhanced programming opportunities at the City's waterfront locations. There is strong community support for the City to avoid duplication of services and to partner with other providers as a way to satisfy demand, enrich the variety of offerings, and efficiently use City resources.

Recreation Facilities

The City of Mercer Island hosts recreation and arts and culture programs in its parks and in several municipal buildings, most notably the Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC). The day-to-day management, ongoing maintenance, and long-term reinvestment in these facilities are crucial to the success of the City's programs. Additionally, efficient scheduling and use of the facilities ensures that cost recovery, diversity, equity and inclusion, program lifespan vitality, and other goals are met. The City should continue to coordinate with the other facility providers on Mercer Island, such as the Mercer Island School District, the Boys & Girls Club, Mary Wayte Pool, the Mercer Island Library, and the Stroum Jewish Community Center, among others, on program offerings and scheduling.

When residents were asked to state how they would prioritize the use of MICEC facilities, they indicated the following were top priorities:

- Activities for youth
- Activities for seniors
- Adaptive or therapeutic recreation
- Fitness programs,
- After school or school break programs.

Additionally, there is strong support for the MICEC to serve as a gathering place for spontaneous play and socialization, one-time activities, and special events, and to showcase local art. The City can leverage the facility as an event center by maximizing private use on evenings and weekends. Also, the future use and function of the North Annex at the MICEC should be guided by a focused master planning effort to examine the community needs and program options suited for that space while also identifying options to replace the aging infrastructure.



Fitness program at the MICEC



Camp Mercer participants



Climbing wall during a special event at Luther Burbank Park



Special Events

The Recreation Division is responsible for the overall coordination of community and special events. These public events provide gathering opportunities, celebrations, inspiration, remembrance, activation of Town Center and city parks, entertainment, and education. Special events draw the community together and also attract off-Island visitors. Some recurring, multi-day community events of the recent past included Summer Celebration, Mostly Music in the Park, Friday Night Films, Leap for Green, Shakespeare in the Park, and Illuminate MI. The City has also hosted or supported numerous one-time or single-day events.

Community gathering and special events should continue to be an area of emphasis; however, the overall number and breadth of City-sponsored special events should be carefully managed to align with the availability of resources and impacts to general park and facility use. Upcoming policy and budget deliberations will guide the City in the number and extent of the special events through the allocation of dedicated resources. A structured approach will help the City manage the growth of these popular offerings; ensure high-quality, adequately resourced events; and enlist community sponsorships, partnerships, and support.

Opportunities to connect are clearly crucial to Mercer Island residents, particularly as the community emerges from the global pandemic. Recent surveys showed strong community support for spending “some tax dollars on a few special events open to all community members,” a desire for more “community events for those without children,” and an interest in “performing arts such as community theater or concerts.”

Wedding ceremony at the Luther Burbank Park Amphitheater



Arts and Culture

The City of Mercer Island plays a critical role in supporting and sustaining the community’s rich and diverse arts and cultural identity. This responsibility is upheld largely through the ongoing work of the Recreation Division and Arts Council, which is more fully described in the City’s Comprehensive Arts and Culture Plan (adopted in November 2018 and provided in Appendix F).

As the City’s official Local Arts Agency (LAA), the Arts Council strives to:

- Advocate for the arts, artists, and arts organizations on Mercer Island.
- Stimulate and promote community awareness, education, and enjoyment of the fine arts.
- Support performing, visual, and literary arts programs, projects, and events.

These goals have been advanced through a range of one-time and ongoing activities, including oversight of the City’s public art collection, the Mercer Island Gallery, and the Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery; advocating for art experiences such as special programs and classes, concerts, film series, dances, and theater performances; fostering community art creation projects; and convening and cooperating with other arts organizations.

The Comprehensive Arts and Culture Plan describes a vision of assimilating “positive art experiences into everyday life for all community members” and areas of policy focus and actions to take to achieve that vision. The plan also names two barriers to achieving the vision: (1) a lack of coordinated cooperation among Mercer Island arts groups, and (2) a lack of space for arts activities and performances. The plan encourages enhancing alliances in the local arts community to improve availability of arts and cultural resources and the ability to fulfill community needs.

The City’s PROS Plan community surveys reflect similar themes and are in alignment with the Arts and Culture Plan findings. Community members voiced a desire for the City to “explore partnerships” as a way to deliver program, event, and facility-based “opportunities for all.” Community members see the City as playing an important role in facilitating access to the diversity of arts and cultural opportunities, regardless of whether or not the City is the primary provider of an event, activity, or facility.

As the City implements the Recreation Reset Strategy, it is redefining expectations for allocating City resources and the outcomes sought from using those resources. Work plans for the Arts Council, the Parks

and Recreation Commission, and City staff identify the policies that need to be developed or updated to enhance alignment with the Reset Strategy and implement program, events, and other experiences. The City will conscientiously target its arts and cultural work efforts and devote energy to evaluating performance on named objectives.

Arts and Culture Programming

The Recreation Division and its community partners deliver arts and cultural programming, with support from the Arts Council and community volunteers. Arts and cultural opportunities have included visual arts classes and exhibits, dance performances and instruction, concerts, summer camps with various arts themes, and special events. As with the approach to other recreation programs, the City endeavors to provide a broad array of public art and community arts and cultural programs encompassing literary arts, performing arts, educational topics, history, and diverse cultures accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Programming varies yearly based on demand, input from the Arts Council and community members, special occasions, availability of resources, and new opportunities.

Arts Venues & Assets

The City conducts arts and culture programs and events at the MICEC. The facility includes the Mercer Island Gallery, a dance room, an outdoor covered terrace, a gymnasium, classrooms, and a large event space. The City maintains a public art collection of more than 65 two- and three-dimensional works, which can be found in public parks and rights-of-way, municipal buildings, and at the Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery. Outdoor venues for arts and cultural opportunities include the City's parks and an amphitheater. Other resources and assets include the City's 1% for the Art fund, which supports the public art collection, and digital tools like the Public Art Story Map and STQRY.

The City's arts and cultural programming, venues and assets are augmented by those provided by Mercer Island arts organizations. A list of these essential partners and resources can be found in the Comprehensive Arts and Culture Plan (Appendix F).

Future Programming Directions

Implementation of the Recreation Reset Strategy, which began in 2021, will take a few years and will require ongoing collaboration between staff, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Arts Council, the City Council, and the community.

The Reset Strategy is not designed to simply restart everything at once but to improve outcomes and align offerings to an overall community investment and prioritization structure. Program offerings will be considered based on several factors, including an assessment of trends and program life cycle stages, competition and duplication within the community, desired program outcomes, partnership and cooperation possibilities, the commitment level of potential participants, availability of resources, and consistency with the cost recovery and resource allocation philosophy.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, it is an exciting time in the Recreation Division as programming and services resume with a robust business framework, in alignment with community priorities, and with an eye towards the future.

Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery (Aubrey Davis Park)



8 TRAILS & PATHWAYS

Trails and paths provide people with valuable links between neighborhoods, parks, schools, transit, business centers, regional trail networks, and other destinations. This chapter provides an overview of the trails system on Mercer Island, including an assessment and recommendations on future initiatives.

Mountains to Sound Trail through Aubrey Davis Park

Completing trail system connections was identified as one of the highest capital project priorities during the community engagement process, and walking was the top activity for Mercer Island residents. Continuing to manage and invest in the trails system while also improving access to transit options is essential to maintaining a healthy and livable community and promoting alternatives to motor vehicle use.

Trail Use Trends

Walking and hiking continue to be the most popular recreational activities nationally and regionally. Furthermore, national recreation studies have consistently ranked walking and hiking as the most

popular form of outdoor recreation over the last ten years. These studies include:

- Sports Participation Survey by the National Sporting Goods Association (2020)
- State of the Industry Report by the Recreation Management Magazine (2020)
- Outdoor Recreation in America by the Recreation Roundtable (2020)

According to the 2020 Outdoor Participation Report published by the Outdoor Foundation, running (including jogging and trail running) was the most popular activity among Americans when measured by the number of participants and total annual outings. Running was also the most popular outdoor activity for all ethnic groups.

The 2018-2022 Recreation and Conservation Plan for Washington State confirmed that outdoor recreation is an integral part of life for most Washington residents, with strong participation in the most popular category of activities, which includes walking (94%) and hiking (61%). Considerable increases in participation rates in outdoor recreation activities since 2006 indicate the importance of State and local communities continuing to invest in parks, trails, and open space infrastructure.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted outdoor recreation activities, including trail use. Indoor facilities and in-person programming were shut down and then only partially restarted in 2020. Local and regional park and recreation agencies that managed trail systems were pressed to adapt to heavy use and crowded trailhead parking, as many people shifted their daily exercise routines to outdoor activities, such as walking and bicycling.

The 2020 Sports & Fitness Industry Topline Report identified sports that increased in popularity in the last six years, including trail running, cardio tennis, BMX biking, and day hiking. For most age segments, activities that households aspired to (e.g., fishing, camping, biking, and hiking) related to the need for supporting trail infrastructure.

An August 2020 report from the Outdoor Industries Association revealed that Americans took up new activities in significant numbers with the biggest gains in running, cycling, and hiking. Walking, running, and hiking were widely considered the safest activities during pandemic shutdowns. Reviewing only three months of data (April, May, and June 2020) revealed that participation rates for day hiking rose more than any other activity, up 8.4%.

BENEFITS OF TRAILS

Trails for Walkable Communities

In the NRPA publication, *Safe Routes to Parks*, walkable, healthy community design elements are outlined as convenience, comfort, access and design, safety, and the park itself. Sidewalks, bike paths, and trails should provide an integrated alternative transportation system for residents to access parks and other destinations within their community. To further emphasize the importance of a walkable community to promote public health, the Surgeon General has issued a Call to Action to “step it up” to encourage walking and build a more walkable world. A more connected network of trails, sidewalks, and bike lanes linked to local and regional public transit also provides economic values and invites a broader range of participants.

Trails for Aging Populations

Today’s active seniors are looking at retirement differently, as many are retooling for a new career, finding ways to engage with their community, and focusing on their health and fitness. It is critical for Mercer Island to pursue a comprehensive approach to the City’s aging population needs. Trails provide the infrastructure for the most popular and frequent outdoor recreation activity of older adults: walking. Constructing and operating trails for a wide range of abilities will help walkers sustain healthy physical activity throughout life. Trails meeting a wide range of abilities will require planning, constructing, and operating a range of trail options that walkers can select based on their abilities. Ideally, the trail system will include a spectrum of choices ranging from steep and uneven “backcountry” trails that access remote open spaces to trails with more gradual grades and fine gravel surfacing that traverse both parks and open spaces. Paved trails close to parking and that offer several distance options to meet the trail users’ needs should also be considered. These trail choices would be clearly communicated through multiple channels, including low-impact site signage where appropriate with key information on trail length, width, grade, and surfacing. Barrier-free parking and paths, walkability, and connectivity also will be key components of future pedestrian planning.

Trails for Economic Health

In the 2009 report, *Walking the Walk: How Walkability Raises Housing Values in US Cities* by Joe Cortright for CEOs for Cities, research cited the connection between home values and walkability. Higher WalkScore measurements where more typical consumer destinations were within walking distance were directly associated with higher home values. Homes located in more walkable neighborhoods command a price premium over otherwise similar homes in less walkable areas. The publication, *On Common Ground*, distributed by the National Association of Realtors, highlights numerous articles citing the preference of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods and the role of walkability in creating healthier communities. These preferences translate into higher real estate prices and housing values. Even the National Association of Homebuilders (March 2014 publication: “Walkability, why we care and you should too”) has recognized that walkability is desired by consumers, creates lower development costs, and allows flexibility in design. As part of the system of walkability and bike-ability, recreational trails are real estate assets that enhance community connections and contribute to community-wide economic health.



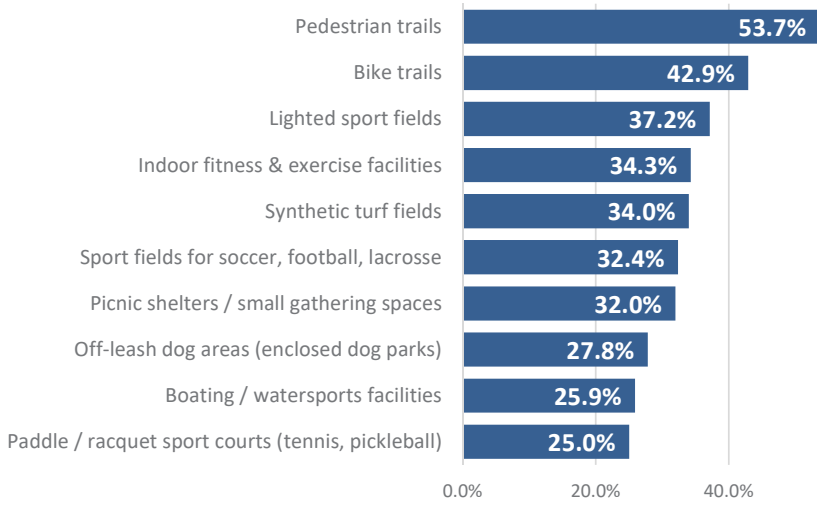
Local Insights

As noted in previous chapters, community feedback from two community surveys and two virtual public meetings (see Appendices A, C, D & E) provided a wealth of local insights on current usage and interests in various park and recreation amenities.

Respondents to the first community survey indicated that the most popular activity is walking or running

(81%) and is the top reason for visiting Mercer Island parks and open space. Respondents indicated that the highest unmet park and recreation facility need is for pedestrian trails. In the same survey, respondents also noted a strong need for additional pedestrian trails (54%) and bike trails (43%), see Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1. Community Need for Additional Park and Recreation Amenities



To further distinguish community priorities from those noted in the first survey, respondents were provided a range of options related to specific potential improvements to the Mercer Island park system. They were asked to select their top three choices. A strong plurality of respondents (44%) noted that connecting gaps in the trail system is a top priority, which was also 13 points higher than the next highest ranked option provided.

Also, respondents were asked to select their top three park and recreation amenities to identify community priorities. The essential amenities noted included walking or jogging trails (93% very or somewhat important) and open space and natural areas (90% very or somewhat important). The second tier of amenities of strong interest includes restrooms (84% very or somewhat important) and bike lanes or paths (68% very or somewhat important).

In the second virtual public meeting and when explicitly asked about improvements to the City’s trail system, participants identified the top two priorities as improving maintenance and upkeep of existing trails (44%) and acquiring and building new trail connections through the purchase of land, easements, or right-of-way (31%).

Trail Classifications

Defining and reinforcing a recreational trail classification establishes a framework for trail design and prioritizes proposed trail enhancements and development. The recreational trail classification system is based on a tiered network and includes five trail categories:

- Shared-Use Paved Trails
- Neighborhood Links
- Natural Surface Trails
- Water Trails
- Park Trails

While some sections of trail will accommodate higher volumes of traffic and provide regional connections, other sections may rely on the local street network and be designed to link local or neighborhood destinations. Planning for differing trail types is essential as it encourages appropriate usage and discourages informal trail creation that could destroy vegetation and cause erosion.



Shared-Use Paved Trails

Shared-use paved trails serve as a vital circulation connection that link adjacent developments, neighborhoods, parks, schools, and other destinations. This trail type is paved with either asphalt or concrete and should be a minimum of 10' wide with one-foot shoulders on each side of the trail. Typical trail users include pedestrians, bicyclists, and people with other wheeled devices (such as scooters). Some bicyclists use these routes for commuting purposes.

Neighborhood Links

Neighborhood linkage trails are multi-use pedestrian walking, hiking, biking, and equestrian connections that link neighborhoods with each other and with other open space, parks, schools, and other destinations. They provide the functional network of the trail system and consist of right-of-way

and facilities designed for use by a variety of non-motorized users. They consist of both soft-surface and hard-surface materials and vary in width.

Natural Surface Trails

Natural surface trails provide connections to remote and unique natural areas within or adjacent to the community. Ideally, natural surface trails should connect to multi-use paved trails. Natural surface trails are generally 2-4' wide. Typical trail users include hikers and mountain bikers.

Park Trails

Numerous City parks include pathways, sidewalks, and hiking trails, etc., that provide access to the park and circulation within the park

Kayak camp at Luther Burbank Park



Water Trails

Water trails are recreational water routes for non-motorized boats and watercraft. The trailhead locations are parks or street ends with dock or beach facilities to enable non-motorized crafts to launch and land. The Lakes-to-Locks Water Trail provides a water-borne route for non-motorized boaters that connects inland lakes, rivers, and waterways with the shores of Elliott Bay and Puget Sound. With more than 100 miles of shoreline and a chain of 100 launch and landing sites, this urban freshwater trail provides numerous opportunities to explore multiple communities, including Mercer Island. Ten Mercer Island water trailheads provide amenities and shoreline access to human-powered watercraft, including:

- 85th Place SE (South Point)
- Clarke Beach Park
- Franklin Landing
- Fruitland Landing
- Groveland Beach Park
- I-90 East Channel Boat Launch
- Lincoln Landing
- Luther Burbank Park
- Proctor Landing
- Slater Park

The Lakes-To-Locks Water Trail was designated in August 2000. The Hiram M. Chittenden Locks in Seattle provides the connection to the Cascadia Marine Trail on Puget Sound.

See: <https://www.wwta.org/water-trails/lakes-to-locks-trail/>

Photo credit: MI Reporter

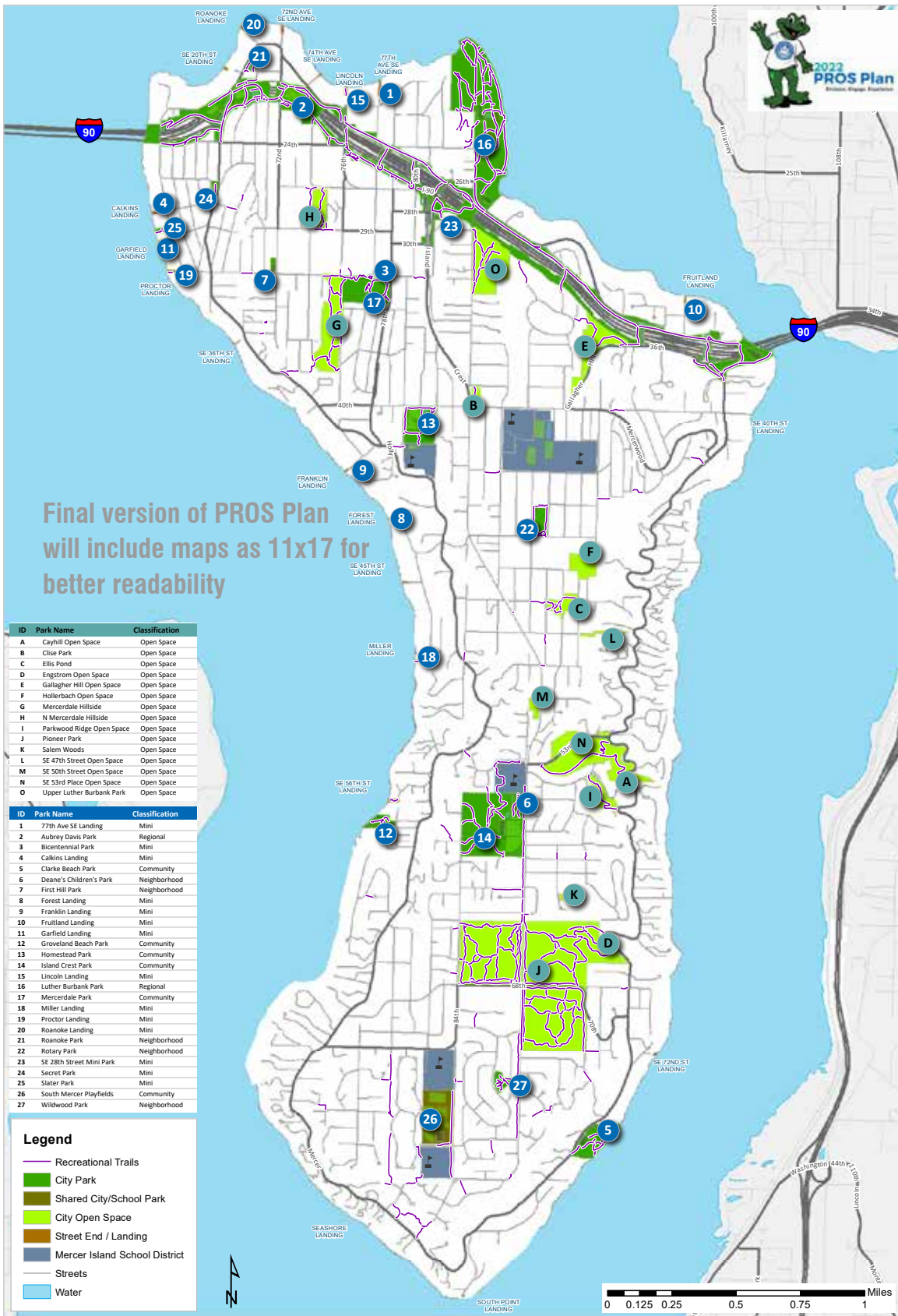


Trail System Inventory

The City of Mercer Island has created a growing neighborhood and park trails system with linkages between parks and across the Island. The existing trails comprise 28.5 miles of trail facilities providing many opportunities for connecting to outdoor recreation locations and other destinations, see Figure 8.2. However, there are still gaps in the trail network that limit the access and enjoyment of trail use on Mercer Island.

Figure 8.2. Existing City-maintained Trails within Mercer Island

Park/Trail/Facility Name	Trail Tread	Length (miles)
Aubrey Davis Park/I-90 Lid	Concrete, asphalt	4.97
Bicentennial Park	Concrete	0.05
Clarke Beach Park	Asphalt	0.48
Clise Park	Rock	0.08
Deane's Childrens Park	Rock, dirt	0.31
Ellis Pond	Boardwalk, stone	0.36
Gallagher Hill Open Space	Gravel, dirt	0.35
Groveland Beach Park	Asphalt	0.16
Homestead Park	Asphalt, gravel	0.57
Island Crest Park	Asphalt, dirt	1.37
Lincoln Landing	Asphalt	0.03
Luther Burbank Park	Concrete, asphalt, stone, boardwalk, dirt	3.02
Luther Burbank Park - MICEC	Concrete, asphalt, gravel	1.17
Mercerdale Hillside Open Space	Gravel, dirt	1.52
Mercerdale Park	Concrete, asphalt, dirt	0.19
Miller Landing	Concrete	0.02
North Mercerdale Hillside Open Space	Gravel, dirt	0.53
Parkwood Ridge Open Space	Gravel, dirt	0.23
Pioneer Park	Asphalt, gravel, dirt	6.43
Pioneer Park - Enstrom Open Space	Gravel, dirt	0.45
Proctor Landing	Gravel	0.02
Roanoke Park playground	Asphalt, dirt	0.13
Rotary Park	Asphalt, rock, dirt	0.45
SE 53rd Open Space	Gravel, dirt	0.60
SE 56th St Landing	Gravel	0.03
Secret Park	Dirt	0.07
Slater Park	Concrete, paver	0.09
South Mercer Playfields	Asphalt	0.26
Upper Luther Burbank Park	Gravel, dirt	0.66
Misc. ROW Trails	Asphalt, gravel, dirt	3.87
	Total	28.46



Map 10: Existing Recreational Trails



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Trail Network Travelsheds

Paths and trails provide people with valuable links between neighborhoods, parks, schools, business centers, and other destinations.

As a supplement to the Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities Plan (last updated in June 2010), a gap analysis was conducted to examine and assess the distribution of existing recreational paths and trails. As with the parkland analysis, shared-use path travelsheds were defined using a ¼-mile primary service area and a ½-mile secondary service area. Travel distances were calculated along the road network starting from each existing segment's known and accessible access points. Trails within parks were also examined, and service areas were calculated with ¼-mile and ½-mile travelsheds for major parks (e.g., Pioneer Park, Luther Burbank Park, and Mercedale Park) and ¼-mile travelsheds for the remainder. Map 11 (page 91) illustrates the citywide distribution of recreational trails and the relative access to these corridors within reasonable travel travelsheds. Approximately 65% of the City has reasonable access to recreational trails, including park trails and the I-90 Bike Trail (also referred to as the Mountains to Sound Regional Trail).

Similar to transportation planning, recreational trail planning should be geared toward connectivity, rather than mileage. Only considering a mileage standard for paths within the Mercer Island park system will result in an isolated and inadequate assessment of community needs with little consideration for better trail connectivity. This Plan recommends eliminating the recreational trail mileage standard in favor of a connectivity goal that re-states and reinforces the desire to improve overall connections across the City and enhance off-street linkages between parks and major destinations, as feasible. Completing trail connections was identified as a top priority through the community engagement process and should also include connections to transit when possible.

Trail System Design Considerations

Alignment

The future growth of the trail network will need to prioritize trail alignments and locations that are optimal from multiple perspectives: trail user, trail experience, and trail connectivity. Cost, regulatory, and site suitability factors should also be incorporated. New trail alignments should attempt to accommodate different trail use types (i.e., commuter vs. recreational/destination oriented) and utilize interim solutions such as widening sidewalks and utilizing existing or planned

utility corridors as opportunities for trail improvements. Accommodating trail alignments for local, neighborhood link trails as connections to regional, shared-used trails or major park trails is essential for providing access and reducing the sole reliance on trailheads for providing access to the trail network.

Access & Trailheads

Safe, convenient entryways to the trail network expand access for users and are a necessary component of a robust and successful system. A trailhead typically includes parking, kiosks, and signage and may consist of site furnishings such as trash receptacles, benches, restrooms, drinking fountains, and bike racks. Trailheads may be within public parks and open space or provided via interagency agreements with partner organizations (e.g., county, school district, etc.) to increase use and reduce unnecessary duplication of support facilities. Specific trailhead design and layout should be created as part of planning and design development for individual projects and consider the intended user groups and unique site conditions.

In many areas, parking on the shoulders is a significant problem that hinders the utility of the shoulders for pedestrian and bicycle use while also creating environmental and neighborhood impacts. While this problem has been particularly noted along East and West Mercer Way and near Pioneer Park, it is also a potential issue in other neighborhood areas. In areas where parking on the road shoulder is persistent for trail access, the City should explore options for formalizing trailhead parking improvements to accommodate typical demand and localize and manage site impacts resulting from trail use parking. The City should also continue to explore first/last-mile connections so that potential park visitors can arrive using transit, reducing the need for on-site parking.

Trail Development Limitations

Opportunities to develop additional trails and connections may be limited due to the built-out nature of Mercer Island. One underlying tenet of the recreational trail system is to enable the placement of trails within or close to natural features to provide access to the City's unique landscapes and accommodate outdoor recreational access to creeks, hillsides, and waterfront. The future planning and design of trail routes through natural areas should be based on sensitive and low-impact design solutions that offer controlled access to protect the resource while providing for a positive experience for all modes of trail user. The determination of future trail alignments should prioritize natural resource and natural hazards planning and protections, in part to meet local land-use policies and Washington State requirements.

Ongoing Maintenance

Following trail construction, ongoing trail monitoring and maintenance will keep the trails functioning as designed, while protecting capital investments in the network. The City of Mercer Island should continue to perform routine trail maintenance through the guidance of its existing trail maintenance program and continue to implement the maintenance and repair projects identified in the 2018 Trail Structure & Maintenance Inventory Report.

This report also identifies substantial portions of the City's existing trail infrastructure that will require significant renovation in the coming years to preserve its function. Future trail renovation projects should be included in the Capital Improvement Plans as a means to identify and secure appropriate resources for needed enhancement. The City should maintain and expand the connection to and communications with the robust network of local volunteers to provide support as appropriate.

Trail Signs & Wayfinding

Coordinated signage plays an important role in facilitating a successful trail system. A comprehensive and consistent signage system, implemented appropriately according to the type, scale and site of the trail setting, is a critical component of the trail network. It is necessary to inform, orient and educate users about the trail system itself, as well as appropriate trail etiquette. Such a system of signs should include trail

identification information, orientation markers, safety and regulatory messages and a unifying design identity or element for branding. The following signage types should be considered and implemented as appropriate throughout the network:

- Directional and regulatory signage
- Trail user etiquette and hierarchy signage
- Continuous route signage for route identification and wayfinding
- Design for consistency with the industry best practices and neighboring cities.
- Mileage markers or periodic information regarding distance to areas of interest
- Warning signs to caution users of upcoming trail transitions or potential conflicts with motor vehicles
- Interpretive information regarding ecological, historical, and cultural features found along and in proximity to the trail
- Consider alternatives to physical signs, such as QR codes and online trail maps, to provide additional information

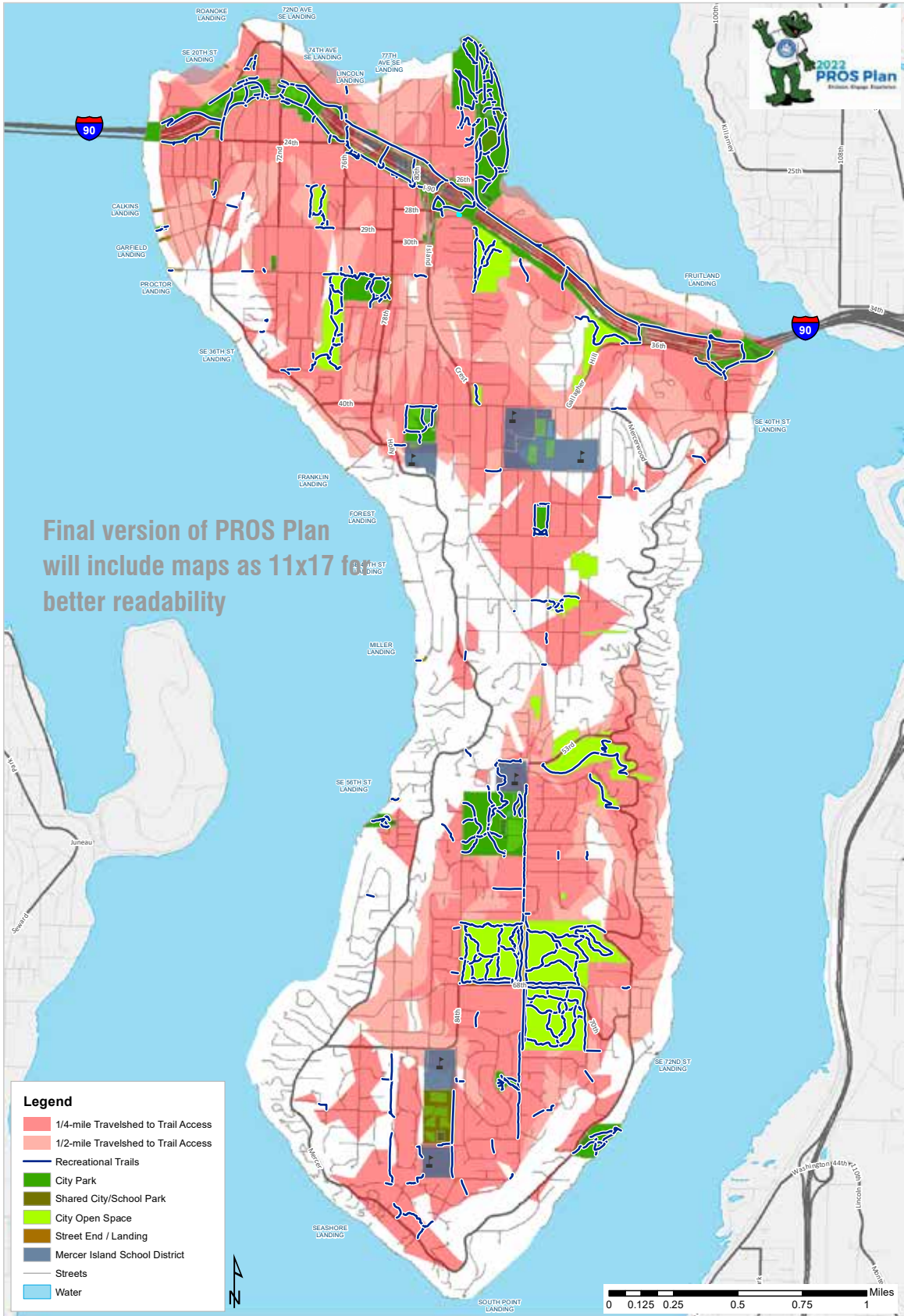
The installation of kiosks at trailheads is a best practice that should continue. Kiosks provide important trail information, while reinforcing the visual brand of the Mercer Island trail experience.



Mountains to Sound Trail at Area A, Aubrey Davis Park



Trailhead at SE 53rd Open Space



Map 11: Travelsheds - Recreational Trails (1/2-mile)



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Future Initiatives

- Continue to implement the pedestrian and bicycle facility improvements from the Transportation Improvement Program.
- Update the 2010 Bicycle Facilities Plan.
- Plan for future shared mobility pilots (such as shareable E-bikes and E-scooters) and the increased public adoption of electric-assist bicycles and other wheeled mobility devices.
- Conduct repairs and trail maintenance as identified in the Trail Structure & Maintenance Inventory Report.
- Continue to improve trail and trailhead signage and wayfinding and explore ways to indicate connections to bus and rail transit.
- Support or provide bicycle skills development and education classes for youth in partnership with the school district and local community-based organizations.
- Explore options to improve parking management that enhances safe trail access sensitive to neighborhood context and environmental impacts.



Trail entry at Engstrom Open Space



9 OPEN SPACE, LAND CONSERVATION & STEWARDSHIP

Mercer Island’s open space and natural areas are an important component of the City’s green infrastructure and play critical roles in supporting healthy, well-functioning ecosystems. These many benefits include maintaining air and water quality, mitigating impacts of climate change, capturing stormwater runoff, and providing recreational and scenic opportunities to connect with nature that promote physical and mental well-being.

Gallagher Hillside

OPEN SPACE

Thanks to the foresight of former City leaders, the Mercer Island community is fortunate to have retained several significant natural areas across the City. Nearly 300 acres of open space properties and natural lands are either owned or managed by the City, in coordination with the acreage of the developed park areas, see Figure 9.1 on the next page. These open space properties include forested lands, riparian corridors, wetlands, and steep slopes across 22 different sites. Together, Pioneer Park and Engstrom Open Space comprise the most extensive public open spaces, accounting for 43% of the open space in the City. Several other significant natural areas, ranging in size from 11 to 27 acres, also provide substantial forested areas. Smaller open space properties, under 10 acres in size, are distributed across Mercer Island.

The “open space” classification distinguishes natural lands from parks developed for active recreation and other highly managed landscapes. Open space may refer to public properties that are exclusively natural areas or portions of larger parks that are managed as natural areas. They may include trails, interpretive signs, or artwork, along with modest support amenities such as parking or restrooms. These open space lands are managed to conserve and restore ecosystem functions, native vegetation, and wildlife habitat. Since 2004, the system-wide management of these lands has been guided by adopted vegetation management plans, which established long term goals that prioritize ecosystem processes and health over aesthetic values. These goals differentiate the maintenance priorities and methods from those prescribed for developed parks.

OPEN SPACE & CONSERVATION

Figure 9.1. Open Space in Parklands

Open Space Areas	Acres
Cayhill Open Space	1.1
Clarke Beach Park	7.1
Clise Park	1.5
Ellis Pond	4.1
Engstrom Open Space	8.5
Gallagher Hill	11.3
Groveland Beach Park	1.8
Hollerbach Open Space	5.2
Homestead Park	3.2
Island Crest Park	27.6
Luther Burbank Park	19.6
Mercerdale Hillside	18.1
Mercerdale Park	6.4
N Mercerdale Hillside	5.1
Parkwood Ridge Open Space	3.8
Pioneer Park	113.7
Salem Woods	0.3
SE 47th Street Open Space	1.3
SE 50th Street Open Space	1.8
SE 53rd Place Open Space	24.0
Secret Park	0.6
Upper Luther Burbank Park	18.1
Wildwood Park	1.8
Total Open Space	286.0



Mercerdale Open Space

In addition to protecting habitat and providing ecological services (e.g., stormwater management and air quality), the open space system provides educational and stewardship opportunities. It is the primary setting for off-street recreational trails. The open space system offers access to nature for passive recreation (including opportunities for viewpoints and wildlife viewing areas) and relaxation.

Pioneer Park and Engstrom Open Space

As the largest single open space in the City, Pioneer Park provides an expansive forested area in the southcentral portion of Mercer Island, divided into three quadrants separated by Island Crest Way and SE 68th Street, see Figure 9.2. The property was transferred to the Mercer Island Open Space

Conservancy Trust in 1992 to protect and preserve the land in its natural state. Pioneer Park offers passive and low-impact recreation, such as walking, jogging, and picnicking.

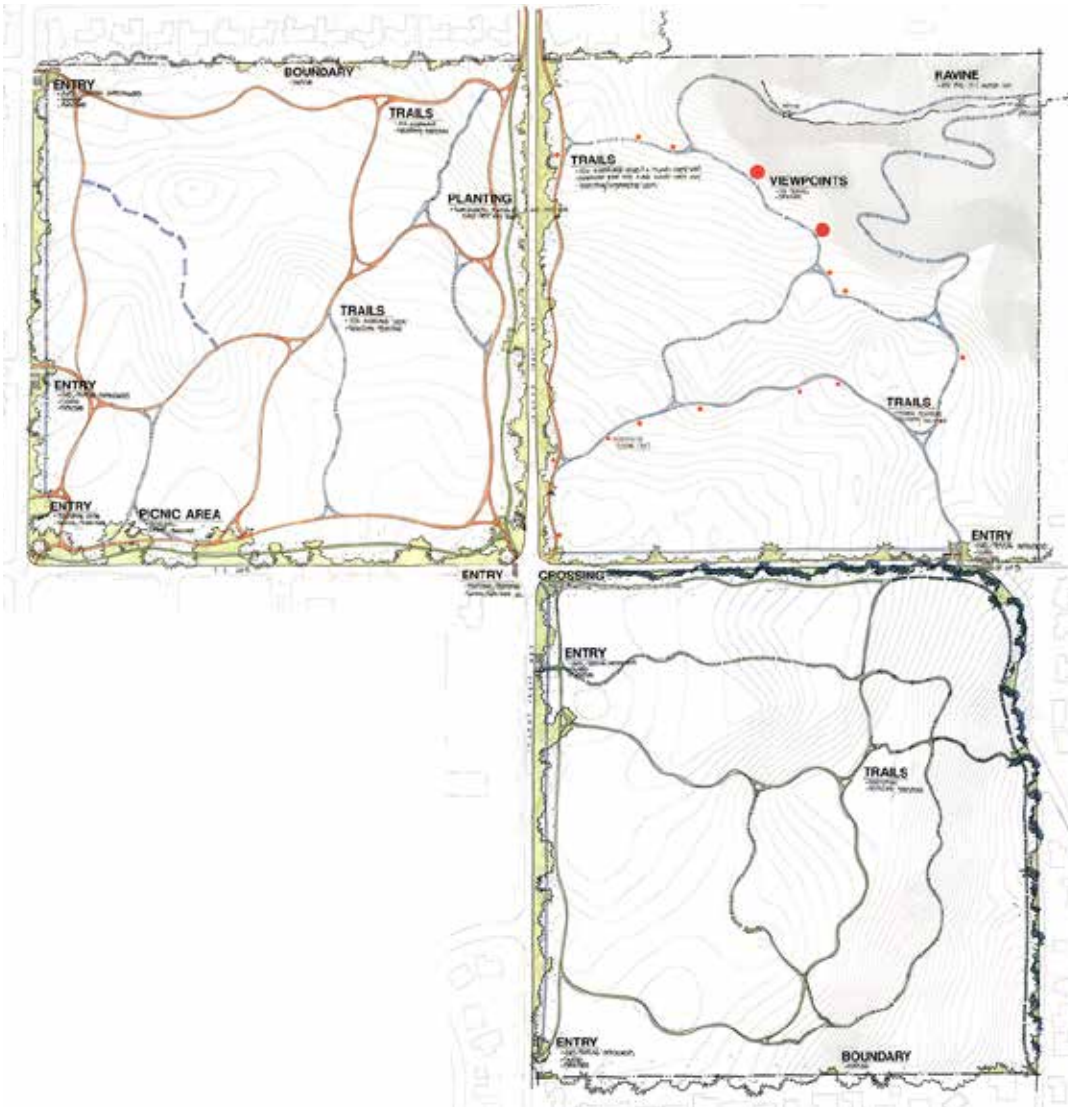
Pioneer Park contains a range of trail types, access points, and trail surfacing. Trails are the primary way park users experience Pioneer Park, so the trail system is crucial to the recreational value of the open space. Trail users include pedestrians (runners, walkers, dog walkers), cyclists, and horseback riders. Equestrian use has been limited to the southeast quadrant and the northwest quadrant's eastern and southern perimeter trails. Large format trail maps are posted at the primary trailheads in each quadrant, with informal trailheads dispersed along the roadsides. Existing amenities in the park include benches, a picnic table, interpretive signs, and trash receptacles.



Acquired in two transactions in the early 2000s, the 8.5-acre Engstrom Open Space abuts the northeast quadrant of Pioneer Park and provides ravine habitat, additional second-growth forest, and perched wetlands. The property has been permanently dedicated for park

and recreation uses, and a pedestrian trail easement on adjacent private property provides a trail connection to East Mercer Way. The Open Space Conservancy Trust charter also includes oversight of Engstrom Open Space.

Figure 9.2. Map of Pioneer Park Trail System (from Pioneer Park Master Plan)



Large Open Space Properties

The City manages several other sizeable open space properties. These areas, which include SE 53rd Open Space, Mercedale Hillside, Upper Luther Burbank Park, Island Crest Park, Gallagher Hill Open Space, and Parkwood Ridge Open Space, contain a variety of distinct habitats, such as wetlands and streams, adding to the diversity of plant species they host. These open spaces also include developed trail systems, serving as recreation opportunities and valuable pedestrian connections for local streets and neighborhoods.

Two of these open spaces, Island Crest Park and Luther Burbank Park, are natural areas that are contained within larger developed parks. Across Mercer Island, eight developed parks include open space, which accounts for 53% of their total acreage. Aubrey Davis Park, which contains many acres of upland forest, is not currently managed as open space, but may be added to this designation in the future. Figure 9.3 shows all developed parks that contain areas currently managed as open space acreage.

Figure 9.3. Acreage of Open Space within Developed City Parks

Park Name	Open Space Acres	Park Acres	Total Acres	Classification
Clarke Beach Park	7.1	1.6	8.7	Community
Groveland Beach Park	1.8	1.2	3.0	Community
Homestead Park	3.2	7.2	10.5	Community
Island Crest Park	27.6	8.3	35.9	Community
Luther Burbank Park	19.6	35.0	54.6	Regional
Mercerdale Park	6.4	5.6	12.0	Community
Secret Park	0.6	0.1	0.7	Mini
Wildwood Park	1.8	1.1	2.8	Neighborhood
Total	68.2	60.0	128.2	

Smaller open spaces, ranging from less than one acre to seven acres, are distributed across the City. Though small, these pockets of natural area serve as refuges for wildlife traveling between larger forested areas, and in some cases, provide meaningful trail connections between adjoining neighborhoods.

Several of these areas have no developed trails or site improvements and are managed exclusively for habitat and to preserve or enhance their ecosystem functions and include: Cayhill Open Space, Hollerbach Open Space, Salem Woods, SE 47th Open Space, and SE 50th Open Space. Development of these sites for public recreational use, including the construction of trails, may be limited, or restricted by natural characteristics of the land, including steep slopes, wetlands, and other features.

LAND CONSERVATION

The City of Mercer Island has demonstrated its commitment to conserving its natural resources within the context of a major metropolitan region. The preservation of Pioneer Park is a shining example of the importance of land conservation to the community. The City has also preserved a variety of public waterfront access and public park amenities along the shoreline of Lake Washington.

Conservation of High-Value Ecosystems

Many of the public lands that the City owns and manages host unique, high-value landscapes. These areas are prioritized for conservation, acquisition, and restoration activities to ensure that they continue to thrive and provide their distinct ecosystem functions and benefits. High-quality shorelines, watercourses,

and wetlands are all vital to preserving Mercer Island's diversity of habitats. Providing safe public access to and within these areas needs to be carefully balanced with the crucial goal of environmental stewardship and natural habitat protection.

Shorelines

Mercer Island's shoreline presents one of its most aesthetic and environmentally important characteristics. Shorelines directly impact water quality as surface, and subsurface waters, are filtered back into the lake. Additionally, shorelines are a valuable fish habitat area, characterized by lake bottom conditions, erosion tendencies, and the proximity to watercourse outfalls that combine to provide a suitable environment for spawning fish. The City's Shoreline Master Program includes goals, policies, and regulations consistent with state guidelines to protect shorelines.

Luther Burbank Park contains three-quarters of a mile of shoreline, much of which is managed as a natural shoreline. Two waterfront community parks, Clarke Beach and Groveland Beach Park, provide public access to Lake Washington while retaining much of their park acreage in natural forested conditions. The conservation and continued restoration of these open spaces further highlight the conservation values of the Mercer Island community.

Watercourses

The City of Mercer Island has identified approximately 90 sub-basins as part of its stormwater management plan. Within these sub-basins, approximately 55 identified watercourses drain into Lake Washington. Watercourses are naturally occurring or partially altered streams characterized by perennial or seasonal flows that contribute to water filtration, stormwater buffering,



erosion control, and the provision of wildlife habitats. Within City-owned properties, preservation and restoration of the land surrounding watercourses are a priority, ensuring that these areas continue to provide their unique ecosystem services.

Wetlands

The City code also protects and regulates wetlands on Mercer Island characterized by soil types (e.g., hydric), water-tolerant plants, and surface waters that are either saturated or inundated for a minimum period of time. Mercer Island's open space is home to several wetland areas, including lakeside wetlands and perched wetlands in upland forest areas. These areas are also a high priority for protection and restoration work. They are fragile ecosystems that host unique plant communities and serve as a valuable habitat for many animals, including bird and amphibian populations.

Land Acquisition

Conservation may also take the form of acquiring important lands that contribute to the ecological health of Mercer Islands' forests, wetlands, and watercourses. The City has developed a park and open space evaluation and acquisition framework for use when considering potential properties utilizing the general goals of the Comprehensive Plan. The framework contains property criteria to assess the value of the physical property for parks and open space, and criteria to determine the impact the acquisition would have on the City and the community as a whole. When private landowners or non-profit organizations look to donate or sell their properties to the City as future conserved open space or parkland, this framework considers how the property adds recreational value or conservation benefits to the parks and open space system.

The acquisition of properties that provide access to the waterfront provides high-value contributions to the open space system. This is supported by the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan, which encourages water-dependent recreational activities to be available to the public and increases the public shoreline suitable for water-related recreational uses. Street rights-of-way abutting bodies of water are generally encouraged to remain in the public domain to preserve public access to the waterfront. Any potential consideration of the vacation of rights-of-way should involve a detailed analysis of the City's projected needs for waterfront access.

Undeveloped lands or sections of existing properties are often restricted in their potential development by steep slopes, wetlands, or critical areas. These features are often highly valued for habitat conservation. These areas may extend existing natural areas or serve as essential habitat corridors between larger open space lands. Conservation easements and public access easements are tools that could be applied to increase habitat benefits and access across the parks and open space system.



Hawthorn Trail at Luther Burbank Park



STEWARDSHIP

For almost two decades, the City has allocated resources toward stewardship of its open space and natural lands. These properties provide an enormous array of services to people and wildlife, including habitat for a diverse range of plants and animals, sites for stormwater filtration and erosion control, and venues for visitors to enjoy Mercer Island's dynamic and diverse natural environments. Their close proximity to urban development, which can alter the biological processes of native landscapes, presents challenges that must be addressed with active management. Without this management, these open space lands will be heavily impacted by invasive plant species, low tree regeneration, and canopy deterioration, limiting their associated ecological benefits. Stewardship of these lands is guided by several studies conducted in Mercer Island open spaces and subsequent management plans informed by quantitative data, site assessments and observations, and periodic reviews of best practices for managing ecosystem health.

Open Space Studies and Management Plans

System-wide Open Space Vegetation Management

In 2004, the City adopted the Open Space Vegetation Management (OSVM) Plan that identified significant threats to the parks system, established work priorities based on research and public involvement, and outlined open space restoration goals. The 2004 OSVM Plan focused on maintaining functional benefits derived from Mercer Island's open space. It noted that native canopy trees, regenerating conifers, and native understory vegetation were critical factors in maintaining these benefits. At the time of this study, more than 50% of Mercer Island's public open space was significantly impacted by invasive plants.

During the subsequent ten years, Parks and Recreation Department staff managed a systematic restoration program to reduce invasive plant cover and plant native species, particularly coniferous trees, to improve forest cover. During this period, 43,000 native plants were installed (covering more than 50% of the open space area) and over 100 acres of trees were freed from climbing ivy.

The 10-Year Evaluation and Update of the OSVM Plan, conducted in 2014, determined that conifer planting had successfully established a new cohort of trees, ivy control efforts were effective in reducing pressures on canopy trees, and restoration work over the preceding years had reduced invasive species cover. The 2014 Plan Update amended goals to reflect the realities of limited program funding and the newly apparent challenges presented by climate change to include the following:

1. Maintain the functional benefits of open space vegetation.
2. Foster resilient plant communities that can recover from disturbances and adapt to climate change.
3. Implement work based on the value of these functional benefits, the community's priorities for the open space properties and the condition of the vegetation found there.
4. Maximize the return on available funding through volunteers, matching grants, and donations.

Pioneer Park Forest Management

In 2003, the Pioneer Park Forest Management Plan was adopted specifically to address the needs of Mercer Island's largest forest tract. The Pioneer Park



Forest Management Plan directs site management and intervention to maintain the native forest ecosystem, protect public safety, and enhance positive uses of the park over time. The Pioneer Park Forest Management Plan addressed a range of considerations for vegetation in the park included by reference in the 2004 OSVM Plan. Among the considerations were tree risk assessment and management, fire management, tree pruning and removal, tree protection, invasive plant control, rare or unusual plants, off-trail use, and habitat management.

In 2009, the Pioneer Park Forest Management Plan was amended to include the findings of the Forest Health Survey, a comprehensive, quantitative study of the park's vegetation and forest structure. This data was used to prioritize restoration work and set specific goals for the park for the next 20 years, shifting from a site-based approach to a systemic approach. The new work plan focused primarily on canopy regeneration, invasive tree removal, and ivy management as the foundational steps toward a healthier and more resilient native forest. In 2018, the City performed a similar vegetation study to assess the effectiveness of the new strategies. The data confirmed that the prescribed restoration tasks in native tree establishment and invasive tree removal had been successful in the first 10 years, but that completion of the 20-year work plan was necessary to address widespread invasive species in the park.

Habitat Restoration and Invasive Species Management

The City has been diligent in working to restore disturbed natural landscapes in open spaces and developed parks, guided by the goals and work plans established in the Open Space Vegetation Management Plan and the Pioneer Park Forest Management Plan. Each year, Natural Resources staff perform an extensive evaluation of each open space property to determine the success of past restoration activities and to plan the subsequent scope of restoration work that will move each landscape toward greater health and resiliency. The majority of restoration fieldwork is performed by contracted landscape crews knowledgeable in native and invasive species identification and ecological restoration best practices. All contracted restoration tasks follow exacting specifications and time constraints established by the City based on various biological and site factors. By evaluating each site, staff can maximize the effectiveness of invasive control, improve the survivorship of newly installed plants, and consider soil characteristics and health. In addition to hiring contracted crews, the City employs a small seasonal team to perform targeted and complex restoration tasks, such as noxious weed monitoring, mapping, and control.

The control of invasive species is a critical element of the restoration process and essential in maintaining a healthy natural landscape. Many invasive and non-native species exhibit strong adaptability to Pacific Northwest environments and displace native species, especially in the disturbed landscapes proximate to urban development. In 2004, more than 50% of Mercer Island's public open space was significantly impacted by invasive plants. In the intervening years, the City has dedicated staff and resources to managing invasive species and expanded partnerships to help with these efforts. While removal efforts are ongoing, the restoration sites cleared of invasives will require continuous monitoring and intervention to reduce or limit the re-establishment of the invasive plants.

Community Partnerships & Volunteers

While the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated many parks and open space volunteer activities in 2020 and 2021, the engagement and management of volunteer resources has been and continues to be an essential element in the restoration and stewardship of Mercer Island's public lands.

For over a decade, the City has contracted with EarthCorps and Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, two local non-profit organizations, to provide volunteer recruitment and management services for restoration events in open space. These organizations coordinate and lead 45-50 volunteer events each year in natural areas across Mercer Island, providing training, tools, and support for volunteers of all ages and abilities. They have established long-standing partnerships with schools, places of worship, and community groups and perform regular outreach to draw new volunteers and forest stewards. Between 2008 and 2018, 20,980 volunteers contributed over 64,000 hours to restoration work in Mercer Island's natural areas.

The City's Natural Resources team also oversees the Forest Stewardship Program, which provides dedicated community volunteers with training, tools, and ongoing support to run effective volunteer projects. Training includes native plant identification, invasive plant identification and removal, native plant installation, and volunteer event coordination. People who complete the training become Forest Stewards qualified to lead projects on behalf of the City's park and open space system. Due to the on-site training program and ongoing support of these Forest Stewards, which require significant staff resources, this program is limited to a small number of community members who express an interest in the long-term stewardship of Mercer Islands' natural areas.

In addition to training local volunteers, community partnerships are a vital component of hands-on stewardship work, and the City has fostered partnerships with many groups.

Besides participating in restoration work, several volunteer groups and individuals have also contributed to studying animals and plants within the City's open spaces. Perhaps the most notable community project is an ongoing bird survey of the Luther Burbank Park North Wetland, which members of the Friends of Luther Burbank Park have performed monthly, beginning in June 2008. Over the last 13 years, this group has identified and documented at least 107 unique bird species within the wetland.

Community members also regularly contact staff about rare plant and animal species seen across Mercer Island, as well as new invasive plant species, which staff can control before they are allowed to spread. Whether one-time or ongoing, these surveys and observations have furthered our understanding of how Mercer Island's natural areas are used by wildlife and contribute to the regional network of diverse habitats.

Sustainable Stewardship Practices

The management of landscapes in City parklands, whether formal plantings in developed parks or diverse forest ecosystems in open space, requires continual attention and an investment of significant resources to properly steward and maintain the living landscape. Regardless of the use of these landscapes, the desired outcomes are the same: to sustain healthy, thriving plants.

However, past practices and traditional horticultural methods to achieve this goal have become less reliable in recent years. Changes to the Pacific Northwest climate have increased summer heat and drought, causing more stress for mature and establishing plants. This change has been accompanied by a shift toward more sustainable landscape maintenance practices, reducing potential impacts on the surrounding environment and its inhabitants.

Water Conservation

Despite the rainy winters, water is not an unlimited resource in Puget Sound, and summers are expected to get even hotter and drier as climate change intensifies. It is increasingly likely that not just voluntary but mandatory water conservation measures will become necessary on occasion to preserve supplies for the most critical uses, such as domestic consumption. In recent years, the City has allowed some grassland and

recreational areas to brown out for the summer months to conserve water and save on significant irrigation costs.

In landscaped areas where shrubs and trees rely on some summer water, staff have adjusted the irrigation systems to water before sunrise to reduce water waste and maximize plant uptake. Depending on the landscape, watering may also be shifted to a deeper and less frequent watering schedule to reduce evaporation and encourage plants to root more deeply.

In addition to reducing irrigation volumes and frequency, the City has shifted to planting more drought-tolerant species and schedules the majority of new plant installations in the early part of the rainy season to maximize root growth and establishment before the onset of the dry season.

Plant Selection

Selecting appropriate plants species for park landscapes is the source of a great deal of discussion, both on the local and regional scale. While drought-tolerant plants will be better able to establish in the short term, consideration is also given to how well newly established plants will survive in the long term. In recent years, cities across the Pacific Northwest, including Mercer Island, have seen many mature native trees decline and die in recent years, unable to adapt quickly to the increased summer temperatures and lack of summer moisture. Plant selection for tree replacements or renovations that consider the anticipated climate in 10-50 years will be more likely to create resilient, mature landscapes that can better transition to warmer, drier conditions.

In natural areas, generally replanted with trees and shrubs native to the immediate area, staff have been selecting new plants from seed zones that reflect the Puget Sound area's projected climate. This focus on plant provenance (the original geographics source of seed, pollen, or propagule) allows staff to plant the same native species better adapted to future conditions. Generally, these plants are propagated from forests in southern Washington and Oregon.

In addition to considering the climate in the selection of plants for developed parks, other factors must also be considered, including the mature size of the tree or shrub, any known pests or diseases that may affect the species, and how a fully developed root system will interact with nearby paved surfaces.



Maintenance Practices

Standard maintenance practices for Mercer Island's park landscapes have shifted considerably toward more sustainable practices that consider the health of the whole system, including soil health, nutrient cycling, and water quality.

All new plantings are provided with a mulch top dressing. Using wood chips, bark, or leaves as mulch in the landscape helps the soil retain moisture, suppresses weed germination and growth, and contributes vital organic matter to the soil. The bulk of the mulch used around new plantings and formal planter beds are wood chips created from tree pruning and removals on the island. Leaves collected in the fall are also used as mulch, which allows their organic matter and nutrients to be reincorporated into the soil over time.

The increased use of mulch in beds has assisted in reducing weed growth and helped staff significantly reduce pesticide use in developed parks. In many cases, remaining weeds are either removed using manual extraction methods or cut at ground level to slow their regrowth. Because this method is more labor-intensive, weeds may be more visible in the landscape, particularly during the active growing season.

A focus on soil and water health has also refined how fertilizers are used in park landscapes such as athletic fields, shifting away from fertilizer applications that may lead to nutrient leaching or runoff. These newer practices include using organic or slow-release products and performing smaller, more frequent applications.

Stormwater Management

The Pacific Northwest region is experiencing more severe rainstorms due to climate change, and more of that rain is falling on impervious surfaces: roads, parking lots, and rooftops. This untreated surface water runoff is a significant source of contamination all along the Lake Washington shoreline and in other riparian areas, impacting both people and wildlife, especially salmon populations.

State requirements for surface water management are becoming more stringent and costly for both developers and the City. Runoff volumes, peak stream flows, and local flooding can be reduced by incorporating trees into stormwater management planning, lessening the need for expensive detention facilities (e.g., catch basins) and the cost of treatment to remove sediment and other pollutants such as lawn chemicals. Green infrastructure is far more cost-effective than grey infrastructure.

Using open space and greenspaces to capture stormwater runoff encourages infiltration into the soil, prevents excessive streambed erosion, and reduces sedimentation in Lake Washington. In addition, a healthy tree canopy increases carbon sequestration potential, encourages local biodiversity, and enhances overall environmental resilience by reducing heat island effects and offering cooler, shaded air.



FUTURE INITIATIVES

A number of future initiatives were identified and recommended for incorporation into the City's work plan over the next six to ten years and are summarized below.

Land Conservation

- Develop a Land Acquisition Strategy to proactively acquire high-quality natural areas and parklands, to expand the existing network of parks, trails, and open space systems.
- Determine the most effective strategy for protecting open space lands in perpetuity. Explore various mechanisms for such protection, including zoning changes, conservation easements, deed restrictions, and transfer of these lands to the Open Space Conservancy Trust's governance.

Open Space Studies and Management Plans

- Continue studies of open space health, collecting vegetation data that can be used to illustrate restoration progress and guide adjustments to management plans.
- Develop a citywide urban forest management plan to define goals for local forested ecosystems and outline the best management tactics to sustain forest canopy. This plan could include a citywide tree inventory, tree preservation and protection code amendments, and considerations for climate resiliency. A more broadly defined urban forestry plan can also be a means to engage the community in tree-related activities and facilitate community conversations about the overall health and diversity of Mercer Island's urban forest.

Habitat Restoration

- Continue restoration work in open space to ensure that progress to date is not lost and ecosystems remain healthy, diverse, and functional.
- Practice adaptive management by regularly evaluating the successes and failures of restoration activities and modify practices accordingly.
- Stay current with evolving best management practices in the field of restoration ecology.
- Collaborate with regional partners to share resources and knowledge. Participate in regional research opportunities.
- Pursue opportunities to contract grow or purchase plants from southern seed zones.

Community Partnerships & Volunteers

- Foster new partnerships that support the conservation and restoration of Mercer Island's open space properties.

Sustainable Stewardship Practices

- Explore the use of non-gas-powered landscape equipment to reduce emissions.
- Continue to adjust landscape maintenance practices in favor of techniques that contribute to the health of the land and lake environments.



Flowering red currant



10 OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE

The following assessment examines agency resource comparisons, identifies trends in park operations, and provides general recommendations for park maintenance operations on Mercer Island.

Luther Burbank Docks and Boiler Building

To effectively plan, develop, maintain, and operate a high-quality park and recreation system, the City needs to continually reassess and reinvest in its park and recreation infrastructure. Older infrastructure will continue to require repairs or replacements to ensure safe and functional facilities. And newer infrastructure requires ongoing care and maintenance to protect the asset. Appropriate use of data and collaboration across City work groups ensures consistency in service delivery and promotes efficient and focused operations and maintenance.

Park Agency Performance Benchmarks

As noted in Chapter 6, the National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) Park Metrics database was used to compare Mercer Island's park and open space system to averages from comparably-sized jurisdictions from across the country. This agency performance data provides a benchmark to compare administration, operations, and programming with other providers. While comparisons can be helpful, no two agencies are exactly alike. History, culture, landforms, hydrology, climate, demographics, and other local variables contribute to how park and recreation providers perform in their communities. Figure 10.1 compares jurisdictional populations served by park and recreation agencies against specific performance metrics.

Figure 10.1. NRPA Agency Comparisons - Facilities

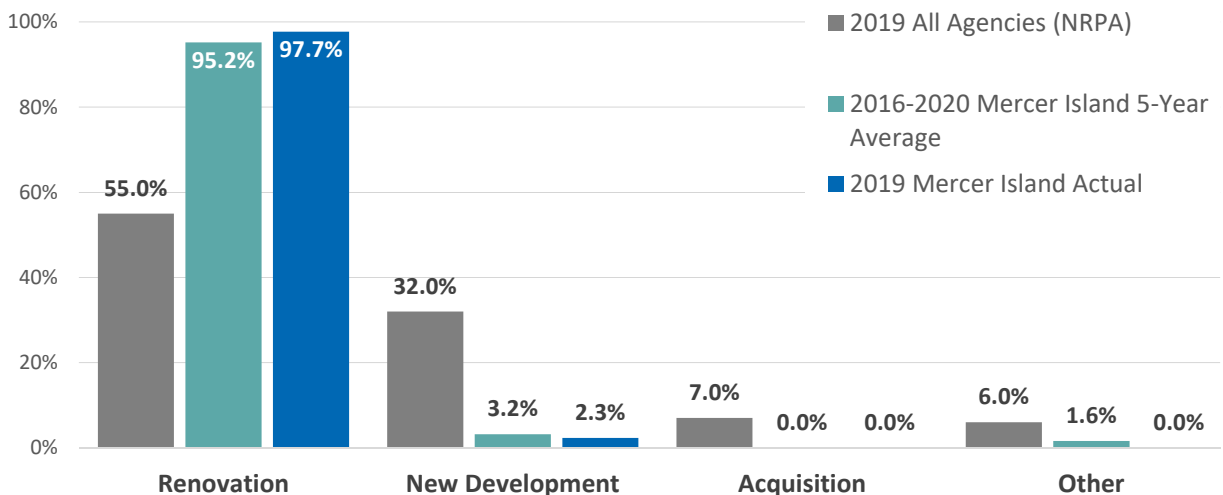
Metric	Median Value		
	All Agencies	Pop. Range 20-50,000	Mercer Island
Residents per Park	2,281	1,963	954
Acres of Parkland per 1,000 population	9.9	9.6	18.5
Miles of Trails	11	8.5	29
Number of Residents per Playground	3,750	3,157	1,430
Number of Residents per Tennis Court (public-outdoor)	5,004	4,347	1,839
Number of Residents per Rec Center	31,141	25,716	25,748

The City should take pride in its admirable service levels compared to the average of all agencies reporting in the Park Metrics data and somewhat comparable jurisdictions with populations between 20,000 and 50,000. Mercer Island's park and recreation services significantly contribute to its residents' high quality of life with higher-than-average parkland acreage ratios, more sports courts, and more miles of trail per capita.

A notable comparison with other park and recreation agencies across the nation comes from capital spending

allocations, see Figure 10.2. The median capital allocations for all agencies who shared data with the NRPA indicated that renovation was the primary focus (55% of the capital budget expenditures) with 32% for new development and 7% for parkland acquisitions. For the City of Mercer Island, budget allocations for park system renovations topped the spending allocations for capital projects, both for the 2019-2020 biennium and over a longer, five-year period.

Figure 10.2. Capital Spending Comparisons: Annual and 5-year Allocations



There has been no capital spending for parkland acquisition over the last five years, largely due to the City's built-out character. Most City of Mercer Island parks, open space, and trails capital projects involve the renovation, replacement, or redevelopment of park amenities. Docks, piers, and other over-water/

waterfront facilities have significant costs with their initial development and repairs or renovations. Mercer Island should expect higher than average capital costs to sustain its waterfront infrastructure as an island community that values its public waterfront amenities.



Existing Staffing Resources

Investing strongly and consistently in the staff, infrastructure, and services that have created and maintained the park and recreation system is necessary to ensure a well-maintained and viable parks system. The dedicated professional staff and labor resources ensure the delivery of quality services and care for the City’s parks and recreation system.

Mercer Island’s Parks Operations staff provide a range of functions related to maintaining high-demand, multi-use athletic fields, playgrounds, sport courts, swimming beaches, street-end waterfront access areas, hiking, biking, and equestrian trails, open spaces areas, and picnic facilities. These staff also provide arboricultural planning, project management, and consultation services for trees and the urban forest in public parks and open spaces and maintain and repair public art installations.

In 2019, in an effort to reduce costs, three parks and recreation positions were eliminated resulting in the reduction in special events, reduced operating hours at the Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC), and elimination of lifeguards at the beaches. The City further shifted its staffing resources in 2020 to align park maintenance, operations, planning, and development under Public Works. Parks Maintenance includes park and facility maintenance, custodial services for the MICEC, open space management, and urban forestry programs. Park capital projects are aligned under the Engineering and Capital Division in Public Works. Park maintenance staff was 11.7 FTEs in 2019-2020 and was reduced by 15% to 9.95 FTEs for the 2021-2022 budget.

The COVID-19 pandemic considerably impacted the Parks & Recreation Department. MICEC closed in March 2020, and all recreation programs, special events, and facility rentals were suspended. Athletic field reservations and picnic shelter/area reservations were also suspended. As a result, workforce reductions were implemented in the spring of 2020. The Recreation Transition Team is now focused on re-establishing operations for MICEC and rebuilding the Recreation Division.

Parks Operations also relies on casual labor to support operations during the peak recreation season (Q2-Q3 annually) to meet community needs and maintain existing service levels. This includes duties such as park mowing,

general landscaping, park restroom maintenance and cleaning, park access and safety, ballfield rentals, and other general park services. On average, 8-10 part-time/casual labor positions are used to help maintain service levels. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the casual labor positions within Parks Maintenance were eliminated in 2020. Maintenance was deferred, and service levels in parks significantly declined. The casual labor positions were restored in 2021.

Maintenance & Operations Standards

Developing maintenance standards that define the level of park upkeep and care can help identify and clarify the expectations for both Parks Maintenance staff and the public. If the level of budgetary support solely determines maintenance standards, a loss in efficiency and a gradual lowering of quality, care and safety may result. Lower maintenance levels often lead to higher capital repair needs due, in part, to a growing backlog of deferred maintenance. Park standards can be refined for new park design and development. Park standards for acceptable maintenance levels can also be developed to identify the level of care in existing parks proactively. These standards can include adequate levels of care for grounds, walkways and paths, signage, trees and landscaping, litter control and trash receptacles, play equipment and play surfacing, picnic shelters, restrooms, sport courts surfacing, accessories and benches and other site furnishings.

Staff time is required to maintain the desired maintenance standards. To ensure adequate staffing resources are allocated to parks maintenance functions, tracking time for the various tasks helps predict staffing needs when additional facilities and amenities are added to the system. One park system in Washington predicted its future labor needs for new neighborhood and community parks by tracking labor hours necessary to maintain current parks based on the type of park and acreage. Figure 10.3 illustrates that the system’s cost per acre is associated with direct labor requirements. The information can be further extrapolated to predict the number of FTE’s reasonably necessary to maintain and operate developed urban parks. As Mercer Island integrates its asset management system with tracking labor allocations, a predictive model could be developed for staffing needs associated with future improvements and programming.

Figure 10.3. Sample of Accounting of Labor Costs per Acre per Park Classification

Type of Facility	Average Acreage per Park	Annual Cost per Acre	Annual Labor Hours per Acre
Neighborhood Parks	4.8 ac.	\$5,500 per ac.	110 per ac.
Community Parks	26.2 ac.	\$4,400 per ac.	112 per ac.
Regional Parks	63.4 ac.	\$3,330 per ac.	100 per ac.
Greenspaces / Undeveloped Parks	5.6 ac.	\$2,400 per ac.	16 per ac.

Operational & Service Challenges Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

A statewide survey of park and recreation agencies was conducted in the second half of 2020, focusing on service demand and operational challenges preceding and resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic. The project was a collaboration between the Washington Recreation & Park Association, the Washington State Association of Counties, the Association of Washington Cities, and Metro Parks Tacoma.

In a question that asked agencies about how stable their outlook was for 2020 before and during COVID-19 Pandemic, the percentage of agencies that stated their outlook as very strong and stable decreased by 25 points, with 27.8% indicating as very stable at the beginning of the year to 2.8% indicating as very stable by August 1, 2020. Similarly, agencies that felt moderately or significantly underfunded and unstable rose from 5.5% to 50% by August 1, 2020. Also, a significant number of agencies indicated service delivery impacts due to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the following ways:

- Reduced ability to manage, maintain, operate, and secure passive parks to safety standards and control access (87%).
- Cancellation of special events and tourism campaigns supporting local employment and driving the local economy (87%).
- Inability to operate critical community programs, pools, attractions and facilities, including services for vulnerable populations (81%).
- Lack of ability to hire/maintain seasonal employees and offer programs/services allowable under Safe Start (74%).
- Addressing public use and behaviors that put the community at risk, such as tearing down caution tape, using fields (85%).

Outside Contractors/In-house Expertise

Park and recreation agencies continually weigh the costs of providing services through internal staffing versus external contract arrangements. Landscape maintenance contractors are sometimes engaged for specific grounds areas and tasks such as mowing and weeding, and specialized services such as tree care and ecological restoration. Other specialized contractors are hired as needed to handle park facility issues, including pavement, plumbing and electrical repairs.

Project management for park capital projects is coordinated with in-house expertise in the Public Works Department, with a limited-term budget allocation for funding an additional capital project manager. Within City departments, Roads, Sewer, and Water divisions have coordinating policies that ensure active cooperation enables efficiencies for capital projects and system repairs that benefit city infrastructure. For park development, trail expansion, waterfront access, and significant capital repairs, a coordinating policy with other city departments also would be beneficial.

Existing undeveloped street ends offer an example of opportunities for collaboration between the Parks planning, Parks Operations, and Utility divisions for creating or improving public waterfront access when upgrading city utilities. The public desire for more waterfront access opportunities could be addressed when future water or sewer projects trigger a need to acquire additional waterfront lands. As those potential future utility improvements are designed and implemented, consideration should be given to accommodating public recreation access to the lake.

With the pending ADA Transition Plan, the City should also coordinate and bundle capital improvements that remove architectural barriers and improve universal access across all public infrastructure.

Asset Management

With limited budgets, many cities struggle to provide adequate maintenance and operational support resulting in situations where proactive maintenance is deferred and assets are repaired, rehabilitated, or replaced only when there is an urgent need or imminent risk. This situation can result in a loss of services or closure of a facility due to lack of funding for needed repairs, higher long-term maintenance costs as assets in worse condition may degrade more quickly and be more difficult and costly to fix, and a loss of public confidence. Consequently, Mercer Island must continue to consider and plan for long-term asset management needs.

The foundation of a holistic asset management program is a comprehensive inventory and assessment of existing facilities and unmet needs. In 2019, the City began implementing an asset management program to help track repairs, maintenance tasks, and operating activities. The City should continue to maintain standardized and systematic inventory documentation of park system infrastructure, including quantity, location, and condition. By tracking installation and the expected useful life of assets, the City can



plan for proactive maintenance and replacement of assets in the future. This life cycle planning should be further supplemented by ongoing condition assessments of assets – particularly those with a high consequence of failure. The City does this regularly with playground equipment inspections, and this practice can be replicated across the other site amenities and improvements. Such assessments can highlight urgent repair needs and can help the City fine-tune maintenance practices for Mercer Island’s weather, wear, and usage patterns. Such information can aid in future budgeting for capital repairs and overall asset management and predict staffing requirements. Going forward, the City could refine its data management through its CityWorks software and utilize life cycle planning to help predict capital repairs and future capital projects.

Volunteer Resources

Volunteer efforts – through volunteer groups, students, neighborhood groups, non-profit partners, or sport and service organizations – have resulted in significant site improvements in Mercer Island’s park system, especially in areas of ecological restoration through invasive species control and native plants species re-establishment. An engaging volunteer program allows community members to gain a sense of ownership in the park system; however, operating a volunteer program requires constant coordination and management. The City must invest in the necessary staffing to manage a successful volunteer base to capitalize on the enhanced resources and community connections.

Although volunteers require effective management at the City’s expense, volunteer contributions readily result in a net gain for the City and community. The City should continue to promote and coordinate volunteer opportunities and specifically identify the needs for volunteers on the website or through social media well in advance of major events. As restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic are safely lifted, the City should re-engage its volunteer program and capitalize on these local human resources to enhance its operational strengths.


More details on the City’s volunteer program can be found in Chapter 9.

Future Initiatives

- Refine data management through CityWorks asset management software to fine-tune maintenance practices, track inventory, predict capital repairs and future capital projects, and develop modeling for staffing needs for future park improvements and programming. Utilize the long-term data to formalize park maintenance service standards.
- Pursue resources to support investments in capital replacements, including upgrading aging shoreline infrastructure, which includes multiple dock projects.
- Seek to collaborate with other City divisions and City-wide planning efforts to coordinate capital and infrastructure work with development and improvement to park spaces, especially in the case of street end and waterfront parks, trail expansion, and expanding public access.
- Consider investing in staffing for the management of a volunteer program to capitalize on strong community engagement and contribute to the improvement of the park system.

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11 CAPITAL PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION



The preceding chapters provided an overview of the Mercer Island parks and recreation system and established goals and objectives to guide future operations, maintenance, and planning. This chapter includes the proposed six-year capital program and provides recommendations on other strategies and areas of focus to successfully implement the plan.

Solemates walking group at Luther Burbank Park

2023-2028 Capital Improvement Plan - \$41.7 Million

A key priority for this PROS Plan is a significant investment in parks infrastructure to maintain and restore existing amenities. The 2023-2028 Parks Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) includes estimated project expenditures of \$41.7 million. Preliminary revenues are estimated at \$17.4 million, which leaves a funding gap of \$24.3 million.

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP establishes the capital investment priorities for Mercer Island parks, facilities, trails, and open space. The projects were selected based on the need to address aging facilities, implement long-standing plans for improvements, and meet the goal of

better connecting and improving access to parks and recreation facilities. A project prioritization tool, see Figure 11.2, was used to evaluate the projects.

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP assigns design, permitting, and construction timelines for each project. Planning level cost estimates are provided and include staff and consulting time for delivery of the project and reflect an annual 3% escalator for most projects.

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP Project list is provided in Figure 11.1 on the following page.

For reference, an estimation of potential revenue by source is provided in Figure 11.2. The estimates represent potential in-flows to support the CIP projects and are subject to change.

IMPLEMENTATION

Figure 11.1. 2023-2028 Parks CIP Project Summary

ID	Location	Description	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	6-YEAR TOTAL
ATHLETIC FIELD PROJECTS									
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES									
PA0110	Aubrey Davis Park	Lid A Backstop Replacement	-	-	-	-	96,000	689,000	785,000
PA0116	Island Crest Park	South Field Lights Replacement and Turf Upgrade	-	-	113,000	1,160,000	-	-	1,273,000
PA0117A	Island Crest Park	North Infield Turf and Backstop Replacement	1,061,000	-	-	-	-	-	1,061,000
PA0117B	Island Crest Park	South Field Backstop Replacement	319,000	-	-	-	-	-	319,000
PA0131	South Mercer	Turf Replacement & Ballfield Backstop Upgrade	1,698,000	-	-	-	-	-	1,698,000
ATHLETIC FIELD PROJECTS - ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			3,078,000	-	113,000	1,160,000	96,000	689,000	5,136,000
BEACHES AND SHORELINE PROJECTS									
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES									
PA0121	Luther Burbank	Swim Beach Renovation	-	55,000	113,000	1,015,000	-	-	1,183,000
PA0122	Luther Burbank	Dock Repair and Adjacent Waterfront Improvements	425,000	3,388,000	-	-	-	-	3,813,000
PA0114	Groveland	Dock Replacement & Shoreline Improvements (TBD)	-	-	-	-	4,180,000	-	4,180,000
PA0112	Clarke Beach	Shoreline Improvements (TBD)	-	-	2,814,000	-	-	-	2,814,000
BEACHES & SHORELINE PROJECTS - ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			425,000	3,443,000	2,927,000	1,015,000	4,180,000	-	11,990,000
OPEN SPACE & TRAILS PROJECTS									
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES									
PA0100	Multiple Locations	Open Space Management (Ongoing)	319,000	329,000	339,000	350,000	361,000	372,000	2,070,000
PA0103	Multiple Locations	Trail Renovation & Property Management (Ongoing)	54,000	56,000	58,000	60,000	62,000	64,000	354,000
PA0129	Pioneer/Engstrom	Open Space Forest Management (Ongoing)	191,000	197,000	203,000	210,000	217,000	224,000	1,242,000
PA0108	Aubrey Davis Park	Luther Lid Connector Trail	-	164,000	845,000	-	-	-	1,009,000
PA0143	Aubrey Davis Park	Mountains to Sound Trail Pavement Renovation	101,000	-	-	-	-	-	101,000
PA0144	Aubrey Davis Park	Mountains to Sound Trail Connection at Shorewood	-	82,000	-	-	-	-	82,000
PA0145	Aubrey Davis Park	MTS Trail Lighting from ICW to Shorewood	-	-	-	58,000	299,000	-	357,000
PA0115	Hollerbach OS	Hollerbach SE 45th Trail System	-	93,000	423,000	-	-	-	516,000
PA0132	Luther Burbank	Upper Luther Ravine Trail Phase 2	-	-	113,000	261,000	-	-	374,000
PA0175	Mercerdale Hill.	Trail Renovation	-	-	-	-	120,000	615,000	735,000
PA0190	Wildwood Park	ADA Perimeter Path & General Park Improvements	-	-	-	58,000	180,000	-	238,000
OPEN SPACE & TRAILS PROJECTS - ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			665,000	921,000	1,981,000	997,000	1,239,000	1,275,000	7,078,000
PARKS PROJECTS									
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES									
PA0101	Multiple Locations	Recurring Parks Minor Capital (Ongoing)	149,000	154,000	159,000	164,000	169,000	175,000	970,000
PA0111	Aubrey Davis Park	Vegetation Management (Ongoing)	117,000	121,000	125,000	129,000	133,000	137,000	762,000
PA0123	Luther Burbank	Minor Capital Levy (Ongoing)	103,000	105,000	107,000	109,000	111,000	113,000	648,000
PA0104	Multiple Locations	Lake Water Irrigation Development	-	82,000	141,000	-	-	-	223,000
PA0106A	Aubrey Davis Park	Lid B Playground Replacement and ADA Parking	-	-	-	232,000	836,000	-	1,068,000
PA0106B	Aubrey Davis Park	Lid B Restroom and ADA Path	-	-	-	232,000	1,195,000	-	1,427,000
PA0107	Aubrey Davis Park	Outdoor Sculpture Gallery Improvements	-	33,000	68,000	198,000	-	-	299,000
PA0141	Aubrey Davis Park	Tennis Court Resurfacing/Shared-Use Pickleball	-	121,000	-	-	-	-	121,000
PA0119	Luther Burbank	Tennis Court Renovation/Shared-Use Pickleball	107,000	438,000	-	-	-	-	545,000
PA0120	Luther Burbank	Parking Lot Lighting	133,000	-	-	-	-	-	133,000
PA0130A	Roanoke Park	Playground Replacement	-	-	-	-	60,000	431,000	491,000
PA0130B	Roanoke Park	General Park & ADA Improvements	-	-	-	-	30,000	93,000	123,000
PA0148	Deane's	Playground Replacement (Castle/Swings/Climb Rock)	-	55,000	226,000	-	-	-	281,000
PA0151	First Hill Park	Playground Replacement & Court Resurfacing	-	-	-	87,000	329,000	-	416,000
PA0166	Luther Burbank	Amphitheater Renovation (Design Only)	-	-	85,000	-	-	-	85,000
PA0182	MICEC/LB	Stair Replacement between MICEC & LB Parking Lot	-	-	-	-	36,000	197,000	233,000
PA0187	Secret Park	Playground Replacement	-	-	-	87,000	448,000	-	535,000
PA0189	South Pt. Landing	General Park Improvements	-	158,000	-	-	-	-	158,000
PARKS PROJECTS - ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			609,000	1,267,000	911,000	1,238,000	3,347,000	1,146,000	8,518,000



Figure 11.1. 2023-2028 Parks CIP Project Summary (cont.)

ID	Location	Description	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	6-YEAR TOTAL
RECREATION FACILITIES PROJECTS									
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES									
GB0102	MICEC	Building Repairs (Ongoing)	107,000	111,000	115,000	119,000	123,000	127,000	702,000
PA0133	MICEC	Technology and Equipment Replacement (Ongoing)	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	240,000
PA0178	MICEC	Entryway Parking Lot Asphalt Replacement	160,000	-	-	-	-	-	160,000
PA0179	MICEC	Parking Lot Planter Bed Renovation	-	-	-	-	239,000	-	239,000
PA0181	MICEC	Generator for Emergency Use	-	-	-	-	478,000	-	478,000
PA0124B	Luther Burbank	Boiler Building Full Renovation	-	-	-	-	239,000	3,690,000	3,929,000
RECREATION FACILITIES PROJECTS - ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			307,000	151,000	155,000	159,000	1,119,000	3,857,000	5,748,000
PARK PLANNING PROJECTS									
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES									
PA0126	Mercerdale Park	Mercerdale Park Master Plan	200,000	-	-	-	-	-	200,000
PA0157	Groveland/Clarke	Clarke and Groveland Beach Joint Master Plan	300,000	-	-	-	-	-	300,000
PA0127	MICEC	Annex Facilities Plan	200,000	-	-	-	-	-	200,000
PARK PLANNING PROJECTS - ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			700,000	-	-	-	-	-	700,000
PARK PROPERTY ACQUISITION RESERVE									
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES									
N/A	System-Wide	Property Acquisition - Reserve			500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	2,000,000
PARK PROPERTY ACQUISITION - ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			-	-	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	2,000,000
OTHER PROJECTS									
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES									
PA0142	Aubrey Davis	Intersection and Crossing Improvements	80,000	83,000	86,000	89,000	92,000	95,000	525,000
PA0150	Ellis Pond	Aquatic Habitat Enhancement	20,000	-	-	-	-	-	20,000
OTHER PROJECTS - ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			100,000	83,000	86,000	89,000	92,000	95,000	545,000
2023-2028 TOTAL ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES			5,884,000	5,865,000	6,673,000	5,158,000	10,573,000	7,562,000	41,715,000

20-Year Capital Facilities Plan

The projects included in the 2023-2028 Parks CIP recommendation were prioritized based on the 20-year parks project list, also known as the Capital Facilities Plan (CFP). The CFP is a compilation of all the anticipated parks capital projects over the next two decades and includes a brief project description and cost estimate for each project. Prior master plans, staff recommendations, and information on anticipated replacement cycles were used to develop the 20-year CFP.

Going forward, the 20-year Parks CFP will be updated at least annually to reflect changing park system needs, remove completed projects, and include new projects identified through master planning or other planning projects.

Figure 11.2. 2023-2028 Parks CIP Revenue Estimate

Description	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	6-YEAR TOTAL
2023-2028 TOTAL ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES	5,884,000	5,865,000	6,673,000	5,158,000	10,573,000	7,562,000	41,715,000
REVENUE SUMMARY							
Real Estate Excise Tax	3,492,000	1,136,000	1,253,000	2,024,000	1,149,000	1,149,000	10,203,000
King County Parks Levy	206,000	208,100	210,000	-	-	-	624,100
Parks Levy/Luther Burbank Levy	252,000	-	-	-	-	-	252,000
Impact Fees	-	-	-	80,000	-	-	80,000
Sinking Fund - Turf Replacement	900,000	-	-	-	-	-	900,000
Sinking Fund - MICEC Technology	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	240,000
Grants	100,000	2,348,000	500,000	300,000	500,000	-	3,748,000
1% for Arts Fund	-	45,000	-	75,000	-	-	120,000
Stormwater Fund	20,000	-	-	-	120,000	-	140,000
Transportation Improvement Fund	80,000	83,000	86,000	89,000	92,000	95,000	525,000
WSDOT Maintenance Agreement	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	600,000
2023-2028 TOTAL ESTIMATED REVENUES	5,190,000	3,960,100	2,189,000	2,708,000	2,001,000	1,384,000	17,432,100
2023-2028 TOTAL PROJECTED NET	(694,000)	(1,904,900)	(4,484,000)	(2,450,000)	(8,572,000)	(6,178,000)	(24,282,900)

Project Prioritization Tool

Between June and November 2021, City staff worked with the Parks and Recreation Commission to develop a project prioritization tool to rate each capital project on the CFP List. The rating tool informed capital project priorities but was not the sole determinant of the projects advanced to the proposed 2023-2028 Parks CIP, see Figure 11.3. The criteria used to evaluate the projects were as follows:

- **Safety & Security:** projects that address safety and security needs in order to provide safe public park spaces accessible to all, with a higher rating applied for projects with increased risk of safety concern or amenities at the end of their useful life.
- **Operating Budget Impact:** assesses the project impact on the operating budget, with a high rating given to projects that decrease the operating budget impact.
- **Extending Useful Life / Enhancing Level of Service:** projects that repair or replace existing amenities and extend the life of the asset or projects that improve service levels receive a higher rating.

- **Expanding Opportunities:** projects that offer new or expanded recreation opportunities and projects that improve ADA/universal access receive a higher rating.
- **Environmental/Sustainability Impact:** projects that enhance the environmental characteristics of the site receive a higher rating.
- **Unique Recreation Feature:** projects with high value and unique amenities, such as docks, piers, all-weather turf, splash pad, bike skills areas, or other specialized uses receive a higher rating.

The criteria were applied to the CFP project list using weighted values. The result was a composite score for each project to inform development of the 2023-2028 Parks CIP. The 20-Year Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) with assigned project ratings follows.



Figure 11.3. CFP Prioritization Rating Matrix

Criteria	Rating Scale	Rating Definitions	Weighting Factor	Max. Score
Safety & Security: projects that address safety and security needs in order to provide safe public park spaces accessible to all, with a higher rating applied for projects with increased risk of safety concern or amenities at the end of their useful life.	(0, 1, 2)	0: No / Low risk (Note: Playground age less than 10 years) 1: Moderate risk of safety or failure to be addressed (Note: Playground age 10 to 13 years) 2: High risk of safety or failure to be addressed (Note: Playground age 14+ years)	6	12
Operating Budget Impact: assesses the project impact on the operating budget.	(0, 1, 2)	0: Increase to operating budget (i.e., >5% impact for park site/amenity) 1: Nominal or no material change to operating budget (i.e., <5% budget impact for park site/amenity). 2: Decrease in operating budget at park site/amenity.	3	6
Extending Useful Life / Enhancing Level of Service: projects that repair or replace existing amenities and extend the life of the asset or projects that improve service levels. If new amenity, rank based on life expectancy of new asset or improvement.	(0, 1, 2)	0: Nominal / No extension of life or enhanced service. If new amenity, life expectancy is five years or less. 1: Moderate extension of useful life (i.e., 5-10 years) or modest improvement to level of service for users. If new amenity, life expectancy is 5 to 10 years. 2: Significant extension of useful life (i.e., 10-20 years) or significant improvement to level of service for users. If new amenity, life expectancy is more than 10 years.	3	6
Expanding Opportunities: projects that offer new or expanded recreation opportunities and projects that improve ADA/universal access.	(0, 1, 2)	0: No new recreational amenity or opportunity. 1: Moderate / Minor improvement to recreational opportunity (i.e., small trail connections, modest ADA enhancements). 2: Significant / New recreational improvements (i.e., newly added features, new amenities, new trail, major ADA upgrades).	2	4
Environmental/Sustainability Impact: projects that maintain or enhance the environmental characteristics of the site.	(0, 1, 2)	0: Significantly impacts or diminishes existing environmental characteristics (i.e., removes substantial number of trees, hardens additional shoreline, requires substantial mitigation, adds significant impervious surface.) 1: Nominally impacts or maintains existing environmental characteristics. 2: Enhances or improves environmental characteristics, includes sustainability projects (i.e., reforestation, substantial invasive species removal, removes hardened shoreline, serves as mitigation bank, improves water quality, energy efficiency projects, etc.)	3	6
Unique Recreation Feature: projects with high value and unique amenities, such as docks, piers, all-weather turf, splash pad, bike skills areas, or other specialized uses.	(0, 2) Binary	0: Does not pertain to a unique amenity 2: Does pertain to a unique amenity	1	2

Key CIP Project Recommendations & Implementation

The following section provides an overview of the capital project recommendations (see figure 11.1 above) and additional implementation strategies including policies and financial recommendations.

Preserving the Natural Character of Open Spaces

As detailed in Chapter 9, the Mercer Island parks system includes nearly 300 acres of open space, a critical component of the City's green infrastructure. Stewardship and preservation of the City's open space were identified as a high priority during the community engagement process.

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP includes projects to continue restoration work in open space throughout the parks system, including Pioneer Park and Engstrom Open Space. The current level of investment in open space restoration work is considered a baseline investment (about \$500,000 annually) to ensure that restoration progress to date is not lost and that ecosystems remain healthy, diverse, and functional. Additional capital project recommendations include:

- Develop strategies which balance access and utilization of open space with preservation of the natural environment.
- Continue to utilize data to inform restoration planning work and to change and adapt practices as needed.
- Seek opportunities through grants, volunteers, community collaborations, or other options to expand restoration work beyond the baseline.
- Develop a property acquisition reserve to ensure that funding is available for open space acquisition in the future. In addition, developing a comprehensive property acquisition strategy, detailed later in this chapter, will ensure resources are available to preserve and protect additional open space in the future.

ADA/Universal Access at Parks Facilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provides comprehensive civil rights protections to persons with disabilities in the areas of employment, state and local government services, and access to public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. The City of Mercer Island must comply with ADA Title II and Title III requirements specific to local governments.

Under federal regulations, when parks and recreation facilities are built or altered, they must comply with the ADA Standards for Accessible Design (ADA Standards), which require the inclusion of features such as accessible parking spaces, routes, toilet facilities, public telephones, and spectator seating areas. For parks and facilities built or altered before the ADA Standards took effect, local governments must develop ways to make the programs and activities in those parks and facilities accessible to people with disabilities.

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.

To address issues of non-compliance, most of the 2023-2028 Parks CIP projects include consideration of needed improvements to address ADA accessibility. The proposed improvements include removing barriers such as curbs around playgrounds, improved access to amenities such as trails and parking, and constructing new access where appropriate.

Some of the proposed projects do not include ADA access improvements, and one of those examples is Groveland Beach Park, specifically beach and dock access. A local government is not required to take any actions that will result in a fundamental alteration to the nature of the facility, will create a hazardous condition resulting in a direct threat to the participant or others, or will create an undue financial and administrative burden. If a particular course of action is deemed unduly burdensome, other options should be explored to provide reasonable access to similar benefits. The challenging grades at Groveland Beach Park, as an example, present a considerable design and construction barrier to achieving ADA access.

Additional capital project considerations:

- At the time of the PROS Plan publication, the City was developing an ADA Transition Plan. The City is required to complete a Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan that will address the requirements of ADA Title II. This plan will be used to identify obstacles limiting accessibility, describe and identify methods to make these obstacles accessible, and plan a schedule to bring City facilities and operations into compliance. The capital project recommendations identified in the ADA Transition plan should be added to the 20-Year CFP List once adopted and considered for inclusion in future updates to the Parks CIP.



Beaches and Shorelines

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 public engagement process and these types of projects are a key feature of the proposed 2023-2028 Parks CIP. Specific project recommendations include:

- Completing the design of the Luther Burbank Dock project and proceeding to construction. The Luther Burbank Docks are at the end of their useful life, and repairs are no longer feasible. A comprehensive re-design is underway in anticipation of total replacement occurring by 2024. Given the regional nature of this facility, the project has already received grant funds to support the design. The pursuit of grant funds for construction and allocating funds through the City's Capital Improvement Fund is one of the highest priorities in the CIP. The total project cost is estimated at \$4 million.
- The City should immediately initiate a collaborative planning process for Groveland Beach Park and Clarke Beach Park to establish a long-term vision and plan to address aging shoreline and dock infrastructure at both facilities. Potential outcomes may include replacing the docks at both parks, enhancing swimming areas, and rehabilitating the shoreline to improve habitat. The infrastructure at both facilities is at the end of its useful life and planning for the replacement is an urgent priority. The 2023-2028 Parks CIP includes \$300,000 for the master planning process in 2023 (for both facilities) and a placeholder of \$7 million for future improvements at both facilities, depending on the outcome of the master planning process.
- The Mercer Island parks system includes numerous street-end parks that provide waterfront access or views. Although modest in size, most of these street-end parks could be improved to enhance waterfront access for picnics, human-powered watercraft access, and waterfront viewing. At the south tip of the Island, South Point Landing is proposed as the first street-end improvement project in 2024 at \$158,000. Future CIP updates should include additional investments in street-end projects. Given that parking at most of these facilities is extremely limited, or non-existent, additional emphasis should be placed on improved user access via alternative transportation modes other than personal automobile.

Playgrounds

Of the 18 playgrounds in the parks system, ten are nearing the end of their useful life and will need to be replaced over the next ten years. The 2023-2028 Parks CIP includes proposed playground replacement projects at Aubrey Davis Park (Lid B), First Hill Park, Roanoke Park, Secret Park, and a portion of Deane's Children's Park. Playground equipment has an anticipated life of about twenty years; therefore, planning for ongoing replacements should be considered in future updates to the Parks CIP.

Diversifying the types of play equipment and upgrading play areas to meet ADA access requirements should be considered for each project. Other capital project recommendations include:

- Initiating a community engagement process a year or more ahead of each playground replacement project to identify preferred replacement equipment and play styles.
- Collaborating with neighborhood groups, community partners, and others to fundraise for the playground replacement projects.
- Although grants for playground replacement projects are highly competitive, some funding may be available for ADA-access improvement projects and those opportunities should be explored.
- Consider combining playground replacement projects with other capital projects to realize design, bidding, and construction efficiencies.
- Efforts should be made over the next two decades or more to phase the playground replacement projects so that they are not all happening at once.

Trail Connections & 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.

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP includes several trail projects to address missing links such as the Luther Lid Connector Trail, the Mountains to Sound Trail Connection at Shorewood, and the second phase of the Upper Luther Ravine Trail.

One of the new trail projects proposed in the 2023-2028 Parks CIP is the construction of the trail system in Hollerbach Open Space, which currently has no public access. Once completed, this trail project will provide an essential east-west pedestrian connection

and better access for maintenance and restoration work. In addition, the proposed project at Wildwood Park will formalize the walking path around the perimeter of the park and include ADA access improvements.

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP also identifies capital projects to address ongoing trail maintenance throughout the parks system such as resources to repair the pavement on the Mountains to Sound Trail and new lighting on a section of the Mountains to Sound Trail near Shorewood. Restoration of the Mercedale Hillside trails and stairways is also included in the project proposal.

Additional capital project considerations:

- Development of a property acquisition reserve will ensure funds are available for future trail easements or outright property acquisition. In addition, the development of a comprehensive property acquisition strategy, detailed later in this chapter, will also support the continued development of the trails system on Mercer Island.
- There are some limited and very competitive grant resources available for trails projects. The City should consider these opportunities when available.
- The City maintains Aubrey Davis Park and the Mountains to Sound Trail through Mercer Island under an operating agreement with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). This maintenance agreement should be renegotiated and include State support for capital re-investment and significant maintenance projects in Aubrey Davis Park.

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. Nearly all the athletic fields in the Mercer Island parks system are due for backstop replacements and extension of the foul ball fence lines. These are critical safety projects to address fly balls in spectator areas. Backstop replacements are proposed at Aubrey Davis Park (Feroglia Fields), Island Crest Park, and the South Mercer Playfields.

Synthetic turf has an expected useful life of 8 to 12 years and depends on many factors, including maintenance and hours of play. In the Mercer Island parks system, synthetic turf typically lasts about ten years. Several fields are due for replacement, including infield turf replacement on the north field at Island Crest Park and infield turf replacement at the South

Mercer Playfields. For efficiency, a number of these projects are recommended to be combined for design in 2022 and construction in 2023.

And finally, a new synthetic turf and light upgrade project is proposed on the south field at Island Crest Park. This project will replace the natural grass outfield and the dirt infield with synthetic turf to match the north field. The project includes replacing the aging light poles and light heads using the latest energy-efficient technology that also reduces light spillover and glare. This project will be eligible for grant funding, but the grants are highly competitive.

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, including Clarke Beach Park, Groveland Beach Park, and Luther Burbank Park. For Clarke Beach and Groveland, a proposed joint master plan for those parks should guide future decisions about the need and location of restroom facilities.

Recreation Facilities

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP proposes completing the Annex Facilities Plan in 2023 to address the aging Annex Building directly behind the Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC). This 1960's building is at the end of its useful life and a decision on a future renovation or replacement is needed. The building is currently leased, and the tenants provide preschool programs.

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP includes ongoing funding for MICEC building repairs and equipment and technology replacement. As one of the newer facilities in the parks system, capital investments at the MICEC are primarily focused on preserving the asset. Other projects at MICEC include a new generator, parking lot asphalt repairs, and renovation of the planter beds. The generator project is a strong contender for grant funding.

One of the more aspirational projects in the 2023-2028 Parks CIP is the renovation of the Boiler Building at Luther Burbank Park, proposed to begin design in 2026, with renovations estimated at \$4 million. This project, first identified in the Luther Burbank Master Plan, will repurpose the boat house facility to support water-oriented recreation. Waterfront access and water-oriented recreation activities were identified as a high priority in the community process, so this



facility renovation project was included in the CIP to support the expansion of those services. This project may be eligible for grant funding in categories related to historic preservation and ADA accessibility and those opportunities should be explored.

Property Acquisition Reserve

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP proposes the establishment of a property acquisition reserve to provide resources for future acquisitions. The proposal includes beginning this reserve in 2025 and aiming for an annual contribution of \$500,000. Though the policy guidance for this reserve will need to be developed, the intent is to ensure resources are available for acquisition of property to support all types of park system needs in the future – trails, open space, active uses, and more.

Setting aside funding for this reserve is challenging, especially considering the magnitude of the other capital project priorities. Still, even 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.

Grant funding is available for certain types of property acquisition and establishing a reserve account ensures resources are available to meet grant match requirements.

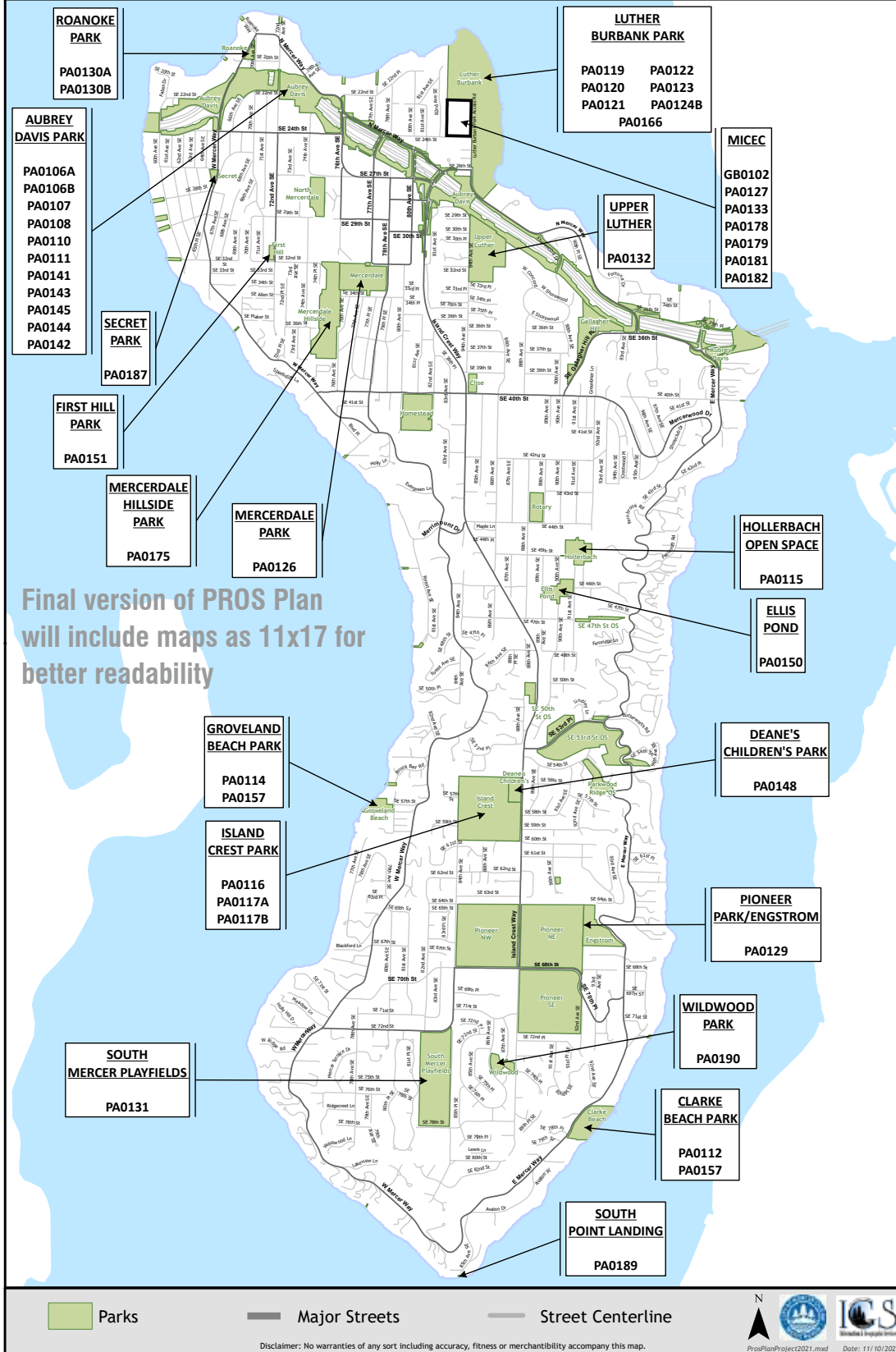
Other CIP Projects

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP also includes the following projects:

- Sports court repairs and resurfacing at Aubrey Davis Park, Luther Burbank Park, and First Hill Park with the intent to expand offerings to include pickleball
- Completion of a Master Plan at Mercerdale Park ahead of the sewer replacement project
- Implementation of lake water irrigation program at Clarke Beach Park, Groveland Beach Park, and Luther Burbank Park
- Improvements to the Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery
- Design of the proposed renovation for the amphitheater at Luther Burbank Park
- Development of an aquatic habitat assessment at Ellis Pond (Stormwater project)
- Intersection and crossing improvements at Aubrey Davis Park (Transportation improvement project)

As stated at the outset of this section, the 2023-2028 Parks CIP is the largest in City history and sets forth an aggressive plan to address the critical infrastructure needs within the Mercer Island parks system. Adopting the CIP provides the roadmap, but much work remains to ensure resources are available to implement the projects. The following section provides an overview of potential CIP funding opportunities.

PROS Plan Project Locations (2023-2028)



Map 12: Capital Improvement Project Locations



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PARKS CIP IMPLEMENTATION

The 2023-2028 Parks CIP project recommendations will trigger funding needs beyond current allocations and may also require additional staffing and resources for operations and maintenance responsibilities. Given that the operating and capital budgets of the Parks and Recreation Department are finite, additional resources will need to be considered. While grants and other efficiencies may help, these alone will not be enough to achieve the project goals identified in this plan.

The following recommendations and strategies are presented to offer near-term direction to realize these projects and as a means to continue a dialogue between City leadership, community members, and partners. A comprehensive review of potential funding and implementation tools is included in Appendix K, which addresses local financing, federal and state grant and conservation programs, acquisition methods, and others.

Potential Funding and Implementation Tools

Levy Lid Lift Renewal

An existing levy lid lift dedicated to parks maintenance and operations expires at the end of 2023. The levy provides nearly \$1 million in annual funding for the Mercer Island parks system, of which about \$250k goes towards capital projects. With the scale of renovation and restoration projects noted throughout this Plan, the City will, at a minimum, need to pursue renewal of the parks levy at its current rate to maintain current service levels.

The City should also evaluate the potential to expand the levy or contemplate a companion ballot measure to provide funding for some of the 2023-2028 Parks CIP projects. Given the expiration of the levy renewal, studying these options should be prioritized and included in the City's 2022 work plan.

Park Impact Fees

Park Impact Fees are imposed on new development to meet the increased demand for parks resulting from new growth. Park impact fees can only be used for park property acquisition and projects that increase capacity of the parks system. Park impact fees cannot be used for the operations and maintenance of parks and facilities.

The City of Mercer Island currently assesses park impact fees. Still, the City should pursue updating the methodology and rate structure, as appropriate, to be best positioned to obtain future acquisition and

development financing from the planned growth of the community. This work item is already identified in the City's 2022 work plan and will be informed by adopting the 2023-2028 Parks CIP and the 20-Year CFP.

Several projects identified in the 2023-2028 Parks CIP are eligible for impact fees, including the new restroom at Aubrey Davis Park (Lid B), the new trails at Hollerbach Open Space, the new walking path at Wildwood Park, the installation of synthetic turf on the south field at Island Crest Park, and all of the trail connections to name just a few.

Real Estate Excise Tax

The City currently imposes both quarter percent excise taxes on real estate, known as REET 1 and REET 2. The REET must be spent on capital projects listed in the City's capital facilities plan element of the comprehensive plan. Eligible project types include planning, construction, reconstruction, repair, rehabilitation or improvement of parks, recreational facilities, and trails. Acquisition of land for parks is an eligible use of REET 1 resources but not a permitted use of REET 2.

REET resources currently fund facilities, parks, trails, open space, and transportation capital projects and average about \$4 million per year based on the six-year historical look-back. Recently, a hot housing market and increasing sales prices have increased REET revenues, with projections for 2021 near \$5.5 million and 2022 at \$5 million.

REET is consistently the single greatest source of revenue for parks capital projects, with annual contributions close to \$2 million. Through the annual budgeting process, and with discussions with City Council, the Parks and Recreation Department should continue to seek access to REET funds to support the delivery of the 2023-2028 Parks CIP.

Collaboration with the Mercer Island School District

The City of Mercer Island and the Mercer Island School District collaborate on a number of projects, including the provision of athletic fields. The City of Mercer Island maintains a sinking fund to replace synthetic turf, funded through field rental fees. The sinking fund does not generate enough resources to cover the total costs of synthetic turf replacement, partly because the City does not charge a fee to the School District for the use of Island Crest Park or the South Mercer Playfields.



The City and the School District should revisit the capital funding plan to replace the synthetic turf and other capital investment needs at shared-use facilities.

WSDOT Maintenance Agreement

The City maintains Aubrey Davis Park and the Mountains to Sound Trail through a maintenance agreement with WSDOT developed over twenty years ago. The City should pursue an update to the agreement to revisit maintenance costs and to address capital project investment needs.

Enhanced Local Funding

The City of Mercer Island maintains reserve debt capacity for councilmanic (non-voted) bonds and voter-approved debt. Councilmanic bonds, however, are an unlikely funding tool due to limited resources for bond repayment.

Conservation Futures

King County assesses the maximum allowable excise fee of \$0.0625 per \$1,000 assessed value to fund the Conservation Futures program and provides cities a venue to access these funds through a competitive, local grant process. The City should continue to submit grant applications to support open space projects and improved linkages to expand the trail network.

Parkland Donations & Dedications

A program to support parkland donation should be developed to support the City's property acquisition goals. Gift deeds or bequests from philanthropic-minded landowners could allow for lands to come into City ownership upon the owner's death or as a tax-deductible charitable donation. The City should develop policies to facilitate such donations efficiently. This work is anticipated to be combined with the overall property acquisition strategy.

Property dedication for park use by a developer could occur in exchange for Park Impact Fees or as part of a planned development where public open space is a key design for the layout and marketing of a new residential project. The Parks and Recreation Department should vet any potential dedications to ensure that such land is located in an area of need and can be developed with site amenities appropriate for the projected use of the property.

Grants & Appropriations

Several state and federal grant programs are available on a competitive basis, including WWRP, ALEA, and LWCF, all of which are further detailed in Appendix K. Pursuing grants is not a panacea for park system funding. Grants are both competitive and often require a significant percentage of local funds to match the request to the granting agency. This can be as much as 50% of the total project budget, depending on the grant program. Mercer Island should continue to leverage its local resources to the greatest extent by pursuing grants independently and cooperating with other local partners.

Appropriations from state or federal sources, though rare, can supplement projects with partial funding. State and federal funding allocations are particularly relevant on regional transportation projects, and the likelihood for appropriations could be increased if multiple partners are collaborating on projects.

Internal Project Coordination & Collaboration

Internal coordination with the Public Works and Community Planning & Development Departments can increase the potential of discrete actions toward the implementation of the proposed trail and path network, which relies heavily on street right-of-way enhancements, and in the review of development applications with consideration toward potential property acquisition areas, planned path corridors, and the need for easement or set-aside requests. However, to expand the extent of the park system and recreation programs, additional partnerships and collaborations should be considered.

Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships are increasingly necessary for local agencies to leverage their limited resources to provide community parks and recreation services. Corporate sponsorships, health organization grants, conservation stewardship programs, and non-profit organizations are just a few examples of partnerships where collaboration provides value to both partners. The City has existing partners and should continue to explore additional and expanded partnerships to help implement these capital project recommendations.

Volunteer & Community-based Action

Volunteers and community groups already contribute to the improvement of park and recreation services in Mercer Island. Volunteer projects include wildlife habitat enhancement, invasive plant removal, and tree planting, among others. Mercer Island should maintain and update a revolving list of potential small works or volunteer-appropriate projects for the website, while connecting to the Mercer Island School District to encourage student projects.

While supporting organized groups and community-minded individuals adds value to the Mercer Island parks and recreation system, volunteer coordination requires a substantial amount of staff time. Additional resources may be necessary to enable a volunteer coordinator to fully utilize the community's willingness to support park and recreation efforts.



72nd SE Landing



Future Work Plan Items and Other Considerations

While this chapter primarily focuses on capital planning, several other work items are identified throughout the plan that the City should consider as potential future initiatives. They are included in the summary below.

Future CIP Funding

- Develop a recommendation for City Council consideration to renew the Parks Maintenance and Operations Levy, scheduled to end in 2023.
- Evaluate other options, including a potential ballot measure, to provide resources to fund the implementation of the 2023-2028 Parks CIP.
- Renegotiate and update the agreement with WSDOT for maintenance of Aubrey Davis Park.
- Renegotiate and update the Interlocal Agreement with the Mercer Island School District for shared use of facilities. Include provisions to fully fund the replacement of synthetic turf at shared use facilities.

Future Planning

In addition to the many capital project recommendations included in the 2023-2028 CIP, a number of future planning projects were identified:

- Amend the City’s Comprehensive Plan to include the 2022 PROS Plan as an appendix. This action is anticipated in 2023 as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update.
- Support completion of the Citywide ADA Transition Plan in 2022 and incorporate potential projects into the 20-Year CFP.
- Support completion of the Citywide Climate Action Plan in 2022 and incorporate potential projects into the 20-Year CFP and identify other items for inclusion in future work plans.
- Update the 2010 Bicycle Facilities Plan, currently identified as a potential future project in the City’s Transportation Improvement Plan.
- Develop a citywide urban forest management plan to define goals for local forested ecosystems and outline the best management practices to sustain the forest canopy. This plan could include a citywide tree inventory, tree preservation and protection code amendments, and considerations for climate resiliency. A more broadly defined urban forestry plan can also be a means to engage the community in tree-related activities and facilitate community conversations about the overall health and diversity of Mercer Island’s

urban forest.

- Prepare a Parks Property Acquisition Strategy to prioritize property acquisition to meet the future parks, trails, open space, and facility needs of the Mercer Island community. Include guiding factors such as level of service standards, connectivity, geographic distribution, preservation, and recreation needs. Develop policies to support donation and gifting of land.
- Continue studies of open space health, collecting vegetation data that can be used to illustrate restoration progress and guide adjustments to management plans.
- Evaluate existing conservation easements and how they are performing, including addressing and remedying encroachments. Map all existing easements.
- Develop a comprehensive wayfinding and signage plan to include consistency in branding and design. The plan will identify recommendations as to type, scale, and number of signs and consider a low-impact approach to system-wide signage.

Future Facilities

- Continue to assess the feasibility of replacing or upgrading the existing maintenance facility behind City Hall with energy efficiency and other sustainability measures in mind.
- 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 support early learning partnership programs.
- 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.
- The City should consider at least one spray park to serve residents as an option for summertime water play. This special use amenity typically is supported by parking and restrooms since it draws users from a wider area. Any spray park facility should be designed to recycle water if possible.
- The Bike Skills Area at Upper Luther Burbank Park is a popular recreational amenity among youth and teens. During the development of this PROS Plan, the area was temporarily closed to allow for an assessment of the site and public input in developing recommendations on improving the site for riders while minimizing environmental impacts. Outcomes of this assessment will guide future site planning and operations.

- In developing future park sites, consider installing nature play features and look for ways to optimize nature play opportunities with the unique characteristics of future parks. Nature play includes interacting with the environment in an imaginative way (e.g., climbing a tree).
- Future master plans should include consideration for expanded picnic areas and new picnic shelters throughout the parks system.

Future Policies

- Determine the most effective strategy for protecting open space lands in perpetuity. Explore various mechanisms for such protection, including zoning changes, conservation easements, deed restrictions, and transfer of these lands to the Open Space Conservancy Trust's governance.
- Revisit off-leash dog policies related to the usage of parks, open space, and trails.
- Continue to develop and review policies related to MICEC operations including special event and facility rental policies and ensure that sustainability requirements and expectations are incorporated.
- Plan for future shared mobility pilots (such as shareable E-bikes and E-scooters) and the increased public adoption of electric-assist bicycles and other wheeled mobility devices.

Future Operations & Best Practices

- Establish park maintenance standards and a routine preventative maintenance program to ensure all assets are in good working order and protect the public investment.
- Explore options to improve parking management that enhances safe trail access which is sensitive to neighborhood context and environmental impacts.
- Refine data management through CityWorks asset management software to fine-tune maintenance practices, track inventory, predict capital repairs and future capital projects, and develop modeling for staffing needs for future park improvements and programming. Utilize the long-term data to formalize park maintenance service standards.
- 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. Evaluate and, if feasible, pursue pilot programs to field test sustainable alternatives and to implement demonstration projects.

- Explore the use of non-gas-powered landscape equipment and vehicles to reduce emissions.
- Continue to adjust landscape maintenance practices in favor of techniques that contribute to the health of the land and lake environments.
- Strive to reuse locally-generated materials (such as downed trees, trimmings, leaves, etc.) as components of on-Island projects, rather than transporting and disposing off-Island.
- Continue to follow and advance the use of Integrated Pest Management strategies that maximize ecological benefits while minimizing environmental, social, and economic impacts.
- In collaboration with other City Departments, assess the feasibility of adding a dedicated staff position to support volunteer programs.

Future Recreation Programming, Arts & Culture

As the Recreation Reset Strategy is implemented, the City will initially focus on providing programs and services categorized as “core” and expand offerings in response to community needs and as resources allow.

- As the recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continues, recreation staff should evaluate and pilot new programs to explore the demand for other activities, as well as pursue enhanced programming opportunities at the City's waterfront locations.
- 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. This includes integration with the Capital Improvement Program, strategies for engaging the community in public art acquisition, updated policies for public art acquisition, siting, security, maintenance, and deaccession.
- Community gathering and special events should continue to be an area of emphasis; however, the overall number and breadth of City-sponsored special events should be carefully managed to align with the availability of resources and impacts to general park and facility use.
- Continue to explore partnership opportunities for the delivery of programs and services.



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