

Thurston County

PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS PLAN



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Acknowledgements

Thurston County greatly appreciates the efforts of community members and advisory members, county staff, and other county leaders who contributed to this planning effort. Your interest and support will continue to foster the success of our system of parks, open space and trails for years to come.

County Commissioners

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Commissioner Gary Edwards (District 2)

Commissioner Tye Menser (District 3)

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Mission Statement

Thurston County Parks and Trails' mission is to be the regional steward of parks, open space, and natural resource lands and waterways dedicated to public use for recreation and leisure enjoyment.

We provide a diverse range of recreation resources, programs, and activities throughout the county and promote the preservation and interpretation of Thurston County's historical and cultural resources, natural areas and wildlife resources.

Our focus is the regional recreation needs of Thurston County. The highest priorities focus on the development and operation of district and regional resources and facilities.

Vision

Thurston County's attractive, well managed parks, trails, nature preserves, and recreation programs enhance the quality of life and nurture the health and well-being of our people, our community, our environment, and our economy.

In partnership with our residents and visitors, we ensure that our parks, trails, preserves, and programs are accessible and responsive to changing needs within our communities.

We provide respite from urbanization; preserve the environment; foster understanding of our natural, cultural, and historic assets; and provide opportunities for recreation that meet the needs of the community. The focus on preserving open space region-wide continues, with a strong emphasis on connecting people to the land, water, and each other.

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

1

Purpose of the Plan

The residents of Thurston County are proud of their community and recognize the natural value and everyday enjoyment that comes from existing parklands and recreational amenities. From actively programmed events to casual gatherings with friends and neighbors; from natural areas for relaxation to inviting areas for exploration, discovery, and play – these assets have a direct connection to the quality of life experienced by every individual within this community.

As growth resulting from new development increases the need for recreational opportunities, it becomes increasingly important to ensure existing and planned parks and recreational facilities can meet the needs of an expanding population. Since 2010, over 30,000 new residents have moved into Thurston County, with many of them settling in and regularly seeking out our unincorporated communities. In this same time period, new studies have come out regarding level of service needs, the roles of corridors and buffer zones that provide cover for wildlife, changes in technology, environmental health, social equity, and changing demographics and their associated needs.

*The Parks, Open Space, and Trails (POST) Plan **provides renewed direction** for Thurston County's parklands and trail system.*

The Parks, Open Space, and Trails (POST) Plan provides renewed direction for Thurston County's parklands and trail system. As an update to the 2013 Parks, Recreation, Trails, and Natural Resources Preserve Plan, this update continues the forward-thinking commitment to parklands

Parks, trails, and open spaces are an essential part of each day for our community, as they provide opportunities for recreation, transportation, connecting with nature, and help maintain a healthy environment. Access to parks and recreation is an important right of every citizen in the community, and proximity to these resources is an important factor in increasing physical activity which results in a healthier population. In addition, the natural resources conserved by open lands help provide clean air and clean water in the region, as well as wildlife habitat and agricultural land that enrich our community.

and trails by reassessing the county's parkland assets, revising the inventory to consider recent acquisitions and improvements, and identifying current needs and future opportunities within the region.

This effort also ensures that the county's Parks and Trails program aligns with Thurston County's Strategic Plan. The plan will describe how the Parks and Trails program supports the Strategic Plan Vision of "a vibrant community ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of generations to live, work, and play," as well as the Mission to "create a community that promotes health, commerce, and environmental protection with transparency and accountability".

With extensive participation and direction from the community, the new POST Plan has been developed to help Thurston County in the realization of its parkland and trail goals while supporting environmental stewardship and sustainable, long-term growth. Although discussed in greater detail in chapter 3, the

key messages from the community included the need for additional non-motorized trails and open space, and a desire to invest in improved maintenance of the existing parks and trails system, while cuts to existing parks service was viewed as the least favorable option in terms of investing in the future of parks services.

Setting and Context

Located at the southern terminus of the Puget Sound, Thurston County maintains a rural and friendly aura as homes gradually intermingle with the densely forested foothills of Capitol State Forest to the west and Mima Mounds and prairielands to the south. There are over 90 miles of Puget Sound coastline, three major river basins, and over 100 lakes and ponds in Thurston County.

The county contains a total area of 737 square miles, or 471,713 acres. Approximately 688 square miles (440,545 acres), or 93 percent of the total area, lies in





unincorporated Thurston County. The remaining seven percent is divided among the seven incorporated cities and towns of Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, Bucoda, Rainier, Tenino, and Yelm.

Residential uses spread from urban areas along transportation routes, up through the Puget Sound peninsulas in the northern end of the county, and around many lakes and rivers. Major landowners in the unincorporated county include the State of Washington (including Capitol State Forest), the federal government (including Joint Base Lewis-McChord and Nisqually Wildlife Refuge), and private timber companies.

Population in Thurston County has grown steadily since it was formed in 1852, and it has been among the fastest growing counties in the state since the 1960s. Unincorporated areas of the county, including urban growth areas, have consistently made up around half of the total population of Thurston County. Although

the rate of growth has slowed since 1980, overall population has more than doubled, increasing by an average of 4,500 new residents each year since 1990.

In 2017, Thurston County's population was approximately 276,900. Projections show more than 390,000 people living in the county in the year 2040, an increase of 42 percent. Just over half of that growth is projected to be in the cities, with another third estimated for the unincorporated urban growth areas. Approximately 14 percent of population growth is estimated to be in the rural parts of the county.

Thurston County has a slightly older population than Washington State overall, with the proportion of residents aged 65 or older projected to increase to nearly a fifth of the population by 2040.

Plans Working Together

In the years since the 2013 Parks, Recreation, Trails, and Natural Resources Preserve Plan was adopted, various other county plans and projects have been advanced or adopted, including multiple updates to the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan (most recently in 2019), Nisqually Subarea Plan (2019), Rochester and Grand Mound Subarea Plans (2018), Habitat Conservation Plan (2018), and Voluntary Stewardship Work Plan (2017).

Other local and regional efforts including the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan, Thurston Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Plans (2018 and 2020), multiple city comprehensive and recreational plans, and older efforts including the 2007 Thurston Regional

Trails Plan, influence and are influenced by this Thurston County POST Plan update.

The Washington State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan has also been updated through the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, complete with a 2019 manual for the development of recreational planning policies and guidelines.

These updated plans offer a range of newly formed insights and approaches to some of the challenges and opportunities faced by their respective jurisdictions. Considered together, they identify a trend of development and land use that can be felt at the local level as easily as it can across the state. As with many areas within Washington State, Thurston County's undeveloped lands and natural settings are coming under greater pressure to accommodate new growth, while existing parks, trails, and open spaces are experiencing increased use levels.

In Thurston County, residents have access to a number of public lands offering a variety of activities such as boating, fishing, bicycling, camping, hiking, and wildlife viewing. Thurston County residents enjoy almost 50,000 acres of state and federal lands, including 2,900 acres of wildlife habitat at the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, 842 acres at Millersylvania State Park, and approximately 40,000 acres in the Capitol State Forest. We also have several major trails, numerous city and county parks, access to water sports on rivers, lakes, and Puget Sound, and hundreds of miles of bicycle lanes adjacent to local roadways.

– Thurston County 2019 Comprehensive Plan

Thurston County Comprehensive Plan (2019)

The 2019 update to the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan includes a number of parks- and open space-related goals and issues, including:

- Retaining and enhancing open spaces, recreational opportunities, fish and wildlife habitat, and water.
- The need for additional public recreation areas and open space to accommodate for growth in the county and acquiring and maintaining those facilities.
- Protecting quality of life, including water availability, and water, air and environmental quality.
- Planning, preparing, and mitigating for the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.
- Addressing pressure on rural resource lands from increasing urban growth.
- Addressing regulatory obstacles, such as lack of supporting infrastructure.

Nisqually, Rochester, and Grand Mound Subarea Plans (2017–2019)

While not formally incorporated, these communities represent significant population centers within Thurston County. Each census-designated area offers unique opportunities and challenges as it relates to future growth and existing recreational needs. While more passive recreational opportunities exist within close proximity to these communities (including the Billy Frank Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, Capitol State Forest

and Scatter Creek Wildlife Recreation Area), survey participants identified a lack of county amenities.

Habitat Conservation and Voluntary Stewardship Work Plans (2017-2018)

Both plans actively work to ensure the protection of environmentally vulnerable and sensitive habitats and species throughout Thurston County. These plans encourage close collaboration with landowners and property stakeholders to develop site specific approaches to environmental stewardship. Both plans have been reviewed by the Washington State Conservation Commission.

Thurston Regional Transportation Plan (2019-2020)

Initially adopted by the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) in March 1993, the 2019 update of the plan involves the Transportation Policy Board and governing bodies of Thurston County, including the cities, towns, Port of Olympia, and Intercity Transit. The Regional Transportation Plan is the guiding document for all other city and county transportation plans. Regional “to-do” goals include a strategy to adapting to e-bikes and other electric assist micromobility devices and improved connections to bicycle and pedestrian networks.

Homeless Housing Plan (2017-2022)

The intent of this plan is to ensure that homelessness is a rare, brief and a one-time occurrence in Thurston

County. By gathering the best of all practices and constructing the most effective service networks, this plan offers a new framework for a regional response to guide people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk to evidence based services and to housing stability as quickly as possible. Building upon the local continuum of care and community health improvement initiatives, this plan represents the community’s best efforts to identify key goals and strategies to end homelessness.

Thurston Climate Adaptation Plan (2018)

In January 2018, TRPC adopted the Thurston Climate Adaptation Plan, which includes 91 actions to help the region prepare for and adjust to climate impacts. In April 2018, TRPC, Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater and Thurston County began work on a climate mitigation plan – with actions to reduce regional emissions 45% below 2015 levels by 2030 and 85% below 2015 levels by 2050. As the plan makes clear, taking action on climate change now can also bring other benefits to the community – including better air quality, more transportation options, and enhanced recreational areas.

Thurston Regional Trails Plan (2007)

Despite the age of this plan, many of the goals and policies of this effort have played a significant role in the development of goals, policies, and actions within both the 2013 Parks, Recreation, Trails, and Natural Resources Preserve Plan and the 2019-2020 Thurston Regional Transportation Plan. The value and

direction of this plan will continue to inform the goals and recommendations of this POST Plan update.

Project Methodology

Thurston County's POST Plan has been developed through an open and inclusive process, consistent with the State of Washington and Thurston County planning requirements. The process has been incremental and progressive, with each phase building upon previous work.

The planning process began with investigation of Thurston County's context and demographics, and analysis of its park and open space assets. This investigation was coupled with community engagement to determine the levels of service currently being provided, as well as needs and desires for future improvements. This input led to recommendations for park and open space improvements which were then reviewed, tested, prioritized, and formed into a vision for the future, with a capital improvement plan outlining the steps to implementation. Oversight and input into this process has been provided by Thurston County staff, county commissioners, and community members.



Existing Facilities **EXISTING FACILITIES**

2

Enriching lives through a safe, attractive, well-balanced park system is essential in a healthy community. Active and passive recreation facilities provide opportunities for physical fitness, reflection, education, stress reduction, fresh air, and a strong sense of community. Habitat preservation and environmental stewardship provides not only for the existing residents and visitors in Thurston County, but for future generations to come.

A quality park system should contain a good balance of property types which should be located geographically throughout the county. Resources must be allocated equitably throughout the community while reflecting changes in the level of demand for parks and recreation resources.

Parks and Open Space Classification

Public parks are classified based on the recreational opportunities they provide. Classifications used by Thurston County are consistent with guidelines recommended by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office and the National Recreation and Park Association. Guided by this system, the county bridges the gap between facilities operated by cities and local entities and the expansive recreation areas administered by state and federal governments.

Thurston County generally classifies its parks and open space facilities into six categories: regional parks, trails, special use parks, historic sites, open space/undeveloped park sites, and preserves/natural areas.

Regional Parks

Regional parks are typically larger destination parks that attract users from a broad service area. These parks provide a combination of passive/leisure recreation and active, enterprise opportunities. Serving large geographic and metropolitan areas as well as tourists and visitors, these parks can have significant natural, cultural, or historical features and often include shorelines, water access, trails, and educational/interpretive features. Examples include Burfoot Park and Deschutes Falls Park.

Trails

Trails are intended to form a non-motorized network throughout the county and beyond, linking neighborhoods, parks, schools, open spaces, civic facilities and commercial centers. Ongoing development of a countywide trail system linking urban and rural Thurston County has been well-received by the community; there are currently 56 miles of county-owned recreational trail corridors connecting various destinations throughout the county. Trails in Thurston County are used for both recreation and transportation, with an increasing number of residents using the trail system for commuting. Some trails may have multi-use components, including equestrian use in some cases. Examples include the Chehalis Western and Ralph Munro trails.

Special Use Parks

Special use parks meet the demands for a particular activity or special event. They serve a targeted user group or population, and need to be of adequate size and have specialized amenities to properly serve their intended use. Currently the county has one such facility, the five-acre Off-Leash Dog Area, maintained by Thurston County Public Works.

Historic Sites

One of the county's recreation goals is to "be responsible stewards of the county's natural, historic, and cultural resources for current and future generations by acquiring and protecting areas of significance." Thurston County is proud to maintain three sites of historic significance – Mima Pioneer Cemetery, Fort Eaton Monument, and George Washington Bush Monument.

Open Space/Undeveloped Park Sites

Though largely undeveloped, the county's open spaces provide residents with visual relief from urban environments, as well as overall environmental and health benefits. Open space sites may or may not be improved, but can include trails, greenway corridors, community gardens, farmed areas, buffers between land uses of differing intensities, and areas left in their natural state. It is worth noting that some of these lands may only exist informally or in the form of a protected conservation easement.

Preserves/Natural Areas

This classification focuses on preserving and restoring wilderness, special natural habitat, and open space over the long term for education and research purposes with limited public access. These areas are intended to be maintained in a natural state and are managed to preserve the natural attributes of the site. Examples include Glacial Heritage Preserve and Woodland Creek Wetlands Natural Area.

Non-County Park Classifications

The county's parks and open spaces are complemented by parks owned and operated by the cities of Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, and other jurisdictions within the county. Thurston County collaborates with other local jurisdictions to offer a wide variety of park and recreation opportunities while minimizing duplication of services. The following summarizes classifications of non-county owned parks within Thurston County.

- **Community parks** provide outdoor and indoor recreation for a defined service area (generally within a 10-15 mile radius).
- **Neighborhood parks** provide recreation space for an immediate neighborhood or cluster of neighborhoods (generally within a one mile radius).
- **Mini-parks** (or pocket parks) are typically play lots or playgrounds providing space for parental-supervised recreation for toddlers and young children.

- **Special use parks** meet the demands for a particular activity or special event. Examples include dog parks, bike parks, disc golf courses, and swimming pool/water parks.
- **Greenspaces** include approximately 50,000 acres in Thurston County that are managed by state and federal agencies. This acreage is comprised of state parks, preserves, and recreational sites within the Capitol State Forest, the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and Black River Wildlife Refuge, and other habitat sites.

Parks and Open Space Inventory

Thurston County currently oversees 2,578 acres of parklands (including 972 developed acres), comprised of 24 properties. These include natural areas, parks, tidelands, beaches, historic buildings, special use areas and undeveloped lands. Included in this inventory are 56 miles of trail, picnic areas, day lodges, shelters, playgrounds, and numerous other amenities. A summary of the county's existing parks and open space facilities can be found in Table 2-1, followed by a complete inventory of these facilities organized by classification.

Table 2-1 Thurston County Parklands and Open Spaces

	Name	Address	Acres
Regional Parks	Burfoot Park	6927 Boston Harbor Rd NE	60
	Frye Cove Park	4000 NW 61st Ave	86
	Kenneydell Park	6745 SW Fairview Rd	40
	Deschutes Falls Park	25005 Bald Hill Rd S	155
	Guerin Park	6500 Nels St SW	40
	Total:		381
Trails	Chehalis Western Trail	-	182 (26 trail miles)
	Yelm-Tenino Trail	-	400 (14.5 trail miles)
	Gate-Belmore Trail (unimproved)	-	243 (14 trail miles)
	Ralph Munro Trail	-	-- (1.5 trail miles)
	Total:		825 (56 trail miles)
Special Use Parks	Off-Leash Dog Park	2418 Hogum Bay Rd NE	5
	Total:		5
Historic Sites	Mima Prairie Pioneer Cemetery	15025 Mima Rd SW	2
	Fort Eaton Monument	Yelm Hwy at Meridian Rd	1
	George Washington Bush Monument	85th Ave SE	1
	Total:		4

Table 2-1 Thurston County Parklands and Open Spaces

	Name	Address	Acres
Open Space/ Undeveloped Park Sites	Deschutes River Park	11013 Stedman Rd SE	50
	Louise H. Meyers Park	5600 NW Calvert St	38
	Rainier View Park	Vail Cut-Off Rd SE	54
	Ruth Prairie Park	Vail Cut-Off Rd SE	35
	Cooper Point Park	46th Ave NW	32
	Lake Lawrence Park	17500 Pleasant Beach Dr SE	15
	Indian Road Park	Indian Rd NE	5
	Total:		229
Preserves/ Natural Areas	Glacial Heritage Preserve	-	1,020
	Woodland Creek Wetlands	-	75
	Johnson Point Wetlands	-	26
	Black River Natural Area	-	13
	Total:		1,134
Grand Total:			2,578 acres 56 trail miles

Burfoot Park

ADDRESS: 6927 Boston Harbor Rd NE

SIZE: 60 acres

REGION: Northeast Thurston County

TYPE: Regional Park

AMENITIES: Beach access, nature trails, three covered picnic shelters, playground, restrooms

Located in northeastern Thurston County, Burfoot Park covers 60 acres with 1,100 feet of saltwater beach frontage on Budd Inlet. The park features picnic shelters, nature trails, and a small playground. Wildflowers and rhododendrons line the trails in the spring, and the beach offers views of the Capitol building and the Olympic Mountains on a clear day. With its wide range of available recreational activities, Burfoot Park attracts Thurston County residents and visitors alike.

IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Level and grade lawn area to reduce maintenance costs and make it more usable for recreation activities
2. Trail system – reconstruct stairways and footbridges
3. Remove existing restroom (built 1977; lacks capacity to serve current need) and replace with larger, more energy-efficient restroom building



Frye Cove Park

ADDRESS: 4000 61st Ave NW

SIZE: 86 acres

REGION: Northwest Thurston County

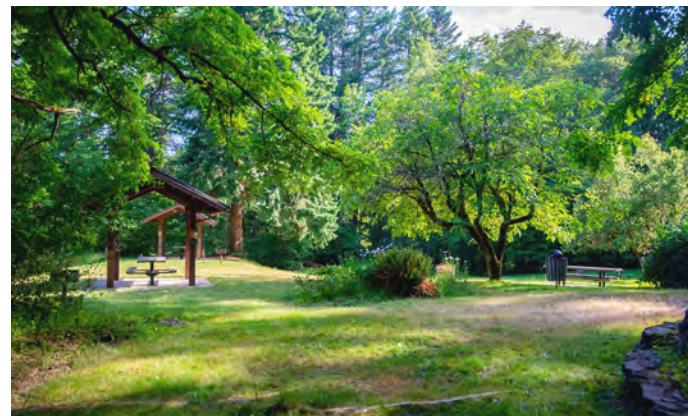
TYPE: Regional Park

AMENITIES: Beach access, swimming area, trails, playgrounds, restrooms, two covered picnic shelters

Frye Cove Park, located on Eld Inlet in northwestern Thurston County features 1,400 feet of saltwater beach, 2 miles of trails, playgrounds, and covered shelters. The park also features beautiful views of Mt. Rainier. Because of its idyllic location, Frye Cove Park is popular among community members for everything from day hikes to weddings to shellfish harvesting.

IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Renovate lawn area for safety of park users; replace compromised soils and re-grade
2. Renovate restrooms
3. Restore/replace bulkhead



Kenneydell Park

ADDRESS: 6745 SW Fairview Rd

SIZE: 40 acres

REGION: Southwest Thurston County

TYPE: Regional Park

AMENITIES: Developed swimming area, trails, athletic fields, two playground structures, three covered picnic shelters, rental lodge, restrooms

Located on Black Lake, this 40-acre park features 1,000 feet of freshwater beach as well trails, athletic fields and a developed swimming area. There are three picnic shelters available for rental, and two large playground structures were added to the park in 2009. The park also has a rental lodge with a kitchen, meeting space, covered porches, tables and chairs.

IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Replace existing restroom building to address capacity issues and meet ADA standards
2. Renovate lodge – building upgrades to improve efficiency, decrease maintenance, and make facility more appealing to prospective renters
3. Renovate/replace existing athletic field



Deschutes Falls Park

ADDRESS: 25005 Bald Hill Rd S

SIZE: 155 acres

REGION: Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Regional Park

AMENITIES: Trails

Acquired by the county in 1992, Deschutes Falls Park was opened to the public in 2017. Thurston County has made minimal improvements to the site; in its natural form, it is a paradise for nature lovers. Natural features in the park include natural rock monoliths, native plants and animals, deep canyons, and the falls.

A gravel trail winds through the park, and a four-foot high fence at the edge of the river gorge helps ensure the safety of visitors. A mobile home was also added to serve as a residence for a live-in caretaker. The site is considered a day-use facility, meaning no overnight camping is allowed.

IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Improve/expand walkway and viewpoints overlooking the falls
2. Increase parking capacity (currently not enough capacity provided for summer use)
3. Restore historic cabin building on site
4. Introduce historical/informational signage



Guerin Park

ADDRESS: 6500 Nels St SW

SIZE: 40 acres

REGION: Southwest Thurston County

TYPE: Regional Park

AMENITIES: Trails

Guerin Park is a forested parcel on the western shore of Black Lake. While the site is largely undeveloped, several footpaths exist on the property.



Chehalis Western Trail

LOCATION: Trail runs from Woodard Bay Natural Resources Conservation Area (north) to Yelm-Tenino Trail intersection at SR 507 near Rainier (south)

SIZE: 182 acres / 26 trail miles

REGION: Northeast–Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Trail

The Chehalis Western Trail was built on the historic Chehalis Western Railroad, which operated from 1926 through the mid-1980s. The trail runs north-south through the heart of Thurston County and links up with the Yelm-Tenino Trail, passing through a variety of ecosystems and environments in both the urban and rural areas of the county.

The trail provides access to over 170 acres of parkland including nearly two miles of frontage along the Deschutes River, access to Puget Sound, Chambers Lake, wetlands, forests, farmland, creeks, prairies, and other habitats. Mileage markers are placed every 1/2 mile running north-south, and there are four trailhead facilities with amenities along the trail:

- Woodard Bay (parking and restrooms)
- Chambers Lake (parking, restrooms, picnic facilities)
- 67th Ave (parking and trail information)
- Fir Tree Road (parking and trail information)



IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Repair asphalt trail surface
2. Construct trail underpass at BNSF Railway to improve safety and eliminate the current alignment along Rainier Rd
3. Add trailhead at 41st Ave NE
4. Add restroom at 67th Ave SE trailhead
5. Maintenance/repairs at Yelm Highway overpass

Yelm-Tenino Trail

LOCATION: Trail runs from Yelm City Hall (east) to Tenino City Park (west)

SIZE: 400 acres / 14.5 trail miles

REGION: Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Trail

The Yelm-Tenino Trail corridor runs east-west through the southern portion of Thurston County and connects the communities of Yelm, Rainier, and Tenino. Acquired by Thurston County in 1993, the corridor historically operated as a railroad from 1869 through the late 1980s. The trail traverses forest and agricultural lands, wetlands, creeks, and other habitat, and runs parallel to State Route 507. Mileage markers are placed every 1/2 mile running east-west.

The Yelm-Tenino Trail intersects with the Chehalis Western Trail, linking the cities of Yelm, Rainier, Tenino, Tumwater, Lacey, Olympia, and Woodard Bay on the Puget Sound. Permitted uses of the trail include pedestrians, bicycles, and other forms of non-motorized transportation. The trail features three trailheads with amenities:

- Yelm trailhead – behind Yelm City Hall (parking, picnic tables, restrooms, and an information kiosk)
- Rainier trailhead – behind Rainier Market, between Centre and Minnesota Streets (restrooms available)
- Tenino trailhead – at Tenino City Park on Washington Avenue (access to restrooms)



IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Repair trestle at Deschutes River crossing
2. Extend trail south to Bucoda (~4 miles) from current endpoint at Tenino
3. Add restrooms at Rainier trailhead
4. Renovate restrooms at Tenino trailhead
5. Increase parking capacity at Tenino trailhead

Gate-Belmore Trail

LOCATION: Corridor runs from 66th Ave SW near Kenneydell Park (north) to Gate/Rochester near the Black River Habitat Management Area (south)

SIZE: 243 acres / 14 trail miles

REGION: Northwest–Southwest Thurston County

TYPE: Trail

To keep pace with the growing need for trails, Thurston County plans to improve this existing corridor over the next 10 years to link the northwest and southwest portions of the county. Called the Gate-Belmore Trail, the county plans to construct, repurpose, and connect unused rail lines, shared-use pathways, and bicycle lanes into a new regional trail. The Gate to Belmore railroad line was acquired in 1996 by the county and is currently unimproved.

The 14-mile corridor links a planned urban trail system from Tumwater near Kenneydell Park with the south county communities of Gate and Rochester. When developed, the trail will provide access to the Black River and will run adjacent to the Glacial Heritage



Preserve and Black River Natural Area just south of Littlerock. It will also provide access to other sites of interest in Thurston County, including Black River Wildlife Refuge, Mima Mounds National Natural Landmark, Capitol State Forest, Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, and the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation. Neighborhoods adjacent to the trail each have a unique history and community amenities that can be connected and enhanced through development of the Gate-Belmore Trail.

Ralph Munro Trail

LOCATION: Trail runs from Mud Bay Rd near Evergreen Pkwy overpass (south) to the intersection of 17th Ave NW and Evergreen Pkwy (north)

SIZE: 1.5 trail miles

REGION: Northwest Thurston County

TYPE: Trail

Formerly known as the McLane Trail, the Ralph Munro Trail was re-named in June 2018 to honor the man who established the McLane Forest Committee. The group was responsible for designing, building and maintaining the trail.

The Ralph Munro trail starts at Mud Bay Road, near McLane Elementary School, and heads north along Evergreen Parkway towards the Evergreen State College. The paved multi-use trail is popular with bikers. It connects with other local trails, including the McLane School Trail at the south end and the Evergreen Parkway Trail at the north end.



Off-Leash Dog Park

ADDRESS: 2418 Hogum Bay Rd NE

SIZE: 5 acres

REGION: Northeast Thurston County

TYPE: Special Use Park

AMENITIES: Water stations, paths, separate areas for large and small dogs

Opened in 2010, the Off-Leash Dog Park is operated by the Solid Waste Division of Thurston County Public Works and located within the boundaries of the Thurston County Waste and Recovery Center on Hogum Bay Road. The park is open from 7:00 AM to dusk, seven days a week.

The park features separate areas for large and small dogs, both of which include obstacles and structures for the dogs to play on. Other amenities include water stations, a sand and gravel area for digging, paths, and fencing.



Mima Prairie Pioneer Cemetery

ADDRESS: 15025 Mima Rd SW

SIZE: 2 acres

REGION: Southwest Thurston County

TYPE: Historic Site

Deeded to Thurston County in 1869 to serve as a cemetery, this site was placed on the Thurston County Historic Register in 1989. The cemetery houses the gravesites of some of the area's first settlers.



Fort Eaton Monument

ADDRESS: Yelm Hwy SE at Meridian Rd

SIZE: 1 acre

REGION: Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Historic Site

The Fort Eaton monument marks the site of one of the many stockades built in the area during the Puget Sound War of 1855-1856.



Top: Mima Prairie Pioneer Cemetery. Bottom left: Fort Eaton Monument. Bottom right: George Washington Bush Monument.

George Washington Bush Monument

ADDRESS: 1400 85th Ave SE

SIZE: 1 acre

REGION: Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Historic Site

This monument and informational site commemorates Bush, a pioneer and one of the first multiracial settlers in the area.

Deschutes River Park

ADDRESS: 11013 Stedman Rd SE

SIZE: 50 acres

REGION: Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Open Space/Undeveloped Park Site

This undeveloped open space is located on the shore of the Deschutes River in southeast Thurston County, adjacent to the Chehalis Western Trail.

Louise H. Meyers Park

ADDRESS: 5600 NW Calvert St

SIZE: 38 acres

REGION: Northwest Thurston County

TYPE: Open Space/Undeveloped Park Site

Located on Oyster Bay in the far northwest corner of Thurston County, Louise H. Meyers Park is a forested, undeveloped open space parcel.

Rainier View Park

ADDRESS: Vail Cut-Off Rd SE

SIZE: 54 acres

REGION: Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Open Space/Undeveloped Park Site

Rainier View Park is an undeveloped open space site located on the Deschutes River in southeast Thurston County. The Chehalis Western Trail runs directly through the park site.

Ruth Prairie Park

ADDRESS: Vail Cut-Off Rd SE

SIZE: 35 acres

REGION: Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Open Space/Undeveloped Park Site

Located just west of Rainier View Park, Ruth Prairie Park is an undeveloped park site bounded by the Deschutes River to the south and the Chehalis Western Trail to the north.

Cooper Point Park

ADDRESS: 46th Ave NW

SIZE: 32 acres

REGION: Northwest Thurston County

TYPE: Open Space/Undeveloped Park Site

Cooper Point Park is a wooded, undeveloped park site located on the western shore of Budd Inlet.

Lake Lawrence Park

ADDRESS: 17500 Pleasant Beach Dr SE

SIZE: 15 acres

REGION: Southeast Thurston County

TYPE: Open Space/Undeveloped Park Site

This is an undeveloped park on the south shore of Lake Lawrence in southeast Thurston County. Located at the end of Pleasant Beach Drive, this site is adjacent to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Lake Lawrence boat launch.

Indian Road Park

ADDRESS: Indian Rd NE

SIZE: 5 acres

REGION: Northeast Thurston County

TYPE: Open Space/Undeveloped Park Site

Located approximately two miles south of Burfoot Park on Budd Inlet, this small undeveloped park site offers beach access and is adjacent to several single-family residences.

Glacial Heritage Preserve

ADDRESS: 15044 Mima Rd SE

SIZE: 1,020 acres

REGION: Southwest Thurston County

TYPE: Preserve

Glacial Heritage Preserve is an excellent example of the Puget Prairie ecosystem that greeted the settlers of the 1800s. Only 2.6% of this type ecosystem still exists today. Thurston County Parks and Trails was fortunate to acquire this unique property.

With the exception of Thurston County Parks and Trails sponsored events, the park is currently closed to public use. Arrangements may be made in advance to access this site for educational or environmental activities.



Woodland Creek Wetlands

ADDRESS: 4707 Hawks Prairie Rd NE

SIZE: 75 acres

REGION: Northeast Thurston County

TYPE: Natural Area

Located near the outlet of Woodland Creek to Henderson Inlet, most of this property is wetlands, marshes, and riparian corridors, which provide a habitat for migrating waterfowl and native fish species. The parcel was originally obtained by Capitol Land Trust in 1989 with the goal of conserving wetlands, riparian areas, and associated upland forests; it is now owned and managed by Thurston County.

Johnson Point Wetlands

ADDRESS: 7526 NE Johnson Pt Rd

SIZE: 26 acres

REGION: Northeast Thurston County

TYPE: Natural Area

This undeveloped wetlands site in northeast Thurston County was placed into a conservation easement with the county in 2014.

Black River Natural Area

ADDRESS: 16800 SW Albany St

SIZE: 13 acres

REGION: Southwest Thurston County

TYPE: Natural Area

This small, unimproved wildlife area is located on the Black River, adjacent to the Black River Wildlife Area (part of WDFW's Scatter Creek Wildlife Area). The site provides habitat for upland birds including pheasant and grouse, and for waterfowl and migratory birds.

Public Involvement **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

3

Prominently featured throughout this process, public participation has been the driving force behind this plan and the ideas, goals, and objectives presented within. With an initial kickoff of the Public Participation Plan in early August of 2019, this effort was distributed throughout Thurston County via newspapers, press releases, social media blasts, in-person offerings, the county's website, and project posters strategically located at parklands and trailheads across the county.

While August represented the official starting line for an intensive outreach and community engagement effort, actions had already been set in motion to ensure public transparency, a diversity of respondents, and a range of flexible opportunities for respondents to offer local community insights on a timeline compatible with their unique schedule and preferred participation medium.

Prior to the start of the outreach campaign, a Public Participation Plan (included in the Appendix) was developed to ensure Thurston County residents were well informed of the opportunity and provided with the necessary context to provide an educated assessment and analysis of how parkland and trail facilities were performing in their current condition and how they could be improved upon in the future.

Community Survey

Building off previous outreach efforts in the 2013 Parks, Recreation, Trails and Natural Resource Preserve Plan, a 2019 POST survey was conducted using a similar set of questions to gather community perspectives and identify any recurring or changing trends. While a summary of survey responses has been included in this chapter, the entire report is included in the Appendix.

Location

In total, 682 individuals provided comments as part of this outreach effort. A map of population density has been included with this information to better illustrate the represented community (Figure 3-1). Respondent clustering appears to reflect existing residential development patterns, with a significant proportion of

respondents residing within incorporated communities. While this distribution can be expected, 58% of respondents state they visit parklands and recreational facilities within Thurston County at least once a week, lending credence to an expressed community interest in a Metropolitan Parks District.

Popular Amenities

When asked about the types of facilities respondents generally use when recreating, paved walking and biking trails were the number one choice (78%) followed closely by unpaved nature trails (68%). Open spaces and natural habitats were identified as the third choice (63%), closely followed by access to beaches and shoreline areas (62%) (Figure 3-2).

While many amenities were popular amongst respondents, it is worth noting that many of the top preferences are on the more passive side of recreational uses with more intensive or programmatic amenities like soccer and football fields and outdoor sport courts such as basketball, tennis, and pickleball registering less than 20% of total respondents respectively.

Based on a deeper review of open-ended responses, this trend can be largely attributed to the availability of more programmatic/intensive recreational opportunities being offered within adjacent communities of higher development or urbanization.

Supporting amenities including restrooms, wayfinding signage, water fountains, and improved lighting were

Figure 3-1 Thurston County Population Density

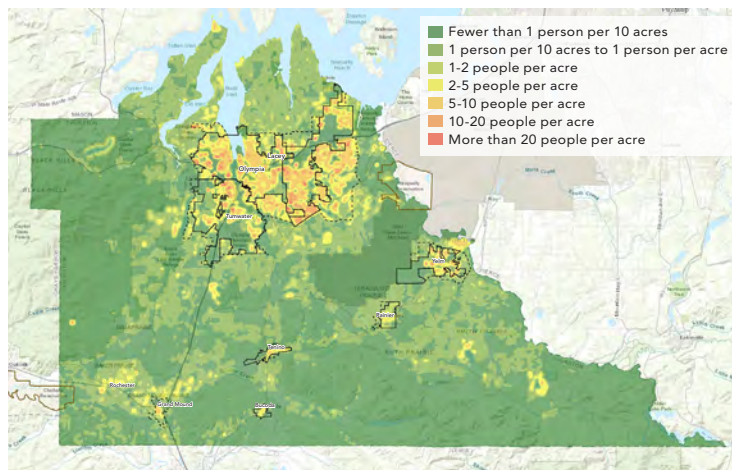
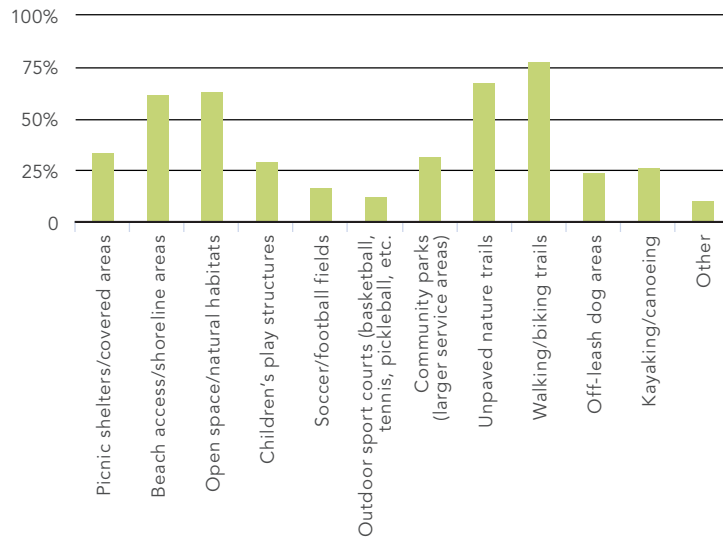


Figure 3-2 Most Regularly Used Recreational Facilities/Amenities Among Survey Respondents



also discussed within this section as they work to enhance existing amenities already offered throughout the county. Interests for nature trails that can accommodate a diversity of uses including mountain bikes, hikers, and equestrian activities were also identified.

Reasons for Travel

Understandably, these options are also some of the top reasons survey respondents give for traveling outside the county in pursuit of recreational amenities. Nature trails were listed as having the greatest pull, with many respondents stating they travel to mountains and State or National Parks to find longer trails with access to undeveloped natural areas. Access

to the ocean and shorelines were also listed as a primary draw, as many of these natural amenities exist outside the county or are heavily privatized within the county.

Higher intensity and more programmatic activities such as turf multi-use fields, spray parks, and covered recreational facilities were listed as the third most commonly pursued category, with many identifying cities within Thurston or adjacent counties as their target destination.

Greatest Need

When asked about existing Thurston County needs, non-motorized trails (84%), undeveloped natural areas and open spaces (84%), and shoreline access (83%) were the highest rated categories. While non-motorized trails were identified as the greatest overall need, those respondents who identified undeveloped natural areas felt more strongly about this as a clear and pressing need. Support amenities including restrooms, facility lighting, recycling and garbage containers, bike racks and drinking fountains rated just out of the top three (81% in support).

Within discussions around this topic, connectivity was strongly represented as parkland and trail users were consistently looking for protected non-motorized corridors to travel and commute between primary destinations including schools, cities, commercial centers, and regional parks.

On the flip side of the conversation, off-leash dog parks, sport courts, and ball fields were the most polar areas of discussion with none of them rating over 50% as an existing county need.

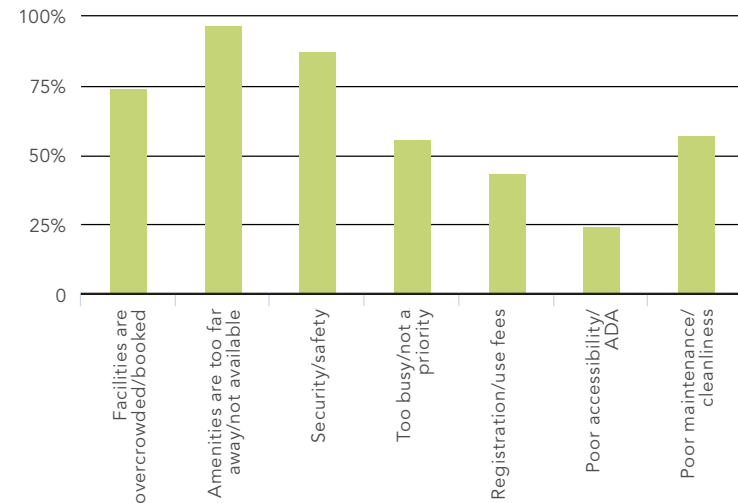
Although public pools and splash pads were commonly identified as more urban level amenities, there was consistent support for swimming opportunities within Thurston County (with 60% of respondents identifying a swimming pool/spray park as a need, and 83% identifying shoreline access as a need). Expressed interests in an aquatic and year-round covered/indoor recreational center throughout the survey appear to support this view. Concerns over the privatization and pollution of outdoor swimming options continued to further this perspective.

Greatest Barrier

Identified 39% of the time by survey respondents, the proximity or nonexistence of desired amenities was the leading barrier for Thurston County parklands and trails. This was closely followed by security and safety at 35% of responses, with antisocial behavior from predominantly street dependent populations being volunteered as the leading cause. Overcrowding and booked facilities was the third reason given with many identifying a desire for turf multi-use fields that have lights for evening and expanded seasonal use.

Facility cleanliness and upkeep was identified as the fourth barrier with cleanliness being attributed to many of the same concerns surrounding safety and

Figure 3-3 Greatest Barrier to Park Use Among Survey Respondents



maintenance primarily revolving around deteriorating pathways and overgrown trails (Figure 3-3).

Future Investments

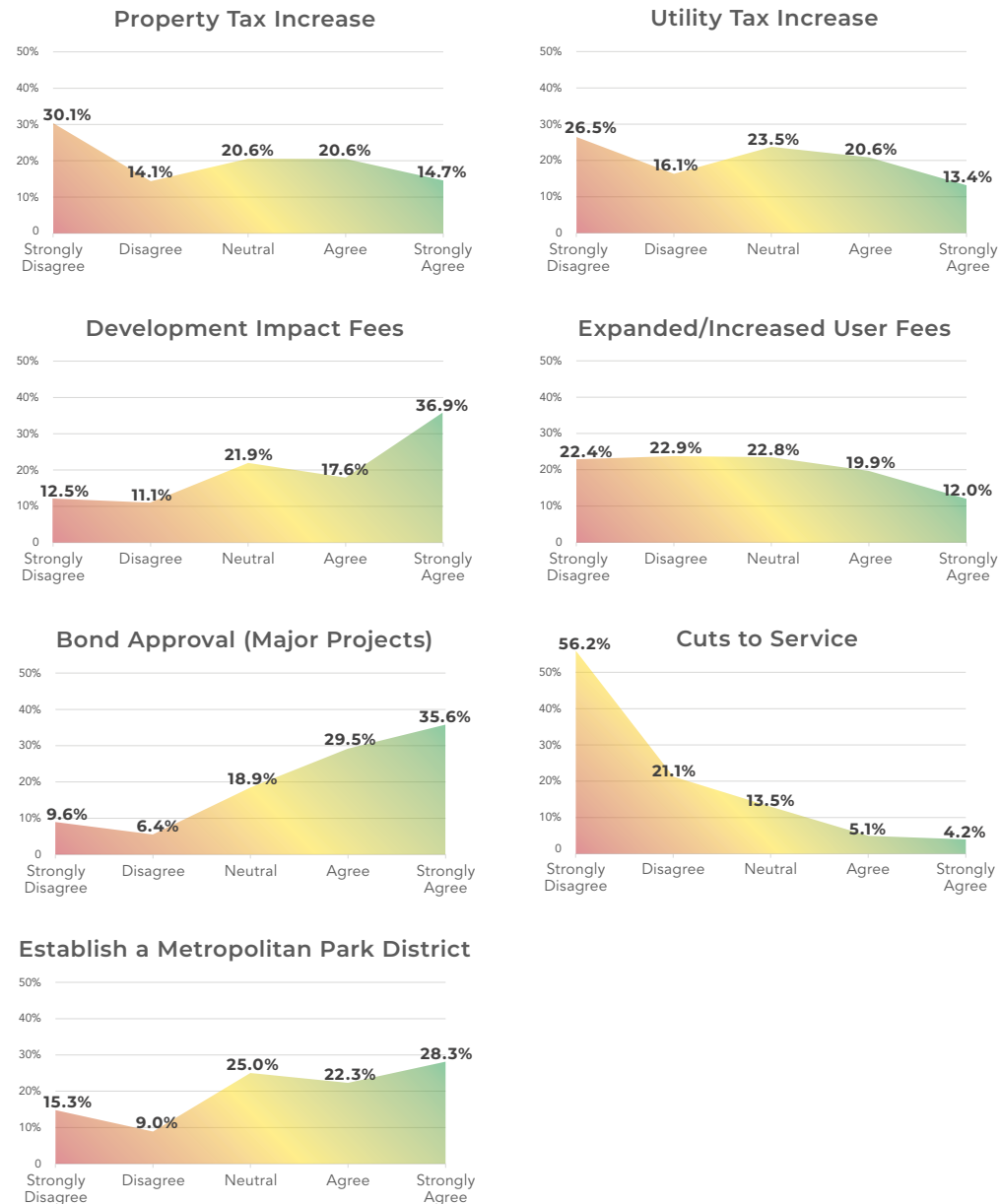
When asked about how the county should allocate park funding, respondents reiterated their preference for the acquisition and development of walking and biking trails in support of network connectivity (34%). This was closely followed by improvements and maintenance within existing parks and trails (33%). Both are consistent with expressed views throughout the outreach process.

The development of new park facilities came in third with funds being allocated towards the construction of new playgrounds and picnic shelters (19%). The

construction of new ball fields including soccer, baseball, basketball and rugby were identified as the lowest priority (14%).

Bond approval for major projects was viewed as the most favorable option (65%) for raising future funds (Figure 3-4). Development impact fees was viewed as another favorable option (55%), with the establishment of a Metropolitan Park District gaining 51% support consistent with discussions within the 2013 plan. Potential cuts to parks service was viewed as the least favorable option with 77% of respondents rating this unfavorably (56% stating they strongly disagree with this option).

Figure 3-4 Preferred Funding Sources Among Survey Respondents



Additional Outreach

A unique benefit of planning for parks and recreational facilities is the public prominence they are afforded within existing social media platforms. While in-person communications and plan specific outreach efforts were heavily relied upon, it is worth noting that various social media platforms and rating/review sites were also consulted to further inform public sentiment and community needs.



POST flyer advertising virtual workshop

Goals and Policies **GOALS AND POLICIES**

4

This chapter contains the goals and policies for parks, open space and trails in Thurston County. Goals described in this chapter identify the community's aspirations; policies describe how the goal can be achieved.

The goals and policies presented here set the trajectory for the long-term vision for Thurston County's parks, open space, and trail facilities and outline the steps to make it successful. They emerged from the values and priorities expressed by the community through surveys, community meetings, and written comments throughout the public process.

These goals and policies will also be incorporated into the Parks and Recreation element of the county's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan contains framework goals that guide countywide policies for the transportation system, public safety, parks, recreation, and other important facets of the community to create a consistent, unified plan for the county's future.

Goals (Not necessarily in order of priority)

1. Secure adequate funding for the operation, maintenance, and improvement of the county's recreational programs, parks, trails, and nature preserves through the implementation of sustainable funding strategies.
2. Operate and maintain the parks, trails, nature preserves, and recreation programs in a safe, clean, and environmentally responsible manner.
3. Expand educational and interpretational opportunities of the natural, historical, and cultural heritage within the county's parks, trails, and nature preserves.
4. Provide connectivity, where feasible, between open spaces, parks, preserves, trails, and wildlife corridors.
5. Promote community by expanding the county's regional trail system to connect the county's urban and rural communities.
6. Promote community by providing opportunities for independent play as well as organized recreation, special events, and group/family activities.
7. Coordinate county parks and recreation programs with the county Health Department's health and wellness programs to foster the well being of our citizens.
8. Improve public access to the county's freshwater and marine shorelines through acquisition, easements, and lease arrangements.
9. Acquire and develop parklands to maintain a level of service that keeps pace with population growth, and demographic change in the county.
10. Be responsible stewards of the county's natural, historic, and cultural resources for current and future generations by acquiring and protecting areas of significance.
11. Work with other park, recreation, and open space providers (including public, non-profits, and private entities) to ensure a coordinated and cost-effective approach to meeting the region's recreation and natural resource preservation needs.
12. Protect the recreational and environmental value of existing parks, trails, and preserves.
13. Create a safe, productive, and rewarding workplace which emphasizes teamwork, communication, and interdepartmental coordination.



I would like to see **better funding** for the parks department, and I would like to see **more county parks with shoreline access**, lake and river access...

– public survey comment



Policies

Acquisition

1. Ensure that the ability to operate and maintain both existing and new assets is factored into decisions on acquisition of parkland, trails and greenways, cultural resources, nature preserves, and other properties.
2. Acquire land and corridors proactively to deliver needed services. This includes acquiring the following:
 - Environmentally sensitive lands and resources that preserve wildlife habitat;
 - Sites of historical and cultural significance;
 - Marine shoreline and river access sites; and
 - Parkland in configurations that maximize accessibility and minimize conflicts with surrounding land uses.

“ There are just not that many **beach areas that are open to the public** along the sound or the local lakes/rivers. ”
 – public survey comment

3. Maintain ability to react to property acquisition opportunities that emerge.
4. Use trails and greenways where practicable to link county, city, and regional parks and preserves.

“ Let’s build a few year-round community bike parks and trail systems that **capitalize on our amazing Thurston County terrain** and help draw people to appreciate our county... and spend money in it on sustainable recreation. ”
 – public survey comment

Planning, Development, and Improvement

1. Assess county needs and demands through annual review of the POST Plan. Update the plan every five years. During the five-year update of the plan, evaluate undeveloped properties to assess merits for meeting county needs and/or their sale/exchange value.
2. Use green design and low-impact methods in developing parks and facilities, including county adopted Integrated Pest Management principles.
3. Solicit community input in the development of parks, trails, facilities, programs, and services.
4. Ensure park design and development guidelines conform to local ordinance and accepted state and federal standards.
5. Provide educational/interpretive signs to foster public stewardship of the environmental, historical, and cultural features of parks, preserves, and trails. Use universal design standards for signs and facilities.

“ We use Burfoot Park almost daily. It’s a great space for taking a walk with my dog, or just having a picnic. **We need more areas like this** as population grows. ”
– public survey comment

6. Include environmental, historic and cultural education, as integral components of the parks experience.
7. Work with other parks/recreation and open space providers (public, private, and non-profit organizations) to ensure a coordinated and cost-effective approach to meeting the region’s park, recreation, and preservation needs.
8. In collaboration with other jurisdictions, explore potential recreational uses of undeveloped public lands.
9. Actively pursue opportunities that allow for the preservation of natural systems, critical landscapes, and other environmental assets.
10. Work with other jurisdictions to establish and protect open space and habitat corridors with linkages to regionally significant open spaces and areas of diverse habitat.

Financial Resources and Regional Partnership

1. Ensure stable funding for Thurston County Parks and Trails operation and maintenance. Diversify revenue base by pursuing additional funding sources including enterprise initiatives, support from tribes and foundations, grants, and partnerships. Work with regional partners to assess feasibility of creating a Metropolitan Park District.
2. Work with local, state, and federal jurisdictions to evaluate impacts of proposed legislation on parks and recreation and/or to draft new legislation that supports Thurston County Parks and Trails’ mission.
3. Work with other parks and recreation providers within Thurston County to identify opportunities for mutual gain. When feasible, use interagency agreements for financing acquisition, facility development, and operation and maintenance to reduce costs and retain financial flexibility.
4. Work with other public and private parks and recreation providers to avoid duplication of services, improve facilities, and reduce costs through coordinated planning and development.

“ Funding sources **should not place an additional burden** on low-income families... but should come from property and development taxes. ”
– public survey comment

Operation and Maintenance

1. Develop a comprehensive program that identifies maintenance needs for all parklands, trails, nature preserves, facilities, and equipment.
2. Maintain property and assets in a manner that:
 - Maintains safety and reduces liability.
 - Supports ecological functions and minimizes disturbances to natural vegetation and wildlife habitats.
3. Manage and conserve natural preserves based on sound scientific principles. Manage vegetation through use of Integrated Pest Management Program.
4. Use on-site caretakers in park and recreation facilities as a security and maintenance resource whenever feasible. Encourage residents, community organizations, and other volunteers to share responsibility for parks by giving them a role in park stewardship.
5. Define park use rules and regulations through the county's park ordinances. Park use rules and regulations should maximize access and ensure safety and the protection and preservation of public assets.
6. Follow training and safety awareness standards as prescribed by the American Public Works Association Manual adopted by Thurston County Public Works.
7. Expand cooperation with other parks/recreation agencies to operate and maintain facilities, including alignment of equipment purchases when practicable.



*Love the Chehalis Western Trail! You do a great job maintaining it. I use it most every week and **it adds a lot to my quality of life.***

– public survey comment



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Demand and Needs Evaluation

DEMAND AND NEEDS EVALUATION

5

A demand and needs evaluation is the investigation and measurement of how well the parks and recreation needs of the community – how people like to spend their recreation time, what types of activities they choose to pursue, and how often they participate – are being met. As part of this plan update, a demand and needs evaluation was conducted to establish an appropriate level of service (LOS) standard for Thurston County Parks and Trails based on the recreation needs of the community.

LOS standards are quantifiable measures of the parkland and recreation facilities that are provided to the community, often expressed on a per capita basis (e.g., the number of park acres per 1,000 residents). The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of public parks, recreation, and conservation, established a set of LOS standards in the 1980s to help communities evaluate their recreation needs. Since then, LOS has been used as a planning tool to compare a local community's facilities against those of other communities, agencies, and national standards.

However, because the vision, values, and needs of each community are different, planners have acknowledged that simply quantifying local LOS to a national standard is not an effective means of evaluating a community's needs. Accordingly, NRPA's LOS standards have evolved in recent decades. Current methodology calls on jurisdictions to determine their own LOS based on the blend of natural, social, and economic characteristics and to define a LOS that's achievable within available land and financial resources.

Based on this evaluation, in addition to citizen input and proper stewardship responsibilities, Thurston County has determined a LOS of 3.0 developed acres per 1,000 residents and the per capita LOS as described in the 2020 Park Impact Fee Study. The demand from municipalities on county parks, though not quantifiable, is significant; thus the entire population of Thurston County is factored into current estimates. While LOS provides a helpful benchmark for comparison, a community that relies solely on LOS for determining recreation needs fails to identify community-specific issues such as a facility's quality, or residents' satisfaction with the existing facilities. Therefore, a variety of methods were used to help determine Thurston County's demand and need for parks, open space, and trail facilities.

Evaluation Methods

This plan takes both a quantitative and qualitative approach to identifying community-specific park needs within Thurston County. Evaluation of the community's recreational needs was conducted using a variety of methods, including an assessment of national and state recreation guidelines, comparison of Thurston County's parks standards and facilities with those of peer communities, analysis of demographic trends and population projections, and input from community members.

National Recreation Guidelines

Comparing the county's parks and recreational spaces to those across the nation provides a quantitative benchmark and a starting point to measuring the performance of its park system. NRPA studies national recreation trends and frequently publishes support documents and recommendations for public municipalities.

The NRPA level of service guidelines originally developed in 1983 offered guidance suggesting that "a park system, at minimum, be composed of a core system of parklands, with a total of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 population"¹. While this has since become a target benchmark, it is important to note that NRPA only requires a basic ratio of 1 acre of parkland per 1,000 people.

Since that time, various publications have updated and expanded upon possible park standards, several of which have also been published by NRPA. In 2017, NRPA published an updated performance review of 925 park agencies across the nation. The typical US park agency that serves a jurisdictional population of less than 20,000 has a median ratio of 10.5 acres of parkland to 1,000 residents. Rather than a one-size-fits-all acres to population standard, NRPA now recommends that each community develop its own standards based on local goals, priorities, and conditions.

¹ Lancaster, 1983, p. 56

Washington State Recreation Guidelines

Washington State's Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) offers additional insights on how to enact level of service standards to guide parks and recreation planning.

The RCO level of service guidelines focus on a community's success in setting and meeting its recreation and open space goals, and proposes that jurisdictions measure level of service based on several criteria, including distance, means of access, support of "muscle-powered" recreation, condition of facilities, sustainability, and public satisfaction.

Additionally, the RCO releases a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Programming (SCORP) document every five years, which includes survey results identifying recreation demand and trends, both statewide and by region; the document was last updated in 2017. These survey results are helpful in understanding broader recreation trends and understanding how the county's needs fit into a larger picture.

The SCORP document includes Thurston County in the state's Southwest region. Notably, the SCORP survey identifies the activity with the highest participation rate, both regionally and statewide, as "walking in a park or trail setting" (82% statewide, 86% southwest region)². This result holds true across all ages, genders,

ages, and incomes. Since the previous survey (2012), walking as a recreational activity has seen an increase in participation. Boating and swimming have also seen an increase in participation between 2012 and 2017; swimming is now a top 10 activity in the state's southwest region. Other top 10 recreation activities in the southwest region include nature activities (e.g., visiting rivers, streams, beaches; wildlife or nature viewing), attending an outdoor concert or event (e.g., farmer's markets, fairs, sporting events), and day hiking. Thurston County's outreach results related to walking/hiking opportunities and nature-based activities are consistent with those identified in state surveys.

Peer Community Comparisons

Comparing Thurston County to other communities in the region offers additional insights on the existing conditions and performance of the county's parks system. Comparison cities and counties were selected based on a range of characteristic similarities including population, density, land use allocations, topography, and regional proximity to Thurston County.

It should be noted that this data does not include other recreational resources such as schools or other non-county-owned land uses that may have factored into the calculations of comparison communities.

² Jostad, 2017

Mason County

Mason County is currently in the process of updating its Parks and Trails Comprehensive Plan. A 2019 draft plan was reviewed as part of this effort. Mason County took a multi-pronged approach to its analysis, with both proximity to park facilities and population allocations factoring into the county's evaluation. Mason County has established a Neighborhood Parks LOS of 0.33 acres per 1,000 residents, while LOS for Community Parks and Regional Parks come in at 3 and 3.5 acres per 1,000 residents, respectively. Neighborhood, Community, and Regional Parks were also identified as having 1-mile, 5-mile, and 15-mile service areas, respectively.

While Mason County offers extensive parkland opportunities for recreation, they also recognize that one of their primary goals is to offer recreational trails to the county's residents. A 15-mile service area radius was established for regional and multi-use trails, with a 5-mile radius established for local trails.

Pierce County

An update of Pierce County's Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan was recently completed, with adoption expected in early 2020. This plan analyzes a number of data points to help focus the needs of the park system and determine where best to add capacity as population grows. These data points include public input, recreation trends, demographics, facility distribution, peer community comparisons, and level of service targets. The county's LOS targets differ based on facility type as follows:

- Developed Park Acres: 6.7 acres / 1,000 people
- Open Space Acres: 7.5 acres / 1,000 people
- Trail/Walking Path Miles: 0.11 miles / 1,000 people
- Sport Courts and Fields: 0.2 facilities / 1,000 people
- Family Activities: 0.09 facilities / 1,000 people

Pierce County uses the information gathered across these data points to identify gaps in service, as well as opportunities for investment or expansion in parks facilities.

Kitsap County

Kitsap County's Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan was last updated in 2018. This plan does not implement any qualitative metrics; its goals and strategies are developed using community input to identify areas for improvement. The PROS Plan provides a six-year plan as well as a 20-year vision for Kitsap County's park system.

Whatcom County

Whatcom County's Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan was last updated in 2016. The county's LOS calculation combines athletic facilities, regional, community and neighborhood parks, developed water accesses, greenway/trail sites and preserves and open space that have parking, restrooms, trails and other developed amenities as representing developed parks. The LOS measurement is expressed in acres per capita.

- Developed Parks: 9.6 acres / 1,000 people
- Trails: 0.60 miles / 1,000 people
- Activity Center: 5 / 100,000 people

In addition to its LOS standards, Whatcom County also tracks park use at most major trailheads and park areas. This data contributes to Whatcom County's understanding of recreation demand and need, and further helps to inform planning decisions.

City of Olympia

The City of Olympia last updated its Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan in 2016. While the city uses a number of methods to determine demand and needs, LOS standards are used as the primary means of measuring progress toward meeting those needs. As the city acquires and develops parklands, LOS provides a measurable way to monitor progress toward meeting established goals. The city's established LOS targets are as follows:

- Neighborhood Parks: 1.09 acres / 1,000 people
- Community Parks: 3.00 acres / 1,000 people
- Open Space: 11.19 acres / 1,000 people

In addition to its LOS standards, Olympia also uses a range of performance measures to develop a data-based approach to parks planning. These performance measures include total trail mileage, total park acreage, and walking distance to a community park or open space facility; each metric is monitored and the results published annually in the city's Business Performance Report.

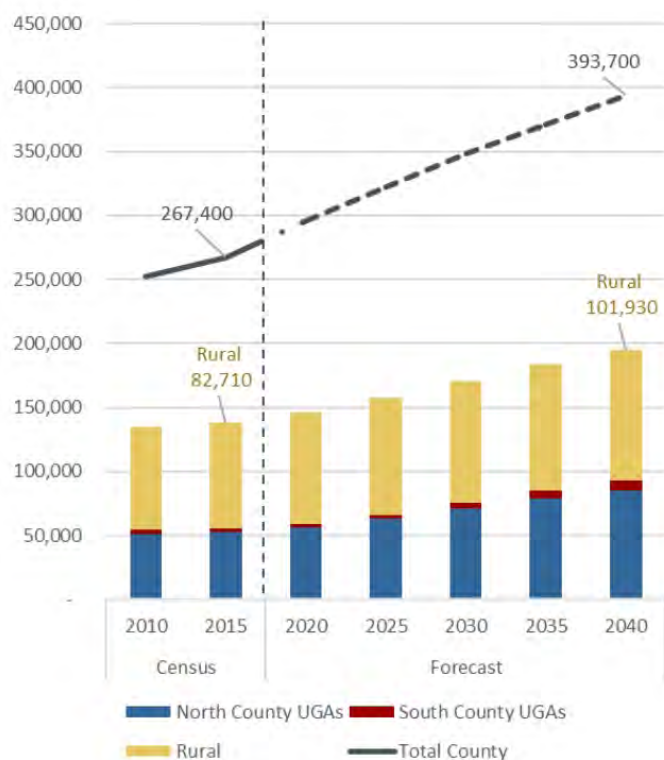
Demographic Trends

While outside metrics have informed this process, local plans, policies, and conditions have a direct relationship with these standards as they are both impacted by and have direct impacts on their likelihood of success. Specifically, current population trends, land availability and development patterns have direct connections to the county's ability to deliver on determined levels of service.

As identified within the 2019 Washington State Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's *Planning Policies and Guidelines Manual*, one of the most simplistic ways to estimate future need is to use population estimates from the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM). Using these estimates, it becomes possible to project future recreational needs and participation levels as they are directly tied to overall population growth.

The county's estimated 2017 population was 276,900, and considerable growth is expected over the 20-year planning period. OFM forecasts indicate an anticipated population of 393,700 by 2040 – an additional 116,800 county residents, or a 42% increase over the 2017 population (Figure 5-2).

While projected population growth is helpful in projecting future needs, it is also important to factor in the role of a community's population by age group, as the varying physical demands of different activities will encourage or discourage continued participation as populations age. Vigorous field sports such as soccer or rugby, for example, trend towards the domain of

Figure 5-2 Thurston County Projected Population Growth, 2010–2040

Source: Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC)
Population and Employment Forecast, 2017.

younger people, while activities like walking or bird watching are commonly favored by older generations who seek outdoor recreation in relevant comfort.

Thurston County has a slightly older population than Washington State overall; preparing for and responding to an aging population will be a major trend over the 20-year planning period. People aged

between 20 and 64 accounted for more than 60% of the growth between 1990 and 2015. The proportion of residents aged 65 or older is projected to increase to nearly a fifth of the population by 2040, while growth among age groups of prime working age is projected to slow.

Land availability and development patterns play another role as increased density tends to reduce the number of backyards and open lots within a neighborhood. Increased density will increase the importance of advanced planning as finding suitable sites for parkland becomes increasingly difficult, with many large lots being already developed, not topographically suitable, or simply not for sale or financially attainable.

Community Perspectives

As previously presented within the Public Involvement chapter of this plan, the outcomes of the county's outreach efforts played heavily into the formation and direction of the demands and needs analysis. Public input was used to identify community preferences and priorities regarding recreation needs, which complements the quantitative data to provide a more complete picture of the community's recreation needs.

The community survey identified paved walking and biking trails as respondents' most-used facilities for recreation, followed closely by unpaved nature trails. Open spaces and natural habitats were identified as the third choice, closely followed by access to beaches and shoreline areas. These responses are consistent

with statewide recreation trends as identified by the RCO.

In terms of the greatest need for the county's parks facilities, survey respondents identified non-motorized trails (84%), undeveloped natural areas and open spaces (84%), and shoreline access (83%) as the highest priorities. Support amenities for existing facilities, including restrooms, facility lighting, recycling and garbage containers, bike racks and drinking fountains (81%), were also identified as a priority for the county.

Survey respondents consistently identified protected non-motorized corridors to travel and commute between primary destinations, including schools, cities, commercial centers, and regional parks, as a high priority for future parkland development. Support for swimming opportunities within Thurston County was another common theme among survey responses, with interest expressed in both an aquatic and year-round covered/indoor recreational center as well as increased shoreline access.

Additionally, survey respondents indicated a lack of facilities in the southern and eastern portions of the county. Many of these respondents felt the county's facilities were too concentrated around the more populated areas in the northwestern portion of the county and would prefer facilities to be more evenly distributed throughout the county.

Future Opportunities

Based on the identified metrics and expressed needs of the community, it becomes possible to both establish a benchmark of where Thurston County stands today, and where the community can plan to be in the future.

Thurston County currently has a total of 2,578 acres of parkland, of which 972 acres are fully or partially developed. This means the county's current level of service is 3.51 developed acres per 1,000 population. Based on the projected 2040 population data, an additional 210 acres of developed parkland are needed by 2040 to attain the county's target LOS. When the proposed land acquisitions and park development in the county's Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) are taken into account, an adequate LOS is maintained to address the needs of an increasing population.

To ensure proper planning for specific needs through the planning period, the county will monitor the adequacy of park facilities annually and update this plan every five years. As part of this long-range planning process, Thurston County will explore acquisition of valuable active park, preserve or other properties that may become available on an "opportunity to acquire" basis. Based on public input, the county should address the development and acquisition of multiple use trails, water access sites, and natural resource preserves as its highest priorities. The county should also look to develop additional parklands that will serve populations in the southern and eastern portions of the county.

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Action Program **ACTION PROGRAM**

6

This chapter identifies the methodology and approach the county follows to prioritize parks projects while working toward the stated goals, objectives, and expressed needs of the community. In order to economically allocate limited county resources and funding toward this end, project evaluation criteria have been developed to assist in decision-making and project implementation.

Using the evaluation criteria, this chapter then outlines an action plan that includes prioritization of parks and open space projects.

Project Evaluation Criteria

These evaluation criteria reflect identified community recreational needs and desires, community approved goals and objectives, the costs and benefits of the proposed improvements, maintenance needs, project feasibility, funding opportunities, ease of implementation, land acquisition, and the potential for loss of desired sites to alternative uses.

Each of these six criteria is valuable and should play a role in the decision-making process of any project. The intent of this structure is to ensure a transparent and equitable allocation of limited county resources throughout the community.

Using these criteria, each potential project is scored and prioritized to create an action plan.

- **Potential Funding:** Will the proposed project qualify for one or more funding sources?
- **Usage:** Trails and parks have counters with existing data that identifies numbers of people using the parks and trails system.
- **Stakeholder Influence:** Interest expressed by elected officials, citizens at large, neighborhood groups, business interests and user groups.
- **Professional Judgment:** Feasibility, finance, safety, level of service.
- **Trail Connectivity and Park Plan Phasing:** Trail projects that connect parks, neighborhoods, other trails and necessary park facilities to address level of service.
- **Maintenance and Operations:** Capital projects that reduce maintenance and operations costs.

Priority Projects and Actions

As a wide range of opportunities and needs have been identified throughout this plan, the following action areas have been separated into sub-groups representing the types of associated needs and then ranked by the overall scale or needed effort to bring that project or opportunity to fruition.

Projects listed first will generally involve a combination of steps or hurdles including significant capital costs, organizational collaboration, land acquisitions, and/or advanced planning. Projects farther down the list are generally characterized by a set of similar needs yet are typically smaller in scale and can be accomplished in a shorter amount of time or allocation of limited resources. The last effort or project listed is typically the lowest in cost and primarily features support or accessory additions within existing parks and recreational facilities. It is important to note that numbering within these categories does not reflect a prioritization of projects.

While it is the expressed intent of the county to pursue each of these projects and their related actions, categorizing target areas in this way allows for greater flexibility in responding to new funding opportunities and resources, community sentiment, and integration with other ongoing and related developments.

Facility Maintenance

1. **Cleanliness and Safety:** Additional resource allocation towards the cleanliness and safety of existing park facilities, with specific attention given to those areas frequented by children and those areas known to have frequent occurrences of antisocial behavior.
2. **Frye Cove:** Settling of grassy areas has resulted in sinkholes and exposed rubble and concrete. Various locations will need to be excavated and regraded to improve existing safety concerns and facility aesthetics.

“

I so enjoy Frye Cove Park. The **closeness to the water**, spectacular view of Mt. Rainier, the trees, walking paths and openness to walk my dog are **incomparable** with any park I have experienced on the West Coast!

– public survey comment

”

3. **Chehalis Western Trail:** Inspect and replace existing culverts as needed along the Chehalis Western Trail to improve fish passage and maintain compliance with NPDES standards.
4. **Burfoot Park:** Re-grade and seed existing 3-acre lawn area within upper portions of site.
5. **Burfoot Park:** Repair and stabilize existing stairways and footbridges throughout site.

Amenity-Specific Renovation or Replacement

1. **Kenneydell Park:** Renovate existing lodge rental space and restrooms to better serve facility patrons, improve ADA access, reduce associated energy costs and existing maintenance demands. Site enhancements have the potential for future use as a primary trailhead along the planned Gate-Belmore Trail.
2. **Deschutes Falls Park:** Expand the currently undersized parking lot to better serve southeastern Thurston County and reduce spillover impacts on adjacent roadways.
3. **Burfoot Park:** Consistent with community preferences for improvements to existing facilities, replace existing restroom facilities with a higher capacity and energy efficient structure that works to reduce existing maintenance needs.

Planning and Development

1. **Gate-Belmore Trail:** Collaborate with adjacent property owners and neighborhood residents to formalize and fully develop the existing corridor into a paved multiuse recreation and transportation pathway with support amenities and strategically placed trailheads and access points.
2. **Black Lake to Percival Canyon Trail Collaboration:** In close partnership with Tacoma Rail (Tidelands Division), adjacent property owners, Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, Mottman Industrial Area, and the cities of Tumwater

and Olympia, seek opportunities to establish a link between the Gate-Belmore Trail and the existing urban trail networks stemming from Capitol Lake.

3. **Lawrence Lake Parcel Master Plan:** In partnership with community residents and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, develop a site masterplan for the 15-acre parcel that compliments existing amenities and existing natural habitats.
4. **School District Collaboration:** Work collaboratively with Thurston County school districts to develop and provide public access to sites similar to the Rochester Independence Community Park that offer recreational opportunities to underserved communities and boost existing county levels of service.
5. **Inter-Regional Trail Connectivity:** Actively identify and pursue partnership opportunities with neighboring counties and their communities, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Nisqually Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, land trusts, timber companies, rail corridors and other stakeholders to identify opportunities and solutions to connect the Thurston Regional Trail Network with other regional trail systems where appropriate.

Trails and Corridors

Paved:

1. **Yelm-Tenino Trail (Deschutes River Trestle):** Continuing efforts started in 2018, replace support pilings of the existing 270-foot trestle that spans the Deschutes River as part of the 14-mile Yelm-Tenino trail.
2. **Yelm-Tenino Trailhead (Rainier):** Consistent with community preferences for amenity enhancements at existing sites, construct a restroom facility with trail-oriented amenities to support existing and projected use levels and human powered transportation needs.
3. **Chehalis Western Trailhead (41st Ave NE):** Consistent with community preferences for amenity enhancements at existing sites, construct an off-street parking area with trail-oriented signage to support existing and projected use levels and human powered transportation needs.

“ There are many amenities in Thurston County, but it is difficult to get between them safely without driving a car. A **more interconnected** set of safe (fully separated trails or protected bike lanes) cycling routes would personally **make the whole network of parks much richer.** ”

– public survey comment

Two significant non-motorized gaps remain at the western terminus of the Yelm-Tenino Trail that are not served by trails, but may benefit from on-street enhancements like wider shoulders and signs: a connection to the Town of Bucoda along State Route 507, and a connection to Grand Mound along Old Highway 99.

– 2007 Thurston County Trails Plan

Bikeways:

1. **South County Bike Corridors (Tenino, Grand Mound, Rochester, Gate):** Consistent with the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan, collaboration with Puget Sound and Pacific Railroad (PSAP), Thurston Regional Planning Council, Washington State Department of Transportation, and other regional stakeholders, work to formalize a bicycle corridor within existing rights-of-way to connect the southwestern terminus of the Yelm-Tenino Trail with the southern terminus of the Gate-Belmore Trail.
2. **Transportation Projects:** Work closely with the Thurston County Public Works Transportation Division to incorporate additional bicycle corridors and non-motorized improvements within the planning process and development plans of future road construction and maintenance efforts.

Natural:

1. **Deschutes Falls Park:** Consistent with expressed community needs and level of service goals for southeast Thurston County, work to improve and

“ Coordinate with Lewis County to develop a **unified trail plan** that hooks up to the Willapa trail system and goes all the way to the Pacific Ocean!
– public survey comment ”

expand upon existing trail systems and viewpoint/ overlook opportunities within the park.

2. **Guerin Park:** Consistent with community goals for expanded water access and natural trails, work to formalize existing soft surface nature trails complete with interpretive signage and water access.

Water:

1. **Cascadia Marine Trail:** Work with the Washington Water Trails Association to extend the National Recreation Trail to incorporate Cascadia Marine Trail sites at Frye Cove and Burfoot Park.

Enhancement and Support Facilities

1. **Site Enhancements:** Consistent with an expressed community preference for existing site enhancement over greater expansion, actively seek partners to improve existing recreational facilities through the additions of amenity-oriented safety lighting, drinking fountains, bike racks, pedestal barbeques, signage and recycling bins.
2. **Awareness Campaign:** Through outreach efforts within this plan, it became clear that many county residents were not fully aware or familiar with existing recreational opportunities within the county. Building off existing regional efforts, including the county website, Thurston Thrives, Thurston Bountiful Byways, land conservation groups and other regional opportunities, work to showcase the diversity of recreational amenities and existing parklands throughout Thurston County with consistent branding, wayfinding, and opportunities for engagement.

“ To **reserve through the park system** is complicated. Finding the right website for who owns the park is a hardship.
– public survey comment ”

Thanks for opening the Deschutes Falls Park!
It's a beautiful place. I think **many folks don't know about** Thurston County's beautiful parks.
– public survey comment ”

POTENTIAL FUNDING AND ACQUISITION METHODS

7

Over the years, Thurston County has used a number of different funding and acquisition strategies to complete capital park and recreational facility projects.

A variety of funding sources are available for park construction and operation, maintenance, and programming in Washington. The funding options discussed in this chapter present potential resources for acquiring, planning, and developing parks, natural open space, trails, and other recreational areas. In limited cases, the funding sources may also be used for maintenance, operations, and programming.

Likewise, a variety of methods for land acquisition exist in Washington. These are presented in this chapter with no reference to the feasibility or recommendation of implementing each technique. Rather, they should be thought of as a toolbox of methods for acquisition when the need arises in the future.

Potential Funding Sources

Funding for park and trail development, recreation facilities, and acquisition projects comes from a variety of revenue sources described in this section, including local taxes, impact fees, bonds, and grants.

General Fund

This category includes general funds allocated to the Thurston County Parks and Trails Program for annual expenditures and capital development. Revenue is generated largely through sales and property tax.

Real Estate Excise Tax

Washington law authorizes the governing bodies of counties and cities to impose excise taxes on the sale of real property within limits set by the statute. This authority may be divided into three parts relevant to park systems.

- **Real Estate Excise Tax 1 (REET 1):** A county may impose a real estate excise tax (REET 1) on the sale of all real property in the unincorporated parts of the county, at a rate not to exceed 0.25% of the selling price, to fund “local capital improvements,” including parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, water systems, bridges, and sewers. REET 1 funds must be used “primarily for financing capital projects specified in a capital facilities plan element of a comprehensive plan” (RCW 82.46.010).

- **Real Estate Excise Tax (REET 2):** A REET 2 may only be levied by cities and counties planning under the Growth Management Act. REET 2 revenues must be used “solely for financing capital projects specified in a capital facilities plan element of a comprehensive plan” (RCW 82.46.035). Cities and counties can use REET 2 revenues for operations and maintenance (O&M) of existing capital projects. The maximum amount of REET 2 that may be spent on O&M is the greater of \$100,000 or 35% of the available funds, not to exceed \$1 million. Counties may only use REET 2 revenues to pay existing debt service on capital projects listed in RCW 82.46.010(6) – the kinds of capital projects that may be done with REET 1 revenues. Acquisition of land for parks is not a permitted use of REET 2 receipts.
- **Real Estate Excise Tax – Local Conservation Areas:** Boards of County Commissioners may impose, with majority voter approval, an excise tax on each sale of real property in the county at rate not to exceed 1% of the selling price for the purpose of acquiring and maintaining conservation areas. These areas include “open spaces, wetlands, marshes, aquifer recharge areas, shoreline areas, natural areas, and other lands and waters that are important to preserve flora and fauna.” Thurston County does not currently assess a Conservation REET.

Property Tax Levies

- **Excess Levy:** Washington law allows cities and counties, along with other specified junior taxing districts, to levy property taxes in excess of

limitations imposed by statute when authorized by the voters. Levy approval requires 60% majority vote at a general or special election.

- **Regular Property Tax – Lid Lift:** Counties are authorized to impose ad valorem taxes upon real and personal property. A county's maximum levy rate for general purposes is \$2.475 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Limitations on annual increases in tax collections, coupled with changes in property value, causes levy rates to rise or fall; however, in no case may they rise above statutory limits. Once the rate is established each year, it may not be raised without the approval of a majority of the voters. Receiving voter approval is known as a lid lift. A lid lift may be permanent or may be for a specific purpose and time period.

Impact Fees

Impact fees are a type of one-time charge developers pay to help finance their proportionate share of the cost of the roads, parks, schools, and other facilities necessary to serve their new developments. The Thurston County Board of County Commissioners implemented Development Impact Fees in 2011.

Impact fee revenue can't be used for operation, maintenance, repair, alteration, or replacement of existing capital facilities and can't be added to general revenue. Public parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities can receive funds generated by impact fees, which can be spent on system improvements. Funds

received must be spent on approved capital projects within 10 years of collection.

Metropolitan Park District

Metropolitan Park Districts (MPDs) are an additional potential source of funding for Thurston County Parks and Trails. An MPD is a junior taxing district established by a vote of the people. State legislation adopted in 2002 (Chapter 35.61 RCW) made establishing an MPD a reasonably straightforward process. The advantages of an MPD include:

- Flexible structure; may include both city and county jurisdictions.
- Formed by a simple majority vote of the electorate.
- A property tax levy of up to \$0.075 per \$1,000 in home value can be assessed.
- Creates a reliable revenue source for parks and open space.

Funds generated by this taxing source could be used for land acquisition, development, and maintenance, as well as for general operations of parks and recreation programs. As a general rule, parks and recreation agency staffing levels, along with programming levels, increase in MPD areas. The Board of County Commissioners and county staff are aware of the requirements for establishing an MPD and the potential impact a dedicated funding source could have on the Thurston County Parks and Trails system; internal analysis and dialogue with other jurisdictions regarding potential MPD partnerships is ongoing.

Bonds

For the purposes of funding capital projects, such as land acquisitions or facility construction, cities and counties have the authority to borrow money by selling bonds. Bonds provide the borrower with external funds to finance long-term investments or, in the case of government bonds, to finance expenditures.

- **General Obligation Bonds:** Voter-approved general obligation bonds may be sold only after receiving a 60% majority vote at a general or special election. If approved, an excess property tax is levied each year for the life of the bond to pay both principal and interest. The state constitution (Article VIII, Section 6) limits total debt to 5% of the total assessed value of property in the jurisdiction.
- **Limited Tax General Obligation (LTGO) Bonds:** LTGO bonds may be issued by the legislative body (i.e., the Board of County Commissioners) without voter approval for any facility development purpose. The bonds, both principal and interest, are retired with payments from existing city revenue or new general tax revenue, such as additional sales tax or real estate excise tax. The state constitution has set a maximum debt limit for LTGO bonds of 1.5% of the value of taxable property in the county.

Conservation Futures

Pursuant to RCW 84.34.210 and 84.32.220, Conservation Futures is a land preservation program that protects, preserves, maintains, improves, restores, and limits the future use of threatened areas of open

space, timberlands, wetlands, habitat areas, culturally significant sites, and agricultural farmlands within Thurston County. These funds, acquired through a property tax levy, are used to purchase land or the rights to future development of land.

Grants

Most grant programs require a portion of the project cost to be provided by a local partner as match funding. Grants from State and Federal Agencies are generally available for the acquisition, construction, or development of parks and other recreation facilities.

State Grant Programs

The State of Washington Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) is responsible for administering a wide variety of public funds for development of parks, open space, and trail facilities. The RCO has been a major source of funding for improvements to county facilities; other grant sources will continue to be pursued.

- **Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA):** In 1984, the Washington State Legislature created this grant program, managed through the RCO, to ensure that money generated from aquatic lands was used to protect and enhance those lands. Grants may be used for the acquisition, improvement, or protection of aquatic lands for public purposes. They also may be used to provide or improve public access to the waterfront. ALEA funds are derived from the leasing of state-owned aquatic lands and

from the sale of harvest rights for shellfish and other aquatic resources.

- **Boating Facilities Program (BFP):** This program was created in 1965 by a voter-approved initiative. The program provides grants to acquire, develop, and renovate boating facilities, including launching ramps, guest moorage, and support facilities on both freshwater and saltwater. Local and tribal government grant recipients must provide at least 25% matching funds in either cash or in-kind contributions. The program is funded from a portion of the motor vehicle gasoline tax paid by boaters and not refunded as allowed by law and is only applicable toward trailerable boating.
- **Boating Infrastructure Grant:** The Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) Program funds guest boating facilities for recreational boats 26 feet and larger. Grant recipients must provide at least 25% matching funds in either cash or in-kind contributions. This program is funded from a portion of the federal Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, and is administered locally by the RCO.
- **Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program (ESRP):** This program provides grants and technical assistance for projects that restore and conserve near-shore areas in Puget Sound. The goal is to ensure Washington's estuaries, bays, and shorelines are intact, functioning, and resilient to climate change. This grant program is managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife with RCO administering the grants.
- **Heritage Capital Projects Fund (HCPF):** This competitive grant program was authorized in 1995 (RCW 27.34.330). Administered by the Washington State Historical Society, the purpose of HCPF is to interpret and preserve Washington's history and heritage. To meet the legislative intent of the HCPF, applicants for HCPF grants must be eligible entities with eligible projects. Heritage Capital Projects (HCP) grants can cover up to 1/3 of the cost of eligible capital projects that preserve and interpret Washington's history and heritage. Local agencies must match 50%.
- **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):** The LWCF provides grants to buy land and develop outdoor facilities, including parks, trails, and wildlife lands, for the public. Grant recipients must provide at least 50% matching funds in either cash or in-kind contributions. Grant program revenue is from a portion of Federal revenue derived from sale or lease of off-shore oil and gas resources. All property acquired or developed with these grants must be kept forever exclusively for public outdoor recreation use.
- **Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program:** The NOVA program provides funding to develop and manage recreation opportunities for such activities as cross-country skiing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, hunting, fishing, sightseeing, motorcycling, and riding all-terrain and four-wheel drive vehicles. A portion of the funding also is available for education and enforcement programs that encourage environmentally responsible use of the outdoors.

Except for off-road vehicle facilities, activities supported by this program must be accessed via a non-highway road, which is a public road that was not built or maintained with gasoline tax funding. Funding is awarded every other year and comes from a portion of the state gasoline tax and off-road vehicle use permits.

- **Recreational Trails Program (RTP):** RTP provides funds to maintain trails and facilities that provide a backcountry experience for a range of activities including hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, motorcycling, and snowmobiling. Eligible projects include the maintenance and rerouting of recreational trails, development of trail-side and trail-head facilities, and operation of environmental education and trail safety programs. A local match of 20% is required. This program is funded through Federal gasoline taxes attributed to recreational non-highway uses. RTP is an assistance program of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and grants are administered locally by the RCO.
- **Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP):** Managed by the RCO, the WWRP is divided into Habitat Conservation and Outdoor Recreation accounts; these are further divided into several project categories. Cities, counties, and other local sponsors may apply for funding in urban wildlife habitat, local parks, trails, and water access categories. Funds for local agencies are awarded on a matching basis. Grant applications are evaluated

once each year. The State Legislature must authorize funding for the WWRP project lists.

- **Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF) Program:** The YAF Program provides grants to develop, equip, maintain, and improve youth and community athletic facilities. Cities, counties, and qualified nonprofit organizations may apply for funding, and grant recipients must provide at least 50% matching funds in either cash or in-kind contributions.

Federal Grant Programs

In addition to the numerous state-administered grant programs, there are also a number of federal agencies that provide funding for parks, recreation and open space.

- **Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Program:** BUILD Grants are administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Eligible projects for BUILD Grants are capital projects that include trail and active transportation projects, as well as multimodal projects with trail and active transportation elements.
- **Wetland Reserve Program (WRP):** This program provides landowners the opportunity to preserve, enhance, and restore wetlands and associated uplands. The program is voluntary and provides three enrollment options: permanent easements, 30-year easements, and 10-year restoration cost-share agreements. In all cases, landowners retain the underlying ownership in the property and

management responsibility. Land uses may be allowed that are compatible with the program goal of protecting and restoring the wetlands and associated uplands. The National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) manages the program and may provide technical assistance.

- **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG):** These funds, administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), are intended to develop viable urban communities by providing a suitable living environment and expanding economic opportunities, principally for low and moderate income persons. CDBG Public Facilities and Improvements funds may be used for the acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of public facilities, including parks, playgrounds, aesthetic amenities, and parking lots.
- **Environmental Education Grants:** In past years, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has sought grant proposals from eligible applicants to support environmental education projects that promote environmental awareness and stewardship and help provide people with the skills to take responsible actions to protect the environment. Although currently not appropriated, this program may become available in future years.

Land Acquisition Tools and Methods

Like funding sources, a variety of tools and methods exist for acquiring land for future parks facilities.

Direct Purchase Methods

- **Market Value Purchase:** Through a written purchase and sale agreement, the county purchases land at the present market value based on an independent appraisal. Timing, payment of real estate taxes and other contingencies are negotiable.
- **Partial Value Purchase (Bargain Sale):** In a bargain sale, the landowner agrees to sell for less than the property's fair market value. A landowner's decision to proceed with a bargain sale is unique and personal; landowners with a strong sense of civic pride, long community history or concerns about capital gains are possible candidates for this approach. In addition to cash proceeds upon closing, the landowner may be entitled to a charitable income tax deduction based on the difference between the land's fair market value and its sale price.
- **Life Estates and Bequests:** In the event a landowner wishes to remain on the property for a long period of time or until death, several variations on a sale agreement exist. In a life estate agreement, the landowner may continue to live on the land by donating a remainder interest and retaining a "reserved life estate." Specifically, the landowner donates or sells the property to the county, but

reserves the right to continue to live on and use the property. At the time of the landowner's death, full title and control over the property is transferred to the county. In a bequest, the landowner designates in a will or trust document that the property is to be transferred to the county upon death. While a life estate offers the county some degree of title control during the life of the landowner, a bequest does not. Unless the intent to bequest is disclosed to and known by the county in advance, no guarantees exist with regard to the condition of the property upon transfer or to any liabilities that may exist.

- **Gift Deed:** When a landowner wishes to bequeath their property to a public or private entity upon their death, they can record a gift deed with the county assessor's office to insure their stated desire to transfer their property to the targeted beneficiary as part of their estate. The recording of the gift deed usually involves the tacit agreement of the receiving party.
- **Option to Purchase Agreement:** This is a binding contract between a landowner and the county that would only apply according to the conditions of the option and limits the seller's power to revoke an offer. Once in place and signed, the Option Agreement may be triggered at a future, specified date or upon the completion of designated conditions. Option Agreements can be made for any time duration and can include all of the language pertinent to closing a property sale.

- **Right of First Refusal:** In this agreement, the landowner grants the county the first chance to purchase the property once the landowner wishes to sell. The agreement does not establish the sale price for the property, and the landowner is free to refuse to sell it for the price offered by the county. This is the weakest form of agreement between an owner and a prospective buyer.

Landowner Incentive Measures

- **Density Bonuses:** Density bonuses are a planning tool used to encourage a variety of public land use objectives, usually in urban areas. They offer the incentive of being able to develop at densities beyond current regulations in one area, in return for concessions in another. Density bonuses are applied to a single parcel or development. An example is allowing developers of multi-family units to build at higher densities if they provide a certain number of low-income units or public open space. For density bonuses to work, market forces must support densities at a higher level than current regulations.
- **Transfer of Development Rights:** The transfer of development rights (TDR) is an incentive-based planning tool that allows landowners to trade the right to develop property to its fullest extent in one area for the right to develop beyond existing regulations in another area. Local governments (e.g., Thurston County) may establish the specific areas in which development may be limited or restricted and the areas in which development beyond regulation may be allowed. Usually, but not

always, the “sending” and “receiving” property are under common ownership. Some programs allow for different ownership which, in effect, establishes a market for development rights to be bought and sold.

- **IRC 1031 Exchange:** If the landowner owns business or investment property, an IRC Section 1031 Exchange can facilitate the exchange of like-kind property solely for business or investment purposes. No capital gain or loss is recognized under Internal Revenue Code Section 1031. This option may be a useful tool in negotiations with an owner of investment property, especially if the tax savings offset to the owner can translate to a sale price discount for the county.
- **Current (Open Space) Use Taxation Programs:** Property owners whose current lands are in open space, agricultural, and/or timber uses may have that land valued at their current use rather than their “highest and best” use assessment. This differential assessed value, allowed under the Washington Open Space Taxation Act (Chapter 84.34 RCW) helps to preserve private properties as open space, farm or timber lands. If land is converted to other non-open space uses, the land owner is required to pay the difference between the current use annual taxes and highest/best taxes for the previous seven years. When properties are sold to a local government or conservation organization for land conservation/preservation purposes, the required payment of seven years’ worth of differential tax rates is waived. The amount of this tax liability can be part of the

negotiated land acquisition from private to public or quasi-public conservation purposes.

Easements and Dedication

- **Conservation and/or Access Easements:** Through a conservation easement, a landowner voluntarily agrees to sell or donate certain rights associated with their property (often the right to subdivide or develop), and a private organization or public agency agrees to hold the right to enforce the landowner’s promise not to exercise those rights. This is a legal agreement between the landowner and the county that permanently limits uses of the land in order to conserve a portion of the property for public use or protection; the landowner still owns the property, but the use of the land is restricted. Conservation easements may result in an income tax deduction and reduced property taxes and estate taxes. Typically, this approach is used to provide trail corridors where only a small portion of the land is needed or for the strategic protection of natural resources and habitat.
- **Park or Open Space Dedication Requirements:** Local governments have the option to require developers to dedicate land for parks under the State Subdivision Law (Chapter 58.17 RCW) and the State Environmental Policy Act (Chapter 43.21C RCW). Under the subdivision law, developers can be required to provide the parks/recreation improvements or pay a fee in lieu of the dedicated land and its improvements. Under the SEPA

requirements, land dedication may occur as part of mitigation for a proposed development's impact.

Other Land Protection Options

- **Land Trusts and Conservancies:** Land trusts are private non-profit organizations that acquire and protect special open spaces and are traditionally not associated with any government agency. Capitol Land Trust is a local organization accredited by the Land Trust Alliance working to conserve natural areas and working lands in southwest Washington. Other national organizations with local representation include the Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land and the Wetlands Conservancy.
- **Regulatory Measures:** A variety of regulatory measures for land protection are available to local agencies and jurisdictions. Available programs and regulations include Thurston County's Critical Areas Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program; the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA); and the State Hydraulic Code.
- **Public/Private Utility Corridors:** Utility corridors can be managed to maximize protection or enhancement of open space lands. Utilities maintain corridors for provision of services such as electricity, gas, oil, and rail travel. Some utility companies have cooperated with local governments for development of public programs such as parks and trails within utility corridors.

Funding Strategy **FUNDING STRATEGY**

8

Parks and Trails Structure and Governance

Until March of 2009, Thurston County Parks and Recreation was a stand-alone county department with a director, support staff, and an independent budget. Departmental decisions were informed by a citizen Parks and Recreation Advisory Board governed by a set of bylaws adopted in 1989.

In 2009, the county reorganized and streamlined its departmental structure, going from 16 departments to nine. In this restructuring, management and maintenance of the physical assets, including parks (developed and undeveloped), trails, and historical preserves was transferred to the Public Works Department. Responsibility for managing and delivering the county's recreational offerings was transferred to the Community Services Division of the Department of Health; these programs are no longer part of the county's Parks and Trails Program.

Operations and Maintenance

Thurston County Parks and Trails' operating budget pays for everyday operations and programs. Thurston County Public Works administers funding to meet administrative, staffing, operations and maintenance, contract service, and capital expenses.

Capital Expenditures

The capital budget for Thurston County Parks and Trails funds acquisition and development of Thurston County's parks, open spaces, trails, and associated facilities. The 2020–2025 Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) proposes an investment of \$2.9 million in 18 projects, dependent on adequate funding. The chart on the next page illustrates expenditures by project. The entire CFP, including additional details on proposed yearly project expenditures, can be found in the Appendix.

Table 8-1 Parks, Open Space and Trails Capital Projects – 2020 to 2025

Project Name	Funding Source	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	6-Yr. Total
Burfoot Park – Level and Grade Lawn Area	REET*	0	\$100,000	0	0	0	0	\$100,000
Burfoot Park – Restroom Replacement	REET/I**	\$200,000	0	0	0	0	0	\$200,000
Burfoot Park – Trail System Footbridge/Stairway	REET	\$1,000	0	0	0	0	0	\$1,000
Chehalis Western Trail – 41st Ave Trailhead	REET/I	0	\$50,000	\$150,000	0	0	0	\$200,000
Chehalis Western Trail – Culvert Replacement	REET	\$50,000	\$150,000	0	0	0	0	\$200,000
Chehalis Western Trail – BNSF Bridge Talcott Ridge Dr Crossing	REET/I	0	\$100,000	\$400,000	0	0	0	\$500,000
Deschutes Falls Park – Parking Expansion	REET/I	0	0	0	\$25,000	\$100,000	0	\$125,000
Deschutes Falls Park – Walkway & View Point Improvements	REET/I	\$100,000	0	0	0	0	0	\$100,000
Frye Cove Park – Lawn Renovation	REET	0	\$25,000	\$50,000	0	0	0	\$75,000
Kenneydell Park – Lodge Renovation	REET/I	\$50,000	0	0	0	0	0	\$50,000
Kenneydell Park – Restroom Replacement	REET/I	0	\$50,000	\$200,000	0	0	0	\$250,000
Parks and Trails – Asset Management Implementation	REET	\$50,000	0	0	0	0	0	\$50,000
Parks Improvements and Development – 2019-2020 Program	REET/I	\$25,000	0	0	0	0		\$25,000
Parks Improvements and Development – 2021-2025 Program	REET/I	0	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$100,000	\$175,000	\$175,000	\$500,000
Parks, Trails and Open Space Acquisition – 2021-2025 Program	REET/I	0	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$125,000
Parks, Trails and Open Space Acquisition – 2019-2020 Program	REET/I	\$25,000	0	0	0	0	0	\$25,000
Yelm-Tenino Trail – Deschutes River Trestle Repair	REET	\$200,000	0	0	0	0	0	\$200,000
Yelm-Tenino Trail – Rainier Restroom	REET/I	0	\$50,000	\$150,000	0	0	0	\$200,000
PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS – TOTAL		\$701,000	\$575,000	\$1,000,000	\$150,000	\$300,000	\$200,000	\$2,926,000

*REET = Real Estate Excise Tax **I = Impact Fees

