



Snohomish County

Conservation and Natural Resources

Parks and Recreation

6705 Puget Park Dr
Snohomish, WA 98296
(425) 388-6600
www.snoco.org

Dave Somers
County Executive

MEMORANDUM

TO: Snohomish County Planning Commission

FROM: Carol Ohlfs, Principal Park Planner

SUBJECT: Park and Recreation Element, Comprehensive Plan Update 2024

DATE: May 8, 2023

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this staff report is to outline and provide information on staff recommended amendments to Snohomish County's GMA Comprehensive Plan Park and Recreation Element. A briefing on the recommended amendments will occur at the May 23, 2023, Planning Commission meeting.

BACKGROUND

The Park and Recreation Element (PRE/Park Element) is a component of Snohomish County's Growth Management Act (GMA) Comprehensive Plan and is prepared in accordance with requirements specified in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70A.070. Snohomish County's Comprehensive Plan is comprised of 12 elements that work together to guide county actions. This Park Element is one of the elements and works together with the Capital Facilities and Utilities Element to guide long term provision of facilities managed by the Snohomish County Division of Parks and Recreation (Parks). This Park Element provides the basis for the creation of the annual six-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and is influenced by the Snohomish County Park and Recreation Visioning Plan (PRVP) which identifies public priorities for the county's provision of parks, open space, and trails.

Parks' planning is centered on public engagement and input. In capital improvements, acquisitions, and ongoing maintenance, Parks anticipates and responds to public needs. Public input is integrated into ongoing park planning and satisfies guidance in the Washington State Administrative Code (WAC) which recommends that the Park Element process be started with a visioning exercise to "...engage the public in the process of identifying needs, evaluating their satisfaction with existing recreational opportunities, and developing goals to guide the development of the parks and recreation element." (WAC 365-196-440). The results of the Parks visioning process are contained within the PRVP and help guide creation of this comprehensive plan and the level of service (LOS) standards.

PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS

Key Changes in the PRE

1. Reformatting and Reorganization

Since the 2015 update, the Park Element has reorganized the goals and integrated new policies and objectives. The structure of the document uses the goals to lead the explanatory narrative through contextual subjects. Readers can focus on the topic they are most interested in researching and find all the relevant information about that topic in its section.

The discussion starts with a large picture of what the park system includes, **'Who are we?'** with a description of what is critically important to the foundation of the county's parks and recreation system. The focus then narrows down to a discussion of **'What do we do?'** by describing the existing conditions, demand and need, and actions for each of the key focus areas of the parks and recreation system. The foundational topics include parks, regional trails, open space and natural areas, recreation programs, and cultural and historic resources.

The narrative and goals then move on to describe the implementation strategies, or **'How can we meet growing demand?'** Including an examination of the level of service methodology, acquisition priorities, and sustainable operations initiatives. Lastly, the element concludes with a look to the future, **'Where do we go from here?'** With an implementation matrix that includes a list of projects and programs that will form the basis of CIP and budgetary decisions in future planning years.

2. Level of Service Methodology Updates

The primary changes to the LOS methodology proposed in this Element include:

- Removing 'waterfront miles' from the LOS metrics
- Adding 'urban open space/preserve acres' as a new LOS metric
- Allowing all park properties, including special use and open space/preserve properties to qualify as 'necessary to support development,' and therefore allow any type of park classification to feature the facilities that are required to meet demand and LOS minimum standards

3. Funding Strategies

Parks plans to continue to seek innovative funding approaches to fund the parks and recreation system outlined in this Element. Some examples of funding strategies that will likely be pursued include programs that are voter-supported such as bond or levy. The county also plans to update the current donation program to potentially provide options to partner with endowment funds or a community foundation model used in other agencies, such as a Snohomish County Parks Foundation. The division may also explore opportunities to implement a park district for the urban core subarea and investigate feasibility of updating the park impact fee collection codes so that the mitigation fees apply to commercial development as well as residential development or utilize transportation impact fees to fund regional trail development.

4. Strategic Park Planning Priorities

Parks' strategic planning priorities are integrated throughout this Element and focus on equity, regional trails, climate change adaptation and resiliency, and providing the passive and active recreation facilities that are in highest demand by the community.

This Park and Recreation Element update retains the same core emphasis on providing regional

park facilities within the context of a healthy environment and supporting growth within the urban growth areas. The document:

- Includes an updated vision statement for providing parks and recreation services reflecting the current factors that influence how Snohomish County provides parks and recreation service
- Addresses equitable public access in policies and actions
- Supports implementation of both countywide and multicounty planning policies, as well as regional plans and initiatives such as the Regional Open Space Conservation Plan

5. Guiding Principles

This update also coincides with Parks' recent public outreach process which led to five thematic focus areas that were refined into guiding principles. These guiding principles form the foundation of Parks' work during this planning period and include:

- Providing more equitable service and access to parks, trails, and open space
- Framing parks and natural open space assets in the larger context of the county's environmental and conservation priorities
- Incorporating climate change resilience and adaptability into the park system while improving existing parks and meeting identified needs
- Connecting county communities and recreation amenities with a regional trails network
- Streamlining the park system and creating efficiencies in managing county properties that provide important community benefits

ANALYSIS

The following analysis provides a summary of the proposed amendments compliance with state law, regional, countywide planning policies.

Compliance with State Law

GMA requirements specific to development of Park and Recreation Elements are provided in RCW 36.70A.070(8). These requirements are included in the PRE narrative content and/or satisfied through referenced documents in the PRE.

When the GMA was enacted by the Washington State Legislature in 1990, it was in response to rapid state-wide growth and uncoordinated and unplanned development, which led to concerns about impacts to the environment, quality of life and other related issues. The overarching goal of GMA is to coordinate planning efforts and establish Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) in which to focus population expansion. The GMA is codified in RCW 36.70A and addresses 12 major goals to "guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations..." (RCW 36.70A.020). Of these goals, the following are most closely related to the development of this Park Element:

1. **Urban growth.** Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.
3. **Transportation.** Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based

- on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.
5. **Economic development.** Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses, recognize regional differences impacting economic development opportunities, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.
 9. **Open space and recreation.** Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.
 10. **Environment.** Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.
 11. **Citizen participation and coordination.** Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.
 12. **Public facilities and services.** Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.
 13. **Historic preservation.** Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures, that have historical or archaeological significance.

The GMA requires that jurisdictions planning under the act consider projected demand and need for at least a ten-year period and identify funding to meet that need. The identification of need is to be based upon an evaluation of current inventory, projected demand, opportunities for intergovernmental coordination and evaluation of facilities required to meet that need. Recommendations for implementation of this process are contained within the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) for Park and Recreation ([365-196-440](#)) and Capital Facilities Elements ([365-196-415](#)).

Compliance with the Multi-County Planning Policies (MPPs)

The policy table includes references to MPPs that prompted policy amendments in this PRE update. Examples include:

- **MPP-En-4:** Ensure that all residents of the region, regardless of race, social, or economic status, have clean air, clean water, and other elements of a healthy environment.
- **MPP-En-11:** Designate, protect, and enhance significant open spaces, natural resources, and critical areas.
- **MPP-En-12:** Identify, preserve, and enhance significant regional open space networks and linkages across jurisdictional boundaries through implementation and update of the Regional Open Space Conservation Plan.
- **MPP-En-15:** Provide parks, trails, and open space within walking distance of urban residents. Prioritize historically underserved communities for open space improvements and investments

Compliance with the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs)

The policy table includes references to CPPs that prompted policy amendments in this PRE update. Examples include:

Natural Environment

- **CPP-Env-2:** The County and cities should work collaboratively to identify, designate, and protect regional open space networks and wildlife corridors both inside and outside the Urban Growth Area and across the jurisdictional boundaries.
- **CPP-Env-3:** The County and cities shall work collaboratively to create goals and policies intended to implement and address the needs identified in the Regional Open Space Conservation Plan.
- **CPP-Env-5:** The County and cities should work with neighboring jurisdictions and tribes to identify and protect significant open space areas, natural resources, and critical areas through appropriate local policies, regulations, or other mechanisms such as public acquisition, easements, voluntary agreements, supporting the efforts of conservation organizations, and other best practices.

Climate Change

- CPP-CC-4: The County and cities should use natural systems to reduce carbon in the atmosphere by establishing programs and policies that maintain and increase natural resources that sequester and store carbon, such as forests, vegetative cover, wetlands, farmland, and estuaries.”
- CPP-CC-5: The County and cities should plan for climate adaptation and resilience by establishing a planning framework in local plans and coordinating regionally to identify, anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to likely impacts of climate change on natural systems, infrastructure, public health, and the economy. These efforts should identify measures to mitigate climate impacts and include a focus on minimizing these impacts upon highly impacted and vulnerable populations.
- CPP-CC-7: Jurisdictions should consider rising sea level by planning for the siting of new and relocation of existing essential public facilities and hazardous industries to areas that are outside the 500-year floodplain.

General Public Services

- CPP-PS-18: The County and cities should work collaboratively at a local and countywide level to promote equitable access of public services and facilities for all residents, especially those that are historically underserved.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Overview of the Public Comment Opportunities:

The GMA requires early and continuous public participation (GOAL 11) and for the Park Element this included:

- Providing an opportunity through SEPA Scoping which began in November 2021 and ended in February 2022
- Making draft policies available for a 30-day early public comment period which began on February 1, 2023, and ended on March 3, 2023
- Continuously open for review through the 2024 Update project website.
- Presented to Park Advisory Board in April 2023

- Park and Recreation Visioning Plan (PRVP) public outreach surveys, community input groups, interviews with partner organizations and staff

Park and Recreation Visioning Plan (PRVP) Public Comment Themes

Parks’ planning is centered on public engagement and input. In capital improvements, acquisitions, and ongoing maintenance, we are anticipating and responding to public needs. Public participation is also a key tenant of the Growth Management Act (GMA) and the county’s comprehensive plan. Public input is integrated into ongoing park planning and satisfies guidance in the Washington State Administrative Code (WAC) which suggests that development of the GMA-based planning and level-of-service (LOS) standards start with a public visioning process.

The public outreach during the PRVP visioning process led to five thematic focus areas that were refined into guiding principles. These guiding principles form the foundation of our work for the next six years.

- Create an equitable and inclusive park system
- Preserve natural areas & open space
- Focus on improving existing parks and meeting identified needs with the current park inventory
- Connect a regional trail network
- Continuously improve on the services we provide

PRE SEPA/Policy Public Comment Themes:

During the SEPA scoping and public policy comment periods, the country received 61 comment letters that addressed the Park Element or included input on parks in their general comments on other chapters of the comprehensive plan. Including 21 park-specific comment letters that came in during the PRE’s 30-day comment period. The public comment themes are listed below, and a discussion of how public comments influenced the Park Element is also provided. All public comments can be found in the index of record.

- Support for
 - Equity, climate change, and regional trail policies
 - Hiking trails and design based on site-specific and appropriate park features
 - Equestrian amenities and trail safety measures
 - Protecting wildlife areas and incorporating habitat areas into all parks
- Requests for
 - Additional recreation-vehicle (RV) camping opportunities
 - Trails/sidewalk access to parks
 - Playgrounds, parks, walking trails, and outdoor community gathering spaces
 - Implementation measures that align with new policies and make them more enforceable
 - More open space land and shoreline for public access
 - Reduced costs to enter regional waterfront parks
 - Greater emphasis on park safety and cleanliness
 - Specific park improvements, acquisition, or enhancement at McCollum Park, and Doc Hageman proposed park development
 - Improvements to Parks’ level of service reporting and monitoring

- Consulting with tribes on park development, integrate cultural information appropriately into interpretive signage, increase park stewardship education, develop recreation amenities in clusters to minimize impact to wildlife and cultural resources, use native plants and protect mature trees

Narrative and policies were edited and refined to include many of the suggestions included in the public comment letters when feasible and appropriate. Often the balance for providing parks and recreation facilities must meet the needs of the community while also staying with in the capital improvement budget allocated to the Parks Division each year. The narrative explains the priorities for this balancing act and incorporates specific park accessibility and development projects into the 20-year project improvement list and implementation tactics.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The County issued a Determination of Significance (DS) for the 2024 Update to the Plan on November 1, 2021. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will likely be issued in September 2023, satisfying State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review.

NOTIFICATION OF STATE AGENCIES

Pursuant to RCW 36.70A.106, a notice of intent to adopt the proposed regulations and standards will be transmitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce for the entirety of the 2024 Update to the Plan in September 2023.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the proposed comprehensive plan amendments and findings contained in this staff report.

ACTION REQUESTED

The Planning Commission is requested to hold a public hearing, consider the proposed comprehensive plan amendments, and provide a recommendation to the County Council. The Planning Commission can recommend approval of the amendments with supporting findings of fact as proposed or modified, deny the proposal with findings, or amend the proposal with appropriate findings.

cc: Lacey Harper, Executive Director
Tom Teigen, DCNR Director
Sharon Swan, Parks & Recreation Director
Rich Patton, Parks Planning Division Manager
Mike McCrary, PDS Director
David Killingstad, PDS Long Range Planning Manager
Ryan Countryman, Legislative Analyst

Attachments

- **Attachment A—PRE Policy Summary Table**
- **Attachment B—Draft Park & Recreation Element**