

PARKS AND RECREATION

Element overview

The City of Tacoma and Metro Parks Tacoma together manage more than 3,000 acres of developed parks and natural areas, as well as local and regional trails, the urban tree canopy, and community gardens. Programs are offered for all ages at community centers, swimming pools, and other recreational facilities. Parks and natural areas give life and beauty to the city and are essential assets that connect people to place, self and others. The goals and policies of this chapter are intended to ensure this legacy is preserved for all Tacomans and future generations and that the City and Metro Parks will rise to meet the challenges posed by growth and change within the City and region.

The goals and policies in this chapter convey the City’s intent to:

- Set clear standards for service delivery and expansion of parks and recreation facilities and services.
- Achieve interagency and intergovernmental coordination in the provision of park and recreation facilities.
- Provide more equitable service delivery in areas that are currently deficient in services or are anticipated to be deficient in services based on anticipated growth and development.
- Promote park and recreation facility design that reflects the City’s unique cultural communities and ecological settings.

Why does this matter?

Good parks and recreation services provide green infrastructure and help manage climate change. Socially, they revitalize communities, create safer neighborhoods, help children learn and grow, improve public and environmental health, and support smart growth. Culturally, open space and program services can nurture a sense of place in the community and provide opportunities to engage the public of diverse backgrounds. Economically, they support adjacent commercial centers and promote tourism.

Exhibit 1: 2015 Planned Park and Recreation System



Exhibit 2: 2015 Comprehensive Plan Park and Recreation Service Gaps

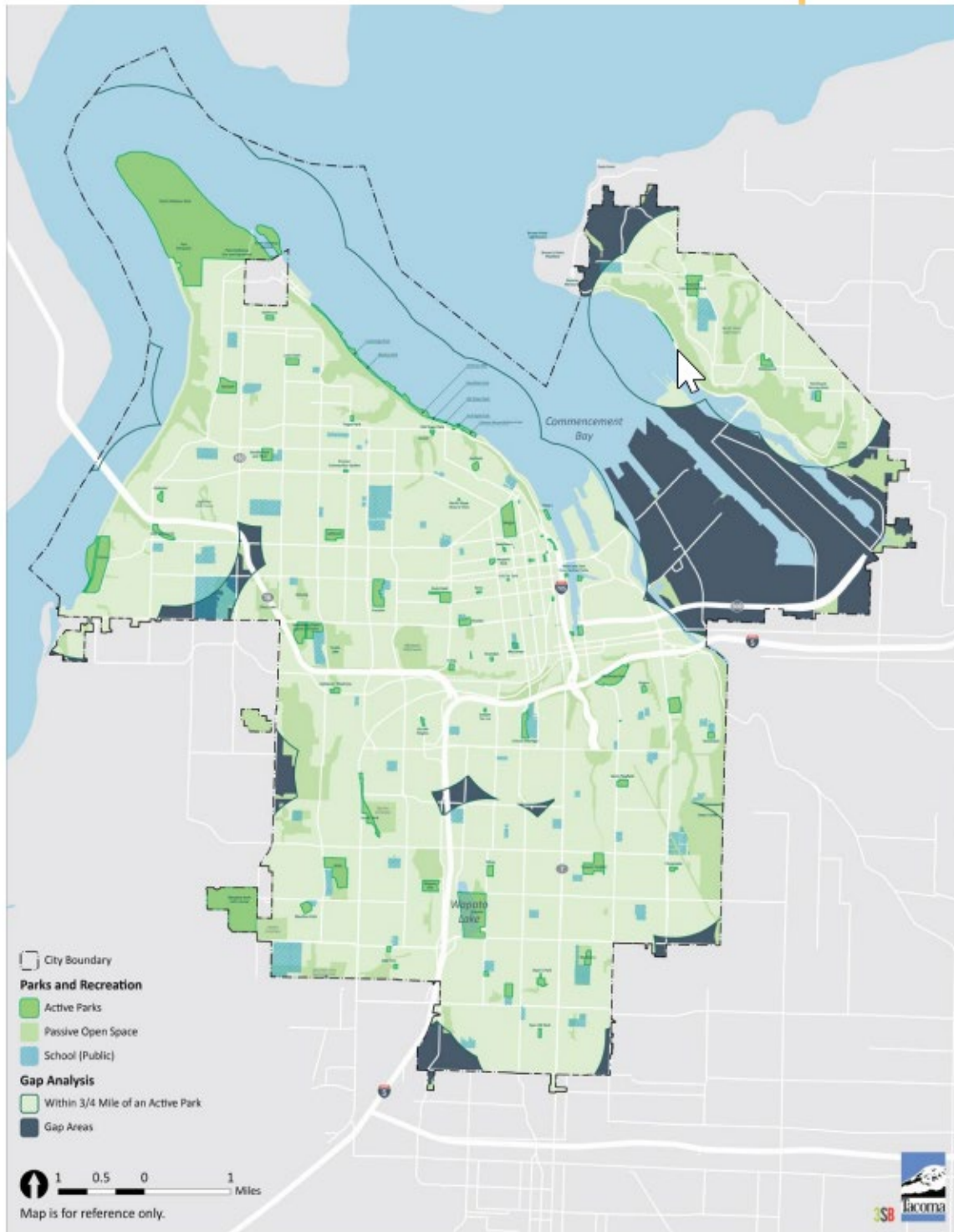


FIGURE 40. Park + Recreation Service Area Gaps

Proposed Amendments

Structure

- Alignment with and clear connections to the recent update of Metro Parks' Strategic Plan, including an increased focus on youth and programming.
- Address priority outcomes like the connections between parks and recreation and neighborhood quality, walkability, heat island effects and cultural access to programs and experiences
- Incorporate results of equity assessment
 - **Urban Heat Index.** Urban heat island effect was found to be highest in the Eastside, Central, and South End neighborhoods.
 - **Walkability.** Walkability scores include access to public facilities such as parks. Neighborhoods with the overall lowest walkability scores compared to city averages were North East, West End, and South Tacoma.
 - **Satisfaction with Cultural Access.** Parks facilities and programs contribute to the network of cultural opportunities in Tacoma. Geographically, there were not statistically significant differences in reported satisfaction across studied areas. Disaggregated by race, Black residents felt least satisfied with access to arts, culture, science, and/or heritage programs or experiences.
- Create stronger ties to the Public Health Focus Area
- Connect to community engagement. Community members support the 15-minute neighborhood concept. Community members want to be able to easily access schools; grocery stores; restaurants (not just fast-food); essential services like childcare, medical services and mental health support; small businesses and retail; movie theaters and other entertainment; pharmacies; libraries; gathering places; outdoor recreation; and safe places for children. This theme overlaps with the desire for more green open space with small parks and community gardens and increasing overall tree canopy across neighborhoods.
- Clarify policies that refer to resources (fee-in-lieu) and how funds are collected, distributed, used (and by whom)
- Consider re-organization to integrate level-of-service standards, gap analysis, and project lists into the Park + Recreation Chapter, rather than Public Facilities and Services Chapter (similar to the Transportation Master Plan)

Language

- Use more people-centered language that focuses on the experience that the City aims to create rather than the characteristics of the physical environment.
- Use more active language where possible. For example, use the core action rather than “strive to” or “consider.”
- Identify accountable parties where possible.
- Use consistent terms.

- Be more specific or at least provide a range related to terms like “regularly.”

GMA Consistency

- Integrate a Level of Service Standard (LOS). Align inventory and LOS metrics with the Metro Parks’ Strategic Plan but update to reflect distinctions for City of Tacoma and considerations of school relationships, city-owned parks, and similar differences in the inventory used for analysis, if needed.
- Update Inventory and better differentiate between existing inventory of park and recreation facilities and the planned system.
- Incorporate findings from Metro Parks Tacoma and City-led community process supporting the forecast of future need.
- Incorporate tree canopy coverage.
- Improve coordination with Metro Parks Tacoma

Policy Framework

State and regional policies

Growth Management Act Goals and Policies (RCW

36.70A

The GMA establishes 15 planning goals to guide planning and policy development efforts. Two of these 15 speak specifically to parks and recreation:

(9) Open space and recreation. Retain open space and green space, enhance recreational opportunities, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.

(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.

Further, the expectations for a Parks Element are detailed in RCW 36.70A.070(8).

(8) A park and recreation element that implements, and is consistent with, the capital facilities plan element as it relates to park and recreation facilities. The element shall include: (a) Estimates of park and recreation demand for at least a ten-year period; (b) an evaluation of facilities and service needs; (c) an evaluation of tree canopy coverage within the urban growth

area; and (d) an evaluation of intergovernmental coordination opportunities to provide regional approaches for meeting park and recreational demand.

As referenced in this description, the parks element will need to be consistent with relevant information shared in the Public Facilities and Services element. We will establish a current level of service and evaluate future demand based on growth targets. We will show the UGA's tree coverage and evaluate opportunities for intergovernmental coordination in meeting parks demand.

VISION 2050

PSRC's VISION 2050 sets a four-county regional plan for growth. One of its nine identified goal areas is to "protect a network of open space". The multicounty planning policies (MPPs) developed as part of this effort provide a framework and reference guide for comprehensive plan updates. Relevant MPPs from VISION 2050 include:

- ***New policy* MPP-RC-3:** Make reduction of health disparities and improvement of health outcomes across the region a priority when developing and carrying out regional, countywide, and local plans.
- ***New policy* MPP-En-9:** Enhance urban tree canopy to support community resilience, mitigate urban heat, manage stormwater, conserve energy, improve mental and physical health, and strengthen economic prosperity.
- **MPP-En-12:** Identify, preserve, and enhance significant regional open space networks and linkages across jurisdictional boundaries through ***added segment*** implementation and update of the Regional Open Space Conservation Plan.
- ***New policy, most direct guidance* 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.
- **MPP-DP-3:** Enhance existing neighborhoods to provide a high degree of connectivity in the street network to accommodate walking, bicycling, and transit use, and sufficient public spaces.
- **MPP-DP-11:** Identify and create opportunities to develop parks, civic places (including schools) and public spaces, especially in or adjacent to centers. ***addition of schools reference is new***
- **MPP-DP-16:** Address and integrate health and well-being into appropriate regional, countywide, and local planning practices and decision-making processes.
- **MPP-PS-2:** Promote affordability and equitable access of public services to all communities, especially the historically underserved. Prioritize investments to address disparities.
- ***New policy* MPP-PS-26:** Work cooperatively with school districts to plan for school facilities to meet the existing and future community needs consistent with adopted

comprehensive plans and growth forecasts, including siting and designing schools to support safe, walkable access and best serve their communities.

New and revised policies in VISION 2050 elevate issues of health, access, and walkability for park and recreation amenities. There is also an added focus on school partnerships for an enhanced network and the role of urban tree canopy in promoting community resilience.

Addressing Priority Outcomes

In the first phase of the comprehensive planning process, the project team identified key outcomes that assess a baseline of wellbeing across a community. The 19 selected outcomes reflect the key themes for this plan update: equity, public health, sustainability, opportunity, and safety. Outcomes were evaluated geographically, comparing results across eight Tacoma neighborhoods. The parks element addresses three of these outcomes directly and many more indirectly.

1. **Urban Heat Index.** Urban heat island effect was found to be highest in the Eastside, Central, and South End neighborhoods.
2. **Walkability.** Walkability scores include access to public facilities such as parks. Neighborhoods with the overall lowest walkability scores compared to city averages were North East, West End, and South Tacoma.
3. **Satisfaction with Cultural Access.** Parks facilities and programs contribute to the network of cultural opportunities in Tacoma. Geographically, there were not statistically significant differences in reported satisfaction across studied areas. Disaggregated by race, Black residents felt least satisfied with access to arts, culture, science, and/or heritage programs or experiences.

Policy Audit

The below principles for plan development will be used when drafting language for this element update.

Structure and Content

- Strengthen the connection between goals and policies in all chapters.
- If needed, aim for more goals and fewer policies per goal to maintain clear connections. (some goals and policies currently read like a laundry list)
- Remove redundant language.
- Connect everything to the Vision Statement and Focus Areas and reinforce the overall growth strategy.
- Policy Chapters should be better connected to community engagement. Key opportunities for community engagement should be explicit.

Language

- Use more people-centered language that focuses on the experience that the City aims to create rather than the characteristics of the physical environment.
- Use more active language where possible. For example, use the core action rather than “strive to” or “consider.”
- Identify accountable parties and parties where possible.
- Use consistent terms:
 - Define and use a consistent set of terms for geographies – centers, outside centers, residential pattern areas, neighborhood council districts, council districts, basins/watersheds.
 - Use a consistent term or terms for those we intend to serve with the plan. There were several uses of the word “citizen.”
 - Recommend using *community member* as the most inclusive term (of visitors and workers) and *resident* when specifically referring to those who live in Tacoma.
 - Finalize the vision statement and use the language consistently.
 - Be more specific about equity terms, existing disparities (reference baseline conditions), and priority groups.

Community Input

The Project Team compiled qualitative data from eight community visioning workshops and categorized it into overarching themes representing community priorities for Tacoma’s growth over the next 25 years. One key theme in the comments was a show of support for the 15-minute neighborhood concept. Community members want to be able to easily access schools; grocery stores; restaurants (not just fast-food); essential services like childcare, medical services and mental health support; small businesses and retail; movie theaters and other entertainment; pharmacies; libraries; gathering places; outdoor recreation; and safe places for children. **This theme overlaps with the desire for more green open space with small parks and community gardens and increasing overall tree canopy across neighborhoods.**

Certain themes emerged specific to the different neighborhoods of Tacoma. In relation to Parks and Recreation:

- Northeast residents would like to see more parks, in addition to services and shops.
- South Tacoma would like to see more places that contribute to the local history and sense of place including parks, and places for kids to play with outdoor recreation like soccer fields, swimming pools, and community centers.
- South End residents expressed the desire for improved cycling safety by creating greenways that connect as bike corridors and wayfinding to green parks.

Another form of engagement during the project’s visioning phase was conducted via the virtual “Ideas Wall”. This page allows visitors to start conversation threads and contribute to dialogue on topics of interest, organized by topic area. Reviewing these conversation threads, “Green/open space” was the 6th most popular topic area with 10 different threads about adding bigger parks as well as microparks, turning parking lots into green spaces, and increasing tree canopy.

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Parks + Recreation

PARKS + RECREATION GOALS

- **GOAL P-1** All Tacomans have safe, convenient, and equitable access to high-quality parks, natural areas, trails, and recreational opportunities within a 10-minute walk.
- **GOAL P-2** The physical, mental, emotional, and social health of Tacomans of all ages and abilities is supported through spending time outdoors and in public spaces. In particular, youth experience socio-emotional development and a stronger sense of belonging through recreational programming.
- **GOAL P-3** Public and private partnerships expand the variety of community services and programs, provide open space, and enhance quality of life.
- **GOAL P-4** Long-term planning efforts maintain and expand Tacoma's parklands and facilities to ensure quality service for current and future populations.
- **GOAL P-5** The development and operation of park and recreational facilities responds to the needs of the site and of the community.
- **GOAL P-6** Tacomans can connect with nature in well-managed natural areas. Urban forests and natural areas protect the unique habitat and biodiversity of Tacoma.
- **GOAL P-7** Neighborhood and community parks serve the diverse needs of the Tacoma community within a safe, 10-minute walk. Areas identified as underserved are prioritized for future investments in new and improved parks and trails.
- **GOAL P-8** Urban parks serve the diverse needs of the Downtown and Regional Growth Center communities.
- **GOAL P-9** Regional parks serve the region's diverse needs and attract visitors from across the Puget Sound.
- **GOAL P-10** Community gardens serve the diverse needs of residents and play a role in addressing food insecurity.
- **GOAL P-11** A connected and well-maintained network of trails offers safe and beautiful corridors for walking, biking, and rolling across Tacoma.
- **GOAL P-12** The public shoreline and waterfront system is well maintained, balancing needs for environmental sustainability and public access and fostering a sense of connection between the community and the water.
- **GOAL P-13** Opportunities for education and continuous learning about Tacoma's environment assets and geographic setting are widely available.
- **GOAL P-14** Site-specific plans and subarea plans guide the unique needs of certain facilities and sites.

Parks + Recreation

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8.1 Introductory Context

What is this chapter about?

The goals and policies in this chapter convey the City's intent to:

- ▶ Set clear standards for service delivery and improvements to parks and recreation facilities and services.
- ▶ Provide more equitable service delivery in areas that are currently deficient in services or are anticipated to be deficient in services based on anticipated growth and development.
- ▶ Promote park and recreation facility designs that reflects the City's unique cultural communities and ecological settings.
- ▶ Achieve interagency and intergovernmental coordination in the provision of park and recreation facilities.

Why is this important?

Parks and natural areas give life and beauty to the city and are essential assets that connect people to place, self, and others. Parks promote health and wellness, encourage early childhood development, build community connections, and contribute to resilience and ecological health. The City of Tacoma and Parks Tacoma together manage almost 3,000 acres of developed parks and natural areas, as well as local and regional trails, the urban tree canopy, and community gardens. Their goal is to manage all park properties, regardless of ownership, as a cohesive park system. This approach enhances the framework and direction of parks and open space management in Tacoma, guided by the policies outlined in this chapter, as well as the Parks Tacoma System and Strategic Plan. Programs are offered for all ages at community centers, swimming pools, and other recreational facilities.

The following policies ensure this legacy is preserved for all Tacomans and future generations and that the City and Parks Tacoma will rise to meet the challenges posed by growth and change within the City and region.

Book I: Core Policy Elements

- 1 Introduction + Vision
- 2 Growth Strategy
- 3 Complete Neighborhoods
- 4 Environment + Watershed Health
- 5 Housing
- 6 Transportation
- 7 Economic Development
- 8 Parks + Recreation**
- 9 Public Facilities + Services
- 10 Historic Preservation
- 11 Engagement + Administration

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- 8.2 Goals + Policies
- 8.3 Priority Actions

What we heard

Community members across Tacoma support the vision of 15-minute neighborhoods and want access to parks they can easily walk, bike, roll, or bus to. Community outreach findings for One Tacoma emphasize that residents wish to have access to diverse green spaces like small neighborhood parks, community gardens, trails, and large parks where children can safely play. This project’s online discussion board featured many different comment threads with topics related to parks and open space, such as adding bigger parks and micro parks, turning parking lots into green spaces, and increasing tree canopy.

Certain themes emerged specific to the different neighborhoods of Tacoma. The residents of Northeast want more parks, along with additional services and shops nearby. South Tacoma would like to see more places that contribute to a sense of place, including parks, places for kids to play, and outdoor recreation like soccer fields, swimming pools, and community centers. The residents of South End want to enhance bicycling safety by establishing greenways that link as bike corridors and providing wayfinding to green parks.

According to the past engagement conducted by Parks Tacoma, pedestrian access to park spaces is a high priority, even though the parks that households use the most are not always located within a 10-minute walk. In some cases, the amenities and facilities offered at a site outweigh the location convenience, which speaks to the importance of taking a holistic approach when reviewing the provision of facilities and amenities across the system. Additionally, community members rated clean park spaces and amenities, trash disposal, shade trees, and public/inclusive restrooms as some of the most valuable park items.

Collectively, this information provides guidance for the goals and policies outlined in the Parks and Recreation Element, focusing on ensuring equitable access to park



“ We need to prioritize green space when increasing housing to ensure there are parks within each 15-minute walk as well.”

-IDEAS WALL COMMENT

PARKS TACOMA

Parks Tacoma is an independent government agency, created in 1907, providing park and recreation services to Tacoma and adjacent areas. The City and Parks Tacoma work very closely together in planning for park services. Concurrent with this Comprehensive Plan update, Parks Tacoma developed a new system and strategic plan, “City in a Park.” These two plans are highly aligned with focus on increasing equitable access to parks. The 10-minute walk level of service is a core access metric driving strategic decisions. The Parks Tacoma strategic plan aims to address access gaps by focusing on areas with high environmental health impacts and limited access.



and recreational facilities that enhance the health and well-being of all Tacomans. It emphasizes promoting partnerships to expand and improve programs, protecting natural areas to give all community members a chance to connect with nature, and establishing and maintaining a comprehensive parks and recreation system to serve diverse needs.

How does this chapter address key themes?

Quality accessible parks, open and natural spaces, and recreation services impact the experience of living in a city in a multitude of ways. They are an essential part of complete neighborhoods, providing engaging opportunities for play and recreation, safe places to gather and socialize, exercise opportunities, and the calming effects of greenspace to residents of all ages. Equity in the geographic distribution of parks and ensuring accessibility is so important precisely because they are so desirable and contribute so much to a healthy lifestyle. **(Equity and Opportunity)**

The availability of and access to parks and green spaces contribute to human health on many levels. At the most basic level, they act as venues for contact with nature, which has been shown to combat anxiety and depression and even to promote better health outcomes. Urban parks and green spaces, in particular, are essential because they can deliver contact with nature to people who would not otherwise have the time, income, or transportation resources to travel to outlying natural areas. Parks also invite active use and recreation through trail networks and facilities such as playgrounds, gyms, and sports fields, contributing to better physical and mental health among users. These positive effects are again compounded when these recreational activities are done with friends, neighbors, and community members. As gathering spaces, parks are an antidote to feelings of social isolation that escalated over the last decade and spiked with the COVID-19 pandemic (Foreraro + Klein, 2023). **(Public Health and Equity)**

Parks and open spaces provide green infrastructure and help manage the impacts of climate change in many ways. As highlighted in Tacoma’s Climate Adaptation Strategy and the Climate Action Plan, parks provide permeable surfaces. They are part of a multi-faceted plan to combat the ill effects of phenomena like heat waves and air pollution, which are unfortunately becoming more frequent in recent years. They manage stormwater, provide habitat for birds and animals, filter air, light, and noise, and mitigate urban heat island effects, among many other ecological services. Parks are also affected by climate change. Long-term effects and sustainability are because of a more prominent consideration in Parks Capital Planning. **(Public Health and Sustainability)**

According to the 2024 Community Survey, only 10.4% of Tacomans ranked “Access to parks and recreational activities” among their four priority neighborhood issues. Meanwhile, “Community safety” was one of the most common priorities, with 50.5% putting it in the top 4. However, these are not competing priorities. How parks and natural spaces are designed and managed matters a great deal for the experience of community safety in a neighborhood. The most active parks are the safest parks in terms of perception and reality. Attracting users throughout the day means offering diverse programming and facilities that are responsive to local community desires, good sightlines and lighting, and investing in beautification, maintenance, and groundskeeping. Well-done parks can anchor the identity of a neighborhood and an overall feeling of safety and belonging. **(Community Safety)**



EQUITY



OPPORTUNITY



PUBLIC HEALTH



SUSTAINABILITY



SAFETY



“We must continue to prioritize increasing our urban forest and protect our existing mature trees in Tacoma! We know of the countless benefits from increased safety, to natural privacy, decreased erosion and flooding, protecting salmon habitats by increasing biodiversity in general, the list goes on and on! Projects must be funded in areas with low tree density particularly South Tacoma.”

- IDEAS WALL COMMENT

What are some baseline conditions and opportunities?

INVENTORY

Tacoma's parks system includes 97 properties, including highlights such as Point Defiance Park, which includes an accredited zoo and aquarium, a marina, an old-growth forest and Fort Nisqually Living History Museum; Meadow Park Golf Course; W. W. Seymour Botanical Conservatory inside an arboretum; Tacoma Nature Center; sports complexes; and five swimming pools.¹ The system's full range of parks is distributed across the city. In addition to official park space, school grounds provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. These areas have more limited hours for public access but represent an important partnership opportunity for enhancing public access to park space, facilities, and amenities. The map in Exhibit 63 is a vision map that includes all current and some potential future open spaces in the city.



Image source: <https://wildliferecreation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Metro-Parks-Tacoma-sprayparks.jpg>

¹ <https://www.metroparkstacoma.org/about/agency-plans-partnerships/strategic-plan/>

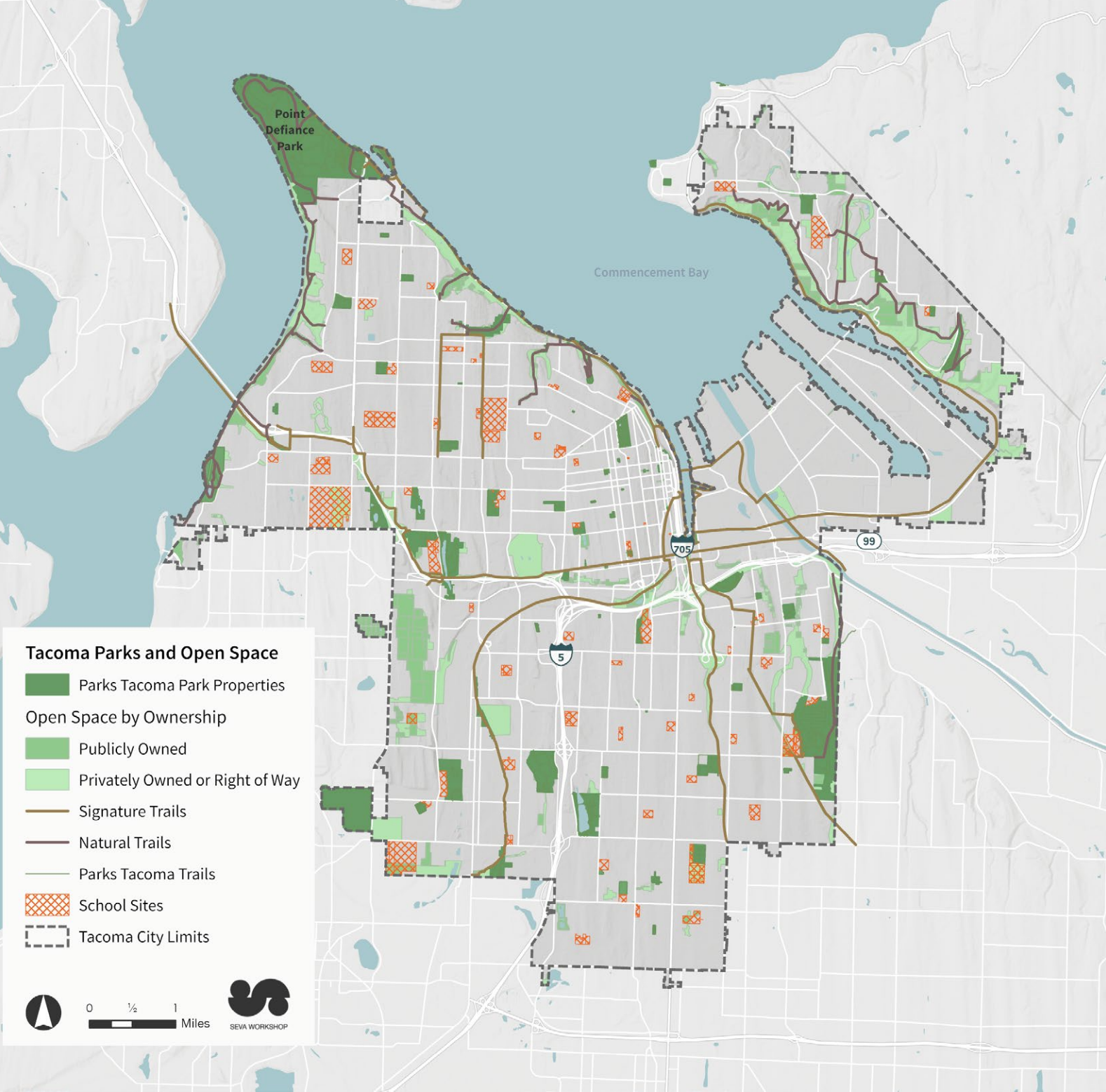


Exhibit 63. Tacoma Parks and Open Space Vision Map

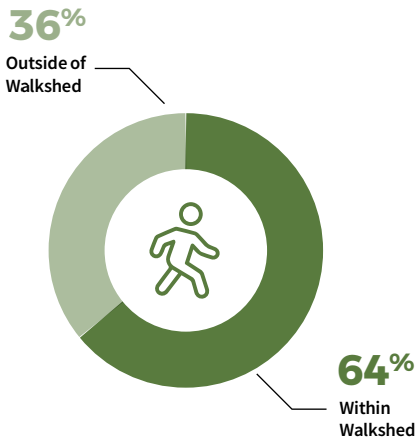
Note: The signature trail routes shown on this map are in the process of updates, to reflect the City's full inventory of separate and shared use active transportation routes.

Sources: Parks Tacoma; City of Tacoma; Seva Workshop, 2024.

LEVEL OF SERVICE

One key change with this comprehensive plan update is alignment around the goal that all Tacomans live within a 10-minute walk of a park. The map in Exhibit 65 captures the existing walkshed coverage of the park system. Areas in gray are current “gap areas.” Purple sites are publicly owned parcels and schools (orange hatched) that have the potential to contribute to publicly accessible open space. Partnerships with the sites and schools in current walkshed gap areas should be prioritized to improve the citywide coverage rate, which is currently measured at 64% when removing industrial areas such as the Tideflats.

Exhibit 63. 10 Minute Walkshed Coverage, 2024



10-MINUTE WALKSHED COVERAGE

A focus for expanding park access in Tacoma is improving the 10-minute walkshed coverage across the city. This metric is roughly equivalent to an able-bodied person walking half a mile. Improvements can be made by acquiring properties that serve areas currently outside of the walkshed boundary and by partnerships with institutions such as K-12 schools and private property owners to improve public access to existing green spaces in these underserved areas.

Sources: Seva Workshop, 2024.

In the baseline conditions report for this plan, the gap areas are overlaid with population density mapping². This analysis, in combination with the equity priority communities identified based on the Community Profile, identifies the following priority neighborhoods for access improvement:

- ▶ Focus areas for addressing walkshed gaps are the southern and northwestern gap areas in South End, the southern portion of Eastside, and the western areas of South Tacoma.
- ▶ Second-tier priority gaps are in the southern and central portions of West End, the central area of North End, and the eastern edge of North East.

² Page 23

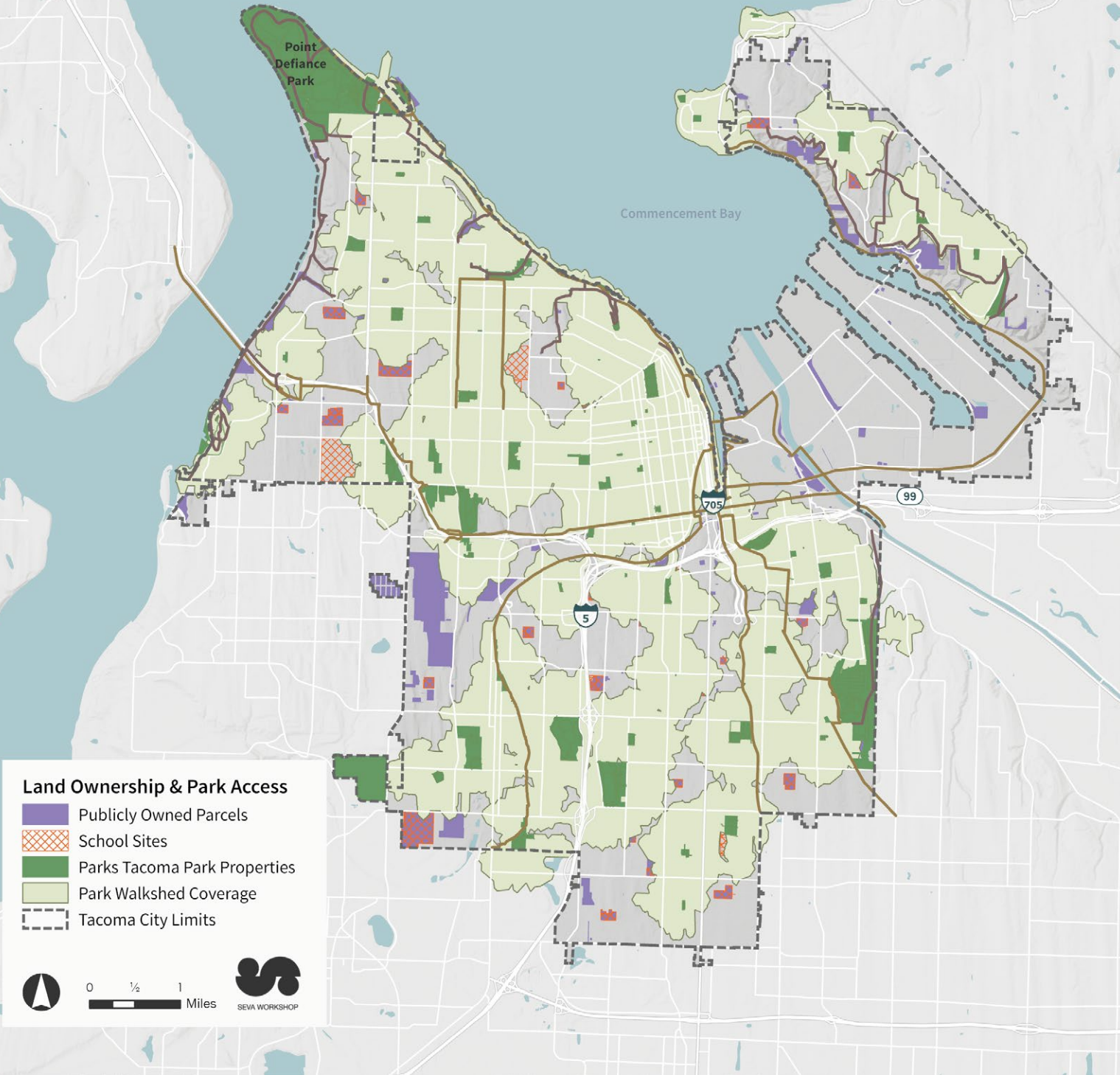


Exhibit 64. Tacoma Parks and Walksheds Map

Notes: This walkshed analysis includes all properties from Parks Tacoma inventory, as well as City owned parks in Downtown. The 10-minute calculation begins with the analysis conducted by Trust for Public Land but then further refines by considering accessible entry points for the park as well as pedestrian barriers, such as I-5. The industrial M1 zoning is excluded from the analysis.

Sources: Parks Tacoma, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

FUTURE DEMANDS AND SYSTEM NEEDS

As Tacoma's population grows and changes, the demands and system needs for its park network evolve as well. Looking to the future, considerations for the size, accessibility, quality, and variety of offerings in Tacoma's park system are all considered to promote health and well-being across the city.

Today's population is served by 12.6 acres of park space and 0.72 miles of trail per 1,000 population.

- ▶ If no expansions to the park system are made, Tacoma's 2050 population will have a Level of Service (LOS) of 8.0 acres and 0.46 miles of trails per 1,000 population.
- ▶ While regional parks may not scale with population growth, the acreage of community and neighborhood parks can be tracked so that park space adequately serves new development.
- ▶ Metrics that track other elements of parks and recreation quality such as walkable access, program offerings, and the quality and variety of facilities available are also valuable considerations for envisioning the future of Tacoma's park system.

The strategy outlined in this Parks and Recreation element, consistent with Parks Tacoma, focuses on acquiring additional spaces that address existing gaps in the 10-minute walkshed access map and maximizing the use of other existing public areas, including public school grounds, utility sites, and rights-of-way, which cover over a quarter of the city's surface area. By integrating these elements with the total size of the park system, the City can improve equitable access and enhance the quality of life for future generations of Tacomans. . In addition to addressing walkshed access gaps, Parks Tacoma also identifies programming as an important focus, aiming to maintain at least 40% of its classes at 75% registration capacity or higher.

8.2 Goals + Policies

GOAL P-1: All Tacomans have safe, convenient, and equitable access to high-quality parks, natural areas, trails, and recreational opportunities within a 10-minute walk.

Policy P-1.1: Provide and maintain a variety of parkland and recreational facilities to serve the city's current and future population based on identified level-of-service standards and community needs.

Policy P-1.2: Prioritize investment in the acquisition and development of parks and recreation facilities in areas where need is greatest, including:

- a. Where availability and access to facilities is lowest;
- b. Where the greatest population growth is occurring or forecasted, such as the mixed-use centers;
- c. Where high environmental health impacts to the local population have been identified;
- d. Where access to public transit is limited.

Policy P-1.3: Foster social equity by providing a wide range of accessible, inclusive, affordable, convenient, and safe opportunities to meet the diverse recreation needs of the changing community.

Policy P-1.4: Establish and manage **special recreational facilities** within the park system to respond to identified public needs and take advantage of land assets.

Policy P-1.5: Consider the community's varied cultural and demographic needs in park and recreational facility design and promote public involvement in park and recreation planning.

Policy P-1.6: Encourage the multiple use of recreation and open spaces to meet community demands where compatible with regulations and environmental protections.

Policy P-1.7: Maintain **special recreational facilities** (such as golf courses and sports stadiums) as enterprises to maximize public benefit and financial self-sufficiency.

Policy P-1.8: Periodically review trends in park and recreation facility use and adapt plans and investments to respond to changing community needs.

Policy P-1.9: Ensure all active parks are accessible to people of all ages and abilities by incorporating continuous accessible sidewalks and curb ramps that meet ADA standards. Additionally, provide secure and conveniently located bike parking at parks and trailheads to encourage multimodal access, promoting active transportation and equitable park access.

Policy P-1.10: Partner with Pierce Transit to enhance transit service across Tacoma's park system.

Policy P-1.11: Keep an up-to-date inventory of parklands, trails, and facilities in coordination with Parks Tacoma that can be used to measure the level of service as accurately as possible. Regularly update this inventory for accuracy and to track progress toward equity outcomes.

GOAL P-2: The physical, mental, emotional, and social health of Tacomans of all ages and abilities is supported through spending time outdoors and in public spaces. In particular, youth experience socio-emotional development and a stronger sense of belonging through recreational programming.

Policy P-2.1: Provide a variety of recreational activities, facilities, and services that contribute to health and well-being. Consider the needs and preferences of Tacomans of all ages and abilities.

Policy P-2.2: Partner with public and private entities to provide new recreational programming and facilities. Prioritize programs and facilities that address an identified gap, service deficiency, or emerging community interest.

Policy P-2.3: Invest in the distribution of recreation spaces and programs in a manner that facilitates equitable participation in our community's parks and recreation system.

Policy P-2.4: Incorporate the voices and experiences of youth and children in the decision-making process for system expansion and program development.

Policy P-2.5: Provide a seamless ecosystem for youth sports that creates space for and attracts all youth in Tacoma to participate in daily, engaging physical activity.

Policy P-2.6: Help youth, including both teens and young children, to more deeply connect with the place they live, especially via interactions with the spaces designed for community and participation in decision-making for the future.



SPECIAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Examples of special recreational facilities include multi-purpose centers and mission-led specialty centers, such as sports complexes, athletic fields, golf courses, outdoor and indoor pools, boathouse marinas, nature centers, zoos and aquariums, wildlife parks, botanical conservatories, and historic interpretative centers.

Policy P-2.7: Ensure that older adults are well served by the parks system, both in capital facilities and available programs.

GOAL P-3: Public and private partnerships expand the variety of available services and programs, provide open space, and enhance quality of life

Policy P-3.1: Continue to work in close partnership with Parks Tacoma, including supporting updates to long-term plans for the parks and open space system.

Policy P-3.2: Encourage public-private partnerships to develop and operate publicly accessible recreational facilities that meet identified public needs.

Policy P-3.3: Partner with public and private cultural organizations to encourage, sponsor, and support a range of public activities and cultural events within appropriate open spaces, as well as within temporarily closed streets, such as markets, festivals, and parades.

Policy P-3.4: Support and encourage the use of streets and sidewalks, on a temporary and intermittent basis, for a range of activities, such as markets, festivals, shopping, dining, and recreation, while ensuring safety and balancing street and sidewalk use for transportation.

Policy P-3.5: Coordinate the planning and improvement of the trail system to enhance and complement the parallel development of safety and access improvements to the active transportation network.

Policy P-3.6: Recognize public school fields and play areas as a valuable part of the city's park system. Partner with the school districts to enhance the recreational value of these facilities, especially in areas that are underserved with park access.

Policy P-3.7: Identify opportunities to integrate small commercial activities within parks, such as food trucks or vendors, kayak rentals along waterfronts, etc.

GOAL P-4: Long-term planning efforts maintain and expand Tacoma's parklands and facilities to ensure quality service for current and future populations.

Policy P-4.1: Maintain a long-range park capital improvements program that balances acquisition, development, and operations; provides a process and criteria for capital improvements project selection; and emphasizes creative and flexible financing strategies.

Policy P-4.2: Invest in capital projects that honor community diversity and cultivate inclusivity for all Tacomans.

Policy P-4.3: Seek funding for new parks and recreation facilities through a variety of sources and consider innovative strategies for the provision of new facilities:

- a. Develop zoning incentives, controls, and/or funding mechanisms, such as transfer of development rights, to create highly functional urban parks and amenities within mixed-use centers, downtown, and planned residential developments.
- b. Consider adopting a fee-in-lieu program that would allow development to contribute toward open space, parks, community gardens, or recreational space within the same neighborhood rather than providing on-site open space.

Policy P-4.4: Pursue opportunities to acquire and/or develop lands declared surplus by other public agencies, offered as donation by private owners, or purchased properties that are condemned/foreclosed, if consistent with policies herein.



PARTNERSHIPS

With a history of successful partnership that extends over 100 years, the City and Parks Tacoma are committed to working together to create healthy opportunities for Tacoma residents to play, learn and grow. Other key partners include the Port of Tacoma, the Tacoma School District, Tacoma Public Utilities, and other public and private partners.

Policy P-4.5: Continue to work toward fully transferring ownership and management of the active parks system from the City to Parks Tacoma. This does not include passive open spaces that the City owns and operates for habitat and stormwater management or shared-use trails that are part of the City's transportation network.

GOAL P-5: The development and operation of park and recreational facilities responds to the needs of the site and of the community.

Policy P-5.1: Employ a diverse array of community outreach methods that increase convenience and recognize different communication styles, languages, and cultural competency.

Policy P-5.2: Improve parks, recreational facilities, and natural areas in accordance with current master plans, management plans, or adopted strategies that reduce gaps affecting underserved community groups, align with development priorities and approved funding mechanisms, expand program opportunities, and respond to community input.

Policy P-5.3: Encourage the design of park and recreation facilities that complement the site's natural features.

Policy P-5.4: Provide the amenities necessary such as restrooms, lighting, seating, drinking fountains, trash receptacles, bicycle parking, and shelters to support the activities designed at the park location.



Policy P-5.5: Incorporate green building practices into park design and construction, including deconstruction/ green demolition and disposal practices, facility decarbonization, use of local and recycled products, and low-impact development techniques.

GOAL P-6: Tacomans can connect with nature in well-managed natural areas. Urban forests and natural areas protect the unique habitat and biodiversity of Tacoma.

Policy P-6.1: Preserve natural areas and resources to protect and improve their ecological health and to provide compatible public access.

Policy P-6.2: Manage natural areas to support environmental co-benefits for public health, enjoyment of nature, climate resilience, and future generational benefits.

Policy P-6.3: Encourage public access provisions in open space corridors where such access will complement, not negatively disrupt, fish, wildlife, and plants.

Policy P-6.4: Provide opportunities for Tacomans to learn how to engage with and experience nature and wildlife in various natural settings.

Policy P-6.5: Design parks and recreational activities that integrate with nature, are context-sensitive, and enhance the area's natural qualities.

Policy P-6.6: Increase everyday access to nature for all Tacomans by integrating urban forest improvements into and throughout neighborhoods.

Complete Park System

Functioning within a highly urbanized setting, the City of Tacoma and Parks Tacoma partner together to offer a complete park and recreation system, ranging from low-impact, natural resource-driven habitat areas to recreation-oriented, high-impact parks and sports complexes.

The City uses a classification system that includes six different park types to help organize and describe the levels of service provided in the community. Below is a brief description of each type of facility, together with supporting policies. These are similar to, although not identical to, the classification system used by Parks Tacoma. Policies are also specific to the city's waterfront areas, signature facilities, and specific areas where additional planning efforts provide guidance for stewardship priorities.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Neighborhood parks provide daily convenient access to basic recreation opportunities for nearby residents by people walking, biking, or rolling. Generally small in size, neighborhood parks are developed primarily for spontaneous and non-structured recreation activities. Sawyer Tot Lot and Optimist Park are examples of neighborhood parks.

COMMUNITY PARKS

Community parks are typically, although not always, larger than neighborhood parks and provide visitors with access to high- and low-impact recreation opportunities. Community parks should be designed to enhance community identity and preserve community open space. As a sub-category of community parks, signature community parks have a broader community appeal, providing a unique benefit that often contributes to the identity of a planning area and enhances the quality of life of District residents. McKinley Park is an example of a community park, and Wapato Park is a signature community park.



KEY DEFINITIONS

Passive open spaces are typically undeveloped lands with vegetation and other natural features such as wetlands, rivers, and streams. They do not encourage visitation to the same degree as other open spaces, which might include trails, picnic areas, or playgrounds.

Open space corridors are lands that support, nurture and preserve natural and wildlife habitats and native vegetation. Open Space Corridors usually contain environmental assets, such as wetlands, streams, wildlife, native and forested habitats, that are managed for stewardship and conservation via best management practices. These lands often provide opportunities for environmental research and interpretative programs, in addition to low-impact recreational activities.

Tacoma's **urban forest** is comprised of trees along streets, in parks, open spaces, backyards, and across the city. These trees are cared for by the City's Urban Forestry Program.

URBAN PARKS

Offering opportunities for gathering, rest, and recreation within the urban core, urban parks are a special type of open space serving the unique lifestyles and recreation needs of those who live or work in or close to Downtown or Regional Growth Centers. While urban parks often serve as neighborhood parks for nearby residents, they may also provide opportunities for community events and district-wide gatherings. They contribute to place-making by enhancing the quality of life and the identity of the urban core and the mixed-use districts. Creating a network of linear urban parks connected with public squares, gardens, and plazas will allow urban residents or workers to walk to public spaces or destinations designed for art displays and other leisure pursuits. Urban parks may be developed and/or managed by other public or private agencies or in partnership with them, depending on their locations and forms of development. Tollefson Plaza and Pugnetti Park are examples of urban parks.

REGIONAL PARKS

Regional parks, usually over a hundred acres, provide visitors with access to unique regional features and attractions. Regional parks often accommodate large group activities and have infrastructure to support special events and festivals. Regional parks can enhance the economic vitality and identity of the entire region by contributing to economic development through tourism. Point Defiance Park, with 760 acres and a wide variety of attractions, is an example of a regional park.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens are lands gardened by a community group for food, plant, or fiber production, either for personal or charitable uses. Community gardens provide access to fresh produce; encourage a connection to the environment; support general health and wellbeing through outdoor activity and the therapeutic benefits of gardening; provide safety and beautification benefits; create healthy soil, which helps with stormwater management; and add to a neighborhood's livability. Properly designed and managed, community gardens enhance a neighborhood's vitality. They can be independent spaces or integrated within existing parks, housing developments, or apartment complexes.

TRAILS

Trails serve both a recreation and an active transportation function. Walking, rolling, and bicycling provide many benefits to individuals as well as to the community. In Tacoma, trails provide opportunities for walking, bicycling, jogging, in-line skating, dog walking, and wildlife watching. An integrated, safety-oriented multi-purpose trail increases mobility choices, reduces reliance on single-occupant vehicles, provides convenient access to schools, centers, transit, parks, and other destinations, and encourages regular physical activity to enhance health and wellness. A map highlighting Tacoma's existing natural and signature trail network is below in Exhibit 65.

GOAL P-7: Neighborhood and community parks serve the diverse needs of the Tacoma community within a safe, 10-minute walk. Areas identified as underserved are prioritized for future investments in new and improved parks and trails.

Policy P-7.1: Prioritize and plan neighborhood and community parks in areas identified as underserved. See map in Exhibit 3. Where land acquisition

opportunities are not available, consider opportunities such as linear parks within the right-of-way.

Policy P-7.2: Design neighborhood parks to enhance neighborhood identity, preserve neighborhood open space, and improve the quality of life of nearby residents. Enhance existing spaces with densified tree canopy and consider water features.

Policy P-7.3: Locate and distribute neighborhood parks to provide convenient, daily pedestrian access to basic recreational opportunities for nearby residents living within a 10-minute walk of the park.

Policy P-7.4: Site and design Community Parks to provide a wider range of recreational opportunities to accommodate large group activities, structured recreation programs, major outdoor recreation facilities, such as sports facilities, and complimentary amenities such as restrooms and parking for vehicles and bicycles.

Policy P-7.5: Site community park fronts onto a public street, preferably a collector or arterial, designed as a Complete Street with sidewalks, bicycle lanes, safe crossings, bicycle facilities, and street trees, and easily accessible by public transit.

Policy P-7.6: Integrate more community gardens across neighborhoods and community parks.

Policy P-7.7: Partner with local artists and arts organizations for more art in parks, creating unique and vibrant community spaces.

Policy P-7.8: Integrate stormwater management through regional stormwater treatment facilities within parks, creating a multi-faceted approach to managing stormwater quality and quantity harmoniously with active parks and open spaces.

GOAL P-8: Urban parks serve the diverse needs of the Downtown and Regional Growth Center communities.

Policy P-8.1: Plan for the acquisition and design of urban parks within the Downtown and Regional Growth Centers based on forecasted growth and adopted growth assumptions.

- a. Establish specific targets for open space, parks, and recreation facilities to meet needs within Regional Growth Centers.
- b. Identify potential locations and opportunities for further action and use innovative methods and partnerships to fund the identified needs.
- c. Ensure park and recreation opportunities are provided in the Regional Growth Centers as the population increases.

Policy P-8.2: Locate and design urban parks to create a focal point and distinctive sense of place for each center.

Policy P-8.3: Coordinate the development of linear urban parks to incorporate designated corridors and signature trails.

GOAL P-9: Regional parks serve the region's diverse needs and attract visitors from across the Puget Sound.

Policy P-9.1: Design unique and high-quality amenities in regional parks, such as landscape improvements and gardens, infrastructure to support events and festivals, and sports fields.



TACOMA'S COMPLETE STREETS DESIGN GUIDELINES

Tacoma's complete streets design guidelines

Complete Streets refers to streets and sidewalks that are designed, operated, and maintained for the safety and convenient access of all potential users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders. There is also an increased emphasis on public realm improvements such as street trees, landscaping, and low-impact stormwater infrastructure. In 2017, Tacoma added a Complete Streets Policy chapter in the Municipal Code. This policy has influenced the development of key streets such as Stadium Way and Pacific Avenue.

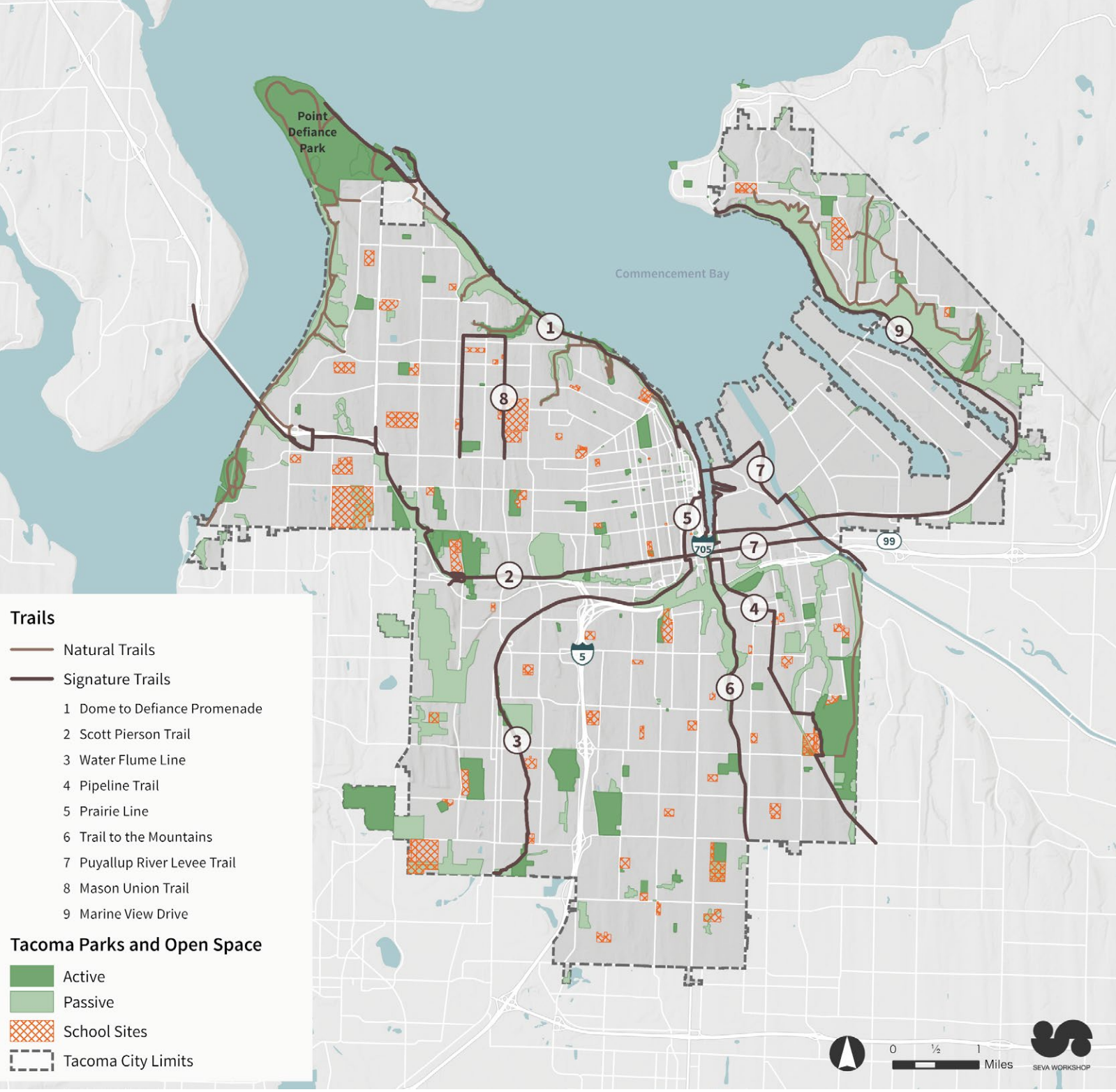


Exhibit 65. Tacoma Natural and Signature Trail Networks

Note: This trails map is in the process of updates, to reflect the City's full inventory of separate and shared use active transportation routes.

Sources: City of Tacoma, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Policy P-9.2: Give priority to the location of new special recreation facilities in areas that are currently underserved and ensure access is provided to those in the surrounding community.

Policy P-9.3: To the extent feasible, locate new destination facilities within, or in close proximity to, designated centers and transit corridors.

GOAL P-10: Community gardens serve the diverse needs of residents and play a role in addressing food insecurity.

Policy P-10.1: Enhance existing and support new community gardens within parks and on appropriate public and private lands.

Policy P-10.2: Support creative approaches to managing gardens, such as support by educational institutions or volunteer management by community organizations.

Policy P-10.3: Prioritize the location of new community gardens in areas currently lacking options for fresh produce and healthy food access.

GOAL P-11: A connected and well-maintained network of trails offers safe and beautiful corridors for walking, biking, and rolling across Tacoma.

Policy P-11.1: Maintain, improve, and plan for a citywide system of public trails that are integrated into a larger network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, seamlessly connecting communities and important destinations across the city.

Policy P-11.2: Identify and address the current gaps in the public bicycle and pedestrian networks by establishing:

- a. A system of shared-use facilities to connect neighborhoods and connect to major transit hubs.
- b. Natural trails within parks and open spaces that bring people closer to nature.
- c. A bicycle and pedestrian system that supports the integration of parks and recreation into the citywide bicycle and pedestrian network to facilitate greater access to these destinations.

Policy P-11.3: Provide adequate bicycle parking facilities along Tacoma's trail network to promote access and ease of use.

Policy P-11.4: Recognize the value of linear parks, which integrate green amenities into road networks, and identify opportunities to create these, especially in places where gaps in connectivity and equitable access to parks can be filled.

WATERFRONT

Tacoma's shorelines and waterfront areas are a source of economic activity, entertainment, and recreation and possess invaluable ecological and cultural functions. As such, promoting shoreline access and recreation is a major priority for Tacomans. The City's waterfront provides opportunities for recreation and the experience of nature that cannot be replicated in other areas of the City and region. Recognizing the multiple benefits and values of its shorelines, the City and others have made substantial investments to clean up environmental pollution and improve shoreline access, recreation, and cultural opportunities. Given the strong connection many people feel to shorelines, investments like these will provide benefits that

many people will enjoy and appreciate, improving Tacoma's livability and long-term prosperity.

GOAL P-12: The public shoreline and waterfront system is well maintained, balancing needs for environmental sustainability and public access and fostering a sense of connection between the community and the water.

Policy P-12.1: Utilize Tacoma's natural topography to connect Tacomans to natural areas and the waterfront.

Policy P-12.2: Locate and develop bicycle and pedestrian facilities that are sensitive to habitat areas, safe for users, and provide transportation and recreation for the community.

Policy P-12.3: Develop active transportation facilities along the waterfront that support high usage, multiple modes, and variable speeds – recognizing that these facilities serve as critical transportation and recreation connectors.

Policy P-12.4: Develop and enhance opportunities for swimming and boating, including the use of Tacoma's water trails, fishing, SCUBA diving, educational activities, wildlife observation, and other shoreline and water-dependent activities.

Policy P-12.5: Implement the priority actions identified in the Shoreline Master Program Public Access Alternatives.

GOAL P-13: Opportunities for education and continuous learning about Tacoma's environmental assets and geographic setting are widely available.

Policy P-13.1: Recognize Indigenous connections to Tacoma's shorelines and waters as cultural, historical, recreational, educational, economic, natural, and aesthetic assets of tremendous value.

Policy P-13.2: Enhance Tacoma's identity as a waterfront community, including designating and enhancing shoreline areas for educational and interpretive displays, public art, community events, habitat restoration, and other activities.

Policy P-13.3: Inspire and engage the community to care about and steward the natural environment through educational programming, guided walking tours, community volunteer days, and partnerships with local schools and environmental organizations.

DISTINCTIVE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Over time, the City and its partners have identified ways to enhance their ability to meet the goals of this element by creating plans for specific areas. This list is intended for larger, distinctive parks and open space sites. It is not exhaustive and is intended to be updated regularly. Other public agencies, particularly Parks Tacoma, maintain separate project lists, which should also be consulted.

This section is intended to convey the City Council's support for and recognition of the policy direction in these plans and to convey that they are planning and implementing priorities. It lends support to applications for City approvals, such as conditional use

permits, rezones, and development regulation agreements, that meet the intent of these plans and the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. This section also provides a forum for the Council to refine its policy direction on a given site in consultation with the Planning Commission and other stakeholders.

GOAL P-14: Site-specific plans and subarea plans guide the unique needs of certain facilities and sites.

Policy P-14.1: Recognize the unique role of Point Defiance Park as a citywide and regional destination, and provide alternative review processes such as Development Regulation Agreements to allow more intensive, destination-oriented features within areas designated as active open spaces within the park.

Policy P-14.2: Support the unique function of distinctive sites within the urban context. Land use needs and regulations are likely to require special exemptions or review processes for the ongoing development of these places. Examples include Wapato Hills, First Creek, the shoreline (including public access to areas managed by the Port), capped landfills, and Swan Creek. Some of these site-specific planning efforts expand recreation functions with new facilities, while other plans emphasize long-term protection of critical natural areas. Regulations should follow the intent and guidance provided by planning documents.

Policy P-14.3: Implement open space and recreation priorities based on subarea plans, neighborhood plans, and EIS documents such as and including those for South Downtown, Hilltop, North Downtown, Tacoma Mall, Tideflats, Pacific Ave, McKinley, Proctor, and South Tacoma.

Policy P-14.4: Coordinate with all site-specific and long-range planning development processes to promote equitable practices in community engagement and alignment with best practices identified in the [Engagement and Administration](#) element of the Comprehensive Plan.

8.3 Priority Actions

ACTION	LEAD
Develop a strategy for addressing any current deficiencies in levels of service and identify opportunities to provide new park and recreation opportunities to close access gaps..	Parks Tacoma
Invest in all ages and abilities trails and bike and pedestrian connections such as closing sidewalk gaps, installing bike parking, and enhancing trail maintenance to enhance access to parks and provide opportunities for active transportation and recreation.	Parks Tacoma and Tacoma Transportation
Assess unused or underutilized public land for opportunities for parks, trails, and linear parks.	Parks Tacoma
Explore funding mechanisms to address both current service needs and enhancements to meet new service demands, including consideration of grants, bond issuance, impact fees, or other.	Parks Tacoma