

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Service Description

The service plans, develops, and maintains over 3,400 acres of parks and open space. The parks and open space system includes gardens, sports fields and courts, children's play areas, picnic shelters, walking, biking, and hiking trails, and natural resource areas.

There is a wide range of public park and open space areas operated and maintained by service staff, volunteers and interagency partners. These areas can be grouped into several categories. *Neighborhood parks* provide accessible recreational, social activities, and general open space and typically include features such as playground apparatus, hard surface play areas, picnic tables, open turf, natural areas, and trees. Neighborhood parks are the basic building block of the City's park system, providing the fundamental park components of children's play, open space, and family and neighborhood gathering areas. We strive to provide a neighborhood park within a 1/2 mile of all city residents. *Community parks* provide large areas for facilities and activities that attract a high number of participants and may include lighted athletic fields, off-street parking, skateparks, and other recreational facilities. These parks draw from multiple neighborhoods within the city. Examples are Amazon Park, Bethel Park, Petersen Park, and youth sports parks. *Natural area parks* make up approximately half of the City's park system. Spencer Butte, Meadowlark Prairie, and Delta Ponds are among the community's largest natural areas. Other park types managed by this service include linear parks, such as the Willamette River Greenway, metropolitan parks such as Hendricks Park, Skinner Butte Park and Alton Baker Park, and the grounds of community centers, such as Campbell Senior Center.

The service also addresses major changes in the park and open space system, such as acquiring new parks and open space to keep pace with growth, renovating existing parks to meet maintenance and safety standards, and addressing significant changes in park use and community needs. The Parks Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan (PROS Plan), an aspirational, guiding document, was completed in 2005. Although the plan was approved by the City Council, the adoption was appealed to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals, which remanded the plan to the City based on a finding that the adoption process was inadequate. The accompanying Project and Priority Plan was adopted in 2006 and is the official guiding document for park acquisition and development.

Historic Perspective

- 1906 First official City park acquired (Hendricks).
- 1914 EWEB deeded Skinner Butte to the City.

- 1920 First park improvement bond issued.
- 1938 Voters approved special tax levy to purchase 280 acres on Spencer Butte.
- 1946 Eugene's first Parks and Recreation Department created.
- 1951 George Owen donated a two-acre river front parcel that became the Rose Garden.
- 1954 Hendricks Park Rhododendron Garden opened.
- 1966 Bond in support of parks issued for \$1.75 million.
- 1969 Eugene awarded Gold Medal for excellence in parks and recreation by the National Recreation and Parks Association.
- 1976 Property tax levied \$1.0 million for parkland acquisition.
- 1979 \$4.0 million General Obligation Bond issued for parkland acquisition.
- 1991 Systems Development Charge (SDC) for parks adopted.
- 1998 Parks and Open Space bond measure approved, raising \$25 million.
- 2001 Public Works created a new Parks and Open Space division.
- 2004 POS Division won 3 ORPA Awards, and received an APWA sustainability award.
- 2005 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan completed.
- 2006 Parks and Open Space bond measure approved, raising \$27.5 million.
- 2006 Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals remanded PROS Plan
- 2006 Project and Priority Plan adopted.
- 2006 Dragonfly Bend wetland restoration project won State Land Board Wetland Award.
- 2007 River Play Discovery Village won American Public Works Association Project of the Year Award.
- 2007 Delta Ponds project won DOGAMI Oregon Plan Award.
- 2008 Delta Ponds project won Landowner Recognition Award from the Salmon and Trout Enhancement Project Advisory Committee.

Citizen Involvement

The manner in which the City acquires, develops, and maintains park lands has a significant impact on our community's quality of life. Staff places a high priority on maximizing public participation of all affected stakeholders. Historically, Eugene residents were involved in creating the Eugene Parks and Recreation Plan, the guiding planning document for the City's park resources in 1989. In 1998, citizen participation shaped the \$25.3 million Parks & Open Space bond measure which was subsequently approved by a two to one margin. Beginning in 1998, staff engaged the community during the design and development of more than a dozen new parks including Amazon Park, Bethel Community Park, Oakmont, Frank Kinney, Trainsong, and Delta Ponds. In addition, more than 3,000 people participated in the

public involvement for the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan and the adopted Project and Priority Plan.

Customer Input

Parks and open space staff are assigned to regularly attend scheduled neighborhood meetings to provide opportunities for direct communication with residents about important parks issues. In addition, the POS Division website at www.ci.eugene.or.us/parks has dramatically increased direct contact and improved the accessibility of information to thousands of Eugene citizens.

Vision

We envision an interconnected and accessible system of vibrant public spaces, friendly neighborhood parks, thriving natural areas, and diverse recreational opportunities that make our city a healthy, active, and beautiful place in which to live, work and play.

Mission

Strengthening our community by preserving and enhancing our parks and open space system and providing diverse recreation experiences.

Outcomes

- Provide opportunities to enjoy nature and the outdoors
- Build environmental stewardship through volunteer, environmental education, and outdoor recreation opportunities
- Distribute parks, open space and recreation services equitably throughout the community
- Build and maintain sustainable parks, recreation, and open space infrastructure
- Protect and enhance diverse, healthy, and interconnected ecosystems
- Build a sense of community by developing strong community partnerships

Operating Principles

- Health: Contribute positively to individual and community health
- Equity: Provide programs and places that are inclusive of all residents
- Community: Reflect community strengths and values
- Service: Maintain high accountability to our constituents
- Sustainability: Look into the future when making day-to-day decisions

Current Operating Environment

External Trends

Impacts to Parks Planning, Acquisition and Design

Challenges to providing parkland to area residents include:

- Dwindling land availability - The increase in population and continued land development, combined with the limitations of the Urban Growth Boundary, result in less available land at higher cost. Since suitable park sites within the City are very limited and can be prohibitively expensive, the service has begun to purchase property for parks outside the Urban Growth Boundary. Development of this property requires special permission.
- Regulatory factors - With many new natural resource regulations in place, parks development costs increase. Acquisition costs increase due to the need to purchase more area to include protected areas for open waterways, stormwater infiltration, and tree conservation.
- Accessibility improvements - New guidelines for accessibility relating to outdoor recreation have been implemented. The City will need to ensure that new facilities meet the current standards and that funding is available for retrofitting existing facilities.
- Increased Systems Development Charges (SDCs) - While the City collects SDCs for providing parkland, the City also pays other SDCs when it develops parkland.
- Sustainable Design - Because of increasing incidents of vandalism, the City must build park amenities (restrooms, park benches, trash cans, etc.) to withstand abuse. The sustainable design approach is to "buy it once." While that may save money in the long run, it costs substantially more up front.
- Public involvement - The City values responsiveness to citizens, which in turn increases reporting obligations and the time it takes to include citizens in decision-making. Over the long run, citizen involvement improves community support for parks but also increases the time and cost of planning, acquisition, and design in the short term.

Trends in Park Usage

In conducting assessments of community needs for the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan, a number of changes in the way parks are used were identified.

- **Youth:** To compete with the pull of highly stimulating computer and video games, youth activities are shifting to more extreme play. Skateboarding continues to grow, but is competing with bikes using the new bowls, ramps, and stairs. New sports such as free-riding (an extreme form of mountain biking) and BMX bicycling have significant user groups, and limited facilities are provided.
- **Families:** With limited time for family recreation, single specialty use facilities are inconvenient for most. Multiple use facilities that address a range of interests and age groups provide the greatest flexibility for families planning activities.

- **Adults:** Responding to the aging baby boomer population will require a different approach to providing “senior” activities. These adults will have significant leisure time, and will be much more active than previous generations.
- **Technology:** More people are making travel and recreation decisions based on ease of finding programs and information and are likely to completely avoid an experience that is not easily accessible. Having an efficient and up- to-date web site with maps and ability to schedule and reserve on-line will be critical as we continue to move into the future.
- **Nature-based recreation:** Although the City has made significant progress in protecting natural areas, there is increased demand for access to and interpretation of these special areas. New partnerships for recreation and education programs can build community stewardship, increase environmental education, promote water quality, and protect important habitats. The draft “No Child Left Inside Act of 2007” is an emerging national effort that the City will continue to track, and which may provide future funding for nature-based recreation.

Importance of Parks System

Parks are a key component of our quality of life, providing a multitude of benefits to individuals, to the community, to our environment, and to our economy. Currently, individuals, communities, and our economy are all at risk due to the rising tide of the extreme health impacts of obesity, particularly in our children. It is anticipated that parks and recreation will be a core part of the national effort to combat this public health issue by providing accessible trails for walking to schools, stores, and parks, and providing places and programs for healthy, fun activities as alternatives to television.

Challenges to Managing Natural Resources

As our knowledge of natural systems has increased, so has the complexity of managing over 3,000 acres of open space consisting of forests, wetlands, riparian areas, oak savannah and upland prairies. The City has moved toward integrating stormwater, wetland, and other natural resource components into developed parks, and added recreation, access, and interpretation facilities to habitat areas. Parks and Open Space has begun to change the way we do business, including adding staff with new areas of expertise, training current employees, purchasing new equipment, introducing permitting issues, changing funding, and adding different partners. Significant issues include management of invasive species, land acquisition, increased regulatory requirements and the costs associated with developing habitat management plans. These types of plans are needed to ensure that open space management is consistent with community goals and that public involvement is addressed in a manner similar to the way the City manages our developed parks. The increased regulatory requirements in

recent years have continued to increase the costs associated with managing the City’s natural areas.

Internal Conditions

Operational Costs Have Grown Much Faster Than Operational Resources

While the parks and open space system has grown significantly over the past 10 years, the resources available for parks maintenance and operations have grown much more slowly. For example, the passage of the 1998 Parks and Open Space bond measure resulted in the addition of 4 new community-scale parks; 19 new children’s play areas, 4 park restrooms, 4 skate parks, a boat launch, 10 new neighborhood parks, an expanded Amazon Pool; and over 400 acres of land for future park development and expansion of the ridgeline trail system. The 2006 Parks and Open Space bond measure, when fully implemented, will add 13 new neighborhood park sites, a new community park in the Santa Clara area, development and expansion of Golden Gardens Park, expansion of several existing community parks, acquisition of more than 240 acres along the ridgeline corridor, acquisition of up to 45 acres of Willamette River frontage and land to improve access at Gillespie Butte. As these significant additions to the parks and open space system have occurred, allocation of general fund dollars for parks maintenance and operations have not kept pace, leaving a growing gap between the magnitude of operational needs and the resources available to address them. Other impacts driving up costs include:

- Vandalism, graffiti, and homeless camping - More staff time is devoted to cleaning and repairing vandalized structures, leaving less money available for regular maintenance.
- Regulatory complexity - Regulations affecting safety and the environment are affecting operating costs. Examples include National Safety Standards for playgrounds, accessibility standards, equipment changes to produce less noise, new techniques for fertilizing parkland, resource recovery (composting), and integrated pest management.
- Assuming operational costs of partnership agreements - As the City forms partnerships with other government, nonprofit, and for-profit agencies, it takes on the maintenance of those lands developed in partnership, further increasing the inventory of parkland to be maintained. Lack of resources for schools results in the City being more involved in grounds maintenance at schools.
- Changes in the ways people recreate to more complex and interactive play areas and varied sports activities requires more technical expertise, tools and resources.

Use of Volunteers

One solution to the problem of increased operational costs has been for the City to develop a volunteer program. Currently there are three volunteer programs, including the Eugene Stream Team, Volunteers in Parks, and NeighborWoods. These programs recruit individuals and organizations as volunteers. They also make use of other labor, such as the Lane County Youth Service, the Northwest Youth Corps, and the Lane County Sheriff's Work Crew. However, these efforts have not been sufficient to solve the problem of increasing operational costs.

Performance Measures

Core Processes

Planning and Acquisition of Open Space

- Number of citizens involved in the planning process per year.
- Number of acres purchased annually.

Developing Park and Recreation Improvements

- Number of development or management plans completed per year
- Amount of money invested in parks and open space capital improvements

Managing and Maintaining Parks and Open Space

- Total acres maintained annually
- Net annual operating and maintenance expenditures per capita.

Total System:

Effectiveness

- Total acres of developed and undeveloped City park land available per 1,000 city residents
- Total acres of developed and undeveloped City park land available per 1,000 residents as compared to the median parkland available of ICMA comparison cities

Efficiency

- Total service cost per acre

Customer Satisfaction

- Percent of Community Survey respondents who believe the City's parks are maintained at an above average level of quality
- Ranking of the reported use of City Parks compared to other City services (from Community Survey)

Strategy 1: Implement a coordinated vision of Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Natural Resources

Objective 1: Maintain a Community Survey rating of at least 4.3 when residents are asked to rate the importance of providing parks and open space on a scale of 1-5.

Objective 2: Maintain a Community Survey rating of at least 3.6 when residents are asked to rate the performance of the service in providing parks and open space on a scale of 1-5.

Objective 3: Maintain a Community Survey rating of at least 3.7 when residents are asked to rate the quality of maintaining parks on a scale of 1-5.

Work Activities:

- Work to implement the PROS Project and Priority Plan adopted in 2006.
- Continue implementation of 2006 bond projects.

Strategy 2: Continue Developing a Parks and Open Space Operations Staff for the 21st Century

Objective1: Provide cross-training to all new Park Specialists I/II within two years of hiring.

Work Activities:

- Continue the employee training program for cross-training Park Specialist I and II positions in all maintenance operations crews including: turf and grounds, natural resources, park amenities, landscape and medians, tree maintenance and specialty gardens.

Strategy 3: Innovative and Efficient Resource Management

Objective1: Create park management plan(s) covering at least 100 acres of developed park land and at least 500 acres of undeveloped parks by FY14.

Work Activities:

- Identify funding opportunities
- Identify stakeholders and develop public involvement programs
- Identify priority areas and issues

Parks and Open Space Service Map

