

CHAPTER 6



IMPLEMENTATION

To provide City leaders and residents with the tools and information needed to make an informed choice about the future of parks and recreation in Gresham, this chapter highlights two alternatives:



- *Alternative I: Unsustainable Park System* describes a scenario where the City must rely on existing funding sources to maintain current resources.
- *Alternative II: Sustainable Park System* describes an alternate scenario where additional funding is obtained to maintain the current park system at an appropriate level of service, to renovate deteriorating facilities, to develop undeveloped park land, and to plan for future acquisitions in underserved areas.

These two alternatives are “the bookends” in a full shelf of choices, where the best option is likely to be found somewhere in the middle. Just as the previous chapter portrayed potential park improvements as a menu of choices, this chapter presents varied implementation strategies to help decide what park system will best serve the community in the next 20 years and beyond.

ALTERNATIVE I: UNSUSTAINABLE PARK SYSTEM

An unsustainable park system is one that cannot be sustained into the future without damaging current resources (parks and facilities) or the environment. With this alternative, the City would struggle to keep parks open for the community’s enjoyment, be unable to fund sufficient maintenance, watch as recreation assets continue to deteriorate, lay-off the staff who have successfully managed and maintained the park system to date, and compete with other services for City funds.

In Alternative I, the Unsustainable Park System is marked by:

- A decreasing level of maintenance at all sites, likely meaning more trash, taller grass, vandalism and graffiti, chipping paint, and unclean restrooms in City parks.
- Deferred maintenance projects, resulting in deteriorating amenities and facilities in the long-term;
- A lack of funds for necessary park renovations, eventually creating unsafe conditions that require facility removal;
- No City-provided recreation programs to meet community recreation needs;
- No park development at undeveloped sites;
- No park acquisition to meet future needs in developing areas or areas currently unserved by parks;
- Staffing cuts to free up funds for existing (but incomplete) park projects; and
- Insufficient staff to oversee volunteer projects, resulting in elimination of volunteer opportunities or unsupervised projects that may not meet City standards or safe practices.

This Unsustainable System is created by relying on current and historic sources of revenue in the midst of a financial crisis. Funds for capital projects and operations have dropped considerably since 2009. Capital and operations funding may now be half or less of last year's budget. Support from the largest funding sources, including parks system development charges (SDCs), intergovernmental revenue, general fund monies, and grants (especially those that require matching funds) has diminished to the point that maintaining the existing park system at last year's level of service is impossible.

Below is a summary of what Gresham residents may expect if the City continues to rely on current funding sources to manage, maintain, operate and develop the park system.

Maintenance

For several years, the City of Gresham has been able to provide just a basic level of care for its park system. This low level of service has included only required maintenance needed at each site, such as litter removal, graffiti removal, mowing and restroom cleaning. It provided sufficient maintenance for health and safety, but not for asset preservation. As noted in the Park Evaluation (Appendix B), the condition of parks and facilities has suffered as a result.

Cuts in staffing and maintenance funding will further decrease the quality of maintenance services provided. The frequency of trash removal, litter pickup, restroom and facility cleaning, graffiti removal, vandalism repairs, field and plant irrigation, and other tasks will have to be cut. Instead of clean, green, and safe parks, residents can expect browning grass, increased litter and trash, and potentially unsafe facilities as conditions deteriorate.

Gresham currently has a parks inventory of 1194.1 acres of parks and natural areas; 241.3 acres of parkland developed and undeveloped and 953.8 acres of natural areas. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has previously identified a reasonable maintenance standard of 64 acres/FT employee. Due to cuts in staffing, field staff Public Utility workers will be responsible for nearly 200 acres each, or more than three times the NRPA standard. Additional supplemental seasonal help in any fiscal year is not a guarantee.

In addition, the development of the two new sites with high maintenance needs (Gradin Community Sports Park and Center for the Arts Plaza) will further impact the park system. If the City can no longer be able to afford to take care of all park sites, some sites may need to be closed. Since fencing parks is an expensive option, the City may need to spend some remaining funds to remove unmaintained, aging playgrounds and amenities at closed parks.

Capital Reinvestment

Capital reinvestment involves replacing outdated or worn facilities as scheduled based on their age and use. Funds should be set aside annually so that the City has money on hand to replace facilities when needed. This helps avoid the need to remove unsafe facilities that are past their prime.

In Alternative I, no funds will be available for a capital reinvestment program. When a facility reaches the end of its lifespan, it will have to be removed rather than replaced.

Renovations

The lack of a capital replacement program, plus a large maintenance backlog of deferred projects, has and will continue to accelerate capital maintenance needs. As noted in the previous chapter, the current need for park renovation is significant, with estimated costs reaching \$31.7 million. The costs for needed renovations will increase as the park system ages. If parks cannot be renovated, facilities will eventually be deemed unsafe and have to be removed.

Some portion of the costs noted above include the addition of facilities at undeveloped existing parks, where recreation opportunities could be enhanced to meet identified community needs. Without a capital infusion, these needs will simply remain unmet.

Acquisition and Development

If some SDC funding continues to be available, the City hopes to have capital funds to move forward on a few high-priority projects. For example, it would require approximately \$6.5 million to fund and implement the following:

- Gresham Fairview Trail (Phase 2 and 3 construction)
- Gresham Fairview Trail (Phase 4 and 5 acquisition)
- Skate park (Phase I construction)
- Civic Neighborhood Station Plaza (Plaza construction at light rail station)

- Springwater Trailhead (Trailhead construction at Main City Park)
- Main City Park (Phase I improvements)

Beyond these projects, no additional park acquisition or development is anticipated. Facilities will not be added to currently undeveloped parks, leaving sites which have been undeveloped for years vacant indefinitely. No additional sites will be acquired, leaving residents in unserved neighborhoods without basic recreation opportunities. No park land would be acquired to serve future development in Springwater and Pleasant Valley.

Programming



The reality of the Alternative I scenario is that park and recreation programming will not be provided. If anything, the City will attempt to maintain various volunteer programs, such as Adopt-a-Park and Adopt-a-Trail. However, with anticipated staffing cuts, volunteer oversight may be lacking.

Volunteers are a valuable resource if managed correctly. Many cities have successful and extensive programs where volunteers help with a broad range of projects from site infrastructure improvements to facility construction, from fundraising to site maintenance. However, the City should be cautious when using volunteer labor unless City staff is available to oversee their work. Construction that is not up to code or not done according to City design and maintenance standards will increase City expenses over time—especially if the City has to remove the existing work and start over. In some cases, volunteer labor may also increase the City’s liability for injuries or accidents. Unless proper oversight can be provided, the City may have to turn away potential volunteers in Alternative I.

ALTERNATIVE I I: SUSTAINABLE PARK SYSTEM

A sustainable system is one that can be sustained into the future without depleting current resources or damaging the

environment. In the case of a park system, a sustainable approach would allow parks to remain open for the community's enjoyment, provide for the maintenance and upkeep of the City's recreation assets, keep sufficient staff to manage the park system, and operate without depleting funds for other needed City services. A sustainable park system operates in a broader social, economic and environmental context—looking at the role parks and recreation play in improving the quality of life in Gresham.

Alternative II presents the future, Sustainable Park System. This system is not a pipe dream to achieve every recommendation in the Parks & Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas Plan. Rather it is a conservative approach marked by:

- An adequately funded, tiered maintenance approach, that focuses efforts on sites with the highest maintenance needs while ensuring that all park resources are adequately maintained;
- A capital reinvestment program, with funds to replace aged facilities when needed;
- Funds for necessary park renovations, especially at the most frequently and heavily used sites;
- City-provided special events and nature-based programs to bring people into parks, provide needed opportunities for socialization and community unity, to develop a park constituency who will support future park improvements, and to meet priority recreation needs;
- Park development at undeveloped and undeveloped sites, especially in areas with the greatest demands and unmet needs;
- Park acquisition in critical areas, where the opportunity to acquire sites in the future may be lost;
- Funds to complete park projects that have already been initiated, as well as funds to maintain all new sites when they are brought online;

- A designated staff position for volunteer coordinator to recruit volunteers and oversee projects; and
- Collaboration with other City agencies and partners to identify and address community-wide needs, in which parks and recreation can play a role.

This park and recreation system would be created by developing new sources of revenue. Current funding sources have diminished to the point that maintaining the existing park system at last year's level of service is impossible.

Consequently, the existing park system cannot continue to operate without serious repercussions and constraints, unless a stable new source of funding is identified. A new funding source is also the City's only option for future park development to meet increasing recreation needs.

Below is a summary of what Gresham residents may expect if the City implements a new funding mechanism to support parks and recreation.

Deferred Maintenance

In Alternative II, the current backlog of deferred maintenance projects would be addressed through park renovation and improved maintenance efforts. Instead of cutting staff and the maintenance budget, additional funds would be applied to increase the current maintenance level of service. Efforts would be based on a tiered maintenance program, so that maintenance tasks would be targeted where they are most needed.

In this approach, it will be critical to identify available maintenance funds before new facilities are constructed. Maintenance needs should be considered at every stage of the planning process, including park planning and design. Park and facility design should emphasize maintenance efficiencies and labor-saving elements where possible.

Capital Reinvestment

With the Alternative II approach, funds should be set aside annually so that the City has money on hand to replace worn

or unsafe facilities at the end of their lifecycle. This helps avoid the need to remove facilities that are past their prime and will sustain the park system in the future.

Renovations

Realistically, Alternative II may not be able to address all identified renovation projects (\$31.7 million at 19 sites) in the short-term. However, it will prioritize park renovation as a cost-efficient way to sustain the existing park system.

Because existing infrastructure is in place, adding more facilities to existing parks is also a cost-efficient way to meet existing and future recreation needs. All parks in need of major park renovation should go through a new master planning process to maximize opportunities for site development. In addition, the new master plans should incorporate sustainable design and maintenance-saving techniques where possible.

Acquisition and Development

Utilizing new and existing sources of funding should expand City options for moving forward on a several high-priority projects and required upgrades. For example, it would require approximately \$50 million to complete the following:

- ADA accessibility upgrades
- All projects noted for Alternative I
- Gresham Fairview Trail (Phase 4 and 5 development)
- Skate Park (Completion)
- Gradin Community Sports Park (Phase I & II completion)
- Two new neighborhood parks (Design and construction)
- One new community park (Design; Phase I construction)
- Zimmerman Heritage Farm Park (Construction)
- Hogan Butte Nature Park (Design and construction)
- Main City Park (Phase II improvements)

- Marine Drive Trail (Construction)
- Pat Pfeifer Park (Phase III improvements)
- Gresham Greenways (Conservation plan)

Beyond these, projects would be prioritized using the criteria described in this chapter to assist in identifying the highest priority projects. To some extent, project priorities may hinge on future development in the City. If Springwater and Pleasant Valley do not develop as quickly as anticipated because of the building slow-down, then the City can postpone plans for parks in these areas. However, when these areas develop, additional SDCs are anticipated to support park acquisition and development in these future growth areas.

Programming

In Alternative II, recreation programs will be recognized as a key component of the park and recreation system. The City should consider programs that will:

- Bring people into parks, which can help increase park safety, make people more familiar with City-provided recreation resources, and provide a number of potential benefits to park users;
- Provide needed opportunities for socialization, which can help strengthen the community and bring families closer together;
- Develop a park constituency who will support existing parks and future park improvements, by creating a sense of park ownership or community investment in parks;
- Highlight the City's environmental and cultural resources to help create a sense of stewardship;
- Meet needs for special events, nature-based programming, and adult programming; and
- Take advantage of partnerships and sponsorships to coordinate the efforts of some 30 different recreation providers in the City.

In the summer of 2008, the Parks and Recreation Division developed key partnerships and sponsorships to run two successful recreation programs: Gresham City Kids and the Mobile Recreation Program. Alternative II would provide funding to retain a City staff person to coordinate and administer these or similar programs. Also, there have been several modest proposals over the last several years to initiate the following:

- Gang diversion and youth outreach program;
- Park volunteer and community partnership program;
- Mount Hood Recreation Partnership (MHCC and Schools); and
- Special events and community partnership program.

Programs that unite the community through partnership and collaboration may be supported in the Sustainable Park System approach.

In addition, Alternative II would expand volunteerism by supporting a volunteer coordinator to recruit volunteers and oversee projects. (This may be the same staff person who serves as a community liaison to pursue other partnership opportunities, as noted above.) Even volunteerism should involve collaboration with other City agencies, schools, private partners, and non-profits to identify and address community-wide needs. For example, the City could collaborate with the Boys and Girls Club and police to provide youth recreation programs that support gang diversion and provide adult volunteers who serve as youth mentors. The City could collaborate with environmental and bicycle groups to provide trail hiking and biking programs that add “eyes on the trails” to increase the safety of all users and encourage healthy, sustainable modes of travel.



POTENTIAL SOURCES OF FUNDING

The critical difference between the two approaches noted in this chapter is their funding base. While Alternative I relies on

historical and traditional funding sources, Alternative II will require a stable, new source of funding. This Plan carefully considers all funding options to see how the City can achieve a sustainable park system for the future.

Appendix G provides an overview of all potential sources of funding, along with a description of each source. Funding sources are divided into two categories:

- Funds for operations and capital projects; and
- Funds for capital projects only.

Typically, it is easier to raise capital funds than monies to support operations. In a sustainable park system, a multi-million dollar capital funding program will not ensure the long-term viability of the park system, unless the City also can find funds to maintain its recreation assets. The City currently faces a shortage of maintenance and operations funding—a deficiency that needs to be addressed before new capital projects can move forward. For this reason, finding a new funding source for maintenance is imperative.

Options for Operations Funding

As noted in Appendix G, the following funding sources may be used for ongoing maintenance and operations, as well as capital projects.

- *General Fund:* General fund dollars have traditionally been used for park maintenance and operations. However, the citywide budget cuts will take their toll on existing staffing and levels of maintenance.
- *Local Option Levy/Serial Levy:* As a property tax mechanism, operating levies can be imposed for five years to support general operations or fund a specific purpose. Levies typically support popular community programs and services that are in high demand to meet double-majority voting requirements. However, increased property taxes have not been well-supported in Gresham in the past, and a variety of services are now competing for tax dollars. Once passed, levies only guarantee monies for five years.

Un-renewed levies may leave a funding gap that is hard to fill.

- *Fees and Charges:* When the new Sports Park is brought online, the City should identify and implement a cost-recovery strategy for facility use to determine appropriate user and rental fees. Sponsorships, naming rights, signage, and other revenue-generating strategies should be pursued. Any programs offered at this site should include built-in facility maintenance fees to offset costs from usage. These strategies could help offset the high cost of maintaining this site. The City also should evaluate other fees and charges to determine how to increase revenue. Still, fees and charges do not typically generate nearly enough to operate the park system in a sustainable way.
- *Public/Private Partnerships:* Partnerships with businesses, non-profit organizations, homeowner associations, and volunteers can help ease maintenance costs. However, this is not a long-term or stable solution for addressing maintenance needs.
- *Taxes and Surcharges:* Many cities use tax mechanisms to help fund park and recreation projects and services. Most promising of stand-alone taxing options are park utility fees and tourism taxes. A hotel/motel tax is already used in Gresham to support the City's General Fund, but it is not dedicated to parks and recreation. These new taxes can provide significant maintenance funds, but both are unlikely to support needed programs and desired capital development.
- *Parks and Recreation District:* A park and recreation district is a special-purpose taxing district established to provide park services to people residing within the taxing district. Its services are limited by the amount of voter-approved funding that supports the district. Like a levy, these funds are based on property taxes, expressed in dollars per thousand dollars of assessed value. However, unlike a levy, the funding does not end in five years. For this reason, the formation of a special district or county service

district could offer a long-term source of stable funding for park operations, maintenance, and capital projects.

Funding Priorities

As noted previously, more funding is critical for the maintenance of the existing and proposed park system. However, to achieve the vision set forth in this Plan, additional funds also will be needed to support recreation programming, park acquisition, and facility development. Any type of proposed funding or financing package should address these needs for the long-term. While a short-term funding strategy may work to enhance the existing park system, it also takes for granted that the City can maintain current parks and facilities at their current or an improved level. This is not the case in Gresham. The City cannot contemplate opportunities for "system enhancement" until it addresses the need to sustain the current park system.

Preferred implementation strategies will address the existing crisis, plus be sustainable in the long term. Because future sources of available funding will determine what projects can move forward, the City will need to identify funding priorities to support future improvements in maintenance, park renovation, facility development, land acquisition, and programs.

PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA

All projects discussed within this Plan will assist in creating the park system envisioned by City residents. However, not all of these projects can be implemented in the next 20 years, given the City's limited funding resources. The following criteria were developed to assist in prioritizing projects as future funding becomes available. By applying these criteria, the Division can make decisions about which projects should move forward first in alignment with the community values and visions as set forth in the Plan.

- *Improves maintenance efficiency:* Projects that improve maintenance efficiency or that will reduce life-cycle costs should be given high priority.

- *Renovates existing parks and facilities:* Projects that include facility upgrades at existing sites and/or new facility development in underdeveloped parks to enhance recreation opportunities should be given a high priority.
- *Implements existing master plans.* Adopted site master plans for the development of undeveloped park sites should be given a high priority.
- *Increases trail connectivity:* A high priority for the park system is to provide convenient access to the network of parks and trails. Developing trails and acquiring corridors that tie to the regional trail system are considered high priority projects.
- *Addresses underserved populations:* The Community Needs Assessment identified unserved neighborhoods and areas where parks are at or beyond capacity in terms of the number of people these sites are expected to serve. Meeting needs in these areas should be a high priority.
- *Serving future growth areas:* Although largely undeveloped, future growth is anticipated in Springwater and Pleasant Valley. As these areas develop, the City should consider it a high priority to acquire and develop planned park land to meet future needs.
- *Promotes economic development and community livability:* Park and recreation projects that enhance Gresham's position as a regional center and create a positive environment for businesses, employees and residents should be prioritized.
- *Utilizes alternative funding or partnerships.* Projects that have potential to be funded through grants, donations, or partner contributions should receive higher priority than projects without other identified funding opportunities.
- *Strengthens the community.* Lastly, proposed projects should be prioritized based on their ability to strengthen community identity, foster interaction between citizens, and build true community. For example, projects that would serve a diverse cross-section of the community or

projects that support community events should be assigned a higher priority.

Projects that meet more than one of the eight criteria described above should be given preference.