

7 Parks and Recreation

7.1 Introduction

This section of the Comprehensive Plan is intended to ensure that people living and working in Burlington have convenient access to parks and ensure the City's most important open space areas are preserved. It shows where new parks and open space areas will be located, describes park improvements and upgrades that are planned over the next 20 years, and provides guidance on the management and operation of existing facilities.

Parks and open space areas provide essential functions including storm-water management, flood control, wildlife habitat, and transportation. Parks enhance the health of residents who live in densely populated areas by providing outdoor living space and opportunities for physical activity and socialization. Parks also serve an important economic role by attracting visitors, making the City an attractive place to work and do business, and enhancing property values.

The cost of maintaining and upgrading aging facilities, coupled with constrained revenue sources will make maintaining existing facilities and meeting the needs of future users challenging. Rather than focusing on the development of new facilities, this plan envisions improving existing programs and facilities to accommodate more users and concentrating development in areas close to existing parks. The City will also partner with other agencies and organizations to provide specialized services and ensure the benefits of existing investments are maximized.

The primary objectives of the Parks and Recreation Element can be summarized as follows:

- **Maximize the use of existing parks and facilities.** Future park and recreation demands imposed by new growth will be primarily met by upgrading and modifying existing parks to accommodate new users. Housing and job growth will be directed to existing built up areas with convenient access to existing parks and accommodated through infill and redevelopment.
- **Ensuring financial sustainability.** The park system will be managed and expanded in a way that considers both immediate and long term financial implications. Partnerships will be developed with other agencies and organizations, and investments that provide the broadest range of benefits will be prioritized.
- **Improving access.** In the future it will be easier to get to parks using trails, paths, and other similar improvements. Signs, maps, and other information showing the location of parks, paths, and trails will be widely available.

7.2 Current Conditions and Future Needs

7.2.1 Inventory

Burlington has 20 parks and recreational facilities encompassing approximately 173 acres. This includes 144 acres of developed park land and 29 undeveloped acres. The majority of the undeveloped land is managed for conservation, flood control, or storm-water management purposes. At 116 acres Skagit River Park is the largest park in the city and serves as a facility for regional and statewide events. In addition to these facilities, the City's three public schools contribute an additional 64 acres of open space, as well as athletic fields and playgrounds that are open to the public during non-school hours. Diking District 12 also owns a significant amount of open space, primarily along the Skagit River corridor. The Dike District's property includes trails and open space areas.

The City's parks are grouped into five classifications based on their size, intended service area, and features.

- **Regional Parks** – These parks draw users from a broad area outside of the City. They typically have unique facilities, are capable of hosting large events, and are 100 acres or larger. In addition to meeting the needs of local residents they are also intended to serve an important economic development function by attracting visitors.
- **Community Parks** – Community parks serve a city-wide area, provide a broad range of specialized facilities, are used to host important community events. Typically community parks are five acres or larger.
- **Neighborhood Parks** – These are small pedestrian oriented parks that serve the needs of individual neighborhoods. Neighborhood parks typically include minimal facilities, such as play equipment and picnic tables. Since these parks are intended to serve the immediate surrounding area they typically oriented to pedestrian and bicycle access and have limited parking facilities.
- **Linear Parks and Open Space** – This category includes trails, paths, and open space areas managed for conservation, flood control, or storm-water management purposes. These properties are generally reserved for passive recreation and environmental conservation purposes.
- **Special Use Facilities** – This category includes Parks Department buildings, support facilities, and properties with a unique, or specialized, function, such as the Burlington Cemetery.

Table 7.1 – Inventory of Parks and Recreation Facilities		
Name	Size	Comments
Regional Parks		
Skagit River Park	134 acres (with Dike District property)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosts regional sports tournaments • R/C race tracks • Pea-Patch Gardens
Skagit River Boat Launch	11 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paved boat launch .
Subtotal:	145 acres	
Community Parks		
Maiben Park	6.5 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball/tennis courts • Spray park • Playground equipment
Rotary Park	10 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sand volleyball courts • Baseball fields • Skate park
Subtotal:	16.5 acres	
Neighborhood Parks		
Alpha Park	4,795 sq. ft.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picnic tables • Annual holiday tree lighting
Country Aire Park	9,834 sq. ft.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground
Grafton Park	22,651 sq. ft.	
Jack Doyle Memorial Park	2.5 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picnic table
Jason Boerner Memorial Park	43,861 sq. ft.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground
subtotal:	4.36	
Linear Parks & Open Space Areas		
Lions Park	2.3 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barbeque grill • RV dump station
Highway 20 Trail	1.7 miles (trail)	
Tammy Wilson (Gages Slough) Trail	0.4 miles (trail)	
Walnut Pond	0.2 miles (trail)	
Burlington Hill	3.7 acres (open space)	
subtotal:	6 acres/2.3 miles	
Special Use Areas		
Maiben House	N/A – located in Maiben Park	
Park Shop	9.3 acres	
Parks and Recreation Building	1.38 acres	
Senior Center/Community Center	N/A – located in Parks Building	
Railroad Park/ Information Center	1.26 acres	
Cemetery	10.8 acres	
subtotal:	22.74 acres	
Total Park Area		
Total:	19.46 acres/2.3 miles	

7.2.2 Programs and Activities

In addition to physical park facilities the City also hosts community events and provides a variety of classes, camps, and programs, including youth programs and camps. Over the past six years the number of programs offered by the City has declined while the number of attendees or users has risen or remained constant.

7.2.3 Level of Service Standards

A Level of service (LOS) standard is way of describing a community’s minimum expectations for public services and facilities. For park and recreation facilities, LOS standards are typically expressed as a quantity in relation to population. Given the City’s large employment base and dense concentration of retail businesses, Burlington’s LOS standards for parks are expressed as a “residential equivalent” (RE). The demand associated with each additional person working in the city is roughly equivalent to half the demand created by each new resident (45.9 percent).

The City has established the following LOS standards using the RE factor:

- Parks: 0.0017 acres per resident equivalent
- Trails and multi-use paths: 0.0001 miles per resident equivalent

7.2.4 Future Needs

Burlington’s current population is 10,464 and approximately 9,896 people work in the City. Over the next 20 years the City’s population will grow by 3,808 people and 3,516 jobs will be added to the local economy. Based on the adopted level of service standards, this growth will create a need for 34.73 acres of developed park land and 2.04 miles of trails and multi-use paths. As shown below in table 7.2 the City currently has 24.42 acres of developed park land and 2.3 miles of trails. Based on the LOS standards discussed above, the City has more than enough trail mileage to meet current and future needs. However, the City has a current deficit of 1.09 acres of developed park land and an additional 10.31 acres will be needed to meet future needs.

Table 7.2 - Future Needs and Level of Service Requirements				
	2016 Inventory	2016 LOS Requirement	2036 LOS Requirement	Difference (2016/2036)
Developed Parks	24.42 acres	25.51 acres	34.73 acres	-1.09 / -10.31 acres
Trails	2.3 miles	1.5 miles	2.04 miles	+0.8 / +0.26 miles

7.3 Parks and Recreation Goals and Policies

The following goals and policies are intended to ensure the City's park system, open space areas and recreation program needs are met. These goals and policies are based on, and consistent with, the goals and policies identified in the City's Parks and Recreation Plan. The bold headings below identify the City's goals related to parks and recreation. Each goal is followed by a list of policies. The goals describe *what* the City is trying to achieve, while the policies describe *how* the goals will be achieved.

7.3.1 Capacity: Over the next 20 years the City is expected to add 3,808 residents and 3,516 jobs. Most, if not all, of this growth will be accommodated within the City's existing municipal boundaries. At the same time, the percentage of attached housing units, such as townhomes, apartments, and condominiums, is expected to increase from 48 percent to 60 percent. This growth is expected to increase the demand for parks and recreation programs. This demand will be accommodated efficiently and cost effectively by increasing the accessibility and capacity of existing parks, and to a lesser extent, by developing new facilities.

1. Increase the number of people living and working near parks by allowing higher residential and employment densities in areas within walking distances of parks, trails, and open space areas.
2. Enlarge the effective service area and allow more people to access the City's existing parks by constructing trails, paths, bicycle lanes, and pedestrian improvements that connect parks to residential and commercial areas.
3. New park capacity should be added first in underserved areas that are not within walking distance of an existing park.
4. Urban growth area expansions and annexations shall not be approved unless a financially feasible plan is developed to maintain existing levels of service and provide new park facilities in the expansion area without compromising the City's ability to serve existing areas.
5. Major public projects shall incorporate improvements that address the City's park, open space, and active transportation needs.

7.3.2 Access and Inclusion: Large areas of the City have convenient access to parks and recreation facilities, but significant gaps remain. Also, many of the City's parks cannot be easily accessed by pedestrians or bicyclists. Access to parks will be particularly important as additional growth occurs in the commercial core where little public open space exists. Over the next twenty years the City will increase the percentage of the City's land area and population base that can access a park within a one-quarter mile walking distance.

1. Priority should be given to constructing non-motorized transportation facilities including, trails, paths, bicycle lanes, crosswalks, and sidewalks that provide access to public facilities, major attractions, and link parks and open space areas together.
2. New developments adjacent to, or near, existing parks should be provide pedestrian access to the park.
3. Parks and recreation facilities should be designed, operated, and maintained to provide access and opportunity for all members of the community regardless of age or disability. Take steps to reduce social, language, or financial barriers that may limit accessibility.
4. Develop and implement a consistent signage program for parks, linear open space areas, and paths.

7.3.3 Conservation and Environmental Management: While much of the City has been extensively developed, a number of large habitat blocks and important ecological features remain, including Gages Slough, Burlington Hill, and the Skagit River Corridor. In many cases preserving land in these area provides multiple overlapping public benefits including opportunities for walking and wildlife viewing, flood control, storm-water management, and the preservation of natural hydrologic processes. Over the next 20 years the City will incrementally expand the amount of publicly owned or controlled land in the special management areas.

1. Prioritize the acquisition of land and easement rights in the Gages Slough special management area that achieve multiple overlapping public benefits including access, wetland restoration, storm-water management, and flood control.
2. Parks shall be designed and managed to enhance and protect critical areas.
3. Parks and open space areas that contain wetlands or wetland buffers shall not be sold or otherwise made available for private development.
4. Impacts to wetland and wetland buffers on publicly owned parks or open space areas shall be offset on a one for one basis by acquiring additional land to protect wetlands and wetland buffers.

7.3.5 Maintenance: Park maintenance and repairs will be prioritized over new developments.

1. Financial plans and projections shall be produced when considering the addition of new parks and trails. These plans and projections must clearly identify short term costs, such as acquisition and development activities, and long term expenses, such maintenance and operations. Parks and trails will only be added or developed when sufficient resources are available to cover the short and long term expenses.

2. Prioritize maintenance activities that reduce the need for costly repairs.
3. Maintain parks and open space areas using practices that conserve water and energy, utilize integrated pest management, and protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and wetlands.

7.3.6 Health and Physical Activity: Many health benefits are associated with physical activity and access to open space. The number of residents who engage in regular physical activity will be increased. The percentage of the City's population that can easily walk or ride to a nearby park will also be increased.

1. Special consideration shall be given to permitting more intensive residential development near parks and recreation facilities.
2. Create a system of multi-use paths that connect park and open space areas together and permit easier access to parks.
3. Support programs that promote health and wellness and allow residents of all ages and abilities to engage in regular physical activity.
4. Promote the benefits of an active lifestyle through partnerships with other public agencies such as the Burlington Edison School District and the Skagit County Public Health Department.

7.3.7 Financial Sustainability: The City's parks and open space areas represent major investments. While adding new facilities creates additional benefits, new facilities also create ongoing maintenance and operations expenses. In evaluating potential park improvements the City will prioritize investments that serve the largest number of people at the lowest cost.

1. When possible, transportation and park money should be pooled to facilitate the construction of trails, multi-use paths, and pedestrian improvements that provide overlapping transportation and recreation benefits.
2. Actively seek partnerships with other agencies and organizations to improve efficiency, minimize redundant efforts, and provide access to specialized programs and facilities.
3. Evaluate potential funding sources for park and recreation services that would provide a stable and dedicated revenue stream.
4. Establish park impact fee tiers, or zones, that reflect the high per user cost of establishing new parks in outlying areas and the unincorporated UGA, and the relative efficiency of

accommodating more users at existing parks and constructing improvements in areas with a dense concentration of housing and businesses.

5. The following order of priorities should generally be used to guide the acquisition and development of new parks, trails, and open space areas:
 - a. Multi-use paths, trails, and open space linkages between existing parks, public services and major attractions;
 - b. Open space land that provides multiple overlapping public benefits including storm-water management, flood control, wetland protection, and wildlife habitat;
 - c. New parks and recreation facilities within the City's existing municipal boundaries that serve underserved areas;
 - d. New parks and recreation facilities needed to serve annexations and urban growth area expansions, but only when associated with a long term financial plan showing how the associated costs will be addressed.

7.4 Funding