

PARKS & OPEN SPACE SYSTEM PLAN



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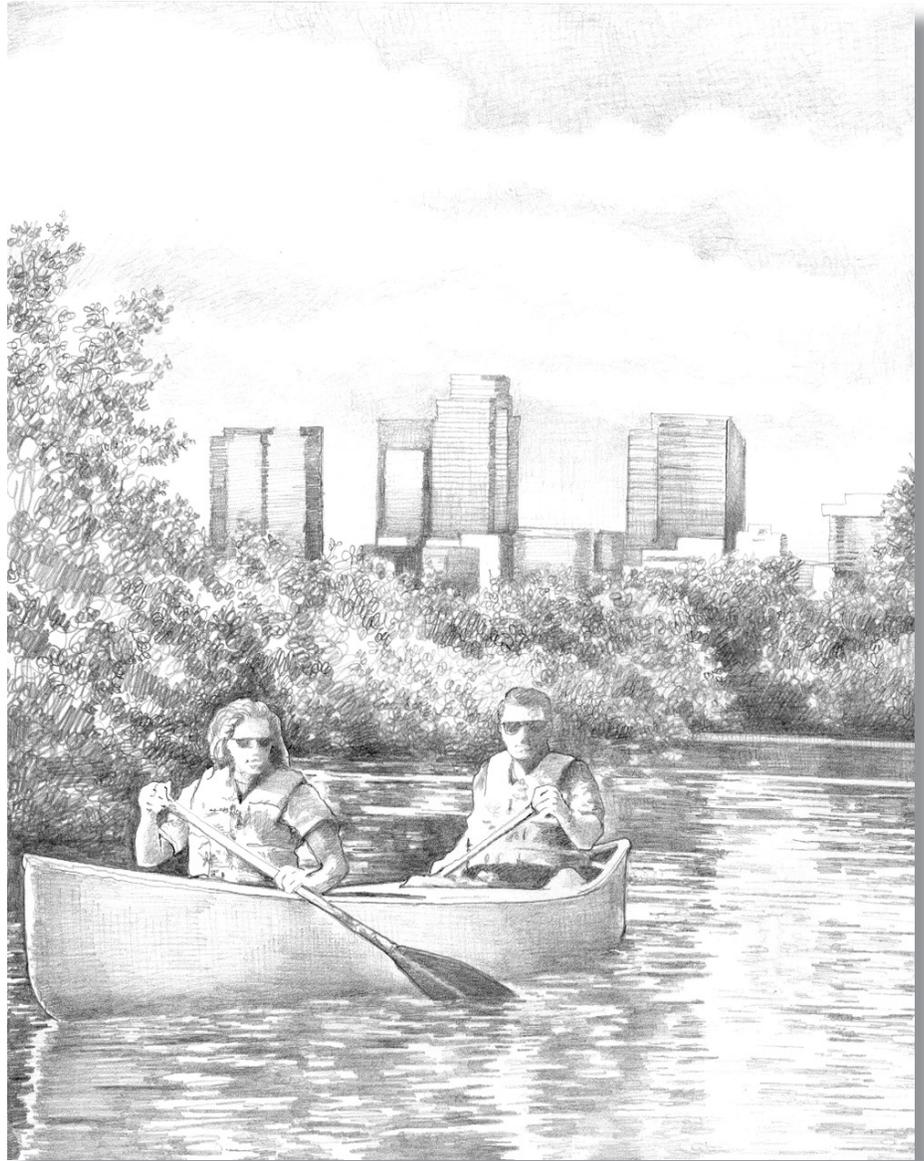
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Chapter 1: **PERSPECTIVE**



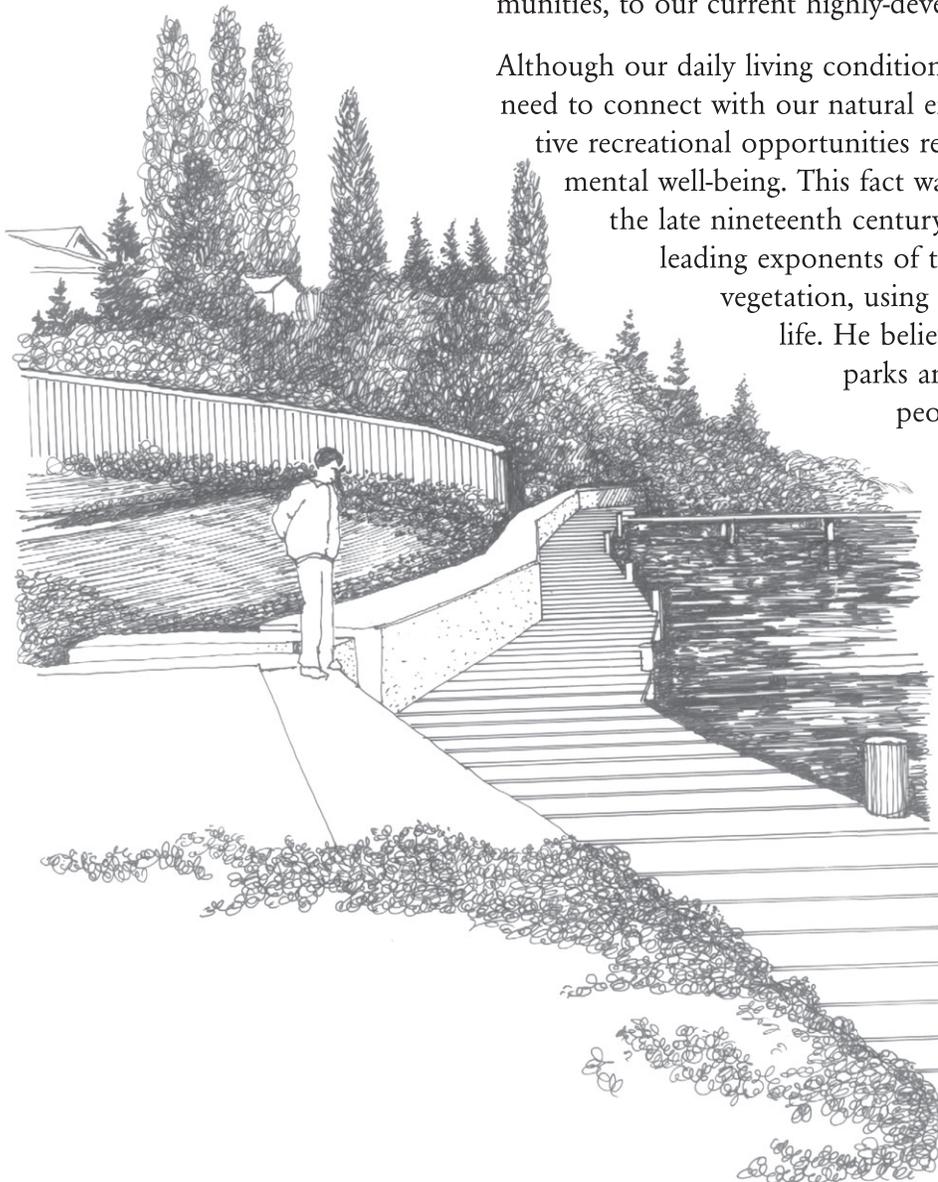


Chapter 1: Perspective

CREATING OUR VISION

People living in the Pacific Northwest are blessed with an extraordinarily beautiful environment that provides an abundance of natural amenities. The region's forests, rivers, streams, and freshwater lakes, Puget Sound, expansive floodplains and wetlands, and the Cascade and Olympic Mountains provide an environment unparalleled in beauty and recreational potential. In the past 150 years, our region has transitioned from unspoiled wilderness, to small resource-based and agricultural communities, to our current highly-developed urban environments.

Although our daily living conditions have changed significantly, our need to connect with our natural environment through passive and active recreational opportunities remains important to our physical and mental well-being. This fact was recognized by urban planners in the late nineteenth century. Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the leading exponents of this vision, proposed a new role for vegetation, using its ability to relieve the stress of city life. He believed that the restorative quality of parks and tree-lined boulevards would bring people together in a healing environment.



The City of Bellevue has evolved from an area historically supported by agricultural and timber resources to a community of 117,000 people in 2002. What makes the City unique is the preservation of large natural areas, such as the wetlands in the Lake Hills Greenbelt and in Mercer Slough. As our City urbanized, important natural resources were preserved. The phrase "City in a Park" celebrates the vision that drives Bellevue's commitment to its parks and open space system.

The Parks & Community Services Department's mission states:

“A healthy community through an integrated system of exceptional parks, open space, recreation, cultural and human services.”

In developing our parks and open space system, considerable time and emphasis has been placed on developing a comprehensive vision and acquiring priority sites. Land acquisition requires strong vision and leadership. Our vision of a “City in a Park” creates the framework that shapes the legacy for future generations as key sites are acquired and developed.

The Parks Department's goals relating to parks, open space and recreation include:

- “Plan, acquire, design and develop a coordinated park system which satisfies the community's open space and recreation needs, and anticipates future park demands as the community grows and matures.”
- “Provide clean, safe, attractive and functional parks, open space, and recreation while protecting the City's capital investments through ongoing maintenance and systematic renovation.”
- “Through partnerships and collaborations, provide Bellevue citizens with opportunities for recreation, socialization, skill development and education in order to enhance physical and mental health.”

FULFILLING OUR VISION

The pace and nature of Bellevue's park development is generally governed by the *Parks & Open Space System Plan* priorities, constituent demand, political direction, and funding constraints. The City's development philosophy has remained constant over the years:

- Respond to well-articulated constituent demand.
- Meet the recreational needs of citizens not affiliated with an organized constituency.
- Provide high-quality improvements.
- Pursue incremental development based on geographic and facility needs.
- Preserve open space for wildlife habitat as well as visual aesthetics.
- Be cognizant of long-term maintenance and operating impacts.

During the City's early years, development focused on small neighborhood and waterfront park sites that met the needs of a suburban, homogeneous bedroom community. As the City's land base and population grew, a more diverse park system began to evolve that included a farm park, golf course, sports park, and tennis center. Our parks and open space system now includes a comprehensive array of facilities reflect-



ing a rapidly changing and growing community. This system includes a recreation center for special populations, a Downtown Park, the Lake-to-Lake Trail, historical buildings, the Bellevue Botanical Garden, waterfront parks, and the regionally significant Mercer Slough Nature Park.

The City did not attempt to duplicate the active recreation space already provided by the Bellevue School District. The School District purchased and developed its impressive inventory of sites prior to acquisition of much of the City's park acreage. Because the School District focused on properties capable of providing active recreation opportunities, such as sportsfields, the City concentrated most of its acquisition efforts on natural systems, community and neighborhood parks, and waterfront parks. The Parks Department now works cooperatively with the School District in renovating and maintaining some of the School District's sportsfields. In exchange, the Parks Department schedules these fields for community use when the fields are not being used for school program activities.

FUTURE DIRECTION

As the City has matured, our philosophical approach to resource expenditure has shifted, with capital resources more evenly distributed between acquisition, new development, and renovation. This shift typically occurs as a city's open space inventory diminishes, major acquisition goals are achieved, and major sites are developed. The Parks Department's focus has shifted towards more targeted acquisitions. These new acquisitions will expand key existing parks and facilities and provide additional sites to meet new recreational needs and trends in the community. Considerably more attention is focused on programming, managing, and operating an increasingly complex and diverse park system.

Although a greater percentage of resources is being devoted to park development, renovation and maintenance, our park system must continue to grow and evolve as opportunities arise and resources are available. To fulfill the "City in a Park" vision, additional acquisitions will:

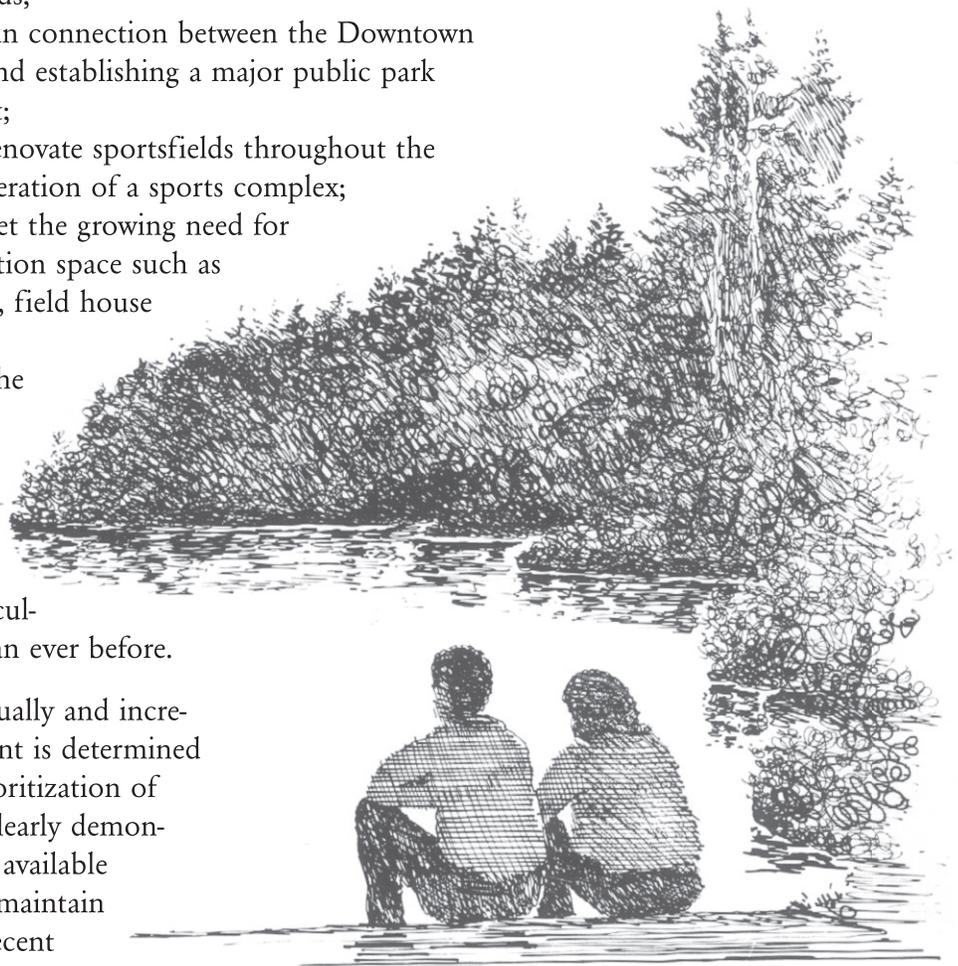
- Complete the City's visionary greenway system and protect critical open space areas;
- Create a greater public presence along the City's shoreline;
- Establish a greater park presence in Downtown;
- Augment major community parks; and
- Provide more mini-parks and neighborhood parks within residential neighborhoods not well served by these facilities.

Steady, consistent progress towards completing our extraordinary park system is essential. While acquisition decisions are strongly influenced

by opportunity and the compelling need to preserve critical land, development decisions are more deliberative and driven by demand and financial capacity. This Park Plan update suggests that priority attention be given to:

- Completing approved Master Plans for major community parks, such as Mercer Slough, Crossroads, Wilburton, Downtown Park, Enatai, and the newly acquired Airfield site;
- Constructing the South Bellevue Community Center to meet the need for indoor recreation space south of I-90;
- Continuing to partner with the Bellevue School District in renovating and maintaining indoor and outdoor recreation space at selected school sites;
- Completing trail connections along the Lake-to-Lake Trail system and throughout the City;
- Acquiring and developing new neighborhood and mini-parks in underserved areas throughout the City;
- Refurbishing major community and waterfront parks, such as Kelsey Creek and Chism Beach, in response to deteriorating conditions and changing constituent needs;
- Establishing a major pedestrian connection between the Downtown Park and Meydenbauer Bay and establishing a major public park presence along this waterfront;
- Continuing to develop and renovate sportsfields throughout the community, including consideration of a sports complex;
- Exploring partnerships to meet the growing need for special purpose indoor recreation space such as a Teen Center, aquatic facility, field house and ice rink;
- Promoting regionalism, and the reality that many contemporary park and recreational challenges must be solved regionally;
- Responding to the park and recreational needs of a more culturally diverse community than ever before.

This work will be completed gradually and incrementally. The speed of achievement is determined by a complex set of variables: prioritization of projects by the elected officials; clearly demonstrated need for the facilities; and available funding to develop, operate, and maintain these facilities. Given the City's recent





and projected funding constraints, we presume that park development will occur in a very deliberate and increasingly innovative fashion.

Increased attention will be given to creating partnerships with an array of private sector, non-profit, and public organizations. Sharing of costs, fund-raising, responsibility and authority is becoming an increasingly common model. Agreements with the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society (Wilburton), the Eastside Heritage Center (Winters House and Paxton House), the Bellevue Boys and Girls Clubs (Ground Zero Teen Center and the South Bellevue Community Center), the Bellevue School District (sportsfields and Tyee Gym), the Bellevue Baseball/Softball Athletic Association (adult sports management), and the emerging partnership with the Pacific Science Center (Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center) indicate the broad range of possibilities in establishing mutually beneficial partnerships. These partnerships can provide a broader variety of community recreation and programming services at a lower cost to each of the partners and to the community.

Regionalism will be expressed in a variety of ways. One current initiative is the “E-Gov Alliance,” a collaborative effort of nine Eastside cities, including Bellevue, to identify ways to partner, via the internet, on similar business practices to improve efficiency and customer convenience. The initial thrust will create a program registration system that will allow customers in all nine cities to access and register for recreational programs from the nine partner cities. Facility rentals and ballfield scheduling are additional web-based services being considered, and many others will follow.

Aggressive, creative management strategies will be imperative in order to implement the remaining park development program. Partnerships, interlocal agreements, enterprise management, marketing, grants, donations, and levy lid lifts will need to augment traditional funding and management approaches, particularly as they relate to long-term maintenance and operation.

A basic element of human nature is our need to explore and expand our mental and physical limits through new experiences. Many new experiences can be provided by expanding our recreational opportunities. The City must be responsive to these emerging recreational needs and trends. In addition, demographic changes which have occurred in the past 10 years, and are projected to continue, have resulted in a significant population increase and a population base which is significantly older and more culturally diverse.

A strong park and recreation system is an irreplaceable asset for the “emerging city.” The City’s quality of life is strongly influenced by the

degree to which greenways, wetlands, streams and shorelines, urban forests, riparian corridors, and park sites are preserved and enhanced. A well-conceived, comprehensive system helps stabilize neighborhoods, provides visual relief and respite from urban pressures, offers extensive recreation opportunities, and contributes to the health and environmental quality of the community.

The City's park and recreation facilities and attendant programs help combat the crucial problems faced by our citizens, such as crime, substance abuse, discrimination, alienation, and despair. The extensive prevention and intervention programs conducted by the City on behalf of the children, elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged would not be possible without existing and proposed facilities.

Because the park system touches virtually everyone's life in a real and meaningful way, we are pleased to present a *Parks & Open Space System Plan* that addresses fundamental park needs progressively and realistically. This *Parks & Open Space System Plan* ensures the vision of a "City in a Park" continues to be realized.

Bellevue Parks & Open Space 2003

