



3. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT





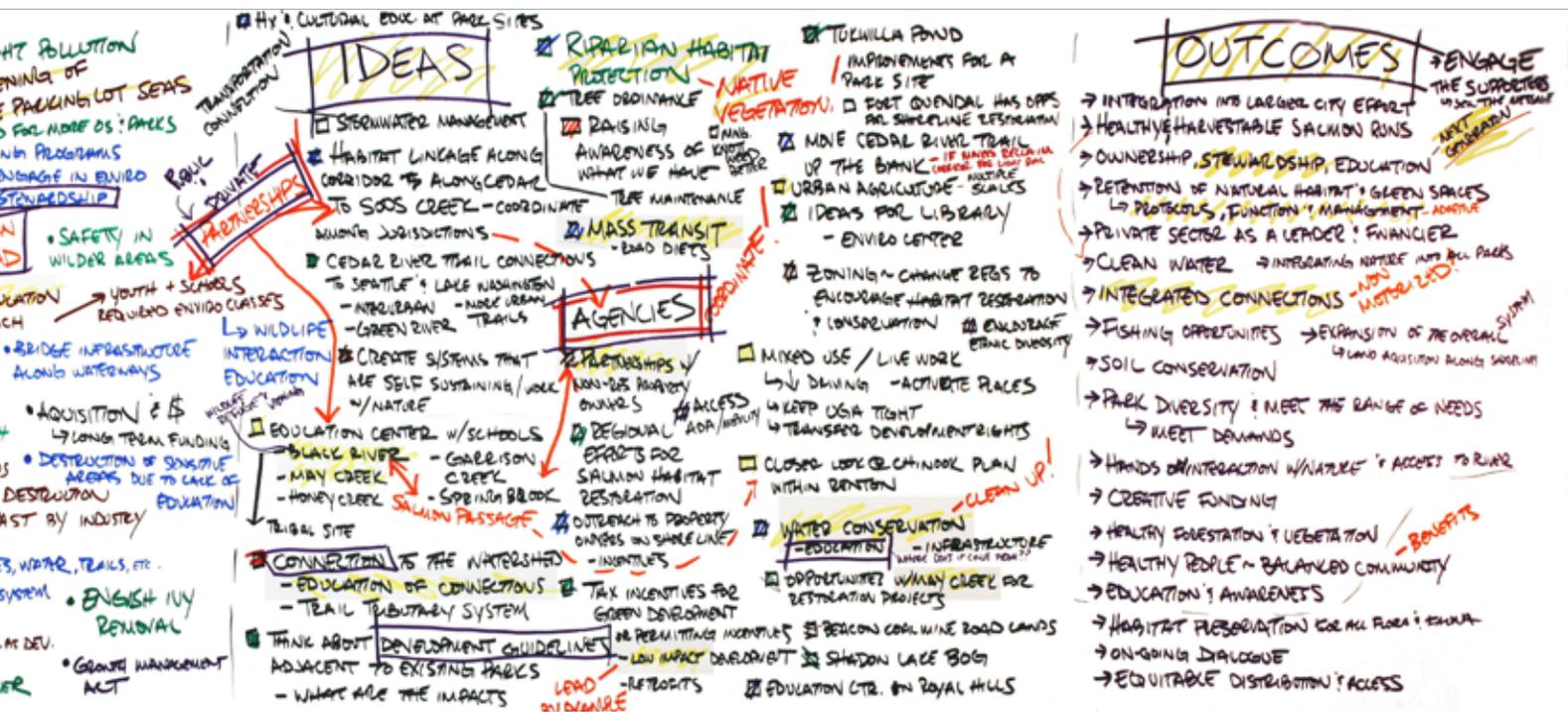
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Connecting our community to the environment and promoting healthy lifestyles is critical to Renton’s vision for parks, recreation and natural resources. Similarly, linking our community to our park resources, and understanding our community’s recreation needs, has been critical to this planning process. The Parks, Recreation and Natural Areas Plan is grounded in an extensive public involvement effort. This chapter summarizes the themes that emerged from community input, which in turn helped shape the vision, goals and recommendations for this plan.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

To better understand the priorities and needs of the entire community, many types of community outreach activities were planned. Activities ranging from a quantitative, statistically valid survey to friendly community workshops were conducted in an effort to engage as many people as possible in the planning process; more than 1,500 people participated. While some forums engaged more participants than others, each planning activity was important in capturing feedback from community members who otherwise may not have been represented. This “layering” of activities ensured that a variety of interests and priorities would be represented in this plan.

Feedback obtained through the community outreach events was used to interpret the demand for parks, facilities and programs. This section summarizes the public involvement activities conducted for the Parks, Recreation and Natural Areas Plan.



- Steering Committee:** The 16 member Steering Committee met four times during the planning process (October 2010, February 2011, May 2011 and July 2011) to advise and provide direction. The committee consisted of a demographically diverse group, representing a range of interests, ages and backgrounds.
- Focus Groups:** Three Focus Group meetings (Environmental, Organized Outdoor Active Recreation and Recreation Service Providers) provided a more in-depth discussion of specific topics important to Renton. Held in late October and early November 2010, the meetings provided participants with a forum to discuss opportunities and perceived needs for Renton, as well as to provide feedback on specific interest areas. The Environmental Focus Group meeting was held at the Renton Community Center and consisted of 28 participants and City staff. The Organized Outdoor Active Recreation Focus Group meeting was held at the Highlands Neighborhood Center and consisted of 16 participants plus City staff. The Recreation Service Providers Focus Group meeting was held at the Renton Community Center and consisted of 19 participants and City staff.
- Stakeholder Interviews:** The project team interviewed stakeholders about their perception of parks, recreation and natural areas issues as well as key challenges facing the City. The interviews served to identify topics and ideas that should be explored in other public input opportunities and integrated into the planning analysis. These stakeholders were drawn from a

Activity	Participants
Steering Committee	16
Focus Groups.....	63
Stakeholder Interviews	9
Community Questionnaire	661
Community Interactive Workshops 1 & 2 (signed in).....	60
Community Visioning Workshop (signed in)....	87
Community Survey	509
Interactive Map	66
Community Interactive Workshops 3 & 4 (signed in).....	64
Total.....	1,535



list of interested parties based on their understanding of a particular issue or representation of a major interest. The planning team conducted the interviews during the month of October (2010) with nine stakeholders during five interviews. Individuals that participated in the interviews represented:

- RUFF – Renton Unleashed Furry Friends
- Renton School District
- Herons Forever
- Renton Skatepark Advocate
- The Boeing Company
- *Community Questionnaire:* The project team and the City of Renton administered an online and paper questionnaire to allow all interested participants an opportunity to provide feedback on existing park facilities, desired activities, future park improvements, recreation facilities, programs, natural areas and services. The questionnaire was available from the last week of October 2010 through the first week of December 2010, and was advertised in City publications and through multiple electronic mail lists. Similar questions were available in paper format in three languages (English, Spanish and Vietnamese), with copies provided at several community facilities and available from the project website. A total of 661 people completed the questionnaire.
- *Community Interactive Workshops 1 & 2:* Two Interactive Community Workshops were held on October 27 and November 4, 2010, to collect information from the public related to community needs and issues, publicize the community questionnaire and market the year-long

planning process. The workshops were both informative and interactive, allowing participants to hear about the project and provide their input on the plan. The workshops were held at two geographic locations: Cascade Elementary School and the Renton Community Center.

- *Community Visioning Workshop:* Over 100 participants attended a Community Visioning Workshop (87 signed in) held at the Renton Community Center on March 29, 2011. The workshop consisted of the Visual Preference Survey, which measured public opinion on images related to the park system, and a Breakout Group Exercise with discussions on the following topics: Fitness and Health, Building Community, Natural Resources and the Environment, Neighborhood Identity and Youth.
- *Community Survey:* A random-sample telephone survey was conducted during April and May 2011, using both land lines and cell phones to validate some of the emerging themes from the public involvement process with a representative sample of Renton residents. Interviewers were prepared to complete the survey in three languages: English, Spanish and Vietnamese (the largest language groups in the Renton School District). A total of 509 interviews were completed with 375 of the respondents located within City boundaries. The error for a sample size of this size ranges from + 2.2% to + 5.0% at the 95% confidence level.
- *Community Interactive Workshops 3 & 4:* Two more interactive workshops were held late in the planning process to update the general public on the planning analysis results, collect feedback on the decision making tools, review and comment on the draft prioritized project list and review and comment on the draft concept plans.





These two meetings were held June 28th and 29th at Cascade Elementary and the Renton Community Center.

- *Additional Outreach:* City staff extended the reach of this process by attending meetings with the Community Liaisons and the Refugee Forum, and targeting communications to a broad range of internal and external stakeholders. A full listing of the outreach targets and contacts is provided in Appendix D.
- *Project Website:* Throughout the process, the City’s website has served as a one-stop online portal for information related to the planning process, updating and educating the community about the Plan. The website includes a library of all planning documents, a calendar of events and opportunities to provide feedback and comments.
- *Interactive Mapping Tool:* The project website also included an interactive map that allowed the public to view and comment on parks, recreation and natural resource opportunities in Renton.
- *Comment Cards:* The public had the opportunity to comment on the draft plan through an online comment card, as well as hard copy planning documents and comment cards located at both King County libraries located in Renton and at Renton City Hall.



CITY MEETINGS AND COORDINATION

In addition to the activities noted above, the planning process has also drawn guidance from a broader group of City staff and commissions.

- *Interdepartmental Team Meetings:* The Interdepartmental Team meetings promoted a high degree of coordination among City departments, gathering feedback and identifying key issues facing the city. The eighteen member team met five times during the planning process, to discuss key documents and concepts, such as the Community Needs Assessment.
- *Commission Meetings:* In addition to two separate meetings each, two joint meetings of the Parks Commission and Planning Commission were held in February and June 2011 to update commissioners on key findings of the planning process. These meetings also provided commissioners the opportunity to discuss and comment on key findings.
- *Committee of the Whole (COW) Briefings:* In addition to the Plan kick-off briefing, the Committee of the Whole met three times during the planning process to be briefed on the project's status, public involvement findings, the Community Needs Assessment report and the Prioritized Project List and Capital and Operations Costs. Meetings were held on March 28, June 20 and August 1, 2011 at City Hall, providing committee members the opportunity to discuss the project direction and provide comments related to parks and recreation needs and issues.
- *Review and Adoption Meetings:* Each of the ongoing review groups, the Project Steering Committee, the Interdepartmental Team, the Parks and Planning Commissions and the City Council had an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the draft plan in advance of a recommendation to adopt the document.



“It is amazingly wonderful to be able to see beaver, otters, eagles, osprey, mink, raccoons and more within a mile of my house. The parks are a big part of why I love Renton and what most surprises visitors.”

- Community Questionnaire Respondent



KEY THEMES

Comments and feedback helped identify seven key themes: sustainability, new parks and facilities, connectivity, partnerships, community identity, healthy community programming and resource protection/conservation.

SUSTAINABILITY

In various community workshops, participants placed an emphasis on the long-term needs of the parks, recreation and natural areas system. Whether parks are natural or developed, an important part of protecting these places is reinvesting in existing facilities to pass along a high quality park system to a new generation of park users. Services must also be sustainable and cost recovery and affordability both need to be considered in recreation programming and services. Decision-making should consider the long-term impacts over short-term needs when establishing priorities for parks and recreation services. The City will need to consider a variety of funding opportunities as well as the use of volunteers and partners to most effectively sustain natural and built assets now and in the future.

Of Community Survey respondents, 91% indicated that the most important improvement for Renton’s park system is improving existing facilities. This desire to take care of existing City assets was also noted in the Community Questionnaire, where respondents indicated that the repair and maintenance of existing parks and facilities is a priority. In several activities, residents noted that they prefer to improve the sports fields that are now distributed across the City before building new ones. In addition, the maintenance and management of park resources could be strategic and involve other partners.

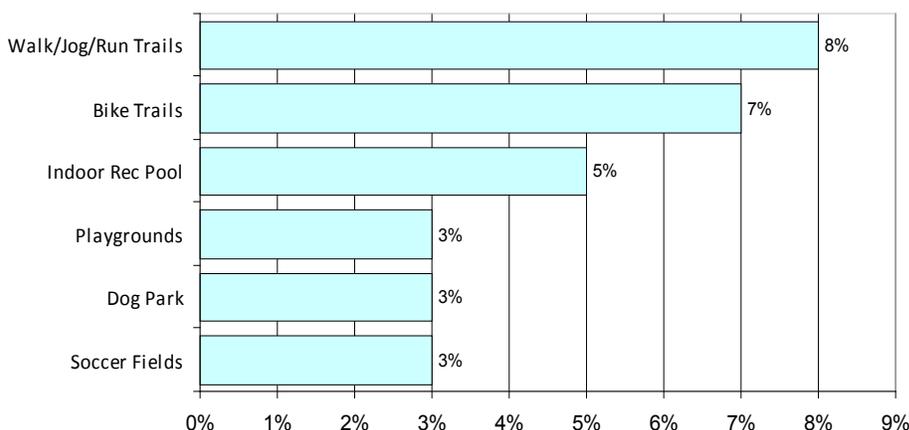


Figure 3-1: Most desired recreation facilities* in Renton (Survey, 2011)

*Of the 74% of the residents who responded to this question. Priorities below 3% make up the 100% total.

NEW PARKS AND FACILITIES

A variety of new parks and recreation facilities are desired by residents, as noted in nearly all of the meetings and public involvement venues. Many community members noted a demand for new parks and identified gaps in park land coverage. Land acquisition for new parks and natural areas is highly supported by many members of the community. Participants also indicated areas where park and recreation development could focus, such as parks in the Cedar River Corridor and natural area land and trails around May Creek. The shortfall of developed parks in south Renton (Benson and Talbot planning areas) was identified as an obvious gap in services. In general, the community wants to ensure that the City is able to provide opportunities where needs exist based on demographics and planned growth, so that parks and recreation facilities are distributed equitably across neighborhoods and throughout the city.

According to public involvement comments, new recreation facilities are also desired. Specific ideas include a sports complex (for soccer, baseball, cricket and rugby fields), water access facilities, a working farm, art center, a larger skatepark, more dog parks and community gardens. Facilities to support children's play are a priority, including traditional sports facilities and playground equipment, in addition to nature access and nature play facilities. In part because of the closure of existing recreation buildings, many residents felt that indoor programming space is also needed.



CONNECTIVITY

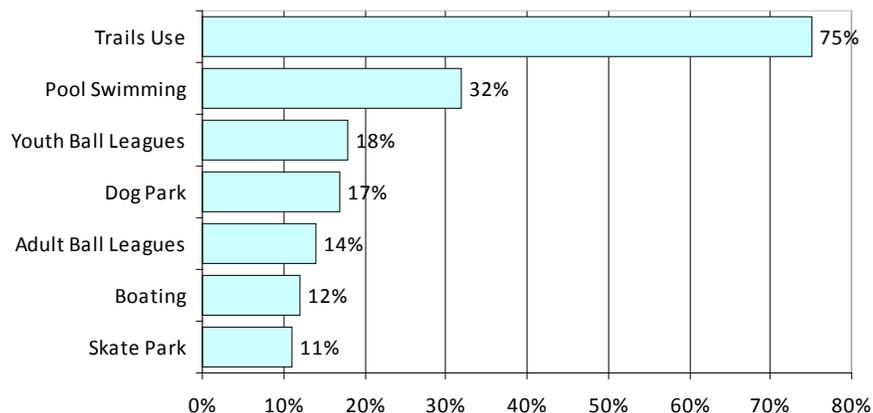
Desires for trail-related recreation opportunities and an enhanced trail system were noted in every public involvement activity. Most residents in the City support the creation of an interconnected trails system, linking parks to other key destinations. Not surprisingly, trails are the most frequently used type of recreation facility in the City. Feedback as well as recreation trends show that trail use appeals to a variety of ages and user groups. Public comments indicated that access and connections to facilities city-wide by a variety of means other than the automobile (transit, trail, bicycle and foot) is in high demand. The popularity of trails and trail related activities matches the findings of the 2008 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).

Public involvement findings also included many specific comments about ways to enhance trail connectivity and use in Renton. For example, Boeing is interested in encouraging trail use to get to and from work, recreate during the day, and move around the work site. Respondents identified gaps in trail networks and the need to complete planned trail projects such as the Sam Chastain Trail. Development of new trail corridors such as the Lake to Sound Trail, the trail extending from Lake Washington to Cougar Mountain along May Creek and the paved/boardwalk trail along Soos Creek are also a priority.

At the statewide level, walking and hiking, nature based activities, team and individual sports, picnicking and indoor facility activities are the most popular activities.

- Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (Washington State Recreation Conservation Office, 2008)

Figure 3-2: Popular recreation activities in Renton* (Survey, 2011)



*Percent of Renton's population participating in these seven activities over the past year. Note that youth ball league participation is close to the total percentage of Renton's population under 18 (24%).

PARTNERSHIPS

The need to establish and coordinate partnerships with a variety of groups was noted throughout the public involvement process. There were many general comments about the need to continue or expand partnerships for programming or facility use with service groups, medical centers, hospitals, environmental groups, ecumenical organizations, and educational institutions such as local school districts and nearby universities and technical schools. Some participants noted that the City could coordinate with multiple partners on regional projects, such as salmon habitat restoration. In addition, stakeholders recognized that volunteers and active community members, with more guidance from the City, represent a considerable potential to provide enhanced programs and events.

Public involvement feedback also revealed several opportunities for partnerships. For example, the partnership and matching funds model that was utilized to develop the dog park is replicable at other locations. Participants suggested that the City might want to consider enhancing the existing Renton School District partnership and centralize scheduling of recreation facilities.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Renton residents are proud of their City and feel that the park system can be used to strengthen neighborhood identity, economic vitality, and the City as a regional attraction. The majority of respondents believe that parks, recreation programs, facilities and natural areas strongly contribute to Renton's quality of life. For example, Gene Coulon Memorial Beach Park and the Cedar River complex of parks and trails are highly valued by residents, and many public involvement participants would like to have greater access to natural areas, the river and Lake Washington. Results of the Visual Preference Survey revealed





[Parks in the Portland metro region are] responsible for the avoided weight gain of 17 million pounds per year among Metro region residents. In healthcare dollars, this is the equivalent of \$155 million in averted healthcare costs every year

- Physical Activity and the Intertwine (Metro 2011)

a strong connection between residents and outdoor activities. The most popular images and elements related to water access, trails and young children playing in the natural environment. This environmental connection extends beyond a desire for outdoor recreation to the stewardship of natural resources, including salmon habitat, the tree canopy and natural areas.

Participants noted that interpretive signage should be provided in all of Renton’s parks to describe the City’s unique history and natural environment. Trail connections, temporary art exhibits, and community gardens would create spaces for residents and visitors to gather, recreate and learn about Renton. City development of unique regional facilities, such as a salmon-focused research and education facility, could increase the number of visitors to the City.

HEALTHY, COMMUNITY-ORIENTED PROGRAMMING

The fitness and health benefits of parks, facilities and natural areas were ranked as top priorities among respondents, in line with national trends favoring healthy activities for all ages. Concerns over the lack of physical activity as a public health issue prompted many comments about expanding opportunities for physical exercise for all ages. For example, participants noted that improving the quality or increasing the quantity of sports facilities is one way to make these facilities more accessible and increase activity among residents. Sports could also be programmed differently for games and practices to stretch the playable space for all ages, including youth and adults. This desire also closely matches the top activities identified in the Washington SCORP. Other types of facilities, including swimming pools, community gardens and indoor programmable space, were noted as valuable assets for fitness and health.

In addition to programs and facilities that support activity and health, many public involvement comments reflected a need for recreation opportunities that build community and/or reflect the needs of the entire community. Popular activities in Renton included arts/cultural programming and community-wide special events. Respondents also noted that the City should periodically evaluate its recreation programming to ensure that City services match changes in the community’s demographics and preferred recreation activities.



RESOURCE PROTECTION & CONSERVATION

A strong interest in the protection and conservation of natural areas or natural resources was noted in many of the public involvement activities and meetings. There is a strong desire to protect, conserve and restore our natural environment as an extension of our own health and well-being. According to public feedback, natural area access is highly valued for outdoor recreation and for the opportunities it creates to instill a stewardship ethic and sense of ownership among residents. Improving access to natural areas through improved trails and trail head facilities is important, both for recreation and facilitation of volunteer maintenance activities. Stakeholders expressed interest in protecting and restoring the Black River Riparian Forest for bird and wildlife habitat as well as for year-round viewing and education. Salmon recovery and environmental education are also important projects to carry forward as components of the City’s identity.



Critical challenges for resource protection include identifying and obtaining funding for acquisition and restoration, removing invasive species, supporting salmon habitat, sustaining the tree canopy, addressing light pollution, ensuring safety within remote places, providing ongoing monitoring and maintenance. According



to respondents, the City’s natural areas should be improved through increased habitat connectivity and the provision of interpretive signage, demonstration gardens utilizing native plantings to educate the public about these lands. The City should also build partnerships with private entities to leverage funding for the protection and acquisition of these important resources.