



3. CLASSIFICATIONS & STANDARDS

The Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation Department owns and operates six different types of parks: neighborhood parks, community parks, regional parks, natural areas and open space, trails and greenways, and special use areas. For neighborhood, community, and regional parks, the Department has adopted acquisition and development standards, which were derived through an evaluation of local needs and conditions. For other park types, need is based on the characteristics of the physical resource, rather than on a population-based standard. This chapter includes a discussion of proposed acquisition and development standards for all park types in the VCPRD system.

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

Six park classifications were used to categorize park and recreation facilities. These include:

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Neighborhood parks provide access to basic recreation opportunities for nearby residents, enhance neighborhood identity, and preserve neighborhood open space. These parks are designed primarily for non-organized recreation. Located within walking and bicycling distance of most users, these parks are generally three to five acres in size and primarily serve residents within a half-mile radius. Sites may vary in size depending upon unique site characteristics, opportunities and land availability. Neighborhood parks often include amenities such as playgrounds, turf areas, pathways and trails, picnic tables, sports courts, community gardens and benches. Elementary school sites have been included under the neighborhood parkland classification, since they often have neighborhood park elements and serve some of the neighborhood park needs. At the present time, the VCPRD provides neighborhood parks within the City of Vancouver and its Urban Growth Area (UGA).

COMMUNITY PARKS

Community parks provide a focal point and gathering place for broad groups of users. Usually 20 to 100 acres in size, community parks are used by all segments of the population and generally serve residents from a one- to three-mile service area. Community parks often include recreation facilities for organized activities, such as sports fields, skate parks, community gardens and play courts. Community parks may also incorporate passive recreation space and community facilities, such as community or senior centers.

Because of their large service area, community parks require more support facilities, such as parking and restrooms. Some middle and high school sites are included in the community parkland inventory, since these facilities can serve some of the community park needs. At the present time, the VCPRD only provides community parks in the Vancouver urban growth area.

REGIONAL PARKS

Regional parks are recreational areas that serve residents from throughout Clark County and beyond. Regional parks are usually larger than 50 acres in size and provide opportunities for diverse recreational activities. Facilities may include sports fields, extensive trail systems, or large picnic areas. In addition, regional parks often include passive recreation space and unique features, such as significant natural areas or access to lakes or rivers. Because of their large size and broad service area, regional parks typically require more support facilities, such as parking and restrooms. These parks are usually designed to accommodate large numbers of people.

NATURAL AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Natural areas and open space are primarily undeveloped spaces, which are managed for both their natural, ecological value and for light-impact recreational use. These areas can range in size from one to thousands of acres, and may include wetlands, wildlife habitats, or stream corridors. Natural areas and open space provide opportunities for nature-based recreation, such as bird-watching and environmental education. Natural areas also provide opportunities for active recreation such as walking and running, bicycle riding, and hiking. These parks can provide relief from urban density and may also preserve or protect environmentally sensitive areas, such

as endangered animal habitat and native plant communities. Natural areas often include:

- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Streams, lakes, and ponds
- Forests
- Prairies and meadows
- Pastures and agricultural lands
- Timber lands

Within the Vancouver Urban Growth Area (UGA), natural areas are typically referred to as urban open space. Within the VCPRD planning area but outside the UGA, these spaces are referred to as natural areas or conservation areas.

TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

The City and County have completed a comprehensive *Regional Trails and Bikeways System Plan* which defines trails as any “path, route, way, right-of-way, or corridor posted, signed, or designated as open for non-motorized travel or passage by the general public.” Five trail types are identified in the plan:

- Regional, multi-use trails, which provide the major access networks across the County;
- Local trails, which provide access from neighborhoods to regional multi-use trails;
- Rustic trails, which are smaller in scale than the local trails and are intended to provide access to natural features and loop trail opportunities;
- Semi-primitive trails, which are intended for rural or forest settings; and

- Bike lanes and pedestrian walkways, which are located on City, County, and State road right-of-ways.

Greenways are corridors that follow linear features such as streams, abandoned railroad rights-of-way, or power lines. Greenways often contain trails and may also include viewpoints, seating areas, and interpretive displays. Greenways provide public access to trail-oriented activities, including walking, biking, or running, and preserve open space. Greenways along streams can also help protect water and habitat quality.

SPECIAL USE AREAS AND FACILITIES

Special use areas are stand-alone facilities such as community centers, aquatic centers, sports complexes, or skate parks that provide space for a specialized activity. Since special use areas vary widely in function, there is no minimum size, but special use areas must be large enough to accommodate the intended use. Support facilities, such as parking and restrooms, are often included.

ACQUISITION STANDARDS

The plan recommends maintaining the current adopted acquisition standards for neighborhood parks, community parks, regional parks, and urban open space. Additional guidelines are also proposed for all park types and facilities.

URBAN PARKS

Urban parks include neighborhood parks, community parks, and natural areas and open space within the Vancouver Urban Growth Area. The plan identifies an urban parkland acquisition standard of 6 acres/1,000 population. This standard is designed to include 5 acres/1,000 of neighborhood and

community parks and one acre/1,000 of urban natural areas and open space.

Neighborhood and Community Parks

Within the combined five-acre standard, the preferred distribution is two acres for neighborhood parks and three acres for community parks. However, the combined standard allows for modifications where existing and proposed development limits the availability of parcels large enough to accommodate community parks.

Acquisition Standards

Neighborhood/Community Parks: 5 acres/1,000
Urban Open Space: 1 acre/1,000
Urban Parks: 6 acres/1,000 population

The recommended NRPA guideline for neighborhood and community park acquisition is 6 to 10 acres/1,000 population. While the City and County have adopted a standard of five acres, their goal is to achieve the higher level of service, particularly in densely-developed areas within the UGA.

Additional guidelines for the provision of neighborhood and community parkland include:

- *Neighborhood Parks:* These parks primarily serve an area within a 1/2-mile radius from each park site, allowing safe and reasonable access. Parks shall be 1 to 5 acres in size.
- *Community Parks:* These parks primarily serve an area with a 3-mile radius from each park site, allowing safe and reasonable access. Parks shall be 20 to 100 acres in size.

- In urban areas where an adequate or suitable community park site is no longer available, or where areas are poorly served by a community park, VCPR shall encourage the acquisition of neighborhood parks; and consider modification of neighborhood park standards to compensate for the lack of a community park. Specifically, consideration shall be given to increasing site size and type of development of neighborhood parks to allow for increased recreation opportunities.
- *Site Characteristics:* Selected sites should be suitable for the desired range of improvements, consistent with community needs and park and recreation trends. An ideal site should accommodate a mix of natural spaces, traditional park amenities, and active recreation opportunities. Recognizing that not all sites can accommodate this range of amenities, each park district should contain an overall balance of active and passive recreational amenities and natural areas.

Urban Natural Areas and Open Space

Although there is no NRPA guideline for urban natural areas and open space, Clark County adopted a standard of 2.5 acres/1,000 population in 1990. Subsequently, this standard was reduced as the Parks Department consolidated and the urban system was standardized. This plan suggests that the City and the County maintain this revised standard of one acre of open space /1,000 population. However, the goal should be to achieve the higher, initial standard.

REGIONAL PARKS

This plan recommends that the VCPRD maintain its regional park acquisition standard of 10 acres/1,000 population, with a goal of

20 acres/1,000 population. Guidelines for the provision of regional parks include a desirable size of 200 acres or more, although no minimum is recommended. This plan recommends that regional parkland be distributed throughout the County based on the availability of unique sites or destinations.

Acquisition Standard
Regional Parks: 10 acres/1,000 population

TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

Neither the City nor the County has acquisition or development standards for trails and greenways. Since trails and greenways are based on multi-modal transportation routes, recreational opportunities, and natural features, this plan does not recommend a population-based standard. Instead, VCPRD should pursue an acquisition and development program consistent with the *Regional Trails and Bikeways System Plan*, in conjunction with transportation, public works, and other departments, which promotes an interconnected system of trails and greenways throughout the County.

NATURAL AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

No standard is recommended for natural and conservation areas in the rural portions of Clark County, since these areas are usually acquired based on the significance of their environment and habitat. The plan recommends pursuing a conservation program that complements outside efforts to protect high-priority and critical lands throughout the County. Acquisition should occur along major riparian and habitat areas, urban growth buffers, and in areas with unique site qualities. The goal for acquiring these areas is to create a connected, cohesive system that spans the entire County. This

effort should focus on areas as identified in this and the *Conservation Areas Acquisition Plan*.

SPECIAL USE AREAS

No standard is recommended for special use areas, since these areas are often acquired based on specific facility needs. The plan recommends acquiring special use areas as needed to meet the facility guidelines proposed in this plan.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Parkland can be classified by intensity and extent of development. Development standards for various park types include both numerical standards (acres/1,000 or percentage of a site) and development levels.

NUMERICAL STANDARDS

Development standards are proposed for the following park types:

- *Neighborhood and Community Parks:* This plan recommends maintaining the current development standards for neighborhood and community parks. In the City of Vancouver, the standard is 4.25 acres/1,000 population of developed urban parkland. In the Urban-Unincorporated area, the standard is for all core parks (neighborhood and community) to be developed to a Level 2 standard, as defined below.
- *Urban Open Space/Natural Areas:* No development standard is proposed for urban open space, which should remain in a relatively natural condition.
- *Regional Parks:* This plan recommends maintaining the current regional park development standard of 18% of the site. These standards allow for active and

passive recreation opportunities as well as open space preservation.

DEVELOPMENT LEVELS

The level of development standards listed below represent a modification of previous standards, designed to clarify the intention of the standard while increasing flexibility to allow for changing community needs.

Neighborhood Parks

Level 1 is intended to secure the site, reduce liability and unsightliness, preserve existing natural resources, and permit pedestrian access to the site. Improvements are dependent on initial site inventory and generally include fencing, fire hazard mowing only, rule signage, hazard removal, rough grading, and noxious/invasive plant removal. Master planning of the site is also completed to guide future improvements.

Level 2 is intended to provide a range of recreational opportunities and protect and enhance a site's natural features as determined in the site master plan. Recreational opportunities and amenities may include walking paths, play options, seating, natural areas, park identification and interpretative signage, and gathering spaces.

Level 3 is intended to provide a greater level of recreational amenities and natural area enhancement, and may be possible if additional capital and maintenance funds are available. Improvements may include additional landscaping, play equipment, signage, paths, irrigation, and structures not provided during Level 2 development.

Community Parks

Level 1 is intended to secure the site, reduce liability and unsightliness, preserve existing natural resources, and permit pedestrian access to the site. Improvements are dependent on initial site inventory and may include fencing, fire hazard mowing, rough grading, and invasive plant removal. Master planning of the site is also completed to guide future improvements.

Level 2 is intended to provide a range of recreational opportunities and protect and enhance a site's natural features as determined in the comprehensive plan. Recreational opportunities and amenities may include parking, play options, restrooms, walking paths, natural areas, park identification and interpretative signage, gathering spaces, and seating.

Level 3 is intended to provide a greater level of natural area enhancement and recreational amenities. Improvements may include sports/ tennis courts and play options able to accommodate larger groups, picnic shelters, and additional landscaping, walking paths, and signage.

Application

The application of the neighborhood and community park development standards differs across the incorporated and unincorporated areas. In the incorporated area, neighborhood and community parks are acquired and developed to Level 2. Within the unincorporated area, priority is given to acquiring, reserving, and making available sites for future neighborhood and community park development. Development priority is given to improving all park sites to a Level 1 standard, followed by developing community parks to a Level 2 standard. Level 2

development of neighborhood parks occurs only after maintenance funds are secured.

