



PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION SM

Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Level of Service Guidance

for Developed Parks and Natural Areas
and Full-Service Community Centers

APRIL 2022

PLAZAS

SPECIALTY GARDENS

GROUP PICNIC

SPRAY PLAY

PLAY AREAS

BASKETBALL COURTS

GARDENS

NATURAL AREAS

**“...there should be a
public recreation ground
within ten minutes walk
of any part of the city.”**

THE OREGONIAN, 1898

How can Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R) plan to best meet the parks and recreation needs of all Portlanders, and what parks and recreation assets should we be providing? This *Level of Service Guidance for Developed Parks, Natural Areas, and Community Centers* provides foundational analysis and community input to inform the care and growth of Portland's park and recreation system.

Parks 2020 Vision (2001) established targeted Level of Service goals and priorities for Portland's park and recreation system. While it established these high-level targets for park service and full-service community centers, it did not establish comprehensive goals for the provision of individual park features and experiences, such as play areas, water play, dog off-leash areas, sports courts, and 9 other assets.

This Level of Service (LOS) Guidance builds on the *Parks 2020 Vision's* goals to provide a park within a ½-mile of every resident and provide a full-service community center within three miles of every resident. The Developed Parks and Natural Areas LOS Guidance further examines thirteen recreational assets provided by PP&R and their spatial distribution across the city.

What is a Parks Planning Level of Service (LOS)?

This Level of Service Study is essential foundation analysis to build a comprehensive Level of Service for Portland Parks & Recreation. A comprehensive Level of Service Plan for the City's park system answers the following question: If I live in Portland, what should I expect, over time, to be provided in terms of parks, natural areas, and full-service community centers? This LOS Guidance helps PP&R set targets for the provision of park and recreation assets so that no matter where a Portlander lives, a certain basic service level can be expected. A comprehensive Level of Service Plan for the entire park and recreation system is an aspiration we strive for, meanwhile this Level of Service Guidance allows the Bureau to plan, budget, and prioritize the equitable distribution of specific services, in a sustainable manner.

There are many other types of service levels. The Urban Forestry Management Plan, for

instance, sets a service level for trees and tree canopy. The Bureau's Regional Trail Strategy establishes service levels for trails. There can be LOS efforts for maintenance, recreation, and other Bureau activities. This LOS is a planning LOS for the provision of community centers and other specific park assets and natural areas.

How the Level of Service was Established

The basic formula for completion of the LOS work is as follows:

Community Engagement + Existing System and Costs Data + Analysis = Level of Service Guidance

First, we engaged the community to determine what needs and desires were for parks and natural areas. How close do Portlanders want a basketball court to be? A playground? How far are Portlanders willing to travel to access these Developed Parks and Natural Areas?



Increased distance from home means increased travel time, increased length of stay and decreased frequency of visits.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Asset	Service Area (all Portlanders within this travel distance)	Current Number of Assets	Number of Additional Assets Needed to cover geographic gaps	Total Number of Assets to cover entire city
 Play areas	½-mile	 138	 42	 180
 Basketball courts	1-mile	 65	 12	 77
 Community gardens		 58	 20	 78
 Spray play		 26	 16	 42
 Dog Off-Leash Areas	2 miles	 38	 1	 39
 Group picnic areas		 99	 1	 100
 Natural areas open to the public		 41	 5	 46
 Skateparks		 8	 11	 19
 Sports fields		 163	 0	 163
 Ballfields	3 miles	 217	 0	 217
 Plazas		 37	 1	 38
 Specialty gardens		 10	 1	 11
 Tennis courts		 109	 0	 109
Asset Total:		1,009	110	1,119
Full-Service Community Centers	3 miles	 4	 4	 8
Developed Parks	½ mile	 154	 29	 183

Sports field complexes: 2, each with 3 - 4 fields with lighting and synthetic turf, in East Portland and Southwest Portland.

We looked at 12 major park features, defined as assets in our Asset Management Program. We also looked at citywide needs for natural areas and full-service community centers. For parks and natural areas, we engaged the public extensively through statistically valid survey methods, focus groups for communities of color and non-English speakers, informal surveys, and attendance at community events. We also applied significant community comments received through previous engagement efforts. We heard and learned some interesting things! The community engagement work is detailed in the full report for Parks & Natural Areas (including an appendix). We did not engage the public on full-service community centers as the Bureau was in the difficult position of closing several small community centers and Columbia Pool due to budgetary and poor facility condition related concerns.

Second, we looked at our current system and existing service level, and also at our costs to provide, operate, maintain, and ultimately replace current park assets.

Third, we took the information from the first two parts of this equation and used many analytical tools, data points, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) capabilities, professional Parks staff expertise, and a 3-member Parks Board working group to develop this Level of Service Guidance for the parks and recreation system, which is summarized here in this Executive Summary. This Executive Summary is the high-level

findings culled from two comprehensive and detailed reports: one for parks and natural areas, and one for full-service community centers (hereinafter referred to as the “full reports”). Both documents are a wealth of information, and also tell the story of how we arrived at the recommendations.

Additional Findings

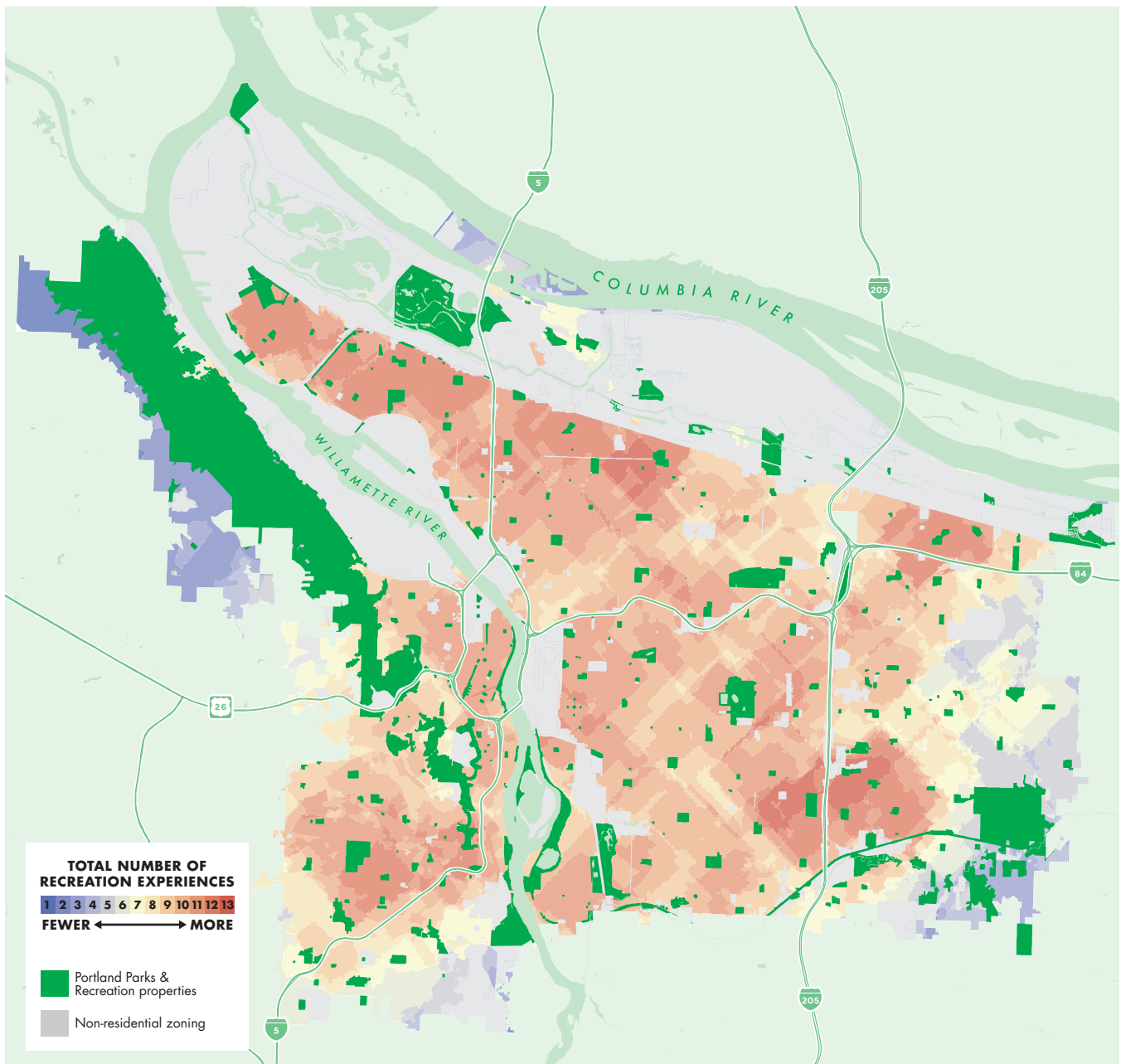
While the previous chart outlines the main findings, there are many other more focused findings on particular assets, setting priorities, what to do in the near term, on next steps, and more. These are listed beginning on page 10 for easy reference, and most include a link or a note about where to go for more detail, and to better understand the recommendation.

What will it take to provide this Level of Service?

If PP&R were to build all 110 of the park assets and four new full-service community centers recommended in this LOS Guidance to meet service level goals, PP&R would need to invest over \$359 million in one-time capital funds to build them, and it would take over \$22.8 million in new annual operating dollars (2019/2020 dollars) to maintain a system that meets these service levels. A full cost assessment and detailed financial data for the LOS is included in the two reports.

PP&R’s Sustainable Future Effort

The LOS Guidance does not include a plan for funding these assets and it does not set a timetable for achieving full LOS implementation. The Parks Bureau is currently



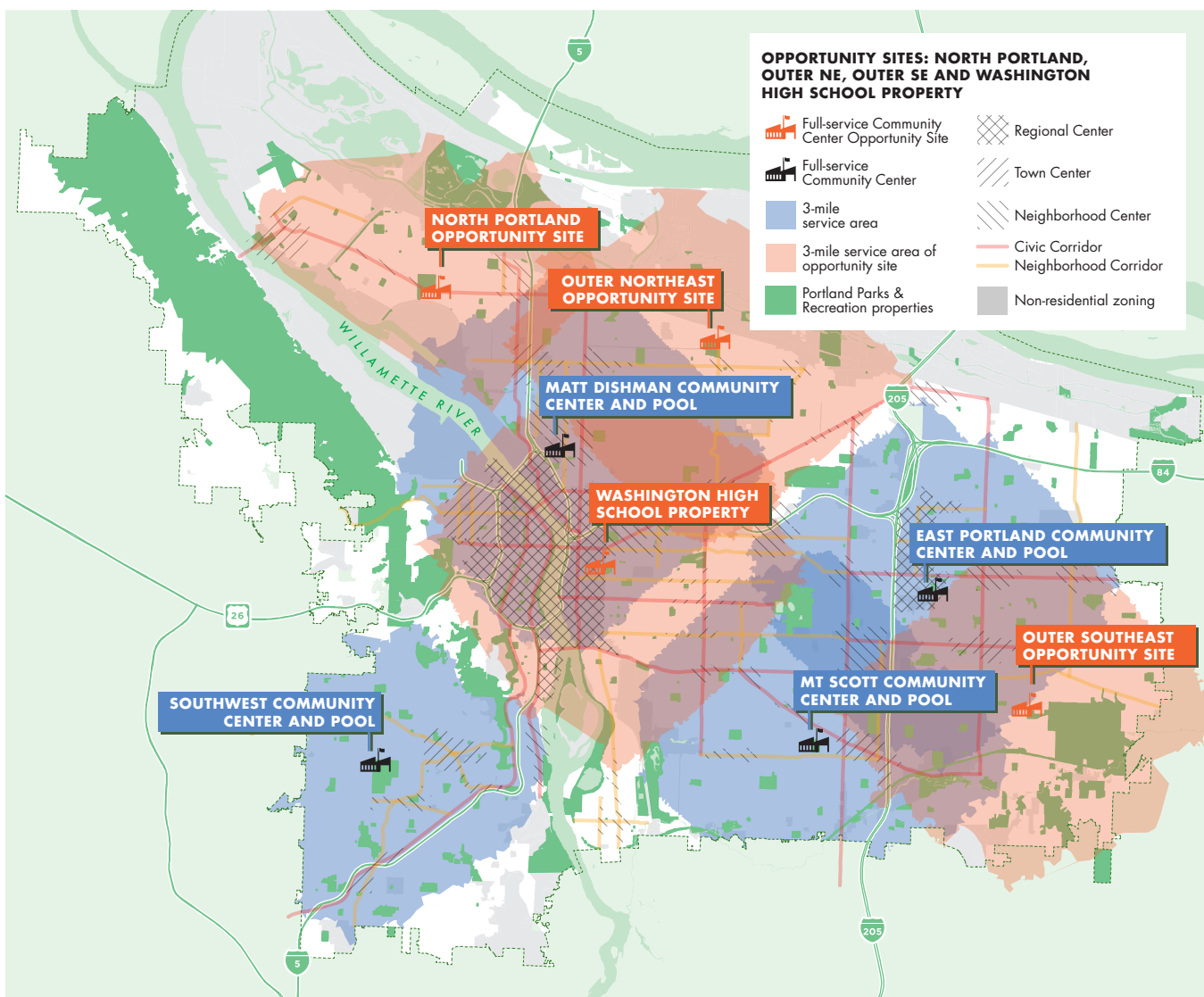
Total Number of Recreation Experiences

This map indicates all the combined service areas of all of the 13 assets analyzed in this Level of Service Guidance for Developed Park and Natural Areas. Cooler colors (blue) depict fewer recreation assets and warmer colors (oranges and reds) depict more recreation assets. One of the goals of the LOS will be to provide more assets in areas that have fewer assets, so there is a more consistent orange indicating more access to recreation experiences in parks throughout the city.

LEVEL OF SERVICE GUIDANCE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

undertaking a comprehensive effort to achieve better financial sustainability. In November 2019, Bureau staff presented to the Mayor and City Council an initial analysis of its current needs, gaps, and outlined three scenarios for moving forward (the presentation is at: www.portland.gov/parks/sustainable-future-our-park-system). The LOS and cost information outlined in this document were used to develop

the scenarios. The Sustainable Futures work will lead the way on how to implement the LOS targets. It is envisioned that multiple funding tools will be needed over time, and the Level of Service can be implemented as these financial resources are put in place. In November 2020, Portland voters approved a 5-year operating levy estimated to generate approximately \$250 million.



The Sustainable Futures work completed to date has found that capital growth funding sources are largely adequate thanks to Parks System Development Charges (SDCs) to pay for the capital costs called for in the LOS. However, there is a substantial unfunded operations & maintenance commitment necessary to sustain newly built assets. In addition, PP&R has a large, roughly \$500 million backlog of maintenance and replacement projects that need to be addressed in order to have a safe, high functioning, sustainable parks system. The Sustainable Futures effort will use the LOS guidance and established cost data to determine how to address these funding challenges.

Near-term Options

The LOS outlines some near-term (up to 5 years) options given the aforementioned existing resource issues. Full-service community centers and three park assets in the City's parks and recreation system (play areas, skateparks and spray play features) have been identified as high cost investments for the Bureau. There are also near-term options for natural areas. There are specific options to consider for each asset in the full reports and in Exhibit A in this summary document, but the basic concept for the cost-sensitive assets is to add them judiciously as operations and maintenance resources are identified to sustain them adequately.

How the LOS will be used

PP&R will use this LOS Guidance as a prioritization tool when planning the

continued buildout of the City's park and recreation system. The LOS guidance will be used annually during the Capital Growth and Capital Major Maintenance Funding Prioritization Process, and in conjunction with PP&R's strategic direction and equity goals. Future visioning, prioritization work and funding will determine the pace at which the projects identified in this LOS Guidance are implemented.

The LOS will prove particularly useful in advancing equity, as it has identified gaps and which gaps are the most urgent given demographics and the number of parks, natural areas, and recreational opportunities in nearby existing park assets. The equity considerations and recommendations are on page 80 of the Developed Parks & Natural Areas Level of Service report. In 2015 City Council adopted citywide racial equity goals. In 2017 Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) developed a five-year Racial Equity Plan that provides a framework and guidance for the implementation of racial equity goals adopted by City Council. PP&R is dedicated to creating a parks and recreation system that is centered on achieving racial equity, and providing high-quality programs and services.

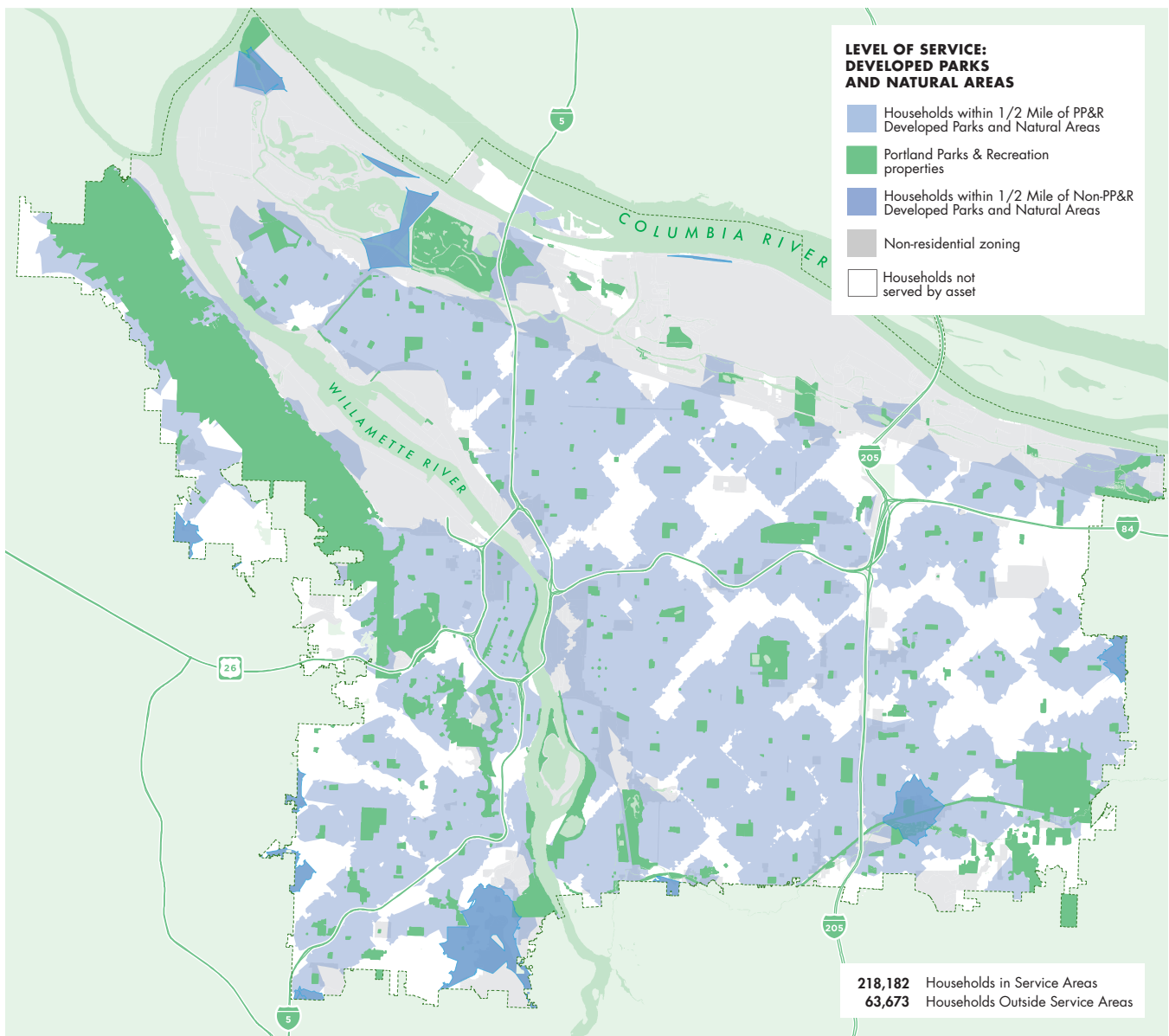
The map on the next page depicts PP&R's existing service level, and reveals the difference in depth and level of access throughout the city. This map combines developed parks and natural areas when evaluating proximity to a park and evaluates whether a household has the desired ½-mile access to a developed park

LEVEL OF SERVICE GUIDANCE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

or natural area. 77% of Portland households are currently located within ½ mile of a developed park or natural area open to the public, indicating that 23% of households don't have walkable access to a park or natural area in Portland. Approximately 29 Service gaps exist throughout the city with the largest gaps

appearing in East Portland. These gaps would be filled by constructing new parks on land currently owned by parks, providing new access to natural areas, and acquisition of additional park land.

PP&R will use this LOS Guidance when prioritizing planning efforts for parks properties,



Level of Service: Developed Parks and Natural Areas

as well as when designing the park properties. PP&R will prioritize planning efforts for its undeveloped parks properties located within the most critical service gap areas when funding is available. The LOS provides a framework and important data which can be used as a starting point prior to embarking on a park plan or design process at any given site with the community.

Welcome to the world of LOS!

This document is a summary of the extensive data, listening and engagement, and analysis completed to create PP&R's first LOS for Parks, Natural Areas, and Full-Service

Community Centers. There is much more to explore, discuss, and learn about in the full reports. Portland Parks & Recreation would like to thank the many community members who contributed their time and expertise to plan for their parks and recreation system.



Peninsula Park splash pad



Gateway Discovery Park skate park

Exhibit A

Summary of other key findings and recommendations

What we learned about people's parks and recreation needs and wants are found in the Developed Parks and Natural Areas Community Engagement Report

People want basic park features.

People strongly support basic park features like trees, picnic tables, unprogrammed and well-designed landscaped spaces, seating, and support facilities like restrooms, drinking fountains, and other park furnishings. These features do not show up as any of the 13 specific assets in the LOS work, but should always be kept in mind when designing and planning parks.

People agree.

There was widespread agreement on needs and wants, and much more commonality than differences. There are some interesting findings from the engagement of communities of color such as higher demand for (and use of): group picnic areas, basketball courts, and other built recreational assets. There were also expressions of less use of natural areas and trails. Safety and security was of greater concern among diverse populations.

People will travel.

The recommendation is to provide a basic developed neighborhood or natural area park facility within a ½ mile of every Portland household and a community center within three miles of every household. People didn't demand everything close to home. Portlanders are willing to travel to many assets. They were cognizant of limited PP&R resources and also considerate of their neighbors. Households without dogs, for instance, recognized the benefit and need to provide off-leash dog areas.

What the level of service didn't do

Community center public engagement.

We did not engage the public on community center needs, and therefore, did not revise or adjust the existing target of having everyone within 3 miles of a full-service community center. We did not explore possible service levels for small or medium-sized community centers or for arts centers. However, work is underway with arts and recreation staff on a strategy for these, and the LOS can be updated after this work is complete. The Bureau is generally moving toward more full-service centers and operating fewer small centers, for efficiencies of scale and cost. We also know that future full-service community centers need improved arts facilities to accommodate arts programming. There will be further discussion and analysis of this direction in the coming years.

LOS use.

The LOS is not intended to override decisions to be made in a local planning & design project. It is intended as guidance and a starting point for community conversations. Certain park assets that the LOS may determine are not recommended could still be built, if there are other, overriding considerations. This is particularly important in more diverse neighborhoods where needs and desires may vary from the more generalized citywide recommendations in the LOS.

What we found with the cost data

Costs.

While one-time capital funding sources are generally adequate, allowing us to expand the park system over decades, there is a large gap in annual funding for operating, maintaining, and replacing assets. Full-service community centers, once built, require millions in on-going funding to sustain. The overall funding gaps are described in more detail in the Sustainable Futures work (see: <https://bit.ly/3NysEW2>) and the community center funding gap is found in the full report for Community Center LOS.

Maintenance backlog.

There are not enough operations and maintenance dollars currently to adequately maintain the existing park system, and there is a \$500 million backlog of repair and replacement work identified. While the LOS work doesn't directly address this issue, the LOS study did use new (higher) cost data for future (to-be-built) assets so as not to exacerbate or perpetuate the current financial situation.

Parks & natural areas

Natural areas service levels and challenges.

The recommendation is a 2-mile service area for natural areas, based on community priority and staff feedback. This will require acquiring sufficient land to protect existing natural resources and provide nature in the City. However, there are special challenges at meeting this recommended service level, including high capital costs for improvements, lack of available natural area land in fully-urbanized gap areas, and current underfunded maintenance. See more about the near-term recommendations in Chapter 5 of the Full Report Volume 2 Level of Service Guidance for Developed Parks and Natural Areas.

Assets.

Three of the assets have much higher costs to build, operate, and maintain than the others. These are play areas, skate parks, and spray play areas. The LOS provides specific near-term (next 5 years) recommendations in light of this reality that are judicious relative to their high construction and maintenance costs.

Asset demands.

A few assets (group picnic areas, sports fields, and community gardens) were identified as having demand-related concerns. These are assets where PP&R might already be meeting the recommended distance or proximity target, but access may be difficult due to high demand. See the specific findings in the detailed sections for these assets in the full report for Developed Parks and Natural Areas.

Sport Parks

The LOS identifies investment in two more sports-focused parks, with all-weather turf fields, like East Delta Park, to address unmet demand for soccer, lacrosse, rugby, and other field sports recreation. Single natural grass fields in neighborhood parks are envisioned to serve local, informal unpermitted sports play.

Full-service community centers

Existing community center service.

The LOS for Community Centers assumes aquatics service in North Portland stays at the current level or is expanded in the next 5 years. Columbia Pool is funded for operations through June 2022, and a new aquatics facility is being explored to serve North Portland.

East-side community center.

The analysis finds that the next full-service community center should be built in the central Eastside.

North-east community center.

The second new full-service community center is recommended to be in Northeast Portland. The LOS can adapt as conditions change in future years, but current data (demographics, population growth, gaps, and density) point to this sequencing.

Arts in community centers

New and renovated Full-Service Community Centers should be designed and planned to accommodate arts instruction. The Bureau is undertaking a separate effort to identify facility needs to ensure this objective is met.

Other general recommendations

Stable funding.

Identify and secure stable, adequate, long-term funding to operate, maintain, and replace future built assets called for by the LOS.

Prioritize assets.

Prioritize new assets where there are fewer parks and park experiences, in neighborhoods with higher density and diversity, and where providing assets will achieve Bureau equity objectives.

Funding decisions.

When making funding decisions, consider the total number of diverse households that would benefit from the investment, in addition to the percentage of diverse households.

Park use intensity

Assess the intensity of park use and its impact on assets when planning and designing parks. Certain assets may need to be larger or built more durably in denser than average neighborhoods.

Recommended next steps

Address new recreation opportunities.

Demand for several emerging recreational activities, such as futsal, pickleball, bike hockey, and others are not included in the LOS, and will need to be addressed. A separate effort is currently underway to begin to accommodate these activities within our existing outdoor tennis court facilities, while also improving courts for tennis programming and informal (no reservation needed) play.

Engage public regarding community centers.

When the timing is appropriate, engage the public on future community center needs. This will likely be when PP&R has a better understanding of its long-term funding plans.

Share LOS.

Share the LOS recommendations, reports, and information with the community, make it available on our website, and introduce it in more depth when the Sustainable Futures effort engages with the community.

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The background of the page features a series of concentric green circles of varying radii, creating a ripple effect. The text labels are placed within these circles, following their curvature.

BALLFIELDS

TENNIS COURTS

DOG OFF-LEASH AREAS

SKATE PARKS

COMMUNITY GARDENS

portlandoregon.gov/parks