

# Parks, Arts, and Recreation



Extraordinary parks, arts and recreation provide opportunities for meaningful life experiences.

## **What Olympia Values:**

*Olympians value the role parks, open space, recreation and art play in our lives. These contribute to our sense of community and to our physical, emotional, environmental and economic well-being.*

## **Our Vision for the Future:**

*A healthy, fun, welcoming and enriching place to live for all Olympians.*

Read more in the Community Values and Vision chapter.

## **Introduction**

Olympia's great parks, vibrant arts community, and many recreation and enrichment programs enhance our lives and strengthen our connection to the community. Public gathering places, whether a small pocket park or large playfield satisfy our need to join with others in the community. One only must walk to a neighborhood park, search for a new skill to learn, or catch the latest downtown event to experience this. The City, community groups, volunteers, and businesses all play a vital role in shaping parks, arts and recreation. These facilities, events and programs improve people's quality of life, promote active lifestyles, create a sense of place and contribute to the local economy. The City of Olympia takes an active role, when appropriate, in influencing regional health policy where it relates to Olympians.

# **Parks, Arts and Recreation Programs and Facilities**

Parks and recreation programs support healthy lives, and those healthy individuals and families help sustain a well community. City programs offer opportunities to exercise, learn a new skill, connect with nature, reduce stress, as well as support personal growth and emotional well-being.

Some recreational amenities are regional in nature and a regional approach to their implementation can be effective. The City looks at opportunities for coordinating with other local and regional governments to develop more parks and recreation facilities. For example, community parks lend themselves to a regional approach, particularly if a potential site is located near a border with Lacey, Tumwater, or Thurston County. Other regional efforts could include expanding the regional trail network, recreational programming, an aquatics center, or even an urban farm park. The City will continue to explore these opportunities.

The following goals and policies apply to all parks, arts and recreation programs, and facilities.

## **GR1 Unique facilities, public art, events, and recreational programming encourage social interaction, foster inclusive community building, and enhance the visual character and livability of Olympia.**

**PR1.1** Continue to provide extraordinary parks and community activities that contribute to our high quality of life and attract tourism and private investment to Olympia.

**PR1.2** Design City parks, arts, and recreation activities and facilities so they are used and enjoyed by as many residents as possible.

**PR1.3** Be responsive to emerging needs for activities, facilities, and community events.

## **GR2 The City leverages its investments in parks, arts and recreation programs and facilities.**

**PR2.1** Seek non-profit organization and community member partnerships, sponsorships, grants, and private donations for park and facility acquisition, development, operation, programming, and events.

**PR2.2** Use creative problem-solving and cost-effective approaches to development, operations, and programming.

**PR2.3** Continue the Joint Use Agreement, and other mutually beneficial partnerships, between the City and the Olympia School District to provide recreation facilities and

programming for the community.

**PR2.4** Pursue opportunities to increase revenues generated by users of park facilities and concessions.

**PR2.5** Search for opportunities for mixed-use facilities and public/private partnerships.



*Figure 1: Indigenous Peoples' Day 2022 at Squaxin Park featuring Squaxin Island Tribe members.*

Cultural events, such as Indigenous Peoples' Day, celebrate and honor the people and traditions of our community.

**GR 11 Olympia Parks, Arts and Recreation is an industry leader in equity and inclusion, where ALL people feel safe and are provided equitable access to engage in parks, arts, and recreation services.**

**PR 11.1** Develop an Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Plan for the Department.

**PR 11.2** Identify and address procedural, distributional, structural, and cultural inequities in the Department and the work that we do.

**PR 11.3** Set performance metrics to hold us accountable toward reaching our goals.

**PR 11.4** Conduct an equity analysis and utilize equity measures when prioritizing park development projects to target areas of highest need.

**PR 11.5** Apply an equity analysis to all budget development and management decisions.

**PR 11.6** Apply an equity analysis to the Department's demographic make-up and strategize proactive approaches to recruit a more diverse candidate pool when hiring. This will result in a team that is representative at all levels and reflects the community's demographics at a minimum. If it's not representative of the community at large, strategize proactive approaches to recruit a more diverse candidate pool when hiring.

**PR 11.7** Seek to reduce barriers to access and participation whenever possible.

## **GR 12 Olympia's park system is resilient and provides climate mitigation and adaptation benefits.**

**PR 12.1 Connect** - an urban trail system to enable car-free transportation to parks and other resources.

**PR 12.2 Cooling** – Restore and plant native vegetation and trees. Maintain and support Olympia's street trees to help cool streets and neighborhoods.


**PR 12.3 Absorb** – Conserve forested areas that provide carbon sequestration and use best practices for stormwater management.

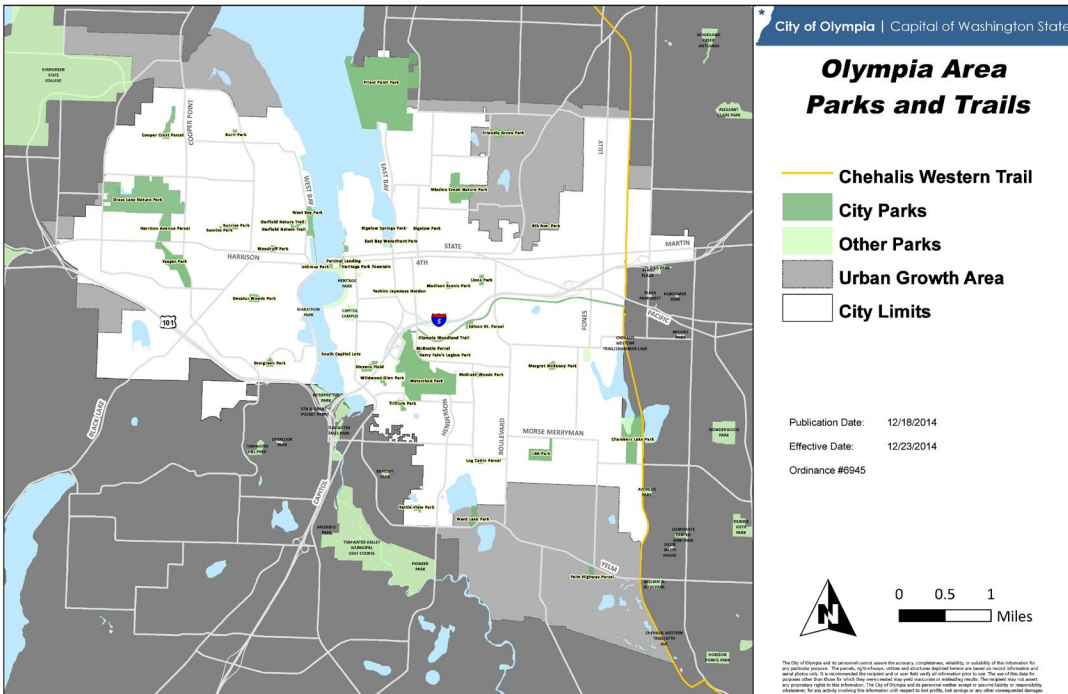
**PR 12.4 Protect** - habitat, restore natural areas, manage shorelines, and plan for climate change impacts.

**PR 12.5 Educate** – about environmental stewardship and conservation including climate change impacts and solutions.

**PR 12.6 Inspire** – inspire community members to act by leading through example in environmental stewardship, visible changes in the way we do business and how we plan for the future.

## **Parks**

There are 53 parks and open spaces in the City of Olympia that give the community a variety of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors from hiking in Watershed Park, to keeping cool in the sprayground at Woodruff Park, to strolling along Percival Landing, to enjoying a reunion in the Rose Garden at Squaxin Park. Despite the number of parks we have, there are still unmet needs, such as soccer fields, neighborhood parks within a 10-minute walk of each resident, community parks, community gardens, bike and nature trails, and open space. For a complete inventory of all existing park, recreation and open space lands in Olympia see the [Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan](#) .



View Map – Olympia Area Parks and Trails *(To be updated in January)*

Over the next 20 years, Olympia will face several challenges and opportunities as we work to meet the demand for parks, arts and recreation.

- **Public Needs to Feel Safe and Secure in Parks and Facilities**

While strategies enacted since the last plan have been effective in reducing the incidence of unsafe behavior in parks, facilities and services, there is still work to do to create a welcoming environment where all visitors feel safe and that they belong.

- **Demand for New Parks and Arts Exceeds Resources**

Many new park projects in Olympia will each cost tens of millions of dollars. These “mega projects” include Percival Landing reconstruction, completing the final two phases of the Karen Fraser Woodland Trail, developing West Bay Park and Trail, developing the Armory Creative Campus, and developing the Yelm Highway Community Park site. To help address funding gaps, the City will look for creative opportunities in grant funding, partnerships and phased development as well as debt servicing options.

- **Population Growth Creating Demand for New Park Land**

As our population increases, we will need more parks and open space to meet current service standards, yet less land and fewer large parcels are available. Staff will explore innovative solutions and continue to pursue land acquisition opportunities to meet future needs.

- **Climate Change Impacts and Action**

Climate change is impacting Olympia's parks and recreation activities. From sea level rise to frequent extreme weather events, we must mitigate these impacts and build a climate resilient parks system that will serve generations to come. As the City updates the Percival Landing Master Plan, design for sea level rise will be addressed. In 2022 the City's Urban Forestry Program hired a consultant to do an evaluation of tree canopy coverage for the entire City. This information will be used by parks to strategically and equitably maintain and enhance tree canopy coverage in parks throughout the City. The full evaluation and report can be found online at [olympiawa.gov/treecanopy](https://olympiawa.gov/treecanopy).

- **The Immediate Need to Undo Institutional Injustice in Parks, Arts and Recreation Services**

Equity, inclusion and belonging needs to be centered in parks, arts and recreation. We recognize our equity journey will present challenges and we commit to the responsibility to face these challenges while building the capacity and accountability resources to embed equity, inclusion and belonging in our daily practices and decision making. We will continually analyze the political, economic, sociodemographic, technological, legal, and environmental challenges facing our work. This will require continually developing solutions and mitigating strategies for the challenges.


## **Conclusion**

Olympia and its community members have changed since 2014 when the last Comprehensive Plan was updated. From an increase in population, to taking climate actions, and a renewed focus and commitment towards equity. These changes have great significance to the programs and facilities that we will provide during the next 20 years. A creative approach will be necessary to address these challenges.

## **Maintaining the quality of Olympia's parks and recreation system**

### **Level of Service Standards**

#### **The Parks and Recreation Plan:**

Every six years, the City undertakes an extensive public outreach effort to update its [Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan](#) . During this time, community members have an opportunity to share what they want from our park system, and our arts and recreation needs, which are used to update Olympia's park level of service standards. These standards -- such as the ratio of developed park land per 1,000 residents --- are used to evaluate the need to acquire more park land or build more recreation facilities.

### **The Capital Facilities Plan:**

The [Capital Facilities Plan](#) describes how the City finances new park acquisition and development, which is funded by a variety of sources including the Metropolitan Parks District, the two percent private utility tax, park impact fees, Washington's State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) mitigation fees, grants and donations. While most of the park projects proposed in the [Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan](#) already have identified funding sources, some significant regional and large projects do not.

## **Neighborhood Parks**

Neighborhood Parks are typically small and are designed primarily for non-supervised, non-organized recreation activities. Facilities found in neighborhood parks include items such as playgrounds (for 2–12-year-olds), picnic areas, restrooms and open grass areas for passive and active use. Amenities may also include items such as trails, tennis courts, basketball courts, skate courts, public art and community gardens. While it is our goal to have a park within 1/2 mile (10-minute walk) of all residences, this does not mean that the service area of neighborhood parks is limited to this radius. Since they each have unique amenities, residents travel throughout the City to experience a variety of them, with 56% of our 2021 random sample survey respondents saying they were "very" or "somewhat" likely to travel across town to a neighborhood park. The service area for neighborhood parks is thus the entire City and its Urban Growth Area.



Neighborhood parks such as Margaret McKenny Park provide nearby places to be active.

There are currently 30 Neighborhood Parks in Olympia totaling 89 acres. For there to be a park within a ½ mile (10-minute walking distance) to most Olympia residents, four new combination neighborhood park/open spaces will need to be acquired and seven neighborhood parks will need to be developed over the next 20-year planning horizon. This is also consistent with the goal expressed in the [Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan](#) of having a neighborhood park within walking distance to most residences.

For more information on the Neighborhood Park standard see the [Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan](#).

## Community Parks

Community Parks are specifically designed to serve a large portion of the community, usually as athletic field complexes or sites with other unique uses such as a waterfront or garden focus. Examples of special-use oriented community parks include Yashiro Japanese Garden and Percival Landing. Olympia has not developed a new community park in the last 40 years.


Athletic field complexes are designed for organized activities and sports, although individual and family activities are also encouraged. They can vary in size, but ideally are large enough to accommodate at least four fields and supporting facilities (such as restrooms and parking) which allows for tournament play. Olympia's three existing developed athletic field complexes are LBA Park, Yauger Park and Stevens Field. In 2018, the City purchased the 83-acre Yelm Highway Community Park site and is currently in the process of developing a master plan for the site with hopes of developing the first phase of the park in 2025.



Community parks add to Olympia's vitality (Percival Landing).

Community Parks can also have special features such as off-leash dog areas, bicycle courses, freshwater swim beaches, waterfront access and community gardens. Based on community needs, Olympia will also need to add additional Community Park acreage to provide for these desired recreational amenities.

For organized sports, it matters less where the player lives, but rather where a game is scheduled. Much like a transit system or library system that is “area-wide”, Community Parks serve the entire Olympia urban growth area. Thus, the service area for Community Parks is defined as being all of Olympia and all of Olympia’s urban growth area.

To meet both existing and future community park needs, the plan calls for acquisition of 20 acres of community park land, development of 52 acres of existing community park land, and upgrades and major maintenance to existing athletic fields. For more information on the Community Park standard see the [Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan](#) .

## Open Space

Open space parks are defined as primarily undeveloped land that is set aside to protect the special natural character of Olympia’s landscape. Open space areas provide an opportunity for the community to experience and connect with the flora, fauna and natural habitats in Olympia. They also provide important natural infrastructure that improves water and air quality, as well as provide climate benefits in the form of carbon sequestration and cooling. Open space may include, but is not limited to, wetlands; wetland buffers; creek, stream or river corridors and aquatic habitat; marine shorelines; forested or upland wildlife areas; ravines, bluffs, or other geologically hazardous areas; prairies/meadows; and undeveloped areas within existing parks. The level and intensity of allowed public use is evaluated based on potential resource impacts. Trail development is typical. Some sites can be appropriate for more active recreational activities such as running or biking. Parking and trailhead facilities such as restrooms, information kiosks and environmental education facilities are also appropriate.

*(Note that the term "Open Space" as used in this chapter has a more specific meaning than as used in the [Natural Environment](#) Chapter pursuant to RCW [36.70A.160](#) .*

Research has shown that residents are willing to travel across town looking for the special and unique features associated with one Open Space in particular. For instance, Watershed Park provides walking trails in a stream and wetland complex while Squaxin Park provides saltwater beach access and old growth forests. Much like a transit system or library system that is “area-wide”, Open Spaces serve the entire Olympia urban growth area. Thus, the service area for Open Space is defined as being all of Olympia and all of Olympia’s urban growth area.



Open spaces such as Mission Creek Nature Park provide opportunities to experience nature within the city.

Open Space and its amenities have a very high value to Olympia residents. In a series of surveys conducted for a recent update to the Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan, one of the most dominant themes was access to nature, open space conservation areas, hiking trails and multi-use paved trails.

Fifteen acres of Open Space acquisition are proposed for the next 20 years. These acquisitions will meet the Open Space Level of Service Standard and will address the impact of projected population growth on the Open Space system. For more information on the Open Space standard see the [Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan](#).

The level of service standards outlined above, and the following goals and policies will guide Olympia's park system towards achieving its vision over the next 20 years.

## Goals and Policies

**GR3 A vibrant park system that meets current and future community needs.**

**PR3.1** Provide parks in close proximity (within ½ mile) to all residents.

**PR3.2** Ensure that Olympia's park system includes opportunities for its residents to experience nature.

**PR3.3** Preserve and enhance scenic views and significant historic sites within Olympia's park system.

**PR3.4** Identify and acquire future park and open space sites that will serve residents in Olympia and its Urban Growth Area.


**PR3.5** Beautify entry corridors to our City and our neighborhoods through art installations, giving priority to street beautification downtown and along Urban Corridors.

**PR3.6** Continue to collect park impact fees within the Olympia City Limits and SEPA-based mitigation fees in the Olympia Urban Growth Areas so new development pays its fair share to the park and open space system based on its proportionate share of impact. Work with Thurston County to devise an alternative system for funding parks and open space in the unincorporated Urban Growth Area.

**PR3.7** During development review, if consistent with park level of service standards or other needs, encourage developers to dedicate land for future parks, open space, and recreation facilities.

**PR3.8** Develop parks or plazas near Urban Corridors.

**GR4 An urban trails system interconnects parks, schools, neighborhoods, open spaces, historical settings, neighboring jurisdictions' trails systems, important public facilities, and employment centers via both on- and off-street trails.**

**PR4.1** Coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions and State agencies to build a regional trail network and coordinated trail signage program that is consistent with the [Thurston Regional Trails Plan](#) .

**PR4.2** Use existing rail, utility, and unopened street rights-of-way, alleys, streams (where environmentally sound), and other corridors for urban trails.

**PR4.3** Preserve unimproved public rights-of-way for important open space, greenway linkages, and trails.

**PR4.4** Encourage walking, bicycling and other non-vehicular access for recreation and transportation purposes by linking parks to multi-modal routes, streets and trails.

**PR4.5** When located in areas where future trails are shown on the adopted map, ensure that new development provides appropriate pieces of the trail system using impact fees, the SEPA process, trail Right-of-Way dedication, or other means.

## **GR5 A lively public waterfront contributes to a vibrant Olympia.**

**PR5.1** Pursue a phased approach to Percival Landing reconstruction and West Bay Park construction.

**PR5.2** Encourage creation of a public shoreline trail as property north of West Bay Park is developed.

**PR5.3** Develop a West Bay trail alignment that follows the shoreline and connects to Deschutes Parkway to the south.

**PR5.4** Designate waterfront trails and important waterfront destinations as the "Olympia Waterfront Route" as outlined in the [Thurston Regional Trails Plan](#) and in this plan.

**PR5.5** Encourage the acquisition of saltwater shoreline property and easements to create more public access to the waterfront.

**PR5.6** Preserve street rights-of-way when they extend to shorelands and install signs that indicate public access.

**PR5.7** Incorporate the [Olympia Sea Level Rise Response Plan](#) findings into future design for Percival Landing reconstruction and West Bay Park construction.

## **GR6 Olympia's parks, arts and recreation system investments are protected.**

**PR6.1** Continue to improve the Parks Asset Management Program to ensure park infrastructure remains functional and safe.

**PR6.3** Design, maintain, and operate facilities to prevent damage by misuse and encourages the intended use.

**PR6.4** Consider regional approaches to funding major recreational facilities, such as swimming pools, regional trails, art centers, and tournament-level athletic fields.

**PR6.5** Establish a strategy for funding maintenance and operation of new park facilities before they are developed.

## **Arts and Events**

Olympia is home to an engaged population of artists and arts organizations active in music, literary, performance, media and visual arts. Olympia offers award-winning

theater, music performances from indie to symphony, the Procession of the Species, and a strong visual, literary and performing arts community that ranges from emerging artists to those with nationwide representation. Both the Olympia Arts and Events program and the Olympia Arts Commission, a nine-member advisory board appointed by the City Council, have worked on behalf of the arts in our community for over 30 years. Because there are no other municipal programs of this type in neighboring jurisdictions, the City's programs benefit the arts regionally, while serving as a model for communities throughout Washington State.



Arts Walk is a beloved community event in Olympia.

With the recent voter approved initiative, [Inspire Olympia](#), a portion of Olympia's sales tax is collected and utilized to contract with local non-profit organizations offering arts, sciences, heritage and cultural programs and experiences for the public in the City and Olympia School District. Inspire Olympia provides a reliable source of public funding that sustains a healthy, visible, welcoming and inclusive nonprofit cultural and science sector, making creative cultural experiences accessible for everyone in Olympia.

Over the next 20 years, Olympia will face two challenges:

- **Developing an Arts Center.** In 1989, the City first identified a need for a regional arts center with exhibition space, working studios, and rehearsal space for regional artists. In 2021 the City of Olympia took ownership of the Olympia Armory building for the purpose of creating a community arts center. While funds have been identified to support the initial visioning, the City will likely need to debt service and fundraise a significant portion of the first phase of construction needed to make the building safe and accessible to the public.
- **Retaining Artists.** Social and economic factors such as cost of living, affordable housing, and stable economy may make it harder for Olympia to retain its artists.



The Armory building will soon be an arts center that supports diverse artists equitably.

## Goals and Policies

**GR7 Permanent and temporary public art is located in parks, sidewalks, streets, roundabouts, public buildings, alleys and other public spaces and facilities.**

**PR7.1** Include diverse works of art.

**PR7.2** Ensure opportunities and participation by local, regional and national artists.

**PR7.3** Use public art to create unique community places and visible landmarks.

**PR7.5** Encourage community participation at all levels of the public art process.

**PR7.6** Ensure our public art collection is regularly maintained so it retains its beauty and value.

**PR7.7** Encourage art in vacant storefronts.

**PR7.8** Encourage neighborhood art studios.

**PR7.9** Support art installations that produce solar or wind generated energy.

**PR7.10** Help artists, organizations and businesses identify possible locations in commercial areas for studios and exhibition space.

**PR7.11** Encourage interactive/experiential art.

**PR7.12** Consider opportunities for public art projects in response to current community issues.

### **GR8 Arts in Olympia are supported.**

**PR8.1** Pursue a community arts center at the historic Olympia Armory building.

**PR8.2** Pursue affordable housing and studio/rehearsal space for artists, including support for, or participation in, establishing or constructing buildings or sections of buildings that provide living, work and gallery space exclusively for artists.

**PR8.3** Encourage broad arts participation in the community.

**PR8.4** Provide affordable, and inclusive opportunities for the public to learn about and engage in the art-making process.

**PR8.5** Provide opportunities that highlight the talent of visual, literary and performing artists.

**PR8.6** Provide technical support and grant opportunities to arts and culture organizations.

**PR8.7** Support the Creative District in downtown and Olympia's art economy in general.

**PR8.8** Create a range of opportunities for the public to interact with art; from small workshops to large community events.

**PR8.9** Encourage early arts education opportunities.

## **Recreation**

The City's recreation programs promote physical and mental well-being, bring community members together in a positive, supportive, and fun atmosphere, while creating memorable experiences for individuals and families. The City offers traditional programs such as sports leagues, youth camps and clinics, and special interest classes. The City does adapt to emerging recreational needs, and it is also important for other providers to supplement recreational opportunities as one department cannot realistically or sustainably meet the entire community demand.

Each year, approximately 400 teams participate in City sports leagues, more than 4,000 community members take a leisure recreation class, and more than 1,500 youth participate in camp programs. In addition to enhancing participants' wellness, people who participate in these programs also gain a sense of belonging, make great

contributions and invest in their community.



Recreation Programs foster community health and wellness. ("Kids Love Soccer" Program).

### **Olympia's recreation programs face the following challenges:**

- **Activating our Community.** Our sedentary lifestyles are contributing to health problems. The City must find places and programs that can compete with the ease and simplicity of TVs, phones, and computers for our time and attention.
- **Connecting with Nature.** Our technological advances and desire to remain indoors have created a culture less connected to nature. If our residents are not connected to the outdoors, it will become increasingly difficult for them to understand or embrace the value of our natural surroundings.
- **An aging population that's ready for action:** Between 2020 and 2040, Olympia's senior population is projected to double. But the seniors of the future are likely to be more active and adventurous than in prior generations. Olympia's recreation programs need to embrace this trend.

## **Goals and Policies**

**GR9 Olympians enjoy lifelong happiness and wellness.**

**PR9.1** Provide opportunities that promote a mentally and physically active lifestyle.

**PR9.2** Provide programs and facilities that stimulate creative and competitive play for all ages.

**PR9.3** Provide programs, facilities, and community events that support diverse self-expression.

**PR9.4** Provide opportunities for bringing balance, relaxation, and lifelong learning into one's life.

**PR9.5** Support recreation opportunities for people with physical and mental disabilities.

**PR9.6** Provide opportunities for community youth to access healthy food options and community households to grow their own produce.

**PR9.7** Provide opportunities for people to enjoy and connect with nature in Olympia's parks.

#### **GR10 Community members gather and recreate together.**

**PR10.1** Provide recreational opportunities for all residents.





**PR10.2** Work towards providing recreation programs that are affordable and/or available to all Olympians.

**PR10.3** Provide parks and programs to serve people of all ages, and with many different abilities, and interests.

**PR10.4** Develop programs and design park facilities that encourage activities people can do together regardless of their age.

**PR10.5** Provide convenient, safe, active, outdoor recreation experiences suited for families.

## For More Information

- [Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan](#) 
- Olympia's [Capital Facilities Plan](#)  shows how park projects will be funded during a six-year period.
- For a complete list of all of Olympia's parks and trails, see [Parks and Trails](#) 
- For a comprehensive look at regional trail planning, see the [Thurston Regional Trails Plan](#) 
- Information on the City's Public Art Collection can be found at [Public Art](#)
- In 2017, the Art's Commission helped develop [Olympia Crossings. An art plan for City gateways.](#)
- To learn more about the City of Olympia's recreational programs and classes, see [Recreation](#)

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