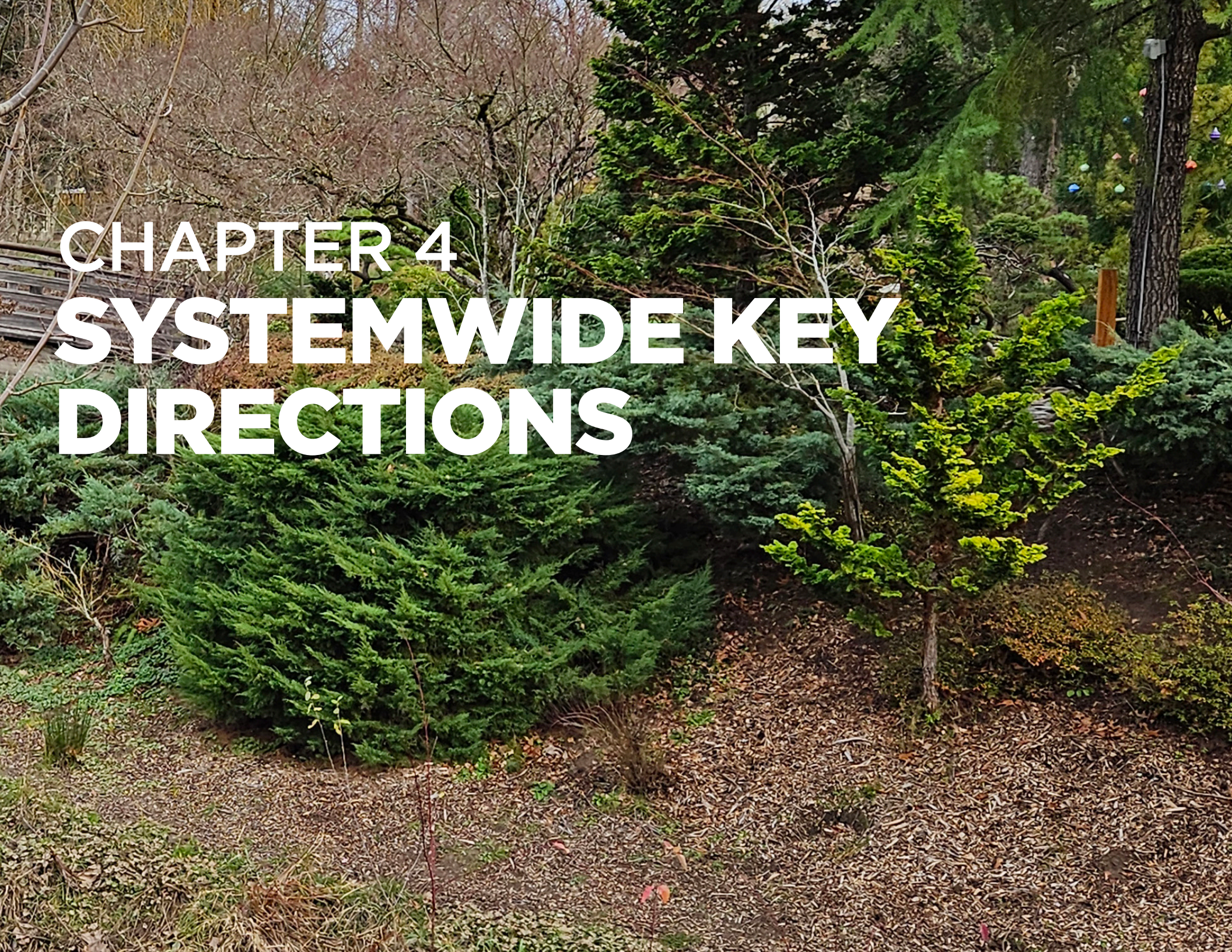

CHAPTER 4
SYSTEMWIDE KEY DIRECTIONS

Systemwide Key Directions

This chapter outlines the systemwide key directions for the strategic use of Gresham's resources to enhance parks, recreation facilities, and trails over the next 10 years.

CORE VALUES

Gresham Parks 2035 is centered around three core values that support the systemwide Key Directions and will guide Gresham's provision of parks, recreation, and trails for the next 10 years and beyond. These core values were identified through conversations with the City's Parks & Recreation Community Advisory Group (PRCAG), a diverse group of community members and institutional representatives. Convened in 2021, this group evaluated the City's recreation services and recommended strategies to improve community outcomes. They identified accessibility, equity, and safety as core values that should serve as the foundation for considering park and recreation investments and the prioritization of programs and projects. To provide clear direction, the group defined the core values as shown in Figure 4-1. These core values guide the Gresham Parks 2035 recommendations included in this document.

FIGURE 4-1: CORE VALUE DEFINITIONS

Accessibility

Capable of being used or accessed. Often in parks and recreation, accessibility means at its basic level, legally accessible to people as determined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Accessible is not the same as inclusive.

Equity

As a function of fairness, equity implies ensuring that people have what they need to participate. Equity ensures that essential programs, services, activities, and technologies are accessible to all. Equity treatment involves eliminating barriers that prevent the full participation of all individuals.

Safety

Parks contribute to safer and more resilient neighborhoods by providing well-maintained public spaces for communities to gather. Physical characteristics that contribute to safety include lighting, clear pathways, a thoughtful layout of amenities, maximizing visibility, ongoing maintenance and positive use.

SOURCE: City of Gresham Parks & Recreation Community Advisory Group

KEY DIRECTIONS

Gresham Parks 2035 recommends seven Key Directions that will guide how the Gresham Parks Program manages, develops, and enhances parks, recreation facilities, and trails over the next 10 years and beyond. These Key Directions reflect the recommended focus areas for the strategic use of Gresham's resources. Each Key Direction is described below and on the following pages, followed by priority action items to implement Gresham Parks 2035. The list is not in order of priority.

1. **Provide safe, welcoming, and well-maintained parks and trails.**
2. **Develop undeveloped neighborhood and community parks.**
3. **Ensure equitable park access and distribution.**
4. **Improve existing parks and trails.**
5. **Strengthen programming, engagement, communication and coordination efforts with partners, volunteers, and community groups.**
6. **Identify sustainable funding sources.**
7. **Promote a sustainable and resilient system.**

*Key Direction numbering does not reflect priority.

KEY DIRECTION 1:
PROVIDE SAFE, WELCOMING, AND WELL-MAINTAINED PARKS AND TRAILS.

Park safety and maintenance emerged as one of the top community priorities across all Gresham Parks 2035 engagement activities. Safety concerns were identified as a top barrier to visiting parks by Gresham Parks 2035 Online Questionnaire respondents, followed by the poor condition or maintenance of parks. Participants in targeted outreach meetings with Spanish, Russian, and Ukrainian speaking residents echoed these concerns, further highlighting the need to increase park safety and maintenance systemwide.

"Main City could use some playground and ball-field love. Currently, the Japanese Garden is the jewel--would love to have the other amenities shine as bright." —Community Online Prioritization Questionnaire Respondent

"I think that all city parks should be well-maintained and preserved, prioritizing sustainability, cleanliness, accessibility, and safety." —Community Online Prioritization Questionnaire Respondent

Improving safety and maintenance of parks and trails leads to a multitude of benefits. For instance, well-maintained and safe parks are more likely to be used and enjoyed, contributing to overall community health and well-being. Regular maintenance of parks and trails also encourages a prolonged lifespan of park infrastructure and equipment, supporting the overall financial health and longevity of the system. To capture these benefits, it is essential that the City prioritizes adequate maintenance resources and safety initiatives, and that when building or renovating sites, that the City focuses on selecting materials that require minimal maintenance and promote longevity. To improve park and trail safety, condition, and maintenance, the Gresham Park Program should focus on the following recommendations.

Main City Park

1.1 Develop a tiered approach to routine and preventative park maintenance.

1.2 Increase tree and natural resource stewardship, restoration, and management within all parks where applicable, but especially within managed nature parks. Explore opportunities to partner with urban forestry workforce development nonprofits, local schools, and other community partners.

1.3 Ensure sufficient maintenance resources (funding, staffing, and equipment) are available to support the safety, cleanliness, and aesthetics for existing, planned, and proposed parks, trails, and managed nature parks. Prior to developing new sites, ensure that sufficient resources are available to maintain and operate these sites without sacrificing quality or level of service elsewhere.

1.4 Design and improve parks, facilities, and trails in a manner that maximizes efficient maintenance practices.

1.5 Implement a variety of operational safety initiatives to target specific and ongoing community concerns such as smoking, drug use, off-leash dogs, and loud music, as well as more serious concerns such as vandalism and personal safety crimes. Potential actions include additional signage, the development of a Park Ranger Program, and further coordination with public safety agencies.

1.6 Design or renovate parks to incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidelines to address the siting of facilities, visibility and sightlines, access and egress, and similar considerations to support park safety. Implement a variety of improvements to increase user perceptions of safety in parks and along trails (e.g. lighting, safety call boxes, surveillance cameras, multilingual signage, etc.). Coordinate these improvements with activities and facilities funded by the City's recently approved safety levy.

1.7 Explore new and expand existing partnerships to support the maintenance, stewardship, and ecological resilience of the City's nature parks as guided by the Gresham Natural Area Master Plan. Examples of current partners include Friends of Trees and Connecting Canopies with Blueprint Foundation.

1.8 Consider the cost-effectiveness of hiring additional in-house staff or develop staff training opportunities for specialized tasks (i.e. arborist) versus contracting out maintenance and stewardship tasks that require specialized expertise and equipment).

Memorial Heat Dome Tree Planting, Nadaka Neighborhood Park

KEY DIRECTION 2:
DEVELOP UNDEVELOPED NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY PARKS.

The City currently owns seven undeveloped park sites, including four undeveloped neighborhood parks, two undeveloped community parks, and one undeveloped nature park. Development of these parks is a highly cost-effective way to leverage existing properties to expand community access to park and recreation experiences. These sites should be a top priority as they are already under City ownership and do not require additional acquisition. At the same time, development of these parks should only be undertaken if the City expects to have adequate resources to effectively maintain and operate these new facilities without compromising operation and maintenance of existing facilities.

2.1 Prioritize development of existing community parks to provide access to sports, large group gatherings, and specialized recreation opportunities for several neighborhoods or a large portion of the community. To encourage longer stays and support outdoor events and programs, include support amenities such as parking, permanent restrooms, shade, and other comfort amenities. Where feasible, connect these sites to the City's trail network (as well as nearby sidewalks) to make them easily accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists.

2.2 Develop existing undeveloped neighborhood parks to support opportunities for play, family gatherings and picnics, gardening, and active recreation for nearby residents that live within walking and biking distance.

Southwest Community Park (Undeveloped)

"Add development, especially access, trails & low-cost amenities, to our undeveloped community parks. Make sure all are ADA accessible."

—Community Online Prioritization Questionnaire Respondent

KEY DIRECTION 3:
ENSURE EQUITABLE PARK ACCESS AND DISTRIBUTION.

The desire for a more equitable distribution of parks and facilities emerged as a key community priority during the Gresham Parks 2035 engagement process, as well as during earlier parks planning processes that served as a foundation for Gresham Parks 2035. Equitable access both to and within parks and facilities are equally important to ensure that all Gresham residents can experience the many economic, social, and health benefits that parks provide. As described in Chapter 3, several neighborhoods in Gresham lack access to neighborhood or community parks within a 10-minute walk, due either to the lack of nearby parkland or the lack of infrastructure such as sidewalks that would make sites more easily accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists. As a result, these areas lack easily accessible recreational facilities and amenities such as play areas, picnic shelters, gathering spaces, and other facilities identified as priorities by participants in community engagement activities.

Chapter 3 also highlights areas of the city that lack access to regional and community trails within a 10-minute walk, which is another priority identified in engagement efforts. To access these park and recreation opportunities, community members are required to travel to other better-served neighborhoods in the city. To improve access and geographic distribution, the City should explore opportunities to develop parks in planned growth areas, high-density areas, areas with higher levels of social vulnerability, and in underserved areas, while also investing in planned community and regional trails or supporting sidewalk development to improve access to parks, facilities, and trails.

Shane T. Bemis Nature Park (GreenWorks)

Mayor Charles Becker Park

The City should prioritize the following recommendations to ensure equitable access to and distribution of parks, facilities, and trails. This Key Direction will be complemented by achieving Key Direction 2 in several underserved areas.

3.1 Coordinate with other City departments to prioritize pedestrian and bicycle projects (e.g., trail connections, pedestrian crossings, sidewalk improvements, installation of bike lanes or shared streets) where they will enhance access and improve safe connections to parks and recreation facilities.

3.2 Triage park development and services in underserved neighborhoods as identified in Chapter 3. Since the City lacks the resources to remedy these gaps immediately, it may consider a variety of temporary services and more permanent solutions to expand equitable access. Potential solutions include:

- Invest in a mobile recreation fleet to bring varied staff-led recreation activities programs, facilities, and equipment to underserved neighborhoods and park deficient areas.
- Focus park acquisition and/or development efforts in underserved neighborhoods of the highest need. (See Chapter 3.) These efforts may include partnerships, improvements to other types of City-owned lands such as stormwater detention basins, street rights-of-way (for trails and associated amenities), building grounds (City Hall, fire stations, the library), etc.
- Develop joint-use agreements with the Gresham-Barlow, Centennial, and Reynolds School Districts to expand recreation opportunities and to leverage access during non-school hours, especially in underserved neighborhoods. (See Chapter 3.)
- Explore opportunities to develop small-footprint facilities on partner sites and small park or recreation properties where larger parks are not feasible. These can leverage small existing green spaces, such as unused lawn or space around schools and other public facilities or areas adjacent to and within the right-of-way of community or regional trail corridors.
- Explore other options for park acquisition or development, including incentivizing private providers to offer public-accessible private open space or recreation opportunities.

3.3 Update the City's Parks System Development Charges (SDC) methodology to ensure that rates and fees are adequate to fully cover capacity-enhancement projects. This effort should be coordinated with the evaluation of updated parkland dedication and other required fees associated with new development. Fees collected should support the land dedication and development of close-to-home neighborhood parks, as well as contribute to the development of larger community parks that provide access to specialized recreation opportunities.

3.4 Develop planned community and regional trails, including planned trails in new growth areas.

KEY DIRECTION 4: IMPROVE EXISTING PARKS AND TRAILS.

Improving old and worn park features and providing diverse and varied amenities and experiences at Gresham's existing parks and facilities was identified as a top community priority throughout Gresham Parks 2035 engagement efforts. Outreach participants noted that a lack of amenities at existing parks was identified as a top barrier to visitation. Community members also raised concerns around the quality of existing park amenities and a desire for improvements to outdated, worn, and broken park features. Beyond these concerns, accessibility of park features and amenities was highlighted as an additional barrier to park use and visitation. Community engagement efforts and an abbreviated American with Disability Act (ADA) Facility Assessment Report conducted as part of Gresham Parks 2035 highlighted the need for site-specific improvements to support greater facility use by people of all ages and abilities. Of the sites analyzed, the assessment noted a need to improve and/or create accessible routes to and pathways within parks, ensure that entrances and park features are accessible, and address a variety of other issues related to the use of specific park amenities by people with physical disabilities. To address these concerns, the City should prioritize investments in existing parks to provide improved, accessible, and diversified amenities.

4.1 Upgrade existing parks to repair amenities and facilities or replace them at the end of their lifecycles. (See site recommendations in Chapter 5.) When renovating parks and recreation facilities, ensure that ADA accessibility improvements to specific facilities and support amenities (such as paths and benches) are made to ensure they are inclusive and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities.

4.2 When renovating and replacing amenities and facilities, consider options to diversify amenities and experiences to expand the types of recreation opportunities offered in Gresham parks.

4.3 Improve trails and paths within existing parks to include accessible surfaces and additional amenities such as benches, drinking fountains, trash receptacles, fitness stations, multi-lingual interpretive signage, and wayfinding.

4.4 Expand existing parks as opportunities arise and resources allow.

4.5 Complete ADA assessments for parks and trails that have not yet been assessed to identify site-specific improvements to support greater facility use by people of all ages and abilities.

"Continuing to upgrade and improve existing parks features will encourage people to get outside, and will also help create a sense of ownership and pride, hopefully minimizing vandalism."

—Community Online Prioritization Questionnaire Respondent

KEY DIRECTION 5: STRENGTHEN PROGRAMMING, ENGAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION, AND COORDINATION EFFORTS WITH PARTNERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND COMMUNITY GROUPS.

Community partnerships are crucial to the current and ongoing success of the Gresham park and recreation system, offering numerous benefits beyond increasing resources. They enhance program offerings and create opportunities to leverage shared interests and resources. Community members expressed interest in expanding recreational programs and services to include more youth, teen, and older adult programs. The City of Gresham primarily relies on community partners to offer recreational programs and services in City parks. This approach should continue, since the City lacks the funding and staffing to be a primary provider of recreational programs. Going forward, City staff should continue leveraging public and private partners, as well as volunteers, to provide and support events and programs in parks.

In addition to community partnerships, volunteers are a non-monetary resource that can offset labor costs for activities such as park cleanups, tree planting, removal of invasive species, etc. To take advantage of these benefits, additional volunteer coordination may be needed for recruitment, training, management, and recognition.

Strong engagement and communications ensure accountability and transparency, leading to greater participation and support for park and recreation initiatives. Many community members want to stay informed and involved throughout the implementation of Gresham Parks 2035. Engagement findings also noted that some residents do not participate in City park programs, because they do not know where parks are or what programs are available.

Gresham Youth Services Mobile Recreation Vehicle

The City should prioritize the following recommendations to strengthen community partnerships, volunteerism, engagement, and communications.

5.1 Periodically review and re-evaluate existing partnership and joint-use agreements to strengthen relationships, identify areas for improvement, verify partners that provide programming for older adults and those with disabilities, and ensure a joint commitment to equity. Ensure there are no exclusive-use partnerships.

5.2 Hire a Volunteer Coordinator to strengthen and formalize volunteer recruitment, coordination, and management.

5.3 Explore new partnership opportunities with residents, partners, sponsors, City departments, community-based organizations, the Gresham Library, and other entities to expand programs for youth, teens, older adults, and individuals living with disabilities.

5.4 Expand partnerships with schools and the Centennial, Gresham-Barlow, and Reynolds School Districts to leverage shared interests and resources.

5.5 Improve external communications regarding parks, facilities, and trails. Use multilingual and interactive engagement materials, tools, and strategies to share information, promote the City's new Park Amenity App once it's available, and improve diverse community involvement in Parks Program efforts.

5.6 Explore formal public/public and public/private partnerships with equity investors or contracted operations for major facility planning, development, operations, and reinvestment.

5.7 Partner with public safety agencies and regional partners to address community perceptions of safety in parks and along trails.

SKIP at Nadaka Neighborhood Park

KEY DIRECTION 6: IDENTIFY SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCES.

Gresham Parks 2035 is a long-range planning document intended to guide decision-making, investments, and projects over the next 10 years and beyond. Implementation of the Gresham Parks 2035 vision and recommendations will depend on the availability of funding sources to improve and maintain the existing system as well as support future investments.

6.1 Prior to developing new parks or facilities, ensure that additional funds are secured and will be available to address park maintenance, operations, and programming, and identify a dedicated long-term funding source to ensure appropriate maintenance and staffing levels.

6.2 Create a dedicated annual funding allocation for park acquisition in existing underserved neighborhoods.

6.3 Conduct a comprehensive fee structure update to analyze existing revenues and update fees to cover asset management, facility costs, and events.

6.4 Update the City's park SDC methodology and rates to explore alternative ways of defining level of service beyond acreage per 1,000 population that better reflect how parks function in an infill context and in higher-density areas; consider inclusion of a reimbursement fee; and potentially revisit the exclusion of commercial and industrial development from the Parks SDC.

6.5 Consider development of additional capital funding, including urban renewal/tax increment financing, expanded grant funding, community donations or sponsorships, and general obligation bonds.

6.6 Consider changes to the City's Police, Fire, Parks Utility Fee (PPF) maintaining and indexing the fee); adjust the allocation split of the PPF to increase the share dedicated to parks; and/or or adopt and implement a separate utility maintenance fee for parks.

6.7 Explore additional potential strategies to increase operation and maintenance funding resources such as operational levies, endowments, increased rental fees, vendor permits, and a separate park and recreation district formation.

6.8 Update land dedication requirements and fees to ensure that parkland dedication requirements and fees are sufficient to support the development of quality parks in residential growth areas. Coordinate this evaluation with updates to the City's park SDC methodology and rates.

"Please don't build any more parks if the City is not going to fund the positions to maintain them. Invest in streamlining the parks we have to make maintenance easier."

—Community Online Prioritization Questionnaire Respondent

KEY DIRECTION 7: PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT SYSTEM.

Beyond providing recreational opportunities, access to nature, and gathering spaces that support community well-being and connection, Gresham's parks play a central role in achieving a sustainable and resilient future. Throughout the Gresham Parks 2035 engagement process, community members raised a desire to adapt to current and future climate conditions to enhance user comfort, promote systemwide ecological health, and increase resilience to hazards such as wildfires and extreme heat. Beyond promoting a more climate resilient ecosystem, parks provide a unique opportunity to increase community resilience and emergency preparedness. Parks bring people together, promote human connection, and provide touchpoints for the City to share critical public information. During emergencies, parks also can provide shelter and staging areas. Each of these elements are essential to fostering a resilient community.

City staff also communicated the importance of implementing measures that contribute to a sustainable park and recreation system, recognizing that sustainable practices also contribute to the system's climate resilience. To improve systemwide sustainability and resilience, the Gresham Park Program should focus on the following recommendations.

Shane T. Bemis Nature Park

7.1 Incorporate ecological and sustainable best practices into the maintenance, management, and development of parks and recreation facilities to support stormwater drainage, flood control, air and water quality, pollution reduction, carbon sequestration, pollinator health, wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and similar environmental and ecological outcomes.

7.2 Implement measures to help parks withstand climate-related impacts such as wildfires, droughts, extreme heat, vegetation pests and disease, and severe weather. Potential examples include providing shade by adding trees, shade sails, or permanent shade structures; adding water play features; using native species in landscaping; and integrating bioswales or other stormwater infrastructure in parks.

7.3 Promote urban cooling in parks and along trails by incorporating shade structures and maintaining, enhancing, and increasing the city's urban tree canopy.

7.4 Use low-maintenance, drought tolerant, and locally adapted native species for landscaping, natural area restoration, rehabilitation, and erosion control wherever feasible.

7.5 Collaborate with other city-wide efforts to enhance sustainability and climate resilience in City parks, recreation facilities, and natural areas, such as Gresham's Climate Action Plan and Heat Plan Strategy.

7.6 Identify opportunities to create multiple benefits within parks by integrating improvements that address stormwater management, emergency response or preparedness, enhanced transportation connections, and other community goals.

"Prioritize native plants and trees with an eye towards resilience as climate catastrophes worsens. Well chosen native plants tend to need less care than introduced species. They also are usually a better match for our native fauna and insects." —Community Online Prioritization Questionnaire Respondent

Pollinator Garden at Leach Botanical Garden, Portland, Oregon (Travel Portland)