

# **LACEY PARKS CULTURE AND RECREATION**

## **Lacey Cares Community Input Findings and Future Outreach Recommendations**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, the City of Lacey has engaged the greater Lacey community in a discussion about the future and the way people would like to see their city look, feel and function. Through the Lacey Cares initiative and subsequent outreach, the City of Lacey Parks, Culture and Recreation Department has established a solid framework for future strategic planning. This document summarizes key findings related to community preferences and priorities and outlines next steps with respect to ensuring future initiatives are aligned with community expectations. The ultimate goal is to build a shared vision for the future of cultural and recreation assets and opportunities.

## II. KEY FINDINGS TO DATE

The following summarizes key takeaways from three proactive community outreach activities, including:

- Lacey Cares Open-Ended Survey (online; multi-topic including Parks, Culture and Recreation)
- Lacey Parks Outreach Team Intercept Interviews (online and in-person at multiple locations)
- Lacey Parks, Culture and Recreation Priorities Survey (online)

This document captures primary findings. However, additional insights may be gleaned from revisiting the summary reports produced for each of the efforts. Conclusions to date include:

### Top Conclusions

#### Survey participants are most supportive of an aquatic center or public pool

##### *Considerations:*

- Tumwater-Olympia regional aquatics center study indicates universal support
- **Popular across ALL socioeconomic profiles**
- People are not satisfied with limited swim lessons/access to NTPS pools
- Preference for indoor pool, or multiple pools with indoor anchor
- Respondents have not yet been asked to opine on financing mechanisms

#### Indoor recreation is a priority, but desired offerings vary

##### *Considerations:*

- An indoor swimming pool is the top priority by far, as a stand-alone or combined offering
- Playgrounds in general do not rank among highest priorities given outdoor prevalence throughout Lacey, but **INDOOR playgrounds** ARE a priority for parents looking for activities out of the rain
- Additional indoor priorities appear to include skating rink, teen center, senior center, basketball
- Worth noting: Basketball courts (highest supported activity after indoor/covered playgrounds) are easily adapted to accommodate other secondary priorities, including soccer, pickleball, volleyball and tennis important to smaller but passionate audiences.

## Open spaces, trails and preservation of natural areas are a top priority

### *Considerations:*

- Combination of inputs and interest, including: preservation of existing spaces; extension and connection of walking and bike trails; and increased **access to natural areas**
- Priority in neighborhoods surrounding Lacey Gateway area due to construction, trucks, tree removal
- Notably, over one-third of respondents selected cross-country trails as a priority (cross-country trails can also be used for walking, bird watching and other passive recreation purposes)

## Affordable, subsidized recreation opportunities remain a top priority

### *Considerations:*

- Approximately two-thirds of survey respondents selected this as a priority, and about 64% selected it with a first or second place vote (out of three votes)
- This may suggest that **people value access not just for themselves, but for others** as well
- There is broad support for additional programming for all ages, but especially teens and youth
- Half of survey respondents voted for more programming for youth and teens; a third supported more programming for seniors; and a quarter voted for more programming for adults
- There were a variety of suggestions, including parenting and cooking classes, but more concentrated work needs to be done regarding the specific TYPE of programming and level of affordability would be most appreciated/used

## There is high support for one or more spray parks and/or splash pads

### *Considerations:*

- There was some question as to how prevalent support was given that spray parks and splash pads first surfaced during intercept surveys over the summer; support was validated in the fall survey
- Splash pads received the second most votes for desired outdoor features, just behind walking trails
- They received the second most Top 3 priority votes, just behind swimming pool

## There is mild interest in acquiring additional parks, relative to other priorities

### *Considerations:*

- Community members appear to appreciate the options already available
- Preference to complete build out at existing parks
- New ballfields not rated as high as other priorities in general
- **BUT year-round, multi-purpose, turf fields ARE popular/desired**

## There is a clear preference for *events* over *classes* with respect to programming

### *Considerations:*

- **Concerts in the park** received the single largest vote, with nearly 50% of participants
- Other activities, including **movies in the park** and **fun runs**, were also rated high priority
- **Cooking, crafts and art** were the highest priority classes
- There is very little support for additional **virtual programming**

## Street fairs with food and entertainment top arts and culture priority

### *Considerations:*

- **Street fairs** are the highest rated priority in the survey (over half rated as priority)
- Expanded **farmer's market** isn't far behind
- **Cultural events and festivals** and **music performances** are also highly rated
- **Art displays and galleries** and **education/lecture series** scored relatively low

## Other Findings of Note

### Several options/potential features should be explored more thoroughly

#### *Considerations:*

- An indoor and/or covered **ice skating rink** rated just below playgrounds on the indoor priorities question, and above other items including basketball, batting cages, soccer and pickleball
- There was modest support for an expanded **senior center**, but additional engagement targeted to the senior community is warranted to determine actual interest among potential users
- Similarly, **pickleball** received middling support overall, but would appear to be a very high priority among an active subset of the population – additional research would be helpful

### The Lacey Museum, future Lacey Museum and Cultural Center, and Lacey Depot were not included in the online survey

#### *Considerations:*

- Both are already in operation and therefore were not included in the “what next” question set, and both are better assessed through community development focus area of Lacey Cares
- While neither emerged as a “write-in” priority through Lacey Cares or Parks Priorities survey, these facilities will be instrumental in hosting popular classes, cultural events, and music performances

### III. NEXT STEPS

This section summarizes context for next steps and outlines topic areas/audiences and approaches for additional public and targeted stakeholder engagement.

#### Context

In 2022, Lacey Parks, Culture and Recreation (LPCR) is scheduled to commence an extensive assessment, analysis and public involvement process that will create the foundation for a Parks, Culture and Recreation Comprehensive Plan update due in 2023. The Lacey Cares engagement and recent Parks Priorities Survey undertaken during 2020-2021 have effectively accelerated that process. Rather than having to proceed with a ground-zero public participation process, the City can tailor the upcoming process to:

- Execute targeted engagement and education strategies
- Determine highest priorities among an already-narrowed, community-defined list of preferences
- Focus on implementation and funding solutions for major projects
- Engage private, public and nonprofit partners with shared interest in specific community goals

While the Lacey Cares and Parks Priorities Surveys provide a solid starting point for future planning, LPCR will also need to synchronize community goals with adopted standard of recreation service delivery and affordability targets. This includes an evaluation of who is participating in current programming, who is struggling to access programs and which programs, or spaces, are no longer viable or of interest.

Ultimately, analysis will also need to consider whether goals are achievable with current staffing and resource levels and, if not, how they will be funded or otherwise postponed until solutions emerge. The following section offers some approaches to help better-define shared goals and ensure Lacey is clearly communicating and moving in the direction that the majority of community members expect.

#### Engagement Gaps and Targets

##### **Conduct Proactive Outreach with Groups Underrepresented in Priorities Survey**

Additional direct engagement with targeted audiences will be beneficial to identifying and clarifying parks, culture and recreation needs. In particular, the City might consider working through community based organizations, the City's Commission on Equity, and other partners to conduct listening sessions or focus groups with demographic segments underrepresented in the Parks Priorities survey, including, but not limited to:

- BIPOC communities
- Senior communities (system users and non-users)
- Youth (under age 21) in general
- System users (sports teams, programs and classes, specific park user groups)
- Military families (particularly those who are new transfers)

## Confirm Public Priorities, Expectations and Support for Perceived Priorities

If the City concludes public funding is required to meet needs and expectations, it would be advisable to conduct a statistically-valid telephone or hybrid phone/online survey. This could be done as a stand-alone Parks, Culture and Recreation survey, or, as part of a larger Lacey Cares prioritization survey. In either scenario, the survey would provide a valuable supplement to the original Parks Priorities survey by providing a statistically reliable gauge of public support by age, income, race and ethnicity.

If conducted far enough in advance of an actual funding proposal, the survey could yield important insights as to information gaps and/or necessary course adjustments. The survey could, in addition to clarifying level of support for future investments, help to determine:

- Preferred funding mechanisms (public-private partnerships, sales tax, property tax, bonding, et al)
- Willingness of voters or homeowners to fund specific enhancements
- The threshold of that willingness in actual annual dollar amounts
- Voter interests and needs by geographic location, age cohort and other socioeconomic factors

The City will also need to increase awareness and build support for funding parks-related maintenance. Over the past several decades, Lacey has assembled one of the premier parks systems in Washington State. While less funding is required to purchase land, ongoing **parks build-out and maintenance** require continued investment. This topic should be included in future engagement and survey activities.

## Approaches

### Begin Exploring Potential Implementation Options and Partnerships

Recreational activities and services are offered by a plethora of public, private and nonprofit entities. Examples include sports leagues, private gym memberships, arts and culture classes, and specific destination recreation venues to name a few. As the City maps out the path forward, it may be beneficial to engage potential partners with overlapping interests. Specific Lacey offerings that might benefit from partnerships include, but are not limited to:

- Indoor recreation spaces in general
- Swimming pool or aquatics center
- Multi-purpose sports fields
- Ice skating rink
- Open space and trail access
- Arts and culture access and programming
- Spray pad/splash park locations

Potential partners could include, but are not limited to:

- The Nisqually Tribe
- North Thurston Public Schools
- YMCA, Boys and Girls Club and other social service clubs and organizations
- Private or nonprofit sports leagues
- Peer Cities and Thurston County
- Saint Martin's University

The goal is to proactively engage representatives of these entities to identify overlapping interests and potential partnership structures that can help advance priorities and maintain affordable access for all.

## Conduct Proactive Education

Parks are often cited by Lacey as being the #1 thing they value about living here – including the abundance and affordable access. However, not many think about the complexity and expense associated with creating and maintaining such a system. Building and maintaining support for Parks, Culture and Recreation advances is an ongoing, iterative process. The most acute challenge is reaching those who do not or perceive they do not benefit directly from investment in park offerings, or who simply do not know what's available. In the coming months, the City can expand community awareness and engagement through:

- Speaker's Bureau presentations (service organizations, senior living facilities, neighborhood associations, military spouse clubs, etc.)
- Newsletter updates (Did You Know features emphasizing parks, culture and recreation resources and features)
- Direct mailings, social media posts and earned media coverage that highlight various aspects of the parks, culture and recreation system – including current assets and future community-defined priorities

Communications should emphasize:

- Why Parks Matter: The value of parks and recreation access to personal AND community health (e.g., increased opportunities for youth, reduction in select crime rates and social spending, the benefits to active seniors, the benefits to working parents, et al)
- Increasing awareness about the range (and creating an easily-accessible inventory) of parks, culture and recreation assets and opportunities available to people of all backgrounds and interests
- The value to Lacey taxpayers relative to typical communities (e.g., park space per capita, cost per capita to access quality recreational programming, economic impact and return on investment derived from parks and recreation offerings, etc.)
- The value of protecting cities from environmental impact (stormwater management, flood mitigation, increased sustainability, etc.)
- Tools for cities to achieve equity goals
- How Parks, Culture and Recreation is an excellent steward of public resources and focused on implementing community-defined priorities

These core messages can be supplemented as appropriate to reflect other topics of interest gleaned from future community engagement.