
Appendix A: *Park Classifications*

The intent of parks and recreation classifications is to aid in making acquisition and design decisions for park sites, facilities and the organization of recreation space which is responsive to public needs, creates quality recreational experiences and facilities that can be effectively maintained.

Park classifications are primarily based on National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA) guidelines and consider types of uses, size and relative service area of each park. The classifications used in Bellingham include:

1. *Parks & Recreation*
 - Neighborhood Parks*
 - Community Parks*
 - Special Use Sites*
2. *Open Space*
3. *Trails*

The guidelines below are for general purposes only. Actual acquisition and/or development of a park site will depend on several factors. These must be considered in connection with classification and guidelines when making planning decisions. These can include any community-based goals or needs for a given area, usually defined through a community process, or site-specific context such as topography, sensitive areas, access, zoning regulations, etc. that may limit the use of a given site.

Park classifications establish several essential elements for park land requirements based generally on the types of recreational uses and services to be provided. The following describes the park classifications for Bellingham, generally modified from the NRPA standards to reflect the Bellingham community preferences. In all cases, the approximate size of each park type shown below is a general parameter only. Actual size should be based on the land area needed to accommodate desired uses. Service areas shown may also vary as physical characteristics, such as topography or major roadways, may reduce the service area if access is limited by these factors. Park lighting and general crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principals should also be considered during the design process to promote safety and security within park settings.

1. Parks & Recreation

Neighborhood Parks

1. General Description: A neighborhood is the basic recreational focus and center of a neighborhood. They should be developed for both active and passive recreation activities geared specifically for those living within the service area. They should also accommodate a wide variety of age and user groups, including children, adults, seniors and special populations. Creating a sense of place by bringing together the unique character of the site with that of the neighborhood is vital to successful neighborhood park design.
2. Approximate Size: 2 to 10 acres.
3. Service Area: 1/2 mile radius.
4. Acquisition Guidelines: Neighborhood parks should be centrally located within the neighborhood it serves. Vehicular access may be provided through arterial roadways or smaller neighborhood streets. Citizens should be able to walk to these parks without having to cross a major arterial street. Some portion of the total acreage should be upland “developable” land of a size sufficient to support the desired uses for that neighborhood.
5. Development Guidelines: Since each neighborhood is unique, neighborhood input should be used to determine the development program for the park. In general, development should provide a balance between active and passive recreation uses and should represent the characteristics and context of the community in which it is located. Where active recreation is provided, it should be intended for primarily informal, unstructured activities, or smaller programmed activities that will not overburden the supporting infrastructure (parking, restroom, etc.). The following activities are intended to serve as a general guideline only:
 - a. *Parking* – generally limited to around 2 – 10 stalls. While the intent is for neighborhood parks to be walkable to most residences in the area it serves, parking may still be needed to support those uses that need greater assistance, such as seniors or those with disabilities. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements should be met in all cases. On street parking may be used to meet these criteria.
 - b. *Site Furnishings* – such as bike racks, benches, trash receptacles, park signage, picnic tables and drinking fountains.

- c. *Restrooms* – may be provided where space and funding allow. This could include permanent, semi-permanent or portable facilities.
- d. *Play Area* – with climbing structures, swings, or other similar elements, designed for a variety of ages and abilities.
- e. *Picnic* – tables, barbeque and/or small group shelters.
- f. *Open grass lawn areas*.
- g. *Sport facilities* – compatible with neighborhood setting and park site constraints, such as:
 - Basketball: half court or full court
 - Volleyball, tennis, bocce ball, pickleball
 - Softball/baseball field (informal or youth)
 - Soccer field (informal or youth)
- h. *Other* – features as needs or site conditions allow that may help create diversity and a unique character to each individual park. These may include public art, skateboard elements, climbing walls, or other similar elements. Where provided, these should generally be smaller in nature to fit the scale and context of the neighborhood park setting.

Community Parks

1. General Description: Community parks are larger in size and are intended to serve a broader range of activities and users. Their focus is on meeting the recreation needs of several neighborhoods with more specialized activities, as well as preserving unique landscapes, open spaces or environmental features. They allow for group activities and offer other recreation opportunities not generally found at a neighborhood level. Due their larger size, they are often designed to serve a neighborhood park function as well and generally include all of the same neighborhood park activities as well as additional unique characteristics described above.
2. Approximate Size: 20 – 60 acres.
3. Service Area: 1 mile radius.
4. Acquisition Guidelines: The quality of the natural resource base or the available land for the uses anticipated should play a defining role in locating potential community park sites. They should be located adjacent to a major arterial or other collector street to provide easy vehicular as well as pedestrian and other multi-modal access. The proximity of other park types should also be considered as the types of activities found in a community park may overlap with other park functions. The service area for these other park types may be used, in part, as justification for or against a community park in a specific area.

Some portion of the total acreage should be “developable” land of a size sufficient to support the desired uses for that park.

5. Development Guidelines: Neighborhood and larger community or city-wide input should be used to determine the development program for a community park. In general, development should provide a balance between active and passive recreation uses and should represent the characteristics and context of the community in which it is located. Where active recreation is provided, it is generally intended for larger programmed activities such as sports league practices, games and/or tournaments. Active recreation, such as sports fields, in community parks may have additional support facilities not found at a neighborhood level, such as bleachers, fencing, dugouts, concessions, synthetic turf and/or lighting. The following activities are in addition to neighborhood park guidelines and are intended to serve as a general guideline only:
 - a. *Parking* – generally larger in size to support more organized activities and larger group events. May be anywhere from 20 – 80 or more stalls depending on the intended uses.
 - b. *Restrooms* – should generally be provided and should provide permanent facilities where feasible. Additional portable facilities may be needed during peak season or for special organized events.
 - c. *Picnic* – larger group shelters that can be programmed and/or rented out for special events.
 - d. *Specialized Uses* – that may not be feasible to provide in every neighborhood park. These may include:
 - Spray park
 - Skateboard park
 - Off leash area
 - Fishing docks or piers
 - Waterfront access
 - Regional trail connections
 - Education/demonstration areas
 - Outdoor stage/amphitheater
 - e. *Concessions/Vendors* – for food, beverage, rentals, etc. as feasible and demand allows.

Regional Parks

1. General Description: Regional parks are generally the largest in size and serve the greatest geographical area, often extending beyond the city or urban growth area limits to include county and/or other adjacent jurisdictions. Their focus is on providing specialized activities, as well as preserving unique landscapes, open spaces or environmental features. They allow for group activities and offer other recreation opportunities not generally found at a community or neighborhood park level. They

may also be designed to serve a community or neighborhood park function as well, but are often of a more specialized nature.

2. Approximate Size: 80 acres or more.
3. Service Area: 5 mile radius or more (as needed).
4. Acquisition Guidelines: Regional park facilities, because they span many jurisdictions, should be acquired jointly with other agency support when feasible, such as county, school district, port authority, preservation groups and/or other adjacent jurisdictions. They should be situated such that sufficient infrastructure could be developed or already exists to support a large number of visitors, including major arterials, buses and other mass transit capabilities. They should also have access to multi-modal connections.
5. Development Guidelines: Regional parks should be developed to maximize their intended uses, whether for sports fields, mountain biking trails, camping, unique natural or environmental features, or extreme sport venues. They may include the same activities as those found in community and neighborhood park guidelines, but are often intended for a more single, specialized use that requires a larger space than can be supported through a typical community or neighborhood park type. Activities provided will depend solely on the type of intended uses for the park and the influence of the community or region as expressed through a public process, so are not listed individually with this section.

Special Use Sites

1. General Description: The special use classification covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward a single-purpose use. They often fall into three general categories:
 - *Cultural Facilities* – unique resources offering historical, educational, visual/performance art or other similar experiences. These include museums, theaters, galleries, libraries and other civic sites.
 - *Indoor Facilities* – geared toward indoor uses, such as gymnasiums, community centers, teen/senior centers, aquatic centers, ice arenas, etc.
 - *Unique Sites* – generally a single use, but smaller than a regional park and not necessarily of a significance that might draw from a larger regional base. These may include arboretums, cemeteries, plazas, sports stadiums, farmer’s markets, marinas, etc. – especially when they are not in conjunction with other typical park amenities.
2. Approximate Size: Varies.
3. Service Area: Varies.
4. Acquisition Guidelines: As specialized, single use facilities, special use parks should be selected based on the function that they are intended to serve. They should be situated such that sufficient infrastructure could

be developed or already exists to support the intended use, including major arterials, buses and other mass transit capabilities as necessary. They should also have access to multi-modal connections.

5. Development Guidelines: Special use parks should be developed to maximize their intended uses. They generally do NOT include the same activities as those found in other park types. Activities provided will depend solely on the type of intended uses for the park and the influence of the community or region as expressed through a public process, so are not listed individually with this section.

2. Open Space

1. General Description: Open space sites are generally lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space and visual aesthetic or buffering functions. One of the major purposes is to enhance the livability and character of a community by preserving as many of its natural amenities as possible, as well as providing wildlife habitat in rapidly urbanizing areas. These may include both individual sites that exhibit natural resources, or lands that are unsuitable for development but that offer other natural resource potential. Examples include sites with steep slopes, old or second growth forests, wetlands, stream corridors, tidelands, shorelines (salt or fresh water), storm water features, and/or watershed or aquifer recharge zones.
2. Approximate Size: Varies.
3. Service Area: Varies.
4. Acquisition Guidelines: The quality of the natural resource should play a defining role in locating potential open space sites and may be quite different than other park classifications. For example, they may not necessarily need good access, vehicular or multi-modal, if they are intended for preservation purposes. Limited access in this case may be more desirable. For the same reason, there is not the same need for “developable” land unless the site is intended for regional trailheads, interpretive facilities, environmental learning center, conference/retreats or other similar auxiliary uses. Therefore, acquisition guidelines are much more flexible to respond to opportunities as they may become available.

Sites that connect to other parks, open space or natural features should be considered, as well as those that provide wildlife corridors through urban or urbanizing areas, though no priority is intended in these guidelines, unless stated other wise in other sections of this plan.

Preservation techniques beyond simple fee acquisition should also be considered, such as preservation easements, dedications, conservation grants or programs, trusts, development regulations and zoning codes. Tax incentives, density bonuses and other “trade-offs” should be

considered to help encourage these types of alternative preservation techniques.

5. Development Guidelines: Because open space sites serve primarily a preservation function, development should be limited. Access, where provided may include trails, minor trailhead and/or educational features. Because of the limited nature of development on these sites, specific activities are not listed individually in this section.

3. Trails

1. General Description: While trails may be categorized into many different types, for the purposed of this plan trails is limited to generally include off-road multi-use trails only. Trails within parks are shown in individual park development plans and on-street non-motorized facilities (sidewalks and bikeways) are included in the transportation element of the Comprehensive Plan. Trails in this context are intended to form a network of connections in and around the planning area, between neighborhoods and parks, schools, open space, civic facilities and commercial centers.
2. Approximate Size: Varies (linear); generally 25' – 50' wide.
3. Service Area: 1/2 mile radius.
4. Acquisition Guidelines: Trails should be located within open space or greenway corridors whenever possible. They may also be located adjacent to streams stream corridors or within utility right-of-ways, abandoned railroad corridors or expanded roadway networks where they can be separated from vehicular traffic by landscape or other natural features. Larger areas may be needed at key locations along trail corridors to support trailhead development as outlined below. Trails should be considered an integral part of the transportation network.
5. Development Guidelines: In general, trail development should meet local and state departments of transportation or public works standards, as needed. They should also consider AASHTO guidelines and ADA accessibility requirements. Consideration should be given to the trail surfacing and drainage patterns early in the design process. The following activities may be included with supporting trailhead development, as feasible, and is intended to serve as a general guideline only:
 - a. *Parking* – generally limited to around 2 – 5 stalls unless development is considered a major trailhead location when more parking may be anticipated. On street parking may be used to meet these criteria.
 - b. *Site Furnishings* – such as benches, trash receptacles, wayfinding signage, picnic tables and drinking fountains.
 - c. *Restrooms* – may be provided where space and funding allow. This could include permanent, semi-permanent or portable facilities.
 - d. *Other* – features as needs or site conditions.