

2020

Parks 2020 Vision





DOROTHEA *L* ENSCH, 1906 - 2000

Portland Parks and Recreation's
First Recreation Director

*A gentle but savvy woman who personified a life of service,
who started many of the city's cultural arts programs that we enjoy today,
who believed that parks and recreation were such important parts of life
that everyone should have the chance to participate,
who served as a mentor for many of the city's parks and recreation professionals,
who had a lifelong belief in the arts as a way of enriching lives,
who taught people to believe in themselves and in their abilities,
who continues to inspire those who knew her with her spirit, her vision,
and her intense joy and curiosity in life.
You have touched thousands and your legacy lives on.*

We dedicate this report to you.

Acknowledgements



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Our city is blessed by its location and the spirit of its people. As Parks Commissioner, I've come to know our park system and to appreciate the wonderful legacy we've inherited. Our residents love our parks, gardens and trees, trails, rivers and mountains. We draw our substance and identity from these sacred places, and we tread a dangerous path if we fail to acknowledge that.

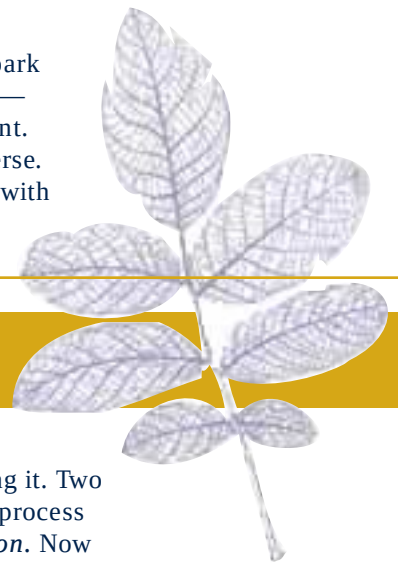
Our parks system is at a crossroads. While there is much to love, there is much that needs to be done. We have 10,000 acres of land, hundreds of parks, and thousands of recreation programs. But Portland cannot be "one city" if some people have state-of-the-art community centers while others have none, or if some find nature within blocks and others must go for miles. Too many of us lack access to nature, parks or recreation spaces. Too many of our buildings, sports fields and natural areas are overused and in short supply. We risk destroying that which belongs to us and to future generations.

Our children are our future, and our responsibility. Every young person in our city deserves to grow up near a neighborhood park or community center with opportunities for nurturing after-school programs, sports, swimming and the enrichment from nature, music and art. We must demonstrate our commitment to them by protecting and providing the public spaces and programs needed for their growth.

By 2020, an estimated 65,000 more people will live in Portland. Our park system will be tremendously challenged to keep pace with this growth—especially as open land and green spaces disappear due to development. Needs are changing—our population is aging and becoming more diverse. The financial needs to protect our parks are vast. We cannot continue with business as usual. We must prepare for the future.



COMMISSIONER'S PREFACE



As an activist, I have learned that talking about a problem is not solving it. Two years ago, Portland Parks & Recreation launched a community-driven process to create a new vision for our parks. The result is the *Parks 2020 Vision*. Now we must take that vision and make it real. We must improve the lives of all our residents and preserve the beauty and integrity of our natural places.

To me, there are four main themes in this report:

- Maintaining what we have;
- Providing access to nature;
- Developing inter-generational community centers in all areas of the city;
- Ensuring safe places for kids.

Accomplishing these won't be easy. This vision asks something of every resident. It requires public support for innovative funding. It requires significant private investment. And it requires us to be stewards of our collective home. But, together we can do it. The *Parks 2020 Vision* marks a new beginning for the city, a new dedication within Park's staff and a new spirit among us all.

Jim Francesconi, Portland City Commissioner



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Portland residents are passionate about their park system. They have come to expect a high level of service and want that service to continue. But funding is flat and is expected to remain so. At the same time, fundamental changes are upon us. Portland is growing, becoming more dense, more diverse, and older. Recreational needs are evolving.

We have the park system we have today because of a legacy of leadership and public support from the past. It took bold action and foresight to set aside the first park blocks, and later the forest tracts, when Portland was only a small town. Each generation has had to recommit its own share of energy and resources to keep the system growing and responsive to emerging needs. Now it is our turn.

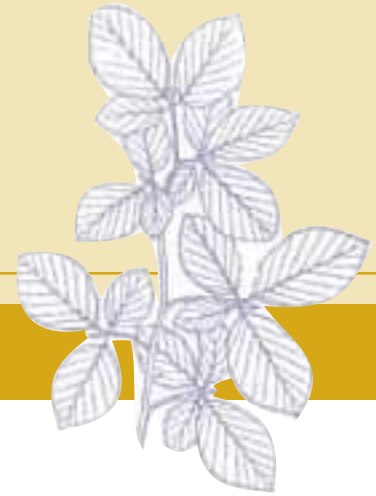
Portland has a park and recreation system of which we are rightfully proud — but there are numerous problems. We have a rich heritage of natural resources — but our heritage is threatened by increased development. We have a first-rate legacy of recreation services — but they are not available to all of us.

Two years ago, a team of city residents and Portland Park & Recreation staff (the Vision Team), along with thousands of residents, began to develop a vision to protect our heritage, to make recreation services available to all, and to leave a legacy for our children that is better than our inheritance. The result is *Parks 2020 Vision*.

“Portland’s parks, public places, natural areas and recreational opportunities give life and beauty to our city. These essential assets connect people to place, self and others. Portland’s residents will treasure and care for this legacy, building on the past to provide for future generations.”

This report looks at all aspects of the current system and offers strategies to continue its successes, remedy its failures, and plan for future park needs. The objectives of the Parks 2020 Vision are to:

- Ensure Portland’s park and recreation legacy for future generations.
- Provide a wide variety of high quality park and recreation services and opportunities for all residents.
- Preserve, protect and restore Portland’s natural resources to provide “nature in the city.”
- Create an interconnected regional and local system of trails, paths and walks to make Portland “the walking city of the West”.
- Develop parks, recreation facilities and programs that promote community in the city.



The challenge for our time is that most residents think that our parks system is in good shape, when in fact every area of the city is underserved in basic ways. The average age of park buildings is 60 years, and most facilities have been adapted — some ill-adapted — for recreation use. Many swimming pools are old and need major renovation — some pools built in the 1920s are still in use.

We expect much from our park system: contact with nature and contact with our neighbors, places for us to play and places for us to rest. Parks add to the vitality of the city, and provide significant economic benefits. Perhaps the most important functions are the intangible ones: public plazas, after-school and recreation programs, parks and buildings that create communities and bring us together as a people.

To make the *Parks 2020 Vision* real, the following actions will be necessary over the next 20 years:

- Acquire 1,870 acres of park land, including 620 acres of protected habitat land.
- Provide 100 new sports fields.
- Build 6 new full-service community centers.
- Provide 150 additional miles of trails, and complete the 40-Mile Loop Trail.
- Increase the urban forest on streets and in parks.
- Create public plazas in each regional and town center and “green connections” along each designated main street in the city.

Strategies for planning, partnership, development, marketing, management, funding and governance provide the details of how to accomplish these things. Recommendations for immediate next steps include:

- Establish a Parks and Recreation Board to advocate for parks and ensure that the recommendations of the *Parks 2020 Vision* are carried out.
- Establish a Parks Foundation to bring new resources and expertise to long-term stewardship of parks and recreation.
- Develop a 20-Year Capital Plan to identify park system needs.
- Develop a Marketing and Communications Plan to inform the public about the value of parks, as well as the services available from their park and recreation system.
- Develop a Comprehensive Partnership Plan to coordinate activities and provide the maximum benefits to residents. Build on and enhance partnerships with public schools.
- Develop Long and Short Term Funding Plans to stabilize park funding and provide needed renovations, acquisitions and improvements.

The challenges of maintaining and improving Portland’s parks, natural resources and recreation services are many but the rewards are priceless.

“Our responsibility to future generations is to protect, enjoy, enhance, and pass on an excellent park system.

We can afford what we want. We recall in special times when we stood briefly, but magnificently, united. In those times no prize was beyond our grasp. We must leave a legacy.”

Reverend Dr. T. Allen Bethel, Pastor,
Maranatha Church of God &
Vision Team member



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Essential Element

The city's parks, open spaces, natural areas, recreation facilities and programs are essential elements that create a livable, dynamic and economically vibrant city.

Connected System

The city and region have an interconnected system of trails, parks, natural areas, streams and rivers that are well protected and ecologically healthy. An integrated system of community centers and recreation facilities serves all residents.

Inclusive and Accessible

All of Portland's residents have access to, feel safe and welcome in, and are equitably served by Portland's parks, open spaces, natural areas, recreation facilities and programs.

Stewardship

Portland residents value and care for public spaces and resources, recognize and respect the intrinsic values of all organisms, and are stewards for all the elements of the built and natural world, sustaining them for future generations.

Intrinsic Value

Portland residents recognize and respect the intrinsic value and intricate interrelationships of all organisms with their environment, without regard to their utility to humans.

Excellence

A full spectrum of diverse, high-quality parks, open spaces, natural areas, recreation facilities and excellent education programs bring joy, fulfillment and growth to the lives of Portland's residents.

Beauty and Innovation

Beautiful public spaces and innovative park designs provide places for a wide variety of experience ranging from quiet contemplation and relaxation to active recreation in all areas of the city.

Future Needs

Ample lands and facilities have been acquired and protected in public ownership to provide a wide variety of high-quality parks, open spaces, natural areas, recreation facilities and programs to meet current and future recreation, open space and natural resource protection needs.

Civic Involvement

Residents are involved and participate in the planning, development and programming of the city's parks, natural resources and recreation programs.

