

Whatcom County Parks, Recreation & Open space Plan: Survey of Parks, Recreation Programs and Financing Options

1. Have any household members used recreational programs, parks, or trails provided by Whatcom County in the last year?

Please rate your level of satisfaction with the following activities and facilities available in Whatcom County that are provided by the county, cities, park districts, and port on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is the very lowest satisfaction and 5 is the very highest satisfaction level.

Conservation and preservation of natural resources

2. Preservation of undeveloped natural areas and forests?
3. Preservation of wetlands?
4. Preservation of agricultural land?
5. Open space and scenic area preservation?

Shoreline and waterfront

6. Freshwater access to lakes, rivers, and streams?
7. Shore fishing opportunities?
8. Boat launching facilities?
9. Saltwater beach access and beach combing?
10. Shell fishing opportunities?

Trails

11. Hiking and walking trails?
12. Mountain bike trails?
13. Horseback trails?
14. Multiuse trails (bicycle, walking)?
15. Off road motorized opportunities?

Picnicking, camping, and pet exercise areas

16. Picnic areas?
17. Campsites and camping opportunities?
18. Pet exercise and off-leash areas?

Interpretive programs

19. Nature, wildlife, and environmental exhibits, centers, walks, programs, and events?
20. Gardens and landscape exhibits, programs, and events?
21. Historical, cultural and heritage exhibits, walks, programs, and events?
22. Historical Homes, museums, and farms?
23. Farm and agricultural exhibits, programs, and events?

Athletic courts and fields

24. Playgrounds?
25. Athletic and play fields?
26. Athletic events and tournaments?

Firearms

27. Shooting ranges and areas?

Supporting services and facilities

28. Directional and informational signage?
29. Restrooms?
30. Parking areas?
31. Bicycle accommodations?
32. Accommodations for people with disabilities?
33. Food and vending concessions?

Rental facilities

34. Rental of canoes, kayaks, paddle boats, and paddle boards?
35. Rental of cabins and overnight lodges?
36. Rental of picnic lodges and shelters?
37. Rental of historic homes, activity centers and similar facilities for weddings, retreats, meetings, and events?

Activities and events

38. Music and art exhibits, concerts, and events?
39. Outdoor skill and safety instructions (backcountry camping, first-aid, bicycling, and horseback riding)?
40. Volunteer opportunities in the parks?
41. Geocaching/orienteering?
42. Outdoor swimming opportunities?
43. Running and walking events?
44. Bicycle and mountain bike rides and events?
45. Ultimate Frisbee and disc golf opportunities?
46. Winter activities snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling?
47. Activities for older adults?
48. Firearms, shooting and hunter's safety classes?
49. Gardening and Horticultural classes?

If it requires more money than can be budgeted from Whatcom County resources to provide future recreation programs, how would you rate the following methods of paying for them?

County recreation program financing options

50. Reduce the number of programs to control costs?

51. Reduce the content, variety, and duration of programs to control costs?
52. Increase user fees for non-residents to finance program services?
53. Increase user fees for everyone to finance program services?
54. Increase county taxes to finance needed program services?

Facility priorities in general

In general, how would you rate the existing inventory of all park, recreation, and open space facilities provided in Whatcom County by the county, cities, school districts, port, state, and other park providers on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is the poor and 5 excellent?

55. Quantity - the number, size and location of existing park and trail sites to serve the existing population?
56. Quality - of maintenance conditions and furnishings including parking, restrooms, trails, campsites, shelters, cabins, and other facilities in existing parks?

How would you rate the need for the following additional facilities with the county in general whether provided by the county, cities, school districts, port state, or another park provider where 1 is the lowest and 5 the highest priority?

Conservation needs

57. Water resources and watershed protection areas?
58. Wildlife habitat, conservation, and natural areas?
59. Forestland conservation areas?
60. Farmland conservation areas?
61. Open space and scenic area preservation?
62. Historical and cultural buildings and sites?

Regional park needs

63. Shore fishing areas from docks?
64. Waterfront access and beach use sites?
65. Cartop boat (kayak/canoe) launch sites?
66. Powerboat launching and moorage facilities?
67. Picnic tables, play areas, and shelters?
68. Tent, yurt, RV campsites, group camps, and cabins?
69. Concessions for food and beverage, bait sales, etc.?

Trail Needs

70. Accessible trails and facilities within parks for people with disabilities?
71. Cross-county walking and hiking trails?
72. Cross-country horse trails?
73. Cross-country mountain bike trails?
74. Snowshoe, cross-country skiing trails?
75. Multipurpose (hike/bike/horse) trails?

76. On-road bicycle routes?
77. Dog parks, exercise areas, and trails?
78. Off-road ATV, motorcycle, snowmobile trails, and ORV parks?
79. Remote backcountry campsites?

Recreational facility needs

80. Soccer, lacrosse, baseball, softball athletic fields?
81. Bocce and pickleball courts?
82. Golf course and driving ranges?
83. Community classrooms and meeting facilities?
84. Youth and teen activity centers?
85. Senior activity centers?

Supporting facilities

86. Restrooms?
87. Access and parking areas?
88. Interpretive and directional signage?

Development proposal priorities

The county, cities, school districts, port, and other park providers may jointly conserve wildlife and open space areas, and develop waterfront parks, picnic and camping facilities, trails, athletic fields, and meeting facilities within the county. How would you rate the following proposals where 1 is the lowest and 5 the highest priority?

Conservancy Parks

89. Protect water resource and watershed areas of the county?
90. Protect wildlife habitat areas of the county in and around fresh and saltwater areas, wetlands, and woodland areas?
91. Protect mature and old growth forested areas of the county from logging in and around urbanizing areas and in backcountry sites?
92. Protect historical and productive farmlands of the county from subdivision and development?
93. Protect scenic areas, viewpoints, and vistas of the county along fresh and saltwater shorelines, farmlands, and wooded hilltop and ridgelines?
94. Protect historic farms, sawmills, railroads, mines, and other heritage sites from demolition and development?
95. Acquire and develop additional saltwater access sites for fishing, beachcombing, and walking?
96. Acquire and develop additional freshwater access sites for fishing, swimming, and boating?
97. Develop additional boat launching facilities at saltwater sites?
98. Develop additional boat launching facilities at freshwater sites?
99. Develop additional non-motorized cartop (kayak / canoe) launching facilities at salt and freshwater sites?
100. Develop additional picnic shelters and group picnic facilities at major regional park sites?

101. Develop additional tent and RV campsites, yurts, cabins, and group camp sites at major regional park sites?

Trail systems

102. Develop cartop boat put-in, take-out, and overnight campsites along navigable salt and freshwater paddling routes?
103. Develop cross-country network of saltwater beach and shoreline walking areas and trails?
104. Develop cross-country network of on and off-road day and backpacking hiking trails?
105. Develop cross-country network of horse stables, riding areas, and trails?
106. Develop off-road cross-country network of hike, bike, and horse trails?
107. Develop off-road cross-country network of snowshoe, skiing and snowmobile trails?
108. Develop cross-country system of on-road bicycle routes using road shoulders and designated bike lanes?
109. ATV/motorcycle riding areas – support the continued private party operation of ATV/Motorcycle riding areas (no graphic provided)?

Note – Whatcom County, like all jurisdictions in Washington State, must restructure fiscal policies to reflect recently adopted restraints on the use of property license, and other taxes for the financing of general governmental services. The following questions outline a number of alternative methods for delivering park, recreation, and open space facilities and programs in the county for your evaluation. County Council could adopt some, most, or all of the following ways and methods for restructuring the way the county delivers and finances park and recreation facilities and services depending on the results of this survey, and in some cases subsequent voter approvals.

Joint venture opportunity and partner options

Besides Whatcom County – cities, school districts, athletic organizations, private operators, and a variety of other public and private agencies own and operate park facilities and recreational programs within the county. How would you rate joint ventures projects with the following organizations where 1 is the least desirable and 5 the most desirable?

Park facility development and/or programming

110. With other public agencies (cities, school districts, and the port)?
111. With nonprofit organizations?
112. With for-profit organizations?

Organizational and financing alternatives

County Council could institute alternative methods of managing and financing regional versus local park, recreation, and open space improvements within the county. How would you rate the following alternatives?

Local park facilities using recreational service areas – County Council could institute a limited short-term (3-5 year) property tax levy as a means of financing the acquisition, development, and/or operation of

local park, recreation, and open space facilities and/or programs within specified areas of the county. Recreation service areas can be established for a single facility for a single benefit area, such as scenic preservation for county waterfront areas – or for multiple facilities for a specified portion of the county, such as athletic fields and indoor gymnasiums for a city or an urban growth area (UGA).

Once proposed, the county residents within each local recreation service area vote to determine whether to assess a limited short-term property tax increment to finance acquisition, development, and/or operation of the proposed facilities and programs within the proposed local service area. How would you rate the following methods where 1 is the least desirable and 5 the most desirable?

Recreation service areas

113. Specific facilities – organizing recreation service areas to finance specific facilities, programs, and land acquisitions such as the preservation of scenic areas?
114. If a levy were to be put on the ballot to finance local park facilities and programs, and land acquisitions within your local area, how much, if anything, would your household be willing to pay per year for this source of funding?

Real estate excise and fuel tax, and license fee options

Subject to voter approval, County Council could institute a variety of optional fees and taxes to be used instead of or in addition to the regional/local organizational financing approaches defined in the above (as a way of reducing the use of property taxes for park financing). How would you rate each of the following optional approaches where 1 is the least desirable and 5 the most desirable?

Optional dedicated fees and taxes

115. Real Estate Excise Tax (REET 3) – an additional 0.25% assessment of the sales price of all real estate property (equal to \$250 per \$100,000 of sale price) paid by the purchaser to be dedicated exclusively to the acquisition and development of park and open space?
116. Local Option Vehicle License Fee – an additional %15.00 per vehicle license registered in the country to be dedicated exclusively to the acquisition and development of trail improvements?
117. Local Option Fuel Tax – an additional \$0.023 per gallon sales tax to be paid by residents and tourists to be dedicated exclusively to the acquisition and development of trail improvements?
118. Local Option Sales Tax – an additional 0.1% sales tax (equal to \$0.10 for a \$100 purchase) to be paid by residents and tourists to be dedicated exclusively to the acquisition and development of park and open space?

General obligation bond options

Subject to voter approval, County Council could also propose a variety of optional bonds as a means of financing park, recreation, and open space improvements for specific projects. This option could be used instead of or in addition to the options defined above. How would you rate the following where 1 is the least desirable and 5 the most desirable?

General Obligation bond – County Council could submit a general obligation bond for voter approval to finance acquisition and development of specific park, recreation, and open space improvements. The bond, which can not be used to finance operation and maintenance, would be financed over a 20-year period.

119. If a bond were to be put on the ballot to finance regional recreational and open space improvements, how much, if anything, would your household be willing to pay per year for this source of funding?

Population growth impact management options

In the next 20 years the county population is projected to increase by another 58,122 people or 25% more than the existing population of 229,247 persons.

120. In your opinion, will existing park and recreation facilities within the county, cities, and school districts be enough to provide for this population increase?

Growth management financing

121. Lower standards – for the number of park facilities provided to future populations?
122. Collect a one-time growth impact fee from new housing development projects to pay for park improvements?
123. Increase county taxes – to acquire and develop park facilities to offset population growth impacts?

Growth impact fees

124. If a park growth impact fee were to be collected from new housing development projects, what percent of this cost would you recommend be charged for every new single-family house to be developed in the county? (The county does not currently charge growth impact fees.)

Your characteristics

125. Which area of the county do you live in?
126. How long have you lived in Whatcom County?
127. Do you rent or own your home?
128. What age group are you in?

Comments

129. Do you have any specific comments or recommendations to make about the proposed park plan or this survey?