

# Chapter 7: Parks, Open Space and Recreation

For generations, access to nature and recreation have been integral components of the Juneau lifestyle. Throughout the community's history, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities and programs have helped residents thrive in Juneau's climate, while parks and trails have connected people to nature and created spaces for the community to gather.

Today, Juneau's parks and recreation system provides a diverse network of parks, trails, and facilities – important components of the quality of life that attracts and keeps people in Juneau. These programs and facilities are a major civic asset that enhances the community by increasing property values, improving neighborhoods, and improving public health and wellness, as residents are offered the opportunities to build new skills, be physically active, and interact socially through shared experience. Parks and trails facilitate access to Juneau's vast natural areas for residents of all ages and abilities, and help Juneau to attract visitors and to maintain a vibrant business community.

A diverse recreation network contains the elements that create, maintain, and enhance physical, social, economic and environmental health and wellness. Recreational resources are vital to quality of life and economic well-being. Recreational opportunities attract and retain location-neutral professionals and businesses, strengthening the economy and adding jobs for residents from a variety of backgrounds. Social and recreational services encourage seniors to stay in Juneau and spend their retirement income locally.

## **RECREATION PROGRAMMING**

"Programming" for parks and recreation assets can be defined by the elements that bring a park, trail, or facility to life. Programming can take the form of equipment that users interact with, events, or vendors. Programming for recreational facilities includes the classes and activities offered at the facility. Recreational programming, from tennis courts, farmers markets, play equipment, concerts or Shakespeare in the park; to trail running races; to swim lessons helps encourage facility use and keeps people at a park or facility for longer, discourages criminal activity, and creates a sense of vibrancy and community.

## **PARKS & RECREATION IN DOWNTOWN JUNEAU**

As the commercial, government, and visitor hub of Juneau, Downtown is home to a number of public parks designed serve visitors as well as residents living, working and recreating downtown. Trails provide access to nature and remote areas, and recreational

facilities and school district assets serve Downtown residents, particularly youth and seniors, with activities and programs. The addition of Overstreet Park and the Seawalk has attracted people to Downtown and connection of the Seawalk will create a public gathering space as well as a commuter connection for residents of the some downtown neighborhoods. Parks and open space are vital to Downtown's character, creating opportunities for placemaking and enhancing the vitality of nearby commercial areas.

## PARKS

Parks provide health, social and economic benefits in and environmental context. While Juneau is surrounded by natural areas, urban parks create access to various active and passive recreational opportunities and serve as public gathering spaces. The Downtown area includes School District managed field space, four mini-parks, a neighborhood park, and a community park. Cope Park has a ballfield that is suitable for tee ball, but is primarily used as a dog park. While Chicken Yard and Capital School parks are in need of major upgrades, the downtown area is well served with park amenities. These existing amenities can be improved by evaluating the purpose of each and creating shared spaces that invite people to spend more time engaging in active or passive recreation, thus reducing crime and illicit activities in parks. Parks can be vibrant community assets or centers for criminal activity. Through thoughtful design and programming, parks can be welcome spaces for all.

### Bishop Kenny Memorial Peace Park

- Location: Downtown, 134 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
- Size: 0.07 acres
- Amenities: Picnic tables with chess boards, benches
- Description: Small urban pocket park located at the corner of Seward and Second Streets, consisting of paving stones, tables and benches. This hardscape pocket park is primarily used as a lunch location for people working in the office buildings nearby. The park was named for Bishop Michael Kenny who served from 1979 – 1995.
- Opportunities: Covered area

### Cathedral Park

- Location: Downtown, 340 5<sup>th</sup> St.
- Size: 0.1 acres
- Amenities: Picnic tables, benches

- Description: Downtown park located at the corner of Fifth and Gold Streets with benches and picnic tables. A slide and other play structures were removed, but the supports remain. The purpose of this park should be re-evaluated and future renovations should include removal of remnants of play structures.
- Opportunities: Community garden, covered gazebo

### **Chicken Yard Park**

- Location: Downtown, 635 6<sup>th</sup> St.
- Size: 0.2 acres
- Amenities: Playground, community garden, basketball hoop, bench, tables and chairs.
- Description: This mini park serves the Starr Hill community and consists of a basketball hoop, small play structure, and a community garden. The park is slated for a public process, design and reconstruction in the coming months.
- Opportunities: **Park Master Plan to be completed this fall**

### **Telephone Hill Park**

- Location: Downtown, 124 Dixon Street
- Size: 0.23 acres
- Amenities: Benches, cedar pergola
- Description: This park sits on the hill above the Downtown Transit Center and offers views of Gastineau Channel. The park features benches and a cedar pergola. The park attracts illicit behavior and is difficult to enforce and maintain.
- Opportunities: Solve enforcement problems through placemaking

### **Capital School Park**

- Location: Downtown, 521 Seward Street
- Size: 0.89 acres
- Amenities: Playground, tot lot, basketball court, picnic tables, Empty Chair Memorial, drinking fountain, seasonal portable restroom, paved parking
- Description: Capital School Park features picnic tables, open space, a gaga ball pit, a half-court basketball and a playground with a separate tot lot. The average Juneau resident visits this park 15 times per year. Play equipment consists of belt swings, tot swings, a play structure and rubber fall surfacing. This park is also home to a public art piece called the "Empty

Chair Project" which honors Juneau's Japanese community, many of whom were forcibly removed and incarcerated in internment camps during World War II. This heavily used park is in need of major improvements. There is an existing park master plan created through a public process, which should be revisited and updated.

- Opportunities: Revisit the existing park master plan and reconstruct park. **Park Master Plan to be revisited during Blueprint process**

### Cope Park

- Location: Downtown, 1001 Calhoun Avenue
- Size: 9.5 acres
- Amenities: 2 tennis/pickleball courts, basketball court, bocce court, swing sets, climbing structure, 1 disc golf hole, ball field/fenced in dog park, public restrooms, hiking trails, paved parking lot
- Description: Located along the banks of Gold Creek in Downtown Juneau, Cope Park is a large community park that features 2 tennis courts with pickleball lines, a basketball court, a ball field which doubles as a fenced dog park, picnic tables, grills, hiking trails and public restrooms. The play area includes tot swings, belt swings, a climbing structure and a combination of tile and rubber mulch play surfacing. The park was recently improved and there is community interest to develop a bike skills park area adjacent to the tennis/pickleball courts. There is an existing park master plan. Most of the work was completed in 2016 but some of the planned improvements were not funded. Cope Park is linked to the Flume Trail and the popular Basin Road recreation areas by the Christopher Trail. The average Juneau resident visits Cope Park 12 times per year.
- Opportunities: Finish build out to park master plan, develop bike skills park, consider opportunities for visitors

### Gunakadeit Park

- Location: Downtown,
- Size: 0.07 acres
- Amenities: None
- Description: Gunakadeit Park was previously a small public space with benches and landscaping. The park infrastructure was removed when a fire leveled an adjoining building and the park has remained a vacant lot since. The site is currently rented to a local vendor for use as a food truck court.
- Opportunities: Maintain park as a commercial space for small businesses

## **Marine Park**

- Location: Downtown, 144 Egan Drive
- Size: 0.7 acres
- Amenities: Public rental pavilion, benches, electrical outlets
- Description: Located at the downtown waterfront, Marine Park consists of a pavilion, benches and picnic tables. The park is part of a larger complex that extends along the cruise ship docks and would connect to a future Seawalk extension. The park was previously programmed during the summer months, and is used by residents and visitors for passive recreation and picnicking.
- Opportunities: Create amenities to make Marine Park the true “hub” of the Seawalk.

## **Mayor Bill Overstreet Park**

- Location: 1031 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street
- Size: 1.1 acres
- Amenities: fountain; restroom; picnic shelter; benches and tables; paved walkways; and educational signage.
- Description: Located by the Juneau Douglas Bridge, Overstreet Park or “Whale Park” is popular with residents and visitors. The park serves as the beginning of the Seawalk, and prominently features “Tahku”, a life-size bronze humpback whale fountain.
- Opportunities: programming such as pop up markets, movies in the park, etc; play area; fish market on D&H property

## **Evergreen Cemetery**

- Location: 601 Seater Street
- Size: 7.7 acres
- Amenities: Benches, cemetery
- Description: Evergreen cemetery includes historic gravesites in a large grassy space. The site is a commonly used recreation area for neighbors.
- Opportunities: walking tours featuring the gravesites of historical figures

## **Seawalk**

The Seawalk currently extends from Overstreet Park to the intersection of Egan Drive and Glacier Ave(???), and from Marine Park to the Franklin Dock. The Juneau Waterfront Plan includes a vision for a fully developed Seawalk, and this connectivity remains a priority for CBJ. The Seawalk serves as a commuter route that allows pedestrians to avoid Egan Drive, a recreation area for residents and visitors, a water access, and public art venue. Currently the north end of the Seawalk, anchored by Overstreet Park, is a recreation area with gathering spaces and stairs to the water for launching personal watercraft, extending to a walkway that is planned to continue to Marine Park. The south end crosses an active port with cruise ship docks, Taku Smokeries, and the Intermediate Vessel Float, while also serving as a popular area for walking and picnicking, and as a venue for public art.

Opportunities: connectivity, small performance venue, art

## **TRAILS**

Trails provide access and opportunities for diverse recreational activities; fostering community involvement and an opportunity to interact with neighbors of varying backgrounds and experiences. According to the public survey conducted for the CBJ Parks & Recreation Master Plan, 89% of Juneau residents use trails. Trails facilitate access to nature for all ages and incomes, and provide healthy recreation opportunities to those who cannot afford expensive equipment or gym memberships. Trail-based activities such as walking, running, cycling, and cross-country skiing are all relatively inexpensive, unstructured activities. Trails that connect neighborhoods enhance community life by enabling healthy, environmentally friendly transportation and creating commuter connections. Juneau's topography lends itself to pedestrian use, with many streets dead-ending in sets of stairs that complete the street grid and provide the only access to homes. Trails and the healthy alternative modes of transportation they support also stimulate the economy by attracting visitors interested in nature-based activities and by contributing to quality of life for local workers as well as increasing the value of nearby properties.

### **Perseverance/Granite Creek Trail Network**

Perseverance Trail is a popular destination for hiking, cycling, and trail running, and serves as access to Granite Creek, Mount Juneau, Red Mill, and Mine Camp Ruins trails. This network, located on Basin Road is easily accessible from all parts of Downtown via the Flume and Basin Road, as well as through Cope Park via the Christopher Trail. Perseverance is used by 49% of Juneau residents. These trails are becoming increasingly popular with seasonal tourists and on summer days, there is a steady flow of tourists and residents using the area. The dynamic nature of the terrain and heavy public use in the area creates the need for frequent

maintenance. Trail Maintenance including the replacement of bridges along the Perseverance corridor should be planned over the coming years.

Opportunities: Develop parallel mountain bike trails

#### **Flume Trail**

The Flume trail follows a historic and still active waterline that remains an important component of Juneau's hydroelectric power generation. The trail is owned by AEL&P and was reconstructed in 2019. The Flume connects the Flats and Highlands neighborhoods to Basin Road, and also connects to the Christopher Trail, which runs from the Flume to Cope Park.

Opportunities: Improve the Christopher Trail as a multi-use connector and mitigate erosion issues

#### **Mount Roberts**

Mount Roberts Trail is heavily trafficked between the trailhead on Basin Road and the top of the Mount Roberts Tramway. Above the Tramway, there are a number of interpretive trails frequented by visitors, and a hiking trail that accesses the ridges above.

Opportunities: Build connector trail to dock area

## **RECREATION FACILITIES INVENTORY**

#### **Augustus Brown Pool**

Located downtown, the Augustus Brown Swimming Pool opened in 1973 and includes a 6 lane lap pool with an Aqua Climb climbing wall, a high (3-meter) and low (1-meter) dive; a 35 by 45 foot warmer recreation pool, a dry sauna; and an exercise deck with fitness and stretching equipment.

Voters approved \$5.8 million dollars in facility improvements to Augustus Brown Pool, indicating public support for two aquatics facilities in Juneau. It is CBJ's intent to operate and maintain these facilities at a high standard of safety and customer satisfaction. Partnerships with non-profit organizations provide free swim passes to low income youth. Through a partnership with the Juneau School District, learn to swim classes operated at Parks & Rec facilities are included in the school curriculum.

Alaska is the fastest aging state in the nation, and as Juneau's population ages, it is important to consider enhancing seniors programming. Currently Parks & Rec offers aquatic fitness for seniors, primarily at Augustus Brown. Residents have requested more

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fitness classes for seniors including yoga, tai chi, and weights. Programs for seniors may continue to be offered at the pools, with new programs added to complement current senior aquatic programs.

Opportunities: Expand seniors programming to include dryland fitness classes

### **Zach Gordon Youth Center**

Built in 1968, the Zach Gordon Youth Center offers supervised drop-in youth activities including a climbing wall, indoor and outdoor basketball, pool tables, board games, activities, exercise equipment, outdoor gardens, and a commercial kitchen. The youth center also provides hot meals, referrals to necessary supports for youth or families in need, and is home base for Parks & Rec's youth-centered activities and programs. Zach Gordon operates as a free of charge drop-in facility.

The Zach Gordon Youth Center works closely with community partners to enhance the lives of youth in Juneau. Partnerships with a variety of organizations support programming in the BAM afterschool program and the Youth Center, and Zach Gordon staff joins forces with government and non-profit partners to run the Youth Employment in Parks Program; staff also partners in several youth related coalitions and community effort groups at the local and state levels. For funding support, Zach Gordon works closely with the Juneau Community Foundation as well as private businesses and individual donors. Funding support is also enhanced through a collaborative relationship with the Friends of Zach Gordon Youth Center.

Opportunities: pursue grant funding for further expanded programming

## **SCHOOL DISTRICT ASSETS**

The Juneau School District assets described below are those currently used as public recreation venues. Downtown schools are addressed in Chapter XX.

### **Harborview Elementary School**

Harborview Elementary School has two playgrounds and a covered play shelter. These are available for public use outside of school hours. There is also a rectangular turf field between Harborview and Augustus Brown Pool. It is used by Juneau School District, Parks & Recreation and local league and club activities, with School District use taking priority.

### **Marie Drake Planetarium**

Constructed in the 1960's, the Marie Drake Planetarium is operated and maintained by a local nonprofit, which regularly hosts astronomy talks and other public events.

### **Juneau Douglas High School**

The Juneau Douglas High School auditorium is available for school and community-based performances. The gym is also occasionally used for local club or league events, such as the Gold Medal Basketball Tournament.

## **PARK AND LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE**

CJB Parks and Recreation is responsible for maintaining the parks and landscaping in public spaces. In the Downtown area, this includes the waterfront and city streets. In the summer season, approximately 23 seasonal staff maintain all of the parks and much of the open space downtown as well as throughout Juneau. This includes picking up trash, cleaning picnic areas, regularly inspecting play equipment, planting, weeding, watering flowers and trees, hanging flower baskets along the street, hanging and maintaining banners, and fixing and maintaining vandalism. Landscaping and its role in placemaking, is addressed in detail in Chapter XX.

## **RELATED PLANS**

### **Parks & Rec Master Plan**

The Parks & Recreation Master Plan was adopted in 2019, with the purpose of guiding Parks & Recreation decisions over the coming decade. The public process included five public meetings, a project website, meetings with over 30 stakeholder groups, and phone and online surveys. The following mission, vision and guiding principles create the framework for the Master Plan:

Mission: To establish Parks & Recreation's role as an essential partner in a healthy community

Vision: Guiding future decisions to provide the highest possible quality Parks & Recreation facilities, programs and services for all regardless of age, income or ability

#### Guiding Principles:

- Promoting community engagement, health and wellness
- Managing our assets effectively
- Ensuring financial sustainability
- Supporting community partnerships
- Engaging youth and encouraging lifelong wellness
- Serving the needs of a diverse and changing population
- Fostering environmental stewardship
- Increasing cultural awareness
- Making programs and facilities accessible to all

#### Waterfront Plan

The Waterfront Plan was adopted in 2004 and includes the plans for the completed Seawalk. Recreation along the waterfront is addressed by defining Marine Park as the nexus of Downtown and the Waterfront, and the notion of the Seawalk and waterfront areas as important for public recreation, including public art, gathering spaces and access to the water for kayaking.

#### Willoughby District Land Use Plan

The Willoughby District Land Use Plan (Willoughby Plan), adopted in 2011, discusses potential relocation of Zach Gordon Youth Center. It is critical that this important community asset remain Downtown and in close proximity to schools. The Willoughby Plan also calls for more public spaces, restored creeks and streams, and

#### SUMMARIZED PUBLIC SURVEY RESULTS (Parks & Recreation Master Plan, 2017):

Importance of Parks & Recreation Facilities and Programs in choice to live in Juneau

- Very important 44%
- Somewhat important 33%
- Not important 18%
- Don't know/refused 5%

#### Top Unstructured Recreation Activities

- Hiking 53%
- Fishing 26%
- Walking 21%
- Swimming 17%
- Downhill skiing 17%
- Cross country skiing 12%
- Road biking 12%
- Camping 11%
- Boating 11%

33% of adults and 19% of children participate in organized recreation activities such as softball, soccer, volleyball, running, and basketball.

#### Value of Activities and Programs to the Community

- Afterschool programs for youth 76%
- Summer programs for youth 73%
- Pre-kindergarten programs 50%
- Programs for adults 44%
- Programs for seniors 38%

pedestrian connections between public spaces and civic buildings. The recommended public green space or plaza in the area would likely be managed by CBJ Parks & Recreation if it were constructed.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Blueprint Downtown visioning process identified Natural Environment, Recreation as one of the nine Downtown Focus Areas. The focus area vision states: *"The location and scale of Juneau offers an unrivaled opportunity to emphasize our setting between the mountains and sea, showcasing an unspoiled and pristine environment. A community and business focus on our setting, coupled with an authentic experience, can make Juneau a leading example of a community embracing residents and visitors ranging from "8 to 80" in a deeply beautiful place. A key community priority is the waterfront, with needed steps to enhance recreation assets and opportunities along the waterfront for both visitors and residents, including families."*

Recommendations from the visioning public outreach generally restate the key themes of previous plans – opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages, Seawalk completion, and opportunities for public gathering spaces along the waterfront:

*An important step as part of moving the downtown area plan to completion would be some research on National recommendations concerning the "8 to 80" recreational target initiative. Juneau already has many of these features embedded in its planning goals, but a more careful analysis would be useful, and may refine steps for successful new projects.*

*An emphasis of Seawalk completion was central, of course, to this theme. However, it moves beyond just the completion of the Seawalk to add more texture and color. People are interested in the Seawalk achieving a true connection to the active sea edge, similar to what has been successfully started at Overstreet Park.*

*The ocean edge can include several more active components, including provisions for small hand-powered craft like kayaks and canoes, and special recreational venues, like covered shelters, picnic tables, and even performance venues. Imagine being able to participate in a Tlingit elder telling a story at sunset, with a water back-drop, or a Jazz and Classics string quartet playing in a small acoustic venue along the water and away from aviation noise.*

## **SUMMARY**

With demographic shifts in Juneau's resident population, increased visitation, and changes in recreational opportunities and preferences, it is important that recreational programming fits the changing user base. As the population ages, Juneau needs increased programming for seniors such as classes, facilities for low impact activities, and parks and trails accessible to individuals with mobility issues. Changes in recreational trends have created public demand for facilities for diverse activities, and user groups are increasingly working with CBJ to find and fund venues for these pursuits. Other such trends include interest in local food security and the move toward promoting community gardens, fruiting forests, and other opportunities for food production in public spaces. Residents of the Starr Hill neighborhood have already created a community garden site at Chicken Yard Park, and this trend should be encouraged. Changing uses and demographics also generate changes in user behavior, which should be managed and considered in new capital projects like the Seawalk and in park and trail improvements.

## **GOALS & ACTIONS**

- Programming in parks for changing user base
- Trail improvements and leveraging CBJ funds for grants for ongoing maintenance
- Seawalk connection/completion
- Bring aging parks up to standard (Capital, Chicken Yard, Marine)
- Commercial use policies and management of parks and trails