



# ESSENTIAL SPACES

Parks, trails, recreation and cultural services improve quality of life in Vancouver. These Essential Spaces contribute to a vibrant and connected community and open doors to economic vitality.

## Society

### COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

Relationships developed between people and the places they live foster a sense of belonging, attachment and stewardship. Recent studies reveal that residents with access to parks, trails and greenspaces feel more connected to their community and neighbors.

### ARTS AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS

Urban parks have always been an important setting for arts and cultural programs and displays. Concerts, movies and festivals in the parks are popular events that bring community members together and enrich our quality of life. Arts and culture help to communicate emotions, ideas, history and more, enriching our experience of public spaces.

### EQUITY

Parks must offer **safety** and a be welcoming gathering place for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to enjoy and thrive. Concentrations of lower income households, high density developments, seniors, those under age 19, people of color and those with higher disposition to chronic disease and obesity rely most on the benefits provided by the public park system. Any disparity in the access to public parks and natural areas demands focused and creative funding approaches to ensure equity for all residents.

## Environmental Sustainability

### ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION

Just as growing communities need to upgrade and expand infrastructure like roads and utilities to serve their residents, they also need to enhance and expand their green infrastructure to **balance the impact of the built environment**. The park system enhances and compliments natural green spaces to improve water quality, reduce flood risk, shade homes and streams during extreme heat and enhance fish and wildlife habitat for environmental and economic sustainability.

An interconnected system of parks, trails, and green spaces help to **conserve the natural ecosystem** resulting in cleaner air and water for improved short- and long-term health benefits. The park system provides **transportation alternatives** with trails and bikeways to **reduce the use of carbon fuels**; offers areas for infiltration of surface water such as rain gardens to **recharge ground water** and protect stream levels; **creates habitat** for urban bird and wildlife species; and supports diverse plant life. These amenities can translate into direct cost savings to city residents.

### STEWARDSHIP

Fond childhood memories are often connected to an experience in the outdoors. Whether it be climbing a tree, seeing your first eagle or the exciting view behind the dugout; each experience connects the outdoors to our own wellbeing. Nature is an outdoor classroom where youth and adults can learn the ecological value of the beautiful natural landscapes we enjoy in the Pacific Northwest. Access to natural environment fosters community connection and stewardship through activities like tree planting; advocating for a larger tree canopy to improve **air quality** and protect scenic views; building bat boxes; planting native species to support pollinators, wildlife and diverse ecosystems; volunteering at a clean-up event; or selling locally grown produce at a farmer's market.

## Economy

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Essential spaces can be a source for renewed neighborhood or community vitality. Quality parks, recreation and cultural services attract and help retain businesses; encourage home ownership; draw new tenants and retirees; provide space for community and corporate events; and encourage a diverse and qualified workforce.

### LAND VALUE

Parks and recreation services are often cited as one of the most important factors in attracting new residents and creating a quality of life that makes them want to stay in a community. Access to interconnected parks, trails and community event spaces **increases property values**.

### TOURISM

Iconic community spaces like Vancouver Waterfront Park draw visitors from outside the area to enjoy our city and all it has to offer! Whether it's a family picnic in the park or an extended stay where visitors enjoy nearby restaurants, hotels and shopping, parks play an important role in attracting tourism. A vibrant and culturally enriched park system boosts the city revenues that **support improved community services** for all.

### COMMUNITY VITALITY

Urban parks broadly include parkland, trails, waterfront promenades, natural areas and riparian corridors, and public gardens. These areas define the layout of a city, its real estate value, traffic flow, land use buffers, public event spaces and the civic culture of our communities. A rich and interconnected green infrastructure **creates cities and neighborhoods with beauty, breathing room and value**.

## Health

### PUBLIC HEALTH

People value the time they spend in city parks, whether walking a dog, playing basketball, having a picnic or sitting quietly under the shade of a White Oak. Along with these expected leisure amenities, parks provide measurable **physical and mental health benefits** simply through direct contact with nature, a cleaner environment, and opportunities for **physical activity and social interaction**. Access to parks and trails promote increased activity levels for adults and youth, **reduce obesity and the impacts of chronic diseases**, especially in vulnerable populations. Parks and recreation opportunities have been strongly linked to reduced juvenile delinquency, reduced health care costs and improved quality of life in a community.

### SAFETY

Recent studies report that green spaces adjacent to residential areas create neighborhoods with **lower crime rates**, where neighbors tend to support and protect one another because they are more socially connected. Parks and recreation opportunities have been strongly linked to reduced juvenile delinquency and health care costs and an increased quality of life in a community.



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