

Seattle Park's Classification

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Seattle Park's Classification

1) Purpose

This document presents a method for classifying the parks in Seattle's system. The classifications are driven by park use, purpose and size. These classifications are not grouped by maintenance frequency or the presence of a particular asset. This document is to be viewed in conjunction with the parks classification spreadsheet, in which all Seattle parks are classified according to the schema described in this document.

This classification schema serves the following purposes:

- These classifications will provide a general guideline for future development options. The combination of descriptors for each park type represents what has generally been successful on a certain sized plot of land located in a certain type of physical environment. These guidelines can help to set community expectations for a given site.
- These classifications may serve as a basis for policies around appropriate programming in different park types.
- These classifications may inform functional planting design standards and other design standards.

This classification scheme is not intended to be used for the following purposes:

- These classifications are not to serve as an inventory of individual of assets (e.g. total acres of natural area or total number of athletic fields) because different combinations of the same assets appear in each park type. For example, total natural area in the system is not derived by adding up the acreage of parks designated as "natural areas" because many other park types contain natural areas.
- These classifications should not serve as the basis for estimating maintenance hours. Each park classification contains a diverse collection of parks that are used at different levels of intensity and have different levels of visibility, which correspond to various levels of maintenance.

2) Descriptors

Each park type is defined by a set of descriptors, which reflect its size, assets, programming, and environmental benefits. Park use, purpose and size are the primary descriptors defining each park classification. The descriptors for each park type are based roughly on National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) park classifications and Seattle Parks' 1974 Recreation Standards, and then modified to reflect the combination of descriptors typically found in different types of parks in the Seattle system.

Table 1 lists and defines the descriptors used to designate each park type. This is followed by a separate table for each park type. The descriptors are applied to every park in the system to determine which park classification it matches most closely. All parks will not fall perfectly into a park type. The descriptors for each park type represent the majority of parks in that classification and the ideal for that park type. If descriptors are broadened so as to fully encompass every park that falls into that classification, each classification will become less distinct and the classification system will lose the ability to serve as a guideline for potential development. This document also should not solidify a park in a particular classification forever. If a park is significantly altered to respond to changing needs, its classification should be reevaluated.

In cases where distinct parks lie side-by-side to create a contiguous property (such as the Jefferson Park area which includes the Golf Course, Park, Community Center and East Duwamish Greenbelt), the entire property will be treated as one park.

Table 1
Descriptor Definitions

DESCRIPTOR	EXPLANATION
<i>Physical</i>	
Size	Acreage range given for each park type
Setting	Type of neighborhood (Single Family Residential, Hub Urban Village, etc.) and immediate surroundings where each park type might be found.
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	Whether or not the park type meets the <i>2005 Seattle Comprehensive Plan</i> Usable Open Space standard defined as primarily green open space for drop-in use over 10,000 square feet
<i>Built environment</i>	
Percent developed land	The percent of land area of each park type that is expected to be developed (includes all landscaped areas) rather than natural
Assets (desired)	Examples of major defining assets such as sports fields, picnic tables, comfort stations, benches, play areas, lighting, etc. that each park type is expected to have. <i>Assumption: It is common understanding that a park of a particular size and in a particular location would have the amenities listed in this category. This list does not include non-defining assets such as garbage cans, drinking fountains, bike racks, etc.</i>
Assets (optional)	Examples of major defining assets that would be appropriate, but is not expected for each park type <i>Assumption: While residents might not expect these amenities in a park of this size or in this location, the inclusion of these amenities is not expected to cause conflict among nearby community members, given past experience and other neighborhood uses. This list does not include non-defining assets such as garbage cans, drinking fountains, bike racks, etc.</i>
Parking	The parking expectation for each park type (street parking, off-street parking, no parking).
<i>Natural Environment</i>	
Natural Area	Whether or not a natural area of forest, wetland, riparian area or shoreline might be found within each park type
Environmental Benefits	The types of environmental benefits each park type should be designed to yield. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil ecosystem services: support vegetation, regulate water, water treatment, nutrient cycling, soil-based habitat • Hydrology: regulate water supply and runoff close to natural hydrology [e.g. green stormwater infrastructure, as defined in the Seattle Stormwater Code], water-based habitat • Vegetation: climate moderation, CO2 reduction, pollutant filters, erosion control, pollinator and plant-based habitat, green stormwater infrastructure, habitat, native plants • Habitat: wildlife, marine preserves, riparian corridors
<i>Programs</i>	
Programming (desired)	Programming such as sports practice, sports games, nature programs, concerts, food vendors, etc. that each park type is expected to have. <i>Assumption: It is common understanding that a park of a particular size, design and location would offer these programs.</i>

Programming (optional)	Programming that would be appropriate, but is not expected for each park type <i>Assumption: While residents might not expect these programs in a park of this size or in this location, the inclusion of these amenities will not cause conflict among nearby community members, given past experience and other neighborhood uses.</i>
Geographic range of users	The radius from which each park type is expected to draw its primary users.

3) Park Classifications

The park types presented in this document include:

- a) Triangles/Circles/Squares
- b) Pocket Park
- c) Downtown Park
- d) Neighborhood Park
- e) Community Park
- f) Recreation Area
- g) Natural Area/Greenbelt
- h) Boulevards/Green Streets/Trails
- i) Special-Use Park

a) TRIANGLES/CIRCLES/ SQUARES

These small sites are typically composed of traffic islands or leftover pieces of land. They are often dedicated to Parks in the original plat rather than purchased for use.

Physical	
Size	Generally under 10,000 square feet (0.25 acres)
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Family Residential, Residential Urban Villages, Hub Urban Villages, Urban Center Villages • Generally constructed on unused land between roads
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	No
Built environment	
Percent developed	100%
Assets (desired)	None
Assets (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benches • Lighting for safety • Public Art
Parking	Street, none
Natural Environment	
Natural Area	No
Environmental Benefits	Possible green stormwater infrastructure
Programs	
Programming (desired)	None
Programming (optional)	None
Geographic range of users	People in the immediate vicinity (pedestrians, cyclists, drivers)

b) POCKET PARK

These are typically smaller developed sites that have been acquired to serve the immediate neighborhood as a small multi-purpose park. These parks are generally not large enough for significant programming or activity. They may incorporate utility infrastructure or a viewpoint.

Physical

Size	Generally between 2,500 sq. ft. and 10,000 sq. ft. (0.25 acres) – this refers primarily to the usable area of the park
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Family Residential, Residential Urban Villages, Hub Urban Villages • Generally surrounded by residences, small commercial, non-arterial streets
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	No, unless it exceeds 0.25 acres

Built environment

Percent developed	70-100%
Assets (desired)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benches • Improved paths • Plaza or grassy area for informal activity (no sports field)
Assets (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed Landscape • Lighting for safety (rare) • Picnic table • Play area • Public art • Viewpoint
Parking	Street, none

Natural Environment

Natural Area	None
Environmental Benefits	Green stormwater infrastructure, native plants

Programs

Programming (desired)	None
Programming (optional)	Small community gatherings
Geographic range of users	Immediate neighborhood – less than ¼ mile in distance

c) DOWNTOWN PARK

These are typically smaller developed sites located in Seattle's Center City and other neighborhood centers. These areas provide a landscaped respite from busy downtown streets and often offer places to sit and space for performers and vendors. The 2006 Seattle Downtown Parks & Public Spaces Task Force report identifies 24 downtown parks in three categories: 1) downtown destination parks, which are "signature parks of interest to the broad community"; 2) downtown neighborhood parks, where "neighborhood involvement in activities and programming...is most appropriate;" and 3) small public spaces or beauty spots, which are "small islands within the urban environment that present opportunities to enhance the city's character and identity, and the public's enjoyment of downtown, but are not large enough for substantial park facilities."

Physical	
Size	Between 0.1 and 5 acres
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2006 Downtown Parks & Public Spaces Task Force Report defines "downtown" as the area bounded by South Lake Union Park to the north, the International District to the south and Interstate 5 to the east. This document currently reflects those boundaries, although in the future the area defined "downtown" may shift as the city changes Generally surrounded by commercial, government or multi-family buildings
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	Only those over 10,000 square feet
Built environment	
Percent developed	100%
Assets (desired)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benches Improved paths Designed landscapes Lighting for safety Plaza or level grassy area for informal activity (no sports field)
Assets (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Picnic tables Play area Public art Stage
Parking	Street, none
Natural Environment	
Natural Area	None
Environmental Benefits	Possible green stormwater infrastructure, native plants
Programs	
Programming (desired)	Buskers, food vendors (carts), small concerts, special events
Programming (optional)	
Geographic range of users	Immediate business community, downtown visitors and residents, tourists

d) NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

Neighborhood parks are larger than pocket parks and serve the surrounding neighborhood for multiple uses. Typical park development may include play areas, small fields, benches, picnic tables, and improved paths.

Physical	
Size	Between 0.25 and 9 acres
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Family Residential, Residential Urban Villages, Hub Urban Villages • Generally surrounded by residences, small businesses, small or arterial streets
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	Yes
Built environment	
Percent developed	30-100%
Assets (desired)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benches • Designed landscape • Improved paths • Level grassy area for informal activity • Picnic tables • Play area
Assets (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball court • Boat launch • Comfort station • Garden • Lighting for safety • Picnic shelter or small shelter house • Public art • Sports fields • Stage • Tennis courts • Wading pool • Viewpoint
Parking	Generally just street parking; may have off-street parking
Natural Environment	
Natural Area	May have natural area, creek, lake
Environmental Benefits	Green stormwater infrastructure, native plants, habitat (if natural area), CO2 reduction
Programs	
Programming (desired)	community gatherings, children and family activities
Programming (optional)	Light scheduling for athletic teams, small concerts
Geographic range of users	Surrounding neighborhood – between ¼ and ½ mile

e) COMMUNITY PARK

A community park meets the recreational needs of several neighborhoods and may also preserve unique landscapes and open spaces. These parks serve multiple uses and provide recreational facilities and accommodate group activities not provided in neighborhood parks. Community park sites should be accessible by arterial and/or collector streets.

Physical	
Size	Between 5 and 60 acres
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Family Residential, Residential Urban Villages, Hub Urban Villages • Should be next to an arterial, institution, or natural area rather than surrounded by homes on all sides
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	Yes
Built environment	
Percent developed	25-100%
Assets (desired)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basketball court • Benches • Comfort station • Designed landscape • Improved paths • Level grassy area for informal activity • Lighting for safety • Picnic tables and shelters • Play area • Sports field(s)
Assets (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boat launch • Community Center • Concessions • Community or specialty garden • Lifeguarded beach • Lighting for specific facility use • Natural Area • Off-leash area • Public art • Pool • Recreation complex (lighted sports fields with designated parking away from residences) • Skatepark • Stage • Tennis courts • Wading pool • Viewpoint
Parking	Off-street parking and street parking
Natural Environment	
Natural Area	May have natural area, creek, lake
Environmental Benefits	Green stormwater infrastructure, native plants, habitat (if natural area), CO2 reduction
Programs	
Programming (desired)	Community gatherings, scheduled for athletic teams, small concerts
Programming (optional)	, naturalist activities, food vendors (cart)
Geographic range of users	Several surrounding neighborhoods – between 1/2 and 3 miles; citywide if park contains a recreation complex

f) RECREATION AREA

Recreation areas supplement neighborhood and community parks, serving broader citywide recreation needs. Each of these parks contains various assets, often for active recreation, and is programmed accordingly. Many also have designated natural areas. Restroom facilities and off-street parking are generally provided for users.

Physical	
Size	Between 20 and 500 acres
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Family Residential, Residential Urban Villages • Accessible via public transit and urban trail system and arterial streets • Usually next to an arterial, commercial building, other institution, greenspace, or waterfront, rather than surrounded by residences on all sides
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	Yes
Built environment	
Percent developed	20-100%
Assets (desired)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benches • Comfort station • Designed landscape • Improved paths • Level grassy area for informal activity • Lighting for specific facility use • Picnic tables and shelters • Play area • Sports field(s) • Stage
Assets (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration Building • Basketball court • Boat launch • Community Center • Concessions • Lifeguarded beach • Off-leash area • Natural area • Pool • Recreation complex (lighted sports fields with designated parking away from residences)Skatepark • Tennis court • Unique garden areas or conservatory • Wading pool • Viewpoint
Parking	Multiple off-street parking lots to allow for access to different parts of the park and maybe street parking
Natural Environment	
Natural Area	Yes – forest, lake, creek, riparian area
Environmental Benefits	Green stormwater infrastructure, native plants, habitat, riparian corridor (possible), CO2 reduction
Programs	
Programming (desired)	Community gatherings, scheduled for athletic teams, nature programs, special events, sporting events
Programming (optional)	, concerts, large special events, , fairs
Geographic range of users	Citywide, regional, tourists

g) NATURAL AREA/ GREENBELT

Natural Areas are park sites established for the protection and stewardship of habitat and other natural systems support functions. Some natural areas are accessible for low-impact use. Minimal infrastructure may include access and signage, where it will not adversely impact habitat or natural systems functions. Larger natural areas may have small sections developed to serve a community park function.

Physical	
Size	Any
Setting	Where tracts of undeveloped land are available. Natural areas may include, but are not limited to, forest, meadows, riparian areas, beaches, tidelands and wetlands. Non-accessible natural areas are generally found on steep slopes or in riparian zones or wetlands. Natural area often serve as a buffer between incompatible land uses. See 1993 Greenspaces Policy (Resolution 28653) for details about natural areas.
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	Only parks with usable open space over 10,000 square feet
Built environment	
Percent developed	Limited to infrastructure for support services
Assets (desired)	None (Parks Design Standard 02900-01 "Site Restoration of Natural Areas" shall apply)
Assets (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort station (in more heavily used natural areas such as Carkeek and Discovery Park) • Environmental Learning Center • Picnic tables • Play area • Signage • Trails (internal and connecting with external urban trails) • Viewpoint
Parking	Street parking, off-street parking for natural areas with more amenities
Natural Environment	
Natural Area	Yes
Environmental Benefits	Green stormwater infrastructure, native plants, habitat, riparian corridor (if there is a creek or shoreline), erosion control
Programs	
Programming (desired)	Environmental education
Programming (optional)	Plant restoration service projects, research
Geographic range of users	Citywide, regional, tourists

h) BOULEVARDS/GREEN STREETS/TRAILS

Boulevards, green streets and trails are linear parks that typically serve as an aesthetically-pleasing transportation corridor. A boulevard is legally designated in SMC 15.02.046, defined as an extension or expansion of a dedicated street which continues to serve as a right-of-way in addition to being park land. Many of Seattle's boulevards are part of the Olmsted plan. Boulevards and green streets often provide safe pedestrian routes as well as recreation opportunities.

Physical	
Size	Any
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Family Residential, Residential Urban Villages, Hub Urban Villages • Along an arterial road • In places with attractive views
Contributes to planning area Usable Open Space requirement	Those with usable open space over 10,000 square feet
Built environment	
Percent developed	25-100%
Assets (desired)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed landscape • Improved Path • Regular street lighting
Assets (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benches • Decorative lighting • Flat grassy area for informal activity • Play area • Public gathering place • Viewpoint
Parking	Street parking, off-street parking
Natural Environment	
Natural Area	May have shoreline, riparian area
Environmental Benefits	Green stormwater infrastructure, native plants, riparian area, CO2 reduction
Programs	
Programming (desired)	None
Programming (optional)	Bike and pedestrian-oriented activities
Geographic range of users	Citywide, all travelers using the street

i) SPECIAL-USE PARKS

This category refers to stand-alone parks that are designed to serve one particular use. Examples of parks that fit into this category include stand-alone golf courses, marinas, boat ramps, and community or specialty gardens. These parks may serve a second or third use (e.g. picnic tables at a marina or walking paths at a golf course), but the primary use is prioritized with regard to design, maintenance and funding decisions.

For each special-use park type, the descriptors will differ depending on industry standards and best practices for the intended activity. For each type of special-use park, a more detailed list of descriptors should be developed by a design expert in that particular field.

Physical	
Size	Whatever size is necessary for the intended use
Setting	Depends on intended use
Contributes to planning area	In some cases
Usable Open Space requirement	
Built environment	
Percent developed	70-100%
Assets (desired)	Depends on intended use
Assets (optional)	Depends on intended use
Parking	Depends on intended use
Natural Environment	
Natural Area	None
Environmental benefits	Golf courses contribute to CO2 reduction, native plants, habitat, and green stormwater infrastructure; environmental benefits of other special-use parks depends on development
Community	
Programming (desired)	Depends on intended use
Programming (optional)	Depends on intended use
Geographic range of users	Citywide