



City of Tacoma  
Planning and Development Services

Agenda Item  
D-1

**To:** Planning Commission  
**From:** Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division  
**Subject:** **Application #2014-08 – Open Space Element Update**  
**Meeting Date:** December 4, 2013  
**Memo Date:** November 26, 2013

At the next Planning Commission meeting staff will present a proposed work program for amendments to the *Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element* of the Comprehensive Plan. The intent is to update the Element, which was adopted in 2008, to reflect planning, programmatic progress and changing circumstances since its adoption; an updated inventory of projects, land and facilities; and enhanced guidance on implementation. In addition, this update will provide a forum for interested stakeholders to help refine the City's park and open space vision, goals and objectives—a discussion which will continue into the 2015 Comprehensive Plan update.

One of the key strategies will be to update the Element to reflect and incorporate recent policy direction, goals and objectives from several City planning efforts. Over the past several years, a number of policy initiatives have refined parks and open space goals and objectives for specific areas of the City, including shorelines and Downtown. In addition, the City's Open Space Program has undergone a transition with new and reallocated roles, responsibilities and resources based on the nexus between natural open space and surface water goals. This includes an evolving relationship with Metro Parks Tacoma, which will be a key stakeholder in this process. By reflecting these up-to-date plans and organizational structures, this update will help set the stage for ongoing consideration of park and open space issues during the 2015 update.

The update will be informed by the planning guidelines of the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). Certain grants administered by RCO have a requirement that local jurisdictions update their park and open space plans once every six years to maintain eligibility. RCO provides guidelines for conducting a robust analysis and public outreach process, which will inform this process.

At the December 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, staff will present an overview of the background and proposed approach, and seek Commission direction on further work and outreach. Attached is an overview of key issues and the proposed approach. The current Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element is available online at [www.cityoftacoma.org/planning](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/planning), select Comprehensive Plan. If you have any questions please contact me at 591-5389 or [elliott.barnett@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:elliott.barnett@cityoftacoma.org).

Attachment

c: Peter Huffman, Interim Director



# Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element Amendments

## Project Overview – Annual Amendments #2014-08

December 4, 2013

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### **SUMMARY:**

As part of the 2014 Annual Amendments, the Planning Commission will consider amendments to the Comprehensive Plan's *Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element* intended to reaffirm the vision and goals, to reflect progress and changing circumstances since its adoption, to update inventories, and to enhance guidance on implementation.

### **Policy update objectives:**

1. Reaffirm the vision, goals and policies
2. Improve and update inventories
3. Reflect recent policy initiatives and implementation progress
4. Enhance guidance on implementation
5. Prepare for the 2015 Comprehensive Plan update
6. Maintain grant eligibility

### **Background:**

The City of Tacoma has a strong policy commitment to parks, recreation and open space. The *Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element* is one of multiple policy documents that recognize the many quality of life and environmental benefits these assets provide. The City partners with the Metro Parks District, School District and other agencies to provide a range of active and passive parks, recreation and open space programs, lands and facilities.

The development of the *Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element*, adopted in 2008, was a major policy initiative over the course of two years. As the name reflects, the Element provides the City's primary policy direction on the full range of park and open space issues (including habitat and recreation). The primary focus of the 2008 policy effort was on conservation and stewardship of natural open space areas, in conjunction with Metro Parks Tacoma's *Strategic Parks and Program Services Plan* which provides thorough policy guidance related to recreation and park facilities.

### **State planning framework:**

The state Growth Management Act (GMA) encourages recreation and habitat conservation planning in several ways, and includes the following goal:

*“Open space and recreation. Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities”* RCW 36.70A.020(9).

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Comprehensive Plans are required to designate areas for recreation and open space as part of the land use element (RCW 36.70A.070), and local jurisdictions must identify open space corridors within and between UGAs (RCW 36.70A.219).

State grant program timelines are one of the drivers for conducting this update in 2014. In order to maintain City eligibility for a range of grant programs administered by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), local governments must update their park and open space plans on a six year cycle, per the substantive, process and timeline requirements of WAC 286-13. The City of Tacoma adopted the *Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element* on December 9, 2008, and current grant eligibility ends on December 9, 2014.

### **APPROACH:**

The following is an overview of the key issues and the proposed update approach.

This update will meet the pertinent planning requirements and guidelines to maintain Tacoma's grant eligibility. More importantly, this is an opportunity to ensure that the Element is serving the people of Tacoma effectively. RCO requires four elements to be addressed through planning processes:

1. Goals and objectives
2. Inventory
3. Public involvement
4. Demand and Need Analysis

Under the GMA, Tacoma is required to complete a thorough review and update of the entire Comprehensive Plan in 2015. This 2014 open space update will help set the stage for that effort. In turn, the Element will likely be modified again in 2015 as part of that broader process. For example, the Element has significant overlap with the Environmental Policy and Urban Forest Policy Elements. Some reorganization and consolidation is likely to occur in 2015.

### **Reaffirm the vision and goals:**

This update will include public outreach and stakeholder consultation to reaffirm the vision and goals of the Element, and to update its policies to ensure they reflect the vision and goals. The vision and goals were developed through a broadly inclusive public process, were well-supported at the time of adoption in 2008, and in staff's view continue to reflect the community and Council's input. The current vision is:

*Create an integrated system of habitat and recreation lands and facilities in Tacoma that defines and enhances the built and natural environment, supports and nurtures plant and wildlife habitat, offers a well-balanced range of recreation opportunities and enriches the lives of Tacoma's current and future citizens.*

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The Element includes policy guidance on the full spectrum of parks, recreation and open space programs and assets, and is organized into the following policy groupings:

- Recreation Lands and Facilities
- Multi-purpose Trails
- Urban Parks in Downtown and Mixed-Use Centers
- Green Infrastructure
- Community Gardens
- Waterfront Open Spaces and Shoreline Access
- Habitat Areas and Habitat Corridors
- Critical Areas Preservation

### Administration and Operation

- Strategic Action Program and Funding
- Citizen Involvement, Public Outreach and Education
- Partnerships
- Citywide Conservation Approach
- Acquisition and Management of Land and Facilities

The Element reflects the fact that parks, recreation and open space opportunities are jointly provided by the City, Metro Parks Tacoma and other entities, and that Metro Parks Tacoma is the primary service provider for recreation opportunities. Through this update, the City will initiate an evaluation of our capacity and approach to meet community needs based on available resources—a discussion that will continue into the 2015 Comprehensive Plan update.

### **Improve and Update Inventories:**

This task will both improve and update inventories of open space projects and assets. Currently, this information is contained within the Capital Facilities Program (CFP). The CFP contains an Open Space Inventory and an Active Use Parks Inventory. These lists do not provide information on the condition of open space and park assets. The CFP also contains a brief projects list describing efforts to acquire and improve open space land or facilities.

These inventories would be updated to reflect changes since 2008, summarized in the *Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element*, and potentially modified or expanded based on public input. The projects would be reflected in prioritized lists similar to the ones in the *Transportation Element*. When available, information would be included on the supply and condition of recreational opportunities and habitat conservation and restoration, and maintenance and operational cost estimates.

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### Reflect recent policy initiatives:

Since 2008, significant policy development has been completed through planning efforts for specific areas of the City or specific subject focuses. Each of the following recent or ongoing policy initiatives includes open space and recreation as one of the key issues:

- **Shoreline Master Program (SMP)** – The recently updated SMP and Shoreline Public Access Plan addresses park, recreation and open space within the City’s Shoreline Districts.
- **South Downtown, Hilltop and North Downtown Subarea Plans** – These subarea plans, currently near adoption or underway, include policy direction on parks, recreation and open space for the whole of Downtown Tacoma.
- **Transportation Element** – This Element includes an annually updated list of active transportation projects, many of which are also included in the Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element. This update provides the opportunity to clarify guidance for trails and ensure consistency.
- **Urban Forest Policy Element** – This Element, adopted in 2010, refined policy guidance related to urban forestry, community gardens and other issues.
- **Metro Parks Tacoma’s Green Vision 2030** – MPT adopted this plan in 2012 as an update its 2006 Strategic Plan. There are many connections between the City and MPT’s planning efforts.
- **Port of Tacoma’s Shoreline Public Access Plan** – the Port adopted this plan earlier this year.

This update would incorporate pertinent policy direction from each of these area-specific plans into the *Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element*.

### Reflect progress and transitions:

Since 2008, progress has been made in implementing the goals of the Element, and the Open Space Program has undertaken new roles and responsibilities. The update will recognize these accomplishments and changes, and modify the Element as appropriate. Significant milestones include:

- **Open Space and Surface Water nexus** – the City Council has recognized that natural areas play an important role in the management of stormwater. The City has now shifted management of natural open space areas to the Environmental Services Department, and there is a new source of funding for that purpose through an increase in surface water fees. Environmental Services in turn is developing a working relationship with Metro Parks Tacoma to manage some City open space areas.
- **Open Space management plans** – the Open Space Program has facilitated or collaborated in the development of several plans for specific open space areas, including First Creek, Wapato Hills, Julia’s Gulch and the Schuster Slope.
- **Green Tacoma Partnership** – the GTP is a collaboratively managed program to support volunteer habitat restoration activities which has been in operation since 2007.

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- **Restoration Action Plan** – in 2010 Forterra developed a system to prioritize habitat restoration efforts based on a habitat quality and risk assessment tool called Tree-iage. This system could be reflected in the Element.
- **Transfer of Development Rights** ordinance – in 2012 the City Council created a TDR Program, which is an action called for by the Element.
- **Critical Areas Code updates** – an update was recently completed to the Critical Areas code to facilitate habitat restoration activities, as called for by the Element.
- **Community Gardens** – the City has collaborated with partners to greatly expand the number of community gardens citywide, as called for by the Element.
- **Active transportation projects** – progress has been made to expand and enhance multi-use trails including the Water Ditch Trail, Pipeline Trail, Prairie Line Trail, Foss Esplanade, Schuster Parkway Promenade, Ruston Way Promenade, and the Dome To Defiance “missing link” at Point Ruston.

### Strengthen Implementation Guidance:

This step would refine the Element’s guidance on implementation.

- The Element calls for the creation of a Strategic Action Program which would create shorter-term implementation plans based on the policies of the Element. This step has never moved forward in the manner originally envisioned, in part due to the fact that multiple entities are responsible for different aspects of implementation. The approach may be revised or replaced to reflect the need for coordination while recognizing the nature of collaborating across agencies with differing focuses, structures and responsibilities.
- Consider incorporating shorter-term objectives into the Element to guide implementation and to facilitate benchmarking progress.
- The Element calls for developing plans for specific open space areas, several of which have since been developed. This update would establish a framework for how such plans will be recognized and implemented.
- The Element would be updated to recognize the system of active parks maintained by the City.
- Consider revisions or new approaches to guide allocation of City resources for implementation and to measure progress. This analysis needs to take into account that Metro Parks Tacoma is the primary service provider in the City for recreation opportunities. One method for measuring effectiveness is setting a Level Of Service (LOS) standard. The Capital Facilities Element establishes the following LOS standards:

#### Parks

- |                               |                        |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| • Local                       | 0.003 acres per capita |
| • Regional                    | 0.007 acres per capita |
| • Open Space/Wildlife Habitat | 0.002 acres per capita |

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### **Organization:**

This task would evaluate approaches to make the Element more succinct and easier to use. The Element contains some background information that may not be consistent with the level of detail provided in other Elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Some policy groupings could be reorganized to simplify the Element.

### **Outreach and Collaboration**

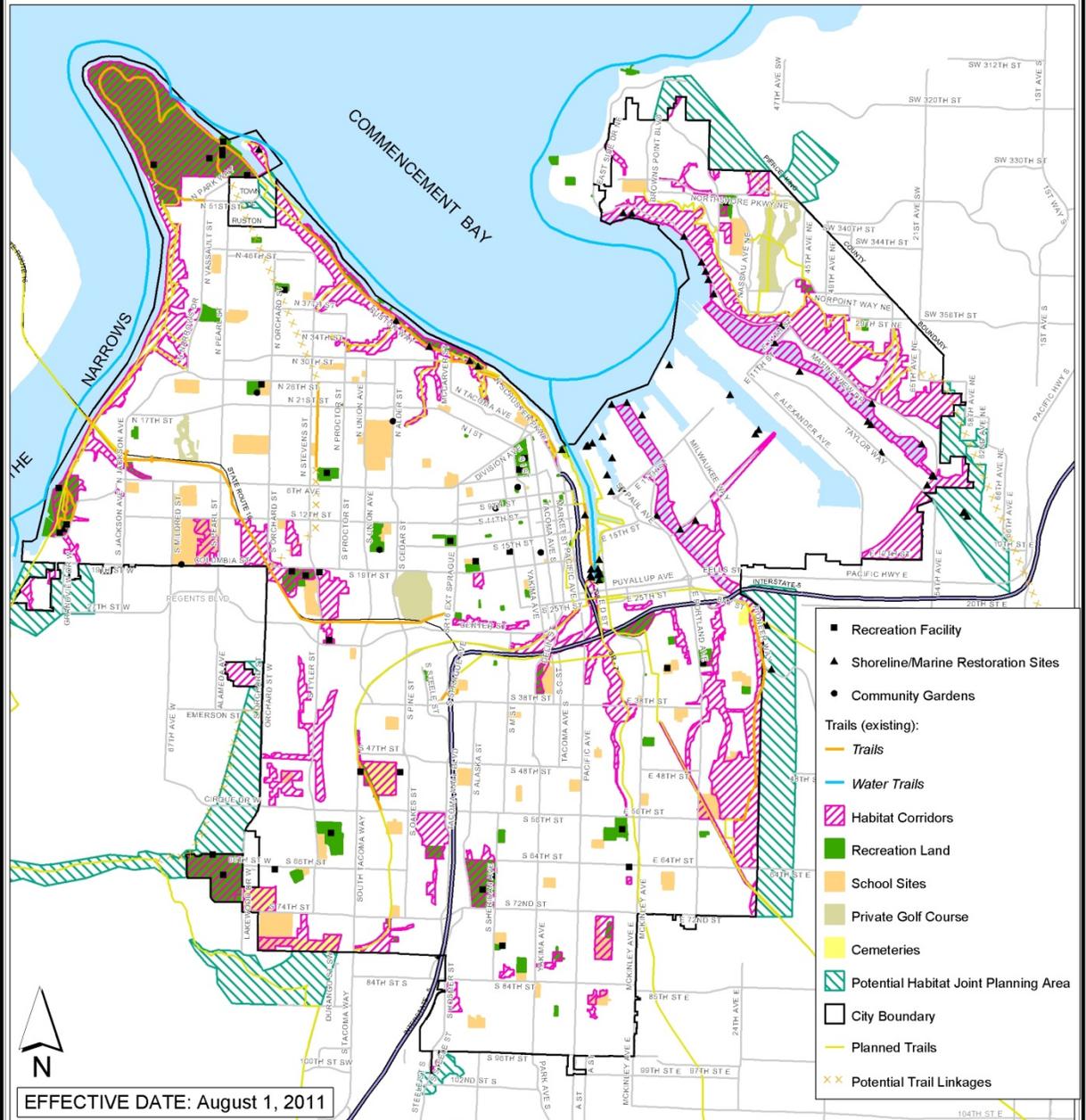
Staff will work with key stakeholders to refine this approach, including:

- Environmental Services Dept.
- Metro Parks Tacoma
- Port of Tacoma
- Green Tacoma Partnership
- Public Works Dept.
- Tacoma School District
- Neighborhood Councils
- Sustainability Commission

ATTACHMENT:

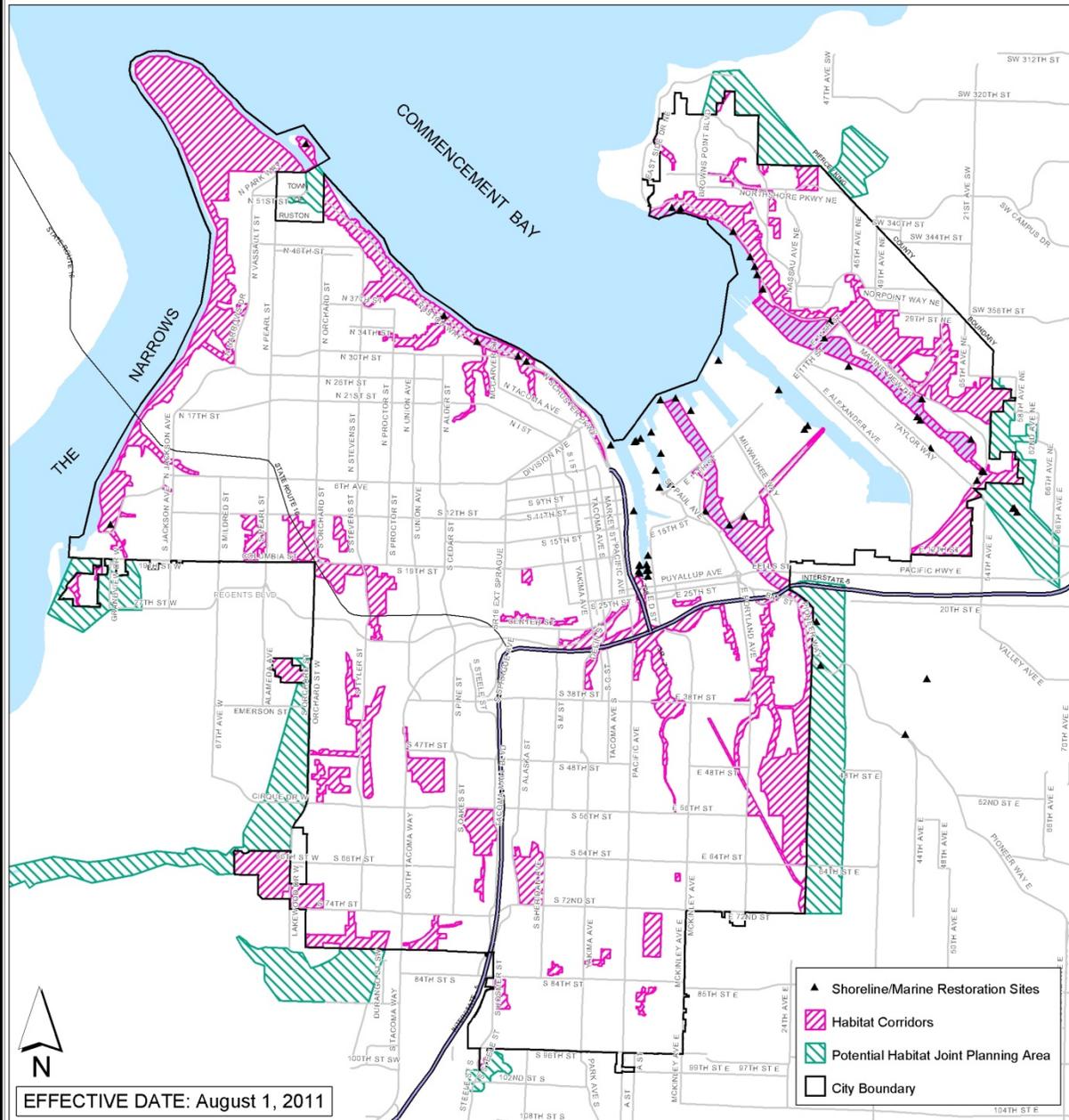
Open Space System Maps

# Figure 1 - Tacoma's Open Space System



This map shows Tacoma's existing and planned system of open space lands and facilities. The areas indicated are public open spaces valuable for the habitat and/or recreation benefits they provide - including recreation lands, habitat areas and restoration sites, schools and community gardens. Also shown are private cemeteries and golf courses, recreation facilities, and existing, planned and potential trails, including water trails. The Habitat Corridors contain the City's most valuable undeveloped habitat areas - generally areas that are larger, connected or contiguous to other habitat areas, and combining multiple valuable functions and features (such as wetlands, streams, slopes and forests). Potential Joint Habitat Planning Areas are areas where habitat features span the City's borders, calling for inter-jurisdictional planning and coordination.

## Figure 2 - Habitat Map



Designated Habitat Corridors contain the City's most valuable undeveloped habitat areas - generally areas that are larger, connected or contiguous to other habitat areas, and combining multiple valuable functions and features (such as wetlands, streams, slopes and forests). Habitat Corridors will be the priority areas for Tacoma's habitat conservation and stewardship efforts. The vision is to conserve and restore habitat functions within the Corridors and, where appropriate, foster low-impact access and recreation. Restoration sites in shoreline and marine habitat areas are also shown. Potential Joint Habitat Planning Areas are areas where habitat features span the City's borders, calling for inter-jurisdictional planning and coordination.

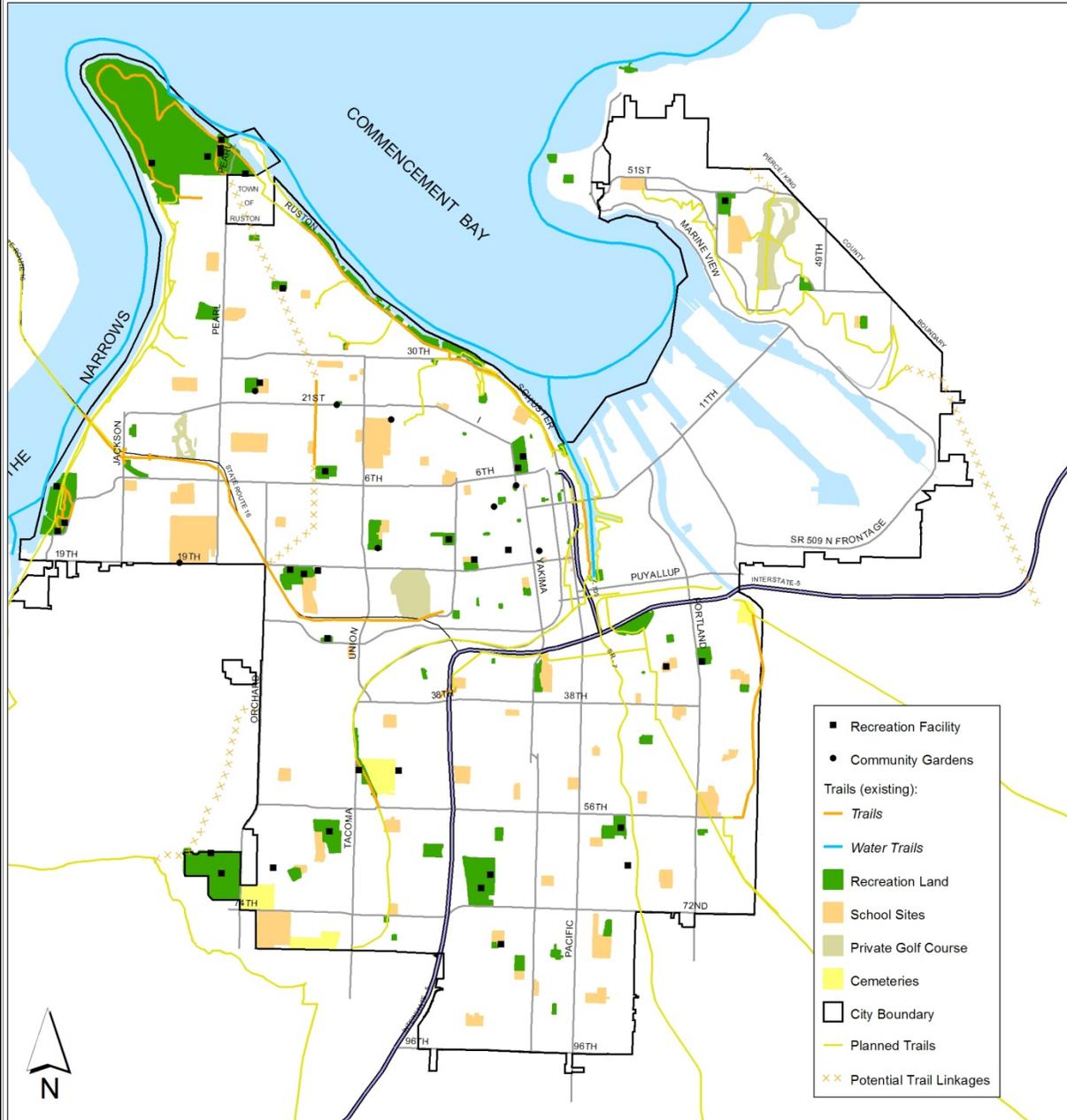
### City of Tacoma Community & Economic Development



NOTE: This map is for reference only.

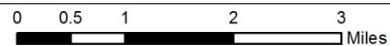


### Figure 3 - Recreation Lands and Facilities Map



This map shows Tacoma's existing and planned open space recreation assets - including parks, schools, community gardens, recreation facilities, and existing, planned and potential trails, including water trails. Also shown are private cemeteries and golf courses.

**City of Tacoma  
Community & Economic Development**



NOTE: This map is for reference only.



Plot Date: 8/11/2008

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