

# Chapter 5 → Parks, Recreation and Open Space

## Element

*The City of Oak Harbor is a beautiful place where the natural environment is woven into the urban environment with such care and precision that the sense of where the built form stops and nature begins is not known.*

*It's a place where human nature has the opportunity to find its balance with its surroundings by merging of the urban and natural environment in seamless ways, inviting nature into the community and creating a wide range of spaces and experience where community can gather as one or the energy of one can rest in solitude and peace.*

*It is a town where the residents of all age groups are active and healthy, and have a wide range of choices for recreation, engaging themselves in mental and physical activity all year round.*

*It's a City where the environment is clean with beautiful landscapes that line the streets and pathways, opening up to breath taking views of the water and mountains. It invites boaters and kayakers into the community compelling them to spend time at this premier waterfront community.*

### Guiding Principles

Guiding principles set the basic foundation for the users of this plan. These principles are a memorandum of understanding. The principles help to provide the user/reader with the right perspective, role and understanding necessary to speak or act on behalf of this community accepted Plan.

1. *The City of Oak Harbor recognizes, respects, preserves and protects areas where nature will and must take its own course in shaping itself. However, the City also recognizes that it is the ambassador for change that is required to create space for the healthy existence of nature within the built environment.*
2. *The City recognizes, designates and differentiates between the spaces that need to be protected and preserved from the spaces that need to be restored and re-vegetated.*
3. *The management, acquisition and development of open space, parks and recreation must be done in a fashion concurrent with development so that a resident's mind should seldom contemplate the question of sufficiency or quality.*
4. *The recreational choices provided by the community, for the community, are of a community nature and will therefore reasonably provide opportunities for all within the community.*
5. *Man-made structures are designed with aesthetic quality and built with natural and environmentally-friendly materials to last a very long time.*

6. *City owned lands that are regional attractions must be welcoming so that a visitor to that space will savor the experience long after departing.*
7. *Creating the experiences of these spaces includes meaningful public input, balancing the needs of the community, and determining the impacts to the vision.*
8. *The community of Oak Harbor acknowledges preservation of the natural environment and in the necessity to protect nature and wildlife may restrict or preclude public access from some open space.*
9. *All open spaces, parks and recreational facilities will be maintained to their designated level of service recognizing that “no-maintenance” is also a chosen form of maintenance.*
10. *Elements of nature can and should be introduced to all public owned lands that will help connect the various spaces and form a complex network of paths between the community’s open spaces, parks and recreational facilities.*
11. *The Parks and Recreation Plan must always remain in compliance with the GMA, State and County agencies.*
12. *A two-way communication system between residents and City administration, to share, inform and receive input, is essential for the success of the Vision.*
13. *Reasonable safety measures will be incorporated into all aspects of the design of new facilities and equipment, acknowledging that people by choice indulge in sport and recreation activity that do have the potential for risks, accidents and danger.*
14. *Recreational choices shall be provided to meet the needs of youth, adult, elderly and disabled population.*
15. *The acquisition of land and easement to meet required levels of service shall be mandated concurrent with development of property. Donation of land for parks, recreation, open space and trails, above and beyond the requirements, is encouraged.*
16. *Recreation facilities are planned for use all year and in most weather conditions.*
17. *Partnerships and relationships with other agencies, such as, but not limited to North Whidbey Parks and Recreation District, Island County, NAS Whidbey Island, Washington State, not-for-profits and other public and private entities, must be continuous, proactive and enhanced through communication, coordination and participation.*
18. *Funding options and opportunities must be explored to provide a consistent revenue stream that will finance the success of the Vision.*
19. *Existing facilities shall be upgraded to meet health and safety standards and to assure the longevity of its service.*
20. *All projects initiated or partnered by the City, from conception to completion, will follow established planning processes, effective notification, public input/discussion, fair treatment and equal opportunity for all.*

## Comprehensive Planning Goals

The goals listed below are an end result envisioned for the community. The goal statements in this section are a compilation of goals from the previous plan as well as new ones that have been added based on the most recent public input process. Since the previous plan was an update of the Plan originally drafted in 1989, it is acknowledged that 20 years' worth of public input has gone into forming those statements. The spirit and essence of the goals have been included in this plan with the intent that it carries forward a community vision that may take several decades to achieve.

The Comprehensive Planning Goals include two types of goals. Some goals are “continuing” and others are “conclusive”. An example of a continuing goal is “Work with North Whidbey Parks and Recreation District to establish recreational programs in the community”. An example of a conclusive goal is “Provide additional RV spaces in or around Windjammer Park” or “Establish a trail connection between Windjammer Park and Flintstone Park”. A conclusive goal can be removed from this chapter after it has been completed.

The end result of an accomplished goal can also take various forms. Some may result in the construction or acquisition of a physical structure, building or space and some may result in the approval of codes, regulations, policies, agreements etc.

Goals included here can be accomplished or furthered in several ways. Some goals can be accomplished by a proactive approach such as including them in the six-year strategic plan. Others can be furthered by using them in decision making for specific projects. They may also be used to support a private venture that may attempt to accomplish similar goals.

Every six years, when the Plan is updated, goals are selected from this comprehensive list to be

included in the Action Plan (Tier II) for implementation. The selected goals are indicated with a seal and the year they were selected. The 2008 update cycle has “Selected 2008”. When the Plan is updated in the year 2014, a new seal can be created to indicate the chosen goals at that time. Over time, this will not only provide an indication of accomplishments but will also reveal areas that need attention.

The goals have been broadly categorized into open space, parks and recreation. A general category has been created for goals that apply to all the elements. The goals listed within each section are not arranged in any particular order nor are they prioritized.



## Open Space

1. Identify, designate and protect open space lands that provide forage, migration, and habitat for wildlife.
2. Partner with NAS Whidbey Island to formulate a Plan acceptable to both parties for the continuation of the Waterfront Trail to Maylor Point.
3. Construct a waterfront trail system linking providing public access to the waterfront from Scenic Heights Road to Maylor Point.
  - a. Connection between Windjammer and Flintstone Park
  - b. City and Navy to determine extension on Navy Property to Maylor Point
  - c. Extend the Freund Marsh Trail to the waterfront
4. Design and build trails around the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Wetlands Tract.
5. Provide safe and convenient trails for walking and bicycling between parks, neighborhood and major activity centers throughout the City, and to other recreation sites on North Whidbey.
6. Prepare a bicycle and pedestrian trails plan that establishes design standards and provides connections between city parks, residential areas and major activity centers.
7. Integrate Island County's proposed Bicentennial Trail, Pacific Northwest Trail and other County-wide trails plans into the City Trail Plans.
8. Identify and preserve open space lands that permit public access to the waterfront, and also to other areas where the public can interact with natural features.
9. Promote the conservation of open spaces that are in both public and private ownership.
10. Utilize open space conservation as a method to establish a "green belt" around the urban core of the city.
11. Identify and protect important "view corridors" that provide visual access to scenic vistas.
12. Protect open spaces that provide important ecological functions and values.
13. Work with Island County staff to identify opportunities for cooperation in preserving open space areas within the city's UGA, as well as within the city/county Joint Planning Area.
14. Promote a coordinated regional effort toward the preservation of open space.
15. Identify properties that may be suitable to create an open space link between Waterloo Marsh and Swantown Lake.
16. Recognize hydrologic and other features that create physical or visual linkages between properties and natural features.
17. Establish an "open space trust fund" for the protection, preservation, and potential acquisition of open spaces through which individuals, organizations, governments, trusts, foundations, businesses, and other entities may contribute.
18. Review and revise as necessary the city's development regulations to ensure that adequate provisions are made to preserve open space as land is developed.
19. Explore options to convert the property located on the southeast corner of SR 20 and Fakkema Road into an Oak Grove.

## Parks

1. Develop an informative brochure that includes an easy-to-read map of all the recreation sites on North Whidbey Island and publish it on all popular media.

2. Post a City Parks directory map at Windjammer Park that graphically incorporates key City landmarks.
3. Construct a concert/performance arts pavilion at Windjammer Park.
4. Provide additional public RV spaces in or around Windjammer Park.
5. Provide shoreline access, campgrounds and trail linkages for kayakers and others using human powered watercrafts.
6. Provide more facilities for large group gatherings in parks.
7. Provide upland facilities at Flintstone Park that will support the Municipal Pier Project.
8. Prepare a concessionaire policy and related ordinance for the City's shoreline and community parks.
9. Provide more attractions at Oak Harbor's shoreline parks, including opportunities for community events and vendors of appropriate refreshments and rental sports equipment.
10. Develop guidelines to promote private properties and existing developments to provide pocket parks along the City's arterial streets.
11. Upgrade existing structures and facilities to make them safe and extend their life and usefulness.
4. Work with the School District to establish long term use of existing facilities where feasible to meet established level of service standards for recreational facilities identified as needed in the level of service analysis.
5. Work with North Whidbey Parks and Recreation District to establish recreational programs for youth in the community.
6. Coordinate with Island County to establish funding for recreational programs.
7. Build a community center that serves as an indoor multiple purpose facility for active and passive recreational needs that serve the residents all year round.
8. Prepare a Marina Master Plan that analyses the community's perceptions and demand for marina services, determines market demand for tourism and commercial fishing, determines methods to establish long term funding, upland development alternatives and timing and enhance its connections to downtown.
9. Improve the appearance of the Marina so as to make it welcoming to the boaters and other users that visit Oak Harbor.
10. Investigate long term funding options for the Marina that are consistent and can serve the facility well into the future.
11. Upgrade all existing facilities and utilities in the Marina to meet or exceed current safety standards.

## **Recreation**

1. Develop the former landfill site, were appropriate, with supplemental recreational facilities.
2. Develop a regional ball park complex to serve local needs and attract tournament-level sports competition.
3. Assist in developing programs to utilize existing facilities within the City to provide recreational opportunities for all ages.

## **General**

1. Explore option to increase the revenues for parks, recreation, trails and open space projects.
2. Develop new volunteer programs to improve city parks, recreation and trails system and other areas in need of beautification.

3. Prepare a lighting policy and associated ordinance for the City's community and neighborhood parks.

### **Recommended Plan**

The Recommended Plan is a conceptual approach to planning for parks, recreation and open space in and around the community. This conceptual approach provides a desired scenario to work towards. Recommendations included in this section are targeted towards achieving a specific scenario.

This chapter provides general scenarios to work towards for the following elements of the Plan.

- Neighborhood Parks
- Community Parks
- Open Space
- Trails

The Recommended Plan draws from analyses and standards contained in other chapters of this document. References are provided where feasible.

#### *Neighborhood Parks*

Neighborhood Parks serve a smaller area than community parks and have facilities that are usually scaled down to serve the immediate neighborhood. Neighborhood Parks should be designed and located so that they are accessible by foot or bicycle. They should be safe and easy to access through local streets, pathways and trails and located away from barriers such as major streets.

Neighborhood Parks should provide playgrounds and recreational facilities for children and young adults in the neighborhood. However, opportunities to provide passive recreation with natural areas should also be considered.

As the City grows, neighborhood parks should continue to be provided in residential areas as they develop. Opportunities should also be explored to provide neighborhood parks in areas within the City where service is not currently available.

Listed below are recommendations of areas to consider for neighborhood parks. These are general areas and exact park location will vary based on patterns of development, street layout, trail connections, natural features and availability of land. Recommended areas are:

- South of Whidbey Avenue and east of Midway Boulevard
- Between SR 20 and Scenic Heights
- West of SR 20 and south of SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- South of Swantown Road and west of Fairway Lane
- North of Swantown Road and west of Loerland Drive
- North of Crosby Avenue and west of Oak Harbor Road

### *Community Parks*

Community Parks serve a larger area than neighborhood parks and include facilities that serve the entire community. Community Parks are larger in area and includes the larger recreational facilities such as playfields for team sports and structures for large community gatherings.

Community Parks are more efficient when various recreational facilities are concentrated in one location. This allows these facilities to share common infrastructure such as water, parking, restrooms, drainage etc. Community Park should also be located along arterial streets since users may access the park by automobiles and mass transit.

The City of Oak Harbor is deficient in many recreation facilities. Most of the needed facilities best serve the City in a Community Park setting. More than one Community Park may be needed to provide the recreation facilities prescribed by the LOS standards. Analysis indicates that the west/northwest portions of the city have the least coverage.

Therefore it would be ideal to locate a future community park to provide coverage in that area.

### *Open Space*

Open space is a signature element that helps to define the quality of life in Oak Harbor. Open spaces are area of land or water in its natural or existing state that is essentially unimproved and designated, dedicated, reserved or preserved for scenic quality, or for sustaining sensitive ecosystems, or for public or private use.

The protection of open space is an issue of importance to city residents, and also to visitors to the city. Open space provides important and sometimes irreplaceable habitat for wildlife. It also provides places where people can enjoy the area's scenic beauty and cultural heritage, which may be passed to succeeding generations of residents and visitors alike.

Open space can serve many functions within a community. Those functions may include agriculture and forestry, wildlife habitat, wetlands protection, groundwater protection, flood management, shoreline access, preservation of view corridors, or similar functions. Individual open space tracts may provide more than one function. While each community may place different priorities on these functions, each can provide an important component of an area's quality of life.

Open space helps to create livable neighborhoods, to soften the edges of the built environment, to enhance property values, and to buffer incompatible land uses. Because the city is already built out to a significant extent, identifying opportunities to acquire or otherwise protect open space can be critical. The extent of the built environment also suggests that the discussion of open space should occur within a regional context.

The City should work with the County and other organizations to help identify and designate natural areas, wetlands, wildlife habitats etc. around the City as open space.

Some of these areas have been identified the Recommended Plan –Long Term Trail Layout Map (Figure 13) as nodes.

### *Trails*

Trails can broadly include dedicated (separate from right-of-way) multi-use paths, marked lanes on roadways and sidewalks. Trails also serve multiple purposes. They can be designed, built and located primarily for recreation or they could be integrated into street projects for transportation. An ideal trail system would be designed to serve both purposes.

The Recommended Plan provides two different scenarios for trail development. One scenario provides concepts for connections within the city limits and the other scenario provides concepts for trail development outside the City in the UGA and beyond.

### **Recommended Plan for Trails within the City**

Providing dedicated trails within the city can be challenging because of the existing built environment. Therefore trails within the city should be designed or designated along existing transportation corridors. Since they are adjacent to existing transportation systems, care must be taken to make them safe.



Figure 11 - Recommended Plan - City Core Trails - CBD

Ideally it is preferred that the entire city be provided with trails and sidewalks to connect the various parks, public facilities, employment centers, commercial centers etc. However, the Recommended Plan identifies two areas specifically for the development of trails within the City. These two areas are the Central Business District (CBD) and the Whidbey Avenue Corridor.

### CBD

The CBD is a high density district with a mix of commercial and residential uses. This district's commercial uses are geared towards capitalizing on pedestrian traffic. The CBD district is in an ideal location to create a hub for interconnectedness between some of the City's prime assets - Windjammer Park, Smith Park, Flintstone Park, Skagit Community College and the Marina. The waterfront trail that connects Scenic Heights Road to the Marina is adjacent to this area. The waterfront trail, a community asset, can benefit from a supporting bicycle/pedestrian trail network in the CBD district. The following recommendations are proposed to improve trails in this area:

- Design guidelines and regulations in this district should be written to guide the physical environment toward a pedestrian oriented environment.
- Enhance the existing trail connection between Flintstone Park and the Marina to a multiuse trail and extend the existing trail from the Marina to Maylor Point.
- Provide marked bicycle path along the primary east-west streets (Pioneer Way, Bayshore Drive, and SE Barrington Drive) and the primary north-south streets (City Beach Street, Dock Street, Midway Blvd and Regatta Drive).

### Whidbey Avenue Corridor

This corridor has been identified in the Recommended Plan since almost all the public

schools in Oak Harbor are primarily located in the heart of the City along Whidbey Avenue. Several other public facilities such as the Vanderzicht Memorial Pool, the Senior Center, and the skate park are also located along this major east-west arterial.

This corridor should be enhanced for all modes of transportation. The following recommendations are proposed to improve trails in this area:

- Include pedestrian and bicycle trails into the design of the reconstruction of Whidbey Avenue.
- Augment the Whidbey Avenue Corridor trail with similar trails along the other major roadways that intersect it such as SR 20, Heller Road, Midway Blvd and Regatta Drive.
- Support the Whidbey Avenue Corridor trail system with sidewalks or a trail system along local streets so that it can provide for a dispersed funneling system to the major public facilities located in this area from organized/scheduled remote drop-off and pick-up locations, preferably, at nearby parks.

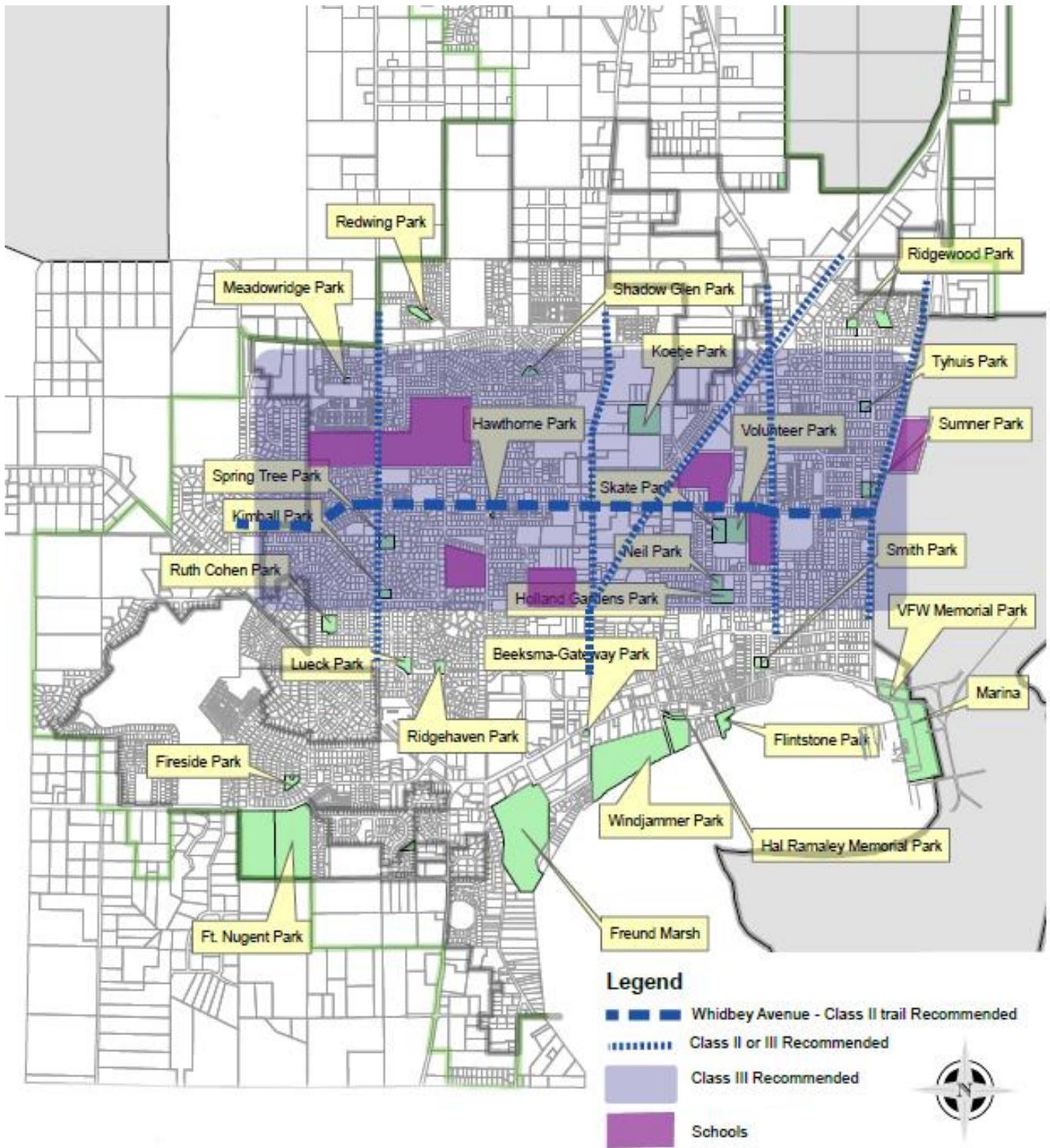


Figure 12 - Recommended Plan - City Core - Whidbey Avenue Corridor

The above recommendations are further supported by the 2007 Transportation Plan. Since these options consider the existing transportation system as a foundation, it is recommended that the City undertake a pedestrian and bicycle study to establish standards and create a detailed plan to achieve this goal.

Trails along existing roadways do not have to wait for road improvements to be implemented. Normally there is adequate right-of-way to accommodate a trail adjacent to existing pavement or storm drain. Trails can be installed temporarily until funding becomes available for street improvements.

#### UGA and Beyond

This section of the Plan lays out a vision for the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan outside the city limits so that the community can plan ahead of possible growth and development. Recommendations within this section are ideas and general directions to follow. Since the City does not have jurisdictional authority beyond the city limits, it is important to coordinate with Island County to pursue the scenario recommended below.

The challenges in these areas are many such as land ownership patterns, varying lot sizes and shapes, critical areas, right-of-way and easement acquisition etc. Therefore the recommended plan for areas outside the City will rely on a few basic principles to help guide decision making.

The scenario establishes two basic elements – nodes and connectors. A combination of these will result in a network of trails, parks and open space that will provide interconnectedness, preserve critical areas, and provide open space and parks to meet the needs of growth and increase in population.

Nodes – Nodes serve as a hub for connectors (trails). They can be community parks, wetlands, natural areas such as forests, lakes, state and county parks etc. They serve to protect the natural environment, natural

features, views etc. The attached map identifies some potential major nodes around the City. Additional nodes can be added during updates or on closer studies of certain areas. Wetlands and other critical areas can have trails along the periphery or incorporated into an enhanced buffer that protects these natural features.

Connectors – These are primarily trails that connect the various nodes to form a network for pedestrians and bicycles. The proposed connectors are conceptual and additional studies need to be done to determine actual locations and alignments. A good location for connectors is to follow drainage patterns. Following such natural features can provide a quality experience to the recreational activity. Connectors in these new areas should preferably be, were possible, a trail network that provides dedicated right-of-way or easement for pedestrians and bicyclists. Trails in areas outside the City will also rely on existing roads for connection. Care must be taken to design them for safety.

The above recommendations are consistent with the Island County Trails Plan.

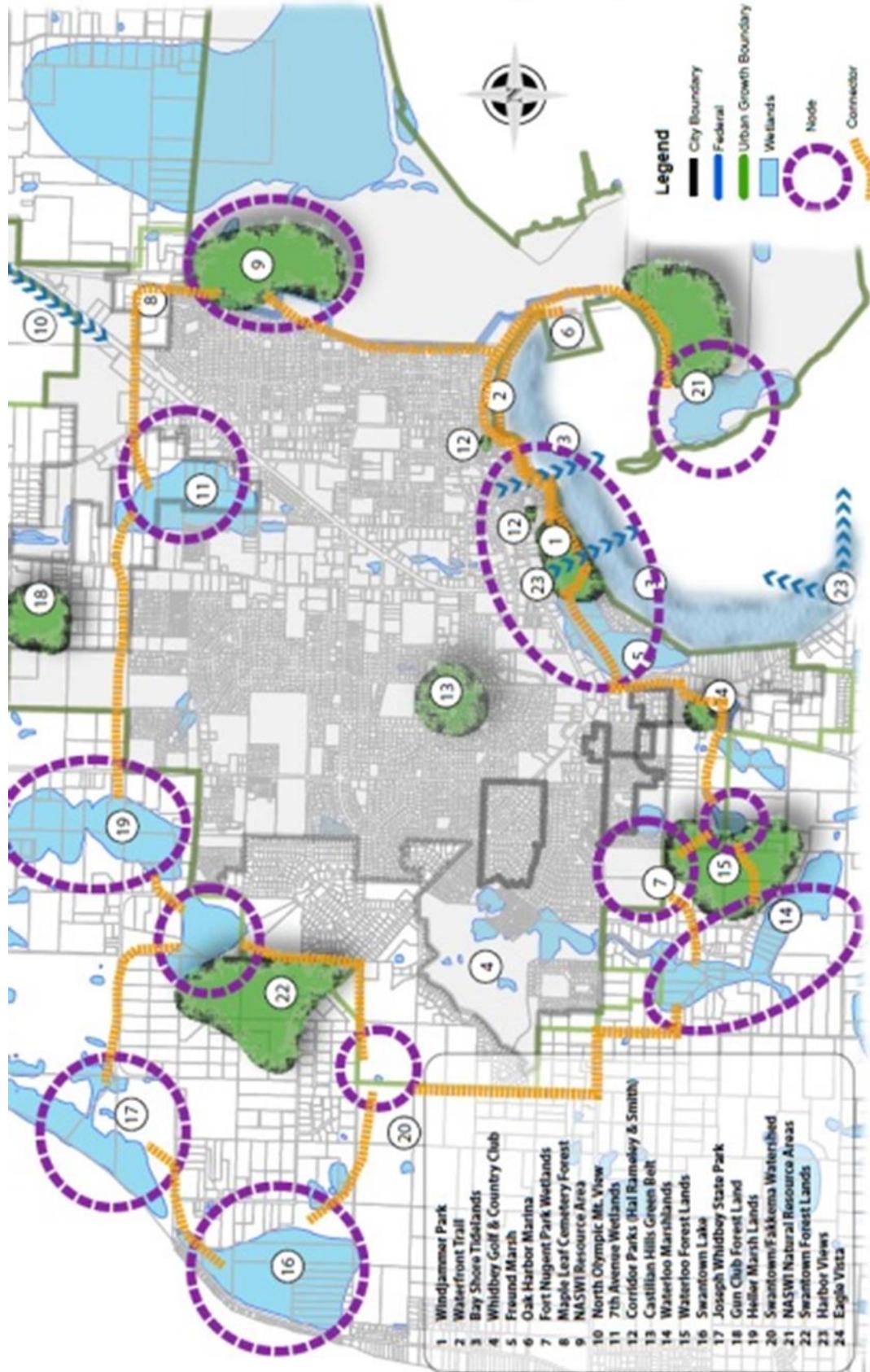


Figure 13 - Recommended Plan - Long Term Trail Layout

## Summary of recommendations

1. Continue to develop neighborhood parks as the city grows
2. Find opportunities to provide neighborhood parks in underserved areas of the city.
3. Explore options to develop a community park that can accommodate a concentration of recreational facilities.
4. Work with Island County and other organizations to identify and designate natural areas, critical areas, wetlands, wildlife habitat as open space.
5. Include bicycle paths and sidewalks in the design and reconstruction of Whidbey Avenue.
6. Develop a trail system for bicycles and pedestrians along existing streets in the Whidbey Avenue corridor with links to parks in the area.
7. Incorporate bicycle and pedestrian paths into the design and construction of streets in the CBD.
8. Enhance the trail connection between Flintstone Park and the Marina as a multiuse trail and extend the trail from the Marina to Maylor Point.
9. Develop a trail system that connects SR 20 to Regatta Drive along Barrington and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue with connections to the waterfront trail.
10. Work with developers to provide trails in new development that provides connectivity to parks and open spaces.
11. Develop design guidelines for new developments that encourage connectivity and use of the trail system.

*REFER TO THE 2009 PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE PLAN FOR MORE INFORMATION ON INVENTORY, EXISTING CONDITIONS, LEVEL OF SERVICE, COMMUNITY NEED AND ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES.*