



WORKING FINAL DRAFT v2
SEPTEMBER 20, 2018

Interagency Coordinating Committee: Metro Parks Tacoma/City of Tacoma
Phase One: Creation of New Policy Guidance

Process Summary

A Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma (MPT) and City of Tacoma (COT) Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC) was established in June 2018 to develop a set of core principles that are intended to serve as the foundation for a new Master Agreement between the City and Metro Parks. The goal of the Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC) was *to create a new imprimatur that serves as an effective reference tool to help resolve key issues and move forward with decision making.*

The ICC was made up of senior staff members from both the City and Metropolitan Parks Tacoma. A “process design” developed prior to the first meeting delineated the group’s meeting goals, meeting agendas, and subjects to be addressed.

The group met five times between July-September. Meetings were held bi-weekly and were facilitated by Margaret Norton-Arnold. The meetings were well attended. At their first meeting, members brainstormed on the five topic areas intended to guide their work. Those topic areas included:

- 1) What does it mean to be into, or out of, the “Parks Business?”
- 2) Transfer of Properties
- 3) Expectation Management
- 4) Sustainable Funding
- 5) Enhanced Coordination & Realignment of Core Services

During this session, members identified the key issues that get in the way of their productive work together. They also suggested new ways of working together that could remedy the current barriers to effective working relationships. Discussions continued over the next four meetings, with the group’s ideas eventually developed into a set of seven core principles.

After each meeting, the consultant assembled the results of the group’s discussion into draft documents that were distributed to members for review and editing. This review period lasted for approximately a week, at which time the consultant created a second draft for discussion at the subsequent ICC meeting. In all, the group developed and worked through nine different draft documents that were eventually assembled into a “Working Final Draft Core Principles” in early September 2018.

At their final meeting on September 6, members compared their core principles against several case studies that highlighted previous disagreements or difficulties in their working relationship.

Members agreed that the core principles would serve as a strong foundation for a new Master Agreement, and further identified a number of specific action items that will be needed to fully enact the principles. Group members ended the process with strong consensus on the content and viability of the core principles.

Introduction and Value Proposition

The City of Tacoma and Metro Parks staff agree it is to their mutual benefit, as well as the benefit of the citizens of the City of Tacoma (City) and the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma (MPT), to refine and clarify the roles of the City and the District in a way that fits within the framework of the voter approved initiative creating the Park District in 1907 and the City's planning responsibilities under GMA, and to achieve efficiencies of scale through sharing of services where appropriate. This course correction would, if supported by City Council and Metro Parks Board, lead to unification of all¹ park facilities, operation, and maintenance with Metro Parks as the primary provider, and better align each agency's core services to reduce duplication. It would also require joint and coordinated planning between Metro Parks and the City. The City and Metro Parks recognize the need to strengthen the provisioning of parks and recreation assets and services through more coordinated long-range planning, as well as assuring that planning goals are relevant, aligned and compliant with the City's GMA obligations. This will allow the parties to gain efficiencies by reducing overhead and ensure a more comprehensive and equitable park system for all residents.

The City and Metro Parks have participated in a collaborative and facilitated process to develop the seven core principles outlined in this document. These principles provide detailed and specific guidance associated with the roles and responsibilities of the entities. They also provide guidance on how the parties shall work toward the goal of Metro Parks serving as the exclusive provider of parks and recreation services, facilities and amenities within the City supported by stable and sustainable resources. The core principles are intended to be used as the framework for a new master agreement between Metro Parks and the City of Tacoma.

Background

The City of Tacoma (1884) and the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma (1907) are separate and distinct municipal corporations sharing corporate boundaries and governed by independently elected legislative bodies. While the City and District were formed for different municipal purposes, they engage in a variety of similar administrative functions (e.g., planning, finance, real property services, public works projects, etc.) and provide services and programs that are often overlapping. This has resulted in an unnecessary duplication of some functions, services and programs and has led to system inefficiencies and additional costs. In particular, the overlap in services and programs has led to a dual parks system that over the years has created conflict and confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of the District and the City relative to planning, management, administration, acquisition, and maintenance and operation of parks in the City.

While Tacoma citizens voted to form a Park District vested with acquiring and managing "parks, boulevards and parkways" using its taxing authority to fund such endeavors, the City of Tacoma has also exercised its general powers to acquire and manage similar parks, trails, plazas, monuments, ravines, open space and other public spaces. Multiple City departments are

¹ Parks under the control of the Tacoma Public Utilities Department are not currently under consideration for unification as TPU was not included in the core principles discussion.

currently responsible for park related activities including Tacoma Public Utilities, Environmental Services, and Public Works.

State law, Tacoma Municipal Code and the City's charter have also enabled the City to form other municipal and public corporations for specific purposes that, in part, provide for the provision of park-like public spaces, functions and amenities. The Foss Waterway Development Authority (FWDA) is a corporation authorized to acquire, maintain, operate and re-develop properties that have resulted in the creation of a variety of park and recreation assets, including trails, boat launches, open space/conservation lands, parks, and plazas.

The state's Growth Management Act (GMA) also requires the City to plan for growth by addressing many areas, including open space and recreation, environment and public facilities and services. Likewise, MPT is required by the State to develop a comprehensive parks and recreation plan to be eligible for state and federal grants. MPT's plans address many of the same elements required of the City to comply with GMA. Given the City's broad planning mandate and MPT's role as the primary service provider for parks and recreation, Tacoma's Comprehensive Plan should be well-coordinated and aligned with long-range plans that emerge from MPT, and vice-versa.

Historically, MPT has managed and maintained some City-owned parks and facilities with the City providing funding pursuant to various agreements and funding formulas that in some cases lack relevance and transparency. Over time, some City-owned properties have transferred to Metro Parks while still others continue to be exclusively maintained by the City. Additionally, Metro Parks has independently established relationships and entered into separate agreements with FWDA for the provision of park and recreation services, properties and facilities.

Overarching Goal

This ICC process, and the new master agreement that is intended to result from this process, have been designed to lead to the unification of all park property facilities, operation, and maintenance, with Metropolitan Parks Tacoma as the primary provider for all park services.

This goal will be achieved through the following seven core principles:

Core Principles

1. MPT and COT will engage in consistent, systematic, joint planning.
2. MPT and COT will create an overarching document that clearly defines ownership and management responsibilities for properties in the City's park system.
3. MPT and COT will develop an improved system for property transfers and dispositions.
4. MPT and COT will develop a new framework for collaboration to ensure that the services they provide are being delivered: a) by the entity best suited to provide that service; and b) in a manner that minimizes the unnecessary duplication of services.
5. MPT and COT will provide greater transparency on funding sources and develop funding structure in alignment with management responsibilities.
6. MPT and COT will collaborate to develop a financial approach to meet the park system's future needs.
7. MPT and COT will work more cohesively to inform elected officials about the park system.

Core Principle 1

MPT and COT will engage in consistent, systematic joint planning.

Rationale for this Principle

The City, which has GMA responsibility to plan for future park and recreation needs, is not equipped to provide those services in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan. On the other hand, Metro Parks Tacoma is set up as the primary park and recreation service provider, but without the responsibility for policy pursuant to the GMA.

Tacoma's park system, as is true for metropolitan areas throughout the United States, has evolved dramatically over past decades. As just one example, new development pressures and higher urban densities have made it increasingly desirable to include areas of open space that are available in smaller segments throughout the city, rather than concentrated in only large swaths.

This example, along with numerous others, has resulted in a new paradigm for Tacoma's parks system. The current interlocal agreement between MPT and COT does not adequately address that paradigm. While both sides have clear mechanisms on how to plan and implement specific projects, there is not a clear system for how the larger visioning and more comprehensive planning should be carried out. This can result in lost opportunities to take full advantage of potential new open spaces, recreational facilities, and partnerships.

The creation of a stronger big-picture planning mechanism will enhance MPT and COT's abilities to fully engage in a more proactive manner, ensuring that the park system is as efficient and effective as possible, and that it continues to meet the current and emerging needs of Tacoma's populace. It will also serve to build and enhance trust between MPT and COT by providing additional opportunities to work constructively together.

Recommended Approach

Given the importance of parks to the quality of life in Tacoma, it is incumbent upon both parties to make certain that park and recreation needs are considered in all relevant planning efforts. This principle will ensure that MPT planners are fully involved and engaged in the city's community planning, development, and regulatory efforts and vice versa.

Joint planning will occur on two levels:

- **Goal Setting and Policy.** Both parties will engage in the development of shared goals and policies for the 2040-2050 Plan horizon, as required by RCW 36.70A (GMA). Especially in light of new development pressures and higher forecasted densities, it is crucial that MPT and COT have a shared vision, definition and set of priorities for the park system that is reflected in the City's comprehensive plan and planning process. Given Tacoma's broad planning mandate and MPT's role as the primary service provider for parks and recreation (RCW 36.39), Tacoma's Comprehensive Plan should be well-coordinated with long-range plans that are emerging from MPT, and vice-versa. Both parties will work to ensure that these long-range processes include full representation from each of their respective bodies. Examples of when joint planning, development and adoption should take place include:

- Park and Recreation Element of the One Tacoma Plan
 - Level of Service – the ratio of parks to population densities
 - Capital Facilities Planning
 - Acquisition of potential new park properties
 - Bi-annual budget planning
 - Demand Assessment
 - Facility and Service Needs
 - Joint Future Parks and Recreation System Map
 - Subarea Plans
- Projects. MPT and COT currently work well together on more detailed and specific projects, including trails, and other green space/park opportunities. A number of ongoing success stories can be highlighted from this work together. This level of planning will continue. It is particularly important to be aware of opportunities for new partnerships and funding resources, and to capitalize on those opportunities whenever possible.

Actions related to this Principle

MPT and COT representatives will work to clarify when and how both parties will engage in big-picture, larger term planning. This will include the development of a strong mechanism to ensure the full engagement of both parties, including the identification of opportunities to carry out this planning together. In ICC discussions, it has been noted that perhaps Tacoma's Comprehensive Plan amendment process could be an early opportunity to test the new mechanism. Both parties will need to periodically evaluate these planning efforts to make certain they continue to effectively meet the needs of the city as a whole. It is also important that the public be fully informed and involved in this coordinated visioning and planning.

Core Principle 2

MPT and COT will create an overarching document that clearly defines ownership and management responsibilities for properties in the City's park system.

Rationale for this Principle

Both MPT and COT know that both parties need to better understand and define their respective roles and responsibilities related to supporting livability, quality of life and the physical park and open space system. The founding ordinance establishing MPT vested certain responsibilities associated with the city's park system with MPT. Laws governing Metropolitan Park Districts have evolved over time, extending additional authorities. Also, during this time the City, under its authority, has acquired park or park-like properties with some transferred to MPT, others retained by COT but contracted to MPT for operations and maintenance, and still others operated and maintained by COT.

Just as the park system itself is evolving, the relationship between the two entities must evolve to meet current and future demands. Although the basic mission statements of COT and MPT will remain constant, it is important to clarify the responsibilities of the parties and then review and modify the mechanics of the actual working relationship on a regular basis.

Recommended Approach

Tacoma's park system has grown over time. This principle commits both parties to a thorough review, inventory and condition assessment of all existing park spaces, including the current assignment of responsibilities related to each property. Based on these reviews, COT and MPT may then want to negotiate changes in their respective roles related to each property. These discussions and potential changes will be carried out in a systematic, well-defined manner, and will include a jointly developed definition of the terms "Park" and "Recreation Facility." It is important to define these terms as inclusive of passive and active natural/environmental experiences and recreational experiences, as well as sustainable community actions.

This principle will result in a new document that clearly defines ownership of each property, as well as a definition for which party is responsible for operations and maintenance, capital facilities, and other management duties associated with the property.

Actions related to this Principle

Both COT and MPT already have efforts underway to create the comprehensive inventory/conditional assessment needed to more effectively transfer ownership and management roles. COT is currently conducting a condition assessment on some of the active open space properties, while MPT is conducting a business process review of the agency's asset management functions. Before additional work is completed on these two efforts, MPT and COT will meet to establish, and agree upon, a system and methodology to complete this assessment work. It is important that each entity is using similar metrics, and methodology, to evaluate their assets. There may even be benefit in using the same vendor to complete this work in order to provide equivalent comparisons of all assets under both City and MPT ownership and management.

Once this joint effort has been completed, MPT and COT will engage in discussions about ownership and management responsibilities, focusing first on those properties where there is disagreement, and working systematically on solutions to resolve those disagreements. These initial discussions will lead to a formal mechanism to continually review and address the respective ownership and management roles.

Core Principle 3

MPT and COT will develop an improved system for property transfers and dispositions.

Rationale for this Principle

Currently, MPT and COT do not have a shared vision, criteria, or definition of the process by which the parties conduct acquisitions and dispositions. The lack of a defined system hinders the ability of both parties to evaluate and act on potential transfers.

For example, there may be times when the City desires to transfer a property, but MPT may not find the property appropriate to acquire. There is a lack of clarity on the factors that may influence the parties' decision-making. Is it because the property doesn't meet the definition of a park, is inconsistent with adopted plans or studies, comes with encumbrances and/or liabilities that are too great, or because ongoing operations and maintenance costs will be too high?

Through an improved process, transfer policies will be clearer and more streamlined, helping to ensure that opportunities can be acted on as efficiently as possible.

Recommended Approach

As noted earlier in Core Principle 1, MPT and COT will engage in joint planning to identify potential City park properties that could be acquired by MPT. In addition, the two entities will work together to establish a clear mechanism for the way in which City park properties are identified, evaluated, and potentially transferred from City to MPT ownership. This core principle will provide clarification on which properties are suitable for transfer and will streamline negotiations between MPT and COT by providing an agreed-upon system for property transfers.

Actions related to this Principle

MPT will work internally to draft a system/process that provides more clarity around transfer evaluations and decision-making. This will be developed into a transfer "tool kit," that will include a value/evaluation sheet that is mutually developed, and agreed to, by both parties.

Core Principle 4

MPT and COT will develop a new framework for collaboration to ensure that the services they provide are being delivered: a) by the entity best suited to provide that service, and b) in a manner that minimizes the unnecessary duplication of services.

Rationale for This Principle

Both MPT and COT recognize that services and programs are sometimes delivered in a duplicative manner, and at times by an organization that does not have the highest level of expertise or "competitive advantage" in that service area. Examples range from real property management to solid waste management, to arts/cultural, urban forestry, concert programming, and the maintenance of streets and roads.

Without a prescribed, overarching mechanism to determine how to best deliver these services, it is left to individual staff members to identify what might be most effective in any given circumstance. Under this newly-developed framework, however, representatives from MPT and COT will regularly review, consult and act on better ways to ensure that services are delivered by the agency that is most suited to provide that service. A variety of mechanisms could be used to enhance the coordination and collaboration between the entities, including contracts, memorandums of understanding, the provision of staff expertise, and numerous other possibilities.

Under the current system, potential changes in service delivery can be limited by funding sources, that is, a specific grant may preclude the ability to engage in the exchange of expertise that can lead to greater efficiency. This new system, however, will allow for unabridged conversations that will enable both entities to explore the entire range of potential options, to select those that offer the most promise, and then to determine how funding sources can be adapted to allow for more efficiency throughout the system as a whole.

Recommended Approach

The goal of this principle is to make sure that the public is benefiting from the maximum level of collaborative efficiency possible between the two entities.

This core principle represents a paradigm shift in the working relationship between the City and Metropolitan Parks Tacoma. Currently, this coordination and sharing of services occurs on an ad hoc basis, depending on the nature of the park property or project and depending on the individuals working on that particular project. This new system will establish a consistent mechanism under which both entities will regularly communicate about ongoing needs and priorities and take the actions necessary to make certain those services are provided to the highest quality, and as efficiently, as possible.

The new framework will be designed in a manner that will make it immune to political or personnel changes.

Actions related to this Principle

MPT and COT will act on this principle by first reviewing, and agreeing upon, the broad range of service areas that both provide, and will determine which entity is most suited to take the lead in each service area.

MPT and the City will also review other systems that could be used as models for this new approach. For example, the City of Tacoma uses a system that provides for shared and coordinated services between various city departments. That system may be suitable, as well, for this new relationship between MPT and COT. And, there may be other such systems to examine. The goal is to not reinvent the wheel if another system is working successfully elsewhere.

Once an initial determination has been made, both parties will work together to establish a coordination system. This will include methods of communication, a list of service areas that can be better shared, an identification of which entity is most suited to provide that service, and a compendium of the types of methods that will be used to share and coordinate these services. The system must be consistently acted upon and applied, but it must also be flexible enough to be regularly reviewed and revised as necessary.

Core Principle 5

MPT and COT will provide greater transparency on funding sources and develop funding structure in alignment with management responsibility.

Rationale for this Principle

Each entity faces challenges in terms of sustainable funding for services. The City and Metro Parks need to develop a process that addresses the growth of costs, demands for capital projects, lack of adequate maintenance funding for existing and new facilities, and limited resources.

The City of Tacoma currently pays in excess of \$4 million annually to MPT for maintenance of certain City-owned open spaces and contributes additional funding for capital improvements on a project-specific basis. The process of funding these capital improvements is unpredictable and does not include a regular mechanism for reviewing and determining related maintenance funding. Not all of the properties that MPT operates/maintains have detailed accounting/maintenance documentation. Therefore, it is challenging to determine the maintenance costs of facilities and parks. The City is unable to review expenses related to shared property or determine the appropriate level of maintenance funding. This has led to a lack of confidence in knowledge and understanding of the underlying maintenance costs of facilities and parks. When MPT asks for additional funds, the City is reluctant to agree to the request because there is not a clear picture of the need for additional funds or of the way in which the funds are currently being allocated for specific park properties.

A greater level of information/transparency as well as an established process will benefit each party and enable the city's elected officials to be clearer with their constituencies regarding the expenditure of city and parks funding.

Recommended Approach

Metropolitan Parks Tacoma and the City of Tacoma will provide greater transparency regarding existing revenue and expenses for both entities. Once funding and expense positions are better understood, the two entities will work to align funding with core services and management responsibilities. The City and Metro Parks will then work to develop a funding process that recognizes the commitments and core services of each entity. This process will include a connection to Capital Facilities Planning across the organizations to better align capital funding processes.

These steps are intended to address current issues around the sustainability of funding and accountability of funding related to Tacoma park services, both through the parks district funding and through general purpose tax revenues and other revenue sources of the City.

This process will include a documentation and reporting format for all future funds exchanged between the parties. The goal is to provide the appropriate metrics, internal systems and level of detail to satisfy each party's mutual interests and to provide a useful tool for staff, elected officials and the public. A parks funding annual report will also be created to document the use of these funds.

Actions related to this Principle

As MPT conducts a business process review of its current asset management system, including a review of its work order and time accounting system, staff will illuminate opportunities to improve accounting and documentation of staff time and resources associated with assets. MPT will engage COT staff on the development of the future functionality and requirements of a new system to improve internal and external transparency and accountability.

COT and MPT will establish a process for biennial budgeting. The process will align each organization's existing funding processes for both operation and capital services planning.

Core Principle 6

MPT and COT will collaborate to develop a financial approach to meet the park system's future needs.

Rationale for this Principle

Both MPT and COT recognize and acknowledge that MPT has responsibility for the management, control, improvement, maintenance, and acquisition of parks. MPT and COT further recognize and acknowledge that funding gaps exist within the park system; both for operations/maintenance and capital repair/replacement. Although there are no current plans to acquire and implement new sources of funding, there are a number of policy and funding mechanisms that could be explored, including impact fees, bond issuance, special taxing authorities, and others. Each requires different levels of approval related to new ordinances, changes to the City charter, or other mechanisms.

In the past, MPT and COT have not worked as collaboratively as they could have in determining when additional funding would be necessary and what new areas of funding should be pursued. Just as the entities will work toward more transparency related to current park funding, they, and the public, will benefit from more transparency and cooperation related to the need for additional funding and the potential new funding sources.

While either of the entities may determine that it should pursue additional funding opportunities when needed and has every right to do so, both MPT and COT also recognize the benefits of working collaboratively on these funding pursuits whenever possible. In these cases, the entities will jointly determine what should be collaboratively pursued and why, and then provide both elected officials and the public with effective information about a) the reasons to acquire additional funds; and b) clarity on how those funds will be used and the benefits they will provide. A stronger partnership in this regard for MPT and COT will result in clearer, more supportive funding actions for the system as a whole.

Recommended Approach

The demand for parks is strong in Tacoma and will continue to grow as population densities increase throughout the city. While re-prioritization of resources will be necessary to meet demand, it may be that new sources of funding are needed to plan for, acquire, and maintain new and existing parks, greenspaces and services. Either entity may determine that additional funding is needed and can pursue those funds through its own mechanisms.

The goal is for MPT and the City to jointly and regularly review the financial needs of the system. If additional funds are necessary, it is also the goal that both parties will commit to collaboratively pursue that funding mechanism.

Actions related to this Principle

No action will be taken on this principle at this time. As future needs are identified, and if MPT and COT determine that additional funding is needed, the parties commit to a strong and coordinated effort to clearly identify those needs and funding sources.

Core Principle 7

MPT and COT will work more cohesively to inform elected officials about the park system.

Rationale related to this Principle

While city and MPT officials are conscientious about informing the Parks Board and Tacoma City Council about opportunities, costs, and trade-offs associated with the parks under their purview, the two parties do not come together often enough to develop joint budgetary and other information that could provide a more comprehensive portrait of the acquisition, operations and maintenance choices that confront both parties on an ongoing basis.

The goal is to provide elected officials with the information they need to be able to respond to their constituencies as effectively as possible about decisions related to park properties.

Recommended Approach

MPT and COT commit to doing a better job of maintaining strong communication with their respective governing bodies. Specifically, COT and MPT want to make sure that elected officials are fully informed of the short and long-term fiscal impacts of park acquisition, maintenance, and operations.

MPT and COT will create a coherent mechanism to provide these policy makers with more detailed trade-off information. For example, if a new park is acquired, what is another property that may not be developed in order to stay within budgetary constraints?

The existing Park Policy Group (PPG) structure- a convening of two elected officials from each of the two organizations- could serve as a subcommittee that would review trade-offs and other information that is of interest to these governing bodies. The Park Policy Group could evaluate and make recommendations to the larger governing bodies, especially around difficult trade-off decisions and other complexities involved in the park system.

Actions related to this Principle

The ICC will jointly develop a mechanism to ensure that cost information and potential trade-offs are shared extensively between both parties, and that this information is shared identically to both the MPT Board and the Tacoma City Council. The ICC will identify key issues and timing

related to budgetary constraints and considerations and will carry out a plan to fully inform elected officials about these issues.

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