
OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Protection of open space lands is a tool to accomplish numerous County goals including protecting our environment, improving quality of life, providing a sense of place to the County, and enhancing our economy. These goals become more challenging as it becomes more difficult and expensive to obtain open space lands and become more important due to increasing development pressures and the compounding effects of climate change. The Open Space Element adopts goals and policies to assist the coordination of the various County programs focused on open space lands.

Multiple Pierce County agencies acquire and manage land for open space for a variety of purposes, including - from recreation, carbon sequestration, to habitat conservation, to and flood hazard risk reduction. These lands are selected based on priorities set by the Comprehensive Plan or other adopted plans that identify specific lands or prioritization methods.

Pierce County's definition of open space encompasses a range of diverse land types, which are is organized into categories based on their function or reason for preservation around functional attributes of open space, or the expressed reason for preservation of the value attributed to that type of open space. Policies for the Although the management and preservation can differ depending on the category, many lands can and do provide multiple values of open space for habitat are very different than policies for working lands or outdoor recreation. It is intent of this element for various departments to work together and with community partners to maximize the return on investment in conservation efforts and achieve multiple goals with open space preservation.

For example, a property with a high-value wetland may be acquired for preservation for to preserve its the stormwater values and functions provided by the wetland, and would be classified as open space for public health, welfare and safety. The property would be managed first for its value to water quality, habitat, and other ecosystem service benefits. for stormwater function. However, the land may also have secondary other functional values as wildlife habitat for carbon sequestration, and/or as part-ial of a value as part of a trail system, but the secondary values are implemented only if they do not interfere with the primary stormwater function.

WHAT IS OPEN SPACE? DEFINITION

Open Space - any parcel or area of land or water which that is devoted to a functional open space use as defined by any one of the following categories:

- A. **Habitat.** Open space for the preservation of plant and animal habitat may include habitat for fish and wildlife species; rivers, streams, bays, and estuaries; and coastal beaches, lakeshores, and banks of rivers and streams. Wetlands help recharge aquifers, provide water quality and other ecosystem services.

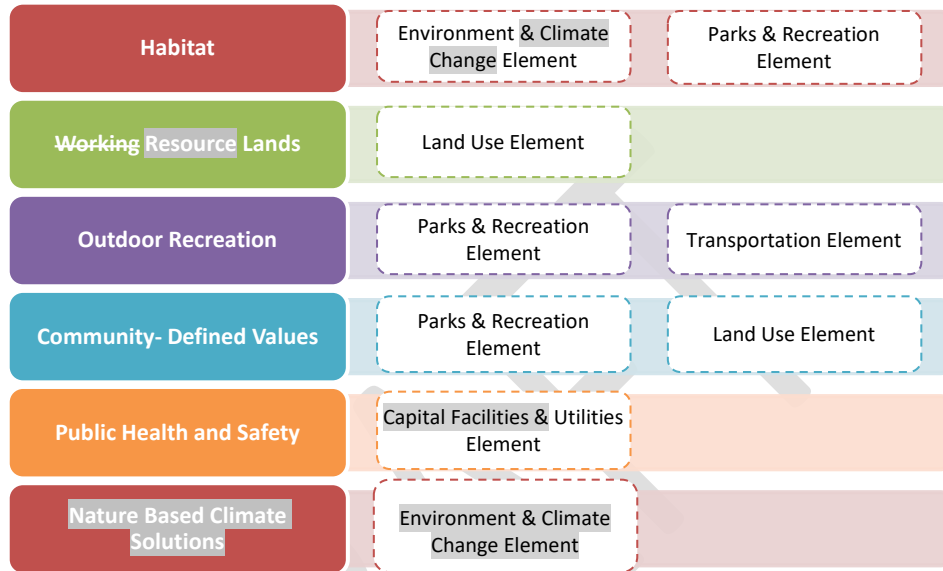
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- B. **Working Lands.** Open space used for the managed production of working lands may include forest lands, agricultural lands, and areas of economic importance for the production of food or fiber.
- C. **Outdoor Recreation.** Open space for outdoor recreation may include athletic fields, recreation facilities, playgrounds, picnic areas, meadows, wooded areas, and trails; and access to beaches and shorelines for swimming, fishing, boating, and beachcombing.
- D. **Community-Defined Values.** Open space for community-defined values may include areas used for ~~buffers~~ **greenspace** between communities, respites from the built environments, and for connecting with nature; and areas of outstanding scenic, historic, and cultural value.
- E. **Public Health and Safety.** ~~These types of Open spaces for public health and safety~~ may include areas used for stormwater management, flood ~~control~~ risk reduction, water quality for public use, air quality, and **increasing tree canopy to lower the urban heat island effect.** ~~carbon-sequestering.~~
- F. **Carbon Sequestration.** Carbon Sequestration is the process of capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it long-term in plants, soils, and the ocean. By conserving existing vegetation and planting more trees in our open spaces, we can facilitate this natural process and reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

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POLICIES

Policies for the protection and management of each category of open space will reside in the appropriate element(s) of the Comprehensive Plan.



This section lists general open space policies that pertain to all types of open space. Policies for specific types of open space are listed in various elements of the Comprehensive Plan that relate to the different categories of open space.

OPEN SPACE GENERAL

- GOAL OS-1** County programs that provide for the acquisition and/or preservation of open space shall have established priorities.
- OS-1.1** Ensure priorities for the preservation of open space shall be in conformance with the policies established in [Chapter 19D.170](#), Pierce County Open Space Priorities.
- OS-1.2** Coordinate These adopted Open Space priorities shall be coordinated with any subsequent updates of the Parks, and Recreation, and Open Space Plan for the County.
- OS-1.3** Apply At a minimum, the adopted Open Space pPriorities will be used for the following programs and regulations: to the Conservation Futures Program, Current Use Assessment Program Public Benefit Rating System, and development regulations.

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~~OS 1.3.1~~ Conservation Futures Program (open space acquisition);

~~OS 1.3.2~~ Current Use Assessment Program Public Benefit Rating System (tax incentive);

~~OS 1.3.3~~ Development Regulations Zoning (density bonus incentive).

NEW OS-1.4 Consider equity in the conservation, development, designation, or acquisition of open space lands, with an emphasis on providing open space in underserved communities and balancing property tax incentives with the associated benefits to County residents.

GOAL OS-2 Ensure that Pierce County open space properties, open space passive recreation parks, conservation easements, and conservation futures covenants are managed and maintained to provide long-term stewardship of the open space function and value.

OS-2.1 ~~Publicly owned or acquired open space properties may be transferred~~ Transfer public owned or acquired open space properties to a qualified non-profits, governmental entities, or local land trusts for long-term management and stewardship where appropriate.

OS-2.2 ~~Pierce County should work closely with local and national land trusts and with other private and nonprofit organizations interested in open space in the management of Pierce County open space properties.~~ Pursue an innovative approach and partnerships in managing County-owned open space properties and work to implement multiple and appropriate strategies to fiscally sustain open space lands.

~~OS-2.3~~ ~~Pierce County should review its land holdings to determine if any parcels fall within the adopted open space/greenbelt network that might be suitable for transfer to a local land trust.~~

OS-2.4 ~~Linkages between open space and screening buffers occur.~~ Encourage the provision of public easements, or transfer of such areas to public entities when practicable, where linkages between open space and screening buffers occur.

OS-2.5 ~~Where possible, open spaces should be located~~ Locate Where possible, open spaces should be located contiguous to other open space areas creating the potential for open space corridors where possible.

NEW OS-2.6 Develop management plans that outline goals, objectives, and management recommendations for open space properties where appropriate.

GOAL OS-3 (MOVED GOAL LU-116) Utilize a number of techniques and innovative measures to acquire and conserve open space.

OS-3.1 (MOVED LU-116.1) Consider the use of overlays, special zoning districts (e.g., agricultural zoning or sensitive resource zones), design standards, low

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impact development strategies, and large-lot zoning to preserve high priority open space areas.

OS-3.2 (MOVED LU-116.2) Provide incentives for open space preservation by allowing innovative measures such as cluster zoning, transfer of development rights, and zero-lot-lines.

OS-3.3 (MOVED LU-116.5) Provide increased opportunities for current-use or preferential tax assessment (Chapter 84.34 RCW) for open space lands by promoting public enrollment in the program.

NEW OS-3.3.1 Support historically productive farmlands being reclassified from current-use farm and agriculture land into open space are designated as Farm and Agricultural Conservation Land where appropriate.

OS-3.4 (MOVED LU-116.6) Consider pursuing public acquisition of open space lands through actions such as:

- LU 116.6.1** • Fee-simple purchase;
- LU 116.6.2** • Less than fee-simple purchase (i.e., purchase of development rights, conservation easements);
- LU 116.6.3** • Voluntary donations with tax incentives;
- LU 116.6.4** • Land transfers or exchanges;
- LU 116.6.5** • Limited development techniques (develop a portion of the site for economic return and leave remainder as open space);
 - Park impact fee credit.

OS-3.5 (MOVED LU-116.8) Consider pursuing a number of funding mechanisms to acquire open space lands, including but not limited to:

- LU 116.8.1** • Property tax levies;
- LU 116.8.2** • General obligation bonds and limited general obligation bonds;
- LU 116.8.3** • Intergovernmental funds (e.g., State grants);
- LU 116.8.4** • User fees;
- LU 116.8.5** • Foundation monies;
 - Real estate excise taxes.

NEW OS-3.6 Recognize the value of open and green space in promoting social and economic health and wellness, encourage the establishment of partnerships with other municipal governments, tribes, state and federal agencies, school and special purpose districts, community organizations, non-profit organizations, and landowners.

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NEW OS-3.6.1 Explore programs that incentivize or encourage the use of privately owned properties for public use or benefit consistent with open space priorities in the urban growth area.

NEW OS-3.6.2 Prioritize the acquisition and conservation of open space sites located in underserved communities.

URBAN FORESTRY

In 2023, the Washington State Legislature passed House Bill 1181 that included new climate-oriented requirements for Comprehensive Plans. One requirement is for jurisdictions to inventory urban tree canopy coverage. Pierce County will continue coordination to monitor and maintain trees in the urban area. This inventory will be regularly updated using available data from state and regional sources to fully comply with HB 1181 requirements and to increase our communities' resilience to increasing climate hazards. Additional work is needed to synthesize data on tree canopy from disparate sources into one comprehensive map, and to assess the benefits which urban trees provide for mitigating extreme heat and precipitation. Currently, the unincorporated urban growth areas in Pierce County had an estimated tree canopy coverage of 36.2%.¹ Map OS-1 shows the estimated tree canopy coverage in the County, with focus on the urban growth areas. A future urban forestry plan may explore tree canopy at a more granular level to account for disparities found within these areas.

An urban tree canopy can provide numerous environmental, health, and social benefits. These benefits are broad ranging and can be deeply beneficial to a community.

Health: *Mitigate the urban heat island effect, reduce rates of asthma, a more appealing walking environment to encourage people to walk further, improved connection to nature.*

Environmental: *Improved air quality, improved water quality, improved stormwater absorption, and a better habitat for wildlife.*

Social: *Create more incidental social connections by encouraging people to be outside, improve mental health for people when they are outside, environmental justice benefits.*

Place: *Enhance community design and create a more hospitable urban environment that improves social cohesion in residential areas and economic activity in commercial areas by encouraging people to get out and eat, shop, play.*

An urban tree canopy should comprise a mix of trees which may include a higher number of small, compact trees or a fewer number of larger, broader-spanning trees, as well as species

¹ Estimate generated in September 2023 based on 2021 National Land Cover Database information generated by the US Forest Service



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that are more compatible with utilities and maintenance needs. The right mix of trees will depend on the environment within which they will need to grow and will vary across zones, land uses, and neighborhoods.

Appropriate urban tree planting locations vary, and urban areas benefit if each type of planting location is scattered across the urban growth area. Street trees can be used along roadway frontages, parks or pockets of open space can allow larger trees to grow even in dense urban environments, parking lots may have compact growing trees spaced throughout, and development can integrate trees into their development in numerous ways.

NEW GOAL OS-4: Adopt and maintain a forestry plan to preserve and enhance the tree canopy in a way that equitably distributes to residents the benefits that trees can provide, especially urban heat island mitigation.

NEW OS-4.1: Coordinate forestry plans with other open space planning efforts to provide overlapping benefits where practicable, such as improving riparian habitat corridors and improving water quality by lowering temperatures due to increased shading.

NEW OS-4.2: Identify and implement an achievable urban tree canopy coverage target based on existing conditions and planned land uses.

NEW OS-4.3: Enhance tree canopy in urban areas by should identifying y underserved communities.

NEW OS-4.4: Work with landowners and businesses to develop strategies to support urban tree canopy goals.

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