

# CITY OF MISSOULA PARKS, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAILS 2040 MASTER PLAN



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*

# Executive Summary





## What is a PROST Plan?

The Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails (PROST) Master Plan is an overarching, 15-year plan that will guide the Parks and Recreation Department in meeting community-driven needs. The document has been developed with community input throughout and in coordination with the Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan, which was adopted in Winter 2024. Other important plans, including the Long-Range Transportation Plan, Transit Services Plan, and the Community Health Improvement Plan informed the plan.

While the PROST Plan will serve as the high-level guiding document for the department, it does not take the place of more focused plans for the department including the Conservation Lands Management Plan, Urban Forest Master Plan, the Parks Asset Management Plan, the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan, and other similar plans. Those plans will go through a separate update process in the future as needed.

### Achieving the Community's Vision Through Planning

Through meaningful community engagement, we have gathered insights into what residents value most. The goals outlined in these plans—such as housing, walkability, sustainability, clean air and water, connectivity, and access to affordable programs and amenities—reflect our shared vision for the future. These goals can be achieved through a series of related actions that bring the plans to life.

Implementing these goals is crucial for realizing our community vision: "Missoula is an inclusive city where all people can live and celebrate meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling lives, while enjoying unparalleled recreational, cultural, and entrepreneurial opportunities." By working collaboratively, we can effectively implement this vision over time.

### Decision-Making Lenses

In 2023 and updated in 2024, the City of Missoula adopted a Strategic Plan that includes three decision lenses to help guide the implementation of its strategic goals: Climate Sustainability, Mitigation, and Resilience; Equity in Opportunity and Access to Local Government Resources and Lands; and Housing Attainability at all Levels with a Focus on Workforce and Affordability. The PROST Plan embraces these three decision lenses and integrates specific strategies, principles, and concepts to support and advance each area.

#### ***Climate Sustainability, Adaptation, and Resilience***

The City considers climate and resiliency impacts in all its decisions specifically guided by adopted plans that address:

- 100 percent Clean Electricity
- Carbon Neutral in City Operations
- Carbon Neutral in Community
- Zero Waste
- Building a Resilient Community

#### ***Equity in Opportunity and Access to Local Government Resources and Lands***

The City addresses holistic, interconnected factors that help build resilient futures while also building an inclusive environment.

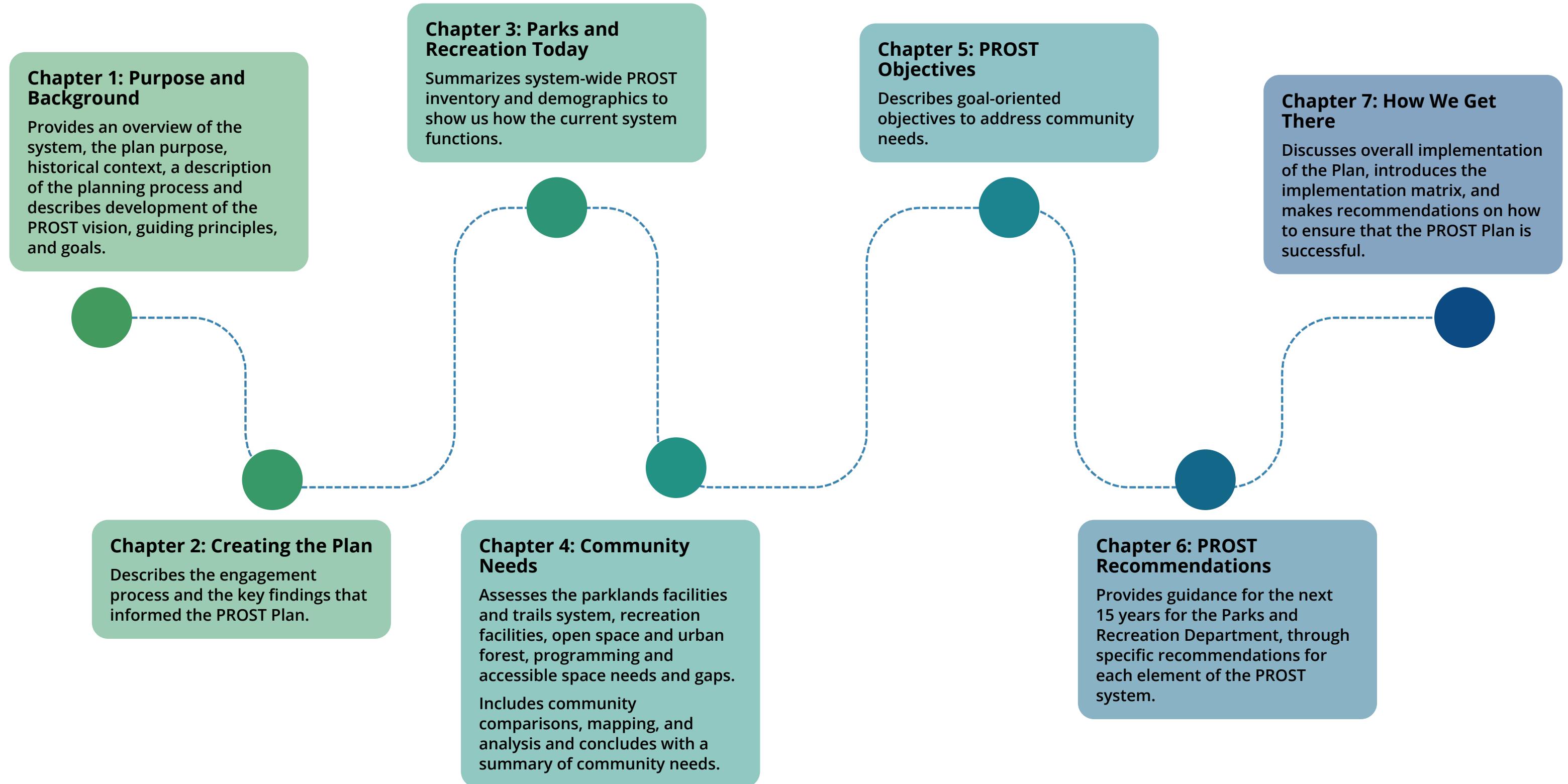
#### ***Housing Attainability at all Levels with a Focus on Workforce and Affordability***

The City considers opportunities to further its housing goals in all its decisions as articulated in the city's housing policy "A Place to Call Home".



# How to Read the PROST Plan

The following graphic outlines the chapters within the Plan and a summary of the key takeaways in each chapter.





# The Public Engagement Process

The PROST planning process took place between Fall 2023 and Spring 2025. A central element of the PROST planning process was the extensive and consistent community engagement that informed the plan at every stage. This process involved three major rounds of engagement, using multiple methods to gather feedback from residents, technical experts, and key stakeholders. Ultimately, this outreach reached over 5,000 residents through various approaches. Additionally, the effort included:

- Community Working Groups
- 2024 Missoula Parks and Recreation Survey
- Online Community Survey
- Artist-Led Engagement and Historically Underserved Communities Engagement
- Mobile Listening Sessions

## Key Findings

### Elevating Quality of Life

Parks and Recreation lands and services are key components of Missoulians' quality of life and part of what makes Missoula a great place to live. Residents highlighted the need for a more equitable and comprehensive park system, ensuring that all have access to a nearby park that has quality facilities and accessible recreation programs.

### Inclusive Community Building

Parks and Recreation lands and services contribute to inclusive community building, including around arts and culture, and there

- Key Informant Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Community Open Houses
- Online Interactive Map

These inputs, among others, helped to inform findings that steered the PROST plan and its recommendations and policies.

is a further desire to see more opportunities for community-building spaces, events, and programs. Outreach to underrepresented community members suggested ways that parks and recreation services could work better for their needs, such as providing more spaces for large gatherings, using native plants, using specialty play equipment and public art to represent area culture and history, and incorporating Indigenous place names.

### Connecting Neighborhoods and Services

Residents would like to see an increased focus on providing a connected system with trails and greenways moving people to and through parks and recreation opportunities as well as connecting neighborhoods with schools and areas of business via connections to the community and regional trail system. Additionally, the Community Working Group highlighted the rivers running through the valley as a key component of community scale multi-modal transit, opportunities to protect sensitive lands through land management practices, as well as providing increased access to nature.

### Having a Year-Round Facility

There is a need for a year-round facility for programming and gathering, especially during the winter, summer, and other times when recreating outside is limited.

### Maintaining What We Have

Residents reflected appreciation for high-quality parks, with an emphasis on maintaining existing parks, trails, and open space. While there is a desire for new facilities, there is a clear emphasis on maintaining and upgrading smaller neighborhood parks.

### Supporting Climate Action

Residents expressed support for climate-related strategies and projects, such as strategies to mitigate extreme weather and to increase ecosystem services.

### Improving Safety

Some residents expressed a concern for safety when visiting local parks or walking or riding on trails, especially after dark. Implementing strategies that promote a sense of community and a feeling of safety, like improved lighting, clear sightlines, strategic landscaping, activation through programming improved amenities as well defining boundaries can be done through physical upgrades and programming.

### Increasing Program Variety

There is a desire for a greater variety of programming focusing on teens, middle-aged adults, and older adults, while the City's childcare and after-school programs remain popular.

### Areas of Divided Opinion

There are areas of divided opinion, such as around where e-bikes should be allowed and how to manage dogs in parks and on trails, that will need creative solutions.

# PROST VISION STATEMENT

The PROST vision to support the department and meet community needs emerged during a two-year planning process, which included more than 5,000 community connection points, meetings with the community working group and a public engagement committee, and input from technical advisors and staff.

**By 2040, Missoula's parks, recreation, open space, trails, trees, and services are more resilient and accessible to our current and growing community while advancing and promoting public health and well-being, contributing to healthy and resilient environments, and fostering a sense of belonging.**



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*

## Guiding Principles

The community working group, formed of 16 Missoulians who were selected through an open application process and represent a diversity of voices and perspectives guided the plan development and created a set of guiding principles early in the process based on public input as well as the city's vision and decision lenses. The guiding principles were used throughout the process to ensure outcomes maintained the community's core values and intentions.

We believe the PROST Plan will serve the greater Missoula community in the following ways...

Prepare for and welcome people of all ages and abilities with varied programs and facilities year-round, incorporating universal design principles.

Foster a sense of belonging and honor our community by highlighting Missoula's unique natural, historical, social, and cultural features.

Promote mental and physical wellness and social connections through parkland, trails, open space, programs, and facilities.

Ensure access to parks and recreation resources for all, and that they are inclusive, inspiring, safe, and affordable.

Demonstrate and inspire climate action and regenerative sustainability throughout all parks, facilities, open space and trails design, construction, management, and operations.

Support integrated affordable housing, walkable and green streetscapes, and healthy and purposeful green spaces in new and existing developments.

Foster a healthy urban forest and robust natural lands for quality of life, climate resiliency, and wildlife habitat.

Build relationships that continue to advance stewardship and expand services through shared ownership and vision.

# PLAN GOALS

PROST goals are informed by the guiding principles and lead to the PROST vision. These seven identified goals reflect and distill the guiding principles into actionable statements and inform development of the department goal-based objectives and recommendations described in Chapter 5 and 6. Two of the goals focus on organizational processes while the other five goals support the community's vision for the PROST system and services. These goals were developed through an extensive community outreach process, which is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

## Organizational Process Goals



### Be Forward-Thinking & Adaptable

Anticipate the needs of Missoula's growing and changing community by creating adaptable and innovative parks, facilities, trails, landscapes, and programs that benefit the community environmentally, socially, culturally, and economically.



### Build & Sustain Partnerships

Expand and sustain community partnerships, and work with other departments, agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals to advance the PROST and greater community vision.

## Outcome-Oriented Goals



### Elevate Quality of Life

Ensure Missoula's parks, recreation facilities, open spaces, trails, trees, and services continue to contribute to and reflect Missoula's identity with a thriving, equitable, and well-rounded park system.



### Support Healthy People

Promote overall wellbeing with increased opportunities for health and wellness, physical fitness, enjoyment of social connections, and increased safety through programs and services.



### Foster a Healthy Natural Environment

Strategically protect, maintain, design, and improve a cohesive system of parklands and open spaces that help to mitigate the effects of climate change and provide respite for residents from the urban environment.



### Improve Connections & Connectivity

Connect people to each other, to community, to public places, and to the natural environment while ensuring connected ecological systems.



### Enhance Maintenance

Provide stewardship of Missoula's parks, open spaces, trails, urban forest, and recreation assets through innovative, regenerative, and effective design combined with maintenance and operations best practices.

# Highlighted Recommendations

The following is a “snapshot” of the community’s gaps and needs that are outlined in Chapter 4 and inform the recommendations laid out in Chapter 6.



## A Walkable and Rollable System

Everyone should be within a 10 minute walk or roll of a park, with a safe route to get there.

## Inclusive Programming

Recreation services need to extend beyond youth to serve adults, seniors, and underserved neighborhoods through diverse offerings.

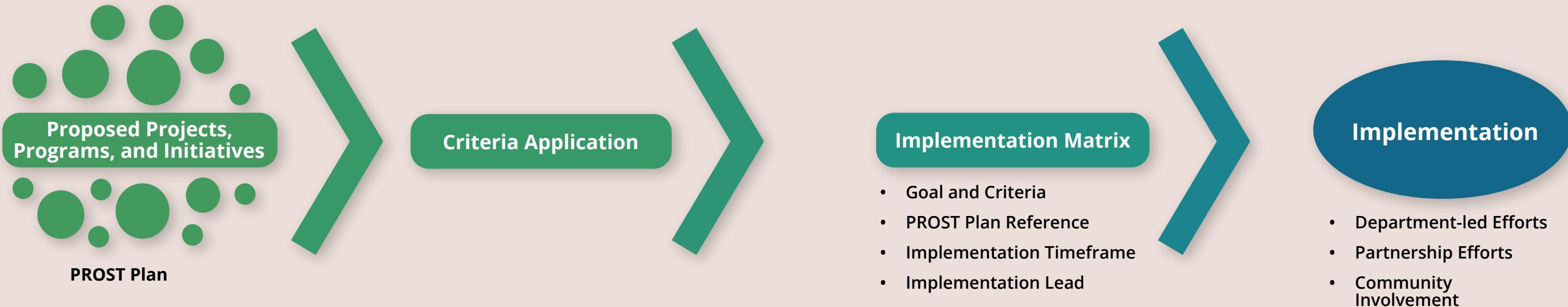
## Urban Park Innovation

New models are needed for higher-density areas with compact, amenity-rich parks accessible to all residents—supporting both housing density and equity goals.

## Support for the City’s Urban Forest

Updating the urban tree inventory, diversifying plantings, and strengthening development codes will protect this vital climate infrastructure.

## Implementation Process



## Where will we be in 15 years?

The Missoula community has provided direction on priorities and this PROST Master Plan identifies the vision, goals, guiding principles, goals and elements to create a healthy, accessible, equitable, and walkable city. Now it is time to set the plan in motion. The Plan provides information on how to operationalize the plan over time.

The diagram above shows how staff will implement recommendations from the PROST Master Plan and breaks them down into workable steps, using the general criteria and proposed implementation matrix presented in Chapter 7.

This is an iterative process, looking out in increments of five years and then making periodic adjustments to consider changing circumstances and conditions. Every recommendation in the PROST Master Plan may not be included in the first five years of implementation, but all should be addressed over the life of the plan.

### Evaluating New Ideas

The pace of innovation and change is unpredictable. Over the next 15 years, new ideas and concepts will come up that were not specifically called out in this Plan. For example, unexpected trends in recreation may generate requests for facilities or programs; scientific breakthroughs might change approaches to managing land; or a major natural event might affect city parks, trails, facilities, or site amenities.

This Master Plan anticipates new ideas, whether proposed by staff, partners, or members of the community. Each new idea should be evaluated for consistency with the PROST Master Plan using the following questions:

- Is the proposal consistent with the PROST vision and goals? *Briefly describe.*
- Which goals and/or objectives does the proposal implement? *Identify.*
- Does the proposal support one or more of the City's decision lenses? *Briefly describe which one(s) and why.*

## Supporting Appendices

Additional information is in the plan appendices.

Appendix A: Parklands Inventory

Appendix B: Facility Asset Quality Evaluations

Appendix C: Park Development Guidelines

Appendix D: GIS Needs Assessment Methodology

Appendix E: Public Engagement Summary

Appendix F: Implementation Tools

Appendix G: Trails Typology

Appendix H: Urban Area Open Space Plan (under separate cover)

# Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i> .....	<i>E.1</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	<i>iii</i>
<i>Letter from Community Working Group</i> .....	<i>v</i>
<i>Letter from the Mayor</i> .....	<i>vii</i>
<i>Glossary</i> .....	<i>viii</i>
<i>Chapter 1 Purpose and Background</i> .....	<i>1.1</i>
<i>Chapter 2 Creating the Plan</i> .....	<i>2.1</i>
<i>Chapter 3 Parks and Recreation Today</i> .....	<i>3.1</i>
<i>Chapter 4 Assessing Community Needs</i> .....	<i>4.1</i>
<i>Chapter 5 Objectives to Meet Community Needs</i> .....	<i>5.1</i>
<i>Chapter 6 PROST Recommendations</i> .....	<i>6.1</i>
<i>Chapter 7 How We Get There</i> .....	<i>7.1</i>
<i>Appendix A: Parklands Inventory</i>	
<i>Appendix B: Facility Asset Quality Evaluations</i>	
<i>Appendix C: Park Development Guidelines</i>	
<i>Appendix D: GIS Needs Assessment Methodology</i>	
<i>Appendix E: Public Engagement Summary</i>	
<i>Appendix F: Implementation Tools</i>	
<i>Appendix G: Trails Typology</i>	
<i>Appendix H: Urban Area Open Space Plan</i>	



# Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the Missoulians and local organizations who participated in this planning process, sharing their time, insights and love of parks and recreation. Without your voices, we could not have developed this plan.

## Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

Charles Besancon	Dale Harris
Erynn Castellanos	John O'Connor
Margaret Costa	Kelly Sellers
Sam Duncan	

## Open Space Advisory Committee

Tori Anderson	Lander Karath
Graham Cobb	Misty Nelson
Vanessa Ehrenpreis	John Rouse
Julie Gardner	Eric Anderson
Daniel Gundlach	Charles Besancon
Tyler Hoecker	DeAnna Bublitz
Anne Iverson	Kit Fischer

## PROST Community Working Group

Dana Kingfisher	Sherene Ricci
Rebekah Fields	Sue Furey
Adeline Schnick	Sam Duncan
Rosalie Sheehy Cates	Darcy Caron
Mickey Navidomskis	Charlie Tillinghast
Steven Gaskill	Derek Kanwischer
Michael Sweet	Kristen Newman
Karen Slobod	Ria Overholt

## PROST Public Engagement Committee

Libby Metcalf, <i>University of Montana</i>	Skye McGinty, <i>Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana</i>
Mellissa Weddell, <i>University of Montana</i>	Damian Chase-Begay, <i>University of Montana</i>
Michael Rohd, <i>University of Montana</i>	Dana Kingfisher, <i>All Nations Health</i>
	Ryan Wetzel, <i>All Nations Health</i>

## City of Missoula Parks and Recreation Department

The entire Parks and Recreation Department was critical to this planning effort.

**Project Management Team:** Donna Gaukler, Ryan Applegate, Zac Covington, Haley Erickson, Ashley Brittner Wells, Becky Goodrich, Lori Hart

**Senior Project Leadership Team:** Donna Gaukler, Ryan Applegate, David Selvage, Nathan Mcleod, Betsy Willett, Danielle Beaudin, Morgan Valliant, Lincoln Lake, and Zac Covington

## City of Missoula Mayor and City Council

Mayor Andrea Davis	Amber Sherrill
Eric Melson	Mike Nugent
Jennifer Savage	Stacie M. Anderson
Mirtha Becerra	Bob Campbell
Sierra Farmer	Sandra Vasecka
Gwen Jones	Kristen Jordan
	Daniel Carlino

## City of Missoula Partners

The Parks and Recreation Department thanks all the City staff who contributed to PROST Plan and acknowledges several City departments who were key partners in the development of the PROST.

Community Planning, Development & Innovation Department  
GIS Services Department  
Public Works and Mobility Department  
Missoula Redevelopment Agency

## Agency Partners

Special thanks to the agency partners who participated and provided guidance throughout the planning process, including the University of Montana, Missoula County, members of the Front Country Recreation Collaborative, Mountain Line, Missoula Public Health, the Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization, Destination Missoula, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Tribal Council, Arts Missoula, Climate Smart Missoula, Summit Independent Living, Missoula County Public Schools, and the Missoula Public Library for hosting meetings and our public open houses.

## Missoula Community Members

Special thanks to the 5,000 plus community members that interacted with this plan throughout the two-year process. This plan seeks to represent the current and future needs of the Missoula community, and your continued engagement, support and direction continue to be invaluable to the process.

## Consultants

BluePoint Planning  
Digital Mapping Services  
Bureau of Business and Economic Research, University of Montana  
W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana

# Dear Reader,

We are honored to introduce the PROST (Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails) Plan, a community-driven initiative designed to enrich the quality of life in Missoula by increasing recreational opportunities, preserving natural spaces, and fostering a deeper connection with the local environment. Through this process we have gained a renewed appreciation for the community we live in and the incredible dedication of our Missoula Parks and Recreation staff.

This initiative would not have been possible without the hard work and commitment of the PROST Community Working Group composed of dedicated residents, local leaders and experts who, across two years, contributed their time, ideas, and expertise. Together with Missoula Parks and Recreation staff we hosted community workshops, conducted surveys, and gathered feedback in order to reflect, to the greatest extent possible, the values and priorities of those who call Missoula home.

This plan is not the end of the process, but rather the beginning. We strongly encourage every Missoulian to play a role in bringing this plan to life. By working together, staying involved, and holding ourselves accountable, we can transform this vision into a reality that benefits everyone in our community.

Thank you for your interest and support in shaping the future of Missoula.

Sincerely,

## ***The PROST Community Working Group***

Dana Kingfisher	Sherene Ricci
Rebekah Fields	Sue Furey
Adeline Schnick	Sam Duncan
Rosalie Sheehy Cates	Darcy Caron
Mickey Navidomskis	Charlie Tillinghast
Steven Gaskill	Derek Kanwischer
Michael Sweet	Kristen Newman
Karen Slobod	Ria Overholt





## Letter from the Mayor

Along with the leadership and staff at the City of Missoula, I am excited to introduce the Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails (PROST) Master Plan for the City of Missoula Parks and Recreation. The Master Plan is an overarching, 15-year plan that will guide the Parks and Recreation Department in managing Missoula's public outdoors in ways that reflect our community's values.

Missoula residents love our parks, open space and trails, and we express that love time and

time again in surveys and public conversations. Missoula's strong sense of place starts with our outdoor spaces and the programs they inspire. And they help inform all we do. In all our planning efforts, we look to coordinate all our long-range plans. The Parks plan works with planning for transportation, land use, public health and other areas that support and improve a healthy and prosperous city.

Missoula does this work best when community and local government work together, and this plan is no exception. It represents thousands of hours of conversation and informed decision-making among community members, City staff and our partner agencies.

This Master Plan will guide Parks and Recreation's work during the next 15 years, and the conversation does not stop here. We look forward to continuing work with the community to see this vision through.

Sincerely,

**Andrea Davis**  
**Mayor**



# Glossary

**10-Minute Walk:** The average distance most people are willing to walk, or roll in a mobility device, from their home, without needing to cross a major barrier (river, rail, busy street) to reach a parkland or trail. This is equal to approximately a half-mile distance for most able-bodied people (10minutewalk.org).

**Access:** Residents experience the same level of service across all user groups.

**Accessible:** In the context of this plan, ensuring the built environment and physical spaces are barrier-free and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) through the use of universal design principles, and ensuring that facilities, programs, and activities are readily available and usable by all residents, including those with and without disabilities.

**Activation:** Creating opportunities for more frequent use and activity in public spaces, to increase sense of community, improve safety, drive tourism and economic development, provide educational opportunities, and other similar benefits.

**Adaptable:** The ability to adjust to changing environmental conditions, community needs, and other factors.

**Common Area:** Common areas may be developed or undeveloped spaces owned and operated by a Homeowners Association or private landholder. Some common areas allow public access and others limit access.

**Community Natural Area:** Community Natural Areas are a classification of Conservation Lands that are usually greater than 10 acres in size. These properties serve to protect natural values and ecosystem functions. These properties may include areas of significant vegetation, important

habitats, stormwater management, green infrastructure, scenic areas, or areas that contribute to the urban shaping and buffering goals of the community, including wildland urban interface buffers and riparian areas. Community Natural Areas provide opportunities for nature oriented outdoor recreation and emphasizes resource protection with appropriate public access provided. The level of development is commensurate with level of public use so long as resource values are preserved.

**Community Park:** Community parks are designed to serve multiple neighborhoods, drawing visitors from several neighborhoods or across Missoula for their features, facilities or programs. These parks serve a broad range of activities and users, support group gatherings, provide space for programs and events and often include specialized recreation facilities. Community parks are generally designed to also serve as neighborhood parks for those living nearby.

**Conservation Lands:** Conservation lands protect land with natural habitats and ecosystems and significant visual, historic, cultural or archaeological resources. They provide opportunities for interaction with nature and may include recreation facilities such as trails and picnic areas. Conservation lands are further classified as Park Preserves, Community Natural Areas and Neighborhood Natural Areas. All or a portion of conservation lands of all types may be closed to public access seasonally or year-round depending on resource protection needs.

**Green Infrastructure:** The use of landscape as infrastructure that preserves and integrates the natural processes of nature into the built environment for the benefits of improved air quality, water quality, wildlife

habitat and overall social and economic well-being. When designed and maintained appropriately, they may serve as a natural area.

**Greenway:** A corridor of open space, varying greatly in scale, and incorporating or linking diverse natural, cultural, and scenic resources. Some greenways are recreational corridors or scenic byways accommodating pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle traffic on both land and water; while others function almost exclusively for environmental protection and are not designed for human passage (americantrails.org).

**Gray Infrastructure:** Gray infrastructure refers to engineered systems and structures that support urban development. Including: streets, sidewalks, utilities, and traditional stormwater infrastructure such as pipes, sumps and retention basins.

**Habitat:** The environment that supports plants and wildlife by providing food, water, shelter, and space. High-quality habitat includes diverse, functional native plant communities that meet the structural and nutritional needs of wildlife. Throughout the city, in urban and rural areas, maintaining native vegetation and ecological connectivity is essential to sustaining biodiversity and ecosystem health.

**High Use Site Overlay:** The High Use Outdoor Site Overlay identifies areas within conservation lands that are developed to support public access to outdoor recreation and may include appropriate recreational facilities. These areas are located outside of sensitive resource zones. High use areas may be closed seasonally for management reasons.

**Inclusive:** Creating an environment and system where all residents feel welcome, safe, and comfortable to participate and

experience a sense of belonging free of physical and social barriers.

**Lands With Special Resources:** Public parklands across the community that contain natural resources that add value to the overall community, have environmental benefits, provide the community with opportunities to engage with nature, or include unique cultural or historical resources. In the 2040 PROST Plan this designation changes parklands that were designated "Lands With Special Resources" to Community and Neighborhood Natural Parks, however it is recognized that most public parklands contain numerous special resources.

**Linear Park:** Linear parks are longer than they are wide and typically include trails. These parks may follow linear corridors such as creeks, rail lines and utility corridors or they may simply provide connections between parks or to other destinations. Linear parks may be developed or natural in character, depending on the corridor. If the corridor is wide enough, linear parks may include park amenities, recreation facilities, or community natural areas.

**Nature-based Recreation:** Nature-based recreation is defined as outdoor leisure activities in natural settings or otherwise involving in some direct way elements of nature—terrain, plants, wildlife, water bodies.

**Nature-based Solutions:** Nature-based solutions are sometimes called green or blue infrastructure, low-impact development, bioengineering, natural engineering, or engineering with nature. Examples of nature-based solutions that mitigate hazards include things like rain gardens to manage stormwater, using wetland areas to store flood waters, etc.

**Neighborhood Park:** Neighborhood parks provide close-to-home public spaces that

meet recreation and social needs for nearby residents to walk, play, exercise and be outdoors. Park users typically live within walking and bicycling distance. Some neighborhood parks incorporate natural areas, such as wooded areas, adding to their overall size. Neighborhood parks are typically surrounded by public streets or trails.

**Neighborhood Natural Area:** Smaller sites that provide habitat patches, protect natural resources or provide ecosystem functions. Level of development is generally low since the sites are small.

**Non-conforming Land:** Non-conforming lands are publicly owned parklands that do not meet City guidelines for delivery of park services to the neighborhood or community

**Open Space:** A broad term intended to interpret the definition found in 76-6-104(3), MCA, generally including parks, trail corridors, greenbelts or greenways, conservation lands, riparian areas, and agricultural lands that are provided or preserved for public benefit (Missoula Municipal Code 12.56.015).

**Park:** A publicly owned and maintained area of land designated for public recreation, leisure, and enjoyment.

**Parkland:** Lands dedicated for public park and recreational use.

**Park Amenity:** Park amenities are improvements that contribute to the use of park land such as benches, play structures, picnic tables, shelters, sports facilities, trails, etc.

**Park Preserve:** Generally greater than 100 acres. These properties protect large areas with natural resource values of community-wide or regional significance. They may provide opportunities for nature-oriented outdoor recreation. Management priority is on preserving and improving native habitats

and achieving an appropriate balance between resource protection and public use. Preserves typically have natural surface trails with associated signage. Some preserves also have single-lane dirt road systems established prior to City's acquisition of the property. Areas are largely undeveloped except in designated High Use Outdoor Site areas or at lower use access points where user amenities (e.g., trash)

**Planning Study:** A stand-alone special study, such as a feasibility study, a large site master plan, or update to an existing guiding plan (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan, Urban Forestry Master Plan, Asset Management Plan, PROST Update, etc.). Planning studies typically include community engagement.

**Pocket Park:** Pocket parks, sometimes called mini-parks, are small parks that may serve a portion of the surrounding neighborhood. Pocket parks may function as small neighborhood parks or simply provide urban green space. Pocket parks can be essential in serving densely populated portions of the city where neighborhood park level of service cannot be met due to lack of available lands.

**Rain Garden:** Rain gardens are shallow, constructed depressions that are planted with deep-rooted native plants and grasses, and are strategically located to capture runoff from hard surfaces such as a driveway, parking area, sidewalk or streets. Rain gardens conserve water, reduce the need for irrigation, and can help filter out pollutants in runoff and provide food and shelter for butterflies, songbirds and other wildlife (epa.gov).

**Recreation Facility:** A public recreation facility is a purpose built building, outdoor improvement or specially maintained park area dedicated and programmed for

recreation purposes to serve the recreation needs of community residents.

**Regional Park:** Regional parks are unique large parks that provide regional attractions or protect cultural, historic, or natural resources of regional significance. These parks serve the greatest geographical area, attracting visitors from across the city and the greater region who tend to visit for longer durations. Regional parks typically include a variety of specialized facilities and large group gathering areas.

**Renewable Energy Infrastructure:** Renewable energy infrastructure includes solar and wind energy production infrastructure and associated facilities.

**Special Use Park:** Special use parks are typically focused on a specific recreation facility or use, though they may include supporting features and amenities. Examples are urban plazas, gardens or arboreta, bike parks, stand-alone indoor facilities, stand-alone boat ramps, bike parks, etc.

**Trail:** A path, route or track generally designed for walking, running, biking, rolling, horseback riding or similar activities. Trails may be separated from vehicular traffic, which connect people to their homes, neighborhoods, parks, places of employment, commercial centers, regional destinations, open space, and other important places.

**Universal Access:** Intentional design that builds upon this Plan's definition of accessible and strives to provide equitable opportunity for participation to the greatest extent possible by all users regardless of socioeconomic status, age, ability, disability, or any other demographic, with or without the need for adaptation or accommodation. This is achieved through the application of

evolving best practices, community feedback, innovation and Universal Design principles.

**Urban Forest:** The urban forest includes the public trees in parks, conservation lands, river corridors, public rights-of-ways. Urban Tree Canopy, can also include trees on private property.

# CHAPTER 1

# Purpose and Background

## Key Takeaways

- ◊ **Decision Lens Integration:** The PROST Plan embeds Missoula's three decision-making lenses—Climate, Equity, and Housing—into parks and recreation planning priorities.
- ◊ **Support Compact Growth:** As Missoula develops inward to address housing needs, the PROST system must provide quality green spaces in denser environments.
- ◊ **Climate Action:** The Plan includes specific strategies for parks, open spaces, and urban forestry to advance carbon neutrality and climate resilience goals.
- ◊ **Universal Access:** Ensuring equitable access to recreation resources remains central as Missoula prepares for 50 percent population growth by 2045.



## Why Plan?

The 1970 City/County of Missoula "Policy Guide for Urban Growth" in the section entitled Environment states:

"The natural environment has shaped the development of the County in the past and has provided resources for economic development and recreation that makes the area unique. How the natural environment is managed in the future will determine how the County will develop and whether the natural amenities cherished by all will continue to add to the quality of life for people living in Missoula."

Though the population of the City of Missoula has grown from just under 30,000 in 1970 to almost 77,000 today the statement remains succinct.

The City of Missoula takes pride in serving the community by providing quality recreation programs, maintained parks and trails, and open spaces for everyone to enjoy. Missoula Parks and Recreation has collaborated with organizations and residents to create a new

Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails 2040 Master Plan (PROST Plan) for the greater Missoula Valley.

Building upon and replacing the 2004 Master Parks and Recreation Plan, this new integrated plan will stand as a blueprint for the next 15 years for parks, recreation, open space, trails, trees, and services to residents.

## What is a PROST Plan?

The PROST Plan is an overarching, 15-year plan that will guide the Parks and Recreation Department in meeting community-driven needs. The document has been developed with community input throughout and in coordination with the Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan, which was adopted in Winter 2024. Other important plans, including the Long-Range Transportation Plan, Transit Services Plan, and the Community Health Improvement Plan informed the plan.

While the PROST Plan will serve as the high-level guiding document for the department, it does not take the place of more focused plans for the department including the Conservation Lands Management Plan, Urban Forest Master Plan, the Parks Asset Management Plan, the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan, and other similar plans. Those plans will go through a separate update process in the future as needed.

## The PROST Plan Framework

The PROST Plan framework, shown on the following pages, outlines the guiding principles and overarching strategic goals. This framework was informed by public outreach and lead to the PROST Plan vision for realizing community needs for the future of public lands, programs, services, and features that fall under the purview of the Parks and Recreation Department. The framework reflects community values and guides the Department in achieving the greatest outcomes for a healthy community and environment.

This framework was developed based on community input and then vetted through a community working group, Park and Recreation Board, and community events.



# PROST VISION STATEMENT

The PROST vision to support the department and meet community needs emerged during a two-year planning process, which included more than 5,000 community connection points, meetings with the community working group and a public engagement committee, and input from technical advisors and staff.

**By 2040, Missoula's parks, recreation, open space, trails, trees, and services are more resilient and accessible to our current and growing community while advancing and promoting public health and well-being, contributing to healthy and resilient environments, and fostering a sense of belonging.**



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*

## Guiding Principles

The community working group, formed of 16 Missoulians who were selected through an open application process and represent a diversity of voices and perspectives guided the plan development and created a set of guiding principles early in the process based on public input as well as the city's vision and decision lenses. The guiding principles were used throughout the process to ensure outcomes maintained the community's core values and intentions.

We believe the PROST Plan will serve the greater Missoula community in the following ways...

Prepare for and welcome people of all ages and abilities with varied programs and facilities year-round, incorporating universal design principles.

Foster a sense of belonging and honor our community by highlighting Missoula's unique natural, historical, social, and cultural features.

Promote mental and physical wellness and social connections through parkland, trails, open space, programs, and facilities.

Ensure access to parks and recreation resources for all, and that they are inclusive, inspiring, safe, and affordable.

Demonstrate and inspire climate action and regenerative sustainability throughout all parks, facilities, open space and trails design, construction, management, and operations.

Support integrated affordable housing, walkable and green streetscapes, and healthy and purposeful green spaces in new and existing developments.

Foster a healthy urban forest and robust natural lands for quality of life, climate resiliency, and wildlife habitat.

Build relationships that continue to advance stewardship and expand services through shared ownership and vision.

# PLAN GOALS

PROST goals are informed by the guiding principles and lead to the PROST vision. These seven identified goals reflect and distill the guiding principles into actionable statements and inform development of the department goal-based objectives and recommendations described in Chapter 5 and 6. Two of the goals focus on organizational processes while the other five goals support the community's vision for the PROST system and services. These goals were developed through an extensive community outreach process, which is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

## Organizational Process Goals



### Be Forward-Thinking & Adaptable

Anticipate the needs of Missoula's growing and changing community by creating adaptable and innovative parks, facilities, trails, landscapes, and programs that benefit the community environmentally, socially, culturally, and economically.



### Build & Sustain Partnerships

Expand and sustain community partnerships, and work with other departments, agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals to advance the PROST and greater community vision.

## Outcome-Oriented Goals



### Elevate Quality of Life

Ensure Missoula's parks, recreation facilities, open spaces, trails, trees, and services continue to contribute to and reflect Missoula's identity with a thriving, equitable, and well-rounded park system.



### Support Healthy People

Promote overall wellbeing with increased opportunities for health and wellness, physical fitness, enjoyment of social connections, and increased safety through programs and services.



### Foster a Healthy Natural Environment

Strategically protect, maintain, design, and improve a cohesive system of parklands and open spaces that help to mitigate the effects of climate change and provide respite for residents from the urban environment.



### Improve Connections & Connectivity

Connect people to each other, to community, to public places, and to the natural environment while ensuring connected ecological systems.



### Enhance Maintenance

Provide stewardship of Missoula's parks, open spaces, trails, urban forest, and recreation assets through innovative, regenerative, and effective design combined with maintenance and operations best practices.



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*

## Plan Organization

This Plan is organized into the following sections:

### **Chapter 1: Purpose and Background**

Provides an overview of the system, the plan purpose, historical context, a description of the planning process and describes development of the PROST Plan vision, guiding principles, and goals.

### **Chapter 2: Creating the Plan**

Describes the engagement process and the key findings that informed the PROST Plan.

### **Chapter 3: Parks and Recreation Today**

Summarizes system-wide PROST inventory and demographics to show us how the current system functions.

### **Chapter 4: Community Needs**

Assesses the parklands facilities and trails system, recreation facilities, open space and urban forest, programming and accessible space needs and gaps. This chapter includes community comparisons, mapping, and analysis and concludes with a summary of community needs determined by the public engagement process as well as the gap analysis.

### **Chapter 5: PROST Objectives**

Describes goal-oriented objectives to address community needs.

### **Chapter 6: PROST Recommendations**

Provides guidance for the next 15 years for the Parks and Recreation Department, through specific recommendations for each element of the PROST system.

### **Chapter 7: How We Get There**

Discusses overall implementation of the Plan, introduces the implementation matrix, and makes recommendations on how to ensure that the PROST Plan is successful.

# Indigenous Land Use and Dispossession in What is Now Called the Missoula Valley

The Our Missoula Equity in Land Use report, prepared by the City's Community Planning, Development & Innovation Department, provides detailed information and context about Missoula's history for the last 13,000 years. Per the Equity in Land Use report:

Since the beginning of human history, the area now known as the Missoula valley has been a place of great significance for the Seliš (pronounced SEH-leesh, anglicized as "Salish") and Qlispé (pronounced Kah-lee-SPEH, also known as "Kalispel" or "Pend d'Oreille") nations. Oral traditions and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous archaeologists have documented a tribal presence in this region that reaches back to the last Ice Age – roughly 13,000 years ago. The period since the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805 — often misunderstood by non-Indigenous people to signify the beginning of history in Montana and adjoining places — accounts for about 2% of human history in the area.

The aboriginal lands of the Seliš encompassed a vast portion of what is known today as the state of Montana on both sides of the Continental Divide. The Seliš were originally organized in at least six large bands that were based in the areas that included places known in English as Butte, Three Forks, the Jefferson Valley, the Big Hole Valley, and Helena. Tribal territory also encompassed the Bitterroot Valley, where in recent centuries, the Seliš population was concentrated; hence they are commonly referred to as the "Bitterroot Salish."

The Qlispé were originally organized in at least twenty-seven bands based at locations throughout the drainage systems of the Flathead, Middle and Lower Clark Fork, and Pend Oreille Rivers across what is now western Montana, northern Idaho, and eastern Washington.

## Background and PROST History

Missoula, located in the Rocky Mountains of western Montana, is a city of significant geographical importance. It is positioned near the confluence of five valleys—the Hellgate, Blackfoot, Missoula, Flathead-Jocko, and Bitterroot valleys—and three rivers: the Clark Fork, Blackfoot, and Bitterroot rivers. Surrounded by millions of acres of national forest and wilderness, Missoula boasts a rich natural environment, reflecting the city's commitment to preserving nature, open spaces, and recreational opportunities.

Situated between Glacier and Yellowstone national parks, Missoula attracts tourism while increasing demand for local resources. The city is closely linked geographically, culturally, recreationally, ecologically, and economically to the Clark Fork, Blackfoot, and Bitterroot rivers, as well as Rattlesnake Creek, which flow through the Missoula Valley. These rivers not only serve as significant attractions for residents and visitors but also function as essential ecological assets and natural corridors encompassing sensitive lands within the PROST planning area.

According to the 2020 Census, Missoula is the second-largest city in Montana, with nearly 75,000 residents. It serves as a regional hub for western Montana and has seen steady growth, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan projects a population of approximately 128,345 in the Land Use Plan area by 2045, necessitating planning for a 50 percent increase in the next 20 years.

City leaders have chosen to focus on inward growth rather than outward expansion. This approach is evident in the adopted Land Use Plan, stating that Missoula "has embraced a



### City of Missoula Mission:

Reflecting the needs and values of our residents, the City of Missoula commits to enhancing opportunity and quality of life through effective delivery of City services and fiscal stewardship while maintaining and creating a harmonious natural and built environment.

### City of Missoula Vision:

Missoula is an inclusive city where all people can live and celebrate meaningful, purposeful and fulfilling lives in a community offering unparalleled recreational, cultural and entrepreneurial opportunities.

'Focus Inward' growth strategy, prioritizing compact, sustainable growth within its urban areas." The strategy aims to minimize urban sprawl, preserve sensitive lands, and enhance social equity by improving access to amenities and public services.

This commitment to sustainable growth underscores the city's dedication to its residents and the environment. Recognizing the need for a compact, walkable city has prompted updates to Missoula's PROST system. Emphasizing the significance of parks, recreational opportunities, trail connectivity, a healthy urban forest, and access to open space is critical as the city continues to grow. This dedication is reflected in the City of Missoula's mission and vision.

## Economy

Missoula is a regional hub for supplies and services like retail, healthcare, banking, and commerce. These are major economic draws for the city and provide employment opportunities. The city is also home to the University of Montana, a public research university, drawing thousands of students and faculty to the area. Missoula Economic Partnership's 2021 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) identifies Missoula's quality of life as one of three main factors contributing to the advancement of the city's economy.

Due to workforce changes, population growth, and economic and housing challenges, the community's needs have shifted. This PROST Plan has been developed to react to those changes, identify future trends, and provide a flexible and adaptable framework.

## Decision-Making Lenses

In 2023 and updated in 2024, the City of Missoula adopted a Strategic Plan that includes three decision lenses to help guide the implementation of its strategic goals: Climate Sustainability, Adaptation, and Resilience; Equity in Opportunity and Access to Local Government Resources and Lands; and Housing Attainability at all Levels with a Focus on Workforce and Affordability. The PROST Plan embraces these three decision lenses and integrates specific strategies, principles, and concepts to support and advance each area.

### ***Climate Sustainability, Adaptation, and Resilience***

The City considers climate and resiliency impacts in all its decisions specifically guided by adopted plans that address:

- 100 percent Clean Electricity
- Carbon Neutral in City Operations
- Carbon Neutral in Community
- Zero Waste
- Building a Resilient Community

### ***Equity in Opportunity and Access to Local Government Resources and Lands***

The City addresses holistic, interconnected factors that help build resilient futures while also building an inclusive environment.

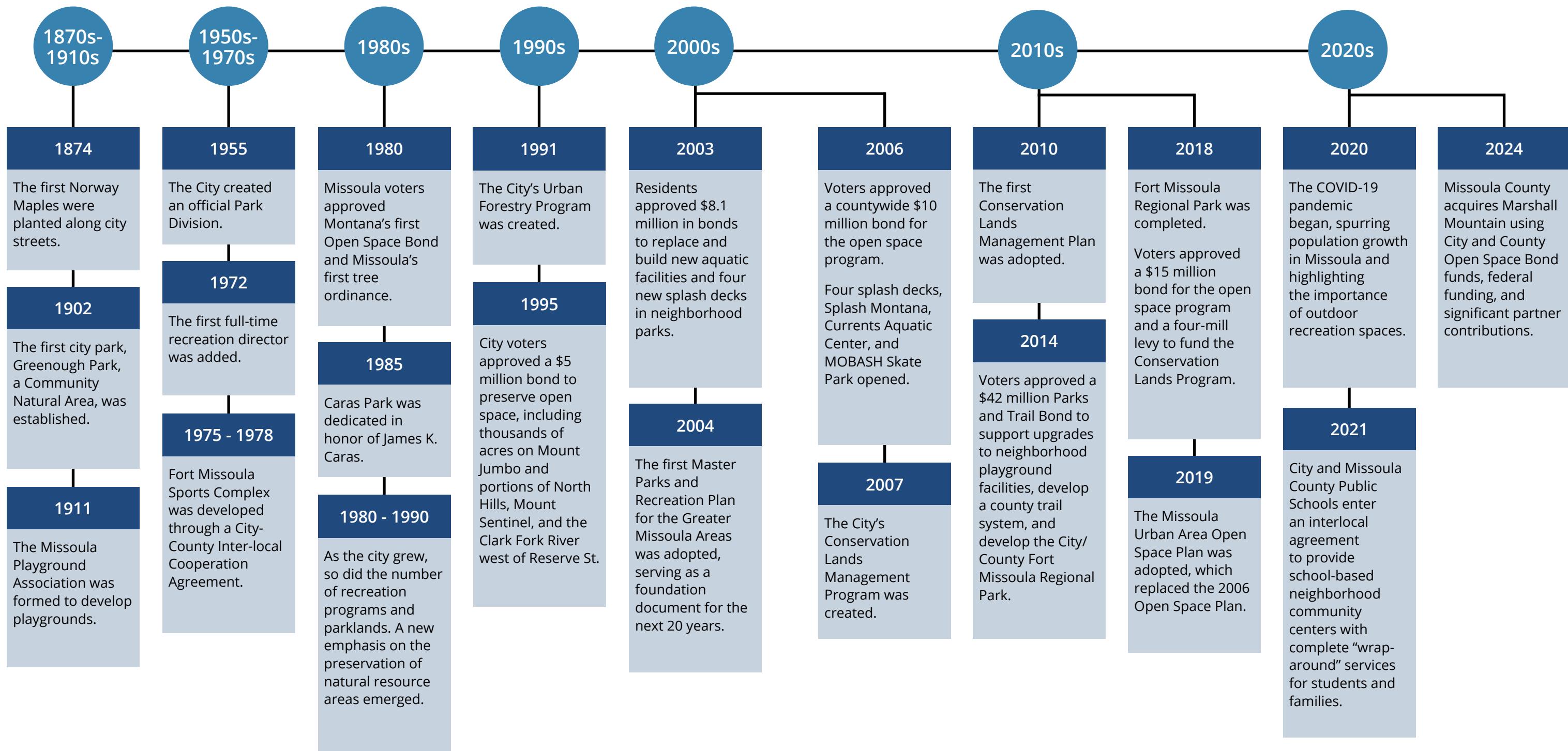
### ***Housing Attainability at all Levels with a Focus on Workforce and Affordability***

The City considers opportunities to further its housing goals in all its decisions as articulated in the city's housing policy "A Place to Call Home".



# Missoula Parks and Recreation Timeline

The City of Missoula has long appreciated the importance of public parks.



# CHAPTER 2

# Creating the Plan



## Key Takeaways

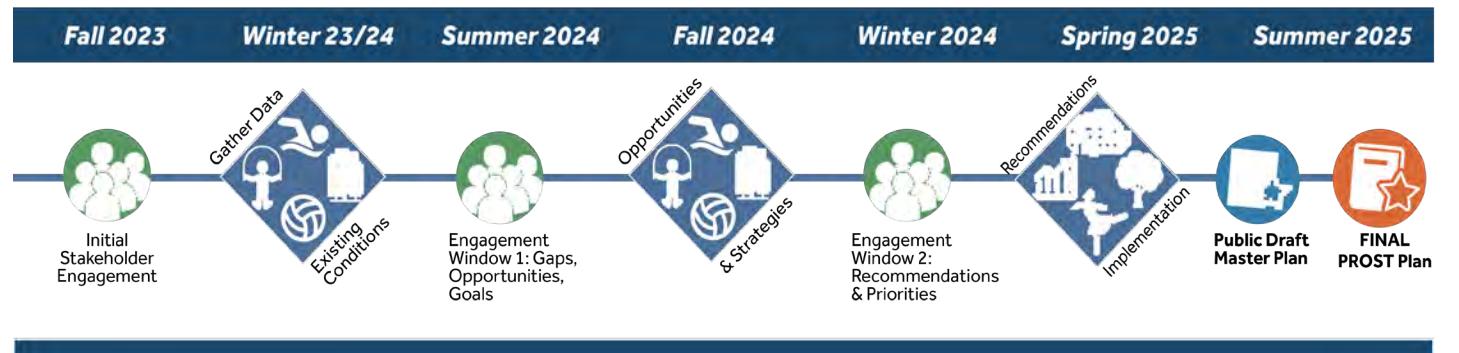
- ◊ **Inclusive Engagement:** The process reached 5,000+ residents through diverse methods, with targeted outreach to historically underserved communities.
- ◊ **Climate Action Support:** Over 85 percent of residents strongly support environmental strategies, including protecting water resources, preserving habitat, and expanding urban tree canopy.
- ◊ **Walkable Development:** As Missoula grows inward, residents prioritize walkable neighborhoods (90 percent support) and connected trails, linking housing density with accessible recreation.
- ◊ **Integrated Planning:** PROST was coordinated with the concurrent local planning processes, including the City's Land Use Plan, and the countywide Community Health Improvement and Long-Range Transportation plans, creating alignment across housing, mobility, health, and recreation systems.



## PROST Planning Process

The PROST planning process took place between Fall 2023 and Spring 2025. The Plan was developed over three major phases: Inventory and Analysis of Existing Conditions, Defining Gaps, and Development of Goal-Based Objectives to drive Recommendations and Implementation strategies. Each phase included extensive engagement with the Community Working Group (CWG), technical advisors, and the wider community as well as collaboration with staff and partners to help guide plan development.

**Figure 1: Process Overview**



The Community Working Group played a vital role in developing the PROST Plan. This group comprised 16 Missoula residents, representing a diverse range of voices and perspectives. Their responsibilities included meeting multiple times during the planning process, ensuring Parks and Recreation addressed community needs, providing input and direction, acting as ambassadors for the plan, and supporting recommendations for approval by the Missoula Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Planning Board and City Council.

Alongside the CWG, staff from the University of Montana, City Parks and Recreation, County Parks, Trails and Open Lands, and

All Nations Health Center formed the Public Engagement Committee to guide community engagement efforts. This offered numerous opportunities for Missoulians to share comments and influence the PROST Plan.

Additionally, the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) Department significantly updated inventory data for parks, conservation lands, and trails, resulting in accurate PROST GIS data.

At the project's outset, the City launched the Engage Missoula website as a centralized information hub during the planning process. This site includes online engagement activities and a library of project reports and documents. The final plan, along with related materials and tools will be available on the City's website.

The planning process followed simplified steps to create the PROST Plan:

### What does Parks and Recreation look like today?

### Documentation of Existing Conditions

The initial phase of the PROST Plan development was to create a comprehensive overview of the current system, based on findings from community engagement, system assessment and inventory, and planning context.

### How is Parks and Recreation working?

### Determining Opportunities

After establishing Existing Conditions, the next phase was to identify key gaps and needs for the system and then develop objectives and recommendations for addressing those gaps and needs. These ideas were then vetted with the community, staff and key stakeholders. During this phase, the Plan's vision, guiding principles, and goals were developed through the CWG, reflecting community input.

### What does the community need?

Identifying gaps and needs and Creating Objectives and Recommendations and Implementation Resources

This phase involved finalizing recommendations and developing tools to help the City implement the Plan.

Community members were first asked to vet the Plan's big ideas and then were given an opportunity to provide public comment on the draft. Additionally, the CWG reviewed and commented on the draft PROST Plan before it was released to the public.

### Project One Pager

**Missoula Parks, Recreation, Open Space, & Trails Master Plan**  
City of Missoula

**Get Involved!**  
Get involved and help us envision parks, recreation, open space, and trails that better serve our community.

**Attend our Open House**  
Learn about our progress so far and share your priorities for the PROST system in an interactive activity at our Open House.  
Tuesday, October 22 | 5:00 - 7:15 PM  
Public Library, 4th Floor

**Visit the Project Website**  
Learn more about the project and find opportunities to get involved by scanning the QR code or visiting [www.missoulaparks.org/prost](http://www.missoulaparks.org/prost).



**About the Parks, Recreation, Open Space, & Trails Master Plan**  
The City of Missoula takes pride in serving our wonderful community by providing quality recreation and aquatics programs, beautifully maintained parks and trails, and plenty of open spaces of everyone to enjoy.

Missoula Parks and Recreation is collaborating with residents to draft a new master plan for the greater Missoula Valley's parks, recreation, open space, and trails. The Master Plan will be a blueprint for the next 10-15 years of parks, trails, open space, and recreation services to residents. Residents will have many opportunities to give input on the plan throughout the process as indicated below.



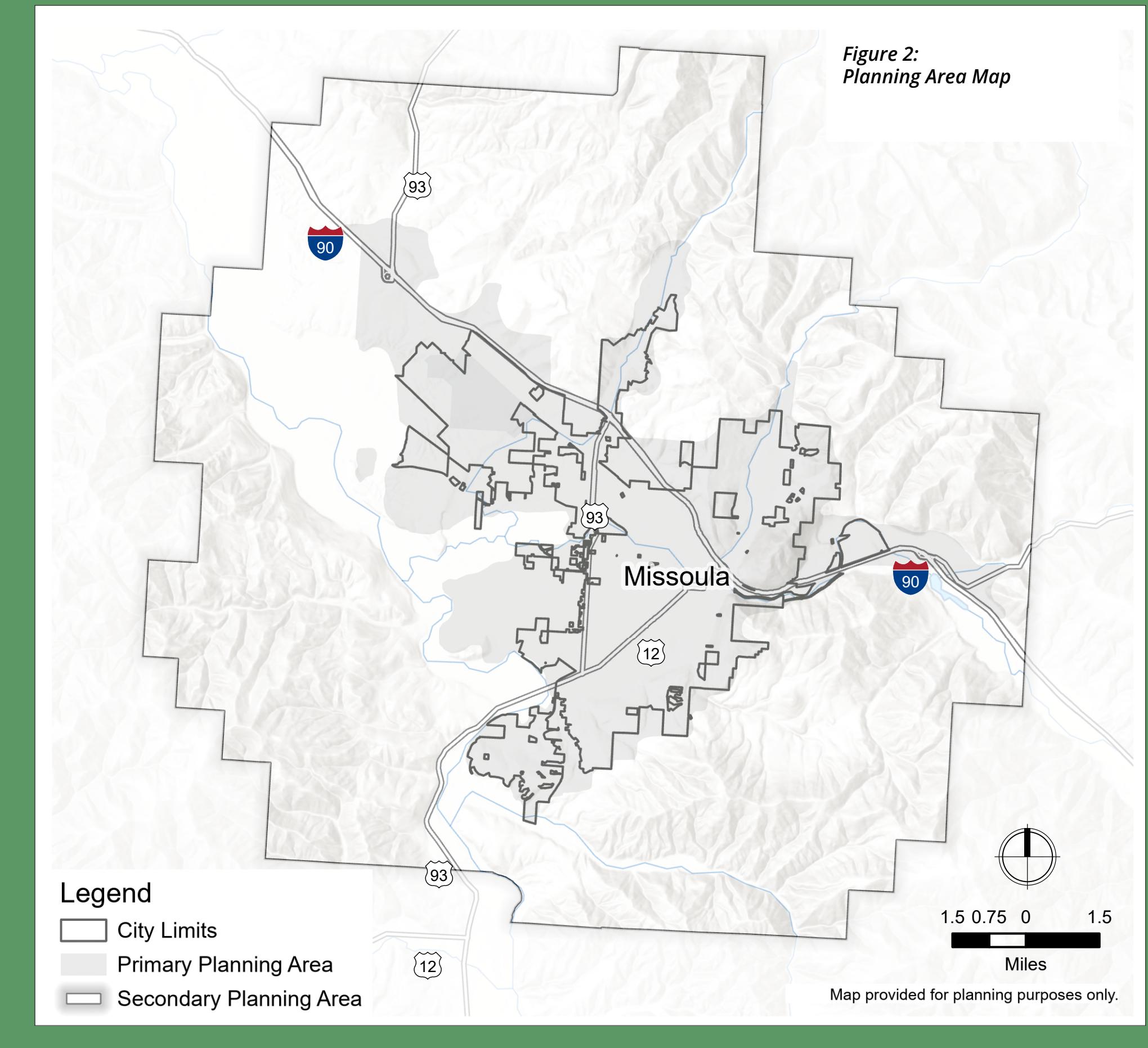
**Parks & Recreation**  
City of Missoula • 600 Creek Lane • 721 PARK

# Planning Area

The planning area for the PROST process extends beyond current city limits, as shown in Figure 2. It consists of both primary and secondary planning areas. The primary area aligns with the Our Missoula Land Use Plan boundary, focusing on land uses and policies within or near the city. The secondary area follows the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan boundary, considering more system users, including those outside the city, to address larger community and regional connectivity needs like trails and ecosystems.

A market assessment report for Splash Montana, the City's 50-meter outdoor pool and water park, indicates that most users live within a 50-mile radius. This report, along with data from recreation program registrations and park usage at Fort Missoula Regional Park, shows that residents outside city limits actively utilize Missoula's parks, trails, and open spaces, and participate in recreation programs.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, significant conservation lands and recreational facilities are within this larger planning area, including those owned by various government agencies, non-profits, and private organizations. Thus, the PROST plan must address needs in this broader area, emphasizing collaboration with Missoula County, federal and state agencies, and non-governmental partners to meet future growth and public park and recreation needs.



<sup>1</sup> Missoula Splash Montana Market Assessment Report

# City-wide Planning Efforts

During the PROST planning process, several other related planning processes occurred, including the Long-Range Transportation Plan Update (LRTP), the Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan, and the beginning process for the development of the City's Unified Development Code.

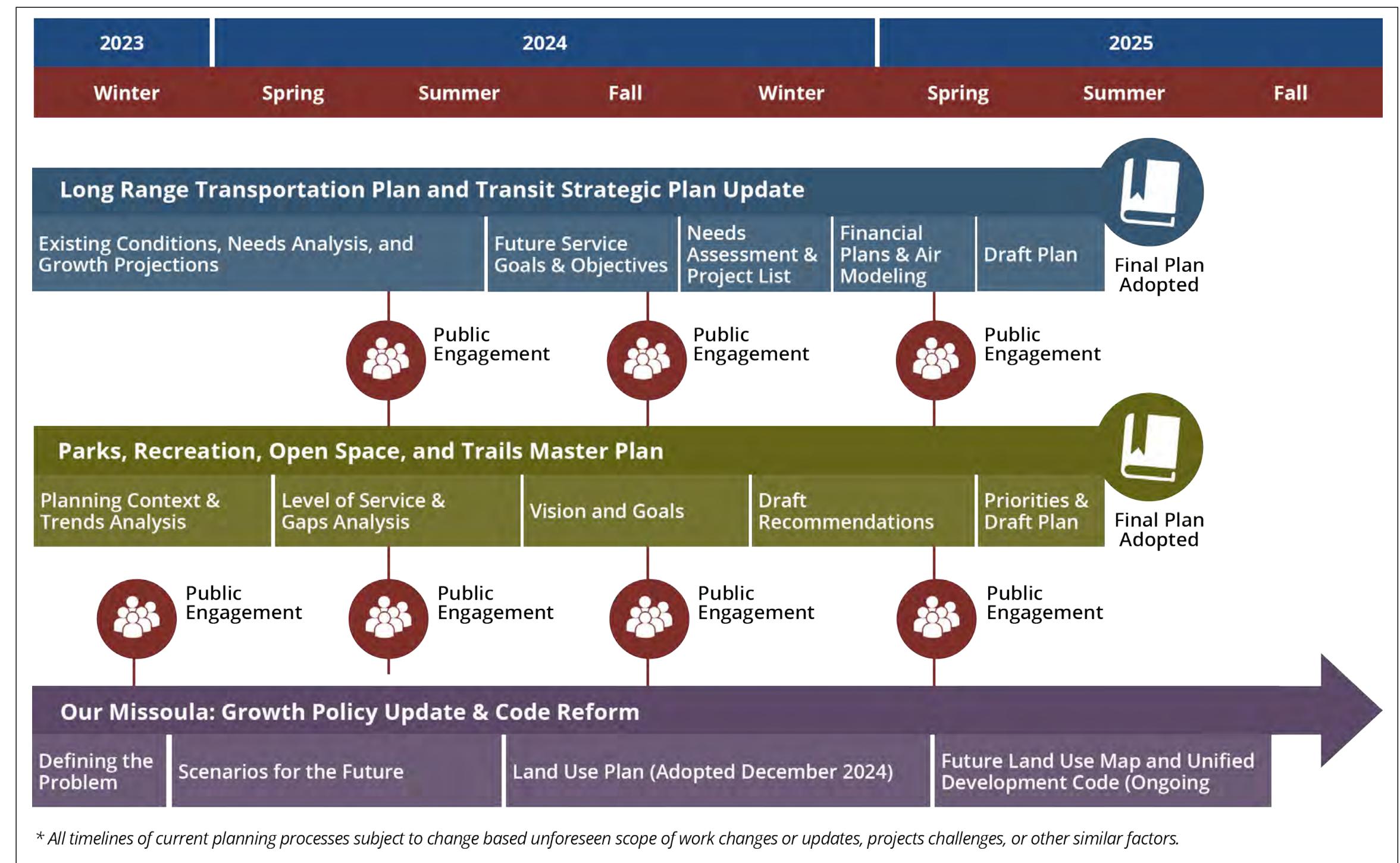
The PROST Plan was strategically aligned with both the LRTP and the Land Use Plan. This intentional interweaving of the plans, which includes recommendations for ordinance updates and requirements for new development related to parklands, trails, and trees, creates a unified vision for these critical elements of community growth and development moving forward.

The PROST planning team took a comprehensive approach, working with various partners and organizations around transportation, transit, land use, public health, climate and resilience, and more to ensure the topics of housing and land use, active transportation, access to employment, goods and services, public health, and more are addressed in concurrence with these other planning processes.

As shown in Figure 3, although different city departments completed these plans, the three major plans overlap in scope and timeline.

During the PROST planning process, several pivotal initiatives were simultaneously shaping the future of the Missoula area. One of the key projects was the county-wide Community Health Assessment (CHA), facilitated by Missoula Public Health. This detailed analysis goes beyond mere statistics; it dives deep into the local public

Figure 3: Concurrent Planning Processes



health landscape, identifying pressing issues and critical needs that directly affect our community's well-being.

In tandem, Missoula Public Health took significant strides in refining the county-wide Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). This collaborative plan is not just a response to the CHA findings; it is a bold action plan aimed at fostering a healthier, more vibrant community.

Moreover, the regional offices of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have also engaged in the essential task of updating their guiding plans. These updates are crucial for sustainable land management and environmental stewardship in our region.

Discussions surrounding these extensive planning efforts converged within the Front Country Recreation Collaborative, a diverse multi-agency group dedicated to ensuring that PROST aligns seamlessly with these other major initiatives. Their collaboration creates cohesive recommendations and strategies that enhance both public health and environmental management in Missoula Valley and beyond, setting a powerful precedent for future planning endeavors.

**Figure 4: Additional Concurrent Planning Processes**

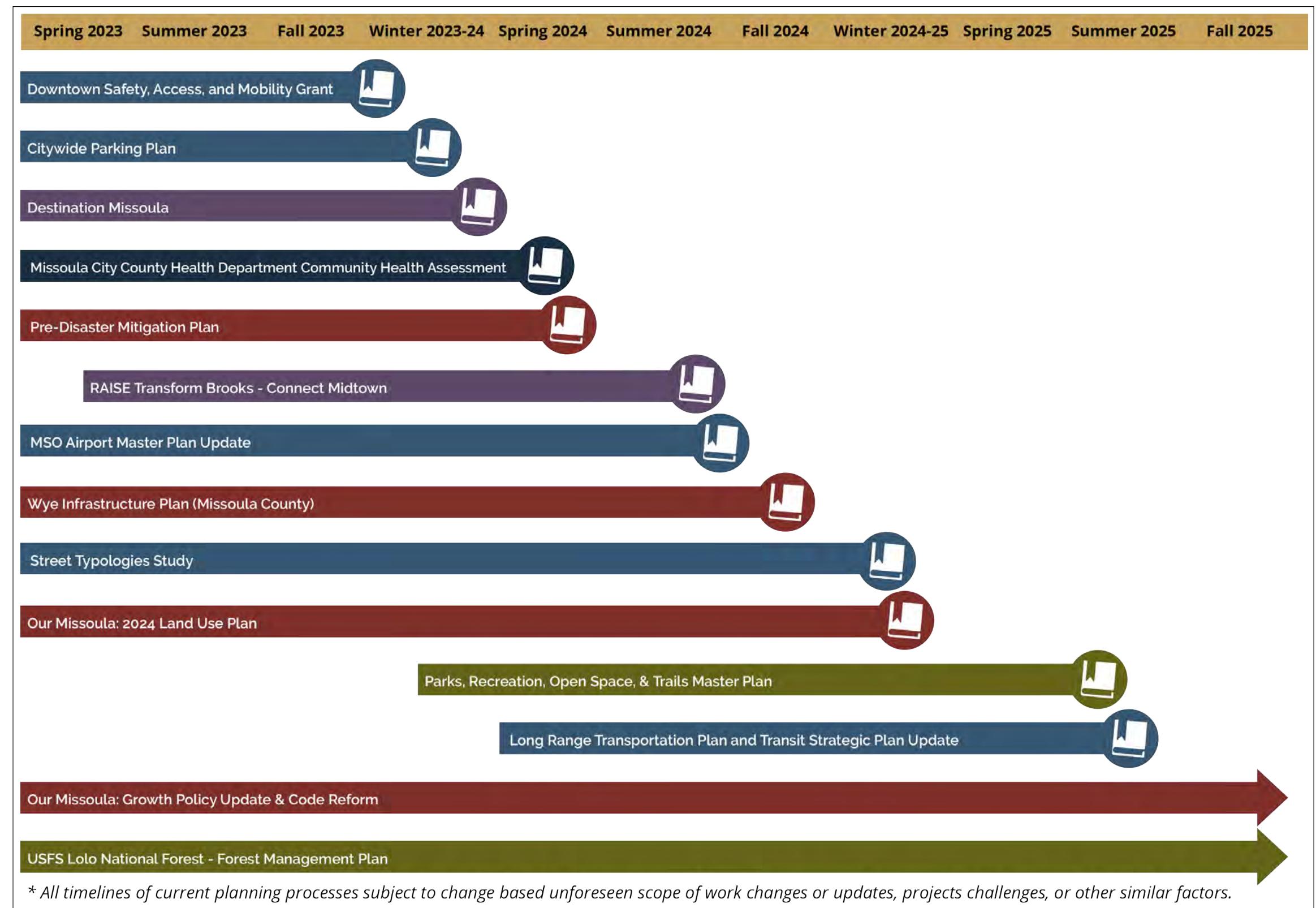


Figure 5: Achieving the Community's Vision Through Planning



## Achieving the Community's Vision Through Planning

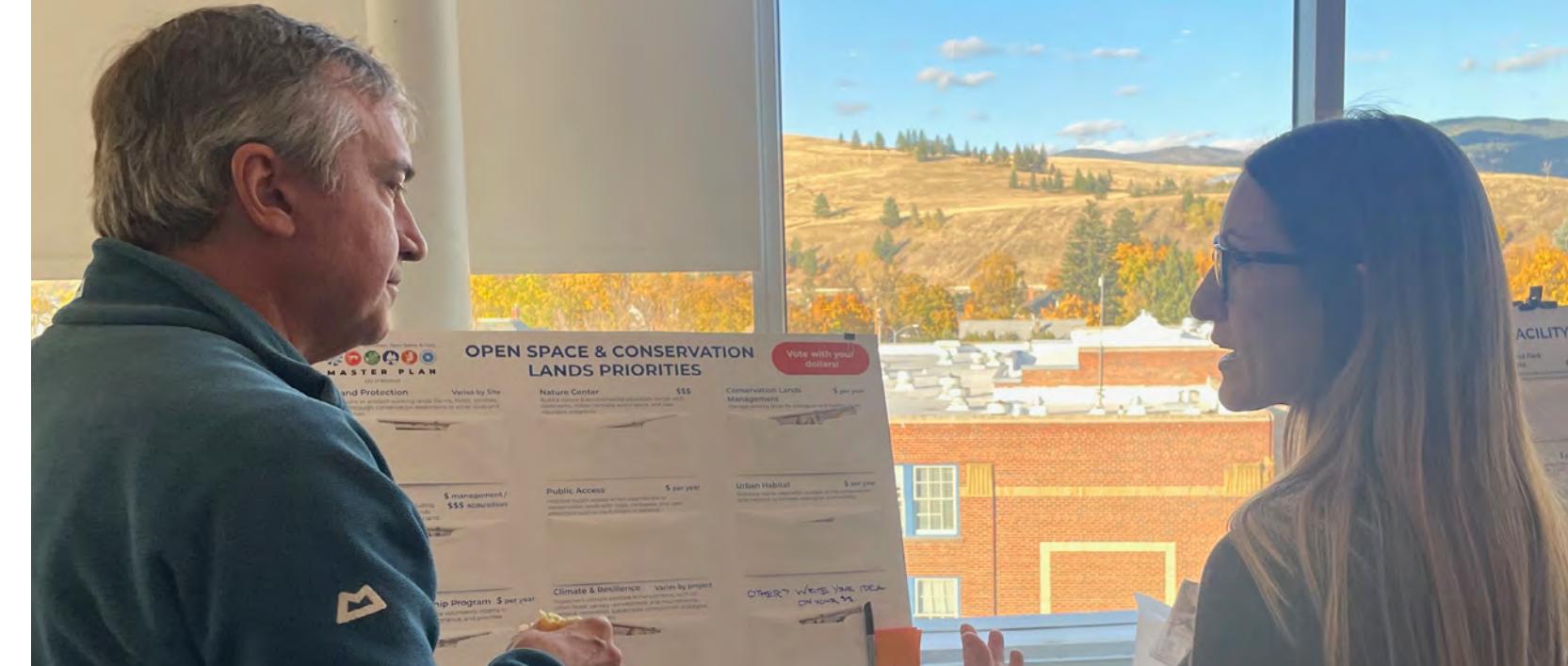
Through meaningful community engagement, we have gathered insights into what residents value most. The goals outlined in these plans—such as housing, walkability, sustainability, clean air and water, connectivity, and access to affordable programs and amenities—reflect our shared vision for the future. These goals can be achieved through a series of related actions that bring the plans to life.

Implementing these goals is crucial for realizing our community vision: "Missoula is an inclusive city where all people can live and celebrate meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling lives, while enjoying unparalleled recreational, cultural, and entrepreneurial opportunities." By working collaboratively, we can effectively implement this vision over time.

### Updating the Plan

This plan will be updated as needed, with a comprehensive review occurring every 15 years or whenever significant changes require an update. Additionally, the PROST Plan will be reviewed every 5 years for minor updates to ensure alignment with the Land Use Plan, Long Range Transportation Plan, and Missoula Public Health's Community Health Improvement Plan.

Reasons for updating the plan may include substantial changes in the community's population or demographic makeup, shifts in resident priorities, significant changes in funding or service prioritization, or other factors. The plan will also undergo an annual review to assess its implementation success and to establish priorities for the year ahead. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board can approve minor updates based on the plan's implementation, while significant changes may require a public process and approval from the Missoula City Council.



## Your Input – The Public Engagement Process

### Overview

A central element of the PROST planning process was the extensive and consistent community engagement that informed the plan. This process involved three major rounds of engagement, using multiple methods to gather feedback from residents, technical experts, and key stakeholders. Ultimately, this outreach reached over 5,000 residents through various approaches. Additionally, the effort included a statistically valid representative survey and considered similar findings from the Community Health Assessment and the National Cities (Polco) Survey.

The community engagement process was tailored to ensure broad participation from a diverse range of stakeholders. Special

attention was given to include underserved community members in engagement activities. The process was designed to assess general community needs while fostering connections and building relationships with populations that may not be represented in a statistically representative survey or have unique needs and experiences.

Engagement activities included representation on the Community Working Group, key informant interviews, mobile listening sessions, artist-led initiatives, focus groups, and various meetings.

The City collaborated with key partners to enhance outreach, allowing for a deeper community reach. This heightened level of engagement was made possible with the guidance and support of the University of Montana's WA Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research, the Bureau for Business and Economic Research, the Co-Lab for Civic Imagination, Arts Missoula, Missoula Public Health, and All Nations Health Center.

## Community Working Group

A Community Working Group was formed to provide input throughout the planning process. This group, formed of 16 Missoulians who were selected through an open application process, represented a diversity of voices and perspectives. The goals of the group were to ensure that the PROST Plan addresses the needs of the community, provide input and direction throughout the planning process, shape recommendations in the PROST Plan, and serve as ambassadors for the PROST Plan.

## Community Input Activities

**Key Informant Interviews.** To kick off the PROST Plan, Parks and Recreation staff conducted 13 one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders. These interviews helped to gather and frame some of the key issues to be explored during the PROST planning process. These interviews gathered information from stakeholders on their experience with Missoula Parks and Recreation as well as the greatest challenges and opportunities.

**Focus Groups.** At the outset of the project, partners from the University of Montana facilitated six focus groups that included 45 participants, with each group covering a theme. The six themes were current program users, frequency users, youth and family services, business and community leaders, equity/community access, and climate resiliency and conservation (see Appendix E for full report).

**2024 Missoula Parks and Recreation Survey (BBER Survey).** The University of Montana's Bureaus of Business and Economic Research (BBER) administered a statistically representative survey within the larger Plan boundaries. This survey was built on the 2018

statistically valid survey and received 544 completed questionnaires (see Appendix E for a summary of BBER survey results).

**Online Community Survey.** An online survey was distributed via social media, in-person events, email blasts, and word-of-mouth to gather input on the gaps and needs of the PROST system, as well as to establish how well the current system was working for residents. The online survey received 1,478 responses and was open from March to July 2024 (see Appendix E for a summary of the online community survey results).

### Artist-led Engagement and Historically Underserved Communities Engagement.

In order to get input from communities that are historically underserved, the project connected with local artists to hold outreach events. Parks and Recreation staff also provided opportunities for additional engagement. These artist-led outreach opportunities were focused on the following communities: Adults 55+, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and the Hmong community.

**Mobile Listening Sessions.** Project team members and Community Working Group members held 38 mobile listening sessions at existing events and locations throughout Missoula. Over 1,200 participants provided feedback.

**Community Open Houses.** Parks and Recreation hosted a series of community open houses at the Missoula Public Library in partnership with Community Working Group members. These open houses attracted more than 400 participants who engaged in a series of interactive activities.

**Online Interactive Map.** Located on the Engage Missoula website, residents had the opportunity to put pins on an online interactive map. Respondents could put comments on a specific map location,



categorizing their comments under "I like it!," "New idea/proposed project," and "Needs improvement." In total, the online interactive map had 693 comments.

**Online Community Activities.** Paired with each community open house was an online activity that mirrored the open house's interactive activity. This allowed those who could not attend the in-person event to share their feedback.

**Community Workshops.** In Spring 2025, Parks and Recreation staff held multiple user group workshops and reviewed draft plan content and recommendations for input. Workshops were held with youth in Parks programs; high school students; aging adults; people with disabilities; community access representatives and organizations; arts and culture groups; transportation and community planners; business and tourism leaders; state and federal agencies; climate resiliency experts; facilities and land use partners; housing organizations and experts, and other groups.

See Appendix E, Public Engagement Summary for more information.

## Elected and Appointed Bodies

The project team provided updates to the Parks and Recreation Board, the Open Space Advisory Committee, the Conservation Lands Advisory Committee, and the Missoula City Council throughout the planning process.

## Technical Experts

To gather technical input across a variety of topics, the project team had a series of meetings with City of Missoula departments,

Missoula County staff, and stakeholders representing transit and transportation, business and tourism, planning and development, front country recreation land managers and partners, Missoula County Public Schools, recreation user groups, climate and resilience, open space and conservation, access and equity, health, disability, and more.

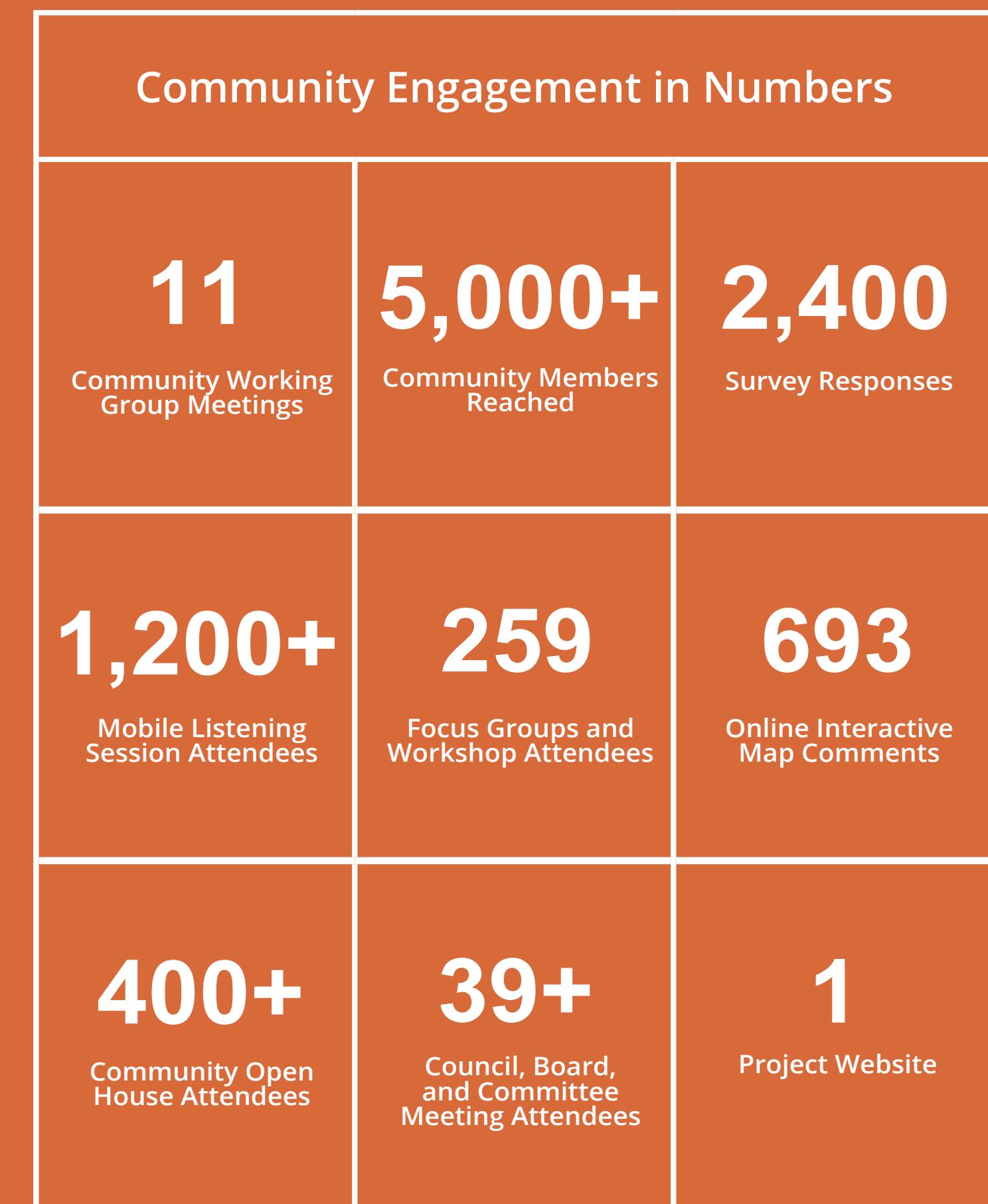
## Public Engagement Overview

Throughout the planning process, the planning team reviewed and integrated data and feedback from other surveys and planning processes. These outside inputs provided additional data points that informed the PROST plan. For example, the National Community Survey from Polco, found that the City's parks and recreation opportunities are highly valued by residents, and Missoula's recreational opportunities, fitness opportunities, and availability of paths and walking trails rank higher than the national average.

As another example, Missoula County recently completed the Community Health Assessment, which included an extensive survey and process to determine social determinants of health. This survey found that green spaces, like public parks, were considered a major strength for Missoula area residents as a social determinant of health.

These inputs, among others, helped to inform findings that steered the PROST Plan and its recommendations and policies.

**Figure 6: Community Engagement in Numbers**





## Key Findings

The following are the key themes from the three rounds of community engagement. For more information on the extensive public engagement process used for the creation of this plan, please refer to Public Engagement and Key Findings in Appendix E. While specific comments made by residents are not featured in this overview, these comments have been integrated into the overall summary of feedback and inform the plan and its implementation.

### Elevating Quality of Life

Parks and Recreation lands and services are key components of Missoulians' quality of life and part of what makes Missoula a great place to live. Residents highlighted the need for a more equitable and comprehensive park system, ensuring that all have access to a nearby park that has quality facilities and accessible recreation programs.

- 77% of residents strongly or somewhat strongly support ensuring neighborhood parks are near their home (BBER Survey).

- 98% of respondents say parks, recreation, and open space are very important to the quality of life in Missoula (Online Community Survey).

### Inclusive Community Building

Parks and Recreation lands and services contribute to inclusive community building, including around arts and culture, and there is a further desire to see more opportunities for community-building spaces, events, and programs. Outreach to underrepresented community members suggested ways that parks and recreation services could work better for their needs, such as providing more spaces for large gatherings, using native plants, using specialty play equipment and public art to represent area culture and history, and incorporating Indigenous place names.

- 85% of residents strongly support or somewhat support ensuring that parks, trails, and natural areas are accessible to people with disabilities (BBER Survey).

- Mobile Listening Sessions found 3 out of the top 5 reasons for using parks are social, including playgrounds, gathering with friends or family, and events in parks.
- Several Key Informant Interviews highlighted the need to focus on equity – including the location and quality of parks – as Missoula grows.

### Connecting Neighborhoods and Services

Residents would like to see an increased focus on providing a connected system with trails and greenways moving people to and through parks and recreation opportunities as well as connecting neighborhoods with schools and areas of business via connections to the community and regional trail system. Additionally, the Community Working Group highlighted the rivers running through the valley as a key component of community scale multi-modal transit, opportunities to protect sensitive lands through land management practices, as well as providing increased access to nature.

- 90% of residents strongly support or somewhat support ensuring neighborhoods are walkable, while 73% strongly or somewhat support ensuring neighborhoods are bikeable (BBER Survey).
- At the community open houses, many comments mentioned connectivity as a top area of improvement.
- "Walking, running, biking, or horseback riding on local trails" was the most popular activity that residents participate in when using the PROST system (Online Community Survey).



### Join us for a Community Open House!

March 5th, 2024  
5:00 - 7:15 pm  
Missoula Public Library

All ages welcome!  
Light refreshments  
will be served.



## Having a Year-Round Facility

There is a need for a year-round facility for programming and gathering, especially during the winter, summer, and other times when recreating outside is limited.

- 61% of residents somewhat or strongly support providing indoor spaces for recreation and fitness (BBER Survey).
- During the stakeholder focus groups, participants mentioned identifying indoor recreational options during adverse weather or during year-round youth programming as a major challenge.

## Maintaining What We Have

Residents reflected appreciation for high-quality parks, with an emphasis on maintaining existing parks, trails, and open space. While there is a desire for new facilities, there is a clear emphasis on maintaining and upgrading smaller neighborhood parks.

- 81% of residents identified maintaining restrooms as a very high or somewhat high priority (BBER Survey).
- 79% of residents identified maintaining the cleanliness of parks as a very high or somewhat high priority (BBER Survey).

## Supporting Climate Action

Residents expressed support for climate-related strategies and projects, such as strategies to mitigate extreme weather and to increase ecosystem services.

- 87% of residents strongly or somewhat support strategies to maintain clean air and water (BBER Survey).
- 90% of residents strongly or somewhat support protecting land for wildlife habitat and environmental reasons (BBER Survey).

- 92% of residents strongly or somewhat support protecting river corridors (BBER Survey).
- 84% of residents strongly or somewhat support improving the urban canopy (street and park trees and native forests).

## Improving Safety

Some residents expressed a concern for safety when visiting local parks or walking or riding on trails, especially after dark. Implementing strategies that promote a sense of community and a feeling of safety, like improved lighting, clear sightlines, strategic landscaping, activation through programming improved amenities as well defining boundaries can be done through physical upgrades and programming.

- 91% of residents strongly or somewhat support ensuring that parks are safe, while 27% of households contained at least one person who identifies not feeling safe as a barrier to using parks, trails, open space, or recreational facilities (BBER Survey).

## Increasing Program Variety

There is a desire for a greater variety of programming focusing on teens, middle-aged adults, and older adults, while the City's childcare and after-school programs remain popular.

- 78% of adults and older adults indicated that they were slightly likely to very likely to use fitness and wellness programs in the upcoming year, compared to only 61% in 2018 (BBER).
- 80% of residents strongly or somewhat support ensuring that families with children have access to out-of-school, after school, and summer programming (BBER Survey).

## Areas of Divided Opinion

There are areas of divided opinion, such as around where e-bikes should be allowed and how to manage dogs in parks and on trails, that will need creative solutions.

- During community open houses, the use of e-bikes was identified as both a challenge and an opportunity for trail use.
- In the open response section of the online community survey, many residents highlighted the need and support for more off-leash and on-leash dog parks, while residents also report off-leash and aggressive dogs as a reason they feel unsafe at local parks.



# CHAPTER 3

# Parks and Recreation Today



## Key Takeaways

- ◊ **Population Growth and Park Needs:** Missoula's projected population growth (to 115,950 by 2045) requires approximately 367 additional acres of parkland to maintain current service levels.
- ◊ **Indoor Recreation Facility Gap:** Unlike peer cities, Missoula lacks indoor recreation centers, a significant service gap given local climate conditions that impacts year-round recreation access.
- ◊ **Urban Forest Challenges:** The urban tree canopy faces decline with removals outpacing plantings by nearly 2:1, threatening a critical climate resilience resource that provides heat reduction, improved air quality, and stormwater management.
- ◊ **Recreation Programming Access:** While offering robust youth programming with \$120,000 in annual scholarships and reduced fees, facility limitations restrict program expansion to fully serve all demographics.



## Population and Demographics

While Missoula has a large population of younger adults, it also has a high percentage of older adults age 65 and over. Currently making up about 17 percent of the population, this age group is projected to increase to roughly 20 percent of the population within 20 years. Longevity has also increased in Missoula, and active adults are generally staying active longer.

### Unique Characteristics

The following are key points related to current demographics in Missoula and their potential implications for PROST Plan recommendations. Missoula's projected population growth over the next twenty years will require additional capacity and increased facilities and recreation services simply to keep pace with growth.

- Between 2010 and 2022, there was an average yearly growth of 1.11 percent, with the highest growth area in the Sxwtpqyen Area.

Figure 7: Projected 2045 Population Growth (Source: LUP Community Profile)

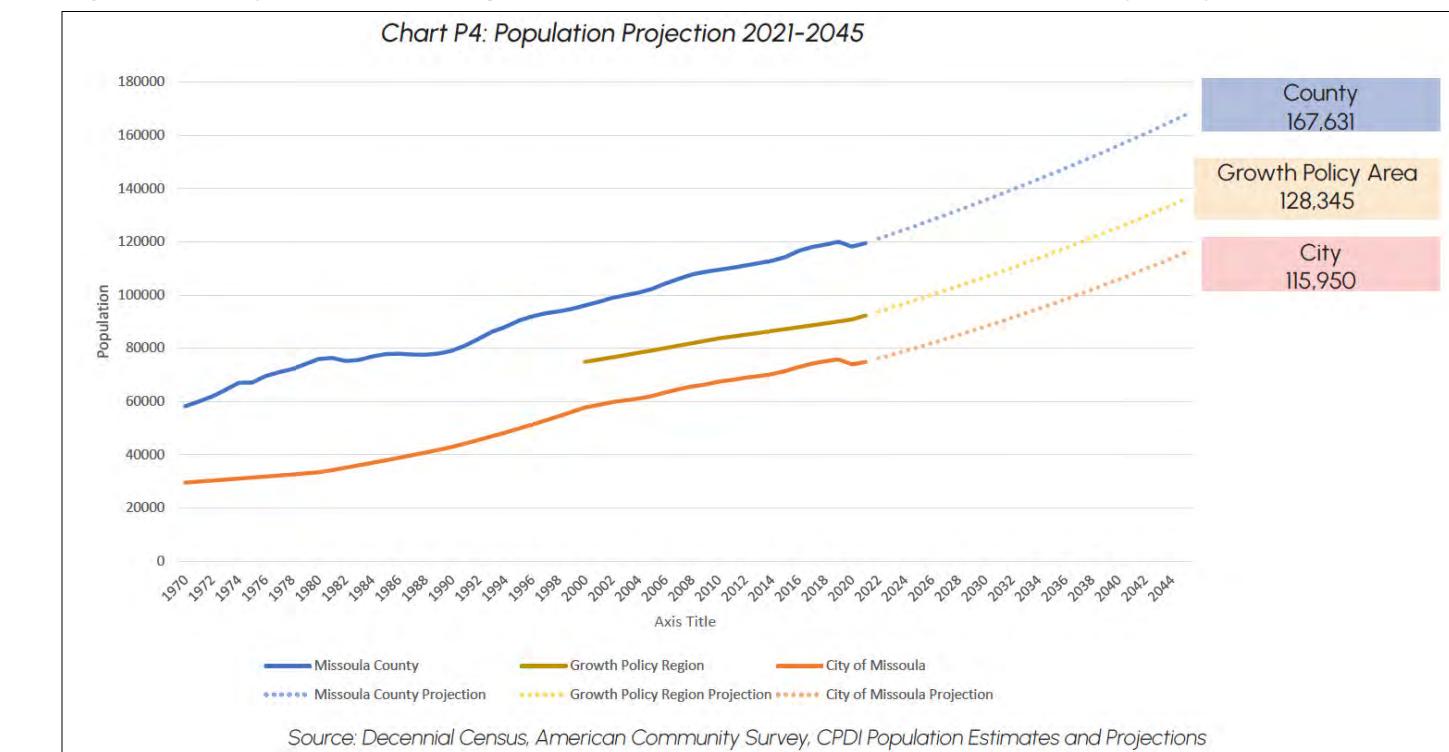
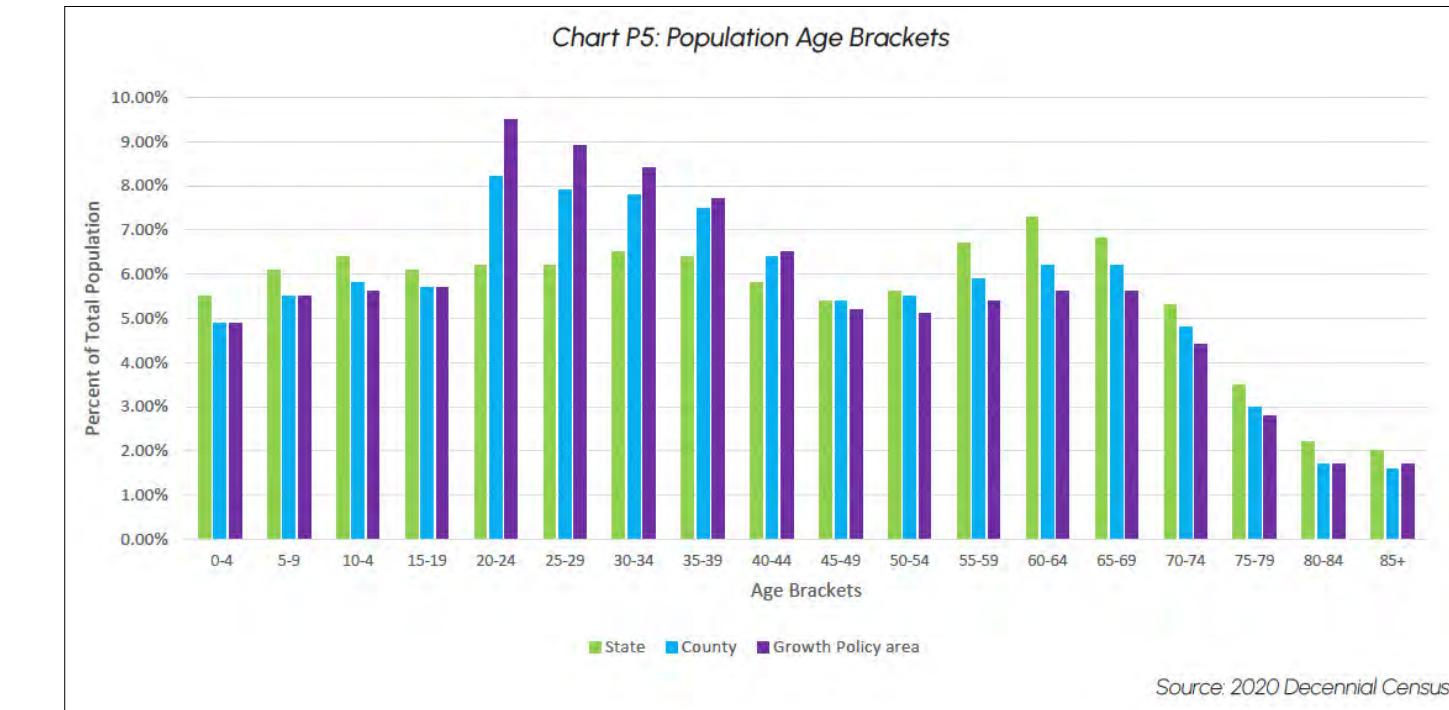


Figure 8: Missoula 2021 Age Brackets (Source: LUP Community Profile)



- Currently, 10 – 12 percent of the population lives with a disability, including 8.8 percent of those under 65. As the population ages, it is likely that this number will rise. The LUP recognizes many of Missoula existing facilities and public spaces do not adequately promote wellness and social connection, leading to social isolation and increased vulnerability for individuals with disabilities and the elderly.
- The overall population of school-age youth is declining, although variations will be seen in individual neighborhoods. Schools that are expected to experience enrollment increases are situated in areas with greater socioeconomic diversity and a range of low to moderate-income housing options.

## Equity Analysis

The following maps from the Our Missoula Land Use Plan show where underserved communities live within the City and highlight the importance of employing an equity lens. These maps are used in Chapter 4 to help pinpoint gaps in park service.

## Demographics

**76,955**

City of Missoula's current population estimate

**93,926**

Land Use Plan area current population estimate

**99,289**

Open Space Plan Boundary current population estimate

**115,950**

City of Missoula's 2045 projected population of (50% increase over current population)

**128,345**

2045 Land Use Plan Area projected population (37% increase over current population)



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*

**Figure 9: Median Household Income, 2020**  
(Source: Our Missoula Equity in Land Use Report)

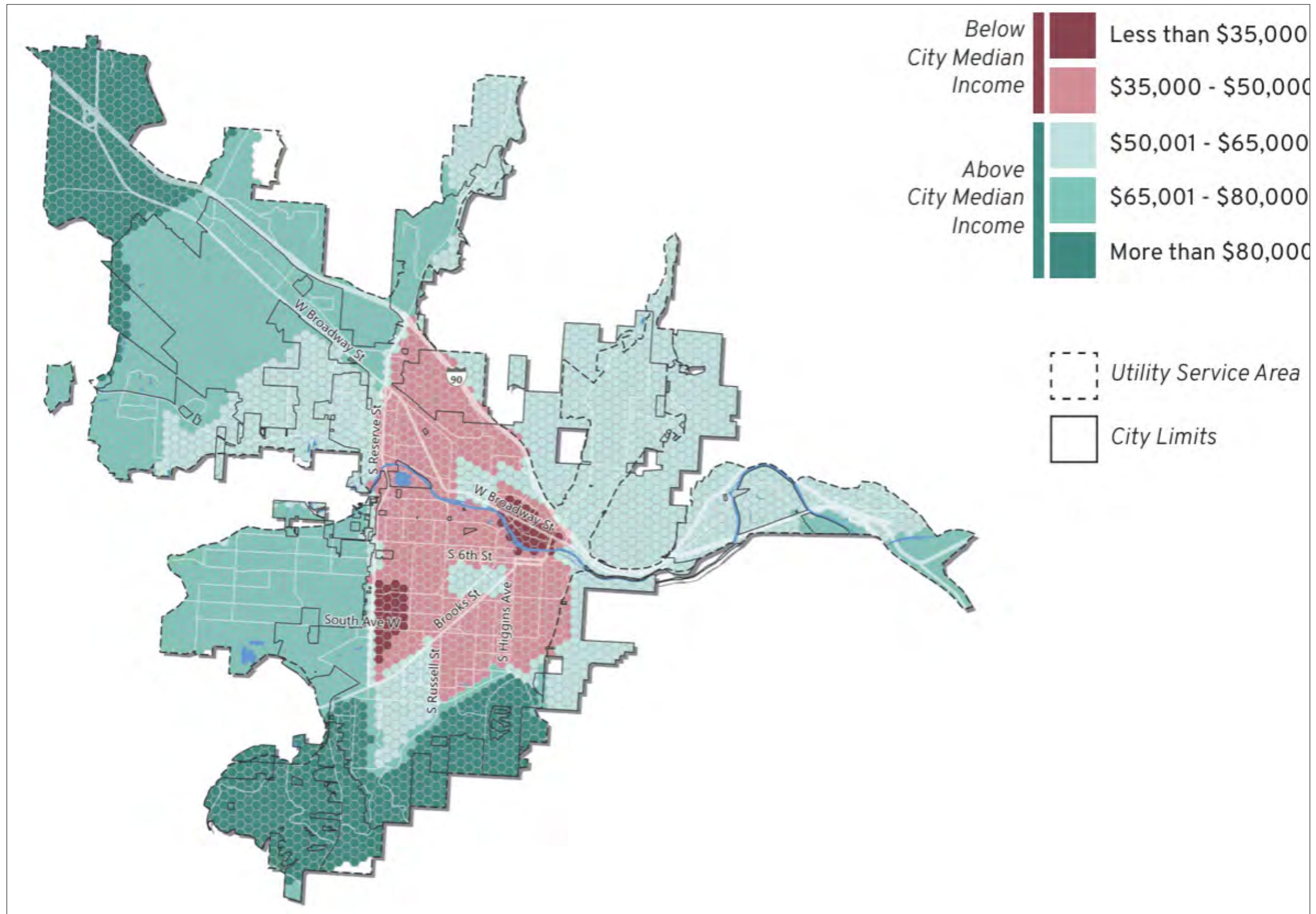


Figure 10: Communities of Color as a Percent of Total Population, 2020 (Source: Our Missoula Equity in Land Use Report)

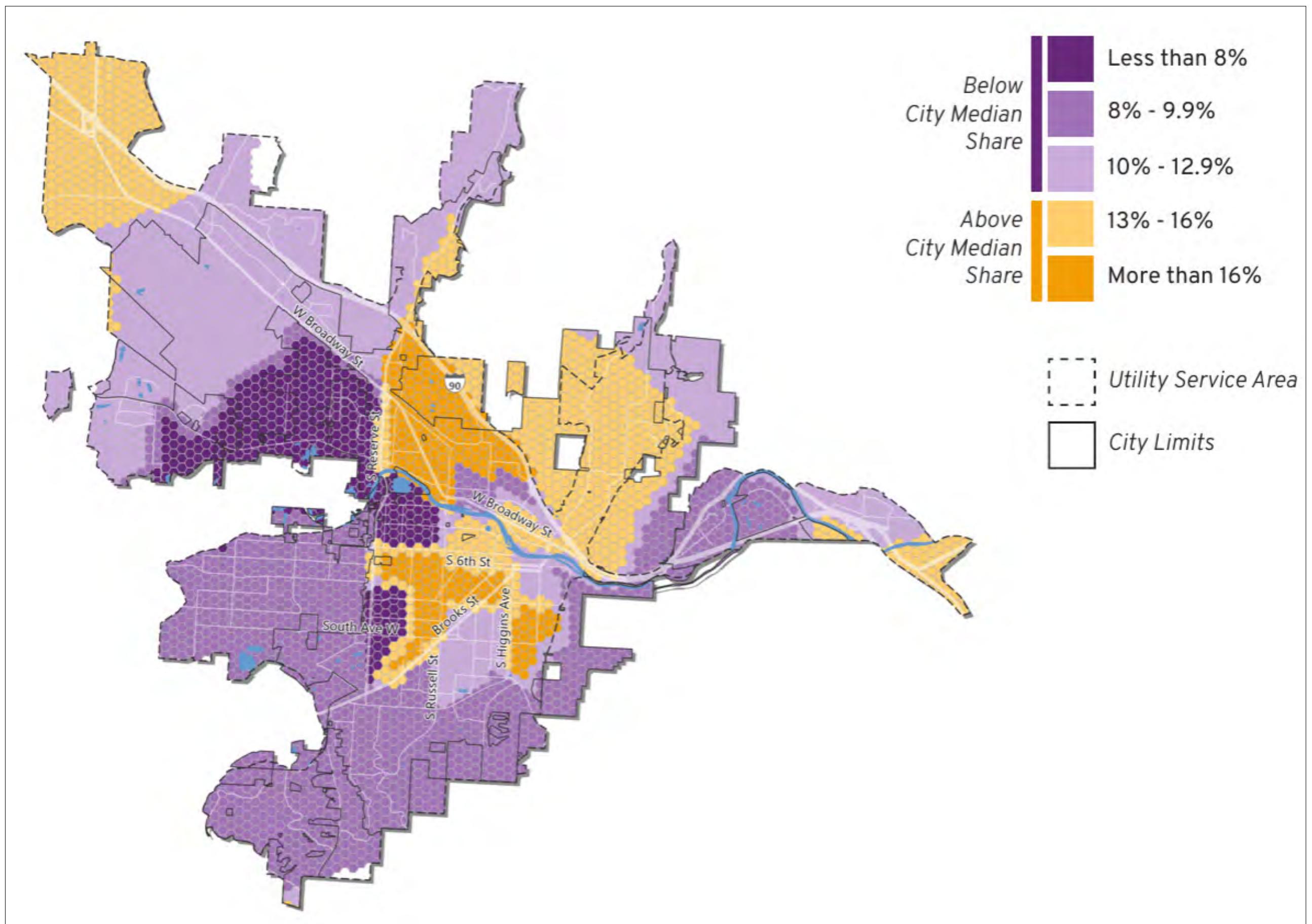
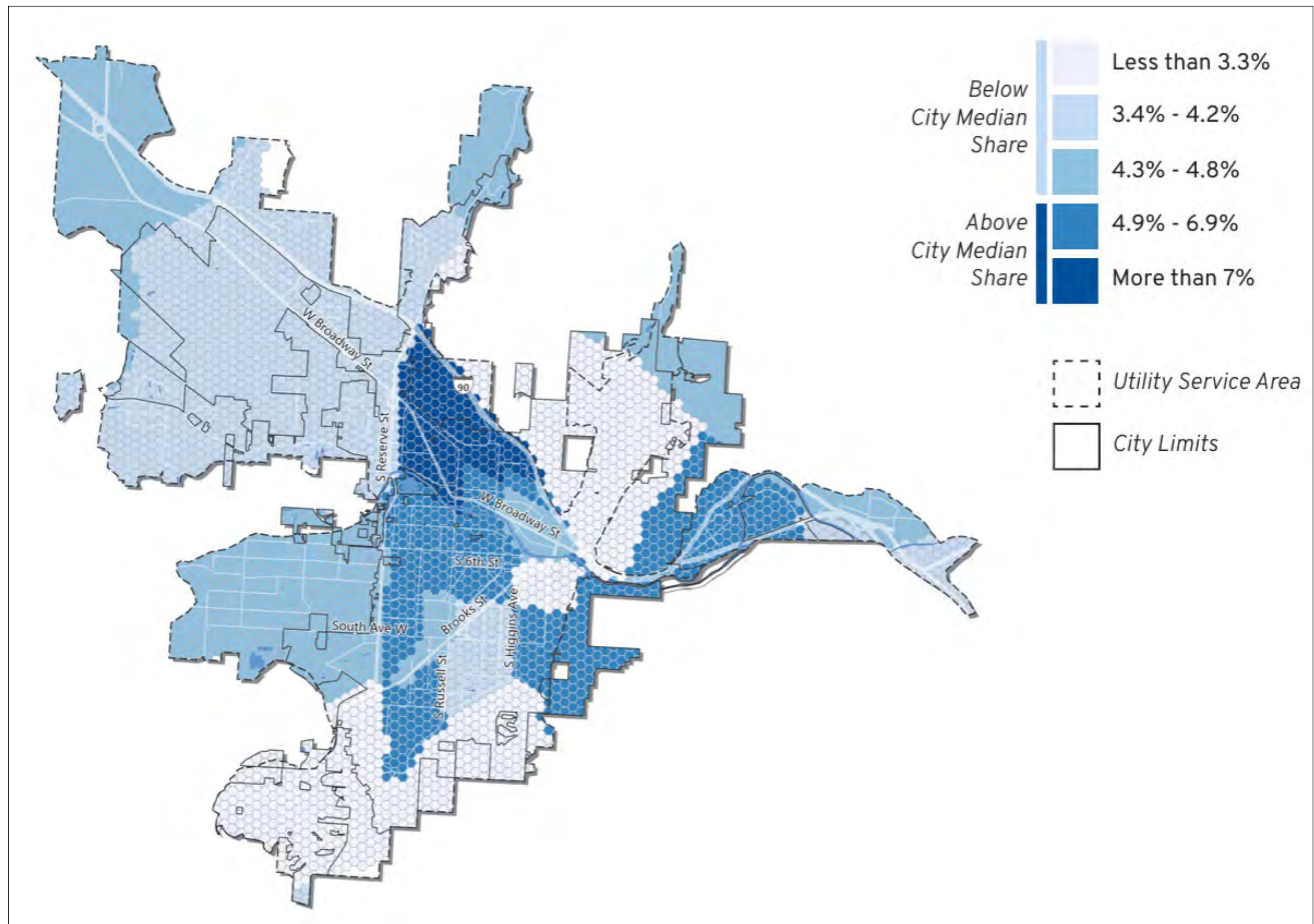


Figure 11: American Indian or Alaska Native as a Percent of Total Population, 2020 (Source: Our Missoula Equity in Land Use Report)





## Highlighting the Current System

Since the adoption of the 2004 Master Parks and Recreation Plan for the Greater Missoula Area, Missoula has developed several notable recreation facilities, including Splash Montana, Currents Aquatic Center, and Fort Missoula Regional Park. This plan has also facilitated the acquisition and improvement of neighborhood parks, the development of miles of paved and natural surface trails, and the creation of new recreational programs for the community.

As of 2025, the system includes just over 500 acres of developed parks, nearly 5,000 acres of conservation lands (such as park preserves, public natural areas, and urban parkland), over 90 miles of trails, and tens of thousands of trees in the urban forest. The system encompasses a variety of settings, ranging from highly developed urban parks to traditional grassy neighborhood parks and expansive natural preserves. It features a diverse trail network that includes miles of paved shared-use paths, as well as natural surface hiking and mountain biking trails.

Many features, facilities, and park amenities within the system are well-designed and generally meet Missoula's recreational needs. However, some components require renovation, replacement, or expansion to address the needs of current and future residents.



## Operations and Administration

### Staffing and Funding of Services

In the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review, the City of Missoula is recognized for providing all the services tracked, unlike a "typical" agency that may offer only a selection of these services.

Compared to typical agencies serving populations between 100,000 and 250,000, Missoula's staffing levels are 14 percent below the median. Additionally, the Department's staffing is 47 percent below the upper quartile, which is a better representation of full-service agencies. The Department's per capita budget is also lower than the national median for agencies serving a similar population size.

The Missoula Parks and Recreation Department offers significant recreational services through its facilities and programming. In 2024, fees from these services comprised 20 percent of the department's revenue. These facilities and programs strive to keep access affordable while maintaining a robust scholarship and sliding fee program, along with ongoing discussions around cost recovery goals.

Furthermore, according to Missoula Childcare Advantage, the city only meets 47 percent of the demand for childcare. The Department plays a vital role in filling this gap by providing after-school and out-of-school programming services for school-aged children.

Due to its small size and distance from commercial centers, Missoula faces higher costs for materials and services. To offset

this, the Department has in-sourced certain functions, such as milling wood from local sources, to reduce costs and ensure quality.

Additionally, the Department employs landscape architects and planners who can manage planning and design tasks. This includes staff with legal training or relevant certifications. The Department can design many small and medium-sized parks and trail projects in-house, allowing for more extensive community engagement at a lower cost than hiring outside consultants.

According to data analysis, the Department operates effectively and efficiently with its existing resources, budget, and staffing. It has successfully secured alternative funding, leveraged existing financing, and excelled in fee-for-service initiatives.

The PROST Plan outlines the community's priorities for existing funds while positioning the Department for future funding opportunities as they become available.

# Lands, Facilities, and Trails

## Parklands

Missoula has just over 500 acres of developed park land, spread throughout the valley in 68 parks. These parks range from small pocket parks that serve a portion of a neighborhood to a large regional park that serves the entire community and regional visitors. Missoula's parks provide a variety of park amenities, including social areas like picnic pavilions, athletic fields, sport courts, dog off leash parks, trails, playgrounds, natural areas, and more.

Table 3, on the next page, provides the various existing park classifications and some of their characteristics, including the definition, size, and service area. The full list of parklands can be found in Appendix A, and the Park Development Guidelines document can be found in Appendix C.

### Parkland Comparisons

The City of Missoula currently has 10.68 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, slightly above the median for similar-sized agencies, according to the NRPA 2024 Agency Performance Review (See Table 1). This includes developed parks and selected non-park preserves for comparability and is based on the population of the municipal area. To consistently align with park metrics data, the inventory includes developed parks, conservation lands categorized as urban parkland, and public natural areas. Conservation easements and park preserves are not included, with the exception of the Waterworks Hill Trailhead which includes a high-use accessible public trailhead and connected trails.

In addition to parks, schools across Missoula's six school districts, and other public agency-managed facilities and parkland play a complementary role in providing access to green spaces. Many of these areas support recreation programming and social gatherings, but public access and development varies between properties and may not be consistent over time, therefore those lands are not counted in the inventory.

To maintain the current level of service of 10.68 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, the city needs to acquire an additional 367 acres of parkland and non-preserve conservation lands by 2045, as projected in the City's Land Use Plan. These new lands will primarily consist of developed parks and non-preserve conservation areas, focusing on filling gaps in community and neighborhood parks to serve new growth. The goal is to ensure that local residents have access to these parks within a 10-minute walk or roll. The new acreage may include additional developed parks to create connections, expand existing sites, or provide space for recreational facilities. Partnering with other land holders, such as schools, Missoula County, or others, to protect public access and develop recreational amenities to serve neighboring residents should be explored.

Table 2 shows an overview of the current City parklands, highlighting the number of parks in each park type and the total acreage. The full park inventory is located in Appendix A.

**Table 1: Acres of Parkland per 1,000 Residents, NRPA**

	Agencies Serving 50,000 to 99,999 people	Agencies Serving 100,000 to 250,000 people
Lower Quartile	4.80	4.40
Median	10.20	7.00
Upper Quartile	17.40	15.50
Missoula Parkland	10.68	

*Note: Acres per 1,000 residents were determined by dividing the current acreage of all publicly accessible City parkland by the current population of Missoula, then multiplying by 1,000.*

**Table 2: Parkland Inventory Overview**

Park Type	Number of Parks	Total Acreage
Regional Parks	1	231.0
Community Parks	4	150.6
Neighborhood Parks	36	150.5
Special Use Parks	11	43.9
Pocket Parks	17	19.7
Linear Parks	11	24.3
Total	80	620.0



## Community Voices

76% of respondents strongly or somewhat strongly support ensuring new housing or commercial development provides adequate access to parks, trails, and green spaces (BBER).

90% of residents somewhat support or strongly support ensuring that our neighborhoods are walkable (BBER Survey).

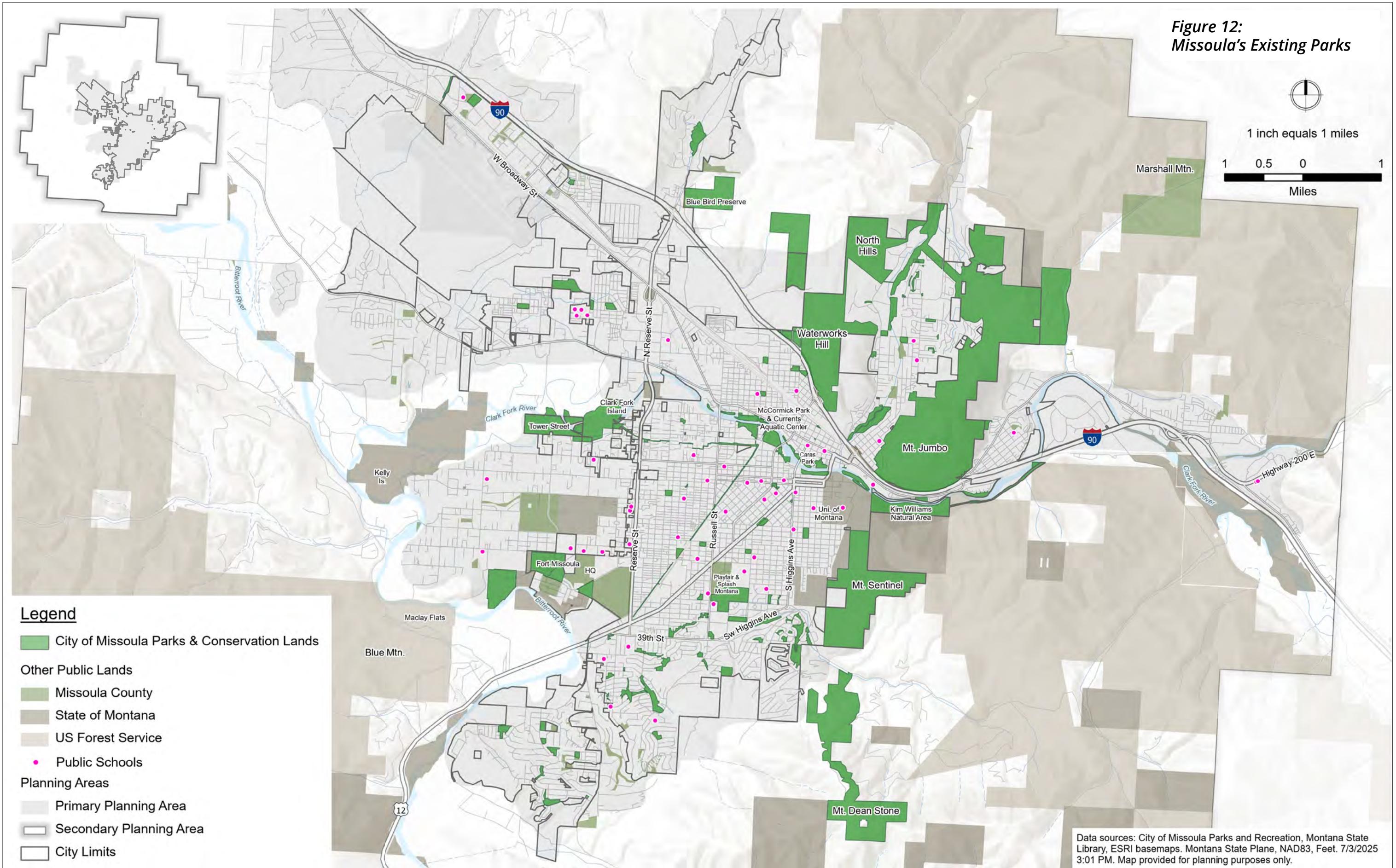
77% of respondents strongly or somewhat strongly support ensuring neighborhood parks are near home (BBER Survey).

85% of respondents strongly or somewhat strongly support ensuring that parks, trails, and natural areas are accessible to people with disabilities (BBER Survey).

**Table 3: Park Classification Overview**

Park Type	Definition	Size	Service Area	Park Type	Definition	Size	Service Area
<b>Neighborhood Parks</b>	Neighborhood parks provide close-to-home public spaces to meet recreation and social needs for nearby residents to walk, play, exercise and be outdoors. Park users typically live within walking and bicycling distance. Some neighborhood parks incorporate natural areas, such as wooded areas, adding to their overall size. Neighborhood parks are typically surrounded by public streets or trails.	Desired size is 5 acres. In the highest density residential areas, at least 2 acres should be provided.	½-mile in medium density residential areas and ¼-mile in the highest density residential areas	<b>Regional Parks</b>	Regional parks are unique large parks that provide regional attractions or protect cultural, historic, or natural resources of regional significance. These parks serve the greatest geographical area, attracting visitors from across the city and the greater region who tend to visit for longer durations. Regional parks typically include a variety of specialized facilities and large group gathering areas.	Desired minimum size is 100 acres, with 200+ preferable.	1 ½ miles. Regional parks may also serve as community parks to residents within 1 ½ miles and neighborhood parks to residents within ½ mile.
<b>Pocket Parks</b>	Pocket parks, sometimes called mini-parks, are small parks that may serve a portion of the surrounding neighborhood. Pocket parks may function as small neighborhood parks or simply provide urban green space. Pocket parks can be essential in serving densely populated portions of the city where neighborhood park level of service cannot be met due to lack of available lands. In these situations, development of pocket parks with neighborhood park amenities should be considered.	Typically less than 2 acres. When developed appropriately, pocket parks can serve as neighborhood parks.	¼ to ½ mile.	<b>Special Use Parks</b>	Special use parks are typically focused on a specific recreation facility or use, though they may include supporting features and amenities. Examples are urban plazas, gardens or arboreta, bike parks, stand-alone indoor facilities, stand-alone boat ramps, etc.	Depends on the special use. Site should be adequate to accommodate the desired special use and associated support facilities.	Citywide
<b>Community Parks</b>	Community parks are designed to serve multiple neighborhoods, drawing visitors from several neighborhoods or across Missoula for their features, facilities or programs. These parks serve a broad range of activities and users, support group gatherings, provide space for programs and events and often include specialized recreation facilities. Community parks are generally designed to also serve as neighborhood parks for those living nearby.	Desired minimum size is 25 acres.	1 ½ mile. Community parks may also serve as neighborhood parks to residents within ½ mile.	<b>Linear Parks</b>	Linear parks are longer than they are wide and typically include trails. These parks may follow linear corridors such as creeks, rail lines and utility corridors or they may simply provide connections between parks or to other destinations. Linear parks may be developed or natural in character, depending on the corridor. If the corridor is wide enough, linear parks may include park amenities and recreation facilities.	Varies, depends on corridor type, as well as width and available length.	Citywide

*Figure 12:  
Missoula's Existing Parks*



## Open Space

Open Space in Missoula, in accordance with definitions found in Montana Code Annotated (MCA 76-6-104(3)), generally includes parks, trail corridors, greenbelts or greenways, conservation lands, riparian areas, and agricultural lands that are provided or preserved for public benefit (Missoula Municipal Code 12.56.015). The City protects open space through the use of multiple funding sources, including open space bond funds.

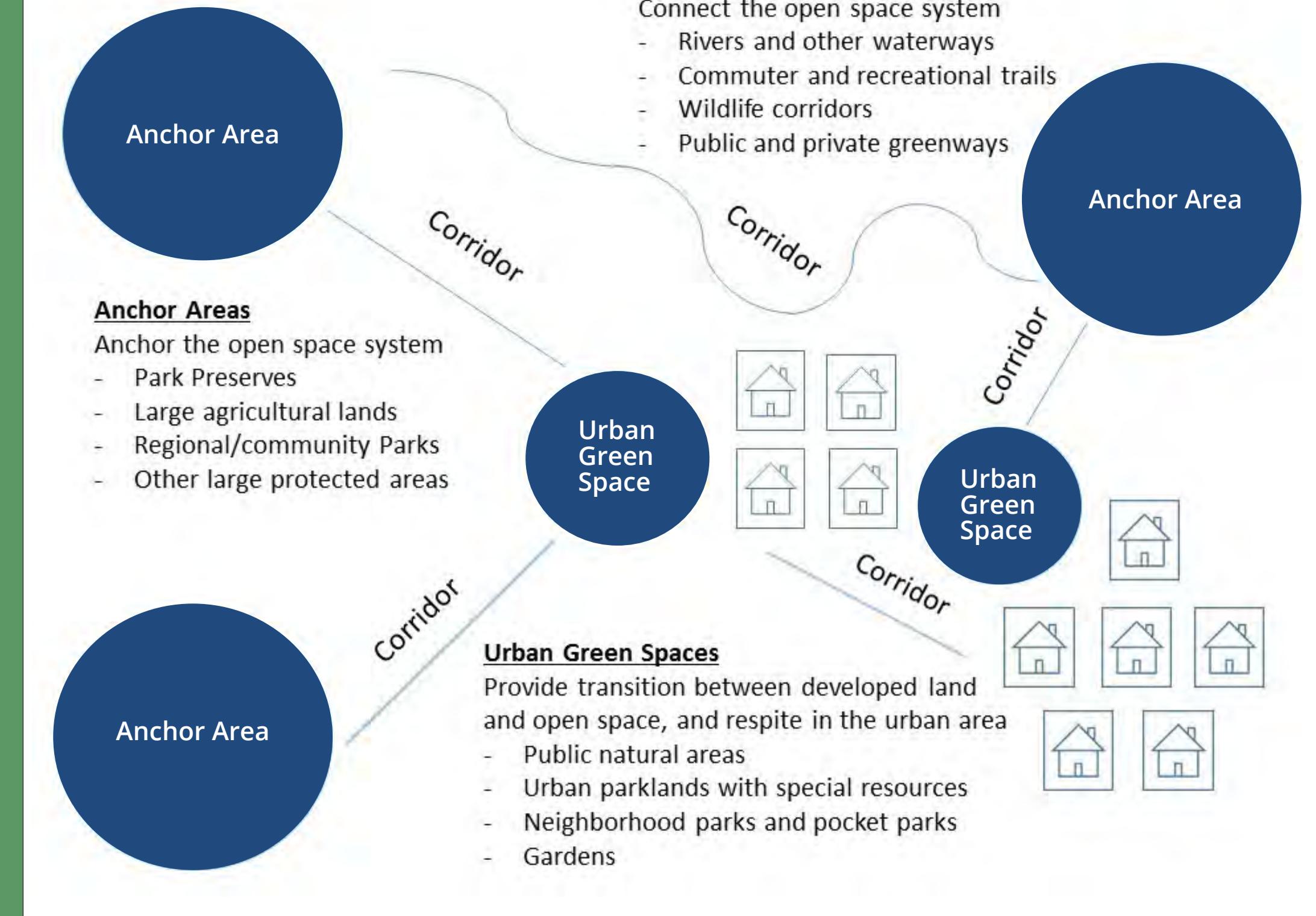
Since 1995, Missoula has followed an open space plan to guide protection efforts. In 2019, the City and County jointly updated and adopted the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan. This plan addresses the protection of open space, trails, and certain parklands, and serves as a guiding document for the PROST Plan, particularly for actions related to Open Space Bond funding.

The 2019 Open Space Plan guides the Open Space Advisory Committee and City Council in prioritizing the preservation and acquisition of open space in the Missoula urban planning area. Open space bond funds can protect and improve designated lands, while the Conservation and Stewardship Mill Levy (passed with the 2018 Open Space Bond) supports improvements to existing open spaces.

The document establishes a protection model including: anchor areas (large core protection zones), urban green spaces (transitions between developed land and open space), and corridors (connections for wildlife and human use). The Plan identifies “cornerstones” representing the highest conservation priorities in the greater Missoula area. (Figure 13 and 14).

As a recent plan, the recommendations in the 2019 Plan will carry forward into this PROST Plan.

*Figure 13: Model of Open Space in Missoula Urban Area (from 2019 Open Space Plan)*





## Community Voices

**92% of residents somewhat support or strongly support protecting river corridors and ensuring natural areas are available to visit and recreate in (BBER).**

**90% of residents somewhat support or strongly support protecting land for wildlife habitat and environmental reasons (BBER).**

**87% of residents somewhat support or strongly support protecting working lands, such as farms, forests, and agricultural lands (BBER).**

**98% of respondents said parks, recreation, and open space are very important or important to the quality of life in Missoula (Online Survey).**

The Conservation Lands Program within the Ecosystem Services Division manages existing natural habitats and ecosystems, as well as significant visual, historic, cultural, or archaeological resources within the city and surrounding areas. While most of these lands are owned by the City, the program also manages some land owned by other entities for various public uses and benefits, including parks and riparian areas along the Clark Fork and Bitterroot rivers, as well as Rattlesnake Creek. These lands provide opportunities for interaction with nature and cultural experiences, and may include recreation facilities such as trails, trailheads, and picnic areas. Together, these important lands create the city's conservation lands system. (Figure 15).

Table 4 shows an overview of the current City Conservation Lands, highlighting the number of parklands in each type and the total acreage. This is utilizing the classifications used previous to the adoption of this plan.

**Table 4: Conservation Lands Inventory Overview**

Type	Number	Total Acreage
Park Preserves	9	4,429
Public Natural Areas	14	101
Urban Parkland with Special Resources	19	185
Conservation Easements	8	680
Total	50	5,405

The following table shows the updated Conservation Land types and definitions, and includes some of their characteristics, size, and service area. The full parkland inventory as of adoption of this plan is located in Appendix A and includes these new designations.

**Table 5: Conservation Lands Classification Overview**

Parkland Type	Definition	Size	Service Area
<b>Park Preserves</b>	Park Preserves are natural areas generally exceeding 100 acres that protect significant community or regional natural resources. These areas offer nature-oriented recreation while prioritizing habitat preservation and balancing resource protection with public use. Preserves typically feature natural surface trails with signage, and some include preexisting single-lane dirt roads established before City acquisition. They remain largely undeveloped except at designated High Use Outdoor Sites or access points, which may include basic amenities such as parking, signage, trash receptacles, and vault toilets.	100+ acres	Citywide/Regional
<b>Community Natural Areas</b>	Community Natural Areas protect ecosystem functions and natural values, including significant vegetation, important habitats, scenic areas, and zones that contribute to urban shaping and buffering. These areas provide stormwater management, wildland-urban interface buffers, and opportunities for nature-oriented recreation and education. Management emphasizes resource protection with appropriate public access, with development levels matching public use intensity while preserving key resource values.	10+ acres	1 ½ miles and can serve as a community park to residents within 1 ½ miles if developed as a high use site with context sensitive amenities that support recreation and conservation.
<b>Neighborhood Natural Areas</b>	Smaller sites that provide habitat patches, protect natural resources or provide ecosystem functions. Level of development is generally low since the sites are small.	Typically less than 10 acres	½ mile and can serve as a community park to residents within 1 ½ miles if developed as a high use site with context sensitive amenities that support recreation and conservation.
<b>High Use Site Overlay</b>	The High Use Outdoor Site Overlay identifies areas within conservation lands that are developed to support public access to outdoor recreation and may include appropriate recreational facilities. These areas are located outside of sensitive resource zones. High use areas may be closed seasonally for management reasons.		

Figure 14: Open Space Cornerstones per the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan

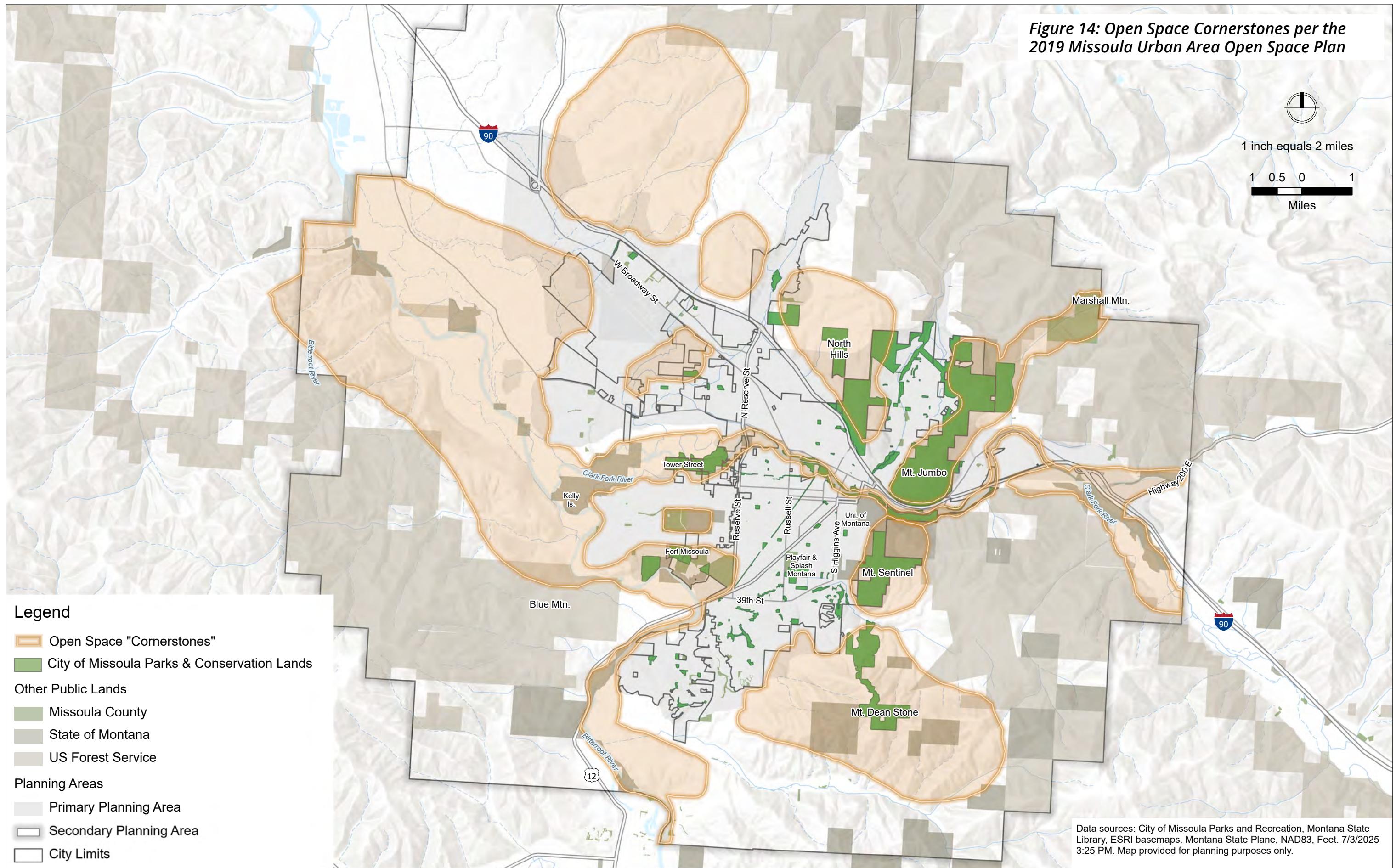
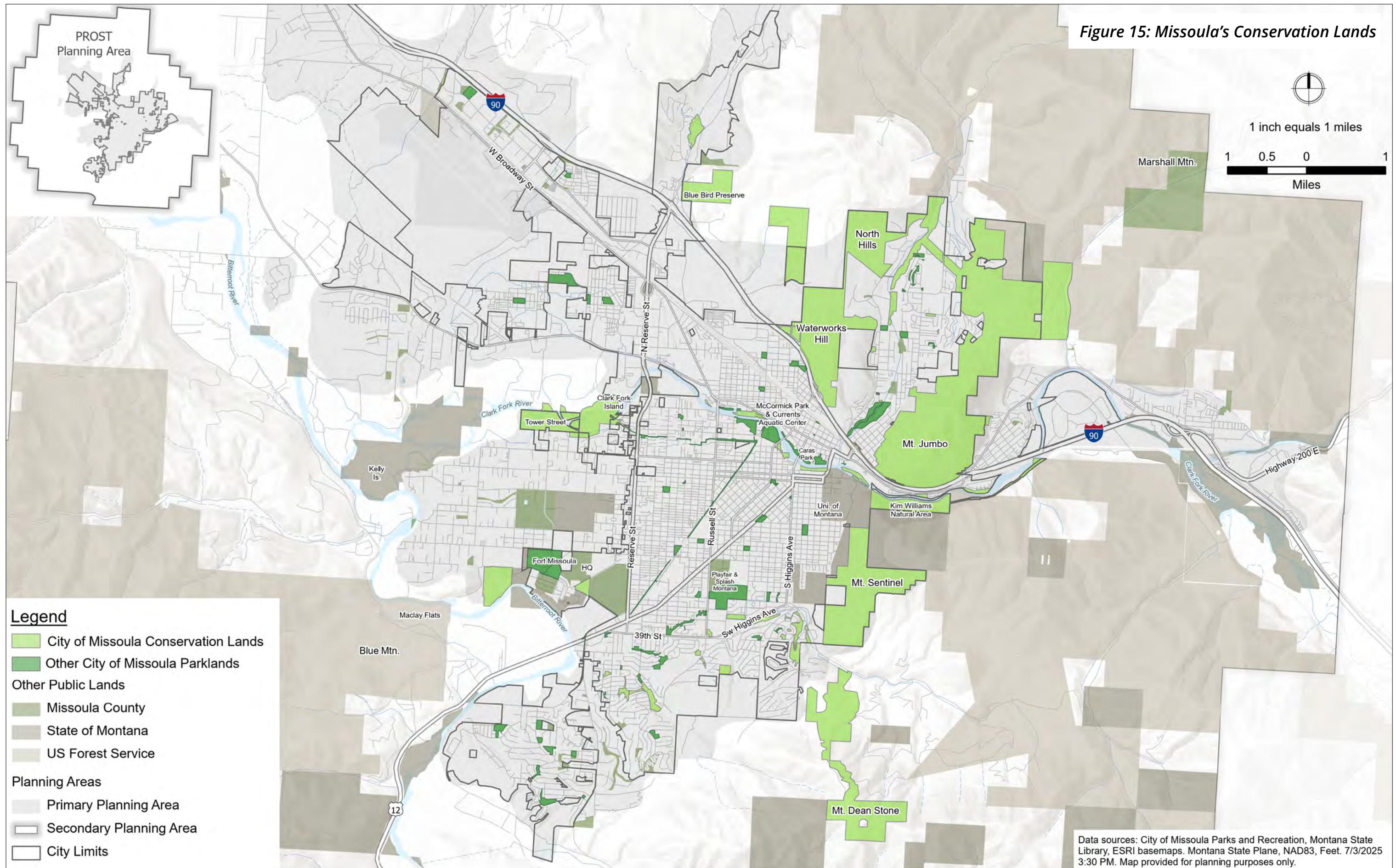


Figure 15: Missoula's Conservation Lands





## Community Voices

82% of respondents strongly or somewhat support improving the urban canopy (BBER).

Members of the Focus Groups and Informant Interviews also mentioned the urban forest as one of the most valuable resources in the city.

## Urban Forest

The Urban Forestry Program within the Ecosystem Services Division manages Missoula's public trees in parks, conservation lands, river corridors, streets, and boulevards. The program works with private developers to plan street trees in rights-of-way, parks, and common areas. Currently, Urban Forestry maintains 35,000+ public trees (likely an underestimate based on incomplete inventory) and partners with Trees for Missoula (a Climate Smart Missoula program) to advocate for urban forestry initiatives.

Missoula's urban forest faces critical challenges: limited species diversity, aging tree population, and removal rates outpacing plantings by nearly 2:1. This trend poses an immediate citywide concern.

The tree canopy is essential to Missoula's climate resilience strategy, providing heat mitigation, improved air quality, stormwater management, and carbon sequestration. Trees promote shade equity during increasingly hot summers and contribute to the city's character. Additional benefits include reduced cooling costs, decreased pollution, improved mental health, and lower crime rates. The 2015 Urban Forest Management Plan guides these efforts.

Trees deliver multiple benefits beyond oxygen production, according to Arbor Day Foundation:

- **Ecological:** supporting biodiversity, wildlife habitat, improved watersheds, and climate resilience.
- **Social:** creating more livable neighborhoods, reducing stress, improving physical and mental health.
- **Economic:** increasing property values, lowering energy costs, and generating \$2-5 return for every dollar invested in tree planting and care.

## Trails

Trails and pathways are highly valued components in Missoula's PROST system, serving both recreational purposes and providing transportation access to parks, facilities, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, community hubs, programs, and events.

These trails benefit the community by offering convenient, active transportation options throughout the Missoula Valley. They reduce vehicular traffic and improve air quality by enabling car-free travel. Trails also function as wildlife conservation and historical preservation corridors, stimulate local economies, provide safe routes for commuting, and promote active lifestyles for all ages.

The trail system presents opportunities to attract tourism through various connections, from multi-day backpacking loops to urban cycling routes. Throughout the system, there are a variety of trail types, defined in Table 6 on the next page.

These include nearly 20 miles of regional trails that connect key regional destinations; 5 miles of community trails that connect the broader trail network and community destinations; 5 miles of neighborhood trails that are usually located within a neighborhood; connector trails that connect to other forms of transportation or trail systems; and 63 miles of recreation trails that are typically located within parks, conservation lands, and open space.

Tables 7-9 provide information on the current inventory of trails publicly owned and maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department. The map that follows depicts the system. Note that this inventory does not include onsite pedestrian circulation systems and paths of travel, nor does it include on-street bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

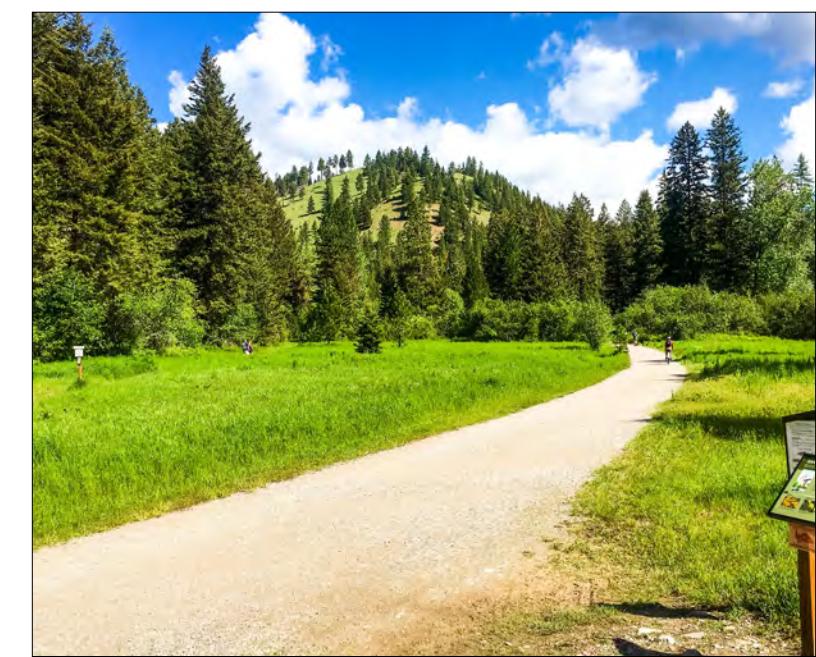


Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust

**Table 6: Trail Typology**

Type	Characteristics
<b>Regional Trails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spans across multiple place types and neighborhoods</li> <li>Connects to multiple regional destinations</li> <li>Planned route extends beyond the Missoula planning area boundaries</li> <li>Managed and designed for year-round commuting</li> </ul>
<b>Community Trails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typically spans multiple neighborhoods or place types</li> <li>Connects to the broader trail network and community destinations</li> <li>Typically more than <math>\frac{1}{2}</math>-mile long</li> <li>Managed and designed for year-round commuting</li> </ul>
<b>Neighborhood Trails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Located within a distinct neighborhood or place types</li> <li>May or may not connect to the broader trail network</li> <li>Typically more than <math>\frac{1}{4}</math>-mile long</li> <li>Often performs as a safe route to school or park</li> </ul>
<b>Connector Trails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Located within a distinct neighborhood or place Type</li> <li>May connect another active transportation facility (trail, transit, sidewalk etc.)</li> <li>May be public or HOA owned with public access allowed</li> <li>Typically short segments, less than <math>\frac{1}{4}</math> mile long</li> </ul>
<b>Recreational Trails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typically located within parks, conservation lands and other open space properties</li> <li>May be shared or single use</li> </ul>

Also of considerable importance is the way the trail system currently connects to, and is complimented by, the city's extensive on-street bike facility and sidewalk network. While these important routes may not be part of a traditional trail system, they are a critical piece of the multi-modal puzzle and provide safe, human-powered routes through and across the city.

### Regional and Community (Commuter) Trails

Several major trails run through Missoula, both extending beyond city limits and connecting different parts of the city. The Milwaukee Trail serves as a cross-town commuting and recreation corridor that follows the Clark Fork River through central Missoula. This trail connects to other key routes including the Bitterroot Trail and Ron's River Trail, while linking neighborhoods, downtown, the University of Montana, and numerous parks.

The Milwaukee Trail is also a segment of the national Great American Rail-Trail, which will eventually span more than 3,700 miles from Washington D.C. to Washington State by connecting over 150 existing trails. Several gaps within the PROST planning boundaries remain priorities for completion.

The Bitterroot Trail extends from northern Missoula to over 50 miles south of Hamilton, generally following the historic Bitterroot Branch railroad and Highway 93 South. This trail connects multiple Bitterroot Valley communities to Missoula.



## Community Voices

**73%** of respondents were very or somewhat satisfied with the quality of trails in the Missoula valley (BBER).

**84%** of respondents strongly or somewhat support ensuring that recreational trails are near home (BBER).

**Table 7: Missoula PROST Trail and Trailhead Classifications and Inventory**

Trail	Miles	Trailhead	Number
Regional	19.91	Primary	13
Community	4.17	Secondary	22
Neighborhood	4.85	Local Access	114
Connector	4.00	Other	1
Recreational	63.23		
Other Trail	0.10		
<b>Total</b>	<b>96.25</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>

*Of this inventory, 2.35 miles are lighted and 11.97 miles have intermittent lighting*

**Table 8: Missoula Trail Surface Type**

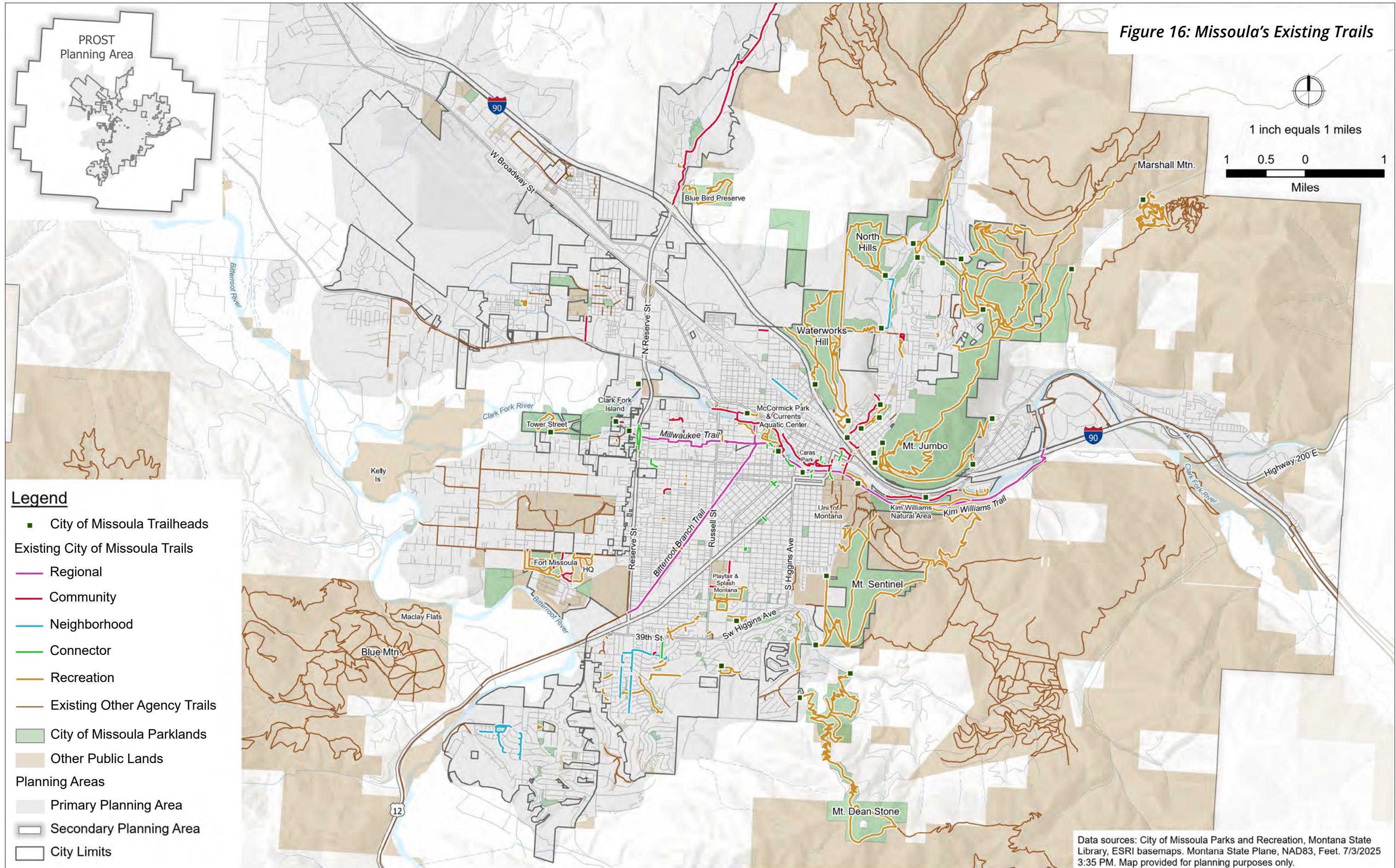
Surface Type	Miles
Paved	22.03
Gravel	13.00
Natural	61.17
Other	0.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>96.25</b>

**Table 9: Missoula PROST Allowed Trail Use by Miles**

Use Type	Yes	No	Yes % of Total
Bike	60.73	35.52	63%
Equestrian	48.01	48.24	50%
Pedestrian	94.17	2.08	98%



Figure 16: Missoula's Existing Trails



# Recreation Programs and Facilities

Recreation programming activates parks and public spaces while promoting community cohesion, health, wellness, and personal growth. It also provides essential after-school and out-of-school childcare for school-age children. The Parks and Recreation Department facilitates recreation through multiple approaches: directly offering programs, collaborating with partners to host events, and providing facilities for outside organizations such as sports leagues and community gatherings.

The Parks and Recreation Department offers programming in the following areas, shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Recreation Programming Areas**

Adult/ Teen Recreation Programming	Youth Recreation Programming	Outdoor Recreation Programming	Runs & Special Events
Active Adults	Afterschool/ School's Out	All-Abilities Inclusive Programming	Montana Senior Olympics
Coffee Walks	Community Schools	Yoga in the Parks	Bill Phelps Kids' Fishing Day
Adult/ Teen Sports	Preschool	Ropes Course	Little Dipper Kids' Trail Run
Teen Workreation	Youth Sports	Folf in the Parks	Run for the Trees
Aquatics	Zootown Derailleurs Cycling	Adventure-Based Programs	Fall Family Fest
	Summer Camps	Backpacking and River Based	Volunteer Events
	Swim Lessons		Drop In Programs

## Outdoor Recreation Amenities

According to NRPA Performance Review benchmarks, Missoula has adequate coverage for dog parks, playgrounds, tennis courts, basketball courts, volleyball courts, splash pads, leisure pools, and pickleball courts when compared to median residents-per-facility ratios for similar-sized agencies. However, Missoula falls below comparable agencies in soccer/multi-use rectangular fields and skate parks.

While these national comparisons provide useful context, they don't account for Missoula's unique character, local participation rates, or amenities offered by other providers such as Missoula County Public Schools. County facilities within the planning area contribute an additional 19 diamond fields, significantly increasing overall

inventory, though they add fewer rectangular fields. Importantly, the condition of amenities must also be considered.

A detailed assessment of City-managed facilities is available in Appendix A. Additionally, the City of Missoula also maintains 36 picnic shelters/pavilions

throughout the developed park system. These facilities range in size and function and support smaller gatherings up to large city-wide events. Location and current condition data for these facilities can also be found in Appendix A.

**Table 11: NRPA Outdoor Amenities compared to Existing Missoula's Amenities (Population estimate for Missoula is consistent with Open Space Plan Boundary)**

Outdoor Park Amenity	% of agencies that have amenity	Median # of Residents per Amenity	# in Missoula	# in Missoula Parks Planning area (County lands)	Missoula # of Residents per amenity (City Lands)	Missoula # of Residents per amenity (City and County Lands)
Pickleball Courts	42%	17,240	12		8,274	8,274
Volleyball Courts	23%	26,612	10		9,929	9,929
Outdoor Full Basketball Courts	84%	26,612	15	1	6,619	6,206
Tennis Courts	72%	10,605	30		3,310	3,310
Baseball/ Softball Diamond Field	85%	3,675	25	19	3,972	2,257
Multi-Use Rectangular	83%	4,070	15	2	6,619	5,841
Skate Parks	46%	60,904	1		99,289	99,289
Dog Parks	68%	55,135	5		19,858	19,858
Playgrounds	93%	3,707	42	4	2,364	2,158
Splash Pads	23%	54,100	6		16,548	16,548
Disc Golf Courses	20%	58,603	1	1	99,289	49,645

## Recreation Facilities

Table 12 below provides comparisons for major recreational facility types.

The Parks and Recreation Department manages several major recreation facilities:

- Currents Aquatic Center:** An accessible indoor facility in McCormick Park serving over 80,000 swims annually. Features include a children's water playground, fitness pool, two water slides, spa, event rooms, and locker facilities.
- Splash Montana:** An accessible outdoor water park in Playfair Park operating June through early September with 80,000+ annual visits. Includes three-story waterslides, zero-depth entry pool, lazy river with wild river branch, spray ground, 50-meter pool, concessions, lounging areas, rental cabanas, and locker rooms.
- Fort Missoula Regional Park:** A regional park within a historic landscape featuring extensive sports facilities: 10 full-sized multi-sport grass fields, a lighted synthetic turf field, softball complexes (5-plex and 2-plex), eight tennis courts,

and six pickleball courts. Additional amenities include The Commons, Mac's Playground, The Greens, Sgt. Bozo Dog Park, CCC Path and Prairie, historic interpretive facilities, and 2.5+ miles of trails. This is Montana's first Silver SITES certified park.

- Caras Park:** Located in Downtown Missoula with Caras Park Pavilion, bandshell stage, carousel, Brennan's Wave, playground, park spaces, river access, and Ron's River Trail promenade.

For additional programming space, Parks and Recreation collaborates with Missoula County Public Schools and other providers to offer activities near population centers. The department temporarily uses the "Base Camp" facility (former City/County Library) for indoor programming, though this inadequately designed space is slated for redevelopment and is not a permanent solution.

## Peer City Comparisons

Beyond national comparisons, the PROST Plan needs analysis evaluated five similar peer cities: Bozeman, Billings, Boise, Spokane, and St. George. These cities share key characteristics with Missoula, including similar populations, university presence, comparable geographic size, Western U.S. location, outdoor recreation orientation, four-season climate, and status as regional centers. Several additional cities were examined to identify emerging trends.

Notable findings from this analysis include:

- River engagement is increasingly popular, with cities like Boise, Bend, Eugene, and Spokane offering programming, events, educational resources, equipment rentals, and other elements that enhance community and tourist access to their rivers.
- Boise excels in providing innovative dog parks, featuring 11 seasonal or designated-hours off-leash areas with amenities such as swim zones, "shy dog" spaces, and shade canopies.
- Eugene, Oregon stands out for its comprehensive adaptive recreation program serving children, teens, and adults with disabilities, including all-terrain and beach wheelchairs and adaptive bikes.
- Many cities, including Missoula, offer extensive teen and youth summer camps focused on nature and outdoor activities.



Bend, OR: Whitewater Park



Boise, ID: Dog Swim Zone



Eugene, OR: Adaptive Recreation

Table 12: NRPA Metrics - Recreation Facilities compared to Missoula Current Facilities

	% of All Agencies	Median # of Residents per Facility	Number in Missoula	Missoula # of Residents per Facility
Recreation Centers (gymnasium)	62%	39,886	0	N/A
Community Centers (no gym)	59%	31,569	0	N/A
Nature Centers	34%	133,773	0	N/A
Aquatic Centers (indoor only)	30%	58,496	1	93,926

Table 13 below highlights the indoor recreation facilities for each community.

These tables demonstrate that Missoula significantly lags behind both national norms and comparable cities in indoor recreation facilities. NRPA data shows nearly 2/3 of similar-sized agencies nationwide have city-owned recreation centers with gymnasiums, and 3/5 have community centers. Based on median figures for agencies in Missoula's population class, the city should currently have 2-3 recreation or community centers.

When compared to peer cities, Missoula's lack of indoor facilities is striking. All five comparable cities offer recreation or community centers, with three providing nature centers that complement their outdoor recreation identities. Like Missoula, all five cities offer aquatic centers, either indoor or outdoor.

Given Missoula's cold winters and increasingly hot, smoky summers, indoor recreation facilities represent a critical unmet need—particularly flexible programming space for activities ranging from older adult fitness classes to accessible children's programs.

## Community Voices

**61% of respondents were strongly or somewhat strongly supportive of providing indoor spaces for recreation and fitness (BBER).**

**At the community open house, a desire for indoor recreation space was one of the top themes.**

**Throughout engagement, there was a strong support for youth after and out of school programming as well as summer camp offerings to support working households.**



**Table 13: Comparable Cities - Recreation Facilities**

	Missoula	Bozeman	Billings	Boise	Spokane	St. George
Population (2022)	93,926	56,123	119,960	236,389	232,315	102,519
Recreation Center	0	1	1	4	1	1
Community Center	0	1	1	1	5	0
Nature Center	0	1	0	1	0	1
Aquatic Center	2	2	2	3	6	2

## Recreation Programming and Services

The Department provides a broad array of program opportunities, especially youth out-of-school programs. Yet, there is much more demand. Appendix C includes the assessment of recreation programs, which looks at current programming, NRPA data,

**Table 14: NPRA Metrics: Program Offerings, red indicating Missoula comparison.**

Percent of agencies with these programs:	Jurisdiction Population					
	All Agencies	Less than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	Over 250,000
Themed Special Events	89%	83%	89%	96%	90%	91%
Social Recreation Events	88%	82%	91%	94%	92%	86%
Team Sports	86%	81%	90%	93%	89%	80%
Fitness Classes	82%	69%	84%	91%	85%	82%
Health & Wellness Classes	80%	64%	78%	91%	86%	85%
Individual Sports	76%	66%	73%	85%	81%	79%
Racquet Sports	73%	64%	71%	84%	77%	73%
Safety Training	70%	57%	63%	82%	77%	78%
Natural & Cultural History	66%	36%	60%	76%	75%	89%
Aquatics	68%	52%	62%	77%	78%	76%
Cultural Crafts	63%	43%	57%	74%	71%	75%
Visual Arts	63%	45%	58%	78%	67%	71%
Performing Arts	62%	39%	63%	79%	68%	70%
Trips and Tours	62%	42%	64%	73%	64%	73%
Martial Arts	56%	36%	61%	67%	65%	58%
Running/Cycling Races	53%	42%	44%	61%	55%	67%
Golf	49%	22%	42%	57%	63%	70%
eSports/eGaming	26%	14%	22%	32%	30%	33%

demographic trends, and community input to identify needs and opportunities for recreation programming. The table below shows a snapshot of types of program offerings, and the percentage of agencies that offer them.

In most cases, the Department directly provides recreation programming by planning programs, securing facilities, and hiring/training staff or contracting with instructors. The Department directly operates most programs in Missoula parks and facilities, except for youth and adult field sports. In FY 23, there were 160,000 visits to Currents and Splash Montana, 7,500 participant days in Missoula's after school/out of school programs, and 12,713 participant days in summer camp programs.

The Department collaborates with Missoula County Public Schools to provide affordable afterschool programming at three area schools

through facility use agreements and specific grants and community donations. These partnerships support wrap-around youth programming until 5:30 pm. The Department also administers a scholarship program offering over \$80,000 in assistance to individuals and households, plus a sliding fee scale for afterschool programs that reduced fees by over \$40,000 in FY24.

In other cases, the Department serves as a partner (e.g., disc golf with Garden City Flyers, community gardening with Garden City Harvest) or as a facility provider for other organizations' programming.

While NRPA categorizes recreation program areas differently from Missoula, NRPA Park Metrics allow for a high-level review of what park agencies nationwide offer for recreation programming. Table 16 shows NRPA programming categories, identifies the percentage of agencies offering that type of program, and documents if Missoula Parks and Recreation is a program or facility provider. There are many private and/or non-profit organizations in the greater Missoula area that provide additional programs and services. The Department strives to work in concert with these other providers to address the needs of local residents.

According to NRPA metrics and Missoula's recreation program offerings, the City of Missoula provides many popular programs, but several programming gaps exist. While some gaps result from limited indoor space (fitness classes, gymnasium sports, arts, and performing arts), others don't necessarily require indoor facilities. These include natural and cultural historical activities, cultural crafts, and trips/tours. Additional opportunities exist to expand current offerings for older adults, people with disabilities, and non-competitive sports.

## Community Voices



Providing opportunities for all, including aging adults, was a key theme in the informant interviews, focus groups, and artist-led engagement.

80% of respondents strongly or somewhat support ensuring that families with children have access to out-of-school, after school, and summer programming.

Appreciate existing partnerships that Missoula has, but could expand them (Key Informant Interviews)

Need more programming: (March 2024 Community Open House – Mobile Listening Sessions)

- Events and festivals
- Arts and culture
- Aquatics/swimming
- Adults Classes
- Summer and After School Kids Programs

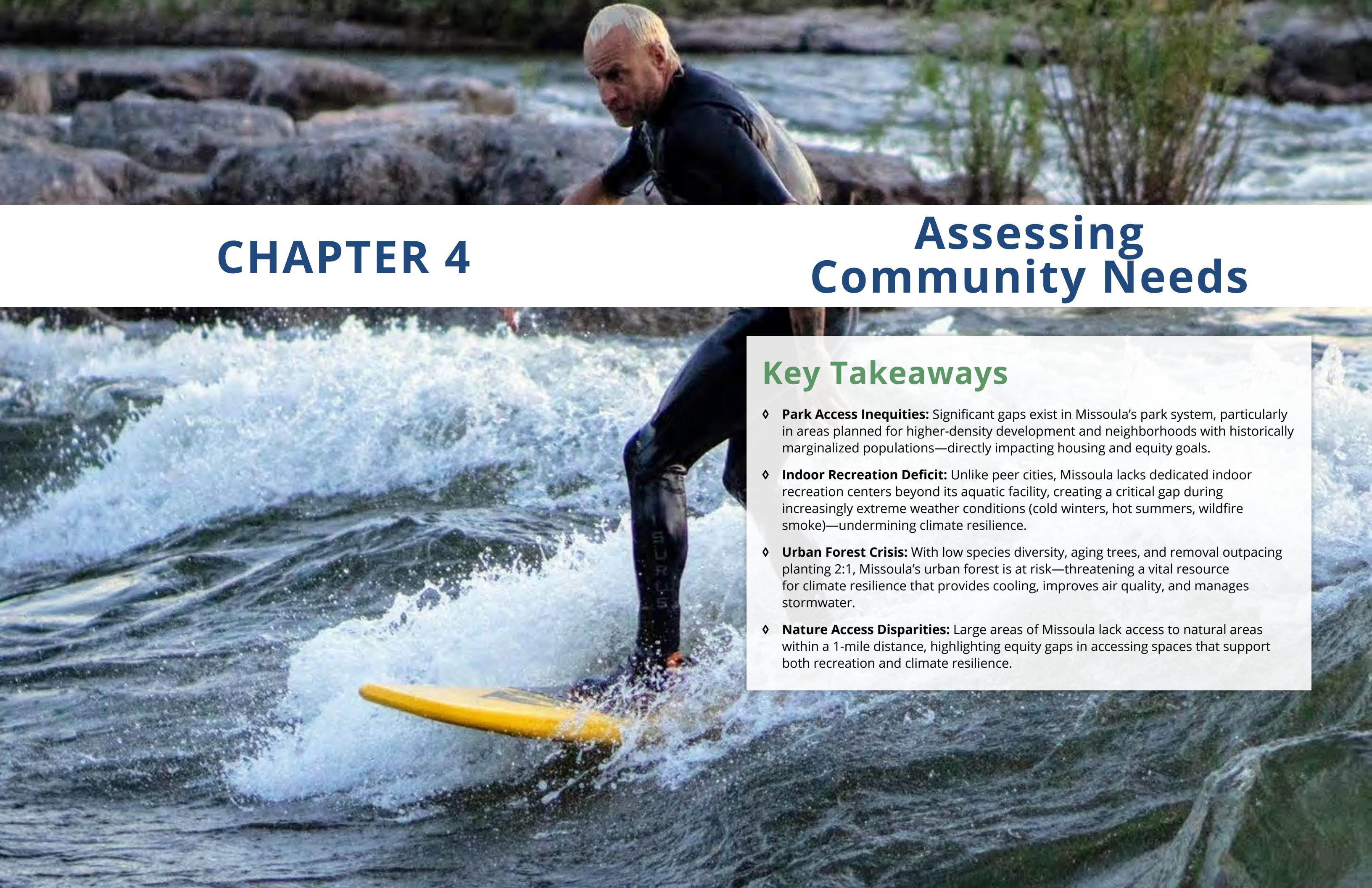
**Table 15: Missoula Recreation Program Areas and Populations Served**

		Program Area											
		Populations Served	Active	After School and School's Out	Aquatics	Camps	Community Schools Programs	Preschool Programs	Special Events/ Drop-in Programs	Sports (Adult/Teen)	Sports (Youth)	Teen	Facility Rentals
Demographic Segment	Preschool		X	X		X	X						
	K-8	X	X	X	X		X	X		X			
	Teens		X				X			X	X		
	Young Adults		X				X	X					
	Adults		X				X	X					
	Older Adults	X		X			X						
	People		X	X			X						
	Communities of Color		X										
	Beginner/Introductory	X	X	X	X								
Program Audience	Moderate		X	X				X	X			X	
	Expert							X				X	
	Drop-in	X				X		X					
	Multi-Generational		X		X		X						

**Table 16: NRPA Programming Categories and Missoula Offerings**

NRPA Programming	% NRPA	Parks and Recreation Dept.
After School Programs	52%	Program Provider
Aquatics	68%	Program Provider, Facility Provider
Cultural Crafts	63%	-
E-Sports	26%	-
Fitness Enhancement Classes	82%	Program Provider
Golf	49%	-
Health and Wellness Education	80%	Program Provider
Individual Sports	76%	Program Provider, Facility Provider
Martial Arts	56%	-
Natural and Cultural History Activities	66%	Facility Provider
Performing Arts	62%	-
Preschool Programs	34%	Program Provider
Programs for People with Disabilities	63%	Program Provider
Racquet Sports	73%	Program Provider, Facility Provider
Running/Cycling Races	53%	Program Provider, Facility Provider
Science, Technology,	58%	-
Social Recreation Events	88%	Facility Provider
Specific Senior Programs	77%	Program Provider
Specific Teen Programs	65%	Program Provider
Summer Camp	82%	Program Provider
Team Sports	86%	Program Provider, Facility Provider
Themed Special Events	89%	Program Provider
Trips and Tours	62%	-
Visual Arts	63%	-





## CHAPTER 4

# Assessing Community Needs

## Key Takeaways

- ◊ **Park Access Inequities:** Significant gaps exist in Missoula's park system, particularly in areas planned for higher-density development and neighborhoods with historically marginalized populations—directly impacting housing and equity goals.
- ◊ **Indoor Recreation Deficit:** Unlike peer cities, Missoula lacks dedicated indoor recreation centers beyond its aquatic facility, creating a critical gap during increasingly extreme weather conditions (cold winters, hot summers, wildfire smoke)—undermining climate resilience.
- ◊ **Urban Forest Crisis:** With low species diversity, aging trees, and removal outpacing planting 2:1, Missoula's urban forest is at risk—threatening a vital resource for climate resilience that provides cooling, improves air quality, and manages stormwater.
- ◊ **Nature Access Disparities:** Large areas of Missoula lack access to natural areas within a 1-mile distance, highlighting equity gaps in accessing spaces that support both recreation and climate resilience.



## How is the System Working?

To effectively establish objectives and recommendations and realize the PROST vision, a deeper understanding of current and future community needs is essential. This analysis considers both quantitative and qualitative elements. The analyses and processes were used to help identify key gaps in Missoula's parklands and facilities including Parks, trails, the urban forest, open space and recreation programs.

This chapter details and then summarizes the following needs and gaps in the PROST system and is organized by:

- **City Decision Lenses**
- **Lands, Facilities and Trails**

## Taking a Modern Approach

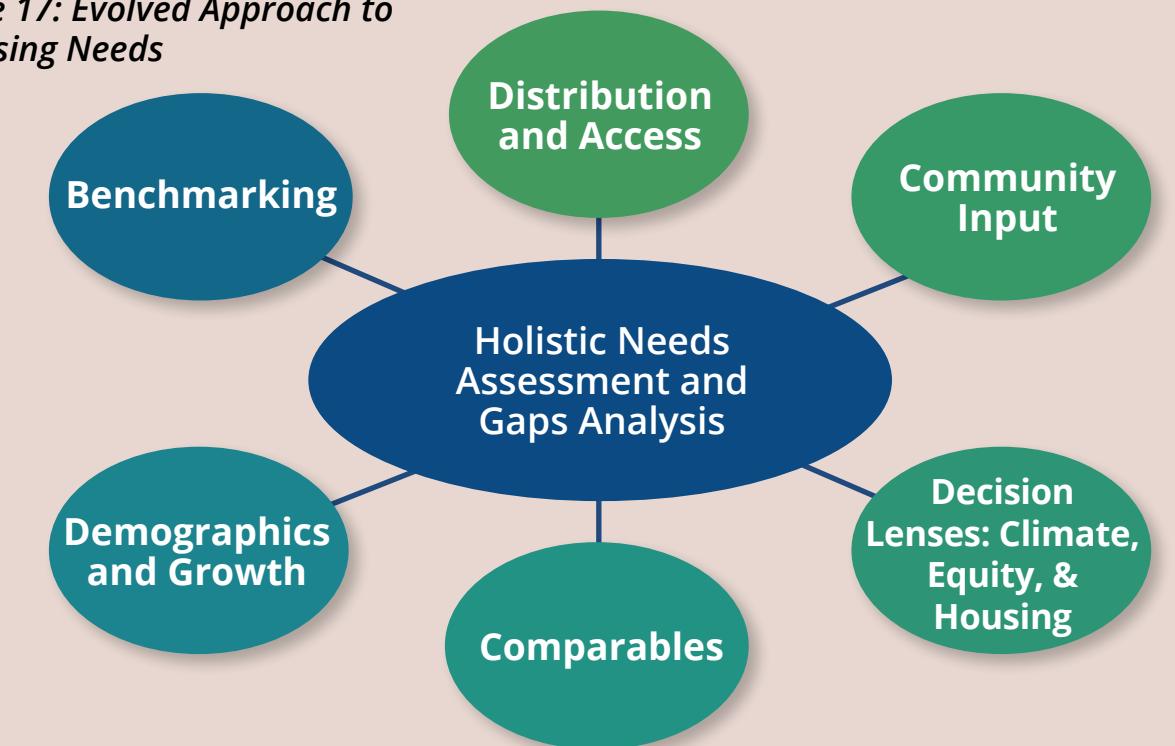
Since the adoption of the 2004 Master Parks and Recreation Plan for the Greater Missoula Area, standards for parks and recreation planning have evolved, including how needs are assessed and quantified. In 2017, the 10-Minute Walk Campaign was launched by the Trust for Public Land (TPL), Urban Land Institute (ULI), and National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA).

Across the US, 300+ mayors – including Missoula's – committed to the vision that everyone in U.S. cities should have access to a quality park within a 10-minute walk of their home, focusing on quality and distribution rather than simply the quantity or acres of parkland.

National Recreation and Parks Association, (NRPA) publishes Park Metrics as a benchmarking tool to allow comparisons to other agencies, with the guidance that agencies should tailor their offerings and standards to their specific community.

The Public Engagement Key Findings discussed in Chapter 2 inform the approach to assessing needs in Missoula in 2025. These

*Figure 17: Evolved Approach to Assessing Needs*



key findings informed the six analysis criteria, as shown in Figure 17. This systems approach considers multiple elements – both qualitative and quantitative – that together serve as the City's Park Performance Standards. This approach provides a deeper understanding of high priority community needs and lays the foundation for goal-oriented objectives and specific recommendations that are outlined in Chapter 5 and 6 of this document.

This chapter provides a summary of findings from key areas of analysis:

**Community Input:** The extensive engagement process provided rich data about needs, priorities, and gaps supporting the PROST vision and goals in Chapter 2. This data appears throughout this section as applicable.

**Community Profile:** Understanding the current and future users of the City's PROST system is critical for planning. The project team utilized data from the Equity in Land

Use Report and population projections from the Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan.

**Distribution Analysis:** After updating the Parks and Recreation Department's inventory, planners used GIS tools (including ArcGIS Network Analyst) to evaluate park distribution, walkability, bikeability, equity factors, and planned land use.

**Benchmarking:** Using the NRPA's 2024 Agency Performance Review and statistics from comparable cities, planners benchmarked Missoula's Park Performance Standards against trends and best practices, as detailed in the Trends and Comparables section.

**Decision Lenses:** The gaps and needs analysis specifically examined the City's three decision lenses—climate, equity, and housing.

# City Decision Lenses

## Equity Lens

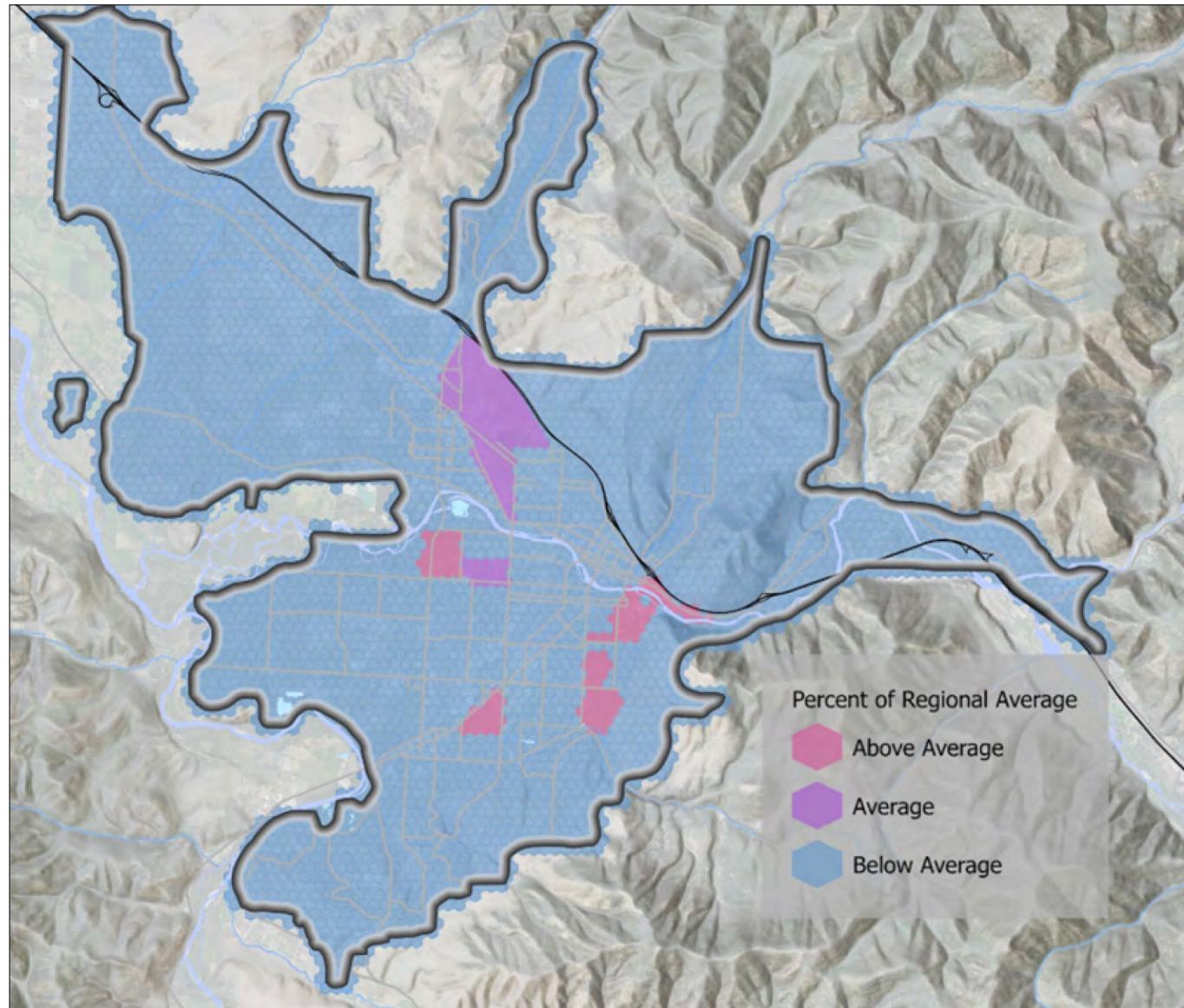
Understanding Missoula's diverse needs requires incorporating equity considerations from the Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan and the Equity in Land Use Report (August 2023) into the Parks gaps analysis.

Key demographic groups requiring special attention include the growing populations

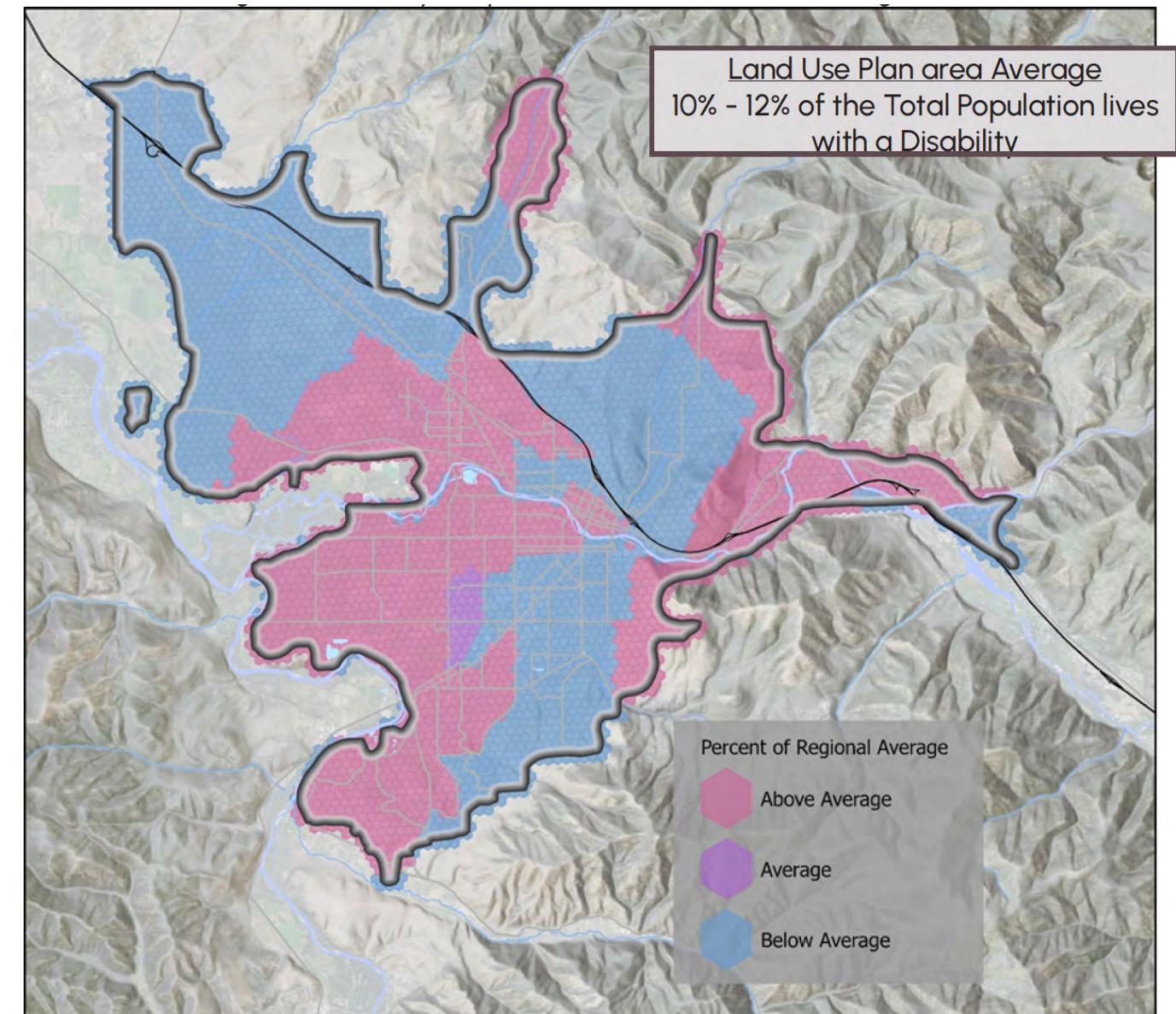
of seniors, younger adults, and people with disabilities.

Proximity of parks and trails to historically underserved areas impacts residents' access to employment, services, exercise opportunities, social spaces, play areas, urban respite, non-motorized transportation options, and overall quality of life.

**Figure 18: Racial and Ethnic Population compared to Regional Average (Source: LUP Community Profile)**



**Figure 19: Disability Compared to LUP area Average (Source: LUP Community Profile)**





## Housing Lens

To have a parks and trails system that contributes to livability, the number and types of parks and recreation needs will be linked to the numbers and locations of residences. The PROST Planning process occurred on the heels of significant efforts to plan for Missoula's future growth.

The Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan (LUP), a growth planning document adopted in 2024, provides a detailed analysis of projected population changes and the anticipated housing, infrastructure, and other services needed to serve a larger population. The LUP uses the concept of Place Types to help guide growth and development. Place Types describe geographic areas using a combination of defining characteristics: land use, built form, mobility, intensity, and constraints. Each Place Type summary includes a brief description of the public parks and open space within each type, summarized in Table 17.

Implementation Action B12 of the LUP also directs the PROST Plan to define park level of service in each of the twelve Place Types.

**Table 17: Summary of public parks and open space by Place Type in the Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan (LUP)**

Place Type	Place Type Characteristics as defined in the LUP		
	Primary Land Use includes Residential Housing	Primary Land Use includes Parks and Open Space	Parks Service Area
Urban Residential High			Parks within walking distance of all residents.
Urban Residential Low			
Limited Urban Residential			
Downtown			
Urban Mixed Use High	Yes		
Urban Mixed Use Low		Yes	
Limited Urban Mixed Use			
Rural Residential			Parks may not be within walking distance of all residents.
Parks and Conservation Lands			
Civic			
Open and Resource	No		Not Applicable. Residential housing is not a primary use of the Place Type.
Industrial and Employment		No	



## Climate Lens

Heat and drought affect lands and recreation programming. August is routinely hot and smoky. Alternatives such as indoor spaces with controlled air are increasingly necessary to meet community and program needs.

Changing winter weather and snow elevations require creativity and demand resilient solutions. The need to secure more indoor facilities for both hot smoky months and the long winter months has increasingly become critical.

Besides being places to enjoy nature, exercise, socialize or relax, the City's parks and open space can address and be designed to better alleviate climate risks and protect green infrastructure assets. Nature-based solutions, often paired with human-made solutions, can mitigate climate hazards while providing co-benefits to the community. "Nature-based solutions" refers to policies or actions that use natural features and processes to tackle socio-environmental challenges.

According to Climate Ready Missoula Plan and the LUP, the City of Missoula will likely experience longer wildfire and wildfire smoke

seasons, extreme summer heat, prolonged drought, more spring flooding, and greater variability. The City has adopted a municipal Conservation & Climate Action Plan with a carbon neutrality goal and has set climate and resilience as one of its three decision-making lenses.

### **Key Climate Impacts**

#### **Wildfires and Wildfire Smoke**

As Missoula's climate warms with decreased summer rainfall, wildfires are expected to increase in size and frequency, with longer fire seasons and more days of unhealthy air. As the region expands, more people may move into the Wildland-Urban Interface, increasing wildfire risk.

The PROST system's parks and conservation lands provide potential buffers and demonstration sites for wildfire mitigation strategies such as using trails as firebreaks, strategic fuels reduction, and emergency planning areas. The Department must address smoke hazards for workforce and visitors and identify strategies for recreation programming during smoke periods.

### **Precipitation Change**

Average annual precipitation is expected to increase, occurring mainly in winter and spring as rain instead of snow, while summers become drier. This pattern increases flooding likelihood.

Green infrastructure across the city, especially in parks and recreation facilities, can help manage stormwater runoff and extreme rain events. Creating areas to slow and absorb runoff can reduce negative impacts of extreme weather. The PROST system offers many opportunities to protect and enhance sensitive riparian areas.

### **Extreme Heat**

Both annual average temperatures and days above 90 degrees are expected to increase. The 2024 Community Health Assessment found residents reported hotter summers and increased wildfires as the most significant climate shifts noticed.

Impacts include increased utility costs, stress and anxiety related to heat impacts, and loss of outdoor recreation affecting wellbeing. Native species will be increasingly at risk, and water conservation planning is needed.

Parks and conservation lands offer respite from urban heat island effects, particularly when designed with heat mitigation in mind. Infill development will likely increase heat islands in certain neighborhoods. Parks and residential development can be enhanced by adding trees, creating no-mow areas, improving soil health through regenerative practices, and using materials with lower heat retention.

The Department is already experimenting with adaptive plant palettes and has many opportunities to continue to experiment within the park system to ensure that trees and vegetation can thrive and provide cooling despite the effects of climate change.



## Community Voices

**87% of respondents strongly or somewhat support strategies to maintain clean air and water (BBER).**

**76% of respondents strongly or somewhat support strategies to reduce the effects of heat and smoke in summer and fall (BBER).**

**92% of respondents strongly or somewhat support strategies to protect river corridors (BBER).**

**87% of respondents strongly or somewhat support strategies to protect land for wildlife habitat and environmental reasons (BBER).**



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*

## Lands, Facilities, and Trails

This section describes the needs and gaps based on the analyses summarized in the previous chapter. Gaps include geographic, systematic, community access, or similar and are the basis for the objectives and recommendations described in chapters 5 and 6 of the plan to create a more inclusive, connected, comprehensive, and resilient system. For further detail on existing conditions and GIS methodology please refer to Chapter 3 and Appendix D, respectively.

### Parklands

As Missoula is growing, it is critical residents do not lose access to parklands and acres of parkland available to residents does not stagnate. One measure of a resident's access to parks is to determine the ratio of residents to park acreage.

The City will strive to maintain 10.68 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, as well as ensure it meets the diverse and changing needs of the growing community through new park standards that are aligned with the Land Use Plan Place Types and take into consideration the more nuanced approach to park performance levels than the 2004 approach.

### A Walkable and Rollable System

Missoula has committed to the principle that everyone should be within a 10-minute walk/roll of a park, and public engagement confirms that community members want a walkable, rollable, bikeable park close to home and a safe route to get there. A series of analyses evaluate whether there are gaps in access for residential neighborhoods, including considering future and current growth, Place Types, and assessing how the equity screening overlays interact with gaps. These analyses recognize that developed parklands of all types can serve as a neighborhood park facility, if they are designed to do so.

Figures 20-25 illustrate the results of these analyses, identifying key gap areas where additional developed parks and natural areas are needed, and/or where there is no or limited connectivity via the existing trails and road networks.

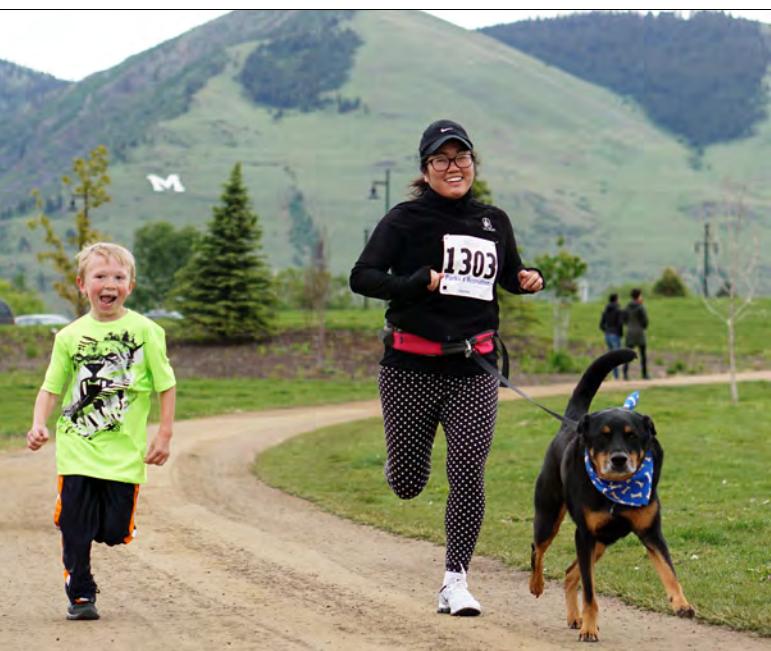
### Park Access Analysis

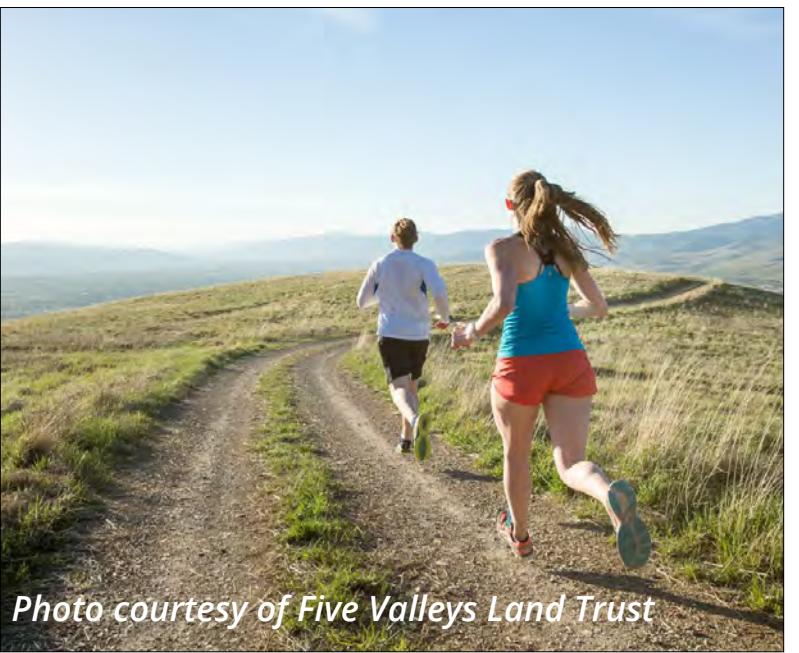
Missoula's parks are well distributed around the city and are relatively well-connected when considering trail and street networks. Some parks may not be adequately accessible due to poor sidewalk conditions that are not mapped. However, the maps show several prominent gap areas.

Several of these gaps are in areas that, according to the Land Use Plan, are expected to become more urban as they grow and evolve or are areas that have a higher percentage of historically marginalized populations. Therefore, providing quality parks and access to nature in these gap areas is a critical need for the Department. There is also some overlap between areas with higher-than-average percentage of disabilities that should be considered in development plans.



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*





*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*



In urban areas, parks may need to look and function differently than they do now, fitting into smaller footprints, increasing recreational value capacity, leveraging streets, and incorporating innovative ideas. To fill the nature gap within the city, consideration for adding natural elements, more native plantings, nature-based solutions, and less turf are identified as key objectives and recommendations in Chapters 5 and 6.

Following are maps showing gaps in the service areas for parks in Missoula, as well as planned parks and potential future park locations. The gap areas are based on 10-minute walk and access to nature analyses, while the planned park locations are based on current development or City projects that are already integrating parks. The potential park sites are undeveloped locations that may make sense for future development. However, potential park sites are not official in any way and would only be completed if they have high community support and if it is possible to acquire the land and fund development.

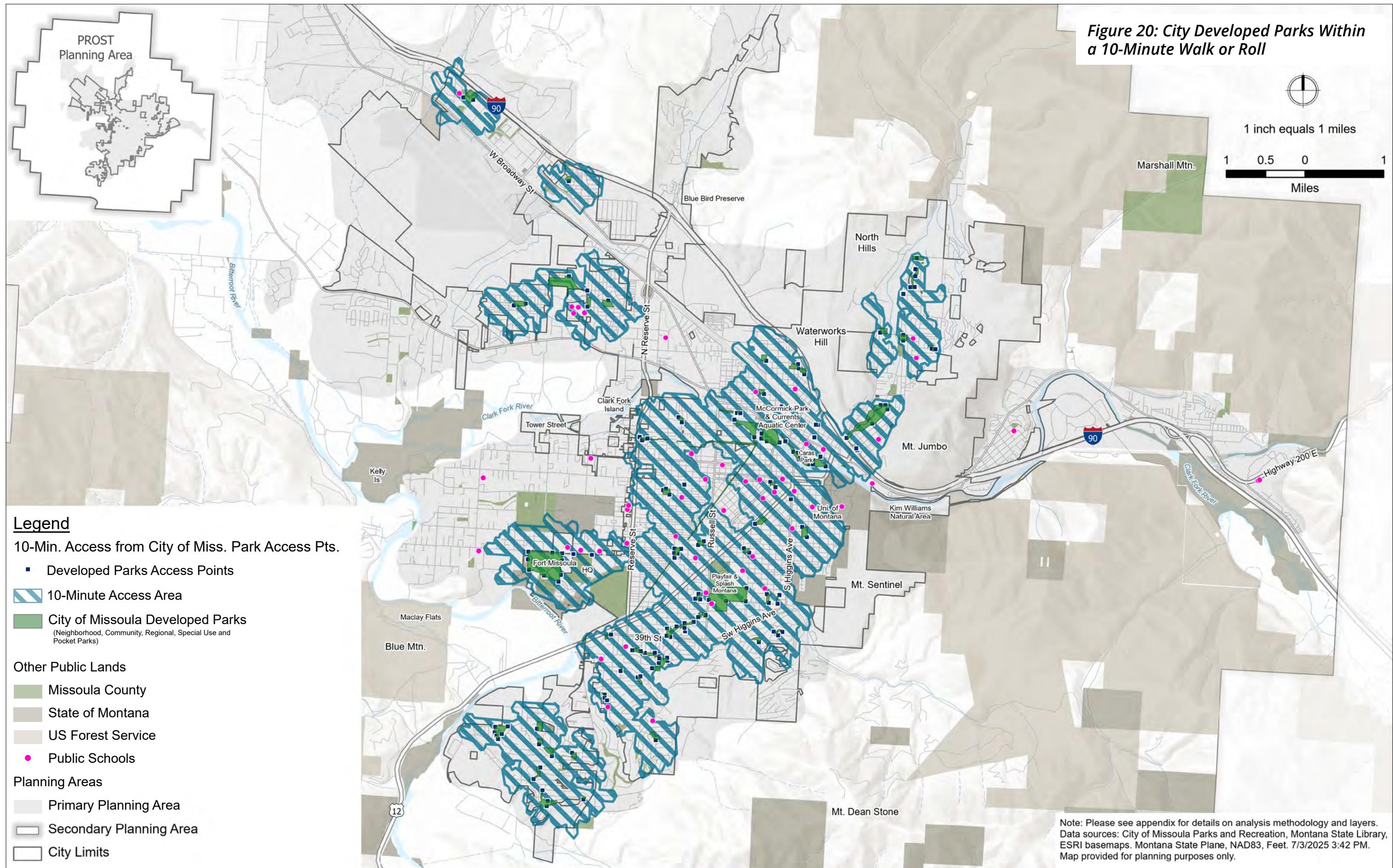
#### **Land Use and Underserved Population Map Overlays**

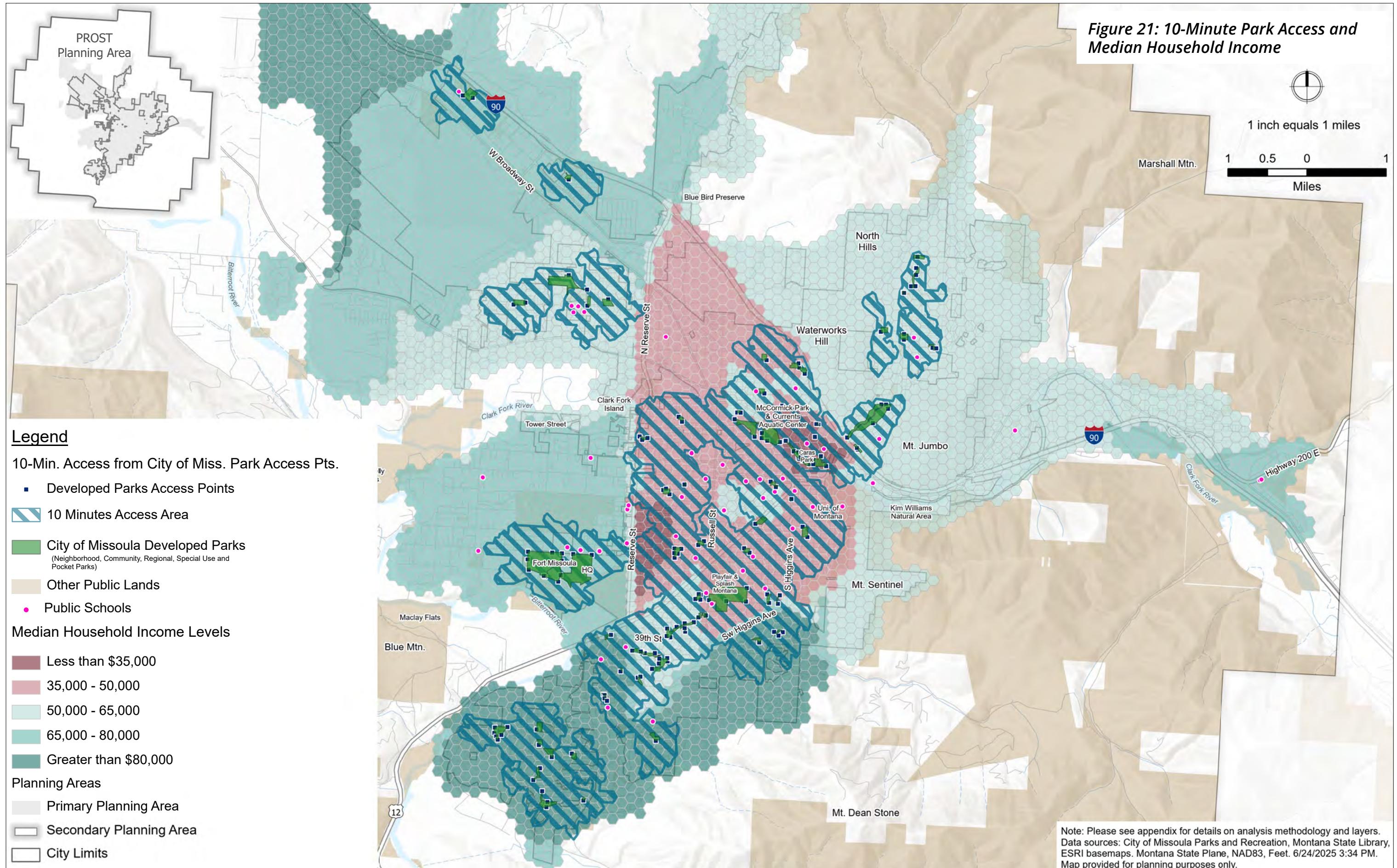
In addition to looking at overall distribution of parks and gaps in the current system, it is also important to consider how those gaps potentially effect the community as a whole, as well as areas with residents of lower incomes, minority populations and other groups. On the next pages are several maps showing gaps in the system and how those overlap with various demographic groups in Missoula.



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*

Figure 20: City Developed Parks Within a 10-Minute Walk or Roll





*Figure 21: 10-Minute Park Access and Median Household Income*

Note: Please see appendix for details on analysis methodology and layers.  
Data sources: City of Missoula Parks and Recreation, Montana State Library,  
ESRI basemaps. Montana State Plane, NAD83, Feet. 6/24/2025 3:34 PM.  
Map provided for planning purposes only.

Figure 22: 10-Minute Park Access and Communities of Color

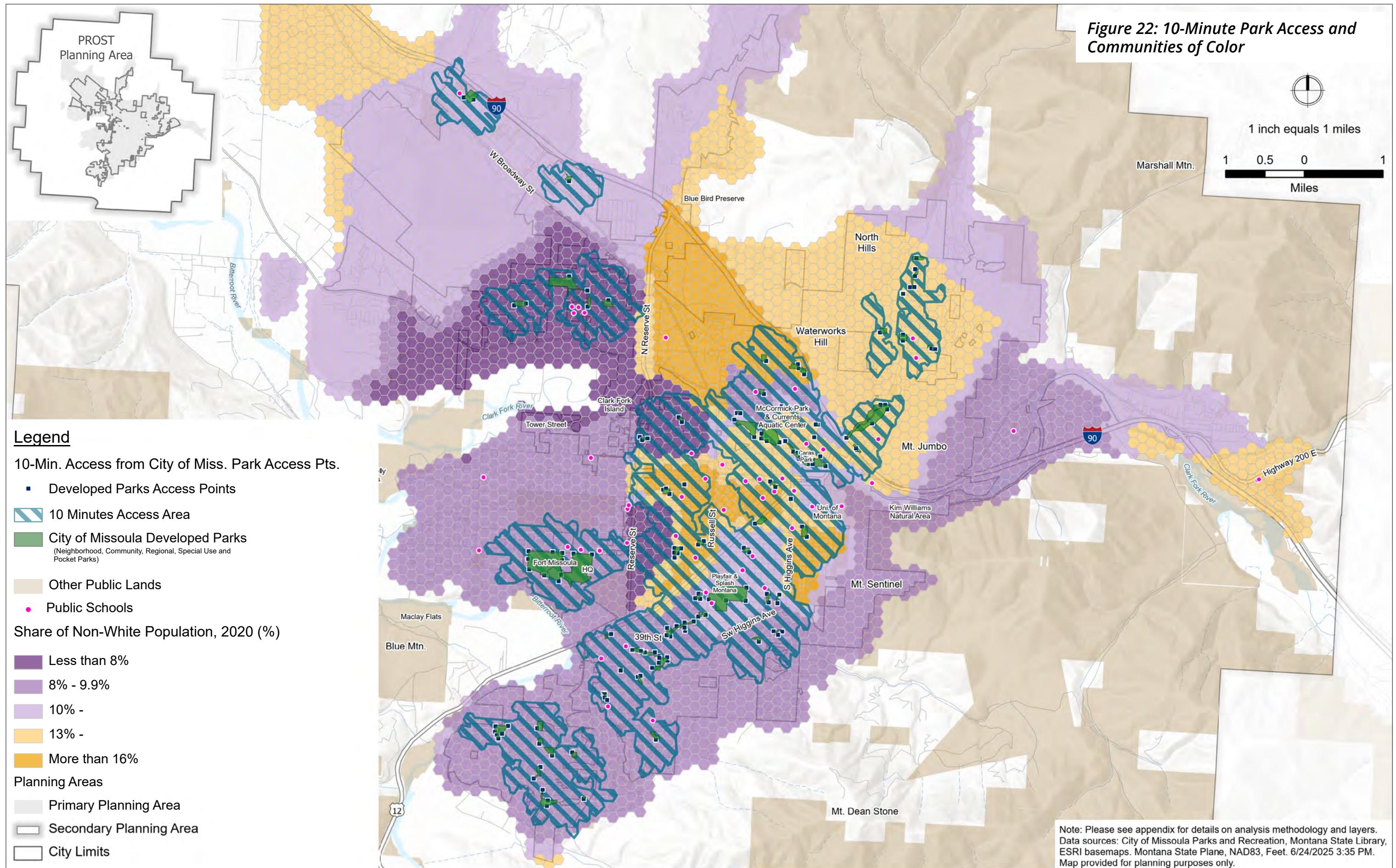
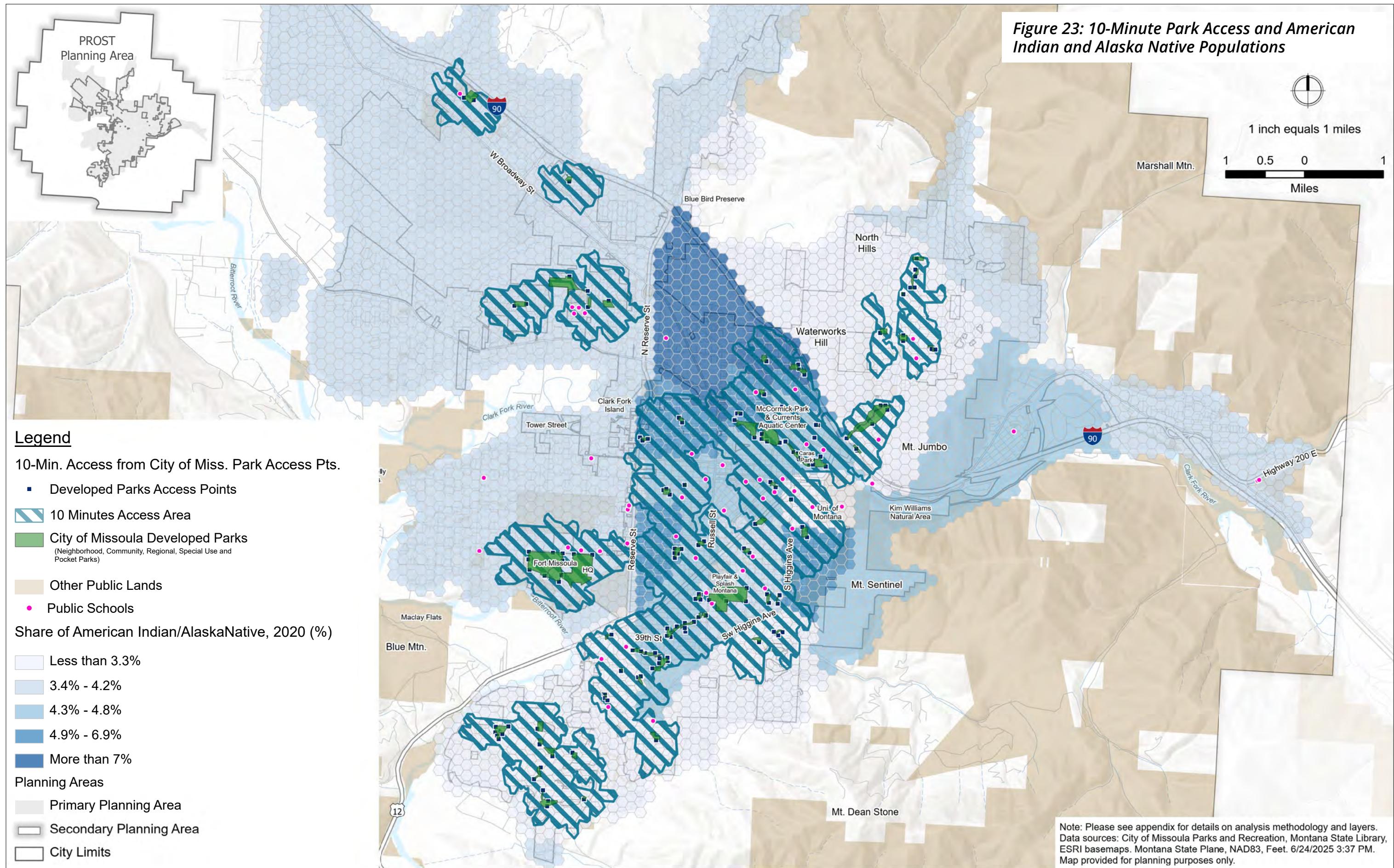


Figure 23: 10-Minute Park Access and American Indian and Alaska Native Populations



## **Serving Higher Density Residential Areas**

Missoula has committed to growing inward rather than outward. The Land Use Plan includes areas that will be more compact and walkable, featuring a more urban character than previously found outside the downtown core.

The Urban Residential High Place Type represents the highest-density residential designation. They consist of small lots, lots with multiple units, and reduced private greenspace. These neighborhoods are Missoula's most complete, compact, and walkable areas, designed for people to live, play, and easily access nearby amenities, whether on foot, by bike, or by car. Residents have a variety of housing options available, including both ownership and rental opportunities. Small businesses provide neighborhood-scale commercial services to local residents and visitors. This Place Type encompasses various housing types, ranging from single-family homes (potentially with accessory dwelling units) to large-scale apartment complexes, all connected by a well-designed street network.

Higher-density residential areas have specific needs. With more residents per acre than other residential zones, the demand for parks increases. Given the limited private yard space, accessible public parks with a variety of recreational amenities, and a connected trail network will become essential for maintaining the quality of life for Missoulians.

As growth occurs, demographics may shift unexpectedly, necessitating more flexibility in design, construction, and partnerships. Additionally, securing large sites for parks may become more challenging, highlighting the need for urban-style park development

that incorporates more amenities and uses within smaller spaces. It is also important to preserve green corridors and sensitive areas, design green streetscapes, and increase tree planting to foster a more resilient future.

Figure 24 shows how park gap areas overlap with the various Place Types in the City's adopted Land Use Plan.

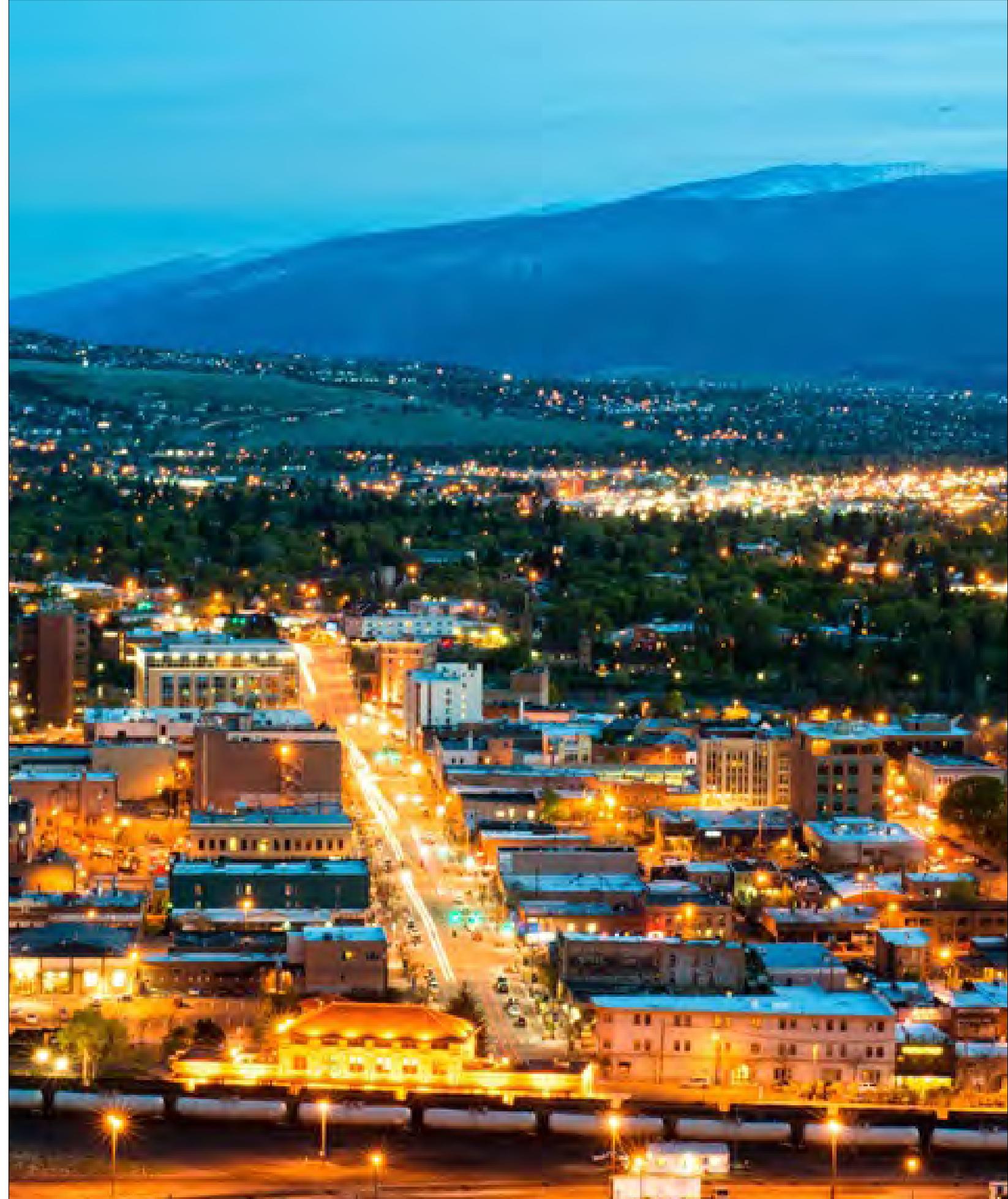
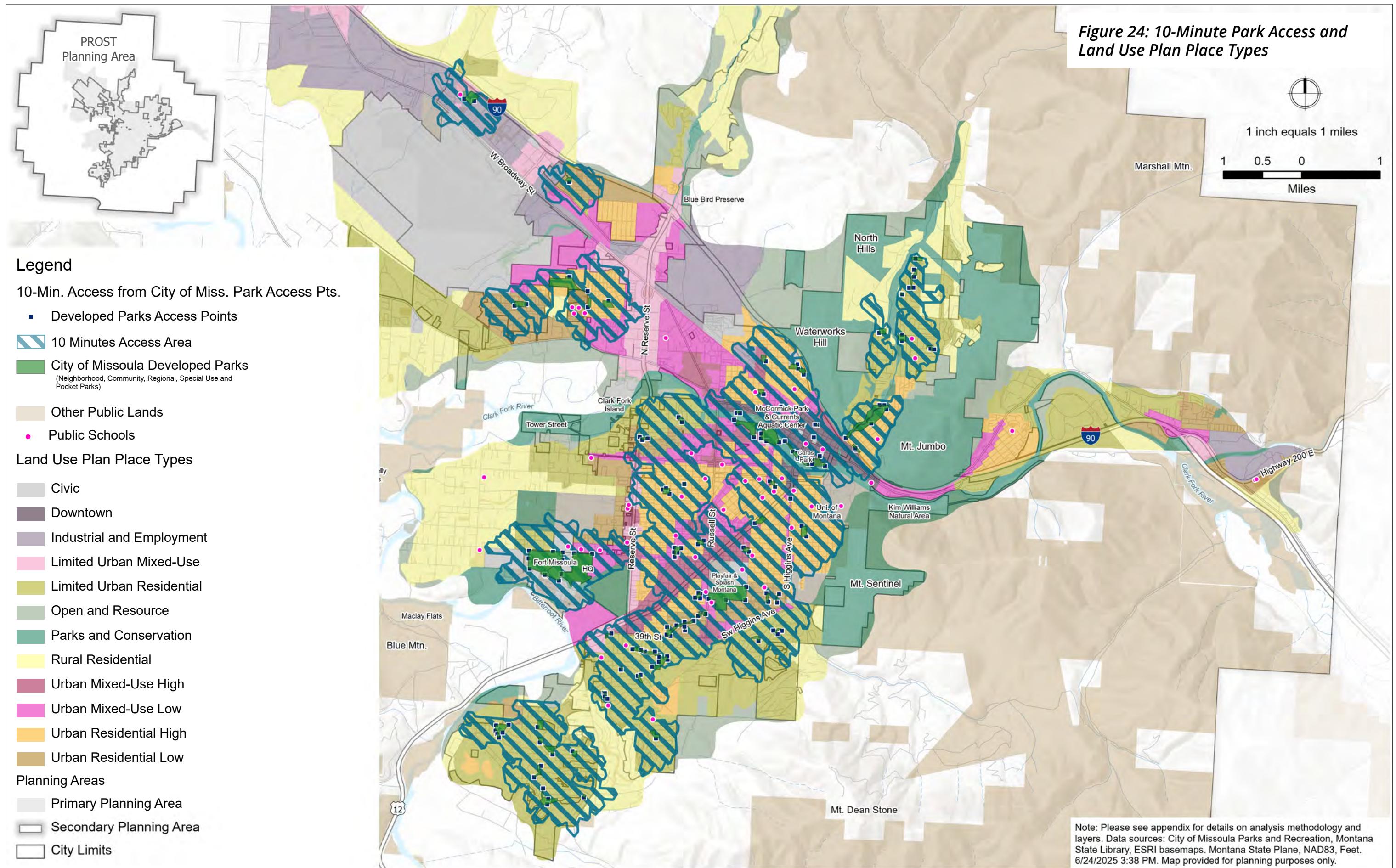


Figure 24: 10-Minute Park Access and Land Use Plan Place Types





# Open Space

## The Connected Ecosystem

The 2019 Urban Area Open Space Plan provides guidance for Missoula's open spaces and conservation lands. The PROST Plan carries forward the Open Space Plan as a guiding document and component of the PROST, with the intent of achieving the open space vision adopted by City of Missoula and Missoula County and largely funded by Open Space bond funds.

The **open space vision** is to conserve, protect, and connect Missoula's system of open space lands to achieve a coherent and connected open space system, with access to a park, trail, open space land, natural area, or recreation area available in every neighborhood. This integrated system includes lands protected for wildlife habitat and natural resources, park lands, lands protected for historic and scenic values, agricultural lands, and trails.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan, Page 3

As outlined in the Urban Area Open Space Plan, the connected ecosystem is created by large anchor areas, smaller urban green spaces, and corridors that connect them all.

Public engagement results confirm that the Missoula community continues to strongly support the open space vision. The PROST acknowledges and confirms that the open space cornerstones are priority areas for ecosystem conservation and potential land acquisition. According to public engagement data highlighted in this plan, there is still a high preference among local residents for protecting river corridors, views and vistas, and agricultural lands, which could include gardens, working lands and Indigenous lands and landscapes.

Other considerations which are not substantially discussed in the open space plan, but could be integrated as part of a future open space plan update, could include topics like ecosystem corridor and connectivity planning, Indigenous lands and cultural integration, open space needs as part of a more urbanizing community, and other similar open space topics.

## Access to Nature

In addition to protecting land for ecosystem values, Missoula residents also want access to nature near their homes. Missoula's robust natural landscape is a key component of the community and why residents live there. To add another layer to the open space vision, the planning team evaluated access to nature, looking at Missoula's conservation lands, including park preserves, community natural areas and neighborhood natural areas.

While access to developed parks is based on a 10-minute walk, this analysis is based on a 1-mile distance. This is because the city currently has larger natural areas that serve a larger area of the community, similar to the role that a regional park plays. While the Department should also consider ways to provide nature for recreation closer to home, residents should be able to access a natural area within a mile. Figure 25 shows the results of the analysis.

This map illustrates the lack of access to City-owned natural areas in multiple locations. Some of the gap areas near the city's edges are adjacent to lands owned by the County or federal agencies, which could help fill the gaps in access to nature.

However, a significant portion, particularly in the Franklin to the Fort and Southside neighborhoods, as well as the North Reserve Street area, lacks access to nature within a 1-mile radius. Much of this region also does not have 10-minute access to a developed park. There are no nature or conservation lands owned by other agencies within this urbanized area. As development continues in the western and eastern parts of Missoula, the need for access to nature in these areas will grow. Protecting open space and incorporating natural landscapes into

developed parks will be crucial for meeting this need.

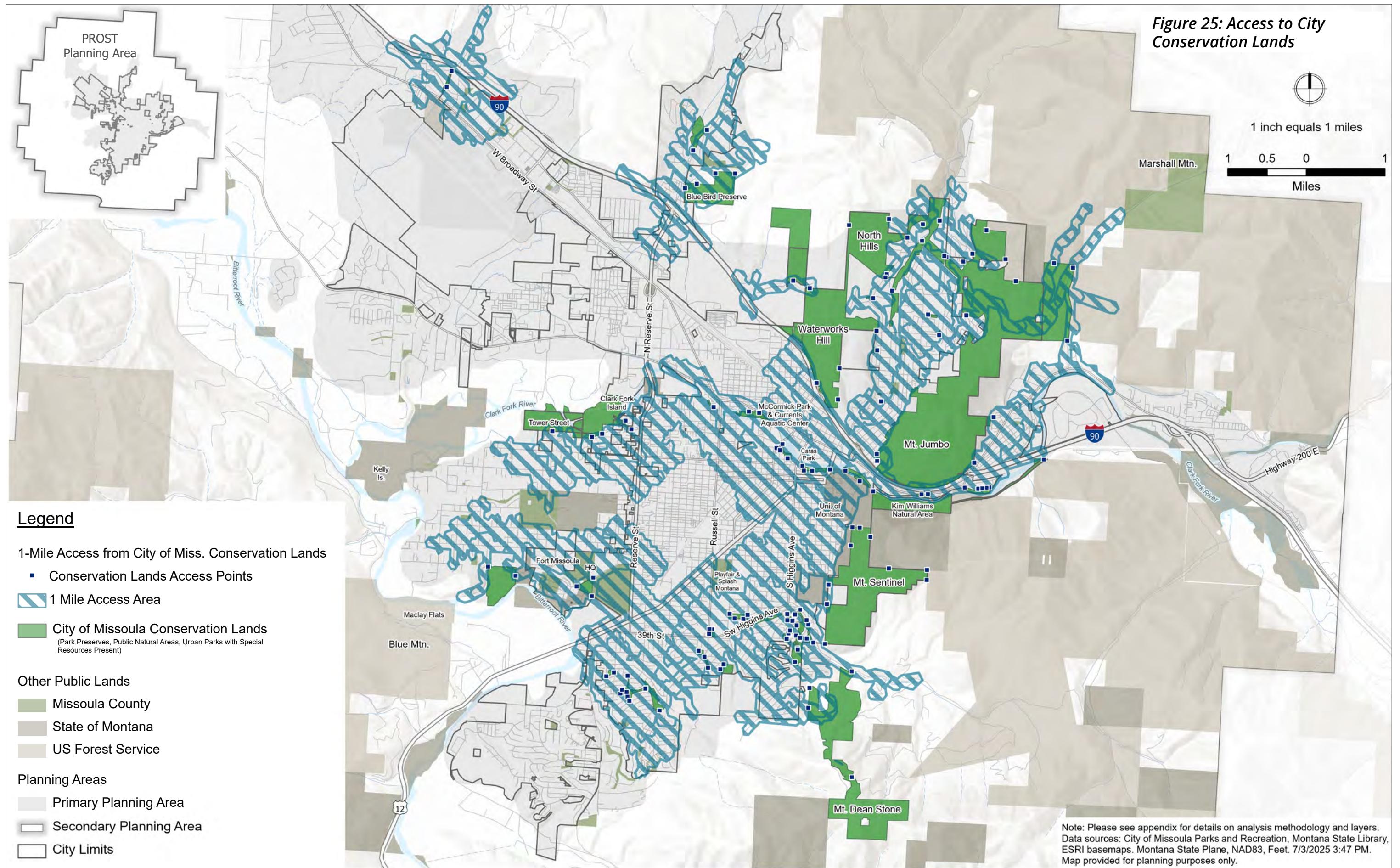
Based on the plan analysis and public outreach, Missoula should explore alternative methods for providing access to nature in these urbanized areas and enhancing amenities in high-use conservation lands. Addressing the existing nature gaps in high-density areas and the mobility challenges on conservation lands will enable Missoula to better serve community needs by developing policies to support broader access to nature.

Additionally, neighborhood, community and regional trails can improve connections to conservation lands from nature park gap areas. Strategies may include adding habitat patches in developed parks or converting portions of developed parks to native plantings.

## Management and Restoration

While there were overall positive comments about the city conservation lands according to the BBER survey (65 percent satisfaction with current quality of open spaces), there was an ongoing request for a continuation of management and restoration, or an increase in certain areas. For example, noxious weeds – weeds that are harmful to agriculture, natural crops, or ecosystems – were mentioned as an area of particular concern for Missoula residents.

*Figure 25: Access to City Conservation Lands*



# Urban Forestry

Missoula's urban forest is vital for the city's quality of life and aesthetic appeal. It plays a significant role in mitigating climate change by enhancing air quality, managing stormwater, improving public health, and sequestering carbon. The urban forest fulfills important social, economic, and ecological needs for our community. According to the BBER survey, 84 percent of residents either somewhat or strongly support efforts to improve the urban canopy.

## Data Needs

While the Department has a GIS-based inventory of over 31,000 trees in its urban forest, including data on genus and in many cases on species and cultivar, this inventory is not complete and needs to be updated. Having an up-to-date inventory of the urban forest will allow the Department to more effectively properly manage and fund the urban forestry program.

## Species Diversity

Based on staff input throughout the planning process and the existing (though incomplete) tree inventory data, Missoula's urban forest canopy lacks diversity, particularly regarding native trees, and faces potential failure.

Currently, more than 31 percent of the inventoried trees belong to the genus *Acer* (maple), while over 11% are from the genus *Fraxinus* (ash). Many of these trees were planted during similar time periods. The severe tree mortality experienced during the windstorm in the summer of 2024, which resulted in the loss of over 600

trees, highlights the impending crisis facing Missoula's urban forest.

Issues such as the high rate of hazardous tree removals and insufficient funding for pruning and planting may not be immediately apparent to the community but are equally critical. Furthermore, development, redevelopment, and the installation of communication infrastructure have negatively impacted street trees.

## Urban Forest Management Plan

The Department also needs to update its comprehensive urban forest management plan. This plan must incorporate updated inventory data and address climate impacts and development challenges while considering how new developments may affect the urban forest. It should include strategies for canopy replacement and expansion, especially in areas with tree inequities and where urban heat mitigation is necessary. The plan should also focus on operational sustainability, which includes securing increased funding and staffing. Additionally, it should address the adequate soil volume required for planting future urban trees.





## Recreation

### Sport and Outdoor Recreation Facilities

While Missoula has adequate quantities of most facility types compared to peers (except for skate parks, disc golf courses, rectangular fields), the distribution and mix of park amenities is low in neighborhood parks and the condition of current amenities is variable across the system (See Table 11, Chapter 3).

Existing inventory shows diamond fields have a much higher level of service than rectangular fields and additional work to determine appropriate level of service for both diamond and rectangular fields should be completed to support development and/or redevelopment of these facilities to best meet community need. Residents expressed interest in ensuring existing amenities are maintained and for more variety across the park system.

Missoula also should consider adding emerging amenities, such as natural play areas, fitness equipment, art and culture

installations, with a focus on diversifying the types of amenities and creating more multi-use spaces.

### Park Amenities

Community engagement feedback highlighted the need to provide more social spaces, programs, and activities not related to sports. Current parks, while well distributed, tend to have fewer amenities to support cultural programming or social activities than desired. Overall, integrating art, culture, and historic elements into parks, as well as incorporating more dynamic and diverse amenities is needed.

This type of enhancement could include more destination play areas designed to be artful as well as playful, natural play areas, integration of natural, cultural, topography, and other elements to better engage and reflect Missoula's unique character.

### Indoor Recreation Facilities

During the snowy winter season, hot summers, and wildfire season, there is a growing demand for more opportunities and facilities for indoor recreation.

Currently, the Department operates one indoor facility: Currents Aquatic Center. This center features a children's water playground, water slides, a fitness pool for lap swimming and water aerobics, and a small community room. The Department has also been temporarily using the Base Camp facility located in the former City/County Library building for indoor programming. However, this facility is scheduled for redevelopment and is not a permanent solution.

Through an interlocal agreement, the Department uses Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) buildings to offer afterschool programming, as well as certain areas of Lowell Elementary School as a neighborhood community center. While these facilities are not owned by the city, they are critical and allow the department to offer various types of programming to youth and households near there homes. These programming services are highly valued by the community and support households in Missoula.

The Missoula community offers a range of recreational activities through different program providers. However, Parks and Recreation specifically provides affordable classes and programs accessible to everyone, allowing residents to develop baseline skills in many areas of interest. In many cities, Parks and Recreation departments offer adult fitness programs that complement private offerings, which are often more expensive, cater to experienced fitness participants, and may be less welcoming to the general population.



Many of Missoula's afterschool programs, summer camps, and other recreational activities depend on indoor spaces. Without additional indoor facilities, the capacity to provide quality, affordable programs for all will remain limited. While partnerships with local schools offer one solution, non-city-owned buildings present challenges, including fees, time restrictions, and uncertainty about future arrangements.

## Aquatics Facilities

Aquatic facilities encompass swimming pools, spray decks, and pool complexes, which can be indoor or outdoor. Outdoor aquatics facilities are usually only open during the summer season, while indoor aquatic centers are open year-round.

Public aquatic facilities typically provide a range of programs and offer scheduled open swim times, except for splash decks that are available to the public at no charge. These facilities are essential to the community in meeting public health and safety goals as well as providing inclusive recreational opportunities to both the Missoula community and the area's larger regional market area.

Missoula's indoor and outdoor aquatics centers include multiple pools and provide a variety of aquatics experiences and programming opportunities. Missoula's existing aquatics facilities are highly used for both recreational swim and learn to swim programs averaging over 160,000 swims per season between both facilities. Attendance numbers are generally holding steady and attendance at learn to swim programs are limited by the amount of instructors the department has. The pool facilities are now nearly 19 years old. Continued reinvestment into facility infrastructure will ensure pool facilities meet current demand for services.

Additionally, the recently completed 2024 Splash facility study has identified improvements at Splash Montana that will improve attendance and create additional revenue. Missoula is similar to the five comparable cities, which all offer indoor or outdoor aquatic centers. More aquatics space is desirable but is a lesser need than non-aquatics indoor space for recreation programming.

## Recreation Programs and Services

Recreation programs serve as a vital connection between a community's residents and its physical spaces. They promote health, livability, and vibrancy while providing essential services such as socialization and childcare.

The Department receives grant funding through Missoula County Public Schools at Franklin and CS Porter schools to offer no-cost afterschool programming. Additionally, Parks and Recreation provides afterschool programming at seven other public and private elementary schools through a sliding fee scale.

These programs significantly support households in Missoula. Moreover, they play a crucial role in activating parks and serving the broader community. Programs must remain adaptable to the community's evolving needs and interests for maximum effectiveness.

While Missoula offers a wide range of programs, they often face limited space, permits, funding, equipment, and staffing constraints. Addressing these service gaps requires innovation beyond traditional approaches—rethinking not just program timing and location but also delivery methods and target audiences. Success will depend on continuous learning, evaluation, and adaptation.





## Trails

Trails and pathways are highly valued components in Missoula's PROST system, for trail-oriented recreation and for transportation and access to/from parks, facilities, and programs as well as areas of commerce, academics, and work. During the PROST Planning process, the Parks and Recreation worked closely with other City departments and agency partners to update and clarify the trail typology in Missoula.

The trail typologies were adapted to be more consistent with other agencies and to align with the Street Typologies from the Our Missoula Growth Policy. According to the BBER survey, 74 percent of residents are satisfied with the quality of trails in Missoula, and the majority of residents prefer to have trails near their home.

### Completing the Network

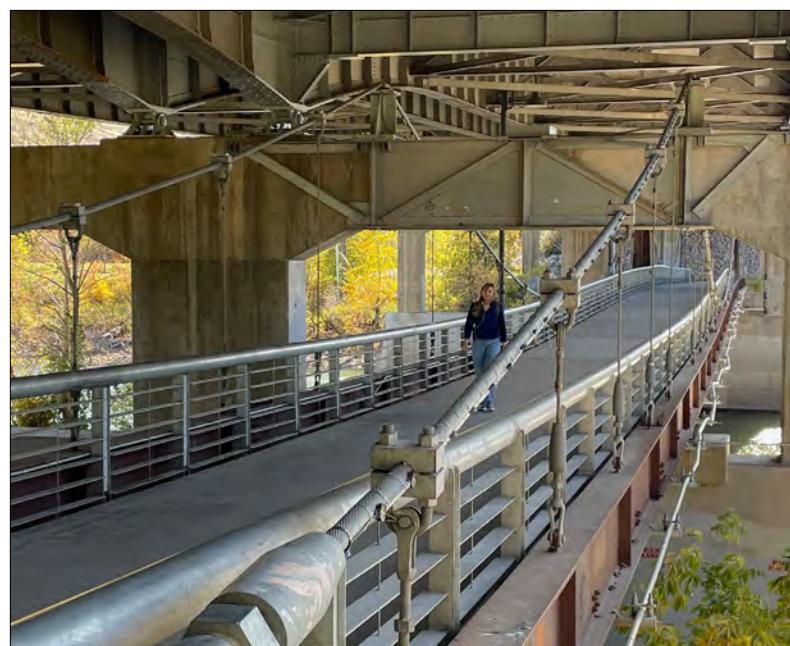
Public engagement results strongly emphasized the importance of trails and connections, resulting in a specific goal to improve connections and connectivity.

Missoula has planned for a comprehensive trail network, as Figure 26 illustrates. There is a need to build out the trail system as planned, as well as a need to improve and enhance existing trails, to increase capacity, accessibility, and reduce conflicts in the existing system. The Trail Typology document (included in Appendix G) provides additional detail on the desired trail widths and surfaces.

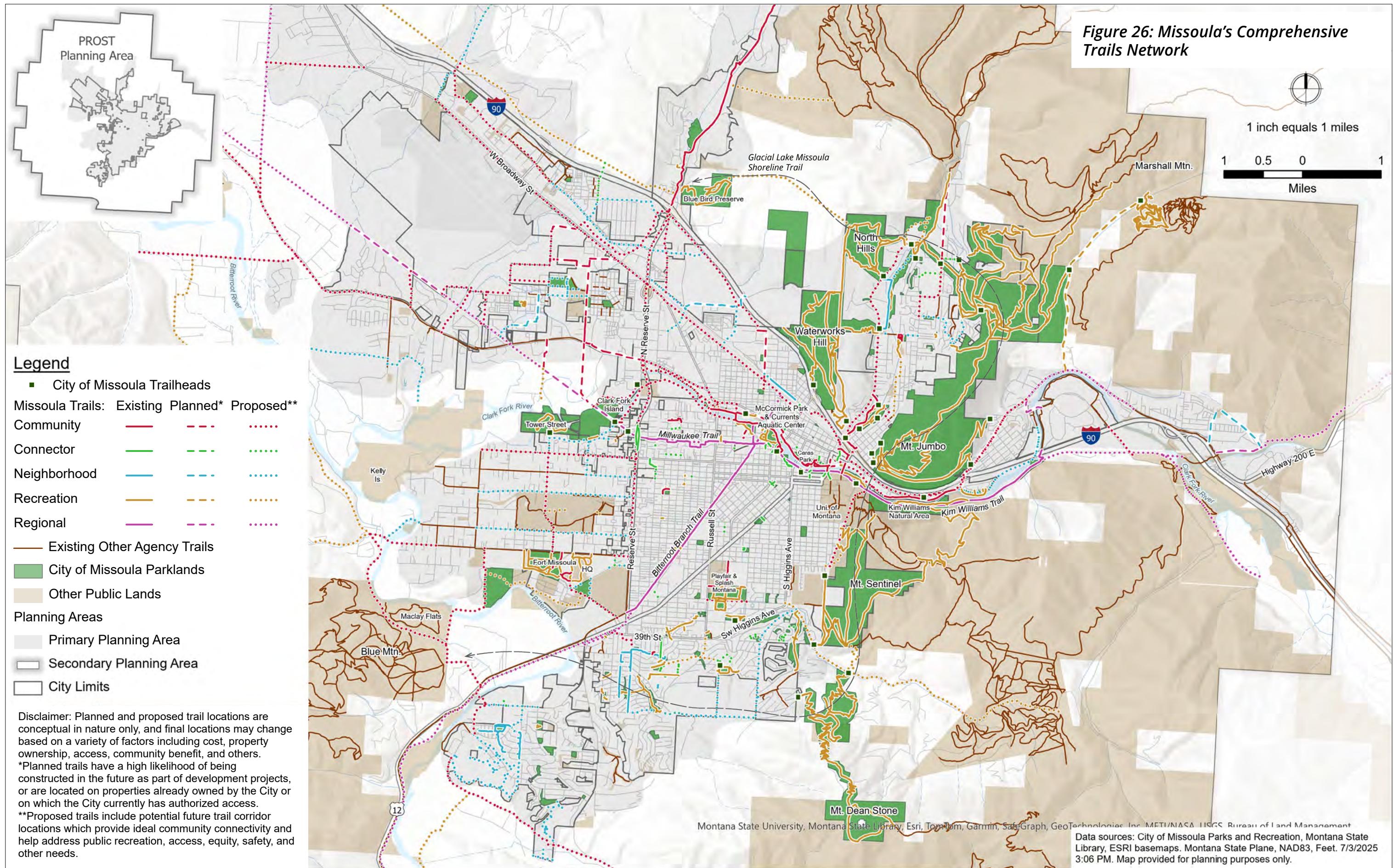
### Safe Routes to Parks and Schools

Missoula's pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is inconsistent and discontinuous. This infrastructure includes trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, greenways (shared-use streets), and shared lane markings, all of which are part of the city's overall transportation system. However, the responsibility for these elements is divided among several agencies and departments, including the Missoula Public Works & Mobility Department, the Missoula Public Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Missoula Parks and Recreation.

There is a critical need to prioritize improvements throughout both the on-street and off-street networks to maximize the potential of existing parks, enhance the safety of the entire system, and encourage greater use of these parks and trails. Implementing these strategies is especially important within a ½-mile radius of parks to ensure that safe routes are available to all parks.



*Figure 26: Missoula's Comprehensive Trails Network*





# Community Needs Summary

## Key Takeaways

- Urban Park Innovation:** New models are needed for higher-density areas with compact, amenity-rich parks accessible to all residents—supporting both housing density and equity goals.
- Connected Green Network:** Developing an integrated system of parks, open spaces and conservation lands, particularly along river corridors, addresses climate resilience while providing equitable nature access.
- Climate-Responsive Facilities:** Indoor recreation options must expand to counter extreme weather conditions (heat, smoke, winter) through new facilities and school partnerships.

- Urban Forest Renewal:** Updating the urban tree inventory, diversifying plantings, and strengthening development codes will protect this vital climate infrastructure.
- Inclusive Programming:** Recreation services need to extend beyond youth to serve adults, seniors, and underserved neighborhoods through diverse, mobile offerings.

This “snapshot” of gaps and needs is used to determine recommendations in Chapter 6: Meeting Community Needs.

Public engagement and input throughout the planning process, as documented in Chapter 2, is key to understanding how residents want parks, recreation, open spaces, and trails to function in and around Missoula in the future. Below is a summary of the needs determined throughout the PROST planning process grouped by lands, facilities and trails, programs and services, and the city decision lenses.

## Lands, Facilities, and Trails

### *Serving Higher Density Residential Areas*

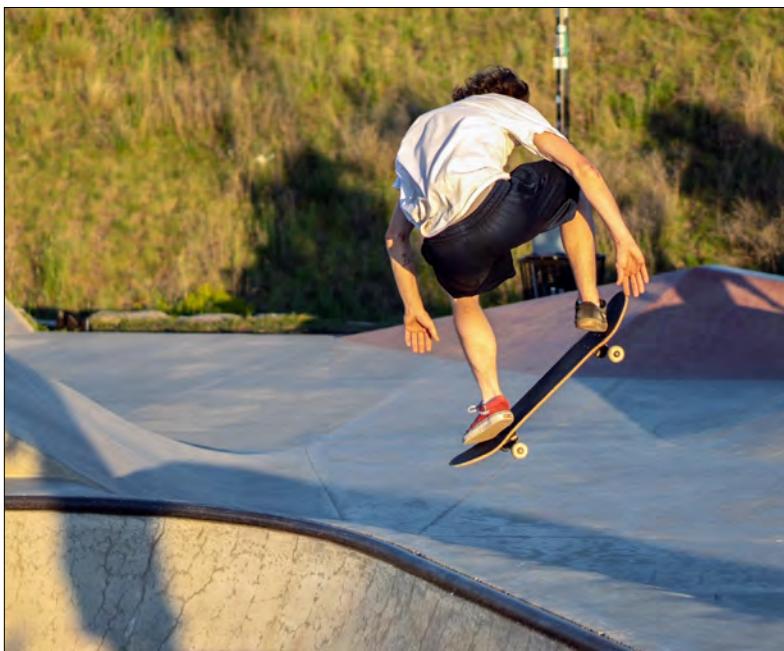
- A walkable, rollable system that provides access to a quality park for all community members.
- Continued land acquisition, park development, and partnerships to serve gap areas and new growth areas.
- New models to serve higher density residential areas, including a shift to more urban parks that include more amenities and uses in a smaller space.
- Innovative activation of existing public spaces, parks, with potential to activate streets for play.

### *Integrating and Updating our Open Space System*

- Continued development of a connected, cohesive system of developed parks, open space and conservation lands.
- Integrate open/natural spaces within the city and expand access to nature, including along the Clark Fork and Bitterroot River corridors.
- Continue collaboration with County and Open Space Partners to proactively identify potential land acquisitions
- Use the asset management system to focus on maintenance and upkeep of the existing park system and planned maintenance as the park system grows.
- Continue development of deferred maintenance funding and assets management plan for all parklands and amenities.



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*



- Develop a coordinated management plan for the Clark Fork and Bitterroot River corridors through town that increases access to parks and trails for residents and visitors and provides access to nature and respite from the urban environment.
- Create a process to identify and implement increased amenities on conservation lands and increased nature in developed parks to meet community demand, along with equity in access and climate goals.

### ***Connecting our Trails***

- Improve trail connections and connectivity by creating the planned trail system.
- Expand safe routes to parks and schools through better connected on- and off-street facilities including trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, neighborhood greenways, shared lane markings, etc.
- Adopt standards based on trail typologies to inform growth and create a connected and intuitive trail network
- Work with other departments, agencies, and private developers to build and connect the trail system
  - Great American Rail-Trail (Milwaukee Trail and other east-west trails through Missoula)
  - Bitterroot Trail
  - Provide for loop, purpose built, and local/tourist destination trails
  - Increase and where appropriate provide universal trails with accessible maps and wayfinding.

### ***Investing in Urban Forestry***

- Up-to-date tree inventory data.
- A more diverse urban forest that reflects Missoula's changing climate.
- An update to the Urban Forest Management Plan to provide focused actions and resources for the urban forest.
- Diversify urban forestry funding sources for better maintenance and new plantings.
- Develop predictable, consistent codes and standards to guide development that align with the City's goals and ensure the integrity and renewal of the urban forest.

### ***Diversifying our Outdoor Recreation Facilities, Park Amenities, and Indoor Recreation and Aquatic Facilities***

- Diversity of park amenities that serve the community as the population grows and changes.
- Implement new amenity recommendation findings of 2024 Aquatic Expansion Feasibility study.
- Continued aquatic services and exploration of options for additional or expansion of aquatic space.
- Continue to invest in existing aquatics facility to ensure regional significance in program offerings
- Continue to develop interlocal agreements with MCPS and others to understand further opportunities for indoor space for recreation programming.

- Diversify options for indoor facility types that can be used by the community year-round and throughout the day, including evening hours.
- Utilize or create spaces for arts and culture, as well as multi-generational and social spaces.

### **Programs and Services**

- Continued investment in core program areas especially aquatics, school's out programs, and summer camps. These programs are extremely popular, essential and community identified as core areas.
- Continue to explore and expand recreation programs as a source of essential childcare for working families in the community and expand upon our relationship with businesses and organizations who support this work.
- Expanded opportunities for adult and older adult programs of all types including but not limited to
  - Environmental / Nature and Outdoor Recreation
  - Arts and Culture
  - Games and specialty clubs
  - Volunteer related programs geared towards the interests of aging adults specifically that link them to younger populations
  - Exploration of alternative program formats, multigenerational short duration, and community-building/cultural events.

- Increase of mobile program offerings to take low or no cost programming to underserved areas of community
- Programming for older youth and teens
- Continued work in developing and maintaining our partnership with Missoula County Public Schools by providing wrap-around programming for students and the immediate neighborhood of schools.

### **City Decision Lenses**

- Demonstration of climate-friendly practices, including energy and water efficiency, in parks, facilities, and conservation lands.
- Continued public education and communications regarding stewardship of the land, trash management, conservation, clean air, public health impacts of extreme heat and wildfire/drought response.
- Planned parks and facilities for emergency response system.
- Code updates to encourage green infrastructure
- Creating new or enhancing existing indoor and outdoor spaces for improved climate controls and mitigations.
- As much as possible, prepare for increased climate variability and extreme weather events (such as the windstorm of 2024).

# CHAPTER 5

## Objectives to Meet Community Needs

### Key Takeaways

- ◊ **Multi-Function Facilities:** Parks should be designed for flexible, multiple uses rather than single purposes, with community parks like Playfair Park being reimagined to serve more diverse needs year-round.
- ◊ **Nature Integration:** The future park system should incorporate natural elements throughout all park types, creating “hybrid parklands” that blend developed recreational areas with native habitat patches.
- ◊ **Expanded Partnership Network:** Building and sustaining robust partnerships with schools, nonprofits, businesses, and other agencies is essential for expanding access, funding, and programming.
- ◊ **All-Season Recreation Initiative:** Strategic investments in climate-controlled spaces, covered facilities, and winter programming are needed to ensure year-round access to recreation despite extreme weather conditions.
- ◊ **River Corridor Management:** A comprehensive, cross-jurisdictional approach to river corridor management will balance responsible recreational development, habitat protection, and educational campaigns.

# Goal-Oriented Objectives

This chapter identifies objectives that will guide the Department's decision-making, approach and actions regarding system operations, design and development, capital investments, lands and facilities, and programs and services, for the long term.

The objectives are organized by the goal areas, recognizing that many individual objectives may support multiple goals. Each is given a letter and number code for easy reference. Following this chapter, Chapter 6 includes more specific project, program and initiative recommendations to guide the Department toward achieving the outlined objectives. Chapter 7 includes an implementation process that connects these goal-based objectives to the recommendations and provides tools for determining priorities moving forward.

## Organizational Process Goals



### Be Forward-Thinking & Adaptable

Anticipate the needs of Missoula's growing and changing community by creating adaptable and innovative parks, facilities, trails, landscapes, and programs that benefit the community environmentally, socially, culturally, and economically.



### Build & Sustain Partnerships

Expand and sustain community partnerships, and work with other departments, agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals to advance the PROST and greater community vision.

## Outcome-Oriented Goals



### Elevate Quality of Life

Ensure Missoula's parks, recreation facilities, open spaces, trails, trees, and services continue to contribute to and reflect Missoula's identity with a thriving, equitable, and well-rounded park system.



### Support Healthy People

Promote overall wellbeing with increased opportunities for health and wellness, physical fitness, enjoyment of social connections, and increased safety through programs and services.



### Foster a Healthy Natural Environment

Strategically protect, maintain, design, and improve a cohesive system of parklands and open spaces that help to mitigate the effects of climate change and provide respite for residents from the urban environment.



### Improve Connections & Connectivity

Connect people to each other, to community, to public places, and to the natural environment while ensuring connected ecological systems.



### Enhance Maintenance

Provide stewardship of Missoula's parks, open spaces, trails, urban forest, and recreation assets through innovative, regenerative, and effective design combined with maintenance and operations best practices.



## A. Be Forward-Thinking and Adaptable

**Anticipate the needs of Missoula's growing and changing community by creating adaptable and innovative parks, facilities, trails, landscapes, and programs that benefit the community environmentally, socially, culturally, and economically.**

*The following objectives are focused specifically on ensuring the Department can adapt, evolve, and be flexible in its provision of services and parks over the next 15 years.*

### Funding the Future

- A.1 **To accommodate population growth, adhere to park standards, and respond to the expansion of municipal boundaries**, ensure the alignment and security of funding and staffing for both current and future park and recreation services.
- A.2 **Implement advance planning to be "shovel ready"** with several projects, initiatives, and programs in preparation for grant, foundation, and donation opportunities.
- A.3 **Prioritize capital reinvestments** and budget enhancements that reduce operating costs through innovative design, reduced water use, decreased energy costs, increased durability, and labor savings.
- A.4 **Increase sustainable revenue streams** to provide longevity to current program initiatives while exploring sources for growth.
- A.5 **Advocate and seek funding for trail projects**, "safe routes to parks," and "safe routes to schools."
- A.6 **Increase funding to address the growing deferred maintenance** needs and fully implement the asset management program, which regularly and proactively reinvests in the park system to sustain its quality and services to the community.

### Adapting Planning and Design of Facilities and Amenities

- A.7 **Leverage professional expertise of staff** to take a leading role in the development of existing and future parks, trail systems, and/or recreation complexes to better serve the community as a whole and ensure the project is aligned with PROST guidelines and follows city standards.
- A.8 **Ensure that event and core public spaces have adequate infrastructure** and facilities, such as electrical services and adaptable use spaces, to support and adapt to a variety of events and activities.
- A.9 **Design and construct neighborhood and community parks for flexible uses**. Avoid the development of single-use parks and amenities to ensure a diversity of users and activities is optimized, allowing enhancements that are consistent with the PROST Plan.
- A.10 **Prioritize multipurpose fields and courts** with configurations and designs that support a broad range of activities when designing new or retrofitting existing sports facilities.
- A.11 **Locate and design new parks and park amenities in collaboration with residents**, neighborhood groups, homeowners' associations, and other partners to best meet community needs.
- A.12 **Work to ensure universal access** of programming, places, and services, including the application of Universal Design principles.

### Assessing Use and Operations

- A.13 **Assess and adapt Parks and Recreation use policies**, fees, and operational policies as needed to adjust to changing needs.
- A.14 **Continue to collect and analyze community needs** through routine user surveys and engagement, in concert with capital improvement plans, the Community Experience Program, and recreation program planning to ensure relevance and to support a culture of continuous process improvements.
- A.15 **Continue to conduct financial feasibility studies** when considering the addition of any major facilities with high operating costs, such as indoor recreation centers, aquatic facilities, and event facilities.

### Updating Climate Policies and Practices

- A.16 **Incorporate climate change considerations** into park and recreation planning and design efforts, adjusting practices, policies, and projects to be more resilient to changing climate and to reduce overall department-related emissions.
- A.17 **Demonstrate leadership in sustainable park management** by implementing best practices and providing educational opportunities for the community. Prioritize low-impact development, green building techniques, and nature-based solutions when revitalizing, developing, and maintaining parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational facilities. These strategies can serve as exemplary models for other organizations.



## B. Build and Sustain Partnerships

**Expand and sustain community partnerships and work with other departments, agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals to advance the PROST and greater community vision.**

*The following policies highlight the need to work closely with a wide range of partners to implement the PROST Plan.*

### Building and Maintaining Shared-use Agreements

- B.1 **Explore alternative service approaches** to fill gaps in service and provide recreation opportunities in parks or programmable spaces, leveraging the strengths and facilities of other organizations.
- B.2 **Strategically conserve open space**, protect and enhance the ecological function of local natural resources, project local agricultural lands and food sources, and improve recreational access with a focus on underserved areas of the community in collaboration with other departments and partners.
- B.3 **Increase educational opportunities, fund projects**, and increase awareness, availability, and accessibility of recreation resources by collaborating with partners.
- B.4 **Continue to coordinate and strengthen partnerships** with Front Country Recreation Cooperative, Five Valleys Land Trust, Three Rivers Collaborative, and federal, state, and local agencies, land owners and other organizations to effectively manage and support community access, and recreational and conservation functions of public lands.
- B.5 **Continue to pursue formalized nonprofit and agency partnerships** with structured criteria, greater definition of responsibilities and financial commitments, and more detailed agreements.

### Identifying and Expanding Robust City Partnerships

- B.6 **Streamline and align development and management activities** to ensure cost-effective, high-quality services for Missoulians in concert with the City and other agencies.
- B.7 **Increase coordination and collaboration with the business community**, including the Downtown Missoula Partnership, Missoula Midtown Association, Destination Missoula, Missoula Economic Partnership, Chamber of Commerce, and other similar groups to increase capacity for project development, programming and event management, public outreach, and park maintenance.
- B.8 **Maximize the public's access to PROST opportunities** and leverage resources while advancing climate, housing, and equity goals through internal coordination and collaboration between city departments.
- B.9 **Build upon current public/private partnerships and vendor agreements** that bring additional amenities and opportunities into the park system.
- B.10 **Advocate and retain quality of life, neighborhood integrity, 10-minute access, and climate goals** through development while increasing housing availability by fostering a positive working relationship with the community.
- B.11 **Work closely with partner agencies and departments to support shared strategies and goals** in the Long-Range Transportation, Land Use, Community Health Improvement, Destination Missoula Stewardship, Urban Renewal District, Downtown and Midtown Master, and other area plans.
- B.12 **Support the local economy, workforce, and related systems** from Parks and Recreation initiatives, projects, and programs, including childcare, local jobs, tax impacts, etc., avoiding negative impacts on the community and community members.
- B.13 **Integrate innovative planning and design principles, such as smart growth, 10-minute walk/roll standards, and other PROST strategies**, into new development and redevelopment projects and through code alignment and engagement with agencies, City departments, and partners.

### Embracing Ongoing Community Engagement

- B.14 **Continue to engage the entire Missoula community** to ensure departmental improvements and investments reflect evolving public needs.
- B.15 **Incorporate more education about Indigenous places and peoples** in current or future programming, places, and services.
- B.16 **Include unique user groups** in the design of programming, places, and services.
- B.17 **Engage in community events to build and foster relationships**, particularly with populations in the community that may not already be engaged in programs or regularly use parklands.



## C. Elevate Quality of Life

**Ensure Missoula's parks, recreation facilities, open spaces, trails, and trees continue to contribute to and reflect Missoula's identity with a thriving, equitable, and well-rounded park system.**

*The following objectives are designed to inform the development of an integrated PROST system through its physical assets.*

### Meeting Park Standards

- C.1 **Provide high-quality parks to meet the needs of local neighborhoods and within a 10-minute walk** of every resident in Missoula's Urban, Downtown, and Limited Urban Place Types per the City's adopted Land Use Plan, and park standards.
- C.2 **Provide high-quality parks within 1 mile of every resident** in Missoula's Rural Place Type per the City's adopted Land Use Plan.
- C.3 **Apply the PROST Park Development Guidelines** to help with the prioritization of renovating parks and developing new ones (see Appendix C), ensuring a focus on areas that lack access per the park equity gaps map (page 3.7).
- C.4 **Explore alternatives to traditional park locations** and sizes in developed areas where land acquisition is challenging. Consider implementing park improvements in underutilized right-of-way areas and other City lands. Develop partnerships for joint use of green spaces owned by private landowners and other organizations. Additionally, implement improvements that increase the capacity of existing city parks.
- C.5 **Advance the goal of 10.68 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents**, recognizing that acreage alone does not ensure the desired level of service. Prioritize quality amenities, features, and access while maintaining the 2004 goal and existing standard.
- C.6 **Consider divesting, trading, or changing the use of sites that duplicate services**, are underutilized, or don't meet development guidelines and apply the revenue generated from this divestment to fund improvements and maintenance of nearby or community parklands.

### Adopting Safe, Inclusive, and Sustainable Design

- C.7 **Follow universal design, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED),** holistic land management practices, and climate resilience principles in the design of parks, facilities, and trails to achieve more welcoming, inclusive, safe, and sustainable public spaces. Consult the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design for the most up-to-date universal design principles and practices.<sup>3</sup>
- C.8 **Create unifying design elements for parks, trails, and open space** that create a sense of identity for the entire system, such as consistent signage, wayfinding, and furnishings, acknowledging that some parks will have unique themes or stories.
- C.9 **Design parks, trails, trailheads, facilities, and amenities to encourage positive behaviors**, promote safety, and accommodate a diverse range of users. Ensure flexibility in design to serve as many people as possible, incorporating key features in facilities like restrooms, shelters, and courts.
- C.10 **Incorporate lighting where appropriate**, ensuring it complies with Dark Skies principles, to improve safety, increase year-round public use, and support various activities and events.

<sup>3</sup> <https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design/the-7-principles>



## D. Support Healthy People

**Promote overall well-being with increased opportunities for health and wellness, physical fitness, enjoyment of social connections, and increased safety through programs and services.**

*The following objectives are focused specifically on providing programs and services to promote a healthy Missoula community.*

### Increasing Programs for All

- D.1 **Ensure programs are accessible** to all Missoula residents.
- D.2 **Expand programs for active and aging adults to foster social connection**, enhance personal health and well-being, strengthen community and environmental stewardship, encourage learning and exploration, support volunteerism, and accommodate diverse recreation interests and cultural traditions. (See Chapter 6 for specific program recommendations.)
- D.3 **Collaborate with Missoula County Public Schools to share facilities** and align goals, advancing long-term objectives through strategic partnership.
- D.4 **Further develop age 0-5 programming** to introduce these children to our parks system as early as possible.
- D.5 **Work with local tribes** to determine historical uses of culturally significant lands and incorporate, wherever feasible, interpretation, education, plantings, and conservation practices that celebrate and protect the historical uses and cultural significance of the land.
- D.6 **Improve equitable access** to park facilities and programs by increasing information and communication about programs, facilities, trails, and amenities through multiple channels.

### Supporting Program Innovations

- D.7 **Explore a variety of programming options**, including piloting programs to test new programming areas and options, such as multigenerational activities, programs for active older adults, and alternative formats that require less time commitment (e.g., one-time, short-term, or drop-in options).
- D.8 **Expand the availability of winter recreation programming**, activities, amenities, trail routes, and other related opportunities.
- D.9 **Expand self-directed health and fitness participation** by promoting benefits and opportunities via social media marketing campaigns, encouraging meet-up walking and running groups (in developed parks or where carrying capacity supports larger groups), or offering mobile programming.
- D.10 **Create and expand program opportunities** through enhanced partnerships and volunteerism that enhance quality and quantity, where and when missions align, and when there is a net benefit to residents.
- D.11 **Promote nature-based recreation and exploration** throughout Missoula's park and conservation lands system using both formal and self-guided activities, through increased and/or improved programming, outreach, planning, site design, and other appropriate means.



## E. Foster a Healthy Natural Environment

**Strategically protect, maintain, design, and improve a coherent system of parklands and open spaces that help mitigate the effects of climate change and provide respite for residents from the urban environment.**

*The following objectives strive to protect, steward, and expand access to nature in Missoula's park system.*

### Protecting and Stewarding Lands

- E.1 **Plan for and protect sensitive lands** in and around Missoula to protect and support public health, safety and welfare through planning, programming, and processes acquiring property where appropriate, and working with stakeholders and partners to reduce impacts from wildfire, severe weather, flooding, and other natural disasters, as well as the protection of wildlife habitat, wetlands, river corridors and riparian areas, agricultural lands, and other sensitive lands.
- E.2 **Foster healthy stream and river corridors** by working with partners to protect water quality, reduce flooding, provide wildlife habitat, and connect people to nature. Improve the quality of riparian areas and waterways in urbanized areas of Missoula—including the Clark Fork River, Bitterroot River, Rattlesnake Creek, Pattee Creek, Grant Creek, and Bancroft Ponds—while strategically managing public use.
- E.3 **Connect urban green spaces and anchor areas** through corridors and connect areas of development with open spaces.<sup>3</sup>
- E.4 **Protect and enhance the biodiversity, habitat value, and ecological function** of Missoula's urban parks, natural areas, and other conservation lands.

### Expanding and Increasing Access to Nature in the City

- E.5 **Expand the availability of natural areas in developed parks** in a sensible, cost-effective, and context-sensitive way to promote human physical and mental health, biodiversity, and improved and/or expanded and connected wildlife habitat.
- E.6 **Diversify developed park landscapes**, increasing the number of large canopy trees and clusters of trees, including native species.
- E.7 **Incorporate stormwater infrastructure** into parks by establishing clear standards for integration. Ensure compatible stormwater facilities enhance park amenities, such as bioswales and rain gardens with diverse vegetation or retention basins designed to hold water and support wildlife habitat. Discourage the use of traditional detention and retention basins in parklands.
- E.8 **Incorporate regenerative and nature-based design** principles and best practices in parking areas, streets, and hardscapes to minimize long-term maintenance needs and to reduce water use and overall expenses.
- E.9 **Maximize ecosystem services** by designing and managing natural areas and green infrastructure within developed parks. Ensure benefits such as stormwater management, air quality improvement, aquifer recharge, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat remain compatible with human enjoyment.
- E.10 **Reduce maintenance requirements and increase biodiversity** by incorporating more natural areas along edges, riparian areas, and in other low use areas through strategic park design and maintenance practices.
- E.11 **Provide opportunities for Indigenous cultural horticulture, land management, and foraging practices** in Missoula's parks and conservation lands, collaborating with partners to support and implement these efforts.
- E.12 **Showcase innovative, successful, and sustainable practices** and strategies to the larger community as practical.

### Supporting and Enhancing the Urban Forest

- E.13 **Restore, maintain, expand, and fund the urban forest** to benefit all residents.
- E.14 **Complete and update the Missoula public tree inventory**, allocating resources to ensure comprehensive data collection and maintenance.
- E.15 **Demonstrate the benefits of a healthy urban forest** in meeting City strategic goals and positive impacts on public health, safety, welfare and the City's climate goals.



## F. Improve Connections & Connectivity

**Connect people to each other, to community, to public places, and to the natural environment, while ensuring connected ecological systems.**

*The following objectives serve to ensure PROST lands, facilities, and programs are connected to places and people, are easily accessed, and encourage one's connection with place.*

### Creating and Improving Safe Routes to Parks and Schools and a Connected Multi-Modal System

- F.1 **Provide “safe routes to parks” and “safe routes to schools”** by working to improve the City’s trail network in and through town, including regional, community, and neighborhood trail corridors. Prioritize improvements with universally designed upgrades, enhanced crossings, and strategically connected neighborhood greenways and on-street facilities.
- F.2 **Implement the planned network of off-street trails and pathways**, in coordination with the on-street pedestrian, bicycle, and greenway network, to increase community mobility and support climate goals.
- F.3 **Ensure a commuter trail, trailhead, transit stop, or neighborhood greenway is within a 10-minute walk** of all residents by developing a connected and accessible network.
- F.4 **Provide a high-quality trail experience** that serves all abilities, encourages active recreation and multi-modal transportation, and creates corridors of natural space.
- F.5 **Embrace and celebrate the Clark Fork River** within Missoula in long-term planning and design, creating a coordinated and connected system of river access points within parkland, along trails, and in natural areas that are accessible to the public and protect water quality, habitat, and riparian vegetation.

- F.6 **Expand Missoula’s multi-modal trail network** to enhance capacity, experience, and connectivity. Collaborate with the Public Works & Mobility Department, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, and other partners to improve on-street pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities.
- F.7 **Extend, expand, connect, design, repair, and widen regional and community trail networks and corridors** throughout the greater Missoula area in alignment with the trail typologies framework in Appendix G.
- F.8 **Coordinate e-bike usage and connectivity** from city trails to other trail systems by working with other city departments, local and regional trail organizations, and public land managers.

### Promoting Social Connectivity through Arts and Culture

- F.9 **Develop an arts and culture plan** that considers how access to arts and culture significantly contributes to enhancing quality of life. The plan should consider the defined objectives below as well as create additional objectives and recommendations through a public planning process.
- F.10 **Expand programming in arts and culture, nature education, and social events** while increasing opportunities for partner-led initiatives in these areas.
- F.11 **Integrate cultural, historic, and place-based art and interpretation**, including locally relevant indigenous culture and history, throughout the park system to enliven parks, celebrate neighborhood and cultural identity, and interpret the natural and cultural environment unique to Missoula.
- F.12 **Expand the number and variety of social gathering spaces** in Missoula’s park system, celebrating history, culture, and place.

### Creating Consistent and Effective Wayfinding and Signage

- F.13 **Implement a consistent system of physical and digital wayfinding and signage** (following applicable City of Missoula’s wayfinding plans) to help users navigate the parks, recreation, open space, and trails system.
- F.14 **Include Universal Design principles** and apply culturally appropriate languages throughout trail systems.



## G. Enhance Maintenance

**Provide stewardship of Missoula's parks, open spaces, trails, urban forest, and recreation assets through innovative, regenerative, and effective design combined with maintenance and operations best practices.**

*The following objectives focus on the importance of supporting quality maintenance and staff capacity.*

### Expanding Operations & Maintenance Funding

- G.1 **Evolve and adequately fund Missoula's operational approaches** for parks, conservation lands, programming, and facilities to deliver high-quality maintenance and excellent long-term value for the entire community.
- G.2 **Include necessary management and staffing resources** to properly address maintenance needs when planning capital projects and creating new programs.
- G.3 **Explore new or expanded funding sources** for operations, asset management, capital improvements, and project planning. Create new staff positions or expand existing roles dedicated to researching, acquiring, and managing external funding, including grants. Consider developing partnerships to support these funding initiatives.
- G.4 **Locate and provide appropriate centralized and satellite operations** facilities to meet system needs while gaining efficiencies.
- G.5 **Emphasize long-term and life cycle costs** when designing and constructing new parks, trails, and facilities, ensuring functionality, safety, and adaptable uses. Incorporate green infrastructure in rights-of-way to enhance sustainability and resilience.

### Investing in Staff Development and Growth

- G.6 **Continue to build and support staff professional development** to ensure there are capacity and skills to implement the PROST Plan and effectively adapt to changing conditions, opportunities, or challenges.
- G.7 Foster innovative, culturally relevant, and dynamic thinking for recreation programming so that Parks and Recreation can continue to offer relevant, in-demand, high-quality classes, events, and activities for all.
- G.8 **Continuously train, evaluate, and celebrate** our work and each other.
- G.9 **Work cross-functionally and collaboratively with other City departments** to support staff and employees as business processes and systems evolve.



# CHAPTER 6

# PROST Recommendations

## Key Takeaways

- ◊ **Park Access Initiative:** The 10-minute walk/roll initiative addresses the fundamental need for convenient park access for all residents, reflecting the core community value of equitable recreation opportunities close to home.
- ◊ **All-Season Recreation:** Given Montana's climate challenges, the ability to enjoy outdoor recreation year-round despite seasonal limitations, extreme weather, and poor air quality is a high priority for maintaining quality of life throughout the year.
- ◊ **River Corridor Management:** The Clark Fork and other waterways are vital ecological, economic, and recreational resources, highlighting the central importance of rivers to Missoula's identity, quality of life, and tourism economy.
- ◊ **Urban Forest Investment:** The plan emphasizes the urgent need to address failing urban forest canopy, reflecting the community's strong valuation of trees for shade, aesthetics, and environmental benefits in the urban landscape.
- ◊ **Nature Integration Strategy:** While related to park access, the specific focus on integrating natural elements throughout the system addresses residents' expressed desire for connecting with nature near their homes.
- ◊ **Equity-Focused Implementation:** The plan prioritizes underserved neighborhoods through equity screens for improvement decisions, expanded scholarship programs, partnerships with underrepresented communities, universal access improvements, and inclusive programming designed for diverse community segments including preschoolers, teens, older adults, and people with disabilities.
- ◊ **Climate Resilience:** The plan embeds climate strategies throughout operations, focusing on water and energy efficiency, transportation-related carbon reduction, waste minimization, habitat restoration, and resilient landscape practices that advance Missoula's broader environmental goals while creating more sustainable park spaces.



The PROST recommendations in this chapter directly address the identified needs for parks, programs, recreation facilities, and trails, as well as systemwide big ideas.

The illustrative map on the following page depicts Missoula's conceptual future park system, which is intended to increase quality of life, promote well-being, foster a healthy environment, and connect people and places.

## Systemwide Big Ideas

The systemwide recommendations described below are big ideas that will help Missoula achieve the PROST vision. These ideas grew from community engagement and an inventory of the current system, and they serve to catalyze multi-benefit opportunities for the City. These recommendations affect multiple sites throughout the system and will require cross-divisional, interdepartmental, and interagency collaboration and coordination.

### Achieving the 10-Minute Walk or Roll

Missoula will implement park and facility improvements to fill gaps in 10-minute walk access throughout the system, with a focus on areas identified by the equity screens (see Chapter 4). As a reminder, the 10-minute walk initiative focuses on all future Place Types that are more urban and may not be realistic for more rural development types (see Chapter 3 for detailed Place Type descriptions). To achieve this initiative, the Department would need to:

#### **Park Expansion and Development**

**Add facilities and amenities to existing parks** of all classifications to ensure everyone has access to a quality park that is close to home.

**Develop smaller, more urban parks and plazas** in urban areas to provide green space, community gathering spaces, and flexible programming areas.

**Acquire and develop new parks** in existing neighborhoods and new residential developments to fill service gaps.

**Implement creative park solutions** such as linear parks along trails, temporary street closures for activities, and other non-traditional park spaces.

#### **Partnerships and Collaboration**

**Build strategic partnerships** with public agencies (including schools), nonprofits, and homeowners' associations to protect land prior to development, enhance public access to lands in gap areas, and jointly fund park improvements.

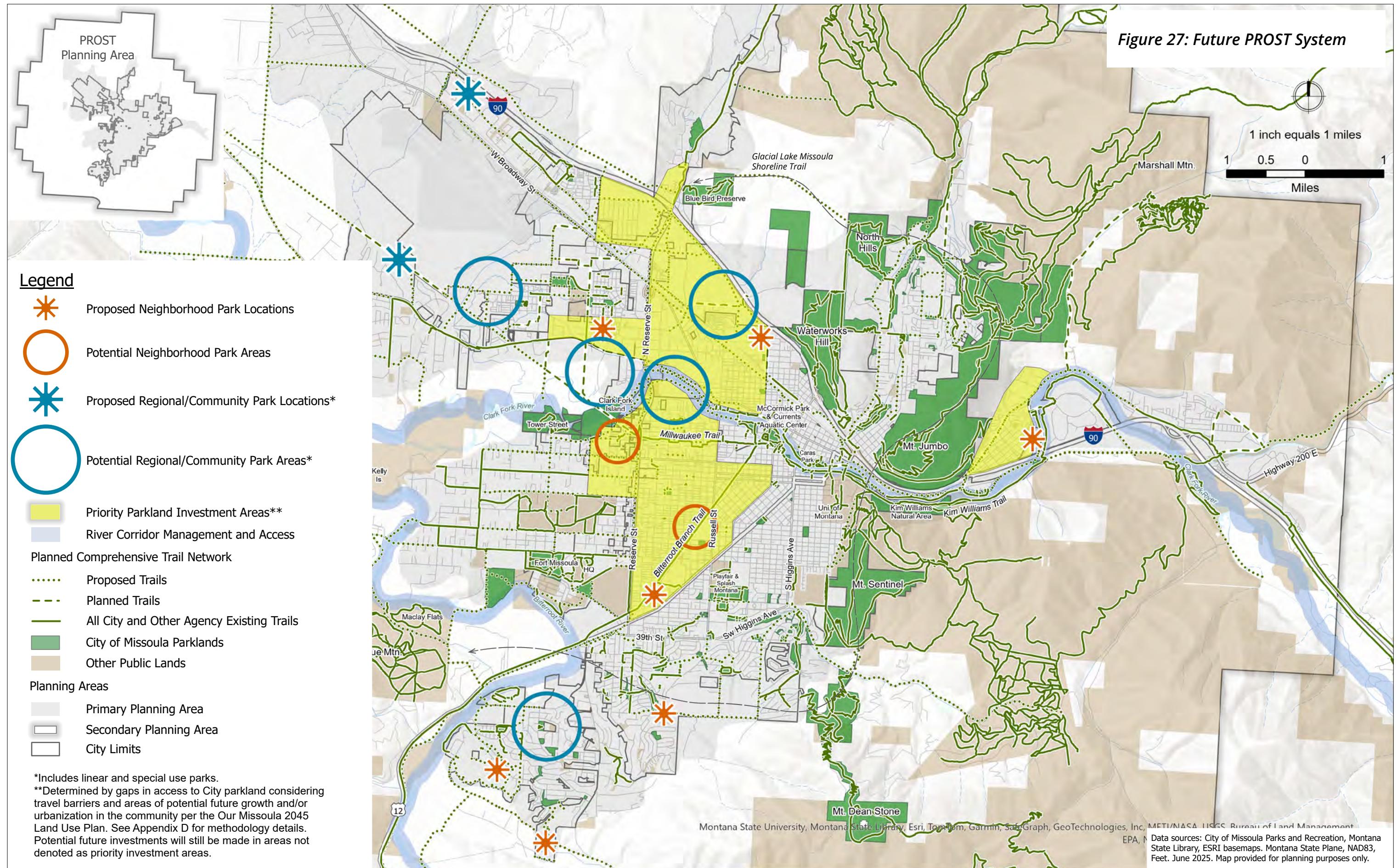
**Coordinate transportation and park access** with City Public Works and Mobility and Missoula County to prioritize right-of-way improvements that create safe routes to parks while mitigating barriers to achieving 10-minute walk/roll access standards.

#### **Planning and Access Standards**

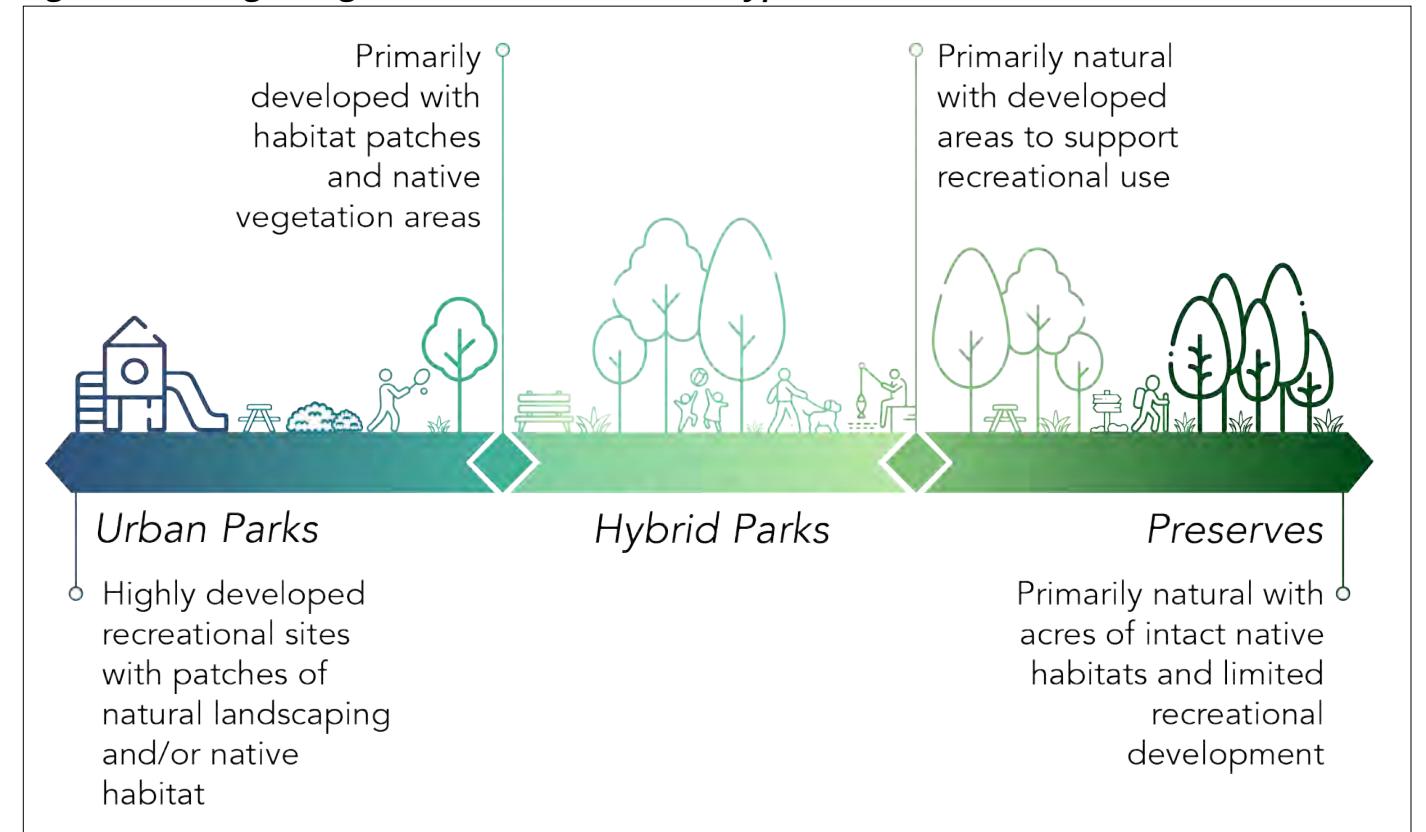
**Integrate comprehensive planning principles** including smart growth, environmental protection, accessibility standards, and other PROST strategies into development projects through partnerships with agencies, City departments, and code alignment that address barriers to the 10-minute walk/roll standard.



*Figure 27: Future PROST System*



**Figure 28: Integrating Nature Across All Park Types**



## Strategically Integrating Nature Throughout the System

The future park system should integrate nature into all facilities, ensuring community members have access to natural spaces and respite from the urban landscape. Enhancing and effectively managing the urban forest is critical for integrating nature into parks and the community, providing additional benefits of shade, cooling, and aesthetic value.

To achieve this initiative, the Department would need to:

**Complete a natural resource inventory** across all parklands.

**Incorporate native, non-invasive, pollinator-friendly, and climate-adapted plants** throughout the system in a responsible and strategic manner.

**Create corridors or patches of natural habitat** throughout the city to increase biodiversity and provide wildlife habitats.

**Ensure all residents can connect with nature** near their homes, creating educational opportunities, enhancing well-being, and fostering respect for and stewardship of the natural environment

**Develop hybrid parklands** that blend natural and recreational elements by transforming existing facilities through strategic capital improvements, staff professional development, specialized maintenance teams, and innovative land management approaches.

Figure 28 shows the spectrum of park landscapes in Missoula, ranging from highly developed urban parks to natural ecosystems in the Park Preserves. Many of Missoula's parks already feature both developed and natural landscapes within the same

boundaries. These "hybrid parklands" will likely increase in quantity and distribution to meet evolving resident and departmental needs. Currently, parkland maintenance operates under two distinct divisions: one manages large intact native habitats and natural surface recreation trails in conservation lands, while a separate division maintains lawns, ornamental plantings, and high-use commuter trails in developed urban parks.

## All-Season Recreation Initiative

To expand use of the current park system and better serve community needs, the Department will implement programs and facilities that promote year-round activities. This initiative directs the Department to invest in both existing sites and new programs that increase usage during shoulder seasons, winter months, and extreme weather conditions. Achieving these goals will require capital improvements, operational enhancements, partnerships, and recreational programming.

### Facilities

- Develop climate-controlled spaces** usable during cold weather, extreme heat events, and poor air quality periods.
- Develop covered field and court facilities** for year-round sports such as futsal, pickleball, and roller hockey.
- Adapt outdoor spaces for multi-season use** by adding synthetic turf fields, lighting for trails and picnic areas, winter-focused amenities, and implementing year-round trail construction standards.
- Add maintenance staff for expanded snow removal** on recreational trail loops throughout the city.

## Recreation Programming and Partnerships

- Develop the City-County partnership at Marshall Mountain** Regional Mountain Park as a hub for year-round, mountain-based recreational activities.
- Create non-snow-dependent winter programming** through partner collaborations, including community events, arts and cultural activities, and nature-based experiences.
- Implement temporary pop-up facilities** to activate parks year-round, similar to the winter disc golf course at Fort Missoula.
- Establish partnerships with local organizations** like schools, the County, and the University for shared facility use to maximize available recreation spaces in all seasons.

## River Corridor Management and Access Plan

Missoula's river corridors and tributaries—including the Clark Fork and Bitterroot Rivers and Rattlesnake Creek—are vital ecological, economic, and recreational resources. Many parks and conservation areas border these waterways, with formal access points such as Brennan's Wave, a whitewater feature on the Clark Fork near Caras Park. Historically, these rivers were primarily used for industrial purposes rather than recreation, resulting in roadways and development encroaching on riverbanks and limiting community access.

The Department is committed to ongoing collaboration with the Three Rivers Collaborative and other partners to enhance cross-jurisdictional management. These partnerships focus on promoting



responsible recreational development, protecting riparian habitats, and supporting public education campaigns. Through this continued collaboration, the Department will contribute to existing efforts like the Clark Fork Restoration and Access Plan and West Broadway River Corridor Plan while recognizing that comprehensive river planning requires multi-agency coordination and appropriate resources.

This collaboration will inform a comprehensive plan for Missoula's river corridors that:

- **Considers both public and private lands.**
- **Identifies locations for public access** for river recreation.
- **Leverages the rivers' natural transportation corridors** for trails and linear parks.
- **Establishes areas for conservation and restoration.**
- **Highlights the river for ongoing support of tourism** and economic development.

The Clark Fork River Restoration and Access Project has been under development for several years and is now at the 100% design phase of development. This initiative builds on years of collaborative community efforts to create and improve designated public access sites while mitigating the impacts of human-made access points along the river. Additionally, the City is working to finalize the master plan for the West Broadway River Corridor Project and plans to prioritize its implementation when the Clark Fork River Access and Restoration Project is completed.

## Land Acquisition Program

Suitable parkland is becoming more costly and difficult to acquire. This initiative focuses on proactive land and trail easement acquisition, which will secure sites in areas slated for development or redevelopment well before development proposals are underway. The Parks and Recreation Department will:

- **Work with partners to acquire parkland** and conservation lands in advance of development. Partners

could include Missoula County, Five Valleys Land Trust, the City's Community Planning, Development and Innovation (CPDI) Department and Missoula Community Planning program, Missoula Redevelopment Agency (MRA), and other partners.

- **Update development standards** to provide clarity and predictability for parkland dedication in subdivisions.
- **Create a park mitigation fee** that applies to all residential developments and replaces multi-family activity area requirements and park impact fees in alignment with City goals and PROST priorities.

## Cultivating Volunteers and Fostering Partnerships

The following recommendations build on the cultivation and management of both volunteers and partnerships to elevate services, manage workflows, improve consistency and institutional memory, and simplify procedures for future volunteers and partners.

- **Develop a centralized volunteer hub** offering diverse opportunities to individuals, groups, and families. Options could range from DIY projects to one-time and long-term commitments. The program should be managed by a Volunteer Program Manager and Coordinator through an online portal.
- **Establish and maintain long-term relationships** with Missoula County, local school districts, public land managers, homeowners' associations, and other organizations to formalize shared stewardship and land management agreements to reach

level-of-service goals for parks and park amenities.

- **Leverage partnerships with other organizations** to enhance volunteer programming. Develop and implement partnership criteria with an evaluation process and tool that works for various scales of partnership and develop agreements to document roles and responsibilities.
- **In partnership with Trees for Missoula and others**, establish a community awareness and communications program that shares the benefits of and the community's and City's roles in managing the urban forest, including establishing community workdays and fun events to promote a healthy urban forest, open space, and parklands.
- **Build partnerships with underrepresented communities** by actively engaging user groups not currently reflected in the parks system and forming community working groups as needed to establish and maintain these relationships.
- **Continue to develop partnerships with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.** Work to provide more opportunities for tribal partnership, participation, involvement, and consultation on departmental projects, programs, and services.
- **Promote and expand "Adopt a Park, Conservation Land or Trail" and park ambassador programs** to activate parks and enhance the sense of safety and belonging in parks, enhance the sense of public ownership of the parks, and help supplement operational funding.



# Operations and Administration

## Key System-Wide Recommendations

In addition to the PROST big ideas, the following operational recommendations will make the Department stronger and more effective:

- **Align departmental planning efforts** by creating a citywide initiative to prioritize and coordinate multiple plans supporting PROST, including the Conservation Lands Management Plan, Open Space Plan, Urban Forestry Plan, Park Asset Management Plan, Turf Maintenance Plan, and neighborhood park plans.
- **Establish visitor use monitoring** across all City parklands with robust, repeatable data collection methods tracking use levels, behaviors, and visitor perceptions to inform management decisions, planning, and service delivery.

Over the next 12-18 months, the City of Missoula, its partners, and the community at large will help envision the future of arts and culture in our city through the creation of an Arts and Culture Plan. This will be our community's first Arts and Culture Plan in over 30 years and will serve as the roadmap

- **Update the Park Asset Management Plan (PAM)** for Developed Parks and Trails, integrating it with the City's GIS system to guide maintenance of existing infrastructure—a community priority. The plan will address both cyclical and deferred maintenance, supporting asset reinvestment projects.

- **Complete the urban forest inventory** as a critical tool for risk management, climate resiliency planning, budget development, and proactive management of this citywide asset.

- **Create a GIS-based Conservation Lands asset inventory** as the foundation for developing management plans, priorities, and capital improvement projects. Completion of this system-wide, GIS-based inventory should be prioritized.

for the future of the arts and culture in Missoula. It will tell us where we are now, what our community values most, what we need to do next, and who we need to support.

The Arts and Culture Plan will give artists a clearer picture of where opportunities exist; will give the community a voice in shaping a thriving, inclusive, creative future; and will give local government and funders a strong foundation for making decisions that invest wisely and fairly in Missoula's cultural landscape.

Following completion of the Arts and Culture Plan, it will be adopted as a PROST implementation plan similar to the Conservation Lands Management Plan, Urban Forest Comprehensive Plan, and other similar plans.

## Advancing Business and Communication Practices and Approaches

Missoula employs a sophisticated approach to funding parks and recreation services, utilizing a variety of tools and mechanisms to ensure high-quality service delivery. The Department has excellent financial management strategies and continues to refine them to enhance operations.

Becoming a Certified Accredited Parks and Recreation Agency (CAPRA) through the National Recreation and Parks Association offers significant benefits. This accreditation process fosters the adoption of industry best practices while also strengthening staff development through ongoing investment in research and implementation of these standards.

The accreditation process will also support the following recommendations:

- **Review and refine event permitting procedures** to enhance access, participation, and promotion of community events within the park system.
- **Improve information management** with consistent protocols across the Department and additional staffing to support implementation.
- **Align community feedback efforts** with updates to the PROST Plan, establishing a timeline of five years or less for systemwide data collection.
- **Enhance accessibility through improved communication tools**, including signage, maps, web resources, and collaborative design processes.
- **Provide regular updates via an annual community report** and other timely communications through multiple channels.
- **Increase transparency on existing trails and facilities**, ensuring residents of all abilities can assess accessibility before visiting.
- **Designate a specific position to write and update maintenance protocols**, particularly for hybrid landscapes, with dedicated time allocated to this responsibility.

## Data Management

### Coordinate and unify data management and maintenance for parks, conservation lands, and trails.

During the PROST planning process, Parks and Recreation and the City's GIS Services Department dedicated significant staff time to developing an authoritative parks layer within Missoula's enterprise GIS database. This

effort involved gathering data from multiple sources across the Department, verifying accuracy, and establishing comprehensive data dictionaries.

To maintain and expand on the authoritative parks data established during the PROST process, the Department should continue to collaborate with GIS Services. Strengthening this partnership will enhance data reliability and streamline staff efforts when compiling critical park system information, such as tree counts; the location, type, and quantity of assets; the age and condition of infrastructure; acreage categorized by park type; and other essential system metrics.

To further improve and expand the unified, single system for all PROST resources, the Department should consider the following:

- **Clearly define roles and standards for PROST asset data** collection, management, and ongoing maintenance.
- **Integrate data management tasks into staff work plans** to ensure consistent and sustainable practices.
- **Prevent siloed data** by avoiding the creation of one-off datasets within individual divisions or workgroups.
- **Systematically retire and archive outdated or redundant datasets** to enhance efficiency and data accuracy.
- **Assess and incorporate Customer Experience data** to inform management decisions and operational strategies.

### Standardize program participation and participant data.

Data can help convey the impact of the community's investment in recreation. The Department should:

- **Standardize and streamline recreation program data reporting** across all directly provided programs, covering registration, participation, attendance, scholarship usage, and satisfaction surveys. Future contract program providers should align their reporting methods with Department standards.
- **Collect and analyze participant demographics** where possible to enhance equitable access to programming.
- **Utilize user input from annual program analyses**, surveys, and other feedback sources to ensure programs and events remain responsive to community priorities and emerging trends.
- **Establish outcome-based indicators** linked to identified objectives to demonstrate how participation data supports overall program goals.

## Support Staff Development and Retention

The following staffing recommendations aim to support the Department in maintaining its cost-effective delivery of high-quality services while adapting to evolving economic conditions.

- **Increase organizational capacity** to align resources with priorities.
- **Embed program support staff positions within each division** (safety/public relations, volunteer coordination, GIS/maps, and data) while coordinating with centralized business team positions.

• **Create a dedicated role to manage partnerships, grants, and agreements**, ensuring seamless coordination of complex collaborations.

• **Expand and diversify staff** to improve and sustain efficient maintenance of natural areas within developed parks.

• **Implement cross-training** to ensure communications, engagement, and experience expertise are available in each division. Department branding, communication guidance, and templates should be coordinated by the communications specialist within the business team.

• **Equip employees with necessary resources**, including technology, equipment, tools, and training to support success.

• **Enhance after-hours park patrols** by adding park rangers or increasing contracting authority. These positions should focus on public education with some enforcement capability and support volunteer ambassador programs.

• **Expand maintenance staffing** to meet or exceed NRPA metrics and ensure continued staff additions based on maintenance impact statements for newly acquired parcels, assets, and responsibilities.

• **Strengthen program support and professional staff** to create additional capacity for technical teams.

• **Strategically bring services in-house** by adding contract, construction management, and engineering services as needed.

### Retain and develop the Department's human capital.

- **Invest in professional development** to ensure staff remain technically proficient.
- **Implement cross-training** to build transferable skills and support organizational objectives.
- **Maintain a balanced workforce** by aligning personnel, administrative, project management, communication, and data management professionals to meet frontline and service-oriented demands.
- **Establish career ladders** that encourage staff retention and professional growth within the City.
- **Support employee well-being** through innovative measures such as wellness hours and industry-leading paid leave accrual policies, especially as tenure increases.
- **Explore cost-of-living solutions** by working with City leadership and other departments to assess options such as workforce housing development, designated seasonal staff housing or camps, and salary adjustments.

### Bring on additional staff as the system and services grow.

As the population and PROST system grows, the Department's staffing should be increased commensurate with growth. All divisions, including Recreation and Urban Forestry, require additional support, along with key functions such as community experience, communications and marketing, engagement and access, and other related areas.

Management staff should reallocate and prioritize assignments to allow time for top priorities for each staff member. Total annual staff hours should be treated as a budget of time by which the Department can deliver the outcomes the community values the most.

- Parks and Recreation will **work with City leadership** to ensure that the budget is commensurate with the growth of City revenue.

## Refine Existing and Develop Additional Funding Resources

Implementing recommendations to support goals and positive health outcomes takes resources to accomplish. The following recommendations consider further exploration of funding ideas:

### Revenue Generation and Program Accessibility

- **Explore opportunities to generate revenue** through service fees and product sales, such as public plant sales from City-grown nursery stock and repurposing waste wood products.
- **Expand tourism revenue** by collaborating with the Tourism and Business Improvement District (TBID) to increase bed tax allocation specifically for parks and recreation purposes.
- **Investigate local option tax possibilities**, potentially beginning with marijuana sales revenue, to support parks and recreation.

- **Implement environmental fees** like a tree mitigation fee to fund plantings when developments cannot meet tree requirements or assess utility easement fees on parklands to generate additional revenue.

- **Enhance accessibility** by increasing sustainable revenue streams to expand scholarship programs and implement sliding fee scales, reducing financial barriers for community members of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds.

### Development and Infrastructure

- **Update parkland dedication and cash-in-lieu policies** to mitigate park impacts from population growth to increase capacity of parks, and encourage amenity development. Expand parkland dedication across all residential development types.
- **Require adherence to park infrastructure standards**, especially those affecting life cycle costs or benefits, and establish adequate City funding to offset costs related to infrastructure project reviews by Parks and Recreation staff.
- **Invest in destination facilities:** Secure funding for continued enhancement of high-value recreation facilities including Fort Missoula Regional Park, aquatic centers, Marshall Mountain Park, and significant trail systems.

### Partnerships and Grants

- Enhance utility partnerships: Explore partnerships with Missoula Water for municipal well placement on parkland to offset irrigation well development costs and seek discounts on stormwater fees for parks with green infrastructure.

- Strengthen community partnerships: Build relationships with Friends of Missoula Parks and other organizations to identify potential donors and increase resource sharing agreements with public and nonprofit entities.
- Pursue larger, more strategic grants that include project management funding to support departmental initiatives.

## Enhancing Operational Practices

The foundation of the PROST system is the neighborhood and community lands and facilities that support the people who live and work in Missoula. The following recommendations consider the operational practices that directly support lands and facilities:

### Headquarters and Maintenance Facilities

- **Relocate Operations headquarters** and yard to a central location with expanded recreation and administrative office space.
- **Establish maintenance satellite facilities** in the Midtown, River Road, and Sxwtpqyen/Mullan areas to support recreation fleet and equipment needs, potentially in partnership with other departments or agencies.
- **Develop a long-range plan for the native plant nursery**, including evaluation of space needs, assessment of current and alternative locations, and creation of an operations plan that identifies specific staffing requirements. In the short term, address immediate staffing needs.

### Planning and Management

- **Update Department management plans** like the City's Urban Forestry Plan, Conservation Lands Management Plan, Park Asset Management Plan, Turf Management Plan, and other related plans to realize the vision and implement the goals of the PROST Plan.
- **Explore alternative options for right-of-way maintenance**, particularly medians and lands without recreation value.
- **Implement maintenance impact statements** to address the increased staffing and maintenance funding needed to keep pace as new facilities, street trees and medians, and lands are added to the system.

### Staffing and Coordination

- **Increase urban forestry staffing** to adequately address current and future workload.
- **Train hybrid maintenance crews** who are qualified to maintain developed park landscapes and native plants in urban areas and developed features on conservation lands.
- **Enhance climate coordination** with the City's Climate Team and consider hiring staff with expertise in climate and resilience in parks.

# Park Development Guidelines

Park development guidelines for each classification establish a clear framework for improvements, ensuring renovations and new developments align with the park's intended function and that investments are distributed equitably. These are detailed in Appendix C.

## Capital Project Types

To assist in allocating resources, eight categories of capital projects are needed to address needs, gaps, and opportunities identified during the planning process:

- **Asset Reinvestment:** Capital replacement of assets to ensure that the park and facilities remain in good condition.
- **Universal Access/Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Improvement:** Specific universal access or ADA improvements completed outside of a park renovation project, such as curb cuts, improved paths of travel, upgraded ADA-compliant parking or seating, and signage (see Glossary for more information on Universal Access).
- **Green Infrastructure/Climate Infrastructure:** Climate-positive upgrades or resilience measures, such as green infrastructure, replacement of turfgrass with drought tolerant lawn alternatives, wildfire vegetation management, and decarbonization projects, including solar panels.
- **Ecosystem Protection and Restoration:** Projects that enhance ecosystem function and biodiversity, from stabilization to restoration.
- **Trail Development:** Improvements to existing trails of all types and development of additional trail connections, trailheads, and loop options.
- **Minor Park Renovation:** Smaller scale upgrades and additions to existing parks, such as pathways, facility replacements/capacity improvements (e.g., replacing a restroom or play structure), and upgrading or expanding one or two existing facilities or adding a new facility (e.g., a shelter, dog park, or sports court). This type of renovation may not require a master plan or extended community engagement process. Renovations should align with an adopted master plan, if one exists for the park.
- **Major Park Renovation:** More extensive upgrades and additions to existing parks and high use outdoor areas on conservation lands. This scale of project may require a master plan and a formal community engagement process.
- **Development/Redevelopment:** Ground-up development of all or a portion of a new site from vacant land or the complete redevelopment of all or a large portion of an existing park. This scale of project typically requires a master plan and the most extensive community engagement process. Neighborhood parks,

in particular, require extensive neighborhood engagement throughout the design process to ensure residents are heard and important design elements are integrated, as is reasonable and within budgetary restrictions.

## Meeting Level of Service in Parklands

Beyond capital projects, Missoula must acquire parkland and conduct planning studies to support project implementation. When land acquisition is recommended, it typically involves fee-simple purchases for new parks or expansions of existing ones. However, when fee-simple acquisition is not feasible, alternative long-term interests—such as leases, options, or easements—should be considered to secure parkland access.

## Parkland Dedication Through Subdivision

In accordance with state law, the City of Missoula requires subdivisions to dedicate parkland. The required amount is determined by land area and density, with specific criteria—such as location, slope, and public street frontage—governing what qualifies. Parkland dedication is a vital tool in ensuring residents of new subdivisions have access to nearby parks.

Currently, Missoula mandates less parkland dedication than permitted by state law and less than some other major Montana cities. The City should explore opportunities to increase required parkland and clarify standards for qualifying dedication. Parkland dedication requirements should be aligned with Appendix C, Park Development Guidelines.

## Fee-in-Lieu of Land Dedication

Subdivisions have the option to provide a cash donation to the Parks and Recreation Department instead of dedicating land. When a subdivision is located within a 10-minute walk of an existing city park, cash contributions are preferred to avoid duplication of park services and improve maintenance efficiency.

The City should also explore alternatives such as “improvements in lieu” of full land dedication, allowing park amenities to be constructed during development. Currently, dedicated parkland often remains underdeveloped for years due to funding limitations.

## Mitigation Fee

The City of Missoula currently collects park impact fees on all residential developments. However, Montana cities are expected to lose the ability to collect these fees in the near future. Infill developments contribute to increased population density, which leads to greater use of existing parks, additional wear and tear, and the need for expanded park capacity. To address these impacts, the City should develop a mechanism for collecting fees from residential infill projects to support park system sustainability.

## Transportation Impact Fees

Transportation impact fees will continue to be collected and allocated toward transportation systems, including regional, community, and connector trails used for travel.

## Dedications and Exactions

To help accommodate population growth, the City relies on dedications and exactions—mechanisms that require developers to contribute land, funding, or improvements to support public infrastructure and services.

## Nonconforming Park Land

Missoula has publicly owned lands that do not meet the requirements for public parks due to their size, location, or other characteristics. These properties, often acquired through subdivision and annexation, are typically small and lack significant park or natural resource value. The PROST Plan advises against accepting additional nonconforming parkland. For existing sites that do not meet park standards, the Department should evaluate options for disposal, repurposing, or transitioning them to other allowable uses.

The following is a partial list of non-conforming parks should be evaluated:

- **Ozyia and Penland Park both lack clear public access** and only serve neighbors who border the park. Both have limited recreational or natural resource value.
- **Stanley Park is a 0.42-acre vacant lot** at the end of Stanley Court. It provides a very limited low-use neighborhood trail connection but very few other recreational or natural resource value.
- **Tiortis Park has no legal public access** and limited recreational or natural resource value.
- **Cattail Corner is primarily an engineered stormwater** retention basin and wetland, with 90 percent of the site serving this purpose. While this site does provide important habitat, it is primarily managed by the City's Stormwater Utility. Parks and Recreation has little authority and/or responsibility for the site.





## PROST Parklands Classification and Recommendations

These classifications and recommendations describe classification changes as well as opportunities to support goal-based objectives. The section is organized by parkland classification and capital project types described on pages 6.16-6.18. Recommendations are consistent with the Park Development Guidelines.

### Regional Parks and Park Preserves

Regional parklands serve as major destinations, offering significant value to both community members and visitors. Typically exceeding 100 acres, these parks feature a range of amenities, including highly developed recreational event spaces, tournament-level sports facilities, and natural landscapes. Park preserves, on the other hand, safeguard large, intact native

habitats and key community viewsheds while providing extensive natural surface trail systems for recreation. By acreage, these parklands are the largest in the system.

Fort Missoula Regional Park is Missoula's only regional park and Montana's only Sustainable SITES-certified park, constructed using nationally recognized safety and environmental sustainability standards. Spanning both City and County lands, its funding and operations are governed by a City-County interlocal agreement, with both entities contributing to a cyclical maintenance fund—serving as a model for developing regional facilities.

Operating as its own cost center, the park is a signature destination, attracting local, regional, national, and international events. As a joint facility, local governments should continue investing in its upkeep and site refinements, especially in areas such as green infrastructure, energy and water efficiency, and improved wayfinding.

### Park Enhancements and Planning Initiatives

- **Develop a master site plan for Fort Ponds** to expand the regional park,

incorporating water-based recreation, trails, habitat protection/restoration, and wildlife viewing opportunities.

- **Assess cultural and historic resources** at the 17-acre triangular parcel west of Larchmont Golf Course and develop a master plan for its best use.
- **Continue collaboration with adjacent land management agencies**, particularly the University of Montana, to ensure cohesive planning.
- **Reinvigorate engagement with the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes** to enhance cultural interpretation and natural resource management.

### Infrastructure and Operations Improvements

- **Enhance transportation planning** by analyzing traffic patterns, parking usage, and travel modes to support alternative transportation initiatives for tournaments and events—reducing parking congestion and aligning with climate goals.
- **Ensure continued availability of the west parking area** by extending the agreement with the University of Montana for use of its lands.
- **Install field lighting on softball fields 6 and 7** to expand playtime capabilities.

### Community Engagement and User Experience

- **Support and improve the teen area** to maintain relevance for local high school students.
- **Consider adding user-friendly amenities**, such as meet-up and parking apps, along with dedicated spaces for arts, culture, and health-focused events.
- **Strengthen collaboration with user groups** to advance shared goals.



## Park Preserves

Missoula's park preserves protect large, intact native habitats with extensive recreational trail systems, providing significant ecosystem services to the community. These areas account for the majority of land managed by the City's Conservation Lands program (4,349 of 4,883 acres, or 89 percent). Many park preserves serve as regional outdoor recreation destinations, offering front-country trail connections to larger state and federally managed landscapes. While the Conservation Lands Management Plan sets broad management priorities, many individual preserves lack parcel-specific natural and recreation resource plans.

### Habitat Management and Ecosystem Restoration

- **Create resource-specific management plans** by habitat type (e.g., coniferous forests, riparian areas, grasslands) to define community priorities, strategies, and success metrics.
- **Conduct habitat condition assessments** and resource inventories across all park preserves to guide ecosystem protection and restoration projects.
- **Ensure conservation goals are met** by following adopted best practices and management plans.

### Trail System Planning and Improvements

- **Develop recreational trail plans** for preserves without existing plans (North Hills, Mt. Sentinel, portions of Mt. Jumbo).
- **Invest in trail improvements** to enhance accessibility, user experience, and environmental sustainability.
- **Upgrade natural surface trails** to align with adopted trail typologies and standards.
- **Prioritize universal access/ADA improvements** where feasible, following the guidance of the U.S. Access Board's Chapter 10: Outdoor Developed Areas.
- **Redesign and repair iconic trails**—Waterworks Ridge (North Hills), Backbone (Mt. Jumbo), and Pengelly Trail (Mt. Sentinel)—to address erosion, trail braiding, and endangered species impacts.

### Site-Specific Planning and Enhancements

- **Prioritize restoration of the Moon-Randolph Homestead barn and Randolph Cabin** to prevent further structural deterioration, and complete other major site improvements as prescribed in the 2015 Moon-Randolph Homestead strategic plan. Assess the need for a plan update after restoration projects are finished to establish new priorities.
- **Assess and improve interpretive signage** across Missoula's Conservation Lands, especially at primary and secondary trailheads, where current updates do not meet community expectations.
- **Develop trail maps and content** for the empty kiosks recently installed at preserve trailheads.
- **Support investments to develop Marshall Mountain Park** in collaboration with the County and other partners.





## Community Parks and Natural Areas

These parklands offer important community connections and gathering spaces and protect valuable natural resources. They serve multiple neighborhoods and are typically managed to provide community-level (versus regional or neighborhood level) services.

Community parks are typically over 20 acres. Community natural areas are typically over 10 acres and have development restrictions to protect on-site natural resources.

### Greenough Park

Greenough Park is a heavily used community natural area centered around Rattlesnake Creek, offering opportunities to experience nature, education, and cultural interpretation. As Missoula's first park, it has a well-documented but under-shared cultural history. Community members value its character, which blends natural areas with developed park facilities. To sustain Greenough Park as a nature-focused community space, minor renovations—including trail improvements, vegetation management, riparian protections, and restroom additions—should continue.

- **Develop a master plan** to guide historic preservation, cultural interpretation, design aesthetics, recreational improvements, and maintenance priorities.
- **Align new or replaced facilities** with the park's natural and historic character—such as considering a nature play area when replacing playground equipment.
- **Restore the 0.52-acre Alvina parcel** as part of the Greenough Community Natural Area, implementing habitat restoration strategies.

### Kestrel Park (currently designated special use)

Kestrel Park currently has diamond sports fields but few other amenities and is designated as a special use park. It is adjacent to DeSmet School. Today, the area surrounding the park is largely for industrial and commercial use. The future land use map designates the immediate area as the Industrial & Commercial Place Type and designates the area to the north of Interstate 90 as Rural Residential.

- **Reinvest in the existing assets.**
- **Plan for park renovations** over the long term, including the addition of community park facilities and renovations to replace the diamond fields with multi-use, rectangular sports fields. Reclassify it as a community park when that occurs.

### McCormick Park

McCormick Park is Missoula's signature community park, centrally located and home to Currents Aquatic Center, the planned Currents Center for Recreation and Creativity (CCRC), and a variety of key outdoor facilities, including MOBASH Skate Park, Silver Summit All Abilities Playground, Silver Lagoon, and a high and low ropes course.

Reinvestment in McCormick Park should remain a priority to sustain its role as a premier recreation destination. The park also offers opportunities for vegetation projects to reduce mowed turf and incorporate habitat patches, enhancing its natural elements.

### Ecosystem Protection and Restoration Priorities

- **Expand and establish riparian buffers** along the Clark Fork River to protect water quality and habitat.
- **Enhance Silver Lagoon** with improvements that increase water quantity and quality.
- **Develop a hardened river access site** for walk-in use to reduce environmental impacts.
- **Replace aging trees** to maintain a healthy and sustainable park landscape.
- **Actively engage in Orchard Homes irrigation ditch projects** to ensure continued water supply for Silver Lagoon

and the River Road Farm, recognizing the City's significant water rights in the system.

### Reinvestments and Renovations in Alignment with the McCormick Park Master Plan

- **Construct a large picnic shelter** to provide additional gathering spaces.
- **Upgrade the river trail and lighting** to improve safety and accessibility.
- **Relocate Park Operations**, recreation storage, and Climate Smart Missoula to free up space for expanded park development.
- **Improve the existing 2-diamond complex** by incorporating additional rectangular field options and replacing the field lighting system.
- **Strengthen connections between McCormick Park and the Bitterroot Trail** to enhance accessibility and regional connectivity.
- **Explore the feasibility of a pedestrian bridge** across the Clark Fork River to improve access.
- **Advance development of the CCRC facility** when funding becomes available, solidifying its role as Missoula's first public community center and a major expansion of Currents Aquatic Center.

### Playfair Park

At 62+ acres, Playfair Park is Missoula's largest community park, featuring Splash Montana, various sports fields, and recreation facilities. It sits adjacent to several important sites, including Missoula County Fairgrounds and Glacier Ice Arena, the Butterfly House and Insectarium, Sentinel High School, Russell Elementary School, and Missoula Family

YMCA, forming a superblock in the heart of the city.

While the park has received capital investments—such as the development of Splash Montana and the recent rebuild of the 12-block tennis facility—aging diamond fields are seasonally used and underutilized. Given its central location and large footprint, Playfair Park presents a major redevelopment opportunity.

#### Strategic Planning and Redevelopment

- **Develop a master plan for Playfair Park** in coordination with Missoula County, Missoula County Public Schools, YMCA, the Midtown Association, and other community partners. Ensure the master plan aligns with the Park Development Guidelines for community parks.
- **Reimagine, reconfigure, or relocate sports fields** to increase year-round use, incorporating multiple sports in rectangular field spaces.
- **Expand multi-use opportunities** by adding covered amenities and additional community-scale facilities to support all-season recreation.

#### Accessibility and Connectivity Enhancements

- **Improve pedestrian and wayfinding connections** between Playfair Park, Splash Montana, Missoula County Fairgrounds, Missoula County Public Schools, and YMCA.
- **Upgrade street and bike connections**, specifically across Brooks Street and linking to the Bitterroot Trail.
- **Integrate looped pathways with lighting** to support year-round walking and running.

#### Playground and Green Space Improvements

- **Revitalize playgrounds and play environments** to reflect the significance of this centrally located community park.
- **Increase shade coverage** by planting additional trees where appropriate.
- **Add native plantings and habitat areas** to enhance urban nature and address stormwater management.
- **Incorporate neighborhood park amenities** to better serve surrounding residents.

#### Infrastructure, Stormwater, and Maintenance Investments

- **Enhance park functionality** with innovative stormwater infrastructure, such as below-ground infiltration and storage under sports fields, and implement nature-based solutions.
- **Upgrade utilities and infrastructure**, including irrigation system replacement.
- **Add satellite maintenance facilities** to support park operations, potentially as a joint City/County facility.

#### West End Farm Park

West End Farm Park, now under City ownership, was planned as part of a proposed housing subdivision and includes an adopted master plan developed in collaboration with the land developer. Development should proceed in phases as funding becomes available, with a focus on implementing amenities that meet PROST standards for a community park.

#### Additional Community Natural Areas Recommendations

Missoula's community natural areas protect critical natural values and ecosystem functions, shaping the urban landscape while providing important habitat, scenic beauty, and buffer spaces within developed neighborhoods on the Missoula Valley floor. Due to their topography and accessibility, these areas offer some of the best opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to connect with nature.

Management of community natural areas prioritizes resource protection while allowing appropriate public access. Development is limited and balanced with conservation goals, ensuring that natural values are preserved.

#### Habitat and Ecosystem Protection

- **Complete habitat condition assessments** and resource inventories across all community natural areas.
- **Utilize inventories to guide conservation efforts**, informing and implementing ecosystem protection and restoration projects based on the Conservation Lands Management Plan, resource-specific management plans, and best practices.
- **Remove outdated playground equipment** at the Ben Hughes Community Natural Area, which protects riparian resources along the Clark Fork River.
- **Enhance riparian habitat** at Ben Hughes by adding or improving nature-based park amenities to better serve nearby neighborhoods.

#### Trail System and Access Improvements

- **Invest in trail improvements** across community natural areas.
- **Prioritize universal access/ADA upgrades** where practical, following the U.S. Access Board's Chapter 10: Outdoor Developed Areas.
- **Upgrade trailheads with better wayfinding**, maps, and interpretive signage.

#### Public Education and Park Identity

- **Expand interpretive and educational signage** where appropriate, highlighting natural resource values and conservation practices.
- **Consider combining and renaming** Peery & Meadowlark Acres and Highland & Hemayagan Parks, as they are adjacent and managed together despite separate names.

**Table 18: Park Reclassification**

Park Property	Current Classification	Reclassification
Jacob's Island	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Community Natural Area
West Broadway Island	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Community Natural Area
Peery & Meadowlark Acres Park	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Community Natural Area

## Community Parkland

### Reclassifications

Reclassify the following properties listed as "Urban Parklands with Special Resources Present" in the 2010 Conservation Lands Management Plan as Community Natural Areas:

In addition:

- **Reclassify John Toole Park**, which is listed as "Urban Parklands with Special Resources Present" in the 2010 Conservation Lands Management Plan as a Community Park.
- **Reclassify the 26.96-acre Charlotte Marbut Preserve** as a Community Natural area based on its size even though deed restrictions on the property prohibit any public access or development.
- **Recognize the three natural areas** at Fort Missoula as integral parts of the Regional Park, including the 16.03-acre Fort Missoula Triangle adjacent to Larchmont Golf Course, the 13-acre CCC Prairie, and the 89.32-acre Fort Missoula Ponds parcel. Although these areas function as community natural spaces and may have parcel-specific management plans, they are not standalone parklands. Instead, they are embedded within Fort Missoula Regional Park, enhancing its ecological diversity and expanding recreational opportunities.

Missoula's designated community natural areas now include the following sites:

- Bancroft Ponds
- Ben Hughes
- Charlotte Marbut
- Clark Fork Natural Area

- Greenough Park
- High Park (with adjacent trail easement)
- Highland/Hemayagan
- Jacob's Island
- Moose Can Gully
- Peery/Meadowlark Acres
- West Broadway Island

## Neighborhood Parks and Natural Areas

Missoula's neighborhood parks are the backbone of the developed park system, providing close-to-home recreation opportunities in urban residential neighborhoods. While not as prevalent as developed neighborhood parks, neighborhood natural areas provide unique recreational experiences and important pockets of habitat in the most urban areas of the city. As noted in Chapters 3 and 4, there are some overlaps in service areas and some notable gaps. Neighborhood parks are intended for walkable access, and as noted, are not intended for Rural Residential and Industrial & Commercial Place Types. The following recommendations apply to neighborhood parks and natural areas.

**Ensure each Neighborhood Park provides a complete park experience.** Each neighborhood park should offer amenities that support recreation in four key categories:

- **Social/Cultural** – Picnic areas, cultural interpretation sites, community gardens
- **Active Recreation** – Sports courts, fitness equipment, bike skills courses,

walking/running loops

- **Play Experience** – Playgrounds, splash decks, nature play areas
- **Nature** – Nature trails, rain gardens, habitat patches

Currently, few neighborhood parks provide amenities across all categories. The Department should prioritize projects in underserved areas and ensure all parks offer a complete experience. Community input should guide specific design and amenity decisions. Improvements may range from minor upgrades to major renovations, depending on the scope of need.

### Ensure each Neighborhood Natural Area provides for unique nature-based experiences and/or habitat protections.

Neighborhood natural areas provide small, quiet respites within Missoula's urban

**Table 19: Park Reclassification**

Park Property	Current Classification	Reclassification
Butler Creek Natural Area	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Neighborhood Natural Area
Clark Fork Natural Area	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Neighborhood Natural Area
Hamilton	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	
Hellgate	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Neighborhood Natural Area
Koly	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	
Woodbine	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Neighborhood Natural Area
Ninkpata	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Neighborhood Natural Area
John Toole	Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present	Neighborhood Natural Area

landscape. Some already feature trails, educational signage, benches, and gathering spaces, but opportunities for improvement vary. In some areas, access may be limited due to steep terrain, constrained parcel geometry, or wetlands. To improve and protect these spaces, the Department should:

- **Conduct habitat condition assessments and resource inventories** to guide ecosystem protection and restoration efforts, following the Conservation Lands Management Plan and best practices.
- **Evaluate physical characteristics of natural areas** without designated trails or amenities to determine suitability for recreational development. Prioritize planning for feasible projects and document areas where development is impractical.

- Invest in trail improvements** where practical, prioritizing universal access/ADA enhancements. Focus on neighborhood natural areas that could serve as connectors between sites or integrate with community and regional trail networks, following U.S. Access Board guidelines.

## Neighborhood Parkland Reclassifications

Reclassify the following properties listed as "Urban Parklands with Special Resources Present" in the 2010 Conservation Lands Management Plan per table below.

Missoula's designated neighborhood natural areas now include the following sites:

- Bancroft Ponds
- Butler Creek Natural Area
- Clark Fork Natural Area
- Clark Fork Natural Area
- Cohosset
- Floral
- Hamilton
- Hellgate
- Koly
- Northview
- Papoose
- Riverside
- Takima-Kokaski
- West Broadway Island
- Woodbine

## Develop and reclassify larger pocket parks located in or near gap areas and areas planned for higher density place types as neighborhood parks or natural areas.

Where level of service standards cannot be met with existing neighborhood parks, nearby pocket parks should be developed with park amenities and reclassified as neighborhood parks to achieve the targeted level of service. Examples include Bentley, Elms, and Little McCormick parks.

## Ensure that all neighborhood parks contribute to implementing equity and climate goals throughout the park system.

Every neighborhood park should receive investments to increase universal access, safety, ecosystem function, and climate resiliency. The following project types apply to every neighborhood park:

- Universal Access/ADA and CPTED** guidelines,
- Green Infrastructure**/Climate Resiliency, and
- Ecosystem Protection**/Restoration.

## Acquire new neighborhood parks in gap areas and new development areas, following the park development guidelines.

Missoula must acquire additional neighborhood parks in new development areas to address gaps in 10-minute park service. The number of parks needed will depend on location, street and trail networks, and park size and amenities.

Assuming a 5-acre park size, Missoula will need 8 to 10 new neighborhood parks over the next 10-15 years. If a 5-acre park is not

feasible, the city could establish two or three smaller, connected sites that collectively provide a high-quality neighborhood park experience.

Each new park will require land acquisition, planning and design, and development or redevelopment. Before accepting ownership, ensure the site has the appropriate soils, turf mix (grasses), irrigation, and woody vegetation and has met the performance standards for quality assurance.

## Pocket Parks

Pocket parks are small, neighborhood-embedded sites with minimal amenities or facilities. While they offer a retreat from the urban environment, their recreation value is generally limited due to their size and lack of features. As noted, three larger pocket parks (Bentley, Elms, Little McCormick) are recommended for reclassification as neighborhood parks.

## Considerations when acquiring pocket parks.

Pocket parks can be a tool for increasing level of service in dense urban areas with limited potential for larger neighborhood parks. However their size significantly limits their recreational value, and they are inefficient to maintain. Acquisition of new pocket parks should be limited to areas where larger neighborhood park acquisition is not feasible.

## Consider existing pocket parks for alternative uses.

Some pocket parks may be suitable for alternative recreation uses, such as dog parks, urban forests, a specific recreation facility, secured maintenance facility or equipment/material storage, or community gardens. Where additional parkland is not needed,

pocket parks, with the support of residents, could be repurposed for housing or other purposes with proceeds used to improve nearby parks.

## Transition pocket parks.

Missoula's pocket parks generally have **few amenities and mostly consist of** turf grass that requires regular mowing by maintenance crews. Pocket parks should be considered for possible sale using the proceeds to improve other parklands or alternative uses as described above. A few pocket parks have manufactured playground equipment. When these assets reach the end of their life, they should be removed and not replaced if they are duplicating amenities in the service area of a neighborhood park. However, the Department will work with local neighborhoods to determine community needs and provide flexibility where needed.

## Green/Climate Infrastructure

### Potential Sites

- 8th Street
- Anderson
- Brooke Lynn (HOA maintained)
- Flynn
- Invermere Park (HOA maintained)
- Khanabad
- Lester
- Lincolnwood Creek Crossing
- River Pine
- White Tail
- Willow Wood

## Special-Use Parks

These parks offer unique recreation experiences or provide a location for specialized facilities.

### Acquire special-use parks when context or facility needs warrant.

Special-use parks may be needed to provide a location for future stand-alone recreation facilities, such as a multipurpose recreation center not located in a community park. This type of park may also be needed to provide

urban park space in urban centers as well as additional downtown parks or to meet demands for sports, arts, or festival sites.

### Implement master plans (or create master plans as needed) and make park improvements at special-use parks.

Table 20 identifies the recommendations and recommended capital project types for each special-use park (See Table A.1 for master plan status).

**Table 20: Park Reclassification**

Park	Recommendation
BN Plaza	Asset Reinvestment, Universal Access/ADA Improvement
Caras, East Caras, and Bess Reed	Implement adopted plan that addresses these three sites as a linked waterfront park network. Asset Reinvestment, Green/Climate Infrastructure at all three sites Trail Development and Minor Park Renovation at East Caras and Bess Reed to widen trail and add amenities
Duncan Field	Asset Reinvestment, Universal Access/ADA Improvement
Memorial Rose Garden	Asset Reinvestment, Universal Access/ADA Improvement Minor Park Renovation
Missoula Art Park	Asset Reinvestment
Silver Park	Consider a destination play area or other community-scale recreation facility to encourage regular use. Asset Reinvestment, Universal Access/ADA Improvement Trail Development, including addressing erosion on riverside trail Minor Park Renovation
Syringa Park	Implement Phase 3 of master plan Incorporate recreational features into the Park Asset Management Plan Develop and fund a maintenance impact statement
Poplar Farm (in process of acquiring)	Study for repurpose to athletic and event facility as well as eco-education Develop based on results of study

## Linear Parks

Linear parks are primarily corridors for trail segments in Missoula. This type of park could also be used to protect other linear features, such as a river or creek corridor, or enhance community or regional trail networks. (See the trails section for recommendations on trails.)

### Acquire linear parks when connectivity needs require public ownership.

Missoula provides trail connections in public rights-of-way, across developed parks and conservation lands, and through easements on land owned by others. When needed for connectivity, or to enhance the character of the connection, consider adding additional linear park acreage.

### Explore adding neighborhood park amenities to linear parks to meet 10-minute park service.

Some existing and proposed linear park corridors pass through gap areas. These parks can offer opportunities to add neighborhood park amenities and fill gaps in service. Neighborhood park amenities, such as playgrounds, picnic shelters, and recreation facilities, like sports courts or outdoor exercise equipment, should be prioritized in gap areas.

### Implement improvements at linear parks.

In addition to developing trails and improving existing trails, Missoula should make improvements to increase ADA and universal access to trails, implement green infrastructure and climate infrastructure enhancements, and make capital reinvestments.

## Relevant Sites

- Bellcrest to Cypress Connector
- Bitterroot Trail (MRL rail corridor through Missoula and south to Sula)
- Ron's River Trail – improvements and missing connections
- Milwaukee Trail/Great American Rail-Trail – acquisitions, connections, and improvements across Missoula County
- Creekside Trail
- Grant Creek Trail-General updates and expansion from I-90 south to the Milwaukee Trail



# Open Space & Conservation Lands

This section addresses recommendations related to the 2019 Urban Area Open Space Plan and Missoula's conservation lands and natural areas.

## Implement the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan.

The PROST Plan affirms and advances the guiding direction of the Open Space Plan, including future amendments or updates. Public engagement confirmed strong support for protecting open space, agricultural and working lands, clean air and water, trail connectivity, and access to parks and trails near residences.

## Strategic Protection & Collaboration

- **Preserve open space in the cornerstones** identified in the 2019 Open Space Plan.
- **Work with partners**—including Missoula County, Five Valleys Land Trust, the Conservation District, and Montana

Fish Wildlife and Parks—to safeguard natural, agricultural, and scenic systems through development incentives, land stewardship, conservation easements, and other tools.

- **Protect open space collaboratively**, including agricultural and working lands, parks, conservation lands, and other key areas.

## Access & Connectivity

- **Enhance residential areas** with nearby open spaces, parks, and trails through acquisition and development, including provision of quality open space, parks and trails for urban or urbanizing areas of the community.
- **Expand regional trail networks** by securing corridors and constructing trails.
- **Enhance public access to open spaces** through community-driven planning and alignment with state and local regulations.

## Environmental & Climate Resilience

- **Protect river corridors, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat**, and other ecologically valuable areas.

- **Safeguard open space** to ensure clean water and air benefits and strengthen climate resilience.
- **Guide development** away from environmentally sensitive areas.

## Implementation & Systemwide Integration

- **Execute the recommendations** outlined in this PROST Plan and currently adopted Open Space Plan.
- **Integrate nature throughout the system**, prioritizing neighborhoods with limited natural access.

## Update the Conservation Lands Plan, including adding the following recommendations:

- **Reclassify conservation lands** as Park Preserves, Community Natural Areas, and Neighborhood Natural Areas. Address "Parks with Special Assets" as needed.
- **Update the park type field** in the authoritative parks GIS dataset to replace "public natural area" with "community natural area" and add "neighborhood natural area."
- **Add a High Use Site Overlay** to designate areas within conservation lands developed for outdoor recreation access. Refer to Park Development Guidelines (Appendix C) for details.
- **Update maps and GIS layers** with new classifications and related data from the PROST planning process.

## Systemwide Integration & Accessibility

- **Implement PROST recommendations** to integrate nature throughout the system, prioritizing neighborhoods lacking access.
- **Incorporate universal access guidelines** and consider amenities such

as art, interpretation, signage, and benches.

- **Improve services and public access** while balancing recreational use with protection of sensitive natural resources.

## Continue to apply management strategies that address climate and increase resilience.

Missoula has established itself as a leader in open space management and should continue advancing climate-focused strategies. The conservation lands program should serve as the City's center of excellence in nature-based approaches, integrating these strategies into developed parks where feasible.

## Wildfire Risk Reduction

- **Use prescribed burns** to enhance vegetation management on conservation lands, collaborating with City departments, the County, and regional partners.
- **Implement nature-based solutions**, such as native plantings and alternative vegetation management (e.g., goats), to mitigate wildfire risks and create buffers between urban areas and open space.

## Land Stewardship & Sustainable Development

- **Establish native planting buffer areas** along streams and riverbanks, including in developed parks, to reduce pollution and runoff.
- **Manage weeds and invasive species** to protect ecological integrity.
- **Develop sensitive lands layers and protocols** for integration into the Unified Development Code in collaboration with City, state, federal, and non-profit organizations.



# Urban Forest

## Recommendations

### Maintain the city's role as manager of the urban forest.

Missoula's Urban Forestry Division oversees the maintenance of all street and park trees. As certified arborists, its staff are uniquely qualified to manage the urban forest as a living resource with broad community benefits. Managing all public trees, regardless of location, ensures more consistent and efficient forest stewardship. Providing Urban Forestry with adequate resources is essential to meeting the city's climate resiliency, equity, and livability goals.

### Budget to prioritize preservation of canopy coverage.

A significant increase in the Urban Forestry annual budget is needed to sustain the urban forest and prevent canopy loss. Additional funding is needed to:

- **Increase pruning** to meet industry standards for cyclical maintenance.
- **Replant rights-of-way and parklands** where canopy is failing.
- **Add new trees**, prioritizing areas lacking shade for equity and climate reasons. (see Landscape Architecture Foundation 2024 research on urban heat.)

Parks and Recreation will collaborate with the Public Works and Mobility Department and other City departments to quantify the benefits of trees for stormwater retention and biofiltration, advocating for increased funding to support urban forestry efforts.

### Update the urban forest master plan.

The 2015 Missoula Urban Forestry Master Plan needs revision to align with newly adopted citywide strategic goals. This update should be informed by a completed public tree inventory and establish specific timelines for improved tree management. The updated plan will help guide realistic decisions for setting a citywide tree canopy coverage goal and climate resiliency strategies.

### Complete the city's tree inventory.

The current tree inventory is incomplete, with over 90% of the dataset collected in 2013. A fully updated inventory is essential for establishing Urban Forestry Program staffing and funding priorities.

### Update codes and design manual to include urban forestry initiatives

Urban forestry initiatives should be integrated into city codes and the standards and specifications manual, including:

- **Ensure redevelopment does not reduce** or negatively impact urban forest health.
- **Address preservation**, species selection, planting, care, soil quality, location, and hardship exceptions.
- **Update the unified development code and design standards** to improve tree planting in rights-of-way and urban streets and ensure new streets include appropriately spaced trees. Ensure standards are clear, predictable, and flexible while aligning with industry best practices to support a thriving urban forest.

### Plan and implement an aggressive canopy replacement initiative.

Missoula's urban forest is facing large-scale decline due to failing even-aged monoculture. Sustained removal and replanting must occur at a more aggressive pace than current resources allow. To implement a robust canopy replacement strategy, the city must:

- **Clarify tree planting requirements** for private development projects.
- **Leverage existing funding** to increase tree planting.
- **Explore additional funding sources**, such as stormwater utility fees, tree mitigation fees, grants, and partnerships.

- **Develop a timeline to reach preventative maintenance** industry standards for cyclical tree pruning.
- **Prioritize class 2 and 3 trees** in the right-of-way for all development, including street renovations.

### Implement proactive risk management.

Regular tree risk assessments, proactive pruning, and tree risk management plans are necessary to prevent failures and reduce liabilities. Increased staffing will be required to support these efforts.

### Establish stable and increased funding to ensure a healthy urban forest

Missoula needs consistent and increased funding for urban forest management. New funding mechanisms should reflect trees' contributions to green infrastructure, including potential sources such as stormwater fees or a utility user fee. The updated Urban Forest Master Plan should evaluate these options and assess their feasibility.

### Increase education and community involvement in managing, maintaining, and supporting the urban forest.

As confirmed through community engagement, Missoulians value their urban forest. Expanding volunteer programs and coordinating with Trees for Missoula and Climate Smart Missoula will enhance engagement opportunities. Developing educational initiatives—such as tree walks and pruning workshops—will further encourage community participation in urban forest stewardship.



# Trails

## Implement the updated trail typology as described in Appendix G.

Incorporate the updated trail typology and associated standards into design guidelines to enhance access, walkability, safety, and long-term maintenance. See Appendix G for details.

- **Integrate the existing and future trail system** with Street Typologies from the City's adopted Land Use Plan.
- **Update the City standards and specifications** manual to align with the trail typologies framework and PROST Plan.
- **Revise the Unified Development Code** to clarify when trail connections are required and what standards must be met.
- **Define regulations on electric assist vehicles** (e.g., e-bikes and e-scooters) to ensure compliance with the trail typologies framework. Use outreach and education to inform the public on proper etiquette, rules, and regulations.

- **Improve safety and reduce conflicts** on multi-modal trails through signage, outreach, and public education.
- **Collaborate with planners, developers, businesses, and landowners** to build a seamless, well-connected trail network.
- **Expand and enhance recreational trails** in parks and conservation lands, focusing on loops, wayfinding, and reducing user conflicts.

## Work with partner agencies and Destination Missoula to designate a multi-day regional hiking loop.

Designate and market the "Glacial Lake Missoula Shoreline Trail," a multi-day loop highlighting the region's geologic history. This trail would connect existing city, county, state, and federal trails, serving as an economic driver for tourism and recreation. Consider developing hike, bike, and equestrian options.

## Develop the Bitterroot Trail Linear Park.

Advance efforts to acquire the Bitterroot Branch Railway corridor for use as a linear park and trail while maintaining the existing trail along Highway 93.

- **Identify opportunities for play areas**, picnics, shade, loop trails, and other neighborhood amenities.
- **Work with partners to eventually connect the trail** from Sula to the Flathead Valley via the People's Way trail corridor along Highway 93 North.
- **Collaborate with multi-state partners** to link Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks.

## Implement the Great American Rail-Trail through Missoula.

Missoula's portion of the Great American Rail-Trail follows the Milwaukee Railroad corridor and connects to the first cross-country multiuse trail spanning over 3,700 miles.

- **Advance the federally funded partnership project** initiated in late 2024/early 2025 by extending the Great American Rail-Trail from Grove St. to Mullan Rd.
- **Work to realign sections of the Milwaukee Trail** along historic rail corridors where possible.

## Assess and re-envision the South Hills Trail System.

Missoula's South Hills Trail System connects neighborhoods but lacks adequate wayfinding and consistent connectivity. Recent land acquisitions and development projects present opportunities for improvement.

- **Inventory and assess the South Hills Trail System** using updated trail typologies and standards.
- **Collaborate with neighborhoods** to redesign and enhance connectivity within the system.

## Develop new trails and enhance existing trails to improve connectivity and accessibility.

- **Fill network gaps and improve existing trails** (e.g., widening, lighting, realignment in high-use areas) by partnering with developers, Public Works & Mobility, the MPO, Missoula County, and other agencies.
- **Create tree-lined, separated trail systems** to ensure safe commuting and recreation.
- **Connect trails** across streets, rivers, railroads, and other physical barriers to form a seamless regional network.

## Increase safety and capacity of the trail network

- **Enhance pedestrian and cyclist safety** by prioritizing key crossings and improvements.
- **Develop grade-separated crossings** for high-use regional and community trails that intersect major streets.
- **Increase trail capacity and safety** through resurfacing, widening, striping, and separating bicycle and pedestrian traffic where needed.
- **Expand lighting** on community and regional trails to improve accessibility and meet climate and equity goals.

## Expand the network of neighborhood and connector trails.

Neighborhood and connector trails strengthen mobility and link communities with the broader trail system.

- **Fill gaps** in neighborhood and connector trails systems in collaboration with developers, Public Works & Mobility, the MPO, and other agencies.
- **Prioritize Safe Routes to Parks and Safe Routes to Schools** connections to enhance accessibility.
- **Improve existing trailheads** and develop additional ones.

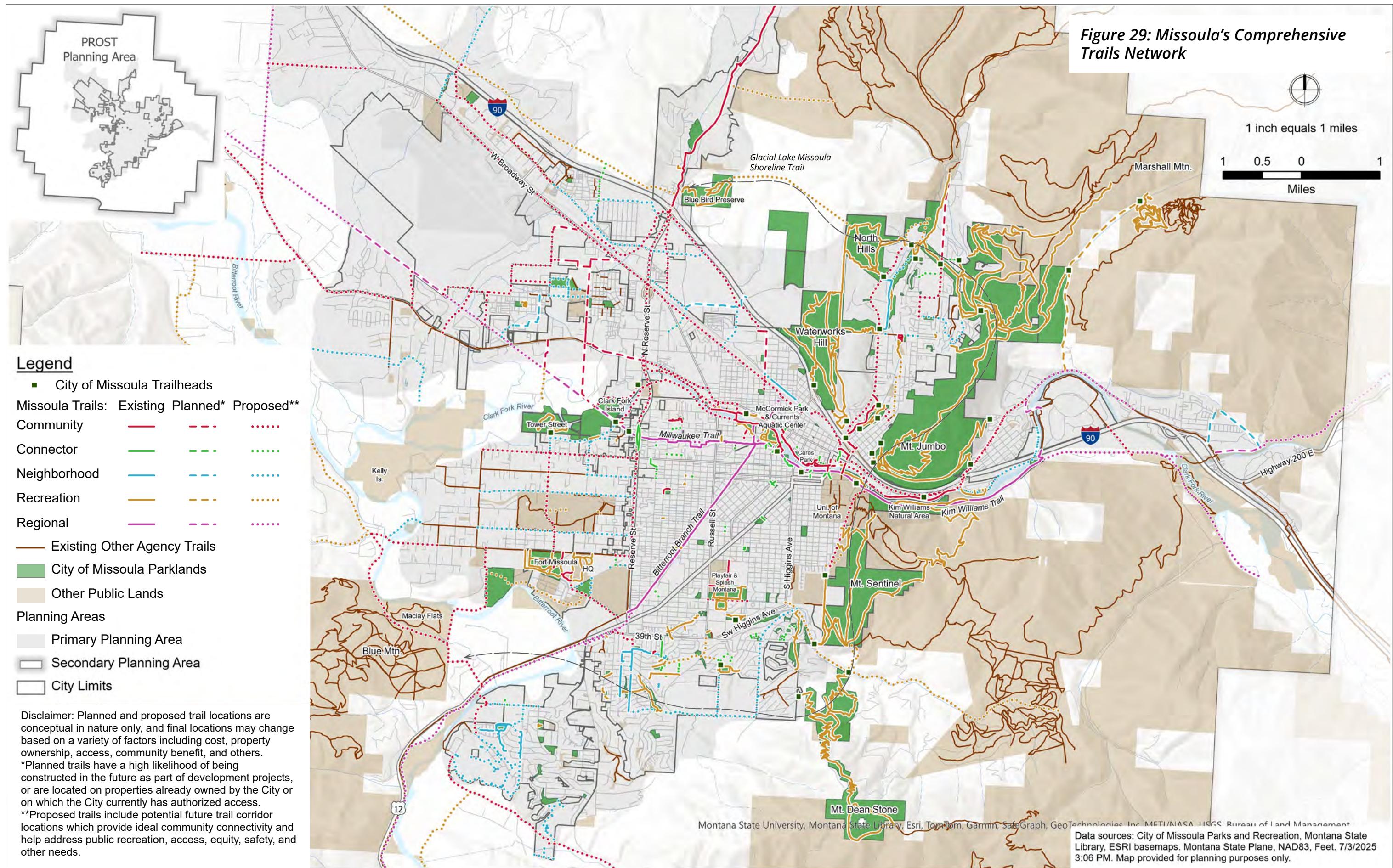
## Increase accessibility, capacity, and amenities within Missoula's trailhead network.

- **Enhance existing trailheads** with improved wayfinding, maps, and accessibility features and expand trailhead capacity.
- **Consider adding more trailheads** to increase access and distribute visitors.
- **Create an accessible public-facing trail map** or adopt a widely used third-party system to improve trail information, usage guidance, and seasonal closures in collaboration with the Front Country Recreation Collaborative.
  - Include an online user map with downloadable route maps connecting homes to parks and conservation lands.
  - Update the printed version of the public trails map to include parks, amenities, and facilities for residents and visitors.
  - Expand the map's coverage area to create a regional trails guide.



*Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust*

Figure 29: Missoula's Comprehensive Trails Network





# Recreation Facilities

When new parks are developed or existing parks are redeveloped or receive major renovation, recreation facilities will be refreshed and added. This section discusses additional recreation facility recommendations.

## Sports Fields and Facilities

### Add more recreation facilities as Missoula adds new parks.

Sports and recreation facilities play a vital role in a park system, but as demographics shift and interests evolve, it is essential to carefully assess new investments. In Missoula, these facilities serve diverse community needs and provide high-quality recreation opportunities.

As new parks are developed or existing parks are updated, the Parks and Recreation Department should add recreation facilities that align with the Park Development Guidelines and reflect community interests.

These may include sports courts, pump tracks, skate parks, sports fields, and disc golf.

When selecting sports facilities for a park, Missoula should:

- **Maintain a variety of recreation options**, considering changing demographics, trends, and community input to ensure equitable distribution across the park system.
- **Avoid allowing any single sports facility type to dominate** the system or a site that is not designated as a special-use park.
- **Design sports facilities to support flexible use**, accommodate varying skill levels, and serve diverse interests.

### Develop a rectangular field complex.

Missoula currently has fewer rectangular fields than industry standards while exceeding standards for diamond fields. To address this imbalance and meet the growing demand, the City should develop a rectangular field sports complex north of the Clark Fork River. This facility would support soccer, lacrosse, football, Ultimate frisbee, and other rectangular field sports.

At least 20 acres of relatively level, developable land is required for such a complex, with the facility's size guided by a comprehensive athletic field and facility strategy. Potential locations include areas near Mullan Road, Reserve Street, or the northside of town near I-90.

- **Site selection** – Locate new rectangular fields within a community park or as stand-alone, special-use facilities.
- **Field quantity and design** – Include at least eight full-size, multi-use rectangular fields, each marked for smaller field sizes and multiple sports.
- **Amenities and infrastructure** – Ensure fields are lighted and equipped with parking, restrooms, Wi-Fi, storage, and essential support facilities, such as concessions, a tournament hub, office space, and an operations facility.

### Evaluate the overall inventory of Missoula-area athletic fields and facilities in collaboration with Missoula County and other partners.

The City, County, and MCPS are key providers of athletic fields and facilities within and near Missoula city limits. **These agencies should collaborate on a comprehensive study** to assess the overall inventory, identify demand for new or upgraded facilities, coordinate investments, and ensure consistent field access. The study should:

- **Establish a coordinated approach to field management** – Balance use requests, schedule maintenance, and preserve access for informal community play.
- **Optimize field provision and policies** – Standardize use and allocation guidelines to maximize public resources.



- **Evaluate existing inventory** – Analyze the supply and condition of athletic fields and major facilities, including school district fields if possible.
- **Develop use and allocation policies** – Establish clear guidelines on field use, scheduling, and pricing.
- **Account for varied needs** – Consider differences between agencies and gather input from sports user groups.
- **Include indoor and synthetic turf options** – Assess opportunities for indoor spaces and lighted synthetic turf fields to expand year-round access.

## Add a permanent disc golf course and increase seasonal course capacity.

Identify a location for an 18-hole disc golf course, and at a minimum:

- **Work with the local disc golf community** to plan and implement.
- **Add a seasonal course** to increase capacity and relieve use of Fort Missoula's seasonal disc golf course.

## Indoor Facilities

### Work with Community Partners to develop the Currents Center for Recreation and Creativity.

Expanding Currents Aquatic Center into a full-service recreation center is a long-planned and much-needed project. The Department should continue to advocate for funding and collaborate with The Converge Foundation and other partners to secure financial support for the Currents Center for Recreation and Creativity (CCRC). Once funding is available, the expansion should be implemented at McCormick Park.

The new facility must include sufficient staffing space to support robust programming and meet the community's needs effectively.

### Seek indoor/covered facilities of all types throughout Missoula.

Indoor space is one of Missoula's most pressing needs. The Parks and Recreation Department should explore all options for adding or securing indoor facilities for public use.

#### Facility Development & Expansion

- **Replace BASE Camp** – Identify a new facility and develop programming as additional spaces become available.
- **Build flexible-use structures** – Develop multi-use buildings or pavilions in existing or new parks.
- **Lease space** – Consider leasing facilities downtown or in redevelopment areas.
- **Add event facilities** – Establish a community park or special-use area capable of hosting programming and revenue-generating events (e.g., weddings, corporate functions).
- **Enhance indoor sports facilities** – Support efforts to establish ice skating, curling, an indoor 25-yard pool, indoor turf, and additional gyms to meet demand across youth, high school, college, and adult sports.

#### School Partnerships & Joint-Use Agreements

- **Expand access to school facilities**
  - Work with Missoula County School District to create joint-use agreements at more schools, supporting extended programming and care services for working households.

- **Utilize gymnasiums and programming space** – Secure access to existing school gyms and programming spaces outside school hours.
- **Explore feasibility of shared gym space** – Assess after-hours gym use or consider constructing additional gymnasiums for public use.
- **Leverage successful models** – Cities like Poway and San Diego have expanded joint-use agreements to maximize school facilities for public recreation. See San Diego's Play All Program for details.

### Plan for the replacement of Basecamp.

The Parks and Recreation Department has been using the former library as Basecamp, a central hub for youth out-of-school programming. This facility plays a key role in service provision, but with redevelopment planned for the site, a new centrally located indoor facility is needed as a replacement.

Ideally, the new facility would also accommodate other programming in the evenings and before school dismissal. If the Currents Center for Recreation and Creativity (CCRC) moves forward quickly, it could potentially meet this need.

## Aquatics Facilities

### Reinvest in existing aquatics facilities.

Missoula should continue reinvesting in Currents Aquatics Center, Splash Montana, and splash deck locations to maintain their value and recreation capacity. Regularly assess the need for upgrades, improvements, or additions to ensure these facilities effectively serve the community, including underserved populations.

Implement findings from the 2024 Splash Amenities and Needs Assessment and Expansion Feasibility Study by:

- **Updating spray and family slide** features and adding new slide features.
- **Expanding party rental areas.**

### Incorporate splash decks and interactive fountains into parks.

Missoula has splash decks at several parks, and additional water play features should be considered for new and existing sites where feasible and beneficial to residents. Parks such as West End Farms and other suitable locations could accommodate splash decks, which should be distributed across neighborhood and community parks citywide.

Interactive fountains, being more customized and having higher-capacity features, should be designated as community-wide amenities. They are best suited for regional, community, and special-use parks, as well as parks within the Downtown place type.

### Add another indoor aquatic center in the long term.

Looking further ahead, the Department should plan for a second indoor aquatic center, potentially as part of a larger multipurpose recreation center. This facility would require a feasibility study and business plan and should:

- **Include a 25-yard or 25-meter pool** and a leisure pool to maximize flexibility.
- **Consider partnerships** with other entities.

**Work with the physical therapy and medical communities to explore the need for, and feasibility of, adding a warm water therapy pool at Currents or another location.**

A therapy pool would increase the aquatic programming capacity and allow for a greater diversity of programming, including programming for older adults.

## Other Recreation Facilities

Based on recreation trends and community feedback, the Parks and Recreation Department should consider the following:

### Family and community gathering spaces

- **Develop picnic areas, shelters, play areas, and facilities** that foster interaction, such as community gardens, orchards, off-leash dog areas, disc golf courses, performance spaces, arts and culture amenities, and seating areas.
- **Support neighborhood events and social gatherings** by offering reservable and open use gathering spaces, including year-round indoor facilities and community meeting areas.
- **Integrate cultural, historic, and place-based art and interpretation** throughout the park system, highlighting Indigenous culture, local history, and unique environmental features.
- **Include dedicated and pop-up locations for arts and culture** activities.

### Recreational access

- **Construct an asphalt bicycle pump track** that is centrally located and open year-round.

- **Include street-style skateboarding** features along trail corridors.
- **Develop a parkour gym/park.**
- **Enhance recreational opportunities for tween and teenage children** by providing additional features and amenities tailored to their interests.
- **Provide environmental education and outdoor recreation facilities** to enhance learning and engagement.

### Nature and wildlife experiences

- **Build bird blinds** and wildlife viewing facilities.
- **Provide permanent boating access points** to improve non-motorized river access.

### Essential park amenities

- **Consider additional dog parks**, especially in urban residential areas.
- **Foster community gardens** in partnership with Garden City Harvest or other organizations, prioritizing urban residential areas.
- **Add picnic shelters and restrooms** at high-use sites.





# Recreation Programming

Missoula's Recreation Division must remain flexible and responsive to evolving trends and demographics, making the most of available facilities and collaborating with partners to deliver services. Accordingly, recommendations for recreation programming are comprehensive and strategic, building upon the policy directions outlined in Chapter 5.

## Overall Recommendations

When considering new or expanded recreation programming, the Department should continue to work with multiple entities, build on existing partnerships, and develop new programs to meet growing needs. Parks can play three major roles in this context:

- **Direct Provider:** Plans programs, secures facilities, hires and trains staff, or contracts instructors.
- **Partner:** Shares costs and responsibilities with another entity to

provide programs or events, varying in scale.

- **Facility Provider:** Manages and maintains reservable facilities for sports leagues, events, nonprofits, and community groups.

## Continue to invest in core program areas.

Core program areas have wide demographic appeal, are high priorities for the community, and address a public need. The Department is best suited to serve that need. There are facilities and sites to support core program areas, but they require continued investment. As noted earlier in this plan, Missoula's Core Program Areas as of 2025 are After School and School's Out Programs, including Community Schools Programs and Camps, Aquatics, and Sports (both adult and youth).

Missoula may add more core program areas in the future based on input. Possible areas for expanding programs include programs for aging adults and people with disabilities, arts and culture programming, nature-oriented programming, and others. For each existing

and potential new core program area, the Department should:

- **Maintain full-time staff** to support adequate staffing ratios in programs.
- **Ensure proper facilities** to support the program.
- **Offer entry-level options**, tiered skill development, varied price points, and a range of offerings.

## Use pilot efforts to test new programming approaches.

The Department should develop an overall approach and evaluation protocol for pilot programs. The overall concept is experimentation and evaluation so that the Department can test out new programs, approaches, and formats. The pilot approach allows the Recreation Division to try out new ideas or do them in new ways to establish what works best and make adjustments. Recommendations include:

- **Work with the City Office of Neighborhoods** to support strong neighborhood programs, events, and initiatives.
- **Collaborate with City departments** to expand recreation services beyond parks (e.g., streets, plazas, civic spaces).
- **Use portable equipment and furnishings** for pop-up park experiences in underserved areas.

## Recommendations for Existing Core Program Areas

### Continue Afterschool and School's Out programs, including Community Schools programs and camps.

These programs have high community support and high value in supporting

Missoula households. Recommendations include:

- **Continue core programming** at the Base Camp site while identifying a replacement location.
- **Collaborate with school districts** to expand wrap-around services at low or no cost.
- **Keep Afterschool, Camps, and community schools** as a separate cost center for tracking.
- **Seek new funding mechanisms** to ensure access, affordability, and quality.
- **Increase program offerings** at all Community Schools sites, expanding indoor options for multi-generational participation.

## Aquatics Programs

Aquatics recreational swimming and related programming are highly supported and have many community benefits. Recommendations include:

- **Adjust aquatics programming** to meet diverse community interests.
- **Expand aquatics fitness offerings** (e.g., HIIT, water yoga, water jogging).
- **Maximize facility use** (e.g., adding bulkheads for flexible lane configurations).
- **Coordinate with Learn to Swim providers** to ensure universal access.
- **Develop sensory-specific and culturally appropriate programming** for inclusivity.

## Sports Programs

- **Combine adult and youth sports** into one program area.
- **Continue roles in facility provision** and direct sports programming.
- **Expand “learn to play” programs**, including adult leagues and middle/high school intramurals.
- **Monitor emerging trends** and adjust programming accordingly.

## Additional Programming

### Recommendation

#### Age-Specific Programming

- **Offer preschool-age programming** across all program areas (e.g., Sports, Aquatics, Camps).
- **Ensure teen programming**, including high school-age options, in areas such as Sports, Aquatics, Arts and Culture, Outdoor/Nature, and Early Mentoring Programs.
- **Emphasize employment-focused** programs for teens.
- **Develop pilot programs for older adults**, leveraging existing park resources (e.g., walks, outdoor fitness, boot camp-style classes).
- **Explore alternative funding sources** to improve programming access, such as the Missoula County Best Beginnings Scholarship program and federally supported programs like Silver Sneakers.
- **Actively program underutilized parks and conservation lands** to increase use, disperse activity, enhance perceptions of safety, and encourage positive public engagement.

## Adult programs

- **Expand adult recreation programming**, starting with activities utilizing existing infrastructure (e.g., walks, outdoor fitness) before broadening offerings for active older adults in sports, dance, and arts.
- **Collaborate with senior service providers** like Missoula Aging Services, Missoula Senior Center, All Nations Health, and MOLLI to coordinate programming and provider roles.

## Adaptive Recreation

- **Continue partnership with the Montana Rural Institute** to provide adaptive equipment for community recreation needs.
- **Develop new adaptive recreation partnerships**, programs, and offerings across core program areas.
- **Collaborate with local providers like Summit Independent Living (SIL)**, Missoula Adaptive Recreation and Sports (MARS) to expand access to adaptive recreation.

## Arts and Culture

- **Develop an arts and culture plan** in partnership with the Missoula community to define coordination between Parks and Recreation, arts organizations, nonprofits, and local artists.
- **Expand historic preservation**, tours, and local history programming, utilizing resources like the Moon Randolph Homestead.

## Environmental Education and Nature Programs

- **Expand Citizen Science** and other educational opportunities in the PROST system by collaborating with partners.
- **Develop a wetland and river education program**, incorporating water safety for rivers and ponds.
- **Offer regular guided walks** featuring staff experts and volunteers (e.g., urban forestry tours, park preserve hikes).
- **Build community knowledge on climate best practices**, resource conservation, native plantings, and sustainability.
- **Strengthen resident and visitor engagement** in climate-smart initiatives across parks and facilities.
- **Continue volunteer opportunities** for ongoing environmental stewardship like planting and revegetation.

## Outdoor Recreation

- **Pilot “learn to” outdoor recreation programs** for adults and older adults.
- **Expand drop-in hikes and bike rides** in Conservation Lands in partnership with recreation groups and the Front Country Recreation Collaborative.
- **Promote responsible recreation values**.
- **Provide access to remote conservation lands** for individuals with mobility, disability, socioeconomic, or other barriers.

- **Address access and cost recovery concerns**:

- **Review existing policies** for unintended barriers (e.g., forms, costs, insurance requirements).
- **Conduct annual cost recovery** assessments, balancing taxpayer subsidies, fees, and philanthropy.
- **Improve transportation access** to programs and events by collaborating with Missoula MPO, public transit, City Public Works and Mobility and Parking Commission.
- **Expand free/low-fee recreation options** to increase accessibility and promote community participation.

# Climate and Resilience Initiatives

These initiatives serve as climate strategies, complementing the policies and projects outlined elsewhere in this plan. Each area presents a set of potential strategies as a foundation for further action. Over time, approaches, technologies, and specific strategies will evolve to support Missoula's climate goals.

## **Develop metrics for tracking successful implementation of climate and resilience initiatives.**

These metrics should build upon the baseline established by the Plan's goals and objectives.

## **Increase water efficiency.**

- **Adopt regenerative landscape management practices** to improve soil health, sequester carbon, reduce irrigation requirements, and increase overall plant resilience.

- **Install water efficiency measures** within all buildings and facilities, especially for showers, pools, and high irrigation areas such as fields.
- **Explore using grey water** and, when possible, black water systems for park and recreation facilities.
- **Monitor and replace aging park irrigation systems.**
- **Utilize stormwater runoff** as a resource to help reduce irrigation requirements in certain areas.
- **Develop climate-conscious parking solutions**, including permeable paving, solar canopies, and dedicated spaces for electric and shared vehicles to enhance accessibility while aligning with environmental goals.
- **Replace low use (non-athletic field) turf areas with alternatives**, such as dryland grass mixes, that may include native and climate adapted pollinator plantings where appropriate.
- **Reduce turf and water needs** where applicable without impacting programming or usable active turf or trees.

- **Consider no-mow or limited-mow areas** and management and maintenance activities that reduce carbon emissions.
- **Explore strategies to reduce runoff** in impervious park areas by identifying locations with high runoff potential and implementing green infrastructure best practices to manage water flow.
- **Identify seasonal lowland flooding**, and plant with native/climate adapted vegetation.
- **Elevate active turf areas with bioswales** on the edge to promote infiltration.
- **Increase water efficiency education and signage** on the why, where, when, and how.
- **Identify parks with the most significant impact on the urban heat island effect**, flood protection, and water quality, while ensuring they offer both passive and active recreation opportunities.

## **Increase energy efficiency.**

- **Promote weatherization, electrification, and energy efficiency** through retro-commissioning of facilities and equipment.
- **Continue the transition to LED outdoor and park lighting** while using light zones to reduce unnecessary usage. Design new parks and facilities to be all electric or electric-ready, depending on renewable availability.
- **Implement solar and battery systems** for park buildings, recreation facilities (e.g., pools), and parking lots.



## Reduce transportation-related carbon emissions.

- **Establish shuttles for special events** and tournaments partnership with Mountain Line and other entities.
- **Incentivize park visitors to use alternative transportation** like transit, biking, or walking, alongside a reduction in free parking and large parking lots.
- **Support the City's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program**, offering incentives for bike and transit use while establishing car share and carpool programs for employees.
- **Prioritize smaller, lower-carbon vehicles** where feasible (e.g., gators, cargo bikes, bikes).
- **Provide bikes for staff use** for short trips between facilities.
- **Upgrade EV charging stations** for internal fleet use and explore community park facilities as potential recharge areas.
- **Transition to electric and low-carbon practices** at Parks Operations, Urban Forestry, and maintenance services to achieve net-zero carbon emissions.

## Reduce food & organic waste.

- **Limit waste** from events, programs, and operations through recycling, strategic product choices, and partnerships with sustainability-focused organizations.
- **Implement a Zero Waste & Zero Plastics policy** for all events.
- **Reduce food waste and support composting** and second-chance food distribution by collaborating with concessionaires.

- **Maintain a comprehensive compost and recycling program** to divert organic and recyclable materials from landfills.
- **Expand the zero-wood waste program** by repurposing urban wood for park projects and composting all remaining wood matter.
- **Compost all organic waste** from turf, weed, and vegetation management activities.
- **Strengthen Leave No Trace policies**, improving community education and signage to reduce park trash.
- **Explore instituting a "pack in, pack out" approach** by removing trash receptacles in select parks.
- **Minimize the use of plastic water bottles and single-use plastics** at events, offices, rental facilities, and across all park operations.
- **Install and maintain water stations** throughout the park system.
- **Encourage sustainable practices** by offering incentives for event participants to bring reusable cups, reducing reliance on single-use plastics and minimizing waste.

- **Expand plant propagation programs** to grow locally adapted species and reduce costs.
- **Encourage climate-adapted street tree species** and enhance long-term tree success by revising right-of-way tree planting standards.

## Resilient, regenerative landscape practices.

- **Explore options for using reclaimed water** from the water treatment plant to irrigate a regional sports field complex at the current poplar farm site.
- **Apply nature-based solutions** in all parklands to address stormwater, drought, extreme storms, wildfire risk, flooding, and other climate hazards.
- **Implement regenerative and holistic soil management practices** to improve soil quality and protect water sources from synthetic contaminants.
- **Quantify carbon storage and sequestration** for parks, natural areas, forested rights-of-way, facilities, and operations to support long-term climate planning.

## Habitat restoration and forestry management.

- **Support and expand habitat restoration initiatives** on preserves and natural areas affected by past practices (e.g., overgrazing, deforestation, wetland and riparian area loss).
- **Develop sustainable wildland forestry management programs**, including goals and certifications.

# CHAPTER 7

# How We Get There

## Key Takeaways

- ◊ **Strategic Implementation Process** – A potential process to systematically prioritize and sequence improvements over 15 years based on funding availability, staff capacity, and seven specific evaluation criteria.
- ◊ **Equity-Focused Evaluation** - Projects will be prioritized when they address service gaps in underserved communities, including neighborhoods with higher percentages of people below median income, communities of color, Indigenous people, seniors, and people with disabilities.
- ◊ **Climate Resilience Integration** - The implementation matrix template helps to track how each project connects to the City's climate lens, with special priority for projects that improve ecosystem function and increase resilience to extreme weather events.
- ◊ **Budget Reality Framework** - The City's budgeting process is the final authority for determining Parks and Recreation funding, with strong consideration given to projects that align with specific criteria, including leveraging partnerships and meeting neighborhood needs.



## Where will we be in 15 years?

The Missoula community has provided direction on priorities and this PROST Master Plan identifies the vision, goals, guiding principles, goals and elements to create a healthy, accessible, equitable, and walkable city. Now it is time to set the plan in motion. Which projects, initiatives and programs will come first? How will we operationalize the plan? How does the PROST system in Missoula evolve over time?

### Introduction to Implementation

The PROST Master Plan is a policy-level document that provides guidance for the Department, focusing on the overarching vision, goals, and objectives of PROST. It does not offer specific designs for sites, operational procedures, or detailed recreation programs. Instead, it serves as a guiding framework for division-level decisions and more specific planning processes in the future,

such as updates to the Conservation Lands Management Plan, Urban Forest Master Plan, Asset Management Plan, and site-specific master plans. These other plans will include detailed actions and recommendations, such as priority locations for tree replacement or planting and specifics of recreation program delivery.

As a long-range plan covering various systems and services, the PROST Master Plan includes a range of objectives, projects, programs, and initiatives. Each aligns with the vision, goals and objectives of the Plan, or multiple goals and objectives, and informs departmental decision-making. However, implementing these recommendations must be sequenced and prioritized over time due to funding constraints, staff capacity, and logistics.

Some projects may be low-cost and easy to implement, while others may be complex or expensive, requiring a phased approach. The pace of these initiatives will depend on factors like public support and the availability of resources—both capital and operational—as well as staff workload.

The City's budget and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) determine funding for Parks and Recreation, influencing work plans and the prioritization of projects. The City has a park district that serves as the primary funding source for Parks and Recreation operations. General funds do not support the Department's services.

When evaluating project budgets, Missoula Parks and Recreation considers citywide needs, legal requirements, safety concerns, potential funding sources (including grants and fee increases), neighborhood priorities, and alignment with current City initiatives.

Although the Department offers a broader range of services, programs, and facilities than many similar-sized U.S. cities, it operates with a budget that is below the median per capita. The Department effectively maximizes existing resources through alternative funding, strategic partnerships, and fee-for-service models, showcasing its efficiency when compared to national and state standards.

The PROST Plan outlines the community's priorities for existing funds while positioning the Department for the future as funding opportunities become available

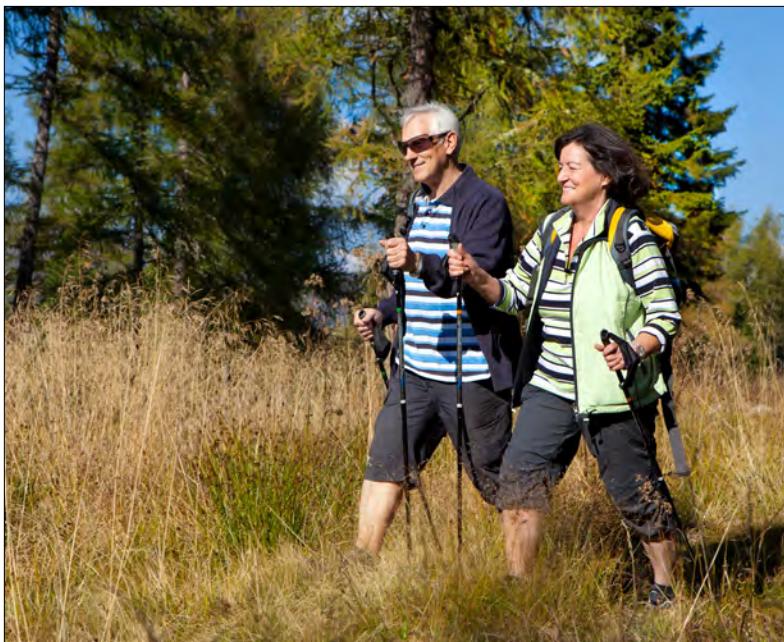
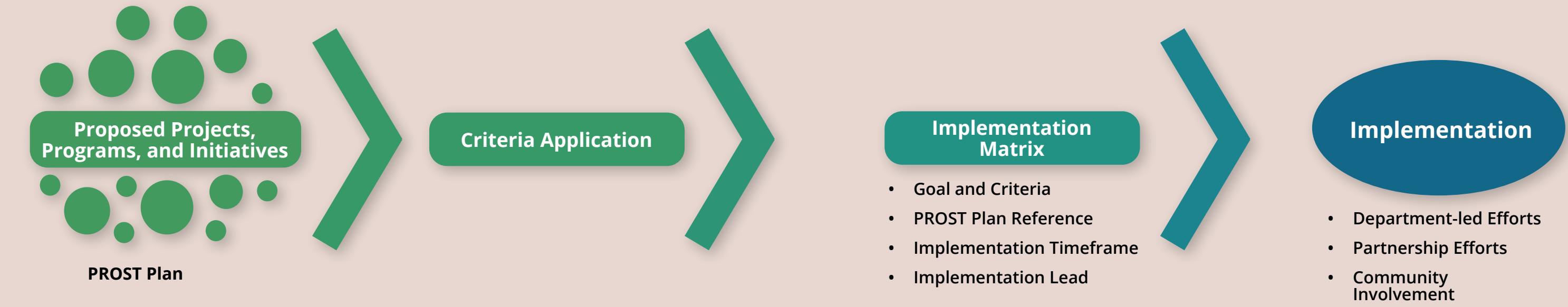


Figure 30: Implementation Process



## Implementation Process

The diagram above shows how staff will implement recommendations from the PROST Master Plan and breaks them down into workable steps, using the general criteria and proposed implementation matrix presented in this chapter.

### Evaluating New Ideas

The pace of innovation and change is unpredictable. Over the next 15 years, new ideas and concepts will come up that were not specifically called out in this Plan. For example, unexpected trends in recreation may generate requests for facilities or programs; scientific breakthroughs might change approaches to managing land; or a

major fire or flood might affect city parks, trails, facilities, or site amenities.

This Master Plan anticipates new ideas, whether proposed by staff, partners, or members of the community. Each new idea should be evaluated for consistency with the PROST Master Plan using the following questions:

- Is the proposal consistent with the PROST vision and goals? *Briefly describe.*
- Which goals and/or objectives does the proposal implement? *Identify.*
- Does the proposal support one or more of the City's strategic lenses? *Briefly describe which one(s) and why.*

A staff review team will evaluate the proposal. If the team determines the proposal is consistent with the PROST Master Plan, the proposal can be added to the implementation matrix, or similar decision-making matrix, for sequencing.

### Implementation Matrix Overview and Template

The implementation matrix is a potential tool designed to track the execution of the plan and ensure that both staff and financial resources are used effectively to further the plan's goals (see Appendix F). This initial version covers the first five years of the plan, focusing on near-term implementation. As the plan progresses, this tool may be modified or replaced to meet emerging needs.

This section outlines each of the columns in the implementation matrix template provided in Appendix E.

**Projects, Programs, and Initiatives:** These elements are derived from the specific recommendations of the Master Plan.

**PROST Master Plan Reference:** For tracking purposes, the related goal will be identified for each project, program, or initiative. Where applicable, staff should include the specific objective reference or page number.

**City Decision Lenses:** These columns help track whether a project, program, or initiative is related to one or more of the City's decision lenses: Climate sustainability, adaptation, and resilience; Equity in opportunity and access to local government resources and lands; and Housing attainability at all levels, with a focus on workforce and affordability. While not every action will connect directly to these lenses, most parks and recreation functions typically overlap with at least one of them.

**Evaluation Criteria:** The evaluation criteria and rating system are outlined below. These criteria ensure that implementation occurs across all goal areas, in accordance with the available resources.

**Implementation Timeframe:** The projects, programs, and initiatives in the PROST Master Plan vary in complexity and ease of implementation. Three defined timeframes help balance workload and demonstrate progress.

**Applicable Parks and Recreation Functional Work Teams:** This section

identifies which functional work teams will participate in and lead each initiative.

See an example implementation matrix in Appendix F.

### Evaluation Criteria

The seven evaluation criteria will guide Missoula in prioritizing projects, programs, and initiatives in the implementation matrix while enhancing community benefits. Each will impact at least one criterion and may affect others. Key questions define each criterion to help staff assess performance, using a uniform rating scale for all.

### Rating Scale

For ease of use, a high-level rating scale is used. The rating scale is:

- **+ (positive).** The project, program or initiative will have a positive effect on the criterion.
- **0 (neutral).** The project, program or initiative does not relate to the criterion.
- **- (negative).** Generally, if a project, program or initiative will have a negative effect on a particular criterion, the action should be retooled to reduce or eliminate the negative effect.

### Evaluation Criteria and Key Questions

Each criterion is defined below with the applicable key questions. The term "Existing Resource" refers to an existing site, facility, asset, program, system or staff position.

### Take Care of What We Have

Missoula residents highly value the existing PROST system and its services. Projects, programs, and initiatives in the PROST Master Plan that address liabilities, deferred maintenance, and maximize community

benefits from existing resources demonstrate stewardship of these resources.

### Key Questions

- Does the project, program or initiative address an existing safety or maintenance concern?
- Does the project or initiative extend the usable lifespan of an existing resource?
- Does the project or initiative maintain an existing resource's use and/or capacity?
- Will the project, program or initiative improve the visitor experience in the existing PROST system?

### Address Gaps

The PROST vision and guiding principles emphasize equity. The planning process involved analyzing service gaps, inequities, and needs of underserved communities alongside projected gaps due to planned residential growth and development. Projects, programs, and initiatives can help increase equity and improve access for all.

### Key Questions

- Does the effort increase recreation opportunities for currently or historically underserved populations or for neighborhoods where there are higher percentages of people below median income, communities of color, Indigenous people, seniors, or people with disabilities?
- Does the project or initiative fill gaps identified in the PROST Master Plan?
- Will the project improve access for user groups not currently involved in the parks system?
- Does the project, program or initiative address needs in planned growth areas?

- Will the project or initiative help Missoula serve a demographically representative cross-section of the population?
- Will the project or initiative add year-round opportunities for use during poor air quality?

### Support Activation

Activation increases regular activity in the park system through programs, events, design interventions, and staffing and volunteer initiatives. This leads to more visitors, improved safety, and transformed spaces into vibrant social interaction and activity hubs.

### Key Questions

- Does the project, program or initiative target sites with limited or no programming?
- Will the project, program or initiative increase the regular use of the site or extend the seasons of use?
- Will the project, program or initiative increase the opportunity for people to engage with nature?
- Will the project, program or initiative ensure a regular physical presence by staff or volunteers at the site?
- Does the project, program or initiative allow residents to engage with nature?

### Improve Ecosystem Function

These projects, programs, and initiatives aim to enhance Missoula's natural systems. Healthy ecosystems are crucial for the community in developed parks, on conservation lands or as part of the regional open space system. This includes efforts to increase Missoula's resilience against extreme weather.

### Key Questions

- Does the project or initiative reduce invasive species or increase native species biodiversity?
- Does the project stabilize a degrading site and/or remove site contamination?
- Does the project or initiative improve or expand wildlife habitat?
- Does the project or initiative protect or rehabilitate existing public land?
- Does the project protect water and/or air quality?

### Align with Other Projects

Some projects, programs, or initiatives can align with or enhance the effectiveness of other efforts, whether from the City of Missoula, another public agency, or a partner organization.

### Key Questions

- Can the timing of this project, program, or initiative be coordinated with another project in progress?
- Is the project, program, or initiative aligned with recommendations in other adopted City plans (such as the Long-Range Transportation Plan, Land Use Plan, Midtown Master Plan, or other similar plan)?
- Is there a related project that would benefit (or benefit from) this action?
- Is the project, program or initiative leveraging, but not duplicating, the efforts of partner organizations in the immediate area?

### Increase Fiscal Sustainability and Capacity

Fiscal sustainability and capacity can be enhanced through efficiencies, cost

reductions, and/or revenue increases. Various projects, programs, and initiatives can improve effectiveness or lower costs in several ways, including reduced utility bills, decreased maintenance time, lower material costs, streamlined processes that require less staff time, and shared use or partnership agreements that leverage resources to provide mutual benefits.

Increased revenue can be generated from user fees, higher program registration, grants and donations, or contracts with other organizations. These efforts help the department maximize its organizational resources.

#### Key Questions

- Does the project or initiative tap into new funding streams or cost-sharing partnerships?
- Does the project increase revenue generation through user fees, fees for service, or strategic partnerships?
- Will the project reduce operating costs?
- How does the cost of the project or initiative compare to alternatives?
- Can the project, program or initiative be completed with existing resources, including staff capacity?
- Does the partnership enhance the department's ability to meet the goals outlined in the PROST Master Plan?

#### Provide balanced investment

As a public agency, the department serves all Missoulians and visitors with diverse interests and priorities within a geographically expansive city. The seven goals of the PROST Master Plan address different components of the community's vision for parks, recreation,

open space, and trails (PROST). To effectively prioritize projects, programs, and initiatives while considering the entire system, the department must balance its limited staff time and financial resources across the PROST system as a whole.

#### Key Questions

- Is the project, program, or initiative located in a geographic area or at a site without recent investment?
- Will the project, program, or initiative help implement a goal that has been less frequently addressed compared to other PROST goals?
- Which recreational interests will the project, program, or initiative address? Are there other projects or initiatives focused on those interests within the same timeframe?
- Will the program, project or initiative address an aspect of the PROST system (e.g., a developed park type, a recreation program area, a trail type, operations, or urban forestry) that requires more attention?
- Will the program, project, or initiative enhance the PROST system, support its goals, and avoid unintended environmental consequences or negative impacts on the local community?

#### Implementation Timeframes

As previously noted, the projects and initiatives in the PROST Master Plan vary in their complexity and ease of implementation. The Department will need to include a mix of implementation timeframes to demonstrate results regularly, take steps forward on longer term efforts, and make effective use of staff

time. There are three general implementation timeframes:

- **Quick wins.** These can be completed within one year or less, and they typically are lower cost, less complex and draw less staff time than more complicated projects.
- **Medium term.** These projects or initiatives may take up to three to five years to implement and will generally require a staff team and potentially an outside consultant.
- **Ongoing.** Some efforts, once initiated, are intended to continue on an ongoing basis. An example of this is the expansion of the volunteer program.

#### Evaluation and Celebration

With each effort it is important for the Department, City, and community to evaluate progress, understand new challenges, and celebrate successes. An annual PROST update should be provided to the Park Board, City Council and community to ensure the PROST plan advances.



# Afterword

The current PROST system managed by the City of Missoula Parks and Recreation Department has evolved over time in concert with changes in Missoula. Continuing to work toward the PROST vision will not happen overnight; but it can happen.

As the Community Working Group stated in the foreword of this plan:

This plan is not the end of the process, but rather the beginning. We strongly encourage every Missoulian to play a role in bringing this plan to life. By working together, staying involved, and holding ourselves accountable, we can transform this vision into a reality that benefits everyone in our community.

And, from the Missoula Parks and Recreation Advisory Board:

As Missoula continues to grow and evolve, so too must our vision for parks, recreation, open space, and trails. These cherished community assets are more than amenities—they are essential to the health, happiness, and sustainability of our city. They provide places for play, connection, celebration, and restoration—for all Missoulians, in every season of life.

The Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails (PROST) Master Plan represents a shared vision that emerged from deep community engagement, thoughtful research, and collaborative planning. We are proud of the work that went into this plan and excited about what it will help us achieve in the years ahead.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the many individuals and groups who gave their time, energy, and insight to this effort. In particular, we thank the Community Working Group, a committed and diverse team of 16 members representing various sectors of our community, including arts and culture, education, health, conservation, persons with disabilities, and more. Their insights and commitment have been instrumental in shaping a plan that is inclusive and forward-thinking.

We also acknowledge the contributions of Missoula Parks and Recreation staff, City leadership, consultants, volunteers, and the many residents who participated in workshops, responded to surveys, and offered public comments. Special thanks go to our partners at the University of Montana, whose academic expertise and community leadership continue to be a valuable resource in planning for a vibrant, equitable future.

Your voices made this plan stronger—and a truer reflection of Missoula's values.

Together, we've built more than a strategic plan; we've reaffirmed our community's commitment to equity, access, stewardship, and joy in the outdoors. We look forward to working together to bring this vision to life.

