

# WHEELER PARKS COMMITTEE MASTER PLAN

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## INTRODUCTION

The Wheeler Parks and Recreation Committee was created by the Wheeler City Council in 2002 as an advisory committee (See Appendix A. Ordinance No. 2002-05). Among its power and duties, the Committee was directed to develop a long range plan for the use of Wheeler's public park areas. This plan was reviewed by the Wheeler Planning Commission for consistency with the Wheeler Comprehensive Plan and land use regulations. This plan was then recommended by the Parks Committee to the Wheeler City Council who adopted it as Ordinance 2005-03. The document sets forth how the many recreational resources and public park spaces of the City of Wheeler can be developed, preserved and enhanced to provide recreational opportunities to meet the needs and desires of Wheeler's citizens and visitors of all ages. The Parks Committee will continue to monitor and work on the development of the many parts of this Plan.

## MISSION

**Mission Statement:** It is the policy of the city to preserve and enhance the quality of its existing parks and recreation resources.

**Conservation:** It is the policy of the city to conserve open spaces, native riparian vegetation -- per the City of Wheeler Comprehensive Plan -- wooded areas and wetlands for wildlife habitat, flood hazard mitigation and future park needs.

**Recreation:** It is the policy of the city to provide recreation opportunities for all ages and users.

**Scope of Review:** In order to assure that current installations and practices maintain the integrity of the Parks Plan, review process is necessary. The elements to come under consideration for

review include: buildings, table and benches, art, fences, rails, signage, plaques, paths or trails, softscape, hardscape, vistas, irrigation, horticultural materials and practices, activities, gifts, donations, and points of interest. Informal northwest design elements should complement and preserve the unique location and cultural history of the Wheeler area.

**Periodic Review:** The Parks Committee shall review and update the Parks Master Plan every five years and make recommendations for revisions to the Wheeler City Council. Prior to submitting any recommended revisions of the Parks Master Plan to the Wheeler City Council for their approval the proposed revisions shall be submitted to the Wheeler Planning Commission for consistency with Wheeler’s Comprehensive Plan and land use regulations.

## **IMPLEMENTATION STEPS**

Planning  
Design  
Presentation  
Funding, Construction and/or Maintenance

## **COMMUNITY PROFILE**

**History:** The original inhabitants of the area were Salish-speaking Tillamook Indians. At the time of the arrival in the area of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1806 there were an estimated 2,000 native people enjoying the many creeks and rivers of the Nehalem Bay area. The first non-native settlers, farmers, arrived around 1871. The town was incorporated in 1913 and was named after C.H. Wheeler, the owner of the Wheeler Lumber Mill located south of town at Vosburg Creek. Like many coastal towns, Wheeler has evolved over the last 130 years and sometimes the changes reflected advances in transportation. The regular ferry service on the Nehalem River around the turn of the 20th century supported a small dairy industry. The completion of the railroad around the time of the town’s incorporation was a boon to the timber industry and a public transportation connection through the coast range to the Willamette Valley. The completion of Highway 101, the Roosevelt Highway, in 1926 increased accessibility and promoted tourism. From the coast’s largest saw mill, to the famous Rinehart Clinic treating people with arthritis, to the coast's largest shingle mill, to a sleepy fishing and retirement town, Wheeler is now known as a tourist destination whose beauty is greatly appreciated by locals and visitors alike. The natural spectacular views of mountains, river and bay and Wheeler's charming atmosphere draw people who enjoy Wheeler's dining, shopping and recreational activities.

**Topography:** The City of Wheeler is situated primarily on hills that rise to the east and south from Nehalem Bay. Gervais, Zimmerman, and Vosburg Creeks which cut through the city. Together with several smaller outlets, these bodies of water contribute to the Nehalem Bay Watershed. The Nehalem Valley lies to the northeast and Neahkahnie Mountain provides a northwesterly backdrop. The City overlooks Nehalem Bay and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Wheeler's bay frontage offers an excellent example of a tideland estuary that supports many important species of plant and animal life. Several wetlands, including a salt marsh, are also encompassed within

the City of Wheeler Urban Growth Boundary which provide critical habitat to many marsh species. Salmon, steelhead, elk, blue heron, seals, bald eagles and hundreds of other birds can be found in this rich ecosystem.

**Demographics:** Wheeler is located on the Nehalem Bay in North Tillamook County. It has approximately 420 full time residents. The grade school for Wheeler children is Nehalem Grade School located in the town of Nehalem two miles north of Wheeler. The Junior/Senior High School is Neah-Kah-Nie High School located in Rockaway Beach 7 miles south. The City of Wheeler is governed by a city council of six members, including the Mayor. The nearby communities of Nehalem, Manzanita and other unincorporated areas participate in the Nehalem Bay Wastewater Agency and Nehalem Bay Fire and Rescue along with the City. Wheeler contracts with Manzanita for police protection and security. The three communities also share a common communication system company and recreation district. Wheeler enjoys the "Scenic Highway" designation, which provides outstanding mountain and waterfront views from Hwy 101, which runs directly through it and is unique in having a City Park on the Waterfront. Activities for families and nature lovers include: boating, kayaking, crabbing, fishing, hiking and birding.

## LAND RESOURCES

Wheeler's two current primary park sites relate well to the aesthetics of the surrounding area. The Waterfront Park borders the river offering excellent close-up views, while the City's Upper Park offers a panorama which helps interpret topography of the area on a wide scale. Rinehart Park, a small pocket park in the central business district provides a place to sit, rest, and reflect in the shade of a flowering cherry tree.

**Waterfront Park:** the site area encompasses nearly an acre of land on the Nehalem Bay. It offers the community unparalleled views of sweeping panorama, Neahkahnie Mountain, the wooded Coast Range, a wildlife sanctuary, and the river estuary. Sunsets, storms, wildlife, fishing boats and rainbows arc all a part of this spectacular landscape. The site consists of several parcels of land under several ownerships. Land owners include the City of Wheeler, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Port of Tillamook Bay Railroad. The latter property consists of 100 foot wide right-of way between the downtown and the City of Wheeler and ODFW parcels. Over the last several years, the City of Wheeler and ODFW have jointly developed recreation improvements on the park site in conjunction with the Oregon State Marine Board. In an effort to enhance use of the existing boat ramp, a floating boat and fishing dock, a parking lot and restrooms were constructed; utility work and bank stabilization were also undertaken. In addition, Norm Laknes and friends, with mostly their own private funds, constructed a passenger train depot in 1993. This brightly painted depot, one of the most photographed spots in Wheeler sits at the top of the bank adjacent to the tracks. It still serves a seasonal excursion train operated by the Oregon Coast Scenic Railway as well as the increasingly popular Rail Riders. Significant improvements, funded by a grant from Oregon State Parks, were made to the City of Wheeler for Waterfront Park in 2007/2008 and included improvements of a new retaining wall, handicap accessible paths, irrigation upgrades, picnic

tables, visitor benches, new planting areas, and several ornamental beds. Nine new trees, donated by a private tree nursery round out the transformation of this park.

**Upper Park:** this two acre park located on the hill above city hall, with an entrance at 2<sup>nd</sup> Street off Rowe Street, has a stunning panoramic view. The city has received grants from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and the Oregon Department of Forestry to assist with improvements to this park. These improvements include: an all-purpose ball field with portable backstop; playground equipment with swings; picnic tables and grills; garbage receptacles; and landscaping with northwest compatible plants and trees. Over a dozen trees were added to the park in 2008/2009 through a donation from a private tree nursery. A community garden was developed for the use by the residents who pay a small annual fee to do so. A set of four horseshoe pits were installed through donations from local businesses. A trail from the SE corner of the park up to Third Street was constructed to support walking routes throughout the city.

**City-owned Lands (Rights-of-way):** Many platted streets in Wheeler are currently not developed and may never be developed. The unused portions of city rights-of-way provide the opportunity for developing a pedestrian/bicycle trail system within the City of Wheeler.

**City-owned Lands (Downtown):** There are a number of places in the downtown area where landscaping is possible and desirable with plants, trees, and shrubs (softscape) as well as benches and other furniture (hardscape) and lighting.

**Privately-owned Lands:** It is common land use practice in subdivisions to require that a certain amount of "open space" be maintained. While the land remains in private ownership or common ownership by a homeowner's association, the possibility exists for the city to negotiate with the ownership for the designation as a park.

**Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails:** Currently the only continuous pedestrian or bicycle trail or corridor is along Hwy 101 between Gamble and Spruce Streets. The downtown improvement project improved sections of sidewalk on the east side of Hwy 101 and added some short sections on the west side of Hwy 101. Two crosswalks were also added. The opportunity exists for planning and developing a trails system for the entire community, which would add greatly to the recreational options available in Wheeler. A potential for access to the railroad bed exists for a "Rails- and-Trails" program, which will be driven by a multicounty-wide effort. We recommend the city take an active role in this program.

## **FUTURE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **Waterfront Park**

Reserve and incorporate features of the waterfront in future development, including historic features.

Explore possibilities for installation of public art by local artists.

Explore development of a trail connecting Waterfront Park with Botts Marsh

### **Upper Park**

Continue development of landscaping  
Explore addition of a restroom  
Add a drinking fountain/faucet  
Explore the development of a covered pavilion/storage area facility; use for point of refuge, restroom, picnic area, emergency supply storage, etc.  
Explore installation of lighting and improved signage  
Explore installation of public art  
Explore development of terrace area  
Investigate playground medium for optimum safety and maintenance

### **City-owned Lands (Rights-of-way)**

#### **City-owned Lands (Downtown)**

Improve landscaping in downtown core area  
Maintain benches at appropriate locations in downtown core area  
Explore installation of public art in downtown core area

#### **Privately-owned Lands**

Explore possibilities in new subdivisions for development of open space as park  
Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails

The citizens of Wheeler have expressed support for establishing trails around Wheeler for both recreational and for safety purposes. The Wheeler Park and Recreation Committee and the Wheeler Emergency Committee play a part in establishing the trail locations. The City of Wheeler Public Works department will assist in establishing and marking a trail system and will monitor and maintain the trails at a minimal level to assure clear passage.

It is the desire of all parties to collectively provide both recreation as well as emergency access to the centralized Emergency Command Center and Medical facility in the event of a disaster. Given that Wheeler is divided geographically by three creeks and a hillside that has limited or no roadway connection between the three sections of town it is imperative that we establish a clearly defined path that would allow citizens to travel from one section to the central area if the highway 101 is impassible.

#### **Along Waterfront**

Begin planning for development of a trail that connects Upper and Waterfront Parks  
Explore talks and development of a trail from downtown heading north along First Street to the newly acquired salt marsh purchased by Lower Nehalem Community Trust in 2012.  
Develop a map that shows interconnectivity of possible trails and prioritize phases of the development plan.

## **FUNDING SOURCES**

**Criteria:** Before accepting any gift, the future maintenance requirements should be determined to be sure resources are available for future needs. The City should compile a list of future needs,

projects and link them with appropriate fund raising methods, including grants and special events for broad-based community support, major gifts, solicitation from donors, memorials, honoraria.

## **Grants:**

### **Public**

Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department provides grants for Upper Park and Waterfront Park

Oregon Department of Transportation, supports the development of bicycle and pedestrian projects through TEA-21 Enhancement funds

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, assists with recreation improvements at Waterfront Park

### **Private**

Ford Family Foundation makes grants to organizations in rural communities in Oregon for projects related to community improvement and development

Meyer Memorial Trust offers both general purpose grants and small grants for capital projects, program development, general operations and continuing project support

Oregon Community Foundation makes grants throughout Oregon for various causes including community enrichment, economic development, capital projects, program development and expansion, and matching funding

Oregon Foundation Directory, published annually, is available through the Tillamook County Library and is a good resource for identifying other foundation grant sources

Rinehart Family provided funding to develop the Pocket Park located in the central business district. This was a one-time contribution however it may be a source for additional funding for future upgrades to that area.

Spirit Mountain Community Fund (SMCF) provides the majority of its funding through our General Purpose funding programs. Organizations can apply for the Small Grants funding program OR the Large Grants funding program.

### **Individual Gifts**

The City of Wheeler Comprehensive Plan, Recreation and Open Space, includes as one of its policies: Involvement of local individuals and groups in the donation of land, labor, funds, or equipment for the improvement of recreation facilities is encouraged. The City may receive offers of gifts related to the parks or public landscape. The gifts may be in the form of money to buy something specific or the parks or public landscape or in the form of a tree, bench, artwork, plaque, etc. Any offer of a gift should be reviewed by the Parks Committee to determine whether it maintains the integrity of the Park Plan. Before accepting any gift, it should be determined what will be the future maintenance requirements and if there are the resources available to meet

those futures needs. The City should compile a list of future projects and link them with appropriate fund raising methods, from special events for broad-based community support to major gift solicitation from leading donors.

**In-kind Contributions and Volunteer Coordination**

An important source of support for the Wheeler park system improvements will come from in-kind contributions and volunteer energy. Wheeler residents and businesses can be solicited for in-kind contributions of materials, equipment and labor to accomplish some of the improvements identified in this plan. Sources outside the city can also be solicited since the improvement of Wheeler's park facilities will benefit the surrounding communities.