

TOURISM AND ENTERTAINMENT TRENDS

More people are vacationing locally. Point Defiance Park has seen a boost in attendance over past few the years. A USA Today/Gallup Poll described the behavioral changes caused by increased gas prices.

This poll reported the following:

- 37% of those surveyed canceled or cannot afford a trip
- 24% indicated they are taking a shorter vacation or staying closer to home
- 20% of those surveyed stated they were cutting down on the number of trips.
- 62% most often take vacation trips with their spouse or significant other
- The most popular trip destinations are cities and urban areas (39%), followed by small towns and rural areas (26%) and ocean beaches (23%)
- The most popular activities are sightseeing (51%) and shopping (51%)

URBAN RECREATION TRENDS

According to a Brookings Institution article, "A Much More Urban America," cities are experiencing a second life due to distinctive physical assets, including waterfronts, mixed-use downtowns, historic districts and pedestrian friendly neighborhoods.

A growing number of the American population (83%) live in metropolitan areas which, "together, drive and dominate the economy and house wealth generating industries, centers of research and innovation, ports of commerce and gateways of immigration." As the trend to move into metropolitan communities continues, park and recreation professionals will need to focus on the physical assets each area offers.

In urban downtown areas there is a movement to create unique, destination parks that attract visitors and employees, as well as the growing number of downtown residents. In Chicago, Millennium Park, built in 2004, is a destination for residents and visitors alike and is a source of civic pride. This signature park, built on top of an underground parking garage, maximizes limited downtown land and contains engaging public art by world-renowned artists, public gardens, an indoor concert venue abutting an outdoor amphitheater and lawn, plaza and pedestrian promenades, a restaurant and food concessions. The park also has seasonal interest with an outdoor ice skating rink. The park hosts special events and is available for rent. Millennium Park is the result of a public/private partnership that included the initial capital funding as well as ongoing operations.

BEHAVIORAL TRENDS

Key behavioral trends reflective of MPT and important to evaluate for future planning efforts include the following:

- Participation in out-of-school activities and programs offers support for youth and working families and benefits both socially, emotionally and academically.
- Environmental education programs were listed at the top of the 10 programs parks and recreation departments are planning to add within the next three years.
- Trails, parks and playgrounds are among the five most important community amenities considered when selecting a home.
- National trends in the delivery of parks and recreation systems reflects more partnerships.
- Washington is culturally rich. Ethnic trends in recreation are vast and require a variety of programming.

In general, dense urban living and SMART growth is occurring throughout cities nation-wide, and an emerging trend is increased densities near waterfronts.



POINT DEFIANCE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

As stated earlier, the future of Point Defiance will be driven on ensuring a fair balance of passive and active programming within this regional park. The goal is to maintain a careful balance between the commitment to protect and conserve resources, while providing important opportunities for recreational and educational use of the Parklands, both now and in the future.

This program document is divided into four sections:

Active Exploration and Adventure

- Sports, Fitness and Outdoor Recreation Programs
- Water Activities

Education and Life-long Learning

- Nature and Wildlife Conservation Programs
- Cultural Arts and Humanities

Retreat and Social Gathering

- Events and Festivals
- Gardens
- Conferences and Lodging
- Playgrounds and Picnic Shelters
- Restaurants and Concessions

Support Services for Park and Park Visitor

- Mobility Plan
- Visitor Center
- Utilities
- Park Maintenance

ACTIVE EXPLORATION AND ADVENTURE

While Point Defiance has terrific land and water assets, it also has a wonderful commitment to nurturing environmental sustainability and improving habitat, and a tradition of continued learning for all ages. As activity increases and visitors come to the Park, more programs and activities can be expanded or created as new facilities and amenities are developed. Some may generate revenue while others will build on the growing excitement and vitality of the Park.

Sports, Fitness and Outdoor Recreation Programs

Benefits to a healthy community: Nearly 6 in 10 Americans participate in outdoor recreation at least monthly. Their motivations for participation vary, but the top objectives are fun, relaxation, experiencing nature and exercise. Regular physical activity as promoted through active living and wellness is one of the best methods to assure and encourage individuals to become and stay physically and emotionally healthy. Sports and fitness contribute to community health and wellness and toward a fit and productive work force. Play and leisure pursuits help prevent childhood obesity and other ailments.

Point Defiance Park provides current and potential new opportunities to help Tacoma citizens become and stay healthy:

- Bicycle Station and Running Club – Retail/Repair/Rental/Social Center
- Interactive Play Equipment and Seasonal Vendors – Ice Rinks and Climbing Walls
- Garden, Forest and Shoreline Ecology Tours
- Kayaking, Fishing and Boating Rental/Classes

Water / Aquatic Activities

Access to water-related activities: The waters of Washington State are a national and international resource. Recreational boating on these waters contributes to the well-being of both residents and visitors. Rent a boat from the Boathouse Marina – the Puget Sound has some of the best fishing in Washington State. Park visitors can also explore the wonders of Owen Beach during low tide. There are many benefits of water-related activities within the Park.

Waterfront views and easy access to the water for recreation and relaxation are eagerly sought amenities in cities everywhere. Point Defiance Park provides recreational activities for visual, physical and recreational access through fishing, boating and wildlife viewing.



EDUCATION AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Nature and Wildlife Programs

Horticulture and Forestry: With the support of many volunteers, the botanical gardens within Point Defiance Park showcase a variety of unique, historical and native plant species for visitors of all ages to enjoy. MPT is well respected for their expertise within the environmental horticulture and botanical industries. Their staff coordinates the production, utilization and maintenance of trees, flowers, shrubs and grasses that are used to enhance the environment. Point Defiance Park demonstrates these practices through landscape management, plant production, botanical collection and educational displays.

Wildlife Conservation: Conservation is at the core of the work at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium (PDZA). It's a passion that drives staff to protect threatened species and their habitats, from the jungles of Borneo to the wetlands of Western Washington. With support from a talented staff and many partners including the US Fish & Wildlife Service, red wolves—once nearly extinct in the wild—have begun a gradual return to their native range in the sweltering swamplands of Eastern North Carolina. In Southeast Asia, researchers armed with motion-sensing cameras have advanced the study of the endangered clouded leopard and work to spread awareness about these elusive and majestic wild cats. At PDZA, the work continues to help bolster populations of the endangered Oregon spotted frog by rearing and releasing the native amphibian into its historic habitat. Their conservation efforts have also advanced the health and management of the Zoo's animals through studies of animal behavior and reproduction. Through the support of Zoo Society members, Zoo guests and other donors, PDZA and their conservation partners continue to protect Earth's biodiversity for future generations.

Science and Environmental Education: The Park district organizes efforts and hosts opportunities to teach how natural environments function and, particularly, how human beings can manage their behavior and ecosystems in order to live more sustainably. Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action (UNESCO, Tbilisi Declaration, 1978). Currently, high school and university students are taking advantage of Point Defiance Park as an outdoor laboratory to study ecosystems. These field-based studies demonstrate the power of well-designed STEM education programs which emphasize science, technology, engineering and math. Knowledge and skills in these areas are essential to the development of responsible citizens and well prepared professionals able to tackle the challenges of the future. The Tacoma School District's Science and Math Institute (SAMI) has matured into a 400 student high school, located within Point Defiance Park, taking advantage of the unique teaching and learning environment and offering the youth of our community an unbridled educational opportunity.

Natural Resources. This unit understands the many practical applications of ecology in wetland management, natural resource management (agriculture, forestry and fisheries) and park planning.

Cultural Arts and Humanities Programs

History: The history of Point Defiance Park is not unique to Tacoma but reflects national trends in city and park development over the past century. The cultural arts and humanities programs encompass the discovery, collection, organization and presentation of information about these past events.

Located within the Park are a variety of historic assets:

- The Pagoda is on the National Historic Register.
- The 1898 Lodge.
- Fort Nisqually is on the state and city registers of historic places.

In addition to the Fort Nisqually Living History Museum, the district will continue to expand Park historical interpretation and focus on:

- Public history which is deeply rooted in the areas of historic preservation, oral history and museum curatorship. Some of the most common settings for the practice of public history are museums, parks and all levels of government. Tacoma is a unique contemporary city that values its history and has a strong historic preservation program.
- Cultural history which typically combines the approaches of anthropology and history to look at language, popular cultural traditions and cultural interpretations of historical experience. It examines the records and narrative descriptions of past knowledge, customs and arts of a group of people. Point Defiance Park has a variety of opportunities to showcase the rich cultural history within the Pacific Northwest and Puget Sound region.

Both historic and cultural assets within the Park are unique to Point Defiance and add to the Park's role in developing Tacoma's unique sense of place.

Visual and Performing Arts: Tacoma is a place of creative synergy. The city is home to a variety of music groups, community theatre, an opera company, various dance companies and a large body of nationally recognized artists involved with permanent installations, as well as temporary shows and exhibitions. These are displayed in a variety of spaces. During the history and development of Tacoma, residents have witnessed the evolution of both performing and visual arts and have seen how it relates back to the city's history and culture. The changing face of arts within Tacoma at present day finds itself fostering ways for individuals to experience, respond, create and express themselves through dance, music, theater and visual arts.



Each genre of the arts contains a distinct body of knowledge, vocabulary and skill, which is endowed to the public through both active and passive participation. This aids in the opportunity to expand each participant's perceptual, intellectual, cultural and spiritual experience, enriching and affecting the lives of Tacoma residents.

Point Defiance Park has incredible spaces throughout the park to be used as developed and natural / site specific forums for dance, music, theater and visual arts.

Currently, there are a variety of public art pieces, primarily sculptural, nestled throughout the Park. This collection of work tells stories, provides interest in Tacoma, creates identity, establishes community presence and reflects the many talents of the visual artists who created them.

The benefits of public art are many. It can transform eyesores into amenities, enliven design, provide park way-finding, become a landmark, encourage community dialogues and create spaces and places where people want to visit and stay. Public art is a city's legacy—Point Defiance Park is an important canvas to this legacy. Proper stewardship for the collection also reflects that caring and commitment to quality that is a keystone of Point Defiance Park.



RETREAT AND SOCIAL GATHERING

During the research stage of planning for Point Defiance Park, Metro Parks Tacoma staff hired Leland Consulting Group and VIA Architecture to help define the types of spaces and activities that would complement the Park and add to its glory. They documented how locals and tourists love Point Defiance Park and how they visit from around Puget Sound and from further afield. It is a place to take out-of-town guests, for kids to see polar bears and budgies, to go for a quiet weekend hike or fishing, to take classes and learn about history/environment, and to hold weddings, picnics and special gatherings.

It is clear that all of these events and activities contribute to the spirit of Point Defiance Park, which can also be thought of as an identity, brand or personality. This program plan is to build on and enhance that identity, rather than alter it drastically. All landscaping, buildings, infrastructure and other improvements should enhance these attributes.

There is an incredible opportunity throughout the Park to build on and continue to provide social gathering and natural retreat areas for all to enjoy. The team explained that the recent history of park planning nationwide provides an abundant source of inspiration and there are scores of parks that gracefully blend urban and natural assets to the advantage of both. Examples of recent integrated parks planning include: Fort Worden Park, Port Townsend, Washington; the Presidio, San Francisco, California; and Bryant Park, New York City. Other examples of this trend include Stanley Park (with four restaurants), Granville Island, and other areas on the Vancouver, BC waterfront; Director Park and Pioneer Square, Portland, Oregon; Balboa Park, San Diego, California; Yerba Buena Gardens, and Union Square in San Francisco, California; and Central Platte Valley Park areas in downtown Denver, Colorado as well as many others.

In his pioneering work on urban parks, “The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces”, William Whyte explains the principles that result in the most successful and well-used urban parks. The first is, simply, adequate and appropriate physical space for people to gather, sit and connect. Another among the top factors is food. “If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food,” writes Whyte. Whyte’s work gave birth to the Project for Public Spaces, which continues to advocate vigorously nationwide for abundant activities in parks that attract, retain and entertain people.

Events and Festivals

The Park should consider a designated area specifically designed for outdoor events such as weddings, festivals, farmers markets, community celebrations, corporate and other events. These activities could be located in the entrance Triangle and at a series of other landscaped areas. New buildings should be planned to allow flexible markets and community uses, both inside and out.

Gardens

Acres of gardens with sculptures, waterfalls and thousands of flowers create beautiful displays throughout the Park. Theme gardens, including a Japanese Garden, Rose Garden and Northwest Native Garden provide a wide variety of horticultural experiences for visitors. MPT should consider developing a garden concept plan that focuses on the current gardens and how they interact with one another, and investigate potential future growth of gardens.

Lodging and Conferences

Much like the Silver Falls Lodge & Conference Center in Oregon, extending the visitor experience year-round via conference and lodging should be considered during the master planning process. Outside consultants also recommend a third party design; contracting, construction and property management consultants should be considered with this type of program.

Playgrounds and Picnic Shelters

The Park needs to create a new destination adventure/nature style playground. This playground could be the largest playground in the Park system. Staff suggests a series of shelters that could be rented as a single unit or multi-shelters combined to accommodate large groups, located adjacent to the playground.

Restaurants and Concessions

There is thought that additional restaurants and small retail spaces need to be considered throughout the Park with a focus on the Triangle. The main purpose for this is to provide complimentary services, extend the stay of the visitor and to assist with revenue development. The layout and number of restaurants may be determined as MPT conducts a master plan and feasibility studies to solicit interest from restaurateurs. Additionally, retail may include one to three small operators, such as a coffee or ice cream shop, bike rental store, art gallery, toy store, gift shop or other business that tastefully reflects the spirit of the Park.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR PARK AND PARK VISITOR

Mobility Plan

One of the three guiding principles, safe and easy pedestrian access, leads to a primary area of concern – circulation around the Park, both of the automobile and pedestrians and how those activities interact. This requires creating a circulation plan for all mobility purposes and levels of access and devising methods to mitigate or manage conflicts. For the Park this includes the pedestrian, whether walking, jogging or hiking, and the visitor who wants to be more mobile through biking, driving a car, or using a public transportation service. There is also a need to incorporate handicap accessibility in compliance with ADA laws.

Already underway is an improved entrance to the Park that will better facilitate movement of both people and automobiles. An entrance roundabout is in the design stages to clean up the existing haphazard intersection of multiple streets. Parking will be included as part of the new Triangle improvements package as well as pedestrian connections to take people from their parked cars further into the property. Ongoing discussions include having a new trolley or shuttle service during the busiest times to take people to their destinations throughout the Park, thus decreasing the impact of automobiles within the Park.



Visitor Center

The most apparent support system for visitors, especially to a Park of this size and complexity, would be a new Visitor Center. The Center should be near to the entrance and highly visible. It would supply information to guide both the first time visitor and the frequent user. While many visitors are comfortable with handouts in the forms of maps and lists of events, the Park needs to utilize technology to enhance public information and education. Apps for phones that show biking trails, historical tours, or event information are just a few of the possibilities. Also available could be touchscreen pads at the visitor center to provide hands on access to park information. This enables the user to find out what is going on at any given time and to get information when the Visitor Center is not staffed.

The Visitor Center should also have public restrooms and concessions available. Many visitors arriving at the Park have come a considerable distance and having these facilities near the front entrance to the Park would be a welcome convenience while they get their bearings. Currently, visitor services function out of the Lodge some distance into the Park. As the Triangle develops, it is anticipated that these services will move into a new building closer to the Park entrance.

Utilities

Support services will always include utilities. Developing and extending utilities in conjunction with current and future layouts will take planning and coordination.

Lighting and power address one of the main concerns of park visitors, providing security for their safety and also deterring vandalism. There is a fine line between having a secure environment and providing too much light and possibly diminishing the character of the Park. Security measures need to be thoughtful and appropriate for the location and the visitor should have enough awareness to be a responsible participant in their own safety.

Other utilities would include providing water to all areas of the Park, both for drinking and for fire suppression. In support of this, the roadways need to be accessible to emergency vehicles.

Park Maintenance

These behind the scenes services are the least noticed when a park is kept clean and is well maintained. When maintenance within a park slips, it can become one of the biggest negatives to visitor experience. MPT has an excellent track record with the public in maintaining the grounds and facilities at Point Defiance Park.

Support areas for maintenance buildings, equipment, tools, greenhouses and stockpiling can consume a large area. Currently these areas are spread around the Park but are mostly found in the southeast corner of the Park within the Triangle, and in the southwest corner within the Baker Tract. In addition, there is a separate maintenance area for the zoo adjacent to the zoo's public parking area.

The largest maintenance area in the Triangle will be phased out as this area undergoes upcoming development. This service area not only supports Point Defiance Park but also other city parks under the management of MPT. As these facilities shift, additional area within the Park will be needed to replace those which just support Point Defiance. Services for other parks are being relocated to a more central facility.