



### Delivering for our Community

In 2014 Tacoma voters approved a \$198 million capital bond measure to help pay for more than 60 improvements and updates throughout the Metro Parks Tacoma (MPT) district. Thanks to strong voter support and numerous partnerships, investments are being made in regional parks like Point Defiance as well as the zoo, community centers, and neighborhood parks. We are leveraging these bond dollars to deliver on our promise to provide quality opportunities to play, learn and grow throughout the Tacoma region. This legislative agenda seeks opportunities to further leverage those dollars. Additionally, it addresses emerging policy issues and concerns and discusses the need for ongoing M&O dollars for our innovative programs and growing amenities.

## WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

### Policy Initiatives:

**Parks and Recreation Funding.** Maintaining a high level of service for robust parks and recreation programs will be a challenge in the decades ahead for MPT and many other parks agencies and local governments throughout our state. With restrictions on property taxes combined with the increasing cost of doing business, our operating revenues will not keep pace with operating expenses.

- MPT will mitigate this challenge with pay-for-use revenues when appropriate, by implementing LEAN business practices and being smart with taxpayer dollars. In the long term, flexibility on property taxes, local improvement districts, impact fees, and other creative sources for local governments will be crucial for maintaining the level of service our citizens expect. As such, supports the Washington State Recreation and Parks (WRPA) effort to study and identify flexible operating revenues for local parks and recreation agencies.

***Additionally, MPT supports changing the 1 percent cap on year over year property tax collections up to the rate of inflation in Washington.***

**Homelessness.** MPT operates as a partner in addressing the rising issues of homelessness in Tacoma and supports and coordinates with the City, State, and non-profit strategies to address and solve the root causes of chronic homelessness. The rise in homeless encampments in the City of Tacoma has affected the maintenance and use of park properties, and the feelings of safety for park users.

- Support CoT in seeking funding from the State for homeless services. Funding should prioritize addressing youth homelessness and support City efforts to secure capital funding to establish a youth drop in-shelter. MPT will also coordinate with CoT to seek tools that incentivize affordable housing and programming to prevent homelessness and address the needs of those who become homeless. ***MPT supports the city in seeking new funding opportunities and leverage possible strategies in utilizing local housing trust funds, modifying the real estate excise taxes, and other opportunities to enhance the construction of affordable housing.***

- WSDOT owns and operates a large portion of property along the state highway routes in Tacoma. These areas are often used as homeless encampments that are unsafe for the people living there and serve as visual blight for major entry points to our community. MPT supports City efforts to seek legislation or a budget authorization to increase funding for DOT to work with local governments in rapid responses to address WSDOT right of way cleanups. ***There are hundreds of encampments on WSDOT properties and MPT will coordinate with other concerned local agencies across the state to seek solutions to address this issue.***
- MPT will also look to how it can perform its due diligence as a partner in addressing root causes of homelessness by leveraging existing park amenities and services to assist the needs of this vulnerable population. This can include but is not limited to providing free showers, job assistance programming, and accessing existing City and local non-profit agency services for homelessness. ***MPT will track and support policies focused around local agencies authority to change and enforce policies addressing allowing or disallowing encampments on park properties, and address inconsistent policies and procedures between MPT and the City of Tacoma.***

**Youth Education and Programming.** MPT is working with to expand low-barrier education youth programming to all of Tacoma’s residents. This work is in partnership with Tacoma Public Schools (TPS) and is critical to implementing the whole child initiative and improving community cohesion and educational outcomes.

- MPT partners closely with TPS to deliver wrap-around services for Tacoma’s students. As part of TPS’ Whole Child Initiative, we collaborate on after school sports, after school arts and recreation, and many other creative programs. The 2017 legislative investment in education unfortunately left Tacoma’s schools short changed. The McCleary solution will reduce the amount of funding to Tacoma Public Schools by approximately \$150 per student per year, which would devastate TPS’ budget and put in jeopardy many of our collaborative programs. ***MPT’s fully supports our education partners and urge the legislature to rectify this situation and fully fund our state’s urban schools districts including Tacoma Public Schools.***
- MPT is working with TPS, The Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, Graduate Tacoma, Pierce County and other community partners to develop a plan for the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA) in Pierce County. These dollars will inject near-term investments in our communities that will directly service students in achieving a wide range of educational outcomes, which includes implementation of the Whole Child Initiative programs. ***MPT opposes any effort to sweep these funds out of the PSTAA. MPT also supports an effort to expand the use of these funds to program endowments and capital expenditures.***

**Environmental Conservation, Health and Safety.**

- The Surface Water Inspection Program, administered by the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department (TPCHC) is crucial for MPT. This program helps our district ensure our creeks, lakes, and swimming beaches are safe for all citizens. Due to cuts in state and federal

funding streams the future of the program is in jeopardy. ***MPT fully supports state and federal grants to ensure the water inspection program stays whole.***

- Metro Parks has become increasingly involved in efforts to limit single-use plastics in our region through guest and community engagement, modeling operational sustainability, and engagement of the business community through the Ocean Friendly Restaurant program. ***MPT will be uniting with a broad coalition to advance state-wide legislation proposed in the January session banning plastic bags and other plastic items known to threaten ocean wildlife.***
- Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park have long supported anti-wildlife trafficking initiatives. PDZA and Northwest Trek have joined the US Wildlife Trafficking Alliance in partnership with AZA and are developing an action plan to include consumer awareness and support for federal policy to reduce trafficking. ***MPT supports funding the enforcement of anti-trafficking work at the State Department of Fish and Wildlife.***

**Metro Parks Tacoma District Commissioner Compensation.** Last session, MPT successfully passed a bill through the House of Representatives that would align our agency's commissioner per diem reimbursements in line with the complexity of their duties to oversee a \$160M/biennium agency. This bill raises the ceiling on the number of days a year an MPT commissioner could be reimbursed for their time. ***MPT encourages the Legislature to recognize that MPT Commissioners govern a unique agency in Washington and support legislation that allows for proper compensation while still staying in alignment with the OFM procedures.***

### **Capital Budget Initiatives:**

The capital budget is a critical funding source for Parks and Recreation Projects across the state and in Tacoma. ***MPT urges the passing of a comprehensive and bold capital budget.***

- Support the funding levels as recommended by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board: \$130 million for the Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program (WWRP); \$12 million for the Youth Athletic Facilities program (YAF); and \$6.6 million for the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account.
- Support MPT capital budget request for a local parks acquisition or partnership development in the South East/Central Tacoma. This section of town has large segments of level of service gaps where community members cannot walk to a park in 10 minutes. We seek a capital budget allocation to help close this gap through land acquisition or a school/non-profit partnership for local parks development.
- In conjunction with the City of Tacoma (CoT) and the Foss Waterway Development Authority (FWDA), Metro Parks is working to develop a regional human power boating facility on the Eastside of the Foss Waterway. An investment of state capital dollars will leverage robust private sector philanthropic fundraising in support of Waterway Park, an effort led by FWDA.
- Support fully funding the salmon enhancement grants in order to protect salmon and fish habitat throughout the state including restoration of the Titlow lagoon. This work is critical to our local restorations and climate resiliency efforts as well as protecting the Puget Sound resident ORCA population.

### **Transportation Budget Initiatives:**

MPT is working with the South Sound Salmon Enhancement Group (SSSEG) to restore the Titlow Lagoon to a critical salmon habitat, which includes the rebuild of a BNSF Rail bridge. ***MPT requests funding for the full design and permitting of the Titlow lagoon restoration BNSF rail bridge project. This will give this exciting salmon habitat and educational project an important injection of funds and energy that will leverage addition state and federal grants.***

**MPT continues to partner with the City of Tacoma to deliver a robust recreational and safe active transportation network to Tacoma that is attractive to all ages and abilities of users.**

- Through existing funds and future transportation packages, MPT urges the legislature to continue to support grant programs that will deliver safe streets and infrastructure for the community. These include but are not limited to, complete streets, safe routes to schools, and other people focused transportation grants.
- Support CoT's efforts to fully fund the Schuster Parkway Promenade, a critical missing link between the Downtown and Point Defiance Trail network.

## **FEDERAL POLICY INITIATIVES**

**Environmental Conservation, Health and Safety. Conservation education and awareness is a growing part of Metro Park's mission and work plan. With Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park taking the lead, we are expanding our reach to raise environmental awareness and action among our constituents and visitors.**

- ***Support congressional and federal efforts to continue active Red Wolf recovery programs*** in the wild in their native range, while maintaining and enhancing robust breeding in zoo-based programs. With a federal court ruling in November 2018 that the USFWS has failed to comply with its duty to continue managing red wolves for recovery, we anticipate that efforts to save this species in the wild will be reinvigorated. Regardless of how those events play out, there is still a lot of work to be done in saving this species with a long-term goal of wild repopulation. Point Defiance Zoo is the national center for the red wolf breeding program and has an off-site breeding facility. It is imperative that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continue this breeding program and extend, and pay for, their contract with Metro Parks to manage this national effort and care for the wolves at this facility.
- ***Support ocean policy initiatives of the Aquarium Conservation Partnership*** relevant to our region regarding fisheries, marine protected areas, salmon and orca recovery.
- ***Support the Washington State Congressional delegation's Save our Sound effort***, a federal package to assist in the cleanup of Puget Sound. Ocean conservation and cleanup are key educational messages and actions of the Zoo's new \$51 million Pacific Seas Aquarium, opened in September 2018.
- ***Support the proposed re-introduction of wild grizzly bears into the North Cascades.*** Re-introducing grizzlies to the Pacific Northwest is good for our ecosystems and is simply sound policy.

- **Support efforts to ban the sale and imports of shark fins and other anti-wildlife trafficking efforts.**
- **Protect the Endangered Species Act in its current form** and oppose any rollbacks proposed by the Administration or the U.S. Congress through executive actions or legislation respectively.

#### **Federal Funding Initiatives for Parks and Recreation Infrastructure, Programs and Audiences**

- It is crucial the federal government maintain core social service funding for our community's most vulnerable populations. In particular, **MPT supports fully funding the USDA summer meals program**, which MPT is a provider of throughout the summer, and senior meals programs, which our non-profit partners host at our community centers.
- **Support legislation to permanently reauthorize the New Markets Tax Credit Program** and provide the Treasury with significant new allocation authority for Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) beyond 2019.
- Through our partnerships at **Joint Base Lewis-McChord**, MPT has received Adaptive Sports Grants from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in support of our unique adaptive recreation programs for veterans in our region. This program connects veterans with disabilities to their community and each other and improves their quality of life. In 2019 the grant was not funded, putting strains on the program's delivery level. **MPT supports restoring and increasing this grant to fully fund and expand our local adaptive veterans programming, in order to serve this significant community in our region.**
- **Advocate for the permanent reauthorization and full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund** to conserve public land and invest in local parks projects across the country.
- As part of the decades long goal to realize Tacoma's Dome to Point Defiance Park vision, MPT and the City of Tacoma are working together on a long-range planning effort to envision and enhance our city's Ruston Way Waterfront. The project will include in-depth analysis of the infrastructure - particularly the road, sea wall and stormwater systems - as well as the community's vision for trails and open space. At the conclusion of the multi-phase planning process, we anticipate that state and federal grants will be needed for construction and renovation of this premier waterfront park. Additionally, this process has served as a timely vehicle to discuss climate resiliency with stakeholder and the public. **MPT urges the state and federal government to incentivize and rewards forward thinking processes and projects that incorporate the latest climate and sea level rise science.**

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