



Tukwila Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan

Education Expert Interviews SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The City of Tukwila is updating its Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan to guide the future of the City's parks and recreation system. To create a plan that meets the needs of Tukwila's diverse community, the PROS planning process included many opportunities for public input, participation, and engagement. One of the inputs selected for this process is data gathered through interviews with Education Experts from the Tukwila School District.

This document presents a summary of key informant interviews conducted with representatives of the Tukwila School District. BERK staff conducted the interviews, either in person or by phone. The interview protocol was designed to solicit school district staff perspectives on the following topics:

- The City's current parks and recreation services;
- Any additional programming and/or parks that should be planned for
- Feedback on how the Parks and Recreation Department operates including how it can be a more effective partner, and
- Needs of the community that aren't being met.

INTERVIEWS

- Guled Ali, Refugee Impact Strategic Advisor, Tukwila School District Administration
- Brett Christopher, Principal, Showalter Middle School
- Kathleen Gantz, Parent Involvement Coordinator, Tukwila School District Administration
- J.D. Hill, Athletics, Activities, & Transportation Director, Tukwila School District Administration
- Anne Marie Littleton, Social Worker, Cascade View Elementary School
- Nina "Will" Williams, ELL & Student Services, Tukwila School District Administration

STRENGTHS

An objective of the Education Expert Interviews was to hear what educators feel are the core strengths of Tukwila Parks, Recreation, and Open Space facilities and programs as well as the department's relationships with partners and stakeholders. Core strengths that educators mentioned throughout the interviews were:

- **Services and programs for youth are great and well received.**
 - Afterschool programs for teens, which provide structure, safe space, and help keep kids and teens off the streets at night are great. Teen Late Night, in particular was described as “an awesome place to be. They are getting around 150 kids a night and it is a quality program. Another interviewee notes “it isn’t too far from where people live, and they have so much energy” and “I hear good things about it from the kids—it’s like the cool thing to do. The kids have a good time and they provide transportation.”
 - The teen room at the community center is a great asset for kids and teens, and allows them to connect with Parks and Recreation in a safe, but self-directed way.
 - “The summer sack lunch program is really important to the community, and I know that we are keeping kids from going hungry.” Another interviewee notes “What they are doing at Cascade View is awesome, if that can be built up. Keep doing that and more of it!”
- **Tukwila has quality recreation facilities.**
 - The pool has been refurbished and is starting to provide more offerings for kids.
 - The community center is a great asset—it really helps connect children and families to Tukwila’s local government. It is also a community nexus. A lot of the community knows about it—but not everybody.
 - Our facilities are wonderful; they are high quality, clean, accessible, and well-maintained.
- **There is diverse and responsive programming.**
 - The Parks Department has embraced diverse programming—like music lessons—that aren’t traditional parks and recreation offerings, but which have grown their active constituency.
 - One interviewee noted that, “the pool and community center are really meeting needs by having women’s only swims and workouts.”
 - The Parks and Recreation Department is really responsive to the community and easy to talk to. People trust the staff.
- **The Parks and Recreation Department has cooperative staff with heart.**
 - Parks and Recreation Department staff members are focused on building relationships and helping engage the people they come into contact with.
 - One Education Expert said, “Tukwila Community Center has quality staff, who really believe in what they do; they have a lot of ideas.”
 - The fact that [the staff] are trying to talk to the community is a strength. One interviewee said, “five years ago I only knew Stacy and Evie [from the human services department], now I know a lot of the Parks & Recreation staff. The fact that the City is trying to collaborate with the community is a good thing.”
 - The Parks and Recreation Department is really introspective and self-aware; interviewees appreciate that they are frequently reevaluating community needs. They are always evolving.

- “Recreation coordinators are great partners!” Another interviewee provides a similar sentiment: “I’ve never had anything but positive experiences, they are a great caliber of people—sweet, professional, and kind—I’ve enjoyed everyone I have worked with in the community.”

CONSTRAINTS & WEAKNESSES

When prompted, Education Expert interviewees offered insight into what they feel are the primary constraints and weakness of the Tukwila Parks and Recreation Department and its parks, recreation, and open space facilities and programs.

- **Community language and awareness barriers and the City’s outreach strategies**
 - We need to put some effort into providing information and advertising in more than one language, and having more translators and interpreters at events.
 - We need to build relationships with our Burmese and Nepali communities.
 - There are partners who could help us with culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach—the Parks and Recreation Department hasn’t taken advantage of this yet.
 - One Education Expert said, “You have a community meeting at the community center, but your community can’t get there. Your community is extremely impoverished; you are demonstrating you really don’t want feedback. I am constantly explaining to families how to get to the community center.”
 - The schools have had to work hard at getting feedback. “We use word of mouth, you can use print but many families are illiterate, so we have to put out a huge effort”. Robocalls work well and have increased turnout. Somali speakers prefer to hear the message, rather than read it. You must also keep in mind whether or not they can walk there—most [families] do not have transportation.
 - [Referring to the Tukwila Community Center] “Not everyone knows about it, they learn things through word of mouth. It is important they everyone knows about the community center and that everyone can benefit from it. [How would you recommend the City reach people?] “Emailing the different organizations that know the communities, like ReWA and SCSC, they can translate and send messages to as many people as possible and word will get out pretty quickly.”
 - The city [staff] is not diverse at all—the people who work with the City do not reflect the community at all. To build good relationships they need to establish those positions. They should establish community liaisons. Getting an invitation for a one-time event doesn’t build relationships. [The City get applicants from across the region, and they have to assess candidates based on their skills] People from Tukwila should get priority. You can’t have the same expectations for a new immigrant as everyone else, if you do they will never have a chance.
 - People think they give input to the City with no follow up—there is an opportunity for improvement here.

- **Lack of transportation and access are barriers to using parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces.**
 - One interviewee said, “I think mobility is a key issue, which makes affordable transportation a key need. Many of our facilities are too long of a walk.” Others mentioned that it would be great to co-locate programs in schools and other buildings near Tukwila’s transit centers, Southcenter Boulevard, Highway 99, 144th by the Foster Apartment complexes, and key cultural community centers.
 - Transportation is a problem—kids can’t get to the community center. It is too far to walk, making it a constraint.
- **Costs are a barrier to the parts of the community that have the most to gain from access to parks and recreation programming.**
 - Starfire is expensive to rent—more than other regional rentals like Highline Stadium, so people go outside of Tukwila to use field turf areas.
 - “A challenge to the before and after school care is that it does not accept DSHS vouchers. That eliminates families that are most in need.” [What is the obstacle?] “Being licensed, but they can get licensed if they want to. They are a City—they could get it done if they wanted to. No one wants to go through the required paperwork that you have to yearly to be licensed.”
- **The relation between the City of Tukwila and the Tukwila School District is seen as an obstacle.**
 - “Different leaders [at the District] came through with different visions of what a partnership looks like. The relationship between the City and the School District became unstable—to increase access to services and programs we need to get back to what is best for kids and families.” [What’s the problem?] We share facilities and grounds; we are teaming on ball fields, etc. We just need to build the partnership back up. [How?] “Look into best practices—figure out the focus, the mission—students, community and family, and inclusiveness...What will offer the best experience to the diverse communities?”
 - [What can be done to improve the relationship?] Just forget the past 5 years, come back to the table, and do what’s best for kids. We’re all here to help this community be a place kids are safe from all our adult issues.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

Education experts encounter community needs on a daily basis. To best insure the City’s parks recreation, facilities and programming best meet community needs now and in the future, interviewers queried what community needs were unmet and how the communities’ needs may change in the next five years.

- **Tukwila community’s need is characterized by dramatic and quick community change**
 - [What is unique about the community’s needs?] The speed in which development came—it just landed on the people here. It is now time to think about cultural competence. It is never done—it is an ongoing effort. Open dialogue encourage more conversation from both sides, we just need a structured environment to have those conversations.
 - The city is very dynamic and growing—it is also varying a lot, so we must be responsive to that.
 - More people are coming—the City is growing more and more diverse each year. Finding apartments is getting difficult.

- **Health and nutrition information, particularly for parents**
 - Health and fitness benchmarks are not being met in many communities.
 - The Tukwila community needs to put a greater focus on health and nutrition—which could be enhanced through recreation programming focused on fitness and other programs focused on healthy living (like healthy cooking classes).
 - I am hearing things from the community—they want help with healthy eating habits. How to have healthy eating habits—we need to show them what works.
 - Health literacy is an area of community need.
 - Exercise is not an accessible concept for cultural communities; we need to make it so.
 - We need some gardening programs because Burmese and Bhutanese communities like gardening, and this might be a great gateway for engaging these communities. They have some gardens along the church.
- **Services for children who are often put into the position of being adults**
 - It is really a challenge in that in some of the cultural communities, kids are the adults in their homes and they are put into a position of leadership that they aren't ready for. They sometimes have to miss school to help their parents. We have to help involve parents. [What would you recommend?] I'm not sure how this is done...It would take a special person to run, someone who reaches parents and kids, but kids at that age don't want their parents around.
 - [What do the youth want?] Relationships, trust. I am always looking for opportunities, to find fun things to build relationships. You'd think we'd have everything in the big city, the truth is everything costs and a lot of kids are looking for things to do.
 - People don't like to admit it, but there are gangs here. We need education and intervention.[What kind of gangs?] The same old things—Bloods, Crips, Latino gangs. They are all in Tukwila.
- **Transportation resources and enhanced connectivity and walkability within the Tukwila community, especially between parks, recreation facilities, open spaces and residences.**
 - We need shuttling to and from programs, especially late at night.
 - We need more walkable routes and connectivity to and from parks and facilities.
 - Rather than move kids from here to there, bring the programs up here to the kids.
- **Services and programs for children, and especially at risk children.**
 - We need a Boys & Girls type program. For impoverished people there can be no fees associated. There is an opportunity to partner with Community Schools Collaboration. Their program is free and a lot of kids benefit. The only kids who are benefiting from the City's programs are those who don't qualify for government benefits.
 - Many of programs are fee-based, so we need more free programs and scholarships for the children and families in our community who can't afford to pay.
 - A lot of our youth crave leadership and more traditional relationships with adults where they have trust and structure. Children also want to learn.

- Think about afterschool care differently; open it up to more kids. Currently [the school] provides afterschool services from 3 – 5 that includes all staff to run academic groups and homework help. The City staff can supplement to open it up to all kids. No fees, with snack, and a wide range of activities based on student needs.
- We need more pre-school services. We have ECAEP that can take 25 kids in the morning and 25 kids in the afternoon. Families work so hard to get into that program, which is based on a point system. Early education is grossly underserved here—tons and tons of families are turned away. There are no DSHS providers in the area—it is really difficult to find. People are relying on family, friend, and neighbor care, which is very sub-par. There is a real opportunity to make a difference here.
- **Places for children and youth to play in their neighborhood**
 - I would love to see more playgrounds with play equipment for young children.
 - More playgrounds with play equipment for kids at all the parks. Now we have some big parks with only one slide or two swings. We especially need equipment for three to seven year olds.
 - Kids need open spaces where they can play, when they live in apartment complexes. Some of the areas where we need more parks are near Cascade Community Park (which is over capacity), Thorndike, and 42nd Hill.
 - I see a lot of open spaces (empty lots) near 144th S and 146th S. There is an opportunity for some public/private development for the community. You could set up as soccer fields, bike loops, or regular playground equipment.
- **Employment opportunities, in general and for youth**
 - Offering summer jobs is important because it prevents youth crime and gives kids something to do. This is also a great thing for workforce development. This is something the City can expand. The City is not going out of its way to hire students from different backgrounds. [What age group are you taking about?] Ages 15 – 21, it will give them some job experience, some income and professional development...help to build their resume.
 - [What are the most important community needs in the African communities?] Summer jobs.
- **Swimming, particularly for Muslim women**
 - Not too many people [in the Somali community] know how to swim. The Mosque is interested in helping children learn to swim. It is important that women have access to the pool—it can work if they have women staff at women only times. Swimming is very important for women. It can help keep them healthy, and they can show their kids that you have to make an effort to be healthy. Otherwise, obesity can happen over time.
- **Educational programs for adults and seniors that enhance their quality of life and that of their family.**
 - We are seeing a lot of health issues in the cycle of poverty especially with needing to encourage fitness in refugee/immigrant communities, and needing to prevent long-term illnesses and obesity related disease.
 - We need more education for adults and seniors.
 - Parent involvement is a community need—it would really be great to have some classes for parents and children to do as families.

- [in the Somali community] Recreational opportunities for older men—they don't feel comfortable working out alongside women.
- You are providing recreational programs for seniors—[the schools] could really use the volunteers to help in the classrooms. It would give a chance for youth to connect to seniors. Cascade View could be an opportunity for a very interesting volunteering program for seniors.
- Seniors get a little left out because Tukwila has such a focus on families. Seniors are an important community to serve, though.
- **Other needs**
 - We need to collect and leverage our community data—thinking about areas where we could share this burden as partners.
 - We need to build community hubs at these parks and facilities.
 - Now that the pool is refurbished, it would be a good time to build water safety and swimming lesson programs for children and diverse communities that don't have experience around the water.

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

The Education Experts were asked for ideas and preferences for Tukwila's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space facilities and programs over the next five years. Themes across education experts' responses include:

- **A focus on health and fitness.**
 - I definitely think that health and fitness is an important end goal for Parks and Recreation over the next five years.
- **Enhanced outreach and service to Tukwila's diverse and historically underserved communities.**
 - We need to provide more outreach and awareness for citizens, and new residents, so that they know what resources are available to them.
 - Building partnerships with nonprofits would help the department target communities through key leaders and build constituencies in specific communities (including underserved communities).
 - Building City of Tukwila's capacity and cultural competencies, to have more cultural understanding and awareness.
- **Continue to focus on Tukwila's children, regardless of income or ability to pay.**
 - Have more youth programs that are free or scholarship eligible.
 - We need to prepare to serve more children—our youth base is growing!
 - I would like to see our Big Brothers, Big Sisters program come back.
- **Build relationships and trust with community members, including by engaging a variety of people in Parks Department service delivery.**
 - We need more community members to know who staff members are, and build relationships and trust with them.
 - The City staff needs to be more diverse and Tukwila residents should get priority for those spots.

- The city should engage more volunteers to help with classes and bring fresh faces to programs and activities.
- Build co-located **programs outside of the community center** and closer to high need areas in Tukwila.
- Build a **dog park**.
- I would like to see more **mission-based leadership** focused on serving students, families, and the community.
- Parks and Recreation serves some **public safety** goals—especially in the prevention of gangs and violence.