

Washington Recreation & Park Association – 2022 Legislative Agenda

Top Priorities

***Provide Local Parks and Recreation Agencies with new Funding Options to Address Vital M&O and Preservation Needs which only became more challenging under COVID-19**

(Policy/Fiscal Bill) The public highly values outdoor quality-of-life amenities that parks and recreation offer. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored for us the enormous appreciation Washington residents have for open spaces, parks, and trails that offer equal access and use opportunities no matter a person's race, religion, income level, or sexual orientation. Parks and recreation provide activities that help us maintain physical health and well-being; protect open spaces and facilities that make our communities attractive and vibrant; and help sell homes. As importantly, local parks and recreation programs enhance jobs-creation and economic development efforts and build trail networks that connect our communities. But investments in local parks and recreation suffered during the Great Recession and have lagged behind areas such as public safety in the years afterward. After narrowly failing to achieve passage of "local option funding" legislation in recent Sessions, WRPA will again work with key lawmakers on a local options bill. At a minimum, the 2022 bill will allow parks and recreation agencies to take a .1 percent sales tax increase to voters and bond against new sales tax proceeds upon voter approval. In 2021, key legislators indicated the state's overly regressive tax code needed to be adjusted before a local-option sales tax bill could proceed. Since these adjustments (*Capital Gains Tax, Working Families Tax Exemption*) did indeed occur, WRPA hopes the decks are cleared for 2022 action on this vital issue.

***Actively partner with the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) to ensure a sound plan is in place for the use of a one-time, \$42 million allocation from the Stadium & Exhibition Center Account**

(Capital Budget) In 2021, RCO received a one-time, \$42 million allocation – funding left over from the \$300 million in state bonds used to build the Seahawks Stadium (*now known as Lumen Field*). The bond funds grew out of a voter-approved referendum enabling the stadium to go forward but also requiring using some of the money to pay for local youth athletic facilities. It is now incumbent on RCO to develop a sound plan for *how* to use this one-time funding to benefit youth. RCO will do so in collaboration with the Governor's Office and the Office of Financial Management (OFM) as well as stakeholder partners such as WRPA. We at WRPA consider the development of this plan to be vital so that the funding is not "re-purposed" by the Legislature and does not end up undermining the ongoing Capital Budget allocations for the Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF) program.

***Actively participate in efforts to replace and recover lost revenue for parks and recreation agencies – while protecting existing resources**

(Operating Budget, Policy Bills) Local parks and recreation agencies absorbed tens of millions of dollars in revenue losses due to parks, programming and events closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. WRPA will actively work with other organizations to seek revenue replacement and/or revenue tools to enable recovery. Initiatives WRPA actively supports include:

- Deployment of remaining American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds retained by the State;
- Adjusting the 1 percent property tax limit, which is arbitrary in nature and does not allow local government agencies to keep up with inflationary increases in costs;
- Adjusting the 1 percent property tax limit with respect to Conservation Futures Tax measures that voters approved in a given county.

Strongly Support

***Protect against any diversions or reallocations of Capital Budget grant programs that significantly benefit parks and recreation and the Great Outdoors:**

(Capital Budget) While 2022 is a Supplemental year for the state’s Capital Budget, WRPA will remain vigilant and work to guard against diversions or reallocations of dedicated funding for grant programs that are critical for the vitality of local parks and recreation and the great outdoors. These include the Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program (WWRP), Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF), and Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA).

***Advocate for Key “Healthy & Active Communities” Funding within the State Budget Process**

(Capital, Transportation, Operating Budgets) As part of its ongoing “Healthy and Active Communities” initiative that began several years ago, the WRPA will work to ensure adequate funding of grant programs and budgetary items that help youth and adults to live active and healthy lifestyles; enhance public health; and combat a growing obesity trend in Washington and across the country. WRPA supports these key budgetary items and wants to ensure that within expenditures, a strong role for parks and recreation identifies and includes:

- Public Health District and “Healthiest Next Generation” funding -- Operating Budget;
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant, Safe Routes to Schools, “Complete Streets” and fuel-tax-distribution funding in the Transportation Budget;
- “No Child Left Inside” within the Operating Budget;
- ‘Target Zero’ programs run by the Washington Traffic Safety Commission;
- Dedicated accounts and grant programs in the Capital Budget such as WWRP, YAF, ALEA, NOVA, BFP.

***Legislation to enhance funding for the Derelict Vessel Removal Program (DVRP) and make the program’s funding more sustainable**

(Operating Budget/Policy Bill) WRPA is poised to support an Agency request bill being brought forward by the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to redirect up to \$5 million from Watercraft Excise Tax monies that currently go into the General Fund. Redirecting and dedicating these funds to the state’s heralded Derelict Vessel Removal Program (DVRP) would better enable DNR to address a growing backlog of abandoned vessels that contaminate waterways – including those that are used for local parks and recreation programs.

“Support/Oppose” Items

WRPA will be prepared to join others in 2022 in supporting the following:

***Efforts to Continue to Address Mental Health, Homelessness, Affordable Housing**

(Policy Bills, Budgetary Items) WRPA will support efforts led by cities and counties, the Low-Income Housing Alliance, and others, to ensure the Legislature continues to provide funding and tools for local governments to address growing mental health, homelessness, and affordable housing crises in their communities. Local parks and recreation officials have an important service-collaboration role to

play in addressing these issues. Additionally, local parks and recreation officials believe it is far better to provide housing, treatment, and service alternatives for those experiencing homelessness than to have them set up encampments on parks properties.

***“Big Tent” Outdoor Recreation Coalition**

(Budgetary, Policy Items) WRPA supports the continued work of the “Big Tent” Outdoor Recreation Coalition, an umbrella organization comprised of several dozen outdoor retailers, non-profits, and others that seek to ensure Washington State recognizes and maximizes the economic, societal, tourism, and health benefits of outdoor recreation. WRPA supports 2022 legislative and budget efforts by the Big Tent Coalition.

Participation in and Tracking of Ongoing Studies

While WRPA does not expect to see 2022 legislative action on the following studies and Task Forces, it will actively participate in them to help shape and inform proposals likely to be brought before the 2023 Legislature. They include:

- ✓ RCO work with multiple stakeholders and agencies on the development of a **Statewide Multi-Modal Trails Database**. Roxanne Miles of Pierce County Parks, who serves as WRPA’s Legislative Chair, represents WRPA’s interests on this one.
- ✓ Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) **“Physical Activity” Task Force** – looking at equitable use of Local Parks and K-12 fields and examining ways to expand Joint Use Agreements. Sarah Margeson of King County Parks and Julie Parascondola of Kent Parks represent WRPA on the Task Force.
- ✓ Department of Health **“Parks Rx” Task Force** Working to Establish Three Health and Wellness Pilot Projects That Would Utilize Local Parks and Parks Facilities as a Gateway to Healthy Activities. Hunter George of Metro Parks Tacoma and Carrie Hoiness of Moses Lake represent WRPA on the Task Force.
- ✓ Governor’s Office/State Parks/African-American Affairs Commission **Study of Ways to Make Access to the Outdoors More Equitable and Enhance Outdoor Experience for Black Washingtonians**. Paris Yates of Seattle represents WRPA and local parks interests within the study group.
- ✓ Department of Children, Youth, and Families study of the **feasibility of a child care multi-sites licensing pilot**. Metro Parks Tacoma is actively engaged in this study.