PARKS & OUTDOOR RECREATION

5

Parks and open space represent the basic foundation of a healthy park and recreation system, providing opportunities for residents of all ages to meet, play, grow and thrive. Medford's parks provide residents with a diverse array of active and passive recreational amenities and options. They are a place to come together with family and friends, to exercise and play, to learn and explore, and to engage with the City's landscape, history and culture.

By improving existing parks and providing new facilities to meet the needs of the whole community, Medford can actively support the mental and physical health of its residents and create places that are welcoming and engaging for all.

TRENDS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

National Survey on Recreation and the Environment

The National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) is a comprehensive survey that has been collecting data and producing reports about the recreation

activities, environmental attitudes and natural resource values of Americans since the 1980s. The NSRE core focus is on outdoor activity participation and personal demographics. The most recent 2012 NSRE reports the total number of people participating in outdoor activities between 2000 and 2007 grew by 4.4% while the number of days of participation increased by approximately 25 percent. Walking for pleasure grew by 14% and continues to lead as the top favorite outdoor activity.

Nature-based activities, those associated with wildlife and natural settings, showed a discernible growth in the number of people (an increase in 3.1% participation rate) and the number of days of participation. Americans' participation in nature-based outdoor recreation is increasing - with viewing, photographing, or otherwise observing nature clearly measured as the fastest growing type of nature-based recreation activity.

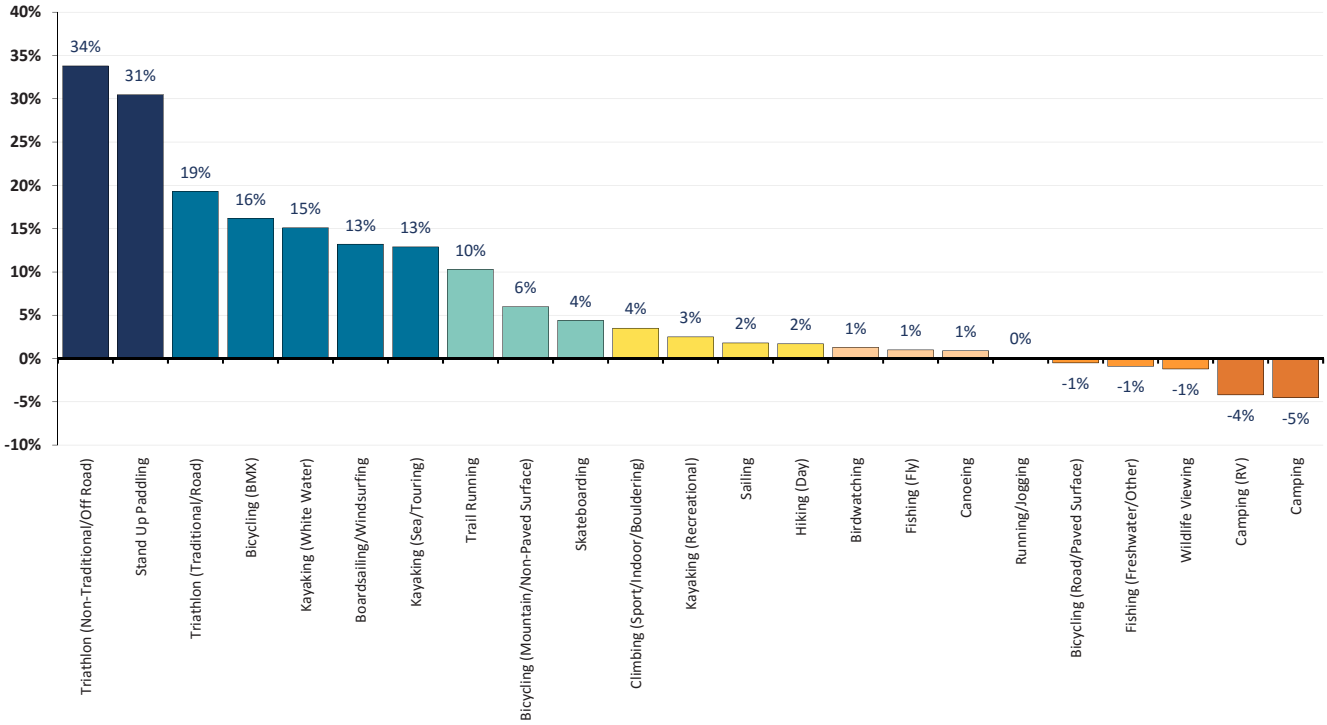
The Outdoor Participation Report

According to the 2015 Outdoor Participation Report, published by the Outdoor Foundation in Boulder, Colorado, participation in outdoor recreation, team sports and indoor fitness activities vary by an individual's age. Gender also plays a role in determining behaviors and participation trends. Figure 9 illustrates the three-year trend changes by major activity. Recent trend highlights include the following:

- The biggest motivator for outdoor participation was getting exercise.
- Running, including jogging and trail running, was the most popular activity among Americans when measured by number of participants and number of annual outings.
- Walking for fitness is the most popular crossover activity.
- Almost one-quarter of all outdoor enthusiasts participated in outdoor activities at least twice per week.
- Indoor fitness becomes the preferred activity among young women ages 16 to 20 and remains the most popular form of activity. Males, however, favor outdoor activities until they are age 66 and older.
- Outdoor activities are popular among children, especially among boys ages 11 to 15.

Participation rates drop for both males and females from ages 16 to 20. These rates climb back up slightly for females into their early 20s and males late 20s before gradually declining throughout life.

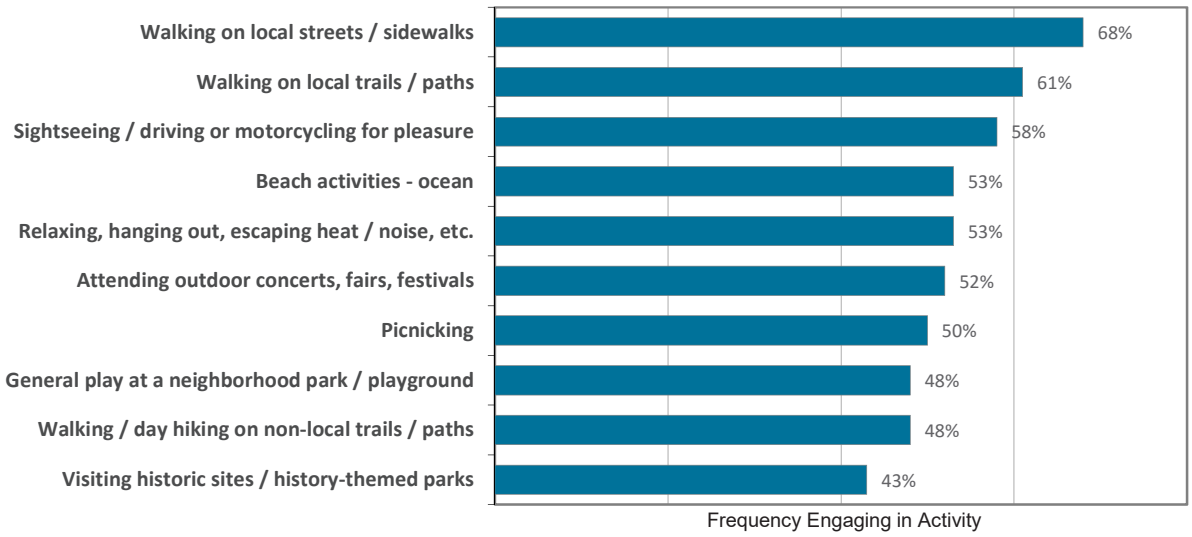
Figure 9. 3-Year Change in Outdoor Recreation Participation of Youth (6-24) (Outdoor Foundation)



Oregon State Outdoor Recreation Trends

The 2013-2017 Oregon Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is Oregon's five-year policy plan for outdoor recreation and provides guidance for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program and for other Oregon Parks and Recreation (OPRD)-administered grant programs. The SCORP included a listing of outdoor activities by participant and frequency, as shown below in Figure 10. Overall, 92% of Oregonians participated in at least one outdoor recreation activity in Oregon during the year of the study. Walking ranked highest in terms of participation levels. A high degree of consistency exists between local interests and statewide results.

Figure 10. Participation Rates of Top Ten Activities for Oregon Residents (SCORP)



The participation rates confirm that outdoor recreation is an integral part of life in Oregon's communities and a pervasive value in the Pacific Northwest. Research indicates that nature and outdoor recreation have a significant positive impact on human health, both physical and mental health. Oregon's economy also benefits directly and indirectly from outdoor recreation through consumer spending, tax revenue and jobs.

The SCORP also outlined the most significant issues effecting the provision of outdoor recreation across the state. As part of the planning process, public recreation providers in the state were queried about the importance of a range of park system issues. The top statewide issues included the following.

- Provide adequate funds for routine and preventative maintenance and repair of facilities
- Fund major rehabilitation of existing outdoor recreation facilities at the end of their useful life
- Add more recreational trails and better trail connectivity between parks and communities
- Recognize and strengthen park and recreation's role in increasing physical activity in Oregon's population
- Recommend a standard set of sustainable park practices for outdoor recreation providers

A set of strategic actions addressing each issue also was noted in the Oregon SCORP.

The State of the Industry Report

Recreation Management magazine's 2015 *State of the Industry Report* indicated park systems that are planning to add features to their facilities in the next three years list their top five planned amenities as:

- Playgrounds
- Park shelters such as picnic areas and gazebos
- Park restroom structures
- Outdoor sports courts for basketball, tennis, etc.
- Bike trails

Outdoor Industry Association

The Outdoor Industry Association produces reports on the outdoor recreation economy for the entire country and for each state. The most recent OIA report (2013) reveals that at least 68% of Oregon residents participate in outdoor recreation each year. This does not include the participants in hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing which are estimated separately. "Americans want and deserve access to a variety of quality places to play and enjoy the great outdoors. Outdoor recreation can grow jobs and drive the economy if we manage and invest in parks, waters and trails as an interconnected system designed to sustain economic dividends for America." In Oregon, outdoor recreation generates $12.8 billion in consumer spending, creates 141,000 direct jobs

and results in $955 million in state and local tax revenue. Preserving access to outdoor recreation protects the economy, the businesses, the communities and the people who depend on the ability to play outside.

Public Parks and Health: The Trust for Public Land

Aside from the recreational activity and sports participation figures noted in this Plan, a number of organizations and non-profits have documented the overall health and wellness benefits provided by parks, open space and trails. The Trust for Public Land published a report in 2005 called *The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space*. This report makes the following observations about the health, economic, environmental and social benefits of parks and open space;

- Physical activity makes people healthier.
- Physical activity increases with access to parks.
- Contact with the natural world improves physical and physiological health.
- Value is added to community and economic development sustainability.
- Benefits of tourism are enhanced.
- Trees are effective in improving air quality and act as natural air conditioners, assisting with storm water control and erosion.
- Recreational opportunities for all ages are provided.

Another significant, recent trend is that of the relationship between child development and access to nature or nature play. Stemming from Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods*, a relative network of organizations and agencies have come together to discuss the impacts of nature play and seek funding and partnerships to facilitate ways to connect kids to their local environment. Recent studies show that children are smarter, more cooperative, happier and healthier when they have frequent and varied opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors, according to the Children & Nature Network, a national non-profit organization working to reconnect children with nature and co-founded by Louv.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

To provide input in determining local recreational needs, the City of Medford conducted a survey between April and June of 2015 to assess community needs and priorities regarding parks, recreation and aquatics.

Parks are a well-used and well-loved community asset in Medford. Roughly 9 in 10 people (90.2%) surveyed said they visited a City park or recreation facility at least once a month over the last year – and 5 in 10 households (49.6%) visited a park or recreation facility at least once a week – according to the statistically-valid survey of Medford residents for this Plan update.

Residents are generally satisfied with the quality of Medford's parks. A majority of residents are satisfied with the physical condition of Medford's neighborhood parks. However, improvements or maintenance needs may exist at Jackson School Park and Union Park – all of which had lower levels of satisfaction in the community survey. Figure 11 illustrates respondents' levels of satisfaction with the quality of Medford's neighborhood parks. Similarly, a strong majority of residents are satisfied with the quality of community parks, as well. Hawthorne Park was a significant exception in that it did not meet the expectations of the vast majority (78%) of residents. It should be noted that the survey was completed prior to the recent renovation of that park that included the installation of a new playground and spray park. Figure 12 illustrates respondents' levels of satisfaction with the quality of Medford's community parks.

Figure 11. Survey Responses of Expectations on the Quality of Neighborhood Parks

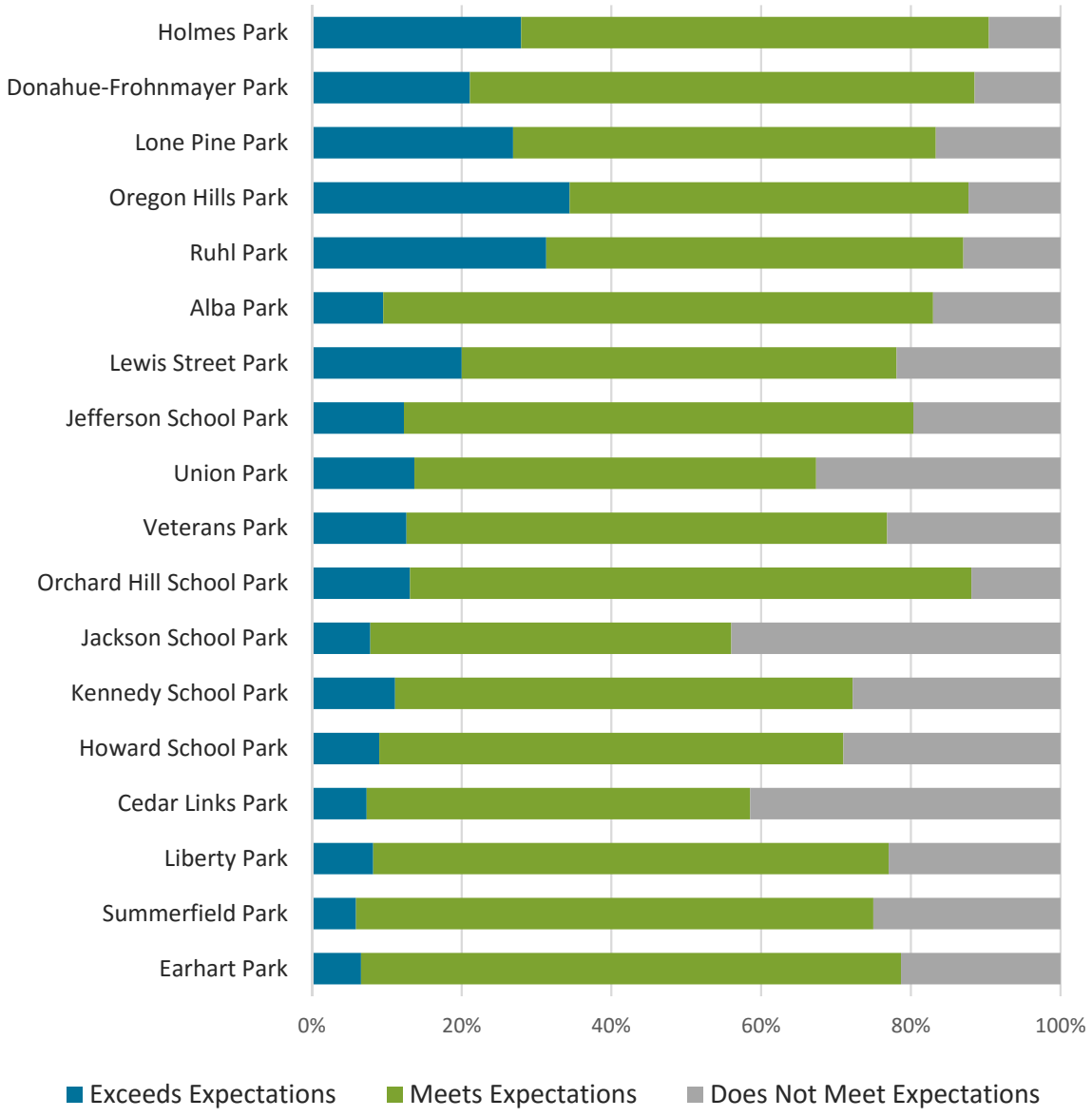
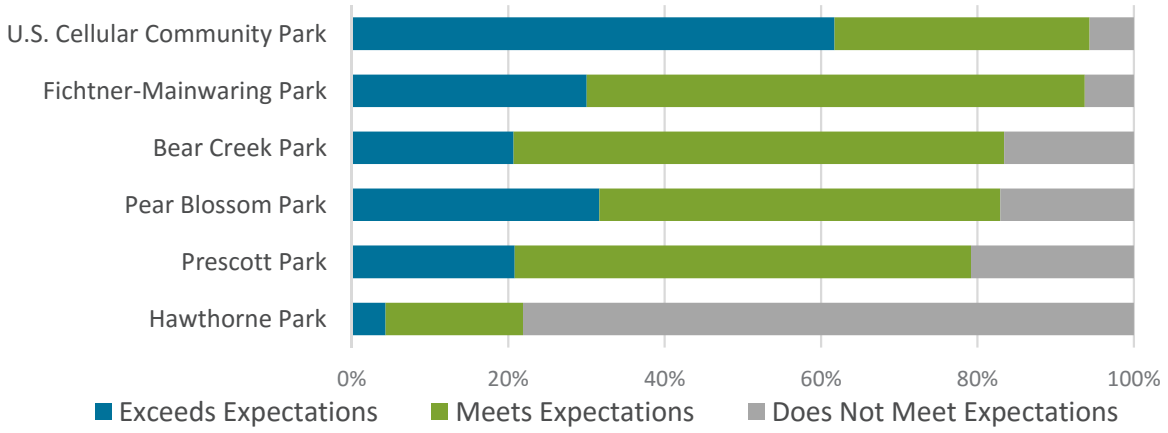
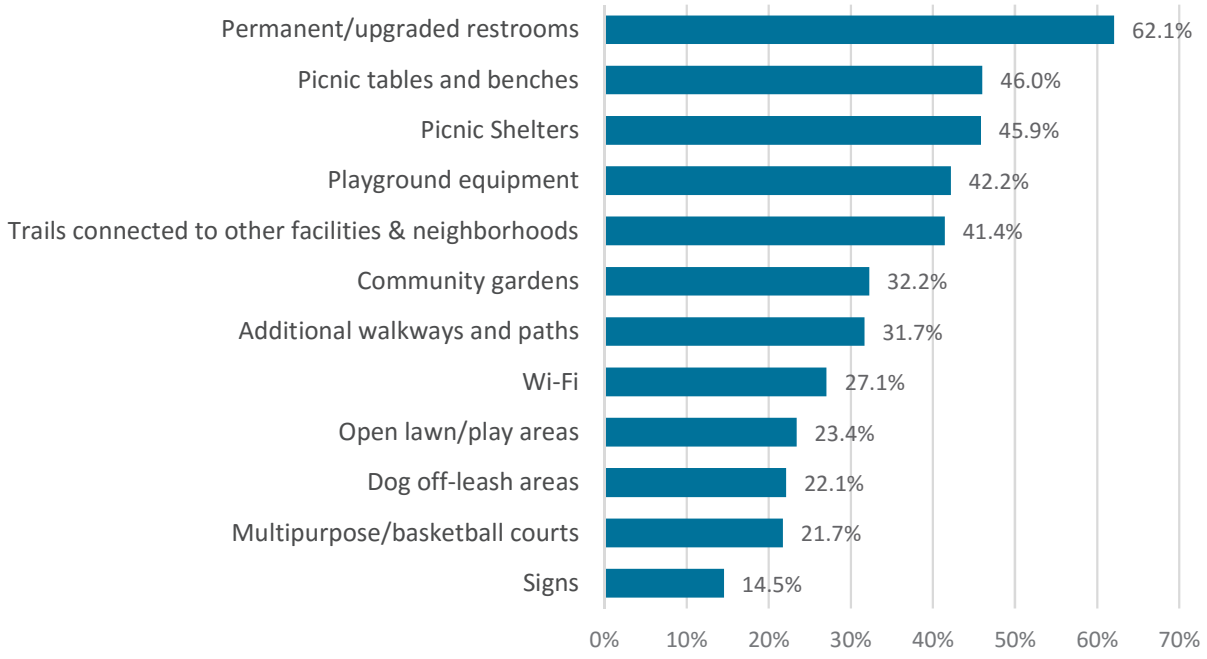


Figure 12. Survey Responses of Expectations on the Quality of Community Parks



When asked to rate the importance of a listing of potential park improvements, patron convenience facilities, such as picnic tables, shelters, playground equipment and restrooms, ranked highest. Considering the interest in gathering spaces, the combination of picnic tables and benches with picnic shelters ranked as the most important improvement. Although many park playgrounds have been replaced or upgraded in recent years, 42% of survey respondents still desire improvements to Medford's playgrounds. Separately, shade or canopy structures for play areas are desired.

Figure 13. Survey Responses of Potential Park Improvements



GAP ANALYSIS

Medford residents are fortunate to have access to great parks, recreation facilities and the Bear Creek Greenway. Through thoughtful planning, the City has secured several

new park sites over the years, and a strong core system of parks and greenways exists today. However, Medford's continued and projected growth will place further pressure on access to new recreational lands. Understanding the known gaps in the park system and re-visiting the City's service standards will provide a foundation for strategic planning to ensure that tomorrow's residents have access to an equitable and distributed system of parks, paths and amenities to stay healthy and active.

Parkland Walksheds

To better understand where acquisition efforts should be directed, a gap analysis of the park system was conducted to examine and assess the current distribution of parks throughout the city. The analysis reviewed the locations and types of existing facilities, land use classifications, transportation/access barriers and other factors as a means to identify preliminary acquisition target areas. In reviewing parkland distribution and assessing opportunities to fill identified gaps, residentially zoned lands were isolated, since neighborhood and community parks primarily serve these areas.

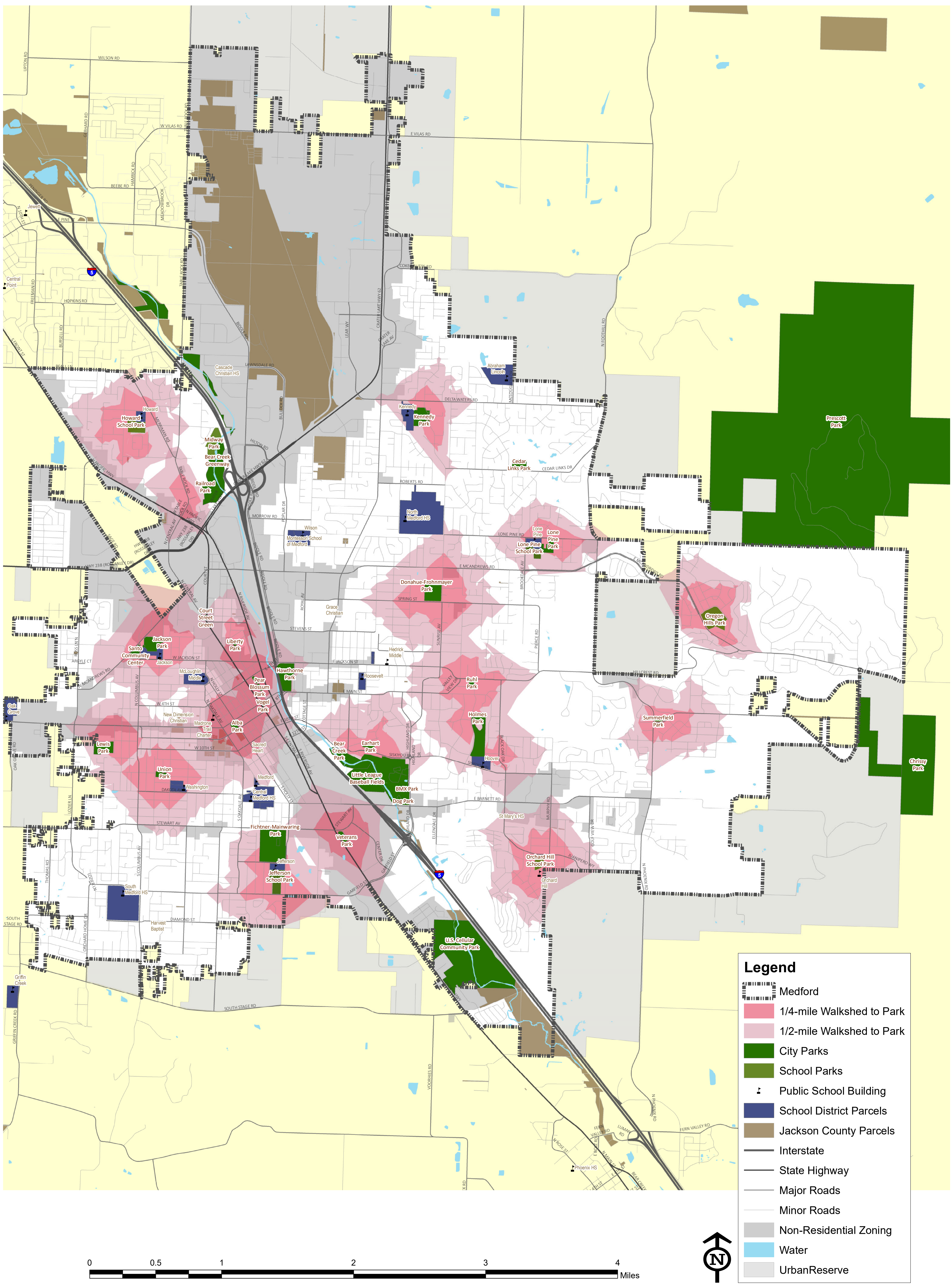
Additionally, walksheds were defined for neighborhood parks using a ¼-mile primary and ½-mile secondary service area with travel distances calculated along the road network starting from known and accessible access points at each park. Walksheds for community parks were derived using ¼-mile, ½-mile, 1-mile and 2-mile travel distances to acknowledge that community parks serve a wider array of users and driving to such sites is typical.

Maps 3 through 7 illustrate the application of the distribution criteria from existing and planned neighborhood and community parks.

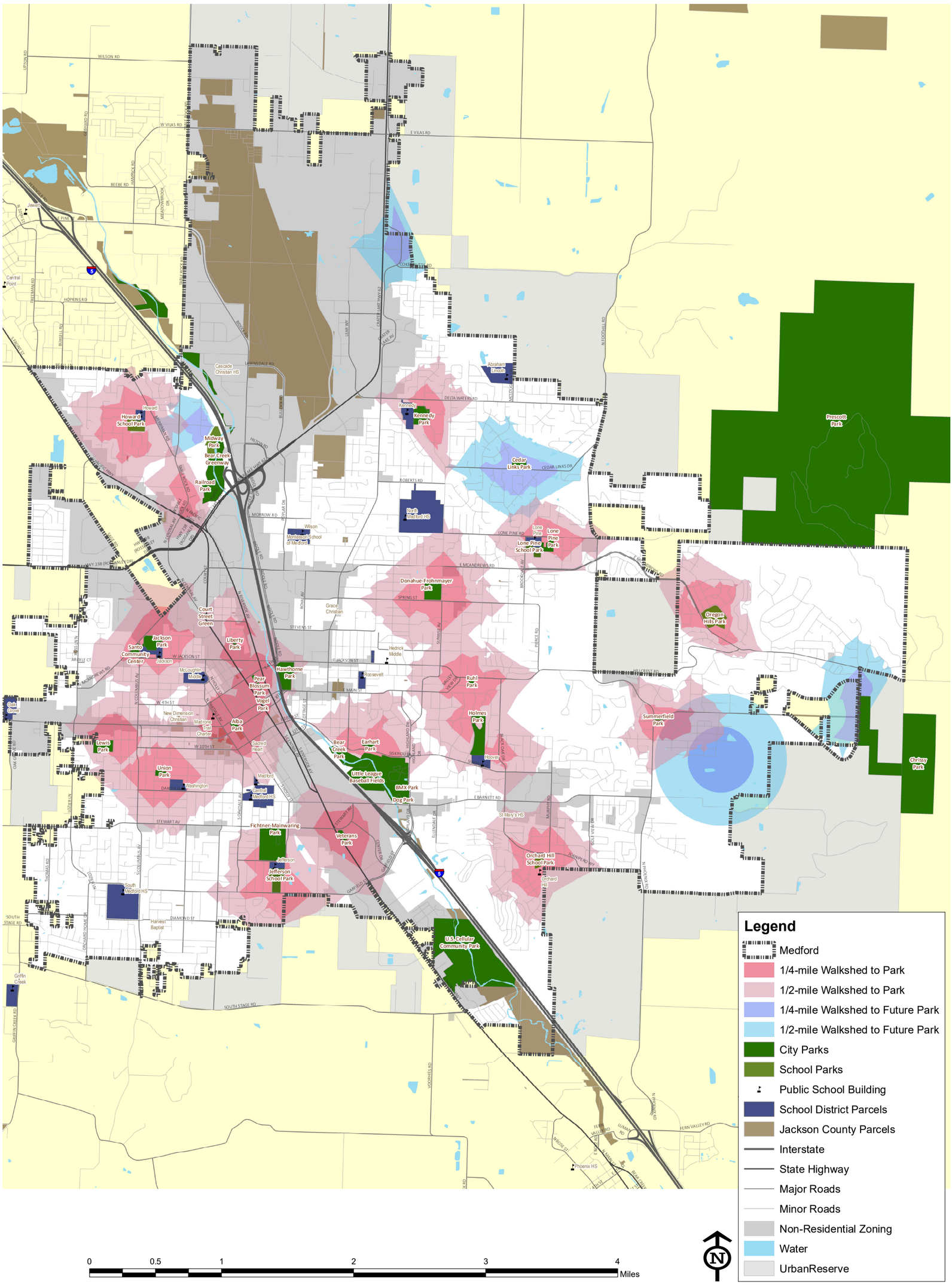
Map 8 illustrates a negative impression of the combined park walksheds to create a "gap" map, which shows those areas of the City where residents need to travel more than ½-mile to reach a neighborhood or community park.

Gaps in parkland distribution appear in nine main areas of the city:

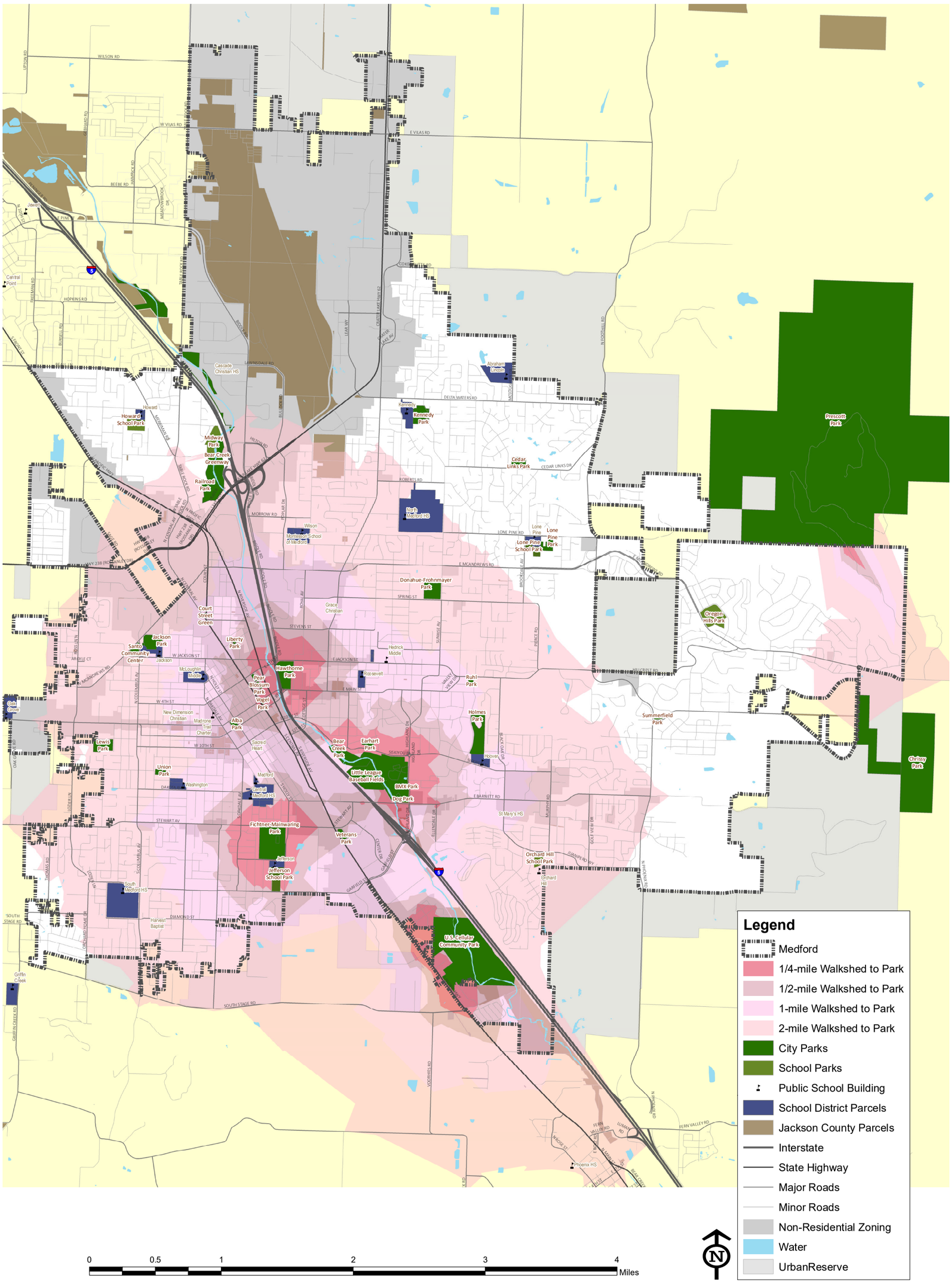
- Central Medford, between North Medford High School and Wilson Elementary School
- Southwest Medford, near South Medford High School
- West Medford, generally near Rossanley Drive and N Ross Lane
- South Medford, east of I-5 from U.S. Cellular Community Park
- Southeast Medford, near N Phoenix Road in the Larson Creek area
- Southeast Medford, southwest of Hillcrest Road and Foothill Road
- Southeast Medford, northwest of Hillcrest Road and Foothill Road
- Southeast Medford, near Hillcrest Road between Prescott Park and Chrissy Park
- North Medford, near Abraham Lincoln Elementary School



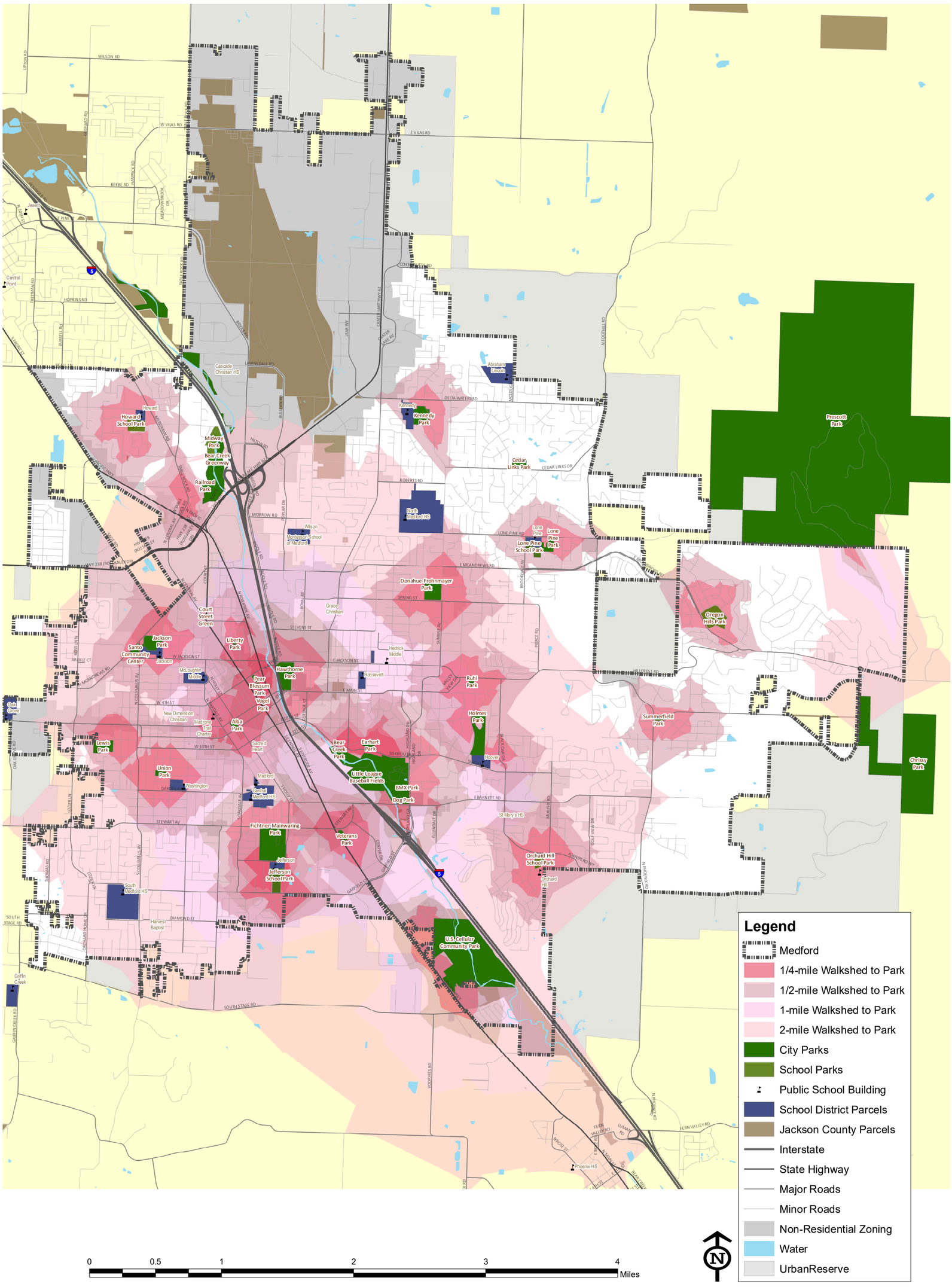
Map 3: Park Walkshed Map (Neighborhood Parks)



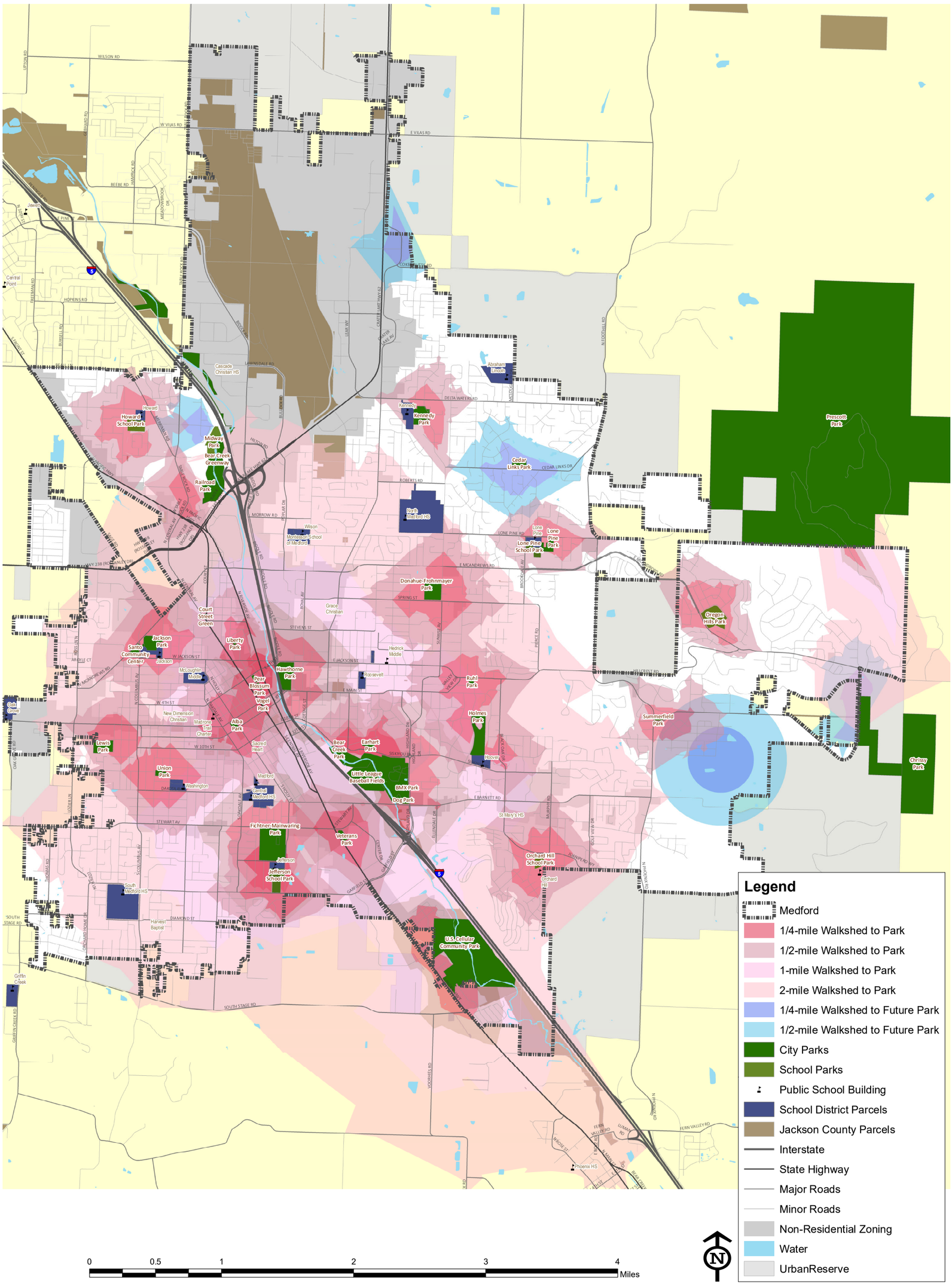
Map 4: Park Walkshed Map (Planned Neigh. Parks)



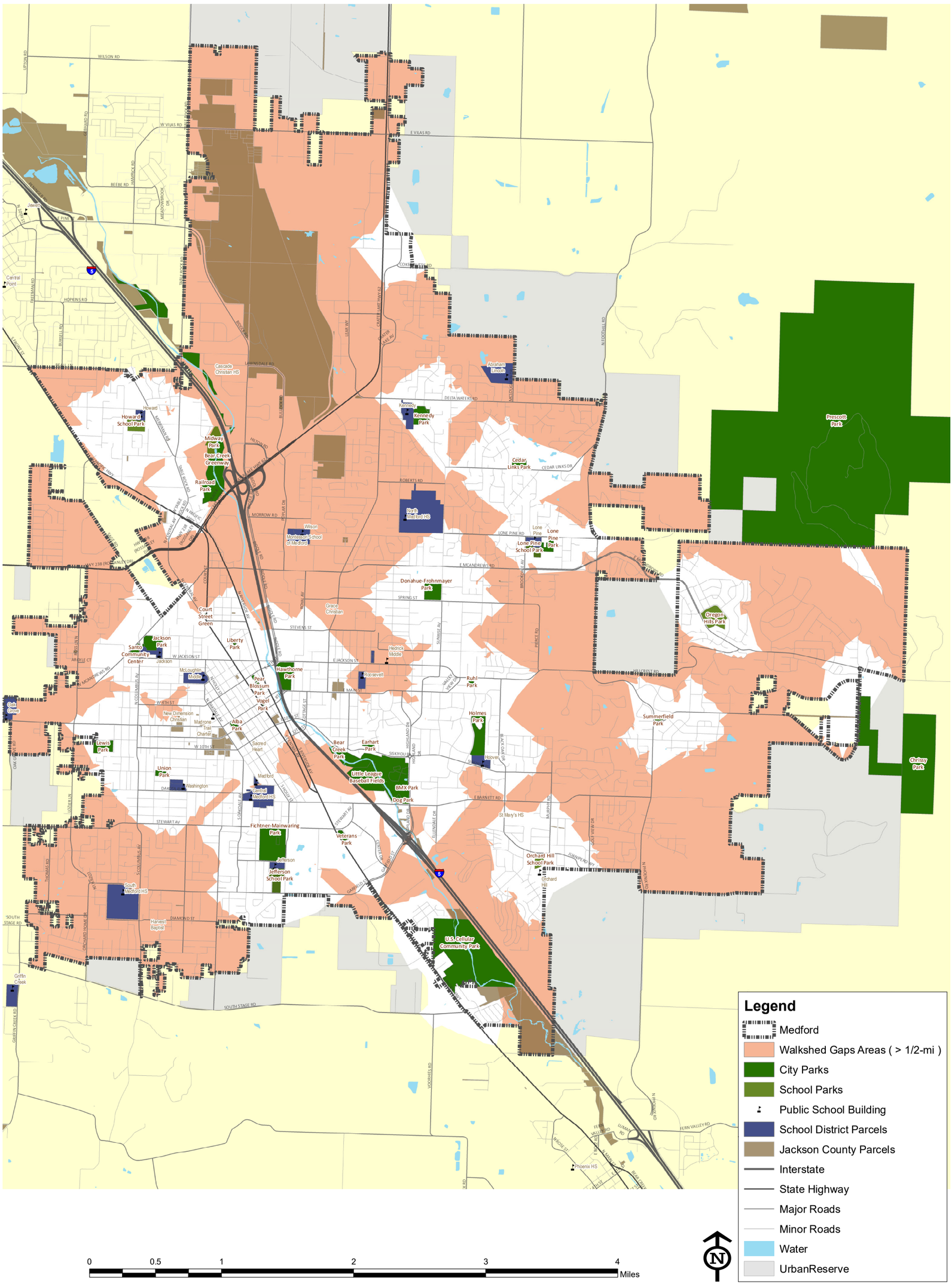
Map 5: Park Walkshed Map (Community Parks)



Map 6: Park Walkshed Map (Comm. & Neigh. Parks)



Map 7: Park Walkshed Map (All Parks)



Map 8: Parkland Gaps (areas farther than 1/2-mi.)

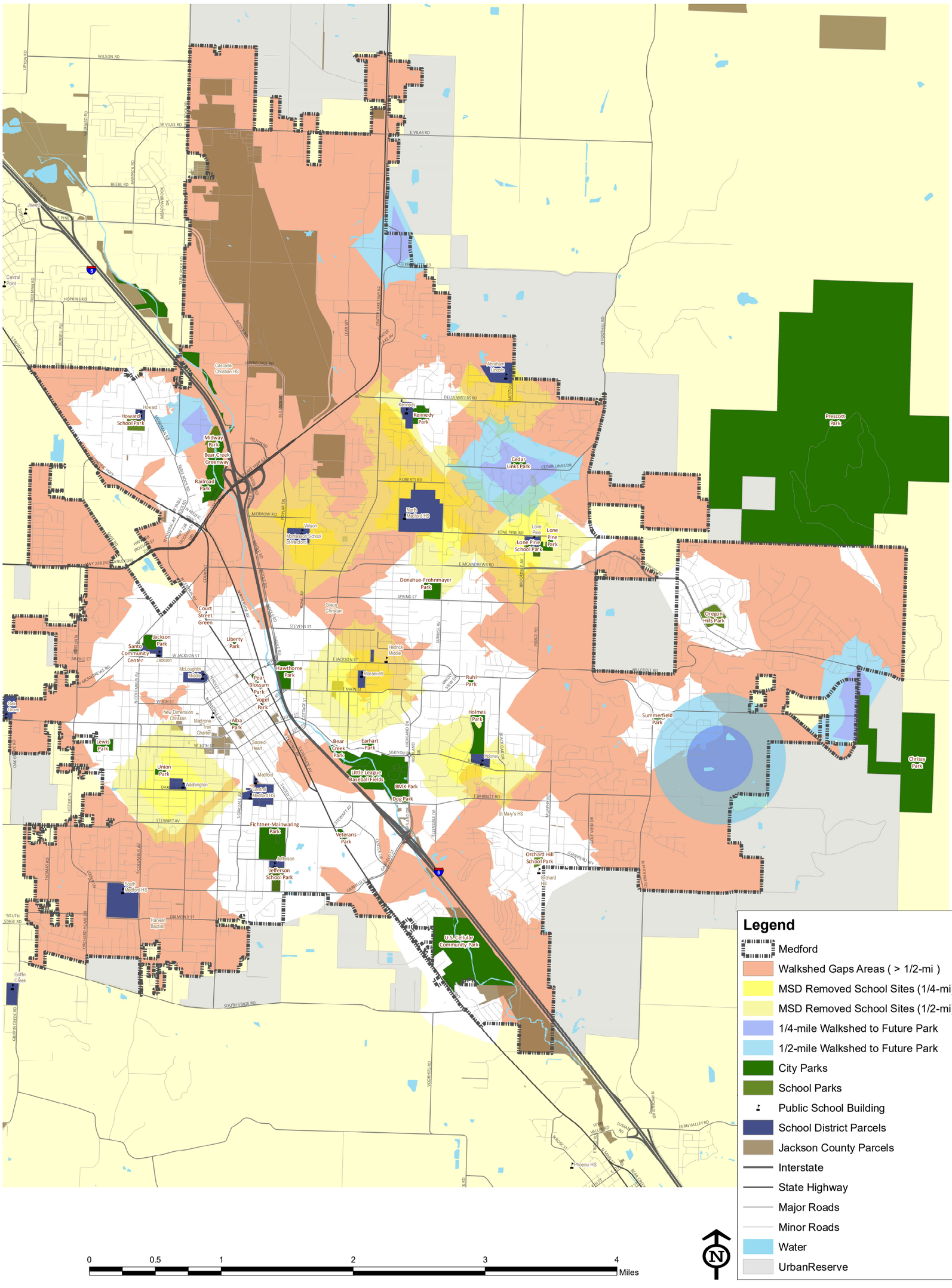
Meeting the intent to provide a neighborhood or community park within a reasonable walking distance (e.g., ½-mile) will require both acquiring new park properties in currently under-served locations, improving multi-modal transportation connections to allow local residents to safely and conveniently reach their local park and re-evaluating the potential use of school sites as surrogates for local neighborhood parks. As Medford develops and acquisition opportunities diminish, the City will need to be prepared to take advantage of acquisition opportunities in strategic locations to better serve City residents.

In previous years, the City of Medford had an interlocal agreement with the Medford School District for access to certain school sites for off-hour and weekend usage as parkland. The agreement expired, and several school sites were removed from the parks inventory, which exacerbated existing gaps in parkland access. As shown on the previous maps, several gaps areas in Medford can be served through the re-establishment of certain school sites as neighborhood parks during non-school hours. Specifically, the City should re-initiate conversations with the District for the renewed usage of, at least, the following sites to serve as proxy neighborhood parks and as a means to enhance public access to recreational lands within reasonable walking distances:

- Abraham Lincoln Elementary School
- Wilson Elementary School
- Roosevelt Elementary School
- Lone Pine Elementary School (to improve access from the west)

Resulting from this assessment, potential acquisition areas are identified for future parks and are noted in the Capital Facilities Plan chapter of this Plan. The greatest documented need is for additional neighborhood and community parks to improve overall distribution and equity, while promoting active-use recreational spaces that can accommodate field sports, court sports and open play.

While the targeted acquisition areas do not identify a specific parcel(s) for consideration, the area encompasses a broader region in which an acquisition would be ideally suited. These acquisition targets represent a long-term vision for improving parkland distribution throughout Medford.



Map 9: Parkland Gaps, plus Impact of Previous School Sites

FRAMING SERVICE STANDARDS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

In addition to and in support of the gap analysis, a level of service (LOS) review was conducted as a means to understand the distribution of parkland acreage by classification and for a broader measure of how well the City is serving its residents with access to parks and open space. Service standards are the adopted guidelines or benchmarks the City is trying to attain with their parks system; the level of service is a snapshot in time of how well the City is meeting the adopted standards.

The use of service standards for parks and recreation has a long history. Also, standards have been widely applied in park systems across the country as a means to benchmark where a community is and target where it wants to be with regard to the provision of parks, open space, trails and facilities.

The use of numeric standards, typically framed as parkland acres per capita, have become tradition for parks agencies, in part, tied to dated publications from the National Recreation and Park Association, which are no longer in favor. Locally, Medford has a long history with park standards, and the City has used these standards to guide the growth of its system and serve as a benchmark reference for itself and in comparison to other, similar cities. In many cases, jurisdictions link their standards with a funding source to help finance the growth of the system. In Oregon, system development charges are a common funding tool for this purpose. The use and application of standards continues to evolve and mature, and this Plan aims to evaluate the City's existing standards and offer recommendations to refine them.

This section begins with a review of current standards and the resulting level of service for different park types. It concludes with a discussion of other considerations and options for standards for the City to consider into the future.

CURRENT PARK ACREAGE STANDARDS

The City of Medford has adopted level of service standards on an acres per 1,000 population basis for providing park lands to its community. These standards have a long history in Medford.

2006 Leisure Services Plan

The 2006 Medford Leisure Service Plan included the level of service of 24.31 acres of parkland per 1,000 population, which was split between community parks (2.75 acres per 1,000), neighborhood parks (1.56 acres per 1,000) and greenways and natural open spaces (20 acres per 1,000) and other open spaces. The 1996 prediction for park land need was for an additional 45 acres of community and neighborhood parks by 2030.

National Comparables

As part of the assessment of current and projected performance of the Medford park system relative to meeting adopted standards, some comparison with current national information on standards and comparables has been compiled.

2015 National Recreation and Park Association Field Report

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) prepared a report in 2015 using their Park and Recreation Operating Ratio and Geographic Information System (PRORAGIS) database that reflects the current levels of service of park agencies across the country based on population density per square mile. The table below indicates the range of acres per 1,000 population from jurisdictions with less than 500 residents per square mile up to urban communities with over 2,500 persons per square mile.

Medford's population density was 3,017 persons per square mile for its 25.7 square miles land area. By way of comparison, the State of Oregon's population density is 40.7 people per square mile. In reviewing the PRORAGIS data, Medford's level of service would be in the upper quartile for urban communities with 24.3 acres per 1,000 population. It should be noted that diverse approaches are used to classify park lands when applied to meeting a level of service standard. Since the PRORAGIS database relies on self-reporting by municipalities, some agencies only include developed, active parks while others include natural lands with limited or no improvements, amenities or access. The comparative standards in the table below should be weighed with this variability in mind.

Figure 14. National Level of Service Data by Population Density (NRPA)

		Population Density per square mile			
	All Agencies	Less than 500	500 to 1,500	1,501 to 2,500	Over 2,500
Lower Quartile	**4.5 ac/1000**	4.8 ac/1000	6.3 ac/1000	7.5 ac/1000	3.3 ac/1000
Median	**9.9 ac/1000**	9.9 ac/1000	12.1 ac/1000	12.9 ac/1000	6.4 ac/1000
Upper Quartile	**17.5 ac/1000**	17.3 ac/1000	19.9 ac/1000	20.6 ac/1000	13.5 ac/1000

In comparing acres of parkland and population density, another important consideration weighs the value of developed parks with undeveloped open spaces. While open space is critical to the environmental health of a community, these park lands do not often allow for public access or provide direct recreational value. Medford's current 24.31 acres per 1,000 population standard is divided between active-use parks (neighborhood and community) at 4.31 acres per 1,000 and greenway/open space lands at 20 acres per 1,000. If the active-use parks service standard is isolated and compared against other park agencies reporting in PRORAGIS, Medford falls short of the median 6.4 acres per 1,000 persons for higher density urban communities. With future development anticipated through UGB expansion and redevelopment, urban density will continue to increase, and more pressure will be exerted on park lands to meet the needs of the community.

CURRENT & PROJECTED LEVEL OF SERVICE

Medford's current level of service is examined using the existing, adopted standard of 1.56 acres per 1,000 for neighborhood parks, 2.75 acres per 1,000 for community parks and 20 acres per 1,000 for greenways and open space. When current populations of the City is compared to the park acreage standards for measuring park land needs, the difference between existing acreage and "demand" for park acreage to meet the standard is considered the "need" in future acreage.

The tables below highlight the measurements for the City's current level of service (LOS) at the existing standards.

In examining Medford's neighborhood park acreage, the City has reached 105% of its adopted standard for park acreage. This performance measurement weighs the existing acreage (128.4 acres) against the "demand" (121.1 acres) at the current population (77,655). A surplus of 7.28 acres exists today for neighborhood parks. As the regional industrial, medical and service center, Medford can expect significant population changes in coming years, especially with the proposed UGB expansion, planned developments in southeast Medford and proposed residential density increases. Using the current park land inventory and the projected increase in population, the level of service for neighborhood parks will decrease from 1.65 acres per 1,000 to 1.16 acres per 1,000. In order to reach the existing standard of 1.56 acres per 1,000 for neighborhood parks, Medford will need to acquire nearly 45 acres in the coming ten years.

Figure 15. Medford Level of Service Performance for Neighborhood Parks

Metric	Measurement			
Existing Level of Service (LOS) Standard	**1.56 acres per 1,000 residents**			
2015 Population	77,655 residents			
2026 Population Projection	111,025 residents			
Parkland Acreage (Neighborhood Parks)	**Total**		**Developed**	
City-owned & maintained	127.08 acres		93.81 acres	
Total	***128.42 acres***		***93.81 acres***	
Level of Service	**2015**	**2026**	**2015**	**2026**
Effective Level of Service based on total acreage *(acres/1,000 residents)*	1.65	1.16	1.21	0.84
Net LOS to Standard *(acres/1,000 residents)*	0.09	(0.40)	(0.35)	(0.72)
Performance to Standard	106%	74%	77%	54%
Acreage surplus (deficit)	**7.28**	**(44.78)**	**(27.33)**	**(79.39)**

The removal of 65.4 acres of school lands classified as neighborhood parks has reduced the City's level of service, and the relationship with the school district should be re-assessed to include school sites into the inventory to help address both the acreage need projected for the future, as well as the parkland distribution need to fill the identified walkshed gaps in the system.

The City currently is meeting its adopted service standard for community parks, as well,

and has reached 116% of its adopted standard for park acreage. However, with projected population growth, the current surplus of 34.4 acres will turn to a deficit of 57 acres by 2026. Population growth will create a demand for an additional 91 acres of community parkland to meet this adopted standard.

Figure 16. Medford Level of Service Performance for Community Parks

Metric	Measurement			
Existing Level of Service (LOS) Standard	**2.75 acres per 1,000 residents**			
2015 Population	77,655 residents			
2026 Population Projection	111,025 residents			
Parkland Acreage (Core Parks - City + MUGA)	**Total**		**Developed**	
City-owned & maintained	247.95 acres		226.54 acres	
Total	***247.95 acres***		***226.54 acres***	
Level of Service	**2015**	**2026**	**2015**	**2026**
Effective Level of Service based on total acreage *(acres/1,000 residents)*	3.19	2.23	2.92	2.04
Net LOS to Standard *(acres/1,000 residents)*	0.44	(0.52)	0.17	(0.71)
Performance to Standard	116%	81%	106%	74%
Acreage surplus (deficit)	**34.40**	**(57.37)**	**12.99**	**(78.78)**

A similar approach was used to examine the level of service for the City's greenways and natural open space. The performance to the standard is 127%, representing 1,978 acres of existing open space in relation to the demand at the adopted standard of 1,553 acres. If the open space inventory were held constant, the existing surplus of 424 acres will grow to a deficit of 242 acres by 2026. This represents a growth-based demand for an additional 667 acres of greenway and open space in the coming decade.

Figure 17. Medford Level of Service Performance for Greenways & Open Space

Metric	Measurement	
Existing Level of Service (LOS) Standard	**20 acres per 1,000 residents**	
2015 Population	77,655 residents	
2026 Population Projection	111,025 residents	
Parkland Acreage (Greenways & Open Space)	**Total**	
City-owned & maintained	1977.59 acres	
Total	***1977.59 acres***	
Level of Service	**2015**	**2026**
Effective Level of Service based on total acreage *(acres/1,000 residents)*	25.47	17.81
Net LOS to Standard *(acres/1,000 residents)*	5.47	(2.19)
Performance to Standard	127%	89%
Acreage surplus (deficit)	**424.49**	**(242.91)**

In all, the existing, aggregate 24.31 acre per 1,000 population standard, while laudable and currently attainable, should be re-assessed given the large projected acreage deficits and in the acknowledgement of projected residential development.

GOING BEYOND ACREAGE STANDARDS

Using a service standard for park acreage tied to a community's population provides a common measure for guiding the amount of desired parkland. However, the acreage of parkland per capita provides only a limited measure of the value of recreational access and park amenities in demand for public uses. While Medford is currently meeting its adopted standards, future population growth will increase pressure on the availability of large tracts of open lands for purchase as future parks. As the park system matures with increasing residential density, other assessment techniques should be incorporated going forward to gauge the community's need for additional lands, facilities and amenities, which include the following.

- Park proximity
- Park pressure
- Variety / type of park amenities
- Condition of park amenities

Park Proximity & Distribution

In 2014, the Trust for Public Lands produced the *City Park Facts Report*, which defines park access as the ability to reach a publicly owned park within a ½-mile walk on the road network, unobstructed by freeways, rivers, fences and other obstacles. This metric can be evaluated by using a geographic information system (GIS) and Census data to determine the percentage of households that are within walking distance from a park or the geographic area that is within walking distance of an existing park. Walking distance is most commonly defined as a ½-mile or a ten-minute walk. Of the 100 largest cities in the U.S. that have explicit park distance goals, over 60% use a ½-mile measurement. Determining the 'walksheds' for a community's existing parks can reveal the gaps where residential areas have no public parks within reasonable walking distance. These gaps provide a measure of need to provide a more equitable distribution of park facilities. Identified gaps within the park system can become targets for future parkland acquisition. A parkland gap analysis for Medford is detailed in the next section of this chapter.

Park Pressure

Park pressure refers to the potential demand on a park. One method of exploration examines the proximity of residential populations to a park and assumes that the residents in a 'parkshed' use the park closest to them and that people visit their closest park more often than those farther away. Using GIS, the 'parkshed' is defined by a polygon or a park service area containing all households having the given park as

their closest park. The population within this park service area can then calculated, providing an estimate of the number of nearby potential park users. The acreage of the subject park is then used to calculate the number of park acres available per 1,000 people within the parkshed. This measure of probable park use and population pressure identifies the adequacy of the park land (in acres per 1,000) rather than simply the location and 'walkability' determined by the park accessibility metric. Depending on the amenities and attractions within the park, the higher the population within a parkshed will result in greater the use and potential increased maintenance and wear and tear.

Park Amenity Mix

Providing unique outdoor experiences, while working to fulfill basic recreational park amenities, will result in parks with a variety of amenities. The variety and location of amenities available within a community's parks and recreational facilities will create a range of different preferences and levels of park usage by residents. Park systems should ensure an equitable distribution and quantity of the most common amenities like playgrounds, picnic shelters, restrooms, sports courts, sports field and trails to help distribute the potential usage of load on individual parks.

Park Amenity Condition

In addition to understanding the inventory of park amenities, communities must also assess the condition of each park's general infrastructure and amenities. The condition or quality of park amenities is a key measure of park adequacy and a required assurance of public safety. General park infrastructure may include walkways, parking lots, park furniture, drainage and irrigation, lighting systems and vegetation. Deferred maintenance over a long time period can result in unusable amenities when perceived as unsafe or undesirable by park patrons.

REVISIONS TO PARK SERVICE STANDARDS

Using only acreage measurements to attain a targeted level of service for parks and greenways in Medford translates to a future deficit of over 346 acres. As growth occurs, the population density will increase, and the competition for land acquisition and costs for real estate also will increase. These factors, and limited financial resources for park acquisition within the city, will create a significant challenge of meeting the targeted acreage to reach the adopted standards.

As noted earlier, the City should consider re-establishing an interlocal agreement with the Medford School District for the usage of school sites to serve as proxy parks during non-school hours. While this option may not be ideal, it can illustrate the power of cooperation between the organizations for the benefit of the residents of Medford. The inclusion of at least some of the previously delisted school sites into the inventory will substantially aid Medford in attaining the service standards for both neighborhood and community parks. Additionally, the City should continue to coordinate and negotiate

with residential developers to secure, set-aside and construct future parks in areas with planned residential growth.

Since the City is currently meeting its service standards for active-use parks, this Plan recommends that the City retain the existing standards for neighborhood parks (1.56 acres per 1,000) and community parks (2.75 acres per 1,000), but re-assess these standards during a subsequent LSP update with special attention toward the development pressure on available land and the remaining opportunities for large acreage tracts.

Community and neighborhood parks are the 'work horse' parks of the Medford park system, inasmuch as they provide the land base to accommodate a range of mixed recreational uses, park infrastructure (i.e., parking, restroom, etc) and the potential for sport fields. As such, the City's priority should be to secure adequately-sized properties to design as neighborhood or community parks to maximize the recreational utility value of those sites for the future.

Since growth pressures also will limit potential land acquisitions for large acreage tracts to meet greenway and open space needs, this Plan recommends adjusting the approach to this standard. Open space conservation focuses on the need to protect areas of special and/or sensitive habitat, and greenway planning focuses on the connectivity of open spaces to create large, linked corridors. An acreage measurement places an arbitrary quantitative target on the demand for open space conservation. Within Medford and its UGB, the primary focus for open space conservation should be based on a natural resource inventory designating the habitats and environmental areas where conservation efforts should be directed, regardless of acreage numbers. Therefore, this Plan recommends the elimination of an acreage standard for greenways and open space lands and recommends the development of a specific conservation and greenways plan to assess and identify key targets for future land conservation and corridor linkages.

Additionally, the City has been a strong leader in the protection of sensitive lands and creek corridors through its land use regulations. In coordination with the Public Works and Planning departments, the inclusion of future, protected open space areas will strengthen and expand the broader greenway system. However, the priority for open space land acquisitions or the acceptance of open space dedications from developers should be focused toward those lands that expand ownership of adjacent City-owned greenways or to ensure sufficient property is available to accommodate public access and future trail connections.

PARK DEVELOPMENT & IMPROVEMENTS

Community Parks

With the exception of Prescott Park, all of Medford's community parks are developed and in good condition. The City should improve community parks as needed to ensure proper maintenance, usability and quality of park features and grounds. Future enhancements or upgrades to community parks should include shaded picnic areas or picnic tables, shade structures for playgrounds, nature play areas, community gardens and accessibility improvements. The City should also pursue the development of a fully-inclusive, accessible playground to provide play opportunities for people with physical or mobility disabilities.

The pending development of Prescott Park is a long-awaited improvement for the Medford community. The site was master planned in 1984 with updates in 1999, 2008 and 2010. Improvements to the park are planned to include an all-weather loop road, trails for hiking, bicycling and horseback riding, overlooks, interpretive signs, restrooms, equestrian/auto parking, lodge for classes and covered pavilions, off-leash dog area, caretaker residence and maintenance yard. Beyond the improvements noted in the master plan, Prescott Park could provide regional value via connections to the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) and connections to Chrissy Park and the Bear Creek Greenway, among others.

Neighborhood Parks

Medford currently has three undeveloped neighborhood park sites. Development of these parks would greatly improve recreational access for nearby communities.

The City purchased a 5.4-acre piece of the former Cedar Links golf course in 2011 to create a neighborhood park. The site was master planned to include playground equipment, a restroom, parking and a picnic shelter, as well as two half-court basketball areas. Much of the interior of the park on the west side will be a large open play area with a looped walking trail.

Midway Park is a 3-acre site located adjacent to Railroad Park and immediately west of I-5. The park was master planned as a neighborhood park to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for nearby residents. The park will include a dog park, playground, basketball court, restrooms, picnic areas and parking. The park will also include a berm along the east side of the park, adjacent to I-5. The park will connect the neighborhood to Railroad Park and the Bear Creek Greenway.

Chrissy Park is a large and unique park property on Medford's eastern edge. The site is 166 acres in size and will serve multiple purposes. A 10-acre portion of the site along Cherry Lane will provide neighborhood park amenities for nearby residents. The park

will also serve as both a special use area with hiking and equestrian trails and as a natural open space area. The park has been master planned, and amenities include sport courts, cycle cross, picnic areas, hiking trails, equestrian trails, disc golf, a playground, restrooms and parking. Chrissy Park is also planned to connect to Prescott Park and link with corridors along the riparian alignments of the Middle and North Forks of Larson Creek.

In general, the City should make improvements to neighborhood parks as needed to ensure proper maintenance, usability and quality of park features and grounds. The City could also consider adding playground shade structures, half-court basketball courts, small skate park elements and other recreation features in the development of new or existing neighborhood parks to expand recreational opportunities.

School Parks

School grounds in Medford play a role in its overall park system. While school sites may offer an open field or play equipment, daytime access is restricted by school use and limited for security concerns. During non-school hours, public elementary and middle school properties provide functions very similar to neighborhood parks. Unfortunately, and as noted earlier in this chapter, the expiration of the agreement between the City and the Medford School District resulted in several school parks being removed from the inventory.

Going forward, the City should re-initiate and revitalize its relationship with the District and seek agreement on a new usage arrangement that can benefit the residents of Medford. Specifically, such an agreement should consider options for the following:

- Utilize school grounds during non-school hours in areas where there are no other opportunities to provide parks for the service area
- Accommodate sport field usage for league practices and recreational programs (e.g., Wilson) and consider options for joint redevelopment or renovation of field turf to improve playablility and safety
- Consider cost-sharing for maintenance and security, as well as improvements
- Re-examine options for reduced or waived fees for indoor facilities and priority access for scheduling, in balance with an option for shared renovation costs for outdoor facilities

Sports Fields

Local Feedback & Needs

In the fall of 2015, representatives of local sports organizations gathered to share their thoughts on the limiting factors of the recreation facility infrastructure, as well as the key priorities for a successful future for their organizations and the overall recreational opportunities in Medford. A summary of the discussion offers highlights of these limiting factors.

- Adequate capacity for both restrooms and parking is an on-going challenge at most sport field facilities.
- The addition of lighting to extend the time of play into evening hours would help meet the increasing demands for more field play time.
- The integration of team practices on school field facilities requires additional coordination that limits field capacity.

Stakeholders shared their key priorities for the next six years for Medford's recreation facilities relative to their programs as the following.

- Conversion to all-weather play field surfacing (Little League)
- Renovation of snack bar and concessions to facilitate fund raising for infrastructure improvements (Little League)
- Field facilities for "mini-mods" for expansion of soccer programs into younger age groups using smaller field configurations
- The Ultimate Frisbee league may also expand their programs into younger age groups using smaller field configurations
- Enhanced Bear Creek Greenway safety and connections to facilitate more walking and running participation on the trail
- Meet the demand for aquatic programming growth

A community survey conducted in the spring of 2015 as part of this LSP update revealed additional desires for park improvements and sports facilities in Medford. The survey results revealed the most highly ranked potential improvement that could be made in parks is permanent/upgraded restrooms. Picnic facilities, playgrounds and trail connections were the next highest ranked potential park improvements. Strong support (85%) was also expressed for the construction of a new municipal aquatic facility.

Relative to sports courts, the survey included comments requesting pickleball courts, improvements to existing tennis courts and more active play options at Oregon Hills Park. Several survey response comments noted the absence of any nearby disc golf courses and suggested the addition of a course somewhere in Medford.

Field Inventory

Medford has a variety of athletic fields available for different levels of organized league and team practice and games. Facilities include adult baseball and softball fields, youth baseball and softball fields, adult and youth soccer fields, and football fields. Other sports, such as lacrosse and Ultimate Frisbee, also use some of these existing field facilities with adjustments to line configurations.

In Medford's sport field inventory, facilities are categorized by ownership – as it influences the availability of the Medford Parks and Recreation Department to schedule use and programming. Facilities owned by the City are considered as "unrestricted" inventory with no limitations for use. Land or fields that are not owned by the City, such as facilities owned by the Medford School District or a private school or organization, typically require preauthorization approval for use. This "restricted" inventory may be available through a use agreement or lease through negotiations with terms and timing that may change from year to year.

Figure 18. Existing Sport Field Inventory by Type

Recreation Facility	Restricted Inventory (2015)	Unrestricted Inventory (2015)	Total Inventory	Net Change ('06-'15)
Adult Baseball	4	9	**13**	*7*
Adult Softball	4	36	**40**	*28*
Youth Baseball/Softball	15	46	**61**	*35*
Adult/Youth Soccer	29	33	**62**	*32*
Football	16	20	**36**	*30*

The inventory of sport field facilities increased significantly with the completion of several phases of the U.S. Cellular Community Park. The installation of synthetic turf also has increased the value and capacity of those new fields to meet the needs of baseball, softball, soccer and football fields. Through a study completed by the City of Hillsboro, each turf field can be considered equivalent to four natural grass/dirt fields, in accordance with the Synthetic Turf Council. Using this metric, the U.S. Cellular Community Park has provided an unrestricted sport field inventory of eight adult baseball fields, 36 adult softball fields, 36 youth baseball/softball fields, 24 soccer fields, and 20 football fields. This increased inventory exceeds the forecasted field inventory demands and needs projected in the 2006 Leisure Services Plan.

Figure 19. Current & Projected Sport Field Needs based on Service Standards

Recreation Facility	Total Existing Facilities	Existing Ratio (#/population)	Service Standard	Total Current Demand	Net Current Need	Projected 2026 Demand	Projected 2026 Need
Adult Baseball	13	1 field per 5,974	1 field per 22,700	4	**0**	5	**0**
Adult Softball	40	1 field per 1,942	1 field per 7,143	11	**0**	16	**0**
Youth Baseball/Softball	61	1 field per 1,273	1 field per 3,846	21	**0**	29	**0**
Adult/Youth Soccer	62	1 field per 1,253	1 field per 3,333	24	**0**	34	**0**
Football	36	1 field per 2,157	1 field per 13,000	6	**0**	9	**0**

Improvements at Existing Fields

Some of Medford's sports fields could benefit from enhanced maintenance, investments and safety improvements. Improvements to turf, irrigation, lighting, restrooms and spectator facilities could allow existing fields to better serve recreation users and extend playing seasons.

Resurfacing existing or constructing new fields with artificial turf will allow more intensive use of field space, extend field seasons and reduce play cancellations due to poor conditions. When planning for turf surfacing, the City should continue to explore partnerships with local user groups and businesses, evaluate opportunities to redesign fields for multi-sport use and assess the existing fee structures. Candidate turf conversion sites include Jackson Park and Fichtner-Mainwaring Park.

Additional Capacity

With projected future population growth and robust participation in team sports, the City and local sports leagues will need to properly maintain existing field resources, use existing sites more efficiently and effectively and/or acquire and develop additional field space to meet demands. Such actions will depend on continued active partnerships between the City, school districts, sport organizations and other recreation providers. Stakeholders and sport leagues noted a need for field capacity to support expansion of lacrosse programs, additional practice fields for a variety of sports and field lighting to extend playing times.

Partnerships

For many years, the Medford community has benefited from a cooperative relationship between the City and the Medford School District. This partnership has been a critical component of meeting field sport needs within Medford. The City should continue to work closely with the School District to reinvigorate their cooperative arrangements and actively explore opportunities for greater joint use of facilities. Agreements between the agencies should identify opportunities and define responsibilities regarding field planning, acquisition, development, improvement, maintenance and operations; as well as clarify scheduling, decision-making and revenue sharing objectives.

The City should continue to participate in annual meetings with the various leagues and field providers within Medford to assist in allocating field space across the leagues and address other issues related to inter-league coordination, field maintenance and protocols for addressing field issues. The City also should remain open to the changing needs and participation rates for youth sports and consider its role in and capacity to provide additional fields within the city to accommodate the growth of the current leagues or the addition of new programs, such as lacrosse.

Policies & Management

Improved management systems and policies will improve the City's ability to maintain and improve sports fields, while balancing the needs of both sport organizations and the broader community. The City should continue to monitor the condition, investment needs and usage rates of various field facilities to best plan for long-term maintenance and capital needs. This includes planning for capital reinvestment and replacement of synthetic fields at U.S. Cellular Community Park.

Field usage policies should be reassessed on a regular basis to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the City, user groups and neighbors. Field usage fees should also be updated periodically – and when significant field improvements are made - to address cost recovery and equity objectives. Such policies and fees should also address field scheduling for alternative uses, such as festivals, concerts and other community events.

Sport Courts

Medford provides a variety of outdoor sport courts in their park system and provides or partners for indoor courts (gymnasiums) to be available for different levels of recreation programs. Since 2006, the inventory in available gymnasiums had a significant shift due to a change in the Medford School District allocation process which resulted in additional fees for recreation use. The costs for Parks and Recreation to provide programming for adult volleyball and basketball programming was prohibitive. The former 2006 "unrestricted" inventory of 22 gymnasiums has been redefined as two "unrestricted" gymnasiums since the bulk of gym space is associated with school facilities. Current gymnasium inventory includes 29 restricted gyms through the Medford School District, private schools and private facilities.

Outdoor tennis courts, basketball courts, sand volleyball courts and one Futsal court are also available for public use in the Medford park system on a first-come, first-serve basis. Fichtner-Mainwaring Park and Bear Creek Park have lighted tennis courts. Medford partners with the United States Tennis Association to provide youth, adult and family programs at the Fichtner-Mainwaring Park tennis courts. Tennis programs are also offered at the Rogue Valley Country Club Tennis Center.

Figure 20. Sport Courts by Park

Park	Basketball	Tennis	Volleyball (sand)	Futsal	Pickleball
Donahue-Frohmayer Park	1/2				
Fichtner-Mainwaring Park	2	8	4		4
Hawthorne Park	1			1	
Holmes Park	1/2	2			2
Howard Park	1	2			
Jackson Park	2	1			2
Lewis Park	2				
Ruhl Park	1/2				

The inclusion of basketball (full court), volleyball and/or tennis courts should be considered in the planning and development of future community parks or community centers. Half-court basketball courts may also be appropriate for neighborhood parks, particularly in underserved areas or where there is expressed neighborhood interest. The City also should track the usage of its pickleball courts and assess the demand for future court installations or tennis court conversions.

Alternative Sports

Providing facilities for alternative or emerging sports, such as skateboarding, BMX, mountain biking, ultimate frisbee, climbing and parkour, can offer residents a more diverse range of recreational experiences, while creating destinations that attract local and regional visitors. Medford currently has an outdoor, 25,000 square foot skatepark located in Bear Creek Park. Opportunities and facilities for other alternative sports are limited in the city.

Disc Golf

The Oregon SCORP reports that across the state there are over 4.5 million user occasions participating in disc golf activities annually. Approximately 7.1% of the state's population enjoy playing disc golf with an average activity level of 16.6 times per year. An average of 2 persons per household typically participate in the sport.

In the community survey conducted for this LSP update, respondents ranked "Frisbee golf" as 5th out of 9 listed choices for other desired activities currently not available in Medford parks. Disc golf was listed in the "other" comment space, as well as mentioned in several general comments at the end of the park survey.

While other disc golf courses are located within the wider region, the installation of a par-4 or competitive course could establish Medford as a destination. The following list identifies the locations of existing courses within a 1½-hour drive from Medford (listed in order of proximity).

- Southern Oregon VA, White City – 25 minutes
- Gold Hill Regional Park, Gold Hill – 25 minutes
- Tom Pearce Park, Grants Pass – 40 minutes
- Riverside Park, Grants Pass – 40 minutes
- Cougar Ridge, Ashland area – 50 minutes
- Shale City / Frog Creek, Ashland area – 50 minutes
- Indian Mary County Park, Merlin – 60 minutes
- Wolf Creek Park, Wolf Creek – 60 minutes
- Lake Selmac Park, Selma – 1 hour, 10 minutes
- Illinios River Forks State Park, Cave Junction – 1 hour, 20 minutes

The sport of disc golf has less stringent landscape requirements than many other outdoor recreation facilities. Extensive grading is not required. Individual hole alignments can bend and curve within reasonable environmental constraints. As long as the tee areas and cage locations can be on level surfaces, courses can be situated on side slopes and hillsides.

The City should consider partnering with a local user group to facilitate the siting and development of a course in Medford. Disc golf players often are connected well in their community such that grants and donations can provide resources for equipment, and volunteers can help with tee box and cage/pad installation.

Bike Skills Park

With the planned development of Prescott Park to include a variety of trails and other facilities, an opportunity may exist to install a modest bike skills course into the design of the park. Such a course could provide a focal point for programming and individual skills development and be complementary to the future mountain bike trails to be built at the park.

Xtreme Sports Park

The City also should consider the future development of a site that could focus on alternative sports, including skateparks, BMX courses, bouldering walls or outdoor parkour features. Depending on the characteristics of the site, such a park also could contain an off-leash dog area or other amenities to draw a variety of users to activate the site. Parking and restroom facilities should be provided with a development project of this nature. Locating such a facility may prove challenging, and the ideal site may need to be located away from a densely developed residential area. One potential site for such a facility may be the area near the Medford Airport.

Community Gardens

Gardening is a popular recreational activity, and community gardens provide common space for residents to grow fruits, vegetables and flowers. Gardens have been shown to increase healthy food consumption, while providing opportunities for active living, social connections, and lifelong learning. Community gardens are becoming more popular park amenities in urban environments, where residents may have limited outdoor space. Gardens are also popular with a diverse range of residents. Medford currently has a community garden at Union Park, and community input for this Plan suggested the need for additional garden facilities. The siting of additional community garden plots could be considered in the design and development of future neighborhood and community parks.

Off-Leash Dog Areas

Walking with a dog is a very popular recreational activity, and off-leash areas have become desired amenities for dog owners living in urban environments who may otherwise have limited opportunities to exercise their pets. Medford has two off-leash dog areas. One is located within Bear Creek Park and is a two-acre, fenced, centrally-located site. The other is located at Hawthorne Park and includes segmented areas for small dogs and larger dogs.

Recreational trends and community input, along with the high utilization of the Bear Creek Park off-leash area, indicate a future need for additional off-leash dog areas in Medford. Communities throughout the Northwest have relied on grassroots or non-profit organizations for the on-going operations and maintenance of such facilities, and in advance of future expenditures for new off-leash areas, the Department should encourage the formation of a local non-profit dog park advocacy and support group to aid in the promotion, development and maintenance of the City's off-leash areas.

As the City develops or redevelops park sites, the Department should consider the potential for off-leash areas. Appropriate sites should be safe, not isolated, and noise impacts on neighbors should be considered. Ideally, a dog park would be a component to a larger community park, where infrastructure (e.g. parking, restrooms and garbage collection) exists and supports multiple activities. Potential sites for consideration are Chrissy Park and the area near the Medford Airport.

Alternatively, the City should consider areas along Pacific Power and Light's powerline corridor, since the siting of an off-leash area would not be impacted by the generally restrictive development requirements of the utility company. Also, such an improvement could be shown to further reduce maintenance demands of Pacific Power and Light at that location if a local non-profit organization is willing to partner for on-going site maintenance and monitoring.

The City should also continue and enhance signage and enforcement of leash laws in parks or natural areas where only on-leash activities are allowed.