

I. Introduction

Sudden Valley is a unique, private community of both modest and large, up-scale homes; located in a vibrant forest within the watershed of Lake Whatcom. The abundant parks, greenbelts and trails offer excellent recreational opportunities, as well as providing homes for a wide range of wildlife.

It is the stated goal, and continuing challenge of the community to keep their Valley green, while providing active and passive recreational activities. This report will create an inventory of existing parks and outdoor recreation facilities and evaluate their condition.

It will recommend maintenance, enhancement, expansion or reductions of the facilities in order to best serve the community.

The Parks & Recreation committee realizes that financial, ecological and community interests are ever changing and try to present a plan that is flexible and responsive to the needs of Sudden Valley.

II. Committee/Volunteer Efforts

A. Current status of Parks & Recreation Committee and coordinated volunteer efforts

At present, there is no standing committee for parks & recreation as has existed in the past. The current committee was created as a sub-committee under Long Range Planning to develop a long term plan for the community's park and trails. After reviewing previous plans, this committee determined that in order for any plan to be followed, a standing committee must be formed and must coordinate frequently with administration in order to help identify and prioritize projects and coordinate with volunteers.

Currently, there is no obvious prioritization of projects brought forth by residents; some are heard by the BOD and some are put on hold while waiting for a response from "volunteer coordinators". In addition, several parks are mostly maintained by neighboring residents, with varying points of contact with administration while others have been neglected. A consistent approach needs to be applied to all parks.

A yearly budget line item needs to be established for the ongoing maintenance and improvement of parks and trails as stated in our *Articles of Incorporation*. As of the creation of this document, an annual budget line item for parks has been approved for 2017.

B. Planning Recommendations/Considerations

1. Establish a standing Parks & Recreation Committee. Ideally the chairperson for this committee would be one of the Volunteer Coordinators and would have at least one member representing each gate. The chairperson should have frequent contact with SVCA Administration so that projects could move forward efficiently. This committee would be established to do the following:
 - a. Solicit community feedback and/or take requests from community members.
 - b. Develop a plan for all existing parks.
 - c. Prioritize projects and work with administration to ensure projects stay within funding requirements and any other regulations.
 - d. Organize a volunteer parks group – the volunteer group would be ready to assist the Parks and Recreation Department and maintenance crews with implementing all projects as soon as they are approved by the parks and recreation planning team or other appropriate committee established by the board. See “Sudden Valley Volunteer Corps Proposal” in Appendix.
 - e. Develop/organize fundraisers where possible.
 - f. Identify potential areas for new parks (i.e. use Airport strip for a bike/skate park)
2. Establish a yearly budget for parks sufficient to provide necessary maintenance to keep parks attractive and safe.
3. Inventory existing play equipment and concentrate on just a few parks at a time to make them more usable for our children.
4. Clarify easements of all Sudden Valley lots bordering a park area and communicate this information to residents owning property adjacent to each park (to alleviate any misunderstandings regarding encroachment issues).
5. Establish clear markers on boundaries/property lines of each park for both visitors and adjacent residents to be aware of.
6. Add clear, noticeable signs at each park’s access point and marked pathways where necessary so that visitors will be able to enter a park without trespassing on adjacent private property.

III. Parks Plan

A. Current status of the Sudden Valley Parks System:

Most of the existing parks in Sudden Valley are underdeveloped, and like the trail systems, have unrealized potential to become attractive areas for residents. For example, some parks intended for children have inadequate play equipment or no equipment and most have not had continual ongoing maintenance or safety evaluation. Overall, the parks have a history of substandard maintenance. A budget line item has been established for the 2017 budget that should ensure that at least basic maintenance tasks are completed on a regular basis.

B. Current assessment / inventory of all existing parks:

The 2016 Park & Recreation Subcommittee of the Long Range Planning Committee first set out to evaluate each of the parks using the 2004 community plan as a guide.

There are **21** existing named parks; this is a brief assessment of each existing park listed under one of three possible categories; Residential Pocket Parks, Neighborhood Parks, or Community Parks. Some of these parks could fall under several categories.

Residential Pocket Parks:

Residential pocket parks are the smallest park type, usually less than one acre in size. They are most often intended to serve children under 12 years old and senior citizens. However, they can provide other functions such as viewpoints and ornamental neighborhood landscaped areas. The National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) standards recommend that these parks should be within a ¼ mile walking radius of the residential area they are intended to serve. (BBCP)

Creekside Park – Gate 9 (Low Priority)

Description: Secluded park along a natural creek. Difficult to access due to park access and boundaries being poorly marked
Features: Natural creek habitat
Condition: Footbridge span gone, but abutments solid.
Challenges: Unclear access; debris in creek.
Opportunities: Remove park from official parks list and maintain as green-space making sure to periodically clear trash and debris from creek due to watershed management concerns.

Harbor view Park – Gate 3 (Low Priority)

Description: Consists of a sloped draw with through-path in dense, shady forest.
Features: Sign with green tree symbol, trail through green space that leads from Sudden Valley drive to Jasper Ridge.
Condition: Unmaintained, neglected feeling; trees overgrown. One railing and stairs need to be repaired/replaced.
Challenges: Dark character; shady and hidden from street. Characteristics do not meet the guidelines for the intended age group for a pocket park.
Opportunities: Restoration of loop path; creation of a picnic space or turn into green space.

Hendrick Park formerly Windwood Park– Gate 3 (Low Priority)

Description: A small, rough street front lawn area backed by a long ravine and ridge.
Features: Sign
Condition: Mushy lawn area. No attractions.
Challenges: Very little useable open space; stream-sensitive redevelopment.
Opportunities: With better drainage could serve as a picnic area or simply be maintained as greenspace.

Lake Trail Park – Gate 1 (Low Priority)

Description: Open, moderately-sloped draw with stream running down center.
Features: No benches or play equipment
Condition: Unmaintained, mostly weeds.
Challenges: No parking. Significant encroachment by neighboring properties.
Opportunities: Maintain as green space. Educate neighbors on property lines.

Lost Fork Park – Gate 3 (Med Priority)

Description: A narrow lawn, very mushy at south end, with a “hidden nook” feeling.
Features: No signage, benches. Slide has been removed
Condition: Poor drainage areas
Challenges: No focus of use currently; No attractions.
Opportunities: Realignment of drainage needed to be used as a park.

North Point Park – Gate 1 (Med Priority)

Description: A good sized park along the lakeshore, with great views and a long shoreline.
Features: Picnic table; canoe rack; swim platform.
Condition: Well maintained by neighbors.
Challenges: No parking but well-marked access path from the street.
Opportunities: Consider making gravel access road available for parking. Add more tables and benches or a small covered structure.

Strawberry Park – Gate 3 (Med Priority)

Description: Located midway along the Strawberry Creek Trail, a small and cozy, yet open-feeling backyard setting with lots of play area, but no equipment.
Features: Green picnic table on narrow peninsula wrapped by stream
Condition: Deteriorating foot bridges; trees need limbing.
Challenges: Stream bank erosion; encroachments from neighboring property
Opportunities: Improvement of downstream trailhead; add playground equipment, move signage to more obvious location, add parking.

Treehouse Park aka Everett Garrett Memorial Park – Gate 3 (High Priority)

Description: A very unique and picturesque play park.
Features: Once elaborate tree fort style play area has deteriorated and is no longer safe. Ladder access has been removed from last remaining tree house.
Condition: Treehouse needs to be rebuilt; park needs to be cleaned up.
Challenges: Lack of benches; lack of designated / improved pathways; trees overgrown.
Opportunities: Complete rebuild, additional/better marked access points and signage.

Neighborhood Parks:

In a suburban environment neighborhood parks form the backbone of a park system. Neighborhood parks combine informal active and passive recreation a level that fosters neighborhood identity and cohesiveness. They typically provide space for a variety of activities, such as playgrounds, play fields, and picnic areas. Generally there is limited on-site parking. Lighting is generally out of character with the community atmosphere of Sudden Valley. The National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) recommends that neighborhood parks serve people within a ¼ mile to ½ mile walking radius. Recommended size is 1 to 10 acres. (BBCP)

Beaver Ridge Park – Gate 9 (Low Priority)

Description: Centrally located on SV's west side, approximately six acres of dense 80 – 100 year old conifer forest, undeveloped except for rough trails.

Features: Trails that once existed are difficult to find.

Condition: Trails improperly located; forest management insufficient. Would require substantial work to return them to usable trail status.

Challenges: No defined purpose for use.

Opportunities: Remove from parks listing and return to natural environment.

Cascade Park – Gate 3 (High Priority)

Description: A very open and attractive picnic, play, and group gathering area.

Features: Older wooden swing set. Sign is low and hidden behind mail boxes.

Condition: Feels forgotten and neglected.

Challenges: This park is located between houses and behind the mailboxes. There is no designated pathway to the park or designated parking spaces. Though the setting is beautiful, it seems underutilized currently.

Opportunities: Update of playground equipment, designated pathway to park, designated parking spaces near mailboxes, picnic tables, fire pit.

Huckleberry Park – Gate 9 and 13 (High Priority)

Description: Very large park with a dedicated area of grass, picnic table and a designated play area. Popular park that gets regular use from the community.

Features: Play equipment; several good tables; Park extends back into a more natural setting with some established trails due to use of residents walking between homes; Stream runs through the natural setting and the neighborhood has created some small “fairy houses” only the trails near Polo Park Drive and Westbrook access points that are whimsical and fitting for the setting.

Condition: Generally good condition. Engineered bark needs to be replenished and regular maintenance needs to be done to keep this park safe and attractive for the many users.

Challenges: Evidence of encroachments from neighboring residents.

Opportunities: Needs additional parking for the area it serves and regular maintenance.

Maple Leaf Park – Gate 3 (High Priority)

Description: An attractive, inviting, open, sunny play park.

Features: Good visibility; swings newer playground equipment; picnic tables; small wetland area.

Condition: Well maintained by neighboring residents. Could use additional mulch.

Challenges: Ditches impede access

Opportunities: Additional parking needed for the area it serves as well as more picnic tables and a trash can.

Sofield Park) – Gate 1 (High Priority)

Description: A flat grassy field sloping gently to the lakeshore, with a more natural, rocky, vegetated rise in the NE corner.

Features: Open view of lake throughout; parking for 6 vehicles; fire pit; racks for 12 canoes; tables and benches; gravel road access to shore / canoes; Swimming platform that may belong to residents.
Condition: Mostly well maintained by neighbors.
Challenges: Encroachment by neighboring residents for private outdoor use.
Opportunities: Improved landscaping and park sign at street; reclamation and redevelopment of prime NE corner of park.

Tumbling Water Park – Gate 5 (High Priority)

Description: Fairly new park with a variety of playground equipment
Features: Playground equipment, picnic tables, ample parking
Condition: Equipment and tables are in good condition. Cushion material needs to be replenished.
Challenges: This park was not completed as there is not edging around the play area and the cushioning material underneath is not up to code. Forest is encroaching on border.
Opportunities: Immediately add border around play area to keep playground cushioning in place. Complete park according to plan.

Lake Louise Park – Gate 2 (Med Priority)

Description: Bird sanctuary between Lake Louise trail and the lake itself.
Features: Picnic table that was once there has been removed. Blackberry bushes along border.
Condition: Marshy during winter months. During the summer months grass is rarely cut and weeds get tall. Easy access from trail or street.
Challenges: Needs better drainage.
Opportunities: Additional tables could make this a nice picnic are in drier months.

Community Parks:

“Community Parks serve more than one neighborhood and have facilities for organized recreational activities such as soccer leagues for both youth and adults. Community parks often double as neighborhood parks for nearby residents and therefore should also provide for informal and passive neighborhood needs when possible. Community parks provide on-site parking”.

Morning (AM) Beach & Afternoon (PM) Beach Park – Gate 2 (High Priority)

Description: Very scenic lakeshore park with a sandy swimming beach, an extensively developed picnic area on a cove, and a large play field in between.
Features: Canoe racks, with sheltered launch area; 1,400 sq. ft. picnic shelter; restrooms; plenty of parking; adjacent natural area with trails; a few picnic tables; volleyball net, loop trail between the two beaches, many recreation uses for one site.
Condition: Picnic shelter has recently been upgraded as well as the trail to AM beach from parking area.

Challenges: PM beach has a slope and steep entry to the water so not ideal for swimming. Park in between needs better drainage during rainy months. AM beach is small and often over-crowded in the summer. Needs additional trash cans and picnic tables. **An exposed metal drain pipe under the water (depending on water level) at AM beach is jagged on the end and could cause serious injury. Consider building a platform or small pier over the area to prevent injury. Large tree just outside swim area needs to be removed to prevent accidental entanglement.**

Opportunities: Consider moving off-leash dog area to PM beach see “Dog Park Proposal” in appendix. This area is very well used in the summer and needs regular maintenance, particularly trash removal. Consider adding a swim platform in one or both swimming areas.

Marina Park – Gate 1 (High Priority)

Description: Large, level, open lawn area on lakeshore, wrapped behind by outlet of Austin Creek. A portion of the area is designated as an off-leash area for dogs.

Features: Sweeping view of Lake Whatcom and mountains; picnic shelter, softball field and backstop, bathrooms, and tennis and basketball courts. Canoe racks and a roped-off swimming area, with a picnic peninsula sheltering the marina slips. Paddle board and kayak rentals available seasonally.

Condition: Picnic shelter and restrooms have recently been upgraded. Sports courts need resurfacing. No swimming dock in swimming area. No barrier between off-leash area meaning dogs are frequently outside of their marked area both in and out of the water.

Challenges: Dog use conflicts with water quality, other users, and wildlife (disturbed creek mouth bird habitat).

Opportunities: Changes needed to off-leash area (see “Dog Park Proposal” in appendix); firm perimeter walking path; improvement of mushy lawn areas/better drainage; repair turf damage created by dogs, improve beach entry, resurface sports courts, add sand volleyball court. Old style picnic tables were recently removed and need to be replaced with new tables as this is a highly used picnic area.

Recreational Corridor (outdoor areas only) – Gate 2 (High Priority)

Description: Large, level, open lawn area on along creek between golf course and Barns/swimming pool.

Features: Views of the mountains. Large playground area and picnic tables, small gazebo, tennis courts, soccer/baseball field, pathway between Barns parking lot and golf parking.

Condition: Most of the playground equipment has recently been updated. Tennis courts need resurfacing and repairs. Baseball backstop needs repair.

Challenges: Dilapidated barns give it a run-down feel. Several of the retaining walls to hold pea gravel are splitting. Old style cement tables need to be replaced.

Opportunities: Highly used park in central location. Improvements to sports courts could improve usage. Partner with YMCA to help with maintenance costs of fields/courts. Repairs needed to paved portion of pathway. Salvage materials

from Barn 6 & & when they are taken down to build a barn “playhouse” in keeping with the original feel and setting of the area.

Airstrip (Med Priority)

Old airstrip is currently authorized as an off-leash dog walking area. It is also used by walkers and bike riders. Could be considered for skateboard/bike park. A skate board park operated by the city of Bellingham is located seven miles from SV along the bus route and would serve as a recreation space primarily for teens. Currently there is no recreation space in SVCA designed for this age group.

Campground (Med Priority)

The old campground is currently authorized as an off-leash dog area. It is also used by hikers and as a training facility for the fire department. Continue to evaluate potential uses for this space giving special consideration to those that could generate revenue for SVCA.

C. Recommendations for Maintenance & Upgrades

Each park was assigned a maintenance priority by the 2016 task force. Recommendations for maintenance are listed below:

High Priority (includes all parks with existing play structures):

- Annual replenishment of bark or pea gravel for playground cushion
- Quarterly safety inspections
- Regular mowing in season
- Regular trash removal year round
- Install adequate signage, pathways, and parking for the area it serves

Medium Priority

- Annual or semi-annual safety inspections
- Regular mowing in season
- Trash removal in season
- Install adequate signage and pathways where necessary
- Evaluate for encroachment by neighboring properties
- Continual assessment for improved usage

Low Priority

- Annual safety inspections
- Maintained as “green space”

Parks do not generate money. There is no practical way that we can charge for their use. Given this reality, our best suggestion is to keep maintenance costs as low as possible. There are several methods:

1. Keep fixtures as simple and as repair free as possible. Use good, high

quality, long lasting play equipment, benches and tables. Quality is expensive at the start, but pays off in the long run. This is one reason to examine “donations” carefully. Many donors, with the best of intentions, are not prepared to invest in the better (pricey) items that are longer-lived. Equipment that needs to be replaced frequently will cost more in the long run.

2. Each park should be designed as maintenance free as possible. There are many different types of grass. Slow growing, short, drought resistant grass would be a good idea. Play equipment areas should have a definite hardscape border which will keep the cushioning material in place. Decorative plants which do not need frequent pruning and feeding are ideal. Many areas which are currently in grass could be replaced with walkable, evergreen moss and ground covers.
3. Make use of any volunteers, neighbors, scouts, etc. who are willing to help with maintenance. Reward them with thanks, praise and a clear communication path with the Parks and Recreation committee and Association Maintenance Dept where necessary.
4. Communicate with residents and help them understand that keeping our parks clean and in good repair will lower costs and save each of us on our dues.

While several of the parks listed as low priority can be returned to their natural state and maintained only as greenspace, several other parks need enhancements or improvements to increase the value they add to the community. The Committee recommends revitalizing or rebuilding one to two parks per year using the following schedule as a preliminary guideline. (Any major upgrades to parks should first get sufficient community support and volunteer effort. Not only will this reduce the cost to SVCA but parks with more community support will be better maintained over time).

2017:

- Finish Tumbling Water Park
- Establish a plan to rebuild Treehouse park

Within 3 years

- Bring all playground cushioning material up to code
- Replace old cement picnic tables in all parks
- Upgrade playground equipment in Cascade Park
- Upgrade playground equipment at the Marina and add sand volley ball or other sports area
- Resurface tennis courts

Within 3-5 years

- Add additional features to Strawberry Park
- Complete a walking/biking path around the Marina

- Determine the feasibility of adding a bike/skate park, possibly in the airport strip.
- Replace backstops at ball fields

IV. Trails

The Sudden Valley trails are, in most cases, non-existent. There has never been a dedicated maintenance plan, nor budget for the majority of the trails. Many of them have simply been eaten up by the forest. On other trail right-of- ways neighboring residents have incorporated the land into their yards.

In the past, a volunteer group of hikers kept some of the trails groomed. A remnant of that group still exists and other enthusiasts have expressed interest for improving the Sudden Valley trails.

With the creation of the Lookout Mountain Trailhead here in Sudden Valley, there is talk of linking our trails to public trails and creating an extensive network. It is difficult to determine what impact this would have on Sudden Valley. We may find that we are approached by the Land Conservancy, Whatcom County, or some other group seeking usage privileges. This occurrence would need to be addressed by the Sudden Valley Board and possibly by the membership as a whole. It would be a smart move to have several strategies prepared in advance.

There are many reasons for Association attention to be given to the trail system.

Attractive, well maintained trails would enhance the amenities of Sudden Valley.

Right-of- Way ownership should not be neglected or abandoned.

Clearly defined trails would keep random hikers off of private property and eliminate possible conflict.

Residents have requested improving the trail system.

Walking along a trail might be safer than walking on our narrow roads.

Trails encourage healthy exercise.

While all of these reasons to maintain our trails are excellent there is simply no money, at this time to do so. What we do have are strong eager hikers, ready and willing to volunteer for work on the trails. This functioned in the past and there is no reason to think it wouldn't again. Therefore, we recommend that the Association encourages the formation of a volunteer group to find and evaluate our trails. This group should educate themselves and the Board on what is a proper trail, how to create one, and how to maintain it. These "Trail Masters" could, over time; help the Board revive the major, most logical trails.

Land that was once designated a trail but which is not considered viable, might be sold to adjacent property holders. Possibly such land would simply be designated green belt. The trails which we wish to keep should be addressed.

As submitted by Committee members: Karen Borchert, Carol Trower & Elizabeth Huthert, September 2016.

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