

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PARKS TACOMA



Why Apply?



This is an excellent opportunity for an accomplished leader to guide a world-class, multifaceted parks and recreation organization into its next chapter. Parks Tacoma is looking for an Executive Director with experience guiding a committed and highly dedicated staff in the delivery of life-enriching park and recreation experiences. This CAPRA-accredited organization is nationally recognized for innovation and has an impressive portfolio that includes 70+ parks, four community centers, and two AZA-accredited zoos, as well as sports and recreation facilities. For a skilled leader with strong interpersonal skills, demonstrated business acumen, and a desire to become deeply engaged in a supportive and vibrant community, this is an exceptional opportunity to make a lasting impact.



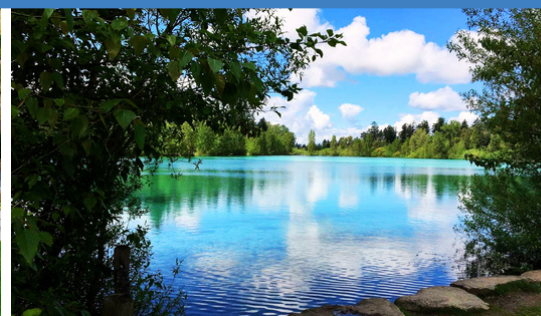
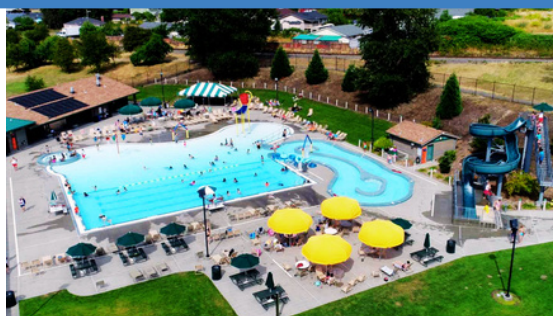
Welcome to TACOMA

Located south of Seattle in Pierce County, Parks Tacoma’s service area encompasses a wide range of communities, including the City of Tacoma, portions of Browns Point and Dash Point, and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park near Eatonville. This region spans a truly diverse landscape—from dense urban neighborhoods and multicultural districts in Tacoma’s south end, to the city’s revitalized downtown core, Puget Sound beaches, and the forested foothills near Mount Rainier.

Tacoma (pop. 220,000) is a vibrant and deeply diverse community shaped by its industrial heritage, rich cultural traditions, and wide array of neighborhood identities. The city’s arts scene, museum district, and waterfront are well known, but equally important are the many culturally distinct neighborhoods across East, West, North, and South Tacoma, where community voices, lived experiences, and local partnerships play a central role in shaping Parks Tacoma’s mission and programs. The University of Washington Tacoma anchors the downtown area, while neighborhood districts such as Proctor, Stadium, Sixth Avenue, and the south end’s many residential and commercial corridors all contribute to Tacoma’s dynamic character.

Reflecting Parks Tacoma’s vision of a “City in a Park,” green space and recreation opportunities are intentionally woven through communities across the city. The 760-acre Point Defiance Park remains a signature destination, and the Ruston Way waterfront offers accessible recreation along Commencement Bay. Northeast communities such as Browns Point and Dash Point provide quieter residential areas with beaches and wooded parkland. Equally significant are the many neighborhood parks, community centers, cultural gathering spaces, and playfields located throughout South Tacoma—areas that serve a highly diverse population and represent some of the most active and engaged parts of the city.

Beyond Tacoma, the landscape transitions to farmland, winding rivers, and forested foothills. Northwest Trek Wildlife Park near Eatonville immerses visitors in this rural environment through a 435-acre habitat where native Northwest animals roam freely. Together, these varied communities form a diverse and interconnected region that shapes Parks Tacoma’s identity and guides its commitment to equitable, community-informed access to recreation, nature, and cultural experiences.





PARKS TACOMA

Parks Tacoma is a special purpose district in Pierce County responsible for an extensive system of parks, recreation facilities and programs, natural areas, and regional attractions. Its mission is to create healthy opportunities to play, learn, and grow.

The District is governed by a five-member Board of Park Commissioners elected to six-year terms. The Executive Director is appointed by the Park Board and serves as the agency's chief executive officer, with responsibility for appointing the organization's directors and officers.

Parks Tacoma operates with a 2026 budget of \$92.8 million, consisting of a \$51.5 million General Fund and \$41.3 million in Enterprise Funds. Staffing includes 410 FTEs and up to 750 part-time staff. The organization includes the Office of the Executive Director and three departments: Business Administration & Planning, Parks & Recreation, and Zoological & Environmental Education.

Established in 1907 as the Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma, Parks Tacoma was Washington State's first independent park district. Over more than a century, the organization has grown from a traditional municipal park system into a broad parks, recreation, conservation, and zoological agency. In 2025, the organization adopted Parks Tacoma as its public-facing name while retaining Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma as its legal name.

Parks Tacoma manages more than 2,900 acres, including 73 parks, 87 miles of trails, and 8.2 miles of public shoreline, along with community centers, pools, athletic facilities, playgrounds, gardens, and natural areas.

The system ranges from neighborhood parks to major regional destinations, including Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, both accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. Parks Tacoma also operates Meadow Park Golf Course, the Tacoma Nature Center, Point Defiance Marina, W.W. Seymour Botanical Conservatory, and the American Alliance of Museums-accredited Fort Nisqually Living History Museum. Across the system, Parks Tacoma offers hundreds of programs and activities for residents of all ages and abilities.



THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director serves as the chief executive officer of Parks Tacoma, overseeing all aspects of the District's operations. Accountable to the Board of Park Commissioners, the Executive Director is responsible for leading the District's operations, advancing the Board's strategic direction, implementing Board policies, and ensuring the District fulfills its mission and statutory responsibilities while maintaining organizational effectiveness, financial sustainability, and public trust.

Direct reports include the Chief Financial & Administrative Officer, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, Chief People Officer, Chief Planning Officer, Executive Administrator to the Board and Executive Director, Parks & Recreation Department Director, and Zoological & Environmental Education Department Director.



IDEAL CANDIDATE TRAITS

- Experience leading a large and complex organization where visibility, engagement, and relationship-building are essential.
- Strategic thinker who sets clear expectations and holds people accountable without micromanaging.
- Ability to develop and execute a vision that balances fiscal discipline with innovative thinking.
- Confident and pragmatic leader who communicates clearly and inspires trust among staff and the community.
- Relationship builder who works effectively both internally and with external partners, community foundations, advisory groups, and tribal governments.
- Dedicated and passionate leader who is invested in the community and committed to enriching the lives of residents and visitors.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP

Reestablish Trust and Fiscal Sustainability

Parks Tacoma has completed necessary restructuring following a period of unsustainable operations. The next leader will be tasked with rebuilding trust, assessing the organizational structure, and planning for sustainable programming.

Implementation of Capital Expenditure Program

In 2026, voters approved a new \$155 million, 6-year capital expenditure program with an impressive 76.1% voter approval. The next Executive Director will need to deliver these maintenance and improvement commitments.

Seek New Revenues and Growth Opportunities

With a significant amount of programs and facilities supported through self-sustaining Enterprise Operations, the next leader will need to take a pragmatic approach to identifying funding for much-needed General Fund-supported programming.

Strengthen Relationships and Establish a Culture of Excellence

Parks Tacoma has a well-deserved reputation for superior facilities, quality programming, and activities that engage the community and visitors. The next leader will need to build on these strengths while assisting the Board in establishing a vision for the organization and strengthening the partnerships Parks Tacoma has long enjoyed.

Internal Communication & Staff Development

The next Executive Director will need to strengthen communication with staff and the Board around organizational goals and accomplishments while building a strong culture of mentorship and focused staff development.



EDUCATION & EXPERIENCE

- 12 years of management experience in a public sector organization with at least 5 years at the senior management level overseeing and supervising teams and operations, strategic planning, working directly with elected officials, and driving financial and community initiatives.
- Bachelor's degree in business administration, public administration, recreation and park administration or related field. Master's degree is preferred.
- Preference will be given to those who possess a current Certified Park and Recreation Executive (CPRE) certification.
- An equivalent combination of education and experience may be considered.

COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

Parks Tacoma offers an annual salary range of \$220,500 – \$285,500 based on qualifications and experience, along with a comprehensive [benefits](#) package.



RESOURCES

[2024-2030 System & Strategic Plan](#)

[Biennial Budget](#)

[Biennial Budget Update](#)

[2025 by the Numbers](#)

PARKS
TACOMA



**TO
APPLY**

Apply Online: gmphr.com

First Review: October 25, 2026

More Info: Greg Young, GMP Consultants
gyoung@gmphr.com / (360) 410-8626

