

City of Olympia

Parks, Arts, & Recreation Director



The annual salary range for this position is \$149,472 to \$224,208.

Starting salary will be based on a combination of experience, education, skills, and abilities.

The City is an equal opportunity employer and is strongly committed to enhancing the diversity of its workplace. We will provide assistance in the recruitment, application and selection process to applicants with disabilities who request such assistance.



Welcome to Olympia

As the capital city of Washington State, Olympia is in a culturally and historically significant and scenic setting at the southernmost point of Puget Sound. The Olympia community is routinely recognized for its outstanding quality of life, vibrant downtown, and family-friendly amenities. Community members enjoy a robust economy, convenient transit, high-quality schools, low crime rates, and varied opportunities for civic and community involvement.

Olympia boasts unparalleled access to the natural environment within an urban setting. The community is walkable and pedestrian friendly with well-established bike and hiking trails, **close to 1,500 acres of public park lands**, miles of public freshwater and saltwater shorelines, and stunning views of Mt. Rainier and the Olympic Mountain Range.

Olympia's vibrant and historic downtown serves as the entertainment, arts, and cultural hub for Thurston County and beyond. Spanning .5 square miles, Olympia's downtown includes over 450 independently owned businesses and over 1,900 residents. The Creative District is a 30-block area that is home to over 150 creative enterprises such as theaters, galleries, breweries, and industrial designers. The Farmers Market, State Capitol Campus, Hands On Children's Museum, and 8 public parks are the main attractions for both Olympians and tourists.

Olympia's ideal location along the I-5 corridor puts residents within reach of Seattle, Portland, British Columbia, the waters of Puget Sound and the Pacific Ocean, and the Olympic and Cascade Mountain Ranges. Seattle-Tacoma International Airport serves the region and is 45 miles to the north.

The City of Olympia

Incorporated in 1859, the City of Olympia operates under a Council-Manager form of government. The seven members on Olympia's City Council are elected at-large to staggered four-year terms during general elections held in odd-numbered years. Position 1 is designated as the Mayor's position. The Mayor and Councilmembers have equal voting authority, with the Mayor voting on all issues as one of seven Councilmembers.

Serving a population of 56,900, the City operates with an annual budget of \$220 million, a capital budget of \$67 million, and a work force of 664 FTEs. Olympia provides a full range of municipal services including public safety (police, fire, and court), streets, parks and recreation, arts, utilities, community planning and economic development, and general administrative services.

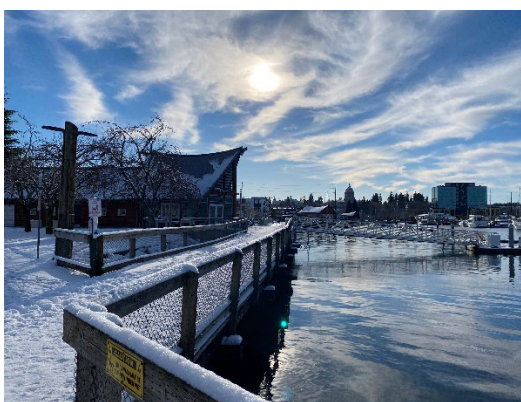
Olympia's City Manager is committed to a "First Team" culture, where we put the interest of the City above our own department or function because we are committed to each other's success. This has been adopted and embraced throughout the organization. The organizational culture places a high value on teamwork, listening, accountability, and meaningful impact in serving the public.

Parks, Arts & Recreation Department

Olympia Parks, Arts & Recreation is dedicated to enriching lives by connecting people with quality experiences. We do this by providing our community with proven, innovative, and reliable services.

The department stewards 45 community parks, which serve as community gathering places, as well as contribute to a neighborhood's character and sense of place and make positive impacts on our environment. We offer hundreds of seasonal recreation classes, camps, and programs each year, which build community, improve individual health, and support the local economy.

We make investments in public art that contribute to a creative, vibrant community, with Olympia's bi-annual Arts Walk events celebrating the arts as a defining characteristic of our community.





The Ideal Candidate

The Parks, Arts & Recreation Director is a key member of City's Executive Team, responsible for leading a dynamic department that enhances community life through parks, public art, and recreation services. This position oversees a wide range of programs, facilities, and partnerships that shape Olympia's cultural identity, public spaces, and overall livability. The Director works collaboratively across City departments, engages deeply with the community, and champions inclusive, forward-thinking initiatives that reflect Olympia's values and aspirations.

- Is a visionary, inspirational, and strategic leader who has the ability to creatively engage the community, City Council, and department employees to advance the goals and priorities of the City.
- Has comprehensive knowledge of municipal parks, arts, and recreation.
- Is not a micromanager. Trusts in the Parks teams to accomplish the goals, objectives, and work plan that moves the Department forward, seeks to remove barriers, and supports risk taking and values the input of employees at all levels of the organization.
- Promotes a healthy work/life balance for staff and models that behavior.
- Has a First Team philosophy; a leadership approach that puts the team they are on above the team they lead.
- Works as an engaged member of the City's Executive Team, offering insights and assistance to ensure the larger organizational goals are met.
- Has outstanding communication skills and is an empathetic and skilled listener with a proven reputation for being accessible, responsive, honest, and transparent. Comfortable speaking out in the community, with staff, and with the Council.
- Is a humble leader who has the ability to foster and maintain thriving relationships with community partners and stakeholders, and staff.
- Will enjoy participating in and championing the many community events and cultural celebrations the Parks Department plans, hosts, sponsors, and helps coordinate.
- Is a trusted, charismatic leader who values all employees and treats them equally regardless of their position.
- Firmly believes in and encourages employee learning and career development opportunities.
- Is a creative problem solver who has the ability to see the big picture.

Challenges and Opportunities

1. Short and Longterm Budget Sustainability

Like most cities in Washington, Olympia's expenses are outpacing revenue generated through sales, property, and business and occupation tax. Our 10-year forecast projects the gap continuing to widen. The City Manager and the City Council's top priority is to develop a long-term sustainable budget. The Parks, Arts & Recreation Director will work collaboratively with the City Manager on budget issues including Olympia Metropolitan Park District revenues.

2. Debt Package -Yelm Highway and Armory

The Olympia City Council has approved a proposal from the Parks, Arts and Recreation Department to move forward with the [Yelm Highway Community Park construction](#) and [Armory renovations](#). The plan is to finance approximately \$26.57 million through a bond sale planned for September.

3. Engaging the community in Parks Plan Update

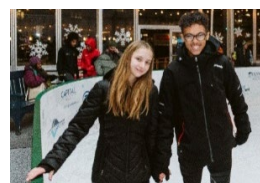
Olympia residents value their parks, arts, and recreation services and provide essential input to update the Parks, Arts & Recreation Plan every six years. The Plan guides how services grow and evolve to meet future needs. Community engagement is key to reflecting diverse perspectives, building trust, setting priorities, and allocating resources. Staff use creative outreach, inclusive participation, and transparent communication to ensure meaningful involvement. Community input strengthens the Plan and ensures it reflects the values of all Olympians. The next update of the Plan will kick-off in 2026. More information can be found online: [Parks, Arts & Recreation Plan](#).

4. Relationship Building and Stakeholder Engagement

The City partners with many groups to provide a wide range of vibrant community and cultural events, including stakeholders and government partners such as the Squaxin Tribe. The Parks, Arts & Recreation Director plays a vital role in the community. The person in this position is responsible for building, strengthening and maintaining working relationships with stakeholders and partners as well as Parks, Arts, & Recreation department employees and other departments within the City.

5. Support for our Equity and Belonging Initiatives in the Parks Department

In 2020, Olympia Parks, Arts and Recreation launched a department-wide Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (EIB) Initiative to address systemic inequities and foster a more inclusive, affirming organization. The Parks, Arts and Recreation Director serves as a key champion and advocate for this work—actively participating in EIB efforts, removing barriers, and embedding equity into the department's programs, policies, and partnerships. Advancing equity and belonging brings both meaningful opportunities and complex challenges. It requires building trust, addressing systemic barriers, and co-creating solutions with the community. The Director models inclusive leadership, fosters sincere relationships, and cultivates a department-wide culture where all staff share responsibility for creating parks and services where everyone feels welcome, represented, and empowered to thrive.





Parks, Arts, & Recreation Director | About the Position

Desirable Qualifications

Bachelor's degree in business management, recreation, park management, or related field and ten years of increasingly responsible parks, arts, recreation experience; experience in a senior leadership role within a complex government agency that involves leading a diverse staff and management of multiple projects. An advanced degree is a plus.

More than Just a Great Place to work! City Benefits Include:

- Comprehensive benefit package including insurance and participation in the State of Washington Public Employees Retirement System (PERS).
- Optional benefits include 457(b) retirement plan, flexible spending account and more.
- Hybrid work arrangements.
- 24-hour access to on-site gym facilities.
- Wellness program with offerings such as yoga, pickleball, farm share programs, and well-being workshops.
- Free public transit access and alternative transportation support (including indoor bike storage).
- Active employee resource groups for: staff of color, LGBTQIA2S+ employees, women, employees with disabilities.
- Human Rights Commission Municipality Equality Index rating of 100.
- Centrally located workplaces within walking distance to vibrant local businesses and restaurants as well as the South Sound waterfront, parks and recreation trails.
- Sabbatical for Directors after five years in position.

Resources/Links



Summer 2025 Recreation Program

Public Art Collection Map



Application Process

Persons Interested in this position should submit the following information:

1. A cover letter describing your interest and qualifications for the position.
2. A current resume.

If you have questions regarding this announcement, please call Marissa Karras at 360.956.1336. The position will remain open until filled but the screening process will move quickly. In order to be considered for the first round of interviews, please submit your application materials at <http://www.karrasconsulting.net> no later than August 29, 2025.