

# Blue River Park

WILDFIRE RECOVERY MASTER PLAN



2023

# Foreword

## FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

When our board members volunteered for the Blue River Parks and Recreation Board, none of us thought we would be dealing with a complete rebuild of the Blue River Community Park after the major 2020 Holiday Farm Wildfire. Our intent was to slowly improve the park little by little. With limited resources, a great deal of enthusiasm, and love for our community, we diligently continued along our path to make Blue River Park a cherished local space.

The Holiday Farm Wildfire brought a new reality no one was ready for. The wildfire destroyed or damaged many of our homes, and no one could blame us if we took time off to take care of personal challenges. But we felt it was important to get the park open as soon as we could. We believe the fabric of a community is made up of its gathering places, and Blue River Park is one of those special places.

Although Blue River Park had its share of issues before the wildfire, we now faced an entirely new set of challenges. Once thick and forested with lush flora, picnic areas, playgrounds, and a quintessential northwest feel, it was now a pile of burnt kindling and ash. But with great challenges come great opportunities. We decided to dive right in and begin a new era of the park. When asked what the board is going to do now, our answer is simple: better.

We have begun to crawl out of the ashes and build a new vision for the park. There have been many accomplishments to date, including the removal of all danger trees, 2,500+ new plantings, an unbelievable amount of clean-up, and the development of this revision plan.

We did not do this on our own. We are extremely grateful to all those who helped us and are committed to helping in the future to make this plan a reality. Thanks to the University of Oregon's Landscape Architecture program and National Park Service - Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA), Blue River Park has a clear vision and is slowly coming back to life after the wildfire.

It is our great privilege to serve on the Blue River Parks and Recreation Board and we look forward to continuing our work with the community to make Blue River Park a McKenzie Valley gem.

With grateful regards,

*The Blue River Parks and Recreation Board*



# Blue River Park

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# Acknowledgements

## RECOGNITION TO ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

Blue River Park continues to be an integral part of the community, and we offer thanks to all those who have supported it through the years. The board offers special thanks to the following contributors. With their help, the park has a beautiful vision supported by comments from residents from the greater McKenzie River Valley who took surveys which helped prioritize our progress.

BLUE RIVER PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD	MCKENZIE RIVER REFLECTIONS	PURE WATER PARTNERS
EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD	MCKENZIE RIVER TRUST	OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY	MCKENZIE WATERSHED COUNCIL	SERENDIPITY COFFEE COMPANY
LANE ELECTRIC	NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RIVERS, TRAILS, AND CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM	SUULUTAAQ, INC.
MCKENZIE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	NINKASI BREWING COMPANY	TAKODA'S RESTAURANT
MCKENZIE RIVER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE		UNIVERSITY OF OREGON DEPT. OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

# Overview & Guiding Principles

Blue River Park is the heart of the McKenzie Valley. For nearly 70 years, it has been a treasured hub for the local community, and a draw for the many visitors who come to experience its beauty and nature. In September 2020, a devastating wildfire destroyed much of the community of Blue River and its beloved park.

The devastation to our park must be seen as an opportunity to provide the community and visitors to the McKenzie Valley with better facilities and a more useful shared space. The Blue River Park District wants to rebuild back better than ever before, once again becoming a favorite place for locals and visitors to experience the beauty and joy of the McKenzie River Valley.

In January of 2021, the University of Oregon's Landscape Architecture Program offered to help redesign Blue River Park, and a concept plan was soon drafted. In 2022, the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA), funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), was recruited to help with community outreach efforts. Based on input from community members and other stakeholders, a recovery master plan was finalized.

The goal of this plan is to plot a road map to rebuild Blue River Community Park. The document aims to provide options, guidance, and inspiration to the board when deciding which project to tackle next. We believe that this plan takes into account the needs of residents to have a safe and practical place to recreate, while also being enjoyable for tourists.



## Guiding Principles

**CELEBRATION & COMMUNITY:** The park will serve as a gathering space for the community to come together. It will have elements which are accessible and interesting to all ages and stages. It will include bright colors and opportunities for play that will bring an element of celebration.

**REMEMBERING & HEALING:** After the difficult months in 2020 and 2021, Blue River locals deserve a place to rest, reflect, and heal. The park can also serve as a reminder of the rich, joyful, and sometimes challenging history of Blue River and the McKenzie River Valley.

**LAND CARE:** The Blue River Park Wildfire Recovery Master Plan is crafted with water health and ecosystem functioning in mind so people can still enjoy the beauty of the McKenzie River Valley for generations to come. We encourage the use of native plants, local and durable materials, and permeable surfaces.

## Partnerships

NPS-RTCA supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the nation. NPS-RTCA assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors. As a collaborative partner, NPS-RTCA helps achieve successful project outcomes by engaging communities in the visioning, planning, and implementation of each project.

The mission of the Federal Emergency Management Agency – Community Assistance Recovery Support Function (CARSF) is to enable local governments to effectively and efficiently carry out community-based recovery planning and management in a post-disaster environment. CARSF also supports state or territorial governments in developing programs of support for local recovery planning.



**NPS-RTCA**  
Rivers, Trails and Conservation  
Assistance Program



**FEMA**

# About Blue River Park

## **A Brief History**

Blue River Park was created in 1952 as a result of the generous gift by Fred and Dorothy Behm. A logger and tree farmer, Fred and his wife Dorothy moved to Blue River in 1941 and purchased local timberland. During their time in Blue River, they became active members of the community and supported local causes. After the Behm's donated a portion of their property to the community to establish Blue River Park, it was overseen by a group of volunteer board members. In 1984 the park became an Oregon Special District and continues to be managed by volunteers and funded by donations.

Throughout the years, all sorts of events have taken place in Blue River Park, including Little League Baseball, community softball, high school track, square dancing, Easter egg hunts, and fundraisers. A children's playground and picnic areas provided a place to relax and enjoy simple activities. The tennis court and basketball court added additional recreation for locals and visitors. In 2014 the Ford Institute Leadership Program completed a project to create a two-mile circular trail through the park.



## **The Holiday Farm Wildfire**

On Labor Day in 2020, the Holiday Farm Wildfire started during a wind-storm near Rainbow, Oregon, burning more than 170,000 acres and ranking it among the largest in Oregon history. Blue River Park, along with most of the surrounding town, was devastated by the wildfire.

- 173,025 acres were burned
- 768 homes were destroyed and another 46 were damaged
- 470 additional structures were destroyed and another 89 damaged
- 250 trees were destroyed along with numerous structures in Blue River



*Blue River Park post-wildfire*

## Restoring Blue River Park

Almost immediately after the wildfire, volunteers began a massive clean-up operation. A great deal of work is already underway at Blue River Park. All maintenance and improvements to the park have been provided by community volunteers and donations, with oversight provided by Blue River Parks and Recreation Board – a local board of volunteers. Thanks to a herculean clean-up effort, the park was able to reopen to the community.

Other accomplishments include:

- 225+ dangerous trees removed
- 2500+ trees and shrubs planted by 72 volunteers
- New signs installed
- A new stage poured
- Wood carving event provided an artful attraction to trees coming down
- The first community event – an Easter egg hunt for local families





# Redesigning the Park

## DRAFT CONCEPT PLAN

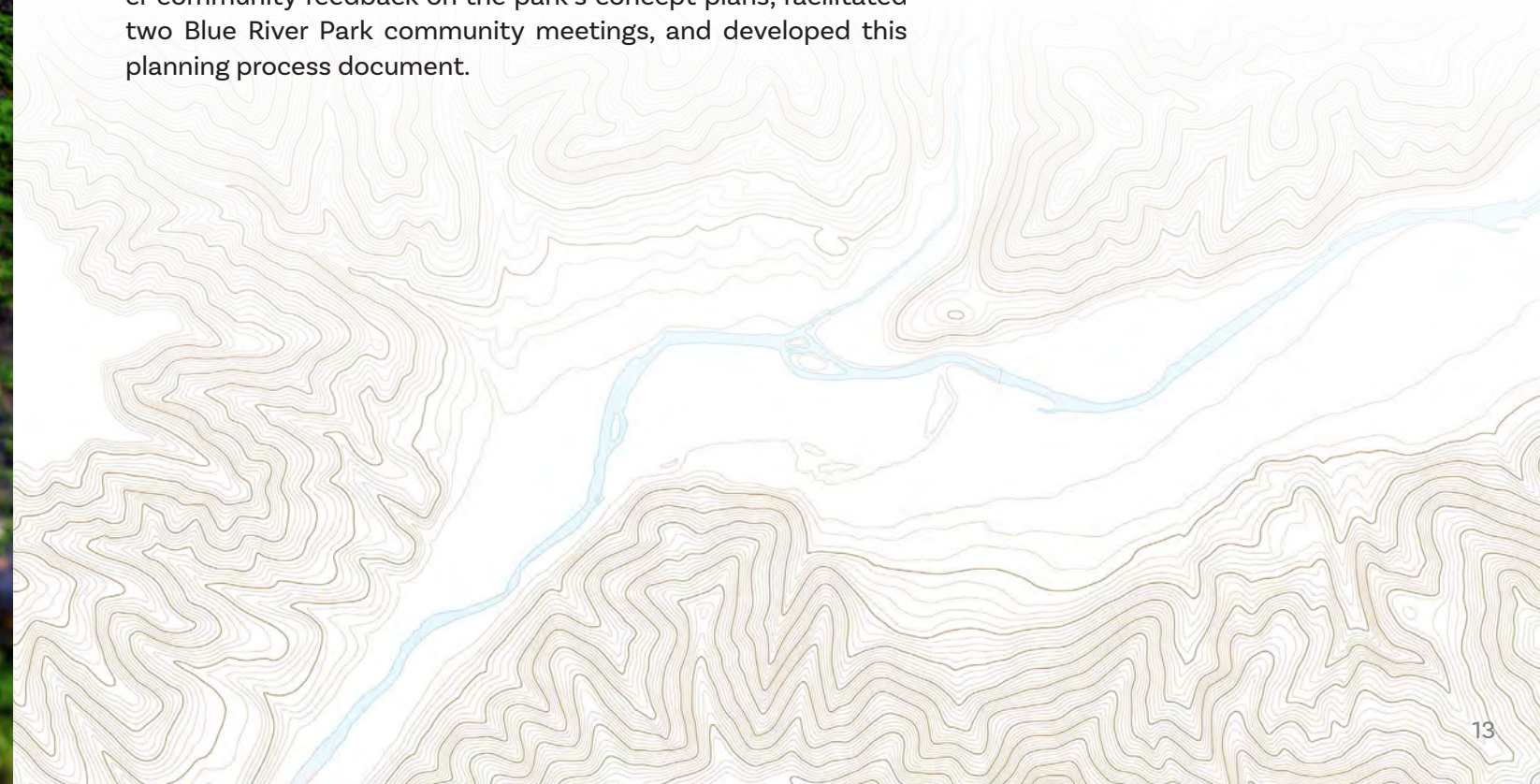
### **University of Oregon Assistance**

In January of 2021, the University of Oregon (UO)'s Landscape Architecture Program helped redesign Blue River Park following the Holiday Farm Wildfire. Audrey Rycewicz, a Master of Landscape Architecture student, developed the first draft of the park's new concept plan with supervision from Arica Durkhoop-Galas, a licensed Landscape Architect and UO faculty member. Over the course of six months, they attended community meetings and the Holiday Farm Wildfire Advisory Board conversations with the goal of listening and participating in the discussions when helpful. From this wealth of local knowledge and creative revisioning of the space, they were able to craft a concept plan to guide the rebuilding of the park.

Following the first draft, Audrey continued working on Blue River Park through a practicum with NPS-RTCA and participated in community meetings to share and revise the plan. By the spring of 2022, Audrey completed a revised plan that included 3-D renderings for the design proposal.

### **NPS-RTCA & FEMA Assistance**

Thanks to funding from FEMA, NPS-RTCA's project manager Dan Miller and Community Assistance Fellow Taylor Bowden, provided technical assistance to help the Blue River Park District gather community feedback on the park's concept plans, facilitated two Blue River Park community meetings, and developed this planning process document.





# Community Engagement

## SURVEYS & MEETINGS

### Blue River Park Community Survey

The Blue River Park Planning team, comprised of Tony Casad (Blue River Parks Board), Audrey Rycewicz (UO), Dan Miller (NPS-RTCA), and Taylor Bowden (NPS-RTCA), developed an online survey to reach Blue River and other McKenzie River area residents. This 20-question survey asked community members about their vision for the new Blue River Park to understand how they would use the park, the amenities they felt were important, and the values they wanted to see reflected in the new design. The survey received 86 responses within two weeks, with over 80% representing residents from Blue River and the McKenzie River area. The survey also shared a map of the draft concept plan and asked for direct feedback on the proposed design. (See appendix for the full set of survey responses).

### Blue River Park Community Meeting

The Blue River Park Planning Team facilitated an open house community meeting on the morning of February 12, 2022 through Zoom. The meeting was advertised through a combination of online and social media outlets, invitations to local leaders, and physical postings in the Blue River community. The meeting opened with a presentation from the Blue River Park Board going over the history of the park leading up to its current state after the Holiday Farm Wildfire, and how the community can stay involved. The meeting continued with a presentation of the draft concept plan and ended with a question-and-answer session. The open house lasted over an hour and there were more than 40 people in attendance. A recording of the meeting was posted on the Blue River Park website for those that could not make the scheduled time, and people were invited to use the website's comment portal in case they wanted to provide additional feedback to the Blue River Park Board. (See appendix for a link to the meeting recording).

### Response Summary

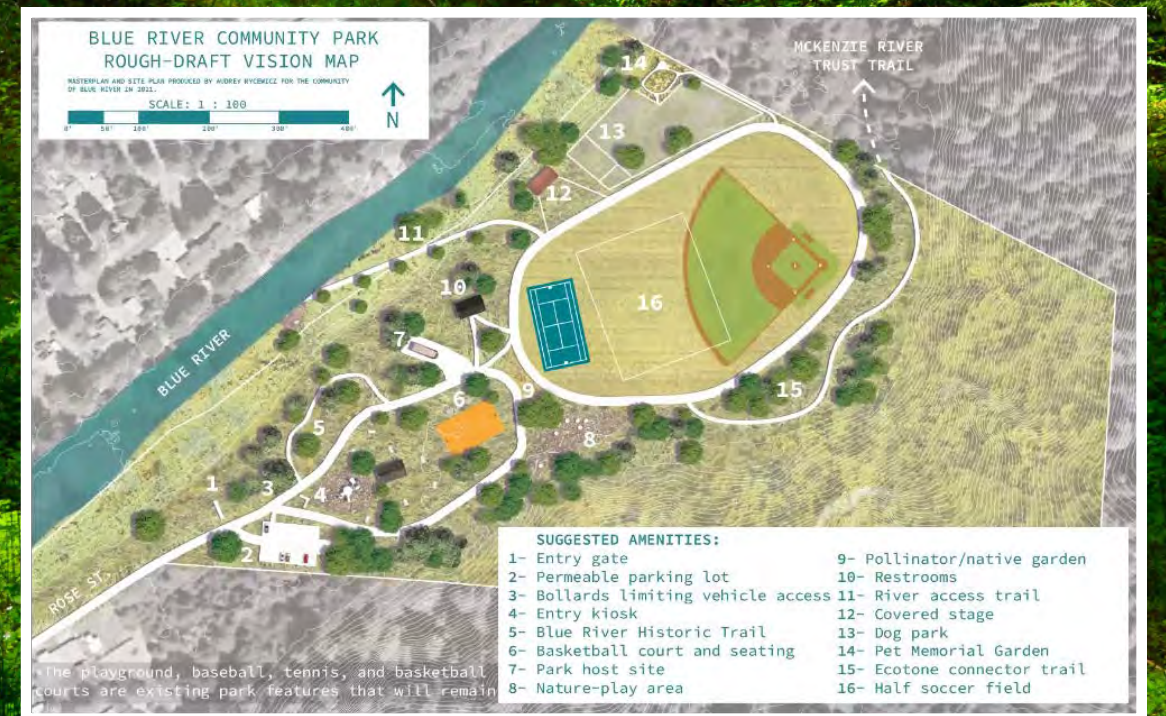
After compiling and analyzing the feedback from the survey and community meeting, the planning team and Blue River Park Board member Joshua Cloke met to brainstorm edits to the draft concept plan. Each proposed amenity was revisited for possible changes; some saw no changes while others were cut entirely. All changes were based on the majority of feedback received. These recommendations were shared with the full Blue River Park Board and received approval at the March 2, 2022, board meeting before moving forward.

### Final Survey and Community Meeting

After completing the revised concept plan, a second online survey was shared with the community to get clarification on specific park amenities, explain the phasing of park development, and inquire about funding initiatives. The survey went live on April 20, 2022 and received 25 responses.

Another community meeting took place on April 30, 2022, to share the revised concept plan for Blue River Park. Community members were presented with a 3-D virtual walkthrough to envision the park, which reflected their feedback. The meeting was followed by an additional conversation about funding and sponsorship.

The concept plan presented at the virtual community meeting.



# Revised Concept Plan

The recommended changes were applied to the concept plan, and Audrey Rycewicz generated a revised plan and 3-D renderings.

## AMENITIES

- 1 PERMEABLE PARKING LOT
- 2 PICNIC & BBQ AREAS
- 3 PLAYGROUND
- 4 NATURE-PLAY AREA
- 5 BLUE RIVER HISTORIC TRAIL
- 6 CAMP HOST
- 7 BASKETBALL COURT
- 8 BATHROOMS
- 9 STAGE LOADING ZONE
- 10 COVERED STAGE
- 11 BASEBALL DIAMOND
- 12 OPEN LAWN
- 13 TENNIS COURT
- 14 POLLINATOR GARDEN
- 15 POTENTIAL DISC GOLF COURSE
- 16 OFF-LEASH DOG PARK
- 17 MEMORIAL GARDEN



## 1. PERMEABLE PARKING LOT

The parking area will include permeable pavers that allow for stormwater infiltration and runoff to an adjacent rain garden to support water quality and river health. The parking area will accommodate about six cars with one spot dedicated to handicap access. Additional parking can be found along Rose St. In the case of a large event, overflow parking and a shuttle service would be utilized.



## 2. PICNIC & BBQ AREAS

There are three covered picnic areas outfitted with BBQ grills. This area is close to the playgrounds so that families can keep an eye on their kids while having a cookout.



## 3. PLAYGROUND (STANDARD PLAY)

The playground would include standard equipment such as slides and swings.



## 4. NATURE-PLAY AREA

The nature-play area contains more natural equipment such as stones and tree logs, arranged in a way for kids to enjoy less structured play. Plantings in this area should be non-toxic and thorn-free.



## 5. RIVER FRONT HISTORIC TRAIL AND KIOSK

This trail would run along the entire north side of Blue River, connecting to several park amenities, like the dog park. At the edge of the park, this trail would also connect to the existing McKenzie River Trust Trail. This path will be made ADA accessible and have seating along it for everyone to enjoy views of the river. The historical aspect of this trail will be highlighted through educational and interpretive signage as well as local artifacts along the way, such as the heritage log display. The trail will be vegetated with native riparian plantings to contribute to a healthy river ecosystem.

## 6. CAMP HOST/RV SPOT

An area for a camp host or RV spot will be included in the design. A park host would be able to assist with park maintenance and monitoring to keep the park safe and in good condition.

## 7. BASKETBALL COURT

The basketball court would be resurfaced and include additional markings for futsal players. Included with the basketball court would be new bleachers for spectator seating.

## 8. BATHROOMS

ADA accessible bathrooms will be included in the design to meet visitor needs. In the case of large events, portable bathrooms would be brought in so as not to over-burden the system.



## 9. STAGE LOADING ZONE

The ADA accessible graveled area will be set close to the stage to offer interior park access for any event or maintenance needs.

## 10. COVERED STAGE

The covered stage will have a concrete pad measuring 30 feet by 40 feet. The stage area can house a full-sized band and can also be used for other events such as markets, community gatherings, or other performances. The stage is slightly raised and looks out onto the lawn area for audience seating.



## 11. BASEBALL DIAMOND

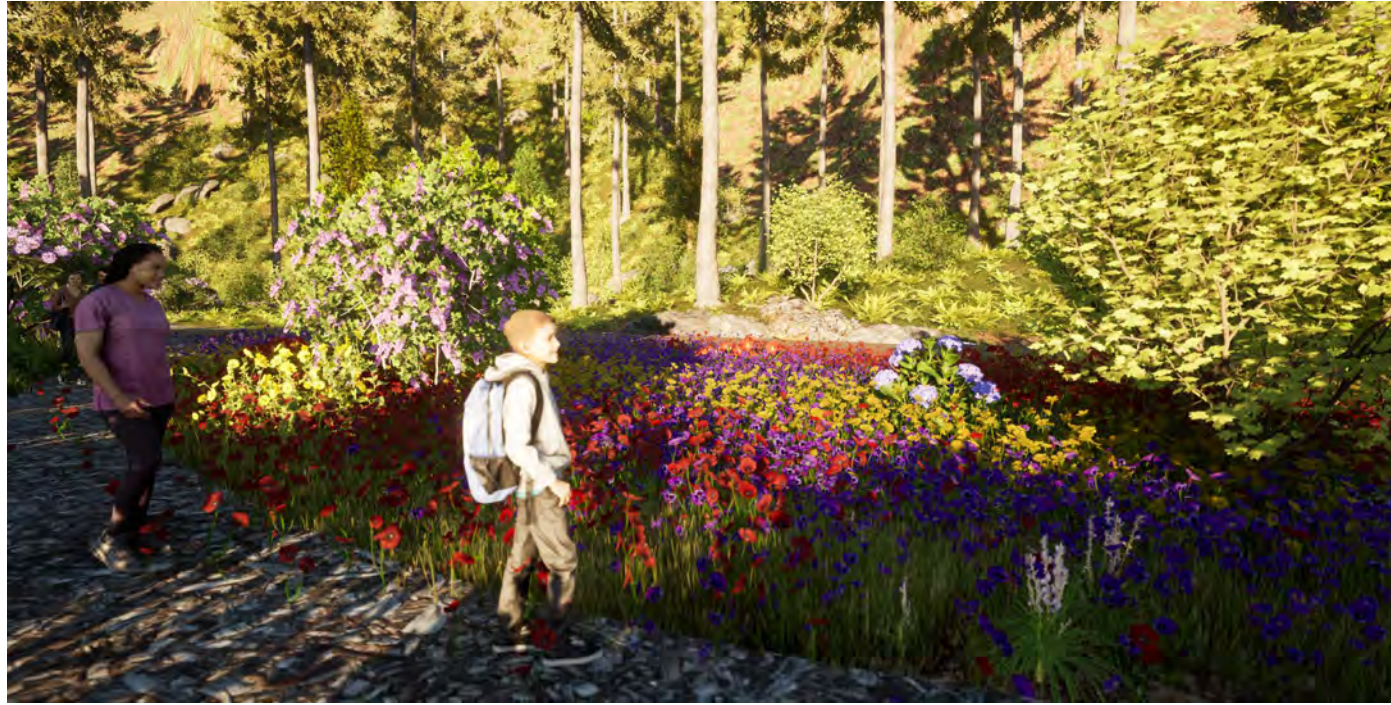
A full-sized baseball diamond will be kept in the design and improved from its former state.

## 12. OPEN LAWN

The open lawn allows for un-programmed activities like play, picnicking, or large community gatherings. It also acts as audience seating for any stage performances.

## 13. TENNIS COURT

The tennis court will be updated by being resurfaced and include additional markings for pickleball. When players are not using the paved area, it can also serve for other activities like rollerblading or skateboarding.



#### 14. POLLINATOR GARDEN

This garden will support local ecologies by providing food and habitat for pollinators and birds. It will also serve as a beautiful and colorful seasonal garden for the community to enjoy. This garden would include signage and labels to educate park visitors on these plants.

#### 15. POTENTIAL DISC GOLF COURSE

We are considering space for a 9-hole disc golf course running along the south-eastern edge of the park where it would minimize interruptions to other amenities and visitors. This disc golf course could attract more tourism to the area as this sport is rapidly growing in popularity.



#### 16. OFF-LEASH DOG PARK

The dog park provides an area for pet-owners to exercise their dogs in a dedicated environment. The design has been extended to include more space, with the front area being fairly open, while the back area has tree-coverage. The dog park would include agility features, designated trash areas, doggy bags, and water.



#### 17. MEMORIAL GARDEN

This tucked-away garden is dedicated to those that suffered during the Holiday Farm Wildfire. It will be designed as a restful and healing space for reflection by including comfortable seating, dedication plaques, and beautiful native plants.

# Next Steps

We need your help!

## VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers will be assigned to assist with projects. If you are interested in helping and have a specific project in mind, please submit your request to the board at: [blueriverpark.com/contact](http://blueriverpark.com/contact)

## FUNDRAISING

Fundraising efforts are underway to finance costs to complete the vision. Contributions great or small are appreciated. Mail your contribution to or donate at:

*Blue River Park District*  
*P.O. Box 292, Blue River, OR 97413*  
Subject: BR Park Rebuild

Visit us online: **BlueRiverPark.com**

# Appendix & References

**Blue River Park Official Website**

**First Survey Responses**

**First Community Meeting Recording**

**Second Survey**

**Responses**

**Second Community Meeting Recording**

**Historic Content**