



# SOUTH LYNNWOOD PARK

Cultural Research Report

## **Cultural Cartographies**

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## SOUTH LYNWOOD PARK

### CULTURAL RESEARCH REPORT

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#### INTRODUCTION

Parks are more than green spaces in urban environments, they are dynamic socio-ecological systems that bring communities and nature together. A great park starts with a vision and a plan, but it only becomes a real community asset when it attends to the needs and interests of the area or neighborhood in which it is located. In consequence, data and information are pivotal in the design of a park project, but its core foundation relies on the insights from the people who live, work, and actively transform the neighborhood.

The South Lynnwood Park was built in 1978, but since then minimal renovations have been done. Currently, the South Lynnwood Park not necessarily meets the needs of the surrounding area, failing to attract members of the community as might be expected in such a dense neighborhood. In 2018, the Trust for Public Land and City of Lynnwood started a series of activities to get the community involved in the renovation of the park. This report, based on the initial project proposed by the City of Lynnwood, includes the insights of users of the park and neighbors living nearby to better inform the design of programs of community integration and placemaking (spatial cultural appropriation).

The overall primary goal of this report is to assess the current conditions of South Lynnwood Park from the users’ perspective and to identify the preferences of potential users to inform the renovation of the park. Public consultation began in August 2018 and continued through September 2018. The recommendations listed in this report are based on what members of the surrounding community expressed via surveys and interviews.

## SOUTH LYNNWOOD PARK

Acquired in 1975 and developed in 1978, [South Lynnwood Park](#) (SLP) is located at 20915 61<sup>st</sup> Avenue West, in the south Lynnwood neighborhood in western Washington. Extending over 4.5 Acres, one acre of the park is forested with the remainder developed for active recreational use. Amenities include:

- [Play Structure](#) (ages 5-12)
- [Tot Lot](#), (ages 2-4)
- [2 Tennis Courts](#)
- Basketball Court
- Ball Wall
- [Large Grass Play Area](#)
- [Forested Area](#)
- [Walking Trail](#) (0.2-mile)
- [Interurban Trail Access](#) (access is available at the south end of the park).
- [Picnic Facilities](#)
- [Restrooms](#)
- On-Street Parking

Currently, most of the infrastructure is in poor condition and plans to update the playground are already in motion according to an article on the [Herald Net](#) (Rikki, 2018). But much remain to be done regarding not only an upgrade in its infrastructure but in terms of assessing what type of upgrades will be more culturally/practically relevant for the different communities that could potentially use this space. In response, the following **RESEARCH QUESTION** was proposed: **how to make South Lynwood Park a more culturally relevant space for its surrounding communities?** The expected outcomes of such approach aimed to identify the most relevant upgrades, both programmatic and in terms of infrastructure, that could be implemented at South Lynnwood Park. Building on the data obtained a number of recommendations emerged—which will be discussed at the end of this report.

## RESEARCH METHODS

In terms of **METHODS** this project unfolded in two stages: exploration and analysis. The first phase was devoted to identifying key (present and potential) stakeholders at South Lynwood Park. The above was achieved primarily through informal and open-ended interviews conducted with subjects identified through snowball and purposive sampling. Fieldwork was conducted at intermittent periods in South Lynwood park and adjacent communities—including other public spaces and private homes. The project formally initiated in late July and extended until late August. The design of the tools used to build this report was informed by initial improvement plans facilitated by City of Lynnwood, neighborhood census data, as well as digital maps of the park. This data guided the design of the social assessment.

To begin the exploratory assessment, we conducted several visits to South Lynwood Park (at different days of the week and at different times) to conduct on-site visual assessments to understand the current state and usage of the park facilities. During the months of August and September 2018, we attended several events organized by City of Lynnwood in South Lynwood Park and interviewed attendees using a six-question, semi-structured interview, to identify current park uses and community interests. In addition, we went from door-to-door to businesses, surrounding organizations and living communities within the South Lynwood neighborhood to invite neighbors to participate in a short semi-structured interview (see Appendix 1). Questions were available in English and Spanish, and bilingual interviewers conducted the study. The interview protocol covered topics around awareness and usage of the park, including perceptions and preferences. All interviews remained anonymous and no demographic data was collected. The qualitative data collected included notes and quotes from semi-structured interviews, field notes from on-site observations, and photographic documentation. Complementing this methodology, a [short survey](#) (see Appendix 2) was developed aiming to capture key demographic and cultural information around the park.

The second phase triangulated and analyzed all data obtained in order to define key infrastructure and programming to be implemented in the park. Phase two went from mid-August to late September. A draft of the final report was produced at the end of this period. For the analysis, the data collected through the different approaches was triangulated to maximize the reliability of the information contained in this report. Full team debriefs were conducted every other week to discuss observations, to clarify insights, and to reflect on the overall research process. Research results will be presented and discussed with city officials during different meetings to be scheduled.

## RESULTS OF EXPLORATORY PHASE

### *Lack of visibility and accessibility*

During the exploratory phase of this research, an indisputable fact emerged: **local people are unaware of the existence of South Lynwood Park**. This was made obvious in the different interviews conducted—and to a degree explains the null response of people in the survey. It is clear that only a handful of families or individuals know the park, and even a smaller number of them actually use it. A few of those individuals who actually acknowledge the location or existence of the park stated that they prefer to go to North Lynwood Park because “that one actually had things to offer, like games, a spray park and places to do exercise”. The implications of this consistent lack of knowledge about the existence of South Lynwood Park are considerable, not only for this research project but especially for its management.

Approximately ninety percent of the interviewed neighbors and merchants interviewed off-site did not know the existence of the park. The reasons why people may be unaware of the park’s existence are multiple: the park’s location plays a crucial role on this—it is not only hidden away from Pacific Island Highway where major traffic of people takes place but also from 208st SW, a main artery in the neighborhood. Unless therefore someone takes you there, you know the park exists, or you run into it by accident, people have no reason no know of its existence. This invisibility is exacerbated by the poor or inexistent signings around the park, both physically but also virtual—there is very little (or null) information online about the park, its resources or events that may take place there. The few signals located in the park are in English and not necessarily visible from the distance. This seems to have a negative impact that affects the visibility and perception of the park, even in nearby neighbors. It is also important to note that accessibility to the park is limited; no major routes of public transportation pass by or stop close the park. The nearest bus station, located ~5 blocks away on Pacific Island (route 101) is more than 2,700 feet away. The mere logistic of how to get to the park can certainly discourage people that lack private transportation. In this context, potential users of the park is likely limited to people who live adjacent to it.

Figure 1: Current signing at SLP



According to our interviews nonetheless, even people living or working a few blocks from the park ignored its existence. Very few people working on the different commercial establishments located around the intersection of Pacific Highway and 208st were aware of the park. Part of this lack of awareness of the existence of the park is the mix urban fabric that surrounds the space, parts industrial area, interspace by two large low-income gated communities, a number of 1960/70s middle income blocks and very recently developed high-end houses. Within this complex fabric, the presence of the park is not intuitive.

SLP's invisibility within the neighborhood is due in part to:

- Location
- [Poor signing](#)
- Scarce infrastructure (attractions)
- [Security concerns](#)
- [Limited maintenance](#)
- Difficult accessibility (no major routes of public transportation)
- Lack of relevance for the surrounding communities as a public space

In this context, it is clear that before the city can meaningfully address what type of infrastructure can or should be offered in the park or what kind of aesthetics could be culturally appealing to the surrounding communities. The inevitable first true challenge involves addressing the park's invisibility and lack of accessibility; only by having this consideration at the forefront of any proposed programs or initiatives, the city aspire to make South Lynwood Park a relevant space for everyone.

*Infrastructure: from Space to Place*

The Trust for Public Land and City Parks Alliance (see Appendix 3) define placemaking “as a cooperative, community-based process using arts and cultural expression to create or rejuvenate parks and open spaces, thus deepening a sense of place and inspiring community pride”. As Lynnwood continues to grow and attracting a diverse population, designing spaces to promote a sense of belonging through community cohesion becomes pivotal. The challenge, regarding South Lynnwood Park, resides in co-designing infrastructure that is relevant for the communities that the city aspires to serve in this public space. The city has already proposed a number of structural improvements on the park; however, much remains to be considered regarding community input—asking the few visitors of the park what type of improvements they wish to see taking place in the park as rather little representativeness in terms of the target communities the park aspires to serve. In other words, with only a fraction of all potential visitors being surveyed—the ones that actually use the park—confirmation bias is present. For instance, if some of the visitors are tennis players and they go to the park to play tennis, if asked in a survey what they would like to see improved in the park, they will likely request improved tennis facilities. But this request may not be (culturally) representative of what the surrounding communities may feel they need, especially with all the cultural/class diversity of South Lynnwood. Therein the importance of community-based placemaking designs.

Based on direct observations and data collected through interviews we identified four main areas of usage of the park:

1. Playground, especially for younger children.
2. Trails: Walking (especially older people and parents with babies in strollers), running, and cycling (mostly adults using the bike trail).
3. Grassed areas: Physical activities including soccer. In addition, during the different visits to the park families took their dogs to play in the park as well.
4. Basketball court: Used by young adults to play basketball and used by teens to play ground games.

Based on these observations, some of the proposed infrastructural changes at SLP are obvious. The poor conditions of certain areas are self-evident and they need to be fixed. However, not all proposed actions may be the best fit for the park, especially if the intent is to transform a (physical) space into a (meaningful) place.

## PROGRAMMING: OPTION A



Figure 2- Programs proposal for South Lynwood Park (design provided by City of Lynnwood)

Even when exercise seem to be a reason for the use of the facilities, socialization seemed to be the main driver for visiting the park. This was corroborated with the preferences indicated during interviews. Individuals consulted on-site emphasized their interest to have access to better facilities: More community activities/events; a fenced basketball court and a space to play soccer; a new and bigger playground, with an area for ground-games; a covered area with more sitting options, picnic tables and grilling facilities; an area for skating; safer restrooms and more lightening; more accessible entrances for people with disabilities.

These are to a large degree basic services any park should offer. In this context, it is clear that the people who use the park perceive it as poorly maintained. This perception of abandonment can be confirmed with photographic evidence collected: Paved trails ([photo 1](#); [photo 2](#); [photo 3](#)); playground ([photo 4](#); [photo 5](#); [photo 6](#)); restrooms ([photo 7](#); [photo 8](#)); dirt areas ([photo 9](#); [photo 10](#)); signs ([photo 11](#); [photo 12](#)); open drainage ([photo 13](#)); basketball and tennis courts ([photo 14](#), [photo 15](#)), and semi-cleared spots ([photo 16](#), [photo 17](#)). All of these images show at different scales de degree of abandonment of the park. Condition that send a strong message to the surrounding communities (re “you do not deserve basic services; we will not invest in you”). In turn, few people make this park their own.

For this reason, it is fundamental that the city invest in this park, ideally co-designing its infrastructure/programs with the aid of its surrounding communities—the only stakeholders that can truly define what services will be relevant for the greatest number. In this context, it is highly recommended that the city creates partnerships with already-existing programs devote to co-design communal spaces; a participatory approach that will no doubt positively impact the two

greatest challenges to address at SLP, namely lack of visibility and the poor condition of its infrastructure.

Photographic evidence:



*Paved trails: Photos 1, 2, 3.*



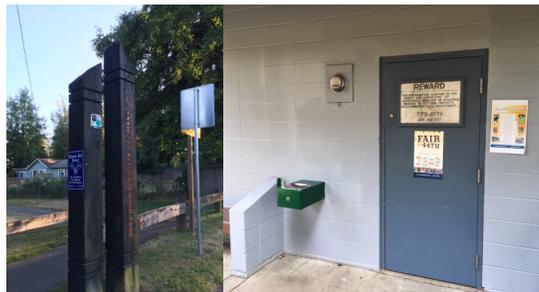
*Playground: Photos 4, 5, 6.*



*Restrooms: Photos 7, 8.*



*Dirt areas: Photos 9, 10.*



*Signs: Photos 11, 12.*



*Open drainage: Photo 13.*



*Basketball and tennis courts: Photos 14, 15.*



*Semi-cleared spots: Photos 16, 17.*

### *Culture or the aesthetics of inclusion*

A park is a common ground. A common ground between differences in social class, ethnicity, “race”, or culture. In this tenet, research participants shared an understanding that aesthetical considerations around colors and cultural motifs were at this stage, the less important problem for the park. Regarding the park’s general appearance, users did not show any preference for types of art, but most of the people interviewed said that they would like to see more colors in the facilities and around the park, as well as better maintained vegetation, especially regarding bushes and blackberry shrubs. Thus, even though the expressed request around this research project was to investigate what cultural aesthetics should ornament the park’s new infrastructure, it soon became obvious that other considerations were more pressing, like communicating that, the park exists and what it offers.

The development of strong communication channels (language appropriate and culturally relevant) to encourage the participation of the communities around the park, especially to participate in recurring events, might also help attracting visitors. Although social media is a commonly used channel, other forms of media should be used, included press media and media offered in other languages. Consider that flyers and digital messages have a limited reception in immigrant communities. Other effective channels of communication are community and religious organizations in the area. The creation of community events to participate in the rehabilitation of the park can contribute to the process of placemaking.

In this sense, a more festive palette of colors and proper lighting suffice at this stage of the park’s renovation to encourage placemaking. The cultural appropriation of these space will be gradual, as different type of people find in the park a space to coexist. According to the U.S. Census, Hispanics/Latinxs, Koreans, Ukrainians, Philippines, and Vietnamese are well represented in the area. Yet, it is Somali and Ethiopian families the ones to visit the park beyond their Caucasian counterparts. This equation will likely change as the park is revitalize and neighbor’s participation substantially increases. Which means new cultural aesthetics may be relevant at different stages. What matters now is that the park finds in the infrastructure, places to socialize and play—from grilling areas to sport courts. Once these spaces become relevant places of interaction, a number of city-lead programs can organize user of all ages to create/design/implement cultural motifs, like murals (a project amicable to take place on first instance in the handball court wall). The design and creation of other murals, fenced art, and

even the installation of a community garden can contribute to this objective as well. Other elements that users suggested could also be added to the current park are:

- Comfortable seating areas
- Trails with separate walking and cycling lanes
- Bike racks
- Snake run/ skate dot provides beginner-level skaters and bikers with a space to gather and develop their skills
- More colors across the park
- More drinking fountains and appropriate garbage/recycling containers
- A separate area for dogs; add a dog waste bag dispenser to encourage people to pick up after their pets.
- Interactive fountain or water features
- More ramps and accessible paths for people in wheelchairs and strollers

In sum, it is thus that time will define what is aesthetically relevant for people visiting South Lynwood Park; what matters is that park is known and what it offers.

## IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

The concepts, ideas, and images presented on the following pages are intended to serve as source of guidance and inspiration for the development of infrastructure and artwork, based on the information gathered for this report and the preliminary ideas shared by City of Lynwood.

### *-Comfortable seating areas:*

The lack of appropriate seating was a point made by most of the people interviewed. Art can be incorporated in the design of new seating spaces. This can include not only benches, but also picnic tables and covered spaces. In particular, immigrants tend to be more family-oriented; 40% of those who were consulted expressed that they would like to see more grilling and eating areas.



Figure 3. Ideas for seating areas: Benches, picnic tables, eating covered areas.

*-Trails and additional infrastructure for bicycles:*

Currently, part of the existing trails are shared with the interurban trail, used by many biking commuters. The fact is that the trails are being used by people of all ages, families with strollers and toddlers, as well as by people with dogs on leash. By adding a special lane for bicycles, as well as a zone for additional biking and skating activities, more people would feel more comfortable using the park and different audiences would be served.



Figure 4. Ideas for bike trails, areas, and racks..

*-Playgrounds:*

90% of the people consulted expressed that the existing playgrounds at SLP are outdated and not suitable for all children. Some children complained about the current type of swings since they get constantly hurt. In addition, simpler path games, such as four-square were popular during the events organized by City of Lynnwood such as Meet at the Park and Free Meals organized by the Edmonds Foundation. Even more, part of the playgrounds could include some water features.



Figure 5. Ideas for games and playgrounds.

*-Sports courts and other delimited areas:*

A great concern of the users is the fact that the basketball court is not delimited, which creates problems not only to recover balls, but also to safety to the children playing in the near playground. In addition, many users expressed that they prefer to play soccer rather than basketball or tennis. Fenced multi-sports courts can attend the different interests. In addition, a delimited area for unleashed dogs is suggested based on the current usage of the park. These delimited areas will provide safety to all users while promoting a sense of respect. Art fences and art posts will help to make these areas more colorful and attractive.



Figure 6. Ideas for delimited areas: Sports and off leash dog areas.

*-Community-building and place-making events:*

Most of the people interviewed indicated that if there were more events at the park, properly announced, they would visit more the park. This constitutes a great opportunity to engage with the community through public art, cultural and even sports programs. City of Seattle publishes and distributes a brochure called “Arts in Parks,” where they announce the planned programs for the year, making emphasis in involving diverse communities.



Figure 7. Ideas for community events: Community-created murals, movie nights, festivals, sports tournaments.

*-Increase accessibility:*

Among the people consulted who use the park, an area of concern is the few services available across the park in terms of drinking water fountains, garbage bins, and accessible ramps. Most of the existing facilities are centered on the restrooms and all messages are in English, even when the presence of international immigrants in the area is notorious.



Figure 8. Accessible features: Drinking fountains, garbage bins, welcoming signs in different languages, ramps for wheelchairs and strollers.

*-Ecological restoration and environmental justice:*

Part of the complaints received regarding the park is the abundance of blackberry bushes, which can be harmful, especially for children, but also the bushed areas where needles and other garbage are usually found. This is not only an issue of safety, but also of environmental justice. The South Lynnwood community could be involved in different restoration projects including cleaning and thinning, incorporation of native plants, and the creation of community gardens.



Figure 9. Environmental features: Water capture bins, native ground covers, art based on cultural-environment local features, community gardens and events for cleaning and restoring the natural areas.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This research identified three key areas of concern: lack of visibility/accessibility; poor infrastructure; the challenge of cultural relevance. It is our understanding that addressing the first two issues from a community-based participatory approach will inevitably solve the last concern. Following these logic, we conclude with the following recommendations:

- To place South Lynnwood park at the reach of people.
- To reimagine South Lynnwood park's spaces and services through a participatory, place-building process.
- To allow this participatory process to define the cultural faces of South Lynnwood park.

Regarding specific artworks, this should be inclusive and accessible to diverse audiences. It should include communities across generations and cultures. Human populations are highly dynamic, while public spaces such as parks represent those gathering spaces to engage with individuals and families and begin authentic processes of community building. At the core of these processes should be the active involvement of the current and future users of the space. Furthermore, parks also constitute a space with socio-ecological communities interact. Processes of ecological restoration should be considered as part of the renovation plans. Especially when talking about community-building initiatives based on place-making efforts, principles of equity and environmental justice come into place. The South Lynnwood Park constitutes an excellent opportunity to embrace these principles, offer opportunities to individuals and families to connect with nature and promote environmental stewardship.

In sum, we suggest inviting the communities living in vicinity to the park to participate in part of the processes of renovation of the park as a way to increase visibility, ownership, but overall, a sense of community.

## REFERENCES

Rikki K. June 21, 2018. Muddy and Puddly, a Lynnwood Park needs a Facelift. Retrieved from: <https://www.heraldnet.com/news/city-plans-new-features-for-aging-south-lynnwood-park/>

## APPENDIX 1. LIST OF BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES VISITED

- Whispering Cedars Apartment Homes
- Pine Wood Square Apartments
- Donut Factory
- Pollos San Fernando
- Walgreens Pharmacy
- La Esperanza store and clinic
- Stadium Flowers
- Japanese Auto Care
- Culture Barber Studio
- Treat yourself Day Spa
- Toshis
- Jugos Mexicanos
- Salon de Belleza Yeraldi
- Taqueria El Antojo restaurant
- Café Neo
- YWCA Pathways for Women
- InterCP (Evangelical Church)
- Lynnwood Vision Center
- River of Life Christian Center
- United States Postal Service
- Edmonds Community College
- Edmonds School District
- College Place Middle School



We want to make South Lynwood Park part of your days!

*To do so, could you please answer a few questions? The information you provide is completely anonymous.*

¿Do you know South Lynwood Park or live nearby?

YES  NO

*In case you do not know, South Lynwood Park is located a mere half a block south of 208 st. on Avenue 61. You can access it too via the interurban trail.*

¿Do you or your family visit South Lynwood Park ?

YES  NO

¿How often you visit the park?

Never

Almost every day

Once a week

Once a month

Whenever there is an event

Could you explain your answer?

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What is it that you would like South Lynwood park to have for you to visit regularly?

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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What would you change or remove of the park?

1. 

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2. 

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We truly appreciate your answers! If you have any question or comment, please contact us at [slynnwoodpark@gmail.com](mailto:slynnwoodpark@gmail.com) or at the number 509 899 6339. We look forward seeing you at the Park!

***Survey for children attending the Free Lunch Program by the Edmonds School District Foundation in South Park Lynnwood // Encuesta para los niños que asisten al Programa de Lunch Gratis por parte de la Fundación de Edmonds School District en South Park Lynnwood..***

- 1.- ¿Qué tipo de juegos practicas regularmente? /What kind of games do you regularly play?
- 2.- cuando vienes al parque, ¿a qué juegas? / When you come to the park what do you play?
- 3.- ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta del parque? / What do you like most about the park?
- 4.- ¿Que no te gusta del parque? / What don't you like about the park?
- 5.- ¿Qué tipo de juegos te gustaría que hubiera en el parque? / What kind of games would you like to have at the park?
- 6.- ¿Qué tipo de actividades te gustaría que la gente hiciera en el parque? / What kind of activities would you like people to do in the park?
- 7.- ¿Qué tipos de dibujos, arte, colores, figuras, te gustaría que hubiera en el parque? /What types of drawings, art, color, figures, would you like to have in the park?

APPENDIX 3.

<https://www.weareteachers.com/a-fun-earth-day-recycled-garden-activity/>

<https://handsonaswegrow.com/nature-suncatcher-wind-chimes/>

<https://www.goodnet.org/articles/6-ecofriendly-arts-crafts-projects-for-kids>

<https://www.creativedisplaysnow.com/articles/creative-cardboard-environmentally-friendly-and-recycled-art-projects-for-kids/>

APPENDIX 4.

<../../../../CWU Teaching/CWU Evaluations/Comprobatorios/F180/Ethnicity@Lynnwood.pdf>