



MEMORANDUM

May 28, 2010

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Mary Bradford, Director of Parks
 Mike Riley, Deputy Director of Parks for Administration
 Gene Giddens, Acting Deputy Director of Parks for Operations
 Dr. John E. Hench, Ph.D., Chief, Park Planning and Stewardship Division

FROM: Brooke Farquhar, Supervisor, Park and Trail Planning Section Park Planning
 Stewardship Division
 Rachel Davis Newhouse, Planner Coordinator, Park and Trail Planning

RE: Urban Park Guidelines: Objectives, Outreach Strategy Recommendations, and Plan Schedule

RECOMMENDED PLANNING BOARD ACTION: Approval of Objectives, Outreach Strategy, and Schedule

Background

The Department of Parks, with input from the Chairman, recognizing that parks are critical to the formation of sustainable and healthy urban communities, included urban park planning in the Park Planning Work Program FY 08-10. The proposed Objectives of the *Urban Park Guidelines* are based on Staff's preliminary review and analysis of urban parks.

Discussions with staff from our agency and from two of the Urban Districts (Bethesda and Wheaton) have helped us begin to formulate a rationale for the pattern, roles, amount, location, design, ownership, funding, and operations of urban parks. During the past two years, Staff has applied this rationale when developing urban park recommendations in several community sector plans.

How the Urban Park Guidelines will be Used

The *Urban Park Guidelines* will be used by Staff to prepare recommendations to the Board for parks in community based master plans, park master plans, and park facility plans in urban areas. These guidelines should provide some predictability, consistency, and practicality to urban park recommendations, while allowing Staff and the Board flexibility to respond to changing interests, context of a particular community, demographic projections, and best practices.

Department of Parks Staff collaborates with Staff of the Planning Department to recommend a system of parks and open spaces as part of a holistic approach to planning communities, along with land use, transportation, environment, and design, for every community master plan. Staff would like to thank Glenn Kreger, John Carter, Dan Hardy, Mark Pfefferle, and Rose Krasnow and their staff in particular, for their collaboration as we worked through parks and open space recommendations for Germantown,

White Flint, Great Seneca Science Corridor, Takoma Langley, Kensington, Silver Spring Green Space, and currently Long Branch, Wheaton, and Chevy Chase Lakes. Staff will continue to work closely with the Planning Department staff as well as the business community, staff from the various urban districts (e.g. Silver Spring, Wheaton, and Bethesda), and members of the public to develop the *Urban Park Guidelines*.

Overall Goal and Key Question

The goal of the *Urban Park Guidelines* is to re-examine and re-define the role of urban parks in community life. While the County has been served well for years by its extensive park and trail system, its urban centers are largely lacking in accessible, conveniently located, public parkland. The pattern of urban parks must keep pace with the County’s vision, plans, and policies for compactly developed, sustainable urban areas.

A key question to be addressed is how to determine which spaces should be acquired and operated by the Department of Parks and which spaces are more appropriately provided and operated by the private sector. Parks are an integral part of the public open space system in each community. The *Urban Park Guidelines* will clarify what is the public sector’s responsibility in meeting urban open space needs, regardless of the private sector’s potential contribution, because it is impossible to predict the amount, location, and function of future privately-provided public spaces.

Figure 1: A comparison of public and private ownership of the public open space system in some of the Sector Plans recently reviewed and/or approved by the Planning Board.

Sector Plan	Publicly Owned Public Use Space		Public Connectivity	Privately Owned Public Use Space	
	Proposed	Existing	The System	Proposed	Existing
White Flint	Civic Green Expansion of White Flint Neighborhood Park	Wall Local Park White Flint Neighborhood Park	New Recreation Loop Green Streets Green Boulevards	New public open spaces associated with new transit, commercial and housing.	Public open spaces associated with existing mixed use development
Great Seneca Science Corridor	Civic Green Urban Recreational Park	Traville Local Park Great Seneca Extension Stream Valley Park Orchard Neighborhood Park Quince Orchard Valley Neighborhood Park	New Recreation Loop Green Streets Green Boulevards	New public open spaces associated with new transit stations, commercial and housing.	
Takoma Langley	Civic Green	Long Branch & Sligo Stream Valley Park Takoma Park Recreation Center	Bike Lane on University Green Streets	New public open spaces associated with new transit stations, commercial and housing.	

Building on the recommendations in recent sector plans and on “lessons learned” from recent research, design, and implementation of urban parks around the region and country, staff will develop guidelines for the pattern, amount, and implementation (ownership, management, programming, maintenance, policing, and funding) of urban parks in Montgomery County.

Proposed Objectives

Staff proposes the following objectives for the *Urban Park Guidelines*:

Objective 1: Define a new (third) park category in the classification system called Urban Parks.

Staff recommends that the definition, role, and functions of urban parks be revised to better reflect the important and evolving role urban parks play in community life. This would be best accomplished by creating a new category that will highlight the vision and role of urban parks to serve mixed-use, densely developing communities.

The existing Park Classification System includes urban parks under the Community Use category, and defines them as those that “serve ...highly urban areas, providing green space in an often otherwise concrete environment. These parks serve as a buffer between adjacent residential, office and commercial districts... (2005 Park Recreation & Open Space Plan / Land Preservation, Parks & Recreation Plan (PROS / LPPRP) p. III-12) ”.

Figure 2: Existing Park Classification System. Urban Parks are included in the Community Use category.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PARK CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM			
PARK TYPE	PARK TYPE DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL FACILITIES*	APPROXIMATE SIZE
COUNTY-WIDE PARKS – Parks in this category serve all residents of Montgomery County			
- Recreational Oriented Parks			
Regional Parks	Large Parks that provide a wide range of recreational opportunities but retain 2/3 or the acreage as conservation areas.	Picnic / playground areas, tennis courts, athletic fields, golf course, campgrounds, water-oriented recreation areas.	200 acres or more
Recreational Parks	Parks larger than 50 acres in size that are more intensively developed than Regional Parks, but may also may also contain natural areas.	Athletic fields, tennis courts, multi-use courts, picnic/playground areas, golf course, trails, natural areas.	50 acres or more
Special Parks	These parks include areas that contain features of historic and cultural significance.	Vary, but may include agricultural centers, garden, small conference centers, historic structures, etc.	Varies
- Conservation Oriented Parks			
Stream Valley Parks	Interconnected linear parks along major stream valleys providing conservation and recreation areas.	Hiker-biker trails, fishing, picnicking, playground areas.	Varies
Conservation Area Parks	Large natural areas acquired to preserve specific natural archaeological or historic features. They also provide opportunities of compatible recreation activities.	Trails, fishing areas, nature study areas, informal picnic areas.	Varies
COMMUNITY USE PARKS – Parks in this category serve residents of surrounding communities			
Urban Parks	Very small parks, serving highly urban areas.	Landscaping, sitting/picnic areas, play equipment, courts, and shelters.	1 Acre
Neighborhood Parks	Small parks providing informal recreation in residential areas.	Play equipment, play field, sitting area, shelter, tennis and Multi-use courts. (Don not include regulation size ballfields).	2.5 Acre
Local Parks	Larger parks that provide ballfields and both programmed and unprogrammed recreation facilities.	Ballfields, play equipment, tennis and multi-use courts, sitting/picnic area, shelters, buildings and other facilities.	15 Acre
Neighborhood Conservation Areas	Small parcels of conservation oriented parkland in residential areas, generally dedicated at the time of subdivision.	Generally undeveloped, may include a storm water management pond and related facilities.	Varies

Many open space advocates of urbanizing communities are asking for parks to function differently from typical suburban parks. Densely developed communities with little open space need central gathering spaces, systems of open spaces connected with walking and cycling routes, and enough green to contribute to health of people and of the environment.

The definition of an urban park should be updated to reflect the open space needs of urban communities, including places for gathering, environmental health, human health, and economic vitality.

Objective 2: Propose a standard amount of public parkland for community master plan areas, based on projected future population in the plan area.

Across the nation, several urban parks departments have open space or parkland goals, measured in acres per thousand residents, and in some cases, employees. Staff will review the standards and their basis in order to propose a standard for the urban areas of Montgomery County.

The County currently meets its countywide goal of 15 acres per thousand residents of recreation lands, but the *Urban Park Guidelines* will propose a standard for smaller, urban areas. It is important to note, however, that the amount of parkland alone will not guarantee “the right parks in the right places” in our urban areas. Other objectives should be used in combination with a standard for the amount of parkland.

Objective 3: Propose a methodology for distributing parkland across a community master plan area.

Staff proposes using at least the following criteria to distribute parkland appropriately within an urban area:

- **Help meet identified needs.** This will be assessed by applying PROS/LPPRP needs estimates for facilities in a given area. PROS/LPPRP will be updated at the same time as our work on the *Urban Park Guidelines*, and should include new, urban park facilities such as event spaces, skate spots, etc.
- **Help create a walkable open space system.** The *Urban Park Guidelines* will propose a standard maximum walking distance from residences and transit stops to parks.
- **Fill gaps in service.** The *Urban Park Guidelines* will propose service areas for each type of urban park that corresponds to its role, and will recommend a gap analysis methodology to identify desired locations for new parks.

Objective 4: Develop a vision and performance standards for each type of urban park.

For each type of urban park, the *Urban Park Guidelines* will define a vision or purpose. For example, the approved and adopted White Flint Sector Plan (page 22) describes a Civic Green as “a central space for gatherings, ceremonies and celebrations”, and a Neighborhood Green as “a meeting space and a landmark.” The *Urban Park Guidelines* will also suggest performance standards for each park type.

Objective 5: Clarify urban park acquisition strategies and the various conditions associated with each.

The *Urban Park Guidelines* will include a summary of current practices for acquisition in and beyond our region, including partnerships, urban districts, and urban park divisions within public park agencies.

Owning, operating, and policing urban parks is expensive because of competing interests for the land and because maintenance and operations require more staff, time, and equipment. In difficult fiscal times the challenge of financing the acquisition, development, operation, policing, and maintenance of urban parks becomes even greater.

In recent sector plans, Staff has recommended, and the Board has approved that those open spaces that serve the entire planning area and beyond, should be owned and operated as public parks (*see figure 1*).

Objective 6: Explain how the Environmental Guidelines, Forest Conservation, ESD, and Stormwater Management regulations will be applied to urban parks.

The *Urban Park Guidelines* will facilitate coordination with environmental requirements and develop a response to what is feasible in the urban areas for stormwater management, forest conservation and water quality protection.

Objective 7: Recommend implementation strategies for design, development and construction of urban parks.

The *Urban Park Guidelines* will:

- Summarize the process needed to implement the construction of urban parks.
- Recommend that every time a master plan is adopted by Council the related park acquisition and development projects are added to the proposed CIP work program.
- Suggest standard text for recommendations in master plans to elevate urban parks as priority amenities for developer contributions for acquisition, design, development and construction.
- Summarize other tools for implementation, such as partnerships and donations.

Objective 8: Describe strategies for operations, including maintenance, programming, and policing:

The *Urban Park Guidelines* will describe the different kinds of maintenance and policing standards needed for the higher level use in urban parks. The *Urban Park Guidelines* will:

1. Outline typical costs associated with implementing the standards.
2. Propose performance criteria to evaluate whether or not the standards are being met.
3. Present pros and cons associated with at least the following three strategies for maintenance and policing:
 - a. Parks Department
 - b. Urban Districts
 - c. Contractors
4. Present an analysis of successful case studies of urban park programming.

Outreach Strategy Recommendations

Staff proposes to reach out to the many groups that should have or already have a voice in planning decisions in urban areas of the County. A combination of outreach methods will be used to engage community members who would be most affected by the *Urban Park Guidelines* or who have experience in the needs of urban areas for parks and open space. Member of communities that have existing and planned urban parks will be targeted as well as countywide interest groups such as Recreation Advisory Boards. Outreach methods will include community meetings, public hearings, booths at community events, online surveys, and an interagency work group.

Staff proposes to form an advisory group team for each of the Plan Objectives. Staff will invite people from the following interests to help to develop a vision and implementable strategies for urban parks:

- **Business Community** - Office of Economic Development, CEO's of corporations, Chambers of Commerce
- **Health Community** – Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, health advocacy groups, Regional Services Centers
- **Safety Community** – Park police and County police
- **Recreation Community** – Montgomery County Department of Recreation, Bike and Trail advocacy groups, Recreation Advisory Boards
- **Environmental Community** – Audubon Naturalist Society, the Sierra Club, and others
- **Development Community** – Chambers of Commerce, Advisory Group members from sector plans
- **Non-profit Land Interest Groups** – Urban Land Institute, Trust for Public Land's Center for City Park Excellence, Philadelphia Horticultural Society
- **Sustainable Design Groups** – ASLA, AIA
- **Partnerships and Urban Districts** - such as Bethesda Urban Partnership, Silver Spring, Wheaton

Plan Schedule

Work has already commenced on the collection and consolidation of urban park planning practices through work on community master plans and other studies. Once the Board approves the Plan Objectives, Outreach Strategy Recommendations, and Plan Schedule, the work program can proceed in a focused manner. The intent to produce a Board-approved document by the end of Fiscal Year 2011 can be accomplished per the following timeline:

- **ONGOING – May 2010**
Department of Parks Inter-Divisional Meetings on draft Objectives and Issues
- **June 3, 2010**
Plan Objectives, Outreach Strategy Recommendations, and Plan Schedule to Planning Board
- **ONGOING –WINTER 2010**
Community Outreach and Interagency Collaboration
- **WINTER 2010**
Publish Draft *Urban Park Guidelines* for Public Review
- **SPRING 2011**
Public Hearing and Planning Board Approval
- **TBD**
Publish Approved *Urban Park Guidelines*

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