MCPB
Item: 13
Date: 6/10/10

May 28, 2010

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Mary R. Bradford, Director of Parks
Michael F. Riley, Deputy Director, Department of Parks
Mitra Pedoeem, Chief, Park Development Division

FROM: Patricia McManus, Design Section Supervisor, Park Development, 301-495-3580
Marian Elsasser, Project Manager, Park Development Division

SUBJECT: Mandatory Referral No. 10901-SHA-1
Maryland State Highway Administration
ICC Environmental Stewardship Project, Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail or Sidewalk Site #33, Lake Frank, Rock Creek Regional Park, Rock Creek Park Management Area

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE mandatory referral for design and construction of the Lake Frank Trail Connector with the following recommended conditions:

1) Obtain approval of the final Forest Conservation Plan from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
   a. Protect existing trees before the bridge is placed. Tree protection measures may include but not be limited to having a certified arborist prune branches that cannot be avoided, protecting the trunks of the trees, and not allowing any equipment to be placed on critical root zones without root protection matting.
   b. Provide additional evergreen screen trees if necessary to achieve the level of visual screening shown in the landscape screening study. Trees shall be 6-8 feet minimum height at time of planting. Locations may be adjusted in the field to provide the maximum benefit to adjacent neighbors.

2) Obtain approval of the final stormwater management plan from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE).
   a. Submit final sediment control and stormwater management plans and continue to work with the Department of Parks on best practices. Any stormwater management facilities that require structural maintenance and inspection shall be coordinated with the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection for inclusion in their program.
   b. Follow Environmental Site Design (ESD) principles in the design of the stormwater management. Sheet flow across the trail should be used where possible. Use flat

bottom grass swales instead of stone-lined ditches where possible and establish sheet flow prior to discharge. To avoid damage to trees, landscape infiltration should only be used in areas that are not within a forested area.

c. Locate all stormwater management within the existing limits of disturbance. Credit for future projects should not be used. Credit may be used for offsite projects if they are constructed as part of this project.

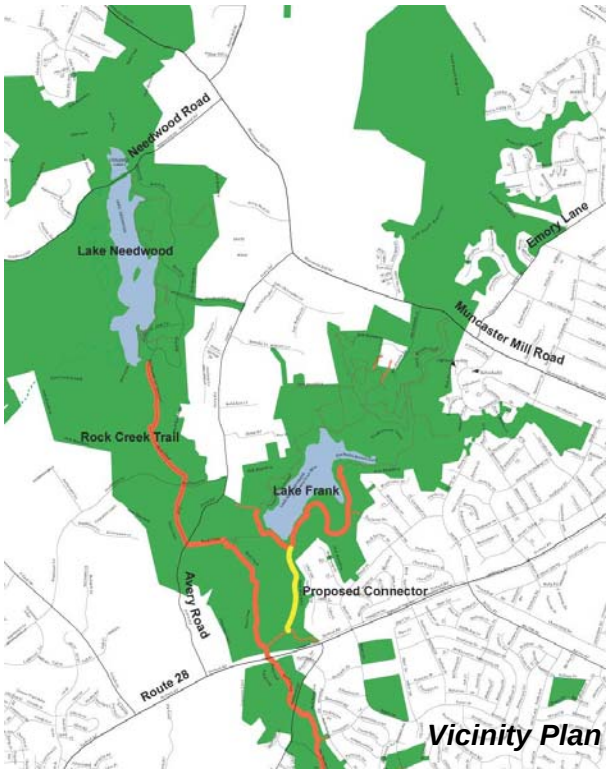
3) As the design progresses, continue to make minor adjustments to the alignment to protect existing trees and improve the function of the trail.
   a. Maintain the running slope of the trail to a maximum of 5% and comply with park design standards for trails.
   b. Avoid using a 90-degree angle at the southern end of the new connector where the trail meets the existing Rock Creek Trail connector. If this is not possible, increase the turning radius to accommodate bicycle access from the existing connector northbound to the new connector trail and the east side of Lake Frank.
   c. Increase the turning radius at the north end of the trail where the new connector trail meets the existing Lake Frank trail to accommodate bicycle access heading towards the east side of Lake Frank.

In addition to transmitting comments to the Maryland State Highway Administration for the mandatory referral, staff recommends that the Planning Board support use of funding from the Department of Parks Capital Improvement Program PDF 768673, Trails: Hard Surface Design and Construction, in FY11 to design the hard surface trail along the east side of Lake Frank to Meadowside Nature Center and Muncaster Road and to remove existing parking lot and roadway paving on the east side of Lake Frank. This work will be performed by the Commission.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction and Location

This project is located within Rock Creek Regional Park and will connect the Rock Creek Hiker-Biker Trail to the existing trail system on the east side of Lake Frank. This 0.5 mile paved trail connector will follow the alignment of an existing natural surface trail that runs along the east side of the park and provides a direct and easily accessible connection to paved trails at Lake Frank. Adjacent uses include single family residential development, zoned R-200, bordering the east side of the park. The alignment of this trail connection was approved by the Montgomery County Planning Board on September 25, 2008 as part of the Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan.



Vicinity Plan

This trail connector is one segment of a continuous regional park trail system that would extend from the District of Columbia northward to Olney. The hiker-biker trail system through Lake Frank and the North Branch of Rock Creek has been recommended in multiple master plans for many years, including the 1978 Master Plan of Bikeways, the 2005 Olney Master Plan, the 1985 and 2004 Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan, the 1998 and 2008 Countywide Park Trails Plan, the 2000 Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan and the 2008 Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan.

The hiker-biker trail on the east side of Lake Frank will ultimately extend northward to Muncaster Mill Road, then run along future shared use paths along Muncaster Mill Road and Emory Lane to the ICC bikeway, and then through the North Branch stream valley to MD 108 in Olney. Segments of the northern portions of the hiker-biker trail system near Olney have already been constructed or are currently being developed.

Project History and Background

As part of the development of the Intercounty Connector (ICC), the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) is required to fund the design and construction of Compensatory Mitigation and Environmental Stewardship projects. This project is an environmental stewardship project and one of four projects listed in the May 29, 2006 Record of Decision under the category of "Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail or Sidewalk" sites, which are projects intended to provide recreational benefits and pedestrian connectivity to the surrounding community. This project is identified as Site #33, located at Lake Frank in Rock Creek Regional Park.

The original trail project in the Record of Decision proposed removing existing roads and parking lots on the east side of Lake Frank, which are currently part of the designated Lakeside Trail system. The project would narrow the existing paving to create a paved trail 8-10 feet in width. The following is the original description of the project in the May 29, 2006 Record of Decision:

> "The roadways around Lake Frank were once open to vehicle traffic. Asphalt roads and parking lots exist around the lake. These roads and parking lots would be removed (approximately 6.87 ac.) and replaced with an 8-10 foot wide asphalt trail. Turf and tree plantings would be added as a buffer."

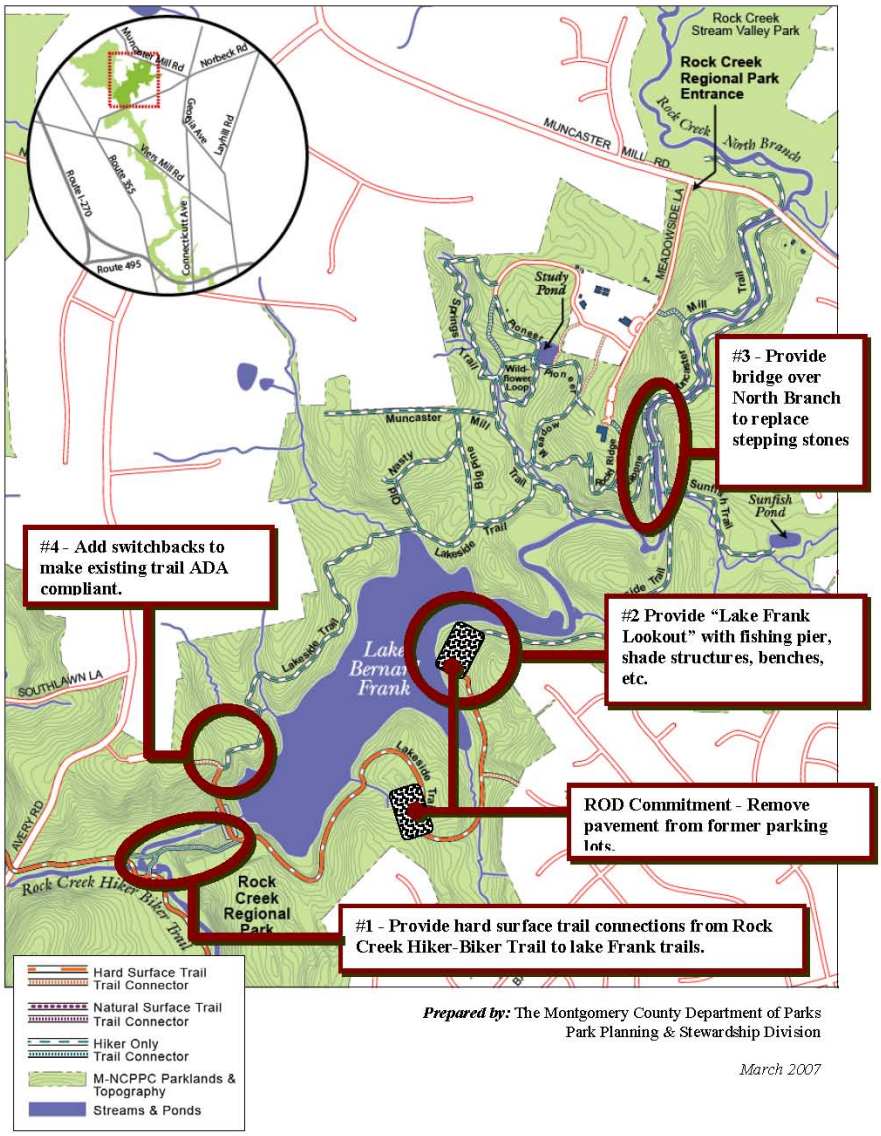
While this original project would enhance a segment of the master-planned hiker-biker trail system, it would not provide additional recreational value to the community, because the existing roads and parking lot at Lake Frank are already available for use by hikers and bicyclists as part of the existing Lakeside Trail system. The environmental benefits to water quality of removing this paving are limited, because the entire area drains to the Lake Frank flood and sediment control structure rather than draining directly to a stream or tributary. The primary benefit of this

Existing road and parking lot on east side of Lake Frank

project would be aesthetic, rather than providing significant recreational or environmental benefits.

Work began on the Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan in May 2006. During the course of this study, staff suggested that there may be alternative projects at Lake Frank that might enhance recreational benefits to the community. At a community meeting held on October 3, 2007, staff presented five alternative projects for Lake Frank that could potentially be implemented with the ICC stewardship funds. The alternatives included the original project to remove paving, as well as several other projects proposed for Lake Frank in the 2000 Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan, including the trail connection to the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail, a developed lookout with fishing pier and shade structures, a bridge for the natural surface trail system, and improvements to accessibility from the Avery Road parking lot. The community indicated a preference for the trail connector project but suggested a different alignment from the alignment proposed by staff. The alternative stewardship projects presented at the October 2007 public meeting are illustrated below.

Community Amenity Projects That Can Implement the Master Plan Trail Concept for Lake Frank



Prepared by: The Montgomery County Department of Parks
Park Planning & Stewardship Division

March 2007

Staff subsequently investigated the trail connector alignment suggested at the public meeting and agreed that it was more desirable than the alignment originally proposed by staff and recommended in the 2000 Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan. The proposed connector follows the alignment of an existing natural surface trail on the east side of the park and provides a direct connection from the Rock Creek hiker-biker trail to the east side of Lake Frank with easily accessible grades and limited environmental impact.

Staff presented a recommendation to the Planning Board on May 1, 2008 to revise the ICC stewardship project to implement the Lake Frank trail connector instead of removing the parking lot paving, and the Planning Board concurred. The new alignment was subsequently recommended in the draft and final versions of the Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan, which were reviewed by the Planning Board in public sessions on June 19, 2008 and September 11, 2008 prior to final approval of the plan on September 25, 2008. The Maryland State Highway Administration presented the project to the ICC Interagency Working Group in September 2008. The ICC Record of Decision was modified in accordance with state and federal procedures and was approved by the Federal Highway Administration on November 25, 2008.

In March 2009, staff was contacted by adjacent property owners who noticed survey flags in the park along the existing trail. In spring of 2009, M-NCPPC received letters from adjacent neighbors who were opposed to the project, as well as several letters in support of the project. The primary reasons cited for opposition were environmental impact to sensitive areas of the park, the security risk of the trail to adjacent property owners, and inconsistency with recommendations from the Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan. The Manor Lake Civic Association also indicated that it had not been notified of public meetings held on the Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan and therefore did not have an opportunity to express opposition to the project. In review of records, staff found that the Manor Lake Civic Association had not been notified of meetings, but Allied Civic Group, an umbrella civic organization for this area of the county, had been notified of meetings. In addition, press notices of multiple public meetings and articles about the project were published in several local newspapers periodically throughout the two-year planning process, which provided opportunities for public input.

In response to neighborhood concerns, staff met with several neighbors on June 25, 2009 to discuss the proposed trail. Staff walked three alternative alignments for the trail suggested by the neighbors. Two of the alternatives were minor variations of alternatives previously considered by SHA and rejected. The third alternative did not provide the needed connection, and all alternatives had significant challenges with grading and accessibility. The neighbors indicated that another local resident would like to submit graded alternatives that they believed would provide workable solutions. Staff subsequently asked SHA to stop work on the project for several months until the new alternatives could be submitted and evaluated.

On August 19, 2009, staff met again on site with neighbors and staff from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to discuss locations of potential alternatives with respect to dam and spillway boundaries. MDE staff indicated that they would not allow a trail to cross or follow the spillway floor at Lake Frank and that the trail built in the spillway at Lake Needwood was constructed without permission. The spillway boundaries were identified from hill crest to hill crest on both sides of the spillway floor. Any trails that parallel the spillway would need to remain a minimum of five feet distance from the crest of the berm or hill on the spillway side. These requirements would make the original trail connector proposal in the 2000 Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan infeasible.

On September 16, 2009, staff and the Deputy Director of Parks met with several citizens from the Manor Lake community. During the meeting, three alternatives were proposed for consideration. One alternative proposed using the dam spillway for part of the alignment and was rejected for further evaluation. It was agreed that two feasible alternatives would be considered, one of which had been mapped and flagged on site by the neighbors. Park staff agreed to evaluate the new alternatives against the proposed alternative and prepare a matrix to evaluate all three alternatives. Staff subsequently walked the alignments to evaluate conditions and implications of construction. Staff mapped the alternatives, graded them to understand the implications and limits of disturbance, and prepared a summary table evaluating each alignment. Evaluation criteria that the neighbors provided in the September 16 meeting were incorporated into the table. A plan illustrating the locations of the alignments evaluated is shown below. The alignment from the 2000 Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan (Alignment A) is also shown for reference purposes.

Alignment B
Recommended Plan

Alignment N
Neighbor's Preference

Alignment L

The following chart summarizes the main characteristics of alternatives considered. All alignments were graded to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act Guidelines, and all are consistent with approved planning documents by providing an accessible connection from the Rock Creek Trail to the east side of Lake Frank. Alignment A, proposed in the 2000 Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan, was not part of the study or evaluation matrix, but information is included in the table below since some neighbors continue to prefer this alternative.

Alternative	Characteristics
Alignment B Recommended Plan (from 2008 Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan)	• Most direct connection to east side of Lake Frank from the Rock Creek Trail (0.7 mile from Rte. 28 underpass) • Overall connector length 2,545 linear feet • Least vertical elevation change to east side of Lake Frank (100' total elevation change from Rte. 28 underpass) • Grading – level alignment, minimal grading, narrow limits of disturbance, does not require retaining walls • Removes the fewest number of large trees, 1/3 of corridor is open meadow area • Easiest alternative to construct, minimal grading, narrow limits of disturbance • Requires one bridge • Closest distance to residences, although existing wooded berm screens views of trail from residences
Alignment N Neighbor's Preference	• Least direct connection to east side of Lake Frank from the Rock Creek Trail (1.5 miles from Rte. 28 underpass) • Shortest overall connector length (1,920 linear feet) • 165' total vertical elevation change from Rte. 28 underpass to east side of Lake Frank • Grading – steep cross slopes present, would require retaining walls to limit extents of grading and tree clearing • Removes the greatest number of large trees in high quality forested area • Most difficult alternative to construct, rock outcrops visible for over 40% of alignment, wide limit of disturbance due to steep cross slopes • Requires retaining walls and bridges or boardwalk at groundwater seeps, swales and historic mill race • Furthest distance from homes with no views of trail from residences
Alignment L	• Less direct connection to east side of Lake Frank to the Rock Creek Trail (1.1 miles from Rte. 28 underpass) • Longest overall connector length (4,580 linear feet) • Greatest vertical elevation change to east side of Lake Frank (182' total elevation change from Rte. 28 underpass) • Grading – Cross slopes are present that would require retaining walls to limit extents of grading and tree clearing • Removes more large trees than Alignment B, but fewer than Alignment N. • Construction requires more grading and limits of disturbance than Alignment B, but less than Alignment N • Requires one bridge, retaining walls • Homes are further away than Alignment B but might be more visible in winter because trail is located at a higher elevation
Alignment A (from 2000 Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan)	• Existing grade of connector is steep (11% slope) • If spillway is not used for alignment, requires five switchbacks to achieve 8% grade (all other could achieve a 5% grade) • Not conducive to bicycle use or comfortable for hikers (especially elderly or disabled users) • Cannot be constructed without impact to the spillway or dam • Requires retaining walls and significant tree clearing

On November 23, 2009, the Deputy Director of Parks sent a letter to the neighbors with an evaluation of the alternatives, and concluded that the alignment approved in the Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan was still the best alternative. It provides the most direct connection from the Rock Creek Trail to the future North Branch Trail corridor with the least amount of grading and environmental disturbance.

On January 25, 2010, State Senator Michael Lenett, who has been very interested in this issue and attended several meetings, requested a meeting with the Chairman of the Planning Board, park staff and SHA staff to discuss the trail. At the conclusion of this meeting, SHA agreed to prepare a study showing additional screening for the trail on the proposed alignment. SHA completed the screening study, which is included in Attachment A. The landscape screening recommendations from this study have been incorporated into the current project plans.

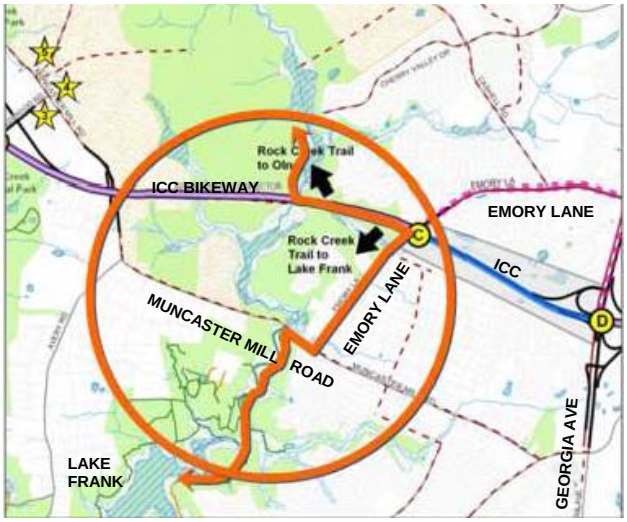
On March 11, 2010, a group of Manor Lake citizens attended a public meeting hosted by SHA staff to discuss five other ICC mitigation and stewardship projects. The neighbors requested additional opportunities for public comment on the project. SHA agreed to hold a separate meeting for the Lake Frank trail connector project. On May 11, 2010 a public meeting was held to review the design of the trail connector. Public comments from this meeting and recent testimony are summarized later in this report.

PLANNING DOCUMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed trail connector is consistent with planning document recommendations that have been in place for many years, and the project will implement specific recommendations for the trail alignment from recent plans. Approved and adopted master plans envision a continuous regional hiker-biker trail from the Rock Creek Trail to Olney, aligned along the east side of Lake Frank and northwards to Olney through the North Branch stream valley. These master plans also recommend a loop bikeway connection along Muncaster Mill Road and the ICC that will connect the Rock Creek Trail Corridor at Lake Needwood with the North Branch (Lake Frank) Trail Corridor. Plan recommendations for this project fall within three master planning areas: Upper Rock Creek, Olney, and Aspen Hill. The most applicable recommendations for this project from approved master plans are cited below.

Master Plan of Bikeways

The 1978 Master Plan of Bikeways in Montgomery County includes (on page 54) a Class I bikeway, Route P-29, connecting Lake Frank to Olney through the North Branch of Rock Creek within the stream valley park.



The Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan, approved and adopted in March 2005, removed recommendations for park trails from the bikeways master plan, and on page 27 references the Countywide Park Trails Plan as the guiding document for trails within the park system.

On pages 39 and 54, the recommendations include Route BL-35 for future bike lanes on Muncaster Mill Road, as well as Route SP-32 for a shared use path on Emory Lane. These routes would be completed as part of future roadway improvements. The plan also references Route SP-40, which is the ICC bike path. The Muncaster Mill and ICC routes would create a loop trail connection between the hard surface trails at Lake Needwood and Lake Frank, and the Emory Lane path provides part of the bike trail connection from Lake Frank northward to the ICC bikeway and Olney to avoid environmentally sensitive areas of the North Branch.

Countywide Park Trails Plan

The Countywide Park Trails Plan, approved in July 1998, includes the following plan objective on page 28 for the Rock Creek Trail Corridor: "Expand the trail system in Rock Creek Regional Park northward to Olney and the Patuxent River." On page 30 the plan makes the following additional recommendations:

> "Provide a hard surface trail connection between Rock Creek Regional Park and Olney. Figure 11 illustrates this concept. A hard surface recreational trail will be constructed in parkland near Bowie Mill Road by private developers. The extension of this trail southward to Rock Creek Regional Park would offer the 30,000 residents of Olney access to the park by a recreational trail….In Olney the proposed trail would connect to the existing multi-use path along MD 108."

Figure 11 on page 29 illustrates the hard surface trail corridor connecting to the existing hard surface trails on the east side of Lake Frank. The Countywide Park Trails Plan was amended in March 2004 and September 2008. The September 2008 amendment updates the plan with recommendations from the Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan.

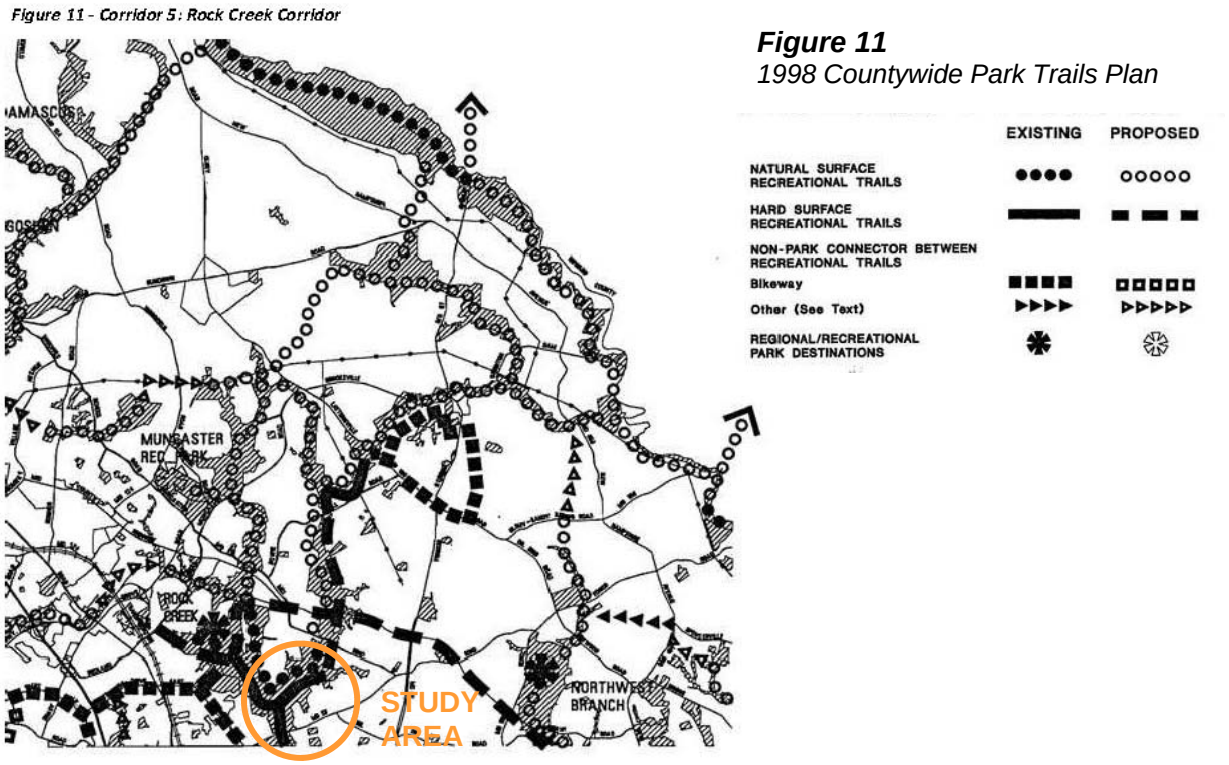


Figure 11
1998 Countywide Park Trails Plan

Olney Master Plan

Lake Frank is just south of the Olney Master Plan boundary. The Olney Master Plan, approved and adopted in April 2005, includes recommendations for the hard surface hiker-biker trail in the North Branch stream valley, which will connect to the hiker-biker trail in Rock Creek Regional Park at Lake Frank. The following recommendations for park trails are included on page 122 of the master plan:

1. Ensure connection of North Branch trail to the ICC.
2. Minimize impacts to the sensitive biodiversity areas in the North Branch of Rock Creek by routing the proposed hard surface trail in that area at the narrowest point to the proposed bike path along Emory Lane.
3. Provide safe crossing of Muncaster Mill Road (traffic light preferred) from the Emory Lane bike path to a bike path on the south side of Muncaster Mill Road for access to Rock Creek Regional Park.

Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan

Recommendations for a regional hard surface trail through Lake Frank have been included in this master plan for many years. The Upper Rock Creek Master Plan, approved in July 1985, includes a map on page 73 that illustrates the proposed bikeway on the east side of Lake Frank connecting the Rock Creek Trail to Olney through the North Branch stream valley. The following text is included on page 74:

> "Additional segments of trail are proposed to connect with the existing 8 miles of bikeway system at Lake Needwood and will ultimately serve the entire Rock Creek Stream Valley Park system, north of Lakes Needwood and Frank (P-29 continued) to MD 108."

The Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan, approved and adopted in April 2004, includes the following additional recommendations on page 86 addressing connectivity to the hiker-biker trails in the Rock Creek Trail Corridor:

> "Muncaster Mill Road and Emory Lane: the Rock Creek Trail Corridor identified in the Countywide Park Trails Plan traverses both the Upper Rock Creek and the Olney Planning Areas. The Olney Master Plan will recommend a Class I bikeway along Emory Road near its intersection with Muncaster Mill Road. This bikeway should accommodate users of the North Branch trail corridors. If it cannot, land at the intersection may need to be acquired for a park trail in this area."

> "When new development occurs in the Planning Area, a major concern should be how residents will access parkland without using their automobiles. This can be accomplished by providing sidewalks, bike paths or trails from new subdivisions to parks. This is especially important in the Rock Creek Planning Area because of the extensive amount of parkland in the area and the many opportunities to enjoy trails in both Rock Creek and the North Branch. Providing connections to these park systems will be a major concern in the review of private development."

Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan

The Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan, approved in October 2000, includes the following recommendations for bikeways on pages 26 and 27 that describe the proposed trail east of Lake Frank and the loop connection to the Rock Creek Trail at Lake Needwood:

> "Rock Creek North Loop – Rock Creek Park from Lake Needwood north to Md. 108, then south to Lake Norbeck (Class I). …. Extend the Rock Creek trail up the east side of Lake Frank, along existing pavement and unpaved trail corridors, to the Muncaster Mill Road crossing and up the North Branch stream valley."

> "Muncaster Mill Road – between Redland Road and Maryland Rte. 28 (Class I). ….. It will also provide a critical northern connection from Lake Needwood to Lake Frank on the north side which is essential to forming a continuous loop in the regional park trail system…."

Recommendations for trails and greenways are outlined on pages 80 and 81 as follows:

> "The Master Plan recommends a general expansion of the hard surface recreational trail system. The major components of this expansion include: ….The east side of Lake Frank with a possible connector over to the Meadowside Nature Center. ….. Creation of a loop from Lake Needwood to Lake Frank via the proposed Muncaster Mill Road and Needwood Road bikeway connectors to the north; and a recreational trail connector south of the two lakes; which in turn will connect to over 14 miles of existing Rock Creek trail heading southward; and creation of a trail extension above Lake Frank to Muncaster Mill Road and beyond."

Figure III-10 on page 79 illustrates the proposed hard surface trail on the east side of Lake Frank along the alignment of the existing parking lots and along the alignment of the existing natural surface trail north of the parking lots. It also shows a separate natural surface trail on the east side of Lake Frank and two pedestrian entrances to the park from the neighborhoods east of Lake Frank. Existing trails are shown in thin solid lines and proposed trails are shown in dashed lines. Hard surface trails are shown in blue and natural surface trails are shown in red.

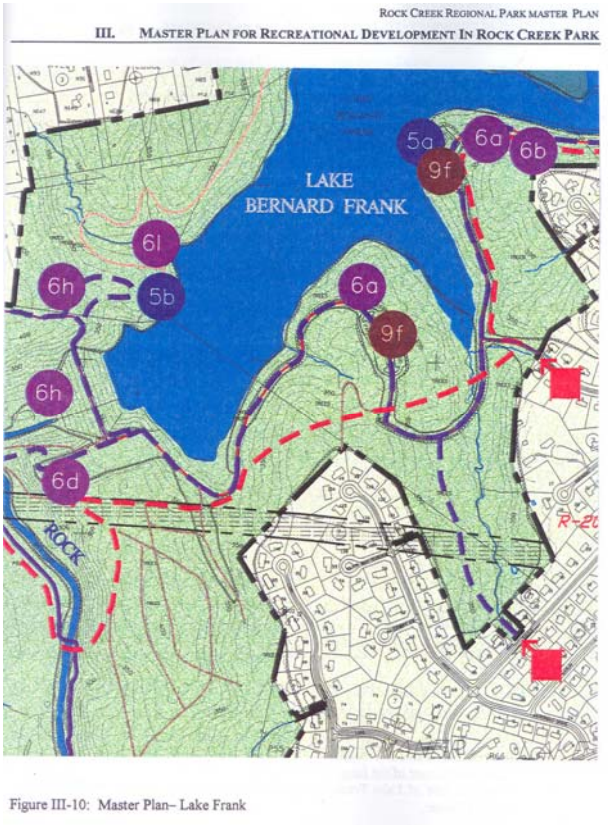


Figure III-10
Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan

Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan

The specific alignment for this connector trail is recommended in the Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan, approved in September 2008. On page 3 the stated plan objective for the corridor is to "expand the trail system in Rock Creek Regional Park northward to Olney and the Patuxent River." Overall plan concepts are identified, including the following starting on page 11:

> "Recommends a hard surface trail connection from Rock Creek Regional Park to Olney. This connection, shown in *Figure 7*, has been part of the Olney Master plan since 1980 and was reconfirmed in the Countywide Park Trails Plan."
>
> "Proposes a series of trail loops within the corridor
> The loop trail concept endorsed by this Plan is shown in the Plan Implementation chapter. Loop trails are popular because they offer variety and can be enjoyed from a single trail access point. Linear trails require "backtracking" to return to the trailhead."

The trail connection to the ICC bikeway is described on page 19:

> "Assure the alignment and design of the InterCounty Connector (ICC) is supportive of the trail plan. …. The ICC will have a bike path along the northern part of the right of way as it crosses two portions of the park. The challenge is providing access to and from this bike path to Rock Creek Regional Park. Along the North Branch of Rock Creek, shown in *Figure 15*, the bike path along the ICC will provide an alternative to locating a hard surface trail in a sensitive biodiversity area. A combination of bike paths along the ICC, along Emory Lane and along a small section of Muncaster Road will provide a continuous trail network for those seeking a hard surface trail."

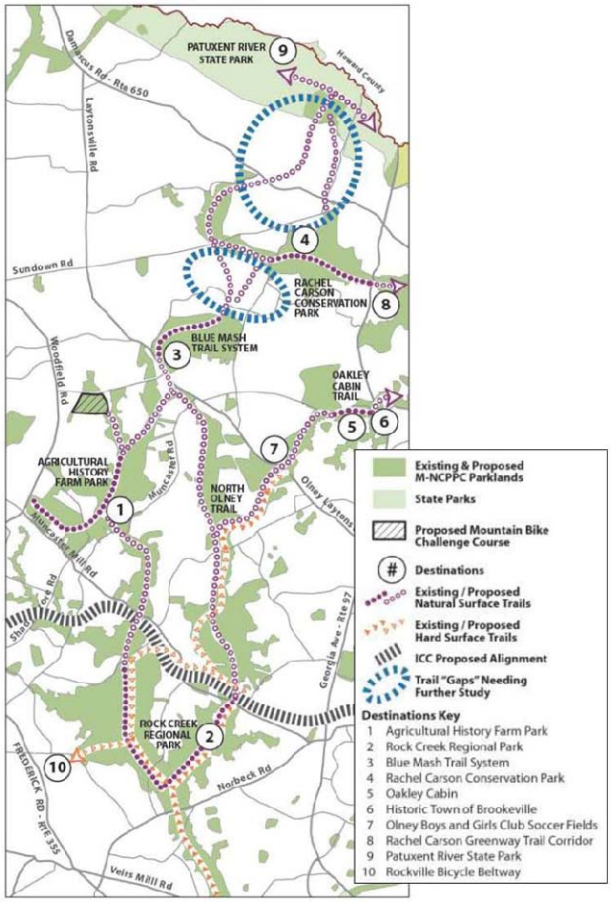


Figure 1
Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Master Plan

The specific alignment of the proposed connector is described in the plan concept on page 22 and shown in Figure 17:

> "Providing trail connectivity between Lake Frank and Lake Needwood trails and the Rock Creek Hiker Biker Trail. The Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan proposes a hard surface trail connection between Lake Frank and Lake Needwood (option "A" in *Figure 17*). Community members have suggested an alternative trail connection that involves less steep topography and is already being used as a "people's choice" trail. The location of this potential trail connection is also shown in *Figure 17* as option "B". Staff supports option B."

On page 23, the plan recommends the following implementation priority:

1. Implement the trail connection of Lake Frank and Lake Needwood as an ICC community enhancement project.

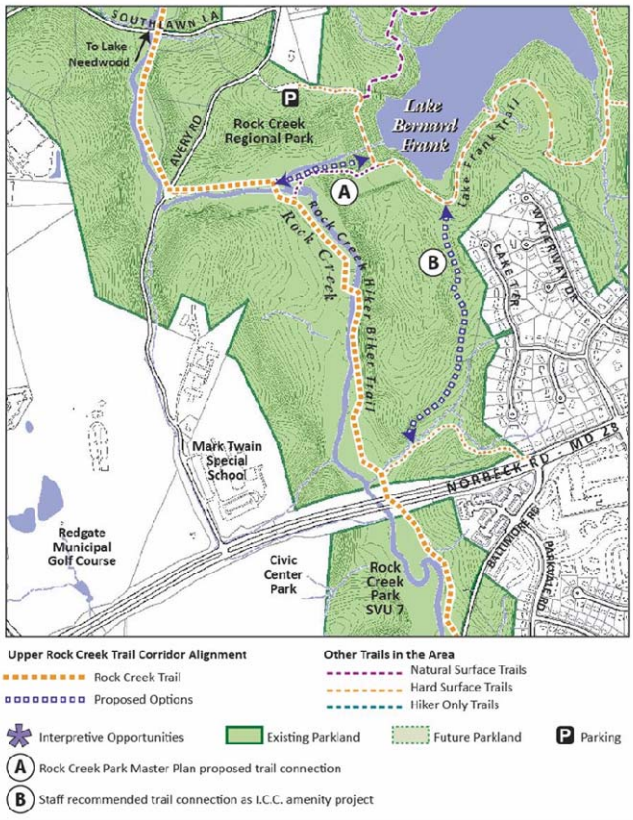


Figure 17
Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan
Recommended Connector Alignment

MANDATORY REFERRAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Existing Conditions

The proposed location for the trail connector follows the alignment of an existing natural surface trail on the east side of the park. The northern third of the trail travels through cleared meadow areas and crosses a gas line utility easement. The trail is visually buffered from the residences on the east side of the park by an existing man-made berm, which was probably constructed at the time the lake was built. The berm is wooded with a mid-successional stage forest that includes invasive understory species. A ridge to the west of the cleared area is also forested with mid-successional stage forest that

View from proposed trail of berm and nearest residential property to trail

includes a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees with a moderate amount of invasive species understory and vines. Due to differences in elevation of the trail and berm, most of the trail would be below the sight line of the houses, and the houses would be out of sight of trail users. The closest property line is approximately 120 feet from the proposed alignment, and only three properties along the entire alignment are less than 200 feet in distance from the proposed trail.

Northern section of trail through meadow

As the trail extends southward, the berm gradually declines in height and eventually disappears. The trail enters a forested area, which is characterized by larger hardwood trees with native understory vegetation and fewer invasive species than the areas to the north. Although there is some wooded buffer between the trail and residences in this area, the houses become visible from the trail. This area would benefit the most from supplemental landscape screen plantings.

Trail in woods with berm on left side

As the trail continues further south through the woods, the distance to residential property lines increases to approximately 400 feet. A storm outfall area from the neighborhood drains into the park, creating a small stream barrier between the homes and the proposed trail. The existing forested area in this location provides an adequate buffer to the adjacent residences without supplemental landscape screening.

Distant views to houses at south end of trail across stream barrier

Residences visible where berm height decreases

Proposed Plan

The recommended plan includes the following elements:

- Approximately 2,500 linear feet of ten-foot wide asphalt trail aligned and constructed to minimize tree impacts;
- One 12-foot wide by 50-foot long trail bridge to withstand 10,000 lb. load;
- Standard trail signage;
- Stormwater management facilities that include stormwater best management practices in accordance with new environmental site design criteria;
- Evergreen trees, 6-8 feet height at time of planting, to provide visual screening of adjacent residences;
- Design of trail in compliance with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidelines; and
- Design of trail in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Guidelines and M-NCPPC park design standards.

Selective tree removal will occur to build the trail. There will be no stream impacts to construct the bridge, and there are no wetlands or floodplains within the trail construction corridor. Refer to Attachment A for SHA submittals.

Regulatory Requirements and Agency Coordination

The following is a summary of agency coordination and the status of regulatory approvals for this project.

Forest Stand Delineation and Forest Conservation - A Forest Stand Delineation (#C10-27) was approved on May 14, 2010 by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). A Forest Conservation Plan has been submitted to DNR. Strategies for protecting trees include root pruning, avoidance of critical root zones, and tree protection fencing. The proposed screen tree plantings surpass park practices to replace trees removed at a rate of 1 inch caliper of new trees planted for each inch DBH of trees to be removed.

Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species - The Maryland DNR indicated that there are no state or federal records for rare, threatened or endangered species within the boundaries of the project site. However it identified four rare, threatened or endangered plant species that are located within proximity to the project site. Surveys for these species were conducted by SHA on May 21, 2009 and April 7, 2010. No species were identified within the project area. Coordination with DNR will continue through final design.

Cultural Resources – Cultural Resources Studies were conducted in 2009 and found that the project has no potential to impact national register eligible archaeological sites or historic structures. No historic or cultural resources have been identified in the vicinity of the project. The studies will be coordinated with the Maryland Historical Trust.

Stormwater Management – A conceptual storm drain and stormwater management report was submitted on April 22, 2010 and will be reviewed by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). Environmental Site Design (ESD) principles should be used to design facilities that have minimal impact to the forested areas. Any structural best management

practices that are required should be located in the open meadow area of the trail to avoid disturbance to trees. SHA has proposed pursuing the potential of taking credit for the future removal of parking lot paving as mitigation for the impervious area. If other ESD practices cannot be accommodated and this approach is used, staff recommends that SHA be required to remove an equivalent area of the south parking lot.

Utility Coordination – SHA is in the process of investigating and coordinating required approvals for location of the trail over the gas and sanitary sewer utility easements.

Zoning – Lake Frank and the west side of the lake are zoned RE-2. The portions of the park east of Lake Frank (where the connector is located) are zoned R-200.

Traffic, Air and Noise – No vehicular traffic is associated with the connector trail, and it is consistent with the current use of the area as a trail. There will be temporary noise and traffic impacts that may occur from construction activity, however all construction activities will be performed in accordance with Montgomery County noise and traffic ordinances. The project will utilize construction access from Trailway Drive and use the south parking lot for construction staging.

Maintenance – Maintenance of the trail and plantings will be the responsibility of M-NCPPC after warranty periods and plant establishment periods have expired, per the Master Agreement. Maintenance of stormwater structures will be the responsibility of the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The design and maintenance requirements of structures will be coordinated with DEP.

Community Outreach and Comments

A public meeting was held on May 11, 2010 to discuss the proposed project. Based on the attendance from the sign-in sheet, approximately 100 people attended the meeting. M-NCPPC and SHA staff presented the history of the project, planning intent, alternatives evaluated, recommended plan, screening study, schedule and next steps for the mandatory referral process. A discussion with questions and answers followed. The audience included citizens from Manor Lake, neighborhoods west of the park, Flower Valley, and Olney. There were mixed views expressed regarding the project, both in opposition and support.

The Lake Frank Trail Committee submitted a petition with 477 signatures that stated “We Petition to Remove the Abandoned, Eyesore Parking Lots at Lake Frank and Reforest the Area. This Promised Benefit was Authorized and Funded by the ICC and Taken Away Without Notice by MNCPPC. We Want It Back. Take Back Our Lake”. It should be noted that one person who collected signatures for the petition indicated that the wording of the petition was unclear and that some people who signed it thought that the purpose of the petition was to remove the parking lots in addition to building the trail connector. The petition, along with other recent public correspondence on the mandatory referral is included in Attachment C.

A summary of the main issues and areas of concern is included in the table below. Staff responses and recommended actions are also noted. Since there was so much public interest expressed in the removal of the parking lots, staff is recommending a plan to expedite this work in the Department of Parks FY11 capital program. Additional detail regarding this proposal is included in the responses below.

Public Concerns and Issues	Response / Recommended Action
<u>Parking Lots and North Trail Extension</u> • Remove the existing parking lots on the east side of Lake Frank and beautify the area (petition submitted.) • Park staff indicated previously that the parking lot removal was not in their capital program, so SHA should do this project instead of the connector. • Remove parking lot paving in addition to connector trail if possible. • Extend the trail north of the parking lots to a destination. Meadowside Nature Center is currently inaccessible to elderly and disabled users from the Lake Frank area.	• Department staff included the removal of parking lot paving in the project to build the North Branch Trail to Olney. The parking lots would be needed as a construction staging area to build the section of trail immediately north of Lake Frank. The North Branch Trail project is currently included in the Parks Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for facility planning starting in FY13. This schedule would not likely result in the removal of paving within the current six-year program. • In order to expedite the removal of paving and provide a connection to Meadowside Nature Center, staff recommends to begin design immediately for the segment of trail from the existing parking lots north to Meadowside Nature Center and Muncaster Mill Road. This project could be accomplished with current funding from the trail connector CIP program. This would allow a first phase of the North Branch Trail to be implemented quickly and included for construction in the FY13 CIP. Facility planning for the northern sections of the trail to Olney would occur as a separate project.
<u>Project Budget</u> • Initial documents from SHA indicated that the budget for the removal of paving was $2 million. Current estimates for the connector trail are $1.4 million. Where is the remaining $600,000? Can it be used for the pavement removal at Lake Frank, and can the ROD be revised again to substitute the projects? • Both projects should be done to make everyone happy. Can the ROD be amended to do both the parking lot and the trail connector projects?	• SHA indicated that the $2 million was a rough planning and early budget number that was not based on actual project estimates. SHA indicated that it is the project scope that dictates the budget, not the original budgeted number. • SHA indicated that current estimates show both the parking lot paving and trail connector projects to be roughly equal in value. Both are estimated at $1.4 million in cost. • The Planning Board indicated it's preference in 2008 to build the trail connector over the parking lot removal. • As stated above, M-NCPPC will recommend expediting the removal of pavement in our CIP, in order to accomplish both projects.

Public Concerns and Issues	Response / Recommended Action
<u>Environment/Natural Surface Trails</u> • People live around the park because of the beauty and secluded character of the lake. The character of the park should be preserved without developing it. This park was dedicated to Bernard Frank, a conservationist and should be left as is with hiking trails only. • Don't destroy the nature in the park. • An independent natural surface trail loop should be developed around the lake to accommodate those who only want to hike. • Lake Frank appears to be private, but should be accessible to everyone. • Cyclists enjoy nature too.	• The Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan and Rock Creek Park Master Plan support the idea of a separated natural surface trail loop around the lake, in addition to the hard surface trail. M-NCPPC will explore the feasibility of a separate natural surface trail in our design study to remove the parking lot paving. • The trail connector alignment that is recommended includes the least amount of grading and environmental disturbance of all other alternatives considered. Minimizing disturbance to the environment is not only a goal of the Department of Parks but also of reviewing authorities that will grant permits for this project.
<u>Hard Surface Trail Alignment</u> • Does the hard surface trail need to run through Lake Frank? Can the connector to Olney be made from the Rock Creek Trail to Muncaster Mill Road and then to the North Branch? • Can bicyclists use the neighborhood roads on the east side of Lake Frank and then cut into the park trail system between properties on Lake Terrace? • Olney will be cut off from the Rock Creek Trail if this connector is not built. The connector location is well screened and removed from visibility of adjacent properties, so this should not be an issue. • Bicyclists are placed in danger with on-road bike routes. • Trail connector alignments further from Lake Terrace are preferred by neighbors. • The current master plans only include a minimum but critical framework of hard surface trails in parks due to environmental reasons. None should be removed. • A hard surface trail will benefit elderly and disabled park users and will enable more people to access and use the park.	• The hard surface trail on the east side of Lake Frank is an integral park trail link to serve the 30,000 residents of Olney. The proposed alternative would increase the overall trail length by more than a mile and would include substantial stretches adjacent to busy roadways instead of a park experience. • The intent of the park trail system is to provide off-road hiking and biking trails that can be enjoyed by all. Property owners on Lake Terrace have expressed opposition to the trail and are unlikely to support a connector to the park through their properties or existing easements. • Other alternatives to the trail were considered. Supplemental landscape screening will be provided to visually buffer the properties from the trail.

Public Concerns and Issues	Response / Recommended Action
<u>Safety</u> • Shared hiker-biker trails compromise the safety and comfort of pedestrians, especially if cyclists are moving fast and there are blind corners. • Planning studies indicate that there will be 47 users per hour on the trail on week nights and weekends. Safety is a concern for property owners near the trail. • Will the potential merger of Park Police with County police reduce services, further compromising safety?	• The trail will be developed in compliance with trail design guidelines that address minimum width and visibility. • Existing natural surface trails in the park are available for those who would prefer a hiking-only experience. Staff will study the feasibility of developing a separate natural surface trail on the east side of the lake or a widened grass shoulder for hikers adjacent to the paved trail. • Increased use of the trail will provide opportunities for additional legitimate public users, enhancing the natural surveillance of the park. • If the police merger were to occur, service to the parks would probably be reduced.
<u>Public Notification</u> • The Manor Lake Civic Association was not notified of public meetings for the Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan. • Olney residents, including the Oatland Farm HOA and Norbeck Grove HOA support the trail and want to be notified of all future meetings on any connectors or segments of the trail corridor. • Avery Village Estates, which abuts the west side of the park, has residents who support the trail and also want to be notified	• Staff has met with the Manor Lake citizens on multiple occasions since June 2009 to discuss their concerns. Visual screening has been added to address concerns of the abutting property owners. Staff is recommending expediting the removal of parking lots in our capital program in response to their concerns and proposes to study the feasibility of a natural surface trail loop around the lake, in addition to the hard surface trail on the east side of Lake Frank. • Staff has noted the requests of residents to be notified of future meetings and has distributed this information to Community Outreach and Park Planning staff.

Project Funding and Schedule

Design and construction of the Lake Frank Trail Connector will be funded and implemented by the ICC and SHA. The anticipated schedule of the project is to complete design by Spring of 2011 and to complete construction by early 2012.

The community has expressed interest in the removal of excess parking lot and road paving on the east side of Lake Frank. Staff recommends utilizing existing funding in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) within PDF 768673, Trails: Hard Surface Design & Construction to complete planning, design and permits for a section of the future hard surface trail from the south parking lot to Meadowside Nature Center and Muncaster Mill Road. The existing parking lots at Lake Frank are needed for construction staging of the future trail north of Lake Frank.

Completion of this connector would enable all of the excess paving at Lake Frank to be removed. Staff proposes to begin the project in FY11, in order to have design completed by Fall 2011, so that the project can be included in the FY13-18 capital program for construction. It would be the intention of staff to seek community input on the design and obtain approval of the project by the Planning Board before requesting construction funding in the CIP. If the project is funded in the FY13-18 program, construction could begin as early as July 2012. This scope of this project is consistent with the types of projects intended to be funded through this PDF. Refer to Attachment B for PDF 768673.

Use of funding from PDF 768673 for design of the Lake Frank trail would delay design and construction of one new hard surface trail connector to the Matthew Henson Trail by approximately one year. Staff believes that a one year delay of this project is reasonable. The Matthew Henson trail connector will serve as a neighborhood access point to the main trail, while the extension of the regional hiker-biker trail at Lake Frank serves a greater population.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends approval of the mandatory referral for the design and construction of the Lake Frank Trail Connector with the conditions stated in the staff recommendation. Staff recommends approval for the following reasons:

- The proposed project is consistent with approved and adopted master plan recommendations
- The proposed project is consistent with the existing park use
- The proposed project is compatible with adjacent uses in terms of the nature and arrangement of the design
- Pedestrian and bicycle circulation systems and landscaping are adequate, safe and efficient
- The proposed project is consistent with environmental guidelines and requirements

Staff also recommends expediting the design and construction for the continuation of the hard surface trail along the east side of Lake Frank to Meadowside Nature Center and Muncaster Mill Road through the Department of Parks Capital Improvements Program. Construction of this project would result in the removal of parking lot and road paving on the east side of Lake Frank, enhancing the beauty of this area. The feasibility of providing a separate natural surface trail on the east side of Lake Frank would also be explored.

This trail connector is a small but critical segment of a continuous regional park trail system that would extend from the District of Columbia northward through Rock Creek to Lake Frank and Olney. This hiker-biker trail has been recommended in master plans for many years, and will enhance the recreational value of Rock Creek Regional Park and Lake Frank for the residents of Montgomery County.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: SHA Submittals
Attachment B: PDF 768673, Trails: Hard Surface Design & Construction
Attachment C: Public Correspondence