



MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 21, 2012

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Mary Bradford, Director of Parks *M Bradford*
Michael F. Riley, Deputy Director, Administration

FROM: John E. Hench, Ph.D., Chief, Park Planning and Stewardship Division (PPSD) *J Hench*
Brooke Farquhar, Master Planner Supervisor, Park and Trail Planning (PPSD) *Brooke Farquhar*

SUBJECT: June 28, 2012 Worksession on 2012 Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan

Staff Recommendations:

- Discuss comments from May 24, 2012 public hearing and staff responses to them
- Allow additional public comment, giving priority to persons who did not testify on May 24
- Defer discussion of Agriculture Chapter comments until July 19, 2012 Worksession

Discussion

This Worksession will respond to comments and testimony, and will focus on:

- 1. Urban Parks** - classification revisions
- 2. Trails**
 - a. success since 1998 approval of Countywide Park Trails Plan
 - b. status of Trails Working Group and Countywide Park Trails Plan Amendment
 - c. level of service analysis preliminary thoughts
- 3. Acquisition of Parkland for Natural Resource-based Recreation and for Facility-based Recreation**
 - a. the recreational value of conservation land
 - b. the balance of conservation and recreation in parkland acquisition priorities
- 4. Other**
 - a. volleyball courts
 - b. cricket fields
 - c. dog parks
 - d. request to renovate playground equipment at Puller Park

- e. City of Gaithersburg's request to add their proposed aquatic facility to the 2012 PROS Plan
- f. City of Rockville's request to include municipal park inventories in the 2012 PROS Plan
- g. athletic field needs

A chart of the May 24, 2012 Public Hearing testimony along with staff's responses is included in **Attachment 1**.

5. **Agricultural Preservation**

The comments, staff responses and material regarding agricultural preservation included in this memo will be discussed at the July 19 Worksession when appropriate staff will be available. The proposed revised Agricultural Preservation chapter will be posted on the Planning Board's agenda prior to the July 19 session.

Urban Parks

COMMENTS AND TESTIMONY

Public testimony supported Plan recommendations on urban parks, particularly the need to provide green spaces in high density areas for urban residents to experience nature. Requested changes to the Park Classification System included retaining the existing Community Based Urban Park classification for those parks that serve adjacent neighborhoods and adding to the Countywide Parks a Civic Green or similar distinct category. It was also requested that the Plan add information on environmental benefits of urban parks such as storm water management, increased tree canopy, and air quality.

Planning Board comments reflected concurrence that urban parks are becoming increasingly important and need to be better defined. Additional Board comments included:

- Why not have more categories of urban parks?
- Urban Parks need careful planning and criteria that allows the private sector to own and operate them in some instances
- Civic Greens may need multiple owners to contribute
- Zoning requirements need to be evaluated
- Urban parks must be activated
- Limited urban spaces may call for unconventional areas for urban parks, e.g. rooftops, road and utility rights of way, indoor recreation, etc.
- How much lawn area is feasible?

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff agrees with all of the public comments (see **Attachment 1**, Public Hearing Testimony) and recommends further revisions to the Park Classification System and some sections of the PROS Plan text in response to public testimony, whereas the Planning Board's more specific comments on acquisition, ownership,

management, activation, and zoning will be addressed in the Urban Park Guidelines, tentatively scheduled to be reviewed by the Board in the Winter of 2012/2013

Staff agrees with the comments that there should be two categories of urban parks in the Park Classification System, one under Countywide and the other under Community Use. Staff recommends that all urban parks should be classified in either of these two broad categories, with subcategories under each. The decision for Countywide versus Community Use should be based on the service area of a park. Those parks in the Countywide category would serve the entire urban area, e.g. Sector Plan Area or Central Business District in which they are located, whereas the parks in the Community Use category would serve a segment of an urban area, such as a neighborhood, a center, or a district.

In response to comments that more clarification is needed for urban parks, staff proposes that those parks that are within or adjacent to an urban sector plan area or CBD should be considered urban parks. Staff examined all existing urban parks, as well as existing local and neighborhood parks abutting urban areas, and all proposed urban parks in approved sector plans, to develop descriptions and roles for each urban park category and its subcategories.

The revised recommendations for the Park Classification System are as follows:

CATEGORY: COUNTYWIDE URBAN PARK

Serves residents, visitors, and workers of an entire urban high-density transit-oriented development area, and may be programmed with numerous activities that attract residents from other parts of the County. Parking is located in structures underground or in nearby public parking lots, garages or along adjoining streets, rather than on-site. Parks may be lighted at night along major walkways and for certain activities such as events, or court sports.

Subcategories: Civic Green, Urban Recreational Park, Urban Greenway.

- **Civic Green:** Urban parks located in the center of high density development that offer a green outdoor “living room” for residents, employees and visitors. Because of their proximity to public transit, they serve people from other parts of the County and Capital Region. These formally planned, flexible, programmable open spaces serve as places for informal gathering, quiet contemplation, or large special event gatherings. Depending on size, they may support activities including open air markets, concerts, festivals, and special events but are not often used for programmed recreational purposes. A central lawn is often the main focus with adjacent spaces providing complementary uses. Other features may include gardens, water features and shade structures. Minimum size: ½ acre.
- **Urban Recreational Park:** Urban parks oriented to the recreational needs of a densely populated neighborhood and business district. They provide space for many activities and may include athletic fields, playing courts, picnicking, dog parks, sitting areas and flexible grassy open space. Programming can include farmer’s markets, outdoor exercise classes, and community yard sales. There is space for a safe drop-off area and nearby accessible parking for those who cannot walk to the park.
- **Urban Greenway:** Linear parks that provide trails or wide landscaped walkways and bikeways and may include other recreational and natural amenities. May occur along road rights of way or “paper” streets. Include extra space for vegetative ground cover and trees. Should link other green spaces, trails and natural systems.

CATEGORY: COMMUNITY USE URBAN PARK

Serve residents and workers in urban neighborhoods and districts. These parks may be programmed for more localized events, but not countywide events. No parking is available on the park property.

Subcategories: Urban Buffer Park and Neighborhood Green.

- **Urban Buffer Park:** These parks serve as green buffers at the edges of urban, high density development adjacent to lower density residential areas. They provide a green space within which residents and workers of an urban area may relax and recreate. Typical facilities include landscaping, sitting/picnic areas, play equipment, courts, and shelters. Minimum size is ¼ acre.
- **Neighborhood Green:** These parks serve the residents and workers from the surrounding neighborhood or district, but may be designed for more activity than an urban buffer park. These formally planned, flexible open spaces serve as places for informal gathering, lunchtime relaxation, or small special event gatherings. They typically contain lawn area, shaded seating and may include a play area, a skate spot, a community garden, or similar neighborhood facilities. Minimum size is ¼ acre.

Trails

COMMENTS AND TESTIMONY

During the review of the Staff Draft, staff heard the following comments:

- The Department of Parks should be proactive in identifying innovative bike/trail route combinations
- PROS Plan should say more miles are needed and not indicate that we can decrease miles of trails and still maintain adequate levels of service
- greenways should include trails

At the public hearing, staff heard the following testimony:

- multi-use trails are important for both recreation and commuting
- connections are needed to County bikeways
- the ongoing Countywide Park Trails Plan (CWPTP) revision is commended for identifying which trails are feasible to construct and which are not
- mountain biking provides high quality cardio- exercise opportunities
- new trends should mention mountain biking skills areas, BMX, etc
- the County has enough trails
- the County needs more trails

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff agrees with most of the comments (see **Attachment 1**, Public Hearing Testimony) and has prepared material on our progress in building trails since 1998, the status of the CWPTP Amendment, and preliminary analysis of the level of service for trails in our County. Many of the points raised in the Board discussion and

hearing will be addressed as part of the CWPTP, which is tentatively scheduled to be reviewed by the Planning Board in the Fall of 2012.

DISCUSSION

Staff will finish our analysis of trail gaps and implementation difficulties and discussions with the Trails Working Group (TWG) in June. Our next step will be to examine ways to increase the level of service for trails in areas where trail segments are no longer considered implementable. Staff has been working with the TWG for the past several months developing a decision-making matrix for evaluating trail suitability for various gaps and implementation trouble spots. This matrix will be used to determine where future trails are and are not recommended.

Our next big effort with the TWG will be to develop a service delivery strategy, with the objectives to:

- serve high density areas more equitably by identifying more trails in underserved high density communities where feasible
- find the right balance between destination trails and local/close-to-home trails
- account for recreational trail networks in regional and recreational parks as part of destination trail systems (to which people are willing to drive)
- create more loop trail systems
- identify more existing natural surface trails as multi-use, and also build new trails as multi-use whenever feasible

In response to the comment that the PROS Plan should say more trails are needed, and that it should not say we can decrease miles of trails and still achieve adequate levels of service, staff proposes to rewrite the text describing how to achieve a good level of service.

Staff assessed our trail system's level of service and finds that Montgomery County has a relatively high countywide level of service for trails. Compared to other Maryland jurisdictions, the County features ample trail-based recreational opportunities. There are currently more than 60 miles of hard surface park trails and nearly 130 miles of natural surface trails on county parkland, for a total of .19 miles of trail per 1,000 residents. The only other Maryland County that comes close to these numbers is Prince George's, which has 44 miles of hard surface park trails and 81 miles of natural surface trails, for a total of .14 miles of trail per 1,000 residents. Of course, when bikeways are factored into the system, the level of service for cycling is much higher.

Despite the overall high level of service, the geographic distribution of trails in Montgomery County could be better. We hear from trail users that downcounty trails are crowded and overused, while upcounty trails are less crowded and underused. Some areas of the county do not have good access to trails, eg. the US 29 Corridor and the I-270 Corridor which are densely populated with few opportunities to acquire new land suitable for new trails. The CWPTP Amendment will attempt to remedy these problems by identifying new trails where appropriate, by better coordinating the park trail system with the planned bikeway network and otherwise improving level of service by enhancing or renovating existing trails or adding comfort features and amenities.

Specifically, staff agrees to delete the following sentences (from page 41 of the Public Hearing Draft):

- *Mileage is not the only indicator of the total amount of usability of the trail system. One way to improve the level of service for trails is to reroute them to reduce resource impacts and to make them more sustainable, accessible and usable. When trails are rerouted, new trail segments are built while older segments are eliminated which can make the total mileage fluctuate. A decrease in mileage does not necessarily indicate a lower level of service, but can actually indicate an increase of service through improvements.*

Staff recommends adding the following language to replace the recommended deletions:

- *From a countywide perspective, residents are well-served by park trails. Compared to other Maryland jurisdictions, Montgomery County features an extensive recreational park trail system, both hard surface and natural surface. But these trails could be more evenly distributed geographically, partially the result of the pattern and timing of past development and land acquisition opportunities. In any event, the result is that some areas of the county are better served (defined as convenient access) than others. For example, our hard surface trail system is primarily located in downcounty stream valley parks in older, more densely developed urbanized areas. It is important to have trails where population densities are highest.*
- *However, some current or proposed high density areas are not very well-served, such as the I-270 Corridor and the eastern area of the county. Residents living in these areas either have poor access to park trails or not enough trails. Additionally, because our hard surface park trail network is primarily located downcounty, residents could benefit from more miles of hard surface park trails upcounty in areas of new growth. New hard surface park trails are scheduled to be built by developers, such as the Clarksburg Greenway Trails. Conversely, because many of the county's natural surface trails are currently located in less populated areas primarily upcounty, residents could benefit from more miles of natural surface trails downcounty in the older, more urbanized areas.*
- *The Countywide Park Trails Plan Amendment currently underway will attempt to remedy these geographic disparities in level of service. But it will be difficult. Many currently master planned trails may not be feasible for environmental reasons or not cost effective. New trails often require more parkland either to complete gaps or bypass sensitive resources, and land acquisition opportunities no longer exist in some areas or are too costly. These problems will result in gaps in the countywide park trail system, some minor and some major. Increasing levels of service for some areas of the county may mean identifying innovative park trail-bikeway combinations to create a new breed of hybrid recreational facilities, such as the MOCO EPIC route in the western and northern sections of Montgomery County and the Cross County Trail in Fairfax County, Virginia.*
- *Ideally, locations for sustainable and suitable new park trails on parkland can be identified. But in areas where it is not feasible or cost-effective, increasing levels of service must be achieved in other ways such as renovating existing trails to make them more sustainable and enjoyable, by adding amenities and comfort features, or by relocating trails out of environmentally sensitive areas to reduce flooding and siltation problems.*

In response to the comment that Parks should be more proactive in identifying innovative bikeway/trail route combinations, staff believes that we have been extremely responsive to requests and innovative in installing facilities. A mountain bike pump track has been installed and will be expanded in FY '13 at South Germantown

Recreational Park. A mountain bike challenge course will be designed and possibly installed in FY '13 at the Carson Farm and we are currently designing one at Fairland Regional Park. We are working with mountain biking advocates to include the MOCO EPIC route in the CWPTP Amendment. This route, located upcounty, features a combination of trails that forms an extensive loop system through Seneca Creek State Park, the Germantown Greenway, Black Hills Regional Park, and Little Bennett Regional Park as well as along bikeways on State and County roads. This route has been lauded by the International Mountain Biking Association as one of the best trails in the country that is close to a major metropolitan area. To be successful, these types of facilities should be planned jointly with transportation agencies and while Parks can certainly do its part to advocate, transportation planners and engineers must also actively work to help make them a reality, by adding signage and promoting the routes to residents and visitors alike. Other opportunities to identify additional long-distance trail/bikeway loops of this type, particularly in the Agricultural Reserve will be explored during the CWPTP Amendment process. Staff will continue to analyze where these types of facility make sense and coordinate ideas with transportation professionals in the County. We will also investigate possible cross-county routes similar to Fairfax County's Cross County Trail.

In response to the comment that greenways should be for trails, not just wildlife corridors, staff intends to clarify the purposes and roles of "greenways" through the CWPTP Amendment. The term has been used inconsistently in various master plans, sometimes referring to trail corridors and sometimes to wildlife/natural corridors, and sometimes both. The traditional definition of a greenway includes only the land and its natural resources, not the facilities that pass through them. Therefore, one proposed change to the CWPTP Amendment will be to remove the word "greenway" from all trail names. The Rachel Carson Greenway Trail would become simply the Rachel Carson Trail, for example. The Seneca Greenway Trail would become the Seneca Trail. And so on. The parkland through which these trails pass likely will still be considered "greenways", particular if specifically identified/recommended in an approved and adopted master plan. But the trails themselves will no longer include the word "greenway" in their names.

That said, not all greenways can accommodate trails. It depends on topography, sensitivity of environmental resources, presence of cultural/historic resources, availability of land to bypass environmental buffers, number of users served, and other factors.

Acquisition of Parkland for Natural Resource-based Recreation and for Facility-based Recreation

COMMENTS AND TESTIMONY

During the presentation of the Staff Draft to the Planning Board on April 12, 2012, comments from Commissioners that focused on the Department of Parks' acquisition priorities for conservation land versus land for traditional recreational facilities included:

- All parkland needs to be activated and accessible
- Acquisition priorities show too much attention to conservation land, and not enough attention to land that allows athletic fields

At the public hearing, several speakers testified on this subject in support of the recreational value of conservation land above and beyond its ecological value. Testifiers requested that the PROS Plan add text on the recreational benefits of natural areas, with a lesser emphasis on traditional facilities and a greater focus on the value of connecting to nature. Vision 2030's support for green spaces to "renew" people was reiterated. The Legacy Open Space program was lauded for its ability to acquire land for both conservation and

recreation. Speakers supported the new “facility” type called urban wooded areas to enhance ecosystems within the built environment and to provide contact with nature for urban residents.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adding text to the PROS Plan that explains the recreational value of conservation land, along with an explanation of how the acquisition priorities (which are based on area master plans) reflect a balance of conservation and recreation land. The text would more or less paraphrase the following discussion.

DISCUSSION

In considering Board comments on park acquisition priorities, staff realized that a comparison of acreage alone might imply a higher priority for conservation land over recreation land; however, the facts reveal that over the last 20 years, the amount of dollars spent on conservation and recreation land is nearly 50-50.

Staff also realized that it was not clear to the Board how much recreation actually occurs on conservation land. The charts in the PROS Plan comparing “conservation” land to “recreation” land implies they are mutually exclusive, when in fact, they are not.

Furthermore, staff notes that conservation land can serve both recreation functions and stewardship functions, whereas facility-based parkland serves primarily a recreational function.

Finally, in response to comments on acquisition priorities for conservation land when compared with land for athletic fields, staff recognizes there is a historical unmet need for athletic fields in the downcounty because of the lack of available or affordable land there. Staff is actively exploring potential acquisitions of lands that are either underutilized or in low density commercial uses to help meet these needs. The Athletic Field Study will analyze in more detail the needs and capacity for fields and recommend strategies to help solve the unmet needs, including acquisition of properties in the downcounty area. The Athletic Field Study, as well as the area master plans, will be used to inform decision-makers of opportunities for future acquisition priorities.

The Recreational Value of Conservation Land

In order to demonstrate the value of conservation-oriented parks for natural resource-based recreation staff performed:

- an analysis of the current use of conservation land in parks for a variety of activities
- an assessment of the relative demand for such activities, when compared with more traditional, facility-based recreation
- a comparison of acquisitions in both dollars and acres, and including both taxpayer-funded and developer-funded projects, over the past 20 years
- goals and progress

Definition of Natural Resource-based Recreation

Natural resource-based recreation is defined as any leisure activity conducted outdoors that is dependent on a particular element or combination of elements in the natural environment. These elements cannot be easily duplicated by man. In contrast, facility-based recreation can generally be provided anywhere, assuming the

availability of space and funds for development. Natural resource-based recreation includes a vast range of pursuits. Some of our County's more popular and quantifiable resource-based recreation activities include land-based activities such as bird watching, nature photography, wildlife viewing, and aquatic-based activities such as kayaking, rowing, canoeing, and fishing.

Trails support activities such as walking, hiking, running, and biking. Although these activities are not necessarily dependent on natural areas, three quarters of Montgomery County residents indicate that they regularly seek out natural surface trails for hiking or to connect with nature. The 1995 M-NCPPC Park Users Survey found that walking and hiking are the most common recreational activities in parks.

Popularity of Natural Resource-based Recreation

The Vision 2030 Plan for Montgomery County (2010) survey indicates that natural areas, which are the platforms for natural resource-based recreational activities, rank higher than athletic fields in importance of adding, expanding, or improving.

Resource-based recreation is expected to increase in Montgomery County with population growth and as the County reaches "build-out." U.S. Census projections indicate that by 2050, one in every four Americans will be over age 65 with a mean age of 45. As the population pyramid shifts and individuals age, use will likely shift from facility-based to natural resources-based recreation. Individuals tend to put down their cleats and bats and pick up Field Guides and walking shoes.

The popularity of organizations that support or rely on the natural areas in parks for education and volunteerism further supports the value of conservation parkland. These include the Audubon Naturalist Society, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, Maryland Native Plant Society, and Trail Riders of Today. A wide variety of nature-related programs are offered at each of Montgomery County Parks' four nature centers. Trail-based and nature oriented equestrian activities are offered at Montgomery County Parks three equestrian centers. There is also a growing number of businesses that organize nature-related activities, such as bird walks and the maintenance of blue-bird trails (e.g., Back Yard Naturalist and the Wild Bird Center). As shown by annual reports of volunteerism in County parks, growing numbers of County residents derive a high degree of personal satisfaction from giving their time and energy to park-based stewardship activities such as reforestation projects, the construction, installation and monitoring of nest boxes for wildlife, trail maintenance, and stream clean-ups. In general, the quality of a natural-resource based recreational experience is directly related to the quality of the natural environment within which the activity is taking place. High-quality natural environments are characterized by a diversity of native plants and animals, an absence of exotic invasive plants, and the necessary quiet and solitude to enjoy the out-of-doors.

Examples of Participation in Natural Resource-based Recreation

Participation estimates for typical land-based natural resource recreation activities include bird watching (19%), nature photography (9%), and wildlife watching (4%). The percentage of the population that participates in these activities rivals, and sometimes exceeds, some County-wide facility-based recreation estimates. For example, the number of County residents who bird-watch is equal to the number who use dog parks. More people in the County are estimated to participate in wildlife watching (4%) than in skateboarding (3.2%). The estimated percentages of the population who participate in water-based recreation include fishing at 7%, kayaking at 1.31%, canoeing at 1%, and rowing at .5%. Many participate year-round in these natural resource-based recreation activities, whereas many facility-based activities are seasonal.

Park category types that provide natural-resource based recreation include 2/3 of Regional Parks, Conservation Parks, Stream Valley Parks, and natural areas in all other park types. Staff analyzed each of our

Regional, Conservation and Stream Valley Parks and found that recreation occurs in all of them, regardless of park type.

Acquisition Comparison of “Conservation versus Recreation” Parkland

An analysis of acquisition over the past twenty years shows a nearly equal level of investment in “conservation” land when compared with “recreation” land. Staff believes that a comparison of dollars invested is more appropriate than acres acquired, because conservation land is necessarily larger in order to preserve the natural resources within it, and it is typically less expensive than recreation land.

Summary of Land Acquisition Program, 1992-2011, by Park Category and Acquisition Type

Park Category	No-Cost Acquisitions		Cost Acquisitions		Recreation vs. Conservation		
	Acres	Cost	Acres	Cost	Acres	%	Cost %
Recreation Oriented Parks	1356	\$ 0	1197	\$ 78M	2553	33%	48%
Conservation Oriented Parks	3017	\$ 0	2236	\$ 83M	5253	67%	51%
No-Cost vs. Cost Totals	4373	\$ 0	3433	\$ 161M			
No-Cost vs. Cost Percent	56%	0%	44%	100%			

Progress in Natural Resource Land Acquisition

Natural resource-based recreation requires land and resource preservation far beyond the actual space for trails, wildlife viewing and other activities. Water quality capable of sustaining a diversity of fish and amphibian species, forests large enough to harbor forest interior dwelling birds, geological and soil conditions diverse enough to provide habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species – all are dependent on large tracts of land. Even urban wildlife accessible to people near their homes depend on threshold amounts and strategic locations of natural habitat.

It’s intuitive that the best resources will attract the greater numbers of visitors and that the quality of a natural recreational experience is directly related to the quality of the environment within which the activity is taking place. High quality natural environments are characterized by a diversity of animals and plants, an absence of invasive plants, a general absence of manmade features and often include varied topography and hydrologic features, and the necessary quiet and solitude to enjoy nature. Large areas of conservation parkland are needed to insure ecological function and sustainability, be it preserving watersheds or limiting fragmentation and edge effects to forested areas. Successful public acquisition of key acres can take decades due to available funding, negotiating with multiple owners, reaching agreements with willing sellers, etc. Examples of accumulating accrete pieces to produce desirable wholes include:

- Recent large additions to Hoyles Mill Conservation Park and Fairland Recreational Park will make these areas regional destinations for natural resource-based recreation.

- The popularity of the Seneca Greenway (State of MD and M-NCPPC) and the Rock Creek Hiker Biker Trail, for thousands of area runners in the fall season preparing for that big annual marathon, is a product of large contiguous and attractive additions to the park system over multiple decades.

It is difficult for a government or community to weigh the value of land acquisition, resource conservation and natural resource-based recreation. Benefits are usually long term, typically outweighing initial start-up cost. Countless studies from a broad spectrum of disciplines continue to confirm what conservationists and park planners have understood since at least the mid-nineteenth century when Frederick Law Olmstead correctly speculated that the cost of New York's Central Park would be covered by the rise in neighborhood value. Expenditures for parks and land conservation are best understood not as a cost but as an investment that will pay dividends, including economic ones, long into the future (Trust for Public Land, 2006).

Parkland in Montgomery County's system currently totals over 35,000 acres, 26,000 acres of which are conservation parkland. There are approximately 6,000 additional acres master planned for future acquisition. Additional lands will be identified for park acquisition as their importance to the public realm is identified. Priorities for future acquisitions (not currently master planned) will include additions to existing parks, areas with identified needs, and acquisition of strategic acreages in priority watersheds. In addition, future large donation opportunities will avail themselves. Specific criteria and priorities for natural resource conservation are described in the PROS Plan Chapter 4.

Other Recreation Facilities

COMMENTS AND TESTIMONY

Public hearing testimony included requests that the PROS Plan indicate need for additional volleyball courts, cricket fields, dog parks, renovated shaded playground equipment at Puller Park, and a joint Aquatic Center in Gaithersburg. Some testimony was received in support of additional rectangular fields. Support was voiced for the Athletic Field Study, and a request was made to not use the 2005 PROS Plan athletic field projections in the interim, and to restrict CIP projects to construction of new facilities requested by the community. Concern was expressed that athletic field service areas should be based on a different demographic unit than has been used in past PROS Plans, such as council districts.

Additional recommendations in the Plan for co-location of facilities were requested.

Municipalities requested additional POS funding with more funds allocated to high density areas.

Planning Board Comments included allowing flexibility for new trends, and reflecting future population age groups in the calculation of needs.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff has reviewed the comments on volleyball, cricket, and dog parks, and will make revisions to the plan accordingly. In response to the playground equipment at Puller Park, a playground renovation is currently in the design process.

The City of Gaithersburg suggests locating an expanded Community Recreation Center in Shady Grove and a feasibility study to determine need for an additional aquatic facility, and reviewing usage of the City of Gaithersburg Aquatic Facility. The City has completed a study for a new aquatic facility and design is 75% complete, funded in part by Montgomery County. They request that this project be added to PROS Plan, and that the County should continue this partnership and construct and operate the facility when economically

feasible. Staff of the Montgomery County Recreation Department believe the Plan should retain the current language because it gives them options, one of which is to review that project as a part of any future decision making.

The City of Rockville requested that data be added on existing parks in municipalities so that the contribution of municipalities to parks and open space in the County is understood. Staff concurs and will add information to the plan.

In response to comments about athletic fields, staff recommends that until the Athletic Field Study is completed, the Board and staff should continue to use the 2005 PROS Plan's estimated needs, which were projected to the year 2020. During the study, staff will evaluate a variety of methods for assessing needs and the capacity of the system to meet those needs. As stated on page 50 of the Public Hearing Draft, the Athletic Field Study will:

"... compare and contrast M-NCPPC Department of Parks current method of predicting future athletic field needs by sport, youth versus adult (as first proposed in the 2005 PROS Plan), with methods used by other jurisdictions throughout Maryland and elsewhere. If the Department of Parks and its various governmental partners agree on a more accurate method for predicting future athletic field needs, the Department will use it."

Agricultural Preservation

Agricultural Preservation will be discussed at the July 19, 2012 Worksession.

COMMENTS AND TESTIMONY

Public Hearing Testimony requested that the PROS Plan add information on the environmental, recreational and aesthetic benefits of the Agricultural Reserve. The Reserve protects many natural resources that must be stewarded and is important as a food source and for youth education. Adding information on important heritage sites was also requested.

Planning Board concerns include recognizing that the Agricultural Reserve is a benefit to all and provides important open space, and that we need to consider how to provide activities for people to enjoy it. The PROS Plan should define the many purposes served by it, e.g., open spaces, views, unprogrammed recreation (fishing, etc).

Staff Recommendation

Staff concurs with comments and recommends the following changes to the Agricultural Preservation Chapter:

- a statement on the benefits of agriculture
- revisions to the state goals for agriculture
- additional information on progress and future goals
- additional information on important heritage sites in agricultural areas

The revised chapter, which will be posted on the Planning Board's agenda for the July 19 Worksession, will expand on the following:

Montgomery County's vision and commitment to agricultural land preservation and stewardship of the Agricultural Reserve continues. Since the 2005 PROS Plan, the County has exceeded its goal of preserving 70,000 acres of farmland, has established a new program, the Building Lot Termination (BLT) program to further protect farmland, has preserved environmentally sensitive and culturally significant properties through programs such as Legacy Open Space, and has initiated an Agricultural Incubator program as a resource to support farmers. Agricultural land serves many important functions including preserving the County's agricultural heritage, cultural resources, open spaces, and sensitive natural areas. Encouraging the growth of farming through land preservation efforts, public policies and programs, continues to be a top priority in Montgomery County. In addition, agricultural land is important for protecting ecosystems, maintaining biological diversity, reducing storm water runoff, and providing open spaces and places for unstructured recreational activities.

Attachments:

1. Public Hearing Testimony and Related Staff Comments

PC:

Gene Giddens – Acting Deputy Director of Parks for Operations
MaryEllen Venzke – Management Services
Kate Stookey – Public Affairs and Community Partnerships
Mitra Pedoem – Park Development
John Nissel – Facilities Management
David Vismara – Horticulture, Forestry, and Environmental Education

Brian Woodward – Southern Parks
John Hench – Park Planning & Stewardship
Mike Horrigan – Northern Parks
Darien Manley – Park Police
Christine Brett – Enterprise
Rose Krasnow - Interim Director, Department of Planning

Attachment 1

Public Hearing Testimony and Related Staff Comments

Public Testimony - The 2012 Pros Plan Public Hearing, M-NCPPC Planning Board - Thursday, May 24, 2012

SPEAKER/ ORGANIZATION	TESTIMONY	STAFF RESPONSE
MAY 24, 2012 PUBLIC HEARING SPEAKERS		
<p>Laura Mol Downcounty Resident Oral And Written Testimony</p>	<p>Agriculture Chapter missing 3 major points that need to be added to draft.</p> <p>1) Importance of Agriculture land as a contribution to Environmental Protection, ecosystems, and biological diversity (SWM, Open Space, etc.)</p> <p>2) Ag. Lands include many important natural resources that we must steward for future generations</p> <p>3) Ag lands are an aesthetic treasure and provide an important part in unstructured recreation activities</p> <p>P. 106 - need more information in Plan on accomplishments and how much more is needed.</p> <p>Replace State goals on agriculture on p. 99 with those in the 2009 Maryland LPPRP.</p>	<p>Agreed. Add language to Plan</p> <p>2009 goals will be added</p>
<p>Joe Fritsch "MORE"- Trail Working Group Oral Testimony</p>	<p>Generally In favor of plan, and its focus on more multi-use trails and the CWPTP. Could add more on how mountain biking provides high quality exercise and opportunity to view nature. Add to new trends section: mountain biking skills areas and pump tracks, BMX tracks. Paved trails are needed for commuting. Need linkages to county bikeways</p>	<p>Will add language to Plan.</p> <p>The CWPTP Amendment will address the need for more multi-use trails, including identifying more trails, and building new sustainable trails, suitable for mountain biking. Staff is also currently examining locations for new bicycle skills areas suitable for both mountain biking and BMXers. The CWPTP Amendment will be well-coordinated with the bikeways master plan.</p>
<p>Dolores Milmoie Audubon Naturalist Society</p>	<p>Commends inclusion of Vision 2030 material.</p> <p>Supports trails- they are adequate.</p> <p>Supports Urban Parks especially urban wooded area. Veterans Plaza gets less use since it was paved over. They help with SWM.</p> <p>Parks are teaching labs for students. "Green Kids" education outreach.</p> <p>Add more specific info on important resources -</p>	<p>Montgomery County is generally well-served by trails, but they are not spatially distributed equally across the county and therefore some areas have better access to the trail system than others.</p> <p>Information was added to Plan</p>

SPEAKER/ ORGANIZATION	TESTIMONY	STAFF RESPONSE
	<p>heritage sites, rustic roads, equestrian programs, Darby Store.</p> <p>Concurs with Laura Mol’s comments on Agriculture. Need more in Plan on importance of what we are doing. Agriculture needed as food source-school participation. 107,000 acres of Ag Preserve- and over 1/3 is parkland.</p>	<p>Added to Plan</p>
<p>Ron Welke Mid-Atlantic Volleyball Club (MAV)</p>	<p>Recommend change on p. 36 - Change additional needs to 8-12. Co-locate courts with restrooms, lighting and picnic tables.</p> <p>p. 46.47- Agree with Service Delivery strategy. MAV would assist staff to evaluate future locations</p>	<p>P. 47 conflicts with p 36. Will revise p. 47. Needs are 6 additional courts in the next 10 years.</p> <p>Staff will contact MAV during implementation site selection study</p>
<p>Natalie Goldberg White Flint Resident</p>	<p>Leave existing Urban Park Category to apply to existing Urban Parks that serve neighborhoods. Add new countywide “Civic Green” category that will serve future growth areas.</p> <p>Civic greens should be better defined. What will they provide for the public?</p>	<p>Urban park classification revised to include both a Countywide Category for Sector Plan or CBD areas and a Community Use Category for parks that serve a segment of an urban area such as a neighborhood or district.</p> <p>Add to Plan</p>
<p>Ginny Barnes Conservation Montgomery</p>	<p>Public Hearings should be at night to allow working residents opportunity to testify</p> <p>Many people don’t know about the PROS Plan and understand what it does.</p> <p>Calls for a new definition of “Recreation” People “re-create” themselves. Urban residents need natural areas too. Vision 2030 expressed how green spaces renew people.</p> <p>People want more access to natural areas and more trails, connectivity.</p> <p>Parks serve multiple functions, add tree canopy, provide storm water management.</p> <p>Praise new trail Plan for looking at connectivity and determining what is realistic- what trails can and can not be implemented.</p> <p>Legacy Open Space acquired 2,550 acres (\$83 mil) on Recreation land and 5,250 acres (\$78mil) on conservation lands – which are lower maintenance.</p> <p>Urban Parks should be multi-functional - Serve SWM, add tree canopy</p>	<p>June 28 work session will be at night and allow testimony</p> <p>Initiate discussions to determine how we can better outreach to the public about PROS, and get people out to enjoy the parks.</p> <p>Add material to Plan, where relevant.</p> <p>Concur</p>

SPEAKER/ ORGANIZATION	TESTIMONY	STAFF RESPONSE
	People need to be encouraged to get out and explore our parks.	
WRITTEN TESTIMONY		
<p>Carole Ann Barth Montgomery County Civic Federation</p>	<p>Commend new definition of urban parks</p> <p>Providing un-programmed natural areas in high density areas enhances ecosystems within the built environment.</p> <p>Plan should recommend more co-located facilities</p> <p>Ballfield Needs Areas should be based on a demographic unit like council districts</p> <p>The proposed Athletic Field Study is long overdue. The 2005 PROS Ballfield needs should not be used as much has changed and the methodology was flawed.</p> <p>Suspend construction of new ballfields that were not initiated in response to community requests until study is completed and new estimates have been thoroughly vetted.</p>	<p>Add wording to text</p> <p>Co- location recommendation on p. 3. Will consider adding text on co-locating facilities to introductory service delivery material for countywide, athletic field and Planning area facility text in chapter 3.)</p> <p>Retain existing Areas. Demographics can be analyzed for PROS Athletic Areas</p> <p>Use 2005 projections until the Athletic Field Study is complete</p>
<p>Burt Hall Director of Recreation and Parks Rockville, Maryland</p>	<p>Add more photos of County parks and facilities</p> <p>The new Urban Parks category is important, and the Urban Park Guidelines, Objectives, Definitions and Recommendations are excellent.</p> <p>Appropriate for PROS to address challenges of urban wildlife management</p> <p>Support the focus on problems associated with non-native and invasive species.</p> <p>Recommend smaller, local special use facilities as opposed to regional drive- to facilities.</p> <p>Support re-purposing athletic fields and courts based on user trends. Support more rectangular fields, question need for any new tennis courts.</p> <p>Support efforts to coordinate bikeway planning and recommend County continue to grow the trail</p>	<p>Concur</p> <p>Both are needed</p> <p>Concur</p> <p>Concur . The CWPTP Amendment will be well-coordinated with the 2005</p>

SPEAKER/ ORGANIZATION	TESTIMONY	STAFF RESPONSE
	<p>system.</p> <p>Recommend adding pickle ball and bocce courts to changing trends, as they are growing sports, particularly among senior citizens.</p> <p>How do PROS recommendations consider the regional differences in cultural diversity of the County</p> <p>Surprised that County has \$29.5 million in Legacy Open Space funds available from the State in the upcoming 5 year CIP when the amount for other park types is \$1.6 mil. State’s funding for PROS resources needs to be re-thought. Need to work with municipalities to discuss a more balanced approach to future State funding policies with more funds going to area where population densities are highest, and include a re-distribution of a portion of these funds annually to the municipalities.</p> <p>Add a section to the Plan that includes substantial information on municipal parks, and how they serve a large number of residents</p>	<p>Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan, to ensure efficient and safe access between recreational trails on parkland and bicycle facilities in transportation rights-of-way.</p> <p>Will add to trends in Plan</p> <p>(Vision 2030- met with groups from African, Latino, Chinese, Caribbean, People with disabilities, teens and elderly to discuss future needs) We will address diversity to the extent possible in the Implementation Study</p> <p>Legacy Open Space is not getting its funds from the State of Maryland: it is a County program.</p> <p>LOS funds are for a variety of our normal park types with an emphasis on open space. Legacy Open Space funds have been used for acquisition of every park type but local and neighborhood parks, and for several park acquisitions in the dense urban corridors.</p> <p>LOS funds are used to acquire rare open spaces within dense urban communities as one of the main categories of the program (Urban Open Space), but other park acquisition funding is required to support facility-based recreation within the dense urban communities of the County (i.e., lobbying for more POS from the State).</p> <p>(Will add some information to Plan on Municipalities)</p>
<p>Julie Bloss Kelsey Resident</p>	<p>Include Waring Station Woods in the Legacy Open Space Program. 10 acre property includes mature hardwood forest and is ecologically and functionally connected to Seneca Creek State Park. Could be an Environmental classroom for Roberto Clemente Middle School across the street</p>	<p>Will be evaluated by Legacy Open Space Committee</p>
<p>Michele Potter Director Department of Parks, City of Gaithersburg</p>	<p>Gaithersburg does not meet the state acquisition goal of 30 acres of recreation parkland per 1000 persons. Request additional Program Open Space Money to expand parks and meet goal.</p>	

SPEAKER/ ORGANIZATION	TESTIMONY	STAFF RESPONSE
	<p>Plan suggests locating an expanded Community Recreation Center in Shady Grove and a feasibility study to determine need for an additional aquatic facility, and reviewing usage of the City of Gaithersburg Aquatic Facility. The City has completed a study for a new aquatic facility and design is 75% complete, funded in part by Montgomery County. Project should be added to PROS report, and the county should continue this partnership and construct and operate facility when economically feasible.</p>	<p>Recreation Dept. has suggested retaining current language as it gives them options, one of which is to review that project as part of any future decision making.</p>
<p>Ali White MCPS Special Education PTSA Rep. and Ha Makom Halom Founder, Upcounty Jewish Multicultural Interfaith Community</p>	<p>Add Waring Station Woods to Legacy Open Space Program</p>	<p>Will be evaluated by Legacy Open Space Committee</p>
<p>Silver Spring Canines Written Testimony</p>	<p>Request recommending more dog parks in PROS Plan, and including one at Nolte Park. Nolte Park is close to downtown Silver Spring and surrounded by a large apt. complex and homes. Request that the eastern most part of the park (1 acre) be considered for a dog park. It is currently a de facto dog park and has worked well, Would like it to stay grass and add amenities, but would accept a no-fence dog park.</p> <p>Need more dog parks in urban areas, and less in regional parks. Dog parks are important to good dog health and behavior, particularly in urban areas. Careful planning is important and should include: 1) Clear signage of rules, payment should be required;2) Fencing including separation of large and small dogs; 3) Adequate seating; 4)Effective surfacing- suggest decomposed granite or K-9 Grass- an artificial turf. Do not use rocks or gravel; 5) Lighting, if night use is anticipated; 6) Enclosed gazebo structures are nice but not critical; 7) Plant material is difficult to maintain-suggest tree pit; 8) Activities for dogs such as toys, jumps, or tunnels, and hose or water for swimming, if possible.;9) Water fountain for dogs and humans ; 10) Sanitary waste disposal to avoid storm water pollution; 11)rest rooms; 12) low maintenance design.</p> <p>Need proper supervision, enforced policies, attention to design, environment. They offer to partner with County to create a world class dog park inside Nolte Park.</p>	<p>PROS Plan recommends 12 more or 24 acres of dog parks in next 10 years. The proposed Implementation Plan to locate sites for dog parks will consider Nolte Park.</p> <p>Service Delivery Strategy on p. 43 will add wording to recommend locating additional dog parks in urban areas.</p>

SPEAKER/ ORGANIZATION	TESTIMONY	STAFF RESPONSE
Boyd Reilly Resident	Consider a dog park at Nolte Park	The proposed Implementation Plan to locate sites for dog parks will consider Nolte Park
Boris Muchnik	More Volleyball courts needed. Only 1 location with lighted courts, Olney Manor which is insufficient for thousands of volleyball in Montgomery County. When planning new sporting facilities or refurbishing old ones, volleyball courts should be added. Volleyball organizations and individuals would be happy to help with issues concerning need, site selection, specifications, etc. Contact Ron Welke	We will work with user groups and players during our Implementation Sites Selection Study
Leo Buscher	M.C. Lacks sufficient outdoor volleyball courts, especially lighted courts. Groups of courts (2 or more) need to be placed in local parks so they are convenient to players. Lighted courts would allow 8 months outdoor play. When planning new sporting facilities or refurbishing old ones, volleyball courts should be added. Would be glad to help advise regarding issues of need, sites, specifications, etc.	We will work with user groups and players during our Implementation Sites Selection Study
White Flint Community Coalition	Support PROS goals and vision, but concerned about PROS definition of urban parks. Concerned about definition of a Civic Green. It should not have an upper size limit.	Revised definition of Urban Parks
Karen Hansel Resident	Replace playground equipment at Puller Park. It is only shaded playground in Kensington, and needs new equipment for different ages. If Rock Creek Hills is used as a middle school, there is no park to take on the extra volume and the residents at Kensington Park Retirement Community will lose a safe place to walk.	Playground equipment replacement at Puller Park in design process and scheduled for replacement after July 1, 2012. Consider adding importance of shade and multi-age equipment to Plan on p. 56.
Cherian Eapen Montgomery County Cricket Association	Need dedicated full- size field for exclusive cricket use. Concur with PROS projected need for 4 fields. Request plan recommend prioritize planning, design, development and delivery of either Barmakian Property or the Little Bennett Regional Park site for the exclusive use of cricket. Look forward to working with parks on site selection. Figure 15, p. 64 should include a cricket field in the short-range time frame, and another one in the mid-range time frame. This could be indicated with a footnote that acknowledges the proposed fall 2012 site selection study and the proposed facility planning project in FY 13/14.	Will add a short term project to p. 64 as a site selection study will be done shortly and there is a cricket field in the CIP for facility planning

Last Updated: Wednesday, June 20, 2012