



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS**  
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB  
Item: 7  
Date: 9/19/13

September 12, 2013

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Mary R. Bradford, Director of Parks *Mary R. Bradford*  
Michael F. Riley, Deputy Director *M. F. Riley*  
Mitra Pedoeem, Chief, Park Development Division *Mitra Pedoeem*  
Patricia McManus, Design Section Supervisor, Park Development Division *Patricia McManus*

**FROM:** Linda Komes, Landscape Architect/Project Manager, Park Development Division *LK*  
Michael Younes, Director of Municipal Operations, Chevy Chase Village *Michael Younes*

**SUBJECT:** Facility Plan for Chevy Chase Open Space Urban Park

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

- 1) Approve Recommended Facility Plan, including cost estimate
- 2) Approve a park name change from Chevy Chase Open Space Park to Western Grove Park

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to develop a facility plan for a new urban park in Chevy Chase Village. Currently known as Chevy Chase Open Space Urban Park, the 1.9 acre site is located at 5409 Western Avenue just outside of the Friendship Heights Central Business District (CBD), within Chevy Chase Village. The property was formerly known as the Wohlfarth Property, and consists of 10 recorded, residential lots.

Chevy Chase Village seeks approval by the Planning Board to change the name of the park to Western Grove Urban Park. The name is appropriate and noteworthy for several reasons. The property is located with street frontage on both Western Avenue and Grove Street. In addition, the subject property once included a small landscape business called Western Grove Nursery and Garden Center, and as a result of its former use, presently includes several "groves" of beautiful and mature trees.

The southern property line of the park is formed by the right-of-way of Western Avenue, which lies wholly within the District of Columbia, including the public sidewalk and a portion of the park's semi-wooded, Western Avenue frontage. Confronting properties within the District of Columbia consist of the Lisner Home retirement center, and the recently renovated Chevy Chase Park, a DC Department of Recreation neighborhood park.

The northern property line is formed by the Grove Street right-of-way, a residential street located within Chevy Chase Village. Chevy Chase Center, a mixed-use development located within the Friendship Heights Central Business District ("the CBD") abuts the park to the West. An entrance to the Friendship Heights Metro Station is located within 1,000 feet of the park. Property to the east of the park is developed with a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Other nearby uses include shopping centers, restaurants, a hotel, high-rise commercial office and residential buildings, a movie theatre, and the single family homes of Chevy Chase Village and Chevy Chase, DC.

## **Background**

The property was acquired as Urban Open Space through the Legacy Open Space program in partnership with Chevy Chase Village ("the Village") in 2001. The Village contributed \$1.25 million dollars, or 25% of the purchase price towards acquisition of the property. In 2002, an intergovernmental Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was entered into with Montgomery County, the Commission and Chevy Chase Village. Under the terms of the MOU the Village is responsible for providing municipal services to the park such as police and trash removal. In 2007, after cessation of a life estate, demolition of the existing structures was completed. The Village contributed 50% towards the cost of demolition.

In 2011, a planning process was initiated to develop a "vision" for the park, a Concept Plan, and a Program of Requirements (POR). A liaison committee, known as the Chevy Chase Open Space Committee, was created by Chevy Chase Village to work hand-in-hand with the Department of Parks, and an internal team of stakeholders was established. From 2011 to 2012, multiple site visits, internal coordination meetings, and public meetings were held to develop the Concept Plan. Public meetings were held in partnership with the Village on June 16, 2011 and June 18, 2012. (See Appendix B and D of the attached Facility Plan Report, Attachment B for more information).

The Concept Plan was approved by the Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers on September 12, 2012, and was presented to the Planning Board in a project briefing on May 9, 2013. Since that time and because the park is already heavily used, several low cost interim site improvements compatible with the Concept Plan have been implemented, including the removal of dead, dying and hazardous trees and invasive vegetation, the addition of two wood chip paths, and supplemental landscape planting.

Facility planning represents thirty percent complete construction documents, including a proposed design, cost estimate and determination of regulatory feasibility. The prime consultants hired in June of 2013 were A. Morton Thomas and Associates, Inc. and Marsha Lea, Landscape Architects. The facility plan was funded in partnership with the Village, with the Village contributing \$46,605, and the Department of Parks contributing the remaining \$25,070 funded from the FY 2010-2011 Capital Improvements Program in the Facility Planning: Non-Local Parks PDF.

If approved, the project will be proposed for final design and construction in the Fiscal Year 2015-2020 Capital Improvements Program (CIP.) It is anticipated that the project will be completed in partnership and with continuing financial support from the Village for park improvements and maintenance. The schedule of the project will be determined during review of the CIP.

### **Existing Conditions**

The nearly square 1.9 acre property has approximately 13 feet of vertical grade change from the high point located in the northwest area of the site to the low point in the southwest corner of the property. The central, open grassy portion of the site is almost completely level and tends to drain very slowly following storms.

The property's character is distinctly gardenesque and tranquil in feeling, which is remarkable given its proximity to the adjacent, heavily urbanized Friendship Heights CBD. The property includes a number of large, mature, specimen-quality trees and shrub masses including a slope covered with a large border of mature Azaleas ("Azalea Hill"). Two informal pedestrian trails bisect the open central green area, providing access to the CBD from the established neighborhoods within Chevy Chase Village. A recently installed cedar fence by the Chevy Chase Land Company provides some screening along the western property line with the Chevy Chase Center development in the Friendship Heights CBD. A line of existing trees provides filtered views into the park from the Western Avenue public sidewalk.

Maintenance access is currently provided via an existing curb cut and driveway entrance located along the Western Avenue frontage.

### **MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Park falls under the 1990 Bethesda/Chevy Chase Master Plan in the Eastern and Southern B-CC Section. Because the land was acquired as parkland well after the Master Plan was written, there is no specific guidance provided for this property's use as a park. Page 152 of the Master Plan states the following: "This Plan recognizes that parks and open spaces are essential ingredients of the quality of life in Bethesda-Chevy Chase. One of the reasons people like living in Montgomery County is because it is green and beautiful. As the down-County area becomes increasingly urbanized, it is even more important to safeguard the parks and open spaces that provide breathing room for residents". Chevy Chase Open Space Park embodies this Master Plan vision.

#### **2012 Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan**

The 2012 Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan includes a park classification system and provides quantitative estimates of future recreational facility needs as well as goals for natural, historic and agricultural resource stewardship. It also includes specific service delivery strategies to meet future needs through 2022 and beyond.

According to the PROS Plan (p. 14), Chevy Chase Open Space is classified as an Urban Park under the Community Use Park category. Parks in this category are very small and serve residents of surrounding highly urban areas. Typical facilities found in Urban Parks include sitting/picnic areas, play equipment, courts, shelters and landscaping.

Page 16 of the PROS Plan further describes this type of park as an Urban Buffer Park which “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”. It is further noted on Page 53 that “A community open space is an open, level, grassy area for a variety of informal recreational activities. The *Vision 2030* survey did not assess the importance of this component; however, it notes that flexible, un-programmed areas in existing parks are heavily used and often requested.

### **Vision 2030: The Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan**

Vision 2030 is a strategic plan for park and recreation services in Montgomery County for the next twenty years. The plan shows Chevy Chase Open Space located in the South Central planning area, an area of the County identified as having the least access to recreation facilities and services. Volume 2, page 10 includes a map which indicates that the South Central portion of the County is projected to have the second highest (after the North Central sub-area) percentage of population growth by the year 2020. This combination of less access to recreation and projected high population growth only reinforces the need to provide more areas for recreation, as increasing pressure is placed on urban green areas such as Chevy Chase Open Space Park.

### **2001 Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan**

This property was designated as an Urban Open Space in the original *Legacy Open Space Functional Master Plan* (LOS Master Plan, 2001), with a recommendation to acquire the property for Urban parkland. The objective of the Urban Open Space category is to preserve important green areas and natural resources within existing neighborhoods. This property (the Wohlfarth Property in the Plan) was identified as a largely undeveloped parcel in a very dense neighborhood that had great potential for providing a green respite from the built environment for area residents, employees, shoppers, and commuters. The site was one of the last remaining undeveloped parcels within the Friendship Heights/Chevy Chase Village area, is situated to provide a transition between the existing central business district and residential neighborhoods, and has the potential to serve many demographic groups within those dense neighborhoods.

## **FACILITY PLAN**

### **The Facility Planning Process**

Because some of the typical tasks associated with the facility planning process were completed during the concept plan process, an abbreviated facility planning process was undertaken and included the following sequence of work:

1. Collect data, prepare site survey, and perform geotechnical investigations.
2. Analyze existing site conditions.
3. Prepare preliminary design based on the Concept Plan.
4. Prepare stormwater management concept submission and obtain approval from the Department of Permitting Services (approval pending).
5. Prepare request for a forest conservation plan exemption and submit Tree Save Plan.
6. Coordinate with regulatory agencies.

7. Prepare facility plan report, cost estimate, and operating budget estimate.
8. Present facility plan recommendations and costs to the Montgomery County Planning Board for approval.

### **Program of Requirements**

The program of requirements for the park was developed during the Concept Plan stage and was the basis of the subject Facility Plan. The major program elements include the following:

- Two hard-surface, ADA compliant, lighted walkways - Trails to provide access to the CBD from the Village and to amenities throughout the park. The main, eight-foot wide trail with reinforced turf shoulders, will also be used by park maintenance staff. The "Woodland Trail" is designed at 4'-8" wide and will provide a connection to the Village's existing Belmont Buffer trail.
- "Azalea Hill" - Preserve and enhance existing garden of azaleas and existing shade trees and the adjacent open slope for winter snow sledding
- "Great Lawn" - Create a large open area(s) for un-programmed play
- Natural Play Area - Develop a creative, low-key, natural play area for children
- Western Avenue Frontage - Preserve the "Birch Grove" and existing trees as a visual buffer and provide a transparent fence for safety, while preserving visibility into/out of park
- Pedestrian Park Entrances - Provide attractive, welcoming, park entrances based on a hierarchy of use. The main gate entry trellis will be constructed in the southwest corner of the park on Western Avenue. A secondary gate/trellis will be provided in the northeast corner on Grove Street. The structures will fit the context and create a sense of identity for the park. An attractive entrance will also be provided at the Belmont Buffer entrance.
- Maintenance Access – Establish a maintenance access drive using the existing curb cut on Western Ave. Create an area where a truck with a trailer can safely pull fully into the park from busy Western Avenue and can turn around. The area should include reinforced turf areas for ease of long term maintenance.
- Park Edge Landscape Buffers - Broken screening consisting of preserved and supplemental landscape planting will be provided along the common property lines with Chevy Chase Center and the Church property.
- Seating/Picnic Plaza - Provide an attractive area with moveable furniture and Wi-Fi for mobile device usage. This area may include a water wall feature to mitigate the noise from Western Avenue.
- Birdhouse Garden – Create garden around existing birdhouse; potential location for optional amenities
- Possible Future Amenities: Water Feature(s), Public Art, Human Sundial, Sand Play Feature, Meditation Maze, etc.

### **Additional Coordination and Regulatory Approvals**

#### M-NCPPC Department of Planning

A Tree Save Plan was approved for the park, as part of the demolition of the existing house, on July 16, 2009 (File #42009125E). An updated Tree Save Plan was submitted and is currently

under review. The site is exempt from Forest Conservation requirements. It is anticipated that an exemption letter will be provided prior to the Planning Board meeting on September 19, 2013.

#### Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services(DPS)

The stormwater management concept plan for the park is currently under review. Preliminary discussions with DPS indicate that the concept will be approved following the Planning Board meeting.

#### District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT)

A permit will be required from DOT for any improvements in the public right-of-way for Western Avenue. An approximate 25 foot-wide strip of wooded land lies between the public sidewalk and the park property line along the western Avenue property frontage. The M-NCPPC is responsible for maintaining this area as part of the park and must obtain a permit from DDOT for any proposed improvements within this area. These improvements include the upgraded maintenance access with bollards, the entrance arbor, fencing, large tree removals, etc. In addition, a connection to the storm sewer line in Western Avenue will also require DDOT's permission and permit approval.

#### **Recommended Facility Plan**

The recommended facility plan is the result of a unique partnership with Chevy Chase Village and the Chevy Chase Village Open Space Committee. The Concept Plan and Program of Requirements were thoughtfully developed with public input in 2011/2012 and were carefully followed in the development of the Facility Plan. The plan acknowledges the site's location next to the urban core of Friendship Heights and preserves and enhances the existing gardenesque and tranquil qualities of the site. The proposed facilities embody the design principle of "Form follows Function". Two lighted, gently curving brick paths, roughly aligned along desire lines, provide comfortable and barrier-free access between the Friendship Heights urban core and metro station, and the neighborhoods just beyond in Chevy Chase Village.



Facilities have carefully and very deliberately been designed to be perceived as “low-key” and to “lie lightly” on the land, enhancing the tranquil qualities of the park. A natural play area is proposed with stepping stone boulders, log seats, and a living hut of bent branches. Low ornamental fencing will be provided along the Western Avenue frontage amidst a grove of existing trees, to safely prevent children from dashing out into Western Avenue, but also allowing filtered views into the park. A welcoming entrance arbor with stone columns will invite users into the park from Western Avenue. A seating area with special paving, moveable furniture,

Wi-Fi access, a seat wall and perhaps, a future water feature, has been carefully located to minimize grading and to take advantage of existing shade and solar orientation.

An existing area in the center of the site with poor drainage will be corrected to create a “Great Lawn” area encouraging unprogrammed and informal play. The slope along the northern edge which contains “Azalea Hill” and the adjacent sledding hill will be preserved. Benches, bike racks, trash and recycling containers, and a drinking fountain with a dog bowl, will be carefully sited. Supplemental planting, concentrated around the perimeter of the park will enhance the existing wooded edges.

A new maintenance entrance will be provided from Western Avenue allowing a maintenance vehicle with a trailer to fully pull into the site and turn around. Reinforced turf will be provided in order to minimize the amount of pervious area. Bollards will be provided to prevent unauthorized vehicles from entering the site. The Village’s Open space committee mentioned that this could be an opportunity to provide an interesting gate in this area in the future.

Future facilities may include a water feature, public art, sand play area, a human sundial, and meditation maze. The program has deliberately been created to be flexible and may slightly change over time based on the needs and desires of the community. It is anticipated that the Department of Parks will fund 75% of the cost of the basic infrastructure for the park, and Chevy Chase Village will fund the remaining 25% of the infrastructure cost. In addition, future special items will be funded and maintained by the Village or through donor contributions.



## COSTS AND PHASING

### Construction Costs

A summary of construction costs for the basic infrastructure of the park is outlined in the table below. A detailed cost estimate is included in the appendices of the facility plan report.

Item	Subtotal
General Conditions/Site Preparation	\$8,500
Earthwork	\$66,000
Stormwater Management, Sediment and Erosion Control	\$40,700
Structures (seat wall, entrance arbors, fencing, drinking fountain, lighting, kiosk with Wi-Fi router)	\$114,200
Paving	\$259,300
Site Furnishings (benches, tables and chairs, bollards, trash/recycling containers, bike racks)	\$51,000
Tree Preservation	\$23,400
Utilities and Permit Fees	\$41,500
Natural Play Area	\$23,400
Landscaping	\$63,800
<b>Construction Subtotal</b>	<b>\$691,800</b>
Construction Contingency (25% of Construction Subtotal)	\$172,950
<b>Construction Total (Subtotal plus Contingency)</b>	<b>\$864,750</b>
Design Contract with Contingency (15% of Construction Total)	\$129,800
Staff Chargebacks for Design (20% of Design Contract)	\$26,000
Construction Management & Inspections (4% of Construction Total)	\$34,600
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST</b>	<b>\$1,055,150</b>



## **Phasing and Funding**

The cost to construct the improvements in the park can be completed in several phases. It is recommended that the first phase include design and permitting, site preparation, earthwork, stormwater management, and sediment and erosion control, utilities, hardscape paths, lighting, entrance arbors, fencing, the seating area, natural play area and site furnishings. Additional landscape planting and such future amenities as the water feature, public art, sand play area, and the mediation maze provide opportunities for donor contributions or funding by the Village. With the exception of the landscape planting, a portion of which is associated with the stormwater management facilities, the cost of the potential donor funded facilities have not been included in the Construction Costs above.

Chevy Chase Village remains committed to playing a significant role in the financial support of the project and is very interested in seeing construction begin in FY15. It is also anticipated that Chevy Chase Village's contribution to this phase of development will be consistent with its prior level of commitment during the acquisition of the property of 25% for the first phase of the project.

## **Operating Budget Impact**

The Operating Budget Impact (OBI) was not completed at the time of this report and will be presented to the Montgomery County Planning Board at the meeting on September 19, 2013. The increase in OBI is not anticipated to be significant. The Department of Parks is currently mowing the grass and providing general landscape maintenance. Chevy Chase Village is currently responsible for trash collection and police. It is anticipated that the Village will provide snow removal of the walkways in the wintertime and will be responsible for the maintenance of future special items such as the water feature, public art, and perennial beds and borders.

The current MOU between the Commission and the Village will be amended as appropriate to incorporate any changes or additions regarding the financial partnership and maintenance responsibilities.

## **CONCLUSION**

Staff recommends approval of the Facility Plan, its associated cost estimate, and the requested name change. Western Grove Urban Park will provide a much needed green respite in a densely developed area of Montgomery County. The ongoing partnership with Chevy Chase Village is an opportunity to share in the costs associated with the development and maintenance of this important urban park. The facility plan embraces the community's vision for this park and preserves the site's unique gardenesque character within the context of the Friendship Heights CBD. The plan and its elements are designed efficiently, with a "less but better" approach, in order to serve multiple functions and provide flexibility for the future. The plan develops the site in a sustainable, sensitive and innovative way, to provide a memorable outdoor experience for future generations.

## **Attachments**

Attachment A: Letter of Support from Chevy Chase Open Space Committee, dated 9/5/13  
Attachment B: Facility Plan Report