





February 5, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Charles Loehr, Director 

FROM: Strategic Planning Division
Melissa Cuñha Banach, Chief 
Roselle George
Michael Asante

SUBJECT: Looking Ahead—Strategies for Planning, Developing, and Managing Parks in the Future

RECOMMENDATION: Contemplative Discussion

Developing and managing our park system in the new millennium will require the ability to monitor contemporary trends and respond effectively with strategic decision-making. This report continues the Department's long history of anticipating the future, by identifying a range of possible trends that will likely affect park use, need, planning, and management.

Given the growing differences in resident priorities, income levels, and park needs, and the accelerating pace of park user change, the timing is right to a) quantify new Census 2000 data that is relevant to the park system; b) respond to trends already anticipated by the Department; c) take a fresh look at national and local demographic, economic, land use, and societal changes that will affect park use; d) identify the successful experiences of other jurisdictions and our own organization in dealing with accelerated pace of park user change; and e) reflect upon the anecdotal experience of our field staff who witness change daily.

By exploring those forces that will likely affect the park system in the future, this report identifies a broad range of possible planning and management implications facing the Department and our extraordinary mission.

This report was developed using recommendations and input from two intradepartmental focus group sessions, Senior Management Team review, and

a nationwide survey of innovative park approaches. Because this report is designed to serve as a catalyst for further discussion, consensus was not sought.

Following Planning Board review, the Senior Management Team will identify activities that can be undertaken in the short term and return to the Planning Board with prioritized recommendations. Subsequently, a Stakeholders Work Group will be convened, modeled after the interdepartmental structure of the Ballfield Work Group. The Planning Board would task this Work Group with the responsibility to review this report and develop an action agenda and work program for its review. The Work Group would most appropriately be comprised of Park and Planning senior management staff, as well as senior management from the Recreation Department, and the MCPS.

This report recognizes the critical importance of diverse perspectives regarding the future planning of our park system. It is strongly suggested that the Work Group circulate the report externally, and convene subsequent focus groups to provide additional dimension to the efforts of the Work Group.

LOOKING AHEAD . . .

Strategies for Planning, Developing and Managing Parks in the Future

February 2003

**Department of Park and Planning
Strategic Planning Division**

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PARK AND PLANNING DEPARTMENT

CORE PARK FUNCTIONS

Acquisition

Planning

Development

Management

Maintenance

Interpretation

Public Safety

Parkland, with its wealth of natural and cultural resources and abundant interpretive and educational opportunities, is the legacy we leave to future generations

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Executive Summary

Montgomery County residents are passionate about their park system. Today's nationally recognized and award-winning park system is the tangible result of a sustained commitment and a legacy of leadership and public support from the past. It took bold action and foresight to set aside the first stream valley parks; identify local parks when land was very plentiful; and more recently, create the Legacy Open Space Program to protect the "best of the best" parkland and open space. Each generation of leaders has had to recommit its own share of energy and resources to keep the system growing and responsive to emerging need. Now it is our turn to leave a legacy greater than our inheritance.

Montgomery County continues to grow and is becoming more diverse, dense, and older. Recreational needs are evolving quickly. Our park system, once again, is at a crossroads. By 2020, our population is expected to reach more than one million residents; 100,000 more than today. We will be challenged to keep pace with this growth- especially as park needs continue to change in response to a broad range of demographic trends. Not only do different households, age groups, and ethnicities have different needs in terms of design and programming of parks, but also they articulate their needs differently.

Budget constraints, population increases, and changing needs present difficult challenges to providing a quality park system that meets the evolving needs of the broad spectrum of users. Funding is flat and is expected to remain so in the foreseeable future, yet new and different types of park features are needed. Some parks have experienced lowered maintenance in recent years, contributing to the erosion of basic infrastructure. If these conditions are not curtailed and rectified, playgrounds, ballfields, and other recreational amenities will be at risk and could become liabilities instead of valued assets.

The hallmark of successful park management is the ability to navigate amid present and future trends and to strategically develop new approaches that respond to anticipated change. Planning and managing the parks requires understanding of changes occurring within and outside the park boundaries.

This report is a springboard for future discussion and decisions. It provides general guidance for policy makers to help define the future direction of our park system. This is not a finished document - it is a work in progress, a framework that will enable the Montgomery County Park and Planning Department to respond to anticipated change and the demands of our current and future citizenry.

This report recognizes the importance of listening to the diverse perspectives of the public regarding the future planning of our park system and suggests that it

be circulated to the public including the business community, recreation and government center advisory boards, user groups, the Recreation Department, Montgomery County Public Schools, other government agencies, and civic groups for review.

Some New Directions for Parks

This report recognizes the importance of proactively responding to the demographic, land use, technological, economic, environmental, and cultural changes anticipated in the future by suggesting some new directions in terms of the way we plan, maintain, administer, and benchmark our park system.

The way we plan our parks...

Looking Ahead... recognizes that the outward expansion of infrastructure, in the foreseeable future, will be less of a priority in Montgomery County. Redevelopment, revitalization, and in-fill development within our existing mature communities will become more important- thus requiring parks and open space to be planned to accommodate larger numbers and diversity of people, a wider range of functions, and a greater intensity of use.

Looking Ahead... advocates a park planning process that seeks to: a) balance stewardship of natural and cultural resources with expanding recreational and programming demands; b) broaden the involvement of a diverse citizenry, potential park users and community leaders throughout plan making, design, delivery, and maintenance efforts; and c) strengthen linkages with community-based planning activities.

Looking Ahead... proposes an evaluation of the complexities of the existing park planning process and suggests clarification and streamlining of roles, responsibilities, and interface with other departmental units including: park development, countywide planning, and community-based planning.

Looking Ahead... acknowledges the importance of maintaining and further strengthening the linkage between park planning and community-based planning staff, resources, and work programs, recognizing that planning for parks is an integral part of planning for the "greater community."

Looking Ahead... recognizes the significant role park planning can play in nurturing civic involvement and responsibility i.e. civic infrastructure in neighborhoods throughout the County.

Looking Ahead... acknowledges the importance of updating the 1992 Recreational Guidelines for private recreational facilities, to better reflect changes in demographics, development trends, and recreational needs.

Looking Ahead... recognizes the need to test new models of park-user information gathering, planning, assessment, and evaluation and advocates the testing of different community outreach models to assure full participation by all residents.

Looking Ahead... recognizes the importance of ensuring accessibility to our parks and suggests that an accessibility assessment and implementation strategy be included for all new and retrofitted parks and facilities to develop recommendations for off-site facilities and transit services, including off-site sidewalks, trails, bus shelters, and expanded Ride-On service.

The way we maintain our parks...

Looking Ahead... recognizes the importance of proactively identifying parks and facilities appropriate for retrofitting because of significant population growth, demographic change, or significant unmet needs.... and proposes that development of these recommendations parallel the area master plans and be incorporated into Park and Trail Analysis Reports all of which can then give guidance to the development of the Department's biannual Capital Improvement Program (CIP), and Operating Budget.

Looking Ahead... suggests the development of a multi-year preventive maintenance plan, subsequent to the completion of the Smart Parks data collection effort- this initiative will help to monitor budget priorities for maintenance of the existing inventory of assets. A pilot plan should be developed first that targets those parks that have the greatest unmet need and maintainance need.

Looking Ahead... places a high priority on the maintenance of park assets and suggests the development of minimum maintainance standards for existing assets that will complement our current "maintenance frequency targets."

Looking Ahead... recognizes the need to continue our examination of performance standards and benchmarks used in other jurisdictions to further measure success of our park system.

*Looking Ahead...*suggests the priority completion of design guidelines and standard construction details to facilitate and increase efficiency of staff review of recreational facilities developed by private entities on parkland (through such mechanisms as: public-private partnerships, HOA's, development districts, and subdivision/site plan requirements).

Looking Ahead... supports the continued refinement of criteria to be used in establishing public-private partnerships to better assess and address the operational implications on the existing park system and assets.

The way we administer our parks...

Looking Ahead... recognizes the need for the management structure to be organized to adapt to a changing park environment. The responsibility for managing the park system has been decentralized over the years. This change may be deemed good, bad, or indifferent in addressing the complexity of demand that the park system will experience. It is the right time to assess whether or not our current structure is conducive to efficiently and effectively implementing our core functions.

Looking Ahead... strongly supports increasing our level of service to our external customers through targeted utilization of volunteers throughout the Department. Maintaining a heightened level of service can be achieved by developing an on-going cycle of assessment-implementation-evaluation for the entire volunteer program.

Looking Ahead... encourages the development of a broad coalition of key stakeholders to support the core functions of the park system with particular emphasis on residents new to the County, as well as business and real estate interests.

Looking Ahead... encourages a heightened commitment to staff training regarding how to manage rapidly changing park environments; it further anticipates the need to develop a hiring strategy to manage multicultural events.

Looking Ahead... places a high priority on building stronger communication with the community and the community with us and identifies staff whose mission is to accomplish this task.

Looking Ahead... recognizes the importance of growing the next generation of stewards, supporters, and users. *Looking Ahead...* advocates a cooperative effort with Montgomery County Public Schools and the Recreation Department to evaluate collaborative interpretive, stewardship, and environmental education programs in terms of content and outreach to maximize resources and effectiveness.

Looking Ahead... supports expanded marketing of our reduced-fee and scholarship programs.

Looking Ahead... suggests that we benchmark our economic competitors.

I. LOOKING AHEAD

The Department of Park and Planning faces important challenges in the decades ahead. Montgomery County will be confronted with significant change- technological, demographic, land use, economic, environmental, and cultural. These changes will profoundly influence our quality of life. Planning and managing our park system will require an understanding of these anticipated changes and proactively respond to them in a manner that is acceptable today and seen as progressive and forward thinking tomorrow.

By 2020, an estimated 100,000 more people will live in Montgomery County. As in the past, our park system will be challenged to keep pace with growth- especially as park needs change in response to a broad range of societal trends and demographic change.

As our population grows, it is expected to become more diverse and older. Coinciding with this diversity and maturity, our park needs are evolving and our land use priorities are changing. The outward expansion of infrastructure will be given less priority. Montgomery County is now turning much of its attention to reinvestment in our mature, existing residential and business communities. Redevelopment, revitalization, and in-fill development will guide land use agendas in the foreseeable future.

Two types of development trends are likely to be very important in the County during the foreseeable future. They are: 1) the reinvestment in and redevelopment of *suburban* communities in ways that largely retain a *suburban* intensity and character of development, and 2) the redevelopment of *suburban and urban* communities in ways that create or expand an *urban* intensity and character of development. Maintaining the stability, livability, and investment in our mature communities will continue to be an important priority that directly affects Montgomery County's economic and social well-being.

The planning for parks, recreation, and open spaces will require extra attention to ensure our future well-being as the County's attention turns to our mature communities. Parks will continue to play a critical role in defining community character and providing a sense of "place."

It is in these maturing communities, where the need for connections to nature, refuge from the built environment, socialization, and recreation will be most intense. Special care must be taken to ensure that our parks satisfy not only the evolving park and recreational needs of the community, but also is of a design and quality that enhances the character and functioning of the "redeveloped" community.

II. FACING THE CHALLENGE

Park usage and utilization patterns continue to change. The traditional park experience has expanded significantly--

- *Young and growing families, now resettling in mature or revitalized neighborhoods, are placing greater demand on the park system.*
- *A rapidly expanding population of seniors are voicing different expectations for our parks, facilities, and programming - they want a blend of the more traditional active and passive recreational opportunities along with expanded educational opportunities that focus on health and fitness and lifestyle concerns.*
- *Growing neighborhoods that are challenged by limited income and limited access to alternative recreational outlets, rely on nearby parks, almost solely, to meet their active and passive recreation and leisure needs.*
- *Living patterns are changing in some communities and more multi-generational families are remaining in multi-family housing for the long-term, thereby placing a greater demand on parks and open spaces which were designed originally to serve fewer people.*
- *The complexity of park usage is further compounded by the increasing conflict between new residents, who often want increased or different park and recreational opportunities, and owners of property near parks who often resist change.*

Demographic, recreational, and funding trends suggest that current shortages and future needs will intensify and likely will produce inequities. Already, too many of our park buildings, sports fields, and natural areas are overused and in short supply. Some people find park facilities in good repair within blocks of their homes and others must go for miles. Some neighborhoods have state of the art community centers and others have older facilities in need of repair. Further compounding the problem are increasing requests for emerging recreational activities that place new demands on an already strained park system, such as the clamor for more dog parks and the demand for skate board, roller hockey, and mountain bike facilities.

III. DEALING WITH CHANGE

Park needs continue to quickly evolve. Today our citizenry expect more facilities and tomorrow they will demand even more in terms of services and programming. Today we experience very high levels of customer satisfaction and tomorrow we will remain committed to providing a quality park experience as the population continues to grow and demand changes.

However, the financial requirements to maintain and improve our park system are vast and dynamic. Decisions about resource allocations between active and passive recreation and natural resources stewardship, conservation, and education must balance current demands with projected park system needs. Although we must continue to invest for the future, accurate predictions are difficult to make in this evolving environment.

The Montgomery Department of Park and Planning, however, has a long history of addressing growing populations and changing park needs. It actively relies on guidance for future planning of parks and open space provided by the *1998 Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Master Plan* and a companion staff document that was prepared in 1998 entitled, *Montgomery County Parks for Tomorrow*.

The *1998 PROS Master Plan* is a State-mandated plan that has been updated every five years. The document provides specific guidance on acquisition, development, and operational policy for the County's park system and sets the priorities for the County's six-year Capital Improvements Program (CIP). The Plan provides quantitative estimates of additional recreational facilities and parkland acres needed by the year 2010. A range of park user surveys provided the basis for determining future park facility needs. The next PROS Plan is scheduled for approval in 2005.

The *1998 Montgomery County Parks for Tomorrow* staff report differs from the PROS Plan by providing a more general, long-term vision to help guide future planning for the park system. The report examined trends in parks, recreation, and open space over the past 70 years and looks forward to the next 70 years. The report included information on potential trends, visions, public attitude, goals, objectives, and strategies helpful for future planning.

In addition, the Department is already working diligently on the development of special park maintenance/management programs such as Smart Parks. The major objective of Smart Parks is to be able to measure and track over time the cost of managing and maintaining individual parks as well as facilities within a park. This information will improve the budgeting process for existing parks and allow staff to more accurately predict the operating budget impacts of new CIP funded projects. Overall, new initiatives like Smart Parks will provide baseline data to help us better quantify where we are so that we can better chart where we want to go.

This report, *Looking Ahead*, represents the next logical step toward further refining a strategy to meet anticipated future park needs. *Parks for Tomorrow* outlined a vision for the future. With the completion of Census 2000, *Looking Ahead* can amplify, refine, and *respond* to the trends identified in the "Parks for Tomorrow" report. The timing is right to take a fresh look at national/ local demographic and societal trends, examine the recent planning and management experiences of other park systems nationwide, and solicit a wide range of input from staff and the public regarding future park and open space planning and need.

This report provides a framework for discussion and a benchmark for future decision-making. It also contributes to the preparation of the next PROS Master Plan by identifying a range of forces that will likely affect future park need and some alternatives courses of action that might be explored.

This report also examines a range of innovative approaches used throughout the nation that respond to demographic change. The accelerating pace of park user change and the growing differences in resident priorities, income levels, and needs elsewhere have produced some good national examples from which we can learn.

Lastly, this report captures the perspectives and recommendations of an exceptional departmental staff with professional and experiential backgrounds in planning, development, maintenance, management, interpretation, and law enforcement. They graciously gave their time to participate in focus groups to discuss the impact of current and anticipated change on the park system. They thoughtfully offered strategies to continue our success and effectively plan for the future.

IV. IDENTIFYING THE FORCES THAT WILL SHAPE FUTURE PARK NEED

Managing the parks of the new millennium will require the ability to monitor contemporary trends and respond effectively to dynamic change with strategic decision-making. Our field staff has been witnessing the changing face, desires, and needs of our users daily. The most recent Census information permits a quantification of these changes. This report reflects these and other trends and considers the implications of the challenges in implementing our extraordinary mission.

These trends will affect the County in the upcoming 20 years. They can serve as a “reference guide” to trends that will significantly affect the future of our park system.

Forces that will influence parks in the future:

- *increased public use*
- *changing demographics*
- *increased leisure time*
- *increased awareness of health and physical fitness*
- *increased emphasis on in-fill, reuse, and redevelopment of existing communities and corresponding need to locate and develop public open space and parks*
- *increased awareness of major environmental issues such as global warming, urban sprawl, transportation gridlock, and potable water*

- *increased concern about the acquisition and protection of natural and cultural resources*
- *cyclical public budgets reflecting competing priorities, i.e. education, safety, and transportation*

Six critical societal components that are likely to change over time are demographics, land use, technology, economics, environment, and culture. These components often influence each other. For example, new technologies can lead to new markets (economic change) and create stresses on the natural environment (environmental change). This report identifies and organizes the components as follows:

The **heading** identifies the specific component.

Data on the current condition and forecast may be presented in a **graph**.

The **trend** over time is highlighted, if possible.

The **significance** of the component on the park system is suggested.

The **source** of the data is referenced.

Please be mindful that this section is not intended to include recommendations. It is a thought provoking piece designed to provide a platform for the development of recommendations.

DEMOGRAPHY

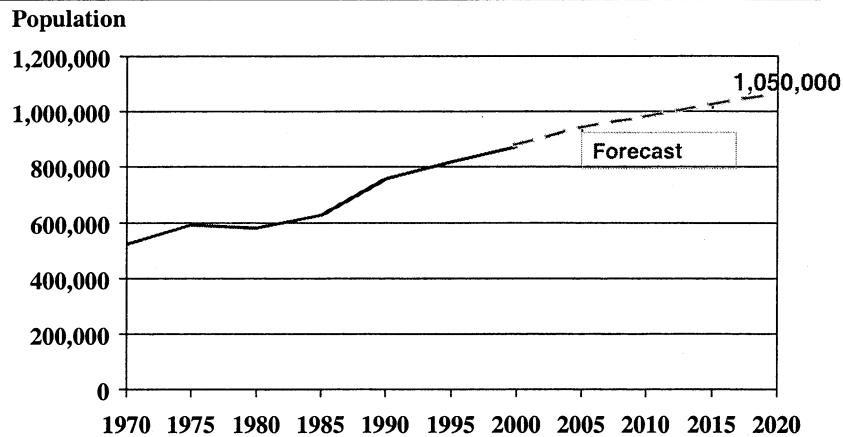
Demography - General population growth

Montgomery County's population grew by approximately 15.4% (gaining 116,000 people) during the 1990's and is expected to exceed 1,000,000 by 2020.

Significance: As the population increases, so will park usage. Population growth will continue to add to the pressure on park resources, facilities, and services.

Source: 2000 U.S. Census; Source: MNCPPC, RTC, Round 6.3 Household Population Forecast

Montgomery County's Population is Expected to Exceed 1 Million by 2020



Research & Technology Center
M-NCPPC, Montgomery Co.



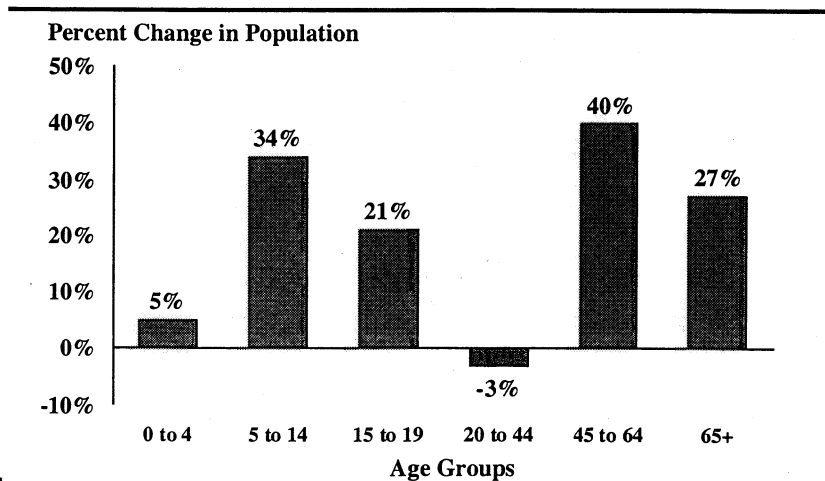
Demography - Children

The number of children (age 5 to 14) and youths (ages 15 to 19) increased (by 34% and 21% respectively) during the 1990's. In the next 20 years, the number of youths, particularly minority youths, is expected to continue to increase.

Significance: Children are an important park user group. Children and young adults are most often the focus of park interpretive programs and recreational activities, particularly playgrounds and athletic fields; open play areas and trails, facilities and enterprise activities. Due to the projected demographic changes, Park Police anticipate increased youth-related crimes. Crime prevention strategies will continue to be implemented throughout the Park system to address the impact of the proposed population change.

Source: 2000 U.S. Census, MWCOG Forecast 6.3

Percent Population Change by Age 1990-2000



Research & Technology Center
M-NCPPC, Montgomery County



Demography - Older population

The population of Americans aged 55 years and older is expected to be the fastest-growing demographic group during the next decade in the country. The 65+ population increased by 27% in Montgomery County in the 1990's. The group aged 45 to 64 increased the most, 40%, primarily a by-product of "Baby Boomers" aging. By 2020, the number of residents over 65 is expected to increase by 51% to approximately 140,000. The 1997 Census Update Survey found that 75% of those residents near retirement age planned to stay in the County for at least the first 5 years or retirement.

Significance: *Older County residents may have more leisure time and financial stability than other age groups. There will be increased competition between adults and juveniles for programs and facilities in our parks.*

We can expect Boomers to be active as volunteers seeking meaningful volunteer activities. They will be a vocal customer group who will demand park services and engage actively in park issues. The Boomers have a heightened awareness of health and physical fitness and will probably seek more active recreational opportunities than previous elderly. These Boomers have been catered to all of their lives and those expectations will continue.

"Boomers will reinvent, on their own terms, what being a 65-year-old means. Parks and recreation agencies that don't plan for boomers carrying on in retirement with the same hectic pace they've long lived will be left behind..."¹ Unlike older adults in former years,

¹ *Recreating Retirement, How Will Baby Boomers Reshape Leisure In Their 60s* by Jeffrey Ziegler, CPRP, *Parks & Recreation*, October 2002.

this next generation of older adults grew up with constant improvements in technology and services.

Additionally, as many of our Department staff members are in this Boomer age cohort, we can expect that many Department staff members will be retiring in the next 5 to 10 years; the Department will be challenged to replace experienced staff at all levels.

Source: 2000 U.S. Census, MWCOG Round 6.3 Forecast, Pollock, Sean R., 1995 *Statistical Forecast of the United States*, New York, Gale Research Inc., MIT AgeLab; (*American Demographics*, April 2002), John Gist, AARP, University of Illinois at Champagne, Ill.

Demography - Family households

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of family households with children increased (by 20%) to 113,665 families; family size increased slightly to 3.19. The number of grandparents raising children and the number of single-parent families increased between 1990 and 2000. The number of female-headed households with children under the age of 18 increased by 41% to 19,033 (37,951 children live in single-parent households). More than 8,000 children are living in households headed by at least one grandparent.

Significance: *In 1997, it was found that households with children were most likely to use the park system. Families are stretched for time. They need recreational facilities² that are convenient, accessible, and safe. Children with single parents or those being raised by grandparents intensify the need for more programmed, educational, and interpretive park facilities, recreational activities and educational programs.*

Source: 2000 U.S. Census, Montgomery County 1997 Census Update Survey Summary Report

Demography - Larger households residing in apartments

The 2000 Census found that apartments have larger households than in 1990 due primarily to the increase in number of children in multi-family units and adults sharing households.

Significance: *Larger households living in apartments, possibly as long-term housing and for longer lengths of time than in earlier years, will need more park and recreation facilities and open space. In addition, the proportionally larger number of youths, often residing in concentrated multi-family housing, will place increased pressure on some small aging neighborhood recreation buildings and larger community recreation centers³ and local park and stream valley park facilities throughout the County. Park revitalization efforts in these neighborhoods should reflect the needs of all segments of the population living in densely populated areas; recreational and open space*

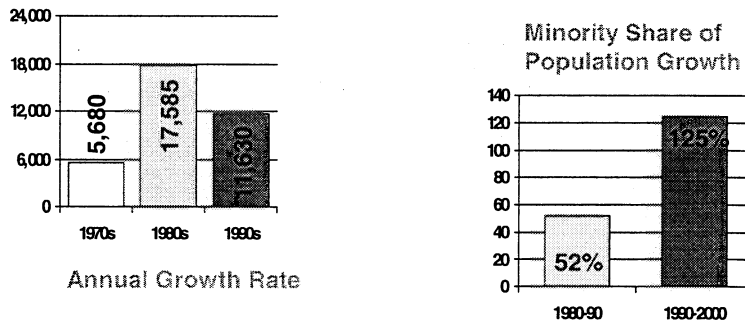
² Throughout this section expanded recreational facilities and programming are suggested; responsibility for the expansion is not assigned and is beyond the scope of this report.

³ The M-NCPPC is responsible for the maintenance and operation but not the programming for 30 small neighborhood recreational buildings while the Recreation Department is responsible for operation of the 17 large community recreation centers as well as recreational programming in the small neighborhood buildings.

development guidelines may need to be reexamined along with detailed, localized park need assessment. Additional pressure will be placed on Regional Parks as well.

Source: 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census

The Population Is Growing and Becoming More Diverse



Minority population gained 145,400 compared to 116,300 increase in total population between 1990 and 2000.



Research & Technology Center
M-NCPPC, Montgomery City.



Demography - Ethnic diversity

The minority population increased at a faster rate than the total population in the 1990s, gaining 145,400 people compared to the 116,300 increases in total population. The minority population now accounts for 40% of the County's population. Foreign immigration accounted for 89% of Montgomery County's total population gain in the 90's. In 1997 households headed by the foreign-born had a larger average household size (3.19) than the native-headed households (2.45). Additionally, the Census reported that 12.9% of the population (105,000) described themselves as "speaking English less than well".

Significance: *The foreign-born population often brings new cultural needs and uses to our parks. Ethnic groups have varying park visitation rates, voice their needs differently, and may engage in different recreational activities. These issues are particularly affecting park facilities in the areas where foreign-born populations are concentrated. Accommodating new residents throughout the park system will continue to require changes in interpretive media and information services. We need to involve our diverse population to a greater extent in planning and stewardship efforts for parks. Most importantly, expansion of educational and stewardship programs are needed to begin to grow the next generation of park supporters, stewards, and users. In addition, some foreign-born populations may not have a history of civic involvement in community affairs. The park planning process should foster and nurture broader civic involvement and responsibility.*

Many of our park users do not speak or read English well and may not be familiar with opportunities to use our parks, the location of our parks, signage within parks, and the facilities and programs available to them.

Immigration trends should be monitored to keep up with future trends.

Sources: Montgomery County 1997 Census Update Survey Summary Report, 2000 U.S. Census, Montgomery County Park and Planning

Demography - Persons with disabilities

The 2000 Census reports that 32.7% of the population over the age of 65 has a disability and 12.3% of those between the ages of 21 and 64 reported a disability.

***Significance:** The active and passive aspects of our parks need to be more accessible and user-friendly to individuals with a disability, including the one-third of our elderly with a disability.*

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

LAND USE

Land Use - Development trends

Two types of development trends are likely to be very important in the County over the next 20 years. They are the reinvestment in and redevelopment of **suburban communities** in ways that largely retain a “*suburban intensity and character*” of development and the redevelopment of **suburban and urban communities** in ways that create or expand an “*urban intensity and character*” of development.

***Significance:** Each of these redevelopment trends presents different challenges with regard to the planning, protection, and enhancement of parks and open space. Redevelopment brings with it a need to ensure that existing parks, open spaces, and historic resources are protected and enhanced as redevelopment occurs within a community. Redevelopment also presents an opportunity for the creation of new parks and open spaces that can significantly contribute to the character, quality, and value of the redeveloped area.*

Source: MNCPPC

Land Use - Multi-family housing

Many of Montgomery County’s multi-family units were constructed in the 1970’s to meet a market need for small starter units. As such, young couples without children or singles usually occupied these units for a short amount of time. These multi-family units were often built in neighborhoods with limited public facilities, such as parks and schools, because it was assumed that there would be few families with children in the neighborhood.

Significance: Today, with families occupying these units, frequently for long periods of time, neighboring public facilities are strained. The high cost of housing is forcing some lower-income residents and families to stay in rental housing longer than in earlier years; rental units are becoming long-term housing for some. Communities challenged by limited income, limited mobility, and limited access to alternative recreational outlets rely almost solely on local and stream valley parks and schools to meet their passive and active park needs. The need to reassess park needs and open space standards in these areas will become imperative. Parks represent an integral part of the mature neighborhood's livability and character, particularly in higher-density neighborhoods.

Source: Research and Technology Center, MNCPPC

Location of Multi-family Housing in Montgomery County



Key: Each dot represents an existing apartment complex in 2000.

Land Use – Who lives in multi-family housing?

In 1997, a more diverse population lived in rental apartment complexes than in single-family units. Non-white households were more likely to live in rental apartment complexes than white households. Non-white households and households with foreign-born household heads have larger family sizes and are more likely to remain in rental complexes for long periods of time. Renter household incomes are substantially lower than those of owners.

Significance: The change in the composition of residents in apartment complexes will place greater demand on nearby park services, which were not designed to serve this larger population. Our diverse population, many living in rental apartment complexes, will be placing greater demand on nearby park services and recreational outlets in the future. Strategic and coordinated park and community planning will be required to meet this expanding need.

Source: Montgomery County 1997 Census Update Survey Summary Report

TECHNOLOGY

Technology - Households with Internet access and the “digital divide”

In 1997, 68% of the households in Montgomery County reported having computers and of those households, 63% had Internet connections. Households least likely to have a computer are those with elderly persons, households in rental multi-family units, household heads with less than a high school degree, and single-person households. The presence of a computer in a household is highly correlated with household income, age, and education. Currently, the majority of the elderly households in the County do not have a computer. In the future this may change, as computer technology will be second nature to the next generation of older adults who used computers extensively at work and home.

Significance: *The Internet changes the manner in which the public can access information. Park staff can provide information and scheduling more efficiently and economically using Internet capabilities, increasing public access. In addition, the public can provide feedback to the Park staff easily. Those with less access to the Internet cannot easily use it to access information, schedule facilities, or send e-mail messages to staff about concerns or desires. This “digital divide” may increase as the lowest income segment of the population may never have an opportunity to buy a computer. As the Boomers age, they will expect more from technology in the way of park communication, information, and services.*

Sources: Montgomery County 1997 Census Update Survey Summary Report;
American Demographics, *Future Speak*, May 2002

Technology - High rate of private vehicle ownership, but not everyone has a car

In 1997, Montgomery County households had an average of 1.8 cars per household. Households living in single-family detached homes had 2.1 cars per household. Apartment residents have the lowest rate of car ownership in the County (1 car per household for residents of high-rise apartments). Approximately 10.3 percent of elderly households do not own a car and these households typically have residents over the age of 75 and live in multi-family housing.

Significance: *Apartment residents and the elderly need parks to be within walking and biking distance or accessible by public transportation. Many parks are not accessible by public transportation, sidewalks, or trails. In particular, Ride-On bus service does not connect some of our major park facilities to our major population concentrations and adequate for bicycles is not available at all park and recreation facilities.*

Source: Montgomery County 1997 Census Update Survey Summary Report

ECONOMY

Economy - Resident County workforce

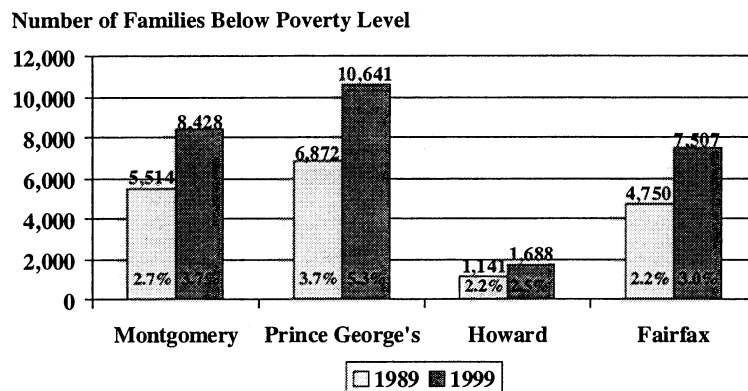
The Boomers made up over one-half of the resident work force in 1997, contributing to Montgomery County's very high labor force participation compared to the nation. Ninety-

three percent of those in the 45 to 54 age group and 86% of those aged 35 to 44 are employed.

Significance: *This high participation rate in the labor force affects the user rate of the parks, availability of park labor, and has implications for children whose parents are all working. Workforce participation influences spending power, spending for leisure, recreation, and time for visiting parks.*

Source: Montgomery County 1997 Census Update Survey Summary Report

Increasing Numbers of Families Live in Poverty in 2000



Research & Technology Center
M-NCPPC, Montgomery City.



Economy – Income disparity

The 2000 Census showed a growing disparity in household incomes in the County. The number of households earning more than \$150,000 increased by 44% and the number of families living in poverty increased by 56%. The number of households in the middle decreased, with many of those households actually leaving the County.

Significance: *If levels of disposable income continue to erode for a larger portion of the population, there may be greater reliance on our park system for leisure activity. Park usage, park needs, and park accessibility are influenced by household income; innovative assessment efforts will be required to more effectively identify the spectrum of need and the ability to pay for services.*

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

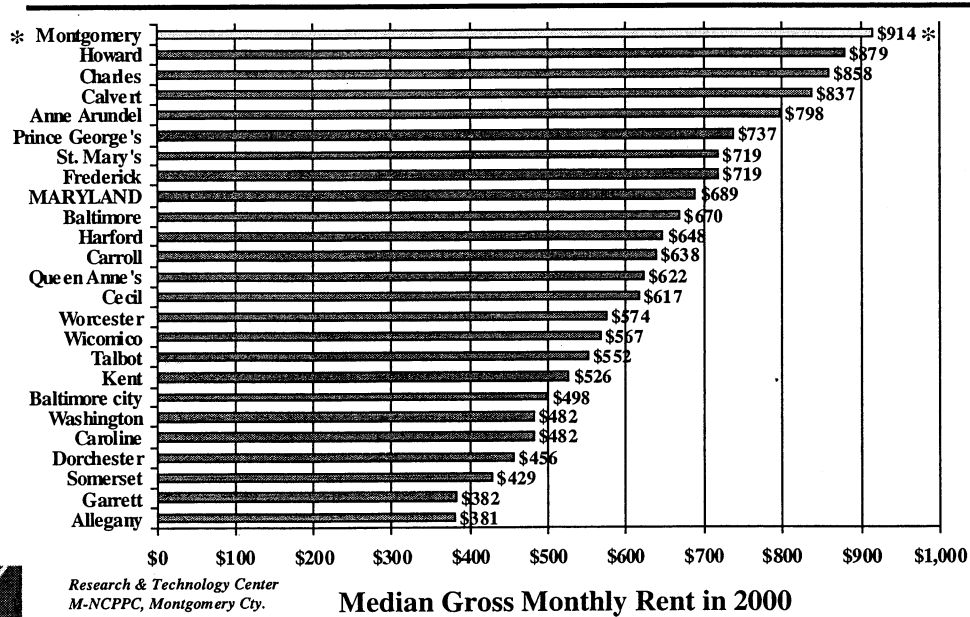
Economy - Housing market

Montgomery County's housing prices are high and rental vacancy rates are low. With the highest median monthly rent in the state (\$914) 26.7% of the renters pay more than 35% of their income for rent. The median value of owner-occupied units was \$221,800 in 2000.

Significance: With housing costs high, land prices are also high. Thus, the cost of parkland is at a premium. Affordable housing for the Commission's work force is also a problem. It is difficult to recruit and retain long-term workers for lower-paying jobs.

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Montgomery County Has the Top Median Monthly Rent in 2000



Economy - County revenue

The cyclical downturn in the economy is resulting in shortfalls in County revenue.

Significance: Less funding for park operations will affect projects, staffing, maintenance, and possibly community livability. There may be less discretionary income for residents and less funding for our parks at a time when residents may rely on public parks as their major recreational activity. Those less-affluent sections of the population may have the greatest need for recreational opportunities, but they can least afford to pay user fees. Care must be taken not to limit recreational opportunities for those who rely upon it for their primary leisure activity.

Source: RESI, Research and Consulting, Towson University

Economy - Telecommuting

A growing percentage of the U.S. workforce is projected to work from home. In 2000, 4.8% of the residents in the workforce in Montgomery County reported working from home.

Significance: *Telecommuting and the ability to work at home may allow some people to use parks with greater frequency. Freedom in work schedules may also allow more leisure time for recreational activities. Telecommuting may play an increasing role in the economic viability of living in Montgomery County. As urban populations increase and congestion remains, many may choose to work from home, allowing the potential for greater demand for local parks and open spaces close to residential centers.*

Source: 2000 US Census

ENVIRONMENT

Environment - Global temperature changes

The buildup of greenhouse gases – primarily carbon dioxide – has caused a gradual increase in the global temperature. Between 1990 and 2000, a global mean temperature change of 0.9 degrees occurred. During the period between 2000 and 2010 the global mean temperature is projected to increase an additional 0.6 degrees, as the total mean temperature change reaches 1.5 degrees.

Significance: *Global temperature changes could affect park environments, design, maintenance, and usage. Increases in global temperature can alter rainfall patterns affecting vegetation types, habitat suitability, and species' home ranges, ... all of which will have budgetary and programmatic implications.*

Source: *A Look Ahead, Key Social and Environmental Forecasts Relevant to the National Park Service*, September 2000. *President's Council on Sustainable Development*. Chapter 7. (2000, July)

Environment - Atmospheric pollutants

Atmospheric pollutants, such as carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide emissions, are projected to increase nationwide. In this region between May 1 and August 13, 2002, there were 32 times when the 8-hour ozone standard was exceeded and 15 *Ozone Action Day Forecasts* were issued in this period. Ozone Action Days occur when the air quality is predicted to exceed EPA health-based standards:

Significance: *Park maintenance, such as mowing, is curtailed on Ozone Action Days. Additionally, recreational activities could be affected by poor air quality.*

Source: Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments

CULTURE

Culture - Growing disparity of educational levels

Since 1990, there have been increases in both the number of those with graduate degrees and the number of people who do not have high school degrees.

Significance: *Education level is an important consideration in park management activities such as marketing, public participation process, skilled labor, and the design of interpretative and educational programs.*

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Culture - Telephone surveys

The number of people who refuse to take part in telephone surveys is increasing. Privacy concerns, the dislike of and resistance to telemarketers, and the proliferation of caller-ID and cell phones all contribute to resistance to telephone polling. As a result, pollsters now can expect only a 20% rate – 20 households will respond out of 100 surveyed, contrasted with 64 out of one hundred surveyed 30 years ago.

Significance: *Although we have frequently relied on telephone surveys for park data collection in the past, alternative methods should be considered.*

Source: Interview with Peter Tuckel, sociology professor, at New York's Hunter College, NPR, December 3, 2002.

Culture - Pet ownership

Nationally pet ownership is increasing. Changing lifestyles and demographic shifts have created more pet owners. More than one-half of all U.S. households (62%) have at least one pet, 52% of young and middle-aged married adults without children have pets, and 25% of those over 65. Approximately 60% of Montgomery County residents are dog owners.

Significance: *Demand for more dog parks and parks where residents can exercise and walk with their pets is anticipated to increase.*

Sources: American Demographics, May 2002; MNCPPC

V. PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Montgomery County is blessed by its unique location in proximity to the Nation's Capital, its exceptional quality of life, and the spirit of its people. We all appreciate the wonderful open space and park legacy that we have inherited. Our residents love our parks, recreation facilities, gardens and trees, trails, streams, and historic resources. We draw our identity from these places.

While there is much to enjoy, there is much to be done to prepare for the future-the future of our children. Young people in our County deserve to grow up near a neighborhood park or community center. Every young person deserves to be enriched by nature and given the opportunity to become part of the next generation of park stewards.

We must demonstrate our commitment to future generations by protecting, maintaining, and providing parks, facilities, and programs needed for their growth. However, needs are rapidly changing and financial demands are increasing.

During two intradepartmental focus groups sessions, which highlighted the results of Census 2000, our trend assessment, and a nationwide survey of some innovative programs, techniques and management approaches, the following perspectives and recommendations were shared with us by staff

Staff Response to Anticipated Change in the Park System

In Fall 2002, focus groups were convened to explore staff response to change in the park system, given the anticipated changes in the future. The focus groups reflected a broad spectrum of the park operations, park management, and planning workforce as well as staff from the Recreation Department. The focus groups did not include representatives from local communities, civic associations, and other stakeholders. Detailed summaries of the focus groups are included in Appendices 1 and 2.

Staff Comment #1: Some park facilities are not being used as they were originally designed because the populations that they serve and recreational pursuits have changed - Reassess use of park facilities in areas undergoing population and demographic change. Design park facilities with greater sensitivity to local wants, needs, and culture.

Staff Comment #2: Open space is becoming increasingly scarce and expensive to purchase, while the needs of our customers are changing and expanding. As acquisition opportunities begin to diminish throughout the County, greater consideration should be given to retrofitting existing parks and facilities. Continue the Departmental dialogue that focuses on the importance of balancing stewardship of the natural and cultural environment with active recreation needs.

Staff Comment #3: Current approaches to gauging park needs must become even more effective in providing for the needs of our future population - Try out some new ways of information-gathering and listening to citizen needs. Do a better job of processing this information and sharing it with all staff. Conduct park-user surveys on a more regular basis. Provide facilities that are responsive to citizen need and culture such as community gardens in our community-use parks, especially in highly urbanized areas.

Staff Comment #4: Parks located in more urban communities often represent the “backyards” for thousands of people; they are used intensively and require more maintenance - Smart Park efforts will help us quantify the cost of park maintenance. Continue to gather more data and information regarding the cost of park maintenance based on type, location, and usage of parks to assure the adequacy of resource allocation in the future. Protection of bio-diversity in urban areas requires careful consideration of trade-offs.

Staff Comment #5: Conflict with existing abutting property owners will continue to intensify as park activities change or are expanded to meet needs of the broader community - Develop new techniques and planning approaches to help minimize conflict and overcome NIMBYism. Vocal opposition by a few individuals must not undermine our service to the broader community. Community meeting facilitation training for staff is needed.

Staff Comment #6: Increasing numbers of Baby Boomers and youth not only have special needs but also are valuable volunteer resources - These groups can help immensely as volunteers. Volunteer programs require significant staff time and specialized skills but can significantly expand our ability to fulfill our core functions. More resources should be strategically allocated to this volunteer function in the future. Focus on development of a core of highly trained volunteer naturalists to assist career staff at each nature center.

Staff Comment #7: Increasing cultural diversity means greater need for multi-lingual communication, bi-lingual staff - Heighten Departmental attention on the need to accommodate more programming in our facilities that responds to the unique needs of the community. Provide better bilingual or international signage, brochures, web site. Further diversify workforce, ask minority employees to recruit others. Do an even better job of representing the interests of those “not at the table”.

Staff Comment #8: We must remain mindful that we are the public park system and not the park system for those with disposable income - Continue to provide a balance of programs and facilities that require a fee and those that don't. Enhance and market reduced-fee and scholarship programs.

Staff Comment #9: Heighten commitment to staff training - Provide more training for staff to better serve and adapt to an increasingly diverse citizenry. Expand the In-Service Training Program to focus more time on technical park topics, since training

time for basic skills has been steadily decreasing. Increase training for first-line supervisors, to increase motivation and efficiency. Use the Census as an opportunity to educate staff.

Staff Comment #10: Environmental education is pivotal to the stewardship of the park system in the future, particularly as our customer base continues to grow and change - *Identify the ultimate number of park nature centers and their geographic distribution. Integrate and coordinate interpretive programs among nature centers and MCPS curriculum. Seek innovative ways to bring environmental and park stewardship education to all youth, particularly those from diverse cultural backgrounds. Focus education on current environmental issues.*

Staff Comment #11: Further maximize the use of available park, recreation, and school resources and programs - *Coordinate more with the MCPS and Recreation Department.*

Staff Comment #12: Park safety must be maintained as one of our highest priorities - *Public safety should be commensurate with increased park usage. Ensure that park facilities remain hospitable and safe so that all age groups feel welcome.*

Staff Comment #13: Public accessibility to our parks and facilities by public transportation, as well as off-site sidewalk and trail routes, needs to be further enhanced - *Consideration should be given to planning for public accessibility as part of the plan-making and funding process. Maybe we should have an accessibility study for each new or retrofitted park.*

Staff Comment #14: Consider a new park logo to replace "Yours for Life" - *As we plan parks for our customers in the new millennium, we should ask ourselves if our current logo still reflects our mission.*

Nationwide Examples of Innovative Approaches

The accelerating pace of park user changes, new land use and housing trends, and the growing differences in resident priorities, income levels, and needs have produced some good examples of innovative park initiatives nationwide. The most successful initiatives are found in jurisdictions that have made a conscious commitment to meet the diverse and changing needs of all citizens through focused management, accountability, and performance.

Jurisdictions that have a reputation for delivering successful plans and programs, despite limited resources and changing needs, generally have several characteristics in common - most often there is strong political support for parks, followed by strong leadership, coupled with effective management teams and supporting staff, and further complemented by a spectrum of very strong volunteer programs and diverse partnerships throughout the community.

This section includes examples of innovative initiatives used throughout the country. These were compiled from a nationwide survey that included, among others, a range of mature large suburban/urban counties with high national profiles similar to Montgomery County with generally comparable green space acreage, well-articulated park departments, comparable demographic features, or a long tradition of park planning. In addition, the survey includes jurisdictions that: a) have been recognized by the National Recreation and Park Association and Project for Public Open Space for their innovation and success, and b) were examined in the Office of Legislative Oversight Report, "Managing Park Maintenance Costs: A Comparative Study." Appendix 3 lists the jurisdictions.

Key Findings and Examples of Innovative Approaches

#1 Park planning has become the cornerstone for successful community revitalization and the delivery of higher-density mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhoods. By closely aligning park and community planning activities, some jurisdictions have used park planning as the leading edge for community planning.

Park planning has become pivotal to increasing the economic benefit of community revitalization and building community identity, and offering settings for programmed activities and cultural activities. Plans for parks and community open space are being developed as integral parts of community planning efforts.

Particularly noteworthy is the shift in philosophy throughout the country from traditional, single-purpose park planning to a place-oriented, neighborhood-planning approach, which often becomes a catalyst for positive community change and revitalization.¹

Many jurisdictions recognize the pivotal role that parks play in creating and sustaining livable communities - park planning and community-planning efforts are often closely integrated to take on the important responsibility of park and community planning in a holistic manner.

Some of the most successful revitalized mixed-income, mixed-use communities developed throughout the United States have used parks as the basic building block to create neighborhoods of distinctive identity, strong character, and long-term stability.

Innovative approaches, often using community-wide charettes, focus on creating parks that are not driven by the park-planning exercise but rather on creating parks that are integral to community design and life. This redefined process shifts planning from parks and the immediate area to the "greater neighborhood" well beyond park boundaries.

¹ The New Hampshire Estates local park is a good example of public involvement within a multi-cultural community. This experience might well become an outreach model in the refinement of the park-planning process.

Examples of Innovative Approaches

Vancouver, Washington: The Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation Department's vision to retrofit a 5-acre local park (Esther Short Park) became the catalyst for a major redevelopment effort in Vancouver. The Park and Recreation Department partnered with the Planning Department and the Office of Economic Development to use the new park design and program improvements as an element integral to the development of a highly marketable mixed-use, mixed-income community. In fact, a developer contributed \$100,000 for park improvements as seed money.

Some nationally recognized companies, such as Urban Design Associates and Community Builders, Inc., have been successful in delivering mixed-income communities that demonstrate a commitment to the design of quality public space in such places as:

Crawford Square, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
First Ward, Charlotte, North Carolina
Mason Run, Monroe, Michigan
Park DuValle, Louisville, Kentucky
Westburg, Portsmouth, Virginia
Vancouver Town Square, Vancouver, Washington

San Bernardino, California, Court Street Square: The Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department and the Department of Development Services combined resources and worked closely with park planning consultants and the community to develop an integrated planning process that included the "greater community" in planning, design, and implementation aspects of the project. This collaborative effort resulted in the transformation of a large vacant parking lot into a park that became a catalyst for the planned development of a mixed use arts and entertainment district nearby, and serves the recreational and open space needs of the surrounding community.

Boston, Massachusetts, Post Office Square: The Boston Parks Department worked closely with the Boston Planning and Redevelopment Agency, Friends of Post Office Square, and a broad range of businesses, open space advocates, and community interests to envision and redevelop this park located in the heart of the city's financial district. The facility was planned and developed as an integral part of the "greater community." It has become the focal point and a stimulant for re-energizing the business district and catering to the multiple and diverse recreational and open space needs of the neighboring residential community, workers, and visitors to the area. The park has become an economically viable venture that has provided the necessary spark for regenerating the district into a lively urban neighborhood, with a mixture of offices, commercial enterprises, housing, open space, and recreation.

Danville, California: The City of Danville decided to redefine, streamline, and align its park-planning process with on-going community demographic changes and planning efforts. They recognized that this redefinition process would represent a substantial “culture” change for the staff. Consequently, they hired a specialized park-planning consultant to help guide the process.

Westchester County, New York: The Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation, and Conservation, together with the Department of Planning, recently completed the first phase of a strategic plan to guide and coordinate the countywide preservation, management, and development of parks and facilities with community planning efforts.

Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota: At the regional level, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Council recognized the economic benefits of integrated park and open space planning with regional and community planning initiatives when it adopted the Regional Recreation Policy Plan in 2001.

#2 The traditional, “one-size-fits-all” need assessments are changing

Many jurisdictions are working to better integrate park-user research into park planning and park management. Jurisdictions are trying new techniques to assess and track changing needs. Some jurisdictions perform regular performance evaluations of their park facilities, particularly targeting those parks most used or those that are underserved. Regular site visits, user surveys, focus groups, community workshops, park-use mapping and videotaping are used to measure the community pulse and reevaluate the needs of the community. Need assessment often goes beyond traditional requirements for more athletic fields - some neighborhoods desire community gardens!

Examples of Innovative Approaches

Hennepin County, Minnesota: Regular needs assessment and park-performance evaluations are key to the successful management of this park system. A specialized research unit, located in the Three Rivers Park District, is tasked with performing on-going data collection, the results of which are regularly shared with implementing departments. This unit focuses not only on targeting the traditional park-user with telephone and mail surveys, but also on identifying “barriers to participation” for under-represented groups, identifying the economic and social benefits of regional parks and the trails system, and providing the basis for planning, design, budget, maintenance, and management decisions.

Westchester County, New York: The Westchester County Department of Planning and the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Conservation collaborate in regular user surveys that are used to benchmark changing recreation and land-use patterns as well as the changing needs of county residents.

Toronto, Canada, Dufferin Grove Park: In order to help the Department of Parks and Recreation accurately assess quickly changing park needs in a large park, the Department identified “leadership links”. By working with a broad-based citizens group, the Friends of Dufferin Grove, the Department of Parks and Recreation was better able to connect the voice and needs of a diverse community on a regular basis.

#3 The traditional notion of community involvement in planning for public spaces is being revised and expanded to include “unlikely community partnerships” beginning with project design and continuing with ongoing programming and maintenance. A positive by-product of this approach is expanded civic consciousness, involvement, and responsibility.

Some jurisdictions are expanding the notion of community involvement beyond the traditional public work-sessions for civic associations and surrounding neighbors to create “unlikely community partnerships” - often using charrette formats, to partner with a broad range of people, institutions, and businesses around a park from project inception, to project completion, to project maintenance - all while growing a civic consciousness.

Partners often include residents, workers, business owners, local college faculty, and members of faith-based, cultural, or civic institutions, with special emphasis on students. Partners have had a major impact on how a park will be used and maintained.

Strong local partnerships tend to broaden vision and need beyond the geographic parameters of the project. Partners contribute innovative ideas, additional financial resources such as in-kind goods and services, or volunteers to help with maintenance or short-term improvement projects. Partners have helped to heighten the impact of a project by participating in activities such as joint programming, marketing, fundraising, and security.

Partners can also move a project forward by giving it political clout. Since different partnerships emerge at different stages of a project, support constituencies are grown along the way.

Involvement of partners often results in less vandalism and less conflict between park activities and abutting neighbors. Some have observed that the cost of security decreases proportionally to the amount of “community ownership” and activity within the public open space.

Examples of Innovative Approaches

Oakland, California, Union Point Park: A collaborative community-wide design process involving more than 1,000 diverse participants, and fifty community and non-profit organizations was spearheaded by the Oakland Parks and Recreation Department to solicit ideas regarding park and open space needs, as well as community recommendations for design and programming.

Modesto, California, Skate Park: This successful specialty park within an existing larger community park was realized through partnership with a variety of unlikely partners - students, young adults, senior citizens, skate enthusiasts, and the neighboring community. The Modesto Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhoods Department expanded its outreach efforts to help define how this public space was to be used and how it would be maintained. Ultimately, each one of the partners was assigned a "management role" for the portion of the park that interested them most. This outreach effort resulted in successful delivery of a controversial park use, broad-based volunteer activity, on-going community maintenance, and a sense of "community ownership."

New York, New York, El Sitio Feliz Park: The City of New York Parks and Recreation Department used the services of a nonprofit urban planning and design organization to help package the successful collaborative effort and articulate the community vision for the park. This multipurpose park is a model of collaboration that resulted in the delivery of park amenities that would not have been envisioned if a broad coalition of "unlikely partners" had not been involved in planning, design, and programming.

San Rafael, California: The City uses a Memorandum of Understanding with volunteer groups to formalize the scope of volunteer commitment. Volunteers assume some maintenance responsibilities and/or fundraising activity to help defray operating costs. The City also relies on different user/interest groups to adopt and maintain a specific activity area within a park.

#4 Listening and responding to broad community concerns and ideas is a critical requirement for successful park retrofitting.

Many jurisdictions are taking the time to reevaluate existing facilities to recalibrate service to meet the needs of future populations or neighborhoods demonstrating greatest unmet need. To help staff listen, understand, and quantify needs, jurisdictions use some of the following approaches:

- a) Allow the community to develop its own vision for the park and surrounding areas: community-wide charrettes are commonly used. Recognize that when a community's vision is driving a project, volunteers, in-kind services, and money from the most unsuspecting sources often follow as the community becomes increasingly vested in the project.
- b) Commit needed time to understand community concerns about the public open space and the surrounding community *before* focusing on what they want.
- c) Take time to carefully observe how the public space is used at different times of day and evening; measure people's perception of how the space is currently used, since perception is their reality; utilize focus groups comprised of children, high school students, business community, religious leaders, and other community-based stakeholders and current park users.

- d) Identify what “unique community activities” would positively respond to the needs of the users and the community.
- e) Develop a “business plan” with the community; identify how the personal and financial assets of the individuals can be used to develop a concept plan, programs, maintenance plan, and safety plan for the area.

Examples of Innovative Approaches

Pegram, Tennessee, Pegram Park: A broad base of community members and leaders established themselves as “the community voice” for transforming a lackluster park with traditional play equipment into a new one that better meets the needs of the population. The Mayor’s Office assisted the Friends with development of a concept plan, and the staff resources necessary for the Friends to conduct user surveys and fundraising activities. The genesis for this grassroots community organization, Friends of Pegram Park, was the frustration among community members regarding the inability of the City of Pegram to respond quickly enough to the changing park needs of a growing and diverse population. The Friends have become effective in communicating grassroots concerns and needs to the City on a regular basis.

Toronto, Canada: The Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation also relies on non-profit community organizations as an effective way to listen to community concerns and receive community feedback. Using this type of listening link, the Department has tapped non-profit community organizations to undertake community outreach, organize community meetings, and promote community participation. The most noteworthy event occurred when the department and a Friends group collaborated to renovate a problematic local park located in a multi-racial neighborhood, Dufferin Grove Park. Under the leadership of the Friends, the community was able to effectively communicate its vision to change the negative image of the public space and introduced a variety of locally inspired activities that represent the cultural diversity of the community.

San Rafael, California: Pickleweed Park Advisory Board: The city of San Rafael supported formation of the Canal Community Alliance for the purpose of establishing a mouthpiece and a connection with the diverse communities on parks and planning issues. The Alliance provides information in Spanish and Vietnamese and holds monthly meetings to listen and discuss issues, problems, and ideas from the grassroots population. The public’s views as well as the Board’s recommendations have assisted the Department of Parks and the Park and Recreation Commission in providing facilities and programs that are sensitive to the diverse cultures and needs of the community.

#5 Accessibility planning is becoming a major component in some park planning initiatives.

Some jurisdictions include recommendations for off-site sidewalks, trail, and pathway routes as well as for public transit routing and stops as part of the park planning, design,

and development effort. The recommendations are accompanied by the requirement to fund and deliver the facilities with the delivery of the new or retrofitted park.

Examples of Innovative Approaches

Denver, Colorado, Commons Park: To insure that this park became a lively center of recreational and cultural activity, a catalyst for community revitalization, and a passive oasis of green space, park planners emphasized easy accessibility. An extended, off-site network of roads, paths, trails, and pedestrian bridges were planned, phased and funded to ensure easy and safe access to the public space by the time the park was completed. In addition, a free shuttle bus service to the park was provided from nearby apartment complexes, single-family homes, and mall.

Toronto, Canada, Dufferin Grove Park: The Friends of Dufferin Park worked in collaboration with government officials to connect the park to the greater community and fund the projects in time for the park opening - including walkways, footpaths, and the location of a new bus route and stop at the edge of the park.

Oakland, California, Union Point Park: Accessibility was viewed as a major element in the park plan. Location of and connection to bike paths, transit routes, and water taxi, and placement of a bus stop and shelter were part of the design.

#6 Volunteer programs are becoming an increasingly important component of successful park systems.

As budget limitations increase and demand for park services change and expand, many jurisdictions are placing an even higher priority on developing and staffing volunteer programs. Jurisdictions are looking strategically at their volunteer programs to define new ways to further their core functions and mission.

Park organizations with successful volunteer programs have leadership that effectively verbalizes its expectation of staff concerning the role of volunteers in the organization. Furthermore, they challenge staff to incorporate volunteer initiatives into the work program and include volunteer duties in job descriptions and performance reviews.

Successful volunteer programs appear to have three common characteristics:

- 1) A clear commitment to volunteerism as a means to enhance staff resources
- 2) A clear concept of the needs of the department and community
- 3) Adequate staffing and resources to support the volunteer effort

Examples of Innovative Approaches

Chicago, Illinois, Elliott Donnelley Park: Working with City staff and a non-profit park planning consultant, a community citizen board manages a group of "block captains" to sustain the volunteer program for this local park.

San Rafael, California, Albert Park: Credit for this popular community park belongs to the spirit of volunteerism. Overall, 87% of the \$1.2 million cost of park redevelopment was generated through the auspices of the volunteer program, which sponsored special fundraising events, brick sales, and volunteer labor.

#7 Some jurisdictions have assigned priority status to creative financing.

Some jurisdictions use innovative taxing techniques to acquire and manage open space lands.

Example of Innovative Approaches

Boulder, Colorado: In 1967, Boulder became the first city in the country to pass a sales tax of 0.40% for the acquisition and management of open space lands. The voters approved an additional 0.33% in 1989. Over 41,000 acres of land has been preserved and protected. Wildlife habitat, unique geologic features, greenways and 130 miles of trails are all part of Boulder's Open Space and Mountain Parks. These lands provide scenic enjoyment and passive recreation for area residents.

#8 Benchmarking and performance standards have become important management tools.

Benchmarking various aspects of park performance is a technique used in many jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions benchmark their performance by comparing themselves with other jurisdictions that are similar to or in economic competition with them. Other jurisdictions simply develop performance standards for a variety of park activity. The following jurisdictions are actively developing and/or using benchmarks and performance standards using consultant support or individually (Appendix 4 includes a list of some performance standards used by a few jurisdictions throughout the United States):

- Albany, New York
- Austin, Texas
- Dekalb County, Georgia
- Fairfax County, Virginia
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Johnson County, Kansas
- Kenosha County, Wisconsin
- Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota
- Oakland Park, Illinois
- Orange County, Florida
- Phoenix, Arizona (Maricopa County)
- Santa Clara, California
- Sunnyvale, California
- Tucson, Arizona

Austin, Texas, 2002 Audit Report on Park Maintenance: The audit was designed to benchmark the performance of the park maintenance program. Austin used benchmarking data from 25 comparable cities using the guidance from the methodology developed by Peter Harnick from the Trust for Public Lands as referenced in his book, "Inside City Parks." The comparison helped to assess and benchmark maintenance priorities, management efficiency and effectiveness, and provided the basis for an overhaul and strengthening of the program.

Oakley, California; Platte County, Missouri; and Joplin, Missouri: These jurisdictions benchmark their performance by undertaking a performance analysis of other jurisdictions comparable to them (sometimes viewed as their economic competition). Some of the more interesting elements benchmarked are: delivery of non-traditional park functions, percentage of costs covered through fees, and percentage of departmental costs to support volunteer groups.

Portland, Oregon: Yearly, the Portland-Multnomah Progress Board establishes Community Benchmarks that guide City and County decisions regarding a broad spectrum of services including park and recreation facilities. A scorecard is kept over time to help with the allocation of resources and the development of new policies and programs as needed.

#9 Sophisticated automation systems for tracking maintenance activities and costs are becoming prevalent resource management tools.

Maintenance databases, well-articulated maintenance plans, and flexible maintenance programs are being explored in many jurisdictions constrained by money and challenged by change.

Periodic evaluations of how parks are performing provide additional information to managers regarding resource allocation and represent innovative ways to benchmark service to the community.² If parks are well used, they should wear out, and that is good - provided that they are renovated in a timely manner!

Examples of Innovative Approaches

Fairfax County, Virginia; Hennepin County, Minnesota; and Portland, Oregon: These jurisdictions combine information technology with other management tools to enhance resource allocation and management. They apply automated systems and software packages designed specifically for tracking maintenance tasks, the amount of time spent on specific tasks in each park, and materials used to complete tasks, to effectively monitor and manage resources.

² Our Smart Parks program will ultimately provide this type of information.

Phoenix, Arizona: Phoenix, Arizona takes a slightly different approach, tracking detailed labor and materials only for the 26 largest and most-used parks.

Modesto, California; and Prince William County, Virginia: These jurisdictions use detailed maintenance standards that are integrated in management of the park systems. Information included in the standards are: desired quality to be maintained; specific tasks to be carried out to achieve the desired standards; required frequency of tasks; amount of time required to perform the tasks; amount of materials required; and types of equipment and tools required. In addition, cost data are employed to enhance management decisions. Previous-year budgets, the knowledge and experience of staff, and detailed maintenance cost data are utilized to enhance resource allocation decisions.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section responds to...

...the changing needs of a population that is growing, becoming older, more diverse, and living in neighborhoods with an increasingly urban character which will redefine the function of many parks, our park standards, our maintenance capability, the park-planning and community-outreach process, park/recreational programming, educational initiatives, and stewardship efforts.

...the recognition that Montgomery County must continue to add park system and maintenance capacity to address the changing needs of our current population, plus an additional 100,000 people anticipated by 2020.

...the reality that many areas throughout the County demonstrate some level of unmet park need now, and that more neighborhoods throughout the County may well be underserved in the future.

...and the reality that preventive park maintenance has necessarily been limited because of fiscal constraints in recent years.

PLAN IT

Strategic, long-term planning and programming are essential to navigate amid present and future trends and to develop new approaches that respond to anticipated change within our park system.

1. Create an **updated process for park planning** that promotes greater involvement of potential park users and the “greater neighborhood.” Involve the beneficiaries of the park system to a greater extent in future planning.

Plan and design park facilities with heightened awareness of changing neighborhood needs, culture, and stewardship needs.

Strengthen the linkage between park planning and community-based planning: make park planning a more integral part of the master plan process.

Target involving field staff throughout the park-planning process as a higher priority.

2. Test **new models for information gathering, planning, need assessment, and evaluation** with the community and their respective leaders. Take time to share this information throughout the Department, with the community, and report back to park users. Further refine facility need assessment beyond the “need for more athletic fields” to include analysis of different field sports.

3. Continue dialogue to further refine the departmental vision regarding the balancing of **stewardship of natural resources, and cultural resources with recreation needs** as customer demand changes and land availability becomes more scarce.

4. Review and revise the **1992 Recreational Guidelines** for private recreation facilities in residential subdivisions of more than 50 units. Private recreation facilities are intended to supplement the public park system and be maintained privately. The Guidelines were to be updated annually; this has not occurred.

The Guidelines were based on the 1990 Census data, development trends, and recreational needs at that time. Much has changed. Specific attention should be given to: a) changing the threshold to something less than 50 units to be more responsive to revitalization, redevelopment, and infill developments; b) reviewing demand factors for facilities (Is the need for tennis courts the same as in 1992?); c) giving greater consideration for public access (i.e. pedestrian and trail linkages); funding and/or maintenance partnerships, scholarships; and d) reviewing of suggested location of recreation facilities.

The proposed Guidelines should be reviewed with the communities, developers, and users they are intended to serve.

Connect design and construction standards used by the Park Development Unit with the revised Recreational Guidelines to guide the development of private facilities.

5. Include a **public access assessment and implementation strategy** as part of the planning and funding process for new and retrofitted public spaces. Key elements include sidewalks, trails, and Ride-On service.

6. Give priority consideration to **retrofitting facilities** to accommodate new uses that meet changing needs, as acquisition opportunities diminish throughout the County.

7. Identify **park and recreation facilities** that need retrofitting targeting areas experiencing significant population growth, demographic change, physical deterioration, or significant unmet need.
8. Evaluate content and outreach methodology of **interpretive programs** to determine if our efforts are expected to meet the needs of our future citizenry. Identify the ultimate number of our park nature centers and their geographic locations.
9. Create a stronger partnership between the Commission and the MCPS in educating youth. Expand **environmental education** programs, particularly in areas with increasing and changing populations, such as the proposed new Nature Center at South Germantown Recreational Park to serve Germantown and Clarksburg.
9. Continue to develop **resource management plans** that detail long-term management strategies for the protection and maintenance of our sensitive environmental areas.
10. Continue park acquisition to protect and preserve **natural open space areas**, with particular emphasis in mature communities having an urban character and intensity.

MAINTAIN IT

The protection of the existing inventory of valuable park and recreation assets is a priority. Through the diligence of staff, the financial commitment of the County Council, and with County residents engaged as stewards of our park system, we can adequately preserve this valuable legacy for future generations.

1. Continue to expedite the **Smart Parks** effort to track park maintenance costs so as to better manage resource allocation and help understand where we are and where we want to be in the future. Use this data in decision-making and to build and substantiate fiscal requests.
2. Enhance and expand our already impressive **volunteer program**. With current projections indicating expanding demand for parks and programming, volunteerism is expected to become an even more valuable resource. The Department should continue to explore new and innovative ways to incorporate volunteers throughout the agency.

The time is right for the Department to embark on a big-picture assessment of our volunteer program, create goals and outcomes, develop an implementation strategy, move forward and periodically reassess. Consider developing truly “professional level” volunteer jobs in key programmatic areas to expand the quality and quantity of our programs.

3. Expand work effort on the development of **maintenance standards**, to supplement our existing “maintenance frequency targets,” to align maintenance with defined and measurable outcomes. This effort should include the development of standards for the maintenance of natural areas, particularly, invasive species management. The Department will need to further identify a continuum of maintenance levels to allocate limited maintenance resources based on purpose of program, project, and type of park.

4. Develop a **multi-year preventive-maintenance plan for existing assets**. This approach would be helpful in protecting current and future assets as well as providing an important management and benchmarking tool to monitor the implications of budget priorities on the maintenance of our existing inventory of assets, including key natural areas. Policy makers would agree to the recommendations in this plan and show their support through annual funding. This document could aid the Executive and County Council while reviewing the CIP and annual operating budgets.³ This idea might be initiated by way of a small pilot project involving those parks that have the greatest unmet need.

ADMINISTER IT

Effective public space management is dependent upon initiative, innovation, and energy at every level throughout the Department. Strong leadership within the Department and support all the way to the neighborhood resident is critical to the long-term success of our park system.

1 Complete the development of criteria needed to establish and evaluate **public-private partnerships** to better understand the operational implications on park operations, maintenance, and assets. Critically examine previous partnerships; lessons learned should be applied to future efforts. Most importantly, make sure the partnerships are congruent with Planning Board approved policies and the Department’s mission.

2. Evaluate the existing merged organizational structure as it relates to park planning. **Clarify internal roles, responsibilities, and process.**

3. Build stronger **communication links with the community**. Finding ways to harness this resource and expand it should be a high priority. Identify staff in the Department whose mission it is to do just this. This effort could be focused with all managers and perhaps evaluate them on their effectiveness.

5. Develop **hiring and training strategies** for employees to manage multi-cultural environments and events.

³ Currently, renovations and maintenance are targeted on an annual basis and funded through our PLAR program. Those projects included in the program follow a facility assessment.

6. Seek innovative and different ways to **deliver park and recreation services** to our citizenry.
7. Heighten commitment to **staff training** focusing on how to manage in **changing and diverse park environments**.
8. Study ways to maximize **resource allocation** among the Department of Park and Planning, the MCPS, and the Recreation Department