



June 17, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Lester L. Straw, Superintendent of Parks
Michael F. Riley, Acting Chief, Park Development Division
Douglas Alexander, Design and Project Management Supervisor

FROM: Linda Komes, Project Manager

SUBJECT: Facility Plan for Renovation, Reconfiguration and Expansion of existing East Norbeck Local Park

I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

- 1) Approve facility plan for the renovation, reconfiguration and expansion of existing East Norbeck Local Park, including cost estimate;
- 2) Approve Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan; and
- 3) Determine schedule for design and construction during review of the FY05-10 Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**A. INTRODUCTION**

East Norbeck Local Park consists of a total of 24.78 acres and is located on the north side of Norbeck Road (MD 28), east of Georgia Avenue, in the southern portion of the Olney Planning Area. Access to the park is provided off of Norbeck Road. The park is bounded by Norbeck Road (MD 28) along the southern boundary, RE-2 zoned land developed with single-family homes to the southwest, undeveloped forest along the northwest boundary, and former cultivated fields along the eastern boundary. A proposed 300-foot-wide right-of-way for the Intercounty Connector is located along the north and eastern property line. Confronting property on the south side of Norbeck Road lies within the Aspen Hill Planning Area, is also zoned RE-2, and is developed with single-family detached homes. Leisure World, a planned adult community, is located very nearby, just south of Norbeck Road. See attached vicinity map, Attachment A.

The park originally consisted of 10 acres and was developed in the early 1970's. The existing facilities include a softball field, a baseball field, a soccer field overlay, two lighted tennis

courts, a lighted basketball court, a playground, a picnic shelter with restrooms, and a small asphalt parking lot.

In July of 1997, after repeated requests from the community and a request from the County Department of Recreation, the M-NCPPC purchased an adjoining 14.78-acre parcel for the purpose of providing additional parking to address a long-standing, and potentially dangerous, parking condition, (created when the small existing parking lot is full and overflow parking occurs along Norbeck Road, and across the road along Bailey's Lane), and for possible expansion of park facilities. The acquired parcel wraps around the existing 10-acre park on the north and east, and generally gently slopes towards the two bisecting streams. Formerly cultivated, the property is basically devoid of trees except for scattered vegetation along the Norbeck Road frontage, and in areas immediately adjacent to the streams, making it suitable for park development.

The purpose of this facility plan is to incorporate the acquired 14.78-acre parcel into the park, provide an adequate amount of parking within the park to support park facilities, improve the existing, worn, and functionally obsolete facilities within the park, and accommodate future masterplanned road improvements.

In February 2002, the Commission contracted with the RBA Group, a multi-disciplinary firm for facility planning the renovation, reconfiguration and expansion of East Norbeck Local Park. M-NCPPC staff and The RBA Group have worked closely to develop a facility plan that meets the recreational needs of the community, provides the minimum amount of parking necessary to support the recreational facilities, provides appropriate access for people with disabilities, and protects the site's invaluable resources.

B. PROJECT FUNDING

Facility Planning for East Norbeck Local Park is funded out of the Facility Planning: Local Parks PDF. Additional funding of approximately \$280,000 will be available for the design and construction of a soccer field in East Norbeck Local Park from a combination of sources as described below.

Several years ago, the Planning Board approved the Small's Nursery subdivision application subject to certain conditions (Preliminary Plan No.1-94011 and Site Plan No. 8-95015) ("Small's Nursery"). Small's Nursery is located in the northwest quadrant of the intersection of Georgia Avenue (MD 97) and Norbeck Road (MD 28). Among the conditions of the Planning Board's approvals, were the requirements that the developer, Tower Construction Company ("Tower"), dedicate certain land to the M-NCPPC for the expansion of Norbeck-Muncaster Mill Neighborhood Park ("Neighborhood Park") and that Tower design and construct a soccer field within the expanded Neighborhood Park, including associated parking and access. Tower completed its design of the facility, including construction documents; however, at the request of the SHA, which had initiated a study of improvements to the MD 28/MD 97 intersection ("Intersection Improvements"), both the dedication of the land to the M-NCPPC and the construction of the soccer field at the Neighborhood Park were delayed.

The Planning Board subsequently amended the conditions of approval for Small's Nursery, allowing Tower to obtain certain building permits before the soccer field and associated improvements were constructed. The amendments were conditioned upon, among other things, Tower posting a bond in the amount of \$234,000 (the estimated cost of construction of the soccer field and associated improvements at the Neighborhood Park). The bond serves to

guarantee Tower's payment of \$234,000 to M-NCPPC in the event, among others, a decision is made to construct the soccer field at an alternate location. It should be noted that members of the community testified at the public hearing on the amendments to Small's Nursery against the siting of a soccer field at the Neighborhood Park.

On March 27, 2003, Transportation Planning Division Staff presented Intersection Improvements alternatives to the Planning Board. The Board voted in favor of transmitting comments to SHA expressing the Board's preference for Alternative 7. The selection of Alternative 7 would preclude development of the soccer field designed for the Neighborhood Park and, consequently, Parks Staff has explored alternate locations for the Neighborhood Park soccer field.

Staff is of the opinion that East Norbeck Local Park is a suitable alternate location for the Neighborhood Park soccer field. East Norbeck Local Park is located approximately one mile east of the Neighborhood Park; and, furthermore, both parks are within the same Planning Area and serve the same general community. Because East Norbeck Local Park is undergoing facility planning, and is proposed to include a soccer/lacrosse field, Staff propose to use the funds from the Small's Nursery conditions of approval to construct the soccer field in East Norbeck Local Park. In addition, because Tower had already designed the soccer field prior to a decision on the Intersection Improvements, the cost to design the soccer/lacrosse field at East Norbeck Local Park should be incurred by the SHA. M-NCPPC and the SHA have resolved to enter into an MOU, which will include provisions for payment to the M-NCPPC of approximately \$46,000 to cover, among other things, costs of designing a soccer/lacrosse field and associated improvements at East Norbeck Local Park. At the time of this writing, M-NCPPC and the SHA are negotiating the final details of the MOU.

Staff recommends that funds for design and construction be considered for inclusion in the FY05-10 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). A cost estimate for design and construction is provided as part of the consultant's Facility Planning Report, attached in Appendix D.

C. THE FACILITY PLAN PROCESS

During the facility planning process environmental and community impacts were analyzed, a program of requirements was developed, various development scenarios were analyzed, and detailed projected construction costs were developed. The goal was to provide adequate parking to support the proposed facilities, meet ADA Guidelines for Accessibility, improve existing facilities within the park, and protect the site's natural resources. The creation of the facility plan included the following steps:

1. Data Collection;
2. Inventory and evaluation of existing conditions;
3. Preparation of Natural Resources Inventory/forest Stand Delineation;
4. Development of three Design Concepts;
5. Presentation to community at a public meeting of Site Inventory and Analysis and Design Concepts;
6. Development of two detailed plans based on community and staff comments;
7. Preparation of a Facility Plan based on County, State, and M-NCPPC comments;
8. Presentation of Facility Plan at 2nd public meeting;
9. Revision of Facility Plan based on community and staff comments;

10. Preparation of Storm Water Management (SWM) Concept Plan and obtain approval from County;
11. Revision of Facility Plan Based on M-NCPPC, County and MDSHA comments and preparation of Construction Cost Estimate;
12. Development of Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan and obtain approval;
13. Presentation of revised Facility Plan at Plan Review Meeting; and
14. Presentation of Facility Plan at Planning Board Hearing.

D. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

M-NCPPC and the RBA Group coordinated two public outreach meetings with the intent of presenting the project to the community and gathering community input. The first Community Meeting was held on May 28, 2002, at the Norbeck-Muncaster Mill Neighborhood Park Community Building. During the meeting, the team presented the site analysis and three different development scenarios and questions/comments were recorded. Staff received valuable input from the community during the meeting and in subsequent conversations and correspondence. East Norbeck Local Park is a well-used community park and the community was generally very supportive of the proposed park improvements. The following comments were received:

- Do not locate the soccer field along Norbeck Road. A fence along this edge would be necessary to keep stray balls within the park and would be unattractive from Norbeck Road.
- Provide additional lighted basketball courts. Basketball courts are well used in the park and they give children and teens a place to go and play.
- Improve the picnic pavilion and continue to include restrooms in addition to portable toilets. The picnic pavilion is used almost constantly, especially on weekends.
- Leave the northwest corner a natural area. Provide a paved path system to accommodate the widest range of users, in particular, the community located in nearby Leisure World.
- Update lighting of the basketball and tennis courts to include current cut-off fixtures. Set fixtures to turn off no later than 10:00 pm.

Following the first Community meeting, staff continued to meet and discuss the plans with members of the community. After learning that members of the community east of the park did not receive notice of the first community meeting, a second community meeting was scheduled and notices were mailed to a much larger group of residents. Once again the site analysis, the three concepts, and a revised facility plan, were presented to an audience of over 20 residents and concerned neighbors.

Following the presentation, a discussion ensued and the community again provided valuable input to staff. During the discussion it was clear that there were a number of differing view points regarding the proposed renovations to the park. The community was unanimous in their support for a new playground located near the picnic area, and asked that the picnic pavilion continue to include restrooms as in the existing park. One group raised concerns regarding protection of the environment, questioned the need for a soccer field within the park, and expressed concern that there was too much parking proposed on the plan. This group also did not favor a paved trail in the meadow area in the northwest corner of the site and expressed concerns regarding increased noise and the lighting of the basketball and tennis courts.

Another group expressed full support of the proposed improvements to the park, but stated a strong preference for a second point of access along Norbeck Road and a paved trail (vs. natural

surface) around the meadow area in the northwest corner. The group stated that there is a large population of elderly and individuals who would find a natural surface trail hard to navigate and that a paved trail better addresses the needs of the surrounding community. This group also stated that the amount of parking proposed was necessary and supported improved lighting of the tennis and basketball courts. Written correspondence from the community is attached in Attachment C.

E. AGENCY INPUT

On March 3, 2003, staff from the M-NCPPC and the RBA Group met with Mark Etheridge in the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS) to discuss options for stormwater management in the park. On April 1, 2003 a stormwater management concept plan was submitted to DPS. Stormwater management concept approval was granted by DPS on April 11, 2003. Stormwater management in the park will be provided via a system of swales and sand filters and a shallow detention basin.

A Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan was submitted to the Natural Resources Division of M-NCPPC and is recommended for approval. Forest Conservation requirements will be met through a combination of preservation, reforestation, and afforestation. Approximately 97% of the existing forest on site will be preserved. Although it will not be possible to preserve much of the existing individual trees planted within the existing park, staff is exploring the possibility of transplanting 15 large existing trees. Because the site was previously cultivated, in order to meet the afforestation threshold, nearly an acre of afforestation is required. The afforestation is proposed in the unwooded stream buffers.

The Facility Plan was referred to Shawn Burnett and Greg Cooke of the SHA. Both reviewers made comments regarding access (vehicular and pedestrian) to the park. A short accel and decel lane exists at the park entrance. Based on comments from SHA, an expanded accel lane from the existing entrance to the western property line (approximately 100 linear feet) and a 250 foot long decel lane will be required.

On May 13, 2003, the facility plan was presented to the Plan Review Committee of M-NCPPC. The plan had been previously reviewed by many of the Committee members during the planning process. A discussion ensued regarding the provision of permanent restroom facilities in local parks. Staff has determined that based on the existing park facilities and the community's unanimous desire for permanent restrooms in conjunction with the picnic pavilion, that restrooms would be included as part of the facility plan for East Norbeck Local Park.

Susan Soderberg, Education and Outreach Planner in the Historic Preservation Section of the M-NCPPC provided information regarding the historical background of the park. It is believed that the parkland was part of a farm owned by the Edmonson family in the 1840's. Paul Edmonson was a free black born in Madagascar. His wife Amelia was a slave and together they raised nine children. Three of the older girls purchased freedom and married free black men. The remaining six children attempted escape aboard the ship *Pearl* from Washington in 1948, were captured, and were sent to New Orleans to be sold. One son was purchased by abolitionists and freed. The three other sons were sold as slaves, and the two daughters were sent back to Washington because of a yellow fever epidemic. Henry Ward Beecher, raised funds to buy the girls freedom. His daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe, took an interest in the girls, sent them to college and added their story to Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Bailey's Park, site of the 2nd baseball field for local black athletes in Montgomery County, was located across Norbeck Road from the existing park. Jim "Sweetman" Offutt and Gordon Hopkins, who later played for the National Negro Baseball League, both played there.

F. PLANNING DOCUMENTS

The PROS Plan - East Norbeck Local Park is located within the Olney Planning Area #23 (PA 23). The 1998 Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan indicated that the Olney Planning Area would need 3 additional fields by the year 2005. The Pros Plan states the following: "Ballfields receive more use than any other local park facility....In examining the escalating need for ballfields it is important to look at more than just demographic increases in specific areas of the County. It is also important to consider the increasing interest in field sports and the trends in ballfield useage. Since 1988, the trend toward an increase in soccer has continued and, in addition to organized play, there are many players that are utilizing fields informally. Soccer is emerging as a growing sport in many ethnic groups with an increasing number of teams, and large numbers of players gathering to play soccer at fields throughout the County". The PROS Plan also reports an upsurge in the demand for youth baseball particularly in the 5-19 year age group. Organized sports are becoming a life-long experience, beginning at age 5 and extending to many teams in the over-45 age-group league.

In addition, the 2001 PROS Plan Implementation Study stated that in the Olney Area "the major proposal is to enlarge East Norbeck Local Park. Also Norbeck-Muncaster Mill Neighborhood Park will be enlarged to include a full size soccer field through a public-private partnership in conjunction with the adjacent developer." There were actually two additional fields at East Norbeck shown in the PROS Implementation Report table for this area. Additionally, the proposal for the soccer field at Norbeck Muncaster Mill Park is now unfeasible because of SHA intersection improvements at Georgia Avenue and Norbeck Road, and the funding from the developer is being used toward construction of the proposed soccer field at East Norbeck Local Park.

Input has also been received from the Montgomery County Recreation Department and the Olney Boys and Girls Club that a multi-purpose rectangular field that can be used for both soccer and lacrosse is very definitely needed at East Norbeck.

Local Parks are intended to provide both active programmed (e.g. ballfields), and unprogrammed (e.g. tennis and basketball courts) facilities, as well as passive, informal recreational opportunities. In the past, local parks have generally ranged in size from 10-15 acres. An effort is now being made to acquire larger local park sites in order to accommodate environmental/conservation goals. East Norbeck Local Park, which is 24.78 acres in size, (23.43 acres without the Norbeck Road right-of-way) is adequately sized to meet the recreation and preservation needs of the community.

The 2000 Park User Survey - According to the Survey the most popular activity in Local Parks in Montgomery County is Ballfield use. Approximately 65.5% of the users surveyed in local parks were either watching or playing. On average there were 62 users per visit observed. The specific data for East Norbeck Local Park noted an average of 72.5 users per visit with over 75% watching or playing on the ball fields. The largest percentage of users was in the 10-14 year age group using the park facilities mostly on weekday evening. The second largest user group consisted of 25-34 year olds with the most use on weekends.

The Facility Schedule Report - The Facility Schedule Report is a database record of how frequently the programmed facilities (e.g. ballfields, and picnic shelter) are reserved. The report indicates that from April 1, 2002-April 1, 2003, the baseball field was reserved 151 times, the softball field 105 times, the picnic shelter 14 times, and the soccer field 12 times. Staff believes that the relatively light scheduled useage of the soccer field is attributable to the fact that the ball diamonds are so popular and noting that the soccer field overlays the ball fields prohibiting its concurrent use.

III. THE FACILITY PLAN

A. EXISTING CONDITIONS

East Norbeck Local was designed and constructed in the early 1970's and includes two ball fields, a baseball field with a 300-foot field depth, and a softball field with a 225-foot field depth. An outfield corner of each ballfield overlaps making it difficult for the two fields to be used simultaneously. In addition, a soccer field overlays both ball diamonds. This type of configuration was popular in the 1970's-80's and attempted to broaden the type of recreational opportunities available to the community in limited space. In addition to the obvious functional limitations created by the overlapping and overlaying configuration, of greatest concern, is that with the increased popularity of soccer and the extended soccer season, turf grass on the fields no longer has the requisite time to rest and regenerate. As a result, more maintenance is required to maintain an often-substandard stand of grass.

Another problem associated with the original and now outdated design is with the softball field depth. When the park was designed in the 1970's, a softball field depth of 225-250 feet was considered the standard and sufficient. Since that time, due largely to the introduction of metal bats, the minimum acceptable softball field depth is 275 feet. The existing field designated for baseball has a 300-foot depth and is designated for youth play. Unfortunately, due to space limitations the existing baseball field will remain at 300-feet and will be restricted to youth play.

The park includes a small asphalt parking lot with 38 parking spaces. The condition of the existing asphalt is poor in some places, and the parking lot is located partially within the 150-foot-wide, master plan recommended right-of-way for Norbeck Road.

The identified parking shortage is what originally prompted the Commission to purchase the adjacent 14.78-acre parcel, and when the existing parking lot is full park users frequently park along Norbeck Road and along Bailey's Lane, creating a very dangerous situation both for park users and drivers. In addition, residents of Bailey Lane have complained that park users regularly block driveways.

The facilities within the park are not handicap accessible, and there are no paved pathways from the parking lot to the existing ballfields, playground, or court. Currently park users must walk over the grass, or in places through drainage swales, to reach the facilities. In addition, the picnic shelter and restrooms do not meet ADA guidelines. The condition of the picnic pavilion is also very poor with numerous cracks visible throughout the concrete slab.

The park includes a playground that is located a relatively long distance from the parking lot and the picnic shelter. During meetings with the community, the community expressed a desire to locate the playground near the picnic pavilion. A close examination of the playground equipment revealed that the existing equipment is somewhat outdated, appears worn, and should be replaced within the next several years.

B. THE IMPROVED PARK

Staff identified several primary goals that formed the basis for the recommended improvements to the park:

- Increase the number of parking spaces to the minimum number necessary to support the proposed park facilities. Locate the parking close to facilities and distribute in several lots so as to avoid a single, large expanse of asphalt.
- Improve the overall accessibility of the park to persons with special needs.
- Minimize the disruption to existing environmental resources.

The Consultant prepared several different plans for the redevelopment of the park. The proposed plan includes 157 parking spaces located in two parking lots. The parking lots include landscape islands with shade trees and bio-retention facilities. A trail network approximately one-half mile in length connects the parking lots to all the proposed facilities. A natural surface trail is provided around the meadow in the northwest corner of the site. This surface treatment of this trail was discussed during the two community meetings, with one group favoring asphalt, and another a natural surface treatment. Staff recommends providing a natural surface trail in this area of the site.

After meeting with the community and various agencies, staff decided to slightly realign the baseball and softball fields so that they no longer overlap, increase the size of the softball field, provide a freestanding soccer/lacrosse field near the ballfields (and well set back from Norbeck Road), and to relocate the playground, picnic pavilion, tennis and basketball courts to the 14.78 acre parcel. At the request of the community, the proposed picnic pavilion will continue to include restrooms, and portable toilets will be provided near the tennis courts and ballfields.

During the community meeting, the community was divided as to whether lighting should be provided for the tennis and basketball courts. In general, members of the community living closest to the park were in favor of continuing the existing practice of lighting the courts, provided the lighting was improved using full cut-off lenses to eliminate glare, and that the lights be timed to automatically turn off by 10:00 pm. The proposed facility plan includes this recommendation.

The proposed renovations to the park require a balance between the need to protect existing environmental resources and the need to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for people of various abilities. The facilities within the park have been located so as to avoid disturbance to the existing stream buffers. The plans include a proposal to reforest portions of the currently unforested stream buffer. Staff is also exploring the possibility of transplanting some of the large trees within the park, that would otherwise need to be cleared, to within the open stream buffer areas.

IV. COST

The Consultant prepared a cost estimate for the design and construction of the renovations to East Norbeck Local Park. The estimated cost to complete the improvements is as listed in the following Table. A more detailed summary is included in the Facility Plan Technical Report, Attachment D.

EAST NORBECK LOCAL PARK COST ESTIMATE

	TOTAL
Land	
Subtotal	\$0
Design	
Contract with contingency	\$185,701
Staff chargebacks: project management for design	\$37,140
Subtotal	\$222,841
Construction Management & Inspections	
Subtotal	\$105,512
Utilities (includes contingency)	
Subtotal	\$26,400
Construction (includes contingency)	
Subtotal	\$2,083,835
TOTAL PROJECT COST	\$2,438,588
FUNDING	
Contributions	
Contributions	\$234,000
State reimbursements	\$46,000
Subtotal	\$280,000

V. ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: Vicinity Map
- Attachment B: East Norbeck Local Park Facility Plan
- Attachment C: Community Correspondence
- Attachment D: Facility Plan Technical Report (Consultant's Report)