

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
8787 Georgia Avenue • Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

October 1, 2004

MCPB Item No. 10
10/07/2004

Memorandum

To: Montgomery County Planning Board

Via: Jeff Zyontz, Chief
Countywide Planning Division

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Subject: Planning Board Work Session: Public Hearing Draft Blockhouse Point
Conservation Park Master Plan -- *Review Public Hearing Testimony and
Approve Plan with Recommended Changes*

Recommendations

Staff recommends that the Planning Board take the following actions:

1. Adopt the Master Plan for Blockhouse Point Conservation Park with the addition of the Trail Concept Plan (Figure 1).
2. Amend the Muddy Branch Stream Valley Park Trail Corridor Plan (M-NCPPC, 2002) to reflect the trail recommendations in the Master Plan for Blockhouse Point Conservation Park.

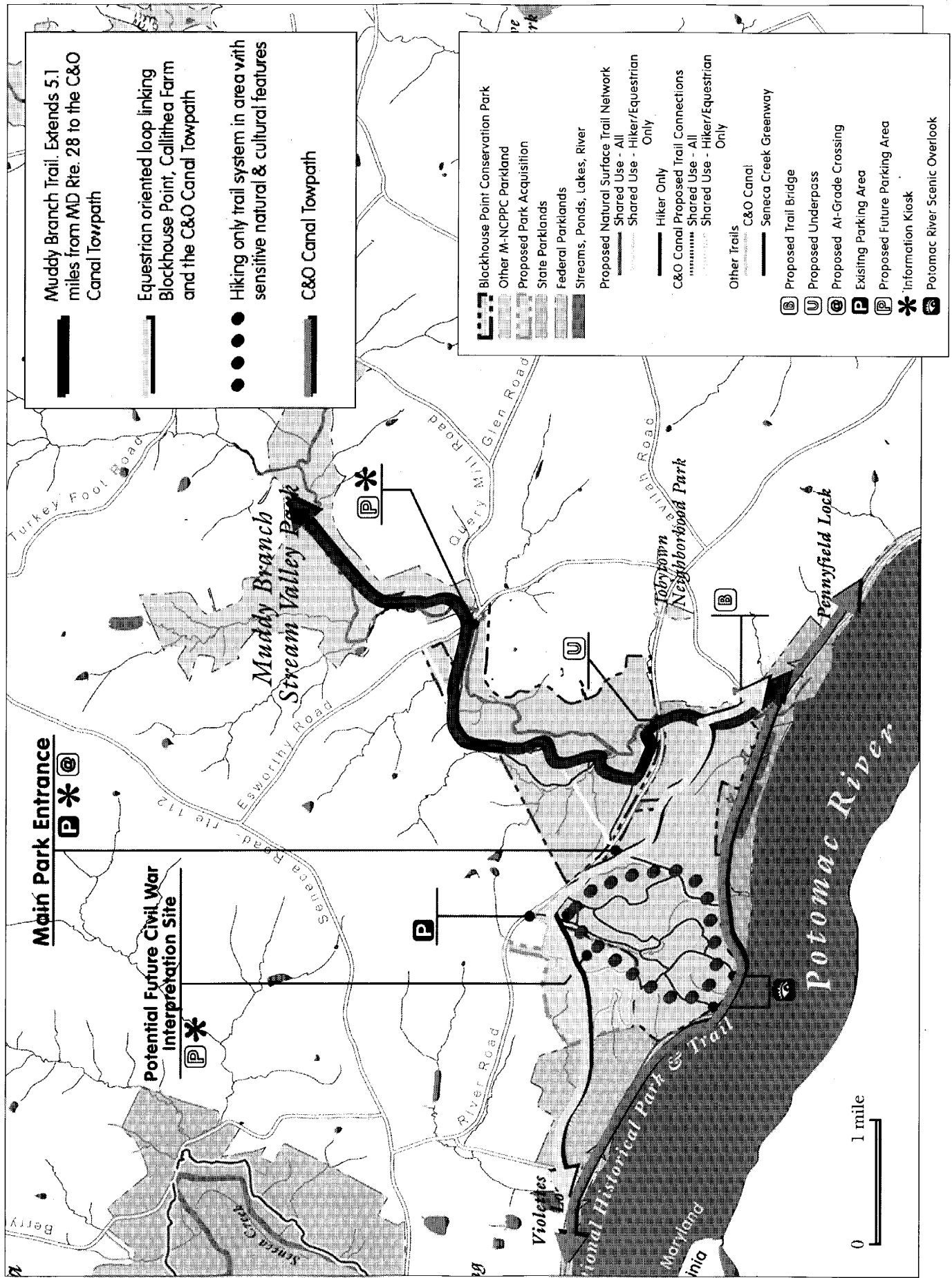


Figure 1 – Blochhouse Point Conservation Park Trail Concept Plan

Background

The Public Hearing for this plan was held on December 18, 2003. The work session on October 7th will address the following topics:

- Topic 1: Overview of staff recommended Planning Board Actions.**
- Topic 2: Staff responses to Planning Board questions during the Public Hearing.**
- Topic 3: Staff responses to Public Hearing Testimony.**

Topic 1: Overview of staff recommended Planning Board Actions.

1. Adopt the Master Plan for Blockhouse Point Conservation Park with the addition of the Trail Concept Plan (**Figure 1**).
2. Amend the Muddy Branch Stream Valley Park Trail Corridor Plan (M-NCPPC, 2002) to reflect the trail recommendations of the Master Plan for Blockhouse Point Conservation Park.

The Trail Concept Plan (**Figure 1**) consists of three major elements:

Element 1

- A Shared Use Natural Surface Trail for Hikers, Equestrians, and Bikers (*i.e.*, *Shared Use – All*) linking the Muddy Branch Stream Valley Park, Blockhouse Point Conservation Park, and the C&O Canal National Historic Park.

The major purpose of this element of the plan is to identify a specific location for the segment of the Muddy Branch Natural Surface Trail located in Blockhouse Point Conservation Park. This action was specified in the Muddy Branch Stream Valley Park Trail Corridor Plan (M-NCPPC, 2002).

As requested by members of the environmental community in late October 2003, the alignment is based on staff's best attempts to avoid and/or minimize impacts to environmentally sensitive areas (*i.e.*, streams and their buffers, 100-year floodplains, non-tidal wetlands, steep slopes, highly erodible soils, habitats of rare, threatened, endangered, and Watch-list species, archaeological resources, and historic sites) and avoid additional fragmentation of the high quality forest (**Figure 2**). Between River Road and Esworthy Road, the proposed trail relies to the greatest degree possible on the alignment of old River Road, established non-sanctioned "people's choice" trails, and underground utility rights-of-way. (Non-sanctioned trails are defined as those natural surface trails currently existing in County parks that are not named, signed, mapped, or regularly maintained.) South of River road, the proposed trail utilizes an existing gravel maintenance road originally constructed to allow access to infrastructure associated with the public water supply system.

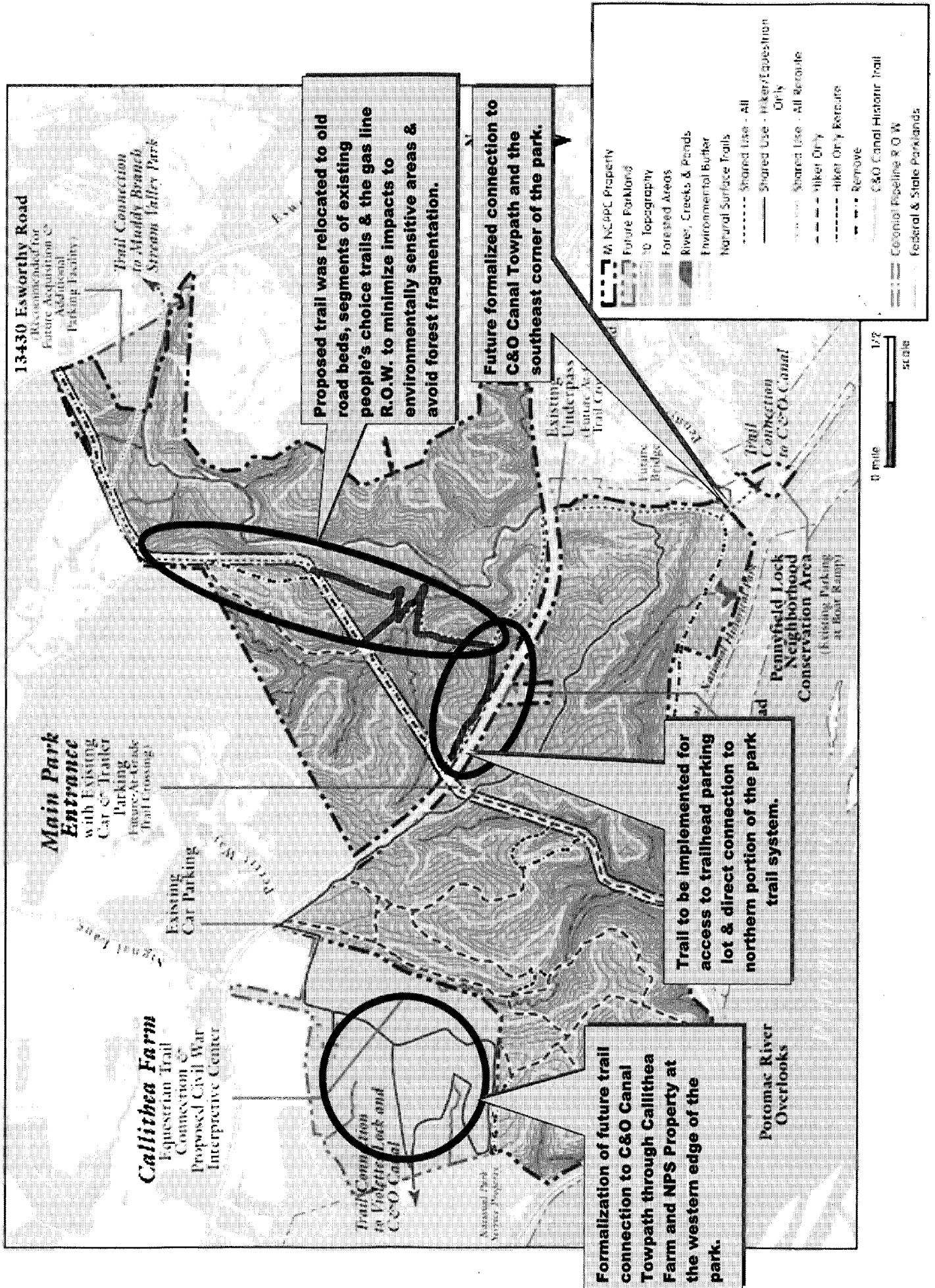


Figure 2 – Staff Changes to Trail Plan Concepts Prior to Public Hearing

Element 2

- A Shared Use Natural Surface Trail for hikers and equestrians (*i.e.*, *Shared Use – Hiker/Equestrian Only*) linking Blockhouse Point Conservation Park, the Commission's newest Equestrian Facility at Callithea Farm, and the C&O Canal National Historic Park.

The major purpose of this element of the plan is to provide a natural surface trail loop for hikers and equestrians linking Blockhouse Point Conservation Park, the C&O Canal National Historic Park between Pennyfield Lock and Violet's Lock, and Callithea Farm.

Thus, the Trail Concept Plan presented herein formally establishes two connections to the C&O Canal National Historic Park for hikers and equestrians (**Figure 2**); whereas the former trail plan *i.e.*, The Trail Plan for Blockhouse Point Conservation Park (M-NCPPC, 1989) recognized only the *potential* for one. This potential connection was shown in the southeast corner of Blockhouse Point Conservation Park immediately adjacent to the C&O Canal National Historic Park and near M-NCPPC's Pennyfield Lock Neighborhood Conservation Area (**Figure 3**).

Staff from M-NCPPC and the National Park Service have agreed that as soon as possible, this trail connection should be improved with a bridge crossing of Muddy Branch that would bring trail users along a very short section of natural surface trail on the east side of Muddy Branch paralleling Pennyfield Lock Road to the C&O Canal. Until that time, trail users will have direct access to the C&O Canal via an existing non-sanctioned "people's choice" trail on the west side of Muddy Branch.

Within Blockhouse Point Conservation Park, the proposed *Shared Use – Hiker/Equestrian Only* trail utilizes an existing natural surface trail roughly paralleling River Road and previously approved for use by hikers and equestrians (M-NCPPC, 1989). Within Callithea Farm, the proposed trail will be "sandwiched" between environmentally sensitive areas and fenced pastures. The loop will also provide equestrians ready access to the natural surface, *Shared Use – All* trail north of River Road in the Muddy Branch Stream Valley.