



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK & PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB Meeting
June 2, 2005
Item #20

To: Montgomery County Planning Board
Via: Les Straw, Superintendent of Parks
From: Carolyn D. Wainwright, Community Services
Brian Woodward, SmartParks and Permits
Tanya Schmieler, Park Planning
Re: Local Park Usage Proposals

STAFF RECOMMENDS: APPROVAL OF PILOT PROGRAM

Background

In the fall, the Planning Board directed staff to seek input from the general public regarding the growing use and subsequent issues involving local parks, particularly as they relate to adult soccer. Large crowds, trash, noise, and sometimes violations of existing park usage behavior are among the complaints we've heard.

Staff held three public forums this winter that were attended by park users, adjacent residents, and staff from the Commission as well as the Montgomery County Recreation Department. Each forum yielded solutions that could be grouped into five categories:

1. Enforcement (felt by those attending as the most important)
2. Permitting
3. Park Maintenance
4. Outreach
5. Park Design

As solutions were discussed, it also became clear that these were not park issues alone. The Office of the Community Use of Public Facilities was also experiencing similar issues on school fields. Indeed, they held a Task Force meeting in March 2005. Therefore, staff held a follow-up meeting with MCRD staff, CUPF staff, and representatives from large sports groups, Council members' aides and staff of several regional service centers. Together we reviewed the suggestions from the forums and added more that we thought were workable. Staff also reviewed approaches taken by Prince George's Parks and Recreation Department to these field use issues.

Proposal

Here's what we feel is a workable strategy in general:

- Maintain a permit policy that allows use on a "First come, first serve" basis, unless posted otherwise.

- Be proactive in enforcing existing policies and park rules.
- Assure that there are adequate resources to address the problems, particularly trash cans and port-a-johns.
- Assure that enforcement is a combination of Park Police and volunteers (adjacent residents continue to offer their assistance, but need oversight and training).
- Implement an outreach program that includes one-to-one contacts, league involvement, media coverage and bi-lingual literature.
- Partner with other agencies to present a “united” front on addressing these issues.
- Consider short-term and long-term design strategies that could bring noise and vision relief to adjacent neighbors.

Staff is, therefore, proposing to develop a pilot program that concentrates resources on nine local parks where the problems are the greatest:

- Bullis LP
- Capital View-Homewood LP
- Dewey LP
- Jesup-Blair LP
- Long Branch-Wayne LP
- Meadowbrook and Ray’s Meadow LP’s
- Old Blair Field
- Randolph Hills LP
- Winding Creek LP

We propose the following as specific steps to take in the pilot parks this spring and summer:

Enforcement

- a) Park Police will continue to attend periodic community meetings to discuss neighborhood park issues and to monitor progress in problematic parks.
- b) Recruit interested community members adjacent to the pilot parks to join the Park Police Volunteer organization and receive guidance and training to assist them in their neighborhoods.
- c) Expand directed patrol practice to include specific times at the pilot parks.
- d) Use undercover park police officers as needed to observe activities and public safety related violations at pilot parks.
- e) Develop and implement specific intelligence gathering, observation and enforcement plans to address the usage issues at pilot parks.
- f) Increase use of Park Police volunteers to target pilot parks.
- g) Assign light duty/injured Park Police officers to observe/monitor pilot parks as long as the tenets of the FOP 30 / MNCPPC collective bargaining agreement are followed.

Permitting

- a) Require users to post their permits when using the field; investigate placing frames at pilot fields to test this idea.
- b) Review each pilot park, its facilities, parking, and neighborhood to determine the proper permitting (or carrying capacity) for that park situation.

Park Maintenance

- a) Provide porta-johns for all pilot fields receiving frequent use. Install porta-johns, perhaps in partnership with user groups.
- b) Return the trash cans to the pilot parks.
- c) Conduct a parking study at each pilot park.
- d) Erect bi-lingual signage stating the rules and regulations.
- e) Direct Park Managers to contact permittee/user to determine what the field will be used for, i.e., type of game, ½ field or whole field used, etc.

Outreach

- a) Develop a bi-lingual field usage brochure that includes the weather hotline.
- b) Set a joint meeting with permittees of the Community Use of Public Facilities and those of Park and Planning in May to reiterate park rules and listen to customer needs.
- c) Meet with the editorial board of La Tiempo Latino and El Pregenero to develop a story about increased park usage for publication in May.
- d) Feature local park usage as a topic on "The Park Show" and the Hispanic program "Tertulia" on Cable Channel 6. Air in May and July, respectively.
- e) Develop an interview on the new Hispanic radio station.
- f) Include an Outreach worker with fluency in Spanish in the Community Relations staff.
- g) Solicit assistance from the Gilchrist Center to translate and develop materials and recruit "other language" volunteers.
- h) Assist with publicity about the Park Volunteers program.
- i) Generate two articles in other government agencies' newsletters about local park usage by December 2005.
- j) Develop an event at selected local parks during permitted soccer games to hand out information and prizes.

Park Planning and Design

(NOTE: There is currently no funding available in the Capital Improvements Program for planning, design and construction of improvements to the specific sites identified in this report. Funding for improvements to specific parks can be considered during upcoming deliberations on the Capital Improvements Program Therefore, here are some items that could be implemented in the near- future.)

- a) Add parking spaces to augment existing parking, where needed.
- b) Add landscape buffering in appropriate situations.
- c) Fence some fields that get high use, therefore controlling use at certain times.

Attached please find our draft long and short-term recommendations for the following areas; each attachment is prefaced by the comments from our public forums and the number of votes (in terms of priority) an issue received : **Enforcement** (Attachment A), **Permitting** (Attachment B), **Park Maintenance** (Attachment C), **Outreach** (Attachment D), and **Park Design** (Attachment E). **Maps** of the proposed pilot parks are in Attachment F.

Staff recommends approval of the Pilot Program to be implemented at the nine parks, beginning July 1, 2005 or sooner.