

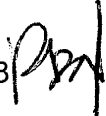
MCPB 6/16/05

Item #: 8

June 9, 2005

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Jeff Zyontz, Chief, Countywide Planning Division (301) 495-4557  
John Hench, Supervisor, PPRA Unit (301) 650-4364

**FROM:** Rachel Newhouse, Landscape Architect (301) 650-4388 

**RE: PROPOSED ELMHIRST PARKWAY NEIGHBORHOOD PARK  
CONCEPT LAN**

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### Staff Recommendations

- To approve the re-classification of the Locust Hill Neighborhood Park to a Neighborhood Conservation Area;
- To approve the re-classification of the Elmhirst Parkway Neighborhood Conservation Area to a Neighborhood Park;
- And to approve the concept plan for the proposed Elmhirst Parkway Neighborhood Park.

### Background

The Locust Hill Neighborhood Park (**Attachment A**) is a 5-acre park that was developed before the construction of the Capital Beltway and included a basketball court, playground, steps to Bellevue Drive and Broad Brook Drive for community access and a small bridge over the existing stream. With the construction of the Capital Beltway, maintenance access became extremely difficult and could only occur through the community access easements that are narrow (10' and 15' wide) with steep steps that maintenance vehicles cannot negotiate. Park Police Patrol also became difficult as the park is behind and below the existing homes.

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In 1991, staff went to the Planning Board with a recommendation to reclassify the Locust Hill Park to a neighborhood conservation area and return the park to its natural state. The Planning Board sympathized with both staff's difficulty to maintain and police the park and the large number of residents who wrote or testified to continue to have a neighborhood park in that location. The Planning Board voted 4-0 to approve the Director of Park's recommendation that the Parks Department staff and the citizens of the Locust Hill community work together to maintain the Locust Hill Neighborhood Park rather than convert it to a neighborhood conservation area as originally recommended by staff. They further asked staff to work with the neighborhood to find a better location for the playground. Since then, residents of Locust Hill have been periodically taking their private lawn mowers into the site to mow the small open areas and no additional play equipment has been installed. Only a seesaw remains today.

In 2003, in response to letters from the neighborhood requesting a new playground, staff wrote a memo (**Attachment B**) again recommending the reclassification of Locust Hill from a Neighborhood Park to a Neighborhood Conservation Area. The memo also detailed staff's attempt to relocate the playground to another area within the neighborhood, a meadow at the end of Elmhirst Parkway and the inability of the neighborhood to come to an agreement on this (or any other) site. Funds for this playground were ultimately used for other playground projects.

Elmhirst Parkway Neighborhood Conservation Park (**Attachment C**) has 7.6 acres of parkland on both sides on Elmhirst Parkway (which is currently maintained by M-NCPPC) and connects to a portion of Rock Creek Stream Valley Unit #3 parcel. The park is mostly forested with a stream running through it and a hard surface trail that connects to a sidewalk along Cedar Lane and ultimately connects to the Rock Creek Trail. Staff prepared a sensitive areas analysis of this site and the Locust Hill Park in August 2003 (**Attachment D- map and memo**). Although most of the Elmhirst Park is in a floodplain and stream valley buffer, there is a small portion of parkland that is out of the 100-year floodplain and stream valley buffer. This is the site recommended for the location of the playground in the concept plan for the neighborhood park.

## **The Need**

The proposed park is located in the Bethesda/Chevy Chase Planning Area #35. The 2003 Census Update Survey indicates that for the Bethesda/Chevy Chase Planning Area #35, the percent of Family Households is 84.6% and there are many families with young children that have indicated their need for a playground in this neighborhood.

The playground distribution map (**Attachment E**) shows the existing Locust Hill playground and the proposed Elmhirst Parkway playground, both within walking distance of the service neighborhood (**Attachment F**). The two closest existing public playgrounds to the service neighborhood are the Maplewood Alta-Vista Local Park playground and the Cedar Lane playground within Rock Creek Park. Both of these are within a ¼ mile to the service neighborhood, but Maplewood Alta-Vista is separated from the neighborhood by Wisconsin Avenue and Cedar Lane is separated by the Capital Beltway, both of which make pedestrian access more difficult.

The 1998 PROS Plan and preliminary estimates for the 2005 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan do not indicate unmet playground needs for the Bethesda/Chevy Chase Planning Area. However, as maintenance and policing issues

have required the removal of the Locust Hill playground, staff is recommending the replacement of the playground in this neighborhood to be within easy walking distance of the residents of this community.

In response to the need for a basketball court, there has not been a demand for a replacement facility in the neighborhood. A review of the 1998 PROS needs do not indicate unmet needs for basketball courts in the Bethesda/Chevy Chase Planning Area #35. Staff is not recommending the replacement of the basketball court at the proposed Elmhirst Parkway Neighborhood Park due to lack of demand for the facility and lack of space at the proposed park.

## **The Concept Plan**

The proposed concept plan for Elmhirst Parkway Neighborhood (**Attachment G**) includes the following:

- Pavement markings on the existing pavement for an accessible parking space and access way.
- Bollards/guard railing at the end of the pavement.
- An accessible walkway to the playground and bridge.
- A playground with multi-age equipment, safety surfacing and benches.
- A bridge over the stream connecting to the existing Elmhirst Parkway Trail.
- A park sign, 2 trail signs and a handicap parking sign.
- Attractive landscaping

Staff is recommending this site for the park for the following reasons:

- There is enough parkland to accommodate a neighborhood park sized play ground (approximately 5,000 s.f.) and maintain an open natural area for Frisbee tossing, dog walking and enjoying nature.
- There is an opportunity to connect the park to an existing trail network.
- The site is easily visible and accessible from the street and can therefore be maintained and policed.
- The area for the playground is located out of the sensitive areas and floodplain.
- There is not a need to remove any forest to construct the proposed park.
- There is an existing vegetative buffer along the adjacent private property that will screen the play equipment.
- There does exist pavement to accommodate an accessible parking space.

Staff is also recommending that the Locust Hill Neighborhood Park be reclassified as the Locust Hill Neighborhood Conservation Area and should include:

- Maintaining the public access from Bellevue Drive
- Maintaining a natural surface trail across the bridge and through the park
- Maintaining the public access to Broad Brook Drive

## **Public Outreach**

M-NCPPC staff co-hosted a public forum meeting with the Western Area Recreation Advisory Board to discuss the proposed plans for the park on May 18, 2005 (**Attachment H**). There were 15 members of the community in attendance. A summary of the attendees and their comments is attached (**Attachment I**). Since the mailing and the public meeting, many emails have been received (**Attachment J**). The community is extremely divided over the location and need for the playground. The Locust Hill Estates H.O.A. tried to resolve the problem by holding votes at the H.O.A. meetings and each time the voting was nearly 50% for a playground and 50% against. The Parklawn H.O.A. across Cedar Lane was not included in the votes or discussion for the playground. The Western Area Recreation Advisory Board will be sending a letter with recommendations for the Planning Board to review. This letter will not be part of the Planning Board packet since the WARAB will not meet until June 9, 2005 to discuss the project. Copies of the letter will be distributed at the Planning Board meeting on June 16, 2005.

## **Future Project Impacts on Locust Hill and Elmhirst Parkway Parks**

### **McDEP's Alta-Vista Stream Restoration Project**

McDEP will be overseeing a stream restoration project along the Alta-Vista Stream in this neighborhood. Part of the project requires McDEP contractors to access the stream in Locust Hill Park thru the neighborhood access stairs from Bellevue Drive. The contractors will be required to restore the steps and site to their original condition following the stream restoration. If the Planning Board approves the staff recommendation to re-classify Locust Hill Neighborhood Park to a Neighborhood Conservation Area, then M-NCPPC will use this opportunity to have the McDEP contractor remove the remaining basketball court and play equipment from Locust Hill Park.

### **SHA's Capital Beltway Widening Project**

Both parks are shown as possible being affected in the preliminary concepts for the Capital Beltway Widening project. The early concepts for this project indicate that there may be a need to locate storm water management areas in both parks. It is too early to determine whether this project will have an affect on the proposed park at Elmhirst Parkway in the future. It is not certain, at this time, when the widening project would occur and what type of stormwater management would be needed. Currently, this is **not** part of the master plan amendments approved by the County in 2004 for Capital Beltway widening due to constraints along the road right of way.

## **The Preliminary Cost Estimate**

The preliminary cost estimate for the entire Elmhirst Parkway Neighborhood Park is \$450,000. There could be phased approaches that would construct the playground portion of the project first and phase in the remainder of the park project at a later time.

## **The Operating Budget Impacts**

Both parks will have an added operating budget impact (OBI) on the Southern Region Maintenance personnel including mowing, playground woodchip replacement, natural surface trail maintenance, trash removal, and playground inspection. The exact OBI will be determined during the detailed design phase of this project.

## **The Proposed Project Schedule**

This project will be reviewed in context with all the proposed CIP projects for FY07-FY12 by the Montgomery County Planning Board this fall. A schedule for the detail design and construction will be developed, then.

## **Attachments**

- A. Existing Locust Hill Neighborhood Park
- B. 2003 Staff Memo
- C. Existing Elmhirst Parkway Neighborhood Conservation Park
- D. 2003 Sensitive Areas Analysis Locust Hill NP and Elmhirst Parkway NCP
- E. Playground Distribution Map
- F. Service Neighborhood
- G. Proposed Concept Plan For Elmhirst Parkway Neighborhood Park
- H. Public Forum Flyer
- I. May 18, 2005 Public Forum Summary
- J. Letters and Emails from the Public