

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Michael F. Riley, Chief, Park Development Division *MR*  
Patricia McManus, Design Section Supervisor *pm*

**FROM:** Heidi Sussmann, Landscape Architect *HS*

**SUBJECT:** Facility Plan for Renovation and Expansion of North Four Corners Local Park

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**I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

- 1) Approve the Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan.
- 2) Approve the Facility Plan – Modified Option B-2, for North Four Corners Local Park, including cost estimate.
- 3) Determine the schedule for design and construction during review of the FY07-12 Capital Improvements Program.

**II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION****A. Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to provide a Facility Plan and detailed cost estimate for the renovation and expansion of a local park, which will provide additional active recreation to serve current and future area needs, in fulfillment of the 1996 Four Corners Master Plan and stated purpose for the land acquisition. North Four Corners Local Park is a 13.9-acre park located on the north side of University Boulevard at Brunett Avenue, near the commercial node of Four Corners. The park is served by public transportation and is within walking distance of many residents, including an adjacent elderly housing facility. It is surrounded primarily by single-family residential neighborhoods.

The original 7.9-acre portion of the park was constructed with facilities during the 1950's including a small community building, a 16-space paved parking lot, a playground area, a soccer/softball field overlay, two tennis courts, a single basketball court, and pathways. The playground, community building, and parking area were recently renovated, and the community building area is lighted. The original portion of the park is accessed from the terminus of Southwood Avenue, within a residential area. The more recently acquired 6.2-acre portion of the park fronts University Boulevard, providing the park with direct vehicular access from a major road. The newer site is undeveloped, free of notable constraints, and is well suited for park improvements. Refer to Attachment 1 for a Vicinity Map.

## **B. Project History and Premise of Facility Plan Project**

The Montgomery County Council and the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) were first approached in 1994 by the Northwood-Four Corners Civic Association (NFCCA) with a request to purchase the 6.2-acre site, formerly the private Yeshiva School, in order to provide additional space for community recreation activities. The community recognized the opportunities of the site in statements from the president of the NFCCA and Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) representative during a June 27, 1995, Joint Public Forum on the FY97-02 Capital Improvements Program (CIP), as follows: *"The acquisition of this property would have the following beneficial results: 1) it would provide additional recreation resources which are a recognized need in this area of Montgomery County"*, and, *"the Four Corners area is in an older, highly urbanized section of the County that has few opportunities for expanding the existing recreational facilities. It has also been identified as an underserved portion of the County by the Silver Spring Parkland Study Group in 1988 and, again, in a 1993 study done by former County Executive Neal Potter's planning staff."*

The Montgomery County Planning Board public hearing for the Four Corners Master Plan was held on March 7, 1996, and the community testified about the importance of the site and its potential to serve area recreation needs as follows: *"With the loss of recreational facilities by the removal of the Yeshiva School and Four Corners Elementary School, this purchase would help to replace a needed resource"*, and, *"When both the Alexander and Four Corners Elementary Schools existed, significant additional recreation facilities were available to the community. As the CAC notes, Silver Spring is currently shortchanged when it comes to recreation facilities."*

The Montgomery County Council public hearing on the Four Corners Master Plan was held on October 24, 1996. The memorandum to the Council included an attachment from the Parks Department Land Acquisition Specialist justifying the recommendation to acquire the property for parkland. The memo endorsed the purchase stating: *"if acquired, the Yeshiva site can provide 1 additional ball field, parking, walkways, gazebo, playground, and a open play area."* The December 1996 Four Corners Master Plan Amendment to the 1986 Sector Plan was subsequently adopted with language stating *"Acquisition of this property will allow an expansion of the existing local park... and will provide additional active recreation resources in this heavily populated area."*

The Montgomery County Planning Board approved the purchase agreement on November 13, 1997, in fulfillment of the Master Plan and in response to community support for purchase of the property to provide recreation. The Planning Board subsequently received thanks from the NFCCA in a letter stating: *"With the County Park Commission's approval of the purchase agreement...our community is looking forward to this much needed addition to the area's recreation facilities. This action by the County will not only benefit our residents but also increase access for those living in the surrounding neighborhoods and in The Oaks elderly housing facility."* Refer to Attachment 5, Appendix A– for community testimony.

## **C. Project Funding and Initiation**

The original 7.9-acre park area was acquired in 1944 and 1947 for approximately \$5,900. The new 6.2-acre tract of land was acquired in 1998 for \$1,251,000, and the Yeshiva School facilities were subsequently demolished in preparation for the new park addition. The facility planning study for this park was funded in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP), FY02 Facility Planning PDF, with subsequent funding transfers and total allocation of \$177,000. The consulting firm of Grace E. Fielder and Associates was hired to prepare the facility plan in October of 2002.

## **D. The Facility Plan Process**

The preparation of the facility plan included many steps. Environmental conditions and site opportunities and constraints were analyzed; recreational needs were assessed; a program of requirements (POR) was developed; community input was obtained; various design scenarios were analyzed; and detailed construction costs were developed. The process included outreach to the surrounding community through three public meetings and two civic association meetings, two local surveys, and posting the project to the Commission website. Refer to Attachment 5 – The Facility Plan Report, for a more detailed outline of the planning process.

## **III. NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

### **A. Planning Document Recommendations**

**Area Master Plan** - The Four Corners Master Plan was approved and adopted in December 1996, following an extensive community process that included the formation of a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The Master Plan was adopted with the following language:

*“This plan recommends that the six-acre property at 315 University Boulevard, formerly a private school, be acquired for parkland. Acquisition of this property will allow an expansion of the existing park, North Four Corners, and will provide additional active recreation resources in this heavily populated area. It will also provide open space and park access along University Boulevard. Connections between the proposed new park site and the existing local park should be accomplished with pedestrian walkways and not a road extension through the properties or from residential streets that terminate at the property line.”*

**Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan (LPPRP) Staff Draft 2005** - Emerging needs assessments from the 2005 LPPRP Plan confirm some of the previous projections of the 1998 Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan (PROS) and also provide more specific information for projections to the year 2020. Present assessment of general trends in the county indicates an increase in multiple sports use of rectangular fields, an increase in youth team sports, a decrease in softball, a decrease in baseball, and a decrease in roller-hockey. The new data incorporates a comprehensive inventory of available park and school facilities and includes a more detailed analysis for specific types and sizes of facilities. Current information indicates that there will be a deficit of over 11.1 standard size multi-purpose rectangular fields, to serve all ages including adults, by 2020 within the Silver Spring/Takoma Park Community-Based Planning Area that includes this park. The data further indicates that there will be a deficit for 77 such field facilities countywide, representing the greatest demand for a specific recreation facility.

**1998 Park Recreation and Open Space Master Plan (PROS)** - The approved and adopted 1998 PROS Plan indicates that ball field needs are met within the planning area of Kemp Mill/Four Corners, but the directly adjacent planning areas all have unmet needs as follows: Silver Spring/Vicinity and Takoma Park have unmet needs of more than 5 fields within each area; and Kensington/Wheaton and Colesville/White Oak have unmet needs of 1 to 5 fields within each area. The plan makes the following statements:

*“Although many of the ball field needs will be provided at new parks and schools, it may not be possible to locate all future ball fields in the planning area where they are needed. This is particularly true in the down-County area, because field construction requires large, cleared, level sites which are in short supply in developed portions of the County. As a result league players may have to drive to fields in nearby areas for their games.”*

*"The need for local park ball fields is greater than for any other recreation facility. Ball fields receive more use than any other local park facility. 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. Projected field needs are based on a substantial increase in teams from 1990 to 1995. Since 1995, teams have escalated at an even greater rate. The need for ball fields has literally exploded in recent years. It is estimated that by 2000 an additional 69 ball fields will be needed to serve County residents and this number will increase to 101 by year 2010."*

**2001 PROS Master Plan Implementation Study** - This report provides site-specific recommendations to meet the needs identified in the 1998 PROS plan for the year 2010. It also makes recommendations based on community based planning team areas in order to aggregate needs and recommendations into larger community based service areas. It states the following:

*"This allows Planning Areas with surplus facilities to serve the needs of contiguous areas with facility deficits. It is recognized that all facility needs will not be met in all areas. Reasons for this include realities of fiscal constraints countywide and lack of land availability down county."*

*"Ballfields are one of the most heavily utilized recreation facilities in Montgomery County and have the greatest estimated shortages."*

*"The Four Corners Master Plan recommended the purchase of a six acre property...for parkland. This recently purchased site...is in the CIP for Facility Planning. The site was incorporated into the existing North Four Corners Local Park and could offer one additional ball field."*

**Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan, 2005** - This functional master plan, adopted by the Montgomery County Council in February 2005, identifies a signed shared roadway SR-31, Colesville Road (US 29) South, to provide the only bikeway connection between downtown Silver Spring and employment centers and communities in the US 29 corridor. The bikeway extends from Lockwood Drive, part of the US 29 Commuter Bikeway, to Wayne Avenue where the Silver Spring Green Trail is planned. The purpose of the route in the Four Corners area is to bypass US 29, which features very high traffic volumes and speeds. The majority of this planned bike route travels along local streets as a shared roadway, requiring only signage improvements. Part of the bikeway, however, passes through North Four Corners Local Park where it is planned as a shared use path. The bike route crosses University Boulevard at the existing mid-block crosswalk, between the park and Brunett Avenue, and passes along the southeastern border of the park to Southwood Avenue. Between Southwood Avenue and Lockwood Drive, the bike route will travel along a planned sidewalk/shared use path along the west side of US 29. Nearby local streets proposed for only bike route signs include Southwood Avenue and Brunett Avenue. This planned bikeway is in fulfillment of the 1996 Four Corners Area Master Plan recommendation #PB-16, for a shared use path through the park, connecting with shared roadways along Brunett Avenue (EB-2) and Southwood Avenue (PB-17).

## **B. Surveys and Studies**

**2003 Park User Satisfaction Survey** - The M-NCPPC recently completed this survey in response to significant demographic changes in Montgomery County, based on the 2000 U.S. Census. This information reflects opinions of residents across the County. Some of the most popular and needed facilities, countywide, include playgrounds, paved trails, picnicking, garden-like/landscaped areas, basketball, rectangular sports fields, and natural areas. Most users think priorities should be: maintaining what we have, buying natural areas, and developing more facilities on existing park property. Data more specific to this

park has been obtained by running responses within immediate zip codes and planning areas. In the zip codes within 1.75 miles of the park, 52.8% of park users believed there were too few soccer-use fields, and 50% believed this County-wide.

**Community Survey 2003** - During the programming phase of this project, over 450 survey forms were mailed to the surrounding community, and 76 forms and letters were received providing comment on 'what was wanted', 'what was not wanted', and 'what the park issues were'. Two petitions were also received from The Oaks at Four Corners and NFCCA, both requesting a passive park. The Oaks petition also supported the concept of a recreation center on the site. The responses were very informative, somewhat consistent, and are listed numerically in each category in descending order of priority.

- Wanted Facilities: 1) accessible paths with fitness stations, 2) natural open space, trees, and/or garden-like areas, 3) additional parking, 4) more playground, 5) benches, and, 6) picnic facilities;
- Not Wanted Facilities: 1) no more ball fields, 2) no enclosed shelters, and 3) no more parking;
- Identified Park Issues: 1) trash, 2) traffic and access, 3) lack of parking to serve the park, and, 4) enforcement.

**School Surveys 2003** - During the programming stage of this project, two nearby schools participated in a survey to canvas the desires of students for active recreation and passive pursuits. The results are listed below.

Sligo Middle School - 6<sup>th</sup> graders requested:

- Active Recreation (195 entries), with most popular facilities in descending priority: 1) playgrounds, 2) paved multi-use area, tied with, 2) multi-use field, 3) paved multi-purpose trail, and 4) basketball
- Passive Pursuits (82 entries), with most popular features in descending priority: 1) sitting/gathering areas, 2) water-related, 3) picnic related, and 4) nature/hiking related

St. Bernadette's private school - 3rd and 8<sup>th</sup> graders requested:

- Active Recreation (91 entries), with most popular facilities in descending priority: 1) playgrounds, 2) multi-use field, and, 3) basketball
- Passive Pursuits (9 entries), generally related to: 1) quiet, reading, and trees.

**North Four Corners Park Site Monitoring 2004** - Staff monitored use at North Four Corners Local Park during ten non-rainy weekend days and several weekday afternoon site visits from August 28 through November 7, 2004. The objective was to determine specific operational issues apparent during peak use times, typically occurring throughout weekends and potentially on weekday afternoons and early evenings. Results varied significantly from very sparse visitation, to intermittent use, to very heavy use of facilities with related parking overflow to the side streets of Southwood and Edgewood Avenues. General observations were that weekday visitation included teen and youth soccer practices along with moderate playground and trail use, and the parking area was rarely overfilled.

Weekends incurred the highest levels of park use with related parking overflow. Youth and teen field use by itself incurred moderate, occasional parking overflow onto Southwood Avenue. Some uses of the community building, with a lot of attendees and no concurrent field use, also incurred moderate parking overflow to side streets. The greatest weekend parking deficits were realized during simultaneous use of the community building, for a church group or dance class, at the same time the field was used for practices and games. Notable parking deficits also occurred during an adult soccer game with many spectators and periodically during very heavy attendance by only the church group.

**M-NCPPC Park Permit Office Records** - During the Spring 2004 season, the Park Permit Office turned away 180 soccer permit applicants county-wide, more than for any other sport. The sports field at North

Four Corners Local Park was permitted mostly for soccer related use during the Spring and Fall seasons of 2003/2004, primarily by Montgomery Soccer Incorporated (MSI) and St. Bernadette's School. Permits were issued for youth and teen games and practices during weekdays and weekends. The field is now being used for Peewee soccer as well. The community building was permitted frequently during the same timeframe for a church group, classes, parties and events, and NFCCA meetings.

### **C. Demographics**

2003 Census Projections for the Four Corners planning area indicates a slowly increasing population. The 2003 census projections for zip code areas within 1.75 miles of the park, from the years 2005 to 2015, indicate the following: 1) an increase in total population from 204,747 to 219,724 people, and an increase of 6,790 households; 2) population increases within the age groups from 0-9 years old, 20-29 years old, and 55-74 years old, with other age groups stable; and, 3) an increasing trend toward diversity, with greatest increases within the Hispanic group. Accessibility will continue to be a critical element in the design of parks based on trends in countywide population growth, which is greatest within age sector groups from 55 and older. Demographic trends may also influence planning for active recreation, considering that moderately sized facilities are easier to play games on with less effort, therefore better suited to recreational players who are getting older and less fit.

### **D. Area Facilities**

North Four Corners Park is a local park and is intended to serve residents beyond the surrounding neighborhoods and immediate planning area. Planning areas within a two-mile radius of the park include: Kemp Mill/Four Corners (PA 32), Silver Spring and Vicinity (PA 36), Takoma Park (PA 37), Kensington/Wheaton (PA 31), and Colesville/White Oak (PA 33). The surrounding area is primarily single-family detached residential with nearby commercial areas. There are several school and park facilities in close proximity to North Four Corners Local Park. Montgomery Blair and Northwood High Schools are both within walking distance. Montgomery Blair High School offers very limited community use of their baseball/softball fields, and no public use of the large soccer field except for school purposes. Northwood High School has need for use of additional fields to supplement their facilities and support their expanding athletic programs, including soccer and lacrosse. Other area schools include: Sligo, Eastern, and Lee Middle Schools; Oakview, Highland View, Forest Knolls, Kemp Mill, Montgomery Knolls, MacDonald Knolls, and Spring Elementary Schools; and St. Bernadette's private school. Seven of these public schools offer small youth sized rectangular sports fields that could be more fully utilized. Other local parks in the area are Indian Spring Terrace and Pinecrest. They each include a softball field, and Pinecrest Local Park includes a rectangular field overlay.

Two stream valley parks are located within one mile of the park, Northwest Branch Stream Valley Park to the northeast and Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park to the northwest. They provide significant tracts of land for conservation, passive recreation and enjoyment of nature, and limited areas for active recreation. These stream valley parks include over 1,000 acres within only two miles of North Four Corners Local Park, and many more acres beyond that. Sligo Creek Golf Course and Wheaton Regional Park are also within the two-mile vicinity. Wheaton Regional Park includes 2/3 of its acreage in an undeveloped state, with the remaining 1/3 of developed land for active recreation and Brookside Gardens.

## **IV. THE FACILITY PLAN STUDY & COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

### **A. Inventory of Site Conditions**

The new park area includes an undeveloped and visible 6.2-acre tract. The site slopes gently down from its ridgeline at University Boulevard, providing pleasing views inward toward a backdrop of trees. This new tract of parkland offers prime vehicular and public transit access, with minimal physical constraints to the creation of new local park facilities. The area consists of upland meadow interspersed with aging specimen trees, forest fragments, hedgerows at its borders, and some invasive vegetation. Small remnants of the former school foundations and paving are present. There are no streams, wetlands, or floodplain on the site, and soils and grades are acceptable for park development. The adjacent 7.9-acre area includes the existing park facilities accessed from Southwood Avenue. Flat to moderate slopes prevail on the site that includes open green space, two areas of mature specimen trees with under-story vegetation, and perimeter hedgerows with some invasive vegetation.

### **B. Program of Requirements**

The first public meeting was held on January 30, 2003, to present the site inventory and analysis, to receive input regarding what was desired at the park, to determine any issues, and to define a program of requirements (POR). Two written surveys were conducted to gather additional information, as previously noted. The school survey results indicated a desire for more active recreational activities with first choices related to a multi-purpose rectangular sports field or a multi-purpose paved area. The community survey results, written correspondence and petitions, and public meeting comments were unanimously opposed to another soccer field and preferred a more natural, undeveloped park that would be used primarily by the immediate neighborhood. As a follow-up to the public meeting, staff attended a NFCCA meeting on April 9, 2003, to discuss specific community concerns regarding park use and enforcement problems with the existing park. These concerns included event-related parking overflow onto side streets, uncontrolled trash, the need for sanitary facilities near the field, excessive use of facilities, and need for improved enforcement of park regulations.

The following program of requirements was developed for the park, based on an assessment of area needs and input received from the community and the staff team:

- Additional active recreation to serve the widest age group possible
- Playground activities for older children
- Passive features, including areas for sitting, picnicking, lawn games, and spaces suitable for use by the elderly
- Trail features including a loop path and pedestrian connections to the existing park
- Accessibility to all facilities
- A shared-use bikeway connection through the park
- Necessary infrastructure throughout the park including parking and maintenance access
- Direct vehicular access and parking off a major road, without a vehicular connection to the existing park or from abutting neighborhood side streets
- Streetscaping to provide an attractive visual frontage for the park
- Improved landscaping, invasive removal, tree saving, reforestation, and buffer plantings
- Rain gardens and improved drainage
- Improved visibility for safety enforcement
- Amenities to facilitate park use, such as exercise stations, portable toilets, water fountain, bike racks, trash cans
- Use of recycled materials during final design and construction

### **C. Initial Design Phase**

Two concept plans were prepared for the park that each provided a primary active recreation feature. Plan A included a multi-purpose paved area, and Plan B provided a small rectangular sports field. The plans were presented at a second public meeting on June 19, 2003, along with the results from the school and general community surveys. The attending majority did not favor Plan B and had concerns with an additional field, due to usage issues related to the existing park field. Plan A was generally favored and became the original direction of the project, in part because it saved more existing trees as the result of a smaller limit of disturbance. Project information was also delivered to The Oaks at Four Corners for their review and comment. Both plans, with site analysis information, were posted to the M-NCPPC website.

The NFCCA proceeded to prepare and promote a plan, titled Plan C, during the summer of 2003, in letters to the Montgomery County Council and the M-NCPPC. Plan C essentially modified Plan A by removing the multi-purpose paved area, reducing the new parking area, reducing the pathways, and placing the new play area close to University Boulevard. Staff did not support Plan C, due to the stated goal and purpose of the project to provide active recreation facilities.

### **D. Design Reevaluation Period**

During summer of 2003 both of the concept plans prepared by M-NCPPC were revised to include more open space and landscaping in response to community comments. They were titled Plan A-2 and Plan B-2. Changes occurred in the direction of the project as a result of staff and management review of these plans. In order to address community concerns about problems with the existing park, the study area was expanded to include the existing park, operational changes were evaluated, and needs information was studied further.

Staff determined that needs were inconclusive for a multi-purpose paved area, based on mixed results observed at recently built facilities and reported declines in roller-hockey teams. As a result, in November of 2003, the plan that was preferred by staff and management became Plan B-2. The change in project direction was made in response to generally accepted and known needs for ball fields down county, per the 1998 PROS Plan and ball field initiatives program supported by the Montgomery County Council. Staff also recognized that this local park is intended to provide recreation for all residents, and there are very limited land opportunities down county for providing active recreation facilities.

In the analysis of the existing park, the primary goal was to add parking, in response to needs identified by the community. Two options were considered reasonable: expansion of the existing parking area, and the addition of a new parking area off Royalton Road. Staff believed that additional parking, portable toilets, and operational changes would help to alleviate problems at the existing park, and the new park area would be designed with adequate parking to meet demands. Plan A-2 and Plan B-2 were posted to the Commission website during summer of 2004, with B-2 stated as the preferred plan. The website noted that Plan B-2, including design ideas for the existing park, would be presented at a third public meeting. Site monitoring followed during Fall 2004, in order to determine specific solutions for improved operations at the current park.

### **E. Finalizing the Facility Plan**

The third public meeting was held September 23, 2004, to review the recommended Plan B-2 and options for increasing parking at the existing park, with the goal of finalizing the recommendation. The large group of attendees was opposed to another soccer field and did not agree that staff should propose it, considering their prior opposition in the previous public meeting to a field. They were also opposed to most of the ideas to add parking in the existing park, especially off of Royalton Road. Essentially they requested for little or nothing to occur on the new site or the existing park area. There was no community support expressed for the recommended plan, other than a few favorable letters and phone calls from neighbors and a Northwood



High School representative stating that school groups would use the proposed field. Refer to Attachment 4 – Recent Community Correspondence and Attachment 5, Appendix A for extensive community correspondence, petitions, and survey summaries.

During the winter and spring of 2005, other options for the site were considered as a result of clearly divergent goals for the park, between community desires and the staff and management team recommendation. Two concepts were prepared, evaluated, and rejected by staff: one plan created an entirely passive park by removing the paved multi-purpose area in Plan A-2, and another plan included a full size regulation soccer field within the new tract. The first plan, titled Plan A-C, was devoid of active recreation opportunities. The other plan, titled Plan D, was considered overly intrusive to the site and neighbors with no free space and it was generally less attractive. Other ideas were discussed, including land banking the new property for another valid public purpose, such as workforce housing. The idea of doing nothing on the new property was considered ill advised on several levels, including crime and safety concerns, as well as poor use of a prime tract of land. Refer to the Facility Plan Report, for the various plan options considered.

Additional assessment of needs and evaluation of options occurred in the interest of forming the best final recommendation. The new 2005 LPPRP Plan process began, with improved methodologies for assessing needs data, and a new Local Park Use study was also initiated. Both efforts incorporate feedback from public and multi-agency forums. These emerging results have helped to shape final recommendations for the North Four Corners Local Park project, including moderate expansion of the small rectangular field proposed in Plan B-2 (150' x 250') to the minimum desirable size to serve all recreational age groups (180' x 300'). The recommended facility plan, with operational improvements, has resulted.

#### **F. Operational and Maintenance Improvements**

Staff is in the process of implementing changes to current park operations and maintenance in order to address issues identified by the community. Although facility planning projects typically deal with plans for physical park improvements, specific operational issues became evident during the facility planning process for this park. As a result, the following new permitting strategies for use of the existing rectangular sports field and small community building have already been initiated, in order to improve park use and alleviate parking deficits:

- Limit use of the existing rectangular field for youth permits only.
- Do not issue permits for the existing community building and field simultaneously during weekends.
- Reduce the group size allowed to use the community building to 50 people.
- Add kiosks at the existing field and community building, and post permits.
- Monitor use throughout the park to determine appropriate future operations.

The recently initiated 'Local Park Use Study' identifies recurring problems at heavily used local parks with ball fields, and recommends general solutions to address these problems. The problems identified in the study include insufficient police enforcement, parking deficits, over-permitting of facilities, trash, lack of sanitary facilities, noise, need for buffer plantings, and improved outreach. These are all issues that have been identified at North Four Corners Local Park and this facility plan recommends the following measures, in addition to new permitting practices, in order to address these conditions:

- Provide additional annual operating funds for increased police surveillance and enforcement, maintenance efforts, and natural resource management
- Add 13 parking spaces at the existing parking lot and 50 spaces within the new tract
- Add trash receptacles throughout the park and portable toilets near the existing and proposed field
- Include maintenance and emergency vehicle access throughout the park
- Add buffer landscaping near property lines, remove invasive plants, and improve visibility
- Remove the softball field overlay and improve soil and turf conditions of the existing field

## G. Response to Public Comments

The following table is a general summary of the public comments received throughout the facility planning process. It includes actions taken by staff in response to public comments.

General Public Comments	Actions Taken
Provide adequate opportunities for public comment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three public meetings were held.</li> <li>• Staff attended two NFCCA meetings.</li> <li>• Two written public surveys were conducted.</li> <li>• Project information was hand-delivered to the adjacent elderly community, The Oaks at Four Corners.</li> <li>• Project information was posted on the M-NCPPC website.</li> <li>• Staff report was released 3 weeks prior to the Planning Board meeting at the community's request.</li> </ul>
Address problems with the existing park, including overflow parking on residential streets, trash, public urination, and security concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project area was expanded to include the existing park.</li> <li>• Numerous site visits were conducted to study use patterns.</li> <li>• Operational changes in permitting practices have been implemented and will continue to be monitored.</li> <li>• Parking options were studied, and additional parking is proposed in the existing park, as well as on the new parcel.</li> <li>• Trash receptacles are being replaced in the park, and portable toilets are proposed.</li> <li>• Understory vegetation will be selectively cleared to improve visibility within the park, and open views will be maintained into the park from University Boulevard.</li> <li>• A local park usage study was initiated to address issues identified at heavily used local parks, including enforcement, maintenance, design, permitting and outreach.</li> </ul>
Needs assessment data could be flawed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodologies for assessing needs have been revised and improved during the LPPRP process and have included public, agency, and user group forums.</li> </ul>
Provide passive, open space areas and natural areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans were revised to include more open, green space. Tree saving measures, under plantings, and rain gardens are included in the plan.</li> </ul>
Bikeway is located too close to adjacent residences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The bikeway was shifted away from the adjacent residences, and buffer plantings are proposed.</li> </ul>
Do not provide a ball field or other active recreation facility in the new park area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facility plan recommends addition of a rectangular sports field to serve critical recreation needs of the down county, taking advantage of a rare land opportunity to do so.</li> </ul>
More than one ball field is excessive for a local park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 129 currently developed M-NCPPC local parks in Montgomery County provide 284 ball fields, which is an average of 2.2 fields per park.</li> </ul>

## V. AGENCY COORDINATION AND REGULATORY APPROVALS

The facility plan process involved coordination and reviews with several agencies as outlined below. Detailed information is included in the Facility Plan report.

*Development Review Committee (DRC)* - Plans A and B were reviewed early in the process by the DRC on June 16, 2003. There were mixed preferences for aspects within each plan. Recommendations included:

one parking access point from University Boulevard; separation of the current sidewalk away from University Boulevard; relocation of the existing sewer line and manhole in the middle of the park; grass-crete surfacing for a portion of the parking spaces; multiple smaller bio-retention/rain gardens for storm water management; tree saving measures to the greatest extent possible; and a designated Class I bikeway connector as a shared-use path through the park.

**Department of Permitting Services (DPS)** - Staff and the consultant met with DPS to discuss the stormwater management approach for the recommended facility plan that included: grass swales and bio-retention/rain-gardens in the newer area; and underground methods for expanding the existing parking area. The stormwater management concept plan for all recommended park development was submitted during March of 2005 and was approved on April 28, 2005.

**M-NCPPC Environmental Planning/Countywide Planning Division** - The Natural Resources Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation Plan (NRI/FSD) was approved January 30, 2003, and October 22, 2004, for the new tract and older park area respectively. An updated plan for the new tract was re-approved on August 23, 2005. The Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan was submitted on August 22, 2005, reflecting the final facility plan. Refer to Attachment 3.

**Montgomery County Department of Recreation (MCDR)** - Coordination occurred with the MCDR during the park process, concerning status of the site selection process for the Kemp Mill Recreation Center. The following project status statement was provided by the MCDR on July 19, 2005: "*Currently, the Site Selection process for the Kemp Mill Community Recreation Center is focused in the more immediate Kemp Mill/Wheaton vicinity and not in the Four Corners area. In all likelihood the North Four Corners Local Park would not be a location given much consideration for this facility.*"

**Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)** - Coordination with MCPS occurred during the project for various purposes: to participate in the local school survey; to share inventory data for fields at nearby schools; and to obtain feedback from the nearby high school on the project proposal.

**M-NCPPC Staff Team and Management Reviews** - The project was reviewed during the process by various members of the staff team at six key progress review points and also for review of the final plan. Park Police review of the plans for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) compliance occurred during the process, resulting in recommendations for proposed landscaping and clean-up of existing vegetation. Management briefings and reviews also occurred throughout the project process to clarify the direction and objectives of the project.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATION**

### **A. Recommended Facility Plan**

A summary of proposed facilities in the recommended facility plan, Modified Option B-2, is outlined below. Refer to Attachment 2 for the recommended facility plan.

#### **The Undeveloped Park Tract:**

- **A rectangular sports field (180' x 300')** - to provide open green space for use by any recreational age group, potentially including permitted practices and games as well as a variety of informal sports play or other field activities. The new field may also eliminate some of the pressures on the existing field and facilitate maintenance of both fields. The proposed field will comply with international standards for the minimum field size to serve recreational soccer players of all ages, which is 150' x 300'. While smaller fields are acceptable for players under 16 and over 35, the preferred minimum size to serve all ages is 180' x 300', and this size also better serves the sports of field hockey and lacrosse.

- ❑ **A play area suited for school-aged children** to complement the existing tot lot.
- ❑ **Passive Features** - a shaded plaza with benches and game tables, seating areas, green space for picnics and lawn-games, a pergola, and a gazebo.
- ❑ **Parking** - a 50 space parking area accessed directly from University Boulevard, sufficient to serve the new field and provide maintenance access; 60% of spaces in pervious grass-crete surfacing.
- ❑ **Improved pedestrian access and circulation** - a paved, accessible loop path and connector paths from the proposed park area to the existing park and to existing facilities.
- ❑ **Amenities** - signage, a water fountain, screened portable toilets at both fields, fencing, exercise stations, heart-smart distance markers, benches, planters, bike racks, kiosks, fencing, and trash receptacles.
- ❑ **A Class I bikeway connection** - from University Boulevard, as a shared-use path through the park, to Southwood Avenue. Full build-out of the park would require a Maryland State Highway Administration safety analysis for crossing improvements and traffic calming measures at the location of the current crosswalk and curb cut on University Boulevard.
- ❑ **Landscape Improvements** - ornamental landscaping, buffer plantings, removal of invasive vegetation, and retention of some natural areas.
- ❑ **Stormwater management** - bio-retention, rain gardens, and vegetative swales.

**The Existing Park Area:**

- ❑ **Additional parking** (13 added spaces) at the current parking lot (for a total of 29 total spaces) with underground stormwater management.
- ❑ **Renovation of existing sports field** (205' x 270') by removing the softball backstop/field overlay, restoring turf conditions, and adding field boundary fence.
- ❑ **A boardwalk connection to the bikeway** – from Southwood Avenue to the park.
- ❑ **Improvements near the community building**, including decorative pavement in replacement of asphalt, and a rebuilt stone wall with railings.
- ❑ **Minor improvements** to pathways and drainage.
- ❑ **Landscape Improvements** – tree under-plantings, buffer plantings, vegetative swales, and removal of invasive vegetation.

**B. Capital Improvements Program (CIP) Construction Cost Estimate**

The estimated cost for implementation of the expansion to North Four Corners Local Park is **\$5,820,555**. The following table summarizes projected costs for design and construction of the proposed park.

ITEM	ITEM DESCRIPTION	COST
1	SITWORK	\$1,079,400
2	SWM & SEDIMENT CONTROL	\$419,775
3	FOREST CONSERVATION & REFORESTATION	\$188,550
4	UTILITIES	\$100,485
5	VEHICULAR PARKING & ACCESS	\$299,760
6	PEDESTRIAN TRAILS & HARDSCAPE	\$469,705
7	STRUCTURES	\$149,600
8	SITE AMENITIES & FURNISHINGS	\$183,700
9	RECREATION FACILITIES	\$302,750
10	LANDSCAPING	\$277,089
*	<b>PARK CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,470,814</b>
11	CONSTRUCTION CONTINGENCY (30% x Construction Subtotal)	<b>\$1,041,244</b>
**	<b>PARK CONSTRUCTION TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,512,058</b>
12	DESIGN W/CONTINGENCY (20% x Construction Total)	\$902,412
13	STAFF CHARGE-BACKS (20% x Design w/Contingency)	\$180,482
14	CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT/INSPECTION (5% x Construction Total)	\$225,603
**	<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST ESTIMATE</b>	<b>\$5,820,555</b>

### **C. Operating Budget Impact (OBI)**

Staff prepared an estimate of annual operating budget impact costs that would be required in order to maintain the new facilities. These costs would be in addition to current costs for operating the existing park area, and include tasks accomplished by staff from the Southern Region, Natural Resources, Central Maintenance, and Park Police. Estimates address labor, staff years, equipment, materials, and contract work. The total estimated annual operating budget for the expanded park area and operational improvements is \$84,875. Refer to the Facility Plan Report for a more detailed operating budget estimate.

### **VII. CONCLUSION**

The Facility Plan for North Four Corners Local Park has been designed to fulfill the original project purpose, address current conditions, and meet long term planning goals. The plan represents a balanced design that is both attractive and functional, offering features for active and passive recreation to serve people of all ages and abilities. The plan addresses estimated recreation deficits in this area for over eleven standard rectangular sports fields and is consistent with planning document recommendations for the site. The plan includes attractive open green spaces, improved visibility for the safety of park visitors, environmental benefits including reforestation, rain gardens, and removal of invasive vegetation, and also provides improved vehicular and pedestrian access directly from a major road to reduce use of neighborhood streets. The plan provides a versatile recreational footprint with level space that can be readily adapted to another active recreation use should it ever be necessary. This will be important if recreational trends change or a new need emerges in the long-term future.

In summary, staff recommends approval of Facility Plan – Modified Option B-2, for North Four Corners Local Park and the associated cost estimate. The facility plan addresses present conditions and expands this park to meet the needs of the future. This is an important opportunity to create an attractive and useful park.

### **VIII. ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment 1: Vicinity Map
- Attachment 2: Recommended Facility Plan – Modified Option B-2
- Attachment 3: Agency Correspondence –
  - Memorandum on Forest Conservation Plan
  - DPS Approval of SWM Plan
  - Memorandum from Community Based Planning
- Attachment 4: Recent Community Correspondence
- Attachment 5: The Facility Plan Report