

FENTON STREET URBAN PARK: Proposed Skateboard Facility
(Community-Based Planning, April 2005)

Recommendation

The Community-Based Planning Division recommends that the existing 0.286 acre Fenton Street Urban Park be expanded to 1.3 acres in order to achieve the recommendations in the February 2000 *Silver Spring Central Business District (CBD) Sector Plan*, including the recommendation that a site be identified within the CBD for a replacement skateboard park.

Objectives

1. Address the demand for a skateboard facility in Silver Spring as demonstrated by the popularity of the interim facility.
2. Provide recreational opportunities for people in different age groups with varying interests (i.e., augment the facilities at Jesup Blair Park and the planned ice rink at Veterans Plaza).
3. Provide an appropriate site for skateboarding in the downtown to discourage skateboarders from damaging public spaces in the new revitalization projects.
4. Create a facility that will be an asset to the CBD and draw people to the downtown.
5. Create an attractive gateway to the Silver Spring CBD.

Sector Plan Guidance

According to the Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, parks and open spaces in Silver Spring serve at least two important purposes: 1) supporting the recreation needs and desires of the employees and surrounding residential communities, and 2) contributing to the downtown revitalization by providing another convenient and interesting reason to come to Silver Spring. The Plan identifies a number of potential sites—including Fenton Gateway Park (Attachment 1) – that should be considered for “urban recreation” (e.g., rock climbing walls, water play fountains, fitness facilities, ice rinks, skate parks, in-line hockey rinks, etc.). “All these facilities use the walls, limited space, and structures particular to an urban environment to create active recreation opportunities. At the same time, they also contribute to the aesthetic quality of downtown and draw users to unique facilities in the CBD.” (p. 131)

With regard to a skateboard facility, the Sector Plan describes the growing demand for such a facility at length on pages 129-30 and recommends that a site be found for a facility to replace the temporary skate park that was located in the Core; this recommendation is repeated on pages 134 and 148. The Sector Plan recommends “considering sites throughout the CBD for the relocated park, including under-used parking garages, the Ripley District, and South Silver Spring.” (p. 129)

The Sector Plan also provides guidance with regard to Fenton Gateway Park. The Plan notes that the existing 0.2 acre park “is an under-used park with the potential to become an anchor and gateway that improves the overall image of the community.” (p. 129) The Sector Plan recommends that the park be expanded through the acquisition of private property—a process which began in 2002—and notes that the Fenton Street/Philadelphia Avenue intersection may need to be redesigned as part of the gateway park. The Sector Plan states that the new park should include trees, public art and seating and should provide direct pedestrian access to adjacent properties. An illustration on page 132 of the Sector Plan (Attachment 2) shows such a facility. The proposed skateboard park builds on this concept by augmenting the area shown in this illustration to accommodate a skateboard facility and some limited parking (Attachment 3).

Site Criteria

Size: Staff searched for sites that were between one and 1.5 acres in size, or capable of expansion to that size. This is big enough to accommodate a 14,000 sf skateboard facility, a limited amount of parking and sufficient landscaping to make the facility attractive and provide a buffer, if necessary.

Public ownership: Staff first considered other publicly owned properties that might be available for a skateboard park in order to constrain the cost to the taxpayers. Jesup Blair Park in South Silver Spring is large enough but it is a historic site and the approved renovation plan is already being implemented. The Veterans Plaza within the Downtown Silver Spring revitalization project has already been designed to accommodate other functions, including an ice skating rink and a large gathering space for public events. The parking area behind the new fire station has been designated for the firefighter’s vehicles, police cars for the new substation, Urban District vehicles, and some public parking for people who may be coming to one of these County offices.

Existing public parking lots were also considered. The parking lot behind the MRO is planned for redevelopment as part of the M-NCPPC consolidation project. Lot 21 at Cameron Street/Spring Street has been committed to United Therapeutics for their new project. Lot 1 on Cedar Street will be used for the housing component that is the last phase of the Downtown Silver Spring project. Lot 16 on King Street in South Silver Spring will be removed and replaced with increased public parking in a structure to be built as part of RST’s new project. Lot 3 in Fenton Village (adjoining the proposed “Adele” housing project) is specifically identified in the CBD Sector Plan as a potential housing site. Other public lots were considered to be too small or not desirable for use as a skateboard park because the parking is needed to support local merchants.

Existing public parking garages were considered to be unavailable pending the outcome of the parking analysis being performed by the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT). It is anticipated that parking will be considered inadequate in some areas due to the parking demand from the extensive redevelopment in the CBD. Garage 7 on Cameron Street near the new court house is already well utilized; construction of the Portico may increase the demand at this facility. Garage 21 at Colesville Road/Spring Street will be utilized more and more by drivers visiting the

restaurants and movie theaters in central Silver Spring, as well as by local businesses now that United Therapeutics has removed the adjoining surface lot. Garage 2 on Cameron Street will also help to absorb the parking demand from United Therapeutics as well as the parking demand from reuse of the bowling alley. Garages 5 and 58 near Metro are needed to provide parking for Metro users and the large employers in the downtown. Garage 9 on Kennett Street provides parking for employees at the Discovery Creative Technology Center. Garage 4 in Fenton Village may have surplus capacity absent redevelopment in Fenton Village but the County will not consider reuse until DPWT's parking analysis is completed.

Private ownership: In considering the availability of privately owned property that might be acquired to provide a skateboard park, staff considered future development potential. CBD zoned property is among the most valuable property in Montgomery County because it is zoned for high intensity development near Metro stations. Staff did not feel it appropriate to eliminate such development potential or remove such property from the tax rolls in order to construct a skateboard park. The Silver Spring CBD Sector plan specifically recommends expansion of Fenton Gateway Park through the purchase of additional land. This small park and the rest of the block are zoned I-4, low intensity-light industrial (Attachment 4). While such property is not inexpensive, staff considered this expansion to be more cost effective than the purchase of CBD-zoned property. We also considered it more consistent with the revitalization goals in the Sector Plan-- and the principles of Smart Growth planning-- to leave the CBD zoned property available for private redevelopment (which will provide public use space as required by the Zoning Ordinance).

Public Outreach

The recommendations in the Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan received extensive public scrutiny during the Planning Board and Council hearings and worksessions in 1999. After the Sector Plan was approved, CBP staff prepared a concept plan for a skateboard park for discussion purposes as well as an analysis of the property that would need to be acquired to expand the Fenton Gateway Park. We discussed the concept for such a facility with Executive staff in the Department of Recreation and the Silver Spring Regional Center in March 2001. DHCA was also consulted with regard to streetscaping the project frontage along Fenton Street. On July 10, 2001 staff met with interested members of the East Silver Spring Civic Association to discuss the concept (Attachment 5). Participants expressed a variety of views, including some support for such a facility and some concerns about parking, vehicular circulation and noise.

On July 12, 2001 park planning staff presented the *Roller Hockey, In-line Skating and Skateboarding Report* at a public session of the Planning Board. This report was prepared after meetings with the various recreation advisory boards and three community meetings, including one with the Woodside Civic Association. The report stated that the "areas with highest unmet need for skateboard facilities in the County appear to be Damascus, Germantown, Olney, and Silver Spring." (p. 25) It also identified potential locations for skateboard parks in Montgomery County, including Fenton Gateway Park.

“Other sites considered for skateboard parks but deemed too small were Woodside Urban Park and Jesup Blair Local Park. The Jesup Blair Facility Plan approved by the Montgomery County Planning Board includes a small skateboard park; however, the available space is only 5,000 square feet, which is too small to accommodate this type of facility. Therefore, staff is no longer recommending its construction.” (pp. 26-27) The staff report also included a memorandum from Councilmember Silverman to the Planning Board encouraging the Planning Board to include a skate park in the next CIP.

Over the next three years, the Planning Board and staff pursued skate facilities in Olney Manor Park and Takoma Piney Branch Local Park. Parks staff is currently bidding the construction of the Olney facility. However, the conversion of two tennis courts at Takoma Piney Branch LP (Attachment 6) to a neighborhood skateboard facility stalled when funding became unavailable. (Note: The Planning Board has not yet approved the Facility Plan for this park and the proposed facilities do not achieve the goals of the proposed Fenton skate park.) M-NCPPC also commenced its efforts to expand Fenton Gateway Park pursuant to the approved Sector Plan. Although a 3,387 s.f. lot on Burlington Avenue was acquired in February 2002—and the small bungalow on it was razed-- other properties were not acquired because the property owners did not accept M-NCPPC’s purchase offers (Attachment 7).

In early 2005 the staff accepted invitations to meet with several community groups concerning the proposed skateboard park in Silver Spring. On January 19 we met with the Commercial and Economic Development Committee of the Citizens Advisory Board. (This group had a second discussion concerning the matter on February 16.) The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board subsequently wrote to the Planning Board expressing support for the study of a skateboard park in Silver Spring and noting that several operational issues needed to be addressed in the design.

On January 20 staff briefed the Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Board, which then voted in favor of a skateboard facility at the Fenton Gateway Park. The Urban District’s February 17 letter to the Planning Board noted that the proposed location for the facility was “very appropriate” and that the park should be designed “with a buffer on the Fenton Street side to present an attractive face to the street and enhance the compatibility of the skateboard facility with the neighborhood to the east.” The Urban District also requested that M-NCPPC program the park expansion and skateboard facility in the CIP “on a priority schedule.”

Staff briefed the Silver Spring Recreation Advisory Board (SSRAB) on February 9; the SSRAB subsequently endorsed the proposed skateboard park and recommended that M-NCPPC acquire the necessary property as soon as possible. Staff briefed the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce on March 15. The Chamber subsequently sent a letter of support for a skateboard park at the Fenton Gateway Park to the Planning Board.

On March 14, 2005 a community meeting sponsored by Impact Silver Spring was held in the MRO auditorium to view a documentary concerning the need for a skateboard park in Silver Spring; the meeting was Standing Room Only. Although M-NCPPC did not

sponsor the meeting, staff was present to answer questions concerning the CBD Sector Plan and the CIP process.

Recommendation

After reviewing the alternative locations for a skateboard facility within the CBD, the staff was unable to find a better location for such a facility than an expanded Fenton Gateway Park. The site is zoned I-4 and it adjoins light industrial uses on the west and south (Attachments 8-9). The concept plan for the proposed 1.3 acre park shows a 14,000 s.f. skateboard facility located nearest the industrial uses with a significant landscaped area along Fenton Street (i.e., the garden area noted in the Sector Plan). The proposal includes on-site parking that could be used for parental drop-offs in addition to the drop-offs which would occur along the Philadelphia Avenue frontage. (The use of the parking on Sunday mornings by Jesus House could even be considered.) The site has good transportation access, including the Metropolitan Branch Trail which will connect the facility to both the Silver Spring Transit Center and to Takoma Park. The proposal also calls for the removal of the two free-right turns in the northern quadrants of the Fenton Street/Philadelphia Avenue to improve pedestrian safety and create a gateway feature.

While other types of recreational facilities could also be placed at the Fenton Gateway Park, providing a replacement skateboard park pursuant to the Sector Plan is a high priority. The development of skateboard facilities at other locations in Montgomery County should also be pursued, depending upon the availability of funding. However, the development of the proposed skateboard park in Silver Spring should be expedited to respond to the need for such a facility and prevent damage to the new redevelopment in the downtown.

This is not to say that such a facility will have no impacts on the surrounding community. The residents east of Fenton Street have raised a number of concerns including traffic circulation, parking, noise, lighting and the appearance of the facility as viewed from Fenton Street. These are legitimate concerns that need to be addressed during the facility planning process. The hours of operation for the facility, mechanisms for controlling use of the parking lot and a decision regarding potential admission fees are specific operational issues that will need to be resolved. (Note: Imposing an admissions charge could discourage use of the skateboard park and it would eliminate some potential sources of outside funding. We hope that a public/private partnership can be used to develop the skateboard park.)

While the potential impacts of a skateboard park will need to be addressed during the design process, we should be clear that the role of the proposed park is to attract users—including those who do not live in the adjoining neighborhood—by providing urban recreation facilities. The proposed site for the skateboard park is within the CBD and suitable for urban recreation, including skateboarding.

Project Status

The staff has explained to interested parties that there is no skateboard park project until the County Council puts it in the CIP. Previously, the expansion to Fenton Gateway Park was included in the FY 03-08 CIP for planning purposes. A \$95,000 appropriation was approved for FY03-04 to undertake and complete facility planning. The Project Description (Attachment 10) noted that a skate park was recommended for the site. It was anticipated at the time that reimbursement for Metro Urban Park would fund the necessary land acquisition and M-NCPPC actually acquired one lot toward the ultimate park. DHCA also committed \$150,000 in Block Grant money for streetscaping along the Fenton, Street frontage.

Two years later, it was recognized that facility planning for Fenton Gateway Park was not yet ready to proceed. The FY05-10 CIP (Attachment 11) omitted Fenton Gateway Park from the sample list of candidate projects. The CIP item noted that reimbursement to M-NCPPC for Metro Urban Park had been expected to help fund the expansion of the Fenton Gateway Park. However, this reimbursement was not forthcoming because Metro Urban Park was proposed for replacement on site. Furthermore, efforts to acquire the necessary properties had not been successful. (As noted above, only one lot was actually acquired.) As a result, M-NCPPC chose to defer facility planning for Fenton Gateway Park.

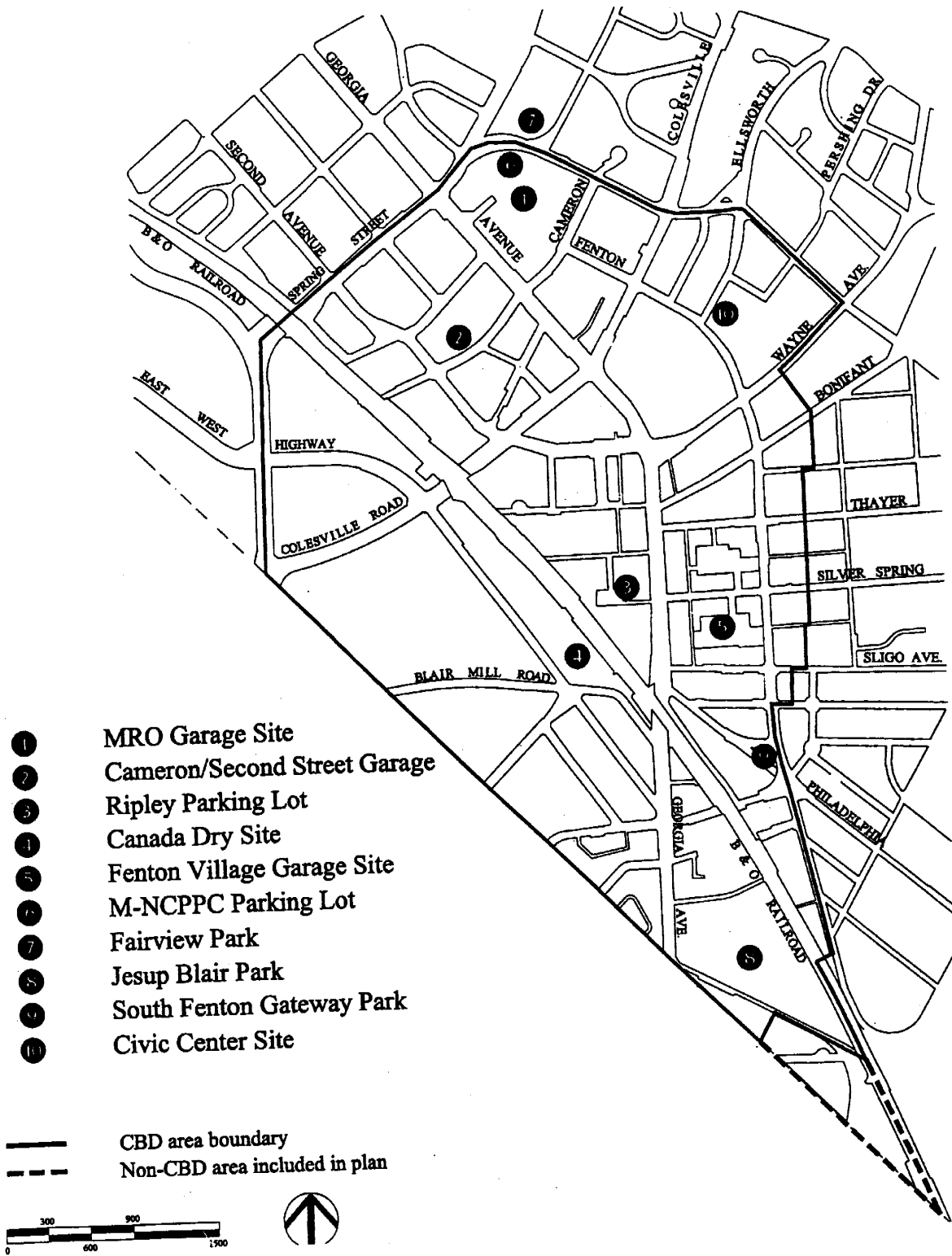
Staff now proposes that the Planning Board include a Fenton Gateway Park skateboard facility in the FY07-12 CIP to be approved by the County Council in 2006. This the only new priority project recommended by the Community-Based Planning Division. Even though there will be no reimbursement for Metro Urban Park, we believe that there is a pressing need for the proposed skateboard park and it should be funded as soon as possible. If the County Council funds both land acquisition and facility planning, the facility planning effort will involve both potential users of the facility and residents in the nearby community. The Planning Board would approve a proposed Facility Plan in a public session. Funding for construction of the facility would then go through the public CIP process.

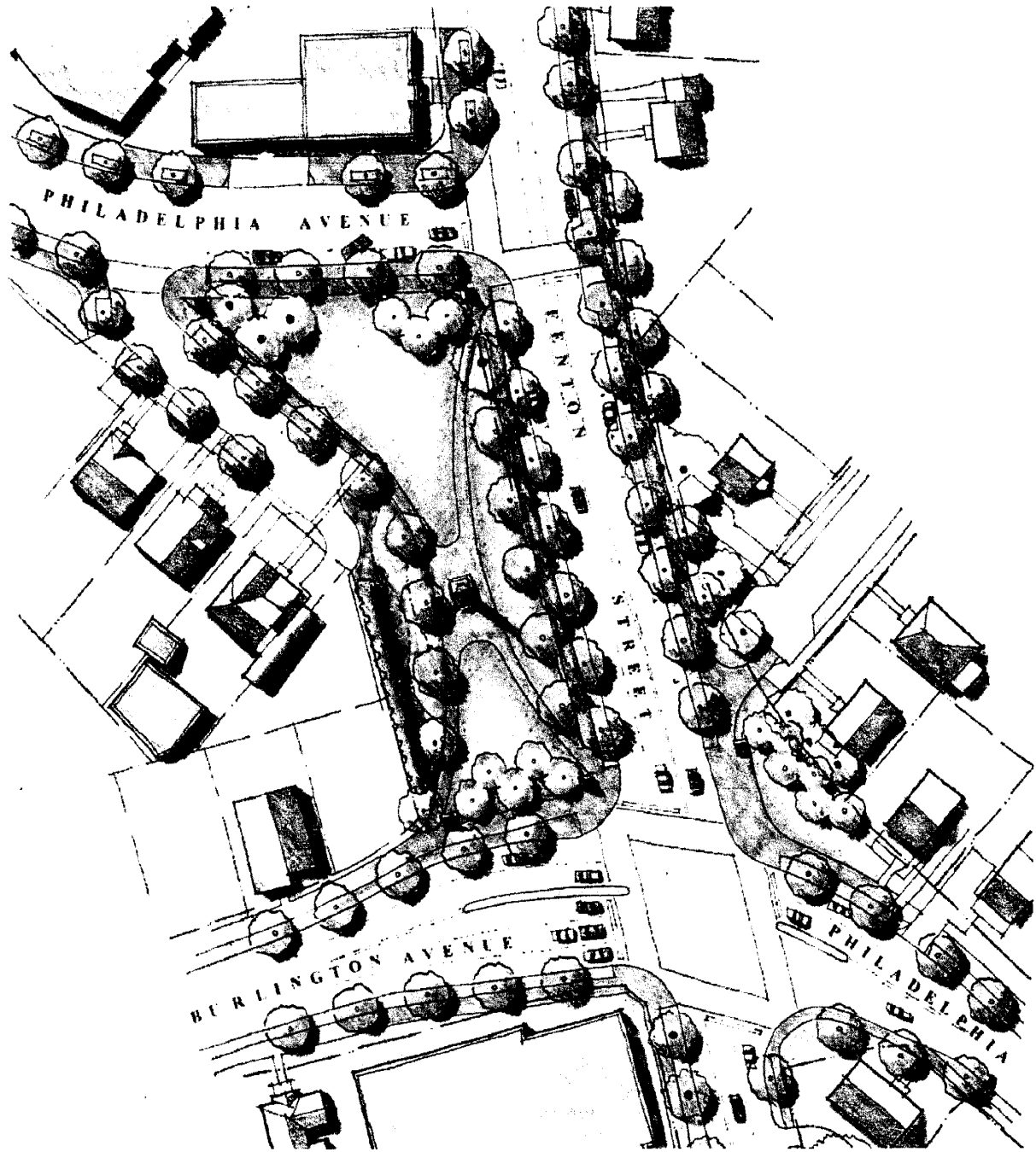
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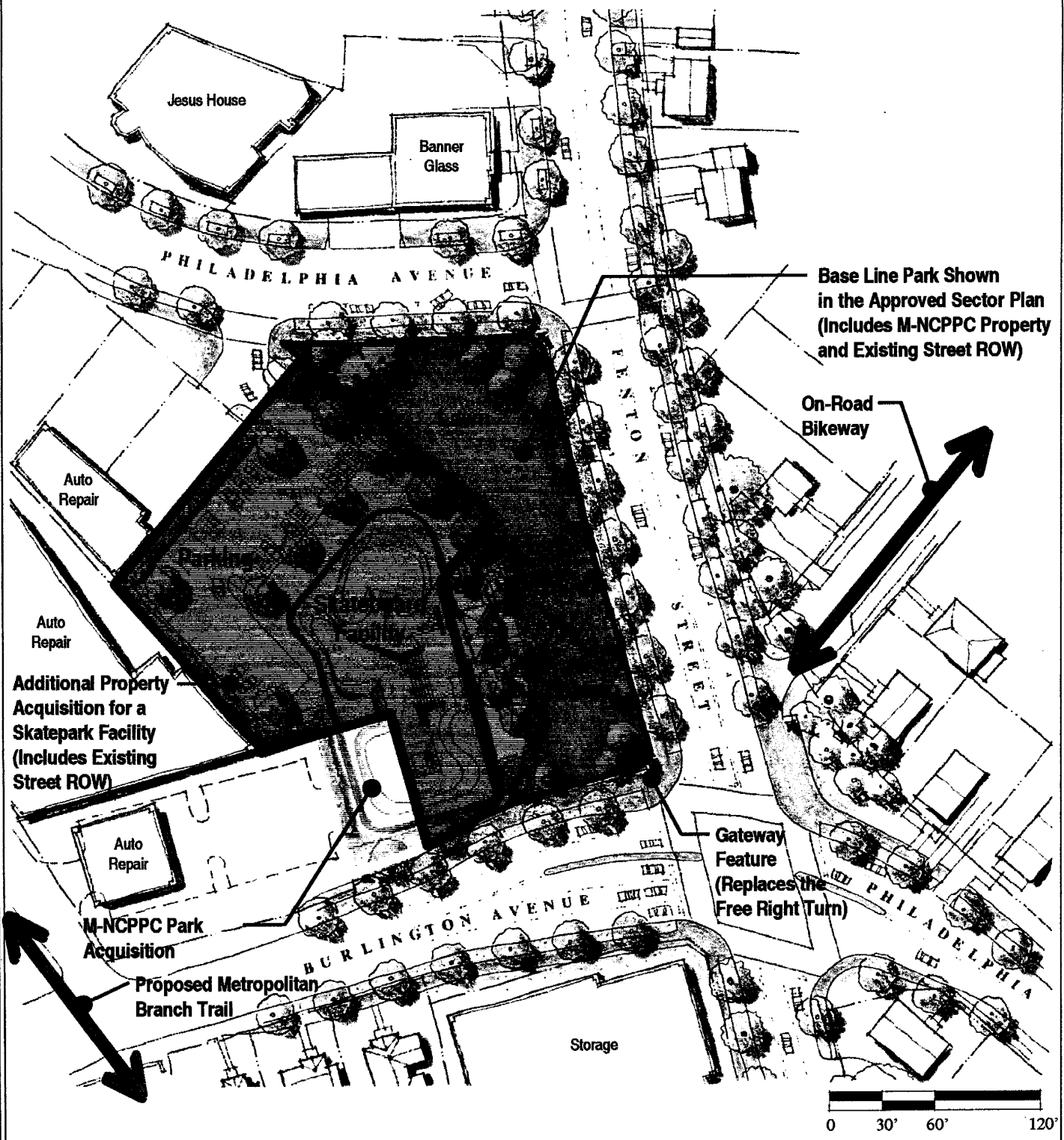
- 1) Sector Plan Map of Potential Sites for Urban Recreation
- 2) Sector Plan Illustration of "South Fenton Gateway Park"
- 3) Map of Recommended Expansion to Fenton Gateway Park
- 4) CBD Zoning Map
- 5) Agenda from July 2001 ESSCA Briefing
- 6) Map of Potential Sites for Skateboard Park
- 7) Map of Proposed Fenton Gateway Park Showing Property Ownership
- 8) Aerial View of Proposed Fenton Gateway Park
- 9) Aerial View of Proposed Fenton Gateway Park
- 10) PDF from Adopted FY03-08 CIP
- 11) PDF from Adopted FY05-10
- 12) January 2005 Gazette article

Attachment 1

Map 41 Potential Siting Opportunities for Urban Recreation







Base Line Park Shown in the Approved Sector Plan (Includes M-NCPPC Property and Existing Street ROW)

On-Road Bikeway

Additional Property Acquisition for a Skatepark Facility (Includes Existing Street ROW)

Gateway Feature (Replaces the Free Right Turn)

M-NCPPC Park Acquisition

Proposed Metropolitan Branch Trail

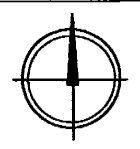
Proposed Expansion Plan

April 18, 2005



FENTON GATEWAY PARK

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND



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