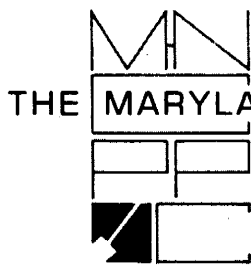


MCPB 12/15/05  
Item #11



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

December 9, 2005

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Gwen Wright, Acting Chief *GAN*  
Countywide Planning

FROM: Joey Lampl, Planner/Coordinator  
Historic Preservation Section  
Countywide Planning

SUBJECT: Public Hearing and Worksession—**Public Hearing (Preliminary) Draft, “From Artifact to Attraction: Strategic Plan for Cultural Resources in Parks”**

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Approve *“From Artifact to Attraction: A Strategic Plan for Cultural Resources in Parks”* as the policy document guiding the Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning on historical and archeological resources on parkland.

**PLAN HIGHLIGHTS**

This draft Strategic Plan was distributed to the Planning Board one week ago to afford the Board additional time for review. It provides detailed information on historical and archaeological resources on parkland and sets out a number of important and achievable goals for these resources. During the worksession, the Board may want to look in detail at some of the major accomplishments and recommendations of the Plan, listed below. The Plan:

- Categorizes cultural resources in the park system based on their potential for reuse and/or heritage tourism through assignment of clear planning categories.
- Creates a **Top 20 Priority Project List featuring properties to be reused with public access**, either because MNCPPC plans to make them accessible to the public or because they will be put to some form of public use by means of a public/private partnership.
- Defines a series of concrete actions for stewarding cultural resources in the park system based on three principles: 1) Capital Improvements, 2) Annual maintenance, and 3) Programming (both interpretive and architectural).
- Provides a sound mathematical formula for assessing maintenance costs for cultural resources.

- Accumulates data on all cultural resource properties and links that data to SmartParks, for the first time establishing a mechanism for historic building repairs to become part of the existing work-order system.
- Requests approximately \$400,000 annually in funding for a Cultural Resources in Parks Maintenance Program to initiate preventive maintenance for historic buildings.
- Creates an integrated approach to protecting resources that incorporates several Department divisions.

## **BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

In 2000, the Department approved the concept of developing a strategic plan for cultural resources in parks, responding to a request by the County Council for more information and the prioritization of historic park resources. The Department's cultural resources inventory includes nearly 150 distinct structures or sites, including archaeological sites. These resources are the properties on parkland that best tell Montgomery County's story, and they encompass structures as small as a shed and as large as a dairy barn. At present, some structures are open to the public for historic interpretation, others are used as MNCPPC offices, some are offered by Property Management as housing, and some, unfortunately, remain vacant and in need of repair and programming.

Initially, an in-house draft report was prepared that captured a cornerstone idea—turning underutilized historic “artifacts” into vital park “attractions.” The task of developing the plan further was taken up again in September 2004. Research focused on: 1) strategic plans in general; 2) other agency/non-profit owners' policies and procedures for maintaining large inventories of historic properties; 3) methodologies used elsewhere around the country to determine annual maintenance costs of historic buildings; 4) heritage tourism in general and in Montgomery County; and 5) the particular history of Montgomery County's stewardship, starting with MNCPPC's origins and its acquisition of sites and leading up to present concerns relating to property use and upkeep.

A huge effort at data gathering commenced, culminating in the creation of spreadsheets linked to a cultural-resources GIS park layer. Simultaneously, meetings were held between Historic Preservation Section staff and SmartParks staff to ensure that new data fields created for the Strategic Plan matched those of SmartParks. From the beginning, it was deemed essential that data on cultural resources be *useful* for generating work orders on annual maintenance.

In January 2005, a Strategic Plan Advisory Committee was formed to infuse the process with expertise from multiple disciplines. Serving on that committee were Department historians, archaeologists, preservation planners, architects, and the director of the non-profit Heritage Tourism Alliance of Montgomery County. The advisory committee met monthly--for a total of six meetings--honing ideas about the most critical initiatives to be taken in order to preserve, maintain, and revitalize cultural resources in parks.

Starting in the summer of 2005, Historic Preservation staff gathered input from other divisions directly affected by the implications of the draft Strategic Plan. Meetings were held with chiefs and supervisors from Central Maintenance, Property Management, and Parks. On July 1, 2005,

an internal draft Strategic Plan was circulated to the Director of the Department and the Superintendent of Parks, as well as to the chiefs of Countywide Planning, Enterprise, Northern Region Parks, Southern Region Parks, Central Maintenance, Park Development Division, Community Based Planning, and Strategic Planning. The vast majority of received comments were incorporated into a revised draft plan. The key concept of assigning a Responsible Party who would assume primary oversight of the maintenance and improvement of each cultural resource was refined at inter-divisional meetings that took place in the fall, with consensus being reached on which division would act in that capacity, at least at the outset of the Plan's implementation.

In mid-November 2005, a broad public notification process was undertaken. On November 16, 2005, approximately 70 interested parties – including preservation groups, civic groups, and tourism groups - received a letter explaining the nature of the document and inviting comment. On November 17th, the entire draft Strategic Plan was placed online at the Department's website, the document was made available in printed form, and a press release was issued by the Community Outreach and Media Relations Section. All of these efforts were aimed at inviting public comment and encouraging public attendance at the December 15, 2005 Public Hearing and Worksession.

## **DISCUSSION**

Approval of the Plan would signal four core principles:

- It would endorse the concept that cultural resources should be a more vital component of the County park system with consequent responsibilities shared Department-wide;
- It would prioritize a list of 20 historic resources that have the best chance for reuse with some level of public access - either by means of Department efforts or by public/private partnerships;
- It would clearly state a commitment to creating a dedicated maintenance budget to be called the "Cultural Resources in Parks Maintenance Program," and to request future operating budget funds of approximately \$400,000 each year.
- It would support improved programming methods, including but not limited to the long-term goal of using paid (as opposed to volunteer) interpretive staff at the most important sites and the short-term goal of streamlining the contracting of architectural/engineering programming services.

The draft Strategic Plan is a blueprint for moving beyond the era of stabilization that has characterized the Department's stewardship over the past several decades into an era of rehabilitation and use. The Plan has five sections:

1. An Introduction describing the Plan's purpose and how to measure whether or not future efforts are successful;
2. "Where We've Been," narrating the Department's history of property ownership;
3. "Where We Are," comparing how we are succeeding and falling behind in our present task as cultural resource stewards; and

4. “Where We’re Headed,” defining the Department’s future direction if we are not only to uphold our legal responsibility for protecting cultural resources but to take that responsibility further by embracing heritage tourism, stronger maintenance and rehabilitation, and more active partnership opportunities for reuse.
5. Appendices that support the body of the Plan.

The message of the Plan is this: rehabilitating and interpreting the most valuable historic resources—using them to tell the County’s history—turns an artifact into an attraction, and generates educational, cultural, social, and economic opportunity as a result. To repeat what is stated in the Plan Highlights section of this report, the draft Strategic Plan for Cultural Resources does the following:

- Categorizes park cultural resources based on their potential for reuse and/or heritage tourism.
- Creates a **Top 20 Priority Project List featuring properties to be reused**, either because M-NCPPC plans to make them accessible to the public or because they will be put to use by means of a public/private partnership.
- Defines a series of concrete actions based on three principles: 1) Capital Improvements, 2) Annual maintenance, and 3) Programming (both interpretive and architectural).
- Provides a mathematical formula for assessing annual maintenance (see below).
- Accumulates data on all cultural resource properties and links that data to SmartParks.
- Requests approximately \$400,000 annually in funding for a Cultural Resources in Parks Maintenance Program.
- Creates an approach to protecting resources that incorporates several Department divisions.

The Plan stresses the important role that heritage tourism plays in bringing more buildings ‘on line,’ and also acknowledges that the Department cannot go it alone. Much will depend on the ability to attract private partners and public users, and to be creative in financing and programming individual properties.

A signature aspect of the Plan is that it contains a great amount of hard data on cultural resources (featured in the spreadsheets at the very back of the Plan). The data fields in the draft Strategic Plan are compatible with Smartparks, so that the information can be downloaded to the Department’s maintenance work order software. Pertinent elements of data, such as “estimated square footage” and “estimated value,” are used as part of a mathematical formula that was developed by staff for the Department in order to ‘jump-start’ annual maintenance estimates for each resource--something that has never been done before. To summarize, 1.5% of a resource’s “estimated value” (“estimated value” being an approximation of the worth of the resource in its current condition) provides a reasonable measure of necessary annual maintenance money. As the Plan explains, the formula for arriving at annual maintenance costs is based on a simplified version of a model used by Yale University to estimate its annual maintenance needs campus-wide. In addition, this formula has been tested by staff against known maintenance costs for both public and private historic buildings in the county. Once the Council approves future operating money earmarked for annual maintenance, actual work orders can be generated for historic buildings in need using the existing Smartparks system.

Staff understands that the Strategic Plan will need to take into account new acquisitions of historical and archaeological resources by the Department. These new acquisitions may require further refinement of priorities. Refinements will take into account: 1) the practicality of a property's ability to be reused with some level of public access by MNCPPC or via a partnership; 2) the level of endangerment of the resource; and 3) its ability to sustain being "mothballed" until a practical use can be found.

## **CONCLUSION**

The draft Strategic Plan for Cultural Resources comes at the right time. To quote the conclusion of the *Report of the Infrastructure Maintenance Task Force*, delivered to the County Council: "The greatest need for information is a complete facility inventory and assessment of major infrastructure on MNCPPC's 30,000-plus acres of park. MNCPPC's most significant concern is the unknown liability for repair/replacement of infrastructure that is not in any inventory." This draft Strategic Plan for Cultural Resources helps populate that inventory, and is one of the early efforts to do so in a systematic way and for practical application. The Plan advocates for a mandate that encourages better rehabilitation and improved, routine maintenance of its buildings and cultural resources.