M-NCPPC

MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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Memorandum

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Gwen Wright, Acting Chief Countywide Planning (301) 563-3413

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SUBJECT: 2005 Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan- Worksession and Plan Approval

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Staff Recommendations

- Approve the Public Hearing Draft Plan changes as indicated in this memorandum
- Approve the Plan for transmittal to the Departments of State Planning and Natural Resources with any additional changes requested by the Planning Board.

Overview

This packet focuses on changes made to the 2005 Public Hearing Draft of the Land, Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan as a result of public input at the Hearing and the forums. The County is required to transmit the final Plan to the Departments of State Planning and Natural Resources prior to December 31, 2005.

The Public Hearing on the 2005 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP) was held by the Montgomery County Planning Board on October 27, 2005. In addition to oral testimony by 19 speakers, a significant amount of written testimony was received during the hearing record period. Much input was also received at the two public forums and in workshops and meetings with interest groups. This packet has attachments that include: a summary of individual Public Hearing testimonies with related staff responses; a summary of the topics discussed at previously held public forums, also with staff responses; comments from the State Department of Planning along with related changes (previously incorporated into the Public Hearing Draft) and a summary of input given at public forums and workshops.

Summary of Public Input and related Plan Changes

A brief summary of major topics discussed at the Public Hearing and Public Forums is included in the section below with related Plan changes and staff comments.

Natural Resource Preservation -

The greatest number of changes to the Public Hearing Draft were made in response to the many comments which were received at the Public Hearing, forums and in user group meetings regarding the need to add material to the Plan on natural resource preservation. Comments included the importance of the overall environment to preserving ecosystem function and the need for preserving our streams, forests, wetlands, and habitats. Several people felt that the LPPRP seemed to give recreation needs priority over environmental preservation and that the Plan should be revised to correct this, and include more specific data on the benefits, and needs for environmental preservation.

A great deal additional material was added to the Natural Resource Chapter including information on the need for the protection of water quality and supply, and the economic benefits of forestland. Survey information was added indicating that enjoying natural areas is the most popular recreation activity by County residents, and the importance of high quality natural areas for this recreation was noted. Also added was information on priorities for natural resource land acquisition, and contributions of park volunteers to stewardship. The LPPRP follows State Guidelines that are intended to give equal weight to environmental and agricultural preservation, and recreation needs. The recreation section of the state guidelines require more specific needs information as quantified by participation data, whereas requirements for natural resources land acquisition is generally based on the quality of the resource and is not quantifiable.

Recreation Needs

Testimony was given on the need for several facilities that were not included in the LPPRP, as they were not required by the State Guidelines. Language was added to the LPPRP that these activities will be addressed in more detail in the upcoming Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Strategic Plan. Some of these facilities include: motor bike and bicycling trails, nature oriented activities, paint ball, etc. A significant number of comments were also received regarding the need for dog exercise areas, indoor tennis, and community recreation centers. Additional material was added to the text on these facilities. We were also asked to add information on recreation trends, and methodologies for projecting facility needs, and have added appendices on each of these subjects.

Ballfields-
The LPPRP estimates that Rectangular multi-purpose ballfields have the greatest estimated deficiency throughout the County for the year 2020. Reflecting the trend change from softball to soccer, lacrosse and other rectangular sports, it suggests that some areas will have a future surplus of softball fields, some of which could be converted to rectangular fields. A survey was distributed to 600 leagues asking for comments on the proposed estimates, but only one response was received. However, a very large amount of e-mails were received from the Damascus area, indicating that they needed fields of all types, particularly lighted fields. Input was also received from

Bethesda that youth baseball teams often have to compete unfairly with adults for fields and that the Plan's estimated needs for 90' baseball fields can not be achieved because of the lack of available open land downcounty. The LPPRP does not count the predominately unavailable high school fields, and the large projected need for 90 ' baseball fields could be reduced if the high schools opened their fields for community use.

Facility "need estimates should be considered "guidelines" rather than hard and fast rules" as stated in the LPPRP. To respond to user concerns, the following statement was added to the Plan. " Field conversions should not be made without careful analysis and consultation with user groups". A ballfield analysis should be conducted in the future to analyze individual field conversion potential as well as analyze potential for future site development.

Proposed Changes to the Plan Needing Planning Board Approval

The following bullets summarize specific major chapter changes and additions made to the LPPRP Public Hearing Draft that need Planning Board Approval.

- **Executive Summary-** An executive summary has been added to the Plan.
- **Chapter 1- Introduction to the Local Plan-** Information was added on the purposes of the Plan and a summary of grant monies previously received.
- **Chapter 2- Framework for the Plan-** An appendix on the Physical Description of Montgomery County was added that relates to the State Guidelines for this Chapter.
- **Chapter 3-Recreaton, Parks, and Open Space**
    - A statement was added, that the future needs for other recreation activities such as birdwatching, nature photography, motorized bike facilities, mountain bike facilities, paint ball, hang gliding, etc. would be considered in the PROS Strategic Analysis.
    - Language was added regarding the need for larger dog exercise areas and indoor tennis.
    - Balllfields- Inserted language recommending that field conversions from diamonds to rectangular proceed with caution and not be made without consultation with user groups
    - Added an appendix on recreation and open space trends
    - Added a methodology appendix, describing how facility projections were derived
- **Chapter 4- Agricultural Land Preservation-** Added information from the Biannual Report on new proposed land use issues that need to be addressed to preserve agriculture including:
    - Proliferation of non-agricultural uses- extending sewer to institutional uses and sand mounds
    - Rate of residential development-
    - Stresses on the TDR Program- Child lot loop holes

- **Chapter 5- Natural Resource Conservation**

  - Information was added to this chapter regarding the importance natural resource settings of parkland for recreation uses, protection of water quality and water supply.
  - Data was included regarding the environmental and economic benefits of forestland, the trends in forest loss, the status of water quality conditions, and the amount of forest and sensitive areas in parkland emphasizes the key role of parkland in preserving ecosystem function.
  - The educational component of the interpretive programs was included and the contributions of volunteers to park stewardship was recognized.
  - Staff added information about the magnitude of funding needed and priorities for natural resource land acquisition and revised the Appendix on priority acquisition
  - Information was added on Legacy Open Space Projects

- **Chapter 6- Cultural Resources Conservation** – No major changes

Attachments

A. Public Hearing oral and written testimony and related staff responses
B. Summary of issues raised at public forums, workshops, correspondence and meetings with user groups and related staff responses
C. Letter from State Departments of Planning and Natural Resources with review comments on the LPPRP Staff Draft with resulting plan changes
D. Summaries of Public Forums
E. Summaries of other user group meetings
   - Ballfield Workshop and ballfield user group comments
   - Natural Resources meeting
   - Montgomery County Tennis Association user group meeting