



MCPB Item # \_\_\_\_\_

April 27, 2017

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** April 17, 2017

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Michael F. Riley, Director of Parks

Mitra Pedoeem, Deputy Director, Administration

Dr. John E. Hensch, Ph.D., Chief, Park Planning and Stewardship Division (PPSD)

**FROM:** Brooke Farquhar, Supervisor, Park and Trail Planning Section, PPSD   
Mark Wallis, Planner Coordinator, PPSD  
Brenda Sandberg, Legacy Open Space Program Manager, PPSD

**SUBJECT:** 2017 Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan Working Draft

**Requested Action**

Approval of Working Draft as the Public Hearing Draft and set the Public Hearing date for May 25, 2017.

**Plan Background**

Parks, recreation, and open spaces are essential to the high quality of life for Montgomery County residents. The greatest challenge for the park and recreation system in the County is to provide facilities for a growing population where there is competition for land, while continuing to steward sensitive environmental and cultural resources. Over the years, Montgomery County's park system has responded to evolving needs from protecting water supply in the 1920's, to hosting organized recreation on courts and fields in the 1950's, to preserving the natural environment in the 1970's, to supporting "SmartGrowth" in recent decades. Parks and open spaces are needed now more than ever to serve not only the leisure needs of residents and employees but to ensure a strong sense of community, while protecting open space and natural resources for future generations. Given the scarcity of available land, utilizing our existing lands and facilities to their maximum potential is more critical now than ever.

On July 28, 2016 the Planning Board approved the outline, schedule and outreach strategy for the 2017 PROS Plan (**Attachment 1**). The 2017 PROS Plan will substitute for the state-mandated *Land, Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan (LPPRP)* which is required every five years to maintain Program Open Space Grant Funding eligibility. The PROS Plan was last updated July, 2012. The schedule mandated by the State requires Final Plan completion by July 1, 2017.

The main purpose of the PROS Plan is to develop strategies to deliver the "right parks in the right places". The 2017 *Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan* serves as the planning policy for parks and recreation in Montgomery County. It assesses needs and recommends strategies for the delivery of park and recreation facilities, protection of natural resource areas, and preservation of historic/cultural areas and agricultural lands.

The PROS Plan supports the park and recreation goals and objectives contained in the County's *1993 General Plan Refinement - Goals and Objectives*. The *2017 PROS Plan* builds upon and expands the work of the *2012 PROS Plan*. That plan introduced a new methodology and typology for urban park planning, service delivery strategies for 27 facility types, funding priorities for historic resources, and resource-based recreation.

When completed, the *2017 PROS Plan* will provide guidance for:

- park and recreation recommendations in area and park master plans
- priorities for park acquisition, renovation and development
- recreation facility needs in the County up to the Year 2030
- urban parks acquisition and development
- natural resource stewardship
- priorities for stewardship of important historic resources in the County
- local agricultural land preservation programs

Sources that were used to guide the *2017 PROS Plan Working Draft* included extensive outreach, research of plans from other jurisdictions, past Montgomery Parks plans, demographic trends, staff experience, and the State Guidelines.

State Guidelines require the Plan to include:

- 1. Plan Introduction:**
  - a. a general overview of county geography, population
  - b. an introduction to the existing system of preserved lands.
- 2. Parks and Recreation:**
  - a. updated inventory of assets and user demand information;
  - b. a level of service analysis to identify deficiencies and opportunities;
  - c. strategies for meeting recreational goals, addressing deficiencies, improving and managing county parks and recreation facilities over the next five years.
- 3. Natural Resource Land Conservation:**
  - a. updated information, analysis, goals and strategies for managing and improving county natural resource conservation land networks.
- 4. Agricultural Land Preservation:**
  - a. updated data on preserved lands;
  - b. goals and strategies for improving the local program.
- 5. Optional: relevant topics of significance in the county including but not limited to:**
  - a. an economic analysis of parks, recreation and land conservation in the county,
  - b. discussion of cultural resource preservation, historic preservation,
  - c. tourism,
  - d. education and environmental literacy

Per State Guidelines, the PROS Plan includes all of the above content for items 1-4, although the document structure is modified somewhat to meet our local needs. We are including a chapter on Cultural Resources Stewardship (5b) and material on education and environmental literacy (5d).

## Outreach and Needs Assessment

Montgomery Parks launched a multi-pronged outreach strategy in November 2016 to engage diverse communities for input about the future of parks and recreation. The initiative, titled *Parks and Recreation of the Future*, was aimed at soliciting public input to inform three separate but related park programs: the *2017 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan*, the *Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan*, and the *Capital Improvement Program*.

Montgomery Parks contracted PROS Consulting and their sub-consultants, Communities Connect Consulting and ETC Institute, to complete a Needs Assessment to solicit comprehensive feedback from residents of the community. The process engaged a broad range of demographic segments present within Montgomery County to better understand the characteristics, preferences, and satisfaction levels of residents in relation to parks and recreation activities. Once a thorough understanding of residents served was established, a variety of data sources and best practice standards was applied to quantify and prioritize community needs for parks and recreation services and amenities in Montgomery County.

The outreach strategy succeeded in soliciting ideas from nearly 3,000 Montgomery County residents. Over 950 people were reached through face-to-face community meetings, focus groups, and interviews. More than 1,000 comments were received via an online survey and interactive maps. Our statistically valid survey had 705 respondents. The outreach efforts targeted a vast array of audiences including, but not limited to ethnically diverse communities, senior populations and people with disabilities. As with the past plans, the process has been and will continue to be a collaborative effort with the Montgomery County Recreation Department.

The Needs Assessment consisted of six community input methods and an analysis of priorities and highlighted the major findings and recurring themes. Ultimately, these key findings and themes laid the framework of the needs, interests, and preferences of residents served by Montgomery County Parks. These key findings were then aggregated into Priority Rankings.

## Major Themes from Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment that was based on all points of input concludes that overall, Montgomery County residents report a high degree of satisfaction with the parks and recreation facilities and programs, which are considered by 82% of respondents of the statistically valid survey (*2017 PROS Survey*) to be important to the quality of life in the County. Three major themes emerged from the extensive outreach and analysis for guiding the park and recreation facilities and services for Montgomery County into the future:

- Build Community Through Parks - Provide spaces and programs that bring people together
- Plan for Future Generations - Increase land for natural resource protection and conservation
- Optimize What We have - Utilize existing park and recreation facilities and lands more fully

### **Build Community through Parks**

Serving the residents of the County has always been a goal of Montgomery Parks and the Recreation Department. One of the values of Montgomery Parks is to “support and embrace cultural differences and offer suitable programs, activities, and services.” The mission of the Recreation Department is to “provide high quality, diverse, and accessible programs, services, and facilities that enhance the quality of life for all ages, cultures, and abilities.” With better methods for outreach, we were able to hear from traditionally underrepresented populations such as individuals with disabilities, foreign-born residents, and older adults. The importance of social gathering spaces and

events, and promoting equitable access to parks and recreation for all populations was a strong theme throughout the Needs Assessment.

**Plan for Future Generations – increase land for natural resource protection and conservation**

Montgomery County has historically emphasized the need to manage land toward natural resources protection and conservation, and the community has been supportive and encouraging of such efforts. The importance of land, programs, and amenities based upon the natural environment was a strong theme throughout the Needs Assessment.

**Optimize What We Have**

In a County where developable or re-developable land is scarce and expensive, it is more important now than ever to make sure our existing lands and facilities are utilized to their maximum potential, and if not, to renovate and repurpose them to best meet needs. This theme was strongly expressed by respondents of the statistically valid survey as well as participants in other outreach venues. Repairing and renovating existing park facilities was considered a funding priority by 49% of the survey respondents, followed by purchasing land for natural resource protection and conservation for future generations (45%) (*Appendix 6 of the Draft Document - Needs Assessment*). This theme was a major recommendation in Vision 2030 from 2011 as well.

## Recommendations

Each of the *2017 PROS Plan* chapters contains information on current policies and background, status of what has been accomplished since the *2012 PROS Plan*, and recommendations for the future. The following is a summary of the recommendations for the future from each chapter.

**Chapter 2, Policy Framework and Plan Foundation**, includes the following new recommendations that will guide staff and decision-makers:

- A policy to Avoid, Minimize, Mitigate, or Compensate, to guide any public or quasi-public agency seeking to use parkland for non-park projects
- Two new urban park types in the Park Classification System, to respond to a need for smaller “pocket greens” and “plazas”
- Fill gaps in service in areas of higher concentrations of lower income households with low walkable access to park entrances and trailheads (Park Equity Analysis)
- Provide quality services and park and recreation programs that are inclusive and accessible to patrons (Guidance for Accessibility and Non-Discrimination in Facilities and Services)
- Continue to Balance Renovation, Development and Acquisition, to better serve the park and recreation needs of the citizens of Montgomery County.

**Chapter 3, Optimizing Growth with Urban Parks**, recommends new strategies for maximizing the use of public spaces in our more populated areas, including:

- A methodology to identify where parks are most needed in areas of higher population density, systematically applied across the County to promote equity in parks and open spaces
- A Park Activation program, across all areas of the County to “get people into the parks,” with a vision for all Montgomery County residents to choose park activities during their leisure time, and to ultimately promote self-directed activation of parks. Programs and activities will be developed for four seasons to promote park use year-round.

**Chapter 4, Recreation and Parks** contains the estimated facility needs to the year 2030. Besides estimating future needs and recommending service delivery strategies for several facilities, the chapter recommends the following to be accomplished in the next five years:

- Build priority trail segments as identified in the Countywide Park Trails Plan for natural and hard surface trails
- Expand athletic field capacity through lighting, synthetic turf, conversions, developer-provided rectangles, and improved design and construction of public school fields
- Accommodate year-round field sports participation trends by eliminating overlay fields when demand for one sport decreases to a point where a small number of remaining users can be relocated to other fields
- Select a site for a group picnic area in Rock Creek Regional Park
- Complete a Nature Centers Functional Plan with an objective and data-based analysis to determine if and where any new nature centers or renovations should be constructed in the park system
- Determine where there are underutilized sports courts for potential conversion to skate parks, dog parks, or futsal courts
- Select a pilot site for pickleball courts by converting one tennis court to two pickleball courts
- Select a site for a purpose-built, adult-sized cricket field in the MD Route 29 corridor to spread out the service in the County

**Chapter 5, Natural Resources Stewardship** contains recommendations to continue Montgomery Parks' strong history of stewarding natural resources in the park system and across the County, including:

- Maintain what we have in good condition as the most important stewardship step
- Target stewardship efforts to the best resources, to be efficient with staff and resources to manage priority resources
- Meet natural resource-based recreation needs while minimizing impacts to all natural resources, by relying upon scientific data and analysis and results-oriented resource management efforts
- Expand efforts to educate citizens and staff about natural resources to reach more children and adults, through interpretive programs (e.g., environmental literacy, Children in Nature, engaging diverse communities), and staff training (e.g., water quality protection, sediment and erosion control, Integrated Pest Management)

**Chapter 6, Cultural Resources Stewardship** provides recommendations and priorities for cultural resources that focus on public interpretation first and foremost, bringing the county's history and archaeological discoveries to life, with three main priorities to:

- Increase funding for the preservation, restoration and adaptive reuse of those sites deemed the highest priority on the Cultural Resources Asset Inventory
- Expand educational opportunities at the parks through historical and archaeological programs with interactive and innovative exhibits

- Select the best sites to create museums or become premier cultural destinations within the parks.

**Chapter 7, Agricultural Land Preservation** contains recommendations that help to keep the highly successful agricultural preservation programs in Montgomery County moving forward into the next decade:

- Explore alternative sources to fund agricultural easement programs, including new public funding mechanisms and tools to incentivize private sector purchase of easements
- Implement the New Farmer Project to promote the creation of new sustainable-practice farm businesses using mentoring, business training, and an innovative approach to pairing start-ups with landowners to speed the start-up process

## Plan Schedule

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### 2016

#### Spring: Preliminary Work

- Webpage and online comment tool launch
- Develop detailed outline of the plan

#### Summer: Analysis

- July 28 - Planning Board Briefing: Outline, Schedule and Public Outreach Strategy  
- [Meeting notice](#) (PDF, 218K), [Staff memo, Item #3](#), [PowerPoint presentation](#) (PDF, 2.33MB)
- Staff work on preliminary content

#### Fall: Initiate Public Outreach

- Community meetings, focus groups, intercept interviews, surveys, online tools
- Countywide Recreation Advisory Board meeting
- Public events - October 16: World of Montgomery, Downtown Silver Spring Holiday Tree Lighting

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### 2017

#### Winter: Continued Outreach

- Jan-March: Community meetings, focus groups, intercept interviews, surveys, online tools
- Public Meetings - [PowerPoint Presentation \(3MB, PDF\)](#)
  - March 22 - Upcounty Public Meeting
  - March 29 - Downcounty Public Meeting
- April - Needs Assessment Report and development of recommendations

#### Spring: Working Draft Presentation and Public Hearing

- April 27: Planning Board review of Working Draft and post Public Hearing Draft online
- May 25: Public Hearing

## **Summer**

- June 8 and 22: Work Sessions and Approval of Final Document
- July 1, 2017: Submittal to State

## **Attachments**

- Attachment 1 - July 28, 2016 Planning Board Memo
- Attachment 2 - 2017 PROS Plan Working Draft
- Attachment 3 - Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Draft Report

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