



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MEMORANDUM

To: MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

Via: Michael F. Riley, Director *MFR*
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From: Judie Lai, Architecture and Special Projects Section Supervisor
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Subject: ADA Program Updates

BACKGROUND

It is the mission of Montgomery Parks to protect and interpret our valuable natural and cultural resources; balance the demand for recreation with the need for conservation; offer a variety of enjoyable recreational activities that encourage healthy lifestyles; and provide clean, safe and accessible places for leisure-time activities for all individuals.

In accordance with the Department of Justice (DOJ) project civic access initiative, Montgomery County entered into a Settlement Agreement in 2011 that spells out its plan to promote and confirm its commitment to inclusion and accessibility. The Montgomery Parks Department submitted a Final Transition Plan to the DOJ in August, 2016. The plan, which has tentatively been approved by the DOJ, provides a strategy and timeline for Physical Access as well as Program Access. Physical accessibility improvements are anticipated over the next 20-25 years where programmatic access is a continuous succession of appropriate program plans and services. The combination of these two key elements constitutes the basis for an inclusive park system enriching the lives of our citizens.

To ensure this Transition Plan is upheld, in 2015, the ADA Access Team was established. The members include Bob Green and Wen Huang from the Park Development Division; Marybeth

Dugan and Genevieve Jennai from the Enterprise Division; and Mike Moxley from the Facility Management Division. The mission of this team is to coordinate, perform, and establish a work program related to physical, structural and program access. This collaboration traverses through all divisions in the Parks Department. Furthermore the Access Team strives to:

- Address issues and develop practices and procedures to ensure ADA compliance standards and requirements are being met to promote and ensure accessibility and inclusion;
- Educate Parks employees by developing and implementing appropriate educational and training opportunities to increase knowledge of the ADA and the needs of the disability community;
- Reach out to our communities by actively engaging and participating in community events, symposiums, meetings, etc. to promote awareness and gain an understanding of community needs.

In cooperation with department staff, the team has worked diligently to uphold the integrity of the Transition Plan. The public is invited to view this Plan and make comments and it is located on the Montgomery Parks website, www.montgomeryparks.org/about/parks/accessibility/. A hard copy is also available.

OVERVIEW OF THE ADA PROGRAM

Physical access focuses on both recurring amenities and unique amenities. *Recurring amenities* are those which occur and are repeated in various parks, such as playgrounds, playing fields, basketball and tennis courts, and other recreation amenities. A *unique amenity* is defined as one offering a singular experience or activity in the Park System. Examples include historic buildings and sites, a tai-chi court, the carousel, and golf driving range.

Priorities are established based on population density, proximity to public transportation, park types (countywide vs. community), amenity uniqueness, and other factors. This strategy will enable the best use of available funds to provide the optimal facility access to park programs for all citizens. Additionally, the objective is to provide a reasonable geographic distribution of accessible amenities throughout the County as well as establishing a destination trip limit of approximately 15-20 minutes by vehicle.

Program access focuses on inclusion by coordinating reasonable modifications for individuals with disabilities to be successfully included in countywide parks, recreation and leisure programs. Most of the programs offered by Parks are concentrated in the following areas: nature and environmental educational programs, ice skating lessons, hockey, synchronized skating, tennis, specialized sports, archaeology, history programs and a full schedule of day camps and events. Volunteer service projects are abundant as they instill stewardship within our Parks system. These activities make up a diverse and exciting program schedule for all patrons to enjoy and for a full experience reasonable modifications are coordinated for successful inclusion:

- *Trained Support Staff*: seasonal/part-time paid staff that shadow/support an individual with a disability or shadow a small group of individuals with disabilities in programs;
- *Companions*: volunteers that support individuals with disabilities. This may also include family members, personal care providers, and other support;
- *Adaptive equipment*: for program participants who need specialized equipment that assist with successful program participation;
- *Braille, large print materials*: for program participants who are blind or have low vision;
- *Audio Description*: for program participants who are blind or have low vision;
- *Assisted Listening Devices*: for program participants who are deaf or have hearing loss;
- *Sign language interpreters*: for program participants who are deaf, have hearing loss and/or are non-verbal.

Since its inception, the Program Access Office has coordinated over 206 direct reasonable modifications for individuals with disabilities to be successfully included in Parks programs.

In addition to modification management, Office staff research and develop policy initiatives; employee training and educational programs; and acts as a resource for staff.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Completion of a self-evaluation plan including all park properties in which 13,600 physical barriers were identified;
- Development of a strategy and time line which is included in the Plan;
- Completion of accessibility upgrades previously identified by the DOJ in the Settlement Agreement as well as two DOJ additional substitute sites. In addition, improvement projects have been completed at 30 various countywide parks and 50 community parks;
- The development of the Program Access/Inclusion Services Office. The mission of this Office is to provide reasonable modifications for individuals with disabilities to be included in our parks programs to enhance their quality of life in a safe, accessible and welcoming setting.

NEXT STEPS

The Final Transition Plan (FTP) proposes an approximate 20-25-year timeframe over which the proposed physical improvements must be completed. Based on our work to date, it is apparent that additional operational and capital resources may be needed to meet the current mandates and schedule outlined in the FTP. Barrier removals take more than \$31M to complete. These estimates are based upon current planning level cost estimates and current funding resources available now; the actual costs will increase with escalation and inflation. Some recent projects show that actual construction cost could be 4 to 5 times higher than the planning level costs.

Many of our future efforts will also need to address additional staffing efforts including an Outreach and Program Specialist, an ADA technician, seasonal and programming staff. Other

initiatives include program enhancements, adaptive equipment, re-usable temporary equipment for festivals and pop up events, inclusion policies, policy development, and expanded community outreach.

At Montgomery Parks, access and inclusion will be the major focus in all we do. Resources, employees, contractors, facilities, policies, and communications must all consistently meet the existing and growing needs of the citizens we serve, as well as the Title II requirements.