



MCPB Item # _____

Date: 5/25/17

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 17, 2017

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Michael F. Riley, Director of Parks *MFR*
 Mitra Pedoeem, Deputy Director, Administration *Mitra Pedoeem*
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SUBJECT: Public Hearing 2017 Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan
 - Public testimony will be taken

Recommendation:

Hear public testimony for the *Public Hearing Draft of the 2017 Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan Update*.

On April 27, 2017 the Planning Board approved the *Working Draft 2017 Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan Update* to be posted as the Public Hearing Draft and set the Public Hearing date for May 25, 2017. A copy of the Public Hearing Draft Plan can be found on our website at:
<http://www.montgomeryparks.org/projects/listing/2017-park-recreation-open-space-pros-plan-update/>.

The Board also requested:

- 1) An Executive Summary that would integrate the findings and recommendations of the *2017 PROS Plan* into several clear and bold strategies to guide priorities for delivering park and recreation facilities and services over the next ten years. The draft Executive Summary is attached **(Attachment 1)**. Any recommendations that are in addition to those contained in the Public Hearing Draft will be discussed at work sessions.
- 2) Additional analysis of priorities and recommendations based on demographics. Staff and the consultant are preparing these for the work sessions.

Remaining Master Plan Schedule

Following the Public Hearing two worksessions with the Planning Board are scheduled for June 8 and June 22, 2017. The plan is due to the State of Maryland July 1, 2017.

Attachments

Attachment 1

2107 PROS Plan – Executive Summary Public Hearing Draft

PC:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT

2017 PARK, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE
(PROS) PLAN

27 May 2017



Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission,
Department of Parks, Montgomery County

Montgomery County Recreation Department

ABSTRACT

Title	<i>Executive Summary Public Hearing Draft 2017 Park Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan</i>
Author	Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), Department of Parks - MontgomeryParks.org , Park Planning and Stewardship Division and the Montgomery County Recreation Department - MontgomeryCountyMD.gov/rec/
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ATTACHMENT 1
2107 PROS Plan – Executive Summary Public Hearing Draft

Introduction

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 Montgomery County is to provide facilities for a growing population of residents and employees while continuing to steward sensitive environmental and cultural resources. Parks and open spaces are needed now more than ever to serve the leisure needs of the County, ensure a strong sense of community, and protect open space and natural resources for future generations. Given the scarcity of available land, making sure our existing lands and facilities are utilized to their maximum potential is more critical than ever.

The *2017 Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan* serves as the planning policy for parks and recreation in Montgomery County to the year 2030 and beyond. It assesses needs and recommends strategies for the delivery of park and recreation facilities, protection of natural resource areas, preservation of historic/cultural areas and agricultural lands, and is required by the State of Maryland every five years to be eligible for Program Open Space funding.

More specifically, the purpose of the *2017 PROS Plan* is to provide decision makers the information necessary to establish priorities in an era of high competition for limited resources, including the following:

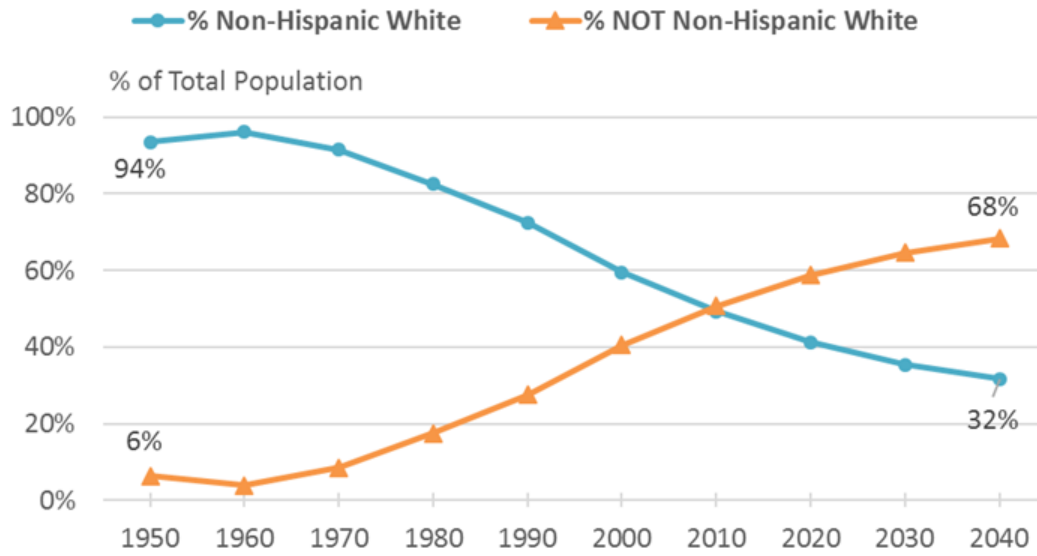
- Provide the basis for park and recreation recommendations in area and park master plans.
- Guide priorities for park acquisition, renovation, and new construction.
- Provide guidance regarding recreation facility needs in the County for the next 10 years.
- Recommend priorities for the restoration, management, public access, and interpretation of our highest quality park natural areas and historic and cultural sites.
- Review policy and background information regarding local agricultural land preservation programs.

During the development of the *Vision 2030 Strategic Plan* in 2010, the Department of Parks and the Montgomery County Recreation Department pledged to “engage a diverse community and proactively respond to changing demographics, needs, and trends”. Accordingly, a great deal of input was collected for the *2017 PROS Plan* through a variety of methods.

Montgomery County demographic trends that influenced the outreach include:

- Increasing racial and ethnic diversity with a projected growth in minority groups from 55 percent of the population in 2015 to 68 percent in 2040. Shown below from the *Draft 2017 PROS Plan*, figure 3 page 20.

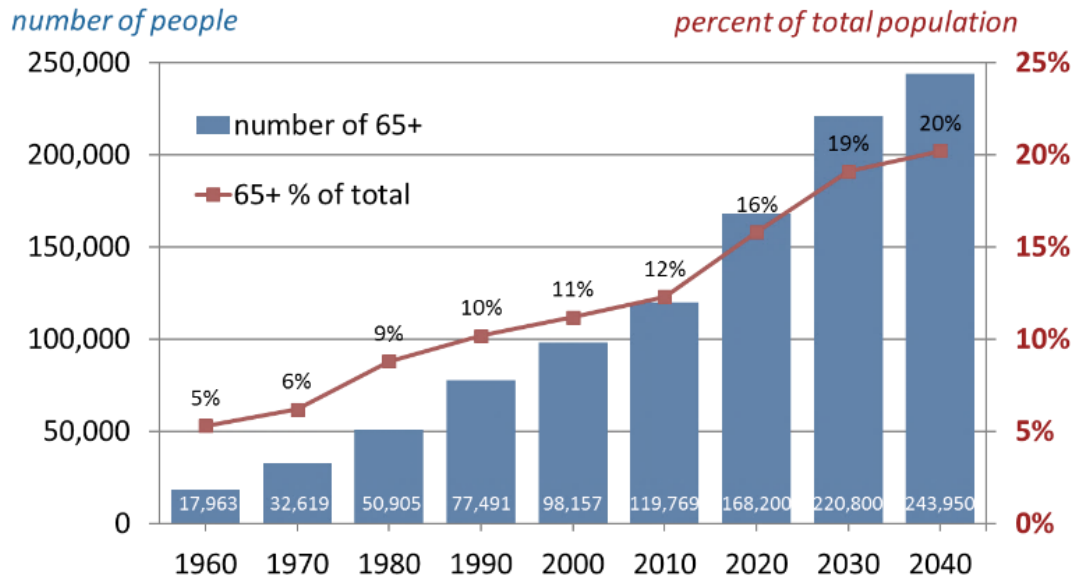
Historical and Forecasted Racial Change in Montgomery County, 1950-2040



Source: 1950-2010 U. S. Census; 2010-2040 Racial Forecast, Maryland Dept. of Planning

- Projected growth in the population people over age 65 from 12 percent of the population in 2010 to 20 percent in 2040. Shown below from the *Draft 2017 PROS Plan*, figure 4 page 2.

Growing Senior Population as Boomers Age.



- Source: U.S. Decennial Census, 1960-2010; Maryland Department of Planning Population Forecast (July 2014).

- A large and widely diverse foreign-born population speaking a multitude of languages and varying English speaking proficiencies. One-third of Montgomery County residents are foreign-born.

Montgomery Parks and Recreation Departments launched a needs assessment process with a multi-pronged outreach strategy in November 2016 to engage diverse communities for input about the future of parks and recreation. A variety of traditional and innovative tactics were leveraged to reach these audiences including foreign-language media, face-to-face interviews, on-line tools, phone and intercept surveys, and targeted focus groups. The key ideas resulting from the input of nearly 3,000 Montgomery County residents were incorporated into a Needs Assessment Report, which, in turn laid the groundwork for the plan's recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the Needs Assessment the public focused on three overarching themes – build community through parks, steward and interpret our natural and cultural resources, and optimize what we have. Within each theme we established goals, strategies, and recommended actions for the future of the park and recreation system. The themes and associated goals are:

Build Community through Parks and Recreation

GOAL: Provide spaces and programs that bring people together.

Steward and Interpret our Natural and Cultural Resources

GOAL: Prioritize the management and protection of natural and cultural resources.

Optimize What We Have

GOAL: Utilize existing park and recreation facilities and lands more fully.



Build Community through Parks and Recreation



Build Community through Parks and Recreation

Providing spaces and programs that bring people together is a major goal of the *2017 PROS Plan*. Parks and open spaces, as places where people can feel welcome independent of income, ethnicity or other factors, are ideal platforms for building “social capital”. The significant increase in density in Montgomery County makes parks and open space areas the “outdoor living rooms” for many existing and new communities. 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.

STRATEGIES

Provide Destination Gathering Spaces of All Sizes in both indoor and outdoor settings.

- Flexible lawn areas for large gatherings and pick-up sports.
- Smaller spaces for people to meet and groups to gather with an emphasis on benches and picnic shelters.
- More large picnic shelters for long-term rentals (1/2 day or longer) with bathroom facilities.

Create Culturally-relevant Programs and Events.

- Program offerings that relate to diverse demographics of an area.
- Historic and cultural events that relate the history of an amenity or area.
- Large-scale festivals and events (e.g. music).

Use Diverse Community Engagement Methods.

- Email blasts, consistent website updates, and social media outreach.
- Outreach through native languages and in partnerships with culturally-focused organizations.
- Proactive outreach and communication with underserved communities.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Create a network of great parks and recreation facilities to serve areas of the County with the highest population and employment.

- Systematically identify needs for social gathering, active recreation, and contemplative recreation across the areas of higher population density in the County.
- Prioritize acquisition, development, programming for parks in the areas of greatest identified need.
- Create two new urban park types in the Park Classification System, to respond to a need for smaller “pocket greens” and “plazas” to complement the larger parks in an urban network.
- Develop and apply a more robust urban design framework to create urban park recommendations for future planning and regulatory review.

- Create “signature” energized public spaces that will become regional destinations in areas of highest density.

Promote park and recreation equity for all citizens of the County.

- Fill gaps in service in areas of higher concentrations of lower income households with low walkable access to park entrances and trailheads.
- Add Park Equity to the criteria for prioritization of the Capital Improvement Program to promote equitable access to parks for all.
- Consider Park Equity as a factor when recommending new parks and open spaces in master plans.

Produce community-building events that address the cultural character of each region.

- Identify existing parkland or potential new parkland to support large community events and festivals.
- Retrofit existing parks to add enhanced picnic areas, large group picnic areas, spaces for food trucks, bus shelters, and other support amenities.
- Select a site for a group picnic area in Rock Creek Regional Park.
- Provide multilingual signage, special bus routes, and marketing via local and ethnic media.
- Hire multilingual staff across the park system to serve non-English speakers.

Expand the park activation program to get more people into the parks during their leisure time. The program is intended to increase awareness of, interest in, and to generate return visitation to parks across the County.

Provide regional recreation centers to create multipurpose centers that combine a broad spectrum of recreation and leisure options, aquatic features and community recreation functions.



Steward and Interpret
Natural and Cultural
Resources

The top image shows four individuals in field gear, including backpacks and waders, standing in a cave-like setting. They are holding long-handled nets, suggesting a field research or conservation activity. The background features colorful graffiti on the cave walls.



Steward and Interpret Natural and Cultural Resources

Prioritizing the management and protection of natural and cultural resources is a major goal of the *2017 PROS Plan*. Stewardship of these resources is key to the Mission, Vision and Values of the Department of Parks. The challenge is how to balance the protection of the county's air, water, land, wildlife resources, and endangered historic and archaeological sites with providing recreation, managing growth and development, and achieving comprehensive land use priorities. Citizens ranked trails, natural space, wildlife habitat, and nature recreation among the top three priorities for parks. Interest was also very strong in taking part in our cultural amenities through museums and interpretive programs. Residents also prioritized nature parks over traditional sports parks, expressing interest in a variety of nature based recreation (contemplative, active, educational, and adventure) as well as in the preservation of urban green space, and the County's rural and agricultural lands.

STRATEGIES

- Develop recreational programs and services that work in harmony with efforts to steward natural and cultural resources.
- Connect current open spaces, natural areas and historic and cultural sites with surrounding communities using sustainable trails.
- Use land development and acquisition strategies that balance natural, cultural, or resource-based recreational activities (e.g., hiking, bird watching, wildflower viewing, mountain biking, rock climbing, kayaking, canoeing, heritage tourism, historic-based field trips) with facilities for traditional sports.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Expand ongoing natural resource management efforts

- Inventory, restore and maintain natural areas with a focus on those areas of highest natural value.
- Ensure that public access into natural areas is accomplished utilizing standards of a sustainable and well-maintained system of natural surface trails.
- Interpret Best Natural Areas and Biodiversity Areas.
- Ensure the Commission's Environmental Guidelines are consistently applied to all development projects on M-NCPPC parkland.
- Add language to the section of the Policy for Parks that clarifies the Planning Board's practice of avoiding, minimizing, mitigating, and compensating for the impacts of public projects to M-NCPPC parkland.

Create the next generation of environmental stewards by improving natural resource-based programs and facilities.

- Educate the public about our success in establishing a network of Best Natural Areas that protects the best examples of natural community types thereby preserving long term our County's native biodiversity.

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.

- 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).
- Grow park advocacy efforts for stewardship of natural resources.

Expand cultural resource stewardship and interpretive efforts.

- Increase the focus on the preservation, restoration and adaptive reuse of those sites deemed the highest priority on the Cultural Resources Asset Inventory.
- Expand interpretive and educational opportunities in parks through historical and archaeological programs with interactive and innovative exhibits.
- Create premier cultural learning experiences at heritage sites (i.e., Josiah Henson Special Park, Woodlawn Special Park).
- Transform the existing Agricultural History Farm Park into a regional attraction consistent with the Planning Board-approved 2005 vision, which would involve additional staff, live animal demonstrations, and expansion of the existing activity center (e.g., additional office space, interpretive displays, public meeting space, and a large auditorium, and expansion of parking areas).
- Work to ensure archaeological sites are protected and/or interpreted wherever possible.

Continue to support a functioning rural and agricultural community in the Agricultural Reserve.

- 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.



Optimize What We Have



Optimize What We Have

Utilizing existing park and recreation facilities and lands more fully is a major goal of the *2017 PROS Plan*. 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. The importance of programming, repurposing, and renovating parks to achieve their maximum potential was strongly expressed throughout the Needs Assessment by respondents of the statistically valid survey as well as participants in other outreach venues.

STRATEGIES

Enhance Cleanliness, Security, & Accessibility.

- Enhance cleanliness of parks, especially restrooms.
- Maintain existing facilities, including repair or renovation.
- Add security, including lights or staff/personnel.

Accessibility by public transportation, pedestrian-friendly traffic elements, and connectivity to sidewalks, trails.

- Provide multi-use trails.
- Create connections between communities and parks.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Develop and incorporate standards for design and planning of new or renovated parks for ease of maintenance, cleanliness and security

Continue to balance renovation, development and acquisition, to better serve the park and recreation needs of the citizens of Montgomery County.

Create a robust trail system of natural and hard surface trails.

- Build priority trail segments as identified in the *Countywide Park Trails Plan* for natural and hard surface trails.
- Provide trails close to where people live.
- Promote health and wellness through trail use.
- Provide access to resource-based recreational opportunities associated with M-NCPPC's trail network.
- Ensure signage at trailheads and at key trail intersections.
- Incorporate historical and cultural interpretive signage wherever opportunities arise at trailheads or along trails.
- Recognize the value of trails for making connections between and within communities.

- Ensure that all trails are adequately monitored, maintained and policed.

Create an exceptional system of athletic fields to serve all areas of Montgomery County.

- Complete an Athletic Fields Strategic Plan to align the services and functions of athletic fields in the County with the needs and expectations of the community, and the mission, mandates and resources of Montgomery County Parks.
- Expand athletic field capacity through lighting, synthetic turf, conversions, developer-provided rectangles, and improved design and construction of public school fields.
- Ensure that fields are adequately monitored and maintained to industry standards.
- Phase out the use of overlay fields to accommodate popular year-round sports.
- Select a site for an adult-sized cricket field in the MD Route 29 corridor.
- Identify existing parkland or potential new parkland to provide exceptional recreational facilities including athletic fields in higher density, downcounty areas.

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.
- Continue to seek sites for dog parks, skate parks, and futsal courts on underutilized tennis courts.

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