



January 14, 2005

MCPB Item No. 7

January 20, 2004

Memorandum

To: Montgomery County Planning Board

Via: Jeff Zyontz, Chief *Jeff Zyontz*
Countywide Planning

From: John E. Hench, Ph.D., Supervisor *John E. Hench*
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Subject: **Location of New Dog Exercise Areas: Locate two new areas, one in Olney Manor Recreation Park and one in Cabin John Regional Park**

Recommendations

Staff recommends that the Planning Board take the following actions:

1. Approve location of a 1-acre Dog Exercise Area in Olney Manor Recreation Park at the site behind ball field # 4. (figure 1).
2. Approve location of a 1-acre Dog Exercise Area in Cabin John Regional Park at the location of the former Noah's Arc site (figure 2).

Background

The County Council requested the identification of two site within parks for dog exercise area. Once sites where identified, funds from the state would be sought to construct one or both of these areas. On November 8, 2004, staff presented the results of an analysis recommending six suitable park sites for potential Dog Exercise Areas. Four sites were located in the vicinity of Leisure World south of Olney. The remaining two sites were within Cabin John Regional Park. As described in the report (Attachment 1) the analysis was based on five criteria: location, size (1 acre minimum), environmental sensitivity, existence of adequate parking, and compatibility with existing park uses.

Following the presentation, the Planning Board directed staff to hold a public meeting for purposes of soliciting community input. The public meeting (see attachment 2) was held on December 13, 2004 at the Montgomery Regional Office building (MRO), Auditorium, 8787 Georgia Ave, Silver Spring, MD. Approximately 27 people attended and offered comments on the six proposed sites. Their comments are presented in Attachments 3 and 4 for Olney Manor Recreation Park and Cabin John Regional Park, respectively.

The six sites, as described in Attachment 1 are:

Leisure World Area

1. Norbeck-Muncaster Mill Neighborhood Park
2. East Norbeck Local Park
3. Olney Manor Recreational Park – Site #1
4. Olney Manor Recreational Park – Site #2

Cabin John Regional Park (CJRP) Area

5. Noah's Arc site
6. Pee Wee Soccer Field and adjacent open field

Based on previous analysis, as well as comments recorded during the public meeting on December 13, 2004, staff is recommending one park site in each target area. The locations for the two Dog Exercise Areas are site #1 in Olney Manor Recreation Park (figure 1) and the former Noah's Arc site in Cabin John Regional Park (figure 2). These sites were selected because they best met the criteria developed by the Site Selection Committee as identified in the original report of site analysis (Attachment 1). In that report the Site selection criteria is as follows.

The committee was assigned to recommend sites only in buildable areas of 1-Acre in size. The Environmental Guidelines approved by the Planning Board in January of 2000 defined the term buildable. Our primary criterion was that each site would be located outside of Sensitive Areas and their Buffers, outside of Biodiversity Areas and Best Natural Areas. Furthermore, so as to avoid conflicts with the intended use of a purchased property the sites would not be located in Legacy Open Space Property, and Conservation Parks. We would also look for park sites that had existing and sufficient parking, and were not in good quality forests. Sites would be ranked higher if they were within the Limits of Sewer and Water Envelope and were not forested, however, existence of trees for shade was desirable. Furthermore, the proximity to the targeted area would give the site a higher rating if it were closer. A site would also get a higher rank if were situated away from occupied residences. Other factors such as consistency with approved master plans, facility, plans, and concept plans, cost to construct, slope of the land, and compatibility with existing or proposed uses in and around the park were also important and gave higher position on the scale. A site would get a higher positive ranking if it fell within the following: Site is in the targeted area, Site is within a 1 Mile Radius of the targeted area, Site is within a 2 Mile Radius of the targeted area.

The site at East Norbeck Local Park is closest to Leisure World but is not one of the two sites being recommended by staff to you. The park has a recently approved facility plan that did not include a dog exercise area. A request for proposals to do the design to accomplish that facility plan has been issued. The design will be completed before FY2007. There after it will be put in the CIP for construction dollars. Any immediate action to put in a dog exercise area in the existing landscape will be disrupted by the parks future renovation. Staff did not believe that limited funds should be used for a temporary facility that will be destroyed within the near term. The parking at the existing park is inadequate. Adding an additional facility could only make that problem worse.

A dog exercise area in the renovated East Norbeck Local Park presents other issues. There is a wildflower area within that plan which would be suitable for a dog exercise area. The wildflower area is removed from the parking area but has a hard surface trail connection of 545 feet planned to provide

access. In order to better accommodate community members with disabilities, it was suggested that the paved path to the wildflower area be redesigned as a vehicular path with two handicap spaces and a turn around at its terminus. This however would require great expense. In addition to direct paving costs, the storm water management area would have to be enlarged. According to the County Department of Permitting, they is no more capacity to enlarge the Storm water management facility and permit would not be granted for such. The end result is that retaining the approved facility plan design and adding a dog exercise area would either mean a somewhat inaccessible dog park area or a dog park area that would add tens of thousands of dollars to cost. In addition, the people who were involved in advocating for the wildflower area did not attend our forum on the location of the dog exercise area. More time would be required to get "buy-in" from those in the community who signed off on the approved facility plan. Completely redesigning the park would require the expenditure of additional funds and additional public outreach.

The Norbeck /Muncaster Mill Neighborhood Park site was also not selected. As reported earlier, the site is a large, open area, which would easily accommodate a 2-acre site. The park is not utilized to it's fullest capacity and there are few residences close enough to object to the addition of a Dog Exercise Area. However, after looking more closely at the permit records for the Recreation Center located adjacent to the park and after speaking with the authorities at the adjacent church, staff determined that a Dog Exercise Area would create a serious conflict of uses. Furthermore, the citizens thought that the access to the park from Muncaster Mill Road was too difficult.

The other location at Olney Manor Recreation Park #2 was not selected because a PEPCO Right-Of-Way (R.O.W.) for a sewer line cuts through the top edge of the site. Use of the R.O.W. is not acceptable to PEPCO. Also, a skateboard park will be built on the existing asphalt parking lot at that end of the park and will further limit parking. For these reasons it was decided that Olney Manor Recreation Park #1 would be more suitable regarding compatibility with other uses, and more parking would be available.

The Pee Wee Soccer Field Area in Cabin John Regional Park was not selected because general opinion was that the site was too close to adjacent homes. In addition, it was felt that there would be insufficient parking. The Noah's Arc site was much preferred.

Cost Estimates

The estimated costs for construction of the Dog Exercise Areas at Olney Manor and Cabin John parks are \$93,100 and \$34,800, respectively (Attachment 5 and 6). The estimated costs to construct these sites are based on the expenses incurred with the construction of our existing 3 Dog Exercise Areas. Each of these costs is approximate and projected from the half acre into a one-acre site. Also, there are specific needs at each, which require a different construction at each site. For example, at Olney Manor Recreation Park, the proposed site is immediately adjacent to the outfield of softball field #4 and used the existing fence as one of its walls. Furthermore, because of the potential for home run balls to fly over the fence, staff is recommending that netting be installed to protect users of the Dog Exercise Area.

The Dog Exercise Areas proposed for the Noah's Arc site in Cabin John Regional Park is heavily wooded. Based on the long time experience of the park mangers at the park that deal with the grounds in the immediate vicinity on a daily basis, it is expected that it will be extremely difficult to maintain grass in the proposed Dog Exercise Area there. Alternative surfaces are being studied and the surface finally chosen will determine that final cost of that area.

Staff has attempted to explain the most likely scenario for construction cost at each specific proposed site. However, as new products come on line and new information is gathered, decision will be made in the best interest of the Dog Exercise Area users as well for the environment and the maintenance of the site. The final decision for construction cost is largely dependant on surface materials, bid packages and amenities chosen to include in each site.

Surface materials

Staff has been doing research with regards to surface materials by visiting other county Dog Exercise Areas, discussing the topic with dog owners who use dog areas around the country, and monitoring our own three existing dog areas. The preferred surface over all is with out a doubt, grass. Not only is grass more attractive and more comfortable for the dogs, it also helps break down bacteria found in the urine, which is a fact of life in the Dog Exercise Areas. However, it has been found very difficult to maintain a healthy grass cover in such a heavily used area. Both dogs and people congregate around and near the entrance gates causing soil compaction, which shortly kills the grass.

In our own experience at the existing dog exercise areas at both Wheaton and Black Hill Regional Parks, the grass initial grass surface quickly disappeared and patrons complained of having to stand in mud on wet days and dust on dry days. We attempted to resolve the situation by spreading blue stone gravel, which was inexpensive and available. That solved the mud problem but created others. Dogs and people began to contract eye infections and complained that the gravel was cutting the feet of their dogs. Evidently the blue stone hold moisture and bacteria from the accumulation of urine. Also, the blue stone gravel created a maintenance expense in that it must be regarded and replenished at least twice a year in each of our existing sites. Part of the problem at each of these locations is their size. Park staff in Virginia has been managing dog parks for ten years or more recommended that when attempting to grow grass in a dog exercise area, size is important and that we build our parks with a minimum of 1 acre.. Thus our minimum size criteria.

Staff has several options for the future sites. Since the areas immediately around our entrance gates gets the most traffic we propose to construct a firm pad for people and pets to congregate on. The proposed size is 15x 15 feet which will accommodate several adults standing, dogs as they congregate to greet the new dog entering the park and allow room for people in wheel chairs to sit off to the side with out getting trample by excited dogs as they greet each other.

We are proposing a material called Poly Pavement, which is a liquid soil solidifier, used on service roads, parking lots, airplane landing fields, and patios. It is reported to be esthetically pleasing alternative to asphalt and concrete, is easy to install, can be mixed with the existing soil for a more natural appearance and requires little if any maintenance. Supposedly it is more than two times stronger than asphalt, is not damaged by rain and can support heavy vehicles. The cost is about half that of concrete.

Staff also proposes to extend the entry pad using either mulch, pea gravel of a newly discovered material called Wood Carpet. This is being use at a dog area in Virginia with good results to date. It has been in place for six month and the park mangers like it. Regardless of the final choice for surface, staff intends to find a product or combination of products that are most suitable for each site, which is sustainable over time, comfortable for dogs and owners, and pleasing to look at.