




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

MCPB Item No: 11
Nov. 30, 2006

November 17, 2006

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board
VIA: Mary Bradford, Director, Department of Parks 
John Hench, Supervisor, Park Planning and Resource Analysis (PPRA)
FROM: Lyn Coleman, Trail Planning Supervisor, PPRA, 301-650-4391
Rachel Newhouse, Landscape Architect, PPRA, 301-650-4388
SUBJECT: Staff Draft Little Bennett Regional Park Master Plan: Approval to Print for Public Hearing (No Public testimony will be taken)

Staff Recommendation: APPROVAL to print for purposes of Planning Board Public Hearing, to be scheduled in January

The planning process is outlined in *Figure 1*.

Description of Little Bennett Regional Park

Little Bennett Regional Park is located northwest of Clarksburg (*see figure 2- Location Map*).

With over 3,600 acres, Little Bennett Regional Park is the largest park in the M-NCPPC park system and is one of our best natural areas. The park is bisected by Little Bennett Creek, a class III stream that supports one of the few brown trout fisheries in the County. There are 11 historic sites in the park including the Montgomery Chapel Cemetery, Zeigler Log House, Hyattstown Mill and Kingsley School House.

Existing park facilities (*figure 3 - Existing Facilities Map*) include a 91-site campground, 18 hole golf course and driving range, over 23 miles of natural trails and a maintenance yard with offices for park personnel. Approximately 67,500 visitors come to the park every year to enjoy hiking, cycling, birding, camping, fishing, horseback riding, plant walks, interpretive programs and golf.

Planning Background

The current park master plan was completed in 1985 (*see figure 4*). The Plan includes recommendations for a Future Family Campground, a Group Campground, a Swim Facility, a Day Use Facility, a Visitors Center, an Outdoor Education area, and a Golf Course Complex. The golf course and driving range were opened in 1994. Since then, there have not been any large capital improvement projects in the park.

Instead, Staff efforts have concentrated on management of the existing facilities and protection of the natural and cultural resources.

As part of the Staff Draft Master Plan for Little Bennett Regional Park, recommendations from the 1985 Concept Plan have been reevaluated. The Staff Draft Plan proposes changes to the pattern and type of uses proposed for the park but the guiding principle of the 1985 Plan remains unchanged:

Development at Little Bennett should emphasize the park's natural features, beauty and tranquil environment while at the same time providing Montgomery County residents with a variety of recreation experiences oriented to this unique outdoor setting.

Overview of Staff Draft Plan

The proposed **Staff Draft Master Plan map** for Little Bennett Regional Park is shown in **Figure 5**. In January 2006 the Planning Board reviewed and approved planning objectives to guide the master plan process. These are listed in **Table 1**. The plan recommendations for realizing these objectives are also included. More detail on the recommendations may be found in the Staff Draft Plan.

The Plan objectives reflect the Planning Board's request at the January worksession to accommodate the potential future need for athletic fields. This has been done by proposing an area for parkland acquisition that lies outside the portion of the park proposed for a natural focus.

A plan objective relating to planning for the future of the golf course has been removed. The 18-hole Little Bennett Golf Course opened in 1994. More than 20,000 golfers enjoy the course every year. One approach to attract more golf course use may be to provide family oriented facilities and group event areas near the golf course. This and other options, such as providing a golf-learning center, will be explored during a separate Master Plan for the golf course being prepared by the Montgomery County Revenue Authority.

The Staff Draft Plan proposes Implementation strategies and includes background studies that have helped shape the Staff Draft Plan recommendations.

Overview of Public Participation Process

The public participation process began in November 2005 with a community "kick off" meeting. Additional public meetings were held April and October 2006.

Staff have also attended the following meetings to seek input from interested groups and civic organizations: Legacy Open Space Advisory Board, Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, Clarksburg Civic Association, Clarksburg Citizens Advisory Committee and Upcounty Recreational Advisory Committee.

Jennifer Russell, Clarksburg Ombudsman for the County Executive, arranged meeting with Executive branch staff to review and comment on the Draft Plan concepts. Meetings were also held with planning staff from Frederick County Planning Department and with representatives from the Hyattstown Fire Department.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF PLAN OBJECTIVES AND PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

PLAN OBJECTIVE	SUMMARY OF PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS
Assure Little Bennett Regional Park continues as nature based retreat and a major open space feature in the upper portion of Montgomery County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasize protection and preservation of the park’s natural features. ▪ Eliminate public vehicular access on old farm roads that now crisscross the park. ▪ Provide a natural surface trail network that is sensitive to environmental features and “lays lightly on the land.” ▪ Identify interpretive themes for the park to enhance public awareness and appreciation of natural resources.
Provide a comprehensive, sustainable trail network for the entire park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assure all natural surface trails meet the department’s sustainable trail guidelines. ▪ Create a “stacked loop” system of trails to avoid dead-ends and to offer more trail options. ▪ Designate an east-west trail in Little Bennett to be part of the regional Western Piedmont Trail. ▪ Provide access from the campground to the shared use trails in the northern part of the park. ▪ Provide trailhead parking around the edges of the park. ▪ Connect the trail system to the Clarksburg Greenway network. ▪ Provide park visitors with disabilities an opportunity to enjoy park trails
Provide a gateway into the park that welcomes visitors and focuses on natural learning and natural themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a welcoming entrance that respects the natural terrain and preserves vistas of the natural landscape ▪ Provide an enhanced landscaped buffer along MD 355 to heighten the sense of enclosure in the gateway area. ▪ Provide meadows and garden areas as a “preview” of the types of plants, trees, birds and butterflies that may be found in the park interior. ▪ Provide recreational opportunities that focus on casual enjoyment of the out of doors and are linked to the park’s landscape.
Recognize the role of Little Bennett Park as a “gateway” to Montgomery county and the importance of the park’s character along MD 355 and Clarksburg Road.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a design concept along MD 355 and Clarksburg Road that clearly defines the area as parkland and points to the natural beauty that awaits those who visit the park. ▪ Remove non-historic park houses as the opportunity arises.
Emphasize interpretation of the park’s natural, cultural, prehistoric and historic resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create an historic landscape that tells the story of community life in past centuries. ▪ Identify nature-based themes to guide interpretation and signage along trails. ▪ Include an interpretive center at Little Bennett Regional Park to foster public understanding of the park’s natural, historic and cultural features.
Assure the park is accessible by different modes of transportation and can be enjoyed by people with limited mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a main entrance accessible by public transit as well as by car. ▪ Provide access to the park by foot, by bike and by horseback. ▪ Ensure the Visitor Center, recreational facilities and key trail segments are designed for people with limited mobility.
Designate unified architectural themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasize nature based themes and historic architectural patens from the late 19th Century.
Provide location to meet potential future need for athletic fields.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acquire additional parkland west of MD 355 for potential future uses as athletic fields.

Figure 1 - Planning Process Chart

November 2005	Issues Meeting with Community
January 2006	Issues, Outreach and Work Program approved by Planning Board
February – September 2006	Community Outreach on Plan Concepts
September – November 2006	Staff Draft recommendations finalized
November 2006	Staff Draft presented to Board and Public Hearing scheduled
January 2006	Planning Board holds Public Hearing
February – March 2007	Planning Board work session (s) and Plan Adoption

Figure 2 - Locational Map

Little Bennett Regional Park

Vicinity Map

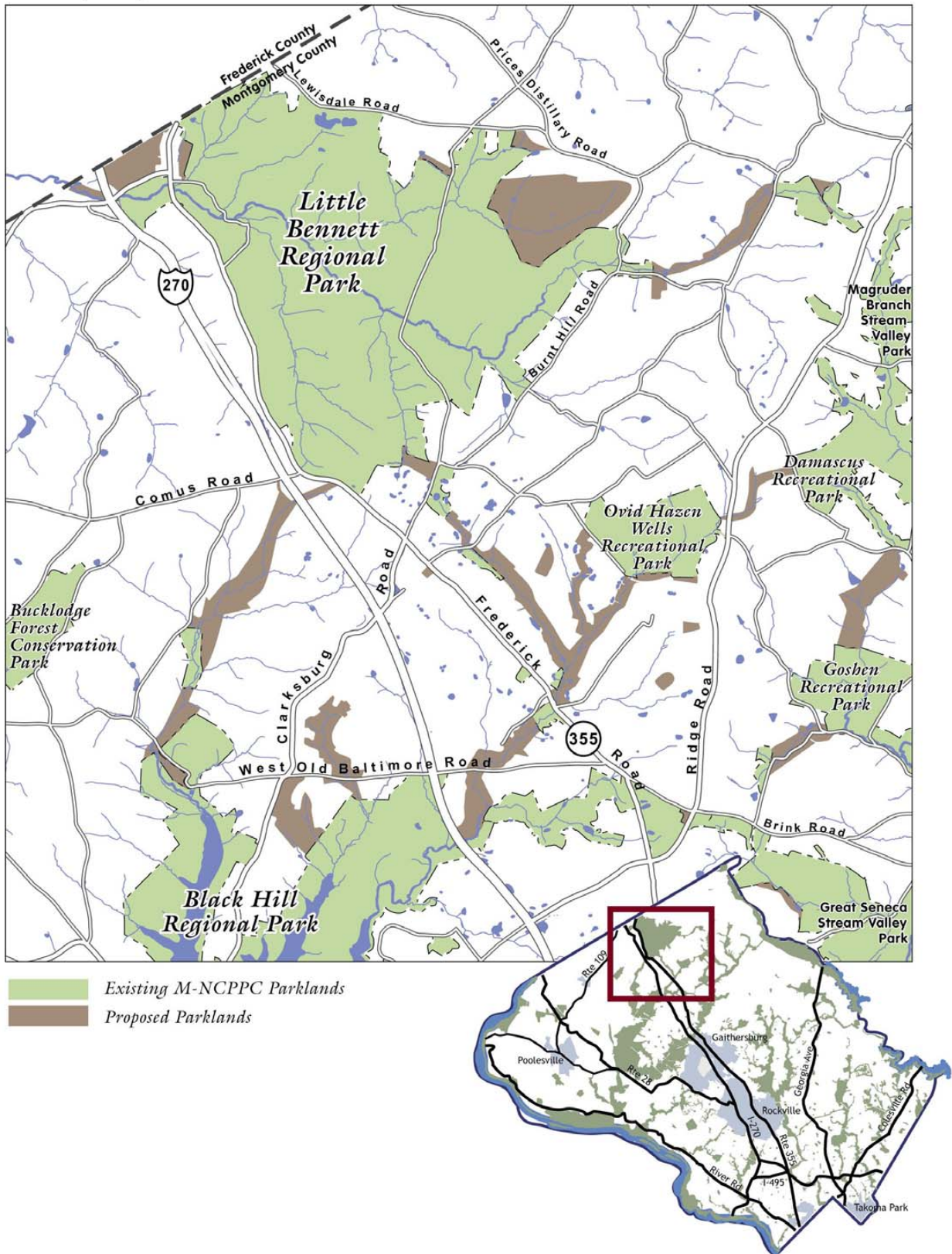


Figure 3 - Existing Facilities Map

Little Bennett Regional Park Existing Facilities Map

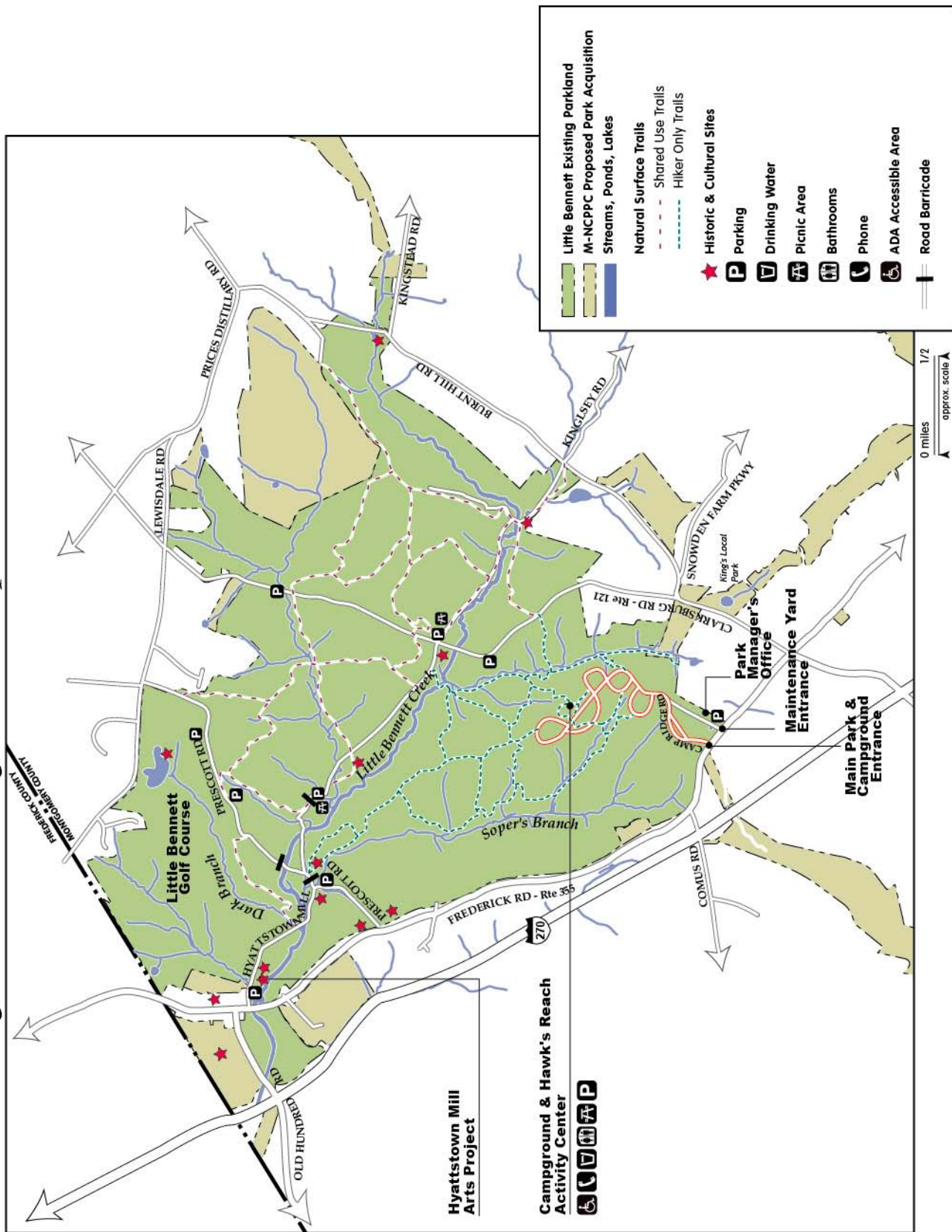


Figure 4 - 1985 Concept Plan

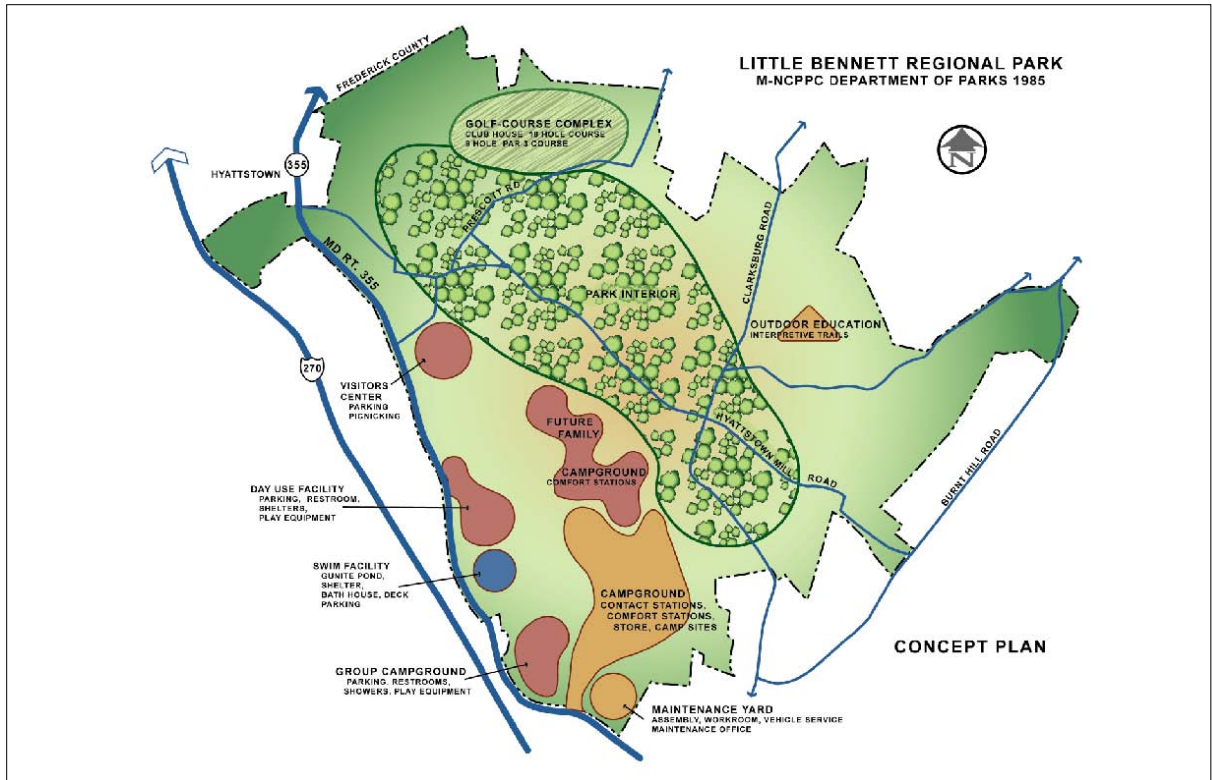


Figure 5 - Staff Draft Proposed Master Plan Map

Little Bennett Regional Park Proposed Master Plan Map

