



## **MEETING REPORT**

**MEETING DATE:** May 14, 2014

**STAFF ATTENDING:**

Christine Brett	Chief, Enterprise Division
Colter Burkes	Urban Forester, Horticulture, Forestry & Environmental Education Division
Ching-Fang Chen	Landscape Architect, Park Development Division
Jai Cole	Natural Resources Manager, Park Planning & Stewardship Division
Aaron Feldman	Project Manager/Landscape Architect, Park Development Division
Shelley Fisher	Facility Manager, Rockwood Manor
Mitra Pedoeem	Chief, Park Development Division
Patricia McManus	Design Section Supervisor, Park Development Division
Christy Turnbull	Regional Operations Manager, Enterprise Division

**PROJECT:** Rockwood Manor Special Park

**SUBJECT:** Project Briefing to West Montgomery County Citizens Association

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Park staff presented an overview of intentions by the M-NCPPC to improve the Rockwood Manor property in the future. Approximately 40 citizens attended the meeting from the Woodrock neighborhood and from the West Montgomery County Citizens Association.

The project was initiated to address a long-term problem with the entrance driveway configuration and width, which does not accommodate two-way traffic in and out of the facility and does not provide adequate turning radii for emergency, maintenance, catering and bus vehicular access. Instead of focusing on this issue in isolation, park staff chose to study the needs of the entire property in a more comprehensive manner prior to initiating specific projects to improve the property. Enterprise Division staff presented background information about the Enterprise Program and the need for each facility to be self-supporting through the generation of revenues, and also discussed the current use of this facility as an event center. Rockwood Manor currently generates revenue but is not self-supporting. Staff also presented issues that the team identified with respect to safety, the natural environment, space efficiency, customer service and the cultural significance of the property. Staff presented the schedule and next steps for the project, which includes completion of a feasibility study followed by community participation to identify potential future projects for design and construction.

Public comments following the presentation are outlined below.

### **Natural Environment**

- Concerns were expressed regarding the recent tree removal in the parking lot, and a comment was made that it seems fortuitous and convenient to have the trees removed now that park staff is considering expanding and reconfiguring the parking lot. Park staff explained that the trees had

been declining over time, and the park arborist had identified these trees for removal a year ago. Park staff utilized PEPCO tree crews to remove the trees, since they were already on site doing other work that had been approved by park staff. The project to assess the needs and opportunities for the facility was initiated after these trees had already been removed from the site.

- The trees are very important assets to the park and should not be removed for the sake of convenience. There should be clear and compelling reasons for future tree removals.
- Consider re-routing overhead electrical lines over the open parking area, so that they do not conflict with tree canopies and so that PEPCO will not need to clear or prune trees in the future.
- Removal of part of the maintenance garage to provide additional planting and buffering of the neighboring residences is a good idea. Many of the properties have small yards, and visual buffers are important.
- Consider appropriate selections of future tree, understory and garden plantings for deer tolerance.
- There was general support voiced for implementing stormwater management practices within the park and for removing impervious surfaces within the stream buffer.
- The deer population around Rockwood Manor is quite bold. Very little has proven to deter the deer from eating all of the plant material they can reach, and they no longer seem to be afraid of humans.

### **Neighborhood Impacts**

- Neighbors indicated that there are nuisance levels of noise generated from programs in the facility every weekend with amplified music playing after midnight. The neighbors requested that the facility should comply with all applicable noise ordinances. Staff acknowledged that last weekend the air-conditioning was not working, all of the doors were open, and there was excessive noise. Staff stated that there are requirements that music must be played indoors, however when doors to the buildings are opened and shut noise escapes the facility. There is also a staff person on site at all times while the facilities are occupied to ensure that the regulations are followed. Staff agreed to investigate this issue further.
  - Montgomery County Code 31B (Noise Control) sets the maximum allowable noise levels at 65 dBA during the daytime (defined as 7am to 9pm on weekdays and 9am to 9pm on weekends) and 55 dBA during the nighttime (defined as 9pm to 7am on weekdays and 9pm to 9am on weekends). Noise levels are measured at the receiving property line.
- Neighbors stressed that they chose to live behind a beloved quiet park and sanctuary, and the current programs are disruptive. M-NCPPC staff needs to walk in the neighborhood's shoes.
- Consideration should be given to physical barriers to buffer noise. In general, the acoustic characteristics of the property magnify even small noises to the surrounding neighbors.
- Concerns were expressed that alcohol is allowed to be consumed on county property, and it was questioned whether the M-NCPPC is operating within legal boundaries. There are late night parties, noise, and impaired drivers on neighborhood roads.
  - MacArthur Boulevard is already a dangerous roadway for sober drivers; vehicles leaving Rockwood Manor after an event with alcohol will eventually cause accidents.
- There is a fundamental tension created with the programming in the park, and the existing programs need to function better. There needs to be a way to meet county objectives and also be a good neighbor.
- There are busses that idle in the parking lot and create a lot of noise. These busses are not necessarily related to uses within this park and are sometimes from events occurring in the national park. There is a state idling code that needs to be enforced.
  - Maryland Transportation Code 22-402(c)(3) states that a motor vehicle engine may not idle for more than five consecutive minutes (various exemptions exist).

- Neighbors expressed concern over the idea of a one-way vehicular traffic system that would create another entrance or exit onto Belfast Road. Staff indicated that if this idea were determined to be feasible, the intention would be to locate the entrance on Belfast Road separated from the neighborhood roads and located closer to MacArthur Boulevard. Neighbors indicated that the grades would probably not allow this and that the easiest way to exit would be at the back of the property near Whiterim Terrace. This would be extremely disruptive to neighbors and would dump traffic onto neighborhood roads.

### **Facilities**

- There was general support for providing additional facilities on the property that the neighbors could use. Some neighbors were not aware that they are allowed to use the property during events.
- Consider providing a picnic area.
- Consider providing trails to the southern section of the property.
  - While those present at the meeting were supportive of this idea, they indicated that other residents may resist the idea of installing trails near their property.
  - Trails should connect to trails on the National Park property, too.
- There was a request to remove miscellaneous sections of chain link fencing, particularly a section of fencing near the cul-de-sac at Laurel Leaf Court and a stormwater management facility. Staff agreed to follow up to determine whether this was on park property and could be removed.
- Consider adding signage to make the public feel welcome. Most people think the park is a private facility.
- The asphalt driveway is degrading and needs to be patched or repaved.
- There was a complaint about the general maintenance of the property:
  - The dumpsters at the loading dock should be screened from general view.
  - The concrete wheel stops in the parking lot are out of sorts and should be realigned.



## **MEETING REPORT**

**MEETING DATE:** January 14, 2015

**STAFF ATTENDING:**

Aaron Feldman	Project Manager/Landscape Architect, Park Development Division
Christy Turnbull	Chief, Enterprise Division
Mitra Pedoeem	Acting Deputy Director, Department of Parks
Michael Ma	Acting Chief, Park Development Division
Patricia McManus	Design Section Supervisor, Park Development Division
Ching-Fang Chen	Landscape Architect, Park Development Division
Nancy Cadigan	Regional Operations Manager, Enterprise Division

**PROJECT:** Rockwood Manor Special Park

**SUBJECT:** Public Meeting to Present Feasibility Study Recommendations

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A public meeting was held to present the final results of the Feasibility Study as well as changes made to the facility's operating policy as the result of prior public comment. The study and PowerPoint presentation were posted on the project website after the meeting to allow public review and a comment period. Public comments from the meeting are outlined below:

- A question was asked whether the County Council approves the funding for this work and what the next steps would be to oppose the project. Staff responded that this project would not be presented to the County Council. It would be presented to the Montgomery County Planning Board for approval before any work moves forward, and citizens would have the opportunity to testify at this meeting.
- There was a suggestion that staff contact the Falls Road fire station to find out the largest truck size from that station, so that the road is designed only to accommodate the largest vehicle from that station, not the largest fire truck from any other county fire station. An individual stated that a hook and ladder truck is not needed for this property.
- Concerns were expressed about the proposed exit drive from the facility onto Belfast Road. Some neighbors expressed concern that traffic from events would adversely affect waiting times for residential traffic and that there would be too many cars stacked up at the same time on Belfast Road at the intersection with MacArthur Boulevard.
- A resident expressed concerns that the intersection at Belfast and MacArthur Boulevard has safety problems. The traffic consultant should review the configuration of this intersection.
- There was a suggestion that there should be two parallel one-way driveways from MacArthur Boulevard to accommodate the one way traffic from the site.
- There was a question whether a traffic light at Belfast and MacArthur would be warranted.
- Concerns were expressed that there is an imbalance of safety and security for homeowners. Belfast Road is dangerous now and will become more dangerous with the park proposal. Particular concerns were expressed that the exit driveway would be located at the back of the park, and park traffic would cut through the neighborhood on Whiterim Terrace.

- The proposal to improve accessibility and parking is fine, and ADA should be met. Extra satellite parking is not needed.
- The other improvements proposed are okay, but the road is not.
- A circular driveway would be better.
- One resident cited a 1984 agreement stating the original owner's intent that the land was not to be used for commercial purposes and that park staff should review this document. The park should not be used for catered events.