

ATTACHMENT 2
Worksession Draft 2017 Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan
Executive Summary

WORKSESSION DRAFT

**2017 PARK, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE
(PROS) PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

22 June 2017



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

Montgomery County Recreation Department

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ABSTRACT

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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.

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INTRODUCTION



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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 equitably provide enough of the “right” parks and recreation in the “right” places for a growing population of residents and employees. 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. Parks and open spaces are needed now more than ever to serve the leisure needs of residents of a County where the majority of people do not have backyards. The focus of the *2017 PROS Plan* is on equitably providing activated, central community spaces, while meeting recreational needs and protecting and managing natural and cultural resources for future generations.

Since its inception, Montgomery County’s park and recreation system has been responding to the needs of its community with a variety of park experiences and services. During the earlier years of the Commission’s 80-year old history, parks were created to protect water supply, and then to provide community recreation in the suburbs. The suburban development pattern of the mid-century reflected the dependency on automobiles to access any destination. Parks and open spaces were located primarily within the suburbs, but not in the commercial centers of the County.

In the late 60’s and 70’s, when environmental policy began to take shape, growth management policies started emerging. The *On Wedges and Corridors (1964) Plan* was implemented to concentrate development along corridors and centers in and around the Beltway (I-495). The introduction of the Agricultural Reserve in 1981 as a land conservation policy preserved our farmland, and encouraged the shift toward “growing smarter”, and preserving access to farmland and open spaces.

More recently, the SmartGrowth policies of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s have encouraged the infill and densification of commercial centers to produce a mix of uses and the highest densities near transit, while continuing to preserve the larger open spaces in the Agricultural Reserve. One of the biggest challenges today and moving forward is to provide adequate central parks and open spaces in those centers where land is already developed and very expensive. The need to focus on parks in these growing areas, established in the *2010 Vision 2030 Strategic Plan for Parks and Recreation (Vision 2030)* and the *2012 PROS Plan*, is further addressed through the recommendations in the *2017 PROS Plan*.

As our county changes in population, age, diversity, with a concentration of people in our mixed-use centers, it is no surprise that citizens value central gathering spaces, open green space and natural areas, and trails to connect them. The *2017 PROS Plan* promotes strategies for service delivery of these types of spaces within our areas of highest density while continuing to provide needed facilities and lands throughout the County.

OUTREACH AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

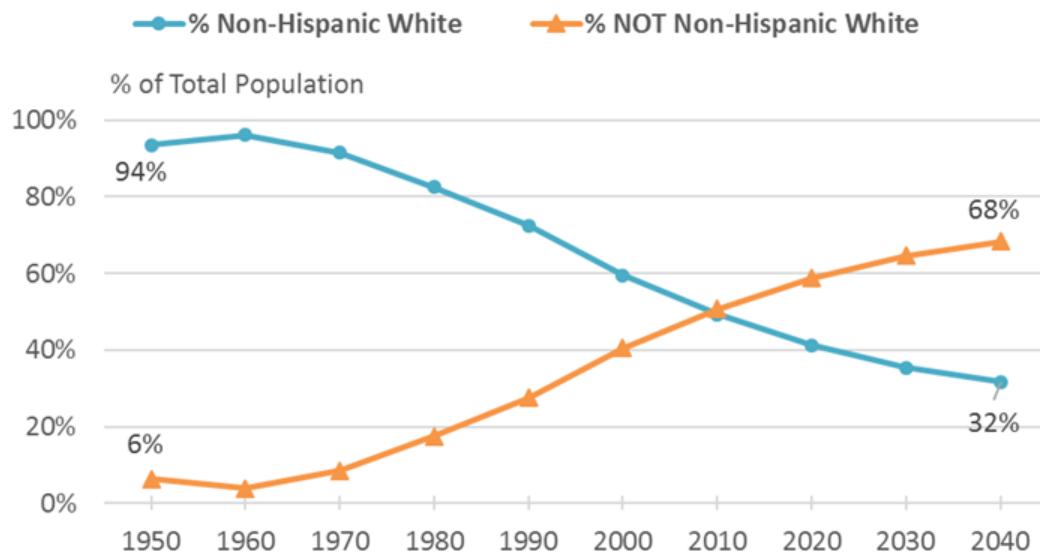
During *Vision 2030*, the Department of Parks and the Montgomery County Recreation Department pledged to “engage a diverse community and proactively respond to changing demographics, needs, and trends”. To better inform the *2017 PROS Plan*, Montgomery Parks and Recreation Departments launched a needs assessment process with a multi-pronged outreach strategy in November 2016 to

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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 the *Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment (Needs Assessment)*. The outreach groundwork laid by this plan will help us to continue to reach out in future planning efforts as well, to make sure we provide types of experiences and facilities that will be valued by our residents.

The outreach strategy for the 2017 PROS Plan was successful in reaching representative demographic segments of our County as demonstrated in the *Needs Assessment*. For example, since the percentage of Non-Hispanic Whites is expected to decrease from 45% of the population today to 32% by 2040 (*figure 1*), we reached out to the groups within other demographic segments using surveys and targeted focus groups. Similarly, we received input from the growing segment who will be over age 65 in 2040, when they are projected to comprise 20 percent of the population (*figure 2*).

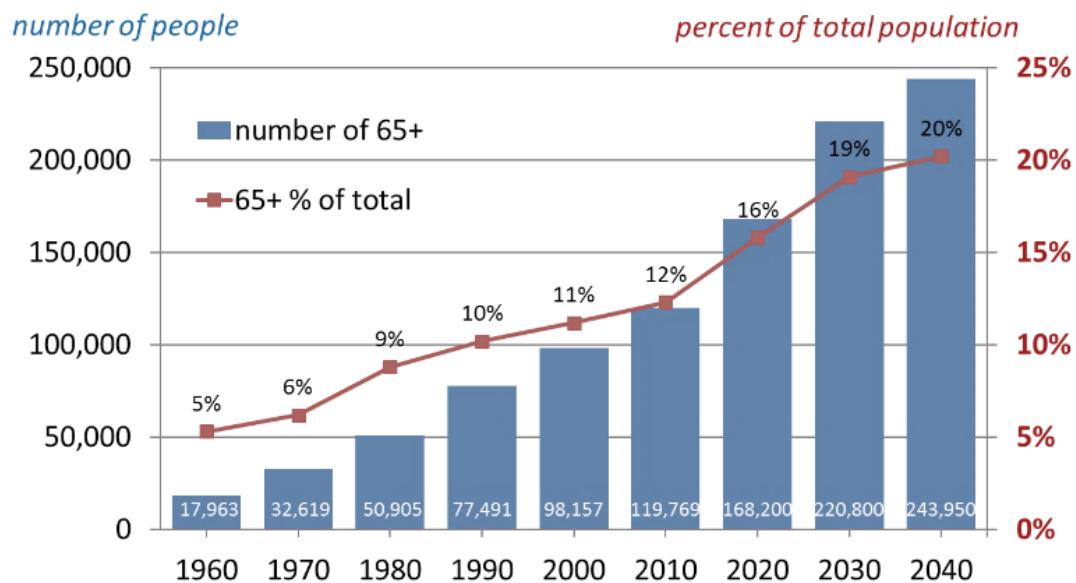
Figure 1 - Historical and Forecasted Racial Change in Montgomery County, 1950-2040



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

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Figure 2 - Growing Senior Population as Boomers Age.



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

The outreach strategy also targeted our 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.

The outreach results provided a basis for aligning recommendations with our citizens' priorities. County residents' top priorities for investment - trails, open green space, wildlife habitat, nature recreation, and space for community gathering – all require strategies for expanding our lands as while simultaneously taking care of our existing lands and facilities.

As a supplementary section to the statistically valid survey taken by Montgomery County Residents, a *Segment Analysis* was performed to further analyze the results according to by geography, age, income, and by race and ethnicity. The *Segment Analysis* shows that, even taking into account different geographic areas and demographic segments of the statistically valid survey results, the priorities of residents remain largely consistent across groups. While there are a few nuances, the priorities for trails, natural areas and wildlife habitats, and green, gathering spaces in urban areas remain constant across the analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The *2017 PROS Plan* promotes strategies for service delivery of facilities and programs to meet the needs of the future throughout the County. New features since the *2012 PROS Plan* include an emphasis on citizens' top priorities from the Needs Assessment, methodologies to more accurately assess needs in

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our areas of higher population and lower income, and updated survey data for estimating numbers of facilities needed.

Service Delivery Across the County

All residents deserve access to parks and recreation for community-building and health and wellness. While proximity to the facilities residents value the most - trails and natural areas - is quite good across the County except in our urbanizing areas, unmet needs exist for a variety of facilities, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, Parks and Recreation. Accordingly, this PROS Plan estimates needs for parks and recreation in all parts of the County, based on updated survey data. It recommends service delivery strategies for a number of needed facilities, from natural areas, nature centers, and trails, to cricket fields and pickleball courts.

Park Equity

This *PROS Plan* recommends aligning our service delivery in a more equitable way than previous plans. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has Three Pillars – Conservation, Health, and Social Equity – with Social Equity defined as “ensuring all people have access to the benefits of local parks and recreation.” The NRPA website states:

“True to the very philosophy of public parks and recreation is the idea that all people – no matter the color of their skin, age, income level or ability – have access to programs, facilities, places and spaces that make their lives and communities great. Parks and recreation truly build communities – communities for all.”

The State of Maryland requires an analysis of Park Equity to “aid in identification of areas where underserved populations do not have easy access to parks close to home.” Accordingly, this *PROS Plan* includes a new Park Equity tool which identifies areas of higher density with lower income residents who have poor access to parks, and which is recommended as a factor in prioritizing projects in the Capital Improvements Program to fill gaps in service in those areas.

Overarching Themes, Goals, Strategies, and Actions

Throughout the *Needs Assessment* three clear overarching themes emerged:

- 1) Optimize existing parks and facilities
- 2) Create great, activated parks to equitably serve the County
- 3) Steward and interpret our natural and cultural resources

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:

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Optimize Existing Parks and Facilities

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

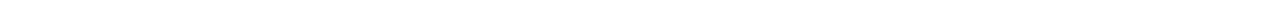
Create Great, Activated Parks to Equitably Serve the County

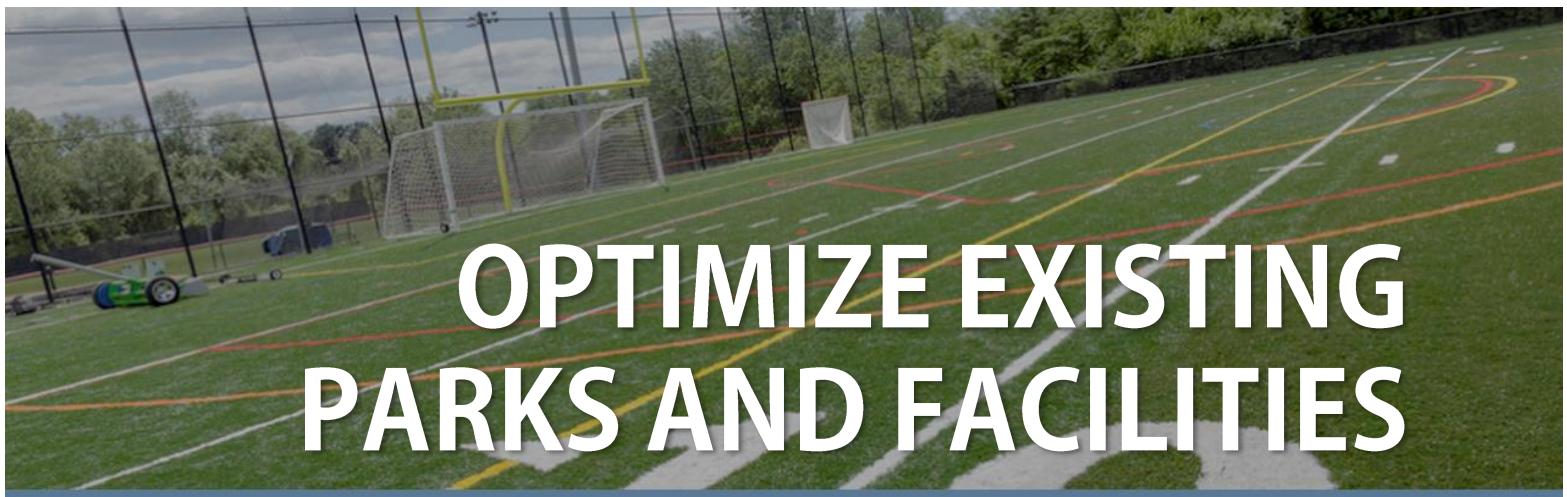
- GOAL: Provide spaces and programs that bring people together.

Steward and Interpret our Natural and Cultural Resources

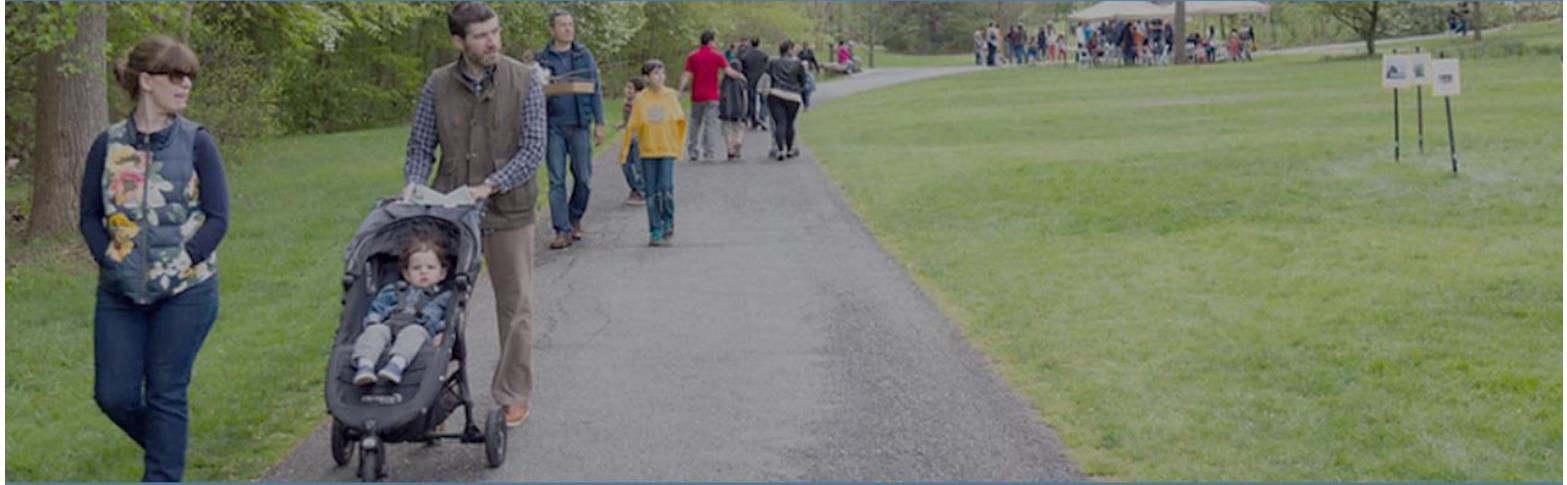
- GOAL: Prioritize the management and protection of natural and cultural resources.

Recommended strategies and actions, arranged by each theme and goal, follow.





OPTIMIZE EXISTING PARKS AND FACILITIES



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Optimize Existing Parks and Facilities

Using 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 used to their maximum potential, and if not, to renovate and repurpose them to best meet needs. Repairing and renovating our existing parks is a funding priority for 49% of those surveyed in statistically valid survey respondents in the *Needs Assessment*.

Trails, in particular, are important to optimize by filling gaps in connected systems. Trails are the most important facility across all demographic groups, because they are accessible without special skills or equipment, they facilitate activity, health and wellness, connect people with nature and with their destinations, and ultimately help define a sense of community. In addition, trails are relatively inexpensive to build for the community benefit they provide.

If we achieve the optimum use of our existing parks, it should provide some amount of capital to address needs for parks and open space in other underserved areas of the County, especially our emerging high density, mixed-use centers where we have the highest concentrations of lower income residents.

STRATEGIES

The strategies below are derived from citizens' responses to surveys and focus groups as documented in the *Needs Assessment*, and lay the groundwork for the specific recommended actions.

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

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

Enhance cleanliness, security, & accessibility.

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

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

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

- Commit to fully realizing the priority trail segments as identified in the *Countywide Park Trails Plan* for natural and hard surface trails.

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

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

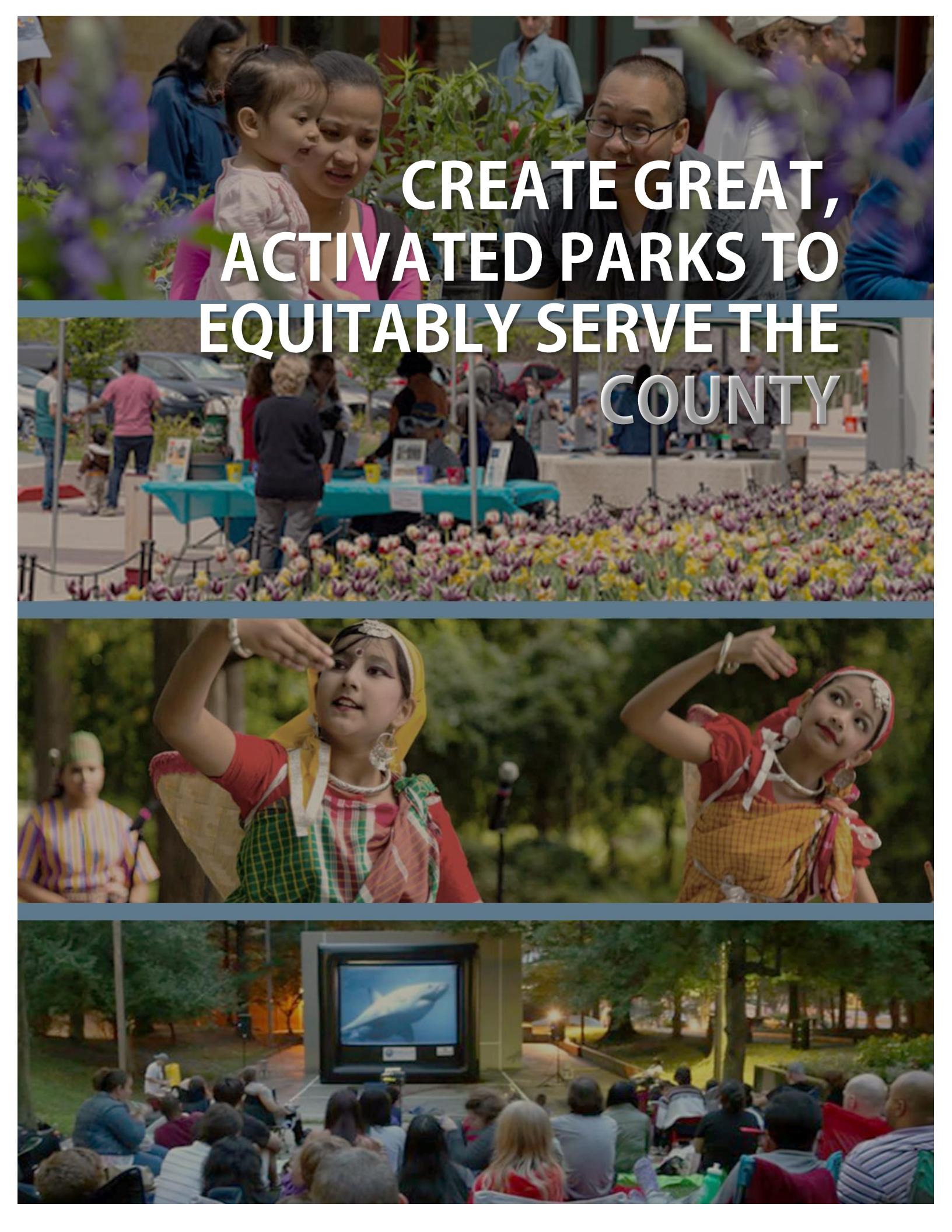
- Complete an Athletic Fields Strategic Plan to align the services and functions of athletic fields in the County with the needs and expectations of the community, and the mission, mandates and resources of Montgomery County Parks.
- Identify existing parkland or potential new parkland to provide exceptional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

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

Continue to balance repurposing and renovation with development and acquisition

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.



CREATE GREAT, ACTIVATED PARKS TO EQUITABLY SERVE THE COUNTY

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Create Great, Activated Parks to Equitably Serve the County

Providing spaces and programs that bring people together is a major goal of the *2017 PROS Plan*. Parks should provide activated open spaces where people can feel welcome independent of income, race or ethnicity. A basic requirement of human well-being is a feeling of inclusiveness. The significant increase in density in Montgomery County makes parks and open space areas the “outdoor living rooms” for many existing and new communities. Social gathering spaces, events, and promoting equitable access to parks and recreation for all populations was a clear priority throughout the *Needs Assessment*. The participants of focus groups from foreign-born segments of the population in particular expressed the need for central gathering spaces to meet people of their own and other cultures.

STRATEGIES

The strategies below are derived from citizens’ responses to surveys and focus groups as documented in the *Needs Assessment*, and lay the groundwork for the specific recommended actions.

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, activated parks that facilitate social gathering to serve areas of the County with the highest population and employment.

- Create “signature” energized public spaces that will become regional destinations in areas of highest density.
- Systematically identify needs for social gathering, active recreation, and contemplative recreation across the areas of higher population density in the County, by applying the

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methodologies of the *Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan (EPS FMP) for Parks in Mixed Use and Higher Density Areas (EPS FMP)*, currently under development, and through those methodologies:

- Prioritize acquisition, development, programming for parks in the areas of greatest identified need.
- Develop and apply a more robust urban design framework to create urban park recommendations for future planning and regulatory review.
- 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.

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

- Provide parks in areas of higher concentrations of lower income households with low walkable access to parks, recreation and open spaces, as identified to the Park Equity tool and staff analysis.
- 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 priority when recommending new parks and open spaces in master plans.

Provide platforms for 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, to interest in, and 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



Steward and Interpret Natural and Cultural Resources

Prioritizing the management and protection of, and public access to 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. Numerous studies have demonstrated over the years that people intrinsically value nature and physical evidence, in the form of standing structures, of their past in the landscape. Educating and interpreting our resources to help people clearly understand the value of natural and biological diversity, ecological significance and environmental benefits of our natural resources as well as the meaning of our cultural resources is essential to building tomorrow's stewards.

A clear priority of County residents is to continue to acquire and provide access to the best of each resource type and to while devoting sufficient resources to take care of what we have. Citizens ranked trails, natural space, wildlife habitat, and nature recreation as the top three priorities for parks, across a variety of demographic segments. Interest was also very strong in taking part in our cultural amenities through museums and interpretive programs. Residents prioritized nature 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.

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, and achieving comprehensive land planning priorities across the Park system – including areas where we have the highest concentration of lower income residents. Montgomery Parks is poised to prioritize park acquisition to achieve the most important service to our public, for increased, accessible open space in our more populated areas and in our areas of our natural areas.

STRATEGIES

The strategies below are derived from citizens' responses to surveys and focus groups as documented in the Needs Assessment, and lay the groundwork for the specific recommended actions.

- Connect current open spaces, natural areas and historic and cultural sites with surrounding communities using sustainable trails.
- Develop recreational programs and services that work in harmony with efforts to steward natural and cultural resources.
- 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

- Ensure that public access into natural areas is accomplished utilizing standards of a sustainable and well-maintained system of natural surface trails.

- Inventory, restore and maintain natural areas with a focus on those areas of highest natural value.
- 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.

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

Expand cultural resource programming so people have sense of identity and community

- Increase cultural resource programming at all types of parks to include, but not be limited to living history events, music programs, cultural hikes, historic re-enactments, foodways, crafts demonstrations, archaeology programs for families, etc.
- 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.
- Work to ensure archaeological sites are protected and/or interpreted wherever possible.

Continue to acquire areas of highest quality natural habitat, including

- Improved access to natural resource-based recreation
- Unique or critical habitats
- Areas of benefit to Best Natural Areas or Biodiversity Areas
- Areas essential to improvement of water or air quality

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.

Inside back cover

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