



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

MCPB Item # _____

Date: 11 / 29 / 2018

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 19, 2018

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Michael F. Riley, Director of Parks
Mitra Pedoeem, Deputy Director, Administration
John Nissel, Deputy Director, Operations
Michael Ma, Division Chief, Park Development Division (PDD)
Brenda Sandberg, Real Estate Management Supervisor, PDD

FROM: Joshua Kaye, Real Estate Specialist (PDD)

SUBJECT: Land Acquisition Recommendation: Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park
Sunninghorse River, LLC Property
4905 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20816
1,848 square feet, more or less, improved

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff requests the following action by the Montgomery County Planning Board:

Approve Resolution 18-085 to acquire the Sunninghorse River, LLC property as an addition to Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park for a negotiated purchase price of \$250,000 to be funded with grant money from Maryland's Program Open Space (POS).

The Sunninghorse River, LLC, property is outlined in red on Figure 2, and Resolution 18-085 is attached.

SUMMARY

This acquisition is being recommended as an addition to Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park. The property will benefit this constrained park in a high density residential community by providing additional space for future amenities, improved visibility and public access to the park, and necessary access for park maintenance and operations.

Figure 1: Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park location between Westbard and Friendship Heights

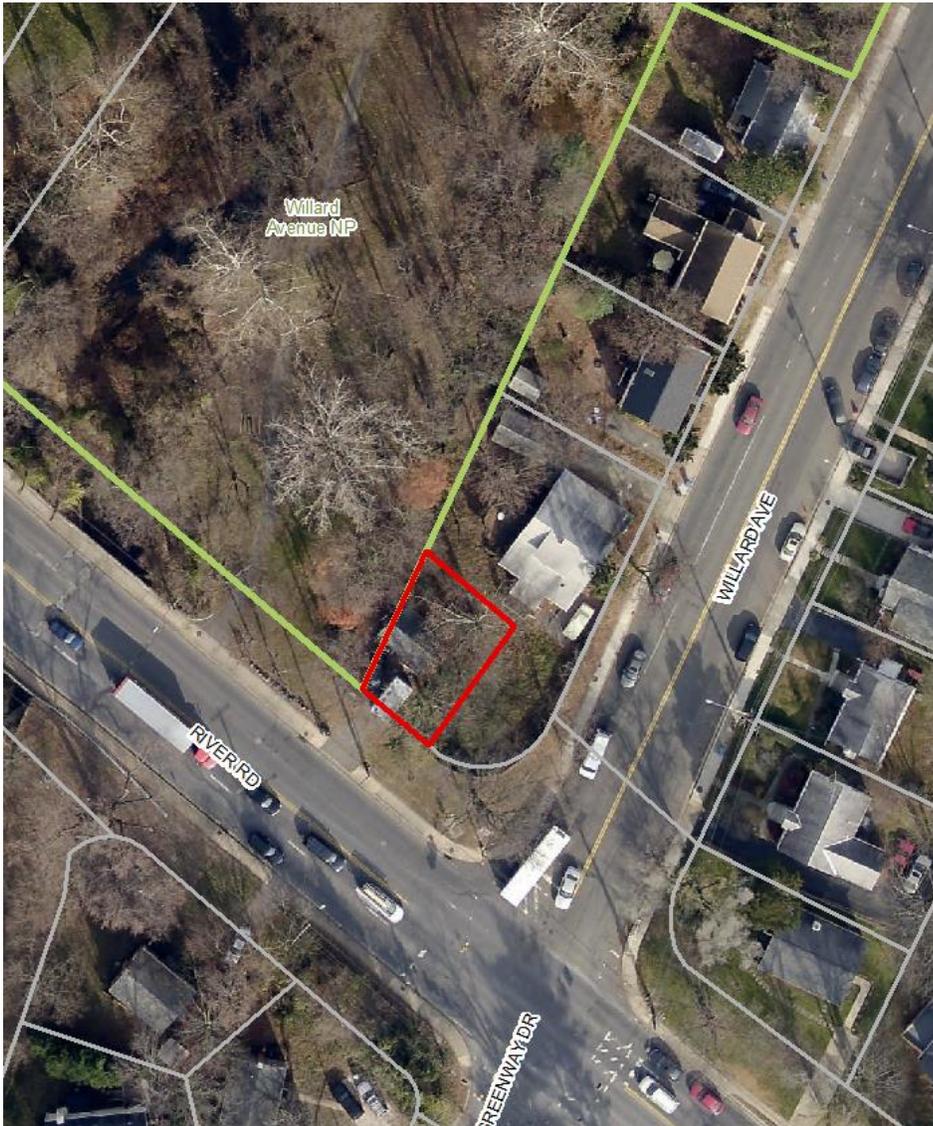


PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The Sunninghorse River, LLC, property consists of 1,848 square feet of land, more or less, improved. The subject property, zoned R-60, is located on the north side of River Road, west of Willard Avenue just outside the center of Friendship Heights. The property address is 4905 River Road and is legally described as Part of Lot P1, in a subdivision known as West Friendship. The property includes a 315 sq. ft., above grade, one-story brick colonial single-family dwelling, purportedly built in 1940. The property was originally owned by WSSC; the current building was constructed to be a WSSC sewer pump house but was never commissioned. The residence is in average physical condition and is currently being leased.

The property directly adjoins Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park. The site is characterized as having flat to moderately sloping topography. Mature tree canopy covers both the existing park and subject property. There are no apparent water features such as streams, seeps, springs, or wetlands on the property itself. Public water and sewer is available. The owner is a willing seller and the property is being acquired through negotiation, in fee simple, with no reservations.

Figure 2: Sunninghorse River LLC Property adjacent to Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park



MASTER PLAN AND POLICY RATIONALE

This property is an opportunity acquisition that supports the goals and objectives in the 2012 PROS Plan, Vision 2030 Strategic Plan for Parks and Recreation, and the recently adopted Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan. All of these planning documents highlight the importance of parks and open space needs for urban communities to promote healthy living through diverse recreation and leisure activities. The acquisition of the Sunninghorse River, LLC property, supports many of the goals and objectives of these adopted policies and plans as described below. Acquisition of additional lots along the Willard Avenue road frontage may be pursued over time to amplify the benefits of park expansion in this location.

Urban Parks Policy

Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park is located adjacent to the very high-density community of Friendship Heights and is just east of the growing Westbard community – both communities within easy walking

distance of this Park. This park functions as an urban park because of its location, enhancing the urban quality of life by providing green relief from the built environment, a sense of place, and an opportunity to connect with community and nature. While the park already provides a significant opportunity for an urban nature experience, most of the existing 6.12-acre park is within the stream valley buffer and floodplain for the tributary to Little Falls Branch that traverses the park, thus severely constraining the park amenities that can be provided. These constraints limit the functionality of the park and result in only a few facilities to serve the adjacent community, consisting of a playground, one half basketball court, and a paved trail with exercise equipment.

The community has expressed interest during recent park upgrades in adding more active recreation facilities to this park. However, the environmental and design constraints of the site limit the opportunity to provide those desired amenities. Acquisition of this small property is the key first step in expanding the potential for better urban park amenities in this park.

Figure 3: Environmental Constraints, Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park



Urban Design Guidelines (Pending)

A new focus on the design elements of existing and new urban parks is being applied to various park design and acquisition projects. Standards to help the Parks Department and private property owners design better urban open spaces are currently in development and will be presented to the Planning Board soon for review and approval (*Design Guidelines for Urban Parks and Open Spaces*). Evaluation of Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park by these urban design principles suggests that there are many potential

benefits of acquiring this property and others along the Willard Avenue road frontage. Acquisition of this property will begin to achieve benefits based on urban design standards and will have the following specific benefits for the park:

- Improves visibility from street and corner
- Makes park more visible and more safe
- Encourages more active use by increasing exposure
- Increases park road frontage and decreases park edge facing the backs of homes

Park Planning and Park Design staff support this acquisition as an opportunity to improve the functionality and urban design characteristics of this park within an urban, down-county setting.

Timeliness of Opportunity to Expand Park

The community immediately surrounding Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park consists of high rise residential and single-family homes on small lots. Many of the smaller single-family homes in this community are undergoing demolition and replacement with significantly larger homes, including several directly across Willard Avenue from the park. Of the six homes adjacent to the park, five of them (including the one on this proposed acquisition) are the original smaller homes from the community's initial construction.

Since these lots have not yet been rebuilt with large modern homes, they are still relatively affordable for this down-county urban community. This situation creates a current market opportunity to expand Willard Avenue Park with one or more acquisitions of these adjacent lots.

Park Needs & Proposed Use

Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park provides green space and limited park amenities within which residents and workers of the Friendship Heights and nearby residential areas may relax (contemplative experiences), gather with friends (social experiences), and exercise (active recreation). However, the constrained nature of the park limits the amenities that can serve social gathering and active recreation needs.

The proposed acquisition will add an additional 1,848 square feet of land to the existing urban park. While this property will add only a small area of land to the park (approximately 0.04 acres), this corner parcel provides some key benefits for the current operations and maintenance of the park and creates the potential for additional recreational amenities in the future as the population continues to grow.

Improved Operational Configuration

Maintenance access to the Park is currently difficult at the small parking area off River Road, the only curb cut that accesses Willard Avenue Park. Access to the east side of the park for maintenance vehicles is limited by the lack of curb cuts and the limitations of the trail bridge over the stream. The curb cut on this parcel will provide critical vehicle access into the east side of the park. Park operations staff strongly support this acquisition for the benefit of providing additional maintenance access on the east side of the stream.

Expanded Developable Footprint

This proposed acquisition is the first step in adding new acreage to the park outside environmentally constrained areas to support additional park facilities. This acquisition alone provides space to create a better pedestrian gateway into the park at the corner of River Road and Willard Avenue. Combined with one or more additional lots along Willard Avenue, additional space can be created that can provide in-

demand recreational facilities such as an Urban Dog Park and Skate Spot. The community surrounding this park recently has requested a dog park and a skate spot.

Start Up Costs & Operating Budget Impact (OBI)

Costs to incorporate this property into the existing park will be very low. The primary initial cost will be to remove the small dwelling on the property and to create appropriate maintenance access from the property's curb cut to the eastern portion of the park.

OBI for the ongoing management of this addition to the park will be minimal. The maintenance of this small property will be absorbed by Park Operations and added to the routine maintenance program that currently exists at the park.

Conclusion

Park staff continually strive to protect and enhance the many parks the Department owns and operates, and acquisition of this lot will provide benefits to the existing park both now and in the future.

Attachment: Resolution #18-085

CC: Bill Tyler
Jeff Devlin
Jai Cole
Darryl McSwain
Jim Poore
Kristi Williams
Shuchi Vera
David Vismara
Megan Chung

MCPB

18-085

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (“Commission”) is authorized by Md. Code Ann., Land Use §17-101 (formerly Article 28, Section 5-101), to acquire, develop, maintain and operate a public park system within the Maryland-Washington Metropolitan District; and

WHEREAS, the Montgomery County Planning Board received and considered a recommendation from staff of the Commission, in closed session on November 15, 2018, that it approve the acquisition of 1,848 square feet (0.0424 acres) of land, more or less, improved, (the “Property”) from Sunninghorse River, LLC, a Maryland limited liability company (the “Seller”), identified as Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation’s Tax Account Number 07-502-00437772, as an addition to Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park; and

WHEREAS, there are sufficient Program Open Space (POS) monies available in the Commission’s FY-19 Local Acquisition Program CIP to pay the \$250,000 negotiated purchase price for the Property; and

WHEREAS, the Property meets parkland acquisition criteria as an addition to Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the acquisition of the Property from the Seller as described above, for a purchase price of \$250,000, in accordance with a proposed Land Purchase Agreement between the Commission and the Seller, is hereby approved by the Montgomery County Planning Board on this 29th day of November, 2018 and the Executive Director is authorized to execute said Agreement on behalf of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

* * * * *

This is to certify the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a resolution adopted by the Montgomery County Planning Board of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission on motion of Commissioner _____, seconded by Commissioner _____, with Commissioners _____, _____, _____, _____, and _____ voting in favor of the motion at its regular meeting held on Thursday, November 29th 2018 in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Casey Anderson, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board