**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Donald Cochran, Director of Parks
Mike Riley, Acting Chief, Park Development Division
Doug Alexander, Design and Project Management Supervisor

FROM: Kathleen Dearstine, Landscape Architect

SUBJECT: Black Hill Regional Park Master Plan and Park Access Road Feasibility Study

I. RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the proposed Master Plan without any additional public vehicular access from Crystal Rock Drive or other location. In the alternative, should the Board approve the access road, staff recommends Alignment 3 as having the least environmental or cultural resource impact.

II. INTRODUCTION

A copy of the Public Hearing draft of the Black Hill Regional Park Master Plan and a copy of the report on the Park Access Road Feasibility Study are attached. Included in the attachments are additional written comments from the public (See Attachment G).

Black Hill Regional Park has been in existence for over 14 years. This Master Plan was created to provide policy direction for future development and renovation of recreational facilities within the Park. The Plan was created with input from surrounding communities, park visitors, and staff, and is designed to delineate a long-range vision for the Park.

As described in the Master Plan, the vision for the Park, in brief, is to maintain the natural character of the Park while preserving and enhancing the visitor's experience by optimizing use and access to the lake, improving passive recreational opportunities;

improving park operational facilities; renovating existing facilities; and adding a few new strategically sited recreational facilities.

On November 4, 1999, the Planning Board approved the Final Staff Draft Master Plan with changes, to be released as a Public Hearing Draft. The primary change directed by the Board was to separate the Master Plan and the Management Plan into two documents. This change was incorporated into the Public Hearing Draft Plan, which was made available to the public on December 3, 1999.

On January 6, 2000, the Planning Board held a public hearing on the Black Hill Master Plan. Testimony was taken from the public on all aspects of the plan. The Master Plan Draft accompanying this memo incorporates changes made by staff based on that testimony. (The transcript from that public hearing and staff responses to the testimony accompanied the March 15, 2002 memo to the Board).

At the Public Hearing, testimony was received from the Germantown Alliance in favor of implementing the second point of access to the park from Crystal Rock Drive as shown in the Germantown Master Plan. Based on this testimony, the Board directed staff to study the access road and return with a recommendation. In preparing the Black Hill Master Plan, staff had previously evaluated the access road and had rejected it based on environmental impacts.

To respond to the Board's request, staff hired a consultant, Frederick Ward Associates, Inc., to conduct the Park Access Road Study (see consultant's report entitled: Enhanced Vehicular Access Feasibility Study, which staff provided to the Board). Their analysis considered three areas: Community planning, environmental/cultural resources, engineering feasibility and cost. The study resulted in four alternatives: three possible alignments and a "no-build" option. The first alignment is least favorable. It is the longest alignment and would have the greatest impact on the natural and cultural environment of the park. The second alignment is an extension of the WSSC Pumping Station access road. The most favorable of all the alignments is the third, which would require an easement through the Far North Village development that adjoins the park on the east side, but has the least impact on resources and is least costly. The fourth option is to maintain the trail access planned from this side of the park and not to provide for vehicular access. This is referred to as the "no-build" option.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE PARK MASTER PLAN

Black Hill Regional Park is a unique resource within the park system as well as the Washington metropolitan area. The Park provides significant passive recreational opportunities and access to the Little Seneca Lake, one of a limited number of large public-access lakes in the mid-Atlantic region. At the same time, the Park encompasses a substantial acreage of unbroken forest cover and a diverse mix of open landscapes. The combination of limited recreational activities within a predominantly natural setting makes the Park both useful and attractive for a wide range of constituents.

The Master Plan will provide a policy document, intended for M-NCPPC staff and the general public, which delineates the vision and use of the Park for the next 20 years. It will also give staff clear direction in order to prepare and prioritize CIP development recommendations for future budget cycles.

The Master Plan seeks to improve the Park through a series of focused recommendations, which address specific problems that have been identified during the Park's fourteen-year history. More importantly, the Plan is intended to realize the optimum potential of the Park to provide a natural respite, but also to help meet regional recreational needs.

The core vision for the future of Black Hill Regional Park promoted by this Master/Management Plan study is comprised of the following four provisions:

- Preserve and enhance the visitor's ability to experience the essential qualities of the Park, by optimizing use and access to Little Seneca Lake, improving recreational opportunities such as trails, and preserving the natural character of the Park;
- Develop new, "strategically sited" recreational facilities, such as new picnic shelters and playground sited on existing developed land, a new boat ramp, possible dog park, and new trails sited on existing utility corridors, old roads and trails;
- Renovate, expand, and replace older facilities in the Park, such as boat rental facilities, to eliminate inefficiencies or crowding and provide safer, more accessible facilities; and
- Provide a means to better operate the Park, primarily through improved park maintenance facilities and infrastructure improvements.

IV. AREA MASTER PLANS

The *Germantown Master Plan*, adopted and approved in 1989, directs the growth of vacant and uncommitted land within the Germantown planning area. The planning area is divided into eight villages, each with a community identity, locally-serving retail center, and a mix of housing types at varying prices and rental levels. Connection by means of pedestrian, bikeway, sidewalk, and roadway systems within each village and between the other villages is an important characteristic.

Churchill Village, where the proposed Park Access Road would be located, is the oldest and most densely populated village with an average density of 8.8 dwelling units per acre. At the time of the *Master Plan*, Churchill Village was nearly completely developed with only 132 of 741 acres remaining to be built out.

The 1989 *Master Plan* recommended policy changes to assure a broader mix of housing choices in Germantown to offset the existing predominance of single-family attached units. The *Plan* set targets for the proportion of single-family detached, single-family attached and multi-family units for the entire planning area and for each village.

This objective shifted the number and proportion of new housing units toward single-family detached and multi-family units.

The proposed Park Access Road appears in two graphic illustrations in the *Master Plan*:

- Churchill Village Analysis Area (Figure 18 – Attachment A)
- Roadway System (Figure 34 – Attachment B).

There is no accompanying text or guidance presented regarding this access road.

In the development of the *Germantown Master Plan*, the Park Access Road was not included in the Preliminary Draft (March 1988) that was presented to the Planning Board, or in the Final Draft (September 1988) forwarded to the Montgomery County Council. The Preliminary Draft contained a suggestion for an extension of Crystal Rock Drive using a 100-foot right-of-way that would bisect a significant portion of Black Hill Regional Park. This suggestion was eliminated from further consideration in the Final Draft Plan forwarded to the County Council.

Research of committee minutes (Planning, Housing and Economic Development) and the adopted minutes of the County Council failed to uncover at what point the Park Access Road was carried forward in the *Germantown Master Plan* maps.

The *Clarksburg Master Plan*, adopted in June 1994, strongly supports the opportunity for public open space linkages to the Park. The *Plan* does not support widening West Old Baltimore Road, but supports retaining its rural character. The *Plan* proposes the extension of Newcut Road across I-270 north of West Old Baltimore Road to improve the access from the north into Black Hill Regional Park and to avoid any negative impacts on the Park:

- Generalized Highway and Transit Plan (Figure 40 – Attachment C)
- Proposed Interchange Design Concepts (Figure 41 – Attachment D).

The *Clarksburg Master Plan* also emphasizes bikeway access to the Park.

V. BENEFITS OF AN ADDITIONAL PARK ACCESS ROAD

Germantown residents presently have two potential routes to enter Black Hill Regional Park by vehicle: one route on the west side of I-270 uses Clopper Road (MD 117) north to Clarksburg Road (MD 121) to West Old Baltimore Road to reach the Lake Ridge Drive entry into the park. This route is approximately 12.5 miles from the Germantown Town Center at MD 118 and Middlebrook Road. A second route uses MD 118 east to Frederick Road (MD 355) to West Old Baltimore Road to the Park entrance. This route is approximately 8.5 miles from the Germantown Town Center.

The number of people to benefit from improved access to Black Hill Regional Park via a new Park Access Road from Crystal Rock Drive as compared to the “no-build” option in 2000 is 18,570. In 2025, it is 21,486. For a full discussion of the need and purpose for the access road, see the Consultant’s Park Access Road report.

An alternative entrance has been voiced in the past suggesting that the same users to the south could be serviced by using the Black Hill Road entrance from Clarksburg Road. Should the suggested entrance from Clarksburg Road be utilized, the number of households within the two planning areas would change. Those areas west of the Park would most likely use the Clarksburg entrance and all areas east of I-270 would use the existing entrance.

Staff had previously assessed the Black Hill Road access option and rejected it based on a number of factors. Black Hill Road exists only as a service entrance and cannot be converted to public use without realignment, engineering, and environmental analysis. Staff continues to recommend against this road access option as more fully discussed in Attachment E, Black Hill Road Access Option.

VI. SUMMARY OF ACCESS ROAD FEASIBILITY STUDY

After reviewing the study submitted from Frederick Ward Associates, it is staff's opinion that the proposed Park Access Road from Crystal Rock Drive into the southeast corner of Black Hill Regional Park should not be included in the Park Master Plan. Although it is likely that the road would be used by a large number of Germantown residents, all three of the road alignments being proposed would have a significant impact on the environment. The clearing for the road would affect large numbers of trees and subsequently affect the bird habitat of the Park. From past projects, it has been discovered that additional trees are lost at the edge of the new clearing for 5 to 7 years after construction. The area with the greatest impact is the first 10 feet of forested area along a newly cut edge.

All three alignments will cross Little Seneca Creek. In order to avoid permanent impacts to the floodplain and non-tidal wetlands, a bridge spanning the creek would require concrete abutments higher up on each bank and above the floodplain. As part of the construction of the road, storm water management ponds would have to be constructed to control storm run-offs of 10-year return storms and to reduce pollution from pavement surfaces. These are required to protect waterways farther downstream. Black Hill Regional Park is located within a "Special Protection Area" (SPA) of Montgomery County. Development and construction within an SPA must comply with a higher level of storm water treatment, which means an enhanced level of treatment for storm water quality. As a whole, M-NCPPC fully complies with SPA requirements within the Park System.

If the Board should elect to include the access road into the Master Plan, staff would recommend Alternative #3. This alternative has the least impact on the environment and is the least costly.

In addition to other impacts, all three alignments will affect existing and planned trails in the Park. These include several CIP projects underway in various stages of planning and design: three hard surface trail projects – Spinning Wheel Trail, Crystal Rock Connector, and Waters Landing Trail Reconstruction; a natural surface trail project – Ten Mile Creek Bridge; and the new Maintenance Yard (see Attachment F).

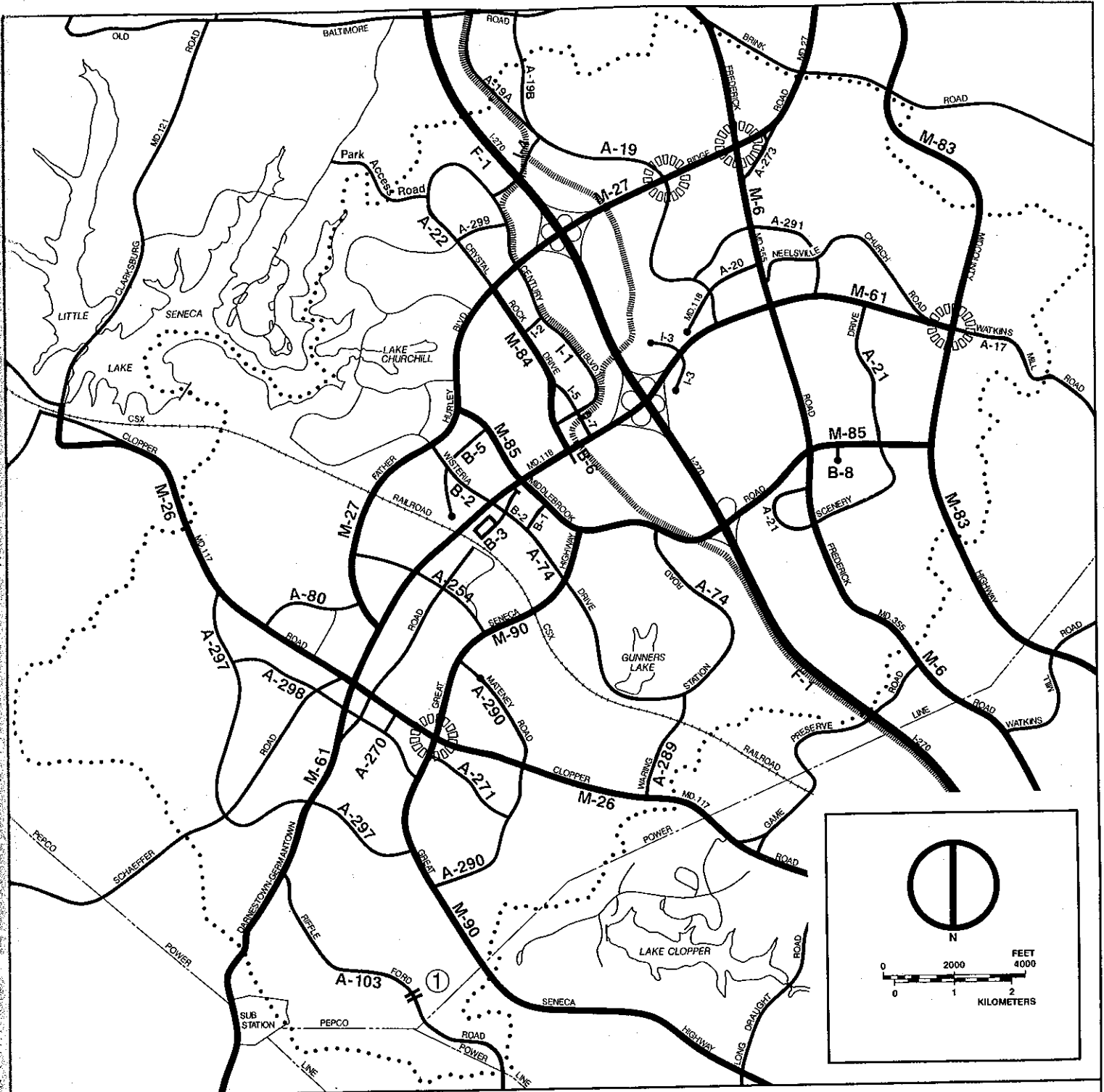
VII. COMMUNITY MEETING

Frederick Ward Associates and staff presented the four alternatives for the access road to the citizens at a community meeting on Wednesday, January 16, 2000 at Seneca Lodge. All comments, oral and written, are included in the consultant's report. The majority of the questions and comments from the community were related to the Crystal Rock Drive proposal, but there was some interest in access off Black Hill Road. The majority of the participants that evening were in favor of the "no-build" option. Interest was expressed by the group for better trailhead parking to access the pedestrian trails into the park at this location. Although not a vehicular access, the existing Crystal Rock Trail project would provide enhanced pedestrian and bike access to the same community. This project will evaluate options to include trailhead parking.

Additional comments from the public are included in Attachment G.


ATTACHMENTS:

- A Germantown Master Plan – Figure 18
- B Germantown Master Plan – Figure 34
- C Clarksburg Master Plan – Figure 40
- D Clarksburg Master Plan – Figure 41
- E Black Hill Road Access Option
- F CIP Projects in Black Hill Regional Park
- G Additional written comments



Roadway System

- Grade-Separated Interchange
- Freeway
- Major Highway
- Arterial(A), Industrial(I), and Business District Roads(B)

 **Comprehensive Amendment to the Master Plan for Germantown**
 Montgomery County, Maryland
 The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

May be closed when Great Seneca Highway is opened to traffic through Great Seneca Park **1**

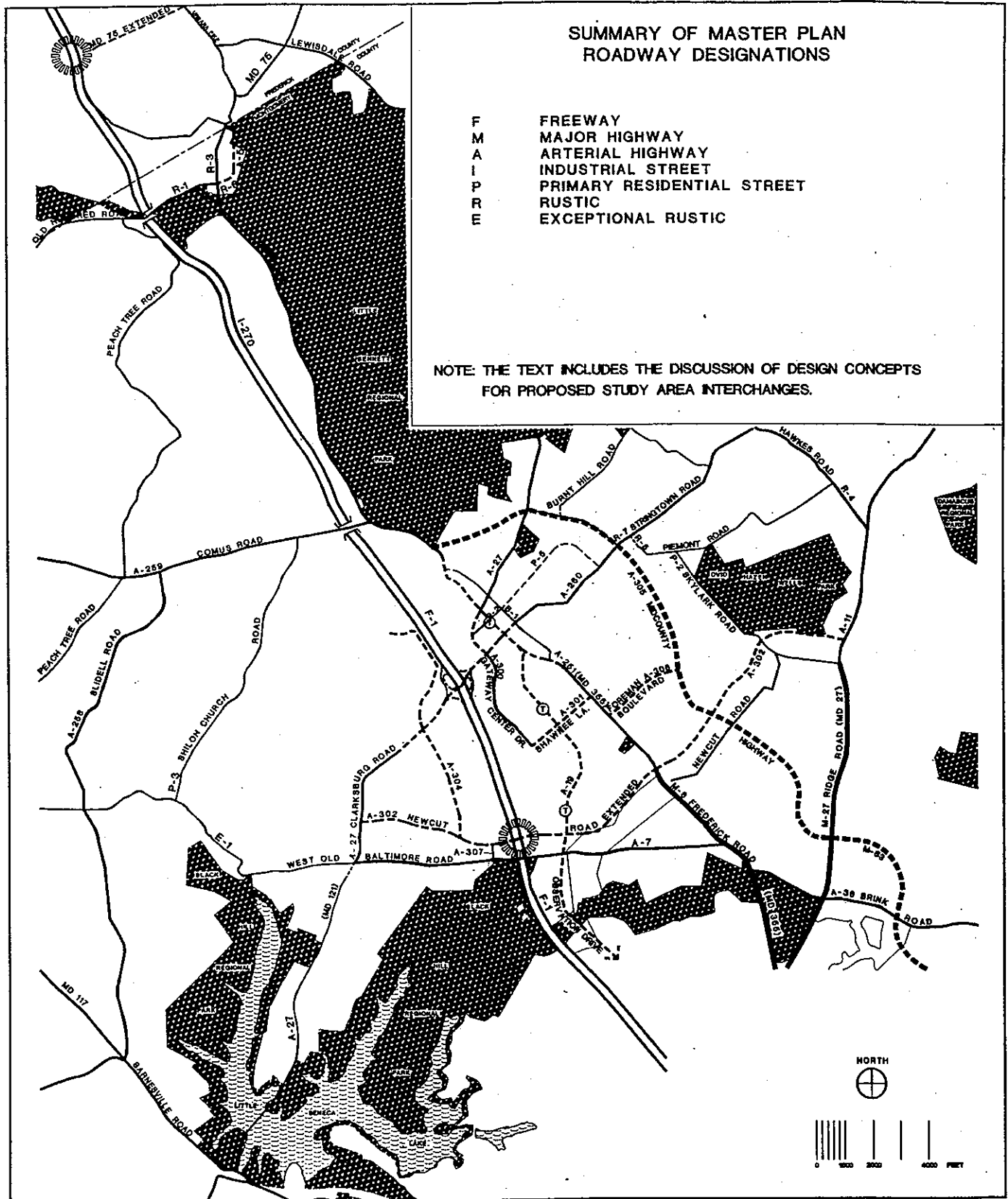
Figure 18



Churchill Village: Analysis Areas

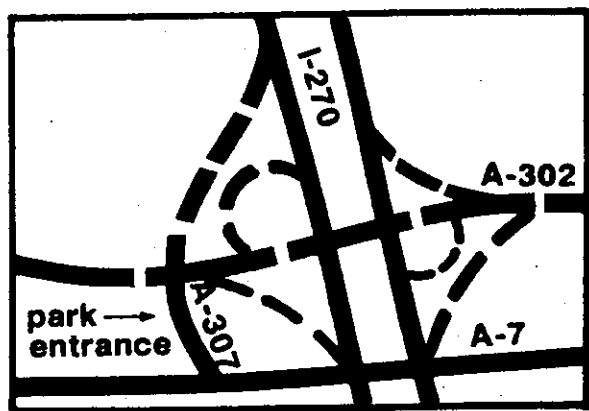
Generalized Highway and Transit Plan

Figure 40

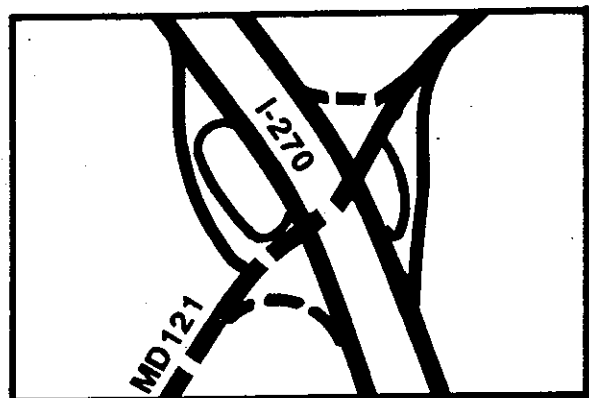


Proposed Interchange Design Concepts

Figure 41



Proposed Interchange -
I-270 at Newcut Road



Existing Interchange -
(with currently designed
modifications) - I-270 at MD 121

BLACK HILL ROAD ACCESS OPTION

At the January 16, 2002 community meeting, the Black Hill Road access proposal was mentioned again as a possible point of vehicular access to the Park. The access would connect Clarksburg Road with Lake Ridge Drive within the Park. Black Hill Road exists only as a service entrance and cannot be converted to public use without realignment, engineering, and environmental analysis. Staff recommends against this option for the following reasons:

1. Park Police, Maintenance, and emergency vehicles now use the Black Hill Road point of access to the Park. These users value this entrance as a means for reaching westerly areas of the Park. Use of this access by the public would impair these functions. In addition, public access at this location would require another point of control for after hours or special events.
2. The present roadway has poor sight distances at the entrance onto Clarksburg Road, which make it unsafe for traffic to exit the park from this location.
3. The existing Black Hill Road passes by three houses fronting the road to the south and additional houses backing onto the right-of-way to the north. Residents have made it clear that they oppose use of this road for an entrance to the park.
4. Black Hill Road is substandard and would need to be widened and upgraded, which would further impact the fronting home sites.
5. An access road at this location would have to be realigned to the south thereby providing a safer entrance and avoiding the existing houses. The alignment would require a substantial bridge and significant engineering and environmental analysis.
6. Constructing both this entrance and the one from Crystal Rock Drive would be inappropriate. It would create a road connection through the heart of the Park. As the consultant's analysis of users shows, significant overlap exists for the two proposals. Therefore, the decision is to build either one or none of these points of access, but not both. The consultant supplied an analysis for the number of households most likely to use a Clarksburg Road entrance. Those areas west of the Park would use a Clarksburg Road entrance and all areas east of I-270 would use the existing entrance as shown in the following:

Number of Households (Germantown and Clarksburg Planning Areas)

Preferred Park Access	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Clarksburg Road	47185	57232	58922	69597	65903	66114
Existing Entrance	22021	31836	24386	50699	56388	56309

BLACK HILL REGIONAL PARK – ON-GOING CIP PROJECTS

The Black Hill Maintenance Yard and several trail projects planned for the Park are currently in various stages of planning and design. CIP projects located in Black Hill Regional Park include the following:

- Maintenance Facility – located at the northeast corner of the Park, adjacent to the entrance. The design for the facility is complete and construction is targeted to begin in August of this year. The facility is expected to be completed by early fall of next year.
- Spinning Wheel Hard Surface Trail – located east of Ridge Drive, is two miles in length and will connect parking lot #6 with the Crystal Rock Trail Connector to Crystal Rock Drive. Facility planning is in progress and will be presented to the Board in July of this year. The project is funded through design, but construction will require funding in a future CIP.
- Crystal Rock Hard Surface Trail Connector – located in the northeast portion of the Park and planned to connect and both the Spinning Wheel and Waters Landing trails to access from Crystal Rock Drive. A portion of the trail is being provided by WSSC as part of their pumping station project. Planning and design began in February this year and will continue through design with completion in September of this year. As a trail connector, the Crystal Rock Connector will be prioritized for construction using level-of-effort funding in the Trails: Hard Surface Design and Construction PDF. Staff will present the trail as part of the Trail Connector Analysis in the summer of this year. This trail connection will include consideration for trailhead parking as recommended in the Master Plan.
- Ten Mile Creek Natural Surface Bridge – locate at the northwest portion of the Park and to cross the Ten Mile Creek south of West Old Baltimore Road. Planning and design began in February of this year and will be completed in September. The bridge will be constructed beginning July 2004 using Trails: Natural Surface Design and Construction funds.
- Waters Landing Hard Surface Trail Reconstruction – located on the east side of the lake and connecting Wisteria Drive to the south with Spinning Wheel Drive to the north, the project will reconstruct a two-mile length of existing trail. Facility planning will begin in June of this year and be completed in the fall, at which time the project will be presented to the Board. The reconstruction of the trail will be programmed for construction in a future CIP.

In addition, the WSSC pumping station located adjacent to Park property and with access from Crystal Rock is under construction and anticipated to be in service in 2005. As part of the project, a section of boardwalk will be constructed by WSSC to complete the Crystal Rock Connector.

BLACK HILL REGIONAL PARK
ENHANCED VEHICULAR ACCESS FEASIBILITY STUDY
PUBLIC HEARING
January 16, 2002

PUBLIC COMMENT PAGE

FEB 11 2002
PLANNING DEVELOPMENT
DIVISION
MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Name: Marc T. Miller

Address: 14411 Chrisman Hill Dr Boyds, MD 20841

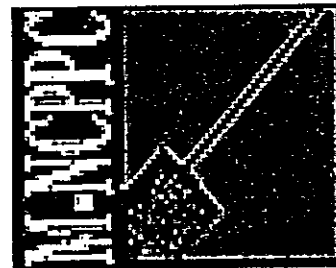
Comments: Building any additional access roads would
disrupt the nature of the park & be dangerous to
pedestrians & wildlife as well.

I am against it.

Marc Miller

Please return comments page to a representative of Maryland – National Capital
Park and Planning Commission or Frederick Ward Associates, Inc.

Thank you for participating in tonight's meeting and for your input into the future
of Black Hill Park.



BLACK HILL REGIONAL PARK
ENHANCED VEHICULAR ACCESS FEASIBILITY STUDY
PUBLIC HEARING
January 16, 2002

PUBLIC COMMENT PAGE

Name: C. Imperatore

Address: 14411 Chrisman Hill Dr Boyds MD 20841

Comments: Although this study was initiated because Germantown's Master Plan shows an additional entrance to the Park, and the Park's plan does not, the environmental impact of adding any other entrance for vehicles (with motors) would diminish the quality of the park experience for many more people than it would serve.

In the master plans for the Boyds and Clarksburg communities, capacity and congestion of existing roads will be increased anyway. Permitting encroachment into the park will destroy wildlife, plant life and quality of life for those in the park, and I do not favor it.

C. Imperatore

Please return comments page to a representative of Maryland - National Capital Park and Planning Commission or Frederick Ward Associates, Inc.

Thank you for participating in tonight's meeting and for your input into the future of Black Hill Park.

