

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Biannual Report describes the activities of the Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning for the period from April 2004 through September 2004. The Department continues to work on many planning and park initiatives that contribute to the high quality of life enjoyed by Montgomery County residents. For more information please visit our website at [www.mc-mncppc.org](http://www.mc-mncppc.org).

### **FOREVER GREEN**

The theme for this Biannual Report is Forever Green. The Department recently prepared a presentation that summarized County programs leading to a green future for existing and future residents. The presentation covers County, State and Federal parkland, agricultural preservation programs, homeowner association open space, forest conservation, and other conservation properties. Many of the planning and park programs discussed later in this report support our Forever Green initiatives, including the following program highlights:

- Green space initiatives effect 47% of the County's land...(148,000 acres),
- The largest component is the 91,00 acres of RDT land (pressure on that land is being addressed as noted elsewhere),
- Forest Conservation has preserved 5,600 acres since 1993,
- M-NCPPC park land now exceeds 32,200 acres.

### **PARK ACTIVITIES**

A number of efforts are underway to both improve the experience of our park users and to increase the Department's efficiency in providing these services. The following summarizes the most significant of these projects.

#### **Brookside Gardens**

Brookside Gardens was chosen as the location for the first Heart Smart trail in the Montgomery County park system. As the result of a partnership between our Department and the Montgomery County Recreation Department, the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and several corporate sponsors, bronze markers embedded at one-tenth mile intervals now identify a walker's progress along the existing mile-long trail that circles these beautiful gardens. The Heart Smart trail initiative is aimed at providing County residents with safe places to walk and jog as they reduce their risk of heart disease, diabetes and related health issues.

The dedication of Reflection Terrace completed a public/private partnership among the Executive Branch, the Montgomery Parks Foundation, Brookside Gardens, donors, and M-NCPPC to design and install a memorial site at Brookside Gardens. The site remembers those lost to the senseless violence of the sniper and will be a place where the community goes to reflect and hope for a peaceful world.

The Brookside Gardens School of Botanical Art and Illustration opened on September 10<sup>th</sup> at McCrillis Gardens. The school will promote and teach botanical art while pursuing excellence in both classical and innovative approaches. Internationally known botanical artist Margaret Saul is the school's director and principal teacher.

### **ParkPASS**

In an effort to provide greater convenience to customers wishing to enroll in park programs and services, ParkPass was created to offer customers on-line capability to request park permits, register for classes, and make tee-time reservations. During this reporting period, ParkPASS was made available to register for classes at Brookside Gardens. Staff designed a campaign to inform more than 2,000 existing Brookside customers of the new capability. During the first two weeks of implementation of Park PASS at Brookside, 20% of total transactions were conducted online.

### **SmartParks**

SmartParks is a new program that has the primary goal of providing management information to park managers and administrators in a manner that will provide opportunities for more efficient and economical operation of our park system, and improve the stewardship efforts and ethic of our workforce. The system went on-line in early July. The Northern Region, Southern Region, Central Maintenance Division and Horticulture and Arboriculture sections are now using the Work Order Management (WOM) system for all daily tasks. The Park Inventory is loaded and available to users, and the park facility data is being collected, validated and entered. The Park Maintenance Service Center is operational and processing work orders based on calls from residents and employees.

### **Volunteers**

Data for FY04 show that volunteers provided over 52,000 hours of service in the Department—an all-time high. Over 70 projects involving episodic volunteers were coordinated including community service workdays, scout projects, and civic group workdays. An additional 966 individuals volunteer regularly with the Department—working directly with staff in numerous facilities and programs.

A programmatic assessment of volunteerism is currently being conducted. A survey of staff and volunteers had been conducted and results are being analyzed by the Points of Light Foundation. This data should provide the Volunteer Services Office more insight into current attitudes about volunteerism and barriers to service, and will result in the development of a strategic plan for volunteerism for the Department.

### **Carry-In, Carry-Out**

After eight months of implementing the Carry-In, Carry-Out program, the Department has removed approximately 1,000 trashcans from parks. In spite of strong community opposition, we continue to believe this program will ultimately be successful. Although a clear

picture of the cost savings of the program has not yet been determined, park managers are beginning to see a decrease in litter, a decrease in work hours for collection, and savings in transfer station fees. A first year evaluation report will be provided to the Council in December.

### **Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA)**

The Commission has recently embarked on another new initiative with our application for national accreditation with the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). Accreditation certifies that the organization meets national standards in areas such as park facility operations and maintenance, including special events programming, community relations, administration, and fiscal management.

We are pleased to report that the CAPRA Visitation Team unanimously approved our accreditation application as being in compliance with all 156 standards. The Commission's involvement in this endeavor is significant because it required the participation of both Montgomery and Prince George's counties in the review process.

### **Grants**

Earlier this year the Department launched a concerted effort to expand the funding base of external resources with the hiring of a Grants Manager. Both private and public funding sources have been identified based upon Department program funding needs. The Department is working cooperatively with Montgomery Parks Foundation on grants procedures. The grants program is also pursuing corporate gifts and working in collaboration with the Department's Enterprise Division, where appropriate, to optimize partnering opportunities in the private sector.

## **PLANNING ACTIVITIES**

### **Housing**

Many activities are underway in support of our Housing Montgomery initiative. A Workforce Housing Information Packet was designed to (a) expand understanding of the need for workforce housing to the business and civic communities, and (b) promote the development of employer assisted housing throughout the county.

An Employer Assisted Workforce Housing Information Roundtable, co-sponsored by the Planning Board and Fannie Mae, is scheduled for November 10, 2004, to promote development of employer assisted housing programs throughout Montgomery County. The Roundtable will bring together key business, corporate, and government leadership to focus on the need for workforce housing in Montgomery County.

The Planning Board recently endorsed an Employer Assisted Housing (EAH) Program for all full-time employees at Park and Planning. The Department added the EAH Program to its employee benefit portfolio. This new EAH Program helps the Department to address the need

for housing that is affordable to its own workforce. It is the first government-sponsored EAH program in the County.

## **Transportation**

Considerable staff effort has been directed to participation in the Intercounty Connector Environmental Impact Study (EIS), including monthly meetings with the State Highway Administration and various technical group meetings to provide expertise in determining proper stream crossings, identifying potential mitigation and stewardship sites, and evaluating impacts to park resources. Future efforts will include providing the Planning Board with sufficient information to properly comment on the draft EIS and make decisions on park resource replacement and compensation.

The Montgomery County Annual Development Approval and Congestion (ADAC) Report, requested by the County Council during the 2003-05 Annual Growth Policy (AGP) Policy Element, was completed during this period. This document, which reports on countywide transportation system congestion using data and analysis available from current sources, is the first one of its kind. It gives the Planning Board and County Council information useful for guiding upcoming transportation capital programs. In addition, the report provides guidance on where additional data collection and analysis resources can best be targeted.

The Countywide Bikeway Functional Master Plan, Planning Board (Final) Draft, was approved by the Planning Board on April 22, and is now before the County Council. The Master Plan of Highways map update is completed, incorporating the recent adoption by the Council of the Master Plan of Highways (transportation) Amendment.

## **Study of Impacts of Non-Master Planned ICC Alignments on Affected Master Planning Areas**

The State has identified non-master planned alternatives for the ICC in its document entitled *Alternatives Retained for Definite Study*, released July, 2004, which include deviations from the master plan alignment along Corridor I, and several northern alternatives (Corridor 2). The State can choose among these non-master planned alignments as its preferred alternative, even though community impacts may be significant. Staff reports on community impact already presented to Planning Board indicate a variety of issue that may have to be addressed by future plan amendments, *e.g.*, isolated communities, impaired historic resources, threats to drinking water quality, potential grounds for rezoning based on “change.” In recognition of the possibility that non-master planned alignments may be selected, based on the alternatives in the ARDS document, staff has begun a study of the impact of these alignments on current master plans, and how those impacts may lead to recommended changes in comprehensive master plans along the alternative alignment. Staff will present its initial work on this study in its comments on the DEIS. If non-master-planned alignments are selected, this work will form the basis for further analysis and recommendations with respect to future master plan amendments in these affected planning areas. In addition, this study, responsive to the ARDS report which identified alternatives accepted by the State, gives the Planning Board a legal basis to reserve right-of-way in alternative alignments, should it choose to do so.

The Planning Board has made no decision as to whether it will or will not place non-master planned alignments in reservation. The Board may consider other options to protect these alignments, such as a condition of preliminary plan approval that requires applicants to give the State Highway Administration 90 days' advance written notice of any building permit application, which will allow the State to take appropriate action to protect those alignments.

### **Agricultural Preservation**

Over the past several years the Planning Board has recommended a range of initiatives to address concerns facing the Agricultural Preservation programs in the County. Concerns about subdivisions in the Rural Density Transfer Zone led to the recommendation of changes to the Subdivision Regulations, the Zoning Ordinance, and the Road Code. Later, a Task Force spent almost a year working out a series of recommendations to address a wide range of concerns about the Transferable Development Rights program. All these initiatives were strongly supported by the Planning Board and sent to the Council for its support before changes to the indicated regulatory tools were initiated. To date the Council has not taken a position on these initiatives; yet most of the problems that they were designed to address continue or are an even greater concern today.

The Rural Area Planning Team has been directed to bring these initiatives back to the Planning Board, recommending which are still appropriate, and identifying any new approaches that may be relevant. The Planning Board will then direct the staff to prepare appropriate amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations, the Road Code, and Master Plans if appropriate, for introduction at the Council. The Agricultural Reserve and the great experiment of the Transferable Development Rights program are too important and under too many increasing threats to not move forward with these proposals.

### **Master Plans**

The past six-months was busy period for the master-planning program. The Planning Board (Final) Draft of Shady Grove Sector Plan and Olney Master Plan were completed, as was the Staff Draft of the Woodmont Triangle Amendment to the Bethesda CBD Sector Plan. The Staff Draft of the Damascus Master Plan and Gaithersburg Master Plan are nearly completed and work is underway on the Twinbrook Sector Plan.

A new initiative contained in this Biannual Report is a proposal to revise the master plan process and program in the future. As part of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite, staff has been analyzing current procedures, processes, and regulations to determine how will they work to promote mixed-use and residential projects in our central business districts and transit station areas. Staff engaged the services of the Urban Land Institute to provide a technical assistance panel on this subject.

One of the recommendations of the panel is the need to focus our planning efforts on the County's transportation corridors and transit centers. We have, of course, devoted significant resources to planning for our central business districts and transit stations. These efforts will continue as evidenced by the Shady Grove and Twinbrook Plans currently underway.

Our corridors, however, have generally not been addressed comprehensively, but rather as pieces of whatever master plan area they appeared in. Many of these corridors, including Georgia Avenue, Veirs Mill Road, University Boulevard, Randolph Road, New Hampshire Avenue, and Rockville Pike, include areas that are not particularly attractive and are, in the words of the ULI Panel, currently underdeveloped. They present an opportunity for providing more housing in areas accessible to transit while at the same time making these areas more aesthetically appealing.

A related issue is the status of our older master plans (e.g. the Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan). Under our normal process these plans would be due for a comprehensive update. However, most of these areas are essentially completely developed and likely have few land use and zoning issues, except for the corridors. We believe the areas without major issues could be dealt with through an abbreviated process that simply confirms the status quo or suggests minor modifications, leaving more resources to be devoted to more controversial issues.

Given this discussion, our proposal for a new master plan process focuses on the idea of looking at our corridors and centers more comprehensively. For example, rather than doing separate updates to the Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan and the Kensington-Wheaton Master Plan, we propose adding a single project to the work program that covers the Wheaton CBD and the Georgia Avenue corridor between Wheaton and Silver Spring. A future plan would include the Glenmont Sector Plan and the Georgia Avenue corridor between Glenmont and Wheaton. Similarly the Town of Kensington Sector Plan, which we are about to begin, will be modified to include the University Boulevard corridor between Kensington and Wheaton.

## **Historic Preservation**

On September 15, the Commission's nominations for additions to the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom were approved. The location of the arrest of William Chaplin at Jesup Blair Park is now included as a site, and the Underground Railroad Experience Hike on the Rural Legacy Trail is now included as a program. Both applications were unanimously approved. Both the site and the program will now be included in the Network, be listed on the official website, [www.cr.nps.gov](http://www.cr.nps.gov), and will be able to use the official logo.