

Biannual Report



Celebrating Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF
PARK AND PLANNING**

**BIANNUAL REPORT
October 2004 to March 2005**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Biannual Report describes the activities of the Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning for the period from October 2004 through March 2005. The Department continues to work on many planning and park initiatives that contribute to the quality of life enjoyed by Montgomery County residents. For more information, please visit our website at www.mc-mncpc.org.

Highlights and new initiatives included in this Biannual Report are summarized as follows:

PARK DIVISIONS

SmartParks

Our recently implemented SmartParks program has the primary goal of providing pertinent information to park managers and administrators to assist with decision-making, provide opportunities for more efficient operations and improve the stewardship efforts of our workforce. Using innovative geographical information system (GIS) and database technologies, the park inventory is loaded and available to users and the park facility data is being collected, validated, and entered. SmartParks is staffed and managed by the Central Maintenance Division at the Park Maintenance Service Center at the Shady Grove Facility. The Center is taking calls from residents and employees, processing work requests, and logging customer comments. The telephone number to the Center is (301) 670-8080.

Please see page 7 for more information on SmartParks.

ParkPASS

ParkPASS, our centralized system for program registrations and facility booking, was launched on August 16, 2004, when Brookside Gardens went online. Five months later, it was joined by our four nature centers. So far nearly 8,000 patrons have opened accounts in ParkPASS and this number is expected to rise sharply in August 2005, when Cabin John and Wheaton indoor ice and tennis facilities become part of the system.

Refer to page 7 for additional information on the ParkPass program.

PLANNING DIVISIONS

Agricultural Reserve

The Department is committed to the preservation of Montgomery County's agricultural heritage. On March 10, the County Executive, County Council and Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning participated in a joint press conference to announce new initiatives to further strengthen agriculture and preserve open space in the County.

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the visionary "Master Plan for Preservation of Agriculture and Open Space" the Department will spearhead a variety of initiatives to reflect 21st century land use issues and agricultural economics. The joint press conference announced plans for a land preservation summit for public and private groups to review a variety of issues important to the future of our Rural Preservation Initiatives.

For additional information on the Agricultural Reserve, please see page 26.

Creating Housing Opportunities

Workforce Housing Policy Development- As the region's home costs continue to soar, County officials have identified the shortage of workforce housing (affordable to households earning above the moderately priced [MPDU] eligibility limit to 120 percent of the area median income) as a growing crisis.

The Department will develop a policy framework to support new legislative, regulatory, and planning initiatives to increase the supply of workforce housing in Montgomery County. The initial product, scheduled for release mid-April 2005, will:

- a. provide a set of basic workforce housing facts and provide definition to the issue of workforce housing
- b. articulate a set of goals for increasing the supply of housing for middle-income families
- c. review other localities around the country that have successfully adopted workforce housing programs
- d. identify options for incorporating "workforce housing" into the current network of laws, ordinances, programs, regulations, policies and planning documents that affect the County's housing production and housing inventory
- e. make recommendations to implement a workforce housing program here in the county.

Park Property and Workforce Housing – The County Council requested that Park and Planning study the possibility of using park property for workforce housing.

The Strategic Planning Division, in concert with senior park staff, completed a study suggesting a range of innovative options that selectively use park property, not needed for park use, to help address housing need, while also strengthening the stewardship mission of the park system.

The Planning Board identified a limited number of candidate park properties with the potential to provide workforce and/or special need housing.

The Department has launched an ambitious request for offers of interest (REOI)/request for proposals (RFP) process to solicit innovative proposals from private and not-for-profit housing providers. Staff has conducted extensive research on the acquisition and/or conveyance terms of each candidate site or structure and the identification of development guidelines in preparation for the REOI, which was released publicly in early March.

Department of Park and Planning Employer Assisted Housing (EAH) Program – The Planning Board recently initiated an EAH Program for all full-time employees at Park and Planning and added the 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 EAH government sponsored program in the County.

The Strategic Planning and Enterprise Divisions have completed the first phase of program development by: (a) developing personnel guidelines and the educational curriculum, in coordination with the Housing Opportunities Commission, (b) convening financial management class sessions for employees, and (c) working with Fannie Mae to connect class participants with a network of local and national mortgage lenders. Attachment 3 describes the EAH Financial Education and Homebuyer Preparation Classes.

The second phase of EAH program development will focus on: (a) further expanding access to park house rentals for employees with household incomes less than \$85,000 or \$70,000 individually, (b) expanding access to park house rentals for income eligible employees from Fire and Rescue, Police, and Montgomery County Public Schools when Commission employees do not express interest in a particular park house, and (c) documenting and enhancing park house structural conditions and maintenance.

For additional information on housing opportunities, refer to the Strategic Planning section of this Report, beginning on page 35.

Proposed Master Plan Program Initiative

As Montgomery County matures, our planning focus must continue to evolve. The outward expansion of infrastructure is no longer a priority. Instead, the

County will increasingly be focused on reinvestment and redevelopment of its residential and business communities.

Exciting new opportunities are emerging. Community-scaled redevelopment and in-fill development, associated with multi-modal transportation initiatives, will provide a new dimension for innovative and imaginative planning that will create livable and inspiring places to live and work for future generations.

Montgomery County has within its reach the tools and opportunities to reshape the master plan program to respond to the unique challenges of redevelopment and in-fill development as the county continues to mature.

The Department has begun to explore a new master plan framework to guide land use and community livability in the future. A report has been produced, *Montgomery County in the 21st Century, A Planning Framework*, that is intended as a catalyst for discussion of this important issue.

See the Attachment section for more specific information on this proposed initiative.

ADMINISTRATION

Grants Management

In spring 2004, the Department launched a new initiative to diversify and broaden the funding base of external resources beyond entitlement grants. A major part of this initiative was the development of grants management procedures, agency compliance, and new guidelines for accepting and expending grant funds outside of CIP-approved budgets. To date, grant applications have been submitted primarily to public agencies and a very small number of private sources that deem local government agencies eligible for their funding. A significant achievement in early 2005 was a successful application to the Rudy Bruner Foundation for the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence for the Downtown Silver Spring sector plan.

For additional information on the Grants Management program, please see page 67.