



MCPB Item # _____

Date: 07 / 26 / 2018

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 19, 2018

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Michael F. Riley, Director of Parks 

Mitra Pedoeem, Deputy Director, Administration

John Nissel, Deputy Director, Operations

Jai Cole Acting Division Chief, Park Planning and Stewardship Division (PPSD) 

FROM: Charles S. Kines, AICP, Planner–Coordinator, Park and Trail Planning Section, PPSD

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SUBJECT: Upper Paint Branch Trails, Staff Recommendations

Recommended Action

Park staff are seeking guidance and comments from the Planning Board on proposed natural surface trails in the Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park system (formerly referred to as a Limited Area Trail Plan).

During the work session, recommended alignments, sequencing and key implementation challenges will be presented.

Background

Park trails are consistently rated among the most popular and most valued by county residents. Trails are very popular because they offer opportunities for active recreational activities such as hiking, running, mountain biking, and horseback riding as well as natural resource-based recreational activities such as birding, interpretive programming, nature walks or forest bathing. Due to the popularity of trails, park staff are continually looking for ways to expand the trail network to better serve county residents. This is particularly true in the eastern county, which is not as well served by park trails as other areas of the county.

A significant goal of *2017 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROS)* is to offer public access to parkland whenever feasible and appropriate, and to balance resource protection with public access. The *2016 Countywide Park Trails Plan (CWPTP)* states that appropriately sited and sustainably designed trails are consistent with resource management objectives. The *CWPTP* also recommends a strategy for evaluating unsanctioned natural surface trails on parkland, and this project is the first to address this issue, creating a new natural surface trail system that draws from existing disconnected unsanctioned trails.

The Upper Paint Branch stream system is a unique, nationally recognized coldwater fishery that is the only suburban stream system in Montgomery County with a long-term self-sustaining brown trout population. Despite the development and impervious storm water inputs from the surrounding residential neighborhoods, the area is characterized by a unique density of cold water seeps and wetlands that maintain the water quality within the stream. As such, it has been designated as one of the five Special Protection Areas (SPA) in the County. Impervious surface restrictions for development projects in the Upper Paint Branch SPA are set forth in the Upper Paint Branch Overlay, which restricts development to an 8 percent imperviousness limit for new projects.

The Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park has also been designated as a Best Natural Area (BNA), containing some of the highest quality and unique park natural resources in Montgomery County. Best Natural Areas contain extensive wetlands, high quality aquatic resources and forests, diverse native vegetation, unique topography and geological formations, and/or unique habitats that rare scarce and/or fragile.

Methodology and Analysis

The Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park currently does not offer formal access to a sanctioned natural surface trail network.

This project aims to:

- Provide sustainable natural surface trail network in the Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park
- Link new park trails to community destinations and also to the larger countywide park/trail system
- Offer loop experiences where possible
- Provide wayfinding and interpretive signage to encourage easy access to the future natural surface trail system and showcase outstanding natural resources

The Department's Natural Surface Trails Program aims to construct (and/or reconstruct) all natural surface trails as sustainably as possible.

Well designed, sustainable natural surface trails:

- Support current and future use with minimal impact to the area's natural systems
- Produce negligible soil loss or movement while allowing vegetation to inhabit the area
- Recognize that pruning or removing of certain plants may be necessary for proper maintenance
- Do not adversely affect the area's natural resources
- Accommodate existing use while allowing only appropriate future use
- Require little rerouting and minimal long-term maintenance

An overarching goal of the trail system is to provide a continuous, sustainable natural surface park trail experience within the Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park. This experience will include two loop trails, the Cloverly Loop (1.11 mi) and the Peachwood Loop (.7 mi), and a 3.6-mi regional trail that will continue the Paint Branch hard surface trail as a natural surface trail from Fairland road ultimately to MD 198 Spencerville Road. This new regional trail will provide a 5.9-mile experience from MLK Jr. Recreational Park to Spencerville Road.

Along this route, this regional trail will also connect with three future shared use path bikeways: Spencerville Rd., Briggs Chaney Rd., and Fairland Rd. There are challenges to completing the full regional trail, so the implementation has been split into phases.

Another goal of this trail system is to link to major community destinations such as Columbia Local Park, Marilyn J. Praisner Library, and the Marilyn J. Praisner Community Recreation Center. These destinations are major activity centers and also offer a logical trailhead/trail terminus with public parking. Locally-serving loop trails are also an easy way to improve trail service in areas of the park system where building longer distance regional trails would be challenging.

Major destinations (**Figure A**) in the study area include:

Parks

- Columbia Local Park (as well as Marilyn J. Praisner Library and Community Recreation Center)
- Maydale Conservation Park.
- Paint Branch Trail (south of Fairland Road) linking to Martin Luther King Jr. Recreational Park
- Cloverly Local Park
- Peachwood Neighborhood Park

Schools

- Benjamin Banneker Middle School
- Briggs Chaney Middle School
- Cloverly Elementary School
- Dr. Charles R. Drew Elementary School
- Fairland Elementary School
- Paint Branch High School

Regional Bikeways

- Fairland Road Shared Use Path
- Briggs Chaney Road Shared Use Path
- MD 198 Shared Use Path
- ICC Bike Path

Figure A. Destinations – Parks, Schools and Regional Bikeways



TRAIL PLANNING

✳ Proposed trail access

Existing Conditions

- Park Trails and Paths
- existing / proposed**
- Off-road Paths *
- Libraries
- Schools
- Recreation Centers
- Parking
- Plan Area Boundary (UPB SPA)
- Existing M-NCPPC Parklands
- Proposed M-NCPPC Parklands
- Other Lands

* Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan



Staff conducted field walks to compare existing unsanctioned trails with resource conditions. This analysis highlighted some unsanctioned trails that should be made official/sanctioned and others that were poorly located, but warranted an effort to find a sustainable alignment based on the desirability of the connection. As mentioned earlier, we then focused on evaluating possible trail alignments on parkland that offer connections to major destinations while also serving adjoining neighborhoods. The final step involved identifying areas where implementation would be difficult due to unsafe road crossings or insufficient parkland ownership.

Recommendations are grouped into four phases. Trails that are immediately implementable are included in Phase 1 (Fall 2018), trail segments that could be constructed within 2-5 years are included in Phase 2, trails that are not immediately implementable are included in Phase 3 (5+ years), and issues for which we cannot accurately establish a timeline are included in Phase 4.

All phases require additional staff analysis and field work to finalize trail alignments, including community connectors to public access locations.

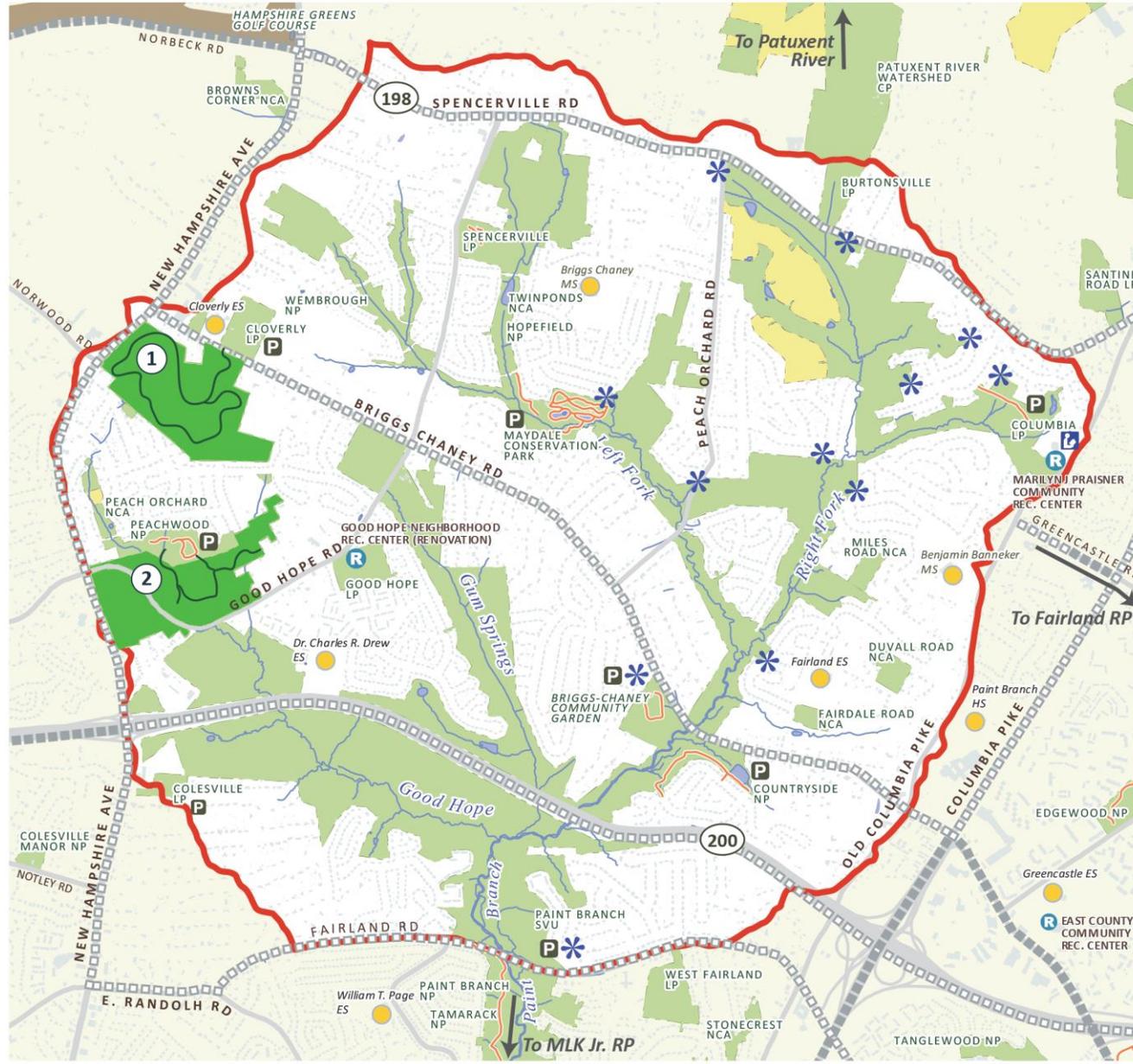
Staff Recommendations

Newly recommended natural surface trails in the Upper Paint Branch are as follows.

Phase 1 (Fall 2018) -Figure B: The following locations currently have people’s choice trails so with minimal trail work and the addition of signage and wayfinding, they can be implemented quickly:

1. **Loop Trail, Upper Paint Branch SVP – “Cloverly parcel.”** This park area is unconstrained. Providing a multi-use, sustainable trail is achievable.
2. **Loop Trail, Upper Paint Branch SVP – “Peachwood parcel.”** This park area is relatively unconstrained, featuring some sensitive natural resources such as wetlands, floodplains and stream buffers. Providing a multi-use, sustainable trail is achievable.

Figure B. Phase 1 (Fall 2018)



TRAIL PLANNING

- Proposed trail access
- Phase 1 (Fall 2018)
- Cloverly Parcel trail loop
- Peachwood Parcel trail loop

Existing Conditions

- Park Trails and Paths
- existing / proposed**
- Off-road Paths *
- Libraries
- Schools
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- Parking
- Plan Area Boundary (UPB SPA)
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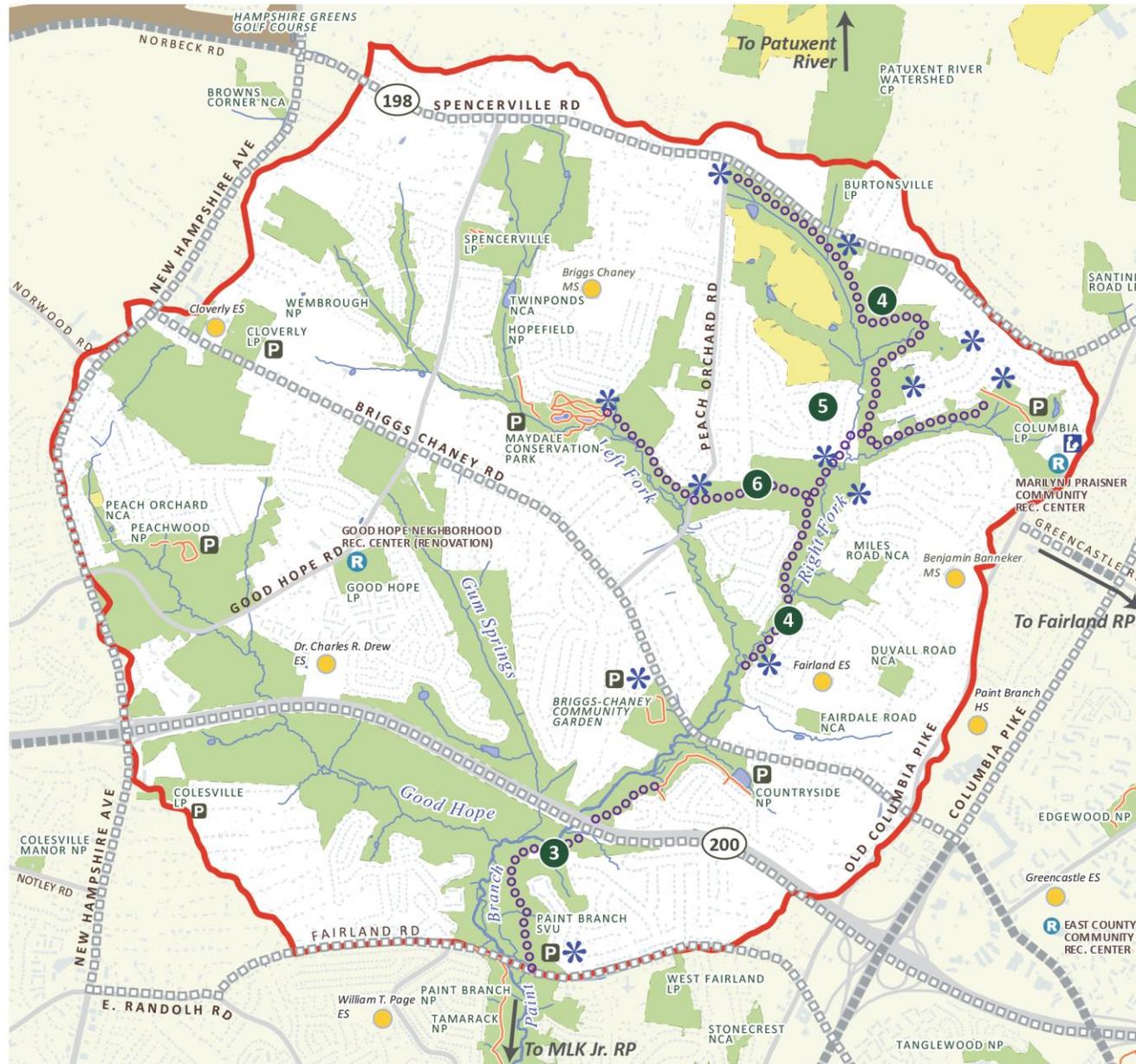
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Phase 2 (2-5 years) – Figure C: These trail segments will need funding through the CIP for full design and construction. While there are a few details that will still need to be coordinated (see ‘trail gap’ below), these trail sections will be added to the current work program with an estimated implementation between 2 - 5 years.

3. **Fairland Road to Countryside Neighborhood Park (1.6 mi).** The trail would extend from Fairland Road to the neighborhood park along the east side of the right fork – constructed outside resource-constrained areas to the extent feasible – linking to the existing paved trail in the neighborhood park. The trail would pass under the ICC.
4. **Bradshaw Drive to Columbia Local Park (1.8 mi).** This segment would start at the stormwater pond at Bradshaw Drive and end at the paved trail in Columbia Local Park. It would involve two stream crossings and include a parkland ownership gap near Prince John Court. During Phase II the trail would route around the gap using neighborhood streets. The Phase 3 options for a permanent solution are discussed below.
5. **Trail gap on-street bypass (0.7 mi).** Until the trail gap issues can be resolved with a permanent solution, trail users will be routed around it from the southern terminus to the northern terminus of Timberlake Drive and also a temporary park trail detour.
6. **Right fork trail from Columbia Local Park to future MD 198 shared use path at Peach Orchard Road (1.5 mi).** This segment links the future MD 198 bikeway with the Upper Paint Branch trail network and connects to Columbia Local Park and Maydale Conservation Park.
7. **Left fork trail to Maydale Conservation Park (1.2 mi).** This segment includes two stream crossings and is near a few homes. It also involves crossing Peach Orchard Road, a low-volume collector. An at-grade crossing – designed appropriately – could be consistent with Vision Zero.

Figure C – Phase 2 (2-5 Years)



TRAIL PLANNING

Proposed trail access

Phase 2 (2-5 years)

- 3 Fairland Rd to Countryside NP
- 4 Bradshaw Dr to Columbia LP
- 5 Temporary trail gap on-street bypass
- 4 Columbia LP to Peach Orchard Rd
- 6 Left Fork trail to Maydale CP

Existing Conditions

- Park Trails and Paths
- existing / proposed
- Off-road Paths *
- Libraries
- Schools
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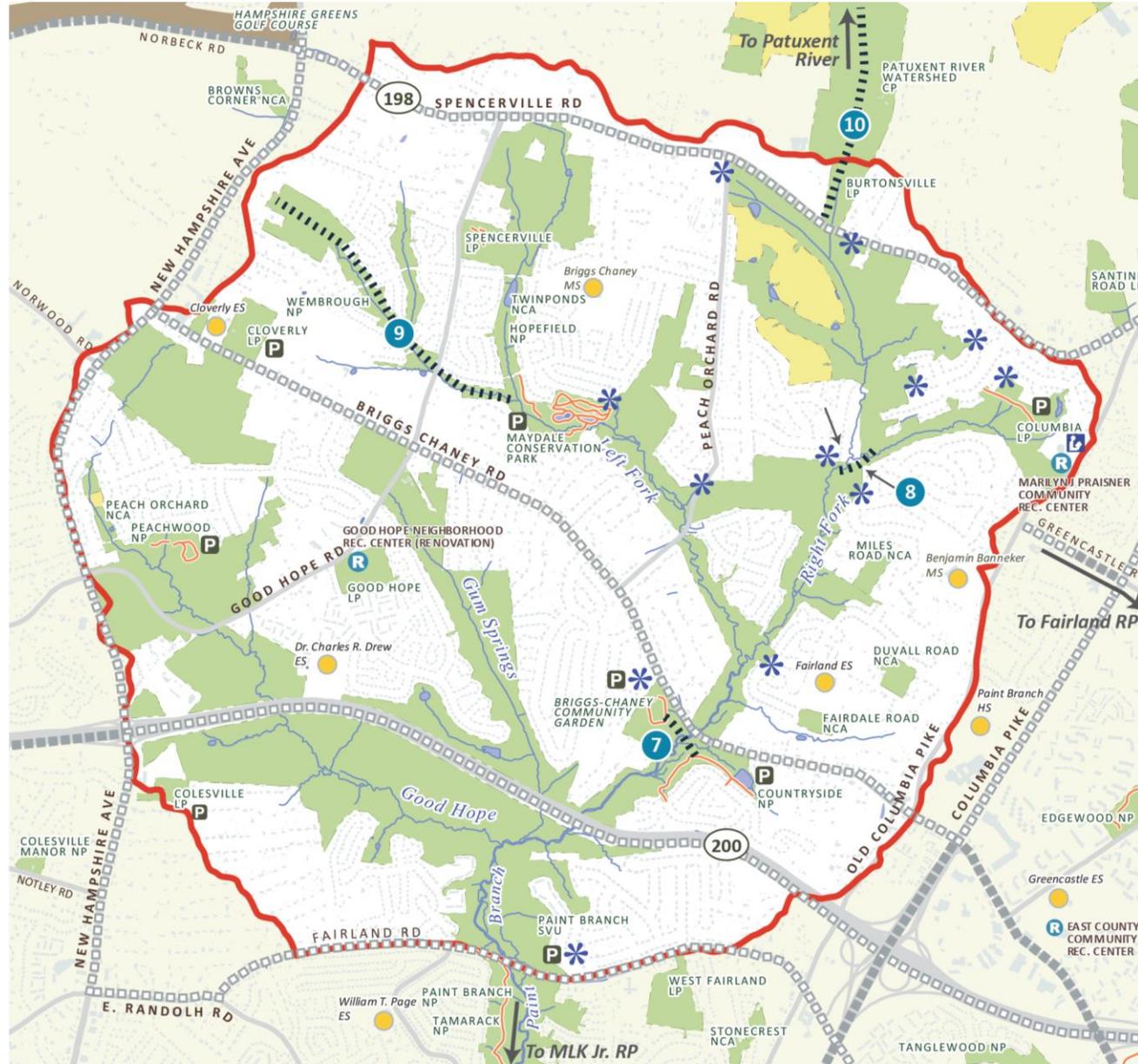
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Phase 3 (5+ years, due to implementation challenges) –Figure D:

7. **Countryside Neighborhood Park to Briggs Chaney Community Garden.** Routing a new trail to the community garden by crossing the right fork south of Briggs Chaney Road would offer a logical trailhead/parking area along Briggs Chaney Road.
8. **Parkland ownership gap near Prince John Court.** Establishing a permanent trail will require:
 - a. Acquiring enough private land to accommodate the through-trail connection; or
 - b. Seeking an easement across private land to allow trail users to link the two areas of parkland to the north and south.
9. **Maydale Conservation Park to New Hampshire Avenue.** This segment requires further study and has not been evaluated in detail yet.
10. **Patuxent Connector.** Ultimately, it is highly desirable to link this new Upper Paint Branch trail network with the existing trails on WSSC land along the Patuxent River. This new trail would pass through Burtonsville Local Park and Patuxent River Watershed Conservation Park. This area is very rural and therefore will be a lower priority than other trails south of MD 198.

Figure D. Phase 3 (5+ years)



TRAIL PLANNING

* Proposed trail access

Phase 3 (5+ years)

- 7 Countryside NP to Briggs Chaney Rd
- 8 Land acquisition or easement
- 9 Maydale CP to New Hampshire Ave
- 10 Patuxent connector

Existing Conditions

— Park Trails and Paths

existing / proposed

▣ Off-road Paths *

📖 Libraries 🎓 Schools

🏟️ Recreation Centers 🅅 Parking

▭ Plan Area Boundary (UPB SPA)

🌳 Existing M-NCPPC Parklands

🟡 Proposed M-NCPPC Parklands

🟤 Other Lands

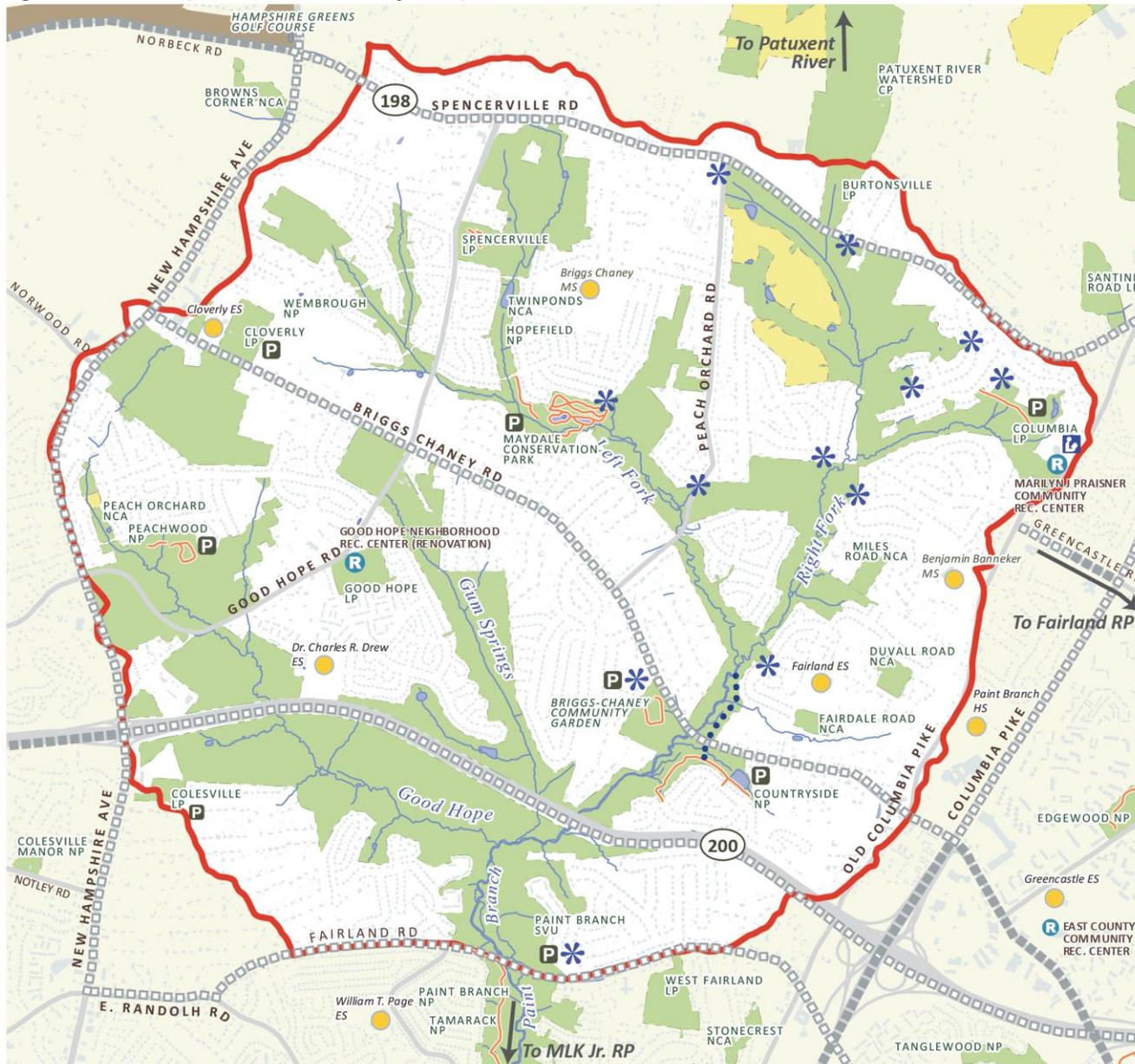
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Phase 4 (Undetermined timeframe) –Figure E:

- **Briggs Chaney Road Crossing.** This stretch of county road experiences high volume and high-speed traffic and is characterized by continuous guardrails along both sides. Sightline distances are undesirable for a trail on the shoulder due to the road’s curvature as it crosses the right fork. An at-grade, uncontrolled crossing would be dangerous, and inconsistent with the County’s Vision Zero policies. Therefore, crossing Briggs Chaney Road would be accomplished by:
 - Replacing the existing culvert under Briggs Chaney Road with a new bridge, which would accommodate a trail underpass. This option requires long-term coordination with Montgomery County to evaluate the culvert condition and develop a plan for replacing it with a bridge. It could then be included in the County’s CIP and would not only benefit the trail connection, but also provide a valuable environmentally sensitive crossing for the stream.

Figure E. Phase 4 (Undetermined timeframe)



TRAIL PLANNING

Proposed trail access

Phase 4 (Timing TBD)

Briggs Chaney Rd crossing

Existing Conditions

Park Trails and Paths

existing / proposed

Off-road Paths *

Libraries

Schools

Recreation Centers

Parking

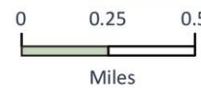
Plan Area Boundary (UPB SPA)

Existing M-NCPPC Parklands

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Other Lands

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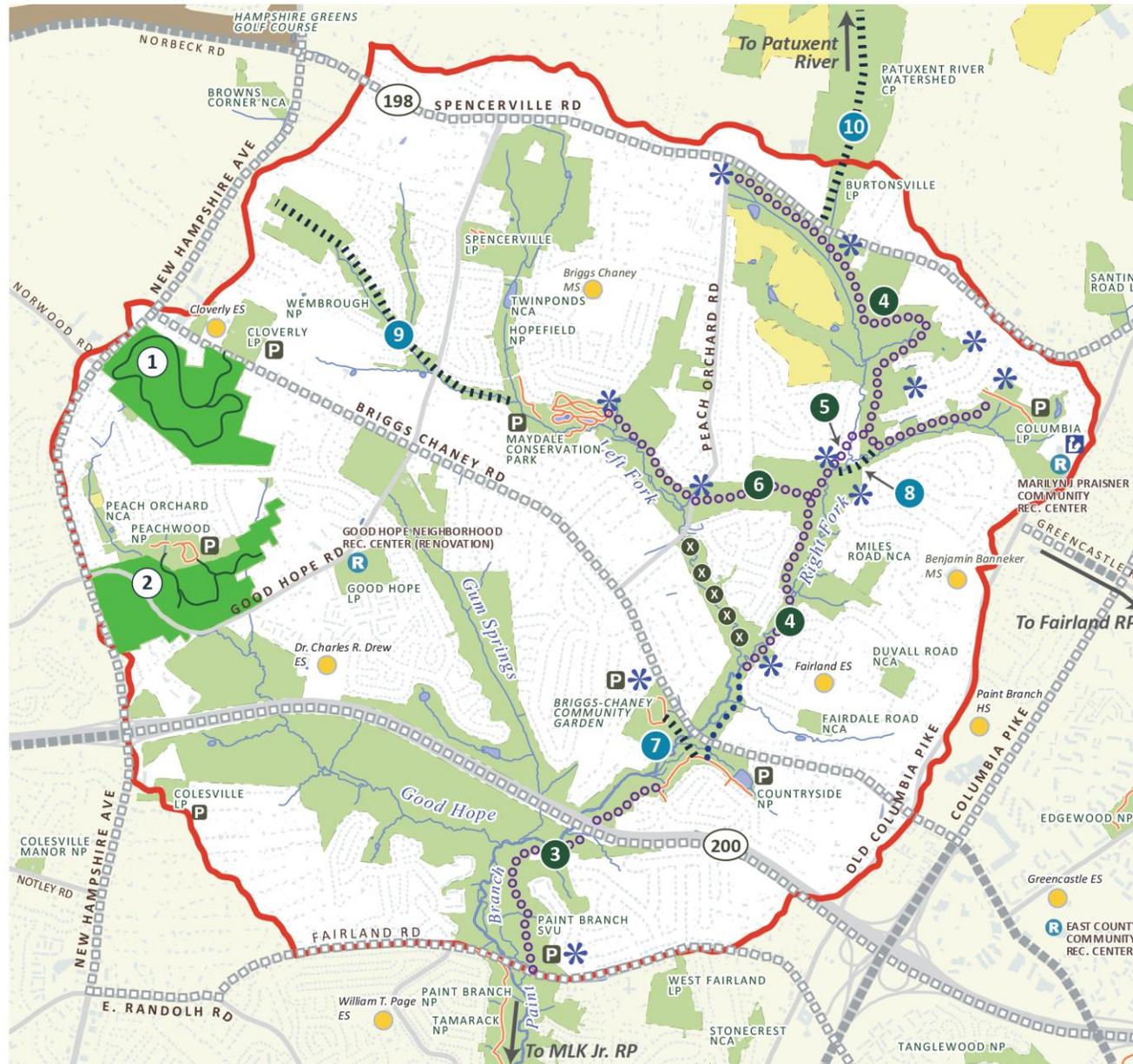
Recommended Master Plan Deletions –*Figure F*:

At the time of any update to the 1997 Cloverly Master Plan, we recommend that the proposed equestrian trail along the left fork – between the right fork and Peach Orchard Road – be removed from the plan. Our analysis determined that a sustainable trail cannot be built through this park segment.

All Plan Recommendations

All staff recommendations can be seen together on *Figure F*.

Figure F. All Staff Recommendations



TRAIL PLANNING

Proposed trail access

Phase 1 (Fall 2018)

① Cloverly Parcel trail loop

② Peachwood Parcel trail loop

Phase 2 (2-5 years)

③ Fairland Rd to Countryside NP

④ Bradshaw Dr to Columbia LP

⑤ Temporary trail gap on-street bypass

④ Columbia LP to Peach Orchard Rd

⑥ Left Fork trail to Maydale CP

Phase 3 (5+ years)

⑦ Countryside NP to Briggs Chaney Rd

⑧ Land acquisition or easement

⑨ Maydale CP to New Hampshire Ave

⑩ Patuxent connector

Phase 4 (Timing TBD)

Briggs Chaney Rd crossing

Remove from Plan

Cloverly Master Plan

Existing Conditions

Park Trails and Paths

existing / proposed

Off-road Paths *

Libraries

Schools

Recreation Centers

Parking

Plan Area Boundary (UPB SPA)

Existing M-NCPPC Parklands

Proposed M-NCPPC Parklands

Other Lands

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Community Concerns

During and immediately following community meeting in November 2017, staff received numerous comments on the preliminary recommendations. Many comments were very positive about a proposed trail network in the Upper Paint Branch. Of the less positive comments, two overarching themes emerged:

- **Proximity to houses.** Due to the narrowness of the stream valley parks, routing a trail between a stream and park boundary can be challenging. As with many other park trails in the county, some trails will be located near private property to avoid sensitive natural resources and to minimize the length of stream crossings. Several community members are concerned about trails located too close to property lines and homes.
- **Exacerbating crime.** The Fairland Estates community expressed concerns that a formal park trail along the east side of the right fork will allow criminals easier access to their community to conduct undesirable activities. Criminal behavior is common already, they say, and this trail will make it easier for undesirable people to gain covert access to their community outside of public view.

Public Outreach

This project is the first effort to study and analyze public access via natural surface trails in the Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park system. Two community meetings were held in 2017 to familiarize residents and stakeholders with the goals and objectives of the project, obtain their feedback, and then present five months later to explain how we incorporated their comments, as well as staff analysis, methodology and preliminary recommendations. This worksession is the final opportunity for public comments before we commence building trails in fall 2018.

- **Community meeting #1**, June 22, 2017: Scope of Work, objectives, schedule
- **Community meeting #2**, November 8, 2017: Preliminary recommendations
- **Planning Board work session**, July 26, 2018: Staff recommendations.

Next Steps

After receiving guidance from the Planning Board today, park staff will study and identify precise trail alignments for Phase 1 loop trails and begin construction of this fall (Figure 2):

- **Upper Paint Branch SVP** – Cloverly Loop Trail; and
- **Upper Paint Branch SVP** – Peachwood Loop Trail.

Additionally, detailed site analysis will begin for the trail along the right fork between Fairland Road and Countryside Neighborhood Park.

The proposed trail system in the Upper Paint Branch affords strong opportunities for the cultural interpretation of Montgomery County history. Because some of the proposed trail system crosses known archaeological sites and/or areas that have high prehistoric potential, archaeological testing will be coordinated with park planners and trail builders to ensure proper stewardship.

Cc: Bill Tyler, Chief, Southern Division
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