



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS**  
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB  
Item: 3  
Date: 05/02/19

May 2, 2019

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Michael F. Riley, Director of Parks *MR*  
Mitra Pedoeem, Deputy Director *mitra pedoeem*  
Andrew Frank, Acting Chief, Park Development Division (PDD) *RAP*

**FROM:** Patricia McManus, Design Section Supervisor, PDD *pm*  
Ching-Fang Chen, Landscape Architect/Project Manager, PDD *CFC*

**SUBJECT:** Facility Plan for the Renovation of Acorn Urban Park

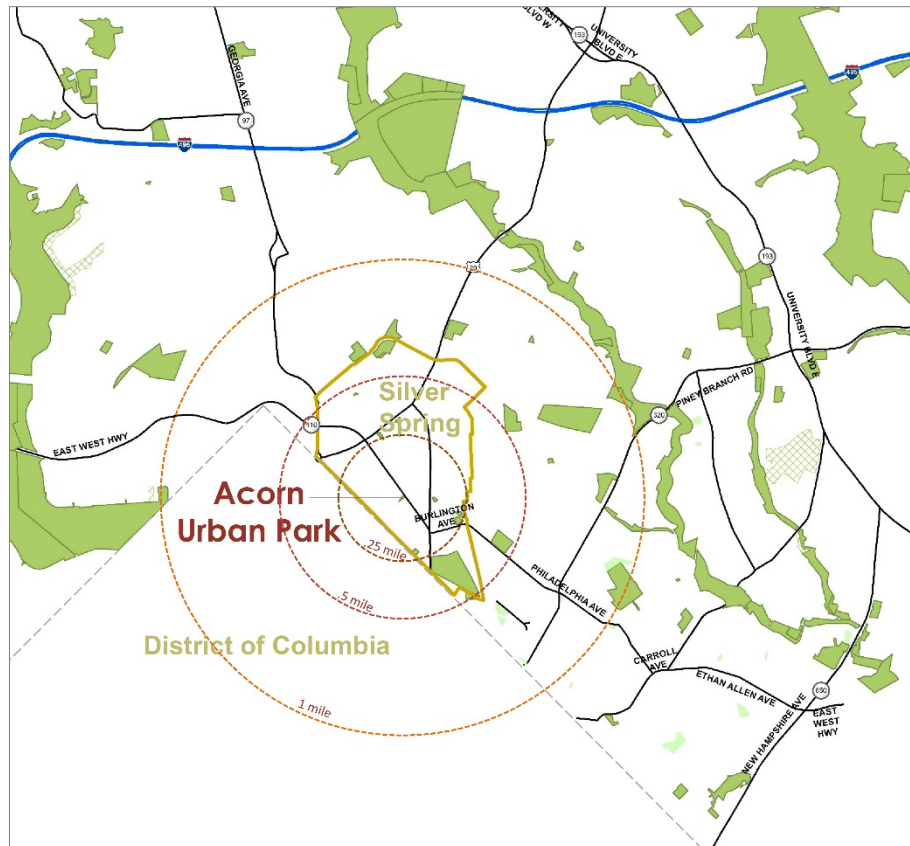
**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** APPROVE the Recommended Facility Plan, including cost estimate.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to prepare a facility plan for the renovation of Acorn Urban Park located at 8060 Newell Street in Silver Spring, Maryland. The intent of the project is to rehabilitate the historic features and improve and activate the park to better serve the nearby communities, while providing accessibility and stormwater management.

The 0.3-acre park is located at the intersection of East West Highway and Newell Street in the Silver



Spring Central Business District (CBD). The existing park contains walkways, mature specimen trees and significant historic resources, notably the original “Silver Spring” for which the town was named, and the acorn gazebo, which was part of the Blair Farm and later moved to this location. The central 0.12-acre triangular parcel is owned by the M-NCPPC. The southern edge of the park is defined by a privately-owned office building on which there are six murals facing the park. The park was listed on the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation in 1985.

The Silver Spring Historical Society, the Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee, and the South Silver Spring Neighborhood Association have made requests to the M-NCPPC to improve the park. Concerns were brought up about degradation of the historic spring, the inoperable fountain and underutilized open space.

### **Project Funding**

Facility planning represents thirty-percent complete construction documents, including a proposed design, cost estimate and determination of regulatory feasibility. The facility planning study for the project was funded with \$190,000 from the FY 2017-2019 Capital Improvements Program in the Facility Planning: Local Parks PDF 957775.

The site survey and Natural Resources Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD) were prepared by Norton Land Design and were approved by the M-NCPPC Department of Planning in January 2017. A public meeting was held on March 28, 2017 to collect public input. Jordan Honeyman Landscape Architecture, LLC was commissioned in August 2017 to provide assistance with landscape architecture, civil engineering, tree preservation, related geotechnical work, cost estimating, permits, design documentation and historic preservation. If approved, the project would be funded for design and construction from the Park Refreshers PDF 871902.

### **Facility Planning Process**

The facility planning process includes the following sequence of work:

#### Initiation

1. Collect data, prepare site survey and analyze existing site conditions.
2. Prepare and obtain approval of Natural Resources Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation Summary Map.
3. Meet with the community to gather input and ideas for the park.
4. Identify the program of requirements and priorities.

#### Concept

5. Develop park renovation concept alternatives based on community preferences.
6. Coordinate with adjacent private property owner to obtain input.
7. Present concept alternatives to the community and stakeholders.

#### Design Development and Preliminary Permits

8. Develop park renovation plan based on input received.
9. Perform geotechnical investigations.
10. Prepare stormwater management concept submission and obtain approval from the Department of Permitting Services.
11. Prepare and submit plan to Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) for design consultation.

### Facility Plan

12. Develop recommended plan based on feedback from the community and regulatory agencies.
13. Submit recommended plan to the HPC for concept approval.
14. Finalize facility plan and prepare 30% construction documents and cost estimate.
15. Coordinate any outstanding issues with adjacent property owners and regulatory agencies.

### Final Documentation and Planning Board Approval

16. Prepare facility plan staff report, cost estimate and operating budget estimates.
17. Present facility plan recommendations and costs to the Montgomery County Planning Board for approval.

## MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS



Vicinity Map

### **Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, Approved and Adopted February 2000**

The Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan envisions a downtown serving both the surrounding residential community and a broader area, an active place with mixed uses attracting people at all times, and an upgraded urban environment that attracts private investment. The Sector Plan articulates the vision and shared goals into the themes of “the transit-oriented downtown, commercial downtown, residential downtown, civic downtown, green downtown, and pedestrian-

friendly downtown.” On page 127, the Plan identifies how urban parks can support these themes.

*Urban parks are designed to meet the recreation and open space needs of the residential and employee community, as amenities and as elements in a linked green system. The park system contributes to realizing the theme of the Green Downtown, Civic Downtown and Pedestrian-friendly Downtown and Residential Downtown.*

Acorn Urban Park is located within the South Silver Spring Revitalization Area where East West Highway, Newell Street and Blair Mill Road converge. It is to become a revitalized gateway to the County and the Silver Spring CBD, and an area of complementary uses including emerging high-tech businesses, arts organizations, Montgomery College’s expansion, commercial improvements along East West Highway and Jesup Blair Park. On Map 17, page 50, the vision for South Silver Spring is described as follows:

*South Silver Spring has the potential to become a unique, varied, and pleasant neighborhood. Physical improvements to accommodate pedestrian, bicycles and car access will add legibility and visual interest to South Silver Spring in a neighborhood combining new and renovated buildings.*

The Plan envisions Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road as urban boulevards that link the downtown’s revitalization areas while East West Highway is considered as a promenade that focuses on pedestrian and bicycle movements to and from the Transit Center. The park is conveniently located near the Metro station, the Silver Spring Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Station (MARC) and the Capital Crescent/Metropolitan Branch Trail. It is serviced by intra-city and inter-city buses. In addition, the park is located in close proximity to a public parking facility on Kennett Street and the proposed East West Highway shared-use path (SP-9). People can easily access the park by car, bicycle and walking. The park is an important pedestrian connection in the South Silver Spring neighborhood and is a significant landmark and a destination of interest in the Silver Spring CBD.

The Plan describes urban parks as community nodes and places that define their surroundings and gather people, becoming centers of community life. The plan identifies two purposes for urban parks and open spaces on page 127:

- *Supporting the recreation needs and desires of the employees and surrounding residential communities.*
- *Contributing to downtown revitalization by providing another convenient and interesting reason to come to Silver Spring.*

On page 73, the Plan recommends incorporating principles of crime prevention through environmental design by integrating visibility, pedestrian activity and programming into project layouts.

On page 135, the Plan recommends incorporating historic resources into new projects and preserving Silver Spring’s unique past as follows:

*Preserving Silver Spring’s historic resources saves more than just old buildings. Reusing and incorporating historic resources into new projects preserves Silver Spring’s unique past, giving texture and depth to the CBD’s redevelopment. Historic buildings stand out on the urban landscape; they look different and they resonate with meaning, recalling memories and experiences.*

The Plan identifies The Silver Spring/Acorn Urban Park as one of the ten historic resources in the Silver Spring CBD and further describes the site on page 137 as follows:



*Acorn Park is the site of the original Silver Spring, for which it is said the community was named. The Park's acorn-shaped gazebo was originally located on the farm of Francis Preston Blair, Silver Spring's founder. The gazebo is an example of picturesque garden features popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The gazebo was moved to the park in 1955.*

*The park should retain its visibility and accessibility amid redevelopment of South Silver Spring.*

## Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation

The Park was listed on the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation in 1985. The site is described as follows:

*This is the site of the original spring, once located on the Blair farm, that gave the name to the town of Silver Spring, Maryland. It is now a "mini-park", landscaped about the spring. In the park is an acorn-shaped structure on wooden posts that once served as a gazebo on Blair's farm. The spring itself is set down in a small, grotto-like recess. It is covered with a carved stone hood. Ironically, the water has been piped in ever since the area began its fast-paced development during this century. Old photos (ca. 1930) show the original Italian marble statue that was placed in the spring.*

## The Montgomery County Bicycle Master Plan, Approved November 2018

The Montgomery County Bicycle Master Plan is a comprehensive amendment to the 1978 Master Plan of Bikeways, 2005 Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan and all bikeway recommendations in past functional plans, area master plans and sector plans. The Plan sets forth a vision for Montgomery County as a world-class bicycling community, where people in all areas of the County have access to a comfortable, safe and connected bicycle network, and where bicycling is a viable transportation option that improves our quality of life. Page 348 of the plan identifies bikeways in the Silver Spring CBD. Acorn Urban Park is within 0.5 mile of the existing Metropolitan Branch Trail and fronting the proposed bikeways along East West Highway (to be separated bike lanes, two-way on north side) and Newell Street (to be striped bikeway).

## 2018 Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan (EPS FMP)

The Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan (EPS Plan) for Parks in Mixed Use and Higher Density Areas is a plan that applies an innovative methodology to identify areas with the highest need for parks and open spaces



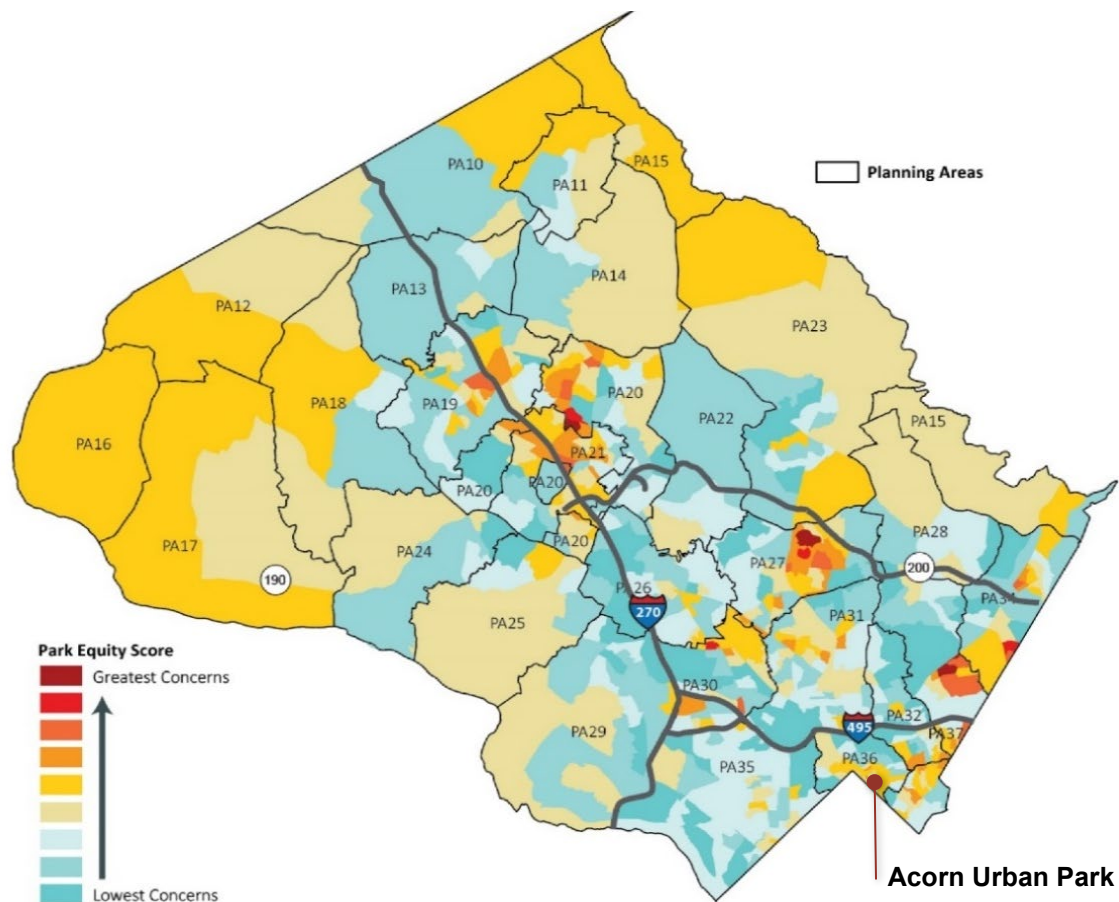
Silver Spring CBD Bikeway Plan

and recommend opportunities to increase the number of parks and open spaces in those communities. The Plan promotes public spaces as platforms where people can share experiences and build a sense of community. The Plan develops a methodology to ensure equity in parks and open spaces within specific geographic areas. On Figure 28, page 75, Acorn Urban Park is identified in the Silver Spring Pilot Area as an opportunity site for activation under “*Pocket Green*”- a new type of *Community Use Urban Park* that brings people together for mixed use and residential communities. On page 76, the plan recommends renovating the park to preserve and interpret historic resources and provide new open space and play amenities.

## 2017 Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan

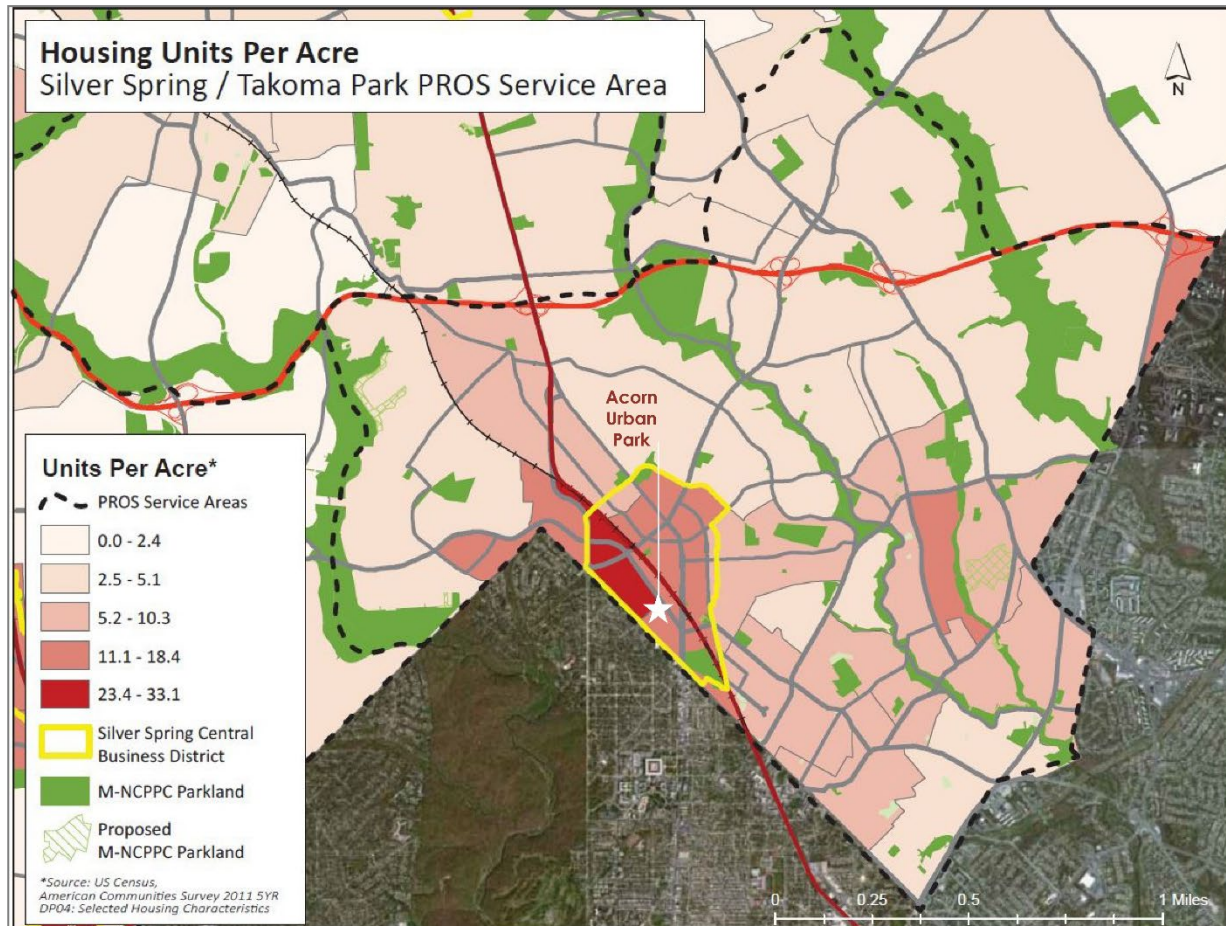
The 2017 Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan serves as the planning policy for parks and recreation in Montgomery County to the year 2030 and beyond. It assesses needs and recommends strategies for the delivery of park and recreation facilities, protection of natural resource areas, and preservation of historic/cultural areas and agricultural lands. The goals are outlined on page 3:

- *Optimize Existing Parks and Facilities: Utilize existing park and recreation facilities and lands more fully.*
- *Create Great, Activated Parks to Equitably Serve the County: Provide spaces and programs that bring people together.*
- *Steward and Interpret our Natural and Cultural Resources: Prioritize the management and protection of natural and cultural resources.*



Park Equity Map of Walkable Access to Parks in Higher Density, Lower Income Areas

The PROS Plan indicates a high need for parks and open spaces in the CBD. Acorn Urban Park is identified under Special Parks for its cultural and historical significance. The PROS Plan recommends a streamlined process to facilitate planning and design to respond to changing community needs and interests.



### **Vision 2030: The Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, Approved and Adopted June 2011**

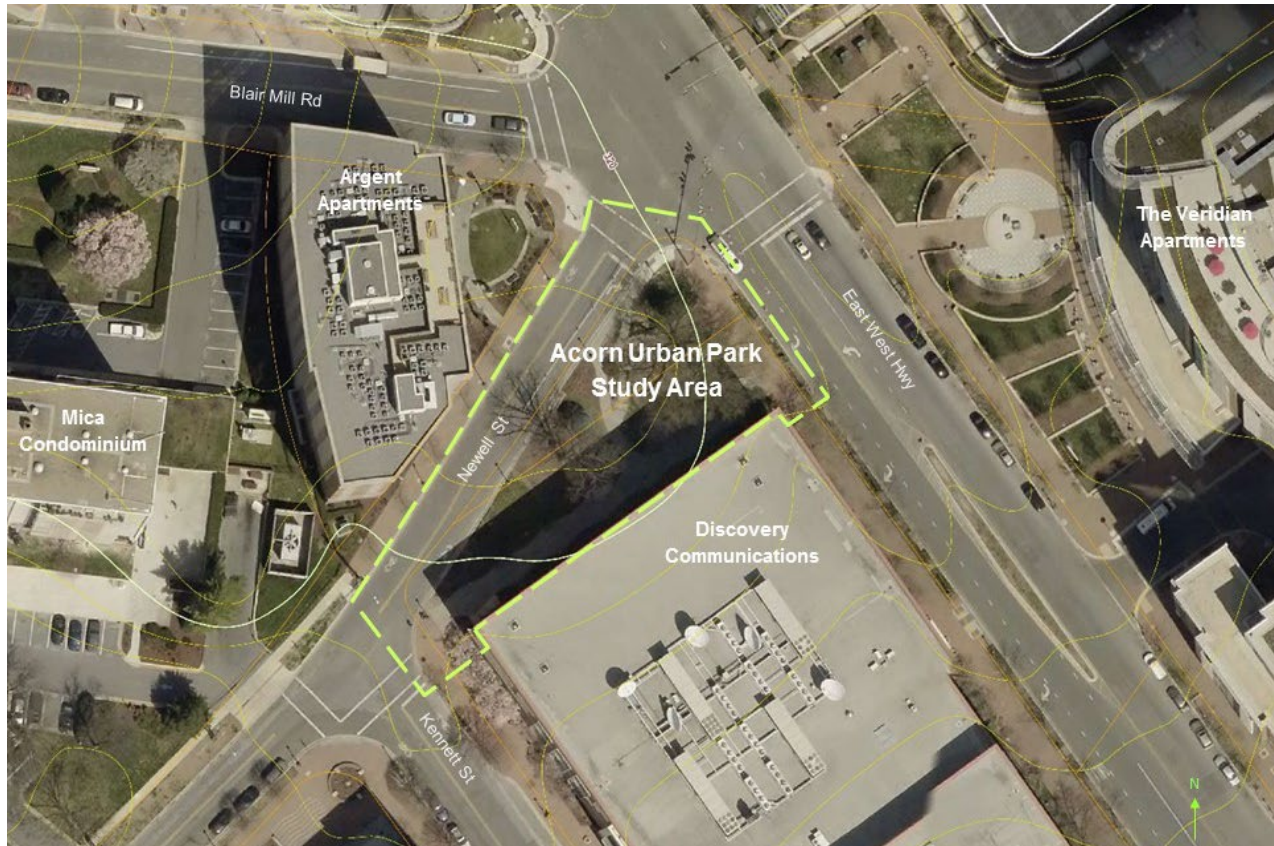
Vision 2030 is a strategic plan for park and recreation services in Montgomery County for the next twenty years. The Plan confirmed that the highest needs for outdoor spaces are and will continue to be in areas of highest population density. Acorn Urban Park is located in Silver Spring within the South Central planning area. Volume 2 of the Plan (page 63) indicates that the South Central area has the lowest level of service of all planning areas for parks and recreation compared to the density of population, even though this area shows a relatively high concentration and access to recreational facilities.

A summary of survey results is outlined on page 16 of Volume 2. The results identify program areas rated as high priorities to improve or expand, including health and wellness, outdoor nature programs, children and youth activities, community gardens, and youth league sports. On page 22 surveys identified additional facilities that rated high in importance, including trails, playgrounds and natural areas. In the table on page 75 (Appendix E), survey results from the South Central planning area show increasing demand for community gardens, dog parks, picnic shelters, and playgrounds.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

Acorn Urban Park is located at 8060 Newell Street in the South Silver Spring revitalization area. The park is approximately 1.75 miles south of the Capital Beltway and one block east of the District of Columbia boundary along Eastern Avenue.



2017 Aerial Map

The existing park has mature specimen trees and walkways connecting to the sidewalks and surrounding public open spaces on East West Highway, Newell Street and Kennett Street. The park contains significant historic resources, notably the original “Silver Spring” for which the town is named, and the acorn gazebo, which was part of the Blair estate and moved to this location in 1955. The Memory Wall on the northern façade of the privately-owned building contains six artistic murals depicting the history of Silver Spring, Maryland.



2018 Google Bird's-eye View



According to local history, in 1840 a newspaper publisher and friend of President Andrew Jackson, Francis Preston Blair, discovered the spring bubbling up through shiny mica sand. Between 1842-1845, Blair and his wife Eliza established a 300-acre summer estate called Silver Spring, on which he built an acorn gazebo. The original residence, located on Eastern Avenue, was demolished in 1955. His winter house, the Blair House, is now the President's official guest house in Washington, D.C. The acorn gazebo was built in 1850 to commemorate Mr. Blair's marriage proposal to his wife under an oak tree.



2018 Photo

The gazebo was moved to its current location from across Kennett Street in 1955 when the public park was established. It is a good example of rustic garden structures and furniture popular in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The park was listed on the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation in 1985. Since that time, the landscape and features have been maintained on an ongoing basis. However, erosion due to frequent flooding has caused problems that need to be resolved.

The historic spring is set in a recessed grotto with a carved stone hood delineating its location. The exact date of the hood is not known. However, it is shown in photographs from as early as the 1860s. The stone retaining wall that defines the grotto area and steps leading to it have been rebuilt and repaired at least twice beginning in the 1950s when the park was established. The gazebo, spring, and stone features contribute to the historic environmental setting.



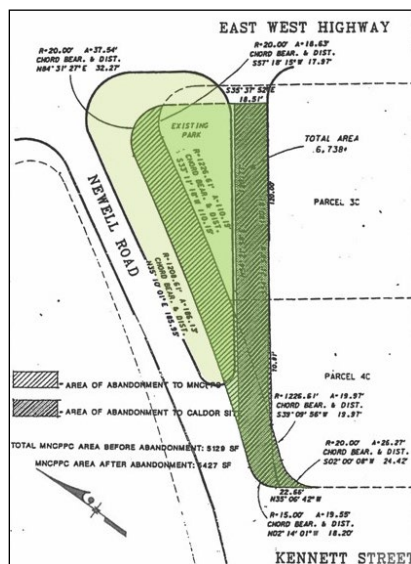
1917 Photo

The approximately 0.3-acre triangular-shaped park is surrounded by high density residential and commercial retail development. The park is comprised of a strip of the Newell Street right of

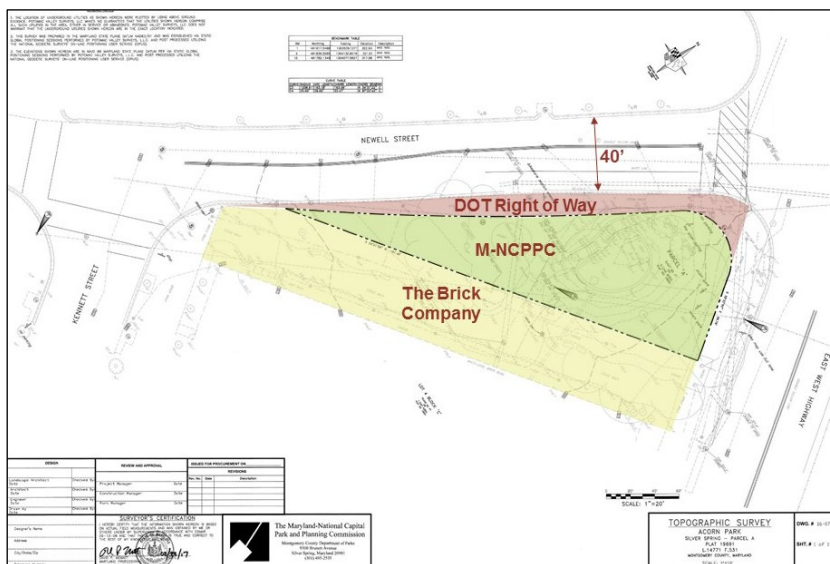


way. The central 0.12-acre triangular parcel is owned by the M-NCPPC, and the southern walkway is owned by The Brick Companies addressed at 8045 Kennett Street. The M-NCPPC is responsible for maintaining the overall park.

The original parkland acquired in 1942 was an island bounded by the two legs of Newell Street and East West Highway. In 1994, the park parcel was modified due to abandonment of the east leg of the Newell Street right of way as a resolution for a development plan approval for the adjacent Brick Companies' property, then owned by Caldor Silver Spring LLC. Newell Street was reconfigured to maintain two-way traffic. The abandoned roadway was redeveloped by Caldor into a walkway and incorporated as part of the park. There are benches along the walkway facing the building wall.



1994 Abandonment of Newell Street



2017 Survey/ Land Ownership

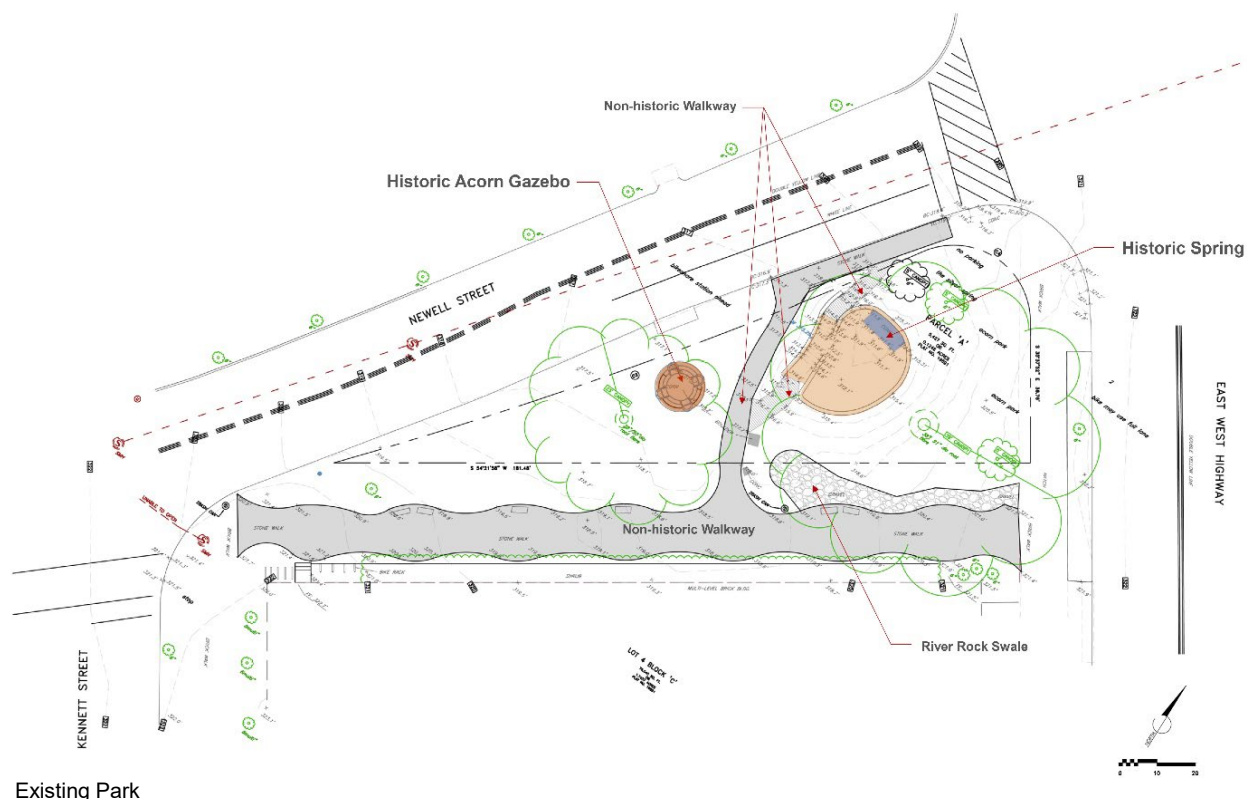


2018 Photo, View from South



2018 Photo

The existing park is underutilized and inflexible. There is not a place for children to play or for people to gather. The historic features are isolated, inaccessible and without a setting. The existing stairways to the grotto are not code-compliant. One of the significant oak trees was struck by lightning a few years ago. The landscape is fragmented and consists of a large area of impermeable surface due to the over-sized walkway. The benches facing the wall are reclusive and uninviting.



The site has no on-site stormwater management and receives a considerable amount of urban runoff from the streetscape of East West Highway. The off-site stormwater creates ongoing challenges for the park. Particularly, the historic Silver Spring feature sitting at approximately 10 feet below street-level is frequently impacted by flooding and silting due to storm events. Interim measures have been installed to alleviate the drainage problems while the facility awaits renovation.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The M-NCPPC has met with the community several times to obtain input for the renovation. The first public meeting was held in March 2017 to gather initial ideas. Preliminary concept alternatives were presented to the community in November 2017, and the recommended plan was presented to the community on September 25, 2018. Comprehensive notes from all community meetings are included in Attachment 11.

### Community Outreach During Project Initiation - Meeting 1

The first community meeting was held on March 28, 2017 to obtain public input and ideas for the park renovation. Existing conditions, background and a preliminary program of requirements were presented. An overview of the process and schedule was also discussed. Key comments brought up by the community include the need for additional open space and space for play in the neighborhood, concerns for historic preservation and interpretation of existing park features, and a request to comprehensively interpret history that is inclusive and accurately reflects the diverse, multi-cultural history of Silver Spring. Below is a summary of the meeting discussion, as well as comments there were submitted before and after the meeting:

### General Comments

- Additional open space is needed for the neighborhood in this highly-developed area of Silver Spring. There is no place for children to play or to walk dogs.
- Consider acquiring certain pieces of land nearby to increase the public park area.
- Jesup Blair Local Park can complement the use of Acorn Urban Park. However, the park is difficult to reach by foot, as Georgia Avenue is very busy and would need to be crossed. Coordinate with Montgomery County Department of Transportation and Maryland State Highway Administration to improve the pedestrian crossing of Georgia Avenue to provide better access to this park.
- A park with this much historical significance should be given more attention than it has been given and should be properly maintained into the future.

### Comments Regarding the Existing Park

- The park is not utilized enough and needs activation.
- Some want the park to be maintained as a bucolic green oasis with no additional paving or impervious surfaces.
- The historic features have been compromised and need to be rehabilitated. Stormwater is impacting the historic spring. The basin and granite inscription are covered with mud from rain events, and rocks are being thrown into the area which could damage the granite marker. Drainage issues need to be addressed. A new nymph should be provided in the grotto and the water feature should be restored to working condition.
- The paved walk along the building is too wide and could be narrowed.
- The historical features are underrepresented, and educational opportunities are missing.
- Maintenance and upkeep of trees should be a priority.
- The park is a neighborhood jewel and amenity for the community. The community should be built around humanity, nature, and the history of this area, as opposed to the needs of cars and traffic flow.

### Suggestions for Improvements to the Park Space and Program

- The park should engage a wide range of users. Festivals and events should be planned to promote the park.
- Retain green space that can accommodate the historic features while providing a neighborhood amenity for people without cars.
- Increase the visual presence of the park. Make the space feel bigger.
- Provide better access to the sunken grotto at the historic spring.
- Create space that can accommodate gentle ball playing and games.
- Create play opportunities by adding game tables or incorporating game patterns into the walk such as hopscotch or games with a historical focus.
- Seating opportunities should be increased and improved throughout the park. Consider providing longer benches within the Acorn gazebo and built-in seating around the sunken grotto to allow people to sit around and focus attention on the grotto. Re-orient benches to face the park. Make sure the seating is comfortable.
- Enhance connections to the surrounding parks and public open spaces that are part of private developments.



- Protect existing significant trees. Plant more oak trees and some nice plants in and around the stone grotto.

#### Interpretation

- The park has the potential to be a great heritage tourism spot. Focus on the history as a basis for additional development or programming of the park.
- Provide a comprehensive interpretation of the history of the park. Consider ways to highlight the significance of the Blair Mansion and Lincoln's visits. A statue of Lincoln playing town ball and bronze ground markings were mentioned.
- Look to integrate with DC on the historical presence and interpretation.

#### Newell Street

- Consider closing the adjacent section of Newell Street from East-West Highway to Kennett Street for special events or perhaps permanently to add additional usable space to this important park. A regular schedule of Sunday closings, May through October, could help make the park more visible and useful. Closing this section of Newell Street and expanding the park to incorporate the green space in front of the Argent Apartments could truly serve the neighborhood's needs while paying proper homage to the history of Silver Spring. It would be best if Newell Street were a permeable surface (grassy) and some of the fences were removed around the Argent Apartments to integrate the open space.

#### Additional input

A group of Montgomery County residents signed a petition letter on June 10, 2017 to express their concerns about the existing "Memory Wall" mural and the history depicted by these artworks and their explanatory plaques and interpretive signage. The letter requested interpretation for the future park to be inclusive and accurately reflect the diverse, multi-cultural history of Silver Spring. The letter also requested that the process be inclusive to engage African American communities, historians and artists. Refer to Attachment 12.

#### **Preliminary Program of Requirements:**

The following program summary was developed for the park based on input received from the community, guidance from area master plans, as well as the initial program of requirements that was developed by the Park Planning and Stewardship Division based on the analysis of existing park facilities, surrounding conditions, policy guidance, and duplication of service. Refer to Attachment 4.

- **Historic Resources Preservation & Interpretation** – Retain and rehabilitate the spring and acorn gazebo, and comprehensively interpret the history of the park while including the diverse, multi-cultural history of Silver Spring.
- **Community Open Space/Terrace** – Provide a level and un-programmed open area for small gatherings, flexible programming and activation events.
- **Park Activation/Play Experience** – Provide a cohesive and flexible framework that supports recreational needs and leisure enjoyment for users of all ages. Create play experiences and opportunities for events in the park.
- **Accessibility** – Provide accessible paths within the park and connect to the street crosswalks and sidewalks.
- **Stormwater Management & Landscape Improvements**

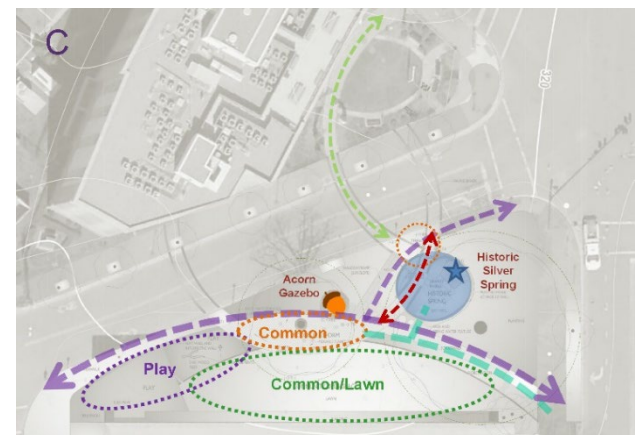
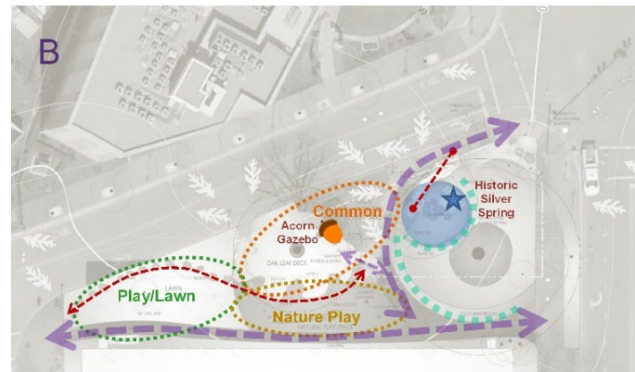
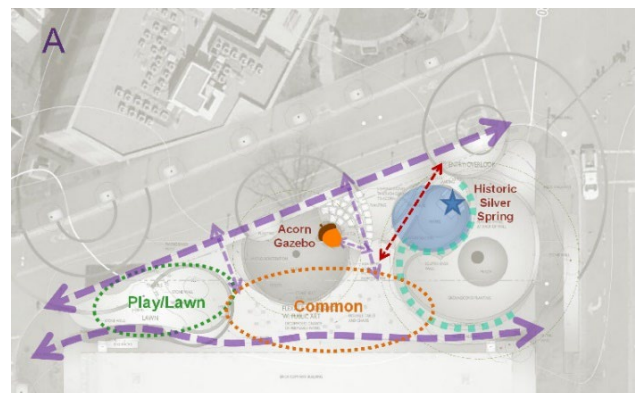
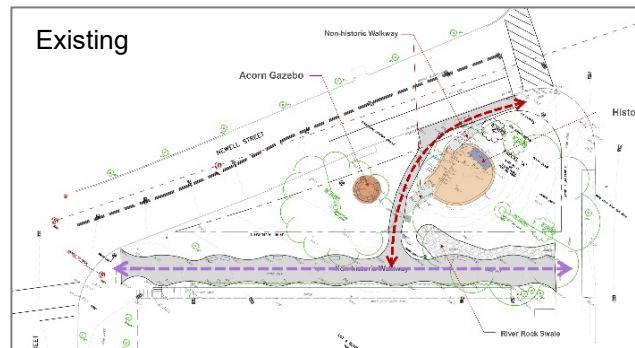
- **Lighting & Site furnishings** – Provide lighting and movable site furniture to accommodate flexible uses.

## FACILITY PLAN DESIGN STUDY

### Alternative Concept Plans Considered

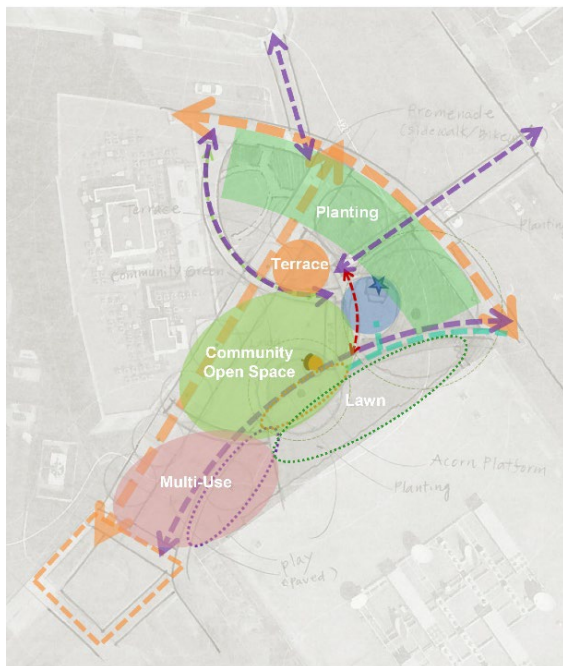
Three alternative concept plans were developed based on the preliminary program of requirements and feedback from the first public meeting. A brief description of each alternative is outlined below.

- Concept A proposes a flexible plaza space at the interior of the park, accessible sidewalks along Newell Street and against the building, a play area with sculpted lawn at the southwestern corner, and stormwater management facilities encircling the existing oak trees.
- Concept B configures a nature play space at the interior of the park with lawn at the southwestern quadrant as an overflow space for play, a wooden platform by the acorn gazebo, an overlook plaza between the grotto and the gazebo, an accessible walkway against the building, and stormwater management along the walkway from the East West Highway sidewalk.
- Concept C creates a community open space at the interior of the park, an accessible walkway and boardwalk through the park, a wooden platform by the acorn gazebo, play and flexible space at the southwestern quadrant with a seat wall separating the play area from street activities, and stormwater management incorporated with the boardwalk and the grotto.



- Concept C incorporating Newell Street

Studies were made to explore closing Newell Street between East West Highway and Kennett Street to expand the park. The concept envisions community open space in the mid-block for activities and events, a multi-use and play area at the southwest quadrant for recreation and a terrace at the center for gathering. For circulation, the plan recommends reconfiguring the intersection of Blair Mill Road and East West Highway to merge the sidewalk, aligning a promenade that combines with the existing sidewalk along the west side of Newell and extending the existing curved walk from the adjacent privately-owned public space to integrate the park. The plan recommends adding planting at the park front to buffer the busy East West Highway and enhance the setting for the historic features. Below is a sketch and a diagram for the Concept C incorporating Newell Street.



Concept C Incorporating Newell Street

## Community Outreach During Design Phase – Meeting 2

The second community meeting was held on November 15, 2017 to present design alternatives for public feedback. Images of relevant examples that might be applicable to the project were shown for inspiration. Three preliminary concept alternatives were presented including the studies for temporarily and permanently incorporating Newell Street into the park.

Approximately 40 people attended the meeting and provided comments. After the group discussion, staff invited the attendees to mark on the image boards to show their preference for specific design or program ideas. Many people liked examples of community open space and terrace with seating opportunities, aesthetic stormwater management, nature-themed play experiences, stone paving, boardwalks, platforms and streetscape for pedestrian purposes. There was a preference expressed for concept Alternative C, because it maximizes the open space, and allocates more green space with less paving.

There were requests for retaining green space near the historic features and restoring the fountain. Adding colorful crosswalks at street crossings into the park for traffic calming and visual highlights received positive feedback. Concerns were also brought up about visibility and maintenance to ensure a safer and more accessible park environment. There were suggestions to incorporate lighting to highlight the historic features and allow safe passage at dark.

Comments were repeatedly brought up for the need of more open space in the South Silver Spring neighborhood. Kids need more space to play and throw a ball nearby. Residents expressed strong support for creating additional park open space for recreational activities. Acquisition of the *Extra Space Storage* at 8001 Newell Street recommended in EPS plan was discussed. The current *Days Inn Silver Spring* property at Kennett Street and 13<sup>th</sup> Street was also mentioned as a candidate for future park space.

The community was receptive to the idea of temporarily or permanently closing Newell Street to expand and activate the park. There was a suggestion to consider changing the two-way street to one-way as an option. Neighbors supported temporary closures of Newell Street to test the impact on local traffic and weekend bus operation. Another resident said that the neighborhood deserves more than just a strip of Newell Street. There was also a request for a safe crossing of Georgia Avenue from the South Silver Spring neighborhood to Jesup Blair Park at 3<sup>th</sup>/Burlington Avenue and Eastern Avenue NW.

The community voiced strong interest regarding history and interpretation for the future park. Staff shared possible themes for future interpretation with the intent to be inclusive and reflect the diverse and multi-cultural history of Silver Spring. Although interpretation is not part of the facility plan scope, in response to the public concerns, staff invited residents and experts who expressed interest to participate in an informal follow-up Focus Group meeting to discuss this subject. The meeting was held on May 22, 2018.

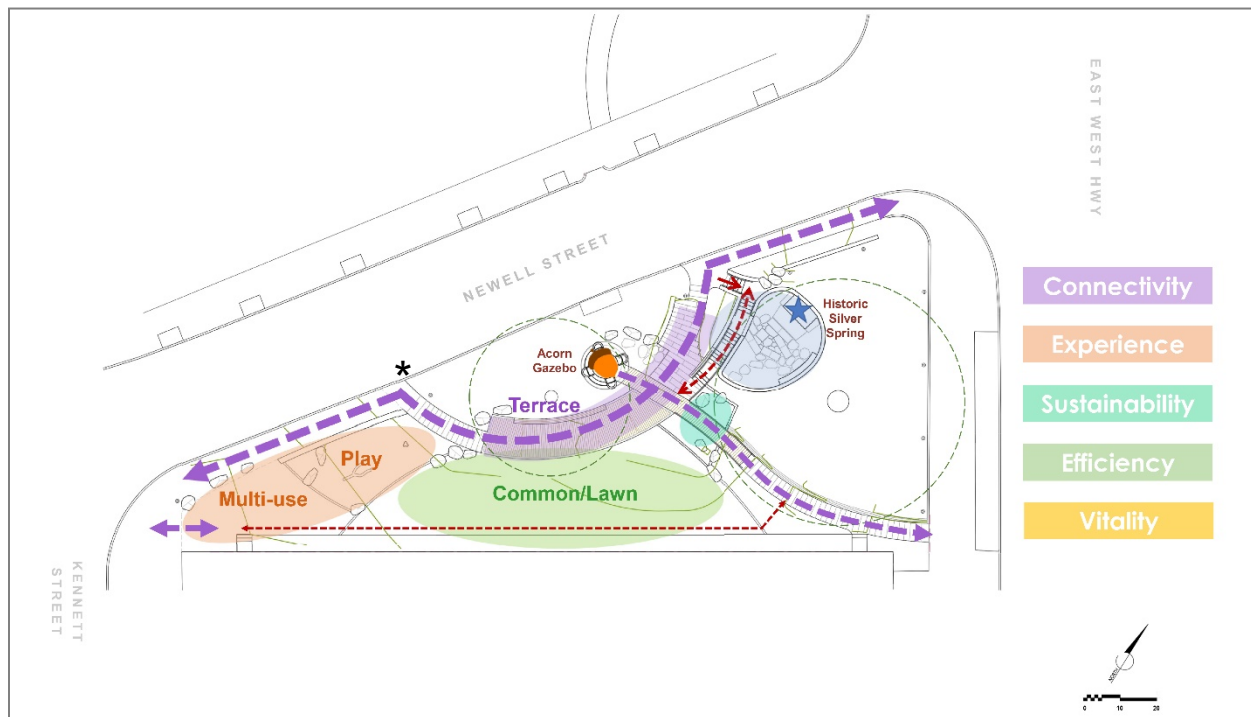
### **Community Outreach During Design Development Phase – Meeting 3**

A third community meeting was held on September 25, 2018 to present the recommended design development plan for public input. The plan refines prior schematic Concept C based on community feedback as well as input from the Historic Preservation Commission preliminary review. The intent is to maximize the usable open space and allocate more green space in the park by reducing paving. The recommended plan was presented to the community along with sections, “before” photos and matching “after” three dimensional renderings.

The plan recommends to:

- Create a consolidated interior lawn and a terrace between the grotto and the gazebo as community open space for gathering and flexible activities. Part of the terrace is to be on an elevated platform to protect existing tree roots.
- Provide low visual impact play elements and a multi-use terrace at the western quadrant and accessible walkways and seating opportunities throughout the park.
- Integrate bioretention facilities with the boardwalk to treat stormwater. Incorporate lighting to highlight the spring and the gazebo and provide safe passage through the park.
- Add new trees and groundcover planting to enhance the historic features and to buffer the park from the street.





Design Development Spatial Diagram

The presentation and recommended park plan were generally well-received. Residents were in favor of the increase in green space and planting as well as bio-retention facilities integrated with the boardwalk/bridge. The primary concern expressed was that the plan does not provide a direct pedestrian route through the park from the sidewalk at the corner of Kennett Street to the intersection of East West Highway. Meeting attendees indicated that this is the most common direction of pedestrian travel through the park. Suggestions were made to soften the corner of the wall (location highlighted on diagram \*) to improve pedestrian flow and allow more direct access to other areas of the park.

Residents also recommended providing free Wi-Fi to make the park more usable. There was a suggestion that the Wi-Fi log-in portal or landing page could have historic information about the park and an Instagram filter. Several opinions were expressed regarding the railings and the boardwalk for aesthetics, compatibility and durability.

### Agency Coordination and Regulatory Approvals

The following is a summary of agency coordination performed for this project:

#### M-NCPPC Montgomery County Department of Parks and Department of Planning

Staff met with various internal stakeholders within the M-NCPPC throughout the facility planning process as part of the Planning, Design, Construction and Operations (PDCO) team process. This included staff from Area 2 Planning, Historic Preservation, Cultural Resources Stewardship, Park Police, Facility Management, Southern Region, Urban Forestry, Accessibility Team, Environmental Engineering and Public Affairs and Community Partnerships.

#### M-NCPPC Department of Planning

A Natural Resources Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD) was approved on January 26, 2017 (File #420170660) for the renovation of the park. The project was not subject to a previously approved Forest Conservation Plan, and since the property is less than 40,000 square feet, the Forest Conservation Law is not applicable to the project. Refer to Attachments 2 and 3 for the approved plan.

#### Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS)

The stormwater management concept plan for the park was approved on August 31, 2018 (File #283958.) The plan proposes to fully meet on-site stormwater management goals via Environmental Site Design to the Maximum Extent Practicable, with micro-bioretenment areas and infiltration under the playground. Refer to Attachments 6 and 7 for the approved plans.

#### Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission

The facility plan was submitted to the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission for preliminary design consultation and received initial comments on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The recommended plan received concept approval on November 14, 2018. A Historic Area Work Permit will be required in the detailed design phase. Refer to Attachment 5 for the staff report.

#### Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT)

Staff coordinated with the Division of Transportation Engineering of MCDOT for the prospect of right-of way closure or abandonment of Newell Street. It was concluded that temporary street closure for special events is feasible and can be coordinated by applying for a permit with the Silver Spring Urban District. Regular weekend closure between May and October may be difficult because the road is used for traffic. Newell Street is an improved county road, and permanent closure would require a County Council Resolution. The Council can only approve such a resolution if there is no current public use or anticipated future public use, or if there has been a change in circumstances since the original dedication of the road. It is unlikely that permanent street closure would be attainable at this time. Refer to Attachment 13 for coordination.

#### Maryland State Highway Administration - Maryland Department of Transportation (SHA)

Staff coordinated with the Office of Planning and Preliminary Engineering of SHA regarding the community's concerns about improving pedestrian crossings of Georgia Avenue to provide better pedestrian access to Jesup Blair Local Park. Ideas were suggested to add a raised refuge island between the northbound and southbound lanes to provide a safety area in the middle of the roadway and to add a signalized pedestrian crossing at King Street where it aligns with the Montgomery College campus to avoid left turn traffic. These ideas are currently under review by the State's transportation planner. Refer to Attachment 13 for coordination.

#### The Brick Companies (TBC)

The M-NCPPC coordinated with the adjoining property owner, TBC, before initiating the park project. An initial phone conference was held on July 12, 2016 to discuss potential improvements to Acorn Urban Park. A follow-up letter was sent on July 28, 2016 to TBC to coordinate the proposed overall park renovation and to seek support and cooperation. Alternatives considered by the M-NCPPC included conveying the TBC-owned park portion of the property to the M-NCPPC, cost sharing, providing a contribution towards specific elements of the park, or possible future programming of events in the park. In a written response on

September 7, 2016, TBC clarified its position of being unable to either deed the property or contribute towards the park redevelopment but will support any drainage or maintenance improvements that need to be made.

TBC has been included in the development of the overall park throughout the planning process and was invited to all public meetings. TBC was informed of concept alternatives, progress plans, illustrations and comments that were brought up by the community. Staff met with TBC on May 1, 2018 to review the recommended facility plan, including easement issues and regulatory requirements. The plan recommends converting the existing paved walkway within the TBC's property into green open space with reconfigured walkways, terraces, infrastructure and other site amenities. TBC understood that on-going coordination with the M-NCPPC will be needed to obtain regulatory approvals and the Historic Area Work permit for the project. An easement will also be required for a portion of the stormwater management facilities within their property. In a letter dated May 23, 2018, TBC supported the proposed renovation of Acorn Urban Park and agreed to make its property an integral part of the park design. Refer to Attachment 14.

## Recommended Facility Plan

### Keys

- |                          |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| A. Historic Spring       | 1. Curb/Edging        |
| B. Historic Acorn Gazebo | 2. Brick Sidewalk     |
| C. Community Open Space  | 3. Stone Runnel/Swale |
| D. Acorn Platform        | 4. Seat Wall          |
| E. Overlook Terrace      | 5. Retaining Wall     |
| F. Boardwalk             | 6. Stairs             |
| G. Accessible Walk       | 7. Ramp               |
| H. Play Area             | 8. Crosswalk          |
| I. West Terrace          | 9. Interpretation     |
| J. Bioretention          | 10. Boulder           |
|                          | 11. Bench             |
|                          | 12. Bike Rack         |
|                          | 13. Light             |

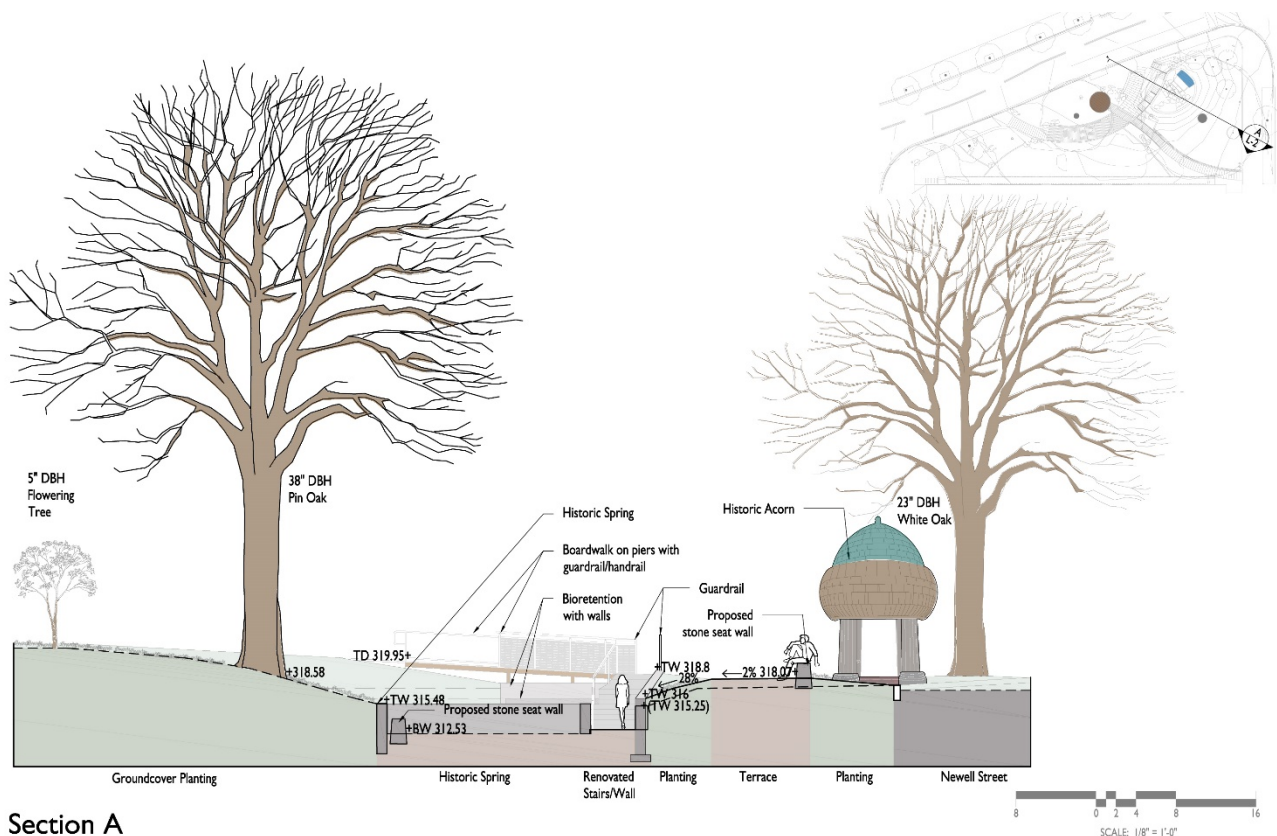


The Recommended Facility Plan envisions the park as a core community space, an urban oasis and a cultural destination. The plan intends to provide a cohesive framework that supports recreational needs and leisure enjoyment; offers a viable park experience that integrates with the unique historic and urban setting; rehabilitates and interprets the historic features; protects and enhances the existing significant trees; provides aesthetic stormwater management to

restore healthy site hydrology and incorporates the principles of *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* (CPTED) in design solutions to achieve a safer and more accessible park space.

The plan rethinks the currently object-oriented, circulation-dominated and fragmented park space. The design approach avoids compartmentalization of the site and instead intends to build connections between people and the place, particularly reinforcing the significance of engaging users in an inclusive environment – a place that serves the higher purpose of social and ecological justice, improved quality of life and conserved historic resources. Besides a physical makeover, the goal is to inspire people to relate to the cultural value of this unique landmark.

The plan recommends reconfiguring the park framework to create inviting program spaces to accommodate a variety of experiences for users of all ages while connecting people to the historic features: an interior lawn for flexible activities, terrace and platform for small gatherings and picnicking, accessible paths, play opportunities, bioretention, landscape improvements, site furnishings and interpretive elements. The renewed park will rehabilitate the spring and acorn gazebo; resolve drainage issues; promote community living and provide opportunities for recreation and enjoyment in this densely populated area. A complete set of plans is included in Attachment 1.





Key elements include:

- A. Historic Spring/Grotto (existing) - retain and rehabilitate the historic spring/grotto. Rehabilitate existing stairs (built 1955 and 1990s) leading to the historic spring area to meet code. They currently do not have uniform heights and tread widths. Add handrail and guardrail as required. Build new stone stairs from the Newell Street entrance to match existing. Add seating opportunities at the grotto.



View from East West Highway Sidewalk (Existing)



View from East West Highway Sidewalk (Proposed)

- B. Acorn Gazebo (existing) - rehabilitate the gazebo and provide ADA access.
- C. Community Open Space - create a consolidated interior lawn as community open space for flexible activities. The space serves as an overflow play area for games or other casual activities.



- D. Acorn Platform - build a wooden platform for seating and gathering. The elevated platform will protect the tree roots and make efficient use of the space. With tree shade and seating opportunities, parents can sit nearby to supervise play while enjoying themselves or engaging in social interaction. The platform serves as an overflow space for the play area.
- E. Overlook Terrace – provide an ADA accessible entrance from Newell Street with seating to welcome people to the park. With proximity to the grotto and the gazebo, the space serves as an overlook terrace for the gazebo and a central location for interpreting the historic features.



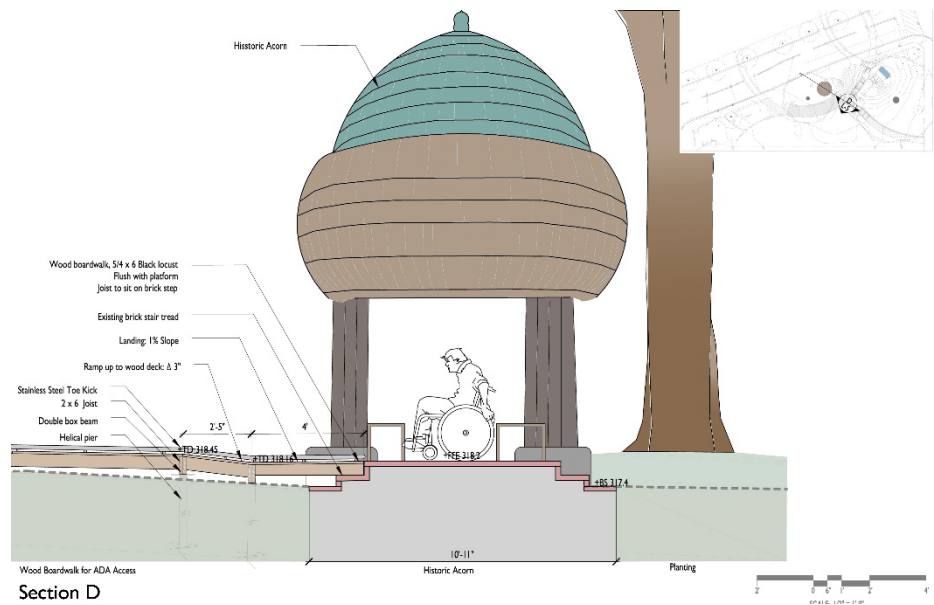
Northwest View from the Park (Existing)



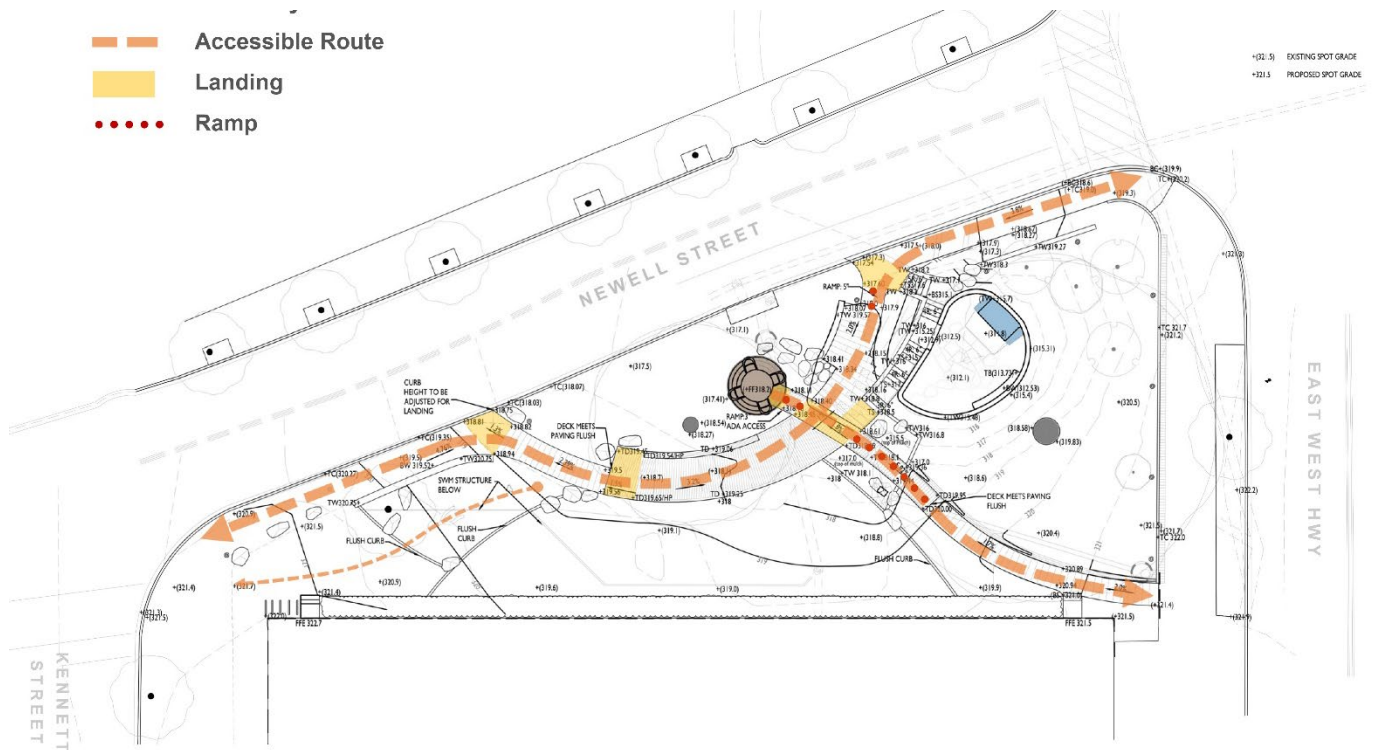
Northwest View from the Park (Proposed)



- F. Boardwalk – provide a wooden boardwalk as part of the ADA accessible route including a non-intrusive ramp and landing for the Acorn Gazebo. Provide handrails and guardrails as needed. The boardwalk protects the existing tree roots, transitions the steep slopes, and passes over bioretention facilities.



- G. Accessible Walk – provide ADA accessible walkways throughout park and connect to the street sidewalks and crosswalks.





- H. Play Area – incorporate boulders and low profile, nature-themed play elements that complement the oak tree setting and allow for an unobstructed view through the park. The stone wall provides seating opportunities and serves as a buffer to separate the play area from the sidewalk and street activities.



Southwest View from the Park (Existing)



Southwest View from the Park (Proposed)

- I. West Terrace – provide a multi-use terrace that transitions into the Kennett Street sidewalk and existing building exit. Retain and install bike racks. Include a game table and movable furniture for flexible uses. Provide paved surfaces that can accommodate game patterns for kids to play.



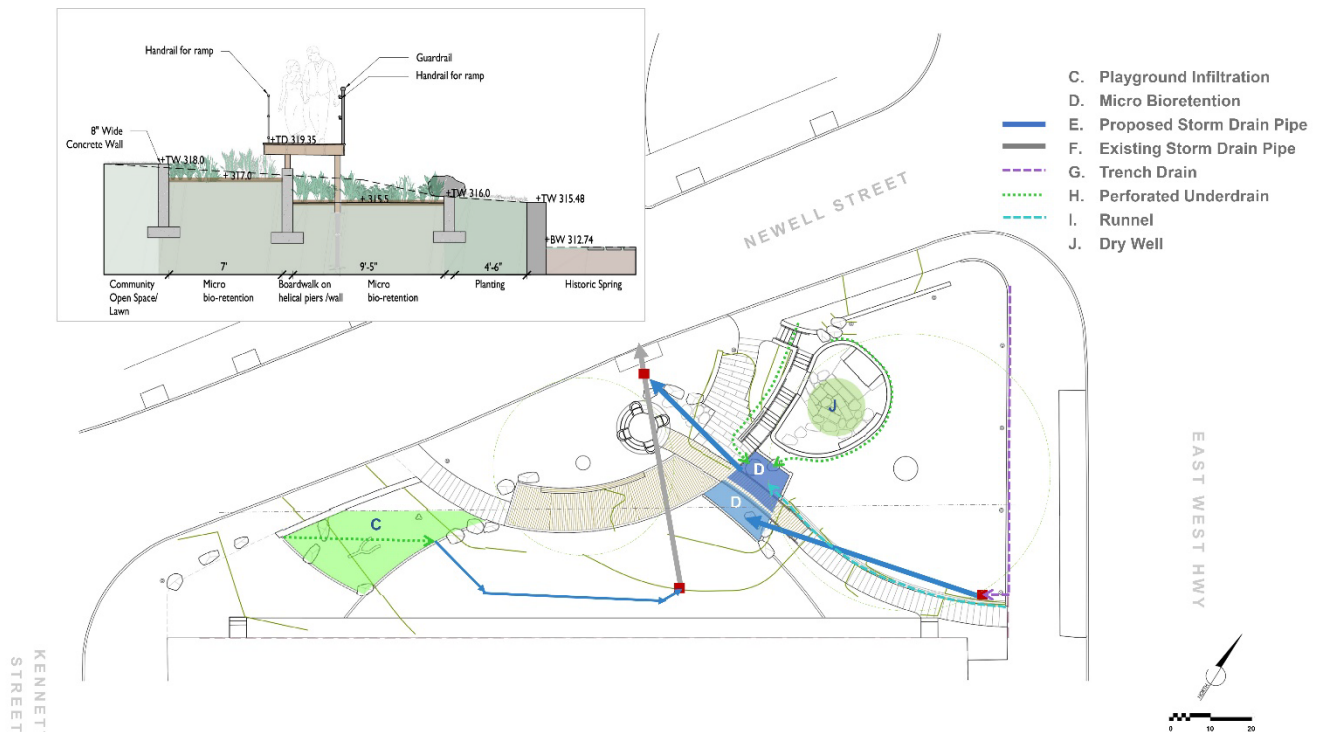
View from Newell Street (Existing)





View from Newell Street (Proposed)

- J. Bioretention – integrate bioretention facilities with the boardwalk to treat stormwater runoff. Add stone curbs, a low retaining wall and a stone runnel to divert and convey offsite runoff from street and sidewalks.



- K. Amenities – provide safe street crossings. Incorporate special paving to draw a visual connection from the privately owned green open space at the Argent Apartments across Newell Street and the surrounding streetscape. Relocate existing light fixtures to the street



front to enhance the park appearance. Install ground level, recessed, and/or other similar spot lights to highlight the historic features and provide safe passage along the walks. Provide interpretation opportunities to interpret the historic features as well as to reflect the diverse, multi-cultural history of Silver Spring.

- L. Landscape Improvements – provide an aesthetic environmental setting for the historic features and sustainable landscape for the overall park. Develop tree protection strategies to guide design, construction and long-term tree care for the significant trees. Plant new trees to expand the urban canopy and to complement the park environment. Consolidate existing evergreen shrubs at the base of the adjacent office building to create a consistent green backdrop for the community open space. Establish shade-tolerant turf for the community open space. Install bioretention planting to treat stormwater. Establish low-growing, low-maintenance groundcovers to prevent soil erosion and to sustain function, beauty and habitat for the park environment.



View from the East West Highway Sidewalk (Existing)



View from the East West Highway Sidewalk (Existing)



## COST ESTIMATES

### Estimated Construction Costs

A summary of construction costs is outlined in the table below. A detailed cost estimate is included in Attachment 8.

Item	Total Cost
Site Preparation and Demolition	\$56,100
Tree Protection	\$31,200
Sediment and Erosion Control	\$8,100
Earthwork	\$6,500
Stormwater Management & Drainage	\$8,800
Utilities (MEP & lighting)	\$73,700
Paving (walkways & terraces)	\$118,600
Structures (walls, stairs, boardwalk, fence & railing)	\$170,400
Site Amenities (playground, furnishings, signage)	\$173,900
Rehabilitation of Historic Features	\$50,000
Landscape Improvements	\$77,200
Miscellaneous	\$10,000
<b>CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$784,500</b>
General Contractor Overhead & Profit @10%	\$78,500
Bond (1.5% Construction Subtotal)	\$11,800
Construction Contingency (15% of Construction Subtotal)	\$117,700
Design Contingency (5% of Construction Subtotal)	\$39,300
<b>CONSTRUCTION TOTAL (Subtotal plus Contingency)</b>	<b>\$1,020,000</b>
Design Cost	\$100,000
Staff Chargebacks for Detail Design	\$30,000
Construction Management & Inspections (4% of Construction Total)	\$40,800
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST</b>	<b>\$1,190,800</b>

### Operating Budget Impact

The total operating budget was estimated at \$11,605 per year, which is a \$9,000 increase from the current cost of \$2,605. A detailed estimate is included in Attachment 9.

## CONCLUSION

Staff recommends approval of the Facility Plan and associated cost estimate. Acorn Urban Park is a gateway to Montgomery County and the Silver Spring CBD, an important pedestrian connection in the South Silver Spring neighborhood, a significant historic landmark and a destination of interest in the Washington metropolitan area. Renovation and activation of the park will protect and steward the County's significant historic resources, create public spaces in a densely developed urban area with high needs for open space, and will promote social equity and accessibility for the neighborhood. The renewed park will support recreational needs and healthy communities, as well as environmental sustainability. If approved, the project expects to begin detailed design in FY2020 and construction afterwards.



## Attachments:

1. 30% Construction Documents- Site Work
2. Natural Resources Inventory / Forest Stand Delineation
3. Natural Resources Inventory / Forest Stand Delineation Approval Letter
4. Preliminary Program of Requirements
5. Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report
6. Stormwater Management Concept
7. Stormwater Management Concept and Water Quality Inventory Approval Letter
8. Detailed Cost Estimate
9. Operating Budget Impact
10. Community Meeting Report
11. Memory Wall Petition
12. DOT and SHA Coordination
13. The Brick Companies Support Letter