

Community Meeting #1 – Silver Spring Intermediate Neighborhood Park

Location: Montgomery Regional Office (MRO) Auditorium, 7:00 pm – 9:00pm

April 18, 2018

Meeting Notes

Silver Spring Intermediate Neighborhood Park Improvement Project

Community Meeting #1

Montgomery County Department of Parks
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC)

Park Staff Present at the Community Meeting #1

Wen Huang, Project Manager, Park Development Division
Andrew Tsai, Project Engineer, Park Development Division
Linda Komes, Landscape Architect, Park Development Division
Judie Lai, Architecture Section Supervisor, Park Development Division
Michael Ma, Division Chief, Park Development Division
Mohammed Turay, Park Manager, Southern Region
Erin Pant, Public Relations and Outreach
Officer Jeff Adcock, Park Police

Number of attendances from the community: 32

Meeting Summary

The meeting began with an introduction of the Parks' "Refresher" Project initiative. The purpose of a "refresher" project is to shorten the process of design and construction for community use parks renovation. These renovation projects are mid-range in scope and cost, generally between \$1 to \$3 million, and are typically not as complex or extensive as wholesale park renovations that go through traditional process which takes 7-10 years to complete. A "refresher" project is expected to be completed from start of design to completion of construction within 3 years.

The improvement project for Silver Spring Intermediate Park is one of the "refresher" projects in Montgomery Parks. The Project Manager shared a PowerPoint presentation of the project, including the site background, and a list of observed issues. Two concept plans were presented in an effort to begin a discussion with the Community input and ideas. The feedback from the community helps the design team to have a better understanding on how well the existing park meets the needs of current and future residents.

The Community's comments from the meeting are summarized at the end of these meeting notes. Additional comments from the community received before and after the meeting have also been included in the summary.

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Park Issues

Silver Spring Intermediate Neighborhood Park is the site of a former Montgomery County Public School (MCPS). The park is currently owned by MCPS and maintained by Montgomery Parks. After the school buildings were demolished in the 1970s, the site was gradually developed as a park. The park was developed well before the enactment of laws requiring accessibility and stormwater treatment. As a result, the park is not accessible to people with physical limitations and during intense rainfall there are areas with ponding and standing water. The stormwater runoff from the park is not treated before being discharged into the adjacent public storm drain system. Current federal law requires that all public facilities, including public parks meet the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition, State and County laws require that runoff generated by the site be treated before being safely conveyed through the public storm drain system.

The design team also observed other issues during site visits at various times and through the use of cameras set up in the park last Spring.

The issues and observations that were discussed in the meeting are:

- Weak, unwelcoming, and non-ADA compliant park entrances
- Lack of ADA compliant access between amenities
- No existing storm water management
- Oversized parking lot
- Not enough seating in playground
- Unevenly graded multi-use fields
- Unattractive retaining wall
- Lack of facilities for dog walkers
- Basketball court improvements
- Usage at tennis courts
- Unsafe sidewalk along Philadelphia Avenue

Concept Plans

Two concept plans were developed by the design team to begin the conversation with the community on how well the existing park facilities meet the community's needs.

Proposed possible improvements to existing amenities

- Entrances. ADA compliant entrances on Boston Avenue near the playground, and on Philadelphia Avenue at or near the bus stop should be provided. Remove the entrance and steps on Chicago Avenue near Boston Avenue.

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- Walkways. Accessible walkways connecting each park feature to the parking lot and pedestrian entrances should be provided. The existing steep asphalt walkway could be replaced with ADA compliant ramps with railings. The walkway in Option 2 is fully accessible and provides access to features within the park, with a length of approximately 1000 ft.
- Parking lot. The size of the existing parking lot could be reduced to allow for more usable green space. Option 1 has 8 spaces, and Option 2 has 10 spaces.
- Bus Stop. The waiting area around the bus stop pad could be increased in size to incorporate more waiting capacity. Low seat walls could be added for seating. Option 1 provides an accessible walkway from the bus stop into the park. Option 2 provides a separate accessible entrance into the park from the corner of the intersection.
- Play fields. The three existing multi-use fields are unevenly graded and could be regraded to be more desirable for informal outdoor activities. Option 1 proposes an enlarged field (100'x175') by reclaiming some of the parking lot area as green space and includes a second, smaller field (60'x120'). Option 2 proposes three smaller fields, with the largest one (90'x135') near the parking lot, and the other two with same size (55'x90') between the playground and tennis courts.
- Playground. The playground is in good condition and is shaded by many large trees; however, it lacks adequate places for users to sit. Additional seating opportunities should be provided near and within the playground.
- Tennis Courts. The existing tennis courts are currently frequently used by dog walkers. Relocating the entrance to the corner and removing the gate, could discourage it's use as a dog park.
- Basketball Court. The recently installed fence at the basketball court is too low to prevent balls from leaving the court area. The height of the fence could be increased to better contain the balls. The rotted timber retaining wall could also be replaced/repaired.
- Retaining Wall. The existing Concrete Masonry Unit (CMU) wall is unattractive with its discolored surface and peeling paint. It could easily be made more attractive and an amenity to the park by incorporating a mural designed either by an artist or by nearby school children.
- Storm water management. There is no storm water treatment in the park. The park naturally drains to the northeast corner of the park where a bio-retention facility should be added to treat runoff before it leaves the site
- Sidewalk along Philadelphia Avenue. The existing sidewalk is very narrow and is located directly behind the curb along busy Philadelphia Avenue making it unpleasant for pedestrians. Intermediate improvements were completed last Summer to remove invasive shrubs and poison ivy that were encroaching on the sidewalk. The City of Takoma Park will initiate a sidewalk improvement plan this Summer, and has identified this stretch of sidewalk as a priority. Montgomery Parks staff met with the City staff and stressed that no trees should be affected during the sidewalk improvement project. Both parties will coordinate when the sidewalk improvements project begins.

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Proposed possible additional facilities

- Shade structure(s)- Option 1 proposes two smaller shade structures, one near the basketball court, the other near the tennis courts. Option 2 proposes one shelter near the basketball court and parking lot, and one small shade structure with two benches near the open play fields.
- Fitness station(s)- Option 1 proposes one centralized fitness station with several pieces of equipment near the tennis courts. Option 2 has three separated smaller fitness areas along the loop path.
- Sledding hill
- Paved dog trail east of the tennis courts- The trail could incorporate slopes and hills, as well as boulders, logs, etc.
- Seating near playing fields-Option 2 offers a small terraced seating area using the existing grading change at the corner of the Boston Ave and Chicago Ave.

Community Comments

Summary:

- Many residents agree one of the most critical issues in the park is drainage
- Residents cherish the park's trees and unobstructed, green open space.
- Residents expressed concerns that the park not become too manicured or overly programmed with features. They asked that accessible paths be minimized and not dissect the park's open space.
- Many residents expressed concerns about the proposal to eliminate any parking spaces.

Comments on the proposed improvements to existing facilities

Entrances

- Users enter the park from all sides. No need for one specific formal park entrance.

Parking lot

- Request to leave the parking lot as is. Reducing the existing parking spaces to 8 is not acceptable.
- The parking lot is used a lot during weekends when Takoma Park's soccer leagues use the fields. On Saturday, the parking lot is filled and cars parking on the street, especially on Boston Avenue. Many homes do not have driveways, and the crowded streets create issues for the neighborhood. Some residents are forced to park far away from their homes on Saturdays due to the crowded streets.
- The parking lot study in the presentation occurred over Memorial Day weekend and may not represent typical use. Suggestion to have another study during soccer season.
- Comment on the parking area to serve no particular purpose other than a service based on past needs. Suggestion to remove the pavement for more ample, structured sports. (Email received prior to the meeting)

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- Suggest to cut the parking spaces, but not support for a large full-sized field. (Email received after the meeting)
- Request that the existing portable bathroom remain at the park. It is important especially for families with young children.

Walkways

- Support to make the park more accessible and bring it into compliance with the ADA, but object too many paved paths throughout the park, which would overwhelm the small space and destroy the greatest asset of the park.
- Keep walkway pavement as minimal as possible.
- There were many concerns that the added paths will cause the park to lose the sense of open green space.
- Someone questioned how necessary ADA compliance is, indicated that the park already seems very accessible to stroller users
- Appreciate the proposed ADA updates that will allow grandparents to enjoy the park more with grandchildren.
- Request that Parks look at other construction materials besides asphalt and concrete for ADA paths.
- Suggest to consider the ADA path to be located along the court perimeters, instead of through the middle of the open space.
- Project Manager received several emails after the meeting that expressed support and understanding for the needs for an ADA accessible park.

Play Fields

- An enlarged field will increase parking demand.
- More fields will create bigger drainage issues in the neighborhood.
- A bigger field will bring more adult players and change the feel of the park, which should remain as a quiet neighborhood park.
- Question on scheduled Montgomery County/Takoma Park soccer games. Indicated it is not fair to other park users.
- This park should not become a soccer field for adult players
- Request dedicated soccer goals on Field A so that older children could use the field.

Green open spaces

- The open green space is the park's greatest asset. Do not cut the open space into separate zones by paved walkways.
- Leave as much free space as possible without paths/fields/gazebos/exercise stations
- Leave the wild, natural areas for kids to explore and play, especially the area east of the tennis courts.

Trees

- Question about the definition of mature trees. Concern over the potential removal of smaller trees that were planted more recently and provide great value.

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- Strong support for preservation and protection of existing trees in the design and during future construction.
- Add a fence at the corner of Chicago and Boston Avenues to protect the mature trees.

Tennis Courts

- Add a larger backboard and improve its quality. Other question on whether the backboard could disturb neighbors.
- Request paint pickle ball lines on both tennis courts.
- Many object the proposal to remove the gate. There is no issue with the courts being used for dogs.
- Refurbish the tennis courts -- resurface, add new nets and fencing.
- Add a wall in the court area for solo squash play.
- The tennis courts need to be resurfaced and leveled. There is ponding water on the surface after rain events.
- Discourage the use of the tennis courts for anything other than tennis. (Email received after the meeting)

Basketball Court

- Many compliments on the recent improvements to the basketball court.
- Increase the height of the fence to prevent balls from leaving the court.
- The existing wood retaining wall is in very poor condition. It is used a lot for seating and needs repair/replacement.
- Maintenance machinery should not park on the court and damage the surface.

Playground

- Add a fence around the playground adjacent to Boston Avenue.
- Add more movable picnic tables.

Concrete Masonry Unit (CMU) Retaining Wall and Railing

- Any railing changes should retain the visually open feel of the existing railing.
- The proposal to include school art work on the wall will be a distraction and become clutter.

Memorial Bench

- There was a question about what would happen to the memorial bench and two associated trees. Request that the memorial be preserved and incorporated into whatever changes are made to the park. Suggested the installation of a drainage system to keep that part of the park less boggy following rain storms. Park staff confirmed that the memorial bench and the associated two trees will be preserved and be incorporated into the design.

Drainage

- Many comments regarding the serious drainage problems in the park and the neighboring community. Within the park water tends to pool and many homes that are downstream from the park frequently experience flooding.

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- Request that a detailed engineering examination be initiated to study the drainage issues, both in the park and in the surrounding neighborhood. Suggest that Parks should coordinate on this with WSSC
- The recently added swale is a safety hazard for park users.

Comments on the proposed additional facilities

Shade Structure

- Shade structure(s) will increase illegal activities and provide opportunities to hide
- Support for a picnic shelter for birthday parties and other gatherings.
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Dog Waste Stations and Dog Trail

- Dog waste stations need regular maintenance and should be refilled more often.
- There is no need for a trail specifically designed for dogs with dog-specific equipment/furnishings. Dogs should just be allowed to run free in open areas.
- Dogs should not be allowed to run off leash in the park as they can scare and intimidate young children.
- Someone suggested to study the potential of a fenced area for dogs instead of a larger field.
- Appreciation to Parks for not considering this site for a dog park. It is too small and the fencing would obstruct the view and use of the park.

Exercise Stations

- Many objections to the proposed exercise stations. They are not used and occupy valuable green space.
- There was support for exercise stations in the park, delivered as a message for someone who was unable to attend the meeting.
- Locating an exercise station near the playground could present a danger to kids
- Select equipment that is safe for kids to play on, as they are likely to do so, if located near the playground.
- Nearby Jessup Blair Local Park is a more suitable park for exercise stations.

Sledding Hill

- There is already an existing sledding hill in the park on the slope that runs from Philadelphia Avenue toward the tennis court. This area is mostly used by younger children. Older kids go to Takoma Middle School for a steeper and longer ride.

Viewing Area and Seating Areas

- Add more movable picnic tables for watching basketball, soccer practices, children in the playground, hosting birthday parties and other outdoor gatherings.
- There is no need for a viewing area near the soccer field, or a shade structure with benches that may obstruct the sense of openness.

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Other comments

- Cars drive much too fast on Philadelphia Avenue, especially at the intersection of Philadelphia Ave and Chicago Ave.
- Support for widening the sidewalk along Philadelphia Avenue and improving its surface. Request to accomplish this with as little disturbance to the adjacent tree buffer as possible.
- Twice a week, for over 20 years, a neighborhood volleyball team uses this park. The temporary swale is constructed at where the volleyball is played without consulting with the user. Future design should incorporate the volleyball play space.
- Several attendees questioned why this project was initiated, stating that the park is just fine as how it is. One person thought the project was started just to add another large soccer field.
- Many cherish the park as-is, quiet, peaceful and not overly programmed, indicating that the proposed improvements are not necessary.
- Fear that the proposed improvements could make the small park seem overdeveloped.
- Request that the park not become overly manicured.
- Question of the water fountain that has not yet been turned on in the Ellsworth Dog Park.
- Support to reinstall the drinking fountain that used to be located near basketball court, or relocate it to be near the tennis courts.
- Observation that the park is also used by many residents of apartments on Sligo Avenue.
- Concern of the potential disruption to the park during the construction. Request that the park remains open during construction.
- Request that future meetings be scheduled at an earlier time in the evening, like around 6:00pm, and be coordinated with events at the local schools to avoid conflicts, so families with young children can attend.
- Request that the Community be given the opportunity to provide input before any plans are finalized.

The End.