

MEMORANDUM

October 11, 2021

TO: Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee
FROM: Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst
SUBJECT: Thrive Montgomery 2050
PURPOSE: Worksession to review the Planning Board Draft Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan

Councilmembers may wish to bring their copy of the Plan to the meeting.

This is the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee's eighth worksession on the Planning Board's Thrive Montgomery 2050 Draft Plan. The last worksession covered the chapter on Affordable and Attainable Housing. This worksession will cover the chapter on Parks and Recreation. On October 18, the Committee will hold a final worksession on any remaining or follow-up issues as well as the Conclusion and a revised Introduction.

Background

The Committee's review of the introductory section of the Plan established that this Plan is not a whole scale rewrite of the wedges and corridor plan but a refinement of the ideas introduced by the wedges and corridor concept - to concentrate growth in downtowns, town centers, and rural villages, and to promote growth along major transportation corridors to maximize the efficient use of land. As noted in the introduction, the policies and practices put forth in this general plan are centered on three overarching objectives: economic health, racial equity and social justice, and environmental resilience. The Planning Board Draft weaves these objectives through each chapter.

In addition to understanding the format of the Plan, it is important to keep in mind the vision for growth that Thrive 2050 is designed to encourage and support. In their briefing to the Committee on July 21, the Planning Department summarized its vision of Montgomery County in 2050 as one that will:

- maintain a constrained growth area;
- reintroduce East County growth corridors as key to racial equity and economic competitiveness;

- place an emphasis on East/West growth corridors with transit;
- protect the Agricultural Reserve and make it more accessible and relevant to the whole County; and
- look for new ways of thinking about growth such as Parking Lots to Places, Complete Communities, and 15-Minute Living.

Last, given the volume of correspondence regarding Thrive 2050, the Attainable Housing Study, and the rezoning of single-family detached homes, it is worth noting that the General Plan is a policy document. It does not change the zoning on any property or change current regulations related to land use, such as development approvals, transportation infrastructure, or environmental requirements.

Chapter 6: Parks and Recreation - For an Increasingly Urban and Diverse Community: Active and Social

The promotion of parks as essential for providing natural areas for recreation, enjoyment, and resource conservation is not new to the County’s general plan. Thrive 2050 reaffirms these important roles and adds new ones that recognize the challenges of providing park facilities in a mature County.

As with the earlier chapters, Council staff, the Planning Board Chair, and Planning staff have agreed to support a revised version of Chapter 6, attached on © 1-9. Many of the changes are simply a reordering of some of the text for clarity and readability, and the addition of information/explanations regarding the three overarching objectives¹; however, more substantive changes or ones related to comments or testimony are noted below.

Chapter 6 begins with a brief decade-by-decade history of the Parks Department, starting in the 1930s through the 2000s. One comment staff received was a request for the Parks timeline description to include some discussion or reference to the systemic racism that shaped land development during this time. The underlined text below has been included in the revised chapter.

- In the 1920s and 1930s, developers of early down-county subdivisions dedicated stream valley floodplains to the M-NCPPC. The resulting parks helped to market these subdivisions and provided a place for water and sewer infrastructure along with parkways for pleasure driving. This was a period when restrictive covenants were used in some residential neighborhoods to exclude racial and religious minorities, and public recreational facilities such as swimming pools were also often segregated.
* * *
- By the mid-1990s, the Parks Department had begun to recognize the importance of preserving and interpreting significant sites in local African-American history. For example, it established the Underground Railroad Trail and related programming to help tell the story of slavery and emancipation as these events played out in Montgomery County. The Department did not, however, give much thought to disparities in the distribution of recreational opportunities or access to nature.
- In recent years, the Parks Department has developed analytical tools such as “equity mapping” to ensure racial, socioeconomic, and geographic equity in parks and recreation budgets and programming decisions. Projects like the Josiah Henson Museum and Woodlawn Manor Cultural

¹ Section headings for text related to each objective and symbols attached to each policy statement indicating the objective it supports (Economic Health (Ec), Racial Equity and Social Justice (Eq), and Environmental Resilience (Env)) have been added to the draft Plan.

Park help to educate residents about the history and legacy of slavery, and staff with deep expertise in historic preservation, archeology, and cultural programming work to document the stories of African Americans and their role in the County's history.

Following this background material, the Plan notes that, while the Parks Department has built a well-deserved reputation for environmental stewardship and has made progress in providing a more culturally-diverse range of recreational opportunities (i.e., cricket), there is room for improvement. The Plan specifically notes the following in need of improvement:

- “Our highest density areas are far from places where the most acreage of parkland exists in the county, with lack of alternatives to accessing such parks other than driving.
- Many conservation-oriented parks lack trails and are inaccessible to walkers, cyclists, and transit users, limiting their availability to the greater public.
- Parks conceived as buffers often act as separators rather than gathering places for people.
- Park facility standards and acquisition strategies conceived during a period of greenfield expansion are incompatible with infill development and adaptive reuse of sites.”

These all seem laudable challenges to work on in the years ahead; however, the bullet on conservation-oriented parks raised concern about the intensity of use it implies. To clarify the intent, the bullet has been revised as shown below:

- Conservation-oriented parks can include carefully designed trails and other low impact recreation areas; however, many ~~conservation-oriented~~ of these parks lack appropriate access for hikers and bikers, trails and are inaccessible to walkers, cyclists, and transit users limiting their availability to the greater public.

In addition to the suggested edits above, the Council recently received a letter signed by several environmental organizations being promoted through the Action Network. The letter requests that the Council prioritize equitable green infrastructure and require a comprehensive plan to restore and increase green infrastructure² in the County.

To this end, under the seventh policy recommendation, which supports the maintenance of high standards of environmental stewardship in park management and operation, the following practice has been added:

- Prioritize the equitable distribution of green infrastructure.

Council and Planning staff also recommend that in the Action List of Resources a comprehensive plan to restore and increase green infrastructure within the County be added as an action item.

Council staff recommends the Committee support adding a practice and action item to prioritize and promote green infrastructure.

Policies and Practices

Thrive recommends the following policies and practices to maximize the contributions of parks and recreation toward creating strong communities with lasting value. Minor edits to the policies and practices have been made for clarity and are consistent with the Chapter 6 revisions on © 1-9.

² Meaning interconnected forested greenways, re-greened urban areas, conservation landscaping, constructed wetlands, native biodiverse habitat, and other nature-based areas.

1. Focus on creating high quality urban parks.

- Prioritize acquisition of land for parks in urban centers and other intensively-developed places along growth corridors and in Complete Communities using the Legacy Urban Space CIP commitment, the Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan (EPS Plan) and the Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan³ as starting points. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Offer programs in urban parks to encourage visitation, increase the amount of time spent in parks, and make these spaces centers of activity. (Eq)
- Implement the EPS Plan to ensure that densely populated parts of the County enjoy walkable access to a full range of park experiences. (Ec, Eq)
- Integrate privately-owned public spaces (POPS) with the park/recreation system to supplement publicly-owned and managed gathering spaces and athletic facilities, using a range of ownership and management approaches to public space. (Eq)
- Coordinate land use and park planning to ensure Complete Communities have access to a range of park types through a combination of publicly- and privately-owned facilities. (Ec, Eq, Env)

2. Use park and recreation facilities/programs to promote active lifestyles.

- Include active recreation as an integral element in park planning and design.
- Encourage active recreation as a key component of POPS in all parts of the County.
- Deliver park and recreation facilities and programs designed to encourage residents of all ages, cultural backgrounds, and abilities to engage in vigorous physical activity. (Eq)
- Integrate park trails and paths into transportation planning and better use them to connect residents to jobs, centers of activity, and other parks and trails. (Ec, Eq)
- Ensure that residents in urban, suburban, and rural areas all have access to a wide variety of parks and programs. (Eq, Env)

3. Ensure that parks and recreation opportunities are equitably distributed along racial, socioeconomic, and geographic lines.

- Amend the EPS Plan study area to incorporate a more refined analysis of equity in its methodology. (Eq)
- Expand and improve the use of racial and socioeconomic equity measures in developing capital budgets for park and recreation facilities. (Eq)
- Gather data on – and address – barriers to participation in park and recreation programs. (Eq)
- Improve accessibility of park and recreation facilities via walking, biking, and transit. (Eq)
- Ensure that urban, suburban, and rural areas all have access to great parks. (Ec, Eq)

4. Make social connection a central objective for parks and recreation.

- Design park, recreation, and related infrastructure and services around building community, creating opportunities for interaction, and making parks and recreational amenities a central element of Complete Communities. (Eq)
- Connect neighborhoods and people to parks with a world-class trail network. (Ec, Eq)
- Include food/beverage in planning and programming parks and recreational facilities where appropriate. (Ec)

³ The PROS Plan has been added in response to comment by the County Executive.

- Provide park amenities that appeal to visitors with different interests and physical abilities. (Eq)
5. **Update park facility standards and acquisition strategies to align with infill development and adaptive reuse strategies.**
 6. **Coordinate with County agencies to accommodate multiple needs, including recreation, education, community-building, and resource stewardship - through colocation, adaptive reuse, co-programming and other combined or shared land and facilities.**
 7. **Maintain high standards of environmental stewardship in park management and operations.**
 - Reaffirm the Parks Department’s commitment to resource conservation, stewardship, and sustainability practices such as innovative stream and habitat restoration projects. (Env)
 - Selectively acquire additional land where needed to protect sensitive natural resources, improve water quality, increase tree cover, enhance wildlife corridors, curb invasive species, and achieve other environmental goals. (Env)
 - Create a resiliency plan to improve the ability of park and recreation facilities and natural resources to withstand the effects of climate change. (Env)
 - Prioritize the equitable distribution of green infrastructure. (Env)
 8. **Integrate parks/rec/public spaces into economic development strategies and land use planning to attract employers and workers, build social connections, encourage healthy lifestyles, and create vibrant places, especially as part of Complete Communities.**

Council staff recommends that the Committee support the above-listed policies and the associated practices.

Economic Health, Racial Equity and Social Justice, and Environmental Resilience

As noted earlier, policies and practices in the Plan are now denoted with a symbol indicating the objective(s) the policy supports. In addition, following the recommended policies and practices, every chapter will have a section on each overarching objective to elaborate on how the policy recommendations further the objective. The Planning Board Draft currently contains some of this text; however, as noted in the beginning, headings have been added to identify the section for each objective. In addition, some of the text has been rearranged for clarity and additional text added.

Council staff recommends that the Committee support the Planning Board Draft sections (as revised).

Metrics

The final section of each chapter provides a list of proposed metrics designed to assess the success or failure of the policies put forth in the chapter. Below are the metrics for Chapter 6:

- Number of urban parks
- Miles of streams restored and stormwater runoff treated
- Percentage of population facing childhood obesity
- Stream water quality
- Amount of urban tree canopy

- Number of miles of trails built
- Percentage of population participating in vigorous physical activity
- Park and recreation patronage/participation by race/ethnicity, language spoken and age
- Awards and other recognition of excellence in urban parks and trails
- Number of residents attending community gatherings at parks
- Proportion of population within 15-minute walk of three park experiences

As noted in earlier staff reports on Thrive, Council staff suggests enhancing the implementation section of the Plan with specific direction for the evaluation and review of the metrics. In addition, any metrics designed to track the progress in advancing equity should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and geographical area within the County. The implementation section will be discussed as part of the worksession to review the Conclusion.

Actions

As mentioned in the review of Chapters 1 and 2, the actions proposed to implement the Plan’s policies and practices are in an appendix titled Actions List of Resources (excerpt at © 10-11). The appendix notes that it is not an exhaustive list of all possible actions that will be undertaken to implement the Plan, suggesting the listed actions be updated regularly as new tools and resources become available to respond to changing conditions. It also suggests that the actions be organized and prioritized based on level of importance and resources available to implement them, noting that some should be short-term actions that need to be completed in the next five years to jump-start Plan implementation while other actions will take place over the medium term (roughly 6 to 15 years) or long term (16+ years), building on the work done through prior actions.

There are 31 actions associated with this chapter. Given the time needed to review the Planning Board Draft Plan, Council staff suggests the Committee set up a plan to review the Action Appendix in detail following the adoption of Thrive 2050.

<u>Attachments</u>	<u>© Pages</u>
Chapter 6, revised	1-9
Actions in Appendix - Parks and Recreation	10-12
County Executive’s comments on Thrive related to Parks	13

PARKS AND RECREATION-- FOR AN INCREASINGLY URBAN AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY: ACTIVE AND SOCIAL

Introduction: Evolving and Expanding Roles for Parks and Recreation







Montgomery County has long been a leader in adopting forward-thinking policies for the preservation of land for parks, recreation, agriculture, and resource conservation. The M-NCPPC has won the National Recreation and Parks Association Gold Medal for the country's best large parks system a record six times. Like other aspects of planning, however, the success of our approach to parks, recreation and open space must continue to evolve to meet changing needs.

The story of the Parks Department closely tracks the ways in which American suburbs – and the attitudes, lifestyles, and values of their residents – have changed:

- In the 1920s and 1930s, developers of early down-county subdivisions dedicated stream valley floodplains to the M-NCPPC. The resulting parks helped to market these subdivisions and provided a place for water and sewer infrastructure along with parkways for pleasure driving. This was a period when restrictive covenants were used in some residential neighborhoods to exclude racial and religious minorities, and public recreational facilities such as swimming pools were also often segregated.
- In the early post-war period, Montgomery County's role as a bedroom community for a growing capital city increased demand for organized recreation in park activity buildings, ballfields, and tennis courts. The development pattern throughout these early decades of the Parks Department's history was characterized by subdivisions of single-family homes with backyards grouped by residents with similar income and social structure and designed with the assumption that residents could, would and should drive to major amenities.
- By the 1960s and 1970s, the influence of the environmental movement – sparked in part by Silver Spring's Rachel Carson – led the park system to devote more attention to resource stewardship. The 1980s and 1990s saw the introduction of "smart growth" and increased appreciation for the benefits of a compact form of development, with park acquisition and the Agricultural Reserve working together as part of a comprehensive approach to land conservation policy as a tool to protect the environment and discourage sprawl.
- By the mid-1990s, the Parks Department had begun to recognize the importance of preserving and interpreting significant sites in local African-American history. For example, it established the Underground Railroad Trail and related programming to help tell the story of slavery and emancipation as these events played out in Montgomery County. The Department did not, however, give much thought to disparities in the distribution of recreational opportunities or access to nature.
- At the turn of the 21st century, the desire to revitalize central business districts led the Parks Department to plan and build more urban parks, initially as "buffers" to protect abutting single-family neighborhoods from more intensive – or simply different – types of development such as apartment buildings, townhouses, or commercial uses.
- In recent years, the Parks Department has developed analytical tools such as "equity mapping" to ensure racial, socioeconomic and geographic equity in parks and recreation budget and programming decisions. Projects like the Josiah Henson Museum and Woodlawn Manor Cultural Park help to educate residents about the history and legacy of slavery, and staff with deep expertise

in historic preservation, archeology, and cultural programming work to document the stories of African-Americans and their role in the county's history.

Montgomery County Parks Timeline 1930 to 2010

<p>1930s-1940s</p> 	<p>1950s-1960s</p> 	<p>1970s</p> 
<p>Stream Valley Parks Water Protection</p>	<p>Regional Parks And Athletic Fields</p>	<p>Neighborhood Parks</p>
<p>1960s-1970s</p> 	<p>1980s-1990s</p> 	<p>2000s-2010s</p> 
<p>Environmental Awareness</p>	<p>Smart Growth Open Space Preservation</p>	<p>Urban Park Shortage</p>

What is the problem we are trying to solve? Closing the Gaps in Park and Recreation Planning to Meet the Needs – and Serve the Values - of a Changing Community

The Parks Department has built a well-deserved reputation for environmental stewardship, and it has made progress in providing a wider range of recreational opportunities, such as cricket, to meet the needs of a more culturally diverse population. It has room, however, for improvement:

- Our highest density areas are far from most parkland, which is difficult to reach without access to a car.
- Conservation-oriented parks can include carefully designed trails and other low impact recreation areas; however, many of these parks lack appropriate access for hikers and bikers, limiting their availability to the greater public.
- Parks conceived as buffers often act as separators rather than gathering places for people.

- Park facility standards and acquisition strategies conceived during a period of greenfield expansion are incompatible with infill development and adaptive reuse of sites.

Meanwhile, the role of land conservation and stewardship in addressing the county’s environmental sustainability goals is as important as ever. Urban redevelopment and infill will reduce the environmental impact of future growth by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and help reverse the damage from earlier development by incorporating modern state-of-the-practice stormwater management features. Nonetheless, the environmental performance of green infrastructure on public land must keep getting better to improve water quality, limit property damage and erosion from flooding, and add tree and forest cover.

In addition to maintaining its leadership role in environmental management, the Parks Department must continue to take on new roles:

- Improve service to residents of downtowns, town centers, and other intensively developed areas
- Focus on social engagement and community building as a central role of parks and recreation
- Encourage vigorous physical activity for people of all ages, abilities, and cultures

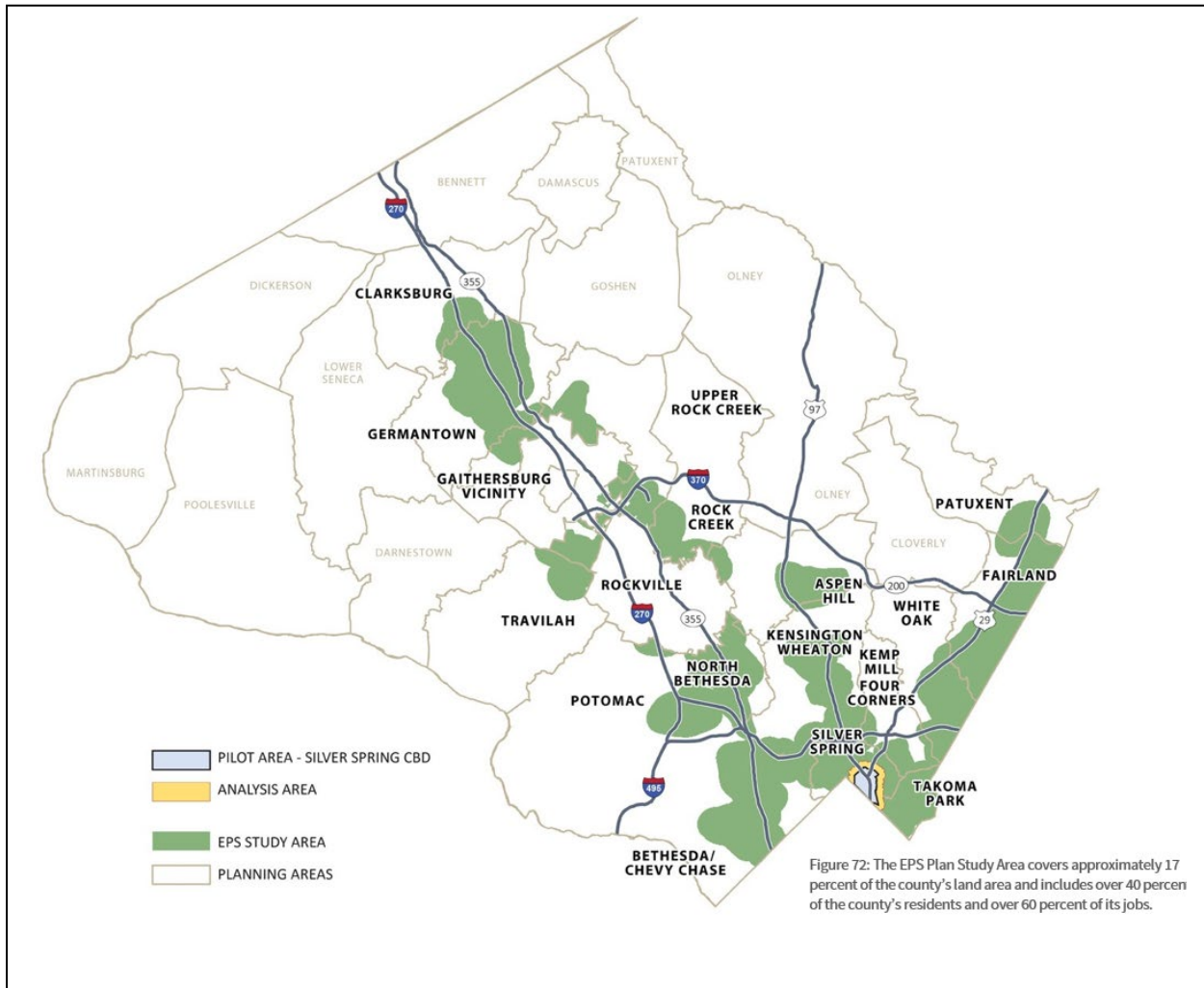
Over the coming decades, our challenge is to acquire, develop and program parks, recreation, and privately owned public spaces that provide a range of active recreation and community building opportunities throughout the most intensively developed parts of the county while continuing to apply sound environmental stewardship practices to public lands.

What policies will solve the problem?

In order to maximize the contributions of parks and recreation towards creating strong communities with lasting value, the county will pursue the following policies and practices:

Focus on creating high quality urban parks.

- Prioritize acquisition of land for parks in urban centers and other intensively developed places along growth corridors and in Complete Communities using the Legacy Urban Space CIP commitment, the Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan (EPS Plan) and the Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan as starting points. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Offer programs in urban parks to encourage visitation, increase the amount of time spent in parks and make these spaces centers of activity. (Eq)
- Implement the EPS Plan to ensure that densely populated parts of the county enjoy walkable access to a full range of park experiences. (Ec, Eq)
- Integrate privately owned public spaces (POPS) with the park/recreation system to supplement publicly owned and managed gathering spaces and athletic facilities, using a range of ownership and management approaches to public space. (Eq)
- Coordinate land use and park planning to ensure Complete Communities have access to a range of park types through a combination of public and privately owned facilities.

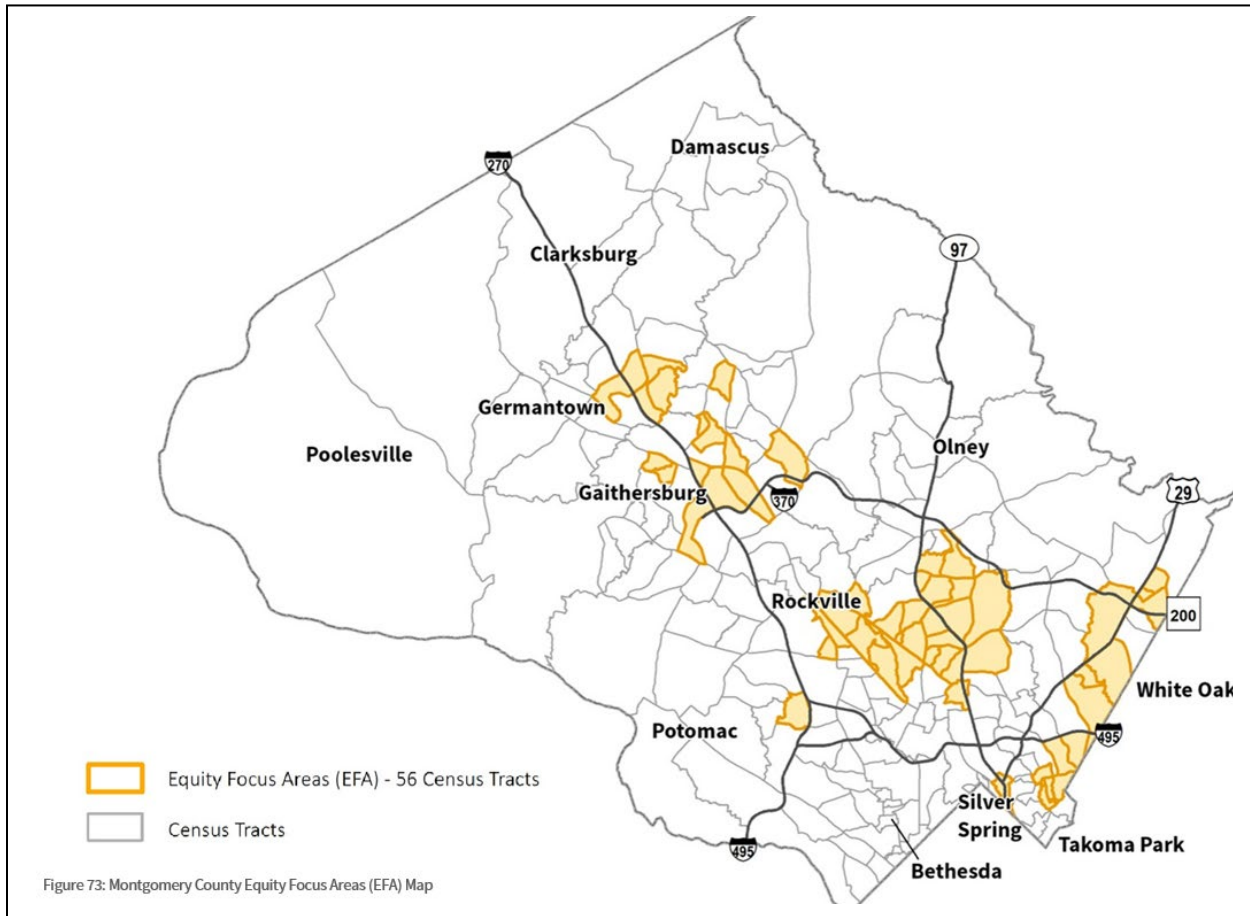


Use park and recreation facilities/programs to promote active lifestyles.

- Include active recreation as an integral element in park planning and design.
- Encourage active recreation as a key component of POPS in all parts of the county.
- Deliver park and recreation facilities and programs designed to encourage residents of all ages, cultural backgrounds, and abilities to engage in vigorous physical activity. (Eq)
- Integrate park trails and paths into transportation planning and better use them to connect residents to jobs, centers of activity, and other parks and trails. (Ec, Eq)
- Ensure that residents in urban, suburban, and rural areas all have access to a wide variety of parks and programs.

CDC data from 2019 indicates that only 14.6-20.5 percent of Maryland adolescents (grades 9-12) achieve one hour or more of moderate and/or vigorous physical activity daily.

Recent survey data show that the percentage of children under age 12 who played team sports “regularly” has declined in recent years, from 42 percent in 2011 to 38 percent in 2018.



Ensure that parks and recreation opportunities are equitably distributed along racial, socioeconomic, and geographic lines.

- Amend the EPS Plan study area to incorporate a more refined analysis of equity in its methodology. (Eq)
- Expand and improve the use of racial and socioeconomic equity measures in developing capital budgets for park and recreation facilities. (Eq)
- Gather data on – and address – barriers to participation in park and recreation programs. (Eq)
- Improve accessibility of park and recreation facilities via walking, biking and transit. (Eq)
- Ensure that urban, suburban, and rural areas all have access to great parks. (Ec, Eq)

Make social connection a central objective for parks and recreation.

- Design park, recreation, and related infrastructure and services around building community, creating opportunities for interaction, and making parks and recreational amenities a central element of Complete Communities. (Eq)
- Connect neighborhoods and people to parks with a world-class trail network. (Ec, Eq)
- Include food/beverage in planning and programming parks and recreational facilities where appropriate. (Ec)
- Provide park amenities that appeal to visitors with different interests and physical abilities. (Eq)

Update park facility standards and acquisition strategies to align with infill development and adaptive reuse strategies.

Coordinate with county agencies to accommodate multiple needs, including recreation, education, community-building, and resource stewardship - through colocation, adaptive reuse, co-programming and other combined or shared land and facilities.

Maintain high standards of environmental stewardship in park management and operations.

- Reaffirm the Parks Department's commitment to resource conservation, stewardship, and sustainability practices such as innovative stream and habitat restoration projects. (Env)
- Selectively acquire additional land where needed to protect sensitive natural resources, improve water quality, increase tree cover, enhance wildlife corridors, curb invasive species, and achieve other environmental goals. (Env)
- Create a resiliency plan to improve the ability of park and recreation facilities and natural resources to withstand the effects of climate change. (Env)
- Prioritize the equitable distribution of green infrastructure.

Integrate parks/rec/public spaces into economic development strategies and land use planning to attract employers and workers, build social connections, encourage healthy lifestyles, and create vibrant places, especially as part of Complete Communities.

How will these policies serve the goals of Thrive Montgomery 2050?

These policies will strengthen the role of parks and recreation in economic competitiveness, racial equity, environmental sustainability and promote an active, healthy community for all.

Parks create vibrant, economically competitive places

World-class places require world-class park, recreation, and cultural amenities. Look to Central Park in New York, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Millennium Park in Chicago, or Hyde Park in London and the significance of great urban parks becomes clear. Parks are essential to creating vibrant, economically competitive places. In fact, parks and the amenities they provide are regularly cited as among the most important factors influencing decisions by businesses about where to relocate or expand.

Multiple academic studies have shown that parks increase adjacent property values from 5 percent to 20 percent, providing incentives for property owners to contribute to the creation of public parkland or to build POPS as part of their development projects. This data also shows that taxpayer-funded investment in parks and related programming and amenities deliver strong economic returns on investment to the public.

Parks improve Equity, Social Interaction and Public Health

The quality and accessibility of parks is a basic component of equity in the delivery of public services. Parks are so integral to what makes a community desirable and healthy that ensuring equity in decisions about which land is acquired for parks in what part of the county and how that land is used is essential to achieving our goals for racial and socioeconomic justice. The Parks Department has made major strides in recent years in incorporating quantitative measures of equity in its capital budget recommendations, and this approach should be expanded to include analysis of programs and facilities managed by other agencies, such as Montgomery County Public Schools, the Department of Recreation, and the Department of Libraries.

Well-designed and sited parks are one of the most straightforward ways to establish a clear sense of place. They invite people of all ages, cultures, incomes, and interests to gather and interact in ways not achieved in any other location or context. Not only do they foster social connectedness, but with healthy levels of civic engagement and social cohesion, they can act as community hubs and focal points for response and recovery during natural disasters and other emergencies.

Parks and recreation also are vital to improving health outcomes for all our residents. According to the CDC, more than 60 percent of U.S. adults do not engage in the recommended amount of activity and approximately 25 percent of U.S. adults are not active at all. Because 90 percent of outdoor experiences happen close to home, parks - particularly in urban areas - play an important role in outdoor recreation. Trails for example, are a great way to motivate people to explore public spaces and new parts of the county, expose residents to different neighborhoods and encourage exercise and healthy lifestyles. Likewise, community gardens help to reduce the impact of food deserts in low-income areas, encourage physical activity and social interaction, and give residents who do not have yards access to nutritious foods that contribute to a healthy lifestyle. Access to opportunities for vigorous physical activity is especially important to improve health outcomes and quality of life for people of color, who suffer higher rates of diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity.

Parks will play a larger and more complex role in environmental management

Of course, parks also play a major role in environmental sustainability. Climate change has resulted in increased frequency, intensity and/or duration of fires, flooding and intense rain events, drought, high winds, and extreme temperatures. This rapid destabilization of climate patterns jeopardizes the ecological stability of nearly all global communities. Parks and natural areas help address the effects of climate change and enhance environmental resiliency. Stream restoration and stormwater management projects on parkland protect against flooding and improve water quality. Parks provide wildlife corridors that can account for changes in habitat patterns. Urban tree canopy mitigates thermal pollution, helps limit the heat island effect of intensive development, filters pollutants, and sequesters carbon. Habitat restoration provides wildlife with natural terrain, reduces human-wildlife conflict, and improves overall ecosystem performance.

These benefits to the natural environment are especially important in parts of the county that have not been the beneficiaries of high levels of public and private investment. Sustainability is and will continue to be incorporated into every aspect of the Parks Department's work, and it should be accomplished in ways that complement and support investments in facilities and programs designed to expand access to active recreation and social connection rather than operating in competition with or opposition to these investments.

How will we evaluate progress?

In assessing proposals related to parks and recreation and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan, relevant measures may include:

- Number of urban parks
- Miles of streams restored, and stormwater runoff treated
- Childhood obesity
- Stream water quality
- Urban tree canopy
- Additional miles of trails built
- Participation in vigorous physical activity
- Park and recreation patronage/participation by race/ethnicity, language spoken and age
- Awards and other recognition of excellence in urban parks and trails
- Patronage at community gatherings
- Proportion of population within 15-minute walk of three park experiences

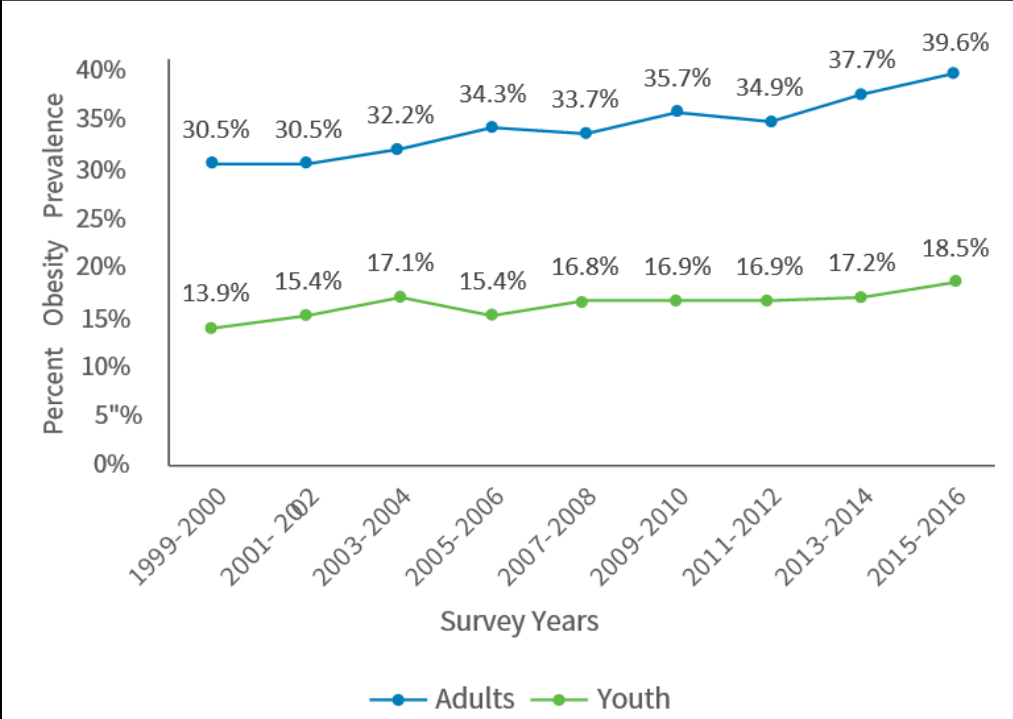


Figure 75: Trends in obesity prevalence among adults aged 20 and over (age adjusted) and youth (ages 2-19 years) in the U.S. 1999-2016

Parks and Recreation for an Increasingly Urban and Diverse Community: Active and Social

- P-1. Incorporate and elaborate on specific actions identified here and other planning exercises into the 2022 [Parks, Recreation and Open Space \(PROS\) Plan](#) and all subsequent PROS plans.
- P-2. Implement the [Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan](#) (EPS Plan) to ensure that densely populated parts of the county enjoy walkable access to a full range of park experiences.
- P-3. Revise the [Recreation Guidelines](#) to ensure that they accurately reflect the availability and accessibility of recreational amenities throughout the county.
- P-4. Work with the Planning Department to utilize and reference the EPS Design Guidelines while creating master plans and during the development review process.
- P-5. Measure the progress of the Legacy Urban Space Program and other dedicated funding sources in increasing park acreage in the most densely populated areas of the county.
- P-6. Prioritize park activation programs – specifically in urban parks and equity focus areas – to expose residents to a variety of unique park experiences and make these spaces centers of activity.
- P-7. Strengthen the role of Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) such that they can perform as public spaces while leveraging private investment.
- P-8. Ensure that the Parks Department is a leading voice in creating strong recommendations for both public and privately-owned parks in master/sector and/or functional plans.
- P-9. Update and implement the [Countywide Park Trails Plan](#) with an emphasis on connecting trails to neighborhoods through connector trails, trailheads, and extending existing trails. Emphasize trail connections to neighboring jurisdictions to support regional connectivity.
- P-10. Amend the CIP to allow more flexibility so the department can be more agile in its service delivery.
- P-11. Amend the EPS study area to incorporate the Equity Focus Areas and other innovative equity tools in its methodology.
- P-12. Work with transportation agencies to provide bus routes to increase transit access to parks.
- P-13. Apply innovative technologies to calibrate service delivery strategies to the needs of the county’s changing demographic and cultural trends.
- P-14. Develop a Racial and Social Equity Plan incorporating data driven tools such as the Equity Focus Areas and EPS to ensure that race and demographics do not

- predetermine the quantity and quality of parks or programming in different parts of the county.
- P-15. Create a trail connections plan to identify and prioritize missing linkages between park trail facilities and to neighborhoods to eliminate gaps in service.
 - P-16. Apply design guidelines, such as the EPS Plan's "Designing Public Spaces," to encourage the delivery of public spaces that are inclusive, welcoming, accessible, comfortable, safe and promote a platform for community gathering and enjoyment.
 - P-17. Expand the community gardens program to serve more residents, especially in underserved and high-density areas.
 - P-18. Promote the creation of multi-use, accessible, and multi-generational facilities when designing parks.
 - P-19. Enhance opportunities for food and beverage offerings in parks, particularly in the more urban parts of the county.
 - P-20. Develop a blueprint for world class trails in Montgomery County that identifies opportunities to: 1. improve connectivity; 2. enhance the existing trail network; 3. develop signature projects; and 4. otherwise deliver a wide range of exceptional trail experiences to visitors and residents with varying interests and levels of fitness.
 - P-21. Continue to refine park facility standards, land acquisition strategies, and other key policies during PROS updates to integrate parks more effectively into the fabric of intensively developed communities.
 - P-22. Coordinate with county agencies to encourage the simultaneous accommodation of multiple needs, including recreation, education, community-building, and resource stewardship through co-location, adaptive reuse, co-programming and other forms of combined or shared uses of public land, buildings and related infrastructure.
 - P-23. Cooperate with government and private sector property owners to identify opportunities for park and recreation facilities on underutilized land or in unconventional locations such as rooftops, parking garages, and unused public rights-of-way.
 - P-24. Create a resiliency plan to improve parks' ability to withstand the effects of climate change. This plan should align with the county's Climate Action Plan and the Sustainability Plan.
 - P-25. Prioritize ecological restoration practices (e.g. stream restoration, native stream buffer plantings, habitat enhancements, and wetland creation) in the stream valleys of the county's most developed watersheds.
 - P-26. Develop and pursue a priority list of natural resource-based land acquisition targets that protect sensitive watersheds, preserve unique and rare habitats, complete critical wildlife corridor connections, and connect communities to natural areas.

- P-27. Ensure environmental and sustainability services improve public health, allow for opportunities for nature interpretation and education, and corrects environmental justices within equity and/or densely populated areas.
- P-28. Develop coordinated strategies with other agencies, neighboring jurisdictions, and relevant stakeholders to target meaningful stormwater treatment opportunities before stormwater reaches parkland. Identify and eliminate point source (piped) stormwater discharge into stream channels on parkland through state-of-the-art stormwater management, outfall enhancements and mitigation techniques.
- P-29. Assess the department's analytical tools and standards for resource management to ensure that they reflect state-of-the-practice understanding of the most effective and efficient means of achieving stewardship goals.
- P-30. Explore the creation of alternative funding tools such as the Bethesda Overlay Zone and resulting Park Impact Payment to support the acquisition and development of parks in urban areas.
- P-31. Use strategic marketing plans that promote programs, trails, and parks targeting multiple demographics, increasing community engagement, and advocacy for the park system.

V. Parks—This new chapter²⁹ recommends that urban parks receive priority without analyzing how this recommendation squares with the 2017 Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan.³⁰ The General Plan should contain a recommendation that the Planning Board shall develop criteria for balancing the competing park needs in the urban areas and surrounding neighborhoods.

A. The Planning Board draft should be revised to include a broader discussion and understanding of general park needs, not just urban parks. That discussion should include a recommendation that Parks establish and follow objective criteria for park selection.

The Planning Board draft has no discussion of the 2017 PROS Plan and relies on the 2018 Energizing Public Spaces Functional Master Plan (EPS) as the policy basis for its recommendations. The PROS plan establishes a hierarchy of park needs based on resident surveys. In 2017 “residents ranked trails, natural space, wildlife habitat, and nature recreation as the top three (sic) priorities for parks, across a variety of demographic segments.”³¹ This, and other PROS findings, need to be rationalized with the Planning Board’s recommendation to prioritize urban parks.

The need for objective criteria for park selection is highlighted by the Planning Board’s recent approval of a dog park in the heavily used Norwood Park. The Board approved the dog park without any analysis of the impact of the dog park on the existing uses: the toddler playground, free play area, and permitted ballfields, even though under Park standards the dog park was too close to the surrounding homes.

B. The General Plan must clearly convey that the existence and careful stewardship of park land is in no way a substitute for county-wide policies that foster sustainability and environmental resilience throughout the entire county.

The removal of the chapter on the environment and its recommendations, and then the addition of a long discussion of Parks’ dedication to Environmental Stewardship in the new Parks chapter is confusing.³² The Parks chapter should be clarified to show that the county understands that its environmental responsibilities go far beyond taking good care of its parks. This is particularly important, because in the 1964 and 1969 Wedges and Corridors plans, before the federal government passed landmark environmental legislation, “environment” was a general word that included conservation, natural resources, and many other concepts.³³ In the 1993 Refinement, the General Plan sets out a new definition of the environment grounded in the federal legislation, and an increased understanding of the environmental context in which land use decisions are made.³⁴

C. Finally, the Planning Board draft should delete its suggestion that “conservation-oriented parks” would be improved if there were better access in the park for bicyclists, walkers and transit users.³⁵

Conservation parks are for the preservation of nature, and access to a conservation park is achieved with natural trails for hiking. It is contrary to principles of conservation to open these parks potentially to bike

²⁹ The Public Hearing draft did not have a chapter on Parks.

³⁰ <https://www.montgomeryparks.org/uploads/2018/06/508-2017.PROS-COMLETE.pdf>

³¹ PROS Plan, p. 6.

³² Planning Board draft, pgs. 115, 122, 1124

³³ https://montgomeryplanning.org/community/general_plans/wedges_corridors/part1-3.pdf, p. 44

³⁴ <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/master-plan-list/general-plans/general-plan-refinement-goals-amp-objectives-1993/> pgs. 66-68

³⁵ Planning Board draft, p. 115.