

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

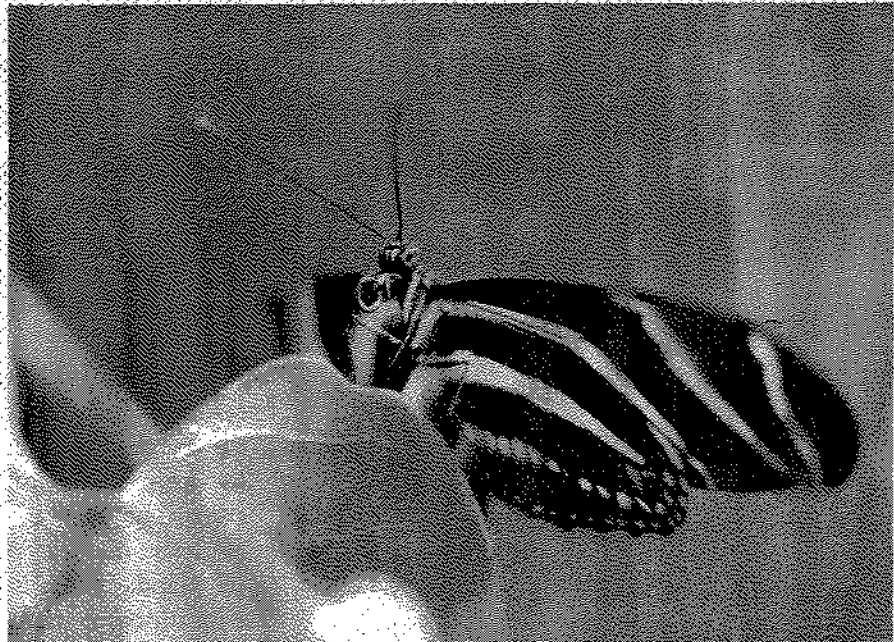
PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

What needs and demands exist for parks, outdoor recreation, and resource preservation in Montgomery County? What must be done to meet these present and projected needs? To answer these questions, the *1998 Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan* document (hereinafter referred to as the PROS Plan) comprehensively looks at present and future needs for recreation facilities, natural areas and historic resources in the County. The Plan also includes recommended strategies for meeting these needs.

The PROS Plan is the Local Land Preservation and Recreation Plan mandated for each County in Maryland to maintain eligibility for Program Open Space grant funds. It provides overall policy guidance for park and recreation planning in the County. As in the past, an important element of the Plan is projections for future recreation facility needs; however, this year's State guidelines for plan preparation request an increased emphasis on natural and historic resource preservation needs. Another significant change from the previous PROS Plan is inclusion of information on Montgomery County Department of Recreation programs and recommendations from that Department's *Recreation Facility Development Plan* and *Aquatic Facility Plan*.

PARKS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

The Plan includes information on the various types of parks and open spaces that serve the County's 810,000 residents. The majority of County parks and recreation facilities are provided by the 28,000 acre park system owned and operated by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). It is categorized into types, based on the service area of each park, physical size, natural features, cultural resources, and the kind of facilities it contains. All of these parks interrelate as a unified system serving urban, suburban, and rural areas of the County. Larger parks that serve regional recreation, or conservation needs, are termed county-wide parks. Small parks that are primarily used by residents of nearby areas are classed as community use parks. Information on national,



"Wings of Fancy" butterfly exhibit, Brookside Gardens

State, and municipal parks that are located in the County is also included in the Plan.

FUTURE NEEDS FOR PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACES

The PROS Plan looks at how tomorrow's park system can accommodate the physical and social changes taking place in the County, and estimates future recreation facility, and natural and cultural resource needs through the year 2010. These estimates consider how many people use parks and recreation facilities, where they live and how far they have to travel to parks, and also incorporate the results of several surveys conducted to provide input into this Plan.

County-wide Park Facility Needs

County-wide recreation facilities are designed to serve all County residents, but also help serve local needs of nearby neighborhoods. County-wide facility need estimates are included in Chapter 6 of the Plan. The estimated additional facility needs for year 2010 at County-wide parks are: 9 tennis courts, 18 ballfields, 100 picnic tables, and 3 large playgrounds. The Plan also identifies needs for additional recreation centers, aquatic facilities, and trails, and discusses many other types of recreation opportunities such as camping, boating, fishing, etc.

Community Use Park Facility Needs

This Plan also includes year 2010 updated community use park facility needs for tennis and basketball courts, playgrounds and ballfields for each of the County's 26 Planning Areas. Needs for ballfields have dramatically increased in recent years due to a large expansion in the number of sports teams, and increased population projections. As a result, there are higher deficiencies for

ballfields than for any other facility. Playground and basketball court needs are also significant in local parks.

Highest needs for additional recreation facilities for the year 2010 are estimated in the I-270 and Route 29 corridors and the Travilah Planning Area, where population growth is highest. The down-County planning areas of Bethesda, Silver Spring, and Takoma Park also indicate very high needs for ballfields. Total County needs for additional community use facilities for the year 2010 are: 9 tennis courts, 56 playgrounds, 48 basketball courts, and 101 ballfields.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION NEEDS

The PROS Plan discusses important natural, cultural, and historic resource protection programs and policies. The Plan also identifies several important environmental areas that should be considered for future acquisition, including: Little Bennett Stream Valley Park, Upper Paint Branch Stream Valley Park, River Road shale barrens, Piney Meetinghouse Road serpentine area, and Hoyles Mill Protection Area. These areas are currently included in the long range park acquisition program. The Plan also includes recommendations for acquisition of land to interconnect Seneca, Northwest Branch and Rock Creek stream valley parks with the Patuxent River Regional Greenway.

Information on historic and archeological resources is also included in the PROS Plan. Over the last decade tremendous progress has been made in the preservation and stabilization of cultural sites. The Plan includes a listing of the highest priority historic preservation sites on County parkland. There is a need to provide interpretive education programs about the significance of these sites. These programs can foster a community sense of identity and strengthen public

understanding of these physical links to the cultural past.

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEETING FUTURE PARK AND RECREATION NEEDS

The Plan recommends a variety of techniques to meet future facility needs including: new park construction within the Capital Improvements Program; expanded community use of school facilities; and development of parks through public/private partnerships, particularly in connection with new subdivisions. Increased land acquisition for active recreation facilities is important to assure that future needs can be met. Innovative ways to provide needed facilities should also be considered. In areas where needs cannot feasibly be met, consideration should be given to serving residents with facilities in adjacent areas, and increasing efforts to maximize the use of current facilities through redevelopment or changes in programming or policies.

The Plan specifically recommends focusing on providing new recreation opportunities for needs highlighted by recent park surveys, including increasing opportunities for natural-surface and hard-surface trails, in-line skating, roller hockey, and bicycling. The PROS Plan also recommends strategizing ways of providing increased ballfields because this is the greatest facility need for the year 2010. A new type of community use park is recommended that would cluster ballfields in a larger local recreation complex so that they are easier to maintain and cause less disturbance to the community. Providing improved field maintenance and expanded usage by partnering with Montgomery County Public Schools is also suggested.

Balancing the development of recreation facilities with the need to preserve sensitive natural and cultural areas is also stressed. It is

recommended that a sufficient amount of non-environmentally sensitive land be acquired to provide for future active recreation facilities without impacting natural areas. New park development should follow a hierarchy of environmental feature impact avoidance, minimization and mitigation. Additional opportunities for passive recreation and preservation and interpretation of historic and cultural resources should also be provided.

The Plan indicates that access to major parks and recreation areas should be facilitated through an interconnected system of greenways and trails that provide corridors for wildlife and opportunities for recreational trails.

SUPPLEMENTAL PROS PLAN REPORTS

A staff planning document entitled *Montgomery County Parks for Tomorrow* serves as a supplement document to the PROS plan and looks broadly at park and open space planning as we prepare to move into the 21st century. It includes proposals for: Recreation Facilities; Urban Open Spaces; Private Recreation Areas in New Residential Developments; Natural Resources; Historic and Cultural Resources; Recreational Trails; and Greenways.

The implementation of the PROS Plan will be provided through the *1999 PROS Plan Implementation Study* which will recommend specific sites for the development of future recreation facilities and the acquisition and preservation of natural areas, historic and cultural resources, and greenways.