



Vision 2030

Montgomery County
RECREATION
DEPARTMENT

Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Vision 2030 and Strategic Plan

African Focus Group Notes

Office of Community Partnerships

May 10, 2010

Hadijah Jordan from the project team welcomed the participants and gave an overview of the Vision 2030 project and the purpose of the focus group. Following are the notes from the discussion of the four focus group participants.

1. What are the key strengths of the parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services in Montgomery County?

- Soccer tournaments
- Cabin John
- Trails in the parks
- Up County parks
- Black Rock
- Community-wide events and places to host cookouts, soccer
- Great places for kids to play
- The number of parks
- The breadth of programs – programs for seniors (“my mother goes to the senior center regularly”), especially the exercise programs
- “My dad uses the facilities as well and he really likes it.”
- Opportunities for hosting programs like soccer league
- Affordability
- Clean
- Table tennis, very popular among African and Asian communities
- Tennis courts

2. What do you believe to be the most essential (of critical importance) public parks and recreation services in the community? Why do you see it/them as essential?

- Restrooms available for the community
 - Important to have disability access in restrooms
 - Low toilet seats for children, i.e. Lake Forest Mall
- Lighting in parks, parking lots, and near facilities
- Transportation, particularly in ethnic communities, and for elderly and youth
- Soccer fields for youth are vital for young Africans!
- Outdoor electrical outlets at park facilities.
- Information needs to be provided in multiple languages and available in simple English that describes resources available and where to find these resources.
- The parks should all be accessible by sidewalk.
- Availability of staff to assist community during reservation process for fields, picnicking facilities, etc.
- Playground facilities for birthday parties, graduations, etc. A place for the children.

- Spaces for the community to have ESOL classes, meeting locations, parent groups, “Zen” space. Rockville park across from Jehovah Witness Park is set-up for meditation.

3. What community issues or problems can the services of parks and recreation address?

- After school hours for teenagers, peer pressure, depression, obesity, and gang violence can be addressed by providing safe places such as youth centers, activities, video games, skate board parks, arts and learning opportunities.
- Elderly activities and physical health. Provide social networks and fitness facilities
- Adults need a place to exert some energy and let off steam to improve community mental health.
 - Sports facilities, programs and leagues
- Our families are all across the region so programs that reach outside the boundary of the county.
- First generation immigrants need more information about what is available for their children/families.
- Lack of community and/or community understanding – parks and recreation can host accessible events that explore the various community groups that exist.
- First, second, third generation, etc. face a challenge of standing in the gap/building the bridge between American culture and new arrivals/immigrants. Community liaisons, staff, partnerships, etc. are needed to bridge the gap.
 - Staff training covering culture of origin and American culture
 - Partnering with local universities

4. What improvements/ changes would you make to the parks and recreation facilities, programs and services in Montgomery County today?

- More “adult friendly” fields
- Increased access and information for gardening resources and facilities. African communities can often be engaged through gardening programs and places to garden. Sometimes gardening classes would be valuable.
- More awareness and inclusion of African restaurants, caterers, suppliers on the Recreation lists.
- Host events such as Taste of Africa, Taste of the Region, etc.
- Youth fare program (previously cut) should be restarted. Youth should be able to get to activities and parks.
- Elderly need more MetroAccess
- Young Africans in Up County can find transportation to resources too expensive and inconvenient.
- While it’s important to have staff that reflects the diversity of the community, the training should be cross-cultural so that to the greatest level possible people are treated equally.

In 10 years

- The African community in 10 years will be getting older. Cultural competency is essential to engage older communities. Parks and Recreation need to learn how to communicate with and engage community members. Learn cultural tools for politeness. Train staff to understand how to intervene in mental health issues in the African community as the members age.
- African cultural facility to increase African cultural connections and to introduce the various African cultural groups to the other community members.

In 25 years

- Perhaps we will actually see the African population diminish because of the high level of return to countries of origin.
- The migration patterns of the African community may change. There may be more dual-country residents. Programming will need to be flexible based upon the new “snow-bird” like culture of Africans spending half of a year in their country of origin and the other half of the year in the US.
- More green spaces as density increases the county will need to provide more nearby green spaces to compensate for the loss of backyards and access to rural areas.

5. How do you think the Departments can work to responsibly address these improvements/changes given its resources? What opportunities exist?

- Take advantage of the existing cultural similarities using Facebook groups and music styles that are similar.
- More conversations with the community to inform future planning.
- Consistent partnerships with community members.
- Keep on top of the diversity of users.

6. Do you believe there are populations/geographic areas that do not have access or who have limited access to parks and recreation services? If yes, please explain. What are solutions to address?

- Seniors and Youth. Increase transportation resources.
- Up County. New Clarksburg and Damascus area low-income users have a lot of transportation issues and that may be causing programs and resources to be inaccessible to these communities. Also, the lack of sidewalks in this area makes it difficult for users to walk or access facilities.

7. Are there potential partners that the Department of Parks or Department of Recreation should consider working with in the future?

- More partnerships with the Department of Transportation and local transportation providers to increase accessibility for community members.
- Given the high-level of African academic achievement, partnerships with university students to support outreach and cultural competency for and by the Parks and Recreation programs.
- Daniel Koroma of the Office of Community Partnerships could provide a list of local African resources.
- African Yellow Pages
- African grocery stores have local papers. Local stores would be a good place to distribute public notices.
- We are largely connected through the churches. Even the cultural associations and community groups are channeled through the churches.
 - You will get to the breadth of community through the church
 - Bethel Outreach World Ministries. This is a more continental community that reaches a broader African community.
 - Pastor Darlingston Johnston
 - Amy Jawah, leader in the Bethel Community
 - Jesus House
 - Mercy Seat Chapel

- There are a lot of smaller churches that use local schools for services.
- African Christian Fellowship
- Nigerian Development Organization (something like that NIGO)