



# Vision 2030

## *Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Vision 2030 and Strategic Plan*

### **Aquatics Focus Group Notes**

Department of Recreation

April 29, 2010

Hadiyah Jordan from Justice and Sustainability Associates 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 held by the 19 aquatics focus group attendees.

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

- Swimming pools
- Wide diversity of programs
- Affordable
- Located throughout county
- More in some areas than others (weakness)
- Staff that runs facilities and the knowledge that they bring to jobs
- Facilities (provide more than other jurisdictions) – more swimming and softball

#### **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?**

- Available to people of all ability levels and ages.
- Diversity of population that access the facilities and use the services.
- Management and imagination, good entertainment.
- Cost is right for everyone in area (low and high income).
- Pools gives residents place to go to exercise, be outside, learn about nature.
- Fulfills needs of population, pools especially fulfill those needs.
- Pools allow population places to exercise and socialize, especially the elderly population (coming everyday).
- Whole spectrum of population use the pools.
- Provide mental relaxation, therapy groups, and are inexpensive.
- Young children from toddlers to high school age come. Lifespan of the population.
- Develop long term relationships with elderly population because of continuity.
- Elite athletes are able to use facilities for therapy and practice.
- Every age group is accommodated when newer pools are built. Using pools help to grow social contacts and introduces people to water which we are surrounded by in Montgomery County.
- Aquatics provide first jobs for teens.

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

- Some pools don't have bus service; public transportation is important.
- Sometimes it is a mile long walk from the main street to the pool.
- Public transportation does not stop at these facilities.
- Worthy use of time when children are not in school.
- Scheduling of games not properly planned with softball teams by Park and Planning, long trips by teams to game location.
- Games are scheduled back to back and waiting teams are not able to park and properly practice before their game. Park police need to be more lenient when ticketing players who are waiting for a parking space.
- Parking spaces are expensive to plan and construct. Coordinate with other county services to provide shuttles.
- Neighborhood parks need to be patrolled by park police more often. Drug dealers are frequenting parks more often because of no patrol. Dealers use the hiking trails.
- Park police and Montgomery County police need to coordinate better.
- Unable to locate park police during emergencies because of no signage.
- Need to address social needs of the population. Reduce crime by providing teens with more activities.
- Trying to get a community to use the facilities is often difficult. May become gathering place for drug dealers and criminals because of lack of community use.
- Placing facilities where it is ignored by population.

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

- What are the plans for Wall Park in the White Flint area? Do the plans call for eliminating parking spaces in White Flint area? When there is a major event, parking is very limited.
- Be able to select better sites in the future, where parking can be more feasible.
- Designers operate with blinders on, not able to see how development will impact surrounding areas.
- Kingsview Middle School – a community center near middle school. Able to build gymnasium that is able to hold events. When pools are not being used, parking is more available.
- Design more multi-purpose facilities.
- Design facilities to be side by side with accessible parking.
- Try to use facilities that can use the same utilities.
- Master plans in White Flint are constantly changing, such as eliminating parking to add a soccer field.
- Preserve green space. Having campus recreation centers (complexes) instead of multiple facilities. Build more like PG Sports Complex, George Mason recreation center.
- In 1974, there was a master plan for an aquatic recreation complex to access regional needs in county. Recommended that multiple facilities could be located in single site. Unfortunately Montgomery County addressed it piecemeal. Made soccer field at one site, aquatic at another. Never fully implemented the plan. Fairfax adopted this approach.
- The complex concept can be readdressed in future development. Might not be feasible if there is not enough land. No point in duplicating sites if needs are already met.

- Aquatic facilities in Montgomery County point to extremely high usage. There are only a few public facilities that can be opened from 5 am-7 pm. Facilities are constantly in use by population during all hours of operation. Pools are probably the most highly used facility, indoor and outdoor.
- Politicians need to realize that the investment in these facilities includes maintenance. Aquatic facilities need to be considered high priority because of usage; it is a good thing.
- Compared to Fairfax County, Montgomery County has 200,000 residents per indoor pool while Fairfax has 100,000.
- Need more pools in more areas, such as Silver Spring.
- There is no additional facility for adults when youth are using the pools. Parents sit waiting for their children. Teen programming goes on for hours. Need space for adults. Design multiple compatible-use facilities.
- What if you had a swimming pool in White Flint or Montgomery Mall? Parking lots will be used and more parents will shop in malls.
- Large amount of effort in designing facilities. With changes in technology, facilities cannot keep up. New technology costs money to install but makes dramatic differences. Need capital improvement plans.
- Asthmatic kids are impacted by poor air quality in pool areas, compared to Takoma Park in DC.
- Whatever you see is what you get when planning facility, because there is no additional funding.
- More county residents use facilities, therefore need more technology updates.
- Potential health compliance issues because health concerns are not being addressed due to lack of funds.
- Facilities need finance to maintain upgrades when planning facilities.
- Year round swimming. Kids need opportunities to swim against other people. Need to close facilities to hold meets. Parking might be issue and health quality. Couldn't use PG facilities because of poor health quality and the pool is only 10 years old.
- Potomac Valley, 60% of swimmers are in Virginia, 40% in Montgomery County, none in PG.
- Every indoor facility should have ultraviolet light disinfectant. New technology to get chlorine out of water. Would make dramatic difference.
- Lot of swimmers kicking water at fast pace, breathing high level of chlorine. Chlorine Bubble. Source capture, suck chlorine out of pool out of window.
- Germantown Indoor Pool near soccer complex – allowing people to wear shoes on deck, track in dirt. Maintenance issues – paint chips falling off (have to close facilities), needs to be addressed. Regular maintenance issue needs to be addressed. Students prefer to play on computer instead of research when hired at facilities. Some people aren't paying (not bringing in income) because staff is not watching.
- Registrants for programs have to reenter information each time (only swimming). Huge lines of people at swim meets. Different software for swim team forces this to happen.
- Pricing should be based on facilities separately, based on what it is offering instead of flat rate. Programs are subsidized by Montgomery County; residents out of town should have to pay more.
- Would like to see more shower curtains.
- County Council needs to understand this is a service available to all tax payers, regardless of income. All groups of population use the aquatic facilities.
- Needs to be part of County Executive priority list.
- Would love to see facilities still in use 20 years from now. Dues are worth it to see this happen.
- More use in aquatics facilities than in any other facilities.
- Found out dues go to general recreation department. Pool dues should go to pool use not general recreation department.

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

- Changes mean money. Should charge more for some activities.
- John Adams, paid \$20,000 a month for gas. Had to raise prices, to maintain the facility. Residents weren't happy but were willing to pay to keep it.
- Decision to charge non-residents, should be considered. Swim team is the most significant to revenue stream. Utilize non-prime time areas of pools. Involves so many kids after school. Recreation department doesn't want to be as expensive as a private sector. Trying to keep fees minimal, so families won't have to choose who to send to what program. Do not want to be elitist. Difficult balance that staff is trying to maintain. A lot of students swimming in meets are developmental, not already top notch.
- All about money during budget cycle. Then there is concern for people who can't come, how much expenditure per person coming. Everybody is unhappy with pool time now. Swim team needs more space, more people want more lane time. Wonderful problem because pools are used heavily.

**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?**

- Western Montgomery County
- Eastern
- Southeastern (Silver Spring, Takoma Park)

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

- Need to partner with private industries.
- Work with school systems, summer leagues, Potomac Valley.
- A model project in Roanoke, Virginia. Private and public got together to build facility. Membership is twice what was projected, enormously successful. Has new technology because of partnership. Opened in January indoors. Good model for partnership.
- Department of Transportation
- Why not put ad in Gazette instead of creating thick catalog? Money used for printing and mailing could have been spent on programs.