



# Vision 2030

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

### **Natural Resources/Stewardship Focus Group Notes**

February 25, 2010

Argyle Center

7-8:30 pm

#### **Participants:**

Ginny Barnes, Legacy Open Space Advisory Group (LOSAG)

Lous Sousa, President, Friends of Little Bennett (also Up County Rec. Adv. Board)

Gloria S. Ralph, citizen, also Mont. County Public Schools

Brenda Sandberg, M-NCPPC Parks

Dominic Quattrocchi, M-NCPPC Parks

John Hench, M-NCPPC, Park Planning & Stewardship Division

Michael Wilpens, Friends of Sligo Creek

Dolores Milmor, Audubon Naturalist Society

Rob Gibbs, M-NCPPC Parks

Jon Putnam, NPS, LOSAG

Mira Rivas, M-NCPPC Parks

Helen Wilkes, AIA, LOSAG, Kensington Land Trust, AIA Potomac Valley

Carolyn Anderson

Mike Riley, M-NCPPC, Park Development

Facilitator: Jim Klein, Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects (Greenplay Team)

#### **Summary:**

The purpose of the focus group was to delve more deeply into natural resource and stewardship issues associated with park and recreation in Montgomery County. Participants were asked to discuss natural resource assets, issues, the balance between natural resources and recreation, potential partnerships to help address the issues, and how the plan can help to conserve and maintain natural resources in the parks.

Participants identified system-wide regional assets such as the role parks play in the environment and ecosystem, the contribution of large forested parks in habitat diversity, and the role that the greenway system plays in providing nearby access to natural areas.

Discussion of natural resource issues focused on growth and development and the pressures on natural resources from land use change, recreational demand, spread of non-native invasive species (both plants and animals) and the political process itself. Participants discussed the need to better communicate the values and contributions of the natural resources to the overall quality of life in Montgomery County. Participants expressed a need to reach out to constituents, especially youth, to continue to build support for natural resource conservation.

Similarly, balancing natural resources and conservation could be better accomplished through more articulate communication of natural resource values, such as communicating the value of ecosystem

services to County residents and businesses. Connectivity was identified as an important way to make park and recreation resources more accessible to the population.

Educational partnerships were extensively discussed as a way to encourage students of all ages to get involved with natural resource issues in the parks. While the County has established partnerships with many organizations, a participant suggested that incorporating partnership development into performance evaluations would help establish the value of the partnership effort to employees.

Participants commented that the strategic plan can help communicate the values that natural resource and stewardship play in the overall quality of life and the ability of the County to attract future jobs and employers.

Following is a summary of the discussion by focus group participants of a series of questions.

1. What are the two or three most important natural resource assets associated with Montgomery County's Parks?

- Lakes
- Ecosystem view
- Potomac corridor (combination of federal, state, M-NCPPC, others)
- Little Bennett Regional Park
- Access to natural areas nearby (bikable, walkable) – shouldn't have to get drive
- Park staff, watershed groups and people to work to make parks better
- Stream Valleys - where the system started
- Large conservation parks – important to diversity
- Tree resources – even more important because of what we know about climate change
- Parks as an environmental classroom – Stream Valleys provide habitat and diversity; Audubon has monitored the health of streams (20 years); county has done well in measuring health of the streams
- Habitat diversity and diversity of the parkland we own – meadows, stream valley, woodland, etc.
- Just acquired 70 acres of forest/woodland on coastal plain in Eastern part of county (vast majority of land is Piedmont)
- Geological diversity, e.g. serpentine barrens)
- Department of Parks has acquired the best examples of land – best natural areas, etc.
- Size of the system, connectivity of the system
- Quantity and variety of land we have preserved
- Outreach and education to children about natural resources

2. What are the most significant issues related to these natural resources? Are there any specific examples of significant issues that have been resolved successfully? Unsuccessfully?

- Need to maintain and grow a constituency for conservation; especially kids since they'll be advocates in 2030
- Tension between recreation/development of parkland and preservation/conservation
- Working to educate maintenance staff in best practices on natural area management and employ best practices (e.g. storm water management)

- Concern about environmental impact of artificial turf; however, some recognize that turf fields allow more playing time, thereby reduce pressure on natural areas in parks for fields
  - Pressures on natural resources; from future growth/development pressures
  - Non-native invasive species
  - Storm water management impact on parks (e.g. use of parks to absorb stormwater)
  - Concern that there is an assumption about environmental/natural resource quality that leads toward passivity in the political process when natural resource issues arise – need to find creative ways to build a “stake” in the parks natural resources
  - What happened to joint legacy open space education/interpretation projects?
    - Open Space functional master plan recommendation was to implement joint education and interpretation efforts – has not been implemented
    - Have an educational gazebo in plan in the Serpentine Barrens Conservation Park (hasn’t been implemented)
  - What happens at “build out” (full growth as planned) – will future infill development impact on park system
  - Deer management and forest management – resources are needed; assumption is that the forests take care of themselves but sustainable forestry/stewardship practices are needed
  - Lime disease/ticks – impact on children’s access to natural areas over concern
  - Need to recruit our own advocates; build a bridge between park system and youth; recognize at the top level; engage youth through student service learning hours
    - Untapped opportunities between schools and Dept of Parks in environmental education
  - Fastest growing area in country – value of parkland will increase and constant pressure to buy and convert them to urban uses, starting with the Agricultural Reserve
  - Potential governance structure that controls parkland – this is often challenged; other option is parkland governed under the executive
  - County vision for all green space, – losing forest cover to non-forest uses, no matter who owns it; e.g. forest along roadside); would like to see a holistic approach to whole county
3. What is the balance between active recreation and natural resource preservation? How can the strategic plan help to achieve this balance – do you have any suggestion for specific actions that would help resolve perceived conflicts between active recreation and natural resource conservation?
- Has to be a way to put a value on lands we wish to protect – present the benefits; eco-system services
  - Communication of original conservation purpose needs to be explicit (e.g. Legacy Open Space purpose of acquisition defines the reason for land preservation action); conservation purposes within facility plans, policy plans, etc have to be made explicit up front in any planning process
  - Recreational benefits of natural areas need to be explained and managed (trails, pathways, etc.)
  - Implement plans to connect trail system to parks – better connections and access mean more people are served and more appreciate the values
  - Advisory boards ; consider renaming Recreation Advisory Boards to Park and Recreation Advisory Boards and broadening focus; focus on just active recreation leads to conflicts and Boards would be better serviced by hearing broader voices up front

4. What are potential partnerships to help conserve or maintain these natural resources in Montgomery County? What about resources that may not be on dedicated parkland?
  - State parks and national parks – more collaboration
  - Pepco and possibly other utilities –more partnerships for linkage opportunities, also some utilities are interested in public service (e.g. volunteer maintenance)
  - Schools and scouts – both groups are motivated (e.g. service learning, scout badges, etc.) – staff need to reach out; give credit to staff (e.g. make part of performance evaluations for reaching out successfully)
  - HOAs, “friends of” groups, garden clubs, etc.
  - Partners with young farmers for local food (on agricultural land)
  - Local land trust and conservation organizations
  - Colleges – internships
  - Americorp; Youth Conservation Corp
  - Public service announcements - educate public about the opportunities to get out in the parks, on the trails and volunteer
  - Anacostia Watershed Society
  - Environmental groups – Audubon, Sierra Club
  - Regional environmental awareness
  - Municipalities and county relationships
  - Summer camps
  - State Highway Administration (e.g. mitigation banks, etc.) and county transportation department
  - Water quality agencies
  - Discovery Channel, Corporations
  
5. How can this plan help better conserve or maintain these natural resources?
  - Give context of metropolitan region – we are the best in preserving parkland so close to the city; comparison will point out the value of what we have
  - Parkland is a selling point – should be a major point in this plan; we are competing with other counties, etc.
  - Parks are a strategic investment in future
  - Survey – identify if people live here because of the open space
  - Raise awareness – politicians, citizens –of the value
  - Corporate attractiveness – quality parkland, education, etc
  - Sometimes attractiveness creates a tension between attracting more people and capacity of system to accommodate them
  - Natural areas provide value for more than people