



# Vision 2030

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

### **UpCounty Focus Group Notes**

Potomac Community Center

April 22, 2010

Following are the notes from the discussion held by the four (4) focus group attendees. This focus group was facilitated by Hadiyah Jordan from Justice and Sustainability Associates (member of the GreenPlay consultant team) as part of the Vision 2030 project

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

- The people that do the different activities.
- Accessibility and location. “The programs that our kids attend are in their school.”
- Reputation
- Opportunities for children. Strong kids programs and good selections.
- Variety of programs
- Damascus site is very homey – “someone has taken thought to provide comfortable seating areas”. The Germantown site feels sterile in comparison.
- Parks. We love that they are there. There is a large variety of parks. They are well maintained sites.
- Availability of the recreation facilities. All of the facilities may not be sufficiently utilized, but they are located where they need to be.

#### **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?**

- The parks. It’s critical to have natural spaces available to the community. Not just “pocket parks” but real green space where families can encounter wildness and animals.
- Safety. People use parks when they are safe places. The space is generally safe today.
- Enthusiasm for programs and variety of resources. There must be a wide variety of programming at both park and recreation locations.
- Provide meeting space for community meetings, classes, etc. It is hard to find locations in the community that are affordable and available.
- Programs for teens are vital. However, this does not exclude the need for programming that is essential for seniors, disabled users, etc. Breadth of programming for all age groups has to be maintained. The schools cannot provide the depth of services needed by junior high and high school students. Gaithersburg has a great teen center that is always full.
- Programs need to be affordable to low income children.
- Fun sports programming, not necessarily competitive sports, but fun for children to participate in.
- Available toilets in the parks.
- The county should teach children to swim. There are good programs but they fill very quickly.

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

- Community meeting space. There is a challenge for community members to find available and affordable meeting spaces for local programming (clubs, civic groups, moms groups, etc.).
- Home school families need services. When home school families participate in events they bring the whole family. This problem is amplified by the need for toilet facilities if you are bringing children to area parks for events.
- “Idleness” of middle school age children. Good programming will engage this age group and can be an intervention in this formative stage.
- Gangs fill the vacuum of good programming. Parks and Recreation programs can channel the energy that can become destructive energy as children mature.
- Parks and Recreation could partner with some of the private organizations that run youth oriented programs to increase the effectiveness and reach of programs. An example was given of the Books and Boxing program designed by focus group participant, Donald Steinman.
- There are many children between the ages of 4 and 11 that are unsupervised who have no place to go to channel their energy. There does not seem to be thought about the ways that the communities can manage that.
- Seniors may not participate in programs because they often get caught in the inertia of being home. A support group or friendship group in which seniors take responsibility for other senior attendance through personal phone calls, car pools, etc.
- Pedestrian safety education for school aged children. Kids are walking, are on scooters, and ride bikes and they are often invisible to drivers.

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

- The Departments should strive to work more collaboratively with all of the available community volunteer and private sector resources.
- Home schooling “market” is growing and there are existing support organizations that are being developed by outside resources. The parks program currently offers some programming during the day but the recreation department might want to try to develop some daytime programming.
- Increase program availability that would be accessible by bus, walking, biking, etc. Maybe more community based programs.
- Create new programs for community gardening – rental plots are great, but there could be actual neighborhood directed gardens and the recreation department could encourage community relationships.
- Be conscientious about recreation fees.

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

- Bring as many of the community members together as possible to contribute to the design and implementation of Parks and Recreation programs. Better public, private/community partnerships. Each community should have the chance to say what they need in their specific facility.
- Program initiative booklet. For those who are interested in creating a program for children, elderly, etc., there would be a workbook that could outline the process for creating a program, could identify the possibility of funding, and would list any local, available volunteer energy that may exist.

- Staff might be based at a community center, but do some of their activities/programming at a local level. Bring services directly to the users – service delivery where the communities are. Example of programs that might work in this model: community gardening, kickball, roller skating.
- Get people out of their cars. Collaborate with local agencies to encourage people to walk. Maybe increase the number of crossing guards and decrease the bus service, for example.
- Increase the already good programming surrounding community gardening. Tie the programs to locally grown/sustainable agriculture.
- Advertise programs through web groups – Yahoo Groups, social networking, etc.
- Maybe create a website that aggregates the information of local programs. If one could create a searchable system using keyword search, then that would help community members locate all community resources regarding a specific topic. One example of this might be KEY WORD: Tennis. The system would search the affiliated county resources for tennis programming.

### Optional Questions

#### **1. How do you think County residents prefer to pay for the parks and recreation improvements or enhancements they wish to have?**

- Given the budget cuts create partnerships between communities and the parks and recreation programs. This could create jobs and increased revenue. The concrete is here, the lights are on, so you may as well look for ways for community members to support programs.

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

- Business community
- Chamber of Commerce – Olney Chamber of Commerce
- Civic Associations
- Probation Department
- Montgomery Home Learning Network
- Maryland UFC – Home Schooling Network
- Baltimore Washington Educators
- Home school coops that are often organized through churches
- Boys and Girls Clubs