

Conservation Montgomery

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Finding our Voice

Perspectives from the CM Board of Directors

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2012 Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROS)

Moving into the Future with our Parklands

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Montgomery County has over 35,000 acres in parklands of all kinds, from tiny neighborhood parks with a playground and some tree shaded benches, to long, linear stream valleys leading to our Rivers; to large conservation parks with forests big enough to get lost in and provide rare species of plants and animals a safe place to thrive. All of our parks are invaluable to nourishing the health and well being of our citizens. For many, they are a primary reason for choosing to live in this part of Maryland. This wealth of green spaces didn't just happen. They are the result of vision, careful planning, some generosity and a good measure of luck. Some parcels are purchased outright with County or state acquisition funds. Some are acquired during the development process and others are outright gifts from citizens looking to preserve something they have lived on and loved.

The *PROS Plan* is required by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to maintain our eligibility for Program Open Space funding. Every six years we evaluate the changing need patterns of our communities and update our goals for parks and recreation to establish and guide priorities for acquisition and development. The current document updates the *2005 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation/PROS Plan*. Based on new guidelines developed by MD DNR, it serves as our local land preservation and recreation Plan.

Much has changed since 2005 when we last took a comprehensive look at park needs. Getting people out of their cars has gone from a nice idea to a movement. So has the desire for locally sourced food. It used to be a dream to move to the suburbs. Now people want to move where they have access to public transportation and activities in walking distance of home.

As the County develops and becomes more urban in areas closest to Washington DC and available Metro stations, opportunities to obtain new parkland dwindle. Parcels cost too much and are simply not available. We need to think about re-purposing existing land uses to serve as parklike spaces for gathering and play. We need to look to pedestrian and bicycle based transport. Park natural areas are no longer just nice oasis to have or holding places for future recreation facilities. Their value is more complex. They are critical to our physical and mental health, even and maybe especially in urban settings. *No Child Left Inside* and the childhood obesity epidemic have pointed to how much we all need to go outside and move around in the open air.

Tree loss has been an issue in dozens of development land use disputes over the last six years. We now know trees are not just another pretty face in the landscape but function to clean our environment and keep us healthy. They sequester tremendous amounts of carbon. and attenuate run-off from high levels of impervious surfaces. Always precious, water from streams and rivers is ever more crucial and keeping our public water supply clean and drinkable so stream valley parklands and the forested buffers they provide have become invaluable to controlling sediment and pollutants reaching our these precious waters. Their adjacent wetlands provide homes for local species of a dwindling worldwide amphibian population.

These changes in how and where we live and how we view our parkland surface in the *Vision 2030 Survey Report* and subsequent *Vision 2030 Strategic Plan* issued in 2011. Input gained from this broad based public exercise has provided valuable data on park user preferences and suggests new ideas for how to address them. When the public was asked what they wanted to see more of in our parks, they were also asked to rate those choices by top, second and third priority. Park users were asked to give their top 3 priorities for adding, expanding, or improving park facilities. The results show park visitors want more community/recreation centers, indoor aquatic centers, playgrounds, trails and natural areas.

The *PROS Public Forum Document of Recommended Service Delivery Strategies* delves a little further into needs expressed and how they will be fulfilled. Some will be met by the Recreation Dept. (under the County Executive branch) by adding fewer, larger centers and combining typical elements of Community Recreation Centers and Aquatic Centers into combined structures. Trails are the function of the Parks Dept under MNCPPC. The *2010 Vision 2030* Survey revealed that the use of both natural and hard surface trails is the County's most popular recreation activity. Sixty eight percent of the respondents reported using both types of trails, and nearly 75% considered them very important to their households. They also ranked highest on the survey as to overall importance when adding, expanding or improving park facilities.

More PROS articles coming: *Park Trail Systems: Connecting our County and a New Vision of Urban Parks*

For further information:

The M-NCPPC, Montgomery County Planning Board is holding a Public Hearing on the Draft [2012 Park, Recreation, and Open Space \(PROS\) Plan](#) during their regular meeting on **Thursday May 24, 2012**. The Hearing will be held in the auditorium of the Montgomery Regional Office at **8787 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring, Maryland 20910**. A **tentative time of 9 am** has been assigned to this hearing, but is subject to change. Please check the Planning Board agenda online for a more exact time closer to the hearing date. You can also download the staff report, and can you sign up to testify (and to listen to the live public hearing broadcast) visit: www.MontgomeryPlanningBoard.org/agenda/ Or you can also call 301-495-4600 to sign up to testify.

The main purpose of the [2012 PROS Plan](#) is to estimate the future needs for park and recreation facilities and natural and historic resource preservation and develop specific service delivery strategies to meet future needs. This effort builds on the results of the 2011 [Vision 2030 Strategic Plan](#).

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The views of a particular Board Member of Conservation Montgomery may not reflect the views of each Board member or their respective organizations on every topic covered in the *Finding our Voice* op/eds.