

"Federation Corner" column
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Planning for future park and recreation facility needs

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The Montgomery County Department of Parks, an arm of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, is preparing an update of the county Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan. The Plan estimates future needs for neighborhood, community and countywide facilities, natural, historic/cultural and agricultural preservation and implementation. Two public meetings will be held this coming week--one in Silver Spring and the other in Germantown-- to educate residents on the Plan and to take comments. Details on date, time and location of the meetings appear near the end of this column.

Montgomery Parks is working in coordination with the county Department of Recreation, an executive branch department under County Executive Isiah Leggett, to update the *2005 PROS Plan* currently in place. The Plan represents a refinement of the overall framework for parks and recreation that is contained in the *1964 General Plan for the Maryland-Washington Regional District within Montgomery and Prince George's County* and in existing park acquisition and development guidelines.

Required by the State of Maryland to maintain Program Open Space funding to the county, the PROS Plan is updated every six years to keep pace with growth and the changing patterns of needs in our county. The Plan also serves as the county's Local Land Preservation and Recreation Plan.

One of the primary purposes of the Plan is to provide guidance regarding recreation facility needs in the county for the next ten years. The Plan also recommends priorities for important natural and historic/cultural areas in the county that need to be preserved and interpreted.

The PROS Plan also provides input to area master and sector plans prepared by the Planning Department, as well as park master plans prepared by the Parks Department, regarding the need for public parkland and recreation facilities. And the Plan helps establish park acquisition and development priorities in the six-year Capital Improvements Program (CIP).

The *2012 PROS Plan* will compare the park and recreation facility needs for different areas of the county so that decision makers have the information necessary to establish priorities as the county's population grows in an era of high competition for limited resources.

The Department of Parks and the Department of Recreation have recently completed the *Vision 2030 Strategic Plan for Parks and Recreation in Montgomery County, MD*, which will enhance the PROS Plan update by its many recommendations and products. But there are significant differences between the *2012 PROS Plan* and the *Vision 2030 Strategic Plan*.

The PROS Plan summarizes guiding policies and specific needs for land acquisition and parks and recreation facilities. The Vision 2030 Plan, on the other hand, is broader in scope and addresses all aspects of operating the Parks and Recreation system such as programming, facility renovation and construction, maintenance, operations, policing, management and marketing.

The most challenging aspect of drafting the 2012 PROS Plan update will be the projection of need for local use facilities (playgrounds, tennis and basketball courts), community team area facilities (diamond and rectangular playing fields), countywide facilities (recreation centers and aquatic facilities operated by the

Recreation Department, natural areas, historic/cultural areas, natural and hard surface trails, picnic shelters, skate parks and dog parks), and general needs (passive recreation, community gardens, cricket, volleyball, nature education, ice rinks, indoor tennis, adventure sports, etc.).

The PROS Plan will also look at meeting needs for land acquisition, facility development and rehabilitation priorities in the short term (2012-2016), mid-term (2017-2021), and long range (2022 and beyond). Another important function of the Plan is the calculation of how the county meets the State Recreational Acreage Goal.

Two public meetings will be held next week on the Preliminary 2012 PROS Plan recommendations. The down-county meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 24, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the M-NCPPC headquarters building at 8787 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring (entrance from parking lot at rear of building). The up-county meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 25, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. in the UpCounty Government Center at 12900 Middlebrook Road in Germantown. [NOTE: After publication of this column in The Sentinel, it was confirmed that the time for the two public meetings is 5:30 to 8:30 .m.] If schools are closed due to inclement weather on either date, the meeting will be rescheduled. The meetings will be held in an Open House format, allowing attendees to circulate among informational stations that address future needs and service delivery options for the various categories of facilities.

The official Staff Draft of the 2012 PROS Plan is scheduled to be presented to the Planning Board in March, after which a public hearing will be scheduled so the Board can take public testimony on the Staff Draft. The Board is then scheduled to hold worksessions on the Plan during June, and perhaps extending into July. They should vote to approve the final version of the Plan sometime in July, after which it will be submitted to the Maryland Departments of State, Planning, and Natural Resources.

Taxpayer dollars will be spent to acquire necessary land for parks and recreation areas, construct and maintain sports facilities, plan and build trails, and preserve and interpret historic and cultural resources to meet the future needs of a growing county. Residents, especially those who regularly use county recreation facilities and parks, should learn about the 2012 PROS Plan update and share their comments with the staff of the Parks and Recreation Departments at the January public meetings, and with the Planning Board at the public hearing later this spring.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net