

Long Branch Sector Plan

**Appendix
Public Parks and Open Space**

Introduction

Public parkland and pathways—as well as both public and private open space—play important roles in the well-being of a community. In urbanizing areas, parks provide important health, social, aesthetic, economic, and environmental benefits. They enhance the quality of community life by providing visual relief from the built environment, a sense of place, an opportunity to connect with nature, and space to gather, play and celebrate life’s milestones. In addition, parkland contributes to the natural environment by providing wildlife habitat, improving air quality, and protecting water quality.

Plans in urbanizing areas like Long Branch propose integrated systems of parks and open spaces to reflect the particular needs of a community. They also help implement land use planning goals and objectives established in the 2005 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP), which guides the County-wide pattern of parkland and recreation needs. The park and trail related recommendations in this document will update the 2005 LPPRP.

As areas urbanize, the roles and functions of public and private open spaces should change to reflect the changing needs of the community. Parks play an important role in enhancing human health and providing natural green settings within the urban landscape. The challenge for any plan is to protect existing park resources while concurrently planning for future needs. The range of recommendations should balance environmental stewardship with active recreation needs. For example, many park facilities in this sector plan are located within the floodplain for the Long Branch stream. Future improvements to these facilities will be reviewed and analyzed with more scrutiny and analysis as a result.

Existing Parks

The Long Branch community is served by several parks and recreational resources, within and outside of the Plan area. The community is anchored by the Long Branch Local Park, which contains the Long Branch Recreation Center and the Long Branch community pool—as well as the Long Branch Stream Valley Park which approximately bisects the planning area. Other parks within the Plan area include Flower Avenue Urban Park, Long Branch Arliss Local Park, Long Branch-Wayne Local Park, Long Branch-Garland Neighborhood Park, Seek Lane Neighborhood Park, Upper Long Branch Neighborhood Park and New Hampshire Estates Neighborhood Park. The planning area features approximately 36 acres of parkland in total (see Table 1 and Map 1), which provide several playgrounds and other amenities, such as basketball courts and tennis courts. The facilities are fairly well distributed geographically with recreational opportunities, particularly playgrounds, within a 5-10 minute walk for most residents. The Department of Recreation currently has no plans to upgrade or redesign either the recreation center or the community pool.

Table 1 Existing Parks and Facilities in Long Branch Sector Plan Area

Park	Acres	Amenities
Flower Avenue Urban Park	0.61	concrete plaza, playground, local path system (6' asphalt)
Seek Lane Neighborhood Park	1.67	playground, local path system (6' asphalt)
Long Branch-Garland Neighborhood Park	0.93	playground and basketball court
Long Branch-Arliss Neighborhood Park	6.16	playground, 2 tennis courts (adjacent to public library)
New Hampshire Estates Neighborhood Park	4.74	rectangular field, playground, plaza, parking
Long Branch Local Park	12.4	diamond ballfield with soccer/football overlay, basketball court, 2 tennis courts, playground, local path system, recreation center, and outdoor swimming pool (Department of Recreation), parking lot
Long Branch Stream Valley Park, Unit 1 (southern Plan boundary to Piney Branch Road)	6.5	8' asphalt path between Carroll Ave and Piney Branch Rd
Long Branch Stream Valley Park, Unit 2 (northern Plan boundary to Long Branch Local Park)	3.5	unsanctioned natural surface trails

Map 1



Existing Trails

The Long Branch Trail parallels the Long Branch stream, within Long Branch Stream Valley Park Unit #1, between Carroll Avenue and Piney Branch Road (MD 320). This eight-foot wide asphalt park trail provides both a linear, active recreational experience, as well as a vital off-road transportation alternative with connections to numerous parks and community resources including the recreation center, the community pool, and public library.

The adjoining communities enjoy good access to this trail due to numerous community connector paths where public streets dead-end at the stream valley park. The Plan area also abuts Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park, which features the regional Sligo Creek Trail that links to numerous bikeways as well as countywide destinations. An important Plan goal will be to enhance connections to these trails as a means to augment active, linear recreational opportunities and to facilitate access to community destinations by bicycle and on-foot.

Park and Trail Planning Policy

The LPPRP gives guidance on the countywide pattern of parkland and recreation needs. It projects recreational needs by broad planning areas, rather than for small sub-areas such as Long Branch. Urban areas present distinct challenges and opportunities to provide park and recreation resources and the Plan will strive to incorporate and create those resources with reinvestment. Future facilities may be best provided through public-private partnerships. Those open spaces that rise to the level of serving as a focal point of community life for the planning area are likely to be recommended to be public parks. The “neighborhood green” areas, those open spaces serving small sub-segments of the Plan area, are appropriate to be provided and managed by the private sector.

Local and neighborhood recreation facility needs are projected by the LPPRP based on residential population. Its assumptions are suburban—that housing will be built on large tracts of land and that desired facilities are playing fields and courts. While locating new parkland for rectangular fields is desirable in the Long Branch Sector Plan area, it will be difficult to find available and suitable land.

The LPPRP indicated that the Silver Spring/Takoma Park Team Area, which includes Long Branch, needs additional baseball fields and rectangular fields (soccer). Approximately 24 additional fields are estimated to be needed by 2020, divided roughly equally between diamonds and rectangular fields. In down-County areas such as Long Branch, it is difficult to find sufficient land on which to locate these fields. Playing field users, who normally drive to fields, may have to use fields in other areas and make more efficient use of existing fields through artificial turf, innovative scheduling, and lighting to increase hours of use.

Urban Park Guidelines

The Plan’s proposed system of open spaces will follow the objectives in the *Urban Parks Guidelines* for Montgomery County, currently under study by staff. The Planning Board is expected to approve these Guidelines in late winter 2011. The goal of the Urban Park Guidelines is to reexamine and redefine the role of urban parks in community life. While the County has been served well for years by its extensive park and trail system, its urban centers are largely lacking in accessible, conveniently located, public parkland. The pattern of urban parks must keep pace with the County’s vision, plans, and policies for compactly developed, sustainable urban areas. The Urban Park Guidelines will clarify what the public sector’s responsibility in meeting urban open space needs is, regardless of the private sector’s potential contribution, because it is impossible to predict the amount, location, and function of future privately-provided public spaces.

Park Planning Issues

1. Designating a central gathering or civic space(s) close to the commercial center and/or Purple Line stations.
2. Designating additional space for adult field sports, soccer in particular.
3. Creating a walkable system of parks and open spaces, with improved bicycle and pedestrian connectivity to regional and community trail system.

4. Providing park amenities that enhance each component of human health (see Table 2).
5. Improving public safety on parkland—particularly the Long Branch Trail—through design improvements and enhanced maintenance and operations.
6. Protecting and minimizing impacts to sensitive natural areas.
7. Relocating impervious facilities away from sensitive natural areas and out of stream buffers.
8. Exploring opportunities to expand the existing park system.

Table 2

Urban Parks

Component of Human Health	Contribution of Parks (Performance Standard)	Example of Amenity
Physical	Provide a variety of settings and infrastructure for various levels of formal and informal sport and recreation, for all skill levels and abilities e.g. picnicking, walking, dog training, running, cycling, ball games, boating, photography, bird watching, camping	Trails, Fields, Courts, Playgrounds, Picnick Areas, Camps, Dog Parks, Boating Lakes
Social	Provide settings for people to enhance their networks and personal relationships from couples to families, to social clubs and organizations of all sizes, from casual picnicking to event days and festivals	Large Open Spaces, Plazas, Lawns, Moveable Tables and Chairs
Mental	Make nature available for restoration from mental fatigue; solitude and quiet; artistic inspiration and expression; educational development; (e.g. natural and cultural history)	Quiet tree lined spaces, water, waterfalls, ponds, Culturally pristine spaces, historic settings interpretive areas and signage
Spiritual	Preserve the natural environment for contemplation, reflection, and inspiration; invoke a sense of place; facilitate feeling a connection to something beyond human concerns	Naturally beautiful spaces or designed beautiful spaces and art
Environmental	Mitigate consequences of an urban landscape. Reduce air and water pollutants, cool local climate, conserve energy. Foster human involvement in the natural environment (Friends Groups, etc.)	Trees, landscaping, stormwater management areas, green walls, green roofs

Components of Human Health and Contributions of Parks from “Healthy Parks, Healthy People”, A review of relevant literature by the School of Health and Social Development Faculty of Health, medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, Deakin University, Melbourne

Park Planning Recommendations

The recommendations aim to create a system of parks and open space that celebrates the community, supports the unique features of the area, and connects destinations. Because private redevelopment may not occur for several years, some recommendations are more likely to be implemented in the short term, without private sector contributions or significant public sector investment, while others are longer term--implementable only through the contributions of private development through dedication or Capital Improvement Program funding.

Park and Open Space Hierarchy

- **Addresses each component of Human Health – physical, social, mental, spiritual and environmental**
- **Creates a walkable system**
- **Fills gaps in service**

PUBLICALLY OWNED
FOR EVERYONE Long Branch Stream Valley Park and Trail – linear recreational amenity in a natural forested stream valley setting. Regional trail connection.
FOR THE SECTOR PLAN AREA Long Branch Local Park – The center of the community , it provides nearby play and recreation amenities, large enough for an athletic field, sitting areas, nature areas and walking paths. Includes local art and cultural amenities.
FOR EACH NEIGHBORHOOD Neighborhood and Urban Parks - smaller community gathering spaces for play, socializing, gardening, and being in nature. Includes art and cultural amenities.
PRIVATELY OWNED
FOR EACH NEIGHBORHOOD Existing neighborhood greens for meeting places, buffers and play areas
FOR EACH BLOCK An urban plaza at each cluster of offices, residences, and shops to provide a place to meet and socialize, view art work fountains, and include s street trees.
FOR EACH BUILDING Private recreation space or public use space including community gardens, green roofs, play areas

Recommendations in the context of the proposed hierarchy of parks and open space (above) are as follows (see Map 1 for detailed locations):

For Everyone

1. The existing central linear park, Long Branch Stream Valley Park that serves the entire planning area and contains a series of parks and spaces connected by a north-south trail. Improvements are needed to improve safety and function of the park to include:
 - a. selective removal of invasive vegetation to improve views into and across the park
 - b. a place to watch and listen to the waterfall at the bridge crossing the stream at the end of Domer Street (assuming no road crossing, see below)
 - c. landscaping, paving, and or signage where Piney Branch Avenue crosses the park and trail to strengthen the views into the park from the road and to alert motorists of trail users who may be crossing the road to access the recreation center and pool
 - d. addition of loop trail along both sides of the park on Garland Avenue, Barron Street, Piney Branch Road and Domer Street Bridge.
2. Connections for pedestrians and cyclists that improves their mobility within and beyond the planning area as follows:
 - a. Extend Long Branch Trail north of Piney Branch Road along pool and recreation center to connect to Long Branch Pedestrian Bridge and Long Branch-Arliss Neighborhood Park.
 - b. Improve the Long Branch Trail crossing of Piney Branch Road. As part of Purple Line project, seek a grade separated crossing or enhance the at-grade signalized crossing at Barron Street.
 - c. Establish a non-park trail connector along Domer Avenue that will provide a route for cyclists and pedestrians to link the Long Branch Trail with the Sligo Creek Trail; and,
 - d. Establish a non-park recreational trail connector and loop within the planning area showcasing art that reflects the local character, and connecting to the Long Branch Trail as well as the other parks and open spaces in the Long Branch area.

For the Sector Plan Area

3. Existing local and neighborhood parks that are distributed throughout the planning area should be improved as follows:
 - a. Hampshire Estates Local Park
 - i. As part of or immediately following the approval of the Purple Line alignment and design, consider reinventing the park to serve as an urban park and/or a civic gathering space near the future Purple Line Station.
 - ii. Work with MCPS to improve functional and spatial relationship with New Hampshire Estates Elementary School and develop school programs on parkland, as well as “adopting” the park.
 - iii. Pursue land swap to mitigate loss of park frontage along University Boulevard from Purple Line construction
 - b. Long Branch Local Park
 - i. Activate the park by improving views from surrounding neighborhoods.
 - ii. Provide improved pedestrian connection between ballfields and Long Branch Bridge and trail along west side of recreation center.

- iii. Consider removing parking within the stream buffer at the pool and recreation center, where feasible, and encourage use of parking lots at Long Branch-Arliss Neighborhood Park and the parking lot at the end of Langley Drive.
 - iv. Improve frontage of pool area by removing excess pavement and adding trees and plants.
 - v. Create a Heart Smart Trail using the existing loop trail around the ballfield.
 - c. Long Branch-Garland Neighborhood Park
 - i. Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the park by adding a shared use path along Garland Avenue that would also function as the loop trail also recommended by this sector plan.
 - ii. Consider narrowing or shifting Garland Avenue to the west to expand parkland, provide a more pleasant pedestrian and bicycle experience and to calm motor vehicle traffic between Domer Avenue and Piney Branch Road.
- 4. Establish a new urban park to function as the planning area’s central civic gathering space in the area of highest proposed density, near the transit station at the corner of Piney Branch Avenue and Arliss Street.
- 5. Establish a new urban plaza to function as the public gathering space at the proposed new high density area near the transit station and development at Piney Branch and University Blvd
- 6. Delete the recommendation in the East Silver Spring Master Plan to acquire 8426 Piney Branch Road for a future park (aka Piney Branch Road Urban Park). The urban park/civic gathering space recommended in this sector plan near Arliss Street and Piney Branch Road replaces the need to acquire this property.
- 7. Consider purchasing properties, where feasible and appropriate, that are adjacent to existing parks or meet identified active or passive recreational needs as documented in the current LPPRP, to reduce active recreation shortages and expand urban green space.
- 8. Look for locations in existing or expanded parks for community gardens.

For Each Neighborhood

- 9. Flower Avenue Urban Park: enhance the use of the park as a complementary space to the historic theater area, by improving seating, play, art experience, and walking connections.
- 10. Seek Lane Neighborhood Park
 - a. Activate the park by new uses and related educational programs with the nearby elementary school, as well as “adopting” the park.
 - b. Expand the park to Bayfield Road to functionally link the park with Rolling Terrace Elementary School and to improve views into the park.
 - c. Renovate the existing playground to better serve the existing community.

11. Support extending Domer Avenue across Long Branch SVU #1. Minimize impacts to Long Branch-Garland NP. While the road would cross a stream and its buffer, the water quality is unlikely to improve in this subwatershed therefore a road crossing is unlikely to cause additional adverse impacts. Seek mitigation for lost parkland due to expanded ROW. Mitigation could include enhancements to Long Branch Trail as well as removal of non-native invasives in the stream valley.



Long Branch Sector Plan
Preliminary Park and Open Space Recommendations

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