

Appendix G: Parks

The following appendix provides background information into the Parks Recommendations in the Sector Plan by providing the framework for the Parks Policy Guidance and PROS Plan Urban Parks Hierarchy. This appendix also outlines the current and future needs for establishing parks and open space in Downtown Bethesda and provides the results of community input during public meetings and work shops in the development of the concept framework plan at the beginning of the project.

POLICY GUIDANCE

The 2012 PROS Plan (PROS) focuses on how the parks and recreation system meets the needs of our growing population and continues to play a major role in shaping Montgomery County's high quality of life. A central component of PROS is its "Service Delivery Strategies" to ensure the "right parks" are put in the "right places." The strategies recommend the type, number and general location of lands and facilities needed to the Year 2022. Current and future plans for urban parks, trails, dog parks, community gardens, and other needed facilities are guided by PROS.

As the County becomes more urban, acquiring park sites in growth areas is increasingly difficult because of competition for land. The Urban Park Guidelines, approved by the Planning Board as part of PROS recommends that a system of parks and open spaces be provided for every urban master plan or sector plan area through a combination of public and private efforts.

PROS Plan Urban Parks Hierarchy

The Urban Parks Hierarchy is guidance outlined in the 2012 PROS Plan for the evaluation and creation of a more complete park, trail, and open space system. The hierarchy is as follows (page 22, PROS):

Each area master plan should include a system of open spaces based on the roles of each type of open space. The amount and size of open spaces may vary from plan to plan and should be directly proportional to the projected density, and adjusted to the pattern of existing open space and other factors such as community-specific needs.

The following hierarchy should be applied to any new urbanizing area:

For the Sector Plan Area:

- Active recreation destinations located within or near the plan area, including courts, playgrounds, and lawn areas large enough for pick up soccer, festivals or events, etc.
- A central "civic green" urban park (Chapter 3), ranging in size from ½ to 2 acres, depending on projected densities, located in close proximity to a public transit hub, next to activating uses, with a mixture of hard and soft surfaces including a central lawn area for events
- An interconnected system of sidewalks and trails to connect parks and open spaces
- Wooded areas that will provide a sense of contact with nature

For each Urban Neighborhood: a neighborhood green, urban buffer park, or community use recreational park

For each Block: an urban square, plaza, or green area

For each Building: outdoor recreation space

For each Residence: private outdoor space

ESTABLISHING PARKS AND OPEN SPACE NEEDS IN BETHESDA, CURRENT AND FUTURE

Park, Trail and Open Space needs for the Bethesda Downtown Plan area were determined through community input, during several public workshops and meetings, and online comment gathering, as well as the 2012 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan.

As outlined in the Bethesda Downtown Plan Briefing Book, existing parks, trails and open space in the area are provided through the following network of spaces:

- several urban buffer parks (Caroline Freeland Urban Park, Elm Street Urban Park, Battery Lane Urban Park, and Chase Avenue and Cheltenham Drive Urban Parks);
- the Capital Crescent Trail, a regionally significant transportation and recreation hard-surface trail corridor;
- two publicly-owned and well-used public plazas (Veterans Park and the Barnes and Noble plaza space);
- Norwood Local Park, the largest park with recreational facilities in close proximity to the Bethesda Downtown area; and
- a series of underutilized privately-owned and publicly accessible plaza spaces concentrated in the Central Business District part of the Downtown Plan area.

The Bethesda Downtown Plan area is a thriving urban and urbanizing Central Business District surrounded by affluent residential neighborhoods. This area provides a clear example of the historical approach to park planning for an urbanized area within Montgomery County: M-NCPPC Parks are located on the perimeter of the downtown core, acting as buffers between the urban area and residential neighborhoods, while the urbanized area itself possesses few central traditional green park-like open spaces. The optional method developments of the 1980's produced many privately provided public use spaces that serve as plazas. The 1994 Bethesda CBD Sector Plan recognized that the public use spaces need to be improved to be safer, more visible, and welcoming to the public.

As Bethesda urbanized and no additional park spaces were built within the Sector Plan area, demand increased for walk-to parks, park facilities, and open spaces. The PROS Plan and additional studies by Montgomery Parks indicate that there is unmet demand in the Bethesda-North Bethesda part of the County for rectangular athletic fields, dog parks, skate parks, adult fitness equipment, community gardens, and community open space.

COMMUNITY INPUT

During the development of the Concept Framework Plan the following key questions were identified: How can Bethesda be improved with green spaces and connections?

- Where are the best places for focal points and gateways? Where is the heart of Bethesda?
- Where can parks provide a transition along the edges?

Throughout the extensive public outreach efforts for this plan, FIVE common themes emerged time after time as people commented about the open space system in Bethesda:

1. Pressing Issues, Concerns and Dislikes of the existing open spaces
2. Existing places and amenities that there should be more of and/or should be expanded
3. Opportunities seen for improvement in existing spaces
4. Parks and Open Spaces that are loved and considered important
5. Solutions suggested for the Public to benefit from increased density

These comments were documented and placed in a summary chart and were used to develop the recommendations for the Concept Framework Plan.

OTHER OPEN SPACE

OPEN SPACE OWNED BY OTHER PUBLIC AGENCIES

Two additional well-used open spaces that are not owned by M-NCPPC are Veterans Park, at the intersection of Woodmont Avenue and Norfolk Avenue, and the plaza outside of Barnes and Noble, at the intersection of Woodmont Avenue and Bethesda Avenue. Both of these spaces are Montgomery County Department of Transportation Rights-of-Way successfully converted to public plazas with seating, landscaping, and water features. In addition, the Montgomery County Recreation Department runs the Bethesda Pool, which is just south of downtown Bethesda.

PRIVATELY-OWNED PUBLIC USE SPACE

For the last two decades, commercial and residential development provided a number of privately-owned and publicly accessible open spaces, in the form of plazas, larger sections of sidewalk, and landscaped seating areas. Many of these spaces, which act as the primary network of public spaces in downtown Bethesda, are not perceived as public space because they are either elevated above the street level or are partially hidden from the street within an interior courtyard. Public input from the public meetings with the Bethesda community indicated a desire for public realm improvements, including:

- Public space is not easily accessible because some are above street level
- Community residents do not have any knowledge of existing public spaces
- Too little green space and its decreasing, more and more taller buildings, narrow sidewalks, especially when tables are set up outside of restaurants, no “affordable” storefronts, inconsiderate bicyclists, too few public recreation facilities
- Lack of use of Metro Center Plaza, (i.e. ice rink programming)
- Lack of green space (space we have isn’t used)

Downtown Bethesda Park Plan – Public Input to Date on Parks, Open Spaces, Trails and Recreation, April 8, 2014

| Date of Input | Pressing Issues/ Concerns/Dislikes | Expand/Need more of/Opportunities | Places you like/Love/think are important | Solutions/Public Benefits from Density |
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| Notes from meeting at Writer's Center November 14, 2013 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns of lack of open space • Not enough provisions for green space and public amenities; acquisition of land for sidewalks • Community residents do not have any knowledge of existing public spaces • Not enough green space is available in the community • Public space is not easily accessible because some are above street level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand Elm Street park – Need for more parks – Create a large green space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love green space, walkability and is in favor of mass transit. Public transit is a good thing. CCT is a great feature to escape the busy area of the city • Artery Plaza and open space/ pocket parks make Bethesda livable. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should consider a new zone – if under three acres there is no open space requirement; what little we have is not usable • Community should get more public benefits from various development projects |
| Group 2 Drop in Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better trail access - Better connectivity | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capital Crescent Trails | |
| Group 2 Drop in Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More open spaces - New gateway places | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common areas o Veterans park o Area by Barnes and Noble | |
| Drop in Meeting | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civic venue in Bethesda for graduations, etc. | |
| Drop in meeting | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outdoor public pool/Rec | |

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| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traffic – speed of cars, noisy restaurants – late night service, very limited public gathering places/parks, realtor driven development | | <p>- Indoor play space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walkability, small town feel, Capital Crescent Trail, Landmark Theater | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uneven brick sidewalks make walking difficult especially for disabled , poor street lighting in spots, shortage of green space | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can walk to stores, restaurants and Crescent Trail | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of a real urban park/gathering space | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nightlife and art venues, walkability/safety, open space/ streetscapes | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too little green space and its decreasing, more and more taller buildings, narrow sidewalks, especially when tables are set up outside of restaurants, no “affordable” storefronts, inconsiderate bicyclists, too few public recreation facilities | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bethesda Row, green spaces | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough space for public gathering (inside and out) , concerned St. John’s church will be isolated, real estate driving decisions | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bethesda avenue, Woodmont and Capital Crescent Trail | |

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| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathering space indoor/outdoor in Center | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retail on Bethesda and Woodmont Ave, Barnes and Noble, Theaters, Trails | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of green space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bethesda Row, St. John's Episcopal Church, Capital Crescent Trail | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gas stations, density, building heights, parking, lack of use of Metro Center Plaza, (i.e. ice rink programming) loss of current affordable units, | Barnes and Noble | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balancing diversity and livability, creation of pocket parks in urban context, providing commercial for daily needs | Barnes and Noble, | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of diversity, too few young adults, lack of urban open space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> B and N | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | | Crescent Trail, | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | | Veterans Park | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space for fresh, local farm markets on a regular basis, maintaining open space for other outdoor events, art venues – theater, live music, etc., | |

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| | | | | promoting helping to survive and thrive Cap Crescent Trail, | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor seating | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 1 | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital Crescent Trail Common areas (Veterans Park) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I propose relocating above ground parking garages underground and constructing parks above the underground garages. We are losing open space in Bethesda and need to create additional space for parks. I am talking about relocating public garages underground such as the Elm Street garage and the large public garage on Woodmont near the Lionsgate and Black Restaurant; Financing for the relocating of the garages underground could come from developers' contributing to a relocation fund in exchange for higher |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 2 | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better trail access | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital Crescent Trail –widen the trail. Rest areas, benches Please pool the public spaces to create larger and better gathering places Taller buildings on/near public transportation (Metro Center, southern portal) | |

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| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 2</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough park spaces • Density has overwhelmed Norwood Park which has most useful space | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green space, parks, theater, local convenient moderately priced restaurants that are accessible, convenient shopping without a mall. | <p>density and building heights. Parks could include a skating rink, water park, space for concerts, art shows etc. Ellis Gordon</p> |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 2</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More and diverse gathering places in addition to Barnes and Noble fountain | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open space/park areas | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 2</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need connection of residential area to trail | | | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 2</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for more park/open space in the CBD | | | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 3</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsafe/poorly defined open space | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barnes and Noble Plaza | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 3</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More walkable streets/better public space | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Crescent Trail | |
| <p>Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 3</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of green space (space we have isn't used) • Not enough playing fields | | | |

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| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Current open spaces in interior of blocks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Green areas-exist ones well used | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Probs w/Metro Plaza | | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disappearing open space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital Crescent Trail | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 5 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pocket parks | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 5 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community gathers Linear parks | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 5 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metro plaza-opportunity Shady areas | |
| Kick-off meeting Nov 4, 2013 Group 5 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital Crescent Trail | |
| OTHER COMMENTS FROM INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATIONS AND 'COMMENT CARDS' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better access to trails and to businesses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of dog parks | <p>Beryl Neuman's comment card: Likes: Sky bridges: these structures enable me to go out from my home during the blizzards of 2010. Taste of Bethesda, BUP and its hosting of events, Dance Bethesda, dance concerts, and outdoor movies. Access to grocery stores close by.</p> |

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| <p>Public feedback on Parks and Open space from March 1 Visioning Session</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many dead-inaccessible public spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metro center (not really a meeting place but should be) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More linkages needed between districts / neighborhoods (example of Bradley center comment: “Bradley Center has lots of nice small shops but not easy to get there by biking and walking”) • The open space at the pancake house needs redesign • Need more alleys like Bethesda Lane to improve access and be interesting in and of themselves • Create great gathering places • Open spaces feel “secret”, unknown and are underutilized – reposition • Open spaces for ALL GROUPS • Heart and soul in all centers • Farmers market and | <p>Important Places: Sky bridges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep Woodmont • East green open space • Capital crescent trail, Norwood Park entrance walkability from Friendship Heights to Bethesda • Preserve light around open spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the art and other open areas as part of deal |
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| | | <p>Elm Street Park combo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usable green spaces on top of high rise buildings • Well-designed public meeting space instead of small limited use open space • The open space at the pancake house needs redesign • Need to make Metro Center Plaza more inviting and green • Create great gathering places • Bethesda Metro / Bus Station: invest in cosmetic and landscape improvements • Clearly defined / re-positioned open/green/gathering space, including dog parks and farmers market • Open spaces feel “secret”, unknown and are underutilized – reposition • Open spaces for ALL GROUPS • More and bigger green spaces • Need GREEN | | |
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| | | <p>connections (no sterile canyons)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog Parks • Need more alleys / paseos • Need more green spaces small areas with benches and tables • Need ball / soccer play fields • Anticipate infrastructure needs of 20 years from now (Green open space is an infrastructure need) • Create great gathering places • Dog parks and Farmers market • Multi-generational play structures: benches; activities; dog parks; athletic fields • Pocket parks -24hr activity • Community gardens • Heart and soul in all centers | | |
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Bethesda Downtown Plan Technical Appendix

Planning Board Draft July 2016

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