

Parks, Community Facilities, and Environmental Resources

These are essential elements of community life that establish neighborhood identity and provide valuable services and programs.

Introduction

Parks, recreation centers, schools, libraries, other public buildings and facilities, and environmental resources are essential elements of community life that establish neighborhood identity and provide valuable services and programs. Their location, condition, and accessibility contribute to neighborhood quality of life and provide a tangible measure of a community's character. Frequent shared use of public facilities in a neighborhood fosters a sense of belonging and commitment, provides places for community interaction, and lessens the fragmentation of urban and suburban life.

North and West Silver Spring neighborhoods have a compact, densely developed residential character. These neighborhoods have a full complement of public facilities—a nearby library, post office, and police station, a fire station, several schools, parks, and some social services.

Much of the appeal and attractiveness of these neighborhoods is derived from their proximity to natural resources, particularly the nearby stream valley parks, recreational facilities, and the urban

forest. Both North and West Silver Spring adjoin major stream valley parks and are also served by local and neighborhood parks and community facilities (see Maps 26, 27, and Table 4). This Plan recommends that the physical connections between the community's resources and the residents be strengthened and improved.

Recommendations

Strengthen and improve physical connections between community resources and residents.

- **Provide community facilities to meet the human service, recreational, security, educational, and other needs of the diverse community.**
- **Renovate existing facilities and provide new facilities and recreational programs for a wide range of ages, backgrounds, and interests.**
- **Ensure pedestrian and bicycle access to parks and community facilities.**

Parks and Open Space

North and West Silver Spring are densely developed and opportunities to add to the park inventory in the future will be limited. There are currently 371 acres of parks and open space in the North Silver Spring area and 421 acres in the West Silver Spring area. The stream valley parks, Sligo Creek and Rock Creek, constitute the largest open space component. Rock Creek Park forms the western boundary of North and West Silver Spring and Sligo Creek Park forms the eastern boundary of North Silver Spring.

Recreation options that enrich leisure time and daily activities will vary with age, income, interests, and available facilities. For example, both the *Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan* (PROS Plan) and research completed for the Urban Park and Open Space Concept surveyed users and found a growing interest in walking as a leisure time activity. Attractive paths for walking are relatively available in the stream valley parks and some local parks, but walking to transit and commercial uses is much less inviting. This Plan emphasizes the need to create a pedestrian friendly environment throughout North and West Silver Spring.

The PROS Plan, which identifies active recreational needs for the overall Silver Spring/Takoma Park area, shows a deficiency in the supply of ballfields and basketball courts. The basketball court deficiency for the year 2000 is two courts and is expected to triple to six by 2010. Ballfield deficiency for the year 2000 is three and is projected to double to six by 2010. Recreation facilities to meet PROS needs can be provided at both park and school sites.

Ballfields and basketball courts at the new Blair High School in Four Corners can help meet some of Silver Spring's recreational needs. In addition, Fairview Urban Park, located along Spring Street adjacent to the Central Business District, is being

developed in phases and may be a good location for a basketball court.

Recommendations

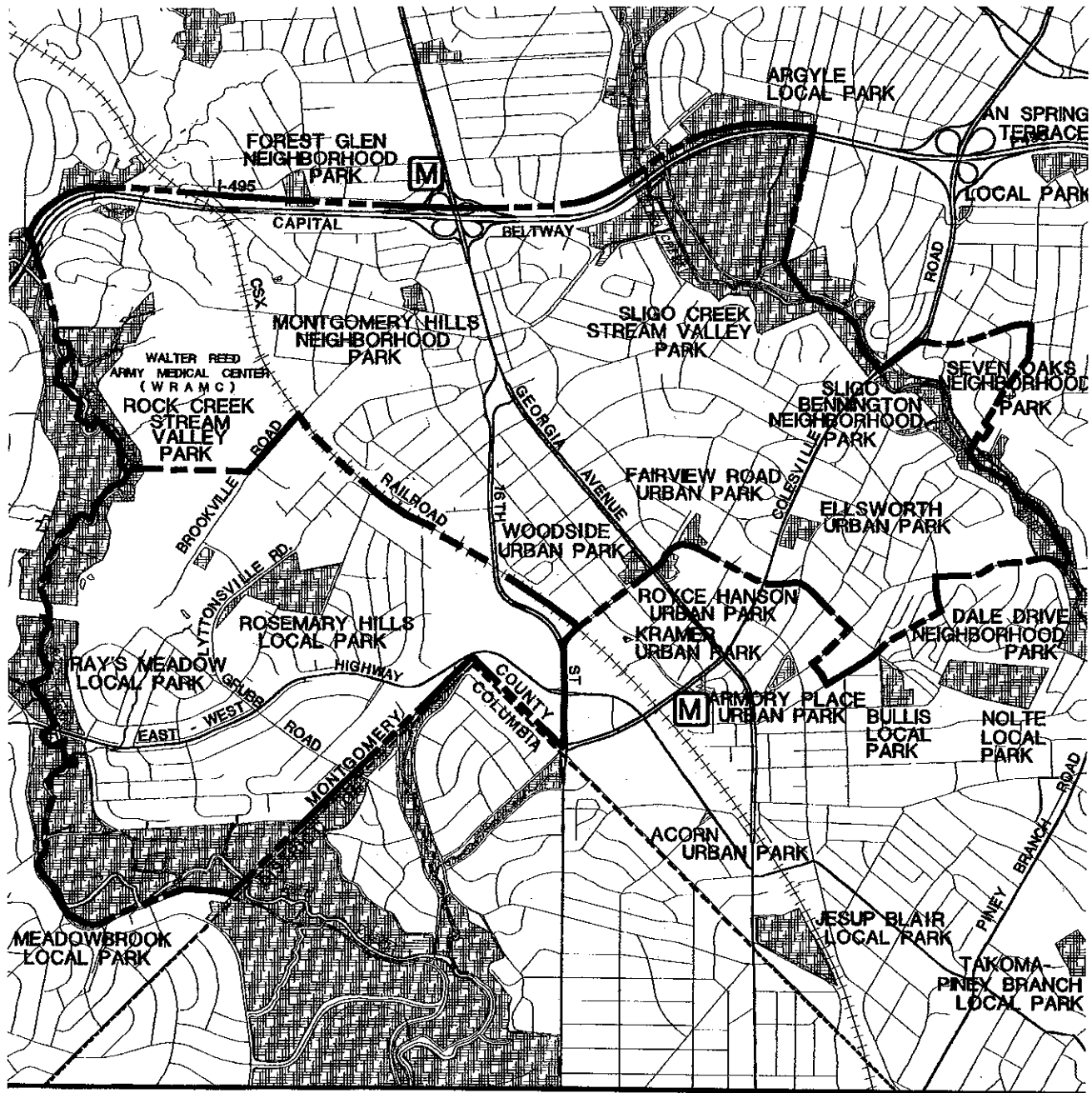
Provide a pedestrian-friendly walking environment throughout North and West Silver Spring, particularly to transit and commercial uses.

- **Preserve and maintain all existing parkland in North and West Silver Spring.**
- **Maintain a varied, well-distributed public open space system that addresses the identification, acquisition, and development of new urban parks and open spaces serving residents, workers, and visitors.**
- **Consider purchase of parcels adjacent to existing urban parks, where feasible and appropriate, if such properties become available, to help meet the recreational needs identified in the PROS Plan and to expand existing urban green space.**

Because North and West Silver Spring are developed, opportunities to increase the number of park holdings will be scarce. One possibility may be to expand the size of existing park facilities. Properties adjacent to existing parks can become available through a variety of means: abandonment, tax sale, change in use, etc. It is recommended that such properties be considered for acquisition and incorporated into the existing park, where feasible and desirable.

- **Complete the Rosemary Hills-Lyttonsville Recreation Center and Local Park reconstruction.**

Rosemary Hills-Lyttonsville is a 17-acre local park that includes a recreation center that is being reconstructed and enlarged. The new recreation center will provide additional recreational opportunities, community meeting



- Master Plan Boundary
-  Parkland
-  Metro Station

0 575 1150 2300 Feet



rooms, and will accommodate a range of programs for all age groups in this diverse, densely populated neighborhood. Parking will be expanded and the existing basketball and tennis courts will be reconstructed. Additional seating areas and improved pedestrian paths leading to the neighborhood are also planned.

- **Continue Development of Ellsworth Urban Park**

Additional development at Ellsworth Urban Park should be considered in the long-term to enhance the Colesville Road edge of the park as a gateway to Silver Spring. Currently, this portion of the park contains a vacant lot and a house leased to Montgomery County. When the County no longer requires use of the house, it will be removed and both lots incorporated into the park. Any additional facility development would mainly consist of pathways, landscaping, and seating areas.

- **Emphasize connections, ease of access, and safety by providing a comprehensive system of inter-connected urban parks and open spaces with public safety in mind.**
- **Examine all parks in the Master Plan area to promote design refurbishing and possible physical modifications consistent with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.**

Each park within the Master Plan area should be analyzed to determine if it meets CPTED principles. Many of the parks in North and West Silver Spring are some of the Commission's earliest holdings; they should be assessed from the perspective of visibility and street surveillance to ensure public safety. Each park design should be consistent with the CPTED principles.

- **Acquire a trail easement on the triangular piece of property opposite Leonard Drive at East-West Highway to provide a possible local neighborhood trail connection to Rock Creek Park.**

The subject property could provide a trail connection since an existing traffic signal provides a protected pedestrian crossing of East-West Highway at Rosemary Hills Drive.

- **Consider converting local government facility sites, once they are declared surplus by the County, to parks as a means to meet the active recreational needs identified in the PROS Plan.**

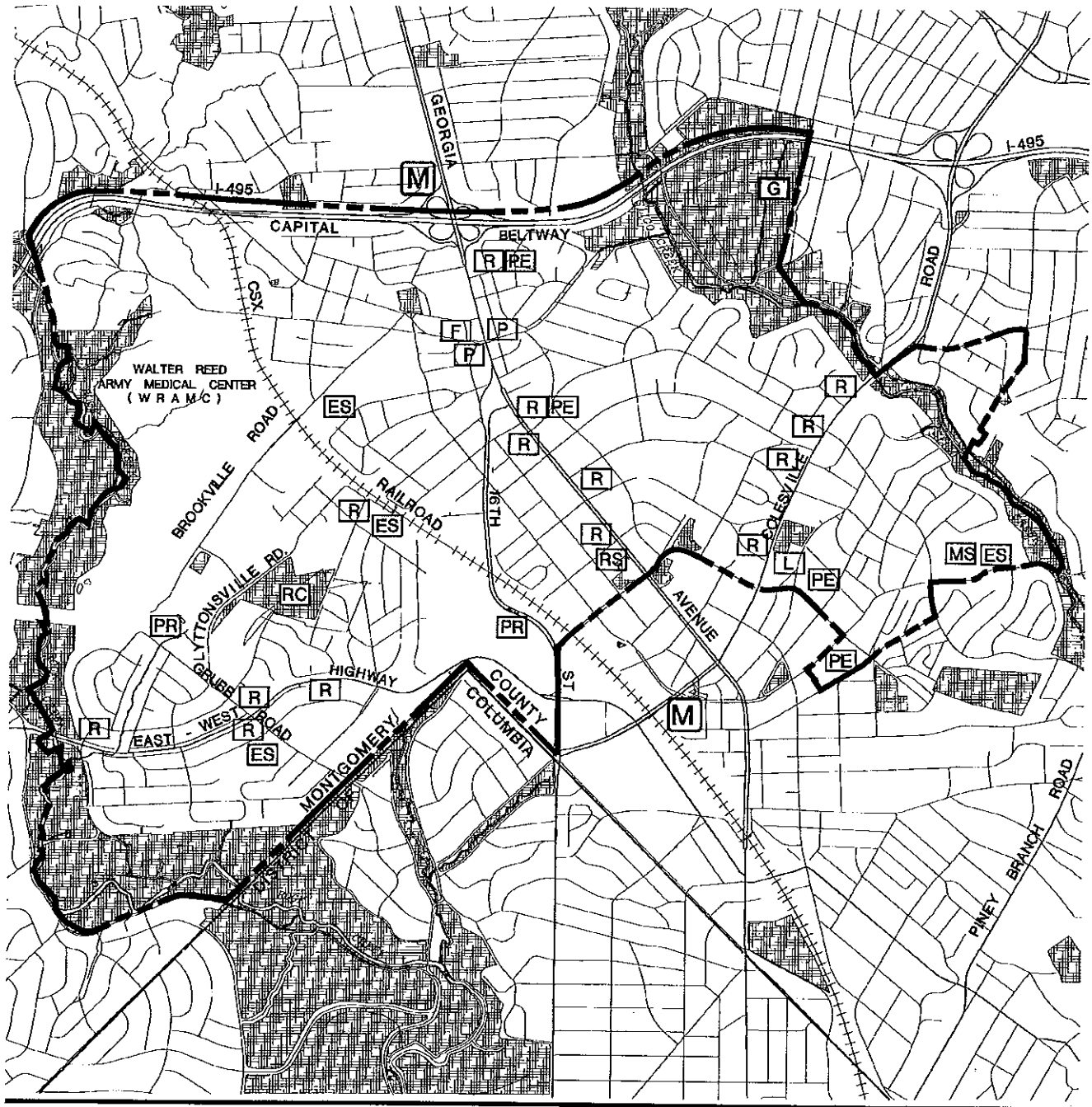
As government facilities consolidate or relocate (e.g., Silver Spring Library, Silver Spring Government Center), each site should be evaluated for possible inclusion in the park inventory. Needs identified in the PROS Plan should be the primary evaluation criteria.

- **Consider a public or private educational use for closed schools before the County declares these facilities surplus. If there is no public or private educational need, consider conversion to a park as a means to meet the active recreational needs identified in the PROS Plan or identify another public use option.**

The former Montgomery Hills Junior High School should be considered for reuse. The County has a process for disposition of closed school facilities that evaluates and determines the appropriate long-term reuse options.

Existing Community Facilities

Map 27



- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| RC Recreation Center | M Metro Station |
| G Golf Course | PR Private Recreation |
| F Fire & Rescue Station | P Public Parking |
| ES Elementary School | RS Regional Services Center |
| HS High School | L Library |
| PE Private Educational | Parkland |
| R Religious Institution | |

0 575 1150 2300 Feet



- **Evaluate the feasibility of relocating access to Woodlin Elementary School from neighborhood streets to Brookville Road.**

The entrance to Woodlin Elementary School is located on Luzerne Avenue, which is a narrow residential street. The school is adjacent to Brookville Road, an arterial road that can better accommodate the school buses and other traffic associated with the school than Luzerne Avenue.

- **Evaluate any future surplus property at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center to assess suitability for addition to Rock Creek Park.**

Should Walter Reed recreation facilities become federal surplus, these facilities should be examined to determine if they can be used to meet needs identified in the PROS Plan for the Silver Spring/Takoma Park planning area.

- **Renovate existing facilities to serve the needs of diverse communities.**
- **Improve utilization of the fields and track at the former Montgomery Blair High School on Wayne Avenue.**

Ballfields are the facility in shortest supply in the down-County area, both currently and long-term. With large tracts of flat, undeveloped land scarce, down-County fields must be operated at maximum potential to serve the most users. Relocating Montgomery Blair High School to Four Corners and converting the existing building on Wayne Avenue to an elementary and middle school provides a greater opportunity for the public to use the athletic fields. Elementary and middle school fields generally have lower night and weekend school-related use than high school fields. The Blair conversion could increase the availability of ballfields in the down-County area.

- **Retain soccer fields along Sligo Creek Parkway and keep them in safe playing condition.**

Given the shortage of level playing sites of any kind in the down-County area, existing, heavily-used fields must be maintained in a safe condition.

Environmental Resources

Environmental resources are important indicators of overall quality of life. Residents and employees in urban areas desire pleasant, green surroundings with adequate open space to lessen the impacts of noise, wind, temperature, and glare. As redevelopment occurs within the commercial, industrial, and residential zones in North and West Silver Spring, this will provide an opportunity to improve the aesthetics and the quality of the natural environment for the many residents and workers in these planning areas.

Concentrating growth in urbanized areas reduces regional and County-wide environmental impacts. Local environments have often been adversely affected by past activities. North and West Silver Spring were developed prior to current standards for landscaping, green space, forest conservation, and stormwater management. Today, there are very few sites with development/redevelopment potential in North and West Silver Spring and the infill that may occur will cause little additional environmental impact. Enhanced landscaping and green spaces around new development, larger green areas around new residential development, and managed stormwater runoff to neighborhood streams will create positive environmental, aesthetic, and even economic benefits over time.

Table 4

Park Inventory
July 1998

Park Type	Acres	Park/ School	Play- ground	Soft- ball	Base- ball	Basket- ball Court	Tennis Court	Foot- ball/ Soccer Overlay	Foot- ball/ Soccer Field	Rec. Bldg.
Neighborhood Parks										
Meadowbrook	16.6		1	5	1	1	4		3	1
Montgomery Hills	2.2		1			0.5	1			
Ray's Meadow	9.9		1		1				2	
Rosemary Hills- Lyttonsville**	17.1		1	1		2	4	1	1	
Sligo-Bennington	6.3		1				2			
Sligo Cabin	1.3	Shared	1							
Stream Valley Parks										
Rock Creek SVU#1	137.0		1							
Rock Creek SVU#2***	240.4									
Sligo Creek SVU#2	39.4						2			
Sligo Creek SVU#3	73.5		1						1	
Urban Parks										
Ellsworth	3.6		1				2			
Fairview	2.0		1							
Woodside*	2.3	Closed	1			1	1			
TOTALS	551.6		11	6	2	4.5	16	1	7	1
<p>* Gymnasium/2 lighted handball ** Montgomery County Recreation Department Recreation Center *** Hiker/Biker Trail - Split between both planning areas</p>										

Air Quality

Air quality problems respect no boundaries, so most air quality policies are implemented at the federal, state, and regional level. Nevertheless, it is important for Montgomery County to do its part in supplementing that strategy by focusing on local initiatives that can reduce vehicle emissions. The Washington metropolitan region is currently classified as a “serious” non-attainment area with regard to federal standards for ground-level ozone, a pollutant for which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently tightened standards to protect public health. Even though considerable progress has been made toward reducing emissions that create ground-level ozone, new EPA ambient air quality standards encourage further reductions in vehicle emissions and require many states, including Maryland, to implement their own reduction programs. New standards also have been set for fine particulate matter, another pollutant that results from vehicle and stationary emissions.

While air quality is generally a regional problem, local air pollution nuisances can occur when incompatible uses are located together or when site design does not consider micro-environmental issues. For instance, public gathering places and residential air intakes should be protected from garage, restaurant or other commercial exhaust fumes. A new County air quality ordinance is being developed to address the issue of facility emissions that affect neighboring uses. Early prevention and management of air pollution through site design can help prevent these conflicts from arising, reducing the need for costly retrofits.

Recommendations

- **Encourage the use of alternatives to automobile transportation to reduce air pollution.**

The recommendations in this Plan to enhance pedestrian access, bikeways, and connections to transit stops support transportation and urban design goals that encourage non-auto trips, which will contribute to improved air quality in the region.

- **Support expanded regional and County programs to reduce air pollution emissions.**

Local programs that need more support include converting government vehicles from gasoline or diesel to compressed natural gas, establishing “Commuter Express Stores” at major employment centers, strengthening the current “Fare-Share” transit discount program, and building on the regional “ENDZONE Partners” program that expands public awareness about reducing use of automobiles, gas-powered lawn equipment, and other pollution sources during air pollution alerts.

- **Design new development and redevelopment to prevent conditions that may create local air pollution nuisances.**

Noise

Noise prevention and control is an abiding concern for the quality of life in any community. The North and West Silver Spring area contains several sources of significant noise volumes, including large amounts of stop-and-go traffic on several major highways, and commuter, freight, and Metrorail train lines. The area also contains an industrial area with significant truck traffic and several commercial areas. Stationary noise sources can also become nuisances on a site-specific basis.

Effective noise control helps ensure the extended sustainability of a community as a desirable place to live, work, and conduct business. It is the public sector’s responsibility to design roads, streetscapes, and public areas to minimize noise nuisances. For example, noise sources should be located away from public gathering places. The private sector

should plan and design development using the receiving property standards of the 1997 County Noise Control Ordinance as a minimum guideline.

Recommendation

- **Design new development and redevelopment to prevent conditions that may create local noise pollution nuisances.**

Community Water and Sewer

Under the County's Comprehensive Water Supply and Sewerage Systems Plan, community (public) water and sewer is available throughout the master plan area and is provided by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC). The water supply system is adequate to meet the demand of all anticipated development.

Two major trunk sewer lines serve North and West Silver Spring: Rock Creek and Sligo Creek. The WSSC recently upgraded the Sligo Creek Trunk Sewer which has sufficient transmission capacity for projected sewage flows through at least 2010. The WSSC recently performed an extensive review of the Rock Creek Trunk Sewer, which historically has experienced very high peak flows due to extraneous flows of groundwater (infiltration) and rainwater (inflow).

The 1985 Blue Plains Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA) specifies the maximum peak flow allowed at the point that the trunk sewer enters the District of Columbia. The WSSC's review of the Rock Creek sewerage system indicates that the peak flow may exceed the IMA limit in the next ten years if actions are not initiated to reduce the impacts of extraneous infiltration and inflow into the sewerage system. Key elements include an aggressive infiltration/inflow control program and optimized use of the existing Rock Creek sewerage storage facility, in addition to other flow reduction projects. The WSSC will closely monitor flows within the sewerage system to ensure that

appropriate steps are taken to manage the peak flows in conformance with the IMA. The analysis of the Rock Creek sewerage system indicated that, with implementation of the appropriate flow management project, the capacity of this system will support future development in North and West Silver Spring.

Landscaping/Forest Conservation

Trees and forest play an important role in communities such as North and West Silver Spring, providing shade, aesthetic beauty, wildlife habitat, improved air quality, recreation benefits, and the potential for reduced energy costs for homeowners. North and West Silver Spring have an abundance of mature trees along roads, on private property, and in public parks. Maintaining this existing healthy tree stock is important to the character of the community.

Many street trees planted in the early 20th century are reaching the end of their life span, creating a need for continued support of the County's tree maintenance and planting programs. The conservation and replanting of trees is also accomplished through the application of the County Forest Conservation Law that protects existing forest and requires the planting of new forest and trees when protection thresholds are not met on some development sites. If priority planting areas for forest are not available in the Silver Spring/Takoma Park planning area, then tree cover, including neighborhood planting and street trees, can be utilized to meet planting requirements. Priority areas for additional street trees and landscaping should be identified in the entire planning area by M-NCPPC with the help of DPWT and other appropriate agencies.

Application of urban forestry principles to landscaping projects, on a voluntary basis, can improve the diversity, health and aesthetics of the urban ecosystem. Prior to development, this area of the County contained upland forest areas with

ribbons of riparian forest along the floodplains of the major streams: Sligo Creek and Rock Creek. Today, the stream valley parks contain most of the true forest remaining in the area and serve as the backbone of the “urban ecosystem.” The urban ecosystem consists of native and alien species of trees, shrubs, and groundcover scattered among the pavement and buildings that make up the urban ring communities, and the animal species (including many natives) that rely on those plants.

Urban forestry concepts should be applied both inside and outside the parks to improve the quality of the urban ecosystem. The condition of the natural ecosystems on park land can be improved through careful stewardship of the land outside the parks. Urban forestry principles reinforce existing park policies to reduce alien invasive plants, increase native species in reforestation efforts, and recreate pockets of true forest within the stream valley parks.

The urban forestry concept is not designed to recreate forest as it existed prior to development, but to create pockets of native trees and understory vegetation within the urban ring to better support the remaining natural ecosystem and create a healthy urban ecosystem. Different kinds of native plant species are appropriate depending on whether a site is located in upland or riparian (near-stream) areas. The benefits of applying urban forestry principles include increased resiliency of the urban ecosystem, more diversified habitat to provide food and shelter to native wildlife (both resident and migratory), minimized yard maintenance through natural landscaping, and reduced encroachment of alien and invasive species on remaining forest and park land.

For street tree systems, especially along major highways, a diversity of species is desirable. Even though the use of native species is not always possible in the harsh roadside environment, planting diverse tree species promotes ecosystem health and reduces disease and tree loss. In

addition to street trees, naturalized landscape areas along the Green Trails that connect the stream valley parks and the Countywide trails can also contribute to an enhanced urban ecosystem.

Urban forestry concepts should be applied voluntarily by property owners when making landscaping decisions. This urban forestry concept also provides guidance for Planning Board review of public and private landscaping projects as one objective to be balanced with others. However, this concept does not contradict or expand upon forest conservation or any other existing regulatory programs. Applying urban forestry principles within the urban ring complements existing forest and tree preservation programs.

Recommendations

- **Enhance the natural environment in North and West Silver Spring by creating green spaces, continuing street tree maintenance and planting programs, and identifying locations for improved street tree planting.**
- **Encourage the application of urban forestry principles to landscaping projects to improve the diversity, health and aesthetics of the urban ecosystem and better support the remaining natural ecosystem of the stream valley parks. Key principles include:**
 - Using native plant species for landscape projects.
 - Planting a mixture of overstory trees and understory trees and shrubs.
 - Controlling existing alien invasive species and reducing their further use.

Environmental Standards for Building Design

Two environmental program areas have the potential to affect the design of redevelopment in North and West Silver Spring. The first is a new County solid waste law that mandates recycling and waste reduction programs for all employers. To meet this requirement and to help meet the County-wide recycling goal of 50% by the year 2000, new development should provide adequate on-site facilities for storage and pickup of recyclable materials at commercial and multi-family residential buildings.

The second program area covers energy conservation programs. The County's Energy Wise program is designed to educate businesses and the public about the pollution prevention benefits of increased energy efficiency. The County also encourages all new construction and building retrofits to follow the County's model energy efficient design standards. An extra benefit may accrue for enhanced interior noise mitigation as well.

Recommendation

- **Incorporate recycling and energy efficiency programs and standards in the design of new development and, where possible, into renovations.**

Water Quality/Stormwater Management

This Master Plan area lies within two watersheds: Lower Rock Creek and Sligo Creek. Many streams that drain the area have been placed underground in a storm drain network that empties into small tributary streams feeding Rock Creek and Sligo Creek. Since most of Silver Spring was developed prior to the adoption of stormwater management requirements, these tributary streams are highly

degraded and have poor water quality and biological diversity, according to the *County-wide Stream Protection Strategy* (CSPS). The CSPS identifies the Lower Rock Creek subwatersheds in this planning area and Lower Sligo Creek subwatershed as Watershed Restoration Areas, with the Lower Mainstem of Rock Creek classified as a priority watershed for future studies and project funding.

The mainstem of Sligo Creek has good habitat quality and improving biological conditions, largely due to the extensive improvements to the watershed implemented over the past decade as part of interjurisdictional efforts to improve the Anacostia watershed. Regional stormwater management facilities now control storm flows off the heavily developed headwaters of the watershed, and instream habitat improvements and fish restocking have occurred throughout the lower mainstem.

Even though significant improvement of stream quality in the planning area is unlikely, stormwater management measures applied during redevelopment provide some opportunity to reduce pollutants and storm flows to the newly restored Sligo Creek watershed and the Rock Creek mainstem. These limited but effective stormwater management opportunities are one critical element of a cooperative strategy to develop comprehensive regional watershed solutions with the help of citizens, developers, and public agencies.

Compliance with current stormwater management regulations, enforced by the Department of Permitting Services (DPS), can be expensive and technically difficult to meet in areas with small lot sizes and high existing impervious levels, conditions that are found in the commercial and industrial portions of this planning area.

To address this difficulty, the State and County are working to create new policies for the redevelopment of sites with high existing

imperviousness. The goal is to protect water quality while not allowing stormwater management to become a barrier to redevelopment.

In addition, the County is undertaking Watershed Restoration Studies to identify stream restoration and stormwater management retrofit projects that address stormwater on a watershed basis.

Watershed-based stormwater management is practical and effective in urban areas, providing greater environmental protection than could be achieved through smaller isolated stormwater management facilities.

The following stormwater management options can improve water quality without discouraging development, and can reduce development costs compared to traditional stormwater management structures or required waiver fees. These options can also enhance the aesthetic quality of Silver Spring and help create a “Smart Growth” community. During redevelopment, Silver Spring is an ideal location to implement and test innovative stormwater management policies and techniques. This Plan suggests that the County’s Departments of Permitting Services and Environmental Protection consider Silver Spring a test case and promote the following alternatives for stormwater management.

Recommendations

The first three recommendations reflect current County policy for stormwater management. The remaining recommendations are innovative stormwater management options.

- **Continue to provide on-site stormwater treatment with effective technologies, where feasible.**
- **Promote comprehensive regional solutions to support further off-site watershed restoration activities in Rock Creek and Sligo Creek using stormwater quantity**

waiver fees from appropriate developing sites.

For sites where stormwater flow control is infeasible or inappropriate, waiver revenues will provide critical funding support for public watershed restoration projects, and provide an important offset for the effects of past uncontrolled development.

- **Explore opportunities for joint stormwater management and instream habitat projects among the County, M-NCPPC and other organizations. Multiple funding sources should be examined for these projects, including state and federal grant programs.**
- **Explore opportunities to create linear stormwater ponds/wetlands within urban open spaces or along greenways.**

Stormwater treatment for multiple small parcels can be consolidated in linear ponds or wetlands located in urban parks and public open space. A related option is to ‘daylight’ urban streams by converting a stream channel that had been enclosed in a storm drain to a more natural open channel. These water features can be attractively landscaped and can serve as a focal point linking the natural environment in Sligo and Rock Creek parks to the built environment.

- **Promote the use of areas designed to increase infiltration within required open or green space.**

Pavement areas should be designed to increase the infiltration of rainfall wherever possible. Acceptable techniques might include alternative pavers, soil amendments and conditioning, small bioretention areas, rooftop gardens, disconnection of impervious cover, or other landscaping techniques that increase infiltration or enhance natural hydrology.

- **Improve permeability of surface parking areas with green space that increases infiltration.**

Commercial and industrial areas often have surface parking lots that generate large amounts of stormwater runoff. Techniques that increase infiltration within the parking lots, such as bioretention areas and disconnection of impervious cover, can reduce the dependence on structural solutions.

- **Expand voluntary business pollution prevention programs within the industrial and commercial zones.**

The County currently has two water pollution prevention programs. The Clean Water Partners Program is a cooperative venture between businesses and the County that encourages businesses to pledge protection of water quality through a variety of on-site procedures, including changes in the use of hazardous chemicals and pollution prevention preparedness. The County also educates businesses and the public about the impact of leaking automobile fluids on water quality.