

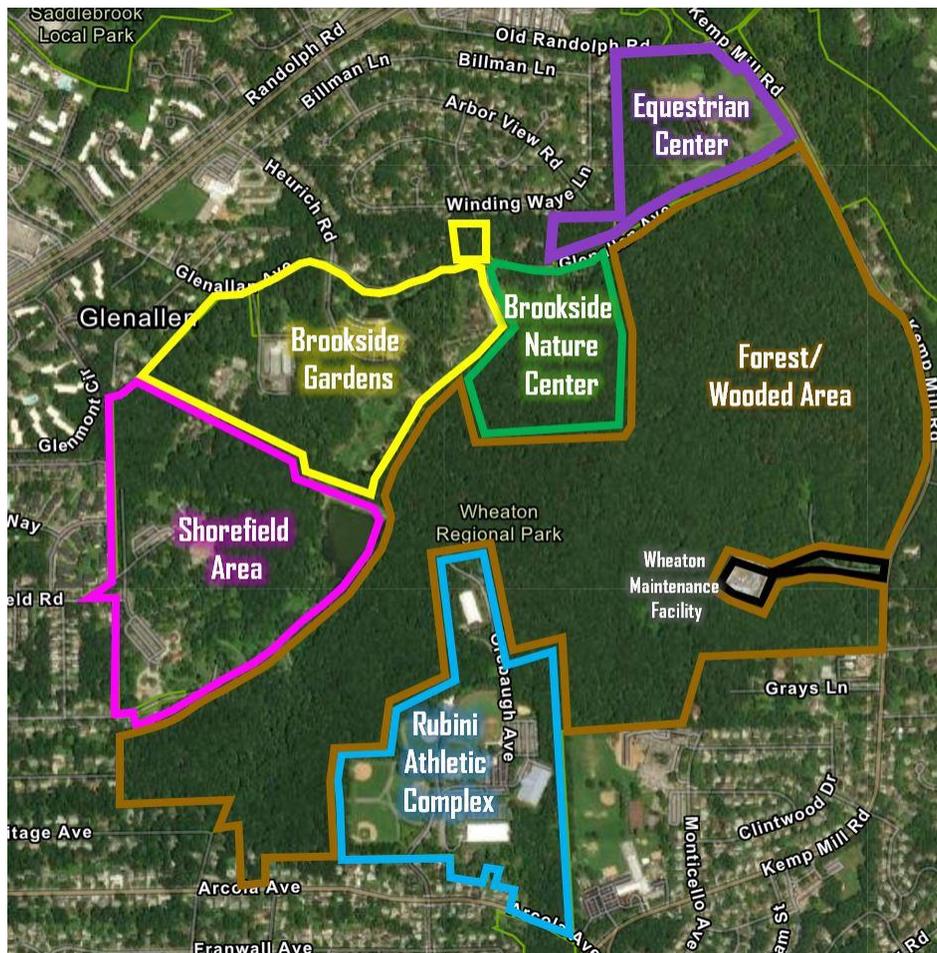
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# Wheaton Regional Park Master Plan

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## Executive Summary of **Draft** Staff Recommendations October 2021

After nearly two years of public outreach, community engagement, and analysis, Montgomery Parks staff presented their key draft plan recommendations during a community meeting on September 9, 2021. While comprehensive detailed recommendations will be shared with a draft plan in the future, below is a summary of what was presented.



Wheaton Regional Park; Park Activity Areas

## PARKWIDE

### KEY FINDINGS

- The park does not have good wayfinding and directional signs; it is difficult for park users to orient themselves and to navigate from one park activity area to another.
- The park was designed in the 1960s when most park users were driving to the park by automobile.
- Traveling to the park by bicycling, walking and transit could be improved.

### KEY DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a comprehensive sign plan for the park, to include not only wayfinding and directional signs, but also orientation signs (“you are here”), interpretive, safety/warning and regulatory signs.
- Coordinate with SHA and MCDOT to improve safe bicycling, walking, and transit access to the park by adding or improving sidewalks and upgrading crosswalks particularly along Georgia Avenue, and implementing Bicycle Master Plan recommendations along roads leading to and immediately surrounding the park.

## SHOREFIELD AREA

### KEY FINDINGS

- Main entrance doesn’t feel welcoming, access by bicycling and walking is not very good.
- Serves young children very well, but could better serve older children, teens, and adults.
- Food concessions or food trucks would be a welcome addition.
- Current playground design/configuration makes it difficult for parents and caregivers to safely supervise children, especially those with special needs.

### KEY DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve safe bicycling, walking, and transit access to park facilities by adding new sidewalks and crosswalks near entrances.
- Add a large digital sign at entrance to welcome and orient visitors.
- Near Henderson Avenue/Lower Parking Lot, add soccer and basketball courts, a food truck and picnic area and a community garden.
- Renovate playground to better serve children with emotional, mental, and physical disabilities and make it easier for parents and caregivers to supervise children (remove retaining walls that create sharp contrasts between upper and lower areas, for example).

## RUBINI ATHLETIC COMPLEX

### KEY FINDINGS

- This area features most of the flat, relatively unconstrained land in the park.
- The main entrance has limited traffic capacity due to passing through a residential area and the uncontrolled intersection at Arcola Avenue.
- The parking lots could be more efficiently designed to accommodate more cars/park visitors and make it easier and safer for bicyclists and walkers to reach park facilities and amenities; there are no sidewalks or bike paths from Arcola Avenue.
- This area of the park features lit and unlit baseball and softball fields as well as indoor and outdoor facilities that are open at night.

- The dog park could be better designed.
- This area feels empty much of the week and could benefit from new physical fitness facilities and social gathering spaces that can be used by all ages throughout the week.
- According to Department of Parks' natural resources staff, the existing forest east of the tennis courts are not high quality.

#### KEY DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build an adventure sports facility that may include a premier, regional adventure sports park, featuring a skate park, climbing walls, parkour/obstacle course facility, bicycle skills area, splash pad, social gathering space and food truck vending area, replacing diamond fields 4, 5 and 6.
- Build two new soccer fields and associated parking on wooded land and add a new one-way-in entrance off Arcola Avenue through the currently wooded area.
- Coordinate with Montgomery County Department of Transportation to build a sidewalk or bike path along Shorefield Road from Arcola Avenue to the park entrance. Parks would simultaneously construct a shared use path/sidewalk from park entrance through parking lots to dog park.
- Upgrade the dog park with separate areas for small and large dogs, lighting, improved paw-friendly surface, weather-protected seating, and more efficient/effective water fountains.
- Upgrade the basketball court with fencing, a new surface, new backboards and rims, and improved lighting.
- Convert 3 tennis courts to 8 pickleball courts.
- Convert underutilized handball courts to a soccer court.

## FORESTS/WOODED AREAS

#### FINDINGS

- Much of the park's forest is designated as a biodiversity area for its ecologically important natural resources.
- According to the online survey this area is very popular, second only to Brookside Gardens.
- The natural surface trails are currently used for hiking and horseback riding, but mountain biking is not currently permitted.
- Many of the natural surface trails near the nature center are used for nature education/interpretation.
- Natural surface trails are not designed well for mountain biking.
- Safe and efficient access by bicycling and walking/hiking from the Northwest Branch Trail to all the park activity areas is a big challenge.

#### DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure cross-park connectivity for bicycling and hiking, both north-south and east-west, from Northwest Branch Trail to all park activity areas.
- Introduce mountain biking on select trails and design the trails to accommodate all user groups (hiking, mountain biking, and horses).
- Maintain select trails used heavily for nature center programming and other select trails, such as the inner loop, as hiking-only.
- Evaluate trail conditions and renovate natural surface trails as needed.

## EQUESTRIAN CENTER/HORSE STABLES

### FINDINGS

- The Equestrian Center is a privately-operated facility on 27 acres of M-NCPPC parkland using park-owned buildings and facilities.
- The building and infrastructure are now 60 years old and well past their useful life and will soon need to be refurbished.
- The Wheaton Park Stables are very popular with the community, offering beginner and therapeutic horse-riding programs both on-site and on the outer-loop trail in the forested area.
- There is available space on this 27-acre parcel to accommodate more natural surface trails.

### DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue operations by current tenant.
- Conduct basic maintenance to keep the facility safe and comfortable for park patrons.
- Conduct a facility condition assessment to determine level of investment needed to modernize buildings and infrastructure. *(NOTE: this is a new recommendations since September 9)*
- Add new natural surface trails on the 27-acre property to enhance beginner and therapeutic riding programs.

## BROOKSIDE NATURE CENTER

### FINDINGS

- It is the oldest nature center in the county park system.
- It's undersized for the number of people it serves.
- The site is constrained, and therefore the nature center operations cannot expand on-site.
- It is very difficult to access the site by walking and biking, and there is no room to expand the parking lot.

### DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to invest in the current buildings and infrastructure to keep visitors safe and comfortable.
- Retain the current buildings as a launching point for programming along natural surface trails and expand mobile program offerings.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian access/accommodations along Glenallen Avenue, in coordination with Montgomery County Department of Transportation.

## BROOKSIDE GARDENS

### FINDINGS

- Brookside Gardens has its own facility master plan approved by the Planning Board in 2004.
- Access to the gardens by bicycling and walking along and from Glenallen Avenue is very difficult and unsafe.

### DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to implement the recommendations in the 2004 facility master plan.
- Coordinate with Montgomery County Department of Transportation to improve bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access along and from Glenallen Avenue.
- Construct a new shared use path from Glenallen Avenue to the Visitor Center.
- Add ample bicycle parking at the Visitor Center.

## MAINTENANCE AREA/YARD

### FINDINGS

- The maintenance yard is the oldest in the county park system.
- It is undersized for the services it provides both for the park and the larger park management area.
- Current facilities are well past their useful life and need to be upgraded and modernized.
- A new regional bike trail, linking Sligo Creek Trail and Matthew Henson Trail, is planned to pass nearby to the maintenance yard and along the driveway/road.

### DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand and modernize at the current location.
- Accommodate new regional park trail that passes adjacent to the facility.