

## Community Meeting Notes:

### Long Branch-Garland Neighborhood Park Renovation

September 21, 2021 – Virtual Community Meeting, 7-8:30pm

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Project Web site (Presentation Slides and Open Town Hall Links):

[Long Branch Garland Project](#)

Meeting Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8J5ktABDjU>

Project Manager: Christie Ciabotti, [Christie.Ciabotti@montgomeryparks.org](mailto:Christie.Ciabotti@montgomeryparks.org)

#### Parks Staff in Attendance:

- Christie Ciabotti, Project Manager, Park Development Division (PDD)
- Tricia McManus, Design Section Supervisor, PDD
- Brian Lewandowski, Project Engineer and Bridge Project Manager, PDD
- Richard Kharman, Senior Manager, Southern Parks
- Carl Heeralal, Park Manager, Southern Parks
- Melissa Chotiner, Media Relations, Community Outreach and Engagement Manager, Public Affairs and Community Partnerships (PACP)
- Erin Pant, Public Relations and Outreach Specialist, PACP

#### Purpose of Meeting

The purpose for this community meeting was to introduce upcoming improvements to Long Branch-Garland Neighborhood Park and the Domer Avenue Bridge and gather input and ideas from the community about the renovation.

#### Meeting Summary

The meeting began with a slide presentation that described the location, existing conditions, planning guidance, project goals, preliminary park concept ideas, and proposed project schedule. A simultaneous Spanish language interpretation was provided throughout the meeting. Staff explained that the primary purpose of the project is to renovate both the Domer Avenue bridge and Long Branch-Garland playground and improve existing amenities in other areas of the park. Staff encouraged participants to ask questions throughout the meeting in the Q&A Box. Following the presentation, a discussion and question and answer period allowed for community feedback through the Q&A.

#### Discussion/Q&A

#### **PICNICKING**

**Shelter:** Picnicking was a large topic of discussion with several meeting participants expressing the need for sheltered picnic spaces for shade, family gatherings, and small events. It was pointed out by a meeting participant that it would be ideal to have multiple picnic areas.

**Reservations:** Generally, in a neighborhood park, picnic shelters are not part of the countywide registration system, but there were some questions about this during the discussion. Based on community input and final design of picnic areas and shelters, design and operations staff will review the reservation question, but likely, picnic areas will not be reservable. Some attendees expressed a preference that they should not require a fee to use them.

## **SIGNAGE**

**Bilingual Signage:** This park renovation will be a good opportunity to incorporate bilingual signage. Meeting participants suggested that creative, attractive, and educational signage (maybe with environmental focus) would be an attribute for the park.

**Safety Signage:** Concern was expressed about safety in the park and a meeting participant suggested signage to encourage safe and clean use of the park.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS**

**Stormwater Management:** Concern about stormwater runoff, stream valley erosion, and increased impervious surfaces was expressed during the meeting. Stormwater mitigation and stream valley protection will be an important part of the project and the project engineer emphasized that Montgomery Parks makes every effort to match and improve on regulatory requirements for stormwater treatment.

**Pollinator Garden:** Some members of the community wondered if a pollinator garden with educational signage would be possible in the park. As part of the design effort, Parks will investigate the feasibility of pollinator-friendly planting at the park, possibly within bioretention areas.

### **Invasive Species Removal/Native Planting:**

Several questions brought up invasive species removal and native planting in the park and stream valley and pointed out that trees along the edge of the park are covered with invasive vines. Parks tries as much as possible to keep invasive species in check at both a local and regional scale through physical removal, but the problem is a big one. Volunteers are very helpful in this effort as well.

Question from audience: What are the volunteer organizations that assist with invasive species removal?

Response from audience: Montgomery Parks manages the Weed Warriors program. Corrine Stephens ([Corrine.stephens@montgomeryparks.org](mailto:Corrine.stephens@montgomeryparks.org)) is the lead for non-native invasive removals.

## **OPERATIONS**

### **Trash and Recycling Management**

Audience members asked if there will be trash and recycling receptacles in the park and expressed concern about existing trash in the stream near the Domer Ave. Bridge. New trash and recycling receptacles will be included as part of the design for the park. In terms of maintenance, Parks has a set maintenance schedule for each park and works with volunteer groups to help. Parks Volunteer Cleanup Coordinator is Valeria Espinosa:

[Valeria.Espinosa@montgomeryparks.org](mailto:Valeria.Espinosa@montgomeryparks.org)

Question from audience: What are the volunteer organizations that assist with collecting trash?

Response from audience: Stephanie from Friends of Sligo Creek and MoCo Parks both organize regular trash pick-ups around the stream.

### **Lighting**

Questions about lighting included requests to add lighting to the park and expressed concern about safety, especially in the winter when it gets dark early. Long Branch-Garland Park is open from dawn to dusk including the courts, playground, and picnic area. The current plan is for those hours to remain the same after renovation. Park amenities will not be lighted. However, the new bridge across Domer Avenue may be lighted at night for visibility and safety.

## **AMENITIES**

### **Outdoor Fitness**

Some comments addressed a desire for outdoor fitness facilities that may include exercise stations, parkour, or other teen and adult fitness amenities. Some ideas included fitness areas near the playground and basketball court. It was pointed out by a meeting participant that outdoor fitness equipment is not readily available in the area and that this is a possible teen amenity as well.

### **Loop/Walking Trail**

A member of the community asked about a loop trail and plans for it at Long Branch-Garland. The Long Branch Sector Plan identifies a possible loop trail along Garland Ave., across the Domer Avenue bridge, north on the Long Branch trail to Piney Branch Road where it would connect with Garland Ave. This park restoration and bridge replacement project will set up the framework for a future loop trail. Some parts of the proposed loop would be designed and constructed as part of future roadway projects that may be initiated by other agencies. This is the case with the potential narrowing of Garland Avenue that was recommended in the Long Branch Sector Plan.

### **Lawn Areas/Unprogrammed Open Space**

Several community members commented that unprogrammed green space is a much-needed amenity for the neighborhood and broader community. Adult athletes were identified as a

group that needs space to play. Unprogrammed open space will be part of the upgraded park design. The location and configuration of lawn areas will be developed during the detailed design process.

### **OTHER PROJECTS IN LONG BRANCH**

Staff explained how this park renovation fits with other projects in the area and the commitment by Montgomery Parks to renovate parks in the Long Branch area over the next several years. This project for Long Branch Garland and the Long Branch Trail renovation are the first.

#### **Long Branch Wayne Park Renovation**

A facility plan was approved by the Planning Board in 2017 for the renovation of Long Branch Wayne Park and we just received our funding to begin final design and construction of the park. We're initiating the process to hire a design consultant and hope to have design underway early in 2022. The design and permitting process usually takes at least 12 months, so construction is expected to begin in 2023 and be completed in 2024.

We did not receive full funding for this project in our Capital Improvements Program – the field renovation and accessible pedestrian bridge over the Long Branch stream valley were excluded. We applied for a grant in September that would enable us to fully fund the entire park renovation project, and we are hoping for a favorable outcome. A link to the project web page was requested: [Long Branch-Wayne Local Park Renovation - Montgomery Parks](#)

#### **Long Branch Local Park / Long Branch Arliss Park**

We are beginning a planning process for renovations to Long Branch Local Park. We prepared a preliminary concept idea and cost estimate to renovate the existing facilities, in order to apply for a \$1 million grant in September to initiate work in this park. Even if we don't receive a grant this year, we will be reaching out to the community to start the planning process for this park and Long Branch Arliss Park, which we would plan together given their proximity.

#### **New Hampshire Estates Neighborhood Park**

We will be planning design work for renovations to New Hampshire Estates Park in the next few years. Our intent with this park is to renovate the park in coordination with the completion of the Purple Line construction.

#### **Long Branch Trail Renovation**

Work is underway and includes trail resurfacing, drainage improvements, a bridge replacement and safety fencing. Crews are currently working near Houston Avenue and Haddon Drive, and the bridge replacement has been completed. Construction is expected to be completed sometime during late winter or early spring of 2022. Following construction, three other bridges are planned to be replaced at Clayborn Avenue, Prospect Street and Long Branch Parkway. These bridges are in the planning and permitting stages, and we are hopeful that they would be ready to be replaced in summer of 2022.

Long Branch Trail Extension to Carroll Avenue

Montgomery Parks gathered public input following a community meeting in June and will move forward with detailed design this fall and winter.

Flower Avenue Urban Park

Minor improvements are underway to help activate the park. Work is nearly complete, and the remaining furnishings will be installed later this fall.

### **PURPLE LINE AND PEDESTRIAN CROSSING AT PINEY BRANCH**

Several meeting attendees commented on the difficult street crossing and resulting lack of connectivity across Piney Branch Road between the park, trail and Community Center and expressed concern about what the future will be like with the Purple Line on Piney Branch Road. Parks staff investigated the plans for the Purple Line in the Long Branch Area. The current plans for the Purple Line show pedestrian crosswalks across Piney Branch Road and Purple Line tracks at both Garland Avenue and Barron Street.

### **DOMER AVE. BRIDGE**

A meeting attendee pointed out that some people in the community believed that the new bridge will allow car access. The new bridge will not be a vehicular bridge. It is intended for pedestrians and bikers.

Question: Will the existing Domer bridge remain open and accessible during construction?

Answer: Parks will make every effort to minimize disruption to the stream crossing during construction, but there will likely be a short period of time when the bridge will be closed to pedestrian traffic. We will know more as the design process unfolds and will notify the community before any closure occurs, including recommended detours.

### **TEENS IN THE PARK**

Parks staff and community members discussed the need for teen areas and activities in public space. Meeting attendees noted that teens like the tree house structures at Seek Lane Park and that teens enjoy swings, sitting walls, and pavilions. While a suggestion to include a skate park as a teen amenity is a good one, Long Branch-Garland Park is not large enough to accommodate a skate facility. This amenity could be considered during the renovation of other nearby parks.

### **PLAYGROUND**

A question was raised about including play equipment for differently abled children. As much as possible given the existing park conditions, the playground will meet ADA guidelines for accessibility. As part of the playground design process, Parks will investigate including equipment for playground users with different abilities.

## **CONSTRUCTION**

Question: When will construction begin?

Answer: It is difficult to predict how timelines might change as the project unfolds, but our detailed design process and permitting will begin immediately. The current goal is to begin construction in fall of 2022 and complete construction of the park in 2023.

Question: How will construction impact local residents?

Answer: The park will be closed during construction with perimeter fencing to keep the area safe. We recognize that the bridge is a prime connection for the community and will keep it open as long as possible. If a bridge closure is necessary, we will make every effort to reduce the time it will be closed. Detour information will be readily available.

## **OUTREACH**

Question: It's good that you have Spanish translation for this meeting. What other outreach do you have for elementary school students and people who live in the apartments by the park? Answer: In response to questions about and a desire for further outreach, staff is working with community advocates to identify community events and other opportunities for community outreach that could reach more local residents including non-English speakers.

At the conclusion of the meeting, staff encouraged meeting attendees to complete a short survey on Open Town Hall [long branch garland project](#) and to share the link with others who may not have attended the meeting, so that Parks can gather more information about the needs and interests of park users and community members. The survey comment period was extended in response to community requests and will be open until November 30, 2021.