



MONTGOMERY PARKS

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
2425 Reedie Drive | Wheaton, MD 20902
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Community Meeting Report

Meeting Purpose: Community Meeting for the Playground Renovation at Olney Mill Neighborhood Park

Meeting Date: October 19, 7:00 – 8:00pm

Staff Attending:

- Tricia McManus | Design Section Chief, Park Development Division (PDD)
- Lori Moore | Project Manager and Landscape Architect, PDD
- Chuck Kines | Planner Coordinator, Park Planning & Stewardship Division (PPSD)
- David Fisher | Park Manager
- Jennifer Bruneau | Civil Engineer, PDD
- Corporal Derrick Williams | Park Police
- Melissa Chotiner | Media Outreach, Community Outreach and Engagement Manager, Public Affairs and Community Partnerships (PACP)
- Michelle Ramirez | Public Outreach Specialist, (PACP)

Meeting Summary

The meeting was held virtually over Zoom with eight staff members present from Montgomery Parks and 12 members of the community. In addition, Senator Craig Zucker, who helped to attain funding for the playground renovation project, was in attendance and spoke regarding the importance of playground renovations in the County and community involvement.

The meeting began with Project Manager welcoming the public to the community meeting. Montgomery Parks staff were introduced, and important reference information was provided. These online links are available on the Olney Mill Neighborhood Park webpage and are listed below for reference:

- Project webpage: <https://montgomeryparks.org/projects/directory/olney-mill-neighborhood-park-playground-renovation>
- Open Town Hall survey: mocoparks.org/OMNPSurvey

The format for the meeting was a presentation followed by a Question and Answer (Q&A) discussion session. Members of the public were encouraged to post questions or comments at any time during the meeting. The agenda for the meeting may be summarized as follows:

- **Project Purpose** – discussion of the four playground renovation projects that are underway in Olney. Acknowledgement of Senator Zucker and the District 14

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Delegation's efforts in obtaining state bond bill funding in 2020 and 2022 to support the four playground projects.

- **Playground Renovation Program** – discussion on the benefits of play; Montgomery Parks' inspection and maintenance procedures for playgrounds; the schedule for the replacement of playgrounds and how the renovations are prioritized and funded; code compliance; typical components of a Montgomery Parks playground renovation project; and the design and construction process.
- **Olney Mill Neighborhood Park's Existing Conditions** – overview of the site conditions and existing amenities.
- **Olney Mill Neighborhood Park's Proposed Playground Renovation** – discussion of the project scope, playground equipment examples, and seating examples. In addition, a diagram was presented showing two potential locations for the playground: in its original location and an alternate location to the east of the path. Discussed the benefits of relocating the playground to the alternate location.
- **Open Q&A Session** – the PDD Design Section Chief moderated the Q&A session where comments and questions that were posted by the public were addressed by Montgomery Parks staff members. A summary of the Q&A session is provided below.

Summary of Questions and Comments Received

PLAYGROUND LOCATION

While some residents felt that the alternative location for the playground was a good idea, others had concerns about this location, primarily due to its existing use as an area for free play. Some community members liked the idea of placing the playground on the other side of the parking lot, closer to the existing pavilion. Parks staff agreed to further explore the locations suggested for the playground and post the concepts for community input.

- The flat field across from Falling Green Road is where kids gather to play football. On school early release days, the field is full of kids playing flag football and generally running around having fun. Please keep the large open field for free play.
 - *When we were originally looking at this alternate location east of the existing playground, we noted that there is an open field area north of the area for free play.*
- Alternate location make sense for numerous reasons.

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- The alternate location is currently used by many community members to play soccer and football. Moving the playground to that area would take away that area for free game play, which cannot be done where the current playground is situated due to the hill.
- What about the space between the parking lot and pavilion as an alternate location? It would help strengthen the relationship between the play equipment and pavilion – the current distance is hard for parents to be part of the party at the pavilion and watch their kids on the play equipment.
 - *We can take a closer look at this location. We do feel the existing location is constrained and the resulting playground would be smaller than what we could make it at an alternative site. Some of the drawbacks are that the existing playground slopes beyond what is acceptable for today's standards (requiring more grading to make it level), it is surrounded by mature trees, and also the path leading to it is too steep to meet current accessibility standards. The sitework required to develop the playground in this location will be more costly than at the alternative site (east side of path). Also, with the alternative site suggested by staff, we feel that we could accommodate the stormwater management more easily by tying the underdrainage system into the existing drainage swale. This is a challenging site in the lower elevations in terms of groundwater so we would need to look at the suggestion for the playground close to the pavilion more closely. We can study several different locations (including near the pavilion) and then bring those ideas back to the community so that they can compare the pros and cons of each location.*
- It is a problem that the path runs through the current playground area. I walk my dog and have to be careful that children are not running toward my dog. I vote for alternate location. The current playground area could be used for football and play.
- It is nice to have the playground some distance from the parking lot as a safety measure for young children.
- I would like to second the importance of keeping distance between cars (parking lot) and the playground.
- Pavilion should be close to the playground.
- Large parties in the pavilion need space next to the pavilion.
- The alternative location may be too close to the parking lot, especially for little ones.
- The open space at the top of the park is not well used.

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- The top of the hill has a small flat area that slopes significantly. This would not allow football or soccer with the balls continually rolling all the way down the hill. Also, the top of the hill is inundated with ground bees every year.
- The site above the playground/tennis courts does not have drainage issues and is rarely used. Seems like a good alternate choice.
- Would it be possible to plane the ground with a retaining wall so that there's enough flat ground to keep and open field for free play? (I know, easier said than done, I'm sure a retaining wall would be pricey.)
 - *Depending on where we put the playground, we might need a retaining wall for the playground and also to preserve an open area for free play. Yes, it would affect the price and the budget, but it is something we can explore further when we look at the location alternatives.*
- Could you use the area on the other side of the pavilion? Not the parking lot side.
- If the alternate location will cost less money does that mean the extra will be spend on playground equipment?
 - *Yes, that is correct.*
- Playground would be better off on higher ground. Maybe at the top of the hill?
 - *Accessibility would be a challenge at that location. Getting an accessible route to the existing playground is challenging due to the slopes. Since the path gets steeper beyond the existing playground, getting an accessible route to this area would be even more of a challenge.*
- The open field is used for kids playing catch. I would not touch that area. Lots of running up there.

OTHER PLAYGROUND ITEMS

- What are the criteria used to determine if the playground will be accessible by children with disabilities?
 - *The playground will be accessible according to current ADA accessibility guidelines. Outside the playground, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) 2010 ADA accessibility guidelines apply where the route to the playground will need to be an accessible route. Within the playground, DOJ 2010 ADA accessibility guidelines will apply as well as the American Society of Testing & Materials (ASTM) accessibility standards. A certain percentage of each play equipment type must be accessed on the ground level for the playground to be considered accessible. In addition, we strive to make our playgrounds inclusive by providing a variety of play equipment types, to support children with different needs.*
- Love the imaginary play

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- What are current thoughts on the new playground surface material? The current use of wood chips is not ideal. Thanks!
 - *With the new playground, we will provide underdrainage so that drainage problems with the mulch will not be an issue. Most of our playgrounds are engineered wood fiber (over 90%). There is no perfect playground surfacing material. Engineered wood fiber is considered accessible if it is compacted properly. Rubber surfacing materials are generally more accessible but have other issues as they are costly, have a short life cycle, and we've also found that they are less sustainable (landfills do not accept the rubber). So, we typically use the engineered wood fiber in our playgrounds unless there is a special circumstance where rubber surfacing would be more warranted. We are always exploring the validity of new materials for surfacing, such as a recycled cork product we are testing.*
- Will the ground surface of the playground be woodchips or the newer squishy rubber material?
- We absolutely love that you all are renovating this playground! Thank you for all the time and attention put into this. Can't wait to see the finished product. Our kids love playing there.
- Can we post the playground equipment options with the open survey?
 - *The open town hall survey that was posted tonight includes some general questions about the type of play equipment that you would like to see in the park. Later, we will post concepts that will include different playground equipment layout options for your feedback.*
- Or at least one bench at the top
- At the playground area, can benches and trees be planned to ensure there are benches in the shade during the summer?
 - *Yes, we will make sure that the playground is shaded and that there is seating for parents or caregivers.*

ATHLETIC COURTS AND LIGHTING

There were several comments during the Q&A session related to issues with the presence of pickleball courts at Olney Mill. Community members noted that the pickleball courts increase traffic and noise in the park and are not appropriate for a neighborhood park. They also had issues with the lighting of the tennis/pickleball and basketball courts and that having the courts lit at late hours is disruptive to the surrounding community.

Parks staff responded that issues involving the athletic courts are out of the scope for this playground renovation project, but park planners will take a closer look at the issues residents are having related to pickleball and park lighting and see how those issues can

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best be addressed. We know that the pickleball courts have generated a lot of traffic in the park. Over the last several years, we have taken out two of the striped pickleball courts and have added a few parking spaces as part of the ADA improvements. We do realize that the park has become a destination for pickleball and so we are also putting more pickleball courts throughout the county to address the demand for pickleball. We currently have 60 courts in the county with 16 more going in soon so we hope that the more courts we provide around the county, the more the use will be distributed. There are also many other courts to play on in nearby jurisdictions. We know that Olney Mill is still crowded with pickleball users, particularly on Tuesday nights. During the pandemic, when indoor courts were closed, Olney Mill became one of the few places with outdoor lighted pickleball courts and became a regional draw so changing that perception has been a challenge and will take some time to fix. Now, there are many places to play at night, so we need to work on educating the pickleball community on where those locations are. Staff had previously talked to the community in Olney Mill about putting up a sign in the park that lists other places to play, and this is something that staff will get posted soon in an effort to take pressure off Olney Mill.

- Will the massive pickleball traffic be addressed?
- Can we discuss the tennis courts? Community members can no longer play tennis due to the pickleball league. We would like for one court to be tennis only, compromising with one for pickleball.
 - *We can take a look at that but can't make any promises at this point.*
- This park is not suited for all the traffic caused by pickleball. Late night games and lots of cars and people for this tiny neighborhood park. It's not conducive to having kids and neighborhood.
- Late night basketball games are very disruptive, especially with the loud foul language and music. The lighting issue needs to be addressed as late-night games (after dark) should not be allowed so close to residential dwellings. The sound travels. The sign posted at the park entrance states that the park closes at sunset; so why are there lights that can stay on until 11:00 p.m.?
- Can we address safety for this park/playground? What is going to be done about letting a league use the park for pickleball. Children/families cannot regularly access the park due to the large number of pickleball league games and tournaments constantly taking up the parking spaces and overflowing onto both sides of the adjacent street. It has become severely unsafe for families walking as you cannot see around the cars and two-way traffic cannot manage to drive safely along the street.
- Having extra pickleball courts has been helpful. Thank you!
- It is better overall for pickleball.

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- The recent additions of pickleball courts around the county, reductions to the pickleball courts at our park and parking expansion has been very helpful in dealing with the pickleball impacts. Thank you.
- Can we limit renting the courts for the pickleball league? Regular, community use, is of course, fine, but this park is too small for the league to be renting out and using this space!
 - *We do not allow pickleball courts to be rented.*
- It has not lowered the pickleball traffic. This park is not in line with new pickleball construction at parks? It is way too close to the houses. Tuesday can come down and see the other days as well. Lots of cars, late games.
 - *Olney Mill was the first park where we tested pickleball and we have learned a lot since then and have developed site suitability criteria. One of the criteria is distance from homes in terms of potential noise impacts and the amount of parking. There is merit in discussing whether pickleball should be in this park but that is a decision for our leadership.*
- Tennis only would be perfect. It has lights.
- How about Sundown Park in Laytonsville. It has lights and would be perfect for pickleball. It only has one pickleball set up. It could have more pickleball courts. Good news, the parking is great there for the massive cars. 6200 Sundown Road, Laytonsville, MD. Check it out please.
 - *We added more pickleball courts at Sundown, and the lights will be upgraded during FY23. We agree it would take pressure off Olney Mill.*
- Any way to have the lights end 1 hour sooner? Or stop lights at sunset; 8:00 p.m. at the latest?
 - *It seems that the main issue of pickleball at this park is play at night and the noise issues that result in play at night. There might be merit in reducing the hours for lighting or removing the lighting all together from the tennis/pickleball court. We need to look at this more closely with leadership.*
- If we are renovating the playground, can we readdress why we can't have one tennis court and one pickleball court? Olney Mill Community members are having a difficult time accessing this park because of the pickleball league. The community would love to be able to use this park, but currently has limited use due to the pickleball league. A small compromise would be to revert one of the courts to tennis only and one for pickleball. Otherwise, it is not safe for families due to pickleball traffic
 - *Park planners will take a closer look at this issue.*
- The lights turn off at 10 on weeknights; 11 on the weekends

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- All they have to do is push the button and it lasts another hour. It is 11pm not 9pm. 10pm on weeknights and 11pm on weekends is too late especially with families and children living close to the park.
 - *Staff understanding is that the lighting has been reduced to go off earlier. The lights should have a push button to turn off or turn on. If the lights are staying on with no one out playing, it is something we could look into. As long as the park is open, there is nothing park police can enforce in terms of noise or lighting. Once the park is closed, residents can call park police with any type of noise issue which can be enforced.*
- Can we update the tennis ball wall to be able to hit against? It is a small board. If it could be expanded, it would be wonderful with tennis.
 - *Not sure on how we make decisions on where ball walls should be located but can start the conversation.*
- A bigger wall. It is really too small at its current size to hit against.
- Thank you for agreeing to look into the pickleball use here. It has been a huge growing pain for all of us neighbors that live in the adjacent homes to this park
- If the issue is pickleball usage in the evenings, then removing the lights would solve the problem in addition to the late-night basketball games. The park is too close to dwellings to be lit late at night
 - *Good thought. We will look into that.*
- So that is good you learned about the mistake at Olney Mill Park about pickleball. Now it should be corrected since it is now clear it is in violation by acknowledged to new pickle ball construction guidelines. It always good to learn as you have to then adjust it to the current guidelines not letting it be out of current guidelines
- To add Chuck, it is not only the noise with pickleball, it is the inaccessibility of the park for community members due to extremely large numbers of pickleball players, the overflow of parking onto the street due to pickleball, the pickleball league also uses the basketball courts on some nights making the basketball courts inaccessible, as well using the pavilion space.
- When could we expect a follow up on pickleball to get park in the regulations?
 - *We will start the conversation with our leadership, and that's all we can promise right now.*
- Safe playgrounds are in harmony with less traffic with massive pickleball traffic.

TRASH CANS

There were several comments related to trash cans and the fact that more are needed in the park. Parks staff responded that there are a limited numbers of cans in the park due to the size of the park and the activities within the park. We can look closer into adding more

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trash cans, but it is not advised to add cans randomly throughout the park because it may be difficult for the team to get in and out and also it would detract from the park. We usually monitor trash according to how much is generated on Sundays, Mondays, and Fridays. If we start noticing that the cans are exceptionally full, that's how we gauge that more cans are needed. At this point, we haven't noticed that additional trash cans are needed but we can look into this to see how much ground litter is in the park and where and see if it is feasible to put another trash can close to the tennis court or by the parking lot.

- Please add garbage cans in multiple spots in park. Currently there is only one. Since it is inconvenient many people just place trash on ground.
- Will trash cans at the playground result in more yellow jackets near the playground area?
 - *Yes, trash cans do attract yellow jackets so we will be careful to place the trash cans in an area that are not too close to the playground. Usually, they are located near accessible access routes that trucks can get to.*
- Hopefully, you can add at least 1 more trash can near parking lot. People leave there and throw trash on parking lot. Happens all the time.
- If not more trashcans, then please add a trashcan on the stand with the doggie bags. The park at Greenwood/Tanterra Pool has one and it's more sanitary to have one attached to the bag receptacle then to take the dog bags to the trashcan right next to the picnic tables in the shelter.
 - *The doggie waste receptacles maintenance intensive. We usually try to avoid these unless it is a park where we can have maintenance staff in daily. We can look into putting a trash can closer to the doggie waste receptacle, so it won't be such a far distance to walk.*
- We have trash bags for doggie waste.
- We appreciate y'all adding that (doggie waste station).
- A trash can near the parking lot will take care of the doggie bag issue. The dog bags are near the parking lot.
- Speaking of the trash cans, can the crew stop driving their truck through the park on the sidewalk to empty them? The truck tires dig muddy ruts along the sidewalks.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

- What is being considered beyond the playground?
 - *The scope of the project is to renovate the playground in kind. We will be including an accessible path to the playground and stormwater management facilities.*

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- Would the county consider a small, fenced area for dogs to play together?
 - *The parks department has done a suitability study for dog parks considering certain suitability criteria. This is not an ideal place for a dog park. We tend to site dog parks where they are not adjacent to residences. Also, we have found that dog parks are a regional draw, and this park does not have the parking to accommodate a dog park facility here. Parks will look at this further to provide a more formal response to this request.*
- Love the Adirondack chairs and tables, umbrella, and chairs/with shade.
- Please add benches around the park so older folks can rest when walking on path.
 - *Park management staff can look into this further. If there is a general area where a bench is needed, that would be good to know.*
- It's not part of the playground area but the sidewalk along the picnic shelter gets extremely icy in cold, wet weather. Hopefully something could be done to improve the safety in that area.
 - *When we have run off from the shelters in the wintertime, there can be some ice accumulation. We don't treat those areas in a neighborhood park, and it usually melts in a day or two. That is something that we'll take a closer look at this winter.*
- Reiterating that the walkway near pavilion is wet and slick after rain and ice. Drainage issue needs to be addressed please.
 - *Staff will look into this and see if there is anything that can be done to help with that situation.*
- The park is so important and instrumental to our Olney Mill Community.
- If you can't answer all of the questions tonight, can they be answered and posted on the project website for all to see?
 - *Yes, we will post the meeting notes on the project website and include the comments and questions from the meeting.*
- The bathrooms being unlocked are common in pavilion. Can there be a better watch of this making sure bathrooms are always locked. Maybe new set of keys?
 - *The restrooms are open for those that reserve the shelter. When they are finished, the group that reserved the shelter are supposed to shut those and they lock. If they prop the doors open or leave them ajar, they won't latch. This is an issue that we have been working on with our team and will continue to address.*
- The bathrooms are not prop open it is unlocked. Maybe too many keys out there? Might be time to put new doorknobs on.
- Thank you. I wish more residents had participated. We appreciate you including the community.

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- Thank you for your work to improve our park and for taking time to conduct this outreach. Looking forward to working with you and your team.
- We appreciate the attention to this park. It is so critical to our community. The drainage around the pavilion is important. It freezes up. It's been lovely to see how many families have used the pavilion for parties this summer.
- We appreciate your attention to this park. I'm in it at least 3x per day. It's so important to our community and having your support is so important. We have been her for 25 years and have used the parks when our kids were babies and continue to use it now that our focus is our dog (as our kids our out of the home). Still, the park is a way to connect to our neighbors and community and is so critical to the feeling that we have a community. Thank you for paying attention to how vital parks are to creating community.
- We appreciate your efforts.
- We have lived on Charline Manor Rd for 35 years. The Park's drainage has been an issue for years and still causes permanent ponding in our front yard. No County attempted fixes have worked. We have replaced our driveway culvert three times, as they rust out from being perpetually underwater. Who do we contact in the County to address this?
 - *Staff will find a contact at County to address this. The drainage issue is likely a combination of our park as well as the road.*
- If you need additional information/perspective, I'm happy to provide it.
- As for drainage in this park, Parks has done a great job to curb the flooding and the puddling in the park over the past years. This park is situated on a convergence of several underground streams, and thus it makes it almost impossible to completely get the water drainage system under control. Thank you!
- Our kids are 20 and 23 now, but I love to see the kids in the playground. Having that as a place for kids to be enriched is so important, but the park is more than just that area. Thanks for your support.

Contact Information

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Maintenance concerns and questions:
David Fisher, Park Manager

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Safety concerns and questions:

M-NCPPC Park Police

301-949-8010/ for immediate matters, please call 911