



A mother and son viewing the new Communication Board at Wheaton Local Park



Montgomery Parks

Access Team Semi Annual Report 2021

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Introduction

Mission Statement

The Montgomery Parks is committed to uphold the integrity of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by delivering appropriate services, reasonable modifications, inclusive programs, and physical access throughout our Park system as we strive to ensure social equity and inclusion of all citizens.

Vision Statement

Individuals will be afforded respect and dignity while engaging in leisure pursuits to enhance their quality of life in a clean, safe, and accessible setting.

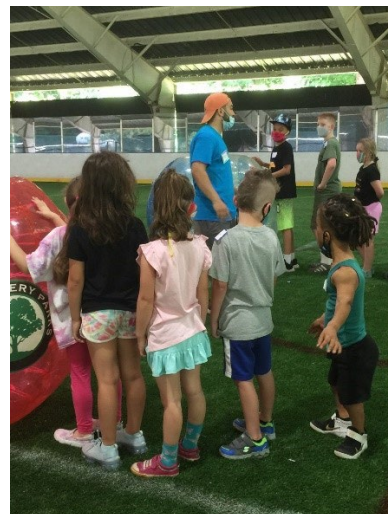


At A Glance

Despite the ongoing global pandemic, the Montgomery Parks Access Team continued to

- plan, build, remove barriers in our parks and facilities.
- program for and engage with members of our community with disabilities.
- welcome new seasonal staff and train Parks employees virtually throughout the year.

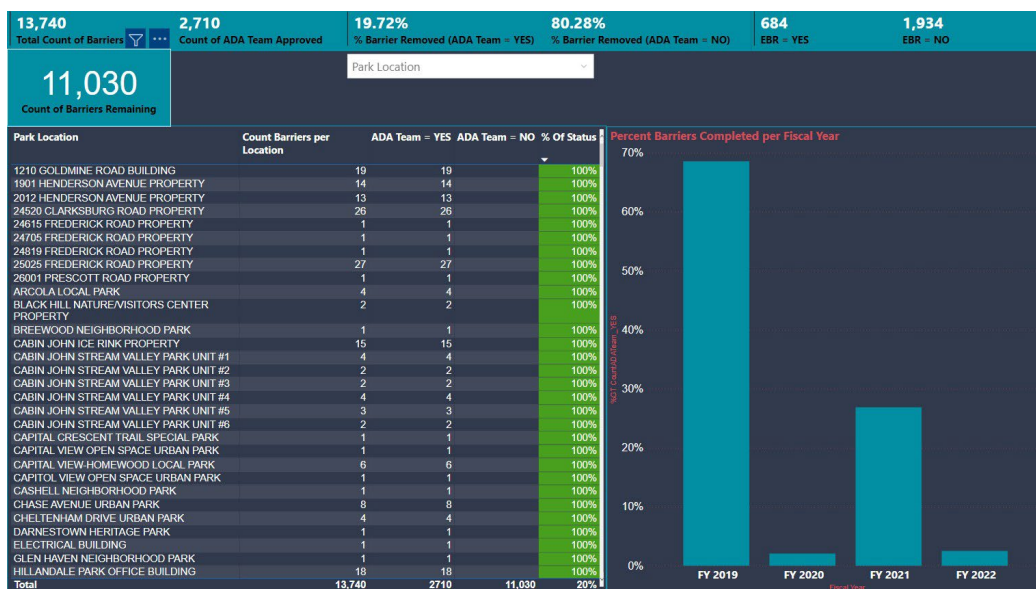
The Montgomery Parks Access Team is pleased to present highlights of accomplishments during the January 1 through June 30, 2021 time period. We invite you to read our story and become part of our mission.



Removing Barriers to Places

EAM Dashboard

In cooperation with the Management Services Division, Data Analytics Unit, the Physical Access Team developed a new dashboard to summarize and track progress in barrier removals throughout our park system. Furthermore, and more importantly, the dashboard will provide data indicating which assets are accessible, use GIS mapping to show location sites, and provide a running summary of accessible assets versus total assets. The dashboard will enable staff to drill down by asset and barrier. Additionally, it will enable the team to respond to inquiries for specific parks or assets quickly and accurately. The dashboard is currently in draft form and is expected to come online in the very near future.



Transition Plan Update and Social Equity

The Department's ADA Transition plan was finalized and submitted to the Department of Justice in August 2016. Over the past 5 years, substantial progress in both Physical and Program Access has been made and we applaud all Parks staff in this noteworthy, long-term, and far-reaching endeavor. Two accomplishments worth noting:

- Twenty-two (22) parks have been designated as either "Fully Accessible" or "Generally Accessible"
- Two thousand seven hundred and ten (2,710) barriers have been removed accounting for 19.72% of the total barriers in our park system.

The ADA Team initiated a major effort to update the Transition Plan. This plan will reflect progress made, highlight lessons learned, and provide guidance and direction moving forward. One of the first steps in the update has been to include social equity criteria in prioritizing ADA renovation projects. Included in the new ranking criteria are parks located within **Equity Focus Areas (EFA)** as well as parks within a short walking distance of an EFA. The early data indicates the inclusion of the EFA component shuffles the previous rankings; the greatest impact is found in local parks. This data will guide the Physical Access Team to prioritize projects in Fiscal Year 2022 and beyond.

Sligo-Dennis Avenue Local Park – Parking lot reconstruction, basketball and tennis court access, picnic area, front plaza, new court lighting with push-button controls



Rock Creek Regional Park Archery Range – Added new parking lot with accessible parking spaces and accessible walkway to the archery stations



Wheaton Regional Park

- Ice Rink – *Additional accessible parking spaces, improved drop-off area, and walkway from parking to the facility entrance*
- Exercise Station – New exercise station, improved accessible parking spaces and walkway from parking to the restroom and the exercise station (pictured above)
- Field 2 – Renovation of Field 2, new walkways, and accessible parking
- Shorefield Restroom – Complete renovation of the restroom from exterior to interior to be fully ADA compliant
-
- Aurora Hills Local Park
- Calverton Galway Local Park
- General Getty Neighborhood Park
- Glenmont Local Park
- Nolte Local Park
- Olney Mill Neighborhood Park
- Rosemary Hills/Laytonville Local Park
- Saddlebrook Local Park/Park Police Headquarters
- South Germantown Regional Park "MOOseum"
- Southeast Olney Local Park
- Wall Local Park

Projects Under Construction

- Blueberry Hill Local Park
- Ken-Gar Palisades Local
- Lynnbrook Local Park
- Meadowside Nature Center
- Sundown Road Local Park
- Stewarttown Local Park
- Cherrywood Local Park
- Tilden Woods Local Park

Inclusive Programming

Spring Fun Kits

During the height of the pandemic, the Program Access Office remained committed to maintain and nurture relationships with participants that typically receive support services throughout the year. In keeping with that spirit, sensory-driven “FUNkits” with lesson plans were sent to individuals that included educational and fun-filled activities.

Shine Brighter Together



April is Autism Acceptance Month and the Program Access Office took the lead in collaborating with county municipalities, agencies, and service organizations to offer a month-long schedule of diverse activities, events, and educational sessions to commemorate the significance of acceptance. **Nature for All**



The Black Hill Nature Center Park Naturalists and the Program Access staff worked in harmony to modify popular nature programs offering a specialized nature program designed specifically for youth and young adults with disabilities entitled "Therapeutic Recreation: Gardening 101".

In addition, the first "All-Anglers Fishing Rodeo", an inclusive community fishing event, was held in May which attracted 30 families to enjoy family time and learn fishing techniques.

Montgomery Explorers

A very popular walking program entitled “Montgomery Explorers” invited the 50 and better population of all fitness levels and abilities to enjoy organized walks throughout the county, promoting mental and physical wellness. Over 200 participants are registered in the program, with 40-45 walkers who enthusiastically hike throughout the county on a weekly basis. The group is led by Montgomery Parks volunteers and from April to July, this dynamic group clocked in over 11,000 miles!



New Outreach Initiatives

Communication Boards



Montgomery Parks unveiled its first communication board at Wheaton Local Park in July. The hands-on interactive device creates a more inclusive and equitable play environment for park visitors who have autism, individuals who are non-verbal, people who have learning disabilities and/or developmental disabilities. The boards can also facilitate communication between individuals who speak different languages. Additional boards are being developed and will be installed at select playgrounds and various park amenities throughout the park system.

Sensory Bags for Park Police Officers



The Program Access team presented the Montgomery Park Police Search and Rescue Division with special sensory bags as the team members conduct heroic search and rescue missions throughout our park system and beyond. Sensory bags contain fidgets, manipulatives, and other objects that are used by the first responders to aid in the de-escalation of behaviors in challenging situations bringing a sense of calm to an individual in distress.

Training

Training and educational programs for career and seasonal staff were conducted in a virtual setting and welcomed nearly 250 employees in disability related training programs including the ADA, Inclusion and Equity and Therapeutic Recreation.

Program Access employees continue to be a valuable as they conduct educational sessions across the state and locally for members of the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association, the City of Rockville Parks and Recreation employees and the City of Takoma Park Recreation Department staff.

Celebrating The Ada

"The R-Word"

The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed on July 26, 1990. To commemorate this milestone, the Montgomery Parks Program Access Office, the Prince George's County Department of Parks and Recreation Disability Services Section and the M-NCPPC's Diversity Council hosted a Lunch and Learn presenting a documentary entitled "The R-Word" to Commission employees. The film depicts the personal narrative of four sibling stories and the first-person accounts of self-advocates. It shows an intimate and nuanced perspective of the challenges and triumphs of people living with an intellectual disability. With this nuanced look at **the word**, it shows American culture how to let go of this unnecessary **word**, while also educating its viewers about inclusive education and the federal law to remove **the word** from government language.

The Lunch and Learn welcomed 136 M-NCPPC employees as they gained a deeper understanding and an awareness of inclusion, acceptance, and empathy.