Pictured above: Veteran and child participant at the annual All-Anglers Fishing Rodeo in May 2022 at Black Hill Regional Park. Children of all abilities learned to fish alongside our Armed Forces.
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Introduction

Mission Statement
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Montgomery Parks and Planning Department are committed to upholding the integrity of the Americans with Disabilities Act by delivering reasonable services, modifications, and physical accessibility 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.

Pictured above: Participants and instructor playing African drums at Go, Grow & Get Active, Montgomery County’s Active Aging Week signature celebration (October 2022).
A-Team (Access Team) Overview

Parks Formally Expands their “A-Team” (Access Team)
In 2016, Parks established an important working committee of professionals whose focus was dedicated to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The mission of the Access Team (better known as the “A-Team”) is to develop, define, and implement policies, procedures, design/construction practices, and protocols to ensure that Montgomery Parks is in full compliance with the spirit and intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In 2022, Montgomery Parks continued to demonstrate its commitment to the ADA by funding and reclassifying positions. First, the Program Access Supervisor position was upgraded to a higher job classification to underscore the importance of this role in the department. Next, the department hired a Website Manager, a new term-contract position, whose primary responsibility is ensuring our website and outward-facing documents are compliant under the ADA, Section 508, and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1) Standards. With the new positions and a goal of increasing communication amongst various divisions within Montgomery Parks, the A-Team expanded (new members of the team recognized with an asterisk below).

Physical Access
Park Development Division
Bob Green, Senior ADA Compliance Project Manager
Wen Huang, ADA Compliance Project Manager/Landscape Architect

Facilities Management Division
Mike Moxley, Acting Administrative Specialist III

Program Access
Jennene Blakely, Program Access Manager
Ashlyn Thompson, Inclusion and Community Outreach Specialist
Vacant, Program Access Specialist
Vacant, Inclusive Programs and Event Assistant

Employment
Management Services Division, Human Resources Division
Darlene Douglas*, Employee & Outreach Engagement Specialist

Accessible Communication
Public Affairs and Community Partnerships Division
Kristi Williams, Division Chief
Lisa Herman *, Marketing and Accessibility Website Manager

Montgomery Planning Department Representative
Carl Morgan, Special Projects and Policy Manager
Physical Access

Montgomery Parks has been diligently working on physical improvements to parks and facilities to meet the requirements defined by the 2010 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design. Since 2011, the Physical Access team has completed over 200 projects specifically related to accessibility. Montgomery Parks has now classified 35 parks as generally accessible 1(18) or fully accessible 2(17). Montgomery Parks is home to nearly 315 developed parks. Today over 10% of our developed parks are accessible.

Park improvement projects completed in 2022 include the following:

- The exterior and interior of the Park Activity Building at Argyle Local Park.
- The walkways and parking areas at the picnic area of Black Hill Regional Park. In addition, Black Hill Regional Park houses a new community garden.
- The Povich Field parking lot at Cabin John Regional Park.
- Refreshments at Cherrywood Local Park and Stewartown Local Park.
- Interior renovations of the Park Activity Building at Indian Springs Terrace Local Park and Meadowbrook Local Park.
- Trail makeover at Long Branch Stream Valley Park.
- Restrooms at Meadowbrook Stables.
- Access to the nature play area at Meadowside Nature Center.
- Replacements and upgrades to a variety of drinking fountains.
- Exterior of the Park Activity Building at Sligo Avenue Neighborhood Park.
- Access to the bike skills area and a new entrance at South Germantown Recreation Park.

Upper left is the walkways at Black Hill Regional Park; Upper right is the access to bike skills area at South Germantown Recreation Park; Lower left is the trail at Long Branch Stream Valley Park; Lower right is the exterior of the Park Activity Building at Sligo Avenue Neighborhood Park.

1 Elements, facilities, and spaces within a park are within reasonable limits of accessibility; however, a few areas or amenities may not be fully accessible or comply with the 2010 ADA Standards
2 A park with a continuous unobstructed path of travel connecting all accessible elements, facilities, and spaces within the park in accordance with the 2010 ADA standard.
Website Accessibility

Compliance with WCAG 2.1
Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) provides technical specifications to improve the accessibility of web content, websites, and web applications across all devices for people with a wide range of disabilities. Public Affairs and Community Partnerships has been working towards compliance with WCAG 2.1. Their efforts have included training website editors on how to write and design a web page to comply with ADA best practices; revising non-compliant web pages to bring them into compliance; migrating non-compliant PDF documents into compliant web pages; creating accessible website components; remediating PDF documents; writing ADA cheat sheets for website editors; and providing ADA compliance guidance for the upcoming website refresh. They are also training park employees on how to layout Microsoft Word and PowerPoint presentations to comply with ADA best practices.

Industry Standards
The Public Affairs and Community Partnerships division uses Site Improve as a tool to test the Montgomery Parks site accessibility. It is a third-party application that provides a score for how the website matches up against best practices and industry standards. The Montgomery Parks website currently holds an 83.1 score for accessibility, close to industry standards for WCAG 2.0. See the chart below that demonstrates the improvements made in just seven months.

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Program Access

The Program Access continues to ensure individuals with disabilities are welcomed to participate in enjoyable leisure-time activities in accessible places and programs provided by Montgomery Parks. This year a total of 61 support services were provided for several disability types.

Training in Parks

The Program Access Office facilitates ongoing training for career, part-time, seasonal, and support staff with Montgomery Parks. This year the team trained 312 Park employees. The Program Access office developed two new trainings in 2022: Accessible Special Events which focused on tactics to make Montgomery Parks events inclusive and accessible; and a Simulation training that provided a more in-depth overview of autism spectrum disorders and how we can best meet the needs of individuals on the spectrum in our programs. Parks continues to provide training related to the ADA and Program Access, disability awareness, behavior supports, effective communication and best practices for programming.
Pictured above: Park Police and Montgomery Parks staff at the training and distribution of Sensory Bags in April 2022. Officers received training on crisis intervention using materials provided by sensory bags such as noise-canceling headphones, puzzles, Rubik’s Cubes, finger traps, and fidget toys.

Inclusive Programs

Parks “Shined Bright” for Autism Acceptance Month

April is Autism Acceptance Month. In 2022, Parks collaborated with The Arc Maryland and Prince George’s County Department of Parks and Recreation Youth Art Corps to create the Shine Brighter Together commUNITY mural – The goal of the mural was to raise awareness of the value and importance of inclusion of students with disabilities in the community. The mural design was created by Justin Valenti, a Gaithersburg resident and digital and visual artist with autism. The Youth Art Corps from Prince George’s County Parks and Recreation was tasked with transferring the design to the wall.

The Shine Brighter Together: Autism Acceptance event was a family-friendly event at Wheaton Regional Park. At the event, the public was invited to help paint the larger-than-life mural and participate in hands-on, sensory-friendly activities while learning more about autism and the variety of resources available in Montgomery County. This program was a collaborative effort led by Parks and included eight other county agencies including Montgomery Recreation, Public Libraries, City of Gaithersburg, City of Rockville, City of Takoma Park, Partnerships for Extraordinary Minds, and The Arc of Maryland.
Montgomery Explorers

Montgomery Explorers is an organized walking club. This program, designed for residents 50 and better of all fitness levels and abilities, encourages participants to maintain a healthy way of life and explore unique areas of our beautiful county. The Explorers have walked 66 trails since the program's inception in April 2021. The group averages almost 40 walkers per week despite rain, frigid temperatures, or blistering heat!

Program Access manages the administrative portion of the program – however, the program would not be where it is without the support of a dedicated group of volunteers. Eight volunteers are responsible for scouting trail locations and drafting detailed descriptions about the terrain, difficulty, distance of trail to share with the participants. The Program Access office is excited to expand their offerings for the 55+ community beginning in early 2023.