



**MEMORANDUM**

June 6, 2019

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Michael F. Riley, Director of Parks

John Nissel, Deputy Director of Operations *J. Nissel*

Shuchi Vera, Acting Deputy Director of Administration *S.V.*

Jai Cole, Chief, Park Planning and Stewardship Division (PPSD) *JEC*

**FROM:** Hyojung Garland, Master Planner/Supervisor, Park & Trail Planning Section, PPSD *H. Garland*

Susanne Paul, Planner Coordinator, Lead Park Planner, Park & Trail Planning Section, PPSD *S. Paul*

**SUBJECT:** Briefing on the purpose, methodology, and initial recommendations of the Site Suitability Study for Dog Parks, an implementation project of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan, that seeks to find new locations for dog park facilities on M-NCPPC Montgomery County Parkland. Staff seeks approval of methodology and list of recommended sites.

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**Staff Recommendation**

Approval of staff's methodology to evaluate existing M-NCPPC Montgomery Parks parkland for Dog Parks and recommendations for potential locations for future Dog Park facilities.

**Background**

M-NCPPC Montgomery Parks recognizes that dog parks are some of the most desired social gathering places in our park system, yet there are currently only six dog parks in operation on M-NCPPC Montgomery Parks parkland. We need more of these facilities to keep up with high demand – particularly in higher-density areas where residents in townhouse or multi-family housing are less likely to have a yard. National trends indicate that dog parks are one of the fastest growing segments of parks and recreation, particularly in urban areas. In the Trust for Public Land's (TPL) annual "City Parks Facts" analysis, TPL staff rank cities according to a number of different factors, including dog parks.<sup>1</sup> The American Veterinarian Medical Association estimates that approximately 40% of U.S. household have at least one dog<sup>2</sup> and Forbes Magazine recently reported that there are now more pet-owning households

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<sup>1</sup> Trust for Public Land. 2019 City Park Facts – Dog Parks. (n.d.). Retrieved May 25, 2019 from <https://www.tpl.org/dogparks>.

<sup>2</sup> American Veterinarian Medical Association. U.S. Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook (2012). (n.d.). Retrieved May 23, 19, from <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Statistics/Pages/Market-research-statistics-US-Pet-Ownership-Demographics-Sourcebook.aspx>

than there are those with children.<sup>3</sup> Numerous popular media articles and scholarly papers on the social, emotional, and physical health benefits of dog parks discuss the importance of dog park facilities as community gathering spaces, and that having these facilities may encourage pet owners to get out for a walk, meet their neighbors, and form new connections.

M-NCPPC Montgomery Parks receives many requests for new dog park facilities, particularly in the highest-density parts of the County. In addition, the last two Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plans (Planning Board approved 2012, 2017) document a need for additional dog park facilities in the park system over the next decade. PROS estimates an overall number of facilities needed in the County based on the percentage of population in each of seven “PROS Service Areas.” As stated in PROS, these facilities should be delivered in proportion to the County population in each of those seven service areas (see *Figure 1 and Methodology section*).

The Dog Parks Site Suitability Study is an initiative of the PROS Plan. Using the service delivery strategy and needs estimates outlined in the PROS Plan, this primarily data-driven study will serve as a reference tool for Parks Department staff and decision-makers in locating new dog park facilities, and within future park design and development projects. It may also help identify locations for temporary, pop-up dog park events such as “Yappy Hour”, recently held at Elm Street Park. Sites identified in this study do not guarantee the construction of a future dog park facility, nor limit the possibility of a dog park facility at other parks in the County.

One critical aspect of any project undertaken by the Parks Department is the need to balance stewardship and recreation. A major tenet of the Montgomery Parks mission is to steward our natural and historic resources and “... *balance demand for recreation with the need for conservation.*” Likewise, we are bound by the Environmental Guidelines and Forest Conservation regulations and will not recommend building new dog parks in environmentally sensitive areas, such as stream buffers, floodplains, and forested areas.

The result of the Site Suitability Study is a list of recommended parks for new future dog park facilities in different areas of the County.

## Key Terms

**PROS Service Areas:** Seven sub-regions of the County used in the PROS Plan to analyze demand and need for future facilities.

**STUDY AREA:** The Study Area is the area used to analyze existing M-NCPPC parkland for new M-NCPPC dog park facilities. The Study Area represents areas of highest residential density in the County. The Study Areas is land zoned for townhouse or greater residential density, including a half-mile from those zones. The Study did not analyze or make recommendations for parkland owned and managed by other municipalities.

**RESOURCE ATLAS:** The Resource Atlas is a Parks Department Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tool used to identify development constraints on parkland, such as stream buffers, floodplains, steep slopes, easements, historic and cultural resources, Special Protection Areas, and numerous other constraint factors.

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<sup>3</sup> Danziger, P.M. (2018, October). *The Pet Retail Market Is Hot And Getting Hotter By The Day*. Forbes online. Retrieved March 3, 2019 from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2018/10/18/the-pet-retail-market-is-hot-and-getting-hotter-by-the-day/#262bae087ecd>.

*PROGRAM OF REQUIREMENTS:* A list of key elements needed for a facility, in this case, a Dog Park facility. This includes fencing, double gate entry, water, etc.

*INITIAL LIST:* M-NCPPC parks that fell within the Study Area.

*REFINED LIST:* M-NCPPC parks in the Initial List that best met the physical evaluation criteria for a dog park.

*CANDIDATE LIST SITES:* M-NCPPC parks in the Refined List that were then evaluated by Park Managers and Parks Staff from various divisions and determined appropriate for consideration as suitable sites. Candidate List sites were reviewed by the public.

*RECOMMENDED SITES:* M-NCPPC parks in the Candidate List that met the physical evaluation criteria of the Site Suitability Study, were favorable to Park Managers and Operations staff, improved geographic distribution of facilities, and received favorable input by residents on the Open Town Hall forum (see *Figure 5*).

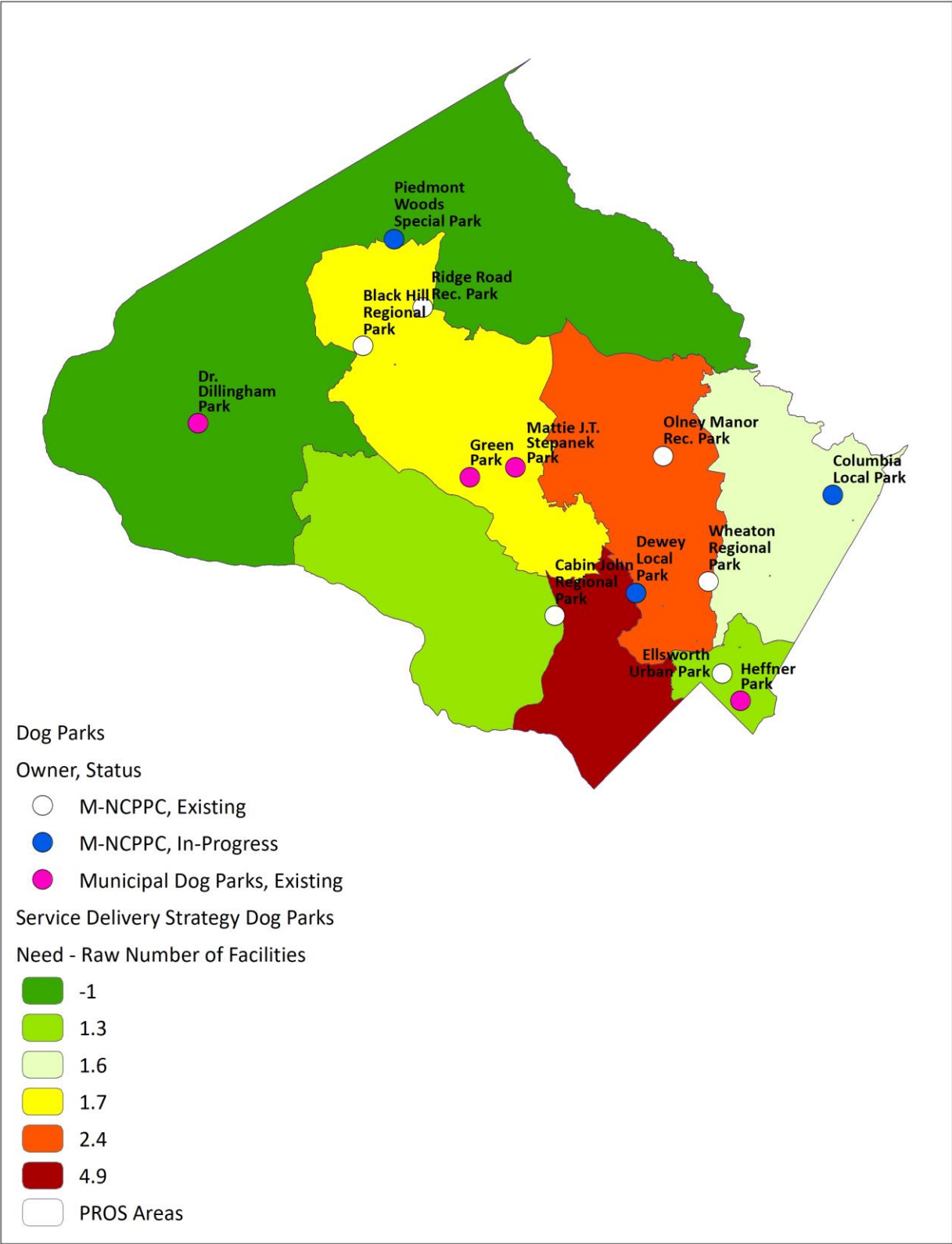
## Methodology

There are ten existing dog parks on public land in the County, all of varying shapes and sizes. Six of these dog parks are on M-NCPPC Montgomery Parks property and four are municipal facilities (Rockville, Gaithersburg, Poolesville and the City of Takoma Park each maintain a dog park). Chevy Chase Village owns and operates a very small facility on one of their park properties; however, the municipality is in the process of re-evaluating their policies and access to the facility and thus is not included in this study. Three new M-NCPPC dog park facilities are in development. PROS 2017 projects the need for approximately 25 total dog parks in the County by 2030. A key strategy in the PROS Plan is to analyze facility needs using a specific geography called “PROS Service Areas”, which are seven sub-areas in the County. PROS states that facilities *should be delivered in proportion to the County population in each PROS Service Area*. Simply put, this logic means that areas with more people receive more facilities and areas with fewer residents receive fewer facilities.

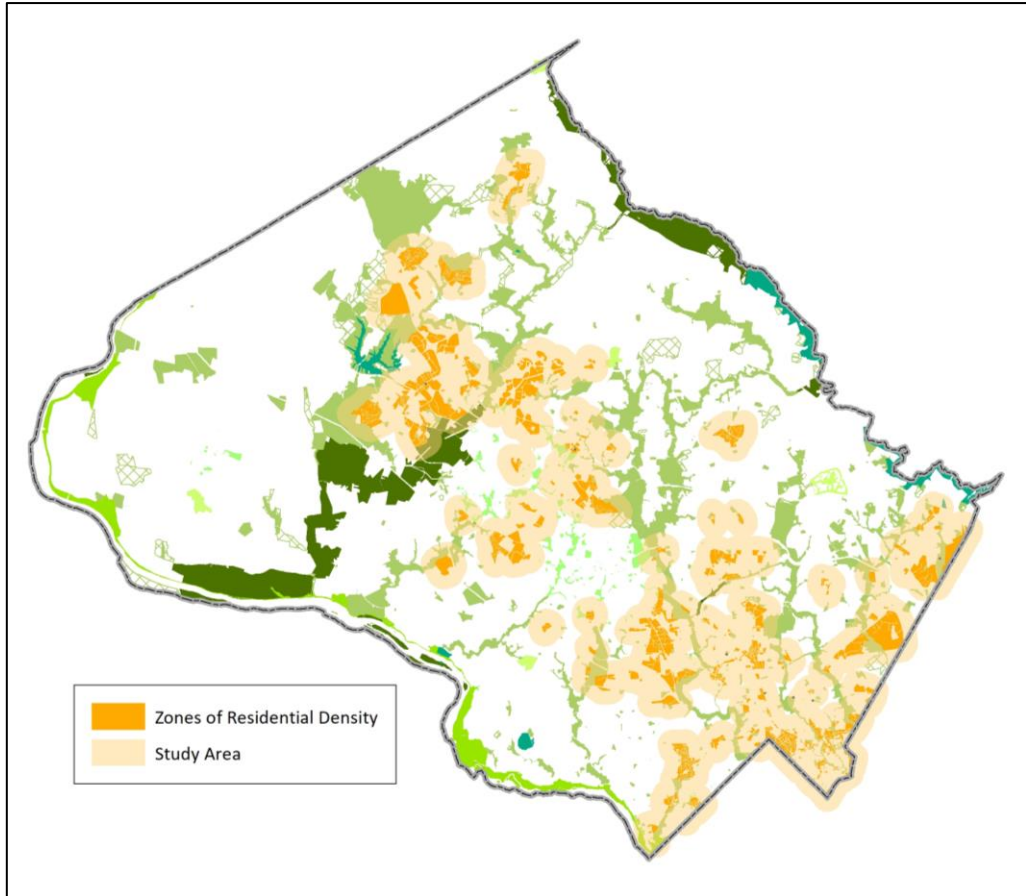
The first step in the Site Suitability Study was to calculate the estimated need for additional facilities according to each PROS Service Area (see *Figure 1*). Using population forecasts for 2030 from the Planning Department’s demographics and research team, Parks Department staff calculated the percentage of residents in each PROS Service Area. Then, knowing the target of 25 total facilities and those population percentages, it was possible to calculate how many out of 25 total dog park facilities should be in each PROS Service Area – this translates into a demand. Staff then factored in the existing supply of public facilities and this result indicates the approximate future need.

Next, staff determined a **Study Area**. As stated in PROS, the purpose of the Site Suitability Study is to help guide the location and development of future dog parks in higher-density areas of Montgomery County. For this study, higher-density areas were defined as those parts of the county zoned for townhouses and/or multi-family housing, including a half-mile from those zones (See *Figure 2*).

Third, staff selected all existing M-NCPPC parks within the half-mile Study Area as the **Initial List**. Parks on the Initial List were inventoried for their existing facilities, cultural resources, natural resources constraints (such as stream buffers or floodplains) using the Resource Atlas tool, possible conflicts, and other relevant information.



**Figure 1: Existing public Dog Parks overlaid on the calculated need for Dog Park Facilities by PROS Service Area.**



***Figure 2: Study Area, based on zones of residential density. While the Study Area includes areas Rockville and Gaithersburg the study did not analyze or make recommendations for parkland owned and managed by other municipalities.***

| CRITERIA   | EXPLANATION  |
|--|--|
| Available Space  | 10,000 square feet of unconstrained land   |
| Playground Proximity                                     | Not directly adjacent to a playground (ideal min 65')  |
| Residential Proximity                                    | Not directly adjacent to residences (ideal distance is 200' or more)   |
| Available Parking  | Is there enough parking to support an additional facility (approximately 2-5 spaces needed depending on the park type and location)? New facilities are envisioned as primarily walk-to facilities, depending on the park type and location. |
| CPTED<br>(Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) | Visibility and accessibility - "Eyes on the Park"  |

**Table 1: Evaluation Criteria**

Then, parks on the **Initial List** were evaluated according to the following physical criteria (see *Table 1*):

- a. **Size:** Adequate space available for the facility (approximately 10,000 square feet)
- b. **Playground Proximity:** Adequate distance from playgrounds (65 feet or greater) to minimize potential conflicts
- c. **Residence Proximity:** Adequate distance from homes to minimize noise transfer (200 feet being the ideal distance)
- d. **Parking:** Available parking if needed, depending on the park type and location
- e. **Safety:** Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles and strategies such as visibility and accessibility

The parks identified as best meeting the five physical evaluation criteria became the **Refined List**. The **Refined List** was then reviewed by staff from various teams and Divisions, including but not limited to Park Management and Operations staff in each Park Management region, who provided their day-to-day knowledge of park maintenance and operations to determine the feasibility of each site; Staff from the Park Development Division, who provided knowledge of current and future park renovation projects; the Resource Analysis team for their technical expertise on natural resources constraints; Park Police; and staff ADA experts. Staff additionally referenced active and recent Sector and Master Plans as well as Parks Functional Master Plans. This internal review narrowed down the Refined List into a **Candidate List**.

Parks on the **Candidate List** were presented for public input using the online Open Town Hall platform and via presentations to the public. Residents were asked to vote for their top two preferences in their region of the County (see *Public Outreach* section below). Parks that received favorable input from the public and park managers, and improved geographic distribution of facilities, moved forward as **Recommended Sites** for future implementation via the Parks Capital Improvements Program (see *Table 2*).

A breakdown of this methodology follows, and the methodology is summarized in *Figure 3*.



Figure 3: Methodology Diagram

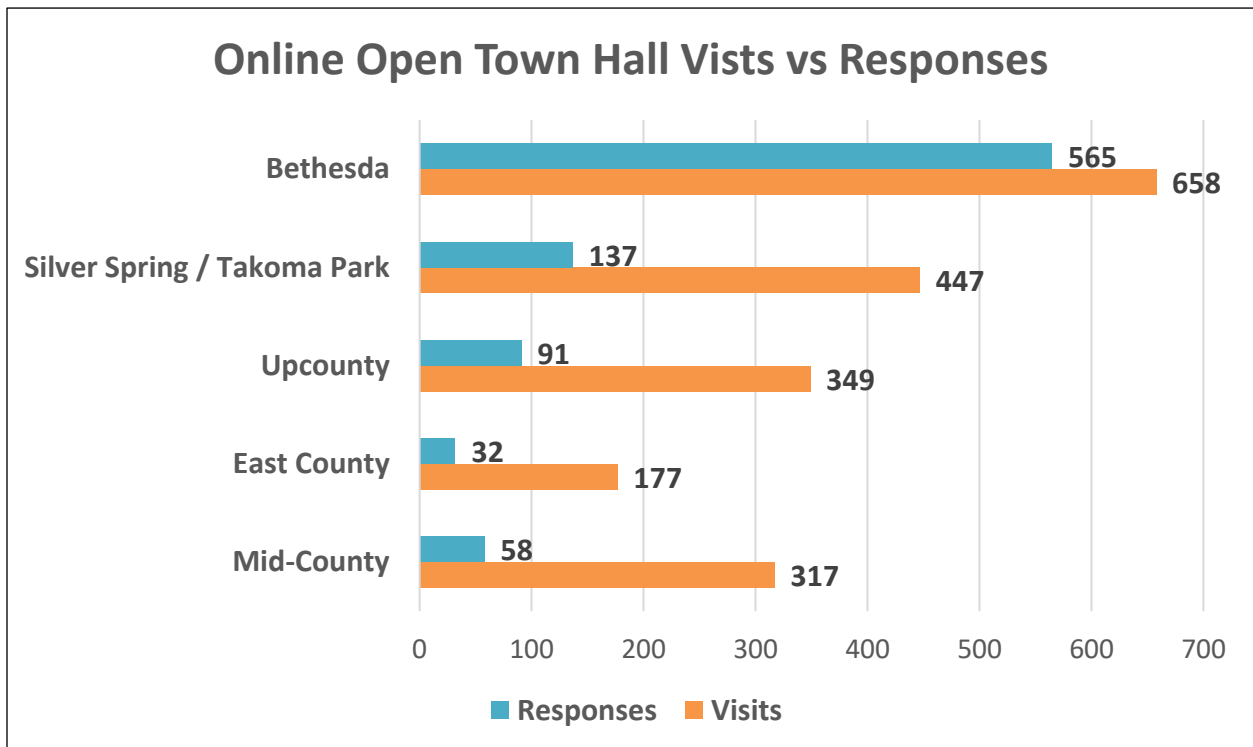


Figure 4: Open Town Hall Online Survey Visits and Responses by Region.

## **Public Outreach**

Parks Department staff in the Public Affairs and Community Partnerships Division, along with Park and Trail Planning staff, employed numerous public outreach methods for this Suitability Study. Public outreach consisted of physical signs in the six current M-NCPPC Dog Parks to capture the attention of our current dog park users, email blasts to all homeowners association listservs, social media posts (Facebook and Twitter), posting on Patch.com community pages, Source of the Spring, The Connection Newspapers, Montgomery County Office of Public Information Newsletter “Paperless Airplane”, Nextdoor.com neighborhood listservs, and direct outreach at “Olney Days” in May.

Using the Parks Department’s Open Town Hall online forum, staff asked County residents to provide input on Candidate sites identified in this study to better understand where residents prefer these facilities within their communities. The Open Town Hall online forum outlined the project purpose, methodology and asked residents to vote for two sites in their region of the County that they prefer. The online Open Town Hall ran from February through May and received 1,948 visitors and 883 responses (45% overall response rate). Responses varied by region, with the Bethesda-Chevy Chase region showing the highest rate of response (86% of visitors to the B-CC Open Town Hall responded). These preference votes were one of several factors in determining the recommendations. Visits and responses by region are shown in *Figure 4*.

Staff corresponded with each Regional Services Center to share the project purpose and scope, and all Regional Services Center Directors shared this information with their residents, to encourage participation in the Open Town Hall forum. In addition, the project manager presented to Regional Services Center Citizens Advisory Boards, as scheduling allowed, to inform community representatives about the project, answer questions, obtain feedback on existing dog park facilities, and solicit participation in the Open Town Hall online forum.

The project manager participated in an interview with County Cable Montgomery, which resulted in a video segment that ran for several weeks on the Parks Rec N’ Roll program. This video segment was also shared with Regional Services Centers for inclusion in their regular e-newsletters.

Staff managed a project-specific email account (dogparks@montgomeryparks.org) to answer questions about existing dog parks, about the Site Suitability Study, and to receive and respond to requests for locations not identified in the study. This email account provided great insight into the wide range of viewpoints and feelings about dogs and dog parks in the County.

Additional outreach consisted of meetings and information sharing with several municipalities managing their own dog parks, including the City of Takoma Park, Chevy Chase Village, and the Town of Chevy Chase.



## Recommendations

As stated above, the M-NCPPC parks recommended in this study are locations that met the physical evaluation criteria of the Site Suitability Study, improved geographic distribution, and received favorable input from both Park Managers and Operations staff, as well as County residents, via the Open Town Hall forum. Using the PROS Plan and the target of 25 facilities by 2030, staff estimated the number of facilities needed per PROS Service Area. The following sites are recommended for future M-NCPPC Dog Park facilities in the County and for programming in the Montgomery Parks Capital Improvements Program.

Table of recommendations below. Facilities will vary in size depending on the park. See Figure 5 for countywide map of recommended parks.

| <b><i>PROS Service Area</i></b>              | <b><i>Recommended Parks</i></b>   |
|--|---|
| <b>Bethesda Chevy Chase / North Bethesda</b> | North Chevy Chase Local Park<br>Elm Street Urban Park*<br>Norwood Local Park*<br>Willard Avenue Local Park*<br>Wall Local Park* |
| <b>Silver Spring / Takoma Park</b>           | Jesup-Blair Local Park<br>South Four Corners Neighborhood Park  |
| <b>Georgia Ave Corridor</b>                  | Layhill Village Local Park<br>(South Four Corners would serve the southern part of this PROS Service Area) <sup>a</sup>         |
| <b>I-270 Corridor</b>                        | Washington Square Local Park*<br>Ovid Hazen Well Recreational Park  |
| <b>East County</b>                           | Calverton-Galway Local Park<br>South Four Corners Neighborhood Park <sup>a</sup>  |
| <b>Rural</b>                                 | South Germantown Recreational Park <sup>b</sup>   |
| <b>Potomac</b>                               | (South Germantown would serve the northwest part of this PROS Service Area) <sup>b</sup>  |

**Table 2: Recommendations**

\*May be part of larger future park projects.

<sup>a</sup>South Four Corners is located on the southwestern edge of the East County PROS Service Area and will also serve Silver Spring / Takoma Park and the Georgia Avenue Corridor.

<sup>b</sup>South Germantown Recreational Park would serve both the I-270 Corridor, Rural and Potomac PROS Service Areas.

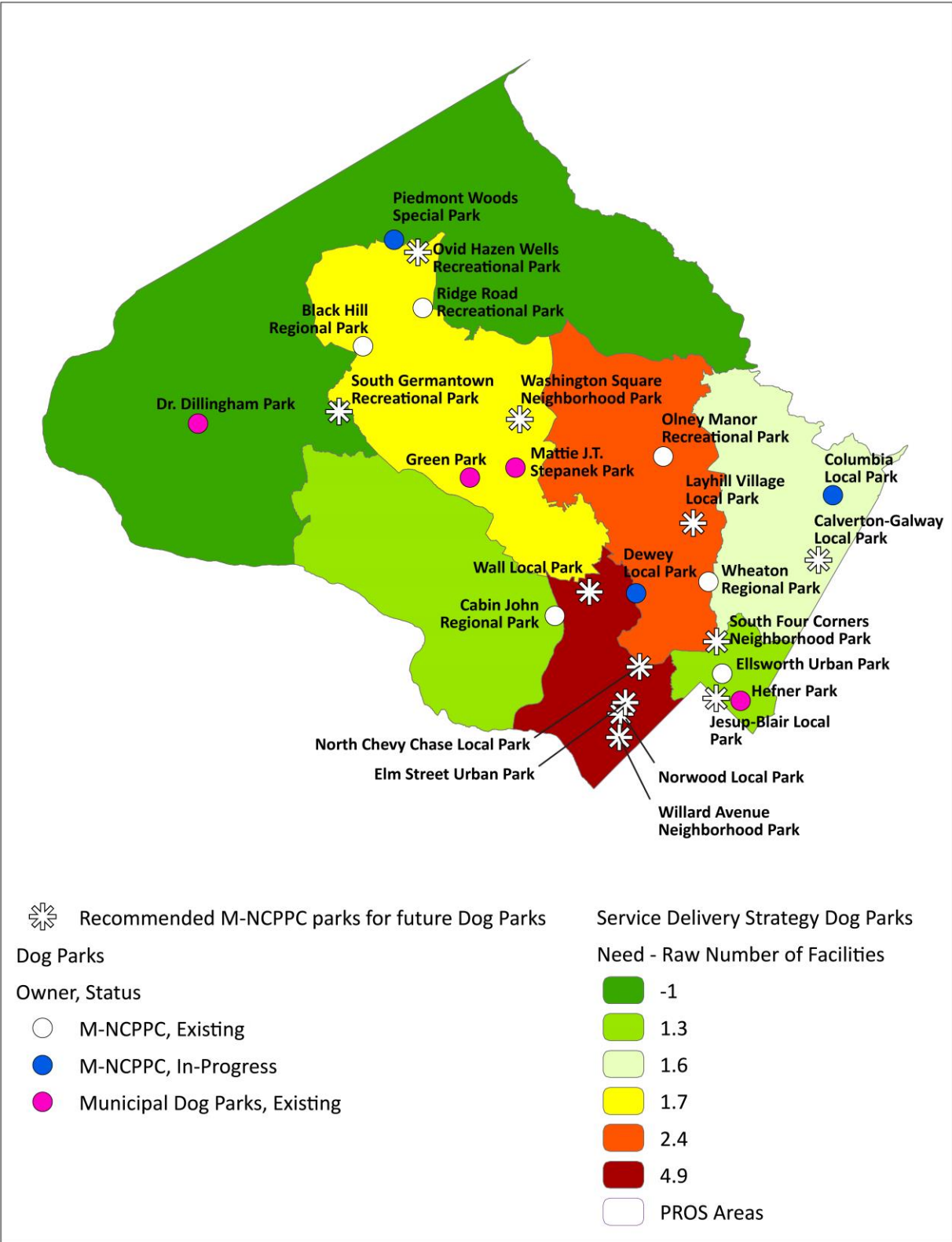


Figure 5: Recommended M-NCPPC Parks for new Dog Park facilities.

cc:

Doug Ludwig, Chief, Northern Parks Division, Department of Parks

Bill Tyler, Chief, Southern Parks Division, Department of Parks

Darryl McSwain, Chief, Park Police Division, Department of Parks

Kristi Williams, Chief, Public Affairs & Community Partnerships Division, Department of Parks

Andrew Frank, Chief, Park Development Division, Department of Parks