



MONTGOMERY PARKS

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
2425 Reedie Drive | Wheaton, MD 20902
MontgomeryParks.org

Community Meeting Notes

Meeting Purpose: Community Meeting for Renovation of Fox Chapel Neighborhood Park

Meeting Date: June 23, 2022, 7:00 – 8:30pm

Panelists:

- Tricia McManus | Design Section Manager, Park Development Division (PDD)
- Matt Weir | Project Manager/Landscape Architect, PDD
- Kathy Dearstine | Playground Manager, PDD
- Brian Lewandowski | Civil Engineer, PDD
- David Farnier | Fox Chapel Park Manager III
- Corporal Derrick Williams | Park Police

Background Information:

- The meeting began with Project Manager welcoming the public to the community meeting. The meeting was held virtually over Zoom. Spanish translation was provided.
- Important reference information was provided at the beginning of the meeting. These online links are available on the project website but repeated here below:
 - Project Website: MoCoParks.org/FCNP_Reno
- Community members were encouraged to complete a 10-minute Open Town Hall Survey about the existing park and proposed recommendations.
 - MoCoParks.org/FCNP_Survey
- The purpose of the meeting was to 1) review the park's existing conditions 2) discuss the potential scope of work and present preliminary recommendations; 3) host an open discussion with community residents.
- M-NCPPC presented a recommended park layout that: reduces the size of the parking lot to create space to build a new accessible playground; constructs a new picnic shelter near the playground and tennis court; converts one or two tennis courts into a soccer/basketball court; adds an-oval shaped walking loop in the lower area of the park (where the playground/shelter are currently), including fitness equipment; includes tree planting and stormwater management; adds new site furnishings; enhances maintenance procedures and accessibility.

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- To review the meeting, see the links below:
 - Video recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l61QX0859N8>

Critical Contact Information

- Project Manager: Matt Weir | matthew.weir@montgomeryparks.org
- Park Maintenance: info@montgomeryparks.org | 301.495.2595
- Park Police: 301.949.8010 (911 in case of emergency)

Summary of Questions and Comments Received:

Below is a summary of questions/comments submitted by the community and the discussion by Montgomery Parks that followed.

PLAYGROUND:

- One resident inquired about the use of engineered wood fiber in the playground. Please consider accessibility for wheelchair users. It is difficult to traverse the mulch in a wheelchair. It is easier to traverse the rubber surfacing.
 - This is the most challenging decision we often encounter on our playgrounds. There are pros and cons to each playground surface type. Rubber surfacing is easier to traverse in a wheelchair but is difficult to repair and has sustainability issues as well. The wood fiber, if maintained properly, compacts to allow for wheelchair use. The reason we typically recommend mulch is for maintenance, longevity, and environmental benefits. However, even if properly maintained, we acknowledge it can still be difficult to navigate in a wheelchair. We will explore the potential to use a combination of mulch and a more stable surface in the playground.

DOG PARK:

- Is there any potential for a dog park in Fox Chapel Park?
 - Several criteria are evaluated to determine which county parks are suitable for dog parks. After evaluating those criteria, M-NCPPC Park Planners have not recommended a dog park for Fox Chapel – primarily because of the proximity of the adjacent private residences immediately surrounding the park. Ridge Road Recreational Park is nearby and includes a dog park. For more information on the decision making process for dog parks and locations of existing dog parks, please refer here: <https://montgomeryparks.org/wp->

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<content/uploads/2020/11/MCPB-Dog-Park-Suitability-Study-Planning-Board-Memo-6.6.2019.pdf>

LIGHTING / SECURITY

- Several residents inquired about lighting in the park. Is it proposed for the new park – either in the parking lot, sport court, or walking paths?
 - M-NCPCC policy is to generally not light neighborhood parks like Fox Chapel. The rationale is that county parks are open only between sunrise and sunset. If lights are present, it implies to passersby that the parks are open for use, which is not the case. There are no lights in the park currently and we have no plans to add any lights. Additionally, lighting the courts or parking lot could potentially spill over onto adjacent properties. So far this year, there have been some calls about cars in the parking lot at night, but no reported crime. Please call Park Police if you see anything inappropriate in the park.
- Residents emphasized the problem of people doing inappropriate activities in the park after hours and stated their desire for security cameras in the park.
 - Only about 10 county parks have cameras – and they are usually in the larger parks. Significant resources are required to monitor cameras. We have no plans to add cameras here.
 - We are also attempting to disincentivize inappropriate activity by reducing the size of the parking lot. Furthermore, we are encouraging more eyes on the parking lot by proposing other uses nearby (i.e., playground). Please do not hesitate to call park police at any time.

SPORT COURT:

- What about the noise generated at the sport court and the proximity to houses? Would they be open for use 24 hours a day? What about the noise associated with moving the playground into the parking lot? This is close to houses too.
 - The park is closed between sunset and sunrise. The potential conversion of the tennis court into a multi-sport court is not materially changing the use of the court space – regardless of if it remains tennis or is converted to another sport, it was and will remain a hard surface court for sports. The community is accustomed to court sports in this location, unlike a dog park, which introduces a new use and potential unfamiliar noise. The potential new playground location is approximately the same distance away from back of houses on Ashworth Court and Aldenham Court as the existing playground is from the back of houses on St Johnsbury Lane and Aldenham Court. The

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potential new playground design and location will not be any noticeably louder than the existing playground.

- Several community members expressed support for converting the tennis court to soccer and/or basketball. One resident stated that the tennis court is currently used for soccer 80-90% of the time. Two other residents expressed a desire to maintain at least one tennis court and keep the practice wall.
 - The popularity of soccer is something we are observing as well. Please complete the Open Town Hall survey! It will help determine the following: whether to convert the court into another sport; how many courts to convert (one, two or none); and, if converted, what sports are desired by the community.
- Why do you need a fenced in soccer court if there is a soccer field nearby? Provide basketball.
 - There is demand throughout the county for paved soccer courts. They are popular because they can be played in all sorts of weather and be combined to also serve as a basketball court. Additionally, a soccer court is suitable for smaller groups seeking to play an informal and quick game of soccer. A soccer court is more convenient and easier for pickup game rather than a full soccer field that requires more players.

WALKING LOOP / FITNESS EQUIPMENT

- A community member supported the idea of fitness equipment and recommended what was used at Germantown Recreational Park (near the lake) as inspiration for the equipment at Fox Chapel. Another resident inquired about if the oval pathway could be used for kids to ride bikes around.
 - We will study that equipment used at Germantown and evaluate it for use at Fox Chapel. The oval walking loop can absolutely be used for kids riding bikes around! It is about a 1/12 of a mile in circumference.
- Will there be a walking trail around the park?
 - The park property boundary is irregularly shaped, so we do not recommend a walking trail around the entire park. However, the oval shaped loop can certainly be used for exercise. We can study the need for distance markers on the oval loop.

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SCHEDULE

- When will plans be made available for the community to review? How long will it take? What are the next steps?
 - The next step after tonight's meeting is to gather feedback from the community survey. The survey is available for about one month. At that time, we will use the feedback (as well as other factors such as cost, M-NCPPC standards, and code requirements) to inform the concept design. The concept design will be posted to Open Town Hall in the fall for additional public comment. After the concept, we will produce construction documents and permits in winter/spring 2023. The target for beginning construction is Summer 2023.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Please prune broken pine branches along the existing asphalt path leading to the playground.
 - The Park Manager made a note of this and will arrange to prune lower branches. This is something that the M-NCPPC design team is aware of and considering as part of this project - pruning will improve sightlines in the park, especially sightlines from the tennis court area looking down into the lower area.
- One resident agreed that the park is very easy to miss due to a lack of signage.
 - The park design is recommending adding two new park signs close to the existing sidewalks on St. Johnsbury Lane and Staleybridge Roads. This will help to inform passersby about the presence of the park and encourage them to enter the park.
- Will there be proper and fixed restrooms? Are the porta-johns staying?
 - Park policy is to not include a "fixed" restroom in a neighborhood park like Fox Chapel – we instead only have them in our larger parks. Instead, we typically include a porta-john where there is a permitted field. In this case, we recommend keeping the porta-john but relocating it to a more appropriate location. The porta-john will be accessible and screened with a fence. The porta-johns are seasonal and removed during winter months.
- How will stormwater management be treated at the park?
 - The existing park includes three existing SWM facilities, but they are outdated. To manage stormwater on the proposed design, we are considering a combination of microbio-retention, swales, recharge beneath

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the playground and tree planting. Our goal is to slow runoff and encourage infiltration on-site while protecting tree roots.

- Will the current playground be available for use during construction of the new?
 - This project began as a playground replacement project only - but as we studied the park further, we noticed other potential improvements as well. Construction of the park as shown in the “Recommended Program Layout” would take approximately 6 months to complete.
- Regarding the charcoal grills – concern expressed about proximity to houses.
 - We recommend the charcoal grills near the shelter. This would place the charcoal grill about 100’ away from the nearest house.
- Will trash cans be added?
 - Yes. We can add additional cans after construction if needed.