

AGE FRIENDLY OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS WORKGROUP MINUTES



Date: 10/21/2020

Time: 09:00 am

Facilitators: Marian Vessels and Nicola Morgal

In Attendance

Marian Vessels

Alice Lewis

Don Mock

Nicola Morgal

Matt Madera

Terri Hansen

Mary Pat Dolan

Margaret Pittman

Kathleen Krintz – Recording Secretary

Minutes Approved

September minutes will be reviewed at the November Meeting.

Announcements:

Jason Thomas – Park Planner with the Department of Recreation and Parks (R&P), Capital Projects and Construction – Presentation

Jason is a registered landscape architect for over 21 years' experience; graduated from the University of Maryland.

Marian stated would like to discuss some of the goals and objectives this group has talked about and how they may play out in the park.

New Business:

Jason's presentation:

Park planners do all the development of the parks–new parks, also repair and renovate buildings, fields, and playgrounds. They are responsible for making sure things are safe and useable and determining if there are new facilities needed because recreation is consistently changing. Adult playgrounds are something R&P is looking into now which includes young as well as older adults. Because of code compliance (ADA, building codes, etc.) most parks and construction come through his office. All 3 planners are registered landscape architects; R&P often contracts with engineers and other landscape architects for the larger projects. When designing and completing construction it is important to be aware of what the needs are in the County.

Question and Answers

- Nicola asked about getting public input about the new projects.
 - It varies, 2017 the comprehensive plan was redone so public input was sought for what was put into the plan. This plans out the next 5 to 10-years. For the next phase of Blandair Park we will be asking for public input.
- Mary Pat stated one of this work group's possible objectives is to initiate, moderate and document a pilot project for outdoor exercise equipment designed for older adults to stay

mobile, active, healthy and physically active. This seems to fit into your adult playground concept. Does Recreation and Parks have the funding for that?

- Not at the moment. As new locations and projects come up our department looks for ways to incorporate exercise equipment/exercise areas. It would be great to find a space to get all of that equipment (different ability levels) into one space and people can help each other based on their ability.
- Mary Pat asked if there was anything this group could do to make our wishes known. Can you offer any advise as to where we should go?
 - Keep advocating and asking for it. And if you think of an area that will get used, an open space that could be available and would be a good place to have adult equipment there, give our office more detail with a target. That will be helpful.
- Margaret stated that in terms of the language the group is using it is thought that multigenerational and intergenerational are really important right now. By doing that would it help in getting the funding needed and make it more meaningful?
 - Timing is good just now as the county is starting the budget process for funding for FY22.
- Mary Pat mentioned about a “donating a bench” program. Wanted to know if Jason’s office would be the one to implement. This group would be responsible for collecting the money.
 - We currently have donate a water fountain program which is through a different bureau.
 - Matt mentioned that have already had a bench and a tree program. Believe the bench program is still in effect. Seems to be the water fountain is the most popular now with the different heights. (children, adults and dogs and bottle fillers).
 - Nicola added that with the benches everyone wanted them to be in Centennial Park.
- Terri mentioned that one of the concepts this group has discussed is universal design and looking at whether anything this group would recommend is really serving all individuals. The current benches are standard but does not necessarily meet a universal design criteria.
 - The design for the bench itself is based on ergonomics. Other things come in such as back benches versus backless benches and having armrails comes into maintenance cost. Benches with arms and backs are more prone to vandalism. A lot of universal design can be handled on the approach as well. Most of the time if a bench goes in there has to be a wheelchair space next to it. It is important to cover all the details so many people will be able to use are parks.
- Terri asked as it relates to the spaces that you use is it possible to set up these intergenerational park areas in something other than a traditional park. Could there be a partnership with recreational opportunities with spaces that are not owned by Recreation and Parks?
 - Most definitely. Even if it’s schools, libraries, Department of Public Works’ land, it is still county property. If there is appropriate space it worth looking into.
 - Matt said that Recreation and Parks has a playground program with most HOA’s. If an HOA provides half the funding and the County will pay the other half to provide a playground.
- Mary Pat mentioned open land in the Stevens Forest area. Is that Columbia Association’s (CA) property.
 - CA is not county owned property. If there was an agreement, it still would be CA’s property with a park on it.

- Marian asked is there a site/park that is not well used, and this group could make an impact in by making a multigenerational park concept? This might be a way to show the age-friendly concept and encourage older adults to get out to the parks and use the equipment.
- Alice stated that Cedar Lane Park is a nice park but is underutilized. Wonderful space with bike trails, play equipment, is near a 50+ Center and close to a senior living community.
 - That was one park that came to mind. The other is Rock Burn Branch. Both are good size parks. Being able to find the right location on that park. A possibility might be when a playground needs to be replaced, expanding it and adding more adult equipment to it, making it for all ages.
- Nicola mentioned that Blandair Park there is a huge “play for all” playground. And next to that is a games area which will have Bocce Ball and Croquet. R&P has some active aging programs there as well.
- Margaret asked about other trends since we currently have Pickle Ball, Bocce and Croquet.
 - One that Jason has seen and focusing on is provide facilities for the “all ages play areas”.
- Terri was looking to see for some of the parks this group has been talking about have bus stops near them. One of the things this group has talked about is the availability to take public transit to the different parks. If this group decides to champion one particular park want to make sure it is easily accessible by public transportation.
 - Matt stated that Cedar Lane Park is a great location and ties in with a lot of different organizations.
 - Terri suggested that the group needs to look at the RTA Website and see if there are any bus routes going to Blandair park. Recreation and Parks have done a fantastic job with Blandair and there is also a pod for Children with Disabilities. And that is what Age-Friendly is all about, looking at people at all ability levels and encouraging that.
- Terri mentioned that one of the things this group had talked about was a more specific and sophisticated method on the county website for describing the so that individuals would know whether a wheelchair or other mobility equipment can be used on a certain trail.
 - This would be through R&P but the department has also been working with DPW and Office of Transportation on getting way-finder signage, and also working with CA since a lot of our trails match up with CA property. Can discuss with the person in charge of the trails and see if there is any definition on how that way-finding signage is accessible. Way-finding is so you know where the trail goes and how long it is, etc. and it is getting revamped throughout the county.
 - Terri stated that this is something very important to this group. And also think that this may be a crossover with Communication and Information group, for some ideas on ways to make sure certain things are communicated and that the information is out there.
 - Marian mentioned this group talking about the app for All trails which does a really nice job being able to identify who a trail is suitable for. As far as this group knows there is no way of knowing about the trails within Howard County. Would think it would be easier to promote to a wide variety of users if people knew what to expect when going to the trails.
 - Jason stated that his department may have some of that information.
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Old Business:

Review of Goals and Objectives.

The Workgroup worked on updating the Draft Goals and Objectives for Consideration during the meeting and updates were made in real time for all to see. The updated version will be sent out to all group members by for review.

Terri will be sending out the format for writing the groups tasks.

Marian asked if there were any other speakers the group would like to hear from. This group had mentioned having Public Information Office (PIO) at our November Meeting.

- Alice mentioned possibly having a Park Ranger come speak to the group.
- Terri stated that when things get advertised by the County it really is two entities. PIO does all the press releases and works directly with the County Executive. Department of Technology and Communicate Services (DTCS) are responsible for what is put on the Website. That group controls the look of the Website. When thinking about what this group wants to get out, is our focus on Website or press releases and what the County Government is saying or a combination of both?
- Marian stated that it would be both groups. The Website is critical. And also developing a campaign.
- Mary Pat stated that how to launch a campaign is more where this group is at. The group has these ideas, how does PIO see us getting the word out? Also suggested at the November meeting spending the time to finish up the Goals and Objectives.
- Marian is concerned about not having a lot of time for homework and input from the speakers. Only have 3 or 4 meetings left before the action plan is due. Based on our discussion today, Nicola and Marian will try and streamline the second goal and send out to the group before the next meeting.

Homework Assignments:

Go over the goals and objectives – respond back to Marian or Nicola with comments.

Next Meeting: Wednesday - November 18, 2020 – 9:00am