

DESCRIPTION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY: CURRENT TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

This chapter includes elements requested by the State for inclusion in each County's Local Land Preservation and Recreation Plan. It includes discussions of the County's physical setting, demographics, and socioeconomic characteristics. The chapter also reviews population growth as well as the socioeconomic and fiscal benefits of recreation and land preservation. Supplemental data is included in the Appendix.

PHYSICAL SETTING

The fifth largest county in the State of Maryland, Montgomery County roughly measures 500 square miles and contains 324,000 acres (including water). The Potomac River forms the County's southwest boundary, separating it from Loudon and Fairfax Counties in Virginia. The Patuxent River flows down the northeastern side of the County, forming a boundary with Howard County. The northwest boundary is a straight line from the headwaters of the Patuxent to the Potomac at the mouth of the Monocacy River. Sharing that boundary is Frederick County. To the southeast lies Prince George's County. Due to the City of Takoma Park's annexation into Montgomery County in mid-1997 the County line now follows its city limits, and appears as a small triangle into what was a portion of Prince George's County. Adjacent to the southeastern corner of Montgomery County is the District of Columbia.

The County lies almost entirely in the Piedmont Plateau on the east bank of the Potomac River, just 30 miles west of the Chesapeake Bay and approximately 100 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. Coastal plain

sediments overlap on the eastern edge of the County. Between the coastal plain and the Piedmont is a drop, shown in the many falls and rapids in this area, which is known as the "fall line." All of these features and water bodies exert influence in different ways on the recreational habits and patterns of Montgomery County residents.

Montgomery County is characterized by gently sloping topography, laced with numerous small streams in relatively narrow valleys, interrupted only where streams have created narrow valleys for themselves. Low ridges of hills stretch green fingers across the central County, separating the branches of Seneca Creek and the watersheds of Rock Creek, Muddy Branch, and Watts Branch which drain into the Potomac River. Northwest Branch, Long Branch, and Sligo Creek in the eastern portion of the County drain into the Anacostia River, which ultimately flows into the Potomac River in the District of Columbia. The portion of the County draining to the Patuxent is more dramatic, with steep slopes and cliffs. The Potomac watersheds have glens and palisades. It is along these waterways that civilization and industry developed. Early peoples followed the waterways as roads, leaving historic evidence of their presence behind. Eventually people settled

in more permanent locations, and later farmers chose the same fertile soils along waterways for cultivation. In later years these same streams and rivers were harnessed for power to operate mills. In the present day and age water resources in the parks system serve as appealing features for residents, visitors and students.

The northwestern area is distinguished from the rest of the County by way of its higher elevation. Slopes are predominantly moderate, with more severe slopes occurring along streams and rock outcrops. The lowest elevation in the County occurs where the Potomac River enters the District of Columbia (52 feet above sea level), while the highest point is just north of Damascus (850 feet) in the upcounty area. Slopes run southeastward and southwestward away from this point. Parr's Ridge defines the boundary between the major watersheds of the Patuxent and Potomac Rivers. Additional information on the physical characteristics of the County including soils, vegetation, watersheds, etc. is included in the Appendix.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

At the heart of effective park planning is the goal of providing adequate facilities to effectively and efficiently serve the people of the County and meet the needs of the park facility users both today and tomorrow. Meeting this goal requires a thorough understanding of existing and forecasted demographics, including issues such as the effect of economic trends on population growth and decline, population density and its disbursement, and character of the population as reflected by age groups and other data.

The Economy and Growth

Because of its proximity to Washington, D.C. employment trends in Montgomery

County have typically reflected the Washington regional economy, which has fared well historically. Overall the County has experienced significant growth, and moderate growth is expected for the foreseeable future.

Until recent years, the majority of Montgomery County's population worked in the Washington, D.C. and down-County areas; as a result, the majority of the population lived in and near the communities in the southeast portion of the County. However, land use patterns along the I-270 Corridor are continuing to encourage new employment centers and the growth of technology-based enterprises in that area. As a result more and more people are moving to the communities along the I-270 corridor.

Along with this expansion in the traditional County-wide employment centers, the population in areas further away from D.C. has continued to grow faster than the rest of the County due to factors such as housing availability and affordability. Germantown and Gaithersburg in particular have experienced dramatic growth compared to the rest of the County, due in no small part to the preponderance of technology-based businesses locating along the I-270 corridor. The changes in population density and location brought about by business development and the economy have significant impacts on the community's need for park and recreation facilities.

Evidence of this expansion is reflected in information about the at-place employment percentage distribution. For example, the years 1975, 1985 and 1995 saw a decrease in the percentage of Montgomery County residents employed by the Federal government, the number falling from 17.2% to 12.4% to 11.0% respectively. On the other hand, employment in the service sector, which most strongly reflects technology-related endeavors, rose over the same period of time from 22.2% in 1975, to 29.5% in 1985, then 34.5% in 1995.

Montgomery County Population Change

By Planning Area: 1995-2010



Figure 3.1

Population

In the years since the previous PROS Plan examined population information, Montgomery County has experienced an overall increase in population. From 1985 to 1990 the population grew dramatically from 628,000 to 757,027, over 17%. Population growth slowed in the early 1990 as a result of the recession, and increased a relatively modest 7% from 757,027 to 810,000 in the five years from 1990 to 1995. During that entire ten-year period the majority of the growth

has occurred in the Germantown and Gaithersburg planning areas.

Projections from the M-NCPPC Research and Technology Division, as shown on the previous page, indicate that population increases through the year 2010 will resemble the pre-recession growth rates. By the year 2010 the total County population is expected to reach 933,000 and be approximately one million by the year 2020.

The population growth in the I-270 corridor has other implications on a County-wide level. The 1988 PROS Plan noted that over half the County's population was clustered in the down-County areas of Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Bethesda, North Bethesda, Kemp Mill, Aspen Hill, and Wheaton. Because these areas contain less than 20% of the County's land area, the result is a highly urban environment. However, the population increases that have taken place in the I-270 corridor as well as the area along US 29 are causing an expansion of what has traditionally been defined as the County's urban area. According to the 1994 Census Update, approximately 32% of the total County population now lives in the down-County area; ten years ago the same down-County area held over 50% of the County's population. This is not the result of population decreases down-County, but instead reflects the population increases up-County.

It is important to note that the County's population increases are primarily the result of new residents coming into the area. The population density increase in areas other than the traditionally urban down-County area brings with it increased need for recreation facilities, as well as the need to preserve land for future facilities and resource preservation.

Character and Age of Population

Both the quantity and type of facilities necessary to serve the community are a direct reflection of the population and its characteristics. Likewise, the age of the population has a significant relationship to the use of park and recreation facilities. As a result, understanding of changes and shifts in the population of an area is a very useful indicator of future needs.

- Park use is typically heaviest by individuals between the ages of 25 and 34.
- The recreation needs of the elderly vary from that of the typical park user.
- High growth areas tend to have more young families and have higher needs for facilities such as playgrounds and ballfields.

Demographic forecasts show the anticipated changes in age distribution throughout the county between 1995 and the year 2010. The

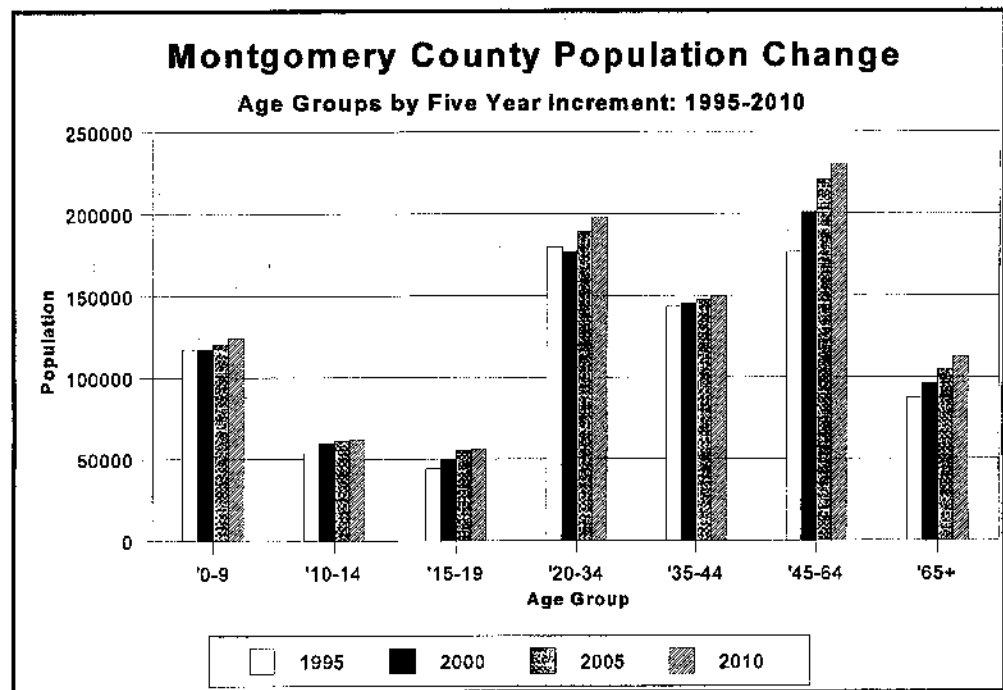


Figure 3.2

most dramatic increases are anticipated in the 45-64 and the 65+ age group (Figure 3.1). This increase in the number of adults over the age of 45, attributed to the aging of the 'baby boomer' generation, is likely to contribute to the need for facilities such as walking paths and golf facilities.

LAND USE AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Land use has an important impact on the number, type and location of parks and recreation facilities needed. Present and projected growth patterns of a community have a great influence on both the location and type of recreation and resource needs an area experiences.

Existing and future land use information is an integral part of the methodology that was used to develop the park needs projections in the PROS Plan. The resulting needs tables, maps, and methodology information is located in Chapter 6 of this Plan. Additional information on land use trends in Montgomery County can be found in the various area Master Plans for sections of the County and also the *General Plan Refinement of the Goals and Objectives for Montgomery County*.

SOCIOECONOMIC AND FISCAL BENEFITS OF RECREATION AND LAND PRESERVATION

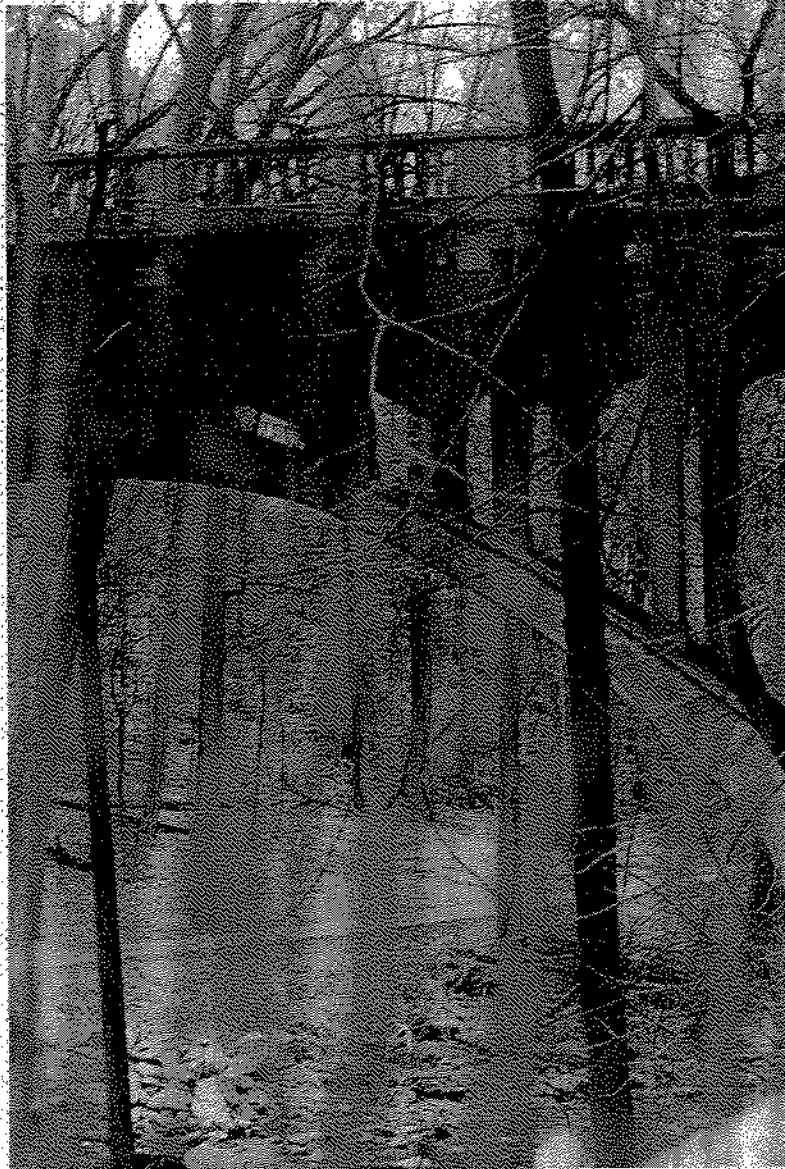
The advantages of a good recreation system are many and diverse. The value to the individual user is the most obvious benefit, but there are many values to the community, the environment, and the economy that flow from

a well designed park system. At the individual level, recreation opportunities reduce stress, improve self esteem, provide an outlet for creative energy, and generally improve an individual's quality of life. For the community at large, recreation facilities provide opportunities to gather for social experiences, to build a sense of community and civic pride, to build ethnic and cultural understanding, opportunities for individuals and groups to interact with nature within an urban setting, and give families a place to grow and connect with each other. What the natural environment gains from the preservation of County parkland is striking: benefits include pollution reduction, protection of the ecosystem, and preservation of habitat. In Montgomery County the preservation of stream valleys, greenways, and other significant natural areas is an especially important aspect of the area's quality of life. These features also provide opportunities for individuals and groups to interact with nature in an urban setting.

Perhaps the most overlooked benefit of a good park system is the economic impact. Increased land values, opportunities for increases in tourism, and improvements in the overall health of the community have many direct impacts and innumerable ancillary benefits to the fiscal well-being of an area. Many homes sell for a premium price due to the immediate accessibility of a park.

Parks and recreation facilities (and programs) also represent an "investment" with great potential to save future public expenditures by providing children with safe, accessible recreation areas. Children and youth in any community who require the attention of police are frequently the children without a safe and accessible place to play in their neighborhood. Young adults who are turned away from playing organized sports because there are not enough fields to meet their needs may find destructive ways to spend their time. When this alternative use of time involves alcohol and drugs, it can

become a public expense and a serious concern to the community. Early investment in leisure facilities pays healthy dividends and can even save public dollars in the long run. This aspect of recreation and park facilities and its importance to the "quality of life" in Montgomery County should not be overlooked.



Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park