



Vision 2030

Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Vision 2030 and Strategic Plan

Athletic Field Users

Focus Group Notes

March 23, 7:00-8:30 pm

Attendees: 6 stakeholders

A brief introduction to the project was provided by Tanya Schmieler (Montgomery Parks) and Anne Miller (GreenPlay consultant), followed by a discussion of the following questions, summarized below.

1. What are the key strengths of the parks and recreation facilities, programs and services in Montgomery County as it relates to your group?

- Cheap (stunningly); Montgomery Department of Parks (DOP) increased costs recently but it hasn't impacted participation to date; regional recreational parks charge more than local parks
- Staff is high level
- Olney Manor park is great with number of fields
- School fields are sand-bare and over-used; while the quality of the DOP fields is outstanding
- DOP has great customer service compared to DC; they seem to care
- Park Police are great too
- Have tried to streamline processes on-line

2. What challenges is your sports association currently facing? How are you responding?

- Need more facilities; synthetic fields and need them lit
- Try unpermitted artificial turf fields for pickup games (like Arlington), or for permitted use
- Unpermitted use can create issues too; tears up the fields
- Meadowbrook field is unplayable due to flooding; school fields are generally small, for use by kids
- Non-resident fees
- Scheduling – field season is open April 1 through August 15; but we start later and go until after Labor Day; Can we start later and go later? We run into other sports' seasons; we all are scrambling; out of state tournaments also force us to scramble; could use the soccerplex but the cost is prohibitive
- Fee increase for the non-profit was hard to take; had to pass it on to the player; would have been better to phase it in or grandfather existing groups; have tried to avoid using the regional parks with higher fees
- Renovating fields and then getting on it sometimes doesn't work

3. What do you see as the Montgomery County Department of Parks and Department of Recreation Department's role in field sports services (youth and adult)?

- DOP
 - Providing the fields
 - Maintaining the fields
 - Permitting
 - Identify new field opportunities to purchase or develop; but don't know what the budget is
 - How strategic and proactive is the county in the scheduling and permitting? (Conduct a field use/capacity analysis)
 - Problem solve with other groups regarding sharing the use of the fields; and address the wear and tear on the fields
- DOR
 - No interaction with DOR
- Gaithersburg is also maxed out

4. What improvements/changes would you make in the parks and recreation facilities, programs and services in Montgomery County today? In 10-years? In 20-years?

- Artificial turf fields (to deal with rain and lack of field space)
- Indoor facilities (gym shortages – using schools to the max; adding facilities)
- Develop field houses (e.g. indoor soccer, etc.)
- Some equipment in the parks is out of date and past useful life (ex: handball courts with coin operated access)
- Maintaining fields to the appropriate level – staffing and budget issues
- Some fields become unplayable due to location and drainage issues
- Convert high school fields to synthetic and started to permit the non-school use; fields are now multi-purpose with diamonds and rectangles (Arlington); the key is to get the permitting out of the hands of the schools
- Partnerships with schools to put synthetic field on the practice fields versus the stadium fields (Fredrick) to allow greater access

5. How can the Departments work to responsibly address these improvements/changes given its resources? What opportunities exist?

- Each individual high school permits their use so we can't count them in the inventory; can this change or is there any availability?
- Lighting fields – but public doesn't want lighted field in neighborhoods

6. How can your organization collaborate or partner with the DOP and DOR in the future?

- Adopt-a-field program gives you some priority – but in order to do this we need to hire a licensed pesticide applicator, etc.– incentives and cost/benefit ratio are not there
- Deal with these problems regionally – multi-county; no such thing as neighborhood sports; where is the open space available to develop?
- Raise money to build own facilities; cost within the beltway is probably prohibitive

- Can we parcel out the labor as a partnership and DOP provide the equipment? Develop a schedule of users/maintenance responsibilities (like PG county); Issues – cost of liability insurance or challenges with quality
- Partnership agreement (DC) earmark \$20,000 to offer sports programs to underserved youth, and sports groups invests \$20,000 to renovate one field per year

7. Do you believe there are populations/geographic areas that do not have access or who have limited access to parks and recreation services? What are your suggestions to address these issues?

- Inner suburbs
- Out migration of families; county is bursting at the seams; other ethnicity and culture demands
- Bigger organizations used to buy blocks of time and not use them but with the fee increases we are doing this less; when this happens the smaller groups may not get permitted use
- Smaller fields are not being used that well

8. OTHER – Information about focus group participants and their organizations:

- MSI Soccer youth (10,000 recreation and 4,000 in Classic and Elite/travel teams)
- Gaelic football adult and youth, 300-400 participants
- East County Recreation Advisory Board
- Gaithersburg Department of Parks and Recreation
- Community boys and girls all sports (10), 6900 of 7000 participants from Montgomery County
- Rugby (20 weeks out of the year)