



Action Alert

for Monday, March 19, 2012

Submitted by Silver Spring Resident Jim Zepp

Contact your Council Members... or the Tree Gets It!

A Majestic 180-Year-Old Black Walnut Hangs in the Balance

CONTACT COUNCIL MEMBERS ASAP TO AVOID LOSS OF MORE GREEN SPACE AND THE LOSS OF A HISTORIC TREE

This coming Tuesday, the Montgomery County Council will vote on parks-related capital improvement projects. **Council Members Marc Elrich** and **Valerie Ervin** will propose shifting funding from building a soccer field in North Four Corners Park that would destroy – for example – a 185-year-old native Black Walnut tree and the surrounding meadow area adjacent to other needed projects. Council Member Nancy Navarro has promised to support this initiative. **Please contact the Council ASAP to ask that the funding for CIP PDF no. 078706 be reprogrammed to other needed capital improvements.**

Short sample message:

Dear Council Members:

I understand that Council Members Marc Elrich and Valerie Ervin will propose shifting funding from building a soccer field in North Four Corners Park that would destroy – for example – a 185-year-old native Black Walnut tree and the surrounding meadow area adjacent to other needed projects. Please make sure that funding for CIP PDF no. 078706 be re-programmed to other needed capital improvements in our county. It is important that we recognize that by improving existing soccer fields and related projects instead of destroying green space for NEW soccer fields, we can use county tax dollars more effectively.

We are tired of the endless quest to destroy more county green space for soccer fields when we can make better use of existing land for this use. There is more to Montgomery County than making every community one big soccer field.

Sincerely,

YOU – THE TAXPAYER!

Keep reading learn about impacts to the County if CIP PDF no. 078706 remains in the capital improvements budget.

Quality of Life Impacts

- Net increase of zero ballfields to the current inventory of 477 County-run ballfields and 91 municipally and privately-owned ballfields because an adult size ballfield will be built while converting an existing youth size ballfield into a "natural" area.

- A ballfield will be 250 yards closer to University Boulevard.
- 50 parking spaces will be added to the park.

Costs

- \$5.6 million (an additional \$250,000 has already been spent to complete 30% of the park's facilities planning work)
- The loss of 11 existing ballfields that could have been renovated for the same amount of funds which would reduce the pressures for more new ballfields.
- The loss of the acquisition of the former MD College of Art and Design (MCAD) site for a park with a ballfield that several Georgia communities have been requesting for years.
- The above-mentioned black walnut tree (which almost qualifies for champion tree status) as well as red maple, holly, Austrian pine, and silver maple trees on the site of a future – proposed – soccer field. There are also hedgerows and islands of native trees (of mixed ages) which include the following species: black locust, persimmon, red maple, silver maple, black cherry, sassafras, sumac, holly, tulip poplar, chokecherry, dogwood, sycamore, and pignut hickory.

We need two more votes for passage of the capital funds reprogramming. If you have limited time, sending an email to the following email will be distributed to all Council members.

county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov

However, appeals to individual Council Members are also helpful:

Phil Andrews	240-777-7906	councilmember.andrews@montgomerycountymd.gov
Roger Berliner	240-777-7828	councilmember.berliner@montgomerycountymd.gov
Marc Elrich	240-777-7966	councilmember.elrich@montgomerycountymd.gov
Valerie Ervin	240-777-7960	councilmember.ervin@montgomerycountymd.gov
Nancy Floreen	240-777-7959	councilmember.floreen@montgomerycountymd.gov
George Leventhal	240-777-7811	councilmember.leventhal@montgomerycountymd.gov
Nancy Navarro	240-777-7968	councilmember.navarro@montgomerycountymd.gov
Craig Rice	240-777-7955	councilmember.rice@montgomerycountymd.gov
Hans Riemer	240-777-7964	councilmember.riemer@montgomerycountymd.gov

Here are some thoughts as to why you should write to Councilmembers:

- **Cost Efficiency** - The \$5.6 million expenditure to build one soccer field on a site with a 35' slope would pay for the renovation of 11 existing ball fields. Since the PDF 078706 project would remove the existing ballfield in the North Four Corners Park by converting it to a "natural" area, this project will result in a net change of zero in the inventory of 477 County-operated ballfields and 91 municipally and privately-owned ballfields.
- **Community Opposition to Loss of Existing Natural Area** - Community residents want modifications to the existing park facilities that would retain the natural vegetative cover, including a 185 year old black walnut tree, which provide recreation spaces for families with children and dog owners as well as habitat for birds and other wildlife. Removal of invasive plants and improvements of the existing park facilities would be far less costly than demolishing these features and flattening the sloping hillside. Community opposition to the Parks staff facility plans has been strongly expressed since 2008 and includes a petition signed by over 600 residents.
- **Responsive to County Citizens' Desire for Natural Areas and Trails** - A statistically valid County-wide survey was conducted as part of the Parks and Recreation Departments' Vision 2030 planning effort which found that natural surface trails was the fourth highest priority (24%) and natural areas was the sixth highest need (16%) among respondents. Soccer and other ballfields was ninth (12%) among the choices cited.
- **2005 LPPRP Ballfield Needs Estimate is Out of Date** - The 2005 Land Preservation Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP) inflated the need for ballfields by excluding 156 existing fields in its estimation process. Adding the 156 fields back into the calculation removes the "need" for additional fields through the year 2020. Parks staff have indicated that the current Parks Recreation and Open Space (PROS) plan will use a completely new method to estimate ballfield needs, and that method will not exclude the 156 existing fields.

Moreover, now that field use is charged by the hour and all fields are permitted under one reservations system, teams no longer book multiple fields for a single event. (In the past, teams booked multiple fields in order to increase the likelihood of having a field in playable condition come game day.) This also led to inflated needs estimates. The Parks Department will be taking this change into account in designing its new estimation method. For these reasons, plus the addition of a considerable number of new fields since 2005, the old needs estimate has been rendered obsolete.

The 2005 LPPRP also recommends the construction of 21 more picnic shelters, 2.3 nature centers, 15 dog exercise areas, and 4,595 acres of nature areas. However, because of the proximity of the Sligo Creek, Northwest Branch, and Wheaton Regional Parks, the Silver Spring/Takoma Park portion of the County is only eligible for more ballfields.

Finally, the Vision 2030 study conducted last year for the County's Parks and Recreation Departments found that the neighborhood access to ballfields in the southeast portion of the County (East Transit Corridor and South Central regions) was at 100% level of service. Other areas in the County have lower levels of ballfield access.

- **The Construction of a Soccer Field in North Four Corners Park Does Not Address the Claimed Need for Ballfields in the Silver Spring/Takoma Park Area** - Although the Parks Department justifies the construction of this ballfield as a solution to its estimated need for these facilities in the Silver Spring/Takoma Park region, the North Four Corners Park is not considered a part of that area for purposes of issuing ballfield permits. The park is listed as being in the Wheaton region for the automated permitting system. The Parks Department's current policy is that any surplus facilities in one region should not be applied to deficits in any adjacent areas. Consequently, the agency's own planning rules would not include the new ballfield in listings of available facilities to users from the Silver Spring/Takoma Park region.
- **The Community's Concerns with the Park's Existing Sports Facilities Are with the Poor Facility Management Practices** - The lack of adequate bathroom facilities has meant that neighbors living near the park and parents with young children were regularly subjected to the sight of groups of men publicly urinating and piles of human feces -- creating a public health hazard and attracting rats to the area. Adult teams without permits were occupying the existing ballfield so that groups with permits could not use it. Calls for assistance to the Park Police could result in waits of up to 45 minutes. This is unacceptable when attempting to manage groups of children wanting to play. Parks staff confirm that up to 9 years could pass before a Port-a-John could be installed in the park as part of the new ballfield construction. Good agency facility management practices, recognition of the park's appropriate user capacity, and user supervision are critical to keeping a public amenity from becoming a public nuisance.

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