

SHEPHERD PARKWAY (RESERVATION #421) CONCEPT PLAN PUBLIC COMMENT REPORT

DECEMBER 30, 2019

INTRODUCTION TO SCOPING PROCESS

Project Description

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing a Concept Plan for Shepherd Parkway (Reservation #421) in Washington, DC. Shepherd Parkway is located approximately between the St. Elizabeths campus to the north and Bald Eagle Hill to the south and bound by Interstate 295, South Capitol Street, and 2nd Street SE. The National Capital Parks-East (NACE) NPS unit administers the Parkway.

The second public comment period builds on the first public comment period, which was conducted in June/July 2019, when the public was invited to share their vision for the park's future. The NPS has reviewed the comments received and considered them in the development of initial concepts for Shepherd Parkway. Following the second public comment period, the NPS will prepare a Concept Plan that contains refined concepts that could then be considered as options for NPS to implement.

Plan Goals

The key goals of the Concept Plan for Shepherd Parkway are to:

- Enrich existing and explore new uses and programming opportunities
- Improve the health of Shepherd Parkway, ecologically and for the surrounding community
- Address safety and maintenance concerns

Public Comment Period

The comment period for the Concept Plan began on November 7, 2019 and extended through December 21, 2019.

DESCRIPTION OF PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held on November 7, 2019 to provide the public with an opportunity to review initial concepts for the future use and enjoyment of Shepherd Parkway. The public meeting was held from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the R.I.S.E. Demonstration Center at 2730 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue SE in Washington, DC. Seven attendees registered on the sign-in sheet.

The public meeting started and ended in an open-house format. During the open house, meeting attendees were provided an opportunity to view and ask questions about project-related information on presentation boards arranged around the meeting room. Attendees could circulate the room to speak to the NPS and consultant representatives to address specific issues. The boards addressed the following:

- Plan Goals

- Project Timeline
- Public Comment Period #1 Summary
- Concepts Overview
- Concepts
 - Northern boundary to Malcolm X Avenue
 - Parkland
 - Malcolm X Avenue to South Capitol Street
 - South Capitol Street to southern boundary
- How Can You Submit Comments?

The middle portion of the public meeting included a formal presentation given by the consultant representatives. The presentation included the same information as presented on the boards, but in more detail. Attendees were provided the opportunity to ask questions at the end of the presentation.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Introduction

Eight pieces of correspondence were received during the public comment period. Four correspondences were received from residents of Washington, DC. Four correspondences were received from members or official representatives of the Audubon Naturalist Society, DC Office of Planning, Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiast, and the Ward 8 Woods Conservancy. Comments received from these groups are summarized in the following section of this report.

Comment analysis assists the planning team in organizing, clarifying, and addressing technical information relevant to the development of the Concept Plan. It also aids in identifying the topics and issues to be evaluated and considered throughout the planning process. The following summary of comments is provided to outline the major groupings of comments, along with examples of specific comments to illustrate the trend.

General statements that the comments included

Area-Specific Comments

1. Northern boundary to Malcolm X Avenue Comments submitted by the Ward 8 Woods Conservancy (Conservancy) and summarized in this report were unanimously approved by the Conservancy's Board of Directors. For the northern boundary to Malcolm X Avenue section of Shepherd Parkway, the Conservancy recommended:

- Construct a narrow dirt hiking path in the area north of Newcomb Street so that the area is accessible for immersive nature hikes
- Create spur trails to provide convenient access to streets
- Erect signage identifying Shepherd Parkway as NPS land at several points
- Remove trees near the top of the hill at the northern end of 2nd Street to create a year-round overlook and picnic area

- Improve the existing picnic area near the corner of 2nd and Orange Streets

The Conservancy also stated that a “trail along the street, especially if it is paved, would require tree removal and would be redundant to existing sidewalks on the opposite side of the street.”

2. Parkland For Option 1, the Conservancy recommended:

- Install a brick-paved plaza centered around a statue or fountain with benches near Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue
- Preserve existing mature trees in the area further west and transect by paved walkways
- Enclose areas between walkways with low fences or retaining walls and plant with native shrubs and grasses
- Install tables and benches
- Install new playground with a nature-inspired design in the same area as the current playground
- Strategically place signage identifying the area as federal parkland
- Fabricate and install interpretive waysides created by Vince Vaise
- Program at least four public events, including live music, movie nights, urban wildlife, and Civil War history programs, annually
- Work with the US Park Police, Metropolitan Police Department, 801 men’s shelter, and surrounding businesses and churches to discourage littering, public intoxication, and violence in the park

The DC Office of Planning (OP) submitted comments that reflect reviews conducted by the Neighborhood Planning Division and are supported by a recent public life study conducted in partnership with the University of Maryland at Parkland. OP is currently in the process of compiling the collected data from the study and offered to share the data with NPS. A summary of OP’s comments at Parkland is provided below:

Programming

- Park users were interested in more places to sit, eat, have access to amenities, congregate with one another, engage in communal activities, and play and recreate across all age groups. Facilities such as water fountains and restroom facilities are needed. Users tend to stay at the park for an hour or more, and with the proposed increased play facilities, families and senior park users, especially, would benefit from these improvements.
- Option 1 reflects the desires heard from the community: areas for seating and programming for community events, as well as an improved play space for youth across various ages. Community organizations expressed interest in continuing to activate the park with outdoor events, services, markets, and movie nights. Residents expressed a desire for more comfortable seating and places to meet and chat with friends and neighbors. The addition of picnic tables and chairs presented in Option 1 mirrors the desire the research identified from the community which cited a lack of seating and tables for large groups. The addition of a kids’ garden also resonates with the research, which found an insufficient availability of nearby fresh food.

- While Option 2 reflects a need for more play space, it allows for less flex space for community events and large gatherings. The public life study illuminated the diverse range of users, from children and families, to adults and social groups.

Safety

- Park users indicated that safety was a priority. Design solutions included more human-scale lighting, lower vegetation, and maintaining site lines throughout the park. The study identified a lack of visibility into the park, which could be mitigated with a landscaping plan that allows a passerby to see into the park and park users to be seen from the surrounding streets.
- The fencing around the expanded playgroup - inclusive play space in Option 1 provides a safety feature for parents, guardians and children. Having activated and diverse zones creates designated spaces for activities, providing users the flexibility and freedom to enjoy the park how they choose.
- The additional fencing around the expanded playgrounds in Option 2 provides safety for parents, guardians, and children. The placement of multiple playgrounds allows parents and guardians the flexibility of watching multiple playgrounds at once, however may impact the site lines from end to end.

Circulation

- The creation of an entry plaza resonates with the design solutions and desires the research team heard from the community. Through the public life study, the research team identified park users entered the park from various sides but congregated near the proposed entry plaza. Pedestrian tracing work indicated that there is a need for pathways that connect through the park from north to south. Desire lines indicated direct pedestrian traffic between Newcomb Street and Parkland Place through the grass. New pathways could facilitate this natural circulation pattern and provide more opportunities for pedestrian presence in the park and the activities taking place there as well as increasing accessibility through the park and to the surrounding the neighborhood.

One commenter, unaffiliated with a group, also recommended using permeable pavers/soft playground material as opposed to natural turf grass at Parkland so that “it continues to look great AND function well.”

3. Malcolm X Avenue to South Capitol Street The Conservancy expressed a strong preference for Option 1 and recommended:

- Create a narrow, dirt-surface trail that crosses Malcolm X Avenue and continues southward behind Brothers Place
- Create spur trails that provide access to and from Parkland Place and Brothers Place
- Selectively remove trees at Fort Carroll to provide a clear view of the earthworks and a view to the Potomac River
- Install dirt walkways along the crest of the earthworks
- Reconstruct one or two features of the original fort, such as wooden ramparts
- Install interpretive signs at Fort Carroll specifying the years the fort was active, for whom it was named, how many troops were stationed there, and evidence of formerly enslaved people living and working at the fort

- Paint the exterior of the U.S. Park Police K-9 unit house

4. South Capitol Street to southern boundary The Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) expressed full support for the transfer of 3801 South Capitol Street to the Bellevue Neighborhood Community Land Trust.

The Conservancy expressed a strong preference for Option 1 and recommended:

- Design and build a single tread, dirt surface trail which minimizes environmental impacts and maintenance costs
- Create a trail that crosses Chesapeake Street west of Leckie Elementary School and continues south past the Fort Greble Recreation Center
- Continue the trail past Blue Plains Drive through District-owned woods, then crosses Bald Eagle Hill, and join up with existing and proposed trails within Oxon Cove
- Remove Asian wisteria and replant native species in the area near BridgePoint Hospital
- Selectively remove trees near the top of the hill at the northern end of 2nd Street near Xenia Street to create an open scenic overlook
- Create at least two picnic areas

Overall Shepherd Parkway Comments

5. Trails Several commenters expressed support or provided recommendations for trails throughout Shepherd Parkway. Residents of Washington, DC not affiliated with a group expressed support or recommended:

- “Trails that allow the community to take in the views”
- Replication of the Fort Circle Trail hiker-biker trail system as a continuous facility linking civil war forts along Shepherd Parkway
- Co-existence of a natural surface hiker/biker trail, which “could weave in and around existing topography and trees,” and a street-adjacent paved trail, which “could track a straighter line along the street/forest boundaries”
- Trails that are bus and Metro accessible
- Regional trail connectivity, including to the Oxon Run Trail, Oxon Hill Farm Trail, the Fort Circle Trail via planned bike lanes on Alabama Avenue, the planned South Capitol Trail, and the planned Shepherd Spur Trail (which would run on former railroad alignment)
- Mountain biking trails, which could provide a recreation option for young people and offer an opportunity to partner with programs that teach children how to fix bikes.
- Bicycles on the new trails (similar to the Fort Circle Trail) and a bicycle pumping track

The ANS expressed support for a combination of trail placements in Option 1: Natural Trail Experience and Option 2: City Trail Experience. The ANS recommended a hybrid trail plan that “weaves the trail through the forest and parallel to the street at strategic intervals, resulting in a combined urban and natural trail experience” and includes the following elements:

- Trails along the eastern edge of the park where the topography is relatively flat, allowing patrons of the trail to see farther into the park without having to enter it if they feel unsafe to do so
- Internal trails in areas with more variable topography
- Frequent access to the street on the east edge of the park by alternating between internal trails and edge trails, offering shorter walks in the woods to maximize safety
- Complete connections between internal and edge trails
- Continuous uninterrupted trails throughout the entire length of the park (i.e., not relying on street crossings to provide connectivity)
- Installation of English and Spanish wayfinding signs indicating distance to the next trail outlet to the street and directions to landmarks
- ADA-compliant trails

Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiast (MORE) expressed support for natural surface trails. These trails could provide multiple recreation opportunities, including walking, running, biking, walking dogs, and enjoying nature, as well as offer an alternative to automobile transportation. MORE noted that they are “willing to build community support for building community natural surface trails infrastructure.” The Conservancy also noted that their staff “will be trained in trail design and construction [in 2020], and could potentially provide for labor for future construction in Shepherd Parkway.”

- 6. Other Comments** Regarding litter, one commenter stated that “while a more routine monitoring and cleanup is warranted, the forests do much better from a trash perspective when there is a dedicated base of users like me who feel a sense of pride and ownership in those lands.”

The ANS also recommended the following:

- Include a broader removal of invasive species. Invasive species obstruct views into the forest and thus, increase neighborhood safety concerns. The Ward 8 Woods Conservancy could be an appropriate partner for invasive species removal.
- Protect intact wooded habitats as a refuge for wildlife through the following elements:
 - Trail placement that minimizes tree removal
 - Connected tree canopy over trails
 - Plant buffers at trail edges to provide additional habitat for ground-dwelling species
 - Wildlife crossings to restore connectivity to habitats bisected by major roadways that run through each section of the park
 - Use of permeable pavement such as bonded gravel for the trails to minimize stormwater runoff and erosion
- Contract service with local Disadvantaged Business Enterprises to complete project construction