

## **Blandair Planning Committee Minutes**

Meeting was held on Wednesday, May 14, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. at the Department of Recreation and Parks Office, 7120 Oakland Mills Road, Columbia, MD 21046-1677.

### **Present – Planning Committee Members:**

Tony Brudis, Lou Parlette, Dave Grabowski, Cathy Latham, Mary Catherine Cochran, Lou Parlette, Jim Sanborn, Joan Lancos, Bridget Mugane, Jim Eacker, Randy Clay, Sandy Curtis, Josh Manley, Maurice Simpkins, Sylvia Ramsey, and Sarah Uphouse.

### **Consultant:**

Tony Olsen, Project Manager, Whitman, Requardt & Associates (WR&A)  
Tom McGilloway, Mahan Rykiel Associates  
Tom Hannan, Whitman, Requardt & Associates (WR&A)  
Mark Lapointe, GWWO  
Mike Bosiacki, GWWO  
Charlie Bailey, Mahan Rykiel Associates

### **Present – Department of Recreation and Parks:**

Raul Delerme, Administrator Capital Projects and Park Planning Division  
Clara Gouin, Park Planner  
John Byrd, Chief, Bureau of Parks and Program Services  
Brenda Mercado, Support Technician  
Doris J. Bedsaul, Recording Secretary

### **Call to Order and Announcements**

Mr. Delerme welcomed everyone and reminded members to sign in and pick up an agenda at each meeting. Mr. Delerme thanked the Members that showed up for the tour on May 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Blandair Mansion and site.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Lancos moved to approve the minutes of April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Mr. Grabowski seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously.

### **Survey Results**

Mr. Delerme reported that a questionnaire was sent to the members about two weeks ago and he distributed the Final Tabulation of Results of the Blandair Advisory Committee Questionnaire. Ms. Gouin stated that a total of 15 responses were received from the members. She combined all the responses for the 11 questions and added a section for additional comments. The results were also distributed to the consultants.

### **New Interchange Proposal**

Mr. Sharar from the Department of Public Works, Bureau of Engineering, said that there is an opportunity for DPW to assist in funding the interchange with Route 175. DPW has access to a road excise tax, that is used solely to provide improvements to the existing road network. It can only be used to add new capacity to the road network, which is generally defined as adding lanes. If we keep Oakland Mills Road open, and allow traffic to go from Route 175

to Oakland Mills Road and/or Old Montgomery Road, we add to the road's capacity. There are advantages and disadvantages:

DPW can help fund the road network of the park from the Federal excise tax. (Right now all funding for the road connection would come out of the Department of Recreation and Parks budget from general obligation bonds). It would help the intersections at Tamar Drive and Thunder Hill Road. It would allow more traffic to get from Route 175 to Oakland Mills Road and vice versa. One problem is phasing; we usually don't have all the money to build everything at one time. The natural assumption is that the last thing to be built would be the bridge, because it is expensive, and we would like to get all the other facilities built.

However, traffic coming into the park and exiting the park, might have to go to the next intersection and make a U-turn.

A disadvantage is that the road divides one side of the park from the other.

**Consultants' Presentation** – Mr. Tony Olsen, Project Manager, Whitman, Requardt & Associates (WR&A)

Mr. Olsen introduced all the team members and presented two refinements to the Master Plan. The aerial topo will be incorporated in the next version of the refinements. Wetland identification has been completed on the site and the wetlands are somewhat smaller than the ones identified some years ago. The Forest Stand Delineation work is still going on.

BGE has a gas pipeline that runs through the project and we had a productive meeting with BGE. It is a 26" gas main and it serves a large area. BGE is open to the idea of a park and having a grass surface over the top of the pipeline. Mr. Olsen added that BGE and SHA are on board with this project. The traffic study is continuing too. He stated that the design team is still in the master planning phase, and at the next meeting they will present a draft master plan.

Mr. Tom McGilloway reported that they have been looking at the site analysis, elevation study, and land form for this property, as well as the cultural aspects of the site. He gave a presentation on Refinement C. (A master plan: Refinement C of Blandair Park dated 5/14/2008 was distributed.)

The design team also presented a slideshow. The following items were described in the North Area:

- One entry road from the roundabout in the North Area would hug the perimeter along the left woodline and serves several small parking bays behind the knoll.
- The primary road turns right and parallels the carriage road to give a similar experience of arrival to the Manor. There is a small drop-off circle north of the Manor, and an extension to a parking area that hugs a small knoll near the Manor gardens.
- The primary road turns north to form part of the loop around the central area and it accesses parking for the Children's Garden and the Interpretive/Nature Center.
- The loop road is not a complete road, but a connection is made via a pathway that would be wide enough to accommodate emergency and maintenance vehicles. It could be made into a complete loop in the future.

- The central lawn area would function as a festival/gathering area and it would also accommodate several ballfields.
- The Children's Garden would utilize the surrounding hedgerows and would interface with the wetland area and the historical area.
- The picnic areas, represented by small circles, could have a shelter or groups of picnic tables.

For the South Area, the following items were described:

- Oakland Mills Road would continue to remain open until the interchange could be developed, and the hedgerows along it could be maintained.
- The skatepark is located adjacent to the multi-purposed building and close to Route 175.
- The tennis courts are moved to the east side of Oakland Mills Road.
- There are two options for locating the destination playground. One is located near the senior area to provide the opportunity for seniors to enjoy watching children at play, and the other is south of the multi-purpose fields.
- The sports fields are divided into two areas: 3 multi-purpose fields are on the left and 2 baseball fields are on the east side.
- These fields will have lights, as will the tennis courts.

The design team also showed an alternate plan for the south area that included the proposed connection between Oakland Mills Road and Route 175. The connector road would hug the east and northeast side of the south area. It also included the following modifications:

- The two baseball fields on the east side are moved closer to Route 175.
- The tennis courts are moved to the SE corner.
- The skatepark is in the SW corner of the east side.

### **Discussion**

Mr. Delorme asked members of the public present tonight, to write their questions on the writing pad provided on the table. The questions will be forwarded to the committee and answered at a later date.

A question was raised how vehicles will be able to go left on Route 175. With the bridge in place they will go around the circle, and using the traffic circles, a vehicle can get in all directions.

Mr. Sanborn questioned whether the new connector road would follow Oakland Mills Road. He prefers it to be on the perimeter. The design team would not recommend that it go right through the center of the park.

Mr. Curtis asked if the NW area would be considered a neighborhood park? He recalled that we had previously talked at one point about having all the access internal. He also inquired about multi-purpose courts.

Mr. Bailey stated that the NW area would serve the park as well and not be called a neighborhood park. Multi-purpose courts could be basketball or volleyball.

Ms. Cochran questioned moving the softball field to the North Area, since they require chain-link fences, backstops and dugout. She stated that those at Kiwanis/Wallas have chain-link fences in the outfield as well, and that would interfere with maintaining the historic viewshed. Mr. McGilloway reported that we would use back stops but not the outfield fences. Ms. Gouin indicated which fields would be used for baseball and which for softball and some fields would be used for soccer playing. There would be fields in both the north and in the south areas. Mr. Grabowski mentioned that outfield fences for youth play are not needed unless you are in the travel program.

Ms. Cochran questioned why it is more beneficial, with the gas line, to have the softball fields? Mr. McGilloway stated that there is very limited ability to change the grade over that easement. The grade now slopes, so the softball fields can be adjusted and it gives us more flexibility.

Ms. Cochran asked if we could place the softball fields up in the northwest corner. Mr. McGilloway answered that it would dramatically change the character of the area.

A question was raised whether the fields in the north end would be lighted. Mr. Delerme indicated that Mr. Arthur told him that they would have lights on them. Mr. Delerme mentioned that the original master plan shows only two baseball fields, and we will actually be getting two on the south and three on the northern side. Mr. Delerme reported that if we had synthetic turf fields with the gas line going through there, we don't want to pay the expense again to redo the synthetic turf fields if something happened with the gas line.

Ms. Lancos reported that we can accommodate a lot of sport activities on the north fields without having to put lights there. Ms. Cochran mentioned that she is not opposed to placing the softball fields there, she would be against having the fields lit. Mr. Brudis indicated that we had already agreed that we would have no lights on the fields on the northern end. Ms. Mugane mentioned that area would be a meadow- like atmosphere and no light emplacements.

Mr. Manley stated that the southeastern side had too much activity at one spot. He would rather have tennis on one side and the skate park on the other. Also, he said that in Refinement C there are five ball fields and he felt multi-purpose fields would be much better. He also wanted more picnic area in the northern side.

Ms. Mugane stated that on the southeast side the population is very dense. There are a lot of children who don't have playgrounds or tot lots, so she would like the destination playground there. She would like to see the ball fields be located closer to Route 175.

Ms. Gouin spoke about the study that was recently conducted for the Board of Education about the shortage of fields at Oakland Mills High School and Long Reach High School. They are short of the recommended numbers. One reason to have fields closer to the high school is that children can walk there.

Ms. Lancos asked if a group of students wanted to make use of the multi-purpose fields for practice because of the school's lack of practice space, how long a walk is it from the school? It would be about a five minute walk.

Ms. Mugane thought that a peripheral road going on the east side would be a big problem because there are about 100 homes there. She would have to go back to the community to ask if a buffer of trees would help there. She asked if there is any reason why we can't build an evergreen buffer right now on the peripheral road on both sides. Mr. Delorme stated that we have to look at the whole project and the cost. Ms. Cochran asked if funding would be available to help in the park if we build any cut-through road? Mr. Sharar reported that if it goes from Route 175 to the other existing roads, yes funding would be available.

Ms. Uphouse reported that she has been working with the Columbia Association and they will be putting in a destination playground in each village. She believes one will be placed near Jeffer's Hill.

Mr. Delorme reported that the Department is talking about \$300-\$500,000 for a playground for this area; that is similar to Meadowbrook.

Ms. Latham said that close to Oakland Mills Road there is a walking pathway in disrepair. Do we have a timeline for this repair?

Mr. Delorme stated that under Phase I we are looking for a multi-purpose field area and some parking lots and we may address some pathway systems to get from the high school to the multi-purpose areas. The Department of Recreation and Parks will need to get with Mr. John Byrd to discuss. This area may be a CA connection. Ms. Uphouse mentioned that CA owns it, but the County maintains it.

Ms. Lancos questioned the parking lot on the south side around the multi-purpose fields. She said that we previously heard testimony from that community regarding concerns about access into that area. Is this just for a picnic area? Mr. McGilloway answered that the intent is primary for the picnic area. Mr. Delorme mentioned that all these access roads have gates that can be locked.

Ms. Gouin mentioned that on Saturday's tour, they went down each one of the potential access roads so that the Committee Members would have an opportunity to take a look and one of them was Timesweep Lane.

Mr. Eacker stated that he liked the Great Lawn concept but it seemed that the multi-purpose fields that were originally in that area would work better within that concept than do ball fields. Also, on the south side the multi-purpose fields have grown from two to three and he feels that we may be squeezing too much in. Mr. Delorme mentioned that we actually eliminated three fields from the northern area. The original plan has three in the north and two on the south for a total of five, but this plan has only three multi-purpose fields.

Mr. Grabowski stated that multi-purpose fields are much more in demand. They are used for lacrosse, football, and soccer, and we need more. Ms. Gouin reported that multi-purpose fields get very heavy use which wears down the turf, so we thought we could use artificial turf. Now with the gas line, we really can't have the artificial turf there, so the multi-purpose fields were moved to the South Area.

Regarding the "Great Lawn", Mr. Clay asked if the gathering space could be used for the "Wine in the Park" festival events, and if that space can accept other kinds of community events. Yes, it could function as the festival area.

Mr. Eacker mentioned that preserving the viewshed from the historic area and the concept for the "Great Lawn" works well.

Ms. Gouin stated that possibly we can preserve the view up towards the meadows behind the barns, but there are a number of large trees now in front of the Manor and that may block the view from it towards the Great Lawn. We like the multi-purpose fields in that area until we were faced with the problems posed by the gas line. It is a large 26", high pressure gas line and we really don't want to put a lot on it. Mr. Eacker asked if the dashed lines indicate the gas line on the map. They depict the 50-foot easement line, and there are 30-foot setbacks on each side.

Regarding the options for the location of the nature center, Ms. Uphouse stated that she liked A; because it is an entrance/welcome to the area and she doesn't like B because it is away from the parking lots. She likes having the structure near the parking.

Ms. Lancos commented that the centralized location of alternate A of the Nature Center would also provide restroom facilities for the Great Lawn and other things such as office space. She indicated that she sees other uses for that building in a centralized location on the site, not just a nature center.

Ms. Lancos stated that the historical area is a wonderful area and we should not put more cars there.

Regarding the skatepark, Mr. Manley does not feel that the skate park should be at Blandair Regional Park. Mr. Grabowski commented that the Skate Spot to be located at Centennial Park is the size of basketball court. He commented that Blandair will be a regional park and will be for everyone. We can locate the skate park near the structure. Ms. Mugane stated that her group on the right side does not have a problem with a skate park.

Ms. Lancos inquire about the senior area. Ms. Gouin commented that it could have things like: bocce ball courts, horseshoes, shuffleboard. The term "quiet games" was suggested instead of "senior area". Mr. Delorme stated that the tennis courts would not be located there as they will have lights.

Mr. Curtis asked what access areas would be closed at dusk. Mr. Delerme responded that all the access areas would be closed at sunset. However, night games would be open until 11 p.m. and access would be open for those.

Mr. Curtis stated that the original plan had parking coming off from Summer Hollow and on this plan the parking seems to be far more elongated. Is it larger than it was? Mr. Bailey commented that it was more of a square lot before and now the plan has probably more than we need there. Ms. Gouin reported that there will be two picnic shelters in this area, each one serving approximately 75-100 people, so the cars that they would generate would be more than just a few. Mr. Grabowski commented that if we don't supply enough parking at the park, patrons will park on the streets and walk through people's yards to get to the park. Mr. Clay asked if the loop system is for two-way movement of vehicles. Mr. Bailey answered yes. Mr. Clay asked if there would be potential to change that into a complete loop with one-way movement, almost minimizing the impact of travel. Mr. Bailey said that it could be done but this design was done this way because one-way traffic seems to make people move faster and is easier to drive. It may encourage driving around the loop with a closed loop system.

Mr. Clay mentioned that we are looking at two different modes: roads and vehicles, pathways and bike travel. He asked how we can focus less on cars in the future. Mr. Tom Hannan stated that it comes back to more flexibility, but he doesn't know the advantage of the one-way system. You could create more travel distance for people who will be dropping off somebody for a ball game and then go to the nature center. There would be more travel distance with an incomplete loop. You can do it either way, but he does not see the advantage of one-way travel. Ms. Lancos commented that if we have the loop it may put too much traffic into areas where it doesn't need to be.

Ms. Mugane asked about children walking on the south side where there are no sidewalks along Oakland Mills (next to Peter's Snowball Stand), which is a hazardous area for walkers. Mr. Bailey commented that this section of Oakland Mills is most likely to become a pathway that ties into the system and into the existing CA pathway system.

Ms. Lancos commented that she liked the things that were done on Master Plan Refinement C and how things are moving in a positive way for Blandair Regional Park.

The Consultants said they received some good feedback from tonight's meeting and will be back at the next meeting with an improved plan

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m. Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 25, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.

/db

I:\blandair\minutemay08summary