

Blandair Planning Committee Minutes

Meeting was held on Wednesday, June 25, 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, Dave Grabowski, Jim Sanborn, Joan Lancos, Bridget Mugane, Jim Eacker, Paul Farragut, Wesley Queen, Cathy Latham, Roger Gabin, Randy Clay, Sandy Curtis, Josh Manley, Sylvia Ramsey, Sally Scott Marietta, Steven Fishman 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:

Gary J. Arthur, Director
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. Arthur welcomed everyone to the meeting tonight and requested that members of the public submit written questions on the pad provided on the table. We will answer the questions at the end of the meeting if time allows. Also, we have a website for updates on Blandair Regional Park.

Mr. Arthur introduced Steven Fishman who had been on the original Committee and wished to return. Mr. Arthur apologized for the error of omitting him, and welcomed Mr. Fishman to the Committee.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Grabowski moved to approve the minutes of May 14, Mr. Manley seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously.

Correspondence

Mr. Delerme reported we received many e-mails from Committee Members. He said that a Correspondence Packet was sent to all Members: 1. Questions submitted by the public at our last meeting, 2. Statistics on field shortages at local high schools, 3. Facility inventory from the Comprehensive Plan, 4. Photos and transit plans submitted by Committee Member Randy Clay, 5. Letter from Committee Member Jim Sanborn, letter from Long Reach Community Association Chair Karen Hitcho on their concerns. We received a letter from President Neal M. Horen of the Glenmont Homeowners Association regarding their concerns on the

northwestern portion of the site as well. We also received a letter from the Energy Group, which was submitted through Cathy Latham, indicating that they would like to see the Blandair park designed with pedestrians and bikes first in mind and cars second.

Meetings

DRP staff met with Bridget Mugane and several of her community members to discuss their concerns, and also with Mr. Fishman regarding his concerns. Staff also met with Andrea LeWinter, a member of the Glenmont Blandair Park Coalition (GBPC). Mr. Arthur indicated the northwestern portion of the park will be one of the later portions to be developed, since we will do several phases. Before we go into design for the area we would meet with the communities that surround that area.

Mr. Steve Sharar reported that the Department of Public Works (DPW) has funding to assist in the development of the park. After the April 23rd meeting, they noticed that Refinement A included a connection between Oakland Mills Road – keeping the existing road and connecting into the new bridge that was proposed over Route 175. It was not their intent to show that as a final alignment, but to recognize the fact that we still needed to have Oakland Mills Road open in order to do the first phases of development. This provided a connection from Maryland Route 175 directly to Oakland Mills Road and it would help out with the transportation network. DPW has at its disposal a road excise tax, which is a tax on new development that is solely for the purpose of providing increased capacity to the road network. It cannot be used for plowing the roads, filling potholes, or to fix up an existing road; it can only be used to increase the roadway capacity, such as adding a lane to a road or adding turn lanes in an intersection. Because we will build a bridge as part of the final plan development, that connection between Oakland Mills Road and the new Route 175 interchange, will add capacity to the roadway network. DPW would be able to participate in funding some of the road network for the park. Mr. Sharar asked the Director of Public Works and he reported that he would make the money available.

This would relieve some of the traffic at Thunder Hill and Tamar, and the State Highway Administration (SHA) has told us in the past that they had some concerns about traffic congestion there already. We can move earlier in the project with the roadway funding and will not leave the bridge to the last. This is a great opportunity to be considered and we have been told that the money will be there if the opportunity is accepted.

Mr. Arthur said the road is something for us to consider. The bridge with access lanes will easily be around \$8 million and if we get that cost covered, that will be a big savings. He reported that this is not a done deal, but when the County has to come up selling bonds to pay for a bridge or receiving some sort of transportation dollars, they will look very hard at the transportation dollars that will be out there.

Several Questions were asked:

Does this cover the cost of the bridge? Yes, the funding would cover the cost of the bridge.

Concerns about the safety in that area? Mr. Arthur reported that pedestrians will have the right of way.

Number of lanes? Mr. Sharar anticipates that it would be just one lane in each direction.

Consultants' Presentation – Mr. Tony Olsen, Project Manager, Whitman, Requardt & Associates (WR&A), introduced all the team members and presented two refinements to the Master Plan. (Tonight's presentation was the same as the presentation of May 14, 2008 with discussion on the new road on eastern side of southern area.)

The aerial topo surveys were formed by flying the site and have been completed. The Forest Stand Delineation work is still going on. The BGE gas pipeline is in the process of getting staked out and located.

The Traffic Study has been going on and traffic counts have been taken at five other County parks to determine trips generated by parks. The studies were done during holiday weeks as well as general weekends. This information is being compiled into a traffic impact study. Once the master plan has been fine-tuned, the traffic impact study will be submitted to the County and SHA. Mr. Olsen indicated that they have already had some initial discussion with the SHA. Also, from the master planning standpoint, they have addressed the comments from the Committee Members from the last meeting.

The Design Team Presented the Draft Master Plan (Refinement "D")

Mr. McGilloway showed the changes in the plan: the backstops were rotated to the perimeter so they could disappear into the trees and be part of the tree edge. The trees will provide shade for players.

The gas line requires a 50' easement and a 30' setback for structures. There is very limited grading allowed over that.

The turnaround is large enough to accommodate bus drop off or transit shuttle. Also he showed the changes in parking and the parking integrated into the natural settings.

Two sundial locations were indicated, one closer to the Mansion, and the other closer to the Interpretive/Nature Center.

In the northwest corner there is a T intersection which will be gated off, with the ability to turn around and exit if the gate is closed.

Mr. McGilloway said since we received some comments on the southeast corner of the park, work sessions were conducted to address the concerns.

They would recommend planting early, well before the connector road is established. This plan works with this road or it works without it.

The Skate Park should be associated with the multi-purpose building and with this layout it is placed up against Route 175.

Mr. Fishman asked about the speed limit? It would probably be 35 mph.

The Senior Area was changed to "Quiet Games Area".

Mark Lapointe reported on the architectural themes. He spoke on the pavilions planned for Blandair – all are very similar in nature; all respond uniquely to the specific sites. He

indicated that the buildings at Blandair have a strong sense of base and common elements in materials.

Mr. Olsen reported that Phase 1 would be on the south side and would use the existing alignment of Oakland Mills Road, three multi-purpose fields, a 150 person pavilion, restroom facility, parking, and trail connections to the existing trails.

They are currently looking at the storm water management requirements.

The Timeline for Phase 1 would be around 2010.

Mr. Olsen reported that they were intrigued with Mr. Sanborn's proposal of looking at the park as a garden.

A Discussion of the Plan and Questions followed:

What will be the gating hours for the park? Dusk till dawn.

Will Oakland Mills Road be lit? Steve Sharar will check this out.

Ms. Mugane spoke on the unsafe crossing. Safety measures will be investigated.

Ms. Mugane talked on speeding to Route 29, and raised strong objection to the southeast area layout. She also said that residents already hear traffic on Route 175 and that area has too much impact.

Mr. Tony Hannan spoke on traffic issues.

Ms. Uphouse commented that she appreciated all the County and Consultants have done to work on this plan.

Ms. Marietta spoke on the grades and knoll in the northern area and her neighborhood did not want to see parking lots.

Mr. Fishman asked if the parking lots would be paved and Mr. Arthur replied yes.

Mr. Curtis opposed Summer Hollow access.

Ms. Latham commented that she didn't want a lot of amenities.

Mr. Grabowski commented that there is a severe need for active recreation in this area.

Mr. Arthur stated that this park would be phased, since it is very costly to build a regional park.

Mr. Eacker stated that the number of fields had changed from 7/8 to 9 in this plan.

Mr. Arthur indicated that the ball fields would not have dugouts.

Ms. Mugane asked about the bleachers on the fields in the northern area. Mr. Arthur responded that except for the larger diamond in that area the other fields would not have bleachers.

Mr. Arthur indicated that on occasion there will be tournaments for traveling teams.

Mr. Arthur commented that the skate park would close at dark.

Ms. Mugane proposed moving the skate park away from the residents to Route 175.

Mr. Fishman indicated that Brookside Gardens was a model of what he is envisioning at Blandair. He requested permission from the Committee to be able to talk to Tom Olsen between our regular meetings. (He also handed out a paper with questions to help guide our move forward to a “Garden of Extraordinary Excellence – A Centerpiece of Howard County”).

He raised five questions and he requested the Committee to give their feedback to him. He suggested we have a subcommittee to look into it further as he felt the study of this will take a year.

Mr. Arthur indicated that he asked Mr. Sanborn to speak on his letter. Traditionally, we have not allowed Committee Members to go out to the consultants and seek their advice because we get charged for it. Since Mr. Sanborn is willing to take the lead in trying to establish more gardens throughout Blandair Park, Mr. Arthur is willing to let him do this, but the type of gardens will be planned at a later date once we get into the planting specifics.

There was no objection by the Committee for Mr. Sanborn to meet with the consultant once we get into design, to work with them on the types of gardens.

Mr. Clay indicated that we have to remember the scale of Brookside, which is approximately 55 acres when we plan our gardens. Also, we need to consider if a 12’ fence should be planned to keep the deer out.

Mr. Arthur reported that Mr. Sandborn’s letter indicated that possibly a non-profit organization would be part of the fundraising aspect of maintaining and operating these gardens.

In reference to the Glenmont Homeowners Association letter, Mr. Manley asked if we have the vote count. Mr. Curtis answered that it was about 80% against the access. Mr. Delorme reported that the community is 256 homes.

Mr. Arthur asked Mr. Curtis to find out the number of responses (was it 80% of the 256). Mr. Curtis will get the information.

Mr. Arthur requested Mr. Curtis to ask the Glenmont community what they would like to have. (For example, if the picnic shelter is too big, what size would they like to have.) Mr.

Curtis will let us know their reply. Mr. Curtis questioned whether we should just wait until this area is planned.

Ms. Mugane suggested a survey be conducted by the Department of Recreation and Parks for the community when we get closer to that phase.

Mr. Arthur indicated that Blandair Regional Park is now in at least seven phases. At Western Regional Park we are only in phase three now and there are six phases planned.

The first phase will be in 2010, and we are looking at seven phases. We are 8-10 years away from the end of the phases, looking at completion at approximately 2020.

Mr. Arthur indicated that the master planning for the Glenmont community is many years out (10) and we don't know if it will be an issue at that time. Mr. Curtis stated that at the present time it is a big issue for the Glenmont community.

Mr. Arthur reported that we do have several issues that need to be resolved before the public meeting on Thursday, September 11th. He hopes that no one feels rushed with this. The Department has tried to communicate with the Committee as much as we could, by e-mail and the Committee Meetings, since February.

Mr. Arthur stated that we still have the issues with Glenmont and Timesweep access, and we have to make some decision on these issues. We have been informed by the Consultant that our early plans for the north area are not going to come to fruition because of the easement for the BGE pipeline that goes through there. The athletic fields had to be moved to the south area, but we have provided some active play area in the north side as well. Ms. Mugane's sub-committee wanted to emphasize that we would create a balance of passive and active recreation on both sides of Route 175. We have realized that this is not going to be possible. The south area really supports more active recreation than the north, partly because of the BGE easement.

Mr. Arthur asked the Committee if they wanted to take a vote tonight to support the plan as shown or just do it by e-mail. The Department of Recreation and Parks will list the issues that are still unresolved and send it to the Committee Members. The two access points are still in question, as well as the road connection.

Mr. Arthur took a hand count tonight to see who wanted to vote tonight and who wanted to do it by e-mail. It was decided that the vote would be performed by internet e-mail. (Count: 5 votes for tonight and 10 via e-mail vote).

The survey will be sent out and Committee Members will reply back to Raul Delerme. After all votes from the Blandair Advisory Committee Members have been received and tallied we will send the results out by e-mail.

Mr. Arthur read several written questions from the public:

What is planned for Phase 2, when will work begin and when will it be completed? Is the plan presented tonight permanent? Mr. Arthur indicated that we have to come up with a master plan and work is all based on the budgetary allocations that we receive from the County. After the public meeting on September 11 at Oakland Mills High School, when we finalize the plan, it will be the master plan for Blandair Regional Park. Then the plan must be approved by the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board. We will probably have seven phases for the park, and each phase has to have three public hearings: County Executive Hearing, Planning Board Hearing and County Council Hearing. In terms of its permanence, it depends on the budget and on the input that the Executive, Planning Board and Council receive as those phases come up.

What are hours and capacity for the multi-purpose building? At this moment, we believe the hours would be 7:00 a.m. – 11 p.m., 7 days per week. This is how we run the Glenwood Community Center now and also the way we will run the North Laurel Community Center when it is built. We are working to define the dimensions of the building, based on the activities we will include.

What is the greatest number of speed humps permitted to ensure a 25 mph? Where does the data for number of cars come from, the number seems unrealistically low? This information comes from the traffic count that has been taken there. The Consultant has this information. In reference to the speed humps they are spaced approximately 500' apart. Mr. Sharar commented that the County cannot commit to speed humps on the road at this time.

A 25' wide road through the park to provide internal access to all park amenities is not much to sacrifice in a 300 acre park. Is there not a way to avoid neighborhood access (any neighborhood)? Mr. Arthur commented that we have looked at trying to minimize as much as possible the impact on the 300 acres by road and paved surfaces. Timesweep Lane is a road that dead-ends right at the boundary of Blandair Regional Park. We have a plan in the office dated 1973-1978 showing that Summer Hollow Road was meant to go through Blandair in the development of the new town of Columbia designed by the Rouse Company. This is one reason why we chose to put access through Summer Hollow, and the other reason was to stop parking in the neighborhoods. We thought if we put the parking in the park, the people would park there instead of in the neighborhoods.

Mr. Sharar commented that both Timesweep and Summer Hollow were intended to go through at some future time when that property developed in some way shape or form.

Ms. Latham asked if Soaring Hill is still on the map as a possible entrance? Mr. Arthur answered that Soaring Hill was eliminated because it has driveways that go directly into the road, unlike Summer Hollow.

The vote survey will be sent out shortly since we need the Consultant to work on the master plan for the public meeting on September 11, 2008.

Meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m. Next meeting is the public meeting at Oakland Mills High School Auditorium scheduled for Thursday, September 11, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.

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