



HOWARD COUNTY

Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation - Executive Summary

DRAFT April 2017







Centennial Park

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Howard County is dedicated to sound planning that supports strengthening the public realm and enhancing the benefits of open space in order to sustain this high quality of life amid the challenges of a growing and increasingly diverse community.

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Purpose and Context

What is a Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan?

A Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP) is an important resource Maryland counties and Baltimore City use to evaluate and update baseline information on key issues, trends, and plans for managing and enhancing the system of preserved public lands, parks and recreation facilities.

The LPPRP seeks to provide clear goals, strategies and priorities for investing to improve recreation facilities and parks and open spaces for residents.

The 2017 Howard County LPPRP (the Plan) is the result of a 16-month research, engagement and planning effort that aims to provide Howard County residents and visitors greater access to programs and amenities, expand and preserve protected agricultural land, and enhance the long-term benefits of natural resources and open space—ensuring that the system will prosper for future generations.

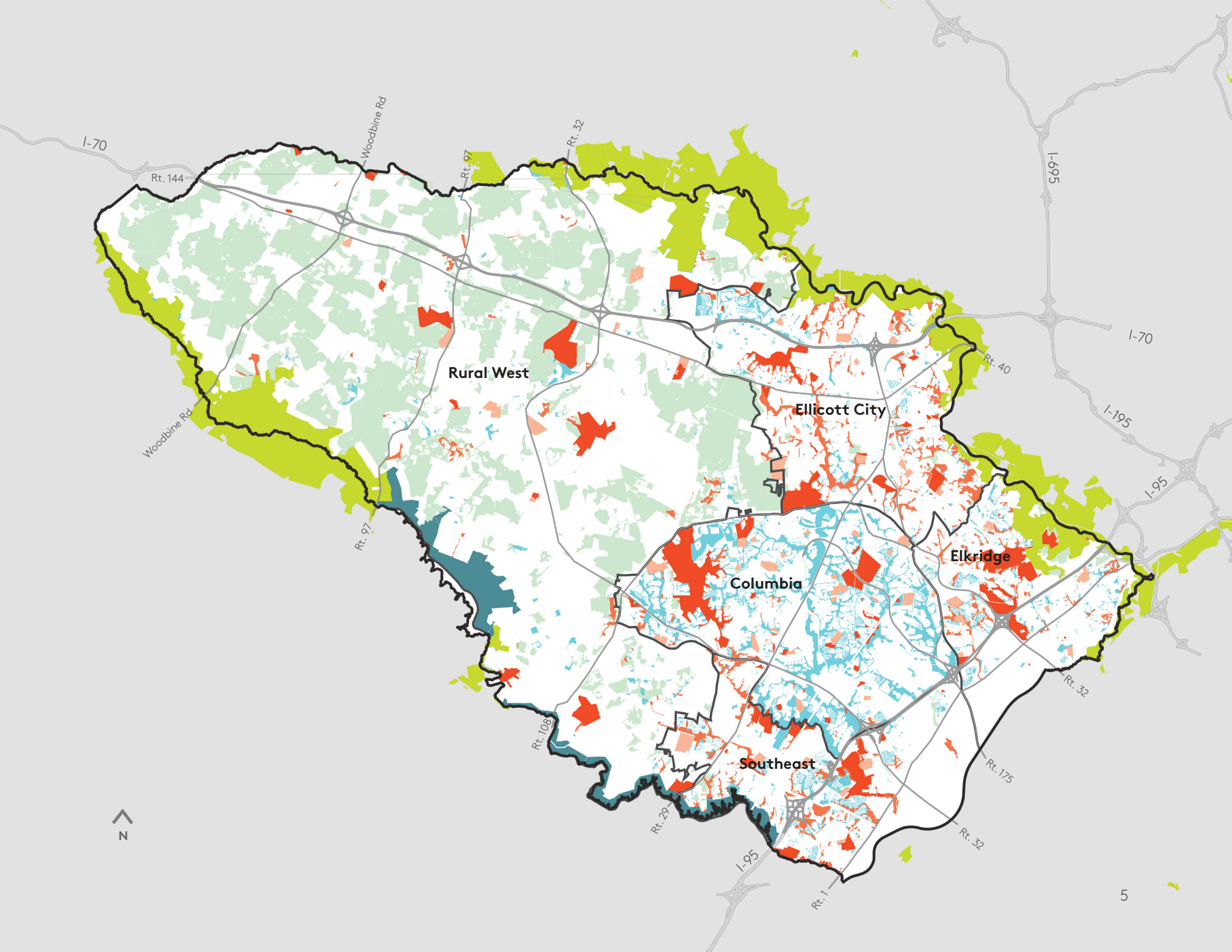
The County is frequently lauded for its high quality of life and has experienced significant

and sustained population growth since the 1950s. Home to over 300,000 people today, Howard County continues to attract residents with their well-performing school district, diverse communities, accessible open spaces, robust recreational amenities, historical heritage, and mixture of urban and rural communities. Howard County is dedicated to sound planning that supports strengthening the public realm and enhancing the benefits of open space in order to sustain this high quality of life amid the challenges of a growing and increasingly diverse community.

The Plan reinforces the accomplishments of the previous plan and draws baseline information and recommendations from the Howard 2030 General Plan, Creating an Age Friendly Community Report, and Howard County Bicycle Plan, among others. The Plan provides a vision for access and growth that balances the preservation of historic and natural assets with intensive investment in increasing access to amenities for the county's diverse, growing population.

2017 Existing System Inventory

-  County-owned parks and natural resource area
-  County-owned open space
-  County-owned school recreation area
-  Privately-owned and homeowner association open space
-  State-owned land
-  Preservation easement
-  WSSC-owned open space
-  Planning area



THE DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS

The Plan is stewarded by the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks, a department within the County government whose mission is to responsibly manage natural resources; provide excellent parks, facilities, and recreation opportunities for the community; and ensure the highest quality of life for current and future generations.

The Department's vision is to strive to deliver recreation and leisure opportunities that will improve the health and well-being of the community and to serve as model stewards of the environment by managing, protecting, and conserving our resources for a sustainable future.

Program Open Space

The County completed its most recent plan in 2012. Since that time the State has allocated \$8.9 million in Program Open Space (POS) funds to the County to support a variety of projects, land acquisitions, and improvements aligned with the Department of Recreation and Parks' mission and vision for the systems under its purview. The 2017 LPPRP is timely; its implementation is on the heels of significant enabling legislation and unprecedented growth in parks, facilities and programs, all since the 2012 LPRP. The Governor recently signed into law legislation that will support the replenishment of POS funding for local systems, funding that is used to acquire vital open spaces, build new

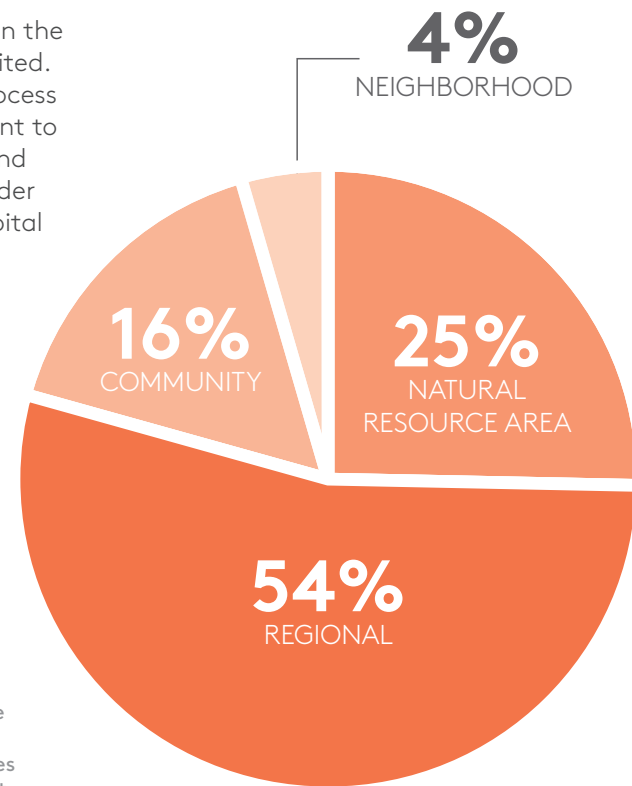
amenities to increase access to the public, and improve an already vibrant system.

National Accreditation

The Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) is a national source the Department uses to maintain a high level of best practices, quality assurance and continue to maintain excellence. Howard County is one of 150 systems in the nation that is currently CAPRA accredited. The alignment of the accreditation process and the LPPRP enabled the Department to evaluate existing programs, services and resources within the context of a broader planning exercise for program and capital improvement funding opportunities.

Programmed Open Space

The pie chart breaks down the Department's programmed open spaces into four categories. These space types account for about 5,750 acres out of 9,378 total acres of land owned by the Department.





Capital Improvements
(Top left) Projects supported by Program Open Space include land acquisition, deferred maintenance and new construction of parks and open spaces, like the Shrimptown/ South Branch Skate Park.

7000+ Programs
(Top right) Programs like the School house Theater Arts Camp represent over 7,000 programs offered by the department every year.



Parks and Open Space
(Bottom) The Department owns and maintains over 9,378 acres of open space, facilities and parks, including Robinson Nature Center.

Community Engagement

Public Outreach Opportunities

To gather support and input for the plan, the Department led a multi-layered public outreach strategy as part of the 2017 LPPRP process. The plan engaged a broad range of constituents, not only through in-person public events, but also through presence at community events, a statistically-valid phone survey, online comment forms, staff, stakeholder and similar provider interviews, focus group discussions, and presentations to the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board.

PUBLIC EVENTS

There were four public engagement events held over the course of the plan. The first engagement opportunity took place at GreenFest, an annual county festival focusing on sustainability. Over 220 festival attendees completed a survey about their usage of

parks and recreation offerings. In July, two public meetings were held at the Roger Carter Community Center and the North Laurel Community Center. Attendees at both locations submitted over 250 comments in the form of group discussions, activities, and one-on-one conversations. The last public engagement event was held in September at Department headquarters to discuss the draft plan. Approximately 30 community members attended this open house-style public meeting, which involved a presentation and small discussion groups around exhibit boards.



Summary of Events

Greenfest

220 Survey Participants

Online Comments

198 Responses

Community Survey (Statistically Valid Survey)

800 surveys, 95% confidence level

July/September Public Events

120 people attended three meetings

Over 250 written comments



GreenFest

(Top right) The first event was through GreenFest at the start of the planning process. Community members identified their favorite facilities and programs and offered suggestions for planning priorities.



July Public Events

(Top left and bottom) A total of four public events were held in the County to solicit community input for the plan. Participants in the July meeting offered thoughts for the future of the system.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

In May, the Department administered a phone survey to 800 households across the County to better understand user satisfaction and community needs. The statistically valid community survey captured responses from 3% of the county population with a 95% confidence level.

The results of the survey were very positive, 80% of survey respondents are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with parks, facilities and programs. An overwhelming majority are also satisfied with cleanliness and park maintenance, as 92% of household respondents agree that the Department’s assets are either always or sometimes clean and well maintained.

With regard to overall satisfaction, there were slight disparities in race and age. White residents reported higher levels of satisfaction than Hispanic residents, and the 25 to 34 age group reported lower levels of satisfaction than other age groups. Satisfaction is also directly related to income; while lower-income residents are not dissatisfied, satisfaction rates are 25 points lower than the highest-income residents.

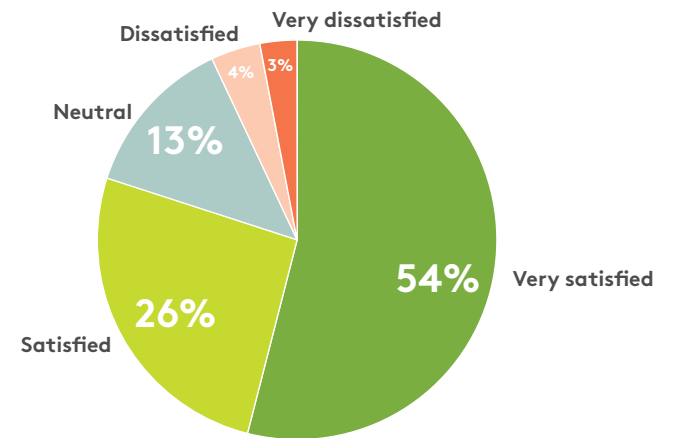
The survey reflects very good usage, with more than four residents out of ten saying they use a recreation facility or park at least weekly, with 35% saying they use a recreation facility or park weekly, and another 7% saying they do so daily.

Respondents were asked why they did not make more use of parks and trails and of recreation programming during the prior 12 months, and in both cases, lack of time was the key limiting factor. Thirty-five percent of residents cited lack of time as a main reason they did not make more use of Howard County parks and trails, and 28% cited lack of time as a main reason they did not make more use of recreation programming.

Other reasons were well back, with distance from home a barrier to park and trail usage for 6%, and no other single reason topping 3%.

As a barrier to recreational programs, lack of specific programs of interest to them was mentioned by 9%, lack of awareness by 8%, program costs by 7%, inconvenient scheduling by 5%, and distance from home by 4%.

Overall satisfaction



Frequency of usage



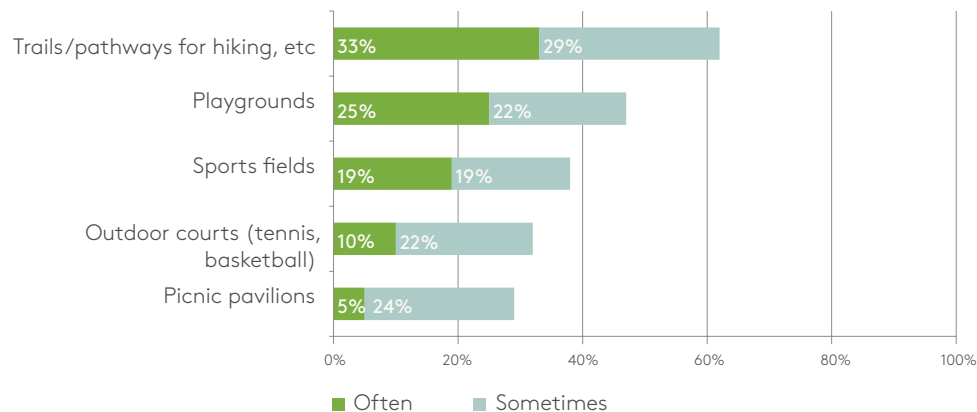
The top non-County organizations that residents had used for recreation activities were the Columbia Association or homeowners' associations (17%), private gyms (10%), YMCA (6%), and youth sports organizations (5%).

When asked what new programs and facilities the County should concentrate on providing, only one-third of residents had specific suggestions. Five percent suggested more classes and programs, 4% wanted better access to aquatic facilities, 3% mentioned improved sports fields or sports programs, with other responses registering at very low levels. Nearly two-thirds (65%) had no specific suggestions for change.

Despite their lack of specificity about new programs and facilities, there is resounding support among residents for dedicating more County resources to improving the park, recreation, and open space system in Howard County. Eighty-five percent of residents support dedicating more resources to this priority, with nearly half of residents (47%) strongly supporting this.

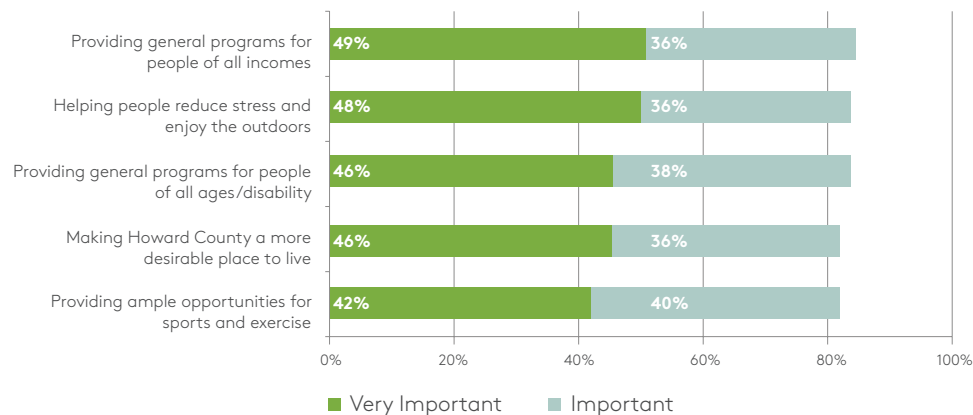
Most popular offerings

In the past year, have you used these County Recreation and Parks offerings often, sometimes, seldom, or never?



Public priorities

People appreciate different things about having a good system of recreation facilities and parks. How important are each of these things to you personally?



ONE HOWARD

The vision for Howard County's recreation and parks system predicated on the achievements of the system in providing the best programs and services for the community that allow the County to focus on creating a vibrant future. It complements the Department's vision, mission and core values, and does not seek to replace the existing vision. Recreation and parks, natural resources and agriculture are integral to the County's

history and legacy, recent successes within the system, and future opportunities for innovation and growth. The vision is a holistic approach to achieving these goals; it maintains the dense, neighborhood features of the eastern communities and seeks to preserve undeveloped lands in the west, but also encourages synergies between the urban and rural to create One Howard.



Guiding Principles

The Plan identifies three guiding principles which incorporate both County and State goals and underline recommendations for future potential capital improvements that align with those goals. Per state guidelines, the three guiding principles also respond to the three themes of the LPPRP; parks and recreation, natural resource conservation and agricultural land preservation. These principles are as follows:

- » Maintaining excellence and driving innovation
- » Enhancing the health and resilience of natural and human systems and cultural heritage
- » Serving as land stewards

Within the LPPRP document, the three principles are presented as individual chapters that identify state and county goals that are both aspirational and forward thinking. Those goals are supported by six recommendations that are grounded in both opportunities for the County system and individual sites; recreation, ecology, placemaking, connectivity, education, and communication and are shown at right.



RECREATION



ECOLOGY



PLACEMAKING



CONNECTIVITY



EDUCATION



COMMUNICATION

MAINTAINING EXCELLENCE AND DRIVING INNOVATION

Enhance placemaking and strive for equity in existing and future recreation and parks amenities.

The County is widely recognized for their high quality parks and open spaces and diverse recreation amenities that attract both residents and visitors. Of the County's 9,378 acres of open space, the Department maintains 5,750 acres of programmable park space, as well as 25 historic sites and eight facilities for recreation or educational purposes. In addition to parks and facilities, the Department offers more than 1,700 programs catering to a range of ages and abilities. Despite all of the amenities and offerings, the true success of this recreation and park system is rooted in the Department's constant effort to align

programs and services with community need, as well as to adapt the system to future trends. In addition to this challenging balance, the Department is committed to driving innovation internally and within the greater industry of recreation and parks.

Maintaining excellence and driving innovation takes advantage of the strides made in recreation programming and open space offerings and proposes a multi-faceted approach to health and wellness; supporting the mental, physical, social and emotional well-being of the diverse Howard County community.

Recommendation Key



Recreation



Ecology



Placemaking



Connectivity



Education



Communication



PLACEMAKING

Stay at the forefront of trends in recreation and park facilities, recreation programs and park design.



EDUCATION

Integrate a multi-faceted approach to health and wellness, supporting the mental, physical, social and emotional well-being of the diverse community.



ECOLOGY

Provide sustainable parks, open spaces and recreation facilities that are safe and secure for users of all ages and backgrounds.



RECREATION

Factor in diversity by providing a range of recreation programs, inclusive park and facility design and cultural awareness.



VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

Build partnerships within County government and across the County to efficiently share resources.



CONNECTIVITY

Improve connectivity to recreation and park resources through all modes of travel.

ENHANCING THE HEALTH AND RESILIENCE OF NATURAL AND HUMAN SYSTEMS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Promote resilience, cultural and environmental health along within open spaces and along ecological and riparian corridors.

Defined by the Patapsco River to the north and the Patuxent River to the south, both of which drain into the Chesapeake Bay, the County plays a significant role in the region's natural resource system. Approximately three-quarters of the county drains to the Patuxent River, while the remaining one-quarter drains to the Patapsco River.

The county's rich and diverse natural resource system consists of stream valleys, forested land, wetlands, farmland, wildlife habitats, mineral resources and several other elements. Many of these open space lands are located adjacent to the Patuxent and Patapsco River are owned by the State of Maryland. Together, the County and State work to protect this system that generates valuable ecosystem services for the region. Within the County, the Department acknowledges the significant

role of natural resources within the county and leads several programs and initiatives working to preserve the environment and its resources for future generations.

The LPPRP is intended to guide decisions about investments in park improvements and development and recreation programs over the next ten years, and beyond. Enhancing the health and resilience of natural and human systems is a central theme to the Department's role as a key steward in conserving and protecting open space and natural resources in the County. The goals and recommendations of this principle are dedicated to strengthening connectivity, identifying and protecting natural open spaces and waterways, and leveraging the already robust programming in support of a healthy natural system.

Recommendation Key



Recreation



Ecology



Placemaking



Connectivity



Education



Communication



PLACEMAKING

Reflect Howard County's natural heritage while making open space a priority equal to its impact on the quality of life for future generations.



EDUCATION

Encourage individual efforts to enhance biodiversity and environmental stewardship beyond park boundaries.



ECOLOGY

Protect and restore biodiversity through habitat improvements and restoration efforts.



VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

Share and promote the departments numerous accomplishments.

Build sustainability goals into operational and departmental culture and functions.



CONNECTIVITY

Connect protected natural areas and park spaces in a comprehensive network.



SERVING AS LAND STEWARDS

Facilitate enhanced connections between agricultural and historic heritage, natural systems and the Howard County community.

Tied to the county's history, farmland serves as one of the top industries within the county and represents 25% of all land uses. Similarly at the state level, agriculture serves as the single largest land use, representing 32% of all land or over two million acres. This industry employs approximately 350,000 individuals across the state, making it the largest commercial industry in Maryland.

Despite their contribution to the state's economy, agricultural lands are particularly susceptible to growth pressure since land that is well suited for agricultural use is most often also well-suited for development. Agricultural preservation in Howard County targets prime land that is suitable for agricultural, horticultural, or silvicultural use and is mostly located in the rural western portion of the County. In addition to providing stability to the agricultural economy and land resource base, agricultural land preservation helps

to maintain a rural character, scenic vistas, and habitat, all of which are important components of Howard County's natural environment. The Department's role in agricultural land preservation includes assists the Department of Planning and Zoning in leasing park land to farmers, educational programs and agricultural easements with landowners. In recent years, the County has made great strides in acquiring easements in the western portion of the county.

Serving as land stewards seeks to leverage agricultural preservation in unconventional ways. The principle presents opportunities for educating the public on the values and benefits of the County's agricultural legacy and economy. It also highlights efforts and opportunities to enhance open space connections with other undeveloped land and conservation easements to reinforce wildlife corridors through the County.

Recommendation Key



Recreation



Ecology



Placemaking



Connectivity



Education



Communication



RECREATION

Connect agricultural heritage to its recreational goals, by incorporating community gardens, healthy eating resources, and educational programs.



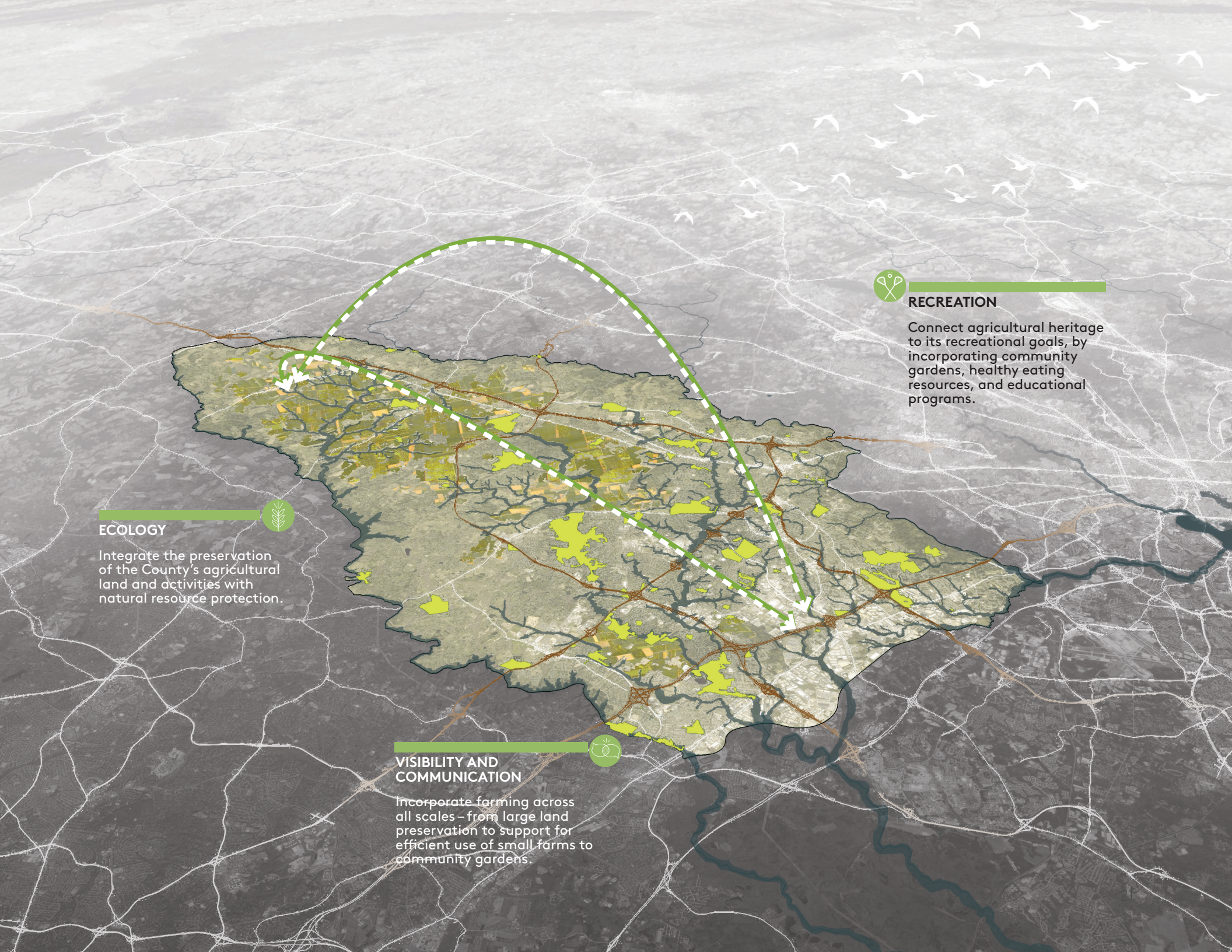
ECOLOGY

Integrate the preservation of the County's agricultural land and activities with natural resource protection.



VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

Incorporate farming across all scales – from large land preservation to support for efficient use of small farms to community gardens.



Implementation

What does the Recreation and Parks system look like?

FIRST STEPS

The Plan requires committed community engagement and the investment of citizens, state and local governments, and private partners to successfully implement the ambitious goals and strategies set out by the vision. A critical first step in implementation will be to leverage existing partnerships and cultivate new collaborative relationships with groups invested in the future of the system, so as to ensure that funding aligns with community needs and the Plan's guiding principles. The implementation process will also involve prioritizing improvements based on the Plan's evaluation of the system's existing assets, needs, accessibility, and community demands, as well as future trends within the industry.

The Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks is a steward of the County's rich and diverse recreation and

parks, natural resources and agricultural systems. The goals and vision of this plan support an underlying philosophy to preserve its valuable agricultural legacy, enhance natural systems and watersheds and drive innovative programming and recreation spaces.

CONCLUSION

The Plan goals and recommendations celebrate the strides Howard County has made over the last five years in creating and maintaining strong programs and spaces and enhancing the benefits of open space in support of high quality of life for the community. The vision reflects aspirations for balancing growth and the preservation of historic and natural assets with intensive investment in access to amenities for the county's diverse communities.



Driving Innovation

The Plan implementation process will prioritize improvements based on the evaluation of the system's existing assets, needs, accessibility and community demands.



Schooley Mill Park

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Recreation and parks, natural resources and agriculture are integral to the County's history and legacy, recent successes within the system, and future opportunities for innovation and growth.

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