



Howard County

Recreation & Parks

SUBJECT: *Council Resolution to Adopt the 2022 Howard County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan*

TO: Lonnie Robbins
Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: A. Raul Delorme, Director
Department of Recreation and Parks

DATE: June 22, 2022

The Department of Recreation and Parks has been designated the coordinator for the preparation of testimony and fiscal impacts related to the above-referenced Council Resolution to adopt the 2022 Howard County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP).

The LPPRP is required under Section 5-905(b)(2) of the Natural Resources Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. Each local jurisdiction must have an approved LPPRP, updated every five years, in order to qualify for Maryland Program Open Space grant funding, a State program to fund the acquisition and development of State and local parks.

The Department of Recreation and Parks and our consultant, Agency L+P, prepared the LPPRP with public input via the following methods:

1. Public Engagement Events

The LPPRP process included three public engagement events. On September 22, 2021, Agency L+P staff presented the LPPRP process at an advertised special meeting of the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board at the Meadowbrook Athletic Complex. This presentation included opportunities for attendees to speak with Department and consultant staff about their parks and programming use and needs as well as utilize engagement resources to provide written feedback. Several members of the public participated and shared their visions for the plan effort. On September 26, 2021, Agency L+P staff attended the Robinson Nature Center 10th Anniversary Open House where they spoke with hundreds of attendees to build awareness of the plan and obtain feedback around vision boards. On November 13, 2021, Agency L+P staff held a pop-up event at Centennial Park to interact with park patrons through discussion along with interactive banners and other resources to get input on the goals and initial actions. Dozens of participants weighed in on additional improvements that could be made to the County's system of preserved lands, leisure services, and park amenities. Activities in all events facilitated youth engagement as well and included prompts like "Design your future park".

2. Statistically Valid Survey

In July 2021, Agency L+P's survey consultant, ETC Institute, administered a statistically valid survey of County residents to understand user satisfaction, barriers to access, and community

captured responses from over two percent of the County population with a 95 percent confidence level. This high degree of confidence ensured that the survey captured a snapshot of the County's diverse population across geographic area, income, race, age, and other factors.

3. Staff Interviews

The consultant team conducted various meetings and interview sessions with employees who have direct contact with customers and leadership staff involved in managing programs and services. Staff shared insight on the Department's overall strengths and areas for improvement.

4. Focus Groups

Agency L+P coordinated several focus and technical group sessions throughout the course of the LPPRP process to cover topics relating to land conservation, agriculture, historical resources, and a variety of programming issues.

5. Online Engagement

County and Agency L+P staff recognized that COVID-19 precautions and wariness meant that public engagement would be more challenging. There was a clear need to engage the public where it was convenient and safe for participation. Agency L+P developed a Linktree virtual survey based on key questions from the statistically valid survey. This virtual survey was promoted through social media, the County website, the Ball Bulletin, the Department's activity guide, cooperation with HCPSS, and signage placed in each of the Department's parks and centers. The virtual survey received over 900 views and 318 responses.

6. Advisory Board Presentations

The consult team presented to the eight-member Recreation and Parks Advisory Board on two separate occasions to get feedback and general guidance during the drafting and refinement phases of the LPPRP. Presentations to the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board were advertised in three local newspapers for two consecutive weeks prior to each meeting. The County's website and social media were also utilized to inform the public of these meetings.

7. Coordination with HoCo by Design

Throughout the development of the LPPRP, Department and Agency L+P staff consulted with staff in the Department of Planning and Zoning to consider and incorporate related public feedback gathered during the HoCo by Design effort to ensure consistency between the General Plan and LPPRP.

The LPPRP is compatible with Plan Howard 2030 and has been reviewed by the Department of Planning and Zoning for compatibility with numerous other plans prepared by the County in the past ten years. The LPPRP has been reviewed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) for compatibility with all State plans, regulations, and guidelines. The County and the consultant team submitted a draft of the LPPRP to MDNR and MDP in December 2021, incorporated recommendations from the State in March 2022, and have now presented the current version of the LPPRP to the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board and the Howard County Planning Board without additional requests for changes. Further State changes are not anticipated but remain a possibility.

Fiscal Impact

Adoption of the 2022 Howard County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP) is a prerequisite for Howard County to qualify for millions of dollars in Maryland Program Open Space (POS) grant funds for the acquisition and development of parkland over the next 5 years. Annual apportionments of POS funding vary and are budgeted in the Department of Recreation and Parks' capital projects. Land acquisition projects funded with POS require no match. Park improvement projects funded with POS require a 10-25% match. The Capital Improvement Plan within the LPPRP is based on the Council-approved FY2023 Capital Budget. Impacts to the Operating Budget over the next 5 years are not known or defined. The LPPRP primarily proposes actions that will revise planning, policies, and practices by DRP and with other agencies that alters programs and daily operations by DRP without expanding position, contractual service, and supply needs. Any immediate or unanticipated increase in expenditures as a result of the LPPRP or the DRP FY25-FY29 Strategic Plan that will be developed based on the LPPRP will have to be absorbed within DRP's self-sustaining fund, aka the Recreation and Parks Fund. The one area of expansion of full-time staff specified within the LPPRP, which was the expansion of Department of Recreation and Parks marketing staff, happened in FY22 during the development of the LPPRP.