

Chapter Fifteen:

Parks

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Goal

Provide a coordinated and comprehensive system of public and private parks, recreational facilities and programs, and open space that will meet the active and passive recreational needs of all citizens of the County and enhance community design, identity, and vitality

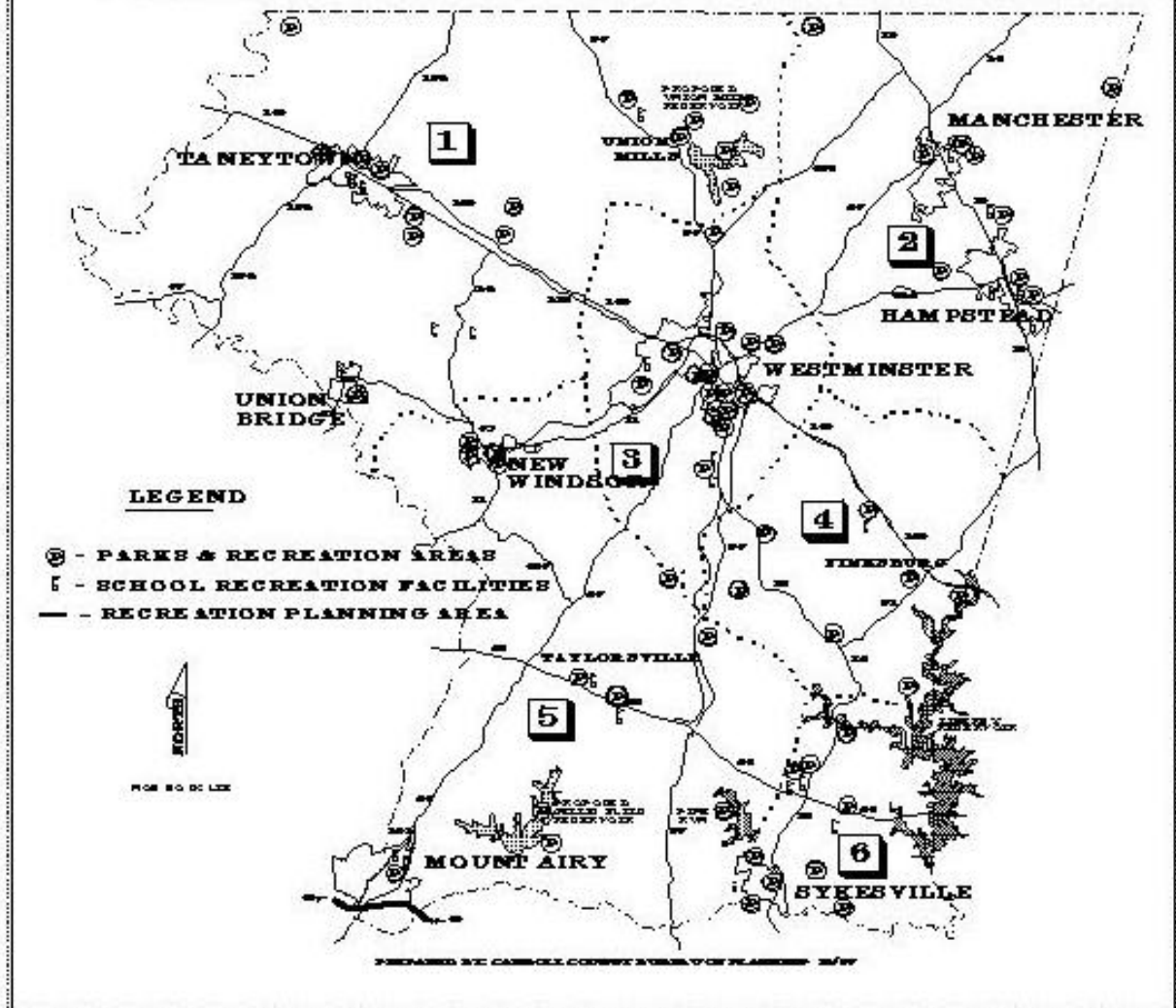
The Significance to Carroll County

Carroll County has approximately 12,177 acres of public lands which are used for recreation to serve its population of 155,338. These recreation areas range from scenic, natural places, such as Piney Run Park and the land around Liberty Reservoir, to high activity parks such as Taneytown Memorial Park. Included in these over 12,000 acres are school sites whose playing fields are used by the entire community, reservoir areas that abound with hiking, fishing, and other recreational opportunities, state park lands in the County, and municipal parks. With all of these opportunities available, the County has an average of .078 acres of publicly-owned park land or open space per person (or 78 acres of park land per 1,000 people).

Many of the acres considered park land or open space are either existing or proposed school sites or existing or planned public water supply reservoirs, the acreage around which is protected to ensure good water quality. It is essential in areas that must rely upon surface water as their main water supply that reservoir sites be planned in advance of their need and that they be well-protected after their creation. Fortunately, this need has created the opportunity to develop low-impact recreational facilities such as boating areas, hiking trails, picnic areas, and bridal paths on the land surrounding the reservoirs. A similar benefit has been derived from school properties, which by their nature include playing fields and other recreational areas. The County's citizens often are able to benefit from and use these sites as part of a joint use agreement with the Board of Education.

A report, entitled the "Carroll County Greenways, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Facilities Technical Report," was prepared by the County in 1994 and outlines a recommendation for creating a countywide trail system. The trails system, if implemented, would facilitate better access to existing and future recreation facilities while concurrently decreasing the impact on the local roadway network.

CARROLL COUNTY, MARYLAND EXISTING PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS



There are two major sport complexes with multiple ballfields in the County, as well as numerous fields and tot lots in smaller parks around the County. These recreational facilities provide additional benefits as well. These include benefits to the community such as safe and convenient play areas for children, aesthetically pleasing green space that relieves the harshness of the built environment, and healthful means of exercise for all citizens. Recreational areas function as local landmarks, imparting a sense of community identity through design, location, and the creation of places where neighbors can gather. The natural environment also benefits from many park areas, which provide plants with habitat and animals with food and shelter when left in a fairly natural state. The advantages in terms of water quality in and around the reservoir areas have already been mentioned but cannot be understated.

The Challenge to Carroll County

Despite the fact that the County land holdings currently exceed the acres considered by the State to be adequate for recreation, it should not be assumed the needs for park land is adequate for the future. The need for recreational facilities and open space cannot be estimated simply on an acre per person basis. Rather, it must be addressed through a comprehensive and frequent review of the County's demographics and the types of facilities that these statistics and the local recreation councils indicate as needed. For example, it will not help to have over 500 miles of hiking trails if there are not enough baseball fields to serve the current and projected members of the Little League teams. Each community may have its own individual and specific needs that are not addressed through the mere provision of a certain number of acres.

In the future, as the face of the County changes so will its needs for recreation areas and open space. The County should plan for and provide its citizens with a network of parks, recreation areas, and open space that serve the needs of the entire population to the greatest extent possible. This will require improvements and additions to the existing network.

The majority of funding for parks and recreation facilities comes from Program Open Space (POS) and impact fees. Given the many services for which residents would like to see a level of service increase, parks often suffer when competing against schools, police, and other similar services for limited funds.

The Choice: Goals, Policies, Thresholds, & Recommendations

Goal

Provide a coordinated and comprehensive system of public and private parks, recreational facilities and programs, and open space that will meet the active and passive recreational needs of all citizenry of the County and enhance community design, identity, and vitality

Policies

- A. The majority of additional park facilities will be funded through impact fees, POS funds, and other non-General Fund sources.
- B. The Planning Commission may consider the location and development of community parks to be an integral part of CPA plan updates.

Recommendations

- A. Locate designated open space contiguous to existing or proposed open space on adjoining development in order to establish scenic greenways, whenever possible.
- B. Encourage the creation of local land trusts for the purpose of accepting non-agricultural easements for recreation and open space and acquiring land for open space.
- C. Develop thresholds for recreational uses as part of the update to the *Carroll County Parks and Land Preservation Plan*.
- D. Periodically update the *Greenways, Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Technical Report*.
- E. Evaluate the existing impact fee structure for parks to see if the fee is adequate to cover the cost of park facility needs attributable to new development.

COMMUNITY VIABILITY THRESHOLD 1

A MINIMUM OF 30 ACRES OF PUBLIC RECREATION AREA PER 1,000 COUNTY RESIDENTS WILL BE MAINTAINED.

The current State goal for recreation land is to maintain a minimum of 30 acres per 1,000 residents. By supporting the State goal, the County will retain its eligibility for POS funds. Since the County currently exceeds the 30 acres threshold, there is room for flexibility to examine specific recreational needs not being met. The minimum acreage is not set higher to help prevent recreational facilities from competing with such higher priority facilities as schools and roads for improvements funding. Recreational opportunities are, however, recognized for their significant contribution to the quality of life in Carroll County.

Recommendations

- A. As the Union Mills and Gillis Falls areas develop for recreational uses, maintain certain areas specifically for low-impact recreation to ensure that this type of recreation remains available, to reduce the cost of park development, and to help preserve some of the County's natural and wooded areas.
- B. Designate public and private recreation areas countywide that meet the projected needs of the local and County populations.

COMMUNITY VIABILITY THRESHOLD 2

INCREASE PEDESTRIAN, BICYCLE, AND EQUESTRIAN FACILITIES BY 5 MILES OR MORE PER YEAR, OR AN AVERAGE THAT PRODUCES 110 MILES OF ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS BY 2020.

Access to the recreational opportunities available to Carroll County citizens is mostly achieved via the automobile. One alternative to making recreation consumers

drive to their destinations is the provision of a Countywide trail system which would interconnect the recreational facilities present in the County while also connecting towns, neighborhoods, shopping areas, and schools. This threshold is included partially because the majority of the funding would likely not come from the General Fund. However, a reasonable and realistic mileage for yearly construction was chosen.

Recommendations

- A. Periodically update the *Greenways, Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Technical Report* to encourage recreational and commuter trips along alternative transportation corridors.
- Create an easement mechanism for designating segments of identified greenway corridors as protected open space on any parcels undergoing development review.
 - Create an easement mechanism for voluntary donation of segments of identified greenway corridors.
- B. Seek non-county (state/federal) funds for construction of greenway corridor trails.
- C. Explore the use of POS or other funds for fee simple or easement purchases of segments of identified greenway corridors.
- D. Give first priority to connection of parks and school facilities with greenway corridors to improve access and to enhance their use as alternative transportation facilities.

Fiscal Impact to the County

The impact fee collected for Parks (\$547 per single-family house) and POS funds (\$680,000 in 1997) accruing to the County from the State transfer tax should help to fund the future park needs in the County. The County currently has sufficient acreage to meet the 30 acres per thousand population until the year 2020, but as the recommendations recognize, additional park development will be needed to assure facilities are available in the growth areas.

As is the case with other recreation facilities, the trail system would be funded primarily by POS and impact fees. Additionally, because the trail system also benefits the overall transportation system, an innovative use of the Maryland Department of Transportation funding programs can be explored.