

CHAPTER 6: PARKS, TRAILS, AND OPEN SPACE

Parks, trails, and open spaces enhance the quality of community life by offering visual relief from the built environment, a sense of place, an opportunity to connect with nature, and space to gather, play, and socialize. In addition, parkland contributes to the natural environment by providing wildlife habitat, improving air quality, and protecting water quality.

Successful community design is anchored by a well-functioning open space network, which includes parks, trails, and open space, as well as the public realm. The public realm is broadly defined as those spaces where civic interaction can occur, such as publicly owned parks, trails, plazas, streets, and sidewalks. It also includes privately owned, publicly accessible spaces, like plazas and seating areas adjacent to residential, commercial, and institutional buildings. Parks also help to protect cultural resources, such as historic buildings or archaeological sites.

POLICY GUIDANCE AND HIERARCHY FOR PARKS, TRAILS, AND OPEN SPACE

Park Planning in Montgomery County is principally guided by the following key planning documents.

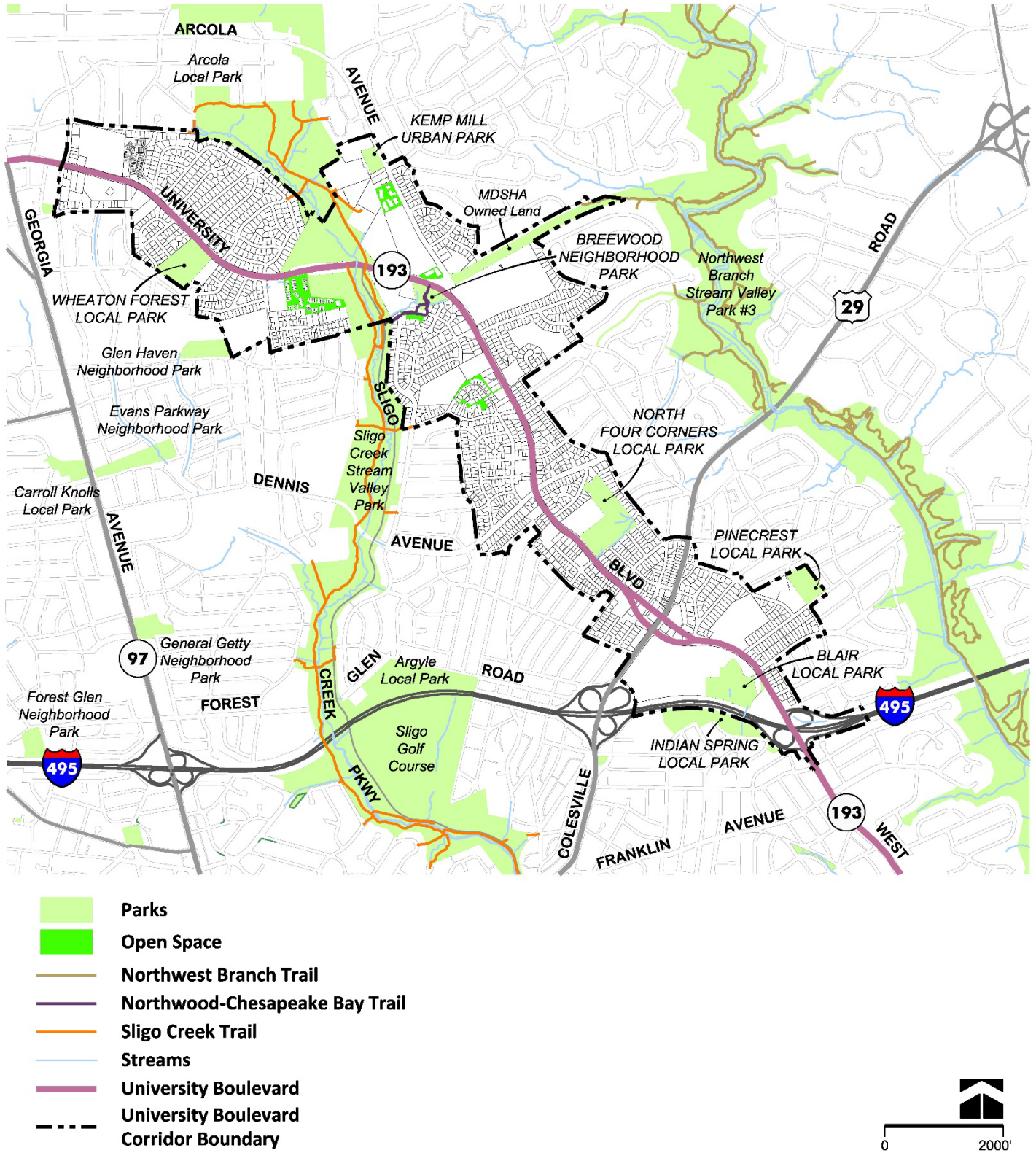
- *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, the County's General Plan update
- The 2022 *Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan*, which is Montgomery Parks' policy plan that focuses on how the parks and recreation systems should be designed to meet the needs of a growing population
- 2018 *Energized Public Spaces (EPS) Functional Master Plan*, which analyzes the supply and demand of active, social, and contemplative experiences in urbanizing areas of the county.

As shown in Figure 60, the Plan area is generally well-served by seven existing M-NCPPC parks managed and operated by the M-NCPPC Montgomery County Department of Parks (Montgomery Parks), plus a strip of land owned and maintained by the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) adjacent to Northwood High School, which functions as parkland from a user perspective.

West to east, these parks are Wheaton Forest Local Park, Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park, Breewood Neighborhood Park, Kemp Mill Urban Park, MDOT SHA land adjacent to Northwood High School, North Four Corners Local Park, Blair Local Park, and Pinecrest Local Park.

Collectively, these parks offer four diamond athletic fields, four rectangular athletic fields, five playgrounds, three basketball courts, six tennis courts, one picnic shelter, and one park activity building, which is under long-term lease and not generally available for public use. The Plan area also includes a portion of Sligo Creek Parkway that is part of the Open Parkways Program, which closes the parkway to motor vehicles and opens it to pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized users; Sligo Creek Trail, which runs between Wheaton Regional Park and the Montgomery–Prince George's County line, where it continues downstream along the creek; and the Northwood Chesapeake Bay Trail, which links Sligo Creek Trail with the Northwest Branch Trail. These trails are all part of the larger regional Anacostia Tributary Trail System.

Figure 60: Parks and Open Space



PARK PLANNING ANALYSIS

The parks located within and near the University Boulevard Corridor Plan area are adequate for urbanizing areas, as defined by the PROS Plan. For example, there are several parks within or adjacent to the Plan Area that fulfill the need for active recreation destinations, as they provide opportunities for softball and baseball, basketball, soccer, picnicking, and playgrounds. This Plan area also includes a significant regional trail—Sligo Creek Trail—that enhances connectivity between parks and open spaces. The Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park also offers opportunities for nature-based recreation. The Level of Service and EPS analysis for this area does identify several park and recreation needs, including soccer courts.

During community outreach and engagement, planners heard from the community that Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park is highly valued and intensely used. Planners also heard that the following improvements and recreational uses are most desired for parks in the Plan area.

- Picnic shelters
- Soccer courts
- Athletic fields
- Playgrounds

PUBLIC PARKS RECOMMENDATIONS

This Plan does not recommend any new public parks. While this Plan area is generally well served by parks and trails, there are opportunities to enhance existing parks, including providing new access points and new facilities or amenities that are needed in this area of the county. The following recommendations are for existing M-NCPPC parks in the Plan area, which will enhance, expand, or otherwise improve these parks.

WHEATON FOREST LOCAL PARK

- Improve pedestrian connections from the adjacent Pomander Court property when it redevelops.
- Consistent with recommendations elsewhere in the county, when properties adjacent to parks redevelop, in lieu of on-site open space require a financial contribution from this property owner for park improvements in or near the Plan area at the time of development.
- Redevelopment of adjacent properties should relate to and engage the park and ensure that park edges are attractive. For example, do not locate parking lots or dumpsters immediately adjacent to the park.
- Investigate options and opportunities to create more shade for park users and especially for athletic field spectators.
- Consolidate the two entrances to the parking lot into a single entrance in accordance with other recommendations and goals of the Plan related to increased pedestrian safety and comfort along University Boulevard.



Wheaton Forest Local Park Picnic Shelter

- Create a paved trail loop in the park that goes around the athletic fields and creates a clearer pedestrian and bicycle connection through the park from the residential neighborhoods to the south to University Boulevard.

SLIGO CREEK STREAM VALLEY PARK

- When the Northwood Presbyterian Church property redevelops, improve public bicycle and pedestrian access and connection between University Boulevard and the Sligo Creek Trail.
 - The Northwood Chesapeake Bay Trail passes through the Sligo Creek Stream Valley Park and Breewood Neighborhood Park, as well as unimproved portions of right-of-way for Breewood Road and Tenbrook Drive, to connect Sligo Creek Trail to University Boulevard. This Plan recommends that management of the unimproved portions of the right-of-way be transferred to Montgomery Parks by the appropriate mechanism to consolidate management and maintenance of the trail by Montgomery Parks and ensure permanent protection of the property and trail route as parkland.
- Relocate the playground between Sligo Creek Parkway and Sligo Creek just south of University Boulevard out of the floodplain.
- Continue to treat and improve stormwater discharge from non-parkland sources into Sligo Creek and its tributaries.
- Improve fish passage in Sligo Creek by reconnecting the stream under University Boulevard.
- Improve the Sligo Creek Trail entrance at Kemp Mill Shopping Center. Redevelopment of the adjacent Kemp Mill Shopping Center property should provide improvements at this location, including improvements that meaningfully connect the privately owned public space, Kemp Mill Urban Park, and Sligo Creek Trail through new street and trail connections, placemaking, and wayfinding.
- Create a paved trail connection for people walking, biking, and rolling between Wheaton Lane and the Sligo Creek Trail.



Sligo Creek Open Parkway

MDOT SHA LAND AND THE NORTHWOOD CHESAPEAKE BAY TRAIL

- The Northwood Chesapeake Bay Trail passes through a strip of land owned by MDOT SHA adjacent to the north side of Northwood High School (Parcel Tax ID 980570). This Plan recommends that this property and the adjoining MDOT SHA property that contains the trail and extends beyond the Plan area (Parcel Tax ID 980626) be conveyed by MDOT SHA to M-NCPPC as soon as possible to consolidate management and maintenance of the trail by Montgomery Parks and ensure permanent protection of the property and trail route as parkland.

KEMP MILL URBAN PARK

- M-NCPPC owns the property containing the driveway entrance to the adjacent Kemp Mill Shopping Center. If the shopping center property is redeveloped, the property owners should explore opportunities to exchange the M-NCPPC-owned properties for property of an equal or greater size (approximately 20,000 square feet), while maintaining access to the shopping center site, to augment the functionality of Kemp Mill Urban Park.
- If the shopping center redevelops, create a new street with pedestrian and bicycle facilities to provide a connection between the park and the Sligo Creek Trail.



Kemp Mill Urban Park

NORTH FOUR CORNERS LOCAL PARK

- Improve pedestrian connection from the adjacent HOC property when it redevelops. If the redevelopment provides an upgraded, publicly accessible connection on-site, it may be factored into the financial contribution for parks.
- Consistent with recommendations for redevelopment of properties adjacent to parks elsewhere in the county and Section 59-6.3.6.C of the Zoning Ordinance, require a financial contribution from this property owner for park improvements in or near the Plan area instead of requiring open space on-site at the time of redevelopment. If the project provides 25% or more MPDUs that receive either an exemption or discount from development impact taxes, the contribution may be reduced proportionally.
- Redevelopment of adjacent properties should relate to and engage the park and ensure that park edges are attractive. For example, do not locate parking lots or dumpsters immediately adjacent to the park.
- Investigate options and opportunities to create more shade for park users and especially for athletic field spectators.
- Engage residents and community stakeholders to identify an appropriate long-term lease for the currently vacant park activity building, one that complements the park and addresses community needs and interests.

PINECREST LOCAL PARK

- Add interpretive signs to educate visitors about the historic Pinecrest Recreation Center.

NEW OPEN SPACE

- This Plan recommends new publicly accessible open spaces on key properties, such as WTOP and Safeway, which may redevelop in the future. These new privately-owned, public spaces will contribute to creating a livable environment and complete communities associated with new development.