

Written Testimony on the Draft 2012 PROS Plan  
(Item 2 on Planning Board's May 24, 2012 agenda)  
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At the May 2012 Members' meeting, the Federation passed a resolution authorizing transmittal of its concerns about the draft 2012 PROS plan.

First, however, I would like to commend the new definition of urban parks which calls for "more green space than paved surface" (including urban wooded areas) and "Predominantly flexible space for community gatherings and festivals, as well as active and passive recreation activities, that may include Frisbee, pickup sports, picnicking, skateboarding, community gardens, etc."

Providing unprogrammed natural areas within walking distance in high-density communities is crucial for serving these communities as well as preserving and enhancing ecosystem services within the built environment. This is something residents in highly-developed portions of the County have been advocating for years. (In fact, in all recent statistically valid countywide surveys citizens countywide have given natural areas a high priority.) Now on to the concerns.

Concern 1: Co-Location of Facilities - Although guidance from the *Vision 2030 Strategic Plan* recommends the co-location of facilities of two or more public agencies, the PROS plan envisions no co-located facilities. Both Parks and the Recreation Department should be actively exploring possibilities for co-location and pro-actively developing the necessary interagency agreements in preparation for taking advantage of co-location opportunities.

Like the concept of residential co-housing communities, sharing common areas between agencies allows for smaller individual building footprints and thus saves both capital and maintenance expenses. Also, when facilities don't need to be as massive, they are easier to site in developed areas where land is expensive and scarce, impervious cover is already too high, and remaining natural areas are far too precious to lose.

Indeed, given the planned footprint of the new aquatic / community recreation center design (the building alone occupies over two and a half acres with roughly another two and half acres of impervious surface for the five hundred car parking lot, hard surface court games, etc.) it's hard to see how it will be possible to site such a facility anywhere in the down county.

By contrast, most of Prince George's County recreational facilities are co-located. For example, community recreation centers are often co-located with schools. Prince George's County Parks and Recreation (part of the Maryland-National Capital Park and

Planning Commission) and Prince George's County Public Schools have an agreement which governs management of the joint facilities. Surely Montgomery County could do as well.

In addition to saving money, co-location with schools means facilities are conveniently distributed within neighborhoods around the County, thus promoting walking over driving. Users also benefit from "one-stop shopping" when (for example) a parent can work out while their child attends team practice or rehearses the school play.

Concern 2: Ballfield Needs Assessment Based on Athletic Field Areas - The athletic field areas used in the PROS plan are meaningless. They bear no relation to field usage patterns, permitting, management, maintenance, or communities. They are merely arbitrary agglomerations of smaller demographic areas. Yet they have been used in needs assessment and planning as if they were geographical islands. (For example, an overabundance of fields in one area was not counted against the shortage of fields in an adjacent area).

The Baltimore County PROS plan, by contrast, uses six geographic areas which are made up of 41 individual park and recreation council areas. The park and recreation council areas are the unified service delivery areas for programming at County schools, parks, and recreation venues. Thus needs assessment and planning at the larger scale are integrated with service delivery, management, and community involvement at the local scale.

We would like to suggest that, in future, ballfield needs estimates be based on a demographic unit that has some recognized meaning. For example, using council districts would at least clarify the demographic basis of the unit. Parks staff has indicated that changing the athletic field areas would hamper their ability to compare current and past planning efforts. However, it would be a simple matter to "re-compile" the old areas into the new format.

Concern 3: Continuing to Use the 2005 Ballfield Needs Estimates - The proposed *Athletic Field Study* is long overdue. The 2005 needs estimate methodology was highly flawed, and in any event, much has changed since 2005. However, since these needs *estimates* are cited as *indisputable needs* in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process, continuing to use the 2005 estimates could potentially waste large amounts of taxpayers' money.

Therefore, the current CIP should be adjusted accordingly. It makes sense to suspend the construction of new ballfields that were not initiated in response to community requests until the study is completed and new needs estimates have been thoroughly vetted in a public process. In other words, suspend those projects which are fundamentally based on the 2005 needs estimates while allowing projects for which there is an actual documented need to proceed.