

"Federation Corner" column
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Bulldozers poised to destroy North Four Corners meadow

by Carole Ann Barth
MCCF President

Will this be the last spring in the Rachel Carson Meadow? The last time to see the delicate fringe of the daisy fleabane flowers or to smell the heavenly scent of the black locust blossoms? The last leaf-out for the 190-year old walnut tree?

As I said at the April Civic Federation meeting, the Montgomery County Parks Department is proceeding with its plan to chop down most of the trees, level the rolling hills, fill in the valleys, and convert this six acre green oasis into a soccer field and 50 car parking lot. At the same time, the park's existing youth soccer field would be converted to a "natural area" (translation: a lawn).

If Parks succeeds in their goal, the end result after spending roughly \$6 million will be lost green space and no additional soccer fields gained. This is the opposite of a win-win outcome. It is lose-lose. Silver Spring and Takoma Park residents will lose a very well-loved and well-used green space. Soccer players will lose as well, because the money budgeted to build this single field could instead have renovated 11 fields.

This is why the project has been opposed by the Civic Federation, the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board, all of the Four Corners civic associations, residents of the Oaks Independent Living Facility, over 600 neighborhood residents who signed a petition, the Takoma Soccer League Commissioner, and many more individual citizens.

Unswayed by this opposition, the Parks Department requested \$4.2 million dollars in state Program Open Space (POS) funding for this project. The District 19 State Delegation was successful in blocking this use of POS money. However, as money is fungible, Parks has simply re-allocated the POS funding to other projects and taken the money from those projects to fund the soccer field.

Nonetheless, despite having been ignored, patronized, and disrespected for 12 years, the Northwood Four Corners community has not given up. We're still pursuing our vision of a win-win solution. Our vision includes a flexible, multi-use park with active and passive amenities for all ages, designed in a way which showcases and enhances the site's natural resources. Our vision also includes a five point plan for increasing the number of playable adult soccer fields in Silver Spring and Takoma Park.

On Sunday, June 2nd, we will again gather for Rachel Carson Meadowfest: Celebrating a Sense of Wonder in North Four Corners Park. This year's event will include a performance by Ocean Orchestra, as well as a special visit from the Green Man and Green Woman. Come join us for the festival and join us in our effort to save the meadow. For more details, please visit the Northwood-Four Corners Civic Association website at www.nfcca.org.

NOTE: the program for the MCCF meeting on Monday, May 13 will feature Brooke Farquhar from Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning. Brooke is the Master Planner Supervisor, Park and Trail Planning. Her presentation will cover two topics: Green Open Space Park Facilities and the Athletic Field Study.

Green Open Space Park Facilities - For many years, Montgomery Parks had a dichotomous approach to park planning; parks were either conservation-oriented or recreational. Conservation-oriented parks were

designed to preserve important natural resources, and recreational parks were primarily designed for organized sports.

Many residents, however, in the densely-settled areas of the County began to ask for accessible, un-programmed open space where people could pursue a wide variety of pastimes in a natural setting. The Vision 2030 plan also called for Parks to “Plan, design and create more un-programmed flexible parks and recreation spaces, and features that are multi-functional or adaptable for multiple purposes.”

Parks has therefore established several new park facility types including Community Open Space and Urban Wooded Areas. Come and hear about these new park types, and whether or not they may be coming to a park near you.

Athletic Field Study - Currently underway, the study is expected to be completed sometime later in FY2013. Parks last estimated the need for ballfields in 2005. Much has changed since then. Twenty-five new fields have been built. Permitting is now centralized, instead of being scattered between three agencies. In addition, ballfields are permitted by the hour. These changes have reduced the practice of booking multiple fields. This practice involved groups which would often book multiple fields to increase their chance of getting a playable field come game day.

The Athletic Field Study includes the following elements:

- conduct extensive outreach efforts to athletic field user groups and various governmental partners, e.g., Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF), Montgomery County Public Schools, and Montgomery Department of Recreation;
- identify athletic field issues and associated solutions unique to each of the seven athletic field areas;
- consider the contributions of alternative providers (e.g., Olney Boys and Girls Club) to meeting countywide athletic field needs; and,
- compare and contrast M-NCPPC Department of Parks' current method of predicting future athletic field needs with methods used by other jurisdictions throughout Maryland and elsewhere.

The May 13 MCCF meeting will begin at 7:45 p.m. in the first floor auditorium of the County Council Building in Rockville. The public is invited and encouraged to attend.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800 to 1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to montgomerycivic@yahoo.com