



City of Rockville Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan



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Executive Summary

This Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROSP) is a long-range policy document that sets overall direction in terms of goals and objectives for parks and recreation in the City of Rockville for the next 20 years. The Plan updates and replaces the Recreation, Parks and Open Space chapter of the City of Rockville 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan, which has functioned as the PROS Plan for the City. The plan will be adopted officially as part of the updated Comprehensive Master Plan, scheduled for completion in FY 2010.

Rockville, the Montgomery County seat, is located 12 miles northwest of Washington D.C. Parks, recreation and open space play a vital role in City life. The City's parks, recreation and open spaces serve a diverse resident population that extends well beyond the city's borders as well as a large employment base. In a scientific survey conducted for the PROSP over 80 percent of respondents said that the availability of recreation classes, parks, and facilities was important to their satisfaction with living in Rockville.

Chapter 1 sets the plan's organizational framework. The City of Rockville's Department of Recreation and Parks is one of the City's largest departments and is key to implementing the City's overall vision as set by the Mayor and Council in 2008:

- Distinct Neighborhoods, One City
- A Cultural Destination
- Green City
- Quality Built Environment
- Exceptional City Services
- Economic Development and Sustainability
- Community Engagement

The Department of Recreation and Parks is organized into seven divisions:

- Administration,
- Recreation Services,
- Senior Citizen Services,
- Community Services,
- Facilities,
- Parks and Open Space, and
- RedGate Golf Course.

The Recreation and Park Advisory Board, an advisory group of resident volunteers, works closely with staff and with the City's elected and

appointed officials to implement the recreation and parks program.

Chapter 2 describes existing and planned recreation resources in and around the City. As of 2009, PROS in the City totaled 1,199 acres. The Department of Recreation and Parks owns or maintains 69 parks, recreation and open space sites totaling approximately 1,035 acres. This includes 14 citywide parks and facilities, 40 neighborhood parks and facilities, four athletic parks, and 11 open space parks. An additional 164 acres are at public school sites and Montgomery College. The PROSP analyzes these sites from a number of perspectives, especially their location with respect to three broad geographic service areas of the City:

- West: West of I-270
- Central: Between I-270 and MD 355
- East: East of MD 355

A broad range of PROS resources are close to the City in Montgomery County, and are readily accessible to city residents. The PROSP defines an Outer Rockville Recreation Area (ORRA), extending approximately one mile around the city in all directions, to study and evaluate these resources and demands.

Chapter 3 describes population and other socio-economic information relevant to planning for future PROS. As of 2008 the City's population was estimated at 61,909, a 31 percent increase over its 2000 population. Growth is expected to continue, with the population projected to reach approximately 74,500 by 2030. The ORRA population, including the City of Rockville, is projected to reach approximately 256,000 by 2030. The City is also a major employment center. As of 2005, there were approximately 78,700 jobs in the City and this number is projected to increase to approximately 108,800 by 2030.

Looking to the future the City and Department are facing a number of challenges with respect to PROS:

- Maintaining high levels of service as the City and ORRA grow.
- Serving an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse population.
- Serving an increasingly older population.

- Retrofitting an essentially built-out City to meet demands for increased pedestrian connectivity and for more “natural” greenways and open space.
- Providing accessible services to all sectors of the population including minorities, lower income, and disabled populations.

Chapter 4 contains the PROSP’s needs assessment. It incorporates a very broad range of inputs, both quantitative and qualitative including an assessment of social and PROS trends, an examination of PROS best practices, a review of past neighborhood master plans, and a supply, demand, and need assessment for PROS land and 17 types of PROS facilities such as tennis, basketball and soccer. Public input into the PROSP was extensive including a scientific survey, two communitywide outreach meetings and 13 stakeholder focus group meetings.

A number of topics were given special attention in the plan and are addressed in Chapter 4:

- Multi-cultural inclusion
- Serving the disabled population
- Safety/security
- Bicycling
- Zoning
- Rockville Pike redevelopment
- Cost recovery and impact fees
- Watershed planning and stormwater management
- Growth and development of the Department of Recreation and Parks

Chapter 5 contains the PROS plan’s major recommendations which are divided into two sections:

- Major department-wide policy recommendations
- Division-specific recommendations

The plan’s recommendations include, wherever possible, benchmarks and performance measures for use in reviewing progress in implementing the plan and for possible incorporation into the department’s annual budget and capital improvement program.

Nine department-wide policy recommendations address the most important themes and ideas that emerged through the PROSP preparation process.

1. **Build community pride and ownership in the City’s recreation and parks system.** The importance of promoting volunteerism,

partnerships with neighborhoods and businesses, stewardship and developing civic pride was a consistent theme through the PROSP preparation process. Through continued and broadened outreach and strengthened partnerships with neighborhoods and businesses the objective is to instill in people a sense of ownership and a desire to be stewards, leaving parks and open spaces in a better state than how they found them.

2. **Support the City’s Sustainability Initiatives.** The Department of Recreation and Parks, with management and maintenance responsibilities for most of the city’s lands, buildings, trees, and landscaping, has a vital role in the City’s drive for sustainability. The Department can be at the vanguard of the initiative by making all facilities and parks models of sustainability, working towards green building standards for facilities, leading with respect to running programs, facilities and events on sustainable principles, and helping implement the City’s Strategy for a Sustainable Rockville
3. **Acquire additional park and open space land.** In order to meet the Department’s citywide parks and open space acreage goal (18 acres for every 1,000 residents) the City will need to add 142 acres to its inventory by 2030. Key recommendations are to obtain funding for land acquisition, and focus on areas of greatest need, especially East Rockville, Twinbrook, Town Center, and Rockville Pike.
4. **Continue to build and develop Rockville as a cultural destination.** Rockville aspires to be a major, regional, cultural destination, recognized regionally, nationally, and internationally. The Department maintains and programs many of the public gathering places that host cultural activities. The PROSP recommends that the City’s cultural and entertainment plan, scheduled to be updated in 2009, consider arts programs that inspire and bring people together as a community in shared experiences; ways to reflect the culture of ethnic populations in park design and incorporate amenities supporting/reflecting different cultures; activities to bring younger audiences and whole families to arts facilities; and improved coordination of publicity of the arts in Rockville.

5. **Strengthen connectivity between neighborhoods, parks and facilities.** Rockville has achieved a great deal in the area of trail, sidewalk, and bicycle connectivity. In the past residents have ranked ease of travel by bicycle and walking relatively low, though in the 2008 citizen survey the rankings were above the national average. Strengthening connectivity will be part physical (new construction and enhancement of sidewalks and trail connections, and signage) and part outreach, educating the public about existing connections so that the perception of ease of connectivity increases.

6. **Balance programmed and un-programmed activities and areas. Focus more strongly on nature-based activities, play, and wellness.** Achieving the “right” balance between active and passive PROS, and programmed and non-programmed activities and areas was a common theme among participants in the PROSP process. Key plan recommendations are:

- Continue to maintain a near 50-50 balance between passive open space and active park areas with recreational amenities.
- Increase awareness of opportunities for un-programmed activities at parks and facilities.
- Promote opportunities for nature-based activities such as hiking trail and bird-watching, and for spontaneous, nature-based, play.
- Integrate wellness considerations into department-wide activities and new park and facility design.

7. **Reinvent, reinvest, and rebuild existing PROS. Share facilities.** While the City needs to acquire additional park and open space land, it also needs to continue to invest in its existing assets. Further, to stay relevant, PROS have to adapt to changing needs or people stop using them. The Plan also supports shared use of facilities; rather than developing centers for specific age groups.

Some staff members are concerned about their ability to maintain high standards given the increasing demands being placed on the PROS system. The Department’s past success is due in large measure to its providing a high quality program. Future success will rely on continuing this approach.

8. **Market the program.** Respondents to surveys generally respond that they receive about the right amount of information about departmental activities and know what PROS resources are available to them. Nevertheless, with approximately 25 percent of respondents responding negatively, and with new residents moving into the City all the time, marketing and promotion must remain high on the agenda. The Department markets well and in diverse ways, though a number of creative, marketing ideas were expressed during the PROSP process. The PROS Plan also recommends the Department not abandon efforts to capture its very broad range of services it provides in a logo or brand. A starting point could be making Rockville a magnet for people seeking a “healthy and fulfilling lifestyle”.

9. **Embrace cultural diversity. Maximize opportunities for ethnic groups to participate in Rockville's parks, facilities and programs.** The City has become a diverse community of many ethnicities and cultures and the Department of Recreation and Parks strives to understand, adapt to, and serve this reality. The PROSP process revealed that minority cultures and ethnicities feel welcome at City parks and facilities. The department should strive to continue this success in upcoming years. Among the Plan’s recommendations are to: showcase and celebrate the City’s diversity of cultures through its parks, facilities and programs; introduce cultural elements into parks; and partner with cultural associations.

Division-specific recommendations are the key recommendations for each of the Department of Recreation and Parks’ divisions. The recommendations are drawn from the analyses and assessments in Chapter 4 in relation to each division’s achievements and challenges. The entire list of findings and recommendations from all of the inputs is contained in a Compilation of Recommendations table included in the plan as Appendix E. Among the key recommendations made for each division are:

1. **Administration**
 - Continue to strengthen workload and performance measures in the annual budget.
 - Continue to work on marketing and outreach, concentrating on lower income

- populations, persons with disabilities, businesses, and people who work in the City.
 - Grow the Recreation and Parks Foundation.
 - Integrate wellness into Department-wide activities.
 - Designate a staff person knowledgeable in the area of therapeutic recreation and ADA regulations as a Department-wide clearinghouse.
 - Play a leadership role in disseminating the beneficial use of technology throughout the Department.
2. **Recreation Services**
- Increase the number of teen activities by 20 percent by 2014.
 - Promote opportunities for nature-oriented programming and unstructured play.
 - Introduce more programs and events of interest to young adults (20s and 30s).
 - Increase familiarity among residents, especially new residents, about what the Department offers.
3. **Senior Citizen Services**
- Meet senior needs by making maximum use of existing facilities throughout the City.
 - Capitalize on any opportunity to acquire a site/land for a future multi-purpose center. A new center should be in Central or East Rockville.
 - Reach out to underserved populations/ populations not using the senior center in numbers proportional to their size.
4. **Community Services**
- Continue programs that reach at-risk and disadvantaged youth and families.
 - Work with other divisions to increase outreach to lower income populations.
 - Continue outreach to and mentoring of young people at risk of involvement in gang activities.
5. **Facilities**
- Continue to “reinvent” recreation facilities, paying attention to maintenance, upkeep, and upgrade, to keep them fresh, interesting, novel, and attractive to users.
 - Enhance the smaller community centers.
 - Increase facility use by businesses and by people working in Rockville.
 - Address facilities needs from the supply versus demand needs analysis: indoor fitness facilities; and indoor sports facilities.
6. **Parks and Open Space**
- Acquire additional park and open space land, including 25 to 30 acres within the Rockville Pike Neighborhood Plan study area by 2030.
 - Develop a city wide open space plan to bring together into a single vision greenways, connections, and potential open spaces in the City.
 - Develop a long-range plan for each existing and new park.
 - Address parks needs from the supply versus demand needs analysis: two new dog parks; up to two artificial turf fields for multipurpose use; two to four picnic areas; eight playgrounds including, possibly, a multi-generational playground; two to three skate spots; an inflatable dome over the swim center outdoor fitness pool; and one new outdoor volleyball court.
 - Support additional community gardens (plots) on City-owned land.
7. **RedGate Golf Course**
- Continue to operate RedGate Golf Course as one of the major PROS assets within Rockville parks system. Retain RedGate as PROS resource if it ever stops operating as a golf course
 - Continue efforts to return RedGate to fully self-supporting financial status.

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Introduction

This Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROSP) is a long-range policy document that sets overall direction in terms of goals and objectives for the City of Rockville Department of Recreation and Parks for the next 20 years. The Plan updates and replaces the Recreation, Parks and Open Space chapter of the City of Rockville 2002 Comprehensive Master Plan, which has functioned as the PROS Plan for the City. The plan will be adopted officially as part of the updated Comprehensive Master Plan, scheduled for completion in FY 2010.

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The City of Rockville Department of Recreation and Parks has a track record of providing excellent facilities, services and programs to the residents of the City and the surrounding area, and people who work in the City. In a survey conducted for the PROSP over 80 percent of respondents said that the availability of recreation classes, parks, and facilities was important to their satisfaction with living in Rockville (see Chapter 4 Section B.9).

In 2008 and looking to the future the City and the Department are facing a number of challenges:

- Maintaining high levels of service, typically exceeding national standards, to a city projected to grow from a population of approximately 59,700 in 2005 to 74,500 in 2030, and the center of a region of over 255,000 people.
- Serving an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse population. In 2000, 31 percent of the City's population was foreign born.
- Serving an increasingly older population. By 2030 the number of people over age 65 in the City will double compared to the number in 2005.

- Retrofitting an essentially built-out City to meet demands for increased pedestrian connectivity and for more "natural" greenways and open space.
- Providing equitable services to all sectors of the population including minorities, lower income, and disabled populations.

Through the PROS Plan process the Department of Recreation and Parks has explored these and other challenges from a variety of perspectives in a broad-based public involvement process engaging appointed officials, a large number of the department staff, staff from other City departments, and from the surrounding area, diverse groups, stakeholders, and the general public.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 describe the organizational framework for the plan, PROS resources, and the City's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Chapter 4 is the plan's needs assessment, including inputs and analysis from the public involvement process. Chapter 5 contains the plan's recommendations. Wherever possible the recommendations incorporate quantitative measures or benchmarks to assist the Department in evaluating its success in implementing the plan.

Note on Plan Content and Appendices

A very large volume of data and information was used to prepare this Plan. To keep the Plan to a manageable length and size, the main text and appendices contain the Plan's key points, data, maps, figures, conclusions, policies and recommendations. Supporting documents, reports, data and memoranda are included in the electronic version of the plan which is available in CD-ROM format or from the City of Rockville Department of Recreation and Parks.