



MONTGOMERY PARKS

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
2425 Reedie Drive | Wheaton, MD 20902
MontgomeryParks.org

Merrimac Neighborhood Park Playground Renovation Project – Community Meeting Notes

March 20, 2024 | 7-8:30pm | virtual (zoom)

Project Website: [Merrimac Neighborhood Park – Playground Renovation - Montgomery Parks](#)

Online Survey: [Open Town Hall - Merrimac Neighborhood Park Playground Renovation - Issue \(opengov.com\)](#)

Meeting Video Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcQ_s0xi0Sg

Playground Renovation Project Manager: Matt Weir, PLA, ISA matthew.weir@montgomeryparks.org

Staff in Attendance:

- Park Development Division
 - Josh Arnett, Engineering Section Supervisor
 - Tricia McManus, Design Section Supervisor
 - Eric Siu, Project Engineer
 - Ben Tauber, Countywide Playground Manager
 - Matt Weir, Project Manager
- Park Police: Derrick Williams
- Public Affairs and Community Partnerships: Michelle Ramirez, Public Relations and Outreach Specialist
- Southern Region
 - Tony Galipo, Playground Inspector
 - Todd Holmes, Regional Operations Manager
 - Derrick Moore, Playground Inspector Manager
 - Javier Moreno, Water Quality Manager

Meeting Purpose: Provide background information, introduce the community to the project, and gather input for the playground renovation project at Merrimac Neighborhood Park (Merrimac NP).

Presentation Summary

The meeting began with Montgomery Parks (Parks) staff presenting information regarding project location, existing conditions, the playground renovation program, playground project scope of work and anticipated project schedule. The presentation also included preliminary ideas for playground equipment and a conceptual layout that demonstrates how the proposed design could address project goals, including safety, play value, access, and environmental stewardship, among others.

Parks staff also acknowledged and thanked the Maryland Legislative District 16 delegation – State Senator Ariana Kelly and State Delegates Marc Korman, Sarah Wolek, and Sara Love – for sponsoring a bond bill to provide funding for the playground project.

Staff provided website links and contact information, encouraged attendees to submit written questions/comments, and requested that attendees and community members take an online survey.

Discussion/Q&A

The community submitted questions and comments on the items below. Parks' responses are summarized after each topic.

- **Playground Design**
 - The existing playground footprint is about 2,750 square feet and includes only four pieces of equipment. Neighborhood Park playgrounds are typically between 3,500 – 5,000 square feet – although sometimes larger. Existing equipment must be upgraded because it is beyond its

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- lifecycle. Parks is trying to increase play value by adding new play equipment and providing a slightly larger playground.
 - There are steep slopes throughout the existing site, especially within and around the playground. The renovated playground needs to be on a flat platform for maintenance, accessibility, and safety reasons. Parks is evaluating a two-tiered terraced playground to provide the proper playground slopes on a steep site. This playground will provide views down to the tennis court area.
 - The new playground will include a diversity of engaging and inclusive play components that benefit all users. The playground will be accessible via a playground walkway.
 - Parks is proposing a fence along the northern edge of the playground to separate the playground from the entry drive. This fence will not enclose the entire playground.
 - The playground surface is expected to be engineered wood fiber (EWF). EWF is permeable, accessible, and cost effective. It is a natural material that is suitable in a woodland setting and usually stays cooler than other playground surfacing options, such as rubber. EWF provides proper impact absorption (fall protection) and is used in more than 90% of Parks' playgrounds.
 - New play equipment will not hold standing water. Equipment will most likely have metal posts rather than wood posts.
- **Basketball / Tennis Courts**
 - Parks is also beginning a separate courts improvement project. The tennis and basketball courts will be resurfaced with new striping and color-coating. Hoops, nets, and the tennis practice wall will be replaced. New fencing will be added to the tennis court. Pickleball will not be added.
 - For information on upcoming basketball and tennis court renovations, contact Project Manager Eric Siu @ eric.siu@montgomeryparks.org
 - Court users should follow court etiquette – e.g., share courts and take turns. One of the two tennis courts may be reserved via the Park Permit office; however, walk-on use and fair access for all is encouraged. If there are any concerns about unequal play, please reach out to Parks Information and Customer Service (PICS) @ info@montgomeryparks.org or 301.495.2595.
 - In accordance with park rules and regulations, dogs are only allowed to be off leash in designated areas (dog parks), and not within courts or other park facilities.
 - **Dog park:** Parks' budget for Merrimac includes renovating the playground, and we have a separate budget for the tennis/basketball court renovation project. A dog park is not included in the scope of work for these projects. Additionally, Merrimac Park does not meet criteria to be a suitable location for a dog park. A link to a study for dog park site suitability is provided below.
 - <https://montgomeryparks.org/projects/directory/dog-parks-site-suitability-study/#:~:text=The%20Dog%20Parks%20Site%20Suitability,Hour%E2%80%9D%20at%20Elm%20Street%20Park.>
 - **Merrimac Park Walkways**
 - The playground project is planning to provide an accessible parking space and/or drop-off zone along the driveway. This space doubles as a maintenance access point and could connect to an accessible walkway leading into the playground.
 - There is currently an accessible walkway from parking lot to the courts. This route will remain.
 - As part of the court renovation project, Parks will investigate the potential for an accessible walkway from the courts to the multipurpose field.

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- **Neighborhood roads (sidewalks, traffic, vehicle speeds)**
 - Neighborhood roads, and the potential for sidewalks along these roads, are under the authority of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT). Sidewalks are outside the scope of the playground and courts renovation projects. Please visit this MCDOT website for sidewalk requests: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dot-dte/sidewalk/index.html>
 - Parks will reach out to MCDOT regarding vehicle speeds/traffic on Winston Drive and the community's request for traffic-calming measures.
 - The public is encouraged to submit any traffic calming requests to TrafficOps@montgomerycountymd.gov
- **Shade**
 - The playground is designed to protect the forest edge on the east side of the playground. These trees will cast shade, especially in the morning. Parks is also exploring locations for a several new shade trees to be planted near the playground.
 - A shade structure would take away budget from playground equipment.
 - Play equipment with roofs will be considered.
- **Trees**
 - Playground crews will occasionally power-wash playground equipment to remove any staining (i.e., from the mulberry tree).
 - Parks is working with urban forestry staff and tree crews for pruning and hazard removal. Some trees have been removed recently. Staff encourages the public to contact Parks Customer Service to report hazard trees/limbs.
 - A detailed tree inventory (species, size, location, condition) will be completed as part of playground project.
 - Parks' goal is to protect trees; however, in order to renovate the playground, a few trees will need to be removed.
- **Buffering adjacent properties**
 - Parks studied whether the playground could be located elsewhere in the park. However, doing so would either take away existing amenities or remove forest, neither of which is desirable.
 - The renovated playground will protect the forest edge. The forest will continue to serve as a buffer (noise and visual) for adjacent homes. If the playground gets larger, it will expand westward, away from homes.
 - The new playground will be in the same general location as the existing playground – the programmatic use of this space will not change.
 - Parks will explore the potential for buffer planting.
- **Multi-purpose field – drainage**
 - Renovating the field isn't within the scope of work for the playground or courts project.
 - The Parks Operations team conducted a ballfield condition assessment this past winter. The assessment for Merrimac noted potential improvements, but the field is not in the current schedule for renovations.
- **Stormwater Management, Drainage, Grading**
 - Merrimac NP currently has three stormwater management facilities on site – at the parking lot, courts, and multipurpose field. These are facilities managed by the Montgomery County

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Department of Environmental Protection. The existing playground does not currently have a stormwater management facility.

- Stormwater management improvements will be included with both the playground and courts projects.
- **Park Police:** There are few security issues with this park. Only five calls for service were received for Merrimac Park in 2023.

Next Steps:

- Community members are encouraged to complete the online survey. Parks will take feedback and ideas from the survey to inform the playground design. A playground concept will be posted on the project website for community review and additional feedback.