

Montgomery Park Report: Citizen Feedback on Revised Draft Plan

Presented to:

Old Town North Small Area Plan Advisory Group

**Department of Recreation, Parks and
Cultural Activities**

Park and Recreation Commission

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by

Darrel W. Drury, Ph.D.

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Introduction

In the Fall of 2014, the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA) reached out to the citizens of Alexandria to obtain baseline information on how the City's 17 smaller neighborhood parks are currently used and how they could be improved in the future. Based on information derived from site visits, public workshops, and online surveys administered in 2014, RPCA staff developed draft plans for the improvement and/or redevelopment of each of Alexandria's neighborhood parks. In the Spring of 2015, draft plans for each of the parks were rolled out for community review—at interactive public workshops, neighborhood association meetings, and on “graffiti boards” posted in each of the parks. Concurrently, in the Spring and Summer of 2015, a second set of online surveys was conducted to collect quantitative and open-ended response data on park users' reactions to the proposed plans. Staff then refined the plans to reflect community feedback, and, in October 2015, revised redevelopment plans for each of the 17 neighborhood parks were posted online (click on the following link to view Department of RPCA revised draft plans: http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/Neighborhood%20Park%20Plan_AllParks_smallest.pdf).

Although RPCA staff should be commended for their systematic approach to community outreach and engagement, the process employed in revising draft plans fell short in one important respect. That is, the second set of online surveys—those designed specifically to gauge citizens' reactions to the neighborhood park plans—seems to have played, at best, a minor role in informing the revision process. Indeed, the “methodology” section of the October 2015 report makes no mention at all of the surveys conducted in 2015, and, in the report itself, readers interested in reviewing the results of the 2015 surveys are referred to a *nonexistent* appendix. The only survey data presented in the report are, in fact, those derived from the initial surveys, conducted in 2014. While the 2014 survey data provide essential background information about citizens' broad preferences, concerns, and park usage patterns, they obviously cannot shed light on respondents' reactions to revisions that were conceived *after* the surveys were implemented. RPCA staff have observed that “those who use the parks have the best knowledge of what improvements the sites need” (p.7, October 2015 report). It follows, then, that citizen feedback from the 2015 surveys must be given careful consideration in revising park plans.

The present report focuses solely on the revised draft plan for Montgomery Park and bases its conclusions and recommendations primarily—albeit, not exclusively—on citizens' responses to the highly relevant, yet underutilized, 2015 survey. In addition to the 2015 survey data, this review draws upon other, complementary sources of information, including: (1) the preliminary survey conducted by RPCA staff in the Fall of 2014; (2) in-depth conversations with approximately 50 citizens who utilize the park on a regular basis; (3) meetings with representatives from various local community businesses and organizations, including the Old Town North Community Partnership, Friends of Montgomery Park, and St. Anthony's Day School; (4) a meeting with Deputy City Manager Emily Baker; and (5) information gleaned from an independent survey of a sample of several hundred citizens of Alexandria (mainly residents of Old Town North)—administered by the North Old Town Independent Citizens Association (NOTICE)—that provides insights into the features that residents would most like to see in a public park.

Recommendations: The Revised Montgomery Park Plan

The revised Montgomery Park Plan comprises seven key recommendations, six of which will be discussed in this report. The seventh recommendation, which involves fixing drainage issues along Fairfax Street, is best left to experts in the field of hydraulic engineering and, as such, will not be discussed here. The remaining six components of the Montgomery Park plan are described briefly below. (Note: the bracketed terms associated with each recommendation are used to identify each recommendation in Figure 1, presented on page 6.)

The six recommendations considered in this report are:

1. **Grade the center of the Park and create a passive lawn with shade trees [Lawn]** – This recommendation advocates for a circular “high quality open lawn that can be used for passive play, picknicking, and community events . . . [with benches and trees located] . . . along the edge of the lawn.”
2. **Convert half the parking lot into a half-tennis court with backboard for solo play [Backbrd]** – Here, the plan recommends the addition of a half-tennis court “just for solo play,” which would occupy approximately half of the current parking lot.
3. **Renovate, expand, and reconfigure the playground [RenMovPlay]** – This recommendation proposes the relocation of the playground “closer to Royal Street,” resulting in a longer, curvilinear, space “with an entrance accessible from both the north and south sides of the park.”
4. **Improve plantings along Royal Street** – This recommendation advocates for planting perennials and trees along Royal Street to “create a softer edge to the park.”
5. **Install pathway to connect the south side of the Park [Pathway]** – Based on the assertion that “the park currently feels disjointed because there is no connection between the park features,” the plan also recommends “a new path, connected to an interior loop, [which] would create a walking system and encourage greater use of the park.”
6. **Renovate the parking lot and include green infrastructure [GreenParking]** – In this case, the plan recommends “replacing half of the parking lot surface with a pervious surface to allow water to flow through and reduce the environmental impacts of a parking lot in city open space. Plantings along the tennis court and tree islands will provide aesthetic improvement to the Park. Bike racks will also be added.”

The 2015 Survey: Citizens' Reactions to Six Key Recommendations

The 2015 survey provides a unique, quantifiable snapshot of the reactions of the Montgomery Park community to each of the six recommendations described above. In each case, respondents were asked: "What do you think of the following recommendation?" They could choose one of three closed-ended responses:

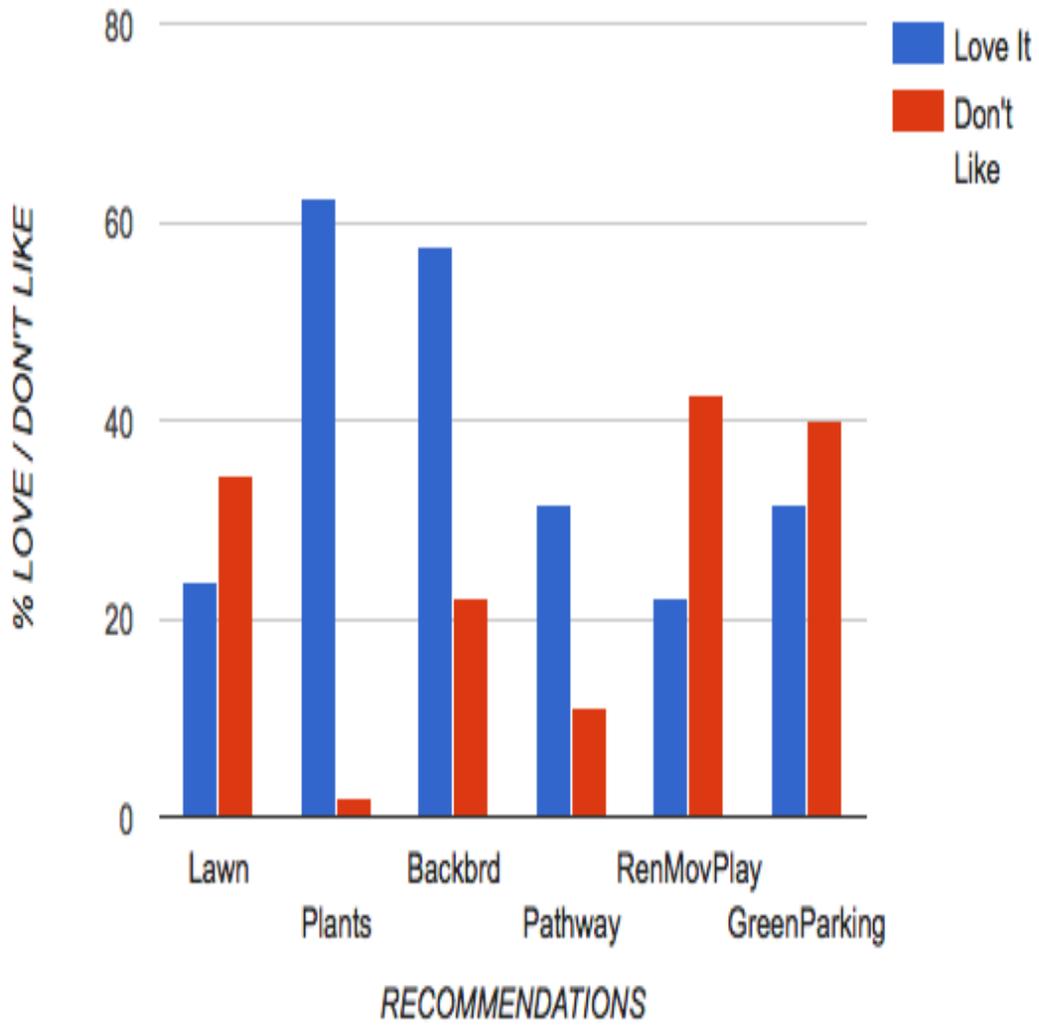
"I love it!"
"It's OK"
"I don't like it."

After registering their opinions regarding each recommendation, respondents were then asked to explain their responses using an open-ended format. Remarkably, 68 Park users completed the survey and provided nearly 150 open-ended comments. No other source of information compares in magnitude or importance with the 2015 survey as a means for elucidating park users' reactions to the revised park plan.

The impressive number of respondents to this survey clearly demonstrates that Park users were eager to voice their opinions regarding the changes to the draft plan proposed by RPCA staff. Indeed, only 2 of the 17 park surveys administered in 2015 had higher response rates (Powhatan and Hooff's Run). It is also important to note that the number of respondents to the 2015 survey far surpassed the number responding to the 2014 survey (just 42 in the case of that earlier survey). Of course, it makes sense that the latter survey would elicit more interest. The 2014 survey, being preliminary in nature, could offer citizens little more than an opportunity to register their broad preference to "preserve," "enhance," or "transform" each of several features of the park. In that survey, respondents were not asked to react to specific recommendations. In contrast, much more was at stake in the 2015 survey—respondents were asked to evaluate and respond to specific proposals for redeveloping the Park. Cast in that light, it is especially critical to carefully examine the results of the 2015 survey to ensure that staff recommendations for improvement are, in fact, aligned with the expressed interests of the community.

The key quantifiable findings from the 2015 survey are presented in Figure 1 (next page). Although all six recommendations proposed by RPCA staff represent important elements in the revised redevelopment plan for Montgomery Park, the first three clearly constitute the most significant components of the plan, representing more than 80% of the estimated cost of implementation. For that reason alone, this report will devote much of its attention to these three key elements of the revised plan. But there is another reason why these three stand out. As will become evident in the ensuing discussion of the 2015 survey findings, these three components of the plan are poorly aligned with the preferences of the user community. They either (a) fail to garner broad support among Park users or (b) are inconsistent with a careful interpretation of the 2015 survey data. In the remainder of this section, all six recommendations in the revised Montgomery Park plan are examined through the lens of park users, as reflected in their responses to the 2015 survey.

FIGURE 1 - % LOVE / DON'T LIKE RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendation 1: Create a passive lawn

The data presented in Figure 1 provide clear evidence that a substantially larger proportion of park users “don’t like” the recommendation to create an expanded, passive lawn as compared with those who “love” the idea. Whereas only 23.6% of respondents favor the idea, 34.6% reject it outright.

Moreover, citizens are not shy about expressing their reasons for rejecting the City’s proposal for an expansive, passive lawn, with trees and benches relegated largely to the periphery. They point out that the existing lawn is underutilized and express health concerns about unabated solar radiation (see Exhibit 1-A). On-site discussions with park users reveal another important concern. If the field were expanded sufficiently to permit sports—such as soccer or volleyball—it would only be a matter of time before an errant ball would strike and injure a three- or four-year-old playing in the adjacent playground.

So what do citizens want instead of a large, circular, passive lawn? The answer is clear. As expressed in more than twenty open-ended comments, there is an overwhelming and consistent desire for *more trees*—for environmental reasons, health reasons, and simply as a means of providing much needed shade (see Exhibit 1-B, next page).

Exhibit 1-A: Citizens Object to an Expanded Passive Lawn

- The center of the park is rarely used because it is too sunny.
- Nobody hangs out or plays in the sun anymore. Have you ever heard of “skin cancer”?
- The park is very hot in the late spring, summer, and early fall, so [we don’t need] more open space unprotected from the sun.
- Too much sun exposure is dangerous to skin health.
- This is a bad idea. In all the years I’ve been using the park, I’ve seen people using the existing passive lawn perhaps a dozen times.
- A bigger passive lawn will not draw more users.
- The center of the park should NOT be an open field.
- On the hot summer days, people crowd under the gazebo because there are very few shade trees to sit under.
- Everyone I’ve talked to at the park thinks that the idea of creating a vast passive lawn is a BAD idea.
- The existing lawn is rarely used.
- Very bad idea. Currently, nobody uses the existing “passive lawn” because it is too hot May – September.
- I walk through the park nearly every day and have yet to see anyone using this area.
- Open field will not be used, just as the current field is rarely used by anyone.
- More open space is not needed at Montgomery Park.
- I would not like to see the [proposed] circular open field as part of the plan.

Exhibit 1-B: What Do Citizens Want? Trees and Shade!

- This area needs trees, not open lawn.
- It would be better to plant large trees in this area to provide shade!
- More trees, not lawn.
- Elms and other large growth varieties that can provide much needed shade [should be planted].
- There is a desperate need for more shade trees.
- We want trees (preferably large trees that provide SHADE), not open lawn!
- Trees are essential for absorbing pollution and provide a canopy to protect from the sun.
- People sit under the gazebo and trees. The rest of the area should be planted with trees so that people can rest under them.
- No shade and it is very, very hot—even on a mild day.
- Trees are essential for absorbing pollution and provide a canopy to protect from the sun.
- I do childcare and shade is better.
- More shade, please.
- I'd suggest some shade trees with benches and perhaps another pathway.
- We would like more trees, benches and pathway providing access.
- More green is better.
- More shade and trees would be nice in the summer.
- Trees. More trees. People sit under trees to relax, eat during lunch hour, read.
- The park needs to keep the existing shade, which is what makes it a pleasant place for both kids and adults.
- Center of park should be planted with many more trees.
- Residents want more trees and bushes. MORE GREEN, LESS SUN.
- Would like more shade and trees.
- I'd much prefer to have this area [i.e., the proposed "passive lawn"] planted with Elms and other broad canopy trees to provide shade.
- Please plant trees, not just grass!
- People seem to want more trees and shade in the park.
- It would be nice if a pathway with benches could be created by planting trees in the open space.
- During the hot summer days, we would all benefit from having this area planted with trees that would provide much needed shade.
- I've noticed that workers from nearby office buildings sometimes come to eat lunch at the park and I'm sure they would appreciate a shady area as well.

Recommendation 2: Convert parking lot into half-tennis court with backboard for solo play

After developing the initial draft plan for Montgomery Park, RPCA staff posted a sign at the Park with a schematic diagram displaying the key features of the plan. In that schematic, the location of the proposed backboard for solo play was clearly identified as being on the northern-most court, closest to Fairfax Street. Furthermore, the question pertaining to this feature of the plan in the 2015 survey clearly implied that, if this recommendation were implemented, the backboard would be installed within the existing tennis court enclosure. Specifically, the question asked: “What do you think of the following recommendation? – Install backboard **at the tennis court** for solo play [emphasis added]?”

Obviously, most people responding to this question would conclude that the proposed backboard would represent a minor modification to an existing court, not a major construction project costing \$250,000 - \$350,000 that would eliminate about half of the parking currently available to park patrons. It is, therefore, not surprising that 57.4% of respondents to the 2015 survey responded positively to the question as worded, while just 22.1% responded negatively (see Figure 1). Had respondents known that RPCA staff would interpret their consent to the addition of a simple backboard as justification for building a separate half-court in the existing parking lot, the response pattern would likely have been quite different.

Parking is already at a premium in the Old Town North area and, with the addition of 175 new apartments at the Kingsley and another 122 units proposed for the Giant/ABC site—both just one block from the Park—the elimination of several parking spaces would unnecessarily diminish access for those who drive to the Park. In this regard, the 2014 survey provides invaluable information. Nearly a third (29%) of the respondents to that survey indicated that they usually drive to Montgomery Park and almost half (46%) stated that insufficient parking had prevented them from visiting the Park. Indeed, only two of 17 neighborhood parks (Angel and Lockett) have more patrons who drive to gain access and *just one* (Angel) has a greater percentage of users stating that insufficient parking has limited their access. In other words, it is difficult to imagine a location where the elimination of existing parking makes less sense.

Given this context, it is fair to say that there is support for the installation of a backboard at one of the existing courts—preferably at the court closest to Fairfax Street to minimize noise for the residents of Watergate of Alexandria—but there can be no justification for the installation of a half-court dedicated to solo play in the existing parking lot. Finally, close scrutiny of the open-ended comments of respondents to the 2015 survey point to another concern among those who frequent the Montgomery Park courts. Given the level of demand for these courts, current users would like to see clear rules governing the use of the court designated for solo play (see Exhibit 2, next page). Specifically, they would like to see solo play restricted to those times when no one is waiting to play a singles or doubles match.

Exhibit 2: Install Backboard at *Existing* Tennis Court (But with Strict Rules Limiting Solo Play)

- As long as this does not affect the ability to use a court for non-solo play.
- Better to allow groups of 2 to 4 play than just one person at a time!
- I don't think these [i.e., backboards for solo play] are used very much.
- One court only. Rule is solo must give up court if in demand and other courts are full.
- Tennis courts are in too much demand.
- These courts are already so full; I would hate to see a whole court taken up by only one person.
- I play tennis at the park regularly and I don't think it makes sense for one person to occupy a court while four people are waiting to play doubles.
- Too crowded to encourage single play.
- I wonder what the rules would be like for using this court. If you have several people waiting, is it O.K. for someone to practice on the court?
- Maybe, but the courts are pretty busy as it is. Not sure it would make sense to tie them up with one person at a time.

Recommendation 3: Renovate, expand, and reconfigure the playground

According to Figure 1, it would seem that there is little support for the recommendation to renovate the playground and relocate it closer to Royal Street. In the 2015 survey, respondents were asked what they thought about renovating and moving the playground. While 22.2% stated that they “love” the idea, nearly twice as many (42.6%) indicated that they “don't like it.” But responses to this question must be interpreted cautiously, as it represents a classic example of a common error in survey design—the “double-barreled” question. By combining two distinct issues—in this case, renovation of the playground and relocation of the playground—into a single question, it becomes nearly impossible to interpret the meaning of responses. Do respondents object to renovating the playground or to moving it?

Fortunately, in this instance, it is clear from respondents' many open-ended comments that their objection is to the proposed *relocation* of the playground, not to its *renovation* (see Exhibit 3, next page). Eight respondents voiced an objection to the proposed relocation of the playground; another 16 indicated that they approve of renovation, but disapprove of relocation; but, most notably, not a single respondent objected specifically to the renovation of the playground. Several respondents even offered a solution to the lack of shade at the playground's current location, something that RPCA staff had hoped to alleviate by moving the playground closer to Royal Street. They propose the installation of shade structures or “canopies” to block the sun's harmful radiation, which could eventually be removed as newly planted trees mature. During onsite conversations, parents and caregivers offered other suggestions for the redesign of the playground: split-rail fencing and hedges around the perimeter of the playground, equipment featuring whimsical elements appropriate for younger children, including spring riders, a pirate ship or train engine to explore, etc.

Exhibit 3:

Citizens Object to Moving the Playground . . . But Want Renovation!

- Playground definitely needs renovation, but should remain where it is.
- Renovate – fine. Move – no.
- Please don't move the playground. Perfect where it is . . . yes, it should be renovated in place!
- I like the plan to improve equipment and make it varied for different age groups. Not as interested in seeing the playground moved.
- I think children should be farther from the street. It is nice [to] have space by [the] sidewalk.
- Renovation is needed, but could be accomplished at present location.
- Playground is fine as is. Moving the playground will make it narrower, a bad thing.
- [The proposed] long shape also makes it hard to keep an eye on kids.
- Do not move it. Instead, plant trees around it and/or use the canopies that are on the playground at Jefferson Houston Elementary. This is a less expensive and more sensible strategy.
- From the diagram, [the proposed playground would be] situated right along the steep grade [adjacent to Royal Street]. Also, it's not clear what the fencing would look like, but [it would be needed] here, since traffic on Royal is out of control with speeders.
- The playground should stay where it is and just get new equipment.
- No reason to change the location . . . spend money on updating the equipment.
- I vote for renovating the playground where it is located right now.
- I don't think the playground should be moved closer to Royal Street. Better to keep it where it is and renovate.
- Please don't move the playground, as it's much safer where it is. Just last week a car went out of control just three blocks away on 1st Street and flipped over!
- Keep the present safe distance between the road and the playground! Renovations are needed, however.
- Renovate playground where it is . . . don't move it, please.
- Adding a circular walkway and moving the playground are completely unnecessary actions that will waste out tax money.
- There is always increased danger when children play too close to the street, so please keep the playground where it is.
- The playground should not go down the hill.
- [Relocating the playground] on Royal is much less desirable.
- Most parents would like upgraded equipment, but like the area where the playground is located.
- The playground should remain where it is.
- When the sign went up showing the proposed plan, the other mothers I spoke with were disappointed and would prefer to see the children's playground renovated in its present location.

Recommendation 4: Improve plantings along Royal Street

No recommendation garners more support and less disapproval among Park users than that concerning the improvement of plantings along Royal Street—62.5% “love it” and only 1.8% “don’t like it” (see Figure 1). Moreover, it is clear from the open-ended comments of those responding to the 2015 survey that users would like to see *beautification* assume a more central role in the redevelopment of the *entire* Park, not just the area bordering Royal Street (see Exhibit 4). Respondents voice consistent support for such features as: landscaping to hide “the ugly metal fences” that surround the playground and dog park; more shrubs around the perimeter of the Park; and a fountain (separate from the water feature already proposed for the playground) in what is now open space, surrounded by flowering plants and trees.

Conversations with Park patrons during onsite visits corroborate these findings. Many emphasize that the focus of redevelopment should not be on altering the Park’s functionality (i.e., adding a half-tennis court) or on the relocation of existing features (i.e., the playground), but, rather, on enhancing the beauty of what already exists, through the addition of trees, shrubs, and other vegetation designed to provide a natural counterpoint to an increasingly urban environment. Others express a desire for attractive lamppost lighting, brick pathways, and wrought iron fencing around the Park’s perimeter in keeping with the historic ambiance of Old Town North. Still others suggest that redevelopment plans might include such fanciful elements as a butterfly garden, similar to that proposed for Hume Springs Park.

Exhibit 4: Improve Plantings along Royal and Throughout the Park

- The most important thing that this survey is missing is a plan for addressing the ugly metal fences that surround the dog park and playground. Both should be planted with dense shrubbery on the outside of the fences.
- More landscaping (trees, shrubs, etc.)
- More shrubs and flowering plants.
- Plant shrubbery around the dog park and playground fences.
- Would be great to have more shrubs and flowers too!
- Yes, [improve plantings along Royal] and also around the ugly metal fences that surround the playground and dog run.
- A fountain in the middle of what is now open space would be nice, surrounded by flowering plants and trees.
- Royal Street is a busy street, so plantings should create a buffer.
- Shrubs [should be] planted around the perimeter.
- Plant a hedge around the playground on outside of fence.
- Cover fences with bushes. Very ugly currently.
- Benches along a path with flowers would also be nice.
- [Recommend] planting shrubs around both the dog park and the playground.
- The existing fencing is really ugly and would benefit from plants.

These findings are not at all surprising. A survey conducted by NOTICe in 2014—targeting a substantially larger sample of Old Town North residents—found that a majority (51%) would prefer a park with exceptional aesthetic appeal, including “tree-lined paths, flower/sculpture gardens, fountains,” and similar features. Other types of parks were less in demand, including a “passive park” (22%), a “culture-centered” park (12%), an “ecological/educational” park (9%), and a “sports-oriented” park (6%).¹

But redevelopment that emphasizes landscaping and beautification as its central theme requires more than planting a few additional trees and shrubs. First, it will be critical to develop an irrigation and water management system that can sustain the enhanced natural environment that will ultimately be created. Currently, although some sections of the park are served by in-ground sprinklers, anyone who has ever walked along 1st Street when they are operational can testify to their inadequacy. The street and sidewalk typically receive more water than the adjacent trees and grass! Second, a professional landscape plan—such as that proposed for Lee Center Park—should be commissioned to ensure that the resulting design makes optimal use of the Park’s limited space. And, finally, every aspect of redevelopment should contribute to the Park’s overall beautification. To cite just one example, the current dog park seems to have been developed with one goal in mind—to provide a large, enclosed space where dogs can run free. But the vast expanse of chain-link fencing that surrounds this area severely undermines the aesthetics of the Park. This could easily be mitigated by planting shrubs outside the fence in a curvilinear pattern designed to “soften” the visual impact of the long expanse of fencing.

Recommendation 5: Install pathway to connect the south side of the Park

The revised draft plan’s recommendation for the installation of a pathway connecting the south side of the Park is favored by 31.5% of respondents to the 2015 survey and disliked by only 11.1%. However, while there is substantial support for this measure, more than just one new pathway is needed. If RPCA staff wish to be responsive to community preferences presented in this report, it will require a total rethinking of the Park’s redevelopment plan. For example, if the playground remains in its current location, the circular pathway envisioned in the draft plan will have to be modified or even eliminated.

Many of the existing pathways exhibit problems of their own. In contrast to the user community’s preference for a Park that emphasizes beauty as its central organizing theme, most of the Park’s existing pathways seem to emphasize functionality alone, with little regard for aesthetics. A straight line may provide the most efficient path between two points, but it is surely not the most pleasing to the eye. Something akin to the irregularly shaped pathways proposed for the redesign of the 3550 Commonwealth Avenue Park would be more consistent with the vision proposed here. Likewise, concrete may be less expensive, but brick pavers would go a long way toward achieving greater compatibility with the architectural style of the surrounding area.

¹ This question addresses respondents’ preferences for a park at the GenOn site in Old Town North.

Recommendation 6: Renovate the parking lot and include green infrastructure

The final recommendation in RCPA’s revised draft plan for the redevelopment of Montgomery Park calls for renovating the parking lot, with an emphasis on green infrastructure. While this element of the plan has fewer supporters (31.7%) than detractors (40%) among those responding to the 2015 survey, it is evident from respondents’ open-ended comments that the term “green infrastructure” was misunderstood by many, limiting the utility of these data to inform policy decisions. Open-ended comments from the survey include:

- What the hell is a “green infrastructure”?
- What does that mean?
- Fancy name for a couple of shrubs?

During onsite visits to the Park, patrons were asked how they would define the term, and the vast majority had no idea. However, with some discussion and clarification of the term’s meaning, most had no objection to this recommendation. Therefore, while the 2015 survey data may suggest otherwise, it seems that there is actually very little resistance to this element of the proposed plan.

Conclusion: A Vision for the Future

This report examines an important, yet underutilized, source of information—the 2015 survey conducted by RCPA staff—to gauge citizens’ reactions to the City’s revised draft plan for the redevelopment of Montgomery Park. Other sources of information, including conversations with more than 50 Montgomery Park patrons and meetings with representatives from several local businesses and civic organizations, have been helpful in supplementing the survey data to arrive at a collective vision for the redevelopment of the Park.

The report finds that, despite an impressive outreach campaign conducted by RCPA staff, the proposed redevelopment plan is poorly aligned with the preferences and values of the user community. This is especially true in the case of the three principal recommendations of the proposed plan: (1) to grade the center of the Park and create an enlarged, circular, passive lawn; (2) to convert half of the parking lot into a half-tennis court with backboard for solo play; and (3) to renovate, expand, and reconfigure the playground. When examined in light of survey respondents’ reactions to the proposed plan, these recommendations either (a) fail to garner broad support among Park users or (b) are inconsistent with a careful interpretation of the data.

While there is little support among Park patrons for the three principal elements of RPCA's proposed redevelopment plan, preferred alternatives to each of the recommendation are unambiguously reflected in this report:

1. Instead of a broad, circular expanse of passive lawn, users would like to see many more trees, providing much-needed shade throughout the Park. This does not mean that there should be *no* open space, but, rather, that a vast open lawn—as envisioned in the revised draft plan—should not be the dominant feature of the Park's redesign.
2. Instead of converting half of the parking lot into a half-tennis court, Park patrons prefer to see a backboard installed at an *existing* court with clear regulations governing its use.
3. Finally, while there is strong support for the renovation of the playground, there is equally strong opposition to relocating the playground along Royal Street. In the short-term, shade structures could be installed to compensate for the lack of trees in and around the playground. In the future, as newly planted trees mature, the shade structures may be removed to provide a completely natural environment.

Above all, the collective vision for the redevelopment of Montgomery Park that emerges from this report suggests that the focus of redevelopment should *not* be on altering Montgomery Park's current functionality or on the relocation of its existing features, but, rather, on enhancing the beauty of what already exists.

The Park is currently circumscribed on three sides by unsightly chain-link fences. Aside from the lighting at the tennis courts, none exists. The lawn is bare in some spots, browning in others. Existing pathways are mostly straight and made of concrete. There is little shade outside of the area along Royal Street adjacent to the playground. The present irrigation system is inadequate.

Given this reality, it is not surprising that patrons' suggestions for improvement tend to focus almost exclusively on the enhancement of the Park's aesthetics. The 2015 survey response data, combined with other sources of citizen feedback, support the following specific recommendations:

- Install extensive landscaping throughout the Park, including many more trees, hedges, and flowering plants, and an irrigation system that will sustain this new green infrastructure well into the future. It is especially critical that dense hedges be planted to "soften" and camouflage the unsightly chain link fencing that surrounds the dog park. Shrubs should also be planted around the tennis courts—perhaps at five-foot intervals—to break up the existing "wall" of black chain link fencing. Finally, the concrete walkway separating the parking lot from the tennis courts should be replaced with attractive shrubs.

- Install low profile (perhaps four feet tall), decorative wrought iron fencing along the entire perimeter of the Park—or, at a minimum, along First Street and N. Royal Street—to enhance the Park’s beauty and provide an air of urban sophistication. The fencing could be interlaced with roses or other flowering plants and capped off with a beautiful arched entranceway on First Street.
- Resurface the existing concrete steps and pathway connecting the Fairfax Street entrance to the dog park, gazebo, and parking lot with brick pavers. Replace the existing straight, concrete pathway that connects the First Street entrance to the dog park with a more aesthetically pleasing curvilinear brick pathway. Install new curvilinear brick pathway(s) adjacent to the dog park and/or playground to connect the northern and southern ends of the Park. Install a shorter, curvilinear brick pathway between the parking lot and the southern entrance to the playground.
- Install lampposts along pathways throughout the Park that complement the historical ambiance of Old Town North.
- Install a centrally located fountain surrounded by a beautifully landscaped flower garden (perhaps emphasizing plants that attract butterflies).
- Enlarge and reconfigure the playground at its current location, replacing its rigid rectangular shape with a more pleasing, irregular footprint, enclosed by split-rail fencing and shrubs. Plant trees within and around the playground for future shade and erect colorful, synthetic canopies to provide immediate protection from the sun (these shade structures can be removed in the future, when they begin to show wear and the trees have matured). Install new playground equipment, including spring riders, a stationary train or pirate ship, and other whimsical features appropriate for very young children.

The people of Old Town North see Montgomery Park as the hub of a vibrant, ever-changing community—a place to join with friends for a picnic under the gazebo, engage in a game of tennis, exercise one’s dog, or just relax and listen to the sounds of children playing. But as the community’s vision has evolved, it has become increasingly clear that the Park’s full potential has yet to be realized. We thank the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities for the role it has played in promoting an interactive, community-based dialogue that has given rise to a new vision for the Park—a vision that embraces not just its functionality, but its unrealized charm and beauty. But if this vision is to be realized, The Old Town North Small Area Plan Advisory Group, working in conjunction with RPCA staff and the Park and Recreation Commission, must ensure that the values and preferences of the citizens of Old Town North—so clearly expressed in this report—are heard and acted upon.