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PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PROJECT
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of the research and analysis initiated as a first step in the update of the Parks and Open Space chapter of the Prince William County Comprehensive Plan. The information provided in this report will provide a basis for a planning dialogue between staff, citizens and public officials on the goals, policies and objectives of the Parks and Open Space chapter. The scope of work for the project identifies the need for an inventory, analysis and mapping of existing public and private parks, recreation facilities and open space and associated land uses. The majority of this report presents this information and describes the methodology used in obtaining the data and analyzing the information. In addition, this report provides a summary of existing policies and practices in the County to preserve open space, as well as a look at some “best practices” found in national, state and local jurisdictions. With these three elements one can begin exploring new policies, changes to existing policies and new strategies in developing parks and open space.

A. BACKGROUND

The quality of life for residents of Prince William County is not only linked to the availability of a well-maintained system of parks, recreation facilities, and public open space, but also to the quality of the entire natural area within which they live. Prince William County’s diverse natural environment such as its streams, lakes, forests, farmland, shores, and mountains, influence the way we spend our leisure time, determine whether we have clean air and water, provide habitat for plants and animals, and serve to strengthen the County’s economy.

The County, through the Park Authority, currently provides a well-maintained system of parks, recreation facilities, and public open space that meet a variety of active and passive recreational needs required by its citizens. In addition, the County has taken initiatives to effectively manage growth and conserve its vital open space and farmland through the creation of a development area and a rural area, as well as a long-range land use designation of Environmental Resource. It is important to recognize that the way we manage development and change, the balance between protection and conservation of land and historic sites and residential and commercial growth and new infrastructure, will have an immense impact on future generations.

However, Prince William County citizens have clearly identified a need for additional passive recreation and open space preservation, especially through a planned, connected system. This was made clear through the strategic planning process, the 2003 Citizen Survey, and the 2002 Prince William County Park Authority Needs Assessment. Each of these citizen outreach efforts found that citizens have a desire for more high quality passive open space parks, in addition to the active parks.

This Parks and Open Space Project will allow the County and the Park Authority to analyze the existing parks and open spaces and determine how to manage the park or open space and how open space will be acquired in the future. In addition, through a series of citizen forums this project will identify the parks and open space values of the citizens of Prince William County and create a method to sustain those values into the future.

B. PURPOSE OF THE PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PROJECT

- ☐ Identify and analyze the County's existing private and public parks and open space resources and assets.
- ☐ Coordinate efforts between the Park Authority's Master Parks and Open Space Plan and the County's Comprehensive Plan to create a shared understanding of the County's and the community's desires for the future growth of parks and open spaces.
- ☐ Identify funding mechanisms and County agencies to implement the strategies and recommendations of the Parks and Open Space plans.

C. PARK AND OPEN SPACE PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- ☐ To review existing parks and open space goals for Prince William County and amend or update those goals as necessary.
- ☐ To provide passive and active recreational opportunities including:
 - o A system of public and private park and recreation facilities of a variety, quantity, and quality suitable to meet the needs of all residents of Prince William County.
 - o A cohesive and interconnected framework of open space to create recreational and ecological corridors throughout the County.
- ☐ To protect environmental resources through the conservation of environmentally sensitive areas.
- ☐ To define and preserve to the greatest extent possible the County's viewsheds.
- ☐ To protect the County's cultural resources.
- ☐ To create a glossary of terms and definitions for parks, open space and conservation areas to be used consistently throughout all County agencies.

- ☐ To identify County agencies, corporate organizations and Home Owner Associations and the roles/responsibilities they will have with regard to the protection and enhancement of parks, open spaces and land preservation.
- ☐ To enhance awareness of the role parks, trails, and open spaces play within the County, especially for land set asides within new and rehabilitated developments.
- ☐ To work with applicants of land use projects to implement the Park and Open Space policies.

D. DELIVERABLES

- ☐ Inventory, analysis and mapping of existing public and private parks, recreation facilities and open space and associated land uses.
- ☐ Revised Parks and Open Space Map to be considered for adoption by the BOCS.
- ☐ Amendment to the LRLU Map that properly classifies public lands, active and passive parks, and open space to be considered for adoption by the BOCS.
- ☐ Report addressing the identification of agency responsibilities and authorities as they pertain to the ownership and maintenance of parks, open space, and environmental preservation, as well as associated funding mechanisms.
- ☐ Amendment recommendations to relevant chapters of the Comprehensive Plan to be considered for adoption by the BOCS.
- ☐ Draft Park and Open Space Master Plan to be considered for adoption by the Park Authority Board.