



Parkland Rehabilitation Design Commission of Fine Arts Concept Approval October 19, 2023

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to rehabilitate the Parkland section of Shepherd Parkway in southeast Washington, DC. This design project is an opportunity to improve existing conditions, increase recognition of the park as an NPS entity, provide flexible community recreation space, and increase safety throughout the park. Parkland is a narrow and gently sloping open space used by the surrounding community. The site is approximately 1.25 acres in size. The project area is located at the symbolic intersection of Malcolm X Avenue SE on the north and Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE on the east, with Parkland Place SE to the south, and a gently sloping wooded area to the west (all roadways are SE unless otherwise noted). The NPS has developed a concept approach for the rehabilitation of Parkland. This concept plan builds off the design process started with the Shepherd Parkway Development Concept Plan (DCP) and a robust stakeholder engagement process.

NPS in the District of Columbia

In addition to its signature parks of national significance, such as the National Mall, the NPS also has jurisdiction over numerous small parks, natural areas, and other federal lands in the District of Columbia (District) that more directly serve the local community. In NPS' 2016 Small Parks Study, the NPS identified over 200 small parks and individual parcels within the District. These small parks and parcels make up many of the city's signature circles and squares. Similarly, unadorned natural areas with limited facilities serve as gateway points to larger contiguous natural parks.

The District's 2022 Ready to Play Parks and Recreation Master Plan developed six park classifications: small, neighborhood, community, district, destination, and nature/conservation area. Based on the criteria, Parkland would be classified as a small or neighborhood park. Although it is slightly larger than one acre, Parkland offers a playground, walkway, and multipurpose turf area, similar to a small park. Parkland also contains several amenities that make up a community park: a playground, open lawn areas for unstructured play, seating and picnic areas, and community gardens. Similar parks within the NPS portfolio in the District of Columbia include Stanton Park, Garfield Park, and Monroe Park.

NPS also has multiple parks that would be classified as nature/conservation area parks. The largest within the District is Rock Creek Park, which contains more than 1,700 acres. These parks frequently include trails, picnic areas, and education programming at nodes within the parks. Shepherd Parkway, which encompasses Parkland, would also be classified as a nature/ conservation area park, although it has limited trails, picnic areas, and programming.

Shepherd Parkway is a long, narrow, predominately wooded portion of NPS land located in southeast and southwest Washington, DC. In July 2020, the NPS finalized the DCP, which outlined potential improvements within the parkway with the overarching goals of bolstering programming

opportunities, improving the ecological health of Shepherd Parkway, and addressing safety and maintenance concerns. The DCP outlined two concepts for Parkland that would accommodate a wide range of programming options and offer spaces for active and passive recreation and access to natural areas for the local community. Each option divided Parkland into three zones connected by pathways: 1) an entry plaza, 2) a family-oriented outdoor space, and 3) an expanded children's play area.

Parkland is in the position to serve as both a small or neighborhood park and as a gateway to a nature/conservation area park. The proposed plan would offer many of the amenities cited for a neighborhood park, including the potential for a future commemorative work. Parkland also offers the opportunity to encourage community connections to the natural areas of Shepherd Parkway by establishing trail connections and supporting facilities, such as picnic areas.

Project Area

Within Shepherd Parkway is Parkland, a narrow, gently sloping open space commonly used by the surrounding community for recreation, events, and gatherings. The site is also used for weekly church visits, food and clothing donations, communal gatherings, worship services, and to connect with neighbors and learn about community events and benefits from social services.

Visitor Use

During the development of the Shepherd Parkway DCP and the public comment periods on Parkland Rehabilitation, the community recognized multiple ways in which it uses the site. People identified the following uses:

- Participate in Ward 8 Woods clean-ups
- Walk .
- Garden at community-installed plots
- Provide social services, such as giving food to those in need
- Gather with friends/family

In addition to those activities cataloged by the community, other visitor activities and use patterns have been observed at the site. Informal activity was conducted primarily by adults. Oftentimes, unwanted park activity occurs throughout the day, starting early in the morning and extending into the evening. Consumption of alcohol and illegal substances has also been regularly observed at the site. These illicit activities create a nuisance that discourages others, particularly families, from using the park for recreation.



Site Context

The character of the nearby neighborhoods informs the potential uses. Parkland is surrounded by neighborhoods with a high concentration of youth, especially those 5–9 years old. Compared to the District's comprehensive demographics, the neighborhoods around Parkland have a much higher concentration of Black or African American population and lower median household income. The immediate project area also contains an above-average percentage of residents with disabilities.

Parkland is located along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue commercial retail activity and is surrounded by single-family and multi-family uses. The retail activity includes an adjacent liquor store north of Malcolm X Avenue and a service station south of Parkland Place.

Visitors can access Parkland on three sides. Visitors can reach the park from the north via the sidewalk along Malcolm X Avenue. West of the project site, a crosswalk across Malcolm X Avenue links the residential area to the north to the park. From the east, a sidewalk and plaza offer access to the park at the northeast and southeast corners, although they are separated from the interior of the park by an evergreen hedge. Along Parkland Place to the south, no sidewalk is present. Access occurs via a mid-block sidewalk apron leading a path to the playground and via an asphalt path with steps linking Parkland Place to Malcolm X Avenue on the southern edge of the site. The western portion of the site is bordered by dense vegetation and steep slopes, and does not currently provide direct access to Parkland.

Vegetation and Environmental Conditions

The trees within Shepherd Parkway represent a substantial portion of Washington's urban forest. The Shepherd Parkway hardwood forest is listed as a priority habitat location in the District of Columbia's Wildlife Action Plan. The Parkland portion is currently an open space shaded by a forest canopy including large special trees and two very large heritage trees, whose trunks are 31.8" in diameter or larger. Most of the trees within the park are willow oaks.

Parkland's groundcover consists primarily of compacted soil, patches of grass, and a small brick plaza near Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue. Soil around mature oak trees and near the picnic tables is heavily compacted. Tree roots are exposed and present tripping hazards. Formal pathways include a paved path to the playground and a dirt path connecting Malcolm X Avenue and Parkland Place at the western end of the park. Several washout areas and signs of erosion appear at the northeast end of the site.

Available space for facilities on site is extremely limited due to the quantity and size of special and heritage trees, as defined by the District of Columbia Department of Transportation, within the park. Most of these trees have large, overlapping critical root zones (CRZs). While the trees provide shade, they present challenges to construct amenities within the park without damaging the roots. While most of the trees are large and healthy, several trees are damaged, have insect infestations, or need significant pruning.

Existing Site Furnishings and Play Area

Multiple trash receptacles and benches are located throughout the site. Despite the presence of trash cans, litter is often present on the ground. The benches are located in shaded areas along the perimeter of the site and near the playground. Additional picnic benches and a single grill are scattered within the eastern portion of the site.

A brick plaza faces Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue with several benches. A heavily used bus stop and a bike rack are located within the plaza. Evergreen shrubs separate it from the picnic area.

The existing playground sits level atop a plateau and is raised above the Malcolm X Avenue elevation. The playground surfacing is worn, especially in areas of high use, such as the swing set and the bottom of the slide. A black metal fence surrounds the entire playground. Existing play equipment consists of a swing set and platform play structure with a slide, both of which show signs of deterioration. The play structure lacks entertaining accessible play.

Parkland is also constrained by the steep slopes along the entire western edge of the site. These slopes are heavily vegetated, including both hardwood trees and invasive undergrowth, and are a prime area for illegal dumping.

Proposed Project

This design project is an opportunity to improve existing conditions, increase recognition of the park as an NPS entity, provide flexible community recreation space, and increase safety throughout the park. The redesign of Parkland will address the following goals:

- Provide space for multi-generational activities for the community
- Provide a large and safe play area for children
- Improve the overall appearance of the park
- cherished by the community

Design Approach

The design approach for Parkland is to capitalize on existing site features and incorporate them into the proposed design while achieving the project goals. The existing tree canopy presents enormous opportunity for shade at the site. In order to avoid CRZs, the overall design places circulation and activities requiring ground disturbance in a limited area. New circulation patterns and pathways replace and build upon social trails created by pedestrians, including connections to future Shepherd Parkway trails. The proposed play areas for the concept integrate the existing site slopes into the play experience.



Discourage illicit activity, illegal dumping, and litter within the park by cultivating a park

Public Engagement

The NPS has begun a robust public engagement effort for the Parkland Rehabilitation. The NPS held a series of public engagement events in 2022 to inform the current proposed concept. At that time, the NPS presented two design concept options of review by the public and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA).

For the current 2023 proposed concept, in addition to review by NCPC and Section 106 consultation, the NPS plans to submit the Parkland Rehabilitation to CFA for concept review in October 2023. Once the public comment period and agency reviews for the preliminary designs are completed, the NPS will refine and finalize the proposed design.

The NPS encourages the public to provide input on the types of activities and facilities they would like to see at Parkland. As part of the public engagement, NPS plans to conduct a public meeting in Fall 2023 to present the project and encourage input on the design. The project will also be open to public comment via NPS's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website for a 30-day period.

2022 Public Comment Summary

The NPS held a public meeting in October 2022 that kicked off a 60-day public comment period that presented two design concept options. The NPS met with the District Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and Deputy Mayor's Office for Health and Human Services. The NPS also presented materials during an Anacostia Coordinating Council meeting. Additionally, the NPS conducted events to reach a range of the public, including on-site at Parkland, at Ballou High School, at Congress Heights Senior Wellness Center, and at Oxon Run Park Green Fair.

Public comments included the desire for various visitor uses and experiences, including the following:

- Participate in events such as movie nights, music performances, church services/ministry, and dances
- Gather with friends and family, such as for a drum circle or to play chess
- Use the playground for recreation
- Explore history and nature; engage in gardening
- Exercise, including cardio, yoga, walking, bicycle riding, jumping rope
- Accommodate all visitors' accessibility needs
- Allow for enjoyment of amenities for all ages
- Provide for picnicking
- Combat and prevent dumping
- Ensure a safe experience

Agency Comment Summary

Feedback from CFA on the two 2022 design concept options included requests to improve the design quality, to provide a more comprehensive summary of community input, to ensure that organization of program areas and pathways accommodate park use, and to consider how fencing is applied. In addition, CFA requested a stronger response to the park's context, including residential and commercial areas, roadways, pedestrian crosswalks, and the gas station. CFA also requested documentation of environmental goals like tree protection, soil erosion, invasive species management, and stormwater management.

District agencies also provided comments. Feedback from the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) included concern for the potential of the project to affect archeological resources. DPR noted that Parkland would ideally complement recreation opportunities offered at Congress Heights Recreation Center, which is currently under renovation. DPR also noted that the service area contains a disproportionate number of people with disabilities.

Through the District Office of Planning Congress Heights Small Area Plan, DPR suggested the incorporation of public art and iconic architectural facades at key community sites, including daylighting the former movie theater marquis of the adjacent liquor store and the forthcoming mural installation on the adjacent blank wall.

Design Summary

Overall, the concept plan provides for a flexible, community-oriented park that includes pedestrian circulation with nodes of activities ranging from exercise pods to educational nature play. The design concept offers site amenities and programming opportunities that appeal to a wide range of ages from play for children to passive recreation for older adults. Specific concept plan elements include the following:

- Attractive and coordinated paths
- New, enlarged playground area
- Flexible gathering space for the community
- Park signage to improve visibility of the park in the community
- Future trail connection through Shepherd Parkway woodlands
- Picnic areas, including individual tables and grouped tables with shade structure
- Site furniture, including benches, adult swing chairs, trash receptacles, and lighting
- Permeable paving
- Improvements to soil to address compaction
- Pedestrian lighting at pathways, plaza, and picnic areas



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Revised Design Concept

The proposed design concept simplifies the 2022 concept and responds to community input for desired activities. The design simplifies circulations within the site to enable access across the park. The plaza to the east connects to metal decking that will provide seating, benches, and community gathering space. An ADA-accessible pathway leads from the plaza to the picnic area and flexible lawn space that can accommodate programmed activities, such as fitness classes and informal recreation. The path further connects to the playground featuring nature play that can accommodate children of all abilities from ages 2 to 5 years of age and 6 to 12 years of age. The path leads to Malcolm X Avenue in the northwest corner of the site. Community garden boxes and screens are found along the southern edge of the park. Specific site amenities in the revised concept include tables, seating/benches, and trash receptacles.

Resource Management and Compliance

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The NPS anticipates that the project would be subject to a Categorical Exclusion. The NPS will provide the documentation once completed.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The project is within the Civil War Defenses of Washington/Fort Circle Parks Historic District as documented in the 2015 National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) boundary increase nomination. The NPS initiated Section 106 Consultation with SHPO on September 9, 2022 and with federally-recognized Tribes on September 25, 2022. During an informational briefing held on August 10, 2023, SHPO expressed concern about potential archeological resources but did not anticipate adverse effects on above-ground resources. In response, the NPS has initiated archeological investigation of the site. The NPS will continue to consult with interested parties as the design progresses.

Stormwater Management

At this preliminary stage of design, stormwater calculations and specific strategies are not included. However, given the site's proposed level of development, the NPS anticipates stormwater can be addressed on-site using bioretention Best Management Practices. Additionally, permeable materials will be used to the extent practicable. NPS will continue to coordinate with the District Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE).

Tree Preservation/Replacement

As described in the design approach, trees at the site would be preserved to the extent practicable. An estimated 11 trees would be removed due to poor condition and new trees would be added to the site. The trees are anticipated to be native species compatible with urban environments. The NPS would follow the National Capital Planning Commission and District Department of Transportation (DDOT) tree preservation and replacement policies, as applicable.

Wetlands and Floodplains

The site does not contain wetlands and is not within floodplains.

Consistency with Shepherd Parkway DCP

The project is consistent with the Shepherd Parkway DCP, which, as described in the NPS in the District of Columbia section, outlined the need for improvements to the park. The Shepherd Parkway DCP provided an overall framework for considerations and options for the rehabilitation of Shepherd Parkway.



Project Context: NPS Portfolio

The NPS manages hundreds of parks and open spaces within the District of Columbia. These parks vary greatly in size, amenities, and resources. The range includes small neighborhood parks offering passive recreation facilities, larger community parks for active and passive recreation, and natural open space/conservation areas with trails and resource education opportunities. Across park types, the aesthetic character of NPS properties is generally one of attractive simplicity achieved through unadorned and natural settings.

Neighborhood Parks





Bryce Park, Northwest Washington



Monroe Park, Northwest Washington



Stanton Park, Northeast Washington



Garfield Park, Southeast Washington







Natural/Conservation Area Parks

Rock Creek Park, Northwest Washington



Fort Totten, Northeast Washington

Project Context: Shepherd Parkway

Shepherd Parkway is a long, narrow portion of predominantly wooded land in southeast and southwest Washington, DC. The park is part of, and administered by, the NPS. Shepherd Parkway is surrounded by the Bellevue and Congress Heights neighborhoods to the east and St. Elizabeths to the northeast.



Shepherd Parkway: DCP

The DCP outlines improvements within the park that would enhance visitor access and experience, increase public safety, and improve overall conditions. Goals of the DCP are to: enrich existing and explore new uses and programming opportunities; improve the health of Shepherd Parkway, ecologically and for the surrounding community; and address safety and maintenance concerns. The DCP calls for new trails, areas for recreation and open space, identifying signage, vegetation improvements, and interpretation.





Project Area: Parkland Section of Shepherd Parkway

The Parkland section of Shepherd Parkway is a narrow, gently sloping open space that is commonly used by the surrounding community for play space and gatherings. The project area is bordered by Malcolm X Avenue to the north, Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue to the east, Parkland Place to the south, and a wooded area to the west.





Nearby Land Uses

Land uses surrounding Parkland are primarily residential, with commercial, civic, and institutional uses located along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue.





Recreation Amenities

Multiple recreation facilities are within a 10 minute walk of Parkland, including DPR facilities and school play areas. The majority of these recreation opportunities are oriented toward school-age children and young adults.





Historic Resources: Area of Potential Effect

The Area of Potential Effect (APE) includes the boundaries of the project site and one block of the adjacent streets. Historic resources within the APE include the Civil War Defenses of Washington/Fort Circle Parks Historic District, whose boundary expansion is documented in a pending 2015 NRHP nomination.





Site Context Map

The Parkland site is situated between two medium-density neighborhoods with primarily commercial adjacent uses. To the west of the project site, the area is characterized by steep slopes, wooded vegetation with invasive species, and evidence of illegal dumping.







Site Context: Topography and Critical Root Zones

The park's existing site characteristics inform the design. The park contains a number of mature trees whose CRZs cover an estimated 82 percent of the site. The site gently slopes from southwest to northwest, although the slope becomes steeper in the northwest portion of the site near Malcolm X Avenue. The presence of the CRZs informs the location of new park amenities. The site is site is approximately 102 feet wide and 572 feet long.





Site Context: Circulation

The site is accessed from all directions except from the west, where steep slopes and thick vegetation prevent access. Official crosswalks across Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenues provide access for visitors from the north and east. Visitor circulation patterns also include unofficial mid-block crossings of the busy Malcolm X Avenue and the residential Parkland Place outside of crosswalks. Although pathways lead to Parkland Place, no mid-block crosswalks are present.









Observed Approach Routes Outside Crosswalks

Site Photos: Northeast Corner



Looking north along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, the Parkland site has a busy intersection with a high volume of vehicular traffic and no shade at the plaza.



Looking west along Malcolm X Avenue, adult uses discourage youth from using the park. Despite being prohibited, alcohol use occurs in the park.





Site Photos: Southeast Corner





Looking northwest from Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, significant portions of the site show signs of soil compaction and erosion.

Looking west along Parkland Place, the site has exposed tree roots and lacks groundcover.



Site Photos: Western Portion





Looking northwest from Parkland Place, the playground is surrounded by fencing.

Looking northeast toward Malcolm X Avenue, the playground is raised from street level.



Site Photos: Northwest Portion





The playground includes a swingset.

The playground has a lack of accessible play features.





Site Photos: Western Portion





Looking west from Parkland Place, the western edge of the project site is wooded and contains invasive plants.

Looking northwest, an unofficial pedestrian path is worn across the site.



2022 Previously Proposed Concepts

The two previously proposed concepts from 2022 had two overall designs: Concept A: Neighborhood National Park with Fitness Loop featured a fitness loop and a central gathering area. Concept B: Neighborhood National Park with Playground and Nature Play focused on an expanded playground and dispersed picnic and gathering space.









Current Proposed Design Concept: Overall

The revised design concept provides three distinct activity areas and simplifies the circulation linking amenities throughout the park. It includes new, enlarged playground areas; a flexible picnic and community gathering space with lawn; and a flexible plaza near the symbolic intersection of Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue and Malcolm X Avenue. It also offers park signage and a potential future commemorative location at the northeast portion of the site, a future trail connection to the woodlands of Shepherd Parkway, seating options in multiple locations, site furniture including benches, trash receptacles, bike rack, and lighting, and permeable paving. The exercise equipment and picnic shade structure have been removed from consideration and a community garden has been added to the design. The design responds to community requests for multi-generational and active visitor experiences.







Current Proposed Design Concept: Site Circulation

The revised design concept simplifies the circulation linking amenities throughout the park with a pedestrian pathway. From the northwest, visitors would enter the site from Malcolm X Avenue and move east to reach the playgrounds, picnic areas, and flexible lawn space. Farther east, visitors could exit the park directly to Malcolm X Avenue to the north. Visitors would be able to access Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue via a pathway south of the metal deck. Site circulation would be ADA-accessible through regrading portions of the site. As a result, low boulders, which could also serve as informal seating, would be placed to serve as a retaining wall along the primary path's southern edge to maintain the site's natural character.

The metal decking would be flush to the sidewalk and plaza area along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue for people to access the gathering space. The west side of the deck would include steps that could also serve as tiered seating during events.

NPS has consulted with DDOT regarding a mid-block crossing at Parkland Place. DDOT discourgaged the idea, stating that its policy is to avoid establishing new mid-block crossings. NPS will continue to coordinate with DDOT to advance this potential connection.





Current Proposed Design Concept: Site Materials

The revised design concept simplifies the circulation linking amenities throughout the park with a pedestrian pathway that would be a permeable flexi-pave. The plaza area along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue would be permeable pavers. The playground area would be of an impact attenuation surface. The intent is to maximize the use of permeable materials throughout the site.





Current Proposed Design Concept: Tree Removal/Replacement

In order to create a communal outdoor space, the park design will include hardscaped plaza areas in addition to groundcover in critical root zones. 11 trees in poor condition would be removed. The proposed plaza and pathway would avoid critical root zones in order to minimize tree removal. In addition to groundcover and removal of existing trees, new trees would be planted in accordance with NCPC tree replacement policies. Two existing street trees would be replaced to maintain a barrier from vehicular traffic on Malcolm X Avenue and Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue.



TOTAL PROPOSED TREES REMOVED: 11

TOTAL PROPOSED REPLACEMENT TREES: 13



Current Proposed Design Concept: Playground Fencing

The revised design concept features two playgrounds- one for children aged 5-12 years old and another for children aged 2-5 years old, both of which are surrounded by a single fence.



PLAYGROUND



Current Proposed Design Concept: Character Images

Park design elements enable the desired park uses while being compatible withe the character of NPS parkland. The images below illustrate how a plaza can incorporate tiered steps, permeable decking, and swing benches. Panels can offer artistic screening of commercial and industrial uses while maintaining a level of transparency for safety. Boulders along pathways serve as low retaining walls and informal seating. Community-led garden boxes offer opportunities for the community to further connect with nature and the outdoors.





Current Proposed Design Concept: Flexible Plaza

The current proposed design concept features a public plaza that can accommodate everyday uses, such as informal gatherings, as well as formal events. The permeable pavers along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue would be accessible to the metal deck; an accessible ramp would lead to the pathway north and south of the deck. Furthermore, steps on the rear of the deck would offer the opportunity for tiered seating at events such as a movie night. Event support equipment, such as a tent or stage, could be placed within the plaza deck, to the west of the stairs, or within the flexible lawn space.

Swing benches are located along Marting Luther King, Jr. Avenue offer seating and informal gathering space. On the southern edge of the site, screens shield visitors from commercial activites on Parkland Place.





Current Proposed Design Concept: Playground

The current proposed design concept features a playground that can accommodate both 2-5 year olds and 6-12 year olds in order to offer amenities to families with children of both age groups. The playground focuses on nature play and utilizes the park's topography to incorporate slides and embankment play. The nature play offers a different play experience than other neighobrhood playgrounds while advancing the NPS mission. The playgrounds will offer accessible play opportunities for children of all abilities.





Current Proposed Design Concept: Materials

The metal plaza will use metal planks to provide a permeable surface that enables tree protection and offers a tailored appearance. This material is ADA compliant and accommodates high-heeled shoes. The finish will be a color that is compatible with the natural setting and NPS parklands.



Metal decking would use a darker color that would be compatible with the park environment.



The decking material has been deployed in a number of landscapes, both urban and natural.



The metal decking would offer a permeable surface that would enable the retention of trees.



The metal decking material comes in multiple formats, including one that would accommodate high-heeled footwear and is slip-resistant.



This metal decking has been used in at High Line Park to provide a "see-through" look while remaining ADA compliant.



Current Proposed Design Concept: Nature Play Equipment

The revised design concept provides much needed communal outdoor space and recreation amenities including play areas. Below are some examples of play equipment, including a swingset, a log climber, and auditory play equipment.









Current Proposed Design Concept: Lighting Zones

Lighting at the site will focus on guiding pedestrian visitors through the site. The existing conditions offer ambient light from adjacent street lights and buildings. The new light would provide illumination at the plaza and picnic areas and along the pathway connecting the east and west sides of the park. The playgrounds would not be lit. The types of fixtures and hours of operation for the lights will be determined in the future.

Zones A & B: Plaza and Deck

Zone C: Walkway





Revised Design Concept: Comparison to 2022 Previous Concept Options

2022 Previous Concept Options





Current Concept



