



Council of the District of Columbia

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

January 31, 2023

Transmitted Electronically

Dear Director Hunter,

I want to congratulate you and your team for the significant achievement that is the draft 'Ready2Play' DPR Master Plan. I will ensure that my staff and I utilize it in our work moving forward, once the plan is finalized. I especially appreciate the addition of the "Level of Service" analysis, which better captures the need for park and amenity access in high-density neighborhoods.

Below are four major comments I have on the draft plan that constitute high priorities and more significant changes, followed by a few more minor suggestions.

1. Meridian Hill/Malcom X Park

Since the time I first represented it on ANC1B I have found myself in the position of informing constituents that despite being one of the most iconic and beloved parks in the District, Meridian Hill/Malcom X Park is NPS property. Unfortunately, the reason this comes up so consistently is because of requests for maintenance, enforcement, improvements, or new amenities that NPS is unable to meet.

Simply put, it does not seem that the Park Service has the resources – or the organizational mission – to manage a large but decidedly urban park, at the confluence of three of the densest neighborhoods in the District. District control or a partnership could enable this park to be an even better historic asset: restrooms and food service amenities similar to the new Franklin Park, or a dedicated dog run¹, for example. Of note, ANC1B passed a resolution to support this proposal during my time nearly 15 years ago, and again this past December. Both resolutions are should be afforded Great Weight in the finalization of this plan.

¹ Off-leash dog activity is a frequent issue I hear from constituents, which NPS is not able to effectively enforce. Since Meridian Hill/Malcom X is in an area of "LOS Need and High-Demand for Dog Parks", it stands to reason that owners letting dogs off-leash is a consequence of that pent-up demand.

There are also significant cultural and historical resources core to this park that the District can stand to take ownership of and elevate: improvements to better accommodate the weekly drum circle, for instance.

Even if DPR has not gotten indications of immediate feasibility, I have to assert that any NPS partnership recommendation list is incomplete without the inclusion of Meridian Hill/Malcom X Park.

2. Armed Forces Retirement Home – Zones B and C

Though it is not an NPS property, I strongly urge DPR's master plan to include the western and southwestern portions of AFRH (Zones B and C, respectively) in the recommendations for partnerships and potential new parks. With the right approach to partnering with the Home, this area has the potential to be a marquee new park location, and one that helps repair a challenging history.

Understandably, focus is currently on Zone A as the site of major redevelopment. The public green space planned for the Zone A development has been pointed to as a considerable asset – which is true – but the AFRH campus is so large that it fails to serve current residents that live adjacent to the AFRH campus, instead being most accessible to prospective residents of the Zone A project.

Most of AFRH was publicly accessible until the 1950s/60s when it was closed in reaction to racial unrest in the District. This has left neighborhoods to its north and west with a significant lack of open space, since at the time that they were developed, this space at the Home was accessible. There is no interest in revoking the Home's ownership of any space, but there are significant opportunities to re-establish that public access in a way that's consistent with their mission.

As a condition for approval of their amended master plan this year, NCPC has required AFRH to engage with surrounding communities to assemble a legitimate plan for connectivity and access. However, those talks have not gotten very far; understandably, AFRH's primary motivation must be financial sustainability, so any change in public access should come with investment and partnership with the District. Now it seems like an appropriate time for there to be more earnest involvement from DC government, but that cannot begin in earnest without DPR setting its intentions in its planning.

For a preview of what is possible, attached below is an excerpt from AFRH's own 2014 master planning document (full document can be viewed [here](#)). With your agency's planning and buy-in, the potential to bring this vision about still exists, and the need is urgent.

3. Defining and Categorizing Plazas as a Distinct Asset

The plan's six-tiered Park Classification system (p. 53) is a very helpful resource, and a good way of framing the plan. However, our experience with DPR projects, and especially management, in Ward 1 indicates that plazas deserve to be their own dedicated category in the classification system. These hardscaped spaces, more integrated into the urban fabric, are and can be some of our most valuable and well-used spaces if we bring them into the tent of "recreation."

In the broadest sense, there doesn't seem to be either a definition or a programmatic home for such urban plazas in District government, whether that's at DPR, DDOT, or elsewhere. This manifests in many ways, from a reluctance to call a space a plaza (see Unity Park in Adams Morgan), to the many challenges we have had keeping Columbia Heights Civic Plaza clean, safe, and in a state of good repair. I've attached a flowchart our office had to put together to track all of the plaza's jurisdictional overlap, for an example of what I mean.

The umbrella category of "Small Park" is in many cases still too large. In many places throughout the District, we should be thinking more in square feet than in acres; if we recognize the potential of locations that at first glance look like little more than an overly-wide sidewalk, there are potentially hundreds of opportunities for passive recreation, places for rest and socialization, and other amenities. Amigos Park, for instance, was initially rejected for consideration as a recreational amenity because of its small size. But in many places of the District – and many with the highest demand and LOS need, per the Ready2Play plan – those kinds of spaces are all we have to work with.

4. Co-location of Housing DPR Facilities

Given the Mayor's housing production targets and the importance of utilizing public land to the greatest extent possible, DPR should establish a formal policy on co-locating housing on its facilities. I understand the Chevy Chase Community Center will have housing incorporated into its reconstruction – I am similarly advocating for housing above a new Rita Bright Recreation Center in Ward 1. Analysis of

housing production feasibility should be built in to DPR's capital planning process in cooperation with DMPED to ensure that the District isn't leaving any potential new affordable housing on the table. I appreciate that Ready2Play establishes a new focus on incorporating DPR's planning into other planning, zoning, and land use decisions – consideration of housing seems to fit well with that philosophy. New development can be leveraged to produce new parks and recreation spaces, but the reverse is also true!

5. Other Recommendations

- I have long advocated for adding Cardozo Education Campus as an option for expanding indoor pool access, as did my predecessor, who secured funds for the pool's refurbishment with this in mind. Establishing public access to that indoor pool – similar to the recently-completed project at Roosevelt High on Upshur Street NW – would be a cost-effective way to improve indoor pool access in an area in need of additional LOS.
- The “Programming Assessment” on p.49 appears to show a significant gap in aquatics programming offered in Ward 1 and lower Ward 4, but this is not acknowledged in the Key Findings section of that analysis.
- I greatly appreciate the recommendation for establishing park-specific maintenance and operating budgets (p.111); alongside that, I suggest clearing up the agency overlap in park maintenance between DPR, DGS, DPW, and others. Otherwise, it will be challenging to get a full grasp of the overall costs.

Sincerely,



Brianne K. Nadeau
Ward 1 Councilmember

COMMUNITY ACCESS PROJECT UNIT



This unit focuses on the southwest corner of the campus where AFRH intends accommodate and support limited public access and use. These projects will help AFRH toward reaching one of its strategic goals: to expand its circle of influence outside the physical boundaries of the Home and engage external stakeholders.

25 Garden Plots	remove the existing garden storage and terminate maintenance, upkeep, and supply of the gardens; allow the plots to return to natural fields unless they are incorporated into a program of public gardening activities supported in the southwest area of the campus.
26 Picnic Areas	work with the community to create designated picnic areas in the southwest area of the campus.
27 Dog Park	work with the community to create a dog park in the southwest area of the campus, preferably in the area south of the lakes.
28 Lakes Outdoor Gathering Area	improve the existing outdoor gathering area at the Lakes for use by both residents and the community.
29 Lakes Fence	remove the existing chain link fence and install a new fence that better meets safety and aesthetic requirements.
30 Lakes Rehabilitation	rehabilitate the lakes and surrounding areas in the southwest area of the campus, including dredging, retaining wall repair, landscaping rehabilitation, and fountain repair.
31 Bridge Rehabilitation	rehabilitate the historic bridges to beautify the lakes and improve the safety of the entire area intended for public access.

COLUMBIA HEIGHTS CIVIC PLAZA- WHO TO CALL

