



Photo Credit: Parks & Recreation M-NCPPC

Executive Summary

Vision Statement

Watkins Regional Park will continue to nurture and promote its signature outdoor experiences to attract people from far and wide, further making the park a key contributor to Prince George's County's culture and economy. The park's exceptional natural resources will continue to be protected from development, while being utilized to provide greater opportunities for environmental discovery and understanding. The park's historic agricultural and cultural landscapes will become a new centerpiece for education and innovation, and better connections will make these experiences more accessible. New leisure activities and refreshed existing activities will fully embrace an accessible and multi-dimensional leisure environment. Integrating play, recreation and exploration will foster community ties and learning. Watkins Regional Park will remain a jewel in the Department of Parks and Recreation system and a great outdoor place within Prince George's County.



Photo Credit: ESA

Shaping the Plan

A park as geographically large as Watkins Regional Park, with its extensive natural and cultural resources and active and passive recreation opportunities, attracts visitors from throughout the county and the larger surrounding communities. Generating a plan that directs reinvestment in existing resources and future growth is key to the park's continued stature as a jewel of Prince George's County's park system.

Guiding Principles

One of the first steps in formulating the recommendations for the master park development plan was to recall Countywide guiding documents, specifically the Formula 2040: Functional Master Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Space. Formula 2040 provides an integrated approach to define a sustainable model for the provision of future parks and recreational programs within the County. The plan recommends strategies and actions on the three pillars, which sets up a framework that assures the Department of Parks and Recreation will meet the county's future needs. The three pillars: Connectivity, Health and Wellness, and Economic Development, work to balance the equity of park facilities and demonstrate their value to the county. The Watkins Park Master Park Development Plan's guiding principles were derived from Formula 2040's pillars and further refined through an extensive public engagement process that included public meetings, stakeholder group workshops, interviews, and focus groups; coupled with thorough physical site assessments and level of service analyses. The following six guiding principles were generated to balance environmental, social, and economic concerns to meet current needs without sacrificing the ability to meet the needs of future generations:

CREATE A SENSE OF PLACE

A compelling mix of destinations will enhance the comfort, ambiance, and choice of activities at Watkins Regional Park. The plan recommends several new features and experiences that will entice and engage new and existing visitors who have long enjoyed the park and its many offerings. Many of these improvements build on the pillars of the guiding principles and bolster visits to resources that were already in place, but were under performing or not used to their potential.

EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING

Nature and landscapes will be more central to the visitor experience. Some of the park's most significant assets – namely a native woodland of exceptional quality and several acres of heritage farming landscape – have been largely untapped because of the lack of park programming that would encourage visitors to experience these places. Several recommended changes will allow visitors, especially kids, to connect with nature and agriculture, including co-locating the Watkins Nature Center and the Old Maryland Farm in the southern half of the park. This move will establish a synergistic relationship between the two activities, launching kids into creative exploration of Prince George's County's farmlands and woodlands heritage. The new area will be known as the Watkins Discovery Center.

INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION

It is essential to maintain and expand the capacity of the park to accommodate larger numbers of visitors as the park continues to grow as a regional destination and attracts new diverse audiences. New programs and improvements to the core of the developed portion of the park will achieve better connectivity, safety, and function. With the activation of the southern portion of the park, the plan prioritizes stronger internal and external neighborhood connections to provide safer access to and within the park. Improved infrastructure will knit the northern and southern portions of the park together, creating opportunities to rediscover Watkins Regional Park.

FAMILY FUN

Watkins Regional Park is already one of the most popular parks in the county, however its current offerings cater mostly to young families with children and/or older adults. The plan recognizes the current and future demographic trends, and recommends an expansion of activities and amenities that involve the whole range of family dynamics by engaging middle and high school aged kids, and young adults without children. The park will be rebranded as a place for activities, spaces, and features that support family togetherness and fun for a whole day in the park—rain or shine.

PERSONAL HEALTH AND FITNESS

The plan recommends the expansion of the existing trail network for running, walking, and leisure. Fitness and health programming will be available at hours that respond to the schedule constraints of the busy professionals who desire to use the park regularly.

HABITAT AND WILDLIFE

Special and unique environmental and historic features in the park will be protected, including the Western Branch, the intact mature forest, and historic farmlands. The preservation of the landscape, stewardship and sustainability, and incorporation of cultural elements that express Prince Georges County's character and identity are one of the plans priorities. Recommendations are to educate, celebrate, capitalize, and support the rediscovery of the park's natural resources through special preservation areas in combination with enhanced active recreation opportunities.

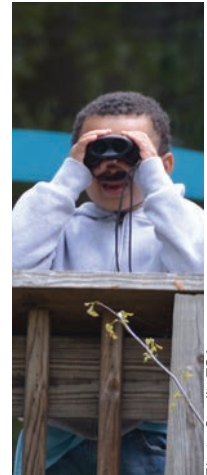


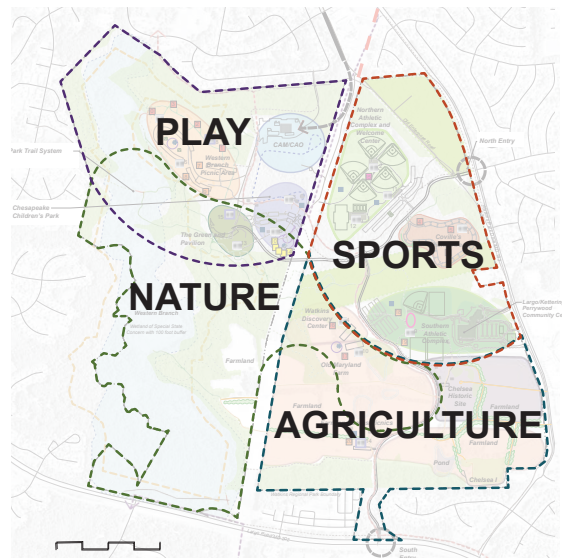
Photo Credit: ESA



Photo Credit: ESA

Themes and Activity Nodes

Largely based on existing park features and conditions, four primary quadrants were established with themes that incorporate how the park functions currently and in the future. The four quadrants: **Play, Sports, Agriculture, and Nature**, take into account the development restrictions in the park. As explained in Chapter 2, Watkins Regional Park can only expand within a development envelope that serves to preserve and protect the park's natural and cultural resources. Although there are areas to avoid, the plan addresses how those areas will continue to be beneficial to the county and future park visitors. Nine activity areas are identified within the four quadrants. The plan strengthens each quadrant by recommending improvements to each activity area.



PLAY

Western Branch Picnic Area

The group picnic shelters located in the northwestern corner of the park are a major attraction that provides an important service to county residents, and revenue for the park. Improvements to this activity area include moving three picnic shelters to Coville's Picnic Area to decongest and make room for additional recreational activities that will serve the remaining shelters.

Chesapeake Children's Park

This activity area has been the heart of children's activities in the park. The area is comprised of the *Wizard of Oz* Playground, the historic Chesapeake Carousel, 18-hole miniature golf course, miniature replica train, and picnic areas. The plan builds upon the success of the hub by introducing strategies for better pedestrian and vehicle circulation, parking, healthier food options, and programming for all ages.

The Green and Pavilion

The Green has served as a performance, event, and outdoor class space for Watkins Regional Park, while also providing visitors with a calm area for meditation and passive recreation. The plan strengthens the role of The Green by transforming the Watkins Nature into a 200 person pavilion that will expand The Green's programming beyond the boundaries of its circle. To expose visitors to Prince George's County agricultural and natural heritage, the Watkins Nature Center and Old Maryland Farm will be co-located in the southern portion of the park.

SPORTS

Northern Athletic Complex and Park Welcome Center

The Central Area Operations building is a central focal point within the park. As it is located close to the MD193 entrance, the building will be more valuable if re-purposed to serve as a Welcome Center, Park Ranger Station, and/or public bathroom. All current diamond fields will be upgraded to meet tournament dimensions, which will have the flexibility to accommodate both adult and youth softball and baseball games.

Coville's Picnic Area

The campground is transformed into Coville's Picnic Area, a picnic glade with three new permitted group shelters, each with a capacity of 150 attendees. The shelters could be operated for adult groups, which would limit alcohol permits to picnics held in this area. Camping could still be allowed under a special use permit, and the area could provide overflow parking space from large events at the park.

Southern Athletic Complex

The Southern Athletic Complex provides the link that can better integrate the Largo/Kettering/Perrywood Community Center and its activities into the park. The plan recommends strengthening this athletic focus by adding two lighted rectangular fields with picnic shelters and public restrooms. Several additional recreational activities attractive to tweens through adults will be considered for installation in this area, ranging from skate parks, to a mountain bike course or pump track, to a ropes course.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURE

Chelsea Historic Site

The Chelsea Historic Site, comprised of the Chelsea Manor and its outbuildings, entry drive, and immediate property parcel, is protected by its designation as an environmental setting of an historic site. Recommendations retain the open farmland between the historic house and Watkins Park Drive, as it is an important viewshed associated with the site. Stabilizing, renovating, and repurposing the adjacent barns to house antique farm equipment for a Farm Museum will help to preserve the setting of the historic site and bring new life and activity to the park.

Watkins Discovery Center (WDC) & Old Maryland Farm (OMF)

Two new, symbiotic facilities will be developed, each building upon the available natural and agricultural resources found on the 200 acres in the southern portion of the park. The Watkins Discovery Center (relocating and growing the Watkins Nature Center in a new location) and the Old Maryland Farm (fully moved to the southern portion of the site and expanded) are co-located, sharing and taking advantage of each other's facility and educational programming. Moving both features to the south will create a much richer destination that offers something for every age group. Multigenerational programming will increase, and programs will expand their focus on agricultural and environmental science, experimental learning, and give purpose to innovative educational opportunities that expose park visitors to the vast natural agricultural resources that surround them.

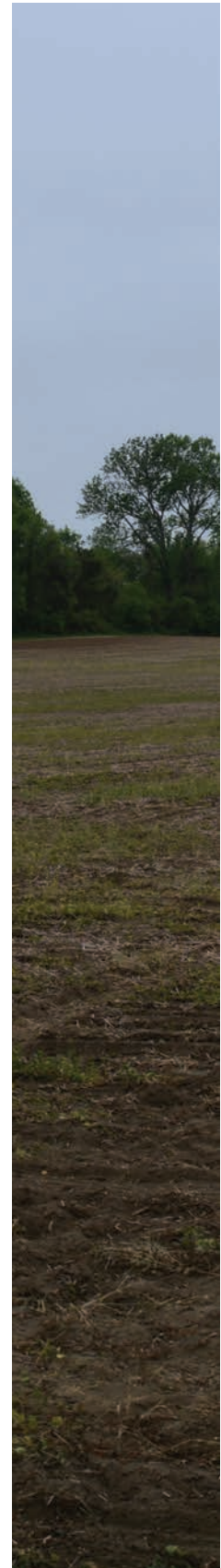


Photo Credit: ESA

Implementing the Plan

Watkins Regional Park has grown organically over the past 40 years—infrastructure, activities, and programs were developed as opportunities presented themselves. This informal growth helped establish Watkins as a jewel that provides a diverse collection programs, activities and natural resources. The park as it is now configured is inefficiently organized to support the over one million annual visitors. Park visitation continues to increase due to new interest and attractions as the county and metropolitan area population continues to grow. With the County's population projected to increase to near one million by 2040, a more holistic planning approach is needed to avoid adversely impacting the park's assets. The Department of Parks and Recreation recognizes the growing demand for facilities within the county and the park. This document provides some initial steps to allocate future conservation and development resources in Watkins Regional Park.

To address the current issues of congestion and insufficient parking, the plan offers several solutions. They are organized into three implementation phases over a 15 to 20 year time period. The implementation strategy is not only used to progressively introduce amenities to the park, but also to prioritize recommendations that will require substantial capital funding. Below are the three phases that encompass all plan recommendations. Each phase's recommendations are presented in further detail through the plan:

PHASE 1: IMPROVE THE CORE

Phase 1 is focused on reinvesting and improving the developed portions of the park by targeting issues related to congestion and aging infrastructure. Phase 1 recommendations address the need of additional of infrastructure and facility upgrades and improvements, including new parking areas, redesigned circulation, and improved water service for those features. It includes the initial projects that begin the physical development of the southern portion of the park. Significant projects included in this phase are:

- Upgrade water system in northern half of the park, and add sewer, water, electric service to southern portion
- Upgrade softball fields; add concession stand and replace restrooms for tournament use
- Close campground and open 3 permitted picnic shelters
- Expand parking at Summer Operations
- Add teen focused activities such as bike facility, skate park, or similar activity west of Largo/Kettering/Perrywood Community Center
- Begin to transition OMF to southern portion of the park and build OMF complex to continue farming activities
- Stabilize and refurbish Chelsea Historic Site outbuildings/barns for use for antique farm equipment display

PHASE 2: THE BIG MOVE

Phase 2 is focused on transforming the southern portion of the park. The southern portion of the park will become a showcase of agrarian uses, retelling the history and complex stories of Prince George's County's agrarian culture. This will be accomplished with the biggest move within the park – completing the relocation of the Old Maryland Farm (OMF) and Watkins Nature Center (WNC) to the south. The two revamped facilities in the south will give will new purpose to the agricultural lands and natural landscapes through recreational and educational activities. WNC's programs will be expanded under the roof of a new building that will be called Watkins Discovery Center (WDC). Facilities including picnic and play areas, parking, safe bus drop-offs, and restrooms will be provided to support both WDC and the OMF. The old WNC building and OMF location will be repurposed to provide amenities that strengthen existing amenities and operational functions in the northern half of the park. Other improvements within Phase 2 include:

- Add nature/agriculture/science oriented experimental playground next to WDC
- Relocate Central Area Operations (CAO), and renovate former CAO offices as Welcome Center
- Add new multi-purpose lighted athletic fields adjacent to Largo/Kettering/Perrywood Community Center
- Expand Central Area Maintenance (CAM) facility into former OMF site

PHASE 3: KNITTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Phase 3 completes the plan by knitting the northern and southern portions of the park together. The trail network is expanded to make stronger neighborhood connections, and connect to the facilities in the southern portion of the park. Vehicular circulation patterns are reconfigured and improved to provide safer access to and within the park.

The plan's concept drawings take into account the existing topography, soil conditions, tree preservation, stormwater and other elements in establishing and recommending future renovations and improvements. Final facility design and engineering is still required for all of the recommended elements in the plan.

Need More Information?

Contact:

Joseph Arce | Park Planner
(301) 699 – 2437
Joseph.Arce@pgparks.com

Watkins Regional Park Master Park Development Plan website:

<http://pgparks.com/279/Watkins-Regional-Park-Master-Park-Develo>



ES-8



The Department of Parks and Recreation encourages and supports the participation of individuals with disabilities. Register at least a minimum of two weeks in advance of the program start date to request and receive a disability accommodation.



Watkins Regional Park Master Park Development Plan

LEGEND

- Primary Park Road
- Secondary Park Road
- Park Road - Staff Access Only
- Parking - new and existing
- New Trail (paved)
- New Trail (soft/gravel)
- Existing Trail (hard)
- Existing Trail (soft)
- Primary Trail Route
- Primary Trail Desireline

- Train Route
- Building/Structure
- Picnic Table Area
- Picnic Shelter - 150 capacity
- Picnic Shelter - 100 capacity
- Picnic Shelter - 50 capacity
- Picnic Shelter - special
- Picnic Shelter - 150 cap removed
- Picnic Shelter - 100 cap removed
- Playground/water feature

- Restroom - sewer/water
- Restroom - no sewer
- Restroom - removed
- Basketball Court
- Half Basketball Court
- Softball/Baseball Field
- Multi-purpose Field
- Tennis
- New sport - pump track, skate park, other

- Forest Interior Dwelling
- Bird Buffer (FID) - 300'
- Wetland
- High Quality Forest
- Tree Conservation Area
- Tree Bank Opportunity