REQUEST: Herring Run Park Master Plan

RECOMMENDATION: Approval and Adoption

STAFF: William Doane, Jr.

PETITIONERS: Department of Recreation and Parks

OWNER: Mayor and City Council – Department of Recreation and Parks.

SITE/ GENERAL AREA

General Area: The Herring Run is a stream which originates with tributaries north into Baltimore County and ends by flowing into the Chesapeake Bay in Baltimore County to the south. Herring Run passes through Mt. Pleasant Golf course, then next to Morgan State University, then through Herring Run Park, finally back out to county and the bay. Herring Run Park’s 375 acres lie in the stream valley of the Herring Run in the former countryside areas north of the original Baltimore City limits.

Site Conditions: Herring Run Park is a linear park that passes through several neighborhoods, and that has very different conditions and opportunities in different sections. Residential uses front onto much of the park perimeter. The park is also intersected by several major and minor roads, including Harford Road, Belair Road, Sinclair Avenue, Mannasota Avenue, and Brehms Lane.

The park is generally divided into three sections from northwest to southeast; the Upper, Middle, and Lower. The Upper section is adjacent to the following neighborhoods: Mayfield, Lauraville, Arcadia, and Belair-Edison. It includes the Hall Springs gateway area entrance, Father Hooper field area, and several mature woodlands. This section is close to Lake Montebello and Morgan State University.

The Middle Section lies between Belair Road and Sinclair Lane, adjacent to the following neighborhoods: Parkside, Belair-Parkside, and Belair-Edison. This section is much narrower than the Upper and Lower sections, and doesn’t contain as much woodland. It also contains several baseball fields which have fallen into disrepair, the Shannon West Gateway with playground, and a multi-purpose field on the Parkside section.

The Lower Section runs south of Sinclair to the City border, adjacent to the following neighborhoods: Armistead Gardens, Claremont Freedom, and Frankford. It contains remnants of
the tennis and basketball courts, as well as dirt-bike trails and other informal uses. Much of the vegetation is invasive species.

**HISTORY**
The area now known as Herring Run Park was initially developed in the mid- to late- eighteenth century. Initial uses were farming, country estates, and in the stream valley, mill operations. During the nineteenth century part of the area was used as a horse-racing track.

In the early 20th Century Herring Run Park was recommended as an extension of Montebello Park (today the Lake Montebello Water Treatment Facility). The stream valley was prized for its picturesque nature and usefulness for park activities as well as low land prices (it was generally not suited for development other than farming). Herring Run Park was also more broadly conceived of as a network of valley parks and parkways with a radial parkway connection to Clifton and Montebello Parks. The upper portion of the valley was valued for its picturesque abrupt turns, stone outcroppings, and beautiful forest trees. The beauty and proximity to two existing parks was critical to achieving the radial parkway system. The lower portion of the valley was valued for its sparse population and economical land prices. The stream valley park was conceived as means of regulating flooding during future development and as a narrow park or broad parkway ultimately connecting to the Back River.

While the Olmsted Brothers firm was hired to provide guidance for a comprehensive park system in Baltimore, including recommendations for land acquisition along the Herring Run and other stream valleys, there is no evidence that the firm designed any elements of Herring Run Park itself.

**CONFORMITY TO PLANS**
The request conforms to the goals and objectives of the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically PLAY Goal 3, Objective 1: Maintain a Well-managed System of Parks and Open Spaces. The request conforms to the goals and objectives of the Baltimore Sustainability Plan, specifically GREENING Goal 3: Provide safe, well-maintained public recreational space within ¼ mile of all residents.

The following plans were examined and incorporated into the Herring Run Park Master Plan: Herring Run Watershed Stream Assessment and Restoration Concept Plan, 2004 (prepared for Department of Public Works); the Herring Run Park Tree Survey, 2008 (prepared for the Department of Recreation and Parks); Upper Back River Small Watershed Action Plan, 2008; and the Technical Memorandum “Baltimore City Stormwater Inventory” 2008.

The following studies were conducted and incorporated into the Park Master Plan: Soils Analysis; Slope Analysis; and Elevation Study.

The following are Concurrent Projects which impacted the Herring Run Park planning area and were incorporated into the Park Master Plan: the Herring Run Park Greenway Trail; the Sanitary Sewer Realignment and Lining; the Argonne Road Bridge Rehabilitation; the Harford Road Bridge Reconstruction; and the Harford Road Resurfacing.
In 2008, Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection and Resources Management in consultation with the Upper Back River SWAP Steering Committee (Baltimore City Public Works, The Jones Falls Water Association, The Center for Watershed Protection, The Herring Run Watershed Association and Baltimore County DEPRM) completed a study of potential storm water retrofit projects in the Herring Run Watershed, Jones Falls Watershed, and Inner Harbor. The best Management Practice conclusions were identified in the Upper Back River Small Watershed Action Plan, 2008, and Technical Memorandum “Baltimore City Storm water Inventory” 2008. The report and memo identified potential watershed restoration measures that included storm water retrofit, stream repair, riparian management, discharge prevention, and pollution source control and municipality best practices. The report/memo indicated 8 potential areas within Herring Run Park with priority rankings of high to low. The techniques included within these areas were storm water ponds/wetland systems, dry swales, and stream restoration. These reports are summarized in Appendix D and individual projects are identified and mapped on Exhibit F. Once the potential sites were identified, preliminary investigations were completed by staff from the Department of Public Works, Recreation and Parks and the Herring Run Watershed Association to identify any site constraints for the proposed storm water retrofit projects. The areas identified within Herring Run Park were found to be unsuitable for storm water storage. As a result of these conflicts, no significant storm water retention ponds or wetlands can be built within Herring Run Park, although minor “demonstration” areas could be accommodated. The Herring Run Watershed Association has identified the Hall Spring area as a potential “demonstration” site for storm water management practices to support their environmental education programs. No conflicts with existing utilities are present in this area.

ANALYSIS
The Department of Recreation and Parks has been systematically developing master plans for each of their major parks. The purpose of these plans is to provide long-range guidance for project implementation in the park. They have completed plans for Druid Hill, Patterson, Wyman, Farring Baybrook, Carroll, and Clifton Parks.

The Department of Recreation and Parks worked with a consultant, Mahan Rykiel Associates Inc., on the master planning process. The process included an extensive public participation process, including town-hall style public meetings, meetings with community groups, and the formation of an advisory board.

Sustainability Principles:
The Herring Run Park Master Plan Recommendations are based on Seven Sustainability Principles.

- **The Natural Oasis: Protection and Enhancing the Parks Natural Resources** - Herring Run Park is a restored and preserved stream valley park which provides visitors with the experience of a healthy, sustainable natural environment.
- **A Place to Play: Recreation** - Herring Run Park supports both outdoor resource recreation and field-based sports. Plans for organized sports facilities complement the park’s natural resources and park communities.
- **A Place With A Past: Revealing the Park’s History** - Herring Run Park is a place where visitors can discover Baltimore history through every day park activities.
• **The Herring Run Link: Connecting Baltimore** - Herring Run Park creates the thread that connects multiple neighborhoods and park areas with each other and is linked to Lake Montebello, Morgan State University and other locations.

• **The Emerald Necklace: One Park, Many Jewels** - Herring Run Park offers visitors a variety of experiences in distinct smaller park areas lying within its unified landscape and connected by the Herring Run stream.

• **A Clean, Safe and Functioning Park: Attention to Maintenance and Safety** - Herring Run Park is known by visitors for its safety, cleanliness and well-functioning facilities.

• **Everybody’s Park: Building Stewardship** - Herring Run Park is known for the stewardship of this exceptional park resource through its strong stakeholder base, public-private partnership and interagency coordination.

**Proposed Park-Wide Improvements:**
Based on these principles the Master Plan includes the following park-wide improvements.

• **Greenway Project:** The Herring Run Greenway project, a funded rehabilitation and repair of the existing asphalt path as well as extending the trail to include the north side of the stream between Sinclair Road and Belair Road (including work with DOT on street crossings, Harford Road Underpass, trail head signage, nature trails)

• **Buffer Enhancement:** Woodland and Riparian Buffer Enhancements (net gain 16 acres), which includes limbed-up edge trees on park and field peripheries

• **Signage:** A signage system based on the city-wide Comprehensive Park Sign System currently in development

• **Traffic Calming:** Traffic calming in areas where park use requires crossing or interacting with roadway

**Proposed Improvements By Park Sections:**
In addition to these system-wide improvements, the Master Plan includes detailed recommendations for each section of the park.

• **Upper Park:** Proposed improvements include Hall Spring/Argonne Gateway renovation, incorporating the Harford Road Bridge underpass connection which is part of the bridge reconstruction project and will connect the Greenway with Lake Montebello, the reconfiguration of Hooper fields, and presenting several options for the Eastwood fields.

• **Middle Park:** Proposed improvements include renovated fields and parking in the Parkside Multi-Athletic Field Area, playground enhancement at Brehms Lane Neighborhood Park, and Woodland Expansion throughout the section.

• **Lower Park:** Proposed improvements include community gardens at the Sinclair Lane Community Park, creation of a neighborhood park at Bowley’s Lane, and establishment of the Lower Herring Run Environmental Education Area, possibly including land-based natural recreation and interpretive information areas.

It is staff’s findings that the Herring Run Park Master Plan supports preservation and enhancement of Herring Run Park’s natural, recreational, environmental, and historical resources. The plan projects rest on clearly articulated goals to allow for flexibility and long-term success. The process has also resulted in a high amount of public participation and community
involvement, resulting in creation of a strong Advisory Board to assist in guiding Plan implementation to encourage use and enjoyment of the park. Thus staff recommends the approval of the Herring Run Park Master Plan by the Planning Commission.

Copies of the Herring Run Park Master Plan will be available at the Department of Planning and Department of Recreation and Parks websites.

Staff has notified City Council members Mary Pat Clarke, Robert Curran, Warren Branch, and Nicholas D’Adamo of this meeting. Staff also notified Arcadia Improvement Association, Inc., Belair-Edison Community Association, Beverly Hills Improvement Association, Frankford Improvement Association, Inc., Harbel Community Organization, Inc., Lauraville Improvement Association, Mayfield Improvement Association, Parkside Improvement Association, Herring Run Watershed Association, Neighborhoods of Greater Lauraville Inc., Morgan State University, St. Francis of Asissi – Athletics, and the Friends of Herring Run Parks of this meeting.

**Thomas J. Stosur,**  
**Director**