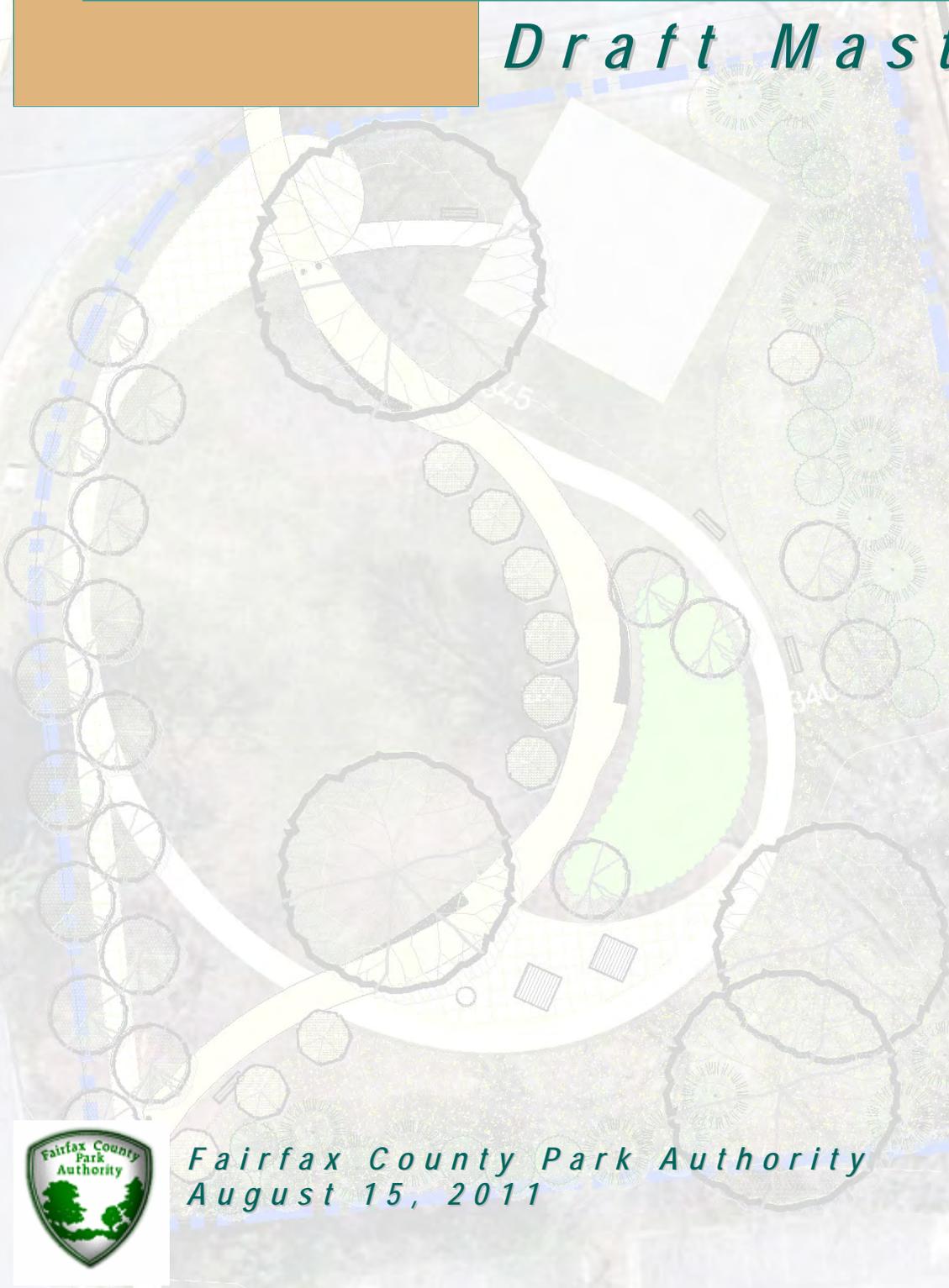




# Merrilee Park

## Draft Master Plan



Fairfax County Park Authority  
August 15, 2011

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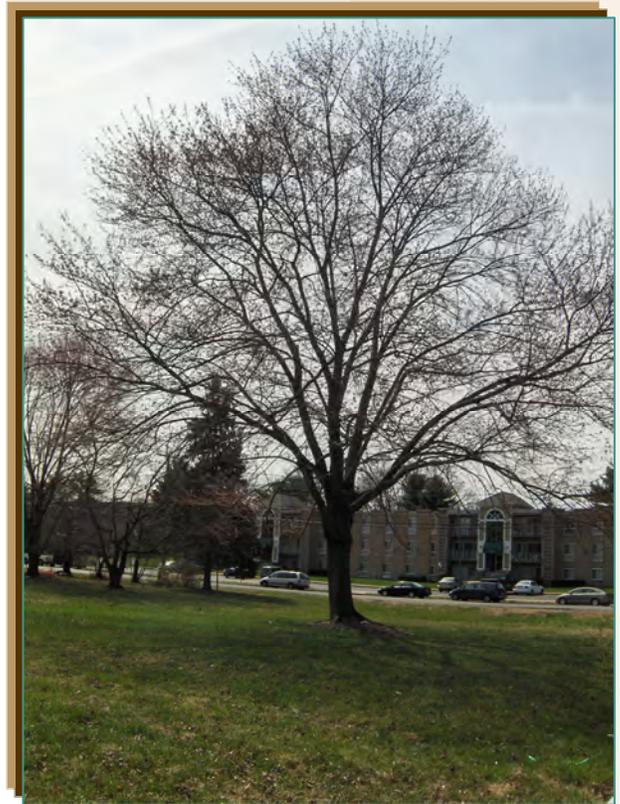
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### SECTION I INTRODUCTION

#### A) PURPOSE & PLAN DESCRIPTION

Fairfax County is a thriving community that is home to more than one million residents and the base for over two hundred million square feet of commercial, industrial and retail space. The County's residents and work force all uniquely benefit from the more than 22,000 acres of parkland and the myriad of recreational opportunities provided throughout the county. In 1950, the Fairfax County Park Authority was established with the charge of maintaining the viability and sustainability of this expansive system of parks and facilities. In providing quality facilities and services while protecting the County's cultural and natural resources, the Park Authority seeks to improve the quality of life for the County's residents today and well into the future.

In order to achieve its long-range goals and objectives, the Park Authority has established a process for the planning of park property and facilities, intended to be consistent and equitable. A key part of this process includes development of Park Master Plans, specific to each park and intended to establish a long-range vision towards future site development. During the planning process, the site is evaluated to assess its context within the surrounding neighborhood as well as within the framework of the entire Fairfax County Park Authority park system. Potential and desired uses are considered with regard to the ability to establish them sensitively and sustainably on the subject property with public input as a key component in the decision-making process. When completed, the individual Park Master Plan will serve as a long-term, decision-making tool to guide all aspects of the development related to planning, design, construction, resource management, and programming within that given park. To maintain the viability of the Park Master Plan as an effective tool, periodic updates may occur so that the plan accurately



*Existing tree within Merrilee Park*



reflects the park and its surroundings, addressing changes that occur over time. Physical site development ultimately will require additional study and detailed engineering that exceeds the scope of the Park Master Plan. It is the framework established through the Park Master Plan process, however, that assures cohesive, efficient and balanced development and usage of Park Authority assets.

**B) PLANNING PROCESS & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Hearing the voice of public opinion is a key element in the Park Authority’s approach to developing a park master plan. As such, a Public Information Meeting was held for Merrilee Park on April 25, 2011. This meeting provided an opportunity for Park Authority staff to share background information about the property and to explain the park master plan process to the local community. Additionally, this meeting offered a forum for the community to share its vision for the park, express concerns and ask questions of Park Authority staff. The meeting provided a comfortable opportunity for open discussion and brainstorming. The surrounding community is one of many facets including residential, commercial and office uses as well as diversity in ethnicity and age.



*2009 Aerial image of Merrilee Park*

Comments from those attending focused on a desire to, in some small way, touch the needs of each facet of the community within the rather diminutive park space. Emphasis was placed on providing safe pedestrian access, offering a walking destination to area residents and workforce alike. Benches would provide a respite for many while paths could provide a biking surface for small children. Small scale skateboarding elements or “skate spots” could provide a neighborhood youth and teen destination.

Additional community input was obtained through a neighborhood meeting with residents of the Merrifield at Dunn Loring Station apartment complex on the evening of May 18, 2011. This rental community of over 700 units is located to the west and north of Merrilee Park, directly across Hartland Road. Many of the



*Entrance signage for apartment development adjacent to Merrilee Park*



comments from the first public meeting where echoed by the Merrifield at Dunn Loring Station residents, particularly the opportunity for this park to serve such a diverse community. Additionally, younger residents in attendance mentioned that the existing basketball courts within the development are highly utilized and that some additional facilities at the park would be beneficial. Maintaining clear lines of sight into the park was also recommended to enhance visibility and safety.

Another key source of input provided in shaping this master plan was the Greater Merrifield Business Association (GMBA). This non-profit organization of businesses and professionals has sought to promote improvements to land use, transportation and economic development of the greater Merrifield area since its foundation in 1984. This group also participated in development of the Comprehensive Plan amendment that helped reshape the vision for Merrifield. Their comments reflected many of the sentiments expressed at previous meetings including an understanding that Merrilee Park should be pedestrian oriented with the provision of safe pedestrian crossing of Hartland Road. Merrilee Park should seek to meet the needs of both the residential and business communities providing trails, seating and a variety of small recreational elements. Landscaping should provide visual interest and shade for park patrons.



*View from north side of park*

Incorporating public input has been a key element throughout this process, recognizing the opinions of those who attended the public meetings as well as those who corresponded through telephone calls, letters and e-mail.

Preferences expressed by the community were considered in balance with the existing site conditions, natural and cultural resource considerations, site management goals and design issues. These elements were evaluated and prioritized to formulate a draft Park Master Plan for Merrilee Park. Continuing to foster opportunities for input, the draft plan will be published on-line and presented to the community at a Public Comment meeting in the fall of 2011. A period for public comment with regard to the draft plan will remain open for thirty days after the Public Comment meeting. The master plan team will consider all input received and address any necessary revisions to the draft plan before presenting it to the Park Authority Board for approval.

# Merrilee Park

## Draft Master Plan

### SECTION II PARK BACKGROUND

#### A) LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

Merrilee Park is located at 2733 Hartland Road in Falls Church, Virginia. This location places the park within the Jefferson Planning District and the Providence Supervisory District. The park is comprised of two individual parcels, identified on Fairfax County Tax Maps as 49-2 ((16)) parcels 2 and 3. The combined land area of these two parcels is 1.09 acres. Both parcels have frontage on Hartland Road and abut the I-495 right-of-way. The interface with the interstate has introduced numerous impacts to the property, most recently due to construction of the HOT Lanes project. The HOT Lanes project, which is an acronym for High-Occupancy/Toll lanes, includes the construction of additional lanes along the portions of I-495 intended to provide options to area drivers and reduce traffic congestion. Project construction is well underway at the drafting of this master plan and has introduced impacts to park property in the form of sound walls, drainage structures and easements along the eastern edge of the park.

The property is gently sloping with maintained lawns and a few scattered trees, appearing open and inviting from the community edge, particularly during the spring and summer months.

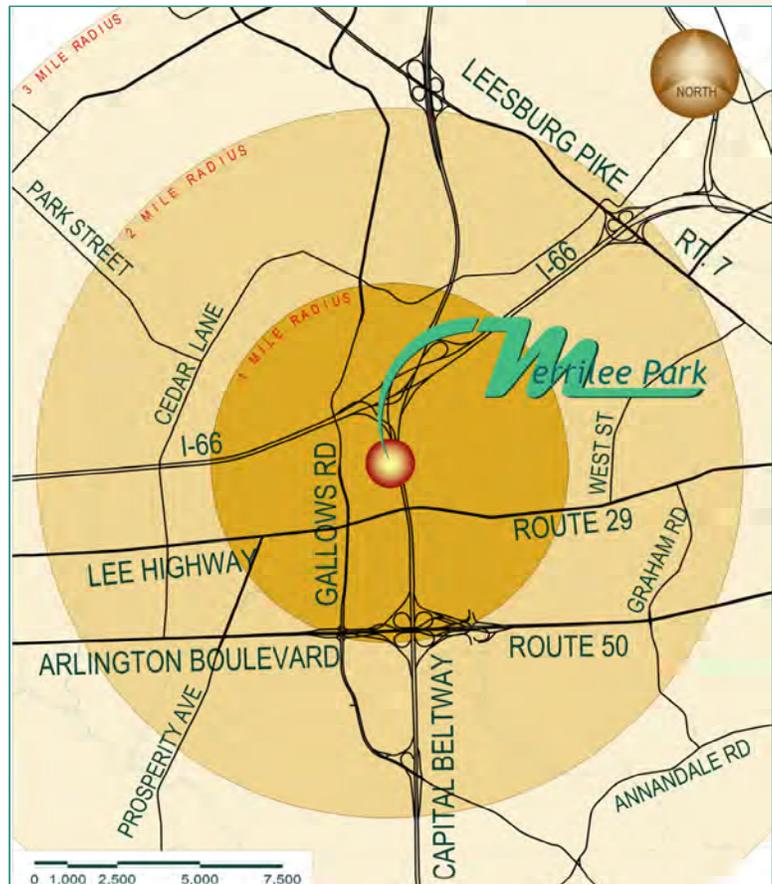


Figure 1  
Vicinity Map



## **B) ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY**

Proximity to the Dunn Loring-Merrifield Metro station, as well as Interstates 495 and 66, makes the Merrifield area one of the most centrally located and easily accessible areas in Fairfax County. Building upon the strength of its central and accessible location, Merrifield is envisioned to develop as a new town center, combining a thriving mix of commercial and residential development with amenities and community-supporting services that will serve both the existing and newly developing communities. In support of this vision, the Board of Supervisors designated a portion of the Merrifield Suburban Center as a Commercial Revitalization Area (CRA) in 1998. This designation allows for facilitated administrative procedures for development review and concurrent Comprehensive Plan Amendments, as well as zoning ordinance provisions relating to area identification signage.

Within the vision for Merrifield is an understanding of the importance of publicly accessible open space for the existing and future residents and workforce. Much of the envisioned open space will be provided within residential and office communities as privately-owned open space with public access. There remains, however, a vision to concurrently provide publicly-owned parkland within the new urban context to serve this growing area. Supportive of this goal, funds were made available to the Park Authority from the Fairfax County Department of Housing and Community Development through a reallocation from the 1998 Bond Referendum on Commercial and Redevelopment Areas specifically for the purpose of establishing an urban park in the Merrifield Redevelopment Area. With the provided funding and direction, the Park Authority sought to acquire the property that, today, is Merrilee Park. The Park Authority purchased both parcels in 2006. Parcel 2 was acquired on February 14, 2006 from John D. and Lynne E. Bellingham. Parcel 3 was acquired February 24, 2006 from Paul L. Jones, Jr.

At the time of acquisition, both properties were developed with single-family detached homes. Each of the existing homes was evaluated by the Park Authority, both for historical value and structural integrity. Neither were deemed to be of specific historic merit worthy of preservation. Various structural concerns were noted in both buildings which had led to significant water damage and mold issues. Damage to the buildings precluded any habitable usage without considerable repairs. Estimated costs to renovate either structure to acceptable conditions for occupancy exceeded what could reasonably be expected to be recouped in rental fees. Additionally, retention of either structure would dramatically reduce the ability to provide publicly accessible park space within the Merrifield area, which was the original intent and purpose for acquiring the property. Ultimately the Park Authority Board decided that demolition of the homes would be the most cost effective



option while opening the use of the property to a broader range of park facilities and, subsequently both homes were demolished.

### C) PARK NAME

During the land acquisition process in 2006, the property was given the temporary name of Merrilee Park. This name, which combines the local names of Merrifield and Lee Highway, was intended to serve as a “placeholder” name with the intent that a more suitable name might be chosen during the master plan process. This opportunity to participate in the naming of this park has been presented to the community at the various public meetings as well as noted on the project’s web page. The Park Authority will continue to seek input throughout the master plan process and, ultimately, a new name for the park may be selected. If no alternate park name is selected, this park will continue to be referred to as Merrilee Park.

### D) PARK CLASSIFICATION

Merrilee Park is designated as a Local Park within the Park Authority’s classification system. As might be inferred by the nomenclature, Local Parks are intended to serve local residential and employment centers. Local Parks provide facilities for active and/or passive recreation, which may include areas for scheduled or unscheduled recreation activities or social gatherings. Areas designated for natural and/or cultural resource protection may also be included. In suburban settings, park size typically ranges between 2.5 and 50 acres. Facilities that might commonly be established in Local Parks include picnic areas, open play areas, playgrounds, trails, athletic fields and sport courts. In a suburban setting, the Local Park service area generally includes communities within a three-mile radius of the park. The typical duration of visits to Local Parks is two hours or less.

As a more finite distinction, Merrilee Park is also defined as an Urban Park. Although fitting within the broader classification of a Local Park, Urban Parks are appropriate in mixed-use and transit-oriented areas and generally emphasize pedestrian connectivity to the surrounding neighborhood, small-scale recreation uses, opportunities for social interaction, and a combination of hardscape elements and adapted plant material. The range in size and style of urban parks can vary greatly in response to the context of the surrounding community. As Fairfax County evolves to address an increasing demand for development and density, the concept of parks within urban communities continues to evolve as well. In November 2008, the Park Authority established the Urban Parks Framework to provide overall guidance in establishing



publicly accessible park space within commercial revitalization areas, transit station areas, and suburban centers, such as Merrifield.

E) PLANNING CONTEXT

Merrilee Park is located within the Jefferson Planning District. The Comprehensive Plan provides an additional level of planning guidance for the area defined as the Merrifield Suburban Center, which includes Merrilee Park. Established by the Board of Supervisors in response to the magnitude of development in the I-495/ Route 50/ Route 29 vicinity, the Merrifield Suburban Center was established with the goal of creating more attractive and functionally efficient commercial and residential areas within pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented environments.

Merrilee Park is located in Sub-Unit B-3 of the Merrifield Suburban Area which is generally planned for office uses up to .50 FAR. No parcel specific guidance is provided for the park property; however, overall design guidance for the suburban center as well as specific guidance for Sub-Unit B-2, which is adjacent to the park, will uniquely impact the future design of Merrilee Park.

Overall design guidance for the Merrifield Suburban Center is provided within four main categories: Land Use, Urban Design, Transportation, and Public Facilities.

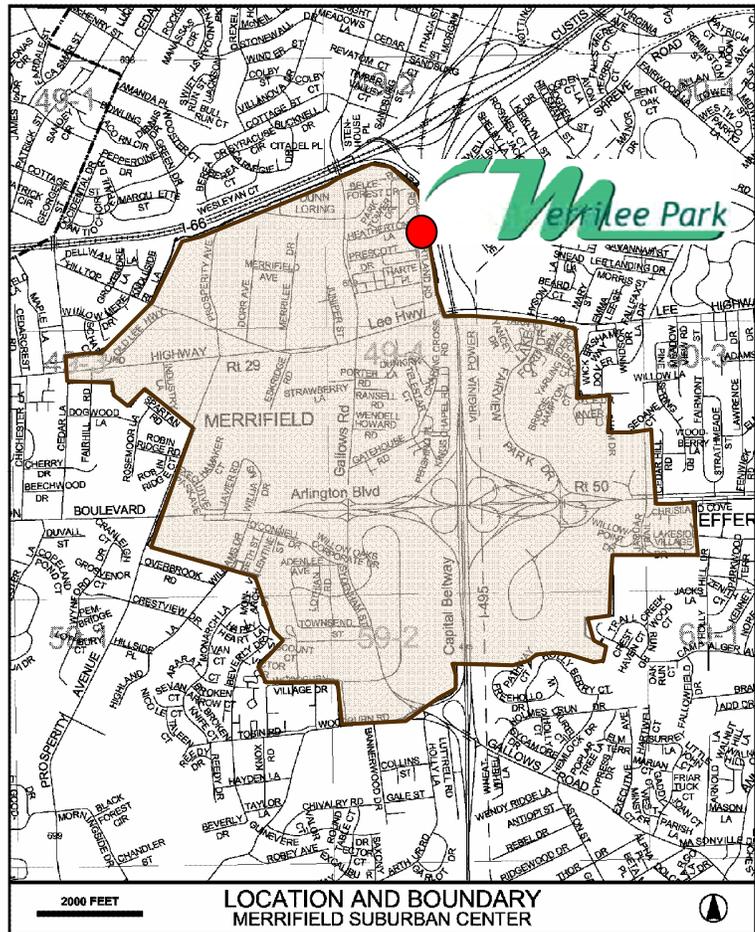


Figure 2  
Location and Boundary map of the Merrifield Suburban Center as found in the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan

Land Use: The vision for the Merrifield Suburban Center is generally defined by land uses, defining areas of greater urban intensity (Core Areas), areas of suburban development (Non-Core Areas), and areas of transition to surrounding communities (Edge Areas). Merrilee Park is within an Edge Area, which includes permanent open space as an acceptable use.



**Urban Design:** Much of the past development within the Merrifield area has resulted in the construction of a series of unrelated buildings and spaces established in close proximity. The current Comprehensive Plan guidance places emphasis on creating an interconnected system of pedestrian routes and open space, a hierarchy of streetscapes, a framework for site design, and limitations on building heights. Most notably, any plans for Merrilee Park should stress and clearly define routes of pedestrian access as well as to provide for the Ring Road Streetscape concept envisioned for Hartland Road.

**Transportation:** Overall transportation recommendations include elements of roadway improvements, connection with transit facilities, and emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle circulation. Elements that affect Merrilee Park include the recommendation that Hartland Road be extended northward to connect with Park Tower Drive, forming a “Loop Road.” Hartland Road would be constructed as a four-lane street section, which would require dedication of right-of-way from the Merrilee Park property.

**Public Facilities:** The public facilities recommendation includes guidance towards the provision of fire and rescue services, libraries, parks and recreation facilities, police, and schools to serve area residents as well as more infrastructure related services such as sanitary sewer, water and stormwater management needs. The recommendations for park and recreation facilities acknowledge the limited opportunities to provide public park space in this densely developed area. The prospect of redevelopment in the Merrifield Suburban Area will

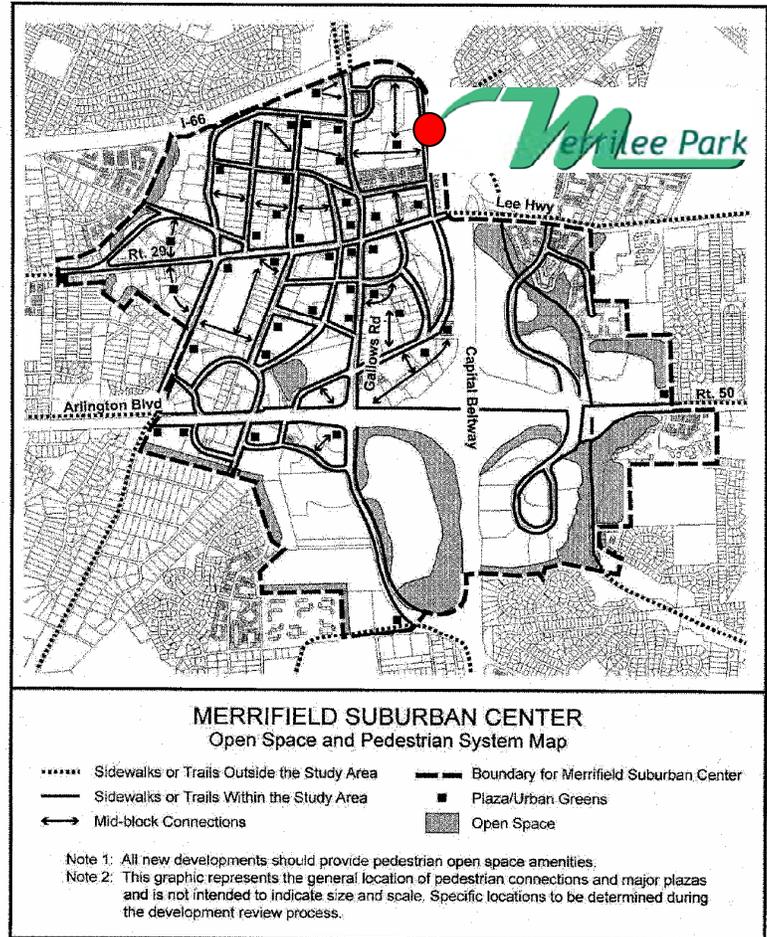


Figure 3  
**Open Space and Pedestrian System Map for the Merrifield Suburban Center as found in the Comprehensive Plan**



present new opportunities to include park space within developments or contribute to off-site public parks that serve the Merrifield area. Comprehensive Plan guidance also addresses the ability to address local park needs with urban parks such as pocket parks, plazas and courtyards.

In addition to overall design guidance, specific plan language addressing the redevelopment potential of Sub-Unit B-2, which lies west and north of Merrilee Park, contains various conditions for redevelopment that bear direct implications to the future of Merrilee Park. While currently developed as multifamily residential at a density range of 16-20 units per acre, Sub-Unit B-2 is envisioned to be redeveloped as higher-density residential (30-40 du/ac) provided, among other conditions, that Hartland Road is constructed as a “loop road”, connecting through to Park Tower Drive, as well as the provision of two to three acres of public park.

**F) PARK AND RECREATION NEEDS**

The Park Authority assesses the need for parkland and recreation facilities through its long range planning efforts. Countywide park and recreation needs are established through a variety of measures including community outreach, surveys to assess County citizen recreation demand and benchmarking with peer jurisdictions both locally and nationwide. Demand is then compared to a detailed inventory of available facilities and projected population growth to identify the current and projected need for parkland and facilities. The most recent Needs Assessment was completed in 2004.

As part of the Needs Assessment process, the Park Authority Board adopted countywide service level standards for parkland and park facilities. Recognizing that community recreation needs are met through a variety of sources, the Park Authority Board adopted the following facility standards for typical local park facilities:

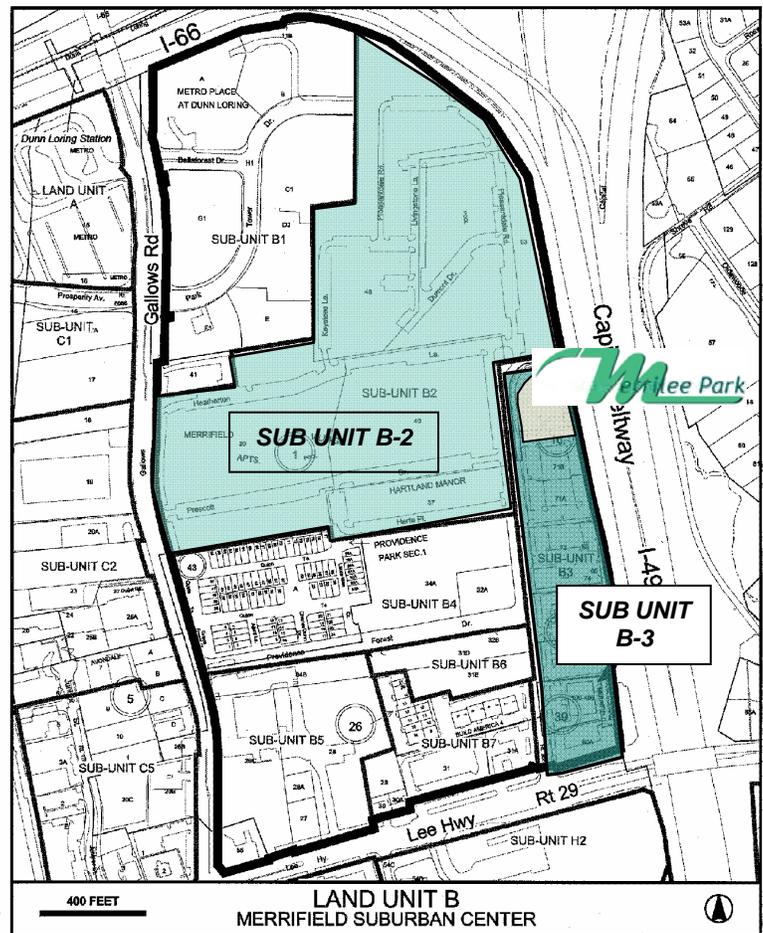


Figure 4  
Merrifield Suburban Center Land Unit B



- Rectangle Fields (1 per 2,700 people),
- Adult Baseball Fields (1 per 24,000 people),
- Adult Softball Fields (1 per 22,000 people),
- Youth Baseball Fields (1 per 7,200 people),
- Youth Softball Fields (1 per 8,800 people),
- Basketball Courts (1 per 2,100 people),
- Playgrounds (1 per 2,800 people),
- Neighborhood Dog Parks (1 per 86,000 people),
- Neighborhood Skate Parks (1 per 106,000 people),
- Reservable Picnic Areas (1 site per 12,000 people).

The Park Authority conducted a more localized examination of needs around Merrilee Park within the Providence Planning District using the planning district demographics and geography as established through the County Comprehensive Plan. Based on the above noted adopted service level standards, the Providence Planning District is currently deficient in the provision of each of these facility types. Projected population growth indicates that by 2020 the demand will be greatest within the Providence Planning District for basketball courts as well as neighborhood dog parks and skate parks.

### SECTION III EXISTING CONDITIONS

#### A) PARK CONTEXT

In addition to assessing area-wide needs, park planning efforts must also evaluate proposed park development within the context of the existing community. An understanding of the surrounding community helps provide a framework to visualize potential development within the park.

##### 1) ADJACENT DEVELOPMENT

Merrilee Park is located within a densely developed portion of Merrifield, generally bound by I-66 to the north, Gallows Road to the west, Route 29 to the south and the Capital Beltway to the east. This quadrant is developed with a mixture of office, commercial, residential and industrial uses. The central residential core of this area includes multifamily dwellings, both in rental and condominium ownership, as well as townhomes. Office development exists to the north of the quadrant (across Gallows Road from the Dunn Loring Metro Station) and to the east, bordering I-495. The southern portion of this quadrant includes retail, such as Merrifield Garden Center, and smaller commercial and institutional uses.

Three of the four sides of Merrilee Park are bound by public right-of-way. To the east, Merrilee Park is bound by the Capital Beltway, currently undergoing expansion for the HOT Lanes project.

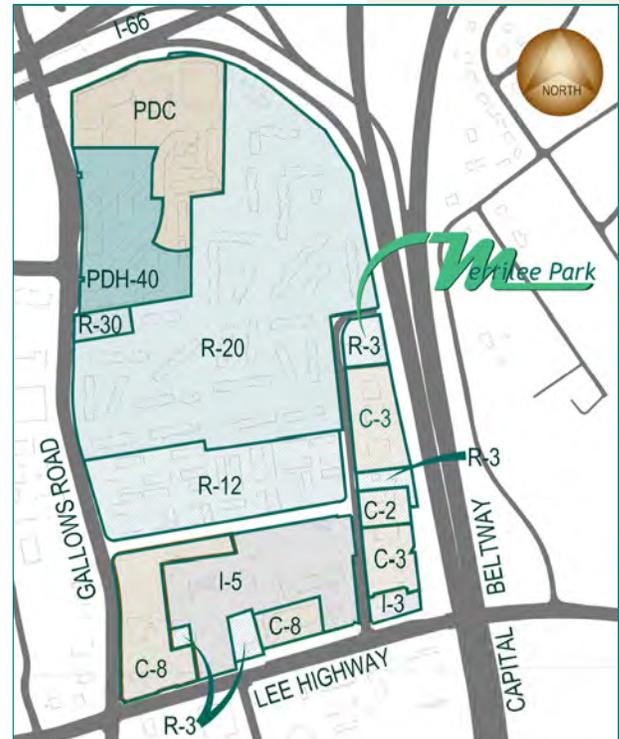


Figure 5  
*Existing Zoning in the Vicinity of Merrilee Park*



*Adjacent Merrifield at Dunn Loring Station apartment complex*



The width of this right-of-way, high speeds and volume of traffic effectively severs any direct connectivity with communities to the east of Merrilee Park other than by vehicular access.

Hartland Road borders the park to the north and west. The properties across Hartland Road are currently developed with multiple family dwellings at an approximate density of 16-20 units per acre.

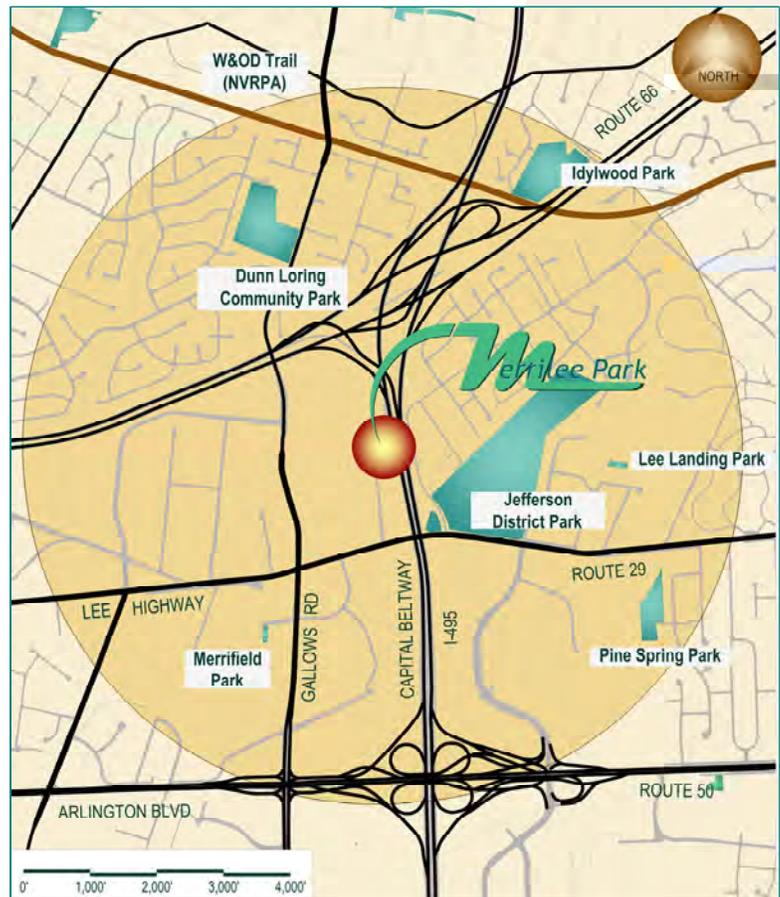
Merrilee Park is bordered to the south by multi-tenant office buildings.



*Hartland Business Center office building located south of Merrilee Park*

2) NEARBY PARKS AND SCHOOLS

In addition to Merrilee Park, a portion of the local community's open space and recreational needs are served by several other parks in the vicinity. An understanding of the nearby park facilities is helpful in evaluating which potential facilities might best serve the community at Merrilee Park. Parks and facilities within a one-mile radius of Merrilee Park are noted in Figure 6, at right, and listed in Table 1, on page 13.



*Figure 6  
Area Parks*



<b>Table 1 Area Parks and Recreational Facilities</b>	Park Acreage	Multi-Use Trails	Playground	Picnic Tables	Picnic Shelter	Tennis Courts	Tennis Practice Wall	Basketball / Multi-Use Courts	Baseball/Softball Fields	Rectangle Fields / natural	Open Play Areas	Miniature Golf	Golf
<b>FAIRFAX COUNTY PARKS</b>													
<b>Dunn Loring Park</b> 2540 Gallows Road Vienna, Virginia 22027	15.68 ac	√	√	√	√	2		1			√		
<b>Idylwood Park</b> 7715 Virginia Lane Falls Church, Virginia 22043	13.84 ac	√	√	√		2	2	1	2	1			
<b>Jefferson District Park</b> 7900 Lee Highway Falls Church, Virginia 22041	5.21 ac	√	√	√		8	4	2				√	√
<b>Lee Landing Park</b> 2780 Hollywood Drive Falls Church, Virginia 22043	0.50 ac	√	√	√							√		
<b>Merrifield Park</b> 8191 Strawberry Lane Falls Church, Virginia 22042	0.39 ac												
<b>Pine Spring Park</b> 7600 Willow Lane Falls Church, Virginia 22042	4.99 ac	√		√		2	2				√		
<b>NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PARKS</b>													
<b>W &amp; O D Trail</b>		√											



In addition to facilities at local parks, a portion of the area’s recreational needs are met through facilities at local schools. Typically, elementary schools have athletic fields and playgrounds that are available to the public during non-school hours. Middle schools often provide a broader range of active athletic facilities including tennis courts and diamond fields. High school fields and facilities, however, are typically reserved solely for the use of the high school and, for planning purposes, are not considered available to the public. Three public schools are located within a one-mile radius of Merrilee Park with three others just beyond the one-mile radius. Nearby school sites are identified in Figure 7, at right, while Table 2, on page 15, reflects the facilities available at these schools.

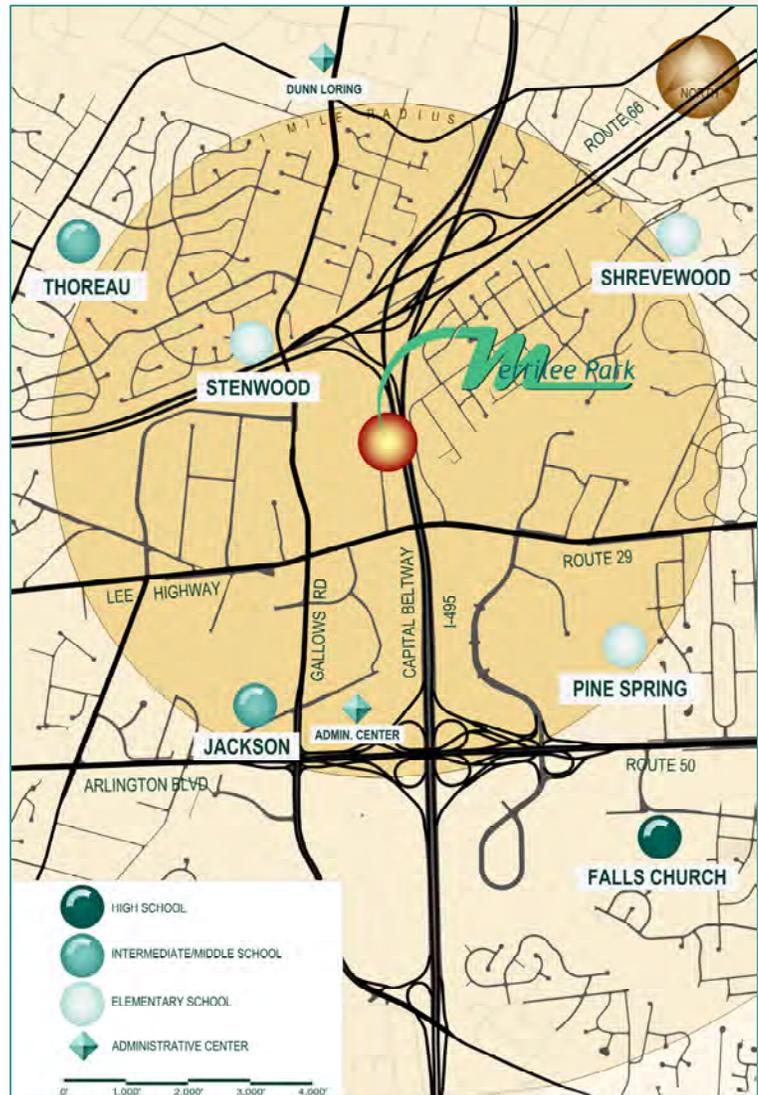


Figure 7  
Area Public Schools



**Table 2  
Area Public Schools and  
Recreational Facilities**

	Playground	Tennis Courts	Basketball Courts	Multi-use Courts	Baseball/Softball Fields	Rectangle Fields / natural	Rectangle Field / synthetic
<b>FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS</b>							
<b>Falls Church High School *</b> 7521 Jaguar Trail Road Falls Church, Virginia 22042		6	3		5	1	
<b>Luther Jackson Middle School</b> 3020 Gallows Road Falls Church, Virginia 22042		3	3				√
<b>Pine Spring Elementary School</b> 7606 Willow Lane Falls Church, Virginia 22042	√		2	√	√	√	
<b>Shrevewood Elementary School</b> 7525 Shreve Road Falls Church, Virginia 22043	√		2			√	
<b>Stenwood Elementary School</b> 2620 Gallows Road Vienna, Virginia 22180	√		√	2	2		
<b>Thoreau Middle School</b> 2505 Cedar Lane Vienna, Virginia 22180			6		4		
* High school athletic fields are typically not available for public scheduling							

**B) EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS**

The Master Plan process includes an evaluation of the existing site conditions, seeking to identify both the opportunities and challenges to the development of the new park. Data gathered during site analysis helps define which uses might be best suited to the site. Such information is also beneficial in understanding how the desired uses might be most sustainably adapted to the site.

**1) NATURAL RESOURCES**

Merrilee Park is a local park in an increasingly urbanized area. Surrounding and past development have introduced significant impacts to the natural resources and ecology of the park. The



proximity of surrounding development provides well-defined boundaries on all sides of the park, making Merrilee Park ecologically isolated from other parkland.

a) TOPOGRAPHY AND SOILS

Topographically, Merrilee Park is characterized by gentle slopes, reflective of the agricultural past of the property. Generally sloping from the edge of Hartland Road to the southeast corner of the property, the existing grade ranges from approximately three to five percent across the site.

Only one soil type, Urban Land-Wheaton Complex, is identified within Merrilee Park based on the 2011 Fairfax County Soils Maps. Description of the underlying soil map unit, provided below, is as presented in the Description & Interpretive Guide to NRCS Mapped Soils in Fairfax County, dated April 2008 and revised January 2009. It should be understood that due to the size of the site and significant amount of disturbance throughout the twentieth century that the existing urban soil may share few characteristics of the original parent soil.

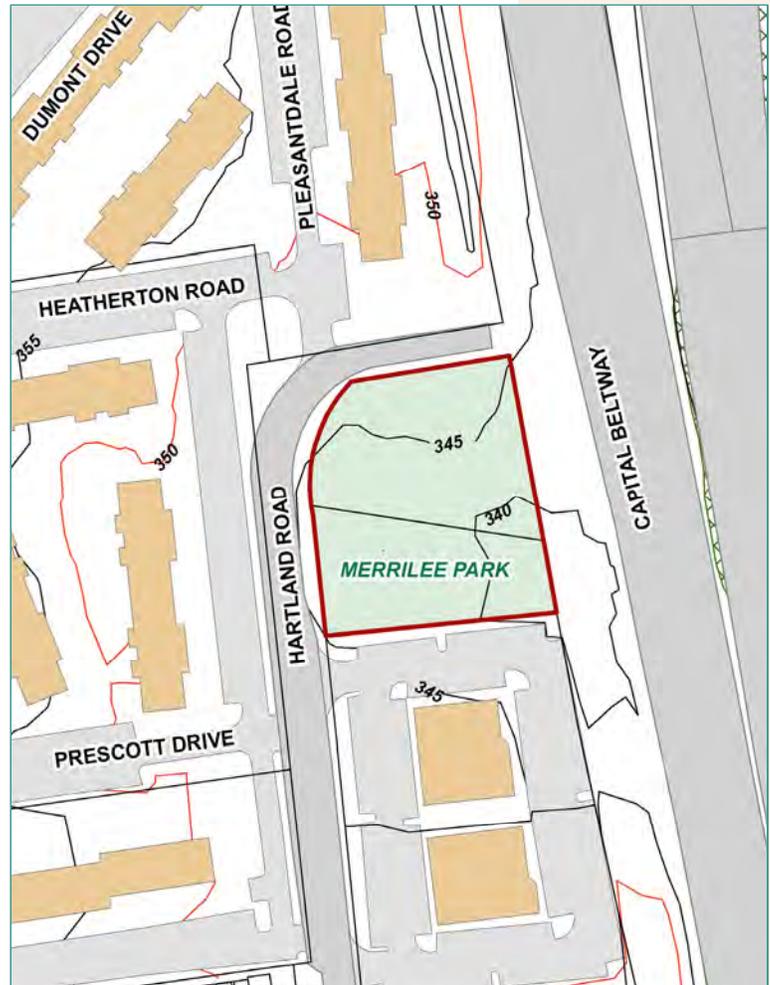


Figure 8  
Topographic Map

(102) Wheaton – This loamy soil consists of sand, silt and clay weathered from granite bedrock that has been mixed, graded and compacted during development and construction. Characteristics of the soil can be quite variable depending on what materials were mixed in during construction. The subsoil is generally loam but



can range from sandy loam to clay loam. The soil has been compacted, resulting in high strength and slow permeability. The soil is well drained and depth of bedrock is greater than 5 ft. In nearly all cases, foundation support is good, assuming that the soil is well compacted and contains few clays. Because of the slow permeability, suitability for septic drainfields is poor and for infiltration trenches is marginal. Grading and subsurface drains may be needed to eliminate wet yards caused by the slow permeability. This soil is found in developed areas of the Piedmont with micaceous schist and phyllite bedrock.

b) HYDROLOGY

Merrilee Park lies within the Cameron Run Watershed. The vast majority of this 42-acre watershed is located within the Capital Beltway and drains to the Potomac River. The Cameron Run Watershed consists of eight subwatersheds including the Upper Holmes Run Subwatershed, within which Merrilee Park is located. In August 2007 the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services published the Cameron Run Watershed Management Plan, intended to identify issues that threaten the quality of Fairfax County’s water resources and to establish a plan to remediate such impacts. The Cameron Run Watershed Management Plan notes that approximately 25% of the Upper Holmes Run Subwatershed area is currently covered in impervious surfaces, with expectations that this value will increase in light of planned redevelopment within the area. Major problems noted throughout the subwatershed

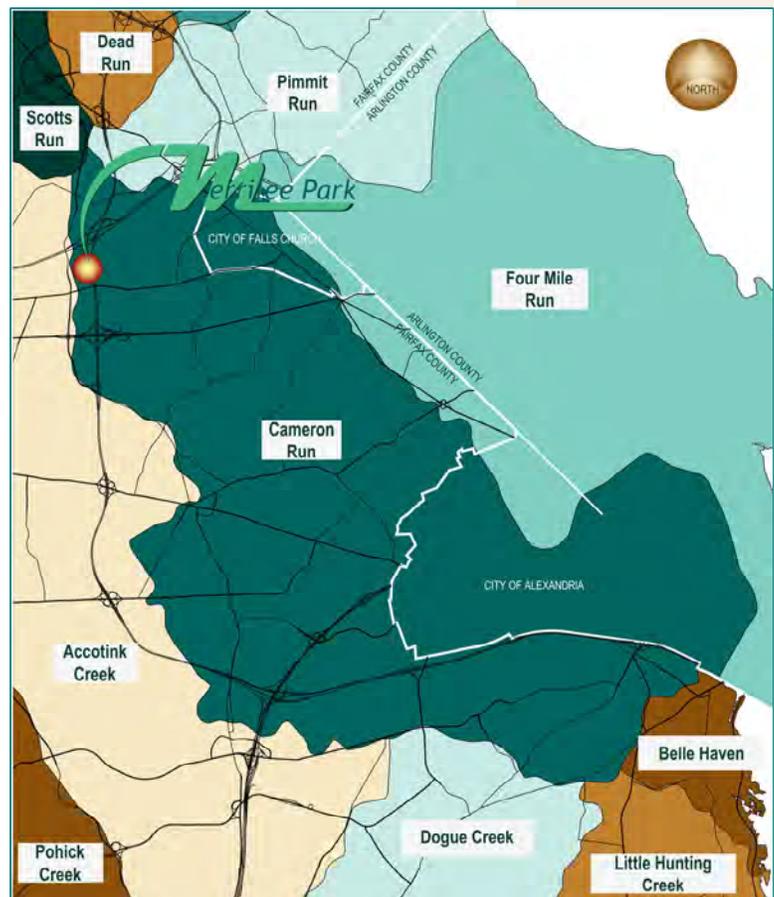


Figure 9  
Watershed Map



include inadequate buffers, eroded streambanks, and trash dumpsites.

Due to the park's location at the outer limits of the watershed and its relative isolation from any significant water resources, no specific watershed management projects are identified in the Cameron Run Watershed Management Plan that are targeted for Merrilee Park. It is the intent of this planning process, however, to establish stormwater management practices that are supportive of the efforts of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services in protecting Fairfax County's water resources.

c) VEGETATION

Reminiscent of the previous residential use of the property, Merrilee Park currently exists as open lawn area with some limited vegetation. Several individual deciduous trees remain; however, many are in poor condition and may have been damaged or stressed in part from the HOT Lanes construction activities or maintenance of overhead utility lines. A few trees that are more central to the site may be worthy of preserving if design considerations allow. No specimen trees exist on the site.



*View from Hartland Road looking southward*

d) WILDLIFE

Due to the disturbed nature of the site, the proximity to I-495 and area development, the level of wildlife noted within the park is, understandably, limited. Squirrels and birds were seen in limited numbers during site visits by Park Authority staff. Deer do not pose a threat to park resources as the site is isolated from established wildlife corridors.

e) RARE SPECIES

There are no documented records of rare, threatened or endangered species on the site according to data from the Department of Natural Heritage. Park Authority staff noted



no such species during site visits throughout the Master Plan process.

f) RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AREAS

No floodplain or Resource Protection Areas exist on the site.

2) CULTURAL RESOURCES

Since Fairfax County was established in 1742, the land associated with Merrilee Park has largely been shaped by the agricultural history of the county. A 1937 aerial image of the Merrifield area clearly indicates the patchwork pattern of area farms and fields along with adjacent wooded areas. Few buildings are noted; yet, the presence of Lee Highway and Gallows Road (formerly Loring Road), which continue to serve as transportation spines through Merrifield today, are clearly established routes. Hartland Road, formerly known as Shreve Road, which provides frontage for Merrifield Park today, provided access to many of these fields.



1937 aerial image of the Merrilee Park vicinity

As the rate of development accelerated in the 1940s and 1950s, the area of Merrifield began to change noticeably, responding to the post-war demand for residential and commercial expansion to the suburbs of Washington D.C. As is evidenced through the 1954 county aerial photograph, much of the rural patchwork remains but additional clearing in noticeable to accommodate the new suburban growth.



1953 Aerial Image of the Merrilee Park Vicinity

The area's network of roadways began to expand as well to match the region's rapid growth, including widening of previously rural roads such as Lee Highway and Gallows Road. The latter 1950's and early 1960's brought significant changes with the construction



of the Capital Beltway. This construction bisected Shreve Road, leading to the renaming of the portion west of the Beltway as Hartland Road. Construction of I-66 to the north of the Merrilee Park site in the 1970's formed the fourth side of the transportation box around the region.

3) EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

a) UTILITIES

Due to the character of development in the area as well as the previous residential development on the property, all major utilities exist in proximity to Merrilee Park. Water and sanitary sewer lines lie beneath Hartland Road. Overhead utility lines are noted along the park's frontage. A storm sewer runs diagonally across Merrilee Park from a yard inlet near the bend in Hartland Road, draining southeasterly to an outfall just west the Capital Beltway. An additional drainage easement was granted along the eastern edge of the property to address stormwater needs of the HOT Lanes construction along the Beltway.

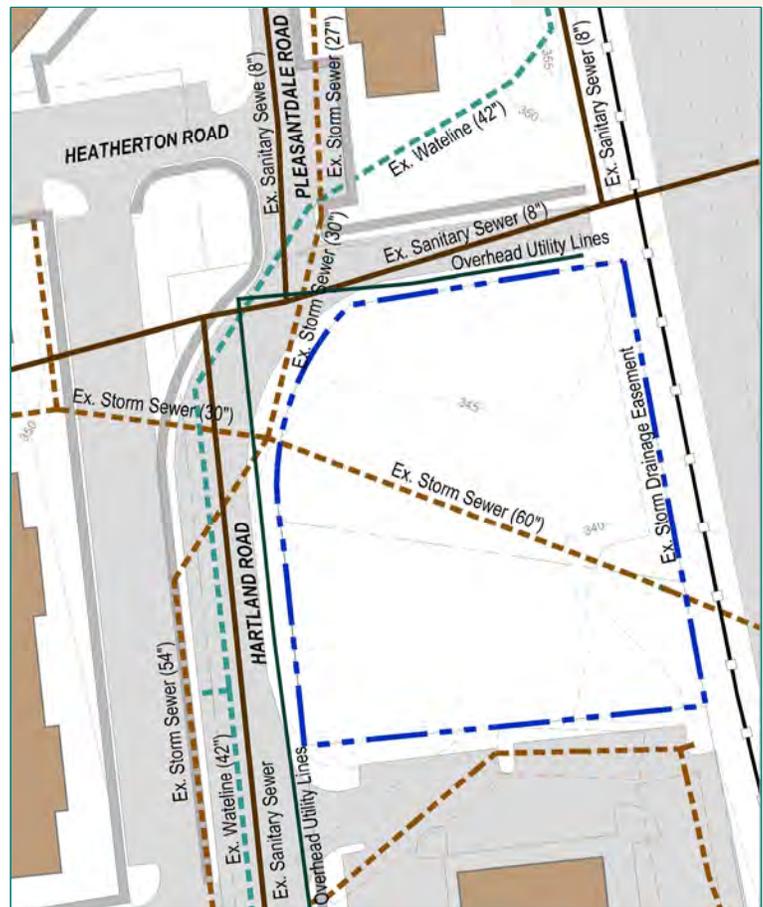


Figure 10  
Existing Utilities in the Vicinity of Merrilee Park

b) ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

(1) Vehicular Access and Parking

Merrilee Park is located with frontage on Hartland Road which provides emergency access and addressing for the park site. No parking currently exists on the site.



## (2) Pedestrian Access and Trails

No trails currently exist within Merrilee Park although the area's residents and work force often stroll through the park and utilize the lawn area for casual recreation. The park is generally easily accessed by existing sidewalks within the community. A few gaps exist in the broader sidewalk connectivity to the park which will ultimately be addressed as those sites redevelop. The most notable gap in pedestrian connectivity is along the park's frontage. Hartland Road is constructed as a ditch-section along Merrilee Park, providing no walking surface along the street edge. Sidewalk and trail connections proposed with this master plan will provide a crucial link to enhancing pedestrian access to the park.

### SECTION IV PARK MANAGEMENT

#### A) PARK PURPOSE

Park purpose statements provide an umbrella for planning and decision-making. If a proposed use conflicts with any one of the purposes listed, it is considered an incompatible use. By establishing a park purpose, future plans remain flexible as legislative requirements and visitor preferences change. The purpose of Merrilee Park is three-fold:

- To provide a pedestrian destination for area residents and work force;
- To provide small-scale recreation opportunities for a range of interests and ages;
- To provide an opportunity to connect with nature in the midst of an urbanizing area.

#### B) PARK SIGNIFICANCE & RECREATION NEEDS

The Jefferson Planning District is one of the earliest districts in the county to experience the rapid expansion of the Washington D.C. suburbs in the 1940's and 1950's. The district is largely characterized by stable, single-family neighborhoods, many of which were established during the County's period of rapid suburban growth, with some later concentration of multiple family dwellings and commercial development along the primary transportation corridors of Routes 50 and 29.

As much of the development in Jefferson Planning District occurred prior to the establishment of the Park Authority, the amount of parkland within this district is limited. Of Fairfax County's fourteen planning districts, Jefferson District ranks as the third most densely populated district while ranking eleventh in the percentage of parkland. Opportunities to add to the existing parkland in Jefferson Planning District, and more specifically the Merrifield area, are extremely limited, due to the densely developed nature of the district.

Similarly, the lack of available parkland limits the Park Authority's ability to address the demand for recreational services for the district. Current 2020 population projections indicate that there will be a deficit



of all major recreational facility types to serve the area's residents and work force, most notably basketball courts, neighborhood dog parks and neighborhood skate parks.

Although limited in acreage, Merrilee Park is a valuable asset in Jefferson Planning District, providing an opportunity for a much-needed respite from development. This park provides opportunities, in small ways, to address outdoor enjoyment needs, provide a connection to nature, and create opportunities to build community within this diverse population.

### C) DESIRED VISITOR EXPERIENCE

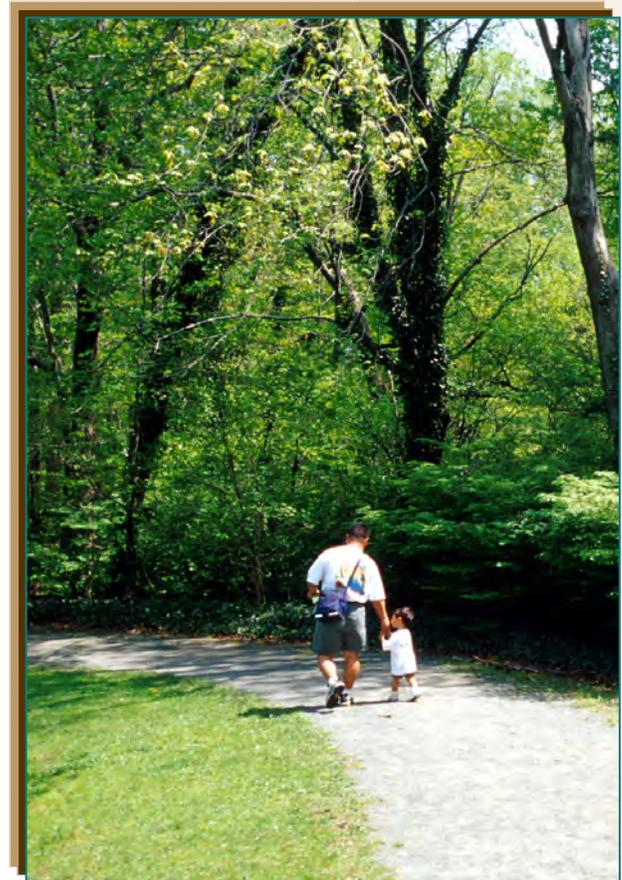
Merrilee Park is envisioned as a local park that will draw users from the residences and businesses within walking distance of the park. As a pedestrian-oriented destination, Merrilee Park is intended to provide a balance between the desire for active uses and the need to preserve open space as a respite from the built environment. The intention is to provide, in small scale, some element for each of the diverse group of users in the park's vicinity within a green, community refuge.

User visits would typically last from thirty minutes to two-hours. As such, the park will be unstaffed and will not include any major service facilities. Visitor amenities may include benches, trash cans, and picnic tables.

### D) MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

In order to achieve the park's purpose, the following objectives have been developed to guide specific actions and strategies for dealing with management issues. Merrilee Park should:

- Remain as a small haven of open space for the Merrifield community, providing opportunities for community-building activities;
- Provide small-scale recreational elements to address overall needs within the Jefferson Planning District.





## E) RESOURCE & SITE MANAGEMENT

### 1) NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The site was heavily disturbed in the 20th century, resulting in degraded soils and limited tree cover that is in generally poor health. In addition, the park tends to be isolated from any nearby areas with sensitive resources due to its location and small size. As a result, proposed improvements to Merrilee Park are not expected to impart significant impacts to the area's existing natural resources.

Natural resource management efforts for Merrilee Park should focus on design and maintenance activities that will improve site vegetation and stormwater control over existing conditions. Improvements to water and air quality as well as wildlife habitat will ultimately enhance not only the surrounding environment, but the quality of life for local residents as well. Any landscaping proposed with the associated park development should strongly emphasize plant species that are native to this region of Fairfax County. Selection of native species enhances sustainability, generally requiring less maintenance and watering than non-native species, while enhancing natural habitat for native animal and insect populations. Stormwater runoff should be effectively managed to meet all County and State requirements with preference for innovative, low-impact development (LID) strategies.

### 2) CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

As disturbance to the site through the 20<sup>th</sup> century has impacted natural resources, the same disturbance has made it highly doubtful that any historical features remain on the property. Park Authority staff has examined the site and found no indication that archaeological features remain.

### 3) SITE CONSIDERATIONS

The Park Authority's area maintenance crew will provide periodic maintenance and repairs to the site. This includes mowing the grassy areas, removing leaves from developed areas, trimming underbrush, emptying trash, and other similar tasks. Other maintenance tasks include inspection of facilities and equipment; cleanup, limbing-up of trees, tree removal, and repairing pavement as needed. The maintenance crew also



responds to any park issues brought to their attention by citizens or staff.

SECTION V  
CONCEPTUAL  
DEVELOPMENT PLAN

## A) INTRODUCTION

The Conceptual Development Plan (CDP) provides recommendations for future park uses and facilities. The CDP contains descriptions of the proposed plan elements and design concerns and is accompanied by a graphic that shows the general location of the recommended project elements. The CDP graphic is included on page 27 as Figure 11.

Development of the CDP is based on an assessment of area-wide needs and stakeholder preferences in balance with the existing site conditions as described in the Section III of this master plan. The scope of the master plan process does not include detailed site engineering; therefore, it should be understood that the CDP is conceptual in nature. Although reasonable engineering practices have contributed to the basis of the design, final facility location for the recommended elements will be determined through more detailed site analysis and engineering design that will be conducted when funding becomes available for the development of this park. Final design will be influenced by site conditions such as topography, natural resources, tree preservation efforts, and stormwater and drainage concerns as well as the requirement to adhere to all pertinent State and County codes and permitting requirements.



Figure 11  
Merrilee Park Conceptual Development Plan



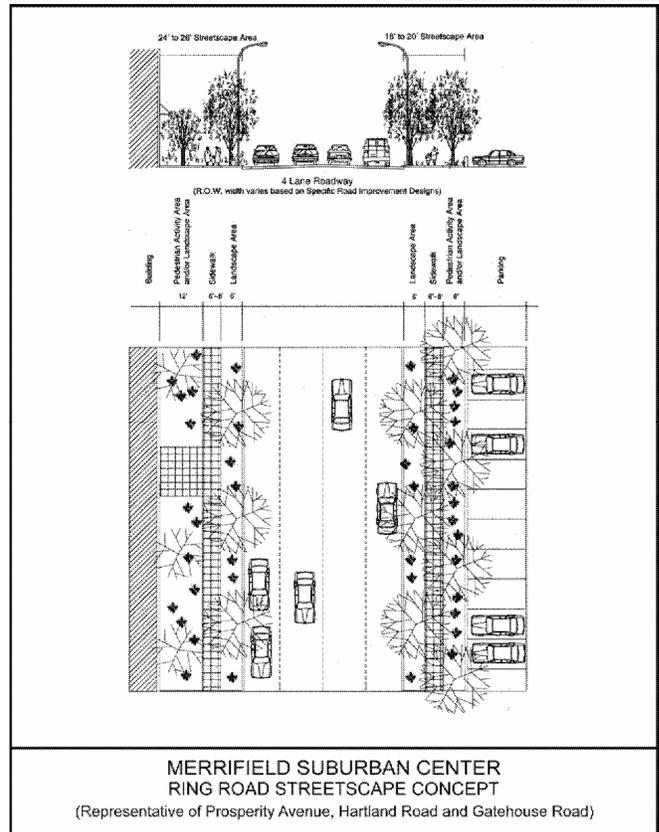
**B) PLAN ELEMENTS**

The following section provides a general description of the uses proposed for Merrilee Park.

**1) STREETScape DESIGN**

As previously discussed in relation to the park’s planning context, development of Merrilee Park will be expected to address the various area-wide recommendations pertaining to the Merrifield Suburban Center which include design guidelines for the streetscape along Hartland Road. The application of the streetscape standard will be a required element of park development, regardless of the uses selected as most appropriate for this park.

Compliance with the Comprehensive Plan’s envisioned four-lane redevelopment of Hartland Road assumes a half-section widening of 26’ from centerline along the Merrilee Park frontage. A landscape area is to be located next to the curb. Per the Comprehensive Plan, this strip should be a minimum of six feet in width. Public Facilities Manual standard 12-0510.4E(5), however, requires a minimum eight-foot wide planting strip if the landscaped area contains trees to be counted towards satisfying the tree canopy requirement. As the streetscape guidelines call for major trees to be planted within this landscape strip, which likely will be required to meet canopy requirements, an eight-foot wide landscape strip is proposed. Any supplemental plantings designed within this strip should be of an ultimate height of less than one foot so that views into the park are not obscured.



*Figure 12*  
**Ring Road Streetscape Concept as found in the Comprehensive Plan**



An eight-foot wide multipurpose trail is to be located outside the landscape strip. This pedestrian route should be constructed in concrete to relate to the urban streetscape edge and to assure compliance with ADA accessibility standards.

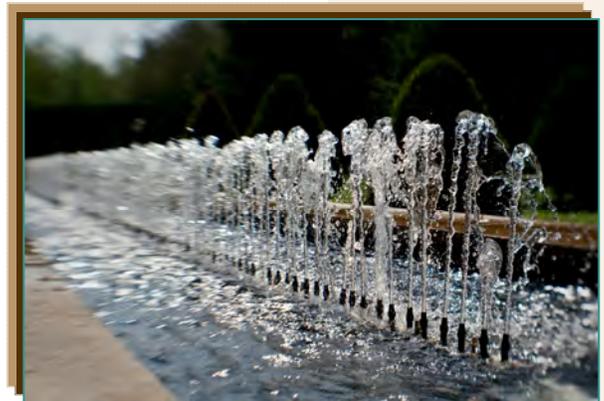
Comprehensive Plan guidance also addresses establishment of a pedestrian activity area between the sidewalk and any building or parking area. As no buildings or parking are proposed with this plan, this element of the streetscape design is not immediately applicable to the Merrilee Park design.

2) TRAIL SYSTEM

Based on the guidance of the Comprehensive Plan and comment from the community, as well as the physical size and location of the park, it is evident that Merrilee Park will function as a pedestrian park. This speaks to both how park users will access the site as well as move within it. The trail system associated with Merrilee Park, therefore, is the element that forms the structure, or the “bones,” of this park design. Although this site is small, the system of trails is intended to serve a range of users while offering a variety of experiences.

a) STREETSCAPE SIDEWALK

As discussed under the topic of streetscape design, an eight-foot wide sidewalk is planned along Hartland Road. As part of the required streetscape design, this sidewalk edge provides a public “face” to the park. Its width and concrete surface provides locations for pedestrian entry to the park as well as connectivity to neighborhoods north and south of the Merrilee Park.



*Gateway concept images*

b) ENTRY PLAZA / SIGNAGE

At the northwest corner of the park, near the bend in Hartland Road, the streetscape sidewalk broadens to create an entrance plaza. Although trails will provide access to the park in several



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locations, this plaza provides an opportunity to create a gateway into the park. This plaza should contain placemaking signage and may include focal elements such as public art, wind sculpture or water features.

c) HARDSCAPE TRAIL

The hardscape trail establishes the primary pedestrian route within the park, providing access to all park features. This path should be constructed as a hardscape element, supportive of walking, biking, skateboarding and meeting all ADA standards. The width of the primary trail should be a minimum of eight feet in width, widening to accommodate areas for benches or skateboard features that may be placed along this route.

d) POROUS SURFACE TRAIL

A secondary pedestrian route within the park is established by a porous surface trail that departs from the hardscape trail. The change in surface material introduces another texture to the pedestrian experience of the park while framing an area for a rain garden and picnic area.

3) SKATEABLE ART

Along the primary hardscape trail, elements of “skateable art” are included in the plan. The addition of “skateable art” allows for an opportunity to address some of the active recreation needs of the area within a relatively small footprint. “Skateable art” introduces an activity to serve younger teens in the area within safe walking distance from home as well as adding visual interest to the trail edge, potentially serving as seating for park patrons. The width of the hardscape path, however, should smoothly broaden to permit placement of each feature beyond the primary walkway, providing sufficient landing space as each particular skateable



“Skateable Art” concept images





element may require, while preserving space for passing pedestrians.

#### 4) HALF COURT BASKETBALL

Both from the Park Authority's study of recreational needs in the Jefferson Planning District as well as from comments heard from area residents, there is a need for active recreation features in this area of the county, even though numerous neighborhood facilities already exist. A half basketball court is included with the plan to partially address some of the active recreation needs of the area. As one of the goals for Merrilee Park is to include a range of elements to appeal to the diverse surrounding community, only a half court has been included so as not to dominate the scale of the park with a full court, which would limit opportunities to provide additional uses.

#### 5) PICNIC AREA

A small picnic area is planned towards the southern end of the park as a use requested both for area residents and office workers. Two to three picnic tables and a trash can are proposed within a small plaza space, providing a surface able to accommodate frequent use. The proposed location makes this area accessible by both the hardscape and porous surface trails.

#### 6) RAIN GARDEN / LANDSCAPE AREA

Situated between the hardscape trail and the porous surface trail, an area is reserved for construction of a rain garden / bio-retention area. Topographically, Merrilee Park generally slopes toward the southeastern corner of the site, making this location ideal to treat any water concentrated by impervious surfaces such as trails, courts or picnic/gathering areas. Construction of the two trails helps define the form of the rain garden while providing access that will permit interpretive opportunities relating to water quality, stream systems, and native plantings.



*Rain garden along pathway concept image*



#### 7) INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE

Interpretive signage may be appropriate within the park along the primary or secondary trails. Interpretive signs should be designed within the framework of the Resource Management Division and Park Operations guidelines for interpretive signs. Sign content might focus on the local history or thematically link Merrilee Park to other area parks. Additionally, signs could provide educational information about the natural resources in the park. Interpretive features should be kept to a minimum and placed strategically to preserve the setting.

#### 8) OPEN LAWN

An area of open lawn is proposed towards the western half of the park site. This preserves an opportunity for spontaneous play such as tossing a ball or for hosting small gatherings. The open character of the lawn area will also help to preserve views into the park, enhancing security.

#### 9) MEADOW AREA

Complementing the maintained open lawn, a meadow area is planned for the areas beyond the porous surface trail. Within this transition area at the park's edges, the inclusion of meadow plantings will provide a means of improving the natural resources of the site. By utilizing native plant species in a less structured, wildlife-friendly manner, this area will enhance biodiversity, improve the quality of stormwater runoff, and provide additional habitat for wildlife. The use of natural landscaping will provide a rare glimpse of a wilder setting in a very urban landscape, extending the benefits of wildlife observation to urban residents and enhancing understanding and quality of life.



*Meadow area concept image*

#### 10) VEGETATIVE SCREENING

Vegetative screening is proposed along both the southern and eastern sides of Merrilee Park. The property immediately south of Merrilee Park is currently developed as an office park with surface parking along the common property line. Supplemental



landscaping is proposed to create a better sense of separation between the uses, both for the betterment of the park site and the office property.

Additional vegetative screening is proposed along the eastern side of Merrilee Park, adjacent to the sound barrier wall that was constructed as part of the HOT Lanes project. Although the construction of the sound barrier has reduced noise levels within the park, the wall is not attractive and could potentially become a target for graffiti. As the Park Authority does not own the wall or have authority to control what occurs on the wall surface, the intent is to address concerns by providing a visual screen. The proposed landscaping will serve to soften views of the wall from within the park as well as to obscure any graffiti that may appear.

Additionally, the landscape screening will provide a physical barrier between park patrons and a concrete drainage ditch that is constructed adjacent to the sound wall. The ditch poses a trip/fall hazard when dry and has the potential to carry a sizable volume of water at significant velocity during storm events. The proposed screening, in combination with the meadow planting, will serve to physically separate park visitors from this potential hazard.

The proposed landscaping may also provide the added benefit of further reducing highway noise levels within the park.

Screening material should emphasize evergreen plantings to obscure views of the wall year round. Selection of species with thorns, spiked leaves, or similar characteristic will also discourage access to the wall and concrete ditch by pedestrians.



*Sound wall and drainage ditch along eastern side of Merrilee Park*

#### 11) MAINTENANCE ACCESS

Although Merrilee Park is designed for the pedestrian user, provision of vehicular access for park maintenance is a critical element for the continued success of Merrilee Park. The primary hardscape trail is designed at an eight-foot width to accommodate the occasional need for service vehicles to traverse the park to maintain the picnic area, stormwater management elements, or other park features. Until such time as Hartland



Road is reconstructed to the four-lane section, the stub end of Hartland Road provides an additional opportunity for maintenance vehicles to park and service the site.

The future redesign of Hartland Road, including any determination about the residual stub street, will impact maintenance access to the park. As the alignment of the Hartland Road extension is undetermined at the time of this master plan, the Park Authority should seek to be included in future design discussions for the redesign of Hartland Road to assure that appropriate access for park maintenance is preserved with area redevelopment.

## C) DESIGN CONCERNS

### 1) PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

A key element to permit the safe access and usage of Merrilee Park is the provision of pedestrian crossings of Hartland Road. Particularly with the vision of Hartland Road being developed as a four-lane, loop road, anticipated increases in traffic volume and speed will make this concern even more imperative. As of the writing of this master plan, the ultimate alignment of Hartland Road has not been established. Safe pedestrian crossings as well as traffic calming features will best be evaluated at the point that the extension of Hartland Road is designed. The Park Authority should seek involvement in the design development of Hartland Road improvements so as to assure that safe pedestrian access can be maintained to Merrilee Park.

### 2) HARTLAND ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

#### a) FRONTAGE IMPROVEMENTS

As stated above, the ultimate alignment for Hartland Road has not been established as of the writing of this master plan. Most likely, this road extension will be designed at the time the Sub-Unit B-2 seeks redevelopment. For the planning purposes of this master plan, road improvements to Hartland Road have been assumed at 26' from the existing centerline to accommodate the four-lane, loop road.



#### b) VACATION OF HARTLAND ROAD STUB STREET

Hartland Road was previously referred to as Shreve Road. With the construction of I-495, Shreve Road was bisected. The portion to the west of I-495 was terminated in the current “stub” street and renamed to Hartland Road (Shreve Road remains on the east side of I-495). The terminus of Hartland Road does not meet current VDOT standards for the termination of a public street. Discussion with the Fairfax County Department of Transportation in April 2011 indicated that development of Merrilee Park would not require the Park Authority to construct a standard cul-de-sac on park property to correct this condition. This assessment was based on the understanding that Hartland Road is, ultimately, intended to be redesigned as a loop road as directed by the Comprehensive Plan and that the Park Authority would not utilize this street stub as public access to the park. With the intended redesign of Hartland Road, it may be determined that the residual “stub” of Hartland Road should be vacated. If the opportunity arises, the vacated right-of-way may be considered for inclusion with the existing Merrilee Park and used as landscape area to buffer the adjacent community.

#### 3) INTEGRATION WITH FUTURE REDEVELOPMENT

Within the Merrifield Suburban Center, Sub-Unit B-2 is planned for redevelopment to a higher residential density. This land unit lies to the west and north of Merrilee Park and elements of its redevelopment will be of importance to the park. The option to redevelop at a higher density includes a series of conditions, including provision of a two to three acre public park. The public park could be located within either Sub-Unit B-2 or nearby Sub-Unit B-6. Regardless of the selected sub-unit, the Park Authority should seek involvement in the review of the redevelopment. Connections between park spaces and assessment of area facility needs should be evaluated. Should the public park space be located within Sub-Unit B-2, options should be explored that would integrate the public park with Merrilee Park.

#### 4) LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT

Final engineering design of this site will be required to adequately address runoff generated by park development.



Opportunities to address drainage and stormwater design through the use of Low Impact Development techniques should be considered wherever feasible. Options include capturing and retaining water in garden beds and meadow areas and through the amendment of soils wherever practicable.

In addition to the rain garden/bioretenion area proposed in the plan, the inclusion of porous pavement should be considered wherever underlying soils permit. Porous pavement materials, however, often exhibit a rougher surface texture than the non-porous equivalent, a characteristic that can relate directly to the permeability of the material. Although there is preference to construct the hardscape trail with a permeable surface material, it is essential that the final material selection supports the intended usage of the trail, particularly by skateboarders.

#### 5) EXISTING VEGETATION

Elements of disturbance to Merrilee Park, particularly with the HOT Lanes construction, have provided an opportunity for invasive species to spring up within the site. Prior to installation of any proposed landscaping, particularly in the areas of vegetative screening and meadow planting, efforts should concentrate on removal of non-native, invasive species.

Additionally, although some mature trees exist within Merrilee Park, many have been stressed and damaged by previous site disturbance. At the time of site development, existing trees should be evaluated to assess which trees merit preservation, the ability of those trees to withstand further stress of site development, and to identify arboricultural practices to enhance their survival.

#### 6) PROTECTION OF SITE FROM VEHICULAR ACCESS

Site management staff has noted some instances of vehicles being parked on park property. This may partly be associated with temporary usage by area construction crews and that the park is currently un-signed, making land ownership unclear. Although completion of highway construction and establishment of park signage may minimize the source of the problem, final park design should include features such as lockable bollards to prevent unauthorized vehicular access into the park.