

# DRAFT

## Town Center North of Beall Avenue – Vision for Public Parkland

The section of Town Center north of Beall Ave. and between MD Route 355 and North Washington Street is approximately 17.2 acres. Of that total, approximately 10 acres of property on the southern portion may see redevelopment over the next few decades. These 10 acres consist of the properties south of the projected east-west alignment of Dawson Avenue, plus the Maxim's site just north of the Dawson alignment (facing 355). The City does not own any land, nor is there currently any public right-of-way within this section.

People who live, work and play in Rockville place a high value on open space, parkland and other areas to gather, relax and recreate. Creating inviting community gathering spaces is a priority, especially in Rockville's downtown. These downtown public spaces offer different kinds of opportunities for entertainment and recreation than the City's more traditional neighborhood parks, stream valley/forest parks and outdoor athletic facilities. A key purpose of the parks within Town Center is to enhance Rockville's sense of community and preserve the atmosphere of a small town, which many residents have said they value..

Given the success and heavy use of the Plaza in Town Square by large numbers of Rockville residents from all neighborhoods, and the general public, it is highly desirable to include another significant public park space or spaces within the Town Center section north of Beall Ave. As with the Town Square Plaza, public parkland in Town Center north of Beall, would be an important and highly valued destination for all Rockville residents, further cementing the Town Center as the "heart" of the Rockville community. This new park (or parks) would also, of course, more directly serve the new and existing residents and new/existing workers in Town Center.

Staff recommends that the City's vision for the Town Center north of Beall Ave. contain a minimum of one acre of public parkland. This total is generally consistent with Rockville's existing zoning for these 10+ acres, in which MXCD zones with a residential component require 10 percent to be available for public use. All parcels in this area are zoned MXCD, with the exception of the 2.2-acre parcel on the northeast corner of Beall and N. Washington (255 N. Washington). That last parcel already has an approved development plan, meaning that the zoning is currently moot.

Under the current development process, open space would be provided on each site as the development proposals are presented to the City. Though the total amount of open space may reach one acre, nothing would ensure that 1) the open space would be cohesive and provide a real and valuable public amenity, and 2) the City would have some measure of control of the programming and quality of the open space.

Ideally the one acre will be a single parcel centrally located within this section of Town Center, to permit the most flexibility. Alternatively, the one acre could be split into two or possibly three

parcels. Which of these approaches is chosen depends on the obstacles to implementation and the nature of the development that emerges.

If it is split among two or three parcels, one of these should be a minimum of a half-acre. The Plaza in Rockville Town Square is slightly less than a half-acre in size. This is considered to be the minimum size necessary for a new, important park and gathering space in the Town Center north of Beall Ave. to host events, concerts, and other gatherings, and to become another valued destination for the Rockville community. No parcel intended as a public park should be smaller than a quarter-acre, as a public park smaller than this would not adequately serve the intended purpose of providing a destination gathering space for Town Square residents and the larger Rockville community. Smaller parcels such as this are certainly desirable but better to be owned and maintained as publically accessible private open spaces.

Based on the popularity of the Town Square Plaza, staff believes the inclusion of these additional public parks will improve the quality of life for Town Center and all Rockville residents, as well as the day-to-day experience of workers and visitors. These additions to the Town Center park system will provide pleasant and comfortable outdoor spaces within one of the more densely developed portions of the City. The value of the adjacent properties will be enhanced by the inclusion of adjacent open space.

The vision for the design and features of this parkland is similar to other Town Center, urban-type parks. Considering the projected amount of use and foot traffic, these parks need to be constructed with hardscape pedestrian circulation. If the desired one-acre park is built it would be much more feasible to include turf areas (grass) into the park design. Other amenities to be considered include:

- Public gathering space with many formal and informal opportunities to sit
- Shade trees
- Landscaping – both in-ground and container
- Children’s play space including informal playground
- Fountains
- Lighting
- Performance stage and pavilion
- Public art
- Outdoor dining