

November 22, 2013

Greg Ossont
Deputy Director
Montgomery County Department of General Services
101 Monroe Street, 9th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Re: Reuse Proposal for 175 Watts Branch Parkway

Dear Mr. Ossont,

Please accept the attached proposal from the Mayor and Council of the City of Rockville for the reuse of 175 Watts Branch Parkway. The future reuse of the property is of keen interest to the Mayor and Council and to Rockville residents. The proposal is consistent with a September 2013 request we made to County Executive Leggett to make the property part of the City's Woottons Mill Park.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit a proposal and look forward to working with you on determining the best future use of this important property. If you have any questions about Rockville's proposal, please contact City Manager Barbara Matthews at 240-314-8102.

Sincerely yours,

Mayor and Council Signature Block

**Reuse Proposal
175 Watts Branch Parkway
Submitted by the City of Rockville, Maryland
November 22, 2013**

Summary:

The City of Rockville proposes that the County owned property at 175 Watts Branch Parkway be preserved as parkland and incorporated into the adjacent Woottons Mill Park, which is owned and operated by the City of Rockville. The City further proposes that the County Executive consider foregoing the payment of fair market value or negotiating a reduced amount in order to support the important goals of protecting the environment and maintaining open space.

Justification:

The City of Rockville and Rockville's residents value open space, passive parkland and active parks throughout the community. The City strives to protect the environment for the benefit of current and future generations of County and Rockville residents. The City also attempts to mitigate the negative impacts of change over time on its current residential neighborhoods. The proposal to incorporate 175 Watts Branch Parkway into Woottons Mill Park addresses these community priorities.

1) Increase parkland

Rockville's 2010 Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan identified nine policy recommendations, including the goal to acquire additional park and open space within the City limits. The City's parkland acquisition goal is to make available 18 acres of parkland for every 1,000 city residents. To meet that goal, the City would need to add 142 acres of parkland by 2030. The proposed addition of 5.07 acres to Woottons Mill Park is a healthy step toward Rockville's long-term park acquisition goal.

Rockville's Department of Recreation and Parks established specific criteria to examine in considering acquisition of additional parkland. The property at 175 Watts Branch Parkway meets many of the 23 criteria, including:

- Proximity to existing parkland
- Forested property
- Stream or wetland on the property
- Significant park buffers
- Significant stream buffers
- Continuous greenways
- Neighborhood benefit
- Manageable operating costs
- Public access

- Property in good condition
- Citizen support
- Property poses some challenges and constraints for development

2) Adequately maintain the area

The City has examined the level of effort and cost to maintain the land at 175 Watts Branch Parkway as an extension of Woottons Mill Park. Staff is comfortable with taking on that task and estimates that the maintenance required to keep the area as a safe and attractive will cost less than \$10,000 annually.

3) Protect the environment

Protecting the environment is a high value for Rockville and Montgomery County residents. Another advantage of incorporating the property at 175 Watts Branch Parkway into Woottons Mill Park is the protection it affords the environment by not developing the land. Development and redevelopment continue to be focused on the transit corridors and higher density areas in an effort to protect the undeveloped green spaces in the community, like the property at 175 Watts Branch. Any development on the site will have implications for stormwater management, the trees on the site, and the nearby stream valley.

Taking this opportunity to preserve open space also aligns with the County Executive's mission to provide Healthy and Sustainable Communities. As a holder of an MS4 Stormwater Permit, Montgomery County is intimately familiar with the need to improve water quality in our local watersheds and ensure the stormwater management system is effective.

4) Avoid the challenges associated with developing the site

The site is currently zoned R-150 and is located adjacent to an existing neighborhood (single family units and townhomes) as well as the park. The reuse analysis memorandum inviting agencies to submit proposals noted the physical and environmental challenges associated with developing the property. They include the slope of the site, the stream valley buffer requirement on the west edge, and forest conservation considerations on the north and east edges. In addition, 175 Watts Branch Parkway is landlocked with the adjoining parcels owned by the City of Rockville. Maintaining the area as parkland avoids the challenges of development and aligns with the interests of the residential neighbors.

5) Support the neighbors

Rockshire Association, Inc., Fallsmead Homes Corporation and individual residents have communicated concerns to the Mayor and Council, City staff and Montgomery County about the future use of 175 Watts Branch Parkway. The residents oppose any change that negatively impacts their neighborhoods and support using the space for parkland. The City's goal is to minimize any negative impacts on existing nearby residential units.

The Mayor and Council received written and verbal comments from Rockshire Association, Inc., Fallsmead Homes Corporation and individual residents requesting that the area be incorporated into Woottons Mill Park. The residents shared the value and popularity of Woottons Mill Park and expressed opposition to any development on the site. They are particularly concerned with actions that reduce open space or tree canopy, change the view of the area from residences, reduce the natural noise barrier that the trees on the site provide and bring more activity and traffic to the area.

Conclusion:

The City recognizes the significant value of the location and size of the property and recognizes that there could be significant interest from other agencies in reusing the site. Understanding that the County Executive will be considering a variety of priorities and needs, Rockville appreciates attention given to the importance of protecting the environment and maintaining open space. We also place a high priority on addressing the concerns and interests of our residents. The Mayor and Council take seriously the input provided by the two large homeowners associations and individual neighbors and aim to protect their quality of life.

City of Rockville Contact:

Barbara B. Matthews
City Manager
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