

Baltimore County Commission on Disabilities
June 15, 2022, Virtual Meeting Minutes
via Webex

Attending: David Bycoff, Shakima Davey, Carla DeMendonca, Jay Doyle, Ben Dubin, Drew Emmer (guest), Julie Gaynor, Sarah Hessler, Terry Hickey, Monica Lijewski, Rachel Little, Greg Miller, Terri Parrish, Mary Scott, Doug Smith, Santa Wallace, Michael Tan

Terry Hickey, Director of Baltimore County Department of Housing and Community Development, offered a summary update on his activities and began by discussing the county's drafting of an affordable housing plan/analysis with more than 40 specific recommendations. Key topics include:

- Strategies for improving the language of affordable housing
- Available land
- Regulatory impediments
- Accessible housing

Ben Dubin discussed efforts in Baltimore City to convert shipping containers into housing units. Terry Hickey is familiar with this effort and finds it to be credible. Mr. Hickey then mentioned that the county is preparing an exhaustive inventory of vacant and derelict land/properties that may be able to support affordable housing. Generally, land in much of the county is more expensive than land in certain parts of the city.

Terri Parrish introduced guest speaker Drew Emmer, chief of capital planning and development for the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks. Mr. Emmer has been employed by Baltimore County for more than two years. He worked with capital projects in the private sector for 20 years prior to joining the county. Mr. Emmer worked to ensure ADA compliance during his private sector tenure.

Park finder app – out sometime 2023. This mobile phone application will allow users to find accessible parks in the county quickly and efficiently.

NRPA certification, accreditation, which includes an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) phase; As part of the certification process, Recreation and Parks will adopt a phased plan for the removal of barriers at county parks within an identified period of time.

Recreation and Parks is currently working with approximately \$131 million to support capital improvements.

Mr. Emmer presented slides illustrating projects that are underway and discussed efforts to establish accessibility in conjunction with the implementation of the projects:

- Rocky Point Park
- Rosedale Park

The transition plan to be developed by Recreation and Parks will rate the accessibility of every county park.

Rockdale Park is presently known as an accessible park and will be re-examined going forward. Creating a universally accessible playground requires a large footprint.

The need for maintenance, and maintenance, funding was discussed. Rubber mulch does not wear well.

Mr. Emmer discussed more upcoming projects, including:

- Middle River Community PAL Center
- Rosedale Community PAL Center
- Sparrows Point Park; will have universally accessible playground and fishing pier, kayak launch. This park will be the pilot/model for building a completely accessible campus.
- Northwest Regional Park playground, will have a fully accessible splash pad added next year
- Hazelwood Skatepark
- Church Lane Park

Mr. Dubin asked about the audio capability within community centers and how potential bike traffic is handled on park pathways.

Mr. Emmer welcomed and encouraged an ongoing relationship with The Commission and individuals with disabilities who can review plans and visit sites to evaluate conditions and make suggestions on accessibility issues.

Mary Scott asked about fencing at playgrounds, which is often helpful to parents watching over fast-moving children. There is some opposition to fully fenced-in playgrounds. Baltimore County does not operate public pools due to safety/liability issues and favors splash areas.

Julie Gaynor asked whether equipment is provided to enable sight-impaired individuals to use track facilities. Such equipment is not presently available.

Doug Smith suggested that the county offer disability passes that would provide free access to all county parks for those with a disability.

Sarah Hessler expressed her appreciation for the Commission's work and the information presented on parks and playgrounds. Ms. Hessler may pursue an opportunity through which her son could be recognized at a county park site.

Jay Doyle reported on new organizations that have applied for capital funding.