

# LA PLATA FARM PARK MASTER PLAN

HERITAGE • COMMUNITY • DISCOVERY

DRAFT • MAY 2023



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The contributions of many were integral to the creation of this Master Plan. We would like to thank all Charles County residents who attended meetings or provided comment and feedback during the project duration.

We would like to directly acknowledge the Board of Charles County Commissioners.

In addition we thank:

- Charles County staff
- Parks Planning Task Force members

Prepared by:



Prepared for:



Charles County  
Department of Recreation,  
Parks & Tourism (DRPT)



Figure 0.01: Perspective rendering of event lawn looking toward the renovated barn and education center.

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Figure 1.01: Existing site photo La Plata Farm Park. Credit: Joe Ignatius

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

La Plata Farm Park embraces the County's rich agricultural history bringing that to the forefront of the master plan. The park is envisioned as a gathering place that can serve as the front porch for the community and as an education center where visitors can learn about gardening and the intersection of farming and everyday life. The theme of agricultural heritage is expressed through many of the park features encouraging a sense of discovery and informing the design of the playgrounds, demonstration and community gardens, greenhouse, sensory gardens, and passive use areas of the site.

Flexibility for a range of features, programming and levels of interaction can be adjusted to respond to visitation, seasonal interests, funding, and staffing. Essential to the master plan was the need to integrate recreation and activity options that appeal to the entire family, and for features that shape the park as a destination that visitors come back to again and again. Programming can be integrated at a range of levels from individual and small group or self-guided exploration to large special events. La Plata Farm Park presents a variety of opportunities to establish partnerships with agriculture based organizations and local farmers to shine a light on activities already incubating in the Charles County agriculture and gardening communities.

La Plata Farm Park - North is comprised of three activity hubs, the garden complex, the playground village and the event lawn. The park will reclaim two structures existing on the site, a barn structure and former homestead, and revive them for new uses. The barn is envisioned as an education center and indoor event space with the addition of a community kitchen. The barn is in close proximity to community gardens and greenhouse activity. Spaces adjacent to the barn will serve for outdoor events, whether for farm or animal demonstration, farmer or vendor markets, concerts or outdoor movies, or private event rental. The large, centrally located lawn when not being used for events is prime location for walking the trail circuit along it's perimeter or picnicking and free play. The playground village will have a collection of play structures spread throughout, creating a safe space for children to cultivate a sense of exploration and excitement. Play structures will target specific age groups, a farm-themed splash pad is planned, and smaller play features will be integrated to allow for small group play or quiet retreat. The playground village will have landscaped areas within and along the perimeter to provide shade and separation of play features enhancing the element of exploration within the playground village. The former homestead, tucked among mature maple trees, will serve as a comfort station near the destination playground. The homestead could also provide meeting space or offices for park staff.

La Plata Farm Park - South is an area of the park separated visually by a forested buffer from other park areas and adjoining properties making it an ideal location to integrate active recreation features that don't directly complement the agricultural theme but are activities lacking in the county park system. Focus features include a skate park and bike pump track/skills course providing recreation options for children not attracted to traditional organized sports. All areas of the park are connected by a trail network for walking and running while ensuring access a wide variety of active and passive uses.



# MASTER PLAN

Figure 1.02: La Plata Farm Park plan rendering.

## KEY ELEMENTS

- |    |                                   |    |                                       |
|----|-----------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------|
| 1  | EVENT + EXHIBIT LAWN              | 13 | PICNIC PAVILION                       |
| 2  | RENOVATED BARN + EDUCATION CENTER | 14 | RENOVATED HOMESTEAD + COMFORT STATION |
| 3  | COMMUNITY KITCHEN                 | 15 | MAINTENANCE SHED                      |
| 4  | LABYRINTH                         | 16 | BIKE PUMP TRACK + SKILLS COURSE       |
| 5  | COMMUNITY TABLES                  | 17 | SKATE PARK                            |
| 6  | COMMUNITY GARDENS                 | 18 | DOG PARK                              |
| 7  | HOLIDAY + OUTDOOR DISPLAY AREA    | 19 | COMFORT STATION                       |
| 8  | OUTDOOR PLAZA                     | 20 | DEMONSTRATION GARDENS                 |
| 9  | GLASS HOUSE                       | 21 | MEADOW MOUNDS                         |
| 10 | PLAYGROUND                        | 22 | PARKING                               |
| 11 | FARM-THEMED SPLASH PAD            | 23 | GATE HOUSE                            |
| 12 | PUMP HOUSE + COMFORT STATION      | 24 | SUNFLOWER FIELD                       |

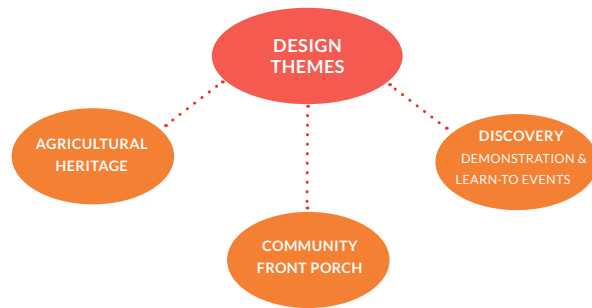
## VISION

La Plata Farm Park is a Charles County destination bringing people together to learn, share, and explore through active and passive recreation and programs focused on agricultural heritage.

## DESIGN THEMES

The design themes for La Plata Farm Park were developed through multiple levels of stakeholder engagement that reflect the input of county staff, elected officials, Task Force members, community groups, businesses and residents.

The first theme, agricultural heritage, reflects the site's history as a farm, the centrality of farming to the character of Charles County and the desire for a destination farm park where visitors can celebrate the farming heritage of the region. The second theme envisions the park as a community front porch, a place for gatherings large and small, and a place that welcomes residents and visitors from beyond the county. The third theme, discovery, invites park visitor to explore demonstration and learn-to events through engaging programming and amenities



**01 AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE**

Figure 1.03 Piscataway National Park  
Credit: Joe Ignatius



**02 COMMUNITY FRONT PORCH**

Figure 1.04: Family Picnic  
Credit: Three Rivers Park District.



**03 DEMONSTRATION & LEARN-TO EVENTS**

Figure 1.05: Equestrian Demonstration  
Credit: MD Agricultural Resources Council



Figure 1.06: Perspective Rendering - Glasshouse and Labyrinth Sensory Garden.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Plan for programming and events to promote discovery of the agricultural heritage of Charles County and significance to everyday life.
2. Promote community connections, both physical and social; connect to:
  - Wills Memorial Park and Town of La Plata
  - Public education system
  - Greater agricultural community and established organization.
3. Integrate a variety of active and passive uses for year-round use and seasonal events.
4. Provide multi-functional park features as opportunities for revenue generation.
5. Integrate unique features new to Charles County for benefit of residents and to support tourism to the county.



# 02 SITE ASSESSMENT

Figure 2.01: Existing site photo La Plata Farm Park. Credit: Joe Ignatius

## SITE CONTEXT

Understanding of the project site was informed through a systems approach which examined how La Plata Farm Park fits into recreational, economic, environmental, social, and cultural networks within and beyond Charles County. On-site assessment of La Plata Farm Park’s physical conditions, ecosystem health and resources, viewsheds and existing infrastructure was utilized alongside GIS analysis and research of the site’s cultural and historic context. This assessment expands our understanding of the existing conditions as well as the opportunities and challenges of the future park.

The site was also examined through an assessment of the community’s values, needs and priorities for a new park in the context of the design themes and park vision. This assessment was useful for ensuring that La Plata Farm Park would not be duplicating but supporting and expanding existing amenities in the region.

La Plata Farm Park is located in the Port Tobacco River watershed, which is a part of the larger Lower Potomac River watershed that feeds into the Chesapeake Bay. This creates an opportunity to highlight the positive role farming and gardening can have in the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay.

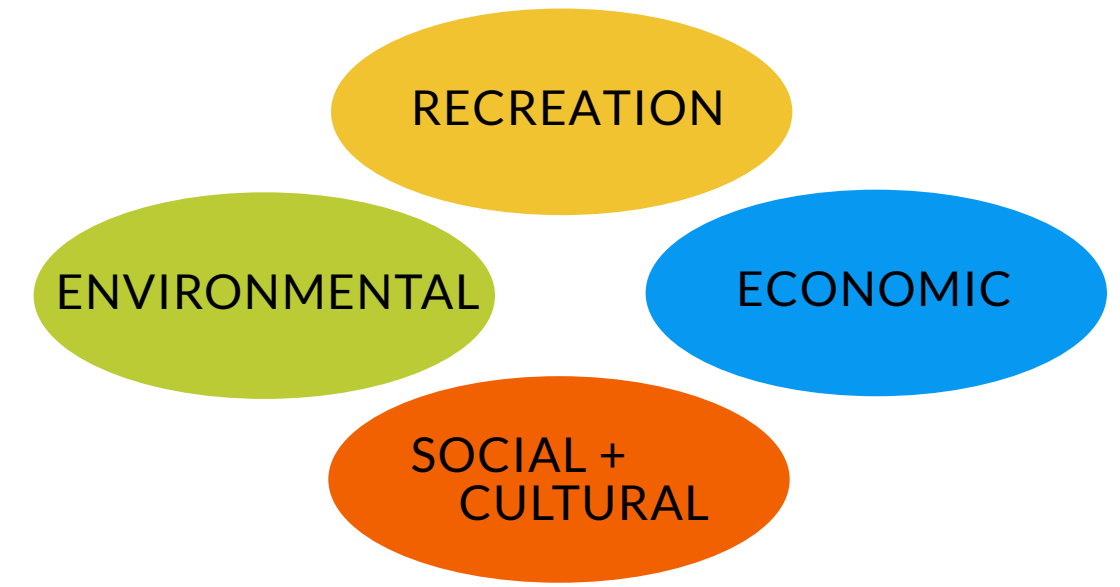
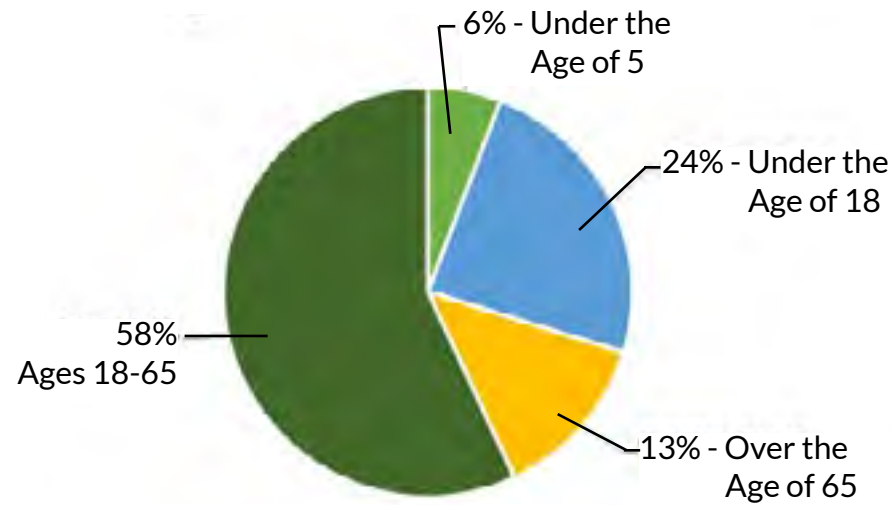


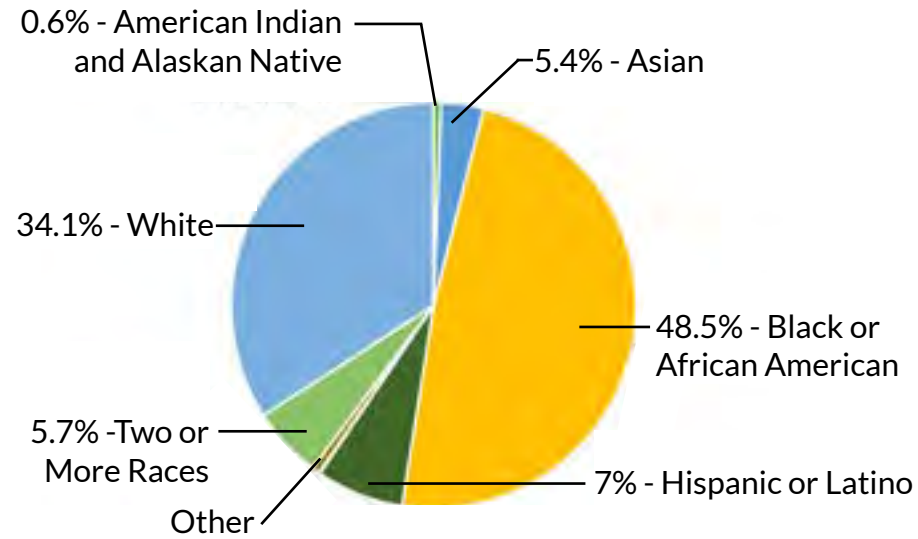
Figure 2.02: Watershed Map.

# DEMOGRAPHICS

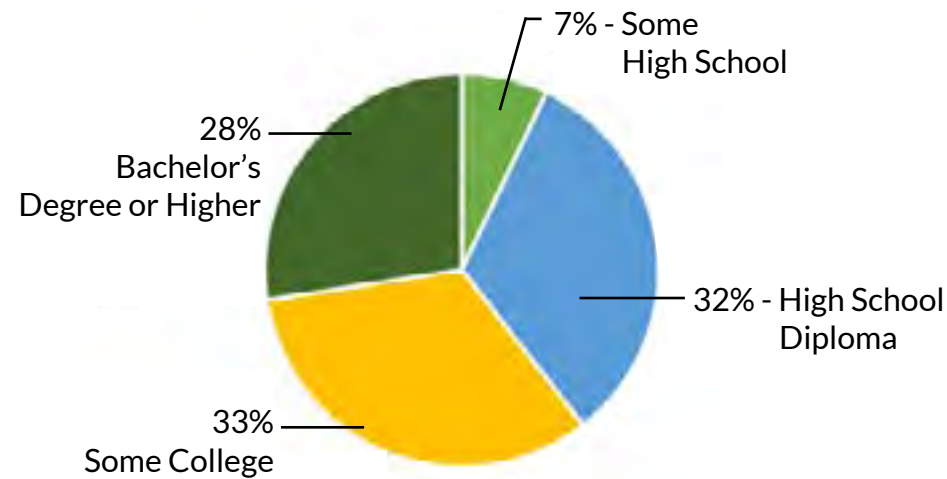
Percentages are based on 2020 census for Charles County, Maryland.



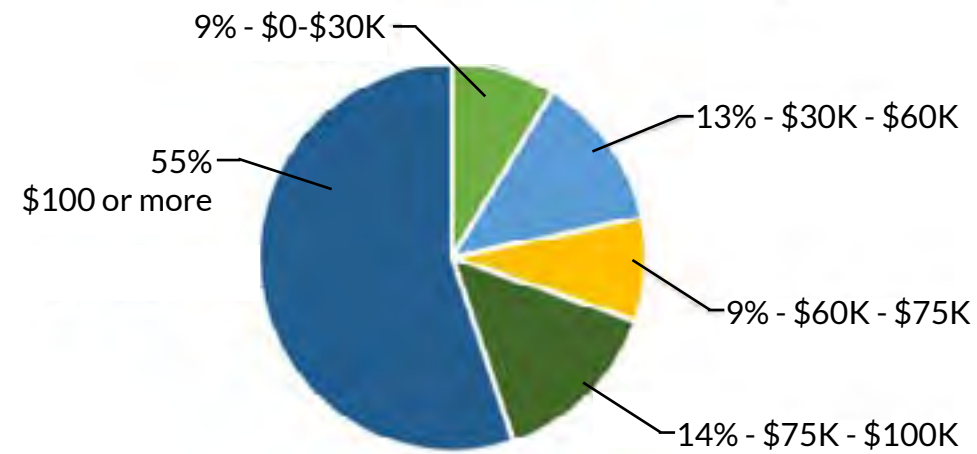
AGE



ETHNICITY



EDUCATION

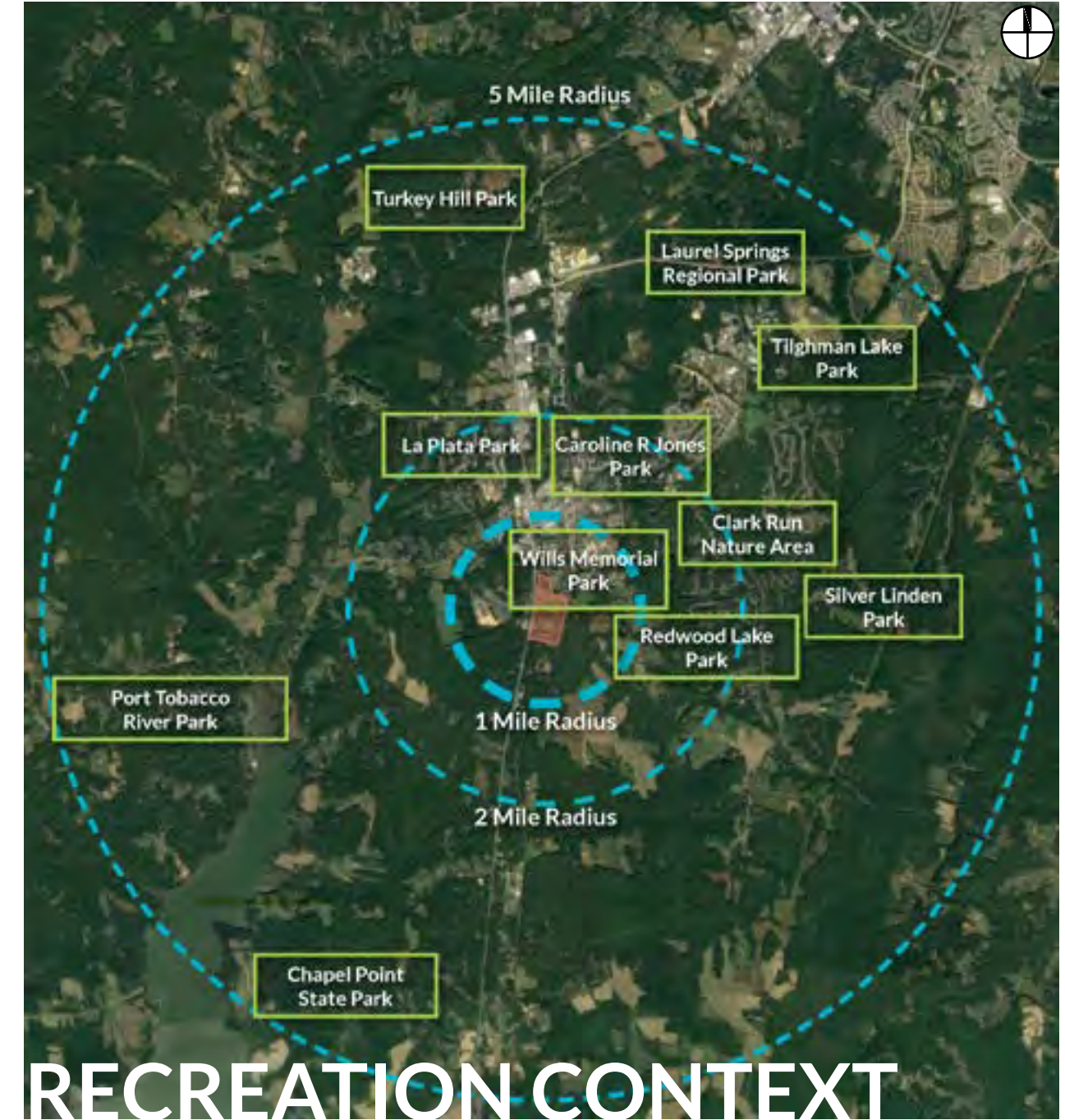


INCOME

La Plata Farm Park is located one mile south of the center of Town of La Plata and the site's northern property line is the corporate limits. The site is situated between US-301 and St Mary's Avenue. The 54.12-acre site includes two open fields which are currently mown and managed for hay production and physically separated by a forested buffer. The open areas of the site identified for development total approximately 30-acres in size.



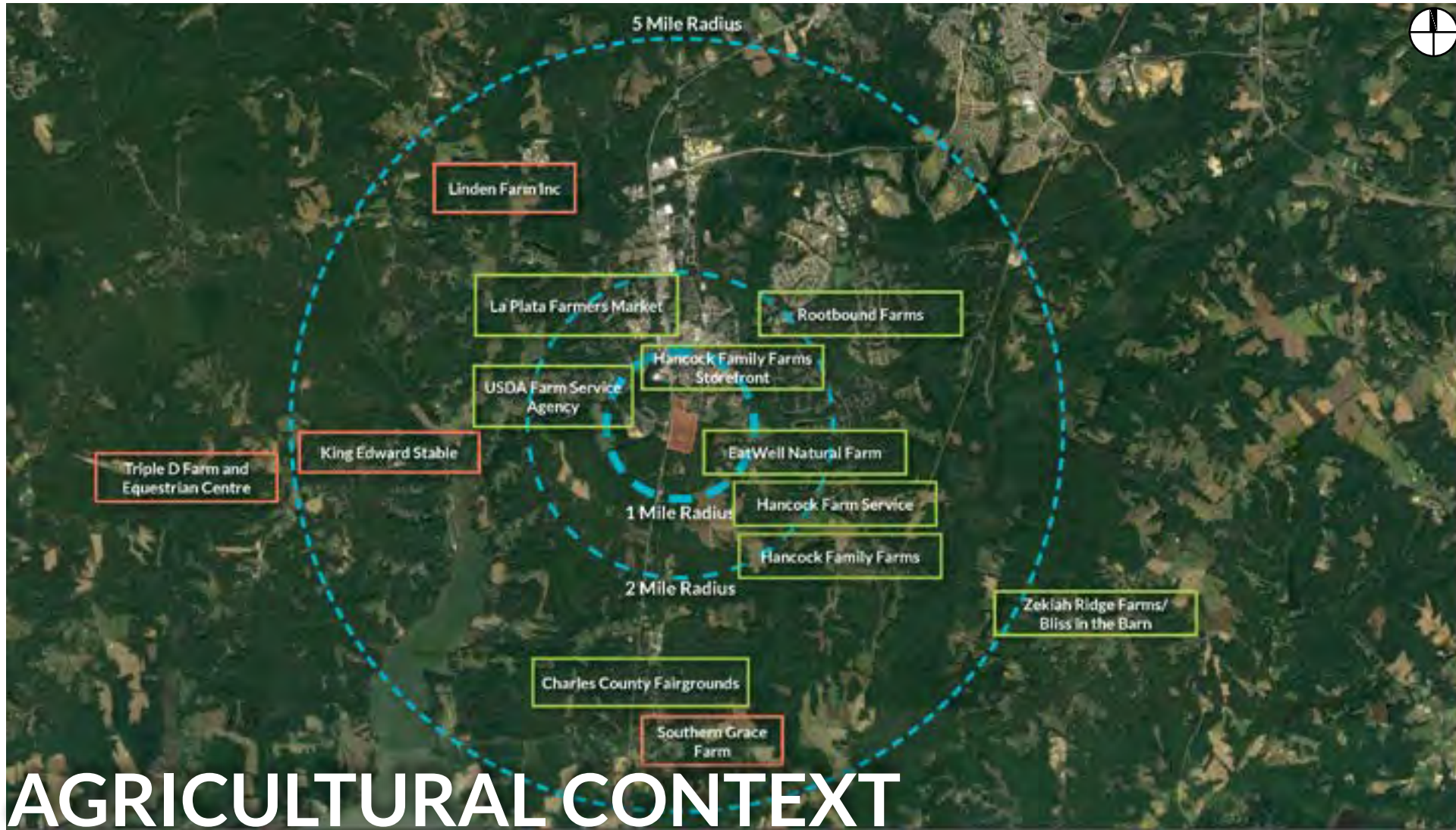
Figure 2.03: Site boundary.



# RECREATION CONTEXT

Figure 2.04: Context within the existing network of parks and designated natural areas.





# AGRICULTURAL CONTEXT

Figure 2.05: Context within the existing agricultural network of agricultural destinations and local farms.

La Plata Farm Park, located adjacent to the second densest population center of Charles County, presents an opportunity to increase exposure to agricultural heritage at an easily accessible site. Additionally, numerous family and commercial farm businesses are located within a five-mile radius of

the future park. A goal identified during the master planning process was to identify ways to support, not compete with, the work already being done by agricultural businesses in the region. A round-table meeting with Charles County farm businesses, educators, and county staff discussed how La Plata

Farm Park might showcase and support agricultural work and heritage. Suggestions from the meeting directly informed park features and programming included in the master plan.



# CULTURAL CONTEXT

Figure 2.06: Existing site photos. Credit: Joe Ignatius

Formerly, the site was the homestead of the Albrightain family, most recently farmed by Patricia B. Albrightain (b. 1928, d. 2021) and James Lemuel Albrightain (b. 1920, d. 1986), until it was sold to Charles County in 2015. Nearby cultural resources include La Plata Historic District in the Town of La

Plata, the Popes Creek line of the Pennsylvania Railroad which connects La Plata to Popes Creek and the Port Tobacco River, and Sacred Heart Cemetery in the Town of La Plata.

A cultural resources report outlining the history of the immediate region and connections to nearby



historic sites is included in Appendix 5.



# ECOTYPES

Figure 2.07: Existing land cover and ecotype mapping.

The major ecotypes present on the site include meadow fields, mixed deciduous forest patches, mixed herbaceous thickets, and hedgerows. Several specimen trees surround the historic homestead on the site, which include silver maple

(*Acer saccharinum*), Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), and crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*). Three primary drainage channels are present which drain across the site from higher elevations in the west (adjacent to US 301) to lower elevations on the

east (adjacent to St Mary's Avenue). Two large, open fields were identified as the primary focus areas for park amenities. Focus Area 1, includes barn and homestead structures, both of which with renovation could serve as anchor facilities in



# OPPORTUNITIES

Figure 2.08: Site analysis and opportunities mapping.

the future park. Focus Area 2, is both visually and physically separated from the central part of the site and has the potential for active recreation features requiring more space or would benefit with buffers from other park uses.. Existing forested areas are to

be preserved as buffer areas between the park and adjacent properties and as a buffer to US 301. To maintain the quiet, farm-like atmosphere of the site, potential entry points were identified along St. Mary's Avenue aligning with existing residential

streets with no entry points from US-301. A utility easement traverses the site. While no structures are planned within the utility easement or the forested areas, there is the opportunity for recreation trails and access for service vehicle through these zones.



# 03 MASTER PLAN PROCESS & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Figure 3.01: Site visit with Charles County staff to La Plata Farm Park. Credit: Joe Ignatius

## INCLUSIVE PROCESS

The master plan for La Plata Farm Park was developed through an inclusive park planning process that ran concurrent with plans for Waldorf Park and Popes Creek Waterfront Park. The master planning and public engagement activities span a one-year duration and began in July of 2022.

La Plata Farm Park was identified as a potential new park site by the Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan (LPPRP), a guidance document for county-wide planning for land conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities, recently updated June 2022. The LPPRP is a county-wide park planning and public input process which examines the geographical distribution of park and recreation facilities throughout Charles County and makes recommendations for future park planning. Beginning with the LPPRP and continuing with this park master planning process, the Charles County Department of Recreation Parks and Tourism (DRPT) is working to ensure the Charles County park system includes a diverse array of amenities and programs that are attentive to a broad spectrum of users and reflect the county's identity and values.



Figure 3.02: Master plan process and feedback loops.

Charles County developed the following vision statement to describe the county-wide park system. This is a grounding rod and the starting point for the master planning process for La Plata Farm Park.

**LAND PRESERVATION PARK AND RECREATION PLAN  
VISION STATEMENT**

CHARLES COUNTY IS A PLACE WHERE ALL PEOPLE THRIVE, AND BUSINESSES GROW AND PROSPER; WHERE THE PRESERVATION OF OUR HERITAGE AND ENVIRONMENT IS PARAMOUNT; WHERE GOVERNMENT SERVICES TO ITS CITIZENS ARE PROVIDED AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EXCELLENCE; AND WHERE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IS THE BEST IN THE NATION.



Figure 3.03: Task Force Meeting 1, September 2022. Credit: Joe Ignatius

DRPT’s intent for the master planning process was to involve residents of Charles County in each step of the process to the greatest extent possible and to provide opportunity to engage the greatest number of residents. Three park sites were identified by DRPT as the department’s next priorities for expanding the county-wide park network. DRPT’s vision is to develop each of these three parks as a destination park with unique focal features that bring new experiences to residents and encourage

tourism to Charles County. Parks are an important component to elevating quality of life for all residents by encouraging an active lifestyle, implementing land stewardship for environmental health, and offering venues for social interaction, community expression, and civic engagement. A strategy to combine public engagement for all three park sites was developed to integrate public interest and input. By focusing on all three parks concurrently, we were better able to understand



Figure 3.04: Task Force Meeting 2, November 2022. Credit: Joe Ignatius



Figure 3.05: Public Open House, February 2023. Credit: Joe Ignatius

overall needs and interests for residents living throughout Charles County, without overextending residents’ time and attention spread across three separate public engagement efforts.

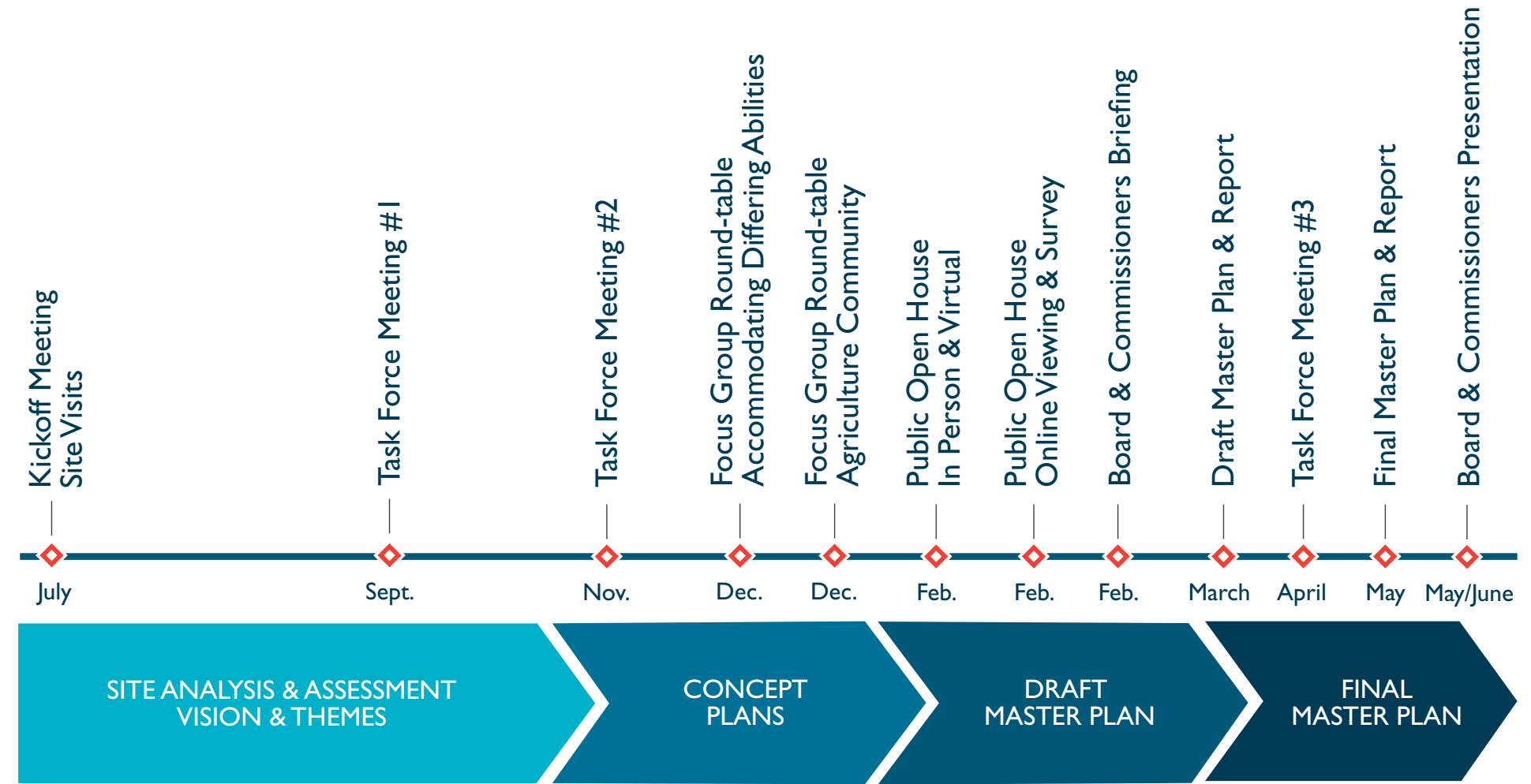


Figure 3.06: Public meeting schedule.



Figure 3.07: Task Force Meeting 2, November 2022. Credit Joe Ignatius

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

It also serves to demonstrate that each park is part of a wider network of public open space and collectively the county park system provides recreation and programming to respond to a variety of preferences and interests. The core of the public engagement plan centered on the convening of a volunteer Park Planning Task Force group, dedicated to continued participation for the one-year project duration. DRPT issued a county-wide request for interest to its residents and received in excess of one hundred

response from residents eager to participate. The Task Force was established and included thirty-five residents representing a diversity of backgrounds, expertise and perspectives. A series of three meetings were facilitated with the Task Force. The meetings were interactive and required Task Force members to engage with each other and the design team for timely input and critiques of the ideas and concept plans presented. Ideas and concept plans were refined with feedback from



Figure 3.08: Kickoff Meeting, July 2022. Credit: Joe Ignatius



Figure 3.09: Public Open House, February 2023. Credit: Joe Ignatius

residents, community organizations, and businesses through public open house workshops, special interest and focused round-table discussions, Task Force meetings, and through regularly scheduled progress meetings with DRPT staff. The design team and County's community outreach coordinator worked closely to ensure that public engagement was reaching a broad base of constituents, that information was easily accessible, and that all age groups had opportunity to participate.

## MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

- Develop a Vision and Design Themes
- Conduct Inventory & Site Assessment
- Establish Guiding Principles
- Implement Design Development

**Feedback Loop 1**

- » Design Ideas/Concept Plans
- » Task Force, Stakeholder & Public Input Meetings

**Feedback Loop 2**

- » Concept Plan Refinement
- » Task Force, Stakeholder & Public Input Meetings

**Feedback Loop 3**

- » Draft Master Plan
- » Task Force, Stakeholder & Public Input Meetings

- Final Master Plan & Report

## TASK FORCE MEETING #1 RECREATION & PROGRAMMING IDEAS

- Getting to know each other, expertise, and perspectives represented.
- Introduction to project sites and understanding of existing conditions and opportunities.
- Developing a list of recreation and programming ideas.

Questions asked:

- What are your favorite recreation activities?
- What events would you attend?
- Which design themes resonate with you?

This meeting established a vision and design themes for La Plata Farm Park and defined a set of guiding principles for the park design and master plan.



Figure 3.10: Image of Introduce Your Neighbor activity cards.  
Figure 3.11: Image of Plan A Day At The Park activity cards.

## TASK FORCE MEETING #2 CONCEPT PLAN ALTERNATIVES

- Finding commonalities for activity preferences.
- Identifying precedents for activities.
- Evaluation of concept plan options.

Considerations for evaluating concept plans:

- Arrival experience
- Special events
- Recreation activities
- Does the park have features that appeal to families, individuals, and groups?
- Are there missing features that would improve your experience?

This meeting defined recreation and programming priorities for selecting a preferred concept plan. Concept Plan = Exploration Meadows was the concept plan option that most closely embodied the preferences of Task Force members. This plan was revised and refined to incorporate stakeholder preferences and recommendations, progressing to a draft master plan.



### TASK FORCE MEETING #3 DRAFT MASTER PLAN & PHASING PREFERENCES

Throughout the public engagement process, cost, maintenance, and operations have been concerns that residents have voiced repeatedly. At the third Task Force meeting, members engaged in an activity Working in groups, to make decisions for funding allocation.

- Given a budget - determine allocation of funding across the three parks for phase one construction.
- For each park - decide the phasing of construction for park features; cost assumptions for park features were provided.



Figure 3.12: Image of Phasing and Funding Priorities activity.

This activity put the decision making into the hands of the Task Force members to better understand priorities for phasing of park features in each of the parks as well as priorities among the three individual parks. This information is instructive to DRPT in the next steps for implementation of these parks.

### ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSIONS

During conversations at Task Force meetings a few topics surfaced as important underlying frameworks that warranted further exploration. Two round-table discussions were held convening voices from the community with known expertise on the focus topics. These meetings were formatted as Conversations with the intention of listening

to expand our understanding of the challenges, needs, and opportunities for a more inclusive and welcoming La Plata Farm Park.

### AGRICULTURAL ROUND-TABLE:

Organized by the county's Agriculture Business Development Manager, this meeting brought together local farming entrepreneurs, educators, and representatives of a number of agriculture focused organizations. Through these discussions we identified future programming opportunities and ideas for how La Plata Farm Park can be a resource to expand agricultural education.

The meeting minutes are included in Appendix 2.

- Expand access for students and opportunities for student agricultural experiences (SAE).
- Partnerships with farmers for sustainable land management through cultivated field crops, meadows, or demonstration gardens.
- Expand events that showcase farm activities – farmers markets, county fair.
- Partnerships with farmers, chefs, etc. to lead classes to showcase their farm products – both indoor and outdoor options desired.
- Community garden plots are in high demand; addressing food access and food insecurity is important.

### ALL AGES & ABILITIES ROUND-TABLE:

Organized by the county's Public Outreach Coordinator and Recreation Therapeutic Coordinator, caregivers, residents, and therapeutic specialists offered feedback on the challenges and needs of people with disabilities. Suggestions included considerations for the physical, social, and sensory needs of park visitors, accommodating access to all park features rather than separate areas for lesser abled visitors, providing options to appeal to a range of interests and abilities. Through these discussions and additional research a set of design best practices was developed for accommodating all ages abilities in park design.

Best practices are outlined in Appendix 1.

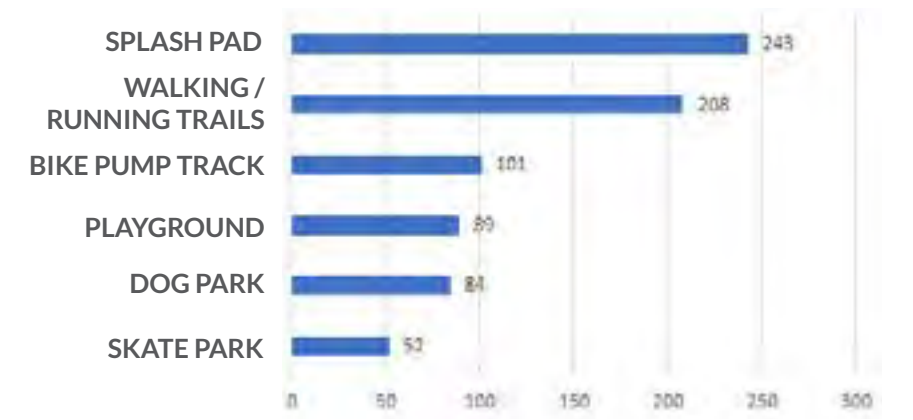
The meeting minutes are included in Appendix 2.

### PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE:

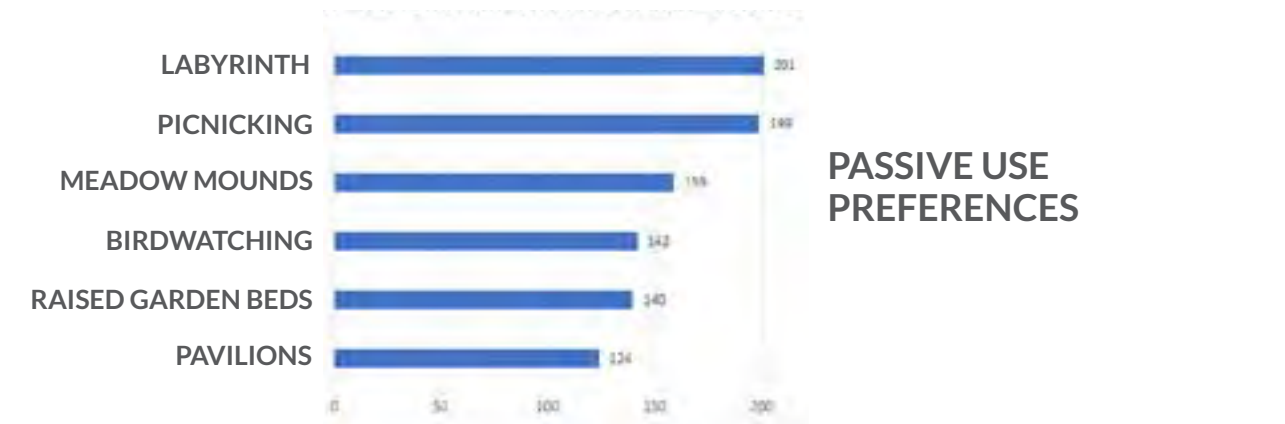
A series of public open house meetings were held to present the draft master plan to county residents. Polling of preferences and opportunity for public comment were provided in three different venues for a one-month duration.

Public input for recreation and programming preferences are aggregated in the following preference charts.

### ACTIVE USE PREFERENCES



### PASSIVE USE PREFERENCES



### PROGRAMMING PREFERENCES



Figure 3.13: Public input for recreation and programming preferences are aggregated in the following preference charts.



Figure 3.14: Nature Park Glauer Felder Credit: hochC Landscape Architects

**What makes a great park?** This question was integral to envisioning La Plata Farm Park as a destination for visitors from within and beyond Charles County. The design team and stakeholders considered the recreational, environmental, economic and socio-cultural factors that make a park worth visiting over and over again.



Figure 3.15: Ben Center for Community Schools, Masonville Cove MD Credit: Joe Ignatius



Figure 3.16: Karst Farm Park Credit: Monroe County, Indiana Government

**Great parks are safe and accessible for all users.** Do people know about the park, amenities and activities? Are park activities free or affordable? Do park users feel welcome? Consider the physical and financial resources needed for people to access the park and lower barriers for entry wherever possible.

**Great parks create positive, engaging, and memorable experiences.** Program opportunities for new experiences and opportunities to learn. Ensure that the park provides novel amenities that cannot be found elsewhere locally. Reinforce a sense of social connection.



Figure 3.17: Denver Green School Credit: DUG

**Great parks are flexible and adaptable.** Design park spaces to be multi-functional. Accommodate a rotation of programming and events. Design with environmental resilience in mind. **Great parks offer activities for all age groups.** Provide space for activities that promote well-being and health. Prioritize intergenerational and family-oriented play. Not every member of a family



Figure 3.18: Pump Track Credit: Alliance Action Sports Experts



Figure 3.19: Watkins Regional Park Credit: Experience Prince George's County

will want to participate in the same way. Make sure there's something of interest for everyone. **Great parks are relevant to the communities they serve.** Does the park design and programming reflect the cultural interests of community members? Community input, feedback and critique is essential throughout the planning process to ensure that the park is responsive to visitors' needs and desires.

**Great parks are maintainable and cared for.** Establish a maintenance program for each park which outlines staffing requirements for programming, operations, park maintenance and safety. Staff up prior to parks opening or seasonal shifts. Prioritize materials and facilities which can be maintained long term.



Figure 3.20: Plan rendering of Concept Master Plan A



Figure 3.21: Plan rendering of Concept Master Plan B

### CONCEPT MASTER PLAN OPTIONS

The design team prepared two concept plan options to explore site layout ideas for further discussion with DRPT and the Task Force members. The concept plan options integrated recreation features, programming opportunities, and ideas discussed as priorities during the initial work sessions with stakeholders. Concepts were critiqued and advanced to one master plan.

**Concept Option A - Cultivating Heritage**, focuses on integrating opportunities for demonstration gardens, orchard, greenhouse, and culinary gardens as teaching opportunities for the County’s agricultural heritage past and present. It strives to reach visitors of all ages with a range of recreation features. The primary features of the site includes a farm themed destination playground, picnic grove, event lawn and extensive trail network. The plan includes features that could be used for

Revenue generation such as rentable pavilions, an event lawn for special events, renovated barn for display or gallery space, event rental and community kitchen. Outdoor space surrounding the barn include a culinary garden, greenhouse, and community tables nestled in an orchard. The southern part of the site has vehicular access to a small parking lot, but can also be accessed by walking trails connecting the two areas. The primary feature in this area is a large dog park.

**Concept Option B - Exploration Meadows**, features active recreation that appeals to a wide range of visitors and creates opportunities for revenue generation. The concept includes amenities that don’t already exist in the immediate vicinity of La Plata and would make the park a destination for return visits. These include an eighteen hole disc golf course, bike pump track, destination playground and farm-themed splash-pad.

The concept offers space for year round special event programming with facilities for rotating holiday displays, rentable pavilions, stage, event lawn, and renovated barn/visitors center. The farming legacy of the site is showcased through a spacious community garden, new greenhouse classroom and planted sensory garden labyrinth which serves as both a teaching tool and activity for kids and adults. In an effort to balance active and passive use, a

network of meadow and forest trails adds interest to the relatively flat site. The trail network meanders through meadow mounds and a forested boardwalk and connects to Wills Memorial Park on the north side of the park.



### KEY ELEMENTS

- 1 EVENT + EXHIBIT LAWN
- 2 RENOVATED BARN + EDUCATION CENTER
- 3 COMMUNITY KITCHEN
- 4 LABYRINTH
- 5 COMMUNITY TABLES
- 6 COMMUNITY GARDENS
- 7 HOLIDAY + OUTDOOR DISPLAY AREA
- 8 OUTDOOR PLAZA
- 9 GLASS HOUSE
- 10 PLAYGROUND
- 11 FARM-THEMED SPLASH PAD
- 12 PUMP HOUSE + COMFORT STATION
- 13 PICNIC PAVILION
- 14 RENOVATED HOMESTEAD + COMFORT STATION
- 15 MAINTENANCE SHED
- 16 BIKE PUMP TRACK + SKILLS COURSE
- 17 SKATE PARK
- 18 DOG PARK
- 19 COMFORT STATION
- 20 DEMONSTRATION GARDENS
- 21 MEADOW MOUNDS
- 22 PARKING
- 23 GATE HOUSE
- 24 SUNFLOWER FIELD

# 04 MASTER PLAN & RECOMMENDATIONS



## MASTER PLAN

Figure 4.01: Plan rendering of La Plata Farm Park master plan.



# EVENT LAWN

Figure 4.02: Perspective rendering of event lawn, renovated barn and education center.

La Plata Farm Park - North is comprised of three activity hubs, the garden complex, the playground village and the event lawn. Connecting all three activity hubs is the renovated barn and education center. The barn is envisioned as an education center and indoor event space with the addition of a community kitchen. The barn is in close proximity to community gardens and greenhouse activity.

Spaces adjacent to the barn will serve for a variety of outdoor events and everyday gathering spaces. The event lawn is an organizing feature of La Plata Farm Park and sure to become a regular meeting spot for visitors. It is easily accessible from parking areas or numerous park features just a short walk away. The lawn is a flexible and multi-functional space. On a typical day, the event lawn can be used



Figure 4.03: Viewpoint Key Map.



# GARDEN COMPLEX

Figure 4.04: Pedestrian and vehicular circulation diagram.

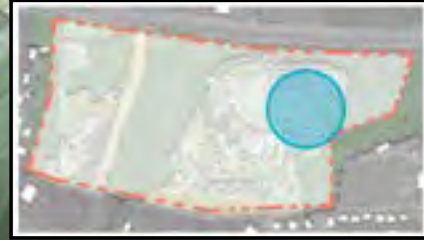


Figure 4.05: Key Map.

## KEY ELEMENTS

- 1 COMMUNITY GARDEN
- 2 LABYRINTH & SENSORY GARDEN
- 3 YOUTH GARDEN
- 4 GREENHOUSE CLASSROOM
- 5 DEMONSTRATION GARDENS
- 6 MARKET GARDEN
- 7 COMMUNITY TABLES
- 8 FOOD TRUCK PULL-OFF
- 9 RENOVATED BARN & EDUCATION CENTER
- 10 COMMUNITY KITCHEN
- 11 PLAZA
- 12 BARNYARD & SERVICE LOT
- 13 PARKING
- 14 STORAGE SHED

for pick-up sports games like soccer, frisbee, or kite flying; passive uses like picnicking; or walking along the perimeter tree lined walking trail. Alternatively, this space can be activated with outdoor vendors, rotating outdoor exhibits, or special events like outdoor movie nights or concerts. Food truck access and parking will be a short walk away in the parking areas adjacent. To maintain open sight lines

and maximize flexibility, there are no permanent structures proposed within the event lawn. Temporary stage or tents can be erected as events dictate. Two covered picnic pavilions are proposed adjacent to the event lawn opposite the renovated barn.

The garden complex brings hands-on learning activities that allow visitors to participate in or witness the life cycle and magic of growing plants. Three community gardens are located within the garden complex with a total of 77 raised gardening beds. Each of the three gardens can be designated to specific user groups, whether that is a youth organization, partnership with public school program, market garden making fresh vegetables available to low income families or open gardening for residents who simply don't have space of their own to garden.

## 77 RAISED GARDEN BEDS

The gardens are bordered by two main parking areas to allow both ease of access and convenient routes to move supplies and equipment. In close proximity is the community kitchen which serves as a space for local farmers and agriculture focused groups to showcase what they are already doing so well in Charles County.

The greenhouse functions as a visual anchor for the garden complex and becomes the hub for gardening classes and demonstrations. It features an octagonal glasshouse design which harkens back to nineteenth-century botanical gardens and serves as both a practical setting for garden education and a unique backdrop of special events. With the potential to work as either a heated space or rely on passive solar heat, the greenhouse would extend the

growing season of La Plata Farm Park year round, all in a relatively small footprint. Adjacent to the glass house, three community tables located in a tree grove expand options for gathering and events in the garden complex.

## 2 ACRES SUNFLOWER FIELD

Demonstration gardens are located throughout La Plata Farm Park - North. These are landscaped areas that offer an educational component or reflect an agricultural vernacular. These areas can be paired with educational signage or programming to assist visitors in learning of their significance.

### DEMONSTRATION GARDENS THEMES:

- Sunflower Field & Cutting Garden
- Kitchen Garden - Herbs & Edible Plants
- Permaculture Garden
- Pollinators & Apiary
- Heritage Crops
- Beverage
- Crops
- Plants for Fabric & Yarn Dying

## 4 ACRES MEADOW INSTALLATION

Continuing the idea of encouraging interaction between visitors and plants, a sensory garden in the form of a labyrinth is proposed. In this feature, paths form a winding bed of herbaceous flowering perennials that appeal to all five senses. Labyrinths have been used as contemplative features in landscape for thousands of years. Found in diverse settings, from houses of worship to playgrounds, labyrinths can be made or planted of many materials. Open to people of all ages and abilities, the path through the labyrinth is wide enough to be wheelchair accessible and includes space to stop and rest on seating areas in the surrounding lawn. The labyrinth can be integrated into garden education programming, including therapeutic gardening workshops and school field trips, and would serve as a stunning setting for weddings and special event rentals.



## LABYRINTH & SENSORY GARDEN

Figure 4.06: Perspective rendering of labyrinth, glasshouse, and community gardens.



Figure 4.07: Viewpoint Key Map.



Figure 4.08: Plan rendering of playground village.

Figure 4.09: Key Map.

## KEY ELEMENTS

- 1 EVENT LAWN
- 2 5-12 YEAR OLD PLAYGROUND
- 3 2-5 YEAR OLD PLAYGROUND
- 4 FARM-THEMED SPLASH-PAD
- 5 PAVILION
- 6 DEMONSTRATION GARDENS
- 7 RENOVATED HOUSE COMFORT STATION
- 8 FOOD TRUCK PULL-OFF
- 9 RENOVATED BARN & VISITOR CENTER
- 10 COMMUNITY KITCHEN
- 11 PLAZA
- 12 BARNYARD & SERVICE LOT
- 13 PARKING
- 14 MEADOW MOUNDS
- 15 HOLIDAY DISPLAY AREA
- 16 PICNIC TABLES
- 17 PUMP-HOUSE & COMFORT STATION

A major feature planned for the destination playground is a splash pad, located in the center of the playground. The splash pad garnered high interest at every public meeting and is a recreation feature not well represented in the county's park system. A pump-house and restroom will be located near the splash pad.

The playground village will have landscaped areas within and along the perimeter to provide shade and separation of play features enhancing the element of exploration within the playground village. These gardens will also create a unique gateway into the play space and provide opportunities to learn about plants.

A row of swings will edge the walk leading to the former homestead. These are reminiscent of a front porch experience. The former homestead, tucked among mature maple trees, will serve as a comfort station near the destination playground. The homestead could also provide meeting space or offices for park staff.



Figure 4.10: Splash Pad, Fitchburg, WI. Credit: Stateline Kids.

The playground village will have a collection of play structures spread throughout, creating a safe space for children to cultivate a sense of exploration and excitement. The destination playground is envisioned as a place of discovery of agricultural heritage for younger visitors through farm-themed play equipment. The play structures will be organized into pods suited to specific

age groups. Smaller play features will be integrated to allow for small group play or quiet retreat. Design of the playground must respond to and accommodate a range of abilities for inclusive play and consider ease of mobility throughout the play area.



Figure 4.11: Plan enlargement Focus Area 2.

La Plata Farm Park - South is an area of the park separated visually by a forested buffer from other park areas and adjoining properties making it an ideal location to integrate active recreation features that don't directly complement the agricultural theme but are activities lacking in the county park system. Focus features include a skate park and bike

pump track/skills course providing recreation options for young people not attracted to traditional organized sports. All areas of the park are connected by a trail network for walking and running while ensuring access to a wide variety of active and passive uses. Tucked behind and to the rear of the site is a two acre dog park with both open and forested areas. Visitors to the dog park have a separate trail

access from the shared parking lot to minimize cut throughs or conflicts with other park amenities. Located near the St. Mary's Avenue entrance to the site, covered picnic pavilions and a smaller playground surround an open play lawn. This area is connected to the central part of the park through a trail network accommodating walkers and runners. All trails within the park are wide enough

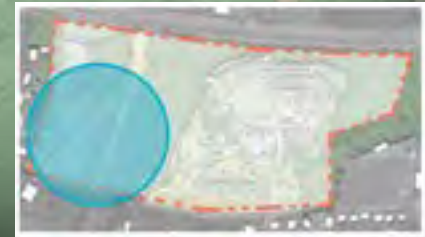


Figure 4.12: Key map.

### KEY ELEMENTS

- 1 DOG PARK
- 2 BIKE PUMP TRACK SKILLS COURSE
- 3 SKATE PARK
- 4 PLAZA
- 5 PAVILION
- 6 PLAYGROUND
- 7 LAWN
- 8 FOOD TRUCK PULL-OFF
- 9 PARKING
- 10 BOARDWALK TRAIL
- 11 FOREST TRAIL
- 12 COMFORT STATION
- 13 PICNIC TABLES



Figure 4.13: Pedestrian and vehicular circulation diagram.

for maintenance vehicles, eliminating the need for redundant maintenance roads. Easy access entering the park has been made possible with two vehicular access points, one for each area of the park. For La Plata Farm Park - North, the main entrance has been aligned with a residential street, Frederick Drive, to make traffic control easier. Vehicular circulation is a one-way

loop road around the perimeter of the park with three designated parking areas located near primary park destinations. In total there are over 200 spaces located throughout La Plata Farm Park - North. La Plata Farm Park - South is accessed by a separate entry point from St. Mary's Avenue providing vehicular access to a parking lot and park features in the southern park area. A total of 46 spaces are

provided here. Runners, walkers, and cyclists can access features of the site via a trail network over two miles in length as well as a direct connection to Wills Memorial Park to the north and a shared use path along the entire frontage of St. Mary's Avenue.



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## MASTER PLAN PRECEDENTS

1. A renovated barn can function as an education center and event venue. Credit: Country Living.
2. The event lawn is a larger scaled space where everyday use or vendor markets and larger special event can be held. Credit: Noblesville Parks and Recreation.
3. A glasshouse and culinary gardens are an

opportunity to translate how agriculture can happen at the backyard scale. Credit: George Weigel.

4. Raised community gardening beds are an invitation to actively learn about growing vegetables. Credit: Tim Street-Porter.
5. A dog park can take many different forms, but here we highlight an example that blends with the agricultural character of the park. Credit: Pet

Friendly Travel.

6. Community tables are features that provide flexibility in use as gathering areas or for farm to table events. Credit: NOLA.
7. In passive use areas of the park, open meadow and sunflower fields are recommended to mimic farm fields and are a beautiful way to buffer St. Mary's Avenue and US 301 from the park. Credit: Joe Ignatius.

8. A planted labyrinth is planned as a sensory garden. Credit: Stefko.

9. A picnic grove is proposed near the renovated homestead and destination playground. Credit: Conservation Ontario.

10. Trails for walking, running, and biking connect all park features and are designed as circuits. Credit: HochC Landscape Architects.

11. Picnic pavilions are located near open lawn areas and can be reserved for families or groups. Credit: Pickerill-Pigot Preserve.

12. Playgrounds and splash pads in a farm theme are different from what you'll find in other areas throughout the County and are a way for younger visitors to experience the farm elements. Credit: City of Kettering.

13. A skate spot and bike pump track/skills course appeal to visitors with differing and specialized interests. Credit: City of Columbia.

14. Holiday displays bring seasonal interest and activities to the park encouraging repeat visits. Credit: Joe Ignatius.

## RECREATION FEATURES

A combination of active and passive recreation features are proposed for La Plata Farm Park. These features are shown on the master plan, however, the implementation of these features can occur at various levels of service or range of operations. Furthermore, the implementation of the level of service will be dependent on available funding needed to operate at that level of service. As funding becomes available and visitor use increases, advancement to a higher level of service becomes a viable option for enhancements such as the addition of shade structures, buildings, or programming. However, intermediate or progressive approaches for some recreation features will need to be integrated as part of the initial installation.

The following chart describes potential options for a range of service levels for each recreation feature.

Recreation Feature	Level of Service		
	Basic	Intermediate	Intensive
Destination Playground	Farm-themed playground; organized into groups of play structures that focus on specific age groups; play surfacing.	Integrate shade structures, perimeter seating and sensory refuge areas.	Custom designed play equipment.
Splash Pad	Farm-themed splash-pad; mechanical pump-house and restroom/ changing room facility.	Interactive features, sequencing and splash patterns.	Custom designed features.
Community Gardens + Greenhouse	Install all or a portion of the 75 raised beds, perimeter fencing, water hookups, and storage shed.	Install demonstration gardens, community tables, labyrinth.	Construct greenhouse; offer classes and programs.
Bike Pump Track and Skills Course	Generally flat asphalt course with pavement markings.	Custom design undulating asphalt or earthen course with several obstacles.	Custom design undulating asphalt or earthen course with a variety of obstacles; tracks for different skill levels.
Skate Park	Concrete surfacing with off the shelf skate ramps, rails, and obstacles; surface mounted.	Concrete surfacing with custom designed ramps, rails, and obstacles in consultation with skate park design working group.	Integrate a concrete bowl.
Demonstration Gardens	Construct themed demonstration gardens.	Integrate educational signage.	Integrate classes and programming.

Figure 4.14 Level of service chart; outlines three levels of service for each recreation feature.



Figure 4.15 Event Overlay Plan

The park is envisioned to be utilized for a wide variety of public events: seasonal or annual events, festivals, and smaller educational classes or demonstrations becoming a true regional destination in Charles County and Southern Maryland. A renovated barn can accommodate indoor uses for educational programming, farmers markets, meetings or private events. The plaza adjacent can accommodate up to 100 guests and visitors as a flexible space.

Designated parking for food trucks is located in the parking lots at either side of the barn. The event lawn can be staged for larger vendor markets with tents along the perimeter walk or have a large stage or movie screen at one end with seating in the middle. The park can be used for seasonal events like carved pumpkin display, weekly farmer/vendor markets, and holiday light displays. The possibilities of options are endless and can be implemented as resources

and staffing allow. The facilities and park spaces are flexible and could be made available for private event reservations. Integrating options for revenue generating events are opportunities to offset overall maintenance and operations costs. Private rentals might include: picnic pavilions, meeting space, events such as weddings or fundraisers.



# CONSIDERATIONS

Figure 4.16 Credit: Mecklenburg County Government

La Plata Farm Park is an opportunity to bring new recreation activities to the county park system while also celebrating its rich agricultural heritage. The master plan identifies a comprehensive plan for recreation, park features, and potential programming throughout the site that can be enhanced by integrating a variety of design considerations to ease operations and improve visitor experience.

## PARK SUSTAINABILITY

- Opportunities to demonstrate sustainable practices
- Present and future farming practices can address larger climate and environmental issues educating future farmers as stewards of the land.
- Consulting soil scientists and local farmers on the best practices for planting demonstration gardens, meadows and other plantings is critical when developing the final park design to ensure the long-term success of the park.
- Alternative energy sources to power buildings or site lighting.
- Community gardens present an opportunity for

farm-table-compost practices to demonstrate the full cycle of how food is grown.

- Signage, smart phone apps, and exhibits can be curated to show how the sustainability practices of the site contribute to a greener place.

## TECHNOLOGY IN PARKS

Technology can be strategically used in the park as an educational tool and enhance the park experience, but also a way to better maintain the park.

- Modern needs of park users include having access to Wi-Fi and charging capabilities. These can be included in pavilions, site furnishings and charging stations around the park.

- Weather station could be placed in the park to monitor the current weather conditions, which will allow park users and facility maintenance staff to better manage the community gardens for irrigation needs and fluctuations in temperature to better care for the crops.
- Sensor technology can be utilized through the park to monitor trash levels in trash cans, monitor guest attendance, and monitor the conditions of the splash pad.
- A park website with interactive maps that can be accessed from a QR code scan using a smartphone provides an accessible way to understand the park experience before, during and after the park use.

## MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

Maintenance is a key consideration from design through the initial park opening and beyond. Designing for ease of maintenance is a priority. The following is starting point for ideas:

- Develop a maintenance plan outlining regular maintenance activities and hire dedicated maintenance staff for the park to proactively avoid issues or address issues quickly and efficiently when they arise.
- A network of trails throughout the park are designed with a width to accommodate to small gator maintenance vehicles with access to all areas of the park.
- A maintenance building is located on-site for storage of maintenance equipment used frequently.
- Materials for buildings and site furnishings are

- selected for their durability for high use and weather conditions to ensure they have a long life cycle.
- Select a family of materials to minimize difficulty of finding parts and replacing products.
- Select plants for low maintenance and meadow establishment in lieu of turfgrass lawn to minimize overall intensive maintenance needs allowing staff to focus time and maintenance in high activity areas of the park.

## SIGNAGE & EXHIBITS

Park wayfinding is an opportunity to incorporate focal elements that help to tell the story of La Plata Farm Park and contribute to a sense of county placemaking and cultural pride.

- Signage should be easily read, written in multiple languages, available in braille and use symbols for the color blind to equitably ensure that Universal Design principles are met.
- Interpretive signage creates opportunities for learning and can be provided at key moments around the park explaining park systems, sustainable practices and highlighting agricultural techniques or garden themes.
- Exhibits, whether temporary or permanent, that support the park themes add a layer of depth to the visitor's experience, enhancing and expanding placemaking and wayfinding in the park.

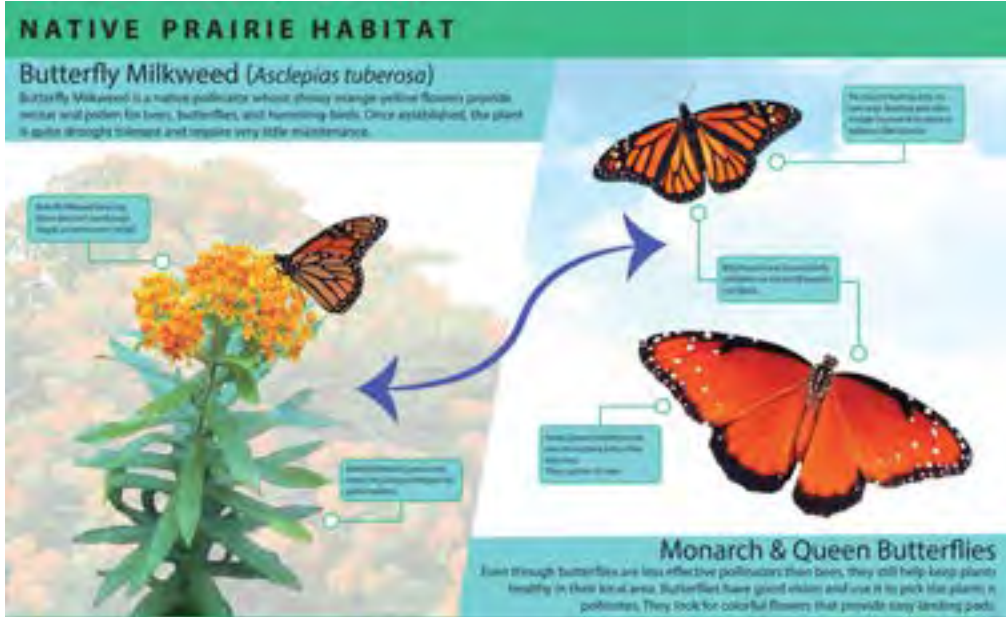


Figure 4.17: Example of educational signage.





# 05 IMPLEMENTATION & PHASING

Figure 5.01: Construction administration plant installation. Credit: Floura Teeter Landscape Architects.



## PHASING

Figure 5.02: Phasing plan.

### PHASE I

- 1 SUNFLOWER FIELD
- 2 RENOVATED BARN + EDUCATION CENTER, COMMUNITY KITCHEN
- 3 COMMUNITY GARDEN
- 4 LABYRINTH
- 5 GREENHOUSE
- 6 PARKING
- 7 COMMUNITY TABLES
- 8 EVENT LAWN
- 9 RENOVATED HOMESTEAD
- 10 DESTINATION PLAYGROUND
- 11 FARM-THEMED SPLASH PAD
- 12 MEADOW MOUNDS
- 15 DEMONSTRATION GARDENS
- 16 PAVILIONS

### PHASE 2

- 6 PARKING
- 10 PLAYGROUND
- 13 BIKE PUMP TRACK + SKILLS COURSE
- 14 SKATE PARK

### PHASE 3

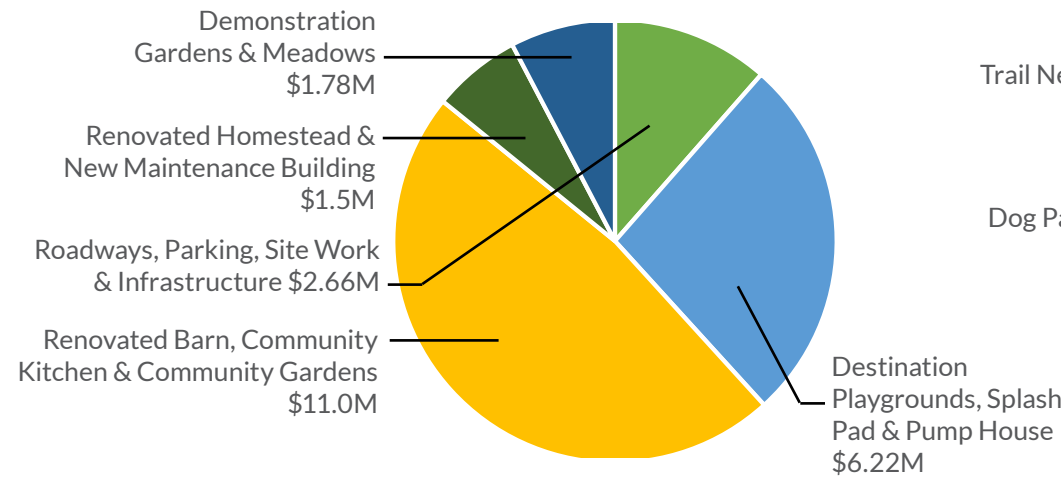
- 16 PAVILION
- 17 DOG PARK
- BRIDGES AND TRAILS

This master plan for La Plata Farm Park puts forth a bold vision to celebrate Charles County's agricultural heritage as expressed through many of the park features which encourage a sense of discovery and inform the design of the playgrounds, demonstration and community gardens, greenhouse, sensory gardens, and passive use areas of the site.

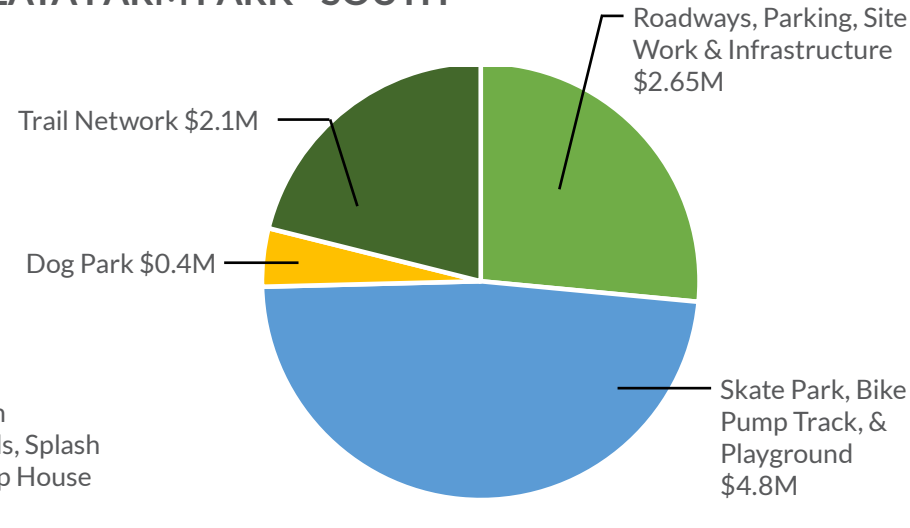
Master plans are intended to set out a vision. The details of each park area and element are then further developed through a collaborative process with the community while taking into environmental and engineering requirements and the practical needs of users. Work on a project of this scale will have to proceed in logical phases or packages of

improvements based on available funding and how various elements of the master plan coincide.

### LA PLATA FARM PARK - NORTH



### LA PLATA FARM PARK - SOUTH

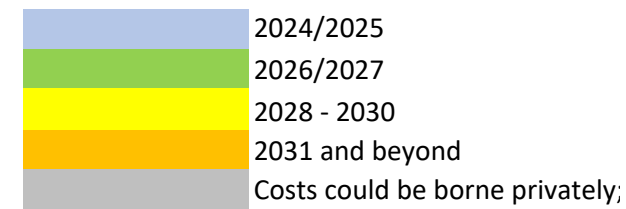


### ASSUMPTIONS

The estimate of probable costs is based on the following assumptions:

1. Infrastructure Items - MDOT SHA unit prices from Q4 2022.
2. Uniform escalation of 3.5% compounded annually.

3. 60% design contingency due to lack of design development.
4. 17% architectural/engineering and permitting/compliance fees.
5. 10% construction management and administration.
6. Cost range used as follows:  
 Low = 80% of cost estimate  
 High = 110% of cost estimate



### PROJECT COSTS & FUNDING

Partnership is critical to achieving the vision of La Plata Farm Park. Charles County government will provide the leadership and much of the funding that sustains plan implementation over time; however, funding from state and federal agencies, philanthropies and partner organizations is critical to bringing the park vision to reality. Ongoing operating funds are typically paid by county government, but unlike other parks with very active uses there will be limited opportunities for revenue generation at La Plata Farm Park. To achieve a high level of programming there will have to be supporting non-profit partners to conduct some activities and maintain the park in good repair.

The full cost of the La Plata Farm Park is difficult to estimate based only on a visionary master plan. In addition to the hard costs of construction, there are engineering costs, environmental compliance and mitigation activities, and construction management costs to consider; contingency for unknown design requirements and inflation also factor into the cost of projects. Together, non-construction and contingency costs make up more than half of each estimate presented in this document. The more elements that have “shovel ready” design plans, the lower the ultimate project costs will be as the County take advantage of unanticipated funding and grant opportunities that favor projects ready to be built.

### A FLEXIBLE PHASING PLAN FOR ACTIVITY HUBS

#### LA PLATA FARM PARK - NORTH

The most iconic elements of La Plata Farm Park will occur at the north area of the site where three activity hubs: the garden complex, playground village and the event lawn will be built. Through the community planning process, participants clearly favored beginning park construction with this area of the master plan..

#### PHASE 1: SITE DEVELOPMENT and PLAYGROUND VILLAGE

To support any of the recreation features and activities planned at La Plata Farm Park - North, site infrastructure is necessary. The loop road, parking, and utilities will support all recreation features and activities and allow flexibility to install any of the activity hubs as funding permits. The event lawn will be defined by an elliptical walking trail with surrounding park features and structures creating an edge to the event lawn. Picnic pavilions proposed on either side of the event lawn could be constructed later. Environmental permitting requirements and engineering considerations are straightforward at La Plata Farm Park. Coordination of trails and connections to Wills Memorial Park which is owned and operated by the Town of La Plata, and construction of a maintenance area should also occur as part of Phase 1. Renovation of the homestead provide an opportunity for park staff offices, and may be a consideration to include in Phase 1.

Community engagement activities indicated that the most sought-after element of La Plata Farm Park is the farm-themed playground and splash pad. Supporting infrastructure for these elements include a pump-house and changing area/restroom to be located within the playground village near to the splash pad. A second restroom is planned as part of the renovation of the existing homestead. Significant renovation work will be needed to convert the homestead to a new use, but the extent of work is unknown until a building assessment can be performed. The splash pad must be permitted through the Charles County Health Department and comply with safety and sanitary regulations.

**DESIGN & PERMITTING DURATION:**  
15 – 18 months

**CONSTRUCTION DURATION:**  
24-36 months

**DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION TOTAL COST:**  
\$8.4- \$12.6 million

## PHASE 2 – GARDEN COMPLEX

### RENOVATED BARN & EDUCATION CENTER, GARDENS & COMMUNITY KITCHEN

The renovated barn, gardens, and community kitchen at La Plata Farm Park are a cornerstone opportunity for partnerships with the agricultural and heritage tourism communities. While it is envisioned that the county would take the lead in designing and developing this part of La Plata Farm Park, its ongoing use and operation requires supportive and engaged partners such as University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development, Charles County Farm Bureau, and others. While the barn and gardens will require some resources to maintain, it is recommended that the community kitchen be built only when there is a clear and sustainable operating partnership that is well capitalized. Caution should be used when creating the community kitchen and planning other events to not undermine activities in the private market that are providing these services.

#### DESIGN & PERMITTING DURATION:

15 – 18 months

#### CONSTRUCTION DURATION:

24-36 months

#### DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION TOTAL COST:

\$11.4- \$17.3 million

## LA PLATA FARM PARK - SOUTH

La Plata Farm Park - South is both visually and physically separated from the core of the park to the north. As such, it is envisioned as a distinct area of the park where active recreation features are grouped providing a range of opportunities for all members of the family.

#### PHASE 3:

La Plata Farm Park - South is geared towards youth and will include the skate park, bicycle pump track/ skills course, playground, picnic pavilions, and dog park. Consideration must be given to building in sufficient visibility, safety, security, and separation between uses; as well as maintaining trail or sidewalk access to areas of the park to the north. La Plata Farm Park - South can likely be built in a single phase with completion of the trail network being constructed as funds are available.

#### DESIGN & PERMITTING DURATION:

15 – 18 months

#### CONSTRUCTION DURATION:

20-24 months

#### DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION TOTAL COST:

\$8 \$12 million

## DESIGN FRAMEWORKS

The design of this master plan was developed with consideration of the concepts presented in the **SITES** guideline which provides for a comprehensive and systems approach to design that integrate sustainability and resilience. We recommend these guidelines continue to be a reference for advancing the design and engineering for the features of the master plan.

Sustainable Sites (SITES)

[www.sustainablesites.org](http://www.sustainablesites.org)