

Parks Department to allow donors to name parks, facilities

Officials say change will help garner donations

by Alex Ruoff, Staff Writer

Montgomery County residents could soon be walking their dogs in Trump Park or enjoying a picnic under the FedEx Pavilion now that the Parks Department has decided to raise money by giving donors a chance to name new parks or existing facilities after themselves.

“If it’s a value to someone to put their name on a picnic pavilion and they say they want to contribute a certain amount, then we’d like to have a way for them to do that,” said Mary Bradford, director of the Montgomery County Department of Parks.

Planning Board members voted unanimously Thursday to approve the plan, but they also asked to revise it so they can remove a person or organization’s name at will. Parks Department officials would not rename parks or facilities that already are named after civic leaders, Bradford said.

The renamings will be managed by the Montgomery County Parks Foundation, a non-profit group that helps raise money for park activities and projects.

Bradford said the idea first arose more than two years ago, when the Montgomery County Tennis Association raised \$100,000 and then donated the money to help renovate the tennis center at Cabin John Regional Park. To honor their efforts, the center was renamed at the group’s behest to the Pauline Betz Addie Tennis Center. Addie, of Potomac, was a five-time grand slam winner in women’s singles tennis and one of the founders of the tennis center and a former member of the association. She died in May at age 91.

The new naming policy will help define how much people or organizations have to give to get their name attached to a new park, an area of a park or an existing park facility, Bradford said. The policy also will open the door to sponsorship opportunities.

The Parks Department already offers a program in which trees, benches, green space and even port-a-potties can be personalized. Buying trees with a plaque costs between \$500 and \$2,000, and benches with a plaque cost \$1,500, according to the Parks Department’s website. Portable toilets can be sponsored for \$165 every three months.

Under the new policy, donors could negotiate putting their names on Parks Department facilities or assets for between 20 and 100 years. There is no set cost for this. But fixed costs are set for buying plaques under the new plan: a small plaque on a piece of park

equipment would come with donations of \$2,500. And donations of more than \$125,000 to any specific facility would garner a larger, 180-square-foot bronze plaque at that site.

Planning Board Commissioner Casey Anderson said Thursday that the Parks Department also needs strict rules about what donors are allowed to put on plaques, pointing out that it's important to exclude potentially political or volatile people or views.

“I don't want to be in a situation where we allow somebody to name something and what we do is give them a hand grenade to throw,” he said.

The web site for the Parks Department is www.montgomeryparks.org.