



2024 ULI WAVEMAKER AWARD SUBMISSION

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BLANDAIR PARK

COLUMBIA, MARYLAND

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Blandair Park, a 300-acre site in Columbia, Maryland, was acquired by Howard County from the Smith family in the mid-1990s with the stipulation that it be developed as a park. The master plan, comprising of nine phases, includes three built and operational. The plan restores the historic Blandair manor home and 16 out-buildings. Recreational features include sports fields, a skate park, playgrounds, and courts for basketball, pickleball, and tennis. Preservation areas will feature a children's garden, nature center, and walking trails, protecting streams, ponds, wetlands, forests, and meadows, with over five miles of trails.



OVERVIEW INFORMATION

CLIENT: Howard County, Maryland

PRIME CONSULTANT: Whitman, Reardon and Associates, LLP (WRA)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT/MASTER PLANNER: Mahan Rykiel Associates

ARCHITECT: GWWO

The work was performed under a 2008 consultant services agreement with the County's Department of Public Works/Bureau of Engineering. DPW managed the contract, and Howard County Recreation and Parks was the Using Agency.

Recently, the Department of Recreation and Parks took over formal management of the project and work is contracted under a 2022 Site and Landscape Design consulting services agreement that the design team signed with the County.

Blandair Park has undergone multiple phases of construction. Here are the key construction dates for its various phases:

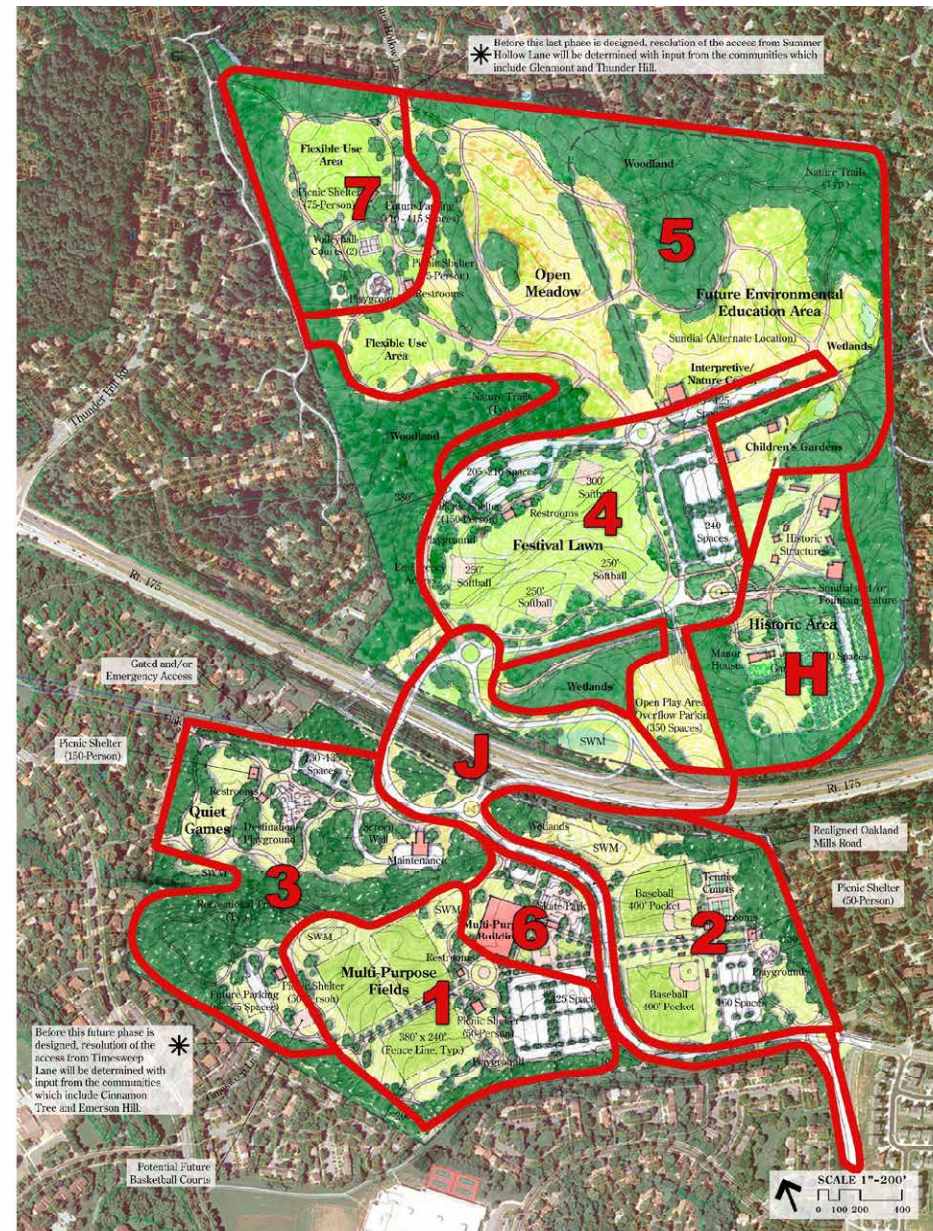
Phase I: Completed in 2012. This phase included the construction of multi-purpose synthetic turf fields, a playground, and parking facilities.

Phase II/J: Completed in 2018. This phase added baseball fields, tennis courts, construction of a Challenge Course, picnic area with restrooms and flex turf field, and parking areas. Phase J includes 1.5 miles of roadway, traffic, and sidewalk/pathway improvements.

Phase III: Completed in 2020. This phase included the construction of Playground that is an inclusive, ADA-compliant "Play-for-all" playground consisting of six unique play areas with fencing, non-verbal communication boards, sun shades, picnic tables and benches; 2 pavilions; Restrooms, parking lots, The Green (a 10,000-square foot synthetic lawn area), Backyard games area with 3 bocce courts, 2 croquet courts, 2 horseshoe pitches, and a park maintenance building with offices and storage.

Phase VI: Conceptual design for Phase VI has been completed. Construction is fully funded, which includes the largest skatepark in Howard County, two new basketball courts, and six pickleball courts.

FUTURE PHASES TBD



11.22.2011
Phasing Plan

Blandair Park

WRA WHITMAN, REARDON & ASSOCIATES, LLP MAHAN RYKIEL ASSOCIATES GWWO

BLANDAIR PARK
COLUMBIA, MARYLAND

COMPLETENESS: COMMUNITY VISION

In 2001, a committee of 23 citizens was appointed to advise the County on the direction it should take in developing the park. The Blandair Planning Committee deliberated for over a year and a half, considering multiple issues regarding the park. The master plan for the 300-acre Blandair Park aimed to balance recreational development with the preservation of over 200 acres of forest, wetlands, meadows, and a historic farm complex. Experts in various areas were invited to address the committee on pertinent topics.

Three sub-committees were established to address:

1. Historic preservation
2. Environmental protection and nature
3. Active recreation

Access to the park from Route 175 and other local roads, as well as bicycle and pedestrian pathways, and a highway overpass to connect the two areas of the park were discussed extensively.

The committee ultimately determined that the North Area should feature historical interpretation, preserve natural areas, and provide predominately passive recreation and nature education. It also could provide space for occasional large outdoor gatherings. They determined that the South Area should provide more facilities for active recreation, as well as preserve its natural areas.

LEGEND FOR COMPLETED PHASES

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Multi-Purpose Fields | and Shelter |
| 2. Baseball Fields | 10. Flex Field/Bocce/Horseshoe |
| 3. Tennis Courts | 11. Picnic Shelters/ Restroom |
| 4. Restrooms/ Picnic Shelter | that includes Family Room |
| 5. Challenge Course | and Adult Changing Table |
| 6. SWM | 12. SWM |
| 7. SWM | 13. Maintenance |
| 8. Wetlands | 14. Restroom |
| 9. Destination Playground | 15. Picnic Shelter |



COMPLETENESS: A THRIVING HUB FOR COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL SPORTS

Blandair Park hosts an estimated **one million visitors annually** through rentals, programs, camps, classes, special events, and daily use of its playgrounds, courts, walking trails, pavilions, and more. It serves a diverse range of user groups, including local and out-of-town high schools, colleges such as Stevenson University, University of Maryland, Coppin State, Towson, UMBC, and Loyola, as well as community leagues like EYO, AYRA, WHC, Palotti, Chapelgate, MACA, CBL, CHEN (a home school organization), HCYP, and many individual teams.

Blandair Park also hosts several national tournaments throughout the year, including the Millon Summer Championships, ECD All-American Showcase, and the Spring BreakOut PlayDay. These events attract participants and spectators regionally, nationally, and internationally, bolstering the park's economic impact and its role as a regional sports hub. This year Blandair Park had participants from 31 states and Canada and was featured on ESPN and ESPN2 twice.

Last year, Blandair Park generated approximately \$653,471 in net revenue from rental facilities and tournaments.



COMPLETENESS: PROGRAMMING & FEATURES

Blandair Park hosts a variety of events beyond sports tournaments. Some notable events and activities include:

Community Fitness Classes: Blandair Park offers fitness classes such as Zumba, which are popular among the local community.

Special Events: The park is also a venue for various special events organized by the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks. Some of the reoccurring events include Food Trucks and Backyard Games, Zumba in the Park, the Play for All Fest, and Movie Night at Blandair.

Environmental and Educational Programs: The northern section of Blandair Park is a sprawling natural reserve that is popular for birding and home to several historic structures, including the Blandair Mansion, which is currently under renovation. This area is planned to feature programs focused on environmental education and historic interpretation, catering to both adults and children. These programs will provide enriching experiences, teaching visitors about nature and local history by leveraging the park's diverse natural and historical resources to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

Private Rentals and Gatherings: Blandair Park's pavilions and fields are available for private rentals, which are used for family gatherings, picnics, and other social events.

These events, along with the sports tournaments and regular recreational activities, make Blandair Park a vibrant community hub and greatly contribute to the overall quality of life in Columbia, MD.



COMPLETENESS: AMENITIES

Blandair Park offers a wide range of amenities for various recreational activities. Here is a list of the key amenities available at the park:

Sports Facilities:

- Three lighted synthetic turf multipurpose fields with press boxes and bleachers
- Two lighted synthetic baseball fields with bleachers
- Five lighted tennis courts with a shade structure

Playgrounds:

- Two large playground sections including the newly constructed Laura's Place playground, an ADA-compliant "Play-for-All" playground with themed areas (Farm, Dinosaur, and Spaceship)
- An area with three bocce courts, two croquet courts, and two horseshoe pitches

Comfort Stations/Pavillions

- Four Pavilions
- Three comfort stations, including an adult changing table in a family restroom located by the play-for-all playground
- Plaza with stone seating walls surrounding raised landscape beds

Walking and Biking Trails:

- Paved walking trails that connect to the Downtown Columbia Pathway

Challenge Course:

- An outdoor Challenge Course with obstacles such as Ninja Steps, Vault Wall, and U-Turn Ramp

Additional Recreational Areas:

Planned future amenities include a skate park, basketball courts, pickleball courts, additional pathways, shade shelters, and expanded parking.



A SENSE OF PLACE AND QUALITY

Blandair Park creates a sense of place and quality through several thoughtful design and development strategies. The park features high-quality materials, ensuring durability and aesthetic appeal throughout its various facilities. The extensive meadows and native plantings not only enhance the park's natural beauty but also create vital habitats for local wildlife, supporting biodiversity and ecological health.

The park's branding elements, including clear wayfinding signage and interpretive displays, guide visitors effortlessly while educating them about the park's natural and cultural history. These elements, combined with the meticulously maintained landscapes and diverse recreational amenities, foster an inviting and engaging environment for all visitors.

Overall, Blandair Park's commitment to high standards in design, ecological sustainability, and visitor experience underscores its role as a premier recreational destination in the region.



SUSTAINABILITY

Blandair Park in Howard County has made significant sustainability investments aimed at environmental conservation and community well-being. The park has implemented integrated stormwater management systems that control runoff, prevent erosion, and enhance its overall beauty. Additionally, the infrastructure supports energy efficiency, with energy-efficient lighting that minimizes electricity usage and reduces light pollution.

The park also features native plantings and natural habitats that support local wildlife and promote biodiversity. These initiatives help reduce the park's environmental footprint and provide educational opportunities for visitors to learn about sustainability practices.

These investments highlight Blandair Park's commitment to environmental stewardship, ensuring it serves as a recreational hub while contributing positively to the local ecosystem and raising community awareness about sustainability.



VISIONARY AND EMULATION

Blandair Park is thoughtfully designed to be multi-generational and inclusive of all abilities, ensuring that everyone can enjoy its diverse offerings. Highlights include the all-abilities Phase III playground, ADA-accessible pathways for easy navigation, and conveniently located bathrooms (including an adult-changing table), and abundant seating. The park seamlessly integrates passive and active recreation areas, catering to different preferences and physical capabilities. Uniquely, Blandair Park also serves as a nature reserve and center with significant historical attributes. This visionary approach makes Blandair a model for other parks to emulate, showcasing how to create a welcoming, inclusive, and multifunctional community space.



A NEED

Blandair Park in Columbia, Maryland was established to meet the pressing need for recreational facilities, particularly ball fields, in the area. Howard County, with a median age of 38.7 years and families with children under 18 years old comprising 42% of the population, demonstrates a significant demand for child-friendly amenities. The county's rapid growth has intensified the need for sports fields, consistently surpassing available supply.

The park now features multiple lighted synthetic turf fields for soccer, lacrosse, and baseball, as well as tennis courts (Pickle Ball coming in Phase 6), playgrounds, and other amenities. These facilities alleviate the strain on other local fields and support the growing participation in youth sports leagues, such as the Columbia Baseball League and various soccer clubs.

Overall, Blandair Park is providing much needed support for physical health and social well-being by accommodating a wide range of harmonious connections between people, environments, and each other.

