



## Public Meeting – Land Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

### Inclusive Playground Project – Russiaville Community Center Park

April 2, 2024 - Minutes

Meeting started at 5:00 pm.

The purpose of this public meeting was to inform the public about the Inclusive Playground, including a picnic pavilion and restroom, to be built at the Community Center Park and seek input on how to proceed. Forty-one citizens were present.

Jill Newby, Park and Tree Board President, thanked everyone for coming. She introduced the Park and Tree Board members present; Janna Hyman, Reba Casler, Jeremy Burns, Cheri Helmberger and Rick Homkes. Erica Parvin was absent. She then introduced the Town Council members present: Pat Reel, Greg Landrum and Don Parvin. She also introduced the representatives from Play Pro and All Sports who were present. Jill explained that the concept of an inclusive playground in our community started as a dream, but with all of the hard work of the park board members the project is becoming a reality. She thanked the park and tree board members for all of their hard work, and stated that Janna was the heart of the project and Rick was the brains of the project. She then turned the program over to Janna and Rick.

Janna discussed the fund raising process, and how encouraging the first few hundred dollar donations were. Fundraising began in 2022. She thanked the community for all of the support, and especially thanked the local donors including Judi Johnson from First Farmers Bank, Jon and Julie Newlin from IGA and Stout and Sons, as well as others. Some major donations / pledges came from the Community Foundation (\$100,000) and the Howard County Commission (\$50,000)

Rick presented a comprehensive summary of the project. His summary included an explanation of what an inclusive park was, where it would be located, who would benefit by being able to use the park, how the community would benefit by having the park, the estimated cost of the project, and the grant process to obtain funding. The initial estimate for the project was \$500,000. A matching grant is available for qualified applicants through the IDNR. This grant is funded through monies from the federal government. If the Park and Tree Board could raise \$250,000 they could then apply for an additional \$250,000 through this grant program. They have now raised \$252,000 and hope to raise an additional \$50,000 before submitting the grant application, with the expectation that the cost will be higher than the initial estimate due to inflation. The grant application due date is August 1. Special mention was made of the federal requirement to put a deed restriction on the affected area so that it could only be used for outdoor recreation.

The meeting was then open for guest comments and questions.



Greg Landrum, Town Council member, stated that when the proposal was first presented to the board, he thought the cost was totally out of reach. However, as the Park & Tree Board continued to make progress in raising funds he began to believe it would become a reality. He said that he was very proud of the P&T board.

Brenda Yonally asked about the time line from grant submission to notification of grant approval or denial, and when the project would begin. Rick stated that it would likely be several months before the P&T board would be notified of grant approval/denial, and that some additional information may be requested before the IDNR made a decision. Physical start of the project would not likely occur until 2025 at best.

Frank Faulkner asked about how to make a Qualified Distribution donation from a retirement plan. Donations go to the Town of Russiaville, with designation to the playground project.

Kimberly Key asked about an adult changing station in the new park restroom. She said that many adults (or adult sized young people) need a private, safe place for changing.

Christy High added to this saying that no public facility in the county offers this, and it is important for those individuals for safety, privacy and dignity. She added that as the Park Board is working to make the first fully inclusive playground in Howard County, it should also take the lead in added the first adult changing table. Christy said that currently her only option for changing her adult daughter is to take her home, or change her on the floor of a public restroom. She said also that stating that an amenity is ADA compliant does not mean that it is acceptable; it is important that all of our citizens have true equity. Christy added that the members of the Ainsley's Angels organization would help in selection and payment of this type of changing table. The P&T board is currently investigating adult changing station options.

A few more comments were made by members of the audience thanking the Board and congratulating the Board / Town for making this initial goal.

Having no more comments, Jill closed the meeting at 5:45 pm.