

MVT CID Update on Parks & Open Space

Monday March 4, 2019

Dear Friend of Mount Vernon Triangle:

It's been a little over one year since [dozens of you shared ideas](#) on where and how to activate Mount Vernon Triangle open space at our [Public Meeting & Planning Workshop](#)—an important community engagement effort that informed much of the information contained in the [MVT Open Space Study](#). Below is an update on efforts to increase open space in Mount Vernon Triangle as well as your chance to weigh in on the direction we're heading and to stay involved through a short survey at the end of the message. But first some background.

Community Needs

As a stakeholder-driven organization, we're obligated to respond to the needs of those who live, work and visit our community. In our neighborhood perception surveys, stakeholders continue to rate parks, green and open space — along with cleanliness and landscaping, and business attraction and retention — as either their second- or third-highest priority for the MVT CID after public safety, which is always the top priority no matter how the question is analyzed. But that's not all you shared.

- Just one in four stakeholders believes Mount Vernon Triangle has sufficient parks and open spaces.
- When asked to share one thing that life in Mount Vernon Triangle is missing or wish they could change, nearly one-third of stakeholders identified a parks-related attribute in their response.
- And the lack of green in space is cited as the fourth-highest reason why residents will move out of the MVT CID within the next 1-3 years—a point reinforced in [this October 2018 Washington Post article](#) in which a former Mount Vernon Triangle resident cited access to more green space as a reason influencing her decision to relocate to another DC neighborhood.

MVT Open Space Study

The above feedback plus [other DC data](#) regarding Mount Vernon Triangle's scarcity of open space is a large reason why our organization invested significant resources to fully define and strategically prioritize the community's open space needs through the [MVT Open Space Study](#). Our transparent, community-led and data-driven process offers a comprehensive master plan for the enhanced use and activation of multiple community open space resources, including:

- [multiple small parcels](#) controlled by the National Park Service, an ownership that precludes their use for off-lease dog activity as well as activations that affix permanent structure to the sites;
- an [underutilized transportation right of way](#) with potential for playground and pet use but also requiring regulatory approval as well as significant investment; and
- an [undeveloped corner lot owned by a local utility](#) that first requires another land use question be resolved prior to knowing whether the space could be available for open space activation.

The study also advanced an approach to providing [community greenspace atop a DC-controlled parking deck](#). The development concept aligns with the deck’s initial intent to [provide replacement townhomes](#) for structures demolished during extension of the I-395 Center Leg Freeway. But lots more study and evaluation is required before a conclusion on whether the idea is achievable can be fully known.

Cobb Park

Among all of the recommendations proposed in the MVT Open Space Study, the study’s most galvanizing, catalytic and imminently achievable proposal is its bold new vision for a “re-imagined” Cobb Park — as shown below — to serve as an iconic open and artistic space, destination and gateway into Mount Vernon Triangle and downtown DC.

Cobb Park Today



Cobb Park “Re-Imagined”



Created as an open space parcel 40 years ago as a result of the I-395 Center Leg Freeway extension, Cobb Park:

- is [recognized by the District Department of Parks and Recreation](#) as a “small park,”
- is [identified in DC Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map](#) as “Parks, Recreation, and Open Space,” and
- was [pledged as an improved park](#) by city officials in 2016.

What’s more, reconfigured roadways have [increased the size of and simplified access](#) to Cobb Park, which will be publicly available open space once again when the site discontinues its use as construction staging for Capitol Crossing this fall.

The redevelopment of Cobb Park is vital to defining Mount Vernon Triangle’s arrival as a recognized and distinct DC neighborhood—in much the same way as Dupont and Logan Circles, Farragut and Franklin Squares, and Canal and Yards Parks define theirs. And for DC taxpayers, Cobb Park presents [an attractive return on investment](#) on land the city already owns, versus investing in sites [held by private landowners](#) or [the Federal government](#).

Park Advocacy

The recommendations contained in the MVT Open Space Study [received the unanimous approval of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6E](#) in February 2018. In addition:

- In May 2018, Ward 3 Councilmember Mary Cheh — Chair of the Committee on Transportation & the Environment — and Ward 5 Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie — Chair of the Committee on Business and Economic Development — both signaled their support for Cobb Park as part of their [respective committee reports and recommendations](#) on the Fiscal Year 2019 budget. This included the directive that the \$500,000 already allocated to activate Cobb Park be more appropriately disclosed in the District budget for FY 2019 to make clear the funds' intended use.
- Ward 6 Councilmember Charles Allen, within whose council district Cobb Park is located, and whose legislative advocacy has been instrumental to this effort, has on multiple occasions [publicly indicated his support](#) for its redevelopment.
- Multiple sponsors — ranging from a [philanthropic DC business owner](#), to a multi-national organization that recognizes the strategic importance that adjacency to open space provides to its business operations — have emerged as potential benefactors to help offset the cost to build and maintain Cobb Park.

Cobb Park is clearly the right idea whose time not only has come, but is long overdue.

The Path Ahead

With the District Council set to review the Mayor's budget priorities for FY 2020 starting later this month, the MVT CID will continue its advocacy in support of solidifying a roadmap to fund, plan, design and build Cobb Park. This is a top priority for the MVT CID, so please take [this quick one-question survey](#) to let us know if you believe we're on the right track, and whether you'd like to be involved with our planning efforts moving forward.

With very best regards,

Kenyattah A. Robinson, President & CEO
Mount Vernon Triangle Community Improvement District