



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION AGENDA

Forest Preserve Advisory Board Report (Interim Pilot of Trail Management Activities in the Greenbelt City Forest Preserve)

COUNCIL MEETING WILL BE ONLINE ONLY

Due to the COVID-19 precautions, the Council Meeting will be held online and is planned to be cablecast on Verizon 21, Comcast 71 and 996 and streamed to www.greenbeltmd.gov/municipaltv.

Resident participation:

Join Zoom Meeting

**[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84224230505?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84224230505?pwd=cEdUWDV0SkhVRUhqN3pqK2x2d0J0UT09)
[pwd=cEdUWDV0SkhVRUhqN3pqK2x2d0J0UT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84224230505?pwd=cEdUWDV0SkhVRUhqN3pqK2x2d0J0UT09)**

OR

Join By phone: (301) 715-8592

Meeting ID: 842 2423 0505

Passcode: 502313

In advance, the hearing impaired is advised to use Video Relay Services (VRS) at 711 to submit your questions/comments or contact the City Clerk at (301) 474-8000 or email banderson@greenbeltmd.gov.

Monday, August 16, 2021

8:00 PM

Work Session Packet

**Public Forum to include Greenbriar Park transfer into the Forest Preserve
Suggested Action:**

Agenda

- Introductions**

- Council Discussion
- Questions and Answers
- Other Items

[FPAB Report to Council 2020-03 Add Greenbriar Park Preserve.pdf](#)

SUBJECT: Adding Greenbriar Park to the Forest Preserve

DATE: June 26, 2020

BACKGROUND: The Forest Preserve Advisory Board has reviewed forested city property in Greenbelt East and proposes to add an existing city park, Greenbriar Park, as a new tract in the Forest Preserve. This parcel was rejected for various reasons when the Preserve was first established, but the board felt that after 15 years a review was needed.

DISCUSSION: Greenbriar Park is a city park located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Hanover Parkway and Mandan Road. It consists of two parcels: Parcel E is 1.0 acres and Parcel 202 is 7.0 acres. The park is completely forested, but there is a picnic area and a former fitness course (now unused) in the park. There are several wide well-used trails and a few smaller informal trails in the park. The wide trails receive foot traffic from park visitors; people may use it as a short cut from the Greenbriar and Glen Oaks apartment complexes to Eleanor Roosevelt High School. Litter can often be found where the trails converge, and the southwest corner of the park appears to be used as a hangout by Roosevelt High School students.

This park receives little formal use and is not programed by the city recreation department. The picnic area is underused and many of the amenities are in disrepair. The once-grassy picnic area has recovered with native plants growing amidst the benches and pavilion. Pink ladyslipper, an uncommon orchid grows in the picnic area.

Greenbriar Park has been continuously forested since the founding of Greenbelt. The forest is very healthy, with an interesting assortment of plants. This may be due to the topography and to areas of wet soil. There are plants that are typically found in wetlands, such as sweetbay magnolia, cinnamon fern, and swamp azalea, growing next to plants that grow in very dry soils, such as white oak, Allegheny chinquapin, and the ladyslippers mentioned earlier. The site has a pair of red-tailed hawks nesting in a tree this year. Members of Greenbelt Biota, a natural history club, have seen blue-tailed skinks, several species of snakes, and many species of nesting birds over the past few years.

Members of the Maryland Native Plant Society recently visited the park. One member, Rod Simmons, wrote:

This is a really nice site and worthy of many return visits... Much of it is a vast, acidic seepage and lycophyte belt (capillary fringe where the water table is permanently near

the surface but not saturated)... It was a nice surprise to see a number of fairly tall *Rhododendron viscosum* var. *glaucum* [clammy swamp azalea]. This is an ancient relictual plant that is rarely seen in our region today, but is well preserved and flourishing here... Another great find - and an even more unusual one because it is wholly unexpected - was mature Sweet Birch (*Betula lenta*) in the lycophyte-ericad seepage. None of these appeared planted - and moreover, have never been documented naturally for Prince George's County (entirely on the Coastal Plain and a little Fall Zone) – and yet here they were.

Ericads are a shrub family that includes blueberries, azaleas, mountain laurel and other heath plants. Lycophytes are related to ferns and a commonly called clubmoss, ground cedar, or ground pine. He described a rare variety of swamp azalea that exists there and discussed the unlikely presence of sweet birch in this region. Sweet birch is a piedmont and montane tree has only been found in one other location in Prince George's County. Another botanist, Michael Ellis, wrote this:

This park is a fine example of the fascinating Coastal Plain plant communities of Prince George's County, and offers unique ecology. Owing to the site's history of very little disturbance of the site, the site retains a well-preserved native soil structure and unique subsurface hydrology, with an absolutely pristine forest interior comprised of almost entirely of native species. Because of the phenomenal ecology the site provides I recommend this site be preserved and protected from undue harm and placed in a permanent conservation status.

Mr. Simmons is a well-known botanist in the region. He is the former president of the Maryland Native Plant Society, and is a botanist for the City of Alexandria, Virginia. Mr. Ellis is a current board member of the Maryland Native Plant Society and is the former vegetation ecologist for Prince George's County Parks. He is currently the curator for native plants at the University of Maryland College Park campus arboretum. Mr. Ellis' letter contains a complete plant list for the site. The two letters that Mr Simmons and Mr Ellis wrote after the field trip to Greenbiar Park are attached as Appendix A to this report.

There is a moderately-incised stream that runs through the center of the park. Based on an examination of aerial photographs this stream seems to have appeared and become incised since the mid-1960's. Currently the source of the stream is a stormwater pond adjacent to the southern end of the park. The stream does not appear to be eroding or becoming further incised. In 2014 a firm approached the city with a plan to restore the stream. At the time FPAB and several other advisory boards opposed this plan and the firm chose another site. That decision saved this forest from being opened to heavy construction, major tree removal, and major damage to plant communities adjacent to the stream.

Greenbriar Park was not recommended for inclusion by the original Task Force because “there is no pressing or urgent demand on the use of this park for any use other than those previously described, which would indicate that the aggressive protection associated with the forest preserve designation is not necessary.” (Management and Maintenance Guidelines 2006, Appendix A, p. 61). The original task force also stated that designation of preserve tracts should be reserved for forests with “some strategic value”. The task force wrote that “opportunity must be retained for the city to respond to future recreation and park needs, and this requires that some city properties not be designated as forest preserve... this parcel should be excluded, at least for the time being, from the forest preserve program.”

RECOMMENDATION: Greenbriar Park should be permanently protected by being added as a new tract in the Forest Preserve. Greenbriar Park is a special patch of forest in Greenbelt. It has been continuously forested since the founding of Greenbelt and is a healthy forest with high plant diversity and an interesting mix of plants and habitats, including uncommon and rare plant and plant varieties. The park’s unlikely hydrology has led to a strange and rare admixture of plant. The unused picnic area has become a grassy glade with several species of native grasses, sedges, and mosses in the centers, with blueberry shrubs, ferns and orchids growing on the fringes.

FPAB disagrees with the assessment that this site has no strategic value. The eastern portion of Greenbelt lacks a large, significant patch of forest, although it does have several 5-20 acre forested areas that could contribute to the variety and quality of the Preserve if they were added. The only Preserve parcel in Greenbelt East is the Sunrise Tract. Greenbrier is an older, healthier forest than Sunrise, which was open grassland in 1938. Adding Greenbrier would double the amount of acres in Greenbelt East that are protected by the preserve designation.

This is a unique and interesting small patch of forest. It should be preserved due to its uniqueness and to expand the preserve further into the eastern portion of the city.