

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL CITY OF BALTIMORE



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

Investigative Report Synopsis

OIG Case # 20-0063-I

Issued: April 1, 2021



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
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April 1, 2021

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The Mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste and abuse.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the Baltimore City Law Department received an email complaint requesting an OIG investigation into the City's allocation of funds and services for Carroll Park. Specifically, the complainant requested the OIG investigate the alleged lack of City resources dedicated to Carroll Park, the alleged years of deferred maintenance services, and the alleged failure to update the master plan since 2001 by the Department of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks (BCRP).

In a narrow review of the fiscal year 2019¹ Carroll Park appropriations and expenditures, the OIG found \$85,295 was allotted to Carroll park for maintenance, but only \$46,866.37 was expended for maintenance related costs. The OIG identified the Carroll Park Recreation Center and Carroll Park Skate Park as areas in need of restoration.

Additionally, the OIG analyzed 311 service request data from December 2016 to December 2020. During this period 846 service requests were identified for Carroll Park, of which 308 were classified as maintenance related. The data shows 89² of these service requests remain open. Seventy-two complaints were created in 2019 and 2020.

The OIG was able to confirm that Carroll Park's master plan was last updated nineteen years ago. It is considered best practice and recommended by the City's Master Plan Project Manager that master plans be updated every fifteen years.

At times agencies may modify budgets or interpret allocations differently from what is advised by the Department of Finance. Those breakdowns can lead to actual or perceived examples of fraud, waste, and abuse. However, the OIG noted Carroll Park may have not received adequate City resources based on a review of Carroll Park's expenditures, the resolution and number of services requests, and the physical condition of the recreational facilities.

BACKGROUND

The BCRP is the City's leading provider of affordable, year-round leisure and recreational activities for citizens of all ages and abilities. Within the BCRP, the Bureau of Parks is responsible for the beautification, management, and maintenance of 4,600 acres of parkland. It also plans and implements

¹ Fiscal year 2019 was used for this investigation because Fiscal Year 2020 was impacted by the global pandemic.

² The Carroll Park district 311 data listed 89 open service requests. These service request represent a variety of categories including maintenance, street lights, abandoned vehicles etc.

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outdoor recreation programs in City parks, including nature and environmental education. Regular park maintenance functions include grass mowing, ball field preparations, and building and playground repairs. The General Fund budget for City parks is divided among the City’s five park districts: Druid Hill, Gwynn Falls, Carroll, Patterson, and Clifton.

METHODOLOGY

The OIG interviewed employees from the BCRP assigned to capital projects, community engagement and the fiscal department to gain knowledge about fund allocations, restoration, and community engagement. The OIG analyzed the BCRP’s budget and expenditures related to maintenance in Carroll Park for fiscal year 2019 (FY19). The OIG communicated with the community engagement team to access their responsiveness to concerns brought by neighborhood associations and overall communications with the community. The public master plan information was analyzed by the OIG and reviewed with the Master Plan Project Manager for understanding and subject matter expertise.

OIG INVESTIGATION

In May 2020, the OIG received a complaint alleging disparities in the BCRP’s distribution of funding and allocation of resources to Baltimore City park maintenance. Specifically, the complaint alleged that Carroll Park is underfunded and does not receive the same resources as other Baltimore City parks. The complaint alleged that because Carroll Park is not in an affluent area of Baltimore City, it is underfunded. Carroll Park is located in the historic Washington Village-Pigtown neighborhood in southwest Baltimore.

General Funds and Maintenance Allocation

This OIG investigation focused on the park maintenance, community engagement, and the master plan of Carroll Park. Carroll Park’s total budget for fiscal year 2019³ was \$1,514,609.00 and the actual expenditure was \$1,538,998. A narrow focus on Carroll Park maintenance appropriations and expenditures supplied by the Bureau of Budget and Management Research (BBMR), determined that \$85,295 was allotted for maintenance, but only \$46,866.37 was expended for the budgeted services as outlined below.

Table 1: Summary of FY19 Carroll Park Appropriation and Expenditures related to maintenance and improvements

<u>Description</u>	<u>Appropriation</u>	<u>Expenditures</u>	<u>Variance</u>
General Operating & Maintenance Supplies	\$ 41,586.00	\$ 30,620.78	\$ 10,965.22
Equipment Maintenance & Repairs	\$ 5,747.00	\$ 556.22	\$ 5,190.78
Real Property Maintenance & Repair	\$ 5,747.00	\$ 2,111.24	\$ 3,635.76
Maintenance of Land	\$ 32,215.00	\$ 13,578.13	\$ 18,636.87
	\$ 85,295.00	\$ 46,866.37	\$ 38,428.63

State Fund Allocations for City Parks

The BCRP also receives funds from the State of Maryland for City parks. According to the BCRP fiscal department, State funds are used as needed for park maintenance and capital projects. A BCRP employee

³ Fiscal year 2019 was used for this investigation because Fiscal Year 2020 was impacted by the global pandemic

informed the OIG that capital funds are allocated based on requests. The OIG was informed that BCRP staff have engaged in recent conversation about renovations to Carroll Park’s recreational facilities.

The BBMR budget publication displays that in FY19, BCRP received \$1,610,099 in State funds designated for park maintenance. A BCRP fiscal employee explained the funds are part of the Program Open Space (POS)⁴ initiative to maintain green spaces across the State. BCRP was unable to confirm if any of the POS funds were spent for maintenance in Carrol Park. The BCRP fiscal employee explained the funding is kept in one account and the funds are not budgeted by park, but rather used as needed for any park. The BCRP fiscal employee added that there are current efforts underway to allocate the POS funds in a more transparent format.

Community Engagement and Park Maintenance

The BCRP leadership created the Community Engagement Team (CET) approximately two years ago to increase communication between BCRP and the community. The mission of the CET has been impacted by the global pandemic. However, according to CET, during the pandemic they have continued efforts to connect with the community via virtual platforms to gather community input.

The CET confirmed that there are issues surrounding Carroll Park, but explained that their staff is limited, and their responsibilities encompass all City Parks, small and large. The CET informed the OIG that they are actively engaging with many community and neighborhood associations. The CET stated the Carroll Park Recreation Center could be a great asset to the Carroll Park community, though it has been closed since 2012. The center last operated as a Police Athletic League (PAL) program.⁵ Currently the vacant recreation center and active skate park need major improvements and renovations (Exhibit 1). The Capital Development and Planning division of the BCRP estimated that it would cost between \$500,000 to \$1 million dollar to renovate Carroll Park’s skate park and an additional \$25,000 to \$50,000 in annual operating costs.⁶ Additionally, the estimated cost to renovate the Carroll Park recreation center ranges from \$1.44 million to \$3.3 million. The operating costs for the recreation center are estimated at \$250,000 to \$350,000 annually.

Carroll Park Service Requests

The OIG analyzed data from 311 service requests to see if the data supports deferred maintenance or an untimely response to service requests. Service request data from December 2016 to December 2020 for Carroll Park was reviewed for the purpose of this analysis and findings are displayed in Table 2. Carroll Park received 846 service requests, of which 89⁷ have yet to be addressed.⁸ Carroll Park has the highest percentage of unresolved complaints at 10%, compared to Patterson Park, Middle Branch Park, Druid Hill, and Montebello. Additionally, the average time to close a complaint at Carroll Park was eight days longer than the other reviewed parks.

⁴ Program Open Space is an initiative by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to provide financial and technical assistance to local subdivisions for the planning, acquisition, and/or development of recreation land or open space areas.

⁵ The PAL is an organization that offers mentorship to young people and assists with homework and activities.

⁶ This estimate does not include design costs.

⁷ The years and number of open service requests is as follows, 2020-58, 2019-14, 2018-11, and 2017-6.

⁸ Due to the ransomware attack some service requests may have been addressed and not closed.

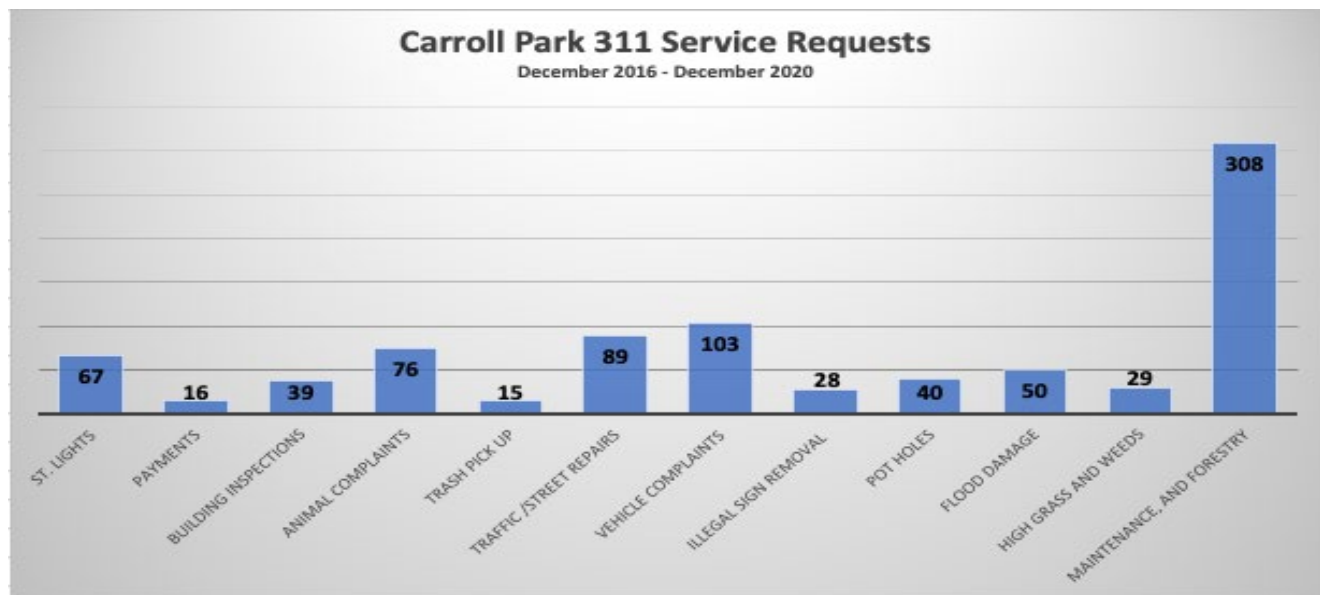
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Table 2: Summary of Carroll Park 311 service request data from December 2016 – December 2020

Description	Carroll	Patterson	Middle Branch/Reedbird	Druid Hill	Montebello
Total 311 Service Requests (December 2016 - December 2020)	846	1,649	986	1,716	907
Open Service Requests without close dates	89	93	47	95	52
Percentage of Service Requests Open without close dates	10.52%	5.64%	4.77%	5.54%	5.73%
Average time to close Service Requests (Days)	38	22	22	32	25

The review also determined 308 of the 846 service requests for Carroll Park were related to maintenance concerns, outlined in Chart 1. These service requests included building, land, and park maintenance, in addition to street cleaning and the removal of fallen trees and/or tree limbs.

Chart 1: Types of 311 Carroll Park service requests from December 2016 – December 2020



Carroll Park Master Plan

On November 13, 2020, the OIG interviewed the BCRP Capital Projects Team (Capital) to gather information about BCRP master plans. A master plan includes information about use of a park, the history of the park, and how the City plans to use the park in the future. Capital told the OIG master plans range in size and can represent information spanning many years. The average age of the sixteen City park master plans listed on BCRP’s website is fourteen years. Carroll Park’s master plan is nineteen years old, four years beyond Capital’s suggested age limit.

According to Capital the focus has been on implementation, which is why Carroll Park’s master plan has not been updated. Capital informed the OIG that they are aware of the condition of the Carroll Park recreation center and skate park. Capital created a plan for a new recreation center in 2015 (Exhibit 2). However, the plan became less of a priority as BCRP leadership and direction changed. Capital suggested a new master plan could be developed for Carroll Park incorporating the planning and recommendations

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from the Southwest Partnership (SP).⁹ Capital also told the OIG revising the master plans allows the community to be involved.

CONCLUSION

The OIG's evaluation of Carroll Park has revealed areas in need of improvement. For example, BCRP was budgeted \$85,295 for Carroll Park maintenance, but expended only \$46,866.37 of those funds.

The OIG was able to confirm that the BCRP's CET have engaged Carroll Park neighborhood associations. Additionally, the limited staffing and number of responsibilities of the CET has impaired their ability to engage community organizations as frequently as they would like.

Additionally, the OIG identified areas of concern with the responsiveness to Carroll Park's service requests. Service requests at Carroll Park on average stayed open eight days longer than the average of the other examined parks. Approximately 36% of 311 service requests at Carroll Park were related to maintenance, supporting allegations that problems with preventative maintenance or deferred maintenance may exist.

The OIG was able to confirm that Carroll Park's master plan was last updated nineteen years ago. It is considered best practice and recommended by the City's Master Plan Project Manager that master plans be updated every fifteen years. The OIG found that Carroll Park's dedicated resources are lacking, resulting in untimely maintenance repairs.

The OIG relied on Baltimore City data and information provided by agencies and systems to conduct this investigation. The OIG understands that information can be changed or updated during the course of an investigation or after an investigation has concluded. However, the mission of the OIG is to provide transparency and accountability. The OIG appreciates the cooperation of all City agencies and Executive Director Reginald Moore for his response to this investigation.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General

Cc: Hon. Brandon Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Nick Mosby, President, City Council
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. James Shea, City Solicitor

⁹ The SP is a coalition of seven neighborhood associations and six anchor institutions in Southwest Baltimore.