



## Position on the Proposed Paddling and Rowing Facility at Quiet Waters Park February 12, 2021

Quiet Waters Park opened 30 years ago as a purposely-planned passive use nature park. In the ensuing 30 years, it has been a popular destination for an increasing number of visitors from Anne Arundel County and beyond. In 2020 almost one million people visited the park to enjoy its peacefulness, walk on the wooded trails and enjoy relaxing in nature.

The Friends of Quiet Waters Park (FQWP), a 300+ member-based organization originally formed as the Quiet Waters Study Committee to guide the development of the park, was formalized at the opening of Quiet Waters Park in 1990 in part to continue the citizen input that was so essential to the formation of the park. Ever since, FQWP has been raising and investing funds for the operation, preservation, development, and enrichment of Quiet Waters Park and furthering public education, awareness, research, interest in, and appreciation for, the history, ecology, environment, and recreational aspects of the Park.

The Board of Directors of the Friends of Quiet Waters Park, respectfully submit the following comments on the “Harness Creek Paddling & Rowing Facility” 30% schematic design prepared by Bay Land Consultants and Designers, Inc., for the Department of Public Works (herein referred to as “30% plans”).

The 30 % plans have been reviewed, questions submitted for consideration at the virtual public meeting on February 2, 2021, and we have attended that meeting. We now have substantial concerns pertaining to the proposed development centering on five key aspects of the plans proposed for this site:

- Inconsistency of the proposed plans with the original Master Plan developed for Quiet Waters Park;
- Substantial environmental impacts caused by this development;
- Multiple user conflicts created with current uses of Quiet Waters Park;
- Administrative concerns for the maintenance and safety of the area;
- Financial needs of the existing park.

### Inconsistencies with 1988 Master Plan

During the development of Quiet Waters Park (called Annapolis Neck Park prior to construction), Anne Arundel County commissioned the development of a Master Plan. The process of developing this plan entailed extensive involvement of a citizen's advisory

committee selected by the County Executive to guide the Recreation and Parks Department in planning the development of the park around anticipated future uses.

*The master plan was developed by a thorough analysis and review process. All the park facilities and the style have been discussed by the Citizen's Advisory Committee, and the outcome of these discussions is reflected in the final plan. At the outset of the planning process, several meetings were held with Recreation and Parks officials to discuss the various features and characteristics that Annapolis Neck Park should take on. The foremost idea that set the style was that the park should be a passive park for people of all ages to enjoy. (page 22 of the Master Plan)*

Despite the fact that this Master Plan has served us well to create the environment that is so enjoyed by all, its utility was summarily dismissed by county personnel during the virtual public meeting held on February 2<sup>nd</sup> as being too old. We strongly disagree; no matter the age of a plan, it has guided us over the decades to create the park that we have today and should stand as the existing blueprint until it is amended or a new plan is written through extensive public input as was present at the formation of the park.

One of the most important inconsistencies is the shoreline development proposed by the 30% plans. The Master Plan states:

*Of the 14,000 linear feet of shoreline, only 700 feet will be developed at the main overlook. This 700-foot section has already been bulkheaded. The rest of the shoreline will remain in its existing condition. (page 33)*

*A one hundred foot naturally vegetated buffer shall be maintained around the tidal marsh areas along Harness Creek. The one-hundred-foot Buffer should extend landward from the mean high water line of the tide. (Wetland Addendum)*

The proposed facility would be a breach of the intent of the original park concept to maintain a natural and undisturbed shoreline through the entirety of the park.

An additional key feature of the Master Plan is the intent that Quiet Waters Park be reserved for passive recreational purposes. A public boat ramp and additional boat dock were explicitly considered at that time but rejected as being inconsistent with this vision for the park.

*“The intensity of use has been limited to passive recreation such as picnicking, hiking, biking, children's play areas, row boating, and skating. Activities that are noisy and busy such as ballfields and boat launching ramps have not been included.”*

While we understand that the current 30% plans only propose building a rowing facility, additional uses and activities are anticipated to accompany the rowing, including team

use and regattas. These expanded activities are a large focus of, and driving force behind, the proposed development within the park and certainly are not consistent with the essential designation of “public passive use.” Passive use focused on individuals and families is a key element of the Park’s purpose, a quality that would be breached by allowing this plan to proceed. Recognizing the tremendous opportunity offered by the geography of the park for providing public access to the waterfront, the park has developed, extensive water access to hikers, shoreline anglers, and other shoreline recreationists as well as a row boat concession (as termed in the original Master Plan) to allow individuals and families to get out on the water in a peaceful setting.

### Environmental impacts

The ecological conditions of the park were also considered important in the original park design and to the park visitors for the last 30 years. We do not feel that, as one presenter at the February meeting stated, “There has to be environmental trade-offs” but rather that it is incumbent upon all of us as stewards of the park to protect against any environmental degradation. In comments to the proposed boat ramp feasibility study submitted by the South River Federation (SRF) in 2017, a number of environmental concerns were extensively detailed which the FQWP agreed with and feel are still pertinent. We strongly agree with the SRF observation in the 2017 study that submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) is present. While SRF itself “has mapped horned pond weed in close proximity to the proposed site of the boat ramp” in recent years, we also note that the 1988 Master Plan for the park indicates the existence of SAV in the vicinity. Construction of the proposed extensive boat dock would be detrimental to maintaining *and* restoring SAVs in this area, a direct conflict with goals of the multi-state Chesapeake Bay Program. The waters in this area are also home to many fish species, turtles, and provides good wood duck habitat.

Further, the area for the proposed boardwalk and boat storage provides critical habitat for Forest Interior Dwelling Species. Many of these species require unfragmented forest cover as part of their life history. The tornado in the fall of 2020 knocked down a number of trees in this area and the removal of another 31 trees as indicated in the plans would deplete the canopy cover. This will destroy the habitat and diminish the capability of maintaining these species in the park. The species affected include not only numerous species of birds, but turtles, fox, raccoon, otters, beavers, and deer.

The proposed boardwalks traverse tidal and non-tidal wetlands. Impacts to these areas will be extensive as boat launching, dog walking and other users will stray from the boardwalk and, additional foot traffic on or off the boardwalk will be detrimental to species dependent on unfragmented tree cover and minimal disturbance. Further, the 4,025 square foot mulched area is in the previously mapped non-tidal wetland, and runoff and flooding will wash the mulch into the shallow waters.

### Administrative concerns

Park users enjoy the water views and access points currently offered in a serene setting in the park. Currently the most popular area is the South River overlook. The proposed

boardwalk and dock area in the vicinity of the cove will create easy access and the potential to “entice” people to the water for fishing and swimming, (people and dogs) as are seen in other areas of the park where access is provided. Although swimming (both human and dog) and fishing in this area is not allowed, it will be a difficult area for rangers to patrol and enforce.

It was stressed at the February 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting that this proposed development is to be open to the public; however, there is every indication that future plans include building a boat storage facility/ club house on the property for use by private, membership-based groups. As previously noted, Quiet Waters Park had close to a million visitors in 2020 and expects these visitation numbers to maintain as the population increases in the area along with an increased interest in outdoor activities. The question was posed but not yet answered, of who will be responsible for the upkeep of the dock, boardwalk, and racks and safety of the facilities, including the shells stored on racks near the waterside and the power boats (used for sculling teams) at the dock. Presumably, maintenance and upkeep as well as security will fall upon the existing park staff, adding burdens on the park rangers who have been tasked with managing, without any additional financial or staff resources, the new Retreat Property acquired in 2019 as well. We have heard, and are awaiting confirmation from county personnel, that portions of the proposed paddling and rowing facility will be fenced off for the exclusive use of private rowing organizations thereby effectively privatizing a portion of this great public resource.

#### Multiple User Conflicts

The Holly Pavilion, adjacent to the proposed development site, is the most popular rental pavilion due to its central location and convenience to handicap parking. When rented, parking in the lot is near capacity and is at overflow during events at the park including the annual summer concerts. Parking and use of this pavilion will be greatly compromised with the added users of the rowing facility and parking of boat trailers. Additionally, the cove itself, is already a popular destination for anglers, paddlers on kayaks and paddleboards and sailboats seeking the peaceful solitude afforded by the surrounding forest cover which would be eliminated through the development of the paddling and rowing facility at this location.

#### Financial needs of the existing park

For the past 30 years Quiet Waters Park has been beautifully preserved by rangers, maintenance staff and large numbers of dedicated volunteers who have a passion and stewardship for all that the park has to offer. As with all environments, the wear and tear has begun to show. A facility survey was recently completed to determine the condition of all of the structures and infrastructure. A total of \$4-\$5 million is needed over the next five years to upgrade and improve the existing facilities for the safety and health of all users. This includes, among other things, badly-needed trail improvements, enlargement of the gate house to eliminate long lines for visitors waiting to enter on busy days, removal of mold from the Blue Heron Center, and ADA improvements to meet federal guidelines. The cost of the proposed boat launching facility is \$1.6 million. This facility may be used by a few hundred people at best. However, the park improvements will

benefit the million people who visit every year. Our question to the county budget office is where is the limited funding better spent and how will a park already burdened by maintenance backlogs address additional burdens if new infrastructure is built?

The carrying capacity of the park has not been determined but as an environmentally sensitive area with nearly a million visitors during 2020, the effects of overuse are being felt without the additional impact of a rowing facility. The establishment of such a proposed rowing facility within a heavily used public park will open the door for other private entities and team sports activities to request facilities within the park boundaries. As a popular, passive use, nature park, Quiet Waters Park should not establish facilities for the specific use of one group of users inconsistent with the intent of the park as a rare destination for individual and family activities.

In closing, while the FQWP is extremely supportive of water-based recreation such as rowing and paddling, and recognizes the need for additional water access in Anne Arundel County, Quiet Waters Park is not the appropriate location for a Paddling and Rowing Facility. In any proposal for new activities, we are cognizant of the potential for Quiet Waters Park suffering “death by a thousand cuts.” Development of a rowing facility in Quiet Waters Park would be an affront to the vision laid out in the Master Plan which has been faithfully followed for the past 30 years to create what is a crown jewel of peaceful serenity amidst a bustling urban environment for all county residents and visitors to enjoy.

Board of Directors, Friends of Quiet Waters Park, February 2021

Photos attached below

Figure 1. Existing “Holly” picnic pavilion impacted by juxtaposition of proposed development of paddling and rowing facility (and possible future site of boat storage/clubhouse)



Figure 2. Site of ingress and egress from proposed paddling and rowing facility on a summer weekend. Circles indicate swimmers, paddle boarders, and kayakers.



Figure 3. Site of proposed paddling and rowing facility showing existing a) forest cover (looking downhill) and b) undeveloped shoreline (water view).

a)



b)

