



November 8, 2022

Anne Arundel County
Department of Public Works
2662 Riva Road
Annapolis, MD 21401

Via Email: pwwdea00@aacounty.org

Re: Comments/Questions on Proposed Quiet Waters Retreat Design

The Board of Directors of the Friends of Quiet Waters Park (FQWP) would like to submit the following questions and comments regarding the proposed Quiet Waters Retreat Design, including changes to existing park infrastructure and operations, development of the park amenities in the "Retreat" section of Quiet Waters Park, and attributes associated with the planned construction of a two-story office building on the leased portion of the Retreat Property. While we feel that the addition of the Retreat Property is a great opportunity to enhance the recreational, environmental, and cultural aspects of Quiet Waters Park, we need to be cognizant of separating out the activities of an office building from the recreational aspects of our Quiet Waters Park – already the most heavily used park in the county.

The Friends of Quiet Waters Park (FQWP), originally formed as the Quiet Waters Study Committee to guide the development of the park during the 1980's, was formalized at the opening of the 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.

Inconsistency With Quiet Waters Park Master Plan

Since this proposed development is part of Quiet Waters Park, we question why the principles of the park's Master Plan are not being followed. 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

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." (page 22 of the Master Plan)

This Master Plan created the environment that is so enjoyed by all, and it has guided development over the decades to create the park that we have today. It 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 with this plan in the proposed Quiet Waters Retreat design is the shoreline development. 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. The QWP Master Plan states

"First, and of greatest concern, is achieving a balance between the natural and the developed environment. Since 52 percent of the site is within the critical area established by Anne Arundel County, careful analysis was given to the uses proposed for this area. The natural areas should be along the site edges, allowing the majority of the site to be undisturbed. The next most challenging task was to provide for the delicate balance of maintaining the natural beauty of the site while allowing all the citizens of Anne Arundel County to enjoy that natural beauty. Most of the 14,000 linear feet of the shoreline and 266 acres of woods should be left undisturbed."

This site plan has developed the whole center section of the Retreat Property, especially the placement of the main office building just inside the critical area boundary along the shoreline and cutting off the spectacular long-range vistas to the Bay for all but those within the building or walking behind and right next to the building. We understand that one section of the building was designed with glass walls to provide views through the building, however, this is not the same as an open view.

We do have substantial hesitation about constructing a privately leased office building in a recreational/residential area, and within a county owned park. Nonetheless, we recognize that a lease has been issued for such purposes. There is plenty of open space for constructing building placement away from the shoreline closer to the interior of the site while still leaving the wooded area undisturbed and maximizing the long-range vistas and water views for park visitors to enjoy. Additionally, increasing the distance between developed surfaces and the water will be more environmentally friendly than constructing immediately up to the critical area.

Some questions were raised during the October 31st meeting about precedent of supporting and leasing parkland to a private organization for commercial purposes. Are there prior cases of this arrangement or does this private lease in the park for a commercial building constitute a precedent that could be emulated in other parks and situations? If there is prior precedence of this nature, please provide information on those arrangements.

Regarding public access within the leased area: will the general public have access to the full site 7 days a week or will some of that area be sectioned off just for use by the building tenants? Will the public be able to walk and sit anywhere in that area when the park is open? This should be clearly outlined in writing.

Mixing Commercial/Business Traffic with Park Traffic on Roads Not Designed For It

We are extremely concerned about the impact of the proposed road on the integrity and enjoyment of the park. We recognize that a balance must be struck between providing the public with an opportunity to enjoy the Retreat Property and the infrastructure necessary to provide this access. However, we feel that there may be alternatives to the plan as proposed that won't negatively impact the existing park nearly as much and that better integrate the Retreat Property into the look and feel that has made Quiet Waters Park the jewel that it has become known as over the past 32 years.

In general, we oppose mixing commercial traffic associated with an office building (both office workers commuting in/out and service/delivery vehicles accessing the building). In addition to the obvious conflicts that will reduce the intent of the park for relaxation and enjoyment by pedestrians and bicyclists, park roads are not designed for, and do not meet the design standards, for this type of commercial traffic. At nearly 1 million visitations annually, Quiet Waters Park roads are already exceeding what was originally envisioned and the addition of even more commuter and commercial traffic will just exacerbate the situation and create increasing user conflicts. Some questions that we have specifically about road access through the park:

- Would a full road into the Retreat Property through Quiet Waters Park be necessary? We strongly recommend considering alternative routes to separate the commercial traffic from the park traffic.
- Has a traffic study been conducted about the proposed impact of vehicular traffic through heavily used pedestrian area of the park? If not, why not?
- Speeding is currently a common problem in the park and will only get worse with additional traffic flow. Are plans being made to install speed bumps (or similar deterrents)? We feel that such devices should be placed in both the inbound and

outbound loop roads as well as on both hills near the Holly Pavilion/concert stage to reduce traffic speeds to the 20 MPH maximum.

- Were any considerations made for moving the existing dog park so that an access road would not cut across an open field currently used for recreation, concert goers, and abutting a growing grove of Memorial Trees? Shifting the dog park 24 feet (the width of the proposed road) would allow the road to traverse the area now used for the dog park and require the re-siting of the walking/biking trail, which would be a much more acceptable alternative than a road cutting through a popular recreation area.
- Have considerations been made to utilize pervious asphalt on all surfaces currently designated for pavement? The original park trailways were designed with pervious (porous) surfaces for the protection of the environment. We strongly urge all new pavement in this project to follow this same construction or anything more environmentally friendly as a commitment to a healthier environment and to the multijurisdictional Chesapeake Bay Agreement.
- Has consideration been made to make the proposed new roadway gated and for "Service Vehicles Only" from the planned Maintenance Building onward, thereby providing access to the Retreat Property via an ADA-compliant walking/bike path only into the new property? This concept is successfully employed to provide access to the very popular existing South River Overlook and provides a wonderful pedestrian friendly experience to enjoy the peace and serenity for all upon reaching the water.
- Why is a 30-space parking area planned adjacent to the proposed Maintenance Building? This is extremely excessive and should be reduced. Currently, 149 paved parking spaces are planned as part of this project (80 at the existing gravel dog park, 30 at the maintenance building and 39 at the office building). If a publicly-accessible roadway is built into this property extending beyond the maintenance facility, we suggest that this parking area be reduced to five or less spaces (only enough to service the needs of the maintenance facility).

Siting of Building and Sense of Place

The Retreat Property is ostensibly being developed as an addition to Quiet Waters Park. However, standing in the current property with the proposed site plans in hand, it clearly appears to be a wonderful multimillion dollar corporate campus with some park features scattered throughout, not an addition to Quiet Waters Park as it is intended to be.

This site was a homestead with its buildings located back from the shoreline, preserving the center lawn and fabulous viewsheds to the mouth of the South River and the Bay. In landscape architecture there is something called "sense of place" or the quality that makes somewhere

distinctive. This property is an addition to Quiet Waters Park, a distinctive environment attracting over a million visitors a year. The Park has been carefully developed and maintained as a passive use natural park. The site plan, as presented, will create a different look, not contiguous with the rest of the park. The entrance road lined with an allee of American Chestnuts sets the corporate atmosphere as one approaches the building site is one example.

The proposed picnic pavilion is another glaring example of the inconsistency with Quiet Waters Park. The flat roof new age design is completely incompatible with the look of the existing pavilions and would be a complete distraction to what should be the focal point, the attribute that makes this property special, the water. We would support eliminating this picnic pavilion entirely and replacing it with a gazebo of the size of that at the South River Overlook.

Additionally, the site plan has eliminated any historical context. While all the buildings have been removed, some elements of the homestead landscape remain but will also be removed as part of this project. The use of all the center lawn area for drives, parking lots and buildings effectively erases the ability to interpret to the public the important history of the site.

Environmental Issues and Interpretation

The interpretive sites unique to this property that the Friends of Quiet Waters Park Environmental Committee would want to focus on are the fish habitat (in a different location than noted on plans), holly forest, cliff bank erosion, cliff habitat, historical use, Loden Pond and shoreline stabilization (when it occurs). Other interpretive locations noted on the plan duplicate what is in the existing portion of Quiet Waters Park. Can we work together on this since it will be within the park's management? Has the park superintendent signed off on the planted areas outside of the leased area? An extensive tall grass meadow and edible forest garden will require maintenance that the park staff may not be able to attend to. Additionally, Quiet Waters Park staff and our Environmental Committee are in the process of re-evaluating all signage in the context of ADA-compliance and we strongly suggest that any interpretive signage in the new addition be consistent with that design when chosen.

Long Range Maintenance

The current lease expires in thirty years. If at some point the organization becomes insolvent or decides to move their offices, are there any restrictions on what type of commercial venture could be allowed to occupy the building? During the public meeting, turning over the building to the county after 30 years was painted as a positive. However, as we are painfully aware, the current buildings in Quiet Waters Park that are 32 years old are in need of costly infrastructure repairs that will only get worse as the buildings age. A 30-year-old building should be viewed as a potential liability, not automatically accepted as an asset.

Proposed Solutions

Ideally, the Retreat Property should be left as undeveloped as possible, with bare minimum impervious surface and only ADA-compliant walking/biking trails accessing the marvelous vista.

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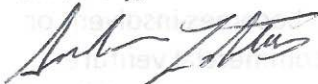
This would be the true meaning of conserving the Chesapeake. However, we recognize that a lease has been issued allowing (but not requiring) the construction of a building and, although we question the efficacy of that decision, in that context we propose:

- Siting the commercial grade office building, if it is constructed, as far back to the wooded area as possible (near the old garage site), preserving the long-range vistas and public enjoyment of the views of the South River and Chesapeake Bay.
- Eliminating the proposed picnic pavilion and replacing it with gazebo of the size of those at the South River Overlook.
- Shifting the dog park 24 feet and routing the access road within what is now the dog park; re-routing the existing foot/bike path accordingly.
- Making the access road gated and for use by park service vehicles only from the planned Maintenance Building parking lot onward.
- Providing access to the entire Retreat Property via an ADA-compliant footpath from the Maintenance Building onward, similar to the existing South River Overlook trail.
- Installing a minimum of 6-8 speed bumps (or similar traffic calming devices) to maintain vehicle speed at the mandated 20 MPH in all park areas.
- Consulting with the park staff on the plans for the areas outside the leased area.

Finally, considering the extensive nature and questions about this development, we suggest one or more additional public meetings be held *before work progresses any further* that are not scheduled for what many consider a holiday. With the first public meeting held on Halloween evening, many people were not able to attend due to family commitments that are traditional on this day.

We appreciate the consideration of these questions and comments and look forward to working with you to integrate the Retreat Property in a way that maintains, and builds upon, the features that have made Quiet Waters Park the most popular park in Anne Arundel County for the past 32 years.

Sincerely,



Andrew Loftus
President of the Board

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