

## **Report of Citizens' Vision Meeting for the Retreat Area at Quiet Waters Park**

### **"Keep it natural. Make it native"**

The Meeting. Thirty-eight citizens met in a professionally-facilitated forum on April 3, 2023 for 2.5 hours at the Eastport-Annapolis Neck Library to express their vision for the future use, development and maintenance of the Quiet Waters Park (QWP) Retreat Area. Citizens came from various areas of Anne Arundel County.

Vision. The primary, almost overwhelmingly dominant vision is to keep the Retreat Area a natural environment, with passive use, without built-structures or the appearance of development. The retreat area is envisioned as a meadow surrounded by forest, "same as it is today but with more native plants". It would truly be a retreat for the urbanized residents of an increasingly congested peninsula and region, of Anne Arundel County. In summary, the citizens' vision is: "Keep it natural. Make it native".

Design Goal for Suggested Mood/Feeling for Retreat Area. The Area would be different in design and mood from the main QWP by retaining its current "other worldly", serene and spiritual qualities, while giving visitors a sense of connection to the earth, feelings of groundedness, yet also mystery. The Retreat Area is a get away from the busy, noisy world of human activity. It is a place for quiet pleasures of the soul, tranquility and connection to the earth and water, which may engender curiosity about the land's history (native American Indians and others). The Retreat should be a park to refresh the spirit with the joys of life and nature, as Christopher Robin experienced in Winnie-the-Pooh.

Become a Model of Environmental Sustainability. The Retreat Area would be a model of environmentally sustainable native plants and trees, attractive to pollinators, insects, birds and mammals. Invasive plants and trees would eventually be eliminated.

Learn by Example. The Retreat Area would help Visitors to learn by example how to maintain their own native landscapes or gardens. Different from other educational areas and efforts in QWP, the Retreat's educational qualities are realized by seeing, observing and experiencing, and perhaps modest signage; and not telling, lecturing, or instructing.

"Design with Nature". The design will be an ecofriendly area, which is actually just an old fashion natural meadow and forest, with native plants (some pollinators) spread throughout. No buildings; although some saw a need for some structures (e.g., benches, small shelter, ADA paths) the majority valued the "unbuilt environment". Participants want to be included in decision-making for the Retreat Area.

Participants felt the 'other' 320-acre main QWP park area has sufficient amenities for diverse interests; the Retreat Area should be different in that its attraction is that it is "natural", meaning serving nature and untouched by structures for human activity. The Area should not have uses and facilities that are redundant of the main park (e.g., large picnic pavilions).

Summary. Overall, the strongest sentiment was expressed as "I love you just the way you are." Participants want a retreat from the modern world, where they can experience a place untouched by human interventions.

Actual Comments from Participants. There were a mix of opinions and all were welcome. But there was a trend of "less is more". Below are suggestions of what participants did and did not want.

**Table 1. Some Participants did want:**

- Participants strongly support citizens and county staff updating the QWP Master Plan to incorporate the plan for the Retreat Area
- ADA paths, for people with limited mobility, including the elderly
- Benches, to sit and enjoy the view, read, reflect
- Shelter or small pavilion
- Pollinator pathways and connecting habitats
- Beneficial plants for pollinators
- Plants that are tolerant to climate change
- Water access to Loden Pond (and South River) for shallow-water watercraft, e.g., kayaks
- Maintenance building not in Retreat Area or even near entry
- A Porta Potty toilet, if a toilet is necessary, before the entry, near where the Maintenance building is planned, but not inside the Retreat Area
- Do not disturb tranquility with water and/or electric utilities; no lights at night.
- Educational opportunities and programs for school-aged kids, e.g., hikes
- Modest educational signage (e.g., tree names, and brief history of area at entry)
- Fence at cliff (some suggested split-rail to look natural)
- Work to stabilize the shoreline's cliffs
- Protect the fox and cliff-dwelling species
- No trashcans; carry out whatever you bring in
- Pets allowed
- Water access to Loden Pond (and the South River) only for kayaks or similar very shallow, paddle water sports, if at all.

**Table 2. Some Participants did not want:**

- Built structures or public buildings
- Parking lot
- Road
- Impervious walkways or paths
- Pavilions, large
- BBQ
- Benches
- Kiddie play areas
- Built or elaborate plots of exhibits of plantings, e.g. at composting area
- Fence at cliff (some suggested split-rail to look natural)
- Dog park
- Pets Not Allowed restriction
- A park attraction in the consumer or retail sense
- Comfort/toilet buildings
- A Porta Potty toilet would be convenient before the entry, near where the Maintenance building is planned, not inside the Retreat Area.

Meeting Organization

Participants were invited by email by the Annapolis Neck Peninsula Federation and by word-of-mouth. All participants were very frequent visitors to QWP, some for many decades, and know the Retreat property quite well. Three-quarters were women. All but one African American (a county Constituent Services employee on assignment) were white, from 25 to 80 years of age. All are residents of Anne Arundel County or the City of Annapolis

The thirty-eight participants were seated at seven tables of approximately six persons. Each table had engineering drawings and graphical images of the 19 acre Retreat property (from County DRP sources, 2'x 3' size) and writing and drawing materials.

Amy Steindler, Annapolis MD, a professional facilitator, led participants thru a 3-step process:

1. Privately note individual feelings, and then share with table mates and then share with all;
2. Discuss with table mates themes derived from such feelings, and then share with all;
3. Express visions, as a group, that arose from themes.

Participants were given minimal guidance or direction about park designs or amenities. They were asked to be open to ideas and to not judge any notion, expression or statement.

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