

**RECREATION AND PARKS BOARD
OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY
Special Meeting of Wednesday, September 24, 2008**

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Patrick Dugan, Chairperson; Richard Buckler, Robert Hicks, Robert Richardson, Thomas Nelson and Lisa Wainger-Rush.

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Coleman Hillman and David Phalen.

RECREATION AND PARKS STAFF AND OTHERS PRESENT: Phil Rollins, Director, Recreation and Parks; Commissioner Kenny Dement; Alan Buster, St. Mary's Youth Soccer League; and Kathy Bailey, Recorder.

CALL TO ORDER

The Board meeting was called to order by Patrick Dugan, Chairperson, at 5:35 p.m. in the public meeting room of the Chesapeake Building in Leonardtown.

DISCUSSION ON POTENTIAL ACQUISITION OF THE BEAVAN PROPERTY

Director Phil Rollins thanked the Recreation and Parks (R&P) Board for holding a special meeting tonight to discuss the potential acquisition of the Beavan property. The Board has discussed this, and two other potential acquisition projects, on several occasions and concluded the Beavan property was the most suitable for a new park. He reported that the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) is scheduled to discuss the potential acquisition and contract of sale on Tuesday, October 7, 2008. The owners of the property have signed the contract.

The BOCC has been considering the possible acquisition of the 76 acre Beavan property for a county park for several months. The Board approved a Program Open Space grant application in August to initiate the process for securing State funding for the acquisition of the property. At the same time, the BOCC had some questions about the property that needed to be addressed. Questions about the property included the status of a perc test done on the property; environmental issues; whether a functional park could be developed on the property; and whether the County could utilize existing, undeveloped park land instead of buying more park land.

A brief Power Point presentation was shown describing the property. Several items supporting the need for additional parkland were discussed and included:

1. The 2005 Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan adopted by the Board of Commissioners included the need for central County parkland to address a shortage of athletic fields.
2. The recent creation of new Girls Lacrosse and Youth Football Leagues and the continued growth of other leagues have created a significant shortfall of playing fields in the central part of the County.
3. There are 46 school and park athletic fields in the northern area of the County and 45 fields in the southern area. There are only 26 playing fields in the central part of the County.
4. The site is in an excellent, central county location and has frontage on Indian Bridge Road.
5. The site is contiguous to the State-owned Salem tract and has opportunities for environmental interpretation.

Some cost and funding source items discussed included:

1. Two independent appraisals were done; and the negotiated purchase price is \$700,000; \$50,000 below the low appraisal.
2. An additional \$30,000 is needed for appraisals, surveys, legal costs, etc. for a total acquisition cost of \$730,000.
3. State Program Open Space funding is available and will cover 100% of purchase. POS is a dedicated funding source for park land acquisition
4. Staff anticipates the POS grant will be on Board of Public Works agenda in late October or early November.

Mr. Rollins provided information on questions and concerns previously raised by the BOCC.

1. Perc test - A perc preservation plat was approved by the Health Department in August. However, wet season perc testing will still be required to secure an additional drain field area large enough to accommodate a park rest room facility (the size of which depends upon the size of the park and number of projected daily users). The Director of Environmental Health has stated that because of the size of the property, it's reasonable to assume that additional percs can be obtained. If problems are encountered getting an adequate sized area to perc, alternatives to traditional septic include a mound system or, in a worse case scenario, waterless toilet facilities.
2. Environmental Issues - The site has an area of potential habitat for the State endangered Eastern narrow-mouthed toad and FIDS habitat (Forest Interior Dwelling Species). These issues have been discussed with DNR's Wildlife Heritage Service, and reviewed by County's Environmental Planner. Toad and FIDS habitat do not preclude park development. State habitat protection guidelines will be followed during park planning. And, because of County forest conservation regulations, only 50% of the property (38 acres) could be cleared and developed. The 50% left in forest should more than satisfy toad and FIDS habitat guidelines.

Lisa Wainger-Rush inquired about the buffers required for the wetland areas. Mr. Rollins stated the park concept plan would include all the required buffer areas as the planning process moves forward. She stated that the acquisition seems to be a win-win situation as it provides area for active recreation and area to preserve critical forest habitat.

Commissioner Kenny Dement joined the meeting during this part of the discussion.

3. Potential Park Development - A preliminary, rough concept plan has been developed to visually display how the park could be developed. The developable area of the park is expected to be about 50% of the site (38 acres). In most cases, there are topographical or environmental constraints such as streams, wetlands, steep slopes, or soil conditions which limit additional development in parks. By comparison, the following acreage is developed at various County parks:
 - a. 28% of the total acreage at Cecil Park is developed (about 17 of 60 acres);
 - b. 32% of the total acreage at Fifth District Park is developed (about 25 of 77 acres);
 - c. 33% of the total acreage at Seventh District Park is developed (about 21 of 63 acres);
 - d. 35% of the total acreage at John Baggett Park is developed (about 15 of 43 acres);
 - e. 44% of the total acreage at Dorsey Park is developed (about 35 of 79 acres);
 - f. 50% of the property at Lancaster Park is developed (about 23 of 47 acres); and
 - g. 58% of the total acreage at Chancellor's Run Regional Park is developed.

Alan Buster, who attended the meeting to represent the St. Mary's Youth Soccer League, expressed support for the project. He's also the Southern Commissioner for the Maryland State Youth Soccer Association. He stated there is a need for additional fields for practice and games. His league's teams currently play at Chancellor's Run Regional Park. Competing teams have provided many compliments on the condition of the fields and facility at Chancellor's Run Regional Park.

Mr. Rollins reminded those present that the new Girl's Lacrosse League approached the County several years ago about the need for athletic fields for the league. All of the existing park and school fields are being used by existing leagues. Funding was appropriated a few years ago to develop some fields on leased property; however, the company that owns the property decided not to lease the property to the County.

Bob Richardson also expressed support for the project. Babe Ruth Baseball is having to juggle practices, and scheduling is becoming a challenge because so many leagues are competing for fields.

4. Use of Existing Park Land – It was suggested that existing, undeveloped County parkland might be used to provide the additional athletic fields needed. Two properties were proposed, Myrtle Point Park in California and the south parcel of the old Lexington Manor site, adjacent to Lancaster Park in Lexington Park. Neither of these properties is suitable for athletic field development.

The 192 acre Myrtle Point Park, located on the Patuxent River, lies almost entirely within the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get approvals to clear and develop athletic fields. In addition, the BOCC adopted a master plan in October 2005 for Myrtle Point to be a nature park. A capital project requesting funds to begin implementing the master plan was included in the CIP in FY07 and FY08. Design and engineering

was planned in FY10 and improvements were targeted to begin in FY11. Due to fiscal constraints, the Board directed that the project be taken out of the CIP during FY09 budget process.

The 50 acre south parcel of Lexington Manor was purchased partially with POS funds with the intention that it would be used passively as part of Lancaster Park. Because of deed restrictions resulting from other funding sources used for acquisition, the property cannot be developed for active recreation, including athletic fields.

5. Timing of POS Approvals and Settlement Date - The property owners have agreed to revise the contract to include language enabling an extension until the Board of Public Works approves the POS grant application. Chairman Dugan expressed concern that if Program Open Space acquisition funds are not earmarked for certain projects they may be lost due to the State's fiscal constraints. Mr. Rollins stated that is a real concern at this time. The County currently has about \$1.85 million available in POS funding that can only be used for parkland or open space acquisition. If this project moves forward, there would still be a balance of approximately \$1.1 million available for other property under consideration. If this POS funding isn't expended or encumbered in the next few months, it is quite possible that it will be reverted to the State's coffers to offset State budget deficits.

Richard Buckler asked if there has been any further discussion about taking part of Miedzinski Park for the new Library facility. Mr. Rollins stated that ongoing discussions have been held on the Library's needs; and it's possible that other potential land acquisition projects could address those needs.

Thomas Nelson motioned, seconded by Lisa Wainger-Rush, to authorize Chairman Dugan to draft a letter on behalf of the Board expressing support for acquisition of the Beavan property.

Mr. Rollins invited Board members to attend the BOCC meeting on October 7th to express support for the project; he will e-mail members with the time for the presentation of the contract.

SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Recreation and Parks Board is scheduled for Thursday, November 6, 2008 at 5:30 p.m., in the public meeting room, of the new Chesapeake Building, at the Governmental Center, in Leonardtown. The meeting location was subsequently changed to Room 14 of the Potomac Building (former Governmental Center building). The meeting of October 2, 2008 was been cancelled.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Kathy Bailey, Recorder

Minutes approved by the Recreation and Parks Board on November 6, 2008.