



FOCUS GROUP MEETING

SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

MEETING DATE NOVEMBER 28, 2023

Prepared by Site Resources, Inc. for Harford County Parks and Recreation

Harford County Parks & Recreation

Paul Magness, P&R Director

Terry Hanley, P&R Deputy Director (V)

David Goodwin, Capital Planning & Development Project Manager

Angela Hoover, Capital Planning & Development Project Manager

Keith Owens, Capital Planning & Development

Dustin Griffin, Capital Planning & Development

John Narvell, Havre de Grace Recreation Council President

Tim Getz, Havre de Grace Recreation Council (V)

Terri Glenn, Swan Harbor Farm

Dan Fama, Aberdeen Recreation Council (V)

Harford County Department of Public Works

Andrew Bodt, Watershed Protection & Restoration Office

Jeffrey Schoenberger, Environmental Services

Hayford Tuffour, Traffic Engineering (V)

Amy Beall, Traffic Engineering

Harford County Planning & Zoning

Alex Rawls, Long Range Planner

Jacob Bensen, Historic Planner

City of Aberdeen

Phyllis Grover, Director of Planning and Community Development (V)

City of Havre de Grace

Tim Bourcier, Director of Planning

Harford Bird Club

Sue Procell, President

Dennis Kirkwood

Historical Society of Harford County

Bill Walden, President (V)

Jackie Seneschal

Susquehannock Wildlife Society

Scott McDaniel, Executive Director

John Garrison

Harford Land Trust

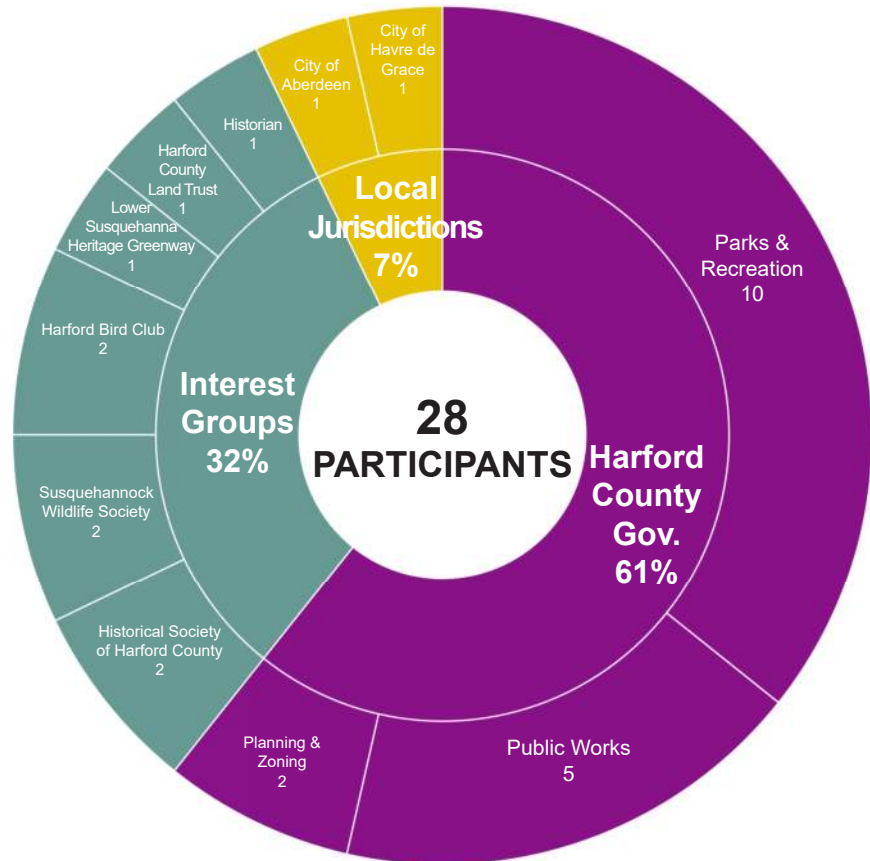
Jackie Koehn, Land Programs Manager

Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway

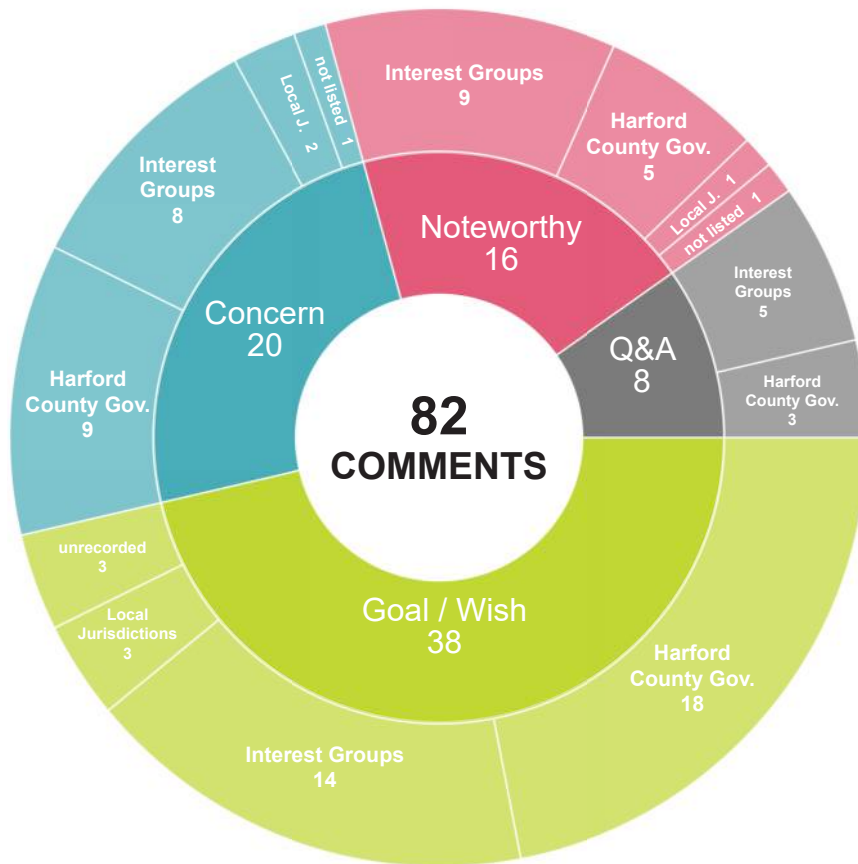
Janet Gleisner, Project Manager

Historian, Educator, Community Leader

Dr. Iris Barnes (V)



PARTICIPANTS



Participants were asked to write comments on color-coded sticky notes for each of the three topics:

- **Noteworthy:** share an interesting fact about or personal experience with the park properties
- **Goal / Wish:** list 1-2 desired goals or wishes for the park
- **Concern:** list 1-2 concerns regarding the development of the park

Additional comments arose during the Q&A session at the end of the meeting.

The chart above shows a breakdown of all the comments by comment type and participant group type.

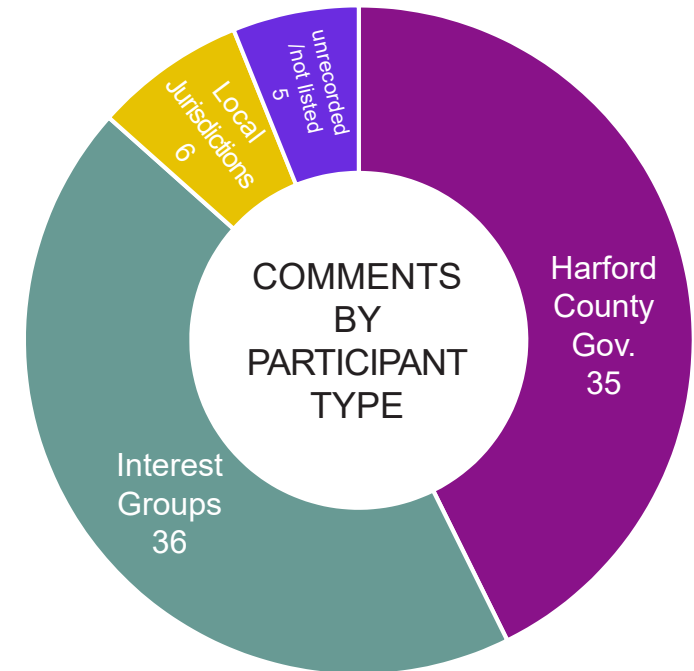


TRAILS and paths for walking, hiking, biking; a land trail system throughout the properties and a CONNECTION to regional trail and greenway systems

SHARING, and exploring further, the HISTORY of the peninsula and its HISTORICAL significance from pre-colonial times to today; celebrating the peninsula's history and telling its STORIES (particularly those related to Belle Vue and Swan Harbor Farms)

PROTECTING and PRESERVING the NATURAL resources and ecosystems of the Oakington Peninsula properties, with EDUCATIONAL exhibits and programming to encourage stewardship

ACCESS to the WATER, shoreline and waterfront views/vistas - an extraordinary opportunity for the general public to experience the WATERFRONT and beautiful VIEWS of the Chesapeake Bay



CONCERNS regarding the negative IMPACTS of too much TRAFFIC, increased park visitation, and the associated DISTURBANCE to the natural features and wildlife habitats.

Protecting, preserving, restoring, and increasing natural HABITATS and BIODIVERSITY, particularly to support existing, and attracting additional, BIRD SPECIES; birding is an established draw for the peninsula and could be expanded upon

Oakington Peninsula properties offer the county a UNIQUE opportunity to create a REGIONAL PARK that could DRAW visitors not only from Harford County but the Mid-Atlantic region (Washington DC, Philadelphia, Baltimore)

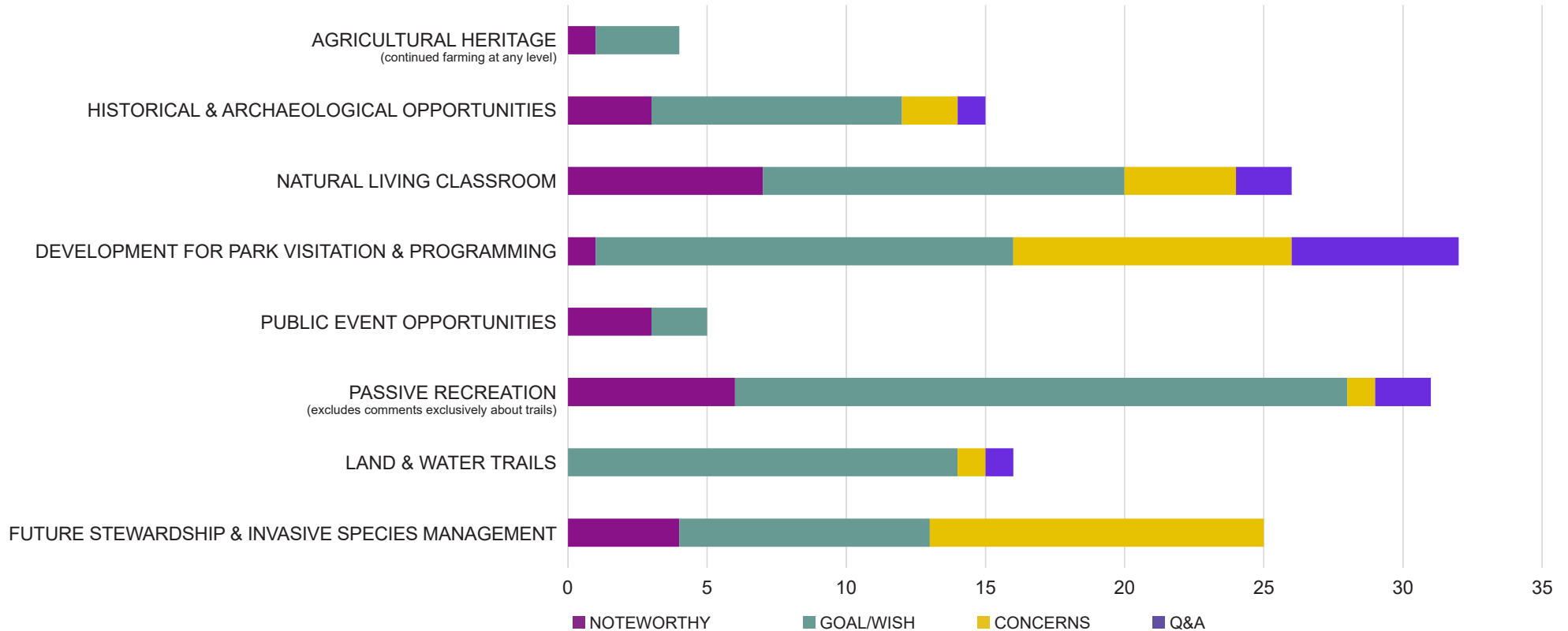


Word cloud created using all 82 comments

Comments were edited slightly to use the same base word or phrase to better find meaningful repetition. Text size reflects the frequency of the word or phrase. Text color does not relate to any other data.

COMMON THEMES

FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS AS THEY ALIGN WITH THE SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT'S “PARK SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT & PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS”



NOTE: Some comments align with more than one topic, and therefore, were included in the counts for multiple topics. (For example, birding comments align well with both “Natural Living Classroom” and “Passive Recreation”)

Based on information gathered during the Focus Group Meeting, some additions to the Site Assessment Report would be adding biking to the “Passive Recreation” list, and commenting specifically on the existing regional significance for birding on the park properties; flushing out more specifics regarding historical opportunities; expanding the “Future Stewardship” section to include the potential for increasing habitats and biodiversity, converting farmland to grasslands, protecting the existing biodiversity and encouraging the expansion of species, commenting on the fact that education of visitors can also encourage stewardship, and potentially inviting researchers onto portions of the property.

SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT

Based on information gathered in the Site Assessment Report and comments shared in the focus group meetings, it is recommended that the recreational activities allowed and encouraged within the Oakington Peninsula Park System focus on those that will be compatible with the natural resources and ecosystems of the park properties as well as supportive of the other recommended historical, educational, and environmental programming.

Placing focus on recreation use types that require less disturbance to construct and maintain and those that do not require significant structures and parking lots will result in more harmony with the Oakington Peninsula park land — publicly accessible land that is uniquely rich in natural features, habitats, and species biodiversity.

RECREATION

walking	birding
hiking	fishing
running	picnicking
biking	nature/wildlife observation
frisbee	orienteering
yoga	photography
tai chi	
kayaking	
canoeing	

PROGRAMMING

historical exploration
environmental stewardship
nature education
history education
volunteering
nature events
cultural events
seasonal uses

FACILITIES

trail network
interpretive trails
(history & nature)
playground
welcome / nature center
pier / water access
demonstration space
study areas
contemplative spaces
interpretive spaces
protected areas (natural
resources, sensitive
habitats, wetlands, etc.)

RECREATION & PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES

OAKINGTON PENINSULA PARK SYSTEM

Recommended Natural Resource Management Priorities

Limit or restrict public access and passive recreation on the Mulligans property, the tip of Tydings Park, Gasheys Creek, and other ecologically sensitive areas;

Consider white-tail deer control measures, similar to Maryland's Public Hunting Permit program;

Maintain and/or establish vegetated riparian buffers of at least 100 feet, with limited exceptions for coastal access points;

Consider establishing a forested buffer between on the southern boundary of Belle Vue Farm and Ashley Addiction Treatment;

Incorporate hay, delaying harvest until early July, if possible, into crop rotation and consider permanent conversion of some cropland for meadows, to provide additional habitat opportunities; and,

Avoid construction of structures and additional vehicular access in forested areas. Assuming additional structures or parking are required, consider conversion of a small portion of agricultural land near the Belle Vue residential area.

Ringfence revenue generated from Oakington Peninsula public lands (i.e., agricultural leases and event revenues) and allocate funds for the Peninsula Park System ongoing operating expenses; and,

Establish a citizen "friends" of Oakington Peninsula group to raise awareness, support conservation goals, and attract and manage volunteers.



A second meeting with the focus group was held in March 2024 to present a summary of the initial meeting. Any additional comments or corrections to the summary information were requested from the focus group participants. This list, enclosed in a letter written to Harford County Parks and Recreation, was prepared by three of the organizations within the focus group.

FOLLOW-UP COMMENTS



FOCUS GROUP MEETING

RECORDED COMMENTS

NOTEWORTHY

THIS LIST INCLUDES THE CONTENTS OF EACH STICKY NOTE

Source			Comment	Notes
Name	Organization	Department		
Jackie Seneschal	Historical Society of Harford County		History!! Elementary school - HDG consolidated school 20th century history - Tydings/Kennedy; ag innovations Swan Harbor / wine making / Thomas Jefferson This peninsula needs a broad historical context outline to identify and guide ways to incorporate history of the area	
John Narvell	HACo P&R	HdG Rec Council	Mullins landfill? Beautiful shore line vista of upper bay	
Tim Bourcier	City of HdG		Co-workers family leased space near Swan Harbor for vineyard/grapes	
Dennis Kirkwood	Harford Bird Club		One of Maryland's and probably Mid-Atlantic's premiere birding spots with many Harford first sightings and unique nesters	
Angela Hoover	HACo P&R	Capital Planning & Development	Love the weddings and views/pictures from Swan Harbor. Also saw my first peeper frogs at Swan Harbor via a rec. program.	
not listed	not listed		Pre-European contact Native American sites (see MHT archeology data)	
Janet Gleisner	Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway		Solitude of the waterfront	
Dennis Kirkwood	Harford Bird Club		Most fruiting PawPaw trees I have seen in Harford County at Bell Vue	
Alex Rawls	HACo DPZ	Long Range Planner	Swan Harbor Farm was a great place to host Wine and Jazz Fest for HDG Colored [School Museum & Cultural Center] fundraiser	
John Garrison	Susquehannock Wildlife Society		there are rare and endangered species present that could benefit from this planning project	
Jackie Koehn	Harford Land Trust		Belle Vue - Part of the Network to Freedom and protected by ACUB from APG and POS from DNR UPDATE: All future development on the Belle Vue property must be in compliance with the conservation easement (easement recorded in the Harford County land records - liber: 14189, folio: 126)	
Sue Procell	Harford Bird Club		Proximity to APG probably ensures that the diversity of species unique to the protected lands of the Proving Ground overflow / utilize the Oakington Peninsula, especially if this property is protected.	
Andrew Bodt	HACo DPW	Watershed Protection and Restoration	Portions of Mullins property were an old dump that is now one of the most ecologically diverse areas of the county. Home to the wood turtle.	
Dustin Griffin	HACo P&R	Capital Planning & Development	I can really appreciate the beautiful and calming waterfront. The nature aspect really shines.	
Scott McDaniel	Susquehannock Wildlife Society		This is one of the most biodiverse locations in Harford County.	

GOAL / WISH

THIS LIST INCLUDES THE CONTENTS OF EACH STICKY NOTE

Source				
Name	Organization	Department	Comment	Notes
Phyllis Grover	City of Aberdeen		It would be great to have a walking trail with trail markers indicating a historic spot, ecological feature, birdwatching sanctuary, etc. No apartments, warehouses, or gas stations.	virtual meeting chat
Tim Getz	HACo P&R	HdG Rec Council	Passive park land and walking trails	virtual meeting chat
Bill Walden	Historical Society of Harford County		educational exhibits for all of Harford's school children, similar to Harford Glenn	virtual meeting chat
Iris Barnes	Historian, Educator		Yes, Bill! I like that. And certainly to include what life was like living on the....	virtual meeting chat - incomplete portion in RED
Keith Owens	HACo P&R		If there are going to be ball fields, maybe we should consider constructing them on the fringes of the peninsula	virtual meeting chat
Phyllis Grover	City of Aberdeen		The continued protection of the natural/environmental resources is of utmost concern and creating a master plan that incorporates sensitive areas and the history of the peninsula. Goal - to create a unique regional draw for Harford County and MD that preserves this beautiful area.	virtual meeting chat
Daniel Fama	HACo P&R		Kayak launch, walking trails, and pavilions	virtual meeting chat
unrecorded			On the properties of Belle Vue Farm and Swan Harbor Farms. They should each have contemplative and interpretive spaces that discuss the systems of labor that kept the farms prosperous. This should allow visitors to sit, read, reflect, on the history associated with these farms and the peninsula. Particular attention to Belle Vue Farm. These could be gazebos with wayside exhibits.	virtual meeting chat - incomplete portion in RED
John Narvell	HACo P&R	HdG Rec Council	Active recreation; maybe 1 area for ball fields	
John Narvell	HACo P&R	HdG Rec Council	exercise trail with a single point with several stations or multiple individual stations along the trail	
John Narvell	HACo P&R	HdG Rec Council	a playground	
Jackie Seneschal	Historical Society of Harford County		Tell a "complete" 400+ year history. Not focused on only one time period. How? Trails w/ themes (Indigenous; African American; Ag. Cultural practices through time; Industry; American politics; Military; etc.) OR use of out buildings OR something else that moves people across the landscape	
Angela Hoover	HACo P&R	Capital Planning & Development	1. would love a nice walking/running trail; 2. would love to see a controlled entrance/exit for access to the area (Controlled traffic: easy to close park if needed)	
John Garrison	Susquehannock Wildlife Society		I would like to see particularly sensitive areas and habitats be protected from significant development	
Scott McDaniel	Susquehannock Wildlife Society		Protected wildlife / ecological areas with limited access for research / educational purposes	
Tim Bourcier	City of HdG		Larger set of interconnected hiking and biking trails Connection of Swan Harbor trail to HdG	

Source				
Name	Organization	Department	Comment	Notes
Amy Beall	HACo DPW	Traffic Engineering	Walking paths/trails and making sure there is connectivity to existing/planned hike/bike trails paths along adjacent state county roads. No gaps in these routes. Accessibility via link. Accessible trails, water, amenities to ADA	
Jackie Koehn	Harford Land Trust		Onsite location/demo space for 4-H/students participating in MAEF (MD. Ag. Ed. Foundation)	
Jeff Schoenberger	HACo DPW	Environmental Services	Be able to ride my bicycle from downtown HdG to the tip of the peninsula	
Jacob Bensen	HACo DPZ	Historic Planner	Preservation and Interpretation of the Historic buildings at Oakington, Swan Harbor, and belle Vue.	
Amy Beall	HACo DPW	Traffic Engineering	Pier, or area designated for Chesapeake Bay Foundation for study / data gathering / volunteer activities - ties into 4H, schools, bay restoration/preservation.	
Dennis Kirkwood	Harford Bird Club		Enhancement of wetland habitats and converting current farmland to a greater mix of grasslands and crops	
Janet Gleisner	Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway		Build on the "stories" being told in HdeG and along the Susquehanna and Upper Bay - these new efforts should enhance the stories being told - not compete with them. 3 National Trails Underground Railroad Re-emergence of Ches. Gateway Proj.	
Janet Gleisner	Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway		Continuation of the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway land and water trail	
Andrew Bodt	HACo DPW	Watershed Protection and Restoration	Shoreline stabilization along the eroded 2+ miles of shoreline with waterside trails. Something similar to Havre de Grace living shoreline that combines recreation with environmental restoration.	
Alex Rawls	HACo DPZ	Long Range Planner	would love to see trail network connect to a regional trail system - such as LSHG and East Coast Greenway	
Dustin Griffin	HACo P&R	Capital Planning & Development	I would like to see a trail run down the length of the peninsula along the waterfront. The trail could benefit from being able to see the water clearly so people can enjoy the view.	
Terri Glenn	HACo P&R	Swan Harbor Farm	Additional event area other than weddings; family socials, picnics, concerts, nature events	
Sue Procell	Harford Bird Club		Accessible habitat that supports a diversity of wildlife where residents can come to see, learn, and appreciate the amazing biodiversity of our local ecosystem. To learn is to love. To love is to sustain/nurture.	

Source			Comment	Notes
Name	Organization	Department		
Scott McDaniel	Susquehannock Wildlife Society		[People] loving the park to death. Increased visitation affects erosion, light pollution, invasives, wildlife disturbance.	
John Garrison	Susquehannock Wildlife Society		One concern for the development of this park is endangered species that occur here are sensitive to human traffic.	
Jackie Seneschal	Historical Society of Harford County		Traffic and Attendance Management - Roads into the area are narrow 2-lane - not suited to significant crowds - Do the Mullins Park and Elementary school have access of Rt40 - maybe they are better locations for space that draws larger crowds How many people can the space handle and still preserve the natural features and ecosystem?	
Tim Bourcier	City of HdG		Creating innovative env. Solutions - Maintaining wildlife habitat - SWM - Forest conservation hubs & corridors - Living shoreline - Make the park useable while overcoming obstacles utilizing non-status quo solutions where possible	
Janet Gleisner	Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway		Build on the "stories" being told in HdG and along the Susquehanna and Upper Bay - these new efforts should enhance the stories being told - not compete with them. 3 National Trails Underground Railroad Re-emergence of Ches. Gateway Proj.	
not listed	not listed		losing diverse habitat to ball fields	
Angela Hoover	HACo P&R	Capital Planning & Development	Protect/hide the 4 rare endangered species so the public doesn't take/destroy them.	
Jeff Schoenberger	HACo DPW	Environmental Services	Need to not disturb the waste mass of the old Mullins Landfill, though it looks like a large portion of it is non-tidal wetland. There isn't much information available about the landfill.	
Jackie Koehn	Harford Land Trust		Invasive species management and management of natural features to offset the impact of large concentration of public access and use	
Dustin Griffin	HACo P&R	Capital Planning & Development	Proper care when developing around the habitats of threatened and endangered plants and animals	

THIS LIST INCLUDES THE CONTENTS OF EACH STICKY NOTE

Source			Comment	Notes
Name	Organization	Department		
Jacob Bensen	HACo DPZ	Historic Planner	<p>Telling the whole history of the peninsula and region from pre-European contact through to the present day. Include a variety of voices - Native American, European Colonists, Enslaved African Americans, 19th & 20th century farm workers, and the land owners.</p> <p>UPDATE: Harford County Department of Planning and Zoning has requested the creation of a historic context for the Oakington Peninsula to be added to the master planning process to assist in identifying historic preservation and historical interpretation opportunities with the Oakington Peninsula. This historic context would be an expansion of the summary context included in the May 2023 Site Assessment Report.</p>	
Sue Procell	Harford Bird Club		Funding short falls can lead to cuts in the original plan or vision. Please consider the local non-profit organizations as resources for labor and support when planning this next phase. Also, consider us as long term resources for interacting with visitors to the peninsula.	
Amy Beall	HACo DPW	Traffic Engineering	Really consider NO ball fields. It's a different demographic and use. Or make these closer to main roads / entrances away from shorelines. Also this brings in major in/out turnaround traffic.	
Amy Beall	HACo DPW	Traffic Engineering	<p>Providing areas of interest for visitors - make sure well delineated to protect natural areas that should remain untouched and unaccessible - might be a yellow but educational info for visitors about impacts on destroying areas where prohibited or by littering - leave it better than you found it</p> <p>Laws/legislation designating this area to not be developed - ever!</p>	
Amy Beall	HACo DPW	Traffic Engineering	Keep all depts./groups involved in all aspects. Better for them to say "no comments" than good info that wasn't received.	
Dennis Kirkwood	Harford Bird Club		It appears that the Oakington Pt part of Tydings Park is isolated from the rest. We need to have a connecting corridor for trail purposes and to make the entire property connected.	
Alex Rawls	HACo DPZ	Long Range Planner	Ensuring that there is no disturbance with Wetlands or Critical Area (How much traffic do we want to bring to another peninsula?)	
Iris Barnes	Historian, Educator		Correction needed on page 8 under National Underground Railroad: Eliza's husband's name was William Parker, not John Parker.	virtual meeting chat
Phyllis Grover	City of Aberdeen		The continued protection of the natural/environmental resources is of utmost concern and creating a master plan that incorporates sensitive areas and the history of the peninsula. Goal - to create a unique regional draw for Harford County and MD that preserves this beautiful area.	virtual meeting chat

DISCUSSION / Q&A

SRI'S NOTES TAKEN DURING DISCUSSION AFTER EACH SET OF COMMENTS AND THE Q&A AT THE END OF THE MEETING

Comment	Comment type	Source	Notes
park system should be something that provides a Regional draw not just HdG or the county, but Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington D.C. - that makes it a destination of some sort, think there's an opportunity to make something very unique and very special	Goal/wish	Jackie Sceneshal (Historical Society of Harford County)	
there's a large birding community (Mid-Atlantic area), lots of unique bird sightings already - conversion of farmland could further enhance the bird habitat and biodiversity, and providing a trail system, all could really increase the draw to the peninsula	Goal/wish	Dennis Kirkwood (Harford Bird Club)	
Swan Harbor as a wedding venue - a good thing (a current draw to the peninsula)	Noteworthy (after Goal/wish)	Dennis Kirkwood (Harford Bird Club)	
birding can be a really big draw (Ohio migration time as example of a large draw, now a planned 10-day thing)	Goal/wish	Sue Procell (Harford Bird Club)	
potential for increasing the number of bird species - especially with all the species next-door at APG	Goal/wish	Sue Procell (Harford Bird Club)	
lots of diversity of species at APG, especially because of very limited access to areas there			
Mt. Cuba could serve as a case study for the opportunities at Oakington Peninsula Park System (regional draw); creating an enhanced habitat (as a goal in itself) as a draw; opportunity to enjoy recreationally and ecologically	Goal/wish	Andrew Bodt (HACo DPW)	
Historic resources - not only standing resources, known and but potentially unknown archeological, pre- and post-European contact; of course we have Dr. Barnesworth's, work at Belle Vue Farm and its connection to the Christiana Resistance, but Oakington Farm and Swan Harbor properties also likely have similar histories of enslavement and potentially resistance to that enslavement; Need to increase the known history and documentation; increase the number of stories there are for these properties; really want to tease out more of the historic stories attached to the entire Oakington Peninsula; the history and the stories can also support a regional draw to the park system	Goal/wish	Jacob Bensen (HACo P&Z)	
there was comparison to the Harriet Tubman Interpretive Center in Cambridge in the chat, but not read verbatim	Goal/wish	unknown	virtual meeting chat - incomplete portion in RED
"Thank you Jacob for flushing this out, I do hope that archeological digs would be appropriate for interpretive purposes"	Goal/wish	unknown	virtual meeting chat - incomplete portion in RED
look at the possibility of having a water shuttle service - Perryville, Havre de Grace, with possible landing area at Swan Harbor Farm; there's a channel if you know where it is; (?pontoon boat or other vessel with little draw; water taxi insurance issue?, private contractor?)	Goal/wish	John Narvell (HACo P&R)	

DISCUSSION / Q&A

SRI'S NOTES TAKEN DURING DISCUSSION AFTER EACH SET OF COMMENTS AND THE Q&A AT THE END OF THE MEETING

Comment	Comment type	Source	Notes
possibility for too many car / vehicle traffic within park system possibility for major traffic issues (like what they're seeing at Perry Peninsula)	Concern	Alex Rawls (HACo P&Z)	
Question posed by David Goodwin: If you envision a center. Is the center in your mind on water, have a water component, or just online with a historical component. Or is there two facilities with more historical on one side and a more nature center. (Think at Oregon Ridge)....	Q/A & discussion	David Goodwin (HACo P&R)	
one combined (historic/nature) center with restrooms and maybe an eating facility; separate individual components and then a central piece	Q/A & discussion	Barkley Creighton (HACo DPW)	
one center and/or central point of entry, maybe near the existing roads on the edge of the park system, with little to no vehicle use throughout park, keep to on-foot or trolley system to get into other parts of park (comparison to Magnolia Farms and other historic plantations in the South); then you can have different themes/tours related to the park programing	Q/A & discussion	Jackie Sceneshal (Historical Society of Harford County)	
look at possibility of one point of entry with a trolley/shuttle to different points within	Q/A & discussion	Jackie Sceneshal (Historical Society of Harford County)	
acquiring additional adjoining properties could provide other entry/parking area locations for the park system and the starting point for something like a trolley system within / settlement on another property should happen end of December	Q/A & discussion	David Goodwin / Paul Magness (HACo P&R)	
Chesapeake National Recreation Area Act - it would integrate the Chesapeake Gateways Program that already exists... Opportunity for HdG to have a water launching into the Bay, share the historic, environmental, cultural aspects... but would be a good opportunity, possible federal funding...	Q/A & discussion	Scott McDaniels (Susquehannock Wildlife Society)	
Note that the currently proposed site for the Chesapeake National Recreation Area only goes up to the Annapolis area, so we'd have to work on fixing that,	Q/A & discussion	Janet Gleisner (Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway)	
concern about Ashley's property and how they're going to view all of the potential here, because of what they do, obviously very important, but they prefer to do it in private, but they're going to be surrounded by all this park land... Have they be involved in discussion about this? (Paul Magness answered that, yes, they have had discussion with Ashley, and will continue the conversation)	Q/A & discussion	Dennis Kirkwood (Harford Bird Club)	