

HORSE PARK TASK FORCE
Final Report of Task Force – October 15, 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Task Force was established by Harford County Council Resolution 17-07 and required representatives from various specialized areas relative to business, legal and veterinary services, parks and recreation, and agricultural and equine endeavors. A list of Task Force members reflecting their areas of expertise is attached as Attachment A.

The assignment involved a review of locations, uses, and possible management structures. It was determined that in order to consider locations it was necessary to first develop the list of uses.

USES

The Task Force conducted an in-depth review and discussion on the potential uses of the Horse Park. The facilities required to support the functions of the Horse Park also provide an ideal venue for complementary activities. These diverse events complement facility use and enhance income potential for the Horse Park and economic impact to the region.

The three categories of potential uses are agricultural, non agricultural and recreational. Each category includes both indoor and outdoor uses. Attachment B provides a detailed list of potential uses.

Agricultural uses include equine competitions and events, livestock sales and auctions, farm fairs, farmers' market, agriculture field day events, agriculture educational events, trail riding and cross country competitions.

Non agricultural uses include festivals, concerts, craft shows, vendor showcases, tradeshows, symposia, expositions, dog shows and working dog exhibitions, antique car shows and hot air balloon races. In addition, facilities will be available for meetings, banquets and management offices.

Recreational uses include camping and RV accommodations with comfort stations (restrooms and showers), mountain biking and hiking trails, cross country skiing, picnicking, basketball and volleyball courts, swimming pool, and seasonal events (winter lights festival, haunted forest). Facilities are also available to accommodate corporate events and outings, as well as musical concerts.

The Task Force has identified possible uses which are intended to complement the primary equine and livestock uses of the Horse Park. The list may require modification as the Horse Park development process proceeds.

LOCATION

The Harford County Zoning Code regulates the use of land, including County-owned properties. The broad range of uses identified by the Task Force for potential inclusion in the Horse Park concept would fall into the definition of a “fairgrounds” together with a recreational vehicle park and animal auctions. All three uses are permitted in the Agricultural Zoning District as Special Exceptions. While some of the uses are permitted as special exceptions in business and industrial districts, the Task Force focused on conditions required for these uses in the Agricultural District as this district would be most compatible with the concept. A Special Exception is a class of uses which may be permitted by the Board of Appeals at a specific location in the zoning district, provided that certain requirements are met and the site is determined to be appropriate. Each of the uses is subject to specific requirements as set forth in Chapter 267 of the Harford County Code:

267-53. A. Amusements:

- 3) Fairgrounds, racetracks and theme parks. These uses may be granted in the AG, CI, LI and GI Districts, provided that:
 - (a) A minimum parcel area of seventy-five (75) acres is established
 - (b) The principal access shall be provided from an arterial or collector road.
 - (c) Separate vehicular entrances and exits shall be provided at least four hundred (400) feet away from any road intersection.
 - (d) No buildings or structures, including rides or other apparatus, shall be located less than fifty (50) feet from any parcel boundary or less than two hundred (200) feet from any adjacent residential lot.
 - (e) No automobile parking space shall be located within any required setback area or within fifty (50) feet of any adjacent residential lot.
 - (f) A buffer yard or fifty (50) feet shall be provided adjacent to any residential lot line.

267-53. F. Residential uses:

- 2) Camps, retreats and recreational vehicle parks. These uses may be granted in the AG District, provided that:

- (a) Recreational vehicle parks shall contain electrical and water outlets for individual sites, one (1) or more central sanitary stations, toilets and shower facilities.
- (b) The parcel shall have a minimum frontage of two hundred (200) feet on a collector or arterial road.
- (c) The maximum density permitted shall be ten (10) campsites or rooms per acre, with a minimum campsite size of three thousand (3,000) square feet. All campsites shall be at least fifty (50) feet from any property line.
- (d) One (1) freestanding sign, not more than fifty (50) square feet in area and not more than twenty-five (25) feet in height, shall be permitted along each road frontage. Building-identification signs shall be attached to buildings and shall not exceed a total of ten (10) square feet.
- (e) The only permitted permanent residential occupancy shall be for the resident owner or manager.

267-53. G. Retail trade:

- (3) Auction sales, agricultural related products. These uses may be granted in the AG, VB and B3 Districts, provided that:
 - (a) A minimum parcel area of 3 acres shall be established.
 - (b) No facility for overnight shelter of animals shall be within 200 feet of any adjacent residential lot.

In reviewing the requirements for these Special Exceptions, two conditions were identified for consideration during the site search. The minimum parcel acreage of 75 acres for fairgrounds would clearly be met as the Task Force had determined that a site of 150 acres, more or less would be needed to accommodate the buildings, show rings, pavilions and parking along with the recreation vehicle sites. Access to a collector or arterial road (as defined in the Harford County Transportation Plan) along with the 200 foot frontage for RV parks would limit appropriate sites to those on US Routes or State highways.

To identify potential sites for the Horse Park, The Task Force requested a map identifying Agricultural zoned parcels of greater than 100 acres, which were not subject to Agricultural Preservation Easements through the State or County programs or Maryland Environmental Trust Easements. The group reviewed the properties shown and received more detailed information regarding topography, wetlands and streams on nine possible sites. Six sites were identified as possible locations for the

Horse Park based on access to arterial or collector roads, size and site information. It should be noted that, at this stage of review, no contact with the property owners has been made. Whether the sites would be available for purchase has not been determined nor have any appraisals been performed to determine fair market value. Information was based on the County Geographic Information Systems. The following properties were identified:

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Cass Property | Churchville | 181.6 acres |
| Fairview Farms Property | Creswell | 247.2 acres |
| Paradise Meadows/Noplock Properties | Webster | 297.0 acres |
| Rutledge/Martin Property | Hickory | 306.8 acres |
| Rutledge Property | Hickory | 194.7 acres |
| Schenning Property | Creswell | 253.7 acres |

GIS maps and acreage of each of the listed properties are included as Attachment C.

Swan Harbor Farm and Oakington Farm were previously identified for inclusion in the concept of a Maryland Horse Park under the auspices of the Stadium Authority. A determination of the compatibility of the current concept with the standards of the Program Open Space funds used to purchase the properties would be needed to consider this site. In addition, access would be needed through private properties in the Chesapeake Industrial Park in the City of Havre de Grace for consideration under the standards identified above.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The task force recognizes there are multiple phases to the construction and operation of a horse park in Harford County. Just as there are multiple phases to the establishment of the horse park, the task force believes that there are multiple options for organizational structures to operate a horse park in Harford County.

The initial development of a horse park in Harford County would require the acquisition of a site and the construction of the initial buildings and necessary ancillary structures. The task force believes that the initial outlay of such substantial funding would require some involvement by the County and some county funding. After the purchase of the land and the construction of the initial buildings and ancillary structures, the operation of the facility could be accomplished through the establishment of a revenue authority, the establishment of a non-profit organization, or a combination of both organizational structures.

Harford County has existing enabling legislation to allow the adoption of local legislation creating a revenue authority. Under the enabling legislation, members of the authority would be selected through a process that involves the County Executive, the Harford County Senate and House delegation to the General Assembly and the County Council. The enabling legislation provides that a revenue authority may be established for the purpose of operating any project related to parks and recreational activities. The task force believes that the operation of a horse park would qualify as a parks and recreation activity and therefore permit the creation of a revenue authority for that purpose. The enabling legislation further provides a revenue authority with the power to borrow money and issue revenue bonds. Under the enabling legislation, the County may advance county funds from the general fund to defray expenses of the authority relative to investigations, engineering and architectural studies, opinions, and compensation of employees and counsel. If the County advances funds for these expenses, these advances shall be repaid by the authority out of the first proceeds of the sale of bonds. Likewise, if the County advances funds to pay the deficiency of any debt service of the authority, the advance of such funds shall be repaid by the authority from receipts, rentals, or revenues of the authority. It is important to note that if the County conveys any County owned land to the revenue authority, the authority must pay the County the reasonable value for the property as determined by a state certified independent appraiser. It is important to acknowledge that any bonds, certificates or other indebtedness of the authority does not constitute a debt of the County or State.

A non-profit organization although not able to issue bonds, does have the ability to raise funds through other means. A non-profit corporation may raise revenue by accepting donations (public and private), accepting grants, holding fund raising events. A non-profit organization may also allow membership into its organization thereby raising revenue and obtaining needed volunteers. A non-profit organization may also provide for sponsors to help with the construction of buildings, ancillary facilities and other infrastructure needs. A non-profit organization's membership is not appointed by the government and usually represents a broad spectrum of citizens from all interested groups within the County.

It is recognized that some level of County involvement and funding is required. The next step in development of the Horse Park concept should be a study of the financial implications of this project. This requires the creation of a steering committee comprised of interested parties. The committee shall study the costs of constructing and operating the facility and the potential revenue generated by activities. The creation of the infrastructure to serve a large, multi-use facility will include the purchase of land, construction of indoor and outdoor show rings, stables, pavilions, a racetrack, tractor pull area, access roads and parking lots, and water and sanitary facilities. The use of the site for multi-day equine events requires the availability of recreational vehicle hook-ups to serve participants in addition to the event venue. At

this feasibility stage, a schematic layout should establish the acreage requirements for the site and identify the types and numbers of structures and facilities in a typical project. Cost estimates for construction of the different elements would be very rough, but could provide a framework for decision-making.

A starting point for information on operating costs and revenue sources could be the 2005 Maryland Horse Park Feasibility study. This would need to be updated to reflect current costs and focused on realistic revenue sources for a Harford County Horse Park. The level of activity needed for the park to support its operating expenses and/or support any debt service for construction of infrastructure could be identified and assist in the development of the management structure.

This will be a very time-consuming venture and immediate action by the County Executive and the County Council to appoint the steering committee should proceed without delay.

ATTACHMENT A

**TASK FORCE
ESTABLISHMENT OF
HORSE PARK IN HARFORD COUNTY**

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ATTACHMENT B

PROPOSED HORSE PARK USES

POTENTIAL AGRICUTURAL USES:

Outdoor

Amphitheater and Show Rings
Ag Field Day Events
Trail Riding
Cross Country Competitions
¾ Mile Track
Therapeutic Riding Center

Indoor

Livestock Sales Facility
Stable Complexes for Events
Show Rings
Ag Teaching (Management, Nutrition)
Museum
Memorial Garden and Park

Indoor/Outdoor

Equestrian Competitions and Events: Dressage, Hunter/Jumper, Breed Shows, Carriage Driving, Horse Pulls, Schooling, Pony Club Shows/Clinics, Jousting, Barrel Racing, Cross Country

4H Shows/Clinics
Livestock Shows and Sales
Farm Fairs
Farmers' Market

POTENTIAL NON-AGRICULTURAL USES:

Indoor

Meetings, Banquets, Awards Ceremonies
Management Offices

Outdoor/Indoor

Festivals, Concerts, Craft Shows
Vendor Showcases, Tradeshows, Symposia, Expositions
Dog Shows/Working Dog Exhibitions
Antique Car Shows

POTENTIAL RECREATIONAL USES:

Outdoor

Camping (Tent & Cabin), RV Accommodations
Comfort Stations (Restrooms & Showers)
Mountain Biking & Trails
Cross Country Skiing
Basketball & Volleyball Courts
Picnicking
Swimming Pool
Seasonal Events (Winter Lights Festival, Haunted Forest)
Boat Launch, Kayaking, Canoeing Events (if water access is on site)
Hot Air Balloon Races
Antique Tractor Pulls

Indoor

Musicals Shows and Concerts
Corporate Events and Outings

ATTACHMENT C

PROPOSED LOCATIONS

Cass Property – Churchville
Fairview Farms Property – Creswell
Paradise Meadows/Noplock Properties
Rutledge-Martin Property – Hickory
Rutledge Property South – Hickory
Schenning Property - Creswell

AERIAL AND GIS MAPS

WITH ACREAGE