

Anne Arundel County
Capital Improvement Project # P584607
Quiet Waters Retreat Design
Summary of Comments for Public Meeting Held October 31, 2022

The Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Department of Recreation and Parks thank you for your interest in and attention to the planned Quiet Waters Park Expansion and the Earl Conservation Center.

A Public Meeting was held on October 31, 2022, at the Blue Heron Center at Quiet Waters Parks. The meeting was scheduled and conducted in accordance with the requirements of the County's Office of Planning and Zoning. A copy of the minutes of that meeting, the sign-in sheet, and a copy of the meeting presentation are provided in a separate document.

Both before the October 31, 2022 Public Meeting and for fourteen (14) days after the meeting, the Office of Planning and Zoning, the Department of Public Works (DPW), and the Department of Recreation and Parks (DRP) received questions and comments from thirty-three (33) citizens regarding the project. There was a total of fifty-six (56) participants in the Public Meeting, of which forty-three (43) were residents, and the remaining thirteen (13) attendees included the County Councilwoman, DRP and DPW staff, and members of the design team.

The public comment period ended on November 14, 2022. A complete listing of those comments is provided in a separate document.

Residents asked many questions or a variety of concerns. In an effort to address the overarching themes of the questions, The County offers the following summary of questions posed and synopses of the answers:

Land Use

- *Who owns this land?*
- *Why isn't the entire property being used for the park?*
- *How does the Chesapeake Conservancy get to build here?*
- *Does the zoning for the property permit a building like the Earl Center?*
- *What happens if the Conservancy leaves?*

The Park is owned by Anne Arundel County and managed by The Department of Recreation and Parks. The property was purchased by the County using funding provided by the County, by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Program Open Space, by the U.S. Navy's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, and by The Chesapeake Conservancy.

A vast majority of the 19.4-acre park expansion is being used for park use. The County Council unanimously agreed to lease 5.82 acres to The Chesapeake Conservancy to develop what is now called the Earl Conservation Center. The lease term is for a period of thirty (30) years, with provisions for two (2) extensions of thirty (30) years each. Upon completion and occupancy of

the Earl Center building, the lease area narrows significantly, to less than 10,000 square feet - only the actual footprint of the building. The land remains property of the County and the end of the lease the ownership of the building and any improvements become the property of the County.

The County partnered with the Chesapeake Conservancy because the missions of both parties are aligned toward land conservation efforts. The County and the Conservancy are working to improve the former retreat property in a way that will benefit the County, the Conservancy, and the local community. The concept for the retreat area is to develop an environmental immersion area through the exploration of interpretive trails, taking in the scenery at the overlooks coupled with intentional plantings, and creating areas to view and enjoy nature in an unobstructed way.

There are a number of covenants and restrictions placed upon the property and the Earl Center. The terms of the agreement for funding by U.S. Navy's REPI program require the land to be used for passive recreation, with no active recreation other than a playground, permitted. The Navy agreement allows for the office space to be constructed for the use of non-profit and similar conservation organizations. This restriction aligns with Anne Arundel County zoning regulations which permits properties that are zoned for Residential use, as is the former retreat property, to be used for offices for non-profit organizations. The REPI agreement limits the total buildings constructed on the property to 15,414 square feet, except pavilions and picnic shelters and further requires that the total amount of impervious surfaces (buildings, paved roads and parking, sidewalks, etc.) never exceed two percent (2%) of the total parcel size. The 13.2 acres of the property which were purchased using funds provided through Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Program Open Space, are subject to a perpetual covenant that the land may not be used for any purpose other than public recreation or public open space.

In the current plan, critical environmental areas are being preserved, and new structures will be located outside of the critical area boundary and buffers. The Conservancy will bring some of the best minds in conservation to the retreat area to create new ways to advance the preservation of our natural resources.

This expansion will allow the County to increase the park's overall area, create new passive recreational activities in the park such as ADA-accessible walking trails, removal of invasive and non-native plants, restoration and creation of meadows, reforestation to replace trees lost to disease and storms, wildlife habitat observation areas, a new picnic pavilion, and new comfort station. Additional work on the former retreat property will include the stabilization of the shoreline on both the South River and Loden Pond, to prevent further erosion and facilitate expanded programming to include staff-guided canoe and kayak tours. This purchase helped to ensure the biodiversity in Loden Pond.

Traffic/Circulation

- *How will people access the Earl Center?*

- *What about the Forest Hill Avenue?*
- *Why does the park road need to be extended?*
- *Did the County do a traffic study?*
- *Where will construction traffic go?*
- *Can the County stop park visitors from parking on Forest Hill?*

Vehicular access to the expanded section of Quiet Waters Park will be via the existing park road system. The current entrance to Quiet Waters Park off of Hillsmere Drive will remain the primary entrance for everyone coming to the Park. The road will be extended from a point near the existing Dog Park, into the new parcel and ending at a new parking lot adjacent to the Earl Center. In addition to the 28-car parking lot at the Earl Center, the project adds a small parking lot adjacent to the new maintenance shed and expands the existing parking lot by the dog park to accommodate visitors to the expanded portion of the park. In addition to providing access to the new features in the Park, County is obligated to provide the roadway to the Earl Center.

The existing gated entrance on Forest Hill Drive, which has served as the primary entrance to the retreat property, will become an emergency access entrance following construction. The gate will be equipped with a Knox box locking system to allow for police and fire access. Regular traffic will continue to enter the Park and access the Earl Center via the existing Park entrance on Hillsmere Drive. During construction of the Earl Conservation Center building and the various park improvements, the Forest Hill Drive gate will be used for construction access. The Department of Public Works will have a full-time manager/inspector assigned to the project during construction and they will monitor and control construction traffic and mitigate any impacts to the surrounding area.

The Department of Public Works is presently performing a traffic impact analysis study to evaluate the impacts, if any, of the Park expansion and Earl Center projects, on the public streets around the Park. Additionally, following the October 31, 2022 Public Meeting, DRP shared with the Traffic Engineering Division (TED) of the Department of Public Works the Hillsmere Community's concerns regarding parking along Forest Hills Drive. DRP has asked the TED to work with the community to see if there are alternative solutions available. The DRP has no authority over signage or use of public roads.

Quiet Waters Park Operations

- *Is the project is consistent with the Master Plan for Quiet Waters Park?*
- *Will concerts and skating be maintained?*
- *Will the Conservancy staff have to leave by 4:00?*
- *How will security be maintained*
- *Will the Park be closed during construction?*
- *Will the County maintain the Earl Center building?*
- *Will there be water if there's another fire?*

Since the retreat property was not owned by the County at the time, there was no planning for the parcel completed for the original Quiet Waters Park master plan. The development of this 19-plus acre parcel does align with the Department's mission to provide access to public land in Anne Arundel County. The plan calls for expanded opportunities for passive recreation, which

supports the original Master Plan. Fully accessible walking paths, new nature trails, wildlife observation and scenic overlook areas, a restroom facility and small pavilion used for educational programming all support the 1989 planning precepts.

There is no plan to change the existing operations at Quiet Waters Park. In addition to concerts and ice skating, the Park will continue to offer Ranger-led hikes and educational and interpretive programs year round. The existing art galleries, private events at the Blue Heron Center, and special community events like Art @the Park and the Earth Day 5K will not be affected by the Park expansion.

The County, in conjunction with the Chesapeake Conservancy, is continuing to develop operational plans to address such issues as after-hours access. The park will continue to close at sunset daily and there has been no discussion of any deadlines for Conservancy staff. Should the Conservancy need to schedule after-hours meetings, events, etc., those plans will be reviewed approved by the Park Superintendent in advance. This is consistent with current Park operations. In addition to after-hours ice skating and Blue Heron Center events, there are often evening meetings, such as the Friends of Quiet Waters Park's monthly Board Meetings, that are scheduled outside of normal operating hours.

Park Rangers will patrol the expanded property in the same manner and schedule as they do at Quiet Waters Park currently.

Quiet Waters Park will remain open during construction. Visitors to the retreat area may encounter notices and barricades that specific areas are temporarily closed to the public for construction. DRP expects this practice to be similar to the recent trail paving project at QWP. The safety of park visitors is of paramount importance.

Care and maintenance of the Earl Center building will be the responsibility of the Conservancy, in accordance with the provisions of the lease agreement. Park staff will maintain the grounds, trail network, comfort station, pavilion and other park amenities.

Water supply was not the challenge with the fire that occurred on the retreat property in 2020; access to the property was. The Anne Arundel County Fire Department had difficulty getting tanker trucks onto the property due to inadequate roadways. The new Earl Center building will include sufficient stored water for fire protection use. With the park expansion and development of the Earl Conservation Center, improvements are planned to remedy the fire department's access concerns. Access for emergency vehicles is provided via a grass-paved emergency road from Forest Hill Drive and accessed through the emergency access gate.

Environmental Concerns

- *How many trees will be removed as part of this project?*
- *Is this building allowed in the Critical Area?*
- *Will the development impact the waterfront*

The development of the Quiet Water Park Expansion which includes the Chesapeake Conservancy's Earl Conservation Center will encompass an area in the southern portion of the existing Park and extending onto the 19-acre former retreat property. The project area is located within the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, with portions falling within Resource Conservation Areas (RCA) and Limited Development Areas (LDA). Much of the project area adjacent to the South River waterfront consists of steep slopes (greater than 15%). Due to the presence of these areas of steep slopes, the typical 100' Critical Area Buffer is expanded on the project site to encompass adjacent slope areas extending to more than 100' from the mean high-water line. Approximately 70% of the project site is forested, with the presence of 51 specimen trees identified. The proposed project development will limit environmental impacts to the greatest extent possible but anticipates impacts to the expanded buffer, steep slopes, removal of approximately 0.7-acres of forest inside the buffer, and removal of three (3) specimen trees. The County will mitigate any trees lost by planting new trees in both the expanded park area and in areas within the existing Quiet Waters Park.

The shorelines along the South River and on Loden Pond will be evaluated in a subsequent phase of the expansion project. The County is looking to provide long-term erosion protection, likely through the creation of a living shoreline along the South River frontage. The shores on Loden Pond will be similarly studied and improvements made as required to support the long-term health of the pond. The existing boathouse on Loden Pond will provide water access for public observation and interpretive points on the pond.

The design consultants have already contacted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Critical Area Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Historical Trust to solicit input. These and other agencies are expected to be involved in the continuing design and permitting efforts.

Cost

- *What is the total cost of the proposed facility to build and install?*

The County is funding the development of the park amenities, and the Conservancy is funding the construction related to their building. Based on the Schematic Design, the County's estimated cost associated with the development of the retreat area to be \$4-\$5 million.