

THE FRONT PAGE

News & Views You Can Use

ANNE ARUNDEL SITE SELECTED FOR HORSE PARK STUDY

A Tale of Two Sites

It has been a long, interesting, occasionally cantankerous and always emotional six weeks for the Maryland Horse Park site selection committee as it tried to determine which of the final two sites (Anne Arundel's Navy Dairy Farm or Cecil's Fair Hill) would be the focus of the proposed feasibility study.

The two sites really could not have been more different.

Fair Hill Not the Fairest of Them All

For all intents and purposes, Fair Hill is a horse park, hosting everything from local 4-H shows to some of the most prestigious international competitions in the world. Short of an indoor, Fair Hill already boasted every other amenity required to be "the" state Horse Park – although, admittedly, some of the barns could be rehabbed, and more barns added. From a financial standpoint, Fair Hill would have required minimal initial capital investment compared to a site that will be built from scratch. Fair Hill would definitely have been the short term, fiscally conservative choice, with the minimal amount of environmental impact, as any improvements would have used less than .05% of the 5,000-plus acre park.

But what currently bedevils the organizers of Fair Hill International would continue to bedevil the management of "the" Maryland Horse Park: lack of an easily identifiable urban audience that could not only embrace the activities as spectators, but could provide that oh-so-critical sponsorship and other economic support. Compounding this would be the siphoning of hotel, restaurant and

fuel station revenues by Delaware businesses, thereby ensuring that our neighbor reaped the benefits of our investment. And you know, they already have slots; what more do they want from us? Of course, Delaware was quite supportive!

However supportive our free-loading neighbor might have been, the natives were not so supportive. Yes, the elected officials and the business leaders in Cecil County were supportive, but not so the citizens. Over 400 attended the September 19 public hearing in North East, and the very vocal majority expressed its opposition – vociferously.

The hearing's organizers, fearing a mob scene, made the unfortunate decision to format the meeting as a brainstorming session, using hired moderators to lead the audience through one-word expressions of their feelings in order to build a consensus. Alas, this backfired, as the audience felt that this was a diversionary tactic to separate them from the decision makers. They were offended, and rightly so. They deserved answers, they deserved to be able to listen to the commissioners who supported the county's bid, and they deserved the right to direct their questions to the Stadium Authority and site selection committee members. Even if the committee could not provide answers to all those questions, the citizens deserved the right to ask them. If the answer was, "We do not know yet," so be it. But to be treated like a class of first graders was downright insulting, and when the moderators said, "Please give one-word reasons why you LIKE the Horse Park proposal," the crowd damn near rioted. As well they should have, because there had been no presentation

of the proposal. The moderators' pleas for audience members to "please read the handout, or go to the website" were patently absurd. Those people were there to have the county commissioners, the Stadium Authority and the site selection committee members explain their vision.

Eventually, organizers realized the error of their ways, and Stadium Authority Executive Director Alison Asti (herself a horsewoman), stepped forward to answer questions. The evening ended better than it started, but the hearing organizers lost a lot of credibility with the audience due to their misguided approach.

Although it has not been anointed THE Maryland Horse Park, as stated earlier, Fair Hill has served as the *defacto* Maryland Horse Park for decades, hosting world championship competitions in eventing, driving, and endurance, as well as steeplechase racing, local shows and trail riding activities. Fair Hill has already played a critical role in elevating Maryland's status within the international equestrian community, and is most certainly one of the reasons we have such a large, diverse and thriving sport horse industry.

And Fair Hill has done all this without the recognition of Maryland's elected officials, without the capital investment being discussed for THE Maryland Horse Park.

Like the trophy wife for whom the faithful wife and mother of 30 years is discarded, we do worry that all the buzz surrounding the shiny new toy – THE Maryland Horse Park – will siphon what little attention and support Fair Hill is currently receiving. But Rob Burk, executive director of the Maryland Horse Industry Board, believes

that Cecil County elected officials are now more aware of and more supportive of Fair Hill than ever before, and that they will help to ensure that Fair Hill gets the attention and support it deserves.

The Navy Dairy Farm

Well, if Fair Hill had the support of its county leaders but not its citizens, the Navy Dairy Farm had the opposite problem, as, by and large, Anne Arundel citizens were enthusiastically supportive, while County Executive Janet Owen was opposed.

The original Anne Arundel proposal included the old campus of a former mental institution known as Crownsville Hospital. Janet Owen was opposed to this site for numerous environmental reasons, and the site selection committee also found it by and large unsuitable, choosing instead to focus on the Navy Dairy Farm. Still, Owens was recalcitrant, gun-shy about being accused of supporting an elitist boondoggle and sticking the citizens with the bill – as had happened earlier with an ill-conceived golf course. Supporters worked very hard to convince Owens that the fiscal structure of this project bears no resemblance to the fiscal structure of the golf course debacle, and eventually the county executive gave her grudging support to the Horse Park proposal.

Unlike Fair Hill, which is owned by the state of Maryland, the dairy farm is owned by the United States Navy, subject to federal restrictions, and therefore mired in a web of bureaucratic red tape. In order to convince the site selection committee that the red tape could be overcome, local horse people had to mount an aggressive grassroots campaign, pulling every chit and

(continued)

every favor that they could to expedite the untangling of the red tape.

In the meantime, the Anne Arundel County hearing was very civilized, with the majority of attendees supportive. Those opposed were primarily neighbors concerned about traffic and noise. The site selection committee took careful notes of their concerns.

What Fair Hill lacks in location, the 800-acre dairy farm has in spades, sitting in the middle of the D.C.-Baltimore-Annapolis triangle and providing the opportunity to develop a strong urban identity for spectators and sponsors. Highways, restaurants, hotels, gas stations – all the necessary infrastructure is not only already there, it is all in our own state, ensuring that Maryland reaps the intended residual fiscal rewards.

Not Yet a Horse Park

The Navy Dairy Farm site was recommended unanimously by the Selection Committee, which consists of Alison L. Asti, executive director, Maryland Stadium Authority; Gary A. McGuigan, project executive, Maryland Stadium Authority; Dennis M. Castleman, assistant secretary, Department of Business and Economic Development; Sue Kenney, project manager, Department of Business and Economic Development; James B. Steele, chairman, Horse Industry Board; Charles C. Fenwick, Jr.; and Gregory Gingery. It was approved by the Maryland Stadium Authority board on October 10.

NO TIME TO REST

If you are supportive of the Horse Park, then it is crucial that Anne Arundel County elected officials know that you are supportive, because – as they say – “it ain’t over until it’s over.” Assessing the county’s official support will be a crucial component of the feasibility study, and – as explained elsewhere – the County Executive is supportive but lukewarm. Other leaders will look to her for their lead.

To contact Anne Arundel County officials, please visit *The Equiery* and click on Anne Arundel County.

The Maryland Stadium Authority has engaged a design partnership firm of Richter Cornbrooks Gribble Inc./Gh2 Gralla Architects LLC to prepare a conceptual design and analyze infrastructure needs. Additionally, KPMG has been engaged to prepare an economic impact analysis.

“The Maryland Stadium Authority looks forward to working with RCG and Gralla Architects, a nationally recognized equestrian architect, to evaluate the feasibility and cost of the project. If the studies demonstrate that the project is feasible, the Authority hopes to introduce authorizing legislation to finance the project during the 2006 session of the Maryland General Assembly,” said Gary A. McGuigan, project executive of the Maryland Stadium Authority.

The feasibility study will provide the U.S. Navy with the detailed information it needs to determine whether the proposed use is compatible with its desire to retain the property’s rural and agricultural nature while meeting the Navy’s economic needs. It will also provide the county and state with a detailed economic impact analysis.

As Jim Steele reiterated, “This is not yet ‘the’ Horse Park; this is the site selected for a feasibility study to determine if the site is suitable to BE the Horse Park.”

Horses Included in National Animal Identification System

According to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, the state launched its part of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) last month with a mailing to Maryland livestock producers, including horse owners.

NAIS is the national livestock identification program initiated to establish important safeguards against the spread of animal disease.

“A number of horse owners have called us to ask if horses and ponies are included in the National Animal Identification System,” said secretary Lewis R. Riley. “The answer is ‘yes.’ Horses and ponies are an important part of our animal health program and are included in the NAIS premises registration effort, along with cattle, llamas, swine, sheep and other livestock. Companion animals such as cats and dogs

are excluded, as is commercial poultry.”

The NAIS program is designed to protect animal health by making it possible to trace the movement of the individual animals back to their birth herds should there be an animal disease situation. The first phase is to identify all livestock premises (farms, grazing areas, livestock markets, slaughter establishments, and veterinary clinics). The second phase, which will be implemented at a later date, will be to identify all livestock animals. At this time, NAIS is a voluntary program; however, by 2007, under the United States Department of Agriculture strategic plan, the program will be mandatory for both production site identification and animal identification.

Producers receiving the materials can register by completing the forms and returning them to MDA headquarters in Annapolis, or they can go to www.mda.state.md.us/animal_health/nais/ and register online. Once registration forms have been processed, livestock producers will receive an NAIS Premise ID number.

For more information about the NAIS program in Maryland and the premises identification process, contact Marilyn Bassford at 410-742-6023 or nais@mda.state.md.us, or visit http://www.mda.state.md.us/animal_health/nais/.



WE GET MAIL!

Dear Maryland Horse People:

Magna Corporation has decided to limit the number of racing days at Laurel and Pimlico racetracks next year, continuing the downward slide of Maryland’s once-great horse racing industry. This is something that I am all too familiar with. As the owner of a feed store, I have seen several of my customers leave and take their operations to Delaware and West Virginia.

As a member of the General Assembly, I was the co-lead sponsor of a slots bill that I believe would have funded both purses and [Maryland-]bred funds to the levels they must be to compete with surrounding states. Unfortunately, this bill, like all other slots bills, did not make it to the governor’s desk for his signature.

In Annapolis, I have tried to explain the importance of the horse industry to my fellow legislators. I have also attempted to illustrate what I see as a growing trend of racing and breeding operations closing down in this state and moving elsewhere. Many of the examples I cite are only reflective of situations I know of. That is why I am writing to you. I want to describe to each one of my colleagues true-life situations involving breeders, trainers, and owners from their individual districts. I want them to see how this crisis is affecting their constituents.

Now is the time for you to communicate with your legislators on how this is affecting your life. Please write to me with your story [about] how not having slots has affected you. I will be sure to forward your comments directly to all legislators. I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. Feel free to call me directly with any questions or concerns at 410-241-9507. With best regards, I remain,

Respectfully yours,

J.B. Jennings
Member, House of Delegates
Owner, Maryland Feed

.....

Dear Equiery:

We’ve gotten GREAT response from your magazine!!! We always ask people who call in where they heard about us and MOST of them say they saw us in *The Equiery*.

Thank you,

Jill Siragusa
Sales & Marketing Administrator
Horizon Structures

CLARIFICATION: The image published on p. 28 of the October issue – which resembled a Coggins report – actually depicted a portion of an equine passport. ■