



ONE COMMON BOND—THE HORSE; ONE COMMON VOICE—MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

MHC UPDATE

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THE MARYLAND HORSE PARK – MAKING SAUSAGE OR MAKING PROGRESS?

by Timothy Capps, executive committee member

The age-old adage that watching legislation and sausage being made are similar exercises, and oftentimes equally distasteful, might be an apt description of the activity surrounding efforts to move forward with the Maryland Horse Park at the selected Anne Arundel County site, the erstwhile U.S. Naval Academy Dairy Farm.

Used for most of its existence to supply dairy products to the midshipmen and staff at the Naval Academy, the farm has been operated on a lease basis in recent years while the Department of the Navy pondered its long-term usage. When the Maryland Horse Industry Board and the Maryland Stadium Authority began doing due diligence on possible Horse Park sites in the spring of 2005, this site was identified as the best possible location for a world-class equestrian facility -- one that would not only support local equine events, but could attract larger such activities and would be a tourist attraction in the Baltimore-Washington corridor, an area that attracts 27 million visitors a year and is one of the nation's most "touristy" locations.

Its 860 acres and prime location would provide ample space for construction of the necessary facilities, also positioning the park to generate more than \$9 million a year in local and state taxes and approximately \$200 million in economic impact to the county and state. In other words, a Maryland Horse Park in that location would not only preserve a beautiful piece of green space, it would maintain the land's agricultural heritage and be an economic boon to the local community and a meaningful new attraction for the state.

Getting from concept to reality is, of course, the challenge, and to say that this is a work in progress is to understate matters. The MSA, after going through a site evaluation process that included potential locations in five other jurisdictions, has been working on several tracks simultaneously, including site facilities planning, traffic analysis and economic impact studies. While much has been accomplished in a short time frame, working with state and local governments and their various budget cycles, not to mention the ever-present reminder that 2006 is an election year, is a complex task.

The governor has been supportive of the Horse Park idea, but is reluctant to push aggressively forward without the strong support of the local jurisdiction involved. The current AA county executive, Janet Owens, has been cautious in offering such support, partly because she wants clarity on the project's costs to the county and its potential economic return, and partly because she is leaving office this year and there will be a new county executive elected in November. Among the would-be county executives, the various candidates have disparate views on the Horse Park plan, with two

of them, Delegate John Leopold and County Parks and Recreation Director Dennis Callahan, having indicated they are opposed to the idea. It is not clear whether their stated opposition is based on legitimate analysis of the project or election year pandering to the members of the local community who oppose the Horse Park simply because they want it someplace else. Delegate David Boschert, also a declared candidate for county executive, is from the district where the Dairy Farm is located and is a supporter of the idea.

And what of the community opposition? Most of it seems to be rooted in the "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) camp, with some people suddenly becoming advocates of organic farming and others looking around for other agricultural alternatives. One thing is certain: The Navy will not permit the *status quo* for much longer. While the bureaucratic wheels may turn slowly, the Dairy Farm's future will be decided, likely over the next several months now that it is in play, and the would-be suitors appear to include a group who would operate a gravel pit on the site and residential housing developers, as well as the organic farmers. Thus, the neighbors of the Dairy Farm will almost certainly be dealing with an alternative use to the site in the near future, based on decisions by the Navy that have to be mindful of federal law, which dictates that the site have an agriculturally-based use.

To be fair, those who live closest to the property certainly have a vested interest in what is done there, and their elected officials have to heed to their concerns, most of which seem to be regarding noise, additional traffic and nighttime usage of the facility if a Horse Park -- or anything else for that matter -- were to be built on the site. There are ongoing community meetings with MSA representatives and Horse Park advocates to provide information dealing with those concerns. There are also meetings with county officials and legislators from the county to keep them informed.

On the all-important legislative front, the governor DID NOT include the Horse Park in his capital budget request for the next fiscal cycle, beginning in July of this year, so there will be no formal legislative action on the full project in the 2006 session. However, there are members of the Anne Arundel County delegation who have indicated interest in sponsoring either a bond bill or legislative resolution on behalf of the park.

The bond bill would not provide the ultimate bond authority that the MSA and the county would require in order to start moving dirt and hiring contractors. It would, however, provide funding to allow the Navy, the MSA and the county to continue to negotiate the specific details of the project in anticipation of reaching a conclusion that would facilitate action in the 2007 legislative session. Likewise, the resolution, which would not

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bind the county or state to a final outcome, would nonetheless set the stage for continuing negotiations with the Navy and the county, again in anticipation of an outcome to be determined in the next legislative session.

Thoroughly confused?

Here's what you can do:

-Stay in touch with the issue through the Maryland Horse Industry Board website, www.marylandhorseindustry.org, or www.MDHorsePark.info, a site set up by Anne Arundel county Horse Park advocates that contains frequently asked questions and answers, and factual information from the MHIB and the MSA.

-If you live in Anne Arundel County, contact your local county council members and legislative representatives or other county of-

ficials to discuss the idea and any concerns they have. Ask them to support the legislative effort, whether a bond bill or a resolution, to permit further negotiation between the government entities.

-If you live elsewhere in the state, contact your local legislator and inform them about the project while asking for their support of the bond bill/resolution. Explain to them that this idea will be a significant addition to the state's tourist and recreational attractions and a meaningful advancement for the Maryland horse industry.

-Contribute to the Horse Park Fund to help underwrite efforts (see next page).

Now that the Maryland Horse Park dream is alive and active, it is up to the state's horse industry — each of us — to do our part to turn the dream into a ribbon-cutting ceremony. ■

Fund Drive for the Campaign for the Maryland Horse Park

Thank you for your contribution to the Maryland Horse Council's drive for the Maryland Horse Park. Your contribution will make it possible for the Maryland Horse Council to hire lobbyists as needed and to underwrite the expenses associated with the public information and grassroots campaign. The goal of the campaign is to educate elected officials as well as the citizens of Maryland about the benefits a Maryland Horse Park will bring, not just to the horse people, but to the entire state of Maryland.

Name: _____

Farm or Business Name: _____

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City/State/Zip: _____

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- You can use my name on a list of supporters
- I prefer that my financial support remain anonymous
- I am willing to testify
- I am willing to help with fundraising
- I am willing to call my legislators

Amount of Contribution: _____

Checks should be made payable to

Maryland Horse Council – Horse Park Fund
P.O. Box 233 • Lisbon, MD 21765

All contributors of \$100 or more will receive a free one-year subscription to *The Equiry*.

The Maryland Horse Council is an umbrella association for all Maryland horse organizations. The Maryland Horse Council is a 501(c)(6) organization. Contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law; consult your tax professional for more information. Any funds remaining after the successful implementation of a Horse Park will be used for other state lobbying efforts to benefit the equestrian community.

Member Associations

Carroll County Equestrian Council; Chesapeake Plantation Walking Horse Club; Cloverleaf Standardbred Owners Association; Days End Farm Horse Rescue, Inc.; Elkridge-Harford Hunt; Equine Rescue and Rehabilitation, Inc.; Fair Hill International; Howard County Iron Bridge Hounds; Humane Society of Carroll County; League of Maryland Horsemen; Marlborough Hounds; Maryland 4-H Foundation; Maryland Association for Wildlife Conservation; Maryland Association of Equine Practitioners; Maryland Combined Training Association; Maryland Council of Equestrian Therapies; Maryland Dressage Association; Maryland Equestrian Foundation/Rosaryville Conservancy; Maryland Farriers Association; Maryland Horse Breeders Association; Maryland Horse Shows Assoc.; Maryland Jockey Club; Maryland Standardbred Breeders Assoc.; Maryland State Quarter Horse Association; Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, Inc.; Mid-Atlantic Saddlebred Association; MidAtlantic Farm Credit; New Market Middletown Valley Hounds; Pasadena Horse and Pony Club; Plantation Walking Horses of Maryland; Potomac Hunt Club; Potomac Valley Dressage Association; Trail Riders of Today; Tuckahoe Equestrian Center; Wicomico Hunt