



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
-PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB Item #1  
5/8/03

9500 Brunett Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

April 29, 2003

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Lester L. Straw, Superintendent of Parks  
Michael F. Riley, Acting Chief, Park Development Division  
Douglas Alexander, Supervisor, Design and Project Management

FROM: Linda Komes, Project Manager

SUBJECT: Rickman Farm Horse Park Development Plan

**I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

- 1) Approval of a Park Development Plan for the Rickman Farm Horse Park
- 2) Initiate Design for the Therapeutic Riding Center, Phase I

**II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND**

A. Introduction

In 1997, William M. Rickman, Sr. donated a 100-acre farm located on the west side of Bucklodge Road in Boyds, Maryland to the M-NCPPC. The park was named the Rickman Farm Horse Park to reflect the intent of Mr. Rickman. Access to the site is currently provided via a twelve-foot-wide driveway off of Moore Road. A PEPCO transmission line easement borders the site to the north and a buried Columbia Natural Gas pipeline transverses the northwest corner of the site.

The largest building in the park is the pre-fabricated metal Arena building ("the Arena"). The 100 x 200 foot-wide building was originally built as a warehouse at another location before it was dismantled, moved to the farm, and reassembled for farm and construction equipment storage. A stable addition consisting of 16 horse stalls was added to the north side of the building. A small residential addition was also added to the south side of the building, but was not completed. In addition to the Arena building, the park includes two barns - a two-level bank barn and a single-level, eight-stall horse barn with attached room and bath, a two-level house (the "Chalet") which is divided into two apartments that are currently leased by the Commission, three run-in sheds, the historic Joseph White House, and a number of fenced paddock areas.

The Joseph White House, circa 1822, is historically and culturally significant. The house is a rare example of formal Georgian architecture in Montgomery County and contains a number of sophisticated architectural elements. It is one of the few brick structures still in existence that utilized local Seneca stone. The Whites, a prominent family in the County for generations, were successful tobacco and wheat farmers, and were important contributors to the agricultural reform practices in the early 1800's. The family included Civil War officer Elijah Veir White, for whom White's Ferry was named. The family owned the property for over 160 years. The entire 100-acre site is considered the historic setting for the Joseph White House.

In 1988, Montgomery County issued a condemnation notice for the Joseph White House citing an overflowing septic system, unapproved potable water source, electrical hazards, structural damage and deterioration, and an inoperable heat system. Since ownership in 1997, M-NCPPC has attempted to stabilize the structure by installing a new roof and extensively repointing the exterior brickwork. A contract for design/build services to stabilize and rehabilitate the structure's mechanical and structural systems to an office standard was executed in March 2003. The work will be paid for in part by a \$200,000 grant from the Maryland General Assembly obtained in 1998, and with an additional \$125,000 from a Special Projects Fund. The rehabilitation is expected to be completed in the Summer of 2004.

#### B. Park Development Program

From the time of the park's inception it was intended that the park would be developed by means of a private/public partnership. In 1998 the Rickman Farm Horse Park Strategic Planning Committee formed and developed a mission statement focusing on expanding public access to horses and set three major program goals to guide development of the park. The program goals were to provide a therapeutic riding program, an equine rescue facility, and a program for youth-at-risk in cooperation with the County juvenile justice system. The Committee was also integral in obtaining the existing funding to develop the park. In 1999 the Committee applied for status as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation and was renamed the Rickman Farm Horse Park Foundation.

In June of 1999, an Amendment to the FY 99-04 CIP and a Supplemental Appropriation to the FY00 capital budget for \$475,000 for the Rickman Farm Horse Park was requested by M-NCPPC and approved by the County Council. The \$475,000 included spending authorization for the \$200,000 State grant for the restoration of the Joseph White House and \$275,000 of County funds to fund the construction of a Therapeutic Riding Center. At the time, the PHED Committee noted that the total cost and scope of the project was not clearly delineated, included language in the PDF which required that the Commission brief the PHED Committee on the full costs of construction after completing planning and design work. The Committee also established spending priorities in the PDF. The priorities are (1) utilities to serve the site, (2) interior improvements in the arena to accommodate therapeutic riding programs, (3) classroom addition to the arena in support of the therapeutic riding program, (4) accessibility, and (5) any site improvements that can be accomplished with remaining funds, if any.

In June 2001, the Rickman Farm Horse Park Foundation and the M-NCPPC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU formalized the relationship of the public/private partnership and outlined the responsibility of each entity in the development of the Park.

### III. SITE DEVELOPMENT

#### A. Site Improvements

Various areas of the site underwent water table and percolation testing in order to find an area appropriate for a septic field. One suitable area was located in the northwest area of the site. Since the testing was completed, the M-NCPPC survey crew completed a topographic survey of a large portion of the park property and Ali Khan, a M-NCPPC civil engineer, designed a septic system and will design all site improvements including the parking lot, stormwater management, and sediment and erosion control. The septic system will provide septic service to the Arena building, the northern bank barn, and to the Joseph White House, and will be constructed by the Central Maintenance Division of M-NCPPC. The septic system is anticipated to be completed in the summer of 2003. An existing septic system services the existing "Chalet".

In September 2002, the Natural Resources Division approved a Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) and a Forest Stand Delineation (FSD). The NRI/FSD was required before the permit to construct the septic field could be granted. A Sediment and Erosion Control permit was granted by MCDEP in October 2002. A Forest Conservation Plan is required and will be prepared by M-NCPPC staff.

In August 2002, the two operating wells on the property were tested. One of the wells provides water to the bank barns and to the Arena, while the remaining well services the "Chalet". Both wells are pumping at approximately two gallons per minute. This rate is insufficient to meet the anticipated demand. In addition, the well servicing the existing "Chalet" was found to be contaminated and has since been treated.

A permit to dig a new well was granted by Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services and the State of Maryland in March 2003. The well is anticipated to be dug in May 2003. The well drilling contractor has identified two possible locations for the well. A new well was apparently dug by Mr. Rickman in the vicinity of the Joseph White House in 1995. The well has been located and is capped. The identification tag on the well states that the well was providing water at six gallons per minute. It is anticipated that this well will be sufficient to provide water to the Joseph White House following rehabilitation of the structure.

Because the Arena building was built in an agricultural zone for an agricultural use, a building permit was not originally required. In order to rehabilitate the buildings for use as a therapeutic riding facility it is necessary to obtain a Use and Occupancy permit. A continuing challenge has been to understand what improvements must be made to the building and to the site in order to receive these permits and what the projected costs of these improvements will be. In addition, because therapeutic riding is a use with specific needs, it was clear that a consultant with this specific expertise was needed.

#### B. Park Development Plan Process

In November 2002, M-NCPPC hired Blackburn Architects, a firm specializing in the design of equestrian facilities, to assist in the design and planning of the park and the therapeutic riding facility. In order to expedite the opening of the Therapeutic Riding Center, the team focused on determining the improvements necessary in order to open a therapeutic riding center. Because the available funding is limited, a Phase I Facility Plan, which consists of only those essential building and site improvements which must be made in order to obtain a building/use and

occupancy permit and ready the site for therapeutic riding use, have been included. In determining the specific code and program related improvements for the therapeutic riding center, it was clear many of the necessary decisions regarding issues such as access, stormwater management, forest conservation, and water and sewer, had impacts on the overall future development of the park. To better guide these decisions an overall Park Development Plan was created.

The Park Development Plan is for the entire 100-acre site. The plans indicate the location of a possible second park entrance road located off of Bucklodge Road. The specific location of the access point was determined by the Maryland State Highway Administration and is based on sight distance. Because it has not yet been determined whether the Joseph White House will be utilized as a residence or for a commercial use, the location and size of the possible future parking area as shown on the Park Development Plan is conceptual and may change. A small parking area is also conceptually located near the two barns in anticipation that the future Youth at Risk and Equine Rescue Programs may occupy part or all of these structures. It is also possible that these programs could occupy office space within the Joseph White House. The Park Development Plan also identifies areas for stormwater management, the location of the approved septic system, an additional outdoor arena, overflow parking area, an area for future stable expansion, and paddock areas.

The proposed Phase I improvements to the Arena building consist of: electrical upgrades; telephone service; grading, base, footing, and kickwalls for the indoor riding area; improved lighting and ventilation; suspended ceiling heaters; stall flooring improvements and window replacement; renovation of the existing Addition to include two restrooms (one accessible); an office; waiting area/classroom; and kitchenette. Repair of the bank barn will also be necessary in order to enable it to be safely used for hay and equipment storage.

Identified Phase I site improvements, in addition to the new septic and well system already discussed, include: a water distribution/fire suppression system; gravel parking lot with truck turnaround and asphalt-paved handicap parking spaces; lighting; repair/replace paddock fencing; muck pit; and an outdoor arena with footing and fencing. A preliminary cost estimate for the Phase I improvements was also provided.

#### C. Phase I Improvement Costs

M-NCPPC staff and the consultant have had several meetings with “the Friends” and Mr. Rickman Jr. during which the Phase I improvements and associated costs were discussed in detail. In a meeting on February 25, 2003, attended by the Executive Director, staff, the consultant, and Ellie Truman representing “the Friends”, many decisions were made regarding the nature and extent of the Phase I site and building improvements and construction responsibility for the specific improvements. “The Friends” verbally committed to approximately \$119,000 in improvements including the site excavation work (parking lot, SWM pond, indoor and outdoor rings), the construction of the outdoor ring, the grading, base, and footing of the indoor ring, microwave, refrigerator, washer and dryer, the mounting platform, and stall flooring improvements. M-NCPPC committed to providing site and building design as necessary to obtain building permits, design and construction of the septic system, new wells, a water distribution/fire suppression system, construction of the parking lot and sidewalk, stormwater management pond, sediment and erosion control, exterior lighting, muck pit and to repair/replace paddock fencing. At the end of the meeting a shortfall of approximately \$156,000 remained.

A follow-up meeting was held with Mr. Rickman Sr. and Jr., representatives of “the Friends”, the Executive Director, and Ken Nichols of the Parks Foundation, on March 28, 2003. During the meeting, the Rickman’s expressed a willingness to work with the Commission to make the project operational either by constructing some of the improvements or by hiring others to do so, and they requested that additional information be provided which supports the estimated costs. Additional information as is currently available without completed construction documents was sent to the Rickmans as requested. It is anticipated that another meeting with the Rickmans will occur within the next several weeks and that the funding shortfall issue will be resolved.

It is critical that the funding shortfall be solved prior to the onset of building construction which is anticipated to begin in the Fall 2003. It will also be necessary to create a formal, flexible management agreement between the Commission and each entity responsible for constructing site improvements. A specific scope of work for each improvement and a detailed construction schedule that establishes the sequence of construction will be critical in order to manage the construction of the project in a logical and timely manner.

In order to receive a building permit for the facility it will be necessary to submit construction documents to the County for building and site improvements. As part of this phase, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing, (MEP) and structural engineering work will be necessary in order to upgrade, improve and replace existing systems. M-NCPPC does not have this expertise and it will therefore need to hire a consultant. Eileen Emmett, a PDD architect will assist in overseeing this phase of the work.

#### D. Building Permits

On February 21, 2003 the staff and consultant met with officials from the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (DPS), and the Department of Fire and Rescue in a pre-design consultation to determine what improvements would be required in order to obtain building permits and therefore be code compliant. During this meeting it was suggested that M-NCPPC staff prepare a letter to the attention of Shahriar Amiri, Chief of the Division of Building Construction in DPS, requesting permission to use the Maryland Building Rehabilitation Code (MBRC), and a building Use classification of Utility and Miscellaneous. A classification of Assembly, as originally suggested by County officials, would require that the large Arena building be fully sprinklered and additional restrooms (beyond the two proposed) would need to be provided. These improvements would far exceed the funding available and would certainly delay if not render the project unfeasible to develop. Mr. Amiri responded in a letter dated April 11, 2003 granting permission to use the MBRC and agreeing with staff that the Arena building could be classified as Utility and Miscellaneous.

On the matter of Life/Safety issues as related to building permits, it was also suggested in the February meeting that M-NCPPC staff contact the local volunteer fire department in Beallsville to discuss whether the existing 12-foot-wide, asphalt road was adequate for emergency access and to discuss various options for providing fire suppression. The meeting was held on March 25, 2003. During the meeting, Chief Earl Moore noted that the existing road was adequate and stated that based on the development program as currently proposed, an adequate water supply for fire suppression would be brought to the site by the Department’s fire trucks and a back-up “tanker task force”. He asked that we include our request to defer the provision of an on-site water supply designated for fire fighting until further development of the park, to him in a letter. The letter was sent on April 1, 2003. In subsequent telephone conversations, Chief Moore has said that he is in general agreement with our April 1 letter, but has not yet responded in writing

because he is trying to follow up with the Montgomery County Fire Marshall who first directed us to him.

As a result of the March meeting and subsequent staff discussions with both the State Fire Marshall and Montgomery County's Department of Fire and Rescue, the Life/Safety classification of Storage will be used which is less restrictive than the Assembly classification.

M-NCPPC has recently retained the services of a fire protection and code consultant specialist to guide us through complicated code issues and determine the most cost effective and expeditious route in obtaining building permits. The Consultant will be available to advise us through the construction document and permitting phases.

#### **IV. THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER OPERATOR**

On December 18, 2002, a Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued by the M-NCPPC for an operator for a Therapeutic Riding Center at the Rickman Farm Horse Park. A pre-proposal meeting was held at the site on January 27, 2003. The proposal due date has been extended from February 24, 2003, to 3:00 p.m. on May 8, 2003, the same date as the subject Planning Board meeting. The date was extended to allow additional time to define the improvements that will be made to the building and site that will be in place when the Operator assumes control of the property. Staff felt that it was important to afford the Operator of the program the opportunity to participate in the final design of the facility.

The County Executive's recommended budget for FY 04 includes \$175,000 under the program of Administration/Public Management for "Horseback riding program in partnership with M-NCPPC". The purpose of this recommended expenditure is to provide funding for the Recreation Department to oversee and manage the Operator of the Therapeutic Riding Center, or in the event that an Operator is not found or later defaults, to assume the management of the facility.

#### **V. Community Outreach**

A community meeting was held on April 9, 2003 at the recreational building at Owens Local Park. At the meeting, staff presented the Park Development Plan and plans for the Therapeutic Riding Center, listened to community comments, and answered questions. The majority of the questions and comments were in regards to the anticipated opening of the Therapeutic Riding Center. Several people expressed frustration over the fact that the facility had not yet opened and that the Arena building had been empty for so long. One person questioned whether the Therapeutic Riding Center would be non-profit. Another person asked about the leasing of the "Chalet" and the suggested that the rental revenue as well as revenue from haying the fields should go towards operation of the park. Several questions were specific to the operation of the Therapeutic Riding Center and were from potential operators. There were also several questions and comments regarding the renovation of the Joseph White House and the drilling of the new wells and septic system construction. There was no expressed opposition to the either the park or to the proposed Therapeutic Riding Center.

**VI. Schedule**

Following the Planning Board meeting, staff will continue the in-house site design work, initiate the consultant design for the Arena building, continue working with “the Friends”, and coordinate with the selected Operator. The due date for the Operator proposal is May 8, 2003. Following the Planning Board meeting on the Park Development Plan, and an opportunity for staff to brief the Board on the results of the Operator RFP, staff will request a briefing of the PHED Committee in late May or June as required in the PDF.

The following construction schedule presumes that sufficient funding will be obtained to cover the funding shortfall as identified in the table included in this report.

Wells Drilled	May 2003
Septic System Construction begins	July 2003
Septic System Construction completed	September 2003
Site Design completed and SWM concept approval granted	July 2003
Construction Documents substantially (90%) completed	July 2003
Permits submitted	July 2003
Permits obtained	October 2003
Construction begins	November 2003
Construction Completed	April 2004
Facility Opens	May 2004

**VII. Attachments**

- A. Site Vicinity Map**
- B. Park Development Plan**
- C. Park Development Plan Details (Riding Center)**
- D. Arena Building Floor Plan**

