

ATTACHMENT # 8

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NORMAN G. KNOPF

July 2, 2003

VIA FACSIMILE AND MAIL

Derick Berlage, Chairman
Maryland National Capital Park
& Planning Commission
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: Indoor Baseball Facility Proposed on Cabin John Park Land

Dear Chairman Berlage:

This letter is submitted in opposition to the proposed indoor baseball facility on behalf of the People for the Preservation of Parks ("PPP"). PPP is a civic organization (in formation) comprised of organizations and individuals seeking to preserve our parks as parkland/open space for use and enjoyment by all members of the public. We are opposed to construction on parkland/open space of large buildings for specialized use by a segment of the general public. Our members include 4 large condominium projects, containing over 1,000 units, located in the immediate vicinity of the proposed Cabin John site; Chelsea Condominiums, Westlake Towers C Condominiums, Westlake Towers B Condominiums, Springlake Condominiums.

By the use of pooled time publicly announced as available to such organizations, we will present facts and analyses which we believe compel the conclusion that this proposal should be rejected.

The proposal raises two overall questions:

- I. Is there a need for an indoor baseball facility requiring the use of public parkland and a public/private partnership?

The facts fail to demonstrate such a need.

- II. Even assuming a need, is the proposed Cabin John site the best location for such a facility?

The facts demonstrate the possibility of other sites with less adverse impact on existing park users and nearby residents.

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I. NEED

1. Documents of the Parks Department and Proposer stress the shortage of ball fields as the basis for the indoor facility. However, the proposed facility does nothing to alleviate the shortage of playing fields.
2. The proposed facility is not essential for the playing of the sport – ball fields are essential. The facility merely makes for better players.
3. Indoor baseball facilities have been created at Germantown Soccerplex and are being used by BCC Baseball successfully. BCC Baseball complains of the inconvenience of traveling to that location rather than the absence of any facility.
4. Constructing a facility at Cabin John for use by a specialized segment of the population principally during the winter season must be balanced against dispossessing the year-round general population from use of approximately one acre of open space/ parkland. This space is intensively used by the residents of the multi-family dwellings in the immediate vicinity of Cabin John. This open space is their local community park. The parkland is also intensively used by County-wide residents from dog walkers to soccer players.
5. The Proposers own “needs” study reflects a weak need and numerous alternatives. “Final Report: Proposed Cabin John Sportplex Research, Spring, 2003” of Sandy Spring Builders states:
 - a. P. 8 - only 20% of high schools “**might**” use the facility; “nearly 40% of the leagues and 75% of the individual users sampled said they would definitely/**probably** use the new facility”.
 - b. P. 14 – Of those who stated they definitely/probably/might use the proposed facility, over half of the teams and 40% of the individual users stated they would use the sportplex “instead of their current facility”. Thus, they have present facilities in which they practice and they would abandon those for a new facility.
 - c. P. 20 – 16 private indoor facilities are listed which presently exist and are used by baseball players.
6. Neither the Parks Department nor the Proposer explains why private enterprise on private land cannot satisfy such facility needs. If the existing 16 listed

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private facilities are inadequate, there is no showing of efforts made by BCC Baseball or others to have a private enterprise, on private property, construct any new facilities. We are aware of no effort by BCC Baseball, or others, to enter into a lease arrangement with a private entrepreneur, similar to that proposed for the Cabin John facility, to permit private enterprise to construct an indoor facility on private land. A public-private partnership, occupying and removing an acre of public parkland/open space from use by the general public, should not even be considered until there is a clear demonstration of need and that private enterprise cannot satisfy such need on private property.

7. PPP does not dispute that the Cabin John facility would be convenient for BCC Baseball and would be used by them (at least for the limited years they are willing to commit). The number of sports is growing, and popularity of a given sport varies from year to year. For example, we now have in-line skating, roller blading, skate boarding, etc. joining traditional sports such as basketball, lacrosse, etc. Are supporters of each such sport entitled to construct an appropriate building on public parkland providing they can organize and exert sufficient political pressure? Do we need to duplicate each such facility to provide equal facilities for women – at least for sports that involve predominately women players – such as field hockey? We have a soccerplex, now a baseballplex, and what other sports will argue discrimination unless they have their own “plex”?

8. In assessing need, the financial ramifications to the taxpayer and the park budget should be taken into consideration. The original RFP proposal envisioned a facility that would not cost the taxpayers money nor would run the risk of tapping park budget funds. The Proposers’ financial documents demonstrate potential cost to taxpayers and risk of involving out of pocket subsidies from park funds.

9. If the rosy projections by the Proposer of financial profitability are realistic, then private enterprise would readily construct such facilities on private land. To the extent that BCC Baseball asserts private enterprise will not so construct demonstrates the substantial risk that the proposal is a financially losing one requiring public funding.

10. Taxpayers are asked to subsidize the facility as the proposed rent, in the early years, of \$5,000 per year for 40,000 square feet of prime parkland in Bethesda, as well as rents for later years, are incredibly low.

11. The Park Commission runs the risk of having to subsidize, with out of pocket expenditures, the operation of the facility due to extremely low assumptions regarding anticipated costs and extremely high assumptions regarding revenue projections. For example, insurance and taxes are projected at \$20,000 per year at the start – unrealistically low; revenues include such rosy scenarios as rent by corporations

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for use of the basketball courts at \$100 per court per use for 50 weeks per year (does anyone really believe employees of corporations will be playing basketball in August, Monday through Friday, mid-day?). ("Cabin John Sportplex Business Plan and Finance Projections, prepared by Montgomery Lane, LLC, March 17, 2003".)

12. The spectre of good intentions, bad financial projections, and financial difficulties as has occurred with the Germantown Soccerplex is likely to repeat itself here.

13. BCC Baseball is apparently willing to commit only for a portion of the period of the 40 year lease proposed – what happens after they pull out? What happens if a competing facility is built – during the lease period?

CABIN JOHN SITE IS NOT SUITABLE; BETTER SITES AVAILABLE

1. The proposed facility would require a lease of approximately 40,000 square feet of park space presently extensively used. This space includes tennis courts/handball courts/volley ball courts, walking areas, dog walking areas, etc. This park/open space area, closest to numerous high density residential units, serves as the local community park for this heavily populated area.

2. The proposed facility will necessarily (as discussed immediately below) result in the destruction of the adjacent open field for needed parking. That field is presently used by children and other residents of adjoining Magruders Discovery, an HOC project, for soccer and for passive recreation.

3. The soccer field is used extensively on weekends by Hispanic County-wide soccer teams.

4. The parking is inadequate – there are 90-some spaces presently in place. The parking analysis of the Proposer contends no additional spaces are needed. The existing parking spaces are presently insufficient for existing use – resulting in overflow parking onto the soccer field, onto "no parking" areas of streets, and into nearby condominium parking lots. The existing insufficient parking space situation will be exacerbated and will necessarily result in conversion of the soccer field into parking.

5. Traffic to the site is extremely congested now, particularly during the winter months – November through January – peak shopping season (when the facility will be at peak use) due to nearby Montgomery Mall and other retail facilities.

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6. Cabin John Park is already near the maximum 1/3 development criteria limit of the Parks Department. It is claimed that the 1/3 limit is not exceeded here because the site is already "developed" since it includes volley ball and handball courts. We disagree. Because the space is open, and residents use it for walking and other outdoor recreational purposes, the residents deem it non-developed, at least compared to the 4-story proposed building which would occupy the site. Additional development on a park already so developed is not appropriate.

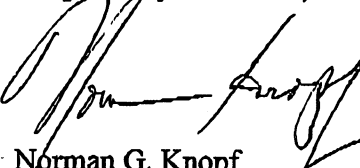
7. No serious effort has been made to explore other possible sites which would be more appropriate as they create less adverse consequences for park users and the neighborhood. For example:

- a. Two Olney sites – large amounts of undeveloped parkland acreage in undeveloped areas – were listed under the Parks Department original proposal for consideration; yet no consideration
- b. The existing Wheaton Ice Skating Rink (closed) could be converted without loss of parkland
- c. Closed Brookmont School is now going through a school re-use process – the Waldorf School seeking to re-lease the facility; the Parks Department should request the school site which adjoins the existing Sagamore Park with its baseball field. The school, which occupies 40,000 square feet, could be demolished to provide sufficient room for an indoor baseball facility. It has parking and is on a major artery.

These examples no doubt can be added to if a good faith effort is made by the Parks Department.

For the above stated reasons, we urge the Board not to enter into any lease negotiations to construct a baseball facility on Cabin John Park.

Respectfully submitted,



Norman G. Knopf
People for the Preservation of Parks