

M-NCPPC



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

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January 20, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief *JAC*
Community-Based Planning Division

FROM: Sue Edwards, Team Leader, I-270 Corridor *SE*
Community-Based Planning Division (301-495-4518)

SUBJECT A: Amendment to the Final Forest Conservation Plan for Mandatory Referral No. 05303-DPWT-1: Public Service Training Academy – 9710 Great Seneca Highway, Rockville, R-90/TDR-4 Zone, Shady Grove Study Area Master Plan

SUBJECT B: Mandatory Referral No. 05303-DPWT-1: Public Service Training Academy – 9710 Great Seneca Highway, Rockville, R-90/TDR-4 Zone, Shady Grove Study Area Master Plan

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

SUBJECT A: Forest Conservation Plan – APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS of the Amendment to the Forest Conservation Plan for the Mandatory Referral for the Public Service Training Academy (PSTA).

1. Submit a Final Forest Conservation Plan that meets the requirements of Section 109.B of the Forest Conservation Regulation prior to any clearing or grading for new facilities.
2. Conduct required site inspections by the M-NCPPC staff as specified in Section 110 of the Forest Conservation Regulation.
3. Update the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) Advance Reforestation Capital Improvements Project (CIP) Project #500112 to reflect the additional area of reforestation based on forest removal at the PSTA.

SUBJECT B: Mandatory Referral – APPROVAL to transmit comments to the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation concerning the Mandatory Referral for the Public Service Training Academy.

1. Complete coordination with Pepco regarding final design and easements for the emergency vehicle egress to Darnestown Road.
2. Perform a full Local Area Transportation Review study as part of any subsequent mandatory referral application for this property.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Public Service Training Academy (PSTA) occupies a portion of the triangular parcel bounded by Great Seneca Highway/MD 119, Key West Avenue and Darnestown Road (see Attachment 1). The PSTA was established in 1973 for the purpose of providing a centralized location for specialized training of public safety employees, particularly police officers and fire fighters. Since 2001, the PSTA has also been used for staging and training for Homeland Security. The PSTA facility includes classroom space, an outdoor course for driver training, and an outdoor space dedicated to training in fire operations.

Project Description

The applicant, the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) seeks the following changes to the existing PSTA site:

- Add 66,807 square feet to the instruction buildings in the form of a second floor.
- Construct a new fire station consisting of approximately 10,000 square feet in the southern portion of the site.
- Construct a canine support facility of 1,350 square feet with offices and kennels adjacent to the canine training area.
- Provide an asphalt surface of 3,600 square feet for the existing helicopter landing pad with windsock and use-activated lighting.
- Add 220 parking spaces to 107 existing spaces.
- Add an access point on Darnestown Road with a 6-foot wide double sliding gate.
- Close an existing entrance point on Darnestown Road, remove paving and restore landscaping.

Previous Approvals

The PSTA was established in 1973 for the purpose of providing a centralized location for specialized training of public safety employees, particularly police officers and fire fighters. There have been no upgrades or renovations to the PSTA since it was completed.

In the past three years, several projects have been reviewed as Mandatory Referral submissions including:

Mandatory Referral No. 03301- F&S-1
PSTA Multi-Agency Driver Training Facility
Planning Board Date: January 15, 2004

This Mandatory Referral was for an expanded driver training facility for various county agencies, including police, fire and rescue, and transit. The project also included a new classroom building of 6,640 square feet. Ten acres of forest were removed to accommodate the expanded driver training facility.

Mandatory Referral No. 0403-DPWT-1
PSTA Academic Building

Administrative Approval of Mandatory Referral; letter sent on August 9, 2004

This Mandatory Referral was for renovation and expansion of the existing Academic Building.

Subject Site

The PSTA occupies approximately two-thirds of the triangular parcel bounded by Great Seneca Highway, Darnestown Road, and Key West Avenue. The Maryland Technology Development Center occupies the remainder of this quadrant.

The PSTA property is triangular in shape and contains approximately 45.15 acres of R-90/TDR-4 zoned land. The PSTA site is developed with an instructional building and associated tower, a canine training facility, surface parking lots, and a helipad. Ingress and egress to the site is from an entrance located on Great Seneca Highway. An existing entrance to Darnestown Road has been blocked from use and will be eliminated as part of this project.

Neighborhood Context

The Shady Grove Life Sciences Center is located across Great Seneca Highway to the east. The Life Sciences Center includes the Shady Grove Adventist Hospital with the Johns Hopkins University complex to the north and the University of Maryland Shady Grove campus to the south. On numerous sites surrounding the hospital and the universities are private biotechnology and research and development businesses. The National Institute of Standards and Technology, which has a Biotechnology Division to advance the commercialization of biotechnology, is located to the north off Muddy Branch Road.

West of the PSTA site, across Key West Avenue, is the Banks Farm/Belward property, which is owned by Johns Hopkins University. The site is developed with Human Genome Sciences at the eastern edge of the property, and one single-family dwelling. The remainder of the site is currently developed with a single-family dwelling, but has an approved preliminary plan for 1.8 million square feet of research and development uses related to Johns Hopkins University.

The following summarizes the additional uses that surround the PSTA site:

- To the east, across Great Seneca Highway, is a child care center, the Learning Center, the Regional Institute for Children and Adolescents (RICA), the State of Maryland's Noyes Children's Center, as well as two buildings for BioReliance, a private company.
- To the north, across the intersection of Key West Avenue and Great Seneca Highway, is DANAC, a biotechnology company.
- To the northwest, across Key West Avenue, is the Human Genome Sciences building and the Banks Farm/Belward property.
- To the southwest, between the PSTA site and Darnestown Road are single-family homes (which face on Darnestown Road) as well as the Shady Grove Children's Medical and a small retail center.
- Southeast of the PSTA academic building, across the access road, is the Maryland Technology Development Center.

Location of New Facilities

The main Academic Building is located in the southern portion of the site approximately 500 feet from the new entrance proposed to Darnestown Road (Attachment 2). Expansion of the Academic Building will be in the form of a second story with a finished height of 29'-2", with a small one story expansion to the east which serves as an entry area and another expansion to the west to serve as a gymnasium. An expanded parking field of approximately 190 spaces with six handicap-accessible spaces to serve the Academic Building will be constructed to the east of the classroom building.

The 60' x 60' helipad is currently in operation adjacent to the Academic Building; an asphalt surface will be constructed at this location.

The new Travilah Fire Station will be attached to the Academic Building on the west side of the building. The building consists of approximately 10,000 feet of apparatus bays, living quarters, offices and support facilities as a modified Class IV station. This design includes living quarters above the two apparatus bays and extending into the area above one maintenance bay in the PSTA garage. A new parking field of 23 spaces to serve the fire station will be constructed west of the Academic Building. New fire apparatus is included in the capital funding for this facility.

The canine facility will be located in western section of the site adjacent to the burn tower used for fire training.

ANALYSIS

Master Plan Conformance

The PSTA property is contained within the 1990 Shady Grove Study Area Master Plan and adjacent to the northernmost boundary of the Potomac Subregion Master Plan. The project is consistent with the 1990 Shady Grove Study Area Master Plan. The 1990 Plan envisioned the continued operation of the PSTA in the foreseeable future and noted that no change to the existing use was proposed for the area. The Plan states that any expansion of the facilities in the PSTA should take into account this site's important location within the Research and Development Village (Attachment 3).

The Approved and Adopted Potomac Subregion Master Plan of 2002 contains discussion of the need and potential location for a new fire station to serve the Travilah area with the following recommendation:

Build a new Class II fire-rescue station in the Travilah/North Potomac area, preferably in the vicinity of Darnestown Road and Shady Grove Road. The 52-acre Public Service Training Academy site should be explored for this facility. This area will continue to grow in population and will require a station in the vicinity to meet increasing demands for service.

Conformance with Development Standards

The PSTA is located in the R-90/TDR-4 Zone. The proposed mandatory referral at the PSTA site meets the applicable standards in the R-90/TDR-4 Zone. Publicly owned and publicly operated uses are permitted. The Academic Building is approximately 125 feet

from the adjoining residential property currently used as a child day care facility operating as a special exception. The finished height of the second story addition to the Academic Building will be 29'-2" which is less than the maximum of 40 feet allowed.

Landscape and Lighting

The landscape and lighting plan for the expanded facilities provide compatibility with the surrounding uses. All trees within the limits of disturbance will be removed with the exception of several trees retained in the canine facility yard to provide shade. The landscape plan addresses vegetation of the access to be abandoned as well as landscaping for parking areas and building foundations.

Lighting for the Academic Building will be provided for nighttime use and switched off after completion of classroom use at 10:00 p.m. During emergencies, the PSTA may be in operation 24 hours a day. The Travilah Fire Station will maintain operations 24 hours per day.

Lighting for the helipad occurs with lighted bollards outlining the helipad surface which are activated when the helicopter is authorized to land. The helipad facility is used by local, state, and occasionally federal public safety officials.

Forest Conservation Law Compliance

A Natural Resources Inventory/Forest Stand Delineation (NRI/FSD) for the PSTA site was updated, resubmitted, and approved on December 9, 2005. An approved Final Forest Conservation Plan covers both phases of the project. The Final Forest Conservation Plan was approved on December 10, 2004 which allows for removal of 6.49 acres of the site's 15.34 acres during Phase I and an additional 0.81 acres during Phase II.

The applicant now seeks approval to modify Phase II to include a new Travilah Fire Station and helipad. This requires the Final Forest Conservation Plan to be amended because an additional 0.14 acres of forest over the amount shown on the approved FCP must be cleared to construct parking for the new fire station. Planting requirements will continue to be met at an off-site location, the WSSC Tridelphia Reservoir, a tree bank established by the County for this purpose.

Environmental Guidelines

The PSTA site sits atop a large serpentinite outcrop that extends from just north on this site down to Glen Road in Potomac. This surface rock generally has thin soils, stunted vegetation and supports rare species in certain locations. Surveys for rare, threatened and endangered species were conducted at the PSTA facility in July 2003 and May 2004. These surveys found no specimens of the state-endangered Potato dandelion (*Krigia dandelion*) that may once have occurred there. The modified plan continues to respect the environmental and wetland buffers with the exception of the existing in-stream stormwater management pond. This encroachment, to update the facility, was originally approved by the Planning Board in 2004 with the approval of the Final Forest Conservation Plan. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Maryland Department of the Environment granted a three-year permit for the in-stream work.

Water Quality

This facility is located in the Decoverly tributary of Muddy Branch. The Montgomery County Countywide Stream Protection Strategy (CSPS, 1998) lists both subwatershed/stream and habitat conditions as 'fair' based on data available at that time. Stream channels in the watershed are incised and bank stability is poor. Sediment deposition and embeddedness problems have been observed in the mainstem. CSPS claims that high levels of imperviousness and inadequate riparian buffers in the headwaters have affected streams over time.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater management requirements for this project will be satisfied by the separate but related Multi-Agency Driver Training Facility project (CIP 509915). The Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services approved the site's stormwater management concept on September 11, 2003 and the final stormwater management plan on February 14, 2005. This approval was subsequently revised in July 2005 to accommodate the new helipad.

Green Buildings

The Program of Requirements (POR) for the PSTA project was approved in 1998. In 2002, the County Council approved the funding. According to the applicant, "neither the POR or the funding request anticipated LEED certification. While it is not a requirement and the County is not seeking LEED certification, the County is attempting to follow the LEED guidelines in most cases without the added costs of the certification."

Noise

The use and frequency of helipad operations are not expected to change over the next five years. Public safety helicopters have been landing in the same location for more than 20 years. Previously, helicopters landed in the grass and sometimes mud; this project supplies a safe, hard landing surface, windsock and use-activated lighting.

A helicopter is used for training exercises several times a semester or on average 10 times per year which typically takes place during evening hours. Occasionally, helicopter landings occur when severe medical trauma victims must be transported or during infrequent county-wide emergencies such as the 2002 sniper incident. Public service helicopter operators state there is little noise from the aircraft as it approaches the landing pad; no noise complaints have been logged.

Transportation and Access

The PSTA site has a full-movement access from Great Seneca Highway with a secondary entrance point on Darnestown Road that is currently blocked from use. This access road is proposed to be removed and replaced with a new access road, an emergency exit only from the Travilah Fire Station which, as shown, crosses property owned by Pepco.

Discussions are on-going between Pepco and the DPWT. Staff urges the applicant to continue to coordinate with Pepco to obtain required easements to construct this new access road. This new access road is aligned with the signalized intersection at Travilah Road and would provide emergency vehicle access. Staff finds that the

existing access onto Great Seneca Highway, the new access onto Darnestown Road, and the internal traffic circulation as shown on the site plan are adequate to accommodate operation of the PSTA with proposed additions and renovations.

Staff reviewed information provided by the DPWT and concludes that this project is not intended to increase the class size or number of students at the PSTA but rather to facilitate academic and training activities. Staff reviewed the submitted traffic statement and concurs that the additional traffic generated by the proposed site expansion is not expected to have an adverse effect on the adjacent roadway network. Expansion of PSTA facilities would generate approximately 13 additional morning and 12 additional evening peak hour vehicle trips. Reviewed as independent projects, these facilities would not require a Local Area Transportation Review (LATR) study to satisfy the Adequate Public Facilities review. Staff does not have a record of a total development envelope associated with the PSTA site. Staff recommends that a full Local Area Transportation Review study be performed as part of any subsequent mandatory referral application for the PSTA.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Staff sent notification letters to over 15 civic organizations and 60 adjoining property owners. One letter was received from Pepco which operates a switching station at the corner of Darnestown Road adjacent to the new access location. Pepco and the DPWT have reached an agreement in principle for the redesign of the PSTA access road such that the new access does not interfere with Pepco operations at the switching station.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends approval of the PSTA classroom expansions and other related facilities on the PSTA property. The project is consistent with the 1990 Shady Grove Study Area Master Plan that endorses on-going operation of this asset. Staff will continue to review subsequent aspects of this project including the signed agreement with Pepco concerning fire and rescue access to Darnestown Road.

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Attachments

1. Vicinity Map
2. PSTA Site Improvements Plan
3. Master Plan
4. Environmental Planning Memo
5. Transportation Planning Memo
6. Detail of Access Road
7. Letter from Pepco Holdings
8. Sketch of Access Redesign