

M-NCPPC



Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning
THE MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

MCPB
Item: D
Date: April 28, 2005

8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

Memorandum

TO: The Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Charles R. Loehr, Director, Department of Park and Planning

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Loehr'.

FROM: William Mooney, Chief, Enterprise Division

SUBJECT: Serpentine Barrens Donation

Purpose: To review an offer from the Gordon V. and Helen C. Smith Foundation: interest in making a substantial contribution to the Serpentine Barrens Conservation Park.

Requested Planning Board Approval Actions:

- Approve the attached letter from the Chairman to the Foundation
- Concur with the requirement of the Foundation that the Commission provide 25% of the funding for the development of the park (note that this level of investment will be very close to what the capital costs might be if the Commission developed the park without the Foundation)

Summary:

In March of this year, the Commission was contacted via the offices of Council member Silverman by the principles of the Gordon V. and Helen C. Smith Foundation. The foundation expressed an interest in developing the Serpentine Barrens Conservation Park for the Commission. We subsequently had a meeting with the Chairman, Bill Mooney, Bruce Smith, and Chas Stuart to discuss the possible donation. Made clear at the meeting and then in the attached letter was the interest of the Foundation in developing a first class park, supporting the educational opportunities, and having hands on involvement in the project.

After receipt of the letter confirming their interest, a second meeting was held involving Mr. Smith and Mr. Stuart, Bill Mooney, Don Cochran, and Dr. John Hench and Jeff Zyontz. Staff presented the current status of the park development – which is that we substantially have completed the research on the park and are preparing to begin the

public input phase. The goal is that a management plan for the park will be completed by the fall for review by the Planning Board.

The result of the meeting was that the Foundation understands and is very comfortable with the process and we now expect that they will be party to the process as a significant stakeholder with the assistance of EDAW Landscape Architects in a relationship that has been discussed and is supported by John and Jeff. At the end of the process to develop the Management Plan, we expect that the Foundation will submit a proposal to implement the plan and at that time will want to have a hands-on roll which we are also comfortable with.

The one requirement that the Foundation has stipulated is that the Commission fund 25% of the development costs of the park which they believe could be \$1 million. Our original rough estimate of the costs was in the area of \$300,000 - \$500,000. The range of costs will depend on the quality of the designs and architecture. The Foundation does not have any interest in over developing the park and, in fact, we found their interests to be very compatible with our goals for a conservation park with an emphasis on education. Even if the park were to cost \$1 million, our 25% share would be less than what we would spend for developing the park on our own.

Finally, when we discussed the possibility that the park might cost less than what the Foundation appears willing to spend, we suggested that the Foundation might consider providing some funding for ongoing maintenance costs and/or interpretive staff for the park. Both concepts were of interest to the Foundation and they will seriously consider them.

The Partnership Committee discussed this potential donation on March 29th and was very supportive of the concept and the proposed way of responding to the Foundation.

Therefore, we are requesting that the Board review the attached letters and approve the concept of matching the Foundation funding and the response letter to document our discussions. The Foundation will then work with us as described during the summer as the staff develops the management plan and then they will formalize their development proposal in the fall.

Bruce G. Smith
Gordon V. and Helen C. Smith Foundation
8716 Crider Brook Way
Potomac, MD 20854

Dear Bruce,

I am writing this letter to tell you how pleased I am that you and the Gordon V. and Helen C. Smith Foundation are interested in making a substantial investment in the Serpentine Barrens Conservation Park. I have been briefed on your meeting with Bill Mooney, Don Cochran, Jeff Zyontz and John Hench. Clearly the interests of you, your father and the foundation are very much in sync with the park planning staff. We share the goal of conservation, education, interpretation and public access consistent with the delicate nature of the site.

It is also fortuitous that the staff has accomplished a lot of the preliminary work and is prepared to begin the public input part of the process. You will join this process as a valued stakeholder and will consider engaging a landscape architect to participate in the public input this summer, primarily as an observer through the next several months. Mr. Zyontz and Dr. Hench will keep you and your staff apprised of the meeting schedule and brief you on the progress as appropriate. At the conclusion of the input process, park staff will develop a management plan for the park that will detail both the operations and the facilities that we would like to have in the park.

I understand that your foundation would then formalize a proposal to implement the plan. At that time, you and the landscape architects would likely take a substantive, hands-on role in the design and construction of the facilities. We also will be exploring with you the possibility of providing support for maintenance and interpretation over the coming years. As discussed, all of these opportunities will be considered as the management plan evolves.

Our Partnership Committee and the Planning Board have reviewed this potential gift. Both are very supportive of the concept and the requirement of providing matching funds as described in your initial letter.

Once again, I would like to say how appreciative the Park and Planning Commission is that you are considering such a generous and thoughtful contribution to the citizens of Montgomery County.

Sincerely,
Derick Berlage

Bruce G. Smith
Gordon V. and Helen C. Smith Foundation
8716 Crider Brook Way
Potomac, MD 20854

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SUPERINTENDENT OF PARKS

March 10, 2005

Derick Berlage
Montgomery County Department of Park & Planning
9500 Brunett Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20901

Dear Mr. Berlage,

I want to thank you for meeting with myself and Chas Stuart last week. I appreciated you and your colleagues, Councilmember Steve Silverman and Bill Mooney, spending some time to listen to our Foundation's proposal to create an accessible park out of the Serpentine Barrens parcel owned by the County, and offering thoughtful insight and guidance on how best to move such a project forward. With the context of that meeting as my guide, I would like to use this letter to formally present our Serpentine Barrens Park proposal.

The Smith Foundation has been actively looking for an appropriate project that would enrich Montgomery County and its residents. My parents moved directly to Montgomery County when they came to the Washington, D.C. area in 1959, and have always remained residents of Montgomery County. All three of their children, myself included, attended Montgomery County public schools from grade school through high school. When my father started his own residential homebuilding business, it was based in Bethesda, and his company has profited from building projects within the County. We have all enjoyed the many benefits of living in the County, and are excited about the prospect of giving something tangible back to the County which can be enjoyed by all County residents as an expression of our appreciation.

The Gordon V. and Helen C. Smith Foundation would like to substantially fund a County park situated on the Serpentine Barrens parcel. The Smith Foundation would also like to be intimately involved in the planning and development of the park according to an agreed upon arrangement that has the blessing of the County and in full cooperation with County Department of Park & Planning. The basic initial vision of the park is a nature hiking park and learning center. Nature trails could crisscross the property to provide access to the flora being preserved on this property and to the interesting geological features. Trails could also lead to points of interests such as creek crossings and a quarry overlook. The Smith Foundation funds many projects and institutions with an educational focus and we would like to make education an element of this park. In this respect we might propose an open air pavilion with instructional panels detailing some the special features of this natural area, as well as some instructional panels disbursed throughout the park.

We have chosen this particular project because it is such a good fit with our Foundation. We enjoy hiking through natural areas and learning about the natural world around us. Gordon, in particular, minored in Botany in college, and has parleyed an interest in Geology into a lifelong learning of the subject. The Foundation has extensive knowledge of this specific land parcel because it was partially owned by family members before it was bought by the County. The parcel is also nearby where Gordon and Helen have lived for the past twenty years.

The Smith Foundation almost always has an active involvement in projects that they have funded and are funding. We believe that our personal involvement is part of being a good steward of our donations. For this particular project, Foundation Board Members have extensive experience in land development and are excited about a park dedicated to nature and conservation using our skills, knowledge and relationships with various contractors to create such a park on this parcel. Thus, we envision an active involvement in this project, and are excited about the new County public/private partnership initiative to help facilitate such an

arrangement, and coordinate the best way to accomplish such a project, and to keep this project on a timely and perhaps accelerated basis. We are optimistically contemplating a potential completion within a year and are prepared to fund as needed.

The budget for this project would probably fall somewhere between the rough County estimate which included the basic elements of a potential park that was put forward by Mr. Mooney at our meeting and the higher figure of upwards to \$1 million which the Smith Foundation put forward which includes some more elaborate elements that the Smith Foundation might want to include to create a truly special place. In addition, I know both the Foundation and the County feel it will be important to create an appropriate maintenance endowment and we fully support that concept. A potential funding split was discussed along the lines of a 75% Foundation/ 25% County funding agreement for both construction and maintenance.

We would like to put forward for your review the names of three planners that we think would be possible choices to take on this project. (EDAW, Parker Rodriguez, Land Design). If these planners are acceptable to the County, we will interview and ultimately select one of them as the planner for this project.

Our Foundation is very excited about working with the County to create this wonderful Park that will accentuate the effort the County has already made to preserve and protect this important parcel. I look forward to your response concerning our next steps. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

I am also working on another project in which the Smith Foundation is involved – a hopefully significant education program in Tanzania – and I will be in that country for the next two weeks. I will begin working with Bill Mooney upon my return.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce G. Smith".

Bruce G. Smith
Director
Gordon V. and Helen C. Smith Foundation

Cc:
Steven A. Silverman, Councilmember, Montgomery County Council
William Mooney