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SRLT's Perspective on the Chesapeake Sports & Entertainment Group Proposal for the Crownsville Hospital Site and County Fairgrounds

While it is still early in the planning process, Scenic Rivers Land Trust's (SRLT) Board of Directors believes it is important to articulate to our supporters the framework with which we will evaluate and comment on this project proposal as it develops.

Over the past ten years, SRLT has both participated in and monitored the many formal and informal discussions about the future of the Crownsville Hospital property. We recognize the **many intractable challenges** that the site presents while maintaining an **open mind** toward any creative solution that brings value to the community at large, is financially viable, and respects the cultural and natural history of both the site and its adjacent lands.

SRLT is well aware of the **exasperating traffic situation** in the entire Crownsville area, and understands that the community will not accept any new project that adds additional traffic burdens and expects any new project to contribute to long-term solutions that alleviate traffic issues.

It is our understanding that neither county or state desire nor funding exists to maintain the *status quo* at the site or provide stabilization of the buildings and basic safety and security. Due to this situation, we anticipate that some type of private/public partnership is inevitable. The sports complex proponents have yet to make a compelling case for their vision, but we will continue **to listen**.

SRLT is directly linked to these important state-owned properties as we co-hold (with the Maryland Environmental Trust) the conservation easement on the adjacent county-owned, 1,000-acre Bacon Ridge Natural Area. **Legally, we are obligated to review** any impacts that this project might have on the terms of the conservation easement and the conservation values it protects.

The Bacon Ridge Natural Area forms the heart of the South River Greenway (SRG), which consists of one of the largest blocks of contiguous forest remaining in Anne Arundel County. The SRG is immensely important to the county due to the following features:

- Undeveloped forests covering over 6,000 acres including 2,400 acres of interior forest;
- Two Green Infrastructure (GI) forest hubs and many GI corridors as identified by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Greenprint Program;
- Fifteen different wetland types covering 800 acres;

- One hundred miles of perennial and intermittent streams in the headwaters of the tidal South River;
- Historical spawning area for yellow perch and river herring as well as habitat for the American eel;
- Four at-risk Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS) reside in the SRG— Worm-eating Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Wood Thrush and Louisiana Waterthrush;
- Recognition as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Audubon, a regionally important area for reptiles and birds by the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and a priority area in the Chesapeake Bay Program’s Resource Lands Assessment and Treasured Landscapes initiative; and
- Recognition as a preservation priority in the 2000 Crownsville Small Area Plan, the 2002 Anne Arundel County Greenways Plan, the 2006 and 2013 Land Preservation, Park and Recreation Plans, and the West County Regional Park Plan.

SRLT has promoted the Bacon Ridge Natural Area over the past 12 years as a valuable and prominent site that demonstrates the compatibility of forest protection with public access. For each of these 12 years, we have hosted the annual **Walk for the Woods**, which has introduced hundreds of Anne Arundel County residents to Bacon Ridge Natural Area and the historic Crownsville Hospital Cemetery. Our accumulated Walk mailing and email lists will be an asset for our communications on any proposed plans for the Crownsville Hospital site.

We understand that there must be an inclusive planning process that respects and enlists the creativity and commentary of local and county-wide residents. SRLT’s approach to reviewing the sports complex proposal will include the following expectations:

1) Demonstration of respect for the natural history of the area:

- a. Priority protection of the entire Bacon Ridge Natural Area along with controlled public access to the central portion of the Natural Area as an integral part of any site design;
- b. Mitigation of impacts on the surrounding community with particular attention to the area under conservation easement;
 1. Adjacent properties secured through purchase or easement to expand and buffer the natural area,
 2. Trail upgrades and repair of deeply eroded sections,
 3. Stream and headcut restoration projects,
 4. Invasive species control,
 5. Noise and light control from events at stadium and associated fields (including a ban on pyrotechnics), and
 6. Creation/improvement of one or more wildlife corridors under or over Rte. 97,

- c. Integrated planning for Eisenhower Golf Course, the County Fairgrounds, Water Works and the Crownsville Hospital site, including means for moving among these properties using non-vehicular transportation; and
- d. Support for scientific research to monitor the effects of the project on the adjacent ecosystems.

2) Demonstration that any new structures, building restoration or road/parking/path construction will employ and celebrate the highest levels of green standards in design and construction:

- a. Confirmation that any proposed vehicular access will not affect the conservation easement on the Bacon Ridge Natural Area in any way;
- b. Connection to Bacon Ridge Natural Area highlighted by a site design that includes hiking, biking and equestrian trails that model the compatibility of public access and land preservation;
- c. All stormwater managed on site with use of rain gardens, native conservation plantings, bioswales and other stormwater management techniques;
- d. Green building technology for structures and infrastructure with use of alternative energy sources; and
- e. Upgrade of the current MES wastewater treatment facility to “Best Available Technology” standards if the project is not connected to public sewer service.

3) Acknowledgement and recognition of the cultural history of the property and surrounding area:

- a. Archeological history;
- b. Crownsville Hospital history
 - 1. Chronicle of historic buildings,
 - 2. Highlighting of the cultural history, including former use of the land and patient experiences,
 - 3. Protection and enhancement of the historic cemetery, including backing for a memorial on site;
 - 4. Evaluation of the proposed on-site African-American history museum; and
 - 5. Recent history of subsidized space for community service providers and nonprofits
- c. Full historic documentation of the buildings deemed irreparable and those that will be refurbished, along with plans for the latter.

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