



Scenic Rivers Land Trust's Perspective on the Crownsville Hospital Property

Revised January 17, 2019

A year ago, Scenic Rivers Land Trust (SRLT) released its perspective on the Chesapeake Sports & Entertainment Complex for the Crownsville Hospital Site, confirming that we were keeping an open mind as various scenarios arose. Community and political opposition to the sports complex now makes this development a less likely alternative. Since the situation has evolved significantly, our position warrants an update. While it is still early in the renewed planning process, the SRLT Board of Directors believes it is important to articulate to our supporters the framework with which we will evaluate and comment on any proposals for this important site.

We are pleased that the new Pittman Administration has embraced the possibility of county ownership and management of the property. 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, but maintain 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 also well aware of the exasperating traffic situation in the entire Crownsville area and understands that the community will not accept a new project that compounds traffic burdens. We expect any new venture will contribute to long-term solutions that alleviate these traffic issues.

Our Connection

SRLT is directly linked to this important state-owned property; we co-hold (with Maryland Environmental Trust) the conservation easement on the adjacent and county-owned 1,000-acre Bacon Ridge Natural Area. Legally, we are obligated to review any impacts by proposed projects 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;
- 15 different wetland types covering 800 acres;

- 100 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) residing in the SRG— worm-eating warbler, Kentucky warbler, wood thrush and Louisiana waterthrush;
- Recognition of 4,900 acres 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, as well as 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 13 years as a valuable, ecologically productive and prominent site that clearly demonstrates the compatibility of forest protection with public access. For each of these 13 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 mailing and email lists from this event will be an asset for our communications on any proposed plans for the Crownsville Hospital site.

Financial Plan Will Be Key

Straying from our area of expertise, we are **anxious to see a sound financial plan** for the property. The economic challenges are enormous; state funding is necessary to remediate the environmental contamination and physical plant deterioration that occurred under the state's watch. County funds, philanthropic support and maybe even special tax districts may prove necessary. The opportunity for private sector partners should also not be dismissed.

A 2015 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene overview reports that 69 buildings sit on the property, totaling 800,521 gross square feet (gsf). Of those buildings, only four were judged to be in excellent condition; three of those were part of the water treatment plant. We informally contacted several contractors recently to assess demolition expenses and received a wide range of estimates contingent on the level of contamination.

Making a few back-of-the napkin estimates and presuming a decision to demolish half (400,000 gsf) of the buildings at anywhere from \$10 to \$30 per square foot for demolition, the resultant cost is \$4 to \$12 million. If the remaining structures are to be restored, that will carry an even higher price tag. With a minimum of 19 buildings deemed historic, greater financial challenges loom.

A 2016 Maryland Department of Planning report noted five underground diesel oil tanks, asbestos in some buildings and on buried steam lines and tunnels, lead paint in all buildings and possible underground dumps, potentially with historic medical waste, thus raising additional concerns. A 2015 Task Force report made reference to completed Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site

Assessments and a 2006 Due Diligence Study. In keeping with the buyer protection provisions of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, these assessments may need to be brought up to date.

To address the sites many challenges and opportunities, there must be an **inclusive and professional planning process** that respects and enlists the creativity and commentary of local and county-wide residents as well as experts who can come up with innovative solutions to restore these lands.

Our Approach to Proposal Review

Returning to our area of expertise, SRLT's approach in reviewing any proposal for Crownsville 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. Securing of adjacent properties through purchase or easement to expand and buffer the Natural Area,
 2. Upgrades and repair of deeply eroded sections of outdated trails within Bacon Ridge,
 3. Implementation of stream and headcut restoration projects,
 4. Control of invasive species within the Natural Area,
 5. Noise and light control due to activities on the hospital property, and
 6. Creation/improvement of one or more wildlife corridors under or over I-97,
- c. Integrated planning that includes the Eisenhower Golf Course, County Fairgrounds, Water Works Park and the Crownsville Hospital site, including the means to move among these properties using non-vehicular transportation; and
- d. Support for scientific research to monitor the effects of site activities 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 abide the restrictions of the existing conservation easement on the Bacon Ridge Natural Area;
- b. Connection to Bacon Ridge Natural Area should be highlighted by a site design that includes hiking, biking and equestrian trails that model the compatibility of public access and land preservation;
- c. Management of all stormwater on site through the use of rain gardens, native conservation plantings, bioswales and other stormwater management techniques;
- d. Use of green building technology for structures and infrastructure employing alternative energy sources; and

- e. Upgrade of the current MES wastewater treatment facility to “Best Available Technology” standards if the site 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 documentation of the historic buildings deemed irreparable and those that will be refurbished, along with plans for the latter.

The Crownsville Hospital Property offers a unique and exciting opportunity to bring useable open space, trails, history, recreation, energy alternatives and a signature public space to the citizens of Anne Arundel County. For too long, the state and the county have let the property fester and degrade. With leadership from the county, this property can be raised to a level that all citizens will be proud of and become a valuable asset to the community at large. As an organization having in-depth experience with the adjacent natural area over a long time period, we look forward to being part of any discussion of future plans for this property.



Nina Fisher
President
Board of Directors



Rick Leader
Executive Director
Rick@SRLT.org
410-310-6541