

FAIR HILL PROPOSED CCI 4* EVENT & FACILITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT OVERVIEW

February 15, 2017

1. Project Background and Description

- In 2015, the Maryland Horse Industry Board (MHIB) conducted a Horse Park System study, which identified Fair Hill NRMA as the potential “Field Event Venue” in a statewide system of equestrian facilities, and calls for hosting the type of outdoor field events already being held at Fair Hill in the existing equestrian footprint. The study identified the Prince George's County Equestrian Center as the indoor equestrian complex in the system.
- Following the release of the study, the MHIB engaged stakeholder groups involved in the coordination of recurring equestrian events at Fair Hill to review the report and develop a course of action in response to the report's recommendations. Using the Horse Park System study as a reference, subcommittees were created and began to develop specific needs assessments, and shelve initiatives that were not considered directly applicable or feasible. The immediate needs identified included a possible pedestrian tunnel under Route 273 to improve traffic flow and parking for large events, improved internet access and live streaming for events, and reconfiguration of the racetrack to meet modern standards and allow for more regular use.
- While this effort was underway, an unexpected Request for Proposal (RFP) was received by Fair Hill International from the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) to host an annual 4-Star Event. Fair Hill International currently hosts a 3-Star event in October. A successful bid would make Fair Hill the host of one of only seven 4-Star Events in the world, and only the second in the country. The possibility of hosting an event of this magnitude and prestige presents a unique opportunity for Fair Hill to reinvest in our existing infrastructure, and bring significant economic benefits to the community of Cecil County and the State of Maryland.
- Fair Hill International recently made the short list for venues under consideration by the USEF and is working in close partnership with the Maryland Sports Commission, MHIB, DNR, National Steeplechase Association and others to further refine the proposal and initiate preliminary engineering and design for the project components.

2. Project Information

- The proposed improvement projects primarily affect the racetrack area, with minor enhancements to the fairgrounds area and Sawmill Field to connect visitor access with the cross country course. Conceptual plans are available for viewing.
- The various elements of the proposed enhancements are presented in greater detail at each table:
 - Fair Hill International and the Maryland Sports Commission will discuss the history and future of FHI events, including the specifics of the CCI 4* proposal
 - Cecil County Tourism will discuss how improvements to Fair Hill and the addition of a CCI 4* will benefit the County.
 - Maryland Horse Industry Board will discuss the study recommendations and revisions made since 2015
 - The Fair Hill Foundation will share its mission, goals, and strategies for funding improvement projects
 - The National Steeplechase Association and Fair Hill Races will discuss improvements to the steeplechase track
 - The Cecil County Fair Board will discuss a proposed tunnel under Rt. 273 and associated benefits to the fairgrounds
 - The Fair Hill Training Center will discuss its support of the horse park system
 - The Maryland Department of Natural Resources will discuss the mission and vision for Fair Hill, oversight of projects, and balance between diverse park users

3. Immediate Timeline/Schedule

- USEF venue recommendation expected mid-summer for fall 2019 event
- Bond bill to be voted upon in March
- Initial engineering studies expected to commence this spring

4. Frequently Asked Questions

- *Will these proposals displace existing events or affect general park users' ability to recreate at Fair Hill NRMA?*
 - The variety of user groups presently enjoying Fair Hill should continue to do so, and new user groups should find Fair Hill a suitable venue for their activities as well. The infrastructure improvements called for in the Horse Park System Study are designed to serve multiple uses and to ensure safe, functional facilities for the future. General recreational park users comprise the largest "user group" in the park. Fair Hill's 5,600+ acres will continue to predominantly support unrestricted access for nature-based recreation. Scheduled activities and events will continue to be focused within the special event area, which maximizes the use of event infrastructure and minimizes conflicts with other natural area users.
- *How will the potential environmental impacts be mitigated?*
 - Preserving habitat and supporting biological diversity has been and will continue to be a top priority. Fair Hill NRMA has taken many steps in recent years to manage the mowing cycle of its hay fields to specifically benefit grassland nesting birds, butterflies, and other pollinators. We have also implemented a number of stormwater management practices to protect aquatic ecosystems from nutrient and sediment-rich runoff, and have design development for several stream restoration and bank stabilization efforts well underway. DNR and partners are very sensitive to this concern and will hold any and all enhancement projects to a consistent standard through careful internal and external review processes and coordination with partner agencies.
- *How will these projects be funded? Will the proposed improvements to park facilities and their long term maintenance needs be financially sustainable?*
 - Projects would be funded through a public-private partnership. Recently a bond bill was introduced requesting an initial allocation of \$250,000 in state funding to be matched by private donations, to serve as the starting fund for engineering and design studies. The goal is that these infrastructure improvements will enhance DNR's ability to address our current maintenance backlog – the cost of which exceeds the current allocation – but will also be financially self-sustaining. Revenues derived from improved facilities and managed through a partner organization will support maintenance costs associated with the special event area. Presently, a sizable portion of resources available to Fair Hill staff are allocated to maintaining the special event area (e.g. turf maintenance, paving, electrical and plumbing repairs, painting, structural stabilization, etc.). It is anticipated that more resources could be put into maintenance and improvement initiatives elsewhere within the park should the proposed investments be made to the special event area. DNR regards long-term maintenance and management of proposed infrastructure improvements to be a prerequisite condition to partner affiliation and project approval.
- *Will the improved facilities be accessible to all park users?*
 - DNR intends to keep all of its facilities available to all park users. As is presently the case, some areas will continue to be available by reservation only for approved events, and not available for general day-use.
- *Will the improved facilities be utilized in a way that deteriorates the rural and natural character of the park?*
 - DNR does not host events that are contrary to its mission, and intends to continue preserving the natural character of Fair Hill and providing for a quality visitor experience. All event requests fielded by the park office are carefully considered for anticipated impacts on the area's natural resources and other park users. Staff work with event coordinators to seek ways to mitigate areas of concern by adjusting the scope of the event to closer align with DNR's goals, and declines event requests that cannot meet requirements or that may negatively impact the park.
- *What permits will be required for these improvements to be made?*
 - The proposed projects will comply with all applicable permit requirements and appropriate plans will be developed as part of the design process, such as a Sediment and Erosion Control Plan, Stormwater Management Plan, and others. An evaluation of the impact of water needs on local water supply will be conducted to determine this limiting factor. Prior to the Horse Park System Study or 4* Proposal, a capital project request submitted by DNR many years ago was funded for the design phase of a new water distribution system installation. DNR is working with Maryland Environmental Service (MES) to design a system to replace the DuPont-era system with one that will meet present and future needs. Adjustments in scope and location of facilities may need to be considered in light of this initiative.
- *Will all required cultural, historical, and environmental review processes be adhered to?*
 - DNR will uphold the standard practice of vetting projects through a review process soliciting comments from all affected agencies. Depending on the scope and location of the proposed work, these often include: Wildlife and Heritage, Fisheries, Forestry, Chesapeake and Coastal Services, Maryland Historic Trust, MD Dept. of Environment, US Army Corps of Engineers, and others. Necessary adjustments will be made to ensure projects meet the specified conditions.