

Agriculture and Forestry Green Infrastructure Focus Group Meeting

July 31, 2006 7:00 –9:00 p.m.
Multi-Purpose Room, Agricultural History Farm Park

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Presentation on Green Infrastructure (20 minutes)
3. Discussion Questions (~ 40 minutes)
 1. How important is it to preserve natural areas? What are the natural areas that you value the most or provide a benefit to you? What are troublesome or helpful results of maintaining natural areas on lands in the Agricultural Reserve?
 2. What are the opportunities and constraints to preserving natural areas on your land?
 3. What existing programs or mechanisms for preserving natural areas on agricultural land (or other land where no development is proposed) are you familiar with?
 4. What works and what doesn't work about these programs? What might improve these programs or mechanisms?
4. Breakout Groups (30 minutes)
5. Wrap-up (15 minutes)

Desired Outcome of the Meeting:

- Participants understand the plan goals, process, and general concepts.
- Park and Planning staff understand green infrastructure-related issues and Agricultural/Forestry concerns, as well as opportunities and constraints.
- A follow-up process that allows continuing input and coordination as needed/desired.

ADDITIONAL FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you have any suggestions for incentives for preserving green infrastructure?
2. Do you have any suggestions for green infrastructure implementation tools (including changes to codes or regulations)?
3. Do you have any suggestions for what types of areas should be included in the green infrastructure network?
4. Do you have any suggestions for ways to enhance the overall effectiveness of green infrastructure or natural area preservation plans?

Any feedback you can provide on the above issues would be appreciated. If you would like to take more time to consider these questions, please feel free to do so and send your responses to:

Mark A. Symborski
Environmental Planner Coordinator
Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

301-495-4636
301-495-1303 (Fax)
mark.symborski@mncppc-mc.org

Agriculture and Forestry Focus Group 07-31-2006

Meeting Summary

Attendees:

Wayne Merkel, DNR Forest Service; Jeremy Criss, DED – Agricultural Services; George Lechlinder, Farm Bureau; Norman Mease, Agriculture Advisory Board; Bill Anderson, Farm Bureau; Vince Berg, Farm Bureau; Mark Symborski, M-NCPPC, Carole Bergmann, M-NCPPC; Mary Dolan, M-NCPPC; Katherine Nelson, M-NCPPC; Pam Rowe, M-NCPPC; Leslie Saville, M-NCPPC; Wade Butler, Butler's Orchard – AAC; Joe Howard, Forestry Board

Financial Issues

Will all come down to money - farmers won't be able to afford to protect a lot of natural areas

Farmers need money for any additional land preservation

Not too many people in the Agricultural Reserve are in favor of greenways

4-wheelers are a problem – sometimes come on private land and cause damage

Has this area been mapped? (Not yet, but the Green Infrastructure map resulting from this project will be a new map showing potential natural area linkages and enhancements.)

Government should just go away, fewer programs and regulations are better

Need to reconcile building homes in forest areas to help preserve more acres in agriculture and reduce agricultural fragmentation.

Well and septic regulations impose excessive restrictions on farmers who want to develop their land

Preserving forest in the Agricultural Reserve pushes development onto farmland

Collect information on how much CREP funding there is and where it is going – CREP money is flat and decreasing

- Funding amount will probably continue to decrease in the future due to competing interests

Funding from State for Rural Legacy program conservation easements/stream buffers has amounted to \$1.2 million in Fiscal 07, but more is needed.

- Maybe State & County could make up the difference – But this will be a big task

Correct pie charts in the presentation slide show with RLP & CREP easement data to increase the area under easements

Agricultural preservation programs → need to direct farmers to proper program

- Programs are voluntary

Need to look at large lot residential properties - nothing productive comes out of that land

Improve communication between agricultural community advocates and Park and Planning permitting services

Forest Resource Issues in the Agricultural Reserve:

- Hedgerows/fencerows – harbor nuisance animals and weed species, larger contiguous forested areas would be better
- Timber resources are important, therefore forest management is important
- Connectivity of agricultural land is important
- Shaded areas can't be cropped or grazed because can't keep vegetation growing
- Critical root zone area
 - Cannot produce crops
 - 16 rows of sweet corn all are lost around forest edges due to shading from trees and critical root zone protection
- Green areas bring deer and Canada geese – need better management programs
- Canada geese are a serious problem
- Need to improve forest mitigation programs, not getting any forest regeneration
- Deer are a serious problem – can't grow sweet corn; field corn also badly grazed
- Deer fencing works in some areas but doesn't address population issues
- Forested corridors are being used by deer to avoid control measures – become deer highways
- Deer management should continue and be enhanced on public lands
 - More barriers to that type of control need to be removed
- Strike a balance to allow off-site forest-receiving sites for tree planting
- Need better management of publicly owned land (M-NCPPC, WSSC, DNR)
 - Need a noxious weed control law - growth of thistle, Johnson grass and other invasive plants are a real problem
 - Level the playing field
 - Deer management is critical
- Conditions on easements → too many restrictions for landowners; current conditions don't allow selective foresting; need balance between goals of forest conservation and farming – need to create income for farmers – forest mitigation opportunities
- Need to define what forest practices can be allowed; look at what harvesting means – sort out forest practices, determine what harvesting techniques are allowed
- Selective forest harvesting needs to be included in the concept of forest conservation. M-NCPPC should not deny landowners to selectively harvest their forest under conservation easement without compensating the landowner.
- Off-site forest mitigation is an opportunity to enhance farming in the County
- Follow-up on forest mitigation areas is necessary

- Deer-control is vital
- Not every property can fence against deer – it is expensive and time-consuming
- Need to keep focus on “conservation” not preservation easements which totally lock things up and allow no other uses → people still want to manage their forests → need incentives for this, FLEP Forest Lands Enhancement Program
- Conservation programs work the best, as opposed to preservation programs
- Park and Planning is discouraging the private Forest Banks and is encouraging payment of large fees to Park and Planning
- Forest Banks should be conservation areas, not preservation areas
- Conservation easements should allow the use of forest areas to meet farmers objectives
 - Create incentives

Irrigation issues → need to protect flows; both for spring flows and keeping water available for irrigation

- Need access to the water and to be able to cross streams for legitimate needs
- Waterways and streams important for irrigating crops, turf, horticulture
- Need the water to irrigate 3000 acres of crops, quality and quantity of water for irrigation
- Streams seem to be drying up more, we need to keep them flowing
- Water quality is an important issue
- Need to make it easier for farmers to create ponds – difficult to get permits
- Need recharge to groundwater - Wells do not provide enough water

Forest Land Enhancement Program Practices

- Forestry programs allow owners to have their lands assessed as forestry lands → lowest rate is the FCMA woodlands assessment program
- County tax assessor will have a list of all properties that take advantage of assessment programs
- Need a list of programs

We need to look at how much land needs to be publicly owned

Various incentive programs → generally first have to have a stewardship plan in place to utilize the incentives; farms generally have nutrient management plans and stewardship plans in place

Willard property and Ruby Hyatt property – already on easements; Park and Planning has it on its acquisition list → conflict over what lands should be targeted, there needs to be more discussion of some of these properties

The park dedication/ acquisition process is out of control → the timing is wrong and impacts landowners too much

- For example, the Ruby Hyatt property seems to be a problem – preliminary plan being held up by dedication; this area already covered by an agricultural preservation easement – question the legality of this

Have someone as agricultural liaison at Park and Planning – someone who will function as an agricultural ombudsman who is focused on the agricultural community, can make policy calls, and participate at DRC

Child lots

- Farmers want to build houses for family members in wooded areas, not on tillable land
- However, Park and Planning wants the house in farm fields, causing a conflict
 - The conflict needs to be resolved, the current process takes too long
- When a farmer subdivides, a 50% threshold for forest conservation reduces the area available for farming – this needs to be reconciled with agricultural preservation policy

Look at large turf areas

Carole Bergman can help with invasive species control

- \$75,000 is available this year
 - This may be a start, but it is negligible compared to the total acreage of parkland under the stewardship of the Parks Department