

# THE FRONT PAGE

News & Views You Can Use

## FAIR HILL AND CROWNSVILLE SHORT-LISTED AS SITES FOR MARYLAND HORSE PARK

Six nominations for the Maryland Horse Park were received by August 1. The site selection committee then moved into overdrive, barnstorming the state and listening to formal presentations. At press time came the Maryland Stadium Authority's announcement that the list of six had been reduced to two: Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area in Cecil County (a.k.a. "Fair Hill") and the Anne Arundel County site that includes the Anne Arundel County Fairgrounds, the state-owned Crownsville Hospital site, and the Annapolis-owned Waterworks Park (a.k.a. "Crownsville").

According to the Maryland Stadium Authority, the principal attributes of the two short-listed sites are:

- Terrain and configuration suitable for all of the proposed equestrian uses
- More than 500 contiguous acres
- Resourceful utilization of existing public lands

- Proximity to major interstate highways
- Adequate number of nearby hotels and restaurants
- Maximization of rural environment experience

Most Maryland equestrians are familiar with 5,613-acre Fair Hill, located near I-95 between Baltimore and Philadelphia and already serving as a *de facto* horse park. Fair Hill hosts everything from local 4-H, hunter/jumper and dressage shows to Western events, steeplechase racing and some of the world's most prestigious international competitions (three-day eventing, world championship driving and endurance).

Fair Hill's Bill Mills trail ride is three days long and attracts over 500 riders. There is foxhunting in the vicinity. There are established vendors offering guided trail rides and carriage rides. There are stables, arenas, a racetrack, trails, a year-round training facility, kennels, and more. In addition, there are vendor facilities and campgrounds, as well as plenty of bathrooms and showers. The only thing that Fair Hill currently lacks is an indoor arena.

Fair Hill (both NRMA and the town) is home to the National Steeplechase Association and the National Steeplechase Foundation, as well as the Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau and Fasig-Tipton Midlantic.

The drawbacks to Fair Hill are its location and support services. Fair Hill lacks a strong relationship with a key urban area; such relationships are useful for support, spectators, etc. Additionally, a large percentage of visitors tend to stay in Delaware, as there aren't enough local hotels. Obviously, the MSA does not want to enrich out-of-state businesses. But this situation could change should the state officially anoint Fair Hill, plowing more resources into it and the surrounding community.

Equestrians are less familiar with the Crownsville site, which includes a combination of the 1,032-acre, state-owned Crownsville Hospital site, the 56-acre, state-owned Anne Arundel County Fairgrounds, the 654-acre Annapolis-owned Waterworks Park, and the 875-acre Naval Academy dairy farm located west of Maryland Route 3 and south of Maryland Route 32.

Unlike the Fair Hill site, the Crownsville site has an advantageous location in central Maryland with easy access to Annapolis (one of the nominating bodies), Baltimore and Washington D.C. It is bisected by I-97 and is convenient to I-95, I-295, Route 50 and Baltimore/Washington International Airport, with plenty of hotels and other amenities already in place. However, the proposed site is currently composed of disjointed tracts that would have to be unified through some sort of legal and/or civic action (which is sure to entail protests by some group). Then, once unified, it would require a greater amount of capital investment to host the level of international competitions that Fair Hill currently hosts.

Bottom line: both sites have their pros and cons, and members of the site selection committee have their work cut out for them.

## The Site Selection Committee

The MSA has selected Richter Cornbrooks Gribble and Gralla Architects (RCG/G) as the architectural consultants to manage the Maryland Horse Park feasibility study. RCG is a local architectural firm with expertise in the design of public assembly facilities, including museums and visitor centers. Gralla Architects is a nationally recognized equestrian architectural firm that worked on the West-World of Scottsdale Equestrian Park's redevelopment, the Oklahoma State Fair Park's rehabilitation and expansion, and Kansas State University's Equine Education and Multi-Use Activities Center.

For the Maryland Horse Park project, RCG/G will assist the Maryland Horse Park Selection Committee in evaluating the proposed sites, performing a technical analysis. Once a final site is selected, they will prepare a conceptual layout of the facility on the site selected, evaluate infrastructure and environmental issues, and present the plans necessary for estimating the project costs. The architectural study and the related economic impact study will provide a basis for a cost and funding study. The MSA intends to approach the Maryland General Assembly for funding in 2006.

The Maryland Horse Industry Board is working with the MSA, and several horse people are serving on the site selection committee, advising on the needs and expectations of the equestrian community.

Greg Gingery, former chairman of the Washington International Horse Show, helped transition the show from the aging Capital Centre to the state-of-the-art MCI Arena, and is himself a dressage and "A" hunter show competitor. He has a strong vision of Maryland hosting nationally and internationally respected horse shows once again. In fact, it was during Greg's tenure as chairman of the MHIB that research began on a state horse park.

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### The Equiry Wants to Know: Where Did You Go On Vacation?

Send us your travel photos! With or without horses! Please be sure to tell us where you went and who is in the photo with you.

Della West, Peggy Bree and Mary Snyder visiting the River Rise State Park in Florida. They tell us they never go anywhere without the latest issue of *The Equiry*! They also tell us: "We wish we had parks like this in Maryland."

IF YOU HAVE NEWS, VIEWS OR UPDATES TO CONTRIBUTE, PLEASE SEND THEM TO Editor at *The Equiry*, P.O. Box 610, Lisbon, MD 21765 • FAX: 410-489-7828 • email [editor@equiry.com](mailto:editor@equiry.com). Be sure to include your full name, phone number and address. All submissions become the property of *The Equiry*.

Had Maryland had such a facility when the time came for the Washington International Horse Show to relocate, the show might have been able to remain in Maryland. Charles Fenwick Jr. has gained considerable knowledge and experience spearheading the highly-regarded Shawan Downs, a 300-acre private, non-profit preservation project that, for the time being, hosts primarily field-oriented horse sports such as point-to-points, steeplechases, and recognized and unrecognized horse trials. Shamrock Farm's Jim Steele has over 30 years of experience in both the Thoroughbred and Standardbred industries, from importing and exporting to breeding and racing.

Jim, Charlie and Greg are also drawing on advice from the Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Racing Commission, as well as the experience and knowledge of the entire MHIB, which includes community leaders such as Trish Gilbert, one of the founders of Fair Hill International Inc. and an internationally-respected course designer and technical delegate.

As Jim Steele notes, the first phase is to select a site for a feasibility study. The study will then determine whether the goals of the MHIB or the site selection committee with regard to a horse park can be realized at the selected site. "What people need to understand is that we are picking a site for a **feasibility** study. The feasibility study must then show that a horse park *at that site* makes economic sense," he explains.

### **The Time Is Right**

Aside from all the poetic and romantic reasons for a Maryland Horse Park (chief among these, the state's long sporting history and its tradition of cultivating world-class horses and riders), there are very real economic reasons, based on current and future needs, for a Maryland Horse Park – one done correctly, and with full support of all branches of state and local government.

The first, most critical reason is that Maryland is losing its top competitions for lack of suitable sites. Business is going elsewhere, and that is bad. The Washington International Horse Show moved from Maryland to the District of Columbia because there were no suitable sites in Maryland. The Potomac Valley Dressage Association has moved its United States Dressage

Federation/United States Equestrian Federation-rated shows to Virginia, because of a lack of suitable facilities. The Maryland Horse Shows Association has located its premiere rated show in Virginia, due to lack of suitable facilities. The list goes on, and the erosion will continue until we have suitable facilities here in Maryland.

As all the economic studies show, from 1992 to the most recently released studies from the United States Department of Agriculture and the American Horse Council, the density and intensity of the horse industry in Maryland makes it one of the largest industries in the state. The fact that our premiere shows are being held in other states is absurd.

And the only reason for it is the lack of facilities.

Our location cannot be beat. Since colonial times, Maryland has been the crossroads for trade from the west, north and south to the Port of Baltimore; from river traffic to railroad traffic to airports and highways, all routes lead to Maryland. The equestrian community can, and should, capitalize on this accessibility with a horse park. It not only makes sense, it is long overdue.

Also on the horizon is an international import/export facility for horses. Equestrians competing abroad and those buying and selling horses internationally have long complained about the New York facility, and for most of the year, the Florida facility is just too hot for practical use. A Maryland import/export facility would only serve as an additional feeder for a state horse park.

There are also political and environmental reasons for a horse park. Politically, the governor and the legislators are finally realizing the size of the industry and its vast potential to contribute even more to Maryland. A horse park furthers the goals of increasing open space and conserving environmental resources, while providing the potential for more trails. From a tourism standpoint, dollars brought into the state by travelers are more profitable than Marylanders' own dollars because visitors require so little in state-funded infrastructure (unlike residents, who require schools, etc.).

And lastly, there are the purely cultural reasons for a horse park – for the museums and the education centers; for the promotion of

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horses to the general public; for the opportunity to give a child its first pony ride; for the retirement of our great Maryland-bred or Maryland-trained horses.

### The Nominations

Members of the site selection committee were somewhat disappointed that there were not more nominations. Only six were submitted by the deadline. Montgomery and Howard Counties' much-anticipated nominations were never submitted.

In addition to the Fair Hill and Crownsville sites, the other nominated sites were:

#### Carroll County

Submitted by Department of Economic Development, Lawrence F. Twele, Director  
*600.36 acres on the Neal property in northwest Carroll County between Westminster and Taneytown. Access via Rt. 140.*

#### Frederick County

Submitted by Colby Ferguson, Mt. St. Mary's University/Trinity United Methodist Church  
*603 acres in the northern part of Frederick County, with potential to expand up to 934 acres with satellite site at the Deer Creek Valley Farm. Located on Rt. 15 in close proximity to Thurmont, Emmitsburg, the city of Frederick and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.*

#### Harford County

Submitted by J. Thomas Sadowski, Director, and C. John Sullivan III, Agriculture Coordinator, Harford County Office of Economic Development  
*997 acres located in Havre de Grace and near the site of the former Havre de Grace Racetrack, commonly known as "The Graw." Located near I-95 exits 85 and 89. Direct access to the Chesapeake Bay, the Susquehanna River and the Susquehanna State Park.*

#### Wicomico County

Submitted by Gary Mackes  
*867-acre site near Hebron, in proximity to Rt. 50.*

The site selection committee (which, as discussed earlier, is composed of representatives of the MSA, the MHIB, the Department of Business and Economic Development, and the aforementioned equestrians and consultants) intends to make the final site choice by mid-September.

### Rumors Ran Rampant

As soon as the MSA released its request for proposals, the rumors

about so-called "frontrunners" ran rampant among the general press and the equestrian community. Every site had a formal or informal public relations/lobbying arm, each hoping that if it spread the rumor that its particular facility was the frontrunner, that would make it so. Every local paper championed its own site, picking up on the press releases being generated by these PR arms and publishing rumors of frontrunners as fact. It was understandable that proponents of each site would try to spin press in its favor. We at *The Equiery* have been approached by several of these papers to verify the rumors, and the reporters have been frustrated, even angry, when we denied their requests to turn rumor into fact.

We were also approached by most of the organizers behind each nomination, asking for *The Equiery's* support for their particular facility. Again, we declined, electing instead to support the process of the site selection committee.

### Infighting, Paranoia, NIMBYism – The Games Have Begun!

As if the press misinformation were not bad enough, members of the equestrian community got up in arms, either for or against particular sites. Some equestrians become so myopic about the facilities in their jurisdictions that they have refused to support a facility being built elsewhere. This is a mistake, and unfortunately smells of sour grapes. Didn't you learn anything from watching the racing people fight among themselves over slots? And because of their fighting, look where they are today: the issue of slots is no longer about racing.

As noted above, Fair Hill is on the short list of potential sites. One hundred and fifty horse people attended a recent meeting of the Maryland Horse Council's Trails and Greenways Committee. Unfortunately, the manager of Fair Hill NRMA, Wayne Suydam, left that meeting with the distinct impression that the majority of horse people oppose the use of Fair Hill as the Maryland Horse Park. This is disappointing, and hopefully not an accurate reflection of our readers' opinions. However, we were dismayed to learn that there is even a website dedicated to opposing Fair Hill's selection as the Maryland Horse Park site.

Opponents of Fair Hill's site decry the potential loss of the Saw Mill field, which they describe

as "currently open grassland and woods." The Saw Mill field is currently used for all the horse trials, and contains numerous permanent cross-country features, including the famous foundation wall and a water complex. It is hardly untouched grasslands, and represents a very small portion of Fair Hill's vast acreage. Contrary to what the website says, Fair Hill's use as the Maryland Horse Park would not be incompatible with its current uses.

Considering that designation of a site as THE Maryland Horse Park will ensure a flood of new state funding, opposing Fair Hill's selection is remarkably shortsighted on the part of its trail users, since the influx of cash will benefit all of Fair Hill, including the trails. As has been reported in *The Equiery*, Fair Hill is desperate for more cash for trail maintenance, and unfortunately, when a trail becomes too damaged, it is not unusual for management to close it due to lack of funding for its repair. So state recognition could be a windfall for Fair Hill's trail riders, endurance riders, and carriage drivers.

In the meantime, down in Anne Arundel County, equestrians have launched an aggressive e-mail campaign lobbying their reluctant county executive, Janet Owens, for her support of Crownsville as the Maryland Horse Park. The mayor of Annapolis, Ellen Moyer, who helped organize the Crownsville nomination, has been allowed to circulate a letter she received from Janet Owens detailing her objections to the use of the Crownsville site. The county executive's letter is followed by a reply from the Annapolis mayor, which attempts to clarify the county executive's misconceptions and apparent misunderstandings of the proposal. We wish Mayor Moyer and Anne Arundel equestrians the best of luck in obtaining their county executive's support.

### 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

There is considerable and legitimate concern within the equestrian community that the MSA's zeal to build a horse park – "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" – might result in the selection of an inappropriate site. Maryland equestrians are well acquainted with the problems plaguing other state horse facilities launched with similarly lofty goals. Some of those sites are struggling for funding as state officials, convinced that the equestrian centers now make bet-

ter hockey rinks, concert venues, mountain bike trails or demolition derby sites, see little point in continuing to dedicate revenue for the sites' original equestrian purposes. Prince George's Equestrian Center, Tuckahoe Equestrian Center, Fair Hill and others – all state-owned, all established with big plans – all now struggle for appropriate funding.

It is possible to have a successful horse park. And a well-situated, well designed, well-managed facility can be a boon to the economy and the quality of life in Maryland. We at *The Equiery* share the concern expressed by our readers that not only will a poorly suited site *not* help the horse industry, it might actually hurt it if the site is poorly utilized and perceived by the general public to be another white elephant.

We encourage the site selection committee to study not only those sites that have succeeded, such as the Kentucky Horse Park, but those that have failed.

### Feasibility Study Will Determine Suitability of Site

"We hope the right site is included in those currently [short-listed], but we recognize how critical it is to the industry and community to have the *right* site, not just any site," concurs MHIB chairman and site selection committee member Jim Steele. "The right site might be one of the currently [short-listed], or it might not be. We will not approve a site just to meet a deadline."

If the feasibility study fails to show that a horse park at either site makes economic sense, it is back to the drawing board.

"But," adds Jim, "We *will* have a horse park, *somewhere* in Maryland. The time is right."

We agree. The time is right.

—Publisher



## READER QUESTION

What would you like to see in the Maryland Horse Park?

Send your wish list to  
editor@equiery.com, fax:  
410-489-7828  
Laurel Scott, Editor  
**The Equiery**  
P.O. Box 610  
Lisbon, MD 21765