



Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

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April 26, 2010

Chairman Scott York
Loudoun County Board of Supervisors
1 Harrison Street, SE
Leesburg, VA 20175

Re: Camping at White's Ford Park – SPEX 2008-0062

Dear Chairman York:

The Park Authority has previously indicated it can not further reduce the number of campsites it is proposing for White's Ford Park. County staff have asked the Park Authority to provide additional information concerning its request for 60 family campsites/cabins and a group camping area for up to 100 persons. The purpose of this letter is to transmit the requested information.

A number of factors were involved in NVRPA's determination of the number of campsites it is requesting at White's Ford Park. Those factors include:

1. Zoning Ordinance Standards
2. Providing Adequate Service to the Public
3. Economic Viability
4. Environmental Impacts

1. Zoning Ordinance Standards

The Loudoun County Zoning Ordinance permits three levels of campgrounds based on the size of a parcel:

Size	# of campsites	Minimum Size
Small Scale	Up to 50	40 acres
Medium Scale	50 - 100	80 acres
Large Scale	100 - 150	160 acres
Level IV	More than 150	Per SPEX 6-1300

By the County's own standards, an un-subdivided White's Ford Park (295 acres) could accommodate up to 150 campsites, with a minor special exception or more than that with a full special exception. NVRPA's proposal for just 60 campsites, which could include up to 10 camping cabins, falls well below the intensity the County recognizes as appropriate for a similarly sized parcel.

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Furthermore, NVRPA has agreed to prohibit all recreation vehicles and pop-up trailers from its campground, a direct response to questions and concerns voiced by staff and neighbors regarding the introduction of trailers to the Property. These additional restrictions are not part of the County zoning ordinance limitations.

2. Providing Adequate Service to the Public

NVRPA believes 60 campsites is the minimum number needed to provide adequate service to the public. The 2007 Virginia Outdoors Plan, which is the statewide comprehensive plan for outdoor recreation, indicates a considerable deficit of campsites in the Northern Virginia region.

At the Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC) meeting, there was a case for less camping at White's Ford, based upon the number of campsites at several Virginia state parks (including Sky Meadows and Shenandoah River) and NVRPA's other campgrounds (Bull Run and Pohick Bay). Such a simple comparison is difficult to justify as there are many factors, besides total land acreage, that determine the number of campsites that may be developed at a particular park. Some other factors include:

- **Supply and demand.** Currently, there is not a single public campground in Loudoun County where a family can rent an individual campsite and experience an overnight stay in a natural outdoor environment.
- **Population density.** NVRPA serves a population of more than 1.7 million, with 290,000 in Loudoun County. Sky Meadows and Shenandoah River State Parks are in counties with populations of 68,000 and 36,000 respectively.
- **Type of camping to be provided.** NVRPA is planning a family campground where local citizens can experience nature and enjoy the Potomac River. Sky Meadows campground is a primitive "hike in" camping area with parking 3/4 mile away that is intended primarily to serve Appalachian Trail hikers. It is not a destination for families as White's Ford Park would be.
- **Space occupied by other park uses.** NVRPA's other two parks with family campgrounds have more total acres per campsite than what is proposed at White's Ford – but they also have many other park amenities. Pohick Bay, for example, has an 18 hole championship golf course, a water park, a 120-foot wide boat launch ramp serving all types of watercraft, four picnic shelters, and both miniature and disc golf courses. At White's Ford, NVRPA has agreed to prohibit virtually all other potential park uses except camping, canoe and kayak launching, picnicking and trail hiking. Furthermore, the 60 family campsites at White's Ford will only occupy approximately 12 acres.

3. Economic Viability

White's Ford is not being acquired to earn a profit for NVRPA and, with the many limitations that have been placed on the site from the conservation easement to the commission permit the

park's revenues will never exceed expenses. However, it is important that development costs are kept at a reasonable level and that some revenues are generated at the site to help offset expenses. The staffing costs of running a family campground is nearly the same if it is for 30, 60, or 100 sites, so the fewer sites the more expensive it is per site. If NVRPA is restricted to a number of campsites less than 60, the project becomes that much more difficult to justify economically – both in terms of development and operating costs.

As you are aware, NVRPA has agreed, as a condition on the commission permit and camping special exception, to widen and improve the entire length of Hibler Road prior to opening the campground – a cost that is estimated at \$700,000. And, even though NVRPA has agreed to tent and cabin only campsites with gravel roadways, there still will be significant development costs that include a campground check-in facility and a shower and bathhouse with well and septic system. Total costs for the camping area, including the road improvements and campground development, will be well in excess of \$1 million. Furthermore, fewer sites will lead to lesser operating revenues generated. From an economic standpoint, NVRPA believes it is not prudent to develop anything less than 60 campsites.

4. Environmental Impacts

In its recent SPEX plans submitted to the BOS, NVRPA is proposing to develop up to 60 campsites with no more than 10 cabins and a group camping area (an open field of approximately one acre in size) that will serve not more than 100 persons. The group camping area is further restricted to being used not more than 25 times per year.

Environmental impacts are important in determining the number of campsites at a park. To minimize impacts, NVRPA has:

- Proposed a number of campsites far below what the zoning ordinances deems to be acceptable based upon the size of the property.
- Completed extensive environmental and archaeological surveys to avoid sensitive resources.
- Agreed to prohibit all RV and pop-up camping trailers, which is in higher demand than tent only sites at NVRPA's other two campgrounds.
- Designed a tent camping layout for the individual campsites that will encompass only approximately 12 acres on the 295 acre property. (*Attachment #1 is a park map and corresponding aerial photograph of a similar tent camping area at NVRPA's Pohick Bay Regional Park. This camping area is approximately 10 acres in size and includes 50 campsites. The aerial photo shows the minimal effects that tent camping has on the land.*)
- Located the tent and group camping areas in existing farm fields where not a single tree will be removed for the campsite development.
- Agreed to improve wildlife habitat by managing the reforestation or meadow creation on more than 100 acres of the property. (*Attachment #2 includes an aerial photo noting the size and location of the 60 individual campsites and the vast open fields*

currently being farmed. The adjacent aerial photo notes the general areas that will be converted back to natural habitat of forest or meadows.)

- Agreed to widen and improve the entire length of Hibler Road up to the park entrance.

We have worked closely with County staff and the Planning Commission during the past 17 months and were pleased to bring a project forward to you with a recommendation of approval from both staff and the Commission (8-1). Despite that previous recommendation of approval, NVRPA has decided to add two more conditions as a result of discussions at the TLUC meeting.

1. NVRPA will agree to relocate the group camping area outside the floodplain. The group camping area is an open field approximately 1 acre in size and used primarily by youth groups.
2. NVRPA will agree to further restrict the use of the group camping area. Currently, it is limited to 25 uses per year and not more than 100 persons at a time. The 100 person figure is intended to accommodate two or three small scouting organizations. NVRPA will agree to further restrict the group camping area use to 5 times per year, with between 50 and 100 persons, and 20 times per year with not more than 50 persons.

NVRPA has made significant plan changes and has agreed to numerous restrictions in order to mitigate possible impacts of the proposed camping to both our park neighbors and the property. We believe the 295-acre property, which is restricted to a small number of potential park uses, can easily accommodate 60 campsites and one group camping area on less than 15 acres.

For the reasons noted above, we respectfully request the approval of the 60-site campground. If a further reduction is imposed by Loudoun County, it is likely NVRPA will never develop the camping as the cost for the road improvements and on-site amenities becomes too disproportionate to the amenities permitted at the park. It also is possible NVRPA would seriously consider not exercising its option to purchase the property if it became economically unviable, as much as we would all like to see this beautiful area become a new park

If you should have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,


Paul A. Gilbert
Executive Director

cc: Loudoun County Board of Supervisors
Sophia Fisher, Loudoun County