

June 12, 2007

Mayor and Council Members  
City of Fairfax  
Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Mr. Mayor and Council Members:

I would like to address the proposed ball field at the property off Stafford Drive in the Mosby Woods section of Fairfax City. First let me say that I appreciate the time and effort which you and the city staff have contributed to this issue. Certainly, there are valid and competing uses at stake with this property. I thank you for your efforts in trying to achieve an outcome that will be in the best interest of city residents.

I am currently on a sabbatical from my position at George Mason University so have had to follow this issue mostly electronically. I did have a recent opportunity to view the property on one of our trips back. My comments are based on that visit and plans for the one ball field option posted on the web.

The one ball field plan currently proposed does a good job of protecting the immediate riparian area of Accotink Creek in accordance with the city's mapped Resource Protection Area. As I understand it, the proposal would generally save an additional buffer up to the crest of a ridge which parallels the Creek through most of the property. In addition, this would save many of the large trees on the slope and ridge although it looks like some on the western side of the ridge might be removed (based on flagging on site). Excavation along the flanks of this ridge would need to be done carefully to minimize future tree loss.

The area slated for the ball field and parking lot does contain valuable ecological resources. There are numerous areas of vernal wetlands in the area which provide valuable habitat for wetland vegetation like sedges as well as animals such as amphibians, insects, birds, and mammals. While the area had dried at the time of my visit, it was clear that just weeks before there was a lush growth of algae in the pools which would have been present at just the right time for reproduction of amphibians like spring peepers and many aquatic insects. This is a unique habitat in the City which is rapidly disappearing. Its loss would be significant. My recommendation would be to try to save it and consider other ways of dealing with ball field needs.

There have been suggestions that George Mason University might use this property as a "living laboratory" for class study and student projects. George Mason has created the Potomac Environmental Research and Education Center (PEREC) which begins operation on July 1 and I will serve as its first director. In that role, I would be happy to facilitate use of this and other city natural areas to the benefit of both the teaching and research program at George Mason as well as the benefit of the City and its residents. In that regard, I think that a survey and inventory of the open space resources within the city as to their ecological attributes and resources and their value as habitat culminating in recommendations for management might be a good first step. This might serve as a basis for arriving at a consensus on the proper management of specific tracts of City open space before proposals for specific uses that involve habitat alteration arise. I will be available to meet with you and/or City staff to discuss this and other ideas about working together when I return in August.

Sincerely,

R. Christian Jones  
Chair, Environmental Science and Policy Dept  
Director, Potomac Environmental Research and Education Center (effective 7/1/2007)  
George Mason University