

Brighton Knolls Neighbors and the Proposed Use of 19900 New Hampshire Avenue as a Large-Scale Day Care and Commercial Event Venue

Who we are

94 households living in Brighton Knolls and along New Hampshire Avenue between Gold Mine and Brighton Dam Roads. 74 households have requested that they be informed of all developments regarding this commercial event venue. Nearly 40% of those households have contributed to our legal fund.

We are dedicated to preserving the tranquil rural environment in which we live and which we think is assured by the local planning documents and their enforcement.

What was being proposed

The property at 19900 New Hampshire Avenue is an abandoned home on 30 acres, 17 of which are to be kept as wooded. The initial proposal was for building five single-family homes and the neighborhood would have supported that development.

However, based on comments made at an April 19th community meeting, the new owners want to intensively develop the property to include:

1. A for-profit summer day-camp for 350 children with 100 staff members
2. A commercial event venue that would host weddings, reunions, and other events for up to 500 people on weekends and evenings after the children leave
3. Year round after-school activities for children from other day-care providers
4. 94 parking spaces, plus plans to park on the grass areas for large events
5. Intensive camp infrastructure on the non-wooded land, including a multi-propose building, activity centers, two classroom buildings, several maintenance and administration buildings, a ropes and zip line course, swimming pool, basketball court, several playfields, two yurts, an archery range, internal driveways, and two extra lanes on New Hampshire Avenue to facilitate traffic entering and leaving the site.

The original application submission included the above design and business plan elements.

Implementation of this plan was dependent on the County approving the Applicant's request to be granted agricultural accessory authority. The Applicant claimed that the property had been, at one time, a "farm." **The County denied this request in August 2023.**

Subsequent Changes to Original Plan

- After the August ruling in a letter dated October 18, 2023 Kate Dadourian stated she would not be holding adult events in the evenings or on weekends. *Note: this letter is silent regarding children and teen events in the evenings and weekends.*

Updated: February 23, 2024 to reflect Current Status

- On October 16, 2023 Rippling Brook Nature Preschool and Summer Camp applied for conditional use to build a 60-person preschool and a 350-person summer camp.
- The November 2023 GOCA presentation by Kate Dadourian outlined this new development plan. The new application is filed under the provisions for a Private Educational Institution. This is a permitted conditional use in a Rural Cluster zone. Likewise, a private educational institution may run a summer day camp with conditional use. *Note: Ms. Dadourian stated she has no training in early education nor any training in school administration. She stated that intends to earn the administration certification.*
- The November presentation focused on the extensive camp build-out which is unchanged from her original plan. The camp includes 13,000 square feet of classrooms, a pool, basketball court, archery and other target sports range, zip lines, ropes courses, amphitheater, trails running through the forest conservation area, and multiple large playfields. In contrast, the preschool has one 2,000 sq foot classroom and one adjacent playground. In public forums Ms. Dadourian has stated that the preschool children would not be using the camp facilities. *Note: while the entire parcel of land is 30 acres, 17 acres are in a forest conservation preserve. Thus, the intensive build-out, parking lots, and drive lanes only can be on the remaining 13 acres, at the front of the property along New Hampshire Ave.*
- The Applicant has filed for a waiver from the County's bike way plan stating that it would be a bike path "to nowhere." A bike path has been proposed along New Hampshire Avenue along the Utility Corridor to Rte. 108 in Ashton as noted in the County Pedestrian Plan. The Washington Area Bicycle Association is addressing this issue on our behalf.
- The Applicant has filed for a waiver from the County's Forest Conservation plan. They stated that not being able to cut down 16 specimen trees, protected by the County, would be a hardship and would preclude development of the property. An adjoining neighbor to this property is a professional landscaper and is addressing this issue. *Note: a smaller camp footprint, a preschool only building, or building 5 houses can be accomplished on this property with little or no removal of the specimen trees.*
- Well and septic capacity remain unsettled. The applicant claims they should be granted permission to proceed with development based on well draws and septic needs for a 150-person camp and be allowed to add well and septic capacity "as needed". This is contrary to accepted practice by the County which requires sufficient well and septic capacity for the maximum projected use. The Patuxent Watershed Protective Association is assisting us with this analysis.

Neighborhood Concerns

- Granting the developer's request for a conditional use would establish a precedent for large-scale commercialization of New Hampshire Ave. The nature and scope of the project are inconsistent with the Olney Master Plan, approved by the Montgomery County Council and adopted by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 2005. The Master Plan specifically calls for the protection of forested areas, open space, and the Patuxent watershed, all of which would be adversely impacted by the Rippling Brook development. Moreover, the Master Plan recommends maintaining "the character and existing scale of development in the rural communities in Northern Olney" by prohibiting "additional zoning for commercial uses, or expansion of commercially zoned areas in these communities."

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Preservation of this area is critical to the protection of County's drinking water resources. The expansive development will increase imperviousness and decrease natural open spaces. More needs to be done to protect the Patuxent River watershed. The camp will put the Hawlings River tributary, which runs through the site, and the local environment at risk.

- The nature preschool proposal is deceptive about the overall scale of the planned development. The summer camp is six times the size of the preschool.
- The application seeks zoning review for only a small part of its anticipated operations, essentially asking the county to ignore the large scale of the venue.
- The Applicant has undercounted the additional vehicle trips daily to and from the site, based on the currently available traffic study conducted by Rippling Brook.

A neighborhood traffic study, using County criteria and measures, estimates that the camp will increase traffic on New Hampshire by *at least* 50% in the morning and 35% in the afternoon. This estimate includes the optimistic assumptions made by the Applicant regarding carpooling and bus usage.

- Rippling Brook has provided no traffic safety plan as required by the County. The increased traffic on a 2-lane windy road will necessitate an expansion of New Hampshire Ave to include a deceleration and acceleration lane. The camp would be introducing an intersection at least as busy as Gold Mine and New Hampshire.

Next Steps

- Planning Board hearing is scheduled for April 11, 2024
- Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings (OZAH) hearing is scheduled for April 29-30, 2024