

South County

Two-ballfield park plans irk citizens committee

By E.B. FURGURSON III Staff Writer

A county parks official plans to present two plans for Franklin Point Park with ballfields, despite the wishes of the citizens committee working on the plan.

Jack Keene, planning and construction chief for the Department of Parks and Recreation, said he'll unveil plans for putting two soccer-lacrosse fields at two different sites on the 477-acre property at a Feb. 25 public hearing.

Members of the Franklin Point-Shady Side Parks Master Planning Committee, charged with divining a plan for five parks on the Shady Side Peninsula, say he's out of bounds.

They intended that a plan be presented without ballfields.

"That does not represent what citizens on the committee have said," Teri Nyman said. "A lot of people do not want to see ballfields ... and those people need to be represented."

There were no minutes available from the Jan. 9 meeting of the committee, but an audio recording by WRYYR indicates it had agreed to put out two proposals: one with two multipurpose fields and one that would offer passive recreation, trails and a visitor center.

Mr. Keene said he did not recollect the meeting the same way.

"If there is a misunderstanding that is unfortunate," Mr. Keene said. "But I don't see how this in any way serves to limit any discussion on the merits of any individual element of the plan."

He said if the public sentiment is against the ballfields or any other element of the plan the committee will be sensitive to that as they deliberate to prepare the final plan.

"This meeting is intended to stimulate public comment."

Mr. Keene pointed out though that the Deale-Shady Side Small Area Plan allows up to 20 percent of the park to be used for active recreation.

"These plans, with ballfields, trails and a visitor center, use less than 5 percent of the park area," he said.

One option would put fields to the right of Dent Road. That area is wooded and has some wetlands. The second option would put them farther down the road in an open field with some wetlands, close to an existing stream.

Each plan would use about 6 acres for two soccer and lacrosse fields and parking.

Some members of the panel said excluding the no-ballfield option is undercutting the months-long and sometimes controversial process.

Early on, South Arundel Citizens for Responsible Development, the environmental group primarily responsible for saving Franklin Point from developers in the mid-1990s, complained that the committee was violating state open meetings laws by not advertising the meetings in advance - in other words, preventing the public from weighing in.

The state ruled that the meetings were exempt from the rule.

"I have approached this with an open mind. I have listened to everybody," said committee member Dale Johnson, a 15-year resident of Avalon Shores.

"What carried the most weight, and what was reflected in the surveys done, was open space. The majority wanted low-impact recreational use. That needs to be considered and shown."

Other options that will be presented at the meeting for Franklin Point include a network of trails, including one hard-surface path - either limestone or paved - looping around most of the property, a nature and welcome center to be built on the footprint of an abandoned house near Deep Creek, a possible spot to put in canoes and kayaks, and perhaps an art center.

Most of the other parks on the peninsula - Jack Creek Park, Shady Cove Natural Area, Shady Side Park and Snug Harbor Park - would remain as they are.

Jack Creek Park could have a parking area, trail and nature observation platform built.

At the Feb. 25 meeting, which begins at 7 p.m. at Shady Side Elementary School, county planners and the committee will take public comment. They'll weigh that feedback while putting together the final management plan draft, due this spring.

pfurgurson@capitalgazette.com

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