

MEMORANDUM

December 21, 1999

From: David Schnare, Esq. Ph.D.
Chairman, Environmental and Land Use Committee
Occoquan Watershed Coalition

To: Elaine McConnell, Supervisor
Springfield District

Al Akers, President
Occoquan Watershed Coalition

RE: Field of Dreams Options

There are only a few options regarding the Field of Dreams (FOD) project and revolve around traffic and environmental concerns. The items below reflect the degree to which impact on the Watershed has been examined and addressed. In general, final decisions on this exempted use will require very serious consideration of health risks associated with traffic and potential long-term manageable risks to the water supply.

- **Public – Private Tradeoffs** FOD offers a privately funded replacement of what the County would otherwise be forced to provide, specifically athletic fields. It is not clear that the field-house would fall under the same rubric, as the County provides lower-cost basketball facilities and apparently sufficient numbers of them. Otherwise, the county has a growing and unmet need for outdoor fields. Conceivably, the public-private tradeoff would not require current approval of the field-house element of the proposal – it could be made a stand-alone element that should await later consideration when more is known about the need and other impacts.
- **Seasonal Use** FOD intends to operate the fields mostly during the spring and fall with virtually no winter month and only minimal summer month use. A variety of citizen groups have expressed deep cynicism as to whether FOD would remain available only for SYA use, or whether it would represent too great an investment to allow it to lie fallow for periods of time when others would pay to use the facilities. The County could condition approval of the exception on restricted seasonal use, or other time and type restrictions. This could preclude a “Woodstock” type of event and reduce other impacts on the site. The exception could be conditioned on transportation and sanitation/environmental considerations.
- **Sanitation and Public Health** FOD will have 7,000 Saturday users and 3,500 Sunday users during the peak periods of the spring and fall. These users, however, will only visit the facilities for one to two hours. Historical patterns of such use suggest that the need for sanitary facilities would be relatively small because of

the short duration of visits and because the toilet equipment will produce a dry waste that will pose very small risk, risk probably lower than residential development. As such, the planned sanitary facilities are acceptable to a watershed exception, for the outdoor field facilities.

The field-house imposes a different risk, one of much less certainty. It would require a septic system with significant liquid wastes. As none of the land on the FOD parcel appears sufficient to permit a percolation field, SYA will have to identify an alternative system acceptable to the County Health Department. At present, we have no idea what size of flows would result and thus could not compare those flows with by-right reasonable development, other than to indicate that by-right development would probably not result in any residential building because the land won't perc. Still, if the Board approves the exception, the only requirement on SYA would be Health Department approval. Because of the uncertainty regarding waste water associated with the field-house, the Board might want to offer an exception conditioned on a requirement for the Board to approve the final design of the field-house and related septic system.

- **Transportation** The most notable problem associated with an exception is the safety problem associated with the very high use of a relatively unimproved road. The drivers will often be in a hurry, many will be teenagers, every car will have at least one child, and the traffic volumes are remarkably large. Further, traffic will flow in very high density waves at the beginning and end of the scheduled periods.

The OWC may not have a significant role in the transportation issue as although the land is on the watershed, the roads do not much threaten the water shed. Nevertheless, the OWC brings up this issue on general merits. Alternatives include the current plans to improve certain parts of the existing road (including a major intersection for entry to Old Post Office Road); significant redevelopment of the road (reflecting expected growth in the Country Club/Golf Court which also uses the road); and, pre-positioning ambulances on the property during high density use. This one issue will require significant attention of the Board as children from throughout the County will use these fields; and, accidents on the road at current usage presage multiple serious auto accidents after development by SYA. OWC respects the limits of its responsibility in this area but believes it has a sober duty to raise this concern, even if it has no immediate recommendation on how to resolve the problem.