



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Capital Parks-East
1900 Anacostia Drive SE
Washington, D.C. 20020

L30 (NPS-NACE/RM)

October 12, 2011

Dear Sir or Madam:

The National Park Service (NPS) announces the start of a 30-day public scoping window to solicit comments on the purpose, need and initial alternatives of the Development of Energy Efficient Visitor and Student Educational Facilities at the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center in the Scenic Easement of Piscataway Park Environmental Assessment.

Public scoping is the first step to involve the public in the Environmental Assessment (EA) process. NPS uses your comments to ensure that it is considering all of the possible alternatives for the management of the resource. The purpose of the public scoping comment period is to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the development of the Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center.

The Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF) brings over 8,000 school students and educators yearly to Piscataway Park for environmental field studies and investigations on its privately-owned, scenic easement land within Piscataway Park. The trigger, or cause, requiring federal action in regard to this development proposed for private property within Piscataway Park is based upon a long-standing scenic easement between the AFF and the NPS. This easement requires the advanced written approval of the Regional Director of the National Capital Region of the NPS prior to the construction of additional buildings, structures, or other physical facilities on the AFF property. It is this NPS approval that constitutes a federal action requiring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and implementing regulations 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, and NPS Director's Order #12 and Handbook, Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-Making (DO-12). Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 is occurring in parallel with the NEPA process.

The purpose of this project is to provide new interpretive and overnight accommodations, new interpretive opportunities and support facilities (including a wetland boardwalk), and provide additional parking on the site. The proposed facilities would be innovative, energy-efficient designs utilizing environmentally sensitive and sustainable materials. Systems designed to monitor and measure energy consumption/conservation at the new facilities are part of the design and would be incorporated into future programs to educate visitors about sustainable building

and living, and about the energy usage 'footprint.'

The action is needed because current facilities are in dire need of upgrades and improvement to meet current and anticipated visitor and program needs. Moreover, the AFF Overnight Lodge (Wareham Lodge), where students stay overnight in extended programs needs to be replaced due to persistent moisture and mold problems that, if not eliminated, may endanger the health of its occupants. Temporary mold remediation has enabled the programs to continue at great expense to the AFF. Day-Use programs use a facility on an adjoining property that is not under the ownership or control of AFF, which exposes the AFF to both uncertainty about the future viability of the programs and potential liability issues, both of which the AFF hopes to eliminate. The new facilities will address the inadequacies and health issues that have surfaced in the current overnight Wareham Lodge and the off-site day-use pavilion.

The EA will analyze the impacts that would result from the implementation of two alternatives, including the no action alternative. The no action alternative serves as the baseline by which all other alternatives are compared. Under the No Action alternative, there would be no significant new development at the AFF's Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center beyond routine repairs and/or cyclic maintenance activities and/or upgrades.

The no action alternative assumes that visitor use for the AFF facilities currently found on the site would continue into the future. However, there may be reduction, and/or lack of improvement of certain programs due to existing problems (i.e. cancellation of the overnight experience due to high moisture and mold issues).

Under Alternative 2, Support New Development at AFF, the NPS would support the new development proposed by AFF, ensuring such changes do not adversely impact the historic views, cultural or natural resources that Piscataway Park was established by the U.S. Congress to preserve. Actions would include:

- Constructing the new 'Grass Building' (3,457 square feet) and associated facilities (i.e. decks, walkways, etc.).
- Constructing the new 'Moss Building area' (11,523 square feet), and associated facilities (i.e. decks, cabins, etc.)
- Construct a wetland boardwalk, replacing an old trail, through the former pasture (wet meadow). This would include bridging the adjacent Accokeek Creek.
- Construct new parking areas, walkways, utilities, etc., that would support the new 'Grass' and 'Moss' building projects.

In keeping with the AFF's environmental mission, the "Living Buildings" will work in harmony with nature, making use of the sun, wind, and rain – and to conserve resources for others and for the future. Through these green facilities, students, teachers and visitors will experience numerous examples of the sustainable engineering and partnership with the natural world.

The Moss Lodge will replace the old Overnight Lodge, located on a shady hillside. Its roof reaches up to gather rain that will be purified to potable standards for use in both buildings. The day-use education center, called the Grass Building, will be built at the sunny edge of a field, its roof spreading out like flower petals to collect enough solar energy to generate all of the power for both buildings. The landscape will capture and filter storm water and use plant

evapotranspiration and groundwater recharge to mimic the native hydrology of the site. Greywater from sinks and showers will be treated in constructed wetlands and also recharge the underground aquifer. Composting toilets will eliminate the current discharge of nitrogen and phosphorous to the ground water. Native landscaping will replace grass and barren soil.

Comments on the purpose, need, and alternatives for the Development of Energy Efficient Visitor and Student Educational Facilities at the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center in the Scenic Easement of Piscataway Park may be submitted on-line by following the appropriate link at:

http://parkplanning.nps.gov/hard_bargain_farms

Note to Reviewers and Respondents:

If you wish to comment, you may submit them electronically only. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Comments will be accepted through November 14th, 2011. Thank you for your interest and participation in this process.

Sincerely,



Alexcy Romero
Superintendent

bcc:
NACE File
RM File
NACE Mocko