

June 8, 2020

Mr. Mike Domanski
President, Walsingham Horseman's Association
13043 114th Ave N
Largo, FL 33774

Dear Mr. Domanski,

Re: Your letter dated May 7, 2020, Walsingham Equestrian Park Stormwater Management Feasibility Study

Thank you for reviewing the conceptual plans developed for the feasibility study and providing consolidated feedback from both the Walsingham Horseman's Association (WHA) and Kiwanis Horses for Handicapped of Pinellas (HforH). We have reviewed each response and addressed your questions and concerns by placing a response after each item contained in your letter.

1. Original description discussed in our initial meeting on December 13th 2019 was depicted as a much smaller scale, please allow WHA and HforH to review the Master Plan and schedule of this project to understand the full scope and timing to understand the full construction schedule and the planned start date.

The proposed water bodies contained on conceptual Plan A are initial layouts that indicate the maximum footprint of a water quality treatment system for low flows from McKay Creek and stormwater runoff from the contributing area east of the creek. The intent of the graphics is to identify potential areas where treatment elements could be sited. The expectation is to receive initial feedback from WHA and HforH as licensees of the Park to indicate which of these areas (if any) would conflict with current or future uses. The location and size of the water bodies can be adjusted based on community feedback and ecological considerations. Alternative approaches including settling ponds, wetlands, and filtration systems that complement the existing ecology may be developed as the study progresses.

The conceptual plan that has been developed is part of a feasibility study and has not been identified as a project. As such, a master plan has not been developed. If the results of the feasibility study indicate that a project is viable, the next phase would be a Preliminary Engineering Study that guides project development through significant community engagement and feedback. Factors such as maintenance, habitat protection, aesthetic / trail-riding enhancements, and mitigation of wildfire danger need to be considered and balanced as the plan develops with input from many stakeholders.

2. Will WHA or HforH be required to stay out of park during construction (liability concern)?

As mentioned, at this stage there is no project; however, if a project does move forward, construction could be staged to allow access to some of the Park while other areas are being constructed. Temporary fencing could be utilized for this purpose.

3. What is the communication and change management plan and how will WHA and HforH be involved?

A website is currently being developed for the feasibility study. If the feasibility study progresses to a Preliminary Engineering Study, a multifaceted communication plan will be developed, which may include a Steering Committee, Neighborhood Project Information Meetings, and a project website for disseminating information and collecting comments.

4. Has the county communicated this plan with the homeowners that abut to the park?

The conceptual plan is still in its infancy. Initial outreach was made to the WHA and HforH as licensees of the Park. Outreach to the larger community will come next. If the feasibility study progresses, a strong public outreach component that engages homeowners will be included in the Preliminary Engineering Study. A County website is currently being developed in order to engage the public and solicit responses.

5. Walsingham Park is 354 acres, while the WHA and HforH horse park is only about 40 acres. Was there any consideration given to explore the possibility of using part of the main (people) park for this purpose? Has consideration been given to install some type of pumping station in the large reservoir in the main park to cleanse McKay Creek? It appears that the Horse park will be used as cleansing station for all the surrounding neighborhoods.

The feasibility study has not considered other locations for stormwater treatment at this time. As discussed at our field meeting, the Walsingham Equestrian Park was identified as a potential site for stormwater treatment though a tool developed for the County to site opportunities for Green Infrastructure (GI). This site was considered because of characteristics such as soil type, slope, need for water quality improvements, and other factors. In addition, opportunities to enhance the trail riding experience were also recognized.

As mentioned in the response to the first question, the conceptual plan includes treatment of McKay Creek baseflows that already run through the Park and treatment of stormwater runoff that is already directed to the existing ditches on the east side of McKay Creek. The addition of stormwater treatment elements could remove nutrients and pollutants and improve the quality of the downstream system.

6. According to the drawing, there are many retention ponds and spillways. Once this new aquatic sanctuary is established, what indemnification will WHA and HforH be provided so that research doesn't come back to claim horses in the park are damaging this new aquatic habitat eco-system? We were instructed that equestrian trails need to be a certain distance from any body of water according to the State of Florida.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and Agriculture recommends that riding should occur a minimum of 25 feet away from water bodies to avoid erosion, pollution, and other related issues. Conceptual Plans A and B contain a 50-foot buffer between water bodies and horse trails.

The size and extents of the open water bodies will most likely be reduced as the conceptual plans are refined. Integration of filtration media systems could further reduce the open water footprint. Any potential project plans will follow all State and County regulations to allow for and support the continued equestrian use of the property.

7. The firebreak is indicated as a trail on the map. Will the county allow WHA and HforH equestrians to use the firebreak as an additional trail?

The conceptual design exhibits do not differentiate riding trails from firebreaks. In addition, the exhibits contained in the license agreement between WHA and the County executed on July 3, 2019 (Agreement) do not indicate the location of firebreaks. The Agreement further states that it is the responsibility of WHA to maintain a firebreak that runs parallel to the fencing along the property line of the parcel west of the creek. This may be best represented by the "trail" that most closely follows the fence line.

Additional community outreach and coordination with Parks and Conservation Resources would be required before a decision could be made on use of the perimeter trail / firebreak for riding.

8. Increasing the floodwater footprint will result in an increase of mosquitos, what is the county plan for mosquito and other insect/reptile nuisance abatement?

All potential stormwater elements would be maintained by the County's Public Works Department to ensure proper functioning of the system, pleasing aesthetics, and mosquito control. Stormwater ponds are designed to promote a healthy ecosystem. When functioning properly they seldom present a mosquito issue due to the natural biological controls such as fish, tadpoles, dragonflies, etc.

Newly built stormwater facilities are maintained under a contract with a consulting firm until the conditions of the permit have been met. Subsequently, stormwater facilities are maintained by County staff. Inspections are performed on a quarterly basis to ensure ponds are functioning properly and have beneficial native vegetation. Maintenance is performed on a cyclic, as-needed

basis based on the findings of the inspections. Pinellas County Mosquito Control monitors mosquito populations throughout the County and performs control measures based on this surveillance. Should an issue develop at any time, Pinellas County Mosquito Control is highly responsive and its performance measured to respond to complaints within 24 hours.

Also, the addition of stormwater treatment elements is not expected to increase the presence of alligators as the property is fenced. As with all County Parks properties, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) or FWC's assigned trapper would be contacted to remove any alligators that act aggressively or approach humans if an issue would arise.

9. WHA Park animal inhabitants; the gopher turtle has been a favorite protected species, as well as eagles and other wildlife. Has an ecological impact assessment been done to examine the potential issues with evicting the air and land species for aquatic species?

The County faces difficult challenges in our heavily urbanized landscape which requires balancing conservation with enhancements needed to improve the environment.

The conceptual plan to integrate stormwater management ponds within the Park could provide new aquatic habitat and attract wildlife while enhancing the trail riding experience. The addition of water features could increase the abundance and diversity of wildlife species that rely upon wetlands for their lifecycle. While the proposed concepts would eliminate parts of the scrub community, the addition of a wetland component could diversify the ecological communities and enhance the opportunity for wetland wildlife foraging, nesting, and breeding on the property. The bald eagles that are seen in the area could benefit from the increase in wetland communities by providing foraging opportunities. From a larger perspective, the proposed project could provide significant water quality improvement benefits to McKay Creek, the most impaired water body in Pinellas County. Naturally filtering the water through wetlands that contain native vegetation could improve the quality of the water that discharges to the intracoastal waterways, helping to reduce adverse effects to the County's marine life.

If the findings of the Feasibility Study identify a viable project, an ecological impact assessment will be performed as part of the Preliminary Engineering Study. Ecological staff will be engaged throughout this study to guide decisions regarding habitat disruption and mitigation. Gopher tortoise surveys will be performed by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agents to ensure no gopher tortoises or active gopher tortoise burrows will be harmed during any phase of the project.

10. Fencing maintenance is a concern, what will WHA be responsible for?

According to the Agreement, WHA is currently responsible for maintaining access gates and perimeter fencing. Where vegetative natural buffers cannot be used, post and rail or other interior

fencing may be included in the project to separate equestrians from the ponds while allowing equestrians to benefit from the visuals of the newly created wetlands. The fencing clause of the agreement may need to be clarified. It is not the County's intent to increase the maintenance responsibilities of WHA.

11. Bridge connecting the park is not clearly indicated, as the creek as illustrated is to be widened. With this design, there is no way for equestrians to get into the horse park from the Horses for Handicapped side and vice versa. What is to be done with the Bridge? Disconnecting the two land masses greatly reduces the park size. Will fencing be set back more? Doing so will eliminate some of the grassy area on the east side of the creek. If we lose use of the bridge during construction, that will really limit those equestrians on the east side of the creek.

Widening of McKay Creek and removal of the bridge are not being considered in the feasibility study. The conceptual drawings made it appear this would be done but that is not planned. The need for continued use of a bridge is acknowledged.

12. Without a bridge a large portion of the WHA community housing their horses at barns on the south will now be cut off from the main park side and arena. Equestrians needing to attend events or ride in the main park will be forced to ride along the busy roads.

Please see response above.

13. For the areas labelled Brazilian pepper and invasive species, will that foliage be removed?

If a project emerges from the studies, the areas mapped as *Brazilian Pepper and Invasive Species* would be removed by the County and replaced with native hardwood species as part of the project, making these areas easier for WHA to maintain. WHA maintenance would be further reduced since the County would take over maintenance of areas within the proposed stormwater facilities.

14. The maps show one of the proposed ponds to be near the back of the HforH property. The HforH riding therapy arena is along the backside of the property, there are concerns having heavy construction equipment in the woods while their special needs riders are there (could present a safety issue – horses could spook at the equipment/sounds in the woods). Will WHA and or HforH have any input into when you are working in that area so it doesn't interfere with any HforH programs?

In the event that a project is built in the Equestrian Park, the County will coordinate closely with HforH and WHA to best accommodate scheduled programs and events to minimize impacts to the use of the property during construction.

15. WHA uses the park for emergency hurricane equine evacuees, horse owners in mandatory evacuation zones rely on having the WHA park to shelter their horses in place in the park, during an impending hurricane disaster. How will this design impact the availability for using the park to evacuate horses?

All conceptual designs will preserve the pre-disaster and post disaster relief utilization of the Park for equine evacuees as defined in the Agreement.

As discussed, a website containing conceptual layouts, preliminary results, and other study related information is being developed to better inform the larger community about the feasibility study and to provide a forum for feedback. The website will be located on the Pinellas County Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Project page, www.pinellascounty.org/publicworks/maps-projects.htm.

Again, we appreciate your feedback and hope for your continued collaboration in this study as it develops. Your feedback, along with that of the larger community, will help guide the study and develop a plan that meets multiple objectives for all stakeholders.

Sincerely,

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