

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Preliminary Subdivision Plat 4-01002  
Mill Branch, Lots 1- 4

OVERVIEW

The subject property consists of approximately 13.73 acres of land in the R-A Zone. It is mostly cleared, with a thin strip of trees coincident with the north property line. The property is currently identified as p/o Parcel 4, Tax Map 64, Grid A-4.

The property has frontage on both Queen Anne Bridge Road and Mill Branch Road. The applicant proposes to divide the property into four single-family residential lots. One lot will have frontage on and direct vehicular access to Queen Anne Bridge Road. The remaining three lots will be served by a common access easement from Mill Branch Road. *The Historic Sites and District Plan* (1991) designates Queen Anne Bridge and Mill Branch Roads as historic and scenic. Part of Lot 4 and the access driveway to three houses is along Mill Branch Road. Scenic easements of varying widths are proposed on the preliminary plat.

Each of the proposed lots will be served by a private well and septic system. The property was also the subject of a recent preliminary plat application that was withdrawn. The previous application proposed six lots. Two of those proposed lots had difficulty with percolation tests and exhibited some degree of Marlboro clay. Therefore, they were originally shown as outlots, in the hope of one day resurfacing in a preliminary plat as lots.

However, given the constraints of the property and the desire to respect the scenic designation of Mill Branch Road, these outlots were deleted and the remaining four lots were spread out. The resulting lotting pattern increases the size of the proposed lots and allows house locations to be further away from each of the scenic roads. Although staff still has some concerns regarding the impact to the scenic roads, the current proposal of four lots is far superior to the original proposal of six lots, and staff will recommend approval with several conditions.

SETTING

The property is located on the north side of Queen Anne Bridge Road and the west side of Mill Branch Road. The property runs to both of the roads but is not at the corner. It is surrounded by open lands, mostly farmed, with a few single-family homes on large lots in the R-A Zone.

FINDINGS AND REASONS FOR STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. Environmental Issues●The Environmental Planning Section has reviewed the above Preliminary Plan submittal, which was accepted for processing on January 3, 2001, and finds that the submission meets all applicable environmental requirements, subject to several recommended

conditions. This memorandum supercedes the previous Environmental Planning Section memorandum dated January 17, 2001.

The subject property is bordered by Mill Branch Road on the east and is north of Queen Anne Bridge Road; both roads are designated scenic and historic roads. A review of the information available indicates that streams, wetlands, and threatened or endangered species are not found to occur on this property; however, a 100-year floodplain runs through the middle of proposed Lot 1. The site is currently farmed. A strip of woodland exists along the northern property line. The site is otherwise devoid of trees. No adverse off-site noise impacts have been identified that would limit the development of this property for this use. This site is within the Patuxent River Watershed.

The soil on the site is in the Westphalia and Sandy Land soils series. Westphalia soils have a K factor of 0.43 and may present an erosion problem on steep slopes. For the most part, development seems to have been limited to the flatter areas of the site. Slopes of up to 20 percent are located on the site and erosion potential is a concern. Marlboro clay is known to exist on the subject property. A soils study may be required prior to the issuance of a building permit at the discretion of DER.

The site is in sewer and water categories W-6 and S-6. Private water and sewer systems are proposed. No proposed greenway systems are affected by this proposal. This site is located across the street (Mill Branch Road) from the Patuxent Rural Legacy Area.

This site is not subject to the provisions of the Woodland Conservation Ordinance because the entire site is more than 40,000 square feet in size but contains less than 10,000 square feet of woodland. The site is not subject to a previously approved Tree Conservation Plan; a Tree Conservation Plan is not required. Woodland does exist on the subject property and it should be retained to the fullest extent possible. The strip of woodland along the proposed access drive provides visual screening of the property from Mill Branch Road.

According to the Prince George's County Soil Survey, Marlboro clay, which can have significant limitations with respect to the construction of foundations, is present on the site. The Marlboro clay is known to exist in this area at the 130-foot elevation, with a typical depth of 15 feet. An evaluation zone is also considered to be between the 130-foot and the 140-foot elevations. The topography of the site does not indicate a need for a geotechnical study to be carried out prior to preliminary plat approval; however, Marlboro clay may limit the success of percolation sites for septic fields.

A 100-year floodplain bisects proposed Lot 1. It appears that Queen Anne Bridge Road east of the subject property floods occasionally. In order to preserve the 100-year floodplain and minimize further flooding of Queen Anne Bridge Road, the text of the 100-year floodplain easement agreement needs to contain the specific allowable uses within the easement.

Mill Branch Road has been designated a historic road in the *Historic Sites and District Plan*. Mill Branch Road and Queen Anne Bridge Road have been designated in the *Bowie-Collington-Mitchellville and Vicinity Master Plan* as scenic roads. The functional classification for both roads is local collector. Any improvement within the right-of-way of scenic/historic roads is subject to approval by the Department of Public Works and Trans-

portation (DPW&T), in coordination with an interagency review team and in conformance with *Design Guidelines and Standards for Scenic and Historic Roads*.

Although roadway design criteria will be determined by DPW&T with consideration for the scenic and historic features of the area, final design decisions will represent a compromise agreement based on the design guidelines and standards for scenic and historic roads, minimum DPW&T safety standards, and minimum AASHTO design standards.

The design of proposed Lot 4 will result in significant visual impacts on Mill Branch Road. Although the plan shows a 100-foot-wide scenic easement parallel to Mill Branch Road, the septic field and its associated 10-foot-wide buffer encroach into this easement area significantly. The scenic easement area is essentially without trees at this time and may be subject to significant grading as a result of the construction of the proposed entrance onto Mill Branch Road.

There is a wooded buffer along the northern property line in the area of a proposed 25-foot-wide scenic easement. This buffer provides screening from Mill Branch Road and should be preserved to the maximum extent possible, however, it contains some dead trees and invasive vines.

The scenic easement along Mill Branch Road on the eastern edge of proposed Lot 4 is currently devoid of trees. The visual impacts of proposed Lot 4 on Mill Branch Road will be significant due to the exposed nature of the property and its elevation. The house, while nearly 170 feet from the road, will be visible from the road across the open septic field. It is essential that this home not interfere with the historic and scenic nature of the road. Staff does not believe that the intent of the historic and scenic road designation is to preclude homes from being seen from the road, but such homes must be carefully sited and designed to fit into the existing character of the road. A wide, undisturbed scenic easement will help maintain the character of Mill Branch Road.

The scenic easement along the southern property lines of all lots, and along the eastern property line of proposed Lot 1, is currently devoid of trees. The visual impacts of these lots from Queen Anne Bridge Road will be significant due to the exposed nature of the property and the elevations of the proposed lots.

When scenic easements are established on properties, they are often not maintained in the condition that was intended. In lieu of planting the entire area of the easements with trees to provide an immediate visual screen, the proposed scenic easements should be allowed to revert to a forested condition over time. To ensure that this occurs, staff recommends a condition be attached to the approval that restricts impacts to the easement.

No other environmental issues have been identified at this time.

2. Community Planning•The *Bowie-Collington-Mitchellville and Vicinity Master Plan* (1991) recommends the property for large-lot, residential development. The *Bowie-Collington-Mitchellville and Vicinity Master Plan* (1991) rezoned this property from the O-S Zone to the R-A Zone. The proposed subdivision is in conformance with the master plan recommendations.

3. Parks and Recreation - The proposal is exempt from the mandatory park dedication requirements of Section 24-134 of the Subdivision Regulations because all proposed lots exceed one acre in size.
4. Trails - There are no master plan trails issues associated with this application.
5. Transportation - The Transportation Planning Section has reviewed the subdivision application referenced above. No traffic study was requested or received of the applicant. The findings and recommendations outlined below are based upon a review of relevant materials and analyses conducted by the staff of the Transportation Planning Section, consistent with *The Guidelines for the Analysis of the Traffic Impact of Development Proposals (Guidelines)*.

Three of the four residences would receive access via an easement onto Mill Branch Road. The remaining residence would receive access via an easement onto Queen Anne Bridge Road. The staff's traffic impact analysis was limited to the intersection of US 301 and Mill Branch Road, which is a signalized intersection. The transportation staff identified limited background developments in the immediate area of the subject property. No area improvements are funded in the county's Capital Improvement Program or the state's Consolidated Transportation Program.

The subject property would be developed with four single-family detached residences. Under the trip generation rates listed in the *Guidelines*, the proposed subdivision would generate one inbound and two outbound trips during the AM peak hour, and three inbound and one outbound trips during the PM peak hour. A trip distribution of 70 percent northbound and 30 percent southbound was assumed.

An analysis of existing, background and total traffic for the US 301/Queen Anne Bridge Road intersection indicates that this intersection operates acceptably as a signalized intersection under each scenario in both AM and PM peak hours. However, the impact of the site on the critical intersection is of a *de minimus* nature.

The transportation staff had previously raised questions about the possibility of at least one of the proposed easements serving more than four residences. After a field investigation, the staff has determined that neither easement should need to serve more than four residences.

Mill Branch Road in front of the subject property has a substandard cross section. There is a sight-distance problem with the existing dirt road that is just north of the subject property. Because Mill Branch Road is a scenic/historic road, the transportation staff does not anticipate considerable grading along the property frontage that would further improve sight distance. However, once the access easement needed to serve Lots 2-4 is graded, the sight-distance problem should be resolved and acceptable. In accordance with the *Design Guidelines and Standards for Scenic and Historic Roads*, improvements to the road will be determined at a permit pre-application meeting with DPW&T. In any regard, the septic field shown on the plan should be moved slightly further into the property in order to ensure that its placement does not interfere with the grading needed to provide safe access into the site.

There are no further transportation-related issues concerning the subject property.

Based on the preceding findings, the Transportation Planning Section concludes that adequate transportation facilities would exist to serve the proposed subdivision as required under Section 24-124 of the Prince George's County Code if the application is approved.

6. Schools●The Growth Policy and Public Facilities Planning Section has reviewed the subdivision plans for adequacy of public facilities in accordance with Section 24-122.01 and 24-122.02 of the Subdivision Regulations and the *Regulations to Analyze the Development Impact on Public School Facilities* (revised January 2001) (CR-4-1998). The proposed subdivision is exempt from the Adequate Public Facilities test for schools because it is less than 36 dwelling units and is not served by public water and sewer.
7. Fire and Rescue●The Growth Policy and Public Facilities Planning Section has reviewed the subdivision plans for adequacy of public facilities and concluded that the proposed subdivision will be within the adequate coverage area of the nearest existing fire/rescue facilities for fire engine, ambulance and paramedic services. The site will be served by the Bowie Fire Station, Company 43, located at 16400 Pointer Ridge Drive. The following findings are in conformance with the *Adopted and Approved Public Safety Master Plan 1990* and the *Guidelines for the Analysis of Development Impact on Fire and Rescue Facilities*.
  - a. The existing fire engine service at Bowie Fire Station, Company 43, has a service response time of 4.28 minutes, which is within the 5.25-minute response-time guideline.
  - b. The existing ambulance service at Bowie Fire Station, Company 43, has a service response time of 4.28 minutes, which is within the 6.25-minute response-time guideline.
  - c. The existing paramedic service at Bowie Fire Station, Company 43, has a service response time of 4.28 minutes, which is within the 7.25-minute response-time guideline.
8. Police Facilities●The proposed development is within the service area for Police District II-Bowie. In accordance with Section 24-122.1 (c)(1)(A) and (B) of the Subdivision Regulations of Prince George's County, staff concludes that the existing County police facilities will be adequate to serve the proposed Mill Branch Subdivision development. This police facility will adequately serve the population generated by the proposed subdivision.
9. Health Department●The Health Department reviewed this application and offered several comments. The Health Department memorandum, dated January 19, 2001, includes information on the originally proposed outlots. The applicant has worked closely with the Health Department and staff to settle on a lot layout that will allow each lot to have an adequate sewage disposal area. The preliminary plat proposed now identifies an adequate sewage disposal area for each of the four lots. Water-table constraints and topography make the exact location of drainage fields and wells problematic. In 1995 percolation tests were performed, several of which failed. These sites have been added to the preliminary plat to help determine the most appropriate location for septic fields. Because the site has specific constraints, the Health Department recommends several conditions that staff has included in the staff recommendation.

10. Stormwater Management ● The Department of Environmental Resources (DER), Development Services Division, has determined that on-site stormwater management is not required. A Stormwater Management Concept Plan, # 8315960-2000-00, has been approved with conditions to ensure that development of this site does not result in on-site or downstream flooding. An incorrect approval number is noted on the plan and must be corrected. The approval date is not. The approval date must be added to the preliminary plat and development must be in accordance with this approved plan.
11. Public Utility Easement ● The preliminary plat includes the required Public Utility Easements. These shall be included on the final plat.

## RECOMMENDATION

APPROVAL, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to application for grading permits, the applicant shall obtain a Letter of Exemption from the Woodland Conservation Ordinance from the Environmental Planning Section for submittal to the Department of Environmental Resources.
2. Prior to signature approval of the preliminary plat
  - a. The preliminary plat shall be revised to include the correct stormwater concept plan approval number and date.
  - b. The septic field area and its associated 10-foot-wide buffer area for proposed Lot 4 shall be revised so that it is at least 50 feet from the Mill Branch Road right-of-way.
  - c. The preliminary plan shall be revised to show a 35-foot-wide scenic easement on the southern property lines of all lots and along the eastern property line of proposed Lot 1, to the greatest extent possible.
  - d. The septic field recovery areas and their associated 10-foot-wide buffers shall be revised on the preliminary plan to eliminate any encroachments into the 35-foot-wide scenic easement, to the greatest extent possible.

Items **b**, **c**, and **d** are predicated upon Health Department approval of relocated septic systems. If the Health Department does not allow the relocation of these systems, the applicant, his heirs, successors and/or assigns shall provide a letter from the Health Department to that effect. Upon receipt of such a letter, the requirement for these items shall be waived.

3. Prior to the approval of any building or grading permits, the applicant, his heirs, successors and/or assigns, DPW&T, the Historic Preservation Section, the Urban Design Section, and the Transportation Section shall hold a conceptual pre-application meeting. This meeting shall take place prior to the applicant submitting a Paving and Stormdrain Plan to DPW&T. The decisions with regard to road design will represent a compromise agreement based on the *Design Guidelines and Standards for Scenic and Historic Roads*, as well as the minimum

DPW&T safety and construction design standards in accordance with minimum AASHTO standards.

4. The existing vegetation within the 25-foot-wide scenic easement along the northern property line shall be preserved to provide a 25-foot-wide vegetated visual buffer from Mill Branch Road, a designated Scenic and Historic Road.
5. A 100-foot-deep scenic easement to provide natural regeneration shall be established along Mill Branch Road, except where the septic field for Lot 4 intrudes. To define this easement, a two-rail, split-rail fence shall be installed along the western edge of the scenic easement. The fence shall be installed prior to the issuance of the certificate of occupancy for Lot 4.
6. All of the land area within scenic easements shall be allowed to revert to forest. Mowing of these areas shall be prohibited. The final plat shall contain the following note:
  - Scenic Easements described on this plat are areas where the installation of structures and roads and the removal of vegetation or mowing of grass is prohibited without prior written consent from the M-NCPPC Planning Director or designee. The removal of hazardous trees, limbs, branches, or trunks is allowed.●
7. All sewage-disposal areas shall be a minimum of 10 feet from any easement on the property.
8. Wells shall be at least 50 feet from and at higher elevations than the highest elevation of the sewage-disposal areas. Wells unable to meet these criteria shall be grouted to the second confining aquifer and located 100 feet away and in a different drainage pattern than the septic fields. A note shall be placed on the final plat that any well located down grade from an on-site sewage disposal system, or other means of pollution, must be grouted to the second confining layer.
9. The sewage disposal area for Lot 2 shall not be below the elevation of water table site 3-2.
10. Prior to final plat approval, the applicant, his heirs, successors and/or assigns shall submit to the Health Department a site plan at a scale of one inch equals 50 feet showing the following:
  - a. All easements, including PUEs and rights-of-way.
  - b. Proposed house locations.
  - c. Proposed driveways.
  - d. Sewage disposal areas of at least 10,000 square feet.
  - e. Proposed well sites.
  - f. Accurate topography at a two-foot contour interval and proposed grading of the site. One-foot contours shall be shown on Lot 1.
  - g. All percolation test sites and water table elevations.
  - h. Any well and sewage disposal system located within 100 feet of any property line.
  - i. The sewage disposal systems and recovery areas approved by the Health Department.