

# **KING FARM FARMSTEAD TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORT**

5/31/2017

## **I. Introduction**

The King Farm Farmstead Task Force (KFTF) envisions that the Farmstead will become a vibrant destination in Rockville that commemorates the King Farm as an important part of the agricultural past while at the same time offering new uses that will enhance the quality of life and provide a strong sense of place for the King Farm community and the general public.

The King Farm was a successful, 430-acre dairy farm. It has been transformed into a diverse community with a mix of housing types, retail stores, employment opportunities, and public open spaces designed with “new urbanism” principles. As part of the approval process, the King Farm Farmstead, including the main residence, dairy barns and out buildings, was conveyed to the City of Rockville for future recreational use.

The King Farm Task Force was appointed by the Mayor and Council and tasked

to identify (1) the best possible uses for the King Farm Farmstead, and 2) viable funding sources for the property development. The overall objective is to complete a strategic process that will provide viable options to the Mayor and Council for the rehabilitation, redevelopment and community use of the historic property.

The Task Force spent considerable time considering ideas that are consistent with and reinforce the agricultural history of the site as well as the “recreational” requirements of the Covenant. The goals of the Task Force recommendations include:

- Commemorating the long history of the site as a dairy farm while celebrating King Farm’s place as an integral part of Rockville today;
- Meeting historic preservation guidelines;
- Preserving and enhancing the existing open space;
- Addressing the identified and diverse needs of Rockville and the King Farm community;
- Providing multi-faceted uses to educate and entertain the residents of King Farm and the general public; and
- Conforming to the requirements of the Covenants.

## **II. Vision**

The Task Force recommendations seek to provide a dynamic destination serving the cultural needs of our diverse community.

- A vibrant open market allowing residents to find produce, prepared food and arts & crafts products produced locally
- A commercial kitchen to support the market and event spaces, and provide opportunities for cooking instruction

- A museum to tell the history of the farm site and surrounding area
- A 150-seat theatre providing entertainment and community assembly space
- A variety of other ancillary uses requiring little additional investment

### **III. Recommendations**

#### **A. Main Residence:**

***RECOMMENDATION #1--Retain the existing King Farm House and utilize as the welcome and operations center for the Farmstead:***

- ***First Floor - Farmstead museum and Visitors Center (with ancillary usage as venue for smaller events)***
- ***Second Floor - Administrative offices for the Farmstead staff***

The Farm House would serve as the center of operations for the Farmstead. The house was the center of domestic life on the farm. It included living spaces and the main office for the farm. Although the house has been improved, it has not been able to be rented as a residence, as had been previously envisioned in plans for the Farmstead. The proposed uses would provide new life for the house and retain the structure as an important feature and center of operations for the Farmstead. The museum would help to fill the City's need for dedicated museum space, and provide a location for display of any documents and/or artifacts associated with the farmstead and surrounding area that are identified in the recommended archaeological investigation of the site. The Visitors Center would serve as the main northern gateway entrance into Rockville. It is anticipated that the design of the museum and Visitors Center on the first floor of the house should allow for ancillary usage for smaller events (receptions, weddings, etc.). The second floor would serve as the center for operations of the farmstead, thereby fulfilling an important function but without incurring the considerable costs of making the space accessible for general public usage.

Examples of historic houses employed in somewhat similar fashion as recommended here include the Beall-Dawson House in Rockville and the Strathmore Mansion in North Bethesda. The Beall-Dawson has a store, restored period rooms, space for public events, and an office area for docents. The Strathmore Mansion has office space, art gallery space and event space. Although smaller in size, the King Farm Farmhouse could serve as the center of operations for the Farmstead with limited office space, visitor space and small group meeting space.

#### **B. Dairy Barns:**

***Recommendation #2--Renovate the existing Dairy Barns and establish as the center of proposed activity for the farmstead with:***

- ***An indoor Marketplace***
- ***A culinary kitchen offering cooking classes and catering for events at the Farmstead***
- ***A venue for larger events***

The Dairy Barns are the most visible and recognizable features of the Farmstead, and the proposed concentration of resources on their repurposing reflects that importance. The renovated Dairy Barns would become a unique feature in Rockville. The combination of indoor and outdoor spaces designed to serve as a Marketplace along with the supporting events and culinary arts center would become a significant resource for the King Farm Community and the general public as required in the Covenants.

Specifically, it is proposed that one of these structures be converted into a Marketplace with indoor stalls for produce, arts and crafts and other items. It would be the only indoor market in the Rockville area.

One possible model for the proposed Marketplace would be for vendor spaces of approximately 10 feet by 10 feet, with a master operator choosing individual vendors and managing leasing terms, hours of operation, trash removal and other operating concerns. This concept is similar to how the Rockville Recreation & Parks Department now runs the Rockville Farmers Market. (However, in that case, there are only two days of operation each week at outdoor locations. Because the proposal here envisions longer hours and slightly more permanence, the management would need to make accommodations for regular trash removal, cleaning, rodent control and other day-to-day operating concerns.) The proposed Marketplace concept would allow for maximum flexibility in that the operator can adjust specific product offerings based upon demand and community feedback. The Marketplace should evolve to be a resource not only for the residents of King Farm, but also for those from surrounding areas of the City of Rockville and Montgomery County. It can be as locally oriented as desired and depending upon how many days each week, and the hours it is operated, it can become a regular or occasional destination.

There are a number of restored and repurposed dairy barns in our area and throughout Montgomery County, the closest being the Casey Barn, owned by Gaithersburg which is less than a mile to the north. The Casey barn was built out to provide interior office space and meeting rooms, but this is not what is being recommended for the historic King Farm Dairy Barns. The closest example of a shell build-out might be the Dickerson Barn adjacent to the County compost facility and the incinerator site in Dickerson, MD approximately 15 miles west. This barn was repurposed as a community center in the late 1990's as part of the preservation of a farmstead that is adjacent to the incinerator operated by Mirant Corp. for the County Dept of Solid Waste. It has concrete floors (all troughs filled in) and windows were replaced with functional yet historically sensitive and accurate materials. This barn is essentially available for 10 months of the year with heating that serves mild winter weather but is not functional on the coldest of days. The Dickerson Barn does not have a 24/7 – 365 day use other than as meeting space. The proposed uses at the Maple Springs Barn at Muddy Branch Rd, two miles west of this site and more similar to the level of finish that is proposed for the King Farm Dairy Barns. The Maple Springs Barn was an active veterinary business for more than twenty years and was built out on the lowest level to meet life safety codes, which included emergency exits and fire suppression sprinkler systems throughout.

The recommendation for the other barn is designed to work in tandem with the Marketplace. It would provide space for events along with a large, commercial kitchen. Events could include

culinary demonstrations and cooking classes, gardening workshops, recreation classes, displays, and social events. Examples of this use include the private, Cookology Center in Loudoun County, Virginia, and the Kentlands Arts Barn in Gaithersburg.

The courtyard located between the two barns could serve as outdoor space for the Marketplace as well as activity space to link the events in the two barns together. The courtyard would be shielded from the adjacent King Farm Community to reduce impacts.

The Dairy Barns would be operated by the Recreation and Parks Department. The number of days of operation, access, parking and range of activities would be carefully controlled by the Department to serve as an appropriate resource and to reduce the impact on the King Farm Community.

### **C. Horse Barn:**

#### ***RECOMMENDATION #3—Convert the structure to a 150-200 seat facility for theater production and musical events (with ancillary usage as community assembly space)***

This recommendation is very similar to the one made by the previous (2001-2003) King Farm Farmstead Task Force, and is based on similar assessments of need and suitability for the footprint of the existing structure. That recommendation provided for demolition of the building's interior (because of serious structural problems) while preserving existing materials for use in reconstruction, and "Either retain current exterior and convert interior or construct from inside out and reutilize exterior shell when building has been completed." This Task Force took further note of the 2014 WGM assessment of the Horse Barn:

The sheer number of structural deficiencies evidenced in this building will make any rehabilitation effort extremely challenging and costly. Throughout the building, the framing is undersized and not properly connected per current code requirements. Rather than try to address each of the numerous structural issues individually, it is recommended that this building be demolished. As much of the existing historical material (siding, etc.) as possible should be salvaged for use in a future reconstruction of the barn according to historic preservation standards.

In making its recommendation for the Horse Barn, the Task Force anticipates that it is very likely significant (if not total) demolition and rebuilding will be required, but does not presume to offer guidance to the City as to how best to accommodate the structural needs with historic preservation requirements.

To ascertain the existing demand, approximately thirty local theater groups were informally polled by a Task Force member regarding their interest in a new performance space. Eleven of these groups replied. All eleven expressed interest in the addition of a 150-200 seat theater and performance space in the Rockville/Montgomery County area. Most of the groups that replied stated that they would be interested in doing two or three shows (six to nine performances) per year in such a space. Most of the groups also expressed a preference for a profit-sharing model like the Gaithersburg Arts Barn versus a rental arrangement. Closing of the Randolph Road

theater (a Montgomery County facility) was noted as a market driver, creating additional demand for a performance space of this size. Convenient access from the Metro was also noted as a positive aspect of this location, potentially expanding the patron market for the theater groups. The Miami Dade College Koubek Center Theater is an example of a 200-seat theater design that would closely match the footprint of the current Horse Barn. The width from wall-to-wall in this example is approximately 46 feet.

In addition to theater group performances, a medium-sized theater presents the potential for other types of performances such as small music groups and dance groups. No marketing analysis has been performed to estimate the interest in these types of performances, but it seems likely that the potential is there. Rental of the space for private events is another potential use. Furthermore, implementation of this recommendation would provide a venue for community assemblies for King Farm residents, a need that was originally supposed to be met via the elementary and/or middle schools that were to have been constructed, but have not been (at least as of now) in the spaces now occupied by the two King Farm parks.

#### **D. Smaller buildings:**

***Recommendation #4—The task force believes that the smaller outbuildings (existing garage; larger tenant house; and smaller tenant house) can best enhance the proposed Farmstead @ Rockville, by, at a minimum, having their exteriors restored to their 1920s/1930s appearance as farm buildings. Developing them for alternative uses would both detract from their primary value of conveying the site’s history as a farm, and impose significant costs in bringing the interiors into compliance with accessibility and other building code requirements.***

The existing garage, larger tenant house and smaller tenant house were all built following the 1925 tornado that struck the site. The garage had a smokehouse attached, and the larger tenant house was originally a horse barn, but was expanded and converted into a tenant house with the construction of several additions.

The task force proposal for the smaller buildings is designed to:

- Reinforce the sense of the site’s history as a FARM, regardless of re-uses chosen for the larger structures.
- Meet historic preservation and covenant requirements.
- Be consistent with 2014 Property Assessment recommendations.
- Provide a sustainable, attractive and appropriate appearance for these smaller buildings.
- Preserve (and slightly augment, via removal of larger tenant house additions) existing open space
- Allow for the scaling of restoration efforts to fit the available budget.
- Allow for concentration of resources (financial, parking, etc.) on the larger buildings (main residence, dairy barns, horse barn).

Specific recommendations for each building are as follows

**Garage: *Recommendation #4a*—Restore exterior as garage and smokehouse (with appropriate external interpretive signage). If additional resources are available, restore interior for site display (including of farm equipment and vehicles). Use second floor apartment space for site storage.**

**Larger tenant house: *Recommendation #4b*—Demolish additions and restore exterior as horse barn (with appropriate external signage). If additional resources are available, restore interior for site display.**

**Smaller tenant house: *Recommendation #4c*—Restore exterior as farm worker house, and (along with appropriate external signage) use to commemorate farm workers and their contributions to the area. If additional resources are available, restore interior for site display.**

#### **E. Silos:**

***Recommendation #5a--Convert the silo nearest to Ridgemont Ave. into an astronomical observatory for use by the general public, and explore the possibility of entering into a partnership with Montgomery College for the school's use of the facility.***

Four grain silos were constructed along with the double dairy barn after the 1932 lightning strike on the property. The two for the barn nearest the main residence have been removed, but the remaining two, attached to the other barn, remain. The 2014 WGM property assessment stated, “The inside faces of the silo walls are damaged and need concrete repairs. The links to the silos have deteriorated significantly, and should be demolished.”

At present, there are no large-member astronomy clubs in the county, but there is considerable local interest in astronomical viewing as evidenced by the significant attendance at the Friday evening public viewing sessions provided by the Montgomery College astronomy division at the school’s Rockville campus. (At present, attendance at these sessions has to be limited due to safety limits on rooftop occupancy.) The College offers astronomy classes utilizing an observatory located on the roof of the Rockville Science Center on campus. This houses two 14-inch telescopes, which, in the words of a Montgomery College astronomer, are “decent size for public outreach” but severely limited for “serious student research.”

An astronomical observatory is one of the few reuses of the grain silos that can make natural use of the structure’s configuration, and these conversions are not uncommon in renovated farm homes across the country. Developing such a facility within the King Farm Farmstead would offer a new amenity, not only to King Farm and Rockville residents, but to the entire local area and provide a “quiet” activity that would utilize the Farmstead on evenings, likely outside the busiest operating hours for other parts of the site. Quite possibly, the availability of a King Farm observatory could spur the development of a Rockville astronomy club. In addition, this proposal provides a unique opportunity to partner with Montgomery College in enhancing the school’s astronomy courses, and opening up additional avenues for project funding. Preliminary discussions between task force members and the College’s astronomy division have disclosed a potential interest by the school in exploring a partnership with the City. Finally, in recent years

there have been cases in which major astronomical research facilities have donated legacy telescopes (i.e., equipment in perfectly good working order that provides excellent basic viewing but is no longer capable of performing cutting-edge research) for public use. This could be explored for the King Farm facility.

***Recommendation #5b—Integrate the silo nearest to the Main Residence into the usage of the adjacent Dairy Barn (by utilizing as an entrance, observing platform or other architectural feature).***

## **F. Grounds:**

***Archaeological investigation: Recommendation #6—Prior to any further disturbance of grounds (and as soon as possible to avoid potential irrevocable losses through accidents, weather events, actions by utility companies, etc.), the City should contract with an archaeological firm to conduct an inventory investigation of the farmstead, including background research and excavation of shovel test pits and/or remote sensing with ground penetrating radar, with the excavations likely centered on and around the site of the 19th century bank barn and possible site of a late 18<sup>th</sup>- early 19<sup>th</sup> century tavern (the grassy area between the dairy barns and 355). The contract should specify that the contractor take steps to minimize disruptions to the surrounding neighborhood and provide an opportunity for King Farm and other Rockville residents to participate in the process.***

The potential presence of significant archaeological resources on the Farmstead was noted in the 2006 Maryland Historical Trust Inventory of Historic Properties Form for the Farmstead: “The property also includes the probable location of a 19<sup>th</sup> century bank barn [on the Ridgemoor Ave. side of the property between the Dairy Barns and Route 355], which was destroyed by lightning in 1932. There is a high potential for archaeological remains of the multiple outbuildings associated with the long-term farming operations at this site, as well as remains of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century occupation at this site.” With regard to pre-historic remains, that same document noted, “An archaeological survey in 1995 of King Farm in the vicinity of the farm house and farm buildings found “a scattering of artifacts, predominantly debris associated with tool making. Therefore, while there is evidence of Native American activity at the site, the materials are either so disturbed or transient in nature that little additional information would be expected from further archaeological investigations into the prehistory of the site.” In an 11/15/16 email to the Task Force, the State Terrestrial Archeologist reported that no actual archaeological testing of the Farmstead has ever been done and recommended that “an archaeological examination [of the Farmstead] be conducted prior to any major ground disturbing activities.”

The proposed project would yield valuable information about the history of the Farmstead (including both agricultural and non-agricultural uses in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) and details on such items as the location and content of buildings, gardens, orchards, and other features. It is also possible that prehistoric remains may be identified. All of this would help to broaden in scope and “deepen” in time, the historic setting of the Farmstead. Archaeological resources are non-renewable and once the ground is disturbed vital contextual information is irretrievably lost. The King Farm Farmstead property has never been subjected to an archaeological investigation, and if the recommendations of this Task Force (or indeed any

significant alternative reuses) for the site are adopted and implemented – with the necessary attendant upgrades of infrastructure (electricity, water and sewer, parking, etc.) – much of the existing archaeological record still lying below the surface will be gone forever. Furthermore, in communications with the Maryland Historical Trust, the task force learned that a mandatory archaeological review would be required “if the City of Rockville was receiving any state or federal funds or permits for park development.” Finally, the cost of the recommended investigation is likely to be relatively modest, with a county archaeologist who toured the site with a task force member estimating the price tag at approximately \$20,000.

***Interpretive signage: Recommendation #7—Appropriate explanatory signage should be provided outside each existing Farmstead structure and identified archaeological resource. In keeping with Rockville’s and King Farm’s great diversity), consideration should be given to making such signs multilingual.***

#### **IV. Discussion**

The Task Force recommendations seek to create a vibrant destination in Rockville that honors King Farm’s place as a historically important part of our agricultural past while at the same offering new uses that will enhance the quality of life for Rockville residents and provide a strong sense of place for the city.

King Farm was an extremely successful business and linchpin for the development of Rockville and Montgomery County. The task force spent considerable time brainstorming ideas that reinforce the agricultural and recreational aspects of the Farmstead. The centerpiece of our proposal includes repurposing the dairy barns into visually attractive and exciting state-of-the-art structures that will feature a vibrant, culinary market and versatile event facility with commercial kitchens. Our vision is for each of these uses to tie back to the nature and history of the farmstead. Specifically, we propose repurposing one of the dairy barns into an open market (inspired by area markets such as Union Market or the Bethesda Women’s Market) that will feature local growers and producers. The other dairy barn can be converted into an event facility that would retain the flavor and elements of a rustic barn. This event facility will include a commercial kitchen that can also be used for cooking classes or to support local entrepreneurs who are producing local food products.

In addition, we propose converting the existing horse barn into a performing arts theatre, which would also, for the first time, afford the King Farm community an adequate community assembly space. This responds to two very real current needs in Rockville and King Farm.

Finally, we recommend that the remainder of the existing structures (and their surrounding grounds) – stretching from Route 355 up to the dairy barns – be utilized to commemorate the long history of the site as a farm while celebrating King Farm’s place as an integral part of today’s Rockville. Specifically, this includes utilizing the Main Residence as the site’s operations center (as well as a museum and visitor center), restoring the exteriors of the smaller outbuildings (garage/smokehouse; larger tenant house/horse barn; smaller tenant house) and conducting an archaeological investigation to further reveal the site’s history (and pre-history).

Each of these ideas can be considered individually and implemented based on demand, interest or funding. The idea is to show how the King Farm Farmstead can be repurposed into a positive asset for the city and its residents without losing the special rural and agricultural characteristics that make it such an important site.

As part of its deliberations, the Task Force has sought feedback from a variety of sources (including Rockville and King Farm residents, market operators, local theater groups, archaeologists, and Montgomery College representatives, among others). Of particular significance was its April 27, 2017 presentation of its recommendations to the Rockville Recreation and Parks Advisory Board. Subsequently, the Board issued a memo expressing support for the Task Force recommendations, but with reservations, specifically concerning parking and management of operations.

The Task Force is appreciative of the Board's support, and takes seriously its suggestions. With regard to the assertion that the Task Force's proposed multiple uses would necessarily present greater parking problems than a more limited one or two activity center, the Task Force recommendations are specifically designed as schedulable venues, where operating hours can and should be staggered to avoid over-use of parking and traffic congestion. For example, it is expected that the proposed marketplace and museum would be primarily daytime destinations whereas the theatre and observatory would be utilized in the evening. This is in contrast to the unified operating hours contained in all of the "single-use" plans received and reviewed by the Task Force (the Habitat for Humanity/Bikes for the World and GrowingSOUL proposals submitted to the City in 2011, the 2012 submission from the Family Academy of Bethesda, and the aquaponics proposal submitted to the Task Force this year), in which parking and traffic would be concentrated within those hours. The other reservation stated by the Board – management demands – indeed could pose a challenge, and the Task Force would support actions to mitigate such challenges. For example, the recommendation for an astronomical observatory in one of the dairy barn silos could be made conditional on finding an entity (such as Montgomery College) that would assume managerial responsibility for the facility.

With further regard to the parking issue, the Task Force believes this is a critical constraint/condition prior to implementation of any phase of this project. The King Farm community has limited parking for residents and significantly reduced street parking, especially around the Farmstead area. Much of the existing parking in this location that is on street has permit limits during the week and is "parked" on weekends. There is almost no parking on the site with the exception of current residential parking at the farm house and four spaces next to the picnic pavilion.

Parking required by ADA could be made available via expansion of the current picnic pavilion parking spaces, with access to the site via Grand Champion Drive. Additional parking is currently located at the King Farm Dog Park (approximately 40 spaces) and the Mattie Stepanek Park (approximately 240 spaces) parking lots, both city parks. However, use of either, or both of these as the primary parking location for the proposed Farmstead attractions is not advisable because: (a) doing so would route all of the anticipated increased traffic into the King Farm

residential zone (via Ridgemont and Grand Champion); b) would pose conflicts with community usage of the existing parks (including youth football and soccer leagues), especially on weekends during certain seasons; and c) this parking is at some distance from the Farmstead locations, with most parking spaces located 1500-2000 feet from the dairy barns.

Metro parking would be available on weekends but is a considerable walking distance from the site.

The Task Force believes that, in order for this project to be viable, parking will have to be located, and possibly constructed, off-site and at a location easily walkable to the proposed events on the site. The land on the northern side of the Farmstead is privately owned. To use this parcel, the City would have to agree to purchase, or to obtain easements to the property or a shared ownership agreement and construction of a parking garage on the site.