

The Capital

South County

County nixes notion of Sudley ballfields

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

A south county legislator has floated the idea of converting some of the county's property at the Sudley landfill into ballfields, but park officials and the administration say it's too expensive to even consider.

Instead, they support proposed fields in Shady Side.

Del. Bob Costa, R-Deale, met on Jan. 21 with officials from the county departments of Recreation and Parks and Public Works and the state departments of Natural Resources and Environment to push for a feasibility study - and state money to help pay for it.

But the county said no, citing as the primary reason complicated and costly engineering requirements outlined by the MDE.

"There is a significant amount of infrastructure at the Sudley facility ... in order to meet environmental requirements," County Executive Janet S. Owens said in a written statement.

"This proposed recreational use could compromise that infrastructure and compliance with MDE regulations."

The end of that statement reiterated the commitment to building ballfields at the 477-acre Franklin Point Park in Shady Side, which some think is the underlying reason the county doesn't want to do a feasibility study at the landfill site.

"They perceive this is just a way to kill the parks at Franklin Point," Mr. Costa said. "But the first priority is the reality that we need ballfields in south county."

He thinks a larger facility would eliminate the patchwork of ballfields and give south county what it wants: a full-fledged recreation facility.

"Let's find out if Sudley will work. That is the purpose of the feasibility study," he said.

He pointed out that two mostly flat areas on the 166-acre Sudley site, outside the 28-acre capped trash dump, could possibly be used for recreation.

The landfill opened in 1981, and stopped accepting trash in 1994. The mound of trash covers about 26 acres and is 60 feet deep in some places. It's sealed with dirt, clay, a plastic liner and sand.

A Jan. 26 MDE letter to the county noted that if the county were to build ballfields on an area of the site outside the mounded dump area, its concerns would greatly diminish.

"Our only consideration would be those systems that might be affected such as monitoring wells ... located in the proposed area of disturbance," Edward Dexter, the MDE's solid waste administrator, wrote. But Jack Keene, the county's chief of park planning and construction, said he wasn't sure which of those monitoring devices could be left undisturbed by any ballfield construction.

He said the information he has seen suggests that only about 16 acres of the Sudley site are relatively dry, flat and not currently used for landfill-related purposes or as a placement area for dredge spoil.

There are also wetlands on the largely forested site that traverses Tracys Creek, further limiting development potential.

Mr. Keene supports the plan produced by a committee of county officials and citizens to build two all-purpose fields at Franklin Point, the environmentally sensitive publicly owned property, if no other suitable site is found. The property was bought by the state in a deal that ended a controversial plan to build homes. The state still holds title to the land, but would turn it over to the county after DNR approval of the management plan forged by the committee.

Redeveloping old, capped trash sites is encouraged by state environmental officials and has been successful across the country. Proponents of the Sudley idea point to places like the aptly named Mount Trashmore Park in Virginia Beach, featuring ballfields, trails and parking on its 165 acres.

Despite the county's reluctance, Mr. Costa says he'll push on.

"I am not going to slack off," he said Tuesday. "With adequate pressure I think we can still move forward."

Pete Medhurst, president of the Shady Side Boys and Girls Club, who served on the planning committee for the Shady Side-area parks, doesn't understand the county's position.

"What does it hurt to at least take a look and see if it is do-able?" he said. "We owe it to the process to examine all options. In the grand scheme of things, that is what it comes down to."

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