

# The Capital

## South County

### Residents again fight Franklin Point development

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Not a soul came out to support planned ballfields at a recent Maryland Critical Areas Commission hearing on the county master plan for 477-acre Franklin Point Park.

Instead, the 75 people attending last week's meeting urged the commission to nix offensive parts of the plan - two ball fields, parking, and a footbridge across the mouth of Flag Pond - for a less developed natural setting more like Jug Bay Wetlands Preserve.

Though the meeting was supposed to focus only on the potential effects of proposed development on the 271 acres of critical areas at the site, it was the trio of offending items that dominated the testimony.

"We, this community, saved this park - not for ball fields, not for parking," said Weems Duvall, one of the founding members of the community organization that saved the environmentally sensitive park from a 300-home development in the 1990s. He was also among three people sued for \$52 million by the thwarted developer, Dominic Antonelli. "It is time to say no, hell no, to this plan. It's just wrong."

"Ball fields don't belong on wetlands," said Anne Wolfe, chairman of the county chapter of the Sierra Club.

The Critical Area Commission listened to testimony from those who signed up to speak. They will make a recommendation to the full commission at a May 4 meeting where a final decision on the plan is expected. Once the plan is finalized, the Department of Natural Resources will turn the property over to the county.

Last month the DNR approved the plan with several recommendations, including a stipulation there won't be lights for the ball fields.

A county parks plan includes ballfields, a nature center, parking, paths and more. All the potential development would only cover roughly 6 percent of the total property, well below the 20 percent allowed under local planning guidelines. And any construction proposed would again have to pass state muster before it is built.

But since the property was saved from housing development many local residents had hoped the park would be preserved in its natural state, save for some trails for hiking and perhaps a place to put in kayaks and canoes to the creeks in the park.

Speakers offered up alternative sites for ballfields, while others stood to oppose a bridge to a piece of the park on the south end of the Columbia Beach peninsula.

Andrea Pitts has been a resident in the historically African American Community nestled along the bay for 42 years.

She recalled meetings trying to stop the initial development of Franklin Point.

"We needed a David, because the county was being a Goliath then," she said pleading with the commission members to come to the community's rescue once again. Community residents in her community think opening access to the tip of their neighborhood will bring a slew of unwanted problems, not the least of which is traffic.

As the meeting adjourned, one of attendees asked which way the Commissioners were leaning.

"You have certainly given us a lot to think about," said Commissioner Gary Setzer, a Department of the Environment staffer said.

*Published April 17, 2005, The Capital, Annapolis, Md.*

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