

# Smith farm plan assailed by Schaefer

**County reneged on deal for horse center, he says;  
Alternate ball field site promoted; Parks official tells  
critics, 'It's time to move on'**

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March 11, 2004

In his latest criticism of a controversial Anne Arundel park project, Comptroller William Donald Schaefer said yesterday that he remains disgusted with the county's decision to build ball fields at a horse farm on the Broadneck Peninsula. Schaefer, who has accused the county of reneging on an agreement with the former owner of the property, said in his opening remarks at a Board of Public Works meeting, "That's why people distrust government."

Elizabeth Gleaves, the former owner, has said that when she sold the property - known as the Smith farm - to the county in 1998, she was promised the land would be used only for equestrian activities. Schaefer and Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. have said they believe Gleaves, and the pair refused last month to sign off on a \$250,000 state bond to help with construction of the ball fields.

But the county has proceeded with the project anyway, angering opponents by rolling bulldozers onto the site in recent weeks. Protesters greeted the bulldozers last week, but their attempt to get an injunction to stop the construction was rejected by an Anne Arundel District Court judge.

County officials say they're doing the best thing for the majority of Broadneck Peninsula residents and that they won't be halted by the protesters or by Schaefer's harsh words.

"There are some people who will not accept a compromise, but I'm sorry, it's time to move on," Dennis M. Callahan, director of parks and recreation for the county, said in an interview yesterday. "We're on the side of the angels in this one."

Not according to Schaefer, who reserved some of his sharpest criticism for Callahan at yesterday's meeting.

"He was all ready to move on, no matter what," said Schaefer, who hinted that Callahan has pushed for the ball fields to bolster his political resume. The parks director is often mentioned as a possible candidate for county executive in 2006. Callahan questioned Schaefer's interest in a local project that was approved by the County Council. "It's almost like Big Brother is looking over your shoulder," Callahan said, after hearing of the comptroller's comments.

Contention has built around the property for several years, with the sniping between state and county leaders punctuating the latest chapter.

Critics of the \$2 million project say the county could build more ball fields for less money at the nearby Bay Head Park, a 24-acre parcel that once served as a Nike anti-aircraft missile battery.

Schaefer and Ehrlich have also mentioned the site as a possible alternative to the Smith property for ball fields on the Broadneck Peninsula. Members of the county's General Assembly delegation have discussed drafting a bond bill to help hasten work at the Nike site.

But Callahan maintains that the Nike site won't be able to hold ball fields before 2010 because the county must first demolish abandoned missile solos and fill the craters left behind with soil. He said the county can meet the high demand for playing space more quickly at the Smith farm, where he said fields should be open by spring of next year. He said the county eventually will operate ball fields at both sites.

House Speaker Michael E. Busch - who works for the Anne Arundel parks department - said he also does not see the Nike site as an alternative to building ball fields at the Smith farm. Bush said he doesn't understand why the fight over the farm is continuing.

"It's had a full and fair debate in front of the County Council and in the community," he said. "There's a democratic process in this country, but in the end, majority opinion prevails."

Activists who oppose ball fields at the Smith farm are not satisfied with those answers and continue peppering local and state leaders with their complaints. "It's time to get politics - and the bulldozers - out of the Smith farm and move forward with a win-win solution that works for everyone," said Diane Rey, spokeswoman for We Hold Officials Accountable!, which opposes the county's plans.

She has an ally in Schaefer, who called the situation surrounding the farm, "a real tragedy."

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