

Neal P. Gillen
9000 River Road
Potomac, Maryland 20854

September 4, 2024

To: WSSC Water
Re: Response to Avenel Equestrian Center RFI's:
Rehabilitation & Rebuilding for Equestrian Facilities
Equestrian Center Management Services

Throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's my family boarded horses at the Avenel Equestrian Center facility managed by Ms. Nancy Evans. My two daughters and I used the facility on nearly a daily basis. My wife and I were also active in support of our daughters in the governance of the Seneca Valley Pony Club whose families utilized the fields on the Kiplinger Farm off River Road and organized two horse trials annually that attract competitors from children to Olympians. In addition, our daughters have boarded at other facilities in Montgomery County. Our oldest daughter, who until recently was a trainer in residence at the Potomac Horse Center, currently is boarding two horses in Germantown. My youngest daughter manages her own small horse farm with four horses. In light of our family's experience, I feel qualified to opine on the pending RFI's pertaining to the Avenel facility. I do not seek to manage the facility, but rather to provide information relevant to its continuation as a vital community asset.

I have spoken at the December 2024 Avenel Community briefing of WSSC officials and also before the Commission, as my daughter and other Montgomery County residents have in recent months. In my statements, I reviewed the history of the facility, the contractual obligations of WSSC pursuant to the Avenel Farm Development Master Agreement, and WSSC's recognition of a community advisory organization, the Avenel Equestrian Center Council, specified in the Master Agreement.

I view these Requests for Information as a guide to WSSC in its decision to move forward in keeping its commitment to the community to maintain and continue the operation of the Avenel Equestrian Center in fulfillment of its obligations as a signatory to the Avenel Farm Development Master Agreement.

Rehabilitation & Rebuilding for Equestrian Facilities

The two engineering studies that I have reviewed, one by WSSC's consultant and the other recently completed by the Avenel Community consultant, disagree on the approximate costs of the rehabilitation of the existing barn, a significant variance of over \$4 million. Whether the costs are \$5.6 million or \$1 million or somewhere in between, there are two approaches to resolve this question. One, deconstruct the barn and reconstruct a replacement utilizing the salvageable bones of the structure. There a number of qualified contractors in the region who specialize in barn reconstruction. Second, a less costly approach is to take down the barn and to build a new facility on the site. At the July WSSC community briefing at the Potomac Community Center, WSSC's

consulting engineer opined that it would be less costly to take down the barn and to construct a replacement for about \$700,000. Many in the equestrian community would welcome the latter and less costly alternative since the horse stalls and barn conditions would be significantly improved along with the amenities that a new facility would provide.

1. *Best practices for Equestrian Facility Management:*

What facilities and appurtenances are required for an effective and sustainable equestrian operation?

Since its conversion from a cattle barn to a horse barn and becoming an equestrian facility in the 1960's, the services provided to boarders by the facility managers have been basic, a stall for boarding horses or a pasture for field boarders, lockers, two riding rings, and extensive trails. The barn manager in the last 40 plus years, Ms. Nancy Evans, took good care of the horses, fed them well, turned them out to pasture, quickly notified boarders of any medical issues with their horse and contacted qualified veterinarians to provide necessary care and medication, provided farriers to shoe horses, and approved trainers to come on site for riding instructions. She also provided horse transportation to horse shows for boarders in Prince George's, Howard, and Montgomery Counties and the District of Columbia.

The Avenel barn's conversion from cattle to horses created stalls that are not uniform in size and the layout of the barn makes it more difficult to maintain them since they are set up in a series of short rows as opposed to a line of stalls on either side of the servicing aisle.

A desirable barn features uniform sized stalls and wide aisles between stalls so that horses can be groomed and tacked without interfering with traffic in the aisles, wash stalls, space for tack trunks or lockers, a tack room, adequate lighting and ventilation, an office, hay and feed storage, and restrooms. While Avenel did not have an indoor arena, a barn with an indoor area with stalls located on both sides of the arena would be advantageous as it enables all weather riding.

What are best practices for the maintenance and upkeep of all buildings, grounds, and equipment?

A barn has to be cleaned daily to be adequately maintained and any mechanical or electrical malfunctions must be addressed immediately. Regular inspections are required to assure that there are no structural issues and a regular yearly cycle of maintenance to the facility and its equipment should be followed.

What are the typical approaches to implementation of capital improvement and maintenance programs?

Regular routine maintenance and continual inspection of the building & grounds will avoid capital improvement expenditures which along with maintenance should be the responsibility of the property owner.

What are the relevant regulations, including environmental and safety standards, that equestrian facilities must and/or should comply?

All equestrian facilities are governed by state and county laws and regulations adopted to provide healthy and safe conditions for the horses residing at a facility.

2. *Best practices & potential offerings for Equestrian activities:*

What are the typical services offered and/or required to facilitate and maintain the availability of equestrian activities?

The typical services are described in the initial paragraph of number 1 above.

What are the necessary facilities for group and/or individual riding instructions?

At the minimum an outdoor ring for individual or group instruction and unsupervised riding by boarders. An indoor ring would be desirable as instruction and riding by boarders could be conducted in inclement weather and during the winter months.

What are the requirements and considerations required for providing horse boarding services?

The requirements for providing horse boarding services begins with a sound knowledge of the physiology & structure of horses, their nutritional needs, and the ability to provide basic veterinary care, i.e. administering medicine, necessary shots, and worming.

3. *Best practices for operational management of a facility;*

What level and qualification of staff is required to maintain equestrian activities?

The qualifications required are a long-time experience as an equestrian, preferably someone who grew up with horses or was active in pony club or 4H in their younger years and also management experience from actively working in barns with a number of horses. Highly desirable is someone with a college degree with majors in equine sciences and management.

Are there notable industry practices for day-to-day operations? If so, what are they?

Barn management is best described as a one arm juggling act – mucking stalls, cleaning aisles, caring for horses, purchasing and installing bedding for stalls, hay, preparing different feed mixtures for each horse, and providing routine medical supplies, calling in vets & farriers, supervising employees, paying bills and payrolls, collecting boarding fees, pleasing boarders, The best practices are reflected in the barn's clean condition, the health of the horses, and the satisfaction of the employees and boarders.

What are the best approaches to additional services such as veterinary care, farrier services, etc.?

Regular vet checks and farrier visits are standard practices. Ideally, the boarder is present and pays the service provider directly or a bill is left for such payment. In some instances, the barn is billed and payments are added to the boarders' monthly bill, although this places a cash-flow burden on the barn manager.

4. *Best practices for engaging community in the activities offered:*

What is industry best practices and strategies to promote an equestrian center within the community?

Build it and they will come is true of any horse boarding facility, especially in the Potomac, Rockville, & Bethesda area. The demand in the Potomac subregion for horse boarding is considerable. There is a waiting list at most Montgomery County barns. When the new Avenel

facility is ready for utilization community organizations, including pony clubs, news media, and individual equestrians will quickly spread the word – there will be a waiting list to board at Avenel.

Are there programs to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for diverse population?

The Potomac Subregion is a highly diverse community of multiple ethnicities and racial origins which is reflected in all area activities. Outreach will be made to African-American community leaders involved in equestrian activities such as Shelia Johnson of BET and Terry West.

Are there additional considerations for therapeutic riding or other types of potential offerings that provide other community benefits?

Therapeutic riding programs require certified instructors and the acquisition of suitable horses. There are organizations in Montgomery County and grants available dedicated to this worthy endeavor with which partnerships can be made.

What types of partnerships with local organizations and schools are typical and/or recommended?

Partnerships with schools and local pony clubs for instructional tours and events can be organized. Tours are usually arranged for younger children in the early grades once they are old enough to go on field trips. Middle and High School tours could also be arranged. Also, there is the public/private school Interscholastic Equestrian Association that sponsors equestrian competition for middle and high school students that can be invited to utilize the facility.

How are appropriate fees and other charges developed for public use of the equestrian center (i.e. public riding lessons)?

Boarding fees & instruction fees are determined by the going market rates at area barns.

What are the typical ranges for the fees associated with offerings at an equestrian center?

In Montgomery County basic stall boarding ranges per horse per month from \$1,000 to \$1,200, and up to \$3,000 per month which includes daily grooming & training. Field boarding ranges from \$500 to \$600, depending on the facility. Individual lessons usually are a minimum of \$100 per hour, and group lessons are a minimum of \$85 per hour. The fees will vary according to amenities offered at the facility and the qualifications of the instructor.

5. *Best practices for business terms for equestrian activities that persons or organizations offering these services may request, including but not limited to the following areas:*

What is the necessary length of a lease or other operating agreement to ensure the operational and financial feasibility of equestrian operations?

The longer the term the better for the operator to acclimate to the boarding facility and develop a conservation plan for pasture rotation, and to become established in the community. In the case of Avenel, an initial five-year lease seems reasonable. There are existing leases in Montgomery County on Park & Planning land for considerably longer periods.

What are the best practices for ensuring that there is on-going investment in maintenance, up-keep, and improvement of facilities?

Regular inspections of the facility & pastures by the facility owner along with regular consultation on maintenance & repair needs is the best means to assure there is an ongoing investment by the facility manager.

Are there host fees or other revenue sharing for revenues generated by the equestrian enterprise?
Hosting horse shows, one-day corporate retreats, engaging trainers, equine physiotherapists, or selling horse merchandise, hats, T-shirts or jackets, or grooming related supplies can be an additional source of revenue.

Are there examples of public-private partnerships for equestrian facilities and activities that serve as potential model for future offerings?

Callithea Farm on River Road in Potomac is a prime example of a successful public-private partnership between the property owner, Maryland Park & Planning Commission's Department of Parks & Recreation and its lessee which is an excellent model for the Avenel Equestrian Center.

The Prince George's Equestrian Center & Show Place Arena, the largest horse facility in the region is located in Upper Marlboro and is operated by the Maryland Park & Planning Commission's (MPPC) Department of Parks & Recreation. In the words of MPPC, this public facility "commemorate(s) the history of Maryland's equestrian traditions and the importance of the horse industry to the state's economy."

As I noted to the Commission in my May 15th testimony there are 87,000 horses in the state (now increased to 94,000) with 8,470 in Montgomery County, the second largest total in the state. And, according to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland is home to more than 717,000 horse-enthusiast households or 30 percent of the population.

What capacity do firms in this industry and/or your firm have for establishing partnerships and/or other means for raising funds for necessary repairs and maintenance of equestrian facilities?

While the burden of capital repairs & maintenance of the facility is a responsibility of the facility owner. The community organization previously recognized by WSSC, the Avenel Equestrian Center Council, would be prepared to assist in raising funds from the private and the public sector to assist in the facilities' maintenance.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Neil P. Hill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Neil" and last name "Hill" clearly distinguishable.