

## Something Still Smells in ICAR Plan

Early plans for GMU's Conflict Resolution Center on Mason Neck still include 250,000-gallon sewage tank.

By Amber Healy

February 20, 2008

Plans for George Mason University's Institute of Conflict Analysis and Resolution have not changed, and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors is still concerned that might mean a 250,000 sewage treatment tank could one day appear on Mason Neck.

During the Monday, Feb. 11 Board meeting, Supervisor Gerry Hyland (D-Mount Vernon) and Chairman Gerry Connolly (D-At large) asked County Attorney Tony Griffin to send a letter to Dr. Alan G. Merten, GMU's president, asking for more information about the center. Their concerns are based on information they believe is lacking from an Environmental Impact Report the university submitted, which does not include details about how much land would be cleared on the 40 acres selected for the center.

"The letter we asked to be sent to GMU is another step for the county to reach out and ask them to include the county and the community in their plans for the site," Hyland said. "We're concerned about what we're hearing in these plans."

THE COUNTY has long maintained that public sewer should not be extended to homes on Mason Neck as a way to preserve open space in the environmentally sensitive area. If GMU decides to build the 250,000 gallon tank, Hyland said he and Connolly are concerned GMU may open up the possibility of extending sewer lines to adjacent properties. Those fears are understandable but unnecessary at this point, said Dan Walsch, a spokesman for GMU.

"We have yet to make a decision about the tank, but we've said before that it's very unlikely we'll need one that size," Walsch said. "We want to keep our options open."

Plans for the center are still in the early stages, Walsch said, with fund raising yet to do before any construction begins.

But if the university decides to build the sewage tank, Walsch admitted there is little the county board could do to prevent it.

"Because we're a state entity, the guidelines we operate under are different in terms of who we answer to," he said.

"We take suggestions under advisement and we want to be a good partner to everyone who has a stake in this."

Del. Dave Bulova (D-37) knows a little about what the university can do without local approval. A few years ago, GMU installed a large digital sign on Braddock Road, which angered neighbors of the Fairfax campus.

Mason Neck residents should be watchful for opportunities to comment on the plan, Bulova advised, and keep in touch with their elected officials in Richmond about their concerns.

"The university is a great community resource, but what they do impacts the community," he said. "We need to set up a system to allow citizens to express their concerns to the university and a way for the university to incorporate those concerns into their future plans."

Del. Dave Albo (R-42) has taken the concerns of the Mason Neck residents to Richmond for this term, submitting legislation three times to ensure GMU has to limit the size of the sewage tank to service the needs of the Conflict Resolution Center and nothing else.

Albo said he first submitted a bill to the House of Delegates that was killed in committee, but when he tried to tie the bill to a bond issue for GMU construction, he was advised to include it as part of the budget plan.

"I've been working with (Hyland's) staff on this bill because it makes no sense why they would want a 250,000 gallon tank when all they really need is about 10,000 gallons a day," Albo said.

According to a draft statement released in 2007 by GMU on the center, maximum occupancy at the center at any one time is estimated to be 100 people.

"If this amendment passes, and (Sen.) Toddy (Puller, D-36) got it in on her side, this might be what saves Mason Neck from being paved over by townhouses," Albo said.

