

**MEMORANDUM**

**Student Perspectives Pertaining to the  
“Wooded Hillock” /UM Forest and the  
University of Maryland’s East Campus  
Redevelopment**

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## SUMMARY

Students and faculty at the University of Maryland currently oppose the proposed removal of 8.75 acres of campus forest commonly known as the “Wooded Hillock” for construction of parking lots, service buildings, and a warehouse. In a time when the United States and the world are facing the unprecedented challenges of energy crises and climate change, the need for smart, sustainable development is becoming increasingly clear. It is with this understanding that we raise objections to this development.

The “Wooded Hillock” is a 22.4 acre forested area on the University of Maryland campus. Located north of the Denton residential community and west of the Comcast Center and greenhouse complex, it is the largest contiguous forest remaining on campus. It is also home to a wide range of plant and animal life rare to the Washington DC Metropolitan area, including native orchids, native azaleas, and more than 50 species of birds.<sup>i,ii</sup>

In late 2006 and 2007, 3 acres of this ecologically significant forest were selected as the new location for approximately 30% of the maintenance facilities that would be displaced by the East Campus Development Project. The East Campus Development Project is proposed as a mixed-use commercial development and student housing project on US-1/Baltimore Avenue that is currently occupied by the University’s motor pool, the mail facility, and the Service Building<sup>iii</sup>. In September 2008, the “Wooded Hillock” was designated as the primary relocation site, requiring that approximately 9 acres of native Maryland forest be cleared.

This site plan was finalized with no input from students, faculty, or neighboring communities, and disregarded the significance of the “Wooded Hillock” to the university community, the priorities of local, county, and state government, and the university’s greater commitment to sustainable development. The University’s Student Government Association unanimously passed a resolution in February 2009 calling for further investigation of alternative sites to the “Wooded Hillock”<sup>iv</sup>. However, alternative sites have not yet been seriously investigated and plans to develop continue to move forward unhindered.

Fifteen professors and an estimated 2,000 students at the University use the “Wooded Hillock” every year as a real-world educational tool to demonstrate and study native Maryland soils, ecosystems, disturbance ecology, species diversity, biogeography, art, and other subjects. Now that the faculty and students have become aware of the “Wooded Hillock”, there is great interest in incorporating this easily accessible campus resource into new and existing courses and curricula. Furthermore, both plant and bird studies of the site conducted by experienced students in May, 2009 found that the site harbors rare species that are invaluable to the region’s ecosystem. Both studies conclude that this forest provides a habitat which is not quickly or easily replaced once it is destroyed, and “every effort should be given to save it.”<sup>ii</sup>

According to conversations with top level administrators, the university is aggressively pursuing development of the site in the next several months. In addition to action by campus stakeholders, external pressure is urgently needed from environmental and social interest groups, local community associations, elected officials, and alumni of the university to encourage the university to reconsider alternative sites.

A more complete and transparent evaluation of financing options and possible site plans with due consideration to environmental resources is needed. Such an evaluation would yield a solution that

satisfies the university's commitments to the community, the future of the State of Maryland, and to environmental sustainability.

Lastly, analysis from experts beyond the College Park campus community is needed to provide the University Administration with objective recommendations.

The following details the decisions and processes that have led to this contentious development and our expressed objections.

## **EAST CAMPUS**

The University of Maryland is eager to transform East Campus from "an underutilized portion of the campus" into a "vibrant environment" and to "catalyze the redevelopment of the U.S. Route 1 corridor." The stated goals of the redevelopment are to "strengthen the City of College Park commercial core and will benefit surrounding communities and University students, faculty, and staff."<sup>iii</sup>

The University has contracted Foulger Pratt-Argo Investments (FPA) to complete the East Campus project. Several of the campus' important functional facilities are currently located on the East Campus site including offices, parking, and maintenance bays for the Shuttle UM, University Police, Building and Landscape Services, and University Mail Distribution. Prior to redevelopment, these facilities must be moved from their current site to another location. Due to budget, the University has insisted that the relocation project remain budget-neutral. According to the University's Vice President of Administrative Affairs, Ann Wiley, none of the University's internal funding has or will be provided for East Campus Redevelopment or the required relocation. Relocating displaced facilities must be funded by money FPA will provide to the campus for the East Campus parcel, which was determined by an external developer hired by FPA to be valued at \$45 million.

## **THE UNIVERSITY'S SELECTION OF THE "WOODED HILLOCK"**

Selection of potential relocation sites began in November 2005 with the creation of the East Campus District Subcommittee (ECDS) which included officials within the University's Office of Administrative Affairs, Department of Facilities Management, Operations and Maintenance, Business Services, University Police, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, the City of College Park, and the University's Student Government Association. ECDS identified, evaluated, and subsequently recommended relocation sites based on the following ranked criteria listed in their *East Campus Redevelopment Initiative* document:

1. All East Campus site development costs, including relocation costs, must be born by the developer. That is the University had no additional revenues for this relocation.
2. The service levels, effectiveness, and efficiency of the functions to be relocated must not be reduced as a result of the relocation. As a result, the EDCS determined that these units must remain geographically central to the campus and that departments that work closely together must be co-located.
3. Because the current East Campus activities are relatively unattractive "back of the house" operational functions, they should be relocated to a site which is less visible to the campus community and visitors.
4. The environmental impacts of the relocation must be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

The ECDS weighed and assessed 12 sites and ultimately recommended 4 final candidates<sup>v</sup>. In May of 2007, ECDS Chair Frank Brewer recommended the “Wooded Hillock” site for relocation of some of the East Campus Facilities. In selecting the site, it was recognized that its development would require the removal of several acres of trees and significant grading on the site’s steep slopes. The environmental impact of the “Wooded Hillock’s” destruction to campus or College Park was not studied or formally considered in the development site selection process.

## **STUDENT SENTIMENT**

In January of 2009, word leaked to students that there was a great deal of unrest among staff and faculty about the development of the “Wooded Hillock”. Members of the Student Government Association and other student organizations immediately met with concerned members of the staff, faculty, and administrators in the Department of Facilities Management. In February 2009, after substantial research and deliberation, the University’s Student Government Association unanimously passed a resolution calling for further investigation of alternative sites to the “Wooded Hillock”<sup>vi</sup>. The University’s Office of Sustainability (OS), although responsible for “facilitating the development and implementation of sustainable policies, practices and curricula for the campus community”, had not been involved in the site selection process. However, in response to the student opposition to developing the “Wooded Hillock”, the University’s Department of Facilities Management, nearly 3 years after the final site had been selected, commissioned the OS to provide recommendations from a sustainability perspective based on the “Wooded Hillock” as the selected site for relocation. OS’s subsequent report, *East Campus Redevelopment Project Sustainability Perspectives*<sup>iv</sup> states that “OS was not involved in the site selection process, does not have financial data relative to the development alternatives, nor quantified environmental impact data.”

## **THE OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY’S ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PERSPECTIVES**

The *East Campus Development Project Sustainability Perspectives*<sup>iv</sup> outlines the environmental concerns of developing the “Wooded Hillock” and the two other sites that were considered as final candidates for the relocation project. The environmental concerns related to the “Wooded Hillock” outnumber those related to the two other sites.

Some of the concerns include:

- “The proposed development of the Wooded Hillock appears to be inconsistent with the [University’s] Facilities Master Plan’s environmental conservation goals.” (p. 4)
- “The removal of trees at the site also impacts the connectivity to other forested areas in and around the campus. It should be noted that this type of parcel (sloped, forested and contiguous) is one that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources seeks to protect under forest bank easements.” (p. 4)
- “The current site is largely pervious and therefore, storm water is mitigated in a manner that minimizes impact to the surrounding streams. The proposed development will reverse this condition resulting in additional storm water runoff.” (p. 5)

- “The two warehouses proposed for the site will not be required to meet LEED Silver criteria. The new buildings will replace existing operations. It is not known whether this will result in an increase, decrease or little change in the University’s greenhouse gas footprint.” (p. 5)
- “The area is currently used by some faculty for classroom field studies. The ability to use the Wooded Hillock for such activities will likely be compromised due to the planned development.” (p. 5)

Furthermore the report states that “A smaller area of impact could be realized by stacking one or more of the buildings and providing below-ground parking for Motor Pool vehicles.” (p. 4)

The original plan approved by the ECDS in 2005 considered use of underground or structured parking spaces to mitigate the project’s footprint on the site. Though students were represented in this decision, the developer later determined that underground or structured parking would exceed the project’s budget. As a result, the design was modified in January of 2008 to include only surface parking and the footprint on the “Wooded Hillock” subsequently tripled to 8.75 acres (with 14.5 acres to be disturbed) without any further ECDS input or student approval.

## **THE UNIVERSITY’S GUIDING DOCUMENTS**

As noted in the *East Campus Development Project Sustainability Perspectives*, the development of the “Wooded Hillock” violates the University’s Facilities Master Plan. The document states (p. 4):

The 1991 Facilities Master Plan, authored by the University’s Department of Facilities Management, established a goal to “protect and preserve designated natural features, special open spaces, views and vistas...” on the campus and identified the Wooded Hillock as an area to preserve. The 2001 [updated] Facilities Master Plan significantly enhances this goal through several environmental stewardship recommendations relative to development. These include the need to establish greenways; protect streams and wetlands; conserve, restore and enhance forest cover; use university land as an environmental asset in education and research; and enhance strategies for land use that shows respect for local and regional natural systems of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and enhances Smart Growth principles.

In addition, the development of the “Wooded Hillock” is in direct violation of other University guiding documents-- the University’s *Climate Action Plan*, and the University’s *2007 Strategic Plan*-- both of which were thoroughly vetted by the campus community and approved by the University Senate.

The University’s *Climate Action Plan* is a 50 year strategic plan for achieving carbon neutrality (no net greenhouse gas emissions) at the College Park campus. The University Senate overwhelmingly endorsed the *Climate Action Plan* in September 2009. Language in the transportation emissions reductions portion of the plan suggests that parking lots will be used, rather than green space, as sites for new development. It states that there will be significantly less cars on campus and indicates that there will be decreased demand for parking “which may allow certain parking lots or even garages to no longer be needed. This may free up land for other purposes such as buildings or recreation areas.”<sup>vii</sup> Additionally, language in the Education and Research portion of the plan outlines the need for the University to become a “learning laboratory for the promotion of sustainability science and action”. It also suggests that “active learning programs” on sites like the

“Wooded Hillock “are essential to improving environmental literacy on campus and preparing students for “careers that address the multiple challenges of a warming climate, finite resources, energy dependence, etc. (p. 54).”

The *2007 Strategic Plan*<sup>x</sup>, approved by the University Senate states:

Academic programs will develop targeted initiatives and work . . . with community leaders to choose areas where community support can advance academic goals, providing real-world experience for faculty and students alike. Possible initiatives might include: support of environmental stewardship and sustainability efforts, working towards the creation of a Green Community (p. 26)<sup>viii</sup>.

Furthermore, the strategic plan states a commitment to working to solve some of the world’s most pressing ecological concerns and to expand green space on campus.

The University of Maryland will be widely recognized as a national model for a Green University. In ten years time the University will have made substantial progress towards addressing energy issues. It will have slashed energy use, expanded green spaces, dramatically reduced its carbon footprint, and built and retrofitted buildings to strict environmental standards. The University will complement these concrete actions with its teaching, research, and development efforts in energy science and policy, smart growth, environmental mapping, sustainable agriculture, and other fields. As the third largest ‘city’ in the state, the University will have a significant impact as a leader and showcase for environmental sustainability (p. 31).

## **STAKEHOLDER DEMANDS**

The relocation site selection process was not transparent to the University community and fails to consider the opinions of student and faculty campus stakeholders. Additionally, the informal cost-benefit analysis of the East Campus District Subcommittee lacks critical details and clarity and does not adequately assess the ecological, educational, and historical importance of the “Wooded Hillock”.

The cost and regulatory impact of 2009 updates to the State of Maryland’s Storm water Management Act of 2007 have not been considered for the site. University faculty experts in Landscape Architecture Program have indicated that the “Wooded Hillock’s” unique geological structure as a gravel terrace will be difficult and expensive to stabilize. Additionally, the State of Maryland’s Forestry Act of 2009, which aims to protect and expand forests in urban areas and increase public appreciation for the value of Chesapeake forests, has not yet been considered for the site.

Campus stakeholders request that the University implement a process similar to the one used to develop the UM Strategic Plant, by which the perspectives, concerns, and opinions of students, alumni, faculty, and community residents can be integrated into selecting a relocation site. It is our recommendation that the process involve reconsideration of:

- Detailed proposals of existing impervious surfaces on campus
- The environmental and non-monetary value of the sites
- The potential use of multi-level parking structures

- Alternative sources of funding for conservation of the “Wooded Hillock “
- An escalated appraisal of the East Campus Redevelopment site

In the meantime, students and faculty are eager to work with the University towards permanently preserving the “Wooded Hillock” to ensure that future UM students will benefit from a healthy local environment, learn from example about sustainability and environmental ethics, and take pride in being green in practice as well as in principle.

## **OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

We seek active support and rapid engagement. University administrators are currently seeking financing for the East Campus Development. Once financing is arranged, the University must submit requests for permits to develop the site to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Upon receipt, DNR’s will advertise a 30-day public comment period. Comments along with required documentation related to Maryland Tree Laws will be reviewed before development of the site can be approved

University administrators can skirt current environmental regulations to facilitate the relocation. Parking lot construction on the “Wooded Hillock”, which is especially pervious to rainwater because of a unique geology, will introduce problems with storm water management and groundwater recharge that could require detailed geological surveys. However the University can request exemption from stricter regulations detailed in Maryland’s Storm water Management Act of 2007 by claiming the project was initiated before the act’s date of effect (May 5, 2009). While the university is required to designate a tree bank for conservation easement, the proposed bank lacks the “Wooded Hillock’s” ecological and educational value, doing little to counteract damage incurred by development. Finally, university administrators have not voiced intentions to conduct a thorough environmental impact analysis.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is hard to overemphasize the value of preserving this land for the sake of the University of Maryland and its broader community. We sincerely believe that the East Campus Redevelopment Plan can be greatly successful without endangering the “Wooded Hillock”. We must reiterate that we are not against the development of East Campus, only the planned relocation. Students continue to petition the University, engage administrators, maintain a website ([www.savethehillock.com](http://www.savethehillock.com)), appeal to relevant community organizations, draft letters to local officials, and conduct student, alumni, and faculty outreach campaigns. But time is waning and we have little hope of swaying the university in its convictions without the exertion of external pressures. We thank you for your time and consideration and hope to garner your support as we fight for our university, our community, and our environment.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

*Joanna Calabrese (2010, B.A. Environmental Science and Policy) is a 2009 Udall Scholar and Director of Environmental Affairs for the SGA, Phil Hannam (Alum 2009, B.S. Mechanical Engineering) is a 2008 Truman Scholar and 2009 University Medalist, Robert Hayes (2011, B.S. Mechanical Engineering) is a University Senator, Dylan Rebois (2011, B.S. Mechanical Engineering) is a project leader for Engineers Without Borders and member of the Student Sustainability Council. The authors are joined by a diverse cohort of students, faculty and staff who support a new paradigm for environmental stewardship at the University of Maryland.*

## NOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> Wooded Hillock Plant Survey [http://www.savethehillock.com/plant\\_survey.php](http://www.savethehillock.com/plant_survey.php)
- <sup>ii</sup> Wooded Hillock Bird Survey [http://www.savethehillock.com/bird\\_survey.php](http://www.savethehillock.com/bird_survey.php)
- <sup>iii</sup> East Campus Redevelopment Initiative <http://www.eastcampus.umd.edu/>
- <sup>iv</sup> SGA resolution supporting alternatives to the Wooded Hillock  
[http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=ddfkf76n\\_37f5jr9pdr](http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=ddfkf76n_37f5jr9pdr)
- <sup>v</sup> East Campus Redevelopment Project Sustainability Perspectives, March 19, 2009 available at  
[www.savethehillock.com](http://www.savethehillock.com)
- <sup>vi</sup> SGA resolution supporting alternatives to the Wooded Hillock  
[http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=ddfkf76n\\_37f5jr9pdr](http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=ddfkf76n_37f5jr9pdr)
- <sup>vii</sup> University of Maryland Climate Action Plan, August 2009, p.36  
[http://www.sustainability.umd.edu/UM\\_FINAL\\_Climate\\_Action\\_Plan\\_082709.pdf](http://www.sustainability.umd.edu/UM_FINAL_Climate_Action_Plan_082709.pdf)
- <sup>viii</sup> Strategic Plan for the University of Maryland, 2007  
[http://www.umd.edu/strat\\_plan/stratplan.cfm](http://www.umd.edu/strat_plan/stratplan.cfm)