



**Sully Woodlands Stewardship Education Center
Discussion Notes from Partnership Charrette
Revised September 23, 2016**

On September 15, 2016, representatives from Fairfax County Park Authority, Quinn Evans Architects, and LINK Strategic Partners conducted an interactive discussion and visioning session with potential partners for the Sully Woodlands Stewardship Education Center. Participants broke into two groups, and the combined notes from those facilitated discussions are below.

Three key themes emerged from these discussions:

1. The design and capabilities of the Sully Woodlands Stewardship Education Center should be as multi-purpose and flexible as possible. The programs provided by potential partners change year-to-year, and the broader format of informal education continues to evolve, so the spaces within the Center should be as adaptable to changing uses as possible.
2. There will be different levels of partnership and engagement. Some participants expressed an interest in offering programming, while others offered expertise or support with grant-writing. Partners will engage as it makes the most sense, and the Park Authority should recognize and meet partners where they feel most comfortable whenever possible.
3. The Center's educational offerings transcend static information and data. Instead, the Center's educational programming should make connections, engaging visitors with their culture, history, environment, and future.

Topic 1: Services and Amenities

- a. *What amenities would you like to see provided at the Sully Woodland Stewardship Education Center?*
- b. *What types of sustainable features should be integrated into the facility design?*
- c. *We're building this center from scratch. What would you want to see in terms of physical space and logistics?*
- d. *What types of services would you like to see at the Center?*
 - Make this a living building that will demonstrate sustainable features and practices (such as labs, LEED, a green roof, native plants, and generate solar or hydro electricity).
 - Use the building itself as a teaching tool to demonstrate different aspects of stewardship and environmental management, such as:
 - Using the construction process as a teaching tool
 - Conducting field work and storing specimens
 - Permeable surfaces that facilitate water management
 - Use natural stone in SWSEC to match historic buildings currently at the site as well as

the regional geology.

- Integrate the indoors and outdoors (interior and exterior). The buildings should have soft transitions to blur the inside/outside divide.
- The Center should be the “home base” for the park, but is not the only focus or place to learn.
- Active water management, such as using the placement of the facility to reduce storm water impacts or publicly featuring how water is managed during the building’s life (e.g., glass floors so you can see the water underneath).
- Make connections with homeowners to give them stewardship/conservation ideas to implement in their own homes and lives. Teach people ‘how to do this at home.’
- Follow the same path as the North American Animal Cam, which features numerous animal cams and also showcases human interactions with animals.
- Make it fun, such as creating a nature play space that engages children and gets them excited about nature. Another idea is rock-climbing, utilizing an actual rock structure and not a rock-climbing wall.
- Create opportunities for both structured and unstructured play. Children should be taught, but they should also have the opportunity to learn about water flow by playing in a stream, i.e. “Pooh Sticks”. There should be room to include parents in these activities.
- Design the outside play area so adults can talk together in full view of kids engaged in self-directed play.
- Include community amenities for local groups (e.g., Cub Scouts, local schools).
- Hands-on environment, so that children and others can directly engage with nature.
- Provide training opportunities for teachers and staff. For example, teachers could learn how to teach students about nature by working directly with nature.
- Outdoor amenities, such as restroom facilities that can be accessed without entering the facilities and an outdoor shelter space.
- A meeting space that could accommodate groups of up to 160 people, and that could be used for a variety of purposes.
- Scalability, so that services can be increased or decreased as necessary.
- Feature interactive exhibits where participants can directly connect with the materials.
- Opportunities to learn about topography and how the landscape is connected, particularly when it comes to hydrology and geology. This includes the opportunity to conduct nature surveys.
- Opportunities to experience the changing of the seasons, both from an aesthetic sense but also from an observation-based environmental perspective.
- Wildlife: Rescue and stewardship programs both inside the building and on the park’s grounds.
- Ideas for potential displays:
 - Real fish tanks
 - Native species
 - Canopies/Trees
 - Storm water
 - Stream systems
 - Culture and history stories, with an emphasis on their interaction with the environment

- Community garden (with demonstrations)
- Edible forest
- Natural oasis
- Composting/Rain barrels
- Energy efficiency
- Pollinator gardens
- Virtual mapping
- Offer the opportunity to participate in overnight programming, everything from a formal “sleep away” camp, to more limited overnights such as astronomy or historical sleepovers, with the opportunity to participate in reenactments of different historical periods (e.g., Revolutionary and Civil War periods).
- Support for photography, such as a designated darkroom space.
- Build canopy bridges that offer the opportunity to shift perspective while researching and monitoring wildlife from a different perspective.
- A maker studio, where local artists and entrepreneurs could create their art and materials, as well as office space that can be used as needed by members of the community.
- Although it’s great to have people admire the natural beauty of the site (and the site should be constructed with views in mind), the Center should also provide interpretation of that beauty. So when people are admiring the trees, we should also teach them about ecology and natural balance.
- Satellite stations for partnership organizations, as it may not make sense for all of their programs and services to be based within the Center. Flexibility is key.
- The spaces within the Center should be flexible, multi-purpose, ‘organic,’ and fun. Furthermore, the furnishings should be accessible and kid-friendly (e.g., colorful fabrics).
- Establish and showcase collections used to teach people, as well as the opportunity to store those materials when they’re not in public use.
- The building should possess the capability to change over time, so the space/furnishing/design should be as flexible as possible.
- Everything should be designed for “Experience”, not just function.
- The building should have many electrical outlets accessible to the public, especially as technology will be used in educational programming.
- Provide free Wi-Fi.
- Auditorium space for theatrical events and possibly IMAX programming.
- Design space for art interactions with the park.

Topic 2: Programming

- a. *What type of programming would you want to see at SWSEC?*
 - b. *What type of programming would you want to provide?*
 - c. *Who is the target audience?*
 - d. *Let’s talk broadly about goals, opportunities, and ideas. We’re building a brand-new facility here, so let’s be as creative as possible.*
- The programming should encompass STEAM, not just STEM: Science Technology Engineering Art Math.

- Programs for participants to use at their own pace, such as scavenger hunts featuring geocaching and natural resources bingo.
- Maintain an ongoing relationship and engagement with partners, and encourage them to share information and ideas.
- Use birds of prey as an education tool, including bird watching webcams and caretaking opportunities.
- Provide a hands-on experience and place-based education. There was a desire for interpretive programming that can be accessed at the Center as well as accessed remotely (i.e. distance learning). The Center should be a living classroom, offering historical and broader interpretation through an immersive experience.
- Emphasize the interconnection of natural and cultural resources, and develop content that Center users can apply in their daily lives.
- Provide STEM programming, particularly for teachers.
- Offer data collection opportunities for citizen scientists, such as the opportunity to collect samples, track information, and conduct experiments.
- Education on specific aspects of environmental management, including forestry management, stewardship, and conservation.
- Engage the home school community by offering the opportunity to access the Center's resources.
- Education about food preparation and cooking, including canning, food safety, and engagement with farm-to-table chefs and restaurants.
- Evening classes year round.
- "Gateway" classes to pique the public's interest in stewardship, offering classes on popular subjects such as butterflies and gardening.
- Emphasize the opportunity to reconnect with dirt and elements of nature (wind, water, etc.)

Topic 3: Community Engagement/Involvement

- a. *How do you engage with the community? What's worked for you before?*
 - b. *What are your ideas for engaging the community to get them excited about the Stewardship Center?*
 - c. *In what ways should the Center contribute to community place making?*
 - d. *What are your ideas for engaging the community to get them excited about the programming opportunities provided at the Center?*
- Placemaking is created through using local materials and local landmarks. People connect specifically to a place through their physical experiences and the memories they make there. We want to create and evoke good memories so that people will come back again and again. Emphasize unique experiences, such as overnights and special events.
 - The building should bring the outside in by using natural materials and natural light. We want to create an immersive experience of nature.
 - Create and protect authentic habitats.
 - All community organizations need flexible and accessible meeting space.

- Many non-profits also need co-working space.

Topic 4: Partner Contributions

- a. As a potential partner, what do you think you can contribute to the Sully Woodlands Stewardship Education Center in terms of staffing, programming, and funding?*
- b. Do you think your organization would be interested in a short or long-term partnership with the Fairfax County Park Authority at the Sully Woodland Stewardship Education Center?*
- c. Are there other partners that you work with that should be part of this process?*

- Find a partner to manage our partners.
- Ideas proposed for partnership engagement included:
 - Grant programs, including partnering to apply for grants
 - Storm water mitigation
 - Shared part-time staffing
 - Insight and expertise, including training Fairfax County staff on specific subjects, such as taking care of wildlife or setting up exhibits.
- *Civic Associations*
 - Work with different groups in our community, including developers and homeowners' associations. They make decisions/set policies that dictate people's experiences with the environment, and they could be good messengers and partners. We could create programs that help private landowners learn how to manage their land to match the practices of multiple county agencies to best manage the over-all acreage in the county.
 - Virginia's Master Naturalist program has service requirements, and SWSEC could be listed as a service requirement.
 - Wildlife Rescue League
 - Faith communities
 - Scouts
 - Osher Life Learning Institute, which provides volunteer opportunities to seniors
 - American Association of University Women Virginia chapter's GEMs (Girls in Engineering) program
 - Urban Forestry
 - Conversation Trust
 - Local restaurants, including the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington
 - Alice Ferguson
 - Partnering with the Sully Senior Center, which will close soon
- *Institutions*
 - George Mason Environmental Education Center
 - Georgetown Medical Center
 - Inova Health and other public health organizations
 - NOVA Technology Council
 - Explore.org

- Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- James Madison University Center for Wind
- *Federal Agencies*
 - National Parks Service
 - NOAA
 - National Fish and Wildlife Service
- *Relationships*
 - Coordinate to develop a sister park relationship with a place that's geographically and environmentally different than Sully Woodlands
 - See what others have done for storm water innovation, with an emphasis on how Washington State's Puget Sound agency has done this.
 - Work with Fairfax County's Neighbors and Community Services department.

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