

*Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park
Federal Advisory Commission Meeting*

December 15, 2011

Warren County Government Center
Front Royal, Virginia

- I) General Introductions
- II) Review of Minutes from March 17, 2011
- III) Visitor Contact Station at Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP, Diann Jacox
- IV) Signage at Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP, Eric Campbell
- V) Belle Grove Welcome Center Planning, John Adamson
- VI) Old Business
- VII) New Business

Meeting Notes

Commission members in attendance: Diann Jacox, Designated Federal Official (DFO); John Adamson, Belle Grove; Mary Bowser, private landowner; Patrick Farris, Warren County, chair; Stanley M. Hirschberg, Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation; Eric Lawrence, Frederick County; Rob Nieweg, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Nick Picerno, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation

Commission members absent: Carl Bernhards, Middletown; Jeanne Frink, Commonwealth of Virginia; Sarah Mauck, Strasburg; and Pam Sheets, Shenandoah County

Others in attendance: Eric Campbell, NPS; John Christianson, Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation; Bob Grogg, NPS volunteer; Elizabeth McClung, Belle Grove; Dave Stegmaier, District Office, U.S. Representative Frank Wolf; and Tim Stowe, Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation.

Chair Patrick Farris opened the meeting at 8:40 a.m. Farris asked that everyone present give their name and affiliation. The commissioners approved the meeting notes for March 17, 2011, as written.

Dave Stegmaier, who heads the district office for U.S. Representative Frank Wolf, introduced himself and said a few words about Representative Wolf's interest in Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP.

Diann Jacox said that this meeting of the FAC would be devoted to two large issues: a visitor contact station (VCS) and park signage. She felt called upon to respond to a letter that had been written by Rob Nieweg and circulated among the commissioners questioning whether the commission had been consulted on the location of the VCS and whether the National Park Service (NPS) intended to develop signage for the national park.

Jacox recapped the history of the discussions that had begun in the December 2009 park advisory meeting. Much of the commission's work on the general management plan had been completed and the discussion turned to how to begin implementing the plan. The consensus at that meeting was that the park should establish a visible NPS presence as quickly as possible including interpretive programs and developing a VCS. The VCS would have introductory exhibits to all the park's interpretive themes and would be staffed. The initial goal was to have a decision made on locating a VCS by August 2011, when the lease on the park's Middletown office expired.

Some background information on how parks are funded was given. The general management plan represents the vision for how the park will develop, but staffing and funding to support development of the park is not guaranteed by the completion of the general management plan. There are 397 units within the national park system and NPS is subject to the same funding shortages that other federal agencies are experiencing. Each of the 397 units has to compete for priority for funding for park operations, line item construction and special projects.

So the question is what is the agency's funding priorities and how do parks align themselves with these priorities in order to receive funding?

Agency priorities are in part established by the NPS Organic Act that says the mission of the agency is to conserve natural and cultural resources and to provide for visitor enjoyment of those resources. Agency priorities are also determined by various federal laws. One such law is Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act which says that all federal agencies including the NPS has an affirmative responsibility to preserve historic resources that they own.

In addition to agency mission and federal law, funding priority is also determined by Backlog Maintenance—a list of maintenance needs within the national park system that currently has a backlog of projects totaling \$10 billion. The backlog maintenance directly impacts funding for all national parks.

NPS uses an asset management program named Facilities Maintenance Software System (FMSS) to help us track assets owned by the NPS and to establish relative priorities among the assets. We use a Project Management Information System (PMIS) to define and justify projects for which funding is requested.

Within these systems, backlog maintenance projects have the highest priority particularly those projects that involve the emergency stabilization of critical resources or that address health and safety issues. These projects have a higher funding priority than the construction of new facilities, including new visitor centers. Most recent visitor centers were not funded by NPS, but were built using a combination of private, non-profit, state and local government and other non-NPS funds.

The question is how does the fact that all new parks need development get reconciled with the demands of existing parks? The simple answer is that the backlog maintenance program trumps most other needs including new construction and facilities. So how do we take these known facts and apply them to this park?

In 2009 we decided that interpretation and cultural resource preservation would be our highest priorities. These priorities correspond with the agency's core mission of resource preservation and visitor enjoyment.

To protect the Bowman-Hite property we have used project funding for emergency stabilization and resource studies. We have also contracted with various universities including College of William and Mary, Mary Washington and Virginia Tech for archeological, historic preservation and landscape studies. We have used base funding to develop and implement interpretive programs and new interpretive media

There are some misunderstandings about the park. There are differences between a national historic site and a national historical park. A national historic site is typically organized around one primary theme and one major resource; while a national historical park is typically organized around multiple interpretive themes and multiple resources and has a larger land base. There are also differences between a national historical landmark and a national historical landmark district. There are no resources within this national park that has an individual designation as a national historical landmark. The national historical landmark district is approximately 2,000 acres and has multiple resource types representing multiple interpretive themes. None of the resources within the national historic landmark district has a higher designation than others. All structures fall within two categories: either contributing or not contributing to the national historic landmark district.

Each of the five key partners manages historic resources, and those resources represent various themes. The partners are focused on their own themes, stories and resources, but the national park must embrace all interpretive themes, all resources and all stories. The visiting public is interested in the stories, interpretive themes and resources regardless of the ownership patterns among the partners. A VCS is needed to provide an orientation to

all of the park's themes and all of the park's resources, regardless of ownership. In addition it will finally allow the park to count visitors, which will assist in making the case for moving up the priority ladder.

One of the park's key partners—Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation—is a national heritage area which encompasses an eight county area. The park's legislation says that the park will serve as the focal point of the Shenandoah Valley Battlefield National Historic District, and one way to do is to have visitors get an orientation to the heritage area at the VCS.

The long term goal for the national park is to open a visitor center, but the reality is that such an undertaking is many years off, so for now we must concentrate on getting a VCS. Initially we planned to locate the VCS at our new administrative headquarters building at 8693 Valley Pike – but because of need to separate offices from public spaces, and to provide additional parking – it was unsuitable. We solicited input from the advisory commission at the December 2009 meeting and Sarah Mauck proposed several locations in Strasburg. Meanwhile we learned that leasing is not handled on the local level, but is handled by our Washington office using GSA guidelines. A public solicitation for leased space was advertised in the *Northern Virginia Daily* and the *Winchester Star* in May 2011.

Meanwhile Elizabeth McClung and John Adamson suggested that the park use the overseer's cottage at Belle Grove as the new NPS VCS, and in addition requested NPS funding to rehab the structure. In July 2011 they proposed that NPS and other Key Partners consider relocating operations to the Belle Grove Barn – but again needed NPS funding to rehab the structure.

Opening a VCS sooner rather than later is a paramount concern of the NPS. Exhibits are in the works as well as an interactive map, and they will need a home. And all partners need to be part of a discussion if the NPS were to locate on one partner's facility.

In August 2, 2011 new guidelines were issued by the Department of Interior directing agencies to reduce the amount of federally leased space. (The guidelines are included in today's handouts.) The park is currently awaiting approval from the Washington office before signing a lease. Until we get that approval, we will not be able to sign a lease for a VCS.

John Adamson made a PowerPoint presentation on Belle Grove's proposed Welcome Center at their 1918 barn. He spoke about Belle Grove's conceptual planning for the barn; the planning team and focus group met in July 2011. The project initially grew out of the need for accessible and reliable bathrooms. While considering the barn as the location for such facilities, it was decided to take a look at the entire structure and other needs that Belle Grove might have that could be addressed if the barn were to be worked on. Belle Grove proposes to move the museum shop and visitor restrooms to the barn, and to use the barn as a welcome center. Using the barn as a welcome center with a sales facility and visitor restrooms would open up the house to a more complete interpretation,

particularly on the ground level. And saving the barn would be a significant contribution to the story of Frederick County, where such barns were once much more numerous than they are now. Though Belle Grove does not currently have a detailed estimate, the expectation is that they are looking at a \$1.5 million project. His PowerPoint included several conceptual drawings including floor plans, parking and site development. A refurbished, repurposed barn would aim to serve Belle Grove and all partners' needs.

Eric Campbell spoke briefly about different kinds of signs. He said that currently all key partner public facilities are adequately marked and signed and function effectively as way finding signs. Currently NPS does not believe that the existing signage needs to be replaced with NPS arrowhead signs. Park entrance signs suggest that most of the park is open for public visitation, but currently that is not the case. Some key partners have expressed concern about the impact of NPS signage on their fundraising and visitation. Some private landowners have expressed concern that visitors will intrude on their property without their permission. To address these issues, the park needs to do a comprehensive sign plan that addresses a number of issues including sign types, location, design, and safety and comprehensive sign plans are very expensive. Currently there are not adequate services and facilities open to the visiting public at the park to justify the development of a comprehensive signage plan at this time. The park currently intends to develop interim signage to provide way finding to the new VCS. In addition, the park intends to request funding for a comprehensive sign plan through our PMIS system. The comprehensive sign plan will be the key to solving both the issues of branding and the location of the individual signs. Accordingly a statement is being prepared to go into PMIS. At the earliest, funding would be available in fiscal year 2014.

Some commissioners expressed confusion about the various funding programs and the manner in getting money for park work, and knew that they would have questions once they absorbed all the information. Others felt that if we don't take advantage now of the sesquicentennial, that will be an opportunity lost. Several asked what they could do to advocate for signage now, to get the identity of the park before the public.

The consensus all around the table is that all these issues need to continue to be addressed by the FAC, not just at this meeting or the next, but continually. Everyone wants to see progress as quickly as possible, even if it means raising private dollars to help move projects along.

Mary Bowser suggested contacting as many private landowners as possible to see what ideas and concern they may have.

Elizabeth McClung also suggested that the key partners address these issues at their next meeting January 9, 2012.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Chair Patrick Farris adjourned the meeting at 11:40 a.m.

The next meeting will be March 15, 2012, in Strasburg, Virginia.

Handouts

Agenda

Meeting Schedule, 2011 through 2012

Meeting Notes March 17, 2011

Memorandum dated August 2, 2011, Facilities and Space Management