

Master Site Plan for Camp Bethel

Supplemental Information, November 9, 2007



This document attempts to summarize the key discussions from information presentations since District Conference Delegates received the Master Site Plan for Camp Bethel (MSP) as information at the 2006 Virlina District Conference. From June 22, 2006 through November 9, 2007, we have offered twenty MSP presentations covering all nine defined geographical representation areas of the Virlina District: Franklin County, Martinsville, North Carolina, Floyd County, Roanoke County, Roanoke City, New River Valley/West Virginia, Eastern Virginia, and Botetourt County.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change." - James 1:17

I. Key points of the plan presentation:

- The purpose of having a Master Site Plan for our District's camp is to enhance and expand our Christian Ministry.
- The MSP is built and based upon work of previous committees and incorporates current District Board work (Virlina Long-Range Financial Plan, Virlina Mission Interpretation Committee, OMC, etc.)
- The MSP is a 100-year plan: OMC and District Board will re-examine this plan every 3 years.
- The MSP is not tied to one ultimate capital campaign, but future Virlina District campaigns will include the camp's MSP.
- The MSP addresses **REAL and CURRENT** needed improvements at camp as well as future growth and expansion.
- Compared to other camps and conference centers, Camp Bethel is currently a medium-sized operation. Even once all recommended new facilities are in place, Camp Bethel will still be a medium-sized camp and conference center.
- Of all the ways Camp Bethel, this "good and perfect gift," has changed over the last 80 years, God who granted this gift to our District, who called leaders over the decades and who blessed our efforts and our time together, does not change.

II. Major directives followed during the planning process:

- Stay true to WHO we are (Church of the Brethren) and WHOSE we are...
- Green Planning... Not necessarily "the way it's always been done"
- Always consider the impact on current and future ministries: summer camp remains the camp's primary mission. Location of new development must not disturb our summer camp ministries
- Always consider how programming or development in each area affects every other area.

III. How the Master Planning Committee developed the MSP:

1. Used the 2000 Virlina District Conference adopted document "A Vision for Camp Bethel in the 21st Century" (developed by the 1995-1999 Visioning Committee for Camp Bethel) as the foundation of our planning.
2. Used topographical maps, boundary data and existing conditions maps for the camp's entire 470 acres as first consideration for location of plan elements, noting the camp's nine landform zones, each with its own distinct geological and historical properties.
3. We walked (and sometimes drove) the entire property, noting interesting sites and possibilities as we studied.
4. Our consultant digitized all our raw data into color maps, giving us the ability to make real-time changes via e-mail.
5. Through careful study, prayer and discernment, the Master Planning Committee revised and adapted the final site plan map to be inclusive of all recommended elements.
6. Together, Tom Nepl and the committee wrote and finalized the Master Site Plan document providing written descriptions of recommendations for long-range land use and development of the camp.
7. The Master Planning Committee developed a power-point presentation to provide visual references and additional descriptions to multiple items contained in the plan document.

IV. The MSP follows the Virlina District's constitutional chain of approval:

1. May, 2006: The Master Planning Committee, as called out by the Outdoor Ministries Committee of the Virlina District Board completed the Master Site Plan (document, site map and information presentation) and sent it to the OMC with recommendation for approval.
2. June 22, 2006: The OMC unanimously approved the recommendation of the Master Planning Committee and sent it to the Virlina District Board with recommendation for approval.
3. September 23, 2006: The Virlina District Board – Church of the Brethren, Inc. unanimously approved the recommendation of the OMC, also approving presentation to the 2006 Virlina District Conference as information followed by a year-long District-wide educational program tour.
4. September 15, 2007: The Virlina District Board – Church of the Brethren, Inc. unanimously approved a resolution for consideration by the 2007 Virlina District Conference for adoption of the Master Site Plan for Camp Bethel.

V. The MSP has garnered much attention and praise for our approach to Environmental Stewardship:

1. Barry LeNoir was invited to be the key note speaker at the 7th Annual Green Living and Energy Expo at the Roanoke Civic Center on December 1, 2006. Barry detailed the camp's approach to "Spiritual Ecology" as presented in our MSP.
2. Barry was invited to speak to 130 women at 2nd Presbyterian Church in Roanoke on March 13, 2007 to explain the camp's approach to "Spiritual Ecology" as presented in our MSP.
3. The Roanoke-based faith-and-environmentalism group, Impact-Amplify! Network, has lauded Camp Bethel and the Church of the Brethren for our efforts at Environmental Stewardship as presented in our MSP.
4. Other camps, agencies and organizations now frequently contact us at Camp Bethel asking for information on Environmental Stewardship based upon their hearing about our efforts as presented in our MSP.

VI. Questions about the Master Site Plan :

Many questions received in regards to the MSP are answered by saying, "We already have/do that at Camp Bethel" or "You'll find that addressed in the MSP on page ___." Examples include questions about the following: risk-management plan; water supply; septic; staff housing; year-round guest groups; adventure opportunities; county and state codes; and accreditation standards. The camp staff and the OMC work hard to educate all Virlina members about Camp Bethel's operation, and a major portion of the MSP power-point details camp's existing conditions and operation.

Q: Such big plans... Will the Church of the Brethren remain in control?

A: YES, Camp Bethel is [and always will be] owned and operated by the Virlina District Board - Church of the Brethren, Inc. The MSP does not call for any outside ownership, but encourages continued cooperation with community groups and organizations (American Camp Association, Virginia Council of Churches, USFS, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, area churches, schools, civic organizations and other Christian denominations).

Q: Why not more ambitious plans for Phase 1 (document page 25)? What's next for Phase 2?

A: The elements proposed for Phase 1 are logical first steps, even without a total Master Site Plan. Before we build anything new, first we take care of our existing facilities, providing needed repairs and renovations. New development proposed in Phase 1 will benefit the camp without the need for several more additional full-time staff. Phase 1 elements focus on revenue-generating enhancements, which will consequently enable future expansions that will require additional staff. More about Phase 1 is on document page 25. Phase 2 will emerge as the logical next steps as Phase 1 elements are created.

Q: Why isn't a second entrance proposed?

A: Except for adding another entrance in Zone 1 (see map on document page 2) a second entrance is either geographically impossible or land-access impossible (National Forest) except for an extreme emergency evacuation plan. A second entrance further up Bethel Road (near the 1842 Crowder/Graybill House) is deemed too close to the existing summer camp programming area and would essentially cut the current and future summer camp area in half. The committee decided to improve the current entrance road, keeping any traffic contained (2-way) where it already exists. See document page 29, Appendix D.

Q: What are the plans for water resources for both facility/personal use and also fire control/hydrants?

A: Water Storage is already being researched as part of management recommendations and requirements from the Virginia Department of Health. Water, septic and utility infrastructure management is part of all camp management. Fire protection (hydrants, sprinkler systems, etc.) would be included in bringing any new development up to building codes for Botetourt County and the Commonwealth of Virginia. We're working closely with Botetourt County Planners.

Q: What further thought has been given to an intentional Appalachian Trail relationship?

A: Camp Bethel has been a member of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy since 1989. We continue to support the ATC and advocate AT use with our campers and guest groups. Since we're so close (in backpacking miles) to Troutville and Daleville "zero days", mail drops and restocks, very few through hikers choose to Blue Blaze the extra 3 miles down to camp from Black Horse Gap. Wilson Creek Shelter is maintained by the Natural Bridge ATC.

Q: How do you plan to build cabins on a rock-outcropping (page 10 "Cliffside Cabins")? That's not possible!

A: The nature of this question shows why this MSP is a plan and not detailed architectural blueprints for every new facility. Every new "permanent" guest facility will require site surveys, architectural renderings and building permits. If an idea is proved to be unacceptable (legally, financially, environmentally), the plan for that specific idea will be adapted in order to fill the need left by any necessary changes. For example, the idea for the Cliffside Cabins is to supplement the RV Village with cabin options for RVers' family and friends who want to camp with them but do not own an RV, (this idea was gleaned from Camp Swatara in PA). The committee thought it would be unique to build these cabins on the rock outcroppings, but if that specific location proves impossible, the plan will change but the idea (and the need for support cabins) remains.

Q: Funding: What's the total price tag? How can a church camp afford this ambitious development? Why doesn't the camp develop an endowment?

A: The committee intentionally left out specific price estimates for plan elements, because in consideration of a 100-year plan, the pricing will change too dramatically. The purpose of this MSP is not to immediately enter a capital campaign to build elements as quickly as possible. The purpose of this MSP is to guide future decision making and to provide a plan for inclusion into future District campaigns, bequests and overall budgeting for Camp Bethel. The endowment question evokes lots of debate: Would an endowment hamper congregational giving? Shouldn't the camp's current year-round activities sustain the entire budget?

Q: When will implementation of the Master Site Plan begin?

A: It has already begun in small ways. The allocation of the recent Nolley bequest to the Virlina District was guided by the Virlina District Long Range Financial Plan which included language supporting elements of the camp's Master Site Plan. The OMC used the MSP to prioritize Phase 1 elements that could benefit from the camp's portion of the Nolley bequest. As for persons who hope for better adult-friendly lodging soon

Q: Why can't Camp Bethel go back to the way it used to be: simple, rustic and small?

A: To be sure, much of the camp will remain rustic and simple, keeping with a summer camping philosophy that models "Peacefully, Simply, Together." Otherwise, it should be District's goal to grow in ministry and to reach as many persons as possible. No church would choose to have fewer members. Growth is not guaranteed, but smart growth should be our goal. Camp won't change just for the sake of change; camp will grow and flourish to meet the changing ministry needs of the Virlina District, the Church of the Brethren, the broader church as the Body of Christ, the community and the world.