



HITTER'S ATTACHMENT # 7

"A Virtual Hitting"

January 28, 2003

Derick P. Berlage
Chairman
M-NCPPC
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Chairman Berlage,

We are writing in response to the proposed Indoor Baseball Training Facility for Cabin John Regional Park. My husband, Dustin, and I are strongly opposed to the county's involvement with the development of this facility from two different perspectives – first as a small business owner within Montgomery County and second as a private resident within the county.

We have spent the past year and a half privately developing and opening an indoor hitting/pitching facility in Rockville, Maryland. As private citizens with an idea, we took our time to study the market, develop a strong, detailed business plan, pursue a SBA loan, secure a location, and make our dream a reality. Montgomery County is an ideal place to run a business; however, there are a lot of challenges involved with being able to open the business. First and foremost is location. Real estate – to purchase or lease – is a prime challenge in this county for multiple reasons:

- High cost of property
- Tight zoning ordinances
- Landlord scrutiny and lease conditions

By enabling Montgomery Lane, LLC the opportunity to use Park land for this facility, the county is providing them with an unfair advantage over the rest of the small businesses in the county. Montgomery Lane, LLC is proposing the development of a for-profit, private business on public land. Their up-front cost of development is reduced significantly. If this were not the case, they would have already developed their facility on private land.

From a community-need stand-point, we believe that through public and private locations, the county already has several facilities that provide the services that will be offered in the new facility. There are 3 privately run Hitting Facilities in Montgomery County:

- Hitter's Park, Rockville, MD
- The Hitting Streak, Rockville, MD
- Derek Hacopian's Baseball Academy, Gaithersburg, MD

There is also 1 facility located right across the county line, in Howard County, Maryland:

- Rocky Gorge Batting Cages, Laurel, MD

All 4 facilities provide batting cages, instruction, and a pro shop. The 3 facilities in Montgomery County also provide practice pitching area(s).

By opening another facility, the county is at high risk of putting one or more of these facilities out of business. The only function that the current operations do not offer is an infield training area. However, that is compensated in other ways. In the spring, summer, and fall months baseball players have use of multiple outdoor baseball fields and open field locations. This includes the new outdoor facility in Olney, Maryland. During the 3 winter months, baseball players can use the Discovery Sportsplex located in Germantown, MD or the Rockville Sportsplex located in Rockville, MD.

In addition to putting the private Baseball facilities at risk, we believe the county will also put the Discovery Sportsplex at risk. Currently they receive revenue from the BCC baseball association for usage. If the Cabin John facility opens, the BCC business will no longer support the Discovery Sportsplex. Based on our survey of Hitter's Park clients, members of organizations such as BAA, MCBA, OBGC, Headfirst, Takoma Park, Silver Spring, and Wheaton, have all agreed that Germantown is not an option for their groups to hold practice due to travel distance. It is also questionable whether any other baseball club in the county has the funds to support the same amount of business as BCC does today for the Discovery Sportsplex. Based on current financial challenges disclosed by the Discovery Sportsplex, the loss of BCC business will negatively impact their revenue, putting that facility further at risk.

From a location standpoint, this facility is being built in an area that already has an abundance of indoor and outdoor baseball facilities within a 15-mile radius. It is being built to serve BCC's baseball community. If the county was looking to serve an area that had a need because of lack of resources, then the location ought to be in the Southeastern area of the county that serves the Takoma Park, Silver Spring, Burtonsville areas. However, these communities combined have less financial resources than the Bethesda/Chevy Chase/Potomac communities.

From a private resident standpoint, we feel that if the county wants to provide land usage to support county resident's baseball activities then there are more options that will satisfy a larger number of county residents. The need in the county for more outdoor baseball fields is higher than the need for this facility. Currently, private organizations such as MSBL/MABL, Ponce de Leon have a challenging time securing outdoor baseball fields in Montgomery County. If the county an not provide land to support the development of additional baseball fields, then what about improving existing baseball fields by adding lighting for night games and improving the upkeep of these fields.

One must also consider the fact that baseball is not like other sports than can be played indoors. With soccer and football an indoor facility can be built with smaller playing fields. With baseball, the infield has to be a standard size. Smaller infields will only provide an indoor field for youth under 12 years of age. The use of this new facility would strictly be for practice – not for games. If you look at the other indoor Sports Facilities, the bulk of their usage is by leagues for games. Based on our analysis of the market the profitability of using the amount of space required for baseball is limited. Our assessment shows that the bulk of the operating costs have to be driven during the 3 winter months to support the facilities annual operating costs. In addition, if the area has a mild winter like it did in the 2001 – 2002 winter months, teams are more likely to use the outdoors for practice. There is no comparison in the depth perception and calculation of catching a fly ball indoors versus outdoors.

We believe that if the county moves forward and enables Montgomery Lane, LLC to open this facility, that Hitter's Park will be at risk of closing and if we survive our growth plans will be highly at risk. In addition, this new facility will be built to serve the needs of BCC only, not of the county as a whole. BCC will be the prime user of the facility, guaranteeing income to Montgomery Lane, LLC, how does that provide an equitable amount of value to the entire tax paying community.

Sincerely,

Dusitn Pizza & Wendy Caputo-Pizza
Owners & County Residents