***Brickyard update***

**By Kristen Milton**

Although the county has announced its soccer partner in building new fields on an organic farm in Potomac, the site will not entirely lose its agricultural roots.

The sublease between the county and Montgomery Soccer, Inc. (MSI) dated April 16 and posted on the county website, specifies that approximately two acres of the twenty-acre Brickyard Road site now known as Nick’s Organic Farm will be an Organic Agricultural Education Center and Community Garden operated by a not-yet-identified nonprofit.

**“We volunteered to do that in our proposal; no one required it,” MSI executive director Doug Schuessler** said. “We would be very happy to have a partner who would work with us on this [educational farm].”

The primary lease for the Brickyard site, signed in April 2011, is between the county and the Board of Education since the land was originally slated to host a school although it has been leased by Nick Maravell since 1980.

Conservation activists and Maravell have opposed the conversion of the farm into soccer fields, citing procedural concerns, lack of public input into the Board of Education decision, and the potential educational and environmental value of the farm. Legal objections and allegations of Open Meetings Act violations have been filed by members of the Brickyard Coalition, which is made up of both civic groups and individuals opposed to the soccer project; however, supportive soccer enthusiasts have pointed to the need for fields identified in a 2005 land use study by Park and Planning. The report said eighty-eight additional county fields were needed for use by soccer, football, and lacrosse.

According to MSI’s approved proposal, phase one at the Brickyard Road site will include two full-sized and two smaller fields as well as a playground area, parking, and the agricultural center. The cost is estimated at $1.6 million. A tentative second phase would include either one more full-size or two half-size fields and required parking.

“We’re definitely excited to do something terrific for the community,” **Schuessler** said, “and by community, I mean both down-county residents and those near to the site.”

**Schuessler** said soccer players and their families currently cope with the field deficit by driving longer distances and “playing the daylights out of” existing fields, often leaving them in need of repair. Providing new fields will help address both issues, he said.

Nick’s Organic Farm has a license to continue working the land through August, and **Schuessler** said there was still much to be done to guide the proposal through required procedural hearings. Construction might begin at the Brickyard site in early spring 2013 if all went well, he said.

**Schuessler** said the process of selecting an agricultural partner has no timeline at present. “It was left a little undefined except that it would need the approval of both the county and MSI,” he said. “I would not think there would be any substantial delay for the educational farm.”

The county website says the approved proposal “reflect[s] the county executive’s commitment for dual use of the site” although Montgomery Countryside Alliance director Caroline Taylor, who started an online petition suggesting such a dual use, disagreed. “When you use the phrase ‘dual use,’ it connotes an equality of the uses,” Taylor said. “That is a primary use with lipstick on the pig.” Nonetheless, Taylor called the inclusion of the education center and gardens “a minor victory and an opportunity with a crack in the door.”

Sophia Maravell, who had proposed operating a program for county students called Brickyard Educational Farm on what has been her father’s farm, said she was not inclined to apply for the two acres offered in the sublease. One concern would be the impact of non-organic soccer field maintenance, she said in an email.

“Additionally, I would have to think if I would be able to ‘farm’ a small portion of land that I once knew so fondly,” Maravell wrote. “It would be incredibly difficult and painful for me to look at the soccer fields every day that are sitting on top of some of the best farmland in the county, just knowing its potential for growing food for local cafeterias, educating kids on where their food comes from, and saving rare varieties of corn and soybean seeds for future generations.”

**Schuessler** said it was possible to create a buffer to keep the educational center on the site’s western border organic and that he hoped opponents would eventually be happy with the results of the process.

“We’ll do what we have to do,” he said. “We know that we’re going to create something wonderful for the community.”

According to the sublease, there will be trailer-mounted bathrooms at the site, no lighting or public address system, and games will be limited to 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. although prep work such as hanging nets and warm-up is allowed outside that window.