

## Weverton Parking Lot Points

### The facts

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is documented to have started this project to showcase the Appalachian Trail (AT). They wanted a park-like parking area to take “dignitaries” from DC and around the world to Weverton Cliffs. The Maryland Department of National Resources (DNR) manages the area around the AT. The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) owns the land that the gravel parking lot. The AT goes through National Park Service land along the C&O Canal and through Harper’s Ferry, WV. They work closely together on matters of shared interest.

It appears that in order to expand the SHA lot, DNR granted permission for SHA to move the trail to make room.

While SHA did the perfunctory impact review, it is not clear that the answers to the responses are thorough.

At several meetings with local citizens, none of the parties mentioned this project to local residents. Neither the SHA nor ATC mentioned this good project.

While it seems that nothing illegal was done, it does raise the question of why the secrecy?

### Concerns

#### **Pleasant Valley is home to historic, scenic, and environmental treasures.**

Special Planning – County Comprehensive Plan - Attempt to change the very nature of the area that ATC and NPS say they want to protect. Citizens are concerned that with the addition of sodium lights. What will stop big-box stores, mega gas stations and fast-food chains from coming into the Valley. This has been identified by National Geographic as a beautiful national treasure. The County says they are interested in preserving the historical and environmental legacy of the area.

Donald W. Campbell, Park Superintendent at Harpers Ferry NHP wrote to Washington County’s Public Works director in 2008 responding to a communication tower that was being proposed: “The county designated Pleasant Valley as one of its few conservation zones in its original 1973 zoning. The county’s most recent Comprehensive Plan further strengthened the conservation rules for Pleasant Valley.” Is this only valid when it is convenient?

**Government Accountability** – was this a good use of resources? Project reported to have started out at \$187k and ballooned to almost ½ million dollars. Who knows what the final budgeted amount is, or how much it actually cost?

No needs assessment done. The Park and Ride need that doesn’t exist. Brunswick’s lot is usually only 1/3 full. Some people park along Rt 67 instead of Weverton Rd, but don’t. Why? Some folks parking along Rt

67 are just as likely to continue to park there for hunting and because there is enough traffic to keep an eye on their vehicle. Cops may ticket them.

Parking is a problem along the C&O, big-time. But at the peak of October color and with the parking lot closed for the expansion, there was plenty of parking along Weverton Rd. Furthermore, people trying to find parking at Keep Tryst and the Sandy Hook area were waiting for spaces. They could have parked at Weverton, but it simply isn't that convenient.

Wrong solution for the wrong problem.

No public input. Perhaps if residents were consulted, they would learn that ongoing concerns exist around public safety and crime in the area. Lights won't solve anything if criminals can hop on the highway and move quickly to other jurisdictions. Who thought a Park and Ride would be a good idea when other parking lots tucked in the woods are either shut down or have reduced use due to crime?

No informing the public until after the groundwork done. Local residents attended a regional transportation meeting where a question was raised about a SHA trailer in the neighborhood. The response was that this was a SHA/DNR project and no further information was provided. Within a few days, the earthmovers were in a trees removed. The State Secretary of Transportation was there, as was the head of the SHA. Did they know? Apparently, our legislators didn't know.

Why the secrecy? Because they can? But if this was such a good idea, why not tell our local and state elected officials?

It seems to be that if the funding for this was for Park and Ride, yet the intention is for an ATC lot, then the SHA lied. This has the feel of bait and switch, except it is the taxpayer holding the bag. Is this really the best use of our resources?

**ATC Accountability** – when calling the regional ATC office, this writer was referred to the SHA since this is their funding and project. After all, this is a Park and Ride. However, the ATC representative on the phone clearly was involved with this as the writer pointed out to the caller stating that his e-mails are part of the communications with the SHA and others. Then he attempted to refer this matter to the local ATC volunteer. How did a ½ million dollar parking lot with asphalt and sodium lights get built in this rural legacy area with their involvement?

Would their membership approve? They added 6 sodium lights to a sensitive region. The lights will be on after the visitors leave. Some research points to lights negatively affecting migratory birds. South Mountain is one of those migratory corridors. Nesting bald eagles live across the river and fly the thermals from Weverton Cliffs. Will they stay? Meanwhile, they are whipping up their membership to stop the powerline PATH from coming through their "view shed". How can they justify pushing back against power line needs when they are adding to it? Furthermore, they could have taken a stand with the State and become the voice of reason to minimize their impact or to use more environmentally progressive parking surfaces, etc. to "showcase" the ATC. Instead, e-mails tell the story that they were bowled over by the ability of SHA to get so much funding for their project.