

INSIDE BUSINESS

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Fort Monroe followers have say

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When Fort Monroe is handed over by the Army to public and private hands in 2011, history may tell of an ideological struggle between historic preservationists and the fort's planners.

From 2006 and into today, preservationists make it clear time and time again of the fort's ties to the Civil War, its role in ending slavery and Jamestown.

The planners are now the Fort Monroe Federal Area Development Authority and its array of consulting companies. They listen, go about their business and try to appease the ever-present preservation voices all at the same time.

And now, based on a FADA-sponsored public meeting held last week at the fort, the two sides seem to be at an uneasy peace. Several attendees were recognizable from prior fort meetings.

Fort Monroe's reuse plan has been updated, and is markedly different from the draft that sharply divided Hampton residents and fort followers two years ago. Several studies have also been done with early results recently released.

The FADA aims to approve the reuse plan, and a supporting federal Housing and Urban Development application for homeless service funding, at its next meeting June 30. The plan would then be sent to Gov. Timothy M. Kaine for review.

While not everyone is seeing what they're looking for, particularly longtime advocates of a Fort Monroe national park, both sides seem ready to move ahead.

"The material that became available is giant steps forward in the ability to understand the most significant facts," said Louis Guy, of the Norfolk Historical Society.

Bill Armbruster, executive director of the FADA, is a relative newcomer in the fort talks. He was named to the position in March.

Armbruster said there's considerable regional interest outside of recurring fort meeting attendees, whom he said are simply the most vocal.

"We just need to make sure we're going in the right direction, and I think we are," Armbruster said.

Some of the less vocal followers are content with the unfolding process. Billie Einselen, a Hampton resident and one-time fort resident, has spoken up in the past and has been interested since the initial reuse plan was released.

"I'm pleased to see the focus on historic preservation," Einselen said.

The reuse plan today divides development into zones. Mixed-use development is the main theme for the area surrounding the stone fort. Existing buildings inside the stone fort would be converted, but nothing new would be built there. A park area would be at the northernmost

end.

Victor Dover, head of Dover Kohl & Partners design firm, said that the new plan is based on the "lightest" density alluded to in the original draft. The 2006 version of the plan called for three levels of densities, which touched off the earlier public division. Dover Kohl, of Coral Gables, Fla., has overseen the reuse plan work over the last two years.

Bay Area Economics of Emeryville, Calif., has recently released an economic impact study of the fort. BAE, which is not affiliated with defense contractor BAE Systems, estimates operations and maintenance costs of the post-Army fort to be \$4 million to \$4.7 million a year.

The Army, however, estimates its active annual O&M costs to be \$15 million.

Anita Morrison, a BAE principal, said the Army includes capital costs and utility costs it pays for out-of-pocket, which would be shifted over to the landowners and building leaseholders after the Army leaves.

Morrison said this is an early estimate, since the FADA and the city of Hampton have not yet agreed on how they would split O&M costs.

On the tourism end, early findings of a study from Economics Research Associates of Los Angeles estimate that at least 225,000 visitors could come to Fort Monroe per year. The full study is expected to be released shortly.

"It means you need multiple things to draw people," said Tom Moriarity, a vice president of ERA. "We strongly encourage marketing with the Historic Triangle for a 'Historic Quadrangle.'"

Moriarity refers to Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown, actively marketed as the "Historic Triangle."

ERA recommends a nonprofit be established to handle donations and grants for historic preservation and tourism. It also recommends marketing the beach, marina and building a 120- to 150-room resort hotel.

In particular, Moriarity said a hotel could revive the resort culture promoted by the former Chamberlin Hotel and its predecessor, the Hygeia Hotel.

National park advocates await the release of a preliminary study by the National Park Service to determine if a second study is needed to evaluate the fort's candidacy for national park status. Fort Monroe was deemed a National Historic Landmark in 1960.

Henry Malone, president of Citizens for a Fort Monroe National Park, said at the meeting that the national park alternative is not mentioned in reuse plan materials.

Armbruster, FADA's executive director, replied, "We all know how important that is to a realistic reuse plan."

There's still time

The Fort Monroe Federal Area Development Authority will take comments for fort plans until June 11. For more information, visit www.fmfada.com.