



Star-Spangled attraction met with warmth

Federal trail, Md. byway mostly welcomed at hearing

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The National Park Service met with Southern Maryland residents in Benedict on Tuesday night to discuss the Star-Spangled Banner Trail and Maryland Star-Spangled Banner Scenic Byway.

Congress designated the national historic trail in May 2008 to commemorate the Chesapeake Campaign of the War of 1812, said Suzanne Copping, project manager for the trail with the NPS. The trail will span nearly 300 miles from Fort McHenry in Baltimore, through Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Prince George's County to Southern Maryland.

The designation, which can bring NPS funding, is permanent, she said, and will serve as a local amenity.

The trail will follow known historical routes and promote outdoor recreation and public access, Copping said, adding that today folks can travel some of the same routes as the British and see some of the same sites.

Port Tobacco resident Mary Pat Berry, president of the Ella Virginia Houck Holloway Chapter of the U.S. Daughters of 1812, said that "it has been a long time coming and it's going to hopefully be a great benefit to the public to increase their knowledge about 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and the sites associated with the War of 1812 in Southern Maryland. People have very little knowledge of the history that's right here under their own feet.

"People can ... look and be on the same waters as [Commodore] Joshua Barney's flotilla, be in Benedict where the first foreign invaders stood on American soil. All of these things are right here in our backyard."

Although "there's nothing right now on the ground, in 20 years, it's going to be something," Copping said, noting that the trail will attract a variety of different audiences such as kids, recreational users, educational groups and what she called "accidental tourists," or those who just happen to stumble upon the trail or landmark.

The trail will highlight multiple themes such as local culture, war stories, the Chesapeake region and American identity — the American flag and the national anthem. After all, it was during the War of 1812 when Francis Scott Key wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner" while witnessing the Americans defeat the British at Fort McHenry in Baltimore.

Three residents voiced concern over the possible influx of traffic, protection of private property owners and possibility for bus tours. About 30 people showed up for the hearing.

Calvert County tourism specialist Joyce Stinnett Baki said people on bus tours "want to go where everyone else is." She suggested they might stop at places such as Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum and Sotterley Plantation, among others, with a ride-along tour guide.

The National Park Service estimated maybe 30,000 visitors a year, which equates to about 500 people per week. For those who own property along the trail, Susan J. Wolfe, executive director of the St. Mary's County Historical Society, encouraged them to contact their local historical society, adding that sharing a property's history doesn't mean people have to visit it.

Roz Racanello, executive director with the Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium, said the scenic byways offer a pretty and charming drive, enabling folks to meander around. These people "want to stop at local eateries, farmers markets and poke around."

"Most who do heritage tourism are very cognizant that [landmarks] are very special," Baki added.

As Wayne Clark, director of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, said during the meeting, the national historic trail is an opportunity to put Southern Maryland back on the map and reclaim its lost history.

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