

Frequently Asked Questions about residential development in the Auburn Valley Master Plan area

DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation oversees the redevelopment of the area covered by the Auburn Valley Master Plan, including the state park and commercial and residential development. The vision and mechanism for the redevelopment of this area includes public-private partnerships in which developers bear the cost and risks of remediating contaminated sites and are allowed flexibility in developing the parcels. DNREC approves the plans for these parcels, rather than New Castle County.

DNREC should have done a better job communicating the specifics of the residential portions of the plan now coming online, including the critical role they play in the public-private partnership. DNREC had a responsibility to communicate directly with the public on the specifics of the residential portions of the redevelopment, and we should have done so.

Why does the Auburn Valley Master Plan area include private developers?

The goals of the Master Plan were to clean up the contaminated watershed, expand public recreation opportunities, and create a vibrant and thriving community with residential, commercial and recreational aspects. DNREC believes this area will be a model of how these uses come together to create a very livable community. The commercial and residential privately developed portions are a necessary mechanism for achieving all of the goals within this plan. Without the private developer involvement, the state would not have been able to transform the area with public funding alone following the 2009 bankruptcy of NVF. Since the beginning the project, DNREC and the partners have removed zinc chloride, sodium hydroxide, acid waste, mercury-containing waste, soda ash, and asbestos from the area's properties, as well as removing zinc via a groundwater treatment system and tons of zinc, lead and other substances through a wetland project.

Why is Quarry Walk included in the Auburn Valley Master Plan?

Like the core NVF properties, the Quarry Walk property is in the Master Plan because of the desire to have the long-standing contamination remediated and to have the parcel put into productive use fitting with the goals for the area. The plan for Quarry Walk includes a trail through the property that will connect downtown Hockessin to Auburn Valley and, ultimately, to Kennett Square. The quarry will become a public and accessible water body for fishing and other recreational uses. And, importantly, the site, which is a certified brownfield due to presence in the soil and groundwater of contaminants (including arsenic and thallium at levels that were found to hold unacceptable risks or recommended limitations for a residential adult, residential child, lifetime user, indoor commercial worker, recreational child or lifetime user), will be cleaned up and made usable. The remediation and trail are both being funded and constructed by the residential developer.

Why didn't Quarry Walk go through the New Castle County permitting process?

To ensure the goals surrounding the cleanup and alternative use could be achieved, all properties that are part of the Master Plan were exempted from certain county land use regulations by act of the General Assembly in 2010. Exemptions from development requirements have been used by the state to effectuate other transformative projects of this type, such as Fort Dupont in Delaware City and the Blue Ball Barn on Route 202. Thus Quarry Walk's plans did not undergo the New Castle County land use process.

Would this development project been approved without the need for any variance or waiver should it have gone through a traditional New Castle County review process?

In accordance with the intent of the state exemption from local land use, the property plans were given greater flexibility in terms of bulk standards, including density, than the county typically allows in order incentivize the private sector to clean up and remediate the property. This flexibility would have certainly required variances if the plan had been submitted to New Castle County for approval.

Is Quarry Walk zoned residential?

Yes, though it has an industrial history (as evidenced by the contamination on the site), the Quarry Walk property was rezoned to residential in 1998 prior to discussions of the Auburn Valley Master Plan.

Did the developer on this project undergo Preliminary Land Use Service (PLUS) review regarding state requirement for developments?

PLUS is a requirement of the local land use process to allow state agencies, including DNREC, to weigh in on the impact to state resources. The state in this case is acting as the planning and approving authority for the Auburn Valley plan elements, so PLUS was not formally required. State agencies that regulate matters impacted by the plan were consulted with and provided comments that were addressed by the developer before DNREC provided approval. Quarry Walk and other recreational, commercial and residential parts of the Master Plan must obtain DelDOT entrance permits, DNREC sediment and stormwater permits, county sewer approval, DNREC brownfield regulation approval, and State Fire Marshal approval. Each of those pieces have been addressed individually with those agencies.

Specifically with regards to traffic, a Traffic Impact Study is warranted for a subdivision only when a subdivision generates more than 500 vehicles per day or generates 50 vehicles per hour, a criteria not met for Quarry Walk. As stated, Quarry Walk met all requirements for and was issued an entrance permit by DelDOT.

Was the Auburn Valley Master Plan, specifically Quarry Walk discussed in any public meetings?

The specific plans for this parcel were not made available for viewing or comment before they were finalized. Legal notices were placed in the News Journal when the Master Plan and its attached plans, including the plan for Quarry Walk, were filed. Prior to that, the plans for the residential parcel were discussed informally with some officials or residents, and presented in the April 2016 Master Plan update session as a concept. The project was discussed with the Greater Hockessin Area Development Association annually from 2016 to 2019. The Auburn Valley project was also discussed through the years at numerous public Parks Advisory Council meetings. However, DNREC did not have a specific public meeting regarding the Quarry Walk property and other residential developments and should have been more transparent. Moving forward, a public review process and comment period will be added for future site development.

What other projects are pending within the Master Plan?

There are two other residential developments – the 27-home Mills Edge project and the 36-home Mill 6 project, that have also been approved by DNREC and will likely begin construction in 2022. These developments are close to the main Auburn Valley/NVF property along Yorklyn Road, near Gun Club Road. Plans for these developments will also be included in the Sept. 17th public session. Other upcoming work in the area includes:

- DNREC has begun work on a new sewage pump station in coordination with New Castle County that will include a new pump station for the gun club area and slip lining the existing sewer line that runs along Yorklyn Road. There may be minimal disturbance within the right-of-way, but Artesian Water has reached out to homeowners on Yorklyn Road.
- DNREC is in the planning phases of a trail running along Yorklyn Road that is part of the approved Master Plan, finishing the approaches to complete Farmlane Bridge, and awaiting installation of a bridge connecting the Gun Club Road area to Snuff Mill Road.
- Agreements are planned with the Hindu Temple and Stone Mill properties to continue the trail towards Hockessin and through Stone Mill for additional parking and trail connection.
- Agreements are planned with Auburn Valley LLC for the development of 200 Gun Club Road, 29 B, Mills One Complex, and Buildings 15-18. The plan identifies the buildings as residential, office, retail, and restaurant. The Division will ensure that each of these development opportunities will go through a public notice and comment process.

History of Auburn Valley Master Plan area:

The Auburn Valley has a rich history starting with grist and saw mills and converting to vulcanized fiber in the 1890's. In 1922, through a merge, the National Vulcanized Fiber Company, known as NVF was formed. The company operated into 2000's until the company was forced to liquidate and file bankruptcy due to shifting markets and major flood damage.

Between 2008 and 2009, DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation received a donation from the Marshall family that included the Auburn Heights Mansion and Museum. In addition, the

Division added 313 acres of management of conservation and cultural resources in the area including the property known as Oversee. During that same period, DNREC gathered a multi-Divisional workgroup that began to secure the former NVF site and gather information on environmental conditions. DNREC partnered with private developers to acquire the 119 acres of NVF Company land from the bankruptcy trustee. Several portions were set aside as conservation easements or were otherwise acquired by the State. Through this unique partnership, DNREC assumed responsibility for environmental cleanup, while the private partners took responsibility for asbestos abatement and demolition of unwanted structures.

In 2011, the Division held a public open house on the completed work on the Auburn Valley Master Plan that shared concepts for the redevelopment of the area. Later, in 2016, the Division continued to make improvements to the site with clean up and had an additional Master Plan update open house. Since the 2016 open house, work continued on the site with the moving of the Gun Club Road out of the flood plan, addition of parking, pavilion, trail development and construction and historic bridge placement. In 2018, Auburn Heights Preserve became Delaware's 17th state park, now called Auburn Valley State Park.