



*Anne Arundel County
Watermen's Association*

P.O. Box 574, Annapolis, MD 20733
www.aawatermen.org

July 17, 2025

County Executive Steuart Pittman
44 Calvert St.
Annapolis Maryland, 21401

Dear County Executive Pittman and County Council Chair Hummer,

I am writing as President of the Anne Arundel County Watermen's Association (AACWA) and from the perspective of a member of the Region 9 Small Area Planning Team. The AACWA is a non-profit organization, created for the purpose of representing independent commercial watermen. Public access to local waterways is essential to our organization's members, many of whom can no longer afford waterfront property in Anne Arundel County. The recently completed Region 9 Small Area Plan emphasizes the importance of water access to the economy of our Region. The sudden closure of the Discovery Village boat ramp in Shady Side over the July 4 holiday, with no prior notice to citizens, and no attempt to reach out to the owners to negotiate, demonstrates this administration's (and County Council's) blatant insincerity towards the whole Small Area Planning Process and a lack of true interest in implementing the strategies that we worked long and hard with the community to develop.

Public boat ramps are made available in all Maryland counties that are adjacent to the Bay. Anne Arundel County has only two, both in the northern part of the County. Private marinas do not provide the same level of safe, open, and free access to the community. In addition, many marinas no longer cater to watermen.

Water-based commercial and recreational activities are the basis of the Region 9 history, culture, and economy dating back to skipjacks, steamships and boarding houses and these are the things that continue to define our community. People come here to boat and fish. The County's Parks and Recreation leadership has demonstrated a profound lack of understanding as to what "recreation" means in our Region. People visit and move to our area to recreate on the water, not on ball fields. The \$150K/year spent on the ramp was likely beyond their grasp and so they worked to eliminate it.

This odd reversal of support for the boat ramp at Discovery Village by Mr. Pittman contradicts statements made by him in the recent past. From a tax-payer's standpoint it is irresponsible. Just over five years ago \$1.5 million was invested and now we are walking away from that investment??? In addition, nearly half a million of State tax dollars were expended via a Waterways Improvement Grant. Given this significant investment, the lease deal of \$150K annually for 7 acres of W1 zoned waterfront with office and lab space cannot be construed as a bad deal. The idea that lease details regarding repair work was a dealbreaker doesn't pass the "smell test." The owner was never even contacted to negotiate lease terms.

The lease aside, the property is now for sale and could be acquired for ~\$3 million, which sounds like a good deal (full ownership at a cost equivalent to 20 years at the former 30-year lease agreement rate). The purchase could open the potential for a future community center on the same site and address yet another strategy of the R9 Small Area Plan. Based on a thorough assessment of existing commercial waterfront during the Small Area Planning process, Discovery Village is uniquely suitable in terms of price, zoning, and location to address plan strategies. As a reminder, the following strategies of the R9 plan (stepped down from the 2040 Plan) include:

Boat Ramp:

- HC3 - Maintain and improve water access in R9 - (Healthy Communities #3)

Community Center:

- HC5 - Evaluate potential for community center (Healthy Communities #5)
- HE1 - Support for re-use of vacant buildings (Healthy Economy # 1)

In closing, we urge the County to honor the spirit and specific strategies of the R9 Small Area Plan by immediately reversing the ill-conceived and executed budget amendment and working with the owners of Discovery Village to restore the boat ramp, recover this significant investment of taxpayer dollars, and explore options to re-use the existing buildings for a South County community center.

Sincerely,



William J. Scerbo
President, Anne Arundel County Watermen's Association

CC: Anne Arundel County Council
Jessica Leys, Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks
Jennifer L. Jackson, Maryland State Department of Natural Resources