To: Baltimore Yearly Meeting Community

From: Brian Massey, Camping Program Manager; David Hunter, Camp Property Manager; BYM Camping Program Committee; BYM Camping Property Committee

Date: February 2023

Approvals

CPMC – February 6, 2023

CPC – February 25, 2023

**Re: Report to Interim Meeting Regarding Opequon Quaker Camp and Rolling Ridge Conservancy**

As many friends will remember, we have been looking for a new location for the program at Opequon for several years.  Our lease at Opequon is coming to an end and several problems with the site have surfaced over the years. The driveway is prone to flooding, the site is a little small, there is no longer an adequate place to swim and many of the improvements that we anticipate needing to make in the years to come will be expensive.  We suspect that friends will be hesitant to invest more heavily in a property which is not secure in the long term.

A joint ad hoc working group of the Camp Property Management Committee and the Camping Program Committee has looked at several properties over the last 4 or 5 years and found that purchasing a new property would cost in the neighborhood of one million dollars.

Fortunately another possibility has emerged! In the 1970s a family of Friends from Baltimore started a foundation near Harper's Ferry West Virginia which is now known as the Rolling Ridge Conservancy. Rolling Ridge is steward to over 1600 acres of land which sits between the Appalachian Trail and the Shenandoah River. At Rolling Ridge three organizations have partnered to fulfill the mission of the conservancy:

1. Friends Wilderness Center offers Quakers and others an opportunity to renew their Spirits and learn about the connections between the natural world and the life of the Spirit in a beautiful wilderness setting. They offer hospitality, workshops and experiences related to conservation and ecology and opportunities for spiritual enrichment.
2. Rolling Ridge Study Retreat offers individuals an opportunity to live in an intentional community, surrounded by nature and dedicated to exploring the connections between spirit, faith and the earth.
3. The Outdoor Environmental Center. Until 2019 For the Love of Children (FLOC), a support and enrichment organization for children in Washington DC, offered young people a chance to connect with nature through their summer camping program and environmental education center. Unfortunately, in 2019 FLOC found it necessary to refocus their attention on their DC operations and sever their connection to Rolling Ridge Conservancy, closing their summer camp and outdoor education center.  Since then Rolling Ridge has been seeking a new partner to fulfill that part of their mission.

With a charge from the Camping Program Committee (CPC) and Camp Property Management Committee (CPMC) to explore the possibility of a partnership, BYM staff members have been discussing this possibility with some of the board members at Rolling Ridge. We have also provided opportunities for members of the CPC, CPMC, and the BYM camping community at large to visit the site and consider the possibility of making it the new home of the program at Opequon Quaker Camp. Trips from Opequon have been visiting Friends Wilderness Center and Rolling Ridge for over a decade now and on several occasions this summer the entire camp began and finished their trips at Rolling Ridge. Nearly all of the feedback we have received has been positive. We have begun exploring the financial considerations and details of forming a partnership between Rolling Ridge and the Baltimore Yearly Meeting camping program.

The Outdoor Environmental Center at Rolling Ridge has:

* A commercial kitchen and dining hall that are usable year around. They are “move-in-ready” and include bathrooms, a healthcare area, and offices.
* A beautiful 4 season lodge (with 6 bedrooms, sleeping 18 people total) and activities areas that are all in good to excellent condition.
* 2 cabin areas with some usable cabins but we would need to provide some better sleeping facilities and toilets in the cabin areas in order to operate our camps there.
* Ponds and streams that are less than a mile from the camp facilities. Longer term, Rolling Ridge is willing to help create an area for swimming that is closer to the camp facility.

A BYM partnership with Rolling Ridge would involve both a lease agreement and an annual payment, similar to the arrangement at the current location. In addition, all Rolling Ridge partners commit to a mutual partnership in which partners are invested in the wellbeing of one another and of the conservancy as a whole. BYM would be asked to appoint 2 members to the Rolling Ridge board.

One of the challenges in managing our camp properties are the limited opportunities for use and revenue generation in the off-season. The Outdoor Environmental Center facilities at Rolling Ridge would offer us a unique opportunity in this area. Since the lodge is a four-season building and the commercial kitchen and dining hall can be used during all but the most extreme cold, there would be opportunities for use and revenue generation throughout the year. The facility could be rented to outside organizations or we could use the facility ourselves for programs such as the Spiritual Formation program, the Women’s Retreat, or workshops and retreats hosted by Local Meetings. The Rolling Ridge community is home to many individuals with skills and knowledge that would allow us to develop a host of outdoor and environmental education programs.

We are very excited about the possibilities at Rolling Ridge! The partnership would provide an excellent new home for the program at Opequon, and it would also offer us many opportunities to build upon our programs and ministries in a spectacular wilderness setting that would be accessible to a larger portion of our membership.

**Moving forward**

Members of CPC and CPMC have been discussing the possibilities at Rolling Ridge for over a year now, and we have begun consulting with various other BYM committees including initial conversations with the Development Committee, Trustees, and Stewardship and Finance.

To understand how to formally make the decision to relocate Opequon Quaker Camp and enter a partnership with Rolling Ridge, we have read the minutes for when Shiloh Quaker Camp was purchased and when the Quaker Arts Camp was moved to the site where Opequon Quaker Camp is currently located. In both circumstances, CPMC, in collaboration with CPC, was charged with exploring the possibilities and making a formal recommendation to the Yearly Meeting, which were then accepted.

At this time, we are making the following recommendations to Interim Meeting:

1. Stewardship & Finance Committee should complete or commission an analysis of the financial viability of a BYM partnership at Rolling Ridge.
2. Development Committee should minute the viability of a capital campaign to raise the necessary capital.
3. Pending affirmative recommendations from Stewardship & Finance and the Development Committee, BYM Trustees should work toward entering into a formal agreement (“a lease”) with the Rolling Ridge Conservancy beginning this spring for the use of the Outdoor Environmental Education facility at Rolling Ridge. Under this agreement, BYM would have use and control of the facilities throughout the year.

**With Gratitude**

We are extremely grateful to the Pidgeon family and their long history of helping to provide sites for our camping programs. It is hard to imagine our camping program being where it is without their ongoing support!

**Additional Resources for Review**

* Supportive comments from current Opequon Quaker Camp Director Jared Wood
* General Secretary’s Opequon @ Rolling Ridge Overview