YMCA EXPLORATORY COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

Respectfully Submitted by:

Bennett Wilson, Chair Michael Brown, Vice Chair Catherine Askey Captain John Brabazon Ashleigh Dufresne Jenna Guzman Tyrone Harris Beverly Johnston John Parlett, Jr. Dr. Monika Lee Omonigho Olumese Donovan Weekley

Introduction and Executive Summary:

After learning about the YMCA of the Chesapeake and introducing its Executive Director to the County, the Commissioners of St. Mary's County (CSMC) established a 13-person committee to further explore the possibility of a YMCA in St. Mary's County. The YMCA Exploratory Committee's (The Committee) role is to: a) investigate community needs; b) learn about YMCA programs and services; c) identify potential locations for a facility; d) discuss potential facility amenities; and e) gauge fundraising capacity. The Committee held public meetings six times over an eight month period.

Summary Findings and Recommendations to the CSMC:

- a) **<u>Finding #1:</u>** The YMCA's involvement in St. Mary's County would greatly enhance the welfare and quality of life for a diverse range of citizens in the County, further supporting stable families, well-rounded children and teenagers, connected and engaged young people, an active aging population, and local employers' ability to retain talent.
- b) <u>Finding #2:</u> The CIP funding currently allocated for a YMCA/community center will be sufficient to build a successful YMCA facility. In addition to the significant research already done through community partnerships, the extensive feasibility study process proposed by the YMCA of the Chesapeake and its research partner will further define the right mix of amenities for the first St. Mary's County location.
- c) <u>Finding #3:</u> With the CSMC providing a site and state-of-the-art building, through contributions by individuals and business, as well as proceeds from memberships, the YMCA will maintain a sustainable operating budget. Robbie Gill of the YMCA of the Chesapeake: "If the County dedicates money to build a Y, the Y will never need to ask the Commissioners for any more money".
- d) **<u>Recommendation #1:</u>** The CSMC should enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the YMCA of the Chesapeake to further specify the business model for our County's YMCA based on the needs and characteristics of the community.
- e) **<u>Recommendation #2</u>**: Based on the Triangle2 study's findings, St. Mary's County Government (SMCG) should move to break ground on the YMCA building in FY21 using its current committed amount of \$14.5 million.
- f) <u>Recommendation #3:</u> Lexington Park should be host to the first YMCA location in St. Mary's County. However, a YMCA would greatly improve the quality of life for young people and families in other parts of the county, specifically the northern areas of the County. The County should anticipate and support other YMCA locations in the future.
- g) **<u>Recommendation #4:</u>** The Committee recommends three County-owned sites as being appropriate for the YMCA location. In no particular order:
 - a. Shangri-La Drive (Tax ID Number: 1908139148)

- b. Nicolet Park (Tax ID Numbers: 1908069174, 1908122164)
- c. Great Mills Pool (Tax ID Number: 1908047847)
- h) **<u>Recommendation #5:</u>** SMCG and the YMCA should work together to ensure that all families feel comfortable inside the facility and its surrounding area. SMCG should explore methods beyond policing to increase public safety, such as well-lit, cleaner streets and sidewalks, "placemaking" strategies for Lexington Park, and property improvement and other business incentives. The YMCA will, in-turn, make the rest of the community feel safer.

Research and Analysis in Determining Key Findings and Recommendations:

The Committee conducted a thorough and critical analysis of the concept of a YMCA in St. Mary's County. This included receiving presentations from Mr. Robbie Gill, Executive Director of the YMCA of the Chesapeake, Mr. Arthur Shephard of the Department of Recreation and Parks, Ms. Amy Ford of the Lexington Park Library, Ms. Trisha Post of the Willows Recreation Center, the Youth Mappers, the College of Southern Maryland, and others.

Individual members of the Committee engaged in site visits and reported findings back to the full committee during public meetings. Site visits occurred to the Willows Recreation Center, the Great Mills Pool, the College of Southern Maryland Leonardtown Campus, the local Sheriff substation, the Gymnastics Center, and three YMCA facilities on the Eastern Shore.

The Committee also received community feedback at the end of each meeting as well as via email.

The Exploratory Committee, selected by the Commissioners of St. Mary's County from a pool of citizens who had applied, included broad expertise and representation. Committee members included health personnel, a financial expert, a real estate developer, and representatives of Naval Air Station Patuxent River, the Department of Aging and Human Services, the Department of Recreation and Parks, the County's Public Schools and the Youth Advisory Commission. It also represented the County geographically with representatives of north, central and southern St. Mary's County.

The findings, followed by the recommendations, are described below.

<u>Finding #1</u>: The YMCA's involvement in St. Mary's County would greatly enhance the welfare and quality of life for a diverse range of citizens in the County, further supporting stable families, well-rounded children and teenagers, connected and engaged young people, an active aging population, and local employers' ability to retain talent.

It is in the Committee's opinion that a YMCA would greatly enhance the welfare and quality of life for a diverse range of citizens. The reasons are as follows:

There are few to no spaces in St. Mary's County that can offer the ability to support the needs of populations that differ in age, race, ethnicity, income, and education. There are no organizations within the County that have the level of experience, the proper facilities, and the organizational flexibility to run a multi-generational, diverse hub of creative learning, athletics, and personal enrichment. The Committee met with the Recreation and Parks Department, the Willows Recreation Center, and the College of Southern Maryland – Leonardtown Campus. Those conversations help inform the statement above. The non-profit status of the YMCA allows it to raise its own funds and operate independently of government. YMCAs are multi-disciplinary, with health and wellness often the primary focus area. They also offer programming centered around mentoring, child development, the arts, aging adult activities, and STEM learning. Furthermore, the brand recognition of the YMCA is a comfort to many families that are not originally from the area.

Young people need a place in which to spend time with each other and adults; a place that is positive, nurturing, and safe. The Committee heard and read a lot of community feedback that stated that young people needed a safe place to be. Furthermore, many said and wrote that having a place for young people to spend time would enhance safety. Many different people stated they "grew up in a Y", and explained how it was an essential part of their family's weekend or after-school hours.

The YMCA turns no one away due to the inability to pay. The YMCA charges membership fees on a sliding scale that is based on household income. This enables people from different socioeconomic statuses to utilize the state-of-the-art facility, as well as interact, create bonds, and strengthen the community. The membership fees paid at market-rate prices are comparable to private health and wellness membership costs.

Finally, it is expected that the YMCA will hire 6-7 full time staff, plus 150-200 part-time staff. 90% of the people hired will be St. Mary's County residents. This estimate is based on the workforces of the YMCAs in Wicomico and Cecil Counties, which are most similar to St. Mary's County.

The YMCA is also a large hirer of first-time employees, providing young people with a strong basis for future success and responsibility as the YMCA is built around positive values and service.

<u>Finding #2:</u> The CIP funding currently allocated for a YMCA/community center will likely be sufficient to build a successful YMCA facility. In addition to the significant research already done through community partnerships, the extensive feasibility study process proposed by the YMCA of the Chesapeake and its research partner will further define the right mix of amenities for the first St. Mary's County location.

Square Feet	Cost	Opening Date	Location	
24,000	\$8.1 m	June '19	St. Michael's, MD	
40,000	\$14 m	2021	Kent County, MD	
41,000	\$14 m	2021	Queen Anne's County, MD	

Here are the construction costs for YMCAs recently or currently being constructed:

*All facilities have indoor pools

Via numerous community presentations, question/answer sessions, letters, and in-person community feedback, the Committee determined there are insufficient offerings for the following amenities and programs in the county:

- Art rooms and art programming
- Music rooms and music programming
- Childwatch, or daycare
- Open common areas where people can gather: reception area as well as indoor meeting/common spaces

- Rock-climbing wall
- Computer area
- Indoor play area for children
- Tutoring and mentoring programs for pre-teens and teenagers

The Committee determined that there are amenities and programs that are often inside of YMCAs that help anchor its core services. In St. Mary's County, the ones that are not offered to a sufficient extent are:

- Fitness center with cardio/weight machines
- Aerobic room(s) for children and adult exercise classes
- Raquetball/squash courts
- Tennis courts

All of the amenities and programs above are found in YMCAs across the country.

A wide array of STEM programming exists in our County, but learning around the arts is insufficient for a community that has a world-class research facility and a growing higher education presence. The St. Mary's County Arts Council says it well in a letter to our Committee: "Through the arts, participants experience activities that foster self-expression, build self-esteem, develop imagination, critical thinking, and valuable social skills. Additionally, exposure to the arts develop diverse skillsets that help youth connect and understand other people and to solve problems communally and non-violently."

The YMCA of the Chesapeake has a process for determining the needs of a community, as well as its ability to support programming and facility costs. Triangle2 will provide data that shows the relative interest in major facility features and programs. This will be important, because the Committee found that many YMCAs offer indoor/outdoor aquatics centers as well as multi-use gym space. The County is already home to swimming pools and gymnasiums, and they are likely not being used to their full capacity. Triangle2, through its extensive surveying, can help determine which facilities will really drive market demand.

<u>Finding #3</u>: With the CSMC providing a site and state-of-the-art building, through contributions by individuals and business, as well as proceeds from memberships, the YMCA will very likely be self sufficient, using revenue, donations, and the support of the YMCA of the Chesapeake. Robbie Gill of the YMCA of the Chesapeake: "If the County dedicates money to build a Y, the Y will never need to ask the Commissioners for any more money".

The YMCA in St. Mary's County would be a part of the YMCA of the Chesapeake. The YMCA of the Chesapeake has the fiduciary responsibility for the financial health of all the YMCAs within it. The YMCA of the Chesapeake will be responsible for the operating funds of the facility, not the County. The financial health of the YMCA is more about the collective financial balance of all the YMCAs with the YMCA of the Chesapeake's purview. Some YMCAs actually lose money for the non-profit, but others are very successful financially. This

allows the YMCA of the Chesapeake to balance its checkbook, if you will, every year. The Cecil County YMCA elected to join the YMCA of the Chesapeake in order to leverage the umbrella organization's resources.

The Committee, based on the numerous letters of support from local businesses, and the support shown by industry organizations like the Southern Maryland Navy Alliance, the Patuxent Partnership, and the St. Mary's County Chamber of Commerce, anticipates that there will be additional significant business interest. Furthermore, demographic data and informal conversations support there are many potential philanthropic donors in St. Mary's County who will support a YMCA.

The YMCA charges membership fees on a sliding scale based on household income. As stated before, the YMCA turns no one away due to the inability to pay. The idea is that everyone should be able to be a member of the YMCA. Households that can pay market rate will do so, while households that earn less per year will pay a lower amount. A key aspect of the feasibility study will be to determine if the County has the interest and capability to support a YMCA.

<u>Recommendation #1</u>: The Commissioners of St. Mary's County should enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the YMCA of the Chesapeake to further understand the possible business model for the YMCA based on the needs and characteristics of the community.

It is the Committee's opinion that a MOA with the YMCA of the Chesapeake will enable the YMCA to begin its process of determining whether or not it would be able to thrive in a community.

This process includes a feasibility study. The YMCA of the Chesapeake works with an organization called Triangle2. Triangle2 has conducted over 200 market feasibility studies since 2000, combining business and YMCA expertise to help YMCAs make good business decisions. The market feasibility study will:

- Project the number of membership units the YMCA can expect
- Test potential site to determine which is the most acceptable to the market
- Determine the range of membership fees residents are willing to pay
- Provide relative interest in major facility features and programs (what will drive demand)
- Identify potential partnership opportunities
- Assess the image of the YMCA in the community

Triangle2 will conduct an extensive analysis that includes phone, in-person, and group interviews with the public to understand the potential users of the YMCA and the desirable amenities. See the attached proposal from Triangle2 to Mr. Gill for information about the depth and breadth of the research and analysis.

The CSMC allocated \$75,000 towards a feasibility study. The Triangle2 proposal to Mr. Gill was significantly lower than what the Commissioners had allocated.

The Committee created a subcommittee to draft the scope of work it would recommend to the CSMC and to Mr. Gill. During that process, the subcommittee also conferred with County staff on the best way to partner with the YMCA. The subcommittee eventually presented to the larger committee on its findings. The MOA route was selected because it is a proven method of the County for doing business with non-profit partners. In this case, it allows the YMCA to have autonomy over its process for the market evaluation and business assessment, but shows the St. Mary's County Government's commitment to the potential of a Y in the community.

Beyond simply being an important step in the process, a MOA also acts as a key signal to the YMCA of the Chesapeake that the County is interested, based on community feedback, and ready to explore further.

<u>Recommendation #2</u>: The County should move to break ground on the YMCA building in FY21 using its current committed amount of \$14.5 million, pending guidance from the feasibility study.

The committee's investigation, as well as numerous letters and in-person statements, demonstrates that the need for community space for teenagers, young professionals and young families is immediate. Companies who are hiring *now* need a state-of-the-art facility to help recruit future employees. Children who are developing *now* need a place learn. Elderly people who are able-bodied and active now need a place to stay fit and socialize. Pre-teens who are coming of age *now* need a vibrant, safe, and enriching facility to help prepare them for adulthood.

The cost to build will be determined by the amenities; some, like pools, are more expensive than others. The feasibility study will determine what amenities will be desirable to the most amount of people.

Square Feet	Cost	Opening Date Location	
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41,000	\$14 m	2021	Queen Anne's County, MD

For convenient, the building cost chart that was also on page 3:

St. Mary's County Government's commitment of \$14.5 million is a long-term investment in the County. Not only will a YMCA be a positive presence for residence, the economy will benefit as well.

Renderings of the Kent County YMCA:







<u>Recommendation #3</u>: Lexington Park should be host to the first YMCA location in St. Mary's County. However, a YMCA would greatly improve the quality of life for young people and families in other parts of the county, specifically the northern areas of the County. The County should anticipate and support other future YMCA initiatives.

The Committee was careful in its thought processes around location. Multiple committee members did bring up the fact that there is a need in the northern end of the county. A space for teens and families is the mostly frequently referenced. Looking at the population data and receiving input from Committee member experienced in real estate development, the Committee selected Lexington Park as the area with the highest need, the ability to serve the most people, and the most probability of success.

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ELECTION DISTRICTS (ED)	Total Population* all ages	Under 18 Population* by ED and SA	Under 18 Population for EDs and SAs by Gender	
SubAreas (SA) in RED			MALE	FEMALE
Entire District 1 (Ridge area)	6,689	1,048	574	474
Piney Point CDP	838	123	76	47
Tall Timbers CDP	390	43	15	28
Remainder of District 2	5,221	935	451	484
Entire District 2 (Piney Point, Valley Lee area)	6,449	1,101	542	559
Town of Leonardtown	3,678	1,122	662	460
Remainder of District 3	14,269	4,106	2,211	1,895
Entire District 3 (Leonardtown, California area)	17,947	5,228	2,873	2,355
Entire District 4 (Budd's Creek, Helen area)	10,156	2,562	1,364	1,198
Charlotte Hall CDP	2,026	670	310	360
Golden Beach CDP	2,875	492	202	290
Mechanicsville CDP	1,765	531	233	298
Remainder of District 5	6,490	1,682	895	787
Entire District 5 (Charlotte Hall, New Market area)	13,156	3,375	1,640	1,735
Entire District 6 (Oakville, Hollywood)	12,096	2,508	1,235	1,273
Entire District 7 (Avenue)	2,992	602	329	273
California CDP	14,298	3,817	2,005	1,812
Lexington Park CDP	11,848	2,947	1,045	1,902
Remainder of District 8	15,316	4,041	2,047	1,994
Entire District 8 (California, Lexington Park, Great Mills, Park Hall area)	41,462	10,805	5,097	5,708
Entire District 9 (St. George Island)	584	222	90	132
TOTAL in County	111,531	27,451	13,744	13,707

The committee first looked at the County as a whole:

Source: 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates (ignores Margin of Error for estimate) provided by SMCG staff

The most populated areas and the areas with the highest population overall and the most children and teens are California, Lexington Park and the remainder of District 8. Almost 40% of the the County's total population and the under 18 population live in the California, Lexington Park, Great Mills, and Park Hall area (District 8). Just like any business or service, proximity to your customers is important, especially if this is the first location. The Committee narrowed the locations to California and Lexington Park.

After careful discussion, the Committee then selected Lexington Park over California for a variety of reasons. These reasons include proximity to a wide array of people, transportation access including walkability, and need. Lexington Park is the business center of the county. It is closest to the County's largest employer, as well as many private companies. These companies as well as the Navy have a vested interest in an accessible YMCA for to their employees. Lexington Park is home to a broad array of incomes. Within one mile of the selected locations, almost 25% of households earn less than \$25,000 per year. Within that same radius, almost 25% of households earn between \$100,000-199,000. It's a diverse population with a common need for more community amenities. Finally, walkability. From a real estate development standpoint, Lexington Park offers the greatest chance of development success for a walkable area. Its dense residential and business population and mix of building/facility uses and connected streets offer locations where many people can walk or bike, easily drive from their workplace and homes, or take public transportation.

Some businesses formerly on Great Mills Road have repositioned themselves on Three Notch Road. However, others have done the opposite. Two established defense technology firms are moving to Lexington Park, within a half-mile of two of the sites recommended below. Our committee believes that if the YMCA facility is well-designed inside and out, and managed successfully, it could support the renewed growth and revitalization for the area. The County should play a leadership role in the growth of its economic and population center (see final recommendation for more information.

The Committee received notable public comments from youth in the northern end of the County that they too would like a safe, vibrant place to spend time and grow. The YMCA of the Chesapeake demonstrated that YMCAs of a comparable size and with relevant amenities can thrive in both rural and densely populated communities. South County residents could very well utilize a Lexington Park location. However, it seems unlikely that North County residents would do the same, because they have other centers of commerce available to them. That is why the Committee recommends to the CSMC that after the completion of the first YMCA initial planning should begin for a second location in the northern end of the County.

<u>Recommendation #4</u>: The Committee recommends three sites as being appropriate for the YMCA location. In no particular order:

- d. Shangri-La Drive (Tax ID Number: 1908139148)
- e. Nicolet Park (Tax ID Numbers: 1908069174, 1908122164)
- f. Great Mills Pool (Tax ID Number: 1908047847)

The sites adjacent to Nicolet Park and the Great Mills Pool are both county-owned. The site on Shangri-La Drive is owned by the St. Mary's County Housing Authority, a partner organization of St. Mary's County Government.

It should be noted that all three sites are adjacent or very close to other facilities currently frequented by the public: for Shangri-La Drive, the Lexington Park Library; for Nicolet Park, the Gymnastics Center; and for the Great Mills Road site, the Great Mills Pool.

The following is an overview of strengths and the drawbacks of each site.

Shangri-La Drive

Tax ID Number: 1908139148

Parcel Size: 3.14 acres

- Benefits
 - Cohesion with the success of, and the potential for partnership with, the Lexington Park Library as a popular community destination for a wide array of people and families.
 - Synergies with Lexington Park Elementary School (Eastern Shore YMCAs do well when they are adjacent to a school)
 - Possible partnerships geared around public service and volunteerism with nearby Lexington Park Rescue Squad and Lexington Park Volunteer Fire Department
 - Proximity to Lancaster Park and Jarboe Park allows for use of nearby amenities
 - Close to numerous well-established churches with partner closely with YMCA for family and child-oriented programming
 - Short walk to/from residential neighborhoods; short drive from residential neighborhoods on Willows, Hermanville, and Forest Run roads.
 - The County's Lexington Park Development District designates that area for main street development, part of an effort to create a town-center like feel in Lexington Park.
 - No large road/infrastructure improvements necessary; site is developable
 - Visible from major streets and public facilities
- Negatives
 - Smaller site offers less room for expansion; consideration for expansion was a recommendation from the YMCA of the Chesapeake
 - Less space for YMCA parking; would probably require trying to partner with school, fire department, and library
 - Housing Authority of St. Mary's County owns the site, so SMCG would need to confer with them on usage
 - Close to, but not within, the Naval Air Station's Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ) which could hinder future development

Great Mills Road;

Tax ID Number: 1908047847

Parcel Size: 16.25 acres

• Benefits:

• Adequate room for expansion; could build an 80-90K sq. ft. building and have space for future expansion

- Synergies with Great Mills High School (Eastern Shore YMCAs do well when they are adjacent to a school) and the Great Mills Pool
- No large road improvements necessary; site is developable
- Just off a major street, so visible to public while in transit
- Further away from the Naval Air Station's AICUZ
- o Negatives
 - Fewer residential neighborhoods and businesses/employers in close proximity in comparison to the other sites; less people, employees and residents, are close to this site
 - This site is less ideal from a mixed-use community development standpoint

Adjacent to Nicolet Park;

Tax ID Numbers 1908069174 and 1908122164

Parcel Size: 11.65 acres and 5.5 acres

- o Benefits:
 - Could utilize the park facility in its programming
 - In close proximity to residential neighborhoods and businesses
 - Ample parking would be available
 - Close to neighborhood churches in Patuxent Park neighborhood; churches have been known to partner with YMCA for family and child-oriented programming
- Negatives
 - Building space is restricted by the topography of the site
 - Though this site is near neighborhoods, it would require road/infrastructure improvements to allow full connectivity/walkability. This need could make the site more expensive
 - Close to, but not within, the Naval Air Station's AICUZ, which could hinder future development
 - Building would not be directly visible from a major street; people would have to go searching for it
 - The streets might be too narrow for cars to comfortability travel

<u>Recommendation #5</u>: SMCG and the YMCA should work together to ensure that all families feel comfortable inside the facility and its surrounding area. SMCG should explore methods beyond policing to increase public safety, such as well-lit, cleaner streets and sidewalks, "placemaking" strategies for Lexington Park, and property improvement and other business incentives. The YMCA will, in-turn, make the rest of the community feel safer.

St. Mary's County Government must play a role in ensuring that everyone feels safe at a YMCA.

Lexington Park was chosen because it is within a population center, is in the largest employment center of the County, is the area of the greatest need in the County, and is one of only two walkable areas of the County, which would allow children and teenagers to walk, bike, or scooter to the YMCA. Despite these benefits, Lexington Park is perceived as a high crime area.

Families will want to feel safe visiting the YMCA. The Lexington Park Library is an example of a facility that is used by a diverse population in terms of race, age, wealth, and educational level that thrives despite the negative perception of safety in Lexington Park. Much of the success is due to the library's enriching programming, well-maintained facility, and attentive and professional staff. The YMCA, therefore, will bear much of the responsibility for creating an atmosphere of safety within the facility. Site visits show that YMCAs are bright and promote a feeling of comfort and safety.

Conversations with local law enforcement by Committee members yielded the assessment that other areas of the County and Southern Maryland are home to pockets of crime, just as much as Lexington Park, but those areas don't have a reputation as a high-crime area.

St. Mary's County Government can help ensure the success of a YMCA in Lexington Park by keeping sidewalks and streets in the area clean and well-lit and working to facilitate reinvestment in the area. The County should also work to identify incentives that encourage business activity in the vicinity of the future YMCA location, allowing for a more vibrant street-life, as more street activity is a recognized method to reduce street crime. The St. Mary's County Sheriff's presence on Great Mills Road in the new substation is a step, but only part of the solution. More public safety paired with cleaner, well-lit streets, more business activity, and family friendly amenities will ensure that Lexington Park both *feels* and *is* a safer, and an enriching place to live, work, and play.

In turn, the YMCA will play it's part in making an area feel safe, further encouraging reinvestment in property and investment in the people of St. Mary's County.

APPENDICES

- MOA draft
- Triangle2 Feasibility Study Proposal submitted by Triangle2 and Mr. Robbie Gill
- Letters of interest (letters and a list of organizations/companies)
- Site analyses provided by Mr. Partlett, Committee Member
- Kent County building information provided by Mr. Gill
- Meeting topics/agendas in chronological order
- Public Comment letters and emails

Public Comment letters and emails arrived from:

- AMEWAS
- AVIAN, Inc.
- C&M Solutions, LLC
- Creative Beginnings
- Historic Sotterley
- KBR Engineering Business Unit
- MedStar St. Mary's Hospital
- MIL Corporation
- PerryGo Consulting Group, LLC
- Primary Residential Mortgage, Inc.
- RightDirection Technology Solutions, LLC
- St. Mary's County Arts Council
- St. Mary's County Chamber of Commerce
- St. Mary's County Community Development Corporation
- St. Mary's County Library
- Sabre Systems
- Senator Jack Bailey
- Summerseat Farm Inc.
- University of Maryland College Park, TechPort
- WMS, LLC
- -
- 8 individuals

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