

## Historic Fort Dupont Complex Redevelopment - Background

The State of Delaware, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, is requesting proposals to address the redevelopment of the Historic Fort DuPont Complex. To view the formal Request for Proposal (NAT 12100-FDUP), please visit:

<http://www.bids.de.gov> and <http://MyMarketPlace.Delaware.gov>

The 443-acre complex is designated as a National Historic District and is located along the Delaware River adjacent to Delaware City. It is bounded by the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal on the south and a branch canal, currently separating it from Delaware City, on the north. It includes Fort DuPont State Park, Governor Bacon Health Center, and a complex of state-owned buildings and residences – many of which are vacant. Fort Delaware State Park sits across from the property, on Pea Patch Island in the Delaware Bay.

Delaware's Governor believes this property has enormous potential to come alive again as a sustainable, mixed-use community. It is underutilized and could be producing revenue, jobs, housing choices, recreational and other amenities while preserving its historic character. Some of the institutional space could be repurposed for educational and community health care needs. In short, the possibilities are wide open as we consider redevelopment concepts that are visionary but also practical in terms of financing and implementation.



The concept(s) must integrate with the plans of Delaware City, a partner in this endeavor, and with state and federal investments to develop a trail system along the C&D Canal. It should also recognize the significant potential for ecotourism and historic tourism – and even paranormal tourism – in the area.

However, the state also recognizes there will be challenges related to the condition of buildings on the property, flooding and sea level rise, the proximity to an industrial complex, an abandoned landfill, and the necessity of relocating certain state services now provided at the site.

## **I. Background and history of the site**

Fort DuPont is situated on the western bank of the Delaware River just south of Delaware City. It was first established as part of the Coastal Defense system to provide protection for the cities and ship building sites of Wilmington, Chester and Philadelphia from enemy ships sailing up the river. Initially called Battery Point and often referred to as "the Fort opposite Fort Delaware" (on Pea Patch Island in the middle of the river), it was renamed Camp Reynolds in 1863 for General John Fulton Reynolds, a Union officer from Pennsylvania who was killed at Gettysburg. Before the bulk of modern fort construction started in 1898, the name was changed again, this time to Fort DuPont, honoring Delaware naval hero Admiral Samuel Francis DuPont, an 1841 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy. He had commanded the naval forces that gained possession of Port Royal Harbor in 1861 as well as the fleet of ironclads that attacked Fort Sumter in 1863. Fort DuPont is one of the few Army installations named for a Navy Officer.

During the Civil War, its ten-gun battery served as an auxiliary coastal defense battery to Fort Delaware, and along with the battery at Finns Point, (later named Fort Mott) in New Jersey, it was part of the "Three Forts" concept, which effectively defended this strategic point in the Delaware River from 1864 to 1921. In 1897, at the onset of the Spanish-American War, work began on three batteries of 3-inch guns. Fort Mott on the New Jersey shore across the river was built at this same time. Two years later, modern masonry fortifications of mortar and rifle batteries and new buildings were constructed at Fort DuPont, including a 12-bed hospital, post exchange, ordnance and quartermaster storehouses, stables, bake house and ten wood frame buildings for officers' quarters.

Another intense period of building activity took place from 1906 to 1915, creating the landscape and defining the area as it appears today. It then became the headquarters and station of the Middle Atlantic Coast Artillery District, joining Fort Delaware, Fort Mott (NJ) and Fort Saulsbury in southern Delaware.

The guns were removed in 1921, as the function of the Fort changed from coastal defense to its new role as the headquarters for the First Engineering Battalion, which it continued up to the beginning of World War II. Permanent brick buildings were constructed in the 1930s, and then in 1939 the First Engineers moved to another location.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s a great number of temporary structures were built to house troops in preparation for World War II. Fort DuPont's major new role was that of a large military training facility for U.S. Army Reserve units.

After Rommel's Afrika Corps was defeated in 1943, German and Italian POWs were sent to the United States, and temporary wooden barracks were built to house those assigned to Fort DuPont.

The Fort was decommissioned on December 31, 1945, and the following year, the military reservation and its 65 buildings were turned over to the State of Delaware. Two years later, the Division of Health

and Social Services opened the Governor Bacon Health Center, utilizing the three-story brick barracks as the main hospital, while its medical staff occupied buildings formerly used for officers' quarters.

Today, these buildings are no longer occupied as residences, and the number of residents in the hospital has diminished to about 85. In 1992, a large portion of the property adjoining the Delaware River was turned over to the Division of Parks and Recreation to be developed as Fort DuPont State Park. Two years later, an adjoining property also was acquired and became part of the State Park. The surrounding marshland is considered a paradise for birdwatchers.

*Compiled by William G. Robelen, IV, President, Fort Delaware Society*

## II. **Property features and surroundings**

- A. Fort DuPont State Park.** The state park itself includes 337 acres and 21 buildings from the old military installation. Fort DuPont is located just south of Delaware City off Route 9 along the scenic Delaware River and the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. It includes a 1.1-mile River Trail and a boat launch into the Branch Canal. The park also provides tennis and basketball courts.

In 1996, the Grass Dale Center was dedicated. This facility serves as the park headquarters and houses a conference center and a storage facility for archaeological, architectural, historical and folk life collections.

Fort DuPont is Delaware's least-visited state park, and the state lacks adequate resources to maintain or enhance the property and complex of buildings.

- B. The Battery.** The main concrete battery, redoubt or "bunker" at Fort DuPont was renovated and used for civil defense beginning in 1951. It later became the Delaware Emergency Operations Center, but the bunker often flooded and those operations moved to a new facility near Smyrna in the 1990s. Smaller batteries and gun emplacements are located throughout the property.
- C. Governor Bacon Health Center.** Governor Bacon is a residential long-term care facility established in 1948 after surplus military property was turned over to the state. The hospital serves 85 residents today, down from a high of 122.

For a map and complete listing of buildings on the property, go to <http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/main/maps/bacon/govbacon.htm> Not all the buildings remain in use. There is also a privately contracted rehabilitation center currently operating on the campus, in buildings along the Branch Canal. The state recognizes that the future of the treatment programs and buildings will affect the viability of any

redevelopment effort and is assessing alternatives.

- D. Theater.** The War Department Theatre is a 398-seat theater that opened in 1933 to serve Army personnel. Its architecture and layout are replicated at similar military posts throughout the country. The theater still has its seats and projectors. A new roof was installed and the marquee was restored in 2007, but the theater remains vacant.
- E. Historic status and resident curatorships.** The entire complex was designated a National Historic District by the National Park Service in 1999. The state Division of Parks and Recreation maintains resident curatorships with individuals and organizations on the property. The Fort Delaware Society restored the former quartermaster's office and uses the building as its headquarters. Burton Hall, formerly a gymnasium, is slated to become the Delaware Military History Museum and is being restored. The Guard also is proposing to renovate one of the former brick duplexes to serve as offices for the Delaware Military Heritage and Education Foundation, the nonprofit organization planning the restoration. Two private residential curatorship agreements are pending.
- F. Fort Delaware and DRBA Three-Forts Ferry.** Fort Delaware, the Union fortress dating back to 1859, once housed Confederate prisoners of war. It is located across from Fort DuPont on Pea Patch Island and is accessible by ferry from Delaware City. Pea Patch Island is a summer home to nine different species of herons, egrets, and ibis. The remote marshes provide an outstanding habitat for one of the largest wading bird nesting areas on the East Coast. The Fort conducts ghost tours by lantern and is associated with paranormal activity, even inspiring an episode of "Ghost Hunters." During the summer, the Delaware River and Bay Authority operates a Three-Forts Ferry between Fort Delaware, Fort DuPont and Fort Mott in New Jersey.
- G. Chesapeake and Delaware Canal Trail.** Delaware's Congressional delegation has been working with Delaware and the US Army Corps to build a multi-use trail the length of the 27-mile canal that connects the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays. Phase 1 is expected to be bid in February 2012 and will be built from the intersection of the Branch Canal and C&D Canal in Delaware City west to the vicinity of Summit Marina. Plans are to eventually build a trail network on both sides of the Canal.
- H. Delaware National Guard.** The 153rd Military Police Company was established in September 1996 and is located at Fort DuPont. The 153rd MP Company's mission involves combat zone responsibilities to include protection of vehicle routes, defile control, route reconnaissance and straggler control. They can be utilized in direct combat and during peacetime. Their five main functions include maneuver and mobility support operations, area security operations, law and order operations, internment and resettlement operations, as well as police intelligence operations.

- I. Delaware City.** The town of 1,695 residents was incorporated in 1851 with a town plan that included two wharves, two public squares along with a compact plan of ten major streets. The site was a larger tract of land granted to Henry Ward in 1675 by the Duke of York for the sum of “four and a half bushels of winter wheat.” Its initial settlement is linked with the 1829 opening of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, shortening the route by water between Philadelphia and Baltimore by 316 miles. The town is actively pursuing revitalization on a variety of fronts, and has designated Governor Bacon as an area for future annexation. Delaware City is a hidden waterfront gem; it is convenient to substantial urban amenities in the North East area but still holds onto the safe harbor of Main Street culture.
- J. Wastewater infrastructure.** New Castle County operates a wastewater treatment facility on the northeast corner of the property. Flows from Delaware City proper and the surrounding areas, including the nearby town of St Georges, flow through county-owned sewers and pump stations and end up at the plant located on the complex. The County-owned facilities are all scheduled for upgrade in the near future to renew the assets and to accommodate additional flows from approved development plans. The complex’s collection system, which ties into the plant, has undergone a renovation within the last 10 years and is considered in good shape.
- K. US Army Corps of Engineers.** The U.S Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) owns and operates a 130-acre parcel of ground immediately south of the Fort DuPont State Park as a Chesapeake and Delaware Canal maintenance dredge disposal area, with a total storage capacity of 790,000 cubic yards of disposal material. The Corps is currently working with a private contractor for the removal of the existing dredge material for re-purposing, allowing for additional storage space.
- L. Old Army Landfill.** The US Environmental Protection Agency and the Department are involved in the assessment of an Army landfill site on the waterfront that was used for waste disposal when the base was operating. An environmental consultant recently completed sampling at the site and has not yet delivered a final results report. A remediation plan has not yet been developed.

### **III. State goals for this effort**

- Create a vibrant, sustainable mixed-use community that complements Delaware City
- Propose a mix of development that would be based on viable market trends, considering:
  - An assortment of housing choices
  - Commercial office space, including the possibility of state or other government office space, and retail
  - Institutional uses such as health care and higher education
  - Key historic buildings on the sites, such as the theater

- Recreational uses incorporating the waterfront, the expansive former parade ground, and trails including the planned C&D Canal Trail
- Honor the historic and cultural character of the site
- Conserve and/or restore the site's natural features, habitat and wetlands and enhance opportunities for eco-tourism such as birding
- Help clarify state's continued presence and involvement at the site
- Attract outside investment and creative financing options that include leverage of the state's ownership of the property
- Demonstrate cutting-edge sustainable design features, up to and including a LEED for Neighborhood Development certification
- Integrate with Delaware City and the proposed Chesapeake and Delaware Canal Trail
- Prepare for sea level rise
- Clearly delineate a path forward, including governance of redevelopment efforts

For scope of services and evaluation criteria, go to:

<http://www.bids.de.gov> and <http://MyMarketPlace.Delaware.gov>