

Architects reveal plans for environmentally friendly YMCA

Plans for the \$16.8 million facility call for a fitness center and childcare center.

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A new facility will be the area's most environmentally friendly YMCA with solar-panel powered signage, geothermal heat pumps and a water management system that would recycle rain to power toilets, planners are saying.

Conceptual sketch plans for the new, \$16.8 million YMCA in Falls, to be called the YMCA Community Center at Snipes Farm, were revealed Thursday night at the farm after a four-day charrette of hasty designing. Architects envision a full-

functioning hub with a fitness center, indoor and outdoor pools, athletic fields and other activities.

The main YMCA buildings on the site will be small and styled to fit in with the farmland. The fitness center, slated for the northwest part of the farm, will be physically positioned for efficiency.

"The building is positioned to catch as much light as possible in the south," architect Scott Kelly said, saying the positioning will help heat the building in the winter and require less artificial light inside. Kelly works with Re:Vision Architecture, the firm chosen to lead the project.

Any trees that need to be removed to make way for the new buildings will be milled locally

and used during the construction, the architects said. Also, they plan to use local materials to support the local economy and cut down on pollution from shipping materials.

The plans also call for a summer camp and athletic fields in the southeast corner of the site. The two areas will be joined by a small thoroughfare.

Construction won't begin until at least 2009, YMCA CEO Eric Stark said. Even after that, Stark estimates the construction process to take at least two years.

In about six years, Stark expects to add a childcare center at the new site, replacing the current Morrisville YMCA.

A group of architects and engi-

neers worked with YMCA representatives and community members throughout the week to plan the new facility.

By collaborating with Snipes Farm, the facility will become a one-stop farm/community/nature/health center, Stark said. "We want to create the greenest YMCA on one of the ... farms in the area," Stark said.

During the planning phase, farm owner Jonathan Snipes had said he'd like to see a plan that utilized unused portions of the farm in an attempt to disturb as little land as possible. Architects responded by placing parking in heavily shaded areas and incorporated areas, such as the old Garden Center, into the new plan.

"We're trying to create strategic

partnerships for the environment, social services and green sustainability of the farm," Snipes said. "While inviting the public to the farm, we are protecting the farm as much as possible. There's a potential in here to do some restoration to areas of the farm, including the wetlands and the woodlands."

Planners also want to use the combined effort as an educational resource that would teach people about environmental issues, from organic farming to green building.

"If we don't create a new consciousness, it doesn't matter where the Y puts its building or where Snipes is," Snipes said.

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