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Commission delays annexation action

RANSON, W.VA.

■ A Charles Town Planning Commission meeting Wednesday night where speakers criticized an annexation to the City of Charles Town and an associated commercial project.

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Saying the land was "watered by the blood of Civil War patriots," more than 100

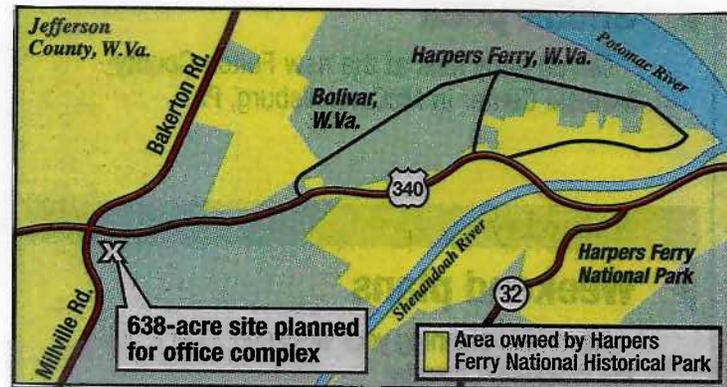
people packed a Charles Town Planning Commission meeting Wednesday night where speakers criticized an annexation to the City of Charles Town and an associated commercial project.

The planning commission eventually delayed taking action on the annexation request because of some technical issues that have arisen. Jim Campbell, an attorney representing developers of the project, said there was a right-of-way for a railroad that

was included on documents describing the tract.

Many people at the meeting at the Independent Fire Co. wore stickers that read "Preserve and Protect Our Heritage" and area government officials continued to criticize the 638-acre annexation proposal and other annexation attempts, saying they threaten Jefferson County as people now know it.

See **ANNEXATION**, A2



Annexation:

Continued from A1

"We're going to wake up one morning and we won't have any county. It's time to put this to a stop once and for all," said Bob Hardy, mayor pro tem of Bolivar, W.Va.

The Charles Town Planning Commission was considering an annexation where a \$200 million office space and hotel project are being proposed. The land is off U.S. 340 near Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and the city would reach the property through a "pipestem" annexation reaching up U.S. 340.

Opponents say the annexation should not be approved because it is too close to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Harpers Ferry is where Gen. Stonewall Jackson oversaw the capture of 12,500 troops in 1862, the largest capture in the Civil War.

Part of the property being considered for annexation has a "pristine" battlefield from 1862, Don Campbell, superintendent of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, told the planning commission.

The right-of-way is not owned by the applicant seeking annexation and needs to be removed from documents, Campbell said.

There are also two lots that need to be removed from annexation documents for the same reason, developer Herb Jonkers said.

The planning commission decided to take the issue up again April 2 at 6 p.m.

If the planning commission approves the annexation, it would go to Charles Town City Council for consideration. Mayor Peggy Smith has said she does not believe there is enough council support for it.

Wednesday's meeting grew heated at times, like when planning commission member Al Hooper was setting ground

rules for public comment on the project.

Hooper said only certain people would be allowed to comment, such as people living in Charles Town or people living adjacent to the 638 acres.

People living elsewhere could submit written comments, Hooper said.

People in the audience shouted as they objected to the rules.

"We'll do it this way or we don't do it at all," Hooper said.

"Quit standing back there hollering and screaming," Planning Commission member Don Clendening said at one point.

Charles Town resident Bill Gavin said when he first moved to the area in 1947, Harpers Ferry was a mess and "squatters" were staying in buildings in town.

Then, the National Park Service and others came to the rescue, and now Harpers Ferry is "one of the gems of the National Park system. This is ridiculous, putting something like this in the center of the park," Gavin said.

Charles Town resident Rich Bringewatt said Charles Town has too many issues on its plate.

There are thousands of new homes under consideration, a downtown business redevelopment plan is in limbo, there are neighborhoods with no sidewalks and the water treatment plant needs work, Bringewatt said.

"The more we pile on, the worse it becomes," Bringewatt said.

Campbell continued to defend the project as a way to bring needed economic development to the county. The project will generate about 6,000 new jobs and will be a way to remove industrial waste on the land that is "ugly and needs to be redeveloped."