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Attorney: Project near park not dead

CHARLES TOWN, W.VA.

By **DAVE McMILLION**

charlestown@herald-mail.com

The controversial proposal of putting a \$200 million office space and hotel project next to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park is not dead, a spokesman for the project said Tuesday.

The developers of the project are looking at all their options because they believe the proposal is still an effective way of increasing much-needed commercial tax base in Jefferson County and creating good-paying jobs for local residents, Charles Town attorney J. Michael Cassell said.

Cassell is one of two attorneys representing developers Gene Capriotti, Herb Jonkers and Jim Gibson.

Cassell would not say whether the developers of the Old Standard quarry site, Altstadt's Corner and Bugler's Rest would consider another development plan or a different annexation attempt.

He did say the developers are "exploring everything. There's more than one way to skin a cat," Cassell said.

The developers' first attempt in developing their project failed Monday night when the Charles Town City Council rejected a proposal to annex 638 acres where the project would be built. The city council rejected the annexation request on a 4-3 vote after more than 100 people attended the meeting and many speakers criticized the idea.

The developers are "exploring everything. There's more than one way to skin a cat."

— J. Michael Cassell, attorney for developers who have proposed an office and hotel project on land surrounded by Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Cassell has said the developers wanted to be annexed into the City of Charles Town because they believe county officials are not interested in such a project there.

The three developers want to build about one million square feet of office space and a 150-room hotel off Millville Road.

Although proponents said the project would generate about 6,000 well-paying jobs for county residents, citizens and government officials worried how it would affect Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Park Superintendent Don Campbell has said that the development would be directly in the line of sight of Civil War battlefields.

Cassell said Tuesday that there should be serious consideration of the office space and hotel project because there are limited areas in the county for such a project. And the county needs such a center to create good-paying jobs, which will save some county residents from having to make lengthy commutes to metropolitan areas like Baltimore and Washington, D.C., Cassell said.

Project: Area mayor sees no way for it to succeed

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Cassell said in other areas of the state, like Monongalia County, county and city officials have worked together on economic development projects.

"Here, we have the cities and the county wrapped up in litigation with each other," Cassell said.

Bob Hardy, the mayor pro tem of Bolivar, W.Va., said he does not see any possible way for the project to succeed.

Harpers Ferry Mayor Jim Addy has expressed opposition to the project and Hardy said Tuesday that the Bolivar Town Council does not support the project and is not interested in annexing the property.

"They've got nowhere to go," Hardy said.

About the only avenue left to the developers is asking Jefferson County officials for a rezoning classification to allow such a project there, Hardy said.

The Jefferson County Development Authority, which helps to bring new business to the county and helps existing employers grow, did not take a position on the office project, said Jane Peters, executive director of the authority.

But Peters agreed with Cassell that there is little land in the county designated for commercial growth. The more job growth opportunities that are opened up in the county, the

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better, Peters said.

Peters said her office fields many calls from companies interested in office space in Jefferson County and they often want space as close as possible to Dulles, Va.

"Which would be that area," Peters said, referring to the Old Standard quarry site.

Campbell said the Old Standard quarry site has Civil War importance because it is where a flanking movement occurred that led to Confederate Gen. Stonewall Jackson's capture of 12,500 troops in 1862, the largest capture in the Civil War.

It remained the largest military capture until World War II, Civil War experts say.

Campbell said Tuesday it would be ideal if the federal government could acquire the land for the park.

Cassell previously declined to comment on whether the developers would be interesting in selling the property for park use.

Campbell said it is hard to say what will happen to the property or the developers' proposal.

"I have no idea where it's going to go," Campbell said.

