

Land-use request rejected

CHARLES TOWN, W.VA.

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The issue had been brewing for months, and it came to a halt Thursday morning before a standing-room-only crowd of about 100 people.

Supporters of the project hoping to convince the Jefferson County Commission that it was in the best interests of the county wore stickers that read, "Live Here, Work Here.

Rezone Old Standard Quarry."

But as had been predicted by two commissioners, the commission rejected a request to change the land-use designation for the former Old Standard Quarry near Harpers Ferry, W.Va., which would have allowed a controversial \$250 million office and hotel project.

The rezoning request was rejected on a 3-2 vote.

Commission President Frances Morgan, who voted with Commissioners Jim Surkamp and Rusty Morgan to deny the rezoning

change, said she was troubled over the project because it sharply had divided the community, and she worried how it would affect the county's heritage tourism, "which we need to build up, not tear down."

Some previous debates over the project centered on conditions that could have been placed on the development to control its design, but opponents questioned how such agreements could be enforced.

See **VOTE**, A2

Vote: Jefferson Co. Commission rejects request

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A vote on whether to rezone the Old Standard Quarry property along Millville Road from agricultural use to commercial use was on the commission's agenda Thursday, and dozens of people streamed into a meeting room at the Old Charles Town Library in town to witness the vote.

The commission came close to voting on the rezoning at last week's commission meeting, but decided not to after a commission attorney said it appeared the commission could not vote then.

On Thursday, the commission gave supporters and opponents of the project another chance to speak their minds about the proposal.

Jim Campbell, an attorney representing a group of five developers of the project, asked the commission Thursday why there could not be any negotiations on the terms of the project.

How they voted

The Jefferson County Commission on Thursday voted 3-2 to deny a request to change the zoning for the former Old Standard Quarry near Harpers Ferry, W.Va.

Voting for: Frances Morgan, Rusty Morgan, Jim Surkamp

Voting against: Greg Corliss, Dale Manuel

Opponents feared the project would worsen traffic congestion in the county, but Campbell said traffic problems are a broader issue in the county and will not go away, Campbell said.

Opponents said the office and hotel project would be too close to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, but Campbell pointed out other developments — including

federal government operations — that already have popped up around the park.

"The opponents don't want change," Campbell said. "They don't even want change to an environmental mess and an eyesore."

Campbell was referring to huge piles of burned limestone on the quarry property.

Eighty acres at the 411-acre quarry are zoned for high-density residential. But the developers said they would not build any homes at the quarry site if the commission would rezone the agricultural land.

J. Michael "Mike" Cassell, another attorney representing the developers, said his clients now will consider residential development on the 80 acres, and said up to 1,600 living units can be built there.

Commissioner Greg Corliss, who voted against denying the rezoning request along with Commissioner

Dale Manuel, said the commission did not have all of the facts to decide the rezoning issue, and said the commission's attempt to bring the rezoning request to a close amounted to a "short circuit" and an "ambush."

Corliss said officials in the county's land planning office are willing to work with the developers on the project, and Corliss questioned the wisdom in voting down the rezoning request and losing the potential of 6,000 new jobs that the developers said the office complex would generate when several large employers, including AB&C Group Inc. and Norm Thompson Outfitters, have left or are about to leave the county.

"I agree with Commissioner Corliss," said Manuel, who added the commission received a petition from 500 people supporting the rezoning. "We shouldn't slam the door shut. We need some economic development here."