

Quarry project decision delayed

■ The Jefferson County Commission nearly votes on a rezoning petition.

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CHARLES TOWN — Jefferson County commissioners ended up tabling a motion to deny the Old Standard Quarry project's rezoning petition for one week after arguing Thursday over whether the decision needed more time.

Commissioners recently agreed that the complex commercial project needed more work sessions with the project developers, county planning staff and interested parties. However, three commissioners changed their minds Thursday and wanted to go ahead and vote immediately on whether to change the property's zoning. A vote for rezoning would allow developers to build 2 million square feet of upscale commercial space at the site, which is south of U.S. 340 along Millville Road.

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"I said we need more time; I've completely changed my mind about that," said Commissioner Rusty Morgan, adding that he has given the rezoning petition a great deal of consideration in recent weeks.

"We all take these issues very, very seriously," he said, pointing out that the proposed hotel and office spaces at the quarry site would be valuable to the community. However, Morgan said he couldn't go along with the project because of its large scale, and its location in a sensitive, historic area adjacent to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

Also, he said there is no guarantee that companies would come in and create jobs there, although developers anticipate that 6,000 new jobs and \$4.4 million in tax revenues would be generated if the commercial plans were approved.

Rusty Morgan, President Frances Morgan and Commissioner Jim Surkamp wanted to vote Thursday, while commissioners Dale Manuel and Greg Corliss wanted to continue gathering more information.

Manuel pointed out that the minutes of the last meeting show that commissioners agreed that there was a need for another work session.

"I don't know why we had to rush," he said. "Why not spend a little time on this?"

Manuel also said he would have liked to have the opportunity to gather more information from the county's planning staff, developers and everyone concerned about the project in order to look into a compromise. He said he strongly supports the development because it would bring much-

needed economic development into the county and "jobs for our sons and daughters."

Corliss also said he supports the project and can't understand why the other commissioners were opposed to gathering more information about conditions and restrictions that could be placed on the development.

Frances Morgan said she is sure that all board members have spent a lot of time thinking about the issues, and she wanted to move forward. She did not say specifically on Thursday whether she would vote for or against the petition to rezone, although she has implied that she is not in favor of it.

She said the issue is simply whether to rezone the property and allow for commercial uses; her opinion is that the developers' plans and possible conditional uses distract from the main issue.

The quarry property consists of about 411 acres that are zoned for rural and high-density residential uses, and developers submitted a petition to rezone the property to allow for commercial uses on April 17.

After Surkamp made a motion to reject the rezoning petition and Rusty Morgan seconded, the commission's legal counsel cautioned against voting during Thursday's meeting.

Assistant prosecuting attorney James Casimiro said the meeting agenda should clearly state that the commission intends to vote on the rezoning petition before the board members can do so. Thursday's agenda showed that the commission intended to reschedule the vote or determine further

proceedings in the quarry matter.

The commission voted 4-1 to table the motion, with Corliss voting against it. Then the commission voted 3-2 to place the rezoning decision on next week's meeting agenda, with Corliss and Manuel voting against the motion.

Leaders from Bolivar and Harpers Ferry expressed their opposition to the project during Thursday's meeting, and strongly encouraged the County Commission to reject the petition. They said they were worried about increased traffic congestion along U.S. 340, as well as effects the commercial buildings could have on the viewshed from nearby park property and historic Civil War sites.

Those who support the project, including the Jefferson County Economic Development Authority and local business leaders, say Jefferson County desperately needs more commercial development and the jobs that would come with it.

Herb Jonkers, one of the property's developers, said that if the commission decides to deny the rezoning petition, that doesn't mean development will be permanently prevented.

"It's not a yes-or-no vote, it's a this-or-that vote," Jonkers said, explaining that the commercial project might not be allowed, but about 1,600 residential units can be built on one section of the property under current zoning. Plus, he said industrial uses are also available on the land, according to state laws.

"We'll see what happens," he said.

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