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Charles Town, W.Va., city council rejects 638-acre annexation

CHARLES TOWN, W.VA.

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The Charles Town City Council voted Monday night to reject a controversial 638-acre annexation to the city during a standing room-only meeting where people expressed concerns about how the annexation would affect Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

The vote was 4-3.

Council member Matt Ward made the motion to reject the annexation and council mem-

bers Tim Robinson, Sandy Slusher McDonald and Amy Schmitt voted for the motion.

Council members Geraldine Willingham, Lacie Mumaw and Don Clendening voted against the motion.

When Ward asked for a show of hands to clarify the vote, Clendening looked to Ward and asked, "Does that please you?"

Clendening and Ward have clashed over growth issues.

Loud yells, whistles and applause erupted from the crowd of more than 100 people after the vote.

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Vote: Charles Town City Council rejects planned annexation

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Mayor Peggy Smith called for a short break after the vote.

The council rejected the annexation request with very little discussion after the Charles Town Planning Commission voted in favor of it at a meeting that started before the council meeting.

The annexation involved three properties known as the Old Standard quarry site, Alstadt's Corner and Bugler's Rest, south of the intersection of Millville Road and U.S. 340.

The project being proposed by developers Gene Capriotti, Herb Jonkers and Jim Gibson called for the construction of office buildings around a lake on the quarry property. A 150-room hotel would have been built along the lake.

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



By Joe Crocetta/Staff Photographer

Harpers Ferry residents Scot Faulkner, left, and Steve Lowe look over the proposed 600-plus-acre commercial property project Monday night after the Charles Town Planning Commission meeting and before the City Council meeting.

Speakers cautioned against threatening the park that, through tourism, pumps about \$32 million annually into the state and local economy.

"If you do this, you're letting the cow out of the barn," said Bob Hardy, mayor pro tem of Bolivar, W.Va.

Opponents of the project said the annexation was too far from Charles Town, and Hardy said Bolivar and Harpers Ferry would have been

stuck with providing services like fire and police protection to the development if the annexation was approved.

"I'm left wondering just what we're trying to accomplish here," Charles Town resident Ann Paonessa said.

The National Parks Conservation Association issued a news release Monday saying more than two dozen local and national businesses and organizations were opposed to the annexation.

How they voted

Voting to reject the annexation: Matt Ward, Tim Robinson, Sandy Slusher McDonald and Amy Schmitt.

Voting against rejecting the annexation: Geraldine Willingham, Lacie Mumaw and Don Clendening

Charles Town attorney Jim Campbell, who is representing the developers, told the council that there has been misinformation about the project.

Although park officials have described some land as having a pristine battlefield, Jim Campbell showed photographs of industrial waste piled on one of the properties that was part of the old quarry site.

Campbell said a landfill also once existed at the site.

"Certainly, no one in this room is saying that it is pristine," Campbell said.