

Project seeks annexation of 638 acres into Charles Town

HARPERS FERRY, W.VA.

By **DAVE McMILLION**
charlestown@herald-mail.com

A \$200 million office space and hotel project being proposed next to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park is coming under attack by local residents and government officials because they say it is "out of character" for the area and could lead to problems like traffic congestion.

The project is also under fire because developers want to annex the 638-acre site into the City of Charles Town, which is roughly 5 miles away.

Under the annexation procedure, the City of Charles Town would use U.S. 340 to reach the property and take it into the city's limits, Charles Town Mayor Peggy Smith said.

Using a highway to reach a property is sometimes referred to as a "pipestem" annexation and such annexations have been criticized by Jefferson County officials, who say such annexations interfere with their ability to plan growth.

Harpers Ferry Mayor Jim Addy, who is opposed to the project, said Monday he immediately wrote a letter to Smith expressing concerns about it.

Addy said he opposes the project because he thinks it



is too close to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and questioned the appropriateness of Charles Town having the property.

"It's 5 miles away," Addy said.

The project would include three properties — the Old Standard quarry site, Alstadt's Corner and Bugler's Rest — which are south of the intersection of Millville Road and U.S. 340, said Charles Town attorney J. Michael Cassell, who is representing the developers.

The project, which is being proposed by developers Gene Capriotti, Herb Jonkers and Jim Gibson, calls for the construction of office buildings around a lake on the quarry property, Cassell said. The lake is about 1 mile long.

The process

First: The annexation request will be reviewed by Charles Town city officials March 16 at 2 p.m. at Independent Fire Co., 202 E. Second St. in Ranson, W.Va.

Next: The annexation will be reviewed by the Charles Town Planning Commission March 21 at 7 p.m. at the fire hall.

Then: If the annexation is OK'd by the planning commission, it could go before the city council for approval in April.

See **ANNEXATION**, A2

Annexation: Charles Town to consider proposal

Continued from A1

A hotel built along the lake would have about 150 rooms and meeting space, Cassell said.

Cassell said descriptions of the project have been exaggerated on the Internet, and he said the office buildings will be "low-rise" structures that will blend with the environment.

Although details of the project are still being worked out, Cassell said it would provide about one million square feet of office space and would cost \$200 million to \$250 million to build.

Cassell downplayed criticism of the project, saying the benefits outweigh the objections.

The developers believe the office space will attract high-tech employers and the buildings will have "all the high-tech connections" for such clients, Cassell said. The hotel would

be ideal for business travel associated with companies that use the office space, Cassell said.

Cassell said the developers want the site to be annexed into the city because they believe county officials are not interested in such a project there.

"It provides a solid plan for economic progress in Jefferson County," Cassell said.

Smith said she has not received Addy's letter in opposition to the project.

Smith emphasized that the city does not seek annexations and that anyone is free to petition the city for annexation.

Smith also said she understands Addy's concern about the city annexing a property near Harpers Ferry.

"It is too far out. I will be the first to say that," Smith said.

But Smith said it "breaks my heart" to see business

opportunities lost in the county and said she hopes the debate over the project will spur county officials to speed up the process of attracting new business to the county.

In regards to the Charles Town City's Council's view of the proposal, Smith said "I don't think the votes are there."

A meeting will be held March 16 at 2 p.m. at Independent Fire Co. in Ranson, where the project will be presented to Smith, City Manager Jane Arnett and Jeremy Camp, director of community development for the City of Charles Town. The proposed annexation will be presented to the Charles Town Planning Commission on March 21 at 7 p.m. at the Independent Fire Co., Camp said.

If the planning commission approves it, the annexation would go before the city council in April, Camp said.

Donald Campbell, super-

intendent of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, said the land is surrounded on two sides by park property. Campbell said he understands a city's need to have commercial growth to generate tax revenue, "but this just isn't the place for that."

On Monday night, Theresa Eisenman of South Samuel Street presented Charles Town City Council members with a 600-name petition asking that the city to stop annexing housing developments until the city and county can jointly develop a plan for growth.

Eisenman said the citizens' concern over growth patterns turned to outrage when they learned of the 638-acre annexation proposal near Harpers Ferry.

"We are on the verge of really harming this community," council member Matt Ward said at Monday's meeting.