

Jefferson Co. office project issue gets cloudier

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CHARLES TOWN, W.Va. — The discussion over whether to allow a controversial \$250 million office and hotel project at the former Old Standard Quarry near Harpers Ferry, W.Va., has gone on for months, and a Jefferson County official said Thursday he could see it taking several more.

Jefferson County Commissioner Rusty Morgan made the comment Thursday after opponents and supporters continued to talk about the issue with the commission.

Two members of the commission said Wednesday they doubted there was support among the commissioners to rezone the 41-acre quarry site along Millville Road to allow the office and hotel project, but the issue seemed to get cloudier Thursday.

Kelley Goes, cabinet secretary of the West Virginia Department of Commerce, was one of several to address the com-

mission Thursday.

Goes said having developers provide office space for new business goes a long way toward generating new jobs in a community rather than depending on companies to build such facilities.

Despite Goes' comments, skepticism about the project continued.

Developers of the project said it could generate 6,000 new jobs in the county, but Morgan said he wanted someone to show him research that creating office space will lead to new jobs.

"We have office space now," Morgan said. "We're not seeing it happen now."

Commissioner Jim Surkamp said the commission agreed two years ago to rezone the so-called F.O. Day Co. property on the Jefferson-Berkeley county line after being told that it could pave the way for a significant federal operation.

Nothing ever came of the project, Surkamp said.

Jane Peters, executive director of the

Jefferson County Development Authority, told the commission that there was no guarantee that rezoning the F.O. Day property would result in the project.

Paul Rosa, executive director of the Harpers Ferry Conservancy, suggested it is time to bring the quarry issue to an end.

"The public wants closure on this issue, not meeting after meeting," Rosa said.

Morgan and Commissioner Dale Manuel were advocating the opposite.

Morgan said the proposal for the former Old Standard Quarry is a complex issue, and should have been addressed in a comprehensive plan for the county. Although Morgan said the day before that he doubted there was support on the commission to rezone the quarry, he said Thursday, "I'm doing my best to listen to everything. I can see this process taking several months. Really it should take several years."

"I, for one, am not going to be held to some timetable," Manuel said.