

# County Votes Down Old Standard Rezoning Request in 3-2 Vote

The County Commission Thursday voted 3-2 to deny the rezoning request of Old Standard Quarry site near Millville from rural to commercial/industrial.

The rezoning would have allowed developers to move forward with a proposed upscale business park and hotel/conference center on the site. The project was expected to bring up to 6,000 jobs to Jefferson County.

More than 100 people turned out for the meeting Thursday where 15 minutes was granted to each side for final comments before a vote was to take place.

Speaking in favor of the project was Attorney Jim Campbell who represents Old Standard LLC. He told commissioners that he was disappointed that there was not further dialogue on the proposed project, especially since his clients had paid more than \$20,000 in fees to the county for the rezoning request.

He told commissioners that "opponents to this don't want change, but change is coming." He went on to say that the property is currently zoned for other uses, including up to 1600 residential units and possible heavy industrial uses that were grandfathered in with the property prior to the county's adoption of zoning.

"We take this as your vision: heavy industrial and high density housing—for this location," Campbell said.

Also speaking in favor of the rezone were local businessmen Gary Chicchirichi and Chip Bennett. Bennett said, "I don't think our history should hold us back." Delegate Bob Tabb also spoke in favor of the economic development the project could bring. "This is a crucial element to the future of Jefferson County," he said. "If we don't move forward with projects like this, it makes it difficult to ask Charleston for help."

Opposition to the rezone was addressed by Harpers Ferry Mayor Jim Addy who called for protection of the historic gateway to the county. He cited traffic issues, potential harm to wildlife and burden on emergency services as reasons to oppose the project.

Harpers Ferry bed and breakfast owner Al Alsdorf also spoke against the project saying it would create an urban area his customers would not care to visit. He went on to say that more commercial property is not needed in the county.

Also speaking was Scot Faulkner who said that the dialogue on the project had gone on too long. He told commissioners that by voting no to the rezone, they would gain control of negotiations of the property.

Commissioners then gave their opinions of the proposed rezoning. Commissioner Greg Corliss called for more information before making the decision.

He said that the preservation of a battlefield issue that had been brought forth was questionable. He said that the terrain would not be diminished so that there could not be proper understanding of battles around Harpers Ferry.

He also spoke about the increasing taxes and the need for some commercial tax base in the county. He voiced his concern over the possible housing units that could be built on the property with the current zoning of 80 acres as residential. "That would be more disruptive than any commercial development," he said.

Dale Manuel also called for more consideration of the project. He pointed out that a letter of support had come from the Department of Natural Resources who applauded the developer's plans to remediate the property and work within environmental guidelines to make the property better. He also pointed out that more than 500 county residents had signed a petition in favor of the project.

Commissioner Rusty Morgan again voiced his disfavor of the rezoning. He said he thought the idea of a hotel on the property, which was part of the proposed use, was a great idea and that he hopes that happens. However, he would not vote to approve the rezoning.

Jim Surkamp attacked the developers of the property accusing them of being less than model citizens because they have previously filed legal action against the county. He went on to say that he would vote "with great conviction" against the rezoning.

Attorney J. Michael Cassell said after the vote that "In the face of imminent loss of jobs in the county as AB&C, Norm Thompson and AmeriCast are leaving, it is disappointing that the county commission would fail to see that a diversified economy in Jefferson County is important to everyone."

He went on to say that the county commission demonstrated that out-of-state special interest groups and the Department of Interior can control three votes on the commission. This came in reference to the National Park Service's vocal opposition to the project which they say could harm tourism in their park at Harpers Ferry and destroy the battlefield. Also opposing the project vocally was the National Parks Conservation Association.

"The commission was hoodwinked by out-of-state special interests burning up fax lines," Cassell said in reference to hundreds of letters of opposition which were faxed to the commission from outside of West Virginia.

Cassell also said it was interesting to note that Surkamp commented on the developers being poor citizens because of lawsuits in which they had been involved when at least one person adamantly opposed to the rezone has filed numerous suits against the county.

Cassell said his clients will look at the alternate uses of the property including the currently zoned residential uses and possibly heavy industrial uses.