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Harpers Ferry Official Warns of 'Desecration'

Park Chief Opposes Development Plan

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HARPERS FERRY, W.Va. -- Development of 683 acres around an abandoned limestone quarry would seriously damage what the superintendent of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park calls hallowed ground, he says.

"I think it would be a desecration of the national park," Superintendent Don Campbell said of the proposed construction of residential and commercial lots.

Last month, the Civil War Preservation Trust named the battleground at Harpers Ferry one of the nation's 10 most endangered sites. It was added after a developer dug 45-foot-wide trenches for water and sewer lines that would serve thousands of new homes.

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Abolitionist John Brown's liberation effort made Harpers Ferry famous. (Harpers Ferry National Historical Park)

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Harpers Ferry -- best known for John Brown's failed effort to arm and free slaves -- changed hands eight times during the Civil War and was the site of an 1862 battle in which Confederate Maj. Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson won the surrender of some 12,500 Union troops.

James P. Campbell, a Leesburg attorney for the developers, has been trying to persuade the Charles Town City Council to annex the land near Millville Road and U.S. Route 340, which he described this week as unsightly and "moonlike."

Though the land could be used for dense residential development, Campbell's clients are proposing only 200 homes.

There are three developers: Old Standard LLC, which according to a Virginia state Web site is run by James B. Crawford III of Charles Town, W.Va., and Herbert Jonkers of Millwood, Va.; Bugler's Rest LLC; and Alstadt's Corner LLC, for whom the state has no online records.

To encourage economic development, Campbell's clients also propose more than 2 million square feet of office and retail space on seven sites, with low-rise office buildings, a 150-room hotel and a 22,500-square-foot conference center.

Campbell said the development could create 6,000 jobs and additional tax revenue for Jefferson County.

The annexation request drew opposition at a recent public meeting, and Charles Town Mayor Peggy Smith said the site is too far from town -- about five miles -- to be a good candidate.

Action on the annexation request was delayed March 21 by a faulty description of the site in a petition, but the Charles Town Planning Commission might discuss it Monday night. The City Council will meet afterward.

The quarry accounts for about 25 percent of the land being considered for annexation; the rest is relatively undisturbed battlefield land.

That land was set aside for the public, and the park superintendent said he does not trust developers to respect its historic integrity.

In other area developments, "darn near every tree and every blade of grass is cut down," Campbell said. "They practice pretty heavy-handed development."