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Lamond Tract Park Probable, Says Hyland

By STEVE HUNT

Staff Writer

Steve Markle has devoted much of his free time during the past 18 months working for the creation of a new Fairfax County park in Mount Vernon.

Markle, a Villamay resident and vice chair of the Lamond Community Task Force, said he was "very optimistic" that the 18-acre tract at 7509 Fort Hunt Road will one day be a place where local residents will hike, enjoy picnics and even get married.

And so is Mount Vernon District Super-

See LAMOND, page 3



Lamond Purchase Probable, Says Hyland

Continued from page 1

visor Gerry Hyland.

Wednesday afternoon (after the Mount Vernon Gazette's deadline) the Fairfax County Park Authority board was scheduled to meet in closed session to discuss land acquisition.

FCPA spokesperson Merni Fitzgerald could not discuss the purpose of the session which had to be postponed from last week due to inclement weather.

Hyland confirmed that the subject of the meeting involved the acquisition of the Lamond property and predicted that the "park authority board will authorize the staff to make an offer on the property."

Hyland added that he expected that the "offer will be accepted" by the developer, who currently holds a contract with Jacqueline Lamond, who had planned on constructing a 33-tract residential development on the site. Tuesday, Hyland could not state what the offer would be, however, he said that the amount of \$4.7 million published in another newspaper was "a little high."

Bond Funds

The majority of the funds used to

purchase the wooded tract and a 10-room brick residence on the site would come from a park authority bond referendum approved by Fairfax County voters.

Last week, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved allocating an additional \$600,000 towards the purchase of the land from the county's \$2 million land acquisition fund. Hyland said one of the reasons supervisors from other districts approved spending roughly three times the amount which would be allocated to each of the county's nine districts from that fund is that the property had been targeted for acquisition by the park authority for about 25 years. "There's no time like now to capture this property," said Hyland, adding that both boards realized it was time to "fish or cut bait."

If the park authority board approves the purchase of land Wednesday, and if the offer is accepted, the condemnation process currently ongoing in Fairfax County Circuit Court would be dismissed.

Master Plan

While Hyland and county staff were working during the past year to come up with funding and negotiate a pur-

chase price, a group of about 25 area residents representing eight Mount Vernon neighborhoods led by Lamond task force chair Eleanor Quigley had been working to come up with "master plan recommendations" for the property.

The task force released its recommendations in December which include a natural surface loop trail, a shaded picnic area with five tables and three grills, and playground areas for age groups 2-5 years and 6-12 years.

Plan elements would also include use of the existing house as a meeting place for citizens, possibly a horticultural-type use and could be rented out for weddings and private receptions.

A 24-foot wide entrance road and paved parking for 25-30 vehicles as well as overflow parking on grass would also be part of the conceptual development plan.

Wide Support

Markle said the task force studied various options for the property during the past year and decided upon "a preservation-based

See LAMOND, page 5

Lamond Purchase as Park 'Probable'

Continued from page 3

plan" in order to retain the character of the land."

Some of the trees on the property are estimated to be up to 80 years old.

Markle said the task force plan has the support of Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations, the Fairfax County Athletic Association, the Sierra Club and the Friends of Dyke Marsh.

In letters sent to board of supervisors Chairman Kate Hanley and park authority director Pául Baldino, the task force stated that its proposal "not only generates revenue for the county, but also provides passive recreation facilities sorely lacking in the surrounding area.

"This progressive plan reflects the will of Mount Vernon District residents. The foresight in its development preserves a small portion of our county for future generations," it stated.

The 17.9 acre tract itself represents one of the few remaining large tracts of open space in this area of Fairfax County, according to the task force.

The land is bounded on the north by Belle Vista Drive, on the east by Park Terrace Drive, on the south by Morningside Lane and by Fort Hunt Road on the west.

The site is completely wooded and roughly two-thirds of the site lies within the 0-5 percent slope range. A small intermittent stream traverses

the eastern end of the site.

Preserve & Protect

The purpose of the Lamond property purchase is to preserve, protect and restore natural resources; provide a variety of active and passive recreation for residents within the service radius of the site; to generate revenue to support the operation, maintenance and restoration of park resources and facilities; and inhibit continued infill development in the Mount Vernon area.

The park could provide a variety of recreational opportunities not available in this area as well as a place for "quiet refuge in a natural setting in an otherwise highly developed area of the county."

Park visitors would be able to enjoy the natural beauty of the land and be provided with the opportunity for solitude and relaxation.

And in the historic 1940s house, visitors could meet for seminars, parties, conferences and receptions and take part in programs such as a master gardener series.

As for the land itself, the area of the intermittent stream should be protected in a "Resource Protection Zone" and likewise the western most portion which parallels Fort Hunt Road should be protected as it contains steep slopes over marine soils making the area unstable and highly susceptible to erosion, according to the

task force. The RPZ should also include a buffer area adjacent to residential properties surrounding the parcel and buffers between the recreational areas of the park would remain undeveloped and may be additionally planted with appropriate vegetation to further limit sound travel and lines of sight.

"Human impact in this zone will be kept to a minimum," the task force stated.

'On Target'

The current vehicular entrance zone for the parcel should remain at the existing gravel road into the property from Fort Hunt Road and the barricaded areas located at the property boundaries at Burtonwood and Admiral drives should be designated as pedestrian entrances only.

The gravel road, however, should be paved and widened to provide adequate ingress/egress of the site and Virginia Department of Transportation-mandated entrance requirements such as turn lanes may be required. Task force concerns relate to instituting a plan to deal with "plant invasives" on the site and a recommendation that park-type facilities should not be lighted for after dark use. Hyland met recently with the task force following its completion of its master plan and said he was pleased with its recommendations.

"It's right on target."