

# Past a problem for the future

PWC BRISTOW HISTORIC SITES

## Preservation plan opposed

By STEVE DANIELS  
of the Potomac News

PN 7/21/89

A dispute over whether to protect a Civil War battlefield could act as a test case for how Prince William County handles the historic preservation issue in the future, county officials say.

The Bristow battlefield, whose historical significance has been debated heatedly in the past, again is the subject of controversy. A steering committee looking at appropriate future land uses for the 44-square-mile Linton Hall Road corridor may recommend that the battlefield be made a historic overlay district.

The committee is scheduled to submit its final report to the Board of County Supervisors in late September.

The recommendation has outraged property owners in the area who believe it would reduce their property values. The dispute at times has reduced public work sessions on the Linton Hall corridor study to shouting matches.

But county officials and the major property owner in Bristow say there is room for compromise on the issue. Both the county and property owners seem ready to find creative solutions, county archaeologist Janet Townsend said.

The battlefield is on a 1,162-acre piece of land south of the intersection of Nokesville and Bristow roads. It is the site of the October 1863 Battle of Bristow Station in which Confederate soldiers, commanded by Gen. Robert E. Lee, attempted to halt the Union Army's westward movement after the Battle of Gettysburg.

About 1,300 Confederate and 600 Union soldiers were killed, wounded or missing. Some soldiers from North Carolina remain buried there today, according to a document nominating the site to the National Register of Historic Places.

It is the only Civil War battle site in Prince William County other than the Manassas National Battlefield Park. The county attempted to place the battlefield on the National Register but met with opposition from residents and withdrew the application in November.

Residents also opposed a proposal nearly two years ago to put a landfill in Bristow, ironically basing their argument in part on the land's historical value.

Hazel-Peterson Cos.' proposal to build



Photos by Lara Gordon-Potomac News

The site of the Battle of Bristow Station would be protected under a plan to make it a historic overlay district. Some residents fear the designation would affect land values. Shown here is the view northwest from the railroad crossing.

a mall on 600 acres next to Manassas battlefield caused a major uproar last year and eventually was resolved when the U.S. Congress voted to seize the tract and add it to the park. Congress and Hazel-Peterson are negotiating compensation for the taking.

Federal intervention is not the ideal way to deal with the historic preservation issue, Ms. Townsend said. The Board of County Supervisors is likely to deal with the issue more as residents grow more concerned about the county's pace of development, she said.

"I think you're going to see more activity on the part of citizens [to preserve the county's history]," Ms. Townsend said. "I think we're sort of getting to that point."

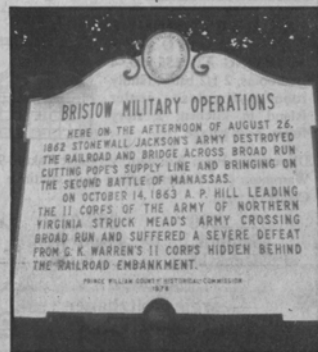
The only developer who owns land in the proposed Bristow historic overlay district said he agrees with preserving important historical symbols. But making the Bristow battlefield an overlay

district would harm landowners' property rights, said Ernie Marcus, acquisitions officer for Washington, D.C.-based GLM Corp., which is planning to build a business park on 256 acres in the northeastern part of the area.

"It's really important to do it [preserve history], and we hope to have an industrial park in keeping with an historic district," Marcus said.

But an overlay district deals better with areas that already are developed because the county intended it to protect historic buildings, he said. Indeed, Buckland's historic overlay district — the only one in the county — is there to protect the hamlet's buildings, which date back to the late 1700s, Ms. Townsend said.

GLM's land already is zoned for industrial uses, and it is listed on the comprehensive plan for high-density de-



Historical marker provides information about Civil War action in the Bristow area.

See PLAN, Page D3

## PLAN From Page D1

velopment. It is the only parcel that the county has rezoned from agricultural, according to John Schofield, former county planning director and a top assistant to the county executive.

Because the land already is zoned, the county cannot stop GLM from using it for a business park, Schofield said.

But the county can negotiate with the other smaller property owners whose land still is zoned agricultural, he said.

"For the balance of the site, through the use of the comprehensive plan, the county may — I underscore the word, 'may' — be able to reach agreement with the property owners," Schofield said.

Solutions to such impasses could involve tradeoffs. For instance, the county could promise increased density in other parts of the county in return for agreeing not to develop land in a historically sensitive area.



But that will not work if the people involved are not land speculators who own other property in the county. That is the case with the Bristow owners, including GLM.

Clustering development on less sensitive spots of historical land could be another solution.

Cluster zones, which allow higher densities on part of a property in return for keeping other parts green, are possible on residential, but not on commercial, land, Marcus said.

Finally, the county, with the help of private agencies, could buy the land, Ms. Townsend said.

The county also should notify affected property owners early in the process when it is considering a historic district, Marcus said.

"[The people] feel sort of ambushed," he said. "I think in this case things could have been done better so there would have been free communication between the county [and the owners]."

Ms. Townsend said she did not expect such opposition from property owners when the issue arose in November. Often, residents welcome an historic designation because it tends to drive their land values up, she said.

"Out here, it's a bit of a problem because the historic overlay district rarely is used," Ms. Townsend said.