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Buy out bill passes

BATTLE from A1

County officials, who have strongly objected to federal interference in what they say is a local land-use issue, were joined last week by several senators who object to the cost of a buy out.

"We are absolutely insane," Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., a member of the Senate appropriations committee, said before the Senate voted 50-25 last Friday to include the provision in the tax package. "This is absolutely crazy."

County estimates show the cost of the buy out range between \$155 million and \$321 million.

The figures include \$58 million to \$155 million to buy the land and \$97 million to \$165 million for the costs of on-site improvements, site work, interest, electrical easements, evictions and \$10 million in prof-
fers.

The county also estimates it would lose \$138 million over the next 20 years in tax revenues if the William Center is not built.

The market value for the 150-acre residential section alone could top \$37 million, said Bob Fitton, president of Equity Resources Inc., a Lake Ridge residential developer that is a partner in the William Center Limited Partnership, which owns the section.

"It's not a question of what's been put into it. It's a question of what it is worth," Fitton said.

Terah Boasberg, an attorney representing the Save the Battlefield Coalition, estimates the value of the tract at under \$40 million, which is much less than county estimates.

Boasberg noted that Congress has banned the construction for at least two years of an I-66 interchange that would serve the tract.

"Without the access, it has got to be detrimental [to the value]," he said. "There's got to be access to I-66."

Boasberg said the three model homes and utility lines already on the property add little to the value.

"You only pay for the stuff that enhances the property," he added.

Until a federal judge or jury determine the value of the land, "all cost estimates are irrelevant," said Melissa Schofield, a Senate aide to Bumpers, chairman of the Senate national parks subcommittee, who led the fight to include the buy out provision in the tax bill.

Last week's Senate action "was terrific. An overwhelming victory," said Annie Snyder of Catharpin, chairman of the anti-mall coalition. "We realize that it would be a little premature to start celebrating," said Snyder, who is spearheading the nine-month fight against the William Center mall.

Robert Kelly, a Hazel/Peterson spokesman, declined to comment on the Senate action.

William Center opponents said Vice President George Bush could help persuade Reagan away from a veto. Three members of the Save the Battlefield Coalition met last week with five staff members of the Bush campaign to gauge Bush's position on the buy out.

"They were very, very interested. We realized it may be a close vote," said Snyder, who attended the meeting, at the campaign's request. While the Bush campaign did not promise anything, she said "they were very attentive."

Hodel, who offered a compromise with Hazel/Peterson that would close of Route 234 and U.S. 29 through the battlefield park, move the proposed mall off Stuart's Hill and preserve three small areas on the tract.

However, the compromise became a moot point when the developer filed its original site plans for the mall on Stuart's Hill.

The action turned to a House bill sponsored by Reps. Frank Wolf, R-10th District, Robert Mrazek, D-N.Y., and Michael Andrews, D-Texas, for a "legislative taking" of the tract.

Despite a the threat of a presidential veto, the House overwhelmingly approved the bill, setting up a confrontation in the Senate, which

by tradition is usually more fiscally restraint.

Indeed, a Senate hearing last month drew strong opposition to the costs of acquiring the property. Nevertheless, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources approved the House bill and sent it to the floor for a vote.

In a late-night session Friday, the Senate approved Bumpers amendment, which is identical to the House-approved bill for a federal legislative taking of the William Center tract.

The vote came after more than one hour of intense debate on the Senate floor over the cost of the buy out and the tract's historical significance.

Amid large area maps and historical troop movement charts, Bumpers and Sen. John McClure, R-Idaho, clashed on whether the federal government should be involved in the William Center controversy.

Bumpers urged his colleagues to "act boldly and bravely" in the spirit of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, who was "willing to take the chance ... not worry about the odds."

"Congress cannot keep revisiting these local boundary disputes," said McClure, who said the tract is "not historically integral" to the park.

Warner tried to find an amicable and less-costly middle ground and force an up-or-down vote by offering an amendment that would permit the legislative taking of about 80 acres.

Warner said "if the Senate waits until January, 'the land will be cleared of those trees ... on its way to development, and all will be lost.'"

In an attempt to persuade his colleagues further, Warner told them his compromise "would be acceptable to the [Reagan] administration."

Warner's proposal would have allowed for the construction of 519 homes and 120,000 square feet of retail space, thus prohibiting a retail mall and reduce the property's cost.

Mall buy out bill survives Senate vote

Two hurdles still remain

By GIDGET FUENTES
Journal staff writer

The U.S. Senate Tuesday night approved a bill that includes a provision for the legislative taking of the controversial William Center tract next to the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

The provision must survive a House-Senate conference committee this week before going to President Reagan.

Sens. John Warner, R-Va., and Paul Trible, R-Va., voted in favor of the bill, which makes changes to the 1986 Tax Reform Act. The bill passed 87-1.

The Senate action could cost the federal government between \$13.6 million to \$321 million to acquire the 542.7-acre tract, depending on whom one asks.

While Congress has spent six

months mulling over the issue, county officials, congressional staff and William Center opponents have played a numbers game in an attempt to sway those undecided members of Congress to their side.

Hazel/Peterson Cos. of Fairfax bought the property, which is assessed at \$13.6 million, for about \$8 million in 1986.

Sen. Dale Bumpers, D-Ark., said if Reagan vetoes the tax bill because of the buy out provision, he would ask for a "do or die" vote on a separate buy out bill he would introduce before the Senate session ends, possibly Saturday.

If that vote fails, he promises to bring the buy out issue back to Capitol Hill when Congress starts a new session in January.

Congressional staff members said they do not know whether Reagan will veto the bill, which includes several other amendments unrelated to the tax bill. Reagan has been urged by Secretary of the Interior Donald P. Hodel to veto the bill.

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