

From: Joyce Hudson
Sent: Thursday, November 15, 2018 9:56 PM
Subject: Comments on the Route 29 Small Area Plan

Hello,

This is Joyce Hudson with the Alliance to Save Carver Road (Alliance), and I am writing to submit collective comments from members of the Alliance on the Route 29 Small Area Plan segment of the county's Comprehensive Plan. We conducted a brief survey of our members and results are attached.

The Alliance is an organization of property owners and their family members from this historic area in Gainesville who were brought together in opposition to the Dominion power lines and which is now organized in opposition to development pressures in our community. For more information on the Alliance, see <https://www.facebook.com/carverroadalliance/>.

The Route 29 plan encompasses a historic African American area called The Settlement, bounded by Carver Road, Old Carolina Road and Route 29, and as generational residents, our members have a significant interest in the future of this area. The current plan provides for a number of zoning, transportation, and other changes which allow for future development in our historic community which we oppose. This includes widening of Carver and Old Carolina Roads, extending McGraws Corner Road, and land use designations which allow for medium to high density development on our properties, all of which we never asked for and do not want.

In summary, our comments reflect our need to:

- keep our community intact, with low density designations
- continue to transfer land ownership to future generations
- recognize our community's historic nature and our ancestors' hard work
- improve the current road conditions of Carver Rd
- have a say in the future of our community through an official advisory role (during a September 12 meeting with county representatives and the community, the Alliance requested an advisory role in updating the plan)

These comments are in line with the county's Strategic Plan, particularly the Wellbeing Goal with it's focus of supporting the lives of vulnerable individuals and families which, in our opinion, includes descendants of freed slaves and one of the most unique communities remaining in Virginia. **Please consider this survey as comments from each of the members of our group.**

Thank you for your consideration and for supporting our historic community!

Joyce Hudson, Chair
Alliance to Save Carver Road
(202) 316

Survey of Homeowners in The Settlement Community

11/15/18

Owner	Willie and Inez Fields	Maxine Allen	Lillian Blackwell	Leon and Emma Nickens	Margaret Ann Thomas	Naomi, Benita, Yolanda Grayson	Nimrod Dade	David and Yvette Holland	Joyce Hudson	Nam Giang	Herbert and Christine Moore	Pete Martin	Rosa Thomas	Pat Lightfoot	Nathan and Michelle Grayson	Totals	
Address	14802 Lee Hwy	7423 Carver Rd	7318 Old Carolina Rd	7205 Old Carolina Rd	7006 Old Carolina Rd	7428 Carver Rd	7350 Carver Rd	7748 Lucas Ct	7202 Old Carolina Rd	7427 and 7431 Carver Rd	7348 Carver Rd	7014 Old Carolina Rd	7320 Carver Rd	7317 Old Carolina Rd	7432 Carver Rd		
1. Do you occupy property?																	
yes	1	1	1	1	1		1	1			2	1	1	1	1	1	14
no						1			1								2
2. Primary goal for property																	
a. Keep in family	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	13
b. Develop										2							2
c. Sell					1												1
d. Undecided								1									1
3. Improvements																	
a. Improve Carver Rd	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
b. Widen Carver	1	1									1				1		4
c. Widen Old Carolina	1	1		1							1				1		5
d. Neighborhood Sign	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1		1				1	1	11
4. Expand study area?																	
yes	1	1		1	1	1	1		1			1	1				9
no						2		1		2	1					1	7
5. Should Carver be recognized as historic?																	
yes	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
no																	

Number of Responses **16**

Summary: Of the 16 owners that responded, 14 occupy their property, 13 want to keep it in family, 15 want Carver Rd improved, 11 want a sign at the entrance, 9 want study area widened, all owners want historic designation

Notes: Survey conducted by the **Alliance to Save Carver Road**. Each property allowed one vote, and only Alliance members with properties on Carver and Old Carolina Roads were surveyed

From:
Sent: Thursday, September 13, 2018 1:00 PM
To: Planning <planning@pwcgov.org>
Subject: Planning Comment Form

Comment Form

Case Name, Number, or Subject: **Oral History of the Settlement meeting**

Comments: **I think a band stand or pavilion like the one in Old Town Manassas, perhaps directed by representatives of Home Owner Associations will help develop a sense of community in Gainesville. A well developed community spirit would be a fitting commemoration of the Settlement and its early residents.**

The dance hall is mentioned by most descendants. In its heyday, it provided a gathering place as would a substantial, well run band stand or pavilion. If directed by members of the community, it might be a vehicle to bring the whole community together. It could also have a museum component providing a place to tell the story of the Settlement as well as office space for running the band stand or pavilion.

From:

Sent: Thursday, September 13, 2018 12:50 PM

To: Planning <planning@pwcgov.org>

Subject: Planning Comment Form

Comment Form

Case Name, Number, or Subject: **Oral History of the Settlement meeting**

Comments: **I do not think that the families involved will think that planning their land in a manner which causes it to be worth less than property in the surrounding area will be considered a fitting celebration to their ancestors. The early black settlers who acquired land in the area came from a plantation oriented background. To them land ownership symbolized that they were an important part of the society. Land ownership was associated with a significant position in society and with wealth.**

It enabled them to provide well for their families even though they often had to supplement it with outside jobs. They were industrious, responsible, community oriented citizens. As newly enfranchised citizens, their role as citizens was important and community building was important. That may be why the Settlement persisted and is so fondly remembered.

Sent: Thursday, September 13, 2018 12:38 PM

To: Planning <planning@pwcgov.org>

Subject: Planning Comment Form

Comment Form

Case Name, Number, or Subject: **The Settlement Oral History Meeting**

Comments: **This article of a dozen years ago has quotes from residents who have passed away and historians who have studied the subject.**

Cashing Out Their History

Descendants of Slave Settlers Sell Prince William Enclave

By Nikita Stewart

Washington Post Staff Writer

Sunday, May 15, 2005

An acre of land in Gainesville wasn't worth much in 1865.

It was worth so little, in fact, that white landowners were willing to rent it to freed slaves who had traveled there in search of land. In a flurry of sales during the 1880s, many of the former slaves bought property for \$10 an acre or even less.

They called the land, which lies roughly along Routes 29 and 15, the Settlement. It became one of Northern Virginia's most significant, and most stable, black communities.

The original settlers believed land was power. They held on to it tightly, parting with bits only

when they were desperate for cash. They educated their children on the value of a dollar and the greater value of land.

But time and circumstance have altered those lessons.

Pursued by developers offering as much as \$300,000 an acre, dozens of families -- many of them descendants of those original pioneers -- are opting to sell their property, and a part of Prince William County's African American history is being transformed into hundreds of luxury houses.

For the sellers, there are regrets, but there is also a conviction that they are being true to their ancestors' original purpose: to provide economic security for their families.

The founders "probably wouldn't be very happy that the land was being sold and great big houses were going on it," said Maxine Thomas, 74, a descendant of an original resident whose family has 15 acres under contract with a \$4.5 million price tag.

"What would I tell them? Well, I would just tell them that we have to move on," she said. "We can't hold on to it forever."

Old Homes for New

The land deals that have conveyed more than 160 of the 383 acres of the original Settlement mark the community's death, but residents said its history had already faded. The Shady Inn dance hall, a hot spot that drew people from miles away, is now a small, quiet church. The general store is gone. Many descendants have moved away. They turned the old homes into summer getaways, then stopped visiting altogether.

Still, it wasn't easy to persuade some of the landowners to let go, even for big bucks, said Carmen Amaya, a real estate agent who pulled together a pending deal for Equity Homes to buy 30 acres from seven families. Fifty to 70 houses will be squeezed onto the land, she said. Another development already underway will include 233 houses.

Amaya said she had to do a lot of talking and, in some cases, begging.

"They've had their land since the 40-acres-and-a-mule era," she said, referring to Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's order that gave each free black family on the Georgia coast 40 acres of abandoned plantation land and an Army mule.

To some residents, selling their land for millions pays true homage to their ancestors.

"They were aggressive people. You come from slavery, and what do you have? Nothing," said Loretta Martin Watson, 78. "I can sell my land. . . . They allowed me that privilege."

In 1865, when those original settlers arrived in Gainesville, it was a mere speck on the map, miles from the hustle and bustle of Washington. The land, owned by defeated and now poor Confederate planters and yeoman farmers, was thin-soiled and scrubby.

"The soil wasn't any good. In many cases, these pieces of land were woods," said historian Eugene Scheel.

Yet about 15 families who had little more than the scars of slavery and the new taste of long-sought liberty were able to coax enough wheat and corn out of the red clay to build a solid community.

Soon the Settlement boasted a church, a country store, two midwives, a bordello and a reputation as a place where moonshine and deep religio coexisted harmoniously. In the community's heyday, Duke Ellington and the International Sweethearts of Rhythm played at the music hall.

There were other black enclaves in Prince William County, but few thrived as the Settlement did.

While racism and Jim Crow laws blocked many African Americans from owning property elsewhere in the country, the Settlement expanded to include holdings bought by the core families' cousins and friends. Relatively isolated, they bartered among themselves without interference from whites or local government -- an unusual freedom that likely contributed to the enclave's longevity, experts said.

Land was important in the South's agricultural economy, and it had special significance to former slaves.

"Land was associated with the slaveholder, and the slaveholder was associated with wealth, and so blacks bought land," said Lucious Edwards, a Virginia State University historian.

In the three decades after slavery, blacks accumulated land more rapidly than whites, said

Vanderbilt University economist Robert A. Margo. By 1900, about 22 percent of black male heads of household owned their homes.

But some all-black communities became targets of white backlash, and government policies deprived many black landowners of their property, Edwards said. One of the most common ways was to delay notice of overdue taxes and then confiscate the land, he said.

The Settlement survived. Even in 2000, when whites had begun to move into the Gainesville area, the Settlement was still 66 percent black, whereas the county was 19 percent black.

Walking Into Freedom

In the den of Loretta Martin Watson's home in the Settlement, a small spotlight hangs over a painting of a white planter standing on a porch, holding a document. Slaves are gathered around him.

"You know what this is? This is the Emancipation Proclamation," she said. "He's reading the paper, and they're kneeling down crying."

Watson's ancestor Eliza Brooks learned of her freedom as she and other slaves gathered around a woodpile on a Hopewell, Va., plantation, or so the family history goes.

"When they called them to the woodpile, they said, 'You're free to go.' Well, free to go where?" she said. "Eliza Brooks, she's the person who was the slave; the small children, she gathered them up and started heading north."

From Hopewell, Brooks found her way to the Settlement, and the family sank its roots there. One of Watson's great-uncles was the blacksmith. A great-aunt owned the country store.

Even though they are selling the land today, the feelings Watson and her brother Marvin Martin, 74, have for it run deep.

Martin, a retired printer who lives in the Settlement full time, said he's holding on to four acres.

"I don't plan to sell, but money talks," he said, saying that he's going to wait for a better price.

Watson, a District resident for 41 years, sold three acres to developer DR Horton in 2003 but still owns a log cabin she built on her aunt Georgia Barnes's property in 1983 as a weekend getaway.

Aunt Georgia, the family historian, liked to survey the thick woods.

"When I was little girl . . . she would say, 'That's a good house spot,' " Watson said of the place where she built the cabin. "I had promised her that I was going to build this house. She could have sold this land and lived a better life."

But she didn't. Cherishing the land was an attitude shared by Aunt Georgia's generation.

The Family Tree

Alfred Powell, 75, recalled how passersby admired a walnut tree that still sits in the yard of the family's circa 1901 home up a gravel road off Lee Highway. Those passersby made offers, but Alfred H. Strother, Powell's grandfather, wouldn't budge. "Granddaddy refused to sell the walnut tree," he said.

"That walnut tree has to be 400 or 500 years old," said Clayton Powell, 59. "That distinguished that property."

The fact that their grandfather wouldn't so much as sell a tree causes the family, which is now selling the land, some anguish. Six of seven remaining Powell siblings gathered recently at the

Arlington home of sister Maxine Thomas to talk about the pending \$4.5 million sale of 15 acres.

They were jovial, reflective and guilt-ridden.

The family can trace its ancestry to the Rev. Moses B. Strother, a founder of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, who they believe adopted their grandfather, and to James Montgomery Peters, a runaway slave who fought with the Union Army. They have memories from the Settlement of picking blackberries and strawberries, getting eggs from hens, raising hogs and milking cows.

In Thomas's sunroom, paintings of scenes from the Underground Railroad adorn the walls. They also keep photographs, newspaper clippings and deeds, the latter holding more sentiment these days.

Land sales and property values in the Settlement rose after a brief yet bitter fight in 2001 between the landowners and an environmental group that wanted to preserve the land as an African American heritage park. The group's plan would have allowed the land to remain with the

families for one more generation, after which they would have been required to sell it to the county for the park. The land never would have realized its true market value, residents said. "They were almost disenfranchised," Supervisor W.S. Covington III (R-Brentsville), who represents the area, said of the Settlement's residents. "I'm glad they're getting something for their land."

Patricia Lightfoot, 69, considered an outsider because she moved from Fauquier County to the Settlement in 1966, rounded up her neighbors to fight the proposed park. She has made the Settlement and its history a personal crusade. "The major reason [to fight the plan] was that it would prevent us from selling our land," she said.

Although she plans to keep her hilltop ranch house, she also plans to sell some property to a developer.

But as residents pack and homes are torn down and new ones go up, Wille ta Wilson Grayson, 77, said she gets an odd feeling.

"It's strange," she said as she sat in a dining room of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. "It's something to look around and remember all the black people. Now, you look up and see white people."

The church sits on Lee Highway. Most parishioners drive from out of town, and even those who live close by cannot take the scenic shortcuts through woods to the church. Those dirt paths, worn by the feet of their ancestors, have been replaced by houses and blocked by bulldozers plowing land to build more houses.

Unlike its longtime parishioners, the church isn't going anywhere.

"We got all these bodies back here," said deacon Nimrod Dade, 64.

The cemetery is a history lesson. Whole families are buried side by side like royalty. Some graves have no tombstones, no names. They are marked only by large rocks that, because of their size and distinctive shapes, somehow seem appropriate tributes to now-nameless freed slaves. The church and its cemetery will remain as a reminder of what once was. And there's one more remnant: The sign for the subdivision under construction by DR Horton reads "Hopewell's Landing."

"I insisted," Loretta Watson said.

The Settlement that never had a real name now has one as a tribute to Eliza Brooks's roots, she said.

The Powells hope to follow suit by lending their ancestors' name to the Equity Homes luxury development, even though they worry that the walnut tree will be knocked down when their 100-year-old home is razed.

"Maybe we'll call ours Strother's Glen," Thomas said.

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Sent: Thursday, September 13, 2018 12:21 PM

To: Planning <planning@pwcgov.org>

Subject: Planning Comment Form

Comment Form

Case Name, Number, or Subject: **The Settlement Oral History Meeting**

Comments: ----- **Forwarded Message** -----

Sent: Thursday, August 23, 2018 3:59 PM

Subject: Article about black settlement in Gainesville area, remarkedly vibrant and stable

I think that this attached article may supplement the work the intern has been doing with regard to an oral history with some of the Carver Rd residents. This article was extensively researched a dozen years ago or so when a number of the now deceased elderly residents were still alive. It mentions the vibrant and long lasting community formed by African Americans who were able to rent and purchase land here after the Civil War. I am not sure about the real estate numbers, but the history agrees with what I have been told by descendants and was reinforced by research with historians. I think Patricia Lightfoot who is knowledgeable about some of this still lives in the area and can be phoned.

Their land ownership was very important to the early African American residents with many coming from a plantation oriented society. Land ownership was a symbol of social status and enabled them to provide for their families. My understanding was that "providing for the family" was very important to them. Perhaps associated with that they were religious and education minded -- maybe so that their children would be well equipped to deal with the world and also provide for their families in turn.

They formed an unusually stable community. And it was a community with interaction. People did more than raise food for the family and some to sell. They had groceries, general stores, a well known dance hall which persisted to modern times. They got together and interacted, socialized and worked on community building issues. I have heard of individuals who farmed but also did a bit of blacksmithing or mechanical work. In later years many also held government jobs.

To this day, the descendants I have met are articulate, successful people, probably better educated than the average person. But a theme is that the land enabled them to provide. They were industrious, community minded citizens.

I once read an article (which I can no longer find) describing how the community came together and established a school for their children when the County chose not to provide one, a not unusual County position in those times. The Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church on Lee Hwy. between Carver Rd and Old Carolina was established by this responsible black community and persists to this day (although it has been burned again and they meet elsewhere until they can rebuild). But old timers are still buried in their cemetery regardless of where they and their families have moved. It was a cohesive, civic minded community.

An important later resident was Georgia Barnes who lived near Lee Hwy and Old Carolina. I think that she was the aunt of Loretta Watson who built the modern log house on Lee Hwy. a little east of Old Carolina, and of her brother Marvin Martin who built a smaller log structure a little east of Loretta's house. They have passed on and their properties have been sold by descendants. But they referred to Georgia Barnes with respect as do a number of other property owners who descend from earlier settlers. I think that she must have been a community matriarch. I wonder if Georgia Barnes was related to the Barnes House (County commemorated) people.

The land was crisscrossed with paths so that people could get together, visit each other. But a theme is that the land will enable them to provide for their families, an energetic business, education and religious minded community, accomplishment oriented.

I think that their story should be told. Perhaps a museum exhibit in a mixed use center, a modern community to replace the older community, would be appropriate. Something people could visit with exhibits to tell the story. I do not think that a very low density residential development is an appropriate testament to the memory of that vibrant community. I think the Carver Rd residents can be protected without the broader community divorced from modern considerations. As they made plain during the I-66/ Rt 29 re-planning effort, taking away their value in their land is not an attractive option to them or one which honors the spirit of their ancestors.

I have saved a few other articles but this is the most comprehensive. It is 4 and a half short pages which I had difficulty saving as one article - not long and well worth reading.

-- Cress Malkerson