

Buckland at crossroads of development, history

By MATT HOURIHAN

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Members of the recently formed Buckland Preservation Society are looking for help in protecting what many historians say is a hidden jewel.

But one potential solution to highway traffic through Buckland, alternately called a Buckland Bypass, Western Bypass and Vint Hill Connector, could raise the ire of some residents in western Prince William and eastern Fauquier in the future.

Buckland, on the Prince William and Fauquier county line, was an incorporated town that experienced its heyday in the late 18th- and early 19th-century.

Many of Buckland's houses and foundations are 200 years old, and most of the original lots still exist. The Civil War battle known as the "Buckland Races" also took place there in October 1863.

Much of the land is now owned privately, and Buckland residents agree that selling the land for development isn't an option.

"This is not about money. This may be humble, but it's our heritage, our beginning. This is Virginia," said David Blake, president of the Buckland Preservation Society and owner of Buckland Farms, speaking at the Tuesday meeting of the county's historical commission.

Blake has spent the last two years researching the area's history and meeting with historians, archeologists and government officials. One meeting included a daylong intensive tour with representatives from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and other experts. Many sang Buckland's praises as a Piedmont town.

"It's an old town with so much of its layout still intact. And I don't think many people know today the value of that historic site," said Childs Burden, a member of the Civil War Preservation Trust and past president of the Mosby

Heritage Area Association.

But a major concern for the Buckland Preservation Society is the area's encroaching development, including traffic from U.S. 29, which was built in 1823. Traffic now rumbles through the middle of Buckland's rural remains, some of which are marked and visible from the highway.

The Buckland society asked the historical commission to endorse preservation efforts and traffic solutions Tuesday night.

"The only assault on this village is 29. There's no possibility of preserving this site unless we do something about this road," Blake said.

Suggested solutions included construction of a road to connect U.S. 29 in Fauquier with Interstate 66 somewhere west of Haymarket to divert traffic.

Buckland residents also oppose plans for two major interchanges at Vint Hill Road and U.S. 15, which they said would hurt preservation efforts. Blake said a bypass could cost \$250 million less than interchanges.

The suggestion of a Buckland Bypass, however, drew concerns that building a new road could cause people to lose their homes and lead to more sprawl, said residents in attendance.

"All of us support Buckland as well as New Baltimore, but all of us are in opposition to a bypass," said Fauquier resident David Mailler, who said he spoke on behalf of 50 families from the area between New Baltimore and Broad Run.

Mailler also pointed out that Fauquier's supervisors had withdrawn their support for a Buckland Bypass.

"This road will bisect the Rural Crescent. You can't sacrifice someone's community for someone else's," said Elena Schlossberg, a Prince William resident and president of the Advocates for the Rural Crescent. "We support the preservation efforts, but building a road isn't the way to do that."

Kim Hosen, executive director

of the Prince William Conservation Alliance, suggested conservation easements as an alternative to construction. An easement is a legal agreement that limits development on a piece of land.

"The threat is the road. We'll grant conservation easements if we have a traffic solution that doesn't go down the middle," responded Buckland resident Brian Mannix afterwards.

There are neither plans nor money to build such a road, but the idea itself isn't new.

Former Gainesville Supervisor Edgar S. Wilbourn supported a connector. During public workshops on the Battlefield Bypass last spring, Reps. Frank Wolf, R-10th, and Thomas M. Davis III, R-11th, and Prince William Board of Supervisors Chairman Sean T. Connaughton, R-at large, all wrote letters requesting study of a western bypass possibility.

Brentsville Supervisor W.S. "Wally" Covington III also has expressed his support.

"I support the concept of the bypass, and I think it's the only solution to that area south of Haymarket," he said in May. "We've got to allow another access to I-66, and Fauquier is building very heavily on that border." He said he'd like to see limited access to any such road to prevent further development.

Buckland resident Linda Wright said she met with attorneys representing KSI, builder of South Market, in December 2002 to discuss the possibility of bringing a bypass near the South Market site. She said Buckland residents would try to work with their Fauquier neighbors to find a solution.

Historical Commission Chairman Ronald Smith said he would ask the county attorney's office if the commission can take a stance on a road project. The Buckland resolution will likely return to the commission next month.

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