

Final Drive To Preserve Battlefield

*Few Hurdles Remain
After Senate Vote*

By John F. Harris
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Eight months after beginning an uphill struggle to block a planned shopping mall at Manassas battlefield, historic preservationists celebrated their latest triumph yesterday, bringing them to the brink of a final and unqualified victory.

The Senate gave preservationists their most important boost yet late Friday night, passing on a 50-to-25 vote an amendment that would use a "legislative taking" to transfer the disputed William Center property to the federal government.

Furthermore, by attaching the Manassas legislation to an unrelated bill concerning changes to the tax code—that bill is expected to easily pass the Senate on Tuesday—proponents said they went a long way toward insulating the measure from a threatened presidential veto.

"I'm not counting my chickens before they're hatched, but we've certainly laid some eggs," said an exultant Annie Snyder, leader of the coalition of Civil War history buffs and preservationists that rallied opposition to William Center, planned where Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee had headquarters during the Second Battle of Manassas in 1862.

The debate has been brewing since last winter, after Northern Virginia's Hazel/Peterson Cos. announced its plans for a shopping mall the size of Fair Oaks as the centerpiece for its 542-acre commercial and residential complex. Prince William County officials, hungering for tax revenue the project would produce, have argued that the tract is of minimal historic value.

Although prospects for passing a legislative taking at Manassas have never been stronger, at least two important steps remain.

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The first results from the fact that the House of Representatives in August passed a legislative taking of William Center as a free-standing bill, not as an amendment.

Although sentiment for adding William Center to the adjacent Manassas National Battlefield Park has been running high, Capitol Hill staff members said key House Democrats may object in a conference committee on the tax proposal that the Manassas provision is not relevant to that bill and should therefore be stripped.

If there are no objections in the House and that first hurdle is cleared, a tax bill with a Manassas amendment is expected to go to President Reagan for signing.

Although Interior Secretary Donald P. Hodel has said he would recommend a veto, Capitol Hill supporters of the William Center taking said they consider it unlikely Reagan would veto the entire tax package merely because of his objections to the Manassas measure.

A White House spokesman declined to comment yesterday.

Friday's 11 p.m. vote came after a crucial showdown between two proposals for Manassas. Sens. Dale L. Bumpers (D-Ark.) and John W. Warner (R-Va.) led the

Senate in a session much like a college seminar, pointing to large maps and describing Civil War troop movements, as they debated the historic significance of the William Center tract.

Bumpers supported the House-passed measure, which would implement the seldom-used legislative taking procedure to immediately transfer ownership of the property to the federal government, with compensation for the Hazel/Peterson to be decided later in court. Estimates on the cost of the measure, which includes \$30 million for road improvements at Manassas, range from about \$50 million to \$100 million.

Warner said he balked at such an expense, and argued unsuccessfully that the government should place a prohibition on a shopping mall at William Center, but take only 80 acres of the tract.

Warner's proposal was significantly diluted from the one eventually approved, but preservationists nonetheless threw him a bouquet. Without Warner's aggressive lobbying, they said, other conservatives opposed to the Manassas legislation might have invoked various parliamentary schemes to prevent the measure from coming to a vote at all.

"We think Warner played an instrumental role in this ... by allowing an up-or-down vote," said Tersh Boasberg, attorney for the Save the Battlefield Coalition.