

# Reagan Signs William Taking

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The federal tax bill, including the William Center seizure, was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan Thursday evening, closing a nine-month bitter wrangle that has sharply divided Prince William County.

Although the signature occurred Thursday evening, it was not announced by the White House until 12:15 p.m. Friday, according to a spokesman.

The 582-acre tract was to be the site of a large mixed development, with a 1.2 million square foot retail shopping mall as its centerpiece.

The legislation to purchase the land and add it to the Manassas National Battlefield Park was introduced earlier this year in the House of Representatives as a means of preventing construction of the mall on land next to the park.

Reagan had earlier indicated he would oppose any "free-standing bill" calling for a William Center seizure, said Barbara Clay, spokeswoman for the Office of Management and Budget.

Reagan "decided that the good of the tax bill outweighed the bad of the Manassas amendment," said Clay. "It's one of many such judgments made during the course of any Congress." The taking is one of a long string of amendments to the tax bill that do not pertain to taxes.

Small opponents have held it would harm the park with visual intrusion and traffic. County officials and mall supporters have held the mixed development and its mall would be an economic boon to the county.

True to the pattern set over the length of the controversy, reaction to Reagan's signature was sharply divided.

"I'm extremely grateful to the Congress and to the president," said Anne Snyder, chairman of the Catholic-based anti-mall Save the Battlefield Coalition.

"It's wonderful timing on Veterans Day," Snyder said. "Veterans all over the country have supported us."

She also was grateful to the "hundreds of thousands of Americans who have supported" the cause by contacting their congressmen and senators, she said.

On the other hand, Board of County Supervisors Chairman Kathleen Seefeldt said the action was "no surprise. We expected it

would be signed. It was a complex bill. It would have been difficult to peel off" the taking amendment. "It was impossible. We're very disappointed."

"I'm overjoyed," said Betty Rankin, president of coalition Words Can't Express how happy I feel.

The action "sends a message" on preservation of historical places, Rankin said. The American people "will not sit down and let people destroy historic resources."

"The tax bill benefits all Americans and the Manassas Battlefield taking benefits all Americans," Rankin said. "It preserves our heritage."

"I guess I knew it was coming," said Coles Supervisor Terry Speltz. "It's been rumored for

several days that he was going to sign the tax bill. The federal government overstepped its boundaries in getting involved in a local zoning matter."

Nebraska Supervisor John Jenkins also had expected the signature, and that the seizure was "the will of the people."

Jenkins has held that plans for the mall should have been subject to the standard land-use review process. The developers, after receiving their rezoning in 1986, did not announce plans for the mall until January 1988. The zoning category they used, planned mixed development, permitted retail uses.

In the face of strong demands for a hearing on the mall plans, the county government held that any further hearings would be illegal as



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and the tax burden now being shifted to Prince William County citizens."

Hazel Peterson said she claimed that when the entire mixed development was completed, it would generate \$23 million in net annual revenue to the county.

Already, 20 percent of Prince William's land is owned by the federal government, King said, and the county receives 75 cents per acre in revenue for that land.

It is "unfair with the impact in the county with all the federal employees in the area, I would hope county residents properly identify the cause and not blame the supervisors for entrenching a developer and placing an undue burden on their purses."

"I have not heard of anything so irresponsible costing as many millions of dollars that no one receives any benefit from whatsoever," King said.

The mall would have been developed by the Hazel-Peterson Cos., a prominent Northern Virginia developer, and the Edward J. DeBarrio Corp. of Ohio, a prominent nationwide shopping mall developer.

Friday afternoon, Hazel-Peterson spokesman Robert Kelly said the zoning already had been granted.

Jenkins and other officials also had suggested that 150 of the acres be dedicated for a Prince William campus of George Mason University. This saw no action.

He also held that county officials were spending too much time pushing the county's cause in a fight that was "not winnable," he said.

Dummetts Supervisor Edwin King also said he was not surprised and that he was disappointed. "With the deficit the way it is, I had hoped Congress would deal more responsibly with the large sum of money See Reagan Signs on A-12.

"I've now they own the property."

The firm has held that it is of slight historical value and other nearby tracts not sought for inclusion in the park are more historically significant.

While the federal government assumed ownership of the property immediately upon the signature, it will pay "fair market value" for it at a later date. The process of agreeing on the purchase price is almost certain to end up in court. Estimates have ranged as high as \$300 million.

Construction work on the property effectively ended after the U.S. Senate added the purchase to its version of the tax bill Oct. 7, Kelly said.

Work since then has included "clean-up items, such as backfilling holes."

Recent tree cutting on the property was performed by the Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative on their easements, said Kelly.

Supporters of the anti-mall fight will stage a "Battlefield Convergence" Nov. 19 at 11 a.m. on Stuart's Hill, a hill on the property that was the site of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's headquarters during the 1862 Battle of Second Manassas.

The event will celebrate Reagan's signing of the legislation containing the seizure, said Nick Clark, head of the Mary land unit of the coalition.

Jackson Walter, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Paul Pritchard, president of the National Parks and Conservation Association; Reps. Robert Mrazek, D-N.Y., Michael Andrews, D-Texas, and Frank Wolf, R-10th, along with U.S. Sen. Dale Bumpers, D-Ark., will speak at the convergence, said Clark. The members of Congress were key in the efforts to get the legislation passed.

Two trees will be planted during the convergence, said Clark. One will commemorate those who fought and died there during the two Civil War battles; the other will salute the "hundreds of thousands of Americans who fought the Third Battle of Manassas," he said.

"Now that we have been successful in the Third Battle of Manassas," said Clark, "we'd like to pass the torch onto other historic sites throughout America threatened by development pressures."

The support would take the form of advice in mounting such campaigns, he said.