

PWC-MANASSAS NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK

Battlefield Battles VDOT Road Proposal

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Staff Writer

A proposal to add turning lanes to the U.S. 29-211 and Va. 234 intersection has run into opposition from some county residents and the superintendent of the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

Superintendent Rolland Swain, claims the Virginia Department of Transportation proposal, for which a developer has promised to pay, would be a detriment to the aesthetic quality of the park. Alternative solutions "must be explored" before any improvements are made to the intersection, once cited as the most dangerous in Prince William County, he said in an interview on Monday. The proposal has garnered the support of Gainesville Prince William Board of County Supervisor Tony Guiffre.

The shoulders of the intersection have undergone severe damage from cars and trucks using them as turning lanes, according to local transportation officials. The intersection is also characterized by a large hillcrest on Va. 234 which ends abruptly at the light. Numerous accidents have occurred at the intersection.

At issue now is the right-of-way owned by the park. The U.S. Department of the Interior, which governs the operations of the battlefield, must agree to making the rights-of-way available to the state before actual construction can begin. VDOT officials are hoping construction can begin as soon as possible.

Sharon Fleetwood, a Gainesville District community activist and a former aide to Guiffre, said a number of people, however, have recently questioned spending county taxpayers' money when the Hazel/Peterson development firm made a financial commitment to pay all costs of adding the lane at the intersection in November.

On Nov. 18, the board of supervisors approved the rezoning of 543 acres adjacent to the park for the planned mixed-use development known as the Williams Center.

According to Guiffre, the \$180,000 which would be spent on improvements to the intersection would be reimbursed to the county after construction of the development begins.

"That's the beauty of this thing," said Guiffre. "The county will pay 50¢ and the state will pay 50¢ (of every \$1), but when the project comes on line, the county will get back the entire \$1. The county can then put that money into another road."

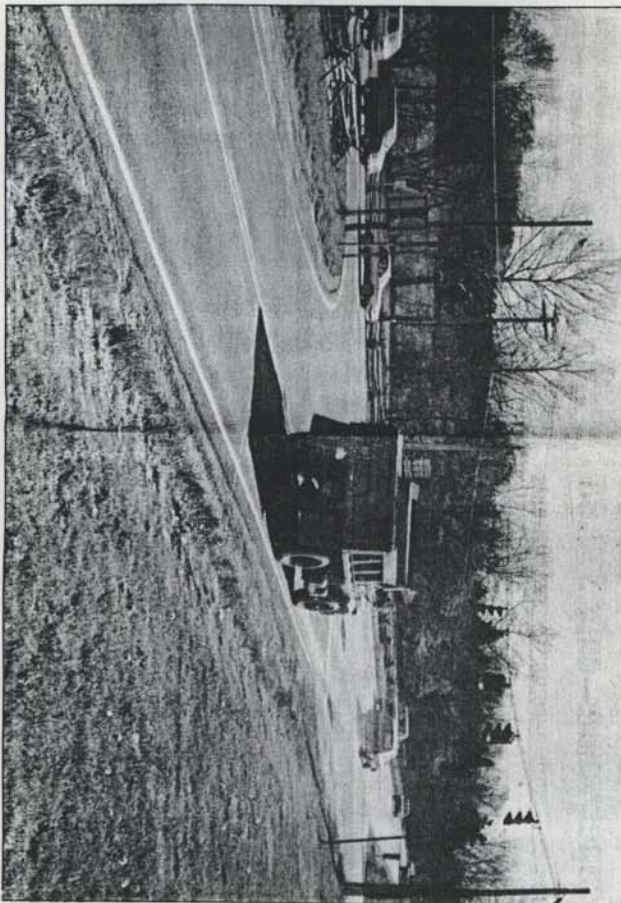
But according to Swain, the issue revolves around the

improvements proposed by VDOT. Widening the road there, he argues, will detract from the park sights frequented by tourists, including the Stone House, located at the road juncture.

"Our concern is that the proposal would significantly increase the amount of asphalt at the intersection and change the overall scene dramatically," he said. "One

question has been why change the intersection, and the answer has been safety, but there are other alternatives."

While insisting he "is not a traffic engineer," Swain said those alternatives could include changing the timing of the signal lights to allow only one direction of traffic through at one time. Another possibility, he said,



Douglas Tesser—The Journal Messenger

Battle Line

A plan to add turning lanes at the intersection of Va. 29-211 and Va. 234 near Stone House (shown above) has drawn fire from Manassas Battlefield Park Superintendent Rolland Swain. Swain is opposed to the new lanes, saying the additional pavement would be an aesthetic detriment to the park.

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

VIRGINIANA FILE REFERENCE

would be to install curbing on the road sides, thereby preventing vehicles from using the shoulders as turning lanes.

The current VDOT proposal, said Swain, is under review by the Department of the Interior. Once that review is completed, he said, he will forward the information to Dave Ogile, VDOT resident engineer.

Guiffre, however, said the primary issue is safety above and beyond what he believes would be a minimal impact on the park.

"His (Swain's) concern should be the safety of the drivers, and the same for the tourists who go through the intersection," he said. "I don't want to fight with the United States Department of the Interior, and I will do what I can to talk them into it. But I'm not going to sit back and let someone tell me this is going to ruin the aesthetics of the park."

"I don't want it on my conscience with this thing approved and funded to have someone get killed at that intersection," he added.

Guiffre said the proposal includes the possibility of using brown concrete to blend in with the surroundings better.

The Gainesville supervisor, noting a memo addressed to him from Swain dated Oct. 31, 1984, said the issue is not a new one, and is something which needs action now.

In an interview Monday evening, however, Fleetwood said she still has major disagreements with the proposal.

"Whether the money comes back or not, the county is still paying now," she said. "One of the big things we fought for (during the Hazel/Peterson debate) was to keep the proffer money in the vicinity of the impact of the development, not on other road projects."

According to Fleetwood, the widening of the intersection is just another step in a planned process conceived by the board of supervisors to widen all of Va. 234.

People moved to the area surrounding the battlefield because they were drawn to the rural atmosphere found there, she said, and widening Va. 234 would destroy that. The former aide to Guiffre said she doubts her former boss's stated rationale for the improvements.

"I don't see that through all the years Tony (Guiffre) has been a friend of the battlefield," she said. "I don't think Tony or the board of supervisors have the best interests of the park at heart."

"The bottom line is they (supervisors) are saying it's for safety, but what they're really after is increased capacity to be able to develop the area faster."