

Manassas, Va.

REFERENCE

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# Battlefield Committee Bashes Supervisors

By EUGENE COX JR.

Members of a National Park Service committee attacked any rezoning development of roads or land around Manassas National Battlefield Park during a meeting in Washington, D.C. Wednesday afternoon.

A dozen members of the Civil War Roundtable of the service's National Capital Region expressed their displeasure with the Prince William County Board of Supervisors' attitude of wanting to develop land around the park site.

Holand Swain, superintendent of the park, spoke to the committee about proposed land just past developments around the park and the difficulties he has in "winning" them off.

Swain said the board's favoring of the Virginia Department of

Transportation's proposal for widening U.S. 29-211 and Va. 234 and other rezoning projects would have "a visual impact" and take away from the historical scene of the park.

Some of the rezoning includes the 543-acre Williams Center by the Hazel/Peterson development firm, property opposite the current battlefield on Va. 234, and the 1,000-foot buffer easement north of Bull Run in Fairfax County.

"The general management plan of the park is to retain the historic character," Swain said. "Even though there have been a few changes, it is still a rural crossroad."

Members of the committee agreed with Swain.

"They (the board) are sure as hell making it worse," said one committee member, who asked not to be identified.

A second committee member, who also wished to remain anonymous,

stated that firms and businesses want to develop land where most of the Second Battle of Manassas occurred.

"The local government should want to protect," he said.

"Prince William County and Manassas are rapidly growing areas. Most people who live here are from out-of-state or outside of the region. They are not concerned. The developers only concern is making bucks."

"If Mr. (William) Mott (the director of the National Park Service) made a presentation today, it would make a difference," he said. "I think people don't know. We have this pro-development board — with just a lot of lip service — who say they care about the battlefield and don't. They're obviously not doing it."

"Or they are not interested in doing it," Swain added.

"You have to remember that the board is a strange beast," the first committee member said. "They could care less about tourist dollars because they can't have the tax base they could have (with development). They don't care. That's the bottom line."

But some committee members believe a compromise can be reached. Manassas Battlefield Park official John F. Byrne said, "It seems to me good planning would be symbolic. The park should work with the board of supervisors. There might be ways where everyone wins."

The second committee member said the park can acquire its land for where the second battle took place and that the board can still have its development.

"We can have both," he said. "Just tailor development to go around the (battle) site. Why build on the site and then spend taxpayers money for other

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## The Journal Messenger

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### Committee Bashes

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parks."

The second committee member added that an advocacy group is needed to get out there and fight for the park service and "attack this crazy zoning. If the public sector doesn't do it, then we could form one privately amongst ourselves."

Swain said, "What kind of activist role can a director take? Is it realistic officially? I don't know."

He added that the environmental awareness or historical research awareness of the park is something the average person does not know. Swain said the board will not represent the park's interest and favor developers.

On widening Va. 29, Swain said, "The state's answer would be if you want a road funded, the other answer would be to put inside boundaries."

As far as we know, the state (VDOT) has not explored any alternatives (to funding the road) and they are not interested in the park's interests."

Some of these solutions include changing the timing of the signal lights to allow only one direction of traffic through at a time or installing curbing on the road sides to prevent vehicles from using the shoulders as turning lanes, Swain said.

Land the park service offers Manassas and Prince William County is complimentary to the park system, he added. "We offer them something they could not offer themselves."

Ed Bears, chief historian for the park service, said the zoning problems Swain discussed in his presentation could hold true for other parks.

"There are development threats to other parks (Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia and Antietam National Battlefield in Maryland), but they are not as acute (as the Manassas Battlefield Park) yet," Bears said. "Maybe in 10 or 20 years (they will be)."

The first committee member added, "What is needed is national attention to this problem. We need to save what we can, when we can. It was just a matter of time (before zoning taken over)."