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# County Nears Deal to Save Rippon Lodge

## Supervisors, Builder Seek Way to Keep Views

By ERIC M. WEISS  
Washington Post Staff Writer

An agreement is in the works that would protect views from historic Rippon Lodge while allowing developers to move ahead with residential construction in the area.

The deal between Prince William County and national developer D.R. Horton Inc. would settle a lawsuit filed by Horton and allow the company to carry out its plans, which have already been approved. Acting County Attorney Joseph L. Howard Jr. said they hope to wrap up the details of an agreement in time for the Board of County Supervisors to approve it at its Oct. 12 meeting.

"We're pleased with the progress at this point," Howard said. "What we're looking at is trying to do the preservation we want and finalize plans that would allow the development they want."

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### 9 Working Overtime

Jay Graham hits the winning field goal as Osbourn defeats Potomac in overtime, 13-10.

HISTORIC SITE FILE:  
RIPPON LODGE  
PRINCE WILLIAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM  
RELC/Bull Run Reg Lib Manassas, VA

# County, Horton Working On Rippon Lodge Deal

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The county asked Horton to remove 42 of 840 townhouses planned for land close to Rippon Lodge, a home built in 1745 that the county bought in 2000 for a museum. The Woodbridge development would also sit astride one of the last existing segments of the historic highway U.S. and French troops used to reach the decisive Revolutionary War Battle of Yorktown.

County officials had hoped to persuade Horton to follow the lead of Centex Homes, which signed a widely hailed agreement with the county two years ago that preserved the Bristoe Station Civil War battlefield, just south of Manassas.

Instead, Horton sued in April. The lawsuit alleges that by asking for changes to the site plan, such as not building on the historic highway and providing a buffer between the lodge and the houses, the county is delaying the project "and seeking to leverage the financial hardship associated with such delay into concessions by Horton."

County officials acknowledge that Horton is within its legal rights to build what it is proposing at the site. Rippon Lodge's private owners subdivided the land in 1970. In 1984, the county increased the density of allowed housing, in exchange for protecting Rippon Lodge's stunning views of the Potomac from the front of the house. County officials acknowledge that Prince William had approved the project, raising historical concerns for the first time in March.

Legal proceedings in the case have been postponed at the request of both parties pending negotiations, Howard said.

Horton officials acknowledged negotiations are underway but

provided few details.

"It's a work in progress," said Mike Jones, a Horton vice president. "We're trying to come to a reasonable accommodation between the parties. But until an agreement is done, you don't have an agreement. But everyone is hopeful and cooperating."

County officials say Rippon Lodge is the oldest house in the county. It sits atop a tall ridge that commands a view of Neabsco Creek and the Potomac River, the last 40 acres of what was once a 21,000-acre tobacco and cotton plantation.

The house, built by Richard Blackburn, was inherited by his son, Col. Thomas Blackburn, George Washington's aide-de-camp during the Revolutionary War. Later, Rippon was home to Adm. Richard Blackburn Black, who explored Antarctica with Adm. Richard E. Byrd and kept Antarctic artifacts in outbuildings on the property.

The county bought the property in 2000 for \$1.4 million from Black's daughter. The county is in the midst of an expensive restoration of the house, which includes replanting gardens behind the lodge. That is where future visitors might be able to catch more than a glimpse of the proposed townhouses.

County officials said the closest house would be only 400 feet from the back of the Rippon Lodge house. That would allow visitors to the 18th-century home to take in views of 21st-century rear patios, air conditioners, children's toys and barbecue grills.

The townhouses also would be built over a segment of King's Highway, which was the Interstate 95 of its day, linking all 13 original colonies. It is known as the Washington-Rochambeau route for its role in the run-up to the Battle of Yorktown.