



# Ed Brown

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## Put high-rise apartments next door to Rippon Lodge?

Of all the decisions that county officials are called upon to make, none have a greater impact upon the area than zoning decisions. Zoning decisions determine traffic patterns, school housing and construction, road construction, recreation needs and even the tax rate. They are not decisions to be made lightly. Above all, they should not be made on the basis of a belief that growth is either good or bad for the area.

Recently the planning commission approved a rezoning for Rippon Landing. That rezoning seems most inappropriate. It provides for the construction of high rise apartments. To my way of thinking this does not conform to the character of the area. Definitely, it will menace the beauty and setting of Rippon Lodge, which has been designated as a national historical site.

One of my major objections is that Blackburn Road cannot handle the additional traffic, and that an already hazardous situation will be further intensified. Not only that, there is a one-lane bridge on Blackburn Road to contend with. Those factors mean that emergency vehicles will take longer to reach their destination. Those are sufficient grounds for the board of supervisors to reject the recommendation of the planning commission.

Still another facet to be considered is the cost of building a new school and the cost of educating the students. It should be realized that apartment renters with children pay even less of their way than homeowners.

The impact upon the welfare department should be assessed because, in order to secure the most favorable financing, the developer may agree to subsidized housing. Such financing would add to county costs.

It appears to me that the staff study on environment leaves much to be desired. They wrote and I quote:

"However, because this proposal lacks specificity as to building pad and paving area locations, or locations of preserved areas, the proposed mitigation of environmental concerns remains conceptual in nature." That to me means in fewer words, we should see what we shall see. I, for one, want to know the whole picture before I agree to anything. That element is lacking.

Finally, it seems that the first priority should be given to the preservation of the importance of nearby Rippon Lodge. Printed below is a letter sent to Prince William County Board of Supervisors Chairman Kathleen Seefeldt, from Richard Blackburn Black, Rear Admiral USNR (Ret.), owner of "Rippon Lodge."

Dear Mrs. Seefeldt:

Mrs. Black and I are extremely distressed at the letter of re-zoning dated April 5.

Rippon Lodge and its retained 40 acres after selling approximately 516 acres in 1972 to Rippon Landing Associates, Inc., is an historic landmark as so designated by the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission in Richmond. It is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior. It is probably the oldest frame house in northern Virginia. George and Martha Washington often stopped and slept here as guests of Colonel Thomas Blackburn, the second son of Richard Blackburn, my fifth great grandfather, who came to Virginia from Rippon in Yorkshire, northern England, and named the house after his home town. He and his wife, his son and his wife, and several other descendents are buried

in the private cemetery just 200 yards from the house.

Ann Blackburn married Bushrod Washington, George's favorite nephew and the inheritor of Mount Vernon, here at Rippon Lodge, and a generation or two later Jane Charlotte Blackburn married John Augustine Washington, also an inheritor of Mount Vernon. Both of these gentlemen and their wives are buried in the Washington tomb, and after the last one, the tomb was sealed forever. Colonel Thomas Blackburn was severely wounded at the Battle of Germantown in Pennsylvania, and Dr. Craik, George's physician, removed a piece of British lead from his groin while he was held down by five slaves.

To say that the proposed development plan is a desecration of historic principles is putting it mildly. Mr. and Mrs. John A. Rollison III, who did attend the

meeting last evening, occupy a guest cottage on the property.

We are aghast at the prospect of 115 high-rise apartments just two or three hundred feet from our southern boundary, and who wouldn't be?

Richard Blackburn Black  
Rear Admiral USNR (Ret.)  
Woodbridge

It seems the first priority should be given to the preservation of Rippon Lodge in its natural setting. Admiral Black's letter, with its historical material alone could stand as enough reason for denying the Rippon Landing rezoning and should be given serious thought by our supervisors.

Ed Brown, a Woodbridge resident, has long been active in civic and political activities in Prince William.