

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 27, 2001
TO: The Board of Supervisors
FROM: John T. P. Horne, Development Manager
SUBJECT: Open Space Land Acquisition Update

At the January 26, 2000, Board of Supervisors Regular Meeting, the Board met in Closed Session with staff to review an update of our open space acquisition strategy. At today's Work Session, staff requests that the Board go into closed session to discuss the purchase of specific parcels. Maps showing those specific parcels will be provided during the Closed Session.

Previous open space acquisition strategies are detailed below. These strategies ultimately resulted in ten parcels identified for acquisition. The status of those ten parcels has been updated.

Open Space Land Acquisition Strategy

In April 1997, staff presented a strategy to the Board which recommended four primary objectives for open space land acquisition. They are:

- # to preserve the "national treasure" of Williamsburg and James City County
- # to preserve the beauty and biodiversity of the natural environment for the benefit of those natural systems and for the benefit of our residents for future generations
- # to restrict growth and development from occurring in areas which compromise the fabric and character of our community
- # to preserve our agricultural heritage through farmland preservation

This strategy led to the identification of the following four geographic areas with the greatest need for conservation or preservation.

Evaluation Criteria Summary

An open space matrix was developed in order to assist staff in evaluating and ranking 123 potential properties. Criteria included:

- # parcel status - if it was for sale or threatened by development
- # significance of the site - were there natural, scenic, historic, or cultural qualities which made this site unique
- # community character issues - did it affect the fabric, character or heritage of a community
- # other factors - such as multiple staff selection or alternative means of acquisition

Staff periodically revisits and updates this large list.

Status of Funds and Acquisitions

Acquisition opportunities for Mainland Farm were partnered with the Williamsburg Land Conservancy (WLC) in June 1997. An agreement by the County secured a two-year option on the property until the WLC completes its fund-raising campaign. A down payment of \$300,000 in November 1997 was followed by a \$724,025 option payment at closing on August 12, 1997. The remaining \$1.2 Million will be paid in ten annual \$60,000 principle plus interest payments. A balloon payment occurs in 2009 for \$600,000. In March, the County submitted a grant request to the Federal Farmland Protection Program for \$800,000 to help finance the purchase of a conservation easement by WLC. WLC would pay an additional \$400,000. No decision has been made on the request. Acquisitions such as Mainland Farm save the County \$280,000 annually by taking 430 homes off the development books, eliminating those residential infrastructure deficits. In eight years, this savings pays for the \$2.2 million acquisition.

As of May 15, 2001, there was an available balance of \$2,092,426 in the Open Space Acquisition Fund. Other acquisitions from open space acquisition funds, timbering restitution, and some as a result of SUP requirements, etc., include:

	<u>Property Location</u>	<u>Year Purchased</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount Paid</u>
1	Jamestown Road Area	1999	3 residential parcels at the entrance to Settler's Mill	\$100,531
2	Exxon	1999		\$611,000
3	Rees / Colonial Parkway	2000	buffer easments	\$17,500
4	Sawin Property	2000	2.021 acres	\$110,000
5	Chanco's Grant	2001	7.93 acres	\$67,000
6	Scott Trust	2001	7.09 acres	N/A
7	Hoffmeyer easement	2000	6.2 acres	N/A
8	Scott Trust easement	2001	0.96 acres	N/A
9	Jamestown Nursing Home/ Gajaski Indian Village	2000	SUP easement	N/A

Current Status of New Open Space Parcels

In March 2001, the Board met in Closed Session and agreed to purchase an easement along Forge Road. The importance of the viewshed along Forge Road was cited as being a primary justification of this opportunistic acquisition. The easement was purchased from owner Sam Hazelwood for \$37,875 for 20.5± acres along Forge Road with a depth of between 400 and 643 feet.

With the successful resolution of Mainland Farm, Gajaski Indian Village, and Exxon, staff continues to work on the acquisition or protection of other key parcels.

2001-2002 Proposed Goals and Objectives

Current land acquisition strategies for the remaining priority parcels recommend full or partnered acquisitions and remains a high priority of the program. Corridor buffering, as development continues, impacts aesthetic components of our Community Character Corridors. Public interest to protect and enhance our roadways with buffers and scenic easements steadily increases. Buffer protection through

easements and zoning may provide the best scenario for continued Community Character protection with limited acquisition funds. Protecting roadway buffers, gateways, and scenic viewsheds with 150-200 foot easements allows parcel interiors to develop as planned while protecting that portion of the property the public considers public. Easements would protect greenbelt corridors, permit buffer regeneration, restrict billboards and other signage, and provide bikeway and greenway opportunities. Greenbelt buffers and community character buffers are successful components of our preservation goals and objectives. As we approach the 2007 Celebration, we should also consider the timetable for timbering and AFD operations to make sure these activities either occur after the Celebration or get scenic easements to guarantee their protection.

Protecting Agricultural Lands

Protecting agricultural lands has been gaining national attention and local support. This serves to protect the agricultural heritage of our County. As development needs increase, large parcels will be subdivided and smaller parcels will be developed. Staff has developed a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program which the Board has reviewed and which is currently scheduled for a primary public information meeting on June 11, beginning at 6:30 p.m., at the Upper County Library on Croaker Road.

Environmental Protection for the Powhatan Creek

In collaboration with James City County and the Friends of Powhatan Creek, the College of William and Mary Center for Public Policy Research recently completed work identifying the environmental sensitivity of the Powhatan Creek watershed. As the most environmentally significant natural resource on the Peninsula (by the Virginia Division of Natural Heritage), the watershed is threatened by increased development pressure which will compromise its character and quality of this watershed that encompasses much of the Primary Service Area (PSA). Its currently designated an impaired stream by the Department of Environmental Quality for high levels of fecal coliform.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board go into closed session to discuss the purchase of specific parcels.

John T. P. Horne