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Hanson farm moves toward development

Planning Board recommends re-zoning approval for North Potomac farm

by Erin Donaghue | Staff Writer

The Montgomery County Planning Board recommended approving the re-zoning of a 170-acre North Potomac farm Thursday, a first step toward the development of the last operating farm in the Potomac subregion.

The application to re-zone the property from a residential to a planned development zone will be considered by a county hearing examiner this week and requires final approval from the Montgomery County Council.

The 2002 Potomac Subregion Master Plan recommended the farm, at the intersection of Travilah and Quince Orchard roads, be developed as a residential community. Initial plans presented by the Hanson family, owners of the farm, include as many as 187 single-family homes and townhouses and a 10-acre park. At least 50 percent of the property would be preserved as open space.

The farm is no longer profitable, the family has said. Both elderly parents still reside on the property.

At the hearing, family spokesman John Hanson said initial plans had been developed with the input of neighbors and citizens groups, including the North Potomac Citizens Association, the West Montgomery County Citizens Association, and the homeowners group for the nearby Hunting Hill community.

"We think what's come out of this process is something that represents what the community would be comfortable with, that would add to the value of the community here in North Potomac, and satisfy the letter and the spirit of the master plan recommendations," Hanson said at the hearing.

In response to traffic concerns, Hanson told The Gazette he would request a traffic study on the intersection of Glen and Travilah roads, and look into costs for a study on the intersection at Travilah and River roads.

The Hunting Hill community, which has worried about increased density, traffic and noise, requested that the board place a "binding element" that would require a future developer to spread the 24 proposed moderately priced dwelling units throughout the property instead of clustering them. However, Planning Board chairman Royce Hanson said it was too early to place such binding elements, and that the board generally shies away from clustering MPDUs.

Any developer who buys the property would need to undergo an extensive review and public hearing process, with a final nod by the County Council, before final plans are approved.

"We feel we have gotten the best of all possible worlds, considering we have to let go of the last farm," Barnes said.