

# County Goes to Bat for River Farm in Mount Vernon

Move is for preservation but never say never.

By MIKE SALMON  
GAZETTE PACKET

**O**n Tuesday, Sept. 14, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors took another step to try to save the River Farm, and approved the Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Historic Overlay Districts by a vote 9-0-1, with Supervisor Herryty abstaining. This tightens up zoning restrictions, part of a continuing effort to save the land at River Farm. The zoning effort began last April when the Board of Supervisors looked to establish the land as the Wellington at River Farm Historic Overlay District ("WHOD").

The amendment states that any locality may adopt an ordinance setting forth the historic landmarks within the locality as established by the Virginia Board of Historic Resources, and any other buildings or structures within the locality having an important historic, architectural, archaeological or cultural interest, any historic areas within the locality.

Supervisor Dan Storck (D-Mount Vernon) is happy with the decision, but notes that preservation is not etched in stone. "The County Board has consistently been very



Save the River Farm has been said more than once over the last year.

supportive of protecting this natural resource and committed to ensuring it remains available to future generations. I am pleased with the decision to add this additional protection to the Wellington at River Farm Historic Overlay District.

I also think the vast majority of Mount Vernon residents are very pleased with the decision, although I am not sure they understand that this protection still does not necessarily preserve the property. While this step is helpful, until the [American Horticultural

Society] Board comes to a consensus on a plan that preserves, protects and keeps River Farm open to the public, we will need to be vigilant of any actions the AHS Board takes," Storck said.

The American Horticultural Society owns River Farm, and in May the AHS Board said they would begin formal negotiations with NOVA Parks and the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust for those organizations to buy River Farm and keep it open to the public.

But Alan Rowsome, executive director of Northern Virginia Con-

servation Trust, recently said that the AHS has not engaged in any meaningful negotiations, and has kept the property listed for sale. "It appears that a developer has submitted a letter of intent to purchase River Farm – along with several adjacent properties – to build a large-scale commercial business there," Rowsome said. "Accepting such an offer would be a betrayal of the original intent of Enid Annenberg Haupt's financial gift that AHS used to purchase River Farm in 1973 and would cast aside their commitment to work with local government, parks organizations, and conservation groups to ensure the future of this unique community asset."

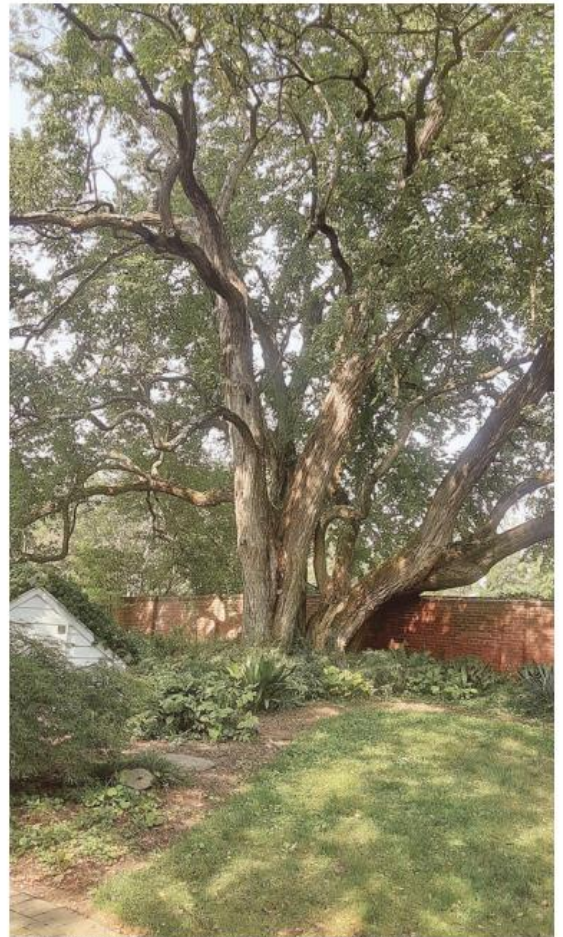
But with prime homes in the area selling for top prices and little land left for new development, the pressure to develop the property is likely to continue.

PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/THE CONNECTION



The view of the Potomac River from the farm.

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This old tree is part of the landscape at River Farm.

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