

## Front Royal-Warren County

"Make sure the financial obligations are understood; get the easements up front; and make sure you understand the logistical issues. As you know, most of these agreements aren't worth much 10 years down the road." – former Front Royal Mayor Stan Brooks to council

# Waking from nightmare of inertia? Town Okays FRLP plan

## County vote on east-side annexation agreement anticipated Aug. 20



**The view from above - looking northeast, the FRLP county property north of the Norfolk-Southern RR tracts and Happy Creek Road.**

By Roger Bianchini  
Warren County Report

Dave Vazzana must have a feeling his life, at least a significant portion of it involving development of land

owned for 25 year or so by his family – business now identified as Front Royal Limited Partnership (FRLP) – is like that nightmare where you are running down a hallway with great urgency but not getting any closer to the far end.

Such at times has seemed the three-way negotiating process on Vazzana's citizen-initiated annexation request to bring 604 acres of Agriculturally-zoned Warren County pasture land between Happy Creek Road and I-66 into the Front Royal Town limits. With much of the land either near developed town land or in close proximity to county land earmarked as Urban Development Areas prime for such proposed mixed, moderate-density residential-commercial development, Vazzana's proposal was initially called a "win-win for everybody" by Warren County Supervisor Richard Traczyk early in the three-way review process.

Eleven months later, with the most recent extension on deadlines from the Commission on Local Government fast approaching this month, the haggling and circular logic characterizing much of the intervening 11 months continues unabated – except that now council has agreed by a 5-1 Aug. 12 vote, Sayre dissenting, that it appears to be in its best interest to boundary adjust the property into town.

Doesn't seem like that tough a call.

Last year in the early stages of discussion, Warren County Attorney Blair Mitchell observed the boundary adjustment could bring Front Royal as much as \$20-million in water and sewer tap fees it would not get were the property to be developed in the county with a privately-owned water-sewer system; as well as eventually add \$500,000 in annual town real estate tax revenue.

FRLP has proffered a maximum mixed residential development of 818 units on the 604 acres. Original planning schematics included commercial and open space and park components. But those were removed from discussion when rezoning was removed from consideration as part of the boundary adjustment proposal at the insistence of town officials.

The current proposal would simply bring the land into Front Royal under its existing Agricultural zoning, with the developer facing future rezoning and site plan approval processes before both the town planning commission

and council to hash out the majority of details on cash and related infrastructure proffers and development parameters.

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"If the issue is just giving this land up for all houses then we'll be a megalopolis all the way to Washington. Expand Front Royal – just not on my property, dag gone it!" – nearby homeowner Ramona Bowden

## Front Royal-Warren County



**Stan Brooks addresses council as nearby property owners listen in front row. Dave Vazzana, finger on cheek, and FRLP rep Bill Barnett are a few rows back.**

### County assurances

However, a \$12,500 per unit cash proffer to Warren County has been offered by the developer since the future decision-making processes would be removed from county's hands.

That the per-unit proffer to the county continues to be at issue was illustrated at a county supervisors work session on Aug. 6. After bemoaning the pace of the process over nearly a year, North River Supervisor Dan Murray said if he owned the land he would be so frustrated he would just want to sell it to get out from under the strain.

"What's your highest number, because I'd be comfortable with \$13,000," Murray then told Vazzana.

"That's it, Mr. Murray," Vazzana replied tersely of the \$12,500 number in the draft settlement agreement.

Murray later said he would go with the majority if they were acceptable to the \$12,500 number that FRLP points out is \$4,000 to \$8,000 more per unit than the county has ever gotten from earlier developments. It is, however, less than an impact model on service impact proffers the Warren County

staff has developed in recent years.

With their own vote on the draft agreement pending on Aug. 20, a poll of the supervisors indicated a split on whether to accept the \$12,500 offer. Asked how he would vote if it were a 2-2 tie on acceptance of the per unit amount, Murray winked and said, "Thirteen – I've got to ask, don't I?"

But was the council vote an indicator of light at the end of the tunnel, or should we say hallway?

### Public concerns

Despite the urging of a trio of public informational meeting speakers that the town continue to move slowly or not at all in consideration of the request, council finally said yes to the pared-back draft agreement with no developmental assurances built into it.

Ramona Bowden, who lost a long fight with Dominion Power about the installation of expanded power lines near the Windy Knoll home she has owned since 1956, expressed frustration at the ongoing intrusions into the surrounding rural neighborhood leading to the banks of the Shenandoah

River.

"If the issue is just giving this land up for all houses then we'll be a megalopolis all the way to Washington. Expand Front Royal – just not on my property, dag gone it! Let it be somewhere else," Mrs. Bowden told council. (actually her property should be pretty well insulated from direct contact with development by the expansive Dominion Power line ROW bordering her property).

Former Front Royal Mayor and Councilman Stan Brooks admitted that as a retired town official he didn't know how much time and study had gone into the process thus far. However, he urged council to ask a final question, "Does it make sense for the town?"

Brooks also pointed to major concern over the path of a proposed east-west connector road through the development from Shenandoah Shores Road into town. That path is forecast to bring new and existing traffic into Front Royal near the low-water bridge at Eighth Street, adjacent to both Bing Crosby Stadium and the site of the annual Fireman's Carnival on opposite sides of Eighth Street.

However, as has been pointed out by FRLP planning officials throughout, details of that transportation infrastructure will be hashed out in the rezoning and site plan approval processes to come. But Brooks warned council to see that adequate ROW acquisition had been accomplished before giving away the farm, both literally and figuratively, in this case of FRLP land currently being used as a rental dairy farm.

"Make sure the financial obligations are understood; get the easements up front; and make sure you understand the logistical issues," Brooks urged, pointedly adding, "As you know, most of these agreements aren't worth much 10 years down the road."

The reference was to the escalating town-county tension over the 15-year-old Voluntary Settlement Agreement between Front Royal and Warren County on development and revenue splits from the 522 North Commercial-Industrial Corridor in Warren County. That development was enabled by the extension of town central water-sewer without annexation (see related stories).

### Confusion to the end

While it appears progress is being

made, it continues to be at a price. This day it was ongoing misinformation on the logistics of what is at issue in the drafted FRLP Voluntary Settlement Agreement.

"We have a second rezoning going on here," Town Councilman Tom Sayre said of FRLP land (150 acres of FRLP land in town has already been rezoned by council for development of 300-plus units) in stating his support for further study. "I don't think it is the proper time to vote. I think we should take it back to a work session or something ..."

"We're not having a second rezoning here," Councilman Bret Hrbek interrupted Sayre.

Mayor Tim Darr agreed, and attempted to redirect the conversation to factual assertions about the coming vote.

In the end it was Sayre alone, voting against the potential revenue gold mine to the town from land earmarked for at least a decade, if not much longer, for future development due to its

proximity to existing development and central town utility infrastructure.

Sayre's family home property abuts the FRLP land to the east, off Shenandoah Shores Road. Sayre's home is adjacent to early plans for the path of the E-W connector road. But Town Attorney Doug Napier said any potential conflict of interest for the councilman had not yet been reached in negotiating the non-rezoned boundary adjustment.

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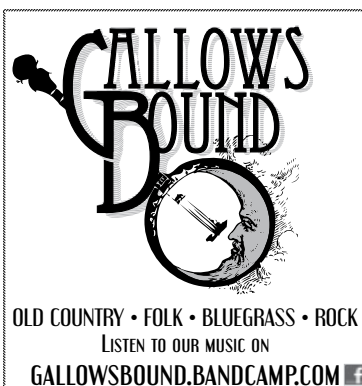
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