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Land put into conservation easement

Nearly 90 acres of open space saved

By Alex Bridges -- abridges@nvdaily.com

WINCHESTER -- Open-space protection in Frederick County has gotten a boost as another piece of land is put into a permanent easement against development.

Elizabeth "Betty" Snapp signed a conservation easement to permanently protect nearly 90 acres of land on the Marlboro Angus Farm on Cedar Creek Grade in the Back Creek Magisterial District, according to county officials and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The easement will be held jointly by the county and its Conservation Easement Authority, the Potomac Conservancy and the USDA. This initiative marks the first time the local government stepped in to serve as co-holder of the easement, authority Chairwoman Diane Kerns said at a press conference Tuesday.

"I don't have to tell you the benefits of open space easements, but that land is now open for future agricultural use, future open space uses, protection of the watersheds, all kinds of really positive things, and it's the fruit of at least a year and a half, if not multiple years, efforts on lots of people's parts," Kerns said.

The effort involved the Frederick County Board of Supervisors and the authority, the Potomac Conservancy, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Office of Farmland Preservation.

"We all need to work together toward our common goals in order to make this happen," said Kelly Watkinson, senior director of land conservation for the conservancy. "This is the poster child for working together to make something happen."

State Sen. Jill Vogel, R-Millwood, said she carried legislation in the Virginia General Assembly aimed at making the conservation easement process easier.

"It's been a long time coming," Vogel said, adding that she helped push conservation efforts when she



Kelly Watkinson, senior director of land conservation for the Potomac Conservancy, talks about the importance of open space on Tuesday. Alex Bridges/Daily



Diane Kerns, chairwoman of the Frederick County Conservation Easement Authority, talks Tuesday about the importance of open space after announcing that a 90-acre piece of land was put into permanent protection as an easement. Alex Bridges/Daily

served as a board member with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. "We were really breaking new ground and trying to encourage people to participate in the program, trying to sell landowners the benefits of it and it grew out of an appreciation for historic battlefields, historic properties, important viewsheds, important watersheds."

Frederick County Planning Director Eric Lawrence said the 90 acres put into easement equals 17 development rights and, if developed, could have cost the locality about \$500,000 in additional services.

Half of the funding for the easement comes from USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. The conservancy received a grant from the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation to cover part of the cost, and the landowner is providing the remaining funds, a USDA release states.

The purchase of the land took approximately half of the \$265,000 the authority received from the state, Lawrence said. The county also contributed some funding to buy the rights, Lawrence said.

"What I will say is the landowners did it because it they felt it was the right thing to do," Kerns said.

Wayne and Samantha Snapp put a 151-acre piece of the family farm into easement last year, the USDA release states.

"My long-term goal for the easement authority is to basically have the conservation easement be a viable and active tool for Frederick County for those landowners that choose to use it, and then have the general public understand the inherent value of open space in the county," Kerns said.

More than 5,469 acres of farm and forest land in Frederick County is in conservation easement, according to the conservancy and the authority.

Contact Kerns at 667-3390, the Frederick County Planning Department at 665-5651, or Watkinson at 667-3606 or by e-mail at Watkinson@potomac.org for more information about easements.

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