

# Chancellorsville Coalition Focuses On Corps of Engineers

By Deborah Fitts

**SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY, Va.** — The fight by preservationists to block development on the border of the Chancellorsville battlefield has entered a new phase, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permitting process now serving as the focus of conflict.

The Civil War Preservation Trust, which is spearheading the preservation battle, is charging that the Corps has failed to conduct a thorough review of development plans on the Mullins Farm, an 800-acre tract adjacent to the Chancellorsville unit of Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. The Trust had hoped that the Corps would withhold a necessary permit.

"Frankly, this is an example of bureaucratic laziness," said Trust spokesman Jim Campi. "The Army Corps was more inclined to do this fast and efficiently rather than in a way benefiting a national historic landmark. This is indeed a trav-

esty."

Landowner John Mullins met during the winter with the Corps regarding plans to develop the 273-acre Orrock Tract portion of his property. Six proposed stream crossings that Mullins applied for last July prompted the Corps' involvement in the process. The agency is required to consider the impact of development on historic sites and can order developers to steer clear of certain areas or mitigate the impact.

Now, said Campi, the Corps has "thrown up its hands" and has decided to "terminate consultations," bringing its review to a halt. The Corps rarely takes such a step.

A spokesman said the decision was made because the agencies involved in the review couldn't agree on essential aspects, such as what mitigation should be required.

The issue now goes before the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for review, which Campi

said could lead to a hearing in Spotsylvania County seeking public input. The Advisory Council is an independent federal agency, appointed by the president, which provides a forum for influencing federal activities, programs and policies as they affect historic resources.

At presstime The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation announced it will hold a public meeting on the evening of July 1 at a location in the Chancellorsville area to be determined. There will also be an opportunity to submit written comment for the ACHP to consider before issuing its comments to the Secretary of the Army. For information, contact Bruce Milhans of ACHP at (202) 606-8513 or by email at [Bmilhans@achp.gov](mailto:Bmilhans@achp.gov).

In March, county supervisors re-jected Reston-based Dogwood Development Company's rezoning application for nearly 2,000 homes and 2.2 million square feet of commercial space on the Mullins Farm. The decision followed a fierce battle by preservationists and by local residents opposed to development in the fast-growing county.

Under current zoning 225 houses and 55 acres of commercial development are allowed on the 273-acre tract. The entire 790-acre farm is assessed at \$5.6 million. Mullins' asking price is \$40 million (*Civil War News* June).

Possible fallout from the supervisors' vote was the recent announcement by Spotsylvania County Administrator Anthony Barrett that he will leave at the end of his two-year contract effective Sept. 3. County supervisors had been discussing whether to renew his contract and in December he survived a 3-4 vote of no confidence after a supervisor said she heard that Barrett told staff to give the "good" side of proposed developments.

Regarding this new phase of the effort to preserve the Chancellorsville battleground, Campi sent a June 9 letter to supporters in which he wrote, "It is now up to concerned citizens to urge the Army Corps to make a more thorough look at the Orrock Tract."

He said the dispute with the Corps "is the direct result of mistakes made by the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors in the late 1990s. Local officials were well aware that the Mullins Farm is core battlefield land. Yet they ignored public opinion, rezoned the Mullins Farm for development, and later included it in the county's primary settlement district."

Citing the successful fight of the Chancellorsville Coalition, its 12 member groups and supporters against the huge Dogwood development, Campi said, "like Lee and Jackson at Chancellorsville, we fight hardest when the odds seem against us."

"As long as Chancellorsville's many friends and supporters remain united, we cannot lose," he said.