

Parker-Gray Plan Voted

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Alexandria Moves to Designate Area Historic

By Caryle Murphy

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The Alexandria City Council last night took the first step towards ending months of controversy over the future of the Parker-Gray neighborhood by voting to prepare an ordinance that would designate the largely black residential area a special old and historic district.

The designation would impose less stringent architectural controls on the Parker-Gray area than those in force in the historic district that governs the look of the fashionable Old Town area.

The council's action, on a 4-to-3 vote, was opposed by most of the area's black residents, who said they fear the designation would force them into making property improvements and into a real estate tax bracket they cannot afford and eventually force them to move.

The proposal incorporated the recommendation of a citizens' ad hoc group formed last summer to reach a compromise among the factions in the neighborhood, which is in the northwest section of the city north of Cameron Street, east of the Braddock Road Metro station and south of First Street.

There must be at least one more public hearing before the council votes whether to create the special Parker-Gray historic district.

Last night's council action, proposed by council member Carlyle C. Ring, was opposed by Mayor Charles B. Beatley, who said he did not want to force a decision on residents if they did not approve of the proposal.

"I do have considerable feeling against extending a district if it is not wanted by a considerable majority of the people there," Beatley said. "I frankly think we should go back to the drawing boards," he said, pleading for "a gestation period."

Beatley was joined by council members Lionel Hope and Donald Casey in opposing the council's action last night. Ring was joined by council members Robert L. Calhoun and Margaret Inman and Vice Mayor Patsy Ticer in voting for it.

Prior to the vote, several residents of the neighborhood spoke both in favor of and against the proposal. But both sides pleaded for the council to take action on an issue it had already deliberated over for about two years.

"At least they did something," said Katrina Ross, a member of the 15th Census Tract Crisis Committee, which opposes the new designation. "It's not what we proposed but at least it's something. We will deliberate to decide what to do next," she said.

Vice Mayor Ticer said after the vote that the action would give the neighborhood protection from development anticipated around the Braddock Road Metro station.

In related action, council member Hope proposed undertaking a study of the zoning in the area. His proposal was unanimously accepted by the council, but it is not expected to affect the legislative process in adopting the new designation.

In other action last night, the council decided to allow A & A Partnership of Falls Church to buy the site of the former John Roberts public housing project, next to the Braddock Road Metro station, for \$7 million.

The developer will pay for the 1½-block property, which the city bought for \$5.2 million from the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority, over a period of seven years.

The partnership plans to build 87 townhouses and 48 condominium units, as well as office and retail space. The buildings will range from two to six stories and will surround a large pedestrian plaza.