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Subject: statement for public hearing on open spaces

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Statement for Alexandria City Council Members
Public Hearing on Open Space
June 21, 2004

I was jogging past the corner of Quaker and Janney's Lane one day when I heard a voice so compelling that I had to stop and listen. The voice called out to me, pleading that I share this message with the citizens of Alexandria. I hurried home and wrote down what I heard.

Plea for Help:

"I existed long before you were born. I watched over this spot when the trees sang to each other in the breeze and birds harmonized to their melodies, when horses roamed freely and ate the grass growing abundantly as far as the eye could see. I drank in the fresh rain, stored the fallen leaves as fertilizer, and slept peacefully under blankets of white snow each winter.

I watched humans come in wagons, cut down trees to build shelter. I witnessed them shoot each other with muskets and cannons. I softened the fall for those wounded, and rejoiced when the hostilities ended. I relished the peace that followed, which lasts to this day.

Families and businesses who originally settled on the water's front spread out and moved up the long hill to take this land, nestled between the protection of two forts. I said a tearful goodbye to my tree and wildlife friends as these settlers divided me into small parcels. They cut grooves in my surface to lay pipes and lines, and tarred over me to smooth the ground for their motored vehicles. They built two small shelters on me -- a church and a manse. We coexisted together for years.

I endured silently, a good neighbor to the humans who allowed the encroaching pavement and shelters to claim more and more of my green cousins each year.

But lately, I discovered I will be divided into smaller parcels still, losing the shelters that have served as my old friends for decades upon

decades. Signs have been placed upon me giving me a new name -- Oak Grove. I learned more of my grass will be replaced by pavement and at least eight new human families will live upon me.

I can remain silent no more. I must speak out.

Will you help me? Will you ask the leaders of your community to find a creative way to save me from further encroachment? Will you help me preserve my quiet dignity? Please?"

And so, I stand before you now to share this impassioned plea. Save the property at Second Presbyterian from development.

Buy back this land, no matter the cost!

Why not keep the property as is -- enhanced with nature trails for the entire City to enjoy? The six acre site is easily accessible by public transit for all citizens in the community, and has ample parking. Several schools are within walking distance: MacArthur Elementary, Minnie Howard 9th Grade Center, T.C. Williams High School, Bishop Ireton High School, and Episcopal High School.

The existing church building can be converted into an artist center, a music studio, a youth center, a civic center, a senior center, a recreation center, or a magnet school. The old abandoned house hidden behind the trees on the back side of the lot, built almost 100 years ago, could be renovated and turned into a visiting artist residence, an art gallery, a museum, a home for unwed teens, a bed and breakfast, or a magnet school boarding residence for students.

The possibilities are endless!

If you must, keep the land as property values continue to skyrocket and sell it later if you find no valuable use for this rolling green property.

I would love to work with City Council members to find alternative uses for the property so that ALL citizens can share this valuable resource.

Allow me, as well as others in the community, to work with you to come up with creative funding sources to pay you back for your investment. Give us a chance to come up with alternatives that meet the needs of the City.

I ask for the gift of time to develop these options further.

Once the property is developed, we will lose it forever to bricks and mortar.

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Proverbs 25:11

A word apply spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.