

FEATURED

Kuhns seek to purchase St. Louis property, stave off proposed development

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JK Moving Services CEO Chuck Kuhn.
Times-Mirror/Doug Stroud

The Kuhn family has put a contract on 42-acres in St. Louis — one of the first villages in Loudoun County founded by African-Americans — in order to prevent the construction of a controversial housing project proposed by developer Mojax LLC, according to a spokesperson with the family. The goal, they said, is to place the land into conservation.

As part of the buying process, the Kuhns are conducting a study of the site, which is currently owned by Mojax. The company's project is located north of Snake Hill Road and a quarter mile east of the St. Louis Road intersection.

"We are excited to be working with Board Chair Phyllis Randall, her fellow supervisors including Tony Buffington, and County Administrator Tim Hemstreet to help save and protect this historically significant and beautiful land," said Chuck Kuhn, owner of JK Land Holdings and JK Moving Services, in a prepared statement.

"St. Louis was bought by freed slaves following the Civil War," he said. "Preserving our county's important history fits with our focus on helping preserve Virginia's natural habitats, ecosystems and past."

The 42-acres are located northwest of Middleburg and were slated to be developed into 45 homes.

With the potential sale to the Kuhns, the land — part of the township which dates back to 1891 — instead will be protected and preserved, according to a Nov. 16 release.

Further, the land will help ensure that nearby and long-time residents of St. Louis — many of whom are descendants of the first African-American settlers — will be able to afford to stay in their homes since this will prevent costly property tax increases in the area.

In April, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors voted to end a proposed deal that included the transfer of Aldie Assemblage — a cluster of historic properties — to Mojax LLC in exchange for the Middleburg Preserve II property, which the board is also seeking to place in conservation.

Mojax LLC's Middleburg Preserve Residential Development Project in St. Louis proposed building 30 single-family detached homes, a roadway and tree conservation areas, according to an executive summary from development representatives.

Mojax and the board exchanged offers to end a controversial housing project proposed for the MP-II property in St. Louis, but neither could come to an agreement.

Mojax argued there was risk involved in obtaining sufficient financial benefit from the property with an easement in place, saying it could not recover its acquisition and development costs from the by-right development of MP-II.

Loudoun County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) said one of the takeaways from the deal, if the study is successful, is that it won't be developed, avoiding adversely affecting area residents.

"My main issue was that we have families who had been living in St. Louis for generations and if we were to put new homes on that property, it would raise their taxes and push them out of their generational homes, and they'd have no place to go," Randall said.

"It is the epitome of gentrification, and I just was not going to let it happen," she said.

Supervisor Tony Buffington (R-Catoctin), who represents the area, said in message to the Times-Mirror that he is thankful for Kuhn's willingness to intervene in the matter.

"I'm thankful to Mr. Kuhn for his willingness to respond to Chair Randall and my request to consider purchasing and preserving this land in order to prevent pending development, increased taxes, and likely displacement of some longtime and very important area residents," Buffington said in a prepared statement.

Shawn Flaherty, a spokesperson for the Kuhn family, said the family hopes to have the results of the study this week.

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