

157628 FVS

# Potomac Yard deal nixes interchange on parkway

By **STEPHEN HENN**  
*Journal staff writer*

The National Park Service and the developers of Potomac Yard announced a complex land deal yesterday that will preserve green space along the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Alexandria and eventually bring 4 million square feet of new residential and office development to Arlington County.

The deal also marked the first step toward the creation of a new 25-acre park in Arlington along the Potomac River just south of Interstate 395 near Gravelly Point.

As part of its plan to develop Potomac Yard, the 300-acre former rail yard, Commonwealth Atlantic Properties had sought to build a new interchange on the G.W. Parkway that would provide access to the development.

Commonwealth Atlantic gave up the rights to that interchange yesterday in return for rights to build on 29 acres of Potomac Yard in Arlington. Development rights to the land had been controlled by the park service.

The exchange was warmly received by Alexandria city activists who for years had opposed plans to build large office buildings and a new interchange along the parkway in Alexandria.

"We sent the first letters to Congress [protesting the interchange] in 1969," said Ellen Pickering, a former Alexandria City Council member and a long-time opponent of building a new interchange along the parkway in Alexandria. "I want to know when I should raise the victory flag and who I should send the flowers to."

Arlington County Board Chairman Christopher Zimmerman also praised the deal, which could eventually bring hundreds of thousands - if not millions - of new dollars into the county's coffers.

"Sure, in the long run it will be a nice addition to the county's tax base," Zimmerman said. "But more importantly, if we do it right it will be a nice addition to the community."

In exchange for allowing a high level of density on its portion of land in Potomac Yard, Arlington County will receive park space north of Reagan Washington National Airport near I-395. It will still have to go through the usual process for creating the park.

"This deal presents some very exciting opportunities," Zimmerman said yesterday. "We will have a lot of planning and hard work to do with the community, but we have good opportunities, too."

For Alexandria, the deal will mean that the George Washington Parkway remains unchanged and that Potomac Greens, which runs along the eastern edge of Potomac Yard, will be built into a low-density townhouse development with no direct access to the parkway.

Without the deal, developers could have built more than 2 million square feet of high-density office development at Potomac Greens - a project that outraged many residents who lived nearby.

"I think this is a plus for the community, no doubt," said Alexandria Mayor Kerry J. Donley when he heard the news yesterday. "It puts to rest a longstanding and controversial issue surrounding the intersection with the parkway, but we are going to end up with the traffic, regardless. And Arlington is going to get the financial benefit."

Commonwealth Atlantic Properties had originally hoped to lure the Patent and Trademark Office to Potomac Yard but abandoned that plan when confronted with overwhelming opposition from Alexandria's activist community. It is now seeking to build a scaled-back development combining residential, commercial and office space.

Like Donley, Zimmerman is also concerned about the traffic impact of the proposed development and said the county will look at ways to improve transit in the area, especially considering the scope of the development just south of the Arlington border in Alexandria.

"We already have Amtrak, Virginia Rail Express and Metro tracks running right through there, so it would be foolish not to tie in," he said.

---