

# When a Bit of History Stands In Your Way



As widely reported in the local press, Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) has contracted to purchase 170 acres in Western Loudoun for a three-school, 4000-student complex. A sixty acre portion of the site includes Wheatland Springs, more commonly known as the Samuel Nixon house. The farmstead dates back to the 1820s, and the property also includes a small cottage, a large bank barn and a number of outbuildings. All of these structures were extensively renovated and restored in the 1990s by the previous owner.

In late March, a citizens group called Small Town Schools obtained a copy of the LCPS purchase contract via a Freedom of Information Act request. The contract includes a clause requiring demolition or removal of the historic buildings.

... Seller shall have the option to elect to remove all of the listed structures and improvements or demolish same by providing written notice thereof to Purchaser. In removing said structures and improvements, Seller shall remove all rubble, debris, trash and materials as a result of Seller's activities in connection therewith.

Seller shall have a period thereafter of 60 days from the date of closing within which to remove said structures and improvements. There shall be no burying of any of the foregoing.

From LCPS Purchase Contract, Part 6. **Removal of Improvements**

The contract language is remarkable for its complete disregard of the special value of the buildings, and its sole focus on the detritus that would result from its destruction. It is almost as though they're talking about a derelict gas station, rather than a nicely preserved home, described as **"a fine example of early-19th-century Federal brick architecture in the Loudoun Valley"** in the site survey on file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.



Worse, a fact sheet posted on the LCPS website on May 4 claimed that **"none of the structures on either the Burgess or Cangiano properties are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places."** Just a week later, after that claim was challenged by citizens, the language quietly disappeared from the LCPS fact sheet without explanation.

In its place, on the same day and also without comment, LCPS posted the “Phase I Cultural Resources Survey of Wheatland Farms,” dated March 2008. This survey was commissioned by Mr. Cangiano as part of his plans to develop Wheatland Farm into a high-end, equestrian themed subdivision, *The Reserve at Waterford*. The portion of the 200+ page survey dedicated to the Samuel Nixon farmstead describes the layout, construction and materials of the house, bank barn and various outbuildings; it also includes two color photographs. The survey states that **the Samuel Nixon house is eligible and is recommended for inclusion in the National Register** based on two of several criteria: a) association with a significant event, and c) embodiment of architecture characteristic of a type, period, method of construction, work of a master architect, or high artistic value.

*The Reserve at Waterford* would have preserved all of the historic structures in a 15 acre estate lot serving as a cornerstone for the development. The plan is included in an appraisal report prepared for LCPS.

Both the Phase I survey and the plan included in the appraisal note that the site is listed by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) as a recorded cultural resource. VDHR Archivist Quatro Hubbard has provided the Wheatland Alliance the original survey of the Samuel Nixon house, conducted in the early 1980s containing the “fine example” language cited above.



To build schools on the Wheatland tracts, which are zoned Agricultural Residential (AR-1), LCPS needs a Special Exception and Commission Permit from the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. Usually, when these exceptions are required, their granting is made a contract contingency in the land purchase. In this case, however, LCPS has made it clear it does not intend to submit its application for a Special Exception until after settlement of the land purchase.

Meanwhile, the Planning Commission will require a Phase I Survey just like the one commissioned by Mr. Cangiano. But the planned demolition or removal of structures and artifacts on the site that are eligible for historic listing would force a Phase II study, and could lead to a recommendation from planning staff to preserve the structures.

LCPS reportedly studied this site for eight months before entering into a contract for its purchase. Did they somehow miss the historic significance of the Nixon farmstead, or fail to understand the complications that its presence would cause in obtaining a Special Exception? Highly unlikely. Did they deliberately rush into a non-contingent contract with a requirement for immediate demolition — and publish misinformation about the Nixon property’s eligibility for historic listing — in an effort to avoid such complications? One has to wonder. Many concerned citizens are having a hard time these days trusting those public servants and elected officials who are charged with protecting the cultural treasures of our County and educating our children about such values.

---

*By Dan Schmidt and Pamela Baldwin*

**References:**

Purchase Contract: <http://tinyurl.com/WA-contract>  
Phase I Study: <http://tinyurl.com/WA-phaseIstudy>  
Appraisal: <http://tinyurl.com/WA-appraisal>  
Original LCPS fact sheet: <http://tinyurl.com/WA-Factsheet1>  
Revised LCPS fact sheet: <http://tinyurl.com/WA-Factsheet2>

 **Wheatland  
Alliance**  
[www.WheatlandAlliance.org](http://www.WheatlandAlliance.org)  
[info@WheatlandAlliance.org](mailto:info@WheatlandAlliance.org)