

SHARON-HERALD

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HERMITAGE, PA

Future of Stull property mulled Commissioner gave land to city

By Joe Pinchot - Herald Staff Writer

A committee charged with coming up with a plan to use former Hermitage Commissioner Sylvia A. Stull's farmstead on Sample Road met for the first time since January. Mrs. Stull, who died Nov. 15, 2006, at 81, bequeathed the 40-acre former farm at 4568 Sample Road to the city, as long as it was used for a public purpose.

City officials initially set about forming a committee more than a year ago, but got bogged down in planning to develop the athletic complex on South Darby Road. Bids to build the first phase of the complex will be opened March 18.

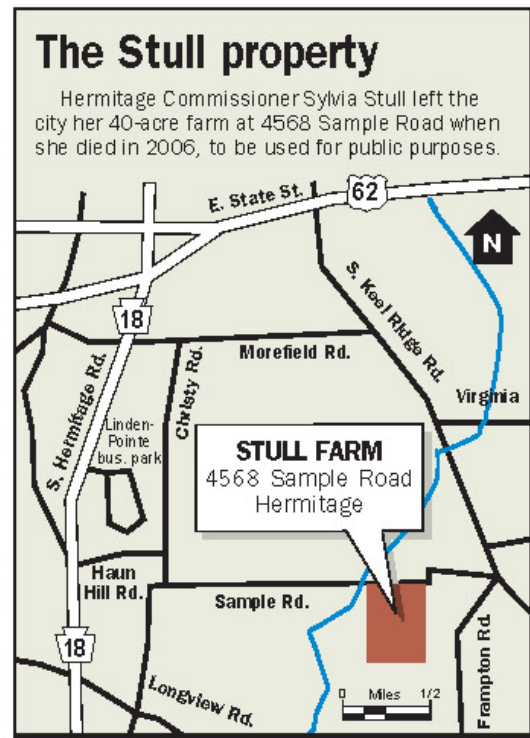
The committee includes 11 city staff members and 19 others, including members of key city boards — commissioners, Hermitage Planning Commission and Hermitage Community and Economic Development Commission — engineers, lawyers, teachers, a planner, and people associated with Munnell Run Farm in Coolspring and Jefferson townships, Pennsylvania State University Cooperative Extension and Slippery Rock University's Center for Environmental Education.

"Very enthusiastic group," City Director of Planning and Development Marcia Hirschmann said of the committee members. The members brainstormed ideas and many of them focused on the property's features, its farm fields, meadows, wetlands, farmhouse and farm buildings. Members envisioned walking and hiking trails, a farmer's market, classes on wildlife, forestry, the environment and gardening, a greenhouse and picnic facilities. In the future, the committee will be asked to prioritize the ideas, Mrs. Hirschmann said.

At the committee's behest, city officials invited neighbors to meet with them to discuss the committee's charge, and express their ideas and concerns. Neighbors were concerned about traffic speed and congestion, security, all-terrain vehicles and lighting, but favored developing the property. "I think they, as a group, liked the ideas that the committee generated and felt they were things that would not cause them a lot of grief," Mrs. Hirschmann said.

They also thought the ideas would be approved of by Mrs. Stull and her husband, Donald, who died in 2004. "I think Sylvia and Don would be very pleased," said City Manager Gary P. Hinson, who knew about the Stulls' plans to bequeath the property before Mrs. Stull's death, but was "sworn to secrecy."

The committee wants its work to be public and has asked city officials to reach out to school, senior, youth and disability groups, as well as inviting the general public to share ideas, Mrs. Hirschmann said. Committee



members will make field trips to sites such as Munnell Run Farm and Slippery Rock's Robert A. Macoskey Center for Sustainable Systems Education and Research to get ideas and see how they might work at the Stull property.

"I would expect the whole of 2009 would be planning," Mrs. Hirschmann said. "We're in no rush," Hinkson added. With the "consultant-quality" expertise represented on the committee, city officials hope the master plan for the property will be developed without having to hire an outside consultant. "I hope this will be a volunteer/ city staff effort," Mrs. Hirschmann said.

The next committee meeting is expected to be held later this month.

City officials have developed a page on the city Web site at www.hermitage.net devoted to information about the Stull property, and it includes information about the first meeting.