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PRESS RELEASE

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Finding Common Ground: A Preferred Development Plan for the Wilderness Battlefield Gateway Area

Orange County, Virginia – Just over two years ago, disagreement over development at the entrance to the Wilderness Battlefield divided this historic community, prompting preservation and development interests to investigate model land planning and development options for this eastern gateway to Orange County. Today, Hill Studio and the Friends of Wilderness Battlefield announce a consensus-based Preferred Development Plan for the Wilderness Battlefield gateway area to achieve both economic development and preservation goals.

The plan is the outcome of continuing, intensive discussions among participating stakeholders who shepherded an initial study of the gateway area released by Hill Studio in April 2012. The vision outlined in this latest document represents an important milestone in advancing land planning for the gateway. It is also timely for the county; the collaborating parties intend the Preferred Development Plan as a document-of-reference for the Orange County Comprehensive Plan, encouraging planned, compatible development appropriate to the gateway's historic setting.

The Preferred Development Plan recommends a more specific, desired location for a traditional, mixed-use Wilderness Village, planned business campus, guideline commercial area for Route 3, supporting public infrastructure, and a regional park along the Rapidan River. The collaborative work effort refined the three development scenarios presented this April and established focused direction for managing development in the gateway area that could be supported by a majority of stakeholders. Further, the Preferred Development Plan integrates the cultural resource, economic and transportation analyses of the initial study and uses a recommended “kit of parts” to promote desired conservation and development patterns.

“We worked to find common ground and identify positive direction for win-win development and preservation solutions,” said Zann Nelson, President of Friends of Wilderness Battlefield. “Our coming together to continue discussions and the creation of a preferred long-range plan fulfilled the first two ‘next steps’ established by the Wilderness Battlefield Gateway Study. Our group will continue discussing the plan with leaders in Orange County, neighboring counties, and with other key stakeholders to build active partnerships for implementation.”

Local landowner Chip King also applauded the multi-phase planning effort. “The gateway study presents Orange County with an extraordinary opportunity to effectively plan the development of the Route 3 corridor,” King said. “But its success will require the leadership and full support of the Orange County Board of Supervisors and all involved stakeholders.”

The efforts of stakeholders in creating the Preferred Development Plan included an intensive two-day planning session with a roundtable of representatives of preservation and conservation organizations, key private landowners and local government officials. The group worked through outstanding critical issues to identify mutual areas of support and direction for preservation and development in the gateway area. Recognizing both the immediate need for mutual understanding and the long-term need for improved infrastructure, an increased economic base and responsible, sensitive patterns of development, the range of stakeholders worked to identify a preferred development plan that could help guide future county planning decisions.

“The consensus and agreements reached in the second phase of the Wilderness Battlefield Gateway Study have provided a road map to the economic development of eastern Orange County,” said David McKee, Vice President of the Lake of the Woods Association. “With the spirit of cooperation reached in this phase between the conservationists, developers, current residents and other interested parties, this project can continue to a successful completion.”

Project Coordinator Glenn Stach, RLA, of Hill Studio spoke to the scale of the progress made. “This group has come a long way to support a preferred plan for continued study and implementation. We achieved a milestone in finding common ground on over 40 points of discussion,” Stach noted. “While varying opinions were expressed, participants supported the advancement and continued exploration of the hallmarks of the Preferred Development Plan.”

Orange County Supervisor Jim White, who participated in the planning process along with fellow supervisor Lee Frame, agreed. “I believe we can incorporate this work in the Orange County Comprehensive Plan to establish a framework for the area along Route 3,” White said. “The Preferred Development Plan establishes a workable direction for the future and will enable us to pursue more detailed analyses and land planning for the gateway corridor.”

Copies of the Preferred Development Plan as well as the initial findings of the Wilderness Battlefield Gateway Study are available for review online at <http://www.wildernessgateway.org>. The Wilderness Battlefield Gateway Study was underwritten through generous grants from the National Park Service and member groups of the Wilderness Battlefield Coalition — including the Civil War Trust, the National Parks Conservation Association, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Piedmont Environmental Council — with additional assistance from the Lake of the Woods Association and the Board of Supervisors of Orange County, Virginia.