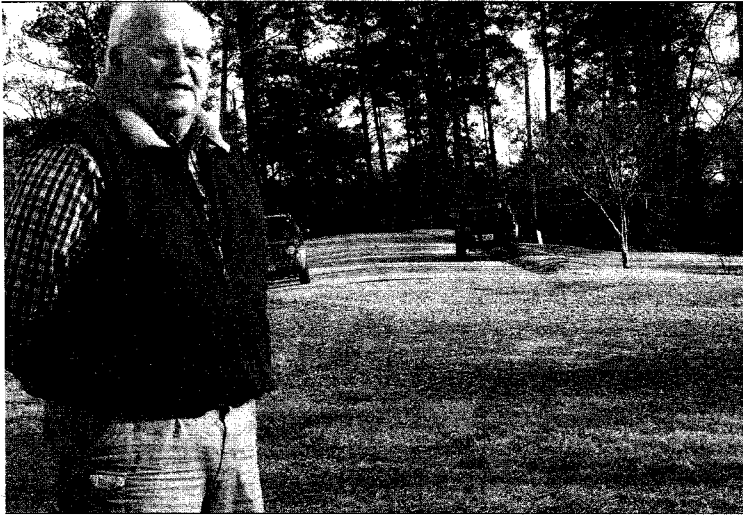


METRO BEAT



▲ WILLIAM HATCHER, LAST MAN STANDING ON HILLSIDE LANE.

Fore ground

BY ERIC JOHNSON ERIC.JOHNSON@METROSPIRIT.COM

GOVT As William Hatcher stands in front of the house he owns on Hillside Lane and surveys the gently rolling terrain as it falls away from Berckmans Road, he can't help musing about possible uses for the land.

"It looks like a golf course, doesn't it?" he says with a laugh.

In spite of its appearance and Hatcher's speculation about the Augusta National's ultimate intentions for the property, the golf course — the real golf course — is on the other side of Berckmans Road, and the land in question, once a thriving neighborhood full of houses like his, has been bought up, cleared, graded and turned into Masters tournament parking.

"It's just absolutely jam-packed with cars," Hatcher says of the area over Masters Week. "It's hard to believe that they can fill this place up with cars and still not have enough parking spaces."

If a plan makes it through the Augusta Commission, however, another small portion of it could soon be given over to more parking. Not Hatcher's house — he's made it clear he's not interested right now in selling — but a little grassy nubbin at the end of his dead-end lane.

The city is considering a proposal to abandon that small portion of Hillside Lane to "the adjacent property owner."

Hatcher, who moved into the neighborhood after returning from Vietnam in 1973, has a website (augustagolfproperty.com) that colorfully illustrates the influence that adjacent property owner has had on the land around him. At one time, Hillside Lane itself had five homes on either side. Now it's only him.

The land being considered for abandonment is small — a mere .15 acres of a road that's neither paved nor used. In spite of its apparent uselessness, however, Hatcher feels the 245 square feet still have value.

"My contention is — this little piece of property is worth something," Hatcher says. "I don't think the city ought to just give it away."

Hatcher says he is willing to put his money where his mouth is, offering the city \$31,000 for the land. So is Kitty Baker, whose house on Heath Drive actually backs up to the land in question.

At a recent public hearing, Baker's attorney, Stan Jackson, laid out her opposition of the abandonment, saying it would adversely affect the value of her property. Additionally, Jackson said, since Baker's property has a 100-foot frontage on Hillside Lane, she has an equal right to acquire the property, though the opportunity has not been offered to her.

Hatcher and Baker were the only two property owners left to oppose the abandonment.

Hatcher's property is more noticeable than Baker's; consequently, he received an unintended boost of notoriety last year when the National used the land adjacent to his for press parking.

"I thought to myself — oh my goodness, somebody's going to see my little house all alone here," he says. "And sure enough, David Kindred called."

Kindred, a contributing writer for *Golf Digest* who received the 2010 Lifetime Achievement Award in Journalism from the Professional Golfers' Association, profiled Hatcher's house and the ocean of cars surrounding it for *Golf Digest* and *Golf World*.

City Attorney Wayne Brown said at the hearing that the proposed abandonment would likely move on to committee meetings this month, though Hatcher doubts it will move forward. Either way, he says he's not going to allow the city to give up those 245 square feet without a fight.

"The city is broke," he says. "They don't need to be giving stuff away."