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Estate: Owner's change of heart has put the boyhood home of a former state senator into conservationists' hands.

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BODY:

In a rare victory for preservationists, an Ellicott City estate that once belonged to one of Howard County's oldest families will forever remain a green and tree-lined glimpse of times past instead of becoming the site of a large 21st-century development.

The owner of Keewaydin, a 10.2-acre homestead a mile from Main Street, has donated an easement to Howard County Conservancy that prevents further development on the land.

It's a surprising reversal that illustrates the possibility of preservation - even in Howard County, where land values are continuously escalating.

"This is an excellent example of how it can work," said Fred Dorsey, vice president of the activist group Preservation Howard County.

On the parcel stands a farmhouse built in 1912 by attorney James Clark, a member of a family that first moved to the area in 1797 - when Howard County was still western Anne Arundel. One of his sons, James Clark Jr., who was born in the house, was president of the Maryland Senate and an ardent conservationist.

The retired senator, whose family no longer owns Keewaydin, helped found Howard County Conservancy in 1990. Late last month, after preserving dozens of properties, the conservancy was given the easement that permanently saves Clark's boyhood home.

Besides the farmhouse and a few outbuildings, the land has been untouched by construction. It will see none, under terms of the easement, other than minor buildings such as a barn or a garage.

A very different future for it had appeared likely.

In 1998, the Howard County Board of Appeals approved a special exception permitting an 87-room group care facility for the elderly to be built on about 5 acres. Neighbors appealed the decision, arguing that the farmhouse - which was not slated for demolition - would have been overshadowed by the new building.

The state Court of Special Appeals ruled 13 months ago that the county board had made a procedural error and sent the project back to the beginning of the development approval process.

But the judicial panel didn't suggest that the plans themselves violated regulations. Edward J. Brush, Keewaydin's owner, could have tried again. Or he could have built up to 19 houses, which would have been permitted under county zoning regulations.

Instead, Brush decided to preserve his land.

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"Obviously he made some financial sacrifices in order to do that, but it was important to him," said Brush's attorney, Lex Ruygrok.

Ruygrok, who helped negotiate the easement, has lived at Keewaydin for several years as the estate's unofficial caretaker. He hopes to buy the property so his family of five can remain there.

It's not hard to see why.

The gray-shingled farmhouse – at once quaint and imposing, with a portico over a striking red door – looks out over a long, green lawn dappled by sun and shadow. Dignified old trees flank the driveway. Cars roar past on U.S. 29 beyond the back yard, but a small forest obscures them from view.

Clark, 83, said the estate's name was taken from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, which identifies "Keewaydin" as an Indian word meaning "the Northwest Wind."

A long family history

Sometime before 1900, Clark's grandfather bought the property to serve as a weigh station for the horse-drawn wagons traveling to and from Baltimore laden with wares. Teams drove over scales on the land and continued on the turnpike.

Clark's parents, who built the farmhouse when they married, lived there until their deaths. They farmed and raised a family.

"We always had horses and cattle," recalled Clark, who lives on property at the edge of Ellicott City and Columbia. "It was a nice little farm. ... I hope the people living there now, the children, have as much fun as we did."

Keewaydin was sold outside the family years ago – probably in the 1970s, Clark said. He's pleased that his childhood home won't be developed after all signs suggested that fate.

"It's going to be a nice little oasis down there," he said.

Keewaydin's salvation wasn't dependent only upon preservation sympathies and neighborhood opposition to development. A conservation easement can sharply reduce a landowner's tax burden.

The annual tax bill for the property – assessed at nearly \$1 million – is about \$10,500, according to state records. With the easement, Keewaydin's owner should be able to persuade state tax assessors to lower the charge significantly, said Ann Jones, vice president of Howard County Conservancy. People who donate easements also get a federal income tax deduction for six years, she said. How much depends on the person's income.

Jones is quick to point out that landowners would make more money by developing. But preservationists hope others realize preservation has tangible benefits, too.

"There are real options available, and property owners don't have to settle for development anymore," said Mary Catherine Cochran, Preservation Howard County president.

Keewaydin would not be eligible for most preservation programs because of its relatively small size and its location: Smart Growth calls for focusing development in areas served by public water and sewer, as Ellicott City is, to save swaths of farmland elsewhere. The property didn't have national acclaim to help its case, either.

Important to Howard

But Howard County Conservancy officials – who can accept any donated easement they deem worthy – think Keewaydin is a perfect example of property that's important to Howard County.

"It's good for the community, these little precious places of history, and this one's just so nice because of Senator Clark's longtime involvement in preservation issues," Jones said.

GRAPHIC: Photo(s), 1. Preserving a 'nice little oasis': Former state Sen. James, Clark Jr., a proponent of conservation who was born in the farmhouse, on the Keewaydin property that his family once owned, is happy about, the current owner's easement donation.; , 2. Switch: Owner Edward J. Brush had planned to allow construction on, the Keewaydin estate in Ellicott City where a farmhouse and out-, buildings are the only structures, but changed his mind and granted, an easement to Howard County Conser-vancy.; , 3. Farmhouse: The home on the Keewaydin estate, which was the boyhood,

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home of former state Sen. James Clark Jr., is occupied now by the, owner's attorney, who helped negotiate the land's conservation, easement., 1. NANINE HARTZENBUSCH : SUN STAFF , 2 & 3. DAVID HOBBY : SUN STAFF

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