

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Columbia council members working to preserve Berrywood Forest

By [Natalie Devlin](#)

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An area in east Columbia known as Berrywood Forest is at risk of development for office space, but some residents in the area are trying to raise money to buy the land for conservation purposes. A bank took possession of the land after its previous owner defaulted on loans. ; [Natalie Devlin](#)

COLUMBIA — Although it is still early in the negotiation process, 11 acres in eastern Columbia known to neighbors as Berrywood Forest might get a new owner, Third Ward Councilman Gary Kespohl said.

Kespohl would not give the name of the prospective owner because it is not a sure thing at this point. The deal would end with some sort of trade with the city of Columbia. The land would eventually be labeled a conservation area if the process goes as planned. Both Kespohl and Sixth Ward Councilwoman Barbara Hoppe are looking into different options that would preserve the

area.

"I don't want too many people talking about it until it's closer to happening," Kespohl said. "I don't want to get anyone's hopes up."

The Woodridge neighborhood has been trying to raise enough money to buy the land and save it from development. They set up a [website to promote their cause](#) and collect donations from people in the neighborhood and people who care about the forest.

For the past nine years that they have lived in Woodridge, Frank and Carol Julian have loved the forest, which has several kinds of trees, including varieties of birch and oak.

"We walk every day, and we walk right past the forest every day," Frank Julian said.

The Julians worry the forest will be used for new office spaces because the land was rezoned a couple of years ago as business space. They said the space isn't needed for new offices because there are empty offices in the lot right next to it.

[The land was rezoned from residential to business](#) so a retirement home, the Silver Oaks Senior Living Center, could be built there. When that owner defaulted on the loan, a bank in Oklahoma took over the land. The neighborhood has been seeking donations to try to buy the land and preserve the forest ever since.

When the land was rezoned, the price of the land increased from about \$200,000 to \$1.1 million.

Kespohl said \$1.1 million is just what the bank is asking for, and he and the buyer are hoping to get the price down to \$300,000 or \$400,000.

"The bank will not want to hold that land forever," Kespohl said. "They have no reason to hold that land."

If the land is successfully bought, it will ease the Julians' fears of pollution being fed into Hinkson Creek from construction runoff and any business that might be located there. Hinkson Creek does not go through the forest, but through other creeks that connect, pollution could end up in Hinkson. Kespohl said he agreed pollution concerns are valid depending on what happens to the land.

The Julians are also concerned with upsetting the natural wildlife in the area. They said that more than 200 plants have been identified in the forest — most of which are native to the area — and that the deer that roam there are continually pushed into smaller areas.

The Julians took a special liking to the wildlife in Woodridge when they were looking for a house in Columbia.

"One of the reasons we liked the house was because when we found the house, a deer came out next to the yard," Carol Julian said.

Frank Julian also enjoys seeing deer in the forest.

"Our dog is too old to do this now," Frank Julian said, "but for years we would go on hikes and she would find the deer for me."