

Senator Mark Warner
Senator Tim Kaine
Representative Don Beyer
Representative Gerry Connolly
Representative Abigail Spanberger
Representative Jennifer Wexton
Representative Rob Wittman
Transmitted by Email

September 20, 2022

Dear Virginia Senators and Northern Virginia Representatives,

As many of you know, the proposed Prince William Digital Gateway (PWDG) is a Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) in Prince William County to designate over 2,100 acres for data center development in a currently rural area, directly adjacent to Manassas National Battlefield Park (Battlefield) and Conway Robinson State Forest. We are writing to alert you that Prince William County is moving quickly to approve this massive and irreversible proposal despite significant opposition and many unanswered questions. The County's Planning Commission voted to recommend approval at its September 14th meeting and the CPA is now on a fast track for approval by the Prince William Board of Supervisors as early as mid-October. This proposal is opposed by more than 30 environmental and historic preservation nonprofits, thousands of community members, the National Park Service, the Virginia Department of Forestry, and dozens of regional Homeowner Associations.

While this might appear at first glance to be primarily a local issue, it differs from other land use decisions in its proximity to a national park and state forest, and that it risks inflicting significant and negative impacts on those resources, damaging the region's drinking water supply and accelerating the rise of carbon emissions in Prince William County, undermining state and regional targets. Further, such action will distinguish Prince William County as the jurisdiction which is reversing its commitment to maintaining a protective down zoned area in its Rural Crescent.

As concerned environmental, national park, smart growth, natural resource and conservation and historic preservation organizations, we are extremely concerned that allowing a huge complex of data centers and industrial development just a stone's throw from the Battlefield will irreparably harm the visitor experience to the park and undermine the decades of collaborative efforts that have gone into protecting this nationally important historic landscape. In addition, the proposal implicates road widening and road connections that reflect a key segment of the age-old outer beltway proposal (Bi-County Parkway). It would also have severe visual and noise and huge additions of impervious surfaces necessary to accommodate an additional 27 million square feet of data centers. Perhaps most concerning to the Northern Virginia region is the fact that Prince William County houses the largest portion of the land within the Occoquan Watershed (40 percent) with over one-third of that forested land.

Our groups and local residents have consistently weighed in on this proposal and there is no indication that decision-makers are listening to the levels of concern expressed. The CPA language prepared by county staff and approved by the Planning Commission is woefully inadequate to protect against impacts to the Battlefield and address the other concerns raised

above. Local water authorities and neighboring jurisdictions have also weighed in to express concerns about maintaining drinking water quality.¹

There is a history of Congress intervening in local matters when national parks and public lands are at risk from short-sighted development proposals. In fact, this occurred in 1988 when Congress purchased the Brawner Farm along Pageland Lane to avert the construction of a mall. Today, with the decline of conventional shopping malls, we can only imagine the fate of the once-proposed mall adjacent to the park. It raises the question of when this generation of data centers will be outmoded and will the national park and its visitors be left with dilapidated industrial buildings as new technology replaces this generation of servers?

The broad array of organizations listed below reflects the high level of concern with this proposal. We ask that you add your voices and work with the Board of County Supervisors to guide this type of proposal to a more suitable location in the County, such as the existing Prince William Data Center Overlay District.

As always, members of our groups, including those signed below, are happy to discuss this further with you and your staff and provide any additional information or answer your questions.

Thank you for your service to our community and for your response to this letter.

Sincerely,

Kate West, Director
Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

Joseph Eaves, President
Manassas Battlefield Trust

Elizabeth Kostelny, Chief Executive Officer
Preservation Virginia

Kim Hosen, Executive Director
Prince William Conservation Alliance

Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director
Coalition for Smarter Growth

Julie Bolthouse, Director of Land Use
Piedmont Environmental Council

Nancy Vehrs, President
Virginia Native Plant Society

Elizabeth Merritt, Deputy General Counsel
National Trust for Historic Preservation

Kyle Hart, Mid-Atlantic Program Manager
National Parks and Conservation Association

Robin Broder, Deputy Director
Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Skip Stiles, Executive Director
Wetlands Watch

Eric Goplerud, Chair
Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions

Michael Murray, Chair
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks

Lee Francis, Deputy Director
Virginia League of Conservation Voters

Morgan Butler, Senior Attorney
Southern Environmental Law Center

¹ Letter from Fairfax Water to Rebecca Horner, Prince William Deputy County Executive, March 21, 2022.

Renee Grebe, Northern Virginia
Conservation Advocate
Audubon Naturalist Society

David V. Brotman, Executive Director
**Friends of the North Fork of the
Shenandoah River**

Anne Little, Executive Director
Tree Fredericksburg

Glenda Booth, President
The Friends of Dyke Marsh

Mark Perreault, President
Citizens for a Fort Monroe National Park

Claudia Thompson-Deahl, Conservation
Chair
Prince William Wildflower Society

Elizabeth Lyons, President
Audubon Society of Northern Virginia

Jim Campi, Chief Policy and
Communications Officer
American Battlefield Trust

David Sligh, Conservation Director
Wild Virginia

Frank Washington, Director
Coalition To Save Historic Thoroughfare

Leighton Powell, Executive Director
Scenic Virginia

Pat Calvert, Sr Policy + Campaign Manager
Virginia Conservation Network

Hope Cupit, Executive Director
**Southeastern Rural Community
Assistance Project**

Reed Perry, Manager of External Affairs
Chesapeake Conservancy

William W. Sellers, President/CEO
**Journey Through Hallowed Ground
National Heritage Area**

Alexander M. Nance, Executive Director
Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area

Nancy Stoner, President
Potomac Riverkeeper Network

John Clewett, Co-Lead
Lewinsville Faith in Action