

Northern Virginia State Senators
Northern Virginia State Delegates
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Transmitted By Email

September 20, 2022

Dear Northern Virginia State and Local Elected Officials,

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 it appears 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 county officials. Following the Planning Commission vote, all signs point to a rapid approval by the Prince William Board of County Supervisors (BOSC) as early as mid-October. This proposal is opposed by more than 30 environmental and historic preservation nonprofits, hundreds of community members, the National Park Service and Virginia Department of Forestry¹, 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.

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 resource. 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 impacts and huge additions of impervious surfaces necessary to accommodate an additional 27 million square feet of data centers. Further, such action will distinguish Prince William County as the jurisdiction which is reversing its commitment to maintaining a protective down planned area in its Rural Crescent.

Perhaps most important 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. For residents in Eastern Prince William, the City of Alexandria, Fort Belvoir and parts of Fairfax County, the Occoquan Reservoir is the primary source of drinking water.

Fairfax Water, which treats drinking water for over 2 million residents and in Northern Virginia, has expressed serious concerns with the PWDG and requested that "Prince William County

¹ December 23, 2021 Letter from Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Forestry Forestland Conservation Coordinator Sarah Parmelee to Board of County Supervisors Chair Ann Wheeler.

request that the Occoquan Basin Policy Board convene and oversee a Comprehensive Study of the proposed Planning initiatives - the Comprehensive Plan Update, Digital Gateway Corridor, and the Data Center Opportunity Overlay District - to evaluate their impact on water quality in the Occoquan Reservoir.” Fairfax Water has asked the county “to embrace a holistic and comprehensive approach” using its Watershed Model “as an essential input to the land use decision process.”² The Board of County Supervisors recently agreed to a study, but the findings of that study will not inform their decisions, since results will be available long after the Digital Gateway CPA will come to the BOCS for a vote.

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 draft CPA language prepared by county staff and approved by the Planning Commission is woefully inadequate to protect against impacts to the Battlefield and Conway Robinson.

The Commonwealth of Virginia subsidizes the data center industry without knowing the true costs to the Virginia taxpayer.³ Between FY 2010-17, state tax exemptions for data centers cost taxpayers \$417.47 million. That figure could be well over \$1 Billion by now. While localities are wooed by local tax revenue, we know two things: revenue diminishes over time and it does not cover the long-term tangible and intangible environmental costs.

- Who will pay to address a degradation in water quality?
- Who will be responsible for the rise in carbon emissions and who pays to mitigate increases in carbon emissions?
- To what extent will ratepayers incur increases in electricity bills to pay for new data center infrastructure?

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.

Local and State leaders will increasingly be confronted by these questions. We have the opportunity to make changes now before irreversible land use decisions are made.

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. Please contact Ann Bennett at ann.bennettrw@gmail.com regarding this matter.

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

Sincerely,

Kate West, Director
Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

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

² Letter from Fairfax Water to Rebecca Horner, Prince William Deputy County Executive, March 21, 2022.

³ <http://ilarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt518-1.pdf>

Pat Calvert, Sr Policy + Campaign Manager
Virginia Conservation Network

Joseph Eaves, Chair
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

Anne Little, Executive Director
Tree Fredericksburg

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

Renee Grebe, Northern Virginia
Conservation Advocate
Audubon Naturalist Society

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

Leighton Powell, Executive Director
Scenic Virginia

Elizabeth Merritt, Deputy General Counsel
National Trust for Historic Preservation

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

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

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

Reed Perry, Manager of External Affairs
Chesapeake Conservancy

John Clewett, Co-Lead
Lewinsville Faith in Action

Frank Washington, Director
Coalition To Save Historic Thoroughfare

cc: Jamie Bain Hedges, P.E. General
Manager, Fairfax Water
Robert Lazaro, Executive Director, Northern
Virginia Regional Commission

Addressees:

Senator Jeremy McPike
Senator Scott Surovell
Senator George Barker
Senator John Bell
Senator Richard Stuart
Senator Dave Marsden
Senator Chap Petersen
Senator Adam Ebbin
Senator Jennifer Boysko
Senator Janet Howell
Senator Richard Saslaw
Senator Barbara Favola

Chairman Jeff McKay
Supervisor Dan Storck
Supervisor Rodney Lusk
Supervisor Penny Gross
Supervisor Patrick Herrity
Supervisor Kathy Smith
Supervisor Dalia Palchik
Supervisor James Walkinshaw
Supervisor John Foust
Supervisor Walter Alcorn

Delegate Candi King
Delegate Danica Roem
Delegate Dan Helmer
Delegate Luke Torian
Delegate Elizabeth Guzman
Delegate Michelle Maldonado
Delegate Briana Sewell
Delegate Suhas Subramanyam
Delegate David Bulova
Delegate Vivian Watts
Delegate Eileen Filler-Corn
Delegate Kathy Tran
Delegate Mark Sickles
Delegate Charniele Herring
Delegate Paul Krizek
Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker
Delegate Karrie Delaney
Delegate Kaye Kory
Delegate Alfonzo Lopez
Delegate Marcus Simon
Delegate Rip Sullivan
Delegate Kathleen Murphy
Delegate Ken Plum
Delegate Irene Shin