



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Manassas National Battlefield Park
12521 Lee Highway
Manassas, Virginia 20109-2005

December 3, 2021

Ann Wheeler, Chair
Prince William Board of County Supervisors
1 County Complex Court
Prince William, Virginia 22192

Subject: Impacts of the Proposed PW Digital Gateway Comprehensive Plan Amendment on Manassas National Battlefield Park

Chair Wheeler and Members of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors:

Earlier today, I submitted formal comments to the Prince William County Planning Office on the proposal to amend the Comprehensive Plan to allow for intensive development along Pageland Lane, adjacent to Manassas National Battlefield Park. I have attached a copy of my comments and will let them speak for themselves, but I wanted to take a brief moment to summarize the grave concerns I have over the potential irreparable harm that this development would cause to one of Prince William County's two National Parks.

I believe that the intensive development of the Pageland Lane corridor is the single greatest threat to Manassas National Battlefield Park in nearly three decades. The impact of this proposal on the Park is comparable to two proposals in the late 1980's and the early 1990's that galvanized the historic preservation movement and garnered nationwide attention. In 1988, the proposed 550-acre William Center development resulted in such an uproar that the United States Congress ultimately ordered the federal government to acquire the contested land and directed that it be added to the Park. A few years later, in 1993, the Walt Disney Company proposed to construct a Disney's America theme park 3 ½ miles to the west of the Park. This proposal was also ultimately defeated after outcries over its impact to the park, historic resources, and the surrounding communities.

In both of these cases, the Board of County Supervisors was attracted by the lure of tax revenue promised by these developments. The same can certainly be said about the current proposal for a 2,133-acre data center corridor along Pageland Lane. But just as was the case in 1988 and in 1993, this proposal is extremely concerning to the National Park Service. I believe that as more people throughout Prince William County - and across the nation - become aware of this proposal and its impacts on the Park, the Board of County Supervisors will face a similar outcry.

I would thus urge you to seriously consider the detrimental impacts to the Park and to the County's historic resources as you deliberate the outcome of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment. As I have described in my formal comments, the southern 570 acres of the

2,133-acre application area is particularly sensitive, and has been recognized by both state and federal agencies for its significance and direct association with the Battle of Second Manassas. If anything, these lands should either be removed from the application, or otherwise designated as an area to be preserved.

Previously, I have written and testified before you about the significant benefits the Park provides the County both in terms of job creation and economic output, and also as an open space in which local residents can hike, enjoy the outdoors, and learn about their nation's history. This experience could be forever changed should you elect to intensively develop the rural area along the park's western edge.

Rest assured that despite statements to the contrary by supporters of this proposal, the western boundary of the Park remains scenic and rural. The mere presence of a power transmission line does not in itself destroy the entire historic and scenic character of an area. While indeed unsightly, the agricultural and historic nature of the battlefield's western edge is still largely intact. And while supporters of this development have claimed there is no other option for the use of their lands, the County's Department of Economic Development is actively fielding inquiries from the agritourism industry, which is attracted to this area precisely *because* of its landscapes and proximity to the Park. This could lead to sympathetic development of lands adjacent to the Park which would be far less impactful.

Finally, I would request that if anything, you consider completing the previously initiated update to the Data Center Overlay District *prior* to advancing this amendment proposal any further. This would give the county firm data on the need and appropriateness of a land use change such as this without having to rely upon this CPA proposal, where many critical details are inaccurately represented or unaddressed.

When I speak with people about the mission of the National Park Service, I like to say that we are in the "forever business." It is our role to protect these places for future generations, as well as to share the stories of our nation's past so that they are not forgotten. In considering this proposal, I would urge you to take a similar approach, as the actions you take have the potential to impact the history of the park and the County for decades to come.

Sincerely,



Brandon S. Bies
Superintendent

Attachment