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**Supervisor Lawson’s Directive to Postpone Data Center Public Meetings Over COVID Concerns Voted Down by Board Majority**

 **Prince William County –** Supervisor Jeanine Lawson introduced a directive to postpone two critical public meetings over the COVID-19 Omicron peak, but was voted down by Chair Wheeler and Supervisors Angry, Bailey and Franklin. The two meetings, hosted by the Prince William County Planning Office, will cover the possible expansion of the data center overlay district in the county on Thursday, January 20th, and the PW Digital Gateway proposal Thursday, January 27th.

“Despite an emergency declaration from the former Governor and a warning from our local health district regarding the current explosion of Covid cases in the county, this board is using the pandemic to suppress public comment on the expansion of data and heavy industrial in the rural area by insisting on holding meetings at the very peak of Omicron variant.

This is just more evidence that Chair Wheeler and Supervisors Angry, Bailey and Franklin want to railroad the destruction of the Rural Crescent,” Supervisor Lawson said.

Residents wishing to participate in these important land use meetings have expressed serious concerns about holding a public meeting during a surge of the Omicron variant, which regional experts expect to peak this week or next. Recent data reported 18,338 new cases last week in the Commonwealth of Virginia, *an all-time high*, and 878 new cases yesterday in PWC, which does not include home tests. Chair Wheeler in her January 7th newsletter stated herself that the transmission and positivity rates of COVID-19 in our area is “staggering.”

Adding their voices are several leading conservation and environmental groups who also expressed concerns:

National Parks Conservation Association
Prince William Conservation Alliance
Great Falls Group of Sierra Club Virginia
Manassas Battlefield Trust
Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area Assoc. Piedmont Environmental Council
Coalition for Smarter Growth
American Battlefield Trust
Virginia Native Plant
Coalition to Protect America's National Park

In a joint letter, they wrote, “County residents should not feel like they must choose between contracting COVID or engaging in the public process on an issue with direct and long-lasting impacts. Furthermore, holding a public meeting at a time when so many people cannot participate undermines the democratic process and public confidence.”