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## AMERICAN BATTLEFIELD TRUST JOINS LAWSUIT TO PROTECT MANASSAS BATTLEFIELD FROM MASSIVE DATA CENTER PROJECT

*Trust joins local citizens to fight controversial rezoning that places  
world's largest data center campus next to a nationally significant historic treasure*

(Manassas Battlefield, Va.) — The American Battlefield Trust on Friday joined nine local citizens in taking legal action to [stop construction of the world's largest data center campus on more than 1,750 acres immediately adjacent to Manassas National Battlefield Park](#). The land was rezoned without regard for the irreparable impact to the region's unique historic, natural and cultural resources. [The lawsuit asks the Circuit Court for Prince William County to overturn the trio of rezonings granted in violation of Virginia Code](#) by the lame duck County Board of Supervisors in December 2023.

"The Manassas Battlefield is a national treasure and the very definition of hallowed ground," remarked David Duncan, president of the American Battlefield Trust. "Hundreds of thousands of people visit this National Park every year, generating tourism dollars for the community and providing local residents with recreational trails and open space. It is reckless in the extreme to jeopardize this historic sanctuary over a development that could easily be built elsewhere in the state."

As the lawsuit recounts, [the American Battlefield Trust was formed nearly four decades ago in response to threats to Virginia's historic battlefields](#), including one of the first major controversies over inappropriate development at Manassas. It has since collaborated with federal, state and local authorities and countless private citizens to preserve more than 58,000 acres at more than 150 sites in 25 states – and continues to fight, when necessary, to safeguard the soil on which Americans bled and died to forge the nation we are today.

The proposed data center development, dubbed the Prince William Digital Gateway, [is slated to become, at full build-out, the world's largest data center campus](#) — and would overshadow famed Brawner Farm where, at the Second Battle of Manassas in August 1862, Union and Confederate forces faced off against one another in horrific combat. The fallow fields that were the [launching point for one of the most devastating and decisive assaults of the Civil War](#) could soon be blanketed with as many as thirty-seven data centers — eight-story, drab concrete-and-steel behemoths that would loom over the battlefield park.

In December, the Prince William County Board of Supervisors approved, in a 4-3 vote, the three rezonings after a nearly unprecedented, 27-hour public hearing, despite overwhelming local opposition, over objections from the National Park Service and against the recommendation of both County staff and the County's Planning Commission. The known harms to the Manassas Battlefield and other cultural resources, the unanswered questions about the development's future impact and the parade of amendments right up until the vote itself persuaded all but the Board of Supervisors of the inappropriate nature of the development.

“Even a month after the vote, it remains dumbfounding that Prince William County ignored its own professional staff, its planning commission, hundreds of concerned citizens, and pleas from the National Park Service and the historic preservation community to protect one of the County’s most famous and treasured landmarks,” noted Duncan.

[The lawsuit cites an array of legal violations committed by Prince William County as grounds to overturn the rezonings.](#) These range from the lack of required information about the development, inadequate public notice and hearings, unlawful waivers of key analyses, submissions and approvals, failure to consider key environmental and historical facts and unlawful delegation of rezoning power through failure to identify which of the more than 1,750 acres could be put to what uses.

The stakes involved, and the impacts of such an enormous and incompatible development on the Manassas Battlefield compelled the Trust to join the fight to protect this area. However, the Trust does not oppose data centers or properly planned development: “We are not against data centers when they are properly sited,” Duncan stated. “However, we cannot stand aside when hallowed ground vital to our understanding of the Civil War is placed at risk. To do so here would dishonor our mission and our history.”

In the 1980s, northern Virginia experienced tremendous development pressure. A contentious plan to develop 600 acres near Manassas National Battlefield Park, including land that was Robert E. Lee’s headquarters during the Second Battle of Manassas, made national headlines. Ultimately, the land was acquired by the National Park Service at great cost. In 1990, Congress responded by creating the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission to identify the nation’s historically significant sites, assess their condition and “recommend alternatives for preserving and interpreting them.” Concurrently, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior created a nonprofit partner to assist the Park Service in protection of battlefield land: the American Battlefield Protection Foundation, a predecessor organization of the modern American Battlefield Trust.

[The passage of time and increase in development pressures has made protection of the Manassas Battlefield all the more critical.](#) Since 2009, the Trust has taken action to acquire multiple parcels of historic significance in the area that will be impacted by the Prince William Digital Gateway, including properties contiguous to rezoned land. This includes 170 acres once part of Rock Hill Farm, an area that served as a field hospital during Second Manassas and likely the final resting place of many who did not survive the battle.

**About the American Battlefield Trust:** From a grassroots organization started by historians 30 years ago, the American Battlefield Trust has grown into one of the most successful private heritage land preservation organizations in the nation. The Trust is dedicated to preserving America’s hallowed battlegrounds and educating the public about what happened there and why it matters today. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has protected more than 58,000 acres associated with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War, representing more than 150 sites in 25 states. Its 350,000 members and supporters believe in the power of place and the continued relevance of history as a means to fully understand our rights and responsibilities as Americans. Learn more at [www.battlefields.org](http://www.battlefields.org).

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