

**Opposition To Amazon Data Center Proposal  
Warrenton, Virginia**

*January 2023*

I have lived in Warrenton for over twenty-five years - long enough to have eaten a ham dinner at Ben & Mary's, watched movies at the old movie theater which became Gold's Gym and then Harbor Freight and bowled in the smoky bowling alley that used to be on Business 29 near Popeyes. Warrenton is a special place to live, and I and the hundreds of community members that have reached out to the Planning Commission, Warrenton Town Council and staff members want to preserve that. In the time I have lived in Fauquier County I have never seen an issue where citizens have spoken out in such great numbers, and have been so unified in their message - **"we do not want the proposed Amazon data center on Blackwell Road to be approved."**

There are so many reasons the community has put forth for not approving this application:

- Is in direct conflict with the Warrenton 2040 Comprehensive Plan
- Ruins the gateway to Warrenton and the southern gateway at the old wire factory
- Visual impacts
- Noise impacts
- Health impacts
- Construction impacts
- Impacts to historic Falmouth Street and Meetze Road
- Decreases property values
- Increases the need for high voltage power lines and new substations
- Attracts industrial businesses to Warrenton instead of hospitality focused ones
- Opens the door for additional data centers in Warrenton
- Increases the risk of an obsolete massive building on prime location in Warrenton

The Amazon application is rife with incomplete and inaccurate information, including a noise study that was discredited and the assertion that "an air-cooled system does not produce significant noise." The balloon study was shoddy at best, and even such basic elements such as elevation sketches from all sides have yet to be provided. Amazon themselves delayed the Planning Commission proceedings twice, and then pressured the Commission to vote on the application despite missing information. Amazon officials have also chosen not to come to Warrenton to attend and participate in public hearings and meetings, showing little regard and respect for both public officials and residents.

This is the most important decision the Warrenton Town Council will make, and how you will be remembered. If the Amazon data center is approved, this will certainly set the precedent for approving additional data centers in Warrenton, and fundamentally change the Warrenton/Fauquier landscape forever.

As you deliberate, I hope you take into account what has happened in Loudoun and Prince William Counties. Neighborhoods such as Great Oak (Prince William) and Brook Haven (Loudoun) have been experiencing significant noise and construction impacts for months with no relief. Imagine being inundated with a loud noise at your house 24x7 and not being able to stop it!

Also, please do not discount comments from Fauquier County residents, even though they are not your constituents. County residents have a vested interest in this decision as they would have noise and visual impacts if the data center is approved, and would be affected by new high voltage power lines and substations. County residents know Warrenton is the heart of Fauquier County. They support the Town by patronizing the businesses and restaurants. They attend Farmers Markets, Fall Festivals, First Fridays, the Christmas Parade, and much more. They contribute to Warrenton nonprofits and are volunteers with the many nonprofit services in Warrenton, from Hero's Bridge to Vol-Tran. Without the support and involvement of County residents, Warrenton would be a weak shadow of the town it is today.

### **Special Considerations**

Councilwoman Sutphin recently expressed her desire to keep resident's tax bills down and ensure town employees get paid fairly. Those same residents that you are trying to keep taxes low for are the same people that are sitting at home trying to figure out how to stop the data center from becoming a reality. You have heard from many of them. Those same people will be much worse off financially if the data center is approved and their neighbors flood the market trying to be the first to sell, and their home values drop \$10k, \$20k, \$30k or more. Personal property taxes in Loudoun and Prince William have not decreased since they added data centers to their county.

With regards to Town employee pay, I would like to learn more about how Town employee pay compares to county employees, and other public officials in neighboring counties. Also, more about Town employee attrition rates.

### **Planning Commission**

Five of the Commissioners came to the right conclusions regarding this proposal - Ali Zarabi, James Lawrence, Ryan Stewart, Susan Helander and Gerald Johnston. **They cited their opposition to this proposal due to lack of information provided by Amazon regarding how much noise the facility would generate, how much power it needs to operate and where the power would come from, how much tax revenue it would generate for the town, impact on the town's scenic gateway and view shed, noncompliance with the town's comprehensive plan and the lack of a plan surrounding the decommissioning of the building.** Former Commissioner

Johnston gave the most personal testament against the proposal when he sold his townhome in the Highlands neighborhood and moved to a different county because he was concerned about the noise that would affect his home should the data center be approved. His parting words before stepping down were “I hope the citizens get what they want.”

Steven Ainsworth - the lone vote in favor of the application - recommended approval saying “the noise issue can be fixed.” **Commissioner Ainsworth is incorrect in his assertion. I have included a section on noise below, but the Amazon data center as proposed for Blackwell Road would violate town noise ordinances at its perimeter most of the time during the day and night according to retired NASA scientist John Lvyer.**

### **Community Opposition**

Most Fauquier residents moved here despite having long commutes into NOVA so they could live in a rural environment. Your predecessors on the Warrenton Town Council, previous and current members of the Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors, etc. have taken great effort to preserve Warrenton and Fauquier County as an agricultural community. Citizens don't want 220,000 square foot/57' tall data centers (building + electrical equipment), electrical substations and 110-120' power lines marring the landscape.

**The community has spoken with one voice that we are opposed to this proposal. As elected officials I hope you listen to your constituents.**

### **11/15 Planning Commission Meeting**

- 400 pages of written comments were received - 99% against
- 100 people signed up to speak (30+ were turned away because of space issues)
- About 60 spoke - 59 against; 1 in favor (landowner advertising his land for data centers)

### **11/22 Planning Commission Meeting**

- 30 pages of written comments were received - 99% against
- 30 people signed up to speak
- 0 spoke because the hearing was postponed

### **12/13 Warrenton Town Council Meeting**

- 170 written comments were received - 99% against
- 22 spoke against

## **12/20 Planning Commission Meeting**

- Almost 90 written comments - 99% against
- 41 spoke against; 1 workers union member spoke in favor of work for his people

Comments and speeches have been made by HOA presidents/representatives from Oak Springs, Highlands, North Rock, North Waterloo, Menlough and Vint Hill; also members of the Piedmont Environment Council (PEC), Citizens For Fauquier County (CFFC), Protect Fauquier (PF), Warrenton Honest Government League, the president of the Great Oak community in Prince William County that has been affected by Amazon data center noise, retired NASA scientist John Lyver and hundreds of citizens from the town of Warrenton and Fauquier County that are opposed to this proposal.

Longtime, established business owners have expressed their opposition by speaking at Town Council meetings and Planning Commission hearings, and by posting signs at their businesses: Latitudes, Miller Carpets, Waterloo Motors, Old Busthead and Viccor Jewelry, just to name a few.

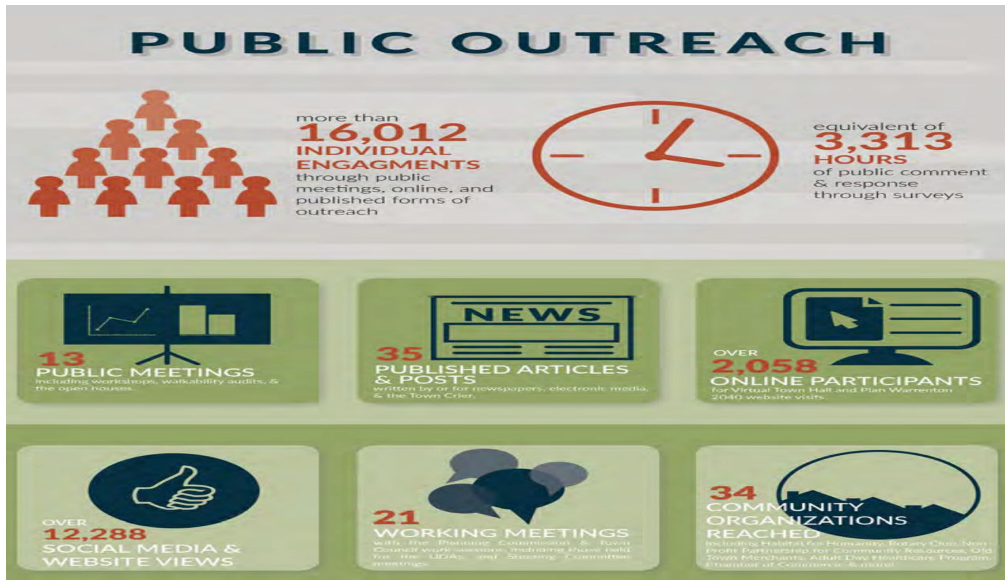
To date, almost 1900 residents of the town of Warrenton and Fauquier County have signed a petition asking the Town Council to deny the Amazon application.

For weeks, The Fauquier Times has been publishing letters to the editor opposing the proposal and criticizing how the process has unfolded.

The community cannot be any clearer regarding where we stand on this issue.

## **Warrenton 2040 Comprehensive Plan**

Town of Warrenton residents and business owners spent thousands of hours over 2 ½ years creating the Warrenton 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Plan Warrenton 2040, adopted by the Town Council on April 13, 2021, **“is the guiding document for future decisions regarding development, preservation, public facilities and other key components of community life. The plan seeks to provide a clear vision to help steer the Town while also meeting the state regulations that require local planning.”**



Data centers were not included in this plan on purpose, and the New Town Warrenton District in which the proposed data center sits **“represents a highly desirable location for a potential signature office/jobs center, characterized by mixed-use with strong live, work, and play options.”** A data center with security guards and an 8’ fence surrounding it is about as opposite of a use for this property as you can get.

Mayor Carter Nevill is quoted in the Warrenton 2040 Plan as saying, “we are a sum of our past, we are the hope of our future, all rolled into one, and we can see that every day when we walk down the streets of Warrenton. Whether it is in Old Town, or going down to the WARF, or walking the streets in our neighborhoods. It is a genuine, sincere community, and it is defined by the people, and the place where we live. **THIS IS YOUR TOWN, THIS IS YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, AND THIS IS YOUR PLAN.**”

So why is the Warrenton Town Council considering a vote that would go against their comprehensive plan? Voting in favor of the Amazon application would be a slap in the face to all the residents that spent hours creating this vision for the town for the next twenty years.

**Zoning**

The Blackwell Road site is zoned light industrial, which by definition is usually less capital intensive than heavy industry and is more consumer-oriented than business-oriented. It is intended for industrial uses which involve the low level of noise, vibration, air pollution, radiation, glare, or fire and explosive hazards.

Also, there are two areas already zoned for data centers in Fauquier County - Vint Hill and Remington. I would argue that the Town would have public support from County

residents for receiving a portion of county data center profits in exchange for not putting data centers up within town limits. Let's start that conversation!

### Gateway To Warrenton/View Shed

The Blackwell Road location where Amazon is proposing the data center is the first thing residents and visitors see when entering the town of Warrenton through its main gateway from the north. This is the first impression, the first look that people get. To put a 6-acre 57' building at this gateway will ruin this entrance to the town of Warrenton.

- Despite all the data centers in Loudoun and Prince William Counties, none have been constructed within their towns - Leesburg, Purcellville, Town of Manassas, etc. This has been done to preserve these towns and not industrialize them.
- Over 4,000 residents and businesses within a 3 mile radius would be visually impacted.

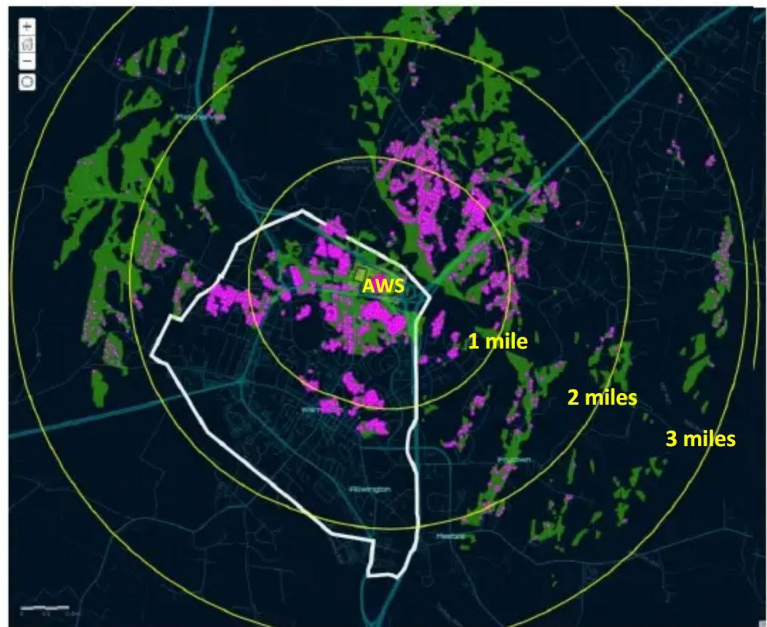
### Quick Viewshed Impact Analysis

#### Elements

- 3.0 Mile Radius Centered on Amazon
- Unobstructed Viewshed (ArcGIS)
- Residence and Businesses Locations

#### Results

- 4094 Residents & Businesses in 3.0 Mile Viewshed
  - **2,395 in Warrenton**
  - **1,699 in Fauquier County**



### Noise

Dr. John Lyver, a retired NASA scientist, conducted a follow-up noise analysis based on (a) the Town's 12/16/22 noise letter; and (b) noise emissions to be expected at the Blackwell site, based on Amazon's description of the data center and comparable data centers in Northern VA. His results are as follows:

- The Amazon data center will violate the Town noise ordinance virtually across the board, probably around the clock, potentially 365 days/year, at all ten

locations along the perimeter where Dr. Lyver analyzed the noise. This only takes into account noise coming from the data center, not ambient noise.

- The magnitude of the violations is substantial. In almost half the cases (i.e., locations and frequencies), the level of exceedance is more than 10 decibels above the Warrenton noise limits.
- Hundreds of Warrenton families in nearby neighborhoods would be impacted by noise that causes adverse health impacts and would likely lower their property values.

In Warrenton, the residential areas that would be most impacted include Oak Springs, Copper Mill, Highlands, North Rock, and the memory care facility of Poet's Walk.

Outside the Town limits, the noise produced by the proposed data center would be higher than the acceptable 65 dBA noise levels in the southern part of the Warrenton Lakes neighborhood.

The Great Oak neighborhood of Prince William County has been dealing with noise issues from the Amazon data centers for months. If you have not been to this neighborhood, I suggest you visit. It sounds like there is a prop plane waiting to take off or a lawn mower running nearby 24x7. The noise readings in this neighborhood are very similar to the noise levels Dr. Lyver is predicting for the Oak Springs, North Rock and the Highlands neighborhoods.

- Amazon's solution to the noise violations has been to wrap what looks like yoga mats around the air conditioners and secure them with bungee cords. Not surprisingly, this hasn't helped. They are engineering a different vent system that they will start installing in the spring that will take several months to install. These re-engineered vents may provide a 5 dBA reduction.





Brook Haven in Loudoun County is another neighborhood experiencing noise issues. Amazon's response at Brook Haven has been to add what looks like room dividers on the outside of the building.



## **Dominion**

In recent weeks, Amazon announced that there would be no substation on the Blackwell Road property and Dominion said they were no longer considering the initial routes they had proposed up from the substation on Old Auburn Road and down from Prince William County. However, their current proposal to get power to the proposed data center by building a new substation off Meetz Road or at the old wire factory would have visual impacts to the Warrenton Greenway and residents in the vicinity. Data centers at the old wire factory, if approved, would add noise impacts as well.

- The old wire factory is in the Greenway and Makers District. According to the Warrenton 2040 Plan, “there is also an opportunity for a vertical gateway element to emphasize the area as Warrenton’s southern gateway, framing the experience as one enters the Town.” Data centers, substations and 110-120’ power lines would certainly detract from Warrenton’s southern gateway.

The current Dominion plan includes distribution lines running up Falmouth Street and Walker Drive which would require a 30-40’ path. Dominion has yet to provide details of where the path would run along these streets. Dominion was going to start public outreach a few months from now, so affected stakeholders have not been given the chance to find out about how this would impact them and weigh in.

## **Property Values**

Amazon’s proposed data center and the supporting infrastructure by Dominion Energy stand to have a huge negative impact on the wealth of the Town of Warrenton and Fauquier County citizens.

- Property values in the neighborhoods surrounding the proposed data center would likely decrease if the predicted noise levels in the 58+ dBA range occur.
- The National Association of Realtors cites studies indicating negative property value impact ranging from 10-40% near transmission lines. Analysis of GIS data from Fauquier County by another member of the community indicates that properties within 1000’ of the transmission lines may experience a loss in value between \$75,000 to \$300,000 per property.
- The amount the Town and County receives in personal property taxes would decrease significantly as a result.

## **Tax Revenues**

Peter Cary of the Fauquier Times wrote an article regarding the challenges of predicting data center tax revenues in October: ([https://www.fauquier.com/news/predicting-tax-revenue-from-data-centers-challenging/article\\_4bdf25a-5485-11ed-b40c-43b72641ef61.html](https://www.fauquier.com/news/predicting-tax-revenue-from-data-centers-challenging/article_4bdf25a-5485-11ed-b40c-43b72641ef61.html))

- Revenue analyses, public documents and interviews with officials in Northern Virginia suggest that the amount of revenue in both places may be either significantly less than expected or, at best, an unpredictable source of public funding. In counties that depend on data center taxation, officials are finding that estimating that revenue is a fuzzy business. And estimating revenue from data centers not yet approved — much less built and operating — is an exercise in futility, as one finance official put it.
- Further clouding the picture is what effect the town of Warrenton and Fauquier County business incentives might have on data center revenue. Both Fauquier and Warrenton offer three years of rebates on 100% of computer taxes paid by tech companies opening or expanding in their areas. If Amazon qualifies for such incentives, millions in tax dollars could be rebated.
- The addition of data centers in Loudoun and Prince William counties has not lowered the amount residents are paying in taxes.
- Loudoun County is facing a \$60 million county budget shortfall after data center equipment was not updated as they were expecting.
- Amazon/Town of Warrenton officials have not publicly announced how much tax revenue the town would receive from the proposed data center. Why is this?

## **Town Development**

A data center in the New Town District would impact future business decisions on whether to locate in Warrenton or not, and may actually discourage any type of redevelopment in near proximity. The industrial feel of the data center will encourage growth of more industrial businesses, whereas if there is more growth in residential and retail opportunities then there will be more interest from retailers, restaurants and hospitality locating in Warrenton because they will see a growing customer base, tourism activity, and proximate complimentary uses. Warrenton is trying to attract interest from retailers, restaurants and hospitality businesses, not heavy industry.

## **Technological Obsolescence**

New technology is being developed that could make data centers obsolete in the coming years. If the Blackwell data center is approved, there is a risk that it would be abandoned - at which point tax revenue would evaporate and Warrenton would be left with a massive building on a prime location in town. The Planning Commission expressed concerns about this at their last meeting on 12/20/22.

## **Construction Impacts**

Amazon has noted that the data center would take 18 months to build. There would be significant traffic in the Town of Warrenton during this time, and construction noise would be heard a considerable distance away. In the Great Oak neighborhood of Prince William, construction equipment can be heard 2000' away. Many homes in this neighborhood were also damaged by the blasting that was needed (foundations and patios).

## **Additional Data Centers**

If the data center were to be approved, this would set the precedent for additional data centers to be approved in Warrenton. Those data centers would result in additional visual and sound impacts for residents in the Town of Warrenton and Fauquier County.

They would also likely result in the need for additional Dominion transmission lines. The initial routes that Dominion proposed with 110-120' transmission lines running across Fauquier County would likely be needed. This would dramatically impact hundreds of families in Fauquier County. Below is an artist rendering of what 110' power lines just outside the town of Warrenton with the needed 100' clearing would look like, drawn to scale. These lines would most certainly be above ground, as only 1% of Dominion's transmission lines in the state of Virginia are buried.

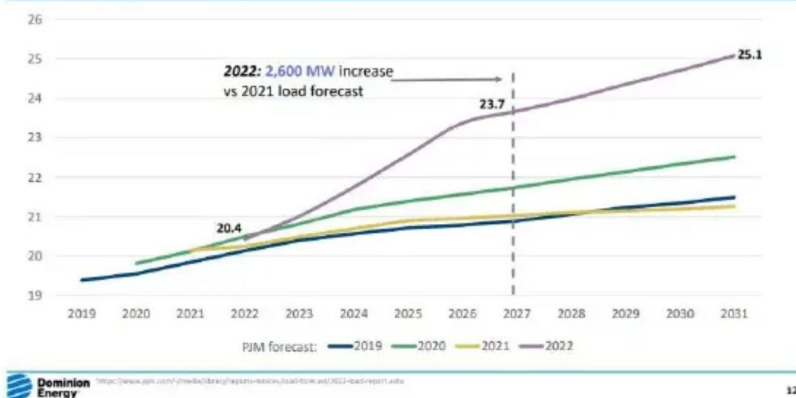


Dominion is certainly ready and willing to add high voltage power lines through Fauquier County as they have recently announced power shortfalls in Loudoun County, the power line infrastructure would be paid for by Virginia residents and data center power usage is the sector where Dominion now makes much of their profits.

## Data and Energy Mutually Beneficial Relationship

Booming data center sector requires mirrored growth in generation and transmission

Dominion Energy Virginia  
PJM DOM Zone summer peak load (GW)<sup>1</sup>



Source: Dominion Q2 2022 earnings presentation

**SAY NO TO AMAZON  
SAY NO TO DOMINION**

## **Conclusions**

If approved, this project would forever scar the Town of Warrenton and Fauquier County, changing the rural, agricultural landscape our residents and visitors love. With your vote you have the ability to:

- Uphold the vision the framers of the 2040 Plan created for Warrenton.
- Maintain the scenic gateway to Warrenton and the southern gateway at the old wire factory.
- Keep a 6-acre 57' structure out of view of 4,000+ residents and businesses.
- Avoid Oak Springs, Copper Mill, Highlands, North Rock, Poet's Walk and Warrenton Lakes becoming collateral damage for the project and not being subjected to constant noise and damage to foundations and patios due to blasting.
- Preserve Falmouth Street, Meetze Road, the Warrenton Greenway and the neighborhoods surrounding the old wire factory.
- Avoid subjecting Warrenton and county residents to construction traffic and noise for 18 months.
- Decrease the need for 110-120' power lines and substations in Fauquier County.
- Preserve property values in the Town and County.
- Encourage the growth of retailers, restaurants and hospitality businesses in Warrenton.
- Avoid additional data centers in the Town of Warrenton which would cause additional visual and noise impacts.
- Avoid the possibility of an obsolete and empty data center building in a prime location in Town.

This is the decision you will be remembered for during your tenure on the Town Council. There are no do-overs, no second chances. I hope you do the right thing and vote "no" on the Amazon SUP.