



**PRESENTATION AT THE APRIL 26, 2016 PUBLIC HEARING**

**Of the**

**Loudoun County Planning Commission**

**CMPT-2016-0001: AT&T SHORT HILL**

My name is Al Van Huyck, speaking tonight on behalf of the members of the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition listed on our letter to the Planning Commission.

I read the ad for this item weeks ago and thought the project was benign as it only suggested a request for a Commission Permit for ***the expansion of a Utility Substation, Transmission.***

Then late last week I received an email asking if I knew about the proposed use and included the Staff package which describes the “expansion” as 160,000 sq. ft. structure, 35 feet high and 433 feet in length, with eight generators and eleven air coolers to operate 24/7 by 60 staff working in three shifts on the ridge line of the Short Hill Mountains.

We believe this would be the largest privately owned, non-agricultural commercial structure in rural Loudoun.

***I’m here tonight to urge the Planning Commission to send this item to committee for further study and to allow citizens with relevant expertise to submit further information for consideration.***

***The Critical Action Date is February 9, 2017, so there is ample time.***

Our Coalition has the highest respect for the County Planning and Zoning Staff and appreciate their dedication and hard work. However, the Staff does not have the specialized expertise in ***Telecommunication Technology, nor the specialized knowledge to assess the potential problems with power sources, noise generation, and light pollution which may be associated with this project.***

***Therefore, the Staff has only the information submitted by the applicant upon which to make an assessment. We urge the Planning Commission to expand the questioning of this project before it is approved or denied.***

### **WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

If the Commission Permit is approved, this huge facility becomes a BY-RIGHT PERMITTED USE. And it will be visible high on our mountains for decades to come.

The decision rests on the final determination of whether it is an “expansion of an existing substation at the site” which is a permitted use in the Zoning Ordinance or is it “a substantially different use such as a **data center which is NOT a permitted use**. There is no technical analysis available in the Staff Report to decide this issue other than the applicant’s claim.

***This use question must be clarified as a cursory review on the internet suggests the configuration of telecommunication substations has no relationship to the physical proposals of this application before the County. We include pictures of substations with this submission. The physical configuration of the application suggests a strong similarity with data centers.***

***There is also cursory evidence that the present 1960s facility on the site has been shut down. It is important to ascertain exactly what the present site is being used for at this time.***

We also note that the application is from Parsons Environment & Infrastructure Group, not AT&T. Is there any commitment that AT&T will actually build and operate the facility? Attached is an internet article that AT&T is in the process of selling \$2 billion worth of their data center assets.

In addition, we ask the Planning Commission to clarify the following questions:

- 1. What will be the power requirements? Will new overhead lines be required and how will they be provided?***
- 2. Will the facility generate noise from the air coolers and generators? Is so what will be the levels and how far will it carry on the quiet, clear, night air of the area?***
- 3. Will the facility have security lights on the building or other lights on at night? If so will the lights be visible to the surrounding area?***

4. ***What will be the ground water requirements? Is there any chance that the facility can cause nearby wells to go dry?***
5. ***What will be the impact on birds and animal habitats and the ecosystem of the mountain if this facility is built?***

If this request for a Commission Permit is approved, the only control left to the County will be the “General Notes or Building Requirements” on the plat. The answers to the above questions need to be clarified on the plat—reference to just the county regulations is insufficient because of the location of the structure on the ridgeline of the Short Hill Mountain.

#### **VIEW SHED ANALYSIS INADEQUATE**

The Staff Report notes that the structure will be visible from Harpers Ferry Road and Mountain Road, and for miles beyond. It also will be very visible for several miles along the Appalachian Trail—one of our important recreational assets in the county and the entire East Coast. In addition, the 900-acre Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship faces the site. There are discussions about establishing Loudoun’s first State Park along the Blue Ridge expanding to connect with Harper’s Ferry Park land. Having this huge structure in the viewshed, visible on the opposite mountaintop, cannot be a positive factor in obtaining the state funding to create the State Park.

If there is noise and light pollution from the facility, it will have an even greater negative impact on most of the northwest corner of Loudoun County.

#### **DOES THE COMMISSION PERMIT COMPLY WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?**

The Staff Report states: “The Planning Commission is asked to determine whether the general location, character, and extent of the proposed use are in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan.”

We submit that a full reading of Chapter 7, the Rural Policy Area; and Chapter 5, The Green Infrastructure yields not a single sentence or policy that advocates for a non-agricultural private commercial facility of 160,000 sq. ft. on the ridge line of the Short Hill Mountain. To the contrary, throughout the Comprehensive Plan is a commitment to the rural life style, agriculture, and the rural economy. And at length it advocates for safeguarding our mountains from development and particularly on the ridge lines. ***Therefore, the Comprehensive Plan clearly does not support the application’s proposed use as being in the general location, character, and substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan.***

Instead the Staff Report substitutes a narrow logic which essentially says that because this huge facility is now deemed an expansion of a “Utility Substation, Transmission” and this use is permitted in the AR-1 zone district of the Rural Policy Area, it is therefore in agreement with the Comprehensive Plan. This is not “substantial accord.”

### **SUMMARY REQUEST**

Again we respectfully request the Planning Commission to send this item to committee for further study and analysis. And to allow citizens with expertise to contribute their analysis and proposals to the record.

The issues and questions raised here have serious implications on a significant and important area of rural Loudoun. The Planning Commission has the responsibility to be sure the County does not make a bad decision.