



The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations, Inc.

P.O. Box 203, Mount Vernon, VA 22121-9998

<http://www.mvcca.org>

July 12, 2021

Dear State Senators Ebbin, Surovell, Boysko, Favola, Howell, Marsden, Petersen, and Saslaw and Delegates Sickles, Krizek, Tran, Bulova, Delaney, Filler-Corn, Helmer, Keam, Kory, Lopez, Murphy, Plum, Samirah, Simon, Sullivan, and Watts:

Fairfax County is undergoing a rapid transformation from a suburban and rural past to an increasingly urban environment. Some of the county is up to date and modern, some areas will and should remain comfortably suburban, and some of it looks like it is stuck in the mid-1900s and desperately needs renovation. In our part of the county, the Embark plan for Richmond Highway offers a dramatic opportunity to transform one of the oldest highways in the county into what the Comprehensive Plan describes as our "Main Street" with modern housing, businesses, abundant trees, and a modern transportation system. This is the county's largest ever revitalization project. It is an exciting effort and should serve as a model for updating other old corridors in Fairfax County as we move to our common modern future.

The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations has long advocated for a transformation of Richmond Highway and strongly backs the Embark plan. We are joined in this effort by the South Fairfax Development Corporation and the Mount Vernon/Lee Chamber of Commerce. The Fairfax Federation also supports this effort as part of a county-wide approach to revitalization. We are deeply worried, however, that key parts of the plan may not be implemented, leaving us a disappointing billion dollar project and setting a bad precedent for development in the rest of the county.

A crucial issue is whether the utilities along Richmond Highway will be undergrounded as part of the project or whether the unsightly and damaging utility poles, wires, and cables that now help mark Richmond Highway as one of the ugliest roads in the county will remain. It is a well-known fact that developers, residents, and business people move to areas that are pleasant to the eye as well as near to urban centers. Richmond Highway certainly qualifies on the second part but fails miserably on the first. Undergrounding will be a key to whether this and other ambitious renovation efforts in the county attract residents and business.

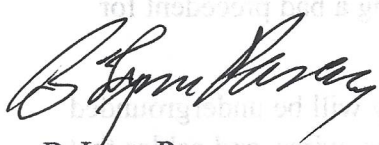
The value of undergrounding utilities goes beyond aesthetic issues and its attraction to development. Power lines are tree killers. There is a growing understanding in the United States that mature trees along highways and elsewhere in urban areas are crucial to reducing the heat island effect of the roads. Planting trees near overhead wires where they will be maimed is ridiculous. (Fairfax County is full of V- or Y-shaped trees that are headed for an early death due to power company trimming.) The wires and cables can be put under the bike path which would allow full scope for the trees. Undergrounding will also ensure the security of the power and communications grid from natural or manmade disasters along this critical corridor between Washington and Fort Belvoir

There is also an equity, "One Fairfax" issue involved in carrying out undergrounding as part of this project. We admire the undergrounding included in recent projects in other areas of Fairfax County and completely laud the effort. In fact, we want all new development projects in the county to have the benefits of hidden utility wires and cables. But undergrounding should be county-wide, not just limited to better off parts of the county. We are absolutely sincere in our belief that undergrounding on Richmond Highway is important to establish the precedent for similar highway projects across the rest of the county so all can benefit equally. What will now benefit Richmond Highway will in the future be key to renovation of older major roads in your neighborhoods.

Failure to do the undergrounding at this time would be an obvious false economy. The poles and wires will have to be removed and replaced in any case, the roadway will already be torn up, and it would be much cheaper to have the same contractor to put in the conduit while the road is being redone as they did in Prince William County. Not doing the undergrounding along with the other work on Richmond Highway would simply be extremely foolish.

We are quite aware of the many discussions about who pays what on Fairfax County roads, but in the end Richmond Highway is a state road and the state has to be interested in quality urban development along its roads as well as adding more traffic lanes. Undergrounding utilities along Richmond Highway is a critically important part of the project, the time to accomplish this is very short, the cost is small relative to the overall project, and the responsibility of all stakeholders is clear. We request that you as our Fairfax County representatives in Richmond act now to provide the Commonwealth's fair share of funding for this essential project.

Thank you.



B. Lynn Pascoe

Co-Chair, Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations

To: Senator Adam P. Ebbin
Senator Scott A. Surovell
Senator Jennifer B. Boysko
Senator Barbara A. Favola
Senator Janet D. Howell
Senator David W. Marsden
Senator J.C. Petersen
Senator Richard L. Saslaw
Delegate Mark D. Sickles
Delegate Paul E. Krizek
Delegate Kathy K.L. Tran
Delegate David L. Bulova

Delegate Karrie K. Delaney
Delegate Eileen Filler-Corn
Delegate Dan I. Helmer
Delegate Mark L. Keam
Delegate L. Kaye Kory
Delegate Alfonso H. Lopez
Delegate Kathleen J. Murphy
Delegate Kenneth R. Plum
Delegate Ibraheem S. Samirah
Delegate Marcus B. Simon
Delegate Richard C. Sullivan
Delegate Vivian Watts

CC: Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay
Supervisor Daniel G. Storck
Supervisor Rodney L. Lusk
Supervisor Walter L. Alcorn
Supervisor John W. Foust

Supervisor Penelope A. Gross
Supervisor Pat S. Herrity
Supervisor Dalia A. Palchik
Supervisor James R. Walkinshaw