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Like it or not, a toll road may be on the way

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AT THE LAST Courtland District town hall meeting, residents learned of the awesome power granted by the state to the George Washington Toll Road Authority for the development of the proposed toll road from Interstate 95 to Gordon Road.

The nearly \$400 million, four-lane artery will exit Interstate 95 at the welcome center, traverse Celebrate Virginia, parallel the Rappahannock, "fly" over River Road, and plow through historic and pristine land, homes, and farms.

The land can be condemned by the county through eminent domain and purchased for "fair market value." While not able to exercise the legal seizure of land, the GWTRA has the authority to make a deal with a recalcitrant owner that he or she can't refuse.



GWTRA membership is composed of three members each from the Spotsylvania and Stafford boards of supervisors, the city of Fredericksburg, and one from the state. This means that all our supervisors could vote against the project, but be overruled if the other members wanted it to go forward. However, this may be moot, because at least one Spotsylvania supervisor who is a GWTRA member has indicated that he supports the toll road.

In the Committee of 500's Spotsylvania Board of Supervisor issue questionnaire for candidates, Courtland Supervisor Jerry Logan stated: "I am a member of the GWTRA that was created by the General Assembly to provide solutions to our most urgent transportation problems. The proposed Rappahannock Parkway Toll Road offers the hope for a practical alternative to [State] Route 3 congestion."

Conversely and most confusingly, Logan responded to another question concerning "the greatest threat" to Spotsylvania County. He replied: "The greatest threat to Spotsylvania County is the loss of our rural land to developers and the deterioration of existing communities in our urban areas."

However, Courtland District supervisor candidate David Ross dropped the biggest bombshell at the town hall meeting. He read a 2004 letter from then-Courtland Supervisor Bob Hagan to the Board of Supervisors and senior staff regarding the Silver Cos.' efforts to get an I-95 off-ramp at Celebrate Virginia. It indicated that Silver's efforts would be enhanced, "if the ramps led to more than just their project, and particularly if it helped improve traffic generally."

Hagan advised that the route discussed was similar to "corridor five of the original outer connector options." He described the route: "It crosses Celebrate Virginia, comes below the intersection of Bragg and River roads, proceeds west and drops down into Route 3 west, after much of the traffic has turned south on Salem Church Road. It moves traffic west."

In attendance at this meeting were representatives from a local builder, which had commercial interests at Single Oak Road and Chancellor, Silver Cos., VDOT, and several other individuals. Hap Connors, who at the time was chairman of the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization and chairman of the Board of Supervisors' transportation committee, was invited to discuss "how we could put together an alternative to Route 3" with Mike Jones of Tricord, Hagan, and Jud Honaker of the Silver Cos. At the last minute, Connors could not attend.

Public and private funding as well as a self-supporting toll road was discussed and the importance of soliciting state and federal political support was stressed to "pitch the project to the Feds in such a way that there would be no reason for them

to say so."

UNDUE INFLUENCE

It is evident that both public- and private-sector movers and shakers started planning at least seven years ago this costly and previously rejected connector road to primarily benefit commercial interests, and secondly to theoretically improve traffic flow. Although it will be claimed that the process was not sub rosa, it was only last year that the public became vaguely aware of its proposed existence. The Silver Cos. has already donated \$200,000 to this effort and, more recently, \$14.7 million has been allocated to conduct further studies and an outreach program for this project. Make no mistake: The toll road is gaining momentum.

Considering the power of public and private forces arrayed in support of this endeavor and the lack of sufficient transparency, the toll-road process appears to be rigged against Courtland property owners whose lives will be destroyed by it, and is a slap in the face for all those who cherish the stretch of pristine Rappahannock River wilderness that this manmade scar will irrevocably damage. Although sections of Courtland District, the rest of Spotsylvania, and the city may not share the same concerns, it was very clear at the two town hall meetings that the vast majority of Courtland residents in attendance were against the toll road.

Politicians and planners, please take note, and the rest of Spotsylvania, please rally in support of those who would be sacrificed for the questionable convenience of others.

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