

New rule angers Spotsylvania

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The tension between Spotsylvania County and the region's transportation planning board has reached a boiling point.

Some members of the Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors say they don't even see the point in belonging to the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, whose membership also includes elected officials from Fredericksburg and Stafford County.

"What on earth is FAMPO doing for us?" Spotsylvania Supervisor Greg Cebula asked at a county board meeting Tuesday. "This is the question."

The conflict boiled over last week, after FAMPO members voted 6-5 Monday night to approve a change in the organization's bylaws that Spotsylvania officials say will stymie debate. The new rule says FAMPO cannot vote on an issue unless a motion has been put forward and seconded by members from different localities.

Spotsylvania Supervisor and FAMPO member David Ross, who has initiated at least a couple of votes that nobody outside of his county supported, says the measure was "clearly an act to silence the minority."

The Spotsylvania supervisors directed County Administrator Doug Barnes to write a letter of disappointment—or "disgust" in the words of Supervisor Timothy McLaughlin—over FAMPO's decision.

But FAMPO Chairman and Fredericksburg City Councilman Matt Kelly said the move was simply an effort to "foster regional cooperation and consensus."

"We're not willing to go back into the old battle days of every locality fighting for their own dollars," he said. "We need to focus on what's best for the region, and that's a lesson they need to learn."

Fredericksburg City Councilman and FAMPO member Fred Howe said the new rule will promote more conversation across jurisdictional lines.

FAMPO, a federally mandated group, identifies the region's transportation priorities. Projects must have its support to receive federal dollars.

Still, some Spotsylvania supervisors say they don't see an upside to FAMPO membership.

McLaughlin, a FAMPO member who often vocalizes his disdain for the group, says Spotsylvania is helping to fund an organization "that won't let us talk."

Ross said he came close to walking out of FAMPO's meeting on Monday. He noted that some votes may be blocked because of the new rule, which he says decreases accountability.

"Quite frankly, if one of our motions isn't seconded in the future, I'm thinking we're going to walk out," Ross said.

Kelly said they'd be walking away from transportation dollars. "If they want to go ahead and lose all the funding for their projects, that's a decision they've got to make," he said.

Since 2012, Spotsylvania supervisors have clashed with the majority of FAMPO members over the \$284 million Rappahannock Parkway project.

Ross has proposed at least two failed votes against the project—one in October 2012, the other in April 2013—and both motions were seconded by another FAMPO member from Spotsylvania. Those votes, which received no support outside of Spotsylvania, wouldn't have been allowed under the new voting rule.

The four-lane parkway would leave Interstate 95 at the Virginia Welcome Center, pass through Celebrate Virginia South in Fredericksburg and connect with State Route 3 near Gordon Road in Spotsylvania. The Virginia Department of Transportation says the parkway would ease congestion on I-95 and Route 3.

FAMPO on Monday voted to proceed with the plan despite Spotsylvania's opposition.

Stafford Supervisor Cord Sterling, an alternate FAMPO member, says Spotsylvania would rather complain about the process than outline projects they want.

Sterling, who also represents the region on the powerful Commonwealth Transportation Board, said he had to initiate a discussion about including improvements to the Massaponax I-95 exit in VDOT's six-year plan.

The CTB, appointed by the governor, oversees the state's transportation decisions.

"I will focus on building roads and solving our transportation problems," Sterling said. "They can worry about bylaws and who gets to second a motion."

Every FAMPO member from Stafford and Fredericksburg voted in favor of the bylaw amendment. That includes Sterling, Stafford Supervisor Paul Milde, Stafford County Administrator Anthony Romanello, Fredericksburg Councilmen Kelly and Howe, and Fredericksburg City Manager Bev Cameron.

But Spotsylvania's FAMPO members—Ross, McLaughlin and Barnes—weren't alone in opposing the change.

Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission Director Al Harf and Marcie Parker, acting

administrator for VDOT's Fredericksburg District, also voted against it.

"Democracy is sometimes messy," Harf said.

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