



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 23, 2013

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Stella Koch, Chairman *Stella M. Koch*
Environmental Quality Advisory Council

SUBJECT: EQAC concerns about proposed improvements to the Braddock Road/Pleasant Valley Road intersection

EQAC has long held concerns about the implications of transportation improvements to natural resources and county parks. We also have concerns about the compatibility of transportation projects with land use, and consequent environmental impacts. Because of this, we have been watching with interest the proposed improvement plan for the Braddock Road and Pleasant Valley Road intersection that would affect the following county parks: Rock Hill District Park; Mountain Road District Park; and Ellick Preserve. We have two concerns with this plan that illustrate our broader focus on transportation projects: the first is related to the unique ecological nature of the parks; and the second relates to the transition of a semi-rural road into a commuter road.

With respect to ecological resources on and near the project site, there are wetlands present in all three of the county parks. Rock Hill Park has a globally rare forested wetland community and two state rare plant species that have the potential to be impacted by the project. There is a receiving stream south of the proposed project that could be negatively impacted by increased flows and no studies have been done to date to consider those impacts.

Any VDOT proposal for this intersection must protect these state rare plants and the globally rare forested upland swamp community. The Virginia National Heritage Program and the Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Resources Management and Protection Branch must be involved in these efforts.

The Natural Resources Management and Protection Branch of the Fairfax County Park Authority has made the following requests; we support these requests and urge the Board of Supervisors to ask that these requests be honored before any decision is made on this proposed improvement, including any requests for a "temporary construction easement":

- 1) Completion of the hydrology and hydraulics analysis of the globally rare wetlands by VDOT.

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- 2) Delineation of the wetlands in Rock Hill District Park and Mountain Road District Park to determine the extent of impacts, if any, of the proposed project.
- 3) Completion of field technical studies with the Virginia Natural Heritage Program staff for the extent of rare plant species and communities.

We request that, before any improvement plans move forward for any transportation project, plans be implemented, where applicable, to protect state rare plants, globally rare communities and other wetlands. In the example of the Braddock Road and Pleasant Valley Road intersection, we feel that such an effort is needed.

Our second concern, as noted earlier, is the compatibility of transportation projects with land use, with consequent environmental impacts. For example, the Braddock Road/Pleasant Valley Road intersection is the back door to the South Riding community in Loudoun County. Many of those residents use the intersection to get to jobs in the Route 28 corridor of Fairfax County. The preferred route from South Riding to Fairfax County is via Route 50, which is designed for commuter traffic. The proposed enhancement would open an alternative route that is not designed for continuously increasing levels of traffic. The traffic projections show demand increasing through 2020 and volume-to-capacity ratios approaching 0.88 with all proposed enhancements. However the supply of commuters from suburban communities will consume the new capacity.

EQAC is concerned with the long term effects of opening semi-rural roads to commuter demands and suggests that alternatives be explored that encourage utilization of high capacity roads as the first choice.

EQAC feels that, when issues of this significance arise on any transportation project, the Board of Supervisors should hold a public hearing on that improvement project. We feel that the proposed Braddock Road/Pleasant Valley Road intersection improvement rises to this level.

SMK:GWL:nhk

cc: Edward L. Long, Jr., County Executive
Robert A. Stalzer, Deputy County Executive
David J. Molchany, Deputy County Executive
Thomas P. Biesiadny, Director, Department of Transportation
Cindy Messinger, Acting Director, Fairfax County Park Authority
EQAC file, September 2013