



Town of Ashland

Center of the Universe

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July 21, 2017

Ashland Citizens, Friends, Neighbors and Community Members,

I wanted to take a moment to reach out and update you on what the Town has been doing in reference to the DC2RVA High Speed Rail project. I apologize that it has been so long since my last outreach on May 1, 2017. I can sense the fear, anxiety and confusion in the community created by this threat to our Town.

JAMES R.
FOLEY.
MAYOR

First, a little background. We are currently in the midst of a six month long community advisory committee (CAC) review of the project and alternative solutions. Monday, July 24, 2017 will be the third of six meetings.

JAMES D.
MURRAY
VICE MAYOR

GEORGE F.
SPAGNA, JR.
COUNCIL MEMBER

I would characterize the first meeting held on May 22 as largely informational. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VADRPT) staff explained the federal process they must use to study the corridor, and we learned a lot about the various engineering issues associated with operating trains.

STEVEN P.
TRIVETT
COUNCIL MEMBER

KATHLEEN K.
ABBOTT
COUNCIL MEMBER

The second meeting was held on June 26. VADRPT staff did their best to explain the modeling they use to determine whether various routes will be able to meet the train capacity needs of CSX and Amtrak, and then we discussed the various screening mechanisms (parks, wetlands, cultural resources, etc.) they use to eliminate options. Unfortunately, it was this conversation that led to a lot of frustration among CAC members and the community. VADRPT staff approach this process in a very matter of fact way and do a very poor job of conveying understanding and empathy towards community members so enraged by the process and possible outcomes. They articulated a “check the box and follow the forms’ mentality without demonstrating any critical thinking.

JOSHUA S.
FARRAR
TOWN MANAGER

ANDREA E.
ERARD
TOWN ATTORNEY

JOSEPH A.
COLLINS
CLERK OF COUNCIL

While the Community Advisory Committee process is advancing, our Town staff are also working with Town Council in other ways. We have re-engaged with our lobbyists to get their help in understanding and influencing the process. Town staff are working to gather facts to help support the community members’ heartfelt stories about the destruction various options would reap upon the Town. Town Council and I will continue to communicate with our state and federal elected officials so they know our story. We must be diligent, and I can assure you that the Ashland representatives on the CAC will be diligent, in asking probing questions of VADRPT that help all of us understand what the best alternatives actually are. We will demand of VADRPT information which has previously been withheld.

As we move forward as a community my message to you is that we should plan for the worst and hope for the best. Your input is always welcome, appreciated and important, but please keep an eye out for particular opportunities where your input and outreach to VADRPT will have the most impact and carry the most weight. We will do a better job of keeping you informed of these very important strategic opportunities.

We have been told the long-awaited release of the draft EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) will occur before August 1. While this document will largely exclude the Ashland area, it will be another important opportunity to provide critical feedback to DRPT and FRA. We will coordinate an informational blitz to take advantage of the 60 day public comment period. More to come on this point.

Finally, I would encourage everyone to attend and provide comment at the CAC meeting on July 24, 2017. This is one of those strategic opportunities for input I mentioned earlier. Please be sure to mention your opposition to a third rail through the center of Town. The bulleted list below are instructions for public participation provided by VADRPT.

- The purpose of this comment period is to help the CAC members understand the views of the public
- In the interest of time, questions may not be answered in the meeting
- Public commenters will be called in the order they signed up
- Each commenter will have approximately 2-3 minutes depending on the number of commenters signed-up
- If we run out of time, please provide your comments in writing
- Please be respectful of every speaker

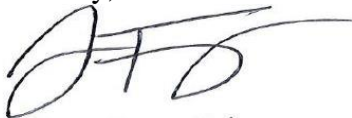
Thanks to everyone in the community for your passion and efforts to save our Town. Please continue to participate and stayed tuned for additional strategic input opportunities. Feel free to reach out to any of the Town's stakeholders to share your thoughts, ideas and suggestions. The Town's stakeholders are:

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Kristin Reihl
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Sincerely,



James R. Foley
Mayor
Town of Ashland, VA
The Center of the Universe