

April 3, 2008

Mr. Joseph Kroboth
Washington County Division of Public Works
100 West Washington Street, Room 238
Hagerstown, MD 21741-4738

Mr. John Barr, Mr. Terry Baker, Mr. James Kercheval,
Mr. William Wivell, and Mr. Kristin Aleshire
Washington County Commissioners
100 West Washington Street, Room 236
Hagerstown, MD 21740

Dear Director Kroboth and Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal to erect a 190-foot communications tower at Keep Tryst and Sandy Hook Roads in Washington County, Maryland. We are writing to express our concerns about this proposal and to encourage the County to work with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and the National Park Service to identify alternatives that will meet the County's emergency communications needs while preserving the natural and scenic character of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.).

As you may know, the A.T. is a unit of the National Park System. It extends 2,176 miles from Georgia to Maine across the Appalachian Mountains and is visited by three to four million people each year. Those visitors come to the A.T. for many reasons, but primarily they come to experience the natural, cultural and pastoral landscapes of the Appalachian Mountains and surrounding countryside.

Central to that visitor experience are the scenic vistas that dot the ridges and valleys along the Trail from Georgia to Maine, each offering a unique window into the character of the local landscape through which the Trail passes. The tower would be highly visible from one such place—with perhaps *the* most scenic view along the Appalachian Trail in all of Maryland—the Goodloe Byron Overlook at Weverton Cliffs, located at the southern end of Washington County. Not only is it special to those in the A.T. community, its importance is also recognized in Washington County's Comprehensive Plan, where it is listed as one of 11 “unique and natural scenic features.” In reference to those features, the plan goes on to state that, “*Protecting qualities attractive to, or enhancing opportunities for heritage and recreational tourism, as well as promoting the County's rural heritage should be a priority.*”

Unfortunately, the integrity of this scenic feature is now in jeopardy. As the County's July 25, 2007, crane test demonstrated, the proposed 190-foot tower at Keep Tryst Road would have significant adverse impacts not only on the A.T. at Weverton Cliffs and other locations, but on

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the view-sheds of other important resources as well. Those include Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

While we recognize and support the County's need for an effective emergency-communications system, we believe such a system can be served by a facility that does not compromise the significant scenic features of the Appalachian Trail and of Washington County. ATC prides itself on working cooperatively with local communities to achieve their communications needs while at the same time protecting important Trail resources. In recent years, we worked successfully to mitigate the impacts of two towers constructed at separate sites along the Trail in Maryland.

We are confident that a win-win opportunity exists to develop alternatives to the County's current tower proposal. We understand that the National Park Service would consider locating a tower on its property, through either a lease agreement or land exchange with the County. Again, we urge the County to work with us to develop a solution that meets its needs while protecting the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and other important natural and scenic resources.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you. Please feel free to contact Director of Conservation Operations Bob Proudman here at ATC headquarters (304-535-6331, ext. 103) or ATC Mid-Atlantic Regional Director Karen Lutz at (717) 258-5771.

Sincerely,



David N. Startzell
Executive Director

cc: Pam Underhill, Park Manager, NPS-Appalachian Trail Park Office
Lee Sheaffer, President, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club
Caroline Petti, Conservation Committee Chair, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club
Rick Canter, Maryland A.T. Committee Co-Chair
Tom Lupp, Maryland A.T. Committee Co-Chair
Dan Spedden, Park Manager, South Mountain Recreation Area, Department of Natural Resources
Al Preston, Park Manager, South Mountain State Battlefield
Butch Norden, Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Elizabeth Cole, Maryland Historical Trust
Don Campbell, Superintendent, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
Kevin Brandt, Superintendent, C&O Canal National Historical Park
Don Briggs, Superintendent, Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail
Donald Johnson, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, Federal Communications Commission
Jeffrey Steinberg, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, Federal Communications Commission
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