



**POTOMAC
APPALACHIAN TRAIL
CLUB**

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March 31, 2008

Washington County Commissioners
John Barr, Terry Baker, James Kercheval, William Wivell, and Kristin Aleshire
100 West Washington Street, Room 226
Hagerstown, MD 21740

Dear Washington County Commissioners:

We are writing to express our strong concerns regarding the communications tower proposed for the intersection of Keep Tryst Road and Sandy Hook Road in Washington, County, Maryland.

The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club maintains over a thousand miles of hiking and non-motorized trails in the four-state area of Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. We maintain the entire Appalachian Trail in Maryland as well as the trail through Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, C&O Canal. We also maintain other trails within the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park including trails on both Maryland and Virginia Heights.

We recognize the importance of clear and available communications to emergency response personnel. At the same time, however, we are also mindful of the natural beauty of the Pleasant Valley region and the abundance of scenic landscapes and vistas found there. We, therefore, ask you to reconsider the proposed communications tower located at the intersection of Keep Tryst Road and Sandy Hook Road. A recent crane test demonstrated that this tower would be visible from many of the unique overlooks within the area, including those from Weverton Cliffs, Virginia Heights, Maryland Heights and from Harpers Ferry itself. (See attached photograph.) Upon first observing this view Thomas Jefferson wrote "The passage of the Patowmack through the Blue Ridge is perhaps one of the most stupendous scenes in nature." Jefferson went on to comment that "the scene is worth a voyage across the Atlantic." Much of that scene is still visible today with unobstructed views from many directions to what Jefferson called "the most powerful agents in nature." As the organization responsible for maintaining many of the trails and overlooks in this area, PATC is deeply concerned with any visual impact to these beautiful and historic views. Unfortunately, the proposed communications tower at Keep Tryst and Sandy Hook Roads would impair all these views.

We are concerned that Washington County appears to have done little to examine alternative locations better suited to protecting the views from surrounding National Park Service and State Park areas or to examine mitigation alternatives aimed at improving tower aesthetics at the present proposed location. This seems contrary to the County's own strictures and admonitions. The County's Comprehensive Plan recognizes that Washington County "has the most scenic and pastoral landscapes in the mid-Atlantic region", singles out Pleasant Valley as having an abundance of scenic qualities, and generally recognizes the importance of preserving the county's natural beauty and scenic resources. And, Washington County's Zoning Ordinances for commercial communications towers state that tower locations "shall be compatible with and shall not adversely impact the character and integrity of surrounding properties. Consideration shall be given to the viewshed associated with scenic and historic areas and to the use of stealth technology to minimize the visibility of the proposed tower." Shouldn't these requirements, and the values embodied in them, also apply to county government towers?

While we support better and enhanced communications for emergency response personnel we feel that the placement of this tower is in an inappropriate location. We therefore ask that you reconsider your tower proposal and develop an alternative that will have less of a visual impact on such an important and historic area.

Sincerely,

Lee B. Sheaffer, Jr.
President