

## Amazon Data Center Would Change Warrenton and Fauquier Forever

By Kevin Ramundo  
CFFC President

By the end of this year, Warrenton officials will have likely decided the fate of Amazon's plans to build a huge data center on a 42-acre site adjacent to County Chevrolet at the northeast gateway to the town. **This will be the most important local land-use decision in decades** and could lead to dramatic and irreversible changes, including massive electrical power infrastructure needed to supply the data center and others that will almost surely follow. Warrenton and Fauquier County could become home to the next data center hub, following in the footsteps of Loudoun and Prince William Counties.

- Citizens for Fauquier County (CFFC) has spent hundreds of hours analyzing all aspects of the project.
- CFFC has reviewed hundreds of pages of emails, documents and communications received from the Warrenton Town Council through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.
- The issues we have identified have been communicated to the Warrenton Planning Commission and we requested the opportunity to meet with the Warrenton Town Council.
- We have and will continue to work closely with the Piedmont Environmental Council and a new grass roots organization, Protect Fauquier.

### Visibility

If approved, this data center and the proposed electrical infrastructure to support it would become the most visible part of a community that has always taken pride in its rural and small-town characteristics. This 220,000 square-foot, 50-foot tall structure (including equipment on the roof) on an elevated site would dominate the view upon entering town from the northeast where Route 17 and Routes 15/29 converge, and would also be visible from many parts of Warrenton and Fauquier. The data center would require up to nine miles of high-voltage transmission lines across Fauquier and into the

town suspended from 120-foot steel towers, and an equally unsightly electrical substation on eight acres next to the data center.

CFFC believes that the planned transmission lines would carry up to 20 times the power the data center would need, paving the way for more data centers in the future. Amazon has not provided visuals of how the data center and substation would look from ground level and the amount of power the facility would require. It should be mentioned that homes in the vicinity of power transmission lines can be worth up to 40 percent less than houses that are not, based on a National Association of Realtors study.

### Noise and Vibration

Data centers produce high levels of noise and vibration under normal operating conditions and even more when the very large diesel-powered generators are in use. Some of this noise is low frequency which accounts for the steady drone these facilities produce which has been found to cause anxiety, irritability, stress and sleeping difficulties. Based on a CFFC analysis, 657 homes and businesses within 2,500 feet of the data center would hear the noise, including 43 residences outside of Warrenton. Amazon did submit a noise study but a NASA scientist and CFFC concluded that it was flawed. In this regard, Amazon has delayed a town planning commission work session that would have reviewed the noise study so that more work could be done.

### Water

It is well known that Warrenton has a limited water supply, and concerns persist regarding how much water the facility would consume. Amazon initially indicated that the facility would only consume 1,500 gallons per day, an amount that would be comparable to what is consumed by four households.

### Reject the Application

Even though the Amazon data center could be a tempting source of revenue for the town and the county, CFFC believes the special use application should be rejected. In addition to the serious issues already raised, the project is inconsistent with the town's 2040 Comprehensive Plan which envisioned that this site would be used for housing, retail, and commercial purposes all of which would bring taxes and more benefits, economic development and jobs to Warrenton than a data center would.

**Any decision that would fundamentally change Warrenton and Fauquier as this one would needs to be based on more information, more attention to process, more transparency and more public input.**

Very strong and active citizen opposition is needed to persuade town officials to reject the project. Please visit CFFC's website to learn what you can do to join those who don't want irreversible changes to come to Warrenton and Fauquier. 🏡



Amazon's 41.8-acre parcel at Blackwell Road in Warrenton. Photo by Hugh Kenny/PEC

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# Empty Promises: Let's Learn From Loudoun County

By **Lori Keenan McGuinness**  
CFFC Board Member

Loudoun County, our neighbor and data center capital of the world, has long encouraged nearly unbridled development of data centers. But after a decade of explosive development, its supervisors are already warning residents of a tight 2023 budget and the looming threat of higher taxes.

Today, Loudoun is attempting to curb future data center development, especially in rural areas and along Route 7. But new challenges continue to emerge – Dominion recently announced constraints delivering power for data center growth, suggesting that although major transmission lines already litter the county, there needs to be more – more power lines, more development and more money.

How can we trust that the indication that data centers provide a long-term source of tax revenue are not just empty promises to get us to say “yes”? Reliable tax revenue estimates are hard to come by, and where are the numbers and strategic studies on Fauquier County and Warrenton’s future with data centers?

If we don’t learn from Loudoun, we may find ourselves in the same position years down the road, where arguably, the only perceived benefit from data centers (tax revenue) becomes a moot point and more of our paychecks turn into tax dollars.

## To learn from Loudoun, Fauquier and Warrenton need to:

- Follow comprehensive plans, rather than “spot zone”/rezone for scattered data centers (“Mixed Use” in the comp plans does not include data centers), don’t allow them outside of designated areas;

- Limit our dependence on data centers for tax revenues;
- Independently analyze estimated data center tax revenues based on the actual landlords and tenants;
- Protect scenic gateways and roadways that do not have the power infrastructure to sustain data centers;
- Adopt modern, data center-specific building standards that address high-quality design, environmental sustainability and proximity to residential and retail areas; and
- Reject pressure to rezone and permit data center development in a scattershot and inappropriate manner.

Culpeper, Fauquier, Prince William and Warrenton seem eager to avail themselves of the perceived tax revenue benefits associated with data centers – but that’s about all there is to benefit. There are no other positive attributes – no economic development potential, very little job creation, no amenities and the ugly truth about noise and vibration that data centers generate.

Even when you put all of the negatives aside, does the seemingly only benefit (tax revenue) really exist? When will we, like Loudoun County, be asked for more?

We simply do not have enough insight to go forward, but we certainly have the foresight to see what we could be facing. Only by learning from Loudoun’s past (and very real present) can Fauquier and Warrenton thoughtfully consider their futures. And only by having a transparent public discussion can we control data center developments, rather than be controlled by them. 🇺🇸



Data Center Alley - Loudoun County



# CFFC Submits Utility-Scale Solar Report to the County

By Jon Knuckles  
CFFC Vice President

As highlighted before in the Monitor, CFFC has been studying the impact of building and operating utility-scale solar (USS) facilities in Fauquier. The effort began in Spring 2021, with the support and interest of the county, and we will soon be finalizing our report. Our greatest concern was the potential of USS facilities to lead to a major loss of agricultural lands and forests.

The examination sought to bring serious study and useful recommendations to county leaders as they grapple with how to balance the understandable desire for “green” sources of energy while protecting Fauquier’s rural traditions. Our goal was to evaluate the pros and cons, understand risks and rewards of USS development, and to help determine the circumstances under which these facilities should be approved and where.

Our work was extensive and included examining the best practices in use in numerous other localities in the eastern United States and discussions with conservation and farm advocacy groups, local government officials, USS developers and other organizations. As a result, we developed a set of recommendations that CFFC believes will help better balance the desire for green energy with the need to preserve agricultural land and open space and protect the environment.



*Storm water run-off can be a major problem at USS facilities.*

#### **A few key recommendations include:**

- USS facilities should avoid rural lands especially where the land is in production or contains especially valuable soils, which is in accordance with the Rural Lands Chapter of Fauquier County’s Comprehensive Plan.
- USS facilities should be restricted to industrially zoned lands, municipal-owned lands and previously developed land to reduce the loss of agricultural and forested land.
- The maximum size solar facility should be 200 acres.
- Consideration has to be given to the negative environmental effects of USS facilities that work against the intent of mitigating global warming and pollution, including

deforestation and groundwater and watershed impacts.

- Requirements that soil and vegetation at USS facilities be maintained in such a way to prevent excessive stormwater run-off.
- Require proof of financial strength and secured bonds to cover annual maintenance costs, environmental clean-up costs, and decommissioning costs.

CFFC’s report will also include detailed recommendations pertaining to land use, soils, stormwater management, ground water contamination and decommissioning requirements. Fauquier County already has a very good USS zoning ordinance and we hope our work will be helpful. 🌍



*Solar facility under construction in Spotsylvania County. Photo Credit: Hugh Kenney, Piedmont Environmental Council*

## Patricia Ewing Joins CFFC's Board




Patricia Ewing

CFFC is pleased to announce that Patricia Ewing has joined Citizens for Fauquier County's Board of Directors, effective September 1, 2022.

Pat, and her husband, Peter Piske, live in Delaplane, and have been Fauquier residents for 22 years. Pat is currently employed as senior vice president and general counsel for a major defense contractor, and has spent much of her 35-year career practicing U.S. procurement law as both corporate counsel and in law firms.

Pat will bring tremendous experience to the CFFC board as an attorney and as a dedicated conservationist

who believes in our mission of protecting open space, supporting agriculture and preserving historical resources. She served in senior legal positions at the World Wildlife Fund and the American Farmland Trust. Locally, Pat served for many years on Fauquier County's Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Committee and on the board of the Land Trust of Virginia for 13 years.

CFFC is delighted to welcome Pat to the 20-member board. She joins four other board members elected in 2022: Dave Gibson, Lori Keenan McGuinness, Sam Mitchell and Ben Smith. 

## PLEASE JOIN US

**Please support Fauquier County's oldest conservation nonprofit dedicated to preserving the county's rural character.** CFFC is a strong advocate for open space, historic preservation and a healthy agricultural economy. We track every land use rezoning or special exception before the Planning Commission and are quick to engage when inappropriate development threatens to bring Northern Virginia sprawl to Fauquier. Planning Commission developments are covered monthly in CFFC's exclusive Land Use Report.

Fauquier County is under tremendous pressure to grow as regional population soars and residents flee neighboring, built-out counties. Help protect Fauquier's future by joining CFFC, a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization. Visit [citizensforfauquier.org](http://citizensforfauquier.org) and become involved.

