

# NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 6

**Occoquan Watershed Coalition** December 1995

10600 Sandy Run Trail, Fairfax Station, VA 22039 | 703-764-1300 | Fax 703-764-3762

## **The Central Crossing is the Wrong Answer!**

*The letter below is in response to one received by Mike Thompson. Mike, the former Chairman of the Springfield District Council, has been a leader in our efforts to stop the "central crossing" from cutting through our protected area. This is a condensed version of his letter to a Sully resident:*

The point of my October 30th letter was that Prince William County has not completed its own Parkway. That is a given. It currently dumps traffic onto a two-lane rural road that discourages commuters who are trying to get to the Rte 28/Rte 66 corridor. If the Prince William Parkway were completed, if it connected into Rte 28, and if Rte 28 were expanded to its originally approved capacity, then traffic would certainly run more smoothly than it does today.

Springfield District is accommodating a great deal of Prince William traffic and will continue to do so through the expansion of Rte 123 to four lanes now and eventually to six lanes if traffic projections are accurate for the future. That expansion affects a large number of Springfield residents. And the completion of the Fairfax Parkway and the expansion of feeder roads to the Parkway are having a substantial impact on our neighborhoods as well.

As a matter of fact, before Rte 123 is expanded to its full six lanes to accommodate Prince William traffic, we in Springfield are getting over 80 miles of new road lanes, more than the mileage from Clifton to Kings Dominion! At not time have I or others in Springfield said that all of the Prince William traffic should come through Centreville. Clearly, a whole lot of Prince William traffic is already coming through Springfield and that will continue.

The area we are discussing, the Occoquan Watershed, was set aside for good reasons over ten years ago — to protect this environmentally sensitive area and our drinking water. Fairfax County's Board of Supervisors has voted on more than one occasion to keep this area environmentally protected and to keep a "Ridgefield Road" from destroying our watershed. This is a special area. It is a watershed. It protects our drinking water. It has been protected not only by the vote of the Board of Supervisors, but also through court decree. This basic fact seems to have been lost by some as we work to figure out what to do with the very real problem of traffic from Prince William County.

The Citizens Working Group that met for several weeks on this subject earlier in the year also agreed — unanimously — that the answer to this problem of traffic coming out of Prince William County was not the

"central crossing", but for Prince William to complete its own transportation network on its side of the river. That conclusion was voted on without dissent with those from the Sully District and Mt. Vernon District voting with us in favor of this position.

There may not be any professional studies to back up my statement that, "we have clearly shown why Prince William County's solution to its transportation problem lies on Prince William's side of the Occoquan River by connecting its own Parkway to Rte 28." However, the eight week series of meetings by the Citizens Working Group; certainly came to this conclusion from the facts that we had available. Without completing its own transportation network as it should, Prince William is not in a strong position to try to force a "central crossing" down our throats here in Fairfax County.

Fairfax County developed a plan to "accept" Prince William traffic into our county. That was done by opening up both Rte 123/Rte 95 and Rte 28/Rte 66 corridors to them. Prince William and Fairfax county have worked well on developing the southern end of this plan with Elaine working hard to complete the Rte 123 expansion, and Gerry Hyland working to properly improve the Furnace Road and Hoes Road corridors so that they connect into the Fairfax County Parkway and break up the bottleneck at the prison site. Our county opened

up both of these corridors to Prince William. We expected their traffic to come into our county through these openings — avoiding the watershed area. The employment centers are more accessible through these points of entry. But Prince William opted to not complete its own Parkway and to force its traffic through the watershed. All we in the Citizens Working Group and those of us in the Springfield District want is for Prince William to do what it should have done in the first place: complete its own Parkway, connect it to Rte 28, allow its own traffic to get to the Rte 28/Rte 66 corridor and let's see what happens at that point. Without taking these actions, you can't expect us in Springfield to sit back silently and "take it on the chin" from those who are unwilling to do their proper part in solving the traffic problem as was planned for by Fairfax County.

You mentioned that there may not be sufficient right-of-way. However, is it any different than the problem faced in widening of Rte 123? Some homes and property will be impacted — including at the end of our own subdivision. If, however, Elaine's office and VDOT will work together as they did so well on the building of the Fairfax Parkway, that impact can be kept to a minimum and several homes and property saved. I'm sure that would be the case in the widening of Rte 28 in Sully District as well.

The point is this: a central crossing makes no sense when Prince William's Parkway is not finished and when the connection to Rte 28 and the widening of Rte 28 has not taken place. The first thing to do is to complete the transportation improvements that were meant to take place and then we can see what else might need to be done. Once the Fairfax County Parkway is completed, the traffic patterns may well change

— as they have already changed in Clifton. On top of this, there is a growing movement to telecommuting that will change our work habits and quite possibly the transportation needs over the next ten to twenty years.

Placing a minimum of 60,000 additional Prince William cars at Butts Corner every morning in order for many of them to take the Fairfax County Parkway to the Reston, Rte 28, and the Dulles Corridor makes little sense to us. That is why Elaine has even discussed taking yet another "hit" by building additional lanes in the north western part of Springfield District to help connect traffic to Rte 28. Those would be additional lanes on top of all the others we are accepting at this point.

Of course, an Origin-Destination study is needed to determine where the traffic in Prince William County is actually going each morning and afternoon. But, please remember that no one is advocating to merely dump traffic we don't want into someone else's backyard. What we want understood is that we in Springfield are taking a great deal of Prince William traffic today and are willing to take even more to help solve the transportation problem, but not without the current transportation plans being completed. And that includes connecting the Prince William County Parkway to Rte 28 and expanding Rte 28 to its originally approved capacity.

We should not disrupt our neighborhoods through the acceptance of new roads until the previously approved roads and road improvements are completed. And Prince William County should not force its commuters through the Watershed while refusing to complete its own Parkway. The completion of already approved transportation

improvements are a natural place to start. Additions to what is already planned will be easier to design when we see the results of what is already on the books.

Much is changing that will impact the transportation needs of Northern Virginia: new industries like the IBM/Toshiba plant in Manassas, the changing time table for the development of the Engineering Proving Grounds, the closing of the Lorton Prison, the economic development planned for the western part of our county and the eastern part of Loudoun County, the building of tens of thousands of new homes on the site where Disney was going to build, the continued expansion of Prince William County, the downsizing of the federal government and our armed forces, etc. Traffic patterns are changing before our eyes with the opening of the Fairfax county Parkway and the widening of Braddock Road, etc. And, over the next several years, the improvements to the Springfield Mixing Bowl and the HOV lanes that could well be added to the Beltway will make it easier for commuters in eastern Prince William to travel to Tysons Corner and other destinations.

**The proposed "Central Crossing" is the wrong answer to our transportation needs.**

*Michael W. Thompson*

## **The Occoquan Watershed and Fairfax County**

The Occoquan Watershed is the land which drains into the Occoquan Reservoir, which, in conjunction with the Potomac River, supplies water for close to 900,000 Northern Virginians.

Fairfax County is one of several jurisdictions within the watershed area.

In the 1970's the State Water Control Board (SWCB) implemented the "Occoquan Policy" to improve the water quality in the reservoir. To reduce point source pollution, the SWCB required construction of a regional high performance tertiary treatment installation, the Upper Occoquan Sewage Authority (UOSA) facility, to replace the eleven secondary treatment plants in use.

Also during the 1970's the northern VA Regional Park Authority acquired 5000 acres and created a series of contiguous parks along the Fairfax County shoreline of the Occoquan-Bull Run Stream Valley. These parks serve public recreational use, act as a conservation area for forest, marshes and wildlife, and help protect the shoreline of the reservoir.

In 1979 the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (FCBOS) directed an Occoquan Basin Study, which focused on nonpoint source contamination, the diffuse pollution which results from land use. The Study, concluded in 1982, found that existing land use plans (combined with structural Best Management Practices (MBPs) and the UOSA facility} would NOT be sufficient to prevent further degradation of water quality in the reservoir.

The Study recommended that the best land use BMP would be a density of one residence per five acres in about 2/3 of the Watershed in Fairfax County, while more intense BMPs would be necessary in the remaining urbanized area of the County's Watershed area.

In July 1982, the FCBOS amended the Comprehensive Plan and

downzoned approximately 40,000 acres of land in the Occoquan Watershed to an R-C District (Residential-Conservation, one dwelling unit per five acres). In such a low density area, the County does not provide sewer or water services. Concurrent with the downzoning, the Board upzoned a portion of the land in the Occoquan Basin to an I-3 District (Light Intensity Industrial). The Board's action to protect the reservoir and Watershed was buttressed in the Fall of that year, by the State Water Control Boards announcement that the phosphorous and nitrogen levels in the Occoquan Reservoir made it the second most polluted lake in Virginia.

The County has spent millions of dollars and untold hours dealing with litigation and board actions defending (successfully) the downzoning; the Original Downzoning Suit, the NV Land Suit/Balmoral, the Consideration of Additional Special Permit and Special Exception Uses (colleges, private schools, clubs), the Ordway Road Sewer Expansion, the Jermantown Road/Oakton Sewer Lines, and the current Randolph Williams, Inc. Litigation.

To summarize, in the 1960s and 70s, the Commonwealth and Fairfax County recognized that a serious water quality problem existed in the Occoquan Reservoir. Awareness of the problem led to construction of a sophisticated treatment plant and the establishment of park land, but the County judged these actions to be inadequate in light of the rapid urban development in Northern Virginia and enacted a large scale downzoning on the Watershed. Over a period of thirteen years, the FCBOS has consistently supported the low density limitation in the watershed, despite lengthy and expensive lawsuits and many planning exception applications.

Challenges to the downzoning are likely to continue. The Watershed area appeals not only to residential developers, but to schools, golf clubs, and other organizations looking for open space in a largely developed county. Many people look at the Watershed and see "unused" land failing to recognize that the Watershed IS serving a high level of usage — maintaining the public health by protecting the water supply. Just as pressures exists to use the Watershed for houses and other facilities, transportation demands from intensely developed surrounding areas, particularly Prince William County, have raised the issue of using the Watershed for major highways. In the last six years, there have been proposals for Ridgefield Road, for a central parkway-to-parkway connector over the Yates Ford Bridge and for a realignment of Rte 123 that would be sited in the Watershed. The various land and transportation use issues facing us and our Board of Supervisors will continue to test both our and the County's Commitment to preservation of the Watershed and the Reservoir.

### *The Town of Clifton*