



Michelle Burrelli <michelle@jthg.org>

Fwd: Wilderness Crossing update

1 message

Bill Sellers <bill@jthg.org>

Thu, Dec 8, 2022 at 1:49 PM

To: Michelle Kellogg Burrelli <michelle@jthg.org>

For the portal...

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Don McCown, PEC <pecnews@pecva.org>

Date: Thu, Nov 10, 2022 at 4:38 PM

Subject: Wilderness Crossing update

To: William Sellers <bill@jthg.org>

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Wilderness Crossing Town Hall Recap and Next Steps



About 200 people attended our town hall with the Wilderness Battlefield Coalition in Locust Grove on October 25. *Credit Marco Sanchez/PEC.*

Dear William,

Hello again! It was great seeing so many folks at our Wilderness Crossing town hall late last month in Locust Grove. Below you can find a recap with some of the key takeaways from the event and an update on where things stand in Orange County's approval process.

Planning Commission Work Session: December 1

We are expecting the Planning Commission to hold a work session on the Wilderness Crossing rezoning application, in lieu of their regular meeting, on December 1 ([see more information on time and location](#)). At that work session, which is open to the public, the commissioners will have an opportunity to question the developer directly about the recently submitted and [significant changes to the application](#).

Then, sometime after the work session, the Planning Commission will likely schedule and hold a public hearing, make a recommendation to approve/deny the rezoning application, and send it to the Board of Supervisors for a final public hearing and vote.

I strongly encourage you to attend the December 1 work session and *both* public hearings. I'll let you know as soon as those are scheduled, but in the meantime, you can still email members of the [Board of Supervisors](#) and the [Planning Commission](#) to express your concerns.

Insights from our recent town hall:

Two weeks ago, we heard from so many concerned Orange County residents at our community town hall and hope that energy will carry forward over the coming months. Hosted by [Central Virginia Battlefields Trust](#), [Friends of Wilderness Battlefield](#), [Germanna Foundation](#), [The Journey Through Hallowed Ground](#), [Preservation Virginia](#), [American Battlefield Trust](#), [National Parks Conservation Association](#), [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#), [National Park Service](#), and [The Piedmont Environmental Council](#) (collectively, the Wilderness Battlefield Coalition) the program brought together almost 200 people from the community, including two members of the Planning Commission.

If you were unable to attend and/or want the presentation materials for reference, [please visit our website](#).



We've posted resources from the town hall to our website including the presentation slides and a [recording of the presentation about the toxic legacy of gold mining](#) at the site.

A lot of information was presented, but the main takeaway is this: **Orange County should not allow Wilderness Crossing, or any other development, to move forward on this property until [the toxic legacy](#) from the property's gold mining history is dealt with, once and for all.** And as if the contamination from mercury and other heavy metals wasn't enough of a problem, this is a terrible development proposal for many other reasons!

- **This project is too speculative.** It envisions a wide variety of possible land uses and development scenarios that could impact public health, safety and welfare. From the vast array of by-right flex/light industrial uses—like data centers, manufacturing, and distribution centers which could result in additional transmission lines, noise, air pollution, heavy truck traffic, etc.—to the possible 1 million square feet of commercial space and 5,000 houses that could result in additional residential traffic along with impacts to schools, water, police, fire and rescue, etc. With the myriad of possibilities and incompatible uses in close proximity to each other, it is difficult to see how this could be developed as a cohesive project or how the County can ensure potential impacts on the community are minimized and/or mitigated. [[See pages 6,8 and 9 of the Wilderness Crossing Design Guidelines Manual.](#)]
- **The traffic impacts would be significant.** At buildout, Wilderness Crossing would add 11,000 car trips to area roads just during the peak hours, with thousands more during the rest of the day and evening.

- **Orange residents would have to pick up the tab.** While the developer offers to donate land to the County for a new school to support the influx of new residents, the developer does not proffer any money to pay for the construction of a new building or the infrastructure. The County estimates that a new school building would cost from \$56 million (for an elementary school) to \$64 million (for a high school). Taxpayers across the County would be responsible for this expense.
- **There may not be enough water.** The County (and the Wilderness Crossing proposal) is relying on the Rapidan to continue supplying water at current levels and to accommodate all future demands for withdrawals. Considering the experience of historic and recent droughts, the total dependence of the proposed development on the availability of water from the Rapidan, and the County's apparent lack of planning for alternative supply solutions, we have serious concerns that there may not be enough water for future, or even current, area residents.
- **Impacts to local history, open space and the tourism economy would be significant.** Each year, Wilderness Battlefield hosts an average of 481,000 walkers, joggers, birders and history buffs. The developer's flawed traffic study does not consider impacts to the beloved park. Heavy area traffic already shapes National Park Service park management decisions. The proposed realignment of Rte. 20 would require a large land disturbance to the historic battlefield and approximately one mile of new road construction through land identified by Congress as worthy of perpetual protection. Additional cut-through traffic will crowd low-volume park roads. Increased traffic significantly threatens the visitor experience on this invaluable open space.
- **And there's the gold mining issue again...** Based on [information unearthed last fall](#), development of the Wilderness Crossing property could exacerbate the ongoing, unmitigated environmental and public health risk to air, soil and water posed by mercury and other heavy metals associated with documented abandoned, contaminated gold mines onsite. Cleanup can only be ensured if the applicant enters the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)'s [Voluntary Remediation Program](#). Orange County should not even consider this proposal until the contamination has been certified as remediated by the DEQ.

Thank you for following this issue, sharing with friends and neighbors, and weighing in with your elected officials. If you have any questions or concerns, I encourage you to reach out!

Best,

Don McCown

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The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership is a non-profit, four-state partnership dedicated to raising awareness of the unparalleled American heritage in a region running from Gettysburg, PA through Maryland and Harpers Ferry, WV to Jefferson's Monticello in Albemarle County, VA. With more history than any other region in the nation, JTHG is recognized by Congress as a National Heritage Area and offers authentic heritage tourism programs and award-winning educational programs for students of all ages. Take the Journey to *Where America Happened*.