

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
12000 Government Center Pkwy
Fairfax, VA 22035

September 21, 2020

Reference: Federation resolution “Supporting the Undergrounding of Utilities & Communication Lines Throughout Fairfax County”, October 24, 2019, (enclosed)

Dear Chairman McKay and Board Members,

The Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations members and Board of Directors have previously recommend that all utility lines and communication lines be placed underground, particularly during Fairfax County road projects (reference the enclosed). This letter encourages your support to make this important planning action a reality.

The Federation believes undergrounding of utility lines and communication lines should be a County policy. Federation members want streets that are pedestrian and biker friendly, beautifully tree-lined, vehicular safe, storm-tolerant, and free of unsightly overhead utility wires. Undergrounding fulfills these desirable community attributes.

Federation committees reviewed several factors of undergrounding and concluded five that the Board of Supervisors may consider:

1. **Continuity of services** - Underground lines will provide greater assurance of continuity of services to residential and commercial customers. Downed power lines in inclement weather are a hazard to the public and to buildings. Frequently, many utility workers will be needed to repair damaged lines and restore services. Undergrounding is a safer option for these utilities.
2. **Opportunity** - The Federation recommends that utility lines and communication lines be installed underground during major roadway improvements such as road improvements, safety or operations repairs, repaving, or roadway extensions. The road projects in the Richmond Highway Transit Oriented Development (TOD) area is an easy example of the opportunity for burying utility lines.
3. **Urban Heat Island Effects** - Urban Heat Island Effects are real because of the increasing area of urban concrete and asphalt roads. Environmentally friendly urban design and planning can mitigate heat island effects by reducing the width

of concrete and asphalt roads and planting native shade trees in wider right-of-ways. According to a July 29, 2020, EPA report Urban Heat Island Effects contribute to higher daytime temperatures, slower nighttime cooling, and higher air-pollution levels. These effects contribute to health exhaustion and heat stroke for all ages and ethnicities. Planting trees over undergrounded utilities greatly reduces Urban Heat Island Effects.

- 4. **Trees** – Street-side trees provide cooling shade, absorb greenhouse gases and automotive pollutants, and are an appealing beauty with a calming impact to busy lives. Shaded roadways contribute to safer traffic conditions brought about by narrower lanes having reduced speed limits. Shaded roadways enhance livable communities that encourage residents to walk to work and to shopping.

- 5. **Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan** - Several areas of the current Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan address the issue of undergrounding utility lines and the enhancing of streetscapes by planting of native shade trees and vegetation. The City of Alexandria on their portion of Richmond Highway in the Metro Way/Potomac Yard area developed narrower, tree lined streets with reduced speed limits. Fairfax has the ability to enhance its Comprehensive Plan with respect to long-term undergrounding planning.

The Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations, the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations, and the Reston Citizens Association look forward to your support of this continuing request for the undergrounding of utility lines. Further, we seek your support for the narrowing of road widths, reducing speed limits, and the planting of native road-side shade trees.

Queries may be directed to the Chair, Undergrounding Committee.

Respectfully submitted,



Pete Sitnik
Chair, Undergrounding Committee (UC)
2nd Vice President, FCFCA
fed2vp2020@fairfaxfederation.org
Mount Vernon District



Patrick Smaldore
Undergrounding Committee Member
Chair, Public Safety Committee, FCFCA
Drainsville District

(Signatures continued)

Karen Campbell
Undergrounding Committee Member
Chair, Land Use Committee, FCFCA
Sully District

C. Flint Webb
Undergrounding Committee Member
Chair, Environment Committee, FCFCA
Providence District

David Edelman
Chair, Budget Committee, FCFCA
Providence District

Donald Hinman
Co-Chair, Citizen Association Services, FCFCA
Mount Vernon District

John Millikin
Undergrounding Committee Member
Corporation Counsel
Hayfield Citizens Association
Lee District

Katherine Ward
Co-Chair, Mount Vernon Council of
Citizens Associations
Mount Vernon District

Dennis Hays
President
Reston Citizens Association
Hunter Mill District

William S. Barfield
President
Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
Braddock District
FedPres2020@fairfaxfederation.org

cc: Bryan Hill, Fairfax County Executive

Enclosure: Federation Resolution on Supporting the Undergrounding of Utilities & Communication Lines Throughout Fairfax County, October 25, 2019



www.FairfaxFederation.org | P.O. Box 3913, Merrifield VA 22116-3913

Federation Resolution

on

**Supporting the Undergrounding of Utilities & Communication Lines
Throughout Fairfax County**

Approved by the Federation Membership
October 24, 2019

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisor's (BOS) adopted a Policy Plan Objective 41 which encourages County citizens to "Construct underground transmission and distribution lines, whenever possible, along existing or planned utility or road rights-of-way, preferably on lot lines which will least disturb future development of the site"; and that "Visual impact should be a key element in the evaluation of proposed transmission line locations."; and,

WHEREAS, the BOS's Board Matter (dated March 5, 2019) directed the County Executive to invite the utility companies (Dominion, Cox, Comcast, Verizon, etc.) to attend a future Revitalization Board Committee Meeting to address undergrounding; and,

WHEREAS, the utility companies joined the BOS's Revitalization Committee on June 18, 2019 and stated that they were willing to work with the County on this matter for the Route 1 corridor; and,

WHEREAS, the Virginia Legislature passed and the Governor signed a bill on March 22, 2019, establishing a pilot program, running until June 30, 2022, for the undergrounding of utilities that allows local governments to request undergrounding of utilities in areas of transit oriented development, and for which the County, in a letter to the Governor, stated the costs to underground utilities cabling should be shared by the entity, the County and the utility; and,

WHEREAS, 75% of the Fairfax County Citizens that responded to the 2019 Fairfax Federation Legislative survey were in favor of undergrounding of utilities in conjunction with road widening and improvements and were willing to financially support such undergrounding; and,

WHEREAS, Washington, DC, is pursuing a 7 year project of undergrounding its utilities; and,

WHEREAS, Maryland has completed a thorough analysis of undergrounding its utilities; and,

WHEREAS, James City County and Prince William County have undergrounded utilities using a variety of funding measures; and,

WHEREAS, the value added to hardening the grid by undergrounding of utilities and communication lines is multifold; that is, undergrounding

- a. Improves safety and reduces maintenance risks;
- b. Reduces vehicular utility poles accidents and the consequent related injuries, fatalities, and outages;
- c. Reduces outages from storms, from which damages are costly for business and citizens;
- d. Removes overhead power and communications lines and their supporting structures and fencing, thus reducing deaths of birds and other wildlife;
- e. Improves environmental and property aesthetics for communities and businesses.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations supports the undergrounding of utilities and communication lines throughout the County during the widening of or improvement to roadways and transportation projects; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations urges the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and staff to make undergrounding an infrastructure improvement priority throughout Fairfax County.