



LOCAL 1664

Montgomery County Career Fire Fighters Association

June 5, 2019

Governor Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr
State of Maryland
100 State Circle, 2nd Floor
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Governor Hogan,

I am writing to you to express my deep concern, and the concern of our members, about the recent decision made by the State Highway Administration to delay the MD FiRST radio system's implementation in Montgomery County, and the Montgomery County Radio System Infrastructure Project, by not constructing the planned tower that will support both systems at the interchange of the Intercounty Connector (MD 200) and Georgia Avenue (MD 97). I and my membership strongly feel this site must be constructed as designed, without further delay, to meet critical public safety needs.

The planned tower is a 250' tower in the northwest cloverleaf of the interchange. There is community opposition to the tower centered on their concern that it negatively impacts the appearance of the "Gateway to Olney". While community impacts and concerns must be taken into consideration for any public infrastructure project, we feel very strongly that there is a gross imbalance between those concerns and the importance of this tower to public safety relative to its aesthetic impact on the interchange.

The community resistance resulted in Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich and State Senator Ben Kramer both insisting that SHA to move the site, which the SHA Administrator Mr. Slater reluctantly agreed to do. The MD FiRST project team was directed to find another location for the tower. There is not another buildable location for the tower that will support the needs of both radio systems.

The ICC/Georgia Ave site meets the coverage requirements of both radio systems with a 250' tower, does not have any regulatory barriers to construction, and has easy access to utilities and the State's fiber optic network. The alternative site advocated for by the community, known as Site 7, is approximately .75 miles east of the interchange, north of and adjacent to the ICC, and unbuildable.

Site 7's first problem is that it is in a Forest Conservation Plan in perpetuity under an agreement signed by Governor O'Malley during the construction of the ICC. Site 7 is also adjacent to the Willow Grove property which is a Nationally Registered Historical Site. The MD Historical Trust has been consulted and they indicate that they would oppose the construction of a proposed tower that would be at least 350' tall on Site 7. Additionally, even if these problems did not prevent approval of the site, the site will be much more expensive to develop than the ICC/Georgia Ave. site.

Since Site 7 is currently inaccessible by road, approximately a one-half mile access road would need to be built. Equipping the site with utilities and the State fiber optic network will be expensive. The network cost alone is expected to be more than \$250,000. Because Site 7 has a lower elevation than the ICC/Georgia Ave site it would require at least a 350' tower instead of the planned 250' tower. There is believed to be a great deal of debris fill on Site 7, which could necessitate extremely deep caissons for the tower foundation, further inflating construction costs. None of this makes any sense, when the concern being mitigated is aesthetics of a 250' tower in what is essentially an interstate highway interchange.

The only other possible site being considered by MD FiRST is at the intersection of Layhill Rd (MD 182) and the ICC. Unfortunately, that location does not meet Montgomery County's requirements and would require a 450' tower to meet the State's requirements. So that location would incur more costs on both the State and the County, as the County would have to build a site (or possibly two sites) to meet the County's requirements.

Additionally, either of the alternative sites also have people who live near them. Why are those people going to happily accept larger towers in their communities because the Olney community objected to a tower in the ICC interchange?

Delaying the construction of the ICC/Georgia Ave site is putting my membership, those that live, work, and pass through the County, and State public safety workers at risk. Right now, in Montgomery County, the Montgomery County radio system is the State public radio system. The State Police and the Transportation Authority Police both operate using the Montgomery County radio system.

The Montgomery County radio system is at grave risk of catastrophic failure and has been failing. Recently there have been several failures lasting hours severely hampering public safety communications in Montgomery County. The Montgomery County radio system is old and well outside support from the manufacturer. Parts are no longer manufactured, and the County relies on scavenging parts from decommissioned systems of similar vintage, and

sometimes eBay, to maintain the system. The public safety radio system in Montgomery County is a risk to public safety and must be replaced as quickly as humanly possible.

Delaying the ICC/Georgia Ave site delays the implementation of the MD FiRST system, which not only will serve the State Police and the Transportation Authority Police in Montgomery County when it is operational, but it could also serve as a backup for Montgomery County public safety workers if the County's system suffers a catastrophic failure before the County's new system is operational. While the MD FiRST system does not have the capacity or coverage of the County's system, in a crisis, it could be crucial to providing essential public safety services to the residents of Montgomery County.

At this point, each and every day that public safety workers in Montgomery County must rely on the Montgomery County radio system, more than 1,000,000 residents, and my membership are at risk. It is imperative that construction of both the MD FiRST radio system and the new Montgomery County radio system proceed as quickly as possible to eliminate that risk.

I urge, in the strongest possible terms, that on behalf of my membership, and the citizens that they protect, that you direct the MD FiRST project team to proceed with the construction of the ICC/Georgia Ave site as quickly as it can be done. This is the fiscally responsible course of action, and the only course of action that addresses the critical public safety needs responsibly.

Thank you for your attention to the most important public safety problem in the most populous jurisdiction in the State of Maryland.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Buddle, President
IAFF Local 1664

cc: Pete K. Rahn, Transportation Secretary
Greg Slater, MDOT State Highway Administrator
Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Executive
Sydney Katz, Chair, Public Safety Committee – Montgomery County Council