

Sully District Council of Citizens Associations



**P.O. Box 230042
Sully Station, VA 20120-0042**

Joint Sully District Land Use and Transportation Committee Resolution on Electrical Substations Zoning Ordinance Amendment

15 September 2025

WHEREAS the Joint Sully District Land Use and Transportation Committee, comprised of members of the Sully District Council of Citizens Associations (“SDCCA”) and West Fairfax County Citizens Association (“WFCCA”) (the “Joint Committee”) recognizes the paramount importance of the protection of the Occoquan Watershed and upholding Fairfax County’s environmental policies, as expressed in the adopted Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan; and as well as protection of residential neighborhoods from development impacts; and

WHEREAS the Joint Committee reviewed the staff report for the Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Electrical Substations scheduled for public hearing with the Planning Commission on October 16, 2025, and wishes to express concerns regarding some of the proposed changes; and

WHEREAS the Joint Committee wishes to express its continued support for facilitation of citizen engagement in the land use process, including a robust public hearing process, with notice to

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neighbors and an opportunity for public comment on land use changes;

Now, therefore, in view of the foregoing, BE IT RESOLVED as follows:

- 1. The Joint Committee supports requiring a public hearing and special exception process for electrical substations, in all zoning districts.** [See staff report, pp. 11-12, Use Table.] The Joint Committee requests that Fairfax County retain a case by case review and public hearing process, for electrical substations, which allows for citizen input, in all zoning districts. While some sites may be appropriate for electrical substations, that use has high potential for negative impacts on the neighbors and viewshed in nearby residential areas. Case by case review and consideration of development conditions may be appropriate to mitigate those impacts.

- 2. The Joint Committee supports establishing the substation setbacks from streets and residential districts, and landscaping requirements, to the maximum extent allowable within the scope of the advertising.** [See staff report, p. 14, subsections 5 a and 5 c.] The Joint Committee requests that the setbacks for electrical substations from streets and residential districts be established at the maximum extent allowable within the scope of the advertising, rather than the generally smaller setbacks recommended by staff. The Joint Committee recognizes that there are few uses which have such an obvious negative impact on an adjacent residential neighborhood, with equipment, electrical lines and security

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fencing, and that maximizing the separation is essential, if these uses are to be allowed in proximity to residential uses. Specifically, for subsection a1, the setback from a public or private street should be 100 feet; for subsection a2, the setback from a lot line abutting residential should be 300 feet. Similarly, the landscaping requirements should be the maximum allowed within the scope of the advertising, to mitigate the impacts from the use. For subsection c1, 50 feet of landscaping along the street should be required; for subsection c2, 50 feet of landscaping abutting residential should be required. The Joint Committee supports the requirement that the landscaping be continuous.

3. The Joint Committee opposes allowing automatic by right increase in fence and wall height across-the-board for electrical substations. [See staff report, p. 14, new subsection 5(b)]. The Joint Committee recognizes that in many instances an increased fence or wall height for an electrical substation may be desirable and appropriate, but that the location and materials of the fencing or wall may have significant visual impacts on neighboring properties, particularly residential uses. Some fences and walls might be more appropriate if set back from a property line and screened with vegetation, and materials evaluated for compatibility with surrounding and nearby uses. A public hearing process and case by case review allows for notice to neighbors and citizen input to mitigate those potential impacts.

4. The Joint Committee supports discouraging the electrical substation use in residential districts. [See

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staff report, p. 15, subsection (7)]. The Joint Committee supports discouraging the placement of electrical substations in R districts. The ordinance should allow the SE use in an R district only for colocation or expansion, and only in extraordinary or exceptional circumstances.

5. The Joint Committee supports discouraging the use of waivers and modifications to required standards to facilitate installation of electrical substations.

Unfortunately, waivers and modifications are routinely granted by the Board of Supervisors in conjunction with many land use approvals. These relaxations of the ordinance requirements undermine the intended protections of the ordinance, and will have severe consequences in the context of electrical substation approvals. Unfortunately, the proposed zoning ordinance amendment is silent regarding the standard of review of proposed waivers and modifications, which should not be approved merely because a developer is asking for relief, or to facilitate a high impact use on a constrained site. Any requests for waivers and modifications should be rigorously reviewed and subjected to an exceptionally high bar for justification, with appropriate mitigation of impacts.

6. The Joint Committee renews its opposition to data centers being a by right use in the I-5 and I-6 zoning districts. The Joint Committee again communicates its strong opposition to allowing data centers as a by right use in the I-5 and I-6 zoning districts, especially in proximity to residential uses. Loudoun County has amended its ordinance to make data centers a special exception use in

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all zoning districts, and that allows for case by case review
and citizen input.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be communicated
forthwith to the Fairfax County Planning Commission, Fairfax
County Board of Zoning Appeals and Fairfax County Board of
Supervisors, as well as the General Assembly members for this
area.

The Joint Committee approved this resolution at its 15 September 2025
meeting:

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Note that this document is posted at:

http://www.sullydistrict.org/resolutions/20250915_JSDLU&TC_Resolution_ZOAonElectricalSubstationsforDataCenters.pdf