

Potomac News

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Tower said to be threat to scenery

Would be built one mile
from **Manassas battlefield**

By MIKE FUHRMAN
of the Potomac News

GAINESVILLE — Plans to erect an 18-story communications tower in Gainesville have drawn concerns the structure would become an eyesore to Manassas National Battlefield Park visitors.

But an official with Bell Atlantic Mobile Systems Inc. said the tower would be unnoticed since it would be built more than a mile from the park.

The company wants to build the tower to better serve a growing number of cellular phone users in western Prince William County, said Bob Johnson, vice president for Bell Atlantic's Washington, D.C. and Baltimore region.

In a recent two-page letter to Prince William County land planning chief Sherman Patrick, battlefield park Superintendent Kenneth Apschnikat said the tower would become a visual distraction at the park's western end.

Apschnikat said he wants to run a balloon test at the tower site to confirm whether between 15 percent and 20 percent of the structure would be visible from the park.

"Should the balloon test confirm our initial determination, we would appreciate consideration

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Tower may go up in Gainesville

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be given to relocating, lowering, or re-siting the tower so as not to be as visible from the battlefield," Apschnikat wrote.

Johnson said Monday that Bell Atlantic would agree to run such a test. "We believe it will show this will not be an eyesore," he said.

A public hearing before the Prince William County Planning Commission is set for Oct. 19. The commission has the final say on whether the tower conforms with part of the county's comprehensive plan that regulates construction of public utilities and facilities.

The comprehensive plan serves as a blueprint for development in Prince William.

Patrick said the county planning office will announce a recommendation Oct. 5 on whether to approve the tower.

The tower, which would be 23 feet thick at the base, is shaped like a thin triangle. It would be painted "sky blue" so that it blends into the skyline, Johnson said.

The proposed site for the tower is on a 48-acre parcel within an industrial park south of U.S. 29 and west of Wellington Road. The site is southwest of the park.

Patrick said the county planning office will announce a recommendation Oct. 5 on whether to approve the tower.

Apschnikat said Monday he will not know for sure how the tower would distract park visitors until tests are run.

"It could be an intrusion that we want to keep away from the rural, agricultural landscape that we're trying to protect and preserve on the perimeter," he said.

"We're very concerned because of the height and that you can see it from the battlefield," said Brad Bradshaw, an aide to Supervisor Bobby McManus, R-Gainesville.

The issue of structures encroaching on vistas at the battlefield park comes amid plans to relocate Virginia Power's transmission lines along the park's western boundaries.

Money for the \$4 million relocation project would come from funding under 1988 legislation that paid for landscaping improvements to the 558-acre Stuart's Hill tract at the battlefield. Congress added that tract to the park in order to halt plans to build a shopping center there.

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Computer system up for vote

Programs would modernize county schools' software

By SANDRA JONTZ-MERRIFIELD
of the Potomac News

The Prince William County School Board will decide Wednesday night whether to adopt school administrators' proposal to spend \$4 million over the next seven years for an updated computer management system.

The school proposal includes plans to buy two state-of-the-art computer systems to meet the needs of the school division for the next 12 to 15 years, officials say.

One program, developed by American Management Systems, will network the administrative side of the school system. It would cost \$2.2 million.

A second computer program, developed by Weidenhammer Systems Corporation and Macro Educational Systems, will access student information such as attendance records, class schedules, grades, disciplinary action and transcripts. It would cost \$1.8 million.

During the budget process for the 1994-95 school year, the School Board approved a \$400,000

expenditure for the first installment of both systems with the understanding that the eight-member board would have to approve the entire plan.

If the board approves the plan Wednesday, school officials will begin replacing the current out-of-date systems, including the 17-year-old student information programs.

If approved, school officials will need about 15 months to implement the first installment of both computer systems. They should be ready to use by January 1996, school officials say.

The board is also scheduled to vote Wednesday on whether to approve a cooperative agreement established between Prince William and Fairfax county schools in 1984.

The agreement lets Prince William students attend Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Fairfax County.

Thomas Jefferson has been designated by Virginia's Department of Education as a Governor's Regional School for Science and Technology. The state department mandates that the two county school boards have a cooperative agreement because Prince William students will be attending a school run by Fairfax County.