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FEATURED

BREAKING

## Board Chair Chris Granger resigns due to concerns over potential conflict of interests

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Fauquier County Board of Supervisors Chair Chris Granger announced he will resign at the end of August.

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**Fauquier County Board of Supervisors Chair Chris Granger plans to resign at the end of August, he announced Friday.**

Granger's resignation from the county board follows the disclosure on social media by his wife, Brandie Schaeffer, Warrenton's former town manager, that she has been hired by Amazon Web Services. Schaeffer resigned as town manager July 12.

The couple's resignations from their respective positions come several months after Amazon filed an application with the town for a special-use permit to build a data center on 33 acres at Blackwell Road and Lee Highway.

In June, Schaeffer announced she would resign as town manager citing concerns about her mental health and the "toll" the job had taken on her personal life. Schaeffer officially submitted her resignation the next month, and the Parks and Recreation Director Tommy Cureton was named interim town manager while Town Council began a search for a permanent replacement.

On Monday, Schaeffer updated her LinkedIn profile announcing she started a new position as a principal for Amazon Web Services' economic development team – with a focus on "Global Infrastructure Expansion."

Over the past several months, dozens of residents have attended Town Council and Board of Supervisors' meetings to express opposition to the Amazon data center because of its connection with Dominion Energy's proposed Blackwell Substation that would include a transmission line through Fauquier to provide electricity to the data center.

The Warrenton Planning Commission is reviewing Amazon's application and held its first work session to discuss the proposal last week.

Granger, first elected in 2011 to represent the Center District, told FauquierNow that he had decided not to run for re-election in 2023 long before Schaeffer was hired by Amazon. He noted it was becoming increasingly difficult to balance his

personal life and duties as a supervisor with the demands of his job as a division chief with the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue.

“Between the extreme tolls that it's taking to keep up with the 20 to 30 hours a week I put in with the board and my fire department's work schedule – I mean, we're like to up an 80- to 90-hour work week – it's kind of staggering,” Granger said.


“My appraisal of the situation: What's best for my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors, what's best for my family, and what's best supporting my wife moving forward in her new roles is to go ahead and step out of my role on the board of supervisors,” he added.

While family concerns are an issue, Granger noted his decision to resign now is because he does not want there to be the appearance of a conflict of interests because of his wife's connection to Amazon.

“It's primarily because I don't have any time for my family,” he said.

“[Schaeffer] going to the private sector just makes it that much easier for me to step away because I don't want any implied or explicit conflict.”

The county board has no authority over the town's permitting process, and the power to approve or deny Dominion's proposal lies with the Virginia State Corporation Commission. But because proposals for more data centers are “inevitable,” Granger said it would be more practical for him to step down.

“I know what the law says is that if there's an Amazon application in front of the county, I would have to recuse myself from any conversations of it,” he said. “But...I don't want to be involved in that because I don't want to be accused of  advancing the industry.”

A spokesperson for Amazon declined to comment on the details surrounding Schaeffer's hiring but told FauquierNow she officially started working for the company in "late July." The spokesperson also noted that "the company takes compliance with laws very seriously and has a robust process in place for screening for possible conflicts of interest."



Brandie Schaffer, Warrenton town manager, fields questions from council members about the budget during a June 8 budget work session.

James Jarvis | FauquierNow

Schaeffer could not be reached for comment.

In a written statement provided to FauquierNow, Granger said he was proud of his accomplishments over the past 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years making Fauquier an even more desirable place to live, work, play and raise a family" by increasing recreation and open space amenities, improving the local economy, increasing public safety services and putting tax dollars toward modernizing the

public school system's infrastructure."

But he noted the county "still has much more to do," particularly in regards to public education, which Granger said "is at a critical crossroad as our ability to attract and retain talented teachers is hampered by our small commercial tax base."

FauquierNow recently reported that Fauquier continues to struggle providing adequate wages for veteran public school teachers despite recent pay increases.



The next board election is not until November 2023. However, a special election could be held as early as May 2023 to replace Granger.

The remaining board members can appoint an interim supervisor to fill the Center District seat and appoint a new chair, which could happen as early as next week at the board’s regular monthly meeting.



Warrenton Town Council appoints Chris Martino as new interim town manager



Fauquier County Supervisor Chris Granger officially steps down as chair; Supervisor Rick Gerhardt elected successor



### Amazon's data center proposal for Warrenton: How we got here

James Jarvis

