

Fauquier Times

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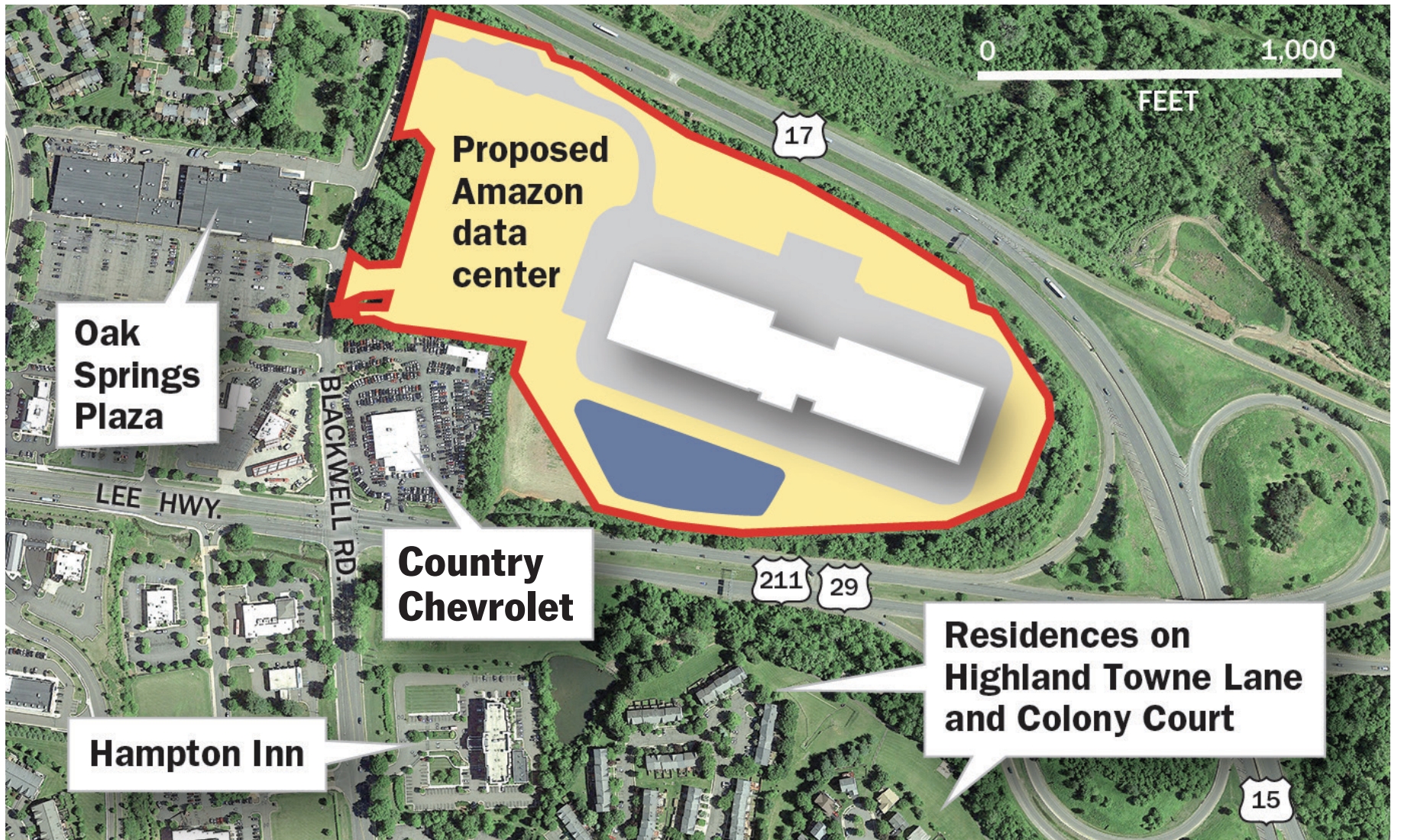
VIRGINIA PRESS ASSOCIATION: BEST SMALL NEWSPAPER IN VIRGINIA 2017-2021

Piedmont Journalism Foundation presents a resident's guide to Amazon's data center proposal

Amazon Web Services has applied to the Town of Warrenton for a special use permit to build a 220,000-square-foot data center on Blackwell Road in Warrenton. The 42-acre industrial-zoned site, purchased by Amazon in June 2021, has been vacant for decades.

Warrenton Town Council members are continuing a public hearing on the application Tuesday, Feb. 14 at Fauquier High School. The council may or may not vote on the plan that night.

The Piedmont Journalism Foundation, which owns the *Fauquier Times*, has sponsored this publication in an attempt to provide a consolidated view of the most important issues surrounding the data center plan. This special section represents a small fraction of the articles and letters to the editor written in the *Fauquier Times* about the proposed data center. For context, each story is marked with the date it was published. Some details may have changed since the publication date. **For more stories on data center issues, see fauquier.com/news/data_centers.**



SATELLITE IMAGE: GOOGLE EARTH

The Amazon data center application: A rocky road

By Peter Cary

PIEDMONT JOURNALISM FOUNDATION
Published Jan. 4

The Warrenton Town Council has advertised a work session and public hearing – and possible vote – for Jan. 10 on Amazon Web Services' application to build a data center on Blackwell Road. Town attorney Martin Crim said Amazon requested that date, though Community Development Director Rob Walton says the town has a year to act. The planning commission has recommended that the center be rejected.

How we got here:

2017-2019. Council initiates research on possibility of placing data centers in industrial areas. Research put on hold pending completion of town's comprehensive plan. COVID stalls renewed interest in 2019.

2021

Feb. 24. Prominent land attorney John Foote contacts then-Town Manager Brandie Schaeffer to say



FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL

Members of the 2022 Warrenton Planning Commission -- Steve Ainsworth, Vice Chair James Lawrence, Chair Susan Helander, Ali Zarabi and Ryan Stewart -- hear from Jessica Pfeiffer, a land-use planner representing Amazon, before the start of the public hearing Dec. 20, 2022.

he has a data center client interested in Warrenton. Client turns out to be interested in old wire factory at 615 Falmouth St.

April 13. Schaeffer asks council to have staff draw up zoning amend-

ment to allow data centers in industrial areas with special-use permits, saying town gets data center inquiries every couple of months, and this just starts staff study. Initiation passes as part of consent agenda.

Council passes Comprehensive Plan. In its one mention of data centers, plan says they should not use town water or sewer.

April 21-22. Foote emails Schaeffer to say he has drafted possible zoning amendment. She tells him she "dropped an initiation on the consent" agenda, and his research is welcome. Foote invites Schaeffer to a Zoom meeting with client, who is not named in email.

May 14. Town officials meet with Amazon, which outlines its plans. Unsigned meeting notes obtained later suggest the participants are Schaeffer and then-town attorney Whit Robinson. Notes indicate that Amazon has shifted interest to 42-acre site on Blackwell Road owned by Weissberg Corp. and that staff will provide draft zoning amendment to Foote before next planning commission meeting.

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