

10 November 2015

Colonel Jason E. Kelly, PMP
Norfolk District Commander
US Army Corps of Engineers
803 Front Street, Norfolk, Virginia, 23510-1011
Jason.e.kelly@usace.army.mil

Re: Society of Architectural Historians Statement on the Planned High-Voltage Transmission Lines Crossing the James River near Jamestown, Virginia

Dear Col. Kelly,

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) expresses its grave concern over the proposed construction by Dominion Virginia Power of a high-voltage transmission line to cross the James River near Jamestown, Virginia. We strongly urge the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to consider recommending alternatives such as adopting an alternate route that involves less historically sensitive locations, burying the transmission lines, adapting the Yorktown station to a new fuel source, or encouraging Dominion to explore alternative energy options.

SAH is the principal scholarly organization for architectural historians in North America. It does not regularly become involved in preservation issues, and speaks only to issues of national and international importance. In 2015 SAH has issued statements on only three threats: the first two were letters to Secretary of State John F. Kerry concerning Nepal and Iraq, addressing damage to architectural treasures in Nepal from the April 25, 2015 earthquake and its aftermath, and damage to historic sites in Iraq by ISIS, looting, and warfare. The third letter was written to Dominion's Mr. Thomas Farrell about the company's proposal, identifying the significant damage the transmission lines and towers would do to the Colonial Parkway, Jamestown, Carter's Grove, and this unspoiled section of the James River. We want to underscore the fact that we evaluate threats to nationally- and internationally-significant architectural resources thoroughly, and do not take positions on them lightly.

The proposed project, which may include as many as seventeen towers, some of which are designed to be up to 295 feet tall, would have a serious and negative impact upon the nationally significant historic and cultural resources in the area. The area is home to Historic Jamestowne, Carter's Grove (the site of the seventeenth-century English settlement known as Wolstenholme Towne), the Colonial Parkway, the Captain John Smith National Historic Trail (managed by the National Park Service), and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network. This region receives some 3.5 million visitors annually, drawn to the area's significant cultural and historic resources, as well as the beauty of the James River drainage and its surroundings.

It was here that the first permanent English colony in America was established at Jamestown in 1607. It was here that the first representative legislature in America (consisting of the governor, his councilors and twenty-two burgesses representing every town, corporation, and large plantation) met in 1619. It was here that an English privateer landed two dozen enslaved Angolans, the first Africans to reach America. It was at Jamestown that English colonists learned how to survive, and

where they first came into contact with Powhatan, Siouan, and Iroquoian peoples in the Chesapeake Region. It was here that tobacco was first cultivated, forming the basis of an Atlantic trading economy that transformed the fate of North America.

Jamestown was the first transatlantic site of what in time became a global empire that carried the English language, laws and institutions across North America. The English Church, representative government, and the rule of law were all first established at Jamestown. Tobacco, which was cultivated all along the James River Valley, was the earliest successful New World commodity developed in British America and was the basis of an Atlantic trading system that endured throughout the colonial period. The tobacco economy stimulated the earliest waves of mass emigration from Britain of tens of thousands of poor workers seeking opportunity and, in stark contrast, the forced transportation of enslaved Africans who had none.

The proposed high-voltage transmission lines are to be carried by as many as seventeen towers up to 295 feet; for comparison, the U.S. Capitol is 288 feet tall, and the Statue of Liberty is 305 feet tall. These towers and the lines they support will forever intrude upon the visual experience of one most important historically significant landscapes in America. This threat was recognized in 2013 when the National Trust for Historic Preservation included the lower James River drainage on their list of the eleven most endangered resources in the United States.

The Society of Architectural Historians joins with Jamestown Rediscovery, Preservation Virginia, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, together with other leading national and regional institutions, in opposition to Dominion Virginia Power's proposed siting of the transmission line. We strongly urge USACE to recommend alternatives such as adopting an alternate route that involves less historically-sensitive locations, burying the transmission lines, adapting the Yorktown station to a new fuel source, or encouraging Dominion to explore alternative energy options.

Sincerely,



Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Chair, Heritage Conservation Committee
Society of Architectural Historians

CC :
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Chesapeake Conservancy
Garden Club of Virginia
James River Association
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