

Amazon to seize the land of freed slaves' descendants to lay power lines

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Local residents inform the *International Amazon Workers Voice* that Amazon is attempting to seize 50 acres of land owned by elderly working class descendants of slaves in Northern Virginia, pave over the residents' homes, and build power lines.

The soil that Amazon plans to cover with asphalt contains the sweat of slaves and the blood of Civil War soldiers. The residents' ancestors, who worked the land as slaves, took possession of these plots after being freed by the Emancipation Proclamation and liberated by the Union Army during the American Civil War. American capitalism has come full-circle: the government is stealing land from the descendants of slaves and giving it to one of the world's most powerful corporations.

A representative of a community group called the Alliance to Save Carver Road (ASCR) told the IAWV, "The homeowners have been there for generations. Many of the properties were purchased by freed slaves. After emancipation, the slaves that worked that area were allowed to purchase property. A number of the property owners are descendants of those freed slaves."

Last month, Amazon subsidiary VAData, working in collusion with local government agencies and utility company Dominion Virginia Power, announced plans to construct 230,000 volt power lines running through the semi-rural community of Carver Road just outside of Gainesville, in order to power nearby internet data centers.

The power lines will also pave over parts of the Manassas Civil War battlefield area. The area in which the community is located, about an hour west of Washington D.C., was the site of the First and Second Battles of Manassas, two key battles of the Civil War of 1861-65. Local reports show that the power lines will be paid for by utility company customers.

The Prince William County Board of Supervisors rejected an alternative route which would have gone through a wealthy area. The rejected route was also estimated at \$167 million while the one traveling through Carver Road was estimated at \$62 million. Deeming the additional expenses too costly, the corporate giant proceeded to cut a path through the historic community to save money.

The ASCR representative said, "Amazon was able to use a loophole in the county rules to site their data center in an area that was not zoned for data centers. If they were in the designated area, there would not need to be any new power lines. Those designated areas have sufficient power. The county is complicit," she added, speaking on the role the government has played in helping the company strong-arm the community.

The state of Virginia has awarded Amazon millions in tax breaks and grants to construct its warehouses and data centers throughout the state, even as it throws families out of homes to make way for these properties and subjects its employees to illegal forms of exploitation. As the case of Carver Road reveals, its abuse of the workforce goes well beyond the four walls of its facilities.

Asked how the slated construction would affect Carver's properties, the ASCR representative replied, "There is a school that would be impacted. The construction does not directly cross the school building, but there is a school nearby. Property values would plummet. You cannot use the property. In my case, I have tenants. They have already told me that they want out of the lease if the lines come through."

"There have been no studies of what Dominion is doing," she noted. "They have not looked at the economic impact [to] our community, or the environment or our property rights. They have not

contacted any of us to discuss any of this... They did a very cursory review of Carver Road.

“Some property owners are not familiar how this will impact them. The elderly are not comprehending what is going on.” The representative of the Alliance to Save Carver Road stated that many of Carver’s residents are retired or on fixed income.

Amazon locates dozens of its sprawling internet data centers in northern Virginia to house its enormous web infrastructure. On a given day, nearly 70 percent of the world’s internet traffic passes through the region, a third of which is filtered through Amazon Web Services’ (AWS) numerous facilities. The region has also become something of a focal point for the nexus existing between the internet giant and the US federal government’s surveillance agencies.

The local government, sensing the growing anger among residents, postponed the planned demolition, which will likely still go forward in the near future. Last week, the Prince William County Board of Supervisors, the same body which approved the plan to destroy the community, voted to give \$30,000 in county discretionary funds to the residents to aid in their legal effort against the corporate giant.

This posturing is entirely cynical. The funds given by the county, roughly equal to the amount of money Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos makes in a single minute, are a face-saving gesture to absolve the government of responsibility for the legal nightmare into which the residents have been thrown. The sum of \$30,000 equals less than what Amazon’s brigade of corporate attorneys are paid in a single day.

The power lines would pass near the federally-protected Manassas Battlefield National Park, home to numerous battle grounds from the American Civil War. One such site, Buckland Mills, would be filled in with concrete to clear space for the power lines.

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