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3/24/2025

Subject: Opposition to Land Donation to the Official Piscataway Conoy Tribe

To Whom It May Concern,

As a member of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, I am strongly writing ***IN OPPOSITION*** to the proposed donation of the former Nike Site to *the Official Piscataway Conoy Tribe*. While I support responsible and meaningful land repatriation, I cannot support this donation due to the lack of transparency in the recipient organization's operations, the misrepresentation of tribal leadership in this process, and serious environmental concerns surrounding the property.

Concerns Regarding the Recipient Organization and Mr. Francis Gray:
It is important to emphasis that *the Official Piscataway Conoy Tribe* is ***NOT*** the State-Recognized Piscataway Conoy Tribe nor people. Despite its misleading name, this nonprofit organization does not represent the broader tribal community, nor does it operate with its support.

Francis Gray is ***NOT*** the current leader of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe. Mr. Gray's term as a tribal councilmember ended, and he was voted out by the community. Despite this, he continues to present himself as the rightful leader, blurring the lines between the state-recognized tribe and his nonprofit organization. His continued claims to leadership are ***illegitimate***, and his actions in seeking this land donation serve only to strengthen his personal politics against rather than to benefit the community. Additionally, Mr. Gray's fellow former council members, all of whom were also voted out of their positions and reached term limits, have largely ***disappeared*** from tribal affairs; this raises concerns about whether they voluntarily distanced themselves or if Mr. Gray has unilaterally assumed control without rightful authority. His continued attempts to seek recognition and resources under false tribal pretenses only serve to divide the tribal community and the proper leadership of Chief Jesse James Swann Jr.

Adding to this concern is the lack of transparency regarding the organization's/individual's use of funding. Mr. Gray and his organization have already been granted funds for a cultural museum, community center, and other alike projects, yet no deliverables or updates have been made known to the tribal community. As this organization/individual continues to gain resources for the tribe but is nowhere to be found doing work in the community, speculations have grown that this organization/individual is seeking to exploit their respective community, the State-Recognized Piscataway Conoy Tribe. *If public funds have already been allocated without any accountability to the communities they are to support, why should more resources—especially land—be granted without a clear plan?*

Tribal Division Concerns:
Without oversight, accountability, and a clearly defined plan, this donation will simply be an endorsement to further ***tribal division***. The lack of transparency in how the proposed organization operates, paired with the illegitimate leadership claims of Mr. Gray, exacerbates existing rifts within the tribe. By rewarding this organization with land, the county would validate a divisive entity, further fragmenting the tribe rather than uniting it.

When supporting the ongoing leadership fathomed by someone who has been voted out of office and continues to claim authority and seek resources for personal or political gain, it undermines the unity that is critical for the tribe's progress and raises concerns on the county's modern role in tribal politics.

Endorsing this land donation without genuine community backing will only solidify the power imbalance, perpetuating a system where decisions are made without consensus, and further alienating members of the tribe. The lack of neutrality and community involvement seen in the county has been deplorable, resulting in a significant number of tribal members who no longer feel represented, heard, and protected by local leaders. With a history in providing direct aid, safety nets, educational opportunities, cultural programing, and infrastructure investments for the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, *Through Piscataway Eyes TPE Inc.* and Chief Jesse James Swann Jr. has repeatedly been turned away by local leaders while seeking support for initiatives. If these decisions continue without the active support and engagement of the tribal community, it will only widen the gap between the true leaders and those who have illegitimately co-opted power for their own purposes. *What guarantees, if any, exist to ensure that this land donation will truly serve the interests of the Piscataway Conoy people, rather than the personal ambitions of a single individual or small group?*

Ethical and Legal Concerns:
The timing of this land donation request raises serious questions. Following the ***eviction*** of Natalie Proctor and the *Cedarville Band of Piscataway Indians*, there is an established and troubling pattern of coincidental timing that suggests ***ulterior motives***. While county officials have previously stated a desire to distance themselves from all tribal politics, neglecting community support initiatives from before, they are now considering land donation to individuals and organizations with legal issues.
There are ***ongoing lawsuits*** involving Mr. Gray and his organization, raising further concerns about legitimacy and operations. Meanwhile, the established nonprofit, *Through Piscataway Eyes TPE Inc.*, and tribal leader, Chief Jesse James Swann Jr, has already purchased and is protecting land for the benefit of the community. *Why was the donation process started with the eviction of a long-standing tribal presence on the property? Was the removal of the previous occupants a strategic move to clear the way for a different party?If impactful land stewardship is the true goal, why is the county considering a donation to an organization embroiled in disputes, controversies, and legal conflicts, rather than an organization currently maintaining land for the Piscataway Conoy Tribe? If the county refused to support community initiatives in the past due to "tribal politics," why is the county now considering a stained organization and an ingenuine claim of power? Why is the county willing to work with ongoing lawsuits and serious allegations of tribal misrepresentation, but unwilling to collaborate with the broader tribal community, Chief Jesse James Swann Jr., or Through Piscataway Eyes?*

Environmental and Structural Concerns:
The former Nike Site is no longer a suitable property for repatriation due to decades of documented soil and water contamination, unresolved drainage issues, and failing infrastructure.

With donating it to the organization in question, the land contains known pollutants and remnants from the Nike Site's use, posing significant ***health risk*** to any future occupants. Additionally, the facilities have a long history of flooding, water shortages, and sewage backup issues that have yet to be addressed. It is also worth noting that a required $10,000 ***land survey*** was previously placed on the Cedarville Band of Piscataway Indians as tenants. *Before any land is donated for use, who will conduct the necessary environmental assessments to determine the true and ongoing risks posed by the site? Who will be responsible for the remediation of contaminated soil and water sources? Considering the intended community, the state-recognized Piscataway Conoy Tribe, how will environmental health risks be studied and addressed? Will the same financial burden be placed on any future tribal occupants? If the burden of these costly environmental cleanups falls on the occupants, how will they secure the necessary funding and expertise to make the land habitable? Is Charles County prepared to offer support for these concerns?*

Final Consideration:
Given the misrepresentation of leadership, lack of transparency, political maneuvering, legal concerns, and environmental risks, I am ***IN OPPOSITION*** of a land donation for the nonprofit organization, *the Official Piscataway Conoy Tribe*, and claimed tribal leadership of Francis Gray.

Land repatriation should be a process of restorative justice, ***not*** political opportunism. It should empower tribal communities in respect to sovereignty, not consolidate power into the hands of individuals or organizations with questionable intentions, financial opacity, and no demonstrated accountability. While I fully support land repatriation efforts, I am firmly opposed to a donation that strengthens tribal dictatorship, supports misaligned organizations, and emboldens community disenfranchisement.

If land is to be donated for the use of the Piscataway Conoy people, it should be done equitably, transparently, and involve the tribal community, not through backdoor tactics, false leadership claims, and legally questionable organizations. I urge Charles County decision-makers to thoroughly examine the facts, try to honorably address these questions, and ensure that any tribal effort serves the true interests of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, not a self-serving few and their immediate families.

Sincerely,

Christopher W. Proctor

(Signature)