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Telework center gets a reprieve

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BY KELLY HANNON

A government-run telework center in North Stafford will remain open, keeping 19 work stations available to public and private employees.

The center's status was thought to be in jeopardy.

The U.S. General Services Administration operates the center in partnership with the Fredericksburg-based George Washington Regional Commission.

Earlier this year, a GSA telework program manager told commission staff that the North Stafford facility would be closed by Oct. 1.

The telework center's users were told they had to find a temporary place to work while the commission relocated to a smaller center with lower rent.

Bob Wilson, GWRC executive director, even did a walk-through with GSA staff this summer prior to the move.

"Then we come to find out [the program manager] never had the authority to do that in the first place," Wilson told commission board members this week.

Five telework centers in the Washington area were incorrectly told they would have to close by a GSA manager who did not have the authority to make that decision, Wilson said.

Now, the North Stafford center will remain open in its current location at least through the next fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, 2010, Wilson said.

The North Stafford telework center on Onville Road is one of three jointly operated by the GSA and the GWRC.

The largest is located in the Southpoint shopping center in Spotsylvania's Massaponax area, with 25 work stations. A third facility with 16 work stations is in Woodbridge.

Teleworking increasingly is seen as an environmentally friendly way to reduce highway congestion and



maintain work operations at satellite locations in the event of an emergency.

Federal agencies are required to allow eligible workers to telework for 20 percent of their work hours in any two-week pay period.

In Virginia, Gov. Tim Kaine declared Aug. 3, 2009, Telework Day.

Still, commission members fear the GSA may try to close all 14 telework centers in the Washington area, including those in Spotsylvania, Stafford and Woodbridge.

"I suspect they are trying to kill it, based on the way it's been run," Wilson said.

A call to the GSA public affairs office for comment was not returned.

The reversal on the North Stafford center is the latest in what Wilson describes as confusing and sporadic communications from GSA staff. Wilson said he has had difficulty getting GSA approval to sign contracts with federal agencies looking for telework locations where they can base employees in an emergency. The difficulty led to missed opportunities to provide services and raise revenue, Wilson said.

The commission's board, made up of elected officials from each locality in the Fredericksburg area, passed a resolution this week asking Virginia's congressional delegation for help.

It requests legislation requiring the GSA to give telework operators at least nine months' notice if the program is shut down. Also, it wants the GSA to assume financial responsibility for any costs that extend beyond the date of the closure, such as lease agreements.

The GSA provides about \$700,000 in funding to run the three telework centers in Woodbridge, Spotsylvania and Stafford, Wilson said.

"We couldn't do it without GSA," he said.

For information on working at area telework centers, visit gotelework.org

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