

INSIDENOVA

PRINCE WILLIAM

Prince William Today

www.insidenova.com
Vol. 8 | Num. 33

Published weekly by Rappahannock Media LLC. All material ©InsideNoVa, 2020. All advertising and editorial matter is fully protected and may not be reproduced without permission.

TO SUBSCRIBE: Subscriptions are \$39/year. E-mail name, delivery address and telephone number to info@insidenova.com. Or mail information and check to address below: **INSIDENOVA 1360 Old Bridge Road, Woodbridge, VA 22192**

TO ADVERTISE:
E-mail cfields@insidenova.com or call 703-318-1386

TO SUBMIT NEWS:
E-mail info@insidenova.com

TO STOP DELIVERY:
E-mail your street address to customerservice@insidenova.com

BRUCE POTTER
PUBLISHER
bpotter@insidenova.com
571-333-1538

GREG HAMBRICK
SENIOR EDITOR
ghambrick@insidenova.com
703-318-1386

DAVE FAWCETT
SPORTS EDITOR
dfawcett@insidenova.com

EMILY SIDES
PRINCE WILLIAM REPORTER
esides@insidenova.com

JARED FORETEK
MANASSAS REPORTER
jforetek@insidenova.com

KEVIN SULLIVAN
REGIONAL CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
ksullivan@insidenova.com
571-309-1684

CONNIE FIELDS
ADVERTISING
cfields@insidenova.com
703-303-8713

CLASSIFIED ADS
703-771-8831
tfields@insidenova.com

NICKY MARSHOK
REGIONAL PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
nmarshok@insidenova.com

Main phone: 703-318-1386
Classified Advertising: 703-771-8831
Fax: 703-318-5509

MEMBER:



Confessions of a Beltway bandit



AL ALBORN

I was a Beltway bandit. For 15 years, I pursued government projects for a series of three Fortune 200 companies. I couldn't have done it without your tax dollars.

Transportation planning in Northern Virginia is about subsidizing the movement of labor from the more affordable suburbs like Prince William County to workplaces in Washington, Tysons, Reston, Fairfax and other points in or around the beltway to support government contracts and related businesses.

Beltway bandits are usually competing for a program. Programs typically end up being housed close to the customer — on-site, in a contractor's facility, or in leased facilities somewhere within or near the Beltway. They are generally relatively autonomous units only bothered by customer visits for the occasional review.

Programs can be established anywhere. The government's penchant to have programs in or near the Beltway is the root cause of our transportation problem. Traffic congestion is a symptom. In my opinion, Northern Virginia's transportation problem won't be solved by spending tax dollars on new roads, buses or trains to treat that symptom. It will be solved by changing the rules for how Beltway bandits and the government do business.

The Federal Acquisition Regulation sets the rules for submitting proposals to compete for government business. It

is time to change the rules. They should be rewritten to incentivize contractors to move work outside the Beltway. The rules should reward proposals that include employees who telework from home or remote locations. Moving people around efficiently should be an important consideration.

Prince William's Department of Economic Development is already positioned to leverage this idea. It does a good job of tracking the kinds of development sites, buildings, and facilities programs are looking for if (and this is the "if") the rules of the game incentivize them to do so.

The economic development department should work with the Prince William Chamber of Commerce, county and city governments, and our congressional delegation to "re-think" connecting people with the work they do as a systems problem rather than as a transportation problem. It's time to "connect the right dots."

County government is always looking for ways to increase its business tax revenue. Moving programs and the facilities necessary to support them to our county would achieve that goal. This would fill empty office space and offer opportunities for new construction.

For example, classified programs require a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility. Building these facilities is a significant business opportunity for developers. Programs rely on subcontractors. Entre-

preneurial opportunities for consulting, professional expertise, services, and supplies would flourish. The economic development department could track federal opportunities, target Beltway bandits and even help with proposal writing to win programs.

This suggestion also transfers discretionary revenue from those employees to local small businesses. Commuters build their lives around their program. They eat lunch (Clyde's Tysons Corner was my favorite), drop off their dry cleaning (often in the program building), buy cars and maintain them (I bought and maintained two cars in Tysons), shop for clothes (I miss Nordstrom), and do their Christmas shopping (Tysons Corner Center must make a fortune off Prince William residents) someplace convenient to where they work. It's time to bring that money spent elsewhere back to Prince William.

As a Beltway bandit, thanks for helping me achieve my business objectives and retire early. As a taxpayer, I'm not that interested in subsidizing those who took my place. Everything is a math problem. The solution for this problem is obvious. It's time for Prince William to stop paying for new roads, and start collecting more business revenue and discretionary spending instead of sending that money somewhere else.

Al Alborn is a political and social activist in Prince William County. His column appears every other week. You can learn more about Al at www.alborn.net.

COLUMNIST | DAVID KERR

Army finally tearing down Ft. Belvoir's nuclear plant



DAVID KERR

Northern Virginia's very own nuclear reactor facility at Fort Belvoir, a product of our country's initial research into nuclear power generation, is finally going to be torn down next year. The atomic core has long since been taken away and according to the Army Corps of Engineers, the still slightly radioactive components will be shipped off to long term nuclear storage sites. After which the buildings will be torn down and the Army will be free to do with the property what it pleases. Right now, the Army has no plans for the property, save just to leave the old site to nature.

The SM-1, as it was called, was the first nuclear electrical generating plant in America to feed into an electrical power grid. It was a noteworthy first. The Army, along with the Atomic Energy Commission, proved it could be done.

However, while the SM-1 existed in the shadows, it was the source of at least a few urban myths — some rather silly — but, for the record, Gunston Cove, near the location of the site, never glowed green at night. Or, yellow or blue. Nor, did any of the areas nearby. However, that's not to say that it hasn't prompted the occasional tempest in a teapot.

Back in the 1960s, a lady living on the

Potomac River not that far from the SM-1 contacted then Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr. to say that the plant was responsible for killing her beloved roses. Apparently, inquiries were made, and trying to keep rumors from spreading, the Army sprung for a new rose bed.

However, in spite of its important first, the vast majority of people in Northern Virginia probably never knew it existed. But there it was, a nuclear plant, 17 miles as the crow flies from the White House. It ran from 1954 until 1973. During those 20 years the SM-1 was also the site of the Army's Nuclear Power school. The Army had high hopes for building small nuclear generators for remote locations and for battlefield uses. These didn't work out. Though, one of these small nuclear plants powered America's science station at the South Pole for over a decade while another, a floating nuclear power plant assembled at Gunston Cove aboard an old Liberty ship, provided power to the Panama Canal Zone. It was an intriguing period in our relationship with nuclear power generation.

The hope was that SM-1, after 50 years or so, would become less radioactive, be declared safe, allowing it to be torn down with little or no fuss. However, in the

intervening years, standards for nuclear decommissioning became more stringent, and darned if the old site didn't lose its radioactive signature as quickly as was originally hoped.

That said, the Corps of Engineers, a good steward of this site for almost half a century, has announced its plans to ship any still radioactive materials to safe long-term storage facilities and then proceed with final demolition. Work is expected to begin next year. At which point, the SM-1 will officially be a thing of the past.

All of the Army's original small reactor sites, save for the SM-1, have been torn down. There isn't even a hint they were ever there.

In a way, it seems like the Army wants to forget this bit of its history. Maybe because it didn't fulfill its visionary mission back in the heyday of nuclear power, or maybe it's because nuclear power generation isn't popular anymore. And what's more, possibly because the less said about a nuclear plant in the heart of Northern Virginia the better. But, that's a myopic view. It was still a remarkable first step into a new technology. That warrants some historical accolades.

David Kerr is an adjunct professor of political science at VCU and has worked on Capitol Hill and for various federal agencies for many years.

INSIDENOVA

PRINCE WILLIAM

Prince William Today

www.insidenova.com
Vol. 8 | Num. 27

Published weekly by Rappahannock Media LLC. All material ©InsideNoVa, 2020. All advertising and editorial matter is fully protected and may not be reproduced without permission.

TO SUBSCRIBE: Subscriptions are \$39/year. E-mail name, delivery address and telephone number to info@insidenova.com. Or mail information and check to address below: **INSIDENOVA 1360 Old Bridge Road, Woodbridge, VA 22192**

TO ADVERTISE:
E-mail cfields@insidenova.com or call 703-318-1386

TO SUBMIT NEWS:
E-mail info@insidenova.com

TO STOP DELIVERY:
E-mail your street address to customerservice@insidenova.com

BRUCE POTTER
PUBLISHER

bpotter@insidenova.com
571-333-1538

GREG HAMBRICK
SENIOR EDITOR

ghambrick@insidenova.com
703-318-1386

DAVE FAWCETT
SPORTS EDITOR

dfawcett@insidenova.com

EMILY SIDES

PRINCE WILLIAM REPORTER
esides@insidenova.com

JARED FORETEK

MANASSAS REPORTER
jforetek@insidenova.com

KEVIN SULLIVAN

REGIONAL CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
ksullivan@insidenova.com
571-309-1684

CONNIE FIELDS

ADVERTISING
cfields@insidenova.com
703-303-8713

CLASSIFIED ADS

703-771-8831
tfields@insidenova.com

NICKY MARSHOK

REGIONAL PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
nmarshok@insidenova.com

Main phone: 703-318-1386

Classified Advertising: 703-771-8831

Fax: 703-318-5509

MEMBER:



Transparency = Trust

Since the first COVID-19 case in Virginia was announced, InsideNoVa.com has been posting a daily update on the coronavirus in our region, relying on statistics provided by the Virginia Department of Health.

The reaction on social media each day is predictable. While some commenters express alarm at the spread of the virus, others accuse us of exaggerating its impact.

Regardless of which side you're on, the facts are important. Over the nearly four months since the virus began spreading, the state has made more and more of these facts available. But persuading the administration of Gov. Ralph Northam to do so has been like pulling teeth. And that is worrisome because, as Northam reminds us every chance he gets, the pandemic is not over.

First, the state refused to provide data on the number of cases by Zip code. Watching Northam and Dr. Norman Oliver, the state's health commissioner, tiptoe around this issue during their regular news conferences was painful. They cited privacy reasons, as if announcing that three people in the 22192 Zip code had the virus would somehow violate the privacy of those individuals. They argued that some Zip codes cross jurisdictional boundaries, which is true but doesn't really matter.

Finally, in early May, a full two months into the pandemic, the Zip code data was released. The detailed data highlighted how much more rapidly the virus was spreading in lower-income areas and in areas more populated by Latinos and Blacks. This is absolutely critical information that was not clear until then.

At the same time, InsideNoVa and many other news organizations began asking about cases and deaths in specific nursing homes and assisted-living facilities. Anecdotal reports from residents and employees of these facilities and their relatives indicated the virus was out of control in many

of the facilities.

For weeks, Northam tap-danced around the issue, citing a vague section of state law that appears to protect the privacy of institutions, such as nursing homes, as if they are individuals. Finally, after the federal government released facility-specific data in early June, the state followed suit on June 19.

Our analysis of that data was startling: In Northern Virginia, fully two-thirds of the coronavirus-related deaths occurred as the result of outbreaks at these long-term care facilities. Five facilities in the region, including Birmingham Green in Manassas, have had over 30 coronavirus-related deaths. This is critical information that was withheld from the public for far too long.

But what about outbreaks at prisons, businesses, schools, churches and other settings? The Prince William Health District has had five more outbreaks at those kinds of facilities for which the state is still refusing to release data. As businesses reopen and students return to schools and colleges this fall, those outbreaks are going to increase. Only by knowing all the details of them can the public and health officials react appropriately.

The state cannot have it both ways. If the law allows it to release data on long-term care facilities, then the law allows it to release data on all outbreaks. Asked about this during a news conference last week, Northam tiptoed again: "If it becomes a public health issue, crisis, then we'll certainly look into that."

Governor, as you have told us on so many occasions, this is a public health crisis. Stop refusing to release data that would help the public understand the true nature of the crisis until it's too late. Only through complete transparency can we restore the public trust in the state's response.

AL ALBORN | AROUND PRINCE WILLIAM

A conversation with Chief Barry Barnard

Forty-one years is a long time to serve our community. That's how long Chief Barry Barnard has worn the uniform as an officer of the Prince William County Police Department. He has watched the police department grow, change and adapt as our population increased and the world became more complex.



AL ALBORN

Barnard evolved from recruit to chief of police here. He retired this week. I chatted with the chief as he prepares for the next chapter of his life.

Being a policeman or woman isn't as simple as it used to be. I walked away understanding that Barnard cares deeply about the community he serves and the team he leads to protect it, and he recognizes the need to apply new tools, technology, partnerships and ideas to protect the public and his team.

A constant theme of our conversation was trust. Barnard considers it the cornerstone of the relationship between police and the community. Anyone who pays attention knows that Barnard understands he was the voice of the county police department. He spent a lot of time visiting multiple venues talking to crowds large and small, to understand the issues our community is concerned about and to answer questions.

I was particularly impressed with Bar-

nard's holistic approach to keeping people safe. Much of our conversation was about the many moving parts involved in protecting our community and how modern police departments understand the variety of resources and expertise needed to work together to solve today's problems.

Simply put, police work is about problem solving. The best preface to the rest of the conversation was the chief's comment: "You can't arrest your way out of problems."

Barnard has actively developed partnerships with local nonprofits, deployed modern analytic technology, and trained police to understand the full range of community tools at their disposal. He considers school counselors and community mental health services critical to helping people solve problems before they evolve into incidents that require police involvement.

Today's police face a world of relative calm interrupted by occasional incidents and the constant possibility of violence and danger. The families who wait for officers to come home share the stresses of a law enforcement career. It's a tough job. Protecting mental health and preventing suicide are keys to protecting his people.

Barnard noted the importance of two

county programs designed to protect officers. The police department's Wellness & Resiliency Center offers confidential counseling, crisis support and emergency management to public safety employees and their immediate families. The department also began a program to provide confidential mental health care tailored to law enforcement. The program provides staff and immediate family with unlimited therapy sessions. Barnard stressed the confidential nature of all services and is pleased when his staff uses them.

I asked Barnard what advice he might have for the next chief. He offered the following: Do everything you can to support your staff and hold people accountable, hire the best people, train them well, and maintain the department's values. That sounds like good advice.

In a more somber moment, Barnard reflected on the things he has seen. He remembers the rough days, "shots fired," the faces of every officer who has made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. Barnard will carry the Hall of Heroes with him into retirement.

Enjoy your next chapter, chief. You earned it. On behalf of a grateful community, thank you for your service.

Al Alborn is a political and social activist in Prince William County. His column appears every other week. You can learn more about Al at www.alborn.net.

INSIDENOVA

PRINCE WILLIAM

Prince William Today

www.insidenova.com
Vol. 8 | Num. 1

Published weekly by Rappahannock Media LLC. All material ©InsideNoVa, 2020. All advertising and editorial matter is fully protected and may not be reproduced without permission.

TO SUBSCRIBE: Subscriptions are \$39/year. E-mail name, delivery address and telephone number to info@insidenova.com. Or mail information and check to address below: **INSIDENOVA 1372 Old Bridge Road, Suite 101, Woodbridge, VA 22192**

TO ADVERTISE: E-mail cfields@insidenova.com or call 703-318-1386

TO SUBMIT NEWS: E-mail info@insidenova.com

TO STOP DELIVERY: E-mail your street address to customerservice@insidenova.com

BRUCE POTTER
PUBLISHER

bpotter@insidenova.com
571-333-1538

GREG HAMBRICK
SENIOR EDITOR

ghambrick@insidenova.com
703-318-1386

DAVE FAWCETT
SPORTS EDITOR

dfawcett@insidenova.com

EMILY SIDES

PRINCE WILLIAM REPORTER
esides@insidenova.com

KEVIN SULLIVAN

REGIONAL CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
ksullivan@insidenova.com
571-309-1684

CONNIE FIELDS
ADVERTISING

cfields@insidenova.com
703-303-8713

CLASSIFIED ADS
703-771-8831

tfields@insidenova.com

NICKY MARSHOK

REGIONAL PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
nmarshok@insidenova.com

Main phone: 703-318-1386

Classified Advertising: 703-771-8831

Fax: 703-318-5509

MEMBER:



Little things add up



AL ALBORN

It started out as a conversation about Gov. Ralph Northam's proposal to eliminate annual motor vehicle safety inspections. As I pondered the issue, I realized we were talking about a "drip."

In the business world, we learn to watch small expenses. The best way to increase profit is to reduce costs. Small expenses -- "drips" -- add up to become a significant hit to the bottom line.

It's time to start looking for transportation "drips" to reduce congestion. Every time we take a car off the road or eliminate something that slows traffic, we stop a "drip."

Eliminating the annual safety inspection is a good example of a "drip." It takes cars heading to and from inspections off the road for hours, or perhaps a day. It's time to start looking for other "drips."

Perhaps the most "drips" occur because many people simply don't understand traffic rules. Have you ever made a left turn at a four-lane road and noticed how cars on the other side of the intersection wait to see if you turn into the correct lane? How often have you waited for a car on the other side to see if it turns into the correct lane? There are usually cars backed up on both sides. Of course, the correct choice is to turn into the left lane from the left lane, or right lane into right lane.

How many times have you watched drivers fail to allow someone to merge when

two lanes merge into one, a zipper merge? If executed properly, zipper merges reduce traffic backups.

At stop signs, I wait for cars coming from my left to see

if they are going to turn or go straight before pulling out onto the road. Some don't bother using their turn signal. Others use their turn signal just before they turn. In either case, the people in line behind me and I wait.

Those traffic examples are all "drips." There are many more "drips" worth looking at. We can fix these traffic "drips" with appropriate signage, public education, and stricter enforcement. Although these appear to be minor annoyances, the cumulative effect on congestion would result in a measurable contribution to helping people get where they want to go faster.

Let's think out of the box for a moment. Online retailers such as Amazon have taken a lot of cars off the road. Some local brick-and-mortar stores are having a tough time competing. Perhaps public policy and economic development should "connect the dots" between businesses who sell things and how those things are delivered to consumers.

Prince William County might consider innovative solutions to connect local businesses with online ordering and consolidated delivery not only to compete with the "big dogs" online but also to reduce traffic. This might also be an idea for a local entrepreneur. Good idea? Maybe. A traffic "think tank" that looks beyond roads, brainstorm, and focuses on "little things" otherwise overlooked is a good idea.

A model to predict something is no better than the variables and assumptions defined therein. Perhaps it's time to reevaluate exactly what goes into transportation management models. The little things when multiplied by how often they occur and how they might be eliminated would, in my opinion, have a measurable effect on the results.

No matter how many miles of road we build, how many buses and rail cars we deploy, or how many carpools we encourage, traffic remains a mess. Perhaps it's time to start looking at the small stuff. "Drips" add up to become big stuff quickly.

Al Alborn is a political and social activist in Prince William County. His column appears every other week. You can learn more about Al at www.alborn.net.

GUEST COLUMN | DAVID KERR

Democrats need to fix redistricting process

What does a political party do, after years of watching from the sidelines, when they finally get control of all the levers of power?

It's not an idle question for a political science class. It's very real and it's the question Virginia Democrats will have to answer during the 2020 session of the General Assembly. With a progressive agenda, a majority in the state Senate and the House of Delegates and a Democratic governor, they are in a position to enact the kind of change they promised.

But there is one promise, or at least a constant complaint they said they'd remedy, that could be forgotten if they're not careful: creating a fair redistricting process.

For the past two decades, Virginia Democrats have lived in the political wilderness, even while holding their own in actual voting totals and winning statewide offices. To put it simply, the elections were rigged. That seems rather crass, but it describes the situation perfectly. Besides, that's what gerrymandering is all about -- it's an abuse of democracy.

Named for former Vice President Elbridge Gerry, also a former Massachusetts governor, gerrymandering refers to drawing district lines in a way to make sure the election turns out the way you want it to. The principle is simple: Create as many districts as possible that favor your party and create as few districts as possible that favor your opponent's party.

Starting in 2000, once Republicans took control of the General Assembly, that's what they did. It was a hole, try as the Demo-

crats might, they couldn't escape until the rapid demographic changes and strong anti-Republican wave of the past two General Assembly elections.

Now, here is the moral question. The Republicans back in 2000 arguably abused their power to draw the lines for General Assembly districts. Now, after the 2020 census, the Democrats will get to draw the new lines. This is something they are required to do. The big question is, will they forget their promises and draw lines that guarantee them a majority for years to come, or will they do the right thing and come up with a fair and impartial process?

It's tempting to follow the GOP example from 20 years ago. But the consequences, as we learned, are a direct affront to representative democracy. Two decades ago, the Republicans passed some of the best district drawing software available -- yes, there is such a thing -- to craft districts that would have made Eldridge Gerry proud. For most of the intervening 20 years, there were rarely any contests of significance in the General Assembly. Democracy had been effectively subverted.

The thing is, Article II of Virginia's Constitution says that districts "shall be composed of contiguous and compact territory and shall be so constituted as to give, as nearly as is practicable, representation in proportion to the population of the district." Virginia's districts are anything but contiguous and compact. Some look more



DAVID KERR

like the images on a Rorschach test than a voting district.

Now, the Democrats have a chance to stop this insane process. It's simple really.

Virginia is working toward a constitutional amendment to change its redistricting process -- one that creates a bipartisan redistricting commission. That

effort requires a constitutional amendment to pass the legislature this session and then be placed on the ballot in the November election.

So, what has to happen is a test of political courage. It's a tough ask, but the Democrats need to support the amendment's passage in this year's General Assembly session. And if redistricting has to begin in the meantime, they should create a bipartisan redistricting commission, something they can do legislatively, to draw the lines. This same approach would be applied to Congressional districts as well.

It's tough, when offered a possible guarantee of power for years, to turn it over almost immediately to a bipartisan commission. Democrats are giving up a heck of an advantage. But if representative democracy is to mean anything, then this is the right thing to do and now is the time to do it.

David Kerr is an adjunct professor of political science at VCU and has worked on Capitol Hill and for various federal agencies for many years.