

INSIDENOVA

PRINCE WILLIAM

Prince William Today

www.insidenova.com  
Vol. 10 | Num. 21

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**BRUCE POTTER**  
PUBLISHER

bpotter@insidenova.com  
571-333-1538

**TREVOR BARATKO**  
EDITOR

tbaratko@insidenova.com

**KARI PUGH**  
DIGITAL EDITOR

karipugh@insidenova.com

**DAVE FAWCETT**  
SPORTS EDITOR

dfawcett@insidenova.com

**REPORTERS**

NOLAN STOUT

nstout@insidenova.com

JARED FORETEK

jforetek@insidenova.com

PAUL LARA

plara@insidenova.com

JAMES JARVIS

jjarvis@insidenova.com

ACACIA JAMES

ajames@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

tfelds@insidenova.com

**NICKY MARSHOK**

REGIONAL PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

nmarshok@insidenova.com

Main phone: 703-318-1386

Classified Advertising: 703-771-8831

**MEMBER:**



# We are NOT ready for some football

Prince William County, are you ready for some football?

The Washington Football Team, under its various names, has been trying to bounce among the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia for decades, and now it appears that it is Prince William's turn to be the belle of the (foot)ball.

According to reports this week, the Commanders are focusing on 200 acres of land between the intersection of Minnieville and Telegraph roads and Interstate 95 to build what Senate Majority Leader Richard Saslaw called "a mini city."

Next week, the General Assembly will again take up legislation creating a Virginia Football Stadium Authority, empowered to sell about \$1 billion worth of bonds to fund the stadium's construction in an area with no access to Metro, no Sunday public transit, congested roads and lots of residential neighborhoods – all for a team under Congressional investigation for financial improprieties and sexual harassment.

Stadium advocates contend that the complex will produce an economic windfall. However, the research does not bear that out. Dr. Charles Tu, chair of the real estate department at the University of San Diego's Knauss School of Business, published his findings regarding the economic impact of FedEx Field on its surrounding neighborhoods in the journal Land Economics, published by the University of Wisconsin Press.

Before settling on Prince George's County, Md., in 1995, the then-Redskins tried to negotiate the building of a stadium in Alexandria in 1992 and Laurel, Md., in 1993. However, both attempts were thwarted by local citizen resistance.

Tu surmised that the Prince George's location was selected in 1995 due to its economic vulnerability, which the team determined would suppress a repeat of the opposition they faced elsewhere because neighbors surrounding the 296-acre vacant lot in Landover, Md., did not have the political resources to fight the proposal.

He determined that the economic impact area of the stadium encompassed a three-mile radius and that housing values within this radius were lower than comparable values outside the stadium's impact zone, with the most significant drop occurring during construction.

A new football stadium would potentially have a substantial negative financial impact on the residents of Prince William. For reference, a three-mile radius around the team's potential site, the impact zone identified by Tu, includes all of Lake Ridge, Occoquan and the Potomac Mills area. It stretches over a vast



KRISTINA NOHE

swath of Dale City, into the Marumsco and Featherstone areas and encompasses both sides of U.S. 1 from the Dale Boulevard and Rippon interchange to the Occoquan River.

Thousands of homes and businesses would be affected before the first game was even played. Residents living near FedEx field have seen the mall across the street from the stadium go under, traffic increase, cars looking for free parking fill up neighborhood streets and fans knock down residents' fences to create shortcuts to the stadium. If the stadium proposal goes through, Landover's problems will become Prince William's.

Dr. Rick Eckstein, an associate professor of sociology at Villanova University, and Dr. Kevin Delaney, an associate professor of sociology at Temple University, reported on the false promises of economic improvement by stadium advocates in the Journal of Sport & Social Issues after studying the effects of 10 stadiums on their surrounding communities.

The researchers found that in most cases, there was "growing evidence, both through systematic research and anecdotal observation, that new stadiums simply do not create economic growth for the areas in which they are built. Nor do they contribute in any way to alleviating the myriad social problems in these communities."

Furthermore, they found that as communities became skeptical of the promise of economic windfalls, political and economic elites pivoted to tout the non-economic benefits.

However, they discovered that the "alleged non-economic benefits have been socially constructed by stadium supporters (usually relatively powerful people and organizations) to achieve their goals despite increased resistance from people and organizations (usually less powerful) who have begun challenging the contention that publicly financed professional sports stadiums stimulate local economic growth."

The most troubling aspect is that members of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors seem absent from the discussion. InsideNoVa reported in March that "the county is under a non-disclosure agreement and cannot publicly discuss specific locations for a stadium."

That is sure to provide little comfort to the thousands of residents sitting in the three-mile crosshairs of the stadium's impact zone.

*Kristina Nohe is a political activist, adoption advocate and homeschooling mom who is proud to be from Prince William County.*

READERS REACT



*Readers had a whole lot to say about this week's news that the Washington Commanders have obtained options to buy 200 acres of land along Interstate 95 in Woodbridge as a potential site for their new stadium. Here's a sampling from our Facebook page.*

"I'm just gonna keep a tent in my trunk so I can live on 95 from now on, since that's effectively what's going to happen now."

– April Streich

"The traffic is one day a week!!! Sundays and possibly a Thursday night or Monday night but like once a year!!! Relax crying about the traffic... I see no positive thinking on here. What about the student jobs programs or jobs period that this will create?? I think it's a good thing!!"

– Ricky McDonald

"We couldn't keep the P-Nats [Potomac Nationals] here in the county for a new stadium – what will we do in 30 years or

so when this stadium is considered old and obsolete? I would take another data center over this."

– Carl Wescott

"That area needed additional development."

– Brian Caine

"Traffic would be an absolute nightmare on game days. Even more than it already is in that area, even if they added a dedicated freeway exit."

– Michael Edmonds

"Beyond stupid. Knowing our development/tax crazy supervisors I'm sure they are

chomping at the bit to see how we – [Prince William County] residents – pay for it. Seriously, just knock down RFK and put the Washington football team IN Washington – we absolutely do not want them here."

– Martin Fernandez

"I-95 is going to be a bigger beast than it already is."

– Sherry Dornblaser

"We can't handle the traffic we already have."

– Stacey Chabra

"For those saying it adds no value... A home directly outside of the current FedEx Field has had its property value increase by 118% since 2001... For reference, the 1984-built home is a 3-bedroom, 2-bath, 1,034-square-foot single-family home that is a 10-minute walk to the stadium. Not my opinion... just numbers and data."

– Dion Coward

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PUBLISHER

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nstout@insidenova.com

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PAUL LARA

plara@insidenova.com

JAMES JARVIS

jjarvis@insidenova.com

ACACIA JAMES

ajames@insidenova.com

**KEVIN SULLIVAN**

REGIONAL CIRCULATION DIRECTOR

ksullivan@insidenova.com

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nmarshok@insidenova.com

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**MEMBER:**



# These actions instilled no pride

Several area teens attended the PWC Pride: Community Celebration & Information Day on June 7 at the county government complex.

They heard from elected officials, conversed with local groups, danced, ate ice cream and felt the embrace of their community. After the festivities, they filed into the building to watch the Prince William Board of County Supervisors proclaim June 2022 as LGBTQIA+ Pride Month.

However, as they settled in to watch their government in action, the teens got a lecture on how an elected official's personal religious liberty trumped secular acknowledgment of them. The invective continued with allegations that the LGBTQIA+ community "condoned" and "accepted" the sexualization of children, easily understood by the teens as a denunciation of how they came to their own identification.

Several of the teens were visibly upset as the supervisor finished by saying that the LGBTQIA+ movement was moving to "a darker and darker place for our society and culture" and that she would "proudly vote against this [resolution] again this year."

The response from the dais to these comments varied from an affirmation of the obvious pain on display in the audience to a censure of the proclamation as divisive. The proclamation "encourages the community to celebrate the principles of equality, inclusion, freedom from discrimination, and justice for all who visit and reside in Prince William County"

It is odd that the Board of County Supervisors still has contentious votes on LGBTQIA+ Pride Month in the name of protecting children from the promotion of the gay movement. That's because on Oct. 6, 2015, the board, including two of the current supervisors who could not support this year's Pride resolution, voted to name the 30-acre park at Potomac Shores where hundreds of children play after a soccer phenom and hometown hero, Ali Krieger, who is openly lesbian.

Last year, Krieger and her wife, Ashlyn Harris, welcomed their first child, a baby girl, and perhaps someday that girl will kick the ball back and forth with her parents at the fields named after her mom by her proud hometown.

The United States was founded on the self-evident truth

that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

This goal has been more aspirational than practical; nonetheless, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." While many people will recognize this quotation as that of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., a deeply faithful man, they may not know that one of King's key advisors, Bayard

Rustin, was gay.

Rustin was with King in Montgomery, Ala., and organized the March on Washington. He led protests for equality as early as the 1940s.

Indeed, it is widely held that Rustin, raised a Quaker and having studied with leaders in the Gandhian movement in India, instructed King on the tenets of non-violent resistance. In 1987, President Ronald Reagan honored the then recently deceased civil rights leader: "Though a pacifist, [Rustin] was a fighter to the finish. That is why over the course of his life he won the undying love of all who cherish freedom."

At the June 7 Board of Supervisors meeting, the words "love" and "Christianity" were used repeatedly by people on both sides of the debate. Therefore, it is worth noting that the first statement in the First Amendment of the Constitution, before freedom of speech, before freedom of the press and before freedom of assembly, is the statement that government shall have "no law respecting an establishment of religion."

However, if one is going to use personal religious beliefs to legislate while simultaneously professing love for those with whom they disagree, it is worth reflecting on 1 Corinthians 13:4-5: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."

Unfortunately, the youth who attended the meeting June 7 did not see either prevailing sentiments from the Constitution or the Bible on display by a number of their elected leaders.

*Kristina Nohe is a political activist, adoption advocate and homeschooling mom who is proud to be from Prince William County.*



KRISTINA NOHE

READERS REACT

**DIGITAL GATEWAY WATER SESSION WAS DILUTED**

The Prince William Board of County Supervisors' water quality work session of June 7 concluded on a less than reassuring note: Don't worry about it.

Chair Ann Wheeler seemed content when the regional director for the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality opined that existing regulations could contain the negative impacts from the Prince William Digital Gateway. This is a premature judgment, especially considering that DEQ declined to participate in the Comprehensive Plan Amendment review process. Never mind that. Their answer was handy.

The county is already on record acknowledging salinity issues in the Occoquan reservoir. Director of Public Works Thomas Smith, in his memo of Nov. 22, 2021, wrote: "The current pollutants of concern like increasing salinity will require additional studies to determine how best to address the issue and they will need to be addressed at a regional level."

In its third review of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment, dated May 5, Prince William's Watershed Management Branch

"recommended the Comprehensive Plan remain unchanged." Additionally, "Watershed supports the statement of other County agencies that this application would benefit from information obtained through completion [of] the study of impacts of data centers outlined in the Board Resolution #21-327, dated May 18, 2021."

A water study would seem prudent considering the magnitude of the proposal. So why does the board resist one when its own staff recommends it? Why is the board even considering this environmentally sensitive area for data centers when there is ample land to develop them in the existing overbuilt district? The answers lie in whose interests this board is serving.

- Bill Wright, Gainesville

**WOODBIDGE DEVELOPMENT PLAN CRITICIZED**

A story online this week about a Maryland developer's plan to bring a high-density development to Woodbridge (see article, Page 10) got readers on our Facebook page talking. Here's a sampling of the more than 70 comments on our story.

"Let's make sure we cram as many

people as possible into an area with very limited public transportation and almost no walkable roads."

- Ellie Blackwell

"Maybe a Maryland developer should go build in Maryland."

- Sandy Martin

"Stop with all the over-development of eastern PWC! Already way too crowded on the roadways!"

- Lannie Milam

"How about the county get all the beat-up road on Route 1 fixed? From Triangle all the way to Woodbridge is horrible. All these new developments going in, they ripped up the roads to run pipes/lines then haphazardly patched the roads. Ridiculous."

- Bob Teague

"Yup. Before they have an answer to the school transportation crisis. Makes complete sense. Add more kids to the schools. Exacerbate the problem and have kids wait for triple-run buses."

- Jason DeFreitas

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PUBLISHER  
bpotter@insidenova.com  
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**TREVOR BARATKO**  
EDITOR  
tbaratko@insidenova.com

**KARI PUGH**  
DIGITAL EDITOR  
karipugh@insidenova.com

**DAVE FAWCETT**  
SPORTS EDITOR  
dfawcett@insidenova.com

**REPORTERS**  
NOLAN STOUT  
nstout@insidenova.com  
JARED FORETEK  
jforetek@insidenova.com  
JAMES JARVIS  
jjarvis@insidenova.com  
ACACIA JAMES  
ajames@insidenova.com  
CAMERON DELEAN  
cdelean@insidenova.com

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

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MEMBER:



# At Colgan, Sharks can be friends, too

“Who has a success to share?” That is how Dr. David Parrish, an assistant principal at Colgan High School, starts the school’s weekly Fin Friends meet-up on Zoom. For seven years, Fin Friends has been building a community of unconditional acceptance at Colgan, and, in the process, it has shaped the school’s overall culture.

One by one, students share wins they’ve experienced over the previous week. Successes include doing well on a test, overcoming an obstacle, getting a new puppy or making a sports team.

Sometimes kids will start out saying, “This isn’t a success story, but...” When they finish, Parrish declares with Ted Lasso-like enthusiasm, “Yes! That was a success!” The meetings, which started as a way to keep connected during the pandemic, have become a weekly oasis away from the negativity that often plagues young people’s lives.

Fin Friends began with a charge from Dr. Tim Healey, Colgan’s principal, to nurture a positive culture that fully integrates special education and general education students. Since the school opened, Fin Friends has worked to do just that; the club is now the largest in the school, with both neurotypical and special needs students. Parrish attributes its success to the focus on building relationships between students.

One Fin Friends member is Dylan Harvey, who is autistic and spent most of elementary and middle school feeling very isolated, said his mother, Heather Harvey. So when it was time for him to start high school, Harvey said, “I felt like I was feeding him to the literal sharks.” She worried about how big the school was and how her child would find his place.

Then Dylan joined Fin Friends. “He came home and told us about how people were shouting ‘Hey, Dylan!’ to him and giving him fist bumps in the hallway,” she recalled. He had found a place to belong and went from a quiet boy to an outgoing member of the Sharks community. In fact, he became a literal Shark.

He went to a football game with Fin Friends and noticed that the other team had a mascot, but Colgan did not. So he spoke to school administrators and became the Colgan Shark mascot, Timmy the Tooth.

Now Dylan is a student at George Mason University studying to become a special education teacher so he can pay forward all that Fin Friends did for him. His mother could not have envisioned this future before Fin Friends. “He changed so much. It gave him all the confidence.”

Dylan still logs on to weekly Fin Friend calls to encourage other



Colgan High School’s Fin Friends club sponsors a variety of outings, including one at a local pool. PROVIDED



KRISTINA NOHE

students because, as his mom points out, “He wants them to know that if he can do it, so can they.”

Maddie Niles, a junior at Colgan, has been involved in Fin Friends since the summer before her freshman year. “It definitely eased the transition to high school,” she said. “Everyone was so welcoming.”

She enjoys that students can join activities that fit their schedule and that the club gives students a chance just to hang out while having fun, whether it is seeing the newest superhero movie, having dinner together before the Homecoming dance or attending school plays and games.

“Everyone loves how inclusive Fin Friends is,” she added. “It’s a safe and appreciative space.”

Parrish says Fin Friends has two requirements: “Be Kind. Reach out.” Along with the weekly Zoom calls, Fin Friends hosts activities often suggested by the students, such as a recent water balloon battle. They continue activities during breaks and the summer to keep students connected. Students will also post photos on the club’s Facebook page showing themselves holding a Fin Friends sign while visiting places as far away as South Korea and Paris. Members have posted from all 50 states and 25 countries.

The melding of general and special education students is not some magnanimous indulgence by neurotypical kids. “The club is all about building relationships,” Parrish said. “It would be empty if it were just being driven by staff. It’s about how you treat people.”

Harvey, whose daughter, Haiden, is also in Fin Friends, echoed that sentiment: “Fin Friends isn’t just a bridge between groups. It’s a community organization.”

*Kristina Nohe is a local activist, adoption advocate and homeschooling mom.*

## READERS REACT

### FAITH LEADERS CALL FOR FOCUS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Our county’s Comprehensive Plan is currently being updated, and affordable housing has been pushed to the sidelines for far too long. It is time that the Board of County Supervisors prioritizes housing that’s affordable in Prince William County.

As faith leaders in the community, our job is to create a community where God’s mercy flourishes by providing basic necessities and opportunities for personal and spiritual growth. Affordable housing is critical to this mission.

However, efforts are underway to make portions of Prince William off-limits to affordable housing through exclusionary housing policies. We, as a county, face a decision: Do we want to move forward as a more inclusive community or do we want to continue with exclusionary housing policies that divide us?

Affordable housing helps those who need it most, and it also helps support the

very people who serve our community daily: our teachers, firefighters, police officers, nurses and government workers. They should be able to live in the same communities in which they serve.

We urge and pray that the Prince William Board of County Supervisors ensures that zoning policies and ordinances are updated to address what has been ignored for far too long: making housing that’s affordable and accessible throughout the whole county, eliminating the gap in housing so that those making 60% or less of the area median income pay no more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs, including utilities.

— *Faith Leaders of Prince William County*

*This letter was signed by the Rev. Mandy North, lead pastor, Manassas Church of the Brethren; the Rev. Michael Sessoms, pastor, Little Union Baptist Church; Dr. Keith Savage, senior servant, First Baptist Church; Dr. George Farmer, pastor, Olive Branch Baptist Church; the Rev. Dr. Etoria*

### ELECTION LETTERS

» Letters about the 2022 elections must be received by Friday, Oct. 28, in order to be considered for publication before Election Day, Nov. 8. Letters should be no more than 300 words, signed, and submitted by email to info@insidenova.com or online at InsideNoVa.com.

*V. Goggins, pastor, First AME Church; Father John O’Connor, pastor, Saint Francis of Assisi Church; the Rev. Adam C. Bowling, pastor, First United Presbyterian Church; the Rev. Abi Foerster, senior pastor, St. Thomas United Methodist Church; the Rev. Sandi Evans Rogers, interim pastor, Woodbridge Church of the Brethren; the Rev. Bob Michalides, pastor, St. Paul United Methodist Church; Tony Lewis, pastor, Light of Life Church, and the Rev. Pamm Fontana, senior pastor, Woodbridge Nazarene.*