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Vote delayed for Devlin data center project

New housing proposal leads to lengthy debate

» BY NOLAN STOUT
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Prince William County supervisors will take time to hammer out the legal repercussions of a seemingly unprecedented last-minute revision to a controversial development proposal.

Around 3 a.m. Wednesday, the Board of County Supervisors unanimously tabled the application for the Devlin Technology Park until March 7.

The action came after the applicant, Stanley Martin Homes, preliminarily agreed to revise its proposed 4.2-million-square-foot data center near Chris Yung Elementary School in Bristow to include part of a previous residential plan on the property.

The revision was presented by Supervisor Kenny Boddye, D-Occoquan.



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Protestors rally against the proposed Devlin Technology Park data center before the Prince William Board of County Supervisors meeting on Tuesday. NOLAN STOUT | INSIDENOVA

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Unified Sports sparks inclusion, friendship

Program brings together students of all skillsets

» BY JARED FORETEK
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If you stood outside Gainesville High School Saturday morning and looked closely, you could literally see the warmth emanating from the building's gymnasium.

Yes, it helped that the temperature outside was a bitterly cold 26 degrees at 9 a.m., but the gym itself was filled with support, camaraderie and joy that undoubtedly spread beyond the building's walls.

The gymnasium was the site of a Unified Basketball Tournament, the biggest yet in the area where Unified teams from seven area high schools met to compete on the court, wrapping up the program's basketball season in front of hundreds of class-



Students and coaches enjoy a Unified basketball game at Gainesville High School Feb. 4. Unified sports programs, an arm of Special Olympics, link special and general education students in various athletic events. DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

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mates, parents, teachers and coaches.

An arm of Special Olympics International, Unified Sports is unique in the way it brings special education students together with their general education classmates to play. It's intended to foster more inclusion beyond the court or playing field by creating interaction between those with and without disabilities.

STRUCTURE AND SMILES

For most involved, the wins and losses were of little concern Saturday morning. Ability levels ranged widely, and for many players the triumph of hitting one or two shots with family, friends and teachers watching was enough to carry the day. Games were played in four four-minute quarters with minimal refereeing and a running clock.

For students like Cameron from Potomac High School – who brimmed with pride after all three of his team's wins – the competition was clearly meaningful.

"I've been practicing a lot with the team, and we just got a good team," he said after Potomac's final game. "I like to play basketball because of LeBron James. He inspired me to play basketball."

His teammate, Tim, added, "It's about having fun playing with your teammates and enjoying everybody playing."

Special education sports can come in many different forms, but Unified teams right now are the most structured opportunities many students can take part in, with inter-school games and events like the one held in Gainesville on Saturday. The program, which is also a physical education class in Prince William County Schools, is growing rapidly in Prince William and beyond.



Unified Sports has brought general and special education students closer together and prompted many friendships. Pictured are two participants in Gainesville Feb. 4. **DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA**

RAPID RISE IN POPULARITY

Emily Utter, the school system's supervisor of health and physical education, said about 10 years ago schools in the county started organizing intrasquad games on their own. Slowly, schools began reaching out to each other to set up games. Now, she said, every high school in the county has some form of Unified Sports program, though some play more inter-school games than others.

According to Special Olympics, Unified Sports is the organization's "fastest-growing program." Last year, Special Olympics International Director Brian Quinn told EdWeek that "the last few years in particular, it's ramped up to a tipping point to become mainstream."

After the basketball season, track and field will start in May.

Aside from the big end-of-season tournament, Prince William's teams also hold

games on school days, drawing students from every grade to the stands to support their classmates.

Megan Negulici, a special education teacher who helped organize the tournament Saturday, brought Unified Sports to the new school when it opened in 2021 after helping to start the Unified track and field program at Westfield High School in Fairfax County. She said the games are a big deal at Gainesville.

"It just brings the whole school together. There's such a sense of inclusion that it's just unreal. You can't even, like, fathom it until you actually see it," she said. "In our school and even the schools we've played against, everyone comes together, everyone is in the bleachers, cheering for both teams."

Cheering on Gainesville's Cardinals Saturday were Muffin and Ray Wilcoski. Their daughter, junior Josie, is one of the team's general education participants. On the court, she could be seen grabbing rebounds and passing to her teammates, or offering them a hand to the other end of the floor, encouraging them to put their arms up on defense.

In Gainesville and at other schools, the program has become incredibly popular with both special education and general education students. Nathan Nemerow, who coaches the team and teaches the Unified physical education class at Gainesville, has already received more than 40 applications from general education students for just a few spots next year.

Research has shown that as general education students gain more exposure to special education and students with disabilities at a young age, they're more likely to go into special education as a



Coaches and players with Unified Sports say the leagues have led to more understanding and compassion among students. **DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA**

profession or work with people with disabilities in adult life.

“She wants to be a teacher, and she just loves to participate and help other kids learn the sport and enjoy it with them,” Muffin Wilcoski said of Josie.

Ray Wilcoski added that their daughter talks constantly about the other students on the team.

“I know them all,” he said. “I’ve never seen them before, but I can name every one of these kids.”

According to Muffin, Manassas’ Osbourn High School, where she teaches, has seen the success of the program in Prince William and is working to build a Unified program that will participate in events like Saturday’s in the future.

‘SPORTS HELPS HIS LIFE’

Unified Sports is also catching on in Fauquier County. Kettle Run High School in Nokesville was the one school represented at Gainesville not from Prince William. Kasey Willoughby, a special education teacher and Unified director at Kettle Run, said it is the program’s second year at the high school and the school already has more applicants from general education students than spots.

“We have a form and an application and a cut-off because there’s so many kids who want to be in the class,” she said. “They get to work one-on-one with our students, and I think they see the bond that people develop with our students, that there’s more to them than just what they see. Now I have kids who hang out with them on the weekends and come back from college to see them ... It’s just something that they want to be a part of.”

In just two years, the program at Kettle Run had already doubled in size. Willoughby said she’s currently working with two middle schools in Fauquier who’ve expressed interest to start Unified classes and clubs.

“It’s spreading like wildfire,” she said. Lourdes Iraheta sat and watched her



A Unified Sports player smiles while hustling on the Gainesville High School court Feb. 4.

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son Dani, a 10th grade special education student at Gainesville, run up and down the floor in his No. 32 jersey Saturday. His face lit up as she called out to him.

She tries to make it to every game he plays in, Iraheta said, because it’s important for him to feel supported. It was particularly hard when COVID-19 shut down school for most students and put a halt to Special Olympics activities.

“Sports helps his life,” Iraheta said.

Now that the doors are back open to everyone and sports are back in full swing, Iraheta said, he can’t get enough, thanks in no small part to Gainesville’s Unified program.

“School is everything for him,” she said. “He wakes up at 5 in the morning, getting ready to come and play games ... His school is his social life.”



Unified Sports participants cheer on their teammates.

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PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATIONS

The county school system has announced dates, times and locations for graduation ceremonies this spring. Here are the details.

School	Date	Time	Location
Battlefield	June 6, 2023	7 p.m.	Jiffy Lube Live
Brentsville District	June 5, 2023	1 p.m.	Jiffy Lube Live
C.D. Hylton	June 10, 2023	9:30 a.m.	Eagle Bank Arena
Charles J. Colgan Sr.	June 10, 2023	9 a.m.	Colgan High School
Forest Park	Friday, June 10	7 p.m.	EagleBank Arena
Freedom High School	June 13, 2023	2 p.m.	EagleBank Arena
Gainesville	June 13, 2023	7 p.m.	EagleBank Arena
Gar-Field	June 11, 2023	7 p.m.	EagleBank Arena
Governor’s School @ IP	May 20, 2023	10 a.m.	Osbourn High School, Manassas Park
Independence Nontraditional	June 8, 2023	6 p.m.	Hylton Performing Arts Center
Osbourn Park	June 11, 2023	2:30 p.m.	EagleBank Arena
PACE West	June 1, 2023	12:30 p.m.	PACE West
Patriot	June 5, 2023	7 p.m.	Jiffy Lube Live
Potomac	June 10, 2023	2:30 p.m.	EagleBank Arena
Unity Reed	June 6, 2023	12 p.m.	Jiffy Lube Live
Woodbridge	June 4, 2023	2:30 p.m.	EagleBank Arena