



## Prince William Conservation Alliance

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### Questions for Prince William County Supervisor Candidates in 2015

*With responses published for community leaders throughout your district*

Please respond to these seven questions and send responses to Prince William Conservation Alliance at [alliance@pwconserve.org](mailto:alliance@pwconserve.org) by September 24. Thank you.

Candidate Name: Earnie Porta District: Occoquan

Campaign Website: [www.earnieportaforsupervisor.com](http://www.earnieportaforsupervisor.com) Party Affiliation: Democrat

**1. What changes, if any, would you make to the current 10 acre minimum in the rural area?**

I support the concept of what is commonly known as the Rural Crescent as a lesser-density area whose open spaces help promote improved water quality and certain types of rural uses. Additionally, I recognize and appreciate that the 10-acre lot restriction has been the most effective tool to-date for preserving the Rural Crescent. Over the last several years, however, environmentalists have shared with me their concerns about the long-term viability of the 10-acre lot restriction and – more importantly – their worry that in the absence of additional tools the remaining undeveloped area in the Rural Crescent will become fully developed as private 10-acre lots, which would be unfortunate from an infrastructure, economic development, environmental, and quality of life perspective. Alternatives are thus necessary over the long-term, and if done correctly I would fully support each of them.

Two of the purest preservation (as opposed to conservation) alternatives available are the Purchase of Development Rights (PDRs) and Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs). The former is effectively what we used while I was Mayor of the Town of Occoquan to preserve from development 17+ acres of

woodlands along Tanyard Hill Road (outside of town boundaries). Both approaches, however, require a consistent community monetary commitment to fund either the purchase of development rights or the infrastructure improvements (e.g. roads, schools, etc.) necessary for other areas to accept the higher density involved in transfers of development rights.

Another potentially effective tool if used correctly – and one that focuses more on conservation than preservation – is some form of managed cluster development. Advocates for the Rural Crescent understandably have lacked confidence in this approach in the past in part because they do not believe the Board of Supervisors will resist subsequent pressure to develop areas that are otherwise set aside in clusters as open space. There are ways to address that concern if we have the political will, starting with agreement on a reasonable percentage of open space in such developments and then protecting those spaces with appropriate conservation easements. Another critical component is an overall plan that will result in connections between the preserved open space areas so that both wildlife and recreational users have contiguous open-space corridors. If done correctly, such an approach should result in the Rural Crescent conserving far more publicly-accessible open space than would otherwise be the case simply using the 10-acre lot restriction.

**2. Would you support Prince William County funding for a Purchase of Development Rights to encourage commercial agriculture and preserve open space in the Rural Area?**

Yes. As discussed in my answer to the prior question, I believe Purchase of Development Rights is an effective tool for preserving open space, and is, in fact, essentially what we employed when I was Mayor of the Town of Occoquan to preserve from development 17+ acres of woodlands on Tanyard Hill Road.

**3. How would you increase commercial agricultural operations in the Rural Area, including wineries and breweries, to preserve open space?**

I support tax, zoning, and other incentives to encourage existing commercial agricultural operations in the Rural Area, and to encourage new commercial agricultural operations. Nevertheless, I am also realistic about the challenges we face in this regard. Fundamentally, a variety of market conditions will drive the attractiveness of Prince William County for such ventures, and for traditional production farming, I fear that we have already developed too much land in the Rural Crescent for them to be sustainable in the long term.

**4. As the county population increases, how will you increase the acreage of public parkland for ballfields and for passive recreational activities?**

We currently have less active and passive outdoor recreational space than our comprehensive plan indicates is desirable. This differential will only increase as our population grows if we continue to rely on proffers and new development as our primary source of new parkland. While we should continue to pursue additional parkland where feasible as part of any new development, we should also broaden our approach. The county should partner with HOAs, as has been done with the Lake Ridge Parks & Recreation Association (LRPRA), to help protect natural resources and gain new passive recreational opportunities. Within reason, we should purchase land for parks. And we should consider redevelopment opportunities on empty or blighted properties. Finally, we need to use the land we already have – the county has parks that are unused or underused for a variety of reasons. An example exists behind the Jefferson Plaza Shopping Center, where an undeveloped parcel owned by the county has long sat empty. While steep slopes make the parcel inappropriate for active recreation, it is suitable for a trail that would connect Route 1 with Veterans Park. Elsewhere, largely unused commuter service lots could be converted to parkland.

5. **VRE has proposed to increase the number of trains running throughout the day, and also to extend its tracks to Gainesville/Haymarket. Which of those two options is your top priority?**

If it is consistent with the wishes of the people in the Gainesville/Haymarket area, I would support the extension of VRE's tracks. I suspect, however, that the costs involved may make such an extension impractical in the short term. Consequently, if demand exists for more trains throughout the day, then I would make that a higher priority.

6. **Do you support the proposed Bi-County Parkway? The Bi-County Parkway is a 10-mile highway segment of the 45-mile long corridor that would connect I-95 in Prince William County to the back of Dulles Airport in Loudoun County.**

The most recent public discussions concerning the Bi-County Parkway were less than ideal and revealed a significant lack of trust between potentially affected residents and the proponents of the Bi-County Parkway. They also featured pendulum swings in opinion among individual supervisors. While I am uncertain whether or not the Bi-County (or the Tri-County) Parkway routes could have been adjusted to satisfy all the relevant constituencies, I do believe that some form of transportation corridor to our west connecting I-95 to Dulles Airport will be critical to the County's long-term economic growth. Current infrastructure simply will not be sufficient to adequately connect us to the economic engine that is greater Northern Virginia.

Such a route, of course, must not simply be a pass-through corridor; instead, it must make Prince William County a more attractive location for desirable businesses. To the maximum extent practical it should also minimize disruption to environmentally sensitive areas, to historic resources (including, I hope, private cemeteries), and to residential areas – and it should incorporate conservation easements where desired to prevent adjacent sprawl.

- 7. In the update of the Economic Development Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, would you consider it a higher priority to improve rail and bus transit capacity in order to attract businesses to Prince William, or would you prefer to rezone acreage to permit more development?**

I do not consider these two choices mutually exclusive, but improving rail and bus transit capacity should generally, I believe, be a higher priority in the near-term where it can be effectively implemented. Candidly I should note, however, that I believe a critical component of successful economic development over the long-term is the flexibility to take advantage of favorable market conditions. Consequently, depending upon the specifics of the type of development involved, rezoning might in some cases be the best available option for all concerned.