

Prince William Regional Chamber of Commerce Candidate Questions
Prince William County Board Of Supervisors
Frank J. Principi, Democratic Nominee

Question 1

Please describe what you believe are the strengths of Prince William and your highest policy priorities for the County's future.

Strength

Prince William County's greatest strength is its people. Cultural and religious diversity is the bedrock of our country, it's what gives us our strength, and it is what makes America great. In our new political reality, it is important to remember to celebrate our diversity and reaffirm what makes America strong in times of crisis – it is our understanding of those different from us, our interactions with our neighbors, it is our drawing strength from one another. When we fall prey to false divisions we undercut that strength and cause divisiveness. In my vision for a "New Woodbridge," we recognize these contributions.

Another important strength of Prince William County is our location, its many open and green spaces, access to Potomac River, and our parks and recreational opportunities. Our proximity to the Nation's Capital provides Prince William residents with an abundance of jobs, historic sites, higher education institutions, museums, and monuments. In the global marketplace we compete in, it is important to continuously reiterate this message to all businesses, existing and those considering relocating to the county. The Potomac Communities anchor strategy must be vigorously pursued starting with the North Woodbridge Master Plan.

Another important strength of Prince William County is our world-class school system. Our kindergarten through university opportunities, specialized curriculums, competitive sports, quality teachers and state-of-the-art technology and facilities all add up to a school system that is often the deciding factor for relocating families and businesses. As we continue to work on teacher salaries and workforce housing, our school system will only get better.

Priorities

My highest policy priority is to bring transportation alternatives to the residents of Prince William County. Gridlock is the single most important challenge to our quality of life. As Prince William County was recently ranked as the second worst area in the nation to drive in, it has become apparent that we cannot wait on Richmond for solutions - there is too much politics and too few dollars - for Northern Virginia. My transportation vision of a "New Woodbridge" includes:

- Commuter Ferry Service;
- Reversible Lanes Through Potomac Communities That Accommodate Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) To Tysons Corner and Washington, DC
- Public-Private Partnerships To Reduce Peak Rush Hour Traffic (Demand Management Incentives)
- A Metrorail Extension From Springfield To Potomac Mills Mall; and

My appointments to various Prince William County Boards and Commissions by Democratic and Republican members of the Prince William County Board of Supervisors positions me to enhance our quality of life. As a member of the Prince William County Mobility (Transportation) Advisory Committee, the group formed to rewrite the transportation chapter in the Comprehensive Plan, I am quickly gaining the experience needed to provide Woodbridge residents with the transportation alternatives to “get us moving again.”

As Chairman of Prince William County’s Future Commission, a group formed to develop the “preferred vision” of 2030, I understand best what our residents desire in their community and their ideas on how to achieve it.

Question 2

Please discuss what you believe is the role of business in Prince William and policies that you will pursue to encourage existing growth and economic development.

Role

Businesses in Prince William County should be a partner in existing growth and economic development. Companies doing business in the county have a lot to offer the county in retaining existing business and attracting new ones. Using a current example to make this point, the business community should be afforded an opportunity to weigh in on all of the costs associated with the illegal immigration policy discussions.

Opportunities should also exist for the county and the business community to promote Prince William County in other countries, e.g., overseas trips to market biotechnology firms. Innovation Park has a lot going for it given easy access to both airports, an educated workforce, other supporting businesses, and George Mason University.

Policies

Our “AAA” credit rating demonstrates a jurisdiction with a strong financial reputation - ranking us among the top 1% of well-managed jurisdictions in the nation. We are in an excellent financial position given a growing local economy together with a competitive property tax rate in Northern Virginia. Like Governor Warner’s record, I advocate the continued adopt of business best practices, e.g., Six Sigma, as a means to continuously improve government services while continuously driving out costs.

Given scarce resources, efforts should be targeted at selected areas in the county and selected industries and types of growth in order that results are tangible. I believe that economic development efforts should be promoted in Woodbridge through acceleration of the North Woodbridge Master Plan and implementation of Potomac Communities.

In an effort to reevaluate the health of the public-private partnership, within the first 100 days of my term as Supervisor, I will work with the Board to call for a comprehensive, top-to-bottom assessment of county policies, plans, procedures, taxes and fees currently in place (and planned) to determine whether they hinder, harm, or promote the retention and attraction of businesses in our county. Among the issues to be considered by this group is the future of the BPOL tax, e.g., revenue thresholds, phase-in requirements, etc. The group will also consider the value of expanding the partnership beyond the government agencies responsible for permits and licenses.

We will conduct this assessment through the formation of a senior management stakeholder advisory group. The group will be charged with recommending short-, mid-, and long-term changes that will result in the selection of Prince William County as the best place to do business in the Commonwealth.

As the owner of an international crisis management consulting business, I am the best qualified candidate to promote a stable business climate and stronger public-private partnership. Success should be measured by the number and type of:

- existing businesses that expand their operations and involvement;
- new business start-ups;
- jobs creation;
- elimination of regulations and red tape; and
- innovations we apply to solving quality of life challenges.

Finally, the speed of county decision-making will also be a significant metric to measure success.

Question 3

Please discuss ways you will involve business leaders in policy development and the development of ordinances and regulations to ensure adverse impacts on business are minimized.

As Supervisor, I will draw upon my experience as a management consultant to ensure that Prince William County, while always protecting our resident's interests, will constantly work to make Prince William County government even more responsive to the business community. The public and private sector needs to work together to provide businesses with the tools to grow and avoid, where feasible, the costs associated with regulatory compliance.

This goal will be achieved through continuous dialogue, joint planning, close coordination, and a collaborative political climate. Knee-jerk resolutions, without input and buy-in by the business community and citizens send the wrong signal across the country, damages our reputation, and destroys hard-earned results. As a former Committee Staffer on Capitol Hill, I understand the value of well-conceived policies and the “law of unintended consequences.”

On growth and development matters in Woodbridge, I am championing the recreation of the Woodbridge Environment, Land Use, and Transportation (WELT) Committee. WELT’s mission, to be mirrored after Lake Ridge’s LOCCA-PELT, will be to foster dialogue in Woodbridge among all stakeholders, including business leaders, on the nature, location, and timing of growth and development decisions in Woodbridge. WELT is not intended to be an opposition group to future growth – just the opposite – rather it will be designed as a forum to ensure all interested parties have an opportunity to weigh-in on the specifics of a balanced, planned, and well-managed “smart” community.

WELT’s recommendations will be advisory in nature and support the Woodbridge Planning Commissioner and Supervisor. WELT membership will be free, voluntary, and comprised of all interested residents and businesses in the Woodbridge District. WELT will conduct its business in public and follow advance notice protocols. To the extent practical, WELT will leverage technology to inform and engage stakeholders in its business.

WELT will help create what I refer to as our “New Woodbridge.” “New Woodbridge” will offer residents a sense of community by providing mixed-use (housing, office, and commercial) space in a walkable and livable community that showcases open spaces. The “New Woodbridge” also has multiple transportation options and celebrates diversity in our neighborhoods. Our “New Woodbridge” will also restore older neighborhoods and reverse the effects of blight through strict zoning code enforcement.

Question 4

Please comment on residential and commercial growth and its importance to economic development. Please describe measures you will pursue to encourage a good mix of housing to include workforce affordable housing as well a measures you will pursue to attract commercial development.

Growth & Economic Development

Residential and commercial growth are an integral part of economic development. However, if not managed well, it can also destroy our quality of life and hamper economic development efforts.

Fifteen years ago, my wife and I made the decision to move our family to Woodbridge and to begin a small business. We fell in love with our open spaces, the trees, the Potomac River, our proximity to the Capital, and the community's diversity. As our community has fallen victim to our own success, our quality of life is being threatened by gridlock, overcrowded schools, and illegal immigration. Unless Prince William County is committed to maintaining a stable business and political climate, developers will move their businesses elsewhere and our community will suffer for it.

Measures

Residential and commercial growth – when properly planned and its negative consequences managed – is a critical element to successful economic development (but it is not the only element). Without continuous economic development, Woodbridge would be in jeopardy of losing its tax base, jobs, businesses, and eventually its residents.

Clearly, greater coordination between the county and the business community, e.g., developers, is needed. The delivery of critical infrastructure and services should be simultaneous to any new development so as to meet our resident's needs, e.g., schools, roads. To accomplish this, closer cooperation is required on land use decisions, including the decisions associated with the location of transit nodes, employment centers, industrial parks, etc. As Supervisor, I will work with Economic Development and the business community to relocate target industries through special incentives, low taxes, and unique business financing options.

Working closer together, the public and private sector can broaden and accelerate Potomac Communities. By incentivizing "smart" growth strategies in Woodbridge we have an opportunity to revitalize the commercial and housing sectors and jump start economic development across the county. Woodbridge is an ideal location given our waterfront access, transit options (I-95, VRE, PRTC), and changing demographics.

Affordable Housing

Our elected leaders need to do much more to bring the reality of workforce housing to Prince William County. As Supervisor, I will sponsor a resolution on the topic that will identify and promote policies that will lead to integrated housing solutions for the everyday heroes that protect us from crime, pull us out of burning buildings, and teach our children. Police, fire, and teachers should live with us in our community if they choose and provide sufficient advancement in order to prevent the county from being a stepping stone to careers in other jurisdictions.

To accomplish this, the Board of Supervisors must develop and pursue a comprehensive approach to address this need, including a partnership working with:

- the US Housing and Urban Development Department and the Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development, e.g., grants, loans, technical expertise;
- the private sector to consider a mix of business tax incentives, deregulation, and voluntary proffers;
- non-profits and foundations that are in business to raise capital to build housing; and
- other jurisdictions to gain a better understanding of how they currently address the same set of issues, e.g., Fairfax, Santa Barbara, and Seattle.

Only through an aggressive and comprehensive approach will the Board of Supervisors be in a leadership position to make workforce housing a reality.

Question 5

Please discuss what you will do to ensure businesses and residents benefit from the changes that will occur in Prince William County due to BRAC.

Most would agree that we are continuing to understand the true impacts and benefits of the military base realignment in this region. With 25,000 relocations at Fort Belvoir and 4,000 military personnel at Quantico, I believe the most significant negative impact will be on our transportation system. Given the increase in military personnel, their families, and the contractor community that supports the mission of the units, Prince William can expect to see more cars on our already crowded roads. We need to anticipate this additional volume on our roads and take steps to mitigate the impacts – particularly during peak rush hours.

Another impact of the base realignment efforts is the impact it will have on our environment. Towards that end, the military will conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that needs to be reviewed and commented upon accordingly.

The realignment also offers the county with a host of opportunities that must be further explored to see real benefits. As Supervisor, I will step up the efforts to share information on the impacts and benefits of the realignments and initiate strategy (working) sessions to identify specific opportunities that the county government and/or the private sector may wish to pursue.

Question 6

Please discuss how Prince William County should balance its need for funding in good and bad economic times.

The largest source of revenue for Prince William County comes from the housing industry. Existing mechanisms at the county's disposal is the Reserve Account (rainy day fund) and our ability to borrow money at reduced interest rates due to our AAA

credit rating. I believe that this needs to be addressed and a set of recommendations considered as soon as possible. If we are to eliminate BPOL, we must determine whether by doing so will generate more county revenue or whether it needs to be replaced.

In this regard, our public policy efforts are like a good football game - a strong offense is a good defense. By electing the right candidate, focusing on developing and implementing the right mix of policies, with quick and efficient implementation, our county will have a strong offense to bad economic times.