Greater Prince William TRAILS COALITION

Funding Trails and Parks in Prince William County

Supporters of trails and parks are encouraging the Prince William Board of County Supervisors (BOCS) to increase funding in FY27 budget to acquire land for county parks and to construct trails.
That would address top priorities in the just-released **Needs Assessment** for parks and recreation. In addition, a key objective in the **2025-2028 Strategic Plan** (p.11) adopted by the current supervisors is "*Expanding access to public parks, trails, and recreational amenities.*"

The **2024 Comprehensive Plan** recognized that increasing the number of parks and trails would be needed to match the increasing number of residents. Other than the remnants of the special funding approved by voters in a 2019 bond issue, there is currently no dedicated annual funding for parkland acquisition. The plan established the target of having a 10,000-acre park system. Currently, the county has about 5,500 acres.

There has been no funding for trail construction in the county's **Capital Improvements Program** except through the bond issue approved by voters in 2019. Starting in **FY25 budget**, the BOCS has included $1 million/year for trails construction. The 2040 Mobility Chapter, approved by the Board of County Supervisors in 2022, planned 416 additional miles of trails (including Shared Use Paths alongside highways). If funded, that would expand the existing 205 miles of bike/pedestrian infrastructure.

Only a tiny percentage of the planned expansion of the county park system and trails network can be provided through regional/state/Federal grants and proffers. Actually increasing park acreage and miles of trails will require increasing local funding.

Efforts to increase regional and state funding for trails continue. Nine bike/ped advocacy groups throughout Northern Virginia have sent a **joint letter** to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) to comment on its **current study** of ways to expand active transportation funding in the region.

In September, the **Trails and Blueways Council** and the **Sustainability Commission** asked the county supervisors to include in the 2026 legislative agenda a request for the General Assembly to add the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST) to the list of **state prioritized trails** and to provide funding.

PHNST is a trail of more-than-local significance. $86 million has been allocated by the General Assembly for trails since 2022, but no funding has been provided for Northern Virginia. Based on a recent Federal Land Access Program (FLAP) grant **study**, current cost estimate for closing Gap 2 of the PHNST is $3.5 million and $5.8 million for Gap 3.

Elected officials respond to public expressions of voter priorities, so advocates of local trails and parks are proposing that the FY27 budget (to be developed in January-April, 2026) should increase allocations for trail construction from the county's General Fund to $5 million/year.

In addition, two bond issues should be placed on the November 2026 ballot for voter approval. One bond could include $300 million for acquiring new land for parks. A separate $300 million bond could fund construction of trails to create live-work-play communities.

Trails and parks, like schools and roads, are not free. Funding is required to convert the 2040 Comprehensive Plan targets into reality and create live-work-play communities.

*The Prince William Department of Fire and Rescue is holding the **Second Annual Public Safety Fall Expo** at Pfitzner Stadium on October 4, noon-5:00pm. There's a bike rodeo. Bring your bike if you have one (and get a free tune up). No bike? That's OK, bikes will be available on site.*

October 23: Greater Prince William Trails Coalition Quarterly Meeting

We'll gather again in-person at the GMU Potomac Science Center at Belmont Bay and on Zoom (**please register**) from 10:00-11:30am to network, share information, and discuss:

- **Prince William County Trails Master Plan** and how to fund its implementation
- Master Trails Plan input and updates from the **East Coast Greenway**
- bike paths and recreational trails in City of Manassas Park
- how trail advocates and the health community share the same goals, as demonstrated in the recent **Community Health Assessment** (CHA)

Second Sunday Hike on October 12

On October 12, 1:00-3:00pm, the monthly Greater Prince William Trails Coalition hike will explore about 3 miles of trails in Manassas Battlefield between Brawner Farm and Deep Cut. The hike is mostly on natural surface, flat trails. Well-behaved dogs on a leash are welcome.

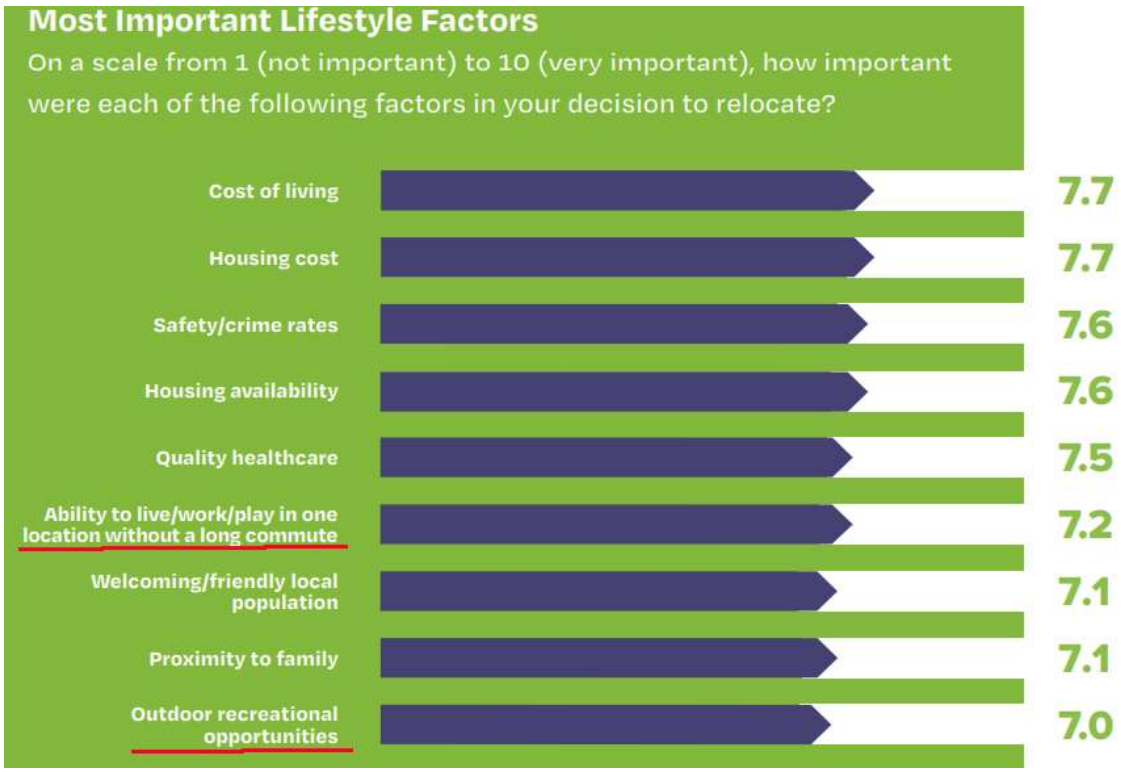
Please **register** to get parking details, and in case we need to contact you because of a weather cancellation. **Prince William Trails and Streams** is the sponsor of these monthly hikes.

World Mental Health Day *is October 10. Getting outdoors is the cheapest prescription; just one nature experience a day can* ***reduce blood pressure and improve depression****. Check out the* ***Walk and Talk Wellness Campaign*** *organized by the Prevention Coalition of Greater Prince William.*

Trails and Blueways Council (TBC) Meeting Report

Prince William County **Trails and Blueways Council** met on September 23. Highlights included:

- **Parks and Recreation Commission** will get an update on the Trails Master Plan at its October 15 meeting. Public meeting on draft plan will be held in early November. **Public survey** remains open.
- TBC members prioritized trail construction projects by magisterial district. Top proposals countywide are:
  - expanding Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail from Neabsco boardwalk to Leesylvania State Park
  - Flat branch trail/shared use path
  - improving Bull Run Trail to Manassas National Battlefield Park



Trails Enhance Economic Development - Really

A *Cardinal News* article, **5 ways that Virginia's changing demography is impacting the state**, highlights that Fairfax County is now losing population. In Arlington, Alexandria, and Prince William County, the number of people in the prime working-age population (25-44 years old) has dropped since 2020. Smaller metropolitan areas are growing as people - especially young families - are moving.

The high cost of housing is a major factor, but the fundamental economic change is that the economy is no longer driven by extraction and processing of natural resources. People do not move to where the minerals or prime farmland are located now.

Instead: "*In today's economy, jobs tend to flow to where the people are — and people are mobile. That's why we see such emphasis on quality-of-life issues, as communities seek to attract or retain a talented labor pool.*"

A survey of "**talent wars**" highlights that quality of life (see graphic above) is a key factor for young workers deciding where to live. A significant expansion of parks and trails, obvious enhancements of a community's quality of life, offers a quick way to compete for young knowledge workers looking at living in Lynchburg or Roanoke - or Prince William County.

Corporate executives deciding where to open new offices look for places where they want to live; tax incentives are just a sweetener in the decision process. To enhance economic development, local governments can "green up" by enhancing parks and trails.

Virginia Bicycling Federation

Virginia Bicycling Advocacy: The Delaware Yield

The **Virginia Bicycling Federation** worked with the Virginia Department of Transportation to refine its **Bicycle Safety** page and **Driver's Manual**.

- *When passing a bicyclist, drivers must slow to a reasonable speed and keep the right edge of their vehicle (including the mirror) at least three feet to the left of the overtaken bicycle and its rider.*
- *Drivers may cross any centerline to pass a bicyclist with the required three-foot or greater gap.*

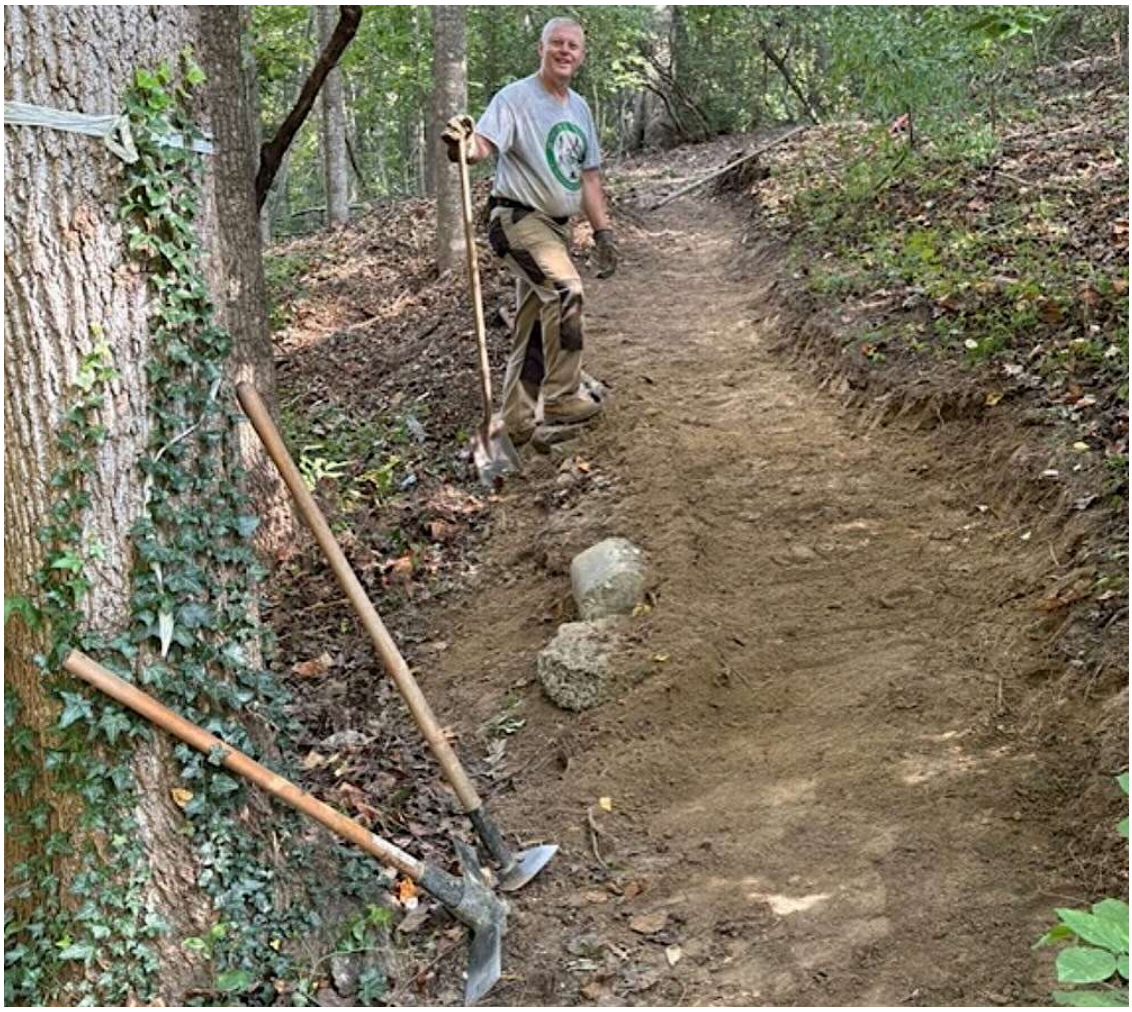
Efforts to get the Virginia General Assembly to authorize the **Delaware Yield** (where bikers, under limited circumstances, are allowed to treat a stop sign as a "yield" in order to maintain momentum and cross an intersection more quicky) have not succeeded - yet. The Delaware Yield is already lawful in 11 states plus Washington DC.

Increasing Access to the Waterfront

Prince William County has launched an economic development study to “activate” the waterfront. The most recent **Needs Assessment** for recreation identified access to the water for boating and fishing areas as a high priority (see p.11).

One solution to the “demand exceeds supply” challenge is to increase the number of public boat ramps. In the 2024 Comprehensive Plan, the **Land Use Map** classified a parcel at the mouth of Quantico Creek as Parks and Open Space (POS). A boat ramp there would be suitable for motorboats, while a **waterfront park** planned by the Town of Dumfries could provide a canoe/kayak/paddleboard ramp.

Another solution is to make existing ramps more useable. The **Prince William Parks Foundation** has proposed adding **self-service kayak kiosks** at two launch points, the Neabsco Creek Boardwalk and Silver Lake Regional Park. The Neabsco Creek site would eliminate the need to haul boats 1/4 mile from the parking lot, though the boating opportunities are limited during low tide.
A self-service kayak kiosk may also be appropriate at **Lake Ridge Marina**. Except between June 16-August 15, the boat rental operation there has limited hours of operation.



*The Occoquan Greenway will remain open while Prince William Water replaces the sewer pump station at Spinnaker Court. Jason Williams and other volunteers "bench cut" a **new stretch** of Segment 7.*

Coordinating Trails Planning, Construction, and Maintenance with Prince William Water

The Prince William Department of Parks and Recreation is planning to build trails that cross underground water/sewer pipelines managed by Prince William Water, and maintains some existing trails within Prince William Water easements.

Coordination of construction, renovation and maintenance projects will be enhanced by formalizing the process through a Memorandum of Understanding, which the Board of County Supervisors is **requested to authorize** on October 7.

Prince William Water plans to provide stone dust trails when feasible as part of its new projects. Each agency will facilitate efforts to create tri-party agreements between the county, Prince William Water, and the property owner to permit both public trail use and water/wastewater infrastructure.

Rails to Trails

As highlighted in the story **Meet us on the rail trail** in the *Washington Post* on September 28, PBS will broadcast **From Rails to Trails** on October 15:
"*Edward Norton narrates the story of one of the most unlikely social movements in American history: the struggle to convert thousands of miles of abandoned railroads into trails for cycling and walking. Facing fierce opposition and legal challenges from private property owners, leaders fought to reclaim these corridors for the public, creating a national network of scenic, car-free paths.*"

Locally, Prince William County, Manassas, and Manassas Park are cooperating on a **rail-with-trail project** connecting the railroad depots in Manassas and Manassas Park, with an extension across Bull Run to the **Bull Run Occoquan Trail** in Fairfax County. That trail would parallel (not replace) the existing rail line.

Also, the Virginia Outdoor Adventures podcast **featured** the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail on September 23. That rail-to-trail project is the closest completed segment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail south of Prince William County.

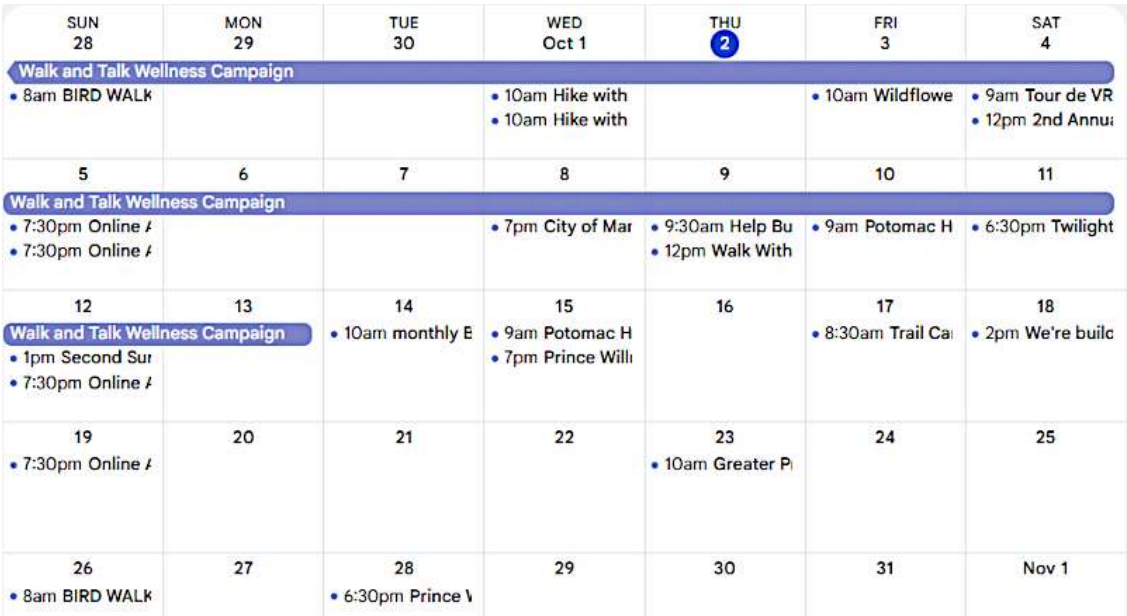
There's more to discover at the **Rails to Trails Conservancy**.

members of the Parks and Recreation Commission and Trails and Blueways Commission discussed future trails at Davis Ford Park on the September 13 bus tour

In Other News…

- The **Prince William Wildflower Society** is offering a botanical walk at **Leopold's Preserve** on October 3, 10:00am-noon, to see late-blooming fall wildflowers, tree species, and animal signs. No reservation required; park at 16290 Thoroughfare Rd, Broad Run.
- Friends of the Occoquan (FOTO) **Fall Clean Up** will be on October 4, 9:00am-noon at five separate locations.
- The 5th Annual **Tour de VRE** bike ride on October 4 will cover the Virginia Railway Express Manassas Line, with a ride from Backlick Road Station in Fairfax County to Broad Run Station in Prince William County.
- During the **Twilight Trek on Neabsco Boardwalk** (October 11, 6:30-8:30pm), park naturalists will bring you up close and personal with beavers, muskrat, deer, and other wetland critters, then assemble at the warm firepit for a warm, gooey s'more. Family friendly; all ages welcome.
- **Complete Streets Plan Aims to Make Region Safer for Walkers, Cyclists** (*Potomac Local*, September 16 - paywall) "*With nearly 1 in 10 Fredericksburg households lacking a car and 38 percent relying on just one vehicle, transportation officials say safer walking, biking, and transit connections aren't just a convenience — they're a necessity.*"
- **DC region challenged to ditch cars next week** (WTOP, September 26) The **Week Without Driving** runs through October 5.

- Northern Virginia Regional Commission's final in-person **session** of the Trail Care Academy series is October 17, 8:30am-12:30pm at Turkey Run Park in McLean.
- Bull Run Mountain Conservancy is offering a “We're building trails across PW County” talk on October 18m 2:00-3:30pm
- **Safety report highlights dangerous Alexandria intersections after 318 near-miss incidents** (*ALXnow*, September 18) Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets identified six intersections where pedestrians and cyclists are at greatest risk from distracted drivers and due to inadequate infrastructure.
- **One Problem, Two Responses: What Philly and Charlottesville Reveal About School Transportation** (*Strong Towns*, September 18) “*Starting in 2021, [Charlottesville] leaned on its Safe Routes to School program to identify barriers that made walking and biking to school unsafe... the city began rolling out ‘quick-build’ projects… These weren't flashy capital projects that take years of planning; they were simple, fast interventions that immediately changed how kids experienced the streets outside their schools.*”
- **DC Capital Bikeshare system marks 15th anniversary, over 50 million trips taken** (WDVM-TV, September 19) “*Starting out with only 49 stations and 400 bikes, the system has flourished to include more than 800 stations in the city and its neighboring states and 8,000 bikes.*”
- **Dumfries finalizes $3.9M purchase of 161 acres for new waterfront district** (*Inside NOVA* September 23) There will be *trails, cultural and recreational spaces, as well as protected wetlands and open space. The project was included in* ***Destination Dumfries Vision 2044****.*
- **Potomac Shores VRE Station to Break Ground in 2026, Open by 2027** (*Potomac Local* [paywall], September 22) The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail will get its second elevator, in addition to the one at the Rippon Virgina Railway Express station, in 2027.
- The National Park Service **survey** on improving visitor services is open for public comment until October 9.



check out the Greater Prince William Trails Coalition ***calendar*** *for events of interest. Let us know at* ***info@gpwtrails.org*** *of events that should be added.*

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