

Prince William Chamber of Commerce 2019 Public Policy Position Statements

Summary

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce is the "voice of business" on behalf of its membership and their 70,000 employees located in Northern Virginia.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce urges federal, state, and locally elected officials to maintain a primary focus on initiatives that promote and sustain economic growth by strengthening the business environment and increasing efficiency and investment in critical education, workforce and transportation initiatives that support a growing economy.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce's positions are developed from the priorities presented by our membership and based on what we believe are economic viability and success:

- Laws, regulations and tax policies should be considered in a way that maintains a strong, pro-business environment that enhances economic competitiveness and protects the ability of business to create jobs, economic opportunity, and business growth.
- The tax base should be grown through expanded economic development, and taxes, should they be necessary, applied broadly and not on any one business or industry.
- Revenue targets should be driven by conservative fiscal principles and highly efficient operations at all levels of government, recognizing that all spending directly affects tax rates.

The following outlines the Prince William Chamber of Commerce's specific public policy positions on the priority issues for our members.

Tax/Fiscal Policy

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce is **for pro-growth tax and fiscal policies that enhance our region's national and global competitiveness**. We also **oppose tax increases that reduce the ability of businesses to grow, invest, and create jobs**.

We believe that a successful economy depends on a tax code that rewards achievement, encourages investment, promotes growth and reflects current and future economic realities. We urge that consideration be given to the development of system-wide, fundamental reforms to modernize fiscal policy to align with the jobs and economy of today.

Finally, as the economy continues to grow, a guarded approach to expenditures is necessary. Government at all levels must continue to support a combination of fiscal restraint, program cuts, competitive outsourcing, program efficiencies and prioritization among investment areas to maintain the integrity of their respective budgets.

Across all levels of government, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce **SUPPORTS:**

- Proposals that simplify the tax code and reduce the cost of compliance on businesses and individuals.
- Tax incentives to promote business expansion and economic growth.

Federal Government

- Responsible federal budgets, passed by Congress, which require budget offsets for government spending increases and constructive resolution to our nation's deficits and record debt. Deficit spending and the national debt must be eliminated.

State Government

- Ultimately phase out unfair business taxes including, the Business, Professional and Occupational License (BPOL) and Machinery and Tools tax. Although revenue from these taxes may be important to funding local government priorities, the taxes themselves inhibit the growth of small businesses and manufacturers and inhibit the establishment and recruitment of these businesses. The growth in local government tax revenue should be the result of a growing tax base from pro-growth tax policies.
- Explore creating Veteran Owned Business contract set-asides, separate from SWAM with an expedited and streamlined approval process, to ensure equity in opportunity and support for Virginia's Veterans.

Local Government

- Increasing the percentage of tax revenues from the commercial business sector in the Prince William region by growing the commercial tax base through a more proactive and resourced Departments of Economic Development. Specific recruitment and retention goals should be identified in addition to the development of a specific strategic plan that accomplishes the desired commercial growth and corresponding tax revenue.

- Continued local funding of priority transportation projects in the region that otherwise could not be completed due to inadequate state funds. Local funding should be prioritized by economic development needs.

Transportation

Improving regional transportation is a primary economic development goal of the Prince William Chamber of Commerce. **Transportation infrastructure is a crucial element in supporting area growth and economic competitiveness, as well as providing an efficient means of evacuating the Nation’s Capital in the event of an emergency.**

The region’s transportation needs are going to continue to grow. We urge all elected, appointed and key officials to work towards providing and allocating consistent funding resources to ensure the region’s ability to efficiently move people and facilitate commerce.

To ensure new and existing transportation revenues are well invested, we strongly urge the most efficient use of transportation dollars and careful evaluation of priorities to leverage and invest those revenues in solutions that move the most people in the most cost-effective manner.

Transportation projects selected should emphasize economic development goals and congestion relief.

In addition, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce SUPPORTS:

- In 2018, the General Assembly diverted essential regional transportation funding from the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority to fund the capital needs of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). While we support maintaining dedicated funding for WMATA, we also support efforts to replace the money lost by the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority from other statewide or regional dedicated funding sources.
- The use of bonds, public-private partnerships, general funds, allocation formula changes, telecommuting, the Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Bank and other funding mechanisms, to continue to address well documented construction and maintenance needs.
- Creating a state “legislative lock box” to prevent transportation dollars from being used for non-transportation purposes as well as measures to prevent the diversion of transportation construction funds to support maintenance.
- Partnerships between local, state and federal entities that will maximize all dollars. In particular, we urge greater recognition for innovative use of technology and support for telework that allows people to perform work without travel.
- A strategic approach to transportation planning that integrates technology, transportation, and economic development.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce OPPOSES:

- Devolving state transportation responsibilities to local government, unless such a policy shift is coupled with a commensurate revenue stream for local governments and adequate capability to perform exists.
- Any legislative efforts that would alter the Public-Private Transportation Act’s current review and selection process or limit the authority or ability of the Office of Public Private Partnerships to choose projects consistent with state, local and metropolitan transportation plans.

In terms of specific projects, as long as they achieve priority status, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce **SUPPORTS:**

Interstate Projects:

- Widen/upgrade I-66 to improve vehicular and public transit

Primary Highways:

- Assign a high construction priority, protect right-of-way, and advance the construction of the Bi-County Parkway (Route 234 Bypass from I-66 to Route 50) to improve connectivity with Dulles regional employment centers.
- Assign a high priority to protecting right-of-way and advancing the construction of the comprehensive plan alignment of the Tri-County Parkway to improve north-south travel, improve Dulles Airport access, and relieve Route 28 congestion.
- Efforts to redevelop and beautify the highway corridor along Route 28 North in Prince William County, Manassas Park and Manassas.

Transit:

- Extend VRE from Manassas to Gainesville and preserve right-of-way for future extension to Haymarket
- Expand VRE services from population centers to the region
- Expand express bus/transit service in the I-66 corridor.
- Continued financial support for existing transit service in the Prince William region.
- Advancement of a Metro Feasibility Study, analyzing the expansion of service to Eastern Prince William County.

Economic Competitiveness and Business Environment

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce **supports legislative and regulatory policies that encourage economic growth and enhance job creation by allowing businesses to operate without undue government or regulatory intervention.** We believe free markets should determine the cost and availability of private-sector services in all cases except where regulation is required as in the case of monopolies. Free market conditions should also apply to compensation and employment, while employers must meet all legal and ethical obligations to their employees and government.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce **strongly opposes all policies and regulations that unnecessarily drive up the cost of doing business.** In particular, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce:

- **Opposes** any laws or regulations that undermine Virginia's Right To Work laws, which historically have played significant role in the state's nationally recognized economic and employment growth, including proposals that undermine the right of workers to secret ballot elections to decide whether to form a union.
- **Opposes** legislative or regulatory proposals to authorize federal government officials to impose workplace rules, such as wage levels and work hours, in the absence of an agreement between management and employees.
- **Opposes** increases in the minimum wage, which fall disproportionately on small businesses, who are often the least able to absorb increases in labor costs.
- **Opposes** Living Wage proposals and other government mandates that establish wage and benefits levels as a condition for obtaining contracts with that government.
- **Supports** Virginia's existing unemployment compensation laws, which provide adequate and temporary financial assistance to employees who become unemployed through no fault of their own.
- **Supports** government outsourcing to the private sector **when appropriate** to accomplish internal operations and provide public services to citizens, recognizing that the private sector is an efficient provider of services.
- **Supports** Veteran employment and business opportunities through the Prince William Veterans Council and state/local hiring and training initiatives.
- **Supports** Veteran and disabled Veteran owned business state contract set asides.
- **Supports** the implementation of consistent economic development policies designed to facilitate the growth of commerce in the Prince William region.
- **Supports** a comprehensive review of Virginia's ABC laws to expedite approval processes, eliminate barriers to entry, and lower the cost of doing business.

Economic Investment

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce **supports a continued strategic approach to the development of Innovation Technology Park and the Gateway Business Park.** This ongoing partnership between the local business community, higher education institutions and state and local economic development officials, guided by a strategic plan for recruitment of bioscience and other technology related companies, must be pursued in order to create the envisioned economically robust technology park. New incentives from the state and local governments should also be pursued.

In addition, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce SUPPORTS:

- Efforts to further develop the Manassas Regional Airport. A robust regional airport plays an important economic role in attracting new business to the region.
- Continued state and local funding for the Department of Housing and Community Development's Virginia Main Street program initiative and Historic Manassas, Inc.
- A renewed strategic approach to redevelopment and revitalization initiatives along the Route 1 corridor and other similar areas in Prince William, as well as the cities and towns within.
- A renewed strategic approach to redevelopment and revitalization initiatives along the Rt. 28/Centreville Road corridor from its intersection with Sudley Road in Manassas to the Fairfax County line.

Workforce & Education

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce recognizes that a competitive, world-class education system and workforce training program is critical to our community's continued economic development.

Quality schools and workforce training programs with competitive educational curriculums that are aligned with high demand fields are essential to attract targeted businesses that will fulfill our economic development goals, enhance the Prince William region's reputation and provide an educated workforce to support our existing and future businesses.

To have that level of excellence in education and maintain the region's competitive economy, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce **SUPPORTS:**

Workforce Initiatives:

- Continue initiatives to reorganize and streamline Virginia's workforce training system to improve efficiency and better align workforce training with current and future workforce needs.

Higher Education Initiatives:

- Continued funding of higher education facilities and programs in the greater Prince William region, to include the area's Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) and George Mason University (GMU) campuses.
- Increased support of GMU as the leader of the Virginia Bio-Sciences Health Research Corporation for regional life sciences initiatives.
- Financial investment in the Institute for Biomedical Innovation on the GMU Science and Technology Campus.
- Support for NVCC's professional and technical programs providing essential workforce training and programs to expand Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, and Health (STEM & H) education through initiatives such as Systemic Solutions and continued funding of scholarships that upskill the early learning workforce.
- Progress in healthcare academics through education and training programs that position the Prince William region to meet the near-term and future needs of our healthcare workforce and market.

Pre-K to 12 Education Initiatives:

- Adequate and realistic state funding of mandates for K-12 public schools, particularly the Standards of Quality (SOQs) and those for Limited English Proficiency (LEP).
- Efforts to improve and expand access to quality Early Childhood Education programs through choice innovation and quality assurance systems.
- Continued annual funding to schools to coordinate the statewide implementation of the Virginia Student Training and Refurbishment program (VA STAR), which provides free, refurbished computers to students, schools, and civic organizations in need of technology.
- Efforts to place a greater emphasis on STEM and Healthcare education including programs and curricula designed to improve student performance in STEM areas.

- Continued and regular communications between the Board of County Supervisors, City Councils and School Boards to fully explore public school priorities and local funding sources to create greater coordination and cooperation of back office functions.
- Responsible policies which provide measurable outcomes against which program effectiveness and service delivery may be regularly evaluated and which appropriately align reoccurring and one-time revenues and expenses, such as merit-based pay, value-added assessments and classroom size.
- Providing broader support for alternative school options and career and technical education.
- Increase the flexibility of existing state funding for at-risk preschoolers (the Virginia Preschool Initiative) to allow it to be more fully utilized at the local level.

Energy

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce believes that future economic prosperity will rely on a broad range of energy sources. It is essential that these sources be available, safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable. **We support a national and state energy policy that is comprehensive, long-term and lessens our dependence on foreign energy.** All forms of available energy should be considered in order to provide diverse options to meet growing demand and the needs of the new economy.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce **SUPPORTS:**

- The Chamber supports the energy infrastructure necessary to meet the growing energy needs of Prince William County residents and businesses, consistent with economic development.
- Incentives to encourage the research, development and implementation of new energy sources.
- Incentives to promote conservation, new technologies and the increased efficiency of existing technologies.
- Promotion of new, clean and renewable sources of energy such as nuclear, clean-coal-technology, wind and solar energy.
- Streamlining current regulations that slow the use of new energy sources and technologies.
- Virginia offshore drilling and wind power, both to increase energy supplies and provide possible new state revenue sources.
- Implementation of the Property Assessed Clean Energy program which is a voluntary program localities may opt-in to allowing property owners to finance energy efficiency and renewable energy projects without the utilization of government subsidies.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce **strongly opposes all policies and regulations that unnecessarily drive up the cost of energy and business.**

Land Use

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce’s policy on land use is guided by the following principles:

- All land use and planning activities of the local governing bodies should foster quality development, particularly in the commercial sector.
- Local land use planning should be closely coordinated with transportation and other infrastructure planning.
- Local governing bodies should maintain flexibility in their Comprehensive Land Use Plans to not only allow, but welcome innovative proposals, sending the message we are “open for/to business” to potential investors.
- Local land use planning should apply research-based solutions based upon sound science from recognized sources that consider the latest technological innovations and efficiency gains to protect the Prince William region’s environment and water quality.
- Economic impact should be a primary consideration in the evaluation of land use proposals, and the local governing bodies should consider regulatory and financial incentives including strategic relaxation of requested proffers for those projects that generate a significant influx of revenue to the commercial tax base.
- Negotiated proffers where available, should be flexible in application, reasonable in amount and should have a direct nexus to the affected development and surrounding communities.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce SUPPORTS:

- Incentives for mixed-use development.
- The development of strategies to redevelop aging commercial areas within the community.
- Innovative regulatory and financial incentives such as tax increment financing and strategic infrastructure investments to serve as an impetus and attract private investment in designated redevelopment areas including the Potomac Communities along Route 1 and the Route 28 corridor.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce OPPOSES:

- The inclusion of regulatory measures in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Impact fees, adequate public facilities ordinances or mandatory levels of service.

Tourism Development

Recognizing that tourism plays an important role in any economic development plan, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce **SUPPORTS:**

- Increasing the Government Services Association (GSA) per diem rate in Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park and modify the General Services Administration (GSA) Washington, DC, Non-Standard Rate Area to align with Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) region; a region defined by one economy and a shared transportation infrastructure which includes Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.
- Develop Sports Tourism programs and partnerships aimed at drawing regional, national and international sporting events/tournaments to Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.
- Ensure that the percentage of Transient Occupancy Tax collected in Prince William County and in the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park pursuant to Virginia Code 58.1-3819 is spent solely for tourism and travel, marketing of tourism or initiatives that, as determined after consultation with the local tourism industry organizations, including representatives of lodging properties, attract travelers, increase hotel occupancy, and generate tourism revenues.
- Increase funding opportunities for the arts thereby enhancing visual, performing arts and cultural opportunities in Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.
- Attract and secure tourism and economic development projects including new retail destinations, hotels, resorts, conference and convention facilities, sport complexes, museums, attractions, wineries, breweries, distilleries in Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.
- Enhance tourism services and facilities at area historic sites in Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park including the two Prince William County national parks, Manassas National Battlefield Park and Prince William Forest Park, and Canon Branch Fort and Liberia Plantation in Manassas.
- Secure funding for the Manassas Museum, Americans in Wartime Museum and Prince William Museum at Rippon Lodge located in Prince William County
- Support continued funding for VDACS that helps farmer's markets, breweries and distilleries; including the AFID Program and Virginia's Finest.
- Support funding for the VTC Cooperative Advertising Program.
- Support funding for renovations, improvements and upgrades to the Visitors Center on I-66 Westbound.

Governance

In order to effectively meet the needs and concerns of businesses and citizens, government must operate with a business-minded focus on efficiency, responsiveness and strategic vision that enable government to adjust to rapidly changing economic and political landscapes. **The Prince William Chamber of Commerce supports a regulatory framework that emphasizes the importance of strong economic growth while ensuring rules are cost effective and based on valid scientific and technical data.**

In addition, the governing process must be transparent so that the public may maintain confidence in the independence of elected officials. The Prince William Chamber of Commerce supports aligning timing and simplifying disclosure of campaign contributions and other expenditures so that the public may have easy access to simple reports that accurately describe contributions and expenditures.

In particular, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce **SUPPORTS:**

- A Constitutional amendment to allow the Commonwealth's Governor to serve two consecutive terms.
- Regular comprehensive reviews of the continued usefulness and necessity for state and local boards and commissions as well as the qualifications and technical expertise requisite to serve as an appointee.
- Regular reliable cost-benefit analyses of all proposed regulations and a detailed annual accounting of the costs and benefits of those regulations at all levels of government.
- Efforts to examine the role of all levels of government in providing goods and services in order to determine those which might be provided for efficiently, effectively and economically by the private sector or non-profit organizations.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce **OPPOSES:**

- The imposition of unfunded mandates, particularly those that would require businesses and other taxpayers to fund the long-term costs of these mandates.
- Diminution of the Dillon Rule.
- Regulations and policies that unnecessarily restrict private property rights, and believes that private property owners should be justly compensated for any reductions in the value of their property caused by government actions.

Finally, the Prince William Chamber of Commerce **believes the grant of regulatory authority to government agencies should not place undue burden on business and any resulting regulations should be fully reviewed for their impact on business prior to implementation.**

Health Care

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce **encourages business collaboration and innovation in a time of limited resources and significant healthcare challenges.** We encourage and support initiatives within each of our businesses to promote employee health and wellness through incentives and access to exercise and information on good nutrition. The Chamber supports the efforts of Prince William hospitals and healthcare related entities to educate and engage citizens in good health practices and resources.

The Prince William Chamber of Commerce **supports:**

- Collaborative efforts between healthcare stakeholders including providers, purchasers, insurers and consumers to ensure continued innovation, transparency and creativity in the private marketplace.
- Providing employers with choice and flexibility in negotiating premiums and transparency in price and quality when buying health insurance.
- Virginia's COPN program in its current form
- Providing employers and employees with information, transparency and choice around providers and services.
- Collaboration between public and private sector providers, insurers and consumers to ensure quality, safety, efficiency of systems, improved health outcomes and decreased costs.
- Promoting business health and wellness initiatives and incentives for a healthier workforce.
- Implementation of Medicare reforms integral to preserving the system's long-term viability.
- Understanding the medical tort system to ensure any reform is based on evidence-based measures to promote fairness and good business practices.
- Continued review of government regulations to reduce business uncertainty and ensure they do not unnecessarily add to health insurance costs or prohibit cost-saving measures.
- Redesign Medicaid reimbursements to businesses that provide services related to the Department of Justice (DOJ) settlement agreement (United States of America v Commonwealth of Virginia, Civil Action #3:12cv59-JAG). The community based for profit and non-profit businesses that provide the training and rehabilitative services for individuals with serious mental, physical and emotional disorders must be reimbursed at a level that allows them to provide the high quality services that are needed by these Virginia residents.
- Improving a healthy living environment and quality of life through supporting education, awareness, initiatives, collaboration and partnerships across Prince William Chamber of Commerce councils/committees and our community at large.