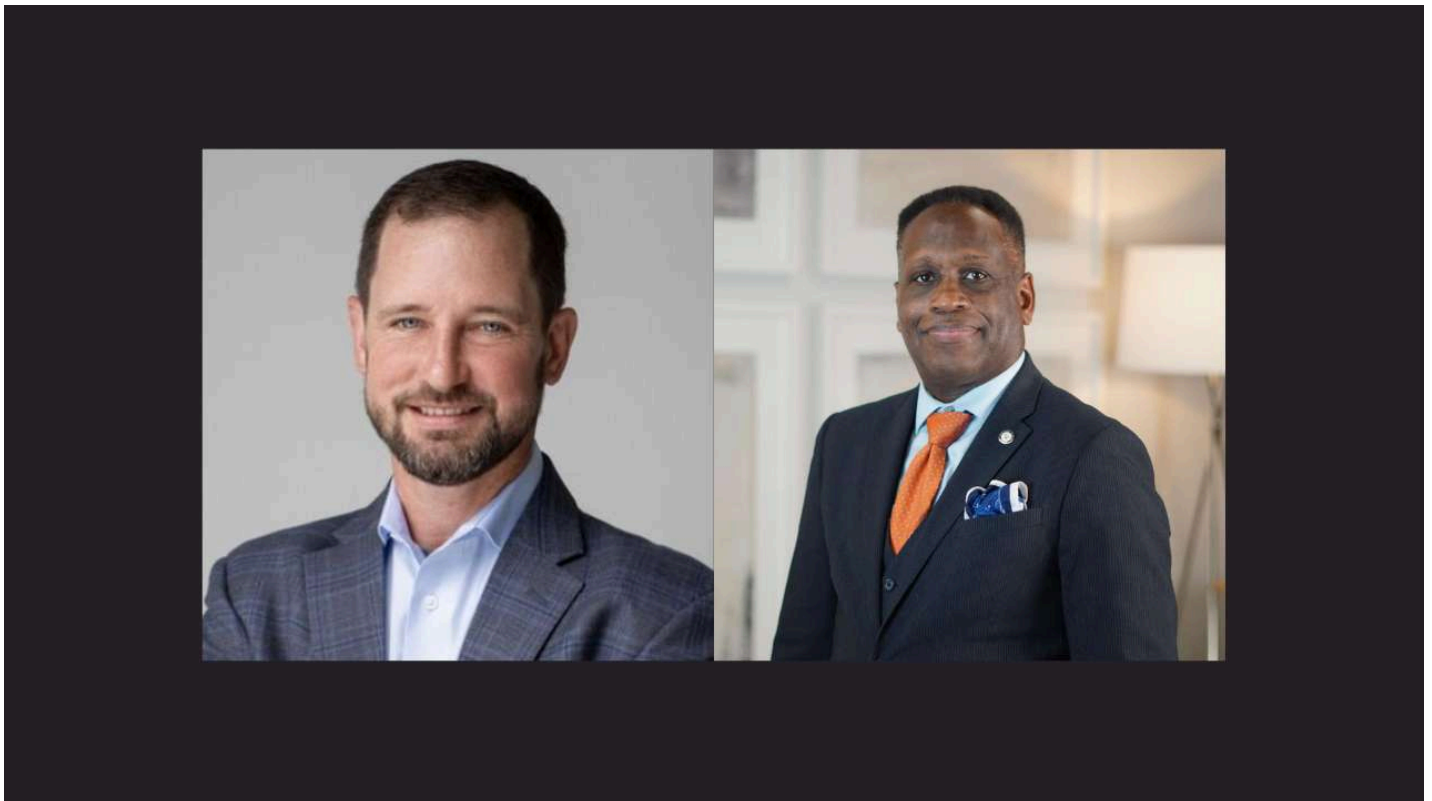


Prince William

10-acre rule divides Gainesville candidates in Prince William land-use debate

By **Uriah Kiser**

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Harders/Stewart

GAINESVILLE, Va. – Prince William County’s long-running fight over the Rural Crescent has become a defining issue in the Gainesville supervisor race, where candidates George Stewart and Patrick Harders are offering starkly different visions for the county’s future.

Stewart: Loosen the 10-Acre Rule for Housing Flexibility

George Stewart, a Democrat running to succeed the late Supervisor Bob Weir, says the county’s 10-acre minimum lot size is shutting out families who want to build in rural Prince William.

He points to a friend who wanted to build a single home on one acre but was blocked by zoning rules.

“Why can’t I just buy a third of an acre or even a half an acre? Just to be fancy, I’ll take a whole acre and call it a day,” Stewart said in an interview.

Stewart argues that modern technology, such as solar panels, battery storage, and septic systems, can support smaller rural homes without straining county services. He also frames the policy as an affordability issue: younger families and middle-income buyers are priced out by 10-acre requirements.

Instead of large-scale sprawl, Stewart says he favors sustainable development and eco-tourism, along with mixed-use hubs near existing roads and shopping centers to create jobs and housing together.



Harders: Preserve 10 Acres to Protect Water, Save Taxpayers

Republican Patrick Harders says Stewart’s approach would undo decades of preservation and saddle taxpayers with costs they can’t afford.

“I strongly support keeping the 10-acre minimum in the Rural Crescent,” Harders said in a written response to Potomac Local. “Reducing it threatens the Occoquan Reservoir and

the drinking water for nearly a million people, increases flood risks, and creates long-term taxpayer costs for schools, utilities, and infrastructure. Sprawl is expensive and almost impossible to undo.”

Harders says the path to affordability is not in the county’s farmlands and forests, but in redeveloping areas with infrastructure already in place. He points to examples in Fairfax, Montgomery County, and Old Town Manassas as models for reinvestment.

On preservation, Harders said the county should strengthen its Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, which pays landowners to keep land in farming or forestry. He criticized past boards for letting data centers use the program, saying it undermined its original intent.



Supervisors to Review PDR Policy October 7

The 10-acre minimum rule isn’t formally up for a vote this month, but the Board of County Supervisors will take an important step on October 7, 2025, when it considers changes to the county’s PDR program.

The agenda item [\(10-A\) would](#):

- Replace outdated “Rural Area” language in the ordinance, since the county’s 2040 Comprehensive Plan eliminated that designation.
- Clarify the duties of the PDR Review Committee, which oversees land preservation agreements.
- Allow staff to draft additional amendments to improve program effectiveness.

While the vote is procedural—authorizing staff to begin drafting amendments—it signals that supervisors are preparing to revisit the county’s broader rural preservation strategy.

Advocates view the PDR program as one of the few remaining tools to counter development pressures. Critics argue it has been underfunded and too easily sidestepped.

What Is the 10-Acre Rule?

- Adopted in the late 1990s to control suburban sprawl in the Rural Crescent, an area between Quantico Marine Corps Base and Manassas National Battlefield.
- Requires a minimum 10-acre lot size for new homes in rural/ag-forest zones.
- Intended to protect drinking water, limit infrastructure costs, and preserve farmland.
- Critics say it makes housing too expensive and limits flexibility for landowners.



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