



## Consistent Leadership Is Needed to Save Blake Lane Park

**Statement in support of preserving Blake Lane Park  
and finding a new alternative site to build the**

**Fairfax Oakton Area Elementary School**

**By Erika Yalowitz, Candidate Providence District Supervisor**

We all benefit by having both excellent schools for education and parks for recreation and the enjoyment of nature. I believe we can have both in Providence District by pursuing innovative options for educational facilities while at the same time preserving Blake Lane Park. I joined the effort to save Blake Lane Park (BLP) several months ago and since then we have received a lot of attention and support, including by sitting U.S. Congressman Gerry Connolly. People have good reasons to support us. The prospect of Blake losing the only green community space to another building, in this case a school, the FIFTH one within a 3-mile radius, is counterproductive.

Here is why I joined the Save Blake Lane Park community in supporting the preservation of the park:

**Traffic and congestion.** The nearby roads are small, and neighbors find traffic congestion extremely difficult, given the existing four schools nearby and commuters going to and from the Vienna Metro, or heading towards 66. Adding another school with up to 800 students will only exacerbate the traffic problem and result in more air pollution from idling cars.

**This park built a community.** Hundreds of Blake Lane Park (BLP) neighbors come each week to meet and let their dogs run free at the first off-leash dog park in Fairfax County. Young people and kids play soccer on the grassy areas, while families enjoy picnics. Volunteers do regular cleanups and have planted trees and the Girl Scouts created a sanctuary for monarch butterflies.

**Access to green space.** This area belongs to the county and should be exempt from private or public development in consideration of home values, quality of life and healthier air quality. If BLP is taken, children and families without access to a backyard will not have enough space to play outdoors and the park would also lose its status as a home to permanent and transient wildlife.

It is gratifying to see new-found passion and energy to save the park by candidates for Providence District Supervisor that were previously proposing replacing the park with a school. I'm running for Providence Supervisor as well. However, I have demonstrated consistency and principled leadership in saving BLP, even when it was not the most popular or visible thing to do.

**Saving BLP is a matter of principles and values;** of responsible public representation and accountability. I can't think of many instances when our government or a developer, has demolished a concrete structure to build a park for public use; if so, the waste of time and resources is not easily justified. Land and real estate prices are high, but we need to realize that green space is priceless for the host of benefits and use that all demographics can enjoy.

**Providence District residents can count on my commitment to protect green spaces like this.** As Providence Supervisor, I will move the Board to transfer ownership of the park to the Fairfax County Park Authority to develop and preserve as a proper park.

As the mother of a future Fairfax County Public Schools student, I am keenly aware of the overcrowding urgency we have at FCPS. It's a troubling trend that needs expert evaluation and conscious planning. You may be thinking "what are the alternatives?" -Fortunately, we have many at our disposal:

**Negotiating proffers-** As new and re-development becomes imminent, land or buildings may be part of future proffer contributions by developers to the County. There are still many old-style office parks in Providence that could potentially offer land or moneys to accommodate space for schools.

**Demolish and re-build existing obsolete school buildings-** As we plan on invest in new buildings, we may also consider using that money towards re-building old structures to meet current and future capacity needs. This an opportunity to update our infrastructure, can also bring innovation in construction by utilizing renewable energy, making buildings energy and space-efficient.

**Building vertically-** This saves green space while addressing capacity and overcrowding. Open space is a valuable commodity- and our community's only park with a large open field would be misused if we deprive this community of green space in exchange for new concrete structures.

On June 11, we have a choice to make. **Providence District and Fairfax County can count on my firm representation and advocacy to preserve and enhance green spaces** in the best interest of our community. Parks enhance our quality of life by providing beauty, cleaner air and places for exercise and other leisure activities. I will fight for better accessibility and connectivity to parks, as a necessity for every community, including non-human ones. I will fight for the preservation of habitats for both transient and suburban species and a balanced and sustainable future.

**Erika Milena Yalowitz**

**Candidate,**

**Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Providence District**

**May 13, 2019**