

# VIRGINIA

TOWN & CITY

The magazine of the Virginia Municipal League

VOL. 51 NO. 1  
JAN/FEB 2016

## 'If I were mayor'

Lily McClung of Fishersville is statewide winner of essay contest



### Inside:

Winning essays  
from all 8 regions

# VML Insurance Programs (VMLIP) recognized for focus on professionalism and education

VMLIP was recently presented the **CPCU Company of the Year 2015** award by the Richmond Chapter of the Chartered Property and Casualty Underwriter (CPCU) Society.

VMLIP was awarded for the pool's continuous support of and commitment to the CPCU Society and employee learning. Among the pool's staff, 34 insurance-related designations are held, in addition to numerous post-graduate degrees and other designations.

When you file a claim with VMLIP, you can rest assured that it is being handled promptly by trained and skilled adjusters focused on providing the best service possible to our members. To learn more about VMLIP, visit: [www.vmlins.org](http://www.vmlins.org) or call (800) 963-6800.





## About the cover

*Lily McClung of Fishersville, Va., was the statewide winner of the League's annual "If I Were Mayor" Essay Contest. Her essay is reprinted on page 8.*

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### Bank On Hampton Roads

A financial empowerment program that began in Virginia Beach is being adopted throughout the region and proving it's a model that works for real people with real financial challenges.

*By Alice Tersteman*

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### A plea for our schools

In an open letter, leaders in Williamsburg and Hampton Roads shared their concerns about the inadequacy of state funding for K-12 education in Virginia. They share some startling statistics, but they may also

sound like a familiar story to your locality.

*By leaders of Hampton Roads*

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### What will the FAST Act mean for Virginia?

The short answer is that localities will get more say over what is funded. And it will likely mean an additional \$5.4 billion for Virginia's transportation projects. But there's more than meets the eye in this \$305 billion federal transportation bill.

*By Leslie Wollack*

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### Ending veteran homelessness

Arlington and Alexandria are leading the fight to functionally end veteran homelessness. Officials from both localities explain the challenges surrounding veteran homelessness and how they tackled the problem in their communities.

*By Kurt Larrick and Carmen Andres*

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# Reflections on an underground lake and music in nature

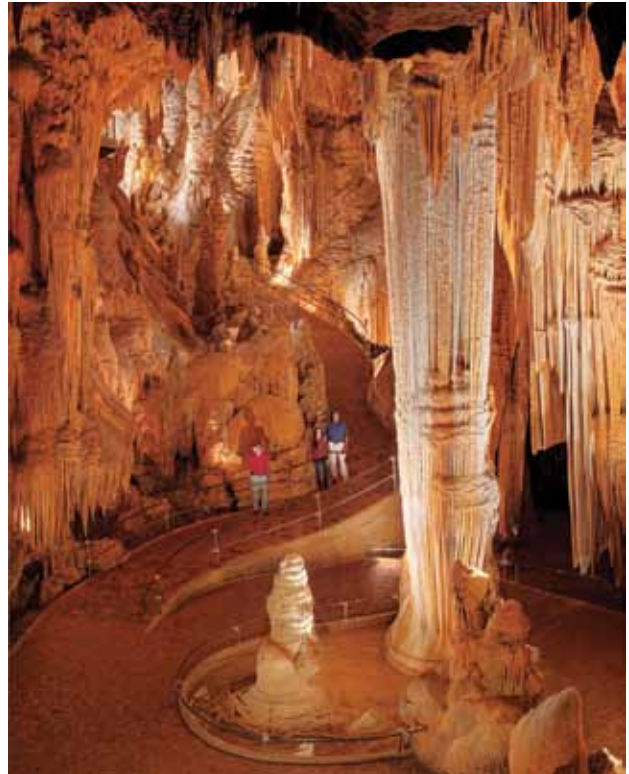
**L**IKE ALL OF YOU, we have noticed the signs along the highway for Luray Caverns. So, when looking for an outing during the holiday break, we decided to venture that direction. As everyone knows, December was absolutely beautiful and we set out on a bright, warm day. We took the backroads between Richmond and Luray and truly enjoyed the countryside in that part of Virginia.

The kids had been through caves before (in the southern Missouri region) so I'm not too sure how excited they were. That all changed right away as we entered Luray Caverns. We had chosen to have the audio recording in addition to the tour guide. They offer a special kids version that includes a scavenger hunt. All throughout the tour, the boys were challenged to spot different formations and then they would learn a factoid about that part of the caverns.

Overall, we were blown away by the unique formations. But, two areas in particular stood out for us. First, was Dream Lake. This is an underground lake that is 18 to 20 inches deep. However, the way that it is situated creates an optical illusion. It truly looks like you are looking into a deep well with many formations growing up from the bottom. In reality, it is a mirrored reflection of the area above the lake. It was one of the most fascinating natural formations that I have ever seen.


We also marveled at the Stalactite Organ. The tour guide brought us into a large open area and demonstrated an organ that literally makes sound by tapping the stalactites. This is quite an engineering feat that creates a unique musical experience.

Before leaving, we took the time to tour the Car and Carriage museum. We were delighted to see everything from sleighs to buggies to performance vehicles. There was even a surrey with the fringe on top, but my children did



**First discovered in 1878, the Luray Caverns are like an underground cathedral with towering rock formations in rooms with ceilings 10 stories high.**

not appreciate my rendition of the song from *Oklahoma!* For more information about Luray Caverns and all of the attractions, go to [www.luraycaverns.com](http://www.luraycaverns.com).

Of course, on the way home we just had to stop in Gordonsville at the BBQ Exchange ([www.bbqex.com](http://www.bbqex.com)). As always, this wonderful restaurant did not disappoint! The boys declared the excursion to Luray Caverns (and the BBQ Exchange) to be one of their favorite trips that we have taken since moving to Virginia. 



**The stalactites reflected on Dream Lake create a stunning illusion.**

## VML names Gowdy General Counsel



VML HAS NAMED MICHELLE GOWDY as General Counsel. Gowdy began her local government career in 2009, working as an Assistant County Attorney in New Kent County. She became the New Kent County Attorney in 2010 and spent a brief time as the James City County Attorney in 2015 prior to joining VML. Gowdy worked as a prosecutor and for the Virginia Department of Forensic Science until 2008.

“I’ve always admired VML’s passionate advocacy on behalf of Virginia’s local governments and am delighted that I can contribute to their efforts to improve the quality of life in Virginia towns, cities and counties.”

- Gowdy -

Gowdy is originally from northern Wisconsin. She received a bachelor of arts degree in International Business from Carthage College in 1993 and a Juris Doctorate from Oklahoma City University in 1996.

She succeeds Mark Flynn, who departed the League in October to move to private practice.

## Payne sets retirement date



Lynchburg City Manager **Kimball Payne** announced his retirement effective June 30. Payne served in the position for 15 years. He previously worked as the County Administrator for Spotsylvania

County and is a retired Naval Reserve Officer. During his tenure with the City of Lynchburg, Payne has been a strong supporter of downtown revitalization and helped usher in a renaissance in the Central Business District. He was also responsible for several community building initiatives including the Dialogue on Race and Racism. Payne is currently chair of VML’s Finance Policy Committee and a member of the League’s Legislative Committee. He is also a past president of the Virginia Local Government Management Association.

## Virginia Beach names new planning director

The city of Virginia Beach has named **Barry Frankenfield** as Director of the Department of Planning and Community Development. Frankenfield had been interim director since July, when Jack Whitney retired. Frankenfield, a licensed landscape architect, began his career with the city in 1985 as a resort

## Mover and Shakers

**Do you know someone who’s on the move? Send your announcements about new hires in local government, promotions, retirements, awards and honors to our editor at [nchafin@vml.org](mailto:nchafin@vml.org).**

planner and later became an administrator with the Parks and Recreation Department. He had been Director of the city’s Strategic Growth Area Office since 2009. In 2011, Frankenfield was named City Employee of the Year.

## Leesburg appoints utilities deputy

The Town of Leesburg has named **Robert Etris** Deputy Director of Utilities. Etris comes to the Town of Leesburg from Whitman Requardt & Associates where he managed a variety of water and wastewater projects from the planning stages through design and construction. Previously, Etris served as director of the Public Utilities Division for the City of Falls Church for eight years and manager of the engineering and planning departments at Fairfax Water.



- Etris -

## Arlington County selects new manager

The Arlington County Board has named **Mark Schwartz** as its new County Manager. Schwartz has been serving as Acting County Manager since July, 2015. He joined Arlington County government in 2005 and also has served as Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Director of the Department of Management and Finance, and Deputy County Manager. Before joining Arlington County government, Schwartz served 12 years in the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Executive Office of the President.



- Schwartz -

## Harrisonburg promotes two to Lieutenant

The Harrisonburg Police Department announced the promotion of two sergeants to the rank of Lieutenant in the Patrol Division. **Lieutenant Carl Cline** joined the department in 2002 and was promoted to Corporal in 2005 and Sergeant in 2008. Cline has served in the Army National Guard and serves as assistant SWAT Team Leader. He was named Law Enforcement “Officer of the Year” in 2010.



- Cline -

## Lieutenant Philip Ritchie, Jr.

joined the Harrisonburg Police Department in 2003. He was promoted to Corporal in 2005 and Sergeant in 2010. Ritchie has served in the U.S. Air Force and is a member on the SWAT Team. Ritchie has received numerous Action Awards, and, in 2011, he received a Lifesaving Award.



- Ritchie -

## Council names Larking as interim city manager

Danville City Council has named **Ken Larking** as interim city manager. Larking has served as deputy city manager



- Larking -

since 2013. His appointment followed the retirement of former City Manager Joe King. King died in December at age 65.

Prior to joining the city, Larking was assistant county manager in Moore County, N.C., for three years. Before that, he was town manager of Yadkinville, N.C.

Larking praised King for his dedicated public service, and he expressed appreciation for the guidance and support that King provided to him since joining the city as deputy city manager.

**Danville leader Joe King dies at 65**

Former Danville city manager **Joe King** died in December. He had retired in November after 13 years



- King -

with the city, the last five as city manager. King spent his career in local government. Spanning 40 years, he worked for six local governments located in five states. He joined the city of Danville in 2002 as assistant city manager of utilities. He was promoted to deputy city manager in 2009. Less than a year later, City Council appointed King to serve as city manager. During King's tenure as city manager, the city received several awards for its River District Development Program and made great strides in eliminating blight.

**Winchester Manager receives ICMA credentials**

Winchester City Manager **Eden Freeman** recently received the Credentialed Manager designation from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Eden is one of



- Freeman -

over 1,300 local government management professionals currently credentialed through the ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program. To receive the prestigious ICMA credential, a member

must have significant experience as a senior management executive in local government; have earned a degree, preferably in public administration or a related field; and demonstrated a commitment to high standards of integrity and to lifelong learning and professional development.

**Leesburg selects interim police chief**

**Captain Vanessa Grigsby** will serve as interim Chief of Police for the town of Leesburg, following Chief Joseph Price's retirement on March 1. Grigsby



- Grigsby -

has been with the Leesburg Police Department since 1996. She is currently Division Commander of Administration and Support Services, a position to which she was promoted in 2014. Captain Grigsby served as a Patrol District Commander from 2004 to 2014. Previous positions with the Leesburg Police Department include Patrol Sergeant, School Resource Officer, Patrol Officer and Detective.

# The New Way To Manage Fund Balances

VML/VACo's **Virginia Investment Pool** enables local governments to enjoy higher yields without putting fund balances out of reach in emergencies.

Developed by Virginia Treasurers and Investment Officers, VIP is a short-term investment pool, professionally managed and governed by participants.

For information on yields or to learn how to participate, visit our website at [valocalfinance.org](http://valocalfinance.org) or phone 804-648-0635.

VIP is rated "AAf/S1" by Standard & Poor's.

## Manassas' 12 days of giving

IN DECEMBER, a group of City of Manassas employees initiated the 12 Days of Giving Campaign. The project helped connect city staff with non-profit groups serving the community. City staff gave their time and talent packing bags for Catholic Charities; cleaning up the Boys & Girls Club; helping with bingo at the Senior Center; restocking the Habitat for Humanity Restore; ringing the bell for the Salvation Army; helping children with homework at a local child care center; working with Project Mend-a-House; sorting and packing food at St. Lucy's food pantry; and helping with Wreaths Across America. In total, City of Manassas staff gave more than 380 hours of service to the community in just 12 days.



(L to R) Capt. Tina Laguna and Zoning Inspectors Wayne Moore and E.J. White drop off food donations at St. Lucy's food pantry.

## Winchester named top place to retire

Winchester has been selected as a top retirement destination by *Where to Retire* magazine. The town is profiled in the March/April issue now in stores. Editor Annette Fuller said Winchester possesses qualities important to today's retirees. "About 75 miles northwest of Washington, DC, Winchester, established in 1752, changed hands more than 70 times as Civil War battles raged nearby. Still prominent in American history, the town has an 1840 courthouse as the centerpiece of a charming downtown pedestrian mall. The Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival attracts thousands each



spring, and dog walkers in the town – population 27,000 – often stop for friendly chats," Fuller said.

### Why attract relocating retirees?

Each year, 700,000 Americans relocate to new towns to retire. Generally, relocating retirees are healthier, better educated and more affluent than those who choose to not relocate. They bring significant economic benefits to their new states and hometowns. Nationally, two dozen states and hundreds of towns seek to attract retirees as a source of economic development.

## Roanoke's Elmwood Park opens skating rink



ROANOKE HAS BUILT an ice-skating rink in its signature downtown park. Named for its title sponsor, the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport, the new rink is called "ROA's Elmwood on Ice." The rink was officially opened the week of Thanksgiving and stayed open seven days a week through mid-February. In its first winter season, more than 15,000 people came to skate. The 3,900-square-foot rink accommodates upward of 100 skaters. Admission fee is \$6, with an additional \$2 for skate rentals. The rink will re-open in late fall or early winter 2016.

Photo by Don Petersen

## More than a firehouse

THE DANVILLE FIRE STATION headquarters is a recent winner of the Career Department Design Notable Award. The award was the second national recognition received by the station. The complex houses a state-of-the-art fire station, a fire fighter museum and memorials. The fire station also features integrated training props, a fitness center, station security and ADA compliance.

The building was designed with reclaimed materials to complement the flavor of the surrounding tobacco warehouse neighborhood and has been a catalyst for re-purposing old tobacco buildings into condos and apartments.

**Camden Fulton and grandmother Bonnie Hales at grand opening ceremony.**



**'Little Mary,' Danville's last horse-drawn fire engine.**



**(Below) Engine bays at the new fire station headquarters.**



## Brunswick Stew Day at the Capitol

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS of every General Assembly session is Brunswick Stew Day at the Capitol hosted by Brunswick County in January. Brunswick Stew Day is the County's way of spreading goodwill and friendship to the elected officials at the General Assembly. The General Assembly, staff and others are treated to a sample of Brunswick Stew cooked on the capitol grounds by the current Champion Stewmaster. The Stewmaster is chosen at the annual Taste of Brunswick Festival, held in October. The Festival is the ultimate place to sample stew from dozens of masters in the art of Brunswick Stew. The next Taste of Brunswick Festival will be October 15 in Alberta, Va.

**(L to R) William Herrington, Mayor, Town of Lawrenceville; Nancy Watson, Brunswick Lake Gaston Tourism; and Charlette Woolridge, County Administrator, Brunswick County.**





# Governor presents awards to eight winners of VML's 'If I were mayor' essay contest

**L**ILY McCLUNG of the small town of Fishersville is the statewide winner of VML's second annual "If I Were Mayor" essay contest. More than 1,000 essays were submitted by seventh graders across the state. There were eight regional winners including McClung.

These talented youngsters from throughout the Commonwealth met in Richmond January 27 to receive their awards from Governor Terry McAuliffe and VML President Ron Rordam. The awards were presented at the Library of Virginia following the Governor's opening remarks to more than 250 local officials gathered for VML Day at the Capitol (see page 16).

In addition to family members, many of the students were accompanied by their teachers and their hometown mayors. The regional winners were:

**Region 1:** Sumer Grace Lloyd, Bristol

**Region 2:** Simran Kaur Gill, Salem

**Region 3:** Lily McClung, Fishersville

**Region 4:** Grace Coover, Petersburg

**Region 5:** Evan A. Lankford, Falls Church

**Region 6:** Brynley Meadows, Culpeper

**Region 7:** Alexander Elstun, Chesterfield County

**Region 8:** Alyssa Levy, King William County

In addition to a framed certificate, each regional winner received a check for \$150. The statewide winner was awarded \$250.

The eight winning essays are printed on the following pages.

VML typically opens the "If I Were Mayor" call for entries in late October.



**VML President Ron Rordam (center left) and Gov. Terry McAuliffe (center right) with the winners of the essay contest: (L to R) Evan Lankford, Brynley Meadows, Alex Elstun, Lily McClung, Simran Gill, Alyssa Levy, Sumer Grace Lloyd and Grace Coover. Photo by Michaele White, Governor's Office.**

# Statewide & Region 3 Winner Lily McClung

**Wilson Middle School  
Fishersville, Virginia**



## If I Were Mayor ...



*I would place emphasis on economic and cultural growth in the community.*

**Lily McClung**

Although Fishersville is a great place to live right now, there is always room for improvement. If I were mayor, I would place emphasis on economic and cultural growth in the community. As more people move to the area, it is important to create more business opportunities and to provide exceptional education for our students.

One of my personal objectives as mayor would be to expand the Fine Arts curriculum in our local schools. I would petition the state government for more money to fund additional programs such as orchestra, drama, and dance. Studies have shown that students who participate in the arts on a daily basis exhibit

fewer behavior problems and generally receive better grades. Although our local schools offer some classes in the arts, more choices would result in a greater chance of a student finding something to hold his or her interest.

I would also like to develop an area to serve as the downtown of Fishersville. Currently, there are restaurants and shops, but they are scattered throughout the area. My proposal would involve a small centralized area of locally-owned restaurants and specialty shops with an outdoor seating and dining area. Business offices would also be given the opportunity to build or relocate near the downtown area, which would provide the shops and restaurants with a customer base during the week. The size of the downtown area would be limited in order to give the citizens more choices for eating and shopping while maintaining the small-town feel of Fishersville. The downtown area could also be used for entertainment purposes such as parades, festivals, or live music.

As a relatively new resident of Fishersville, I believe our town needs some sort of outreach office to welcome new citizens to our area. The most recent census taken, which was in 2010, revealed that the population of Fishersville had grown almost fifty percent in ten years. As more and more people relocate to the area, it is important to make them feel welcome and help them transition smoothly into our community. From personal experience, I know that it would be helpful to have a way for new individuals or families to meet others. In addition to introducing new citizens into the community, the outreach office would guide new citizens through all the processes such as registering for school, updating their driving licenses, locating a physician, or other similar situations.

The most important thing I would do as mayor of Fishersville is to listen to the people. It is important to know how they feel about their town and what ideas they have to make it a better place to live. Unfortunately, people will inevitably have conflicting opinions; therefore, it will be my responsibility as mayor to use good judgement to help decide what is best for the future of our town.



# Region 1 Winner Sumer Grace Lloyd

Virginia Middle School  
Bristol, Virginia



## If I were Mayor...



*I believe environment comes before economy. Seven tons is way too much garbage.*

Sumer Grace Lloyd

“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

*John F. Kennedy*

If I were Mayor, I would first make sure every person in the city is both safe and taken care of. I would make time to ask people what they need and try my hardest to make their wishes come true. I would make sure that EVERY person in Bristol was treated equally, even if they don't have a lot of money or they are different. Even though I lean towards the Democrat side, I would make sure I treated my fellow

Bristolians that lean for the Republican side equally. One of my main promises would be that all of the ordinances are followed through for everyone, even the higher in authority; our city would be a good example of rule of law. I would also make sure that I would have a regular meeting with my fellow council members, such as, Vice Mayor Bill Hartley, Councilman Jim Steele, Councilwoman Catherine Brillheart, Councilman Guy Odum, and of course, Councilman (Mayor now) Archie Hubbard.

One of the main issues I would take care of is pollution. Even though a lot of people don't recognize it; there is a lot. Since I do lean towards the Democratic Party, I believe environment comes before economy. I wouldn't make it a law to recycle, but I would definitely encourage it; I mean, seven tons is way too much garbage. Maybe we can stretch that twenty-five more years a little bit more.

Now for social programs, some people believe it should be from charity only. I think I side with both, give it from the government to the people who REALLY need it, but also have charities to help a little more.

If I were mayor I would make my main priority the city schools. Our youth are our future; if we make our future a priority, it just might be a bright one.

I would make our beloved city, Bristol, a very active city. Even though Bristol already has a lot of landmarks, I really want to put Bristol on the map.

I would visit schools and youth groups to talk to them regularly. I would want to know their opinion as well as the rest of the city. As a kid, I don't think young people are included enough; I mean we live here, too! I just want to make my wonderful city even better. Even though we have a great mayor now, I think maybe when I'm old enough, I would want to be mayor. Because in the end, we all love Bristol so much we want what's best for it. If I were mayor I would do my best to serve and make this city the best it has ever been! I love my city. That, my fellow citizens, is what I would do if I were mayor!



# Region 2 Winner Simran Kaur Gill

**Andrew Lewis Middle School  
Salem, Virginia**



## If I Were Mayor ...



*I would start a counseling camp at the homeless shelters to give people opportunities to learn a trade so that they could get jobs.*

**Simran Kaur Gill**

Being a Mayor has prestige, but also comes with a lot of responsibility. If I were the Mayor, I would want my city to be the best it can be.

Safety is one of the most important things for a community. I would encourage education about social media safety, anti-bullying, and self-defense in schools and how to remain safe even in the toughest times.

For a city to prosper, everyone needs to do well. I would like to reduce unemployment in my city. My grandfather often mentions this famous quotation,

“You give a man a fish, he eats for a meal; you teach him to fish, he eats for a lifetime.” I would start a counseling camp at the homeless shelters to give people opportunities to learn a trade so that they could get jobs.

I would encourage recycling and reducing waste. A recycling truck would go around the city, so it would be easier for all to practice it, and help create a better world. Once a month, I would open the City Hall for anyone to share ideas and concerns with me.

I would work to end discrimination between genders and encourage equal pay for men and women. I don't think it is fair to pay people differently for the same kind of work.

Some important residents are the elderly in the nursing homes. Visits from children usually light up their faces. I would propose school trips to nursing homes. This would be an educational experience for the children, and bring joy to the elderly.

There are many police officers, firefighters, veterans, teachers, and other public workers in my community. To show that we care about them, the city of Salem would hold a charity match and a bike race to benefit them.

We know the importance of eyes and ears. There are many families who cannot afford to get their child's eyesight and hearing checked. The city of Salem would hold a free vision and hearing camp to provide preventive screenings for vision and hearing problems.

I would work on improving the train service. Salem would be connected to other cities via the railroad. The train would reduce pollution, and lessen the traffic on the highway.

I would work with the Salem Recreation Department to build a park, which would have monuments of different countries. This would provide the residents an opportunity to learn about different cultures, boost tourism in Salem and help it flourish.

I would start a counseling camp at the homeless shelters to give people opportunities to learn a trade so that they could get jobs.

“Education is the key to success” is a famous quote. Salem is a town full of smart kids and adults. Many jobs look for people who know more than one language. I would offer a program at the Salem Public Library, for people to learn new languages.

I know that these things will be very difficult to do, but with determination, hard work, and the help from the community, one can overcome challenge.



# Region 4 Winner Grace Coover

**Kenston Forest School  
Petersburg, Virginia**



## If I Were Mayor ...



*We are going to start changing the world through our own local government.*

**Grace Coover**

It's true: the next generation is children my age. Since we are the next generation, we are responsible for how we change the world. Some think that we will change the world for the better, while others think we will change it for the worse. How we are going to start changing the world is through our own local government. If I were mayor, I would change the City of Petersburg in two major ways.

If I were the mayor of Petersburg, I would first clean up the city. I would not only request volunteer groups to pick up the litter, but I would get construction groups to repair the broken and abandoned houses and workplaces. Some of these consist of Lighthouse

Furniture and Alrod Enterprises. I would also urge the need to take care of historical museums and other sites. Some historical places and museums would include Siege Museum, Good Fellows Building, and the Hiram Haines Coffee House where Edgar Allen Poe had his honeymoon in 1836. I would also request improving and paving the roads in Petersburg except the old cobblestone roads in Old Towne. Another idea I would urge is keeping the Appomattox River Clean. The river could become a huge tourist attraction if properly cared for.

The second thing I would do if I were mayor of Petersburg is make more job opportunities and increase businesses. I would immediately increase the police staff to decrease crime. Decreasing the crime would make residents feel safer and lure tourists and new families to Petersburg. Many people don't have jobs because there are very few opportunities. With the crime rate decreasing, all we would have to do is lower the business taxes to lure businesses in. Once businesses started to come, I would propose we clear some of the trees near the waterfront to have a restaurant so citizens and tourists can enjoy a meal on the stunning Appomattox River.

The next generation, believe it or not, is intelligent. Look at all the young people who know how to work devices older people cannot. We are striving for goals that our elders never thought about or attempted to reach. We can change the world for the better; we just have to try. I've started my part in this big change with the City of Petersburg.



# Region 5 Winner Evan Lankford

Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School  
Falls Church, Virginia



## If I Were Mayor ...



*Both young and old alike are choosing to live a lifestyle that doesn't include owning a vehicle.*

Evan Lankford

If I could be Mayor of the City of Falls Church, I would look forward to the challenge of addressing the generational differences and lifestyle shifts that are changing the way people live in the City. I would look for ways to provide funding for two initiatives that I believe would best equip our City for the changes to come. In addition, I would gather community input and support for these projects, along with looking at the use of available state and federal sources of funds for the following two initiatives:

### Revolutionize parking in the city

As the City continues to transform its downtown with condos and apartments, both young and old alike are choosing to live a lifestyle that doesn't include owning a vehicle. Instead, they are turning to vehicle sharing alternatives such as Zipcar and B-Cycle bike sharing systems. These types of shared transportation alternatives will require reserved street (or sidewalk) parking spaces or a centrally located parking center, including recharging stations for electric vehicles. I would propose funding for this type of infrastructure to create incentives for residents to make use of these transportation-sharing alternatives. Specifically, I'd request \$600,000 from the Downtown Reinvestment Budget to locate parking on North Washington Street in the downtown commercial district.

### Create sustainable and safe traffic lanes for cyclists in the city

With social networking and smartphone apps, City residents, students and parents alike are exploring ways to commute smarter and safer to school and work by bicycle. This has a positive environmental benefit by helping our roads to become less polluted and congested. Creating bike lanes in the City to accommodate cyclists will help make a better flow of traffic for all. Bike lanes also improve overall safety for pedestrians and bicyclists by reducing the likelihood of accidents that can occur if people ride on sidewalks instead of on the street. Specifically, I'd request \$200,000 from the Public Works Budget to expand bicycle accessibility along South Washington and West Broad Street commercial districts, and near MEHMS and GMHS along Haycock from Broad Street to Great Falls.

I hope to bring my enthusiasm and new ideas to the role of Mayor and the City of Falls Church.



# Region 6 Winner Brynley Meadows

**Culpeper Middle School  
Culpeper, Virginia**



## If I Were Mayor ...



*We are making finding a job harder than it needs to be.*

**Brynley Meadows**

A mayor of a town is a person who officially speaks for the government and the community together as a whole. The mayor is a presiding officer and a regular member of the city council. They speak on behalf of the people around them, making decisions that meet the needs of every citizen, working with the ones of those who do not agree. If I were ever made mayor, I would be like that.

If I were mayor, I would add donation services at every school. Some schools do canned food collections at Thanksgiving, but what about Christmas and Easter? Churches have food closets during the holidays, but I think that the kids should have a chance to contribute as well. Food shouldn't be the only donation. We all know that everyone has heaps of clothes that they don't wear anymore, whether they can't wear them or they choose not to. We shouldn't let them sit there in a box, we should give them to people in need. There are many people who aren't fortunate enough to have what we have, so throughout the school year, I would have every school have an open donation period, where students, parents, and staff could bring food, toys, and clothes for both children and adults. It needs to happen, but if we don't take action, it's not going to.

Another thing I would focus on is tourism. Culpeper has many historical features that could benefit the learning experiences of citizens. Yowell Meadow Park was a battlefield, and cannons are placed throughout it, symbolizing how it was a war zone. There are also many stands that hold information explaining what happened there. When it comes to tourism, Culpeper is located in a very convenient place. You can drive no more than two hours in any direction and visit the houses of at least four presidents. These presidents are Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, and George Washington. Culpeper also has many scenic features. We are completely surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains, and in the fall they turn beautiful shades of red and orange that could attract more people and start new traditions.

The last thing I would do as mayor is make it easier to find work. Many teens have trouble finding jobs nowadays, and I want to end that. To legally work, you have to be fourteen. Many companies won't hire young teenagers because of "their lack of experience," but to me, if they have an interest in working, you should let them. I'm not saying if they walked through the door you should give them a job, but if they come up with a good resume and seem dedicated, you should hire them. There are many places that offer jobs to the youth, but we are making finding a job harder than it needs to be. If I, Brynley Meadows, were to attempt being the mayor of Culpeper, I would do my best to make Culpeper a better place.



# Region 7 Winner Alexander Elstun

**Tomahawk Creek Middle School  
Chesterfield County, Virginia**



## If I Were Mayor ...



*We need to pass a reasonable budget for the county and not go above this budget.*

**Alexander Elstun**

Chesterfield County ... the perfect example of a prosperous and thriving community. While Chesterfield may not be as well known as other counties in Virginia, if I were mayor, I would take Chesterfield County a step further economically, financially, and environmentally. Chesterfield has much to offer, and the following actions will make the county even more appealing to all citizens of Virginia.

As a fan of landscape and nature, I would promote programs focused on conserving the environment. I will fight for more funding to improve conditions, and increase activities in state and local parks, such as Pocahontas State

Park. In addition, I will make the James River more accessible to residents and support the expansion of river-based activities. I will pass laws increasing penalties for littering to help preserve the natural beauty of the landscape. The citizens of the county should always have opportunities to enjoy nature, as it relieves the mind and body. As mayor, I will strive to have Chesterfield recognized for all the grand views and landscapes the county offers.

Chesterfield could significantly boost revenues by increasing tourism. I will promote tourism by advertising Chesterfield's historical significance within the Commonwealth. For example, the mining industry was important to Chesterfield in the late 1800's and early 1900's. In addition, we are fortunate to be close to multiple battlegrounds, historic sites and famous cities, including history all the way back to John Rolfe and Pocahontas. Chesterfield is also home to the Richmond Metro Zoo, providing guests an opportunity to get up close and personal with many types of animals! There are numerous destinations for history buffs and families to explore, bringing more tourism dollars to the county.

The economy, arguably the most important factor, needs to be addressed. We need to pass a reasonable budget for the county and not go above this budget. I will help grow small businesses by opening up more advertising spaces, including park benches and other prominent places. I will encourage people to support local businesses in the area, such as the Sugar Shack. People traditionally like supporting the community and this extra attention on local small businesses will help them thrive. This support will encourage new growth and entice other companies to consider moving to Chesterfield.

I hope you agree with my reasons for running for mayor and believe the citizens of Chesterfield support my positions. Chesterfield has a beautiful environment, and I will do my best to preserve it. In addition, Chesterfield has potential to increase tourism and boost the economy through local businesses. Please vote for me and stand behind my recommendations, as I feel these three focuses will make Chesterfield a better place to live, work, and play. I assure you, I will do my best to make Chesterfield County prosper.





# Region 8 Winner Alyssa Levy

**Hamilton Holmes Middle School  
King William County, Virginia**



## If I Were Mayor ...



*It would increase the work force of King William and also give people a chance to get back on their feet.*

**Alyssa Levy**

The county of King William is a great place to live. But everything can be improved, from our educational standpoint, to the local park. I understand the county of King William doesn't have a mayor, but we do have a board of supervisors and if I were on the board I would improve King William and make the lifestyles of many better.

King William is a place where there is plenty of fresh air and tons of unused space. We have a recreational park that holds plenty of opportunities. Though it has seen better days, it is a spectacular place to be. The

playground is older and could easily be redone. I know King William has plenty of Girl and Boy Scout troops that I know need to earn community help badges, and would be happy to support. We could also run a fundraiser to earn the money needed to improve the playground. If we fixed the playground, it would make people want to bring their kids or grandchildren out into the fresh air and get some exercise. Improving the park would be one step closer to a better King William.

Our county suffers another overlooked problem; homeless people are discarded and ignored. Without food or a place to turn, they are forced to live on the streets. We do have canned food drives and Toys for Tots, but I would take it a step further. We could hold a "Find a Job Day." We could bring together a list of local jobs that require little or no skill and they could come to where we hold the meeting and look through the list. They could pick a job that would suit them and we could contact the employer. This would solve two problems at once, it would increase the work force of King William and also give people a chance to get back on their feet. The "Find a Job Day" is a simple and easy way to solve a huge problem.

Another problem I see in King William is our school transportation. All of the gas from the buses is causing our air to become dense and polluted. I think that we should lessen the amount of baggage students need to bring back and forth to school, therefore freeing more space on one bus for more students. We could also combine routes to decrease the need for as many buses. We could also make buses longer providing more seating. There could also be a speed limit for all buses no matter where they are to cut down on gas. I would also add seatbelts to make the buses safer. Doing this could save lives and air.

King William is an amazing place to be. But doing these simple things could make King William a more sufficient and better place to be. There are all the things I would do if I were Mayor.



# VML Day at the Capitol

MORE THAN 230 LOCAL OFFICIALS from throughout the state gathered in Richmond for VML Day at the Capitol on January 28. This annual event is a prime opportunity for local leaders to meet with their elected officials and share their concerns about how pending legislation will impact their localities. In addition to meeting with legislators in their offices, local leaders spent time with their representatives at a reception at the Library of Virginia. More than 70 delegates and senators took the opportunity to speak informally with local leaders in their districts by attending the reception.

VML delivered a powerful lineup of speakers, beginning with keynote speaker Governor Terry McAuliffe, who also presented the “If I were Mayor” Essay Contest awards to eight talented seventh graders from throughout Virginia. McAuliffe’s address was followed by presentations from The Honorable William Howell, Speaker of the House of Delegates; Secretary of Education Anne Holton; and Brian Canon, Executive Director of OneVirginia 2021.

VML wishes to thank all of the participants – senators, delegates, presenters, essay winners, and local leaders who traveled to Richmond to make their voices heard.



**Terry McAuliffe was the keynote speaker at VML Day and presented the awards to the “If I Were Mayor” essay contest winners.**



**VML Executive Committee members Katie Sheldon Hammler, Leesburg City Council; and Patricia Woodbury, Newport News City Council.**



**VML Executive Committee member Edythe Kelleher, Vice Mayor of Vienna; and Woody Harris, Emporia City Council.**



**House Speaker Bill Howell**



**Falls Church City Council members Letty Hardi and Phil Duncan.**



**(Left) Former VML President Jay Fissette, Vice-Chair of Arlington County Board, and Brian Stout, federal lobbyist for Arlington County.**

**(Below) Regional essay contest winner Simran Gill and her family hail from Salem, Va.**



# Checks and Balances

## Virginia Beach makes financial control a reality for struggling families

**A** GROWING PROBLEM WAS EXPOSED when the Virginia Beach Human Services Department had a spike in requests for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance between 2008 and 2010. The recession was proving its impact on families living payday to payday. A resulting study by the department revealed that financial empowerment needed to be at the top of the city's agenda. To empower low-income families in these tough economic times, the city of Virginia Beach launched Bank On Virginia Beach.

Now in its fifth year, Bank On Virginia Beach has been so successful that two neighboring cities, Portsmouth and Norfolk, have joined forces with Virginia Beach under the name of Bank On Hampton Roads. Bank On Portsmouth conducted its first class in September while Bank On Norfolk launched its first class in January.

Bank On programs have been established in cities throughout the country to help families establish relationships with traditional financial institutions and avoid costly alternatives. Bank On Virginia Beach is unique among national programs in that it measures improvements in financial capability while providing the education and support needed to establish written financial plans.

Established as a community collaborative, partnering with financial institutions, non-profits, churches and volunteer networks like AARP, the Financial Planning Association, and the Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education, Bank On Virginia Beach launched in January 2012.

The program aligned perfectly with the National League of Cities' Mayors' Action Challenge and Mayor Sessoms' initiatives to increase the financial fitness of families. This challenge was organized to connect 500 low-income families to mainstream financial institutions and help these families avoid foreclosure, avoid predatory lenders and stretch budgets in tough economic times, ensuring they are financially fit for the future.

The Mayor's Challenge measures participants' success by:

- Increased income
- Increased savings
- Debt reduction
- Improved credit score
- And consumer protections established

### They took control

People of all ages and walks of life have taken control of their financial future through Bank On Virginia.

**Linda and Chester Holliman** – grandparents



*"We want to leave a great inheritance for our grandchildren. Bank On has helped us to get a budget together that is realistic. We had an excellent coach. It was exciting to be with other people who had the same*

*goals. We've learned to save money and our credit score went up tremendously."*

**Antwain Johnson** – young father

*"I'm 24 and have a 3-year-old son. I'm a manager at a fast food restaurant. I was living paycheck to paycheck. I had no established credit. I didn't have a plan. We put together a plan to stay on track with my budget and set goals ...to own my own business. Having a plan makes me feel wonderful – without worries at night."*

**Ina Thomas** – senior

*"I was over my head in debt. I had no direction in terms of my spending when I came to Bank On. I didn't know how much I was spending before. The first thing is to develop a budget...then get ahold of my spending. I've achieved a savings account. I would recommend Bank On to anyone who wants to get more control over their finances."*



**Tina & David Taylor** – military couple

*"We had a lot of unexpected expenses. We never seemed to get ahead, we were just robbing Peter to pay Paul. At one point in the coaching, it clicked: if we have an emergency fund, we won't have to use the credit card. Having a plan feels like a huge relief. It gives us the structure we need to keep that larger goal in sight while managing on the small goal level."*



**Virginia Beach Mayor William Sessoms (center) with Bank On graduates Carol Lilly (left) and Shirley Palmer (right).**

Every Mayor's Action Challenger establishes written goals with timelines for completion and milestone actions along the way. A Financial Empowerment Passport was developed and is provided to each challenger as a guidebook to help them track their progress through the Challenge. Since the program has expanded to other Hampton Roads municipalities, new challenges are being formed to inspire even more residents to take positive financial action.

### Calling all bankers, instructors, coaches

In the summer of 2011, Mayor Sessoms, in partnership with Human Services Department, convened a group of bankers and community leaders and formed a Bank On Virginia Beach Planning Council. Human Services began forging strong working relationships with the National League of Cities, the Federal Reserve Board, the FDIC, Virginia/America Saves, local bankers, non-profits, and other community partners. Through these collaborative efforts, the City has developed a strategic outreach for financial empowerment, and places classes in neighborhoods with significant demonstrated need.


Two components of the Bank On Virginia Beach program include instruction by qualified financial instructors and one-on-one financial coaching provided at no cost. To ensure consistency and quality in instruction, the Virginia Cooperative Extension offers instructors and coaches a 20-hour course through the Master Financial Educator Volunteer Certification program. In an effort to strengthen ties to traditional financial institutions, local banks and credit unions offer staff to serve as instructors and coaches. Graduates of the Bank On program

often want to give back and serve as another important source of volunteers.

### Interfaith Alliance matches people's savings

As part of the community collaborative, the Interfaith Alliance at the Beach (IAB) has established a Matched Savings Program to complement Bank On. Funds are raised by the IAB through local donations and grants. As money is available, eligible Bank On participants receive a \$150 match to establish a \$300 emergency savings fund.

Bank On Virginia Beach has been recognized for its impact with several awards over the years, including the Virginia Cooperative Extension State Award for Collaboration in 2013 and the Volunteer Hampton Roads Group Award in 2014.

Bank on Virginia Beach is open to anyone motivated to improve their financial condition and has been embraced by many city employees. 



#### About the author

*Alice Testerman is the Supervisor of the Bank On Virginia Beach program and former Communications Coordinator for the City of Virginia Beach Department of Human Services.*

# FAST Act could mean \$5.4 billion for Virginia's transportation projects

**T**HE EARLY DECEMBER passage of a five-year \$305 billion transportation bill ended years of short-term funding and uncertainty for local transportation programs. The "Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act" or FAST Act provides funding for a long-term surface transportation program and reverses some of the setbacks for local transportation programs contained in the last 18-month extension known as "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century" or MAP-21. The FAST Act will allow more funding and flexibility for regional approaches and opportunities to design transportation that works for communities and the people in them.

"When it comes to regional planning, it's not just stapling together a project wish-list. It's responding very directly to the needs of a community," U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, the former Mayor of Charlotte, N.C., told the Transportation Research Board in Washington last month. "It's aligning that plan with development proposals and revitalization and efforts to increase access to jobs, education and healthcare."

## Diminishing revenues yet to be addressed

While the FAST Act provides a longer-term funding solution, it doesn't fix the

problem of diminishing revenues for federal transportation programs and relies on short-term fixes such as Federal Reserve surplus funds and selling oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to support the next five years of transportation programs. Federal taxes designated for transportation programs such as the tax on gasoline have not changed since 1993, despite the nation's growth and the aging of our roads, transit systems and bridges. Since 2008, rather than increase taxes to expand federal transportation programs, Congress has

opted to use general Treasury funds to make up the difference between revenue collected specifically to fund transportation and the transportation dollars allocated to states and local governments.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that by the end of the FAST Act, the U.S. government will have transferred over \$140 billion in general funds to the Highway Trust Fund since 2008. The result will be that a program intended to be financed by transportation users' revenue will only cover half of the national program with the balance coming from general tax dollars. The need to continually raise more funds to keep the program afloat will force Congress to assess key policy issues such as a mileage user fee for vehicle miles traveled, the delicate balance between financing highways versus alternative transportation such as transit and turning the program back to the states.

As the Highway Trust Fund continues to collect gas tax revenues which do not meet current spending levels, pressure will grow on states and communities to meet infrastructure needs since, after an initial increase in funding

**As the Highway Trust Fund continues to collect gas tax revenues which do not meet current spending levels, pressure will grow on states and communities to meet infrastructure needs.**

## By the Numbers

**\$305 billion**

Funding authorized by FAST Act to support local transportation projects

**5%**

estimated increase in federal funds for transportation coming to VA in the next year

**\$3.4 billion**

additional funding available to Metro Planning Organizations via block grants



## FAST Act

provided by the FAST Act, funding will be relatively flat for the five years of the bill. And when the bill expires in 2020, the Highway Trust Fund will have only an estimated \$8 billion for highways and \$2 billion for transit programs.

### Localities will get more say over what is funded

Organizations representing local governments, working together as the LOT Coalition, did not get everything they asked for in the legislation, but were able to gain greater decision making authority over federal transportation dollars in their own communities and increased funding for bicycle and pedestrian programs. The National Association of Regional Councils, representing councils of governments, regional planning agencies and metropolitan planning organizations, joined with local government colleagues – NLC, NACo, USCM, AMPO and NADO – to advocate on behalf of transportation programs that serve local needs and broader community goals.

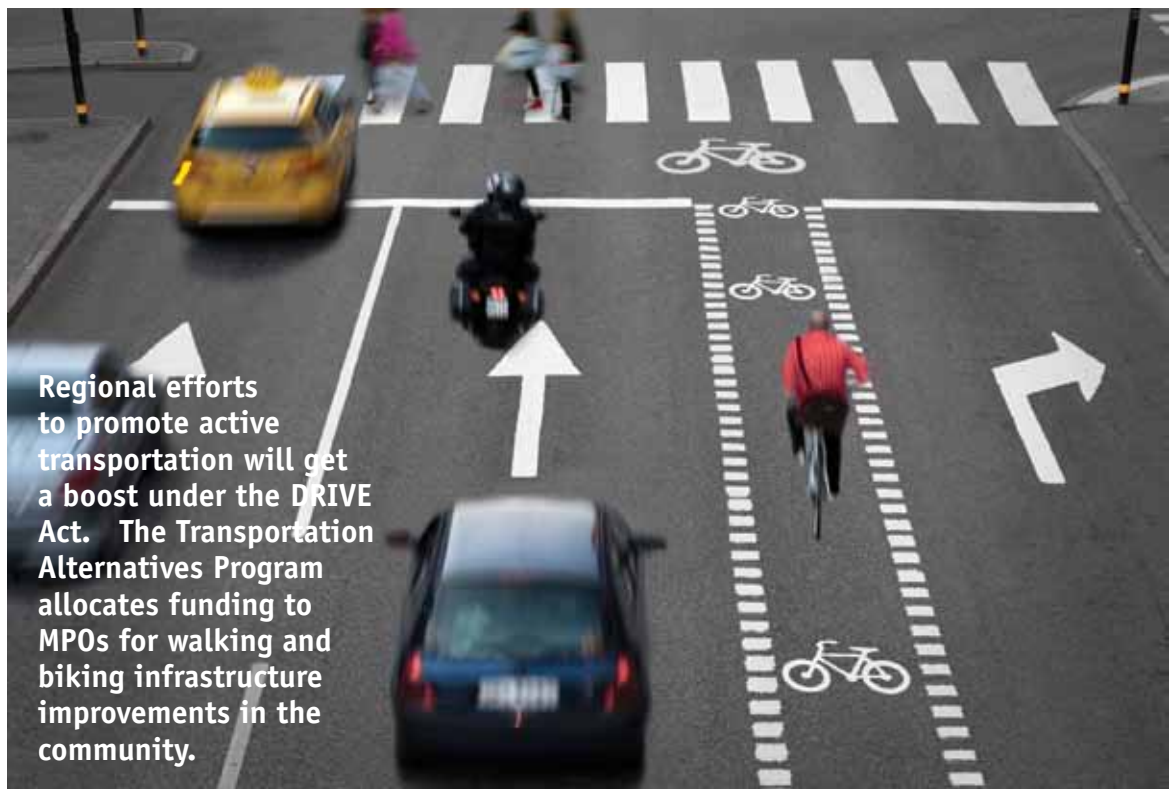
Under the FAST Act, Metropolitan Planning Organizations will receive a greater share of funding from the new Surface Transportation Block Grant Program with increased ability to make decisions on spending priorities. Funding will increase from the current 50% of the program to 55% providing an additional \$3.4 billion over the life of the bill for local projects through the ST-BGP. In Virginia, the Secretary of Transportation reported to the legislature that this will likely result in an increase of 5% in funds be allocated for construction. Under the prior MAP-21 legislation, states were given greater flexibility in how to allocate funding which in many cases resulted in a reduced local share.

The Congestion Management Air Quality Program (CMAQ), which aims to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality, was expanded beyond the current use for areas already not meeting air quality standards to those areas in attainment to use for maintaining their air quality. Regions use their CMAQ funds to make improvements to transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities and expanding service or enhancing access to transit services. Traffic flow improvements such as turn lanes or traffic signal improvements also are popular uses of the program.

Regional efforts to promote active transportation will get a boost under the DRIVE Act. The Transportation Alternatives Program allocates funding to MPOs for walking and biking infrastructure improvements in the community. The legislation also expands funding for important bridge and transit programs. A significant provision in the DRIVE Act

allows MPOs to continue their current process for determining transit representation on their governing boards. MAP-21 had included a provision interpreted by some to override MPO bylaws or enabling statutes on who was eligible to serve as a representative of the local transit agency. A proposed rule by the U.S. Department of Transportation would have disallowed local elected officials to serve both as a transit representative and their own jurisdiction on the MPO Board. The DRIVE Act cleared up the controversy and allows MPOs to continue current practices of transit representation.

Councils of government and regional organizations wel-



Regional efforts to promote active transportation will get a boost under the DRIVE Act. The Transportation Alternatives Program allocates funding to MPOs for walking and biking infrastructure improvements in the community.

come the new transportation program and continue to find ways to incorporate transportation planning into collaborative community efforts. In developing a shared vision for the future, MPOs, local agencies and regional organization are seeking to include the public in making informed decisions on transportation, land use and development. Greater flexibility in federal funding and decision making at the local level help communities ensure that federal transportation dollars contribute to shared community goals such as expanded transit access and walkable communities.

Secretary Foxx called on local officials to take advantage of the opportunities in the FAST Act. “We’re challenging you to ask what you can do to help communities measure and visualize how well a project increases connectivity for all residents and be a thought leader for solutions that connect Point A to Point B, without forgetting the points and people in between.”



#### About the author

Leslie Wollack is Executive Director of the National Association of Regional Councils.

# Hampton Roads leaders make plea for state funding for schools



*In an open letter published in several regional newspapers, leaders in Williamsburg and Hampton Roads shared their concerns about the inadequacy of state funding for K-12 education in Virginia. Below is the full text of the letter.*

**O**N DECEMBER 11, 2015, more than 150 local government, school division, and business leaders from Virginia's Urban Crescent – the area from Northern Virginia to Richmond to Hampton Roads comprising 24 percent of the Commonwealth's land area and home to over 70 percent of its school-aged children – met to discuss concerns regarding the state's share of funding for public education.

Their concern was animated by the fact that since 2008-09, the Commonwealth has reduced its share of spending on public education by more than \$1 billion. This has meant that state funding on a per pupil inflation adjusted

basis has decreased from \$4,275 at that time to \$3,655 today – for the Williamsburg-James City County school system this has meant an annual loss of over \$6 million. Further, while Virginia stands in the top ten in both per capita and median household income, it remains in the bottom ten for public education funding.

At first glance, it may not appear that localities across an area that contains many of Virginia's largest cities and counties as well as some of its smallest have a lot in common. However, like all communities within the Commonwealth they have a number of common interests – one of the most important being the provision of quality public education to prepare all our children for a successful future.

Without adequate State funding for public education, our communities have struggled to provide the public education our citizens expect and deserve and that has implications for our communities, regardless of size, in a variety of ways.

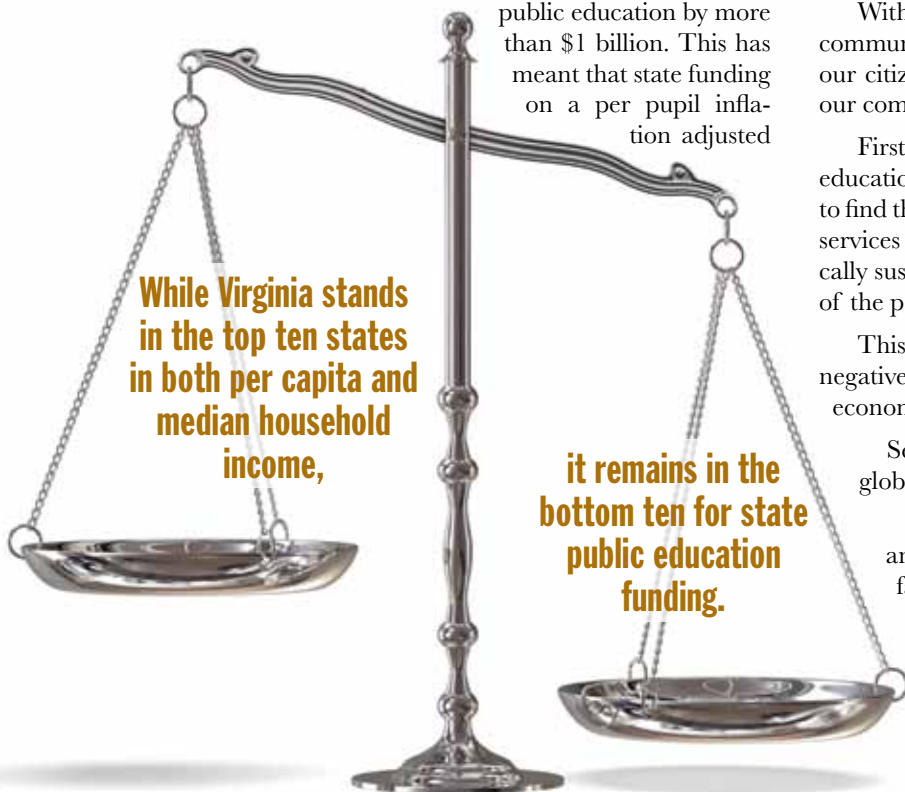
First, as additional local funds have been devoted to K-12 education, localities have struggled, and continue to struggle, to find the resources to support public safety and other essential services for our residents. Local governments cannot realistically sustain the extraordinary funding demands for education of the past several years.

This has also increased pressure on property taxes with negative impacts on efforts to attract new businesses and on economic development.

Second, for Virginia to compete in the national and global economy, quality K-12 education is a necessity.

Businesses and individuals make location choices with an eye toward the local education system both for their families as well as for the educated workforce they need today as well as in the future.

STEM education and career technical training that are such a critical part of preparing young people for the workforce are among the most expensive.



## Funding for schools

Third, under financial constraints, program enrichments fall by the wayside, and the educational demands of special needs children and those with limited English, and the particular educational requirements of children in poverty place increased costs on systems already struggling to meet our community's needs.

### Stay tuned

... to see whether the state begins to restore some of cuts that have been made in public education. The House Appropriations Committee and Senate Finance Committee released their versions of the state budget on February 21. The final budget is scheduled to be adopted by March 12. Please contact your legislators to advocate for increased state support of our local schools.

The education system today is very different from that of even the recent past and as it continues to change, local resources cannot meet the future needs of our children and our

Finally, adequate state funding is critical to ensuring that young people from jurisdictions with disparate resources have equitable access to a basic education that comes with across-the-board state funding.

economy without the Commonwealth stepping up to meet its responsibility to fund a fair share of public K-12 education.

Thus it is incumbent upon the state to make K-12 education a primary funding priority. The local governments, school divisions and business partners of the Virginia Urban Crescent call upon the 2016 Virginia General Assembly and Governor to recognize the consequences of the Commonwealth's failure to adequately fund K-12 education and to increase meaningfully the Commonwealth's proportional and required share of funding for a high quality public education system.

#### **Bryan K. Stephens**

President & CEO  
Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce

#### **Mike Kuntz**

President & CEO  
Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce

#### **Clyde Haulman**

Mayor, City of Williamsburg  
Chair, Hampton Roads Planning District Commission

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# Bringing soldiers home

## Alexandria and Arlington end veteran homelessness

**P**ERCHED JUST ACROSS the Potomac River from the home of the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. military, the City of Alexandria and Arlington County have strong and deep ties to the nation's armed forces.

Alexandria's connections go back more than a century when it was a hub of defense, transport and hospitals for the Union Forces during the Civil War.

Flash forward to the present day: Arlington is home to the Pentagon, Arlington National Cemetery, and a military base. Both communities' economies benefit from robust defense contracting sectors.

And now Arlington and Alexandria have another important connection to the military – both communities have ended veteran homelessness.

Many communities in Virginia embraced the Mayor's Challenge and Zero: 2016 initiatives, and in 2015 Virginia became the first state to officially end veteran homelessness. Virginia has housed 1,432 veterans since October 2014, according to the Governor's office.

### How many homeless veterans are there in Virginia?

Accurate counts are impossible to come by – the transient nature of homeless populations presents a major difficulty. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates that, nationally, 47,725 veterans are homeless on any given night, with about 1,190 of those being in Virginia. According to the Disabled Veterans National Foundation (DVNF) and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV):

- The vast majority of homeless veterans (96%) are single males from poor, disadvantaged communities.
- Homeless veterans have served in World War II, Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the military's anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America.
- The number of homeless female veterans is on the rise: in 2006, there were 150 homeless female veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars; in 2011, there were 1,700.
- Roughly 56% of all homeless veterans are African-American or Hispanic, despite only accounting for 12.8% and 15.4% of the U.S. population respectively.
- About 53% of individual homeless veterans have disabilities, compared with 41% of homeless non-veteran individuals. Half suffer from mental illness; two-thirds suffer from substance abuse problems; and many from dual diagnosis (which is defined as a person struggling with both mental illness and a substance abuse problem).

**In 2015, Virginia became the first state to officially end veteran homelessness.**



**Megan Stacy (left), Administrative Assistant for OCS, and Jessica Lurz, Homeless Services Coordinator for the city of Alexandria, use a yellow ribbon system for each veteran to help them visualize who is still homeless. They move the ribbon to the little house when the veteran is no longer homeless.**

Alexandria's efforts came under the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, a program developed by the U.S. government and championed by First Lady Michelle Obama. Arlington did its work under Zero:2016, a movement of communities working to end veteran and chronic homelessness by the end of 2016 led by Community Solutions, a New York City-based non-profit social services organization.

Both the Mayor's Challenge and Zero: 2016 help localities by providing resources designed to improve their homelessness response and housing assistance systems. The communities have streamlined how they help a veteran experiencing homelessness to quickly secure permanent housing.

### What causes veterans to be at increased risk of homelessness?

Veterans are susceptible to the complex set of factors influencing all homelessness – shortage of affordable housing, livable income and access to health care. Veterans, however, face several unique experiences that create an increased risk of

homelessness. According to the DVNF and NCHV:

- Veterans are 50% more likely to become homeless than other Americans due to poverty, lack of support networks, and dismal living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing.
- About 1.5 million veterans are considered at risk of homelessness. “At risk” is defined as being below the poverty level and paying more than 50% of household income on rent.
- Research shows that the greatest risk factors for homelessness are lack of support and social isolation after discharge. Veterans have low marriage rates and high divorce rates. Social networks are particularly important for those who have a crisis or need temporary help. Without this assistance, they are at high risk for homelessness.
- Additionally, military occupations and training are not always transferable to the civilian workforce, placing some veterans at a disadvantage when competing for employment.

The effects of untreated or lingering post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression are thought to play a large role in homelessness among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. According to NCHV, 19% of returning service members experienced possible traumatic brain injury, and 7% of returning service members report both probable brain injury and PTSD or depression. Across the U.S., approximately 12,700 veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) were homeless in 2010.

### What is “functional zero”?

Under Zero: 2016, functional zero means that, at any point in time, the number of veterans experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in a community will be no greater than the average monthly housing placement rate for veterans

**“Encouraging veterans to take advantage of services can be challenging. Some choose not to accept housing options, but we’re proud to be able to say that any veteran who becomes homeless in Alexandria has the opportunity to move into permanent housing ...”**

– Jessica Lurz, City of Arlington

experiencing homelessness in that community. In other words, a community that reaches functional zero never has more veterans experiencing homelessness than it has proven it can house in an average month.

For the Mayor’s Challenge, functional zero is reached in a community by identifying all veterans experiencing homelessness, providing immediate shelter to any unsheltered veteran who wants it, maintaining the capacity for all veterans to move into permanent housing and providing a system to respond to any veteran who experiences homelessness in the future.

## Hard facts about veteran homelessness

**50%** more likely to become homeless than other Americans

**96%** of homeless veterans are single men from poor communities. However, the number of homeless female veterans is on the rise.

**56%** of all homeless veterans are African-American or Hispanic, despite accounting for only 12.8% and 15.4% of the U.S. population respectively.

**53%** of homeless veterans have disabilities, compared with 41% of homeless non-veterans.

**Sources:** Disabled Veterans National Foundation (DVNF) and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV)

### How Arlington and Alexandria got to zero.

“Zero is a very big number when it comes to homelessness,” said David Leibson who, along with Melissa Bondi, co-chairs the County’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness Executive Committee. “The level of cooperation and collaboration among County agencies, non-profits and others who have a stake in ending homelessness in Arlington has matured tremendously over the past half-dozen years or so.... We’ve agreed that our path forward must include an adequate supply of affordable housing – the County and the public and non-profit sectors are addressing that. We’ve agreed that preventing homelessness before it occurs is a smart investment – and we have programs in place to provide emergency or short-term assistance with rent, utilities and other expenses. And probably the most important thing we’ve seen first-hand is that a roof over your head isn’t enough sometimes – you need ongoing support to help you maintain that housing.”

For Arlington, having laid the foundation was essential, but that wasn’t going to be enough. “This required a lot of hard work and teamwork from many, many wonderful people,” said Cynthia Stevens, Housing Assistance Bureau Chief for Arlington’s Department of Human Services (DHS). “We signed on to the federal and state Zero: 2016 campaigns knowing it would be a challenge to end veteran homelessness in Arlington by year’s end. But we also knew from experience that we had the pieces in place to really make a strong run at reaching that goal.”

Some of those key pieces included the existence of affordable housing units available in the community, having access to rent subsidy programs, and being able to tap into supports ranging from mental health and substance abuse counseling to job training.

“Those are the building blocks and toolkit for ending homelessness – you simply can’t do it without them,” said Stevens.



“Fortunately, we have a community and elected officials who understand solutions aren’t going to come out of thin air. Over time, we have built a strong community infrastructure that starts with a 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. The plan has helped focus efforts on identifying our local issues and their solutions. It’s been a catalyst for everything from ongoing development of affordable housing units, to expanding our supportive housing services, to improving partnerships among non-profits and the County and engaging the business and faith communities... all the things that are needed to make it work.”

The greatest asset, said Stevens, is the human element. “It takes people to connect those pieces together and actually get folks off the streets and out of shelters into permanent, stable housing. Staff at the Department of Human Services, at our non-profits and shelters, and across our entire continuum of care have developed a tremendous level of expertise in meeting the challenges associated with housing veterans and others with significant housing barriers.”

Taking a deliberate approach was a big part in Arlington’s success in housing veterans, said Kathy Sibert, president and chief executive officer of A-SPAN, a local non-profit that works closely with homeless individuals, including veterans. “We literally kept a list of our homeless vets by name and sat down in face-to-face meetings on a monthly basis to assess how they were progressing toward the goal of stable housing: have they been connected with Veterans Administration benefits?... have we reached out to their families to reconnect or mend fences?... are their physical or mental health issues being addressed?... have we helped them find a job or connect them with a job coach to increase their skills?... have we located a housing unit that will accept them? Every person has unique circumstances, but the toolkit we’ve assembled is pretty strong and we’ve become adept at addressing challenges as they come.”

Down the road in Alexandria, the recipe for success included many of the same ingredients.

“Collaboration and cooperation were at the center of our effort,” said Kate Garvey, executive director of Alexandria’s Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS). “Our Center for Economic Support’s Office of Community Services took the lead in coordinating the effort — a city-wide collaboration between local homeless service providers, veteran service providers, the Office of Veteran Affairs and DCHS’s PATH Homeless Outreach, a local branch of the



**In Arlington, before and after photos of former homeless veterans Mr. Netting (top) and Mr. Barnes (bottom) show what a difference a home can make.**



**Former homeless veterans Angela Hopper and Alvin Hill show off the keys to their new homes.**

federal grant program serving individuals with mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse problems.”

The Alexandria group also included members familiar with veterans and their experiences, like a retired Air Force colonel and Megan Stacy, an administrative assistant in the Community Services Program whose husband is active duty Army.

Like Arlington, Alexandria had a strong foundation to build upon – committed partners, housing resources and a strong accompaniment of supportive services. But getting the job done was going to take a calculated, deliberate approach. The key to the City’s success, said Community Services Program Coordinator Jessica Lurz, was monthly meetings attended by the collaborating service providers. “We used a ‘by-names list’ — a best-practice used with success by other local communities. The list helps us maintain a working record of every veteran currently in homeless programs and shelters and allows us to engineer tailored interventions.”

**The effects of untreated or lingering post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression are thought to play a large role in homelessness among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.**

Bringing partners to the table on a regular basis has also been important. “We meet with all providers monthly to do case staffings and discuss what we need to do to get the veterans permanently housed,” said Lurz. Discussions at these meetings include everything from getting proper identification documents to connecting to Veteran Affairs medical services and securing housing. “In the month following our first meeting, we secured housing for eight veterans. We started to gain momentum and experienced faster rates of housing veterans than ever before.”

The system is really working, said Lurz. “It doesn’t mean we don’t have veterans in shelters, but we do have a good system in place now to help them—and we do that quickly.”

Another technique Lurz and Stacy’s group used to keep clients at the forefront was creating a yellow ribbon for each veteran and posting them on a bulletin board in their workspace. They move the ribbon to a little house when the veteran is no longer homeless.

“It helps to visually show us who is still out there,” says Lurz. “Encouraging veterans to take advantage of services can be challenging. Some choose not to accept housing options, but

we’re proud to be able to say that any veteran who becomes homeless in Alexandria has the opportunity to move into permanent housing within an average of 90 days after connecting with the community-based homeless response system.”

## Next: Tackling chronic homelessness

For the 36 veterans (20 in Arlington and 16 in Alexandria) housed in Arlington and Alexandria, Zero: 2016 and the Mayor’s Challenge have been life-altering experiences. Perhaps more important is the legacy that the programs leave in their communities – in-place systems ready and able to assist those who need it in the future. Both communities will now focus on their next challenge: functionally ending chronic homelessness by 2017. A person is considered chronically homeless if they have experienced homelessness for a year or longer, or have experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years to total 12 months, and has a disability.

### One veteran’s story

(see next page)

Habitat for Heroes is another great program providing housing for veterans. In Hampton, Gary Hope and his daughter will soon move into a home built through a partnership of Virginia housing organizations.

“Ending chronic homelessness will be more challenging,” said Alexandria’s Lurz, noting that there are more resources available to veterans than other populations. “Our success with the Mayor’s Challenge will help us and local homeless service providers identify additional resources and develop a more effective system to help people in need connect with services quickly. We’re also continuing our efforts to educate the community about the need to support and create affordable housing opportunities.” As part of the community education process, Alexandria has been actively engaging local churches and other community organizations.

In Arlington, Stevens agrees that tackling chronic homelessness is no easy task. “We’ve learned through our successes and through our challenges,” she said. “One of our focus areas moving forward will be to work with area landlords. If they have an application that shows a history of homelessness, bad credit, unstable employment, incarceration or other elements that don’t put potential tenants in the best light, what choice do you think they’re going to make?”

To get past this barrier, Arlington has launched a new partnership program with area landlords. For agreeing to accept clients referred through the partner agencies, landlords receive rapid response to tenant concerns, case management for tenants to help ensure stability, and access to a risk reduction fund for lost rent or damages in excess of the tenant’s security deposit. “It’s another tool in our toolbox, a win-win,” said Stevens. “Homeless individuals and families receive access to housing and landlords receive a greater amount of protection from risk.”

### About the author

*Kurt Larrick is the Communications Manager for the Arlington County Department of Human Services. Carmen Andres is the Public Information Specialist in the city of Alexandria’s Department of Community and Human Services.*

# Veteran and daughter are the real winners of Habitat design competition

**T**HE VIRGINIA BUILDING and Code Officials Association played an integral role in a collaboration that will culminate in a disabled veteran and his nine-year old daughter moving into a new house in Hampton later this spring.

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development sponsored a design competition for the house's



**“I don’t think I’m a hero at all. I [served in the military] because I wanted to do my part as a citizen the way I know how....One day I would like to be looked at as a hero through the eyes of my daughter Diamo-nique. One day, I would like for her to look at me and say, ‘My dad loved me. He was a strong man who overcame obstacles to make sure I had a better life.’”**

– Gary Hope, Army veteran

blueprint in conjunction with the 2015 Virginia Governor’s Housing Conference. The competition was held in November in Hampton.

DHCD asked VBCOA if the association would participate in the planning for the competition. Sean P. Farrell, then VBCOA president, came up with the name of the venture: Blueprint for the Future: A Home for Everyone.

The competition, which was open to all, was to submit a design for a home that met affordability, energy and accessibility standards. Competition participants could use their creativity and ingenuity to design a home that incorporates those essential characteristics that will enable the occupants to “age in place.”


Farrell, Code Compliance Supervisor in Prince William County, also was part of the DHCD steering team that developed the competition rules, design parameters, cost limitations, and general guidelines for entries.

Charles S. Bajnai, Jr., Chief of Residential Plan Review in Chesterfield County, developed the judging criteria and assisted with the overall competition design parameters. Bajnai also represented VBCOA as a juror in selecting the competition winner.

The winner of the competition was Chris Eads of Blue Ridge Architects in Charlottesville.

The 1,200-square-foot, fully accessible house will be built by Habitat for Humanity-Peninsula and Greater Williamsburg Area (HabitatPGW) on a lot in Hampton. The American Legion Auxiliary is the house sponsor and other partners, in addition to DHCD, include the Hampton Redevelopment and Housing Authority and the Virginia Housing Development Authority.


Groundbreaking for the home took place Nov. 18, 2015, and was attended by officials from HabitatPGW, DHCD, VBCOA and others, and most importantly, by the recipients Gary Hope and his daughter. Hope is an Army veteran who was honorably discharged after being paralyzed in a motor vehicle accident and is the first participant in HabitatPGW Habitat for Heroes program.

Habitat for Heroes is a program aimed at providing former military families with access to quality affordable homes. Program participants receive a 25 percent discount off the total cost of the housing. The house in Hampton is expected to cost about \$75,000. In addition to paying the interest-free mortgage, recipients are required to put in “sweat equity” on various Habitat projects. 

## About the author

Mary Jo Fields is VML’s Director of Research.

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