



# Feeling the squeeze

Local governments struggle  
to keep pace with service and  
infrastructure needs

**Inside:**  
Remembering Howard Dobbins





## **VMLIP offers multiple sexual harassment training resources**

In the era of #metoo, it's more important than ever to ensure your sexual harassment policies are up-to-date, and training has been made available to staff.

VMLIP provides members with a variety of sexual harassment training resources, from sample policies and procedures to recorded webinars, bulletins, videos, online courses, and more.

Examples include:

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- Sexual Harassment Training for Law Enforcement Personnel, webinar
- Supervisor Training: Preventing Harassment, webinar
- Sexual Harassment Prevention for Employees, online course
- Sexual Harassment Prevention for Supervisors, online course
- Sexual Harassment Prevention: Supervisor Supplement, online course
- Sexual Harassment: A Commonsense Approach – Manager's Version, video
- Sexual Harassment: A Commonsense Approach – Employee's Version, video
- Preventing Sexual Harassment: The Manager's Role, video



Learn more online at: [www.vmlins.org](http://www.vmlins.org) or (800) 963-6800





## About the cover

Local governments are between a rock and a hard place, as they face service and infrastructure demands that outstrip revenue growth. Learn more about the results of a survey of local fiscal conditions conducted this past November and December. Story begins on page 12.

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The weather was anything but delightful, but people still showed up to discuss economic and fiscal issues.  
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### In Memoriam: Howard W. Dobbins

Howard Dobbins lived a long life and lived it well. He served as VML's general counsel for 44 years and was a transformational figure at VML and at Williams Mullen.  
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By *VML Staff*



### Dedicated officials brave wintry weather to attend conference

A hardy group of officials did not let the snow and ice deter them from learning about their new roles at the Newly Elected Officials Conference held January 5 in Charlottesville.  
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### 2018 VML Legislative Day

Governor Ralph S. Northam was the kick-off speaker at the 2018 VML Legislative Day, held January 31 at The Library of Virginia in Richmond.  
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# Session moves past half-time

## Suggestions, comments sought on VML Legislative Day

I WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY to thank everyone who attended VML Legislative Day. VML is thankful to Suzette Denslow, Deputy Chief of Staff for Governor Northam, for her help on VML Legislative Day as well.

It is always great to get feedback on these events and with this one I would really like to have your input. Some of the discussions that were had included:

Is Wednesday the best day?

Is this the best time in the session?

And, how about the program – should it be in the morning, early afternoon or later in the day?

VML strives to provide relevant information at these events and wants to make sure that our members find them valuable – so please tell me what you think! Send your comments to e-mail@vml.org. I welcome input from you.

Having said that, the Executive Committee created a conference subcommittee to look at the Annual Conference schedule. The surveys from Williamsburg were great and helped the subcommittee make some decisions. For 2018, the Annual Conference is in the City of Hampton and will begin Sunday with the banquet Tuesday evening. We are working on great speakers and plan to make time in the schedule for visits with exhibitors as well as time for networking.


Now on to the General Assembly! As the General Assembly approaches cross-over (when each house hears bills from the other side), I want to thank everyone who has made calls, sent emails and talked with Senators and House members on legislation. The biggest issue – Medicaid – has not come to a conclusion yet and it certainly is key in driving the budget. Transportation is also another huge issue this year and discussions continue on how to fully fund transportation needs throughout the Commonwealth. There are many Freedom of Information Act bills; two particularly bad ones – one dealing with additional civil penalties which are unnecessary and another dealing with the requirement of public comment in front of every public body. The infamous “checkbook” bill is back as well and continues to be a thorn in our side!

Now for my latest rant on the wireless infrastructure legislation, and I know that you have endured endless pleas from us to work those bills. I'm so proud of our VML members: We asked you to adopt resolutions or send letters, and you stepped up to the plate. I'm disappointed that despite all our efforts the legislation is moving through the General Assembly.

From our perspective, these bills will not expand wireless service to rural and underserved areas. These bills ad-

dress wireless service, not secure broadband that delivers access to the Internet to homes, schools, offices and businesses. We are glad that an amendment was placed on the House bill (HB1278) that will provide some transparency to that notion. The amendment simply requires that the providers will annually report on the extension of services to geographic areas that previously were underserved.

Please pay attention to our alerts and we greatly appreciate any and all information that you can provide to your delegation or any members of the General Assembly that you know. VML will continue to provide updates and will do a “roadshow” in the spring to discuss the session.

The plain and simple truth is that the members of the General Assembly need to hear from you, the “folks back home.” We-VML staff-can't be effective or persuasive unless mayors and board chairs, council members and supervisors, and managers and administrators get involved and stay involved. 



(L-R) Herndon Council Member Signe Friedrichs, Michelle Gowdy and daughter Campbell at the Newly Elected Officials Conference (highlights and more pics are on page 20).

VML connects you with a variety of networking and professional development events. Learn about these opportunities at [vml.org/events](http://vml.org/events).

- Jan. 10 - March 10** 2018 General Assembly Session
- March 15** Emergency Response Seminar
- June 6** FOIA-COIA Seminar - Richmond
- June 7** FOIA-COIA Seminar - Roanoke

## VML 'alumni' Denslow and Flynn appointed to state positions



- Denslow -

**Suzette Denslow** is serving as deputy chief of staff in the administration of Governor Ralph S. Northam. She held that position in the administration of former Governor Terry McAuliffe as well. Prior to that, Denslow was the chief of staff to Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones.

She has extensive experience in state government, having served as legislative director for Governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine. In addition, she served as the Deputy Secretary of Education for Governor L. Douglas Wilder.

Previously, Denslow spent about 15 years lobbying the General Assembly on behalf of local governments. She was deputy director of the Virginia Municipal League and led the league's legislative advocacy team. She also was director of the Tennessee Municipal League.



- Flynn -

**Mark Flynn** has been appointed the director of the Virginia Department of Aviation. He previously was in private practice and served as the local government attorney to various jurisdictions. He also lobbied in the General Assembly on behalf of local government and education interests.

Prior to that, Flynn served 18 years as general counsel and chief lobbyist for the Virginia Municipal League. He was city attorney in Winchester from 1986 through 1997. He is a past president of the Virginia Local Government Attorneys Association and received the LGA's Edward Finnegan Award for Distinguished Service in 2013.

He has extensive experience in aviation matters and is a licensed single engine aircraft pilot with instrument, commercial and instructor ratings.

### Hopewell fills city manager position

Hopewell city council on January 23 appointed **John M. "March" Altman, Jr.** as the city manager effective February 5, 2018. Altman worked for the city from 2000-2013 as director of development, assistant city manager and, in 2007, as interim city manager. He is a Hopewell native and lifelong resident of the city.

Most recently, Altman has been the

deputy city manager for operations in Petersburg. Prior to that he was the deputy county administrator for community development in Powhatan County. Altman served as the interim city manager in Hopewell in 2007. In addition, he was director of development in the city.

Altman has a bachelor's degree in urban affairs and planning and a master's degree in urban and regional planning from Virginia Commonwealth University.

## People

### Lovettsville personnel changes announced



- Finz -

**Samuel Finz** was appointed town manager by the Lovettsville Town Council this past December. He has served in several capacities for the town since 2005, including town planner, interim town manager, and general consultant.

Prior to coming to Lovettsville, Finz was an independent consultant whose work included serving as the economic development director and special assistant county manager in Arlington County, VA. He has served as the city manager in College Park, MD and as the utilities director and city manager in Hollywood, FL. His background includes working with International Developers Inc. and the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association. Finz started his career in government with Fairfax County, serving as the deputy county executive for planning and development throughout the 1970s. He was appointed by two former Virginia governors to committees reviewing planning and development related issues.

Mr. Finz has a bachelor's degree in economics from New York University and a master's degree in quantitative economics and statistics from the University of Maryland.

**Harriet West** has been promoted to the assistant town manager position in Lovettsville. She has worked for the Town since 2012 as the town clerk and as the assistant to the town manager since 2015.

West has more than 30 years of experience working with federal, state, and local governments in Maryland and Vir-



- West -

ginia, with an emphasis on developing and implementing a broad range of programs at the local, regional, and national level. Her prior experience includes serving as the manager of administrative services in Montgomery County, MD and the public information officer/recycling coordinator in Frederick County, MD. While working for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, she led the creation of a regional telework program which served as the model for similar initiatives in six other states. She also served as the Project Manager for a four-year nonprofit capacity building initiative in Fairfax County.

West has a master's degree in business administration from Frostburg State University, MD.

### Richardson tapped as Albemarle executive

The Albemarle County Board of Supervisors appointed **Jeff Richardson** as county executive, effective last November. As county executive, Richardson will establish the long-term vision for Albemarle County and provide management oversight and direction for Albemarle County government departments and agencies.



- Richardson -

Richardson has 27 years of local government experience, including 17 years in senior management. Before assuming the position in Albemarle County, he served as county manager for Cleveland County, NC from 2013 to 2017. He also served 12 years as deputy city manager for the city of Asheville, NC. He is a credentialed manager with the International City/County Management Association.

Richardson has a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Asheville and a master's degree in public administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also is a 2003 graduate of the Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia.

### Campbell comes on board in Harrisonburg



- Campbell -

**Eric D. Campbell** began work as the city manager in Harrisonburg on January 16, 2018. The Harrisonburg City Council announced his selection as manager last November.

Campbell most recently served as an assistant city manager in Dallas, TX. Prior to that, he was an assistant city manager in Charlotte, NC. He previously was a deputy city manager in Portsmouth and an assistant manager in Petersburg.

Campbell grew up in Richmond, VA. He completed his bachelor's degree at Hampton University and earned his master's degree in public administration from Syracuse University. He is also a credentialed manager through the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

The search process for a new city manager began this past year when Kurt Hodgen, who was then city manager, announced his plan to retire in October 2017. Hodgen served the city for more than 15 years.

### Wilson appointed Poquoson assistant city manager



- Wilson -

**Graham Wilson** is now serving as the assistant city manager in Poquoson. Previously, Wilson was the commissioner of the revenue for the city, a position he had held since 2000. Prior to

his election as commissioner, Wilson was a city auditor in Hampton for five years and Hampton's chief deputy commissioner of the revenue for one year.

Wilson was appointed following the retirement of Judy F. Wiggins, who retired as city clerk and assistant city manager of Poquoson on January 1. She began her career in the city as city clerk in 1980. During her tenure, she served twice as acting city manager. Wiggins received her certification as a Master Municipal Clerk from the International

Institute of Municipal Clerks in 2000. Prior to her appointment in Poquoson, she was a legal assistant with a private law firm. Wiggins was an active member of the Virginia Municipal Clerks Association, the International Institute of Municipal Clerks, the York/Poquoson Social Services Board and the Mayor's Commission on Homelessness.

### Carter named Amherst town manager

**Sarah Carter** was appointed town manager in Amherst, effective January 10. Carter was formerly the planning and zoning administrator in Cumberland County. She began working for the county in 2014. Prior to that, Carter was a planner in Chesterfield County. She also served on the Board of Supervisors in Appomattox County from 2014 through December 2017.

Carter replaced former Town Manager Jack Hobbs, whose resignation was effective last September. Hobbs, who had served as manager for 25 years, is now the county administrator in Madison County. Hobbs is a licensed professional engineer. Prior to his tenure in Amherst, Hobbs worked as an engineer for the city of Williamsburg and as the director of planning and community development in Henry County.

### Booth appointed Danville chief of police



- Booth -

**Scott C. Booth** assumes the post of police chief of the city of Danville on Feb. 5. Booth has more than 21 years of law enforcement experience, including 19 years with the Richmond

Police Department, where he rose through the ranks to major.

Previously, Booth was the deputy federal security director for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Transportation Security Administration in Charlotte, NC. Prior to that, he was police chief of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA).

Before entering law enforcement, Booth served in the U.S. Army as a sergeant in a combat infantry platoon and a military police squad stationed in the



United States, Germany, Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. He was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge for service during Operation Desert Storm.

Booth succeeds Philip Broadfoot, who served as police chief in Danville for 14 years before retiring effective Jan. 1.

### Dementi retires from VML



**Sherall Dementi**, special projects coordinator for VML, retired as of January 31. Dementi joined VML in 2005. Her responsibilities included database maintenance for the VML membership, as well as the databases for two VML affiliate groups, the Virginia Local Government Management Association and the Virginia Building and Code Officials Association. She also served as circulation manager of *Virginia Town & City*. As special projects coordinator, her responsibilities included managing logistics of various VML offsite events.

Prior to coming to VML, Dementi worked as a workers' compensation adjuster for VML Insurance Programs. Before that, she was a court reporter for 16 years with the firm of Cook & Wiley, Inc.

VML wishes her the best in her retirement!

### Taylor named Alexandria's legislative director

In January, City Manager Mark B. Jinks appointed **Sarah G. Taylor** as Alexandria's legislative director.



According to a city press release, Taylor first joined the City in 2001 as a public information specialist for the Office of Historic Alexandria, and later served as a public affairs officer in the office of the city manager. She has also served in legislative, communications, and planning positions for Henrico County, VA, and the cities of Bristol and New Haven, CT. In addition, she has worked as a consultant for San Francisco and Richmond, CA. Taylor earned

- Taylor -

a bachelor's degree in political science and urban studies from the University of Richmond.

Since 2010, Taylor has been a senior official with the Democratic caucus of the Oklahoma State Senate, where she most recently served as chief of staff. In that role, Taylor worked to develop multi-sector coalitions and advance legislation of interest to local governments.

Taylor succeeds Bernard Caton, who was the City's legislative director from 1995 until his retirement in fall 2017.

### Martone named Lexington public works director

City Manager Noah A. Simon named **Jeffrey Martone** as the director of public works in Lexington, VA at the end of December.

The city's press release notes that Martone is a licensed professional engineer who has worked in civil engineering and construction for over 25 years. He had been serving as interim director of the department since this past fall, following the retirement of Mike Kennedy. Martone was appointed the city engineer in Lexington in 2015.

Prior to his employment at the city, Martone worked for almost 20 years at Pembroke Construction Company, Inc., based out of Hampton. Before that, Martone was employed as a project engineer for two Newport News consulting companies.

Martone has a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Ohio State University and a master's degree in civil engineering from Old Dominion University.

### Charlottesville hires new director of communications



**Brian Wheeler** will assume the position of director of communications in Charlottesville on February 20, according to a city media release issued January 22.

Wheeler is currently the executive director of Charlottesville Tomorrow, a media outlet covering Charlottesville and Albemarle

County governments. He also served as a member of the Albemarle County School Board from 2004 to 2010, including two years as the Board Chair.

Prior to working with Charlottesville Tomorrow, Wheeler was the chief information officer at SNL Financial (now S&P Global Market Intelligence), which is a provider of data to Wall Street. Before that, he worked at the W. Alton Jones Foundation, a private family foundation.

### Hill assumes reins in Fairfax County

**Byron Hill** came on board as the county executive in Fairfax County on January 2, 2018. Hill served as the county administrator in James City County from 2014 through 2017.

Prior to coming to James City County, Hill was the deputy administrator in Beaufort County, SC for seven years. Hill also has served as the vice chancellor for finance and operations at the University of South Carolina's Beaufort/Bluffton Campus, and in administrative positions at the University of Maryland.

Hill is the recipient of an award for academic excellence from the American Association of Budget and Program Analysts. He has an undergraduate degree in public administration from Alfred University and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Southern California.

He replaces Edward L. Long, who retired in September.

### In memoriam

**J. Steven Randolph**, who served on the city council in Manassas for 28 years, from 1986 to 2014, passed away on January 1, 2018. Among other accomplishments, he worked to bring the Virginia Railway Express commuter train service to the city and to build a new train station. He was a former member of the VML Executive Committee and its Environmental Quality Committee.

## Meter, street light upgrades lead to savings, improved customer service in Martinsville

THE CITY OF MARTINSVILLE saved \$260,440 in utility operating and maintenance expenses following the installation of new water and electric meters three months earlier, according to a November 29 article in the *Martinsville Bulletin* that reported on the city council meeting held the day before.

The newspaper reported that Johnson Controls replaced about 8000 electric meters and 7300 water meters with ones that will be read electronically from a central location. Prior to the replacement of the meters, city staff had to read the meters individually. Further, the company said that as the meters that were replaced had aged, they began to operate more slowly and record lower electric and water usage than was actually used.

The replacement of the meters was part of a \$7.4 million project undertaken by the city that was completed earlier in 2017. Another part of the project was to install citywide approximately 3,000 new street lights based on light-emitting diode (LED) technology. The LED lights use less electricity and require less maintenance but are designed to be brighter than the lights that were replaced.

The city financed the project through a lease purchase arrangement that is designed to be paid for in part through lower expenditures on energy and staff, as well as additional revenue resulting from the more accurate util-

ity meter readings. The bills for some utility customers have increased due to the more accurate readings.

While not discussed in the newspaper article, the meter upgrades also improve customer service as excessive water consumption is detected immediately. This capacity has allowed city staff on numerous occasions to contact customers to let them know about a potential leak. In many cases, the customer would not have known about the leak until the next billing cycle. City staff notes that the new system detected close to 20 residential leaks during a recent cold spell that included below-freezing temperatures for multiple days. The leaks generally were from broken pipes the residents did not know they had.

City staff also relates that the electric meters have the capability of notifying the system when there is a power outage, so that restoration can begin more quickly. Further, the electric meters detect high temperatures. In one case an electric meter flagged a high temperature that could have led to a house fire. A defective meter base was identified, crews were dispatched, and the meter was immediately pulled.

According to the article, Johnson Controls had guaranteed that the city would save at least \$145,678, but the city is now showing savings of an additional \$114,762.

The full article can be found at <http://bit.ly/2E4o8ew>.

## Richmond among first in nation to use FirstNet

RICHMOND IS AMONG the first cities in the U.S. to begin using FirstNet, a wireless broadband network designed exclusively for public safety officials.

According to a January 17 press release, the city's Department of Emergency Communications recently began testing FirstNet, which is expected to be used city-wide by the end of 2018.

The network was created by an independent authority within the U.S. Department of Commerce in partnership with AT&T. The network will allow public safety officials to share data without being vulnerable to delays and outages, especially during times of high-usage, such as major events and disasters. Fire, police, 911 and the city's ambulance authority are part of FirstNet.

The information provided by the city notes that then Gov. Terry McAuliffe accepted the FirstNet and AT&T plan last July. Virginia was the first state to decide to participate in the program, but today, all 50 states, two territories and the District of Columbia have opted in.

Richmond and Fairfax County are the first localities in

Virginia to begin using FirstNet. Richmond police officers and personnel in the Department of Emergency Communications are in the process of testing FirstNet during day-to-day operations with phone and mobile data devices.

According to the press release, Jackie Crotts, the deputy director of technology for Richmond's Department of Emergency Communications, said "During the 2011 earthquake, all cell phone service went down because the system was saturated. That won't happen with FirstNet. There was no up-front cost for the city, because we were able to use our existing mobile data devices."

FirstNet and AT&T will build, operate and maintain the wireless broadband communications network for Virginia's public safety community at no cost to the state for the next 25 years, according to FirstNet.

Additional information on FirstNet is available at [FirstNet.com](http://FirstNet.com).

As a note from the league, VML Executive Director Michelle Gowdy has been a member of the workgroup working to implement FirstNet in Virginia.



## Herndon is on the go

“HERNDON ON THE GO” is the official platform for Herndon citizens to access town government in a single location from mobile devices.

According to the town’s website, citizens can submit, track and view nearby service requests through their smartphones. Back at the office, town staff redirects and responds to submitted requests through a workflow management system and provides residents real-time status updates.

Citizens also can pay their water bill and find information about town events, town news, police news, town meetings, employment opportunities, and more. Widgets also connect users to the town’s restaurant web-

site, town places such as parks, and the town’s Facebook page.

“Herndon ON the Go” is downloadable for free through iTunes and Google Play. The app is powered by PublicStuff, the town’s vendor for its customer relationship management (CRM) interface.

Additional information is on the town’s website at <http://bit.ly/2DEVLXt>.



The logo for Herndon ON THE GO is a red rounded square. At the top, the word "Herndon" is written in white. Below it is a large, stylized white "on". At the bottom, the words "THE GO" are written in white.

## Norfolk recognized for citizen engagement

NORFOLK HAS BEEN NAMED as one of five Citizen-Engaged Communities in the U.S. for 2017 – 2019 by Public Technology Institute (PTI). This is the third consecutive time Norfolk has been named a citizen-engaged community.

According to a city news release, the award recognizes the city’s Norfolk Cares Center, which is the single point of contact for all citizen service requests, issues and inquiries. Norfolk Cares representatives are available Monday through Friday from 7 am to 6 pm, but receive requests through voicemail, email and online 24 hours a day.

The city will be featured in an annual publication and on the PTI website.

In 2017, the Norfolk Cares Center participated in 46 engagement events, received 148,059 incoming calls and assisted with citizen inquiries and issues through an additional 68,642 outgoing calls. Norfolk Cares representatives also processed 22,361 online requests, 4,487 requests through email and another 5,892 mobile application requests.

The four other cities recognized by PTI for citizen engagement were Bellevue, WA; Charlotte, NC; Fresno, CA and San Francisco, CA.

The city press release is posted at <http://bit.ly/2Gi3GY7>; the PTI announcement is posted at <http://bit.ly/2Bre4cK>.



## Roanoke County unveils new brand

ROANOKE COUNTY OFFICIALS released new gateway signs and fleets decals showcasing the county’s new branding mark on December 1, 2017. The brand, which includes a profile of McAfee Knob, includes blues and greens that reflect the area’s mountain, river and open spaces.

According to a county press release, the brand grew out of the Board of Supervisors vision statement of making Roanoke County “a vibrant, innovative, and scenic community.” The board developed the vision statement in 2016.

The new Roanoke County gateway signs are installed in three locations so far, with a fourth location planned for this spring. They are located on Route 460 West, Route 11 West, and Route 419 South. A fourth sign will be installed in 2018 on Route 220 South.

The new brand was developed by county staff in the Public Information Office and the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department. During the unveiling of the new brand, Roanoke County Supervisor (and then Board Chair) Joe McNamara recognized the work of staff in developing and launching the new brand with no additional funding outside the existing county budget.

More information is available at <http://bit.ly/2rY8L56>.



## Smithfield recertified as crime prevention community

THE TOWN OF SMITHFIELD was recently recognized for having its Certified Crime Prevention Community Award re-certified. Derrick Mays, the accreditation center program manager at the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), presented the re-certification award to Smithfield Police Chief Alonzo Howell and Mayor Carter Williams.

Other re-certified communities include Chesterfield County, Christiansburg, Fairfax County, Galax, Hampton, Hanover County; Henrico County, Herndon, Newport News, Roanoke, and Virginia Beach.

The Crime Prevention Community program encourages localities to develop and implement collaborative community safety plans within a flexible framework. It also provides an ongoing process by which communities can reassess and update their plans to address emerging

community safety issues. To obtain certification or re-certification, a locality must meet 12 core community safety elements/strategies in addition to a minimum of seven approved optional elements.

DCJS runs and monitors the program.

(L-R) Chief Howell, Mr. Mays, and Mayor Williams.



## Resiliency workshop held in Norfolk

MIT Solve, the City of Norfolk and RISE hosted a half-day workshop on January 24 in Norfolk that brought together people from Hampton Roads, the United States and internationally to discuss and prioritize key resilience challenges for coastal communities.

Resilience is a key topic as communities adapt to rising sea levels, more frequent or stronger natural disasters and economic changes. This workshop was the first step in a broader year-long partnership between MIT and RISE.

Norfolk is one of the world's first members of The Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities program and is the third city in the world to develop a Resilience Strategy. The city's leadership on resiliency issues is the reason MIT Solve chose Norfolk as the site for the workshop.

RISE is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping solve some of the most pressing resilience problems facing coastal communities. RISE seeks to position Hampton Roads as a global leader in the effort to build more resilient communities. For more information, visit riseresilience.org.

Solve is an initiative of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) that identifies and supports lasting solutions to the world's most pressing challenges. Solve brings together technologists, social entrepreneurs, business leaders, and others to find and implement solutions to specific challenges. Learn more at solve.mit.edu.

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# Consider long-term financial stability when choosing an insurance pool

**W**HEN CHOOSING A local government entity insurance pool, consider the financial stability of the pool – or the prospect of assessment.

In 2014, school districts in Kentucky were assessed to the tune of \$154,000 after the Kentucky School Boards Insurance Trust assessed members to recoup deficits in its workers' compensation and property and liability pools. Additional insolvencies have included the Oklahoma Schools Property and Casualty Cooperative and the Texas Association of Public Schools Property and Liability Fund, which dissolved.

While many entities seek out low-cost insurance rates, they fail to consider the importance of being in an appropriately funded insurance pool. A pool with an actuarially sound reserve funding or equity policy is more likely to have the strength to persevere through years of large and costly claims or fluctuations in the reinsurance market.

A strong equity position provides these benefits:


- Balanced rate stability;
- Paying insured claims promptly and adequately;
- Weathering reinsurance market changes;
- Ability to expand coverage and services;
- The capability to award risk management grants to member's year after year; and
- The ability for a pool to fund all projected liabilities.

Rest assured, no insurance pool or insurance company can unequivocally guarantee it will never make member assessments or go insolvent, as no one can predict the future.

VML Insurance Programs (VMLIP), however, focuses on

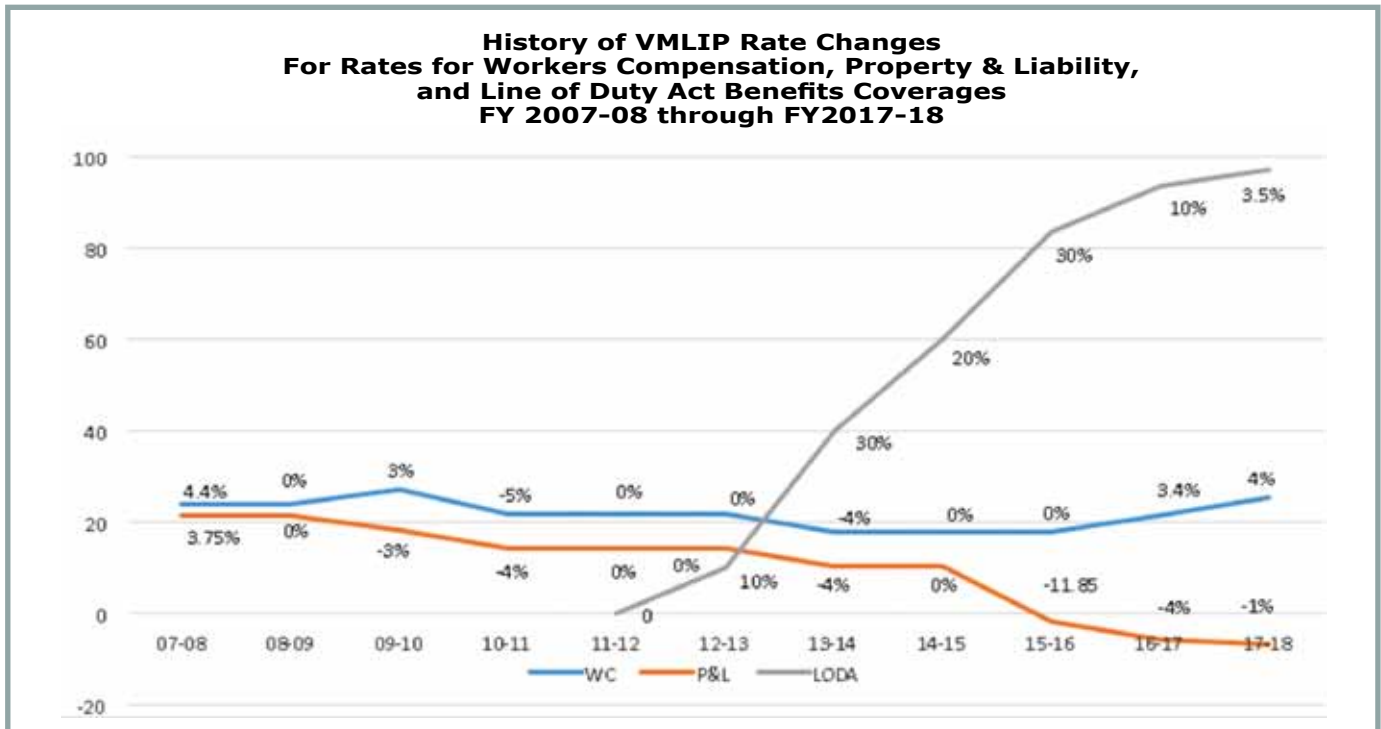
ensuring rate stability. The oldest local government entity insurance pool in Virginia, VMLIP has a strategic plan that takes into consideration how much more (or less) capital is required to withstand financial uncertainty.

The graph below showing VMLIP's below-rate stability clearly illustrates the benefit of having enough equity to maintain stable rates, even while incurring losses from 200-year events such as the 2011 earthquake, increased hurricane activity, major flooding, widespread hail damage storms, devastating tornados – coupled with – with multi-million-dollar liability awards, significant workers' compensation claim payments and medical expense inflation.

When it is time to review your annual property, liability and workers' compensation insurance proposal, you also should request the pool's annual financial report so that you can see the equity maintained by the pool. To find the most up-to-date VMLIP annual report, visit: [www.vmlins.org](http://www.vmlins.org) 

## About VMLIP

VMLIP IS THE FIRST and largest group self-insurance pool in the Commonwealth of Virginia. For more than 35 years VMLIP has provided auto, property, liability, and workers' compensation coverage to more than 470 local political subdivisions across Virginia. With assets greater than \$300 million and members' equity of more than \$106 million, VMLIP is the most financially secure self-insurance pool in Virginia.



# Finance Forum draws lively crowd

**D**ESPITE THE DIRE WEATHER forecast of snow and icy weather coming that evening, attendance at the January 3 Finance Forum was good, and the conference attendees were engaged in a day-long discussion of economic and fiscal matters.

Featured speakers included Virginia Senate Finance Committee Interim Co-Director Sarah Herzog, who pointed out that a conservative revenue forecast for the state was appropriate because Federal spending could have a significant impact on state income tax collections. She reviewed the challenges that some school divisions face in finding enough teachers, noting that in Central Virginia, Petersburg and Richmond each had more than 50 unfilled teaching positions as the school year began.

Virginia Beach Director of Finance Patti Phillips described the role of local elected officials in fiscal stewardship. She reviewed a series of “red flags” that deserve attention, including one-time significant revenue items, significant issues with collecting revenues, use of aging analysis tools in the review of collections and overdue or delinquent accounts, an increase in delinquent accounts and significant revenue shortfalls.


Fiscal Analytics Principal Jim Regimbal made suggestions for the state to improve its economic growth prospects, including measures such as addressing the K-12 achievement gap, improving the connection between community college

education and workforce needs, encouraging more venture capital and gap financing, focusing state policies on infrastructure needs, modernizing the state/local tax base and developing more tools for localities to relieve their fiscal stress.

Virginia Retirement System Executive Director Patricia Bishop had good news for conference participants. Based on the recently-completed valuations of local pension plans, the funded status increased in a majority of local plans, and contribution rates decreased, as compared to the 2016 valuation results. Employer contribution rates decreased for 306 of the 589 employers participating in VRS. A majority of the rate decreases were associated with plans without enhanced hazardous duty benefits.

Jeff Shapiro, a political columnist with the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, gave an informative and entertaining talk on Virginia’s political history and the likely changes in the political landscape in light of the election results last November.

As the last presentation of the day, VML/VACO Finance Director Bob Lauterberg presented the results of a survey of local fiscal conditions (see story on page 12).

VML President Dr. Patricia Woodbury presided over several of the sessions, and Virginia Association of Counties Past President Judy Lyttle closed out the meeting. VML and VACO co-sponsored the meeting and VML/VACO Finance sponsored the luncheon for participants. 



Virginia Senate Finance Committee Interim Co-Director Sarah Herzog discusses state finances at the forum.





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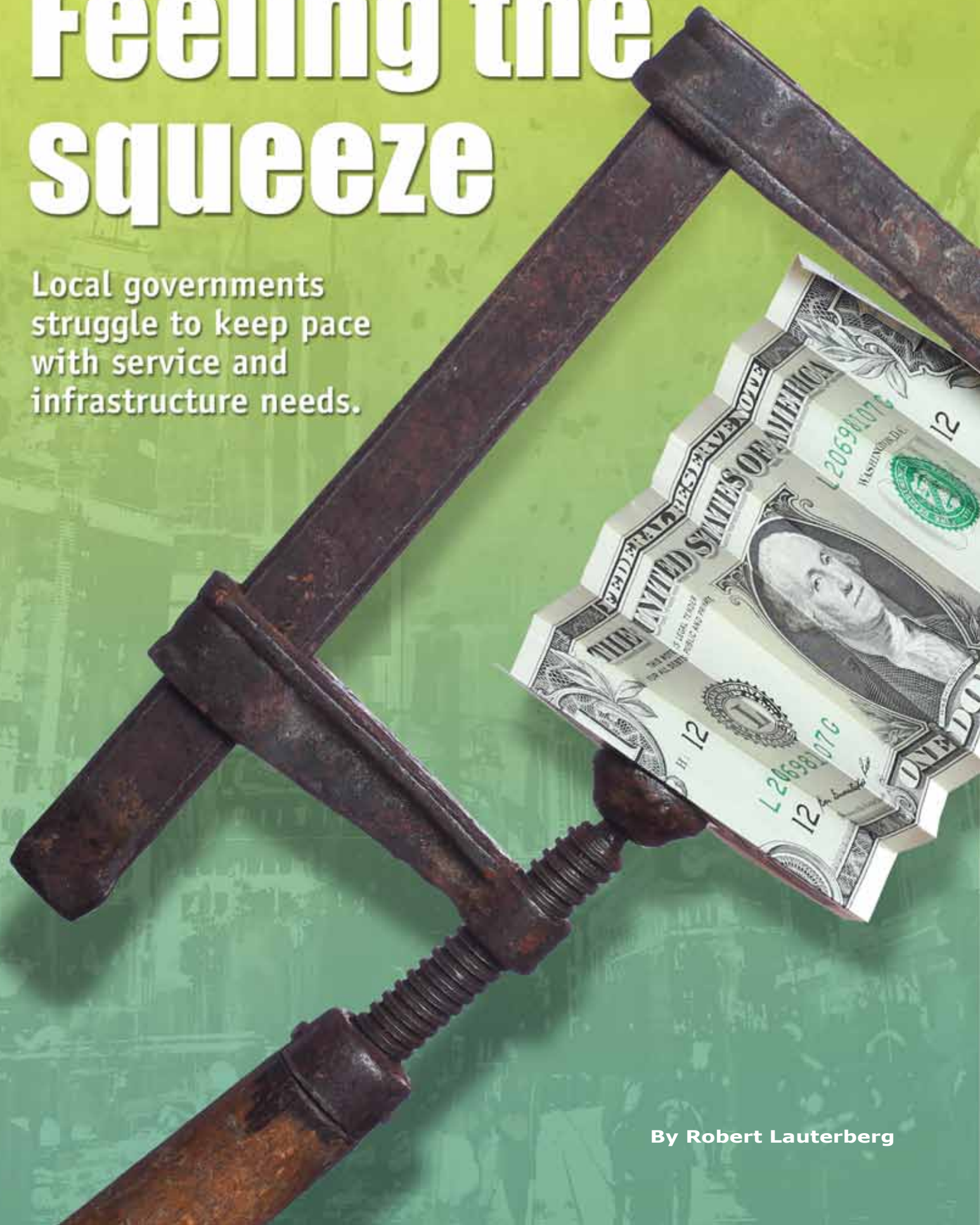
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**1.** RTD columnist Jeff Shapiro discussed changes in Virginia’s political landscape. **2.** Virginia Beach Director of Finance Patti Phillips pointed out red flags that warn local officials about fiscal concerns. **3.** (L-R) Hampton Roads Planning District Chief Financial Officer Nancy Collins and Senior Accounting Manager Shelia Wilson. **4.** Petersburg Finance Director Blake Rane, AQUA Virginia, Inc. Director of Business Development Clifton Parker, and Petersburg Projects Manager Reginald Tabor.

# Feeling the squeeze

Local governments struggle to keep pace with service and infrastructure needs.



By Robert Lauterberg



**W**ITH REPORTS INDICATING the national economy as a whole is getting stronger, have local governments finally turned the corner? And, how do Virginia localities compare with their peers across the U.S.?

The financial services arm of VML and VACo – VML/VACo Finance – conducted a survey of Virginia local governments to find out. Modeled after the National League of Cities (NLC) City Fiscal Conditions survey, the Virginia survey was distributed to cities, counties, and towns across the Commonwealth.

The current perceptions of local officials serve as a leading indicator of the future fiscal actions of local governments. Local officials are likely to get a sense of local economic conditions long before the impacts of such conditions are picked up in the annual financial reporting cycle.

In its City Fiscal Conditions 2017, NLC estimates the lag between changes in the economic cycle and the impact on local revenues is typically 18 months or longer. One reason for the lag is that local governments are largely reliant on real estate taxes. Local governments may not feel the impact of changing property values until the next real estate assessment, which is sometimes years away. This “lag effect” may help to explain why many Virginia local governments were still mired in a fiscal slump years after the Great Recession ended.

As an indicator of where localities actually stand today, the Virginia Fiscal Conditions Survey reveals views that are positive, and that indicate areas of concern.

### Good news & cautionary signs

To understand the “big picture,” local officials were asked to identify the three “most positive” factors impacting their local budgets. The good news is that a majority of respondents identified their local economy (54.9 percent) and tax base (51.2 percent) among the three most positive factors. Rounding out the top three positive factors was population growth (23.2 percent).

These top three positive factors identified by Virginia localities were the same three identified by respondents in the NLC national survey – but by even larger percentages: 77 percent, 83 percent, and 33 percent, respectively.

The next three factors identified by Virginia localities as

“positives” were all related to the current low rate of inflation: health benefits, energy costs, and prices/costs in general.

Along with these positive findings, other survey findings are cause for concern. When asked to name the three most negative factors impacting local budgets, respondents identified these spending challenges: infrastructure (56.1 percent), health benefits (46.3 percent), and unfunded state mandates (39.0 percent). Infrastructure funding was also the top concern reported in the NLC survey, similarly identified by 55 percent of respondents nationwide.

Interestingly, the Virginia survey named health benefits as a top-three negative budget factor (46.3 percent) even while a sizeable but smaller percentage (17.1 percent) named this factor as a positive. One explanation for the difference in opinion may be that health insurance costs, after rising dramatically in recent years, are rising less rapidly today – at least in certain areas.

Another interesting result: while 51.2 percent named their tax base as a top-three positive factor, a significant percentage of localities (23.2 percent) view this factor as a negative. Clearly, local officials have very different views of the state of their local fiscal conditions depending on their own local and regional circumstances.

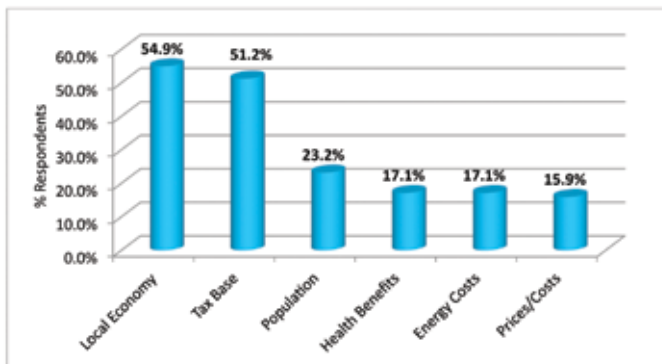
Incidentally, one of the top three negative factors identified by NLC respondents that did not make the Virginia list is the cost of retiree health benefits. This issue is at the forefront this year because of new accounting standards that will require governments to report their total health insurance liability on the face of their financial statements. In prior years, local governments were allowed to phase-in the reporting of this cost – often considered a major budget driver – over a period of up to 30 years. With the new reporting requirement, local governments that have not yet begun funding their so-called “Other Post Employment Benefits” (OPEB) may see a significant degradation of their bottom-line “net position.” Fortunately, a majority of Virginia localities with the most significant OPEB liabilities are already setting aside funds for this purpose, many through the VACo/VML Pooled OPEB Trust.

### Outlook for local revenues

Putting its survey results in context, NLC noted that revenues of U.S. cities through 2016 had not yet fully recovered from the recession. Consistent with this finding, an examination of audited financial statements for Virginia cities reveals that their FY 2016 revenues in inflation-adjusted dollars were

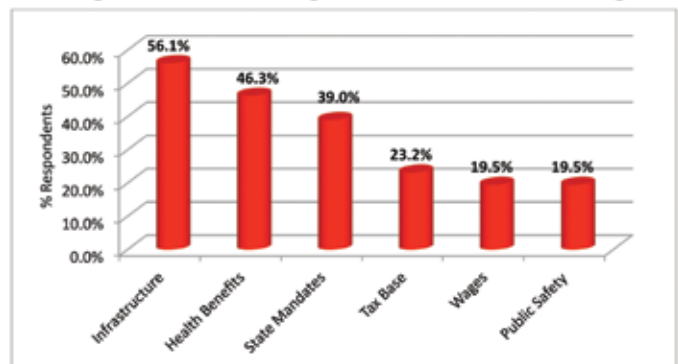
#### Positive factors impacting local budgets

Percentage of localities selecting factor as one of three most positive.



#### Negative factors impacting local budgets

Percentage of localities selecting factor as one of three most negative.



## Feeling the squeeze

just 96.7 percent of revenues collected in FY 2007. However, for Virginia localities as a group - cities, counties, and towns reporting to the Auditor of Public Accounts - revenues in FY 2016 fully recovered, exceeding FY 2007 revenues by 3.2 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars. These figures are taken from the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts (APA), Local Government Comparative Reports.

Still, local revenues are growing at a much slower pace than before the Great Recession. VML/VACo Finance examined FY 2016 reports, the latest audited financial data compiled by the APA, and then asked survey respondents to provide their actual results for FY 2017 as well as projections for FY 2018.

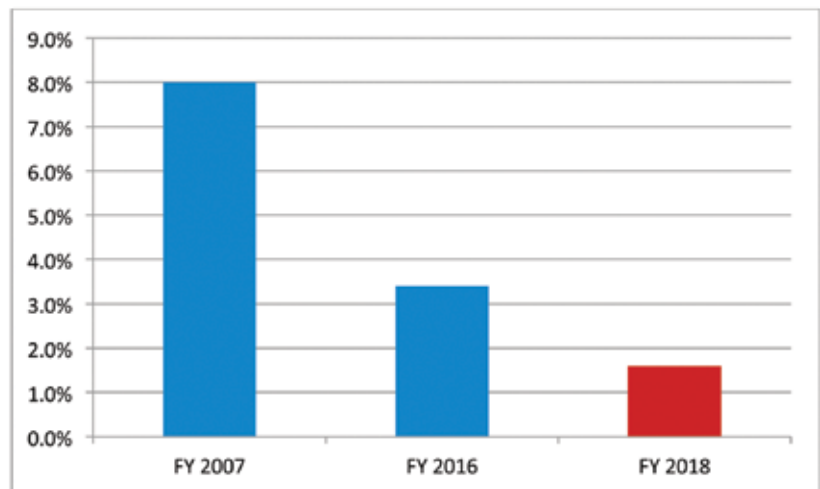
The audited APA data shows that local government revenues grew markedly slower in FY 2016 (3.4 percent) than the 8.0 percent in FY 2007, the last pre-recession year. (8.0 percent). (A parallel trend was noted by surveyed localities that report to the APA. For this group, revenue growth was 4.5 percent in FY 2016, compared to a rate of 7.6 percent in FY 2007.) When asked how fast General Fund revenues are projected to grow between FY 2017 and FY 2018, the aggregate survey response was 1.6 percent -- indicating even further slowing.

The same trend applies to real estate tax revenues. Audited APA data shows real estate tax revenues grew by 3.8 percent in FY 2016, as compared with 10.4 percent in the last pre-recession year, FY 2007. (Survey results track this trend as well, as real estate tax revenues declined to 3.9 percent in FY 2016 from a rate of 10.0 percent in FY 2007.) The survey indicates that real estate tax revenues will grow at a still slower aggregate rate of 2.8 percent in the current fiscal year (FY 2018).

More troubling, 31 percent of survey respondents reported that they expect total General Fund revenues to actually decline this year as compared to last.

The outlook for local revenues reflects what is happening in the larger economy. It is no surprise that large swaths of the Commonwealth, particularly in Southside and

## Local Revenue Growth Pre-recession, Post-recession, Today\*



\*FY 2007 & FY 2016: Auditor of Public Accounts; FY 2018: survey responses

Southwest Virginia, continue to adjust to disruptions in the core industries of mining and textile manufacturing. A more recent phenomenon, centered mostly in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads, is federal sequestration, which has decimated defense spending.

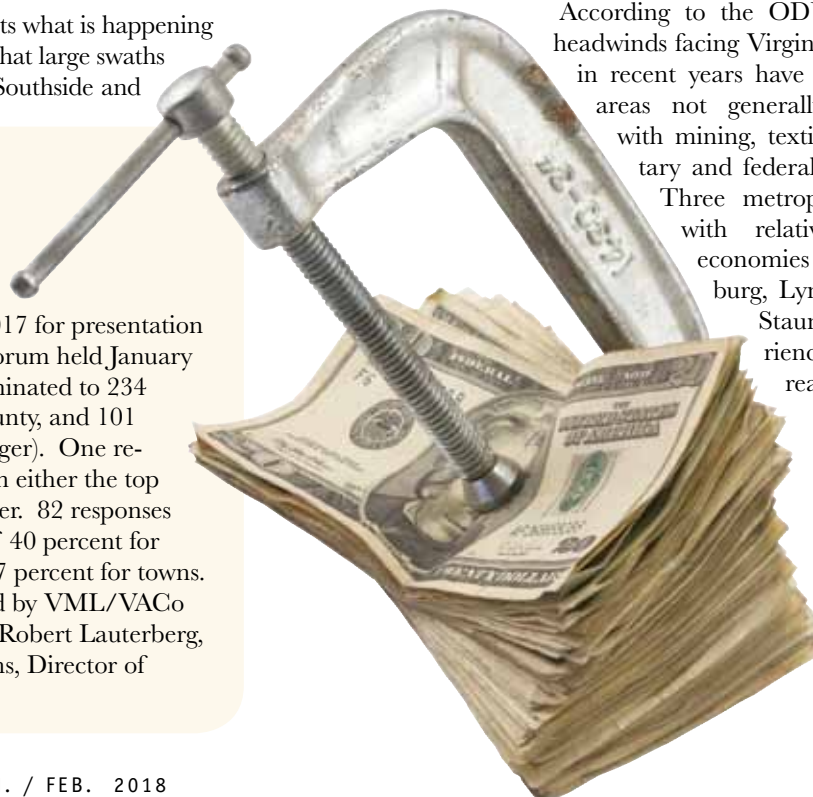
According to the 2017 State of the Commonwealth Report published by Old Dominion University (ODU), close to 30 percent of Virginia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is directly related to defense spending. Between 2008 and 2016, sequestration has had a staggering effect on Virginia's economy:

- Federal contracts in Virginia declined by 7.8 percent
- Total defense contract volume is down by 21.1 percent
- The number of active-duty military personnel in Virginia has declined by 25.5 percent

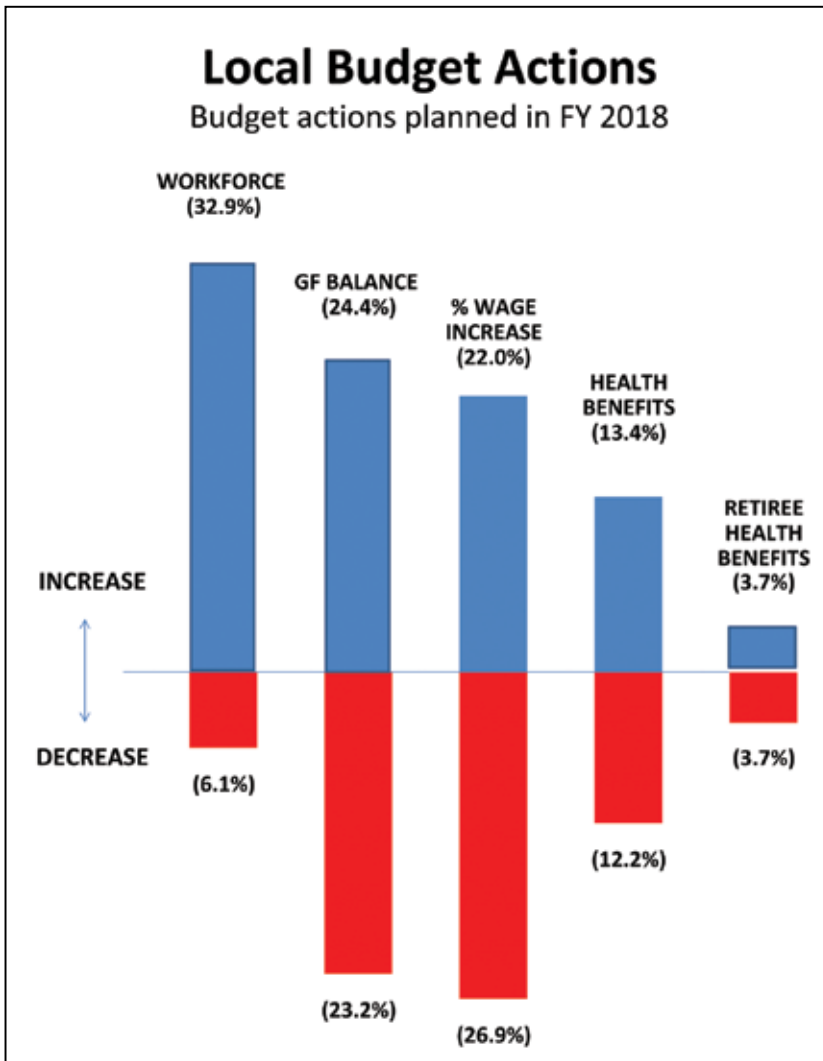
According to the ODU study, the headwinds facing Virginia's economy in recent years have also affected areas not generally associated with mining, textiles, the military and federal contracting. Three metropolitan areas with relatively diverse economies - Harrisonburg, Lynchburg, and Staunton - experienced declining real rates of

## How the survey was conducted

THE VIRGINIA LOCAL Fiscal Conditions survey was conducted during November and December 2017 for presentation to the 2018 VML/VACo Finance Forum held January 3, 2018. Online surveys were disseminated to 234 localities (every Virginia city and county, and 101 towns that have a professional manager). One response was solicited per locality, from either the top administrator or chief financial officer. 82 responses were returned, for a response rate of 40 percent for cities and counties combined, and 27 percent for towns. Surveys were compiled and analyzed by VML/VACo Finance staff under the direction of Robert Lauterberg, Managing Director, and Beau Blevins, Director of Government Consulting.







growth between the years 2010 and 2016. The Roanoke metropolitan area was essentially stagnant with growth of just 0.1 percent.

On the other hand, three other metropolitan areas performed close to the 2.1 percent national average compound annual growth rate during this period: Blacksburg and Charlottesville (1.8 percent and Richmond (2.0 percent). And, recent developments – including the passage of a federal tax-cut stimulus package, record-high stock prices, and improving GDP reports – suggest there may be better times ahead.

### Local response

With localities facing such an uneven situation and so much uncertainty, it is no wonder that there is no consensus among local officials on what budget actions to take. About the same number of officials are adding to their General Fund balances (24.4 percent) as are planning to draw down those balances in order to balance the budget (23.2 percent). There is a similar split between those giving employees a higher percentage wage increase this year versus last (22.0 percent) and those offering a either a smaller percentage increase or no increase (26.9 percent). The number of localities increasing versus decreasing health benefits for employees and retirees is also evenly divided.


Approximately one-fifth of localities indicated they were implementing new revenue actions this year, including impos-

ing new fees (22.0 percent); adjusting real estate tax rates (17.1 percent increase / 2.4 percent decrease) and personal property tax rates (4.9 percent increase / 1.2 percent decrease).

Regardless of the local revenue picture, the demand for services continues to grow. One-third (32.9 percent) of local governments surveyed will increase the size of their workforce to meet the needs of constituents, while a small percentage (6.1 percent) is downsizing.

At the same time, infrastructure spending – identified in the survey as the biggest local budget challenge – is causing more localities to take on more debt. According to the latest APA audited figures, outstanding local bond financed debt totaled \$24.1 billion in FY 2016, 30.4 percent more in nominal dollars than in the last pre-recession year of FY 2007.

Virginia localities are at a crossroads. Should another recession arrive in the near future, Virginia local governments appear to be in an especially vulnerable position given that many of them are still feeling the squeeze of the Great Recession.

If, however, the economy continues to improve, local governments may finally have the opportunity to strengthen their financial positions and begin to address their most pressing service and infrastructure needs. 

**About the author:** Robert Lauterberg is a Managing Director of VML/VACo Finance and an MSRB-registered Municipal Advisor.

### References:

National League of Cities, *City Fiscal Conditions 2017*, at <http://www.nlc.org/CFC>.

Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, *Local Government Comparative Reports*, available at [http://www.apa.virginia.gov/APA\\_Reports/LG\\_ComparativeReports.aspx](http://www.apa.virginia.gov/APA_Reports/LG_ComparativeReports.aspx)

Robert M. McNab and James V. Koch, *2017 State of the Commonwealth Report*, Center for Economic Analysis and Policy, Old Dominion University, available at <http://www.stateofthecommonwealth.com/>.

### About VML/VACo Finance

VML/VACO FINANCE is the financial services arm of the Virginia Municipal League and Virginia Association of Counties. Established in 2003, VML/VACo Finance is registered with the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board (MSRB) as a Municipal Advisor. In addition to providing Financing and Municipal Advisory services, the program administers the VACo/VML Pooled OPEB Trust and the Virginia Investment Pool (VIP) and assists localities with accounting services. More information is available at [valocalfinance.org](http://valocalfinance.org).

# HOWARD W. DOBBINS

1919 - 2017

## Longtime VML General Counsel dies at 98

**H**OWARD W. DOBBINS, a Richmond lawyer whose distinguished career included serving the interests of Virginia local governments as the longtime General Counsel for VML, died Dec. 25. He was 98.

Mr. Dobbins was retired from the law firm of Williams Mullen, where he had served as a senior partner and later of counsel. Not until the age of 95 – in 2015 – did he fully retire. Serving as VML General Counsel from 1968 until 2012 – a span of 44 years – he was instrumental in the league’s transformation from a statewide association providing traditional service programs to one offering more entrepreneurial ventures such as group insurance. He and his wife Virginia Anne were fixtures at VML’s annual conferences and Executive Committee meetings. An affable gentleman in the truest sense of the term, Mr. Dobbins was a gifted storyteller with a keen sense of humor. He was a favorite among league staff members.

“I could always count on Howard to be a reliable sounding board on organization problems, legal matters and legislative issues,” said R. Michael Amyx, who worked closely with Mr. Dobbins as Executive Director of the league from 1980-2013.

Mr. Dobbins specialized in law related to banks and other financial institutions, according to accounts of his career provided by Williams Mullen and the Virginia State Bar. The work included organization and licensing, representation before regulatory and administrative bodies, mergers and acquisitions, and commercial litigation. He lectured frequently on various financial and commercial subjects and had extensive experience as a trial lawyer in all state and federal courts, at both trial and appellate levels.

Mr. Dobbins, however, was best known to Virginia’s local governments for his experience in governmental matters. He testified frequently before committees of the General Assembly as VML General Counsel. For years, he fought on behalf of

VML’s interests in the Senate Local Government Committee where his extensive knowledge of local government law made him an invaluable resource to the committee while serving the interests of VML member local governments.

Mr. Dobbins was the driving force behind the adoption



**Howard W. Dobbins, then VML general counsel, stands next to a portrait of himself adjacent to the Dobbins conference room at Williams Mullen.**

of legislation in the 1980 session of the General Assembly that enabled localities to pool their liabilities under the Virginia Workers’ Compensation Act. Passage of this and other measures led to the creation of the Virginia Municipal Group Self Insurance Association (VMGSIA), which is now the VML Insurance Programs. VMGSIA was the first group self-insurance association in Virginia, providing workers’ compensation coverage for local political subdivisions. Mr. Dobbins not only drafted the law, but he worked the halls of the General Assembly to ensure its passage.

Early in his legal career, Mr. Dobbins joined the Richmond firm that eventually became Wallerstein, Goode & Dobbins. In 1986, according to the state bar, that firm merged with Williams, Mullen & Christian and took on the name of Williams, Mullen, Christian & Dobbins. In 1999, another merger led to its current incarnation as Williams Mullen. Mr. Dobbins



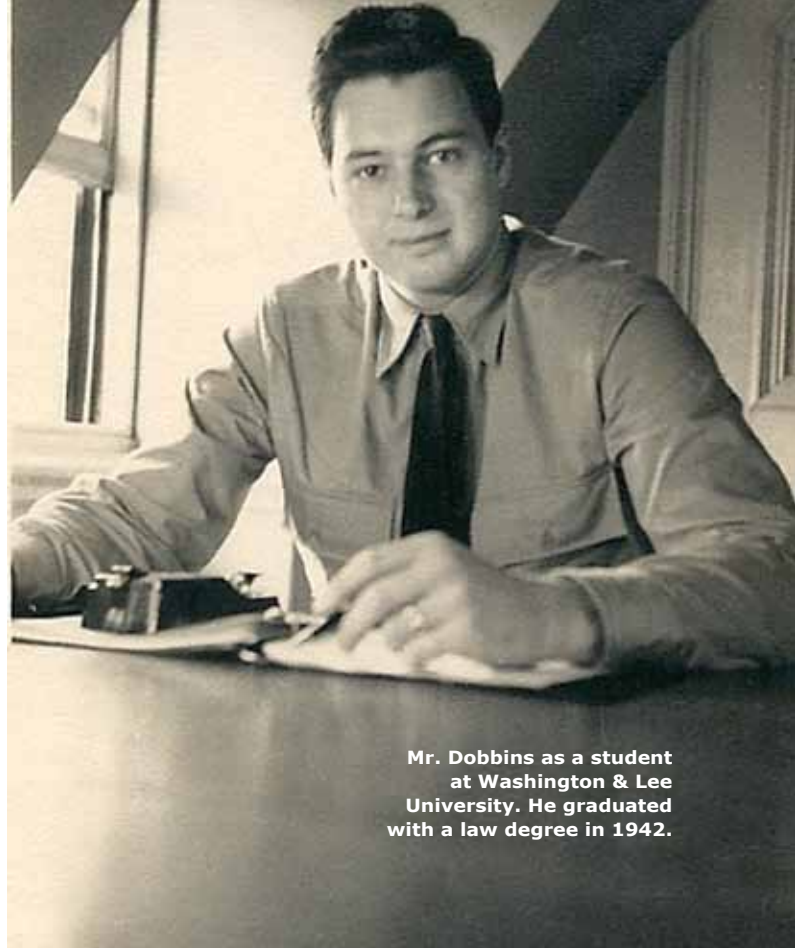
was described by the firm as a “transformational figure” in its history.

His legal involvement with the league began in the late 1950s when he assisted Morton L. Wallerstein and V. Cassel Adamson, who served as general counsel until 1968. The topic of Mr. Dobbins’ first column for the league magazine in 1968 demonstrated that he had a good handle on Virginia municipal law. It was titled “Sovereign Power.” He used the opportunity to outline the significance of the Dillon Rule – a rule of law that limits the authority of local governments in Virginia to that expressly granted by the General Assembly and the Virginia Constitution.

Calvin Fowler Jr., president and chief executive officer of Williams Mullen, described Mr. Dobbins as “a lawyer’s lawyer.”

“His knowledge of the law was extensive, and his skills covered multiple practice areas. Howard was a leader in the legal profession and was respected and admired by his peers,” Fowler told the state bar. “Simply put, you would be hard pressed to find a finer person or a finer lawyer than Howard Dobbins.”

According to a Williams Mullen summary of his career: Mr. Dobbins received a combined undergraduate and juris doctor degree from Washington & Lee University, with high honors, in 1942. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and Omicron Delta Kappa in the undergraduate school, and to Phi



**Mr. Dobbins as a student at Washington & Lee University. He graduated with a law degree in 1942.**



**Mr. Dobbins judges an entry in the Crystal Goblet contest for the best tasting public drinking water at VML’s 1999 Annual Conference in Williamsburg.**



**Mr. Dobbins with the Virginia State Capitol in the background. He represented VML before committees of the General Assembly.**

Delta Phi and Order of the Coif in law school. He served as co-editor-in-chief of the Washington & Lee Law Review and was elected president of the student body. Mr. Dobbins served in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Pacific theaters with the U.S. Navy during World War II.

Mr. Dobbins, according to the summary, was active in the organized bar and served on numerous committees of the Richmond, Virginia and American bar associations and the Virginia State Bar. A past president of the Virginia State Bar in 1974-75, he was formerly a member of the bar’s executive committee and chairman of its Business Law Section.

In addition, Mr. Dobbins was a former member of the


## Howard Dobbins

House of Delegates of the American Bar Association. He was elected as a fellow of both the American Bar Foundation and the Virginia Bar Foundation. He was a permanent member of the Judicial Conference of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Mr. Dobbins was listed in *The Best Lawyers in America*® (1995-present) and had been named a “Super Lawyer” by *Virginia Super Lawyers* magazine. Martindale-Hubbell rated him an AV attorney, its highest rating available, according to the firm.

In 2004, Mr. Dobbins was inducted into the Washington & Lee Athletic Hall of Fame. The citation recognized him as a four-year member of the basketball and football teams, the leading scorer on the basketball team, an all-state basketball selection his junior and senior years, and team captain and student body president his senior year.

Born June 19, 1919 in Louisville, Ky., Mr. Dobbins was predeceased by his parents, Vivian Leon and Katharine Collins Dobbins; his wife, Virginia Anne Jones Dobbins; his brother, Charles William Dobbins and his son, Howard W. Dobbins Jr. Survivors include two daughters, Anne Brasfield (Evans) and Leigh Johnson (Craig); five grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

A full obituary from the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* can be read at <http://bit.ly/2CUZAmM>. 



Howard and Virginia Anne Dobbins were married for 73 years and were fixtures at VML conferences and events.



**Mr. Dobbins as a Captain in the U.S. Navy. He saw action in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Pacific theaters during World War II.**



**Portrait of Mr. Dobbins taken in 1968.**



## REMEMBERING HOWARD DOBBINS

### **R. Michael Amyx, former VML Executive Director**

“That man could tell a great story. Yes, I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard that said about Howard Dobbins at a VML meeting. He was a master joke teller and had wonderful timing for the appropriate quip. Invariably, when discussing a lawsuit, Howard would state, ‘I could have lost that case for a lot less in fees.’ It never got old. He had a true gift as a storyteller and I am thankful he was willing to share it.

“Howard made an effort to know people – another rare gift. Whether it was an elected official or a staff member of a member locality, Howard introduced himself and started to build a long-term relationship. Being around the VML staff frequently, he took a special interest in learning about their backgrounds and families. Howard could be counted on to provide the energy that would make a VML holiday staff luncheon a success.

“As Executive Director of VML, I could always count on Howard to be a reliable sounding board on organization problems, legal matters and legislative issues. In the 1970s municipal leagues moved away from traditional service programs to more entrepreneurial ventures such as group insurance programs. Howard made sure the Executive Committee and staff gave careful study to any new ventures. He would remind us all that VML was providing a full range of services to its members and that any new service program had to have high merit because it potentially placed our reputation at risk. Once a decision was made, he could be counted on to fully implement all legal aspects of the new venture. Howard’s involvement with VML ensured that the organization was always considered to be one of the better state municipal leagues in the country. The thousands of local officials associated with VML over the 44 years that Howard served as general counsel all benefitted from his work and support.

“On a personal note, Howard and [his wife] Virginia Anne were great friends and treated my wife Linda and me like family. Linda and Virginia Anne spent lots of time out and about at different meetings and Linda always said you could put Virginia Anne in the middle of anywhere and she could find her way around. She knew all the best places to go. Linda and I will miss them both.”

### **Joni S. Terry, VML Office Manager**

“I met Howard in 1978 when I first began working for VML. I could tell right away that we would be friends. It was evident to me the importance and dedication he placed on VML. Anytime I saw him I was always greeted with a warm smile. Howard would attend the annual staff holiday lunches and was always the ‘life of the party.’ He would tell a great story, impart some words of wisdom and leave us all laughing with his witty sense of humor.

“I will remember him always as a very intelligent, kind,



**One of Mr. Dobbins’ pastimes during vacations at the beach was reading.**

gentle giant who could always make us laugh. I am so honored to have had the pleasure of meeting and working with him.”

### **Mark K. Flynn, Director of the Virginia Department of Aviation, and former VML General Counsel**

“I worked with Howard in my role of in-house VML attorney and later, after he retired, as general counsel, when I would consult with him on league issues. He understood the law as thoroughly as any attorney I have ever worked with. He was a force to be reckoned with as a lawyer. But, being comfortable with who he was, he never bothered blowing his own horn. He simply did the work to help the league.

“A force though he was, he treated [his wife] Virginia Anne as his queen, never in my experience demanding first chair. I suspect he appreciated that wisdom is the better part of valor.

“Howard’s story-telling abilities went beyond jokes. He would talk about his life on the destroyer in World War II, about the Washington and Lee sports teams he led, and about cases that he had handled over the years. He led quite a life. From knowing him and knowing a bit about his life, I will always consider him to have been a lion among men.”

### **Clay Wirt, former VML Deputy Director**

“Howard served as a willing mentor to me, as I am sure he did to many other younger attorneys. He not only had a solid understanding of local governments and their inner workings, but he cared deeply about our localities and their officials. When arriving at VML in 1981, it didn’t take me long to realize that when Howard spoke, we all listened – so respecting his advice. I enjoyed Howard’s great ability to tell a good story, bringing chuckles and making us all feel at ease. What a great example. He lived a long life and lived it well.”

# Dedicated officials brave wintry weather to attend conference

**E**VEN IN THE face of record-breaking cold temperatures, a hardy group of newly-elected officials met in Charlottesville to discuss topics that would get them off to a good start in their new careers.

University of Virginia Law Professor Richard Schragger kicked off the meeting with a discussion of the importance of public service. He noted that Alexis de Tocqueville said that cities were the backbone of democracy and that robust local governments were a requirement of democratic government. He also noted that as the national government and state legislatures become more paralyzed, local governments are having to do more and more. He said it was important that local officials educate their citizens on the importance of resisting efforts to preempt local authority.


Staunton Mayor Carolyn Dull and City Manager Steve Owen gave tips for healthy council-manager relations, including the expectation that the manager would stay out of individual council disagreements or politics, follow up on council issues and provide clear, well-researched alternatives. For his or her part, the council should be sure to conduct an evaluation of the manager, support the manager's professional development and continuing education, and avoid criticizing the manager and staff in public meetings.

Alan Gernhardt led a discussion that focused on FOIA's core purpose of ensuring that the people of the Commonwealth have ready access to public records and free entry to meetings of public bodies where the business of the people is being conducted. Gernhardt is executive director of the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council. He reminded attendees that all public records and meetings are presumed to be open, unless an exemption is properly invoked, and further, that the provisions of the FOIA statute are to be

liberally construed.

Lynchburg City Attorney Walter Erwin pointed out that the Conflict of Interests Act (COIA) has three main parts: prohibiting public officials from taking certain actions, such as accepting bribes; regulating the acceptance of gifts; and requiring the filing of financial disclosure forms. Erwin reminded the officials that state statute required that they read and familiarize themselves with the COIA and pointed out that VML publishes a guide to COIA, the Freedom of Information Act and the Public Records Act (available on VML's website at <http://bit.ly/2DorOL2>).

Richmond attorney John Conrad said the goal of his talk was to help elected officials identify legal issues that they would face, and learn about the resources available to them about those legal issues. He urged the attendees to be resourceful, to understand the defense of sovereign immunity and to learn that the exceptions basically swallow that rule. He suggested that it was important for officials to seek the advice of counsel when legal issues arise.

In her presentation on budgeting basics, Roanoke Director of Finance Amelia Merchant defined a budget as a legally required, quantified, planned course of action over a definitive time period that, among other things, translates priorities into resources. Her presentation included a series of tips from the members of the Roanoke City Council, which are presented in the side bar. 

## NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS CONFERENCE

VML thanks Chip Boyles, David Blount and Gretchen Thomas with the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission for their help in hosting the meeting at the Water Street Station in Charlottesville.



Staunton Mayor Carolyn Dull and City Manager Steve Owen discussed the ins and outs of council-manager relations to a full house.



**UVA Law Professor Richard Schragger discussed the importance of public service.**



**Charlottesville Mayor Nikuyah Walker.**



**Fairfax Council Member Jennifer Passey and Richmond Council Member Andreas Addison.**

## Advice from the Roanoke City Council on council's role in budgeting

ROANOKE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE Amelia Merchant asked the Roanoke council for advice to give to newly elected officials on budgeting. Here's what the council members had to say.



**- Amelia Merchant -**

### Advice to newly elected officials regarding role in budget process or budgetary decisions

- Don't be discouraged if you don't understand much in the beginning
- Meet with administration to understand the current budget, budget process and how monitoring will occur
- Explore the history related to why items are included in the budget.

### Most valuable thing you have learned about governmental budgeting

- Collaboration and communication are imperative
- "It's not about choosing between good ideas and bad ideas; it's about finding the right balance among many good ideas"
- Counting pencils and line item "adjustments" don't move the needle at all; look at the long term "big picture"
- Council deals with policy matters that form the budget
- Use the expertise of staff to understand the process and your role/responsibilities.

### Biggest challenge in responding to budgetary policies and decisions

- Consideration of tax increases when economic growth does not produce increased revenues sufficient to meet priority needs
- Getting colleagues to actually talk about policy instead of gravitating towards what is desired in addition to the current budget
- Determining a clear picture of what the baseline may be and, at times, determining a list of priorities and why.

### Steps to undergo in preparation for responsibilities

- Meet with other elected and administrative officials one-on-one, especially those who have been through multiple budget cycles, to get their perspectives
- Understand budget policy.

### Support to considering requesting of administration

- Aides that report directly to elected official to assist in researching policy issues and responding to constituent concerns
- Share performance measure information
- Identify the budgetary items cannot be touched, resources that are "tapped out" (rates set as high as they can go) and those that have room for adjustment
- Regular and timely updates on the budget (development and throughout the fiscal year).



# 2018 VML Legislative Day

VML PRESIDENT Dr. Patricia Woodbury opened the VML Legislative Day program on January 31 at the Library of Virginia by welcoming the keynote speaker, Governor Ralph S. Northam. Governor Northam addressed the priorities for his administration, including support for public education, Medicaid expansion and job creation. He assured attendees that he supports local authority. He

also noted support for the Virginia Grocery Investment Fund, which would help tackle the problem of food deserts in the state.

Secretary of Finance Aubrey Layne made the point that it will take some time for the effect of Federal tax changes to be known. In the meantime, the plan is to set aside most of the tax issues until after May 1, to allow more time to evaluate the true implication of the changes enacted by Congress. Rev-

enues will not be reforecast, and it might be that a special session on tax reform would be in order down the road.

Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Brian Moran discussed his support for allowing localities to prohibit carrying firearms at permitted events and the need to increase the larceny threshold. The current threshold of \$200 was set in 1980 and should be raised to \$500. He also noted the need for mental health services for people in jails, and improvements in juvenile justice because of the move to a community-based system.

Jonathan Adelstein, the president and CEO of the Wireless Infrastructure Association, spoke about efforts of his association to support the widespread deployment of wireless infrastructure in order to deliver broadband access to all citizens and communities.

VML staff members Janet Areson and Neal Menkes talked about bills and budget amendments currently before the General Assembly, and VML Executive Director Michelle Gowdy wrapped up the staff presentations by discussing bills amending the Freedom of Information Act, including legislation that would require a public comment period at every meeting of a public body.

A reception in honor of the Virginia General Assembly then took place in the foyer of the Library.



**1.** Governor Ralph S. Northam opens the program. **2.** Secretary of Finance Aubrey Layne spoke about state finances. **3.** Attendees (L-R) Winchester Vice Mayor John Hill, Winchester Mayor John David Smith Jr. and Winchester City Manager Eden Freeman were briefed on issues before the General Assembly.





**1.** VML President Dr. Patricia Woodbury greets Leesburg Council Member Ron Campbell at check-in. **2.** Cape Charles Mayor George Proto asks a question about wireless structures in rights-of-way. **3.** Guest speaker Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Brian Moran. **4.** Guest speaker President and CEO of the Wireless Infrastructure Association Jonathan Adelstein. **5.** Martinsville Vice Mayor Chad Martin poses a question during the program. **6.** Newport News Legislative and Management Analyst Jerri Wilson (l) and Norfolk Special Assistant to the City Manager Morgan Whayland at the reception. **7.** Vienna Mayor Laurie DiRocco and Fairfax Council Member Jon Stehle chat during the break.



Go to [www.vml.org/classifieds](http://www.vml.org/classifieds) for details on these listings and for the most comprehensive listings of local government jobs.

### Psychiatrist, Portsmouth

Salary: DOQ + full benefits. Under general supervision, this position evaluates and assesses client conditions and needs, prescribes medications, monitors effectiveness and potential side effects of medication, and provides psychotherapy to clients with mental illnesses. Employee supervises the medical component of the mental health services programs. Works closely with clinical and nursing staff to ensure case coordination. Participates in a variety of professional development activities and provides clinical guidance and education. Employee serves as Behavioral Healthcare Services Medical Director. Apply: [va-portsmouth.civicplushrms.com/CareerPortal/Jobs.aspx](http://va-portsmouth.civicplushrms.com/CareerPortal/Jobs.aspx). Deadline: March 23, 2018.

### Utility System Trainee or Technician, Leesburg

Salary: \$39,384 - \$71,785 DOQ + full benefits. Required: HS/GED; min. one to two years of specific experience with utility system maintenance; possession of a valid driver's license and a safe driving record; ability to obtain Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Class B with tanker endorsement within six (6) months of hire; ability to obtain VDOT Flagging Certification and CPR/First Aid Certification within six (6) months of hire; ability to assist with emergencies on an "on-call" basis. Preferred: Five (5) plus years of utility system repairs; Trench Safety Certification; Forklift Certification; Cross Connection Certification; basic computer skills; bilingual in English/Spanish. Apply: [www.leesburgva.gov/jobs](http://www.leesburgva.gov/jobs). Resumes may be submitted as supplemental only. Deadline: Open until filled. EOE/ADA.

### Combination Commercial Inspector, Goochland

Salary: \$47,000 - \$52,000 DOQ + full benefits. Requirements: High School Diploma and considerable training and experience in skilled/construction trades or an equivalent combination of education and experience. Completion of the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development's Building Code Academy. Extensive experience as a building inspector, construction manager, or related job skills. Must be compliant with State certification standards. Must attain certification through DHCD as a Combination Commercial Inspector within three years of employment. Must possess a valid Virginia driver's license with a good driving record. Full job description and required online Goochland County Employment Application at [www.goochlandva.us/231/Employment-Opportunities](http://www.goochlandva.us/231/Employment-Opportunities). Background check, Driving Record check and pre-employment drug screen required. Deadline: March 22, 2018.

### Network Engineer, Portsmouth

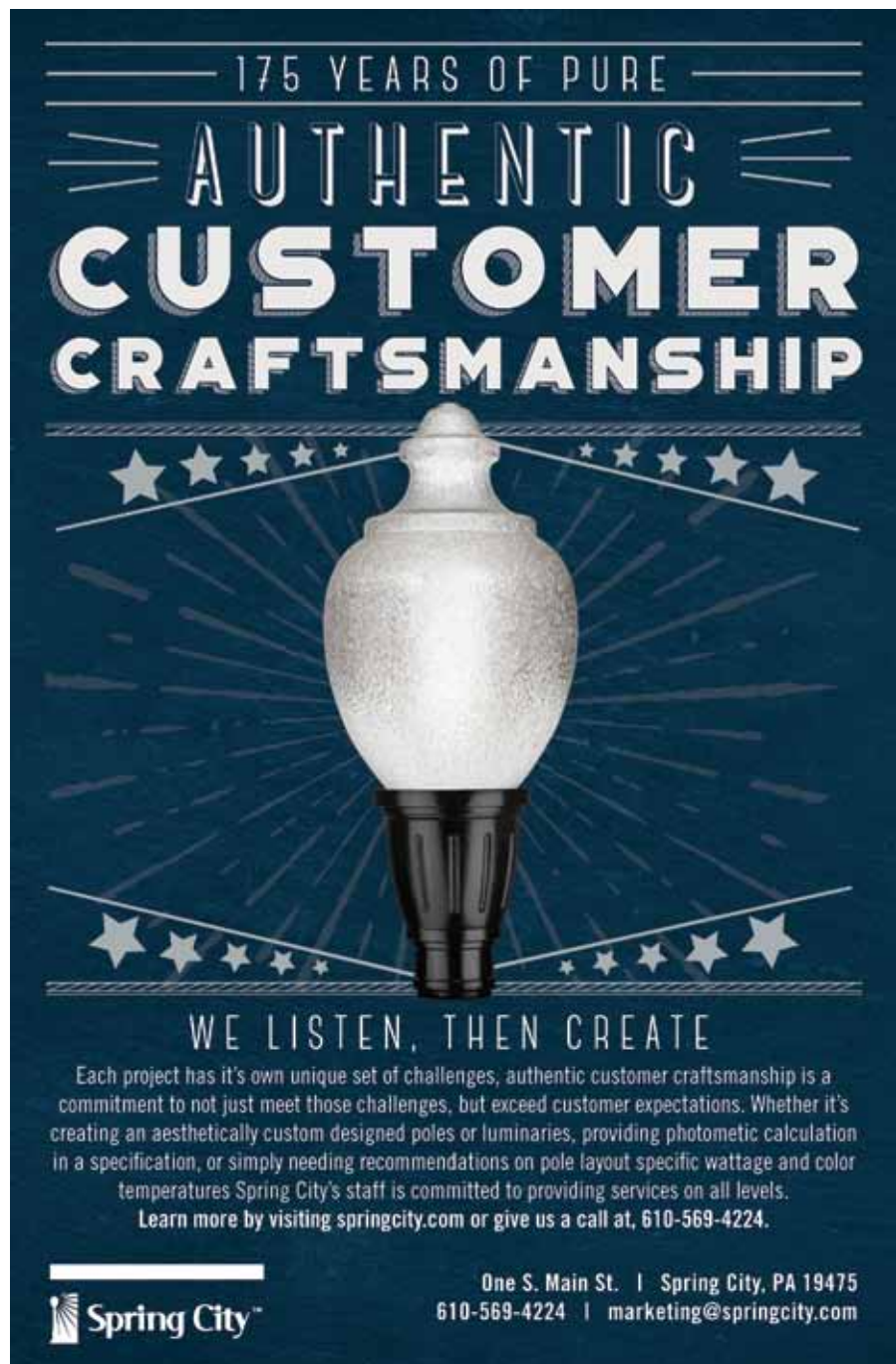
Salary: \$48,729 - \$70,500 + full benefits. Under limited supervision, this position plans, organizes and directs data networks, including

software and hardware, linking computer systems, telephone systems, and other electronic equipment. Maintains the city's local, wide area and wireless network environments. Reports to Chief Information Security Officer. Apply: [va-portsmouth.civicplushrms.com/CareerPortal/Jobs.aspx](http://va-portsmouth.civicplushrms.com/CareerPortal/Jobs.aspx). Deadline: March 23, 2018.

### Town Clerk, Purcellville

Salary: \$55,000 - \$65,000 DOQ + full benefits. Coordinate and prepare semimonthly Town Council agendas; attend Town Council meetings, record proceedings, draft min-

utes and maintain minute books; coordinate and disseminate press releases and other information; coordinate publication of all legal notices; maintain, post and disseminate the official Town meeting calendar and post agendas, minutes, meeting recordings, press releases and other notices on the Town's website. Bachelor's degree supplemented by three to four years of administrative work experience. Apply: <http://www.purcellvilleva.gov/jobs>. Deadline: March 19, 2018.




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