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VIRGINIA
TOWN & CITY

THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

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City of Alexandria



VOLUNTEERS
POWER
COMMUNITITES



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ABOUT THE COVER

For the 2021 Annual Conference, our outgoing President Willie Greene (Mayor, City of Galax) asked us to do something special for volunteers. As a volunteer fireman, volunteerism is close to Mayor Greene's heart. So, we honored volunteers with branded goods, a special conference session and now, to bring it home, an issue of our magazine!

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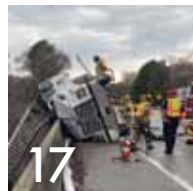
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Giving thanks for volunteers... and funded mandates!

THE ELECTIONS ARE over! Thanks to all who voted, all the election officials, and to all the candidates willing to volunteer their time to help our local, state, and federal governments. No matter which side of the aisle we fall, it's right to thank each of the candidates (and the ones who are now elected officials) for the enormous amount of personal time that their service takes.

Congratulations to all our local elected officials who won their elections and welcome to the newly elected officials – I look forward to meeting each of you in person! VML will host a Newly Elected Officials event in early January, and we encourage old and new members to attend. Topics will include FOIA, COIA, local budgeting, and other topics tailored specifically to local elected officials in Virginia.

As I write this, VML is preparing for the 2022 General Assembly Session. To help us better help you, I would ask that you introduce (or re-introduce) yourself to your local Delegates and Senators and share the 2022 VML Legislative Program with them. It's crucial that they are aware of the issues and positions most important to local governments before the session begins. The more local officials who bring it to the attention of their legislators, the more likely those legislators are to keep local governments in mind when making decisions and crafting legislation.

The 2022 VML Legislative Program is available under the "Advocacy" tab at www.vml.org.

VML's main legislative priorities include funding the real cost

of education, state assistance to local police departments, and funding of community services boards and behavioral health authorities. Given that there is a substantial budget surplus this year, VML and our member localities need to emphasize that additional unfunded mandates are unwarranted and the unfunded mandates that currently exist need to be funded (finally)!

This issue of the magazine is about volunteers. I want to thank everyone who volunteers to help with their local government programs or community organizations. Of course, even those who work for local governments often find themselves volunteering their time. Some awesome examples of staff volunteering can be found in the "The Tales of Two Managers" episode of our podcast the *VML Voice* that featured interviews with now retired managers Terry Tilley of the Town of Stuart and Keith Barker of the City of Galax. These discussions include examples of many evenings when they would go out and work on broken sewer pipes or water mains in the middle of the night. We also recently posted four new episodes of "Conference Connections" with interviews conducted during our Annual Conference.

VML Voice episodes are available at www.vml.org/category/podcast.

By the time you read this, Thanksgiving will be over, but I don't need a holiday to thank all of you for being VML members and for supporting local government. Thank you and Happy Thanksgiving!





- Jan. 7, 2022** **VML/VACO/APCo Steering Committee Member Meeting -**
A virtual event.
- Jan. 27-28, 2022** **VBCOA Board Orientation and Meeting -** Charlottesville, VA
- Feb. 3, 2022** **VACo/VML/VAPDC Local Government Day -** Richmond, VA
- Feb. 16-18, 2022** **VLGMA Winter Conference -** Staunton, VA
- Feb. 17, 2022** **MEPAV Board Meeting -** Charlottesville, VA

Movers 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 Rob Bullington at rbullington@vml.org.

Roanoke County Administrator O'Donnell to retire



- O'Donnell -

After more than two decades of service, Roanoke County Administrator **Dan O'Donnell** has announced that he will retire effective February 1, 2022. Prior to his current role, O'Donnell served Roanoke County as assistant county administrator from June 2000 through December 2018 and served as interim county administrator from August 2015 through December 2015.

O'Donnell has an extensive background in local government administration with more than 35 years of experience including service as county administrator for Steuben County, NY and Berkeley County, WV. He also worked to promote economic development for two agencies in the Baltimore, MD area.

During his tenure at county administrator served as project manager for the Green Ridge Recreation Center and the Public Safety Center projects. He also oversaw the development of Roanoke County's first Community Strategic Plan. Other significant achievements include coordinating the passage of the first compensation study and step pay plan for public safety personnel with the goal of retaining and recruiting top-notch employees. Most recently, he led the county's response to the COVID-19 crisis.

O'Donnell holds a Master's Degree in public administration from West Virginia University as well as a Bachelor of Science degree in history. He is a Certified Local Government Manager with the International City/County Management Association.

Durrette named assistant chief of Charlottesville Police Department



- Durrette -

While the City of Charlottesville undergoes a national search for its next police chief **Latroy "Tito" Durrette** will manage the department's day to day operations as assistant chief.

As part of the transition process, Durrette has been promoted to the rank of major. Previously Durrette served as the commander of the Support Services Division in which role he held the rank of captain.

Following the termination of Chief RaShall Brackney's employment contract on September 1, 2021, former assistant chief James Mooney returned from retirement to assist with the leadership transition. However, Mooney completed his temporary assignment effective October 8, 2021 creating the need for a new assistant chief.

In a press release, City Manager Boyles stated: "I want to thank James Mooney for assisting with the ongoing transition and Major Durrette for stepping up to this challenge. I am very confident that he is committed and prepared to help keep the department moving in a positive direction."

Durrette started with the Charlottesville Police Department as a Police Explorer at age 16 and was subsequently hired as a community service officer. He was later assigned to work in city parks during the summer before starting full-time work.

Durrette's career with the department has been a series of milestones. When he graduated from the academy at age 21, he was the youngest officer and the 25th Black

officer hired in the department's history.

When he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant, he once again made department history as one of only two Black lieutenants to ever serve the CPD. As a lieutenant, Durrette was responsible for the daily operation of daylight shift before being transferred to the Community Support Bureau where he led the department's School Resource Unit and Traffic Unit.

City Of Lexington hires Bell as new finance director

Recently City Manager Jim Halasz was pleased to announce the hiring of **Jennifer Bell** as the new finance director for the City of Lexington.

Jennifer Bell joins the City of Lexington as its new finance director after more than 20 years of finance experience with stints in firms in Boston, MA and New York, NY. Most recently, Bell served as the chief investment officer at a Lexington investment firm based out of Roanoke where she oversaw daily financial and operational matters while working with ownership to analyze and secure financing for new business opportunities.

In a press release, Bell said, "I am truly honored to have been selected for this position and hope to carry on the good works of those who filled it before me. I look forward to the opportunity to work with staff and elected officials to serve the citizens of this beautiful city."

In the same press release, City Manager Jim Halasz said, "Jennifer has the great combination of skills, experience and character that makes her a great match for meeting the needs of the community and working effectively with the city staff."

Bell, a native of Dalton, MA, earned a Bachelor of business administration at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

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Richmond hires Joy-Hogg to fill vacant deputy chief administrative officer role



- Joy-Hogg -

In early November, the City of Richmond announced that it had filled a position that had been vacant for two years with the hiring of **Sabrina Joy-Hogg** as the new deputy chief administrative officer for finance and administration. The position also involves overseeing the city's departments of budgeting and strategic planning, human resources, procurement, and information technology. She is scheduled to begin her new role on January 10, 2022.

Joy-Hogg previously served as the chief deputy city manager of Norfolk, deputy city manager in Charlotte and as a policy and planning specialist for the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget. Her current position is that of technical adviser for the nation of Uganda's Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development through the United States Treasury.

Joy-Hogg holds Bachelor of the Arts and Master of Social Work degrees from Stony Brook University.

Booth is Blacksburg's new transit director



- Booth -

Brian Booth, a native of Hardy, and a 2007 Virginia Tech graduate has accepted the position of director at Blacksburg Transit. Booth started his career as a bus operator and dispatcher with Blacksburg Transit (BT)

while still in college at Virginia Tech. He departed BT in 2011, but he stayed in the transit industry assuming various leadership roles at New River Valley Community Services before ultimately becoming the manager overseeing all aspects of the transportation department, which included the operation of Radford Transit. In 2017 Booth became the general manager of the Greater Lynchburg Transit Company.

Deputy Town Manager Steve Ross commented in a press release that "Brian's experience with fixed route bus service, paratransit services, university relations, and governmental agencies, along with demonstrated leadership abilities makes him a perfect fit for the Town of Blacksburg and BT."

Since BT began service in 1983 over 40

former employees have moved on to transit careers at other systems. Booth is the first to come back and lead the organization. His first day with Blacksburg Transit was August 30, 2021.

Hudson receives Local Government Attorneys of Virginia award

The Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc. (LGA) awarded its highest honor, the Edward J. Finnegan/Elizabeth D. Whiting Award for Distinguished Service, to



- Hudson -

Cynthia E. Hudson, currently an attorney with Sands Anderson PC and formerly Chief Deputy Attorney General of Virginia and City Attorney of Hampton, at its recently concluded fall conference in Richmond.

The Finnegan Whiting Award recognizes Hudson for her significant and sustained contributions to Virginia local government law and LGA. The award noted that her



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“knowledge of local government law combined with her expertise in public policy, makes her one of the most accomplished and well-respected attorneys practicing in Virginia’s public sector today.” In addition to her distinguished employment history, Ms. Hudson has served the Commonwealth of Virginia as Chair of the Governor’s Commission to Examine Racial Inequity in Virginia Law, Co-Chair of the Governor’s Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and as a former President of LGA.

Just prior to her receiving the award, the

President of LGA, Michelle R. Robl, announced that the LGA Board of Directors had added the name of Elizabeth D. Whiting to the title of the award. Ms. Whiting, who died in September, was an authority on local government law, a mentor to local government attorneys throughout the state, a former president of LGA, and a prior recipient of the Finnegan Award. The presenters of the Finnegan Whiting Award noted it was particularly appropriate that Hudson was the inaugural recipient of the renamed award as she, like Liz Whiting, “is beloved

and deeply admired and respected for her remarkable career, her integrity and intellect, and her generous spirit.”

Leadership changes announced for the City of Alexandria’s Office of Communications and Public Information

Recently, Alexandria City Manager Mark Jinks announced the departure of **Craig**



- Fifer -

Fifer, the city’s long-time director of the Office of Communications and Public Information (OCPI). Fifer had been appointed director of intergovernmental affairs for the Commonwealth

of Virginia by Governor Ralph Northam, effective October 25. He has been on executive loan to the Office of the Governor since January, supporting the administration’s coordination with local government partners on several key issues, including COVID-19 response efforts and vaccination roll-out.



- Taylor -

Assistant City Manager **Sarah Graham Taylor** who oversees the work of OCPI will lead the search for a new director. Taylor also serves as the city’s legislative director in which role she represents city council’s

legislative agenda before the Virginia General Assembly and U.S. Congress and serves as the city’s primary liaison to the executive branches of state and federal government. She has had a 25-year career in legislative affairs, policy development, political strategy, public affairs, and strategic communications. This work includes serving in public information positions for the City of Alexandria.

Taylor holds a degree in political science from the University of Richmond.

Kelly Gilfillen will continue to serve as acting director of OCPI, a position she has held since January 2021. Gilfillen brings more than 20 years of marketing and communications experience to this position, with 15 years in the public sector in Alexandria and the City of Carlsbad, CA. She joined the city in 2013 and has been serving as marketing and communications manager for the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities. In this role, Gilfillen was responsible for implementing the department’s marketing and communications divi-

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sion, executing comprehensive data-based communication strategies and customer care initiatives.

Gilfillen earned the Certified Public Manager credential from George Washington University and is anticipated to receive a Master's degree in public administration from George Mason University in December 2021.

Montoya appointed Arlington County's Latino liaison officer



As part of the Arlington County Police Department's ongoing commitment to strengthen its community engagement practices, Deputy Chief Wayne Vincent, commander of the Community Engagement Division, recently announced the creation of a Latino liaison officer position. **Corporal J.P. Montoya**, who has served with the Department since 2018, was appointed by Deputy Chief Vincent to serve in this role.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 15.6% of Arlington's population identifies

as Hispanic or Latino origin. Historically, the Department recognizes that crimes may go underreported due to concerns about police interactions and individuals may have reservations about seeking police assistance. The addition of the Latino liaison is part of an effort to strengthen the department's relationships and create a safer, more informed community and better ensure equitable access to police services.

In collaboration with Spanish-speaking officers across the department, the Latino liaison officer will work to develop educational programs on local and state laws, ensure the community understands their Constitutional rights, is aware of how to report crimes and seek assistance from the department, share crime prevention information, and leverage partnerships with non-profit and community stakeholder groups to improve safety within the community.

Montoya brings a wealth of experience to this role. Born and raised in Medellin, Colombia, Montoya moved to the United States when he was 19 years old and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. He completed recruit training in December 2007 and was stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C. Corporal Montoya served with honor for 10 years and

achieved the rank of staff sergeant.

In 2009, while deployed to Camp Ramadi, Iraq, he became a US Citizen with more than 200 military service members during a ceremony held at Camp Victory, Baghdad, Iraq. While deployed to Delaram II, Afghanistan in 2011, Montoya sustained an injury during combat and was subsequently awarded a Purple Heart. Following his deployments, Montoya spent the remainder of his service at the 8th & I Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C. During this time, he supported the 2013 Presidential Inauguration, more than 100 funerals and 115 evening and sunset parades at the Marine Barracks.

Corporal Montoya joined the Arlington County Police Department as a patrol officer in January 2018, after spending one year with the Metropolitan Police Department, and was promoted to the rank of corporal in July 2021. He serves as a member of the Department's Honor Guard and actively works with the Personnel and Recruitment Unit as an ambassador conducting information sessions for prospective applicants and attending career fairs at colleges, universities, military bases, and other venues.



The VML Voice is the official podcast of the Virginia Municipal League. Each episode explores a different locality or issue but the focus is always on Virginia and the local governments that make the Commonwealth work for everyone.

Contact Rob Bullington, rbullington@vml.org to suggest topics, ask questions, or inquire about sponsorship opportunities.

Subscribe now at www.vml.org and listen to our newest episode.



Hopewell Recreation and Parks earns top Virginia Recreation and Park Society honors

EACH YEAR, THE VIRGINIA RECREATION and Park Society (VRPS) conference hosts a formal presentation of awards honoring individuals, departments, and organizations throughout Virginia who have demonstrated excellence in a variety of areas. This year, the Society's Awards and Citations Committee received 115 submissions vying for awards in 15 categories.

Judged by a panel of peers, Hopewell Recreation and Parks was recognized more than any other organization in Virginia, walking

away with eight awards during the 2021 ceremony. Hopewell Recreation and Parks' department awards included: Best New Environmental Sustainability Award - Woodlawn Urban Orchard; Best New Program Award - Young Athletes; Best New Special Event Award - Pumpkin Patrol; Snapshot Moment - Personal Sacrifice and Dedication; Best Health and Wellness Initiative - Citywide Personal Protective Equipment Distribution; Most Innovative Marketing Piece - Santa Sightings Tree Lighting.

In addition to the department awards, two Hopewell Recreation and Parks employees were honored with individual awards. These awards are the most prestigious of the program and are offered to professionals who have demonstrated exemplary performance in support of the Society and in the field.

The Outstanding New Professional award was presented to Hopewell Recreation and Parks Community Programs Supervisor, AJ McCage. The Distinguished Service Award was presented to Hopewell Recreation and Parks Director, Aaron Reidmiller. The Distinguished Service Award, second only to the Fellows Award, is one of the Society's highest honors and includes an elite group who have displayed continuous outstanding service to the profession and the community.

To learn more about Hopewell Recreation and Parks, visit www.hopewellrecandparks.com.



(L-R) Tom Gates, CPRP, Facilities and Maintenance Manager; Tabitha Martinez, CPRP, Recreation Programs Manager; AJ McCage, CTRS, Community Programs Supervisor; Aaron Reidmiller, CPRP, Director.

AIA Virginia hosts first community dinner since pandemic in Norfolk

VML COMMUNITY BUSINESS MEMBER, the American Institute of Architects' (AIA) Virginia chapter held its "Blueprint for Better Communities" dinner on September 29th in Norfolk.

Created in 2019, this initiative brings together architects and community influencers for a private dinner to discuss how all parties can work together to pursue the host locality's vision. Suspended temporarily due to COVID-19, AIA Virginia reconvened the program with the Norfolk engagement at VIA Design. The evening proved full of inspiring conversation and fellowship. Local leaders in attendance included Mayor Kenny Alexander, Vice-Mayor Martin Thomas, and City Manager Larry Filer. Regional architecture firms were represented by principals from VIA Design, Work Program Architects, Andre Marquez Architects, Hanbury, and The Urban Collective.

If you are interested in organizing a similar event in your locality, contact AIA Virginia Executive Vice President Corey Clayborne at cclayborne@aiava.org.



(L-R) Georgie Marquez, AIA, Partner, Andre Marquez Architects; Kenny Alexander, Mayor, City of Norfolk; Andrew McKinley, AIA, Principal, VIA Design



Portsmouth adds podcasting to its social media mix

THE CITY OF PORTSMOUTH has joined a host of municipal governments (and the Virginia Municipal League!) in using podcasts to deliver important, timely and relevant information to residents. Titled *Let's Talk, Portsmouth*, the city's podcast posts on third-party hosting app Podbean twice monthly.

Let's Talk, Portsmouth provides the city, via its Marketing & Communications department, with a unique opportunity to tell long-form stories about very different city departments rendering a variety of services – all working together for the good of the people. The podcast platform allows guests to talk in detail about city business, their role in government, services offered by various departments, and to share success stories. For example, newly appointed Portsmouth Police Chief Renado Prince appeared on the podcast where he expertly described his policing and crime-fighting philosophies. He talked about his plans for the future of the Portsmouth Police Department, new technology used in crime-

solving, training police officers and more. Chief Prince's interview was complemented by a separate podcast on the activities of the Portsmouth Crime Line.

Dr. Darlene Sparks Washington, executive director for the Portsmouth Volunteers for Homeless (PVH), was featured on the podcast in September. Dr. Washington relayed the heart-warming story of a life changed because of the intervention of PVH. More recent topics have included COVID-19 vaccines, libraries in the 21st century, and mental health conditions. Topics already booked for 2022 include "How Are We Going to Pay for That" which will look at how the city budget is developed.

Find *Let's Talk, Portsmouth* at <https://portsmouthva.podbean.com>, Spotify, and Amazon Music/Audible. For more information, contact the Department of Marketing & Communications at 757-393-5143.

City of Roanoke partners in the National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day

THE CITY OF ROANOKE once again partnered in the National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day that took place on October 23rd. Local law enforcement agencies, the Roanoke Area Youth Substance Abuse Coalition (RAYSAC), the Prevention Council of Roanoke County, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Western Virginia Water Authority worked together to collect expired, unused, and unwanted medications for safe destruction at convenient parking lot locations across the valley. Vaping devices and cartridges and veterinarian medications were also collected.

The public was invited to bring unused or unwanted medications to this free and anonymous event that seeks to prevent prescription pill abuse, theft and environmental concerns. Since these take-back events started in 2010, over 39,000 pounds of prescription medications have been turned in by Roanoke Valley citizens for proper disposal.

This initiative addresses vital public safety and public health issues. Medications that languish in home cabinets are highly susceptible to diversion, misuse and abuse. Rates of prescription drug abuse in the U.S. and in the valley are increasing at alarming rates as are the number of accidental poisonings and overdoses due to these drugs. Studies show that 90% of abused prescription drugs are obtained from family and friends, including from the home medicine cabinet. In fact, the majority of commonly abused drugs by teenagers are prescription medications.

Learn more about the program at www.takebackday.dea.gov.



Middleburg holds "Fall Into Clean" event

ON OCTOBER 30TH, the Middleburg Sustainability Committee (formerly the "Go Green Committee") held a town clean up event. Following a briefing and equipment handout at the town office, three groups dispersed to spruce up Marshall, Washington and Federal streets and returned two hours later to enjoy breakfast provided by the Salamander Resort & Spa

Participating organizations included Yuck Old Paint which takes old house paints in their original cans. Apex Organix, which the town has engaged to spearhead a pilot compost program, was on hand to collect compostable items on the day of the event and sign-up households for weekly or bi-weekly compost collection. Battery recycling collection was handled by Big Green Box and TerraCycle US battery and razor collection boxes.



Arlington Community High School finds a home at Amazon's PenPlace

ARLINGTON COUNTY AND ARLINGTON Public Schools have announced that Amazon will support the building of a permanent home for Arlington Community High School (ACHS) as part of its PenPlace development in Pentagon City.

The school will be built as part of the mixed-use development on approximately 10.5 acres in the transit-rich Aurora Highlands neighborhood. With Amazon's support, the new facility will be completed in time for the 2026-27 school year.

In a press release, Arlington County Board Chair Matt de Ferranti noted that "the school will benefit the entire community and advance the county's commitment to equity, fulfilling the community benefit promised when the original site plan was approved in 2013."

ACHS serves a diverse student body of approximately 300 students ages 16 and older from across Arlington County, who are focused on earning a high school diploma, while preparing themselves for college, work, and the future.

In 2013, the original PenPlace development was approved with a 20,000 square foot community facility with a use to be determined during the final site plan review process.

ACHS has never had a permanent home in the County – moving around to locations that were not ideally located or tailored to meet the needs of ACHS students. Currently, the school is co-located with the Career Center, which is scheduled to undergo a major renovation, requiring the school to relocate

in 2023 per the APS Adopted CIP. Arlington Public Schools and Arlington County have been searching for a permanent home for the school in the southern portion of the County. Now, Arlington County and Arlington Public Schools, with the support of Amazon, have committed to develop ACHS, providing benefits to students and the entire community, while advancing the shared County and APS commitment to equity.

To engage the community, on October 28 Arlington County hosted a PenPlace Walking Tour that kicked off a 10-day virtual engagement as part of the Site Plan Review Committee's public review process.

A second virtual meeting of the Site Plan Review Committee will include opportunity for public comment and will occur by the end of 2021. There will be a third Site Plan Review Committee meeting held in early 2022 and both the Planning Commission and County Board will hold public hearings on the project that are currently anticipated to occur in March 2022.

Additional information about PenPlace, including site plan documents, recorded presentations, and meetings can be found at www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Projects.



City of Alexandria wins multiple awards for employee wellness program



THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA has garnered three awards this year for its innovative wellness program for city staff. The "Work'n Well" employee program has won the "Nation's Best and Brightest in Wellness" for the second consecutive year; the "American Heart Association 2021 Workplace Health Achievement Gold-Level Recognition Award"; and "2021 Healthiest Employers Winner, First Place Virginia Mid-Size Category."

"A well workplace is a productive workplace," said City Manager Mark Jinks in a press release. "City employees have responded enthusiastically to this program, which has provided health benefits to our workforce, and given employees respite from the stresses caused by the pandemic."

Employees have become more motivated to improve their health, increase work productivity and boost overall morale. Throughout the pandemic, the city has been diligently providing more onsite preventive care solutions, such as vaccinations, mammograms, and dental exams. Despite the global pandemic, employee program participation increased by 7 percent in 2021, as several virtual and in-person activities were offered to combat isolation.

The City's Work'n Well Employee Program, which was established in 2014, offers support and resources for all dimensions of well-being. The program includes Work'n Well Rewards, which provides awards and incentives based on quarterly progress. The program also offers an insurance premium credit for a higher-level achievement milestone. The Work'n Well program actively works to lower healthcare costs, reduce sick leave, increase productivity, boost employee morale and increase overall employee health awareness.

City of Richmond welcomes new public space at gateway to Arts District in Historic Jackson Ward

THE CITY AND VENTURE RICHMOND have built a new, vibrant public space connecting the Historic Jackson Ward neighborhood and City Center. The intersection of Brook Road and West Marshall Street now hosts a three-part placemaking project consisting of a custom-designed parklet, pedestrian plaza, and intersection mural designed to provide space for community gatherings and art appreciation.

Designed by local firm Walter Parks Architects, this is the first custom-designed public parklet built in the City of Richmond. Located outside of ART 180, it provides safe space for participants in the nonprofit's youth programming to gather before and after class and is open to the public as well.

Local artist Chris Visions designed the mural, which references the rich history of Jackson Ward and the neighborhood's enduring mission to carry on a legacy of Black excellence. The design is based on the Sankofa, an Andikra symbol from Ghana meaning "to go back and retrieve/get," and the colors echo the red, black and green of the Pan-African flag. ART 180 youth painted the mural as part of the culmination of their Community Program earlier this fall.

The plaza is a result of reclaiming unused public space in front of Gallery 5 and restoring the historic bricks that existed beneath the asphalt. Artist Chris Visions created an artistic extension of the intersection mural into the plaza space and Venture Richmond



provided bike racks for people visiting Gallery 5, ART 180, and neighboring businesses and residents.

City of Richmond staff from Planning and Development Review, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Public Utilities and the Public Art Commission worked alongside Venture Richmond to make the project possible. Additional project partners include ART 180, Big Secret, CB Chandler Construction, Cite Design, Gallery 5, Richmond Toolbank, Vanderbilt Properties, and Walter Parks Architects.

Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) Grant awarded to Town of Colonial Beach

THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION and Recreation has announced \$7.5 million in Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) grants of which nearly \$400,000 will go to the Town of Colonial Beach to protect Eleanor Park and conserve land along the Potomac River.

The Eleanor Park property is green space that boasts mature hardwood trees and is adjacent to the Potomac River. The parcel has significant historic, environmental, recreational, and scenic value to the town and the Point neighborhood. Originally deeded as a park by Henry Kintz in 1882, this conservation effort honors the land use as originally intended.

This initiative, which has been under consideration and discussed for several years, benefits town residents, visitors, and wildlife. The Park already contains several large trees that osprey, eagles, and other birds call home. Additional plantings and vegetation will increase the coastal resilience, floodplain management, and overall environmental value of the space. The Park will remain open to



the public year-round, with monetization of the space being explored. One opportunity includes the construction of a gazebo or small stage that can be rented out for special events.

To accept the grant funding, which is the largest grant award the town has received in the past five years, the town council would need to vote to accept the grant award and execute a deed to preserve Eleanor Park as public open space in perpetuity. The execution of this project is timely because it is critical for localities, and particularly smaller localities, to consider undertaking land conservation efforts in concert with major development projects and sales of public land.

Private land trusts, local governments and state agencies use VLCF grant funds to acquire and protect significant lands in the following categories: farmland, forestry, historic resources, natural areas, and parks and open space. The grant selection process incorporates ConserveVirginia, the commonwealth's innovative land conservation strategy that is based on "smart map" technology.

VEPGA holds annual meeting

VIRGINIA ENERGY PURCHASING Governmental Association (VEPGA) held its 2021 Annual Meeting on November 18, 2021, the first in-person Annual Meeting VEPGA has held since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Five individuals were re-elected to the VEPGA Board of Directors for three-year terms expiring in 2024, **Michael Barancewicz** (Loudoun County Public Schools), **Bill Eger** (City of Alexandria), **Lori Herrick-Borden** (City of Virginia Beach), **John Lord** (Fairfax County Public Schools) and **Najib Salehi** (Loudoun County).



- Burr -

strategic planning, program implementation and data reporting. Most recently, Burr served as supervisor of energy efficiency data

Stephen Burr (Arlington County) was elected to fill a vacancy on the Board which will expire in 2022. Burr is currently the energy manager for Arlington County, supporting the county's energy and climate neutrality goals with a focus on reducing energy use in county facilities, renewable energy deployment and implementing the County's Community Energy Plan. He has over a decade of experience in

analytics at Washington Gas, supporting a portfolio of energy efficiency and demand side management program design, evaluation, and regulatory reporting. Prior experience includes work with the U.S. Department of Energy's Sustainability Performance Office.

Burr holds a Bachelor of business administration from Marshall University and a Master of city and regional planning from Clemson University. He is a Certified Energy Manager (CEM) by the Association of Energy Engineers, Certified Planner (AICP) by the American Planning Association and LEED Green Associate by the U.S. Green Building Council.

About VEPGA

VEPGA negotiates multi-year electricity contracts with Dominion Energy on behalf of its members and keeps members informed of energy developments. Originally created as a VML/VACo Steering Committee in 1974 and formalized as a joint powers association in 2002, VEPGA collectively negotiates electric power rates and terms and conditions of service with Dominion Energy on behalf of its members, which includes over 170 Virginia local governments, public school systems and public authorities. For more information about VEPGA please visit the website www.vepga.org or contact Sandy Harrington, VEPGA secretary/treasurer at sharrington@vml.org.

City of Manassas earns GFOA budget award

THE CITY OF MANASSAS Finance Department has won an eighteenth consecutive award for the excellence of its fiscal year 2022 budget presentation. The Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) is the highest form of recognition in government budgeting.

"Producing the City's annual budget takes a year-round effort from the city manager and a dedicated budget team along with extensive input from all city departments and thoughtful deliberations by the city council," Finance Director Diane Bergeron explained in a press release.

"The award represents a significant achievement by the entity," the GFOA reports. "It reflects the commitment of the governing body and staff to meeting the highest principles of governmental budgeting. In order to receive the budget award, the entity had to satisfy nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation. These guidelines are designed to assess how well an entity's budget serves as a policy document, a financial plan, an operations guide, and a communications device."

Visit www.manassasva.gov/budget to find current and past budget presentations and schedules for budget hearings.





VOLUNTEERS POWER COMMUNITITES

Volunteers power communities

By Rob Bullington

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY when the first person said, "Let me give you a hand with that." Certainly, people have been helping each other for a long time. But in the United States volunteerism as a force for communal good can be said to have properly begun on December 7, 1736, in Philadelphia. It was on this date that Benjamin Franklin co-founded the Union Fire Company, also known as the "Bucket Brigade." Although the model for Franklin's company came from the existing Mutual Fire Societies of Boston, the Union Fire Company was different in that it served the entire community, not just members.

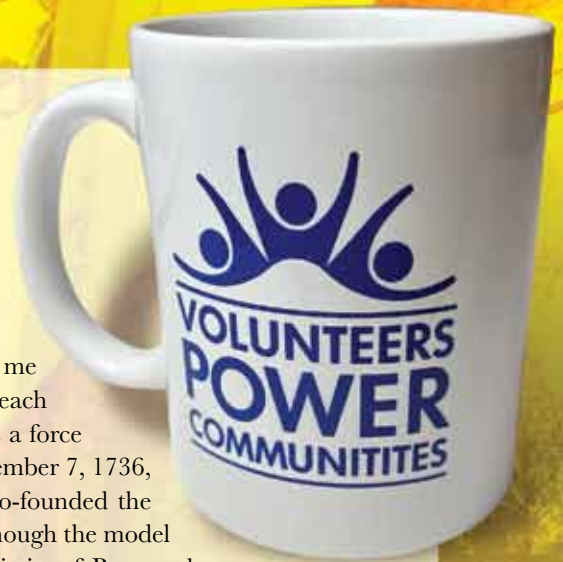
Like many volunteer organizations today, Franklin's fire company was borne out of an emergency. In 1730, a ship in Philadelphia's harbor caught fire which quickly spread to the wharf. All the warehouses and three homes were consumed by the flames. This led Franklin to begin advocating for a service to protect the community. The original group of 26 volunteers soon swelled into multiple companies. The result was that the city no longer lost entire blocks of buildings to fires with the damage being contained by groups of bucket wielding volunteers.

Forty years after that first volunteer fire company was formed, Dr. Franklin was back in Philadelphia after many years in England, to sign the Declaration of Independence. Surely Franklin appreciated that the fate of the fledgling nation would be determined not by the power of his signature but by the determination of the volunteers which formed the American army. Whether those volunteers had the discipline and spirit to remain in the field against the professional army arrayed against them was very much still a question at the time.

Today, it's no question that we still rely upon volunteers to fight fires and to fight battles, but our local governments often rely upon volunteers to do so much more. From feeding the hungry, to beautifying our parks, volunteers working with local officials and staff make our communities better by identifying where needs are not being met and then working to fill those needs. In this issue of *Virginia Town & City* we hear how...

- Volunteer fire companies face declining membership and are experiencing other challenges meeting the needs of their communities. New Kent County Fire Chief **Rick Opett** has some ideas to help.
- We are all very busy and it can be hard to make the leap to volunteer your time. **Kisha Johnson** from God's Storehouse in the City of Galax explains why you will never regret the time you spend volunteering.
- Local governments are often faced with situations that require creative thinking and volunteer help. **Nicole Trifone** with the City of Williamsburg highlights recent (and in one case, award-winning) efforts in her city that benefitted from volunteer help.
- Some localities may hesitate to use volunteers because they are unsure of the risks of using non-staff workers. The **VRSA staff** provide reassurances and answer some questions.

So, let's raise our mugs to the volunteers that power our communities. Thanks!



Answering the Call: How to nurture volunteer fire-EMS programs

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT that one of your loved ones, or, better yet, you yourself, are having a heart attack. You call 911... then you wait, and you wait, and you wait. Finally, 30 minutes after you called 911, an ambulance arrives. Those 30 minutes likely felt like an eternity. The EMS crew, now on scene, assesses and administers care for another 20 minutes before loading you into the ambulance to transport you to the nearest hospital... some 25 minutes away. In this scenario, the process from the time you called 911 to your arrival at the hospital emergency room was at least 75 minutes, not counting the time that passed between the sudden onset of symptoms and you placing that all-important call. For anyone, let alone someone experiencing symptoms of a heart attack, this surely sounds like a lot of time; and yet, this is a realistic scenario occurring daily across our Commonwealth. The biggest challenge 911 dispatchers have in any emergency scenario is finding someone to “answer the call.”

In cases of heart attack, the first hour after onset of symptoms is

decisive, and thus commonly termed the “golden hour.” Appropriate action received within the first 60 minutes of a heart attack can likely reverse its effects. American Heart Association guidelines recommend that for best patient outcomes the artery be reopened within 90 minutes. These 90 minutes can best be thought of in terms of three 30-minute increments:

- 30 minutes from the time symptoms start to the time the patient has engaged medical care,
- 30 minutes from cardiology team mobilization to patient arrival in the cardiac lab, and
- 30 minutes from the start of the treatment procedure to the opening of the artery.

This means that having someone ready and willing to swiftly answer an emergency call can mean the difference between life and death.



What can be done?

For all the reasons outlined above, a key issue, or “silent epidemic,” facing many rural public safety fire-EMS providers here in Virginia and across the nation is a critical shortage of volunteer fire-EMS personnel coupled with constituents who demand high quality service in an expeditious manner. As such, the fundamental problem facing many local governments is how to balance the demand for high quality public safety with an ever-smaller volunteer workforce.

To address this issue, let’s look at a few solutions to bridge the gap in service you may be experiencing, or are on the verge of experiencing, in your own community.

Ramp up recruitment

In today’s public safety arena, a large percentage of candidates who join volunteer fire and EMS services do so to gain practical experience with the end goal of eventually being hired as full-time career/paid firefighters. This presents a real challenge for communities heavily dependent upon volunteers. Communities that once could anticipate 20-30 years of service from a volunteer, now, realistically, may only get 2-4 years of service before they move on. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this trend, it does mean having to recruit twice, even three times, as many volunteers to address the community’s needs.



Who answers the call?

The modern volunteer Fire-EMS service is very different from that of the past few decades. Previously there was an abundance of volunteers “answering the call” at all hours of the day. In fact, in years past it was often understood that volunteer fire-EMS personnel were allowed to leave their jobs when the “fire whistle” blew. Yesterday’s volunteers, who grew up in the fire service by following in their family’s footsteps, were keenly engaged, very dedicated and unselfish. These volunteers often gave 20+ years to their community.

Today’s volunteer fire labor force, according to the National Volunteer Fire Council, consists of citizens who are more technically savvy and driven by an entirely different set of criteria. These individuals are often working multiple jobs and devote a significant portion of their family time at sports parks, gymnasiums, and concert halls supporting their children’s extracurricular activities. This leaves them with precious little time for participating in fire-EMS drill nights and dedicated staffing of the volunteer fire house.

Just as today’s volunteer fire-EMS personnel approach their service with a vastly different set of criteria than years past, the public, (your constituents), likewise have a vastly different set of expectations for public safety.

In years past, the public generally understood that relying upon volunteer-based emergency services meant the possibility of longer response times. Communities set their expectations knowing that volunteers weren’t necessarily sitting around the station waiting for a call, but were likely busy with their own lives. So, when a call came, they had to drop everything they were doing, get themselves to the firehouse, wait for other volunteer crew members to arrive; and then respond.

Current expectations are quite different. Chief John Eversole of the Chicago Fire Department best characterized current public expectations when he opined, “In three minutes, they want five brain-surgeon decathlon champions to come out and solve all of their problems.”



Fire-EMS programs

Change the culture

Along with a more intense recruitment strategy, a change in volunteer fire-EMS service culture must happen with the following points taken into consideration and emphasized during recruitment:

- ✓ The experience is rewarding and worth the time.
- ✓ The training requirements are not excessive.
- ✓ The time demands are adaptable and manageable.
- ✓ The rewards include a personal sense of valor.
- ✓ There is good leadership minimizing conflict.
- ✓ There is ample community support for the organization.

Overcome the hurdles

Implementing the recruitment and culture changes described above means going from a stable department with a relatively small number of long tenured volunteers to a “transitional” department with an increased number of volunteer members staying for shorter durations. This is no small feat. Indeed, the biggest hurdle to be overcome starts with negotiating the department’s traditional vision of itself and its operations.

Changing the way volunteer fire departments do things is not an easy undertaking, and if you pursue it, you likely will experience a lot of opposition. However, when you come up against this challenge, consider the words of Rear Admiral, Grace Hopper: “The most dangerous phrase in the language is, ‘We’ve always done it this way.’”

To draw in newer members without sacrificing the pride that many feel for their department and its role in the community here are a few suggestions that may entice people to come on board and add value to their work.

- ✓ Retirement and pension plans (LOSAP)
- ✓ Pay per call per hour
- ✓ Food / gas reimbursements
- ✓ Tax exemptions, credits, and deductions
- ✓ Health insurance
- ✓ Housing assistance
- ✓ Live-in programs
- ✓ Seasonal bonuses
- ✓ Business discounts
- ✓ Uniforms
- ✓ Specialized/technical training
- ✓ Educational support
- ✓ Recognition & awards programs

Other staffing solutions

If your best recruitment efforts fall short – and this is something you certainly must prepare for – there are other solutions available to “answer the call.” The first is to pool resources with your neighbors, either by merging departments or by creating a regional authority. Often, neighboring departments duplicate resources; this is true even among departments located within a few miles of each other. Leveraging these assets and putting them into one “box” could certainly benefit all the localities involved. These mergers allow departments to reduce their recruitment efforts since they are no longer chasing the same candidates. Moreover, combining departments means reducing high operating capital costs and offering a strong, pooled leadership capability.

Another solution, and one that seems to be trending in Virginia,

is to supplement volunteer staffing with paid on-call, part-time or full-time personnel during peak call volume times. Customarily, peak call volumes occur between the hours of 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM – the same block of time that volunteers may not be readily available due to their employment commitments. This model certainly offers the most consistent call response coverage; however, it can become costly and doesn’t address the “next” call (multiple calls at once) scenario departments must always take into consideration.

Additional items to consider

As local government leaders you are charged within ensuring that high quality public safety personnel are available to serve your communities. Your constituents do not care whether the people who show up are volunteer, career/paid, or paid-on-call, just so long as the need is met by qualified personnel. As I mentioned earlier in this article, when the public calls 911 what they want – what they expect – is someone who knows what they are doing, and they want them there fast.

As our nation’s culture continues to change, there are certain questions government leaders must answer and have a plan for:

1. When residents call 911, if no one shows up or shows up too late, who is liable? The fire-EMS department? The municipality? You, as the government leader?
2. As you change recruitment efforts to adapt to today’s trends, if it doesn’t work like you planned, what’s next?
3. Are your fire-EMS call response times under 20 minutes? Are they getting longer or shorter?
4. Are your fire-EMS public safety personnel properly trained? If not, what steps will you take to address that gap?

These are all vital questions, and you must have answers to each of them. Every community operates differently so there can certainly be different “right” answers to each of these questions. Whatever the answers are for your community, the critical take away I hope to impart with this article is that it’s imperative you have the answers ready, so you are not forced to make hasty decisions to solve a problem. Ask your leadership team the hard questions – ask them to think outside the box – and ensure there is a plan for when something fails. Having a plan not only protects you as a public leader, but it could save many lives.



About the Author: Chief Richard (Rick) Opett is a 31-year veteran of the Fire service who has worked his way up through the ranks to where he now serves as the Fire Chief/Chief Fire Marshal and Emergency Manager for New Kent County since 2013. He proudly leads a department of nine divisions and 51 career firefighters that today is swiftly transitioning from a primarily rural response area to one that is steadily becoming more and more sub-urban.





Five truths about volunteering

“VOLUNTEERISM” IS A long word. Before I ventured into the world of volunteering, I had mixed emotions. I have always been eager to do things, it’s part of who I am. But when I was first asked if I’d like to volunteer at a soup kitchen in my home city of Galax, I hesitated. Now I realize that my pause when I heard the word “volunteer” came from not knowing what it would mean for me personally. After all, volunteering is giving up some of your time for free. When I first considered volunteering at God’s Storehouse, I was working forty hours a week, plus serving as a part-time caregiver, and raising a seven-year-old. Every day I drove an hour to work and another hour to my daughter’s school. Moreover, I hosted a women’s group once a week for book study and monthly for meetings.

To put it simply: I was busy! I couldn’t imagine giving away any more of my time.

Yet, as much as I already had on my plate, there was a little voice inside me telling me to go help at God’s Storehouse. That little voice would not go away. So, when the opportunity to volunteer came up again, I jumped at it. Eventually, the nudge that the little voice gave me turned into a push and before I knew it, I was all in. I’m so glad to be a volunteer!

Helping others has changed my whole perspective. What I came to understand is that although there is no pay involved, what I gain by volunteering is priceless. That one act – volunteering – changed the entire trajectory of my life. Being a volunteer immediately gave me a

sense of hope that I didn’t consciously know I had needed. Being at God’s Storehouse makes me want to serve others and I’m a better person for it.

So, for those of you still on the fence, I want to share five truths about volunteering that I’ve learned during my time at God’s Storehouse:

1. Show up. That little voice giving you a nudge is there for a reason.
2. You can put a price on a job, but volunteering is priceless.
3. The right attitude can make or break the experience. Look at things through the lens of “I get to do this.”
4. Leaving your mark on something that changes people’s lives for the better never gets old.
5. When you are a volunteer, the people who are grateful for what you do will always outweigh the ungrateful.





What people express interest in volunteering at God’s Storehouse, but seem hesitant, I tell them that we get the chance to share kindness. I tell them that we get the chance to give our best and this has the power to lift others up and it will lift them up too. I tell them that we get to be one of the good parts in someone’s story.

My hope is that if you’re reading this, that you will listen to that little voice and become a volunteer. There are few things more satisfying than being part of a team that you know is helping your community. And when that first day as a volunteer arrives, roll your sleeves up and smile because above all else, you get to do this!

About God’s Storehouse

God’s Storehouse was established in 2012 by Becky McClendon after she moved to Galax from Anderson, SC and noticed that her new home had a need for a soup kitchen. For four years Becky worked tirelessly to feed her community. In 2016, Becky wanted to move to be closer to her children and grandchildren and decided it was time to turn God’s Storehouse over to the mother/daughter duo of Delina Parks and Kisha Johnson.

Under Delina and Kisha’s guidance, God’s Storehouse has continued to provide a soup kitchen, but has also grown into an agency that provides education services for children and adults, an extremely

successful addiction recovery group called the Hope Dealers, and a food pantry.

In the summer of 2021, God’s Storehouse opened its first women’s recovery home, named Ms. Clair’s House. The home supports a 13-month program that equips women who have battled substance addiction with the necessary skills to lead healthy lives.

In partnership with the City of Galax, God’s Storehouse has begun “Project Light” which will relocate its operations to a new building where it will be able to offer many services under one roof: small business development, culinary arts training, mentoring, a prison to work program, and workforce development (to name just a few). To quote Galax City Councilmember Beth White, “It’s priceless real estate. The place where people will have an opportunity for a fresh start.”

Project Light was the recipient of a 2021 VML Innovation Award in the Community Health category.



About the author: *Kisha Johnson is the executive director God’s Storehouse in Galax. Learn more about the organization at www.godsstorehouseva.org.*

Volunteerism is good for local governments

ONLY A FEW MONTHS into the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Williamsburg – like many other localities across the Commonwealth – found itself facing the prospect of hosting an election amid the risks of a growing health emergency. Two major areas of concern became apparent:

Place: Would voters feel safe congregating at a precinct to cast their ballots?

People: Would the Voter Registrar’s Office find the number of people needed to run the election with many poll workers typically drawn from the demographic most vulnerable to the pandemic?

Fortunately, the City of Williamsburg found solutions to both these problems. On May 19, 2020, a drive-thru setup in the bays of Williamsburg’s fire station allowed citizens the safety of staying in their vehicles while casting their votes. City employees and a group of civilian volunteers served as poll workers.

The experiment was a success and garnered plenty of positive feedback (*Editor’s note: including a 2021 VML Innovation Award*). The effort was a testament to the innovative, hard work of the city’s staff and was one of many times during the pandemic that the staff gained a new appreciation for the value of working in partnership with citizen volunteers.

Volunteers keep Williamsburg beautiful

Like most local governments the City of Williamsburg relies on volunteers for a long list of ongoing and short-term projects and initiatives, which often focus on upkeep and beautification.

Individuals or organizations regularly request trash pickup equipment and supplies from the Public Works & Utilities Department to help keep the city’s roadways and parks clean. Over Halloween weekend, a local Girl Scout hosted a Recycling Outreach event in City Square that included six vendors, all with the goal of educating the public about the positive effects of recycling.

This school year, volunteers with the William & Mary Community Engagement Program have worked on beautification projects in and around the Blayton Building, which has public housing units maintained by the Williamsburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (WRHA), on a weekly basis. Students from this program have spread mulch and planted flowers, repainted doors and walls, and added numbers above the doorways of each unit. With the volunteers taking care of the look and feel of the building, WRHA staff have more time to focus on the individual needs of the public housing residents.





Cedar Grove Cemetery, owned and operated by the City of Williamsburg, has one caretaker to manage the property's maintenance. Caretaker Bill Brown has cultivated a team of volunteers that help him not only to maintain the beauty of the cemetery's 20 acres but also to preserve the stories of the individuals buried on the grounds.

Cemetery volunteers, from the historical society as well as other individuals and organizations that offer to lend a hand, also help with gravestone cleanings and rubbings, general upkeep of the cemetery, and setting flags at the graves of veterans on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

The 10 members of the Cedar Grove Historical Society bring all manner of expertise to the cemetery. A retired landscaper helps plan and execute some of the more difficult cleanings, such as when a gravestone is covered in shrubbery or has sunk too deep into the ground. One historical society member dedicates her time to updating FindAGrave.com with written memorials and gravestone photos for those buried in the cemetery.

With such an active volunteer base, Cedar Grove Cemetery is not simply well-maintained. It is preserved with a deep honor and respect for those who are buried on the grounds as well as their families.

Volunteers bring a wealth of talent

With a premier university and a world-renowned history museum within its nine square miles, the City of Williamsburg has a wealth of talent and expertise among its more than 15,000 residents.

Williamsburg regularly taps into its built-in talent pool. Boards and commissions are teeming with people at the top of their fields who are truly engaged with the well-being of the community where they live and work.

Recognizing the depth of talent in Williamsburg, the city

Volunteerism

has begun to involve members of the community in special initiatives through City Manager Workgroups, each created through a city council resolution that directs the city manager to form the group. In recent years, these workgroups have taken on three different topics: neighborhood balance, affordable housing, and racial healing.

The structure of these workgroups allows the city to bring together staff, experts, and stakeholders within the community – economists, university administrators and students, real estate professionals, longtime residents, entrepreneurs, bankers, educators, activists – to tackle complex issues that governments have struggled to address on their own.

The result is a community-informed final report with specific short- and long-term recommended actions. The first of these workgroups, the Neighborhood Balance Committee (NBC), wrapped up its work in December 2020; city council has already implemented several of NBC's recommended actions. The Affordable Housing Workgroup presented its final report to City Council in November 2021.

In July 2021, city council adopted a resolution that directed the city manager to form a Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC), made up of seven community members, that would study the impact of racism and racial injustice both historically and presently on city residents and to present their findings and recommendations to city council for further action.

These workgroups are designed to take on big issues that benefit from the expertise and lived experience of community members working alongside city staff. The collaborative process creates a sense of ownership among the members, who then become ambassadors both for the solutions and for the workgroup process.

Volunteers connect the city with the community

The City of Williamsburg welcomes the help of volunteers in a variety of ways, from its volunteer fire department to Scouts looking to earn a badge. No matter the nature of their volunteerism, the volunteers walk away with a connection to the Williamsburg community that they may not have had before.

That connection can only benefit the city in its work. In the 2020 National Community Survey, 80% of Williamsburg respondents said they had a sense of civic/community pride and 79% said they had opportunities to volunteer.

Whether they are donating to a food drive, freshening up a garden bed, or using their expertise to tackle the city's biggest problems, volunteers contribute to the quality of life of their neighbors and help the city better serve its residents.

About the author: *Nicole Trifone is the Public Information Officer for the City of Williamsburg*





Protections for volunteers on behalf of the public entity

THROUGHOUT THE COMMONWEALTH, volunteers are a critical asset for many government bodies. Most people immediately think of volunteer fire and rescue associations when considering volunteer engagement in their communities. However, volunteers serve many roles that make it possible for entities such as schools, special events, and community-based arts and cultural organizations to function effectively. Volunteers often provide the essential level of support needed to make possible these and many other valuable services that might not otherwise be possible due to lack of funding or staffing. The Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA) often receives questions from our local governments about the protections that need to be provided for volunteers by the public entity.

Note: VRSA is unable to say whether a future or theoretical incident, demand or suit is covered. Every incident, demand or suit is unique; therefore, each one is evaluated to determine how coverage may apply.

Frequently asked questions

Who pays the medical bills if a volunteer is injured?

If injured while performing an authorized and supervised activity, the public entity's coverage for medical and related expenses for bodily injury by accident provides coverage, subject to the policy language and limitations.

Would the actions of volunteers be covered by the public entity's liability?

Generally, yes, if the actions are authorized and supervised by the public entity.

Are volunteers covered under workers' compensation?

Volunteers are specifically excluded under the Virginia Workers' Compensation Act. If volunteers are provided or promised something of monetary value in exchange for their services, the Act may find that an employee-employer relationship was created. If an employee-employer relationship is found to exist, workers' compensation coverage may apply.

A public entity can pass a resolution classifying volunteer firefighters, volunteer rescue workers, auxiliary police officers, and auxiliary sheriff deputies as employees for purposes of workers' compensation coverage.

Is there an age minimum for volunteers?

No, there is no minimum age requirement for volunteers. However, VRSA encourages each public entity to consider the responsibility and expectations of the volunteer activities when considering an age minimum.

When should background checks be conducted on volunteers?

Volunteers may be screened for many of the same reasons employers conduct background checks on employees and/or potential employees. Public entities should review their policies and procedures

with their attorney to ensure all federal, state, and local laws are followed.

Should our organization obtain a waiver and release form for each volunteer?

By signing a waiver and release form, volunteers acknowledge acts, responsibilities, and risks associated with volunteering. A waiver and release form may help guard against a suit; however, it may not prevent a suit. Public entities should consider the use of these forms with their attorney.



Developing a volunteer program

VRSA Local Government Specialist Peter Stephenson has advice for governmental entities looking to utilize volunteer time and talents.

"In my local government experience, a challenge I have seen is simply taking the time to channel this energy and enthusiasm into a programmed effort that can be sustained long term," said Stephenson.

"Mention volunteer job descriptions, applications, background checks, orientation and training, supervision, and recognition to some local elected officials, and you are just being a bureaucratic manager. However, it's precisely these details, along with adopted policies and procedures that will in fact promote successful volunteerism."

Stephenson, whose services include identifying emerging risks and challenges in local government, finance, planning, and compliance as well as leadership consulting, has gathered several resources for entities looking to increase their volunteer programming.

1. **Supervisors Guide to Managing Volunteers**, International City/County Management Association (ICMA) – A training manual written by the City of Roseville, California Volunteer Center has broad applicability beyond this community or state for those looking not to reinvent the wheel. www.icma.org/documents/supervisors-guide-managing-volunteers
2. **Managing Volunteers in Times of Disaster**, ICMA – Summarizes how volunteers can serve during emergencies and raises important legal issues which may arise from using volunteer resources. www.icma.org/blog-posts/managing-volunteers-times-disaster
3. **Volunteerism in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond**, ICMA – Highlights nine reminders for leveraging local interests and assets regarding volunteerism. www.icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/volunteerism-time-covid-19-and-beyond

For more information on coverage related to public entity volunteers, contact your VRSA underwriter.

For more information on leveraging volunteers in your community, contact Peter Stephenson at: pstephenson@vrsa.us.

About VRSA: *The Virginia Risk Sharing Association is the first and most financially sound group self-insurance pool in the Commonwealth of Virginia.*

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CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

By Virginia Housing staff

Alexandria receives Urban Land Institute Robert C. Larson Housing Policy Leadership Award

IN OCTOBER, ALEXANDRIA'S Office of Housing and its Department of Planning and Zoning received the 2021 Urban Land Institute Robert C. Larson Housing Policy Leadership Award. The award recognized their work to create a residential multifamily (RMF) zone in the city's South Patrick Street neighborhood. The new zoning ordinance was crucial to the preservation and creation of affordable housing in that area.

Anyone who works in the housing or development industry knows the importance of zoning. It dictates land use – what is allowed and what is not – and can be used as a tool to stimulate or slow development. Changes to zoning are often requested when new needs arise.

So, in 2018 when City of Alexandria officials realized that hundreds of affordable housing units along its Route 1 South corridor

were at risk of being redeveloped into market-rate housing by-right, they knew they had to act.

City Council created the South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy community planning and engagement process. This provided a proactive approach to address the expiring federal rental assistance contracts at two of the city's deeply affordable housing developments, The Heritage at Old Town and Olde Towne West III. This was a multi-departmental effort, led by the Office of Housing and Department of Planning and Zoning.

"We needed to determine what type of incentive it would take to keep those deeply affordable units, but also have it make financial sense for the owners," said Helen McIlvaine, Alexandria's Director of Housing.

South Patrick Housing Affordability Project





Planning Director Karl Moritz and Housing Director Helen McIlvaine accepting the award

The goal, explained McIlvaine, was to ensure the properties were redeveloped into successful and financially sustainable communities that served a broad range of incomes.

A big piece of that strategy was the creation of the Residential Multifamily Zone (RMF). This new zoning could be applied to both properties to allow an increase in density, so that more units could be built on the property than currently permitted — resulting in an increased rental revenue stream to subsidize the affordable units.

“The RMF zone allows that level of substantial density in exchange for the preservation or production of affordable housing,” said McIlvaine. “It also requires that tenants living in the buildings being redeveloped will be relocated within the city during construction and given a guaranteed right to return — so the entire process really is a very big deal.”

A high priority was communicating this message to neighbors, stakeholders, and the tenants who would be impacted.

“Because we were proposing to increase density, we knew this would be closely watched, and we wanted there to be a lot of public participation,” said McIlvaine. “And because the apartments had a large Amharic-speaking population, including those who support the local hospitality industry and other critical service workers, we knew we needed translation services, options for virtual participation, childcare — anything we could do to get people engaged and to dispel fears that they would lose their home.”



Enter Virginia Housing

To help engage and reassure the community, the city applied for Virginia Housing’s Community Impact Grant (CIG). This type of grant offers local government resources for community revitalization.

“The Virginia Housing Community Impact Grant was such a boon because we were able to do culturally competent engagement, meaning that all of our meetings, newsletters and all of our communications, including the Strategy, were translated into multiple languages, and Amharic interpretation was offered at each meeting. Every meeting was livestreamed, with opportunities for comments and questions from those not able to join in-person. This preceded the pandemic,” said McIlvaine.

Matthew Bolster, a Senior Strategic Housing Officer with Virginia Housing, said large-scale community outreach efforts like this can be costly, which is why the CIG exists.

“Virginia Housing wants to make it as easy as possible for local governments to engage with their communities,” said Bolster. “The City of Alexandria was very concerned about losing affordable housing options for its residents, and officials knew they would need transportation, childcare, translators and other services to be able to communicate effectively to the residents.”

The \$140,000 grant provided the tools Alexandria needed to educate and inform the community about the proposed RMF zoning.

“We held pop-ups at Ethiopian coffee houses, handed out flyers, held meetings at the properties,” said McIlvaine. “We wanted to make sure there were no barriers to participating and that there was a lot of opportunity for input and understanding throughout the process.”

The result? The RMF zone was approved Feb. 23, 2019.

“This is the first time we’ve done something this comprehensive, and it’s actually become our model — our gold standard,” said McIlvaine. “It would’ve been truly impossible for the city to have managed this without the CIG from Virginia Housing.”

The progress continues

Although COVID-19 slowed some things down, progress is being made in implementing the Housing Affordability Strategy. Asland Capital Partners, which acquired the Heritage at Old Town in 2019, is proposing to redevelop its three apartment buildings along Route 1 — increasing the number of units from 244 to 750. Of the 750 apartments, 195 would remain affordable housing, with the majority to be deeply affordable to households with incomes at or below 40% of the area median income.

“The reason I wanted to nominate the RMF policy was because I felt the process we created could be a model that would work elsewhere, and it’s so cool to see something actually being implemented — that doesn’t happen all the time,” said McIlvaine. “You can have the best plans and ideas in the world, but a lot of them end up staying on the shelf, but here it’s happening. We have a project that’s going to be coming online in the next couple of years, with all current residents of The Heritage having an opportunity to return.”

About the awards: *The Larson Awards recognize exemplary state and local programs, policies, and practices that support the production, rehabilitation, or preservation of workforce and affordable housing. The program was created in 2011 to honor the legacy of the late Robert C. Larson, a former ULI Foundation chairman and a longtime ULI trustee.*

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