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ABOUT THE COVER

Between 1908 and 1940, it was possible to purchase a home from the Sears catalog. To many at the time, this seemed both odd and innovative. But while the process may have been different, the affordable homes themselves proved to be familiar and long lasting. In fact, many are still standing and happily occupied. Catalog homes (not to mention catalogs themselves) may be a thing of the past, but a new frontier in affordable housing beckons. In this issue of *VTC* you'll learn more about how the affordable homes of the future will be put together employing new techniques such as CrossMod construction and 3D printing (like the home on the cover).

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Don't delay! All entries must be received via e-mail by 5 pm, Monday, August 15. Visit www.vml.org to start your entries.

Together, we are bringing it all together!

HAPPY SUMMER! This is the time of year that VML staff begin putting all the pieces in place for our annual conference and gathering the input of our members to craft the 2023 Legislative Agenda. It's also the time of year that we engage with state agencies and other stakeholders on various study and work groups as advocates for our members to ensure that the needs of Virginia's localities are heard. Sometimes, there are wonderful opportunities that bring all these things together. Here's a case in point...

Recently, a VML member town had a question about the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) rehabilitation program. Specifically, the town wanted to know if the DHCD's grant could be used to address "one-off" properties instead of the town being required to create a "program area" – which is a term of art for these grants. I reached out to other towns and found that this issue is not unique. As I learned more, I was extremely impressed by the efforts being made to accommodate the needs of the towns within the parameters of the program. In the end, representatives from VML, the town, and DHCD decided to hold a meeting to discuss what could be accomplished. The meeting was a success and spawned a cool plan for a rotating, party-style learning session to be held during the 2022 VML Annual Conference.

How will it work? As part of VML's 2022 Annual Conference, DHCD has agreed to host a "Grant Party" where VML members can ask questions and learn about the various grant programs that DHCD handles. I am very excited about this because during our meeting, the DHCD staff discussed so many innovative ideas and grant opportunities – many of which were previously unfamiliar to us. Please take advantage of this valuable session at the VML Annual Conference happening October 2-4 in Richmond!

Thanks to the staff from DHCD who have proven they are more than willing to sit down with any of our localities and talk about their grant programs!

In other DHCD-related news – and appropriate for this issue of *VTC* – VML attended the Youngkin Housing Affordability Listening Sessions in Virginia Beach which was facilitated by DHCD. This was the first of eight listening sessions planned by the governor to focus on ways to increase the affordability and supply of housing across the Commonwealth.

And speaking of housing...Affordable housing, short-term rentals, local taxation, and marijuana are among the pressing issues that the VML Legislative Committee took up when it met at the end of June. As most of you are already aware, this meeting was the first step in crafting VML's legislative program for 2023. Our policy committees will meet in late July to adopt revised policy statements and help identify priorities for 2023. Please volunteer to be on a policy committee if you haven't done so already! Our policy committees are Community and Economic Development, Finance, General Laws, Human Development and Education and Infrastructure, Transportation, and Environmental Quality.

Information about all our policy committees is available at www.vml.org/advocacy/policy-committees.

If you have an issue that could become part of legislation next year, please contact me so that our committees can consider it.

As I write this, VML's staff are looking forward to a wonderful 4th of July weekend. I hope that everyone had a safe and enjoyable celebration!



October 2-4
Downtown Marriott, Richmond



Get to know: Hala Gilbert – councilmember intern, rising university student, and future judge

VML PRESIDENT AND CITY of Fairfax Councilmember Jon Stehle is a busy guy. But he's not too busy to help a young person interested in learning more about local government. So, in June of 2021 when he was contacted by Langley High School student

Hala Gilbert, he offered to show her the ropes. That initial offer turned into an internship for Hala as she accompanied Jon to council meetings, VML's 2021 annual conference in Leesburg, the National League of Cities' (NLC) conference in Washington D.C., and a technology event at MITRE Corporation.

With Hala set to start at Northeastern University this fall, Jon thought it would be a good chance for VTC get to know Hala and find out how she plans to put her experience with local government to use in the coming years.

VTC: *How did you start interning with Councilmember Stehle?*

Hala: It's a funny story. I didn't apply for anything, but during COVID quarantine I started listening to podcasts and wanted to get more involved with local government, so I thought maybe I'd get involved in a campaign. I talked to my aunt about it, and we volunteered for Hala Ayala's campaign for lieutenant governor. I didn't enjoy that experience too much, but my aunt is friends with Jon from working at MITRE Corporation and we hit it off. I shadowed him at a couple things and then it became more of a formal internship.

VTC: *Jon told me that you are planning to major in computer science at Northeastern this fall. Is that still the plan?*

Hala: Yes, I still want to major in computer science and then I want to go to law school and hopefully get a degree in tech law...my dream job is to become a judge someday.

VTC: *Wow, you've got much more of a plan than I did at your age!*

Hala: Everyone in the McLean area seems to be doing something, so I thought I've got to get into something as well to get a leg up before going to college.

VTC: *What are some of the most valuable things you've done during your internship so far?*

Hala: The NLC conference in D.C. really stuck out as worthwhile. We got to see President Biden and Speaker Pelosi speak, which was really, really amazing. I also got to network and talked with a lot of individuals like local politicians from all over the country. Also, I recently attended an event at MITRE Corporation and got to see how they incorporate technology with the localities. Falls Church wants to pursue a smart city and what they had to say was interesting.

VTC: *Do you feel that the exposure to local government you've had through this internship will stick with you?*

Hala: I decided to try it, and I did enjoy it. That's why I've started working with City of Fairfax Mayor David Meyer to create a youth council. I promised to chair it, even though I'll need to do it virtually, for the first three years and then hopefully it will run itself. But even out of college, I'd like to stay involved with local politics somehow because that's where everything is. Everything around you is run by local government.

VTC: *No arguments here. Do you imagine there will be an internship aspect to the youth council you are trying to put together?*

Hala: At first, I thought maybe I'd like each councilmember to take on an intern, like what Jon did with me. But when I went to the NLC conference in March, I started talking to members of their youth council on the West Coast. They have a small group of high schoolers who apply to be on a youth board and help with local issues. They meet bi-monthly and attend events. I think it's a good model.



PEOPLE

Coleburn stepping aside after four terms as Town of Blackstone's mayor

Current Town of Blackstone Mayor **Billy Coleburn**, who was elected in 2006, announced in December 2020 that he would not seek a 5th term. He will leave office Dec. 31, 2022 after leading the Town for 16 1/2 years.



- Coleburn -

Coleburn, 53, is a Blackstone native and 1990 graduate of the College of William & Mary. According to a press release, his dual roles of mayor and journalist — he's editor of the *Courier-Record* newspaper in Blackstone — were primary issues in his first election. However, Coleburn ran on transparency and says he's tried to do that while also representing the town and its citizens in a "fair and positive manner." Coleburn is also a member of the state Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Advisory Council. He uses Facebook Live addresses to keep citizens updated on various local issues, weather emergencies, and crime updates, as well as his own Town Hall musings.

As the town's chief spokesperson, Coleburn played a vital role educating and calming residents when 10,000 Afghan evacuees were accommodated a mile from town limits at nearby Fort Pickett during the summer of 2021.

Blackstone is a Black-majority town, and Coleburn pushed for the town to hold a Juneteenth celebration in 2021. He also has presided with the town's first-ever Black-majority council. "We have come a long way from the voting rights lawsuits of the 1980s. We are a diverse community, and we are working together to make it even better." He also launched a "Black History Heroes" program, now in its second year.

"A lot of us who grew-up in the south don't like discussing race relations. It can be awkward for white people and painful for Black people, but I've always believed in being able to discuss those things that make us uncomfortable. That's the only way we can improve and cast aside negativity."

Coleburn said he believes his greatest accomplishment has been improving transparency at Town Hall and reaching out to children in various capacities. He started an essay contest to celebrate the town's annual Grand Illumination, and winners get to help him 'throw the switch.' He also has advocated for the VML's "If I Were Mayor" contest, visiting local classrooms and discussing the role and responsibilities of a small-

town mayor. Kenston Forest in Blackstone has produced three regional winners in the past six years!

During Coleburn's tenure, Blackstone became a Virginia Main Street Community, revitalized its downtown Historic Business District, built a \$3 million medical building for Bon Secours, expanded its regional bus system, strengthened relations between the town and Fort Pickett, greatly improved its financial standing, began to renovate the town's 1936 old armory building, and made many other improvements.

City of Williamsburg welcomes Griffin as the new planning and codes compliance director



- Griffin -

As of May 16, **Tevya Griffin** is the new director of planning and codes compliance for the City of Williamsburg.

Griffin succeeds Carolyn Murphy, who retired in December 2021.



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A certified planner with the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and a member of the American Planning Association, Griffin previously served as Hopewell’s director of development beginning in 2013. In this role, Griffin supervised the Planning and Zoning staff, the Building and Code Enforcement inspectors, and the GIS administrator. She was also the city’s zoning administrator and flood plain manager.

Her career with Hopewell began in 2004 as the housing and grants administrator. In 2006, Griffin became the city’s planner. Prior

to her work for Hopewell, Griffin worked as the long-range planner for Isle of Wight County.

“Tevya will be an excellent addition to the Williamsburg team,” City Manager Andrew O. Trivette said in a press release. “The community and our organization will benefit from the enthusiasm and initiative that she has demonstrated during her successful career in the field of planning and community building.”

As the director of planning and codes compliance for the City of Williamsburg, Griffin will prepare and update the Com-

prehensive Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, and related documents; manage staff and relationships with Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and the Architectural Review Board; act as liaison to the Williamsburg Area Transit Authority, Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, and other various boards and committees; serve on the City of Williamsburg’s leadership team; and oversee all department functions for both planning and codes compliance.

Griffin holds a bachelor’s degree in Public and Urban Affairs from Virginia Tech and a master’s degree in Community Planning from the University of Maryland.

Moore is Mount Jackson’s new director of planning and development



- Moore -

Recently, the Town of Mount Jackson was pleased to announce the appointment of **Erick A. Moore** as director of planning and development. The new position is to provide for an executive level review, assessment, and approval for commercial, economic and residential development.

In a press release, Mayor Donald Pifer stated that “Mr. Moore comes to the Town of Mount Jackson with more than 25-years of community development, erosion and sediment control, planning and zoning administration and inspections. We are pleased to have someone with Mr. Moore’s background, vision and energy dedicated toward the Town’s future and success.”

In his new role, Moore’s responsibilities include items such as expanding the town’s Historic District, assisting civic groups with promotional projects, providing new outdoor recreational opportunities, and planning projects related to the Rails to Trails development through downtown Mount Jackson.

Prior to Moore’s career with local governments, he was the director of governmental affairs and public relations for the Roanoke Home Builders Association and, served as a political consultant & chief of staff for Virginia House of Delegate and Virginia Congressional members.

After serving in the United States Navy, Moore graduated Lord Fairfax Community College and Ferrum College with degrees in environmental science, natural resources, and biology. Moore spent his college summers with the Army Corps of Engineers as-

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PEOPLE

sisting with wetlands delineation and wildlife habitat improvements.

Moore holds a Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management from the Virginia Tech Center for Public Administration & Policy and is a Certified Zoning Administrator from the Virginia Association of Zoning Officials. He has held various leadership roles with VAZO Executive Committee & local governments.

Gordonsville Town Manager Kendall earns ICMA credentials



Deborah S. Kendall, town manager of Gordonsville, recently received the Credentialed Manager designation from ICMA, the International City/County Management Association. Ms. Kendall is one

of over 1,300 local government management professionals currently credentialed through the ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program.

ICMA's mission is to advance professional local government through leadership,

management, innovation, and ethics, and by increasing the proficiency of appointed chief administrative officers, assistant administrators, and other employees who serve local governments and regional entities around the world. The organization's 13,000 members in 27 countries also include educators, students, and other local government employees.

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

In a press release, Gordonsville Mayor Bob Coiner said, "I'm so proud of Debbie and the wonderful work she does as our town manager. I'm also proud of the leadership she has consistently shown in her work-related professional organizations. Gordonsville is fortunate to have someone with her competence and character at the helm, and her abilities, education and local government experience make her the perfect candidate to receive the prestigious Credentialed Manager designation from ICMA.

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.

Speaking for our council and staff, I'd like to offer sincere congratulations and best wishes to our esteemed colleague!"

Ms. Kendall is qualified by more than 20 years of professional local government executive experience. Prior to her appointment in September 2014 as Gordonsville's town manager, she served as planner/clerk for the town, as well as director of planning for Orange County. A 1988 graduate of Virginia Tech, Ms. Kendall holds a bachelor's degree in Geography.

Ms. Kendall is a member of the Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA), an ICMA affiliate, and currently serves on the Executive Board as third vice president. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Virginia Local Government Finance Corporation and has been a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) since July 1998. Ms. Kendall is a member of the American Planning Association-Virginia Chapter, the Virginia Association of Zoning Officials, and is a lifetime member of the Rural Planning Caucus of Virginia.



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.

Listen to our newest episode at www.vml.org.



Brewster selected as Blacksburg chief of police



- Brewster -

On June 14, the Town of Blacksburg was pleased to announce that Captain **Todd Brewster** of the Blacksburg Police Department had been selected chief of police, succeeding Chief Anthony Wilson who retired July 1 on which date Brewster began in the role.

A native of Tazewell and a graduate of Radford University, Brewster began his career as a dispatcher for the Blacksburg Police Department in 1997 and became an officer in 1999. He continued to advance in his career with the department, working through the ranks of sergeant and lieutenant while supervising the Accident Reconstruction Team and serving as the DMV grant coordinator. He was promoted to police services captain in November 2020 where he has since overseen the criminal investigations unit, accreditation, community outreach, recruiting and hiring, and the training unit. He has also served as a volunteer firefighter with the Blacksburg Fire Department as well as the Christiansburg Fire Department.

"I congratulate Todd Brewster on being selected to serve Blacksburg in his new role as chief of police," said Town Manager Marc Verniel in a press release. "With every assignment Todd has distinguished himself as a community advocate and leader. He has the skills to lead the department into the future and will continue to build upon the relationships he and our police officers have established in our community."

Brewster, a recipient of the Virginia Police Chiefs Foundation's Lifesaving Award, is also a graduate of the FBI National Academy, a member of the FBI National Academy Associates; International Association of Chiefs of Police; and the Blue Ridge Association of Chiefs of Police. Locally he serves on the Board of Directors for the New River Valley Alcohol Safety Awareness Program.

City of Petersburg appoints White new director of human resources

In May, the City of Petersburg was pleased to announce the selection of **LaKishah White** as director of human resources. White is a seasoned professional with more than 23 years of experience in HR.

"Throughout the competitive recruit-



- White -

ment process for the HR position, Mrs. White demonstrated solid leadership, professionalism and genuine dedication to staff recruitment, retention, and team building," said Interim City Manager Kenneth Miller in a press release. "I believe she will continue to serve with these same characteristics to help build and sustain a high performing Petersburg team that supports City Council's vision for providing a superior level of service to the community."

White comes to Petersburg following a 20-year tenure with Bon Secours Mercy Health System in Richmond where she worked as the HR system director serving approximately 9,500 employees. She has also worked with Chesterfield County Department of Social Services and Brenco, Inc. in Petersburg.

White, a graduate of Petersburg High, earned a bachelor of arts degree from Old Dominion University and a master of business administration from Strayer University. She holds Professional in Human Resources (PHR) and SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP) certifications.

Rodriguez is the Town of Leesburg's new public information officer

On May 8, Leesburg Town Manager Kaj Dentler announced that **Kara Rodriguez**



- Rodriguez -

had been hired as the town's public information officer.

Rodriguez succeeds Betsy Arnett, who was recently promoted to the position of senior management analyst.

In a press release, Dentler said, "I believe Kara's extensive media and local government background makes her an ideal fit for this position, and we are excited for her to join the town government."

Rodriguez has been a longtime reporter in Loudoun County, exclusively covering the Town of Leesburg government for almost 15 years. During her time with both *Leesburg Today* and *Loudoun Now* newspapers, she has been recognized on several occasions by the Virginia Press Association for her local news coverage, recently winning awards for business, financial and technological writing, and her coverage of the Leesburg Mobile

Park sale. Additionally, Rodriguez currently sits on the Berryville Town Council as its Ward 4 representative, a position she will continue in until her term expires at year's end. Rodriguez plays an active role on several Berryville government committees and has several leadership roles in her daughters' school. Early in her tenure at *Leesburg Today*, she co-founded the Young Professionals group with the Loudoun Chamber of Commerce.

Rodriguez, a Northern Virginia native, holds a liberal arts degree from New York University, where she studied newspaper journalism and political science.

Hughes appointed chief of police for Town of Warsaw



- Hughes -

In June, the Town of Warsaw was pleased to announce the appointment of **Andrew John Hughes Jr.** as chief of police. Chief Hughes, is a seasoned police officer with 25+ years of progressive experience

in Law Enforcement, Corrections, and Investigations. Hailing from the Richmond area, Hughes is passionate about community policing and contributing to building better, stronger communities. His goal is for families and business owners to feel safer and be better educated about state and town ordinances, their rights as citizens, and law enforcement in general.

Chief Hughes has served in police work and corrections since 1994. He has been a supervisor in charge of School Resource Officers, a juvenile Investigator, and a field training officer. Throughout his career, Hughes' priority has always been education and developing strong community relations wherever he serves. Hughes has also committed time to motivational speaking and mentoring. Prior to accepting his current role, Hughes served the State of South Carolina, where he last worked as the lieutenant over operations for the Town of Andrews, SC.

In a press release, Town of Warsaw Mayor Randall L. Phelps stated: "Chief Hughes seems to be a motivated individual and we have high hopes for his tenure as our chief. As the town grows and expands, we feel confident in his abilities to lead the department forward and to protect and serve the residents of the town."

SAVE THE DATE



October 2-4 • Downtown Marriott, Richmond

About the VML Annual Conference

Each fall hundreds of local government officials, speakers and member organization representatives attend the VML Annual Conference. The conference includes:

- General sessions featuring political leaders, nationally-known speakers and local government experts.
- Workshop sessions on a variety of local government issues.
- Business meeting focusing on the adoption of the annual VML legislative program and the election of officers for the upcoming year.
- The presentation of the annual Innovation Awards recognizing excellence in local government programs.
- The opportunity for networking with colleagues from across the state.

Visit www.vml.org for up-to-date information and to register.

City of Fairfax hosts inaugural event in anticipated youth sports series

ON SATURDAY, MAY 21, the Fairfax Police Youth Club in conjunction with USA Lacrosse and with assistance from George Mason University hosted a free lacrosse experience to give new players ages 6-14 a chance to try the sport. The City of Fairfax helped make the event possible by using ARPA funds to rent the facilities from GMU as part of an initiative for non-profit groups to stage youth sports activities. Despite it being the hottest day of the year (so far), 60 kids came out to use the provided gear and learn from accomplished players like Morgan Gunn and Laurent Distadt – members of GMU’s women’s lacrosse team who volunteered their time.

Dawn Hicks, GMU’s director of community relations, was pleased that the event went so well. “We just love the concept of getting children off their computers and off their video games and

back on to grass and fields to play with one another, especially after the pandemic.”

The city and FPYC promoted the event via social media. Future events will include another sport and will be held at other sites with the next event tentatively scheduled for November.



Arlington County’s Park system ranked third in the nation by the Trust for Public Land

IN EARLY MAY, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) announced the localities identified through its annual ParkScore index which ranks park systems in the 100 most populous U.S. cities and is widely considered the “gold standard” for park evaluation.

“Our parks and recreation opportunities are a key contributor to quality of life in Arlington County. From livability, bikeability,

fitness, health and more, our community benefits from our parks,” said Arlington County Board Chair Katie Cristol. “And during the challenging

recent pandemic years, our Department of Parks and Recreation proved that recreation is a core service by delivering food to those in need, providing and coordinating facilities to administer COVID-19 tests and vaccines, and offering all of us respite and connection to community.”

For the past several years, Arlington has ranked fourth in the country but this year it moved up a notch to third, just behind Washington DC and St. Paul, MN. Arlington scored 79.1 points

out of 100 in the ParkScore® index. The calculation is based on an average of five categories reflective of an excellent city park system: access, investment, amenities, acreage and equity. Arlington scores near the top in the community’s investment (both dollars and volunteerism) and access. The County scored about average on the percentage of the city’s overall area that is dedicated to parkland and below average on park size.

“Our community’s commitment to its parks makes a difference,” said Parks and Recreation Director Jane Rudolph. “They have supported us by voting for park bonds. They steward our parks as volunteers. They provide great input as we develop new programs and facilities.”

About the TPL: The TPL is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, TPL works with communities to create parks and protect public land where they are needed most. Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 3 million acres of public land, created more than 5,000 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places, raised \$84 billion in public funding for parks and public lands, and connected more than 9 million people to the outdoors. To learn more, visit www.tpl.org.



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City of Franklin holds successful first annual Spring Fest

ON SATURDAY, APRIL 23, the City of Franklin held the first annual Spring Fest. Similar to the city’s beloved Franklin Fall Festival, numerous blocks of the downtown historic district were closed from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. to wel-



come visitors and residents. Attractions and activities included over 80 specialty vendors and local businesses, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts artmobile, a cornhole tournament benefiting Special Olympics, a Children’s Zone with bounce houses and activities, a spring farmer’s market, free photos courtesy of Brittany Vandiford Photography, an animal adoption event hosted by the City of Franklin Animal Shelter, entertainment, and more!

City of Fredericksburg formally opens smart park and “Otter-ly Amazing” trail

FREDERICKSBURG CELEBRATED the opening of Riverfront Park and the launch of Fredericksburg Main Street’s Otter-ly Amazing project on Saturday, May 21. Riverfront Park is a nearly 4-acre property in historic downtown and the city’s first “smart park.” As its name suggests, it features fantastic Rappahannock River views and includes open space, event space, an interactive water feature, a meadow area, and a children’s play area.

As a “smart park,” Riverfront Park is the first park in the region to provide solar-powered lighting, free public Wi-Fi, flood sensors, and security cameras. The free public Wi-Fi service enables people visiting Riverfront Park to access the Internet through their own wireless-enabled devices.

Thanks to the city’s partnership and a \$75,000 grant from Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPIC), more expansive plans for Riverfront Park were integrated into the park design with smart technology that will be implemented in phases. Additionally, the park is fully plumbed and ready for future restrooms. The stage area is prepped with all electrical work, and city staff is already working to attract private donations and grant funding for a permanent stage.

The park’s signage will work to interpret and share the city’s

rich history with visitors. Six different archaeological investigations were conducted in the park area prior to construction, revealing a rich history of activity spanning from the prehistoric Native American presence through the Civil War to a community hub in the 20th century. The park was constructed to leave some of the most significant findings intact below the ground.

Designed to be a hub for downtown events and culture, Riverfront Park was also the natural “home base” for the mother otter in Fredericksburg Main Street’s Otter-ly Amazing Trail. This exciting partnership between the downtown business community and the City of Fredericksburg seeks to promote the precious Rappahannock River ecosystem and the city’s rich arts community through an interactive art experience in historic downtown. “We look forward

to the public ‘hunting’ for the bronze river otters downtown and enjoying all the wonderful restaurants, coffee shops, and retail along the way,” said April Peterson, lead on the Otter-ly Amazing Fredericksburg Project.

For more information about Riverfront Park, visit www.fredericksburgva.gov. For more information about the Otter-ly Amazing project, visit www.fxbgotters.com.



Town of Vienna hosts successful bike tour

ON MAY 14, the Town of Vienna held its second annual “Tour de Hunter Mill” which began at the Vienna Town Green and proceeded through the Hunter Mill district. Despite gray skies and sprinkles, about 140 bike enthusiasts participated. Mayor Linda Colbert completed the 5-mile family ride and Hunter Mill District Board of Supervisors Member Walter Acorn took part in the longer 18-mile route. Those on the family ride had the opportunity to pull into a pit stop at the corner of Tapawingo and Hillcrest. Supervisor Acord started the event last year as an opportunity for residents to explore of the Hunter Mill district and to encourage bike riding as a form of transportation.





City of Bristol announces 2022 Historic Preservation Award winners

THE BRISTOL VIRGINIA Historic Preservation Award Committee recognized property owners and developers at their homes/businesses on May 17 and May 19, for preservation of properties located within the city's five historic districts and citywide.

This year's winners:

Euclid Avenue: The Young home at 513 Park Street was restored by Parker Gemmill and Jason Cunningham. The two-story Dutch Colonial home was originally built in 1900, and was often referred to as the "barn house."

Solar Hill: The Shew home at 258 King Street, known as the King-Lancaster-McCoy-Mitchell House, contains two rooms that date back to 1816. The dwelling is a Victorian Italianate-style with Colonial Revival details.

Virginia Hill: The Mitoraj home at 417 Spencer Street, known as the I.C. Fowler House, was built in the Greek Revival architectural style in 1867. This outstanding historic home is a beautiful showcase within walking distance of downtown.

Bristol Downtown Commercial: The Cameo Theater at 703 State Street was built in 1925, and is one of the 15 oldest theaters in Virginia. Over forty years of neglect left the building

with a crumbling façade and chipping interior ceilings and paint. The beautiful restoration by owner Brent Buchanan took over three years and included new plumbing, drywall, paint, tile, trim, carpet, and sound system.

Bristol Warehouse Historic: Crossroads Medical Mission recently opened the single-story building at 433 Scott Street. Originally built in 1950, the building features a concrete foundation, flat roof, and concrete block exterior.

Citywide (pictured): Hannah's Cabin at 1452 Lee Highway was originally built approximately 1780-1820. From 1980-1990, the cabin's hand-hewn logs cut from the fields and huge v-notch rafters were dismantled and moved to Bristol, Virginia, from Logan Creek in Washington County, Virginia, and the cabin was rebuilt in 1991 by the Kistner family. The massive rock foundation was rebuilt with concrete and steel girders. The front porch and roof were replaced, and a farmhouse limestone chimney reassembled. Hannah's cabin stands today as a wonderfully preserved piece of the history of pioneer life in Southwest Virginia!

Learn more at www.bristolva.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=274.

Williamsburg, Strasburg host "3 Day Bike About" events

A "3 DAY BIKE ABOUT" is a small (300-400 cyclists) bicycle tour over a 3-day weekend (Friday, Saturday & Sunday), in or near a small locality in Virginia, with tent camping in a local park (or for those who prefer more luxurious digs – local hotels), while supporting a local charity and the local economy.



3 Day Bike Abouts provide riders, their family, and friends a fun-filled weekend of cycling and sightseeing. Routes range from 15 – 100 miles, in a different direction with new places to visit each day. When not cycling, participants and non-cycling family members can participate in other activities, such as kayaking, hiking, and visiting historic sites, as well as shopping and dining.

The City of Williamsburg hosted a Virginia's Historic Triangle 3 Day Bike About from April 29 – May 1 with camping at Chickahominy Riverfront Park along the Chickahominy River and the Virginia Capital Trail – a 52-mile paved multi-use trail from Jamestown to Richmond. The Williamsburg tour benefited The Arc of Greater Williamsburg.

The Town of Strasburg hosted a 3 Day Bike About from June 10 – 12 originating at the Strasburg Square and Market Pavilion with routes of 16 miles up to 100 miles (combined) and group camping at Strasburg High School Campus. This 3 Day Bike About was in support of the Shenandoah Rail Trail.

Learn more at www.3daybikeabout.com.

Floyd's "Small Town Summer Series" returns for 2022

THE TOWN OF FLOYD is moving forward with the 5th season of Floyd Small Town Summer! The season will feature 7 free events and will run from June 9th - September 1st every other Thursday night for the summer months. Residents and visitors are invited to bring the whole family and enjoy the beautiful Warren G. Lineberry Park filled with music, movies, face-painting, inflatables, games, food and beverage and special activities presented by a variety of community organizations. The kick-off event on June 9 featured Grammy winning Americana icon, singer-songwriter Jim Lauderdale and his band along with the Floorboards band, an American Roots Rock ensemble hailing from the Blue Ridge Mountains. Sponsors for the season include Citizens (communications coop), Skyline National Bank, Hotel Floyd, the Floyd Press, and (of course) the Town of Floyd.



Don't just think outside the box, build a better box!

By Rob Bullington

WHAT DOES IT MEAN for housing to be affordable? A useful way to think about housing affordability is to consider the average cost of a home compared to average median income. In the United States, that ratio was between 4.0 and 5.0 from about 1960 to 2001. This means that the price of a home was about 4 to 5 times the amount of the average median income. That ratio exceeded 7.0 at the peak of the housing bubble (the same that caused in the 2008/2009 economic crises).

Where are we today? On April 1, 2022, the ratio was 8.02.

So, if you've been thinking the housing market is a little crazy right now...you are correct!

And it's no better for renters. In fact, the rent-to-income ratio has nearly doubled since 1985.

Thankfully, there are plenty of people trying to ameliorate the situation. And there are lots of approaches – from working to raise wages, to increasing the housing supply – that can all be explored at the same time. But sometimes it's not just enough to think outside the box. Sometimes, you just need to build a better box. And, in this case, that means spending less money to build the box.

In this issue of *Virginia Town & City* we look at different, more affordable, ways to build those boxes we call our homes.

Innovate for affordable housing

WHEN THE WORD “INNOVATIVE” is used in relation to housing, we typically think of cool kitchen gadgets or luxe options for new construction. “Innovative” usually connotes televisions that display as artwork when idle, or hidden rooms like pantries or food staging areas; even items that are now considered commonplace like solar panels or energy-efficient light bulbs still evoke the “innovative” label. However, with the current shortage of affordable housing, “innovative housing” can now mean finding creative ways to get all demographics of homebuyers and renters into housing.

At Virginia Housing, we understand that innovation can be accomplished through building new communities to attract a diverse population of residents, tailoring existing communities to fit the actual needs of their current residents, and creating financing options to help those in need realize the dream of homeownership. We are pleased to share some of our innovation success stories in this issue of *Virginia Town & City*.

Innovative Partnerships: Creating affordable housing in Martinsville

A new neighborhood in the rural landscape of Martinsville-Henry County combines affordable housing with low-interest loans through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Five Points neighborhood in Martinsville includes single-family homes and townhouses ranging from \$125,000 to \$155,000. This project is a real success story built on partnerships among Virginia Housing, City of Martinsville, USDA-Rural Development, Nationwide Homes, Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corp., United Way of Henry County & Martinsville, and The Harvest Foundation.

Virginia Housing provided a \$500,000 Community Impact Innovative Demonstrations grant to complete site work for the 12 single-family homes. The United Way of Henry County & Martinsville serves as the official contact organization for potential applicants interested in housing at Five Points. Households earning up to \$48,300 may be eligible for a 33-year term direct loan, provided by USDA-Rural Development, to finance a new home in the neighborhood. Households earning up to \$90,300 may be eligible for a guaranteed loan, financed through a lender. These homes are required to be owner-occupied. Individuals may also qualify for additional support from the VIDA (Virginia Individual Development Accounts) program. This program allows participants to earn \$8 for every \$1 saved toward a new home, up to a maximum match of \$4,000.

The City of Martinsville provided direction on property acquisition and site development. City Manager Leon Towarnicki says that the partnerships made during the project were the reason that everything came to fruition:

“There had not been a mixed-use community here since the late 1970s, so the housing stock was incredibly old. We recognized the need for workforce housing and in using the partnerships, we were able to put together a plan and space to provide housing for the people in this community. The most innovative part of this project for us is the collaboration between the for-profit and nonprofit sectors — the people who came to the table and understood their role and worked together to make the project a success.”

Nationwide Homes serves as the main home builder for the project, providing a modular building process designed to take advantage of increased efficiencies that provide faster completion times.

Jeff Sadler, a consultant with Complete Community, notes that savings were literally built into the construction:

“The way the homes are manufactured for this project has certainly helped to streamline the process. The Nationwide Homes factory is in Martinsville, which was a huge plus for us because we have been able to support a local business while also providing a quality product to homebuyers at a fast completion rate, with efficiency being the standout here. Everything’s done in bulk so you can save on labor costs as well as materials costs which ultimately provides savings to the homebuyer.”

The Harvest Foundation provides support in the form of an Affordable Housing Fund that will serve as a backup for the project if homes at Five Points are on the market for an extended time. However, most have already sold!

DeWitt House, a senior program officer with the Harvest Foundation, says this new neighborhood development will support revitalization in Uptown Martinsville and hopefully give new opportunity for future residential options. “The partnerships that we’ve made during this venture can certainly lead the way for another Five Points in the future,” concludes House.

CAVCO INDUSTRIES



A pre-constructed Nationwide modular home frame is placed on its foundation.



Land is mapped for additional cottages in the Five Points neighborhood.



The cottages in the Five Points neighborhood await their new owners.

Innovative Urban Planning: Grant program provides money for a mission

Virginia Housing provides grants for localities and organizations working to create or preserve affordable housing for Virginia's

For more information about Virginia Housing grants, please contact Grants@VirginiaHousing.com.

families, the homeless, seniors, people with disabilities and people in high-growth or high-cost areas. Each year, Virginia Housing contributes a significant portion of its net revenues to the Community Impact Grant (CIG) program to help localities across the state protect and secure affordable housing. Many localities have used the CIG in the decade that it has been active, however the City of Alexandria leads the pack in showcasing its potential.

Having the resources to be able to bring people into the civic process of city planning to meet their housing needs and beyond is huge...the Community Impact Grants have been a very flexible mechanism to give localities and nonprofits funds to look at more innovative ways to do our business and keep our communities diverse. We've used these grants to fund several projects in our city throughout the last few years.

- Helen McIlvaine,
housing director for the
City of Alexandria

needed and led the city to plan for the preservation and/or creation of 800 committed affordable units with half of these at 40% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Remarkably, more than half of the plan's goals have been achieved so far!

Alexandria Showcase #1: The City of Alexandria used CIG money to survey residents in an area where a proposed large-scale development would likely mean the demolition of the existing workforce housing. The survey was meant to involve the affected residents by gathering demographic information. The survey found that there was a tremendous need for committed affordability targeted to households at lower income levels. The people who lived in the area worked in construction, hospitality, or other service-related jobs and were already burdened by the existing, "affordable" housing costs. The survey showed that more affordable housing was

Alexandria Showcase #2: The city again used a Virginia Housing CIG to conduct outreach with the intention of preserving two existing affordable apartment complexes (with expiring rental subsidies) that housed a predominantly North African population. Landlords, renters, and the community came together through a weeklong charrette process (funded by the CIG) to create a redevelopment strategy that would allow more housing density, including market-rate units, to preserve the existing deeply affordable units.

The result: In the space occupied by 200 units, there will now be around 750 units, with all the existing subsidy-based units – which will also be redeveloped – remaining affordable at 40% of the AMI (i.e., \$56,920 for a 4-person household). Everyone currently residing in the apartments will be relocated to housing in the city during construction, and everyone has a right to return when the project is completed. This initiative won the Urban Land Institute's 2021 Best Housing Policy Award!

Alexandria Showcase #3: When the city developed a housing plan for a Latino neighborhood close to the new Amazon headquarters, community members were very concerned that the neighborhood would undergo significant gentrification during development. The city worked with community members to develop a plan to preserve the culture of the neighborhood by expanding and improving

housing affordability. Furthermore, the plan sought to retain existing small businesses considered critical to residents.



The City of Alexandria holds an event to discuss plan recommendations with members of the community.



Community outreach goes mobile as city planners talk with community members on their bus ride to work.

All documents and materials for the plan were "Spanish first" (i.e., presented first in Spanish and then in English). To ensure community involvement, the city worked with partners on the ground to help get people to meetings every Monday night during the summer of 2020. The feedback received was incorporated into the development concept for a new housing community of 475 units. Of these, 417 units will be rental with 25% reserved for residents earning 40% or less of the AMI. There will also be 58-60 affordable condo units for sale to qualified first-time homebuyers. The development plan includes commercial space for a health center with medical and dental services, affordable daycare, and other neighborhood-serving retail options. The Virginia Housing CIG is also being used to help area residents become "ready to rent" and "ready to buy" as new housing is developed.

Innovative Financing: Localities use SPARC to help hopeful homebuyers

More and more hopeful homebuyers are being forced to remain in rental properties due to the rising cost of homes. In fact, in most areas of the country, properties sell for \$20,000 to \$75,000 over asking price! Homebuyers are frustrated to learn that properties they could once afford are now out of reach. In this competitive climate, innovative financing is just one of the tools potential homebuyers can

use to make homeownership a reality. Financing programs like Virginia Housing's SPARC program can help by providing funding and homeownership opportunities to localities and nonprofits. Through SPARC, Virginia Housing's approved lenders can provide a 1% mortgage interest rate reduction to eligible first-time homebuyers. This increases their purchasing power and potentially saves them thousands of dollars over the life of the loan.

Regina Pinkney, the Northern Virginia regional business development officer for Virginia Housing, notes that the SPARC program is aggressive in defense of affordability and helping the buyer. "SPARC is not the answer but the catalyst to turn a 'No' into a 'Yes' in the homebuying process," observes Pinkney. "It reduces the interest rate enough to open the door to first-time homebuyers."

Virginia Housing is the only housing organization in the area that offers a program such as SPARC. Maryland Mortgage Program, DC Open Doors, North Carolina Finance Agency and Tennessee Housing Development Authority all have programs and grants for down payment assistance, but none offer the competitive buy-down option that SPARC provides.

To learn more about SPARC and apply for the program, visit VirginiaHousing.com/Grants.

About the author: *Adrian Robinett is the public relations manager for Virginia Housing*

The future of housing innovation: A 3D-printed home shows the way

THE U.S. IS IN THE MIDST of an affordable housing crisis. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is a shortage of more than 7 million affordable homes nationally. Even more alarming, in no state can a renter working full-time at minimum wage afford a two-bedroom apartment! In response to this crisis, organizations like Virginia Housing are turning to innovative solutions to bring more affordable homes to their communities. To this end, Virginia Housing has created an innovation grant to help spur the adoption and use of new construction methods, building materials and processes to create more affordable housing inventory.

Among the initiatives made possible by the innovation grant is a project for a three-bedroom, two-bath home that broke ground at 217 Carnation Street on the City of Richmond's southside. Construction of the home, which was built using 3D-printed walls, began last summer and was recently completed.

"We are just beginning to understand the broad application of 3D-printing technology and its impact on the housing market," says Virginia Housing's Director of Strategic Housing, Chris Thompson. "We are incredibly excited as we see this as yet another tool to create more affordable housing inventory, something we desperately need across the Commonwealth."

According to Thompson, 3D-printed homes will be exceptionally durable and energy-efficient which means lower repair and

heating/cooling costs for homeowners. The Richmond project also plans to outfit the home with smart home technology to monitor building performance.

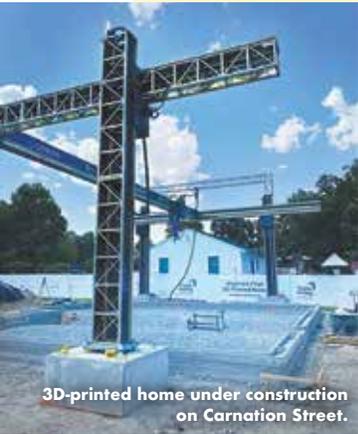
Alquist, a 3D-printing construction firm, printed the walls for the home. The process for creating the walls resembles that of creating a layer cake as the large-format 3D-printer head extrudes a cement mixture layer after layer to build up to the desired wall height. The home's concrete slab foundation, roof system and interior walls were completed with traditional construction techniques.

The hope is that 3D-printed homes will be able to be constructed at a lower cost because they require fewer onsite contractors and less time to build. This method has the potential to significantly lower costs and reduce the overall time it takes to construct a new house.

Additional partners in the Richmond project included the Better Housing Coalition and project:HOMES, which identified a Virginia resident for the completed house who will have the option to secure a mortgage through Virginia Housing. These two nonprofit housing organizations are handled the coordination of local regulatory compliance, permitting, zoning, and insurance.

"Virginia Housing is funding and leading this collaborative 3D-printed home project with a team of housing experts and community partners. Our latest project builds off recent innovative approaches we've explored, including modular and factory-built homes, and it reflects our longstanding commitment to making homes affordable for all Virginians."

- Susan Dewey,
CEO of Virginia Housing



3D-printed home under construction on Carnation Street.



The nearly completed 3D-printed home on Carnation Street.



Rendering of a finished 3D-printed home.

Factory-built housing for a more affordable future

THE FACTORY-BUILT HOUSING industry is thriving in Virginia. These affordable, quality built, energy efficient homes typically come in one of two construction types: manufactured or modular. The difference between the two is the building code the home is constructed to.

Manufactured homes must follow a nationwide building code regulated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, thereby often referred to as “HUD coded homes”. The HUD Code first took effect in June of 1976 and is known as the Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards; Part 3280. The HUD Code is revised periodically to adjust the construction standards based on recommendations from the Manufactured Home Consensus Committee. HUD gives states the choice to oversee the manufactured housing industry in their individual states or choose to have HUD to oversee the industry. In Virginia, the State Administrative Agency (SAA) is the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Some of DHCD’s responsibilities include overseeing the Manufactured Housing Board, conducting inspections of building facilities and dealer locations, and giving interpretive guidance. The Manufactured Housing Board is directed to promulgate regulations, oversee licensure, and oversee the consumer complaint resolution program.

Modular construction must follow the state building code and be constructed to the same standards as if the home was built on site. In Virginia, modular homes must be built to the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC). Since most of the construction takes place off site in a factory, DHCD reviews plans and issues stickers that show the home was built compliant with the Code. The homes receive third party inspection at the factory. The local jurisdiction’s code official will inspect the onsite components to the home including footers, electrical connection, HVAC, and decks/steps/porches. While all manufactured homes must be constructed on a frame (chassis), modular homes can be either on frame or off frame construction.

One of the challenges for manufactured homes is consumer financing. There are not as many lenders in the manufactured housing arena as there are lenders for traditional real estate mortgages. Although there are several sources for new construction, the resale market for manufactured homes leaves the consumer with few financing options. As a result, the Dodd Frank Act, enacted in July of 2010, requires the government sponsored enterprises (GSE’s) with the duty to serve the underserved manufactured housing industry. Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae have both developed programs to support broader lending to the industry.

One new product that is on the market as a result of the GSE’s duty to serve is the CrossMod™. Although this is a manufactured home, the CrossMod™ home has several features more commonly found with site-built homes including a higher pitched roof, covered front porch, finished sheet rock throughout, upgrade cabinets, and frequently a garage or carport. Freddie and Fannie have developed programs to finance this new class of homes and even allow site built comparables with their appraisals. Freddie’s program is called Choice-Home® Mortgage and Fannie’s program is called MH Advantage.



CrossMod recently shown on the National Mall as part of HUD’s Innovative Housing Showcase.

The Virginia Manufactured and Modular Housing Association recently partnered with Virginia Housing and Next Step Network, Inc to bring a pilot project of CrossMod™ homes to Danville. The City of Danville expressed the need for affordable workforce housing. Working with Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority, 5 lots were identified to be well suited for the CrossMod product. There was one difficult issue to address before the project could move forward; zoning. The City of Danville had no land zoned for fee simple manufactured homes, only manufactured home communities. Working with the planning and zoning office, the city planning commission, and city council, an overlay district was created which would allow the placement of manufactured homes allowing the project to proceed. Currently, three homes have been completed with 3 new families calling their CrossMod™ “home”.



A newly completed CrossMod home in Danville.

Effective July 1, 2021, localities in Virginia shall consider the use of manufactured homes to meet their affordable housing needs with the adoption of their comprehensive plan (§15.2-2223.5)

About the author: *For guidance, options, and solutions, please feel free to reach out to Randy Grumbine, Executive Director of the Virginia Manufactured and Modular Housing Association (VAMMHA) at randy@vammha.org*

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Uncertainty: The effects of the unknown on the cusp of recession

IT'S NO SECRET that our current economy lacks stability. Inflation remains high at 8.6% for the month of May, a 40-year peak that has led to significant Federal action. Employees at major companies such as Carvana, Wells Fargo, and PayPal are experiencing hefty layoffs. With the delayed passing of the Virginia budget, state officials are now scrambling to allocate funds appropriately and effectively.

All of which is to say, it's a great time to look at how economic uncertainty relates to economic crises! It's also a wonderful opportunity to think about how new legislation might affect the Commonwealth if a recession occurs.

Signs of recession

For policy to be effective, it's necessary to predict the future state of the economy. The recent speculation about a recession within the next year is driven by several signs. First, we'll consider the inverted yield curve.

The yield curve represents the projected yield of a debt instrument in relation to the duration. An inverted yield curve – such as we are now experiencing – is a leading indicator of economic recession. Tellingly, the curve inverted prior to seven of the last eight recessions.

Another worrying sign of recession: inflation has skyrocketed this year well above projections. The Federal Reserve has tried to reduce the rate of inflation by raising interest rates. In fact, the most recent interest rate increase of over half a percent was the highest executed in twenty years. This demonstrates the severity of the situation. While lowering inflation will be beneficial, it is not without cost. The economic trade-off between the inflation rate and the unemployment rate is clearly demonstrated in what's referred to as the Phillips Curve model.

In the Phillips Curve model, the unemployment rate tends to decrease during times of high inflation and increase during times of low inflation. It follows that by targeting inflation, the Fed raises the likelihood of increased unemployment (as evidenced by those layoffs mentioned earlier). However, action by the Fed is necessary to prevent the economy from entering “stagflation”, a condition in which the economy experiences both high unemployment and inflation.

While we know that high inflation historically precedes recession, the current high inflation is no cause for panic. Why? Because the coming recession is not expected to be as severe as the Great Recession or the Coronavirus Recession. In fact, we are more likely to enter a “technical recession”, in which the economy will face a drop in GDP, but the large, long-term effects are limited. That said, there are still many lessons from previous recessions to keep in mind as we navigate the coming year.

Lessons from the Great Recession

Virginia, like most other states, suffered many long-term drawbacks during the Great Recession. A significant reason for the state's slow recovery was over reliance on federal funding. Coming out of the Great Recession, federal funding was slow to ramp back up, causing federally dependent states like Virginia to experience slower recoveries than those with more financial independence.

What does that mean for Virginia today? For starters, it means that any state tax cuts and resulting loss of revenue should be given extra weight. With many tax cuts passed during the final draft of Virginia's budget, this raises the question: Where will the missing funds come from? Any increased reliance on Federal funds should be a cause for concern. We've played this game before and lost.

History shows that the best approach to dealing with a recession is aggressive fiscal policy. By passing tax cuts, funding becomes less secure in times of economic instability, and fiscal policy is much more difficult to pursue.



To tax or not to tax?

The 2022 General Assembly passed legislation that eliminated the 1.5% state tax on groceries but left the 1% local tax intact. This was the less aggressive of the two proposals; the House wanted to eliminate both the state *and* local tax. Groceries account for about 20% of taxable sales in Virginia and it is expected that this will mean about \$280 million of lost annual revenue for public schools and \$140 million lost annual revenue for transportation. However, the General Assembly asserts that this will not reduce the school or transportation funding to which the tax revenues were allocated.

The General Assembly's assurances notwithstanding, it's worth noting that with a recession looming the external funding is much less certain. During the Great Recession, spending on prepared food decreased and groceries became a larger proportion of money spent on food as disposable income decreased. If these spending habits remain true today, the revenue loss will be much greater than anticipated by the General Assembly should we enter a recession.

Another way to think about it: Will this tax cut truly benefit the everyday consumer, or will it prove detrimental in the presence of a recession? Only time will tell.

On the other hand, the Gas Tax Holiday proposed by Governor Youngkin failed to pass the 2022 General Assembly in any form. Those

championing the idea held that the high and rising gas prices across the Commonwealth are reducing disposable income. However, the tax – and the state revenue it generates – will remain in place for now.

In other tax news from the General Assembly, retirement income of veterans of up to \$40,000 will not be taxed. Teachers, state workers, and state-supported local workers will experience a 10% increase in wages over the next two years (though, with inflation where it is, this will not substantially raise the real wage for these workers until the economy cools off). Finally, \$13 million will be spent to prevent gun violence and healthcare funding saw a \$1.4 billion dollar increase.

Universal broadband access: The economics of fulfilling a moral imperative

WITH THE CORONAVIRUS having moved many jobs online – and a return to in-person work pushed-back or delayed for many – access to fast and reliable internet is more and more of a necessity. Virginia is among the states that are pursuing widespread availability of broadband internet for all its residents.

Socio-economic barriers prevent certain groups of people from having reliable access to broadband. Similarly, those in rural areas tend to experience higher pricing for internet service (when it is available) due to the greater effort necessary to provide it. Is it Virginia's moral duty to provide universal, affordable broadband access as part of its greater effort to ensure equal opportunity for all?

While there will always be barriers and differences between the availability of resources, if internet access is deemed a necessity in modern life, then there is a moral obligation for the state to provide it in much the same way we approach necessities like electricity and clean drinking water. However, like those other necessities, universal broadband comes with a cost.

As highlighted in the sidebar, there is quite a lot of funding going into providing universal broadband in the state of Virginia. In judging whether this outlay of funds is justified, there are both positive and negative economic effects anticipated with the provision of universal broadband to be considered.

Expanded internet access is expected to:

- Boost the state's GDP due to increased online shopping activity. While this is true everywhere, this is especially relevant to Virginia given that the second Amazon Headquarters is being established in Arlington.

What Virginia is planning

IN DECEMBER OF 2021, Governor Northam announced that the state of Virginia will invest more than \$722 million to expand broadband internet access across the Commonwealth. Recently, Virginia was also granted \$220 million in federal funding to assist in achieving universal broadband access. As reported in VML's *eNews* the week of June 20 (and covered in a webinar for members prior to that date), the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) recently released its broadband coverage map that, among other things, highlights the rural areas of the state that still lack broadband access but indicates plans for expanding broadband into those areas. To support this effort, HB445 (Murphy) / SB446 (Boysko) – which passed during the 2022 General Assembly session – established the Broadband Service to New Development stakeholders group tasked with outlining challenges and solutions to expanding broadband access. This group will give its report to the Broadband Advisory Council no later than September 30, 2022.

Budget uncertainty creates lag

There are many lags that occur within fiscal policy and Virginia is about to experience an implementation lag. This is true because the longer the budget takes to confirm (and it took a good long while this year), the longer it takes to allocate funds, and therefore the longer it takes for the funding to have an effect. As previously mentioned, history shows that an aggressive fiscal response is the best way to deal with a recession. The lesson: Virginia would be well-served by a timely budget process to allow for quicker distribution of funds.



- Make it easier for individuals to find jobs and employers to replace employees by posting and conducting online job searches across a larger pool of opportunities and candidates.
- Create a boost in human capital as initiatives to expand online education programs and provide devices to students have made it easier to access of relevant information. This increase in human capital is likely the largest contributor to the economy, furthering the economic benefits listed above.
- Open new doors for economic activity in towns that traditionally relied upon manufacturing which has steadily moved overseas. With access to broadband, these localities can revamp and rebrand themselves more efficiently and with greater visibility.

But for every silver lining, there is a cloud. For example, while increased access to broadband means increased access to shopping as outlined above, it's also true that many small businesses in areas previously unserved or underserved by broadband will need to adapt to not get left behind. Small shops in rural areas that do not have an established online presence will likely have a difficult period of adjustment as broadband access rolls out in their communities.

Similarly, internet service providers warn that state funding will deter competition and innovation. However, it's equally true that for the most part only those in urban areas currently have a choice in internet providers while most rural consumers are stuck with a local service provider monopoly. Such issues could be addressed with generalized coverage, but this does not address the concerns for quality.

What does this all mean? Since internet access is now treated as a necessity in Virginia, the moral and fiscal ideologies surrounding the expansion of broadband internet access are not mutually exclusive. While there are potential negative effects, providing a general, base-level universal coverage for the state of Virginia is a step in the right direction, both morally and economically. We look forward to learning what the Broadband Service to New Development stakeholders group proposes to address the many economic challenges to this moral imperative.



About the author: *Dean Barton is an undergraduate student of economics at the University of Virginia and a 2022 VML intern.*

TOWN OF CHILHOWIE

By Linda Burchette

Chilhowie Fire & EMS staffs first all-female shift

Note: *This article originally appeared in the Smyth County News & Messenger on May 9, 2022*

L T. JENNA RUFFIN and Firefighter/EMT Hannah Hayes went on shift together April 14. It was Hayes' first day as a full-time member of the Town of Chilhowie Fire & EMS. It became the department's first all-female shift.

"I kind of got a feel for it because I was the first female firefighter as a career in the county," said Ruffin. "It's kinda cool that I have someone else now."

"I had someone to look up to with Jenna," said Hayes. "I can show others how it feels."

The young women enjoy working a 24-hour shift at the department.

"It's pretty nice actually," said Ruffin about the lengthy shift. "We only work 10 days a month but we work 24 hours a day. I personally like it more than 8 to 5 or a 12-hour shift or anything."

They work a schedule each month that goes from Wednesday and Saturday to Monday and Friday, and then Sunday and Thursday.

"I think it's an adjustment, for sure, because if you work night shift then you usually sleep during the day then you're up at night, and then with this sometimes we work all day," said Hayes. "Sometimes we sleep all night. Sometimes we do whatever during the day and we're up all night, so you're not set to night shift or day shift, you're just switching back and forth all the time. So, it definitely has its pros and cons, but you adjust to it."

Ruffin has been on duty full-time since 2017.

Hayes began as a volunteer July through

November 2021, went to part-time in November, then full-time last month.

The department also has two female volunteers, seven part-time members and five full-time members.

On a call-out, Ruffin said that for EMS it would be just the two of them unless they need help. A fire or a wreck call would go out on dispatch and all members with radios would hear it and respond as needed.

"We respond to fires, wrecks, medical calls, clean the station, check out the trucks with equipment, and there's always some sort of daily training," Ruffin said of their duties.



Jenna Ruffin (left) and Hannah Hayes comprise the first all-female shift at the Town of Chilhowie Fire & EMS.



"Some days we build shelves," Hayes added.

Hayes was inspired in this career first in the medical area and later in firefighting.

"As far as the EMT I originally started out wanting it to be a summer job while I went to college and I just fell in love with it and decided to go on and get my paramedic [certification]," she said. "And then the fire portion I really wasn't that sure about it at first and then once I got into it and I saw it, it got to become like 'Oh I really want to go in but I can't' so that's what made me want to get my fire training and start on that side of it. It's an adrenalin rush for sure, and it's exciting. Something I didn't want to miss out on."

Hayes said she started with emergency medical services before graduating high school.

"I'm the first in this career in my family and they all think I'm crazy," she said. "I'm the first person in the medical field in my family. I had originally planned to go to nursing school but when I got my EMT I decided to go that way."

Ruffin followed in family members' footsteps as the second or third generation in firefighting. And her husband Hunter is a part-time firefighter with Chilhowie and full-time with Bristol.

"I started when I was still in high school," she said. "I was 14 years old when I became a junior member and I fell in love with it, kind of like she (Hayes) did just in a different way. I started as a junior and just kept with it for the next 12 years of my life."

"This feels like home, where I'm supposed to be," Ruffin said, "and I can't see myself doing anything else."

As future goals, Ruffin plans to take more officer, instructor and technical training while Hayes is finishing up paramedic training and plans to take swift water rescue training in June and some more specialized training.

Ruffin said that training for department members includes Firefighter I and II, which is basic in Virginia. Emergency Medical Technician is basic on the medical side. From there, a person can move up to paramedic and instructor/officer training and more specialized aspects of training.

Ruffin and Hayes have both been through training in the department's burn building, which is part of a developing complex on the south end of town. A new classroom building is being constructed to provide a permanent place for classroom instruction. The site

is not only for Chilhowie firefighters but welcomes members from other departments for training.

Both say their fellow department members feel like family and they have always been treated with respect and equality and they do not expect any special treatment.

"The people I work with are the best," Ruffin said. "We're basically just one of the guys. I've never been treated any differently because I'm a female."

"I see them more than my own family," Hayes said. "I never feel like we're discriminated against in any way here. All the guys treat us like one of the guys."

They said members of other departments treat them the same although the public can sometimes be a little shocked.

"Some people in the public can take it a little bit differently," Ruffin said. "It's not really bad, there's still a mentality out there that it's a very male-dominated field so I think that's probably a learning curve for the public but for people in the industry I think it's pretty common."

"Especially for the public when it's just us who shows up," Hayes said. "But the people in the department, they treat us just like one of the guys, so we've been very fortunate in that respect."

And they both have high praise for Chief David Haynes.

"I never met someone who cares about his people more than he cares," Ruffin said.

"It's a great program," Hayes added. "We have the best boss. I think he's very dedicated and puts a lot in this program."

Both feel women can bring a different perspective to the fire service.

"First of all, we can do the job the same as a man, the job in general," Ruffin said. "I do think that women can bring a unique perspective to some things in the fire service."

Like paint colors, they said laughing. They were recently picking new paint colors

for the department, not typically the strong suit for a man, they said, but what they were put in charge of. On the other hand, they said building shelves took them about nine hours and they said the men could probably have done it a lot faster.

"There's things that women are better at and there's things that men are better at," Hayes said.

"Organization," Ruffin added. "We're the organizers here."

The best part of the job for both of them is the people they work with.

"It's like having a second family," Hayes said. "And we get to go home knowing we did something for the greater good. It's rewarding. There's a lot of really great aspects to it."

"I agree wholeheartedly," said Ruffin. "The job is fulfilling in itself, but the people are the best. I very much enjoy the people that I work with."

About the author: Linda Burchette is a staff writer for the Smyth County News & Messenger.



2022

VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE INNOVATION AWARDS

Complete rules and entry form are at www.vml.org



DON'T DELAY!
All entries
must be received
via e-mail by 5 pm,
Monday, August 15.

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE IN VIRGINIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT

HAMPTON ROADS PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION MEMBERS

Program helps homeowners understand flood risks and protect their property

OFFICIALS WITH THE National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are predicting a 65 percent chance of an above-average Atlantic hurricane season for 2022, with 14-21 named storms and 6-10 hurricanes. The team behind GetFloodFluent.org want to know: Are Hampton Roads property owners prepared?

“In addition to securing your home and evacuating when advised, there is another crucial step to take before severe weather arrives; get flood insurance,” said Ben McFarlane, a senior regional planner with the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC). “The emphasis is on planning now, rather than later, due to the 30-day waiting period before your flood insurance policy goes into effect.”

GetFloodFluent.org was launched in 2019 by the HRPDC, with support from the City of Portsmouth and advice from local planners and emergency managers throughout the region. The online resource separates facts from fiction when it comes to flood insurance in Hampton Roads. The website and region-wide awareness campaign educate about the dangers of flooding, using easy-to-understand language, an interactive challenge to assess your flood “fluency,” and video testimonials from residents whose homes were devastated by flooding.

“The damage of just one inch of water in your home can cost more than \$25,000 in repairs,” McFarlane said. “You can hope that flood waters will not reach your residence, or you can protect yourself and your belongings from devastating loss by purchasing flood insurance.”

Updated Flood Risk & Coverage Calculator

A hallmark of GetFloodFluent.org is its Flood Risk & Coverage Calculator, which can help residents determine their flood zone and the cost to insure their home and belongings should flooding occur. McFarlane and his team are revamping this feature to align with FEMA’s update of the National Flood Insurance Program’s risk rating methodology, called Risk Rating 2.0. When the updated GetFloodFluent.org calculator launches this summer, residents will be able to obtain a more targeted and unique estimate, taking into consideration the home’s distance to a flooding source, ground elevation, first-floor height, and foundation type.

Be Prepared for the next Storm

In the meantime, the GetFloodFluent.org site has a wealth of information to help Hampton Roads residents understand the impacts of local flooding and take steps to protect their home. Among the tips, McFarlane suggests are:

Manage rainfall on their property. Make sure gutters are clean; have downspouts direct water away from the home toward grassy areas; add and use rain barrels; and keep a proper grade around the foundation.

Install flood vents. This will help the water flow through the structure if flooding occurs, preventing structural damage to the foundation.

Plant trees and shrubs. Plants stabilize the soil and soak up rainwater, preventing rapid run-off that can overwhelm ditches and stormwater pipes.

Use French drains. Dig a slightly sloped trench and fill it with gravel and a pipe to divert water away from your home.

Build smart. Add new structures outside the flood risk area, elevate critical systems like HVAC compressors, and consider using permeable patio pavers, stone, crushed shells or gravel in place of sidewalks and paving.

Create a rain garden. Select and plant native, deep-rooted species in a shallow depression near flood-prone areas, to capture and absorb rainwater and runoff.

In advance of threatening weather, it is also important for residents to store important items at higher elevations in their home, know their evacuation zone (which is different from their flood hazard zone), avoid walking and driving in flood waters and stay up to date on the latest weather conditions.

About GetFloodFluent.org

An initiative of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, GetFloodFluent.org was developed by an advisory group comprised of municipal planners and emergency management staff representing all 17 local jurisdictions in Hampton Roads. Their goal is to make residents

aware of the facts associated with flooding in the region and encourage them to act responsibly by making sure their homes and businesses are covered by flood insurance.



Portsmouth residents can check back this summer to access the updated Flood Risk & Coverage Calculator. For more tips and information about flooding and hurricane preparedness specific to the region, visit www.GetFloodFluent.org.

VML members of the HRPDC: Cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; the Town of Smithfield; and the Counties of James City and York

The Counties of Gloucester, Isle of Wight, Southampton, and Surry are also HRPDC members.

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