

VTC

VIRGINIA
TOWN & CITY

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE
VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE



Be Local, Be Bold, Be RVA!

Inside:

2021 - 2022
Year In Review

Supreme Court
Preview/Review for
Local Governments

... and more!

BE LOCAL, BE BOLD
RICHMOND MARRIOTT DOWNTOWN
OCTOBER 2 - 4





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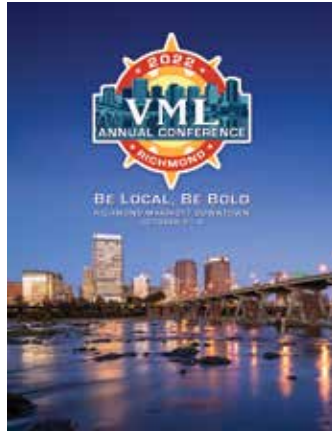
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ABOUT THE COVER

Welcome to Richmond! For those of you traveling to our 2022 Annual Conference, the league staff are thrilled to have you in our city! For those of you who live in the Richmond Region, we don't need to tell you how great this place is (but please read the magazine anyway).

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Getting ready to welcome you to Richmond!

AS I WAS WALKING in downtown Richmond the other day – I was almost run over by a very fast runner...oh wait – it was VML staff member Manuel Timbreza mapping out a fun run for the VML annual conference here in Richmond! The run will take participants from the hotel down to the James River Park system and across the Potterfield Bridge just in time for fantastic, early morning views of the river and Richmond skyline. It will be a great opportunity for photos before heading back up “the big hill.” This is just one of the fun activities that VML will have at our annual conference that we are looking forward to sharing with everyone.

VML staff has been very busy preparing exciting sessions that I hope are both informative and useful for you and your locality. I am very excited to have Matt Lehman as our keynote speaker – he is widely known for his ability to inspire people to work on something that is more important than ever these days:

How to disagree without becoming disagreeable. The conference will also have several sessions discussing civility and how to successfully work together. In keeping with this theme, we will be distributing a proposed civility pledge that we will suggest your localities consider adopting!

Of course, VML staff aren't the only ones doing work to get ready for the conference. The

legislative committee met in early September to prepare for their October 2nd meeting during the conference. They kept many of their previous priorities: funding of community services boards and behavioral health authorities; local land use control; maintain sovereign immunity and stormwater local assistance funding; HB599 funding and taxing; and licensing and regulation of internet-based businesses and services.

The legislative committee proposes to add the following positions: state-

mandated exemptions to local sales taxes should be reimbursed; there should be local excise taxes for vaping and cannabis products; swatting; and support public education and funding for local and regional jails.

All these positions will be voted on at the Annual Business Meeting and we ask that your locality please attend and support/comment on these proposals. Thank you to all the members of the legislative committees and the policy committees who worked over the summer. Please feel free to volunteer next year for these committees!

Recently, VML went to Marion for a FOIA/COIA/Risk Management meeting along with the Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA). We had a very good discussion and great turnout. Thanks to all who attended this event and thanks for VRSA for working with us to make it happen!

In closing, I want to note that we've arranged some robust speakers for the VML

Annual Conference and Mayors Institute. Among these is the last speaker on Tuesday, Professor Richard Schragger from the University of Virginia School of Law whose talk “The Past and Future of Home Rule in Virginia” should be very interesting.

I look forward to seeing everyone at Host City Night at Virginia Museum of History and Culture. Cheers!!



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City of Richmond



LEVAR M. STONEY MAYOR



To my fellow VML members:

On behalf of my colleagues on the Richmond City Council and our 229,000 Richmonders, I would like to extend a warm welcome to everyone attending the Virginia Municipal League's (VML) annual conference. Thank you for visiting Virginia's capital city!

Every year, VML offers municipalities across the Commonwealth the opportunity to showcase what makes their town, city, or county special by hosting this annual conference, and this year is no exception. We are excited to partner with VML and the Virginia Museum of History and Culture to officially welcome you to the Host City Night celebration on the evening of Sunday, October 2nd.

We are also thrilled that participants will have the opportunity to explore all that Richmond has to offer, including many craft breweries, amazing restaurants, museums, wonderful parks and trails, and of course, the mighty James River. I strongly encourage participants to arrive ahead of the conference to attend Richmond's 34th Annual 2nd Street Festival in Historic Jackson Ward on Saturday, October 1st. This free festival offers conference attendees an opportunity to enjoy music with headliner Grand Master Flash, arts and crafts vendors, and experience the energy and excitement of Jackson Ward, a neighborhood once known as "the Harlem of the South."

Conference attendees will also learn more about the City of Richmond through a few of VML's mobile workshops. These workshops include learning more about the City's efforts to reconnect our beloved Jackson Ward community and highlighting our freshly painted Bus Rapid Transit lanes. Our Host City Night sponsors, Timmons Group & Moseley Architects, will also provide a workshop highlighting Scott's Addition's revival. These programs highlight Richmond's commitment to making the city the best place to live, work, play, and raise a family in Virginia.

The City of Richmond is elated to host the annual VML conference once again, and we hope that your stay in the River City is a memorable one.

Welcome to the City of Richmond!

Sincerely,

Levar M. Stoney
Mayor

900 East Broad Street, Suite 201 • Richmond, Virginia 23219 • (804) 646-7970

Welcome to the Richmond Region: An Eclectic Destination



THE CITY OF Richmond (aka RVA) warmly welcomes the members of the Virginia Municipal League to an “Only in Richmond” experience where an eclectic culture has popped up through the cobblestones. Its history, family attractions, arts and culture, and craft beer scene earn accolades (and millions of visitors) every year. Richmond is where murals cover the walls of local restaurants and shops and it’s where major art museums draw national attention. Food is an art here, too. In fact, *National Geographic* put the Richmond Region on their list of the “world’s top 10 places to travel for food.”

Seven jurisdictions, each with their own personality and flavor, make up the vibrant Richmond Region: The City of Richmond (of course), the Town of Ashland, Chesterfield County, Colonial Heights, Hanover County, Henrico County, and New Kent County. From urban bustle to small town charm, from river life to nightlife, a visit to the Richmond Region is as diverse as the people you’ll meet along the way.

And running through it all is the James River, the region’s most acclaimed natural resource. There are as many ways to enjoy the James as there are people who enjoy it. Whitewater raft through downtown on its class III and IV rapids. Bike the Virginia Capital Trail, which runs right alongside the James. Or just hang out on the river rocks with your pets and pals.

Furthermore, RVA is a place that celebrates diversity. Through community-driven initiatives, visitors see first-hand that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are woven into the fabric of the region.

Welcome to your outdoor playground

The James River offers a beautiful escape into nature just steps from downtown Richmond. In fact, Richmond is the only U.S. city where you can kayak and raft Class III and IV rapids in an urban setting! It’s no wonder that the James River was ranked top 3 in *USA Today’s* 2022 10 Best Reader’s Choice Awards for “Best Urban Kayaking Spot.”

The expansive James River Park System offers parks and trails to explore. Enjoy the relaxing feel of the beach at Pony Pasture Park – a popular riverfront location with sandy banks and shallow waters along the shoreline. Or take the pedestrian bridge to Belle Isle, a popular hangout in the middle of the river with wooded trails, a wheelchair-accessible fishing pond and a mountain biking skills course.

Stretching 1.25 miles along the James River and the Kanawha and Haxall Canals is the popular Canal Walk. This bike-friendly walking path is a scenic excursion just off the James River. Learn about centuries of Richmond’s history at landmarks along the trail and snap photos of the breathtaking murals. Or book a historic canal cruise for a deeper look into local history.

Several outdoor recreation businesses in the region offer the gear and guidance you need to take on your next outdoor adventure in RVA. For beginner peddlers and expert cyclists alike, Adventures in RVA offers bike rentals with equipment for all skill levels. The company provides road bikes for causally exploring the Richmond area



James River Park kayaks.



Virginia Capital Trail biking.

and mountain bikes for off-road adventures. Rent tandem bikes and kids' trailers to bring along the whole family!

RVA is often recognized as a must-visit destination for kayakers. Plan your next outing on the water with guided experiences by RVA Paddlesports. This local outfitter and adventure company offers exhilarating rafting and kayaking outings on the James River; plus beginner rock climbing classes at the Manchester Rock Climbing Wall. For those looking to take on a new challenge, RVA Paddlesports offers introductory level watersport classes, plus certification trainings.

Bring your adventure back to land with a guided bike tour

through RVA. Basket & Bike and RVA on Wheels offer guided excursions throughout the Richmond Region via traditional road bike or an electric bike. Enjoy gorgeous sunset views from Richmond's downtown or feel the breeze while gliding along the Virginia Capital Trail, the region's popular bicycle and pedestrian path. Beginning in the heart of Richmond, the trail runs to Jamestown and passes several landmarks and historical sites along the way. Move at your own pace to pedal, walk or skate along any stretch of the paved path. The nearly 52-mile trail highlights views of the scenic Route-5 corridor and features amenities throughout such as eateries, bike rental stations, picnic areas and parking. For a full trail map, access points and updates on the latest trail activities, visit the Virginia Capital Trail website – www.virginiacapitaltrail.org.

Continue your outdoor adventure at Pocahontas State Park, Virginia's largest state park with more than 7,000 acres of beautiful natural scenery to explore. Whether you're hiking, biking, swimming, fishing or just relaxing, this park located in Chesterfield County is perfect for outdoor excursions and camping adventures either alone or with a group. Ready for an exhilarating ride? Bikers are welcome to take on the park's 25 miles of directional mountain bike trails. Be sure to visit the park's website for guides and updates before you go – www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/pocahontas.

More to explore

Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden

Looking to immerse yourself in nature and take in a scenic view? Check out one of the most-visited greenspaces in the region, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Offering year-round beauty with more than 50 acres of spectacular gardens, dining and shopping, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden features a classical domed Conservatory – the only one of its kind in the mid-Atlantic! More than a dozen themed gardens include a Children’s Garden, Rose Garden, Asian Valley, and Cherry Tree Walk. Pathways lead visitors to parts of the garden that delight around every turn. Explore secret spaces, learn about the plant collections, and enjoy the garden’s world-class botanical displays. With something for all ages and interests, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden is a place to learn, marvel, and relax in a beautiful setting. The Garden has many seasonal events and exhibits, including art exhibits, outdoor concerts, a popular holiday light show, plant sales, and much more. Visit their website to see a calendar of events – www.lewisginter.org.

Maymont

Maymont is one of RVA’s most popular outdoor attractions, perfect for a day of fun with the entire family. The 100-acre estate and park has been transformed from the Gilded Age showplace of millionaire couple, James and Sallie Dooley, into a public wonderland that offers unique experiences for all ages. Stroll through century-old Italian and Japanese gardens, marvel at national and state champion trees, and explore the wildlife habitats with native Virginia animals like black bears and bald eagles. This carefully preserved landmark also includes the 33-room Maymont Mansion filled with magnificent furniture, decorative arts, and a collection of antique and reproduction carriages. The Robins Nature Center holds giant aquariums and creatures of the James River – including Louis, the popular river otter. The park also has a farm with goats, pigs, cows, and other livestock. Look for special programs and events throughout the year. Admission to the grounds and gardens is free. There is a suggested donation for a tour of the Maymont Mansion, and there is a required fee for specialty and holiday tours as well as admission to the Nature Center. Learn more at www.maymont.org.



Glass greenhouse at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.



Japanese Garden at Maymont.

Downtown Parks and Outdoor Attractions

Enjoy a relaxing walk with stunning views of downtown Richmond in one of the city’s scenic parks. Brown’s Island is an amazing, six-acre riverfront park for walking, running, and biking that is popular with locals and visitors alike. The island connects to the James River Park and is a popular venue for outdoor concerts and festivals throughout the year including the Friday Cheers concert series,

Dominion Energy Riverrock, and the Richmond Folk Festival, which attract over 400,000 people to the riverfront. Discover the April 1865 exhibit that connects to the Potterfield bridge, a popular biking and walking destination spanning the river over some of its most impressive rapids. Visit the War Memorial, American Civil War Center, and National Park Service all located nearby. Head east along the paths towards 10th, 12th and 14th streets and you’ll find over 75 restaurants in the Shockoe area and some of RVA’s unique, local shopping.

Libby Hill Park is one of RVA’s most popular greenspaces known for its stunning scenic view of the city and the river. One of Richmond’s three original parks (when it was called Marshall Square), the view from Libby Hill Park is said to so closely resemble the view of Richmond on the Thames in England that it gave the city its name.



Rock climbing event at Dominion Energy Riverrock.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) terrace.



The Institute for Contemporary Arts reflection pool at VCU.

Explore creative culture

The Richmond Region has a deep and rich culture of creativity. But there's more than just lip service to the city's art, historical features, and culture. There's real conversation – a living dialogue about

the works of art, the nation-shaping events that happened here, and how it all creates a contemporary city full of diversity and understanding. Richmond is home to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States with barrier-breaking art like Kehinde Wiley's Rumors of War statue. Next door is the newly reimagined Virginia Museum of History and Culture that explores the unique facets of Virginia's regions with an eye to inclusion. And those amazing institutions are just for starters! Be sure to check out the Children's Museum of Richmond, the Science Museum of Virginia, and The Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU. Just outside the city, the Glen Allen Cultural Arts Center is home to concerts, art shows and the Latin Ballet of Virginia.

Of course, there are plenty of alternatives for those who want to explore outside of curated collections. Visitors can walk through the city's 70+ galleries or engage in a self-guided tour of more than 100 urban murals. Richmond is a place

where dancers who grace magazine covers come along with designers who are changing the arts world and musicians who draw crowds from around the world. Spend some time here and you'll learn that Richmond is a destination with art at its epicenter.

Richmond Region



Bring your appetite

Richmond is home to more than 900 restaurants, and the best are locally owned. This acclaimed food scene has received some of the nation's highest accolades including James Beard nominations and endorsements in *Bon Appétit*, the Food Network and *Esquire*. Creativity comes by the plateful and the choices range from awesome food truck fare to white tablecloth chop houses.

Celebrating diversity in the Richmond Region

Black history and culture are woven into the fabric of the Richmond Region. In fact, studies show that one in four African Americans in the United States have roots in Richmond. Highlighting the Black community in Richmond, BLK RVA is a community effort to increase tourism to the Richmond Region by celebrating the history and accomplishments of African Americans past and present. By bringing positive attention to the hundreds of Black-owned restaurants, shops, and entertainment platforms in the region, Richmonders and visitors can share pride in the place we call home. Learn more at www.visit-blkrva.com.

In 2014, Richmond was the first city to officially come out of the closet with an OutRVA tourism campaign. OutRVA is a community-driven initiative of Richmond Region Tourism promoting LGBTQ tourism in partnership with members and organizations. This groundbreaking campaign made headlines in the *New York Times* and since its debut, has received coverage from national queer publications including, *Out*, *Passport*, *Edge Media*, and *Curve Magazine*. Learn more at www.outrva.com.

Moreover, the Richmond Region is home to the only LGBTQ-

focused theatre company in the Mid-Atlantic and, for more than 40 years, the Rainbow Bowling League. It also has one of the most diverse and active chapters of Stonewall Sports in the United States. The city's focus on LGBTQ inclusion resulted in a score of 100 out of 100, the highest Municipal Equality Index (MEI) score in Virginia, by the Human Rights Campaign.



See you in October!

The Richmond Region is proud to be a destination known for opportunity, innovation, and exploration. RVA welcomes the VML Annual Conference this year, with the hope that every league member gets to experience all that this beautiful region has to offer.

About the author: *Alex Eady is the Content Manager for the Richmond Region Tourism.*

Black History Museum & Cultural Center.



VA PrideFest Love Work sign.

The Richmond Region in the News

RVA has become a nationally and internationally acclaimed destination and has been featured in some of the top publications:

Southern Living: The South's Best Cities 2022

The New York Times: Celebrating Black History Month? These 5 Cities are Going All Out

MSN: America's Beautiful Small Towns Packed with History

MSN: 50 US Cities Worth Exploring in 2022

Redbook: The Up-and-Coming Travel Destinations You Should Check Out ASAP

Bella Magazine: City with the Best Street Art

Money: The Best Places to Live 2021 (Chesterfield County)

Matador: "8 Awesomely Diverse US Cities".

Best Life: The 10 Best U.S. Cities to Visit for Beer Lovers

USA Today: Readers' Choice '10 Best' Arts District

USA Today: Readers' Choice '10 Best' Urban Kayaking



A message from VML President Jon Stehle

A year of making time to make connections

ALARGE PART OF what I've taken away from the experience of being your president this year has been all about meeting people where they are. From Pennington Gap to Onancock, from Galax and Marion to Leesburg, from Manassas to Dumfries and everywhere in between, I've benefitted from sitting down with people and having conversations about what makes local governments work. I think this is the core of what it really means to be part of VML. Time is an incredibly precious resource and choosing to spend it with another person, focused on that discussion, and being immersed in their world is one of the most valuable opportunities the league offers.

I also think about the connections that local leaders make as part of our time in office. In my case, I was pleased this year to help Hala Gilbert, a student who shadowed me as part of her senior year in high school. I also appreciate the connections local governments make with organizations in the community. During my year as president, I enjoyed bringing VML members to the MITRE Corporation for a day of learning focused on innovation in transportation.

Sometimes those connections come about naturally because of overlapping passions. For example, my passion for the sport of lacrosse and keen appreciation for the value of non-profits came together when we were able to create a connection among USA Lacrosse, George Mason University, and the Fairfax Police Youth Club for a youth sports day. It was a wonderful event for everyone involved and especially for the kids who had never had a chance to try out the sport. These sorts of events can serve as an example for officials in other jurisdictions to create their own passion driven connections!

Taken together, these connections (and so many more like them) lay the foundation for what is awesome about local governments sharing membership in VML. Through the league, we learn from each other and share great ideas. A great example is the way in which VML has facilitated information about the American Rescue Plan funds and how localities throughout Virginia are putting them to good use.

This year I was also reminded of the value in being connected to other state leagues when I was privileged to chair the Southern Municipal Conference. Having conversations across fourteen other states as to what we are all doing makes us better as community leaders. I was especially pleased to make the acquaintance J.D. Chaney, the execu-

tive director of the Kentucky League of Cities. Being able to talk with someone at different conferences over time and to have another voice in the conversation who gets to know you is important. With all the pressures we face as elected leaders and as individuals – particularly as we move out of COVID and into the next election cycle – it's great to build that network of connections to provide support.

Knowing that there are others going through the same thing and are trying to make their community better each day gives me hope that we can leave this world a little bit better than we found it and pave the way for the next generation that that I know is going to step in and be amazing.

I'll close by thanking some people who made my year as your president possible. First my amazing family – Stephanie, Zoe, and Cooper. Many of the connections I made this year were continued via Zoom and they were supportive and patient even as I did my work in the shared space of our small townhouse. Second, my immediate predecessor as your president, City of Galax Mayor Willie Greene. I had the chance to visit Mayor Greene last month and he gave me so much more

than just the 25-cent tour of his amazing city. I am humbled by Mayor Greene who epitomizes what it means to be a public servant, so I want to thank him and his entire family for their dedication to their community. They are truly an inspiration. Connecting with Willie at a VML conference six years ago, when we shared a bench and a conversation, has changed my life. Thanks Mayor Greene!

I would be remiss if I failed to express my gratitude to Joni Terry for her amazing 48 years of service to VML. She has been the center of so many connections for the league over the years and she will be missed. Thank you Joni!

And thanks to all VML members! It has been an honor to serve you this year. I leave you in the incredibly capable and accomplished hands of your next president, Vice-Mayor Jill Carson of the Town of Pennington Gap.



Jon Stehle

VML Board of Directors



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LAST YEAR WE SUMMED UP the year as “Always Flexible!” This year our yoga may have taken that flexibility to a new level! With the House of Delegates and the Governor’s mansion changing from Democrat to Republican led, Virginia’s local governments have had to flex their local authority and adapt as needed. It’s always a challenge to navigate a new administration and new majority (no matter which way the pendulum swings), but thanks to our experience being “Always Flexible” VML notched some successes in 2022 (check out the Lobbying & Advocacy section below for more on these).

2021 Annual Conference

There are plenty of ways to mark the passage of a year. Most people think of January-December as a full year. Budget directors and their ilk like to think in terms of Fiscal Years. Here at VML, we often think of a year in terms of Annual Conference to Annual Conference. In this sense, the Town of Leesburg and Loudoun County started off the “Conference Year” with the 2021 Annual Conference at the Lansdowne Resort in October 2021...and what fun it was! It was so great to get everyone together in person and we will never forget the Towns of Loudoun Mayoral skit and the beautiful evening at the Marshall House. During the conference VML members heard presentations on social media, electric vehicle charging stations, solar and Marcus Alerts (just to name a few). It was no surprise that the sessions on “Disruptions at Board Meetings” and “Effective Town-County Connec-

tions” were favorites! Our special guests included Governor Northam (via Zoom), Clarence Anthony, CEO and Executive Director of the National League of Cities and Lisa Soronen, Executive Director of the State and Local Legal Center.

Sad note – recently, the State and Local Legal Center voted to dissolve. Lisa is an integral part of local government advocacy at the Supreme Court and VML was disappointed that the organization will cease to exist. In good news – Lisa has generously offered to join VML at our 2022 Annual Conference to provide her valuable insights to our members.

Lobbying & Advocacy

2022 General Assembly Session

As we went into the 2022 General Assembly “long” session (60 days), VML was hopeful that we would complete our work on local authority as it relates to marijuana legalization and have a final state budget in good order and in good time. As you know the General Assembly did neither. Problematically, it remains legal to possess marijuana in Virginia but illegal to purchase it, and the state budget was not passed until.....(wait for it).....June 17!

As for the mechanics of the session, this year the chambers met in person with an option to watch committees online. For those of us immersed in the doings of the General Assembly, the daily debate was “Do we need to be in crowded rooms and elevators in suits and skirts? Or will Zoom in sweatpants and sneakers be enough?” On the plus side, the typical illnesses (remember colds and the flu?) that go along with General Assembly season were muted greatly due to everyone’s use of hand sanitizer and respect for distance.

When the General Assembly can’t get all its work finished, even in a long session, it likes to have special sessions. In fact, they like them so much they do them again and again! This year, the General Assembly decided to have its first special session right in the middle of the time most schools (and parents of school age children) would typically enjoy Spring Break. No legislation affecting localities was taken up during a second special session in September.

In the end, the 2022 session saw over 3,000 introduced bills and had a whopping 33 vetoes! The vetoed bills included a local government charter bill (requested by the locality) on qualifications of boards and commissions members and a bill that dealt with independent policing auditors – again, requested by a locality – for those operating under the county-manager plan of government. Also, of interest (and exasperation) for local governments was a bill that would eliminate a town charter. It’s worth noting that this bill was introduced even



2022 Annual Review



though the town in question opposed it! That locality, the Town of Pound, now has until November of 2023 to work with VML and other stakeholders to improve its situation or lose its status – we are rooting for the Town of Pound!

VML's legislative priorities for the year included addressing behavioral health services in local and regional jails, expanding electronic meetings, maintaining land use control, and pursuing school modernization via a one percent local option sales tax.

Right from the start, however, the new Governor's comments let us know that we would spend a lot of time on a completely different topic: The grocery tax. Luckily, with the help of many partners, I am happy to report that the local portion of the grocery tax is still in place (for now).

VML worked with the Press Association, the Coalition on Open Government, VACo, and Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker to achieve consensus on electronic meetings. As the legislation passed out of the House with a 98-0 vote, all parties were in lock step agreement that even local governing bodies could hold some electronic meetings outside of a state of emergency...and then we got to the Senate where things began to go sideways. Bennett-Parker negotiated a compromise with the Senate which in essence allowed electronic meetings outside of an emergency but only for non-governing bodies. Bennett-Parker spoke to one our policy committees earlier this summer and indicated that she will try to expand the scope again in 2023; VML supports her efforts in this regard.

As mentioned earlier, marijuana legislation saw no action this year as it failed to advance out of a House subcommittee. Despite this, the Virginia Cannabis Control Authority maintains that adult use retail marijuana dispensaries and adult sales remain on track to begin January of 2024. Unfortunately, this leaves local authority to hold a referendum, levy a local option tax, or adopt zoning requirements in limbo as the authority for such was not provided. VML will continue to advocate for local authority in 2023 (and beyond).

On the behavioral health front, legislation was approved to allow smaller localities to opt into – or out of – a few

components of the Marcus Alert law. Now optional for localities with populations of 40,000 or less are mobile crisis or community care response team agreements for law enforcement, and development and state approval for protocols for law enforcement participation in such agreements.

Every city and county, no matter what size, will still be required to develop protocols for diverting mental health crisis calls from 9-1-1 to a crisis call center where a more targeted assessment and engagement can take place, as well as deployment of a crisis response or community care team, if one is available.

Some forward movement was made on the issue of law enforcement involvement in emergency custody and temporary detention processes, including passage of legislation allowing auxiliary police to assume custody in some circumstances, and a study of alternative custody issues and options with the goals of greater use of alternative custody and alternative transportation and reducing waiting times in emergency departments for individuals in crisis or diverting them entirely to programs that can provide help and treatment more expeditiously.

Cybersecurity was also a pressing topic for the 2022 General Assembly due in no small part to the large-scale cyberattack in late 2021 that affected the General Assembly and related organizations in the Commonwealth. The cybersecurity legislation that passed during the 2022 session requires all public bodies to report to the Virginia Fusion Center within 24 hours of discovery any known incidents that compromise or threaten the security of the public body's information technology systems. A work group that included VML met over the summer to create the form that must be filed to adhere to the new law; it can be found at www.reportCyber.virginia.gov.

The VML team appreciates the assistance of all our local government partners who help us during General Assembly sessions by talking with legislators and educating them on how various bills will affect local governments. This effort is gigantic, and we appreciate the opportunity to work with all our partners.



Local Government Day

Thursday, February 3, 2022, was Local Government Day at the Richmond Omni which VML hosted in conjunction with the Virginia Association of Counties and the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions. Several legislators and state officials were on

hand to chat with local government officials about legislation. This is always a fantastic event (no matter what the weather) and we had great attendance this year! Thanks to everyone who came and spoke with their delegation.

Policy & Legislative Committees

Summer finally arrived and with it an explosion in the price of gas. VML staff debated the need to hold in-person policy committees and it was decided that since we had all learned to work remotely during the pandemic, we could certainly meet virtually to ease the pain at the pump! So VML's policy committees met virtually during the last two weeks of July to complete their work. VML now has five policy committees as the work of the separate committees for environmental and transportation issues were combined into the new Infrastructure, Transportation & Environmental Quality Committee. All five committees heard presentations on a range of pertinent topics including (but certainly not limited to) swatting, marijuana, transportation, jail issues and electronic meetings. Each committee chose one or two priorities that were discussed during the Legislative Committee meeting on September 8.

The Legislative Committee met first in late June and heard presentations on housing, the state budget and marijuana. At that time the committee also received a General Assembly update and referred issues to the various policy committees. The Legislative Committee met again virtually on September 8 during which it took up the recommendations proposed by the policy committees. The Legislative Committee will meet again (in person this time) on Sunday, October 2, at the VML Annual Conference in Richmond.

A Summer of Studies

The number of studies and efforts to address current issues during the summer and early fall was staggering and had VML staff running in all directions. In addition to a gubernatorial initiative around housing, with a seven locality housing tour (VML made six); there was a transient occupancy tax study; a stakeholder advisory group to evaluate local and state policies, procedures, or ordinances to facilitate the expansion of high-speed broadband service and associated infrastructure in new residential and commercial development; a study of alternative custody; a study of the fees charged to inmates (and their families) by local and regional jails; a study of local and regional juvenile detention facilities with an eye on possibly reducing or merging facilities; a study of local health department funding and responsibilities; a continuation of a drinking water contaminant study (PFOAS/PFAS/forever chemicals); and continuation of a coastal and recurrent flooding study.



Education & Training

Mayors Institute

VML's Mayors Institute explores issues essential to the responsibilities of mayors and vice mayors as local government leaders. Typically, this 2-day event immediately precedes the Annual Conference in the fall. However, in early 2021, with the pandemic still very much dictating what we could do, VML made the decision to hold the Mayors Institute as a standalone event to better ensure the success of an in-person event. And it really was a big success! All the officials who gathered at the Omni Hotel in Charlottesville on July 15-16 were obviously pleased to be able to gather after so much time apart. As in years past, attendees benefitted from sessions on FOIA/COIA as well as topics relevant to their vital role in maintaining their communities.



Annual Conference

The 2021 VML annual conference held on October 3- 5 in Leesburg was a great opportunity to meet in person. Seeing people in person after too many zooms brought great delight! About 500 people attended from all over the Commonwealth to learn about issues directly affecting local governments, share experiences, visit exhibitors, and the Towns of Loudoun displays.

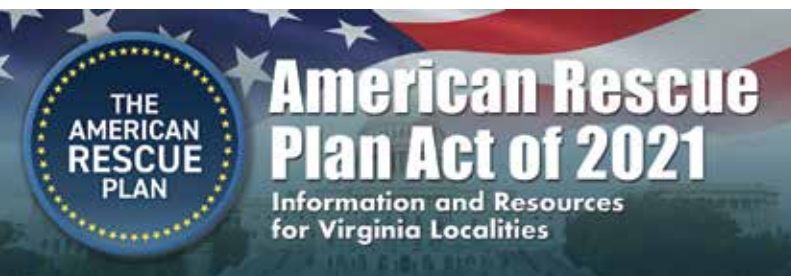
Over the course of the two days, attendees were able to attend general and breakout sessions that allowed for interaction and Q&A with subject matter experts in a variety of fields. Before, during and after the conference VML members had opportunities to review VML's draft policy and legislative statements. During the Annual Business Meeting these statements as well as an updated VML slate of officers was voted on and approved. Councilmember Jon Stehle from the City of Fairfax became the new VML President, and City of Galax Mayor Willie Greene handed over the gavel.

Newly Elected Officials Conference

On January 6, VML held what we hope will be the last virtual Newly Elected Officials Conference. While many meetings (and even some events) work great online, attendees of this event know they get the most out of it when everyone can meet in the same room. But VML and our members persevered in 2022 and made the best of a virtual situation. Attendees heard "Lessons Learned from Serving on Council" from City of Charlottesville Vice Mayor Sena Magill. VML President Jon Stehle was on hand to tee up sessions on "Municipal Budgeting" with Peter Stephenson, Local Government Specialist with the Virginia Risk Sharing Association and "State Budgeting" with VML staff. The afternoon was spent covering FOIA and COIA training with Mike Lockaby from Guynn, Waddell, Carroll & Lockaby, P.C. and VML's Executive Director Michelle Gowdy respectively.



NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS CONFERENCE



ARPA Assistance

Again, this year VML was pleased to offer our members assistance with ARPA questions through our experts at McGuireWoods Consulting. All in all, we fielded more than 100 questions from dozens of localities (big and small) on everything from using ARPA funds to install pickle ball courts, to navigating the U.S. Treasury's reporting requirements. Many thanks to Margaret Rockwell and Preston Bryant from McGuireWoods Consulting for their expertise and dedication to helping our members.

Broadband Together

On May 18-19, VML, VACo and the Broadband Association of Virginia hosted an in-person conference in Richmond which included discussions on connectivity, affordability, equity, telehealth and even how broadband affects the cost of real estate! It was a great networking opportunity for local government officials and broadband providers to meet and discuss how to work together to solve these issues in the Commonwealth.

Also at the event, a representative from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) spoke about the new Line Extension Assistance Program (LECAP) which is for the subset of Virginians for whom broadband connections are not attainable because their home exceeds an internet service provider's standard connection drop length from a roadway or easement containing telecommunications infrastructure.

As a conclusion to the event, the Broadband Advisory Council met and heard from representatives from Virginia Tech who introduced the new broadband mapping tool: Commonwealth Connection. This interactive map allows localities to determine where there is connectivity and where it is lacking. VML members can learn more about this valuable resource during a session at the 2022 Annual Conference.



Webinars

During 2021-2022 VML was pleased to offer members a variety of timely webinars on topics of importance to local governments. These included:

2021 SB1398 Implementation (November 2021)

Stephanie Gilfeather of The Expedia Group to talk about the collection and remittance of taxes under Senate Bill 1398, and how local governments can best work with travel intermediaries to ensure the correct collection of information.

ARPA Monitoring and Reporting Compliance for Localities (December 2021)

Experts from Ernst & Young, LLP overviewed ARPA and its Coronavirus State & Local Recovery Funds ranging from fundamentals of the program to requirements for plan administration, compliance, and monitoring.

2022 Drinking Water Funds for Localities (March 2022)

Virginia Department of Health – Office of Drinking Water (VDH-ODW) had ARPA funds remaining with more coming from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Barry E. Matthews, CPG, Director – Division of Training, Capacity Development and Outreach discussed how these funds can be best distributed to local governments.

Regular Session Summary (May 2022)

While we all waited for the budget, VML policy staff addressed issues raised during the 2022 General Assembly Session during this preliminary General Assembly wrap-up webinar.

Broadband Availability Map Presentation (June 2022)

DHCD and Virginia Tech's Center for Geospatial Information Technology presented an in-depth look at DHCD's statewide broadband availability map indicating broadband coverage, including maximum broadband speeds available in areas of the Commonwealth.



Communications

2022 found VML's communications keeping our various channels to our members flowing with stories, information, and notifications to help our members help their communities.

Magazine: *Virginia Town & City*

Each issue kept our members apprised of the latest comings and goings in local government officials and staff, highlighted the fun events and important achievements of member localities and delivered feature articles on a theme, including:

- Volunteers Power Communities (November 2021)
- Connecting with VML's new President Jon Stehle! (December 2021)
- Federal acts, local wins: Outcomes of the American Rescue Plan Act and the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (Jan/February 2022)
- Small towns, big achievements (March 2022)
- Hot topics: Staff reports from the 2022 General Assembly (April 2022)
- Words of wisdom: Our annual education issue with essay contest winners plus sound advice on how to build better school facilities (May 2022)
- New Frontiers in Affordable Housing (June 2022)
- Rethink your recreation! Advice for successful outdoor adventures (July/August 2022)



Newsletter: *eNews*

VML's electronic newsletter continues to be our primary channel for distributing information to members and anyone interested in the issues, opportunities, and events that matter to Virginia's local governments. Published bi-weekly during most of the year, and much more often during General Assembly Sessions (sometimes several times a day!), *eNews* and the legislative "Action Alerts" distributed via the platform during sessions are a critical component of VML's communications. Look for updates to the look and improvements to the accessibility of *eNews* in the 2023!



Podcast: *The VML Voice*

VML's podcast began as a labor of love for Director of Communications Rob Bullington in the depths of the pandemic. In 2022, the podcast began to find its stride and we look forward to continuing to develop this entertaining channel for VML members. In 2022 episodes included:



time and energy to serving on VML's Board and committees.

"Board Check" (January 2022) – VML is able to do what we do thanks to the fantastic work done by the local officials and managers who serve on our committees and Board of Directors. In this episode we visited with some new and veteran Board members and found out what makes VML work and why folks might want to devote some of their



time and energy to serving on VML's Board and committees.

"The Case of the Missing Councilmember" (March 2022) – In November of 2021 the City of Radford was missing a councilmember. Well, they weren't really "missing" a councilmember; he had resigned before the end of his term to pursue a job opportunity elsewhere. But, missing or not, the remaining councilmembers had a vacant seat to fill. Normally, they would have appointed someone without too much fanfare to finish out the term. However, this time the City of Radford decided to bring the public into the process.



“Speaking of Speaking - Part 1” (May 2022) – It’s estimated that as much as 75 percent of all people are fearful of speaking in front of groups. If you’re a public official or local government staff, the occasions where you need to speak in public can be frequent and unavoidable. That’s why the VML Voice did a two-part series on “Strategies for Successful Public Speaking.” In this first episode we talked with public speaking instructor Myeisha Grady from VML Community Business Member the American Public University System.



“Speaking of Speaking - Part 2” (June 2022) – In episode one, we learned that confidence is what makes a great public speaker, well, great. In this second part of our two-part series on “Strategies for Successful Public Speaking,” Leslie Strickler of Etre Communications explained how everyone can be more confident and achieve greatness as

a public speaker.



“An Outdoor Recreation Conversation with Jessica Bowser” (August 2022) – If you’ve checked out the July/August issue of VML’s magazine *Virginia Town & City* then you already know that it’s all about making the most of all the outdoor recreation options available in our amazing Commonwealth. In this episode of the VML

Voice, host Rob Bullington called contributing author Jessica Bowser for a chat about all the great advice in her article “How to recreate in Virginia.”



VML’s website and year-round app

You may have noticed that VML’s website is so full of information it’s become (almost) too much! Look for a thorough reimagining of this important resource in 2023. And new for 2022 is VML’s year-round app. The app replicates the most important content from VML’s website in a mobile-friendly format. Best of all, during the Annual Conference the year-round app will become the conference app with all the information you need on speakers, sessions, and notifications of changes and exhibitor raffles.

Awards and acknowledgements

Innovation Awards

In 2020, VML temporarily suspended the Innovation Awards out of consideration for the work everyone was doing to deal with the pandemic. Instead, we recognized individuals who were going above and beyond to help their communities during that difficult time with our Local Champion acknowledgements.

The Innovation Awards came roaring back in 2021 with outstanding entries – many of which were unsurprisingly about the truly creative and inspiring things localities were doing to help their communities navigate the pandemic.

About the awards: Nearly 50 years ago, the Virginia Municipal League launched our “Achievement Awards” to recognize outstanding work being done by local governments across Virginia. The program went on to become Virginia’s highest honor in local government creativity. In 2017 the name was changed to “Innovation Awards”, but the purpose remains the same: To celebrate all that you do to make your city, town, or county a great place to live! The 2021 winners were:

Category: COMMUNITY HEALTH

Winner: **City of Galax**

Entry: Project Light community kitchen and soup kitchen, and food bank

Category: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Winner: **Town of Hillsboro**

Entry: ReThink9 Traffic-Calming, Pedestrian Safety and Infrastructure project

Category: ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Winner: **Town of Purcellville**

Entry: Nutrient Bank to create the largest municipality owned carbon sequestration and nutrient credit bank project in Northern Virginia

Category: PUBLIC SAFETY

Winner: **City of Chesapeake**

Entry: Verified Responder program using a team approach for cardiac care in the community

Category: WORKING WITH YOUTH

Winner: **City of Roanoke**

Entry: Star City Reads program to combat literacy challenges by ensuring that all the city’s children have access to books beginning at birth

Category: COMMUNICATIONS

Winner: **Town of Wytheville**

Entry: The Wytheville Christmas Show to allow the community to come together virtually, and to invite friends and relatives near and far.

Category: RISK MANAGEMENT

Winner: **City of Williamsburg**

Entry: Drive-thru elections that consolidated voting locations into a single drive-thru system at the Williamsburg Fire Department.

Category: LOCAL CHAMPION

Winner: **Town of Vienna** –

Town Manager Mercury T. Payton

Entry: Liberty Amendments Month to kick off the new state-wide Juneteenth holiday

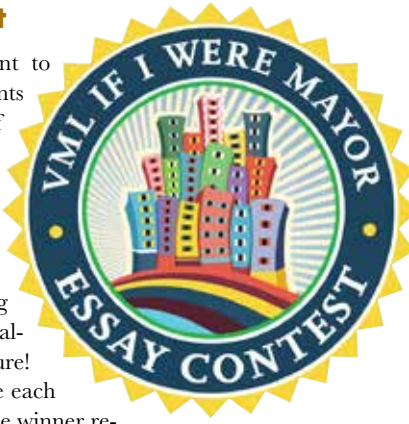


"If I Were Mayor" essay contest

Promoting good local government is important to VML, and our annual essay contest provides students the opportunity to reflect on the important role of elected officials in their locality. This year, students demonstrated a grasp of an issue affecting their community and developed persuasive proposals to mitigate the problem. In every case, it was apparent that these students cared about the people in their town or city and wanted to help them. If these young people are any indication, then Virginia will have a talented group of local leaders to draw upon in the future!

Regional winners selected from around the state each received a \$150 cash prize and plaque. The statewide winner received a \$250 cash prize. The runner-up from the region that received the statewide award became that region's winner.

VML staff were pleased to attend council meetings to present the awards to the 2022 winners.



2022 VML "If I Were Mayor" essay contest winners:

- Statewide winner: Charlotte Lieu of Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School in Falls Church
- Region 1: Olivia Wyatt of Northwood Middle School in Saltville
- Region 2: Jordin Hernández Machuca of Martinsville Middle School in Martinsville
- Region 3: Elizabeth Loring of Sacred Heart Academy in Winchester
- Region 4: Kailey Krotzer of Kenston Forest School in Blackstone
- Region 5: Rose Weatherly of Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School in Falls Church
- Region 6: Hayley Lumpkin of Culpeper Middle School in Culpeper
- Region 8: Sophia Buckley of Hugo A. Owens Middle School in Chesapeake

Note: VML did not receive any entries from Region 7 this year.

If you're not getting it, you're not getting it.

Don't be caught uninformed on local government issues!

The VML *eNews* gives you all the latest developments affecting local government – from legislation in the General Assembly and Congress to new grant opportunities and other resources available at the state and national level.

The *eNews* also notifies you of training and educational opportunities specifically for your field in local government.

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Annual Briefings from VML's Affiliate Organizations



**Chair: Susan Hafeli, Utility Analyst,
Fairfax County**

**Secretary/Treasurer: Sue Mellen,
VML Chief of Staff**

THE VIRGINIA ENERGY PURCHASING GOVERNMENTAL ASSOCIATION (VEPGA) is a joint powers association created in 2002 pursuant to authority provided in the Virginia Code. VEPGA negotiates multi-year electricity contracts with Dominion Energy on behalf of its members. VEPGA also keeps its members informed of energy developments in Virginia and offers opportunities for members across the Dominion service area to collectively promote their interests and learn from each other. VEPGA's membership includes over 170 Virginia local governments, public school systems, authorities, and other governmental entities. VEPGA is governed by a Board of Directors elected by its members. VEPGA's Joint Action Committee meets

quarterly with Dominion to identify and resolve operational issues, including those involving construction and streetlighting. VEPGA's annual spring meeting offers sessions that address educational, technical, and policy topics, as well as opportunities to meet and network with energy professionals from across the Dominion Energy service area. The VEPGA contract includes rate schedules designed to offer electrical service options for facilities that range from a small, house-sized office building to large school campuses. Schedules address small, medium, and large accounts according to energy usage, all-electric buildings, pumping stations, and traffic control, street, and roadway lighting. The contract also provides a low-cost option for the purchase of renewable energy credits. Learn more at www.vepga.org.



**President: Durwin Joyce, Electric Director,
City of Martinsville**

**VML Support Staff: Josette Bulova,
Policy Communication Coordinator**

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC POWER ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA (MEPAV) consists of 16 localities that operate their own electric systems across the Commonwealth. Founded in 1954, MEPAV provides its members with the information and support needed to provide reliable and low-cost energy to their customers.

Members include Bedford, Blackstone, Bristol, Culpeper, Danville, Elkton, Franklin, Front Royal, Harrisonburg, Manassas, Martinsville, Radford, Richlands, Salem, Virginia Tech, and Wakefield. MEPAV and its members are affiliates of the American Public Power Association (APPA), an organization that advocates for over 200 municipal utilities across the Nation.

One of the main purposes of MEPAV is to foster a continuing spirit of cooperation among Virginia municipalities that operate their own utilities. Utility members within MEPAV greatly benefit from the knowledge and experience of one another regardless of if

the subject matter is technical in nature or not.

MEPAV meets several times throughout the year to continue promoting knowledge and experience within its membership. In addition to meeting on a quarterly basis, MEPAV also hosts engineering and operations workshops (E&O) and an annual business meeting. The E&O is a series of training courses for members to learn and share vital information. Held in Virginia Beach, the annual business meeting focuses on trends within the industry on a broader scale while offering networking opportunities.

MEPAV is supported by its associate members which consist of persons, firms, or corporations engaged in or closely allied with the generation, transmission, or distribution of electric energy. Members of manufacturers and suppliers of utility equipment and members of municipalities not engaged in the operation of electric systems are among the list of associate members.

Learn more at www.mepav.org.



**President: Timothy K. Fitzgerald, County Administrator,
County of Augusta**

**Executive Secretary: Janet Areson,
VML Director of Policy Development**

THE ABILITY TO RETURN TO IN-PERSON meetings and conferences was a major highlight of 2022 for the members of the Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA). Welcoming smiles and good discussions were bountiful at VLGMA two conferences this year: the winter conference in Staunton, and the summer conference in Virginia Beach. Both conferences featured sessions focusing on personal development and care as well as issues including federal and state funding, labor law, interpreting Census data, and embracing generational differences.

VLGMA also was able to welcome back public administration students as in-person attendees at the conferences. The association gives a number of students a free day-long registration so they can attend sessions, meet local government management professionals from across the state, and learn more about the profession directly from those in it. This is a part of the association's goal to encourage and promote the next generation of local government management professionals.

The Local Government Certificate Program at Virginia Tech remains a cornerstone of VLGMA's next generation strategy. The program is aimed at those already working in local government who want to learn more about various components of local government as well as management topics. All courses are taught by current or recently retired Virginia

local government management professionals. Several current managers have completed the program, which was initiated by VLGMA in the early 2000s in partnership with Virginia Tech and is now an established part of Virginia Tech's academic curriculum.

Also back in person were the semi-annual meetings for "deputies, assistants and others" or DAOs. The fall meeting was held in Rockingham County and included speakers and panelists from around the Valley to talk about wellness program and navigating the future workforce; the spring meeting was hosted by Prince George County and included discussions around what's next for communities after the pandemic with a growing economy, scarce workforce, and when an employer leaves your community.

At the summer conference the association honored its "Marcia Mashaw Outstanding Assistant" award recipient. Prince Edward County Assistant County Administrator Sarah Elam Puckett received the 2022 award this year.

VLGMA is a state affiliate of the International City-County Management Association (ICMA) and is governed by a board that includes seven officers and a 12-member executive committee. VLGMA is an affiliate association of VML. To learn more about VLGMA, visit its website at www.vlgma.org.



**President: Mike Eutsey, Assistant Chief Building Official,
Hanover County**

**VML Support Staff: Josette Bulova,
Policy Communication Coordinator**

THE VIRGINIA BUILDING AND CODE OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION (VBCOA) is a network of more than 1,000 building safety professionals from across the Commonwealth dedicated to the protection of health, safety, and welfare. Founded in 1929, VBCOA has worked to foster relationships with groups dedicated to the promotion of safety and enforcement of regulations.

VBCOA continues to have a strong partnership with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Virginia Fire Prevention Association (VEPA), Women in Code Enforcement (WICED), the International Code Council (ICC), and other organizations involved in the codes industry.

The past Presidents, now including Matt Westheimer, of VBCOA have worked diligently to ensure the goals of VBCOA and the strategic plan are met. This includes ensuring members are included in decision making processes, the Executive Board upholds their oath, and members gained a certain level of knowledge to implement in their localities. VBCOA does this during their two large conferences that occur a year focusing on leadership development, technical training, and networking opportunities. Monthly training opportunities are also available at any of the eight regions throughout the Commonwealth.

Learn more at www.vbcoa.org.

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BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



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.



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 Wakefield
 Warrenton
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 Woodstock
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Albemarle
 Alleghany
 Arlington
 James City
 Loudoun
 Prince George
 Prince William
 Roanoke
 Stafford
 York



2022-2023

Legislative and Policy Committees

Local officials from diverse localities are appointed each year by the VML president to serve on VML's legislative committee. Committee members develop positions on legislation and urge the enactment, amendment, or opposition to a variety of legislative initiatives. Over 160 local officials work on the VML policy committees. They help to shape the broader policies and make specific legislative recommendations to the Legislative Committee.

All localities are encouraged to participate on policy committees. Nomination forms are sent to each locality in the spring. Let a VML staff member know of your interest or send an email to e-mail@vml.org and we will follow up with you.

Legislative Committee

Chair: Deanna Reed, Mayor, City of Harrisonburg

Vice Chair: Terry Short, Jr., Council Member, City of Waynesboro

City Section

Pat Dent, Council Member, City of Williamsburg

Frank Friedman, Mayor, City of Lexington

Cindy Mester, Deputy City Manager, City of Falls Church (Infrastructure Co-Chair)

Terry Short, Jr., Council Member, City of Waynesboro (HD&E Chair)

John David Smith, Mayor, City of Winchester

Jason Tyree, City Manager, City of Buena Vista (Gen. Laws Chair)

Town Section

Nancy Bailey, Vice Mayor, Town of Big Stone Gap

Keith Harless, Town Manager, Town of Pennington Gap

John Hodges, Vice Mayor, Town of Ashland

Sara McGuffin, Town Manager, Town of Amherst (CED Chair)

Honorable Edward Owens, Mayor, Town of South Boston

Keith Rogers, Jr., Town Manager, Town of Dumfries (Finance Chair)

Urban Section

Christopher Blakeman, Environmental Manager, City of Roanoke (Infrastructure Co-Chair)

E. Michelle Davis-Younger, Mayor, City of Manassas

Shannon Glover, Mayor, City of Portsmouth

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Rocky Holcomb, Council Member, City of Virginia Beach

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Supreme Court for Local Governments 2021-22

By Lisa Soronen

State & Local Legal Center



THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE is pleased to reprint this helpful and insightful look on behalf of the Big Seven national organizations representing state and local governments. The original article was published by the State and Local Legal Center (SLLC) in July 2022.

**Indicates a case where the SLLC has filed an amicus brief.*

The U.S. Supreme Court's 2021-22 docket, which included abortion and guns, was historic. These most significant cases of the term impact local governments but will likely have a greater impact on states and ordinary Americans. This article summarizes four local government cases all of which will impact the day-to-day operations of local governments. All, remarkably, involve the First Amendment.

In *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District** the U.S. Supreme Court held 6-3 that the First Amendment protects an assistant football coach who "knelt at midfield after games to offer a quiet prayer of thanks." The Supreme Court also overruled *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971).

Public school coach Joseph Kennedy had a long history of praying alone and with students at midfield after football games and praying with students in the locker room pregame and postgame. When directed to, Kennedy stopped the latter practice. But he told the district he felt "compelled" to continue offering a "post-game personal

prayer" midfield. The district placed Kennedy on leave for praying on the field after three particular games.

Justice Gorsuch, writing for the Court, concluded Kennedy was able to make the initial showing that the school district violated his free exercise of religion and free speech rights by not allowing him pray on the field after games.

Regarding Kennedy's Free Exercise Clause claim, the Court concluded the school district burdened his sincere religious practice pursuant to a policy that is neither "neutral" nor "generally applicable." The district's actions weren't neutral because "[b]y its own admission, the District sought to restrict Mr. Kennedy's actions at least in part because of their religious character." The district's actions weren't "generally applicable" either the Court concluded. While the district stated it refused to rehire Kennedy because he "failed to supervise student-athletes after games," the district "permitted other members of the coaching staff to forgo supervising students briefly after the game to do things like visit with friends or take personal phone calls."

Regarding Kennedy's Free Speech Clause claim, the Court first had to decide whether Kennedy was speaking as a government employee (who isn't protected by the First Amendment) or as a citizen (who receives some First Amendment protection). The Court determined Kennedy was acting as a citizen. "When Mr. Kennedy uttered the three prayers that resulted in his suspension, he was not engaged in speech 'ordinarily within the scope' of his duties as a coach." "He

was not instructing players, discussing strategy, encouraging better on-field performance, or engaged in any other speech the District paid him to produce as a coach.”

The district explained it suspended Kennedy because it was concerned a “reasonable observer” would conclude it was endorsing religion by allowing him to pray on the field after games. In response the Court overturned the so-called Lemon test.

Lemon “called for an examination of a law’s purposes, effects, and potential for entanglement with religion. In time, the approach also came to involve estimations about whether a ‘reasonable observer’ would consider the government’s challenged action an ‘endorsement’ of religion.” In its place the Court stated it has adopted a view of the Establishment Clause that “accor[ds] with history and faithfully reflec[t]s the understanding of the Founding Fathers.”

The Court also found insufficient evidence students were coerced to pray.

In *City of Austin, Texas v. Reagan National Advertising** the Court held 6-3 that strict (fatal) scrutiny doesn’t apply to Austin allowing on-premises but not off-premises signs to be digitized.

Austin’s sign code prohibits any new off-premises signs but has grandfathered such existing signs. On-premises signs, but not off-premises signs, may be digitized.

Reagan National Advertising argued that this distinction violates the First Amendment’s Free Speech Clause. Per *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* (2015), a regulation of speech is content based, meaning strict scrutiny applies, if the regulation “applies to particular speech because of the topic discussed or the idea or message expressed.”

According to the Fifth Circuit because the City’s on-/off premises distinction required a reader to determine “who is the speaker and what is the speaker saying,” the distinction was content based. According to the U.S. Supreme Court the lower court’s interpretation of *Reed* was “too extreme.”

In *Reed*, the Town of Gilbert’s sign code “applied distinct size, placement, and time restrictions to 23 different categories of signs.” For example, ideological signs were treated better than political signs and temporary directional signs were most restricted. The Court reasoned these categories were content based because Gilbert “single[d] out specific subject matter for differential treatment, even if it [did] not target viewpoints within that subject matter.”

Justice Sotomayor, writing for the Court, opined: “Unlike the sign code at issue in *Reed* . . . the City’s provisions at issue here do not single out any topic or subject matter for differential treatment.” “A given sign is treated differently based solely on whether it is located on the same premises as the thing being discussed or not. The message on the sign matters only to the extent that it informs the sign’s relative location.”

In *Shurtleff v. City of Boston** the Court held unanimously that Boston’s refusal to fly a Christian flag on a flagpole outside city hall violated the First Amendment.

On the plaza, near Boston City Hall entrance, stands three 83-foot flagpoles. Boston flies the American flag on one (along with a banner honoring prisoners of war and soldiers missing in action) and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts flag on the other. On the third it usually flies Boston’s flag.

Since 2005 Boston has allowed third parties to fly flags during events held in the plaza. Most flags are of other countries, marking the national holidays of Bostonians’ many countries of origin. Third-party flags have also been flown for Pride Week, emergency medical service workers, and a community bank. When Camp Constitution asked to fly a Christian flag Boston refused, for the first time ever, citing Establishment Clause concerns. The flag has a red cross on a blue field against a white background.

Camp Constitution sued arguing that Boston opens its flagpole for citizens to express their views in which case it can’t refuse to fly Camp Constitution’s flag based on its (religious) viewpoint. Boston argued it “reserved the pole to fly flags that communicate governmental messages” and was “free to choose the flags it flies without the constraints of the First Amendment’s Free Speech Clause.”

The Supreme Court held that Boston’s flag-raising program doesn’t constitute government speech, meaning the First Amendment applies and it couldn’t reject Camp Constitution’s flag based on its viewpoint.

Justice Breyer, writing for the majority, conducting a “holistic inquiry” which considered “the history of the expression at issue; the public’s likely perception as to who (the government or a private person) is speaking; and the extent to which the government has actively shaped or controlled the expression.”

According to the Court the “general history” of flying flags “particularly at the seat of government” favors Boston. But “even if the public would ordinarily associate a flag’s message with Boston, that is not necessarily true for the flags at issue here” where “Boston allowed its flag to be lowered and other flags to be raised with some regularity.”

While neither of these two factors resolved the case, Boston’s record of not “actively control[ling] these flag raisings and shap[ing] the messages the flags sent” was “the most salient feature of this case.” Boston had “no written policies or clear internal guidance—about what flags groups could fly and what those flags would communicate.”

In a unanimous opinion in *Houston Community College v. Wilson*, the Court held that when a government board censures a member it doesn’t violate the First Amendment.

As Justice Gorsuch describes David Wilson’s tenure on the Houston Community College board was “stormy.” He accused the board of violating its bylaws and ethics rules in the media, he hired a private investigator to determine whether another board member lived in the district which elected her, and he repeatedly sued the board.

The board censured him stating his conduct was “not consistent with the best interests of the College” and “not only inappropriate, but reprehensible.”

The Court held that Wilson has no actionable First Amendment free speech claim arising from the Board’s purely verbal censure. It noted that “elected bodies in this country have long exercised the power to censure their members. In fact, no one before us has cited any evidence suggesting that a purely verbal censure analogous to Mr. Wilson’s has ever been widely considered offensive to the First Amendment.”

Conclusion

The most significant doctrinal change from any of these cases is the overruling of *Lemon*. Every time a local government faces an issue involving Establishment Clause concerns it now has to apply the Court’s new historical test. The Court has offered little guidance as to how this test is to be applied and no guidance as to the status of all the precedent which relied in whole or in part on *Lemon*.



About the author: *Lisa Soronen is the Executive Director of the State and Local Legal Center (Washington, D.C.). The SLLC files Supreme Court amicus curiae briefs on behalf of the Big Seven national organizations representing state and local governments and is a resource to states and local governments on the Supreme Court.*

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Herndon appoints Jovanovich as clerk



- Jovanovich -

On October 3, **Kirstyn Barr Jovanovich** will begin work as the clerk for the Town of Herndon. Jovanovich replaces Viki Wellershaus, who is retiring from the town after 29 years of service.

In her new post, Jovanovich will be responsible for the provision of comprehensive administrative support to

the mayor, town council, town manager, and town attorney. Jovanovich will report directly to Town Manager Bill Ashton and will serve as a member of the town’s management team. “The specifications for this position are complex, exacting and demanding,” said Ashton in a press release. “Kirstyn’s breadth of experience, innate talents and professional aspirations align perfectly with her new role. I look forward to welcoming her to our leadership team.”

Jovanovich comes to the town following two tours of duty as town manager of the

Town of Occoquan where she oversaw operations and managed a staff of six, to include the town’s police chief, events director, town clerk and town treasurer. Significant accomplishments during her tenures included overhaul of the town’s comprehensive plan; professionalism of administrative processes; and updating of the town charter to reflect Occoquan’s structure as a town-manager form of government. She has also served as acting town manager for the Town of Frederick, CO; as public information officer for the Town of Vienna; and community relations/communications specialist for the City of Newport News.

Jovanovich holds a B.A. from Christopher Newport University and a Master of Public Administration from Old Dominion University. She has also completed coursework of the Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia’s Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.

Boyer accepts position as Blacksburg’s public works director



- Boyer -

The Town of Blacksburg has hired **John Boyer** to serve as its director of public works, following Kelly Mattingly’s retirement in August.

Boyer began his career with the Town of Blacksburg in 2006, as horticulturist and certified arborist. During this time, he directed the daily activities of the horticulture and grounds field crews, created landscape designs for public gardens and outdoor spaces, supervised collection services and snow removal, and led Blacksburg’s urban forestry program. Most notable during this time was his project to design and construct the town’s tree nursery, which to date has grown over 1000 trees for planting in town parks and other properties.

In 2010, he was promoted to assistant director of field operations where he managed all aspects of Public Works maintenance activities, including streets, traffic signals, roadway signage, and athletic fields, as well as construction of capital improvement infrastructure projects. Boyer established the town’s pavement management program, where roadway data is collected and analyzed for the purpose of long-term planning of infrastructure improvement projects and for the optimization of roadway maintenance funding.

“John is a natural fit to lead our Public

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Works Department,” said Town Manager Marc Verniel in a press release. “He has successfully progressed through the ranks of the department and demonstrated time and again that he has the professional skills and vision to lead our Public Works Department into the future. I’m looking forward to our continued work together.”

In addition to holding two degrees from Virginia Tech, Boyer is a graduate of the university’s Local Government Management Graduate Certificate program, and a member of the American Public Works Association.

Patrick set to become Lynchburg’s new deputy city manager



Greg Patrick will begin as the City of Lynchburg’s new deputy city manager on September 28. Patrick is filling the position left vacant upon the resignation of former Deputy City Manager Reid Wodicka.

Patrick currently serves as director of budget and strategic planning for the City of Norfolk. During his time with Norfolk, Patrick has helped guide the city to its first ever AAA credit rating, developed a formula to guide local K-12 operating funding and a capital funding model for school construction, and created “Civic Lab,” which supports data-informed and innovative management in city operations and increased transparency in the community.

In addition to his current position, he also served as budget team leader and management analyst III with the City of Norfolk. Patrick graduated from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor’s degree in Resource Management and has a Master’s degree in Accounting from Strayer University.

Woodstock welcomes Bixler as deputy town manager

In a recent press release, the Town of Woodstock announced that **Michelle**



Bixler is the new deputy town manager effective August 1. Bixler replaces Amy Dill, who recently became Shenandoah County’s finance director.

In her new role, Bixler’s responsibilities will include project management, coordi-

nation of capital improvement program maintenance, economic development, grant management, risk management, and maintenance of the communications strategy.

“As we move forward this coming fiscal year with several capital projects and forward-looking planning efforts, I know Michelle will be a great asset in helping us achieve Council’s vision and objectives,” Town Manager Aaron Grisdale stated in the release.

For her part, Bixler said in the release that she is “thrilled and honored” at the appointment.

“The town’s contributions to the quality of life and economic vitality of our area are continually improving and make it a wonderful place to live, work and recreate,” she said. “I look forward to collaborating with the community, Town Council and the dedicated professionals who advance that progress each day.”

Bixler has years of progressively challenging experience in the public and private sectors, including positions with the City of Eugene, OR, Town of Strasburg, and most recently as the City of Staunton’s communications manager.





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Bixler earned a B.A. from James Madison University and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Oregon.

Martino appointed interim town manager for Warrenton

Former Prince William County Executive **Christopher Martino** was appointed as the new interim town manager for the Town Warrenton by a unanimous vote of the town council in August.

Martino replaces interim town manager, Tommy Cureton, who took over the role for 30 days after the previous town manager, Brandie Schaeffer, resigned on good terms in June to take a position with



- Martino -

Amazon Web Services.

The council is still conducting interviews for a permanent replacement for the town manager post. Martino's duties will last until that replacement is found.

Martino served as the county executive for Prince William from 2016 until Dec. 31, 2021, when he announced his retirement. Prior to his term as county executive, Martino served as the deputy county executive for general government, and before that he was director of finance. Martino served the Prince William County government for 26 years.

According to a Prince William County news release on his retirement, Martino said what he was most proud of during his tenure was "changing the organization's culture to empower employees and focus on the Board of County Supervisors' goals; aligning the county's personnel policies, procedures and practices; completing and implementing classification and compensation studies to help with recruitment and retention of county employees; overseeing the creation of Chapter 9.2 and a single combination fire and rescue system; and maintaining the Board's principles of sound financial management and triple AAA bond rating status."

Miles will fill unexpired council term for Virginia Beach



- Miles -

On August 9, the City of Virginia Beach announced that **Delceno Miles** had been selected to fill the unexpired City Council term representing the Bayside District. The Bayside District seat had been vacant following

the death of former mayor, former vice mayor and long-time councilmember Louis R. Jones on June 18.

Miles was selected following a call for applications from Bayside residents interested in filling the vacancy. From the initial group of nine applicants, city council narrowed the candidates for consideration to three. After hearing from each finalist during the August 2 meeting, the council heard public comments about each candidate at the August 9 city council meeting before deliberating to make their decision. Miles took her seat at the dais starting with the Tuesday, August 16 council meeting.

Miles will serve on the City Council until voters select a permanent representative during the November election later this year.

Miles is the president/CEO of The Miles Agency, a Virginia Beach-based marketing and public relations firm that she founded in 1989. Additionally, she previously served on the Virginia Beach School Board and served as vice-chair for two years. Miles holds a B.A. in Psychology from Stanford University and earned her M.A. in Communications from Regent University.

In Memoriam: Jim Campbell



Jim Campbell, former intergovernmental affairs director for the Virginia Municipal League and the retired executive director of the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) for 25 years, died Aug. 17 at age 73 after a long illness.

He was the longest serving executive director in the history of VACo and transformed the relatively small, financially challenged organization into the strong, statewide advocacy organization it is today.

Campbell's leadership was often credited with securing association's longevity. In 2008, recognizing counties' liabilities to account for Other Post-Employment Benefits, he helped form an OPEB Trust that pools funds to earn a higher rate of return on investments. The OPEB Trust currently comprises almost 50 counties, cities and towns investing nearly \$1 billion. It's believed to be the nation's largest pool of its kind, according to VACo.

He also helped establish the Virginia Investment Pool (VIP). Local governments use the investment program to enhance their return on reserve funds.

Campbell was also adept at creating connections between the disparate regions of the Commonwealth. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, upon his hiring, noted the schism among urban, suburban and rural counties. However, Gerry Hyland, a former Fairfax County supervisor and VACo's president in 2002-2003, noted that Campbell overcome those schisms. "Through his efforts, rural counties and large urban-suburban counties have been brought together to speak with one voice," Hyland said, "whereas when he started, I think there was a division among the large and the small that was not a situation in the best interests of all counties in Virginia."

To many, perhaps Campbell's crowning achievement was overseeing the purchase and renovation of 1207 East Main St. in Richmond for VACo's headquarters, a stone's throw from the Capitol. Under his leadership, the 1866 building was updated with an eye toward preserving its historical significance while developing an environment-friendly LEED-certified "green" building.

At the time of Campbell's retirement in 2015 he said that he was "proud of what we've accomplished during my tenure, and believe the association is primed to launch to greater heights in the coming years."

Fairfax County Supervisor Penny Gross, who has served on VACo's board for 26 years, called Campbell's retirement "the end of an era. "But Jim has put together a fine young staff that will continue to pursue the goals of VACo just as VACo has always done under Jim's tutelage," she said in 2015.

Before his illness, Campbell capitalized on his retirement by spending time with his family and traveling with his wife, Christine.

Excellence in Virginia Government Awards Nominations open September 15

THE L. DOUGLAS WILDER SCHOOL of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University is pleased to announce the 16th annual Excellence in Virginia Government Awards (EVGA) on April 11, 2023. EVGA celebrates people and organizations in the public and private sectors who have made significant contributions to the practice of government and the well-being of our communities and citizens.

“These awards recognize outstanding work at all levels of government in Virginia and honor dedicated public service, innovative approaches and commitment to excellence,” said Susan T. Gooden, Ph.D., dean of the Wilder School.

Nominations for the 2023 Awards open September 15 and will be accepted through November 1, 2022. Nominations are being accepted

in seven categories: Community Enhancement, Grace E. Harris Leadership Award, Hill-Robinson Expansion of Freedom, Innovation in Government, Lifetime Achievement, Public-Private Partnerships, and Unsung Hero.

To learn more details about the Excellence in Virginia Government Awards, including criteria and past winners, visit <https://bit.ly/evgavcu> or contact Paula Otto, piotto@vcu.edu.



Blacksburg uses citizen engagement to redesign beloved playground

THE HAND-IN-HAND wooden playground, located on Turner Street in the Blacksburg Municipal Park, was built by community volunteers in 1992. The 30-year-old structure has brought joy and entertainment to many children, but it is showing much wear and tear and needs to be brought up to current national safety standards. Leathers & Associates, the same company that helped design the original playground, will once again be working with the town to design and install a new custom-designed destination playground using modern materials.

To ensure that community members, including children, had a voice in the process, Blacksburg invited citizens to provide input in one of three ways: 1. Complete an online playground survey on the “Let’s Talk Blacksburg” site 2. Upload drawings, pictures, or other ideas for the playground to the Hand-in-Hand project page. 3. Participate in the town’s interactive engagement event held on August 27th which included fun and interactive activities for kids to provide their input.

Leathers & Associates is using all the community input to create two conceptual plans for the new playground. Citizens



will then have an opportunity in October to select the plan they prefer. Winter of 2023 will be spent finalizing plans, ordering materials, and beginning site work. Blacksburg plans to unveil the new playground in May 2023.

Waynesboro downtown market and real estate redevelopment study completed

WITH SUPPORT FROM THE VIRGINIA Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and an Industrial Revitalization Fund (IRF) Planning Grant, the Waynesboro Economic Development Authority (EDA), contracted with Creative Economic Development Consulting (Creative EDC) to research and prepare a downtown market and real estate redevelopment study. Although the pandemic caused a slight stall, in the last decade, Waynesboro's downtown area has experienced a renewed energy, reduced vacancy, and modest growth. This study will assist the city and downtown property owners in developing a marketing campaign to attract new business to enhance continued growth while developing a reuse plan for five identified

derelict buildings ranging from retail, restaurant, bed and breakfast, and office.

Additionally, there are several public and private transformation projects moving into development. The Waynesboro campus of the Virginia Museum of Natural History is expected to open in 2025 and attract 65,000 visitors annually. Adjacent to the new museum, the current redesign of Constitution Park will culminate in the South River Preserve (SRP), a signature 26-acre park along the banks of the South River. In addition to this park, the former landfill, Sunset Park, will become a city park with event space and 4.5 miles of biking and hiking trails.

Creative EDC made recommendations for additional city planning and public investments to support redevelopment. Examples include applying for grants for building renovations, expanding the city's revolving loan fund, studying the need for co-work space in downtown, and implementing the Gateway Redevelopment Plan's recommendation for a regional visitor center.



Newport News Commissioner of the Revenue Office expands communications



Commissioner of the Revenue Tiffany Boyle

IN JULY OF THIS YEAR, the Newport News Commissioner of the Revenue Office released its latest installment of its expanded PSA campaign translated into American Sign Language. This expansion, which followed previous initiatives to provide services in Korean and Spanish, offers citizens information regarding tax support, business licenses, personal property, as well as a general overview of services available to taxpayers.

On the expanded service, Commissioner of the Revenue Tiffany Boyle remarked, "Taxpayers should be treated as stakeholders in their government while the work we engage in as public servants should reflect their investment and respect their interests. We hope the expansion of our Public Service Announcements in American Sign Language, Korean and Spanish will serve as an example that local governments can lead by example and embrace all of our communities."

This installment of the PSA campaign makes Commissioner of the Revenue Boyle the first elected official in Hampton Roads and the only elected constitutional official in the Commonwealth to provide PSAs in Korean, Spanish, and American Sign Language.

Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore opens new headquarters in Franklin

THE FOODBANK OF SOUTHEASTERN Virginia and the Eastern Shore recently announced the opening of its new Western Tidewater Branch located at 618 South Street in the City of Franklin. This \$3 million investment marks a major commitment to eliminate food insecurity and its root causes in the region.

The nearly 17,000-square-foot building houses a fully equipped warehouse featuring walk-in refrigerators and freezers and dry storage capacity that can accommodate up to 48 pallets (96,000 pounds) of dry, shelf-stable foods; that's equivalent to the weight of 27.5 Mini-Cooper automobiles. Additionally, the new branch facility features a marketplace where neighbors experiencing food insecurity can "shop" for dairy, meat, and fresh produce in a farmer's market-style shopping area, providing the dignity of a client-choice shopping experience. The building also houses numerous classroom and meeting spaces, plus a computer lab to support programs designed to address the root causes of food insecurity, namely employment, healthcare and nutrition, education, housing, and financial literacy.

"With food insecurity on the rise, this new investment could not come at a better time," says Foodbank President & CEO Christopher Tan in a press release. "It's all about doing more... providing more food and more services to more people. One thing I fervently believe is that food is connection. Helping to feed someone is one of the most personal things you can do for another. Among other things, it establishes trust. We want to use that connection to help people onto the path of self-sufficiency."

Economic impacts continue to take a disparate toll on low-income and rural communities and communities of color, where food insecurity rates are rising. The Foodbank's Western Tidewater Branch was established to provide enhanced services to the region and target families facing food insecurity in the rural communities of Franklin and Suffolk and the counties of Isle of Wight, Southampton, and Sussex. The opening of this new branch enables the more than 30 partner agencies in Western Tidewater the ability to access a Foodbank warehouse — which supplies food supporting local church and community-based food pantries and soup kitchens — in under 50 minutes.

Like any major undertaking, this new branch would not be possible without the generous support of many community partners,

such as the Obici Healthcare Foundation which has provided \$600,000 in grants over the past three years, Hubbard Peanut Company, Hampton Roads Ventures, First Baptist Church, and the Camp, Landmark, and Truist Foundations. Additionally, the project received \$2 million in support from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

About the Foodbank

For more than 40 years, the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore has provided over 350 million meals to those in our community who face hunger. Through our programs, facilities, and large network of community partners, we "eliminate hunger" on a daily basis for many. However, we understand that our current work addresses hunger for individuals in the short term. It does not address the root causes which force individuals to return to a food pantry again and again. This understanding has led to the creation of a strategic plan aimed to move Hampton Roads closer to achieving the mission of eliminating hunger for those we serve — not only for the day, or for the week, but for a lifetime. For up-to-date information on the visit www.foodbankonline.org.



Leading the effort to eliminate
hunger in our community



Loudoun County celebrates opening of new Lovettsville Community Center

THE LOUDOUN COUNTY BOARD of Supervisors and the departments of Parks, Recreation and Community Services and Transportation and Capital Infrastructure celebrated the grand opening of the Lovettsville Community Center with a ribbon cut-

ting on Wednesday, August 31. The public was invited to attend the ceremony and enjoy the facility's amenities.

The new center is located at 57 East Broad Way in Lovettsville, on the same property as the existing community center building. This project included the construction of a new 18,500 square-foot building as well as an addition and renovation to the existing pool house building.

Features of the new center include a full court gymnasium, a fitness room and a dedicated seniors' area, as well as five classrooms, a kitchen, restrooms, and meeting spaces. The pool house renovation included expansion of the showers and changing areas, first aid area and concessions areas. The pool house renovations were completed and opened to the public in May 2022.

Following the opening of the new center, the existing community center building was closed and will be demolished for the construction of a new parking facility.



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About the VML Community Business Membership (CBM) Program

As a CBM organization you hold a sustaining membership in VML and keep your firm or organization connected with the issues that are important to municipalities around you. Being a CBM places your organization at the forefront in the minds of VML members, ensuring you the visibility, access, and awareness that will help move your organization forward.

Please note that each level of membership includes both year-round benefits as well as benefits specific to VML's Annual Conference held in the fall.

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