

VTC

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VML ANNUAL CONFERENCE

NORFOLK

RESPECT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

NORFOLK WATERSIDE MARRIOTT | OCT. 8-10

Inside:

Destination Norfolk:
400 years of history
all around you!

2022-2023
The Year In Review

Three steps to opioid
policy success

How Harrisonburg is
using ARPA funds to
make generational
improvements for all
its residents

... and more





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ABOUT THE COVER

The City of Norfolk welcomes VML for its 2023 Annual Conference at the Waterside Marriott. While you're there, take in all that the "Mermaid City" has to offer! Learn more in this issue.

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Next stop: Mermaid City!

AS I WRITE THIS, the VML Annual Conference is just around the corner, and I couldn't be more excited to spend time with our members in the fantastic City of Norfolk! The mayor and city staff have worked very hard to make sure that this event will be a success. As you know, Norfolk is home to the Naval Station and the Nauticus maritime museum that features the Battleship *Wisconsin*. As a native of Menomonie, WI, I hope you will all forgive me for using this occasion to say: "Go Packers!!!"

I also hope that you have been following the articles about the City of Norfolk over the past few issues of the magazine. I know I've learned a few things about the city, and I hope you have also found a few items to put on your to-do list while you explore the "Mermaid City".

Host City night will be at the Chrysler Museum of Art which has indoor and outdoor space so please dress appropriately and be prepared to enjoy the exhibits, including the city's silver mace which has a fascinating history you can read about in this issue. Personally, my favorite exhibits are the blown glass pieces which are truly breathtaking.

Every year we are pleased to make it possible for our members to get out and see the host locality while learning about projects and resources that may inspire ideas in their home localities. This year one of the mobile workshops will be a guided bike tour on the Elizabeth River Trail which promises to be not only educational but also good for some fresh air and a little exercise. Other offerings include a tour of a medical marijuana growing facility, a boat tour of the Port of Virginia and a bus tour of the St. Paul's transformation project. The St. Paul's project is a joint effort between the City of Norfolk and the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority to transform a public housing community into a mixed-use, mixed-income community.

On-site sessions during the conference will include information on transportation funding, grant funding opportunities, how to deal with rising interest rates and housing, and many more!

But as with any of our Annual Conferences, it can't be all learning and networking. There is league business to see to as well. VML is *your* league, and the Annual Business meeting is a great opportunity for both new and returning attendees to understand the work we do. The legislative committee and the

policy committees have been hard at work over the summer, so please take the time to review their work before the business meeting which will be early afternoon on Monday.

Monday night will be the VML Reception & Awards Dinner followed by live music from Soul Expressions. The evening will be a great opportunity to applaud our Innovation Award winners and then celebrate with some dancing. Thanks to everyone who submitted Innovation Awards – I enjoyed reading about all the important projects our localities do!

Tuesday kicks off with Roundtables, including a room of tables dedicated to helping our members understand grant opportunities from the Department of Housing and Community Development. Tuesday wraps up with a session during which we will hear from a group that is working on the next generation of air passenger vehicles to be

used by localities as a "subway in the sky" – it promises to be an exciting presentation.

I look forward to seeing all of you in the Mermaid City for some learning, networking and fun!





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Kenneth Cooper Alexander, Ph.D.
Mayor



CITY of NORFOLK
Office of the Mayor

TO ALL ATTENDING THE
VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE
2023 MAYORS INSTITUTE & ANNUAL CONFERENCE
NORFOLK WATERSIDE MARRIOTT
OCTOBER 8 - 10, 2023

Greetings!

As Mayor of the City of Norfolk, and on behalf of the entire city council, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all those attending the Virginia Municipal League's 2023 Mayors Institute & Annual Conference at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott. We are honored to serve as this year's host city and look forward to sharing our hospitality with each of you.

Throughout its history, the Virginia Municipal League has come together to exchange ideas and experiences promoting closer relationships between its member cities, towns, and urban counties, working together to serve as a legislative advocate for Virginia localities. We look forward to continuing that tradition in our great city of Norfolk. Together we will build a better Virginia, improving the quality of life in communities across the Commonwealth.

I strongly encourage participants to arrive ahead of the conference to take advantage of the many opportunities our vibrant, and authentic waterfront has to offer. In our walkable downtown, visit the award-winning Slover Library, take a harbor cruise of the Elizabeth River, explore historical artifacts at the MacArthur Memorial, or discover Nauticus and the Battleship *Wisconsin*. I also highly recommend the serene beauty of the Norfolk Botanical Garden, the collections displayed in the Chrysler Museum of Art, and a visit with the animals at the Virginia Zoo.

Norfolk is a diverse, dynamic city that embodies the cultural and commercial advantages of a big city while maintaining its intimate charm and friendly atmosphere. We look forward to providing you a truly memorable experience. Welcome to Norfolk!

Sincerely,

Kenneth Cooper Alexander, Ph.D.
Mayor

810 Union Street · Suite 1001 · Norfolk, Virginia 23510 · (757)664-4679 · Fax (757) 441-2909 · kenneth.alexander@norfolk.gov



Destination Norfolk: 400 years of history all around you!

Note: *this is the fourth and final in a series of articles about the amazing City of Norfolk where VML members will gather October 8-10 for the 2023 Annual Conference.*

THE CITY OF NORFOLK looks forward to welcoming our fellow members of the Virginia Municipal League to the 2023 Annual Conference at the Waterside Marriott. While you're here, you will be surrounded by history.

“Norfolk Town”

In 1682, “Norfolk Town” was established at the point where the Eastern Branch joined the Elizabeth River – a location that provided convenient water access to most of the surrounding area. By the time of the American Revolution, the population had grown from 1,000 to 6,000.

During the Revolutionary War, Norfolk suffered extensive damage. St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, located at the corner of St. Paul’s Boulevard and City Hall Avenue, was the only surviving structure. The church is within walking distance of this year’s VML conference and still has the cannonball, purportedly fired by the Royal Navy’s frigate *Liverpool*, embedded in the wall.

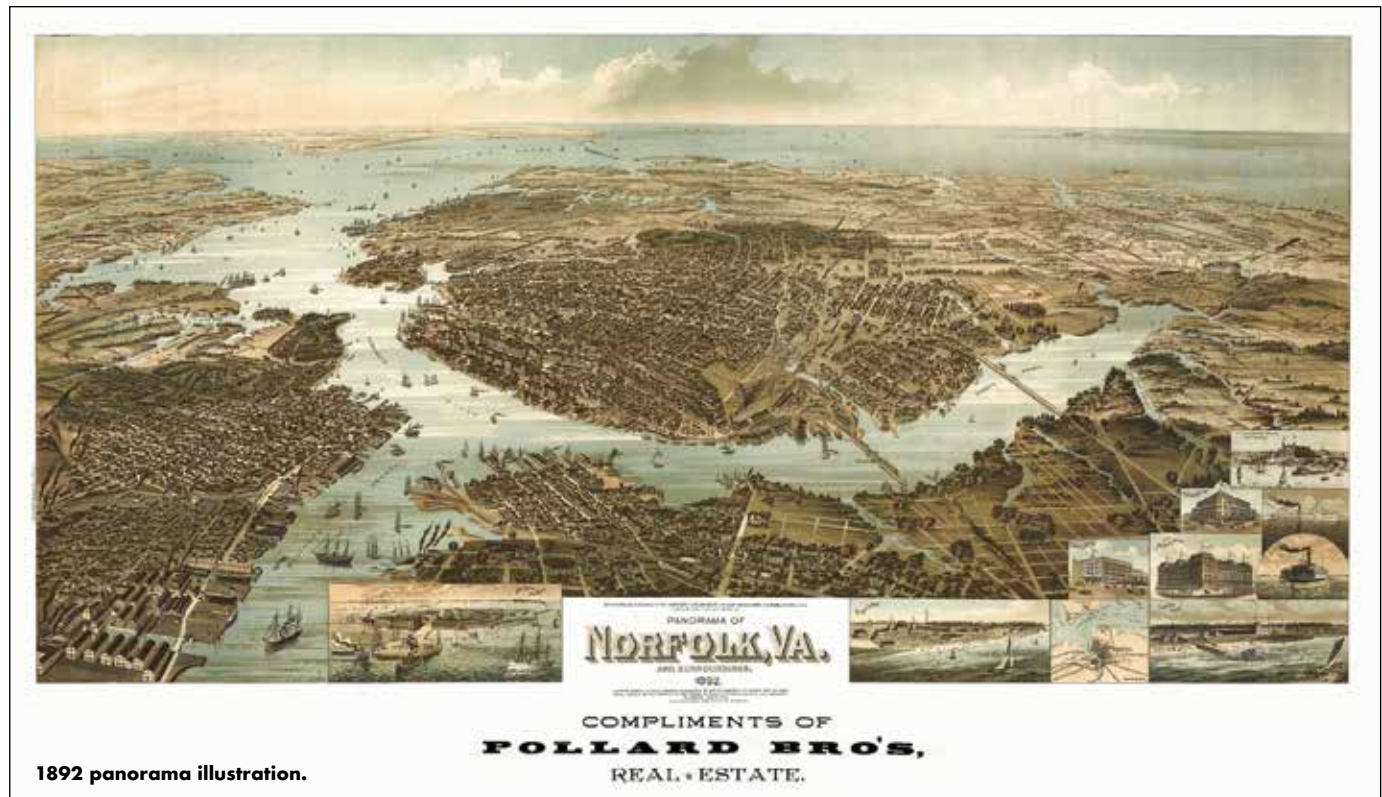
In 1845, with a population of more than 10,000, Norfolk successfully petitioned to incorporate as a city. This was a period of stability and great prosperity, reflected in the construction of several substantial public buildings.

The MacArthur Memorial

Architect, Thomas U. Walter, who designed the dome of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, designed Norfolk’s City Hall, which serves today as the MacArthur Memorial. This two-story, stucco and granite building – also within walking distance of the VML conference – serves as both a museum and research center dedicated to preserving and presenting the life story of General Douglas MacArthur. The Memorial also pays tribute to the millions of men and women who served with General MacArthur in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. It is also the final resting place for MacArthur and his wife, Jean.

The Norfolk mace

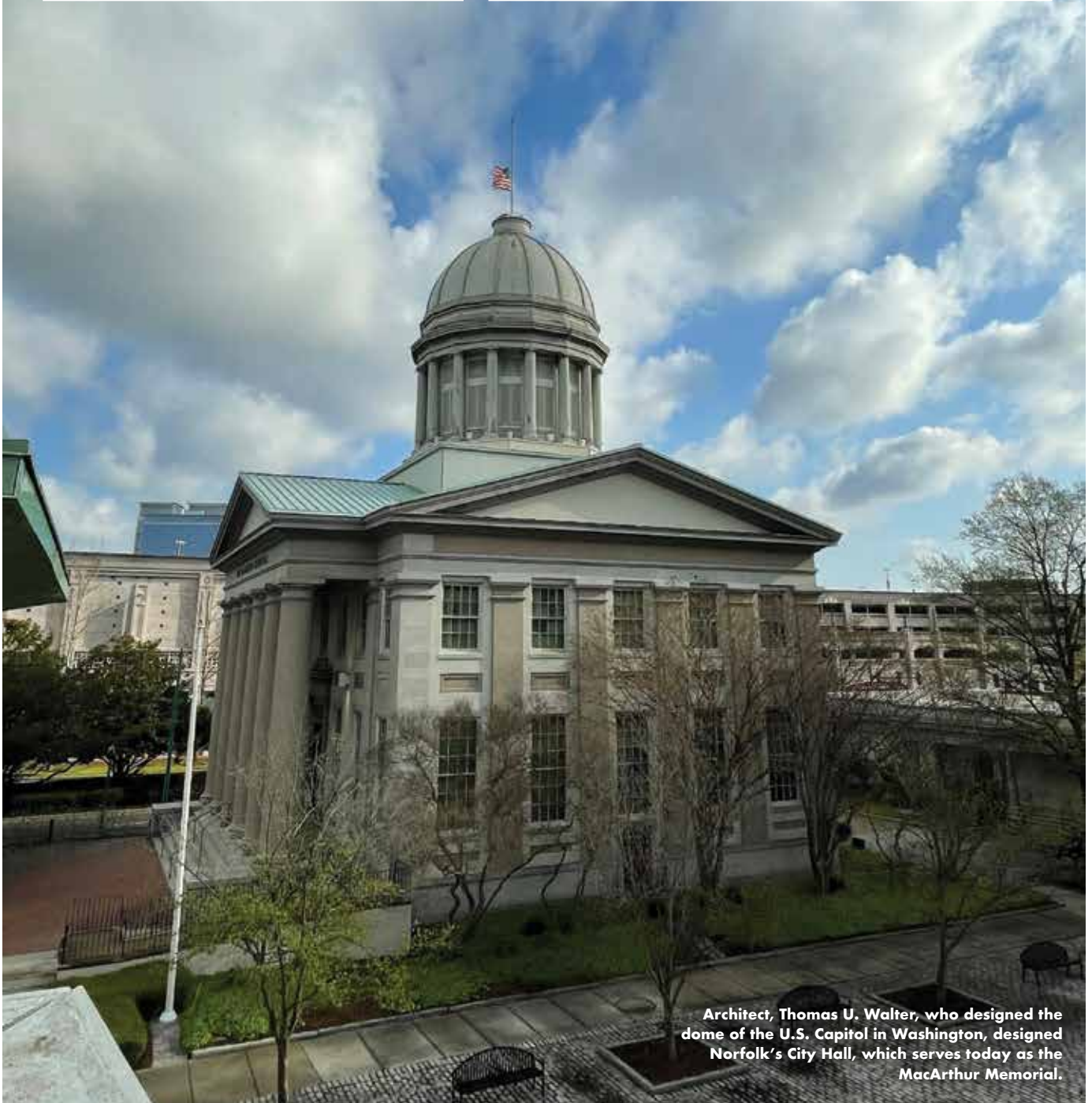
By the start of the Civil War, Norfolk had become a moderate-sized city with many substantial public and private buildings, as well as residences. During the Civil War, the city avoided destruction by surrendering to Union forces. Prior to surrendering to Union General John E. Wool, Norfolk Mayor William Lamb hid Norfolk’s Colonial-era solid silver mace beneath a fireplace hearth. This action saved the historic mace from capture and possibly from being melted down by Federal troops. Norfolk is believed to be the only U.S. city to have an intact silver mace from its colonial days. *Continues on page 8.*



1892 panorama illustration.



Norfolk's City Hall c.1880s.



Architect, Thomas U. Walter, who designed the dome of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, designed Norfolk's City Hall, which serves today as the MacArthur Memorial.

The mace was presented to the Borough of Norfolk in 1754 by Robert Dinwiddie. When Norfolk burned in 1776, it was safely buried at Kemps Landing for its protection. When Virginia became the tenth state to ratify the new United States Constitution in 1788, the mace preceded the mayor during a parade celebrating the historic moment. When it was hidden again during the Civil War, it was beneath the hearth of Mayor William Lamb's home that later was occupied by Union troops, but never discovered. The mace was kept at the Exchange Bank of Norfolk following the war but disappeared when the bank foreclosed in 1885. Nine years later, Police Chief C. Iredell discovered the mace among litter in the Norfolk Police station. Finally, in 1989, the mace arrived at its current home in the Chrysler Museum of Art where it remains on public display.

This year's conference goers will have an opportunity to view the historic mace during Host City Night at the Chrysler.

Ghent and Huntersville

Ghent, Norfolk's first planned community, was developed between 1893 and 1903 on farmland originally owned by Richard Drummond. To honor the Treaty of Ghent, Drummond changed the name of his property from Pleasant Point to Ghent. This treaty had ended the War of 1812 and reopened the port of Norfolk to overseas trade.

Huntersville, one of Norfolk's oldest and most intact settlements remaining from the late 19th century, is unique because it was not planned by a company or commission but developed over time. It was also unique because this small area, which is located today in the heart of the City of Norfolk, was the most cosmopolitan of Norfolk's neighborhoods. It was the only predominantly Black neighborhood to be annexed during the more than 70 years of annexation. The neighborhood centers around Church Street, one of the oldest thoroughfares in the city.

Norfolk International Terminals

Maritime trade continues to be a large economic driver for Norfolk as the Port of Virginia, a group of four marine terminals, moves cargo through world-class facilities and transports goods to and from markets around the globe. Norfolk International Terminals (NIT) is the largest of the four facilities with 567 acres and 50-foot-deep channels capable of handling the newest class of Ultra Large Container Vessels. Conference attendees will have an opportunity to visit NIT including the new \$452 million terminal optimization project. This

state-funded project will increase the total capacity of NIT by 46 percent within the same footprint. In total, The Port of Virginia will have an added capacity of over one million containers due to the expansion project at Virginia International Gateway and the terminal optimization project at NIT. These historic investments ensure that ocean carriers, cargo owners and transportation partners will have room to expand their international business for decades to come.

The Attucks Theatre

Located along Church Street is the Attucks Theatre, originally known as the "Apollo of the South." Designed by African American architect Harvey Johnson, the theatre opened in 1919, and showcased a host of legendary performers such as Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Mamie Smith, Nat King Cole, and Redd Foxx. The Attucks



Theatre is named in honor of African American Crispus Attucks, the first American patriot to lose his life in the 1770 Boston Massacre. For 34 years, the theatre remained a vibrant performing arts facility, but ceased functioning in 1953. In 1977, the United States Congress deemed the Attucks Theatre a National Historic Landmark and, after a restoration period of three years, it was reopened in 2004 by a partnership between the City of Norfolk's Department of Cultural Facilities and the Crispus Attucks Cultural Center, Inc.

NORFOLK PUBLIC LIBRARY



WPA workers in the original garden.



WPA Memorial Garden.

Norfolk Botanical Gardens

In the late 1930s, the City of Norfolk provided 75 acres of high, wooded ground and another 75 acres of the Little Creek Reservoir to establish a city azalea garden. On June 30, 1938, Representative Norman R. Hamilton announced a Works Progress Administration (WPA) grant of \$76,278 for the Azalea Garden project. Within less than a year, a section of underbrush had been cleared and readied for planting by a group of more than 200 African American women and 20 men. By March of 1939, four thousand azaleas, two thousand rhododendrons, several thousand miscellaneous shrubs and trees and one hundred bushels of daffodils had been planted. After a series of name changes, the Norfolk Botanical Garden was established in 1958 to “promote for the people of Tidewater, Virginia, a Garden that will always remain an inspiration, and lead the home gardener to greater





enjoyment and accomplishment in his own yard [and to] present rare and exotic plants in variety only exceeded by few other sections of the world.”

Today, Norfolk Botanical Garden includes 175-acres, with more than 60 themed gardens that can be viewed by tram, boat or by foot. Themed gardens include the Bristow Butterfly Garden, the Sarah Lee Baker Perennial Garden, the Virginia Native Plant Garden, and the Margaret Moore Hall Bicentennial Rose Garden. Each of these gardens allow guests to see a variety of plants – from the cultivated to the wild – and enjoy a serene place to visit amid the hustle and bustle of city life.



Welcome to Mermaid City!

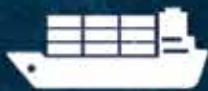
The City of Norfolk welcomes you to take in all that the Mermaid City has to offer. Stroll along our vibrant waterfront. Enjoy our cuisine which, like our community, isn’t singular in its signature, but more a product of the melting pot Norfolk’s always been. Take in the history that makes Norfolk one of a kind. There is plenty to discover!





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Source: The Fiscal Year 2022 Virginia Economic Impacts of The Port of Virginia, Raymond A. Mason School of Business, William & Mary

A message from VML President A.D. "Chuckie" Reid

A year of walking in larger-than-life footsteps



A.D. "Chuckie" Reid

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE it's been almost a year since we were all together in Richmond. So much has happened. For starters, I did not expect to be serving as your President this year. Sadly, Town of Pennington Gap Councilmember Jill Carson passed away just a few short months after being sworn in as VML's President at the 2022 Annual Conference. I very much wish Jill was writing this instead of me, but I have done my best to walk in her footsteps this past year. It has been an honor to finish her term. I am humbled by Jill's example as I think of the year to come during which I will serve my full year as your President.

Given the circumstances, I will keep this message short and say only that VML has had a busy year – hosting events, spending time at the General Assembly, waiting for a budget, rolling out a new website and da-



Jill Carson

tabase, and much more that you can read about in the Annual Report in this issue of the magazine. Personally, one of the most fulfilling things I got to do this year as VML's President was to attend the Congressional City Conference held in Washington, D.C. by the National League of Cities. At this event I met local officials from all over the country. It's so inspiring to know that as an elected official you are part of a larger family with similar concerns and everyone is ready to learn from each other – whether you serve in Pennington Gap, Farmville, Norfolk... or Seattle!

I look forward to seeing everyone in Norfolk where we will gather under the banner of "Respect for Local Governments." It is my honor and my pleasure to work on your behalf.

A.D. "Chuckie" Reid

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WHEN VML MEMBERS gathered in Richmond for the 2022 Annual Conference, it's fair to say that the most emotional moment came during the closing session when Town of Pennington Gap Councilmember and newly installed VML President Jill Carson addressed the gathering. Wearing a shirt that proclaimed her a cancer survivor, she seemed frail in body, but was strong in spirit. President Carson's speech encouraging everyone to nurture civility in their local governments and their own lives was an amazing coda to a great event. Sadly, Jill Carson passed on January 28, 2023 and VML's Vice President and Vice Mayor of the Town of Farmville Chuckie Reid stepped up to complete her term. Of Jill Carson, Vice Mayor Reid observed, "She was a fighter. She spoke her mind and was very respected and loved. I will miss her deeply." Indeed, everyone in the VML community who knew her misses Jill but has found inspiration in her strength to continue the work she held dear.

It would be tempting to describe this past year as "the calm before the storm." Although VML and Virginia's localities had to cool our collective heels while we waited for the General Assembly to finally pass a budget – and although the 2023 session was technically a short one – it was anything but "calm." For starters the 2023 session was incredibly busy with 2,863 pieces of legislation introduced and 1,687 bills passed in just 45 days. During this time, and through the dog days of summer, VML's staff also worked to transition our website and aging database to a new platform. This was a heavy lift over ten years in the making but it's finally completed! And through it all, VML hosted events and Regional Meetings, organized the activities of our various committees, answered questions from our member localities and did everything we could to support our mission of "Better Communities Through Sound Government". Thank you to all the officials and staff in our member localities for the work you do. It's an honor to work on your behalf.

Oh, and about that "storm" – there's certainly something significant in the forecast as the relative stability in General Assembly membership is about to be swept by a surge of new members after the November election. But don't worry, we've got our umbrellas ready and will be here to support Virginia's local governments!

2022 Annual Conference

The 2022 Annual Conference held at the Richmond Marriott Downtown was among the best attended in recent memory. Maybe it had something to do with the City of Richmond? Maybe it was because everyone was happy to feel more distant from the



pandemic? Whatever it was, it certainly wasn't the weather because it rained and rained! Fortunately, the rain was not an issue because over the course of three days attendees heard a keynote address from nationally recognized speaker Matt Lehrman (who will be back for 2023), enjoyed a Host City Night at the Virginia Museum of History, went on mobile workshops to housing developments with Virginia Housing, to the Library of Virginia for records retention information, and toured the historic Jackson Ward neighborhood as well as the eclectic Scott's Addition area. VML members attended sessions on everything from FOIA/COIA to ARPA funds, from short term rentals to social media for small towns, and so much more.

Lobbying & Advocacy 2023 General Assembly Session

In an odd numbered year, we would normally be talking about a "short" session of the General Assembly with everything wrapped up within 45 days. The policy side of the session was indeed completed in that timeframe. However, getting a completed amended budget took somewhat longer.

Unable to come to agreement on proposed changes to the current biennial budget by the end of the regular session – particularly additional tax cuts proposed by the Governor – budget conferees instead rolled out (and members approved) a "skinny budget". It's worth noting that "skinny budget" is a new term in Virginia budgeting. As employed by the 2023 General Assembly, the "skinny budget" addressed a few issues, most notably correcting the Basic Aid calculation error that came to light during the session, but left unresolved many, many more issues, including salary increases for teachers, CSB staff and others; behavioral health initiatives to help communities with crisis and other services; and so much more!

After several false starts, General Assembly budget conferees came to an agreement on a more comprehensive package of budget amendments in late August and the General Assembly convened in a special session on Sept. 6 to approve that budget package.

Now everyone gets a short breather – if you can call it that – before the approaching elections in which all General Assembly seats are in play; the moving of General Assembly member offices, staff, agencies, and operations from the Pocahontas Building to the brand new General Assembly buildings at 9th and Broad Streets; and the presentation of the Governor's proposal for the 2024-2026 budget in December.

Then the fun begins again with the 2024 Session in January!





The General Assembly that convenes in January 2024 will look very different given the large number of voluntary and involuntary retirements from both bodies. Gone will be at least 590 years of experience from the body as a whole. New members will face a steep learning curve and fewer experienced colleagues to provide guidance and support with a fast-paced and complex process.

Given these circumstances, it will be more important than ever to educate the members of the General Assembly on all the critical work done by Virginia's local governments. Please review the "How to Communicate with your Legislator" information that will be available at our conference and the website. Also keep an eye out for the VML Regional Events to be held in early December.

Overall, local governments had a decent session in 2023, particularly with the defeat, watering down, or movement to studies of legislation affecting local revenue authority, procedures, and collections as well as local authority regarding waste-related "flow control" ordinances; but localities were dealt a few losses, including the failure of legislation to give local governments the authority to impose a local sales and use tax of up to one percent to use solely for school construction and renovation, and the lack of movement on legislation to address local referendum and zoning authority in regards to commercial marijuana businesses.

On the public safety/behavioral health front, some helpful bills were approved to create a fund and grant program for opioid use reduction/jail-based substance use disorder programs; more definitive direction on the use of alternative transportation during emergency custody/temporary detention situations; and other legislation to give emergency room doctors more flexibility regarding requests for testing/treatment/observation or release of an individual if they no longer meet the criteria for temporary detention. VML's legislative priorities included many of these issues.

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. It's a never-ending process, and the local government input is so very helpful in keeping legislators and their staff members "in the know" on the many issues facing communities.

Local Government Day

VML once again co-hosted Local Government Day at the Richmond Omni 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 and many members were able to squeeze into small meeting rooms to hear committees and subcommittees address all types of legislation. This will

be improved in the new General Assembly building, with larger meeting rooms and public spaces! Thanks to everyone who came and spoke with their delegation members.

The next Local Government Day will be February 1, 2024, at the Richmond Downtown Marriott.

Policy & Legislative Committees

VML's Legislative Committee began its work in early June with an update on the 2023 session (sans budget) and a look into issues that may be in play during the 2024 Session. The five policy committees met throughout July to receive presentations on a range of pertinent topics including tax policy, education funding, transportation funding, and housing issues. Each committee chose a limited number of items to forward for further consideration by the Legislative Committee during its September 11 meeting. The priorities include state assistance to local law enforcement, funding of CSBs and BHAs, more money for the stormwater local assistance fund, support for public education funding and the retention of sovereign immunity. The Legislative Committee will meet again (in person this time) on Sunday, October 8, at the VML Annual Conference in Norfolk.

Please review the proposed policy and legislative committee statements which can be found on each committee's page on our website.

Studies Everywhere

Once again, the number of General Assembly-generated studies and Executive Branch initiated efforts to address current issues kept VML and local government staff scrambling this summer. FOIA, housing, behavioral health reform, tax policy, transportation funding and natural resources issues were all on the table this year. The Virginia Housing Commission created four workgroups to review legislation while the FOIA Council only created two. The road maintenance two-year study will be complete in December and the review of SMART SCALE will produce changes (also in December). The studies have been slow but there will be reports rolling out in the fall so stay tuned to *eNews*!

Notably, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) issued a long-awaited report regarding the state's funding of the Standards of Quality (SOQ). Study findings reinforced many of the concerns VML has been expressing for years; specifically, the refusal by state policymakers to recognize prevailing practices in school divisions. This dogged adherence to artificially low standards for funding put localities – even the most fiscally distressed – into the position of making up for decades of state underfunding to adequately staff classrooms and meet the needs of their communities.

Education & Training

Annual Conference

The 2022 VML annual conference held October 2-4 in Richmond was a great success. With close to 600 attendees from all over the Commonwealth it was evident that VML's members and partner organizations were in a mood to get together! This premiere event is the best opportunity for local officials and staff to meet their counterparts from localities near and far, to learn from one another, and to make the connections that can often mean a world of difference down the line.

Over the course of three days, members 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. Town of Pennington Gap Councilmember Jill Carson became the new VML President, and City of Fairfax Councilmember Jon Stehle handed over the gavel. Sadly, as noted in the introduction, Councilmember Carson passed on January 28, 2023, and Town of Farmville Vice Mayor Chuckie Reid is serving out her term as VML's President.

Elected Officials Conferences

VML hosted two Elected Officials Conferences in 2023. These were offered as hybrid events with strong turnouts both in Richmond and virtually. The first was held in January with a follow up event in June. The events focused on the nuts and bolts of local government; manager-council relations, budgeting, zoning, and ethics in local government. Not only were they educational but also offered great networking and learning opportunities for local government members and staff. VML will keep hosting these conferences, which will build upon previous offerings to be valuable to both new and experienced local government officials and staff. Please stay tuned for the next event which will be held in early January 2024!

Mayors Institute

VML's Mayors Institute was held at Richmond's Marriott Downtown during the two days immediately preceding the Annual Conference. This annual event explores issues essential to the responsibilities of mayors and vice mayors as local government leaders. Among other things, attendees heard "A Courageous Conversation About Civility" from Matt Lehrman (the keynote speaker for the Annual Conference), toured the Virginia War Memorial and were updated on "Facebook Best Practices and Instagram Information for Local Officials" by Ashley Aniton from Meta.

Broadband Together

On May 18-19, VML, VACo and the Broadband Association of Virginia hosted an in-person conference in Richmond that brought together some of the leading voices in Virginia and national broadband. Attendees this year heard presentations on BEAD grants, a 2023 legislative recap, smart technology and farming, digital equity, cybersecurity, digital literacy, and much more.

Evan Feinman, the Director of the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment Program for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (and formerly the Chief Broadband Advisor for Virginia Governor Ralph Northam), provided an agency update. Later in the program representatives from FirstNet by AT&T provided information on the technology and hardware fueling this innovative communications option for local emergency responders.

Website and Database

2022-2023 was a big year for VML not just because of the information we put out, but also because of the information we bring in. Specifically, after many years of looking for a technology platform that can handle the complexities of our data and interactions with members, we identified a solution that brings many of our work processes – communications, finances, event registration, data tracking, website (to name a few) – under one roof.

VML's new website and database, built on the Euclid Technologies ClearVantage platform, allows staff to maintain records and make updates in one place where before they were spread across numerous areas. Equally important, we are now able to offer the same kind of user-driven experience that so many of us have come to expect from the organizations and businesses we interact with online every day.

Aside from the changes to the layout of the site, users are now able to create a profile and access resources, register for VML events, opt-in/out of our newsletter, create and manage job postings, and more!

The work to accomplish all this began in late 2022 with the new platform going live in July 2023.

Communications

With the launch of VML's new website and membership platform (outlined above), there were some changes over the past year in how VML staff are now able to send electronic messages to our members. Most of these changes were "behind the scenes" and have increased the efficiency of our work. Changes our members might have noticed are explained below.

Magazine: Virginia Town & City

As part of our database transitions, VML updated the subscriber records for our magazine and now have a more effective way to track changes to subscriptions. Beginning in 2023, VML's magazine is now published nine times a year (with Oct/Nov combined). This was done in part due to the rising cost of printing and in part to align the schedule of the magazine with work created by VML events. What hasn't changed is that each issue in 2022 and 2023 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:

- Priority Transportation (November 2022)
- A Pennington Gap Conversation with VML's new President Jill Carson (December 2022)
- Perspectives on Public Safety (Jan/February 2023)
- The Ingredients for a Successful Mayor/Council-Manager Relationship (March 2023)
- Legislative Summary for Localities from the 2023 General Assembly (April 2023)
- The Education Issue (featuring the winners of VML's essay contest) (May 2022)
- Chart a Course for Charters (June 2022)
- Outdoor Spaces That Do More (July/August 2022)

Newsletters: eNews and Legislative Bulletin

Prior to 2022-2023 VML's electronic newsletter *eNews* had been 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.

During the 2023 General Assembly session, however, VML staff determined that the reports and alerts being developed through their work should be available only to members of the league. Knowing that VML would be implementing a holistic change to our communications and website environment later in the year, we began distributing information to members through a *Legislative Bulletin* while continuing to publish general news and opportunities via *eNews*. Beginning in August 2023, VML fully transitioned to providing *eNews* as a members-only publication but added a News Board to our website for the general public to find notices about events and opportunities relevant to Virginia's local governments.

VML News Board

It's new. It's on the website. It's got great information everyone can enjoy. Check back often because we're always adding new items!

Podcast: The VML Voice

With all the work that needed to be done to get VML set up on our new website and database, the VML Voice didn't get as much love this year. That will change for 2023-2024. However, during 2022-2023 we were pleased to provide these episodes:

At the Broadband Together, Together (Parts I and II) (September 2023) – On May 18 and 19, VML, VACo and the Broadband Association of Virginia hosted an in-person conference in Richmond that brought together some of the leading voices in Virginia and national broadband. The VML Voice was there talking to some of the leading voices in broadband.

Dream Big Bristol: A new council brings fresh perspectives (April 2023) – This episode of the VML Voice came at the suggestion of City of Bristol Manager (and VML Board Member) Randy Eads. Bristol's city council members are all relatively young and new to local government. But we think you'll find, as we did, that though they may be young and new they are also enthusiastic and bring a lot of the table.

A New Center of the Center of the Universe: Ashland's Town Hall Project (December 2022) – The VML Voice travels to the Town of Ashland (aka "The Center of the Universe") to chat about their new town hall. What was wrong with the old town hall? How did the staff and PMA architecture make the case for a new town hall? What makes the new town hall fantastic? And...who paid for it? These, and other questions, are answered in glowing detail. Guests include Town Manager Josh Farrar, Town Engineer Ingrid Stenbjorn, and PMA Architecture's Proposal Manager Pam Manager.

Awards and acknowledgements

Innovation Awards

In September, the Virginia Municipal League was pleased to announce the winners of its annual awards for excellence in local government. The statewide competition recognizes innovative problem-solving, excellence in management, citizen participation, and improved services to citizens.

The judges selected one winner in each of the eight categories. VML President and City of Fairfax Councilmember Jon Stehle selected the City of Williamsburg's entry in the Risk Management category as the 2022 winner of the President's Award for Innovation.

The winners of the 2022 VML Innovation Awards were:

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Town of Blacksburg – Aging in Place Planning Resources

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Town of Marion – "Road Trip Marion" Great Gas Giveaway!

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Town of Warsaw – The Bounds Redevelopment Project

PUBLIC SAFETY

City of Newport News – Community Assistance Response (CARE) Program

WORKING WITH YOUTH

City of Newport News – YouthBuild Program

COMMUNICATIONS

City of Virginia Beach – The Ripple Effect: Navigating an Approach to Coastal Resilience

LOCAL CHAMPION*

City of Roanoke – Director of General Services Jeffrey Powell

RISK MANAGEMENT AWARD and PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR INNOVATION

City of Williamsburg – Reserve Protection

*Category retired after 2022

"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 prize and plaque. The statewide winner received a \$250 prize and plaque. 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 2023 winners.

2023 VML "If I Were Mayor" essay contest winners:

- Statewide winner: **Jayden McCraw** of Fries School in Fries
- Region 1: **Billie Hall** of Marion Middle School in Marion
- Region 2: **William Wall** of Martinsville Middle School in Martinsville
- Region 3: **Avery Diette** of Lylburn Downing Middle School in Lexington
- Region 5: **Talia Forster** of Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School in Falls Church
- Region 6: **Zohair Zaman** of Walker-Grant Middle School in Fredericksburg
- Region 8: **Viktorija Gobush** of St. Clare Walker Middle School in Locust Hill (resident of Urbanna)

Note: VML did not receive any entries from Regions 4 or 7 this year.



Annual Briefings from VML's Affiliate Organizations



Chair: Stephen Burr, Arlington 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: W. Patrick Pate, City Manager,
City of Manassas**

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

THE VIRGINIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION, (VLGMA) is a statewide association of local government management professionals with more than 300 members. VLGMA supports professional local government management who work to build great communities through inclusion, innovation, and leadership. Our strategic priorities include providing professional information and networking, supporting the next generation of local government managers, facilitating civic engagement in our communities, supporting members of the profession through professional development, and promoting principled leadership and ethical behavior in ourselves and our organizations.

VLGMA offers members opportunities for professional development and support, networking, and information sharing through two statewide conferences each year and a monthly newsletter. The Association provides access to a network of regional support coordinators, senior advisors and a coaching program that allows for professional mentoring and the ability for one-on-one meetings with seasoned members as requested.

VLGMA's commitment to developing the next generation of local government management professionals takes several forms. One is the Association's support of the Local Government Certificate Program at Virginia Tech. Initiated by VLGMA in the early 2000s. The Certificate Program is an established part of Virginia Tech's academic curriculum targeted to individuals already working in local government and students who want to learn more about local government management. All courses are taught by current or retired Virginia local government management professionals. Several current managers and administrators in Virginia have completed the program. We are also working to enhance connections with universities across the Commonwealth (with an emphasis on HBUs) as well as developing resources for use in our local school systems to enhance civic knowledge and promote careers in public service.

The Association's "deputies, assistants and others" or DAO

group, is also very active in promoting professional development for individuals who are key non-CAO leaders in our organizations. The group offers professional development sessions in the fall and spring, hosted by DAOs in communities around the state. These sessions focus on specific topics or issues and give members opportunities to network with one another. The Association also supports the Women's Leadership Institute which operates in cooperation with Virginia Tech and is specifically targeted to women working in Virginia local governments and programs at the Virginia Institute of Government like the Senior Executive Institute.

Each year, VLGMA recognizes an outstanding assistant or deputy manager/administrator with its Marcia Mashaw Outstanding Assistant Award. This year's recipient was Angela Hill, deputy county administrator and CFO for Montgomery County, who was recognized during the summer conference and has recently been selected as the next CAO for the county.

The Association is led by a Board consisting of seven officers and 12 executive committee members. We are a state affiliate of the International City-County Management Association (ICMA) and an affiliate association of VML. To learn more about VLGMA, visit its website at www.vlgma.org.

"If you are an elected leader, I hope that you will ask your CAO if they are a VLGMA member and that you will actively support their involvement in VLGMA. Your organizational staff leaders need an opportunity for professional growth and networking that allows them to bring back best practices and new ideas to improve your community. Encouraging your CAOs and senior staff members to join and participate in VLGMA is one of the best ways to show your commitment and help them be their best!"

Executive Secretary Janet Areson



**President: John Broughton, Building Official,
Franklin 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 Mike Eutsey, 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 gain a certain level of knowledge to implement in their localities. VBCOA does this twice a year during their conferences focusing on leadership development, technical training, and networking opportunities. Monthly training opportunities are also available in 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.

2023 VML Local Government Members

Cities

- City of Alexandria
- City of Bristol
- City of Buena Vista
- City of Charlottesville
- City of Chesapeake
- City of Colonial Heights
- City of Covington
- City of Danville
- City of Emporia
- City of Fairfax
- City of Falls Church
- City of Franklin
- City of Fredericksburg
- City of Galax
- City of Hampton
- City of Harrisonburg
- City of Hopewell
- City of Lexington
- City of Lynchburg
- City of Manassas
- City of Manassas Park
- City of Martinsville
- City of Newport News
- City of Norfolk
- City of Norton
- City of Petersburg
- City of Poquoson
- City of Portsmouth
- City of Radford
- City of Richmond
- City of Roanoke
- City of Salem
- City of Staunton
- City of Suffolk
- City of Virginia Beach
- City of Waynesboro
- City of Williamsburg
- City of Winchester

Towns

- Town of Abingdon
- Town of Accomac
- Town of Alberta
- Town of Altavista
- Town of Amherst
- Town of Appomattox
- Town of Ashland
- Town of Bedford
- Town of Berryville
- Town of Big Stone Gap
- Town of Blacksburg
- Town of Blackstone
- Town of Bluefield
- Town of Boones Mill
- Town of Bowling Green
- Town of Boydton
- Town of Boykins

- Town of Branchville
- Town of Bridgewater
- Town of Broadway
- Town of Brodnax
- Town of Brookneal
- Town of Buchanan
- Town of Burkeville
- Town of Cape Charles
- Town of Capron
- Town of Cedar Bluff
- Town of Charlotte Court House
- Town of Chase City
- Town of Chatham
- Town of Cheriton
- Town of Chillhowie
- Town of Chincoteague
- Town of Christiansburg
- Town of Claremont
- Town of Clarksville
- Town of Clifton
- Town of Clifton Forge
- Town of Clintwood
- Town of Coeburn
- Town of Colonial Beach
- Town of Courtland
- Town of Craigsville
- Town of Crewe
- Town of Culpeper
- Town of Damascus
- Town of Dayton
- Town of Dillwyn
- Town of Drakes Branch
- Town of Dublin
- Town of Duffield
- Town of Dumfries
- Town of Eastville
- Town of Edinburg
- Town of Elkton
- Town of Exmore
- Town of Farmville
- Town of Fincastle
- Town of Floyd
- Town of Fries
- Town of Front Royal
- Town of Gate City
- Town of Glade Spring
- Town of Glasgow
- Town of Gordonsville
- Town of Gretna
- Town of Grottoes
- Town of Grundy
- Town of Halifax
- Town of Hallwood
- Town of Hamilton
- Town of Haymarket
- Town of Haysi
- Town of Herndon
- Town of Hillsboro

- Town of Hillsville
- Town of Hurt
- Town of Independence
- Town of Iron Gate
- Town of Irvington
- Town of Ivor
- Town of Jarratt
- Town of Jonesville
- Town of Keller
- Town of Kenbridge
- Town of Keysville
- Town of Kilmarnock
- Town of La Crosse
- Town of Lawrenceville
- Town of Lebanon
- Town of Leesburg
- Town of Louisa
- Town of Lovettsville
- Town of Luray
- Town of Madison
- Town of Marion
- Town of McKenney
- Town of Middleburg
- Town of Middletown
- Town of Mineral
- Town of Monterey
- Town of Montross
- Town of Mount Crawford
- Town of Mount Jackson
- Town of Narrows
- Town of Nassawadox
- Town of New Castle
- Town of New Market
- Town of Newsoms
- Town of Occoquan
- Town of Onancock
- Town of Onley
- Town of Orange
- Town of Painter
- Town of Pamplin
- Town of Parksley
- Town of Pearisburg
- Town of Pembroke
- Town of Pennington Gap
- Town of Phenix
- Town of Port Royal
- Town of Pound
- Town of Pulaski
- Town of Purcellville
- Town of Quantico
- Town of Remington
- Town of Rich Creek
- Town of Richlands
- Town of Ridgeway
- Town of Rocky Mount
- Town of Round Hill
- Town of Rural Retreat
- Town of Saint Paul
- Town of Saltville

- Town of Scottsville
- Town of Shenandoah
- Town of Smithfield
- Town of South Boston
- Town of South Hill
- Town of Stanardsville
- Town of Stanley
- Town of Stephens City
- Town of Stony Creek
- Town of Strasburg
- Town of Stuart
- Town of Surry
- Town of Tappahannock
- Town of Tazewell
- Town of The Plains
- Town of Timberville
- Town of Toms Brook
- Town of Troutville
- Town of Urbanna
- Town of Victoria
- Town of Vienna
- Town of Vinton
- Town of Virgilina
- Town of Wachapreague
- Town of Wakefield
- Town of Warrenton
- Town of Warsaw
- Town of Washington
- Town of Waverly
- Town of Weber City
- Town of West Point
- Town of White Stone
- Town of Windsor
- Town of Wise
- Town of Woodstock
- Town of Wytheville

Counties

- County of Albemarle
- County of Alleghany
- County of Arlington
- County of James City
- County of Loudoun
- County of Prince George
- County of Roanoke
- County of York

Allied Member

Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC)

If your locality is a full dues-paying VML member and is not on the list above, please contact VML at e-mail@vml.org or call 804-649-8471.

2023-2024 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

Nancy Bailey, Vice Mayor, Town of Big Stone Gap

Curtis Bethany, Vice Mayor, City of Newport News

Mary Beth Connelly, Council Member, City of Falls Church

Michelle Davis-Younger, Mayor, City of Manassas

William Patrick Dent, Vice Mayor, City of Williamsburg

Frank Friedman, Mayor, City of Lexington

Shannon Glover, Mayor, City of Portsmouth

James Gray, Vice Mayor, City of Hampton

Keith Harless, Town Manager, Town of Pennington Gap

John Hodges, Vice Mayor, Town of Ashland

N.D. "Rocky" Holcomb, Council Member, City of Virginia Beach

Amy Jackson, Vice Mayor, City of Alexandria

Alonzo Jones, Mayor, City of Danville

Andria McClellan, Council Member, City of Norfolk

Sara McGuffin, Town Manager, Town of Amherst

Edward Owens, Mayor, Town of South Boston

Stephanie Reed, Mayor, City of Lynchburg

S. Z. (Debbie) Ritter, Council Member, City of Chesapeake

John David Smith, Mayor, City of Winchester

Jason Tyree, City Manager, City of Buena Vista

Brian Vincent, Mayor, Town of Farmville

Patricia White-Boyd, Council Member, City of Roanoke

Community & Economic Development Policy Committee

Chair: Sara McGuffin, Town Manager, Town of Amherst

Andreas Addison, Council Member, City of Richmond

Susan Anderson, Vice Mayor, Town of Blacksburg

Matt Arcieri, Director of Planning & Comm Dev, City of Manassas

Brad Arrowood, Council Member, City of Staunton

Sharon Ebert, Deputy CAO - Planning & Econ Dev, City of Richmond

Karen Epps, Economic Development Officer, City of Colonial Heights

Mamie Johnson, Council Member, City of Norfolk

Keven LeBlanc, Council Member, Town of Herndon

Keith Liles, Council Member, Town of Vinton

Stephanie Lillard, Council Member, Town of Luray

So Lim, Council Member, City of Fairfax

Lisa Lucas-Burke, Vice Mayor, City of Portsmouth

Susan Mattingly, Council Member, Town of Blacksburg

Phillip Miller, Council Member, Town of Middleburg

Stephanie Moon Reynolds, Council Member, City of Roanoke

Amber Morris, Council Member, Town of Front Royal

Benjamin Nicely, Council Member, Town of Clifton Forge

Tammy Pearson, Council Member, City of Martinsville

Richard Peters, Town Manager, Town of Vinton

Donielle Scherff, Council Member, Town of Herndon

N. Janie Schmidt, Council Member, Town of Culpeper

Vernon Tillage, Council Member, City of Portsmouth

Tina Vick, Council Member, City of Newport News

Joseph Waltz, Town Manager, Town of Front Royal

Lue Ward, Vice Mayor, City of Suffolk

Mark Wolfe, Council Member, City of Manassas

Finance Policy Committee

Chair: Patricia White-Boyd, Council Member, City of Roanoke

Vice Chair: Kevin Greenleaf, Assistant Director Finance/Revenue, City of Alexandria

Diane Bergeron, Finance Director, City of Manassas

Curtis Bethany, Vice Mayor, City of Newport News

Dale Burdette, Vice Mayor, Town of Clifton Forge

John Bush, Council Member, Town of Blacksburg

Shannon Glover, Mayor, City of Portsmouth

Susan Goodwin, Finance Director, City of Newport News

Bradley Grose, Mayor, Town of Vinton

Linwood Johnson, Council Member, City of Franklin

Gregory Kochuba, Mayor, City of Colonial Heights

Bridge Littleton, Mayor, Town of Middleburg

Amelia Merchant, Finance Director, City of Roanoke

John Rector, Council Member, City of Suffolk

Mark Robertson, Council Member, City of Staunton

Duane Rogers, Council Member, Town of Front Royal

Thomas Ross, Council Member, City of Fairfax

Cody Sexton, Assistant Town Manager, Town of Vinton

Jeffery Shupe, Finance Director, City of Norton

Ralph Smith, Council Member, City of Manassas

Michael Stallings, Town Manager, Town of Smithfield

Leon Towarnicki, City Manager, City of Buena Vista

BJ Wilson, Finance Director, Town of Front Royal

**General Laws
Policy Committee**

Chair: Jason Tyree, City Manager, City of Buena Vista

Theresa Coates Ellis, Council Member, City of Manassas

Matthew Dotson, City Attorney, City of Norton

Kate Doyle Feingold, Council Member, City of Fairfax

Roger Fawcett, Council Member, City of Suffolk

Bryan Foster, Deputy City Manager, City of Manassas

Leslie Hager-Smith, Mayor, Town of Blacksburg

Wayne Hall, Council Member, Town of Smithfield

Clark Hedrick, Vice Mayor, Town of Herndon

Morris Jacobs, Council Member, Town of Middleburg
 Monica Johnson, Council Member, Town of Saltville
 Lawrence Mitchell, Councilmember, City of Martinsville
 Laurie Mullins, Council Member, Town of Vinton
 Luke Priddy, Council Member, City of Roanoke
 Wayne Sealock, Vice Mayor, Town of Front Royal
 Joe Short, Council Member, Town of Culpeper
 George Sonnett, Town Attorney, Town of Front Royal
 Timothy Spencer, City Attorney, City of Roanoke
 Caryn Self Sullivan, Council Member, Town of Colonial Beach
 Steven Trivett, Mayor, Town of Ashland
 Chuck Unroe, Town Manager / Clerk, Town of Clifton Forge
 John Wood, Council Member, City of Colonial Heights
 Alice Woods, Council Member, City of Staunton

Human Development & Education Policy Committee

Chair: Mary Beth Connelly, Council Member, City of Falls Church
 Naila Alam, Council Member, Town of Herndon
 Leroy Bennett, Council Member, City of Suffolk
 Joseph Cobb, Vice Mayor, City of Roanoke
 Donna Collins, Human Resources Director/ Risk Manager, Town of Vinton
 Lauren Colliver, Council Member, Town of Blacksburg
 J. Kevin Daly, Council Member, Town of Middleburg
 Melissa DeDomenico-Payne, Council Member, Town of Front Royal
 Traci DeShazor, Deputy CAO, City of Richmond
 Michele Edwards, Council Member, City of Staunton
 Marcellus Harris, Council Member, City of Newport News
 LC Jones, Mayor, City of Martinsville
 Sabrina McCarty, Council Member, Town of Vinton
 Laura Poe, Council Member, City of Colonial Heights
 Ellen Robertson, Council Member, City of Richmond
 Abe Rutherford, Director of Social Services, City of Norton
 Pamela Sebesky, Vice Mayor, City of Manassas
 Jon Stehle, Council Member, City of Fairfax
 J. Alex White, Council Member, Town of Luray
 Carl Wolfé, Council Member, Town of Clifton Forge

Infrastructure, Transportation & Environmental Quality Policy Committee

Chair: Andria McClellan, Council Member, City of Norfolk
 Chris Bernard, Council Member, Town of Middleburg
 Christopher Blakeman, Environmental Manager, City of Roanoke
 Robbie Boyer, Director of Public Works, Town of Front Royal
 Shelley Butler Barlow, Council Member, City of Suffolk
 Linda Jane Colbert, Mayor, Town of Vienna
 Amy Darby, Vice Mayor, City of Staunton
 Todd Flippen, Director of Public Works, City of Colonial Heights
 Jerry Ford, Council Member, Town of Blacksburg
 William Herndon, Public Works Director, Town of Vinton
 Katherine Jordan, Council Member, City of Richmond
 Debbie Lauder milk, Council Member, Town of Clifton Forge
 Kathy Lawson, Council Member, City of Martinsville

Cleon Long, Council Member, City of Newport News
 Steve McElroy, Public Works Director, City of Norton
 Cindy Mester, Deputy City Manager, City of Falls Church
 Sheila Olem, Mayor, Town of Herndon
 Tom Osina, Council Member, City of Manassas
 Bruce Rappaport, Council Member, Town of Front Royal
 Catherine Read, Mayor, City of Fairfax
 Howard Springsteen, Council Member, Town of Vienna
 Bob Steidel, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, City of Richmond
 Michael Stovall, Vice Mayor, Town of Vinton
 Michael Sutphin, Council Member, Town of Blacksburg
 Sonia Vasquez Luna, Council Member, City of Manassas
 Peter Volosin, Council Member, City of Roanoke
 LeOtis Williams, Council Member, City of Suffolk
 Patricia Woodbury, Council Member, City of Newport News

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 F.H. Paschen
 General Code
 GrantMatch Corp.
 JJM Associates
 Mattern & Craig
 McGuireWoods Consulting
 Moseley Architects
 Northeastern University - Arlington
 PMA Architecture

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 Siemens
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 Spatial Data Logic
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Three steps to opioid policy success: Review, revise, request

ACCORDING TO CDC and NIH statistics, 2,626 Virginians died of drug overdose in 2021 and 2,104 (80 percent) of these deaths were specifically caused by opioids. With this alarming statistic in mind, it is crucial that Virginia's local governments have a plan to effectively address the opioid epidemic.

My research in this area has led me to conclude that there are three important things every local government should consider as part of their efforts to combat opioid addiction and deaths in their community:

- 1. Review** their substance abuse programs.
- 2. Revise** their substance abuse programs to be community-led, integrating harm reduction strategies alongside traditional rehabilitation and medicinal treatments. Combining harm reduction and traditional rehabilitation has proven most effective in reducing opioid-related deaths in Virginia.
- 3. Request** settlement grants through the Opioid Abatement Authority for their local substance abuse programs. The settlement funds from the National Opioid Settlements can create new – and strengthen existing – substance abuse programs to reduce the trend in opioid-related deaths across the Commonwealth.

It is crucial to act at the local level. Virginia's state and local governments went to extraordinary lengths to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, yet more young Americans die from opioids than COVID-19. There is cause for hope, however, as places such as Arlington County have succeeded in reducing their opioid-related deaths by almost half from 2021-2022.

Before diving into the methodology that led to my recommendations, it is important to define opioids/opiates and discuss the historical context behind the epidemic.

What is an opioid?

The term "opiate" refers to natural opioids such as heroin, morphine, and codeine. The term "opioid", however, refers to all natural, semi-synthetic, and synthetic opioids. Both opiates and opioids are substances that act on opioid receptors in the brain that create a strong pain-relieving sensation.

Opioids were used in the medical field for many years before the present epidemic began in the mid-1990s when Purdue Pharma (now Knoa Pharma LLC) created and manufactured OxyContin, which caused the first wave of "legal" opioid-related deaths. The second wave of the opioid epidemic arrived in 2010 when the heroin market expanded to draw in those who were already addicted to opiates. The fuel behind the flames of the most recent,

and most deadly, wave of opioid deaths is attributed to the relatively recent introduction of synthetic fentanyl into the illegal drug market.

The NIH statistics tell a clear and grim story. In 2010 there were 21,089 opioid overdose deaths. In 2021, that number had increased to 80,411 Americans dead of an opioid overdose. In fact, opioids are on track to become one of the leading causes of death in the United States. However, recent settlements against pharmaceutical companies and new attitudes towards addiction provide hope that local and state governments can reduce this trend.

Review: One solution does not fit all

The data* that supports my key findings came primarily from the Office of Virginia's Chief Medical Examiner's Department of Forensic Epidemiology which tracks all opioid related deaths caused by both legal and/or illegally obtained opioids. I used this data to identify the top five counties that had either the largest increase in opioid related deaths, or the largest decrease in opioid related deaths from 2021-2022. I then compared the substance abuse programs in these counties to inform my conclusions.

**This data is available at www.vdh.virginia.gov/medical-examiner/forensic-epidemiology.*

The localities in Virginia that saw the biggest decrease in opioid-related deaths from 2021-2022 were, in order, Chesterfield County, Fairfax County, the City of Norfolk, Henrico County, and Caroline County. Additionally, Arlington County showed an impressive de-



crease in opioid-related deaths. The localities in Virginia that saw the biggest increase in opioid-related deaths from 2021-2022 were, in order, The City of Richmond, The City of Roanoke, The City of Salem, Buchanan County, and the City of Chesapeake.

Having identified the localities that would form the basis of my research, the next step was to examine their substance abuse programs to identify patterns. As part of this work, I met with several substance-abuse and public health professionals from around the Commonwealth to get a better idea of their locality's specific programs and to solicit their opinions on what works in their region. Some of the common themes that emerged from those conversations were the difficulties related to transportation, trust, accessibility, and funding. However, the means to overcome these issues varied from place to place. In Arlington County, for example, I learned although their substance abuse programs experienced the same issues as other localities, their community-led initiatives set them apart. In fact, Arlington County has not adopted the newly approved Comprehensive Harm-Reduction sites through VDH because they have not needed to implement it.

Some will argue that large cities like Richmond are experiencing an increase in opioid related deaths due to their larger, more concentrated populations. However, the City of Norfolk, with even more residents than Richmond, has seen one of the largest decreases in opioid related deaths in the state. The explanation likely has something to do with Norfolk's community-led substance-abuse programs.

The takeaway from Arlington County and the City of Norfolk is that not all substance-abuse programs need to look the same. These localities have demonstrated that community-led substance-abuse programs can bring positive results that are family and people oriented.

Revise: Harm reduction + rehabilitation = results

When localities conduct a review of their approach to the opioid epidemic, it's important to keep in mind that many places in Virginia, and across the nation, approach the epidemic using traditional models of addiction rehabilitation and medication. The statistics show, however, that traditional rehabilitation and medicinal treatment of addiction isn't getting the job done. Many users enter rehabilitation centers before they're mentally prepared to go through the program. As a result, many users leave rehab after a period of abstinence and use again, often resulting in a fatal overdose. This was a big reason why activists in Southwest Virginia demanded the Comprehensive Harm Reduction sites from legislators. Wise County and Smith County saw frightening levels of fatal overdose due to failed rehabilitation attempts by individuals. These counties were at the forefront of getting harm-reduction programs approved for Virginia and offer a great example of why it's important to review and then adjust treatment programs to suit the needs of the community.

Harm reduction, with its pragmatic approach to addiction, succeeds in doing just that: reducing the harm associated with opioid addiction. Harm reduction means implementing clean-syringe exchange programs prevents the transmission of Hepatitis C between drug-users. Harm reduction means making Naloxone and Narcan readily available and training people how and when to administer them can save many lives. Finally, harm-reduction means giving drug-users the time to decide to seriously commit to a rehabilitation program. And this last point is perhaps the most important as harm reduction is most successful when paired with rehabilitation and medicinal treatment options. The City of Norfolk, for example, has a comprehensive harm reduction site where it also offers rehabilitation and medicinal treatments. Since introducing harm reduction to their program, Norfolk's opioid related deaths have decreased by 20 percent.

Case study: Arlington County

Among the Commonwealth's localities, Arlington County is unique in that its substance-abuse program is not administered through a Community Service Board. Instead, it is administered by a stakeholder group, the Arlington Addiction Recovery Initiative (ARRI) composed of first responders, medical professionals, justice system officials, and private citizens. AARI was founded in 2017 at the height of the third wave of the opioid epidemic. Its mission, as outlined on the website, is to "reduce the incidence of substance use . . . and overdose by improving the community understanding of the dangers of substance use and utilizing an integrated system of community members . . . to provide support, resources, and education."

AARI is focused on prevention, treatment, and supply reduction, with an emphasis on educating the community on addiction and opioid use. For example, AARI was successful in advocating for public high school students to carry Naloxone in case a fellow student suffers an overdose during school hours. This community-led program, which looks much different from other programs in the Commonwealth, is a great example of a progressive substance-abuse program that is getting great results. In 2021 there were 28 opioid deaths in Arlington County; in 2022 that number dropped to 17.

Request: Funding is essential

As outlined on their website, the Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA) was established by the General Assembly in 2021 to "abate and remediate the opioid epidemic in the Commonwealth through financial support from the Virginia Opioid Abatement Fund in the form of grants, donations, or other assistance, for efforts to treat, prevent, and reduce opioid use disorder and the misuse of opioids in the Commonwealth."

Under the Commonwealth's settlement distribution agreement, 30 percent of funds go directly to the cities and counties of the Commonwealth; 55 percent of settlement funds go directly to the Opioid Abatement Authority; and 15 percent go directly to the Commonwealth. Although a set percentage of the National Opioid Settlement already goes directly to the cities and counties of the Commonwealth, there is even more reserved for the localities through the OAA.

The "Estimated Opioid Settlement Fund Distributions" shows how much money is owed to each county/city in the Commonwealth that is not included in the 30 percent of funds that already go to the localities directly. For example, the City of Chesapeake is owed an additional \$1,258,341 through the OAA. However, these funds are not automatically distributed – the locality must take the initiative to apply for the funds. All eligible localities must apply for their additional OAA funds by creating and demonstrating an effective substance-abuse program based around opioid remediation. While creating new substance abuse programs might seem daunting, the OAA provides guidance and coaching to support program development. As such, every eligible locality should apply to receive OAA funds.



About the author: Farah Lankarani interned with VML during the summer of 2023. She is a fourth-year student studying Cognitive Science and Bioethics at the University of Virginia. She hopes to make great contributions to the field of Health Policy and Ethics in the future.

CITY OF HARRISONBURG

By Michael Parks

Mission Possible: How the City of Harrisonburg is using ARPA funds to make generational improvements for all its residents

DURING A MID-AUGUST SESSION in Harrisonburg's Council Chambers, U.S. Senator Tim Kaine and Harrisonburg city council members listened intently as nonprofit leaders and mental health service providers explained how their organizations would be using the city's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to help the community.

The six organizations represented at that meeting provided services to community members ranging from homelessness support to protecting victims of sexual harm. They had all received part of the \$400,000 in funding from Harrisonburg's ARPA Mental Health Fund that was set aside by Harrisonburg's city council to address mental and behavioral health needs – one of 21 projects funded through ARPA to help Harrisonburg recover from the pandemic.

"You are on the front lines and you're seeing needs here that my team and I need to know about to do a better job, so I'm very excited to hear from all of you, what you're doing with these particular funds, and what needs are out there that we need to focus on," Senator Kaine said to the Harrisonburg ARPA Mental Health Fund recipients.

Observing how the ARPA funds were being spent, Kaine continued, "The degree of creativity and innovation...and we've been talking about a couple of examples of the way Harrisonburg used funds that might not have been the way other communities did... but they were really tailored to local need. Congratulations for being part of this initiative, and to the city for recognizing how important it is!"

The creativity and innovation used to most effectively allocate the city's ARPA funds that Senator Kaine observed that day was not a

matter of happenstance. In fact, city leaders relied upon an intensive community engagement campaign that included dozens of public meetings, more than 3,000 submissions from community members, and a partnership with James Madison University.

Their efforts are best understood as a three-part process which this article will explore in the hopes that other communities will find inspiration and guidance from what has been a remarkably successful endeavor for the City of Harrisonburg.

Step 1 – Understand the community's needs

In late 2021, with Harrisonburg having received \$23.8 million in ARPA funding, the city council and staff decided that the community needed to be the driving force for how the funds would be used to ensure that they would benefit as many in the diverse, growing municipality as possible. To bring that goal to fruition, local leaders realized they would need to conduct the largest, most ambitious public engagement effort in the city's history.

"It would have been easy for us to have taken those ARPA funds and put them toward some of the many projects our departments have listed in the Capital Improvement Program or in various master plans," Harrisonburg City Manager Ande Banks explained. "But we genuinely believed that these funds were critical to helping our community recover from the pandemic, and to addressing inequity that existed in Harrisonburg. The only way we could intimately





Step 2 – Determine how to meet those needs

With the results of the community outreach in hand, Harrisonburg’s city council spent four individual work sessions digging into the data. Working with city staff, the council identified what needs could be addressed by identifying appropriate projects and programs that would reach as many in the community as possible – with a special focus on equity and reaching the underserved.

As a result of this work, in December 2022 the council identified 21 programs and projects to receive funding. City staff were directed to begin implementing the funding as soon as possible. The programs and projects slated to receive funding were as follows:

Enhancing Community Spaces

- **Replace the Kids Castle Playground at Purcell Park.** For \$2.65 million, Harrisonburg Parks & Rec will create a modern, interactive playground to replace the beloved but aging play structure at one of the city’s most popular parks.
- **Build the Ralph Sampson Park Splashpark.** For \$2.2 million, a destination splashpark will be created within a short walk of the historic Northeast Neighborhood in Harrisonburg – revitalizing a seldom-used baseball field and adding a water amenity close to one of the city’s most diverse neighborhoods.
- **Improve a school system athletic field so all can use it.** For \$1 million, the city will partner with Harrisonburg City Public Schools to upgrade an athletic field at Thomas Harrison Middle School. The school system will be able to use the field for athletics and play whenever they like, but the field will also be available to the public when not in use by the school. This unique partnership will add another athletic field to Harrisonburg Parks & Rec’s inventory while costing much less than it would take to add an additional field at the city’s Smithland Athletic Complex.
- **Improve the Smithland Athletic Complex.** For \$1.31 million, lighting and a restroom will be added to the complex, which hosts city football and soccer programming. The additions will improve the quality of life for visitors while allowing for Parks & Rec programming to be extended into the evening hours. This will reduce the wait list the department currently experiences for athletic programming and allow more children to take part in activities.
- **Replace the Westover Park skatepark.** For \$475,000, the city will replace a failing skatepark constructed in 2003 with a more modern amenity better suited to withstand the use of skateboarders, bicyclists and others who use the park.

understand those issues and how to move forward was to create a space and opportunity for community members to share their stories, and the hardships they’ve experienced, with us – and give them faith that we were going to reward their confidence in us by coming through with the improvements they and their families needed.”

With limited expertise and staff, the city recruited help in the form of James Madison University’s Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue (ICAD) – a Harrisonburg-based team that works to design and facilitate community conversations. Working together, city and ICAD staff constructed a robust and optimistic community engagement strategy that ultimately included two community surveys, numerous public meetings held in community centers and schools, 11 pop-up events in public spaces, and dozens of small group sessions with area nonprofits and those they served – all with the goal of facilitating conversations that met people where they were.

“This was something we had never tried before, but we knew we had to go above and beyond to enable the type of change that needed to be accomplished with these funds,” Harrisonburg Acting Deputy City Manager Amy Snider said. “And the community responded more than we could ever have anticipated.”

In the end, more than 3,000 people offered information about how they and their families had struggled during the pandemic and made suggestions on how the city could invest funding to best address their needs. ICAD distilled this feedback, and hundreds of pages of notes from the community gatherings, into eight categories:

1. Increase Safe, Accessible and Sustainable Housing
2. Support Our Workers and Working Families
3. Strengthen Support for K-12 Students
4. Improve Community Mental and Physical Health
5. Expand and Enhance Public Spaces
6. Upgrade Neighborhood Livability and Sustainability
7. Improve How We Get Around
8. Build Capacity of City Government

Even with nearly \$24 million in funding, it was immediately apparent that hard decisions would need to be made to address as many of the identified needs as possible. And, of course, all funding decisions had to be made within the legal parameters set by the federal government.

Other Government Services

- **Build the fifth Harrisonburg Fire Department (HFD) Station.** For \$5 million, the city will build a fifth station in the northern end of Harrisonburg. This project will reduce response times across all of Harrisonburg, as HFD is able to shift resources and bring in additional resources to make sure its five response areas have the focus they deserve.
- **Provide employee retention incentives.** For \$2 million, the city provided incentives to staff members to help address retention concerns during the pandemic. This effort helped ameliorate staffing shortages many departments were facing.
- **Implement business recovery grants.** For \$200,000, Harrisonburg Economic Development is making recovery grants available to businesses impacted by the pandemic. This will increase the total amount of funding Harrisonburg has provided to businesses due to the pandemic to \$1.3 million.
- **Administer ARPA effectively.** For \$125,000, the city funded a position to help coordinate the administering of ARPA funds and to seek additional state and federal funding that could support the community.

Expanding Accessible, Affordable Housing

- **Build a homeless services center.** For \$5 million, the city will construct a facility that will include a low-barrier emergency shelter for adults and a drop-in center for adults experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity to access resources, wrap-around services and programs that support their efforts to access housing, achieve self-sufficiency and personal growth.
- **Create a housing fund.** For \$2 million, the city will provide funds to applicants to help create affordable housing opportunities in Harrisonburg.

Improving Neighborhoods

- **Improve streets and sidewalks.** For \$846,000, the city will pave four streets in Harrisonburg's Northeast Neighborhood and add a sidewalk to improve connectivity to a nearby elementary school.

Increasing Affordable, Accessible Childcare

- **Create a childcare fund.** For \$496,000, the city will create a fund to maximize new childcare seat creation and help in-home providers become registered and/or licensed. The fund will help with activities such as minor renovations, required training, recruitment, and more.
- **Support childcare services.** For \$146,000, the city will provide licensing navigator support and business support services to childcare organizations.

Investing in Community Mental Health

- **Create a Mental Health Fund.** For \$400,000, the city created a fund to support organizations providing mental and behavioral health services, with an emphasis on services to low-income, underserved, uninsured and/or underinsured individuals and families.



“The breadth of these projects literally touches all in our community, It’s not hyperbole to say every citizen will benefit.”

**- Harrisonburg Grants and Programs Analyst
Luke Morgan, who oversees the City’s ARPA funding**

Step 3 – Ensure the hard work bears fruit

At that mid-August meeting among city leaders, mental health service providers, and Senator Kaine, one overarching achievement became clear – each program or project was supporting a different vulnerable population in the Harrisonburg community, thereby improving mental health throughout the city. The seemingly impossible goal that the city council had set for itself in 2021 was coming to fruition.

As Mayor Deanna Reed observed, “This was a lot of hard work on behalf of all of us, but it was so worth it. Sitting here today and hearing how these funds are going to make The Friendly City a better and healthier place assures me that we have made life-long changes to our community through the investment of these ARPA funds. I’m proud of our team, and I’m proud of Harrisonburg!”

More information on Harrisonburg’s ARPA engagement process and the program and projects selected for funding is available at www.harrisonburgva.gov/ARPA. Members of the Harrisonburg City Manager’s Office are happy to speak with anyone interested in learning more about the process.

About the author: *Michael Parks is the director of communications for the City of Harrisonburg*



VCU L. DOUGLAS WILDER SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Emergency Management Virtual Workshop: The Essential Role of Local Elected and Appointed Officials



Friday, October 20, 2023
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, catastrophic weather events, manmade disasters, and more have all posed significant threats to communities across the nation. In light of these and other events, The VCU L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs is spearheading an initiative to equip Virginia’s elected and appointed officials at the local level with the necessary skills to effectively address the frequent and severe impacts of disasters.

The training and workshops will feature topics such as understanding the pivotal role of emergency managers, implementing measures to mitigate disaster impacts, collaborating with key partners, ensuring effective communication with the public and the press during emergencies, resource allocation, and more. By honing their expertise in emergency management, participants will assume a vital role in safeguarding lives, minimizing damages, and fostering resilient communities in the face of adversity.

Training and workshop opportunities will be held in person at the VCU Wilder School as well as virtually. The first virtual workshop will be held in conjunction with the Center for Homeland Defense and Security – Naval Postgraduate School, entitled, **“Emergency Management Workshop: The Essential Role of Local Elected and Appointed Officials.”**



This event will be held on Friday, October 20, 2023, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. This virtual training is free to all participants. To participate, pre-register at www.rampages.us/wildertraining or scan the QR code below.



For more information, please contact Eric Campbell, Senior Practitioner in Residence within the VCU Wilder School’s Master of Public Administration Program, at campbelle@vcu.edu or 804-828-3098.



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Wakefield

Stone is Ashland's new director of finance

In early August, the Town of Ashland was pleased to welcome **Terry Stone** as its new director of finance. Stone most recently served as finance director of the Upper Mataponi Indian Tribe (UMIT) in King William, VA. Prior to her appointment with UMIT, Stone was employed by Hanover County Public Schools as assistant superintendent of business and operations and with Henrico County Public Schools as assistant superintendent for finance and administration.

Previously, Stone served as chief finan-



- Stone -

cial officer for Williamsburg James City County Schools, as director of finance for Hanover County Public Schools from 2008 to 2013, and as director of finance for Hanover County from 2005 to 2008. Stone held various financial positions for Hanover County dating back to 1988.

Stone received a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting from Virginia Commonwealth University and is a Certified

Public Accountant; she is a past president of the Government Finance Officers Association and previously chaired the GFOA Treasury and Investment Management Committee and served on the Nominating Committee. In addition, Stone served on the elected Board of Supervisors for King William County from 2012 to 2015 and previously served on the elected King William County School Board from 2004 to 2011. She returned to the School Board in 2020. Stone also is a past president of the Virginia Government Finance Officers Association. She was awarded the Distinguished Local Government Leadership Award from the Association of Government Accountants in 2014.

Petersburg's Parham appointed to state board



- Parham -

Governor Glenn Youngkin has appointed Petersburg Mayor **Sam Parham** to the Virginia Advisory Board on Service and Volunteerism. Parham's role will involve advising state officials on service programs. He will

also ensure these programs adhere to federal rules and help plan their expansion.

Parham's responsibilities also include promoting AmeriCorps programs. These programs address key needs in areas like human services, education, environmental protection, and public safety. Collaboration with institutions like AmeriCorps and the Department of Social Services is required.

The board also recognizes Virginia citizens and organizations for community service. Parham will cooperate with community organizations and the Department of Social Services to honor these achievements.

Additionally, Parham will support faith-based organizations in their service efforts. He will work with the Department of Social Services to increase their involvement in service initiatives. This appointment is intended to improve community service programs in Virginia.

Parham, a native of Petersburg, holds an Associate of Science degree from Richard Bland College and a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Virginia Commonwealth University. Parham's political career began with his election to the Petersburg City Council in November 2014. His peers on the council elected him vice mayor in January 2015. Two years later, in January 2017, he was elected mayor by the city council.

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* Includes loans and Municipal Advisory engagements | valocalfinance.org

Charlottesville: Thomas is new fire chief, Hicks is named interim deputy city manager for operations



- Thomas -

On August 8, Charlottesville City Manager Sam Sanders announced his selection of **Michael L. Thomas** as fire chief and **Steven W. Hicks** as interim deputy city manager for operations.



- Hicks -

Chief Thomas has over three decades of Fire & EMS service experience and joined the Charlottesville Fire Department after retiring from the Lynchburg Fire Department. He has been with CFD since June 2022, serving first as the deputy chief of community risk reduction and most recently as interim fire chief, where Thomas ensured uninterrupted continuity of the overall department functions.

Of his selection, City Manager Sanders stated in a press release, “Chief Thomas has had a stabilizing presence in that period. He has had a stabilizing presence in that period, and I am excited to see what he brings to the role now that interim is dropped. I trust that Chief Thomas will lead his team with honor and professionalism as they meet the high standards of serving the people of Charlottesville.”

Chief Thomas holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and an Associate Degree in Fire Science. He holds certifications as a Fire Inspector, Fire Investigator, Certified LEO, Incident Safety Officer, and has attended the National Fire Academy as well as ICMA’s (International City/County Management Association) Professional Development Academy.

Steven Hicks has been with the city for a few months, serving as the senior transportation project manager in the engineering division of Public Works. He was previously the town manager of Front Royal, VA, and town manager of Selma, NC.

Of Hicks, City Manager Sanders remarked, “I met Steven over a year ago at the VLGMA conference and I found him to be a great resource for having just met me, but in talking with him, I heard his words define him as a coach, mentor, and collaborator. These being all things important to me, I feel comfortable and excited to add him to the team.”

Hicks holds a Master of Science Degree in Civil and Infrastructure Engineering from George Mason University and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Urban Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University. He also is a graduate of the University of Virginia Darden School Senior Executive Institute, the University of North Carolina School of Government, Municipal and County Administration, and the Virginia Tech Transportation Construction Management Institute.

Girois is the Norfolk Health District’s new health director

On July 31, the Virginia Department of Health welcomed **Susan B. Girois**, MD, MPH, FACP, CPE as the director of the Norfolk Department of Public Health.



- Girois -

“We are excited to have Dr. Girois join our team,” said Sulola Ad-ekoya, M.D., MPH, acting director of the Norfolk Department of Public Health in a press release. “As a practicing physician in the area for years, she will bring a community wellness perspective to the Norfolk Department of Public Health.”

Dr. Girois has served as physician leader in the private and public health sectors in the U.S., as well as non-profit organizations overseas. She began her professional service in inner city Philadelphia providing primary HIV/AIDS care in that city’s public health system. From there she moved to France where she joined a non-profit that supports access to services for people with disabilities in low-income countries.

Upon return to Norfolk in 2011, she joined the Norfolk Community Services Board to provide integrated primary and behavioral health care to people with serious mental illness. For five years she served as Chief Medical Officer at JenCare Senior Medical Centers in Hampton Roads, delivering value-based primary care to low-income seniors.

In 2019 she joined Iora Health as Regional Medical Director. When COVID19 required her to stop travel, she took a job locally as PCP at the Hampton VA Medical Center, Women’s Clinic.

Board-certified in Internal Medicine, Dr. Girois earned her medical degree from Penn State University College of Medicine, and a Master of Public Health from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

She completed her internship and residency at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

VML’s Bulova completes the Virginia Tech Local Government Management Certificate Program

This summer, VML’s Policy Communications Coordinator **Josette Bulova** completed the Virginia Tech Local Government



- Bulova -

Management Certificate Program. Virginia Tech offers this graduate program geared solely towards local government managers, financial officers, planners, and other related positions. Taught by professionals currently working in the field, this program consists of four rigorous classes that explore the various roles essential to the local governments. Students gain valuable insights into the workings of local government from first person perspectives and have numerous opportunities through their study to make important connections with others on the same career track.

During her time in the program, Bulova studied the work of town and city managers including budgets, staff management, and planning administration. Josette began as an intern with the league in May 2019 and joined as a member of the staff in July 2021.

A Christopher Newport University alum, Bulova earned a degree in Communication with a double minor in Political Science and Human Rights and Conflict Resolution. She came to work for VML out of college and currently handles policy work related to elections and education in addition to her other duties.

Virginia Housing CEO Dewey announces retirement



- Dewey -

On August 22, Virginia Housing announced that longtime CEO **Susan Dewey** will retire at the end of the year. Dewey has led Virginia Housing since 1999, and previously served for three years as Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Virginia and was an ex-officio Virginia Housing Commissioner.

During her tenure as chief executive officer, Dewey played a critical role in growing the independent, self-supporting authority

that is responsible for addressing the statewide housing affordability needs of low- and moderate-income Virginians.

Due to her vision and leadership, Virginia is considered one of the top state housing finance agencies in the country. She was recognized in June 2023 by her peers as one of three recipients of the National Housing Conference's (NHC) Housing Visionary Award.

"A lot has changed since I first began working in state government more than four decades ago, but my commitment to serving Virginians, especially related to safe, affordable housing, has remained a guiding force throughout my career," Dewey said in the press release announcing her retirement. "It's been my greatest professional honor to work with Virginia Housing leaders and dedicated employees, and with our private and public sector partners, to fulfill our mission of helping all Virginians attain quality, affordable housing.

"I leave knowing that Virginia Housing is well-positioned for success for the next 50 years," she added.

"Under Susan's leadership, Virginia Housing made critical and timely strategic changes over the years to position us for suc-

cess. We thank her for her dedication and wish her only the best in retirement" noted Bill Shelton, chairman of the Virginia Housing Board of Commissioners.

About Virginia Housing

Founded in 1972 as the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA), Virginia Housing has worked for over 50 years in partnership with the public and private sectors to help Virginians attain quality, affordable housing. While receiving no state taxpayer dollars, Virginia Housing raises money in capital markets to provide mortgages to first-time homebuyers, financing for rental developments and neighborhood revitalization efforts. Virginia Housing invests in innovations in affordable housing and makes homes for people with disabilities and older Virginians more livable.

South Hill appoints Reekes as town manager

On August 24, South Hill Mayor Dean Marion and the town council announced that **Keli H. Reekes** had been selected as the new town manager. "I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to serve the council



- Reekes -

members and citizens of the Town of South Hill as their town manager," said Reekes in a press release. "I'm excited to become a part of the positive change and excitement that's currently happening in the Town," continued Reekes. "I have worked in local government for 13 years and I am fully prepared for this next step. I am ready to come home."

Previously, Reekes served as the director of finance for Brunswick County for 11 years before her appointment as assistant county administrator in 2021. Prior to that, Reekes worked as a senior audit specialist for the Auditor of Public Accounts.

Reekes completed her Bachelor of Business Administration at James Madison University and currently serves as the president-elect for the Virginia Government Finance Officers' Association where she has been a member since 2012.

Reekes began her new role as South Hill's town manager on September 25, 2023.

Utility Management Services Celebrating 25 years in Business

Looking Back

In the early years, Utility Management Services (UMS) Founder Brian Coughlan began his career as an Account Executive for Carolina Power and Light. In that role, Coughlan was responsible for supporting large commercial, industrial, and governmental customers, school districts, colleges, manufacturers, and hospitals.

"As a young engineer straight out of college, I realized they were all paying too much for electricity. So, I made it my mission to help all of them and teach them how they can pay less."

Looking Forward

If longevity is a measurement of success, then everyone at Utility Management Services has something to smile about, as they recently celebrated their 25th anniversary. What's more important to the UMS team, however, is the fact that they have been able to save their clients more than \$220 million since the company's inception in 1998.

UMS operates in a niche that is often overlooked by many large and small organizations, businesses, and governmental entities. By analyzing utility bills for their customers to identify potential cost savings, the team at UMS has created a value proposition that is difficult to refuse. The only thing a prospective client must do is agree to let UMS analyze the utility bills. If the team can identify cost savings, those savings are split equally between UMS and the business



The company underwent an extensive rebranding and website overhaul recently. Part of the reason for the rebranding is to provide clarity on the fact that UMS works with clients across the nation. UMS works with everyone from the US Army and cities to major national corporations and hotels. Over the years, they have been consistently adding services and expanding their geographic impact.

With a proven track record helping clients realize significant financial savings without increasing their risk exposure, along with a team-based approach that leverages the insights of a group of professional certified analysts, the opportunities are endless.

UMS and VML Partnership

UMS has partnered with the Virginia Municipal League (VML) to offer a 25% discount for all VML members. They want to help you add more money back into your budget.

Stop by their table to learn more and hear the Founder Brian Coughlan speak as a part of the EV Infrastructure panel at our upcoming conference.



Brian Coughlan,
Utility Management Services Founder

Arlington launches MOST, a New Mobile Outreach Team

LAUNCHED JULY 31, THE MOBILE Outreach Support Team (MOST) is the latest addition to Arlington County’s expanding network of care for people experiencing mental health and substance use issues.

The MOST program is coordinated by the Department of Human Services (DHS), in partnership with the Arlington County Police Department, Arlington County Fire Department, and the Emergency Communications Center, which operates the County’s 9-1-1 call center. MOST operates Monday through Friday, between 1 p.m. and 9 p.m.

The goals of MOST include increasing access to mental health and substance use treatment and decreasing the role of non-clinical first responders in addressing mental health needs. The program also aims to provide alternatives to incarceration for those engaged in “nuisance crimes/behaviors,” and decrease emergency department and psychiatric hospital admissions.

“MOST is an important expansion of our efforts to ensure that people in crisis can get the right help when and where they need it,” said DHS Director Anita Friedman in a press release. “MOST team members are specialists who will be out in the community. That includes responding to 9-1-1 calls that have a

behavioral health need, conducting outreach to people who are homeless, and working closely with our partners in Police and Fire to support them in the field when needed.”

About MOST

The National Guidelines for Crisis Care from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) emphasize the importance of offering mobile, community-based intervention to individuals in need wherever they are, including at home, work, or anywhere else in the community where the person is experiencing a crisis.

The MOST team – which includes a licensed behavioral health clinician, a certified peer recovery specialist, and an outreach worker – will provide a range of essential functions that include:

- Triage/screening, including explicit screening for suicide risks
- Assessment
- De-escalation/resolution
- Peer support
- Coordination with medical and behavioral health services
- Crisis planning and follow-up

Arlington’s MOST will also be able to distribute harm reduction tools such as Narcan and fentanyl test strips, connect people who are homeless to shelters and other services, and transport people from the scene to providers where they can receive assistance.

Mobile Unit

The MOST has a specially equipped van (a county fleet vehicle modified using federal grant funds) to provide services in the community. The van is connected to the County’s computer-aided dispatch system and an on-board computer allows MOST clinicians to use DHS’s electronic health record system. The vehicle includes supplies for harm reduction, non-perishable food, water, a defibrillator, clothing, and hygiene items.



Mobile unit interior.

Winchester recognized for quality care for heart attacks and strokes

THE WINCHESTER FIRE AND RESCUE Department has received the Mission: Lifeline® EMS Gold achievement award from the American Heart Association (AHA) for its commitment to offering rapid, research-based care to people experiencing the most severe form of heart attack and stroke, according to a July city media release.

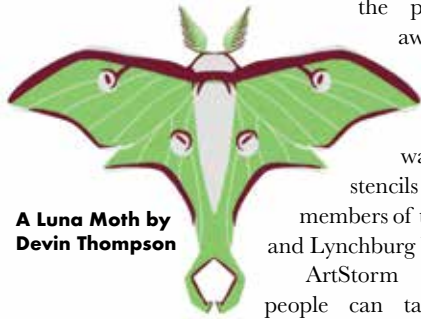
The AHA Mission: Lifeline EMS designation recognizes prehospital emergency agencies for their quality of care for heart attack and stroke patients. The recognition program focuses on transforming care quality by connecting all heart attack and stroke care components into a seamlessly integrated care system. This national initiative advances the system of care for patients with high-risk, time-sensitive disease states by helping to reduce barriers to prompt treatment — starting from when 911 is called, to EMS transport and continuing through hospital treatment and discharge.

The achievement award focuses on agencies’ on-scene care, bringing to the forefront the collaboration and contributions to patient care for prehospital providers.



Storm drain art installed in Lynchburg

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS in Lynchburg on September 8 worked as a group to paint storm drains using stencils designed by local artists as guides as part of ArtStorm, a project that has



A Luna Moth by Devin Thompson

the purpose of spreading awareness of the natural resources in Lynchburg.

This was the first year that a design contest was held. The winning stencils were selected by members of the James River Council and Lynchburg Water Resources.

ArtStorm focuses on actions people can take to help conserve

natural resources. Preventing pollutants from entering storm drains is an easy and effective way to reduce pollution. As the city's media release says, "only rain down the drain leads to only rain in the James!"

The art installations on storm drains encourage the public to think about their impact on streams and watersheds. Storm drains carry stormwater from urban surfaces into streams and rivers. When pollutants like trash, dirt or chemicals get into the storm drain, they enter those streams and rivers, causing harm to wildlife and eventually to people living downstream.



Frog in Love by Jessilyn Schultz

Artist Charles Sthresley donates eight artworks to the Town of Ashland

AT THEIR REGULARLY SCHEDULED meeting on September 5, the Ashland Town Council passed a resolution to accept an artwork donation agreement with Mr. Charles Sthresley that includes eight pieces of artwork, ranging from functional art to abstract sculpture to photography, to be added to the Town of Ashland's growing Public Art Collection.



Charles Sthresley

Earlier this summer, members of the Public Art Commission visited Sthresley's home and studio to see the pieces in person and discuss the possibility of a donation. The Commission then received a formal proposal and presentation from Sthresley at their regularly scheduled meeting on July 27. At that meeting, the Commission

voted 5-0 to recommend acceptance of the eight artworks into the Town's Public Art Collection.

"On behalf of the Town of Ashland's Public Art Commission, I would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Sthresley for his generous donation," said Ms. Leslie Bax, chair of Ashland's Public Art Commission. "Mr. Sthresley's unique perspective and creative spirit will help fulfill our mission by enhancing our public spaces and perhaps generate conversations about art within our community."

A long-time Ashland resident, Sthresley is an accomplished multidisciplinary artist working in stained glass, steel, wood, ceramics, painting, photography, and installation art. Mr. Sthresley is best known as a studio furniture maker working in concrete. His career includes exhibits in New York City,

the Meredith Gallery in Baltimore, the Franz Bader Gallery in Washington, DC, and a continuous exhibit at the former Gallery Flux in Ashland.

"I'm happy to donate these artworks," Sthresley said in remarks to town council. "Especially right here in my hometown where I will be able to see them often and hopefully being enjoyed by my community."

Exact placement for the artworks is yet to be determined but will be solidified in the coming months by the town manager at the recommendation of Sthresley and the Public Art Commission.

More information on the Public Art Commission can be found at www.ashlandva.gov/664/Public-Art-Commission.

CRETE SEAT
Concrete, rope,
hardware
51" x 30" x 30"
1999

Crete Seat was inspired by the ancient cultures on the island of Crete. The seat is made of rope woven into a triangular pattern and is quite comfortable. I think it would work well in a public waiting area.



Virginia projects score AARP grants

NINE PROJECTS IN VIRGINIA – running the gamut of urban, suburban, and rural – will receive funding from AARP to help make their communities more livable for people of all ages. More than 3,600 non-profits and governments applied for the grants, which will be used to improve public places; transportation; housing; digital connections; diversity, equity and inclusion, with an emphasis on the needs of adults ages 50 and older. Some \$3.6 million will be distributed to 310 projects, including the following in Virginia.

Arlington Neighborhood Village, a non-profit focused on helping older residents of Arlington, will use volunteers to participate in a “Senior Ambassador Program” to provide older residents in their neighborhoods with information about local services. The project also will compile a Senior Resource Guide and translate it into Spanish.

The **Roanoke River Rails-to-Trails, Inc.**, will conduct walk audits along the Tobacco Heritage Trail branch in Boynton, with the goal of finding ways to increase safety so more people can enjoy it.

The **Town of Fries** will turn underused property beside the town’s farmers market into a community garden with 10 raised vegetable beds, rain barrels and two ADA-compliant benches.

The **Appalachian Agency for Senior Citizens** will upgrade an underused playground in Richlands to a “Fit for Life” multigenerational park for exercisers of all ages, especially older adults.

The **City of Roanoke** will hold an accessory dwelling unit design competition to increase public awareness of this housing option. The competition will result in a set of plans that homeowners and developers can use to build an ADU on a single-family residential lot. Further, the **Roanoke Local Office on Aging** will create an outdoor fitness area, including a walking track and fitness equipment suitable for use by older adults.

In Winchester, the **Blue Ridge Habitat for Humanity, Inc.** will create and distribute a printed Quick Look Reference Guide, a one-page directory of services for older adults in the region.



Staunton water project awarded grant

THE CITY OF STAUNTON has been awarded a \$5.93 million grant by the Virginia Department of Health Office of Drinking Water to go toward the City’s Gardner Springs Pump Station project. The city had previously issued a bond for \$8.5 million to cover the project, but the grant funds will enable the city to allocate part of the bond funds to other capital improvements projects related to the city’s water system.

The Gardner Springs Pump Station is the primary water source for the city. The project replaces the current pump station, which was installed in the 1940s, with a new one that will be elevated above the flood plain and will have adequate emergency power to allow full operations without commercial power. The project will greatly increase overall resiliency across the entire source water system.



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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.

Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference

Come to your

Senses

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We're passionate about our public-private partnerships, so let's get started. Visit us at [VirginiaHousing.com](https://www.virginiahousing.com).



Left to right: Market Heights, Norfolk, VA | Developer: Lawson
Pecan Acres, Petersburg, VA | Developer: Petersburg RHA
The Ashton, Norfolk, VA | Developer: S. L. Nusbaum

