

VTC

VIRGINIA
TOWN & CITY

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE
VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

VML's new president!

Galax Mayor
Willie Greene

Inside:

Retiring members
reflect on service

2021 VML
Legislative
Program



2021

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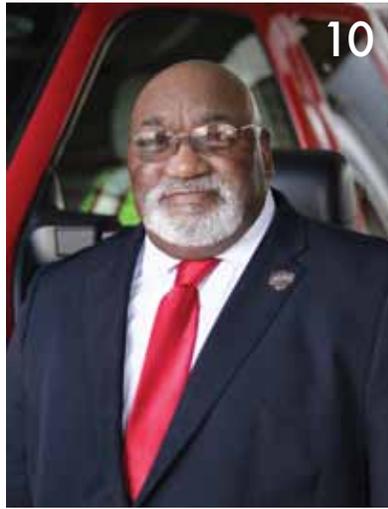
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ABOUT THE COVER

City of Galax native Willie Greene has worn many hats including (but certainly not limited to) fireman, restaurateur, safety consultant, council member, vice mayor, mayor and now president of the Virginia Municipal League. (cover photo by Austin Pinckney of Monroe Street Photo – Galax, VA www.monroestreetphoto.com).

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Looking forward to 2021

The year in which communication will be key!

IN THIS FINAL MONTH of 2020, my goal is to write about 2021 with the expectation that it will be a great year. How do I know this? Because all of us working together are going to make it one!

In this issue of *Virginia Town & City*, we have included our legislative program and I want to ask each of you to read the program and share the issues it raises with your local delegation. As the General Assembly enters an unprecedented online regular session, it is imperative that legislators hear from their localities before, during, and after the session. Yours are the voices that need to be heard!

In fact, your voices are more important now than ever before. In this virtual environment, speaking with legislators has become extremely hard. VML staff can't camp outside of their offices (darn!) and legislators can't answer every lobbyist's phone call. That is why VML really needs you to help us promote the local message. Determining how to contact legislators during the session and what method to use is vital so that we can deliver our message in the most efficient manner. Speak with legislators ahead of the session to pass along core principles, convey the vital issues outlined in our legislative program, and find out how they would like you to contact them (and then hold them to it by contacting them).

For example, during a recent legislative liaison retreat, VML learned that many of the legislators in attendance preferred email over other methods of communication. However, they made it clear that if we didn't put our position (support/oppose) in the subject line, they may not get the message. Small things like that are going to be vital during the session, so please let us know if you learn any of these "tricks."

For all these reasons (and more) communication – between VML and our members, between our members and their legislators, and between VML and legislators – will be key this year. If you

have not signed up for *eNews*, I strongly encourage you to do so. We will also begin a podcast series in 2021 and will try to devote some episodes to discussions of legislation. Please give us feedback.

VML is offering several virtual events in January that will provide opportunities to learn from, and communicate with, your fellow members. Recently we've had lots of requests for training, so VML is pleased to offer a Newly Elected Officials Conference on Wednesday, January 6 free to everyone! This is a



great opportunity for local officials to reset for a new year. Some of the items covered will be the Freedom of Information Act, the Conflict of Interest Act, budgeting and council-manager relations. It is also a great opportunity to connect with officials outside your locality who may be experiencing similar issues and have ideas to help.

On Monday, January 11, VML will hold a State Budget Overview Session for a discussion of the budget amendments introduced by Governor Northam that are of greatest interest to local governments. VML staff and experts will also outline other budget issues and potential amendments to be addressed by the 2021 General Assembly. This event is free to members.

Finally, on January 28, VML, VACo and the Planning District Commissions will hold a Local Government Day. For a small registration fee, local officials and staff will be able to hear from state officials and local government lobbyists on 2021 General Assembly developments, what legislation exists and the potential impacts on local government.

Please join us for as many of these events as you can!

So, with one last backward glance, I can see that 2020 was a year defined by cooperation and patience. By cooperating and adhering to the new, stricter restrictions we are healing. Thanks to all our localities on their work to adhere to the rules! And our collective patience has kept us going even as our individual patience has been tested. It is with immeasurable and much appreciated grace that our first responders, health care workers and many others have handled our individual moments of impatience. Thank you!

In closing, I will observe that together we continue to overcome the challenges 2020 has left us and together we look forward to some sunshine and good fortune in 2021. 



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VML connects you with a variety of networking and professional development events. Learn about these opportunities at vml.org/events.

- Jan. 6, 2021** **2021 Newly Elected Officials Conference**
Free Zoom Event - Visit www.vml.org for details and registration.
- Jan. 11, 2021** **State Budget Overview Session**
Free Zoom Webinar - Visit www.vml.org for details and registration.
- Jan. 13, 2021** **2021 General Assembly convenes**
- Jan. 28, 2021** **2021 Local Government Day**
Virtual Webex - Visit www.vml.org for details and registration.
- Feb. 18, 2021** **Municipal Electric Power Association of Virginia (MEPAV), Board Meeting**
Holiday Inn Monticello, 1200 5th Street SW, Charlottesville, VA 22902
- Oct. 2 - 5, 2021** **Virginia Mayors Institute & Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference**
Lansdowne Resort, 44050 Woodridge Pkwy, Leesburg, VA 20176

PEOPLE

Harless receives 2020 Region Strong award

On November 16, Carl Nichols with the Board of Directors of the Cumberland



- Harless -

Gap Regional Tourism Association recognized **Keith Harless** town manager of Pennington Gap with the 2020 Region Strong award for his work in improving the community of Pennington Gap, making it a

better place to live and work. "Through his dedication to improving Pennington Gap, he is making his community a destination that will attract visitors not only to his community, but to Lee County and the entire Cumberland Gap Region," said Nichols.

Mr. Harless was also congratulated by Delegate Terry G. Kilgore with an official commendation from the Virginia House of Delegates in recognition of receiving the Region Strong award.

Lancaster to retire from Town of Luray Council

Following more than three decades of service, Town of Luray Vice Mayor **Leroy**



- Lancaster -

Lancaster chose not to run for re-election this year. During his tenure, Vice Mayor Lancaster did not miss a regular meeting, work session or special meeting since he was first elected in

1988. During this time, he was a regular attendee of VML's annual conferences.

As owner of Lancaster Enterprises of Luray, Mr. Lancaster also serves as advisor to the Luray Planning Commission, director

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PEOPLE

the Page Valley Agricultural and Industrial Fair, treasurer of the Broadhead Archery Club, member of the Saturday Night Supper Club, and St. Mark's Lutheran Church.

Stipes retires as Town of Christiansburg clerk

Michele Stipes, who has served as the clerk for the Town of Christiansburg for more than 21 years, is retiring on Dec. 31, 2020. Stipes was appointed to the position on Sept. 7, 1999, after serving as acting clerk of council for the three months prior. In her time with the town, Stipes has served with four town managers and three mayors.

"For more than 21 years, Michele has shown impressive dedication and commitment to the Town of Christiansburg," Mayor Mike Barber said. "Her skills, attention to detail and organization will be dearly missed."

Stipes plans to continue working as a part-time special education aide with Mont-

gomery County Public Schools.

Christiansburg Town Council has named executive assistant Tracy Heinline as deputy clerk.

Vinton welcomes Drummond as new police chief; Peters as new town manager

As of December 1, **Fabricio D. Drummond** is the new police chief for the town of Vinton.



- Drummond -

Drummond assumed the role of interim police chief in late July after former Police Chief Thomas L. Foster left the town to become the United States Marshal for the Western District of Virginia.

Chief Drummond first joined the town as an officer in 2009 and was promoted to deputy police chief in 2016. Prior to joining the town, he worked for the Roanoke Police Department where he began his law enforcement career in 2006.

Drummond has received numerous awards and recognitions during his career and has attended several critical leadership and management courses, most notably the Virginia Association of Chief of Police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Leadership Development Courses.

Drummond enlisted in the United States Marine Corps after high school and served until 2006. He has a multidisciplinary Bachelor's degree specializing in both criminal justice and business cognitive and a Master's degree in national security, both from Liberty University.



- Peters -

On January 1, 2021, Vinton will welcome **Richard W. Peters, Jr.** as its new town manager. Peters has served as the acting town manager since August 1, assuming the role shortly after former Town Manager Barry Thompson, announced his retirement effective December 31, 2020. Peters has more than 20 years of experience in local



- Sasser -

In Memoriam: Carl Leroy Sasser, Sr.

Former vice mayor and current council member for the Town of South Hill, **Carl Leroy Sasser, Sr.** died on November 9, 2020 after a brief illness. Leroy and his late wife "Dolly" moved to South Hill in 1969. At that time, he was the regional manager for four Leggett's Department Stores including the South Hill

location. He served as chairman of the Downtown Retail Merchant Association and was a past president of the South Hill Chamber of Commerce. He was vice president of the Community Development Association and was a member of the Lions Club, Rotary Club, and Moose Lodge. Starting in 1978, he served the community as a member of the South Hill Town Council. Leroy also worked as a funeral assistant with Farrar Funeral Home for the past 30 years. He was a member of First Baptist Church where he served as a deacon.

Leroy loved Christmas and served as grand marshal of the South Hill Christmas Parade in 2018. He also enjoyed spending time with his family and friends whether at ball games, graduations, dance recitals, vacationing, or golfing. He will be remembered for his warm smile, giving nature, and devotion to the Town of South Hill.

The family requests memorial considerations be placed in his memory to the South Hill Volunteer Fire Department, 114 N. Brunswick Avenue, South Hill, VA 23970; the South Hill Moose Lodge, 1201 W. Danville Street, South Hill, VA 23970; or the charity of your choice.

In Memoriam: Stuart Connock

Former Virginia Secretary of Administration and Finance **Stuart Wallace Connock** passed away at the age of 95 on December 6, 2020. Connock began his many years of public service to the Commonwealth in the Virginia Department of Taxation and as a journal clerk for the House of Delegates. He was a field representative for the Virginia Municipal League from 1961 to 1966. In 1996 he became director of the new state Division of Sales and Use Tax in the Virginia Department of Taxation, and later served as tax commissioner. Connock served with distinction in Democratic and Republican administrations as the assistant secretary for financial policy and then as secretary of administration and finance. He was known for his encyclopedic knowledge of the state budget and his nonpartisan, results-oriented approach to government.

After Connock retired from state government in 1990, he served at the University of Virginia as the executive assistant to the president for state governmental relations until 2012.

Connock served in the Pacific theater during World War II and returned to Virginia to earn a Bachelor of Science in economics from the University of Virginia. He was recognized for excellence in public administration and received many awards and commendations throughout his career.

A full obituary is posted at <https://legcy.co/3acNY20>.



- Connock -

government including the City of Roanoke and Botetourt County.

Peters first joined the town in 2015 as assistant town manager/director of economic development. During his tenure with the town, Peters has seen many successful projects to completion. Among these, he played a key role in the town receiving and managing numerous state and federal grants, including overseeing a Community Development Block Grant to assist with revitalization efforts and develop business support programs for the town's downtown business district.

Peters is also active in the community representing the Town of Vinton on numerous regional boards including the Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission, Roanoke Regional Partnership and the Vinton Area Chamber of Commerce, to name a few.

Peters has an undergraduate degree from Ferrum College in recreation and leisure services and a Graduate Certificate in local government management from Virginia Tech, a program co-sponsored by the Virginia Local Government Management Association.

Arlington County Department of Libraries Director Kresh nominated for Trailblazer Award

On December 10, the League of Women in Government (LWG) and National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) jointly announced the top-10 finalists for the 2020 Leadership Trailblazer Award.



- Kresh -

Among the nominees is **Diane Kresh** who joined Arlington as director of libraries in April 2006 after a 31-year career at the Library of Congress.

An Arlington native, Kresh is the only top-10 finalist from Virginia.

Over the course of her career, Kresh has earned numerous awards and accolades, including a "Top 50 Innovations in American Government" award for the Veterans History Project, issued by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation and the Council for Excellence in Government.

In announcing the Trailblazer finalists, league President, Kelly Houghteling added, "Of the amazing nominees from across the country, the judges felt these ten finalists best captured the spirit of the award. Being recognized as a top-10 finalist is a wonderful tribute to all of these remarkable leaders."

This year's award recipient will also be inducted into the League of Women in Government Hall of Fame. The winner is set to be announced in mid-December. [Editor's Note: This edition of *VTC* went to print before the winner was announced. Good luck to Ms. Kresh!]

Kresh holds both a Masters in library science and a BA from Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

City of Virginia Beach CIO Wallace named a Local IT Leader of the Year

City of Virginia Beach Chief Information Officer (CIO) **Peter Wallace** has been



- Wallace -

named a Local IT Leader of the Year as part of StateScoop's 2020 LocalSmart Awards.

Wallace has served as the city's CIO since 2017. In this role, he guides enterprise technology strategy and leads 200 employees in the IT Department. Wallace, an advocate for digital equity and inclusion, has been instrumental in advancing a host of technology initiatives including a dark fiber regional connectivity ring to be developed in collaboration with Hampton Roads municipalities. He is currently a board member for the Metropolitan Information eXchange (MIX), a professional, national network of technology executives.

Wallace is a certified chief information officer and project management professional. He holds a Masters degree in business from the University of Phoenix and a BS in business from Nova Southeastern University.

The City of Virginia Beach also secured a Local IT Innovation of the Year award for its traffic data-sharing partnership, "Waze" which empowers citizens with real-time information about road conditions.

The LocalSmart Awards program recognizes visionaries whose contributions transform local government and leave a lasting impact on government information technology (IT). Nominations are submitted across five categories, and winners are determined through open voting. More than 350,000 votes were cast this year, which is over three times the total amount recorded in 2019.

Movers and shakers

Do you know someone who's on the move? Send your announcements about new hires in local government, promotions, retirements, awards and honors to **Rob Bullington** at rbullington@vml.org.



- BaCote -

In Memoriam: Mamye BaCote

Former Virginia Delegate **Mamye BaCote** passed away on December 14 in Newport News. BaCote was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 2003 and served through the 2015 session. She was a member of the House Appropriations Committee and was instrumental in obtaining funding for the Newport News Drug Court. She was a relentless advocate for expanding opportunities in education and for allowing local governments the authority to ban firearms in public libraries.

Prior to her election to the House of Delegates, BaCote served on the Newport News City Council from 1996 to 2003. While on council, BaCote was an active member of the Virginia Municipal League, including serving as chair of the league's Human Development and Education Policy Committee.

After graduation from Virginia Union University, BaCote taught social studies at Huntington High School and then Menchville High School in Newport News.

While a student at Virginia Union University, BaCote was one of the "Richmond 34" who staged a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter at Thalhimers in downtown Richmond. The U.S. Supreme Court eventually overturned the trespassing charges against the students, in a ruling ending segregation in places of public accommodation.

A full obituary is posted at www.ohsmithandsonfuneralhome.com/obituary/mamye-bacote.

Atkinson Boulevard connects major Newport News roads

A RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY was held December 8 to open Newport News' new Atkinson Boulevard, which connects Warwick Boulevard and Jefferson Avenue, two major thoroughfares in the city.

The new road is a 1.2-mile, four lane divided roadway that features a 1,740-foot bridge over Interstate 64 and the CSX Railway. It also includes a multi-use path for pedestrians and cyclists. Construction on the project began in 2017.

The new roadway is named for Newport News native Harry Eugene Atkinson, who was a member of Newport News City Council from 1962-1966 and 1974-1978 and served as mayor from 1974-1976. Atkinson was a retired major in the United States Marine Corps and practiced law in Newport News after leaving the military.



Petersburg partners with restaurants to provide holiday meals

THROUGH ITS "FEED THE NEED WITH A TASTE OF PETERSBURG" program, the City of Petersburg partnered with local restaurants to purchase pre-packaged meals that were delivered to Petersburg residents experiencing food insecurity due to COVID-19.

More than 8,000 meals were provided for the Thanksgiving holiday. The city had the goal of preparing and delivering 10,000 meals for the Christmas season by partnering with the same restaurants that prepared the Thanksgiving meals.

This initiative was developed to provide meals to Petersburg residents who have been affected by COVID-19 while also providing economic stimulus to local restaurants and their employees. Funding from the CARES ACT was used to implement the program.

New life for former Kmart in Waynesboro, Hampton

WAYNESBORO'S KMART RETAIL store on West Main Street closed in late 2018 as part of a nationwide restructuring. However, Amazon recently confirmed that it has leased the former Kmart building to operate as a delivery station, with opening scheduled for 2021.

Waynesboro Mayor Bobby Henderson welcomed Amazon to the city and stated his appreciation for the company's commitment to the area and the job opportunities for citizens. Henderson said that "the addition of the Amazon Delivery Station to the Waynesboro economy is encouraging for our city and citizens. 2020 has been challenging for our community and many others; this facility provides positive reinforcement that our future is bright."

In Newport News, Amazon has closed on the long-vacant Super Kmart property on Mercury Boulevard where the company plans to operate a last mile delivery center. The new center will add jobs and speed package delivery to customers in the region.

"This is a really great day for the City of Hampton," said Mayor Donnie Tuck. "To have this long-vacant eyesore being turned into an Amazon center, with new jobs, is beyond fantastic."

The new center will employ approximately 200 full-time workers earning a minimum starting wage of \$15 per hour



Strasburg sponsors home decorating contest

IN LIEU OF STRASBURG'S ANNUAL "Tis the Season" festivities, the Town of Strasburg held a Strasburg Home Decorating Contest. Homes could be nominated through a web-based application process. Participating homes were given a number and a yard sign. Digital maps detailed the



location of the participating houses and members of the community could then visit the locations during the last two weeks in December and vote on their favorites at the Strasburg Visitor Center. Winners were to be announced on January 1.

The Strasburg Business Alliance, in partnership with the Shenandoah County Chamber of Commerce, also hosted a "Frosty Frenzy", to encourage local businesses to incorporate a snowman into their window display.

Norfolk human services goes direct

THE CITY OF NORFOLK Department of Human Services (DHS) has received state approval to use a mobile unit to serve eligible customers seeking education, training, and employment services. The DHS PowerUp EmployMobile will be the first of its kind in Virginia.

The vehicle will support Norfolk's VIEW (Virginia Initiative for Education and Work) program, which serves more than 450 residents each year and helps families achieve self-sufficiency. VIEW provides a network of supportive services including career development, education and training, professional attire, equipment and licensing, shelter and transportation assistance, and other help.

The EmployMobile will allow staff to take services and supports directly to VIEW clients. Additionally, DHS will be able to make its service delivery model more efficient. The department will use state VIEW funds to procure the vehicle.

Additional information is available on the city's news page at www.norfolk.gov/CivicAlerts.



Vinton, Warsaw, Wytheville receive revitalization grants

GOVERNOR RALPH NORTHAM announced on November 20 that the towns of Vinton, Warsaw, and Wytheville had received Industrial Revitalization Fund (IRF) awards totaling more than \$1.4 million. The IRF, which is administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, provides gap financing to leverage local and private resources to achieve market-driven redevelopment of deteriorated structures, creating a catalyst for long-term employment opportunities and ongoing physical and economic revitalization.

The **Town of Vinton** will redevelop the historic Gish Mill into a mixed-use site that includes a restaurant, speakeasy, seasonal market, and lodging rooms. The IRF loan will be used for the rehabilitation and repair of the structure, as well as the demolition and removal of specific components. Vinton purchased the property in 2015 and is in the process of selling it to a local development group, which has private financing from local lending institutions committed for the purchase and renovation. This



project is expected to create 37 full- and part-time jobs.

The **Town of Warsaw** will use the IRF award for the build-out of a centrally located mixed-use site that will have a brewery space, taproom, upstairs event space, and patio. The town received a \$1 million Community Development Block Grant in 2017, and this project will help continue the locally developed revitalization plan. Matching funds for this project will come from the developer with the town contributing economic incentives. The project is expected to create four full-time and five to 10 part-time jobs.

The **Town of Wytheville** is rehabilitating the Millwald Theatre as a community auditorium for live and film entertainment, as well as a center for performing arts education. The IRF award will be used for demolition and new construction within the existing structure, a new HVAC system, new plumbing, electrical upgrades, and architecture and engineering fees. The project is expected to create seven full-time and at least seven part-time jobs.

Loudoun County asks public to “Scrape. Squash. Report.” the spotted lanternfly

LOUDOUN COUNTY RECENTLY ASKED residents who purchased live material not grown in Loudoun County for holiday decorating to look for egg masses of the spotted lanternfly – an invasive insect that can affect agricultural and ornamental plants.

Adult spotted lanternflies die at the onset of winter, but their egg masses can survive below-zero temperatures. Egg masses typically include 30 to 50 jellybean-shaped eggs in neat rows covered by a waxy substance that looks like mud. The egg masses accumulate on tree trunks, branches, and other surfaces from the fall to early spring when they hatch.

The county asked people who find spotted lanternfly egg masses to take a photo and send it the cooperative extension office, and then to destroy the eggs by scrapping them into a plastic bag with alcohol.

Residents were also advised that decorative live material was available from many local farms where the spotted lanternfly has not been detected.



Charlottesville, Virginia Beach recognized by MCCi

THE COMMISSIONER OF THE REVENUE in the City of Charlottesville and the City of Virginia Beach Public Schools recently received Excellence Awards from MCCi, a company that assists organizations with records management and document digitization.

The awards recognize innovative strategies for process or technology challenges amidst COVID-19, civil unrest, or natural disasters.

In Charlottesville, Commissioner of the Revenue Todd D. Divers deployed several COVID relief forms including but not limited to housing affordability grant application, real estate tax

relief auditing, rent relief application and auditing, and customer document submission.

In Virginia Beach, the public schools eliminated paper from business processes by implementing Laserfiche as their content services solution. Engaging in the digital transformation process allowed the school system to create streamlined workflows for many departments including human resources, accounts payable, travel and reimbursement, school leadership and risk management.



Rocky Mount holds Festive Fridays

THE TOWN OF ROCKY MOUNT and the Community Partnership for Revitalization held three Festive Fridays on December 4, 11, and 18. Residents were invited to walk around, enjoy the spirit of the season with decorations and Christmas music playing throughout the town. Participants were also encouraged to shop local with many participating businesses extending their hours until 8:00 p.m. These businesses also offered special incentives for holiday shoppers during the three events. Each Friday featured a different theme, including Flannel Friday, Ugly Sweater Friday and on the third Friday participants were encouraged to dress as their favorite Christmas character. With ample parking, residents were able to stroll through the town rather than clustering together. Santa was at the Farmer’s Market waving to children as they passed, and a mailbox was set up for kids to deposit their letters to him.





Leesburg maintains Triple AAA credit rating Town will refinance \$13.5 million in general obligation bonds

ALL THREE MAJOR RATING agencies (Fitch Ratings, Moody's, and Standard & Poor's) recently affirmed Leesburg's AAA ratings with stable outlooks prior to the town's upcoming sale of general obligation refunding bonds in early December. AAA with stable outlook is the highest rating a municipal government can receive.

The three agencies all cited the town's diverse tax base,

population growth, and continued economic development as factors in the ratings. Standard & Poor's called out the town's management, noting that its "financial practices are strong, well embedded, and likely sustainable."

The bonds were scheduled for competitive sale on December 8 and were being issued to achieve interest savings by refinancing bond sales from previous years.

Town of Herndon and Comstock to redevelop portion of downtown in public-private partnership



Mayor Lisa Merkel

ON DECEMBER 16, COMSTOCK Holding Companies, Inc. announced that Comstock Herndon Venture, LC and the Town of Herndon closed on the transfer of land in historic downtown Herndon that is the subject of a public-private partnership. Comstock's planned redevelopment of the 4.7-acre parcel is the centerpiece of Herndon's revitalization plan for its historic downtown. Comstock and its design team worked closely with town officials to develop an innovative plan that also honors the historic character of Herndon's downtown.

The plan earned the unanimous approval of the Herndon Historic District Review Board in 2019.

"This project is the culmination of years of careful planning and will result in an exciting, 21st century downtown that respects both our proud history and our vision for Herndon's future," said Mayor Lisa Merkel. "Dynamic living spaces, retail, restaurants, the arts – all will come alive in downtown Herndon as a result of our collaboration with Comstock."

Christopher Clemente, CEO of Comstock, expressed similar enthusiasm for the plan. "We are excited to have completed this important part of the process and look forward to redeveloping this key piece of downtown Herndon into a vibrant mixed-use development," Clemente said.

Located approximately 1.5 miles from the new Silver Line's Herndon Station at the intersection of Elden and Center streets, the planned development will be adjacent to Herndon's Old Town Hall, the W&OD trail, established restaurants and retail stores, and the Town Green – site of events and concerts throughout the year. Comstock's development will include approximately 273 residential apartments, 17,300 square feet of boutique restaurant and café space, a 16,265 square feet arts center, three public plazas with outdoor seating and dedicated art, and a seven-level parking garage with 726 spaces.

Meet VML's new President: City of Galax Mayor Willie Greene

A true son of Galax with proven perseverance, a record of leadership and the heart of a volunteer

ON A COLD DAY in early December, with the first bite of winter hovering in the air, I drove from Richmond to Galax to spend some time with VML's new president, Mayor Willie Greene. Although we had met before, Mayor Greene and I had never had the opportunity to talk at length and I looked forward to getting to know him better.

He was waiting for me at the Galax Municipal Building on South Main Street, in the heart of Galax' downtown. It was too cold to be outside for long, so indoors, with masks in place and distanced across a conference table, Mayor Greene and

I talked for a couple hours. He told me about his childhood and shared some experiences from the many jobs he has held over the years. He also told me about what led him to run for council in the first place and what accomplishments he was proud to be part of during his time on council. Mayor Greene also imparted lessons learned from a lifetime spent in service to his community – both as an elected official and as a volunteer.

I am pleased to be able to share here some of what I learned from Mayor Willie Greene over the course of that thoroughly enjoyable afternoon in Galax.



Mayor Greene outside the City of Galax Municipal Building.

A true son of Galax...

Willie Greene's parents moved from Austinville to Galax soon after he was born. His mother was a domestic worker, and his father was a butcher at the local store. Besides Willie, they had two daughters. His father walked to work every morning and walked home, often with groceries for his family, every evening. "He made sure we had what we needed," observes Willie.

Indeed, Willie's father made a strong impression on his son in ways both big and small. "Dad always wore khakis and a tie," Mayor Greene remembers. "And to this day I wear a lot of khakis; of course, I wear a lot of baseball caps too!"

As a lifelong resident of Galax, it's no surprise that Mayor Greene embodies many of the best things that define the city.

For a lot of people, Galax is synonymous with traditional American old-time music and the annual Galax Fiddlers Convention draws thousands of attendees from around the world. Around the city are freestanding upright bass sculptures, artfully adorned to pay tribute to the region's musical heritage. Fittingly, Mayor Greene is a musician. He plays guitar, keyboards, and bass in church but, "just to fill in when someone else can't make it," he's quick to note.

For others, Galax means quality furniture thanks to the city's rich history as a furniture manufacturing hub. Vaughan-Bassett Furniture and Albany Furniture are still going strong and the city has plans to redevelop the now empty 408,000 square foot old Vaughn furniture plant into a cornerstone mixed-use facility.

Mayor Greene has deep ties to Galax's furniture industry. Among his first jobs was working at the furniture plant where he eventually became the safety coordinator. Among his more recent jobs was safety consultant for Albany Industries, the Galax distributor for the Mississippi-based furniture manufacturer.



a few). While he was running "Willie's Place" he was also working 40 hours a week at the furniture plant. But when his wife, Sue M. Greene, the pastor at McMillian Ministries was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006, he closed the restaurant so they could focus on her health. Thankfully, she is a survivor and continues to preach and lead her congregation.

These days, Mayor Greene prefers to let others do the cooking, though he can still be found behind the grill at McMillian Ministries' annual Father's Day cookout at Claytor Lake. "I let others do the big stuff, I just do the burgers and dogs now," he observes, "after all, it is *Father's Day!*"

And yes, Mayor Greene is a father and grandfather. He and his wife have two children. Their son Willie Greene, Jr. and his wife Nancy have a son Will and daughter Megan; their daughter Jacqueline Greene Dalton and her husband Robert have a son Robert and daughter Kaitlyn. All the children and grandchildren live in Martinsville, VA.

...with proven perseverance...

While all the things (and more) outlined above make Mayor Greene a true son of Galax, to get an even better idea of what Galax means to Willie Greene, and what he has meant to the city, you would do well to skip the fiddler's convention, the furniture plants, and the restaurants (for a bit) and start your visit at 105 Rosenwald Felts Drive. The building at this address was originally the segregated Rosenwald Felts grade school that Willie attended as a child. One day a teacher came into the classroom and told the students that the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. had been killed. "I still remember that moment," recalls Mayor Greene. "I remember the day Kennedy was shot too."

After finishing high school, Willie saw that his old grade school (which had closed after desegregation) was looking pretty run down. He thought someone should do something with the building, so at the ripe old age of 19 he ran for city council.

He lost.

A bit later, in 1974, he ran again. And he lost again.

However, in the late 1970s he got on the Parks and Recreation Commission. Since the Commission controlled the old Rosenwald



Then there are those for whom Galax means food, specifically good home-style southern cooking. And Mayor Greene has some experience in this area as well as the proprietor and cook at "Willie's Place" – a restaurant he ran from 2000-2006. "People loved the mashed potatoes" he recalls. "They were real mashed potatoes – we had a potato peeler; we really went through those things!"

Willie Greene has rarely only worked one job at a time, "almost always at least two" he observes. Aside from the jobs mentioned above, he was a salesman for Lance, an assistant manager for Pizza Hut and he owned and operated a day care for 10 years (to name just



105 Rosenwald Felts Drive today.

Felts school building they took it over and eventually it became a kindergarten. Currently, Rooftop of Virginia, a community action program serving numerous low-income/disadvantaged residents in the region, operates Galax HeadStart classes in the building. Moreover, thanks to Willie's efforts, the grounds around the building have become a neighborhood gathering spot with a basketball court, shelter, and grills. Every year the community hosts the "King of Hill" basketball tournament on the site.

...a record of community leadership...

In 1994 Willie Greene ran for council again and won. He continued to serve on council, both as a member and as vice-mayor, until 2020 when he was appointed mayor. During his time on council, he was part of a city initiative that took over a failing private golf course

and made it a successful public golf course. Also, during this time, council used input from a 10-year study to renovate the high school, middle schools and, most recently, the city's 1930s-era elementary school. Council also turned the old Heilig Meyers building on South Main Street into the city's new Municipal Building, built a new library and established Mountain View park with two baseball fields.

Mayor Greene is quick to give credit where credit is due, and he credits his fellow councilmembers and City Manager Keith Barker with putting the city on firm financial footing. "Keith is great city manager," notes Willie. "When he took over 10 years ago, we were several million in the hole."

In May of this year, Willie Greene became the first Black mayor of the City of Galax and its

first new mayor in nearly 30 years.

So, pandemics aside, what has been the biggest issue for Mayor Greene thus far?

"We're getting a lot of calls about the raised fees for stormwater," he observes. "We've got older pipes and flooding. A large manufacturer had water running through their business; Main Street was like a river sometimes! We had a public hearing before we raised the fees, but people were still surprised and call to complain."

What does he tell them?

"I tell them exactly why it's necessary. And I tell them that I pay those same fees too! We do it for everybody. When you do something, you do it for a good reason. Then they understand and it's OK."

To help raise public awareness about issues confronting the city, Mayor Greene has started a monthly column called "A Minute with the Mayor" in the local paper.



The newly renovated Galax Elementary School.



“One time I was teaching a class and I told an attendee that I was a volunteer firefighter and she told me that her brother was a ‘real’ firefighter, meaning it was his job and he got paid for it,” Willie told me. “That didn’t seem right to me. We take the same training. We are ready to help 24/7. Some people don’t recognize this. Plus, volunteer fire departments must raise money just so they can operate. Another time I was teaching a class out in the country and I was amazed to learn they had to sell Christmas lights just so they could afford to buy gloves!”

Mayor Greene’s affinity for volunteers extends well beyond firefighters, however, as I learned after our discussion. “Come with me,” he said, “I’ve

got some people you should meet.”

I followed* Mayor Greene to the basement of a nearby church being used by God’s Storehouse Soup Kitchen. We had a little trouble with the exterior door, but finally made our way down a short flight of stairs to a room set up like a small cafeteria and bordered by boxes of produce and canned goods.

Here I met volunteers Bill Parks, Christy Mendoza, and Beth White (a City of Galax councilmember) along with Director Delina Parks, and Executive Director Kisha Johnson. This friendly group of folks were quick to tell me stories about the people they serve: People who have run out of options, neglected children suffering from malnutrition and depression, teenagers and adults struggling with drug addiction and mental issues and, in one case, a couple whose possessions including their clothes had been lost in a flood and arrived sharing the same blanket and nothing else.

God’s Storehouse was founded by Becky McClendon in 2012. The group I met started volunteering in 2014 and kept things going when Becky moved to South Carolina to be closer to her children. In the past five years they have expanded to offer an adult and children’s literacy program, an addiction recovery program, nutrition classes, and food box giveaway. Having outgrown their current space, the group is in the process of purchasing a new building where they will expand their literacy programs and begin a Partners in Education (PIE) that will partner with local income and English as a second language classes to build a stronger network with parents and guardians within the school

**It should be noted that Mayor Greene uses a cane (“bad knees” he explains), but when he wants to get somewhere, he gets there! In fact, he’s hard to keep up with.*

...and the heart of a volunteer.

Toward the end of our time together, I asked Mayor Greene what he hoped to bring to the forefront during his tenure as VML’s president. He was quick to respond. “I want people to be aware of volunteers. We talk about front line folks, and that’s all good, but often people forget about volunteers – people who do things just for the love of their fellow citizens.”

Willie has been a volunteer firefighter for 35 years and continues to be a trustee of Galax Fire & Rescue.



The crew at God’s Storehouse (L-R): Bill Parks, Director Delina Parks, Christy Mendoza, Executive Director Kisha Johnson, Mayor Willie Greene, and Councilmember Beth White.



Willie Greene

system. God's Storehouse wants their new building to be a safe space for at risk youth before and after school.

Volunteers like those at God's Storehouse are close to Mayor Greene's heart and, from what I observed, the respect and affection are mutual.

As we were leaving, Mayor Greene again had trouble with the door and then noticed the lettering on it. "Looks like we came in the emergency exit," he noted. "Good thing the alarm didn't go off."

Remembering that our next stop would be the Fire Department for some photos, I quipped, "I guess if it had, the Fire Department would have come to us."

"Yeah," he responded matter-of-factly, "they would have." 

About the author: Rob Bullington is the editor of VTC and VML's Director of Communications.

Mayor Willie Greene on faith, family, and healing

I am a blessed man. I have a great family. My wife is a pastor and has been preaching for forty years. Both of my children are good workers in their churches.

They come and help us often. I could not ask for a

better and more supportive Son-in Law and Daughter-in Law. I also have four wonderful grandchildren. My faith in God keeps me grounded. This year alone He has healed me and my wife of COVID-19. I was in the ICU for eight days. I knew it was the hand of God when the nurse said, "you must have a lot of people praying for you." At that time, she was not used to seeing patients recover.



Pastor Greene and Mayor Greene

60 Seconds with Mayor Greene

Apart from your work on council and mayor, what other roles* have you held?

- Served on the State Board of Social Services for eight years, two as vice president, two as president.
- Served on the State Board of Social Work for eight years.
- Serving on the State Executive Council for the Office of Children's Services
- Serving on the Twin County Regional Airport Commission
- Serving on the Carroll, Grayson Galax Regional Landfill
- Serving as Chairman of Mount Rogers Planning Commission Executive Committee
- Serving as president of the Mount Rogers planning District and on the Improvements to I-81 Committee
- VML Executive Board: City chair for two years, at-large member for one year, president elect for one year and now president

***Editor's note** – There are plenty more than we have space to list here, enough to fill another magazine!

Sounds like you've spent some time driving from Galax to Richmond over the years. What's your favorite route?

I take Route 58 all the way to Richmond. That way I can stop off and see my kids and grandkids in Martinsville along the way.

Favorite food?

Food.

OK, is there any food you don't like?

I've never cared for oysters.

What makes Galax special to you?

Our people. We have good people. When you have a problem, everybody has a problem.

What is the future for Galax?

Tourism is important, sure. But I believe local manufacturing will continue to be important to Galax and the region. We need to find ways to attract new manufacturers and keep the ones we already have.

How do you unwind?

The fire department has a camp at New River. I've got a 30-foot class C camper. I like to spend my summers up there. I do a lot of reading to keep up with work.

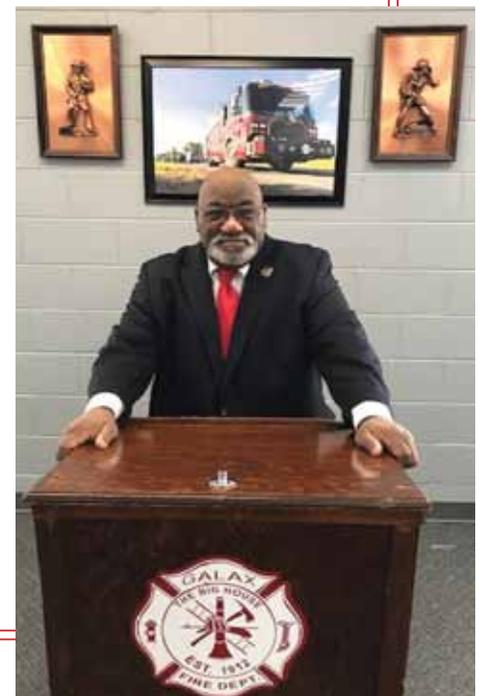
What is the strangest request you've received since becoming Mayor?

My grandson is 10 years old and loves trains. The night I was appointed mayor, he asked if I could talk to council about opening the old caboos on display downtown so it could go through town and give rides. I thought maybe he'd forgotten about it, but three weeks later he asked, "How's that request coming?"

One of the councilmembers actually did look into what we could do with the caboos. The state owns the property, and the old caboos wasn't up to their standards. My grandson was not put off. He said we should have a contest to raise money. He took different pictures of trains that he wanted me to show to council and then accused me of forgetting to show them!

Oddest ceremony you've attended?

My family had our camper in Virginia Beach one summer and a bird flew into a window and killed itself. Before we could hide it, my 8-year-old granddaughter saw it and insisted on holding a funeral. We all gathered round, and she preached a remembrance of the bird in which she said, "This bird died doing a stupid thing!" She was so serious about it, and it was all we could do not to laugh (though we've laughed about it quite often since, nothing against birds mind you).



Retiring members reflect on service

VML WILL BE SORRY to lose the help of several elected leaders retiring from public service after 2020. Their support of the league through work on our board and/or committees has been invaluable. Before we let them go, however, we wanted to get their thoughts on what their time of public service to their community has meant to them.



John Rowe (Mayor, City of Portsmouth)

I have been so blessed from the very start of my career in local government. I began my career working for the legendary Norfolk City Manager G. Robert House, Jr. in June 1971. I attended my first VML Annual Conference that fall at the Cavalier Hotel in Virginia Beach. Bob House emphasized the importance of the special relationship between the council and the manager and stressed that we must always build upon it to make it even stronger.

Over the past five decades, I have had the unique opportunity to practice that relationship from both the appointed side and the elected side. I have learned that this relationship is the “secret sauce” that makes the Council-Manager form of government work so well. In addition, I have been blessed that all my public service career has been in Virginia – the birthplace of the Council-Manager form of government in Staunton. Virginia’s local governments are strong, and we in local government enjoy a good bond with our state government.

Lastly, I have been very blessed to serve my hometown Portsmouth both as its appointed city manager and its elected mayor. A local government practitioner could not ask for more. I have found that public service in local government in Virginia is a most satisfying career and way of life – what could be better than community building...helping one’s neighbors achieve their aspirations in life? I can think of nothing better.



Lisa Merkel (Mayor, Town of Herndon)

Serving as a mayor has to be the most rewarding job in politics. Over the past 10 years I have had the opportunity to visit hundreds of town businesses and have been on every street and in every neighborhood in town. The best part of the job has been all the people I’ve met along the way – all over Herndon and of course all over the Commonwealth, thanks to VML.

Downtown redevelopment was my number one priority throughout my tenure and signing off on the final approvals and closing documents was my last official act as mayor. It was the perfect bookend to my decade of service! Serving as Herndon’s mayor has been the honor of my life, and I will definitely miss being in office once January rolls around. Fortunately, the town is in good hands with our next mayor and our outstanding professional staff! I look forward to a long future ahead as Citizen Lisa, knowing from a unique perspective that our town is a place that truly cares for its residents.



Hal Parrish (Mayor, City of Manassas)

As a young boy, I remember riding around with my father, who was mayor of what was then the Town of Manassas, looking for locations for the town to dig a well because the town was running out of drinking water. It was during this time that a group of town leaders put their heads together to create Lake Manassas. This decision has led to so many other great opportunities for the city and I wonder sometimes if those leaders ever realized what opportunities their actions would create.

Now that I am looking back at my career of nearly 30 years of service, beginning in 1993, I get a little introspective. I always want people to know that nothing is ever accomplished by one person’s actions. Each decision or opportunity taken is taken by a team of city leaders, staff and others who have the community’s best interest at heart. And they work together to make it happen.

During my tenure on council beginning in 1993 and then as mayor beginning in 2008, I believe we have continued making good decisions and great opportunities for this city I call home. My hope for future city leaders and staff is that you keep leading with the best interests of the community at heart and keep making great decisions.



Hector Cendejas (Councilmember, City of Manassas Park)

Four years ago, the people of Manassas Park elected me as a write-in candidate. It has been a blessing and honor representing the community, and I am thankful for the four years of service.

Additionally, I want to thank my colleagues in the governing body, and our city employees for all the hard work in ensuring our city strives now and in the years to come.

Finally, I want to thank the staff at VML (shout-out to Janet Areson and Jessica Ackerman) for advocating on our members’ behalf and for the great friendship!



Anita Price (Councilmember, City of Roanoke)

Service is something I have always felt compelled to give – and now that my twelve years on Roanoke City Council and serving VML is ending, I offer a few reflections. First, I must acknowledge the time has flown by because I have enjoyed my tenure and giving back to my community. I can honestly say that I now understand the phrase “all politics is local.” Public servants on the local level are the ones who will take questions from our neighbors in the grocery store or at church and can offer an answer or at least some guidance. I am humble to have had the opportunity to help our citizens – of all ages – on such a personal level.

Secondly, I am so grateful to have met and worked with so many incredible people from all around Virginia! I have met new friends and made sweet relationships that I will always cherish. And these friends and relationships include the professionals of VML – some of the most dedicated people I have ever had the honor to know. We are so blessed and privileged to have them on our side to provide the knowledge and expertise that makes Virginia the outstanding state that she is!

In closing, I will continue to support all our citizens – we have many challenges before us, but working together and with continued prayer, I know we will survive! Many thanks to all and continued blessings of peace to each of you in your service!



Don Harris (Mayor, Town of Bluefield)

After 21 years of community service to our community, I am looking to spend more time with my family. I was so blessed with the VML staff for their assistance during my time. Thanks to all.

2021 General Assembly Session preview

Getting ready for Richmond's biggest virtual event this winter

THOSE OF US WHO ARE ACCUSTOMED to working directly with legislators and their staff during General Assembly sessions were heard to utter a collective sigh of resignation upon the news that public access to the 2021 General Assembly's meetings and floor sessions would be exclusively on-line.

Of course, we understand that this is vital for health and safety during a world-wide pandemic, and we are all getting better at operating in a virtual world, but there is nothing like meeting in person for getting things done!

Nevertheless, the 2021 General Assembly Session will begin January 13, 2021. It is slated as a "short" session and may actually be an even "shorter" session if legislators do not agree to lengthen the 30-day window to 45 days as has typically been the practice in odd numbered years. If it remains at 30 days, expect evening and weekend committee meetings and floor sessions as members plow through the bills in an expedited manner.

As Virginia operates with a biennial budget, this year's Session will focus solely on budget amendments (i.e., we are in the middle of a two-year budget cycle). The timeline of the shortened session will present a formidable challenge to the committees with budget responsibilities. Members and staff on those committees will be working rapidly to consider changes to the Governor's proposed amendments and those of their members. State budget deliberations are always of interest to VML's members because local governments are often responsible for managing state-mandated and high-priority programs.

Apart from budget issues, legislative areas of concern to VML members in 2021 include provisions to expand broadband and access to housing; updates to the communications sales and use tax to reflect 21st century realities; land use and zoning issues; and potential changes to qualified immunity. Also expected this Session is discussion on the potential legalization of marijuana, which has been gaining momentum late this Fall, including support from Governor Northam. VML will be following that issue closely with particular attention to local authority in zoning and land use and taxation as well as public safety and health-related issues and concerns.

The VML 2021 Legislative Program which follows was developed by VML's policy and legislative committees operating virtually during the past several months and adopted by the VML membership at a virtual business meeting on October 8.

Please share these priorities with your General Assembly members!

With current limitations on in-person meetings, it is more important than ever to engage your legislators year-round. VML has created a guide to help you communicate with your legislators on the issues that matter to your locality. Download it here: www.vml.org/advocacy.

By VML Director of Policy Development Janet Areson



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

2021 VML Legislative Program

As approved by the VML Membership Oct. 8, 2020.

Guiding Principle: Local Authority

VML supports expanded local government authority and opposes any erosion of local authority.

I. Legislative & Budget Priorities

Funding the Real Cost of Education

- A strong public school system is essential to economic development and prosperity.
- During an economic downturn and particularly during a pandemic, state funding is vital to provide the tools and supplies necessary to maintain safe and effective education services – in person or virtually – for students across Virginia. This includes access to broadband service.
- The state must be a reliable funding partner in accordance with the Virginia Constitution and state statutes.
- The Standards of Quality should recognize the resources, including staff positions, required for a high-quality public education system.
- VML opposes changes in methodology and changes in the division of financial responsibility that result in a shift of funding responsibility from the state to localities.
- VML opposes policies that lower state contributions but do nothing to address the cost of meeting the requirements of the Standards of Accreditation and Standards of Learning.
- The state funding formula for education operating costs breaks down on a statewide level as 55 percent state/45 percent local funding. However, the Standards of Quality does not recognize the true costs of education, including pupil transportation, school support staff, providing and updating broadband and other technology, and instructional staff salaries. Neither does it recognize most construction and renovation costs.
- Local governments match more than is required for basic state education dollars, pay the majority of public school capital costs and struggle to find scarce local tax dollars to keep up with the demands for meeting additional and expanding state requirements and for creating 21st century learning environments for our children to master the challenges of tomorrow's workplace.
- VML supports actions for the Commonwealth to recognize and fund the true costs of public education, including new avenues for funding public school construction and renovation costs such as the creation of a pilot program of competitive grants using funds from the Virginia Public Building Authority to offset new construction or renovation costs for publicly owned and operated K-12 schools in fiscally stressed communities as defined by the Virginia Commission on Local Government.

COVID-19 – Addressing Short and Long Term Needs

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the need to provide broadband access for all homes and businesses without delay. Localities understand the importance of robust broadband for economic viability; the pandemic has further stressed the need for broadband to address K-12 education and telemedicine access. Private broadband, internet and wireless companies and potential new service providers including electric cooperatives need to work with localities and the state to provide this access.

Along with broadband access for economic, education, and medical needs during an extended health emergency now and in the future, VML supports:

- Increased state and federal funding and technical support to allow for robust and timely COVID-19 testing and contact tracing services throughout the Commonwealth.
- Creation of a state stockpile of personal protection equipment (PPE) to ensure that essential workers – including those in public safety, human services, transit, and public schools – get access to sufficient PPE on a timely basis.
- State funding for public health emergency services functions to enable the state and its local health departments and stakeholders to better prepare for and respond to public health emergencies such as a pandemic.
- Increased state funding for public health information technology resources and staff so that critical, timely information about public health emergencies is made available to state and local policy makers, first responders, and the public.
- Additional funding and programming to prevent evictions resulting from people battling the COVID-19 pandemic or economic hardship from job layoffs or reduced work hours.
- Additional funding to help households with extreme medical needs or financial insecurities because of the ailing economy make payments for utility services.
- Additional funding for local governments to work with local businesses to develop and implement strategies necessary to implement public health standards and combat the Coronavirus.
- Additional funding for local governments to keep public buildings and facilities both safe and free from the coronavirus.
- State efforts to persuade Congress to enact new legislation providing financial assistance to local governments and to individuals. Such assistance to localities should permit local governing bodies to replace lost local revenues with the additional federal money until the economic recovery takes hold.

State Assistance to Local Police Departments (HB 599)

Almost 70 percent of Virginians live in communities served by police departments. The state created a program of financial assistance to local police departments (HB 599) when it imposed an annexation moratorium on cities more than 30 years ago. It has increasingly

de-emphasized this funding obligation as a priority but has never compromised on the annexation moratorium. VML calls for the state to honor its commitment to local governments and public safety by funding the program as stipulated in the Code of Virginia or lift the moratorium on annexation.

Stormwater Local Assistance

VML supports continued investment of at least \$50 million annually in the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund to assist localities with critical stormwater projects to comply with federal and state clean-water requirements.

Taxing, Licensing, and Regulating Internet-Based Businesses and Services

In taking state action to regulate private enterprises employing a business model that emphasizes the use of the internet to either provide retail or facilities or ride-sharing services, local government interests should be acknowledged, and localities should be included in the decision-making.

As general principles, VML believes state and local policies should 1) encourage a level playing field for competing services in the market place; 2) not provide a tax preference or tax policy advantage for one group at the expense of another group in the competitive field; 3) seek to preserve state and local revenue; 4) ensure safety, reliability, and access for consumers, providers, and the public; and 5) protect local government's ability to regulate businesses whether they are traditional, electronic, Internet-based, virtual or otherwise.

VML also believes that the state should not prohibit the sharing of financial information between the Commonwealth and appropriate local authorities that is normally treated as part of the public domain. VML further believes that the state should not prohibit a locality from exercising its authority to enter into voluntary collection agreements provided that such agreements include provisions to protect the public's interest.

II. Other Legislative Positions

Addressing Behavioral Health Services in Local and Regional Jails

The Board of Corrections is considering enhanced behavioral health care regulations to apply to every local and regional jail in response to legislation approved by the 2019 General Assembly. VML supports necessary health care services and urges the state to provide needed funding for such services through either enhanced jail per diem payments or another funding mechanism that covers the additional costs to serve inmates with serious behavioral health needs.

Communications Sales and Use Tax

The Virginia Communications Sales and Use Tax was enacted to establish a statewide tax rate and to preempt local taxes on communications sales and services.

- VML supports setting the tax rate at the same level as the state sales tax rate and broadening the coverage of the tax to include audio and video streaming services and prepaid calling cards.

- VML opposes transfers of these revenues to the state general fund for purposes other than those currently stipulated in the Code of Virginia.

CSA Special Education Programs and Private Day School Funding

Virginia cities and counties share the funding responsibility for special education private day school placements through the Children's Services Act (CSA) program. The cost of these programs has been growing at a greater rate than inflation for a number of years; the number of placements continue to steadily rise as well. VML supports:

- State rate-setting.
- State contracts for such day programs as well as for residential placement services, with an opt-out provision for larger localities.
- Pilot programs allowing local school districts and their local governments to individually or regionally offer special education day programs using CSA funds to serve more children in the community.

Economic Development

VML supports local flexibility to promote economic development as our localities come out of this pandemic. A changed business landscape will necessitate a review of revenue sources to localities along with new ideas and actions that will broaden and diversify local revenue streams. Retention of current businesses is vital, and we support continued grant funding and common-sense restrictions for current businesses that are both efficient and effective.

2020 General Assembly-approved amendments to Sec. 2.2-3115 under the Conflict of Interests Act have created a major deterrent to continued participation by citizen volunteers on local industrial development authorities and economic development authorities. VML supports transparency but also a balance in financial reporting requirements on citizen volunteers to ensure that economic development authorities and industrial development authorities continue to operate with interested and knowledgeable volunteers.

FOIA

VML supports the position that any proposed changes to the Freedom of Information Act legislation be sent to the FOIA Council for analysis and recommendations prior to General Assembly consideration or enactment.

Funding for Planning District Commissions

VML supports increased state funding for the statewide network of planning district commissions/regional councils (PDCs). PDCs carry out efforts supported by state and local policy makers to advance and sustain regional coordination, cooperation, and technical assistance for the benefit of regions across the Commonwealth.

Funding of Community Services Boards and Behavioral Health Authorities

VML supports additional state funding to community services boards/behavioral health authorities in order to:

- Successfully implement STEP-VA requirements.

- Allow CSBs/RBHs to fully and safely respond to community needs during an extended pandemic, including the use of telehealth services, which require access to broadband service in communities across the state.
- Respond to increased focus and need for crisis response resources as part of criminal justice reform.

Land Use Control

Localities must maintain control of local land use decisions. Neither the state nor the federal government should usurp or preempt a locality's authority to make such decisions; nor should they impose requirements that weaken planning and land use functions. This includes the authority to promote affordable and mixed income housing as well as the required infrastructure to facilitate in-fill development, redevelopment and mixing of uses.

Local Option Income Tax

To broaden local tax bases, the General Assembly should authorize, at local option, a "piggy-back" income tax to be imposed at the local level for both general and special purposes.

Property Assessments Appeals

Article X of the Virginia Constitution mandates that all real and personal property be assessed at fair market value and that all property not constitutionally exempt be taxed.

Taxpayers have the right to contest property assessments through administrative and legal means. Taxpayers pay no local fees to challenge real property and personal property assessments. If taxpayers are displeased with the determinations made by their local commissioner of the revenue or other local assessing official, additional real property appeals can be submitted to the local Boards of Equalization. Taxpayers can also appeal real and personal property assessments in the Circuit Courts and, if still aggrieved, may appeal to the Virginia Supreme Court.

Reforms enacted in the 2011 Session of the General Assembly lowered the level of proof required by the taxpayer (from "clear preponderance" to "preponderance") to prove property is valued at more than fair market value or that the assessment is not uniform in its application and that it was not developed in accordance with generally accepted appraisal practices and applicable Virginia law relating to property valuation.

In 2017, there were more than 3.1 million taxable parcels and 20,777 appeals of which 10,472 were administratively resolved. Another 2,341 appeals were granted by local Boards of Equalization. Taxpayers filed 18 appeals in circuit courts of which seven were granted.

VML does not believe the assessment appeals process is flawed or in need of major policy changes and opposes statutory changes that would upend a process that protects taxpayers and the public.

Sovereign Immunity

Expanding liability and eroding immunities at the state level across the nation have had a chilling effect on the actions of local government officials contributing to local government insurance problems, creating immense financial risks (particularly for legal costs), and posing a substantial obstacle to the provision of needed public services.

The Virginia General Assembly should strengthen and must maintain the principles of sovereign immunity for local governments and their officials.

VML supports limiting the liability for civil damages for injury or death resulting from or related to actual or alleged exposure to COVID-19 in the course of or through the performance or provision of the localities business operations unless the government, or political subdivision failed to substantially comply with applicable COVID procedures established by the federal, state, or local agency which governs the business operations.

Transportation Funding Assistance

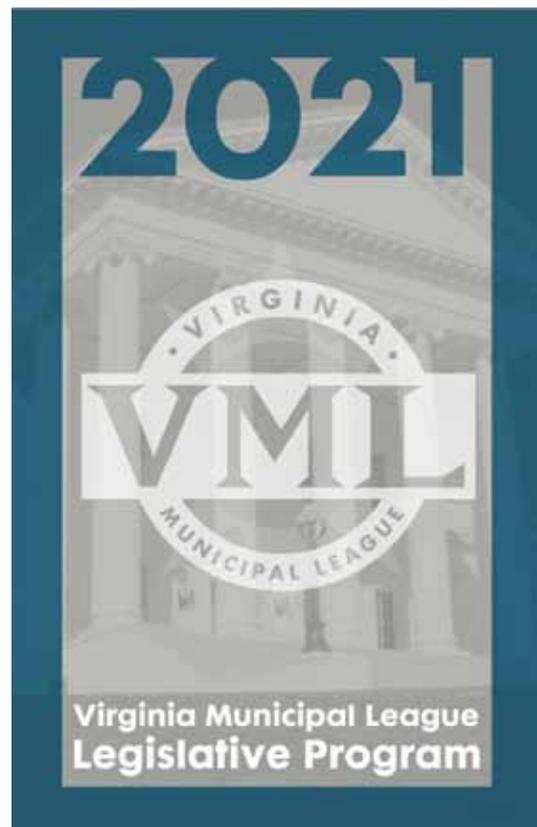
VML supports continued funding assistance and flexibility to continue local transportation programs and projects and the operation of public transit systems.

Utilities

Many local governments own and operate utilities that provide services that may include but are not limited to water, sewer, electric and natural gas. These utility services are funded by localities both outright and as enterprise funds. These utilities have bonding authority and financial restrictions on their operations. Localities must be able to manage revenues and expenditures related to these services without state interference.

Water Quality Funding

For continued successful local water quality improvement projects the Commonwealth must fully capitalize the Water Quality Improvement Fund and provide the necessary appropriations for local government water quality improvement projects to clean up the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. In addition, any changes to the state's stringent wastewater mandates imposed on localities must be scientifically and economically defensible, employing implementation strategies that produce any necessary wastewater improvements at the least cost.



More affordable housing coming thanks to new innovation program

INNOVATION.

It's a word we use a lot these days – describing vast improvements to products and services that not only make our lives easier, but better.

When it comes to housing, innovation also means opportunity.

Through Virginia Housing's new Innovative Demonstrations Program, three affordable housing developments will soon take shape, allowing prospective homebuyers the opportunity to live in safe, attractive workforce housing that otherwise would be unavailable.

The program requires those in the homebuilding industry to think creatively and incorporate cost-saving construction methods into their developments. Whether that means using sustainable materials or innovative building techniques, the goal is to reduce construction costs and increase affordable housing options for Virginians.

"This program is really the first of its kind," notes Chris Thompson, Virginia Housing's director of strategic housing. "We are making an intentional effort to spur innovation in affordable housing, and we're getting some really great results."

This year, three proposals were selected to receive \$500,000 in award money each.

The Harvest Foundation / City of Martinsville: The Church Street Housing Development

The Harvest Foundation and City of Martinsville are working together to increase housing stock for low- to middle-income homebuyers in the area's Central Business District.

Modular home specialist Nationwide Homes and construction partner Silverpoint Homes will build and deliver 12 cottage-style modular homes and 15 townhomes priced between \$120,000 and \$150,000 and place them on land donated by the city.

"While Martinsville is experiencing economic growth, people recruited to work here end up living outside the area," said Jeff Sadler, housing and development coordinator for Martinsville-Henry's Economic Development Corporation. "We are investing in an area that hasn't had much investment."

Nationwide Homes is incorporating several cost-saving measures into the development, including reduced shipping costs (Nationwide is only a few miles from the building site); ordering materials in bulk; building the modular homes in bulk; and reduced crane rental fees, since three to four modular homes can be set up in a day as opposed to one stick-built home per day.

NATIONWIDE CUSTOM HOMES

Church Street townhomes.





Church Street cottage-style modular homes.

Virginia Tech: Exploring 3D printed homes

While modular and manufactured homes reduce construction time and offer cost savings, shipping costs can still impact their pricing. The Better Housing Coalition, Alchemy 3D LLC and The Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech are studying ways to further reduce housing costs by using 3D concrete-printed construction.

The group plans to construct one 3D-concrete printed home in the Greater Richmond area and develop a broad set of recommendations for 3D concrete house printing across the Commonwealth. “This work will contribute to other important efforts around the U.S. aimed at understanding and reporting the performance of manufactured housing,” said Dr. Andrew McCoy, director of the Virginia Center for Housing Research. “Our goal is to show how this innovative technology can help reduce production process costs and make housing more affordable to produce.”

project:Homes: Rethinking manufactured housing

With help from the Virginia Housing innovation grant, the non-profit group project:Homes will place six modified modular homes in Richmond’s Bermuda Estates Manufactured Home Community, a park recently acquired by the organization. “Our team is designing a new type of manufactured housing,” said Madeline Petrie, director of marketing and communications for project:Homes. “They will fit on the same footprint as a traditional mobile home but be designed at a much higher quality and will last much longer.” These hybrid homes will be HUD-certified, built to building code and can be placed in a mobile home park or on a private lot. The idea is to transform the traditional mobile home so that it is not a depreciating asset for the owner. Instead, these hybrid homes will be investments that, at the very least, hold their wealth and help maintain the strength of the community in which they are situated.

Petrie said they have also partnered with the Virginia Center for Housing Research (VCHR) at Virginia Tech to analyze the process and create a report comparing the building efficiencies of the new manufactured homes to that of stick-built homes.

Interested in applying for a grant?

The Innovation Demonstrations Program offers an open submission process. Inquiries can be made to: Chris.Thompson@Virginia-Housing.com.

About the author: *Amy McCluskey is a writer with Virginia Housing*

DESIGN ALTERNATIVES | MATERIAL PALETTE

22

-Slab-on-grade

-Exposed Wood Columns

-Window Colors

Phase 1: Pre-construction

DR. ANDREW MCCOY

DESIGN ALTERNATIVES | MODERN FARMHOUSE (3)

21

Effective circulation.

Effective use of space.

Optimized MEP.

Phase 1: Pre-construction

DR. KERESH AFSARI



Thursday, January 28, 2021 • 9 a.m – 11 a.m.

Virtual Webex event

Cost: \$30

Register at www.vml.org/2021-local-government-day

Join VML, VACo, VAPDC and the Virginia Rural Center for the 2021 Local Government Day at 9-11 am on Thursday, January 28. This is our day to advocate for local governments at the 2021 General Assembly Session.

Governor Ralph Northam has been invited to speak, and we're excited to hear how the Governor's legislative agenda will strengthen Virginia's communities. In addition, legislators have been invited to join the discussion. VML staff also will provide legislative reports on the major issues facing local government in the 2021 General Assembly Session.

Agenda items

Introductions
Governor Ralph Northam (Invited)
State Legislators Roundtable
Team Legislative Reports

Registered attendees will receive the 2021 VML Local Government Day Bulletin before the event.

We encourage all localities to participate in the legislative process – listen to reports about the issues and speak with your representatives about your locality's concerns.

A year of risks managed: VRSA reflects on 2020



LIKE MANY OF YOU, the Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA) started 2020 with big plans.

2020 marked the pool's 40th anniversary – one we planned to celebrate by focusing on our mission

of providing financial stability through risk management to Virginia's political subdivisions, so they can effectively serve their communities.

In 2020, more than ever, this mission remained at our core.

As we navigated the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread social unrest, VRSA staff responded by taking steps to ease our members' worries.

In the spring, VRSA responded to members' changed circumstances by refunding 15 percent of member annual 2019-2020 automobile liability and general liability contributions, totaling \$1.2M. To assist members with funding risk management equipment and training, we also increased the amount of Risk Management Grant funding available and made COVID-19 related personal protective equipment grant-eligible.

But we didn't stop there.

As reinsurers all over the country began adding COVID-19 exclusions, we decided that in the wake of unprecedented challenges VRSA would provide our members with the broadest possible protection and we would *not* add a COVID-19 exclusion to our primary liability policies.

Throughout the year, VRSA received hundreds of workers' compensation claims related to COVID-19, primarily from public safety personnel including firefighters and emergency medical technicians. Fortunately, many of these claims were only notifications of exposure, and only a very small percentage of those exposed eventually tested positive.

For those who tested positive, and whose claims were deemed compensable under the Virginia Workers' Compensation Act (VWCA), most required little to no treatment and recovered within weeks. However, for those few with severe symptoms, VRSA stood committed to covering the costs for their hospitalizations and medical care.

Law enforcement evaluations

COVID-19 was not the only emerging risk we responded to in 2020. VRSA's law enforcement members were called to increase transparency and reevaluate their policies and procedures. In response, VRSA Public Safety Specialist Gary Dillon increased his focus on promoting best practices, conducting policy reviews, and even developing a sample "Duty to Intervene" policy to assist agencies with recent legislation.

We increased training focused on Use of Force, Duty to Intervene, Arrestee Restraints, and the President's Executive Order on Standards for Certification on Safe Policing for Safe Communities.

School challenges

VRSA's school members also faced difficult choices this year. To help, VRSA brought together school members for several roundtable discussions on topics including strategies for minimizing exposure and the VOSH Emergency Temporary Standard.

VRSA staff also hosted roundtables which encouraged discussion among school members to navigate closings and openings under Centers for Disease Control guidelines. Staff worked with pupil transportation and maintenance staff, as well as administrators, to assist in their compliance with the VOSH Emergency Temporary Standard and other best practices.

Virtual training

We embraced virtual training and quickly pivoted from in-person to virtual engagements, hosting 103 online events with more than 3,200 in attendance. We developed a COVID-19 resources page on our website and hosted 15 virtual engagements and roundtables directly related to the pandemic.

Additionally, five VRSA staff members – Thomas Bullock, Fonda Craig, Eddie Shelton, Vinny Gallo, and Gary Dillon – earned certification as COVID-19 Infectious Disease Prevention Specialists from the National Association of Safety Professionals (NASP). This certification allows our consultants to provide COVID-19 risk assessments, classify worker exposure to infectious disease, develop risk reduction strategies, and build an Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan.

VRSA members are fortunate that two of our senior safety specialists, Eddie Shelton, and Vinny Gallo, who previously worked for Virginia Occupational Safety and Health (VOSH), prepared a "plug and train" template for members to meet the requirements of VOSH's Emergency Temporary Standard.

More than insurance

As new challenges continued to arise in 2020, VRSA was there – providing more than insurance! Through training, policies, grants and more, we were there to ease the worries of our members – so they could focus on serving their communities.

We were able to do this because of our financial strength.

It is this strength that enables VRSA to maintain stable rates you can count on, manage claims, effectively protect member employees and assets, and provide value-added services and resources designed to empower members to manage their risk.

If 2020 showed us anything, it is that there are significant challenges and uncertainties ahead. However, one thing remains certain – VRSA's unwavering commitment to our members.

We look forward to working with you through whatever lies ahead.

About the author: *Steve Craig is the managing director of the Virginia Risk Sharing Association.*

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS

PAID SICK LEAVE AND EXPANDED FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE UNDER THE FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA or Act) requires certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. These provisions will apply from April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

► PAID LEAVE ENTITLEMENTS

Generally, employers covered under the Act must provide employees:

Up to two weeks (80 hours, or a part-time employee's two-week equivalent) of paid sick leave based on the higher of their regular rate of pay, or the applicable state or Federal minimum wage, paid at:

- 100% for qualifying reasons #1-3 below, up to \$511 daily and \$5,110 total;
- ⅔ for qualifying reasons #4 and 6 below, up to \$200 daily and \$2,000 total; and
- Up to 12 weeks of paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave paid at ⅓ for qualifying reason #5 below for up to \$200 daily and \$12,000 total.

A part-time employee is eligible for leave for the number of hours that the employee is normally scheduled to work over that period.

► ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES

In general, employees of private sector employers with fewer than 500 employees, and certain public sector employers, are eligible for up to two weeks of fully or partially paid sick leave for COVID-19 related reasons (see below). *Employees who have been employed for at least 30 days prior to their leave request may be eligible for up to an additional 10 weeks of partially paid expanded family and medical leave for reason #5 below.*

► QUALIFYING REASONS FOR LEAVE RELATED TO COVID-19

An employee is entitled to take leave related to COVID-19 if the employee is unable to work, including unable to telework, because the employee:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;2. has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine related to COVID-19;3. is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and is seeking a medical diagnosis;4. is caring for an individual subject to an order described in (1) or self-quarantine as described in (2); | <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. is caring for his or her child whose school or place of care is closed (or child care provider is unavailable) due to COVID-19 related reasons; or6. is experiencing any other substantially-similar condition specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. |
|---|---|

► ENFORCEMENT

The U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division (WHD) has the authority to investigate and enforce compliance with the FFCRA. Employers may not discharge, discipline, or otherwise discriminate against any employee who lawfully takes paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave under the FFCRA, files a complaint, or institutes a proceeding under or related to this Act. Employers in violation of the provisions of the FFCRA will be subject to penalties and enforcement by WHD.



WAGE AND HOUR DIVISION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

For additional information
or to file a complaint:

1-866-487-9243

TTY: 1-877-889-5627

dol.gov/agencies/whd



WH1422 REV 03/20



How much paid leave can employees take?



In general, applies to you if you are an employee of either a private employer with fewer than 500 employees or a covered public sector employer



You are following a federal, state, or local quarantine or stay-at-home order or are quarantined by a health care provider

OR

You have COVID-19 symptoms and are seeking a diagnosis

TIME OFF
Up to two weeks or 80 hours of paid sick leave at higher of regular rate or minimum wage*



You must care for someone under a federal, state, or local quarantine or stay-at-home order or are quarantined by a health care provider

OR

You must care for your child whose school, child care provider, or place of care is unavailable due to COVID-19

TIME OFF
Up to two weeks or 80 hours of paid sick leave at higher of 2/3 regular rate or minimum wage*



You must care for your child whose school, child care provider, or place of care is unavailable due to COVID-19

AND

You've been employed at least 30 calendar days

TIME OFF
Up to 10 additional weeks of family leave paid at 2/3 regular rate*

*Paid leave is capped at specific maximum amounts per worker

Learn more at dol.gov/FFCRA



Virginia Building and Code Officials (VBCOA) year in review

LIKE MANY GROUPS IN 2020, the Virginia Building and Code Officials Association (VBCOA) had to alter most of their activities. The association's last in-person annual meeting was held in September 2019, followed by an in-person board retreat at the Craddock Terry Hotel in Lynchburg, in January 2020. The retreat consisted of orientation and training for new board members, review of their roles and responsibilities, and review and revision of the strategic plan. The Craddock Terry also provided a historic overview of the old shoe factory, a special treat for VBCOA Board members, as the association was first established in December 1929 and the first VBCOA President, George C Hough, was from Lynchburg.



The old Craddock-Terry Company shoe factory.

The March 2020 Mid-Year meeting was scheduled to be held in Staunton, one of the localities involved in the creation of the VBCOA and whose first paid fire chief, E.H. Dabney, was on the original VBCOA board. Appropriately, conference committee members had been working with the city to arrange tours of some of its older buildings.

But it was not meant to be.

VBCOA cancelled the in-person meeting in March and during the summer of 2020, moved the September annual meeting (with fingers crossed) to December, in Williamsburg. But this too was not meant to be as it became clear that there would be no in-person VBCOA meetings for quite some time.

So, adjusting to the new reality, VBCOA held a scaled down virtual annual meeting on December 15, 2020. Silver lining: Attendance was exceptional with almost 200 people logged on for the event!

Awards and Recognitions

Each year VBCOA recognizes regions for their achievements and contributions to the association, the profession, the industry, and to their communities. Typically awarded in March for the prior year, the 2019 awards were postponed in the hopes of having an in-person event later in the year. But with 2020 on its way out, and in-person events cancelled, VBCOA chose to use its annual meeting to bestow the 2019 awards.

Region of the Year Award: Region VIII

Region VIII adopted several new initiatives to educate members and the communities they serve with training courses providing continuing education and opportunities for fellowship to share ideas with neighboring localities. These proactive programs contribute to the improvement of the profession by targeting specific issues within the

community to improve residents' quality of life.

Region VIII is also committed to advancing the profession by promoting the next generation of inspectors. Region VIII cities such as Newport News conduct an annual Summer Training and Enrichment Program (STEP) for individuals who have expressed a desire to pursue a career in the field. Participants are hired by the city as interns and receive training to assist inspectors with all facets of the job. The hope is that these STEP participants, having had an introduction to the profession, will, one day, be able to join the ranks of the city's highly trained inspectors.

Also, during 2019 Region VIII partnered with the Women in Code Enforcement (WICED) to provide volunteers to build a house for Habitat of Humanity Hampton Roads and, during the holidays, donated to the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and Eastern Shore.

Merit Region of the Year Award: Region I

Region I received the Merit Region of the Year Award for

their involvement in the ICC Code Development Process, Building Safety Month, and High School Technical Training Program activities. President James Moss (who sits on many code development committees and participates in the code development hearings), as well as Winfred Collins and Rick Statzer participated in the code development process.

Region I also offered code trainings for contractors and citizens, including educational opportunities for members such as permit technician training, fire alarm systems, food truck safety, and manufactured housing set-up and inspection process. Additionally, Region I sponsored many activities during Building Safety Month including booths staffed at community events and municipal buildings including Galax, Carroll, Wytheville, Hillsville and Grayson and children's programs in Grayson County, in conjunction with the City of Galax Fire Department, that taught children fire safety techniques.



Region I Award Presentation with (l-r) James Moss, VBCOA President; Terry Atwell, Region I Chair; Willie Greene, VML President; Keith Barker, City of Galax City Manager.



- Hinson -

Jack A. Proctor Meritorious Service Award: William "Rick" Hinson, Jr.

This year, William "Rick" Hinson, Jr. was awarded the Jack A. Proctor Meritorious Service Award for design professionals in special recognition and appreciation of his more than 40 years of service as an engineer, manager, plans examiner, building official and lecturer/instructor to the Commonwealth of Virginia, the greater Mid-Atlantic region, local and regional municipal agencies, public and private building team

professionals and to his colleagues in the code compliance industry. Rick is currently the facilities department manager in charge of Code Consulting Services for ECS Mid- Atlantic, LLC. He is a registered professional engineer in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Additionally, he is certified as a building official and property maintenance official by both the Commonwealth of Virginia and the International Code Council.

In supporting Rick's nomination, Chesterfield County Building Official Ron Clements, stressed that "Mr. Hinson was instrumental in developing and delivering the Jack A. Proctor Virginia Building Code Academy (JPVBCA) course on the Virginia Existing Building Code." Furthermore, Clements noted that Hinson is a gifted instructor and passionate about building safety, and good, sensible building codes in Virginia.



**Public Service Award:
Frank Woeste**

Frank Woeste received the 2019 Public Service Award in recognition of his technical support to building officials, plans examiners and to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Mr. Woeste was specifically commended for his professional and academic accomplishments, notably his investigative work in analyzing deck structural failures

and his Virginia Tech course in wood design. Mr. Woeste is a professor emeritus and adjunct professor of sustainable biomaterials at Virginia Tech where, during his 26-year tenure, he has conducted wood engineering research and taught wood design courses. In conjunction with his colleagues at Virginia Tech and Washington State University, Mr. Woeste developed and presented continuing education programs for more than 30-years. He currently serves on the American Wood Council, Wood Standards Design Committee which is responsible for revisions to national design standards. On a routine basis, Mr. Woeste consults with the public, design professionals, contractors, and building code officials on various aspects of engineered wood construction and residential construction, including decks and balconies.



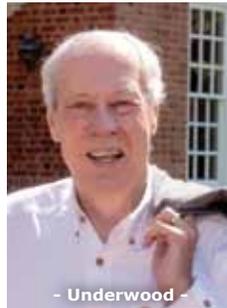
**ICC Emory Rodgers
Scholarship: Ron Clements**

Cindy Davis, Deputy Director of DHCD and a member of the ICC Board of Directors, announced that Chesterfield County Building Official Ron Clements, was the 2019 recipient of the ICC Emory R. Rodgers Fellowship.

The Fellowship is available annually to a building safety professional, who has embarked upon a demonstrated executive-level career path and wants to further develop their leadership skills through an eligible executive development program. The Fellowship affords up to \$20,000 to cover the full cost of an educational program.

In making the announcement, Ms. Davis stated she was very proud that VBCOA's Ron Clements is the recipient of this year's ICC fellowship award. "There is no better example of Emory's mentorship and Ron's demonstrated executive level leadership abilities. He has served on so many national code committees going back to the days of BOCA International including the development committee for the very first IRC, as the Chesterfield County deputy building official and now as the building official and serving the VBCOA for many years in many various positions including his current role as legislative liaison."

Honorary Membership



During remarks to members at the first official VBCOA annual meeting in 1930 held in Roanoke, Executive Secretary Morton Wallerstein stressed the importance of a membership committee to ensure that information about building permits, model building codes, and other matters pertaining to building inspections would be shared within the building codes professional community.

Today, the membership committee first proposed by Mr. Wallerstein, is chaired by Michelle Coward and has continued to grow the membership, with over 1,000 current members.

Occasionally, outstanding individuals are presented to the membership for consideration for Honorary Membership, which is bestowed for outstanding service in the furtherance of the purposes and objectives of the association. This year, the members voted Debby McMahon, Guy Tomberlin, and Lynn Underwood to join the Honorary Membership core.

Congrats to these outstanding individuals, who join the ranks of the less than 60 Honorary Members over the course of the VBCOA's ninety-one-year history!

**Looking back.
Looking forward.**

As we close 2020, one can only imagine how proud the professional trailblazers of 1929 would be of their organization today! Through changing times, VBCOA has remained steadfast in its mission to come together, share knowledge and provide a framework for members to mutually benefit themselves, their profession and their communities. This year, despite operational limitations due to the pandemic, President Moss has worked very closely with the Board of Directors to ensure a continued focus on VBCOA's strategic plan. Also, beginning in January 2021, President Moss will begin hosting the "Final Friday Chat" series. These "chats" will be held virtually and will cover items of interest to the membership.

The best place to stay connected to everything new is on the VBCOA website, www.vbcoa.org 

About the author: *Sandy Harrington serves as the VBCOA Executive Director and can be reached at sharrington@vml.org*



TOWN OF WYTHEVILLE

By Brandon Wolford

Parks and Recreation receives award for program promoting healthier lifestyle

DURING ITS 2020 VIRTUAL annual conference in October, the Virginia Recreation and Park Society awarded Wytheville Parks & Recreation the “Best Health & Wellness Initiative” award (population 25,001-50,000) for the town’s “Hike the Appalachian Trail” program.

The award-winning program to promote a healthier and active community, was created through a collaboration between the Town of Wytheville’s Parks & Recreation Department and Wytheville

Mayor Beth Taylor’s local HEAL (Healthy Eating, Active Living) initiative. It was conceived as a fun way to promote exercise in the community and to get residents outdoors to experience the Appalachian Trail, local state parks, and walking tracks throughout the heart of Wythe County.

The premise of the free

program was for participants to walk, hike, or run the total equivalent distance of the 2,190 miles of the Appalachian trail over an eight-month timeframe. The participants were provided with pedometers to track their mileage and a packet with details about local walking/hiking routes as well as information about parks and trails throughout Southwest Virginia. Each month participants were encouraged to submit their mileage by phone, email, or by stopping by the Wytheville Parks & Recreation Community Center. The participant’s name and mileage were placed on a hiker decal and attached to an oversized map of the Appalachian trail in the Community Center lobby. This created a little friendly competition and motivated the group.

A variety of local businesses helped by sponsoring the program and donating items such as gift certificates, shirts, coffee, smoothies, stickers, bottles, and towels to reward and encourage the participants throughout the program. “Hike the Appalachian Trail” inspired participants to enjoy the natural beauty of their own backyard by utilizing local trails and recreation areas throughout Southwest Virginia and even into Western North Carolina. Survey results indicated that the program helped participants lose weight, be inspired to walk to work instead of driving, and helped achieve lifetime fitness goals. In fact, the program was so successful that, even though it has concluded, many participants continued to log miles!

Participation in the program far exceeded expectations with the group completing a total of 77,700.77 miles and six participants individually

completing the goal of 2,190 miles. Those who completed the entire miles were presented with a proclamation and a grand prize by Mayor Taylor during a regular meeting of Wytheville Town Council.

The “Hike the Appalachian Trail” Program made a positive impact on the health and wellness of local citizens. Wytheville Parks & Recreation continues to offer programs, events, and challenges throughout the year to ensure area residents have encouragement, resources, and opportunities to continue their journey to a healthier and more active lifestyle.

About the author: *Brandon Wolford is the Fitness Supervisor for the Town of Wytheville Parks & Recreation.*



Wytheville Mayor Beth Taylor and Brandon Wolford from Wytheville Parks & Recreation, present Aaron Lawson with a proclamation and prize for completing the “Hike the Appalachian Trail” program.



Guided walks through Downtown Wytheville and the historic district were conducted periodically during the program for group activities.



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**You've got vision.
We've got resources.
Let's solve this.**

Virginia Housing offers a variety of grant and loan programs to help local governments, nonprofits and developers revitalize neighborhoods and solve workforce housing needs.

To learn more about partnering with us, contact us at Resources@VirginiaHousing.com.

