

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

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decisions with the
power of technology

Connecting with VML's new President Jon Stehle!





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ABOUT THE COVER

Who is that man on the cover? Is it a City of Fairfax Council Member? Is it a Director for Tyler Technologies? Is that a coach? A husband? A father? A professor? Is he an award-winning champion of local government partnerships? A Northern Virginia commuter extraordinaire? Well, yes, he's all those things (and more). Meet VML's new President, Jon Stehle.

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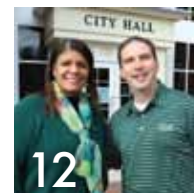
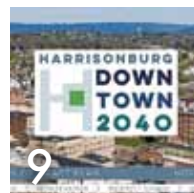


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Let's tame the variants (both viral and legislative)

OMICRON – NOT A WORD that I want to hear! I think we all would like to attend parties, travel, and hug each other after all this world has been through but, here we are again with a new variant that is still mostly an unknown. The most important thing to do is to voluntarily get your booster shot. I went to the local pharmacy to get mine and during the 30 minutes that I was there, I was amazed that myself and an elderly lady were the only persons to get the booster! Not going to lie, this one hurt. But hopefully it is the protection that I will need to work with another set of new variants that are still mostly unknowns – the new Governor and the new members of the General Assembly in the new year!

The Republicans are now in charge in the House of Representatives, the Governor's office, and other statewide offices. Only time will tell what the new approaches and focus they will be bringing to issues means for localities, but here are some ideas to share with your legislators over the holiday break:

First, according to www.youngkinfor-governor.com, the Governor Elect has said that he will eliminate the Virginia Grocery Tax. Doing so would significantly affect local government revenues. Virginia's grocery tax is 2.5 percent, with one percent of the tax revenue going back to local governments. Governor Elect Youngkin, speaking to ABC News 13, said, "There's plenty of money in the system, and we'll make sure that localities aren't going to come up short."

VML strongly urges the new Governor to ensure that localities are kept financially sound. Offsetting revenue losses (such as those proposed) with one-time monies won't fly. Instead, there must be a recurring stream of money equivalent to the losses incurred by the elimination of the grocery tax so basic, essential government services, like K-12 education and public safety, can continue to be funded.

Note: *Northam has just proposed a cut of the grocery tax – but VML still urges localities to push for consistent long-term funding to make up for the loss.*

The next two issues are difficult because they touch on benefits to workers who are vital to communities. But I am going to be honest about the costs associated with these proposals so it's clear what they will mean to Virginia's localities.

Education. Outgoing Governor Ralph Northam has announced a 10 percent teacher raise over the next two years. "Paying teachers is the right thing to do, and a wise investment," he said as reported WTOP News

Teachers are very important but offering money for only

those positions acknowledged by the state's Standards of Quality (SOQ) when there are 1) many 100 percent locally funded positions because the state's standards are woefully low; and 2) many other school division employee groups not acknowledged by the state, shifts a real financial burden onto the locality.

How do you propose a school budget offering a raise for only some employees of the school system and not for others working alongside them? Please remind your legislators that this proposal incurs a true cost to localities and that they should address these costs if they wish to move forward.

Law Enforcement. Northam has indicated that his new two-year budget will propose a 7.7 percent pay increase for new state troopers, a 25 percent increase to starting salaries for new correction officers, and a 20 percent pay increase for new deputy sheriffs and regional jail officials. "Law enforcement officers carry a heavy burden as they work to protect Virginians, and this raise is the right thing to do," the Governor stated according to WWBT News.

While laudable, raises for these segments of law enforcement IGNORE the state's statutory commitment to local police departments through the HB 599 program. Close to 70 percent of Virginians are served by local police departments, NOT law enforcement sheriffs' departments.

Bottom line: The state needs to step up and honor its funding commitment to local police departments or remove the moratorium on city annexation, which was the deal struck with localities in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

For more information on this issue, please refer to the VML 2022 Legislative Program and its discussion on HB599 printed in this issue of *VTC* and available online at www.vml.org/2022-general-assembly.

So, in summary, VML understands and supports law enforcement and teacher salary increases, but believes it is vital for state policy makers to acknowledge and address the burden these measures place on local governments. State K-12 and public safety staffing standards and funding levels simply do not address the reality of staffing needs in communities!

On December 16, Governor Northam proposed a two-year biennial budget and changes to the final year of the current two-year budget. As always VML, was pleased to provide information on the proposal in *eNews* – so don't miss out! Make sure to sign up and check out previous issues (like the one from December 16) at www.vml.org/publications/enews.

Thank you for all you do for local government. Happy New Year everyone!





- Jan. 6, 2022** **Newly Elected Officials Conference** - Charlottesville, VA
- Jan. 7, 2022** **VML/VACO/APCo Steering Committee Member Meeting** - A virtual event.
- Jan. 27-28, 2022** **VBCOA Board Orientation and Meeting** - Charlottesville, VA
- Feb. 3, 2022** **VML/VACo/VAPDC Local Government Day** - Richmond, VA
- Feb. 16-18, 2022** **VLGMA Winter Conference** - Staunton, VA
- Feb. 17, 2022** **MEPAV Board Meeting** - Charlottesville, VA



VML Welcomes Moon Reynolds to the Executive Board

City of Roanoke Council Member **Stephanie Moon Reynolds** has been appointed to fill a vacant At-Large Member position on the Executive Board. Moon Reynolds's term is effective immediately; she will be up for re-election at the Annual Business Meeting in October of 2022. Prior to her appointment, Moon Reynolds was an active member of VML, including serving several years as a member of the Human Development & Education Policy Committee.

Moon Reynolds was elected to the Roanoke City Council in 2020 after serving in the city clerk's office for 42 years of which 13 of those years were spent serving as Head Clerk. She was the first African American to hold that position for the city.

Moon Reynolds serves on several government and non-profit boards, such as the Kiwanis Club of Roanoke, The Salvation Army, Project Discovery of Virginia, Roanoke Alleghany Regional Commission, Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority Council Liaison, Family Services of Roanoke, and the Roanoke City Council Legislative Committee.

Moon Reynolds holds an AAS degree in international law and legal studies from Virginia Western Community College.

Her civic engagement efforts have resulted in recognitions by the Roanoke Branch NAACP, the Roanoke Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and Total Action for Progress and the Roanoke Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Moon Reynolds is married to Earl Reynolds, Jr., who currently serves as the Deputy City Manager for the City of Danville. They are both active members of Shiloh Baptist Church in Salem.

Radford uses inclusive process to select Harshberger as interim city council member

At the beginning of November, the Radford City Council began a process to fill the vacancy left by Mr. Onassis Burress' resignation. Council met several times over the course of the month, first developing a process for how to select the interim member and then developing a key list of qualities that the individual would possess. These qualities included experience with city operations, a wealth of knowledge pertaining to Radford and the work of council, engagement in the community, shared vision for the direction of Radford, a good,

professional representative of the community, a desire to serve, and a passion and love for Radford. Throughout the process, council engaged with citizens seeking nominations and letters of interest and support before deliberating and selecting the interim member.

According to a city press release, "the entire process, especially council's interactions with each of the prospective nominees, strengthened the current council's conviction that Radford has a very strong future."

Recently, Radford City Council was pleased to announce that **Dr. Richard Harshberger** had been selected to fill the interim role of council member and began his duties effective immediately.



- Harshberger -

Dr. Harshberger needs no introduction to the Radford community, as he has served on city council previously for sixteen years, as a council member and vice-mayor. Dr. Harshberger has also served in various leadership roles throughout Radford, including service to over ten boards, commissions, or committees. Dr. Harshberger brings a wealth of knowledge, experience, professionalism, engagement, and passion for Radford.

Albemarle County personnel updates: Burton named director of information technology, Coltrane is the new director of human resources

VTC is catching up with some news from earlier this year from Albemarle County.

In August, the Albemarle County Board



- Burton -

of Supervisors announced the promotion of **Roderick Burton** to director of information technology. Burton has worked for Albemarle County for 21 years, most recently as the information technology chief of knowledge management and communications.

In a press release, Assistant County Executive Trevor Henry noted that "In just three years in the IT department, Rod has led a team to accomplish several major technology projects, including the launch of the new website and our employee intranet, as well as developing mobile inspection capability, launching our audio/visual program, and supporting a teleworking workforce during the pandemic. His project management skills and collaborative leadership acumen

PEOPLE

PEOPLE

position the department to continue its long history of excellence in government information technology.”

Mr. Burton has worked in IT as well as Community Development over his tenure with Albemarle County. He holds a Bachelor of Science in geography/geographic information systems from James Madison University and a certificate of Project Management, also from JMU.

Also in August, the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors named **Ti-Kimena-**



Mia Coltrane as the new director of human resources.

In a press release, County Executive Jeff Richardson observed that “Mia brings a range of experiences across the Human Resources discipline in different levels of government and in academic settings. Her breadth of Human Resources background and knowledge, along with her demonstrated experience in organizational development impressed our team. Her commitment to top level HR service delivery was evident throughout the process, and I believe will serve us well over the next year as we establish a dedicated Local Government Human Resources Department.”

Coltrane has over 17 years of experience as a human resource professional, most recently as the organizational learning and development administrator for the City of Roanoke. Coltrane has a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from the University of North Texas, a Bachelor of Science in human services & religious studies from Indiana Wesleyan University, and a Master of Public Administration from University of Maryland. She also holds a Senior Certified Professional certification from the International Public Management Association.

Marc Woolley appointed interim city manager for Charlottesville

On December 1st, **Marc Woolley** began as the interim city manager in the City of Charlottesville.



- Woolley -

Woolley served most recently as business administrator in the City of Harrisburg, PA where he oversaw the departments of Finance and Procurement, Information Technology, Human

Resources, Communications, Risk Management, and Tax Collection. Prior to that, he served as deputy general counsel, chief compliance officer and corporate secretary for the Hershey Trust Company in Hershey, PA. Before that, he served in various public service positions including stints for the Delaware River Port Authority in Camden, NJ, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, and the Chester Upland School District’s Empowerment Board in Delaware County, PA for which he served as chairman.

In a press release, Charlottesville City

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.

Councilor Lloyd Snook said, “Marc Woolley has a long record of helping governments in times of transition. His management style is very collaborative, and we on council believe that he will lead us well through a difficult time.”

Woolley noted that “Charlottesville is an amazing city full of history and I am fortunate to be joining and leading the city

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team. There are many projects that need to be completed and I am looking forward to the challenges. I want to thank the members of the Charlottesville City Council for their confidence in providing me this opportunity to serve the residents of Charlottesville.”

Mr. Woolley holds a B.A. in psychology from Georgetown University and a J.D. from Boston College Law School.

City Council will launch a public search process for hiring the permanent City Manager in April 2022. In the interim period, Mr. Woolley’s senior leadership team will include

Deputy City Managers Ashley Marshall and Sam Sanders.

Alexandria hires Parajon as next city manager

The Alexandria City Council has appointed **James F. Parajon** to succeed outgoing manager Mark B. Jinks, who will retire this January.

Parajon boasts more than a decade in city service with Arlington, TX, and almost three decades of experience as a professional planner. Since 2006, he has served in a wide



- Parajon -

range of roles including oversight for the Dallas-area city’s asset management, economic development, real estate services, civil engineering, federal grant programs and housing authority. Before his time in Texas, Parajon worked for the North Carolina cities of Raleigh and Cary.

In a press release, Alexandria Mayor Justin Wilson said of Parajon’s appointment, “With input through surveys, town halls and review panels, the city council sought to find a candidate who would reflect our values, and we found that in Jim Parajon.”

Among his first tasks will be to work with city council members in shaping Alexandria’s Fiscal Year 2023 budget over the coming weeks.

Parajon, a native of Poughkeepsie, NY, earned his Master’s degree in regional planning at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.




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

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

2022 All-America City Award

By the National Civic League & Campaign for Grade-Level Reading



Theme:
Housing as a Platform for
Promoting Early School
Success & Equitable
Learning Recovery

Be the Next All-America City from Virginia!

Alexandria (1963, 1984, 1985)	Martinsville (1969)	Roanoke County (1989)
Blacksburg (1982)	Norfolk (1959, 2013, 2016)	Roanoke Valley (1979)
Caroline County (2009)	Petersburg (1953)	Tri-Cities (Bristol, Johnson City, Kingsport) (1999)
Charlottesville (1979)	Portsmouth (1976)	Winchester (2005)
Danville (1977, 2020)	Radford (1960)	Winchester-Frederick Co. (1991)
Falls Church (1961)	Richmond (1950, 1966)	
Hampton (1972, 2002, 2014)	Roanoke City (1952, 1982, 1988, 1996, 2012, 2017)	
Lynchburg (1986)		



Now accepting applications, due March 1st
nationalcivicleague.org/america-city-award/

Hillsboro's ReThink9 Project wins regional industry award, advances to national competition



Hillsboro Mayor Vance and former Vice Mayor Marasco with Volkert Vice President Bobby Hester.

ON DECEMBER 8TH, VOLKERT – the engineering firm responsible for much of the work on the Town of Hillsboro's recently completed ReThink9 project – received a regional ACEC/MW Engineering Excellence Award (EEA) for the infrastructure project. Hillsboro Mayor Vance and former Vice Mayor Marasco were on hand to share the celebration. The ReThink9 project will now advance to the competition for the national EEA award.

The ACEC/MW Engineering Excellence Awards competition recognizes engineering firms for projects that demonstrate a high degree of achievement, value, and ingenuity and provides Metropolitan Washington area firms the opportunity to obtain regional – and possibly national – recognition.

MITRE's Nudge Lab convenes multi-year tree planting effort



LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE ON the front line of efforts to address rising temperatures and the public health burdens they impose. For example, the Town of Purcellville recently garnered a 2021 Innovation Award for its Nutrient Bank project that established 111,000 trees.

A critical method to build climate resiliency is to plant trees, as their shade creates cooling conditions among other benefits. As such, many local governments have invested millions of dollars to plant and

maintain Urban Tree Canopies (UTC). Urban forest management is inevitably linked to public participation, as the involves multiple stakeholders (e.g., private residences, small businesses, public lands, educational institutions, and religious institutions).

VML Community Business Member MITRE's Nudge Lab conducted targeted outreach to private and public organizations to strategically convene multi-year tree planting efforts in D.C.'s Ward 8, leveraging MITRE's expertise in building public-private partnerships.

The team gained more than 650 commitments to have free trees planted on properties in a matter of 12 months. In addition, MITRE developed and implemented a Tree Planting Challenge in Ward 8 and supported two mural art projects (Anacostia High School and Thurgood Marshall Academy) to draw attention to the D.C. UTC, engage in meaningful dialogue with residents, and encourage human-environment connections.

The group looks to expand the project to the surrounding region as opportunities become available.

For more information, visit www.mitre.org/research/mission-focused-research/decision-science/nudge-lab.



City of Fairfax residents celebrate opening of eruv

IN MAY OF THIS YEAR, the Fairfax City Council unanimously approved a license agreement between the city and the Fairfax Eruv Committee for the placement of eruv facilities on certain existing joint use utility poles within the city. That agreement was vital to the committee being able to complete the eruv and support the Sabbath observance of many Jewish residents of Fairfax City and Fairfax Country.

An eruv is a symbolic boundary created with a string or fishing wire typically hung from a series of utility poles or other structures. The eruv creates a safe space for Orthodox Jews to carry certain items they otherwise would be forbidden to carry while outside the home on the Sabbath.



The Fairfax Eruv was declared kosher in October 2021 and continues to be run by volunteers so that residents are now able to celebrate the Jewish sabbath with a fully functioning eruv. In addition to enhancing the lives of those who personally observe Shabbat or who have family members and visitors who do so, the eruv has the potential to deepen community bonds by facilitating the interactions that neighbors have with each other on Shabbat.

On December 19th, the Fairfax Eruv Committee celebrated with a grand opening ceremony at Congregation Olam Tikvah, which is one of the eruv partner synagogues that many residents attend.

More information is available at www.fairfaxeruv.org.

Virginia Passenger Rail Authority begins surveying in Ashland

IN MARCH OF 2021, the Commonwealth of Virginia and CSX Transportation signed a deal to transfer 223 miles of track and 386 miles of right-of-way to the Commonwealth to improve and expand passenger rail service in Virginia. The surveys will aid in the development of a plan to study Virginia's 179 miles of Interstate 95 corridor between the Woodrow Wilson Bridge in Alexandria, Virginia and the North Carolina border.

As part of that effort, the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) recently notified the Town of Ashland that it will begin surveying select Town-owned properties, businesses, and private residences to delineate boundaries between CSX Transportation right-of-way and right-of-way recently purchased by VPRA.

In a presentation to Ashland's Town Council in June about the acquisition, Mr. Clark Mercer, Governor Northam's Chief of Staff, noted that the deal includes an agreement from all parties to maintain the existing two-track rail system within the Town of Ashland. Any expansions to a three-track system would occur outside of Ashland's residential and downtown areas to the north and south of town.

Ashland residents were advised that if surveying is required on their property as part of the study, VPRA will notify them in writing or in person. Any individuals entering property for the purposes of the study will carry identification and must present it upon request.



Harrisonburg gets creative to engage residents for “Downtown 2040” initiative

RECENTLY, THE CITY OF HARRISONBURG and Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) published a draft of their “Downtown 2040,” a community-driven plan for the downtown. As part of the plan development process, Harrisonburg residents were given two ways to share their thoughts, ideas, hopes, and concerns about the future of downtown.

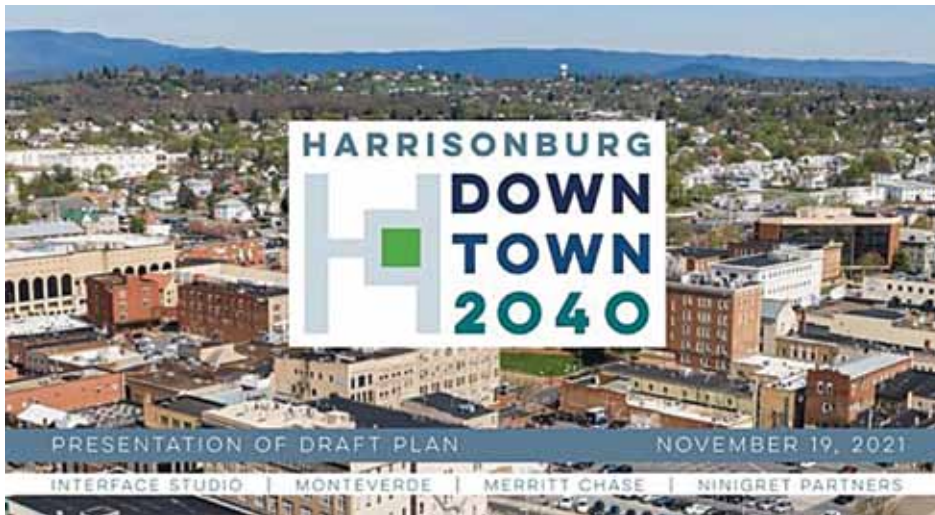
Residents were invited to use an online, interactive map to indicate special places and place-specific ideas or issues/concerns in

and around downtown. In the end, residents contributed over 450 ideas and concerns regarding future change, as well as love notes to Harrisonburg’s past and present.

Additionally, residents who supported a downtown restaurant or brewery in the spring of 2021 might have received a Downtown 2040 “Take-Out Menu” mini survey. These generated more than 170 “orders” for downtown, which provided valuable insight into their priorities for growth, change, and preservation.

Finally, in July 2021, Downtown 2040 hosted a series of pop-ups, such as happy hours and coffee hours, across downtown – from South Downtown to North Downtown and Court Square and everywhere in between! The planning team presented some strategies for the future, and more than 150 people stopped by to catch up on the planning process and weigh in on the ideas. For those that missed the pop-ups, an online survey was available to answer the same questions posed at the events.

The draft of the plan is now available at www.harrisonburg-va.gov/downtown-2040.



Portsmouth Library System is offering free COVID-19 test kits

ON DECEMBER 7TH, the Portsmouth Public Library system, in partnership with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), became a distribution site for free COVID-19 at-home test kits. Residents can schedule an appointment on specific days to pick up their test kits curbside at designated branches. There is a limit of two tests per household.

To take the test at home, participants use a smartphone to download the testing app, called Navica. Each person taking the test must create an account which requires primary contact information. At eMed.com the participant can obtain a proctor who walks them through the testing process showing their photo-ID. There is no cost for the test or the eMed guide. Public Wi-Fi is available from the participant’s vehicle while in the library parking lot, if necessary. Results are typically available within 15 minutes.

Participants are advised to keep in mind that these Rapid COVID-19 Antigen tests may not satisfy any travel testing requirements. The at-home test kits are made possible through the

Supporting Testing Access through Community Collaboration (STACC) – a new VDH program launched in October. Currently, approximately 30 library systems across the Commonwealth are participating in the free eMed program.



Connecting with Jon Stehle

Meet VML's new President Jon Stehle, Council Member for the City of Fairfax

By Rob Bullington

A LONG TIME AGO (OK, maybe not that long ago), in a place far away (assuming you consider Pennsylvania far away), young Jon Stehle sat in an assembly in his elementary school. It was an important day for Jon because his grandfather was talking to his schoolmates about his work as a member of the Butler City Council. Jon had always felt that the work his grandfather did as a council member was important to their small city just a half hour north of Pittsburgh. Now everyone could hear about it and understand how their city worked.

All went well until it was time for Q&A and one of Jon's friends decided to ask a funny question to try and fluster their guest. "What do you do if a firefighter is too big to fit down the hole to go down the pole?" asked the prankster.

Far from losing his cool, Jon's grandfather didn't skip a beat. "We make the hole bigger and put him on a workout program. Next question!"

If he didn't know it before, Jon Stehle knew in that moment that someday he would follow in his grandfather's footsteps and run for office.

I recently had the pleasure of spending a day in conversations with, and about, VML's new President Jon Stehle who, true to his younger self's vision, is now serving his third term as an elected official on the City Council of Fairfax.

It should be noted that talking to Jon Stehle is akin to holding a conversation with a tea kettle on the cusp of boiling over. Ideas percolate as though he can't keep them contained. Far from being the whimsy of a merely active mind, however, Jon's career – both professional and private – proves that he's adept at putting those ideas to work by finding common cause with others. Indeed, it's



City of Butler Council Member Joseph Stehle and grandson Jon.

the connections he has made that have resulted in some fantastic achievements both for himself and for the City of Fairfax and, looking forward, to the members of the Virginia Municipal League as well.

Family foremost

Arguably, the most important connection Jon has ever made occurred in the 6th grade when he met his future wife, Stephanie. They dated in high school, went to prom together and got married in 2005. It was also a crucial connection for their two children, Zoe who is now a 7th grader and Cooper who is in the 4th grade. Jon is quick to assert that family is the most important thing in his life and he's



Jon, Cooper, Stephanie, and Zoe Stehle.

unabashedly and endearingly proud of them. For example, Stephanie recently defended her doctoral dissertation in Education. “She’s Dr. Stehle now!” he exults.

Despite their busy professional lives, both Jon and Stephanie are engaged parents. It’s an understatement to say that both are active in sports. In fact, they met while playing on the same soccer team (coached by Jon’s mom and Steph’s dad). Later, in high school, Jon parlayed his love of sports and willingness to connect with people into an award from the local sports radio station. “I was excited when I won the KDKA Extra Effort Award,” remembers Jon, “but I knew I needed some guidance on how to handle the speech - so I picked up the phone and called a previous winner to see what it was like.”

The Stehle’s are not only sports fans (Penguins and Steelers, of course) but coaches as well. Jon coaches a hockey team (a lifelong passion), and Stephanie coaches a high school softball team. Both coach lacrosse teams. Does this take a lot of time and effort? Of course, but totally worth it in Jon’s estimation. In fact, while we were talking on the phone, Jon seemed to be struggling under some great burden and I could hear heavy items being moved and an open car door alert pinging. “Sorry,” Jon explained, “I’m loading up the kids’ hockey stuff for Steph to take them to practice this evening.”

A longtime advocate for public transportation, Jon and Stephanie were a one car family for many years in a region known for its complicated commutes. “Our townhome is close to a CUE Bus stop,” Jon

Jon Stehle

explains, “I took the metro to DC for 8 years.” He confesses, however, that his car gets used more often these days even if it does present occasional challenges. “Coop plays the cello and Zoe plays the double bass. We have a Honda Fit,” he noted. “Ever try loading a double bass into a Honda Fit? It isn’t easy!”

Welcome to Fairfax

It’s 270 miles from Butler, PA to Fairfax, VA. But you can go just as far from Butler and reach lots of other places. So how did Jon and Stephanie wind up in the City of Fairfax? Unsurprisingly, it came through a connection Jon made for himself. While finishing his Master of Public International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh, he applied for an internship with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) which was part of a fellowship based out of the University of Portland. He did not hear back, and a friend told him that all the spots were filled.

So, Jon decided to make a connection.

He called the program’s director George Beard. After that conversation, he was notified that he had been awarded an internship with CNCS in Washington, D.C. for the summer. Stephanie, who had been teaching in the Butler public school system while completing

a Master of Education interviewed with Fairfax Public Schools and walked out with an offer to teach physics. Jon followed suit with a job at CNCS.

So, the young couple from Butler, PA needed a place to live in Washington D.C. or Northern Virginia. With public transportation into D.C. readily available, the logical place was somewhere near Stephanie’s new school. For six months they rented an apartment in Fairfax County without any real awareness of the difference between being in the city or the county (though Jon is quick to assert he’s very aware of the difference now). After those six months were up, and they both still loved their new jobs, they asked a realtor to show them some places they could afford.

Jon remembers being driven around to look at townhomes and the realtor kept saying “Now we’re in the city. Now we’re in the county. Now we’re in the city.”

Finally, they settled on a townhome inside the city limits. That was 2007.

“A year later, our ‘investment’ was worth half what we’d paid for it,” Jon observes wryly. “We weren’t going anywhere!”

But he and Stephanie feel it all happened for a reason. “We had to put roots down here,” he explains, “and we’re so glad we did!”



Jon with Dawn Hicks, the Director of Community Relations with George Mason University.



Photo by Stephanie Stehle.

"I think that Jon is a very effective connector of people; he is a good communicator and tries to ensure that everyone is brought into the decision-making process. He is always focused on the positive outcomes. Not only is Jon able to think conceptually and strategically, but he's a good tactician in terms of working actions through his local council and working with citizens. He is a great asset to our council and we are pleased he is serving as VML's President this year."

- City of Fairfax Mayor
David Meyer

Work – Study - Work. Repeat.

Jon worked as a Budget and Program Analyst at CNCS (which runs the AmeriCorps program among other things) for more than a year before moving to a similar position with the Government Accountability Office (GAO). There he distinguished himself by running the High-Risk List of over 30 federal government areas that needed transformation. The experience made him realize that he enjoyed working on solving big problems. One of those was auditing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) as part of a GAO team that looked at how 16 states were using the funds. Another big task was working on the Government Performance Results Modernization Act.

It's characteristic of Jon that when he talks of his time with GAO, he gets equally enthusiastic about the experience of working on performance and financial auditing of large government programs as he does the experience of auditing the development of the V-22 Osprey (Yes, he got to fly on one. Yes, it was "very cool.").

During his time at GAO, Jon earned a second Masters degree from the Naval War College in National Security and Strategic Studies. To achieve this, he worked during the day and took night classes with service personnel just back from tours of duty and staff working in various aspects of the Federal government.

Soon after he finished the rigorous schedule of working during the day and studying at night, with six years into a challenging job at GAO, two young children at home, and his wife working as a full-time educator, Jon's City of Fairfax councilmember announced that he did not plan to seek re-election to, in the retiring councilmember's words, "create space for new people with energy."

Jon, who had never given up on his intention to run for office and was at the time serving as President of his neighborhood's civic organization, thought "Well, I'm new and I've got energy so why not?"

Public office

Jon and Stephanie spent a weekend discussing whether Jon should run for city council. With his wife's support, Jon launched a campaign in February for a May election without having a committee or any fundraising.

He lost.

Looking back, Jon believes it was not a mistake to run in that election. However, on election night he did make a big mistake that he would counsel others in a similar situation to avoid. At the press conference, he stood up and announced that he would be back in two years. Unfortunately, Jon made that announcement without first running the idea past his wife. He sat down and she promptly kicked him!

By the time the 2016 council elections arrived, Jon had been appointed to the City of Fairfax Parks & Recreation Advisory Board and he was working as a Strategic Performance Management Lead for the MITRE Corporation (a Federally Funded Research and Development Center that is currently a VML Community Business Member). With plenty of lead time, he was able to assemble a proper campaign for council. This time he won.

He is now serving his third term on the City of Fairfax Council and works as a Director for Tyler Technologies in Washington, D.C.

Creating Connections: Community, Government & Organizations

A defining characteristic of Jon's time on council, if not his entire professional life, is his drive to connect organizations, people, and his local government to make the best possible use of the resources available to all. A great example of this is Jon's work with Dawn Hicks, the Director of Community Relations with George Mason University. The two met at a "Rock the Block" event in Fairfax where they immediately connected while discussing their shared enthusiasm for a partnership between GMU's lacrosse team and Fairfax City Schools.

Thanks in part to Jon's diligence, Fairfax Schools Superintendent Dr. Phyllis Pajardo was brought into the mix and four years later the completely voluntary program has GMU teams including lacrosse, baseball, wrestling, and track & field each partnered with kids at a dedicated school. The student athletes serve as mentors and provide support for the younger students based on the goals and objectives of the school.

Dawn gives a lot of credit to Jon for the program's success: "He is phenomenal. He is such a cheerleader. For anyone that has the honor and opportunity to work with Jon they are the better for it. Literally from the day we met...he has been a tremendous supporter. I call him my superhero, my Energizer Bunny! I love his heart and passion for people and for his community."

Jon Stehle

Thanks to this and other work he has done to connect GMU and the City of Fairfax, Jon was honored to receive the university's 2019 Jack Wood Award in the Government category. The award recognizes individuals who demonstrate leadership in fostering mutually beneficial relationships between the university and the community. Jon remembers that at the ceremony, GMU President Dr. Ángel Cabrera said to him "Don't stop!"

He has taken this advice to heart.

Jon's zeal for connections also extends to the way local government leaders are connected across time as each group does its part to move a vision for their community forward during the tenure allotted them. A perfect example is the downtown community center in Old Town Fairfax – one of five small area plans being pursued by the current council. This downtown space was made possible, and was first envisioned, by prior councilmembers when they created the Sherwood Center downtown and allocated space for future community development. Jon loves that they are fulfilling the vision of the prior council. It's even more exciting that this new community center will sit next to new housing targeted to GMU students further connecting the city and the University.

For his part, Jon is proud to be part of a city government that orchestrated the relocation of a non-profit called NOVA Labs to the city. The organization's maker spaces teach hands-on skills such as wood working, 3D printing, blacksmithing, and carbon fiber (to name just a few). The city worked with the group to move into a space across from the middle school so the students could benefit from its programs. This effort was made possible thanks in part to Delegate David Bulova's legislation from several years ago that highlighted the need to have paths available for those seeking skills apart from a college degree.

Jon can barely contain his enthusiasm for the project. "Kids need to see what they can do with their hands that isn't just sitting in front of a computer," he observes. "This is a generational impacting project that is just beginning. I can't wait to see what it does for the city!"

Jon realizes he will most likely not be on council by the time the fruits of the project begin to be felt in the community, but just as he listened to older councilmembers talk about plans for Sherwood Center, he looks forward to watching a future council realize the potential of this project as the kids who learn and prosper there enter the community as skilled adults.

What does the year hold for VML President Jon Stehle?

"There's so much to do in just one year," says Jon of his term. "Of course, my fellow board members and I will work to move the Strategic Plan forward, and I plan to be a big part of that effort." However, as you might have guessed by now, Jon hopes to bring some of his experience to the table as well. "I will make it my mission as your President to help VML and its members find new ways to connect, to realize the true potential of each connection, and to share those successes with others."

And here Jon pauses for a couple beats to acknowledge the new reality: "Connections have become more important than ever these past couple of years, but it's become more difficult to keep them going. I'm excited though to help the league find new and creative ways to forge and maintain connections."

It should be an exciting year connecting with President Jon Stehle!

Building a connected local government: A conversation with City of Fairfax Councilmember Jon Stehle and City Manager Rob Stalzer

DURING OUR INITIAL CONVERSATION, Jon asked that we loop in Fairfax City Manager Rob Stalzer who, although a relatively recent addition to the city's staff, has decades of experience making local governments work. In our earlier discussion, I had asked Jon about some of the things he considered top achievements for the city during his time on council and he was quick to cite the city's effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, I thought it was good to lead with that theme for our talk with City Manager Stalzer.

VTC: *Jon told me that he was proud of the way in which your city has handled the pandemic. Can you tell me more about what worked for you?*

Stalzer: I'd say that whatever success we've had has been due to being transparent with the data which created a culture of trust. We didn't think of this as something that would go away. We took an open-ended long view. At the very start we designated a safety officer – a retired fire chief – who has done a fantastic job. This trust led to a willingness to share information across the government and in the community.

Of course, it helped a great deal to have tremendous support from the mayor and council. It's hard for elected officials to not be in the middle of the fray, but the city's mayor and council have stayed out of the fray and let the organization find its way.

Stehle: Early on, we decided that there would be regular health

updates and data from the fire chief at council meetings. This established a pattern and rhythm that was reassuring. If a council member had a question, they knew that when and where they could get the answer.

Stalzer: From the first day, we handled the pandemic like it was a flood or hurricane or similar emergency. We have a fantastic Emergency Manager, Walter English, who reports to our Fire Chief John O'Neal. As the Director of Emergency Management, I made sure everyone understood their roles and responsibilities. We shared information across the two lanes – between the governing body and the staff – and that culture of openness worked.

VTC: *Your region depends heavily upon public transportation. How have you kept that running during the pandemic?*

Stalzer: I think we did a good job maintaining the health of our employees and making sure they knew that their health was among our priorities. We involved them in conversations from the start. Like a lot of other localities, we went fare-free for our bus system ("CUE Bus"), implemented rear door entry only, and installed safety shields around drivers (which, admittedly, should have been there pre-Covid).

VTC: *Rob, I know you've worked for local governments for many years involving stints with Roanoke County, the Town of Herndon, Fairfax County and now the City of Fairfax.*

What makes local governments work?

Stalzer: It's critical that staff like me develop relationships, especially with elected officials, and make the black boxes accessible to everybody. This means we must all be completely open and transparent, even when we screw up!

My predecessor at the City of Fairfax, Bob Sisson, was here 27 years and left things in great shape. So, I came into a good situation, but I had to develop my own relationship with each member of council and the mayor. My way of doing this is letting them see behind the curtain. I am comfortable being vulnerable in front of elected officials...it builds trust so we can move farther faster.

I'm in the later stages of my career and this is the first time I've felt I've got a clock ticking. I wake up every morning as enthusiastic as when I started. A sense of urgency can be a good thing because we've got a lot to do!

Jon: I know that I am not going to be on council forever. Rob helps me remember that sense of urgency. When you find someone who is willing to be vulnerable and you yourself are willing to be so, learning can happen.

VTC: What is something all local governments should aspire to?

Stalzer: A Capital Improvements Program (CIP) that is real and implementable. There are several large projects in the City of Fairfax that people want to make happen, and that's true pretty much everywhere you go. We worked hard on our CIP which is drafted at over \$290m and is fully funded. Not all jurisdictions can make that claim! With that in place, I think we're going to bring some long-standing projects to fruition.

VTC: Any advice for up-and-coming managers?

Stalzer: I'm a fan of the acronym WAIT – Why Am I Talking? It's something every person in local government should ask themselves before speaking to staff, officials or residents.

Jon: Rob is a steward of the craft of local government. I've learned so much, and been inspired, by working with him. He understands the art, structure, and science of his profession. In know we make each other mad sometimes, but that's part of our jobs.

60 Seconds with Jon Stehle

Guiding principle: As a member of the Engaging Local Government Leaders organization, I find that their motto resonates with me – “Work hard, be kind.”

Important life lesson: Working at GAO, I learned quickly that you are never going to have perfect information. You document as much as you can, but then you must decide. This has helped me on council to understand that It's OK not to have unanimous votes. We're not always going to agree on everything You hear the arguments, you take a vote, and then you move forward.

Recent accomplishment: I was proud to play a role in the recent modernization of the city's fire department. The building has been reimaged to attract and retain the best in the profession.



Mrs. and Mr. Stehle at the 2021 VML Annual Conference.

Strangest Request: Following a big snowstorm, I received an email from a constituent asking me to come plow their road. At the time I couldn't get out of my own driveway! I explained that I don't have the power to control where the snowplows go but assured them that they were most likely on the way.

Favorite Food: Primanti Brothers sandwiches from Pittsburgh. Anytime you get to take a big piece of bread, some French fries and coleslaw and put it on top of some type of meat and cheese it's a good day!

Least favorite food: In the past I would have said “tofu” as my go-to answer. But, surprisingly to me and everyone who knows me, I have developed a taste for well-cooked tofu. So, I guess it's safe to say that nowadays I'll try anything.

Influential public figure: As an assistant adjunct professor at West Virginia University, I teach a class on leadership. Recently I've used the autobiographies of Bob Gates and Leon Panetta and mapped their stories to change management models. I find both men fascinating and inspiring.

Organizations:

The list of organizations Jon has been part of would be too long to print! Here are his current affiliations:

- Member, Association of Government Accountants (AGA)
- Member, Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL)
- Member, Board of Washington Metropolitan Chapter of the Community Association Institute (WMCCAI)
- Vice-Chair, FARM Ad-hoc Committee, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCG)
- Board Member, American Association for Budget and Program Analysis (AABPA)
- Member, USA Lacrosse
- Member, USA Hockey

2022 General Assembly Session preview

A long session that promises to be long on issues affecting local governments

THE 2022 GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION, beginning Wednesday, Jan. 12, will feature a new Republican majority in the House of Delegates, a new Republican Lieutenant Governor (Winsome Sears) presiding in the Senate, and a new Republican Governor (Glenn Youngkin) to be inaugurated the week that the General Assembly convenes.

That's a lot of people in new roles working to address the regular business and long-standing issues coming before the General Assembly.

This year is a long session of 60 days. A primary focus will be putting the General Assembly's priorities into the 2022-2024 biennial budget proposed and presented by out-going Governor Ralph Northam on December 16, for implementation on July 1, 2022. Final adjustments will also be made to the existing two-year budget that runs until June 30, 2022, through the so-called "caboose budget," also proposed by the out-going Governor on December 16.

Of course, there will be numerous bills to be addressed during the 60-day session, many covering issues of great importance to local governments – education funding, local revenue authority, FOIA, public safety, mental health, transportation, and more.

The VML 2022 Legislative Program, outlined in the following pages, was a collaborative effort developed by VML's policy and legislative committees during the summer and fall of 2021 and adopted by the VML membership during the annual business meeting held during VML's 2021 Annual Conference in October.

We hope that you will share this program with your General Assembly members and ask them to support these local government priorities.

VML, in concert with the Virginia Association of Counties and the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions, is planning for an in-person Local Government Day in Richmond on Thursday, Feb. 3, at the Omni Richmond Hotel. Make sure you sign up! The event begins at 11:30 AM and will conclude with a reception that begins at 5:30 PM. After the reception, we encourage you to take your legislators to dinner.

Learn more about the event and register at www.vml.org/2022-local-government-day.

VML staff will keep you updated on the actions of the General Assembly in the days leading up to the 2022 Session and throughout the Session. If you haven't signed up for VML's *eNews*, please do so to stay current on the many issues potentially affecting local governments and actions on those issues in the coming months.

Sign up for *eNews* using the Subscribe link at www.vml.org/publications/enews.

As our longtime subscribers know, we send out Action Alerts via *eNews* to bring to the forefront urgent issues that require your support to help us hold the line on local authority in Virginia. When you see those, please, please, please add your voice to ours so that together we can be heard.

By VML Director of Policy Development Janet Areson



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

2022 VML Legislative Program

As approved by the VML Membership on October 4, 2021.

Guiding Principle: Local Authority

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

I. Legislative Priorities

Funding the Real Cost of Education

- A strong public school system is essential to economic development and prosperity.
- 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.
- Local governments match more than is required for basic state education dollars, pay most 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 for creating 21st century learning environments for our children to master the challenges of tomorrow's workplace.

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.

Sovereign Immunity

Expanding liability and eroding immunities at state levels 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.

Funding of Community Services Boards and Behavioral Health Authorities

- VML supports sufficient and sustained state funding and technical assistance for community services boards/behavioral health authorities to implement STEP-VA requirements and to support the planning and implementation of Marcus Alert protocols. This funding should not come at the expense of other community-based service initiatives and requirements; nor should the burden of funding these state initiatives be shifted to local governments.
- Federal ARPA funds and robust state revenues offer an opportunity for the state to make new investments in the community and in the state hospitals.
- Investments must go to both build the network of community-based services and to assist state hospitals with their vital mission. This cannot be a zero-sum funding situation where one part of the system benefits at the expense of the other part of the system.

Marijuana: Clarification of Local Referendum and State Support

VML urges the General Assembly to clarify the city and town referendum opt-out process by specifying that:

- towns may hold concurrent referenda with their counties with the outcome of the town referendum binding within the town, and
- only in the case of a town not holding a referendum would a county's referendum outcome affect a town's legal sales of recreational marijuana.

VML further requests dedicated and near-term financial state support to assist communities with the upfront, pre-implementation administrative, health, and public safety costs incurred prior to the start of legal sales in localities. This includes training for local law enforcement, and other applicable local government personnel (taxation, code enforcement, zoning, etc.) on the new law and regulations.

VML urges the Cannabis Control Authority to begin its work as soon as possible to fill the regulatory vacuum. This work must include participation by local governments to clarify state and local roles and responsibilities pertaining to marijuana rules and regulations, including but not limited to, establishing enforcement guidance and training standards, guidance for marijuana equivalents, and eliminating ambiguity from local authority. VML supports the equitable implementation of this law.

II. Legislative Program Items

(listed alphabetically)

Addressing Behavioral Health Services in Local and Regional Jails

New state regulations establishing behavioral health care will apply to every local and regional jail. VML urges the state to provide adequate and necessary funding for such services through either enhanced jail per diem payments or other funding mechanisms to cover the additional costs to appropriately serve inmates with serious behavioral health needs.

Broadband

VML supports affordable broadband or internet access for all Virginians. Localities understand the importance of robust broadband for economic development projects as well as in households. As the state and federal governments offer money to ensure all Virginians have broadband, they should also use their funding resources to make it affordable for all. This includes working with private broadband, internet, and wireless companies and potential new service providers, including electric cooperatives, to ensure access to robust service at an affordable cost.

Collective Bargaining

Concerns about the increase in the cost of government, bureaucracy in local government operations, and more adversarial employee relations are reasons that VML has traditionally opposed collective bargaining.

VML does not support requiring localities to engage in collective bargaining.

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.

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 for current businesses that are both efficient and effective.

The 2020 General Assembly-approved amendments to Code of Virginia § 2.2-3115 under the Conflict of Interests Act are creating 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.

Expand Local Authority to Self-Certify Tax Exempt Utility Capital Improvements

VML supports an amendment to Code of Virginia § 58.1-3660 enabling political subdivisions to self-certify equipment, facilities, devices, or other property intended for their own use in conjunction with the operation of their water, wastewater, stormwater, or solid waste management facilities or systems.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The Virginia FOIA drives and impacts localities every single day. Poorly conceived legislation can complicate and unintentionally thwart the timely delivery of public documents to Virginia citizens seeking information.

- VML supports FOIA legislation review by the FOIA Council prior to enactment.
- VML supports expanding electronic meetings outside of declared emergency periods with flexibility for localities to determine how to include public participation and public comment.
- VML supports clear guidelines on fees for FOIA requests but does not support shifting the burden of FOIA costs to localities.

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 all types of housing to include but not limited to short-term rentals. VML also supports local government authority to promote affordable and mixed income housing as well as the required infrastructure to facilitate in-fill development, redevelopment and mixing of uses. Any mandate from the state should include full funding for the locality.

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. Such authority could help take the pressure off real estate taxes and help keep people in their homes as property values rise.



School Modernization and One Percent Local Option Sales Tax

VML supports the statewide authority for local governments to impose a one percent sales tax to help raise funds for school construction and renovation. For those already imposing an approved one percent sales tax for local or regional special funding needs, an additional one percent for school infrastructure funding should be authorized for school construction and renovation purposes.

Statewide Authority to Enter into a Clean Energy Contract

VML supports legislation that allows any locality to enter into a Clean Energy Contract also known as a Virtual Power Purchase Agreement (VPPA).

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

State actions to regulate private enterprises employing a business model that emphasizes the use of the internet to either provide retail, facilities, or ride-sharing services must acknowledge local government interests and include local governments 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 a 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.

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 and usually have bonding authority and financial restrictions on their operations. Moratoriums on service cut-offs without proof of COVID-related hardship result in lost revenues that cannot be recovered from citizens who were fully able to pay for the service. Customers' bills can be a significant financial hardship for them because they assumed the state was going to cover the expense during the moratorium.

VML supports localities' right to manage the operation of utilities without state interference.



Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022 • Noon – 7:00 pm • Register now at www.vml.org

Omni Richmond Hotel, 100 South 12th Street, Richmond, VA 23219

VML, VACo and VAPDC will host the 2022 Local Government Day starting at noon on Thursday, February 3. This event will allow local governments to advocate at the 2022 General Assembly Session.

Get ready for the 2022 General Assembly Session!

Local leaders play a crucial role in educating state legislators on how the actions they take at the General Assembly will affect communities. During General Assembly sessions, VML often calls on local leaders to communicate their reasons for opposition to, or support of, specific legislation. Local leaders often make the critical difference as VML seeks to curtail bills that weaken local authority and to support bills that benefit localities.

Your input during sessions has been, and will continue to be, important. Here is what you can expect in the coming months.



Before and during the session

- The General Assembly Session begins on Wednesday, January 12, 2022
- Stay in contact with your legislators. Before session ask them the most effective way to communicate with them and use it often.
- Schedule at least one visit or call with your legislators during session; VML is happy to participate in these meetings.
- Remember that the relationship you cultivated over the interim will lead to a stronger partnership and more communication between you and your legislators during the session.
- Stay engaged with VML and your neighbor localities to stay informed about what happens during session that affects your region directly.
- If you aren't already a subscriber, sign up for VML's newsletter **eNews** to receive alerts about committee meetings, bills and actions to support the VML legislative agenda.
- Attend VML's General Assembly activities and budget updates.

After the session concludes

- Publicly thank legislators who supported local issues.
- Hold legislators accountable if they failed to support local issues.
- Attend one or more of VML's wrap-up events to discuss the recent session and interact with your colleagues.

All year long

Build relationships! Among the most important things you can do is to make connections – both with your legislators and with partners in your community. The relationships you cultivate and the effort you put into building them will facilitate a stronger partnership between your locality and the state.

VML looks forward to working with our local government members during the 2022 General Assembly session. Remember, we're all in this together!

Are you signed up for VML's eNews?



If you're not a subscriber, you're missing out on recent articles about:

- The latest in the partisan redistricting battle and where it's headed
- The likely fate of the state's revenue surplus
- School safety issues and initiatives coming to the Commonwealth
- ... and so much more!

eNews is delivered to your Inbox every other week except during sessions of the General Assembly. During legislative sessions it is published weekly, with additional issues as needed.

It's easy and free to sign-up:

1. Go to www.vml.org and click on the "If you're not getting it, you're not getting it" window in the slideshow
2. Click on the "Subscribe" link
3. Fill out and submit the short form
4. You're all set to get the next issue

Make better land use decisions with the power of technology

How the Conservation Innovation Center is empowering local governments with groundbreaking data, analysis, and support tools

Editor's Note: While the Chesapeake Conservancy is a regional organization working across several states, its ties to Virginia includes efforts to protect many special places in the Commonwealth including Werowocomoco and Fort Monroe National Monument. Additionally, Chief G. Anne Richardson of the Rappahannock Tribe and former Mayor of Hampton, Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources, and current Treasurer for Hampton Molly Joseph Ward serve on the organization's board.

CHANGES TO ENVIRONMENTAL regulations and increased investments in renewable energy at the national and state levels have increased the degree to which land use decisions at the local level can significantly affect budgets and public health. For example, the growth of utility scale solar in Virginia has led many communities to consider how they might benefit from the cleaner energy and economic growth these projects can bring. However, any consideration of these benefits must be tempered with measures to ensure that Virginia's farms and forests aren't needlessly cleared to make way for solar arrays.

Fortunately for localities wrestling with these issues, new technologies can make land conservation and restoration project analysis more efficient and effective. Specifically, localities in Virginia can benefit from the work of the Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center (CIC) which was established in 2013 to empower data-driven environmental conservation and restoration efforts.

What follows are some examples of how the CIC is helping to empower local governments in Maryland and Virginia with the latest technology to inform their land use decisions.

Achieving "precision conservation"

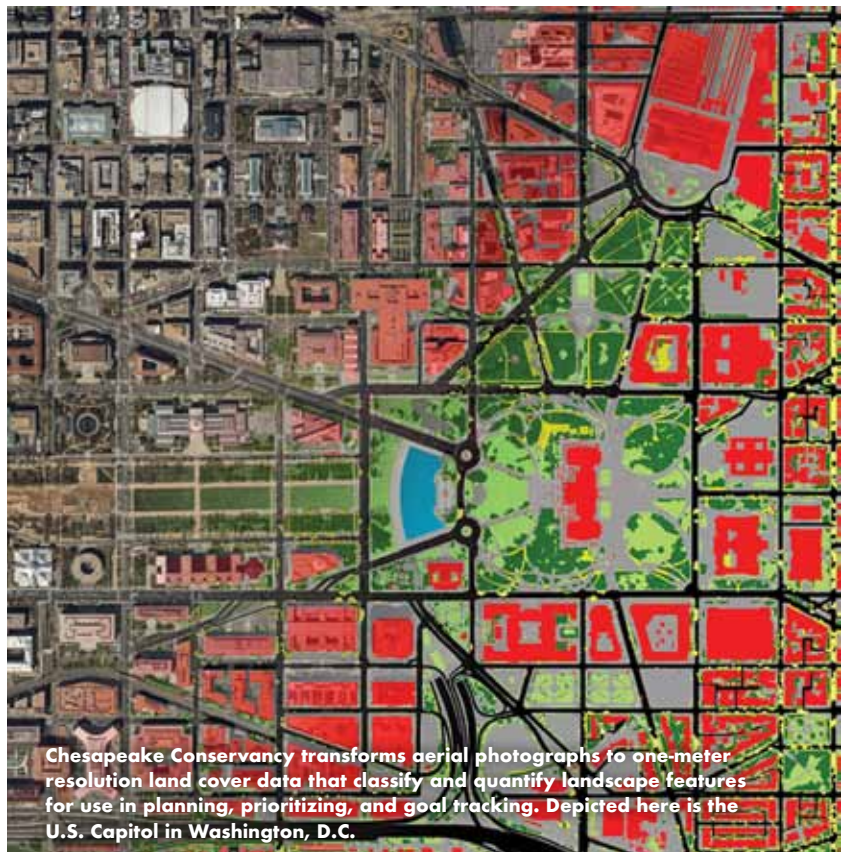
In partnership with several organizations, including the Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program, the CIC produced high-resolution land cover data for the Chesapeake Bay watershed at the resolution of 1-meter by 1-meter which provides far greater detail than the previously

available 30-meter resolution. The higher resolution data accurately depicts fine-scale features like urban tree canopies, roads, and buildings – vital information for anyone trying to understand or do land planning at the parcel scale.

This data set – one of the country's largest high-resolution land cover data sets – is free to download for anyone, anywhere. The CIC can build customized tools for cities and towns to harness the power of this groundbreaking high-resolution data for a variety of needs such as mapping tree canopy change, streams and stream channels, vacant lots, and green space planning and protecting viewsheds of Virginia's beautiful waterways, just to name a few.

As you can imagine, conservation decisions become more cost effective with more data backing them. For example, this data could allow municipal planners in Virginia to see exactly where to plant trees to reduce stormwater runoff at the most strategic locations – essentially getting more bang for the Virginia taxpayers' buck.

These efforts are critical as the region's growing population means ever-increasing impacts on the Chesapeake's land, water, air, and climate. For this reason, the CIC makes this data accessible for local



Chesapeake Conservancy transforms aerial photographs to one-meter resolution land cover data that classify and quantify landscape features for use in planning, prioritizing, and goal tracking. Depicted here is the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY CONSERVATION INNOVATION CENTER

Artificial intelligence, natural benefits: The CIC is working on artificial intelligence technology to provide regular, timely updates to the hi-res Chesapeake Bay watershed data set so that planners know what is going on as close to "real time" as possible.

If you would like to learn how the CIC can help your locality with precision conservation, email Vice President of Conservation Technology Susan Minnemeyer at sminnemeyer@chesapeakeconservancy.org.

governments and restoration professionals to yield a greater impact with fewer resources by practicing what’s known as “precision conservation” – projects at the right place, the right scale, the right size, and at the right time with clear results to demonstrate their effectiveness.

Mapping solar arrays

While solar and wind energy technologies are not new, they are quickly evolving to become viable options to generate clean power efficiently. While many look at these renewables with hope that they will be the clean energy sources of the future, it’s important to understand that they also present real land use challenges. Chesapeake Conservancy is helping our partners navigate those challenges. Here are some examples of projects completed in Maryland, which could be replicated to benefit Virginia’s localities.



Photo by Maryland Governor’s Office.

Large collections of solar panels used to generate electricity, known as solar arrays, provide renewable energy but compete with other land use needs, such as farming or housing. Recently, partners in Maryland asked the CIC to use geospatial analysis to identify optimal solar sites that would avoid land use tradeoffs and answer the key question: “Are enough optimal sites available to meet renewable energy goals for solar energy?”

Valleys Planning Council, a nonprofit based in Towson, MD commissioned the report *Solar Siting Methodology for State and Local Governments Pilot: Baltimore County and City*. A draft was shared with the Governor’s Task Force on Renewable Energy Development and Siting, established by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan in 2019.

“The results of our analysis showed extensive opportunities for solar panel placement on optimal sites, including degraded lands; rooftops of commercial, industrial, and residential buildings; and creating solar canopies on parking lots,” said Chesapeake Conservancy’s Vice President of Conservation Technology Susan Minnemeyer. “By maximizing solar on optimal sites, we can avoid using land now dedicated to farming or nature.”

Soon after the Baltimore solar siting report was released, Minnemeyer received a similar request from leaders in St. Mary’s County, MD, where community members had raised concerns about recent requests for utility-scale solar arrays. In April, CIC staff met with the St. Mary’s County Solar Task Force and presented a new report: *Optimal Solar Siting for St. Mary’s County, Maryland*.

“Based on our analysis of solar energy development opportunities, St. Mary’s County demonstrates the potential to create 4,097 GWh/yr of electricity from solar energy from 4,431 acres of opti-

mal sites such as degraded lands and landfills, rooftops, parking lot canopies, and publicly owned lands,” said Chesapeake Conservancy Senior GIS Analyst Emily Wiggans. “There is an additional 4,026 GWh/yr of potential electrical generation available from 2,614 acres of preferred ground-mounted opportunities less than one mile from electrical transmission lines. These numbers well exceed the 331 GWh/yr estimate for St. Mary’s share of solar compared to the rest of the state.”

Benefitting from the Virginia study on carbon sequestration

In August, the CIC released *Climate Benefits of Chesapeake Bay Restoration in Virginia*, which examined how efforts to improve water quality in Virginia’s portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed have also provided the secondary benefit of removing carbon from the atmosphere.

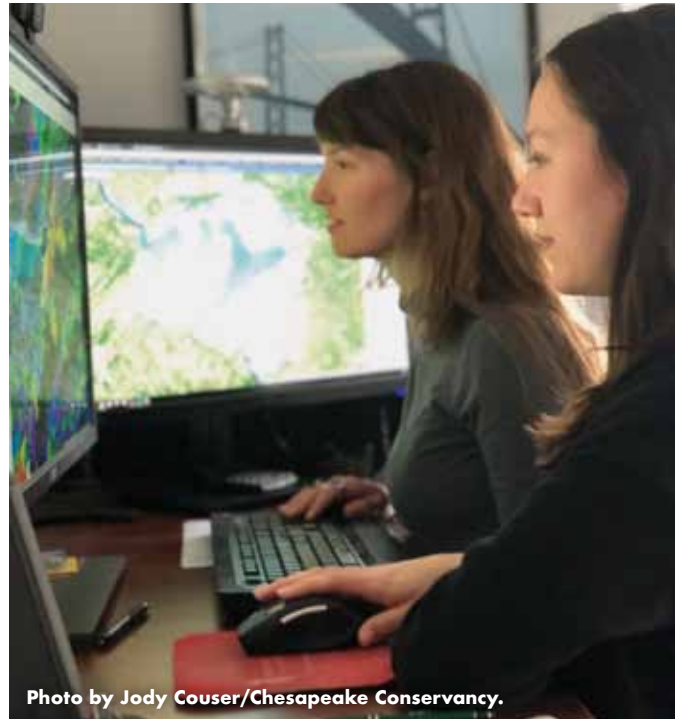


Photo by Jody Couser/Chesapeake Conservancy.

“We wanted to understand better how efforts implemented under the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement to improve water quality in Virginia could also generate significant climate mitigation benefits by removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in vegetation or soil,” said Minnemeyer.

“The results showed meaningful co-benefits for climate change leaders to consider when scaling conservation and restoration practices throughout the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed. This is proof that restoration projects that aim to improve water quality are also powerful tools to fight climate change.”

For local leaders considering such projects, such win-wins are powerful arguments in favor working to protect the Commonwealth’s water quality.

Learn more about the important work that the Conservation Innovation Center is doing across the Chesapeake Bay watershed and elsewhere. Together with our partners, the CIC is enhancing the pace and quality of conservation with groundbreaking technology. Visit www.chesapeakeconservancy.org.

About the author: *Jody Hedeman Couser is the senior vice president of communications for the Chesapeake Conservancy.*

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