

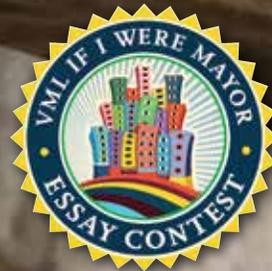
THE MAGAZINE OF THE
VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

Down to Earth solutions from tomorrow's local leaders

The winners of the
2024 "If I Were Mayor"
essay contest

Inside:

2024 General
Assembly Review for
local governments



Statewide Winner

Piper Dellinger
of Signal Knob Middle School
in Strasburg





Risk Management Grants

VRSA allocates **\$400,000** back into member communities to help prevent and reduce losses. Funds are designated for purchasing equipment or professional education.

See example of grant awards on our YouTube channel!



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BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT



ABOUT THE COVER

Piper Dellinger isn't just a middle schooler in the Town of Strasburg, and she isn't just a member of the Virginia Future Farmers of America, she's also the statewide winner of VML's 2024 "If I Were Mayor" essay contest! Way to go Piper! Read her essay and all those from our regional winners inside.

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Visit www.vml.org or scan the QR code to download the VML app.

Welcome to summer!

THIS ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE features the 2024 winners of VML's annual "If I Were Mayor" essay contest. Every year I look forward to reading the submissions – they are such good reminders of what members in our localities want to see and there are always some great ideas on how to make positive changes. These essays also serve as a good reminder of how vast the Commonwealth is. I hope you enjoy reading these winning essays. Congratulations to all the winners!

This issue also includes a summary of the General Assembly session and the budget (which was late again). Thanks to all who participated in the VML webinars on the General Assembly session earlier this month.

Although the season has just begun, this has already been – and promises to continue to be – a busy summer! VML staff are participating in numerous workgroups, and we just hosted our first ever Small Towns Conference. This event held in Abingdon was attended by members from all over the state and while I could not be there for the entire event, I enjoyed meeting some new people. VML also recently hosted the summer offering of our Virginia Local Elected Officials Conference in Richmond. This one-day event (with some networking at the Richmond Flying Squirrels baseball game the night before) included the mandated Freedom of Information and Conflict of Information training along with a discussion on economic development and other local government issues.

Up next is the Emerging Technologies Conference happening July 17-18 at the Hilton Short Pump outside of Richmond. This conference, hosted by the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police and the State-

wide Interoperability Executive Committee, is all about how organizations can mitigate threats to public safety from emerging technology. The keynote speaker is global cyber security leader Timothy Ramsay. I encourage everyone interested in this important topic to attend.

On June 27 the VML Legislative Committee met virtually to learn about the 2024 General Assembly successes and to begin planning for the 2025 General Assembly session. The Committee also proposed some topics for VML's five policy committees to discuss. These policy committees will meet in mid-July and

will then make changes to the various policy statements that VML uses for its lobbying efforts. The Legislative Committee will meet again in August and September to finalize the legislative priorities for the 2025 General Assembly session. Both the Policy Committees and Legislative Committee will present their proposals at the Annual Business Meeting in October.



VML ANNUAL CONFERENCE
MARRIOTT VIRGINIA BEACH OCEANFRONT
OCT. 13-15

And speaking of October...registration is now available for the VML Annual Conference (Oct. 13-15 in Virginia Beach). The Annual Business Meeting is scheduled for Monday, Oct. 14 during the conference.

The first evening of the conference will feature the awards ceremony for the Innovation Award winners followed by live music from the Soul Expressions Band, which earned rave reviews at last year's conference. It should be a lot of fun! Please make plans to attend and submit your Innovation Award applications.

I hope that everyone has a great summer!



CALENDAR

Learn more about these events and additional opportunities at www.vml.org

- July 17-18** 2024 Emerging Technology Conference - Richmond Short Pump Hilton
- Aug. 26** Innovation Award Submission Deadline - Enter on-line at www.vml.org.
- Oct. 13-15** 2024 VML Annual Conference - Marriott Virginia Beach Oceanfront Resort



In Memoriam: Town of Culpeper Councilwoman Meaghan E. Taylor



- Taylor -

On May 20, the Town of Culpeper lost its beloved Councilwoman **Meaghan E. Taylor** who was a dedicated and long-time member of town council and the Planning Commission.

Taylor was also a past chairwoman of the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission and active member of Culpeper Renaissance, Inc., Full Circle Thrift and many other local service organizations. She was truly dedicated and committed to serving the town.

Mayor Frank Reaves Jr. said: "Our thoughts and prayers go out to her family, friends, and the entire community during this time of great loss."

Taylor was born in Middletown, Connecticut, to John and Patricia Shortt. She was educated at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1989. Then, inspired by her grandmother, a registered nurse, Taylor dedicated her professional life to helping others by working as a registered nurse.

Taylor is remembered as a wonderful wife and mother, whose love and dedication to her family knew no bounds. She loved Culpeper and was deeply committed to its well-being. She was first elected to council in July 2014. She was always involved in local initiatives and community events.

Taylor's family requests those desiring to honor her life perform an act of kindness for a loved one or by contributing to their community.

VML President and Town of Farmville Vice-Mayor Reid participates in ceremony honoring the "Lost Generation"



- Reid -

At a ceremony held on Sunday, May 19, Longwood University conferred honorary juris doctorate degrees upon individuals from the generation of Prince Edward students who made civil rights history by protesting conditions at the county's Roberta Russa Moton school for African Americans and being on the forefront of legal actions that eventually led to Brown vs. Board of Education decision. Often referred to as the "lost

generation" because they were denied an education for years when Prince Edward County chose to close its schools rather than integrate, the participants came from near and far to be honored. Those who could not attend in person watched live streaming of the event and those who had passed were represented by relatives. A Longwood University press release characterized the feel of event as "part history lesson, part family reunion, part revival, and part academic ceremony."

The keynote speaker was L. Francis "Skip" Griffin, who was among those locked out of the public schools when they were closed from 1959-64, and is the son of Rev. Francis L. Griffin, H. '19, who served as counselor to generations of Moton students. "Your suffering and sacrifice have made the lives of many quite better," he said. "They have opportunities that our ancestors could not imagine."

Longwood President W. Taylor Reveley IV told those in attendance, that "more than just these anniversaries, today we honor and celebrate you, the heroes of those causes, the actors in this history, who each in your own way took concrete steps—argued, persuaded, made use of the tools of democracy, to move our nation forward."

Among the speakers was Armistead "Chuckie" Reid who was eight years old when the doors closed for Prince Edward students. A third grader at the time, Reid saw white students go off to private school, places that banned Black students from enrolling. Meanwhile, he waited for his own classes to resume. "Not for days, but for weeks, months, five long years," Reid, now Vice Mayor of the Town of Farmville and President of VML said. "Equality is justice for us here in Prince Edward County."

Reid is also the chair of the Moton Council and a member of the Prince Edward NAACP.

Newport News Mayor Jones elected to AAMA Board of Trustees



- Jones -

On April 26, City of Newport News Mayor **Phillip Jones** was elected to a one-year term on the African American Mayors Association (AAMA) Board of Trustees. The election came during AAMA's national conference in Atlanta. During the conference, Black mayors from across the

country met with federal officials and business leaders to discuss issues and legislative polices impacting their cities and to share best practices across their organizations.

"I am honored to have an opportunity to serve alongside this amazing group of board colleagues that are wholeheartedly dedicated to making their cities successful," said Jones. "The selflessness of the AAMA members and the unwavering focus on the well-being of the cities represented will guide our work in the coming year."

AAMA's policy priorities will be anchored around key areas that are critical to the well-being of its communities. The association will prioritize public safety, address the affordability crisis, improve healthcare access, and build and reinforce 21st-century cities through investments in transportation and infrastructure, as well as environmental justice.

About the AAMA: *The African American Mayors Association (AAMA) is the only organization dedicated to representing over 500 African American mayors across the United States. The role of the AAMA includes taking positions on public policies that impact the vitality and sustainability of cities; providing mayors with leadership and management tools; and creating a forum for member mayors to share best practices related to municipal management.*

Middleburg hires Fletcher to be new finance director / town treasurer



- Fletcher -

On May 22, the Town of Middleburg announced that its new finance director / town treasurer would be **Angela J. Fletcher**. Previously, Fletcher held the same role for the Town of Strasburg for six years.

Fletcher also previously served as the treasurer for the Town of Round Hill for two years, and worked in human resources and finance for a defense contractor for eight years.

Middleburg conducted a nationwide recruitment for its new finance director / treasurer. Town Manager Danny Davis said, "We are pleased to have Ms. Fletcher join the Town of Middleburg with her vast finance experience. She brings knowledge of local government accounting practices, commitment to quality customer service, and experience in our financial systems and programs."

In her new role, Fletcher will be re-

PEOPLE

sponsible for the day-to-day management of the town's finances, utility billing, receipt of taxes, employee payroll, budget development, and financial reporting. Fletcher will also oversee the customer service function of Middleburg, specifically by managing the administrative and accounting assistant.

Fletcher holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Liberty University and a Virginia Government Accounting Certificate. She is certified as a Master Governmental Treasurer by the Treasurer's Association of Virginia.

NVRC's Jackson appointed to Virginia Floodplain Management Association



Nora Jackson, Resiliency Planner, at the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) was recently appointed as a representative to the board of the Virginia Floodplain Management Association.

VFMA is a non-profit organization composed of professionals from state and federal agencies, local governments, and private firms dedicated to expanding the application of proactive floodplain management in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Nora will serve on the board through March 2025. NVRC is pleased that she will spend the next year supporting the work of the association in advancing flood mitigation and resiliency planning in Virginia.

About NVRC: NVRC is a regional council of thirteen-member local governments in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington D.C. The Commission's member governments represent more than 2.5 million residents with a regional GDP of \$276 billion which is nearly 42% of statewide GDP, larger than 24 states and if a country the 48th largest economy in the world.

Lackey is Fredericksburg's new city attorney



At its May 28 meeting, the Fredericksburg city council appointed **Kelly J. Lackey** as the new city attorney. Lackey has worked as a local government attorney for 15 years, beginning as an assistant city attorney in the City of Chesapeake through her current position as the city's special projects counsel, a post she has held since February of this

- Lackey -

year. She also served as the King George County attorney from November 2021 to January 2024.

Lackey serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc., and was recently elected vice president of that organization. She has volunteered for the Virginia State Bar as a member of the Professionalism Faculty offering training in ethics and civility to new lawyers from 2022 to present.

In a press release, Mayor Kerry Devine shared "We are delighted to appoint Kelly as the new city attorney. It has been a pleasure getting to know her through her work as Special Projects Counsel this spring. She possesses a reputation for integrity and professionalism at the highest levels, and a breadth of experience in all aspects of local government law. The city council looks forward to working with her for years to come."

Lackey earned her B.A. at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA and her J.D. at the William & Mary School of Law in Williamsburg.

Hampton's Glass elected VMCA president



- Glass -

City of Hampton Clerk of Council **Katherine K. Glass** was recently elected as president of the Virginia Municipal Clerks Association (VMCA). VMCA's mission is to promote professional development through continuing education and networking opportunities. The objectives are

to promote education and certification of municipal clerks, promote better municipal government, increase the efficiency of municipal clerk operations, be alert and responsive to federal, state, and local legislation that impacts the clerk's office, and educate the public and colleagues regarding the role of the municipal clerk.

Glass was appointed clerk of the Hampton City Council in March 2005 and has attained both the Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) and Master Municipal Clerk (MMC) certifications. Previously she served as a citizen appointee to Hampton's Solid Waste Advisory Commission and also as a Planning Commissioner from 1996 through 2004, completing the Virginia Certified Planning Commissioner's Program in 1996.

Glass spent the first half of her career as a certified professional legal secretary and certified legal assistant at the Hampton law firm of Joseph Smith, Ltd. and was active in the National Association of Legal Secretaries, the Virginia Legal Secretaries Association, as well as serving in several offices in the Peninsula Legal Secretaries Association.

An active community leader, Glass has served in non-profit and fraternal organizations including the Virginia Peninsula Council on Domestic Violence, the Fox Hill Neighborhood Center and Athletic Association, and the Hampton Exchange Club. She is a life member of Girl Scouts and was recognized as a Famous Former by the Girl Scout Council of the Colonial Coast in 2017.

Glass' term as VMCA president began on April 18, 2024, at the 47th VMCA Annual Conference hosted by Culpeper and held in Charlottesville. She represented the

Each episode explores a different locality or issue but the focus is always on Virginia and the local governments that make the Commonwealth work for everyone.

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

Listen to all episodes at www.vml.org

VMCA at the International Association of Municipal Clerks at their Annual Conference in Calgary, Alberta, Canada in May 2024.

The following individuals were elected to serve on the Executive Committee of the VMCA for 2024-2025:

Kimberly Ellis, MMC – First Vice President (Culpeper - Deputy Clerk to Board of Supervisors);

Camisha Brown, CMC – Second Vice President (Dinwiddie - Executive Assistant to the County Administrator / Clerk to the Board of Supervisors);

Kaylyn McCluster, CMC – Secretary (Pittsylvania – County Administration, Deputy Clerk);

Jenn Green – Treasurer (Newport News – Deputy City Clerk);

Travis O. Morris, MMC – Parliamentarian (Albemarle County – Senior Deputy Clerk);

Mina D. Barberis, MMC – Historian (Norfolk – Deputy City Clerk);

Teresa J. Saeed, MMC – Immediate Past President (James City County – Deputy Clerk to the Board of Supervisors);

For more information on VMCA, visit www.vmca.com.

Town of Broadway selects McAlister to fill town manager role



At a special meeting on May 28, the Town of Broadway council unanimously selected **Stefanie McAlister** to replace former Town Manager Kyle O'Brien who retired in March.

- McAlister - McAlister, who will begin with the Town of Broadway on July 1, has served in the same capacity for the Town of Grottoes since 2021. Prior to that she served in the Virginia Department of Emergency Management as operations manager of the 911 & Geospatial Services Bureau and as director of its Regional Outreach Division from 2018 – 2021; as regional coordinator with the Virginia Information Technologies Agency from 2009 – 2018; and as geographic information system coordinator and planner for Rockingham County from 1995 – 2009.

In a press release, McAlister said of her new role, "I'm thrilled with the opportunity to be Broadway's Town Manager. I appreciate the confidence council is showing in me and I look forward to meeting and working with the employees, citizens, business community and civic organizations here in town."

In the same press release, Vice Mayor Bev London shared, "Ms. McAlister is joining a wonderful team of employees and has the full support of town council. We look forward to welcoming her as the leader of the Broadway team."

McAlister is a native of Augusta County and holds a Bachelor's degree from James Madison University.

VML VACO FINANCE Celebrating Our **20 Year Milestone**

Thanks to all of our 308 (and counting) Virginia local government participants!

- ▶ More than 300 loan closings*
- ▶ \$4 billion in invested assets
- ▶ Over 200 accounting engagements and actuarial studies

* Includes loans and Municipal Advisory engagements | valocalfinance.org

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.

Danville, Newport News, and Roanoke among the 2024 winners of the All-America City Award

IN EARLY JUNE, the National Civic League (NCL) announced the winners of the 2024 All-America City Award (AAC). This year, ten exemplary communities were recognized for their transformative, community-driven efforts to strengthen democracy through local action and innovation. Recipients also showcased the strength of their civic infrastructure – the network of relationships, partnerships, and capacities driving effective decision-making and problem-solving.

Congratulations to the three Virginia localities that were among the winners: Danville, Newport News, and Roanoke!

The other winners were: Edinburg, TX; High Point, NC; La Marque, TX; Lexington, KY; Monrovia, CA; Seattle, WA; and, Watkinsville, GA.

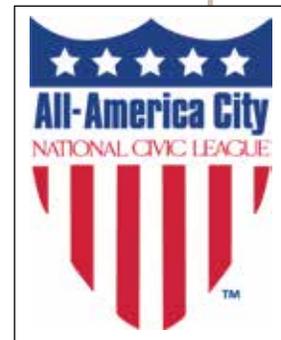
From June 7-9, finalist communities convened in Denver, where diverse teams presented their stories and initiatives to a jury of nationally recognized civic leaders. After careful deliberation, the jury selected the ten winning communities, which were announced during the closing ceremony. These communities exemplify the power of civic participation and innovation, offering

a blueprint for others wanting to do their part to fortify democracy.

Learn more about the award at www.nationalcivicleague.org/america-city-award.

About the NCL

The mission of the National Civic League is to advance civic engagement to create equitable, thriving communities. Founded in 1894, the League is America's oldest good governance organization, championing many of the democracy innovations of the early 20th Century. Today, the League maintains the Model City Charter, organizes the All-America City Award, publishes the National Civic Review, and supports an extensive national network of local elected, appointed, and civic leaders. The League's Center for Democracy Innovation works with public officials in the U.S. to understand, test, and disseminate the next generation of civic innovations, which have the potential to make democracy more participatory, equitable, and productive.



Manassas opens renovated city hall

AFTER AN EXTENSIVE two-year renovation, departments and services began moving back into Manassas City Hall in early June and the building officially opened to the public on June 24. No services were interrupted during the phased-in moving period.

“I believe our residents and customers will find the new layout easier for them to navigate and conduct business,” said Interim City Manager Douglas W. Keen in a press release. “It also adds a much-needed community conference room, something our community has asked for.”

The \$15.9 million City Hall renovation included a new roof, generator, windows, elevator, HVAC system, plumbing, electrical, data system, and exterior façade upgrades for the 1987 building. The upgrades make the 31,000 square foot building more energy efficient and ensure it will serve residents for the foreseeable future. The City Hall Renovation Capital Improvement Project was introduced in 2014.

The renovation also converted hallways into usable space, reorganized department office space, upgraded customer service counters, created more community meeting space and carved out more public art display space.

Farmville town manager and police chief go bald for a good cause

ON MAY 23, the Town of Farmville held its annual employee spring/summer picnic. As part of this event, Police Chief A. Q. “Andy” Ellington issued a challenge to raise \$5,000 for one of the town’s dispatchers that is battling brain cancer. He stated if the town raised that amount, he would shave his head. Town Manager C. Scott Davis put more skin in the game with the promise to shave his head too if \$10,000 were raised. That raise led to razors coming out when the town ended up pulling in over \$15,000 in donations! According to a social media post by Davis, “The community and employees came together to support one of our own! So proud of this team of employees each day!”



Staunton holds Crossing Way ribbon cutting to celebrate new road

THE MORNING OF MAY 30, the City of Staunton held a ribbon cutting for the completion of Crossing Way which now connects Richmond Avenue to Valley Center Drive, giving access to the interior of Staunton Crossing.

“This milestone has been many years in the making. It is progress that a lot of our Staunton community members are excited to see,” said City of Staunton Mayor Stephen W. Claffey in a press release. “The roadway gives access to hundreds of

acres of prime real estate for development for new businesses that would create jobs.”

Staunton Crossing is about 300 acres of land on the north side of Richmond Avenue, where the Western State Hospital was located until 2013. The site is bordered by I-81 to the east and N. Frontier Drive to the west, extending northward up to the new Western State Hospital.

Crossing Way was a VDOT-administered project, funded with about \$10.5 million in grants. The project also includes a park and ride. BRITE Bus will add a stop there in the future.

The Staunton Crossing site is large enough to accommodate a combination of offices, medical facilities, manufacturing, and limited retail.

The city and the Economic Development Authority continue to invest in the infrastructure at Staunton Crossing. In mid-May, bids were received for the construction of sewer and water lines and a water tower for the site. The city has applied for grants through the Virginia Business Ready Site Program to help pay for these improvements and increase the site’s business ready rating.

Hotels, restaurants, and retail have already been developed on roughly 25 acres along Richmond Avenue. This small section brings in more than \$1.2 million annually in tax revenue. The completion of Crossing Way connects this development in phase one to the rest of Staunton Crossing, highlighting the great potential of the remaining 275 acres.



Blacksburg launches Toms Creek Basin planning study

THE TOWN OF BLACKSBURG is kicking off the Toms Creek Basin (TCB) Planning Study, an effort that will engage the public and local stakeholders and guide a strategy for the future of TCB.

The study will take approximately one year to complete and will be led by planning and community development firm Development Strategies, in close partnership with a steering committee and town staff. Throughout the project, the team will talk extensively with the community in a variety of ways and use data to evaluate key TCB characteristics, including open space and conservation, ecology and environmental elements, past and future developments, recreational amenities, transportation, and infrastructure.

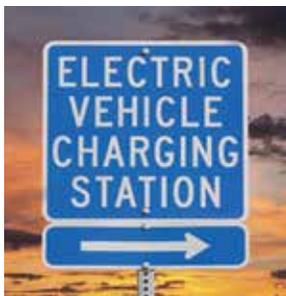
“This is an important moment that will greatly affect the long-term future of the TCB,” said Toms Creek resident and Steering Committee member Bob Freyman in a press release. “Residents in the basin and the town at-large need to provide input to be sure the results of the study reflect their values and desires for the TCB.”

The kickoff started the week of May 6 with a tour of the basin and included a presentation to town council and the Planning Commission. There will be numerous public engagement opportunities throughout the project, both online and in-person. These activities and conversations will allow the town to gather community insight that will ensure future actions and policies align with a common vision for TCB.

“As Blacksburg continues to develop over time it is critical that the town takes proactive steps to create a clear vision for the Toms Creek Basin that

aligns with our community and town council values for the area,” said Deputy Town Manager Matt Hanratty. “There are many competing interests in the TCB including the need for housing, recreation, environmental preservation, open space management, and connectivity. It’s important that these are balanced in a plan that allows the town to grow sensibly in the basin. This study will be the foundation for that growth moving forward and provide a roadmap for decades to come.”

TCB comprises approximately 4,000 acres west of the US Route 460 Bypass and north of Prices Fork Road. The area was annexed into the town in 1973. When surveyed in 1996, residents stressed the importance of preserving the rural character, open spaces, and scenic views of TCB. Blacksburg’s town council re-affirmed this sentiment in 2022 at its biannual retreat.



Norfolk uses survey to inform electric vehicle infrastructure deployment study

THROUGH JULY 1, City of Norfolk residents were encouraged to complete a survey available both online and at all Norfolk Public Library branches. With electric vehicles (EVs) becoming more common in Norfolk, the city wanted to gauge interest in EVs and preferences as to where charging stations might be installed in the future.

Survey responses will be included in Norfolk’s EV Infrastructure Deployment Study conducted by Norfolk’s Environmental Sustainability division with a consulting firm, The Cadmus Group. Study results will be incorporated into a plan that will serve as a roadmap to accommodate the anticipated needs of

Norfolk residents, businesses and visitors as more choose to transition from conventionally fueled vehicles to EVs.

The plan will include an analysis of the community’s needs, opportunities and challenges, detail strategies for low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, communities with a low ratio of private parking spaces and areas with a high ratio of multi-unit dwellings and single-family homes. The final report will establish a vision, goals and clearly defined roles for the city, the private sector and the community to implement strategies that facilitate increased deployment of EV charging infrastructure across the City of Norfolk in an equitable manner.

For more information about EV resources, benefits and to locate charging stations in Norfolk, visit www.norfolk.gov/electricvehicles.

Waynesboro receives Virginia Tourism Corporation grant for tourism marketing

IN LATE MAY, Governor Glenn Youngkin announced that the City of Waynesboro was among the 268 local and regional tourism marketing programs across the state to receive a share of the more than \$3.27 million in Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) grants.

Waynesboro received a \$16,000 grant for “Waynesboro’s Art Doesn’t Just Hang in Galleries.” This comprehensive marketing campaign is aimed at promoting the vibrant street art scene in Waynesboro and attracting tourists from diverse regions to experience the city’s cultural offerings. A key component of this initiative is development of a Waynesboro app through Visit Widget, a user-friendly platform designed to showcase Waynesboro’s Street Arts Trail with interactive map features, artist profiles, and information on nearby attractions, providing visitors with a seamless experience for exploring the city’s art scene.

“We’re really excited to have received these grant funds to help promote the Streets Arts Trail, which currently has twenty stops, including some iconic and award-winning murals,” said Stephanie Duffy, project manager for Waynesboro Economic

Development & Tourism in a press release. “With this initiative, we hope to position Waynesboro as a premier destination for art enthusiasts and tourists, with a particular focus on attracting overnight and out of region visitors.”

About VTC grants

VTC’s tourism marketing and sponsorship programs are designed to increase visitor spending by leveraging limited marketing dollars, to stimulate new tourism marketing through partnerships, and to extend the “Virginia is for Lovers” brand to drive visitation. Using the hub and spoke tourism partnership model, Virginia entities partner to apply for funding. Partners may consist of Virginia cities, towns, counties, convention and visitors’ bureaus, chambers of commerce, other local or regional destination marketing organizations, museums, attractions, cultural events, and other tourism-related non-profits and tourism-oriented businesses. More information on VTC’s Grant Programs can be found at www.vatc.org/grants.



Introducing tomorrow's local leaders

IF YOU WERE LOOKING for a list of likely future mayors, councilmembers, and board members for Virginia's local governments you'd be wise to start with the list of winners from VML's annual "If I Were Mayor" essay contest. This was true when we started the contest in 2015 and it remains true in 2024. In fact, this year's list of winners comes from an even larger pool of contestants, as this is the first year we've expanded the contest to both seventh and eighth graders. The challenge to the students, however, remained the same: Identify an issue in their locality, talk to others about possible solutions, and then identify what solution would best address the issue.

So, keep your eye on these kids because one day you might be voting for them!

Of this year's statewide winner, Piper Dellinger, VML's Executive Director Michelle Gowdy said: "Ms. Dellinger did a fantastic job of identifying a bedrock issue that affects not only her own community but those across the Commonwealth: the lack of citizen engagement and understanding of their local government. I appreciate that her solutions included both things that citizens could do to become more involved as well as things that local governments could do to raise awareness of their work. An outstanding essay by someone who I'm sure has a future making a difference in her community and beyond. Congratulations Piper and to all this year's winners!"



Piper Dellinger (center) with her mother (left) and her civics teacher Margaret Bachman at the May 14th Strasburg Council meeting.



Statewide Winner

Piper Dellinger

Town of Strasburg – Signal Knob Middle School

Teacher: Margaret Bachman



WHY DOES THE TOWN of Strasburg have citizen involvement issues, why is involvement important, and how can we fix it? My name is Piper Dellinger. I reside in Fishers Hill, right outside of the town of Strasburg where I go to school. I have been in contact with our mayor Ms. Brandy Boies so that I could better understand my community's issues and how they can be solved.

Why does the town of Strasburg have citizen involvement issues? Although this question can be interpreted in different ways, I take it as our citizens being unaware. I think that the citizens of Strasburg are unaware of the votes and decisions that are made in our town. Many of these decisions impact their everyday life. Not long ago I attended a town council meeting for my Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter during national FFA week. Looking back there were two things I noticed. The first thing I noticed was that I had no clue what was happening in my town! There were points brought up and discussions about problems that I had no clue were happening in my town. The second thing that occurred to me was that I was very unaware about town council meetings. The only reason I was aware that a meeting was happening was because of my involvement in FFA. Though the town posts a calendar with the council meeting dates on Facebook, I still believe they are overlooked. I don't think this problem is because people don't see them on the calendar. I think the root of this problem is that citizens are unaware of what happens in a town council meeting. I think that these meetings have a reputation of being not meant for everyday citizens. However, it is quite the opposite. The town council discusses things that impact everyday citizens' lives. So, why do everyday citizens feel they should not be involved?

Why is citizen involvement in their town's government even important? Because the town government makes decisions that impact citizens' everyday lives. Mayor Boies informed me, "Elected officials are making these decisions. We need more people to vote, pay attention to elections, and even consider running."

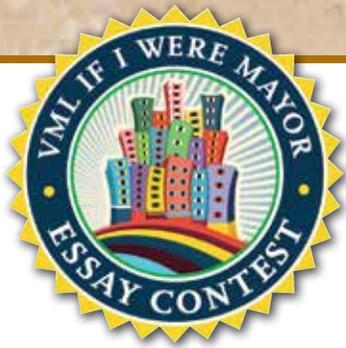
It is important that citizens stay up to date with the local government so they can understand why changes are made. If citizens are unaware of why changes are made, then they might jump to conclusions and become nasty to government officials. I think it is important to remember that town officials are normal people. Take Mayor Boies for example. In one of her emails to me she said, "We need everyday citizens to be engaged with government. Often (and I was one of them) we are busy focusing on our careers and families, and volunteer passions, but we are not paying attention to the decisions that are being made that impact our everyday lives."

With an issue like citizen engagement of such importance there has to be a solution. Throughout writing this essay, I have thought of a few ways to improve our town citizens' involvement with their local government. The first idea I have is to go into more detail on Facebook. I think social media can be a very helpful tool when it comes to informing people. Many people spend a lot of time on Facebook. Like I said earlier, people see the council meeting calendar, but I think there should be a separate thing stating what will be discussed in that specific meeting. Another thing I think the community would benefit from is the council getting involved with the school. For example, there could be a day or two each year when the town council members visit classes in the high school and talk about what they do.

Overall, I think the community needs to promote its local government more.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 1 Winner

Maya Morrison

Town of Marion – Marion Middle School
Teacher: Matthew Neese



IF I WERE MAYOR there would be a lot of changes that I would make. I am going to share some of them with you today. I would give our police officers more training. Now, you may think that our officers have all the training that they need, but did you know that our officers don't have adequate training for a problem concerning a person with a mental health issue or a history of mental health issues? They need that training to help them better evaluate and assess the situations that they are put into. The community member that I asked about this agreed that police officers need more training in dealing with people experiencing a mental health crisis. I would have a mandatory week of mental health training every three months. How would I fund that, you may ask? In all

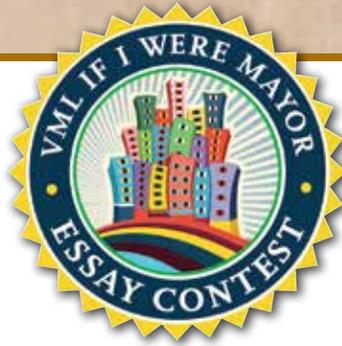
criminal cases where the victim is awarded restitution, I would charge interest starting the day of court and ending when the restitution is paid in full, or I would charge a small fee to be accessed on all criminal cases where the defendant is found guilty.

Another problem that we have in Marion is that there are tons of litter! Who would want to come to see a state park filled with trash? I don't know about you, but I sure wouldn't want to go there! So, to fix this problem I would have Juvenile Detention and some of the people at the local jail – depending on their crimes – and drug court participants pick up the trash in Marion. They would get paid a small wage to be put toward their court fines and costs. You may think that it is not safe to do this, but they would be supervised the whole time by officers. How would a small town pay for this? We would ask for federal funding. When I asked a community member what they thought about this solution to the litter problem they said that it was a good idea. However, they said they would only use drug court participants because they aren't convicted of violent crimes, are required to do community service as part of the program, and need less supervision, which would keep costs low.

Those are some of the problems that I would fix if I was the mayor of Marion Virginia.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 2 Winner

Avery Gallimore

Town of Rocky Mount – Christian Heritage Academy
Teacher: Laren Massey



IF I WAS THE MAYOR in Rocky Mount, I would try to solve any problem possible. However, one problem that I would like to solve is the flood risks. This is a real problem within the community, and I would hope to improve it as mayor.

Floods can have a huge impact on Rocky Mount. A survey run by Risk Factor, a website that assesses different types of risks, says of Rocky Mount, “There are 182 properties in Rocky Mount that have greater than a 26% chance of being severely affected by flooding over the next 30 years. This represents 7% of all properties in Rocky Mount.”

Even though 7% may seem small, it still will affect several families and their land. Unfortunately, floods will still have an impact on the citizens of Rocky Mount. Some good news is that the risk of flooding is only moderate. Still, transportation will stop, the police and firefighters may not be able to reach those in need, and power will be out. Risk Factor reports that “41 out of 287 homes will be affected by the floods.” Considering that most likely multiple people live in a house, many people will be affected by floods.

I asked my friends Skylar, Ruthie, and Addy what they would do about this problem. Addy said, “I would try to get the citizens of Rocky Mount to come out and support the community. They could make donations and donate their time. Joining together as a whole could boost relationships and get jobs done.”

Ruthie said, “Make sure everyone who needs medical attention gets it. Then do the best you can by giving resources for damage and health reasons. Then set up news stations and give everyone positive feedback, letting them know it will be OK. Then an inspector would come to make sure everything is safe and make sure the economy is back on track.”

Skylar told me, “I would make sure rivers and bodies of water have proper materials and drainage systems to somewhat control the flooding.”

I feel like all my friends’ solutions were very well said and could all work. However, here are my suggestions. As mayor, I would first protect the houses better. I would suggest to the architects to not build in flood plains and assess proper drainage when building properties. For older houses, I would say to build barriers and trenches to keep the water out. Secondly, I would focus on infrastructure. I would make better drainage systems and have better management of ecosystems to prevent erosion.

Those are my solutions for reducing flood rates in Rocky Mount. If we can try to use all or most of these suggestions, then we can make life in Rocky Mount better.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 3 Winner

Aiswarya Vinu

City of Staunton – Shelburne Middle School
Teacher: Corinna Hunter



IF I WERE MAYOR, I would fix one of the biggest problems many schools face today which is teacher pay. Did you know that teachers in Virginia make \$31,791 less than teachers in Washington D.C.? That is because teachers in Staunton, Virginia get paid the lowest in the state. The teachers of Virginia are getting paid \$45,736 yearly but teachers in D.C. are getting paid \$77,167 yearly. The last time the teachers got a pay raise was on July 1, 2019. It was only a 5% pay raise. Plus, the state doesn't pay for any teachers beyond those needed to meet the minimum student-to-teacher ratios set by the Standards of Quality. For example, the student-to-teacher ratio in kindergarten shouldn't exceed 24-1, according to 2018's Standards of Quality.

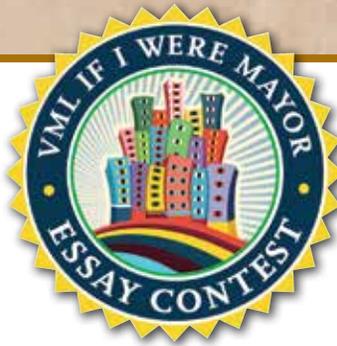
I interviewed our school superintendent, Dr. Smith, and I asked him if there's a way to increase teacher pay. His response was, "The only way is if the state gives us the 60% they are required to pay."

Another question I asked was, "Why are teachers getting paid so little?" Dr. Smith's response was, "Because the state of Virginia is not doing its part."

This is very shocking because schools are a big part of childhood and giving kids the best school experience possible is an important part of many families. But if kids are sent to schools where even the teachers are not getting paid enough then just think about how the school environment might look.

The solution to this problem might be very difficult to carry out. It will cost a lot of money. So, the best solution would be to start a march to the White House and personally meet with the president to address this very crucial issue. Another way might be to file a case against the state for ignoring the schools of Staunton Virginia.





Region 5 Winner

Madeline Sherwood

City of Falls Church – Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School
Teacher: Kieran Shakeshaft



MY COMMUNITY OF Falls Church City is full of places to walk to. We have many local restaurants, shops, and parks to visit. With our small size of just over two square miles, the city should be very walkable. However, that's not always the case. In many neighborhoods, public areas, and even to some of our schools, it can be difficult to walk due to the lack of sidewalks.

With the ever-increasing use of motor vehicles, walking and biking is very important. Not only does it decrease the pollution that vehicles cause, but it also has health benefits. Spending more time walking can increase both physical and mental health. If there is no sidewalk to walk on, people are left with no choice but to walk in the street, which could be unsafe, or just skip walking altogether and drive. Being able to walk and bike to places in a city like Falls Church is important because it is better for the people walking and the city that they are walking in, which is why we need more sidewalks to do those activities.

I talked to my mom, a community member in Falls Church, about possible solutions for the sidewalk issue. Her proposal is to have more funding for the existing sidewalk program in Falls Church, the Missing Links Program, which repairs and adds sidewalk infrastructure in areas of the city that are missing sidewalks. Having more funding would be helpful for the program because it would allow it to hire more staff and materials to plan and build sidewalks around the city. However, this funding has to come from somewhere, and she suggested either raising money or relocating funds from other less pressing programs to help increase funds for the sidewalk program.

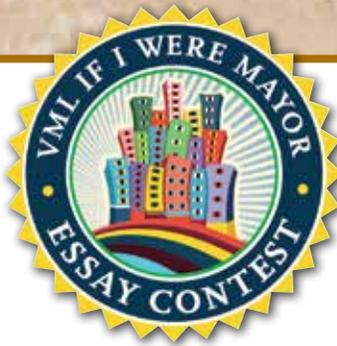
I think that this solution is a good start, but there is much that needs to be done. On average, 200 feet of concrete sidewalk can range from about \$1800 to \$2400. This can get quite expensive, as there are many areas of Falls Church that need sidewalks. The Missing Links Program would need much more funding to build sidewalks in all the places that don't have them. To fund the program, we could raise money through events such as city-wide fairs, similar to existing fall festivals, where there are many things to buy, games to play, and food to purchase. However, this time, some money that's made could go to funding the Missing Links Program.

Another way to get funding for the program could be to require developers who want to build in the city to provide some money for the sidewalk fund, since there is lots of construction going on around Falls Church, and much of it makes walking around town harder.

If more funds could be raised for the Missing Links Program, then it would be much easier for sidewalks to be built around Falls Church. Having these sidewalks would be beneficial to community members, and make the city much easier to bike and walk in.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 6 Winner

Leia Hatem

Town of Leesburg – J.L. Simpson Middle School
Teacher: Matthew Ludwig



IF I WERE THE MAYOR of Leesburg, I would address the issue of the increased number of airplanes flying over densely populated areas in Leesburg. I have been living in Leesburg for 14 years, and this issue hasn't been a problem until recently. The source of this problem is flight schools at the Leesburg Executive Airport, which is the second-biggest general aviation airport in Virginia. The planes are flying all around Leesburg and especially over the neighborhoods. This causes two problems, the first being safety as the planes cause pollution, the second being noise disruption.

Many people may not realize that the pollution the planes cause when they fly directly overhead is harmful. The planes fly over areas with many people, and the pollution is especially harmful for children. The population in Leesburg is dense and has close to 50,000 residents, and the pollution from the airplanes is putting all those people at unnecessary risk. Plus, animals, pets, and wildlife are exposed to pollution. Even a small exposure to the pollution caused by planes can put residents at risk of lung disease, heart cancer, and respiratory infections.

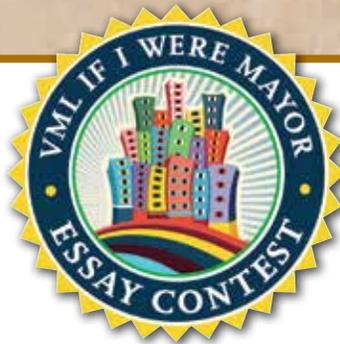
The planes are also causing a lot of disruption that countless people in the town have noticed. From personal experience, I have noticed that other people coming to Leesburg from out of town have been shocked by the level of noise the planes constantly cause. The noise disrupts sleep, work, businesses, and even extracurricular activities such as sports. The planes also fly all throughout the day, even before waking hours. The noise can even harm residents by causing sleep disruption and high blood pressure.

I talked to several members in the community who voiced their concerns as well. One community member offered the solution of not allowing the flight schools – which fly over homes repeatedly in circular patterns – to take place in the Leesburg Executive Airport but in a different one surrounded by fields and farms. I think this would be a great solution. If the planes flew over a sparsely populated area, less people would be affected by this, and the flight school could take place as usual. I suggested the idea to other members in the community who thought that, with a few adjustments, the solution would be effective.

To me, this solution would be most beneficial and effective for both the residents of Leesburg and the airports. We all should have a right to live free of disruption and without fear of health problems caused by pollution. Leesburg would benefit from this solution as it would be a safer and more enjoyable place to live, work, and grow up.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 7 Winner

Eli Henry Smith

City of Emporia – E. W. Wyatt Middle School
Teacher: Sutania McBean



HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED what you would do if you were mayor? Well, I have. I have seen some recurring problems in the city and schools across the globe. One problem is food waste. Cities and schools have experienced food waste problems every day. Reducing food waste would benefit the cities and schools by helping those in need, reducing the amount of trash, and allowing people to share unwanted food.

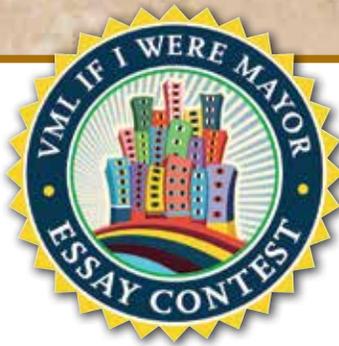
To start, I would have my own company with a program to promote reducing the amount of food wasted. Some people don't have the luxury to eat anything they want (or anything for that matter) and with the program decreasing food waste in schools it could decrease the number of people in need. To also increase the number of people participating in the program we will take it to social media for faster promotion.

Secondly, in cities, there is a lot of trash around the streets and inside some buildings. I would add very accessible trash cans all around the city and have a job for some of the people who are in need. This job will have them join the company and pick up trash around the city which will promote the program. As for schools, I would have more custodians on the job to help and I would increase the number of trash cans for students.

I would also promote the saying "sharing is caring" in my program for the people who are in need. Kids in school have food that isn't touched or won't be eaten that someone could use. If kids in school shared food with their peers there would be a decrease in kids who are in need.

In conclusion, food waste should happen less in schools and cities worldwide. My program would be a great way to start to change a big problem.





Region 8 Winner

Jay Reese

York County - Grafton Middle School
Teacher: Veronica Hodges



If I Were Mayor

IMAGINE DRIVING ON a major road in your city and watching somebody dash across it to the other side when the stop light turns red. Wondering how somebody could be crazy enough to brave the roadway in the middle of the day, you search for crosswalks that the person could have used to safely cross the street. However, you find none. My community of the Yorktown/Grafton/Hampton Roads area lacks crosswalks, sidewalks, and bike lanes.

Transportation is extremely important in this modern world, but lack of infrastructure can limit the possibilities of non-fossil fuel methods to go places. As non-sustainable fuel sources diminish, and climate change becomes worse, more stable methods for transportation will be needed. By not working to resolve this problem now, we are crippling ourselves for the future. I know that this is a problem in my community because it affects many people negatively.

One group of people that are affected are students. For example, I know a student who lives half a mile from her school. However, the lack of sidewalks and crosswalks means that she cannot safely walk to school. A ten-minute walk becomes a twenty-minute bus ride. If she could walk to school, it would not only keep the environment cleaner, but also open a bus route for another area that is not within walking distance. Many times, my bus and/or another bus has had to drive a double route to get everybody back home.

Another cohort of people that are affected by lack of transportation infrastructure are those who only have one car. An adult I know only has one car between herself and her working husband. In her neighborhood, she has crosswalks, but they are not connected to the rest of the community. She lives within walking distance of Kroger, but she cannot get there because there are no crosswalks for her to safely do so. This lack of infrastructure is problematic for those with less income.

Trying to find a solution, I asked some fellow students what they thought could be done. The peers I asked came up with the idea of hiring workers to paint crosswalks, paint bike lanes, and build sidewalks. Money would be set aside from taxes to pay for the infrastructure. Another person I asked was my mother, who suggested that as new neighborhoods are approved to be built, a requirement could be to install infrastructure such as sidewalks and crosswalks.

I believe that a mixture of my peers' solution and my mother's solution would work to solve the problem. Fixing the problem works for now, but putting in rules as a safeguard for the future will prevent a lack of infrastructure from occurring again. By preventing and changing the lack of transportation infrastructure, life in my community will improve and thrive.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT

2024

VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE INNOVATION AWARDS

Enter on-line at www.vml.org. Deadline for submissions is Aug. 26, 2024.



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RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE IN VIRGINIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2024 General Assembly Review for Virginia’s Local Governments

THE 2024 GENERAL ASSEMBLY Session featured a brand-new General Assembly Building with ample modern and beautiful meeting rooms, public spaces, and office spaces. If you have not had the opportunity to tour the new building, plan to do so – it’s a wonderful facility.

But the novelty didn’t stop at the building as it was full of brand-new General Assembly members. The 2023 elections brought in a wave of new members: a total of 31 new House members, with a change in the majority party from the Republicans to the Democrats, and 18 new Senate members. The changes in the House and Senate membership resulted in new leadership for most committees as well as several committee membership changes.

The General Assembly, as usual, had a cascade of bills to consider during the 2024 session with 3,595 bills and resolutions introduced this year. A total of 2,281 passed; 405 were continued to the 2025 Session, 909 failed, and Gov. Glenn Youngkin vetoed a record 201 bills.

There were also budget bills – changes to the current year budget (the caboose bill) and the proposed budget for the 2024-2026 biennium. Those bills were approved on time, along with the rest of the legislative agenda, but things got tricky when Governor Youngkin sent a record number of amendments to the budget bills back to the General Assembly.

During the reconvened session on April 17, the General Assembly dealt with all the gubernatorial amendments and vetoes to regular bills. The budgets, however, were another matter. The General Assembly set aside the budget bills and the General Assembly and Governor backed into their respective corners for a breather and a plan to return in May.

On May 13, the General Assembly returned to Richmond for a special session and approved compromise budget bills for the current year and the new biennium. Governor Youngkin signed those bills following that May 13 special session.

What follows is a summary of legislation of interest to local governments from the 2024 General Assembly session along with a summary of the budget.

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Budget Summary

Now that we have a budget (or budgets) that the General Assembly agreed to and the Governor signed off on a few weeks ago, it’s interesting to go back to December 20, 2023, when the Governor kicked off the budget process and try to remember all that transpired. Like a good football game, we tend to focus on the last two minutes of an event and forget all the plays that make up the entirety of the game.

It was late in December that Governor Youngkin introduced amendments to the Caboose Bill, the budget that wraps up on June 30, 2024, as well as his proposed biennial budget that would govern the period from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2026.

Unlike the proposed 2022-24 biennial budget that Governor Youngkin inherited from former Governor Northam when he was sworn into office in 2022, the next biennial budget is the only one that Governor Youngkin recommends and negotiates during the 2024 General Assembly.

As in prior years, the Governor’s recommended budgets were defined by tax policy changes. His budget proposed net tax relief of nearly \$1.0 billion for the biennium...\$999.5 million to be more



precise. The signature element of his proposal involved reducing individual tax rates across the board by approximately 12 percent, while offsetting the cost of this tax reduction by raising the statewide sales tax rate by 0.9 percent from 4.3 percent to 5.2 percent and expanding the sales tax to “new economy” products such as digital downloads, streaming, and computing services.

Modernizing the sales tax by expanding it to digital services made a lot of sense and may explain why House and Senate budgeteers ultimately retained this proposal as part of their recommended budget package, with a few tweaks.

The biggest bombshell from the Governor Youngkin speech in December was when he asked his “colleagues in the General Assembly to work with me to completely eliminate the hated car tax and replace it with an increase in the local sales tax.” We heard rumors a few days before the Governor’s budget was rolled out that he might recommend this proposal but, in the end, pen was never put to paper and no initiative ever materialized.

The focus on tax policy seemed to divert attention away from the spending side of the ledger where the Governor’s comprehensive budget recommendations added funding for K-12 education, child care, behavioral health services, resiliency, Chesapeake Bay and water quality projects, and economic development. He also recommended bonuses in the first year and salary increases in the second year for teachers (2%), state employees (1%), and state supported local employees (2%) that were increased by the General Assembly to 3% each year and no bonuses in the final budget agreement.

After doubling down on additional tax cuts and taking criticism that the Governor’s proposal shortchanged K-12 education by not addressing recommendations that the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) proposed in July 2023, rumors swirled that the General Assembly, now controlled by Democrats by the slimmest of margins, would scrap the Governor’s budget and start anew.

Anyone who knows the budget process in Virginia realizes that was hyperbole. But it was clear that changes were coming, and the first thing to go was the Governor’s proposed tax relief.

Neither chamber passed legislation enacting the Governor’s \$1.0 billion tax proposals, resulting in an equal amount of money for the House and Senate Budget Conferees to fund their priorities. But the conferees went further by endorsing the Governor’s proposal to expand the sales tax to digital services, bringing in an additional \$1.0 billion in general fund revenues. Most of these additional resources were allocated to K-12 education, higher education, and salary increases.

When the General Assembly sent the Governor a final budget before it adjourned in early March, the Governor cried foul that it “cherry-picked” from his tax proposal with no additional cuts. In response, the Governor proposed an unprecedented number of budget amendments at the Reconvened Session in April to remove any tax increases but also related spending that had been funded with the extra revenues.

On the day the General Assembly gathered to take up the Governor’s proposed budget amendments, both sides agreed to set aside the Governor’s amendments and return to the budget the conferees had sent the Governor in early March.

At the same time, it was revealed that strong revenue growth in the current fiscal year – in excess of \$500 million – and the use of bonds instead of general fund cash (\$515 million) for numerous capital projects, would

permit the House and Senate Conferees to walk away from relying upon additional tax revenue to fund all of their spending initiatives.

In the end, the Governor was able to claim victory by pushing back on tax increases and the House and Senate Budget Conferees were able to steer additional funds toward K-12 education, higher education, behavioral health services, and salary increases, as evidenced by the table below.

Comparison of HB 30 (Governor) to HB 6001 (Final Budget) (GF dollars in millions)			
Category	Governor HB 30	Final HB 6001	Difference
Education	\$ 25,899.6	\$ 27,127.6	\$ 1,227.99
Health & human resources	\$ 19,670.2	\$ 20,003.1	\$ 332.87
Public safety	\$ 5,303.7	\$ 5,268.1	\$ (35.52)
Finance	\$ 4,334.5	\$ 4,345.6	\$ 11.03
Administration	\$ 1,975.5	\$ 1,982.9	\$ 7.38
Judicial	\$ 1,277.2	\$ 1,313.1	\$ 35.83
Commerce & trade	\$ 1,209.6	\$ 1,001.1	\$ (208.53)
All other	\$ 2,342.7	\$ 2,707.5	\$ 364.90
TOTAL, GF Operating Budget	\$ 62,013.0	\$ 63,749.0	\$ 1,735.95

Tax & Finance

With the influx of new members to the General Assembly in the 2024 Session, there were questions about what legislation might be introduced and ultimately enacted into law. In hindsight, there was no discernible pattern to the bills that were heard or passed. There did appear to be a reluctance to pass anything that resulted in additional general fund commitments, beyond the priorities of the new General Assembly, as the House and Senate seemed to wall off revenues for their major commitments such as education, behavioral health services, and salary increases for state employees and state-supported local staff. Even popular tax credit initiatives and spending proposals that in the past may have advanced were gently laid on the table rather than committing the Commonwealth to new calls on the general fund.

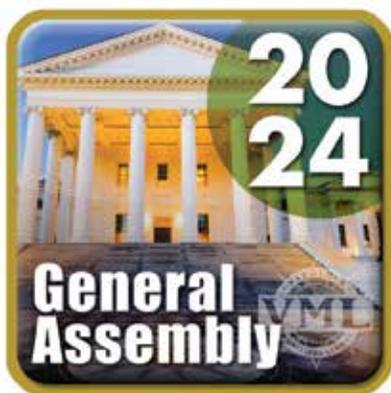
Passed

SB645 (Aird) Local fiscal distress. Codifies budget language that lays out a process to identify and assist localities that are flagged by the Auditor of Public Accounts as being in fiscal distress. That language has been included in the Appropriations Act since 2017. But the bill goes further, ultimately authorizing the appointment of an emergency fiscal manager to manage and remediate the distressed locality’s finances, notwithstanding the roles and responsibilities of the local governing body or chief executive officer.

Designed to address fiscal management issues in the city of Hopewell, the ability to appoint an emergency fiscal manager was eventually narrowed to localities in Planning District 19, the Crater District, that includes:

- Charles City County
- Chesterfield County
- City of Colonial Heights
- Dinwiddie County
- City of Emporia
- Greensville County
- City of Hopewell
- City of Petersburg
- Prince George County
- Surry County
- Sussex County

HB1099 (Kilgore) Tax on heated tobacco products. Redefines the definition of “cigarette”, for tax purposes, to include any product containing nicotine that is intended to be burned or heated.



The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) proposed the change out of concern that the likely imminent introduction of a new “heat-not-burn” product to the market might result in non-compliance with the Master Tobacco Settlement Agreement, potentially jeopardizing revenues accruing to the Commonwealth. The bill subjects heated cigarettes to an excise tax of 2.25 cents per cigarette, compared to 3.0 cents for traditional cigarettes. Local governments have received assurances from the OAG that the proposed changes will not interfere with the ability of local governments to tax cigarettes, including these new products.

SB4 (McPike) Constitutional amendment; property tax exemption for certain surviving spouses (voter referendum); SB240 (McPike) Property tax; exemption for surviving spouses of armed forces members who died in the line of duty; SJ3 (McPike) Constitutional amendment; property tax exemption for certain surviving spouses; HJ45 (Tran) Constitutional amendment; property tax exemption for certain surviving spouses; HB558 (Hernandez) Constitutional amendment; property tax exemption for certain surviving spouses (voter referendum). Expands a property tax exemption that is currently available to the surviving spouses of soldiers killed in action to include the surviving spouses of soldiers who died in the line of duty. The proposal requires voter approval through a referendum in November 2024. It is estimated that the cost to localities of current property tax exemptions for disabled veterans and their spouses as well as the surviving spouses of soldiers killed in action has grown from \$8 million in 2011 to \$188 million in 2023. If approved in November, the cost of expanding mandatory property tax exemptions to the surviving spouses of soldiers who died in the line of duty is likely to increase.

Failed

HB1483 (McQuinn) Meals tax; statute of limitations, penalties and interest / SB294 (DeSteph) Local tax; penalties and interest. Would have modified the way localities could generate local tax revenues. The bills were designed to address problems that restaurant owners in the City of Richmond had been experiencing with meals tax collections. As originally drafted, the bill’s provisions applied to all local tax collections and every locality in Virginia, even if meals tax collections have not been an issue. The final version that failed to pass out of the Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee was pared back to only address meals tax collections but also cities with finance directors, which would have affected a handful of cities.

Failed (but may return)

HB1328 (McNamara) Transient Occupancy Taxes. Would have required the Department of Taxation to collect local transient occupancy taxes on behalf of local governments and distribute tax revenues to the applicable locality. The bill also required the Department to contract with a third-party provider to develop an electronic interface that enables accommodations intermediaries to provide a single filing and remittance system for transient occupancy taxes due for all localities, beginning on July 1, 2025.

HB695 (Ware) Short-term rentals. Would have required the Department of Taxation to establish a registry of short-term rental properties that includes accommodation providers and intermediaries (e.s., Airbnb, VRBO, etc.) to nudge certain accommodations intermediaries into compliance with current law as it relates to the administration and collection of transient occupancy taxes.

Carried Over to the 2025 General Assembly Session

HB540 (McNamara) Sales and use tax; exemption for food purchased for human consumption & essential personal hygiene / SB110 (Suetterlein) Sales tax; exemption for food purchased for human consumption and essential personal hygiene. Would eliminate the 1% local option sales tax on groceries and personal hygiene products. Two years ago, the General Assembly repealed the statewide sales tax on these products, but the local option has remained in place. The grocery tax generates about \$300 million annually, providing a reliable and flexible source of revenue for localities to use at their discretion. The bill was carried over to the 2025 Session with a letter to the Joint Subcommittee on Tax Policy.

HB1446 (Coyner) Real property tax; assessment of real property used for affordable housing. Would change the way that affordable housing is assessed at the local level. The bill requires that local assessors only use an income approach for property operated as affordable housing as part of certain federal affordable housing programs, a requirement that would be inconsistent with generally accepted appraisal practices, which allow some flexibility to address circumstances where the income approach is not appropriate (for example, when property is under construction). The bill was continued to the 2025 Session and the subject matter referred to the Housing Commission for further review and discussion during the interim.

General Laws

Passed

SB544 (Bagby) Short-term rental property; locality’s ability to prohibit use of accessory dwelling unit. No local ordinance enacted after December 31, 2023, or any subsequent amendment, shall require that a special exception, special use, or conditional use permit be obtained for the use of a residential dwelling as a short-term rental where the dwelling unit is also legally occupied by the property owner as his primary residence.

HB852 (Williams) Local government ordinances related to fire departments; billing on behalf of volunteer fire departments. The governing body of any county, city, or town in which a fire department or fire company is established may make such ordinances in relation to the powers and duties of such fire departments or fire companies, and chiefs and other officers of such fire departments or fire companies, as it may deem proper, including billing property owners on behalf of volunteer fire departments as provided in § 38.2-2130 and billing on behalf of volunteer fire departments for the support of a licensed emergency medical services agency, as defined in § 32.1-111.1.

HB1415 (McQuinn) Civil penalty for demolition of historic structures. Authorizes any locality to adopt an ordinance establishing a civil penalty for the razing, demolition, or moving of a building or structure that is located in a historic district or that has been designated by a governing body as a historic structure or landmark in violation of an ordinance that no such building or structure shall be razed, demolished, or moved without the approval of a review board. The bill provides that such civil penalty shall not exceed the market value of the property as determined by the assessed value of the property at the time of razing, demolition, or moving of the building or structure.

HB947 (Lopez) Local government; regulation by ordinance for locations of tobacco products, etc. Localities may by ordinance regulate retail sale locations of tobacco products, nicotine vapor products, alternative nicotine products or hemp products

intended for smoking and may prohibit a retail sale location within 1,000 linear feet of a child day care center or school. There are exceptions.

HB650 (Coyner) Zoning; residential and electrical generation projects; period of validity. Provides that the conditions of a special exception or special use permit may include a period of validity; however, in the case of a special exception or special use permit for residential and electrical generation projects, the period of validity shall be no fewer than three years. The bill provides that for so long as a special exception, special use permit, or conditional use permit remains valid, no change or amendment to any local ordinance, map, resolution, rule, regulation, policy, or plan adopted subsequent to the date of approval of the special exception, special use permit, or conditional use permit shall adversely affect the right of the developer or his successor in interest to commence and complete an approved development in accordance with the lawful terms of the special exception, special use permit, or conditional use permit unless the change or amendment is required to comply with state law or there has been a mistake, fraud, or a change in circumstances substantially affecting the public health, safety, or welfare.

SB701 (French) Vested rights; building permits. Provides that if a locality has issued a building permit, despite nonconformance with the zoning ordinance, and a property owner, relying in good faith on the issuance of the building permit, incurs extensive obligations or substantial expenses in diligent pursuit of a building project that is in conformance with the building permit and the Uniform Statewide Building Code, the locality shall not treat such building as an illegal use but rather as a legal nonconforming use.

SB296 (VanValkenburg) / HB1356 (Owen – did not pass) Local planning commission; action on proposed plats, site plans, and development plans; residential use. Requires local planning commissions to use the same approval process for residential development projects as is currently required for commercial development projects.

HB1461 (Mundon King) Short-term rental property; locality's ability to prohibit lessee or sublease operator. No local ordinance shall prohibit an operator from offering a property as a short-term rental solely on the basis that such operator is a lessee or sublessee, provided that the property owner has granted permission for such property's use as a short-term rental. Localities may enact an ordinance that limits a lessee or sublessee to one short-term rental within the applicable locality and create a registry for this purpose.

HB128 (Watts) Local regulation of door-to-door vendors; political parties exempted. Provides that local ordinances regulating the activities of door-to-door vendors shall not apply to any person participating in certain specified political activities.

HB281 (Reaser) / SB13 (Favola) Early childhood care and education; child day programs; use of office buildings; waiver of zoning requirements. Permits any locality to by ordinance provide for the waiver of any requirements for zoning permits for the operation of a child day program in an office building, as defined by the bill, provided that such facility satisfies the requirements for state licensure as a child day program.

HB311 (Hope) Virginia Public Procurement Act; local public bodies; electronic submissions of bids or proposals. Requires all local public bodies to provide an electronic means for the submission of bids or proposals for procurement. The locality can

also require a certain number of paper copies for review. The bill has an effective date of January 1, 2025.

HB242 (Bulova) / SB242 (McPike) Virginia Public Procurement Act; competitive negotiation; exceptions to contractual terms and conditions of the Request for Proposal. States that a public body may request objections to contract terms at the time of submitting proposals but can't use them in scoring for the short list of proposals.

HB1108 (Carr) / SB18 (Locke) Virginia Public Procurement Act; construction management and design-build contracting. Construction Management (CM) and design-build (DB) contracts entered into by localities cannot use their CM/DB experiences in deciding who to shortlist; they can use it in deciding to whom to make the award.

HB1113 (Carr) Virginia Public Procurement Act; job order contracting; limitations. Increases from \$6M to \$10M, the maximum threshold above which the sum of all jobs performed in a one-year job order contract shall not exceed and increases from \$500,000 to \$1M the maximum threshold for any one job order.

HB1116 (Carr) Virginia Public Procurement Act; methods of procurement; certain construction projects. Raises the small purchase limit on construction to \$300,000.

HB151 (Helmer) / SB245 (McPike) Energy, Department of; building standards for certain local buildings. This is a bill that amends §15.2-1804.1 dealing with energy efficient building construction. The additions clarify that the legislation applies to public school buildings and includes buildings for electric vehicles. It also retains the ability of a local public body to opt out of the requirements if they find them too expensive or have other reasons for opting out.

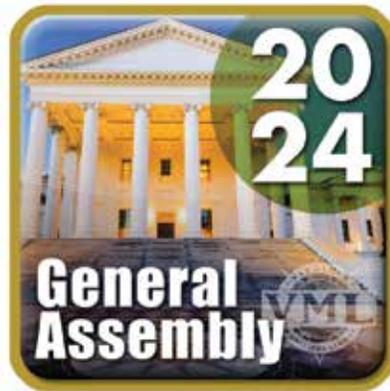
HB264 (Hope) / SB157 (Boysko) Legal notices and publications; on-line news publications, requirements. A locality may publish their legal notices in an online-only news publication in lieu of publication in a newspaper if the online publication meets the criteria listed in the code section.

HB894 (Bennett-Parker) / SB734 (Marsden) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; electronic meetings. Amends the number of all-virtual meetings that certain public bodies may hold from 2 or 25% to 2 or 50% per calendar year.

HB1040 (Bennett-Parker) / SB85 (Favola) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; definition of "caregiver," remote participation in meetings. Stipulates that a person with a disability or their caregiver can participate remotely as part of the public body in a meeting and count as part of a quorum. "Caregiver" is defined in the legislation.

HB816 (Cherry) / SB244 (McPike) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; effective date of procedures for conducting meetings held through electronic communication means during declared states of emergency. Stipulates that meetings by electronic means due to a state of emergency are declarative of existing law since March 20, 2020, as long as the notice and access requirements were met.

HB818 (Cherry) / SB36 (Locke) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; definition of meeting. Amends the definition of "meeting" as it relates to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to clarify that a gathering of two or more members of a public body is not a meeting if there is no discussion or transaction of any



public business by the members of the public body and that certain educational trainings are not meetings subject to FOIA.

HB1412 (Cherry) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; exemption for complainant personal contact information. Amends an existing exemption from mandatory disclosure under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act for names, addresses, and phone numbers of complainants furnished in confidence with respect to an investigation of individual zoning enforcement complaints or complaints relating to the Uniform Statewide Building Code or the Statewide Fire Prevention Code made to a local governing body to exempt personal contact information of such complainants as defined in the bill.

SB215 (Perry) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; removal of. Virginia residency requirement for access to certain criminal investigation files. Removes the requirement that persons to whom non-ongoing criminal investigation files shall otherwise be disclosed be citizens of the Commonwealth. Current law limits disclosure of public records to individuals who are citizens of the Commonwealth unless a clear exception applies.

SB204 (Diggs) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; release of criminal investigative files exception. Exempts a victim's insurance company and attorney from the prohibition on releasing photographic, audio, video, or other records depicting such victim. The bill also permits a victim, a victim's immediate family members if the victim is deceased, a victim's parent or guardian, the victim's insurance company, or the victim's attorney to waive the 14-day period for a public body to respond to a request for criminal investigative files.

HB456 (Callsen) City council salaries; permitted salaries. Increases the statutory salary caps for members of city councils and requires a public hearing prior to adopting an ordinance to set city council salaries. The bill also provides that the maximum salaries may be adjusted in any year by an inflation factor not to exceed five percent.

SB413 (Head) / HB1488 (Henson) Local government; standardization of public notice requirements for certain meetings, hearings, etc. This is a clean-up bill from the code commission regarding public notice requirements. The revisions include amending the frequency for publishing notices in the newspapers, the number of days required to elapse between the publication of notices and the amount of information to be contained in each notice.

HB69 (Bulova) Vacancies in elected local offices; interim appointments; notice requirement. Requires the local governing body or elected school board making an interim appointment to fill a vacancy in the membership of such body or board to hold a public meeting at least seven days prior to making such appointment. The bill specifies that at such meeting, the body or board shall announce the names of all persons being proposed for the interim appointment and shall make available for inspection each person's resume and any other materials required by the body or board.

HB1395 (Hope) Historic preservation. Provides that the filing of a building permit or demolition application shall stay a locality from issuing any permit to raze or demolish a historic landmark, building, or structure until 30 days after the rendering of the final decision of the governing body of the locality pursuant to a historic preservation ordinance.

SB17 (Stanley) Motor sports facilities; historic landmark designation; enterprise zone. Allows a locality that is home to a

motor sports facility, as defined in relevant law, in the Commonwealth to propose local incentives that address the economic conditions within such locality and will help stimulate real property improvements and new job creation. The bill allows a locality to establish eligibility criteria for local incentives that are different from the current criteria required by relevant law.

HB61 (Wright) / SB679 (Head)*slightly different language – Enterprise zones; renewal periods. Authorizes the Governor, upon the recommendation of the Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development, to renew enterprise zones for up to four five-year renewal periods for zones designated on or after July 1, 2005, and for up to two five-year renewal periods for zones designated before July 1, 2005.

SB538 (Bagby) / HB578 (McQuinn) Uniform Statewide Building Code; violations, increases fines. Increases from \$2,500 to \$5,000 the minimum amount and from \$5,000 to \$10,000 the maximum amount that any person, firm, or corporation shall be fined when convicted of a third or subsequent offense of violating the provisions of the Building Code committed within 10 years of another such offense after having been at least twice previously convicted of such an offense.

HB755 (Walker) Civil penalties for certain local property violations; industrial and commercial areas. Allows localities by ordinance to charge enhanced civil penalties

for certain local property violations on property that is zoned or utilized for industrial or commercial purposes.

SB48 (Locke) / HB1486 (Thomas) Vacant buildings; registration. Allows any county, city, or town to require a vacant building registration if the building has been vacant 12 months and meets certain criteria.

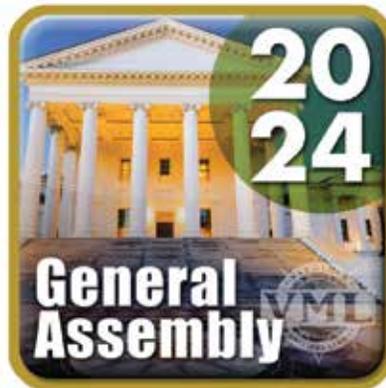
SB49 (Locke) / HB478 (Coyner) Community revitalization fund; expanding use for all localities. Expands the current law to allow all localities the ability to establish a community revitalization fund to be used to prevent neighborhood deterioration. Currently only the City of Richmond has this authority.

HB634 (Simon) / SB308 (McPike) Residential dwelling units; rentals for 30 consecutive days or longer. Prohibits a locality from enacting or enforcing an ordinance that bans the rental of residential dwelling units for 30 consecutive days or longer. The bill allows a locality by ordinance to regulate such rental if such regulations (i) are reasonable and (ii) do not exceed the requirements for an owner-occupied residential property or a residential property rented for a lease term of 12 months or more in the same zoning district.

SB354 (Locke) / HB467 (Simon) Establishment by localities of certain real estate contract disclosures prohibited. Localities may not establish or enforce a mandatory disclosure requirement for a real estate transaction dealing with residential real property.

HB1211 (Hayes) Tax assessment districts; petition by parcel owners. Changes the threshold for petitioning a city or town for establishment of a tax assessment district from not less than three-fourths of the landowners affected to the owners of not less than three-fourths of the parcels affected.

HB1019 (Wilt) Health insurance; locality to allow local employees to participate in its group health insurance programs. Permits any locality to allow participation in its group health insurance program by any non-benefitted employee, including members of governing bodies, if such non-benefitted employee or govern-



ing body member is not otherwise entitled to participate, provided that such non-benefitted employees reimburse the locality for the full cost of their participation. The bill provides that reimbursement may include forgoing all or a part of a local government salary.

Failed

HB4 (Martinez) Plastic bag tax; distribution to towns. Would have provided that any town located within a county that has imposed a disposable plastic bag tax shall receive a distribution of revenues collected by the county based on the local sales tax distribution formula for appropriations to towns. The bill required that towns use such revenues for the same purposes allowable for a county or city.

HB953 (Lopez) Local Environment Impact Fund. Would have allowed any locality by ordinance to create a permanent and perpetual fund to be known as the Local Environmental Impact Fund (the Fund). The Fund would have consisted exclusively of appropriated local funds and any gifts, donations, grants, bequests, and other funds received on its behalf.

HB1028 (Reaser) Affordable Housing; assisted living facilities. Would have allowed any locality that has adopted an affordable housing program pursuant to § 15.2-2304, 15.2-2305, or 15.2-2305.1 to by ordinance require that in an application for a special exception or special use permit in accordance with § 15.2-2286 affordable rental units be included for any proposed development of an assisted living facility to be licensed pursuant to § 63.2-1701.

HB1207 (Hayes) / SB588 (Lucas) Department of Housing and Community Development; Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act; affordable housing; criminal record screening. Would have required the Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development to develop a criminal record screening model policy for admitting or denying an applicant for affordable housing covered under the Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act in accordance with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's guidance on the application of the Fair Housing Act and maintain such model policy on its website.

HB1386 (Convirs-Fowler) Firearm regulation by local governments. Stated that any locality that adopts an ordinance prohibiting the public carrying of firearms shall not have workplace rules that are less restrictive than such ordinance.

HB1398 (Bennett-Parker) Preservation of affordable housing; definitions; civil penalty. Would have created a framework for localities to preserve affordable housing by exercising a right of first refusal on publicly supported housing, defined in the bill.

SB477 (Aird) Blighted and derelict properties in certain localities; rate of tax. Would have allowed the governing body of a locality with a score of 100 or higher on the fiscal stress index to levy a real property tax on blighted and derelict properties at a rate exceeding the rate applicable to the general class of real property by up to 15 percent on blighted properties and by up to 30 percent on derelict properties.

SB570 (Ebbin) Virginia Human Rights Act; definition of "employer." Would have made it a violation of the Virginia Human Rights Act for a locality or other government agency to refuse reasonable ADA accommodations for employees. It waived sovereign immunity in a lawsuit over violations of the law.

SB595 (Bagby) / HB208 (Simonds) Comprehensive plan; healthy communities strategy. Would have allowed localities to adopt a healthy communities strategy in their comprehensive plan.

SB597 (McPike) Affordable housing; local zoning ordinance authority; comprehensive plan. Would have authorized any locality in the Commonwealth to provide an affordable housing dwelling unit program by amending the zoning ordinance of such locality.

HB950 (Lopez) Uniform Statewide Building Code; temporary prohibition on modifications. Stated that notwithstanding any other provision of law, neither the Governor nor the Board of Housing and Community Development shall modify any regulation in the Uniform Statewide Building Code (§ 36-97 et seq. of the Code of Virginia) prior to the conclusion of the Commonwealth's next triennial code development process.

Health & Human Services

Passed

HB326 (Glass) / SB239 (Hashmi) Social Work Licensure Compact. Authorizes Virginia to become a signatory to the Social Work Licensure Compact, which allows social workers who are eligible for an active, unencumbered license in the compact member state where they reside to apply for a multistate license. After verifying eligibility, the social worker is granted a multistate license authorizing practice in all other compact member states. This compact only goes into effect when enacted by a seventh member state. The individual is responsible for paying associated costs (e.g., fingerprinting).

HB327 (Feggins) Commissioner of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services; inclusive housing plan; individuals with disabilities. Directs the Commissioner of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to work with stakeholders to develop a plan to ensure that people with disabilities, including individuals affected by the 2012 Settlement Agreement have an opportunity to access affordable and inclusive housing, as defined in the bill. The plan shall be reported to the Chairs of House Health and Human Services and the Senate Education and Health Committees by Jan. 1, 2025.

HB515 (Hope) Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services; discharge pilot program; report. Directs the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to implement a pilot program relating to the discharge of select individuals on the extraordinary barrier list at one state hospital (likely Catawba). The bill allows the facility director to discharge such individuals over the objection of the Community Services Board or guardian. The legislation specifies that the costs of the home or trial visit would be the responsibility of the guardian or the local social services department. There is existing language in Code of Virginia § 37.2-837 related to currently allowable home and trial visits. The Department shall submit a report to the General Assembly on its findings and recommendations no later than Nov. 1, 2025.

HB855 (Herandez) State Department of Social Services; Home Energy Assistance Program. Authorizes the State Board of Social Services promulgate regulations to allow applications for the Home Energy Assistance Program be submitted over an application period extended beyond current application period as of July 1, 2024, provided adequate funding is available to extend the application period. By extending the application period more participants can apply. A fiscal impact is expected for local departments of social services, which administers the program.

HB1431 (Hodges) Alternative onsite sewage systems; approval of treatment units. Requires the Virginia Department of Health to approve alternative onsite sewage systems that meet certain national standards or testing requirements.

HB1499 (Willett) / SB155 (Head) Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority; Virginia Health Care Career and Technical Training and Education Fund created; psychological practitioner defined; educational requirements for nursing faculty. Amendments include addition of four ex officio members to the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority, directing changes to regulations regarding qualifications for qualified

mental health professionals, establishing a licensing procedure for a psychological practitioner as defined in the bill, and establishing the Virginia Health Workforce Innovation Fund to be administered by the Director of the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority.

SB34 (Locke) Temporary detention; certified evaluators; report. Creates a new category of “certified evaluator,” a private hospital with a psychiatric emergency department in Senatorial District 23 (Senator Locke’s district) could employ or contract with a certified evaluator to perform evaluations to determine whether a person meets the criteria for temporary detention for behavioral health treatment. Currently a Community Services Board (CSB) evaluator performs this role. The hospital assumes all costs for the certified evaluator (e.g., hiring, training, duties). Extensive reporting to the state is required, but a gubernatorial amendment, accepted by the General Assembly, exempts the evaluators from the state’s human rights regulations. The bill sunsets in 2026.

Failed

HB75 (Hope) / SB40 (Favola) State Board of Social Services; regulations; application for and use of foster care benefits. Would have required the State Board of Social Services to amend its regulations to (i) require local departments of social services to apply for federal benefits on behalf of children in foster care that they may be eligible for, (ii) prohibit the use of federal benefits to pay for the care and support of children in foster care that the Commonwealth is otherwise obligated to pay for, and (iii) require local departments of social services that are representative payees for children in foster care to conserve such federal benefits in an appropriate trust instrument or protected account that is exempt from federal asset and resource limits.

HB177 (Gardner) Department of Medical Assistance Services; reimbursement rates for Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; work group; report. Would have required the Department of Medical Assistance Services to convene a work group to assess and make recommendations related to reimbursement rates for the federal Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C program) and report to the appropriate General Assembly committees.

HB354 (Hope) Public pools; regulations. Would have directed the Board of Health to adopt regulations governing swimming pools and other water recreational facilities operated for public use, including swimming pools and other water recreational facilities operated in conjunction with a tourist facility or health spa. VDH has a workgroup currently working on related issues that includes local representatives.

HB608 (Price) Temporary detention; certified evaluators; report. Would have created a new category of “certified evaluator” that any private hospital with a psychiatric emergency department in the state could employ or contract with to perform evaluations to determine whether a person meets the criteria for temporary detention for behavioral health treatment.

HB885 (Watts) Community services boards; core of services. Would have increased the services required of every Community Services Board/Behavioral Health Authority.

HB992 (Tran) Local departments of social services; agreements with local workforce development boards; coordinated workforce development services. Would have directed each local department of social services to enter into a written agreement with its local workforce development board to provide for coordinated workforce development services to participants in the Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW) program and those in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Train-

ing (SNAP) program who choose to participate in such a program. No recipient would have been subject to denial of SNAP benefits for failure to participate.

HB1052 (Batten) Department of Health; local government; alternative and conventional onsite sewage systems. Would have required a locality to check the Virginia Department of Health onsite sewage database before sending a notice to applicable homeowners regarding maintenance requirements for their system to ensure the proper maintenance information is given to the owner of the sewage system.

HB1204 (Scott) Department of Health; mobile food units. Would have required local health departments and health districts to allow a mobile food unit to conduct up to 20 percent of its sanitation and food preparation activities within a 50-foot radius of the mobile food unit.

SB70 (McPike) SNAP; employment and training. Would have required every local department of social services to offer a voluntary employment and training program for SNAP (food stamp) program participants.

SB141 (Ruff/Mulchi) State Department of Health; regulation of certain organizations; sale of food. Would have loosened requirements for nonprofit organizations (e.g., VFDs, schools, etc.) to supply/sell food at community events the organization is not sponsoring. Would have placed a \$3,000 limit for the year for such functions without getting a restaurant permit.

Carried Over to the 2025 General Assembly Session

SB590 (Deeds) Community services boards; required services. Would add to the list of mandated services to be provided by community services boards (i) crisis services for individuals with a mental illness or substance use disorder, (ii) outpatient mental health and substance abuse services, (iii) psychiatric rehabilitation services, (iv) peer support and family support services, (v) mental health services for members of the armed forces located 50 miles or more from a military treatment facility and veterans located 40 miles or more from a Veterans Health Administration medical facility, and (vi) care coordination services. The bill would remove language that conditions the duty of community services boards to provide case management services on the availability of funding.

Jails / Juvenile Facilities / Public Safety

Passed

HB103 (Hope) State Board of Local and Regional Jails; powers and duties. Requires the State Board of Local and Regional Jails, when promulgating regulations and adopting any policy or guidance document related to the enforcement of any minimum standards applicable to local and regional jails to specifically include such items in its published agenda for meetings of the Board or any of its subcommittees. Also requires the Board to adhere to procedures of the Administrative Process Act when developing and implementing policies and procedures for the review of the death of any inmate or when establishing minimum standards for health care services.

HB912 (Shin) Stores and telephone systems in local correctional facilities; fees. Requires net profits from sales in local/ regional jail commissaries or stores and for telephonic communication services to be used for education, recreation, or medical services benefiting inmates of the jail. This includes behavioral health, substance abuse, reentry, and rehabilitative services for inmates; net profits may

also be expended to pay for the training, salaries, and benefits of employees or contractors whose primary job is to provide such programs and services to the inmates. The original bill capped fees and charges by jails.

Failed

SB41 (Peake) Local jails; compensation for cost of incarceration. Would have required the Department of Corrections to compensate local and regional jails for the actual cost, based on the rate calculated in the Compensation Board's annual Jail Cost Report, of incarcerating felons who should otherwise be confined in a state correctional facility. Current law provides for local jails to be compensated at the rate and timelines set forth in the Appropriations Act, which override requirements in the Code of Virginia for prompt transfer of state responsible prisoners.

SB438 (Suetterlein) Juvenile detention home, group home, and residential care facility commissions; membership. Would have required all members and alternates for a juvenile detention home, group home, or residential care facility commission to have a background in law enforcement or corrections.

HB1043 (Sickles / Austin) Virginia Firefighting Personnel and Equipment Grant Program. Would have created the "Virginia Fire Personnel and Equipment Grant Program" to be administered by the Department of Fire Programs that would award grants on a competitive basis to localities with such funds as may be available. Funds would be used to help hire new, additional full-time firefighters; convert part-time or volunteer firefighters to full-time, or recruit and retain volunteer firefighters.

HB1484 (Campbell) / SB573 (Obenshain) Virginia Public Safety Communications Infrastructure Fund and Program; established. Would have created a Virginia Public Safety Communications Infrastructure Fund and Program, to be administered by the Department of Emergency Management and financially managed by the Virginia Resources Authority. The Fund would have made loans and award grants to local governments to assist with improvement projects relating to public safety radio and communications infrastructure, with preference given to fiscally distressed and rural jurisdictions.

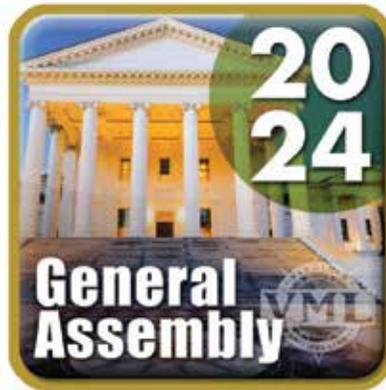
Carried Over to the 2025 General Assembly Session

HB489 (Garrett) Insurance; Fire Programs Fund; purposes. Would allow the portion of the Fire Programs Fund allocated to localities to be used for the additional purposes of (i) constructing, improving, or expanding fire station facilities, (ii) providing mental health resources, or (iii) hiring additional fire personnel and funding recruitment and retention programs. Would prohibit funds from being used, except as provided, for the purposes of investments, operating expenses, debt repayment, taxes, or fees.

HB988 (Seibold) Behavioral health services in correctional facilities; report. Would require state and local correctional facilities to report annually to their respective oversight bodies (e.g., board of local and regional jails) certain statistics regarding the population in the facility, including: if individuals received screening for mental health/behavioral health issues; how many were assessed, how many were believed to have a mental health/behavioral health diagnosis; numbers and types of staff (full time, part time, or contractual; degree level) who provide behavioral health treatment, and other

information about provision of services.

SB648 (Perry) Fire and Emergency Medical Services Grant Fund; funding for fire and emergency medical services. Would create the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Grant Fund to provide funding (i) to increase the number of firefighters and emergency medical services personnel to help communities meet industry minimum standards and attain 24-hour staffing levels, and (ii) to purchase heavy apparatus necessary for fire and emergency medical services. Resources for this Fund would come from an increase to the vehicle registration fee used to provide support for emergency medical services from \$4.25 to \$6.25 for each pickup or panel truck and each motor vehicle.



Education

Passed

HB599 (Simonds) School boards; unexpended local funds; capital reserve fund permitted. Permits any school board with the approval of the local governing body to maintain unexpended surplus funds at the end of the school year.

Failed

HB805 (Rasoul) / SB14 (McPike) Additional local sales and use tax to support schools; referendum. Would have provided statewide authority for counties and cities to impose a one percent sales and use tax if approved via referendum dedicated solely to school construction and renovation needs. As amended, HB805 would have accomplished the above and added the ability to use the dedicated funding source for debt services.

SB104 (Lucas) / HB187 (Clark) Average teacher salary in the Commonwealth; national average. Would have required the Governor's introduced budget bills for 2025, 2026, and 2027 Regular Sessions of the General Assembly to propose funding for, and state funding to be provided under the general appropriation act enacted during any regular or special session of the General Assembly during 2025, 2026, or 2027 to fund, the Commonwealth's share of compensation supplement incentives for Standards of Quality-funded instructional and support positions sufficient to increase the average teacher salary in the Commonwealth to at least the national average teacher salary by the end of the 2026–2028 biennium and established a detailed timeline and process for satisfying such requirement.

SB105 (Lucas) Public school staffing and funding; National Teacher Certification Incentive Reward Program and Fund; At-Risk Program; English language learner students. Would have renamed the National Teacher Certification Incentive Reward Program and Fund as the National Board Certification Incentive Reward Program and Fund.

SB533 (Jordan) Education Excellence for All Program established. Would have created the Education Excellence for All Program which would take money intended for public schools and place it in a savings account for parents to access and use for private needs. Funds would have then been diverted from public education to be used for private schooling.

SB558 (DeSteph) School choice educational savings accounts. Would have created the School Choice Educational Savings Account which appropriates state funds designated for public schools to savings accounts for parents to use for education-related expenses such as tuition, deposits, fees, and textbooks at private schools, online

programs, and higher educations. This again takes funds intended for public schools and places them into private use.

SB128 (VanValkenburg) Public school funding; certain calculations. Would have addressed funding calculations of the Standards of Quality (SOQ) and required the Department of Education to include various staff members in the cost of salaries, including the cost of compensation for instructional and support positions, prohibit a cap being placed on inflation rate adjustments during re-benchmarking, and utilize a three-year average when calculating the local ability to pay.

SB227 (Hashmi) Public school funding; certain calculations; certain support services positions; programs for at-risk students. Would have created an omnibus bill encompassing all JLARC recommendations that came from the JLARC SOQ study from this summer. Includes items such as eliminating the support cap, competing cost adjustments for instructional and support staff salaries, funding for at-risk programs, using a three-year average for the local composite index, estimating consumption costs, and amending the SOQ formula and definitions.

HB1164 (P. Scott) / HB1296 (Griffin) Education Excellence for All Program established. Would have created the Education Excellence for All Program which would have taken money intended for public schools and placed it in a savings account for parents to access and use for private needs.

HB359 (Simonds) Public school funding; nonpersonal cost categories; federal fund deduction methodology; support services. Would have required the Department of Education to include costs associated with leased facilities and work-related travel into nonpersonal costs, examine division spending on support costs, require support positions to be funded based on prevailing costs, and prohibit a cap being put on instructional and support positions.

HB825 (Cousins) Public school funding; At-Risk Program established. Would have established an At-Risk Program defined as any state funding provided for programs of prevention, intervention, or remediation according to the at-risk add-on program designed to support programs for students determined to be educationally at risk. With this new definition funding level criteria would have been administered. This would have been in conjunction with the state's already existing At-Risk Program for which localities receiving state funding would have been held harmless if they received more funding with the existing program.

Elections

Failed

SB428 (VanValkenburg) Elections; conduct of election; ranked choice voting; locally elected offices; report. Would have allowed local and constitutional officers the ability to conduct an election via ranked choice voting if approved by the local governing body. It gave authority to localities to determine how best to conduct elections based on the equipment and software readily available. This legislation would have also directed the Department of Elections to review the testing and approval framework for voting equipment in the Commonwealth.

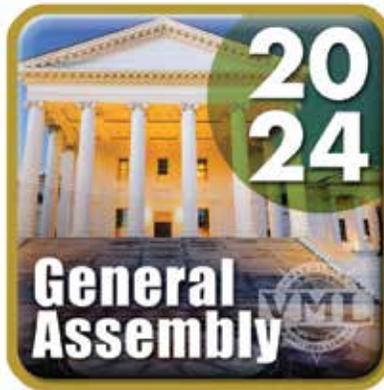
HB1408 (Srinivasan) Voter satellite offices; standards and guidelines for determining number and location. Would have directed the Department of Elections to develop standards and

guidelines for local governing bodies to utilize when determining the number of voter satellite offices including a recommended number of days the offices must be open to the public.

HB1530 (Cordoza) Elections; administration; chief deputy and other deputy registrars. Would have required each locality to have one chief deputy registrar. The bill required any chief deputy registrar serving on a full-time basis to be paid not less than 60 percent of the salary paid to the general registrar. The bill required that any chief deputy registrar of a locality whose population is greater than 10,000 serve on a full-time basis and gave the general registrar in a locality whose population is 10,000 or less the authority to determine whether the chief deputy registrar serves on a full-time basis.

SB303 (Stuart) Elections; voting equipment and systems; State Board approval process; printed receipt for cast ballot. Would have required all voting systems to produce a printed receipt for each vote cast. Out of the four voting systems Virginia currently uses, none of the machines can accommodate this making this legislation extremely expensive to localities.

HB254 (Sullivan) Elections; form of ballot; party identification of candidates. Would have provided that any candidate nominated by a political party or at a primary election be identified on the ballot with the name of their political party.



Carried Over to the 2025 General Assembly Session

HB907 (Kent / Green) Elections; voting equipment and systems; State Board approval process; printed receipt for cast ballot. Would require all voting systems to produce a printed receipt for each vote cast. Out of the four voting systems Virginia currently uses, none of the machines can accommodate this making this legislation extremely expensive to localities.

SB270 (Subramanyam) Elections; presidential primaries; ranked choice voting. Would allow for presidential primaries to be conducted via ranked choice voting if the political party chooses to do so.

Utilities & Natural Resources Passed

HB220 (Orrock) Waterworks remote operation. Authorizes sewage treatment, waterworks, and water treatment facilities to employ a licensed operator to remotely monitor facility operations provided the necessary technology to remotely monitor is in place. This bill provides greater flexibility to maintain operation of these facilities by licensed operators remotely while staying compliant with state regulations.

SB93 (Stanley) Local animal cruelty registries. Allows localities to establish an animal cruelty registry for felony convictions of: animal cruelty, animal fighting, maiming, killing or poisoning, killing or injury to a police animal. The registry will be for public access and can be published on the locality or local police department website and can include the names, address at the time of conviction, and the offense for which they were convicted.

HB71 (Bulova) / SB372 (Ebbin) Combined sewer overflow outfalls; compliance with regulations; Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Extends the deadline for upgrading certain Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) outfalls in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed from

7/1/2025 to 7/1/2026 in order for the Commonwealth to comply with federal mandates. This legislation provides localities with CSO capital projects additional time to meet state deadlines.

HB309 (Hope) Department of Forestry; Forestland and Urban Tree Canopy Conservation Plan required. Directs the Department of Forestry to establish a forest conservation plan in coordination with stakeholders to report on how to conserve and protect forests in the Commonwealth with a focus on identifying how to maintain and expand tree canopy.

HB985 (Tran) High polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon pavement sealants; prohibition; civil penalty. Prohibits after July 1, 2024, the sale or distribution of pavement sealants that contain more than 1% by weight concentrations of high polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. The use of these substances is currently not recommended by the VDOT manual.

HB1053 (Knight) Destruction and disposal of abandoned watercraft by localities and state agencies. Establishes criteria for localities and state agencies to request that the Department of Wildlife Resources authorize the destruction and disposal of abandoned watercraft under certain circumstances similar to those for acquiring the title for abandoned watercraft.

SB480 (Aird) /HB906 (Shin) Utility Disconnection Standards and Notice Requirements. Prohibits disconnection until the customer's account is 45 days in arrears. When a payment is missed by the customer notice must be given using at least one of the following methods: mail, email, text message, phone call, or door hanger. The legislation also requires that disconnection policies be provided to customers when they create a new residential account, when a disconnection due to nonpayment is scheduled, and on the utility website. Notices must be in English and Spanish and include payment plan information as well as state/federal utility assistance programs and information about utility assistance programs.

- Disconnections can also not occur, depending on the type of utility, when certain high or low temperatures are forecasted within 24 hours.
- Water and Wastewater service cannot be disconnected when temperatures are forecasted to be above 92 degrees within 24 hours after the scheduled disconnection.
- Electricity service cannot be disconnected when temperatures are forecasted to be below 32 degrees or above 92 degrees within 24 hours after the scheduled disconnection.
- Gas utility service cannot be disconnected when temperatures are forecast to be 32 degrees or lower within 24 hours of the scheduled disconnection.

Additionally, no utility service can be disconnected on Fridays, weekends, state holidays or the day prior to state holidays.

SB243 (McPike) / HB1085 (Rasoul) Department of Environmental Quality; Department of Health; PFAS; identification; monitoring; PFAS Expert Advisory Council established; report. Requires the owner or operator of a publicly owned treatment works to monitor PFAS levels on an applicable discharge monitoring report required by federal regulations. The bill requires DEQ, in certain circumstances, to develop a PFAS action plan to identify and address sources of certain PFAS detected in a public water system's raw water source, perform outreach efforts regarding PFAS contamination, report annually on its activities, and work with certain entities in developing its PFAS action plans. The bill requires certain facilities that manufacture or use PFAS to report the use of such chemicals to the Department and to monitor such PFAS at least quarterly. Also directs DEQ and VDH to jointly establish a PFAS Ad-

visory Committee to assist with PFAS-related activities and to report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly.

Failed

SB668 (Stuart) Department of Environmental Quality; groundwater and surface water withdrawal permits; five-year moratorium. Proposed a five-year moratorium on DEQ-issued new groundwater or surface water withdrawal permits unless those permits are solely for human consumption. This bill would have limited water withdrawal for agricultural or economic development purposes and is expected to return next session.

HB1100 (Carr) Conservation of trees during land development process. Proposed additional local ordinance authority to require the conservation of trees during the development process.

HB636 (Sullivan) / SB567 (Deeds) Siting of energy facilities; approval by State Corporation Commission. Proposed allowing the State Corporation Commission to pre-empt local land use decisions and approve the siting of certain energy generation facilities such as solar.

Carried Over to the 2025 General Assembly Session

HB9 (Ennis) Animal control officers; additional training. Would require nine additional hours of training for animal control officers once every three years.

Transportation

Passed

HB1071 (Carr) Reduction of speed limits; local authority. Provides towns and counties that do not control their own roads with the authority to by ordinance decrease speed limits in business and residential districts to below 25 mph and not less than 15mph. The governing body within 30 days of adopting such an ordinance must notify the Commissioner of Highways in writing prior to changing the speed limit.

HB1287 (McClure) Towing companies; local authority. Expands local authority to regulate tow operators in Planning District 8 as localities have had in the rest of the Commonwealth. Allows localities to require towers obtain a permit for tows that occur within the locality regardless of whether the vehicle is being towed within the locality or outside of the locality.

SB450 (Marsden) Regulation of towing fees; State Corporation Commission; report. Directs the State Corporation Commission to study private and trespassing towing fees and regulation and directs the commission to consider how it could take on a role regulating Virginia's towing industry.

SB336 (Roem) Photo speed monitoring devices; high-risk intersection segments. Allows photo-speed monitoring devices only in high-risk intersections which are intersections defined as having marked crosswalks within 1,000 feet of a school zone where a fatality has occurred since 1/1/2014. This expands where cameras may be placed to areas adjacent to existing school zones that are demonstrated as posing a serious threat to road users. Devices operated under this authority must remit all civil penalties collected to the Virginia Highway Safety Improvement Program.

HB234 (Ward) All-terrain vehicles and off-road motorcycles; seizure, impounding, and disposition. Authorizes cities to adopt ordinances for the seizure, impoundment and disposal of off-road vehicles operated on the sidewalks or highways of a city. This legislation provides cities with additional authority to address

the increasing illegal operation of off-road vehicles on public sidewalks, roads, alleys, and other rights of way and places the public and operators of these vehicles at risk.

HB285 (McQuinn) Uniform State-wide Building Code; bus shelters. Transfers authority to approve of bus shelters built on state right of way from the Virginia Department of General Services to local building officials provided the bus shelter is no greater than 256 square feet. This will provide greater flexibility in using state, federal, or local funds to construct bus shelters on state right of way while also streamlining the approval process for constructing bus shelters on state property.

Failed

HB21 (Jones) / HB1072 (Carr) / SB535 (Bagby) School crossing zones. Proposed expanding the definition of school crossing zones to include institutions of higher education.

HB461 (Runion) Photo speed monitoring devices; pole-mounted speed display sign. Proposed requiring that drivers be notified in real time of their speed prior to passing a photo speed enforcement device by requiring the placement of a speed display sign.

SB73 (Craig) Photo-monitoring system for traffic signals; proof of violation; retired law-enforcement officials. Proposed allowing retired law-enforcement officers to review photo-enforcement media to determine if a violation has occurred.

Carried Over to the 2025 General Assembly Session

HB20 (Jones) Photo speed monitoring devices; location. Would provide local authority to operate photo-speed enforcement device in any location deemed necessary by the locality.

HB521 (Laufer) Photo speed monitoring devices; locality-designated highway segments; civil penalty. Would provide local authority to operate photo-speed enforcement device on a “locality designated highway segment” if the speed limit is 35mph or above.

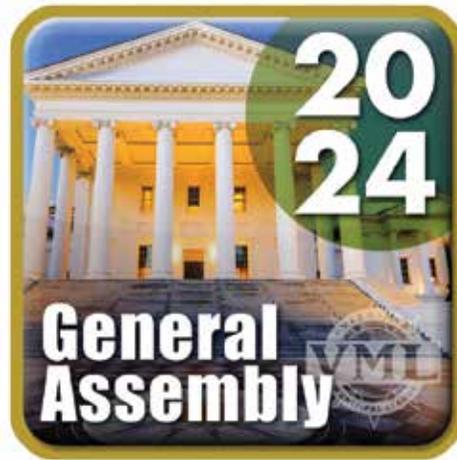
HB533 (Seibold) Photo speed monitoring devices; location. Would expand authority to adopt an ordinance to operate photo-speed enforcement devices on any highway with a speed limit of 45 mph or below that is located in a “priority pedestrian corridor” as identified by VDOT in the statewide Pedestrian Safety Action Plan or other high-risk corridor as designated by the Commissioner of Highways. Directed revenues from all photo-enforcement devices into the Virginia Highway Safety Improvement Program.

HB905 (Shin) Photo speed monitoring devices; location. Would expand local ordinance authority to operate photo-speed enforcement devices in “any location deemed necessary by the locality”.

Cannabis

Failed

HB698 (Krizek) / SB448 (Rouse) Cannabis control; retail market; penalties. Would have legalized the retail sale and production of cannabis. The legislation included local authority to hold a referendum this year, a local tax rate of 2.5%, land use authority, as well as local ordinance authority to prohibit the use and sharing of cannabis in public and on school grounds and regulate hours of operation for retailers. The total state and local combined tax rate



levied on cannabis retail sales under this legislation would have been 11.625%. Under these bills retail sales would have started as early as May 2025, with licenses distributed beginning in November 2024.

Local referendums to prohibit retail sales would have needed to be held prior to the end of 2024. Licensing would be regulated and administered by the Virginia Cannabis Control Authority.

The legislation included local ordinance authority to levy taxes, or hold a referendum to opt out of retail sales. It also included local land use authority and local ordinance authority to prohibit the possession on school grounds or the public use of cannabis.

HB698 and SB448 were the first bills to pass the General Assembly authorizing retail sales of recreational cannabis. Gov. Youngkin vetoed both bills over safety concerns.

Studies: Housing, FOIA, Artificial Intelligence, and Fentanyl Crises

Housing Bills to be considered by the Virginia Housing Commission

There were a lot of bills related to housing this year and many were sent to the Housing Commission which created the three workgroups listed below. The bills to be considered by each group are listed for each below.

Their agendas and dates of the various meetings can be found at <https://vhc.virginia.gov/meetings.asp>.

Affordable Housing, Landlord and Tenant Law workgroup:

- HB1124 (Carr) / SB233 (Hashmi) Faith in Housing for the Commonwealth Act.
- HB863 (Hernandez) Virginia Residential Property Disclosure Act; flood-related disclosures.
- SB354 (Locke) Establishment by localities of certain real estate contract disclosures prohibited.
- SB555 (Williams Graves) First-time home buyer tax credit.
- SB693 (Sturtevant) Prohibited acquisition of residential land; restrictions; civil penalty.
- SB512 (Williams Graves) Income tax credit; adaptive repurposing of underutilized structures.
- HB878 (Bulova) Purchase of development rights for affordable housing.
- HB477 (Coyner) / SB50 (Locke) Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act; Eviction Diversion Pilot Program; expiration.

Local Land Use and Community Living workgroup:

- HB528 (Krizek) Property Owners' Association Act; managed conservation landscaping; unreasonable restrictions prohibited.
- HB1236 (Marshall) Local government actions related to comprehensive plans, local planning commissions, subdivision plats and site plans and zoning ordinances; approval process.

- HB646 (Coyner) Zoning; certified recovery residence.
- SB123 (VanValkenburg) Improvements, repairs, or maintenance of property; entering adjoining property; petition for entry.

Accessory Dwelling Unit workgroup:

- HB900 (Srinivasan) Zoning; development, and use of accessory dwelling units.
- SB304 (Salim) Zoning; development, and use of accessory dwelling units.

FOIA Study

A significant study is Senator Danica Roem’s Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) bill SB324, dealing with charges for production of public records. Senator Roem is very passionate about the FOIA and the public’s access to public records.

The FOIA Advisory Council met on May 28 and created a workgroup that will include VML and VACo to study this issue. Please, please take the time to follow this workgroup and provide comments and or examples on this issue. Information on workgroup meetings will be posted on the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council website: <https://foiacouncil.dls.virginia.gov/foiacouncil.htm>.

Artificial Intelligence Study

SB487 (Aird) Joint Commission on Technology and Science; analysis of the use of artificial intelligence by public bodies; report. Directs the Joint Commission on Technology and Science (JCOTS), along with stakeholders, to conduct an analysis of the use of artificial intelligence by public bodies in the Commonwealth and the creation of a commission on artificial intelligence. This bill initially banned public bodies from using artificial intelligence but was amended into a study.

Fentanyl Crisis Study

HJR41 (Srinivasan) Study; Joint Commission on Health Care; policy solutions to the Commonwealth’s fentanyl crisis; report. Directs the Joint Commission on Health Care (JCHC) to study policy solutions to the Commonwealth’s fentanyl crisis. Issues to be examined include the causes and impact of prevalence and overdoses; insights into the crisis within the context of other drug crises and addiction trends in recent history; and the impact on Virginians and the Commonwealth’s health care system. The JCHC shall make policy recommendations related to reducing the prevalence and the number of fentanyl overdoses in the Commonwealth. Meetings shall be completed by Nov. 30, 2025, with findings and recommendations subsequently submitted to the General Assembly.



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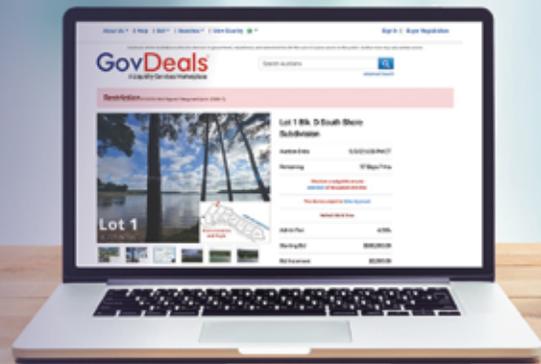
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in Fredericksburg



\$86,500
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\$22,600
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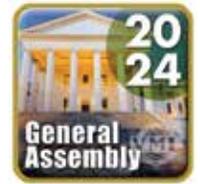
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What I learned at the 2024 General Assembly Session



ON MY FIRST DAY of the 2024 General Assembly, I walked into 201 N 9th Street armed only with a simple piece of wisdom shared with me by several experienced individuals: “You can’t understand a session until you’ve done it.”

I wondered what I was going to experience, who I would meet, and how my first day might unfold. As it turned out, it was the beginning of a short but intense educational experience that would challenge my preconceived ideas and expand my understanding of the political landscape in Virginia.

Into the whirlwind

The day began at the VML satellite office, where lobbyists from across the state were already hard at work. The group was all hustle and bustle as they prepared to navigate a full day of legislative proceedings. Then I was off and running again, this time to the new General Assembly Building. As we approached the building, a VML staff member and I discussed the agenda for the day. Our mission was clear: To “work a bill” to fund K-12 education through a modest increase in sales tax that could be used by localities if approved by local referendum.

Simple, right?

As we entered the building, I was enveloped by a dizzying array of people hurrying from one floor to the next; it was difficult not to get swept up in the excitement as each person in the throng carried their own mission and agenda for the day through the building. I soon discovered that “working” a bill meant going to more offices than I could count, on more floors than I could keep track of, to speak with many legislators.

I soon learned my first valuable lesson: The front desk personnel with their intimate knowledge of schedules and agendas are

indispensable in securing face time with decision-makers. This lesson also served as a tacit reminder to treat everyone with respect. I witnessed several instances in which a friendly, courteous lobbyist achieved a favorable outcome – whether it was a surprise scheduling opportunity or the promise to pass along critical information – simply by being present and polite.

On those rare occasions when the legislators were in their office, the interactions were cordial but hinted at the nuanced dynamics between lobbyists and decision-makers. Disagreements arose at times, underscoring the complexities inherent in the legislative process. I felt a bit like a spectator at a tennis match, head bobbing back and forth, as the lobbyist and legislator discussed the bill in question.

After a morning of meetings, we headed back to the satellite office for a hasty lunch spent remotely watching the floor sessions before trekking back to the General Assembly Building for the afternoon’s subcommittee meetings where I experienced another critical component of lobbying.

Observe. Support/Oppose. Carry on.

If the floor of each chamber is its heart, then the subcommittees are the arteries. As I sat in subcommittees, I learned that for a bill to pass the chamber, it had to survive the relevant sub and full committees. In committee the bill had to withstand the keen eye of legislators, the persuasive testimony of lobbyists, and then make it to the floor of each chamber where it faced further opposition.

Even if a bill cleared one chamber, it had to survive crossover: The deadline that requires each chamber to act on its body of legislation before sending them to the other chamber for further action. The process is exhausting and must be accomplished in a matter of weeks!

I observed several committee meetings this session, spending most of my time with the public education subcommittee. The legislation before this subcommittee touches on topics that blend emotion with pragmatism: teacher pay, transgender rights, infrastructure funding, teen suicide prevention, and human trafficking (to name but a few). Take HB675, for example, which dealt with the VA School for the Deaf & the Blind, and its push to have an on-campus police presence. Here, I experienced first-hand the power of lobbying. The presence of an affected student in the committee hearing made the point clear: the school needed the presence of law enforcement. It was a moment of clear bipartisan support, all of which was predicated on the power of the message and the messenger.

Thanks VML!

My time at the General Assembly was not just an introduction to the intricacies of policymaking – it was a testament to the power of individuals to affect meaningful change in the world around them. I am incredibly grateful to the VML staff for their support and encouragement during my time with them.

About the author: Matteo R. Murrelle was VML’s legislative intern for the 2024 General Assembly session. He is a J.D. Candidate (2025) at the University of Richmond School of Law.



Lieutenant Governor of Virginia Winsome Sears and Matteo Murrelle at the 2024 Legislative Day event in Richmond.

CITY OF FALLS CHURCH

By VTC editor and VML Voice host Rob Bullington

A conversation with Falls Church Mayor Letty Hardi



Letty Hardi

ON MAY 14, I TRAVELED from Richmond to Falls Church for a VML podcast recording session with City of Falls Church Mayor Letty Hardi and Councilwoman Marybeth Connelly. After braving – and mostly being defeated by – the congestion on I95, I arrived at City Hall where Letty and Marybeth (they insisted on first names) and I had a fantastic conversation that has now been posted as the latest episode of The VML Voice.

The below interview with Letty is excerpted from that conversation which, among other things, features Marybeth's thoughts on why the Falls Church council is now comprised almost entirely of women: Six females to one male, to be precise. I encourage you to check out the full podcast when you can.

There were several reasons why I wanted to talk to Letty for this issue of the magazine. First, because May was Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month and, as Marybeth had exclaimed when we met at the 2024 Legislative Day in Richmond in February. "You must do something to feature our new mayor. She's the first Asian American Mayor in Falls Church's history – maybe the first in Virginia – and she's wonderful!"

Also – the Region 5 winner of VML's annual "If I Were Mayor" essay contest was a student at Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School in Falls Church and since this issue would feature all the essay contest winners it seemed like a great occasion to talk to Letty.

My timing was fortuitous as May 14 happened to be the day after the Falls Church council had not only honored their contest winner but had also celebrated AAPI Heritage Month and passed a budget! All of which meant that we had plenty to talk about...

How did it go last night honoring the essay contest winner?

It was great. We were happy to help celebrate her win. Especially because the topic she had written about was sidewalks, which is something we all care a lot about in Falls Church. So, it was great to see a young student advocate for sidewalks and write so passionately about it.

Sidewalks are one of those bedrock local government topics. What do they mean in Falls Church?

As we think about growing our city from a 1940s suburb into a more walkable 15-minute city I think sidewalks are one of the best equitable investments we can make. They are so good for so many reasons. The environment, because they get people out of cars. Equity, because not everyone can afford to own a car and they give people options. Economic development, because we know that walkable neighborhoods bring more people and businesses.

When did running for council (2016) or being elected mayor become part of your plan?

I always say that I am the last person to run for public office. And I still have moments where I catch myself and think "What am I doing up here? I am not qualified to do this." The whole imposter thing is very real. This is the last thing I thought I'd do, but here we are!

How do you handle the job?

You have to be authentic. I ask a lot of questions. That's how I

learn. I learn by processing and understanding and then I think about it and then I talk to people and then I think about it some more. I feel like along the way I've stayed true to that. Nowhere along the way did I think "I'm an expert on that thing" and hopefully that keeps me humble and authentic.

The council also marked Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage month last night. Is that heritage something that you put at the forefront of identity as a public official?

I was actually thinking a lot about that just last Friday because I was at the White House for an event marking AAPI month. On one hand, I am cognizant not to use identity politics. I never want my gender or race to be the thing that people notice first and think that's why I am where I am. At the same time, I understand that it matters for some people, that representation does really matter at the end of the day, so I understand when it's times like AAPI month people want to see examples of leaders who have made it. So, I struggle with it because on a personal level I hate being the center of attention; I don't want to be that person who is held up. But I understand that there aren't that many of us and it's important for people to see that you can own that part of your culture and heritage and be proud of it.

How do you approach being a civic leader?

I try to lead from where my personal stories influence my policies. So, I always say that for me housing and education are the great equalizers because they are both part of my story. When I was a child and my family emigrated from Hong Kong to San Francisco, English was not my first language. I was in ESL classes for the first



Councilwoman Marybeth Connelly and Mayor Letty Hardi being interviewed for the latest episode of The VML Voice podcast. Use the QR code to check it out.

several years of my life in San Francisco. Also, our first housing in San Francisco was a basement apartment because that's what was accessible to us at the time.

So, those two parts of my own history – education and housing – have shaped what I think is important to be a welcoming and inclusive community. I feel like investing in education and having more accessible, affordable, and diverse forms of housing are important to level the playing field for everybody.

Was education important in your family growing up?

I am not only a first-generation immigrant, I'm also a first-generation college student. I know it sounds cliché, but my parents came to the U.S. to give me opportunities that they didn't have. But I didn't feel the traditional Asian American family pressure to be a doctor or lawyer. I think I put that pressure on myself. At the same time, I always joke that no Asian American mother would ever say "Yes, I want my child to grow up to be a politician!" That is such an Asian American thing to want. Don't stick your head out to get attention; put your head down and work hard. Those are the ideals they've instilled in me.

Falls Church is small and very densely populated. How are you addressing affordable housing?

We are only 2.2 square miles. We are the smallest independent jurisdiction in Virginia – maybe the United States. But our median home price is \$950,000...which is absurd when you think about it. We're doing inclusionary zoning so that inside mixed-use developments we negotiate through a special exception process how much affordable housing we get. We are also investing in quadruplexes in town with the eventual hope of adding more affordable housing on those sites. We are also pursuing more diverse housing. We have what I call a "barbell" issue where we have a whole bunch of single-family homes and we've added a whole bunch of apartments so we are at about 50/50 in terms of a housing mix. But when you think about what happens when someone outgrows their 1-2 bedroom apartment, or when you downsize from your 4 bedroom single family home like my in-laws are looking to do...where do you go?

We don't have a lot of missing middle housing stock. We haven't built town houses in about 20 years. So, we pursued something called our transition zone changes to allow that gentle density like 3-4 story town homes, condos, that middle housing that people really need. We are likely going to take on accessory dwelling units in Falls Church. Which will be a big thing, I know. Many of our neighbors in NOVA have already legalized accessory dwelling units so we can learn from them what will work in Falls Church.

We also have a new affordable home ownership program since we are the lucky recipients of some Amazon grant money. We buy down the price on a house for first time homebuyers and we put a restrictive covenant on it, so it stays affordable forever. But what's unique – and we're pretty proud of this – is they we have an equity share agreement because we understand it's important to build generational wealth in the next group of homebuyers. So, when someone decides to sell that house, they get to keep between 70-80 percent of the equity and the remaining 20 percent or so goes back into the program to replenish the fund for the next homebuyers.

You did the budget during last night's council meeting. How did it go?

It does a lot of good. Falls Church along with Loudoun County are the only two jurisdictions in NOVA that have been able to lower their tax rates. Everyone is facing such high commercial vacancies right now and that really affects local government revenues with high office vacancies and drags down assessed values which drags down property taxes. Falls Church is kind of unique in that we don't have that because we didn't have a ton of office space and we're also small which is something we lamented for years but wound up being a blessing.

Having a diverse portfolio of real estate is really good, in general, but we really lucked out. Loudoun County's data centers obviously help out and bring a ton a revenue so when I take a step back, we have a lot of good things going for us in Falls Church and we are pretty lucky to be able to fund all the things we want. Could we always do more? Absolutely, but a budget is all about balance so you're always trying to weigh everyone's desires including the taxpayers at the end of it too.

You have three kids. How do they feel about you being on council and now mayor?

It's changed a lot over the years. When I first ran, I think they were 3, 5, and 7 so they didn't know any better. With each subsequent decision to run, it's been more of a family discussion. This past time, I told them they didn't have to be on any campaign materials and didn't have to show up to anything. When they were younger, they enjoyed the ribbon cuttings and the pomp and circumstance associated with it. They are now 12, 14, and 16. The older two are like "Nope, I am happy to opt out of all that". The 12-year-old is getting there. So, at times I think they're proud, but then they're like "Oh my God, that's my mother in the paper again!" But I'm glad that they see their mom as an identity other than mom.

Are you going to run again?

TBD.

60 Seconds with Mayor Letty Hardi:

- Attended UVA where she started out pre-med with psychology and biology majors but dropped biology and added economics. "I realized it was a lot like psychology – it's how people behave but as it relates to money and macroeconomics."
- First job out of college: Capital One where she spent 11 years in about half a dozen roles and traveled a lot between NOVA and Richmond.
- Favorite place to get gas between Falls Church and Richmond – Exit 130A (WaWa)
- First elected to council in January 2016. Elected vice mayor January 2022. Elected mayor in January 2024.
- Most "Falls Church Thing" a visitor can do: "If you come on a Saturday, the farmers' market. And don't leave town without visiting our homegrown hardware store, Brown's Hardware. It's more than 100 years old."

Check out Letty's blog!

Letty has an amazing blog that she uses to track everything from what happens in council meetings, to what's happening at the state level that might affect the city, to community events and achievements.

"It's been going on for nine years and I think I'm close to around 350 posts. Maybe it comes from a place of naivete, but I do it because I feel like if I inform people that, even if we end up disagreeing, people will understand and respect the way I decided and voted. If I'm going to go to all these meetings with all this wonky, nerdy local government stuff, maybe if I can explain it in a way people understand and maybe they'll respect my vote or understand it and maybe want to get involved."



AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

How the right educational environment can make a dream a reality

WHILE AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY (APU) alum Deana Moreno would frame them as nothing more than hurdles, she and her family have experienced their fair share of struggles. From financial instability as a youth when she often had to choose work over school, to as an adult when she had to move states away to help care for an injured brother, Deana has been through a lot. However, Deana’s persistence has served as the bedrock for her educational achievements and professional ambitions – a BA in Psychology from APU and a position as a foster care case manager for Loudoun County.

Deana credits her educational experience with APU as the turning point on her path toward a graduation long overdue. Deana doesn’t dwell on the obstacles along the way, but she’s happy to talk about the community, the efficiency, and the flexibility at her alma mater.

From dream to reality

While living in upstate New York, Deana’s drive to aid others, particularly children, led her to join Key Club, a Kiwanis Club community service branch. As part of her service to the community

Deana mentored a young girl, an experience that caused her life’s direction to shift profoundly.

“There was a day that I was like, ‘I really want to study psychology,’ because I remember that girl. I gave her a little Christmas present, and she cried, because she said she wasn’t going to get one, and her foster parents hated her. That was the moment I realized I really want to help kids like her.”

Before Deana could act on that new dream of studying psychology so she could make a larger impact in more children’s lives, she moved to the City of Manassas – a place she’s since set down roots and now calls home – to help take care of her brother who had been injured a few years earlier while serving in the Navy.

“Two days after I graduated high school, I just jumped in my car, I came down here, and I helped take care of him.” Deana said. “I would make dinner for him. I would try to help him look for jobs, help him through physical therapy. We just worked together to help each other.”

Deana’s move to Virginia, familiar territory from her childhood visits and her brother’s time stationed at Virginia Beach, was a welcome change despite initial challenges. While she attempted to navi-



Deana Moreno

gate her education through a local community college, her brother, enrolled at American Military University (AMU), APU's sister institution. He encouraged his sister to also consider the university. Despite her initial skepticism, this suggestion marked a turning point in her educational journey.

"I'd been going there [community college] full-time, waitressing full-time. I was overwhelmed with the number of hours and not having enough time in the day to do what I needed to do because classes had to be over by 6 p.m." Deana said.

She was also getting the runaround when it came to her credits and graduation requirements. According to Deana, every time she got close to getting her associate degree there were more classes she needed to take, more credits to earn. Finally fed up with the moving goal posts and envious of her brother, who could work 12-hour shifts and attend AMU remotely full time, Deana contacted an adviser at APU.

"When they told me that I had more than enough credits for an associate degree and I was almost halfway done with my bachelor's degree, I was excited," Deana said. "It was just breathtaking, the fact that I didn't have to sit through more classes and waste more money. It was such a nice feeling when I transferred."

Initially hesitant about APU's online format, Deana valued the flexibility of asynchronous classes but feared missing in-person interactions. However, her perspective changed after taking a speech class shortly after enrolling. It reshaped her view of online learning.

"The whole experience was just mind-blowing because, for me, I couldn't even imagine doing something like that online. Then, after being in the class, it was just so exciting. You actually got to put faces to names. Some of the students from that class, I still keep in contact with them."

She even found a sense of academic community with her brother. "My brother and I would have these little study sessions together, because we were both going to college at the same time." Deana said. "There was actually one time where we took the same class together. We would study together, and we'd both have our computers up. We'd be looking and checking to see if we were doing the right thing. We were really helping each other. That was really nice when we were able to share moments like that."

And so it went; brother and sister pushing each other toward the finish line. They graduated at the same time – both having achieved something they thought was so far out of reach.

Before Deana worked as a foster care case manager for the County of Loudoun County, she was at the Department of Social Services in the City of Manassas where she assisted people applying for aid programs; another role made possible by her degree from APU.

As to be expected for Deana, it was the personal interactions that got her out of bed in the morning.

"I'd have to say the favorite part of my day is first thing in the morning when I walk in the building," Deana said. "I see families waiting for help, I see families just sitting there. It's nice to be able to just take a break before I start my day and talk to them, see how they're doing."

Her story exemplifies how persistence, coupled with the right educational environment, can overcome adversity and lead to fulfilling one's dreams.

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Seals on Wheels: Bridging the gap between the judicial system and the public

How the cities and towns of Prince William County benefit from a new mobile legal services program

THE PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY Circuit Court Clerk's office is forging a connection with the community to improve transparency, accessibility, and trust. This is being achieved through a retrofitted mobile service van, which operates on a flexible schedule to accommodate the public's routine.

At the helm of innovation is the capacity to be flexible, user-friendly, and convenient to the community. As a court, modernization is not the easiest pursuit. However, services that underscore citizens' fundamental rights are often sought through the Circuit Court Clerk's office, such as property records, marriage licenses, firearm permits and jury duty. Streamlining services to be adjustable to the community is crucial in an age where the public's expectations are continually shifting towards more efficient and responsive governance.

Alleviating challenges

The 21st century has brought a myriad of challenges that affect the public's access to judicial services. Issues such as mobility, transportation, and financial constraints are compounded by the digital divide and the increasing demands of work and daily life. These challenges are often left to be addressed by the will of the people alone.

By acknowledging the intricate web of mobility, financial, and digital hurdles, along with the overwhelming workloads and schedules that residents face, the Circuit Court Clerk has taken a proactive stance in redefining access to judicial services. The development of local partnerships and the strategic acquisition of grant funding helped establish a way to prioritize the needs of the community. This, along



First Seals on Wheels event in Dumfries.



Seals on Wheels at Dale City Library.

ensures that residents can secure necessary documents, mitigating the impact of such events on individual rights and community well-being.

For example, in times where major damage occurs and residents are unable to present a record of property ownership, Seals on Wheels can locate the specified neighborhood, and residents can attain their record on file.

Balancing proactive initiatives with reactive capabilities helps support and protect the community effectively. Seals on Wheels success in delivering a wide range of services, coupled with its responsiveness in times of crisis, underscores the value of adaptable and accessible public services. It not only meets the immediate needs of residents but also contributes to the resilience and safety of the community at large.

with a commitment to being community-centric, has led to the implementation of the first of its kind, the Circuit Court Clerk’s mobile services center, Seals on Wheels.

Seals on Wheels is an innovative solution that not only brings services closer to people but also integrates seamlessly into their daily routines, minimizing any disruption. It addresses the residents’ needs and serves them where they are. The mobile service unit’s ability to navigate the area and provide services outside of regular business hours is a significant step in alleviating the limitations of transportation and time.

Implementation and services

Seals on Wheels offers versatile and comprehensive services. Of the over 715 services obtained at Seals on Wheels, copies of records, forms, and marriage licenses are among the most popular. Most residents who stop by the clerk’s mobile service center often receive other services that they don’t expect.

“We’ve been meaning to get our marriage license, and we took the opportunity to stop by Seals on Wheels, which was closer to our home. While here, we found out we could get married too, and I even applied for a CHP. There are a variety of services open to the community at Seals on Wheels. It saved me 3.5 hours and at least a half day of work. We’ll be using these services again in the future.”

Civil services are the most common service sought at Seals on Wheels, primarily permits for firearms. Attentive to the demand for concealed handgun permits, the clerk’s office partnered with Project Child Safe’s Safe Communities’ initiative to offer free gun locks at all Seals on Wheels events. 753-gun locks were handed out at Seals on Wheels in 2023, encouraging safe storage and preventing misuse or accidents.

Seals on Wheels also have the capacity to deploy during post-emergency situations. In times of emergency, such as FEMA-declared disasters, many of the public’s fundamental rights can be protected by having access to records on file. In the aftermath of disasters, when access to court records is crucial, Seals on Wheels’ deployment

Funding and mobility

The Seals on Wheels initiative, spearheaded by Circuit Court Clerk Jacqueline Smith, represents advancements in public service delivery. By securing state technology grant funding, the clerk’s office has been able to retrofit a mobile services van and provide services. The mobility of these services provided via Seals on Wheels is a solution to the traditional constraints of brick-and-mortar government offices.

At least one Saturday a month, residents can get a free Project Child Safe gun lock, apply for or renew a permit, fill out and submit a marriage license, have a civil celebrant ceremony, receive a copy of or satisfy their deed or property record, file petitions and motions, and more. The Seals on Wheels van is equipped and staffed to ensure there is someone who can assist the residents outside of typical business hours, speak multiple languages, and access technology.

This mobile service center travels directly to the heart of communities, setting up shop in easily accessible locations such as public libraries and community festivals. This strategic placement ensures that a wide array of essential services is brought directly to the residents, eliminating barriers that often hinder access to government services.

Moreover, Seals on Wheels is adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of the community it serves. By operating outside of standard business hours and providing multilingual staff, the program demonstrates an inclusive approach, ensuring that all residents can benefit from the services offered. The mobile service center is equipped with the necessary tools and staff expertise to provide efficient and effective service delivery.

The flexibility and accessibility of Seals on Wheels services have proven to be invaluable. The ability to receive timely assistance with important matters in both a location and time that suits the busy lives of residents is not just a matter of convenience but a significant enhancement to their quality of life. It sets a precedent for how public services can be implemented to better serve the public by making government services approachable, flexible, and integrated into the daily lives of residents.

“Seals on Wheels was able to help us get our marriage license and finalize the legal side of our marriage. Timing is really hard with our schedules in the medical field. This has been really helpful. We can’t thank you enough!”

Community and collaboration

The collaboration with independent government entities, police departments, schools, and libraries has broadened the reach of Seals on Wheels and underscores the program's multifaceted approach to community integration. By aligning with established community festivals and resource hubs, Seals on Wheels visibility and impact ensure that services are attained by all residents who need them.

"I finally changed my name, thanks to Seals on Wheels! I've been wanting to do this for a while. I'm so thankful I didn't have to take time off from work to do this!"

Since Seals on Wheels launched in 2023, the feedback from residents has been remarkably astounding. In its first year, Seals on Wheels attended twenty events across the Circuit Court Clerk's service area. This has fortified the foundation of trust and cooperation within the community.

Communication is an integral part of Seals on Wheels success. Trusted sources, like friends and family members, share information about Seals on Wheels, which is pivotal to expanding services across boundaries throughout the area. Grassroots interactions highlight the program's appeal and positive impact on the community.

Advancement

Seals on Wheels connects residents to circuit court clerk services, regardless of the situation. It represents a significant advancement in the realm of public service, particularly in the judicial system. Its array of services offered is comprehensive, ranging from the issuance of free Project Child Safe gun locks to the processing of marriage licenses and civil celebrant ceremonies, embodying a one-stop-shop model. This innovative program demonstrates a commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring that all residents, irrespective of their personal circumstances, have equitable access to essential circuit court clerk services.

At its core, Seals on Wheels is more than just a mobile service center; it reimagines judicial services to be more inclusive and accessible. It embodies the principles of justice, equality, and community outreach, serving as an example for other courts and government entities. The program's success lies in its ability to adapt, communicate, and improve

continually, making it a mainstay in the community and a pillar of public service.

Seals on Wheels transcends traditional barriers such as physical, geographical, financial, occupational, or digital constraints. The mobile service center is an approach that proactively reaches out to the community, offering both preventative and responsive solutions to a variety of needs. Its impact extends beyond the immediate services it provides, as it encourages a more proactive approach to governance, one that prioritizes the well-being of every citizen. It is a model of progress in public service.

For more information, please visit www.pwcva.gov/department/circuit-court or contact CChoi@pwcgov.org.

About the author: Candi Choi is the Prince William County communications & community outreach specialist.



Free Gun Lock Program at Seals on Wheels.



Circuit Court Clerk Jacqueline Smith administering wedding at Seals on Wheels.



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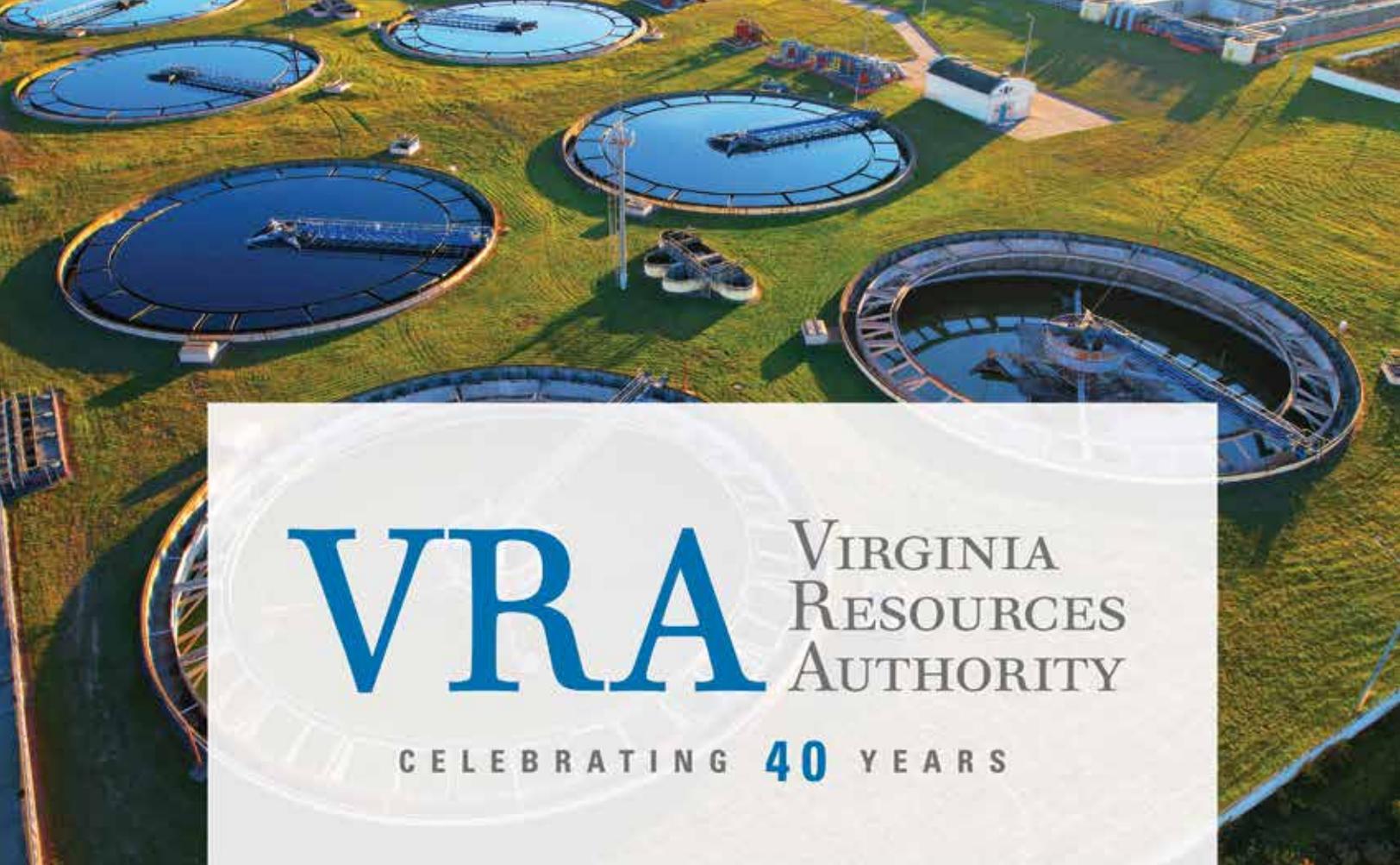
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