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VIRGINIA
TOWN & CITY

THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

VOL. 60 NO. 2
MAR/APR 2025



Moving Forward Together: Celebrating Women's History Month

Inside:

2025 General
Assembly Review for
Local Governments

VBCOA Region of the
Year award winners





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Virginia Town & City (ISSN0042-6784) is the official magazine of the Virginia Municipal League. Published 10 times a year at 13 E. Franklin St., P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241; 804/649-8471. E-mail: e-mail@vml.org. Reproduction or use of contents requires prior approval of the Virginia Municipal League and if granted must be accompanied by credit to *Virginia Town & City* and the Virginia Municipal League. Periodicals Postage paid at Richmond, VA. (USPS 661040) Subscription rates: members - \$16 per year; non-members - \$32 per year. Single copies - \$4 each.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Virginia Town & City*, P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241-0164.

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ABOUT THE COVER

March was Women's History Month! Every year, the National Women's History Alliance (NWHHA) selects a theme for Women's History Month. The 2025 theme, "Moving Forward Together! Women Educating & Inspiring Generations," celebrated the influential women who have dedicated their lives to education, mentorship, and leadership. We are happy to feature some of the women helping Virginia's local governments to move forward together!

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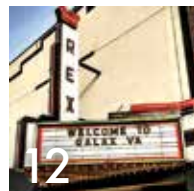
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2025 General Assembly review for local governments

3,107 bills and resolutions introduced with 1,989 passed; 1458 failed, and 158 vetoed by the Governor! VML's policy team looks at the ones that matter most to Virginia's local governments 26

VBCOA Region of the Year award winners

Tom Coghill, building official with the County of James City and the chair of the VBCOA Public Information Committee, shines a light on the winners 37



We celebrate Women's History Month, and the 2025 General Assembly is history (for now).

MARCH WAS WOMEN'S HISTORY Month, and I want to thank all the women who are willing to serve and dedicate their time to local government. I thoroughly enjoyed reading all the interviews in this issue. We have some wonderful women in local government!

March also marked the end of the regular 2025 General Session and April kicked off with the day-long reconvened session on the 2nd. Recently, I was presenting an update on the Virginia General Assembly session to my colleagues from around the South and was reminded of how our session started. I was flying back to Richmond the night before session began and had read about the water crisis in Richmond. Before the plane landed, the crisis felt distant; but later, as I was walking through the airport with my luggage, I discovered that the only available restrooms were porta johns. At that point the crisis began to feel close. It felt even closer on the first day of the session – which was online-only for lobbyists – and the scene on all the television stations was of General Assembly members dressed up for the session but using outside facilities. Of course, the General Assembly lets no crisis go by without creating some legislation for it. In this case, Richmond's water crisis resulted in HB2749 (LeVere Bolling) and SB1408 (Reeves) that require localities that manage their own water system to report water issues within two hours (!) to the state.

You will find HB2749, SB1408, and many other bills affecting local governments summarized in this issue of the magazine. One of my favorites is HB2419 (Webert) which waives the licensure requirement for child day programs providing instructional experience in horse riding! Another bill that I will mention here is SB1029 (Roem) that dealt with Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

charges; this bill was vetted by the FOIA Council, and it was set to pass...until Senator Roem voted against a Fairfax casino bill. The bill ultimately failed but it will be back again. Localities should be prepared by reviewing your process for charging for FOIA requests, keeping this proposed legislation in mind. There will also be many studies over the summer including (but certainly not limited to) how to expand affordable housing, taxation, consolidation of elections, and public safety. Please sign up for our newsletter *eNews* if you haven't already done so, as VML will report on these groups over the summer. As always, we welcome your comments on the topics being considered by these studies.

In closing I will note two departures, one happy and one sad. Robert Lazaro (Bob), the executive director of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) has announced his retirement effective August 31, 2025. Bob has worked with VML and Virginia's localities for many years as the NVRC's executive director, a councilmember, and a mayor just to name a few of his jobs. For an example of the kind of work accomplished by Bob and the NVRC see the item on page 15 of this issue. Please take the time to thank Bob for all he has done and to wish him a happy retirement!

Sadly, on April 2, 2025, a dear friend of mine and of VML passed away; Claudia Hantman Arko. Claudia was the head lobbyist with Fairfax County and our staffs share office space during the session. Her leadership and commitment to public service was unwavering and she was a great advocate for local governments in Virginia. She will be deeply missed by all of us. Our sympathies to her family, friends and all the Fairfax employees and board members.

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

CALENDAR

May 21-23

2025 MEPAV Annual Conference - Hilton Garden Inn, VA Beach

June 5-6

2025 Small Towns Conference - Longwood University, Farmville (*See page 23*)

Oct. 12-14

2025 VML Annual Conference - Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center



In Memoriam:

Former Suffolk Fire Chief Mark Robert Outlaw



The Suffolk Fire & Rescue Department mourns the passing of former Fire Chief **Mark Robert Outlaw**. Outlaw served the department and the City of Suffolk with unwavering dedication, integrity, and a profound commitment to the safety of the community.

Outlaw began his career with Suffolk Fire & Rescue in 1977 and retired in 2012. In a statement, current Suffolk Fire Chief Michael Barakey noted, "Rising through the ranks from firefighter to become the youngest fire chief in Virginia in 1994, Chief Outlaw's visionary leadership transformed our department. His tenure brought the construction of new fire stations, the expansion of personnel to meet the growing needs of Suffolk, and critical advancements in fire safety equipment. His tireless efforts laid a foundation that continues to shape the strength and effectiveness of our team today."

Beyond his professional achievements, Outlaw is remembered for his kindness, wisdom, and deep sense of service. His passion for the fire service extended far beyond Suffolk, touching lives and inspiring colleagues across the field. Members of Suffolk Fire & Rescue, along with multiple fire apparatuses, took part in the funeral procession on January 16, passing by Fire Station 10 where Outlaw dedicated much of his career.

Former South Boston Town Manager James "Aubrey" Houghton



James "Aubrey" Houghton passed away peacefully at Lakewood Manor in Richmond on Wednesday, March 12, at the age of 99.

Houghton's love of community led him to devote more than 38 years of his life to civil service. He served the City of Portsmouth from 1951 to 1956 and was the town manager of South Boston from 1956 to 1989, one of the longest tenures of town managers in the state. During his long career in South Boston, he was the catalyst that led to many economic achievements for both the town and Halifax County. He played a key role in the industrial development on U.S. 58 and paid close attention to the businesses and industries that located, expanded, and flourished in South Boston. Although time and a changing economic world have led to the demise of many of these industries, a fitting tribute to his endeavors was the establishment of the J. Aubrey Houghton Industrial Park on Hamilton Boulevard in South Boston. In the mid-1980s, he oversaw

the downtown revitalization program that modernized the streets and utilities in the historic downtown district.

The extent of Houghton's contributions was clearly evident in his membership and participation in professional and volunteer organizations. Upon his retirement, the town council recognized his tireless efforts on behalf of the Halifax County Chamber of Commerce, where he served for over 25 years. They also cited his work as an initiator in the formation of the joint city/county Economic Development Commission as well as participation and leadership in the Halifax-South Boston Community Hospital Board of Directors, the Southside Planning District Commission, the South Boston Planning Commission, and the Danville Regional Airport Commission. The town council praised his efforts to provide more jobs for the area, an improved and diversified tax base, better health care, better community planning, and improved municipal service.

On June 29, 1999, Houghton was awarded life membership in the Virginia Local Government Management Association where he was an active participant and leader since 1951, including serving as its president in 1976-77. His statewide recognition as an exceptional public administrator resulted in him serving as a member of the board of trustees of the Virginia Supplemental Retirement System from 1977 to 1989, and as a member of the Virginia Municipal League, Effective Government Policy Committee, and the City/County Annexation Task Force.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Powell Funeral Home. Online condolences may be directed to www.powellfuneralhomeinc.com or by visiting their Facebook page.

Claudia Hantman Arko, legislative director for Fairfax County



The Virginia Municipal League staff were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of **Claudia Hantman Arko** on April 2 at the age of 55. She was a valued and longtime member of the Fairfax County legislative team and worked hand-in-hand with VML staff during General Assembly sessions. Her vibrant spirit touched the lives of many.

Through her work, she collaborated closely with numerous agencies across Fairfax County and the state and advocated for policies that continue to shape and benefit her community. Services were held on Saturday, April 12. Those who wish to express their sympathy in the guestbook can do so at the Adams Green Funeral Home website www.adamsgreen.com/obituaries/Claudia-Hantman-Arko?obId=40754453.

Kendall is the new community development director for Orange



- Kendall -

Debbie Kendall began on April 1 as the Town of Orange's new community development director. She replaced John Cooley, who left the role in November 2024 for a similar position in Culpeper County.

Kendall previously served with the Town of Gordonsville as town manager for 10 years and as town planner/town clerk for four years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Geography and Cartography from Virginia Tech and is a Certified Planner with the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and a Certified Zoning Administrator with the Virginia Association of Zoning Officials. Kendall is currently serving as the president of the Virginia Local Government Managers Association (VLGMA).

Crawley chosen as Emporia deputy chief of police



- Crawley -

Police Major **Eric T. Crawley** began his role as the City of Emporia deputy chief of police on January 2.

Crawley was born and raised in Emporia and brings a wealth of experience, having started his law enforcement career in 2007 with the Suffolk Police Department where he served in various roles ranging from uniformed patrol officer to special operations. He was promoted to sergeant in 2016. Crawley has completed advanced training programs like the FBI National Academy for first-line supervisors, and courses on supervisory liability, use of force investigations, ethical leadership, and managing civil unrest. He also helped run the Suffolk Citizens Police Academy, connecting local citizens and law enforcement.

"Eric is not only known for his professional accomplishments but also for his integrity, leadership qualities, mentorship, and unwavering family values," said Emporia Police Chief Troy Hawkins in a statement. "His expertise and dedication are sure to enrich our community and department, and we eagerly anticipate his contributions and leadership."

Throughout his career, Crawley has garnered numerous accolades, including recog-

nition from Mothers Against Drunk Driving, "Supervisor of the Year" awards, multiple department commendations, and various other achievements that underscore his commitment and exemplary performance.

Newport News Vice Mayor Bethany appointed to National League of Cities committees



- Bethany -

City of Newport News Vice Mayor **Curtis D. Bethany III** has been appointed to serve one-year terms on the National League of Cities' (NLC) Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations Committee and the NLC's Large Cities Council Committee.

"I am deeply honored to be appointed to serve on two pivotal National League of Cities committees," said Bethany in a press release. "These roles provide an invaluable opportunity to advocate for our community while working alongside fellow municipal leaders nationwide. I'm excited to bring new ideas and collaborate on innovative solutions to the challenges cities face, ultimately driving lasting positive change for our residents."

Bethany, who is in the third year of his first term on council, is the youngest vice mayor in Newport News history. He chairs the Financial and Governmental Performance Committee and serves as liaison to the Charter Review Committee and the Virginia Peninsula Community College Board. Additionally, Bethany serves on the board of directors for the Virginia Municipal League.

Bethany holds a Master of Arts in Public Policy, with a concentration in Public Administration, from Liberty University. He is also a graduate of Virginia Peninsula Community College and Old Dominion University. Additionally, he earned a Business Analytics Certification from Cornell University, further enhancing his expertise in governance and leadership.

For more information about the NLC and its initiatives, visit www.nlc.org/about.

Fairfax names Foster acting city manager

Following a special meeting on January 21, the Fairfax City Council unanimously appointed **Bryan Foster** to serve as acting city manager. Foster was hired through a contract agreement with Baker Tilly Advisory Group LP, a public sector executive recruitment



- Foster -

firm. He began his new role on January 27.

Foster has 28 years of local government experience, most recently serving as deputy city manager for the City of Manassas until early 2024. His breadth of experience includes implementing a new Enterprise Resource Planning system, reorganizing and managing Manassas' capital improvement program, coordinating legislative affairs, and overseeing key operational departments.

Foster's previous experience includes stints as director of public utilities for the City of Portsmouth, county administrator for Halifax County, and town manager of Altavista. He holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy and Economics from the College of William and Mary.

Foster will lead the City of Fairfax through the fiscal year 2026 budgeting process, which is currently underway. The FY 2026 proposed budget presentation was slated for February 25, and the city council will adopt a final budget on May 6 following a series of work sessions and public hearings beginning March 4.

Melanie Zipp will serve as acting deputy city manager, and Chief Financial Officer Juan Carlos Martinez will serve as acting assistant city manager.

City of Winchester selects Lewis as police chief

After a nationwide search, the City of Winchester has named **Ronnie Lewis** its new



- Lewis -

chief of police. Lewis comes to the city with over 28 years of experience in law enforcement and public safety, including extensive expertise in leading complex organizations, community policing, community

relations, and risk management. Lewis previously served as the chief of police in the Town of Bedford and has worked his way up the ranks, starting as a patrol officer with the City of Fairfax Police Department.

"After many interviews, consultations, and conversations with partners and stakeholders, Ronnie stood out among all the applicants," said Winchester City Manager Dan Hoffman in a press release. "He brings

decades of experience to this role and has a strong track record of success as the chief of police in Bedford. We are thrilled to have Ronnie on board and look forward to him leading our police department and working closely with the community to enhance public safety in Winchester.”

Lewis led the Bedford Police Department’s transformation into one of Virginia’s most effective law enforcement agencies by attracting qualified talent, upgrading technology, innovating community policing practices, and boosting residents’ faith in the department. On his watch, residents, local government officials, and other law enforcement agencies consistently praised the Bedford Police Department for achieving an impressive reduction in crime while treating all community members with dignity and respect.

Woolridge to lead SVHEC as its next executive director

The board of trustees of the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC) has appointed **Dr. Charlette Woolridge**



- Woolridge -

as the agency’s executive director. Woolridge’s appointment concludes a national search led by Fahrenheit Advisors. She began her tenure on March 25. She succeeds Dr. Betty Adams, who retired after leading the agency for nearly 16 years.

Woolridge brings over 30 years of experience in public administration, governance, and community development. As the current administrator for Greensville County and the former administrator for Brunswick County, she has demonstrated exceptional leadership in managing complex county operations and overseeing diverse departments ranging from economic development to emergency services. Her strategic vision and operational expertise have enabled her to administer multimillion-dollar budgets, streamline service delivery, and cultivate a workforce culture rooted in excellence and diversity.

Stanley Jeffress, chairman of the SVHEC Board of Trustees, said of Woolridge in a press release: “She has built an impressive career as county administrator in both Brunswick and Greensville counties, and the SVHEC Board of Trustees is confident that she will bring the same energy, passion, and professionalism to her new role.”

Prior to serving in county government,

Woolridge spent 17 years with the City of Richmond holding several high-ranking positions, including deputy director of administration for Fire and Emergency Services and chief of staff in the City Manager’s Office. In these positions, she played a pivotal role in policy development, budget management, and strategic planning, enhancing the efficiency of municipal operations and advancing citywide initiatives. Known for her innovative problem-solving and results-driven approach, Woolridge combines strategic vision with operational acumen to deliver impactful solutions.

In addition to her expertise in public administration, Woolridge also brings a deep understanding and appreciation of higher education. She currently serves as vice-chair of the Southside Virginia Community College Local Board and previously served two terms on the SVHEC’s Board of Trustees.

Woolridge holds a PhD in Public Policy and Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University, a Master’s in General Administration from Central Michigan University, and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Virginia Union University. She has completed senior executive leadership programs at the University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Services, Virginia Commonwealth University Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, and the National Forum for Black Public Administrators. She participates on local, regional, national, and international boards and organizations including the National Association of Counties, Virginia Association of Counties, Virginia Resources Authority, Virginia Israel Advisory Board, Crater Workforce Development Board, and Rotary International.

Hamm takes over as Marion town manager



- Hamm -

and its operations to his new role.

The Marion Senior High School graduate was initially hired as a timekeeper in 1984, recruited by former Town Manager Carl Taylor. Hamm developed a program to monitor highway maintenance funds and maintained heating and cooling systems at

the local senior citizens center.

Hamm was promoted to purchasing agent in 1988. In 2014, he added the role of fire chief in addition to his purchasing agent duties, having long served as a volunteer firefighter. As chief, Hamm merged the fire department with Marion’s lifesaving crew into a single town department. After stepping down as fire chief, Hamm was named assistant town manager in 2022, while also continuing his job as purchasing agent.

Salem’s Sellers retires after more than five decades of service

Longtime City of Salem employee **Angela Sellers** retired on February 1, and the Salem City Council honored her by proclaiming January 27, 2025, “Angela Sellers Day.”



- Sellers -

its residents. She began her career in May 1973 as a payroll clerk in the Finance Department.

“Back then, the city was just five years old and there were no computers, cell phones, or word processors,” the city stated in its proclamation. “There were only adding machines, typewriters, and the very first hint of IBM punch cards.”

Sellers remained a fixture in the finance department and advanced to accountant, accountant II, and eventually to the assistant finance director position. She served in that latter role from 1979-2008 and always displayed a commitment to the city’s fiscal responsibility and integrity, providing oversight and ensuring the efficient allocation of public resources for the benefit of all residents.

In February 2008, Sellers transitioned to director of Technology Systems. During her tenure in this role, she not only migrated the department to a new building on West Main Street, but she played a major role in implementing systems that enhanced service delivery, modernized operations, and ensured that Salem remained at the forefront of technological innovation.

In 2013, she moved back to City Hall under the city manager to lead several key initiatives as special projects coordinator, special projects director, and as the city’s process improvement and business efficiency director. From 2013 to the present, she worked with her fellow employees to create achievable solutions, streamline business

operations, and foster a culture of efficiency and continuous improvement.

Sellers retires as the longest-tenured full-time employee in Salem's history.

Henry joins Charlottesville as director of Social Services



- Henry -

Leon Henry has been named director of Social Services for the City of Charlottesville. Previously, Henry was the manager of clinical social work for University of Virginia Health. In that role he was responsible for managing a department of 70 clinical social workers and two supervisors to collaborate with departments throughout the medical center and community. He has also held roles at UVA Health as a clinical social work supervisor and psychotherapist. Additionally, Henry has over a dozen years of child welfare experience with the Department of Children and Families in Massachusetts.

Henry completed the Cornerstone Leadership Program at the University of Virginia and the Health Leadership Institute of UVA's Medical Center Leadership Pro-

gram, and he is a member of the Leaders Lab of Greater Charlottesville. His leadership skills have allowed him to follow his passion and focus on fatherhood engagement.

"I always lead with my heart and choose to use my voice in times that are difficult or when others don't always feel comfortable speaking up," Henry said in a press release. "I want to help children and families break down barriers to create opportunities for people so they can have progressive lives that they can be proud of. I will always meet people where they are and be creative when it comes to problem solving. When you stay curious, anything is possible."

Henry was raised in the Bronx, NY. He is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and holds a Bachelor's in Wellness Management from Oswego State University and a Master's in Social Work from Westfield State University.

Virginia Beach appoints Green as economic development director

On February 24, **Christian Green** began as director of the City of Virginia Beach Department of Economic Development.

Green was selected for his more than



- Green -

20 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, including over a decade of leading municipal economic development and tourism teams and driving large-scale investment in the communities he has served. His key experience includes recruiting and managing more than \$40 billion in public/private projects.

"Throughout his career, Christian has worked with public, private, and development communities to successfully facilitate projects with complex timelines and delicate situations," City Manager Patrick Duhaney said in a press release. "His vast and varied experience will be an asset to Economic Development's efforts to identify new revenue streams that meet the ever-growing needs of the city."

Green previously served as deputy director of economic development and tourism in Glendale, AZ, where his team won an International Economic Development Council (IEDC) award for their efforts during the 2023 Super Bowl hosted in Glendale. Prior to this, Green worked as the economic de-



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velopment/tourism manager for the City of Scottsdale, AZ.

Most recently, Green served as the director of economic development and tourism in the city of Stonecrest, GA. In that role, he helped rebuild the Development Services Division and the Stonecrest Development Authority, creating the East Atlanta Entertainment District and leading the initiative to develop a new city center to drive economic development and tourism in the area. Green also led the efforts to update the 2038 Citywide Comprehensive Plan and helped establish the Stonecrest Economic Development Plan.

Green has a Bachelor's in Business Administration from Washburn University.

Dumars is Albemarle County's new director of Facilities and Environmental Services



- Dumars -

The Albemarle County Board of Supervisors has appointed **Jeffrey Dumars** as the director of Facilities and Environmental Services (FES). Dumars has served as interim director since September 2024 and joined the county as deputy director in January 2024.

Dumars succeeds Lance Stewart, who provided six years of dedicated service to Albemarle County as director of Facilities and Environmental Services. During his tenure, Stewart oversaw the advancement of the county's environmental and facilities initiatives.

Dumars brings more than 20 years of experience as an urban planner and designer, with expertise in planning and facilities development for municipalities, the private sector, and institutions of higher education. As interim director, Dumars led several key initiatives, including developing a framework and guiding document for space management, implementing the county's litter collection program, and overseeing the construction work to open Biscuit Run Park.

"Jeff's leadership and expertise have already made a significant impact on our community," said Chair of the Board of Supervisors Jim Andrews in a press release.

"We are excited to have him lead Facilities and Environmental Services as we continue to focus on creating a sustainable and vibrant future for Albemarle County."

The FES Department is responsible for maintaining and improving county-owned buildings, grounds, and infrastructure. The department manages the planning, design, and construction of all major Capital Improvement Projects. The department also manages the county's operations to prevent pollution, ensures compliance with state and federal environmental laws and regulations, and assists residents in minimizing waste in the county. Other services provided by FES include fleet management, building security, copy and mail services, and street sign maintenance.

Dumars holds a Master's in City and Regional Planning and a Bachelor's in Landscape Architecture from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. He is a LEED Accredited Professional and past institutional member of the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP). Dumars has built a reputation for developing award-winning planning processes, comprehensive master plans, and major capital project programs. His professional experience includes leadership roles at Virginia Tech, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and Auburn University, where he directed significant facilities and environmental planning initiatives.

Goens begins as Radford's director of Parks and Recreation



- Goens -

On March 17, **Charlie Goens** began his new role as director of Parks and Recreation in the City of Radford. Goens previously served as the Parks and Recreation operations & facility division manager for the City of Tucker, GA. Prior to that, Goens served from 2017 to 2023 as the athletic supervisor/parks maintenance supervisor for Roanoke County Parks, Recreation, and Tourism.

Goens is a native of Salem and has worked with the City of Salem Parks & Recreation Department. He has also served as a college baseball coach with several universities, including the University of Richmond, and has worked as facility operations manager/head groundskeeper throughout minor and major league baseball including for the Staten Island Yankees, a Class A affiliate of the New York Yankees.

Goens has a Bachelor's in Recreation-Sports Management from Newberry College and received his Master's in Recreation-Administration from Western Kentucky University. He is a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional through the National Recreation and Park Association.

Danville's David to be honored for government innovation



- David -

Robert David, the City of Danville's violence prevention manager and head of Project Imagine, was named the winner of the 2025 Excellence in Virginia Award for Innovation in Government from the Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. The award was presented at a ceremony on April 8 at the Omni Richmond Hotel.

David is one of six award recipients, with others honored for lifetime achievement, community enhancement, leadership, freedom expansion, and heroism.

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

"This award speaks to the work that we do and the model that we have put together," David said. "This model works. We reach kids early, providing the resources, mentorship, and opportunities they need to change. They want a better path – we just have to give them the support to take it."

Project Imagine is based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy principles, helping participants visualize and pursue a life free from gangs and crime. Teens enter the program through referrals from law enforcement, courts, schools, and parents. Since its launch in 2018, 187 youths have completed the program.

David said the Project Imagine model is the culmination of the 30 years that he has served in the criminal justice field.

"This model not only works, but it is sustainable," he said. "Looking at my years of experience in this field, this award is a testament to everybody who does this work and does not feel as if they are being seen. You do not always get noticed for the work that you do. I hope this award sends a message to others: Don't quit."

Newport News' Vick appointed to chair Virginia First Cities



City of Newport News Councilwoman **Tina Vick** has been named as the new chair of Virginia First Cities (VFC), a coalition representing Virginia's largest cities. Vick's appointment underscores her ongoing dedication to improving the lives of urban residents and advocating for policies that strengthen Virginia's cities.

- Vick -

VFC is a statewide organization that works to address the unique challenges faced by urban areas, including economic development, affordable housing, transportation, education, and public safety. As chair, Vick will lead the coalition in its mission to elevate the voices of Virginia's cities and ensure they are adequately represented in the state legislature.

"I am deeply honored to be selected as chair of VFC," said Vick in a statement. "Virginia's cities are vibrant, diverse com-

munities that are vital to the Commonwealth's success. As chair, I look forward to working alongside my colleagues to push for policies that support sustainable growth, create economic opportunities, and improve the quality of life for all residents in our cities."

Vick, who has served on the Newport News City Council for over 16 years, has earned a reputation as a strong advocate for economic development, neighborhood revitalization, and community engagement. She has worked tirelessly to address the pressing needs of urban areas, and her leadership will be key in guiding VFC toward achieving its goals.

Currently, she also chairs the Community Development Block Grant Committee and is the vice chair of the Public Safety Committee. Additionally, she serves as a liaison on several of the city's boards and commissions, including the Architectural Review, Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center, Newport News Redevelopment Authority, and the North End/Huntington Heights Architectural Review.

LaBarca named captain of Leesburg Police Department



- LaBarca -

The Leesburg Police Department has announced the appointment of Captain **Loriann LaBarca** to its leadership team and a department restructuring aimed at better serving the needs of the community. Captain

LaBarca has over 27 years of distinguished law enforcement experience, including 25 years with the Fairfax County Police Department, where she retired at the rank of major.

Captain LaBarca's extensive career in law enforcement has been marked by her dedication to public safety, leadership in critical policing operations, and commitment to community engagement. Throughout her tenure with the Fairfax County Police Department, she served in a variety of leadership roles, including the commander of the Organized Crime and Narcotics Division, commander of the Mason District and West Springfield District Stations, and assistant commander of the Special Operations Divi-



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



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sion. Her expertise in investigations, officer development, and crisis response will be invaluable to the Leesburg Police Department as it continues to enhance its services and strengthen community partnerships.

"We are excited to welcome Captain LaBarca to the Leesburg Police Department," said Chief Thea Pirnat. "Her vast experience and leadership will be a tremendous asset to our department and the Leesburg community. We look forward to working together to uphold the highest standards of public safety and service."

Captain LaBarca officially began her new role on February 24 and was sworn in by the Honorable Gary Clemens.

Brewster to retire as Blacksburg police chief



- Brewster -

Blacksburg Police Chief **Todd Brewster** has announced that he will retire in July.

A native of Tazewell and a graduate of Radford University, Brewster began his career with the Town of Blacksburg as a volunteer with the Blacksburg Fire Department in 1995. While volunteering with the fire department, Brewster worked as a driver for Blacksburg Transit before being hired as a communications officer in the dispatch center for the police department in 1997. In 1999, he transitioned from dispatch into the ranks of the police department as an officer. He continued to advance in his career with the department, working as sergeant and lieutenant while supervising the Accident Reconstruction Team and serving as the DMV grant coordinator.

Brewster was promoted to police services captain in November 2020, where he was responsible for the criminal investigations unit, accreditation, community outreach, recruiting and hiring, and the training unit. In July 2022, he was appointed to his current position as chief of police.

In 2023, Governor Glenn Youngkin appointed Brewster to the Virginia Department of Emergency Management 911 Services Board. He is also chairman of the PSAP Grant Committee. Brewster, a recipient of the Virginia Police Chiefs Foundation's Lifesaving Award, is a graduate of the FBI National Academy; a member of the FBI National Academy Associates, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police; and serves as the vice-president for the Blue

Ridge Association of Chiefs of Police.

As chief, Brewster led the department as it transitioned out of the COVID pandemic. Brewster had many accomplishments during this time, but he's proudest of the implementation and development of the Crime Analyst Program. This program not only operates for the Blacksburg Police Department but regionally assists other agencies with tracking crime trends across Southwest Virginia. The program has become so successful that it has been recognized by the FBI National Academy and other organizations throughout the country.

Town of Herndon selects Heavner as chief communications officer



- Heavner -

The Town of Herndon has named **Brent M. Heavner** as chief communications officer. Heavner replaces Anne Papa, who is retiring from the town after more than 19 years of dedicated service.

In his new post, Heavner will be responsible for a wide range of materials and outreach programs that inform the public of town policies, activities, services, and accomplishments. Heavner will report to Acting Deputy Town Manager Kirstyn Jovanovich and will serve as a member of the town's leadership team. He will collaborate with all town departments in the development and implementation of communications strategies designed to promote better understanding of town resources and initiatives, and to foster engagement and dialogue. Heavner will oversee tactical execution against all communications strategies, to include media relations, promotional programs, collateral development, and web strategy. He will also be responsible for integration of the town's new brand into its operations and programs, and will serve as the town's Freedom of Information (FOIA) officer.

"Brent brings an exceptional mix of experience, expertise, and strategic insight to his new role," said Jovanovich in a press release. "The town council, leadership team and I will all benefit from his communications guidance, and our residents and businesses will benefit from his passion for public service. I look forward to welcoming Brent to our leadership team."

Heavner most recently served as communications and outreach analytics lead for the U.S. Department of Education, a role

in which he led organizational performance measurement, content governance, data management, and communication technology planning for the agency. Previously he had served in Prince William County for more than a decade, in increasingly responsible roles that culminated in his position as director of communications and marketing for the county's Parks and Recreation Department. In that capacity, Heavner led a team that was responsible for all facets of communications and marketing, growing its annual output by more than 30 percent during his tenure by formalizing project management processes and implementing new technologies.

Heavner holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in Communication Studies from Marshall University.

Town of Herndon appoints Pihonak as chief of police



- Pihonak -

The Town of Herndon has appointed Captain **Steven T. Pihonak** as chief of police. Chief Pihonak succeeds Maggie DeBoard, who served as chief from 2012 to 2025.

Pihonak joined the town's police force in 1999. He subsequently rose through the ranks, earning many accolades including Officer of the Year, culminating in his most recent promotion to captain in 2020.

In addition to his dedicated service to the Herndon Police Department, Chief Pihonak is known for being the sidekick to Bragg, the department's first certified facility dog. They both recently provided on-the-scene support to first responders in the aftermath of the tragic midair collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in January 2025.

"Chief Pihonak is a highly skilled command-level law enforcement officer who is uniquely qualified to lead the Herndon Police Department," said Interim Town Manager Chris Martino in a press release. "His background, experience, and expertise have already earned the respect of the men and women of the department, and I am confident in his ability to excel in this critical role."

Pihonak holds a Bachelor's in Criminal Justice from Champlain College.

City of Fairfax publishes its first *State of the Urban Forest*

THE CITY OF FAIRFAX'S urban forestry program is growing, as documented in the city's first *State of the Urban Forest*, a new annual report that summarizes the city's tree accomplishments.

"Forest growth and care can be slow and out of sight to most, so it's important to celebrate our successes," said Anna Safford, urban forest manager. "There's still a lot to get done, but it's good to reflect on what we are doing."

Fairfax has been a proud Tree City USA recipient for 38 years, requiring the city to maintain a tree board or department, have a community tree ordinance, spend at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry, and celebrate Arbor Day each year. Having a healthy and sustainable urban forest is integral in providing residents with meaningful environmental, social, and economic benefits. City staff work to expand the native tree canopy while protecting existing mature trees on public and private land.

The *State of the Urban Forest* incorporates feedback from many partners: city government leaders and staff, board and commission members, George Mason University, environmental partners, residents, and city schools. The four-page report is full of facts and figures, including how many trees were planted (130),

the number of city parks surveyed for invasive species (25), and volunteer hours donated (449).

The document highlights city policies and regulations, including the new tree conservation zoning text amendments, the launch of the Urban Forest Master Plan, and the new tree preservation and landscaping guide. It includes an introduction to the urban forestry staff and the poetic observation of trees by Daniels Run Elementary School's Aarna Damle.

In the summer of 2024, Fairfax launched the SPROUT (Stewarding, Planting, Restoring Our Urban Trees) Initiative. SPROUT was awarded a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service to plant and maintain trees, combat extreme heat and climate change, and improve access to nature.

Explore the full document by visiting www.fairfaxva.gov.



Waynesboro Economic Development launches Grow Waynesboro Wednesdays initiative

Providing free resources and mentorship for local entrepreneurs

THE CITY OF WAYNESBORO Office of Economic Development is launching Grow Waynesboro Wednesdays, a new program designed to support local entrepreneurs and small businesses with free mentorship, expert resources, and educational opportunities.

Every Wednesday afternoon, business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs can access guidance from experienced mentors, industry experts, and small business development professionals - all aimed at helping them succeed.



Afternoons of the first, third, and fourth Wednesdays of the month, business mentors from either the Small Business Development Center (SCORE), or the Greater Augusta Regional Chamber of Commerce will be available at the Waynesboro Economic Development & Tourism Office. Entrepreneurs and business owners can drop in or email in advance with specific questions.

The second Wednesday will feature a rotating schedule of special presentations and technical services tailored to local entrepreneurs. In February, Kelli Weaver from the Virginia Tourism Corporation shared insights on leveraging tourism resources and grants for business growth.

"This program is about making small business support more accessible," said Stephanie Duffy, assistant director of Waynesboro Tourism and Economic Development. "Grow Waynesboro Wednesdays will provide free, direct access to experienced professionals who can help with funding, marketing, operations, and more."

Grow Waynesboro Wednesdays is an extension of the city's broader Grow Waynesboro program, which has supported numerous businesses in the community. By offering structured, consistent support, the program aims to help more local businesses launch, grow, and thrive. More information on this program can be found at www.growwaynesboro.com.

Manassas approves MIFCO property purchase agreement

DURING ITS JANUARY 13 MEETING, the Manassas City Council unanimously approved a \$3.1 million real estate sale agreement to purchase property owned by the Manassas Ice and Fuel Company (MIFCO) adjacent to the City Hall parking lot on Center Street.

The purchase will be funded through the 2026 fiscal year budget, which begins July 1, 2025. The purchase agreement includes a 120-day due diligence period where the city may decide to proceed with the purchase and a closing date of September 10, 2025.

The acquisition of the property is expected to give the city greater flexibility regarding the possible construction of another downtown parking garage and/or a City Hall annex.

“Redeveloping the property fits with the long-range planning goals to eliminate industrial uses from downtown, which are stated in the city’s 2040 Comprehensive Plan and serve as a blueprint for future development,” said Interim City Manager Douglas W. Keen.

“We are looking to the future with this land purchase,” Mayor Michelle Davis-Younger said during the meeting. “We are helping to ensure that we have space for our community’s needs and that we can maintain the unique character of our downtown.”

The City Hall-Downtown Parking Capital Improvement Project was introduced in 2016 to provide parking for the government complex and address an imbalance of parking north of the railroad tracks. The City Hall Annex Capital Improvement Project has been considered an addition, which includes the relocation of

city departments from leased space to enhance customer service.

Since 2022, the city has been discussing the purchase of the six parcels included in the sale, located at 9003, 9005, 9007, 9007A, 9009, and 9011A Center Street. Tenants who currently occupy the MIFCO property are not required to move from the site until August 31, 2025.

While the redevelopment of MIFCO is not an official capital project, residents can learn about the Capital Improvement Program and view other major capital projects on the city website: www.manassasva.gov/cip.

The Manassas Ice and Fuel Company has a long history in Manassas. Beginning in 1922 as the Davis Ice and Fuel Company, Edgar G. Parrish became an owner in 1923. His son, former Mayor and State Delegate Harry J. Parrish, and grandson, former Mayor Harry J. “Hal” Parrish II, continued ownership of the company.



New Heritage Marker recognizes fight against segregation in Hampton

ON JANUARY 4, the City of Hampton dedicated a Heritage Marker in recognition of three nurses who risked their careers in 1963 to protest segregation at a Hampton hospital.

The Black nurses known as The Dixie Three — Mildred Smith, Patricia Taylor, and Agnes Stokes — chose to eat lunch in

the hospital cafeteria that was deemed for “whites only,” rather than in the small room in the basement for African American staff members. Their protest, which mirrored similar acts happening across the South, led to a court battle that was ultimately settled in their favor.

Smith died in 2013, but the other two nurses, now Patricia McKenzie and Agnes Chrisman, attended the ceremony dedicating the marker. It is located at the former hospital site, now Hunter B. Andrews PreK-8 School.

At the ceremony, Mayor Jimmy Gray said, “Often history is made quietly, gradually, by ordinary men and women whose names are not known beyond their hometowns...These three ladies made a profound statement with the simple act of sitting down to eat.”

On February 22, a locally produced documentary about The Dixie Three was screened at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk as part of the celebration of Black History Month.



Galax receives grant for Rex Theater accessibility renovations

A VIRGINIA GRANT will help improve accessibility at the City of Galax's beloved Rex Theater.

Galax is one of 35 localities to receive an award from the Virginia 250 Preservation Fund Grant Program. The \$674,674 grant will be utilized to improve and increase equitable accessibility to performances at the Rex Theater for traditionally underserved populations.

Funds will be used to install an elevator for the facility while preserving the building's historical character. Additionally, a platform lift will be installed to enhance accessibility to the stage. ADA accessible bathrooms will be installed in the basement to support current performers, and basement-level spaces will be created to support future programming. Preliminary engineering and operational plans are currently in development thanks to funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC).

Of the project, Galax Mayor Willie Greene said, "The city is extremely thankful for this significant funding. As we continue to renovate and revitalize the Rex Theater, this will enable us to serve those with mobility issues that might not otherwise be able to enjoy the exciting shows that will grace the Rex stage. These improvements will help bring more visitors and tax revenue to the city while increasing entertainment options for local residents and enhancing sales for local businesses."

Including this grant, Galax has now received \$1,004,674 in grant funding since May 2024 to improve the Rex Theater. The city has agreed to provide \$256,226 in local matching funds, which means that the city is investing \$1 for every \$4 grant dollars received.

"We are so grateful to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources for this grant through the Virginia 250 Preserva-

tion program, as well as their grant of \$225,000 from the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization fund that will be used to renovate the balcony and upstairs restrooms in the theater," said Michael Burnette, Galax city manager. "All of these funds, along with a grant from the Twin County Community Foundation and our local match, have created a pool of approximately \$1.25 million to improve our beloved Rex and make it the centerpiece of our downtown revitalization plans."

The Rex continues to be the home of true old-time music and is expanding its offerings to include more diverse acts to reach an even larger audience. The Rex also hosts a free movie every Wednesday night for residents and visitors alike. For more information on what is happening at the Rex Theater, visit www.rex.theater.



Ballistic vests donated to Blacksburg Police K9 officers

THE K9 UNIT of the Blacksburg Police Department will now be safer on duty, thanks to a generous donation.

Brady's K9 Fund has provided ballistic vests for each of the department's four-legged officers, Tyr, Xena, Mia, and Zero. Brady's K9 Fund is passionate about supporting K9 officers who work tirelessly to keep communities safe. The organization is dedicated to supplying essential equipment and resources to these brave dogs, helping to ensure they are well-equipped and protected for their entire shift.

Brady's K9 Fund was founded by Brady Snakovsky, an eight-

year-old boy who felt K9 officers deserved body armor just like their human partners. Since 2018, Brady's K9 Fund has raised over \$1.25 million and has provided vests for over 950 police dogs across all 50 states.



Buena Vista completes Tree Canopy Master Plan

THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA, in collaboration with the Green Infrastructure Center (GIC), Boxerwood, and students from the BV Cool Trees program at Parry McCluer High School, has announced the completion of its Tree Canopy Master Plan. This combined effort has been supported by technical assistance from the Virginia Department of Forestry and aims to enhance the city's green infrastructure.

The Strategic Tree Canopy Plan establishes a city-wide goal of maintaining 45% tree canopy coverage over the next decade. Working to accomplish this goal reflects Buena Vista's commitment to environmental sustainability and its dedication to creating a healthier, more beautiful community.

"To achieve this goal, we need to proactively plant approximately 100 trees annually to offset losses from development,"

said Tom Roberts, director of Community Development. "Additionally, we will focus on planting trees strategically to maximize benefits such as aesthetic enhancements, heat reduction, and improved stormwater management."

Key goals and strategies include:

- **Engaging the Community:** The city is encouraging residents and businesses to participate by planting trees on private property. Future initiatives include a tree giveaway event in partnership with Boxerwood and the BV Cool Trees program.
- **Establishing a Tree Board:** The city is forming a Tree Board made up of community members that would oversee tree planting and maintenance, educate the public about the importance of trees, and assist the city in tree canopy management and goals. Boxerwood will play a key role in facilitating the board's operations.
- **Strategic Planting:** Efforts will include planting trees on public lands such as parks, city streets and schools, and encouraging private landowners to contribute to the canopy goal.
- **Celebrating Arbor Day:** With BV Cool Trees, the city is planning an Arbor Day tree-planting event in April to kick off these efforts.

"Local residents are eager to make Buena Vista greener and healthier," Roberts added. "The Tree Canopy Plan provides a clear path for everyone to get involved and make a difference."

The city is seeking feedback from residents as it develops the next steps of the plan, offering a tree survey for locals to share their thoughts and ideas.

THE NEWS-GAZETTE



Students from Parry McCluer High School.

New battery electric buses join Loudoun County Transit fleet

LOUDOUN COUNTY HAS ADDED two new battery electric buses to the Loudoun County Transit fleet. The buses will be available for use on multiple local bus service routes.

The buses are a key step in the county's efforts to achieve the goals of the Loudoun County Energy Strategy, which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions in transportation and leading by example in county government operations. Each bus is estimated to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 180,000 pounds a year.

In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants, battery electric buses are quieter and have lower operating and maintenance costs than diesel buses. The buses are capable of traveling 230 miles on a single charge of the lithium-ion battery, which takes a little more than four hours to charge.

More information about Loudoun County's efforts to increase energy sustainability, as well as other environmental initiatives, may be found at www.loudoun.gov/environment.

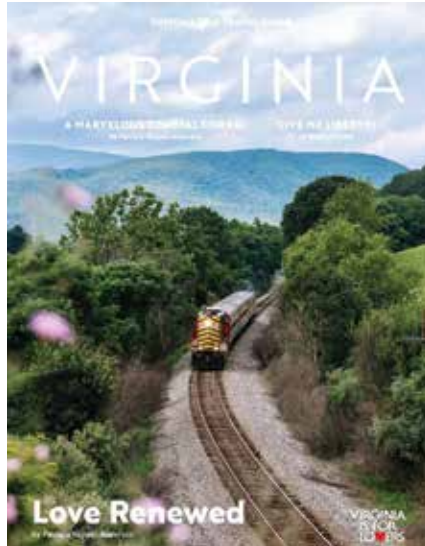


Staunton's Virginia Scenic Railway featured on *Virginia Travel Guide* cover

THE VIRGINIA SCENIC RAILWAY is featured as one of the three different covers for the 2025 *Virginia Travel Guide* which is published annually by the Virginia Tourism Corporation and Roanoke-based Leisure Media 360. The guide is available for free on www.virginia.org and at Virginia State Welcome Centers.

The Virginia Scenic Railway is the state's only scenic railway, offering a unique and relaxing journey through the heart of the Shenandoah Valley. Departing from Staunton, this passenger rail experience combines breathtaking views of the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains with the charm of train travel. Guests enjoy comfortable seating, delicious onboard dining, and an opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural beauty and rich history of the region.

"We are honored that the Virginia Scenic Railway has been chosen as a cover feature of the *Virginia Travel Guide*," said Staunton's Director of Tourism Samantha Johnson.



"This recognition highlights not only the breathtaking beauty of Staunton and the Shenandoah Valley, but also the unique experiences that await travelers here. The Virginia Scenic Railway captures the essence of adventure, relaxation, and discovery that makes our region a must-visit destination. We extend our gratitude to Virginia Tourism Corporation for this spotlight and invite visitors from near and far to explore the charm and wonder of Staunton."

The 2025 *Virginia Travel Guide* features a curated collection of personal recommendations and heartfelt narratives from talented writers, local enthusiasts, and passionate travelers. Readers get the insider's perspective on the best ways to experience Virginia, from lesser-known road trips and dining destinations, to sustainable travel tips and new perspectives

of Virginia.

Visit virginia.org/travelguide to request a free copy.

"GetGreen Arlington" mobile app launches

ARLINGTON COUNTY and EcoAction Arlington recently announced the launch of "GetGreen Arlington," an innovative mobile app designed by Emerald Technology Group to inspire and empower residents and businesses to take climate action.

Developed in partnership and funded through a Northern Virginia Smart Region Initiative grant from Smart City Works, this app is tailored to meet Arlington's environmental goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fostering a community of eco-conscious individuals.

Aimed at making sustainable living accessible and engaging, the app features interactive climate action challenges, personalized tips to reduce carbon footprints, and local community engagement opportunities. By integrating competitions, outreach efforts, and user-friendly tools, "GetGreen Arlington" hopes to establish itself as the go-to platform for all things eco-friendly in Arlington.

"Later is too late," insists Arlington County Board Chair Takis Karantonis. "We are at a pivotal moment in our fight against climate change. The 'GetGreen Arlington' app is a great way to make climate-conscious living a meaningful part of everybody's daily life. Only climate-informed individuals can build a climate resilient community."

Key features of the "GetGreen Arlington" app:

- **Climate Action Challenges:** Users earn points for completing sustainable activities like reducing energy consumption, utilizing public transportation, or choosing local goods.
- **Tailored Tips for Reducing Carbon Footprints:** The app provides actionable advice to make daily life more sustainable.
- **Community Engagement Opportunities:** Connect with local events, initiatives, and fellow users who are equally passionate about sustainability.
- **Exclusive Rewards:** Participate in challenges and competitions to unlock rewards and show off your eco-achievements.

Elenor Hodges, executive director of EcoAction Arlington, emphasized the importance of collaboration to achieve Arlington's environmental goals. "GetGreen Arlington is more than an app – it's a movement to unite our community in taking bold, collective climate action," she said. "Together, we are not only addressing greenhouse gas emissions but also making our Arlington community healthier and more sustainable for generations to come."



Berkleytown Heritage Park in Ashland to include oral histories

A NEW TOWN OF ASHLAND park is slated to open in 2025 that will honor the historic neighborhood of Berkleytown. Situated along the northern edge of Randolph-Macon's campus, Berkleytown developed in response to segregation in the early 1900s. In 2022, the neighborhood was officially added to the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places as the Berkleytown Historic District, recognizing its enduring significance.

"This park is a tribute to the generations who built and sustained Berkleytown as a thriving community," said Martha Miller, Ashland's assistant town manager of External Operations. "It's a place where stories will be preserved, shared, and honored for years to come."

Features of the Park

- **Walking Trails:** The newly paved paths will offer a quiet space for relaxation and reflection.
- **Historical Storytelling:** Interpretive signs and QR codes throughout the park will link visitors to oral histories conducted by Randolph-Macon students, featuring interviews with lifelong Berkleytown residents.

- **Art Installations:** Local artists Tim Harper and Matt Lively will contribute artwork to further honor Berkleytown's legacy.
- **John M. Gandy High School Tribute:** The park will commemorate places central to Black life in Ashland, including this historic school.

A community effort

This project has been made possible thanks to the Hanover County Black Heritage Society, Habitat for Humanity's donation of the property, and the dedication of Randolph-Macon students who conducted oral history interviews.

Dr. Donelle Boose, assistant professor of History at Randolph-Macon College, led her students through a series of interviews to preserve oral history and memories of Berkleytown. By capturing the voices of those who were there, the students have created a deeper connection to the past.

"I want the park to emphasize the impact Berkleytown had on the Black community of Ashland," said lifelong Ashland resident NaChay Grimes. "It's good for more people to be aware of Berkleytown and our history."

The park is on track to open in 2025, with further public meetings planned to guide its development.

Northern Virginia Regional Commission introduces NOVA Flood Map

THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA Regional Commission has introduced NOVA Flood Map, the first open access, near real-time rain gauge platform in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Funded by Virginia's Community Flood Preparedness Fund, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, and NOAA through U.S. Senate Appropriations, NOVA Flood Map is the result of a pilot project intended to evaluate the opportunities and benefits of connecting and optimizing the rainfall-runoff monitoring network in Northern Virginia. Additional data feeds, such as flood gauges, will ultimately be incorporated in coordination with local government and state agency partners.

Flood forecasting relies heavily on the tracking of storms and real-time data about rainfall and water levels in streams, rivers,

and lakes. Local governments in the region recognize the value of monitoring rainfall more closely as they respond to increasing flood hazards across Northern Virginia. By integrating the individual networks, the goal of the program is to empower data sharing throughout NOVA and investigate how a regional monitoring network could provide cost savings and improve or contribute to sensor management and reporting, post-event analysis, model calibration, and long-term network planning.

With climate change bringing more intense weather to Northern Virginia, helping the public understand their relationship to the changing flooding patterns in the region is an important component of helping them understand their risk. In addition to its practical applications, a public rain gauge network can foster community engagement by allowing individuals to access and interact with rainfall data, in turn increasing awareness of changing rainfall patterns and flood hazards.

NVRC thanks the members of the NOVA Flood Mitigation and Resiliency Workgroup and local government partners for supporting this effort. To explore the project, visit <https://novafloodmap.elements360.aem.eco>.



A brief history of Women's History Month



MARCH IS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH in the United States. Its roots trace back to the first National Woman's Day observed on February 28, 1909, as women fought for labor and voting rights. In 1910, an International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen proposed an International Women's Day, which was first observed in March 1911 in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland. More than one million people attended rallies campaigning for women's rights and equality. Subsequently, International Women's Day was established as March 8 annually.

In the United States, however, enthusiasm for International Women's Day waned until an International Women's Day March held in Berkeley, CA in 1969. This march resulted in the creation of the Women's History Research Center, which ultimately archived nearly one million documents on microfilm related to the women's rights movement. Then, in 1978, the Sonoma (CA) School District organized a Women's History Week to expand upon the celebration of International Women's Day. The following year, attendees at a women's history conference at Sarah Lawrence College (co-sponsored by the Women's Action Alliance and the Smithsonian Institution) discussed the success of the Sonoma School District event and initiated an effort to create a National Women's History Week.

In February 1980, President Jimmy Carter formally declared the week of March 8 as National Women's History Week. His proclamation stated, "From the first settlers who came to our shores, from the first American Indian families who befriended them, men and women have worked together to build this nation. Too often the women were unsung and sometimes their contributions went unnoticed. But the achievements, leadership, courage, strength and love of the women who built America was as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well."

In the ensuing years, 14 states declared March as Women's History Month. Congress officially followed the states' lead in 1987 and from there the observance of March as Women's History Month has spread internationally. Here in Virginia, the governor issues an annual proclamation declaring March Women's History Month. On March 1, 2025, Governor Glenn Youngkin's Women's History Month proclamation cited the work of a diverse group of Virginian women including Pamunkey Chief Cockacoeske, the first First Lady of the United States Martha Washington, renowned educator and public servant Virginia Estelle Randolph, and the former First Lady of Virginia Roxane Gilmore.

Each year, the National Women's History Alliance (NWHHA) selects a theme for Women's History Month. The 2025 theme, "Moving Forward Together! Women Educating & Inspiring Generations," celebrated the influential women who have dedicated their lives to education, mentorship, and leadership. In this spirit, we are pleased in this issue to include **Moving Forward Together: Profiles in Leadership** featuring some of the many women local government leaders making a difference in the Commonwealth.



Amanda Pillion

**Councilmember (former Mayor) –
Town of Abingdon**



“It’s important to me that women know they can do all these things.”

Local government background:

- Elected to town council in 2020
- Served two-year term as mayor from 2023-2025

Reason I got involved: I have four children, and at various times they have played pretty much every sport. About six or seven years before I ran for council, the owner of Food City donated a large piece of land to the town of Abingdon to create a sports complex, which was very badly needed. The other half of the land was where he was building his flagship grocery store and a shopping center. There were people in town who did not want this to happen and campaigned against it. We had two decrepit baseball fields with single-stall bathrooms, and at that point in my life I was spending pretty much every night there. I knew we could do better for our kids, so it was an important issue for me. At the urging of my friend, who was the mayor at the time, I spoke at town council meetings several times to express the need for the new sports complex. The council voted to zone it recreationally and people lost their minds. People got really upset and took sides. Things got ugly. There were lawsuits. The sports complex was planned and the land was prepared, but then people who were part of the group that opposed the complex won seats on the council and everything came to a stop. We had this piece of land with nothing happening. Even though we had borrowed the money, the complex wasn’t happening. So, I ran for the town council because I had a very strong opinion that we needed to move forward with the project. At that point my kids didn’t even play baseball anymore!

We completed the complex in the spring of 2022, and we have had several other enhancements that go along with it. We have a walking trail that goes around the complex, a bike skills park that abuts the Creeper Trail, we have a story walk, an adaptable playground, two soccer fields that our high school soccer team now uses...all these amazing things that have benefited our community.

Now, we have four ball fields where we have tournaments every single weekend from the end of March through the middle of November – which is a huge tourism opportunity. The first weekend that we had a big tournament the restaurants ran out of food! For a town that relies on meals and lodging taxes for the primary source of our income that’s a really big deal. It means that we don’t have to raise taxes to build sidewalks.

What keeps me motivated: My husband’s a state legislator so he’s gone a lot. When I decided to run, my children were like, “What are you doing, Mom?!? You’re going to be stressed out.” I told them that their father was giving back, and we could see him making a difference in the world, and now it was my turn to give back to the community that I care so much about. Serving on the council helps me be part of making things better. I get to know about the people who live here and their needs and their wants, and I enjoy it.

Women who inspire me: I will highlight one person in particular. I am only the third female mayor in the history of Abingdon, and that’s about 250 years of history at this point! The one that was most recent before me was a lady named Cathy Lowe. She was the one who encouraged me to always come and talk to the council and advocate for the things I cared about, like the sports complex. She was the person who encouraged me to run. She took me out and helped me get signatures. She made sure that I had my ducks in a row and counseled me. Even now I can call her, and she has the historical knowledge of the town that is incredibly valuable. She has been a huge supporter and inspiration.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: It’s important to me that women know they can do all these things. You can be a mom, you can take care of your kids, you can work, or you can put your career on hold and go back and do your career and other things later. There are going to be times when that’s not easy. I’ve had situations along the way when men have not made it easy for me – even in 2025 – but you just have to keep going and set a goal and do all the things that you want to do. I think that’s particularly important for kids from Southwest Virginia to know because historically we haven’t had the same opportunities that people from other parts of the state have had. I think those days are over and that we need to move past that and realize that that it’s not a hurdle for us anymore.

Big challenge facing my community: The upper portion of the Creeper Trail was devastated by Hurricane Helene and needs to be resurrected. The first 17 miles, which is maintained by Abingdon, was mostly spared except for some damage to some trestles that can be fixed and a lot of tree damage. The trail is a regional treasure and it’s going to take a lot of work to bring it back to what it was before the storm. The town has done a lot of work to make sure that the part of the trail between Abingdon and Damascus is usable and welcoming. We want to help our neighbors in Damascus with their tourists as well. The challenge going forward is not only going to be to help with the recovery of the other 17 miles, but also to create a plan to deal with future damage. The trestles are very difficult and costly to repair, and we need to have a plan going forward for similar situations.

Maureen Coffey

Board Member – County of Arlington



“It’s important to think about if you do lose, what have you accomplished just by running?”

Local government background: Began serving in January 2024. Youngest person to serve on the board and first renter to ever do so.

Reason I got involved: I think it matters to have different perspectives represented. Arlington County is 60% renters, and 50% of our population is under 35 and those people have not had a whole lot of a voice. I grew up here. My grandparents, parents, and brother all live here. So, it’s hard for me to imagine going anywhere else, especially as I get older. But the trajectory of the cost of living here, especially housing, is pretty challenging. I had been involved through

my neighborhood association, as well as some of our local Democratic Party organizations, and was talking to some of the people on the board about how impossible it is to find places to rent and they said, “We know it’s happening, but no one’s coming to us and talking about it.” And I thought, “How is that possible? It’s all I think about.”

What keeps me motivated: The median rent on the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor at this point is about \$2,400 a month for a one-bedroom apartment. And when I tell that to older people – people who haven’t been in the housing market for a while – they say, “That’s more than my mortgage!” When I couldn’t find a place to rent, I talked to an advisor about buying a house and was told that despite being gainfully employed with a pretty good job, I’d never be able to afford anything nearby. So, if really cutting back and saving for several years is still not enough to guarantee that you can afford to buy something in the community that you want to live, then I think the cost benefit of spending your money now as opposed to saving it for later really changes. That disincentive to save is going to hurt this community down the road. It needs to be addressed. I hope that the things that we’re doing and working towards now can make it so that the next generation of young people have a little bit more hope that they can stay here and be around their parents if they want to.

Women who inspire me: I have to give credit to Katie Cristol who was on the board when I met her about eight years ago. She was young and fun and cool. I was in my early twenties, and she was so willing to meet for coffee and to just talk about what she did and how I could get involved. I think it matters a lot to have those one-on-one opportunities because it’s hard to ask dumb questions when you’re in a group.

I would also shout out Alexis Rogers, who’s in Richmond. She ran for mayor in 2020. I knew her through the Young Democrats. She is such a strong community organizer and advocate. She taught me a lot about being willing to take up space and believe in yourself. I think younger women write themselves off quite a bit and need a little bit of extra encouragement to push forward. I would add Jennifer McClellan as well. She came up through the Young Democrats and was elected to the legislature in Richmond at a pretty young age. She’s always willing to take a phone call.

Since I’ve been elected, Libby Garvey has made sure I felt supported. She retired at the end of last year but was our chair and had been serving in Arlington between the county board and the school board for almost 30 years. I would also say some of our colleagues across some of Northern Virginia’s jurisdictions have also been great. Letty Hardi in Falls Church is amazing and so are Sarah Bagley and Alia Gaskins over in Alexandria, and Delegate Elizabeth Bennett Parker. I think we have a really good group of younger elected women in NOVA. It’s important to have people who are interested in supporting your own success and will let you vent when you need to.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: You have a strong why. There’s all this encouragement for young people and women to run for office, but you need a driving reason, and you need to understand what you are trying to achieve. Ambition is not a bad word, but I don’t know that that’s enough. Sometimes in the campaign world there’s a feeling of, “Never run as though you’re going to lose.” But I think it’s important to think about if you do lose, what have you accomplished just by running?

Big challenge facing my community: The loss of federal jobs is a big concern. I really worry about the regional economy from a housing perspective and from a tax revenue perspective. There are plenty of jobs out there, but they’re not one-to-one aligned. Getting people into jobs that sustain the cost of living that they have had to take on to live here is going to be really challenging. I have so many friends who have lost jobs and it’s really emotional.

India Adams-Jacobs, ICMA-CM Town Manager – Town of Bowling Green



“If you’ve given yourself the opportunity to be a little bit flexible and nimble, I think you learn a lot more.”

Local government background:

- City of Tacoma, WA – ICMA Management Fellow & City Council Assistant, Management Analyst
- City of Delray Beach, FL – Assistant City Manager
- City of Petersburg – Assistant to the City Manager
- Town of Colonial Beach – Town Manager

Reason I got involved: During a fellowship with Albemarle County, Virginia, I met the assistant to the city manager for the City of Tacoma, Nadia Chandler Hardy. She saw me taking notes in the back of the ICMA conference and asked me if I would like a copy of the presentation. She encouraged me to consider the Management Fellowship with the City of Tacoma. It was probably a small thing for her, but for me, at that critical moment when I was so young, it gave a trajectory in my career that I probably wouldn’t have had otherwise.

What keeps me motivated: Seeing the impact of the work and being able to make connections beyond just the career. I have two small kids now under the age of five, and my four-year-old son is now at the age to kind of understand what I do for work. Recently we happened to be in Petersburg near the Appomattox River just walking the trail and I was able to show him things that I had worked on. I think it’s pretty cool to be able to see the impact that you’ve made and people actually benefiting from it. In this work, you don’t have a crystal ball to see where things will end up, but seeing the impact of the work years later is definitely something that keeps me tied to it.

Women who inspire me: My late grandmother, who kind of became the Parks and Recreation Department in Caroline County. She was inducted into the Amateur Softball Association (now USA Softball) Hall of Fame. Through her passion for sport and recreation, I saw the kind of connectivity to not only create a higher quality of life but also to create amenities for kids to enhance their childhoods. She also gave women opportunities to travel up and down the East Coast with her softball team. **[Editor’s note: Adams-Jacobs followed in her grandmother’s footsteps and was a member of George Mason University’s women’s softball team].**

I was also inspired by my late maternal grandmother who was a cook at Fort A.P. Hill (now Fort Walker). As I’ve gotten older, I’ve really come to appreciate the value of her work in helping with the readiness of our National Guard folks by preparing meals and making them feel like they had a home away from home. My mother also played an important part in inspiring me to succeed. She worked in journalism in Richmond at Channel Six and was one of the few managers of color for the South’s oldest station.

I was lucky enough to have some amazing women who helped me in this profession including Bonnie Svrcek, who is the former city manager in Lynchburg, and Aretha Ferrell-Benavides, who was the manager in Petersburg when I was there and is now the city manager

in Martinsville. I think being able to help women in this profession see the best version of themselves and not dismiss career possibilities just because they've got families or are thinking about starting families in the future can have a real impact.

Another woman who helped me was Marilyn Strickland, who is now a Congresswoman from Washington state. When I was looking at the ICMA fellowship opportunity in Washington state, she was on the cover of the magazine *Governing* along with the city manager in Tacoma. I thought, "If I'm not taking the opportunity to work with people who are literally on the covers of magazines, then maybe I should be rethinking who I'm choosing to work for!" I got a chance to work with her on a microsite project in Port Tacoma and her mentorship helped me tremendously.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: I encourage younger people in general to not necessarily stay in one place – try to get some different experiences! If you've given yourself the opportunity to be a little bit flexible and nimble, I think you learn a lot more. I also tell them not to be afraid to apply for something that they think is maybe a stretch. We've all seen literature that women wait until they feel like they have 90% of the qualifications before they apply for a job, but I tell folks, particularly women, to go for it. Otherwise, they might be sorry that they didn't take the chance.

Big challenge facing my community: Finding creative ways to fix some of our issues related to infrastructure is important. We have a waterline replacement project that will hopefully break ground by the end of the year, but with some of the recent uncertainty at the federal level the timeline is less certain. Small rural local governments like ours have critical infrastructure needs that we can't accomplish alone. So that's a challenge, but I'm hopeful that the federal assistance will return or that we can partner more with the state or other localities.

Sue Way

Mayor – Town of Buchanan



"We should never stop growing and learning and trying new things."

Local government background: Elected first woman mayor of the town in 2024.

Reason I got involved: My mom grew up in Buchanan. This is where her family is from. My family's always been very big on community involvement and giving back to the community. My uncle was mayor and captain of the rescue squad for years. My cousin was captain of the rescue squad. My grandfather was a member of the volunteer fire department.

I retired from teaching last year. Somebody said, "Oh, you're retiring. Would you run for mayor?" I tend to be more behind the scenes, so I didn't give it much thought. The next day, I walked out of my house and a car driving by slammed on the brakes and the driver rolled down the window to say, "I'm so excited you're running for mayor! We've already started the phone chain." So, I ended up running and getting elected. This is a whole new thing for me. I've never been a political person at all.

What keeps me motivated: My goal is to do the job right for the Town of Buchanan. I spent a lot of my childhood here and I feel more at home here than any other place. Being the mayor is exciting. No matter how old you are, you can still do new things. I will turn 66 this year, and I think we should never stop growing and learning and trying new things.

Women who inspire me: During my second year of teaching, I was in Virginia Beach where the assistant principal, Ms. Bell, was an inspiration. She was hard as nails. You didn't mess with her. Everybody respected her – the kids respected her, and the teachers respected her. She expected you to be your best at all times and she gave her best at all times. She reminded me of the assistant principal I had in high school, Mrs. Henderson at Northside High School in Roanoke. They had that same push for excellence. You don't just settle for second best; you always, always, always do your best. I appreciate that because that's the way I was raised. That is your obligation to yourself.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: Don't think it's going to be easy. Don't get discouraged, or let your discouragement overwhelm you. Find something positive. Research your facts, find out everything, and then move forward.

Don't let things just pile up to where you feel like you're just overwhelmed. Yes, you're going to have days like that. Everybody does. But don't let it destroy you. Just turn it around and try to make something positive out of it. There's always a kernel of something positive that you can grow.

Big challenge facing my community: Online shopping. And I love online shopping, don't get me wrong. But it's hard nowadays for local businesses to survive. We used to have multiple grocery stores in town – my grandparents owned two of them. People worked in town. But we don't really have any industries in town anymore like we used to when my mom was a kid or even when I was a kid. We do have a movie theater in town. We have a really nice library in town. But we don't have a grocery store or a pharmacy.

Buchanan has three things going for it: History, outdoor recreation, and the people. It's what makes this place a wonderful place to live. I love this town, and I always will.

Letty Hardi

Mayor – City of Falls Church



"Running for council was kind of a leap of faith."

Local government background:

- Elected to city council in 2016
- Elected vice mayor in 2022
- Elected mayor in 2024
- Currently serving as the city section chair of the VML Board of Directors

Reason I got involved: When anyone asks me why I ran for council, I always start by explaining that I'm the last person who thought she'd run for public office. I never aspired to this. But I did it

because the bug bit me once I went to my first meeting during budget season. I saw how impactful all the decisions that were being discussed are at the local level, so much more than people realize. Everything from how much teachers get paid to the books at the library to traffic on the roads to what sort of development and small businesses are going to be considered. I had this realization that as a resident in a community like 80 percent of what makes up our lives is actually local government. Also, I just didn't see anyone up there that represented the next generation of people. No one that looked like me had the same perspective. So, running for council was kind of a leap of faith. I was with a friend at that council meeting, and I said, "I'll run if you run." So, she ran to be on the school board, and I ran to be on the city council.

Of course, the decision to run was easier because I had no idea what I was getting myself into! But given that my husband grew up in Falls Church, and we had lived there for about 16 years, and I had put my career on hold because we had young kids, it seemed like a really good opportunity to give back to a community that has given so much to me and my family.

Women who inspire me: We have a group of youngish women elected in Northern Virginia that get together regularly. Women like Dalia Palchik from the Fairfax County Board and Katie Cristol from Arlington County and Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, who was vice mayor of Alexandria and is now a delegate. We've been friends for years, and we've seen each other through all the tough votes. We still get together regularly to hang out, talk, and share ideas. I'm so grateful for that community because that's important not only to be able to talk shop and geek out on policy issues, but also to see the human side of how to be a mom and a wife and a woman in elected office.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: It's so important. Give it a try. You'll love it.

What keeps me motivated: I ask myself that all the time because I believe that at some point it shouldn't be me. I should try to pave the way for more people to run so there's new people with new ideas and perspectives. So, right now, I am doing it because there's things I want to finish. Also, because local government – especially at a time like right now – is where you can really make an impact because it's so close to people. You can make decisions on Monday night and three years later, you can see a new high school get built! That's really gratifying, especially knowing that these have been long-standing, seemingly intractable issues that the community has grappled with, and we can collectively roll up our sleeves and figure it out and do something. That school that is created is a multi-generational investment for a community that really values public education. That's really satisfying especially when we know that other levels of government are not quite so functional.

Big challenge facing my community: For years, you've had economists say that the Northern Virginia economy is too tied up into the federal government, and now it is essentially coming true. I think something like 16% of the region's population are federal workers and they say that for every federal worker there's two to three contractors. So, it's clearly very impactful to our workforce.

Long term, I think we'll be fine. The region is resilient, and we do have lots of positive things going for us. We need to take care of our residents and the social safety needs that come from unemployment or the sense of impending unemployment. I'm certainly happy to brag about Falls Church, and I think the city is in a really good place budget-wise because of the economic development decisions we've made over the past 10 years, but I know that my neighbors are not as fortunate. So, as a region we are all going to grapple with the chilling effect that the federal government changes will have on the regional economy.

Deanna Reed

Mayor – City of Harrisonburg



"You put yourself at the table because that opens it up for others to come behind you."

Local government background:

- Elected to the city council – 2016
- Appointed mayor – 2017
- Currently serving fifth term as mayor

Reason I first got involved with city council: I ran because of the overcrowded conditions of the high school. A lot of people thought maybe I should run for school board, but I knew city council was where those money decisions would be made, especially for the schools, and we needed a new high school. I was able to be the deciding vote for the new Rocktown High School. I also ran because I wanted the young girls that I mentor – especially the young Black girls – to see someone that looked like them as a councilwoman and mayor.

What keeps me motivated: Harrisonburg is my hometown. One thing that keeps me going is that I'm able to use my platform for people in my community that feel like their voices are not heard. When I started, I was the only woman and the only person of color on council. And now if you look at our council, we're majority minorities and we're majority women. I think that my being elected helped the progression to move our council forward.

Recently, I was honored to be named one of the Top 50 Women Leaders of Virginia for 2025 by Women We Admire, a membership organization comprised of accomplished women executives and leaders across the U.S. and Canada. That's not why I do this, but it always feels good to be recognized.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: It's kind of a cliché, but it's just powerful: Put yourself at the table. Initially, I was kind of hesitant. 2016 was when Hillary Clinton was running for president. I looked at my city council and I thought, "When was the last time a woman has been on council?" Turns out, it had been something like 25 years since a woman had served on council! I didn't think that I had the credentials or was qualified to do it, so I looked for other women to do it. It turned out that Harrisonburg was open and ready for me. But I had to put myself at the table, and that's what I tell my young ladies. If you see that there is a committee or a board or a program or anything that you're interested in, you put yourself at the table because that opens it up for others to come behind you.

Women who inspire me: I always talk about four women in my life who prepared me for this journey.

The first was Barbara Blakey who was the first African American teacher that I ever had. She was my high school typing teacher. She watched over our small group of Black students at Harrisonburg High School, got us involved, and made sure that we had the same opportunities as our white friends. She got me involved in government by sending me to Girls State in the 10th grade.

Ms. Wilhelmina Johnson is another one. She was one of my grandmother's friends from church. As students and young adults, we were always in the church plays and reading scripture. She would not let us read off a paper; we had to memorize everything. I realize now that she was preparing me to speak confidently in front of people.

Another woman who inspired me was my aunt, Doris Harper who was a community activist. She taught me to put myself at the table and to be nosy. And finally, my grandmother, Carmelita Bundy. She showed me how to be humble and have grace.

Those are the women that got me here. Now that I'm here, a huge mentor of mine is Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan. She has mentored me my entire tenure as mayor, and I go to her often.

Big challenge facing my community: Housing. As a city council, we are focused on affordable housing and making sure that our city is affordable for everyone to live in. We now have a housing coordinator and we've done a housing study. We haven't had either of those things before. We are also very focused on helping people who don't have housing. Homelessness in my city keeps me up at night. But we are doing something about it. We have a new low-barrier homeless shelter, The Navigation Center. The city, along with stakeholders and non-profit organizations, were able to come together and build this beautiful center that's more than just a shelter. It's a campus where people can get the tools and wraparound services that they need to live independently. I think the center shows the heart of Harrisonburg and how we came together as a community.

Also related to housing is the question of how we make Harrisonburg more affordable for people to live in? It's a problem but we are doing things to address it. For example, we now have a housing coordinator to work on affordable housing and help us make those decisions. We haven't had that position in the past. We've done a housing study which is something else we haven't done in the past. We're also looking into developing a housing trust fund. So those things give me hope because we're focused on the issue, but it is a challenge. Harrisonburg is a beautiful place and it's a wonderful place to live. I want people to be able to live here. That's something that I will always, always fight for.

Kelly Burk

Mayor – Town of Leesburg



"There are sacrifices you have to make, so it better be something that you really enjoy."

Local government background:

- Elected to the Leesburg Town Council in 2004.
- Served the Leesburg District on the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors from 2008 through 2011.
- Re-elected to the town council in 2012.
- Served as vice mayor from January 2015 through December 2016.
- Elected mayor in 2016; currently serving fifth term.
- Currently serving as vice president of the VML Board of Directors.

Reason I got involved: I come from a very political family. We were expected to work the polls and knock doors and do all that political stuff for candidates that we supported. When I moved to Leesburg in 1979, there were a number of years I stayed home and raised my kids before I began working in Loudoun County public schools as a special education teacher. At that time there was a development that was going in that I very much opposed. I thought it was going to be terrible. I kept talking about the development at lunch at the teacher's lounge, and finally my colleagues got to the point where they said, "You need to run because we're tired of listening to you!" So, I did. I wasn't able to stop the development, but it got me involved in politics.

What keeps me motivated: Lots of things. Every time I can solve a problem, every time I help someone that didn't understand the process, every time I can work with a group of Girl Scouts and they're so excited to see what a woman can accomplish. My background is in teaching and being involved in local government is just another type of service like teaching.

Women who inspire me: Everywhere I look, there was someone there to help me. My grandfather had been on the Clinton City Council in Iowa, and when I expressed an interest in running for council, my Grandmother Burke (with an 'e'), was fully on board. "Oh, yeah, you have to do that. That'd be great," she'd say. "We'll do this, and we'll do that." She would also talk to me about policies and things of that nature. That made me feel like I could do it. And I had a better understanding, not just of what I didn't like, but what I wanted to do. But all the members of my family helped with my campaigns. My mother was out there knocking on doors!

I was fortunate early on in my career to meet Madeline Albright, and she was a huge mentor for me. She did around half a dozen fundraisers for me. She was always there if I had a question, if I was wondering about something. She was an accomplished, fascinating woman and the fact that she was willing to spend time with me was inspiring.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: I think the opportunity to serve in local government is very appealing. It's very thrilling. But you have to learn how to manage your time really well as a professional, as a parent, and as a spouse. My husband is a very much a quiet man. He doesn't appreciate a crowd. He doesn't want to gladhand or talk to people he doesn't want to talk to, so we had to make an agreement very early on that I was going to be doing this stuff by myself or with friends, but not with him.

That balance is so important. There are sacrifices you have to make, so it better be something that you really enjoy. Otherwise, it's going to be a very miserable experience.

I feel my role is to encourage young women who are interested, to make them aware of the impact they can have on the community. As an example, we're going to ask the high schools in Leesburg to pick a junior and a senior girl, and we will match them with women that work in the government here. They can spend a day learning about the government and what it's about and what it's like to be a woman leader within the organization.

Big challenge facing my community: I think that's two-fold. The long-term challenge is to continue to make sure Leesburg remains vibrant and exciting and interesting. We have a lot of very strong women-owned businesses in town. They are coming up with their own programs and their own things to do, not relying just on the government to do it for them. And that's been exciting to see. In the short term, the big challenge is figuring out the local impact of what's happening in Washington. That keeps me up at night.

Michelle Davis-Younger

Mayor – City of Manassas



“We’re trying to be the best darned city in the state of Virginia!”

Local government background:

- Elected to city council in 2018
- Elected mayor in 2020
- Re-elected mayor in 2024
- Currently serving as an at-large member of the VML Board of Directors

Reason I got involved: This isn’t the only reason, but a pretty significant one: when I was elected mayor, I became the first African American woman to hold the position. I wanted to break through that glass ceiling and show that it can be done. In the grand scheme of things, the whole color, gender, political part doesn’t really matter. I mean, it’s about doing the job and doing it well! When it comes to the job of the mayor, I sometimes hear things that can be hurtful, and I must remember my purpose and why I’m here. Women are natural nurturers. We tend to put ourselves last and we’re always there for everybody else. I think that was an entirely new concept for someone in this office. People may not have seen the mayor as much before, whereas I try to show up for anything and everything that I can. I purposely put myself in the community and made myself the “approachable” mayor.

What keeps me motivated: Coming together to solve problems is exciting to me. For example, Prince William County, the City of Manassas Park, and the City of Manassas are now setting up an inter-jurisdictional committee where we’re going to sit down and talk about our shared services. We will discuss things like billing, how it all works, and where our needs are best met. This is the first time this has ever been done among these three jurisdictions, and these types of things keep me going. Also, the little girls that come up to me to ask, “Can I shake your hand? Can I have a hug?” It lets me know that I’m doing something right, that I am having an effect somewhere. Sometimes the days can get really rough, and you wonder why people do and say some of the negative things that they do, but you have to put it in a box, and you can’t let it stop you, because you have bigger and better things to do. If it isn’t about making the city better, and it’s not a city concern, you need to let it go and move forward, because we’ve got WORK to do. We’re trying to be the best city in the state of Virginia!

Women who inspire me: Just looking around the region, it was inspiring to see the Prince William County Board of Supervisors become more diverse recently with the election of Margaret Franklin and Andrea Bailey coming on and then Deshundra Jefferson becoming the first black woman chair of PWC. And in Manassas Park there’s a fellow woman mayor, Alanna Mensing who was just elected and we have a great relationship. Phyllis Randall, who is chair in Loudoun County, same thing. I believe that for a long time she was the only woman of color chair in the region. We all deal with so many different things, but then when we get together and share stories, there’s

so many commonalities when all along you were thinking you were the only one. Also, anyone who knows me knows that I was deeply inspired by the vice presidency of Kamala Harris. She was the first and you can’t take that away.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: I have a program called “My Mayor Looks Like Me” in which I bring in a cohort of young girls to the City Hall. It opens the world of local government and lets them see how it works. They get to be in a mayor’s office and sit in a mayor’s seat and bang the mayor’s gavel. For almost all of them, including their parents, it’s their first time being here. I had to put the program on hold during the pandemic and then while we waited for our beautiful new city hall to be renovated, but it’s finally back. While I hope to inspire those young girls, my practical message to them, and anybody who wants to do this, is you literally have to talk to everybody! It’s about knocking on doors. You’ve got to make people get out and vote and understand that it’s so you can make changes where they live. When that pothole gets filled and that tree limb gets cut down, that’s your work. You can point at that and say, “I did that for my community.” That’s what I’m trying to get them to see.

Big challenge facing my community: Like a lot of other local leaders, affordable housing is at the top of my list. But recently the federal workforce layoffs have become a big concern as well. We have upwards of 2,000 federal employees. What people haven’t thought a lot about is the mental state of people during this time. We cannot forget the impact that it’s having. If mom and dad are not working, that household is suffering in so many ways. It’s not just about the money; it’s also about the constant worry about food on the table and heat and lights. It’s all connected. Our social services are going to need help. We have got to be very thoughtful – maybe more than ever before – about spending and taxes going forward. We want to offer as much help and as many resources as we can, but we still have to pay our staff, fire & rescue, our police, and our teachers.

Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond

Councilmember – City of Virginia Beach



“I call myself a ‘walk the talk’ person because my belief that visibility is viability motivates me to act in accordance with my statements.”

Local government background:

- Served on city council from 2012-2016
- Re-elected to council in 2022
- Currently serving as an at-large member of the VML Board of Directors

Reason I got involved: I am originally from Liberia, West Africa, where my father served as mayor of its capital city, Monrovia. [Note: Nathan C. Ross served as mayor of Monrovia from 1956-1969]

Having grown up in a political environment, I gravitated to the fascinating world of local government, with dreams of following his footsteps and one day running for public office. Upon moving to Virginia Beach and starting my tenure at Norfolk State University

(NSU), I observed problems with teachers' salaries and insufficient funding for essential resources in our city public schools. This spurred me to visit the school board and city council sessions. As an educator, I felt compelled to make a difference and began advocating for change by speaking during public hearings, volunteering to serve on a community board, and getting involved with my local political party. After researching the city's \$2.8 billion budget appropriations, which included 44 percent to fund the schools, I decided to run for city council because that's where the "sausage" is made. In preparation for this role, I attended and graduated from the UVA's Sorenson Political Leadership and Candidate Training Institute programs. My platform included increased resources and pay for teachers, public safety, and expanding PreK school offerings across the public schools. Currently, most Virginia Beach City public schools offer full-time PreK programs which are economically helpful for our working parents.

What keeps me motivated: I call myself a "walk the talk" person because my belief that visibility is viability motivates me to act in accordance with my statements. When an issue or concern is brought to my attention by a constituent, I visit that neighborhood to listen and observe the situation prior to deciding what action to take. Bringing about impactful changes through community engagement keeps me motivated.

Women who inspire me: My mother Nancy A. Ross was my role model and inspiration. She was a pillar of strength in the community, serving as president of Monrovia's Beautification Commission, on the board of the Liberian American Mining Company, as president of the city's YWCA, and as the board supervisor for the Methodist Church Hostel which was for girls from the rural villages to pursue their secondary education in Monrovia.

Politically, the late Senator Yvonne Miller of Norfolk inspired me. As the director of service-learning and civic engagement at NSU, I annually accompanied the political science students and their

professors to visit the General Assembly. Senator Miller set aside time to share a wealth of information about her duties with us and she once invited me to sit at her desk and encouraged me to run for public office. I also admire Shirley Chisholm, Dorothy Height, Daisy Bates, Mahalia Jackson, and met Hillary Clinton during a rally. These are examples of women who inspired me on my journey.

Advice for young women who want to serve in local government: I always advise any young woman who wants to serve that *knowledge is power*, and *preparation is the key*. I encourage them to choose a mentor, especially one who is a candidate, and volunteer with her campaign. Attend the school board and council meetings to become acquainted with the issues that affect your city, town, or county, and join local civic leagues or the League of Women Voters. More important is to network and cultivate relationships during your undergraduate studies, or enroll in a local or statewide training program or institute. Today, one of my former NSU students, Delegate Candi Mundon King, serves the 23rd District, and Senator Jeremy McPike, my Sorenson Institute classmate, serves District 29 in the Virginia General Assembly. This makes VML's Local Government Day seem like a reunion for me each year.

Big challenge facing my locality: The big challenge facing our locality is getting a handle on the ongoing inflationary costs to complete current Capital Improvement Programs (CIP). For example, our Flood Protection Plan FY 2024 Referendum was approved at the price of \$560 million. Today's price is \$1.1 billion due to inflationary costs, which is staggering! During the FY 2025-26 budget retreat, we reached a consensus by giving guidance to our staff to set realistic expectations, prioritize public safety, transportation, and quality of life for our residents. We also decided to delay some projects, and complete those that were promised, while being mindful of our debt capacity and real estate tax rate.



SMALL TOWNS CONFERENCE

2025

June 5-6, Longwood University, Farmville

Building on the success of last year's inaugural offering, the Virginia Municipal League and Virginia Tech will host another Virginia Small Towns Conference on June 5-6 on the campus of Longwood University in Farmville.

Scan the QR code for full details and to register.



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
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The Virginia Women's Municipal Leadership Institute is building leaders and creating connections

AFTER NEARLY 21 YEARS of dedicated service to the City of Lynchburg – including 16 as the first female deputy city manager and four as city manager – Bonnie Svrcek retired in 2020.

How did she celebrate? Certainly not by slowing down.

“I don’t call myself retired in any way, shape, or form,” Svrcek explains. “I call myself a ‘repurposed city manager’ because I’m not sitting in a rocking chair with my glasses on my nose, rocking away.”

Instead, Svrcek helped create something she had long dreamed of – an educational and networking organization for women in Virginia’s local governments. During her career in local government, Svrcek felt a dearth of support for women in administrative roles. She hoped to connect like-minded women in government, providing educational tools to strengthen leadership skills, building a network of participants across the Commonwealth, and ultimately empowering women to guide Virginia communities.

The Virginia Women’s Municipal Leadership Institute is Svrcek’s brainchild, a collaborative effort between Virginia Women Leading Government and the Virginia Tech Roanoke Center.

“I am doing this work because I am passionate about it, not because I am a raving feminist and believe women should rule the world,” she says before pausing. “So, only half of that is true. I am not a raving feminist, but I do believe that women should rule the world... or at least share that rule with men.”

Beginnings

Svrcek credits Jerri Wilson, intergovernmental affairs manager for the City of Newport News, with providing the jumpstart to get the institute off the ground. Having encouraged Svrcek for years to pursue the concept, in 2019 Wilson compiled a list of women working in Virginia’s local governments and contacted them with the aim of founding a Virginia chapter of Women Leading Government.

“I thought maybe the same 10 people that had been talking about it with me for a while would say ‘yes’ and that would be it,” Wilson recalls. In fact, over 100 women enthusiastically responded. Wilson and Svrcek got to work fleshing out the chapter with a board, bylaws, committees, professional development...and then the COVID-19 pandemic arrived! The time needed to work on the institute melted away as the work of local governments became more important – and time consuming – than ever.

Then Svrcek retired from the City of Lynchburg and finally had time to focus on her passion project. Armed with a lineup of potential participants, Svrcek drew upon her prior experience as president of the International City/County Management Association to develop the curriculum for the institute as an offshoot of the newly established Virginia chapter of Women Leading Government.

“I learned in creating the curriculum that there were only four other states in the country that have such a program for women, which is pretty amazing,” Svrcek notes.

Svrcek held focus group calls with representatives from those four other states – Washington, Oregon, Texas, and Michigan. What she



Bonnie Svrcek



Jerri Wilson

learned led her to cap the institute at 25 participants for each cohort. The participants are employees, not elected officials, working a gamut of roles ranging from clerk to the council to assistant directors, county managers, assistant city managers, and human resources directors. Precedence is given to those who work as directors or assistant/deputy managers. “The goal is to build the confidence level and skills for these women to apply for even higher-level positions – and, more so, get them,” Svrcek explains.

The Virginia Women’s Municipal Leadership Institute officially launched with its first cohort in 2022, and the curriculum has evolved each year based on attendee feedback. “We want topics in the curriculum that we can’t necessarily get elsewhere,” Svrcek says. “I think we are hitting a stride where we’re getting a curriculum down that is exactly where it needs to be for the audience that we serve.”

The current program includes six, two-day in-person sessions and two virtual half-day sessions. The fourth cohort of the institute took place in early March 2025 in Roanoke. As an example of the evolving topics, early focus areas such as Ethics, Conflict of Interest,

Building a network

One very real measure of the institute’s value for Svrcek has been hearing about independent gatherings of institute participants after completing their cohort. To support this trend, the institute held its first-ever reunion in Roanoke this March that was comprised of attendees from cohorts 1-3. The 2025 cohort also began with a “Connection (or Reconnection) before Content” dinner which was an opportunity for attendees to create and nurture relationships.

“I really believe the relationships that these women are forming are everlasting,” Svrcek says. “I hear stories of how a group of women that are within an hour-and-a-half drive of Roanoke get together for lunch every quarter. Another group went away for a weekend to Lake Anna last summer. I cannot tell you how that just feeds my heart and soul.”

and Freedom of Information have been replaced this year by Negotiating Strategies for Women and Mastermind Problem-Solving. In the new Mastermind Problem-Solving offering, attendees break into smaller groups at separate tables that each host a guest “Mastermind” – women from outside of the program who excel in their profession such as attorneys and professional recruiters.

Wilson – who was a member of the inaugural 2022 cohort and now serves as president of the Virginia chapter of Women Leading Government – is a fan of the Mastermind sessions. “The people in the small group are encouraged to think of a problem, like a workplace issue they’ve come up against, and then the ‘Masterminds’ facilitate a conversation,” Wilson explains. “You get a chance to do a real time, real life ‘solve this issue’ with people who you probably wouldn’t have had access to otherwise. One of the things that the institute brings is real practical, useful, day-to-day pragmatism.”

Goals and hurdles

As of December 2024, the percentage of women serving as town, city, county managers or administrators in Virginia was less than 17%, which puts the state in the bottom five. Boosting those numbers is a goal of the institute. In fact, the institute has already made a positive impact, with multiple graduates elevating to director and deputy director positions, as well as one graduate who recently became a town manager. But given the state’s overall poor numbers, there remains significant room for improvement.

Another goal of the institute is to support the value of mixed gender leadership with hard data. However, this remains a work in progress concedes Svrcek. “In the private sector, the value of mixed gender leadership has been proven with profit and loss statements,” Svrcek says. “What is the proof in the public sector? I strongly believe that the more leadership reflects the demographic of the community, the stronger the community is going to be. But how do I prove it? It’s not a bond rating. It’s not a fund balance. What is it?”

And while limiting the cohort size to 25 attendees each year enables deeper connections and individualized attention, Svrcek notes that it also means nearly 100 applicants have been turned away over the past four years.

“One of the evaluations from a participant in the most recent cohort asked if the size of the group could be increased given the demand,” Svrcek notes. “But we’re not doing that because you lose so much when you make it bigger.” Still, Svrcek acknowledges that she is worried about the women that they haven’t been able to serve. “I’m trying to figure out how we can do that,” she observes.

The road ahead

Outside of the institute, Svrcek’s “retirement” includes a bevy of activities, but the importance and progress of the institute is always at the forefront of her thoughts. “I don’t know what the future is, but I know that the strength of success in the program will guarantee its future success,” she says.

Wilson also expresses her confidence in the future of the Virginia chapter of Women Leading Government in general and the institute specifically. “The organization has kind of ebbed and flowed, but we’re back at it again this year with a new board; we’ve got a plan, nonprofit status, and a bank account,” she observes. But even in the midst of these ebbs and flows “the institute has blossomed,” she concludes.

Scan QR code to learn more about the Virginia Women’s Municipal Leadership Institute.

About the author: *Brian Ahnmark is a copywriter for Virginia Town & City.*



The 2024 Virginia Women’s Municipal Leadership Institute participants.



2025 General Assembly Review for Virginia's Local Governments

THE 2025 GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION started in the most unanticipated way – with no water in the building or the city! The outside of the General Assembly building was lined with porta johns, and no one was allowed inside except staff and the members of the General Assembly. Needless to say, it didn't stop them from doing business and they probably enjoyed the relative peace in the halls! Once we were allowed to enter the building, however, it seemed like record numbers of people were vying for time with the delegates and senators. Also, given that it was already a short session this year before it was made even shorter, it certainly felt rushed.

The General Assembly members, as usual, had a cascade of bills to consider during the session with 3,107 bills and resolutions introduced this year. A total of 1,989 passed; 1458 failed, and Gov. Glenn Youngkin vetoed 158 bills – many of which were similar to legislation he vetoed last year.

During the Reconvened Session on April 2, the General Assembly dealt with all the gubernatorial vetoes and amendments to regular bills. They also dealt with 205 proposed changes to the 2024-2026 biennial budget and the eight vetoed budget amendments. The General Assembly ultimately rejected 172 of the 205 amendments. So, the question at the time of this publication is will Gov. Youngkin sign the budget bill or line-item veto to reject funding for items that he doesn't support? He has 30 days to decide. Either way, VML is here to assist our members as the actions of the 2025 General Assembly and Gov. Youngkin play out in the coming months.

What follows is a summary of legislation of interest to local governments from the 2025 General Assembly session along with a summary of the budget.

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Budget Summary

When the House and Senate released their respective budgets in early February, it was striking how similar many of their proposed budget amendments appeared to be. To many of us it seemed that budget leaders in the General Assembly had been comparing notes as they pulled together their fiscal plans.

Moreover, it suggested that lawmakers wouldn't be needing over-time this year to settle their spending and saving differences; they



didn't. For the second year in a row, the General Assembly completed its work on the budget with time to spare.

Unlike a few years back when counties, cities, and towns had to wait weeks or even months for the budget to be resolved, we had an on-time budget.

While the budget returns to Gov. Youngkin for his final review, it appears we will have certainty on the *Commonwealth's* fiscal plans as local governments hit the backstretch in the development of their budgets.

As luck would have it though, while state fiscal certainty is within reach, the federal government has thrown us a wicked curveball that has many local budgeteers on edge. The Trump Administration's decisions to freeze, reduce or eliminate federal grants in addition to eliminating federal positions at certain agencies, are forcing localities to think about the potential downside of some of these federal actions, as we aim to finalize our spending plans by June 30.

Fortunately, state lawmakers have included several provisions in the recently agreed-upon budget to monitor federal funding decisions

that impact state revenues or costs and initiate conversations between Governor Youngkin and the General Assembly about how to respond, if necessary.

In addition, the House and Senate have both established bi-partisan committees to assess the impact of these federal actions.

Near the end of the 2025 Session, House Speaker Don Scott announced the creation of a bi-partisan **Emergency Committee on the Impacts of Federal Workforce and Funding Reductions** that is charged with assessing “the potential impacts of cuts to the federal civilian workforce and programs and ensure the General Assembly can adopt measures to protect Virginia families and mitigate impacts to the state budget.” The committee has already met twice -- in Richmond on the last day of the 2025 Session and on April 8 in the City of Alexandria. They plan to convene in more communities across the Commonwealth in 2025 to inform their discussions and plans.

Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee Chair, Senator Louise Lucas, announced a **Special Subcommittee on Federal Impacts to Resources** with a similar charge; its first meeting was held on the day of the Reconvened Session, Wednesday, April 2. The committee heard testimony from officials at the Federal Reserve of Richmond, who provided an update on the Commonwealth’s economy and reliance upon federal funding.

In retrospect, the budget the General Assembly sent to Youngkin in late February looks quite different from the budget he unveiled in December 2024.

Gone is his proposal to create a three-year Car Tax Relief Program using one-time revenues of \$1.1 billion with future costs estimated at \$375 million annually once those general funds are exhausted. In its place the General Assembly recommends a one-time tax rebate of \$200 for individuals and \$400 for dual filers, at a cost of \$978 million. Those checks will show up later this year.

Also missing from the budget agreement were Youngkin’s K-12 proposals that would have provided:

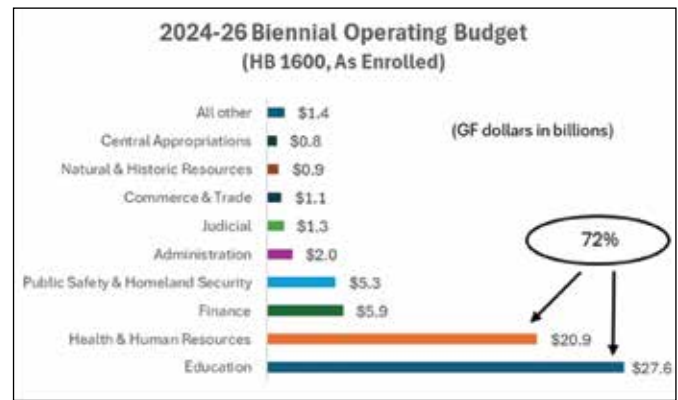
- \$25 million for new College Partnership lab schools.
- \$50 million for a Virginia Opportunity Scholarships Program.
- \$50 million for School Performance Supports.
- \$66 million for a new K-12 State Assessment Contract.

Instead, the General Assembly repackaged Youngkin’s K-12 funding initiatives and steered monies from other proposals to provide sufficient resources to eliminate the cap on funding to school divisions for support positions, a budget cutting relic from the Great Recession. The agreed upon budget also adds funding for students with special education needs and one-time funds for a bonus of \$1,000 for SOQ-funded instructional and support positions with no local match requirement.

In the final analysis, two areas of the budget continue to dominate state general fund spending: education, primarily funding provided to local school divisions for K-12 education; and health and human resources, which is dominated by Medicaid spending for the elderly, disabled, pregnant women, and children; the Medicaid expansion population receives no general fund support.

On March 24, Gov. Youngkin proposed 205 amendments and eight vetoes to the budget agreed upon weeks earlier by the 2025 General Assembly (HB 1600). At the Reconvened Session on Wednesday, April 2, 2025, the House rejected 164 of the Governor’s proposed changes to the budget, including a recommendation from the Governor to pare back funding by \$138.1 million that eliminated the cap on local school division for support positions.

Later that day, the Senate took up the remaining 41 amendments that the House of Delegates had previously approved and discarded



an additional eight amendments to the budget. In summary, only 33 of the Governor’s 205 budget amendments were approved, comprised mostly of technical amendments to the budget.

Gov. Youngkin was more successful with proposed vetoes to the budget, where six of his eight amendments were approved. Two of the vetoes were ruled out of order and rejected on procedural grounds. Those amendments were related to the use of proceeds from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative that was previously agreed to by the Governor and General Assembly.

As of this writing, the budget has been returned to the Governor for his final consideration. He has the option to sign the budget, veto amendments that the General Assembly rejected, or veto the entire budget. Thus far, little word has trickled out of the Patrick Henry Building, where Gov. Youngkin and his budgeteers reside, about how he plans to proceed. He has until midnight on May 2, 2025 to decide.

Budget Amendments

Passed

School Construction Assistance Program. The General Assembly added \$10.0 million (non-general fund) in FY 2026 for the School Construction Grant Fund. The funding source is casino gaming revenues; the additional money reflects an expected increase in 2025 casino gaming proceeds coming to the state. Also approved was a budget amendment proposed by Gov. Glenn Youngkin for consideration at the General Assembly’s Reconvened Session; this increases state funding for school construction by \$50.0 million in FY 2025.

Direct Aid - Raise Support Cap to Prevailing Ratio of 27.89 per 1,000 Students. The General Assembly approved \$222.9 million in FY2026 to raise the funding cap placed on support positions from the current rate to 27.89 SOQ-funded positions per 1,000 students. This was a recommendation of the Joint Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education Funding following the 2023 JLARC report on school funding. Gov. Glenn Youngkin proposed an amendment for the General Assembly’s reconvened session (amendment #56) to “Modify the funded support position staffing ratio”, by reducing funding for local school divisions by \$138.2 million in FY 2026. The General Assembly rejected Youngkin’s amendment, eliminating a budget gimmick that has been in place since 2009.

CSA state reimbursement cap. The state broke its long-standing commitment to the Children’s Services Act (CSA) program by capping its share of funding for private special education day program tuition costs. It began with the introduced budget’s inclusion of a proposed cap on state funding if the cost of a private special education day placement increased by more than 2.5 percent over the previous year. The average cost increase for placements has been about 10 percent. Budget amendments introduced in both chambers

attempted to remove the proposed cap; only the House included that amendment in its budget. The budget conference report increased the state cap amount to five percent (a \$5.0 million savings for the state and equivalent cost shift to localities) starting in FY 2026.

Failed

Additional stormwater funding for localities. The General Assembly approved \$40.0 million in Stormwater Local Assistance Funding and \$31.0 million for wastewater capital improvements. Gov. Glenn Youngkin proposed to veto this additional funding, and the General Assembly failed to override Youngkin's line-item vetoes at the reconvened session, resulting in the elimination of additional funding for both programs. The additional resources would have funded grants to localities to mitigate stormwater impacts and improve pollution controls on wastewater plants thereby improving water quality across Virginia and help clean up the Chesapeake Bay.

Tax & Finance

Passed

HB2029 (Hernandez) / SB816 (Rouse) Real property tax; exemption for elderly and disabled individuals. Revises provisions of the local real property tax exemption and deferral program for elderly and disabled individuals, by allowing a locality to require that an individual either:

- (i) pay all delinquent taxes, penalties, or interest assessed by the locality for the property that were incurred prior to becoming eligible for an exemption or deferral for the elderly or disabled;
- (ii) enter into an installment agreement with the locality for the payment of all such delinquent amounts in installments for a period not to exceed 72 months;
- (iii) submit and obtain the treasurer's agreement to an offer in compromise; or
- (iv) a combination thereof.

The bill also permits notice of the terms and conditions of the elderly or disabled exemption and deferral program be included in any notice of change in assessment and require the terms to be posted on the locality's website. This bill would allow localities to provide a prorated exemption or deferral for the portion of the taxable year during which the taxpayer would have qualified for such exemption or deferral but had not yet filed an application. The bill would limit any such proration or deferral to the taxable year in which the taxpayer qualified for such exemption or deferral and not any prior year.

HB2245 (Callsen) Real property tax; assessment of affordable rental housing. Modifies current law by requiring that assessments for affordable housing be based on the income approach if the property is generating income. The income approach would only be required if adequate information was provided by the property owner to the local assessor to conduct the assessment. The changes are effective for assessments beginning on January 1, 2026.

The bill also requires the Department of Taxation (TAX) to develop a uniform income and expense reporting form that may be provided by duly authorized assessors and completed by the owners of affordable rental housing properties prior to assessment of such affordable rental housing properties. TAX is required to consult with a stakeholder group of affected parties in the development of the form.

The form is required to include the name and home address of the owner of the affordable rental housing, the physical address of

the affordable rental housing, the current rental rate of any dwelling upon such property, any tenant concessions, the gross annual rental income and any other revenues incidental thereto for such property, the vacancy rate of any dwelling units upon such property, the current collection loss rate, any annual reserve for replacements, the annual operating expenses for such property, and any other data that the stakeholder group agrees upon. TAX is required to complete its work by Sept. 1, 2025.

HB2383 (Mundon King) / SB1402 (Surovell) Transient occupancy tax; administration. Provides that an accommodations provider (i.e., Airbnb, Expedia, VRBO) shall not be required to transmit a transient occupancy tax return to a locality if (i) all retail sales of accommodations owned by the accommodations provider are facilitated by an accommodations intermediary and (ii) the accommodations provider attests to the locality that all such sales were facilitated by an accommodations intermediary. The bill was a compromise between Airbnb and the Commissioners of the Revenue.

The bill requires that information provided by an accommodations intermediary to a local commissioner of the revenue, treasurer, or any other local tax or revenue officer or employee of a county, city, or town for transient occupancy tax purposes is confidential and cannot be divulged to any other department or official of the locality or any other political subdivision of the Commonwealth. Such information shall be used by such officials only for the purpose of levying and collecting retail sales and use tax, transient occupancy tax, and any other taxes imposed on the sale of accommodations. Local government officials raised concerns that the provision prohibiting the sharing of information among local departments may make it difficult to verify who is operating a short-term rental in their locality, but the issue was not addressed.

An alternate approach that VML supported but which ultimately failed, **HB1557 (Ware) and SB1330 (Marsden) Short-term rentals; registration; civil penalty**, would have required the Tax Department to establish a registry of short-term rental properties and require accommodations providers and intermediaries to register. The bill was designed to improve tax compliance among some short-term rental platforms, primarily Airbnb.

Converted to studies

HB1743 (Watts) License taxes; deduction for out-of-state receipts, effective date, report. As introduced, this bill expanded Business Professional and Occupational License (BPOL) tax deductions for businesses operating in other states. Under current law, any receipts attributable to business conducted in another state or foreign country in which the taxpayer is liable for an income or other tax based upon income are deductible from gross receipts or gross purchases for license tax purposes.

The bill proposed to expand the definition of "income or other tax based upon income" to mean "net income tax, as defined in 15 U.S.C. § 383, or any other tax the measure of which is based in whole or in part on gross or net income, or receipts."

The change was likely to decrease BPOL tax revenues. But the amount in question was unknown, which is why VML, VACo, the Commissioners of the Revenue, and other local finance officials pushed for a thorough review before proceeding.

The bill sailed out of the House of Delegates but ran into trouble in the Senate. The Senate converted HB1743 to a Section 1 bill, requiring the Department of Taxation to convene a work group that includes VML, VACo, and the Commissioners of Revenue to review:



- The current policy and methodology of out of state deductions.
- Concerns regarding the existing laws governing these deductions.
- The potential impact of proposed changes, including local revenue impacts, administrative complexities, and complexities to taxpayers.
- Any impact to such deductions from other existing provisions of law.

The Department is required to submit workgroup findings and recommendations to the Joint Subcommittee on Tax Policy by October 1, 2025.

Failed

SB895 (Rouse) / SB900 (DeSteph) Real property tax; surviving spouses of members of armed forces who died in line of duty. Allowed any locality to provide, by ordinance, up to a total exemption from real property tax for the principal place of residence of a surviving spouse of a member of the armed forces who died in the line of duty, for dwellings assessed at any value and located within the locality, provided dwellings are zoned as single family residential, beginning Jan. 1, 2025.

Under current law, to qualify for the total exemption from real property taxes, the assessed value of the real property dwelling must be less than the average assessed value of all dwellings located within the locality that are zoned as single family residential.

SB1443 (Durant) Income tax; car tax credit. Reflecting the Gov. Glenn Youngkin's proposal to create a Car Tax Income Tax Reimbursement Program, the program would have provided a refundable state-funded income tax credit of up to \$150 for individuals whose federal adjusted gross income (AGI) is less than \$50,000 or up to \$300 for married persons whose federal AGI is less than \$100,000. Despite media reports to the contrary, the bill did not propose to repeal the car tax. Unlike Youngkin's proposal, Senator Durant's bill would have created a temporary, three-year program for tax years 2025, 2026, and 2027 at a cost of roughly \$365 million annually. Durant proposed to use \$1.1 billion from surplus general fund revenues for the three-year program.

HB 2004 (McNamara) Local meals and prepared food and beverage taxes; maximum rate. Proposed to cap the amount of revenue local governments could generate from the meals tax on food and beverages. Effective January 1, 2028, local meals taxes could not exceed 6 percent. And unless approved by voter referendum, the meals tax rate would be limited to 4 percent.

VML and VACo collected information from local government to quantify the impact of this proposal. Based on the response of 42 localities, a fraction of all localities in Virginia, the projected impact would be significant. It is estimated that capping the meals tax rate at 4 percent would have resulted in the loss of \$113 million in local revenue to cities, counties, and towns each year. That assumes voters reject keeping the rate at 6 percent.

The proposal was more nettlesome for towns where the meals tax appears to be limited to the combined rate charged by county and town. For example, if County A had a meals tax of 2 percent, then Town B's meals tax could not exceed 2 percent unless approved by the voters, in which case the town's meals tax rate could be 4 percent.

HB2006 (McNamara) and SB1172 (Suetterlein) Retail Sales and Use Tax; food purchased for human consumption and essential personal hygiene products. Proposed to eliminate the one percent local option sales and use tax that is imposed on food purchased for human consumption and essential personal hygiene products and replace it with state general fund revenues. The

cost to the general fund to replace this locally generated revenue was estimated by the Department of Taxation at more than \$300 million annually.

HB2488 (Green) Local tax authority; nicotine vapor products. Would have helped to diversify local government revenues while at the same time addressing a public health issue of concern to many communities. This legislation would have authorized localities to impose a sales and use tax on nicotine vapor products. The Commonwealth already holds the authority to tax vaping products, but local governments do not.

HB2404 (Scott, P.) Real property tax; certain driveways owned by disabled veterans and surviving spouses exempted. Exempted from taxation driveways used to access land otherwise exempt from real property taxes as being owned by a veteran with a 100 percent service-connected, permanent, and total disability. The bill also proposed to exempt from taxation driveways used to access land otherwise exempt from real property taxes due to being owned by a surviving spouse of a member of the armed forces who died in the line of duty.

Land Use

Undecided (at time of publication)

SB1449 (Ebbin) / HB1601 (Thomas) Siting of data centers; site assessment; high energy use facility. Defines "high energy use facility" and allows a locality to require a site assessment before approving any new high energy use facilities.

Passed

HB2330 (Hodges) Notice of certain land use actions; first-class mail to last known address, etc., or property owner. When there is a proposed change in the zoning map classification of 25 or fewer parcels of land, notice is currently sent by registered or certified mail. This legislation changes that to be one notice sent by registered, certified, or first-class mail to the last known address of certain property owners affected by a proposed change in the zoning map classification of 25 or fewer parcels of land provided that a representative of the local planning commission shall make affidavit that such mailings have been made and file such affidavit in the file.

HB1996 (Bennett-Parker) Planning and zoning; second hearing public notice. This legislation came at the request of VML members; it changes the second public hearing notice that a planning commission or governing body publishes for planning and zoning actions to be published five days before the date of the meeting instead of seven days.

SB1210 / HB1706 (Pekarsky/Bulova) Virginia Residential Property Disclosure Act; required disclosures for buyer to beware; aircraft noise. Requires the Department of Aviation to create a general public access website showing noise exposure maps. Also, in the disclosures regarding the sale of residential property there will be a provision that suggests buyers review the maps and local ordinances that deal with noise and airports.

SB974 (VanValkenburg) Subdivision ordinance; plan review by designated agent. Requires the review of a subdivision plat, site plan and plan of development to be completed administratively by the designated agent except those localities with a population of 5,000 or less can use the Planning Commission as the designated agent. HB2293 (Coyner), which was the same, failed.

SB1263 (Bagby) Water and sewer connection fees; new residential development. Allows a locality to provide for the full or partial reimbursement of water and sewer connection fees, capital

recovery charges, and availability fees remitted by an applicant in connection with any new residential development.

HB2660 (Simon) Subdivision ordinance; shortens time-frame for local approvals. Shortens the timeframes for various local government approvals of subdivision plats and site plans. It also calls on the Virginia Code Commission to convene a work group of various stakeholders to review existing provisions related to the submission, review, and approval of subdivision plats and site plans. The work group shall develop recommendations to (i) organize procedural steps in a clear, logical, and sequential order to enhance ease of reference; (ii) clarify the processes, requirements, and timelines applicable to each type of plat or plan; (iii) standardize terminology to ensure consistency, reduce ambiguity, and minimize misinterpretation; and (iv) identify and eliminate redundant or duplicative provisions to streamline the Code and improve its usability.

SB1476 (Pillion) Vacant and blighted or derelict property; locality allowed to sell. A locality which has a vacant property for five years or longer and is declared blighted or derelict and also has delinquent taxes may petition the circuit court to appoint a special commissioner to convey the real estate to the locality, the locality's land bank entity, or an existing nonprofit designated by the locality in lieu of a public auction. The bill includes technical steps and options for the locality to sell the property including requiring that repairs and renovations are made and that within two years the building be compliant with the building code. HB2745 (O'Quinn), which was similar, failed.

SB992 (Williams Graves) Civil penalties for certain repeat zoning violations in Planning District 23; appeals. *Please note that changes to Board of Zoning Appeals code section of this bill apply to all localities. Provides an enhanced level of civil penalties in Planning District 23 (Hampton Roads) for repeat violations involving nonpermitted commercial uses as defined in the bill. The bill also clarifies (i) that when a board of zoning appeals hears appeals from the decision of an administrative officer and alters the statutorily required order of evidence, it is a reversible error if the appellant lodges an objection citing this section and the board refuses to reorder the hearing and (ii) that the required statement of a right to appeal an administrative officer's decision must be sent to the aggrieved person by certified mail with proof of delivery.

HB2128 (Walker) Derelict buildings; expands authority of localities to impose civil penalties. Acts to include industrial properties as derelict buildings for the purpose of imposing a penalty.

SB1422 (Reeves) Zoning violations; appeals; fines. Deals with the conviction of the storage or disposal of nonagricultural excavation material, waste, and debris being punishable by a fine of \$2000 but if the problem is not abated within the specified time period the fine shall rise to \$5000 and \$7500 as outlined in the regulation.

SB1267 (Aird) Zoning; enhanced civil penalties; certain residential violations. Makes repeat violations of a zoning ordinance for multifamily residential purposes to be not more than \$1000 for a second violation and subsequent violations also are more with a cap of \$6000 for all violations within a 12-month period.

SB838 (VanValkenburg) Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services; recovery residences; certification required; penalty; work group. Addresses licensure and oversight of recovery residences, including creation of a workgroup to look at oversight and credentialing of such residences. The bill addresses civil penalties for violations related to operation of recovery residences; gives the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services the authority to issue conditional, time-limited certification to certain recovery residences; and directs the creation of a work group to (i) make recommendations related

to oversight and transparency issues for recovery residences and (ii) develop credentialing guidelines for recovery residences. VML and VACo will make recommendations for the local representatives to the workgroup, which will report its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly by Nov. 1, 2025.

HB2533 (Sewell) Zoning, development and use of accessory dwelling unit. Allows a locality to consider in the comprehensive plan tiny homes or accessory dwelling units. Tiny homes are defined as a dwelling of 400 square feet or less in floor area and accessory dwelling unit means an independent or attached dwelling unit as defined in the legislation. SB932 (Salim / Stanley) failed.

HB2203 (Kilgore) / SB787 (McDougle) Housing and Community Development, Dept. of, consolidation of varying due dates for certain reports. The Department of Housing and Community Development submits many reports to the General Assembly and the timelines vary; this legislation puts all of those reports on the same timeline. It also creates a requirement for (i) an annual report on the outcomes associated with closed projects that received a grant from the Virginia Growth and Opportunity Fund and requires the Department to use such report to create and maintain a performance dashboard with such information to be updated annually and (ii) a comprehensive annual report on the state's homeless programs. The bill has a delayed effective date of Jan. 1, 2026.

Failed

SB1128 (Lucas) / HB1638 (Hayes) Va. Residential Landlord and Tenant Act; affordable housing, criminal record screening model policy. Required the Department of Housing and Community Development to create a model policy that ensures that a criminal record is not the reason for denying a person housing unless the policy is followed. It also created a workgroup. This law would not have been effective until Jan. 1, 2026.

HB2037 (Bulova) Land development; solar canopies in parking areas. Allowed a locality to adopt an ordinance that requires an applicant to install a solar canopy over designated parking areas. Such provisions would apply only to non-residential parking areas with 100 parking spaces or more and could require coverage of up to 50 percent of the parking area. Localities would be authorized to provide development density bonuses for properties that are subject to such provisions.

HB2054 (Reaser) Affordable housing; application for special use permit for assisted living facilities. Allowed localities that have adopted an affordable housing program to negotiate that in an application for a special exception or special use permit affordable rental units be included for any proposed development of an assisted living facility. Such ordinance would apply to applications approved on or after January 1, 2026.

HB1718 (Price) Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act; enforcement by localities. Allowed a locality to create an ordinance that provides that if a condition exists in a rental dwelling unit that constitutes a material noncompliance by the landlord with the rental agreement or with any provision of law that, if not promptly corrected, constitutes a fire hazard or serious threat to the life, health, or safety of tenants or occupants of the premises, a locality may institute an action for injunction and damages to enforce the landlord's duty to maintain the rental dwelling unit in a fit and habitable condition, provided that (i) the property where the violation occurred is within the jurisdictional boundaries of the locality and (ii) the locality has notified the landlord who owns the property, either directly or through the managing agent, of the nature of the violation and the landlord has failed to remedy the violation to the satisfaction of the locality within a reasonable time after receiving such notice.

SB1313 (McPike) Affordable housing; local zoning ordinance authority; comprehensive plan. Amended Virginia Code Section §15.2-2304 to include all localities and added implementation tools that could be included in an affordable dwelling unit ordinance.

SB1254 (Bagby) Comprehensive plan; environmental strategy. Added to the comprehensive plan consideration of being an “environmental justice community” as defined in §2.2-234 if you are a city with a population greater than 20,000 and each county with a population greater than 100,000.

HB1827 (Simonds) Comprehensive plan; social determinants of health. Would have encouraged a locality, when reviewing the comprehensive plan, to use relevant, and available data and research related to social determinants of health as defined in the Virginia Code to consider how the adopted plan would affect public health and access to health care.

HB1973 (Bennett-Parker). Affordable housing; preservation, definitions, civil penalty. Allowed localities to preserve affordable housing by exercising a right of first refusal offer by a locality or qualified designee of publicly supported housing in an ordinance.

SB985 (Williams Graves) / HB1654 (Helmer) Short-term rental properties; human trafficking awareness training. Required an accommodations provider to complete an approved training course on recognizing and reporting instances of suspected human trafficking. The course would be approved by the Department of Criminal Justice Services. Human trafficking training is already required for hotel/motel employees.

SB1305 (McPike) Local taxes; zoning assessments; injunctions; ordinances. Stipulated that any zoning ordinance or amendment to a zoning ordinance and map that has been enacted after Dec. 1, 2023, would not be effective until there is a final determination or the appropriate time period for an appeal expired.

HB2438 (Mundon King) Solar facilities; local regulation, special exceptions. Stipulated that Ground-mounted solar energy generation facilities located on property zoned agricultural, commercial, industrial, or institutional shall be permitted pursuant to various criteria to be included in a local ordinance, such as specifications for setbacks, fencing, solar panel height, visual impacts, and grading, and a decommissioning plan for solar energy equipment and facilities.

HB2641 (Helmer) / SB975 (Van Valkenburg) Statewide housing targets; require localities to increase their total housing stock. Required localities to increase their total housing stock every year, created a “Housing Approval Board” that could overturn local governing bodies’ decisions on a residential project. The Board could provide a locality with a reprieve from the growth target if it adopted prescriptive housing growth strategies as outlined in the bill and had not rejected more than 25 percent of new housing developments over the past five years.

HB1758 (Gardner) Surplus real property; prioritization of disposition for affordable housing. Required the Department of General Services and each local governing body to prepare an inventory list of all real property within its jurisdiction to which the locality holds fee simple title that is suitable for the development of affordable housing. If a local governing body chose to dispose of such a property, such property would be offered for at least 180 days exclusively to eligible organizations, as defined by the bill, for the purpose of developing affordable housing, through purchase, lease, exchange, or donation in return for a recorded covenant to provide affordable housing for at least 30 years.

SB839 (VanValkenburg) Zoning; by-right multifamily development in areas zoned for commercial use. Required

localities to allow for by-right development of multifamily residential uses on all land contained in commercial or business zoning districts.

SB899 (Stuart) Data centers; water use. Stipulated that a locality could include in its zoning ordinance provisions for (i) requiring proposed data center developments to submit water use estimates and (ii) considering water use when making rezoning and special use permit decisions related to data center development.

HB1310 (Clark and Henson) Zoning; enhanced civil penalties; certain residential violations. Stipulated that for any violation involving nonpermitted commercial uses, the penalty shall be not more than \$500 for the first violation, \$1,000 for a second and \$1,500 for the third violation not to exceed \$4,500 within a 12-month period.



Studies

PASSED: HB2153 (Carr) Faith and Housing; comprehensive plan; zoning; Department of Housing and Community Development. Requires a locality in its comprehensive plan to obtain input on strategies to support affordable housing on religious organization property and other tax exempt nonprofit organizations property. SB1178 (Hashmi), which was the same, failed.

PASSED: HB2396 (Simon) / SB1270 (Hackworth) Deed fraud; VHDA to evaluate prevalence, develop recommendations for prevention, etc. Directs the Virginia Housing Development Authority to create a technical advisory group to evaluate the prevalence of deed fraud to include notary fraud, seller impersonation, owner impersonation and fraudulent lien filing. The group is to provide recommendations to prevent these types of fraud. VML is part of the technical advisory work group.

FAILED: HJ64 (Webert) Localities hosting data center infrastructure; DHCD to study revenue sharing program. This was a proposed study to look at revenue sharing between localities for data center revenue.

FAILED: HJ442 (Orrock) Affordable housing; study on tax policies enacted by the Commonwealth and political subdivisions. The Virginia Housing Commission was to examine and gain an understanding of all available tax policies concerning affordable housing.

General Laws

Undecided (at time of publication)

HB2724 (Herring) License Plate Recognition Systems; regulation of use by law enforcement agencies. Requires the Department of General Services to determine and approve automatic license plate recognition (LPR) systems for use in the Commonwealth and requirements for use LPR systems by law-enforcement agencies. It limits the use of such systems by law-enforcement agencies to criminal investigations where there is a reasonable suspicion a crime was committed or as part of an active investigation related to a missing or endangered person or to receive notifications related to a missing or endangered person, a person with an outstanding warrant, a person associated with human trafficking, a stolen vehicle, or a stolen license plate. It also requires law-enforcement officers to collect data on whether a stop of a driver of a motor vehicle or stop or temporary detention of a person was based on a notification from an automatic license plate recognition system and if so, the specific reason for the notification as set forth in relevant law. This legislation also permits the use of LPRs on state right of way subject to VDOT right-of-way

permitting. It requires systems approved for use in the Commonwealth be publicly posted by Jan. 1, 2026. Finally, the bill requires annual reports from law-enforcement agencies using LPR systems.

Data collected using an LPR system can only be retained for 21 days under the bill as passed by the General Assembly. The General Assembly rejected Governor Glenn Youngkin's amendment to increase data retention to 30 days, leaving Youngkin with the choice to either accept the bill as it passed the General Assembly or veto the bill.

Passed

HB1820 (Reid) Public safety communications; evaluation of need for infrastructure updates & hardware replacements. Directs the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security with the Secretary of Finance and the Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee to evaluate the need for public safety communications infrastructure updates and hardware replacement. The evaluation will include: a review of the current state of public safety communication infrastructure; whether updates to such are needed to assist with redundancy and enhanced resiliency; and the cost of attaining such necessary updates and the current availability of state funding sources, including grant and local programs.

HB2150 (Carr) Virginia Public Procurement Act; contract terms inconsistent with Virginia law. Stipulates that no contracts for information technology goods and services may contain terms in conflict with Virginia law; but the bill only applies to localities if the locality has adopted this policy.

HB2152 (Carr) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public body's officer training. States that if the designated Freedom of Information Officer for a locality is its local government attorney, the attorney must attend training by the Freedom of Information Advisory Council.

HB2628 (Glass) / SB997 (Williams Graves) Local officers; oath of office. State that local officers must take the oath of office and give bond if appropriate on or before the day on which the term of office begins.

HB1659 (Henson) Local Foundation and Soil Management Fund. Authorizes localities to create a local foundation and soil management fund out of local money for granting funds to citizens for foundation management and soil settlement repairs on previously developed lands.

SB1165 (Salim) / HB2024 (Seibold) Virginia Public Procurement Act; national environmental protection and product safety standards. Prohibits local governments from excluding materials contained in solar products if the products meet the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Recommendations of Specifications, Standards, and Ecolabels.

Failed

HB1764 (Martinez) Disposable plastic bag tax; distribution to towns. Allowed any town in a county with a plastic bag tax to receive a distribution of the total tax collected by the county based on the local sales tax distribution formula.

SB1052 (Ebbin) Virginia Human Rights Act; definition of "employer." Reduced from 15 to five the number of employees for each working day in each of 20 or more weeks for purposes of the definition of "employer."

SB1489 (Bagby) / HB2559 (Lopez) Authority of local government; service employees. Allowed any locality to require

by local ordinance compliance various provisions that assist service employees as defined in the bill transition to a new service company or retain their job when the locality moves to a new service company.

SB1118 (Roem) Registration by localities of cemeteries on private property. Required localities to adopt an ordinance creating a register of identified cemeteries, graveyards, or other places of burial on private property. This bill had been amended to only apply to Planning District 8.

HB2175 (Clark) / SB1136 (Boysko) Local anti-rent gouging authority; civil penalty. Allowed localities to adopt by ordinance anti-rent gouging measures after proper notice and public hearings.

SB876 (Ebbin) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; notice of public meetings; proposed agenda required. Required public bodies subject to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act to include a proposed agenda listing all items expected to be considered by the public body at its meeting and that those items be sufficiently descriptive to give the public reasonable notice of matters to be considered. The bill allowed for amendments to be made to any such proposed agenda but provided that the public body shall not take any final action on those amended or additional agenda items.

SB1029 (Roem) Virginia Freedom of Information Act, procedure for responding to requests; charges; posting of notice of rights and responsibilities. Limited the fees that can be charged for producing public records to the median hourly rate of pay of employees or the actual hourly rate for the person performing the work, whichever is less. It also amended the notice of rights and responsibilities on the website and made some other technical amendments.

SB1357 (Ebbin) / HB1745 (Watts) Conflict of Interests Act, State and Local Government, personal interest in a transaction. Added to the definition of "personal interest in a transaction" for the purposes of State, Local and the General Assembly Conflict of Interests Act includes when the subject of the transaction is the spouse.

Fire/Emergency Response

Passed

HB2065 (Thomas) / SB1282 (Durant) Fire Programs Fund; aid to localities, requirement for emergency incidents reporting. For localities to remain eligible for funding from the Fire Programs Fund, they must report all emergency incidents through the National Emergency Response Information System while sharing such emergency incident data with the Department of Fire Programs. The bill has a delayed effective date of July 1, 2026.

SB1248 (Hackworth) Fire Prevention Code; prohibition on permit fees for fire departments, etc. for certain localities. Prohibits the State Fire Marshal from charging a fee for the approval and administration of a permit for explosives, blasting agents, theatrical flame effects and fireworks issued to fire departments and emergency medical services of a locality with a total population of less than 10,000.

SB934 (Craig) Certain unclaimed property presumed abandoned; Volunteer Firefighters' and Rescue Squad Workers' Service Award Fund. If funds or property in the Volunteer Firefighters' and Rescue Squad Workers' Service Award Fund (Fund) are unclaimed for more than five years after a member's forfeiture of his membership or dissolution of a volunteer emergency services or fire department they shall be presumed abandoned for purposes of the Virginia Disposition of Unclaimed Property Act.



Failed

SB972 (Rouse) / HB2494 (Askew) Emergency Response Exposure Grant Fund and Program. This fund would have awarded grants to localities to support certain emergency responders who were exposed to a qualifying emergency, defined in the bill. The bill required funding to be used for annual cancer screenings and health care expenses incurred by eligible emergency responders, defined in the bill, in the event such emergency responders are diagnosed with cancer from toxic material exposure. The bill permitted funding to be used for out-of-pocket medical expenses not otherwise covered by insurance, workers' compensation, or other available funding. The Department of Fire Programs would have administered the Fund and Program. The enactment clause stated that the 2012 airplane crash in Virginia Beach was a qualifying emergency.

SB1246 (Stanley) Va. Emergency Management Preparedness and Capabilities Grant Program and Fund. Established the Virginia Emergency Management Preparedness and Capabilities Grant Program and Fund for the purpose of awarding grants to political subdivisions to assist with the cost of emergency management and preparedness.

Education

Passed

SB1413 (Surovell) Public school buildings; indoor air quality; inspection and evaluation. Establishes several requirements for local school divisions to ensure adequate indoor air quality in every public school building in a division. Requirements include providing an inspection and evaluation once every two years and an industry-recognized uniform inspection and evaluation every four years.

HB2419 (Webert) Programs providing instructional experience in horse riding; exemption from licensure. Exempts from the requirements for licensure of child day programs by the Superintendent of Public Instruction programs providing instructional experience in horse riding, provided that (i) such a program is taught (a) by an adult with a recognized certification in horse riding instruction and (b) to fewer than 12 children at any time, (ii) at least one adult actively supervises no more than three children at any time during such a program, and (iii) the majority of programming for any such program relates to horse riding and equine activities.

Failed

SB1307 (McPike) Sales and use tax, local; additional tax authorized in all counties and cities to support schools. Granted statewide authority for any county or city to impose a sales and use tax of up to one percent dedicated solely to school construction, renovation, and debt services only if approved by local ordinance and voter referendum. Nine localities currently have this authority. This version, excluding the current nine, also stipulated that funds cannot be supplanted for anything outside the referendum language's scope. Support for this legislation was one of the 2025 VML Legislative Priority Program items. SB1307 passed the General Assembly but was vetoed by Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

HB2164 (Cole) / SB1149 (French) Public school funding; certain funding calculations. Required the DOE to exclude the true value of real property eligible for certain disabled veterans and surviving spouse property exemptions in the locality when calculating the local composite index (LCI) for each school division.

HB2231 (Cherry) / SB1346 (Jordan) Public schools; Virginia Opportunity Scholarship Grant Program established.

Established the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship Grant Program. Provided grants of \$5,000 per eligible student up to 10,000 students per year to be used exclusively for private education needs, including textbooks and uniforms.

SB1033 (Pekarsky) / HB1988 (Askew) Local school boards; powers and duties; binding arbitration agreements. Allowed any school board to enter into a written agreement to submit any existing controversy to binding arbitration and to execute a contract that includes collective bargaining.

Legislation Based on JLARC Recommendations: In 2023, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) published a report on the Virginia K-12 funding formula and the Standards of Quality (SOQ). The report included several short and long-term recommendations to address funding issues in public schools. One key finding was that local governments are paying significantly more for SOQ-covered positions and entities than the law requires. A commission was established to address the ability to implement the short and long-term JLARC recommendations. No policy recommendations were passed during the 2025 General Assembly. However, several recommendations were introduced:

- **HB1954 (Rasoul) Equity in public school funding and staffing; special education students; at-risk students; English language learner students; report.** Established an At-Risk Program to support programs and services for educationally at-risk students including prevention, intervention, or remediation. Services would have included teacher recruitment efforts, English language learner programs, and hiring additional support staff.
- **HB2032 (Reaser) Department of Education; English language learner students; data collection on expenditures.** Required state-funded add-ons to be provided to support English language learner students. The bill would require local funds to be obligated for add-ons determined by the local ability to pay.
- **SB977 (Hashmi) Public schools; Standards of Quality; certain calculations; support services.** Required DOE to make changes to the Standards of Quality (SOQ) funding formula when calculating nonpersonal costs.
- **HB1831 (Simonds) Public schools; Standards of Quality; certain calculations; support services.** Required DOE to examine actual school division spending on support costs required support positions to be funded based on a calculation of prevailing costs.
- **HB1594 (Clark) Average teacher salary in the Commonwealth; national average.** Required the Governor's budget to include funding to ensure that teachers are paid at the national average for the 2026-2028 biennium budget.
- **SB1236 (Aird) Public schools; Standards of Quality; certain calculations; support services.** Required DOE to examine actual school division spending on support costs, and required support positions to be funded based on a calculation of prevailing costs.

Elections

Failed

HB1794 (Helmer) / SB1119 (VanValkenburg) Elections; primary dates; presidential year primaries. Moved all primary elections to the presidential primary date. Regarding candidates for election in November during a presidential election year, the bill

eliminated the requirement that petition signatures be collected after Jan. 1.

HB2056 (Reaser) Absentee voting in person; voter satellite offices; days and hours of operation. Authorized the governing body of any county or city to establish satellite voting offices for absentee voting in person. Dates and hours of operations of satellite polling locations would be prescribed by local ordinance. Lastly, notice to local general registrars must be provided two weeks before the enactment of the ordinance.

SB1009 (Salim) Elections; conduct of election; ranked choice voting; report. Allowed any local election to be conducted using rank-choice voting. The State Board of Elections would be required to create any necessary standards and approve tabulation software on existing systems conducting rank-choice voting elections.

HB1938 (Reid) Elections; general provisions; prohibited area. Maintained the 40-foot prohibited area around polling places, electoral board meetings, and recount locations with an additional requirement of a five-foot prohibition around vehicles.

HB2139 (Walker) Elections; form of ballot; party identification; option for candidates for local offices. Allowed candidates for local office who have been nominated by a political party or in a primary election to be identified by a political party at the discretion of the candidate.

HB1566 (Green) Elections; absentee ballot security measures; watermark. Required that any ballot mailed to an absentee voter to be printed on a secure paper that incorporates a visible watermark that identifies the ballot as an official ballot to preserve ballot secrecy.

SB1175 (Sutterlein) Elections; absentee voting in person; uniform availability. Required in-person absentee voting to be available from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday during early voting and from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on the first and second Saturday and Sunday before all elections. Removed local governing body flexibility to establish hours of satellite locations and add Sunday hours.

SB1404 (Pekarsky) School boards; method of selection; election required. Mandated that all school boards be elected. Current law requires all school boards to be appointed, but they may be elected if approved by referendum. This bill would have affected 12 localities.

HB2478 (Zehr) Elections; absentee voting; drop-off locations for return of absentee ballots; 24-hour video surveillance requirement. Required 24-hour video surveillance of all absentee ballot drop-off locations, including polling locations such as schools, government buildings, shopping malls, etc.

Studies

PASSED: SJ253 (Surovell) / HJ443 (Simonds) Study; joint subcommittee to study the consolidation and scheduling of general elections in Virginia; report. Create a two-year study on the feasibility of consolidating and scheduling general elections. A 13-member joint subcommittee will study the potential and probable effects of moving some or all of Virginia's state or local elections to even-numbered years coinciding with the federal election schedule. This change would require a constitutional amendment. As such, the legislation must pass again next session before being sent to the Governor for a signature.

Technology

Passed

HB2541 (Tran) Information Technology Access Act; digital accessibility. Makes several changes to the Virginia Information Technology Act to align the Virginia Code with Federal Standards all local bodies must comply with by 2026 or 2027. This bill adds small adjustments above federal standards.

Failed

HB2094 (Maldonado) High-risk artificial intelligence; development, deployment, and use; civil penalties. Created requirements for vendors to develop, deploy, and use high-risk artificial intelligence systems, as defined in the bill, to be enforced by the Attorney General. This bill came as a recommendation from JCOTS. It did not include any local public bodies; however, it did mandate developers that local governments would use.

SB1214 (Aird) / HB2046 (Anthony) High-risk artificial intelligence; development, deployment, and use by public bodies; work group; report. Created requirements for the development, deployment, and use of high-risk artificial intelligence systems, as defined in the bill, by state public bodies. Directed the Chief Information Officer (CIO) to develop, publish, and maintain policies and procedures concerning the development, procurement, implementation, utilization, and ongoing assessment of systems. This bill did not include counties, cities, or towns but did include a work group to determine the feasibility of extending this requirement to local governing bodies.

Health & Human Services

Passed

HB1733 (Cole) / SB1372 (Suetterlein) Petitions for relief of care and custody of a child; investigation by local department of social services; Office of the Children's Ombudsman work group; report. Require a local department of social services (LDSS), as a part of its investigation after the referral of a request for a petition for relief of the care and custody of a child, to refer the parent to the Children's Services Act (CSA) local family assessment and planning team (FAPT) and also to create a written report. The Virginia Department of Social Services, in coordination with the Virginia League of Social Services Executives, will create a template and guidance for the written report.

The bill also directs the Office of the Children's Ombudsman to convene a work group to (a) determine the factors a court should consider when determining good cause is shown for a petitioner's desire to be relieved of care and custody and (b) examine the issue of raising the standard of evidence for granting temporary relief of custody from the current standard of preponderance of the evidence to clear and convincing evidence. This report is due Nov. 1, 2025.

HB1760 (Gardner) Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Act; report. Directs the Department of Health, with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Department of Education, to convene a work group to develop a plan to (i) create a mental health screening and assessment tool for children in early childhood care and (ii) provide mental health consultation resources and training to early childhood education providers, pediatric health providers, and families. Findings are due to the House and Senate budget committees by Nov. 1, 2025.

HB2105 (Kent) Regional correctional facilities; investigation of acts of violence; report to law-enforcement agen-

cy; policies. Requires regional jail superintendents to promptly report to the primary local law-enforcement agency in the jurisdiction in which the facility is located or to the Department of State Police any act of violence, as defined in § 19.2-297.1 (includes malicious wounding and assault), that occurs within such correctional facility. Requires regional jails to adopt a policy with procedures for investigation of such acts of violence and the roles/responsibilities of the jail superintendent and law enforcement agency to which a report is made. A copy of the policy must be provided to the state board of regional jails prior to January 1 each year, beginning on Jan. 1, 2026.

HB2260 (Delaney) Child in need of services; definition. Expands the definition of a “child in need of services”(CHINS) for purposes of juvenile and domestic relations districts courts to include a child who remains away from, deserts, or abandons his/her family or lawful custodian during one occasion and who is demonstratively at risk of coercion, exploitation, abuse, or manipulation or who has been lured away from home by means of trickery, misrepresentation, or under false pretenses. Such children will become eligible for services under the Children’s Services Act (CSA); the number of children covered by this bill and impact is unknown.

HB2309 (Hodges) Department of Health; local health districts and local health departments; guidance for onsite sewage system and private well permits. Directs the Department of Health to develop guidance for local health districts and local health departments so their staff evaluate and recommend solutions to problems with a valid onsite sewage system or private well permit prior to issuing a revocation for such.

HB2457 (Glass) State Board of Social Services; regulations; application for and use of foster care benefits. Addresses federal benefits for youth in foster care, directing the State Board of Social Services to amend its regulations by Jan. 1, 2026, to (i) require local departments of social services to apply for federal benefits on behalf of children in foster care for which that they may be eligible, (ii) prohibit the state from using military survivor benefits to pay for services for 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 military survivor benefits in an appropriate trust instrument or protected account that is exempt from federal asset and resource limits.

HB2749 (LeVere Bolling) / SB1408 (Reeves) Department of Health; waterworks; mandatory reporting. Require owners of waterworks to report any critical equipment failure or malfunction or contaminant release to the Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Drinking Water as soon as practicable but no more than two hours after discovery. Owners of waterworks that are required to submit a monthly operating report to the Office must include in reports any noncritical equipment failure or malfunction that could adversely affect water quality, public health, or service continuity. This bill incorporates HB2407 (Scott, P.A.).

HB2754 (Singh) / SB870 (Favola) Behavioral health services; exchange of medical and mental health information and records; correctional facilities. Address sharing of medical/mental health records of incarcerated individuals by allowing the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), the Department of Social Services, and any local department of social services to access medical and mental health information and records of individuals committed to a correctional facility for the purposes of providing pre-release services, reentry planning, and post-incarceration placement and services. The bills authorize DMAS to access a juvenile’s social, medical, and behavioral health reports and records during pre-release and for up to 30 days following such juvenile’s release from commitment for the purposes of providing pre-release services,

reentry planning, and post-incarceration placement and services.

SB801 (Favola) Children’s Services Act; state pool of funds. Updates statutes regarding the Children’s Services Act (CSA) program, including removal of language from initial establishment of the program in the 1990s regarding state funding consolidation and establishing community responsibility for service planning/provision. Adds reference to youth who are determined to be a child in need of services, as defined in law, and modifies the eligibility criteria for funding for such through CSA. Changes were recommendations of the Virginia Commission on Youth.

SB819 (Favola) Referrals to community-based outpatient stabilization programs for voluntary treatment. Addresses community-based outpatient stabilization by requiring health care professionals and evaluators to consider, prior to a patient’s release from an emergency custody order or temporary detention order, if a referral to a community-based outpatient stabilization program for voluntary treatment is appropriate for that patient.

Failed

HB1710 (Gardner) Department of Medical Assistance Services; reimbursement rates for Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; work group; report. Directed 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 (the Part C program) and report back by November 1, 2025.

HB1964 (Tata) Future in Focus Program. Established the Future in Focus program for young adults (21 through 23 years of age) who participated in the Fostering Futures program immediately prior to attaining 21 years of age. Services would have assisted and supported participants in transitioning to adulthood, becoming self-sufficient, and creating permanent, positive relationships.

SB1432 (Marsden) Juvenile secure detention facilities; closure or consolidation; funding contributions; education programs. Forced the closure/consolidation of eight local/regional juvenile detention facilities; if a locality/region did not cooperate, it would lose all state funding for that facility. Required other facilities to take in youth from closed facilities or else lose their state funding.

Natural Resources

Passed

SB851 (Diggs) Rainwater harvesting. Pre-empts local ordinances requiring connections to a municipal water supply when the most stringent permit is issued for a rainwater harvesting system has been issued by state board of health.

HB2000 (Laufer) / SB857 (French) Local authority to mitigate dam failure. Provides authority for a locality to agree to act on behalf of the State to mitigate unsafe dams that present an imminent hazard and directs the Secretary of Natural Resources to set out the actions the state is requesting a locality to take on the state’s behalf to mitigate imminent dangers. Creates new safety inspection requirements for improving dam safety and establishes new criteria for private dam owners to identify and mitigate unsafe dams and establishes new fines and fees for dams that remain out of compliance.

HB2008 (Martinez) / SB1093 (Perry) Property access for MS4 utility. Authorizes localities that operate a municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) to enter properties where a discharge enters the MS4 using properties other than those owned by the locality. Governor’s Amendments were rejected by the General Assembly.

HB2313 (Lopez) Animal boarding and grooming facility inspections. Expands the authority for animal control officers to inspect animal grooming establishments based on complaints or twice per year for facilities not already regulated by the Board of Veterinary Medicine. Establishes a work group to consider establishing regulations and a licensing process for animal boarding facilities to report back to the General Assembly by Dec. 1, 2026.

HB2630 (Willett) Tree canopy fund. Provides permissive ordinance authority for localities to establish a tree canopy fund using fees from developers unable to meet tree canopy requirements. Funds may then be used to plant and maintain trees and to support non-profit organizations that plant and maintain trees.

Failed

SB923 (Stuart) Virginia Institute of Marine Science; study of the cumulative impacts of surface water intakes on aquatic fauna and water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its major Virginia tributaries; report. Prohibited the issuance of interbasin water transfers exceeding 5 percent of the non-consumptive volume for two years.

SB930 (Stuart) Virginia Institute of Marine Science; study of the cumulative impacts of surface water intakes on aquatic fauna and water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its major Virginia tributaries; report. Directed the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences to study the impact of surface water withdrawal intakes on aquatic flora and fauna.

SB1190 (Deeds) Virginia Energy Facility Review Board established; localities; comprehensive plan and local ordinances related to siting of critical interconnection projects; planning district commissions; regional energy plans; Virginia Clean Energy Technical Assistance Center established. Pre-empted local zoning authority for clean energy projects via a state-wide review board and provided technical assistance to localities.

SB1319 (McPike) Self-reporting of PFAS manufacture and use for PFAS assessment; Department of Environmental Quality; industrial wastewater; publicly owned treatment works. Required industrial customers of a publicly owned wastewater treatment facility to self-report the use of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances to the facility and required that the wastewater facilities report this information to the Department of Environmental Quality within 90 days.

SB1365 (Pillion) Stormwater management regulations; localities outside Chesapeake Bay watershed. Repealed stormwater management regulations for localities outside the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and reverted regulations to those in effect prior to 2014.

Transportation

Passed

SB852 (New Craig) Photo speed monitoring devices retired law-enforcement officials. Expands the criteria for who is allowed to swear or affirm a violation has occurred that was captured by a photo speed enforcement camera. Permits retired sworn law enforcement officers in addition to sworn law enforcement officers currently permitted to review violations under a photo speed enforcement program.

HB2718 (Leftwich) Photo speed monitoring devices documentation requirements. Requires that a photo speed enforcement camera operating in a school zone demonstrate through images or documentation that the school zone lights were activated and blinking at the time a violation occurred.

SB1332 (Marsden) Local Option Towing Fee Increase. The General Assembly accepted Gov. Glenn Youngkin's amendments to the bill which will remove the fuel surcharge for trespass towing and allow localities to increase the cost of trespass tows up to \$210 from \$150 in current code. Youngkin's amendments remove the deadline for setting a towing fee lower than \$210 that was proposed in the bill.

Failed

SB1233 (Williams Graves) Pedestrian crossing violation monitoring systems and stop sign violation monitoring systems; speed safety cameras; violation enforcement; civil penalty. Authorized law enforcement to use pedestrian and stop sign monitoring devices in school and work zones as well as at high-risk intersections. The bill restricted how localities could use civil penalties collected by a photo speed or pedestrian/stop sign monitoring program to include covering the costs of installing, operating, and maintaining photo speed equipment and contractual costs for program operations. Additional funds would be required to be used for road and pedestrian safety improvements with projects prioritized in the school and work zones where photo speed/pedestrian & stop sign monitoring programs are in operation. The bill also expanded reporting requirements, mandated daily tests of photo speed monitoring devices, and increased reporting and penalties.

HB1664 (Jones) Photo speed monitoring devices; placement and operation by certain localities. Authorized towns without law enforcement agencies to operate photo speed enforcement devices.

SB1445 (Diggs) Photo speed monitoring devices; photo-monitoring system for traffic signals; proof of violation; certain persons swearing to or affirming certificates; training. Authorized training for local employees certifying violations under a photo speed enforcement program and allowed non-law enforcement employees to affirm violations under such programs.

HB1801 (Cohen) School crossing zones; increases maximum boundaries of a zone from limits of school property. Expanded boundary of school crossing zones to 1,500 feet from 750 feet.

HB2159 (Carr) / SB1491 (Bagby) School crossing zones; institutions of higher education. Allowed higher education institutions to establish school zones with capital costs covered by the institution.

HB2080 (Austin) / SB1061 (Diggs) Registration decals; discontinued. Discontinued vehicle registration decals on license plates that display the expiration month and year of motor vehicle registration.

Cannabis

Failed

HB2485 (Krizek) / SB970 (Rouse) Cannabis control; retail market; penalties. Established a regulatory framework including fines, fees, penalties and taxes for a recreational cannabis market. Included authority for cities, towns, and counties to hold a referendum prior to Dec. 31, 2025, to prohibit cannabis retailers from operating in the jurisdiction. Also included local authority to levy a 2.5 percent tax on cannabis retail sales and maintained local land use authority regarding cannabis retailer businesses in addition to including local authority to regulate the hours of cannabis retailers. This legislation also expanded local authority to regulate the use of cannabis on school grounds and public property. Cannabis retail sales would not have been allowed prior to May 1, 2026.

Region I takes top honors at VBCOA Mid-Year School and Conference!

ON MARCH 10 at the Virginia Building Code & Officials Association (VBCOA) Mid-Year School and Conference in Roanoke, Region I was recognized as the 2024 Region of the Year Award winner. Notable achievements included the Russell County Board of Supervisors' proclamation designating May as Building Safety Month and the Skills USA Building Competition event which was held at the Tazewell County Public School in February 2024. Several Region I building officials participated as judges in the event. Other events included code change training for contractors, held at the Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon, with 61 contractors in attendance. Membership training included a review of fire protection systems by Frank McCloud of Alkegen Fire Protection. In August 2024, Brian Hilderbrand of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) provided training on the

setup of manufactured homes. Notably, Carol County Permit Technician Concetta Hancock applied for and received a scholarship which enabled her to attend the ICC Code hearings in Long Beach, CA. Region I also awarded one scholarship to the VBCOA Annual School and Conference.

Region II was recognized as the 2024 VBCOA Merit Region of the Year Award winner for their outstanding activities, including Building Safety Month events with official proclamations in Franklin County and Botetourt County. Region II also provided code update training for 105 contractor attendees and held bi-monthly membership meetings with specialized training on diverse topics.

About the author: Tom Coghill is a building official with the County of James City and the chair of the VBCOA Public Information Committee.



Gary Jackson accepts the 2024 VBCOA Region of the Year Award on behalf of Region I.



Mark Bowles accepts the 2024 VBCOA Merit Region of the Year Award on behalf of Region II.



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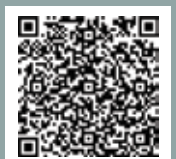
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