VOL. 61 NO. 4 JUL/AUG 2026

VTC VIRGINIA TOWN & CITY

THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

2026 General Assembly

We've got a budget!

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Member Spotlights on Roanoke County, Town of Dumfries, and City of Bristol

Remembering Mayor Frank Friedman

2025-26 Supreme Court term roundup

Spotlight on AccuWeather

VIRGINIA VML MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

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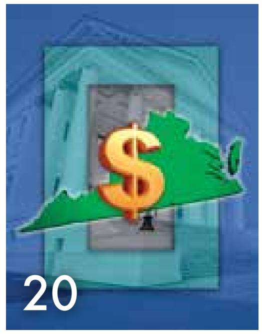
BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



ABOUT THE COVER

The Commonwealth's 2026 budget process played out over a $1 billion difference of opinion between the House and Senate. There are lots of descriptors that could be used to characterize how it all went down. Words like protracted, delayed, divisive, fraught, tense, and worrisome could all be used. In an ideal year, none of these would apply, but despite its difficult gestation and eleventh-hour delivery, Virginia is now the proud parent of a budget. So, what does it mean for local governments? In this issue we find out.

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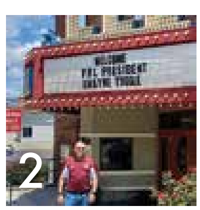
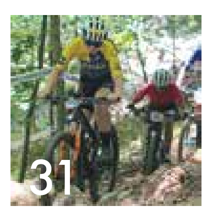




By **Michelle Gowdy**, VML Executive Director and General Counsel

Relax…it's still summer!

SUMMER IS USUALLY such a relaxing time, but this year summer got off to a decidedly unrelaxing start as we all waited on the edge of our seats for a state budget well into June. But just before June turned into July, we finally had one! Since then, VML staff have been working to interpret all the various provisions that affect local governments. Director of Fiscal Policy Joe Flores, along with other VML policy staff, have included their breakdown of those budget items in this issue of *Virginia Town & City*. Happy reading!

One of VML's top priorities was the 1% Sales Tax for School Construction. While I know that the timeline to adopt a resolution to hold a referendum this year is tight, it was great to see so many localities discussing this option.

On a more relaxing note, VML President and Mayor of the Town of Amherst Dwayne Tuggle and I met in Pennington Gap a few weeks ago for a visit. What a great experience! It was amazing to see how well the town is using grants to add some cool things. I also visited Glade Spring, which was an equally enjoyable experience. Dwayne had great tours of Chilhowie, Gate City, Coeburn, and St. Paul; he definitely made the most of his trip!

The occasion for our sojourn to SWVA was a meeting of the Southwest Mayors at the Harvester in Rocky Mount. It was a wonderful gathering and a great opportunity to discuss VML, the plans for our upcoming Annual Conference, and our policy process. We also toured the Harvester and I was reminded how fantastic it is as a live music venue. I was disappointed that there weren't any concerts happening while we were there, but I'll be back for sure. Thanks to the Town of Rocky Mount for their hospitality and to the mayors who attended the meeting.

In other meeting news, Delegate Otto Wachsmann recently invited VML to attend a meeting with the mayors in his district. This meeting included mayors from Broadnax, Courtland, Jarratt, Newsoms, McKenney, and Waverly. Hearing about the various issues that these towns are dealing with was educational and will prove useful as VML crafts its policy statements for the 2027 General Assembly Session.

Not to be outdone by the Southwest Mayors and Delegate Wachsmann, VML held our own meetings in July when our five policy committees met (Community and Economic Development, Finance, General Laws, Human Development and Education, and Infrastructure). Following those meetings, each group sent 2-3 issues to the Legislative Committee to inform their work on the 2027 Legislative Program. That program will be voted on during the Annual Business Meeting the afternoon of Monday, October 12 at the VML Annual Conference. The revised policy statements are available on our website (**www.vml.org**) under the Advocacy tab. Just select the committee's name to get to its statement. I strongly encourage you to review them prior to the Annual Conference.

And speaking of the conference, VML staff visited the City of Norfolk to meet with staff from the city and the hotel to make plans. It was so exciting to feel the energy from the City of Norfolk staff and the great ideas they have for their Host City Reception happening the evening of Monday, October 12. We left feeling very energized about the conference. Please register if you have not yet done so. We look forward to seeing you there!

Oct. 10-11 **2026 Virginia Mayors Institute -** Norfolk Waterside Marriott, Norfolk, VA

Oct. 11-13 **2026 VML Annual Conference -** Norfolk Waterside Marriott, Norfolk, VA

In Memoriam

Lexington Mayor Frank Friedman

Frank Wilson Friedman, beloved husband, father, grandfather, brother, friend, financial advisor, and devoted public servant, passed away peacefully on July 2 in Roanoke, surrounded by family. His sudden passing came as a profound shock to all who knew and loved him. He was 60 years old.

Friedman was born on October 10, 1965, in Radford. He spent his early childhood on Woodbine Farm in Blacksburg before moving with his family to Lexington in 1973 – a community that would become both his lifelong home and the focus of his unwavering service.

A 1984 graduate of Lexington High School, Friedman went on to attend Hampden-Sydney College, graduating in 1988. There, he served as Student Government secretary-treasurer, was a proud member of Phi Kappa Alpha fraternity, and was inducted into Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society. He later graduated from the prestigious Darden Banking School at the University of Virginia.

For nearly four decades, Friedman built a respected career in financial services. After working in Jacksonville, FL, and Richmond, he returned home to Lexington, where he spent the next 29 years serving individuals, families, and small businesses with integrity, wisdom, and genuine care. Since 2011, he served as a financial advisor with CornerStone Bank, earning the trust and friendship of countless clients who often became lifelong friends.

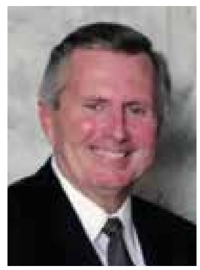
Friedman believed deeply in giving back to the community that had given him so much. After serving on Lexington City Council, he was elected mayor in 2016 and was reelected in 2020 and 2024. He approached public service with humility, thoughtfulness, and an unwavering commitment to improving the lives of those around him. Whether working through difficult decisions, celebrating community milestones, or simply greeting neighbors downtown, Friedman led with kindness, common sense, and a sincere love for Lexington.

His commitment to service extended well beyond City Hall. Throughout his life, Friedman generously shared his time and leadership with numerous organizations, including the Carilion Rockbridge Community Foundation, Kendal at Lexington, Virginia March of Dimes, Rockbridge United Way, Augusta Community Health Foundation, the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission, and the Blue Ridge Resource Authority. Most recently, he was honored to be elected to the board of the State Fair of West Virginia, a role he eagerly anticipated.

Friedman leaves behind a legacy measured not only by the offices he held or the organizations he served, but by the countless lives he touched through his compassion, integrity, generosity, and unwavering belief in the power of community. Lexington is a better place because of his life, and his influence will continue to be felt for generations to come.

In lieu of flowers, the Community Foundation for Rockbridge, Bath & Alleghany has established the Frank Wilson Friedman Memorial Fund to honor Friedman's lifelong commitment to the Lexington community. Memorial contributions are gratefully welcomed and will continue the work and values that meant so much to him.

For more on Mayor Friedman, see the remembrance on page 11.



Former Manassas City Manager Larry Hughes

Lawrence D. "Larry" Hughes, beloved husband, father, public servant, and friend, passed away peacefully on June 8 at the age of 85.

Hughes lived a life defined by service, leadership, family, and a deep love for the communities he called home. For more than three decades, he devoted his professional career to public service, helping guide the growth and development of Prince William County and the City of Manassas while earning the respect and admiration of colleagues, elected officials, and residents alike.

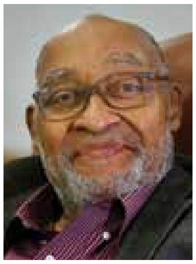
Born in Independence, MO, Hughes carried his Midwestern values of hard work, integrity, humility, and kindness throughout his life. He earned his Bachelor's degree from Graceland College and later received his Master's degree from the University of Missouri, preparing for a career dedicated to improving local government and strengthening communities.

Hughes served for many years as deputy county executive for Prince William County and served as acting county executive. In 1999, he was selected to become city manager of Manassas, a position he held until his retirement in 2012. During his tenure, Manassas experienced significant growth and revitalization while maintaining the character and history that made the city unique. He helped oversee numerous projects that continue to benefit residents today, including the development of the Loy E. Harris Pavilion, improvements throughout Old Town Manassas, the downtown railroad walkway, and the establishment of the city's first Fire and Rescue Department. Through periods of prosperity and economic challenge, Hughes' steady leadership, fiscal responsibility, and thoughtful planning helped position the city for a successful future.

Hughes' legacy can be found in the parks, public spaces, civic institutions, and neighborhoods he helped strengthen. More importantly, it lives on in the countless lives he touched through his kindness, wisdom, leadership, and friendship.

Condolences can be left at **www.bakerpostfh.com**.

In Memoriam



Former Norfolk Vice Mayor Paul Riddick

Paul R. Riddick Sr. passed away on July 15. Born in Norfolk on February 3, 1948, Riddick was educated in the Norfolk Public Schools System during the era of segregation and graduated in 1966 from the historic Booker T. Washington High School. He continued his education at Norfolk State University and later earned an Associate of Applied Science degree in Funeral Service from John Tyler Community College in Chester.

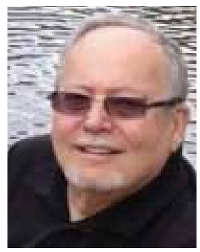
Following in the footsteps of his father, Riddick proudly carried forward the family business, Riddick Funeral Service, which was founded in 1937. He was a past member of the Norfolk Funeral Directors and Embalmers Association and the Virginia Morticians Association.

Long before his years as an elected official, Riddick demonstrated a deep commitment to protecting the future of children and ensuring that every child had access to opportunity and quality education by serving as the lead plaintiff in *Riddick v. School Board of the City of Norfolk*, a significant effort focused on protecting neighborhood elementary schools. He was first elected to the Norfolk City Council on July 1, 1992, representing Ward 4, and faithfully served the citizens of Norfolk for more than 30 years until his retirement on December 31, 2022. He also served as vice mayor of Norfolk from 1994 to 1996.

Riddick served as co-chair of the Mayor's Advisory Committee for the St. Paul's Area, represented the city as a member of the Southeastern Tidewater Opportunity Project (STOP), and previously served on the Board of the Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads (HRT), the Southside Task Force, the Church Street/Huntersville Development Committee, and as president of the Norfolk Branch of the NAACP. He was also appointed to the Hampton Roads Regional Jail Authority, where he served from 2014 to 2015. He was named Citizen of the Year by the Lambda Omega Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., and was honored as Citizen of Tomorrow by Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

In addition to his elected service, Riddick made lasting contributions to his community including establishing a dedicated burial section at Forest Lawn Cemetery for the Islamic community and supporting the creation of the Second Chance Program. He championed projects that enhanced Norfolk's neighborhoods and public infrastructure, including the installation of bicycle racks on Hampton Roads Transit buses, the development of the Southside Aquatics Center, the Horace C. Downing Library, the Richard A. Tucker Memorial Library, and the revitalization of Palmer's Market in Berkeley.

In a statement after Riddick's passing, Virginia House Speaker Don Scott shared his condolences and said Hampton Roads "lost a giant… Paul was part of a generation of leaders who kicked down doors so people like me could walk through them. I don't get to be Speaker without men like Paul Riddick."



Former Dumfries Town Manager Daniel Edward Taber

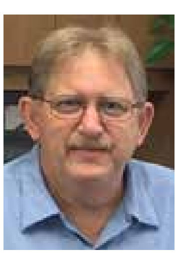
Daniel "Dan" Edward Taber, 76, of Manassas passed away on June 12 while under hospice care at the Adler Center for Caring on the Van Metre Campus.

Born in Auburn, NY, Taber served in the United States Army from 1969-1971 before beginning a 37-year career with the Prince William County Police Department, a nationally accredited agency, retiring in 2008 as assistant chief of police after serving 12 years in that position. He was subsequently appointed chief of police in the Town of Dumfries and then served as Dumfries town manager for almost five years, becoming the longest continually serving person to hold that position. He retired from the role in July 2016.

Taber earned a Bachelor's in Police Administration from American University and a Master's in Public Administration from George Mason University. He was a graduate of the FBI National Academy, the Senior Management Institute for Police (PERF), and the Professional Executive Leadership School (University of Richmond). He taught Criminal Justice and Management courses at Northern Virginia Community College, the University of Richmond, and ECPI University, and provided ethics training to senior law enforcement managers across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In lieu of flowers, please donate to PWC Animal Shelter in Memory of Major Dan Taber, Prince William SPCA, PO Box 6631, Woodbridge, VA 22195.

Culpeper Light & Power Director Stover retires



- Stover -

Town of Culpeper Light & Power Director **Mike Stover** retired on July 1. He served the town for over 40 years, beginning his employment with the Light & Power Department in March 1986. Stover was appointed director in August 2011. In that role, he elevated the levels of professionalism in the department with encouragement, training, experience, and his personal drive for excellence.

Stover is an active member of multiple organizations, including the Virginia Municipal Electric Association (VMEA) and Municipal Electric Power Association of Virginia (MEPAV). He served as MEPAV vice president in 2018, president from 2019-2022, and Executive Committee member from 2017-2023. He also served as VMEA vice president from 2019-2023.

Stover was recognized at the June 9 Culpeper Town Council meeting and presented with a Resolution of Appreciation for his 40 years of devoted service to the citizens of the town.

Town Manager Chris Hively selected Assistant Light & Power Director Chris Heggen to fill the director position. Heggen has been with the Light & Power Department since April 2024. He has over 28 years of experience in the electric utility industry and holds a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification.

Drewry retires as deputy county administrator and director of finance for Prince George County; Mehta named new director of finance

Betsy Drewry, deputy county administrator and director of finance for Prince George County, retired August 1, concluding a distinguished 36-year career in public service.

Drewry joined Prince George County in 2016 and served the community for more than 10 years. She was appointed deputy county administrator in 2018, expanding her leadership responsibilities across county operations. A Virginia Tech graduate, she previously held positions with Richmond City Schools, Prince George County Public Schools, Surry County Public Schools, Greater Reach Community Services Board, and the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts.


- Drewry -

During her tenure, Drewry strengthened a culture of financial excellence and accountability. Under her leadership, the Finance Department consistently earned Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) awards for both its annual audit and budget document, continuing a long-standing tradition of excellence.

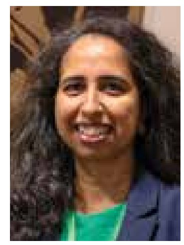
She led and supported numerous initiatives to enhance transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency, including expanding the county's use of OpenGov to improve public access to financial data and reporting; implementing policy improvements, including strengthened purchasing and travel guidelines; coordinating department-level strategic planning efforts to align performance with county priorities; and overseeing a major banking transition in 2025, in cooperation with the Treasurer's Office, to optimize financial operations and generate interest earnings on county funds.

Drewry also played a critical role in managing and reporting on significant federal funding, including $6.69 million in CARES Act funding and $7.44 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, ensuring full compliance with all state and federal requirements.

In addition, she led the financial coordination of numerous debt issuances supporting major capital projects across the county. She also partnered with county leadership to establish dedicated funding streams for Fire and EMS equipment and supported multiple grant-funded initiatives, including multiple public utility projects funded by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants.

"Mrs. Drewry has left an indelible mark on the government of Prince George County with her financial stewardship, and she has served with the highest level of professional standards every day," said Kristen Pudlow, interim county administrator. "Her legacy will continue to be looked upon as a guide for our future goals and direction, ensuring that her strong financial leadership and foundation do not leave with her, but instead endure beyond her years in honor of her devoted public service."

Prince George County has introduced **Namrata Mehta** as its new director of finance. Her first day with the county was July 6.


- Mehta -

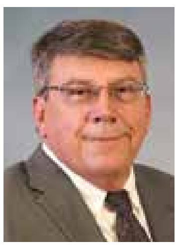
Mehta brings more than 20 years of experience in accounting, budgeting, financial analysis, and government contracting. Before joining Prince George County, Mehta worked in government contracting supporting federal, state, and local operations, including organizations connected to the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard.

"We are excited to welcome Mrs. Mehta

and look forward to honoring her passion for public service and financial stewardship here in Prince George County," said Pudlow. "We know our residents deserve the best levels of service and sincerely appreciate her time and investment in this new chapter of her career."

Mehta earned a Bachelor's in Accounting from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a Master's in Economics from North Carolina State University.

Fredericksburg welcomes Cash as new community planning and building director



- Cash -

The City of Fredericksburg introduced **Ray Cash** as its community planning and building director in late June. Cash has over 22 years of experience in planning, zoning, and community development. He has worked closely with elected officials, staff, residents, and development partners to achieve positive results for communities. Most recently, he was the assistant director of community development and planning in Goochland County.

"Fredericksburg is at an exciting time as we start putting the FXBG Forward Comprehensive Plan into action," said City Manager Tim Baroody in a statement. "We are working on key projects for housing, transportation, economic development, historic preservation, public facilities, and quality of life."

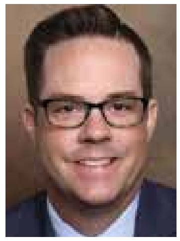
In Goochland, Cash led community development efforts and worked closely with local boards and commissions. Throughout his career, Cash has worked in comprehensive planning, zoning administration, and land use policy.

In his new role, Cash will guide the city's planning and zoning efforts and play a key role in continuing to bring the city's vision of FXBG Forward to life. The plan will focus on expanding housing options, supporting neighborhoods, improving sustainability, improving transportation, and thoughtful redevelopment, while protecting the historic charm that makes Fredericksburg special.

Cash earned a Bachelor's in Political Science from James Madison University, a Master's in Public Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University, and a Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Public Management. He is a Certified Planner through the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and holds several certifications from the Virginia Association of Zoning Officials (VAZO).

Warrenton selects Rex as new town manager

The Warrenton Town Council has chosen **Judson J. "Jud" Rex** as the new town manager. He assumed the role on July 13.



- Rex -

Rex is a local government veteran with over 20 years of experience leading communities in Virginia and Texas. Warrenton Mayor Carter Nevill said, "We are very pleased to welcome Mr. Rex to Warrenton. The town council interviewed five strong finalists, and Mr. Rex rose to the top based on his knowledge, experience, and demeanor. We were impressed with his experience as a town manager in Virginia and as a city manager in Texas, with his familiarity with Warrenton, and his understanding of what makes it unique. He understands the challenges of accommodating appropriate growth while preserving the town's special character and enhancing quality of life in the community. We found Jud to be knowledgeable and engaging and we feel that he will be a good fit for Warrenton."

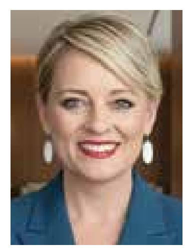
Rex spent the early years of his career as a city planner in Utah and Ohio. In 2009, he was appointed assistant town manager/director of planning for the Town of Strasburg. He was promoted to the position of town manager in 2010 and served almost four years. In Strasburg, Rex led the construction of a new water treatment plant and a $22 million upgrade to the town's wastewater treatment plant. He secured grant funding for infrastructure improvements, including downtown streetscape enhancements, water projects, and trail development connecting downtown to key commercial areas. Rex also guided long-range planning and revitalization efforts focused on strengthening Strasburg's historic downtown through placemaking, historic preservation, and infrastructure improvements.

Rex left Strasburg to become the assistant city manager and then city manager of Denison, TX. During his tenure there, he again led downtown revitalization projects and the development and implementation of the city's first comprehensive five-year Capital Improvement Program.

In 2021, Rex became assistant city manager in Garland, TX, and was appointed city manager in 2023. In Garland, Rex helped to complete a major downtown redevelopment project that revitalized the city's historic downtown core and contributed to a significant increase in sales tax activity. He also oversaw major capital infrastructure programs and strengthened organizational performance through leadership alignment, culture building, and process improvements.

Rex earned a Bachelor's in Planning and Resource Management from Brigham Young University and a Master's in City and Regional Planning from The Ohio State University. He also attended the Senior Executive Institute at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia, is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), and is a Credentialed Manager with the International City/County Management Association.

Nissinen appointed to head Arlington Economic Development



- Nissinen -

Arlington County has named **Anna Nissinen** as chief economic development officer and director of Arlington Economic Development (AED), following a nationwide recruitment and search by an independent executive search firm. In this role, Nissinen will lead the development and execution of the county's long-term economic vision and competitiveness strategy. She began her new role on June 29.

"I am excited to welcome Anna to Arlington," County Manager Mark Schwartz said in a press release. "She brings a combination of global economic development experience in the region, strategic vision, collaborative leadership, and a deep understanding of how innovation economies evolve that will help propel Arlington forward. I am confident Anna will build on the momentum already underway across the county and ensure we are well positioned for the future."

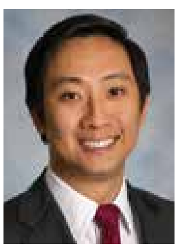
Working alongside county leadership, AED staff, and public and private stakeholders, Nissinen will lead efforts to strengthen Arlington's position as one of the nation's leading urban innovation economies that drives demand for business investment and growth in the real estate market, promotes visitor spending, and fosters a vibrant culture and arts community.

Nissinen currently serves on the executive leadership team of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA), where she leads global business investment, innovation, branding, marketing, and competitiveness strategies for the largest economy in the Commonwealth of Virginia. During her tenure, the organization has supported the creation of more than 35,000 jobs, 5.5 million square feet of commercial space leasing activity, and more than $5 billion in earned media visibility globally.

Nissinen holds a Master's in Strategy from the University of Alabama and a Bachelor's in International Business from Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration (now Aalto University). She is Cornell University-trained in real estate development, finance, and investing, and an award-winning branding and marketing strategist. Nissinen also serves on multiple regional advisory boards and works on collaborative initiatives focused on innovation, workforce development, and long-term economic competitiveness across Northern Virginia and the Greater Washington region.

Zhang named New Kent County attorney

New Kent County has appointed **Benming "Benny" Zhang** as county attorney. Zhang started on June 1.


- Zhang -

In this role, Zhang will serve as chief legal counsel to the Board of Supervisors, the county administrator, county departments, and constitutional officers in matters involving local government operations, policy, and public service to the citizens of New Kent County.

"On behalf of the Board of Supervisors, I'd like to welcome Mr. Zhang to New Kent County," said Board Chairman Ron Stiers in a statement. "We are absolutely thrilled to welcome him to staff as his extensive experience in local government makes him the perfect fit to support our county as we continue to grow."

Prior to joining New Kent County, Zhang practiced law with Kaufman & Canoles, where he maintained a diverse practice spanning local government, corporate, securities, zoning, real estate, and estate planning matters. During his time at the firm, he served as county attorney for King William County and as outside counsel to the New Kent County Board of Zoning Appeals, succeeding the late James E. "Jim" Hudson, Esq. He also advised publicly traded domestic and international companies and underwriters as part of the firm's securities team.

Zhang previously served as an elected member of the Williamsburg City Council from 2016 to 2020, becoming one of the youngest members ever elected to the body and the first Asian American to serve on the council. He continues to serve the Commonwealth in judicial appointments as assistant commissioner of accounts for several Virginia localities and as commissioner in chancery in Virginia's Sixth Judicial Circuit.

Deeply engaged in civic and community leadership throughout Hampton Roads and the Commonwealth, Zhang brings more than 14 years of experience serving in executive and officer positions on numerous nonprofit, banking, educational, and governmental boards and commissions. Earlier this year, he was appointed by the governor and confirmed by the General Assembly to serve an unexpired term on the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority. He currently serves as president of the Williamsburg Bar Association, as a director on TowneBank's Williamsburg Regional Board, and as a trustee of the Williamsburg Community Foundation, among other community leadership roles.

Zhang has received numerous professional and civic honors, including recognition by Best Lawyers in America: Ones to Watch, Virginia Super Lawyers Rising Stars, the inaugural *Virginia Business* Forty Under 40, and *Inside Business* Top 40 Under 40.

Zhang earned his Bachelor of Arts with Honors from William & Mary and his Juris Doctor from William & Mary Law School.

City of Manassas Park selects Sternbeck as assistant city manager


- Sternbeck -

Following a comprehensive executive search and recruitment process, the City of Manassas Park has chosen **Dustin Sternbeck** as its assistant city manager. Sternbeck brings a strong background in local government leadership and operations, with over 20 years of combined experience in the National Capital Region and North Texas.

In this role, Sternbeck will support the city manager in operational coordination of city departments, advancing key strategic initiatives, leading citywide marketing and communications efforts, and continuing to strengthen service delivery across departments.

He most recently served as the first chief communications officer for the City of Denton, TX, where he was a member of the city manager's executive leadership team. In that role, he oversaw all city marketing and communications functions, including strategic messaging, public engagement, and the city's television production operations. He also directed the city's Convention and Visitors Bureau, leading tourism strategy and event coordination efforts that supported economic development.

"Dustin brings a well-rounded perspective and a strong track record of leadership across multiple areas of local government," said City Manager Carl Cole in a statement. "His experience in delivering reputable communications, advancing municipal operations, and contributing to community initiatives will be a valuable asset as we continue to move forward as an organization."

In addition to his municipal experience, Sternbeck currently serves as a national consultant supporting a local government advisory initiative with the Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance. He is also an instructor for the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Emerging Leaders Development Program, where he helps prepare the next generation of public sector professionals.

Earlier in his career, Sternbeck built a strong foundation in public safety, with experience working for fire and rescue, emergency management, and law enforcement agencies.

Sternbeck holds a Bachelor's in Communications from West Virginia University and a Master's in Public Administration from the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University.

Pershing retires from Hopewell Department of Healthy Families

After 29 years of dedicated service to the City of Hopewell, **Debbie Pershing** retired from the Department of Healthy Families on July 1.


- Pershing -

Throughout her distinguished career with the city, Pershing exemplified professionalism, dedication, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to public service. In August 2022, Pershing transitioned from the City Manager's Office to join the Department of Healthy Families, bringing with her years of administrative leadership, institutional knowledge, and a true passion for serving others.

Pershing was a source of strength, encouragement, and inspiration to staff and leadership alike. Known for her patience, wisdom, kindness, and willingness to always help others, she created a welcoming and supportive environment for everyone around her. Her guidance and mentorship have positively impacted not only the daily operations, but also the growth and confidence of many team members.

Pershing's dedication to the "heart work" of supporting children and families has helped strengthen the mission of the department and has touched countless lives throughout the community. Her commitment, reliability, and caring spirit leave behind a lasting legacy that will continue to impact the department for years to come.

Town of West Point appoints Hudgins as town manager


- Hudgins -

On July 1, **Steve Hudgins** began as the town manager of the Town of West Point, following the retirement of longtime Town Manager John Edwards.

Hudgins joined the town in November 2024 as assistant town manager, a position created by town council to prepare for this planned leadership transition. Over the past 20 months, he has worked closely with Edwards, gaining institutional knowledge, strengthening relationships with town staff and community partners, and helping maintain continuity on key initiatives and projects. His preparation and experience ensure the town is well positioned for its next chapter while continuing to deliver effective, responsive local government.

"Steve has been a wonderful addition to the town staff," said Mayor Jack Lawson. "His qualifications, along with his time serving as assistant town manager, made for a seamless transition into his new role. Council felt he was the best person to keep the town moving forward."

Hudgins brings more than a dozen years of local government leadership experience to his new role, along with a background in architecture and a proven record of strategic planning, operational leadership, and public service. Prior to joining the Town of West Point, he served in several leadership positions with King William County, including director of operations, interim county administrator, and deputy county administrator. During his tenure, he oversaw major capital improvement projects, guided significant infrastructure initiatives, and helped lead the county through a period of organizational change while strengthening relationships among local government, schools, and community partners.

Though originally from nearby Mathews County, Hudgins and his family have long considered West Point home. Their connection to the community spans many years, making his appointment both a professional milestone and a personal one.

With Hudgins' appointment now complete, the assistant town manager position will not be filled. The position was created specifically to support the town's planned leadership transition and has successfully fulfilled its intended purpose. As originally envisioned by town council, the role concludes with the completion of the succession plan.

Govan is new deputy Loudoun County administrator

George Govan has been appointed as a deputy Loudoun County administrator, County Administrator Tim Hemstreet announced in late June. Govan was promoted to this position following a nationwide recruitment. His appointment was effective July 2.


- Govan -

Govan had been serving as an acting deputy county administrator since November 2025. His service with Loudoun County began in 2023, when he was selected as the director of the Department of Finance and Procurement.

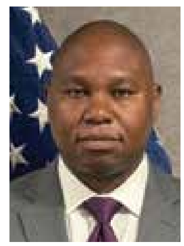
Prior to joining Loudoun County, Govan was chief financial officer of the US AbilityOne Commission. He also served in multiple executive and senior leadership roles at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Transportation Security Administration, and the Railroad Retirement Board. During his career in the United States Air Force, Govan served as a financial management officer in progressively responsible positions until his retirement as a lieutenant colonel in 2011.

"I am very pleased to have George join the Office of the County Administrator's senior leadership team on a permanent basis," said Hemstreet in a press release. "During his time with the county, he has demonstrated exceptional ability and leadership."

As a deputy county administrator, Govan will join other members of the Office of the County Administrator in directing and supervising the day-to-day operations of Loudoun County departments and agencies that are under the direct control of the Board of Supervisors. The office also serves as the Board of Supervisors' official liaison to the constitutional officers, the judiciary, and state and regional agencies.

Govan holds a Bachelor's from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, a Master's from Troy University, and a Doctorate in Education from The George Washington University.

Town of Warsaw names Radden chief of police


- Radden -

Following action by the Warsaw Town Council on July 9, Major **Barry Radden** has been appointed chief of police for the Town of Warsaw.

Radden brings more than 22 years of law enforcement experience, having served in municipal, county, and university policing throughout his distinguished career. During the past year, he served as deputy chief of police for the Warsaw Police Department, where he quickly earned the trust and respect of officers, town leadership, and the community through his professionalism, integrity, and servant leadership.

Radden assumes leadership of a department with tremendous momentum and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Built upon the dedication of officers, the support of town leadership, and the trust of the citizens, the Warsaw Police Department will continue moving forward under his leadership while remaining committed to "Professionalism, Respect, Integrity, Duty, and Excellence."

Outgoing Chief Sean Peterson shared, "One of the greatest responsibilities of any chief of police is preparing the next leader. Over the past year, I have had the privilege of working alongside Barry and watching him quietly earn the trust and respect of our officers, our town leadership, and our community. He has never sought recognition or attention. He simply leads by example, puts people first, and does the right thing for the right reasons. I have complete confidence in his leadership and know the Warsaw Police Department will continue serving this town with honor, compassion, and excellence under his command. Congratulations, Chief. It has been my privilege to serve alongside you."

Purcellville taps Rogers as interim town manager

At its July 14 meeting, the Purcellville City Council appointed **Michael Rogers** as the new interim town manager. He started on August 3, succeeding Anthony Sabio, who will remain employed by the town as a consultant.


- Rogers -

Rogers was recommended after a search conducted by the Robert Bobb Group, a consulting firm. He previously served as the chief operating financial officer for the City of Petersburg, interim town manager in Charlottesville, city administrator for Washington, D.C., and executive director of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. He has also held senior positions in the New York City government, and with the Minority Business Development Agency.

Rogers earned a Master's in Public Policy from the University of Michigan and a Doctorate from Georgetown Law.

City of Petersburg names Harris as director of Public Works and Utilities, Crews as director of Planning and Community Development

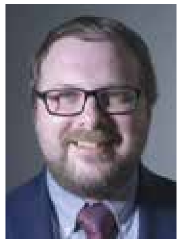
The City of Petersburg has appointed **Richard K. Harris III** as director of Public Works and Utilities.


- Harris -

Harris will provide executive leadership for the city's Public Works and Utilities Department, overseeing Street Operations, Public Utilities, City Engineering, Stormwater Management, Facilities, and Grounds Maintenance. He is responsible for strategic planning, infrastructure improvements, capital project delivery, emergency operations, departmental budgeting, personnel management, and the continued delivery of essential public services to Petersburg residents.

Bringing more than 14 years of municipal experience to the role, Harris joined the city in 2012 as a safety locating officer. Throughout his tenure, he has advanced through several leadership positions, including general supervisor, assistant general manager of Street Operations, interim general manager of Street Operations, interim director of General Services, and interim assistant general manager of Utilities. He has also served in multiple interim director of Public Works and Utilities appointments.

A United States Navy veteran, Harris holds professional certifications in a broad range of disciplines, including public works operations, construction safety, emergency response, utility systems, heavy equipment operations, roadway maintenance, OSHA compliance, traffic control, and water operations.


- Crews -

The City of Petersburg has also appointed **Jared Crews** as director of Planning and Community Development. Crews, who had served as interim director since June 2025, will now take on the role permanently, leading the city's planning, zoning, and community development functions.

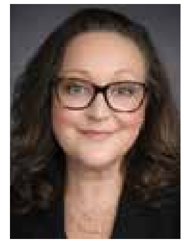
Crews first joined Petersburg in February 2024 as planning manager before being appointed to an interim role. In his new capacity, he will oversee long-range planning, development review, land-use policy, and community development initiatives. He is also leading updates to the city's Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances and Historic District Design Guidelines – efforts central to shaping Petersburg's growth and preservation priorities in the years ahead.

Crews brings a solid foundation in local government planning with experience serving communities throughout Virginia, including the Town of Christiansburg, King George County, and the Town of Culpeper. His expertise spans comprehensive planning, zoning administration, development review, land use policy, and community planning initiatives.

Crews holds a Bachelor's in Political Science from Radford University and a Master's in Public Administration from James Madison University. He earned the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) credential through the American Planning Association and holds the Certified Zoning Administrator (CZA) designation through the Virginia Association of Zoning Officials.

Emporia appoints Turner to lead the city's Family Violence Sexual Assault Unit

Recently, the City of Emporia announced that **Katherine Turner** would be promoted to executive director of Family Violence Sexual Assault Unit (FVSAU). With a distinguished career in counseling and therapy spanning over two decades, Turner brings a wealth of experience and a deep dedication to serving the community.


- Turner -

Prior to her promotion, Turner served as FVSAU's director of programs. In that role, she assisted the executive director with the unit's program implementation and provided oversight of a functional Child Advocacy Center and Sexual and Domestic Violence Program. She worked closely with multiple stakeholders including the court system, public schools, local community, local government and clients.

"Katherine brings an impressive combination of professional experience," said City Manager William E. Johnson III. "Her background in trauma, counseling, and therapy is a tremendous asset to the Family Violence Unit. We are excited that she will continue to lead the efforts of FVSAU in a higher capacity."

Turner has more than a decade of experience supporting executive leadership in both public and private-sector organizations. She holds Master's degrees in Executive Leadership, Professional Counseling, and Human Services. She is also a licensed Professional Counselor, registered Play Therapist, certified Child/Adolescent Trauma Professional, and Approved Clinical Supervisor. Additionally, Turner is a Qualified Expert in Child Abuse and Trauma for Mecklenburg County Courts.

Prince George County's Baldwin announces retirement

Robert "Bob" Baldwin, director of the Prince George County Planning and Zoning Department, retired on August 1. Baldwin led the department since July 2023 and guided key efforts to update the county's comprehensive plan and modernize zoning and subdivision ordinances, while strengthening staff capacity and internal processes to support the county's long-term planning goals.


- Baldwin -

"It has been a privilege to work alongside Bob. His commitment to thoughtful planning and his focus on building a capable team have strengthened our county's ability to manage growth responsibly," said Interim County Administrator Kristen Pudlow.

A career planner with deep roots in Virginia and experience across the country, Baldwin's professional journey took him to a range of communities, from urban centers to rural counties. He began his planning career in Portsmouth and later served as planning director in both Portsmouth and Suffolk. In Portsmouth, he also held a dual role as deputy city manager. His work in Hampton Roads included leading award-winning comprehensive plans, shaping redevelopment efforts along the Portsmouth waterfront, and planning the entertainment district and zoning framework surrounding the city's casino project.

Baldwin also brought his expertise to York County as chief planner and spent time in Jefferson County, CO, where he worked on zoning ordinance rewrites and led an affordable housing task force focused on retaining teachers, police, and firefighters in the community. His career included national and international service, as well; he worked in Naples, Italy, supporting Regional Fire and Emergency Services, and later served as a community planning liaison officer for the U.S. Navy, coordinating between military installations and local governments from Virginia to Maine.

During his tenure in Prince George County, Baldwin focused on building a capable, cohesive team and advancing the department's core work in plan development, code modernization, and compliance with state requirements. He credited the county's dedicated staff as one of its greatest assets and noted pride in the department's progress in establishing clear procedures, checklists, and a professional planning culture.

Tim Graves, formerly the county's principal planner, is now serving as interim director of the Planning and Zoning Department. In this capacity, Graves will oversee daily operations and ensure a smooth transition as the county moves toward finalizing its leadership succession for the department.

Movers and shakers

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

COMMUNITY BUSINESS MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENT

VIRGINIA SILVER MEMBER MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

PMA ARCHITECTURE

Akshar Patel promoted to principal

VML COMMUNITY BUSINESS Member PMA Architecture recently announced that Architect Akshar Patel, AIA, MBA, had been promoted to principal.

Patel joined PMA in 2017 after his graduation from Philadelphia University, where he earned a Bachelor of Architecture and an MBA in Innovation, equipping him with a unique ability to balance creative vision with strategic direction. With a strong passion for thoughtful, human-centered design, Patel approaches each project with a focus on innovation, functionality, and aesthetic clarity. His interests extend beyond architecture into graphic and interior design, allowing him to contribute to a cohesive, detail-oriented sensibility across multiple dimensions of the built environment.

Patel has successfully managed a multitude of projects at PMA, including the award-winning renovations of historic log and wood-framed and modern CMU cabins at four of Virginia's original state parks: Douthat, Fairy Stone, Westmoreland, and First Landing. The projects have spanned eight years and represent approximately $24 million in public investment in income-producing recreation resources at the heart of Virginia's tourism portfolio. As an all-encompassing, large-scale project, Patel's work has been meticulous and attentive to the client's needs and the project's outcomes. He brings this attention to every project.

Patel brings a savvy sense of design, coupled with an approachable leadership style, that fosters a positive workplace culture at PMA and beyond. He joins Jeff Stodghill, AIA, and Katie Stodghill, AIA, NCARB, in the leadership of the firm. We look forward to his vision and leadership in shaping the firm's future.

About PMA Architecture

PMA Architecture, which is celebrating 50 years of planning and architectural services, is located in the idyllic Hilton Village of Newport News. The winner of AIA Virginia's Award of Merit in Historic Preservation (2023) for the Douthat and Fairy Stone State Parks cabin renovations and the HRACRE Award of Merit for Best Renovated or Historic Rehabilitation Project (2026) for the B.J. Roberts Behavioral Health Center, PMA offers exceptional architectural, interior design, and planning services to private, local government, federal, and healthcare clients.

Learn more at **www.pmaarchitecture.com.**

(L-R) Jeff Stodghill, Katie Stodghill, and Akshar Patel.

Remembering Frank Friedman

WE HERE AT VML were deeply saddened by the news of Lexington Mayor Frank Friedman's passing. He was a wonderful, kind member of the VML community who always made any gathering better. We will particularly miss him this fall at our Annual Conference in Norfolk as he was a welcome, animating presence at many of the conferences over the years. In fact, Mayor Friedman and his wife were among the adventurous souls who boarded the boat in Norfolk for the Port Authority tour of the harbor during the 2024 conference even as a rain squall swept across the harbor (the rain didn't last long).

> ***If there's one thing we can all take away from Frank's life, it's this: Live like Frank. Wear the bright jacket. Share the smile. Speak to the stranger. Ask someone how they're really doing. Love your people well. Help those in need. Be kind without expecting anything in return. And never take a single day for granted because life is precious and far too short.***
>
> **- Photographer Brandi Wimer in a Facebook post**

We also remember how Mayor Friedman graciously (and humorously) agreed to be interviewed for the March 2023 issue of *Virginia Town & City* for a feature on manager/council relations. So, in tribute to the wisdom of a true public servant gone too soon, we are pleased to reprint some of Mayor Friedman's observations from that article.

VTC: What are some strategies for dealing with conflict among councilmembers?

Mayor Friedman: I'm Presbyterian and when I served on session, I was introduced to the idea that when an item comes before the council – or the session at the church – there's vigorous debate and lots of engagement. But once the vote is taken, you get behind it and move forward whether you were in support or against. If you spend the next year saying "I didn't vote for that" it doesn't serve the citizens well and certainly doesn't make for a positive working relationship.

VTC: How do you maintain civility during meetings?

Mayor Friedman: I think that we have an obligation to hear people, but what's most important is how we react. We're not going to respond or engage in debate on questions that we are asked. We refer them to the city manager to follow up on technical questions or something of that nature. It takes two to fight, so if somebody comes in spitting and fussing and fuming and just looking for a fight, we can certainly fall into that trap. We have code of ethics as part of our conflict of interest and that talks about civility and operating collaboratively in the best interest of the city, so we can always encourage one another to focus on that goal.

VTC: What do you do if councilmembers are at an impasse?

Mayor Friedman: One word: duel.

Just kidding. We don't duel in Lexington, at least not anymore. These days there are two things that we use to settle disputes among council: time and information. You should ask of any decision that you're making for city council, "how is this in the best interest of all the citizens of our community?" When you can answer that, you'll see a good path forward.

Frank Friedman's Five Points to Follow for Successful Council Meetings

#1 – Always review the material prior to the meeting. It's always so disappointing when somebody opens a packet for the first time sitting on the dais.

#2 – Alert the mayor and/or the staff of any questions or concerns ahead of time. The old "gotchas" in the open session really don't benefit anybody and are only good for political theatrics.

#3 – Engage peers to understand their position. I have found that there are times when councilmembers may not like one another or may not communicate very well, and they end up at odds with each other. We had a circumstance where one councilmember nominated someone for the school board, and she assumed everyone would agree with her choice. It sort of broke her heart when the vote came about and she lost. Plus, we had to vote down someone before we voted up someone, which was awkward for the rest of council as well.

#4 – Use the bathroom before the start of the meeting! You never know how long they're going to last.

#5 – Do not schedule a vacation on a meeting day. You signed up for the job and you know when they are!

City of Waynesboro announces grant programs to support local businesses and tourism

THE CITY OF WAYNESBORO Economic Development and Tourism Department has launched two competitive grant programs designed to strengthen local businesses, enhance commercial corridors, and grow tourism in the city.

Applications are now open for the Building Improvement Grant Program and the Building Opportunities to Support Tourism (BOOST) Grant Program, providing funding for projects that improve Waynesboro's appearance, attract visitors, and support economic growth.

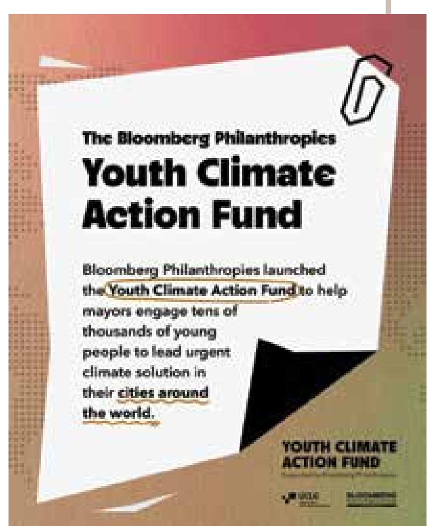
The Building Improvement Grant Program offers financial assistance to property owners, tenants, and prospective tenants in qualifying areas of Historic Downtown Waynesboro and Rockfish Gateway. Eligible businesses can receive reimbursable grants of up to $5,000 for exterior façade improvements such as painting, awnings, and signage, along with up to $4,000 for landscaping improvements including hardscaping, paving, and new plantings.

"The Building Improvement Grant Program is designed to encourage reinvestment in some of Waynesboro's most important commercial areas," said Greg Hitchin, director of Economic Development and Tourism. "When businesses invest in their storefronts, it creates momentum that benefits neighboring businesses, property owners, and the community as a whole."

The BOOST Grant Program provides grants of up to $3,000 to businesses and organizations for the marketing of tourism-related events, festivals, attractions, and initiatives that increase visitation to Waynesboro. Funding is available for eligible projects taking place within the City of Waynesboro during the upcoming grant cycle.

"We're excited to support projects that encourage visitors to discover everything Waynesboro has to offer," said Stephanie Duffy, assistant director of Economic Development and Tourism. "By helping local businesses and organizations expand their marketing reach, we're investing in experiences that strengthen our tourism economy and showcase our community to new audiences."

Hampton chosen for innovative youth climate program



THE CITY OF HAMPTON has been selected by Bloomberg Philanthropies to be a part of the organization's expanded Youth Climate Action Fund.

The program helps participating cities mobilize residents aged 15-24 in creating and developing innovative approaches to environmental challenges facing their communities. Since its inception in 2024, the program has grown to 300 municipalities around the world.

Hampton Mayor Jimmy Gray said, "I am thrilled that Hampton has been chosen for Bloomberg's Youth Climate Action Fund. This is an exciting way to get more of our younger residents involved with our city's ongoing efforts to develop innovative approaches to dealing with climate change and sea level rise. This is an outstanding program that has been very successful at engaging creative young minds in other cities. I look forward to seeing what projects will emerge in Hampton from this new collaboration and from the resources that Bloomberg provides."

The program helps cities open competitions for young residents to present innovative ideas, then aids with funding the development and implementation of the most promising entries. Bloomberg provides $50,000 in funding as well as technical assistance and staffing.

"The Youth Climate Action Fund is helping city halls around the world work alongside hundreds of thousands of young people to take action on city climate challenges and improve their communities," said Patricia E. Harris, CEO of Bloomberg Philanthropies. "They are showing how local government can be a partner on issues youth and residents care deeply about – and they are building trust along the way. We look forward to expanding on these efforts and inspiring a new generation of civic leaders."

Greater Williamsburg Sports and Events Center celebrates grand opening

THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED Greater Williamsburg Sports and Events Center officially opened its doors with a grand opening celebration on June 24, ushering in a new era of sports tourism, community programming, and economic impact for the region.

Located adjacent to the Colonial Williamsburg Regional Visitor Center, the state-of-the-art facility is designed to host a wide range of athletic competitions, tournaments, community programs, corporate trade shows, and special events. The center features versatile hardwood courts, flexible event space, modern amenities for athletes and spectators, and the capacity to accommodate local, regional, and national competitions.

The grand opening event included a ribbon-cutting ceremony with community leaders, guided facility tours, youth sports demonstrations, and family-friendly activities. Residents, business leaders, and visitors experienced firsthand the dynamic space that is poised to become a premier destination for competition and community engagement.

The facility reflects a collaborative partnership among York County, James City County, and the City of Williamsburg, with support from Visit Williamsburg and the Williamsburg Hotel & Motel Association. Together, these efforts enhance sports tourism, strengthen community engagement, and elevate recreational opportunities across the region.

"The Greater Williamsburg Sports and Events Center is the result of true regional collaboration and long-term commitment to our community's future. By working together across jurisdictions, we've built a destination that will elevate opportunity, drive economic growth, and create meaningful experiences for residents and visitors alike," said Scott Stevens, chair of the Historic Triangle Recreational Facilities Authority.

For more information about the Greater Williamsburg Sports and Events Center and upcoming programming, please visit **gwsportsandeventscenter.com**.

Hopewell launches Legacy Business Grant Program

THE CITY OF HOPEWELL Economic Development Authority (EDA) has announced the Legacy Business Grant Program, an initiative designed to support the growth and long-term success of existing businesses within the City of Hopewell.

While the EDA remains committed to attracting new investment and businesses to the community, it also recognizes the vital role that established businesses play in Hopewell's economy. The Legacy Business Grant Program reflects the EDA's ongoing commitment to fostering a strong business environment by investing in the businesses that have helped shape the city.

The Legacy Business Grant Program is a matching grant program that provides financial assistance to eligible businesses that have been operating within the City of Hopewell for at least one year. Grant funds may be used to support business expansion efforts, as well as improvements to business properties and facilities.

City of HOPEWELL VIRGINIA

Staunton Economic Development Department wins award for redesigned business website

THE CITY OF STAUNTON'S Economic Development Department has earned a prestigious international Web Excellence Award for its newly redesigned business portal, **StauntonBusiness.com.** The award recognizes excellence in web development and digital communication, highlighting the city's transition to a modern, strategic digital asset.

The platform overhaul directly fulfills a high-priority initiative in the city council's strategic plan, which explicitly directed staff to complete the city's Economic Development website update to strengthen the city's economic vitality.

"Our strategic plan focuses heavily on supporting our existing businesses, building upon the incredible success of our downtown, and attracting new industries and housing growth," said Deputy City Manager Amanda DiMeo. "This award-winning website directly reflects that vision. By removing barriers for site selectors and local entrepreneurs, we are turning our digital presence into an active driver of economic growth."

Key enhancements include:

Direct Property Integration: Featuring seamless, direct integration with the Virginia Scan property database, allowing prospective investors to search available commercial properties without leaving the site.

Streamlined Pathways: Using intentional, user-centered navigation to guide visitors straight to critical economic data, community assets, and regional advantages.

Promotion of Local Incentives: Offering dedicated resources to easily navigate and leverage the city's recently updated Enterprise Zone incentives program.

Long-Term Sustainability: Eliminating technical barriers, allowing city staff to efficiently update market data and property listings so the site remains accurate and scalable.

In alignment with council directives to measure success, the Economic Development team will actively monitor user engagement, property search data, and lead generation, reporting progress to city council on a regular basis.

To explore the new website and learn more about business opportunities in the Queen City, visit **StauntonBusiness.com.**

Town of Culpeper celebrates National Travel and Tourism Week with new mural at Yowell Meadow Park

THE TOWN OF CULPEPER joined destinations across the country in celebrating National Travel and Tourism Week, recognizing the powerful role travel, tourism, arts, and culture play in strengthening communities and local economies.

As part of this year's celebration, Culpeper Tourism partnered with local artist Kat Tines to create a vibrant new mural at Yowell Meadow Park's skate park, transforming the popular recreational space into a colorful reflection of Culpeper's creativity, energy, and community spirit.

"This mural is a celebration of Culpeper's identity and the people who make this community so special," said Paige Read, director of Culpeper Tourism and Town Economic Development. "Tourism is not only about attracting visitors. It is about investing in the places we share, supporting local artists and businesses, and creating experiences that inspire pride among residents and lasting memories for visitors."

Established in 1983, National Travel and Tourism Week highlights the importance of the travel industry to communities across America. This year's theme, *Postmarked: Essential*, recognizes travel as a foundational driver of economic growth, cultural connection, and community vitality.

Tourism continues to play a major role in Culpeper's economy and quality of life. According to the 2024 Economic Impact Report released by the Virginia Tourism Corporation, direct visitor spending in Culpeper reached $77.9 million in 2024, contributing to a total tourism economic impact of $121.6 million. Tourism also supported 764 local jobs and generated $5.8 million in local and state tax revenue.

Beyond its economic impact, tourism helps sustain the arts, preserve historic character, support small businesses, and create vibrant gathering spaces that benefit both residents and visitors alike. Projects like the mural at Yowell Meadow Park demonstrate how tourism and placemaking initiatives can work together to strengthen community culture and foster civic pride.


GANA LOCKER PHOTOGRAPHY

Blacksburg Transit receives inaugural Hill Spencer Ridership Award

BLACKSBURG TRANSIT (BT) has been recognized by the Virginia Transit Association as a recipient of the inaugural Hill Spencer Ridership Award, recognizing the agency's year-over-year ridership growth among public transit systems across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Named in honor of Robert Hill and Dr. Turner Spencer, the inaugural presidents of the Virginia Public Transit Officials Association and the Virginia Transit Association, respectively, the award recognizes transit agencies achieving the highest percentage increase in ridership based on data from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's Open Data Portal. Awards are presented across four ridership categories, ranging from systems with more than two million annual passenger trips to those with fewer than 100,000 annually. BT was recognized in the two million+ annual passenger trips category.

The recognition follows a record-breaking year for BT, which provided more than 4.7 million passenger trips during fiscal year 2025 – a 26% increase over the previous year and the highest ridership total in the system's history.

"This award reflects the hard work and dedication of our staff, the support of our community partners, and the trust our riders place in us every day," said Brian Booth, director of Blacksburg Transit. "We've worked hard to improve service reliability, efficiency, and the overall rider experience, and it's rewarding to see those efforts recognized."

BT's recent ridership growth has been driven in part by the March 2025 opening of the new Transit Center located on Virginia Tech's campus and the implementation of "The Loops" in August 2024, creating a centralized transit hub on campus and improving operational efficiency across the system. The redesigned network has allowed BT to increase service frequency on many routes without adding additional buses, while also reducing travel times and increasing route connectivity.

Recognized as the fifth-largest transit system in Virginia, BT provides safe, courteous, reliable, accessible, and affordable public transportation to the citizens of Blacksburg, Virginia Tech, and partnering communities within the New River Valley. For more information about Blacksburg Transit, visit **ridebt.org**.

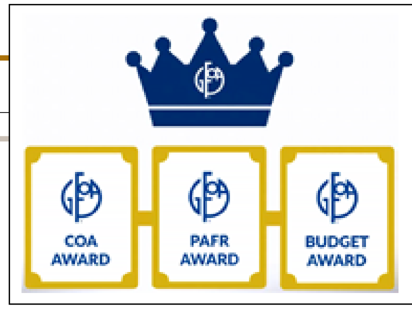
Loudoun County launches stormwater inventory map modernization project

LOUDOUN COUNTY IS UPDATING its inventory of stormwater infrastructure, which will improve the county's ability to accurately assess flood risk, support advanced modeling, and inform future land use and stormwater management decisions.

As part of the stormwater inventory map modernization project, the county will be surveying stormwater structures including storm drain inlets, pipes, and best management practices (BMPs). The project will result in a comprehensive database of the county's stormwater infrastructure, excluding the incorporated towns, which manage their own stormwater systems. The current inventory of more than 145,000 items contains data gaps, inconsistencies, and missing information, limiting accurate flood risk assessment and system modeling.

This project received funding from the Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund Grant Program through the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The process is expected to take three years to complete. A schedule identifying which areas of the county will be surveyed will be posted at **loudoun.gov/StormwaterInventory**.



City of Fairfax receives GFOA Triple Crown Award

THE GOVERNMENT FINANCE Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) has recognized the City of Fairfax as a 2024 Triple Crown Winner. This distinction honors governments that earn all three of GFOA's major awards for a single fiscal year:

- The Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting (ACFR)
- The Popular Annual Financial Reporting Award (PAFR)
- The Distinguished Budget Presentation Award

Fairfax is one of only 441 governments across the United States and Canada to earn the Triple Crown for fiscal year 2024.

"Earning the GFOA Triple Crown adds to the City of Fairfax's longstanding legacy of excellence in financial management, building on decades of consecutive national recognition for our budget and financial reporting. This achievement reflects our staff's ongoing commitment to transparency, sound financial stewardship, and clear communication with our community while meeting the highest professional standards in government finance," said JC Martinez, chief financial officer of Fairfax.

To receive the Triple Crown, a government must meet the high standards of all three award programs, each of which recognizes excellence in producing transparent, accessible, and professionally compliant financial publications.

GFOA advances excellence in government finance by providing best practices, professional development, resources, and research to more than 35,000 members and the communities they serve.

Capital Region Land Conservancy acquires key Mayo's Island parcel for future Richmond park

CAPITAL REGION LAND Conservancy (CRLC) has acquired the last remaining private 0.25-acre parcel on Mayo's Island in Richmond. Moving forward, CRLC intends to work with the City of Richmond to ultimately transfer the property for inclusion in the future Mayo's Island Park, helping create a cohesive and unified public space.

"The acquisition of the final privately-held parcel on Mayo's Island marks a significant step forward for the City of Richmond and our vision for the James River," said Mayor Danny Avula in a statement. "This important milestone is critical to the ongoing effort to transform Mayo's Island into a vibrant public park and riverfront destination. By bringing the entire island under unified ownership, we can advance plans that expand public access, celebrate the river's natural beauty, and create a welcoming space for residents and visitors for generations to come."

In 2024, the City of Richmond acquired approximately 15 acres of Mayo's Island with a vision of transforming the property into a publicly accessible park. CRLC was an instrumental partner in helping advance the project. As a co-holder with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation of a conservation easement on the previously acquired portion of Mayo's Island, CRLC has remained committed to the long-term vision of preserving the entire island as public open space in perpetuity.

"This acquisition represents the culmination of more than five years of negotiations and work to acquire Mayo's Island for a park," said Parker C. Agelasto, CRLC executive director. "While small, this last parcel is important to realizing the full potential of Mayo's Island Park by closing a significant hole in the center of the park and creating future opportunities for the development of the space."

Town of Bowling Green designated as 2026 Main Street America Affiliate

THE TOWN OF BOWLING Green's BGVA Main Street has been designated as a 2026 Affiliate Main Street America program for meeting high performance standards.

Each year, Main Street America and its partners announce the roster of designated programs in recognition of their commitment to creating meaningful improvements in their downtowns through preservation-based economic development and community revitalization using the Main Street Approach™.

"We are proud to recognize BGVA as a 2026 Affiliate Main Street America program for its unwavering commitment to grassroots transformation and the extraordinary abilities of its staff, board of directors, and volunteers to respond to the needs of their community," said Erin Barnes, president and CEO at Main Street America. "BGVA Main Street demonstrates a dedication to investing in the people and places that make a downtown district special and contribute to the collective power of the Main Street movement to build vibrant spaces and durable economies."

BGVA Main Street is one of 453 nationally recognized Affiliate Main Street America organizations and is a part of a network of over 1,600 communities leading positive commercial district transformation efforts throughout the United States.

Main Street America recognizes two tiers of national designation – Accredited and Affiliate. BGVA Main Street's performance was evaluated through assessments conducted by the organization's personnel and board of directors in partnership with Main Street America to identify local programs that meet rigorous national community evaluation standards.

To qualify for Affiliate status – Main Street America's second designation tier – communities must demonstrate a strong commitment to the Main Street model and dedication to achieving outcomes in six areas: broad-based community commitment to revitalization; inclusive leadership and organizational capacity; diversified funding and sustainable program operations; strategy-driven programming; preservation-based economic development; and demonstrated impact and results.

In 2025, Main Street America's programs generated $9.4 billion in local reinvestment, welcomed 6,936 net new businesses, facilitated the creation of 36,549 net new jobs, rehabilitated 10,623 historic buildings, and leveraged 1.8 million volunteer hours. On average, for every dollar a Main Street program spent on operations, $23.13 was reinvested in its downtown district.

In partnership with BGVA Main Street, the Town of Bowling Green has made numerous strides to promote the town's business community, historical preservation, and tourism attractions.

"This is an exciting time for the Town of Bowling Green," commented Town Manager India Adams-Jacobs. "The town's partnership with BGVA Main Street has energized our outreach efforts in so many successful ways. We greatly appreciate the volunteers who have spent endless hours to promote the town and enhance the possibilities for our business community and the citizens at large."

Grant funds to boost Fresh Food Access Initiative in Emporia

A NEW GRANT PROGRAM aims to improve fresh food access for select Emporia-area residents.

The Greensville Memorial Foundation Grant Award will fund 200 vouchers, which may be redeemed at the Emporia/Greensville Farmers Market for fresh fruits and vegetables. This initiative will expand access to nutritious food for seniors and low- to moderate-income households while supporting local farmers and small businesses.

This funding builds upon the city's partnership with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) through the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Because DARS vouchers are limited and distributed on a first-come, first-served basis, this grant will help ensure that additional residents have access to fresh, locally grown produce.

The Fresh Food Access Initiative aligns with the city's ongoing efforts to address food insecurity, improve health outcomes, and strengthen the local food system.

City of Fredericksburg opens new mobile stage at Riverfront Park

THE CITY OF FREDERICKSBURG held a ribbon-cutting on June 23 to celebrate the new mobile stage at Riverfront Park, enhancing one of the city's most prominent public spaces along the Rappahannock River.

Riverfront Park has long served as a central gathering place for residents and visitors, with a history rooted in the city's connection to the riverfront and ongoing efforts to enhance public access, recreation, and community engagement. The addition of the mobile stage builds on that legacy by expanding opportunities for performances, public events, and cultural programming in the park.

The mobile stage was purchased from Century Industries for $289,489. In 2022, the City of Fredericksburg was awarded a federal grant of up to $1.2 million from the U.S. Department of Economic Development Administration to support performance stage infrastructure and related improvements at Riverfront Park. The grant requires a 20% local match toward eligible project costs.

Following the grant award, the city issued an Invitation for Bids for a tensile shade-covered stage structure. Only one bid was received, totaling approximately $2.3 million. Alternative options were then evaluated, including a mobile stage and a truck to pull the stage estimated at approximately $400,000 and a bandshell-style structure with a concrete stage estimated at approximately $1 million.

At a February 2024 city council meeting, staff recommended the mobile stage option. This approach was selected in part because it provides flexibility for other uses of Riverfront Park while offering expanded event capabilities at a lower cost compared to fixed-stage alternatives.

The mobile stage includes a three-year manufacturer's warranty and is expected to have a useful lifespan of approximately 15-25 years, depending on usage. When fully deployed, the stage provides a 24' x 36' performance area and includes a 9' x 16' movie screen, an enclosed 8,000-watt generator allowing for use in locations without readily available power, and upgraded electrical, lighting, and sound packages. Additional features include a 48-inch wheelchair lift and configurable add-ons designed to support a variety of event needs from small community performances to larger public gatherings.

As Fredericksburg continues to advance its trail network and pedestrian connectivity, Riverfront Park is expected to serve as a central hub for activity, with future links envisioned between Motts Run Reservoir and Dixon Park, further strengthening recreational access throughout the city. The addition of the mobile stage supports the city's continued efforts to activate Riverfront Park as a vibrant destination for arts, culture, and community events in downtown Fredericksburg.

Riverfront Park opened in May 2022 as the city's first Smart Park, featuring free Wi-Fi, solar-powered lighting, and security cameras. The park includes open green space, a children's play area, and is located near downtown businesses, parking, and the Visitor Center.

For more information about Riverfront Park, visit: **fredericksburgva.gov/982/History-of-Riverfront-Park**.

Suffolk Transit awarded for marketing excellence and ridership growth

SUFFOLK TRANSIT HAS BEEN recognized with two statewide awards from the Virginia Transit Association, highlighting recent success in promoting public transportation and increasing ridership.

At the Virginia Transit Association Annual Conference, Suffolk Transit received the Outstanding Public Transit Marketing Award – Small Agency for its "A Good Time to Ride" campaign. The award recognizes excellence in marketing efforts that increase awareness and encourage the use of public transit services.

Suffolk Transit also received the inaugural Hill Spencer Ridership Award – Small Group, which celebrates transit agencies that achieve significant ridership growth. Suffolk Transit earned the honor after recording a 15.2% increase in ridership from 2024 to 2025.

"It is great to be recognized by the Virginia Transit Association for our ridership growth and 'A Good Time to Ride' marketing campaign. As a small rural agency, this recognition is especially meaningful," said Maria Ptakowski, transit manager for the City of Suffolk Public Works. "We're excited to see this growth and our community embracing Suffolk Transit. As we build more regional connections, we expect continued ridership growth and stronger connections for our community."

Suffolk Transit's recent growth has also included expanding regional service with two new routes: the Peanut Express to Windsor and the Seaport Express to Portsmouth. These additions strengthen connections across the region and improve access to jobs, services, and key destinations.

For more information about Suffolk Transit, visit **suffolk-transit.org.**

Mount Jackson unveils new LOVE sign at Mayor's Park

THE TOWN OF MOUNT JACKSON has installed a brand-new LOVE sign at the north end of Mayor's Park. More than just a sign, it's a story of collaboration that has been years in the making.

The journey began in 2024 as a shared vision between the town and the late Todd Lynn, beloved former principal of Triplett Tech. Lynn was a champion for technical education and community partnership; this sign stands as a vibrant tribute to his commitment to connecting students with meaningful local projects.

From a pool of community submissions, Kerry Higdon's design was chosen to represent Mount Jackson. Higdon, a local artist and Shenandoah County resident, designed each letter to be a timeless stage for photos that capture the unique character of the town. Bringing that vision to life required a village of local talent, starting with the incredible time and energy of Triplett Tech instructors and students.

The L, representing history and patriotism, was built by the Carpentry Department under instructor Philip Crisman. It is constructed from used railroad ties, a nod to Mount Jackson's historic commercial and transportation importance. Some ties even feature scorch marks as a symbolic tribute to the resilient history of the Meems Bottom Covered Bridge. The front-facing edge is lined with gold metal stars inspired by the Veteran's Memorial downtown.

The O, representing growth and togetherness, is a true feat of industrial art. John Grimm (Auto Body Department) and his students welded and weaved over 200 feet of rebar to create a one-of-a-kind basket. This design honors the handicraft feel of the community and includes a functional interior for seasonal decorations, from springtime flowers to autumn pumpkins, reflecting the vibrant gardens of the town proper.

The V represents natural beauty. Dagan Stephens (Electrical Department) expertly crafted the structure of the letter, while Jessica Dellinger with VECCA added artistic soul with custom paintwork. The design features two intertwining branches laden with apples, including a whimsical worm and a trailing vine, paying homage to the town's storied past in the apple industry and local orchards.

The E represents community and hospitality. The Electrical Department also created this letter, with nods to the quintessential Southern porch. Complete with steel pickets, a detailed railing, and a light post that works, this letter symbolizes the warmth, pride, and invitation found in the historic and modern porches that line the streets of Mount Jackson.

The Town of Mount Jackson Public Works managed the installation and site preparation, ensuring this landmark is ready to welcome visitors for years to come.

"This project is the perfect centerpiece for our 200th anniversary," said Olivia Hilton, town manager. "It's a physical representation of the spirit of Mount Jackson. Seeing our students and staff pour their talents into the heart of downtown is truly moving. We are a town with deep roots, and as this sign shows, a whole lot of LOVE."

Abrams Creek restoration project underway in Winchester

WORK IS NOW UNDERWAY along Abrams Creek in Winchester as part of a major environmental and infrastructure improvement project in the Christianson Familyland area of Jim Barnett Park. The project focuses on restoring the natural stream channel, stabilizing eroding banks, and improving how stormwater flows into the creek. Over time, runoff from surrounding development has contributed to erosion, pollution, and declining water quality in Abrams Creek. These are all issues the city is now working to correct through a long-term restoration effort.

In addition to reshaping the creek and upgrading stormwater infrastructure, crews will remove invasive plant species that have grown along the stream corridor. These non-native plants can crowd out beneficial vegetation and worsen erosion. In their place, the city will plant only native species, which are better suited to the local environment and help stabilize soil, filter pollutants, and support wildlife. The project is also expected to reduce localized flooding risks by slowing and better managing stormwater during heavy rain events. Restoring a more natural, meandering stream will improve both the ecological health of the creek and the resilience of the surrounding parkland.

Budget review for local governments

By VML Staff

AS OF JUNE 29, 2026, the Commonwealth has a budget for the 2026-28 biennium! It was a long time coming, but it's done, with one day to spare.

Just a week earlier, the Commonwealth's legislative budget writers were able to wrap up their fiscal homework, admittedly a few months late. Wanting to have her say and final stamp on the budget, the Governor requested 14 amendments – nine language-only changes and five that recommended $63 million in additional funding – that were ultimately approved at the second Reconvened Session of the 2026 Session. Governor Spanberger then signed her name to the new biennial budget.

In this article, VML staff have highlighted some of the important fiscal policy issues we followed during the 2026 Session and others that have implications for local governments.

Topic index

Budget Overview

The final budget deal signed on Monday, June 29 was no doubt greased by $1.5 billion in additional general fund resources from a revised economic forecast issued in early June, $1.2 billion from a new Data Center Electricity Consumption tax, and more than $900 million from the rejection of most of former Governor Youngkin's proposed tax policy changes.

Data centers take center stage

The dispute about the appropriate level of taxation on data centers was clearly the fiscal policy issue that led to the protracted budget delay. Simply put, the Senate budget proposed to sunset the sales and use tax on data center equipment at the end of 2026, instead of 2035. When it was initially enacted, the exemption was projected to cost the general fund several million dollars each year, but the tax incentive for data centers has grown to nearly $2.0 billion annually.

The House's budget writers and Governor Spanberger acknowledged the foregone revenue but expressed concerns that sunsetting the exemption for a growing industry early could jeopardize the Commonwealth's status as the data center capital of the world.

Ultimately, all parties agreed to a data center consumption tax that is expected to generate no more than $600 million each year with any excess being returned to the data centers, but it isn't clear that this is the last word. In fact, the final budget directs a joint subcommittee to examine issues around the current tax exemption and other ancillary impacts of data centers as described below. Findings from that group may inform future policy changes.

Joint Subcommittee on Tax Policy Study on Data Centers (Item 1 #7c) – Requires the General Assembly's Joint Subcommittee on Tax Policy to study the data center sales and use tax exemption and other data center impacts, including:

- Review Virginia's data center sales and use tax exemption.
- Examine the impact of the existing and any potential future exemption or incentives.
- Examine approaches taken in other states related to the data center industry including tax preferences, incentives, environmental standards and mitigation, moratoriums on incentives or location of new facilities, and sustainable development requirements.
- Review methods related to data center investment in non-urbanized areas of the Commonwealth.
- Review the recommendations and options in the 2024 JLARC study on Data Centers in Virginia.
- Review the estimated direct and indirect economic benefits of data center investment in Virginia.
- Review the direct or indirect impacts on the environment and quality of life related to data center location and siting.
- Evaluate the impact of artificial intelligence on employment.
- Review the State Corporation Commission reported data on electric service agreements, water usage, permitted generators.
- Recommend mechanisms to provide direct revenue to the state from the data center industry.

A final report from the joint subcommittee is due to the General Assembly by December 15, 2026.

A sample of provisions related to data centers are outlined below.

Data Center Cooling Water Scarcity Area Regulations (Item 366 #7c) – Authorizes the Department of Environmental Quality to establish criteria for determining Cooling Water Scarcity Areas related to data centers. DEQ is also required to conduct a study and provide a plan on the retrofitting of existing data centers in the Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Area to use air cooling systems, 100 percent recycled water and/or stormwater for cooling, or use a closed loop system. That report is due by October 15, 2026.

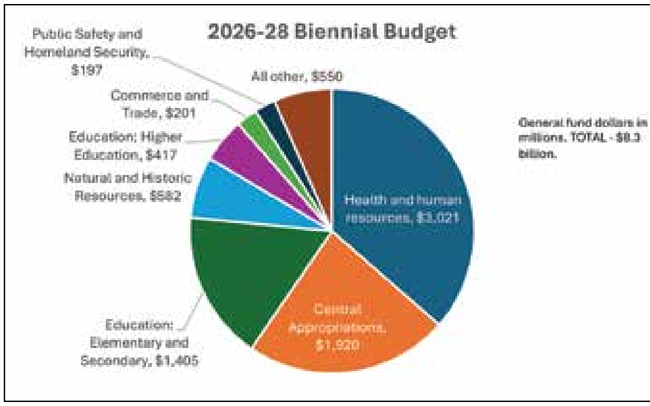
Data Center Noise Regulations (Item 367 #2c) – Authorizes the Department of Environment Quality to adopt and enforce regulations for noise at data centers to be effective no later than December 31, 2029. The regulations are required to:

- Be based on the Department's determination of the lowest achievable noise from a data center.
- Establish the lowest achievable noise for a data center.
- Provide that on or after January 1, 2030, any data center that violates such regulations shall be subject to a civil penalty of up to $32,500 per day of violation.
- Authorize and provide for enforcement by the Department or the locality in which the data center is located.

Budget winners

In total, the approved general fund operating budget sums to $73.6 billion for the 2026-28 biennium, including $8.3 billion in new general fund commitments. The approved budget also adds $2.7 billion in cash for capital projects.

The big budget winners of 2026 are not new to the limelight. More than $3.0 billion was allocated to health and human resources (HHR) programs, $1.9 billion to central appropriations, and $1.4 billion for elementary and secondary education. Those three categories accounted for more than three-quarters of new general fund spending in the 2026-28 biennial budget as depicted below – HHR (36 percent), central appropriations (23 percent), and K-12 education (17 percent).



Most of the new general fund commitments in health and human resources are for required spending in Medicaid, primarily health and long-term care services for the elderly and disabled but also pregnant women and children. None of these new dollars are used for the Medicaid expansion population which receives no general fund support.

Central appropriations accounted for the second largest portion of new state spending in the final Conference Agreement. The introduced budget included 2.0 percent annual salary increases for state employees and state-supported local employees. The General Assembly upped the increase to 3.5 percent each year. In total, compensation costs for these salary increases totaled $714 million. The budget agreement also included several large infusions of cash including:

- $489 million for state agency health insurance premiums.
- $350 million for unanticipated increase in Medicaid spending.
- $225 million to address the uncertainty of federal funding.
- $100 million for environmental impact monitoring.

Finally, elementary and secondary or K-12 education received large allocations of general funds to provide 4.0 percent salary increases in each year of the biennium. The cost of these increases is approximately $771 million. Funding for special education was augmented by $148 million in new allocations.

Last year, the House and Senate established interim work groups to assess the impact of federal budget actions on the Commonwealth, meeting in various communities around the Old Dominion. The Conference Agreement includes roughly $624 million over the biennium to do so (*see table below*).

Response to Federal Budget and Policy Changes
(General fund dollars in millions)

	FY 2027	FY 2028	Biennium
Federal Medicaid contingency fund	$225.0	-	$225.0
State premium assistance program	$150.0	-	$150.0
Fund the state share of SNAP	-	$135.0	$135.0
Replace federal SNAP administrative costs*	$43.0	$57.4	$100.4
Backfill reductions to the Ryan White HIV/AIDS program	$6.6	$6.6	$13.2
TOTAL	**$424.6**	**$199.0**	**$623.6**

**Included in Governor's introduced budget*

As a reminder, most of the federal budget decisions related to ongoing Medicaid funding have not been programmed into the state budget; the impact of those decisions will need to be addressed in the coming years.

VML Contact: Joe Flores, jflores@vml.org

Legislative

JLARC: Review Aid to Localities (Item 25 #2c) – Directs the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to include an analysis of state spending for aid to localities, at least every five years, as part of its State Spending report. VML staff will remind JLARC that the Commonwealth also requires numerous unfunded mandates that reduce the impact of state aid to localities.

JLARC: Review Teacher Compensation (Item 25 #3c) – Requires JLARC to periodically review comprehensive teacher compensation in Virginia, including benefits.

VML Contact: Joe Flores, jflores@vml.org

Finance

Property Tax Exemptions Workgroup (Item 260 #1c) – Requires the Department of Taxation to convene a work group to review the cost of mandatory property tax exemptions for disabled veterans and their spouses. The workgroup is required to:

- Review and collect data on the cost of the exemption and implications to localities;
- Detail changes to the exemption and the impact of those changes to localities;
- Evaluate legislation previously introduced by the General Assembly on these exemptions; and,
- Provide any recommendations to the General Assembly on these mandatory property tax exemptions.

A report of the workgroup's findings and recommendations is required to be submitted to the Chairs of House Finance, House Appropriations, and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees by November 15, 2026.

VML Contact: Joe Flores, jflores@vml.org

Central Appropriations

State-Supported Locals Data Collection (Item 469 #2c) – This language-only amendment directs the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) to collect full-time salary data and employee counts of state-supported local employees each year. State-supported local employees are defined as:

- Locally elected constitutional officers.
- General Registrars and members of local electoral boards.
- Full-time employees of locally elected constitutional officers.
- Full-time employees of:
  - Community Services Boards
  - Centers for Independent Living
  - Secure detention centers supported by Juvenile Block Grants
  - Juvenile delinquency prevention and local court service units
  - Local social services boards
  - Local pretrial services act and Comprehensive Community Corrections Act employees
  - Local health departments where a memorandum of understanding exists with the Virginia Department of Health

The implementation of salary increases and bonuses for state-supported local employees tends to be cumbersome and imprecise, creating confusion and morale issues at the local level. This language is designed to improve upon that process.

State Employee and State-Supported Locals Pay Raise (Item 469 #7c) – Includes $96.0 million in FY 2027 and $215.0 million in FY 2028 to provide 3.5 percent increases each year of the biennium for state employees and state-supported local employees. The local employee salary increase includes:

- Locally elected constitutional officers.
- General Registrars and members of local electoral boards.
- Full-time employees of locally elected constitutional officers.
- Full-time employees of Community Services Boards, Centers for Independent Living, secure detention centers supported by Juvenile Block Grants, juvenile delinquency prevention and local court service units, local social services boards, local pretrial services act and Comprehensive Community Corrections Act employees, and local health departments where a memorandum of understanding exists with the Virginia Department of Health.

VML Contact: Joe Flores, jflores@vml.org

Schools

One percent local option sales tax for school construction (Item 4-14 #2c) – The final version of the budget included one of VML's top priorities for the last several years: statewide authority for all counties and cities to impose a sales and use tax dedicated solely for school construction. Although nuances added to the language during the legislative process mean that the final product is not entirely what VML sought, this is still a big win for local governments.

All counties and cities are now authorized to impose a sales and use tax of up to one percent if approved by voter referendum and ordinance dedicated solely to capital projects or major renovations of public schools.

This authority is permissive; no locality is required to use this authority. To have this authority placed on the November 3, 2026, ballot, all actions necessary to hold a referendum must be completed 81 days prior to November 3 – if your local government attorney opines that early voting does not have to be included in the calculation.

Following the passage of the referendum, an ordinance must be approved, which in turn will become effective on the first day of the month, a minimum of 120 days after adoption. Please note, the timing of the referendum comes from the interpretation by the Commissioner of Elections and the Spanberger Administration.

Key components of this legislation mean that this tax:

- Can only be used for new capital projects or major renovations.
- Cannot be used for previous debts but can be used for future debts related to bonded projects.
- Expires 20 years after the date of the resolution.
- Is not granted as standalone referendum authority for the two towns which operate their own school divisions.

The budget also allows members of Planning District Eight (PD8) in Northern Virginia to use this authority for transportation funding related to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), as well as school construction. Any locality in PD8 wishing to use this authority for both transportation and school construction can do so, however the percentage must not exceed a total of one percent.

For questions related to the authority to impose a sales and use tax for school construction, please speak with your local attorney. VML can also serve as a resource for additional questions.

VML Contact: Josette Bulova, jbulova@vml.org

Cannabis

Cannabis retail marketplace established (Item 4-14 - Enactment 5) – Establishes a retail cannabis marketplace in Virginia. Cannabis retail sales were included in the biennial budget, which creates a state-regulated cannabis retail market with sales beginning July 1, 2027. Provisions include new local taxation on cannabis retail sales, continuation of local land use authority for cannabis retailers, expansion of local ordinance authority to prohibit the public consumption of cannabis or sharing of cannabis on public school property, and authorization for localities to adopt ordinances regulating the hours of operation for cannabis retailers. However, under the legislation localities will not be able to ban retail cannabis operations.

This legislation includes two authorities that have been part of VML's legislative program since 2021: local taxation authority on cannabis retail sales and retaining local land use authority. A third priority – local authority to hold a referendum on retail cannabis sales – was not included in this legislation.

Localities are prohibited under the biennial budget from adopting any ordinances that prohibit the "cultivation, processing, possession, sale, distribution, handling, transportation, consumption, use, advertising or dispensing of marijuana or marijuana products." However, a locality may adopt ordinances that:

- Regulate the hours of operation for marijuana retail to sell retail marijuana.
- Prohibit the public consumption or sharing of marijuana products as those acts are described in §4.1-1108.
- Prohibit the possession or consumption of marijuana products on the grounds of public elementary or secondary during or after school hours as those acts are described in §4.1-1109.

Localities are required to levy a local tax rate on cannabis retail sales of between 1-3.5 percent. Furthermore, localities retain land use authority over cannabis retailers and retailers must demonstrate during the application process for licensure from the Cannabis Control Authority that their premises are in accordance with local land-use requirements.

The language in the biennial budget establishes a maximum of 350 retail licenses with licenses to be distributed evenly among all areas of the Commonwealth (taking into account population densities) with retail stores limited to a maximum square footage of 2,500 square feet.

The Cannabis Control Authority must provide notice to localities through their manager, administrator or other designee with a 30-day window for the locality to provide any objections upon preliminary approval for a cannabis license. The Cannabis Control Authority may deny licensing if the applicant does not meet local land-use and zoning laws and may revoke licenses if a business does not conform to local requirements regarding sanitation, health, construction, or equipment or if the business is delinquent by more than 90 days in payment of any local taxes, penalties or interest owed to the locality.

Under the budget language the Cannabis Control Authority will develop regulations for licenses ranging from cultivators and processors to retailers and other regulated activities during the second half of 2026 with licenses issued in early 2027.

VML Contact: Mitchell Smiley, msmiley@vml.org

Legislative Branch – Commission on Youth

Child advocacy center workgroup (Item 21#3c) – Directs the Commission on Youth to work with stakeholders (including VML) to develop recommendations to "incentivize" local governments to draw down additional funding to support Child Advocacy Centers through partnership agreements to include allocation of space, and administrative or other support. Recommendations will also include potential access to funding through various court fees or other revenue options. The report is due November 1, 2026. Note: These centers currently receive state general fund support.

VML Contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Judicial Branch – Indigent Defense Commission

Public defender support staff (Item 40#2c) – Provides $3.71 million and 45 positions each year of the biennium as additional support staff (e.g., paralegals, investigators, legal assistants) in public defender offices in line with 2023 JLARC recommendations.

VML Contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Administration – Compensation Board

Redirect deputy sheriff funding (Item 60#2c) – Removes $3.90 million each year from the introduced budget that would increase the minimum number of deputy sheriffs in each office from five to 10.

Additional funds for assistant Commonwealth Attorney positions (Item 64#1c) – Restores state support for 50 assistant Commonwealth's Attorneys and 15 support staff positions previously removed due to budget reductions.

Jail reporting requirements (Item 67#3c) – Authorizes the Compensation Board to withhold state reimbursements to local and regional jails for noncompliance with Board of Local and Regional Jail reporting requirements regarding deaths in custody. Funding will be released when reports are made in the same fiscal year that funds were withheld.

VML Contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Commerce and Trade – Department of Housing and Community Development

Housing trust fund workgroup (Item 102#5c) – Directs the Department of Housing and Community Development to convene a workgroup to examine current uses of the Virginia Housing Trust Fund and provide recommendations on how to best optimize Fund resources to address housing affordability, supply issues, and homelessness. Provides an additional $40.0 million in the first year for deposit into the Fund, bringing total support to $215 million. Also provides $20 million in the first year for a two-year pilot program to provide loan origination and serving activities for mixed income housing.

Support homelessness services (Item 102#9c) – Adds $14.0 million in the first year for homelessness services; $7.0 million for rapid rehousing efforts and continuum of care lead agencies; the other $7.0 million is for the City of Charlottesville for development of transitional housing and training for individuals/families experiencing homelessness.

Restore local income energy efficiency program fund interest (Item 102#14c) – Removes language from the introduced budget that would divert funding from this program to the Department of Emergency Management.

VML Contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Department of Education – Children's Services Act

Education transition services guidance (Item 118#1c) – Directs the Department of Education to issue guidance on how localities can use authority to transition students back to public schools from private day placements and recommend how the Students with Intensive Support Needs funding and application process could be more flexible and useful for keeping students at risk of private placement in their public school setting.

Expand Support for students with intensive support needs application (SISNA) (Item 125#1c) – Provides $10.0 million the first year to serve additional special education students in public school settings by expanding the disability categories eligible for tuition reimbursement through the Department's Student with Intensive Support Needs Application (SISNA) program, with a goal to reduce the number of students referred to CSA-funded private day school programs. Also updates the name of the program from Special Education Regional Tuition to SISNA and establishes annual reporting for this program. A companion amendment in the Office of Children's Services establishes a similar report.

VML Contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Health and Human Resources

Secretary's Office

Coordinate work opportunities for Medicaid enrollees (Item 270#1c) – Requires the Secretary, along with the Secretary of Labor, to coordinate efforts with community providers to connect Medicaid expansion applicants/enrollees with work opportunities. Federal rules beginning January 1, 2027, will require these enrollees to undergo eligibility redetermination every six months (currently 12 months) and be subject to work requirements.

Task force on SNAP error rates and community engagement (Item 270#2c) – Requires the Secretary of HHR to establish a task force to address the SNAP error rate and implementation of community engagement requirements in the Medicaid program.

Children's Services Act

Private day special education program rate language (Item 271#1c) – Clarifies that the state's cap on reimbursements to localities for private day special educational services applies to the per student/per diem tuition rate. The base rate is the maximum allowable amount for FY2026 and can increase 2.5 percent from the base amount year over year. Note: If a facility increases the per diem tuition rate above the 2.5 percent, local governments will be on the hook to pay the additional amount unless they can get the provider to comply.

Private special education placement reporting (Item 272#2c) – Requires the Office of Children's Services to produce an annual report (due December 1 each year) on CSA-funded private day special education placements to include total and per pupil local and state costs, number of students served, and local match rate amounts. Requires OCS to work with Department of Education to ensure data is comparable to and aligned with the annual report on Students with Intensive Supports Needs Application (SISNA) referenced in Item 125.

Department of Health

Opioid response strategic plan (Item 278#2c) – Provides funding to the Department each year of the biennium ($105,115) from the Commonwealth Opioid Abatement and Remediation Fund to develop a strategic plan for opioid response to reduce overdose and overdose death rates.

Fund core public health services (Item 278#3c) – Provides general fund ($14.94 m in FY27; $16.91 m in FY28) and non-general funds ($578,702 each year) to support and maintain core public health services, including epidemiological response capacity/preparedness, and public health systems including IT and cybersecurity. Also includes funding for medical facility inspectors and funding for eight community health services positions.

Backfill reductions to Ryan White HIV/AIDS program (Item 278#4c) – Provides $6.60 million each year to backfill anticipated loss of federal funds for this program. Will restore medical and supportive services and prevent disruptions in lifesaving medications for Virginians living with HIV.

Fund free clinics (Item 282#2c) – Provides $5.0 million each year to support free clinics' delivery of medical, dental, vision, speech, hearing, and behavioral healthcare services and prescription medications and substance use disorder treatment.

Drinking water grants (Item 283#1c) – Provides $50.0 million in the first year for the Virginia Department of Health to provide one-time grants to localities to upgrade or replace drinking water infrastructure. A local match of 25 percent is required. Original offers to Town of Bowling Green and counties of Greene and Fauquier will be honored. For new grants, prior year applications will be considered, and priority consideration will be given to the towns of Orange, Jarratt, and Blackstone and County of Fairfax. Funding will also be given to City of Richmond for capital improvements to its water treatment plan.

Medical Assistance Services

Behavioral health redesign (Item 291#9c) – Delays implementation until July 1, 2027.

Medicaid sustainability work group (Item 295#7c) – Directs DMAS to convene a work group to analyze Medicaid expenditure trends and identify strategies to moderate the rate of spending growth while preserving access to quality care in compliance with the law. Report is due November 1, 2027.

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services

Recovery residences oversight (Item 299#1c) – Provides funding and one position for DBHDS to adopt regulations for recovery residences and monitor credentialing agencies pursuant to the Code of Virginia (Chapter 1079 and 1000, 2026 Acts of Assembly).

Crisis facilities incentives for no-barrier model (Item 299#3c) – Directs DBHDS to identify strategies to serve more individuals subject to emergency custody/temporary detention orders in crisis facilities with incentives for such centers/units to adopt a no-barrier approach for all individuals and to offer rapid drop-off option for law enforcement.

Study of local match for CSBs (Item 299#4c) – Directs DBHDS to examine alternatives to the current local match requirement for community services board/ behavioral health commissions (CSBs & BHCs). The report is due Nov. 1, 2027.

Statewide implementation of Marcus Alert (Item 301#1c) – Adds $3.60 million in the first year and $7.80 million in the second year to support statewide implementation of this program that emphasizes a behavioral health or co-response, rather than solely public safety, response to behavioral health crises.

STEP-VA reporting (Item 301#5c) – Directs DBHDS to collect detailed annual expenditure and service data from CSBs/BHAs on STEP-VA services and to assess whether flexibility may be needed to reallocate funds among STEP services to match community needs.

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

Community brain injury services (Item 318#1c) – Provides $750,000 each year for community services for individuals with brain injuries to address waiting lists for services and meet existing critical service needs.

Department of Social Services

Child welfare workforce support (Item 328#1c) – Provides $300,000 each year and one position for a statewide program to provide better support for the well-being of local social services workers and improve workforce retention.

Payment error rate vendor (Item 328#2c) – Provides $1.0 million GF/NGF each year for the Department to contract with a vendor to assist in efforts to decrease the SNAP error rate.

Employment supports (Item 328#3c) – Provides $1.5 million each year to help individuals receiving SNAP or Medicaid and subject to new federal work requirements to make connections to qualifying employment or volunteer activities and resources.

State share of SNAP benefit allotments (Item 329#1c) – Provides $135.0 million in the second year for potential use as a state match for a federal SNAP benefits cost share.

SNAP error rate data by locality (Item 330#2c) – Requires the Department to establish and maintain a quality control methodology for determining each local social services department's payment error rate and publish those rates along with the state error rate by June 30 each year.

Funding expanded child abuse reporting requirements (Item 330#3c) – Provides $258,516 in the first year and $323,165 in the second year to address increased local workloads associated with legislation (HB 1414) that expands the number of mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect and will likely increase reports made to local departments.

Local social services funding (Item 330#4c) – Requires the Department to report on allocation and use of state and federal funds distributed to local departments of social services, including the funding received and federal grant source; programs and services supported by the funding; and the amount of local funds required and contributed for applicable matching requirements. Report is due September 1 each year.

Centralized CPS intake system (Item 333#2c) – Provides $2.45 million in the second year to support initial implementation costs of creating a centralized child protective services intake system pursuant to Chapter 900, 2026 Acts of Assembly. Also provides $1.0 million each year to support a third-party contract to conduct a comprehensive review of local screening processes for CPS complaints.

Child advocacy centers (Item 335#1c) – Provides $1.5 million each year from TANF balances to increase funding for these centers.

VML Contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Public Safety and Homeland Security

Department of Criminal Justice Services

Jail mental health pilot program (Item 394#1c) – Ends the model addiction recovery program and transfers $153,600 each year to the jail mental health pilot program as recommended by the Joint Commission on Health Care.

Community-based violence reduction grants (Item 394#2c) – Provides $2.05 million each year to increase targeted grants to reduce community level violence.

Jail-based substance use disorder treatment/transition (Item 394#9c) – Provides $1.0 million (NGF) in the first year for this program as recommended by the Joint Commission on Health Care. The Fund was previously given a one-time appropriation of $2.0 million in FY2024.

Expand safer communities program (Item 394#10c) – Increases funding for the Safer Communities Program by $8.0 million each year and expands the list of eligible localities to include the cities of Danville, Hampton, Hopewell, Newport News, and Petersburg. Also increases support for the Firearm Violence Intervention and Prevention Fund by $7.0 million each year, including $1.0 million the first year for the cities of Chesapeake and Virginia Beach and the remainder for localities and nonprofits engaged in group violence intervention efforts. Removes language authorizing Operation Cease Fire Grant Fund and associated appropriations of $10.0 million each year (current grantees not affected by this reduction).

Department of Emergency Management

Study emergency management needs (Item 398#2c) – Provides $130,000 in the first year to support a work group to evaluate emergency management needs in the state (HB 169/SB 98).

Emergency preparedness study (Item 399 #3c) – Provides $225,000 in the first year to support a study required by HB 1189.

Department of Fire Programs

Maintain current law on Fire Programs Fund use (Item 405#1c) – Removes funding and authority from the introduced budget that would have allowed the Department to use its Aid to Localities funding to cover the personnel costs of the State Fire Marshal's Office.

Department of Juvenile Justice

Restore transformation language (Item 413#1c) – restores language related to the use of savings from the closure of state juvenile correctional facilities as part of the 2016 transformation plan; this allows use of funds for a wide range of purposes including placement and treatment programs; educational and career readiness programs; and rehabilitative and mental health services for youth in state, regional, or local programs and facilities.

VML Contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Transportation

Transit Funding and Studies (Item 433 I) – Includes appropriations for Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) operations in the amount of $153 million as well as one-time funding of $19 million for statewide transit capital funding. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit (DRPT) will be responsible for distributing this one-time capital funding allocation.

The one-time appropriation for WMATA also includes new financial responsibilities for specific Northern Virginia localities in the out years of the budget in combination with increased flexibility to use the statewide local authority to increase the sales tax by 1 percent by referendum for transit in those same localities as authorized in Virginia Code §58.1-605.1.

Studies

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Capital Plan (Item 433 G (1)) – To be produced every five years beginning June 30, 2027. The report will include annual reporting requirements on the performance of WMATA, evaluation of adherence to the plan in the prior year, and anticipated future costs anticipated by the capital plan.

Department of Rail and Public Transportation (Item 433 G (2)) – Will review cost savings and efficiency at WMATA with a report due to the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations and the House Appropriations Committee by October 15, 2026.

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation (Item 433 H) – Will evaluate the feasibility of incorporating transit agencies in Northern Virginia into a single bus system. A report on this topic is due to the chairs of the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations and the House Appropriations Committee by December 15, 2026.

Transit-oriented development housing study

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation in coordination with the Department of Housing and Community Development (Item 435 C) – A "statewide review to plan, promote, and identify funding opportunities for transit-oriented development" focusing on current and future rail and transit stations. The report is due to the governor and General assembly by December 15, 2026.

VML Contact: Mitchell Smiley, msmiley@vml.org

Natural Resources

Water Quality Improvement Fund and Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (Item 368) – Includes $329.4 million for the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF) with funding allocated for the agricultural cost share program as well as wastewater capital projects that will reduce nutrient loads in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed for projects specified in budget language and the Code of Virginia.

Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (Item 368) – Includes $43.5 million in funding for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF). This funding is administered by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and provides matching grants to localities for the planning, design and implementation of stormwater best management practices that reduce pollutants in an effort to improve local water quality. More information about SLAF and how to apply for these funds is available on the DEQ website, **www.deq.virginia.gov**.

NOTE: Appropriations for SLAF and the WQIF are consistent with the position VML adopted as part of our 2026 Legislative Program. Thank you to all our members who emphasized to state lawmakers the importance of these appropriations for localities across Virginia.

Studies

Department of Environmental Quality: Data Center Cooling study in Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Area (Item 366 M. 2) – Study retrofitting of data centers in the Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Area to use air cooling systems, 100 percent recycled water or stormwater, or a closed loop system for cooling. The report is due October 15, 2026.

Department of Environmental Quality: Loudoun/ Fauquier Groundwater Supply study (Item 366 N.) – Study threats and challenges facing groundwater supplies to include historical and current data trends relating to groundwater levels and quality and future projections for groundwater levels and quality. Evaluate future potential impacts to groundwater supply as a result of groundwater withdrawals and whether a groundwater management area should be established under Code of Virgina § 62.1-254 et seq. Also, recommend any statutory or regulatory restrictions to ensure health of water supply for residential and commercial users. The report is due December 31, 2026.

Department of Environmental Quality / Virginia Tech: Groundwater Recharge feasibility study (Item 366 O) – Evaluate the feasibility and cost of groundwater recharge using technology similar to the Sustainable Water Initiative for Tomorrow (SWIFT) project at the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD) in the Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Area (EVGMA). Also, assess other beneficial uses of treated wastewater for cooling, irrigation, industry or other gray water uses. The report is due July 1, 2027.

Department of Environmental Quality: DEQ PFAS Disposal Capacity Study (Item 366 P) – Evaluate capacity for landfill, disposal or incineration of PFAS as well as the impact of the costs of disposing of PFAS at the state, local/utility and household levels. Also evaluate the impact on farmers for the loss of biosolid capacity.

Department of Environmental Quality: Upper Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Area (Item 366 Q) – Establish multi-well research stations to collect and evaluate data in the upper reaches of the EVGMA.

State Corporation Commission / Department of Environmental Quality and all political subdivisions and applicable utilities: Collect all electric service agreements or equivalent contracted demand with data centers (Item 477 D) – To include electric load from all electric utility providers; all data center water usage from municipal or private water providers; and permitting information on data center generators and tiers of generators. The report is due October 1, 2026.

By Stephanie Martinez-Ruckman – Co-authored by Amanda Karras

2025-2026 Supreme Court term roundup: Decisions important to local government

Editor's Note: *This blog was originally published on the National League of Cities (NLC) CitiesSpeak blog on July 20th, 2026.*

Use the QR Code to view this article on the NLC site:

Use the QR Code to visit the NLC's CitiesSpeak blog:

IN THEIR 2025-2026 term, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) issued decisions that directly impact local governments on issues including local government tax foreclosure and the amount of equity that is due back to a homeowner after a tax sale; election law and redistricting issues; law enforcement issues, including qualified immunity and geofence warrants; birthright citizenship; and the Second Amendment. Consistent with our legal advocacy efforts and through our partnership with the Local Government Legal Center ("LGLC"), the National League of Cities (NLC) participated in amicus briefs presenting sound and persuasive legal arguments to the court on principles and issues important to good municipal government.

This blog breaks down the most significant SCOTUS rulings and their implications for local governments from this past term. Understanding these decisions is essential for local officials to navigate the changing legal landscape and effectively serve their communities.

Pung v. Isabella

The issues in this case were 1) whether taking/selling a home to satisfy government debt and keeping surplus violates the Takings Clause when the sale is from an "artificially depressed auction price"; and 2) whether taking of real estate worth more than debt and sold for fraction of fair market value is excessive fine under the Eighth Amendment.

The case was brought by the estate of Timothy Pung, a homeowner in Isabella County, MI, who had long received a Principal Residence Exemption from property taxes on his residence. After his death, the property's continuing entitlement to the exemption became the subject of dispute. Ultimately, a delinquency of $2,242 was assessed against the property, which the estate refused to pay. The county initiated foreclosure proceedings, and the home was subsequently sold at public auction for $76,008. The county then returned the balance – slightly less than $74,000 – to the estate. Given that the county had assessed the home for property tax purposes at $194,000 and the residence was resold some 18 months later by the auction purchaser for $195,000, the estate sought to recover a much higher amount from the county, arguing that fair market value was the proper baseline under the Fifth Amendment's Takings Clause "just compensation" requirement.

The Supreme Court ruled that the Fifth Amendment's Takings Clause does not require the government to use fair market value as a baseline when it sells a foreclosed property at a tax auction and returns only the surplus proceeds above the outstanding tax debt. The Court also rejected the taxpayer's claim that the county's forfeiture process constituted an excessive fine in violation of the Eighth Amendment.

This decision is a win for local governments as it preserves the basic architecture of tax foreclosure law as it has operated in jurisdictions across the country for generations. Local governments retain the ability to satisfy unpaid tax debts through public auction without exposure to liability for the gap between sale price and fair market value, provided the auction itself is procedurally sound. Property tax revenue is of overwhelming importance to local government budgets. Had the Court ruled against the county in this case, it would have undermined the ability of local governments to preserve their property tax structures and collect property tax debts nationwide.

NLC filed a brief (PDF, *use QR Code*) in this case along with the founding partners of the LGLC, the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the International Municipal Lawyers Association (IMLA), along with associate members the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA).

Case v. Montana

The issue in this case was whether a criminal probable cause standard is required for community caretaker warrantless entry, or if an officer's objectively reasonable belief that an emergency is occurring sufficient?

In this case, law enforcement entered the home of a suicidal individual without a warrant after his girlfriend called them to report his suicide threat and based on other observations at the home that indicated he might be suicidal. Mr. Case was shot by law enforcement in the home after he pulled back a curtain and appeared to reach for a nearby handgun. He sought to suppress the evidence of the gun in his criminal trial based on the warrantless entry into the home. (He was charged with the crime of causing apprehension of serious bodily harm to a police officer).

The Supreme Court held that law enforcement officers do not need criminal probable cause to enter a home without a warrant when they have an objectively reasonable basis to believe an occupant is seriously injured or imminently threatened with such injury.

This decision is a win for local government as it allows law enforcement to enter a home to help members of the community in circumstances that do not involve criminal activity, such as where an individual may be suicidal or where a neighbor calls in a wellness check. The standard adopted by the Court will reduce liability for police and local governments in these circumstances.

NLC filed a brief (PDF, *use QR Code)* in this case with the founding partners of the LGLC, NACo and IMLA, along with associate member ICMA.

First Choice Women's Resource Centers, Inc. v. Davenport

The issue in this case was whether constitutionally-based challenges to state or local administrative subpoenas can be heard in federal court before state proceedings have concluded.

At issue was an administrative subpoena issued by the New Jersey Attorney General to First Choice Women's Resource Centers, inc. based on concerns that First Choice was misrepresenting its services in its marketing materials. The subpoena was based on potential violations of a New Jersey law that made it unlawful to mislead donors and that data sought in the subpoena included names and addresses of First Choice's donors. The subpoena was not "self-executing," meaning that it had no force or effect until enforced by order of the New Jersey Superior Court, giving First Choice the opportunity to decline compliance, challenge the scope of the subpoena, etc. Instead, First Choice preemptively brought an action in federal court to enjoin the subpoena under Section 1983, arguing that the mere fact of the subpoena inhibited donors from contributing for fear that their identities would be made public, undermining First Choice's right of free association protected by the First Amendment.

The Supreme Court held that where a state Attorney General's administrative subpoena sought an organization's donor information, the subpoena recipient could preemptively challenge it in federal court on First Amendment right of association grounds, even though the subpoena had yet to be held enforceable in state court. The Court found First Choice had standing to sue in federal court as it had suffered a cognizable injury as there is a "vital relationship between privacy in one's associations and the freedom to associate."

Local governments utilize administrative subpoenas to investigate potential wrongdoing in their communities as they seek to safeguard the health and welfare of their constituents. This decision is a loss for local government as it clarifies that federalism concerns will not protect state or local administrative subpoenas from preemptive challenge in federal court when First Amendment associational rights are implicated. The decision's reach may be limited based on the focus of the injury associated with the state seeking donor information.

NLC filed a brief (PDF, *use QR Code*) in this case with the founding partners of the LGLC, NACo and IMLA.

Olivier v. City of Brandon

The issues in this case were: 1) whether Heck v. Humphrey bars a Section 1983 challenge to a local ordinance where the plaintiff seeks prospective injunctive relief instead of damages; and 2) whether Heck bars a Section 1983 suit where the individual was never incarcerated / never had a habeas opportunity, and never obtained a reversal, expungement or pardon.

This case involved a street preacher who had been convicted of violating the city's ordinance restricting protests and loud microphones near the public amphitheater (the restriction applied in a content-neutral manner). His conviction was a misdemeanor and he never served any jail time. Olivier wanted to return to the venue to continue to preach after his conviction, but without the threat of criminal punishment, so he brought a Section 1983 action seeking only forward-looking relief, asking the court to declare the ordinance unconstitutional and prevent its enforcement against him.

The Supreme Court held that Heck v. Humphrey does not bar a Section 1983 suit seeking purely prospective relief, assuming a credible threat of prosecution.

This decision is a technical loss for local government, but the Court cabined its holding in two important ways. First, it did not answer the second question about the application of the Heck bar in circumstances where the individual never had access to habeas because it found the first question fully disposed of the case. That question was of greater concern to local governments given the potential onslaught of Section 1983 litigation – a decision allowing such suits to proceed would have wrought. The Court also specifically noted that it was not saying that "every person can challenge his statute of conviction through a Section 1983 suit for wholly prospective relief" and instead, reserved the question of "whether a person may bring such a suit while he is in custody for violating the statute challenged."

NLC filed a brief (PDF, *use QR Code*) in this case with the founding partners of the LGLC, NACo and IMLA, along with associate member ICMA.

Chatrie v. United States

The issue in this case was whether geofence warrants violate the Fourth Amendment prohibition against unreasonable search.

In this case, police used a geofence warrant to find a suspect who committed a bank robbery. The geofence warrant was served on Google; there was a three-step process between law enforcement and Google to review location history of users within the geofence that began with fully anonymized data but ultimately produced individual names, leading to the suspect in this case. The questions centered on whether law enforcement's review of location data for a short period of time constituted a search, and whether law enforcement review of data voluntarily provided to Google by users is a search – and finally, whether the geofence warrant itself met the Fourth Amendment's requirements.

The Supreme Court held that law enforcement conducts a search under the Fourth Amendment when it reviews location data a user voluntarily provides to their cell phone company. The Court did not decide whether the geofence warrant was reasonable under the Fourth Amendment and instead remanded to the lower court to determine that question in the first instance.

This decision is a technical loss for local government as the Court rejected the government's arguments that law enforcement's review of the data was not a search because: A) it only reviewed a short time-period of the location data (2 hours); and/or B) the location data is voluntarily shared with the cellphone providers (i.e., the third-party doctrine). But, because the Court did not decide whether the geofence warrant itself was reasonable, law enforcement may still be able to utilize these warrants if they meet the Fourth Amendment's requirements. Lower courts will decide that question.

NLC filed a brief (PDF, *use QR Code*) in this case with the founding partners of the LGLC, NACo and IMLA, along with associate member ICMA.

Monsanto v. Durnell

The issue in this case was whether a duty to add warning to label under state law is preempted by federal agency determination that no warning is required. Local governments have a significant interest in ensuring this Court's preemption jurisprudence considers the careful balance between federal and state/local power inherent in our constitutional structure.

The Supreme Court held that the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) expressly preempts state labeling requirements that are "in addition to" or "different from" federal labeling requirements.

This decision is a loss for local government. While the overall decision was a technical loss, because the Court did not reach the question of implied preemption the decision will have less of an impact on other preemption issues in the future.

NLC filed a brief (PDF, *use QR Code*) in this case with the founding partners of the LGLC, NACo and IMLA.

The Court also issued two additional decisions of interest to local governments in which NLC did not file briefs – *Louisiana v. Callais and Trump v. Barbara.*

- In ***Louisiana v. Callais***, the Supreme Court struck down Louisiana's redistricting maps by significantly modifying the test courts must use to determine if a claim under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) for race-based vote dilution may proceed. To prove whether a claim can proceed, a litigant must assert that a minority group has less opportunity than other voters to elect representatives of their choice. The result of the opinion is a narrowing of the VRA, which will remove checks on partisan-driven redistricting by requiring proof of intentional discrimination rather than just discriminatory results. This decision goes beyond congressional districts and could impact state legislature districts and councilmanic districts, thus directly impacting cities, towns and villages redistricting decisions. Learn more (*use QR Code*).
- In ***Trump v. Barbara***, the Supreme Court struck down President Trump's Executive Order purporting to end birthright citizenship. In doing so, the majority relied on the plain text of the Fourteenth Amendment's Citizenship Clause, the unbroken history of English common law through Reconstruction that recognized birthright citizenship, and existing Supreme Court precedent. While the Executive Order was always couched as prospective, today's result avoids potentially stripping approximately 250,000 children per year of citizenship. This would have resulted in likely increased burdens for local governments that provide critical services to residents in their communities, as these children would no longer be eligible for federal benefits like TANF and WIC. It would have also created some uncertainty for local governments as to how vital records should be administered for children born to parents lacking legal status going forward. The Court's decision maintains the status quo for both individuals and local governments. Read the opinion (PDF, *use QR Code*).

About the authors: *Stephanie Martinez-Ruckman is the legislative director, human development for NLC; Amanda Karras is the executive director/general counsel for the International Municipal Lawyers Association (IMLA).*

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ROANOKE COUNTY

By Em Poertner

A new era at Explore Park

WHEN FOUR MILES of greenway along the Roanoke River opened this spring at Explore Park, Doug Blount, deputy county administrator and former director of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, noted that the greenway was more than just a new amenity.

"This is a legacy type of project for Roanoke County," he enthused.

Indeed, the greenway was just the latest evidence that over a decade of investment by the county and its partner organizations was paying off for the community. But it wasn't always a foregone conclusion that Explore Park was a worthwhile investment.

Roanoke County took over ownership of the park from the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority last summer, but the county's involvement began in earnest in 2013 when the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors negotiated a 99-year lease for the county to resume operations of Explore Park after it had been closed for 17 years.

"Our Board of Supervisors was willing to take on what was then a shuttered park that I don't think folks had much confidence in," County Administrator Richard Caywood said.

From that point on, however, there was strong community engagement in the future of the park. A survey about the park's future gathered over 1,100 responses that, along with input from stakeholders, helped the county to form the park's Adventure Plan.

"Breathing life into Explore Park by focusing on what the community's desires were for the park was just really exciting," said Lindsay Webb, a longtime planner for Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

The recent greenway is just one of the many items from the Explore Park Adventure Plan that have

come to fruition. Other key components that have been completed include bringing in food and lodging, as well as building activity zones like a zip-line course, a bike skills park, and a disc golf course.

"With Explore Park we really have the opportunity to provide an asset to all levels of users to be able to get out and enjoy the great outdoors," said Parks, Recreation and Tourism Director Allen Hayes.

Today, Explore Park hosts the USA Cycling's National Mountain Biking Cross County Championships, is a part of the regional Go Outside Festival, and is the site of signature events like the free Tavern Stage Summer Music Series.

These events not only generate interest – Explore Park saw 12,000 spectators over the three days of cycling in 2025 – but also create momentum for improvements. For example, in preparation for the USA Cycling events, the park's trails were improved to make it a national championship-caliber course.

Now the new greenway presents new opportunities for events at the park. Plans are already in the works to host 5Ks, 10Ks, and half-marathons on the greenway. Looking ahead, the county's Planning Department is studying options to connect the Explore Park greenway with the 30-mile-long Roanoke Valley Greenways system, which runs through the city and surrounding region.

"There are still so many more exciting things that I think Explore Park can be," Blount added. "And I think we're just scratching the surface."

About the author: *Em Poertner is Roanoke County's social media manager.*

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TOWN OF DUMFRIES

From press releases by Tiffany Johnson

Virginia's oldest continuously chartered town continues to experience historic progress

DURING THE LAST week of May, Town of Dumfries Mayor Derrick R. Wood welcomed more than 100 residents, business owners, community leaders, elected officials, and regional partners to Potomac Valley Church – with several hundred more streaming online – for the town's 2026 State of the Town Address.

One of the evening's highlights came as attendees rose to their feet in recognition of the town's financial accomplishments, including its second consecutive clean audit and first-ever bond rating.

Almost exactly one month later, Governor Abigail Spanberger signed the Commonwealth of Virginia's budget, which included a historic $7 million investment for the Town of Dumfries to support redevelopment and improvements along the U.S. Route 1 corridor.

"This is a transformational investment in the future of our community," noted Wood soon after the budget was released. "This investment reflects the confidence that the Commonwealth has in the future of Dumfries and our vision for what this corridor can become."

These accomplishments come as Dumfries moves forward with its Destination Dumfries 2044 Comprehensive Plan to make the town "a place people choose to visit, invest in, and call home."

The money from the state will serve a pivotal role in several projects to support that mission. Town Manager Tangela Innis emphasized the importance of leveraging this investment to create lasting benefits for residents and businesses.

"This investment provides the town with an incredible opportunity to continue transforming one of our most important corridors," said Innis. "We look forward to working with our residents, businesses, and community partners to strategically invest these resources in projects that improve safety, enhance our sense of place, and support long-term economic growth."

These projects could include:

- Pedestrian safety and enhanced walkability improvements;
- Streetscape and beautification initiatives;
- Gateway and wayfinding features;
- Historic preservation and heritage tourism investments;
- Public spaces and placemaking projects; and
- Infrastructure improvements that encourage redevelopment and private investment.

Town leadership and staff will now begin evaluating potential projects and developing an investment strategy to maximize the impact of the funding while identifying opportunities to leverage additional state, federal, and private investment.

For his part, Wood sees the state money as part of a larger trend.

"This is more than an investment in a roadway," Wood observed. "It is an investment in our residents, our businesses, our history, and our future. The future is being built right now, and this investment brings us one step closer to realizing the full promise of Destination Dumfries."

"The state of our town is strong, and the future is being built right now." Mayor Derrick Wood

Indeed, the progress being experienced throughout Dumfries – and the Commonwealth's confidence in that progress as evidenced by the budget funding – is the result of years of hard work. The town's councilmembers, staff, boards and commissions, business leaders, community organizations, volunteers, and residents have worked together to achieve several important financial milestones, including not only the second consecutive clean audit and first-ever bond rating mentioned earlier, but also:

- The successful issuance of the town's first public bond.
- More than $1.7 million in projected taxpayer savings through strategic financing.
- Continued implementation of the Destination Dumfries 2044 Comprehensive Plan through a public-facing implementation tracker that includes more than 300 action items.
- Creation of the Dumfries Economic Development Authority.
- Ongoing economic development activity and private investment throughout the community.
- An increase of more than 100% in assessed property value which reflects growing investment throughout the community.
- The Rose Gaming Resort and Wawa, which together support approximately 500 jobs and generate millions of dollars in annual wages and economic activity throughout the region.

In turn, these achievements make possible projects such as:

- Advancement of the Dumfries Luke and Clarice Torian Overlook Park.
- Approval of the framework and design for the Clyde N. Washington Jr. Recreation and Aquatic Center, including an indoor aquatic center.
- Continued planning and investment in the Town's Waterfront District and the Quantico Creek corridor.

"The future of Dumfries is no longer theoretical," Wood said. "It is visible. It is measurable. And it is being built right now."

About the author: *Tiffany Johnson is the public information officer for the Town of Dumfries.*

CITY OF BRISTOL

By City of Bristol Staff

The future looks bright for the city … and the future of women in public service!

THIS HAS BEEN a big year for women in local government in the City of Bristol. Since February, the city has welcomed four exceptional leaders to its team including a new city council member, city manager, chief financial officer, and city attorney. Each brings extensive experience, proven expertise, and a strong commitment to public service. Together, these accomplished women represent a wealth of knowledge and leadership that will help shape Bristol's future.

With a fresh, outstanding leadership team in place, this is an exciting time for Bristol. The city is demonstrating the strength that comes from diverse leadership and setting a powerful example for future generations of women in public service.

Councilmember Alex Littleton

In February, Alex Littleton was appointed to fill a vacant seat on the Bristol City Council. Serving on council has given Littleton the opportunity to give back to the community that has shaped much of her life. A lifelong resident of the city, Littleton believes that strong communities are built by people who are willing to step forward, work together, and focus on solutions.

Throughout her career, Littleton has had the privilege of working alongside educators, businesses, nonprofits, and community leaders to remove barriers and create opportunities for others. Those experiences taught her that lasting progress is never the work of one person – it comes from partnerships, collaboration, and a shared commitment to making the community stronger. After spending more than a decade serving families and students through the Communities In Schools organization, she felt called to continue that service through local government.

Bristol has given so much to Littleton and her family, and she feels that serving the city is both a privilege and a responsibility that

(L-R) City Attorney Holly Cline, Councilmember Alex Littleton, City Manager Tamrya Spradlin, and Chief Financial Officer Tammy Jones.

she does not take lightly. She believes local government has one of the greatest opportunities to positively impact people's everyday lives, from supporting economic development and maintaining high-quality public services to creating a community where families choose to stay, businesses choose to invest, and the next generation can see a future for themselves.

Littleton believes that by continuing to invest in strong partnerships, thoughtful planning, and opportunities that enhance quality of life, the city is well positioned for continued growth and success. She is optimistic because she sees leaders throughout the community who are committed to collaboration, innovation, and keeping the needs of residents at the center of every decision.

Littleton is honored to serve alongside her fellow councilmembers, dedicated city staff, and community partners, and she is especially proud to serve alongside so many accomplished women in leadership roles. She looks forward to helping build a future that celebrates Bristol's rich history while creating new opportunities for generations to come.

City Manager Tamrya Spradlin

When Tamrya Spradlin stepped into the Bristol city manager position in March she brought more than two decades of local government experience and a proven track record of public service. Having previously served as the city's chief financial officer (beginning in 2017) and later as assistant city manager, Spradlin has a deep understanding of her community, its finances, and its potential.

In remarks following her appointment, Spradlin praised the city's people and its dedicated workforce. She also expressed her commitment to leading the organization forward while continuing to improve the quality of life for Bristol residents.

Spradlin is a Certified Public Accountant and graduate of Christopher Newport University. Her career reflects her commitment to sound financial management, accountability, and strategic planning. Those strengths have positioned her to lead Bristol during an important period of opportunity and growth.

As Bristol continues to attract investment and pursue economic opportunities, Spradlin sees responsible growth as the key to sustaining high-quality city services and infrastructure improvements. She recognizes that strong municipal finances create the foundation for every successful community initiative. Her priorities include strengthening the city's financial position, maintaining fiscal responsibility, expanding revenue opportunities, and ensuring Bristol remains financially resilient for future generations.

Community and economic development also play a central role in her vision. Spradlin understands that growth is about more than numbers; it is about creating vibrant neighborhoods, supporting local businesses, attracting new employers, and enhancing the overall attractiveness of the city. By encouraging investment and fostering partnerships, she aims to position Bristol as a destination where families, entrepreneurs, and industries can thrive.

Another important focus for Spradlin will be addressing code compliance concerns and dilapidated properties throughout the city which she sees as opportunities for neighborhood revitalization. By working with residents, property owners, and community stakeholders, Bristol can transform underutilized and deteriorating properties into assets that strengthen neighborhoods, enhance property values, and improve the city's appearance. To achieve this, Spradlin's approach will emphasize collaboration, property improvement, and community pride.

Chief Financial Officer Tammy Jones

Tammy Jones has dedicated her career to public service and financial stewardship. In her new role as chief financial officer for Bristol, she continues that commitment. Jones joined the city in May, having spent 26 years serving as director of finance and chief financial officer for Bristol Public Schools. Throughout her tenure, she managed complex budgets, maintained strong financial controls, and ensured that public resources were used efficiently and responsibly. Her extensive background in local government finance made her a natural fit for the city as it positions itself for future growth.

A Certified Public Accountant, Jones earned an Associate Degree in Business Management from Virginia Highlands Community College and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Accounting from Bluefield College. Before entering public service, she worked in public accounting, gaining experience in financial reporting, auditing, and fiscal management.

Under Jones' leadership, Bristol is implementing a new citywide accounting system designed to improve efficiency, strengthen internal controls, enhance reporting capabilities, and provide greater transparency for city leaders and citizens. The project is one of the most significant financial modernization efforts undertaken by the city in recent years.

Beyond implementing the new technology, Jones is responsible for evaluating financial processes, establishing best practices, and ensuring staff members are fully prepared to utilize the system successfully. With plans to retire in May 2030, Jones will develop the city's future financial leadership team, which she sees as an opportunity to contribute to the continued success of the community she has served throughout her career.

From supporting infrastructure improvements and economic development initiatives to helping the city capitalize on tourism growth and new business opportunities, Jones is committed to building a financial foundation that will serve Bristol for generations. Through innovation, accountability, and leadership development, Jones is positioning Bristol to meet challenges while taking advantage of the many opportunities that lie ahead.

City Attorney Holly Cline

In June, Holly Cline was selected as Bristol's new city attorney. The appointment gives Cline the opportunity to combine her passion for public service with her deep connection to Southwest Virginia. Raised in the region, she developed an appreciation for the values that define its communities – hard work, integrity, resilience, and looking out for one another. She received both a Bachelor of the Arts and a Juris Doctor from the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Cline feels that returning to serve Bristol is both a professional privilege and a personal honor. She was drawn to Bristol by its rich history, bright future, and the people who are deeply invested in the city's success.

Public service has been the foundation of Cline's career. She has advised government leaders on complex legal and policy matters, managed high-profile and sensitive issues, and translated complex legal questions into practical guidance for decision-makers. Most importantly, she has always been driven by the opportunity to help public servants better serve their communities.

Cline believes the role of the city attorney extends beyond providing legal advice. It means serving as a trusted partner who helps the city navigate challenges, manage risk, and find practical solutions while earning and maintaining the public's trust. As city attorney, she is committed to providing practical legal counsel, building strong partnerships, and helping city leaders make informed decisions that advance the community's best interests. Cline is grateful for the warm welcome she has received and looks forward to working alongside city leaders, employees, and residents to help Bristol continue to thrive.

ACCUWEATHER

By Jonathan Porter

Accurate weather insights to support safer communities

AccuWeather

Editor's Note: *The Virginia Municipal League has partnered with AccuWeather® to provide our local government members a 10% discount on the services discussed in this article. Learn more at **www.vml.org/Resources/AccuWeather-for-Localities**.*

VIRGINIA'S MUNICIPALITIES FACE a growing range of weather risks that can impact public safety, infrastructure, and daily operations. Events such as flooding, severe thunderstorms and winter storms can escalate quickly, leaving limited time for response. When conditions change rapidly, the ability to act early is critical.

AccuWeather's mission is to save lives, protect property, and help people and companies make the best weather-impacted decisions. With more than six decades of forecasting experience, AccuWeather provides forecasts and warnings with proven Superior Accuracy™ that often deliver earlier, more detailed and more actionable information.

Just ask Dorothy … minutes matter!

For tornadoes, AccuWeather's proven Superior Accuracy™ provides, on average, 16 minutes of advance notice compared to an average of only eight minutes from the National Weather Service.

Across all severe weather scenarios, one factor remains consistent: time. Earlier, more accurate forecasts and warnings provide decision-makers with more time to make the best weather-impacted decisions.

AccuWeather SkyGuard® Warnings provide site-specific severe weather warnings, while AccuWeather Snow Warning Service™ delivers highly accurate snowfall forecasts, timing, and impact information. Together, they help municipalities make the best weather-impacted decisions through more advance notice, expert meteorologist consultation, and actionable information that helps better protect residents, infrastructure and operations.

The following case studies highlight how more accurate forecasts and site-specific weather warnings with more advance notice help support better decisions and improved outcomes.

CASE STUDY 1: Near Dante, VA – Flash Flooding, July 2025

During the afternoon of July 18, 2025, slow-moving thunderstorms with torrential downpours produced seven inches of rain near Dante, VA, causing water rescues and evacuations, mudslides, downed trees, and significant property damage.

AccuWeather Expert Storm Warning meteorologists issued a lifesaving SkyGuard® Flash Flood Warning with 42 minutes of additional advance notice. **AccuWeather was the only known source to issue a warning before flash flooding began.** The National Weather Service (NWS) and all other known sources did not issue a warning until after the flooding was already underway.

The lesson for Virginia's municipal leaders is clear: relying solely on standard weather sources can leave communities with little or no time to prepare when life-threatening weather develops rapidly and every minute matters. In this event, AccuWeather provided 42 minutes of advance notice, giving decision-makers valuable time to make the best weather-impacted decisions and helping better protect residents, infrastructure, and operations when every minute mattered.

As weather risks continue to evolve, AccuWeather's proven Superior Accuracy™ provides municipalities with the advance notice and actionable information needed to make the best weather-impacted decisions and better protect their communities.

CASE STUDY 2: Texas Hill Country – Flash Flooding, July 2025

In the early hours of July 4, 2025, rapid flash flooding impacted the Texas Hill Country, causing widespread damage and loss of life. Water levels rose quickly along the Guadalupe River, demonstrating how fast-changing rainfall events can become dangerous.

Near Hunt, TX, AccuWeather Expert Storm Warning meteorologists issued a SkyGuard® Flash Flood Warning with 30 minutes of additional advance notice compared to warnings from the National Weather Service and all other known sources, precious extra time at night when most people were sleeping. Nearly 24 hours before flooding began, AccuWeather also issued a Severe Weather Threat notification highlighting the escalating flash flood risk, almost nine hours before the NWS issued a Flash Flood Watch.

Following the event, AccuWeather partnered with local organizations to support recovery and preparedness efforts. Through collaboration with regional partners, AccuWeather extended site-specific severe weather warning services to first responders and community organizations.

As part of this initiative, participants received:

- Site-specific severe weather warnings, often with more advance notice than broader, publicly available alerts.
- Multi-channel notifications including text and automated calls and confirmation of receipt.
- Coverage of flash flooding, lightning, high winds, extreme heat, and wildfires.
- Live, immediate, direct consultation with AccuWeather expert meteorologists.

This case reinforces a critical lesson for municipal leaders: more advance notice and better location-specific information help emergency managers make the best weather-impacted decisions and support more effective emergency response and communication.

CASE STUDY 3: Destructive Derecho: Ohio and Pennsylvania, April 29, 2025

When a powerful derecho swept across Ohio and Pennsylvania on April 29, 2025, winds exceeding 70 mph snapped power poles, uprooted trees, and knocked out electricity to hundreds of thousands of customers across both states.

Utilities and municipalities faced challenges including:

- Downed trees and power lines that closed roads for days and blocked emergency response.
- Extended power outages that compounded impacts on residents and critical infrastructure.
- Near-zero warning time from standard sources – the NWS upgraded their wind warning only three minutes before the destructive winds arrived.

AccuWeather's proven Superior Accuracy™ enabled earlier and better preparation, including:

- Identifying the damaging wind threat five days in advance – a full day before the NWS and all other known sources.
- AccuWeather's SkyGuard® Warning delivering a 32-minute advance warning, giving utilities and municipalities critical time to stage crews and equipment.
- Accurate identification of the system as a derecho with its destructive path projected more than three days out.

This event demonstrates that advanced warning is the difference between reacting to destruction and better preparing for it, best protecting infrastructure, operations, and lives.

CASE STUDY 4: Buffalo, NY – Winter Storm, December 2022

A major winter storm in December 2022 resulted in widespread impacts across the Buffalo region. Rapid deterioration in conditions, including strong winds, heavy snowfall, and falling temperatures, created dangerous travel conditions.

The severity of the event was driven by:

- Snowfall rates that exceeded the capacity of road treatment operations.
- Limited visibility and drifting snow.
- Timing coinciding with peak travel periods.

AccuWeather forecasts most accurately highlighted the potential for rapid deterioration and hazardous travel conditions ahead of the storm. AccuWeather was the only known source to forecast blizzard conditions in Buffalo lasting more than 36 hours. Two weeks in advance, AccuWeather clients were warned of "a major winter storm later next week causing significant travel troubles" and "the coldest lead-up to the Christmas holiday in decades."

Key lessons for municipal leaders included:

- Snow intensity can have greater impact than total accumulation.
- Timing of weather events significantly influences risk.
- Early decisions, including travel bans, can reduce exposure to dangerous conditions.

AccuWeather's proven Superior Accuracy™ gave clients more advance notice to better prepare, days before other sources recognized the storm's historic severity. For municipalities, this meant the opportunity to pre-position equipment, issue travel restrictions, and activate emergency operations before conditions became unmanageable.

A partner focused on decision support

AccuWeather serves more than half of all Fortune 500 companies and thousands of government agencies, helping them reduce risk, improve operations, and enhance public safety. AccuWeather has an annual renewal rate of 97%.

AccuWeather is pleased to partner with the Virginia Municipal League, offering members not currently subscribing to AccuWeather's proven Superior Accuracy™ services a discounted rate. Sign up for the AccuWeather Snow Warning Service™ and SkyGuard® Severe Weather Warning Service, which are tailored for municipalities, at a league discounted rate today.

Use the QR Code to learn more.

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To receive the discounted rate, just let us know that you are a VML member!

About the author: *Jonathan Porter is the senior vice president and chief meteorologist for AccuWeather.*

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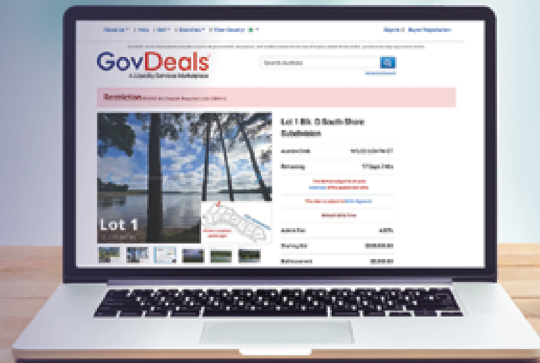

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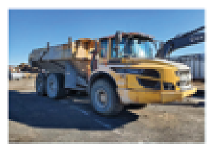
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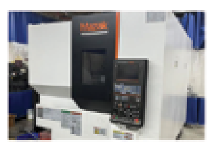
$43,500 in Roanoke


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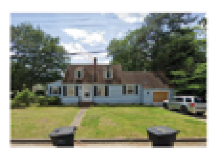
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