

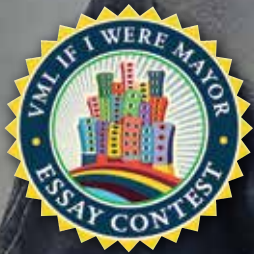
THE MAGAZINE OF THE
VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

Listening to tomorrow's leaders today

The winners
of the 2026
"If I Were Mayor"
essay contest

Inside:

2026 General
Assembly Review for
local governments



Statewide Winner

Serene Colden
of Lindsay Middle
School in Hampton



Also inside:

Innovation Awards
call for entries





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BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT



ABOUT THE COVER

While the work of Virginia’s middle schoolers and state legislators seldom overlap, they do in this issue of *Virginia Town & City*! Inside we are pleased to present not only the winners of our “If I Were Mayor” contest but also our annual review of the actions of the General Assembly that matter most to the Commonwealth’s local governments. We hope you enjoy the mashup!

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We celebrate some winners and await a budget

WANT TO THANK the Town of Chincoteague for rolling out the red carpet for VML and all the Small Towns Conference attendees in May. What a great Virginia town doing so many amazing things! We could not have asked for a warmer welcome or more wonderful weather (and ice cream!). Stay tuned for an announcement about the location of next year's Small Towns Conference soon.

Recently, I had the distinct pleasure of going to the Hampton City Council meeting to present an "If I Were Mayor" award to our statewide winner. Over the past few weeks, VML staff have presented regional awards to winners at council meetings in Emporia, Lexington, Windsor, Martinsville, Appomattox, and Falls Church. Last, but most definitely not least, will be Saltville in July. Congratulations to all the winners and thank you to all the schools that participated. It is always good to read about what our 7th and 8th graders think about their communities and their ideas to make our localities even better. You can read all the winning essays inside.

This issue also has a lot of information about the 2026 General Assembly session but lacks an analysis of the budget...because, as of the time of publication, we still don't have one! Please note that VML will continue to monitor the budget status and send out updates as information becomes

available. We will also devote featured space in the next issue of the magazine to the passed budget since it does appear that both the House and Senate will be back in Richmond in late June to hopefully make it happen.

As I am sure you are very much aware, collective bargaining was vetoed by the governor. VML thanks everyone who sent letters, texts, and emails on the collective bargaining issue. Our position has been that the right to enter into these agreements should be discretionary and not mandated. Also vetoed this session was legislation for retail sales of cannabis, meaning that the uncertainty relating to retail sales will continue in the Commonwealth. Regardless, VML will continue to ensure that there are local tax dollars and land use authority in any proposed legislation. If nothing else, hopefully the immediacy of the issue this year helped you assess local ordinances that can be changed (and must be changed).

Is it too early to talk about 2027? Hopefully not, because VML has already begun preparing for next year's General Assembly session by hosting our first legislative committee meeting of the summer. Our policy committees will meet in mid-July. If you have any proposals for the legislative agenda or the policy committees, please let me know.

Have a great summer and thank you for all the work you do!



CALENDAR

To learn more about these events and additional opportunities, scan the QR code below.

- Aug. 24** 2026 Innovation Award Submission Deadline - See pages 30-31.
- 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:



Former Covington Mayor Fred F. Forbes III

Fred Fenton Forbes III, 63, of Covington, died March 14 at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital in Roanoke. Forbes was born on May 8, 1962, in Clifton Forge and was a lifetime resident of the area. He was employed as a crew foreman

for Lanford Brothers for several years before his retirement. In 2021, shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began to ease and Covington City Council reinstated in-person meetings again, Forbes became a regular attendee.

“I don’t know what I can do to help the city if I don’t come to meetings and learn what the city does,” Forbes said to council soon after he began attending meetings. Even before his election to Covington City Council, Forbes pushed for and saw the passage of a resolution by council marking March 14 each year as Fallen Officer’s Day in the City of Covington, following the line-of-duty death of a Covington Police Department officer.

In 2022, with the retirement of then-District 2 Representative Allan Tucker, Forbes was elected to Covington City Council for a term in his own right, beginning a brief – but impactful – tenure representing his constituents and the residents of Covington. From the start, Forbes took an active role in understanding his responsibilities as an elected official and how he could use that role to benefit the city. He took positions on various committees and boards and became a regular fixture at ribbon-cuttings and area events, promoting not only the city but also the regional cooperation built over the previous decade between the city and Alleghany County.

In January 2025, he was appointed vice-mayor of Covington by the members of city council. Following the unexpected passing of Mayor Lance Carson in July 2025, Forbes assumed the role of Covington mayor, a position he never sought but swore to perform to the best of his ability.

Those who served with Forbes or encountered him during his service on Covington City Council almost unanimously remember Forbes as genuine, a person who wanted to serve others with no personal agenda. His contributions to the betterment of the city and its residents will be felt for many years to come.

To view Forbes’ memorial tribute page, please visit www.lovvingfuneralhome1913.com.



Former Saltville Mayor Franklin Emmett Lewis

Franklin Emmett Lewis, better known as T-Bone, died April 1 just a few weeks before his 90th birthday. Lewis was a graduate of Hiwassee College, where he was president of his class and a member of Phi Theta Kappa. He received a

Bachelor’s from Emory & Henry College and was a star basketball player at both schools. He received a Master’s from the University of Virginia.

His first job, as a teacher and coach (and later as a guidance counselor), was at R.B. Worthy High School in Saltville, where he remained for over 30 years. Lewis held many other jobs, including positions with Field Enterprise Corporation, S & L Coal Sales, and Highlands Union Bank. He started the Saltville Progress newspaper and the Shorty’s Express train to help support the Saltville Labor Day Celebration.

Lewis was a visionary whose persistence and ability to get things done brought about significant developments in Saltville, the town he loved so much. He served one term on the town council and was mayor of Saltville for 26 years. He also served on many town and county committees.

Lewis applied for and received a grant to design and implement the Smyth County Litter Attack Program, which helped keep the county clean for many years and provided summer jobs for the county’s youth. He also developed a successful anti-smoking campaign and, along with some of his students, traveled to schools and events to educate people about the negative effects of smoking.

Lewis was a newspaper columnist for the Smyth County News & Messenger, where he wrote the Smyth County Litter Attack Program column, and for the Saltville Progress, where he wrote the Coffee Club column and other articles.

Online condolences may be expressed at drhendersonfuneralhome.com.



Former Alleghany County Administrator Kenneth Reid Walters Jr.

The Alleghany Highlands community is mourning the loss of former Alleghany County Administrator **Kenneth Reid Walters Jr.**, who died May 6 following a battle with cancer. He was 50 years old.

Walters served as Alleghany County administrator from May 2022 until his resignation in June 2025 due to health concerns. Prior to joining Alleghany County, Walters served as town manager of Independence as well as Spencer and Bethel, NC.

Walters dedicated his professional life to strengthening the communities entrusted to his care. He was a teacher at East Rowan High School prior to his career in public administration. Walters also served as a Spencer town alderman and contributed to numerous county and town planning boards across both states, always working to open doors and strengthen communities while improving opportunities for others in the places he called home.

Walters earned a Master of Public Administration degree from Appalachian State University and dedicated more than 20 years to local government administration and public service. County leaders and community members remembered Walters for his commitment to public service and devotion to improving the quality of life for residents across the region.

A funeral service was held May 16 at Thomas Funeral Home in Fuquay-Varina, NC.

PEOPLE

Hopewell selects Jones as new city manager



- Jones -

The City of Hopewell has appointed **Vincent Jones** as its new city manager following a comprehensive nationwide search conducted by Colin Baesinger & Associates. He officially began his new role on May 13. Jones brings a strong record of public service and executive leadership to the role. He previously served as deputy county administrator for Loudoun County, a position he had held since March 2024. Other prior experience includes serving as deputy administrator in Warren County and Portsmouth, as well as holding several executive-level positions across the country.

In a statement, Mayor Johnny Partin shared, “We are very excited to have Mr. Jones join the team in Hopewell. His extensive experience and expertise will continue to move Hopewell forward.”

Jones earned a Bachelor’s in Sociology from The College of William & Mary and a Master’s in Public Administration from Florida State University. He is also a Creden-

tial Manager with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

Adams-Jacobs, Boucher, Hively named Government Champions

In honor of the America 250 celebration, Local Gov 250 and the National Academy of Public Administration have announced the Government Champions. This award recognizes and celebrates the exceptional individuals, from all levels of government, who make a significant impact in their work in cities, counties, regional councils, states, and the U.S. Federal Government.

These individuals are currently working in government (or recently retired) and exemplify “democracy at the doorstep” through dedication, innovation, and the highest sense of public service. The Government Champions were recognized at a May 12 event in Philadelphia.

Virginia champions include India Adams-Jacobs, town manager of Bowling Green; Brian Boucher, deputy director of Community Development in Leesburg; and Christopher D. Hively, town manager of Culpeper.

India Adams-Jacobs was born and raised in Bowling Green and was appointed



- Adams-Jacobs -

to the town manager’s position in January 2024. She has over a decade of local government experience, including stints as town manager of Colonial Beach and assistant manager for the City of Petersburg. Adams-Jacobs recently received the Credentialed Manager designation from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

“This recognition is a testament to India’s dedication to the Town of Bowling Green community and its larger, positive impact on Caroline County,” said Bowling Green Councilman David Storke. “Two years ago, she returned home to Bowling Green, facing an infrastructure crisis and years of organizational instability. What we’ve accomplished since – completing years of overdue audits and establishing strategic planning processes – demonstrates what’s possible when committed local leadership, professional management, and community partnership align.”

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After graduating from George Mason with a Bachelor's in Public Administration, Adams-Jacobs pursued her graduate studies at Virginia Tech. In 2014, she received a Master's in Public Administration and a Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Tech's Center for Public Administration and Policy in 2015. Later this year, Adams-Jacobs will assume the duties of president of the Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA).



- Boucher -

Brian Boucher is a 30-year Town of Leesburg employee who currently serves as deputy director of the Department of Community Development. He has also served as a planner and zoning administrator.

"Brian has helped shape Leesburg's built environment during a significant period of growth and change, during which time Leesburg became the largest town in the Commonwealth," said Community Development Director James David. "He helped guide many development applications through the process and most ended up being better projects for the community because of his efforts. These projects have been transformational for the town and its evolution from a small town to an urban destination."

Boucher is a former board member of both the Loudoun Museum and the Mt. Zion Church Preservation Association and was named Preservationist of the Year by the Preservation Society of Loudoun County in 2006. He is a graduate of Hampden-Sydney College and the University of Virginia School of Law.



- Hively -

Chris Hively, town manager of Culpeper, has helped guide the town through a period of significant growth and progress. Under his leadership, the town has advanced key infrastructure investments, strengthened partnerships with local businesses and community organizations, and supported continued economic development in the historic downtown and surrounding areas. His collaborative approach with town council, staff, and regional partners has helped to position Culpeper as one of Virginia's most vibrant and economically resilient small towns, while maintaining the community's historic character and high quality of life.

"Chris Hively's leadership and dedica-

tion to the Town of Culpeper exemplify what public service is all about," said Mayor Frank Reaves Jr. "This national recognition reflects the positive impact he has made in our community and the respect he has earned throughout the profession."

Hively holds a Bachelor's in Civil Engineering from Virginia Military Institute and a Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Martinsville City Council appoints Fincher as new city manager



- Fincher -

During an open session in March, the Martinsville City Council voted to approve an agreement with **Robert Fincher** to make him the new city manager effective immediately. Fincher had served as interim city manager since August 2025, bringing more than three decades of public service and leadership experience to the role.

Before being appointed interim city manager, Fincher spent 31 years with the Martinsville Police Department, including his final three years as the chief of police.

"It is with great joy that we announce the appointment of Robert Fincher as our new city manager," Vice Mayor Kathy Lawson said. "Rob's leadership during the interim period has exceeded all expectations, and we look forward to his continued service to our city in this new role."

His professional development includes completion of the Professional Executive Leadership School at the University of Richmond, the Institute for Leadership in Changing Times at Virginia Tech, the Senior Management Institute for Police through the Police Executive Research Forum, and the FBI National Command Course.

Fincher graduated from Martinsville High School. He earned a Bachelor's in Criminal Justice and Sociology from Averett University and a Master's in Human Services and Executive Leadership from Liberty University.

Spradlin named city manager of Bristol

Tamrya Spradlin is the new Bristol city manager. She was appointed to this position effective March 12 by a unanimous city council vote, replacing Randy Eads, who resigned in mid-January to work as general



- Spradlin -

counsel for new Virginia Attorney General Jay Jones. Spradlin previously served the City of Bristol as assistant city manager and as chief financial officer. She received a Bachelor's in Accounting from Christopher Newport University and has been licensed as a Certified Public Accountant in the Commonwealth of Virginia since October 2000.

Spradlin has over 23 years of local government work experience. She is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, the Virginia Society of Certified Public Accountants, and the Virginia Government Finance Officers' Association.

McIlvaine retires as Alexandria housing director



- McIlvaine -

Helen S. McIlvaine, director of the Alexandria Office of Housing, retired on April 30 after 20 years of service advancing affordable housing and community development in the city. Beginning May 1,

Deputy Director Aspasia Xypolia took over as acting director of housing.

McIlvaine joined Alexandria in 2006 as deputy director of housing and was appointed director in 2015. During her tenure, she helped shape the city's long-term housing strategy, leading implementation of the Housing Master Plan and guiding community engagement for the Housing 2040 plan.

"Helen's dedication and leadership have made a lasting impact on Alexandria," said City Manager James F. Parajon in a statement. "We are grateful for her 20 years of service and wish her all the best in retirement."

McIlvaine oversaw more than a dozen affordable housing development and preservation projects across the city, including the Sansé & Naja mixed-income community, which is expected to begin phased completion in 2026. Her leadership has expanded and preserved housing opportunities for residents while strengthening partnerships with community organizations and regional agencies.

McIlvaine earned a Bachelor's in History from the University of Maryland Global Campus and a Juris Doctor from Rutgers Law School.

Williamsburg City Council appoints DeWitt as city manager

The Williamsburg City Council appointed **Michele Mixner DeWitt** as city manager during a special meeting on May 27.



- DeWitt -

DeWitt had served as interim city manager since February 2026. DeWitt previously served as the City of Williamsburg’s first economic development director, joining the organization in 2005. She was promoted to assistant city manager in 2021 and to deputy city manager in December 2025. DeWitt also served as the interim commissioner of the revenue from January 2025 to December 2025.

DeWitt is Williamsburg’s ninth city manager and the first woman to hold the role.

“Michele has demonstrated exceptional leadership not only during her time as interim city manager, but throughout her 20 years of dedicated service in a variety of roles within our city organization,” Mayor Douglas G. Pons said. “The city council saw no need for the disruption of a search when we already have someone so well known, qualified, and trusted by our community. We are confident in her ability and unwavering commitment to Williamsburg, and we have full faith that she will continue to move our city forward with the best interest of our residents at the center of everything she does.”

DeWitt brings three decades of public-sector leadership to the role. In her role as economic development director, DeWitt was a catalyst for growth, expanding that department to provide premier concierge services to the business community and overseeing the \$5 million City Tourism Development Fund.

A native of Virginia Beach, DeWitt holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia School of Architecture and a Master of Public Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University. Her career is defined by “firsts,” having served as the first environmental planner for Middlesex County and the first economic development director for West Point and Williamsburg. She is a Certified Planner through the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) with the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), and an Economic Development Finance Professional (EDFP) with GrowAmerica.

An active leader, DeWitt is also a past president of the Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA) and the Williamsburg Garden Club.

Chandler named Danville finance director



- Chandler -

Danville City Manager Ken Larking has announced the appointment of **Amy Chandler** as the city’s new finance director.

In her new role, Chandler will oversee the financial operations of the City of Danville and the employees’ retirement system. She will manage the Finance Department staff and direct and coordinate accounting, collections, real estate assessment, purchasing, print shop, and internal auditing functions.

“Amy has demonstrated exceptional leadership, integrity, and financial expertise throughout her career with the City of Danville,” Larking said in a press release. “Her deep understanding of our organization and her commitment to public service give me great confidence in her ability to serve as our next finance director. I am especially pleased that we have the ability to promote talented people within our organization and community to key positions within the organization.”

A native of the Danville community, Chandler began her career with the city in 2009 as a staff accountant. She was promoted to business systems accountant in 2010 and assumed the role of assistant finance director in 2023.

In addition to her service with the city, Chandler has served as chief finance officer for Caswell County Schools and as director of budget for Elon University.

Chandler holds a Bachelor’s in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting from Averett University and a Master’s in Accounting from Liberty University. She is a Certified Public Accountant.

Prince George County Police Chief Early announces retirement

Prince George County officials have announced the retirement of Police Chief **W. Keith Early**, effective July 1. Early’s retirement marks the conclusion of a storied law enforcement career that began over 33 years ago and culminated with more than 10 years of visionary leadership as the police chief for



- Early -

Prince George County. “Chief Early has served Prince George County with distinction and has worked to build and maintain a strong and highly capable law enforcement team ready to take on the challenges facing the county,” said Kristen Pudlow, interim county administrator. “We thank him for his dedicated service and wish him continued success in his future endeavors.”

Early shared the following comments: “It has been the highest honor of my professional lifetime to serve the men and women of this department as they faithfully and effectively serve our community. Leadership is not about individuals; it is about team success. Our PGPD team has consistently delivered results for our community, and delivering results will always remain the expectation. Our citizens should take comfort in knowing that this police department is well positioned for the future. We have strong leadership within our ranks, and the department will not miss a beat as transitions occur. Apart from the men and women of our department, I have truly enjoyed working with past and present members of the Board of Supervisors, county administrators, fellow department directors and staff, as well as our regional, state, and federal partners – and of course the Prince George County community at large. Thank you for allowing me to serve.”

Mason appointed Fredericksburg chief of police



- Mason -

The City of Fredericksburg has named Interim Chief **Betsy Mason** as the city’s next chief of police.

Mason has served as a sworn member of the Fredericksburg Police Department since 2012.

Prior to joining the city, she served over seven years with the Spotsylvania County Sheriff’s Office, rising to the rank of sergeant. During her tenure with Fredericksburg, she has held a range of leadership roles, including detective, sergeant, lieutenant, and captain. In 2023, following a statewide search, she was selected to serve as deputy chief. She has been serving as interim chief since the retirement of Chief Brian Layton on January 1, 2026, and now formally assumes the role of chief of police.

Mason is a Certified Law Enforcement Command Executive through the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, a licensed polygraph examiner, and an instructor with the Rappahannock Regional Criminal Justice Academy. She is also a graduate of the FBI National Academy, a distinction earned by less than one percent of officers nationwide, and is currently participating in the Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Fredericksburg Class of 2026.

"Chief Mason has been a leader within our police department and was previously selected as deputy chief after a statewide search. She is the right person for the job, and I am proud to appoint her as Fredericksburg's next chief of police," said City Manager Tim Baroody in a statement.

Mason holds Bachelor's degrees in Criminal Justice and Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a Master's in Public Administration from George Mason University. She brings extensive operational leadership experience and a strong commitment to professional development, officer wellness, and community engagement.

Hampton Mayor Gray receives Humanitarian Award for inclusion



- Gray -

The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities recently honored Hampton Mayor **Jimmy Gray** with a Humanitarian Award from its Peninsula chapter. Gray received the honor at the chapter's 58th annual awards banquet in Newport News.

In his acceptance speech, Gray reflected on his career in public service, as a firefighter and fire chief, assistant city manager, city councilmember, and now mayor.

"This Humanitarian Award represents a commitment to respect and understanding among people of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds," he said. "I accept it not as a personal accomplishment, but as a shared responsibility. As mayor, I have the privilege of serving a beautifully diverse community. I believe our differences are not weaknesses to overcome, but strengths to embrace."

He concluded his remarks with a commitment to "building bridges, creating space at the table, and ensuring that no child – and no adult – feels unseen or unheard."

The other award recipients included

longtime Hampton educator Donna Woods, family physician Patricia Lee Geyer Wessler, social justice advocate Hakima Muhammad, and Christopher Newport University professor John Finn.

Purcellville Police Sergeant Dickson honored by VFW

Purcellville Police Department Sergeant **Michael Dickson** has been selected as the



- Dickson -

recipient of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Law Enforcement Public Servant Citation. Dickson was honored during the VFW's April 1 awards ceremony at the Loudoun County Post 1177 in Leesburg.

Since joining the department in 2017, Dickson has consistently demonstrated exceptional professionalism, dedication, and compassion in his service to the Purcellville community. He brings extensive knowledge and training to his role, including an Associate's in Administration of Justice from the Northern Virginia Community College and completion of an advanced Firearms Apprenticeship program. As the department's lead firearms instructor, he oversees firearms training and ensures compliance with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services standards. He is also certified in Crisis Intervention Training, equipping him to effectively respond to individuals experiencing mental health crises, and is also widely respected for mentoring new officers. His exemplary service has previously been recognized with a Unit Citation at the 2022 Loudoun Chamber of Commerce Valor Awards and a Safe Driving Award in 2025.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Dickson is deeply committed to community outreach, regularly participating in the PPD & BetterALife Homework Club, Kickball with a Cop, Cocoa with a Cop, Public Safety Day, and many other events to connect with community members. Known for his kindness, professionalism, and calm presence, he has received numerous accommodations of appreciation from residents.

Newport News appoints Clark as new city clerk

The Newport News City Council has appointed **Dr. Xavier D. Clark** as the new city clerk, following the retirement of Mabel Washington last year. Clark will serve as the senior executive support official to city council, reporting directly to the governing body



- Clark -

and leading the strategic, administrative, and operational functions of the City Clerk's Office. He assumed his duties on May 5.

Clark brings a distinguished record of leadership across federal service, academia, nonprofit management, and organizational transformation. Most recently, he served as the first senior accessibility officer for the United States Intelligence Community, where he led enterprise-wide accessibility strategy and culture modernization across all 18 agencies. His federal service also includes leadership roles with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence & Analysis, where he supported national security operations through strategic planning, organizational development, and executive communication.

In his new role, Clark will oversee all functions of the City Clerk's Office, including the management of city council meetings, agendas, records, and legislative processes. He will ensure compliance with federal, state, and local laws while advancing transparency, accessibility, and civic engagement. As the city's official records manager, he will maintain and certify public records, oversee records retention and compliance, and coordinate responses to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

Clark will also lead constituent engagement efforts on behalf of city council, strengthen communication between residents and local government, and implement innovative systems and technologies to modernize operations. His leadership will support the alignment of city actions with council priorities while fostering collaboration across departments and with community partners.

"Dr. Clark's experience at the highest levels of government and his proven ability to lead complex organizations make him exceptionally well suited for this role," said Mayor Phillip Jones in a press release. "His commitment to transparency, innovation, and public service will strengthen how city council connects with residents and carries out its work. We are excited to welcome him to Newport News."

Clark's career also includes leadership roles in the nonprofit sector, including serving as chief of staff & operations for Project Nehemiah and holding executive positions with the Fashion For All Foundation. In academia, he served as executive director of the George Mason University Pop Culture

PEOPLE

Studies Lab and as an adjunct professor and speech coach.

Clark holds a Bachelor's in Political Communication from The University of Texas at Austin, and a Master's in Emergency Management & Homeland Security and a Ph.D. in Strategic, Organizational, and Health Communication from George Mason University.

Davis is new deputy county administrator in Loudoun



Danny Davis has been appointed as a deputy county administrator in Loudoun County, effective July 2. Davis, who was selected for the position after a nationwide search, most recently served as the town manager

of Middleburg.

Davis has more than two decades of public and private sector leadership experience. He began his public service career with the Loudoun County government, serving in several roles including as a legislative aide to a member of the Board of Supervisors, and later as senior project manager and chief of staff in the Office of the County Administrator. Prior to his appointment as the Middleburg town manager in 2018, Davis served as president and executive director of Tribute at One Loudoun Assisted Living and Memory Care. He also served as assistant town manager in Purcellville from 2015-2017.

In his new position in Loudoun, Davis will join the 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.

Davis has a Bachelor's in Public Policy from Patrick Henry College and Master's in Public Administration from George Mason University. Davis has lived in Loudoun County and been involved in community activities since 2000.

Davis is also an active member of the International City/County Management Association and has earned the prestigious Credentialed Manager designation. To receive the credential, a member must have significant experience as a senior management executive in local government, meet educational requirements, and demonstrate a commitment to high standards of the profession and to lifelong learning and professional development.

Prince William Senior Deputy County Attorney Kelly honored by Local Government Attorneys

The Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc. (LGA) recently held their spring conference in Portsmouth. During the program, LGA awarded the 2026 A. Robert Cherin Award for Outstanding Deputy or Assistant Local Government Attorney to **Megan E. Kelly**, senior deputy county attorney for Prince William.

The Cherin Award recognizes a deputy or assistant local government attorney for exemplary public service and unwavering commitment to the highest ethical and professional principles.

After graduating from the College of William & Mary Marshall-Wythe School of Law, Kelly earned her Master's in Public Administration from George Mason University, where she served as a consultant to address challenges faced by state and local governments. She also served as an adjunct professor teaching graduate-level Ethics and was a guest MPA program lecturer.

Kelly began her legal career with the Prince William County Office in 1994, starting as a law clerk then as an assistant county attorney, and rose through the ranks to senior deputy county attorney. She has also been involved in and eventually served as chair of the Prince William County Beat the Odds program. Kelly also assisted the Prince William Fire and Rescue System in the development of countywide personnel and operational policies and procedures.

Currently, Kelly is helping the Prince William County Board and staff adopt and

implement collective bargaining. Throughout her career, she has shared her expertise in over a dozen published works, presentations, and training courses, many covering ethics. Kelly has been recognized with multiple local, regional, and professional awards, including LGA's Walter C. Erwin III Special Project Award for the 2007 Bono Committee Special Project.

DiMeo promoted to Staunton deputy city manager

Staunton City Manager Leslie Beauregard has announced the promotion of **Amanda**



DiMeo to deputy city manager. DiMeo, a 22-year veteran of city government, will serve in a dual capacity, retaining her current role as the director of Economic Development.

DiMeo's career is a full-circle story that began with a high school mentorship in Augusta County. Since joining the City of Staunton, she has served in several critical capacities. DiMeo has been a driving force in the Economic Development Department for several years, serving as director since 2024 and previously as an economic development specialist. In these roles, she spearheaded progress at Staunton Crossing and managed the city's Business Retention and Expansion Program, developing key marketing strategies to attract regional investment.

DiMeo served as the city's director of elections and registrar for more than 12 years, gaining extensive experience in local government administration, regulatory compliance, and public service.

In her new, dual role, DiMeo will continue to lead economic growth initiatives while taking on a broader portfolio of citywide administrative priorities. By designating this role as deputy city manager under Virginia State Code, the position is empowered to handle administrative duties during the city manager's routine absences or travel, a standard municipal best practice that streamlines day-to-day operations and ensures continuous, seamless service to the community.

DiMeo is a graduate of the LEAD program through the University of Virginia and the Virginia Women's Municipal Leadership Institute at Virginia Tech. She holds a Bachelor's in Political Science and Public Administration from Mary Baldwin University.



Megan E. Kelly (left) receives the 2026 A. Robert Cherin Award resolution from colleague Michelle R. Robl (right) during the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc.'s 2026 Spring Conference in Portsmouth.

Dumfries promotes Vines to deputy town manager



- Vines -

The Town of Dumfries has promoted **Joseph R. Vines III** to the position of deputy town manager, effective June 1.

In this leadership role, Vines will work alongside Town Manager Tangela Innis to support the town council’s strategic priorities, strengthen organizational operations, and advance initiatives focused on community engagement, service delivery, and sustainable growth.

“Joseph has consistently demonstrated a collaborative leadership style, operational expertise, and a deep commitment to public service,” Innis said in a statement. “His promotion reflects the town’s continued investment in strong leadership and organizational excellence as we advance the council’s vision for the future of Dumfries.”

Vines brings more than 25 years of public sector leadership experience in parks, recreation, tourism, civic engagement, and community development. He most recently served as the town’s director of recreation and civic engagement, a role he assumed in April 2024. Throughout his distinguished career, Vines has demonstrated a strong track record in executive leadership, operational management, strategic planning, program development, facility and project management, capital improvement planning, budget administration, and the planning design and renovation of parks, recreational facilities, and community centers.

Vines is working toward a Bachelor’s in Business Management and Planning. He has also completed numerous professional development programs and certifications that support excellence in public service leadership, including the VRPS Athletic Fields Course, Front Line Leadership Training, Creative Conflict Resolution, and Professional Communication.

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.

Emporia welcomes Boone as human resources specialist



- Boone -

In early June, the City of Emporia announced the appointment of **Alexandria Boone** as the city’s new human resources specialist, bringing experience in municipal human resources, classification and compensation, personnel policies, human resources generalist, and public administration to the community.

Previously, Boone served as the classification and compensation specialist for the Virginia Department of Health. In that role, she provided direct guidance to hiring managers and HR staff, enforced policy compliance, and assisted with the implementation of a new HR system. She developed and delivered training, ensured that positions were appropriately classified, and was responsible for completing salary analysis for over 3,000 employees.

“Alexandria brings an impressive combination of municipal experience,” said City Manager Mr. William E. Johnson III in a press release. “Her background in human resources, payroll, benefits and classification and compensation, and job description management will be a tremendous asset to the city. We are excited to welcome her to the team.”

A native of Emporia, Boone holds a Bachelor of Administration degree from the Strayer University in Chesterfield.

Youmans named Roanoke assistant city manager



- Youmans -

Lavar Youmans has been selected to join the City of Roanoke’s executive team as an assistant city manager. Roanoke City Council confirmed Youmans’ selection at its April 20 meeting following a national search. He began his new role on June 1.

Youmans brings more than 16 years of experience, leading complex public organizations through fiscal recovery, strategic planning, and operational modernization. He comes to Roanoke from Hampton County, SC, where he served as county administrator. During his tenure in Hampton County, he led a financial stabilization effort that significantly improved the General Fund’s budgetary fund balance and advanced stra-

tegic goals into 33 adopted objectives, many with immediate fiscal impacts.

Alongside Assistant City Manager Angie O’Brien, Youmans will support City Manager Valmarie Turner. Youmans will oversee multiple operational departments, including Public Works and General Services.

Youmans holds a Bachelor’s in Communication from North Greenville University and a Master’s in Social Work from Howard University.

Newsoms’ Ellsworth-Cofield honored by disABILITY Law Center of Virginia

Town of Newsoms Mayor **Stephanie Ellsworth-Cofield** received the 2026 disABILITY Impact Award for Distinguished Service, presented by the disABILITY Law Center of Virginia (dLCV) during its May awards ceremony.



- Ellsworth-Cofield -

Ellsworth-Cofield – the first Black female mayor of Newsoms – was recognized for her dedicated volunteer service and advocacy supporting individuals with disabilities and other vulnerable community members across Virginia. As a dLCV volunteer, she has contributed to legislative advocacy efforts, polling place accessibility surveys, and institutional monitoring initiatives that help identify and prevent abuse, neglect, and barriers to access throughout the Commonwealth. She has also led the initiative for Aphasia Awareness Month to be officially recognized and adopted in Southampton County through a formal proclamation.

“The disABILITY Impact Awards remind us that meaningful change happens because people choose to lead, advocate, and create space for others. We are proud to recognize this year’s honorees and the impact they are making across Virginia,” said Devin Coleman, director of development with dLCV.

“This effort was deeply personal and rooted in my passion for disability advocacy, health equity, and public awareness surrounding communication disorders that affect countless individuals and families,” stated Ellsworth-Cofield in a press release. “Receiving this recognition is both humbling and motivating, as it reflects the ongoing work I have dedicated toward advancing disability rights, accessibility, advocacy, and equitable opportunities for all Virginians.”

Newport News celebrates Ella Fitzgerald

NEWPORT NEWS HOSTED a citywide series of jazz performances this spring to honor its most famous native, Ella Fitzgerald.

The Ella Fitzgerald Jazz Celebration, presented by Hampton Roads Jazz Incorporated (HR Jazz), featured multiple performances across several venues, bringing together nationally recognized artists, emerging performers, and local talent. The series continued HR Jazz's mission to present live jazz while supporting education and community engagement throughout the region.

In addition to the HR Jazz concert series, the celebration included the 28th Annual Ella Fitzgerald Music Festival at the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center, home of the Ella Fitzgerald Theater. The festival, a longstanding tradition in Newport News, featured multiple performances highlighting a range of jazz styles.

The Ferguson Center for the Arts at Christopher Newport University also hosted performances as part of the celebration, presenting internationally recognized artists at one of the region's primary concert venues.

Together, HR Jazz, the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center, and the Ferguson Center for the Arts coordinated events across April and May as part of a broader effort to recognize Fitzgerald's legacy and Newport News' role in jazz history. The celebration included a mix of concerts, educational programming, and community events designed to engage audiences of all ages.



New LOVEworks sign in Alberta designed by high school welders

THE TOWN OF ALBERTA – home to roughly 300 residents – now sports the Commonwealth's newest LOVE sign, courtesy of a skilled group of high school welders.

Unveiled during a ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 17, the metal sign was designed and constructed by Sarah Burkett's welding classes at Rowanty Technical Center, a facility available to Prince George, Dinwiddie, and Sussex High School students interested in exploring trade work. Town residents gathered to mark the occasion, taking photographs and sharing stories.

The iconic LOVEworks signs are an integral part of the Virginia Tourism Corporation's "Virginia is for Lovers" campaign.

More than 300 installations now dot the Commonwealth; each is a work of art intended to celebrate local materials, history, and pride.

In a statement, Dinwiddie County Public Schools shared, "We are so proud to recognize the talented students of the Rowanty Technical Center welding class for their contribution to the brand-new LOVE sign in Alberta. Through hard work, craftsmanship, and dedication, these students helped to bring a meaningful project to life while showcasing the valuable skills they are developing through Career & Technical Education."



Roanoke County identifies community needs through housing study

By Em Poertner
Social Media Manager
Roanoke County Communications Office

ROANOKE COUNTY RECENTLY completed a housing market analysis study with RKG Associates to identify housing needs within the county and how the county can address those needs. The analysis will help the county with future planning to focus on housing diversity, land use, and strategic investments.

The county has seen a demographic shift over the last decade with the fastest growing age group being adults over 55, while families with children are declining. The median household income has also increased by 37% since 2013, from \$60,795 to \$82,931.

The county is seeing an affordability gap with newer single-family home prices reaching an average of \$385,000. The development trends also show density for common housing types (single-family homes, apartments, etc.) falling behind the industry standards, which is partially due to the environmental and physical constraints of the county.

With this information in mind, the county can focus planning efforts on increasing housing diversity. Recommendations from the consultant include:

- Increasing supply for first-time homebuyers
- Diversifying housing types for owners
- Increasing supply and quality of rental housing
- Increasing housing options for seniors

Effective land use is also a high priority for the county with a blend of suburbs and rural, mountainous areas. Improving housing density in existing development areas and prioritizing



projects that encourage diverse pricing and redevelopment are recommendations the county is already working toward. The Planning Department has begun a study in the Glenvar community to examine land use, housing, facilities, transportation, and natural resources. There has also been a recent zoning approval for redeveloping a former hotel into compact apartments.

Strategic investment is the last recommendation area from RKG Associates. This includes encouraging innovative site use, leveraging state and federal funding programs for development, and supporting rehab assistance programs to help revitalize existing homes and neighborhoods.

The results from the study will help inform the Roanoke County Planning Department, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors when making decisions from comprehensive planning to rezoning requests.

More information on the study can be found at roanoke-countyva.gov/HousingStudy.

Downtown Wytheville earns 2026 Great American Main Street Award

DOWNTOWN WYTHEVILLE, INC. received the prestigious Great American Main Street Award at the 2026 Main Street Now Conference in Tulsa this April.

Selected by a national jury of leaders in economic development and historic preservation, Downtown Wytheville, Inc. was

recognized for leading one of the nation's most dramatic downtown turnarounds. The organization reduced vacancy rates from 42% in 2014 to just 4% today through strategic preservation, stacked small wins, and deep community trust-building resulting in nearly \$24 million in private investment.

"Downtown Wytheville exemplifies the power of the Main Street Approach to rebuild not only buildings, but civic belief," said Erin Barnes, president and CEO of Main Street America. "Through grassroots leadership, inclusive engagement, and a preservation-first strategy, Wytheville transformed a largely empty downtown into a thriving district where residents see themselves reflected in the future."

Downtown Wytheville, Inc. is one of only three programs in the nation to receive the 2026 Great American Main Street Award, solidifying its place among the country's top downtown revitalization efforts.

For more information about the organization and this award, visit downtownwytheville.org.





Town of Ashland recognized for gains in community trust and engagement

THE TOWN OF ASHLAND has received national recognition for its continued progress in strengthening community trust and civic engagement, as highlighted in a recent feature by Polco and the National Research Center.

The recognition is based on results from the National Community Survey (NCS), a nationally benchmarked survey that measures resident perspectives on quality of life, local government performance, and trust. By comparing results with hundreds of communities across the country, the survey provides a clear, credible measure of how Ashland is performing – and the town's most recent results show meaningful gains in both trust and engagement.

“This recognition reflects the kind of community we've been working to build – one where people are informed, involved, and confident their voice matters,” said Town Manager Joshua Farrar. “That doesn't happen by accident. It comes from consistent communication, real dialogue, and a commitment to follow through on what we hear matters to our community.”

That trust is not just reflected in survey data; it's showing up across the community in tangible ways.

This year, Ashland received more feedback on its town budget than in the past 10 years combined, alongside a significant increase in applications to serve on boards and commissions and strong participation from a large pool of candidates in the past two town council election cycles.

“What's notable is that the engagement we're seeing isn't driven by a single issue or moment. It's consistent,” said Assistant Town Manager Martha J. Miller. “We're seeing more people give feedback, more residents step into leadership roles, and more interest in serving the community. That tells us people believe their voice matters – and that they can make a difference here.”

Over the past several years, Ashland has made intentional investments in community engagement, including the continued growth of its Community Leadership Academy, the Community Ambassadors program, rapidly growing viewership of public information tools like the Town Tea, and the recent launch of EngageAshlandVA, a new online engagement portal to expand access and meet residents where they are.

These efforts reflect a long-term strategy to expand participation, strengthen communication, and build pathways for civic leadership through consistent, transparent access to town information and staff.

“This is about building a community where people feel heard and valued,” Farrar added. “We're proud of the progress, and we're committed to continuing that work.”

The town will continue to build on this momentum by expanding outreach, strengthening partnerships, and creating even more opportunities for residents, businesses, and community organizations to help shape Ashland's future.

Project Imagine launches pilot housing program in Danville

A NEW 12-WEEK PROGRAM in Danville is giving young adults the tools to not only find housing, but to keep it and succeed.

The Project Imagine Housing Stabilization Program, created in partnership with the Danville Redevelopment and Housing Authority and Third Chance Housing, is designed specifically for young people ages 18 to 24 who are ready to take the next step toward independence. This pilot program brings together housing, support services, and one-on-one guidance to help participants build real-world skills and create a stable future.

“The goal is to meet young people where they are and give them the support they need to succeed long-term,” said Robert David, the City of Danville's violence prevention manager and head of Project Imagine. “This program isn't just about getting housing – it's about building confidence, life skills, and a foundation they can carry with them moving forward.”



The first four weeks focus on the basics of living on your own. Participants take part in hands-on classes covering topics like understanding tenant responsibilities, managing money, keeping a home clean and organized, and building everyday habits that support long-term stability.

After that, the program shifts gears. Instead of classroom time, participants work closely with housing stabilization advocates who provide personalized support, help troubleshoot challenges, and connect them to resources along the way. By the end of the program, participants will have gained practical skills, built confidence, and received consistent support to help them maintain stable housing and move forward successfully.

This partnership is all about giving young adults the tools, support, and opportunity to build a strong foundation for their future.

Albemarle County partners with Southern Development Group on Northside Drive industrial project

ALBEMARLE COUNTY has partnered with Southern Development Group in expanding infrastructure to support industrial businesses in the county, with a new project on Northside Drive at Route 29. The project will bring much-needed industrial space to the region and create opportunities for businesses in manufacturing, logistics, and research.

The new development will begin on a 9.2-acre parcel strategically located along Route 29, one of the few remaining undeveloped sites in the county zoned for heavy industrial use. The first phase of the project will develop a modern industrial building designed to serve multiple purposes. The 72,000-square-foot building is intentionally designed to be adaptable, with 50-foot wide-increment bays that offer a customer-oriented front entry and a loading dock with truck travel ways at the rear. This will accommodate a variety of commercial and industrial user needs, including showroom and storage space for businesses with customer-facing needs, small-scale production areas, and flexible research and development space for startups looking to scale. It could also provide warehousing capacity for regional-scale businesses.

Industrial space is in short supply in Albemarle County, and this project addresses that gap. The property has carried industrial zoning for decades but has never been developed, making this project a long-awaited opportunity to unlock its potential and strengthen the region's economic resilience.

To help make the project a reality, the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors and the Albemarle County Economic Development Authority (EDA) approved a performance-based incentive



at their January meetings. The synthetic tax increment financing (SYNTIF) agreement will rebate 75 percent of property taxes generated by the new development for up to 10 years, capped at \$350,000. Payments will only occur after the project is built and producing revenue. The agreement is contingent on Southern Development completing the purchase and development of the parcel by June 30, 2027, securing all necessary permits, providing quarterly progress reports, and remaining in good standing with Albemarle County and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The EDA also awarded this project a Building Reuse Grant award of up to \$250,000 to support the extension of a sewer line to provide service access to this site. Adequate infrastructure is essential for light industrial activity.

The project aligns with Albemarle County's long-term economic development strategic plan goals, including maintaining a pipeline of sites and buildings that meet the needs of key industry clusters. With its proximity to Route 29, Charlottesville Albemarle Airport, and Interstate 64, the Northside Drive site offers strategic advantages for businesses looking to grow in Central Virginia.

New Kent/Charles City Children's Services Act Department receives state award

THE NEW KENT/CHARLES CITY Children's Services Act (CSA) Department was recently selected to receive the State Executive Council's (SEC) Excellence in CSA Award.

As a part of the SEC's strategic plan, local CSA programs that demonstrate best practices and innovation serving their communities and enhancing their local system of care are recognized. In collaboration with the Office of Children's Services (OCS),

the SEC has been presenting the Excellence in CSA Award to outstanding local CSA programs since March 2025.

New Kent/Charles City CSA Director DeDreama Harrod played a central role in receiving the Excellence in CSA Award, and Harrod accepted the award this spring.

"This is a well-deserved recognition for the outstanding work being done to serve our children and families," said New Kent County Administrator Rodney Hathaway. "Mrs. Harrod's leadership and the dedication she shows continue to strengthen our local system of care, and we are proud of the example she sets."

More about the Children's Services Act

The Children's Services Act is a 1993 Virginia law providing state and local funding for services to at-risk youth and their families. It promotes community-based, child-centered care for children with severe emotional/behavioral issues, special education needs (including private school placement), and those in foster care. Local teams, such as the one serving New Kent/Charles City, manage these funds to keep families together.



Charlottesville City Schools advances major Solar Power Purchase Agreement for high school

CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY SCHOOLS (CCS) and the City of Charlottesville have announced the successful execution of a major Solar Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) that will significantly advance community sustainability goals while delivering long-term financial benefits. A PPA is an arrangement in which a third-party developer installs, owns, and operates an energy system on a customer’s property. The customer purchases the system’s electric output for a predetermined period.

Under this new agreement, a 1.318 MWdc size solar energy system will be installed at Charlottesville High School (CHS). Once operational, the system is expected to generate approximately 1,738,000 kilowatt-hours of renewable energy each year. This production will offset an estimated 59% of CHS’s total annual electricity use.

Over the 25-year term of the PPA, the project is forecast to achieve approximately \$2.3 million in avoided electricity costs. The environmental benefits are equally significant. The project will avoid more than 40,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions, which is equivalent to removing roughly 8,400 gas-powered cars from the road for an entire year. This initiative represents a substantial contribution toward the city’s long-term climate and sustainability goals.

This project has been a collaborative effort between CCS and the city. Work toward establishing a solar PPA has been underway for nearly a decade, reflecting a long-standing commitment to renewable energy and responsible stewardship of public resources.

“This project reflects intentional and substantial climate and sustainability work. It demonstrates our community’s understanding and willingness to tackle solutions that will deliver multiple benefits,” said Kristel Riddervold, director of the Office of Sustainability.

The city partnered with Madison Energy Infrastructure (MEI+), a Virginia-headquartered company with an office in Charlottesville. Several Madison team members are city residents, bringing local expertise and community connection to the project’s development and execution.

“Charlottesville City Schools and the City of Charlottesville have set a powerful example of public sector leadership, driving \$2.3 million in avoided costs over 25 years and making a significant leap toward their sustainability goals,” said Meghan Milo, director of MEI+. “We’re proud to be trusted as their partner, and to bring hands-on STEM education into the classrooms where some of our own children learn. This project hits close to home in the best way.”



Colonial Heights marks 100 years since establishment

IN 2026, THE CITY OF COLONIAL HEIGHTS proudly celebrates a century since its establishment as a town – 100 years of community, progress, and shared history. This milestone offers the city a special opportunity to honor its past, reflect on growth, and look forward to the future. Throughout the year, the city will host a series of commemorative events and activities for residents, families, and visitors to enjoy.

Upcoming highlights include the Recreation & Parks Block Party on select dates throughout June, the Colonial Heights Fireworks on July 4, the Boys Invitational Baseball Tournament in August, Colonial Heights National Night Out on August 4, and the Americana Fest on August 22.

The city invites all to join in marking this historic anniversary and celebrating the spirit that makes Colonial Heights such a remarkable place to call home. To learn more about upcoming events, visit colonialheightsva.com/ch100.





Clifton Forge unveils branding for Main Street district

RECENTLY THE TOWN of Clifton Forge, in partnership with Clifton Forge Main Street, unveiled its new branding to a crowd of eager residents at the Historic Masonic Theatre. The branding initiative was partially funded by Virginia Main Street's (VMS) Community Vitality Grant (CVG).

"This grant funded a comprehensive branding initiative to strengthen the town's identity and economic positioning," said Courtney Mailey, state coordinator and program manager for Virginia Main Street. "Building on Clifton Forge Main Street's history of impactful projects, including downtown revitalization, business support programs, and community events, we hope this branding will serve as a strategic tool to promote tourism, foster economic growth, and enhance civic pride."

After several community input sessions, the town and its chosen design firm, Arnett Muldrow, settled on incorporating a "forge" inspired by the town's namesake. The new branding package includes a suite of designs for local government, the Main Street organization, and potential event logos.

"In this community-led effort, people wanted to incorporate the railroad history, the arts scene, the friendliness of the people who live here, the outdoor availability of parks and trails – forging all of these ideas into one concept seemed an impossible task," said Clifton Forge Board Member Gayle Hillert.

Effective immediately, the branding will be used for all government correspondence, including letterheads, marketing materials, and placemaking initiatives. The marketing materials are also available for public use, whether by residents or businesses using them in their merchandise.

Branding is just one part of community development and is only as effective as its implementation. For Clifton Forge, local government will certainly get its money's worth in the coming years, as several state-funded initiatives are underway. Most recently, the Department of Housing and Community Development awarded Clifton Forge a \$75,000 Community Development Block Grant to create a Downtown Master Plan, which will outline a strategy for future investment from both the public and private sectors. Additionally, Virginia Housing awarded the town a \$1 million grant in late 2025 to redevelop the historic Jefferson School, a segregation-era school built to serve Black children. Upon completion, 28 new workforce housing units will be created.

Main Street Clifton Forge is an Exploring Main Street community and has been a part of the Virginia Main Street program since 2024.

City of Fairfax named a top small town arts scene

THE CITY OF FAIRFAX has been recognized as one of the 10 best small town art scenes in the country. The city of 25,000 residents placed fourth in USA Today 10BEST's 2026 Reader's Choice Award for Best Small Town Arts Scene.

Nominations were carefully curated by a panel of subject matter experts and USA Today 10BEST editors before being voted on by the public. ArtsFairfax, which represents more than 200 arts organizations in the Fairfax region, promoted the city for the award.

"Our late mayor, John Mason, the founder of Spotlight on the Arts in 1985 and a former chair of ArtsFairfax, would have been so pleased that Fairfax city's investment in the arts is being recognized," said Mayor Catherine Read. "This honor is a decades-long culmination of a focused effort to build strong re-

lationships with our local partners in the arts, including George Mason University."

Evidence of the city's patronage of the arts is everywhere. A major restoration project is underway at Old Town Hall, the iconic 126-year-old Colonial Revival building anchoring the historic district. The windows, which are being restored by a specialist in Ohio, have been temporarily replaced with large, colorful paintings by Murals at Mason artist Girasol O'Neill.

"Our city is home to artists and artisans whose work is nurtured and appreciated here," Read continued. "Beautiful murals are blooming on exterior walls throughout the city, and we feature local works of art inside City Hall and at the Sherwood Center."

A nature-themed mural adorns the exterior of the Draper Drive Park restroom building, and a new mural will be installed at Thais Memorial Park when the renovation project is completed. Three mini art vending machines featuring local artists' work are available at the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, the Sherwood Center, and various city businesses. The quarter-operated machines are fun and playful. There is also a new LOVE sign in Old Town Square.

Visitors to Fairfax are encouraged to discover stunning murals and public art on a self-guided walking tour. A map available on the Fairfax Economic Development website will lead visitors to the city's many Instagram-worthy locations.



Six venues and events recognized as new affiliates of the Heritage Music Trail

THE CROOKED ROAD – a 330-mile driving trail through Southwest Virginia connecting music venues and festivals – has accepted six new Affiliate Venues onto Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail.

The 2026 Affiliate Venue additions include the Fries Old Time and Bluegrass Fiddlers’ Convention, the Chilhowie JAM-Boree, the Newport Community Center, the Flat Ridge Community Center, the Fancy Gap Country Store, and Blue Highway Fest.

The Crooked Road’s Affiliate Venues showcase the finest in traditional music and present a unique experience based on their historical and cultural significance. There are currently 46 Affiliate Venues along The Crooked Road, representing a collection of venues, festivals, jams, and concert series across Southwest Virginia. As part of their recognition by Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail, each venue will be presented with an official banner, marking its place along The Crooked Road.

The Fries Old Time and Bluegrass Fiddlers’ Convention is an annual convention held in Grayson County. Kevin Combs, Fries tourism director, describes joining The Crooked Road as “another way to share the music, people, and sense of place that have shaped this community for generations.” The organization will be presented with their banner during the convention, which is to take place August 14-15.

The Chilhowie JAM-Boree in Smyth County is a weekly jam hosted by The Chilhowie Lions Club. The Chilhowie JAM-Boree banner presentation will be announced later.

The Newport Community Center in Giles County hosts a biweekly jam, welcoming local and regional musicians.

“The tunes and stories woven through generations here are lifted up and carried forward through this recognition and through the beloved bluegrass and old-time jam sessions,” said Cora Gnagy, tourism director of Giles County. The Newport Community

Center was presented with its banner on March 20.

The Flat Ridge Community Center in Grayson County hosts a weekly meal and jam from April through December. For 21 years, the center has provided family-friendly fun for the community.

“Being welcomed into The Crooked Road means more than a place on the map for Flat Ridge Community Center. It honors the musicians who share their talents freely, the volunteers who serve with open hearts, and the neighbors and visitors from far and near who gather here each Saturday night,” says Michelle Galyean, Flat Ridge Community Center board member. The Flat Ridge Community Center was presented with its banner on May 9.

The Fancy Gap Country Store in Carroll County hosts a weekly jam and operates an old-time country store. The store is owned and operated by Mark Gaydos, who opened the location to share his love of mountain music.

“We are honored here at The Fancy Gap Country Store to be an affiliate of The Crooked Road and for helping us put Fancy Gap back on the music map,” Gaydos said. The Fancy Gap Country Store banner presentation is to be announced.

Blue Highway Fest is a music festival held annually in Wise County. The festival brings world-class musicians together in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains. Ked Meade, Big Stone Gap tourism director, says joining The Crooked Road “helps bring more visitors to Big Stone Gap, supports local musicians and businesses, and highlights our town as a place where live music and tradition are still very much alive.” Blue Highway Fest will be presented with its banner during the festival, which is to take place October 8-11.

For more information about The Crooked Road, please visit thecrookedroadva.com.



Town of Front Royal honored with awards for power safety, electric reliability

THE TOWN OF FRONT ROYAL has earned the American Public Power Association (APPA) Safety Award of Excellence for safe operating practices in 2025, receiving the top Diamond Level honor in its utility category.

More than 240 utilities entered the annual Safety Awards contest for 2025. The entrants were placed in accordance with their number of worker-hours and ranked based on the most incident-free records and the overall state of their safety programs and culture during 2025. The incidence rate is based on the number of work-related reportable injuries or illnesses and the number of worker-hours during 2025, as defined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

APPA has conducted the Safety Awards annually for more than 68 years. APPA is the voice of not-for-profit, community-owned utilities that power 2,000 towns and cities nationwide.

The Town of Front Royal also received national recognition for achieving exceptional electric reliability in 2025. APPA helps electric utilities track power outage and restoration data through its subscription-based PowerTRX Reliability service. Once per

year, APPA's Reliability Team compares this data to national statistics tracked by the U.S. Energy Information Administration for all types of electric utilities.



“I am continually inspired by the unwavering commitment of public power utilities to delivering reliable service to their communities,” said Adrienne Lotto, senior vice president of Grid Security, Operations, and Technical Services. “The utilities honored here have set the standard for excellence and dedication, ensuring that families and businesses can count on their local power providers every day. Congratulations to these outstanding teams for earning this well-deserved recognition and for making a positive difference where it matters most.”

Nationwide, the average public power customer has their lights out for less than half the amount of time that customers of other types of utilities do.

“We are proud to receive this recognition. It is a testament to the hard work of all our staff to ensure that we keep Front Royal powered,” said Carey Saffelle, director of energy services for the Town of Front Royal.

Leesburg breaks ground on pickleball courts



(L-R) Parks & Recreation Commission Chairman Brody McCray, Mayor for a Day Luca Hobel, Mayor Kelly Burk, and Councilmember Zach Cummings.

MAYOR KELLY BURK, Councilmember Zach Cummings, and members of town staff gathered to celebrate the official ground-breaking of Leesburg's first municipal pickleball courts on April 8.

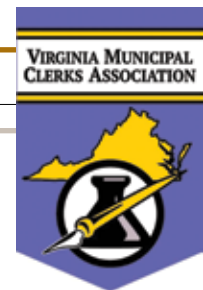
Located adjacent to Freedom Park in southeast Leesburg, the project will involve the installation of asphalt pads to accommodate five outdoor pickleball courts surrounded by perimeter fencing with lighting. Construction is expected to be completed by fall 2026.

The project was officially added to the town's Capital Improvements Program in Fiscal Year 2023, following advocacy from residents.

“Over the past several years, we've seen pickleball take off across the country, and Leesburg has been no exception,” Burk stated. “Our residents have embraced this sport. You've filled our indoor spaces, shared your passion at meetings, and collaborated with our Parks and Recreation team to help us understand what this could mean for Leesburg. And today we get to turn that energy into a permanent, dedicated space.”

To mark the occasion, Burk, Cummings, Parks & Recreation Commission Chairman Brody McCray, and Mayor for a Day Luca Hobel, a fifth grader from Ball's Bluff Elementary School, shoveled out some pickleballs (in lieu of dirt) to signify the start of construction.

More information on the project can be found at leesburgva.gov/pickleball.



Virginia Municipal Clerks Association names Brown as new president

THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL Clerks Association (VMCA) has sworn in Camisha Brown as the VMCA president for the 2026-27 term. In addition to this distinguished leadership role, Brown has also been honored as the VMCA Clerk of the Year, recognizing her exceptional service, leadership, and dedication to the municipal clerk profession.

Brown was sworn in during the VMCA Annual Conference, surrounded by fellow clerks, colleagues, and local government leaders from across the Commonwealth. As president, she will lead the association in advancing professional development, strengthening collaboration among clerks, and promoting excellence in local government administration throughout Virginia.

The Clerk of the Year Award is one of VMCA's highest honors and is presented annually to a municipal clerk who demonstrates outstanding achievement, innovation, and commitment to public service. Brown's selection reflects her unwavering dedication to her community, her profession, and her peers.

Brown serves as the executive assistant and clerk to the Board of Supervisors for Dinwiddie County, where she plays a key role in supporting the board's administrative functions and legislative responsibilities. Known for her professionalism, attention to detail, and commitment to transparent governance, Brown brings strong organizational and communication skills to her work with both elected officials and the public. Her commitment to professional growth and public service is reflected in her impressive credentials, having earned her Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) designation in 2024 and achieved the prestigious Master Municipal Clerk (MMC) certification in 2025.

As VMCA president, Brown will continue advancing the organization's mission: to elevate the expertise of municipal clerks and foster a community of excellence by providing the tools, resources, and support needed for professional growth and development. She will represent the Commonwealth of Virginia at the 2026 IIMC Annual Conference in Reno, NV.

Big Stone Gap celebrates grand opening of Tyler Flanary Bike & Skate Park

THE TOWN OF BIG STONE GAP and Friends of Southwest Virginia celebrated the ribbon-cutting of the Tyler Flanary Bike & Skate Park at Bullitt Park on May 16. The opening marked the completion of a years-long effort to bring world-class outdoor recreation infrastructure to Southwest Virginia and to honor the memory of Tyler Flanary, whose community-led memorial fund helped bring the project to life.

The park was made possible through the combined investment of the Town of Big Stone Gap, Friends of Southwest Virginia, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation, the Cumberland Forest Fund, and the Rapha Foundation.

"The Town of Big Stone Gap has worked hard to make this park a reality, and today we celebrate what our community has built together," said Stephen Lawson, town manager of Big Stone Gap. "The Tyler Flanary Bike & Skate Park is more than a recreational facility; it is a gathering place, a tribute, and a statement about the kind of community we are and the future we are building. We are proud to offer this space to our residents and to welcome visitors from across the region and beyond."

The park features a Union Cycliste Internationale-rated asphalt pump track designed for competition-level biking, along with a competition-grade concrete skate park with steel coping rails.

Following Flanary's passing, family, friends, and community members established a memorial fund that raised nearly \$100,000, a grassroots effort that became the foundation for the broader partnership that ultimately brought the park to fruition.

"We are so honored to see this vision come to life," said Kim Davis, executive director of Friends of Southwest Virginia. "From the beginning, this project has been about honoring Tyler's life

and the incredible impact he had on this community. It's also about creating something lasting for Big Stone Gap, a place where families, kids, riders, and visitors can come together for generations to come. The momentum happening in Big Stone Gap right now is incredible, and this park is a powerful example of what can happen when a community believes in itself and people come together to make something meaningful happen."

The Tyler Flanary Bike & Skate Park is now open to the public, serving as both a community gathering space and a regional outdoor recreation destination. The park adds to Southwest Virginia's growing portfolio of world-class trails, parks, and adventure assets.

For more information, visit FriendsofSWVA.org.



Loudoun County's Scrape for the Grape program targets harmful lanternflies



AN ANNUAL LOUDOUN County program to combat the invasive spotted lanternfly continues to grow. Now in its third year, Scrape for the Grape focuses on one of the most effective early-season management strategies: removing spotted lanternfly egg

masses before they hatch. The lanternfly feeds on plant sap and can severely damage grapevines, fruit trees, hardwood forests, and other crops. Without preventative measures, the insect ultimately weakens plants, reduces yields, and threatens agricultural operations.

This year's Scrape for the Grape campaign drew over 1,100 volunteers who spent three weekends in March and April destroying more than 10.3 million lanternfly eggs. Since 2024, over 2,300 volunteers have prevented an estimated 20 million spotted lanternflies from hatching in Loudoun County.

"To almost double the impact we made last year is a testament to how much our community values our wine industry and wants to protect our number one visitor attraction," Visit Loudoun President and CEO Beth Erickson shared in a statement. "The momentum of this campaign has now garnered national media attention, which will show destinations across the country the impact people can make to protect the places they love."

The campaign was initially formed as a partnership between Visit Loudoun, the Loudoun Invasive Removal Alliance, the Virginia Cooperative Extension of Loudoun County, and the

Loudoun Wineries & Winegrowers Association. This year, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy joined the organization.

The event incorporated 30 locations across the county, including wineries, parks, and neighborhoods. Volunteers were trained to identify spotted lanternfly egg masses and destroy them using credit card-sized scrapers. Each egg mass eliminated prevents dozens of lanternflies from emerging later to feed on sap from the vines and severely damage or kill them. Participants also identified 117 trees of heaven, the lanternfly's preferred host plant. These trees will later be removed.

Loudoun County is home to one of the most prominent wine regions in the Mid-Atlantic. Often referred to as DC's Wine Country, the county has more than 850 acres of vineyards producing approximately 2,300 tons of grapes each year. The region supports more than 50 wineries that produce over 25 grape varieties. For vineyard owners, managing invasive pests such as the spotted lanternfly is essential to maintaining vine health and the long-term sustainability of their businesses.

"The spotted lanternfly is a huge threat to our vineyards and our livelihood," said Bill Hatch, owner of Zephaniah Farm Vineyard. "My hope is that Scrape for the Grape will continue to build awareness of the threat that all invasive species have on farming and on the beautiful Loudoun natural environment."

New trademarked by Visit Loudoun, the partner organizations hope to expand the Scrape for the Grape program beyond Loudoun County in the coming years.

Tappahannock Central Park Phase Two complete; grand opening held April 16

THE COMPLETION OF Phase Two renovations at Tappahannock Central Park marks another significant milestone in the continued development of this popular community space.



Newly constructed permanent public restroom facilities officially opened to the public during a grand opening celebration on April 16. Additional improvements completed as part of Phase Two include:

- Two new 16x20-foot pavilions
- Conversion of stone pavers to smooth, accessible concrete pathways
- Installation of an additional shaded bench near the playground
- Placement of new flagpoles

These enhancements were designed to improve comfort, accessibility, and the overall visitor experience, ensuring the park continues to serve as a welcoming gathering place for both residents and visitors.

Tappahannock Central Park has quickly become a hub for recreation, relaxation, and community connection. With the completion of Phase Two, the park is even better equipped to support public events, family outings, and everyday enjoyment.

Listening to tomorrow's leaders today

IN HER STATEWIDE winning essay, City of Hampton resident and Lindsay Middle School student Serene Colden addressed the persistent problem of local flooding. While this issue is especially relevant to her locality, near the end of her essay, Ms. Colden made an observation that rings universally true: “When leaders listen and respond, people feel safer and more supported.”

In his comments on the essay, VML President and Mayor of the Town of Amherst Dwayne Tuggle picked up on Ms. Colden’s sentiment when he noted: “Serene’s approach to the problem looks at not just how to solve the problem, but how to engage and inform citizens while doing it.”

Indeed, Ms. Colden’s assertion that leaders must not only solve problems but also assure their constituents that they are heard lies at the very heart of the “If I Were Mayor” essay contest. Every year we want to know what young people think can be done to solve an important issue by listening to their community members so they feel safer and supported.

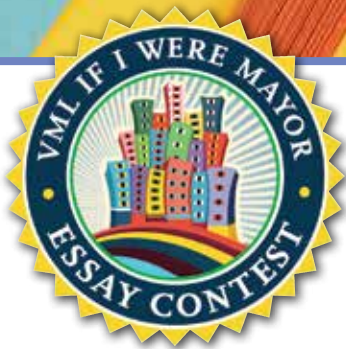
And this year’s winners did just that!

As VML Executive Director Michelle Gowdy put it: “Although they wrote from personal experience and community awareness, this year’s winners were focused on issues like mental health, affordable housing, and access to medical care (just to name a few) that concern Virginians of all ages across the Commonwealth.”

So, congratulations to all!

Each winner received a certificate and gift card presented by VML staff at a council meeting. And, of course, the essays are featured in this issue of *Virginia Town & City*. We hope that you enjoy reading the thoughtful solutions to real problems proposed by these future leaders.





Statewide Winner

Serene Colden

Lindsay Middle School – City of Hampton
Teacher: Stacey-Ann Facey



IMAGINE WAKING UP after a heavy rain and seeing your street covered in water. Cars cannot pass, students are late for school, and families are worried about damage to their homes. If I were Mayor of Hampton, the most important problem I would focus on is flooding.

Hampton is a coastal city, which means flooding happens more often than people may think. Even short storms can cause water to collect on roads and in neighborhoods. Some streets flood almost every time there is a hard rain. I spoke with a family member and a neighbor, and they both said certain low areas are always a problem. This shows that flooding is not just a rare event – it is an ongoing issue that affects many people.

Flooding is serious because it affects safety and daily life. When roads are underwater, emergency vehicles can be delayed. People may miss work or school. Water can also damage homes, cars, and businesses. Families should not have to feel stressed every time it rains.

If I were mayor, I would start by improving Hampton's stormwater drainage system. First, I would work with city engineers to find the areas that flood the most. These places would become top priorities. The city would clear clogged drains and fix or upgrade old pipes so water could flow away faster during storms. Next, I would support natural solutions. Planting more trees, building rain gardens, and protecting wetlands would help soak up extra rainwater. These actions will not only reduce flooding but will also make neighborhoods greener and more beautiful.

Another important part of my plan would be better communication. I would create an easy online system where residents can report flooding and get updates during storms. When leaders listen and respond, people feel safer and more supported.

If I were mayor, I would work hard to protect Hampton from flooding now and in the future. By fixing drainage systems, using natural solutions, and listening to residents, we can make our city safer and stronger. Preparing today will help keep Hampton safe for years to come.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 1 Winner

Kenzley Frye

Northwood Middle School – Town of Saltville
Teacher: Amy Dunn



SIMPLE ISSUES LIKE patching potholes and repairing buildings are straightforward problems that first come to mind when discussing improvements our town needs. But our small town of Saltville has many other underlying issues that you may not even consider at first. Promoting tourism that highlights our town’s history, improving accessibility for people with minor and major disabilities, as well as building a more diverse and welcoming community are all equally significant issues our town faces.

Tourism is one of the biggest missed opportunities for small towns like ours. Saltville lies in the heart of Appalachia and has plenty of historic value, natural scenery, and family owned businesses that larger cities cannot offer. These features that our small town presents often go unnoticed by travelers simply because of lack of marketing. Creating a town website, social media page, or hosting our own unique, seasonal festivals are small but impactful ways to increase visitor interest and give outsiders a reason to stop by. Tourism does not just bring visitors, it brings income for local businesses and workers that continue to help keep our town alive.

Accessibility should be a priority, not just something you acknowledge and never take action to improve on. It isn’t something that just benefits individuals with physical disabilities, it’s a factor that helps assist elderly residents, parents with strollers, and even just injured citizens. Towns much like ours were built decades ago when disabilities were rarely taken into account. Steep curbs, narrow entrance ways to town buildings, and lack of ramps make everyday life challenging for mobility impaired individuals. Certain accommodations must be met in order to help make our town easier to navigate and become more welcoming to everyone.

Our town could benefit tremendously by taking steps towards becoming more diverse and inclusive. People in our community are very foreign to other cultures and ways of life. Promoting diversity can introduce new perspectives, foods, and ideas that help shine light on the other cultures our town isn’t familiar with. Encouraging the people within our area to welcome these ways of life will in turn create an overall more together community.

Improving our town doesn’t mean we have to change it, it means helping it grow and flourish. By taking small steps to provide a welcoming and accessible town, we can bring new life to our streets and create a place that ensures everyone can fully participate in community life while also creating a place where everyone feels they belong. Through these minor improvements, our small town can preserve its charm while building a strong future for generations to come.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 2 Winner

Hailey Coleman

Martinsville Middle School – City of Martinsville
Teacher: Robin Fletcher



IF I WERE MAYOR, I would help people with mental health problems. Mental health is commonly overlooked but it is a serious problem. Nearly one billion people worldwide struggle with mental health, but it's still not taken seriously.

Most mental health problems start at the age of fourteen. As a teenager, I have faced my own mental health problems. I was desperate to communicate about my agony but had no one to lean on. Virginia has over 750,000 people that struggle with mental health issues but currently only has nine mental health institutions. This can be resolved by adding more mental health institutions in Virginia.

When I was struggling with my mental health, I felt like I was drowning. I avoided doing my assignments at school and my grades were slipping. I was so unmotivated that I couldn't even get out of bed. And I was lashing out at my family due to problems they had nothing to do with. I felt like there was a void in my life, something that could never be filled. But the worst part was, no one had noticed, not a family member, not my friends. I had to decide: Do I want to be sad forever, or do I want to do something about it?

I lost my brother to suicide; it shaped my whole life. When you feel like nobody cares about you, trust me, they do. I was missing a piece of my puzzle. But instead of being sad, I smiled because even though he's gone, he's at rest. There are so many reasons to live, you have a future that Jesus is shaping, he purposely intends to hurt you so you can learn and grow from your mistakes. Because after I went through a battle, I got my spark back, so when you think it's over, it's really not.

Mental health should start to get more attention. Because in the blink of an eye someone you loved so dearly can be gone in an instant. Mental health can be invisible, and there's so many different types of struggles, rather than just depression. Some different types of mental health are anxiety, eating disorders, depression, bipolar, substance abuse, and others. So, when you get home hug your loved ones, tell them how much you love and appreciate them, because it can save a life.

"I've been down for oh so long, seemed like my soul was dead and gone, but its alright, I'm back in the fight." – from "Cannock Chase" by Labi Siffre.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 3 Winner

Kinley Carter

Lylburn Downing Middle School – City of Lexington
Teacher: Spender Golladay



THERE ARE MORE than 40 hotels and inns in Lexington, but there is only one hospital, Carilion Rockbridge Community Hospital, which has 25 beds. Building a large hospital in Lexington would significantly improve the quality of life and safety for its residents.

Imagine you or a loved one needing medical attention. Would you want to drive an hour away to go to an overcrowded hospital and risk them not surviving? The distance to the hospital could create unnecessary risks, hardships, and delays, especially in urgent situations.

Sure, we have urgent care clinics and doctors, but none of those places have the same equipment as larger hospitals. Think about this: a larger hospital is a good use of money, and it benefits everyone.

Adding a hospital in Lexington can ensure faster access to emergency care in times of need. In medical emergencies such as strokes, heart attacks, or other serious injuries, every second counts. Having someone or an ambulance drive you to the nearest hospital can be risky, even if it's only a few minutes away. In some cases, injuries could be fatal if medical service isn't provided right away, and long travel times have a huge impact on patients. If there is a larger hospital in Lexington, not only will it increase survival rates, but it could also improve recovery outcomes. Immediate access to care can be life-saving.

A hospital in Lexington, VA, would also provide better access to basic healthcare. Many people, specifically the elderly, might have trouble trying to go to routine check-ups or seek treatment for illness if care isn't close. Minor conditions could potentially worsen if the individual has a hard time getting to healthcare facilities. Local resident Lisa Carter states that it is especially hard for pregnant women since there is no birth centre or NICU in Lexington, VA. To have their baby, they would have to travel to Roanoke, Staunton, or even the UVA Hospital. With the help of a larger hospital, mothers and newborns receiving consistent medical attention can be quick and efficient, which would promote community health and reduce long-term healthcare costs.

Not only could adding a hospital help people receive medical attention, but it could also open up more job opportunities. Doctors, nurses, and other positions would be available, leaving a positive effect on the local economy by attracting professionals to Lexington. As a result, encouraging further development, such as clinics, pharmacies, and other related services, would increase employment.

Undoubtedly, adding a hospital in Lexington would bring many benefits to the community. It would provide faster emergency care, improve access to healthcare, and boost the local economy. It would also enhance the safety and well-being of residents. Clearly, investing in a local hospital is a necessary step toward a healthier and more secure future.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 4 Winner

Elijah Zug

Appomattox Middle School – Town of Appomattox
Teacher: Danielle Ulmer

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and the most inhumane.”

- Martin Luther King Jr.



ONE OF THE LARGEST issues in our community is the lack of health care. Appomattox has about 1,700 emergency calls each year, but without an urgent care facility in town the chance of survival decreases. Currently our closest options for urgent care are Farmville or Lynchburg. When a medical emergency occurs, either of these is a long way to travel to get assistance. As mayor of Appomattox, I would focus on solving this issue of health care and I have several solutions.

My first idea is to use some of the state aid funding for health, which amounts to 22 million dollars, to purchase one of several abandoned buildings in downtown Appomattox. I would look at the vacant Wilbuns and Gordmans buildings. One of these buildings would be converted into an urgent care facility which would also contribute to the rejuvenation of downtown. I would also start a capital campaign to raise funds to build a new facility and hire staff to work at the medical center.

Another option would be to contact the Lynchburg and Farmville urgent care facilities to see if they could alternate staff and provide medical manpower to one of our current doctor offices. We would then have the staff available to provide after-hours medical care.

However, my focus would be on renovating one of the current vacant buildings using state funded money. These available buildings are in great locations and are currently an eyesore. It would be advantageous to renovate one of them into an urgent care facility to provide local after-hours care to Appomattox citizens, while rejuvenating the downtown area. This proposal would add jobs to our community in the areas of construction, medical, administration, and maintenance. This solution – which would be the most effective in cost, resources, and funding – also avoids a lengthy capital campaign which can last 3 years on average. Plus, this proposal does not require any outside coordination with other medical facilities which most likely will become complicated.

Having more medical services available to the citizens of Appomattox would have a huge impact on the residents' quality of life. Currently they must travel at least 30 minutes to acquire after-hours medical care. With more medical aid in the town, we could lessen the impact of seasonal illnesses and reduce the loss of attendance at work and school. With this fully implemented it would help commence the restoration of Appomattox County. This would increase the well-being and economic impact for the citizens. Adequate health care should be available to everyone; it is a fundamental human right.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 5 Winner

Willa Thom

**Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School – City of Falls Church
Teacher: Jeff Buck**



IF I WERE A MAYOR, my primary focus would be keeping the pedestrians in my city safe. In many cities, especially in Falls Church, there are lots of local attractions and things to do. A unique feature of Falls Church is its amazing walkability, and walking is a primary mode of transportation for lots of residents – especially its youth population.

Walking is a wonderful part of our little city, but it could be improved by implementing features to keep walkers safe. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, “More than 6,200 pedestrian fatalities and 75,000 pedestrian injuries [occur] in roadway crashes annually.” With this statistic in mind, it is important to make sure Falls Church has adequate safety measures to keep people protected when getting around.

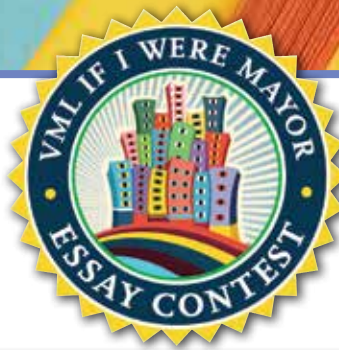
An adult I talked to about this problem said that it would be beneficial to have more road signage, for example, more speed limit, stop, and yield signs. The main benefit of adding these safety measures would be to educate drivers on the traffic laws in an area and make speed limits and safety measures clearer. Although this suggestion would be helpful in theory, in practice it could lead to what the National Institution of Health calls “information overload.” This can cause drivers to not pay as much attention to the road and may increase the number of pedestrian accidents.

When doing my own research into what would be most beneficial for pedestrian safety, I learned about a small thing that helps road safety immensely: sidewalks. Walking on sidewalks is a vast improvement from walking on the road, and can help disabled people, elderly people, and people who just need a space to walk. The statistics shocked me, with sidewalks able to prevent up to 88% of car-pedestrian accidents according to the Department of Transportation.

More sidewalks would improve safety and surely improve resident mobility. The only drawback to this idea is that it would take time to install the sidewalks. Overall, it would take a few weeks to a month to put sidewalks in high walking areas. However, this is not a long time, especially considering how long the sidewalks will last, and how many people they will help.

In conclusion, if I were a mayor I would add sidewalks to my city to improve walkability as well as increase safety by keeping walkers off the road and add foot traffic to businesses.





Region 7 Winner

Alexis Hargrove

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



IMAGINE NOT KNOWING if you can afford to stay in your house or apartment. Many families in Emporia face this problem every day. Everyone deserves a safe, affordable place to call home. If I were mayor of Emporia, my top priority would be increasing affordable housing. A strong Emporia begins with making sure every family has a safe place they can afford. Housing is important because people need a stable home to feel secure and improve their lives.

City Manager William Johnson III says that “Affordable housing remains a significant need in our community. As the City of Emporia continues to grow and develop, expanding housing options will help us attract new residents while ensuring those who already live and work here have access to safe, quality, and energy-efficient housing they can afford.”

This shows that affordable housing matters not just for families, but for the future of the whole city. Census.gov states that over 50% of residents in Emporia rent their homes, which is higher than the national average. I talked to several renters about how important affordable housing is in the city. They said it’s a big need because waiting lists are long, and families often struggle to find a good place to live. Because of this, some end up in homes that are too expensive or not in good condition.

Renters are also more affected when prices go up. If rent becomes too expensive, families may have to move, which can interrupt children’s education and make it harder to stay connected to their community. Owning a home helps people save money and create a better future for themselves.

The median household income in Emporia is about \$51,899 based on 2020–2024 U.S. Census Bureau data. Even though housing prices may be lower than in other places, many people still struggle because they do not earn enough. This means families may spend too much of their income on housing and not have enough left for needs like food, healthcare, or transportation.

If I were mayor, my plan would focus on four ideas: building more affordable homes, fixing older homes, helping more people become homeowners, and improving empty properties. Building more homes would give families more options. Fixing older homes would make sure they are safe. Helping people buy homes would allow them to build wealth. Improving empty properties would make neighborhoods look better and safer.

The result would be stronger neighborhoods, more growth, and a better quality of life. When people have stable housing, they can focus on other needs. Overall, affordable housing helps people feel secure and gives them a better chance to reach their goals.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 8 Winner

Finley O'Shell

Isle of Wight Academy - Town of Windsor
Teacher: Amanda Keith



IF I WERE MAYOR of Windsor, I would focus on the wellness, happiness, and safety of my community. There are numerous ways I could do this, but the most effective by far would be to stop problems at their root. Barriers to wellness, happiness, and safety stem from systemic issues, typically financial or economic stress. Despite my town's moderate income, we face a higher rate of poverty compared to the average town in Virginia. While governments can't hand out money, they can combat indigence at its source.

I spoke to my sister, who is currently a resident of Windsor and an undergraduate in college. She explained that even with parental support, she struggles to prepare for everyday life as an adult. This lack of preparation predisposes young people like her to financial stress.

"I think it can be easy to fall behind if you're not looking into or are unaware of certain aspects of adulthood," she conveyed. "I think classes or resources devoted to introducing these topics in school can help teach children about basic life responsibilities."

I agree with this idea as a solution. Not only would life skills classes benefit our community, but also the individuals taking them. In a study by Education Week, over 70% of graduates felt unprepared for life after high school. On top of the mental strain, this neglect can and will cause more trouble. With mandatory life skills courses, we can teach students how to avoid financial stressors.

While life skills classes are a strong start, there are also other ways to increase my town's welfare. Fortunately, Windsor's crime rate is lower than the national average, but crime is not our biggest threat to safety and happiness; the environment is. Our community faces threats from contamination, pollution, and natural disasters. By partnering with the Virginia Department of Health and Department of Environmental Quality, I would work to eliminate all pollutants in our food and water. Additionally, I would ensure safe conditions during hurricane season through repairs and construction. And because flooding is the biggest natural hazard in Windsor, I would expand the budget for structural solutions such as drainage, green infrastructure, and other water management practices.

My plan for Windsor is demanding but useful. With educated youth, stronger buildings, and safer environments, our community can flourish. As mayor of Windsor, I would guarantee a safe and sound community for citizens and visitors alike.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT

SAVE THE DATE!



Virginia Mayors Institute

October 10-11, 2026 • Norfolk



VML ANNUAL CONFERENCE

NORFOLK WATERSIDE MARRIOTT

OCT. 11-13

Make plans to join the hundreds of local government officials, speakers and member organizations representatives who attend the VML Annual Conference each fall to learn from the experts and from each other what makes the Commonwealth work for everyone.

Scan QR for conference details and to register. >





2026 VML Innovation Awards CALL FOR ENTRIES

THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE'S INNOVATION AWARDS celebrate the programs

and individuals that make it possible for our local governments to solve pressing problems, address emerging needs, and adapt to changing circumstances.

Local governments of all sizes are encouraged to compete for coveted Innovation Awards across seven categories. The **entries will be judged based on the scope and results of the project in relation to the community's size**, thereby putting all localities on a level playing field.

One of the seven category winners will be selected for the prestigious President's Award for Innovation. The winner of the President's Award will be revealed when all the award winners are honored during the Awards Banquet at the VML Annual Conference in Norfolk in October.

Don't miss this premiere opportunity to spotlight innovative programs that make your town, city or county a great place for people to call home!

Enter on-line at www.vml.org or scan QR code.



Criteria

Projects and programs are judged on how well they demonstrate the following:

- **Innovative problem solving**
- **Improved quality of life**
- **Excellence in management**
- **Making the most of local resources**
- **Increased citizen participation**
- **Long-term value to the community**
- **Adaptability to other communities**

Award-winning projects typically demonstrate innovative ways of delivering services, addressing community needs, or significantly improving an existing service.

2026 CATEGORIES

AWARD CATEGORIES are based on broad topics. As such, many projects relate to more than one category. The same project cannot be submitted for more than one category. When deciding what category best fits your project, consider the primary goal of the project and which components of the project demonstrate the greatest innovation.

Localities may submit only one entry in each of the seven following categories (i.e., a maximum of seven submissions total per locality):

Community Health

Includes building healthy community environments through active lifestyle programs, nutrition education, and improving access to healthier food choices.

Economic Development

Includes business development and retention; international competitiveness; infrastructure development and investment; planning, land use and zoning; blight; enterprise zones; housing; transportation; workforce development; and historic preservation.

Environmental Quality

Includes natural resources and the authority of local governments to manage the environment, including water resources and quality, solid and hazardous waste management, air quality and the Chesapeake Bay.

Public Safety

Includes police, fire, rescue services, emergency planning and coordinated response, building code enforcement, jails, health, and mental health related to public safety.

Working with Youth

Includes civics education, pre-k-12 education, summer programs, parks and recreation, and literacy programs.

Communications

Includes promotional campaigns, branding campaigns, crisis plans, events, customer service programs; media can include online, video, print, social and other formats.

Risk Management

Includes a proactive process of identifying, assessing and mitigating a locality's risks. This includes but is not limited to fiscal and physical assets, information technology and data, governance and management.

President's Award for Innovation

One winning project from the category winners will be selected for the top prize – the President's Award for Innovation – and will receive this top honor in addition to the award in their category. The President's award can come from any of the categories.

Deadline

All entries must be received via email by 5 p.m., Monday, Aug. 24, 2026.

Rules for entering

The competition is open to all VML local government members.

All entries must be submitted via email. Localities must download the entry form at www.vml.org/Opportunities/Innovation-Awards and fill in all of the requested information directly on the form. The completed form must then be emailed to mtimbreza@vml.org.

Entries must cover **new projects** or programs completed between Jan. 1, 2025 and June 1, 2026. For **existing projects**, entries must cover **major enhancements** during the same time period.

Each entry form must be fully completed and must be signed by the local government's chief administrative or elected official.

A local government can only submit one entry in each of the seven categories. The President's Award for Innovation is not a separate category.

Supporting materials totaling no more than 10 pages, including photos, brochures, charts, or other information, can be included in a separate document. This document must be emailed as an attachment.

NEW: The video component is now optional. If you want to include a video, please provide a link to the video in your supporting materials. The video should be posted to a readily accessible website or platform (i.e., YouTube, Vimeo, etc.). The video should be no more than five minutes in duration.

Judging

Entries are screened by VML staff and judged by individuals chosen for their expertise. The judges generally represent a variety of backgrounds.

Please note: The scoring will remain confidential throughout the process.

Winners

Winners in each category will be announced ahead of the Annual Conference happening October 10-13, at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott. The awards will be presented during the Awards Banquet on October 10 at which time the winner of the President's Award for Innovation will be revealed. All winning entries will also be featured in VML's magazine *Virginia Town & City*.

Questions?

For more information about completing your entry or other details, contact Manuel Timbreza at mtimbreza@vml.org or call 804-649-8471.



Enter on-line at www.vml.org or scan QR code.



2026 General Assembly Review for Virginia's Local Governments

THE 2026 SESSION saw 24 new faces in the 140-member General Assembly, as 22 new delegates and 2 new senators took their seats during the month of January.

Of course, those weren't the only new faces this year. Former Governor Youngkin kicked off the legislature's proceedings on Wednesday, January 14, 2026, followed that weekend by the swearing-in of Virginia's new, and first female, governor, Abigail Spanberger.

That handoff was more than ceremonial, it was substantive. The former governor not only handed over the keys to state government but also the introduced budget that he and his finance team had been working on for months during the fall of 2025. New governors rely heavily upon the members of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations committees to assist with modifying the budget they inherit. And this year was no different, except that the Senate threw Governor Spanberger and the House of Delegates a wicked curve ball. Specifically, when the Senate and House rolled out their respective amendments to the introduced budget on Sunday, February 22, the Senate version included a proposal to sunset the sales and use tax exemption for equipment used in data centers.

What was projected to be a minor revenue inconvenience when it was initiated years ago has ballooned into a billion-dollar headache that the Senate decided it wanted to phase out earlier than expected. That this decision was made notwithstanding the success those tax incentives have demonstrated in luring data centers to the Commonwealth was not lost on observers.

The bottom-line revenue differences that resulted from these differing visions for the budget ground negotiations to a halt. In fact, since late February, very little progress has been made on the new biennial budget that begins on July 1, 2026.

It is perhaps appropriate that the budget process should be on ice during recent weeks, as many of us were iced-in during the first two weeks of the 2026 Session thanks to the major winter storm that slowed movement around Richmond for much longer than expected. But, while progress on the budget has moved glacially, it did not stop the members of the General Assembly from attempting to advance numerous legislative initiatives during the session itself. In fact, the number of bills and resolutions introduced by the House and Senate increased by 17% during the session from 3,107 in 2025 to 3,646 in 2026. Ultimately, 1,132 bills were signed into law by Governor Spanberger.

When the General Assembly adjourned on time, it did so, unfortunately, without a budget agreement for the next biennium. During the reconvened (or veto) session on April 22, the General Assembly dealt with gubernatorial vetoes and amendments to regular bills in a day filled with fits, starts, and much debate.

What follows is a summary of legislation of interest to local governments from the 2026 General Assembly session along with some observations on the current status of the budget.



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Budget

On Sunday, February 22, the House and Senate rolled out their respective changes to Governor Youngkin's budget for the biennium that begins on July 1, 2026. In total, the House proposed 450 amendments to the former governor's introduced budget while the Senate offered up 399 adjustments.

Since then, it appears that none of the 849 amendments put forward by the General Assembly has been approved. By all accounts, one amendment, a Senate proposal to sunset the sales and use tax exemption for equipment used in data centers on January 1, 2027, stands in the way of a final budget agreement. Under current law, the data center exemption will expire on June 30, 2035.

According to an analysis by the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee staff, phasing out the sales and use tax exemption will generate more than \$1.3 billion in new revenues in FY 2028 when fully annualized (see table below).

Additional revenues from sunset of sales and use tax data center exemption in FY 2028 (dollars in millions)	
Category	FY 2028
General funds – unrestricted	\$464.0
General funds – K-12 education	\$314.3
Transportation	\$207.2
Local option	\$230.3
Other regional*	\$133.7
TOTAL	\$1,349.4

* Approximately 89% for Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and 11% for Central Virginia Transportation Authority. Seventeen percent of the sales tax activity for exempt data center equipment occurs in areas of the state with no regional taxes.



To date, however, there's been no progress reconciling those bottom-line revenue differences nor the spending decisions that go along with the additional monies. In fact, by most accounts there have been few face-to-face interactions among the conferees since Governor Spanberger invited the General Assembly's budget writers to the Executive Mansion in the waning days of the 2026 Session.

In less than a month, lawmakers in the General Assembly will need to put a bow on the Commonwealth's 2026-28 fiscal plan. And they will complete a budget before the end of the fiscal year. It is baffling, however, why this debate has taken so long and what has been gained by the lengthy delay.

Sadly, tardiness crafting a new biennial budget is not without precedent. Twenty years ago, Governor Kaine signed an agreed-upon biennial budget on June 28, 2006, just days before the new budget kicked in. At the time, the discord also revolved around taxes – the appropriate level of taxation for transportation. Back then the fight was between House and Senate Republicans.

Today's fisticuffs are between Democrats that control the House and Senate, and we're all painfully aware that the current debate is about the level of taxation that should be imposed on data centers.

It's a good reminder that simply because one party controls the General Assembly doesn't mean that agreements will come easily. In fact, the most visceral budget fights oftentimes occur within the same political family, especially when you throw tax policy into the mix. We've certainly witnessed that this year.

From experience, I can assure you that sitting around waiting for

lawmakers to make budget decisions isn't relaxing. When the process works, it can be exciting and gratifying. It reminds you why you signed onto this frenetic fiscal adventure. When the process doesn't function, let's just say it ain't good.

Let's hope a budget is agreed upon soon, so we can all move on to bigger and better things! When that agreement is reached, VML staff will provide a timely update to keep our members in the loop.

Tax & Finance

PASSED

HB 282 (Callsen) Real property tax; classification of land and improvements; Charlottesville and Falls Church.

Adds the cities of Charlottesville, Falls Church, Fredericksburg, and Newport News to the list of cities authorized to levy a tax on the improvements to real property at a different rate than the tax imposed upon the land. Under current law, improvements to real property in the cities of Fairfax, Roanoke, Poquoson, and Richmond constitute a separate class of property for purposes of imposing the real property tax upon the land on which it is located, provided that the rate of tax on such improvements:

- Is not zero, and
- In the case of the cities of Fairfax, Richmond, and Roanoke, does not exceed the rate of tax on the land on which it is located.

HB 341 (Martinez) Plastic bag tax; distribution to towns.

Requires any county that has imposed a disposable plastic bag tax to distribute a portion of these tax revenues to any town located within the county.

HB 474 (Rasoul) Real estate with delinquent taxes or liens; appointment of special commissioner; increases required value.

Increases from \$75,000 to \$125,000 the maximum assessed value of a parcel of land that may be subject to a locality's appointment of a special commissioner to convey property with delinquent taxes or liens to the locality or to the locality's land bank entity in lieu of sale at public auction.

HB 1358 (Runion)/SB 649 (Obenshain) Real property tax; special assessment for land use; notice requirements; civil penalty.

Adds language to the "buyer beware" statute setting out what must be included in a residential property disclosure statement that the owner provides to the buyer; under the bill, this statement must include notice that the owner makes no representations with respect to whether the property is located in a locality that has adopted a land-use plan that may provide for use value assessment and taxation for real estate.

FAILED

Grocery Tax Legislation

HB 13 (McNamara) / SB 9 (Suetterlein) Sales and use tax; food purchased for human consumption and essential personal hygiene products and HB 703 (Tata) RS & UT; food for human consumption and essential personal hygiene products, delayed effective date.

HB 13 and SB 9 proposed to eliminate the remaining one percent local sales and use tax that is imposed on food purchased for human consumption and essential personal hygiene products and distribute an equivalent amount of revenue to cities and counties monthly effective July 1, 2026. Delegate Tata's bill had a delayed effective date of January 1, 2027. Each bill was continued to 2027, effectively killing them during the 2026 Session.

Car Tax Legislation

HB 566 (McNamara) Tangible personal property tax relief; rate of taxation. As introduced, this car tax proposal would have required localities to reduce the tax rate on qualifying vehicles to a fraction of a cent for the first \$5,000 of assessed value, and gradually increase the amount of assessed value that would qualify for the reduced rate each year, if the locality's revenues grew by five percent or more that year, until \$20,000 of value was subject to the reduced rate. The bill was tabled in House Finance.

SB 799 (Durant) Tangible personal property tax relief; rate of taxation. This car tax proposal removed the \$950 million cap on the amount of tangible personal property tax relief reimbursed to localities by the Commonwealth and required localities to reduce their tax rates to a fraction of a cent. The bill was passed indefinitely by the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee.

HJ 34 (Franklin, L.) / SR 6 (Marsden) Qualifying vehicles, certain; Dept. of Tax to study options for abolishing personal property tax. Directed the Department of Taxation to evaluate options for eliminating the car tax and accounting for the lost revenues to localities. VML supported these measures to thoughtfully analyze and understand the impact of eliminating one of local government's major revenue sources before proceeding. The resolutions failed to pass during the 2026 Session.

Property Tax Exemption Legislation

HB 175 (Feggans) / SB 8 (DeSteph) Real property tax exemption; surviving spouses of members of the armed forces who died in the line of duty. Allowed localities to provide total exemption from real property taxes for dwellings owned by surviving spouses of members of the armed forces beginning in January 2026. Under current law, a total exemption is only allowed for dwellings with assessed values in the most recently ended tax year that are less than the average assessed value of a similarly situated dwelling. Both bills were continued to the 2027 Session by the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee.

Other Tax Legislation

HB 956 (Watts) License taxes; deduction for out-of-state receipts. Expanded the deduction for out-of-state receipts to include receipts from net income taxes or business activity taxes based in whole or in part on gross or net income or receipts. Because of the uncertain impact on local revenues and administration, the bill failed to report out of House Finance.

HB 960 (Watts). Required that tangible personal property employed in a trade or business, other than such property set out for different valuation in current law, be valued by means of a percentage or percentages of original cost to the taxpayer. The bill was continued to the 2027 Session.

HB 68 (McNamara) Local taxation of real property; effect on rate when assessment results in tax increase; consideration of inflation. Would have factored inflation into the calculation of the assessed value of real property in a locality for purposes of determining the lowered tax rate necessary to offset increases in assessment that must be provided in certain public notices. The bill was continued to the 2027 Session.

Housing

Housing bill to watch in 2027

The Homebuilders of Virginia stated in a public meeting this will be their priority bill in 2027!

SB 454 (VanValkenburg) / HB 816 (Helmer) By-right multi-family residential development in areas zoned for commercial use. This proposed legislation* applies to cities and towns with a population of more than 20,000 and any parcel located within a designated metropolitan planning area pursuant to 23 CFR 450. It would require localities to revise their zoning ordinances and maps to ensure that 75% of all land in zoning classifications or that include commercially or business zoned property allows multi-family residential development by-right.

**These bills went through many drafts, but this is the concept they are attempting to put forward.*

PASSED

SB 388 (McPike) / HB 1279 (Cole, J.) Affordable housing; religious organizations and other nonprofit tax-exempt properties. Requires localities with a zoning ordinance to allow certain nonprofit and religious organizations to build by-right housing on their property with only administrative approval. The property has to have been owned by the entity for five years prior to the development application and 60% of the housing should be affordable. The first floor may include a coffee shop, health clinic or other uses ancillary to the operation or mission of the organization. The provisions of this bill take effect on January 1, 2027, and expire on January 1, 2031. The property is to be affordable for 30 years.

SB 531 (Srinivasan) Zoning; development and use of accessory dwelling units. Localities are now required to include in their zoning ordinance for single-family residential districts a method to allow attached or detached accessory dwelling units. The bill requires that the permit be \$500 or less and sets out criteria related to setbacks, height, etc. There is a delayed effective date of July 1, 2027.

Please note that a locality may adopt an ordinance that "substantially complies" with this statute prior to July 1, 2027. VML recommends discussing this option with your attorney.

HB 4 (Bennett-Parker) Affordable housing; preservation, definitions, civil penalty. This proposal sets out framework for localities to preserve affordable housing by exercising a right of first refusal on publicly supported housing, defined in the bill. This property is to remain affordable for 15 years.

HB 14 (Price) / SB 290 (Aird) Virginia Residential Landlord and Tenant Act; landlord remedies, noncompliance with rental agreement. If a condition exists in a dwelling unit that constitutes a material noncompliance by the landlord with the rental agreement or with any provision of law that, if not remedied within a reasonable time frame, constitutes a fire hazard or serious threat to the life, health, or safety of a tenant or occupant of the premises, a locality may institute an action on behalf of any tenant or occupant of the premises who is injured by such material noncompliance for injunction and damages to enforce the landlord's duty to maintain the dwelling unit. There are numerous notice requirements that have to be met before the locality inserts itself.

HB 867 (Cousins) / SB 74 (McPike) Affordable housing; local zoning ordinance authority. All localities in the Commonwealth can provide an affordable housing dwelling unit program by

amending the zoning ordinance. This has a delayed effective date of July 1, 2027.

HB 1212 (Sewell) Zoning; small residential lots. Localities with a population of 50,000 or more shall adopt and maintain at least one zoning district classification that permits single-family dwellings as a by-right use on lots with a minimum lot not to exceed 3,000 square feet. This does not apply to areas within a historic district.

SB 425 (Bagby) Comprehensive plan; environmental justice strategy. Requires cities with populations greater than 20,000 and counties with populations greater than 100,000 during reviews of their comprehensive plan to consider adopting an environmental justice strategy. The legislation outlines the criteria that the strategy should consider.

HB 257 (Simonds) Comprehensive plan; social determinants of health. Encourages localities to consider how social determinants of health impact the locality's overall public health and access to healthcare services in their comprehensive plan.

HB 1144 (Martinez) Water and sewer connection fees; first-time homebuyers, affordable housing. Provides that any locality may allow for types of reimbursement to a first-time homebuyer of water and sewer connection fees, capital recovery charge and availability fees.

HB 164 (Thomas) / SB 328 (Perry) Housing for local employees; grants for homeownership. Eliminates the maximum grant amount authorized for localities to provide local employees for homeownership. The maximum was \$25,000 per employee.

HB 352 (Thomas) Local authority; authorized by ordinance to establish affordable housing performance grant programs. Localities with an Economic or Industrial Development Authority may establish by ordinance an affordable housing performance grant program. The ordinance must include a definition of affordable housing, guidelines for grants, criteria and the process to be successful.

HB 806 (Carr) Industrial development authorities; housing. Allows industrial development authorities in localities where a housing authority does not exist to use their authority to promote single- or multi-family residences.

HB 1130 (Reid) Workforce housing for employees of a locality or school board; lease of surplus property. Local governing bodies or school boards may lease surplus or underutilized property for the development of workforce housing.

HB 888 (Shin) Zoning; minimum off-street parking requirements in certain areas. This legislation curtails local government authority to regulate parking near a mass transit or public transportation area as defined in the bill.

General Government

PASSED

SB 699 (Ebbin) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; public bodies to post meeting agendas. This legislation states that when a public body posts an agenda (which shall be posted on the government website if available) prior to the meeting no final action may be taken on items added to the agenda after the meeting commences unless they are time-sensitive or are the subject of a closed meeting. The bill also defines "final action."

HB 135 (Simon) Virginia Code Commission; extends subdivision plats work group. This work group met over the

summer but needs more time, so this bill extends it for one more year. VML is part of this workgroup.

SB 530 (Srinivasan) State and Local Government Conflict of Interest Act; electronic disclosure by local government officers and employees. This legislation requires local government officers and employees to file their annual disclosure statements electronically with the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Committee. Localities with populations over 250,000 will have to begin this process January 1, 2028; over 100,000 in January 2029; and under 100,000 in January 2030.

HB 177 (Anthony) Fees for passing bad checks to localities; payment order not paid by recipient. Localities charge fees for bad checks; this bill makes it possible to charge a fee for bad electronic payment orders as well.

SB 87 (Stanley) Local government sporting events and sporting facilities; automated external defibrillators (AED). Requires localities to ensure that operational AEDs are available at local government sporting events and facilities beginning July 1, 2028.

SB 443 (McPike) / HB 891 (Shin) Siting of battery energy storage projects; commercial solar photovoltaic generation facilities; permitted accessory use. Deems battery energy storage projects as a permitted accessory use in all zoning districts on any parcel of land that is subject to an approved special exception or similar approval for a solar facility with other criteria outlined in the legislation.

HB 277 (Seibold) Zoning; wireless communications infrastructure, application process. States that no locality shall disapprove an application for modification of a wireless communication infrastructure if certain criteria are met. The fees are limited and the approval timeline is abbreviated. There is the dreaded "deemed approved" language.

HB 876 (Shin) Zoning; wireless facilities, temporary support. Requires a locality to include in its zoning ordinance provisions an allowance for temporary wireless support structures that meet certain requirements (height, need, emergency) for 180 days with an allowance for an extension up to two years.

HB 1404 (Guzman) Appointment of a youth representative to a local governing body. Allows a local governing body to appoint a youth representative to serve as a nonvoting member of the governing body.

FAILED

SB 56 (Roem) Virginia Freedom of Information Act; procedure for responding to requests; charges; posting of notice of rights and responsibilities. This proposal would have limited the fees charged for producing public records to the median hourly rate of pay of employees of the public body or the actual hourly rate of part of the person performing the work, whichever is less. It also changed the notices of rights and responsibilities that must be posted on a locality's website along with other technical amendments.

HB 313 (Wachsmann) Virginia FOIA; public records to be open to inspection, non-citizen property owners. Included non-citizens of Virginia owning property in the state to receive public records under FOIA.

SB 334 (Roem) Conveyances of interests in real property; public hearing required. Would have required a locality disposing of a real property interest (to include easements, license,



right-of-way, etc.) for the purpose of allowing electric transmission or distribution facilities, public utility infrastructure, data center operations or supporting utility infrastructure or any commercial or industrial facility to hold a public hearing with no vote to be taken until public comment is received.

SB 50 (Rouse) Lobbying; registration; local governments; penalty. Would have expanded the definition of “lobbying” to include influencing or attempting to influence local governments.

Public Safety

PASSED

HB 862 (Cousins) / SB 391 (Stuart) VASAP/ASAP authority and funding. Updates provisions of the Code of Virginia regarding the governance and operations of the Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program (VASAP) and community-based Alcohol Safety Action Programs (ASAPs). Adds new requirements, such as a required but unspecified local funding contribution from each locality (county, city, and town) participating in an ASAP as well as a requirement for a local fiscal agent for each ASAP.

Amendments initiated by VML and VACo delay the local funding requirements until January 2028 and require creation of a work group that includes VML, VACo, General Assembly budget committee staff, and VASAP representatives. This work group is now underway and will examine VASAP’s funding structure and sustainability and look at other states’ programs. This report is due to the General Assembly by October 1, 2026.

HB 1421 (Keys-Gamarra) State Board of Local and Regional Jails; administrative and supervisory authority. Directs the Office of the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security to convene a work group to evaluate the feasibility of transferring the administrative and supervisory authority of the State Board of Local and Regional Jails from the Department of Corrections to another state agency or an independent oversight body. Work group membership will include the Virginia Association of Regional Jails and the Virginia Sheriffs’ Association, representatives of civil rights organizations, experts in correctional oversight and restorative justice, and other stakeholders. The work group will evaluate the feasibility of various oversight models, including creation of a fully autonomous ombudsman’s office or integration of the State Board into the Office of the Department of Corrections Ombudsman within the Office of the State Inspector General. The work group’s report, including plans, recommended timelines, and legislative proposals regarding the transfer of the Board, are due to the Chairs of House and Senate Courts of Justice, House Public Safety, and Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services by November 1, 2026.

FAILED

SB 468 (Marsden) Statewide plan and designation of local juvenile detention beds. Would have directed the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice to designate the number and location of local/regional juvenile detention facilities and number of beds in each facility as part of its statewide plan for juvenile detention facilities. The bill was carried over to 2027 by the Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee.

Human Services

PASSED

HB 681 (Hayes) Retired law-enforcement officers for emergency and temporary detention admissions. Clarifies that retired law-enforcement officers may be used in carrying out emergency custody and involuntary temporary detention orders.

HB 976 (Price) Alternative transportation providers; youth transport and custody. Permits a person who 1) works for, or contracts with, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, or 2) works for a private or state hospital in Virginia to provide transportation. Also addresses allowable alternative transportation providers for transportation and custody of minors during an emergency custody and involuntary temporary detention process.

SB 75 (Lucas) Emergency and temporary detention; alternative transportation providers; youth transport and custody. Addresses components of both HB 681 and HB 976 above.

HB 931 (Simon) / SB 270 (VanValkenburg) Recovery residences/regulation. Establishes certain requirements for recovery residences and directs the State Board of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to promulgate regulations to establish minimum certification standards for recovery residences. Directs that the workgroup addressing standards and regulations that was formed by the General Assembly in 2025 continue its work until 2031.

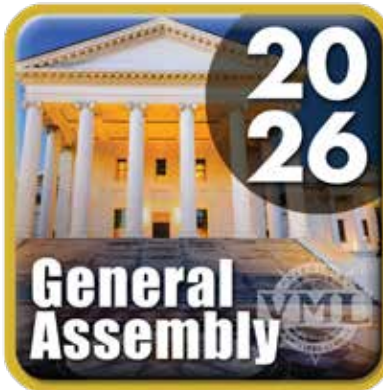
HB 1366 (Callsen) Department of Social Services – corrective action plans and control of local boards/departments. Authorizes the Commissioner of Social Services to create and enforce corrective action plans for any local board/local department that fails to administer public assistance and programs in accordance with law and regulations or whose actions/inactions pose a substantial risk to the health, safety or well-being of a child or adult. A

local department may request assistance with programs/services from the state, which can deploy staff or contract with a private entity to assist the local department with public assistance and social services.

The bill also creates a task force with state and local representation to review eligibility and administration of state-administered benefits and possible changes in processes/applications, and develop a comprehensive improvement plan to address changes needed at the state and local department level including a study of funding and local match requirements and the methodology used to allocate administrative funds. The task force’s report is due November 1, 2026.

HB 1490 (Tran) Centralized hotline for reports or complaints of child abuse or neglect. Shifts Child Protective services reports/complaints from a local intake model to a centralized intake model. Requires a comprehensive study of CPS issues and local practices by a third-party contractor and report to a work group established under the bill. This report will also include identified best practices and recommendations for an effective and efficient intake system. The work group will include state and local staff and state organization representatives. The findings and report are due to the General Assembly by December 1, 2026. Finally, the bill directs VDSS to phase in the centralized intake system beginning July 1, 2028, through July 1, 2030. Local DSS agencies would administer intake until phased into the centralized intake system.

SB 640 (Pillion) Department of Social Services corrective action plans and centralized intake system for child



protective services reports and complaints. Incorporates the components of HB 1490 and HB 1366 listed above.

HB 222 (Hope) Regulation of swimming/water recreation facilities. Directs the State Board of Health to adopt regulations governing swimming pools and other water recreational facilities operated for public use, including such facilities operated in conjunction with a tourist facility or health spa. Regulations will address operational functions and staffing; water treatment and disinfection; posting of water quality information; safety equipment, features, maintenance and testing; and incident response. The bill does not prohibit any locality from adopting any ordinance equivalent to or more stringent than the regulations adopted pursuant to the legislation.

SB 683 (Reeves) Appointment of receiver for waterworks; public waterworks. Allows the Commissioner of Health to petition the circuit court for the jurisdiction in which any public or private waterworks is located for the appointment of a receiver for such waterworks. Currently such appointments of receivership are only for private waterworks.

Elections

PASSED

HB 234 (Pope Adams) Elections; general provisions; electoral board members to wear identification; civil penalty. Requires the Department of Elections to create and issue identification badges to local electoral board members to wear while conducting official duties on the day of the election. Board members that do not wear badges may be fined up to \$1,000. The House budget includes funding for the creation of these badges ensuring the financial burden is not shifted to localities.

HB 630 (Callsen) / SB 176 (VanValkenburg) Elections; conduct of election; ranked choice voting; locally elected offices; report. Expands the eligibility for elections to be conducted utilizing ranked choice voting to all local public bodies, which will now include towns. Currently, only County Boards of Supervisors and City Council can use ranked choice voting.

SB 438 (Bagby) Absentee voting in person; available the second and third Sunday before all elections. Requires absentee voting locations in person to be open for a minimum of five hours the second and third Sundays prior to any election.

FAILED

HB 71 (Reaser) Absentee voting in person; voter satellite offices; days and hours of operation. Would have authorized the governing body of any county or city to establish the hours and times of operation for satellite voting locations and offices by ordinance. Currently, this authority is granted to the local electoral boards.

This bill was introduced in the 2025 General Assembly Session but was vetoed. This bill was then reintroduced in the 2026 session but was continued to the 2027 General Assembly Session in the House Privileges and Elections Committee.

HB 23 (Helmer) / SB 76 (VanValkenburg) Elections; primary dates; presidential year primaries. Would have mandatorily shifted all primaries for offices to be filled at the November election in presidential election years to be held on the date of the presidential primary.

HB 51 (Bloxm) Elections; time of certain local elections. Would have allowed localities to conduct elections for local officials in May by reverting to the law prior to 2021.

HB 235 (Gardner) Elections; districts, precincts, and polling places; super precincts; pilot program. Would have

created vote centers or super precincts available as a pilot program to all localities. This bill would have allowed individuals to vote in a different location than the location closest to their home.

SB 202 (Sutterlein) Elections; filling vacancies in county and city governing bodies. Would remove the ability of a county or city governing body to fill vacancies via interim appointment and instead require an immediate special election be held. The local governing body would be mandated to petition the court to issue a writ of special election with the court within 45 days of vacancy.

Education

PASSED

HB 195 (McQuinn) / SB 33 (Favola) Programs for at-risk students; permissible uses of funding. Alters the at-risk student funding to include initiatives to support the mental and physical health of students in public schools. This permissible flexibility aims to cover more school employees for schools.

HB 544 (Askew) / SB 498 (Aird) Commission on School Construction and Modernization; revisions; elimination of sunset. Eliminates the sunset of the commission and establishes a regular meeting schedule.

FAILED

HB 92 (Rasoul) / SB 90 (Favola) Equity in public school funding and staffing; special education students; at-risk students; annual report. Would have created and funded the at-risk program, and provide additional funding for English Language Learners and Special Education students. These bills addressed the funding and language in adjusting the SOQ differently after various substitutes were passed but dealt with the same underlying concept. Both bills were a response to the 2023 K-12 Summer JLARC report on education funding.

Both bills were continued to the 2027 General Assembly and have language and funding included in both the House and Senate budgets.

HB 412 (Cole, N) Local governing bodies; school division budgets; funding levels. As introduced would have required the local governing body to grant the local school board whatever funding amount requested by the superintendent or more, but no less. As amended this bill became a study to determine the feasibility of implementing this concept.

HB 1204 (Scott, P) / SB 733 (Sturtevant) Local governing bodies; appropriations of local school funds to families for compulsory student attendance in nonpublic school settings. Would have allowed any local governing body to reserve the per pupil amount apportioned of SOQ costs and instead give that amount of funding to the parents of students within the local school division to be used in nonpublic schools, such as private schools or homeschooling. Although permissive, this would have taken money from the school division and directed funding elsewhere.

HB 753 (Runion) / HB 1101 (Hodges) / HB 1167 (Carroll) Public school funding; composite index of local ability-to-pay. All three bills attempted to alter the local composite index (LCI) by including changes for agricultural areas, data centers, and property tax exemptions for military veterans. Although the bills were somewhat different, each sought to change the makeup of the LCI to provide more accurate distribution of funding levels to localities.

All three bills failed to pass after being left in the House Education and House Appropriation Committees. At the time it was noted that changes to the LCI would be addressed by the Joint Subcommittee to Study Elementary and Secondary Education Funding. However, al-

though this committee was created following the 2023 Summer K-12 Education JLARC report, it has not met in the last year.

HB 334 (Rasoul) / SB 66 (McPike) / SB 607 (Lucas) Additional local sales and use tax to support schools; referendum. Would have authorized the statewide authority for any county or city to impose a sales and use tax of up to one percent dedicated solely to school construction if approved by voter referendum. Currently only nine localities have this authority. The passage of this authority is one of VML's top legislative priorities.

HB 334 and SB 66 removed the cap on the duration of the tax, allowed towns with a school division to receive a prorated portion of funds, and allowed the tax to be used for previous indebtedness. SB 607 did not have any provisions added to HB 334 and SB 66. However, SB 607 did include language disallowing any funding to be supplanted.

HB 334 passed the House 70-28 but was continued to the 2027 General Assembly Session by the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee. SB 66 was incorporated into SB 607 which was then left in the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee. These bills were left in committee since language identical to SB 607 is in the Senate version of the budget. The language is not in the House budget. It remains to be seen if the language survives to the final budget.

HB 751 (Runion) School Construction Program; eligibility; projects completed or initiated within immediately preceding 10-year period. Would have allowed public school buildings and facilities eligible for grants pursuant to the School Construction Program to now include any building or facility construction, renovated, or expanded that was completed or initiated within a 10-year period preceding the application. Similarly, HB 755 (Runion) School Construction Program; use of grants; debt service would have allowed the School Construction Program to be used for any debt service repayments.

HB 1187 (O'Quinn) Localities; issuance of bonds for capital projects for school purposes. Would have allowed any local governing body, with consent of the school board, to issue bonds to finance all or a portion of any school capital projects and use all or any federal, state, or local grant to cover principal and debt service payments on such bonds.

Cannabis

FAILED

SB 452 (Aird) / HB 642 (Krizek) Cannabis control; retail market; penalties. Sought to establish a Cannabis Retail Market with sales beginning July 1, 2027, and licenses being issued as early as September 1, 2026, with up to 200 licenses for cannabis retailers and additional licenses for the cultivation, distribution, and processing of cannabis. The legislation also included a path for existing medical cannabis licensees to sell retail cannabis to retail consumers.

This legislation would have established new local ordinance authority to levy a tax on retail of 1-3.5% with the tax collected by the state and distributed back to localities.

Additional local authority included in the bill would have authorized local ordinances to prohibit public consumption of cannabis on rights-of-way or school property, establish minimum distances of less than 1,000 feet between licensees and certain facilities such as schools defined in the bill, and regulate the hours of operation for cannabis

retail operations. The bill also allowed localities to retain zoning authority over cannabis retailers.

The bill would have prohibited localities from banning cannabis retailers or retail-related activities licensed by Virginia.

This legislation was vetoed by the Governor after the General Assembly rejected amendments proposed by the Governor but is expected to return at a future date for further consideration.

Natural Resources

PASSED

SB 386 (Stuart) / HB 1443 (Lopez) Owners of sewage treatment works; land application, marketing, or distribution of sewage sludge; perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances; testing requirements. Directs the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to regulate perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS/PFOA) levels in biosolids to be land applied on agricultural land. PFAS/PFOA are used in industrial and manufacturing processes for consumer and industrial goods ranging from takeout containers, shampoos, raingear to mining equipment and fire suppression foam at airports.

SB 386 and HB 1443 establish limits on PFAS/PFOA in wastewater treatment plant sewage sludge to be used as biosolids for land application, uniform testing standards, testing protocols for PFAS/PFOA, and quarterly testing. Results of testing are to be provided to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. The legislation also establishes limits for land application of any biosolids that exceed limits established in the bill and protocols for varying thresholds of PFAS/PFOA and requires landowners to be notified of PFAS/PFOA testing results if certain thresholds are exceeded but below the limits established in the bill prohibiting land application.

HB 1072 (Laufer) Local authority to test biosolids for PFAS/PFOA. Authorizes localities to test and monitor land applied biosolids to ensure compliance with all relevant water quality and permitting requirements. If certain levels of PFAS/PFOA below limits set by the bill are exceeded, landowners are required to be notified prior to the land application of any biosolids.

HB 1381 (Bloxom) / SB 784 (Stuart) Inspection of water distribution systems; lead status inspections for water service lines. Prohibits the injection of bioslurry injection wells in a groundwater management area. This bill will prevent attempts to inject various waste products into underground wells and help protect groundwater resources.

FAILED

HB 1356 (Convirs-Fowler) Precipitation design standards; non-stationary precipitation; climate-adjusted rainfall. Would have established new precipitation design standards for transportation and other capital projects administered by the state and localities based upon current National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to account for changing precipitation levels over time. This bill failed to advance in the House.

HB 1436 (Cole) Virginia Erosion and Stormwater Management Program authority; right of entry; performance bond. Would have authorized a Virginia Erosion and Storm Management Authority to enter onto private property without a surety



bond for the purpose of maintaining conditions imposed by the authority on a land disturbing activity after providing proper notice to a landowner who has failed to take proper action within the specified time frame. This bill failed to advance in the House.

Transportation

PASSED

SB 59 (Diggs) / HB 684 (Hayes) Photo speed monitoring devices; photo-monitoring systems for traffic signals; school bus video-monitoring systems; proof of violation; certain persons swearing to or affirming certificates; training. Creates a training program at the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services that will allow non-law enforcement officers, “Conservators of the Peace,” to certify photo speed enforcement violations. This will allow a locality to employ trained staff to administer photo speed enforcement violations once they have successfully completed training from the Department of Criminal Justice Services. This legislation is designed to free up sworn law enforcement officers currently confirming photo speed monitoring violations to perform to other duties instead.

SB 84 (Williams Graves) Photo speed monitoring devices, pedestrian crossing violation monitoring systems, and stop sign violation monitoring systems; placement and operation; violation enforcement; civil penalties. Authorizes the use of pedestrian crossing monitoring systems in school and active work zones. Penalties, process, and requirements to operate such a program are identical to those for operating a photo speed enforcement program. Includes new requirements for photo speed enforcement devices also included in HB 1220. This establishes a new tool for localities interested in photo safety monitoring programs focused on whether vehicles fully stopped whether pedestrians are present or not in school and work zones.

SB 219 (Jones) Photo speed monitoring devices; placement and operation; summons. Requires a second notice to be issued for speed violations issued under a photo speed enforcement program and requires that DMV place a hold on any new vehicle registration, renewal, or issuance of license plates until the penalty is paid.

SB 221 (Jones) School crossing zones; active times. Allows localities to extend the duration of school zone monitoring from 30 to 60 minutes.

SB 436 (Bagby) Photo speed monitoring devices; highway work zones; workers present. Limits use of photo speed monitoring in work zones to when workers are present as affirmed by the photo speed monitoring device operator.

HB 564 (Reid) / SB 583 (Salim) Parking, stopping, and standing enforcement; bus obstruction monitoring systems. Authorizes the use of automated enforcement on transit buses for the enforcement of illegal parking, stopping, and standing using bus obstruction monitoring systems. Authorizes localities to use automated bus obstruction monitoring devices to enforce local ordinances related to parking, stopping, or standing in bus zones/lanes and further authorizes localities to contract out for the operation of a bus obstruction monitoring system.

HB 994 (Seibold) Photo speed monitoring devices; placement and operation. Expands local authority to operate photo speed enforcement devices in a “safety red zone” as identified by the VDOT Commissioner in Planning District 8.

HB 1220 (Delaney) Photo speed monitoring devices; placement and operation. Provides for uniform citations for violations of photo speed enforcements, increases requirements for sig-

nage, device calibration, and opportunities for contesting violations, limits fees that can be imposed, creates new obligations for photo speed monitoring vendors, restricts how penalties collected can be used by localities, establishes new data retention requirements, creates new reporting requirements for localities, and establishes new penalties for localities that are found to operate photo speed enforcement programs in violation of state law.

The legislation directs the Virginia Supreme Court to establish a uniform summons for photo speed enforcement violations. The effective date is July 1, 2027, and such summons must include information for contesting or paying a civil violation and provide an opportunity to inspect photo speed device speed calibration information within 30 days of the mailing of a summons.

Requires two conspicuous signs placed within 1,000 feet of the photo speed device warning of the use of photo speed devices; one sign must be a speed display sign that measures and displays the speed of oncoming vehicles in real time. Signage requirements have a delayed enactment date of July 1, 2027.

Under the bill vendors are required to provide calibration data of photo speed devices within 10 days electronically or postmarked within 10 days of receiving the request from a person issued a violation from a photo speed device. Vendors failing to meet these requirements are subject to a \$1,000 civil penalty per violation.

New restrictions for how fines, fees, and penalties collected by a locality are established for the planning, design, and construction of specified road safety improvements such as speed management, bicycle and pedestrian safety, public transit, and local systemic safety initiatives otherwise eligible for funding under the Virginia Highway Safety Improvement Program. Funding of projects must be prioritized by those areas where photo speed enforcement is in use.

Vendors are prohibited from collecting fees for the mailing of violations or administrative fees other than for reasonable postage costs and no more than a 5% processing fee in addition to the civil penalty of \$100.

New limits are established requiring the destruction of data collected by a photo speed device within 21 days of its capture unless the data is used for a civil violation or for the purposes of reporting requirements under the statute.

Violations issued in work zones are subject to an additional requirement for documentation by photo, video, or by a sworn certificate that workers were present at the time a photo speed violation was issued.

Expands reporting requirements for localities that operate photo speed enforcement programs to include the operating costs of a photo speed program, projects and initiatives funded as a result of the program, the change in summonses issued, and moves the deadline for reporting from January to November.

Directs law enforcement agencies operating these devices to develop an emergency action plan in accordance with USDOT guidelines and to review annually the placement of devices to consider racial, economic, and other equity issues or public concerns.

Requires a locality to widely publish (e.g. social media, websites) information about contesting violations, publicizing changes and new locations for a photo speed enforcement device, and a link to the website of the vendor so long as it meets all requirements.

Requires a 30-day warning period for any device installed after July 1, 2026, where no fine can be levied for violations of a photo speed enforcement device.

Violations by a vendor or a locality are subject to a \$1,000 civil penalty.

Establishes new penalties and legal recourse for localities operating photo speed programs found by a judge to be operated in willful

disregard of applicable law. Penalties can include redirection of funds collected through a photo speed program to state funds until the locality comes into compliance.

FAILED

SB 428 (Jones) School crossing zones; institutions of higher education. Would have allowed school crossing zones for Institutions of Higher Education to be designated as school zones. This bill failed to advance in the Senate.

SB 670 (Salim) Commercial use of fully autonomous vehicles. Would have authorized the operation of commercial autonomous vehicles on state and local roads in Virginia. This bill failed to advance in the House Committee on Transportation.

HB 661 (Willett) Traffic regulation; bicycles, electric personal assistive mobility devices, electric power-assisted bicycles, and motorized skateboards or scooters. Would have allowed cyclists to use an “Idaho Stop” at stop signs by requiring cyclists yield at stop signs when no other traffic is present, allow cyclists to proceed with the walk signal at a stop light, and authorize cyclists to ride two abreast on certain roads if specified conditions are met. This bill failed to advance in the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations.

SB 297 (Peake) Use of photo speed monitoring devices; repeal. Would have repealed the authority necessary for operation of photo speed enforcement programs across the Commonwealth and was subsequently amended to continue to allow photo enforcement programs while limiting fees levied by vendors operating a photo speed enforcement program. This bill failed in the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations.

SB 306 (Peake) Use of violation monitoring systems to enforce traffic light signals and certain traffic control devices; repeal. Would have repealed the authority of local police departments to operate photo speed enforcement programs.

HB 1143 (Austin) Registration decals; discontinued. Would have eliminated vehicle registration stickers issued by the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles. This bill failed to advance in the House Committee on Transportation.

HB 1330 (Seibold) Speed safety cameras, pedestrian crossing violation monitoring systems, and stop sign violation monitoring systems; placement and operation; violation enforcement; civil penalties. This bill was identical to SB 84 (passed) which expanded local authority to operate photo stop monitoring programs in school and work zones. HB 1330 failed to advance in the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations.

HB 900 (Sullivan) / SB 730 (Ebbin) Sales and use tax on taxable services and digital personal property; taxes levied in certain transportation districts; funding for transportation. Would have decreased the Retail Sales and Use Tax rate statewide while expanding the tax to include services as well as a statewide regional highway use fee and a new retail delivery fee in Northern Virginia. Funding would have generated new revenue for ongoing transportation needs primarily for transit systems statewide. Both bills failed to advance in their respective chambers.

HB 1179 (Tran) / SB 638 (Ebbin) Transportation funding. Would have established new taxes on transportation network companies, retail deliveries, commercial parking lots, and a regional highway use fee on all vehicles and other new fees to generate

new transportation revenue to meet ongoing transit funding needs in the Commonwealth. Both bills failed to advance in their respective chambers.

Labor

PASSED

SB 100 (Stanley) Protection of employees; volunteer emergency responders; civil action. Prohibits an employer from discharging, disciplining, threatening, discriminating against, or penalizing an employee or taking other retaliatory action regarding an employee’s compensation, terms, conditions, location, or privileges of employment solely because the employee fails to report for work because such employee is serving as a voluntary emergency responder, as defined in the bill, and is actively responding to an emergency alarm or during a state of emergency, provided that certain requirements are met.

FAILED

SB 378 (Surovell) / HB 1263 (Tran) Collective bargaining by public employees; Public Employee Relations Board established; exclusive bargaining representatives. Would have required public employers and employee organizations that are exclusive bargaining representatives to negotiate in good faith with respect to wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment. The bills would have created the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB), which will rule on appropriate bargaining units and provide for

certification and decertification elections for exclusive bargaining representatives of state employees and local government employees. The law would have become completely effective in July 2028. The bills provided that any existing collective bargaining agreements would remain in effect until at least that time.

Public Safety

PASSED

HB 702 (Cole) Virginia Firearm Give-Back Program and Fund established. Requires all city and county law enforcement agencies to adopt a gun give-back or sell-back program, with exceptions for weapons that are evidence in a criminal prosecution. Each such law enforcement agency is required to hold one event annually. It permits towns to do the same.

HB 273 (Helmer) Law-enforcement officers; duty to render aid upon danger to life or limb; civil immunity. Provides that a law-enforcement officer, while engaged in the performance of his duties, has a duty to render aid to any person that he observes suffering from a serious bodily injury or life-threatening condition as circumstances objectively permit. The bill provides immunity for such officers from civil liability for any acts or omissions that are not due to gross negligence or willful misconduct resulting from the rendering of such aid.

SB 647 (Pillion) Use of unmanned aircraft systems by law-enforcement officers; search warrants. Allows use of unmanned aircraft systems without a search warrant when law enforcement is surveying the scene of a crime or to respond to a public safety call for service, to locate a person when such person has fled the offense location during the initial response to an incident, or to provide



real-time aerial observation to increase on-scene safety and security, deliver essential supplies, and provide enhanced communication for emergency personnel in response to emergency calls. It also authorizes the use of unmanned aircraft systems by law enforcement during large gatherings, demonstrations, disturbances, and other such events in the public domain to aid in maintaining the safety and security of event attendees and members of the public.

Sovereign Immunity

PASSED

SB 637 (Ebbin) Virginia Human Rights Act; definition of “employer”; sovereign immunity. The bill expands access to the Human Rights Act. The original version waived sovereign immunity for any violations of the Virginia Human Rights Act by a government agency. The final version does not contain that waiver.

FAILED

SB 228 (Surovell) Localities; liability insurance; certain waiver of sovereign immunity. Would have required that if a locality provides liability insurance for public safety workers and volunteers (police, fire, EMS), then in any action against such public safety workers or the locality, the local government would be deemed to have waived sovereign immunity as a defense.

Eminent Domain

PASSED

HB 1401 (Franklin) Eminent domain; certificate of take; description of property. Clarifies that a certificate of take in an eminent domain matter may include a combination of one or more plats, drawings, or plans to provide the description of the property being taken as required by law.

SB 779 (Obenshain) Eminent domain; condemnation proceedings; entry of order and recordation of certificate; disbursement of funds by circuit court clerk. Creates techni-

cal amendments including the removal of the cap of \$25,000 for business relocation expenses. The federal limit is \$25,000. If a state court grants more, the federal agency will almost certainly not participate in the coverage.

Miscellaneous

PASSED

HB 505 (McAuliff) / SB 648 (Perry) Counties, cities, and towns; dual office holding, etc. As agreed to in the conference report, any member of a local governing body that has been employed by any governmental agency that is part of or subject to the control of that governing body and is a current member, will be deemed to have a continuing personal interest for two years following termination. Additionally, the conference report outlines a course of action in the event that a town officer in Planning District 8 with a specific population is charged with a felony. If that occurs, the court must suspend that officer from their position while proceedings occur. Course of action expires in July 2028.

HB 1150 (Hodges) Impersonating any local, town, city, or county elected official; penalty. Makes willfully and intentionally impersonating or falsely assuming the identity of a local government official a class 3 misdemeanor.

FAILED

HB 707 (Hayes) State government; transaction of public business; prohibited website domains. Would have required all public bodies (as broadly defined in the bill) to have a .gov website domain and email address. Due to the cost and expansion of the bill, HB 707 was continued to the 2027 General Assembly Session. In the interim, a letter was sent to the Joint Commission on Science and Technology (JCOTS) to study the cost, implementation, and feasibility of changing all domains. VML is included in the workgroup and expects a final report to be given to JCOTS full committee in July 2026.



Session takeaways from VML's 2026 legislative intern

THIS JANUARY, AT THE OPENING of the Virginia General Assembly session, I began my internship with the Virginia Municipal League in Richmond. From the start, I was immersed in the world of municipal advocacy and state policymaking. For those that have not experienced it firsthand, the energy within the Capitol during the session is palpable; every discussion, debate, and vote holds the potential to shape the lives of Virginians across the Commonwealth.

The Virginia Municipal League serves as a vital link between local governments and state policymakers, advocating for legislation that supports the interests of municipalities and strengthens local governance. During my internship, I quickly came to appreciate the complexity and collaboration required to represent such a wide network of communities. My responsibilities included tracking legislation, monitoring committee hearings, and preparing materials that informed staff and member municipalities about bills relevant to local operations and budgets. Among my duties was creating and refining bill trackers and data spreadsheets designed to improve VML's legislative efficiency. This work ensured that staff had real-time access to critical information throughout the session and gave me insight into how advocacy organizations navigate the legislative process.

A particularly memorable part of my internship was attending committee and subcommittee meetings, where state legislators, local government officials, and lobbyists engaged in thoughtful (and sometimes spirited) discussions about legislation. Watching the intersection of local needs and state policy unfold gave me greater appreciation for how decisions made in the Capitol ripple outward, affecting schools, utilities, infrastructure, and countless other aspects of life in the Commonwealth. This experience underscored the importance of informed advocacy and clear communication between state and local leaders.

My introduction to VML began the previous summer at the Small Towns Conference held on the campus of Longwood University. There, I met Executive Director Michelle Gowdy and several members of the VML team. At the time, I was interning under Craig

Hughes, town manager of Brookneal, where I assisted with policy development, municipal management, and daily administrative operations. That summer experience – my first window into the challenges and rewards of local government service – inspired me to explore how policy decisions translate into administrative action. When I got the opportunity to intern with VML, it felt like a great chance to build on that foundation and contribute to an organization that supports localities across Virginia.

Throughout the session, I was especially grateful for the mentorship and guidance provided by Gowdy and the entire VML staff. Their professionalism, dedication, and collaborative spirit gave me a better understanding of how policy is shaped, negotiated, and implemented at every level of government. More importantly, it reaffirmed my passion for public service and solidified my goal of pursuing a career in public policy, municipal management, or a federal agency focused on community development and governance.

The “affordability” session

While the 2026 General Assembly session closed without a final budget, it did usher in a slate of policy changes that had the potential to shape how Virginia's cities, towns, and counties serve their residents in the years ahead. From my vantage point as a VML intern, the session underscored both the importance of local advocacy and the continuing tension between new statewide mandates and the fiscal realities faced by local governments.

The overarching political theme in Richmond this year was “affordability,” a term applied to a wide range of initiatives, from wages and housing to energy and taxes. However, even as legislators advanced policies framed as making life more affordable for Virginians, they rejected numerous revenue measures that would have provided sustainable state funding, leaving local governments wary of future cost shifting.





At Local Government Day with VML's Policy Communications Coordinator Josette Bulova and Membership Services Administrator Keyara Johnson.

Data centers and local revenue

While “affordability” dominated the rhetoric, the session also highlighted continuing debates about how to balance economic development incentives, tax policy, and local revenue needs. One high-profile example was the discussion around data centers and the long-standing sales tax exemption on data center equipment.

Some lawmakers argued that rolling back this exemption would provide revenues to help fund affordability measures, while others, including key leaders in one chamber and the governor, remained committed to maintaining the exemption as an economic development tool. For local governments that currently host (or are courting) data centers, the outcome of this debate will matter greatly, as they weigh infrastructure demands, land use decisions, and community impacts against the promise of jobs and tax base expansion.

At the same time, the General Assembly approved certain new revenue sources tied to gambling expansion and marijuana licensing, as well as a payroll tax to fund paid family and medical leave, but declined other options that could have provided more robust support for state and local priorities. This mixed approach leaves many local officials concerned that new policy commitments will outpace the revenues needed to sustain them over time.

Key policy actions affecting localities

Lawmakers agreed on several major bills that will have immediate and long-term implications for local governments.

Minimum wage: The General Assembly approved an increase in the state minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2028, which will directly affect local payrolls as public employers and indirectly affect local economies and tax bases. For many cities and counties already moving in this direction, the state’s action brings welcome alignment, but it also raises concerns for smaller or fiscally stressed localities that must absorb higher personnel costs without matching state support.

Housing stability: Legislation extending the period for tenants to pay off back rent before eviction aims to reduce displacement and stabilize communities. Local governments will likely see impacts in their courts, social services, caseloads, and partnerships with nonprofits providing housing assistance and mediation.

Public safety and firearms: Closing the “boyfriend loophole” for firearm purchases adds another protective layer in domestic violence situations, with implications for local law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim services programs.

Courts and immigration: A bill prohibiting federal immigration enforcement at courthouses seeks to ensure that victims, witnesses, and defendants can access the justice system without immigration consequences. Local governments will need clear implementation guidance for sheriffs, court security, and local police agencies as these changes take effect.

Energy and infrastructure: Legalizing small “balcony solar” installations reflects a broader trend toward distributed energy resources and will intersect with local building codes, permitting processes, and inspections. For many localities, this is one more example of the need to keep local ordinances and staffing aligned with rapidly changing technology and state law.

What does all of this mean for VML members?

For VML and its member localities, the 2026 session reinforced two core realities. First, sustained advocacy is essential: local voices helped shape numerous bills, from labor and housing measures to energy and public safety, ensuring that legislators understood on-the-ground implications for city and town halls across the Commonwealth. Second, the unresolved budget (hopefully resolved by the time you read this!) underscores the need for local governments to remain engaged not only during the regular session but also in special sessions and budget negotiations, when key decisions about state aid and shared revenues are finalized.

Looking ahead, local officials will need to monitor implementation of the new laws, adapt local ordinances and administrative practices where necessary, and continue communicating with constituents about how state actions translate into local services and tax decisions. As an intern for VML, this session made clear to me that even in a year defined by “affordability,” our members’ ability to deliver essential services depends on a careful balance of policy ambition, fiscal responsibility, and respect for local authority – a balance that VML will keep working to protect on behalf of Virginia’s cities, towns, and counties.



About the author: *Andrew Betson recently graduated from Hampden-Sydney College with a degree in Government with a minor in National Security Studies. During his time there, he served as president of the Tiger Athletic Club and as a peer career advisor in the Ferguson Career Center.*

VIRGINIA HOUSING By Chris Thompson

Shaping the future of our communities: Zoning, land use, and Virginia Housing's support



IN RECENT YEARS, demand for homes across Virginia has continued to rise, as have the costs of owning or renting one. At the same time, supply has struggled to keep up. One critical part of addressing housing affordability is understanding the role that zoning and land use play in shaping communities.

At Virginia Housing, the state's housing finance agency, both zoning and land use are central to our work to expand and preserve the supply of affordable housing statewide. When policymakers and housing professionals are clear on how their zoning ordinances allow and restrict various ways of using land in their communities, they are better positioned to address their housing needs. More broadly, understanding how residential, commercial, recreational, and other land uses fit together is essential for attracting jobs, staying economically competitive, and improving overall quality of life.

Virginia Housing has provided grant funding to numerous localities seeking to use their land more effectively — both to address housing challenges and to advance broader goals for vibrant, resilient communities. As you read about these projects, we encourage you to think big about your own community's needs. Virginia Housing is always eager to discuss ideas and opportunities for partnership, even in early stages.

The Virginia Zoning Atlas

Zoning can be a complicated subject. Early zoning codes were relatively short and straightforward, but that is no longer the case. Across Virginia's 357 jurisdictions, there are more than 4,000 zoning districts and roughly 50,000 pages of zoning code. The average code alone is nearly 175 pages!



Presenting findings from the Virginia Zoning Atlas. Courtesy of HousingForward Virginia.

Fortunately, Virginia's localities now have a powerful new tool for breaking this information into more digestible insights: the Virginia Zoning Atlas, an interactive map that visualizes zoning code details for nearly every locality in the state. Atlas users can zoom from the national map down to specific cities and counties, where they'll find information about permitted housing types, minimum lot sizes, and parking requirements. The atlas also includes data on protected land, flood zones, green space, transit access, and more.

By bringing this information together in one searchable online tool, the Virginia Zoning Atlas gives users a clear picture of both the current realities and future possibilities for land use in their community. This information gives decision-makers far more insight into how zoning might evolve to meet local goals.

The Virginia Zoning Atlas was created by HousingForward Virginia, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and policy organization focused on housing issues. HousingForward Virginia partnered with the National Zoning Atlas to develop the tool, and their effort benefited from the support of a broad public private collaboration. Funding came from Capital One's Community Impact and Investment Division, \$185,000 in grants from Virginia Housing, and contributions from the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, the Bob and Anna Lou Schaberg Foundation, the Hampton Roads Community Foundation, the Community Foundation for a Greater Richmond, the League of Women Voters of Virginia, Sentara Health, Atlantic Union Bank, Fulton Forward Foundation, and Wells Fargo.

"As we all know, health, educational, and economic outcomes directly correlate to housing. The Virginia Zoning Atlas empowers lawmakers to make informed decisions about zoning policies in the



The Virginia Zoning Atlas is available at ZoningAtlas.org/Virginia.

future. Now, policymakers and decision-makers across Virginia will be able to visualize the impact zoning has on housing development and our communities more broadly,” said HousingForward Virginia Executive Director of Programs Jonathan Knopf when the final map was unveiled in late 2025.

Explore the Virginia Zoning Atlas at ZoningAtlas.org/Virginia or use the QR code.



The ZONED OUT campaign

Complementing the Virginia Zoning Atlas is ZONED OUT, an outreach and education campaign from HousingForward Virginia designed to help local governments and community groups put the Atlas to work in their own backyards. Available both in person and virtually, ZONED OUT offers a menu of options tailored to the needs of each partner, from introductions to zoning fundamentals to deeper dives that incorporate real-world local data and scenarios.

Since the program’s debut in February, HousingForward Virginia has conducted seven ZONED OUT events: two in Richmond and one each in Chesapeake, Virginia Beach, and Warrenton, as well two virtual sessions. While ZONED OUT sessions are tailored to each community or organization, the core goal remains the same: helping Virginians understand how to expand housing choices, both in where they live and in the types of homes available. Sessions review demographic trends, such as shifting family sizes, age distributions, and the gap between starter home demand and construction. They also explore how information from the Virginia Zoning Atlas can be used to address local housing challenges.

Although ZONED OUT is housing-focused, HousingForward Virginia has also delivered sessions to organizations working in related fields, including transportation, environmental conservation, and economic development.

“Zoning is something that local governments can exercise a lot of discretion within Virginia,” said Knopf. “However, very few of us were taught about zoning and land use in school. With the Zoning Atlas and ZONED OUT, we really want to make those tools accessible. The goal is that we leave decision-makers better equipped to have productive conversations with their constituents and neighbors about what their neighborhoods will look like in one year, five years, 50 years.”

Learn more about ZONED OUT at HousingForwardVA.org/Zoned-Out or use the QR code.



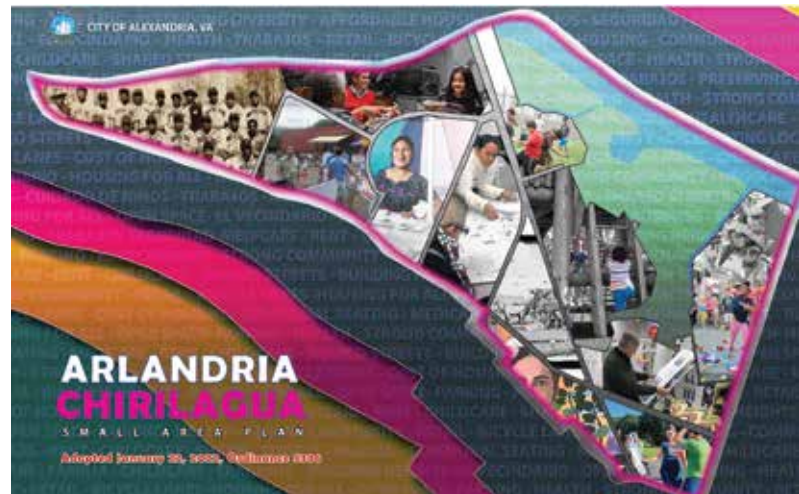
Community Impact Grants and support for communities

Beyond the statewide Virginia Zoning Atlas, Virginia Housing has partnered with localities and regional organizations to address the intersection of land use and housing. This work ranges from property inventories and feasibility studies to reviews of local policies and zoning ordinances, as well as data analysis that helps identify housing inventory needs and strategies for filling the gaps.

A key resource Virginia Housing uses to support these efforts are Community Impact Grants, which can support the costs of market research, design and engineering studies, community outreach, neighborhood design, mixed-use and mixed-income development planning, and other initiatives that foster housing and economic growth. These grants have been implemented in communities across the Commonwealth for an array of needs, but all with one common goal: to increase attainable, affordable housing for all Virginians.

City of Alexandria: South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy and Arlandria Chirilagua Small Area Plan

Alexandria is one of Virginia’s leaders in zoning and land use innovation. Although the city has a large and diverse housing stock, affordability has declined for years as developers have acquired and converted affordable units into market rate housing. While many of these older, modest units have remained relatively affordable because of their age and condition, pressure for higher-end renovations has intensified. Because demand for housing at all income levels is high, subsidies alone cannot meet Alexandria’s needs. Increasing density, paired with strong affordability requirements, has become a central strategy.



Alexandria’s Arlandria Chirilagua Small Area Plan. Courtesy of the City of Alexandria.

The South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy exemplifies this approach. The area included 215 garden and townhouse units under a single owner, with affordability subsidies set to expire. Concerned about the likelihood of redevelopment and conversion to market rate, city leaders created a new residential multifamily (RMF) zone that offered enough density to make preserving affordable units financially viable for the property owner.

Virginia Housing supported this effort by providing grant funding for planning activities ranging from traffic and utility analyses to urban design considerations. Another important component was a community-centered engagement process designed to reflect the perspectives and needs of residents living in the affordable units. The South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy ultimately won a national Urban Land Institute award, underscoring its economic feasibility and inclusive approach.

The city saw a second major project with the arrival of Amazon’s second headquarters in nearby Crystal City. The Arlandria Chirilagua Small Area Plan was part of Alexandria’s desire to preserve affordability along the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor, an area with many affordable units and vibrant retail, as well as sites capable of supporting greater density.

Working with the community and landowners, planners developed a system of height bonuses tied to affordability commitments. These bonuses, which allow for significantly taller buildings, have become powerful incentives for preserving affordable units. Robust community outreach was essential as most Arlandria Chirilagua residents earn well below the area’s median income.

Under the plan, developers can build up to twice the height permitted under existing zoning if affordable units are included. Without this plan, the affordable housing stock might have increased only mod-

Conceptual development rendering from the Franklin County Housing Assessment. Courtesy of Franklin County.



estly while the region's overall affordable stock declined. Instead, affordability commitments are now secured, and the plan won the American Planning Association's Virginia Plan of the Year award for its technical strength and focus on equity and inclusion, as well as a Virginia Governor's Housing Conference award in November of last year.

Franklin County: Franklin County Housing Assessment

In a more rural part of the state, Virginia Housing supported the Franklin County Housing Assessment, which aimed to expand both the supply and diversity of housing options. Also known as a development code analysis, the assessment examined regulatory, permitting, and cost barriers that can limit the creation of desired housing types. Its goal was to ensure that the county's codes and ordinances align with the housing vision established through earlier planning efforts.

Many communities articulate strong goals for expanding housing affordability, but unless their development codes support those goals, achieving them can be difficult or even impossible. In Franklin County, this challenge was especially relevant in Union Hall, a rural area of the county where they had previously adopted a small area plan calling for more housing types and increased density. The housing assessment led to specific recommendations, including the creation of a zoning district tailored to Union Hall's blend of agricultural and residential uses and an overlay district permitting duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and other housing types consistent with the small area plan.

City of Roanoke: Riverdale Conceptual Plan

Riverdale is a neighborhood in southeast Roanoke along the Roanoke River and at the base of Mill Mountain. Its 125 acres are comparable in size to the city's downtown. Formerly an industrial hub, the area has declined significantly since jobs began leaving in the late 50s, and today, the area's poverty rate is much higher than that of the surrounding area, while property and home values are much lower.

The Riverdale Conceptual Plan is an effort to reimagine Riverdale as an anchor for southeast Roanoke, complete with residential, office, retail, dining, and light industrial space. Virginia Housing has

Rendering of Riverdale Conceptual Plan in the City of Roanoke. Courtesy Poole and Poole Architecture.



supported the city of Roanoke's efforts to gain insight from Roanoke residents on the future Riverdale redevelopment, as well as the development of both a market study to understand how space in Riverdale might be used and a feasibility study to consider what kinds of uses might be possible. Information collected in each of these endeavors is currently being used to guide revitalization efforts in Riverdale.

Let's solve this together!

Strong communities don't happen by accident. From the Virginia Zoning Atlas and ZONED OUT campaign to locality-focused land use planning efforts, the work highlighted here shows what becomes possible when leaders take a strategic look at how their zoning and land use policies shape housing opportunities. From large cities to small rural communities, thoughtful planning can enhance neighborhood quality, foster long-term economic strength, and address the housing crisis.

Virginia Housing is proud to support these efforts. If your community is exploring a land use or housing initiative, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate. Please visit VirginiaHousing.com or email Grants@VirginiaHousing.com to start the conversation.

About the author: *Chris Thompson is Virginia Housing's director of strategic housing*

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

Stronger Together: A restructured City Manager's Office aligns strategy, data, and service delivery

IN RECENT MONTHS, the City of Charlottesville has quietly undertaken a significant restructuring of its City Manager's Office, building out a leadership team designed to meet increasingly complex community needs while strengthening internal coordination, strategy, and service delivery.

At the center of this shift is a clear theme: aligning people, data, and operations in a way that better connects City Hall to the community it serves. Under the leadership of **Sam Sanders**, and with Deputy City Manager **James Freas** supporting overall coordination and organizational management, the city has added new roles and expanded its executive bench, signaling a move toward a more integrated and strategic model of local government.

One of the additions is the creation of a chief strategy officer position, now held by **Jennifer Hendrick**. Coming from a background in private-sector data and analytics, Hendrick's role reflects a growing emphasis on using data to drive decision-making and improve performance across departments. Her work focuses on strengthening how the city plans, measures outcomes, and equips staff with the tools needed to operate more effectively. In practice, that means not only refining internal systems but also increasing transparency and accountability for residents.

Complementing this internal focus is the city's first-ever economic mobility officer, **Abigail Matthew Wade**. The position is funded through a fellowship program with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and represents a more outward-facing component of the restructuring, focused on addressing systemic challenges such as poverty and access to opportunity. Tasked with coordinating efforts across departments and community partners, Matthew Wade is leading the development of a citywide Economic Mobility and Opportunity Work Plan. The intent is not to create new programs in isolation, but to better align existing resources and improve residents' access to pathways to stability and growth.

Supporting these strategic efforts is **Steve King**, who joined as assistant to the city manager. With experience spanning local, state, and

national government, including work with the International City/County Management Association, King's role centers on advancing cross-departmental initiatives and strengthening coordination both within the organization and with external stakeholders. His background in economic development and workforce initiatives positions him as a key connector between policy priorities and on-the-ground implementation.

The restructuring also reinforces operational leadership through the addition of assistant city manager positions. One of these roles is currently vacant, with a portfolio including Public Works, Utilities, Information Technology, and Parks & Recreation. **Samuel Roman** serves in the other assistant city manager position, overseeing public safety and human services, including Police, Fire, Emergency Management, and Human Services. With a career rooted in public safety leadership, Roman's approach emphasizes community trust, accountability, and early engagement in decision-making. His experience managing both operations and capital projects adds another layer of cohesion to the city's evolving structure.

These appointments illustrate a deliberate shift toward a more holistic model of governance. Rather than operating in silos, the restructured City Manager's Office is designed to connect strategy with execution, data with decision-making, and community input with measurable outcomes.

While each role carries its own distinct responsibilities, they are unified by a shared objective: improving how the city delivers services and responds to the needs of its residents. It is an approach that acknowledges the increasing complexity of local government, while also reinforcing a fundamental principle: Effective public service depends not only on what a city does, but on how well its people and systems work together to do it.

About the author: *Afton Schneider is the director of communications & public engagement for the City of Charlottesville.*



- Sanders -



- Freas -



- Hendrick -



- Matthew Wade -



- King -



- Roman -

AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

By American Public University staff

Education for public service skills that matter

IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT, no two days look the same. One day you're responding to a community need, the next you're navigating new technology, policy updates, or an unexpected challenge. As government responsibilities grow more complex, so does the need for strong, adaptable skills. It's not just about what you know; it's how you think, how you communicate, and how you respond to change.

At American Public University (APU), education does more than deliver knowledge. It develops the skills professionals rely on every day: critical thinking, digital literacy growth, and a growth mindset.

Critical thinking: Making decisions that matter

Municipalities across Virginia are making difficult budget decisions as they adjust to federal funding changes. These include the expiration of COVID-relief funds, federal workforce reductions, and recent cuts to Medicaid, low-income food benefits, and other programs.

These changes have taken a heavy toll in Northern Virginia in particular, with Fairfax alone projecting a budget shortfall of \$131 million to \$300 million for the 2026-2027 fiscal year. Localities must decide whether to make painful cuts or close the gap with local tax dollars. Finding solutions will require critical thinking and innovation to create evidence-based, future-looking policymaking.

Critical thinking enables government staff to project federal funding impacts, assess which programs deliver the greatest impact for residents, make smart budget decisions, and avoid funding cliffs. Finance departments empowered with critical thinking skills can budget smarter and better serve their community.

APU emphasizes critical thinking across disciplines, encouraging students to question assumptions, analyze information from multiple perspectives, and develop well-reasoned solutions. These aren't abstract exercises – they mirror the decisions public service professionals face daily. Along the way, students also strengthen related skills such as communication and problem-solving, ensuring they can reach sound conclusions and explain and implement them effectively.

Digital literacy: Navigating a technology-driven world

Local governments are increasingly shaped by data, digital systems, and emerging technologies. From cybersecurity and infrastructure to artificial intelligence (AI) and data-informed decision-making, digital fluency is central to effective public service.

In January 2025, a mechanical failure at Richmond's main water plant caused a water crisis throughout the region, with residents losing access to drinking water for days. A city investigation found that lack of real-time system information, limited monitoring and backup capabilities, under-preparation, and poor communication exacerbated the crisis.

Digital literacy is at the core of these issues. This skillset translates into smarter infrastructure systems with improved monitoring

and alerts, better use of data to track system performance, and staff trained to quickly interpret (and act on) information.

APU weaves digital literacy throughout its programs, helping students build confidence in using technology, interpreting data, and understanding how digital tools can improve operations and community outcomes. This goes beyond technical know-how. Students learn how to think critically about technology, evaluate its use, understand its implications, and apply it responsibly.

Growth mindset: Adapting, learning, and leading through change

Many Virginia cities and towns struggle with recruiting and retaining enough workers to maintain services. According to an April 2025 staffing assessment in Prince William County, key departments – including Human Resources, Social Services, and the City Attorney's Office – are understaffed.

When local governments are understaffed, residents can feel the impact with delayed services and reduced programs. Municipal staff feel it, too, as they're asked to reorganize, take on more work, and field complaints. A growth mindset – one that understands that change is a constant in public service – can ease the burden.

APU fosters a growth mindset that encourages continuous learning, resilience, and openness to new ideas. This mindset strengthens critical thinking, supports ongoing digital learning, and prepares professionals to lead through uncertainty. By adopting a growth mindset, local governments can upskill existing staff, cross-train employees across departments, and encourage employees to embrace flexible roles and new career pathways.

An education option that fits working professionals

APU's online format makes it possible for busy municipal employees to continue their education. But it's not just about convenience. It's about creating an environment where education works with the demands of public service. Furthermore, APU's courses are designed to connect directly to real-world challenges – whether that's managing budgets, responding to emergencies, supporting public health initiatives, or strengthening infrastructure. What students learn isn't meant to sit on the shelf; it's something they can bring back to their roles right away.

And because many students are experienced professionals, the classroom becomes a place to exchange perspectives while learning new concepts. Discussions center on real situations, making the experience more practical, more relevant, and more useful.



Programs aligned to municipal needs

APU offers a wide range of degree programs that support the work of Virginia's municipal workforce, including:

- **Public Administration** – Develop skills in governance, policy, and public sector management.
- **Emergency and Disaster Management** – Build expertise in crisis response, preparedness, and recovery.
- **Business Administration** – Strengthen organizational leadership, budgeting, and operational strategy.
- **Information Technology** – Gain critical knowledge in cybersecurity, data systems, and IT infrastructure.
- **Health Sciences** – Support community health initiatives and public health systems.
- **Fire Science** – Advance knowledge of how to lead in fire service and emergency response.
- **Education** – Enhance teaching, training, and workforce development capabilities.
- **Criminal Justice*** – Prepare for roles in law enforcement, corrections, and public safety leadership.

**This degree program is not designed to meet the educational requirements for professional licensure or certification in any country, state, province, or other jurisdiction. This program has not been approved by any state professional licensing body and does not lead to any state-issued professional licensure.*

A partner for your public service journey

For municipal employees, education isn't just about earning a degree – it's about finding a path that respects their experience and

Exclusive opportunity for VML members

As part of its commitment to public service professionals, APU is proud to offer a 10% tuition reduction to employees of Virginia Municipal League members and their families. This partnership makes it more accessible for municipal employees to invest in their education and professional growth – with less financial strain. For local governments, it's also an opportunity to strengthen their workforce by encouraging continued learning and skill development

clears barriers to help them move forward. APU is committed to supporting those who serve by offering a **no-cost transfer credit evaluation**, making it easier to see how previous coursework may apply toward a degree. It's a simple but important step for professionals returning to school after time away or who have completed college-level learning elsewhere.

APU also recognizes that learning doesn't only happen in a classroom. Public service professionals build deep expertise through their work. With APU's prior learning assessment, students may be able to translate that experience into academic credit, helping them move more quickly toward their goals.

Cost transparency is another important part of the equation. With **\$0 ebooks**, students can focus on their coursework without the added expense of course materials. It's one less hurdle – and one more way APU makes education accessible and straightforward.

APU meets students where they are and helps them get where they want to go. For those working in public service, that kind of support can make all the difference in earning a degree and continuing to grow, lead, and serve their communities.

Learn more about APU's 10% grant for VML members and their families at APUPartners.com/VML.

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY OF ACHIEVERS

When you enroll at American Public University (APU), you'll be joining other civil servants and working professionals pursuing continuing education motivated by a common goal: building knowledge and skill.



CONVENIENT & FLEXIBLE

Make a plan that works for you with online coursework, mostly 8-week class formats, weekly schedules with no set login times, and monthly start dates.



BETTER VALUE

We prioritize affordability. At APU, finish faster with transfer credits, evaluated and applied at no cost, plus \$0 app fee for undergrad and master's-level programs, and \$0 ebooks for undergrads.



Digital Learning for Real Life Starts Here:

Visit APUPartners.com/VML and request information to learn if you qualify for a tuition grant.



Some programs require in-person activity, including doctoral residencies, internships, practicums, proctored comprehensive exams, or class projects with in-person assignments. View your program of interest for specific requirements.

The University reserves the right to accept or deny credits according to policies outlined on our University website. Please visit the University's transfer credit policy webpage for complete information.

American Public University is part of American Public University System, which is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (hlcommission.org), an institutional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. American Public University is not affiliated with American University or the U.S. military. For more about our graduation rates, the median debt of students who complete a program, and other important information, visit www.apus.edu/disclosure. 04/24

THE VIRGINIA STATE POLICE INSURANCE FRAUD PROGRAM

The hidden cost: What Virginia's municipalities need to know about insurance fraud

FRAUD IS EVERYWHERE, but most of us have learned to spot the obvious kinds. Your phone probably buzzes with them regularly: urgent texts about an unpaid toll, a package that couldn't be delivered, or a suspicious charge on an account you need to verify immediately. Insurance fraud, on the other hand, is different. It's quieter, less visible, and for Virginia's cities and towns, it hits a lot closer to home.

Virginia municipalities are among the largest employers in the Commonwealth. This means they are also among the most exposed when it comes to insurance fraud, particularly the kinds that target workplace and organizational insurance. When fraud goes undetected, it doesn't just harm insurers; it drives up costs for everyone, including the governments and the taxpayers funding them. Each year, it's estimated that fraud costs the average Virginia family around \$1,000 in the form of higher premiums.

How to combat insurance fraud

The Virginia State Police Insurance Fraud Program (IFP) was established in 1999. Over the past 25 years, the program has grown steadily in both reach and impact. In 2025, IFP received 3,159 referrals, up by nearly 50 percent from the previous year, and initiated 578 investigations, up by more than 70 percent compared to 2024. But the program's value to Virginia's local governments goes well beyond enforcement numbers.

Common types of fraud affecting municipalities

The types of insurance fraud most likely to affect local governments fall into a few key categories.

Workers' compensation fraud is one of the most common and most costly forms of insurance fraud facing employers. It occurs when an employee files a false or exaggerated claim for a workplace injury, continues to work elsewhere while collecting benefits, or misrepresents the circumstances of a legitimate injury to receive greater compensation. For municipalities with large workforces, the financial exposure can be significant.

Property fraud is another area of concern for municipalities. This includes any fraudulent claims related to physical damage of property, including exaggerated or fabricated roofing claims, staged storm damage, or inflated repair estimates. For municipalities that own and maintain public buildings and infrastructure, the exposure is real and worth watching.

Fleet and vehicle fraud is relevant for any locality operating a significant number of vehicles. Staged accidents, inflated repair estimates, exaggerated damage claims involving municipal vehicles, or claims by third parties against municipal fleets are all documented forms of fraud that IFP investigators encounter.

Liability fraud, including exaggerated injury claims stemming from incidents on public property, is another exposure point for local governments. A slip and fall on a city sidewalk or in a public facility may be a legitimate claim, but it may also be the basis for a fraudulent one.



Fraud Fighter Awards

When it comes to stamping out insurance fraud, some people's shoeprints are bigger than others. That's why, every year since 2003, the Virginia State Police Insurance Fraud Program has honored those who go above and beyond in our battle against fraud – with the Fraud Fighter Awards.



(L-R) First Sergeant Peter W. Lazear, CIFI, Special Agent S. Craig Hudson, Intelligence Analyst Sr. CJ R. Walton, and Program Support Tech Sr. Marilyn Elam.

Watch for these red flags

Insurance fraud isn't always easy to spot, but there are warning signs that managers, supervisors, and HR staff can learn to recognize.

In workers' compensation cases, red flags include:

- Injuries reported immediately following a workplace conflict or disciplinary action.
- Vague or inconsistent descriptions of how an injury occurred.
- A reluctance to provide details or undergo examination.

In liability and vehicle cases, watch for:

- Witness accounts that don't align.
- Claims that surface long after an alleged incident.
- Injuries that seem disproportionate to the circumstances described.

None of these signs prove fraud on their own, but they are worth noting and, when in doubt, worth reporting.

A resource built to detect and prevent insurance fraud

The Virginia State Police accepts tips from people and organizations – including municipalities – that suspect insurance fraud. Tips can be submitted online at StampOutFraud.com or by calling the insurance fraud hotline at (877) 62-FRAUD. All submissions are confidential.

Once a tip is received, investigators evaluate the information and determine whether a formal investigation is warranted. Tips leading to a conviction may be eligible for a reward of up to \$25,000 (eligibility requirements apply).

Beyond its investigative function, the Insurance Fraud Program is also available as an educational partner for local governments interested in training staff to recognize and report fraud. If your locality

is looking to build awareness around this issue, whether through a staff presentation, a community event or another format, the Virginia State Police Insurance Fraud Program welcomes those conversations.

Get in touch!

Unlike the scams that flood your inbox, insurance fraud rarely announces itself. It hides in claims, costs, and circumstances that can be easy to overlook. That's exactly why the Virginia State Police Insurance Fraud Program exists, and why Virginia's cities and towns are stronger because of it.

To learn more about the Insurance Fraud Program, visit StampOutFraud.com or contact us directly via email at InsuranceFraud@vsp.virginia.gov.

About the author: *First Sgt. Peter Lazear is the statewide coordinator for the Virginia State Police Insurance Fraud Program*



DOMINION ENERGY

By Malesia “Nikki” Taylor



As summer heat rises: Helping Virginia households stay cool and manage energy costs

AS WE MOVE into the summer months in Virginia, longer days and higher temperatures result in increased reliance on cooling systems to keep homes safe and comfortable.

As temperatures rise, so can the cost of staying safe and cool.

For many households, these seasonal increases can create real financial pressure. When energy usage climbs, families are often forced to make difficult choices balancing the need to stay cool with other essential expenses.

Affordability is not just about energy. It’s about the ability to cover essential needs, including safe and reliable cooling during the hottest months of the year.

Municipal leaders see this reality every day. Teachers, healthcare workers, service employees, retirees, and hourly wage earners are among those feeling the pressure. These are hardworking people in every community doing what they can but still facing challenges when extreme weather drives up energy usage.

The good news is that there are resources available – whether someone is experiencing financial hardship, looking for ways to reduce their energy use, or trying to better manage their monthly bills.

Start here: Find the right help for you

Dominion Energy offers a simple way for customers to explore programs that fit their needs through its Savings Finder tool.

By visiting www.dominionenergy.com/savemore, customers can quickly identify:

- Programs that help reduce monthly energy costs
- No-cost and low-cost energy-saving options
- Bill assistance resources
- Tools to better manage energy use

This personalized approach helps customers take control, connecting them with the right solutions based on their situation.

Immediate help when you need it most

For customers facing financial hardship, Dominion Energy’s **EnergyShare®** program serves as a critical safety net.

EnergyShare is a year-round program of last resort that provides bill payment assistance during the summer cooling season (up to \$300) for those who qualify – regardless of income. The program is not income based, meaning anyone experiencing a hardship can apply.

In addition to bill support, eligible customers may also receive



no-cost energy efficiency upgrades called weatherization. These upgrades help improve comfort and reduce energy use long-term.

These upgrades can include:

- Air sealing and duct repair
- Insulation improvements
- Heat pump tune-ups or replacements
- LED lighting
- ENERGY STAR® appliance upgrades

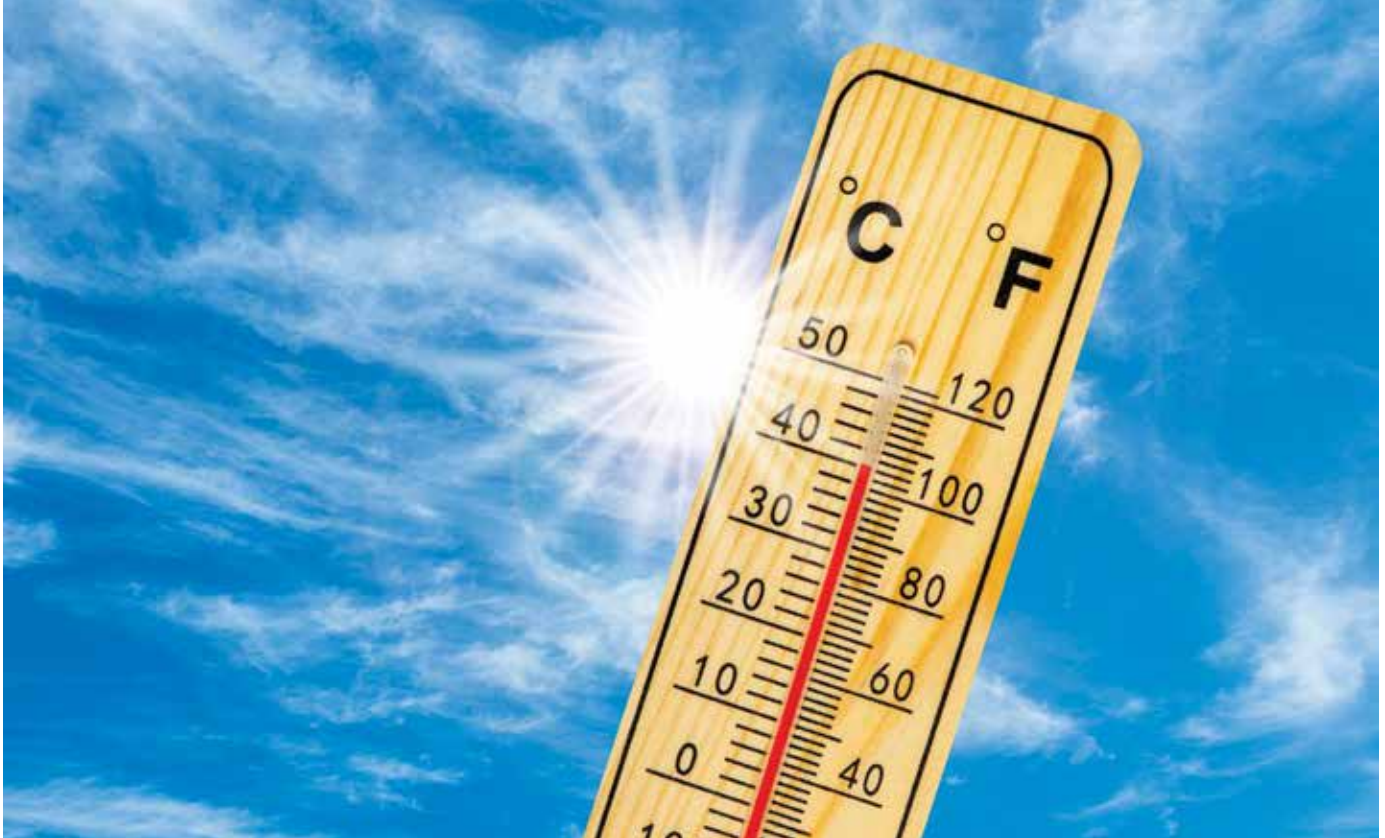
Together, these improvements help homes stay cooler more efficiently – reducing both energy use and monthly costs.

To learn more, visit www.dominionenergy.com/energysare or call 2-1-1 for a referral to a local EnergyShare agency.

Income-based programs for ongoing stability

For households that meet certain income guidelines, additional programs can provide more structured, ongoing support. Many residents may also qualify for programs administered through the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which provides seasonal support for heating and cooling needs.

The Percentage of Income Payment Program (PIPP) helps eligible customers maintain affordable bills by capping payments at a percentage of household income – often paired with opportunities for debt forgiveness when payments are made consistently. This program is designed to create stability and predictability for customers who need it most.



No-cost ways to lower energy use

Not all support comes in the form of financial assistance.

Many customers can take advantage of no-cost and low-cost energy-saving options that help reduce energy use right away, including:

- Adjusting thermostat settings for efficiency
- Sealing air leaks around doors and windows
- Using fans to support cooling systems
- Switching to LED lighting

For those who qualify, more comprehensive no-cost home energy upgrades – such as insulation improvements, duct sealing, and HVAC tune-ups – can make a lasting difference in both comfort and cost.

Tools to help you stay in control

Managing energy costs isn't just about reducing usage. It's also about predictability.

Programs like Dominion Energy's Budget Billing allow customers to spread energy costs evenly throughout the year, avoiding spikes during extreme summer heat. When paired with energy-saving improvements and assistance programs, these tools help customers better plan, budget, and stay on track.

Take the first step

Too often, families who could benefit from these programs never access them – simply because they don't know where to start. That's why it's so important to make information clear, accessible, and easy to navigate.

As temperatures rise, no one should feel like they must navigate higher energy costs alone. Whether you need immediate assistance, are looking to lower your energy use, or want more control over your monthly bill, there are resources available to help.

Start by visiting www.dominionenergy.com/savemore to explore options tailored to your needs.

Because when families have the right tools and information, they can take control of their energy use and better manage the costs that come with it. And for Virginia's communities, continuing to raise awareness of these resources is more than good policy – it is an investment in the health, stability, and resilience of the people who call the Commonwealth home.

VTC Editor's Note: *VML member localities are encouraged to share this article with their residents on websites or other publications. Please contact VTC Editor Rob Bullington, rbullington@vml.org for more information.*

About the author: *Malesia Taylor is the EnergyShare program manager for Dominion Energy.*

MEET THE ENERGY SAVINGS FINDER!

How you'll benefit:

- ✓ Energy-saving programs
- ✓ Tools like energy alerts
- ✓ Bill support when you need it most

Scan the QR code or visit DominionEnergy.com/SaveMore.

Innovative employee benefits for small local governments



LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ACROSS Virginia face increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining a skilled public workforce. Competition with the private sector, rising employee expectations for flexibility, and fiscal constraints require local governments to think creatively about compensation beyond traditional salary and benefits. In response, a growing number of local governments are experimenting with innovative employee benefit programs designed to improve recruitment, retention, job satisfaction, and organizational culture.

Virginia Tech’s outreach and technical assistance efforts with small governments, including towns, confirm their struggle to compete with county governments for talent. For example, a project for a town in the Shenandoah Valley recently showed that town salaries were approximately 20% lower than the county resulting in difficulty recruiting employees and retaining trained, experienced employees.

This article summarizes findings from an evaluation conducted by Virginia Tech’s Center for Public Administration and Policy and the accompanying presentations at the 2025 ICMA Annual Conference and the 2026 VLGMA Winter Conference. The study examined three innovative employee benefit models implemented in small local governments:

1. A Lifestyle Benefit Account
2. A four-day, 36-hour workweek
3. A high-deductible health plan paired with a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA)

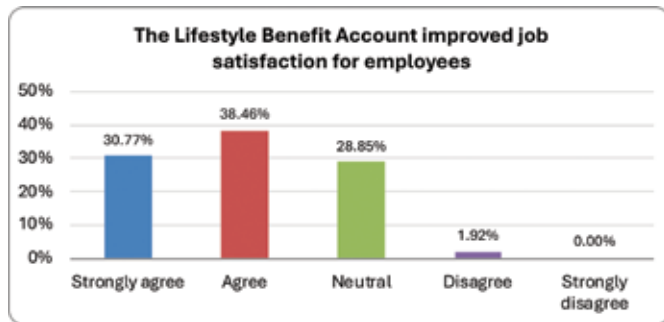
Employee survey data from the four local governments provide early evidence on how these programs are perceived by staff and what lessons Virginia localities may draw from these experiences.

Lifestyle Benefit Accounts: Town of Wendell, NC

The Town of Wendell, NC (pop. 16,000), implemented a Lifestyle Benefit Account that reimburses employees for a broad range of non-medical expenses, including childcare support, education, fitness, financial planning, and wellness services. Employees are eligible for reimbursements of up to \$2,100 annually. Eligible expenses include childcare and support, education and school, fitness, financial planning, and other resources such as dry cleaning, pet care, pet boarding, and pet walks.

Of the town’s approximately 90 staff members, 48 employees responded to the evaluation survey. Survey results indicate strong support for the Lifestyle Benefit Account. Employees largely agreed that the benefit helped attract new employees, retain existing staff, and improved job satisfaction and organizational culture. Responses consistently skewed toward “strongly agree” and “agree,” suggesting that employees value the flexibility and personalization offered by this benefit. Importantly, the evaluation found no statistically significant differences across outcome measures, indicating broad, consistent support rather than isolated enthusiasm.

Chart 1. Town of Wendell Employee Responses



For more information, please contact Town of Wendell Manager Marvin Collins at mcollins@townofwendellinc.gov.

Four-day, 36-hour workweeks: Pennsylvania case studies

For an example of an innovative work week schedule in Virginia see page 56.

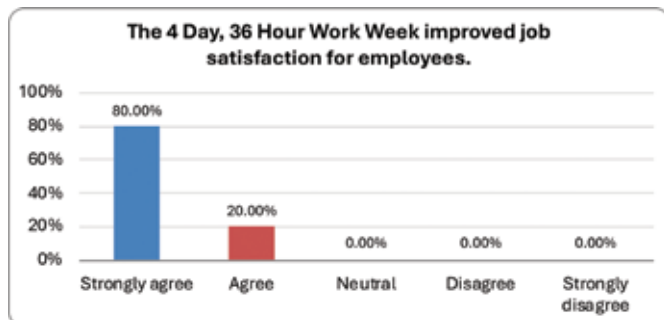
Two Pennsylvania townships – New Hanover (pop. 14,000) and North Whitehall (pop. 15,655) – implemented a four-day, 36-hour workweek for full-time non-uniformed staff without reducing pay. In both cases, administrative offices aligned operating hours to four longer weekdays, allowing employees an additional day off each week.

New Hanover Township, with 16 eligible employees, achieved a survey response rate of nearly 69 percent. Employees expressed highly positive views of the four-day workweek, particularly regarding job satisfaction, motivation, and recruitment potential. Similarly, North Whitehall Township, though limited by a smaller sample size, showed overwhelmingly positive responses across all survey measures. Employees in both communities reported improved morale and work-life balance, reinforcing national research suggesting compressed workweeks can enhance employee engagement without harming service delivery.

Chart 2. New Hanover Township Employee Responses



Chart 3. North Whitehall Employee Response



For more information, please contact New Hanover Township Manager Jamie Gwynn at jgwynn@newhanover-pa.org and North Whitehall Township Manager Randy Cope at rcope@north-whitehall.org.

Health Reimbursement Accounts: Sussex County, VA

Sussex County (pop. 10,753) implemented a high-deductible health insurance plan paired with an employer-funded Health Reimbursement Account (HRA), providing \$5,000 for employee-only plans and \$10,000 for family plans. While conceptually promising as a cost-containment and flexibility strategy, survey results were more mixed than with the other benefit options discussed above. It's worth noting, however, that only nine employees responded, limiting the analytical power of the results. Unlike the other benefit models, responses did not consistently skew positive, suggesting that the complexity of health benefits may require additional education and time for employees to fully appreciate their value.

For more information, please contact Sussex County Administrator Richard Douglas at rdouglas@sussexcountyva.gov.

Key takeaways for Virginia's local governments

Across cases, flexible and easily understood benefits – such as four-day workweeks and lifestyle spending accounts – generated the most positive employee responses. These programs align closely with employees' immediate quality-of-life concerns and offer visible, tangible benefits. In contrast, more complex benefits, such as HRAs, may require longer implementation horizons and stronger communication strategies.

For Virginia municipalities considering innovative employee benefits, these findings suggest that relatively low-cost, high-flexibility programs can yield meaningful improvements in employee satisfaction and recruitment competitiveness. As competition for talented personnel persists, local governments that adapt their benefits to meet evolving employee needs may gain a critical advantage in attracting and retaining talent.

The author would like to recognize the contributions of the research team including Dr. Sharon Mastracci, professor at Virginia Tech, and Dr. David Bredenkamp, collegiate associate professor at Virginia Tech. The research team developed the survey and analyzed the data. Dr. Bredenkamp co-presented at the ICMA National Conference in Tampa, FL. The research team is housed at Virginia Tech's School of Public and International Affairs.

For more information on this study and other outreach and technical assistance programs, please contact: Stephanie Davis at sddavis@vt.edu; Sharon Mastracci at smastracci@vt.edu; and David Bredenkamp at dbredenkamp@vt.edu.

About the author: *Stephanie Davis is the collegiate associate professor and program director for the Virginia Tech School of Public and International Affairs.*



Innovative service hours make Town Hall better for all

IN AUGUST 2021, the Town of Ashland adopted an innovative approach to Town Hall service hours, moving away from the traditional Monday-Friday, eight-hour workday to a Monday-Thursday schedule with four 10-hour workdays.

This approach evolved from efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to create a safer work environment through social distancing, particularly in areas where multiple employees shared workspace. Although born out of necessity, this four-day workweek had a significant, positive impact on employee morale even as the town continued to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars by maintaining a 40-hour workweek.

As part of the change, Town Hall hours shifted from 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Early anecdotal evidence suggested that the extra hour in the morning and evening created new opportunities for residents to visit Town Hall who otherwise could not have due to their own traditional work schedule. Staff started seeing residents and business owners stop by Town Hall on their way to work or on their way home, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

As the pandemic subsided, town staff studied the impact of the schedule change by tracking the number of visitors and phone calls during the affected hours and conducted a community survey. The findings were presented to Ashland's Town Council in May 2021. While council approached the proposal cautiously, members agreed to allow a pilot period to gather additional information.

At a meeting the following August, council reviewed the further research from staff and community feedback and ultimately ratified

the four-day workweek for Town Hall hours (Monday-Thursday, 7:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.), with the condition that an "on-call" system be established on Fridays to ensure residents could still receive assistance when needed. The change did not affect the Police Department operation or the ability of the Public Works field staff to respond to urgent matters (health, safety, and wellness) in the community.

Today, residents who visit Town Hall on Fridays are greeted by a sign explaining the schedule and providing a phone number for same-day service. Calls are either routed directly to staff members who have elected to work on Fridays or directed via voicemail to a designated department for a prompt response.

Although the schedule remains unconventional, the evidence continues to show that the town serves more community members in the extra morning and afternoon hours on Monday-Thursday than were served during traditional Friday hours.

This four-day workweek has undoubtedly improved employee morale by providing greater flexibility and additional time for respite and personal responsibilities. At the same time, it has enhanced accessibility for residents and business owners, allowing the town to better serve the community through innovative service hours.

If any community would like more information about Ashland's experience with the four-day workweek, please contact Doug Goodman (below).

About the author: *Doug Goodman is the assistant town manager for the Town of Ashland. He can be reached at (804) 798-8617 or dougg@ashlandva.gov.*



TOWN OF ALTAVISTA

From Town of Altavista and Campbell County press releases

Community development and wastewater treatment get a financial boost in A-town!

RECENTLY ANNOUNCED STATE and federal funding will aid the Town of Altavista with two major upcoming projects: rehabilitation of the Mosley Heights neighborhood and upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant.

Community Development Block Grant for Mosley Heights

Altavista has been awarded a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in the amount of \$828,165 to support the Mosley Heights Revitalization Project. This funding will be applied toward the rehabilitation of housing in the town's Mosley Heights neighborhood.

Plans call for the town to reconstruct two owner-occupied units, rehabilitate six additional owner-occupied units, and demolish one blighted structure within the neighborhood. All 17 residents of the eight units to be assisted are identified as low- and moderate-income families.

The project team responsible for this initiative includes the Mosley Heights Project Steering Committee, the Central Virginia Planning District Commission staff, and the Town of Altavista staff. Planning efforts were funded by a previously awarded CDBG Planning Grant of \$60,000 that allowed the team to conduct a needs assessment through community surveys and meetings, and to help identify potential beneficiaries.

The federally funded CDBG program has been administered by DHCD since 1982. DCHD annually distributes this grant funding to small cities, counties, and towns to provide new or improved water and sewer systems in rural areas, rehabilitate housing in declining neighborhoods, revitalize commercial districts, and provide facilities for a variety of needed services, such as healthcare clinics in underserved areas. In this grant cycle, the Commonwealth awarded more than \$18 million to 25 projects across Virginia.

Federal funding to aid wastewater treatment plant

U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine have successfully secured \$3 million in Congressionally Directed Spending in the Fiscal Year 2026 Federal Budget to support major upgrades to Altavista's wastewater treatment plant. This funding follows the town's formal application submitted through Warner's office.

"I'm thrilled to deliver this federal funding to Altavista so that the town can modernize their wastewater treatment plant. This improved and more cost-effective infrastructure will be critical to the health and well-being of local residents and businesses," Warner said in a press release.

These funds will enable the town to replace aging wastewater treatment equipment, implement more cost-effective treatment processes, significantly reduce power consumption, and increase the facility's overall treatment capacity and resiliency. These



improvements are essential for ensuring long-term operational reliability and protecting water quality for residents, businesses, and downstream communities.

"The town is grateful for the leadership of Senator Mark Warner and the support of Senator Tim Kaine, as well as their staff members, in assisting us with funding for our wastewater treatment plant project," said Mayor Reggie Bennett. "Having efficient and dependable systems is critical for our citizens and businesses. This funding will go a long way to support the improvements we need."

The proposed project will:

- Restore the plant's effective rated capacity and improve operational reliability.
- Significantly reduce aeration requirements, leading to lower energy usage and operational costs.
- Enhance treatment capabilities to meet current and future regulatory requirements.
- Improve system resiliency and extend the useful life of critical infrastructure.

Town officials emphasized that this investment represents a vital step toward modernizing local infrastructure and supporting sustainable community growth. The town will continue coordinating with federal and state partners as the project advances toward design and implementation.



Mosley Heights Community Event held during the planning phase of the CDBG project.

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