

VTC

VIRGINIA
TOWN & CITY

THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

VOL. 61 NO. 5

SEPT/OCT 2026

Inside:

2025 - 2026
Year In Review

Member Spotlights
on City of Hampton,
Bolton, and
Timmons Group

Summer Intern
Report: Learning
to love local
government



VML ANNUAL CONFERENCE

NORFOLK WATERSIDE MARRIOTT

OCT. 11-13



The leading online marketplace to sell your surplus assets virtually – anytime, anywhere.



The GovDeals Solution

- ## The GovDeals' Process



- 

-
- ```

graph TD
 A[] --- B[]
 A --- C[]
 A --- D[]
 style A fill:none,stroke:none
 style B fill:#f9f,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
 style C fill:#f9f,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px
 style D fill:#f9f,stroke:#333,stroke-width:1px

```

- 

- 

- Call on me today:**

## The Numbers

## Virginia Assets Sold on GovDeals



## Testimonial

**Scan For More Information**



**GovDeals®**  
Online Government Surplus Auctions

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Michelle Gowdy

**EDITOR & ADVERTISING/  
CIRCULATION MANAGER**

Rob Bullington

**CONTRIBUTING EDITOR & GRAPHIC DESIGN**

Manuel Timbreza

**CONTRIBUTING COPYWRITER**

Brian Ahnmark

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

D. Dwayne Tuggle (President), Town of Amherst  
Kelly Burk (President-Elect), Town of Leesburg  
Curtis Bethany (Vice President), City of Newport News  
Steven Trivett (Past President), Town of Ashland  
Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond, City of Virginia Beach  
Robert Wood, Town of Rocky Mount  
McKinley Cardwell, Town of Appomattox  
Letty Hardi, City of Falls Church  
Dany Fleming, City of Harrisonburg  
Renée Turk, City of Salem  
Michael Stovall, Town of Vinton

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

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

*Statements or expressions of opinions appearing within this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Virginia Municipal League. Publication of any advertisement should not be considered an endorsement of the product or service involved. Material from this publication may not be reprinted without permission.*



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH  
SOUND GOVERNMENT



## ABOUT THE COVER

Be honest: If you had to guess what sort of building we've featured on the cover of this issue, we're pretty sure "library" would be pretty far down the list. Right? But that eye-catching structure is in fact Norfolk's amazing Slover Library, which is not only a valuable resource for the community, but a one-of-a-kind venue. But you don't have to take our word for it. See for yourself on Monday night of the Annual Conference when, along with the adjacent Selden Market, The Slover is where we will all enjoy the Host City Reception. See you in Norfolk!

### Welcome to Norfolk

A letter from Norfolk Mayor Kenneth Cooper Alexander ..... **3**

### The Slover: Building on history to create the future

Learn all about the amazing venue that will be the site of the Host City Reception during the Annual Conference ..... **5**

### Norfolk's People First program earns national recognition

Dr. Susan L. Perry, director of the Norfolk Department of Housing and Community Development, highlights the city's recent All-America City win ..... **6**

### Make the most of Norfolk!

The staff at VisitNorfolk have identified the top things to do during your VML Annual Conference visit ..... **7**

### Virginia Municipal League: Annual Report

A review of the league's advocacy, research, and education activities 2025-2026.

|                                                       |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| A message from VML President Dwayne Tuggle .....      | <b>14</b> |
| Board of Directors .....                              | <b>15</b> |
| 2025-2026 Year in Review .....                        | <b>16</b> |
| Affiliate updates (VLGMA, MEPAV, VBCOA & VEPGA) ..... | <b>24</b> |
| VML staff listing .....                               | <b>26</b> |
| VML local government members .....                    | <b>27</b> |
| Committees lists .....                                | <b>28</b> |
| Community Business Members lists .....                | <b>29</b> |

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS

### City of Hampton: A coastal city doing big things to change its relationship with water

Join VTC Editor Rob Bullington on a resiliency bus tour inspired by Lindsay Middle School student Serene Colden's statewide winning essay ..... **32**

### Bolton: How to get ahead of Virginia's new mandatory paid leave for localities

VML Community Business Member Bolton has learned a lot working on mandatory paid leave in Maryland and shares those lessons to help Virginia's localities comply with the new law ..... **36**

### Timmons Group: Positioning Virginia municipalities for flood resilience

Aislinn Creel, senior engineer with VML Community Business Member Timmons Group, wants you to be prepared for flooding before it happens ..... **38**

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

### VML Summer Intern Report: Learning to love local government

Jordan Feldman, a third-year undergraduate Government major at UVA, did a lot of work as VML's summer intern and came to a new appreciation for local governments along the way ..... **41**

# It's Annual Conference time! Please have fun, learn lots, but read this first...

**V**ML STAFF HAVE been working diligently to put together the program for this year's conference, and we are finally ready to welcome everyone to Mermaid City!

Norfolk will be opening their Selden Market and adjacent Slover Library for the Host City Reception on Monday, October 12. We had the opportunity to tour both sites earlier this summer, and VML staff share the city's opinion that these beautiful, unique spaces are sure to make for a memorable night and a great space for all our members to meet.

Also happening at The Slover: Attendees of the Mayors Institute are going to have a great dinner Saturday evening at the Slover Speakeasy underneath the library. For the mayors who will be there, please be aware that there will be a wedding in one of The Slover spaces that night, so our entrance may be different on Saturday versus Monday. Please follow the signage and of course VML and Norfolk staff will be on hand to help guide you to these events.

If you are attending the Mayors Institute, the goal this year – based on feedback from recent years – is to have a lot of small group conversations over the course of the event. So, please come with topics in mind, or send them to us early! There will be presentations on economic development, changes to the federal grant rules, risk management, and collective bargaining. Also, Ventris Gibson will speak about serving as Director of the U.S. Mint.

For the main conference, I am just going to be honest: One of the most challenging parts of planning the event is that there are too many topics that are too important to leave out. While we endeavored to limit each block of breakout sessions to four or less, we failed! So, there are some blocks with five sessions each. While all the sessions are useful and timely, I'm afraid you

are going to have to make choices (but having too many good things to choose from isn't so bad). For example, Sunday afternoon has three different tracts: A bike ride resiliency tour, a presentation by VRSA's Gary Dillon on civilian responses to active shooter events, and a session of Public Safety Quick Takes with experts presenting on hurricane preparedness, speed cameras, flock cameras, and other traffic safety automation technologies. Monday morning will begin with two concurrent sessions; one dealing with energy and the other with housing. On Tuesday morning you won't have to choose, as we will all be together to discuss collective bargaining, retail cannabis, and receive a visit from Governor Abigail Spanberger and Senator Tim Kaine!

Finally, please note that the Annual Business Meeting will be held on Monday afternoon and we will NOT be printing hundreds of copies of the policy positions and legislative positions this year, so please review ahead of time.

Use the QR code to visit VML's Policy Development page and click on each policy committee to visit its page with a link to its draft policy statement, or visit [vml.org/Advocacy/Policy-Development](https://vml.org/Advocacy/Policy-Development).



It is imperative that you read these documents prior to the meeting so that we can discuss the positions that VML will fight for in the 2027 General Assembly Session.

I want to thank everyone for making the time to come together for these upcoming days of learning and sharing. See you in Norfolk!



## VML ANNUAL CONFERENCE

NORFOLK WATERSIDE MARRIOTT  
OCT. 11-13



**CITY OF NORFOLK**  
*Office of the Mayor*

**Kenneth Cooper Alexander, Ph.D.**  
Mayor

**VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE**  
**2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & HOST CITY RECEPTION**  
*“Learning Together”*  
OCTOBER 11 – 13, 2026



As Mayor of the City of Norfolk, and on behalf of the entire City Council, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Virginia Municipal League 2026 Annual Conference and Host City Reception in our vibrant waterfront community.

For more than a century, the Virginia Municipal League has strengthened local governments across the Commonwealth by fostering collaboration, professional development, and shared learning among municipal leaders. We are grateful for VML’s continued leadership in supporting strong, effective municipal governance.

In Norfolk, our commitment to strong, inclusive communities has earned us the 2013 and 2026 All-America City Awards, recognitions that highlight our ongoing work to expand opportunity and resilience across our neighborhoods. That commitment is reflected in our People First program, the human-services foundation of the St. Paul’s Transformation, which supports families through housing stability, education, economic mobility, and health and wellness. This year’s conference theme, Learning Together, aligns with our values and our belief that stable communities grow from shared knowledge, open dialogue, and collective engagement.

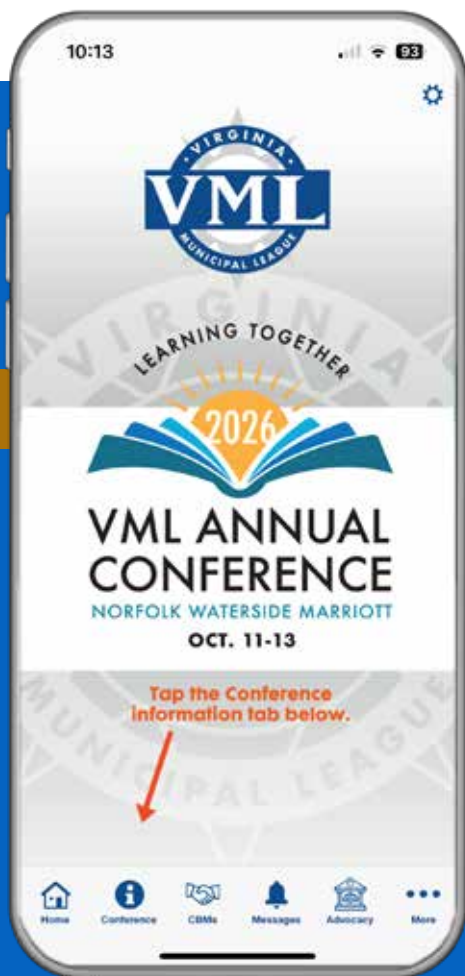
As you explore our city, I hope you experience the creativity and energy that define Norfolk. Our arts and cultural community is one of the strongest in the Commonwealth, anchored by the Chrysler Museum of Art, home to an extraordinary collection spanning centuries, and its Perry Glass Studio with its internationally-acclaimed glass collection where artists and visitors can learn side by side through demonstrations and collaborative creation. The Norfolk Botanical Garden further enriches our cultural landscape, showcasing expansive gardens, seasonal exhibits, and immersive outdoor learning. Our libraries serve as centers of lifelong learning, offering programs that strengthen families and expand opportunity. And throughout the year, Norfolk hosts signature events that bring people together, celebrate culture, and highlight the best of our coastal city.

We are delighted to welcome municipal leaders from across Virginia back to Norfolk. Thank you for the work you do every day to support your communities. May your time here be productive, inspiring, and filled with the spirit of collaboration that defines both VML and our city.

Welcome to Norfolk!

Sincerely,

Kenneth Cooper Alexander, Ph.D.  
Mayor



# THE EASIEST WAY TO STAY CONNECTED DURING THE CONFERENCE

## DOWNLOAD THE VML APP TODAY!

With this App you will be able to view details about all sessions, special events, conference speakers, sponsors, and exhibitors, and receive important updates, messages and more.



Search for  
**Virginia Municipal League**  
in your APP store or scan the QR Code.



*New from VML/VACo Finance  
and the Virginia Investment Pool:*

## VIP FIXED TERM PORTFOLIOS

- ✓ **Lock in interest rates**—avoid volatility and uncertainty.
- ✓ **Invest in professionally managed, AAAf rated portfolios** with maturities of 3, 6, 9, or 12 months.
- ✓ **Diversify your investments** to protect against declining interest rates.
- ✓ **Easily transfer** between your other VIP accounts.



804.648.0635 | [info@valocalfinance.org](mailto:info@valocalfinance.org) | [virginiainvestmentpool.org](http://virginiainvestmentpool.org)



Not investment advice. Please refer to the VIP Informational Statement for risks and complete details.

# The Slover: Building on history to create the future

**Editor's Note:** *The Slover and adjacent Selden Market will be the site of the Annual Conference's Host City Night Reception happening Monday, October 12.*

**I**N THE HEART of downtown Norfolk stands a building where the city's history and its future meet.

The building that is now The Slover has been a distinctive part of Norfolk's landscape since 1898, anchoring the city as a federal post office and courthouse, and later city hall. Given new life as The Slover, the building is now a landmark for civic engagement and learning where people gather to celebrate, collaborate, and experience arts and culture.

The vision for The Slover began in 2008 when Frank Batten Sr., former CEO and chairman of Landmark Communications, donated \$20 million for construction of a new main library to be named after his uncle and former Norfolk Mayor Col. Samuel Slover. Following Batten's death, The Batten Foundation donated an additional \$20 million to the project. The City of Norfolk committed \$22.6 million, and the remainder was collected from private contributions through the Slover Library Foundation. The project was completed in 2015 with a modern addition to the western side of the historic building by Newman Architects in collaboration with Tymoff & Moss. The Slover continues to be a mainstay of downtown Norfolk by blending history, community, and progress.

As communities across Virginia consider how public spaces can continue to adapt, Norfolk is reimagining The Slover as more than a place to visit, but also a destination to experience connection. Library services and programming through The Downtown Branch at Slover are creating new and exciting reasons to walk through its doors. Entrepreneurs and local professionals can exchange knowledge through initiatives provided by the Roy E. Hendrix Business Center. Novices to advanced creatives can expand their skill sets or use resources in The Slover's makers and sound studios. Members of the community and visitors can weave through The Sargeant Memorial Collection, which preserves a vast archive of Norfolk's rich local history and genealogy and provides public access to these historical materials.

Continuing to build on a legacy of community involvement, The Slover provides spaces to support everything from meetings and conferences to community and civic events, professional development opportunities, art shows, private celebrations, and large-scale gatherings. Historic rooms sit alongside modern event spaces. Flexible meeting environments and terraces overlook downtown Norfolk, creating opportunities for people to gather in both familiar and new ways.

Together, these efforts point toward a larger vision: positioning The Slover as a true community hub, where history, innovation, connection, and opportunity come together.

The Slover is preserving history without being confined by it. It's creating spaces that can serve a resident one day, a local entrepreneur the next, and gather the community the day after. Most importantly, The Slover recognizes that the value of a public building is ultimately found in the people who use it.



# Norfolk's People First program earns national recognition

**W**HEN NORFOLK RESIDENTS, community partners, and city staff took the stage in Denver to receive their 2026 All-America City Award, it was to tell a story they knew by heart.

Their presentation brought the city's People First program to life through a mock Norfolk City Council meeting. A reporter set the scene, and residents and partners stepped forward during "public comment" to describe what the program has meant to families. The evident passion on the stage helped deliver a clear message: Norfolk's progress is powered by people!

The National Civic League named Norfolk a 2026 All-America City Award winner, recognizing the city's commitment to civic engagement, collaboration, and resident-centered solutions. Rebecca Trout, senior director of Programs and Partnerships for the National Civic League, later presented the award to Norfolk City Council, celebrating the residents, partners, and employees whose work made the national recognition possible.

For Norfolk's delegation, the story was easy to tell because People First has become an important source of support and opportunity for Tidewater Gardens families displaced by the development of the Kindred Neighborhood project.

## The making of "People First"

Created in partnership with residents before redevelopment began, People First delivers the human infrastructure that complements the physical transformation of the community. Family support specialists work directly with households to strengthen housing stability, economic mobility, education, and health and wellness. The team listens first, connects residents with the right resources, and continues supporting families for years after relocation.

Seven years of results show the impact of this approach. More than 100 families have already returned to the newly completed Kindred community, with three additional housing blocks scheduled to lease up by the year's end. Participants secured 94 jobs in year seven, and 90 percent of those employed maintained work for at least six months. Annual household income has risen from \$14,000 at baseline to more than \$28,000, and 76 percent of residents are now employed – up from 47 percent at baseline. In addition, 89 percent of residents have a regular healthcare provider outside the emergency room. Early-learning enrollment among assessed children ages 0-4 has grown from 66 percent to 87 percent.

Norfolk's All-America City win represents more than a single program. It reflects what is possible when local government treats residents as partners and invests in their choices, stability, and future.



*VML Executive Director Michelle Gowdy, who serves on the Board of the National Civic League, was proud to be in Denver to see Norfolk receive their award.*

**About the author:** Dr. Susan L. Perry, Ph.D. is the director of the Norfolk Department of Housing and Community Development.



# Make the most of Norfolk!

## Top things to do during your VML Annual Conference visit

AS THE 2026 Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference and Mayors Institute kicks off, you're probably curious about your host city. We know you'll want to make the most out of your visit to Norfolk, so the team at VisitNorfolk put together the following list of suggestions! We hope you'll enjoy seeing them as much as we enjoy sharing them.

### First things first

Looking for maps, want to talk to a local about the best things to do, or need to bring home some Mermaid City-inspired swag to your friends or family? Head to the VisitNorfolk Visitor Center at 232 E. Main Street, which is a very short walk from the conference area. Inside you will also find our shop, the Mermaid Market (for Norfolk- and Virginia-themed gifts), and a very friendly staff to point you in the right direction.

### Explore our downtown museums and attractions

The beauty of seeing our museums and attractions is that you can spend as little – or as long – as you want at each of them. Here's a quick rundown of our downtown attractions.

**Nauticus**, a maritime discovery center with educational activities that accommodate both child and adult nautical enthusiasts, is located next to the **Battleship Wisconsin**. The battleship is one of the largest and last battleships ever built by the U.S. Navy – standing proudly at the foot of our waterfront city. Explore its deck through a self-guided or guided tour.

Next, check out downtown's free **Glass Light Art Gallery**. This two-story gallery is made up of 65 small and life-sized pieces of glass art that come from a local family's private collection. If the typically perfect October weather beckons you, check out our rich history through the self-guided **Cannonball Trail** – a walk-it-yourself tour through 400 years of Norfolk and American history. The trail winds along the shoreline of the Elizabeth River and through multiple districts in downtown Norfolk. Another free attraction, **MacArthur Memorial**, is a museum dedicated to preserving and presenting the life story of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, as well as the millions of men and women who served with General MacArthur in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War.





The **Chrysler Museum of Art** holds one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of glass in the world, with more than 10,000 glass objects spanning over 3,000 years! It is also home to a staggering collection of modern, impressionist, Renaissance and other paintings, religious objects, and items from antiquity. Did we mention it's free? On the same campus as the Chrysler is the must-visit, newly renovated **Perry Glass Studio**, an interactive glass mecca that hosts free demonstrations and glassblowing classes.

### Spend an hour exploring the Elizabeth River Trail

Ready to get some steps in? Start your day in Norfolk by exploring our 10.5-mile-long riverfront trail, the **Elizabeth River Trail**, also known as the ERT. You can experience the ERT by bike, scooter, or on your own two feet. With Lime scooters scattered throughout the city, you can easily hop on and off the trail from just about any location. Renting bicycles at **E-Bike Alley**, located in downtown Norfolk, is also an option to explore.

The ERT takes you through multiple neighborhoods with different waterfront views. Starting out at **Norfolk State University**, the trail winds you through a few historic neighborhoods and campuses and ends in the prestigious neighborhood of Lochhaven. The ERT is sprinkled with breweries and delicious restaurants along the way, and if you are not familiar with our city, it's a great lookbook to a day in the life of a Norfolkan.

### Catch world-class entertainment

While in town, take in world-class performances and entertainment at our historic and iconic venues. Check the fall schedules for the **Wells Theatre**, **Harrison Opera House**, and **Scope Arena** to see what's on stage during your visit. Here are a few:

October 10 at 7:30 p.m., you can watch the classic 1984 motion picture *Amadeus* with a simultaneous, live performance from the Virginia Symphony Orchestra and Chorus at the Harrison Opera



House! At the Wells Theatre, you can take in *The Heart Sellers* play (various performances this week). Also, Broadway in Norfolk hosts *Spamalot* starting Tuesday, October 13 at the Harrison Opera House.

## Shop locally at Selden Market (location of Host City Reception on October 12)

**Selden Market** is an eclectic, historic shopping hall that features local artisans, chefs, and new pop-up shops. Because it is ever-changing, you'll see different vendors with each visit to Norfolk. Visitors may find an assortment of offerings like handmade leather goods, unique jewelry, candles, international cuisine, and more. Select evenings and weekends, Selden hosts pop-up concerts, yoga and wellness experiences, maker demonstrations or classes, anime and comic book events, and so much more.

## Stroll the cobblestone streets of Freemason

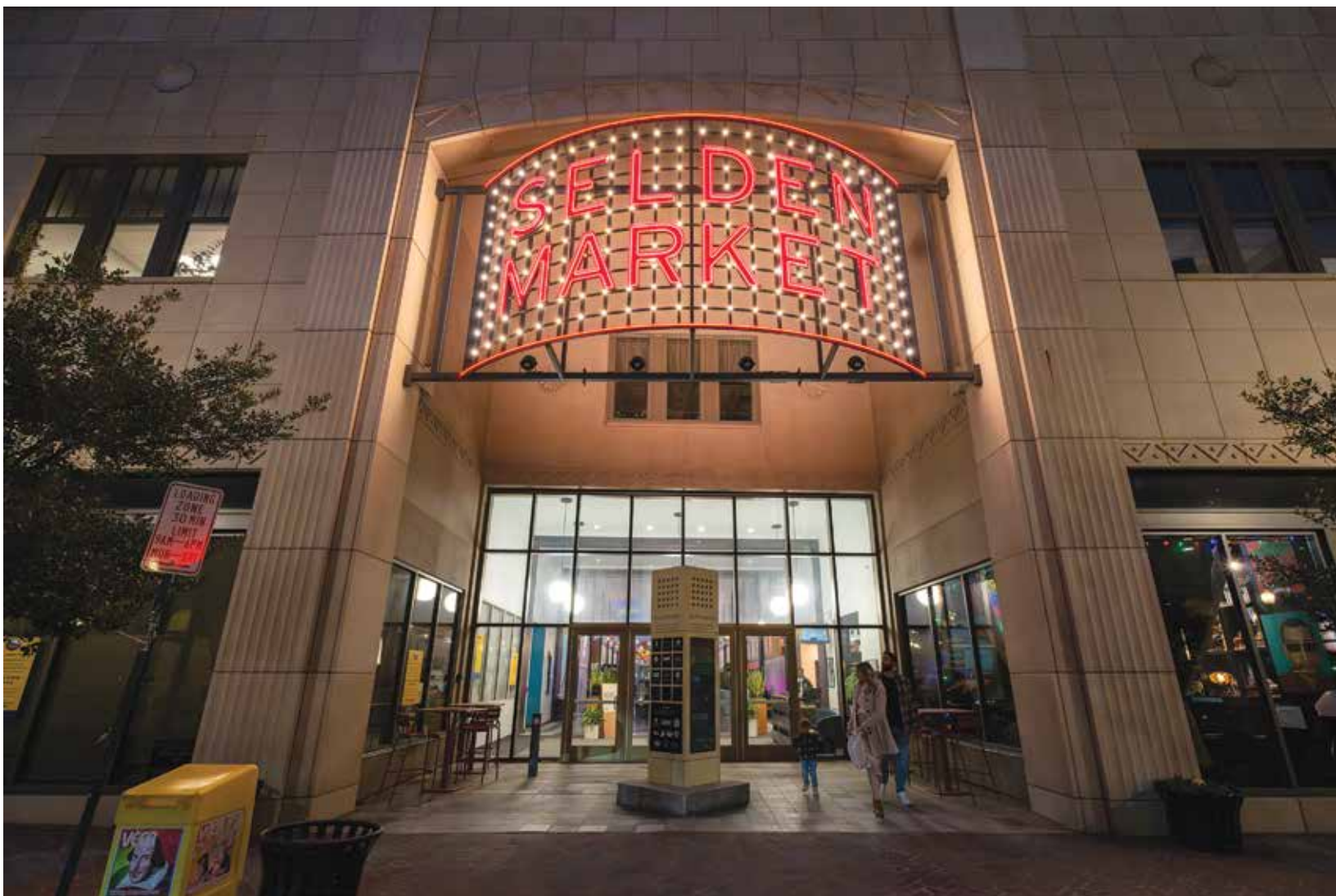
Just a short walk from the conference area is Norfolk's most charming and oldest standing neighborhood, **Freemason Historic District**. Located along the Elizabeth River, Freemason features beautiful, tree-lined cobblestone streets, manicured gardens, and historic homes. While here, explore the **Hunter House Victorian Museum** and stop in for lunch at **Freemason Abbey**, a local

favorite housed in a historic church that is known for their she-crab soup. Are you a coffee connoisseur or just someone who needs a caffeine pick-me-up? Head to **Cure Coffeehouse**, one of the best coffeehouses in town!

When walking along the waterfront in Freemason, you will think you traveled to the Far East when stumbling upon the **Pagoda & Oriental Garden**. The Pagoda was authentically designed, assembled and gifted by Taiwan; its garden features tranquil fountains, and swaying forests of bamboo also provide breathtaking backdrops for your team LinkedIn or Instagram selfies!

## Dine along Granby Street

Granby Street is an iconic street in Norfolk, and you can find just about any type of cuisine along its mile-long, marquee-lighted path. Enjoy an espresso with fresh crêpes for breakfast at **Lamia's** Parisian-style cafe. Slurp down some local oysters or try the she-crab soup at **Saltine**. Spend an evening dining by candlelight at **Luce**, a finer-dining Italian restaurant, or try something out of the ordinary and completely irresistible at **Codex**. Grab a pint of Guinness at **Grace O'Malley's** Irish pub or a plate of seriously good home cooking at the newly opened **Black Eyed Peas** or **PJay's Kitchen**.



### Sip drinks with a view at Waterside District

Grab a refreshing drink by the water at **Waterside District**, where a massive outdoor dining area overlooks the Elizabeth River and Waterside Marina. This makes for a great spot to catch the sunset or simply watch the ships go by. You may even spot some Navy ships boating around. Weekends at this spot are filled with DJs and live country-Americana bands playing outside, against the backdrop of the river.

### Keep an eye out for our mermaids

You are sure to spot a Norfolk mermaid statue within minutes of strolling around the city. Two decades ago, local bronze sculptor Kevin Gallup mass-produced 130 mermaids that were designed and painted by local artists. Today, these mermaids have doubled in quantity and are scattered throughout the city for residents and visitors to enjoy.

### Learn the history of Naval Base Norfolk

Norfolk is home to the world's largest naval base, which can be seen from the **Victory Rover's Naval Base Cruise** or land-based bus tours.

### Explore Norfolk Botanical Garden

The **Norfolk Botanical Garden** (which neighbors the Norfolk International Airport) is nationally recognized for its deep-rooted history and celebrated for its blooms in every season. This 175-acre garden is home to 52 distinctive themed gardens, 95 species of birds and 30 kinds of butterflies. Its recently opened "Garden of Tomorrow" features multiple biomes and glass art from renowned artist Dale Chihuly. Each winter, this attraction hosts the wildly popular "Garden of Lights" holiday spectacular, where over 1.5 million lights decorate the meandering pathways for those getting into the holiday spirit.

### Explore the Virginia Zoo

From the plains of Africa to our own backyard, the **Virginia Zoo** offers a world of discovery for everyone. Having just celebrated its 125th anniversary, the zoo is open year-round and located just minutes from downtown Norfolk. The 53-acre park features majestic lions and giraffes along the African Safari trail and red pandas, orangutans, and a Siamese crocodile in the "Asia: Trail of the Tiger" exhibit. When you need a break from walking, hop aboard the electric Virginia Zoo Express train to take in the beautiful, lush gardens and catch a behind-the-scenes look at their state-of-the-art Animal Wellness Campus.



## Shop, dine, and see historic homes in Ghent

Just minutes from downtown, this neighborhood dates to the 1890s. Featuring an array of different architecture designs, ranging from Dutch Queen Anne to Shingle and Colonial Revival styles, Ghent also boasts nearby shopping and dining along **Colley Avenue** – perfect for a morning or afternoon of strolling. The nearby **Railroad District** is a vibrant area packed with locally owned restaurants.



## Sail the American Rover

Through the end of October, this red three-masted topsail schooner resides in downtown Norfolk, making it an icon of our waterfront. They offer three different types of cruises: a hands-on sailing adventure, a harbor cruise, and a sunset cruise.

## Try the Original Waffle Cone at Doumar's

This ice cream and barbecue joint is a local favorite that has stood the test of time. Reminiscent of a 1950s car hop diner, **Doumar's** still uses their original waffle cone maker from 1905 that visitors can still see in action.



### Spend the day on the beach in Ocean View

If the weather allows, head to Norfolk's 7.5-mile-long beach! Vibrant **Ocean View** is a quick Uber or taxi ride from downtown and will meet all your needs for a perfect beach day. Once you arrive at Ocean View, spend the day swimming with dolphins in the Chesapeake Bay, crabbing, or sunbathing. Once you have worked up an appetite, head to one of Ocean View's many beloved restaurants.

**Longboards** offers waterside dining, **COVA** is a coffeehouse by day and brewery by night, and **Ocean View Pier Restaurant** has a spectacular water view. **Mudita** is a favorite café for the lunch crowd, **De Rican Chef** serves up top-tier Puerto Rican/Latin American cuisine, while **Riffle Farms Market** is a hidden gem for specialty foods, including buffalo hot dogs harvested from the owner's farm.

*For more destination resources and ideas to take back to your teams, check out [VisitNorfolk.com](http://VisitNorfolk.com).*



NOR-Fick \* ? ? NORfolk ? ?

# HOW DO YOU SAY NORFOLK?

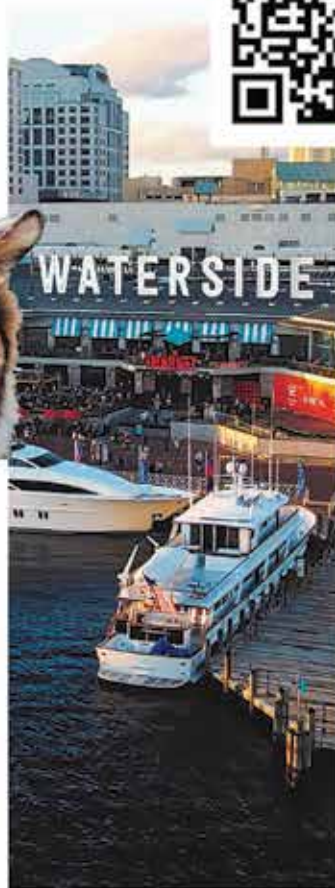
Whether you say Naw-folk, Nor-fick or Nor-folk, there's a lot to say about our city.

From nationally recognized arts and can't-miss festivals to waterfront attractions, local flavors and one-of-a-kind experiences, there's always something worth exploring in Norfolk. Here for business? Vacation? A little of both? We'll give you plenty to talk about.

VISIT *Norfolk*



[visitnorfolk.com](http://visitnorfolk.com)



# A message from VML President Dwayne Tuggle



IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE that my year as your president is coming to a close! It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as your president and I want to wish our new president, Mayor Kelly Burk from Leesburg, best wishes for a successful and enjoyable year. I look forward to supporting her as immediate past president.

One of my goals for the past year was to increase the number of opportunities for our members to learn about safety for themselves and for those they serve. We live in difficult political times, and I want everyone to feel secure in choosing to serve. This effort began at the Mayors Institute last year, continued with a special day of programming at the Elected Officials Conference in January, and now includes sessions at this year's Annual Conference. We can all think of examples of bad things happening to political leaders all the way from the national level down to the very local level, so I believe it will be important to carry forward this good work.

Like many of you, I've always tried to find ways to make a difference on a larger scale. For example, my father instilled a love of baseball in me, and I grew up playing the game. But I wanted to do more, so at a young age I began umpiring. Of course, I was happy to make a little (*very* little) pocket money, but being involved in the game beyond the role of participant was important to me. This motivation led me to work as umpire-in-chief for Lynchburg and the Little League World Series. I went on to serve as district administrator and as a member of the Board of Directors for Little League. Just last month I spent three weeks in Williamsport, PA, working in security for the Little League World Series, something I've done for over 30 years! In fact, I am proud in recent years to have served as the assistant director for security for the Little League World Series.

That's a long way from being a kid tossing a ball with his dad!

In that same spirit, when I retired from the Virginia State Police after three decades, I wanted to find a way to continue to serve locally. So, in 2016 I ran for mayor of Amherst and in that role found ways to give back to my community. But just two years later, I decided I wanted to find ways to share and learn from other local leaders around the state, so at the urging of my town manager, I attended my first VML conference, and I've been involved ever since! What I love most about VML is that

we take home great ideas to solve problems and improve our communities based upon what we learn from everyone else.

So, while I am proud to be the mayor of Amherst, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to make an impact beyond my community by serving on VML's Board of Directors. Over the past year, I have had opportunities to engage with state and national leaders, shape the direction of the league, and work with local officials from across the country on the issues that matter most to towns and cities. One of the "perks" of being president is having a board meeting in or close to your own locality, so in June I had the pleasure of hosting my fellow VML board members for a meeting at Sweet Briar College. While I was happy to have that opportunity to show off my town, I was also happy as VML president to visit several member localities across Southwest Virginia this summer. That trip only cemented my (unbiased) opinion that Virginia – all of Virginia – is a great place to be!

Thank you for everything you do for your communities and thank you for your service. Successful local governments are what make the Commonwealth succeed for everyone, and it's good to know that through VML, we have ways to help each other succeed.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Tuggle".

# VML Board of Directors



**Kelly Burk**  
President-Elect  
*Mayor, Town of Leesburg*



**Curtis Bethany**  
Vice President  
*Vice Mayor, City of Newport News*



**Steve Trivett**  
Immediate Past President  
*Mayor, Town of Ashland*



**Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond**  
District Member  
*Council Member, City of Virginia Beach*



**Robert Wood**  
District Member  
*Town Manager,  
Town of Rocky Mount*



**McKinley Cardwell**  
District Member  
*Council Member, Town of Appomattox*



**Letty Hardi**  
District Member  
*Mayor, City of Falls Church*



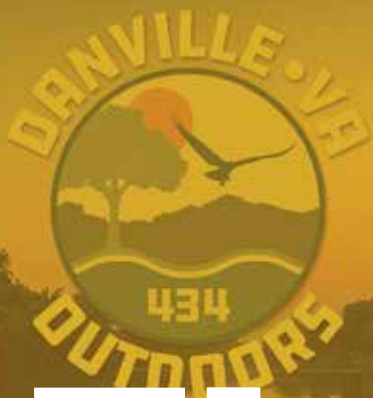
**Dany Fleming**  
District Member  
*Vice Mayor, City of Harrisonburg*



**Renée Turk**  
District Member  
*Mayor, City of Salem*



**Michael Stovall**  
District Member  
*Council Member, Town of Vinton*



# 2025

# The Year

IT WAS A challenging year for local governments to keep track of everything happening at the state level. But VML was here to help our members make sense of it all!

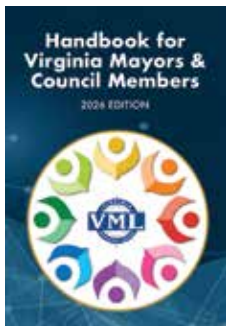
In 2026, after years of divided executive and legislative branches, all three branches were controlled by the same party and the floodgates opened. From collective bargaining to retail cannabis, from a one percent local option sales tax for school construction to making school zones safer with expanded local options for speed cameras, the General Assembly pushed through legislation with far-reaching consequences for local governments.

Of course, not every initiative came to fruition as our new governor decided she would have a say with vetos and amendments. So, while some legislation with deep implications for local governments – like collective bargaining for public employees – did not become reality this year (due to the governor's veto), you can be sure they will be back in some form next year. Other initiatives, like retail cannabis, took a strange turn and found a new life in the budget. Still others, such as pedestrian crossing monitoring systems and a one percent local option sales tax for school construction (a VML priority for several years) are now law.

Over the past year, VML also made sure that our members had plenty of chances to learn together and from each other. The 2025 Annual Conference in October was held at the historic Hotel Roanoke and January kicked off with another offering of our Elected Officials Conference in Richmond with FOIA and COIA training for local elected officials. In February, we welcomed our members back to Richmond for Local Government Legislative Day, which is always a valuable opportunity for our staff to provide updates on legislation and for members to make their delegations aware of the issues important to local governments. In May, we hosted the third annual Small Towns Conference in Chincoteague.

Our members have access to resources like the new 2026 edition of our *Handbook for Mayors and Council Members* and the annually updated guide to the *Virginia Freedom of Information Act*, *Virginia Conflict of Interests Act* and the *Virginia Public Records Act*. VML members also receive regular updates via our newsletter *eNews* and magazine *Virginia Town & City*.

We do all this with one overarching goal in mind: to ensure that our local government members have the information they need to do what's best for their communities.



## Lobbying & Advocacy

### 2026 General Assembly Session



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

Of course, those weren't the only new faces this year. Former Governor Glenn 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 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 curveball. 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. The bottom-line revenue differences that resulted from these differing visions for the budget ground negotiations to a halt.

But, while progress on the budget 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 percent during the session from 3,107 in 2025 to 3,646 in 2026. Ultimately, 1,131 bills were signed into law by Governor Spanberger.

## Budget

It was a long time coming, but on June 29, with one day to spare, the Commonwealth had a budget for the 2026-28 biennium!

Just a week earlier, the Commonwealth's legislative budget writers had wrapped up their fiscal homework, admittedly a few months late.

# 2026 Annual Review

Wanting to have her say and final stamp on the budget, the governor requested 14 amendments – nine language-only changes and five that recommended \$63 million in additional funding – that were ultimately approved at the second Reconvened Session of the 2026 Session on Monday. Later that day, Governor Spanberger signed her name to the new biennial budget.

## Data centers took center stage

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

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

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

## Budget winners

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

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

Most of the new general fund commitments in health and human resources were for required spending in Medicaid, primarily health and long-term care services for the elderly and disabled but also pregnant

women and children. None of these new dollars were used for the Medicaid expansion population, which receives no general fund support.

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

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

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

Last year, the House and Senate established an interim work group to assess the impact of federal budget actions on the Commonwealth, meeting in various communities around the Old Dominion. The Conference Agreement includes roughly \$624 million over the biennium to plug budget holes created by federal budget writers.

As a reminder, most of the federal budget decisions related to ongoing Medicaid funding have not been programmed into the state budget; the impact of those decisions will need to be addressed in the coming years. It's also worth noting that on August 25, the governor issued Executive Order 20 to begin addressing these gaps.

## Budget amendments of interest that passed

An analysis of all the budget amendments significant to localities was published in the July/August issue of *Virginia Town & City*. Below are a few of the bigger items.

### One percent

**local option sales tax for school construction (Item 4-14 #2c)** – The final version of the budget included one of VML's top

Use the QR code to access the July/August issue of *Virginia Town & City*.



priorities for the last several years: statewide authority for all counties and cities to impose a one percent local option sales and use tax dedicated solely for school construction. Although nuances added to the language during the legislative process mean that the final product is not entirely what VML sought, this is still a big win for local governments.

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

Key components of this legislation mean that this tax:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The language in the biennial budget establishes a maximum of 350 retail licenses, with licenses to be distributed evenly among all areas of the Commonwealth (taking into account population densi-

ties) with retail stores limited to a maximum square footage of 2,500 square feet.

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

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

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

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

## Legislation of interest that passed

An analysis of all the legislation affecting localities was published in the May/June issue of *Virginia Town & City*. Below are a few of the more significant items.

Use the QR code to access the May/June issue of *Virginia Town & City*.



## Housing

**SB388 (McPike) / HB1279 (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.

**SB531 (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.*

**HB14 (Price) / SB290 (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.

## General Government

**SB699 (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."

**SB530 (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.

**HB177 (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.

**SB443 (McPike) / HB891 (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.

**HB1404 (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.

## Public Safety

**HB862 (Cousins) / SB391 (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 and for a local government to serve as employer of record.

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.

## Human Services

**HB681 (Hayes) Retired law enforcement officers for emergency and temporary detention admissions.** Clarifies that retired law enforcement officers may carry out emergency custody and involuntary temporary detention orders.

**HB976 (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.

**HB1366 (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.

**HB1490 (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.

## Elections

**HB630 (Callsen) / SB176 (VanValkenburg) Elections; conduct of election; ranked choice voting; locally elected offices; report.** Expands the eligibility for elections to be conducted using ranked choice voting to all local public bodies including towns. Currently, only county boards and city councils can use ranked choice voting.

**SB438 (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.

## Education

**HB544 (Askew) / SB498 (Aird) Commission on School Construction and Modernization; revisions; elimination of sunset.** Eliminates the sunset of the commission and establishes a regular meeting schedule. **Note:** The Commission began meeting again in September 2026.

## Natural Resources

**SB386 (Stuart) / HB1443 (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 per-fluoroalkyl and poly-fluoroalkyl (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, and raingear to mining equipment and fire suppression foam at airports.

## Transportation

**SB59 (Diggs) / HB684 (Hayes) Photo speed monitoring devices; systems for traffic signals; school bus video-monitoring systems; proof of violation.** 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 and free up sworn law enforcement officers currently confirming photo speed monitoring violations.

**SB84 (Williams Graves) Photo speed monitoring devices, pedestrian crossing violation monitoring systems, and stop sign violation monitoring systems; placement and operation.** 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.

**SB219 (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 the DMV place a hold on any new vehicle registration, renewal, or issuance of license plates until the penalty is paid.

**SB221 (Jones) School crossing zones; active times.** Allows localities to extend the duration of school zone monitoring from 30 to 60 minutes.

## Sovereign Immunity

**SB637 (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.

## Workgroups & Studies

When the General Assembly wraps up each year, the efforts of studies and workgroups mandated by its legislation begin. VML staff work throughout the summer and fall to represent the interests of local governments during these meetings. Some of the many 2026 workgroups and studies are outlined below.

### Workgroup: HB707 (Hayes) State government; transaction of public business; prohibited website domains

HB707 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, HB707 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.

### Workgroup: Item 260 #1c Property Tax Exemptions

Requires the Department of Taxation to convene a workgroup to review the cost of mandatory property tax exemptions for disabled veterans and their spouses. The workgroup is required to:

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

The first meeting of the workgroup was held on September 16, 2026. VML staff provided data to the TAX Department documenting double-digit costs for the unfunded mandate.

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

### Workgroup: Item 21#3c Child Advocacy Center

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

### Workgroup: Water Quality Improvement Fund

The Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF) workgroup evaluates Virginia's WQIF framework, looking at fund administration, statutory updates, and the potential inclusion of the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF). A preliminary report was issued in January 2026, and a final report is due by November 1, 2026.

### Workgroup: SB582 (Salim) / HB774 (Thornton) Elections; absentee and provisional ballots; cure process.

Requires that if the electoral board determines that any person having submitted a provisional vote was not entitled to vote as a result of a material error or omission on the provisional ballot form, the registrar must promptly notify the voter by telephone or email of the error or omission and provide information to the voter on how to correct the issue so his ballot may be counted. The voter is entitled to make such necessary corrections before noon on the Monday after the election. The bill moves the deadline for curing errors or omissions in absentee ballot applications from noon on the third day after the election to noon on the Monday after the election. The bill also requires the Department of Elections to issue guidance to local election officials on the uniform processing and counting of provisional ballots, including any provisional ballot cast by a person submitting a registration application on the same day as the election. The bill has a delayed effective date of January 1, 2027.

## Policy & Legislative Committees

VML's 2026 Legislative Committee, led by Hampton Mayor James Gray and Farmville Mayor Brian Vincent, began its work in June with an overview of the 2026 General Assembly Session, studies underway by the General Assembly this year, and presentations on data centers and collective bargaining.

VML's five policy committees held meetings over the summer to learn about and discuss current issues and update their statements for the coming year.

Some highlights included:

The **Finance Policy Committee** received a presentation on access and affordability of local audits from Rachel Reamy with the Auditor of Public Accounts Office; discussed the status of the current Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program (VASAP) workgroup; and held a panel discussion about the state of the local economy featuring four members of the policy committee from across Virginia.

The **General Laws Policy Committee** received briefings on the SB233 (Head) study of the Fire Programs Fund and E-911 funding issues, and an overview of election administration issues.

The **Human Development & Education Policy Committee** received a briefing on Virginia Department of Education priorities from Superintendent of Public Instruction Jenna Conway, as well as a presentation on the study of Child Advocacy Centers from Will Egen with the Virginia Commission on Youth.

The **Community and Economic Development Policy Committee** discussed impact fees and proffers as well as the status of Virginia Housing Commission workgroups.

The **Infrastructure Committee** heard presentations and discussed several transportation and environmental quality issues.

All of the committee's revised policy statements are posted on VML's website. The proposed statements and the proposed legislative program will be discussed, debated, and adopted during the Annual Business Meeting at the VML Annual Conference. Please review the draft statements prior to the meeting; paper copies will NOT be provided.

## Events, Education & Training

### Mayors Institute & Annual Conference

The 2025 Mayors Institute & Annual Conference was held at the Hotel Roanoke October 11-14. On the first day of the Mayors Institute, attendees heard from Gary Campbell, owner of Impact2Lead, LLC and the president and CEO of Johnson Health Center, on "Inspiring a Culture of Excellence." Day two featured sessions on "Personal Safety for Public Officials" led by Glenn Armstrong with the Virginia State Police and "Social Media for Public Officials" with Town of Rocky Mount Mayor C. Holland Perdue.

The Annual Conference kicked off the afternoon of October 12 with presentations by staff from the City of Roanoke, followed by two concurrent "Learning Labs" featuring short presentations on topics such as Next Generation Automated Traffic Safety Enforcement, ADA Compliance for Local Government Technology, Evaluating the Fiscal Impact of Real Estate Development, Clean Water Assistance for Local Governments, and more. The first day of the conference closed with the VML Awards Banquet, at which it was revealed that the City of Danville had won the President's Award for Innovation in the Community Health category for its "Danville Outdoors" initiative.

On Monday, morning breakout sessions covered topics such as Community Policing for the Elected Official and the Officer, Data Centers & Economic Development, Locality-Driven Housing Solutions, Collective Bargaining - Right to Work, Virginia's Energy Present & Future, and Financing of Public Utilities. The



afternoon was devoted to mobile workshops to the Wasena Neighborhood Projects, the Roanoke-Blacksburg Airport, and the Roanoke Regional Water Pollution Control Plant. During the Annual Business Meeting later that afternoon, members voted on VML's draft policy and legislative statements as well as VML's slate of officers. Town of Amherst Mayor Dwayne Tuggle became the new VML president. That evening, VML hosted a Bluegrass Reception with live music and the City of Roanoke held a host city event at the Taubman Museum.

The final day of the conference wrapped up with back-to-back general sessions that sought to answer the questions "What's in Store for Virginia's Economy?" and "What's in Store for Virginia Politics?"

### Virginia Local Elected Officials Conference



The Virginia Elected Officials Conference (formerly Newly Elected Officials Conference) is a valuable, annual offering that includes topics relevant for both new and long-serving elected officials. Previously a one-day event, the 2026 event was held over the course of two days beginning the afternoon of Wednesday, January 7 and wrapping up the afternoon of Thursday, January 8 at The Place at Innsbrook. On the first day, attendees heard presentations on Safety for Public Officials, Opportunity Zones, and Cybersecurity. VML hosted a reception at the adjacent Capital Ale House that evening.

Day two of the event included sessions on topics such as Budgeting, Local AI, Council/Manager Relations, and Veterans' Exemptions. The event also included the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Conflict of Interest Act (COIA) training required of all elected officials in Virginia.

The next Elected Officials Conference will take place January 7-8, 2027, at The Place at Innsbrook. There will be a reception on the evening of January 7. The event will once again include FOIA and COIA training.

### Local Government Legislative Day



On February 5, nearly 300 elected officials and staff from VML member localities gathered at the Richmond Hilton Downtown for 2026 Local Government Legislative Day. The event kicked off at noon with remarks by VML President and Town of Amherst Mayor Dwayne Tuggle. Attendees then heard from Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources David Bulova and Secretary of Finance Mark Sickles, as well as Jessica Hoff, executive director of the Virginia Housing Alliance.

VML policy staff then walked attendees through the legislation and budget items important to local governments. After the briefing members visited the General Assembly to meet with their delegations and voice the concerns of their communities. That evening, Senator Mark Warner spoke at the reception and stayed to chat with members.

Thanks to everyone who came! This event is essential to furthering the goals of the VML Legislative Program and making local voices heard at the General Assembly each year. The next Local Government Legislative Day will be held Thursday, February 4, 2027, at the Richmond Marriott.

## Small Towns Conference

Given the success of the 2024 and 2025 Small Towns Conferences, VML added another half day to the event this year, which ran from May 13-15. Thanks to Chincoteague Mayor Denise Bowden and the staff of the Chincoteague Center for making everyone feel welcome. The first day featured an afternoon session “Tools & Materials for Building Communities” hosted by The Timmons Group, followed by a VML Reception at Steamers Restaurant. The second day, was full of programming on topics such as “What Your Attorney Wants You to Know,” “New Marijuana Laws and the Workplace,” “Council/Manager Relations,” and more. The town provided their new shuttle bus to ferry attendees to and from the hotels as well as the evening reception hosted by Virginia American Water at the Ropewalk Restaurant. Friday morning included sessions on “Social Media for Towns” and “Downtown Revitalization.”

The next Small Towns Conference will be held in Clifton Forge, May 19-21, 2027.



## Communications

### Magazine: *Virginia Town & City*

Each issue of VML's magazine *Virginia Town & City (VTC)* features the latest comings and goings of local government officials and staff, highlights of our members' achievements and fun events, profiles of our Community Business Member organizations, and articles on topics from across the Commonwealth. Since the last Annual Report, some of the topics featured in VTC include:

#### 2025:

- **November/December** – Features on each of the Innovation Award winners including President's Award for Innovation winner the City of Danville. Also, Annual Conference wrap-up with photos and a spotlight on the Town of Gate City.

#### 2026:

- **January/February** – We visited the Town of Amherst to get to know our new president, Mayor Dwayne Tuggle. We also spotlighted the Town of Round Hill.
- **March/April** – For this special “Thinking Outside the ‘Burg” issue, we featured the cities of Fredericksburg, Harrisonburg, and Petersburg, as well the Town of Pearisburg. Plus, there were photos from our Elected Officials Conference and Local Government Legislative Day.
- **May/June** – We featured the essays from the winners of our annual “If I Were Mayor” essay contest for 7th and 8th graders; we published a comprehensive review of the just-concluded General Assembly Session with all the legislation localities needed to know about; and, we spotlighted the towns of Ashland and Altavista, as well as the City of Charlottesville.
- **July/August** – The big budget review for localities took a bit longer this year because, well, the budget took a bit longer. Also, we included a 2025-2026 Supreme Court term roundup with decisions important to local governments, and we spotlighted Roanoke County, the Town of Dumfries, and the City of Bristol.

## Newsletter: *eNews*

As the league's primary channel for distributing information to our members, *eNews* is a valuable resource for local government officials and staff. Throughout the year, the bi-weekly *eNews* covers the issues, opportunities, and events that matter to Virginia's local governments. This is especially true during General Assembly Sessions, when *eNews* is published sometimes as often as several times a day along with Action Alerts that keep our members aware of happenings at the General Assembly.

## News Board

While the reporting and analysis in *eNews* is password protected and available only to league members, the events, announcements, and opportunities posted to our News Board are available to anyone. You can find the News Board on the Resources tab of VML's website, and the most recent items are listed in each issue of *eNews*.



## Website: [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org)

Not only is the VML website the repository for back issues of our newsletter and magazine, it is your resource for everything VML! Want to know who is on which policy committee? Want to download the latest edition of the *Handbook for Virginia Mayors and Council Members*? Need to register for a VML event? Want to post a job opening for locality?

All these things (and so many more) are available to our members at [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org).

## Awards

### Innovation Awards

In September, VML was pleased to announce the winners of its annual awards for excellence in local government. The statewide competition recognizes innovative problem-solving, excellence in management, citizen participation, and improved services to citizens.

Of this year's Innovation Awards, VML Executive Director Michelle Gowdy said, “It's inspiring to see that despite the budget uncertainty this past year – or in some cases, because of it – our localities found ways to innovate and succeed. Virginia's local governments have a lot to be proud of. In fact, there were almost double the number of entries compared to last year. Thanks to everyone who entered and congratulations to the winners!”

The City of Danville took home the **President's Award for Innovation**, which was announced at the Awards Banquet on Sunday, October 12 at the Hotel Roanoke during the 2025 VML Annual Conference.

Former VML President Steve Trivett remarked on his process for selecting “Danville Outdoors” as the President's Award winner: “Picking a single winner was not easy! But this section from the winning application helped my decision: ‘Working together, the initiative provides hands-on programs, community events, and environmental education that engages residents of all ages and backgrounds, while breaking down barriers to equitable access. This turns every park, trail, and green space into a classroom for



learning, exploration, and connections.' The 'connections' across community, across generations, and across organizations and the ongoing nature of this initiative became the clincher for my choice!"

### The winners of the 2026 Innovation Awards were:

**PRESIDENT'S AWARD FOR  
INNOVATION & COMMUNITY HEALTH:**

**City of Danville** – Danville Outdoors

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

**City of Alexandria** – Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Communications

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

**Town of Hillsville** – Community Business Launch

**ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY:**

**Town of Strasburg** – Town Run Riparian Native Plant Buffer

**PUBLIC SAFETY:**

**City of Norfolk** – Community 1ST

**RISK MANAGEMENT:**

**City of Roanoke** – Safety Awareness Event

**WORKING WITH YOUTH:**

**City of Chesapeake** – 10th Annual CE3 Engine Camp

### "If I Were Mayor" essay contest

The annual "If I Were Mayor" contest invites seventh and eighth graders from throughout Virginia to submit essays describing what they would do if they were mayor of their hometown. The essay contest is a key component of VML's civic education programming, which seeks to teach schoolchildren and adults how local government works and how they can become involved in making their communities better places to live, work, and play.

The challenge to the students is to present an issue in their locality, talk to others about possible solutions, and then identify what solution would best address the issue.

### The 2026 winners were:

- Statewide winner: **Serene Colden** of Lindsay Middle School in the City of Hampton
- Region 1: **Kenzley Frye** of Northwood Middle School in the Town of Saltville
- Region 2: **Hailey Coleman** of Martinsville Middle School in the City of Martinsville
- Region 3: **Kinley Carter** of Lylburn Downing Middle School in the City of Lexington
- Region 4: **Elijah Zug** of Appomattox Middle School in the Town of Appomattox
- Region 5: **Willa Thom** of Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School in the City of Falls Church
- Region 7: **Alexis Hargrove** of Edward W. Wyatt Middle School in the City of Emporia
- Region 8: **Finley O'Shell** of Isle of Wight Academy in the Town of Windsor

\*VML did not receive entries from Region 6 this year.



Of statewide winner Serene Colden, VML President and Mayor of the Town of Amherst Dwayne Tuggle noted, "She addresses an issue that affects many localities throughout the country. 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. Great job, Mayor! Congratulations Selena and to all this year's winners!"

All winning essays were featured in the May/June issue of *Virginia Town & City*.

### New Staff Member



In July, **Jessica Dennis** began as the Virginia Municipal League's new deputy director. Jessica began her local government career in 2014 with the City of Norfolk, working in the City Manager's Office as an analyst until 2021. She then transitioned to representing the city's state and federal legislative interests as the intergovernmental relations officer until 2024.

Prior to joining VML, Jessica managed Norfolk's Capital Improvement Plan implementation dashboard and coordinated fiscal impact and legislative analysis as a principal analyst for the City of Norfolk's Department of Budget and Strategic Planning.

As VML's deputy director, Jessica will advise VML member localities on legal and policy matters, monitor legislative and regulatory developments, and help advance the interests of local government through advocacy and stakeholder engagement.

A native of Texas, Jessica holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Bioenvironmental Sciences from Texas A&M University and a Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center.

Our property development firm is looking for...  
Responsibilities:  
• Identify changing demands of... as well as the market place  
• Assist with analysis of target mar... and specific projects to ass  
• Conceive opportunities and threats... order to gain a competitiv  
• Establish good relationships with... preserve their confic  
• Identify and package real estate... development investment of  
specific investment projects.  
Requirements:  
• A minimum of 2-8 years of... sales  
• Knowledge of market and... try trends, com  
• Qualification and ability... Russian / French  
• ...have background in the real estate in  
...applications from... with sales exper

**Looking for a job or  
have a position to fill?  
Visit our Classifieds at  
[www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org).**

# Annual Briefings from VML's Affiliate Organizations



**President: India Adams-Jacobs, Town Manager, Town of Bowling Green**

**VML Staff: Janet Areson, VML Director of Policy Development & VLGMA Executive Secretary; Keyara Johnson, VML Membership Services Administrator**

The **Virginia Local Government Management Association** is a statewide association of local government management professionals that is a state affiliate of the International City-County Management Association (ICMA). Its mission is to support local government managers and administrators who work for their elected bodies to build great communities. VLGMA offers professional development and networking opportunities, promotes principled, ethical leadership for members and their organizations, and works to foster the development of the next generation of local government management professionals.

VLGMA promotes learning through its two conferences each year and its semi-annual "Deputies, Assistants, and Others" programs hosted by members in communities across Virginia. The large conferences offer a variety of sessions on current issues facing Virginia communities and their leaders; the DAO programs are one day in length and focus on a particular topic, providing opportunities to build networks with their colleagues throughout the Commonwealth.

For more than 20 years, VLGMA has committed itself to developing the next generation of local government man-

agement professionals. It created and provided critical early support for the Local Government Certificate Program housed at Virginia Tech and continues to provide scholarship support. Several VLGMA members serve as program instructors, as well.

VLGMA actively supports the Virginia Women's Municipal Leadership Institute, created in partnership with the Virginia Women Leading Government coalition and the Virginia Tech Roanoke Center. It also provides scholarship support for the Senior Executive Institute and LEAD and LEAP Programs at the Virginia Institute of Government. Finally, VLGMA provides scholarship support for selected first-time attendees to ICMA's annual conference.

One of VLGMA's major goals this coming year is to create relationships with Virginia colleges and universities to better promote local government professions with undergraduate and graduate students.

VLGMA is led by a board consisting of seven officers and 12 executive committee members representing towns, cities, and counties throughout Virginia. To learn more about the association, visit [www.vlgma.org](http://www.vlgma.org).



**President: Kyle Kratzer, Building/Fire Codes Administrator, Fairfax County**

**VML Staff: Sandra Harrington, VBCOA Executive Director**

The **Virginia Building and Code Officials Association (VBCOA)** is a statewide association of building safety professionals dedicated to the health, safety, and welfare of all persons who live, work, and visit the Commonwealth of Virginia. Since 1929, VBCOA has worked to foster partnerships among all groups associated with the construction industry. Membership includes over 1,000 members, consisting of building and safety professionals from across the Commonwealth dedicated to the protection of health, safety, and welfare.

VBCOA is governed by an elected and appointed Board of Directors that meets quarterly. Additionally, VBCOA provides educational opportunities at its Mid-Year and Annual Conferences and provides educational opportunities all year long. VBCOA is also a member of the International Code Council (ICC) and has many members who have either served on, or are currently on, the ICC Board.

For more information, please visit the VBCOA website at [www.vbcoa.org](http://www.vbcoa.org).



**President: Don Bowman, President & CEO, Bristol Virginia Utilities Authority**

**VML Staff: Sandra Harrington, MEPAV Secretary/Treasurer**

The **Municipal Electric Power Association of Virginia (MEPAV)** was founded in 1954 with the main purpose of fostering a continuing spirit of cooperation among the various Virginia municipalities operating their own electric utilities and the various privately owned and cooperatively owned utilities that supply most of the energy distributed by the municipalities.

MEPAV consists of 16 members: the Town of Bedford, Town of Blackstone, Bristol Virginia Utilities Authority, Town of Culpeper Light and Power, City of Danville Power and Light, Town of Elkton, City of Franklin Power and Light, Town of Front Royal Energy Services, Harrisonburg Electric Commission, City of Manassas, City of Martinsville, City of Radford, City of Richlands, City of Salem, Virginia Tech Electric Services, and Town of Wakefield. Additionally, MEPAV is a member of the American Public Power Association (APPA), an organization that advocates for over 2,000 towns and cities nationwide.

MEPAV is also supported by associate members which consist of persons, firms, or corporations engaged in or closely aligned with the generation, transmission, or distribution of electric energy; manufacturers and suppliers of utility equipment; and members of municipalities not engaged in operating electric systems.

MEPAV is governed by an elected Board of Directors and meets several times throughout the year. In addition, MEPAV annually hosts an Engineering and Operations Seminar and Annual Conference. These events provide training, information sharing, and networking opportunities for MEPAV members and associate members.

For more information about MEPAV, please visit the website at [www.mepav.org](http://www.mepav.org).



**Chair: Stephen Burr, Energy Manager, Arlington County**

**VML Staff: Sandra Harrington, VEPGA Secretary/Treasurer**

Dating back to the 1970s, local governments in the Dominion Energy service territory formed a Steering Committee to collectively negotiate electric power rates and terms and conditions of service. For more than two decades, the Steering Committee negotiated multi-year electric contracts with Dominion Energy that included rates based on cost of service as well as terms and conditions reflective of government needs. This joint effort ensured that localities could benefit from the ability to share legal, consulting, and administrative costs related to these activities.

In 2002, the Steering Committee was formally organized as a joint powers association and became what is now

known as the **Virginia Energy Purchasing Governmental Association (VEPGA)**.

VEPGA continues to negotiate contracts on behalf of its members, monitors state regulatory and legislative developments, and maintains several committees to advance its members' interests. VEPGA is governed by an elected Board of Directors that meets quarterly. The organization provides educational opportunities throughout the year for its members and holds an Annual Meeting. VEPGA membership includes over 170 Virginia local governments, public school systems, authorities, and other governmental entities.

Please visit [www.vepgg.org](http://www.vepgg.org) to learn more.

# Virginia Municipal League Staff

**Janet Areson**

*Director of Policy Development*  
(804) 401-0303  
jareson@vml.org

**Rob Bullington**

*Director of Communications*  
(804) 401-9328  
rbullington@vml.org

**Josette Bulova**

*Policy Communications Coordinator*  
(804) 297-4385  
jbulova@vml.org

**Jessica Dennis**

*Deputy Director*  
(804) 297-9020  
jdennis@vml.org

**Joe Flores**

*Director of Fiscal Policy*  
(804) 297-4455  
jflores@vml.org

**Patrick L. Ford**

*Press Operator/Clerk*  
(804) 297-1767  
pford@vml.org

**Michelle Gowdy**

*Executive Director*  
(804) 649-8471  
mgowdy@vml.org

**Keyara Johnson**

*Administrative Assistant*  
(804) 401-6432  
kjohnson@vml.org

**Rebecca Rowe**

*Chief Administration Officer*  
(804) 401-3642  
rrowe@vml.org

**Mitchell Smiley**

*Policy Manager for Transportation & Natural Resources*  
(804) 401-7425  
msmiley@vml.org

**Manuel Timbreza**

*Director of Digital Communications*  
(804) 921-1234  
mtimbreza@vml.org



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH  
SOUND GOVERNMENT

## News Board

**Get on Board with the News Board!**

VML's News Board is the place for Virginia's local government leaders to learn about state and national grant opportunities, training and educational offerings, outreach efforts, and much more!

# 2026 VML Local Government Members

## Cities

City of Alexandria  
City of Bristol  
City of Buena Vista  
City of Charlottesville  
City of Chesapeake  
City of Colonial Heights  
City of Covington  
City of Danville  
City of Emporia  
City of Fairfax  
City of Falls Church  
City of Franklin  
City of Fredericksburg  
City of Galax  
City of Hampton  
City of Harrisonburg  
City of Hopewell  
City of Lexington  
City of Manassas  
City of Manassas Park  
City of Martinsville  
City of Newport News  
City of Norfolk  
City of Norton  
City of Petersburg  
City of Poquoson  
City of Portsmouth  
City of Radford  
City of Richmond  
City of Roanoke  
City of Salem  
City of Staunton  
City of Suffolk  
City of Virginia Beach  
City of Waynesboro  
City of Williamsburg  
City of Winchester

## Towns

Town of Abingdon  
Town of Accomac  
Town of Alberta  
Town of Altavista  
Town of Amherst  
Town of Appomattox  
Town of Ashland  
Town of Bedford  
Town of Berryville  
Town of Big Stone Gap  
Town of Blacksburg  
Town of Blackstone  
Town of Bluefield  
Town of Boones Mill  
Town of Bowling Green  
Town of Boydton  
Town of Boykins  
Town of Branchville

Town of Bridgewater  
Town of Broadway  
Town of Brodnax  
Town of Brookneal  
Town of Buchanan  
Town of Burkeville  
Town of Cape Charles  
Town of Capron  
Town of Cedar Bluff  
Town of Charlotte Court House  
Town of Chase City  
Town of Chatham  
Town of Cheriton  
Town of Chilhowie  
Town of Chincoteague  
Town of Christiansburg  
Town of Claremont  
Town of Clarksville  
Town of Clifton  
Town of Clifton Forge  
Town of Clintwood  
Town of Coeburn  
Town of Colonial Beach  
Town of Courtland  
Town of Craigsville  
Town of Crewe  
Town of Culpeper  
Town of Damascus  
Town of Dayton  
Town of Dillwyn  
Town of Drakes Branch  
Town of Dublin  
Town of Duffield  
Town of Dumfries  
Town of Eastville  
Town of Edinburg  
Town of Elkton  
Town of Exmore  
Town of Farmville  
Town of Fincastle  
Town of Floyd  
Town of Fries  
Town of Front Royal  
Town of Gate City  
Town of Glade Spring  
Town of Glasgow  
Town of Gordonsville  
Town of Gretna  
Town of Grottoes  
Town of Grundy  
Town of Halifax  
Town of Hallwood  
Town of Hamilton  
Town of Haymarket  
Town of Haysi  
Town of Herndon  
Town of Hillsboro  
Town of Hillsville

Town of Hurt  
Town of Independence  
Town of Iron Gate  
Town of Irvington  
Town of Ivor  
Town of Jarratt  
Town of Jonesville  
Town of Keller  
Town of Kenbridge  
Town of Keysville  
Town of Kilmarnock  
Town of La Crosse  
Town of Lawrenceville  
Town of Lebanon  
Town of Leesburg  
Town of Louisa  
Town of Lovettsville  
Town of Luray  
Town of Madison  
Town of Marion  
Town of McKenney  
Town of Middleburg  
Town of Middletown  
Town of Monterey  
Town of Montross  
Town of Mount Crawford  
Town of Mount Jackson  
Town of Narrows  
Town of Nassawadox  
Town of New Castle  
Town of New Market  
Town of Newsoms  
Town of Occoquan  
Town of Onancock  
Town of Onley  
Town of Orange  
Town of Painter  
Town of Pamplin  
Town of Parksley  
Town of Pearisburg  
Town of Pembroke  
Town of Pennington Gap  
Town of Phenix  
Town of Port Royal  
Town of Pound  
Town of Pulaski  
Town of Purcellville  
Town of Quantico  
Town of Remington  
Town of Rich Creek  
Town of Richlands  
Town of Ridgeway  
Town of Rocky Mount  
Town of Round Hill  
Town of Rural Retreat  
Town of Saint Paul  
Town of Saltville  
Town of Scottsville  
Town of Shenandoah

Town of Smithfield  
Town of South Boston  
Town of South Hill  
Town of Stanardsville  
Town of Stanley  
Town of Stephens City  
Town of Stony Creek  
Town of Strasburg  
Town of Stuart  
Town of Surry  
Town of Tangier  
Town of Tappahannock  
Town of Tazewell  
Town of The Plains  
Town of Timberville  
Town of Toms Brook  
Town of Troutville  
Town of Urbanna  
Town of Victoria  
Town of Vienna  
Town of Vinton  
Town of Wachapreague  
Town of Wakefield  
Town of Warrenton  
Town of Warsaw  
Town of Washington  
Town of Waverly  
Town of Weber City  
Town of West Point  
Town of White Stone  
Town of Windsor  
Town of Wise  
Town of Woodstock  
Town of Wytheville

## Counties

County of Albemarle  
County of Alleghany  
County of Arlington  
County of James City  
County of Loudoun  
County of New Kent  
County of Prince George  
County of Roanoke  
County of York

## Allied Member

Northern Virginia Regional  
Commission (NVRC)

*If your locality is a full dues-paying VML member and is not on the list above, please contact VML at [e-mail@vml.org](mailto:e-mail@vml.org) or call 804-649-8471.*

## Legislative and Policy Committees

Local officials from diverse localities are appointed each year by the VML president to serve on VML's Legislative Committee. Committee members develop positions on legislation and urge the enactment, amendment, or opposition to a variety of legislative initiatives. Over 150 local officials work on the VML policy committees. They help to shape the broader policies and make specific legislative recommendations to the Legislative Committee.

All localities are encouraged to participate on policy committees. Nomination forms are sent to each locality in the spring. Let a VML staff member know of your interest or send an email to [e-mail@vml.org](mailto:e-mail@vml.org) and we will follow up with you.



### Legislative Committee

**Chair:** James Gray, Mayor, City of Hampton

**Vice Chair:** Brian Vincent, Mayor, Town of Farmville

Leslie Beauregard, City Manager, City of Staunton  
 Leroy Bennett, Council Member, City of Suffolk  
 Linda Jane Colbert, Mayor, Town of Vienna  
 Robert Coleman, Council Member, City of Newport News  
 Marybeth Connelly, Council Member, City of Falls Church  
 Laura Dent, Council Member, City of Harrisonburg  
 W. Pat Dent, Vice Mayor, City of Williamsburg  
 Dany Fleming, Vice Mayor, City of Harrisonburg  
 Alyia Gaskins, Mayor, City of Alexandria  
 Keith Harless, Town Manager, Town of Pennington Gap  
 Jacob Holmes, Mayor, City of Bristol  
 Sara McGuffin, Town Manager, Town of Amherst  
 Monae Nickerson, Vice Mayor, Town of Dumfries  
 Johnny Partin, Mayor, Council Member, City of Hopewell  
 Terry Short Jr., Councilman, City of Waynesboro  
 Lloyd Snook, City Councilor, City of Charlottesville  
 Neil Steinberg, Council Member, Town of Leesburg  
 Vernon Tillage, Jr., Council Member, City of Portsmouth  
 Steven Trivett, Mayor, Town of Ashland  
 Renée Turk, Mayor, City of Salem

### Community & Economic Development Policy Committee

**Chair:** Vernon Tillage, Council Member, City of Portsmouth

Yesy Amaya, Councilwoman, City of Manassas Park  
 Chris Bernard, Vice-Mayor, Town of Middleburg  
 Leonardo Caballero, Deputy City Manager, City of Colonial Heights  
 Carolyn Campbell, Council Member, City of Hampton  
 Hope Harper, Council Member, City of Hampton  
 Joshua Ingram, Council Member, Town of Front Royal  
 Keven LeBlanc, Mayor, Town of Herndon  
 Lizi Lewis, Director of Community Development/Tourism, Town of Front Royal  
 Keith Liles, Council Member, Town of Vinton  
 Jill Loope, Special Projects Assistant to the Town Manager, Town of Vinton  
 Alvina Matthews, Council Member, City of Emporia  
 Julian Mei, City Council Member, City of Martinsville  
 Kari Nacy, Council Member, Town of Leesburg  
 Jeff Overholtzer, Council Member, City of Staunton  
 Tom Roberts, Director of Community & Economic Development, City of Buena Vista  
 Monica Robinson, Council Member, City of Harrisonburg  
 N. Janie Schmidt, Council Member, Town of Culpeper  
 Joashua "Joash" Schulman, Council Member, City of Virginia Beach  
 Jeffery Shupe, City Manager, City of Norton  
 Pam Sopall, Council Member, Town of Ashland

Sonny Sundaramurthy, Town Councilor, Town of Amherst

Juandiego Wade, Mayor, City of Charlottesville  
 Lue Ward, Vice Mayor, City of Suffolk

### Finance Policy Committee

**Chair:** Leslie Beauregard, City Manager, City of Staunton

**Vice Chair:** Keli Reekes, Town Manager, Town of South Hill

Anthony Amos, Council Member, City of Fairfax  
 Treavor Calhoun, Director of Finance, City of Norton  
 Todd Cimino-Johnson, Council Member, Town of Leesburg  
 Vincent Copenhaver, Finance Director, Town of Rocky Mount  
 Zach Cummings, Council Member, Town of Leesburg  
 Michelle Ferebee, Council Member, City of Hampton  
 Dany Fleming, Vice Mayor, City of Harrisonburg  
 Bradley Grose, Mayor, Town of Vinton  
 Linwood Johnson, Council Member, City of Franklin  
 Ashleigh Kimmons, Vice Mayor, Town of Strasburg  
 Gregory Kochuba, Mayor, City of Colonial Heights  
 Bridge Littleton, Mayor, Town of Middleburg  
 Michael Lloyd, Council Member, Town of Herndon  
 Martha Mugler, Council Member, City of Hampton  
 Bruce Rappaport, Council Member, Town of Front Royal  
 John Rector, Council Member, City of Suffolk  
 Christina Sadler, Finance Director, City of Colonial Heights  
 James Saunders, Council Member, City of Emporia  
 Cody Sexton, Deputy Town Manager, Town of Vinton  
 Joan Shifflett, Town Council, Town of Broadway  
 Sheila White, Finance Director, City of Newport News  
 BJ Wilson, Finance Director, Town of Front Royal

### General Laws Policy Committee

**Chair:** Monae Nickerson, Vice Mayor, Town of Dumfries

Chris Brown, City Attorney, City of Harrisonburg  
 Zach Cummings, Council Member, Town of Leesburg  
 Matthew Dotson, City Attorney, City of Norton  
 Deborah Gallagher, Council member, Town of Middleburg  
 Rayshaun Gravely, Council Member, City of Martinsville  
 James Gray, Mayor, City of Hampton  
 Stacey Hardy-Chandler, Council Member, City of Fairfax  
 Donald Hunter, Council Member, Town of Farmville

LC Jones, Mayor, City of Martinsville  
 Megan Lawless, Administrative Operations  
 Manager/Town Clerk, Town of Vinton  
 Sara McGuffin, Town Manager, Town of  
 Amherst  
 Phil Miskovic, Town Manager, Town of Crewe  
 Laurie Mullins, Vice Mayor, Town of Vinton  
 Catherine Read, Mayor, City of Fairfax  
 Wayne Sealock, Council Member, Town of  
 Front Royal  
 Joe Short, Vice Mayor, Town of Culpeper  
 George Sonnett, Town Attorney, Town of Front  
 Royal  
 Michael Sutphin, Mayor, Town of Blacksburg  
 Clifton Threat, Council Member, City of  
 Emporia  
 Jerri Wilson, Intergovernment Affairs Manager,  
 City of Newport News  
 John Wood, Council Member, City of Colonial  
 Heights  
 Robert Wood, Town Manager, Town of Rocky  
 Mount  
 Alice Woods, Council Member, City of  
 Staunton  
 Ebony Wright, Council Member, City of  
 Suffolk

## Human Development & Education Policy Committee

**Chair:** Jacob Holmes, Mayor, City of Bristol  
**Vice Chair:** Carlos Clanton, Councilman,  
 City of Norfolk

Meagan Abbey, Mayor, Town of McKenney  
 Nasser Alsaadun, Council Member, City of  
 Harrisonburg  
 Leroy Bennett, Council Member, City of  
 Suffolk  
 Virginia Blount-Moore, Deputy City Manager,  
 City of Newport News

Steven Brown, Council Member, City of  
 Hampton  
 Donna Collins, Director of Human  
 Resources and Risk Management, Town  
 of Vinton  
 Pam Curran, Council Member, Town of  
 Middleburg  
 J. Kevin Daly, Council Member, Town of  
 Middleburg  
 Melissa DeDomenico-Payne, Council  
 Member, Town of Front Royal  
 Michele Edwards, Mayor, City of Staunton  
 Marcellus Harris, Council Member, City of  
 Newport News  
 Becca Lynch, Administrator, Youth and  
 Human Services, City of Colonial  
 Heights  
 Sabrina McCarty, Council Member, Town  
 of Vinton  
 Rachel McQuillen, Council Member, City  
 of Fairfax  
 Caetrina Peterson, Council Member, Town  
 of Dumfries  
 Joe Petty, Town Manager, Town of Front  
 Royal  
 Deanna Reed, Mayor, City of Harrisonburg  
 Alex Reyes, Council Member, Town of  
 Herndon  
 Abe Rutherford, Director of Social Services,  
 City of Norton  
 L. Dale Temple, Council Member, City of  
 Emporia

## Infrastructure Policy Committee

**Chair:** Laura Dent, Council Member, City of  
 Harrisonburg  
**Vice Chair:** Erin Rayner, Council Member,  
 Town of Purcellville

Andrew Barnes, Director of Public Works,  
 City of Colonial Heights  
 Randy Bowman, Council Member, City of  
 Hampton  
 Robbie Boyer, Director of Public Works,  
 Town of Front Royal  
 Shelley Butler Barlow, Council Member, City  
 of Suffolk  
 Stacy Hall, Council Member, City of Fairfax  
 Christopher Hersh, Council Member, Town  
 of Middleburg  
 Kathy Lawson, Council Member, City of  
 Martinsville  
 Mark Lilly, Council Member, City of  
 Emporia  
 Steve McElroy, Assistant City Manager/City  
 Engineer, City of Norton  
 Mark Moore, Assistant Town Manager, Town  
 of Rocky Mount  
 Kevin Moreau, Council Member, City of  
 Manassas Park  
 Richard Peters Jr, Town Manager, Town of  
 Vinton  
 Thomas Peterson, Council Member, City of  
 Fairfax  
 Blake Shepherd, Council Member, City of  
 Staunton  
 Neil Steinberg, Council Member, Town of  
 Leesburg  
 Michael Stovall, Council Member, Town of  
 Vinton  
 Amber Veitenthal, Vice Mayor, Town of  
 Front Royal  
 LeOtis Williams, Council Member, City of  
 Suffolk

## Community Business Members

### Diamond

Virginia Housing

### Platinum

Dominion Energy  
 Obvio  
 Virginia American Water



### Gold

Currently no members

### Silver

Airbnb  
 American Public University System  
 Berkley Group  
 Blue Line Solutions  
 Bolton  
 Capital Results  
 Golden Transcription Services  
 HomeServe  
 Mattern & Craig  
 Moseley Architects

OpenGov  
 PMA Architecture  
 Radarsign, LLC  
 SDL  
 Sparks@Play  
 Timmons Group  
 VAcorp  
 Virginia Institute of Government - Weldon  
 Cooper Center  
 Virginia Tech School of Public and International  
 Affairs

### Bronze

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay  
 Cavalry Real Estate Advisors  
 Comcast  
 DePorter Dominick Associates  
 Glave & Holmes Architecture  
 Kimley-Horn

McGuireWoods Consulting  
 Really Clean Streets  
 Spectrum Design PC  
 Thompson & Litton, Inc.  
 Virginia Resources Authority



# VRSA

Virginia Risk Sharing Association

## WHAT SETS

## US APART



[www.vrsa.us](http://www.vrsa.us)

# We are a truly member-owned and governed organization, with no outside interests.



## COVERAGE:

We offer the broadest protections for Virginia's local governments. Our average **claim acceptance rate is 88 percent.**



## COST:

We are the first and most **financially sound** group self-insurance pool in Virginia. This strength allows us to continue to provide **stable rates and dependable coverages.**



## SERVICE:

Members are assigned a **dedicated service team** of VRSA staff who manage claims, as well as provide HR guidance, site and security inspections, contract review, education and training, and more.

## CITY OF HAMPTON

By VTC Editor Rob Bullington

# A coastal city doing big things to change its relationship with water

## Or ... What I learned on the Hampton “If I Were Mayor” Resiliency Tour

*If I were Mayor of Hampton, the most important problem I would focus on is flooding...*

- From Serene Colden's statewide winning VML essay

“IT’S REALLY HOT,” observed City of Hampton Resiliency Officer Olivia Askew, “so anybody that wants water, just let me know.”

It was perhaps an ironic offer, given that the group she was addressing was set to embark on a bus tour of city projects to mitigate the effects of water.

But it was, as Askew had noted, quite warm in Hampton on the morning of Wednesday, August 19, so the offer of water was much appreciated as we piled into the comfortable (and thankfully air-conditioned) interior of a city shuttle bus.



The impetus for the tour began earlier in the year when Hampton resident and Lindsay Middle School student Serene Colden chose to write about her city's problems with flooding in her “If I Were Mayor” essay entry.



(L-R) Hampton Mayor Jimmy Gray, Essay Contest Winner Serene Colden, and Lindsay Middle School Principal Sharif Hicks.

Serene's essay was good. So good, in fact, that it was named the statewide winner (that's her smiling on the cover of the May/June issue of VTC).

Hampton Mayor Jimmy Gray and the members of the Resilient Hampton team were understandably proud of Serene's achievement, but they also saw her essay as a great opportunity to show a young person how they are planning for the future of their city in ways that will improve its relationship with water. Ways that were, perhaps, not apparent to the casual observer, but very real and – in some cases – quite large.

Serene was on the bus along with her mother Symena Green, Lindsay Middle School Principal Sharif Hicks, Mayor Gray, and City Manager Mary Bunting. Also joining us were Director of Community Development Kim Mikel, Hampton City Schools Director of Community and Government Relations Jenn Oliver, and Summer Youth Employment Participant (and photographer) Adelsie Najcque.

From the city's multi-discipline Resilient Hampton team, we had the aforementioned Askew, Coastal Resilience Engineer Scott Smith, Resilience Specialist and bus driver Anna Hammond, and recently hired Resilience Specialist Grace Kann.

In 2015, Hampton completed its comprehensive resilience blueprint, *Living with Water Hampton*. Now, in 2026, we were about to see how that blueprint was being implemented.

*...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...*

Our first stop was the **Mary Jackson Neighborhood Center**, which had been rebuilt in the early 2020s with resiliency in mind. The center, which serves the Olde Hampton area, is a true neighborhood resource with a Board of Directors that looks for ways to engage the community. It was also among the first projects that Resilient Hampton played a role in shaping. Askew enthusiastically detailed how green infrastructure was built into the new center. For example, the roof of the gym funnels rainwater on both sides into bio-retention areas called “bioswales.” A “cues to care” sign near one of the bioswales explained that they “work like natural ponds and lakes, allowing water to gradually be absorbed by the soil below instead of flowing into the storm drains.”

At the Mary Jackson Neighborhood Center, a bioswale in the background.



“The signs help,” Askew explained, “I used to have to tell people that it’s not just an overgrown garden.”

Smith demonstrated another green feature of the center by pouring some of his water bottle onto a parking spot. We could see that the permeable grooves around the pavers allowed the water to be absorbed by the soil beneath rather than producing additional runoff.



As we headed back to the bus Askew pointed out the pollinator garden on the other side of the tennis court. Once we were underway, the bus drove down the newly completed Grant Street running next to the center that will one day have development but is currently home only to a constructed wetland teeming with plants and wildlife. A small flock of ducks, unaware that their watery home was also serving the residents of Hampton, mostly ignored our bus as it turned the corner.



The new Grant Street retention pond.



The current state of North Armistead Avenue.

*...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...*

Next on our itinerary was **North Armistead Avenue**, a low-lying throughfare bisected by Newmarket Creek running under it. We learned that the busy avenue suffers from regular flooding during rainstorms and often needs to be closed.

However, the Resilient Hampton team had two big projects, one about to begin and one almost completed, to address the issue. Beginning soon, motorists traveling on North Armistead will find that lanes on the road will be closed for periods of time. The inconvenience, however, will be worth it – crossovers are being installed to raise the avenue to an elevation of 7½ feet above sea level.



Coastal Resilience Engineer Scott Smith points to the island that serves as bird sanctuary.

The other almost-completed project is the new **Lake Hampton**, which sits between North Armistead Avenue and Interstate 64. This large, beautiful water feature is surrounded by trails that will connect to the city’s Water Walk Trail and plantings including a venerable cedar tree that was spared during the construction. A central island in the lake serves as a bird sanctuary. All these amenities are obvious benefits, but the lake is also a significant water retention and storage system with a valve that automatically opens and closes to reduce stormwater runoff into Newmarket Creek.



Resiliency Officer Olivia Askew (L) explains the benefits of Lake Hampton.

Mayor Gray was quick to point out that Lake Hampton is also a biofilter that helps the city meet state mandated goals to reduce pollution from runoff going into the Chesapeake Bay.

At the time of our visit, all that remained to be completed at Lake Hampton were signs identifying the ecological and environmental benefits of the lake, as well as some final touches on the boardwalks. In fact, Hampton’s residents have already started to enjoy it. “People were out using the boardwalks before they were finished!” noted Smith.



Lake Hampton's boardwalks

Before we departed, Hammond asked everyone to be quiet for just a second. “You hear that?” she asked.

We heard the wind in the trees, the birds singing, and the sound of water lapping the shore.

“Exactly,” she said. “Here we are between North Armistead Avenue and I-64 and you hear nature. It’s just another way that this area benefits the community.”

Our next stop is familiar to anyone who has ever driven into Hampton on I-64 and marked their location by the sudden appearance of the Mother Ship, a.k.a. the Hampton Coliseum, on the side of the road. It’s a familiar site to many, but what most drivers don’t realize is that the body of water fronting the Coliseum is more than just a reminder that you’re getting close to the beach – it’s a stormwater pond that helps improve water quality in the area. Coliseum Lake, as it’s called, also serves as a recreational asset for the community as we saw when we encountered people fishing during our visit. For many years the lake served its stormwater remediation task well, but adjacent Newmarket Creek was increasingly prone to overflow into the lake (a big no-no for stormwater ponds). The solution was the **Coliseum Lake Weir Project**, which received the Dave Pearson Watershed Excellence Project Award from the Virginia Lakes and Watersheds Association (VLWA). The weir is made up of granite stones and a slide gate that keeps Newmarket Creek on one side and the lake on the other as it should be. That’s a win-win for Resilient Hampton and the Public Works teams.



The new boundary between New Market Creek and Coliseum Lake.

*...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...*



Our final stop took us into the quiet Mercury neighborhood, where we parked next to what appeared to be a drainage ditch running between the houses. In fact, the **Big Bethel Blueway** was previously a drainage ditch, but now weirs are being installed for flood retention and a paved, tree-shaded trail runs for a mile beside it. The Blueway trail serves as a foot and bike path from the neighborhood to commercial services that were previously unreachable except by car for residents. In the future, when heavy rain inundates the ditch, the water can be managed by the weirs instead of overflowing. And, when not serving its stormwater storage capacity, the Big Bethel Blueway is a lovely and useful feature for the residents to enjoy.

Back at City Hall, Mayor Gray thanked everyone for riding along and especially thanked Serene for noticing things about her city that needed to be addressed. He hoped that she saw that progress was happening, and more importantly, encouraged her to be part of that work when she’d finished her education. “This work we are doing is for your generation and the ones to follow,” Mayor Gray noted, “so we look forward to the day when maybe you can join us!”



The Resiliency Tour members at the Big Bethel Blueway.

# Public power is hometown power



**T**urning on a light ... turning on the oven ... turning on a computer. They all require electricity. Thanks to the members of the Municipal Electric Power Association of Virginia, more than a quarter million residents across the Commonwealth don't have to worry if there will be power to turn on, because it's always there. MEPAV members are your not-for-profit, community-owned

utilities that provide reliable and safe electricity at a reasonable price. Our commitment to the communities that we serve goes beyond keeping the lights on and appliances running. Our success is intertwined with that of each family and local business. MEPAV is part of a vital American tradition that makes communities better places to live and work. It's a tradition that works.



MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC POWER ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA

Bedford  
Blackstone

Bristol  
Culpeper

Danville  
Elkton

Franklin  
Front Royal

Harrisonburg  
Manassas  
Martinsville  
Radford

Richlands  
Salem  
VPI & SU  
Wakefield

## BOLTON

By Bolton staff

# How to get ahead of Virginia's new mandatory paid leave for localities



**Y**OU ALREADY HAVE a full plate: budgets, staffing shortages, evolving technology needs, and the usual list of things that land on a local government's desk before anyone else's. Now, add a new statewide mandate to that list!

This spring, Virginia became the first Southern state to require paid family and medical leave (PFML), and the countdown for compliance has already started, even though benefits will not commence until December 2028.

If you lead HR, finance, or administration for a Virginia city, town, or county, this is the year to start planning.

Here's what the law requires, and how Bolton is already helping Virginia entities get it right before the mandated deadline forces you to scramble. We've spent the last two years in the trenches with Maryland's local governments on a nearly identical program, and we're putting that experience to work for Virginia through our partnership with the Virginia Association of Counties and our Community Business Membership with the Virginia Municipal League.

## What we learned from Maryland

Bolton has advised many of Maryland's counties, municipalities, and school systems as they work through the Time to Care Act, Maryland's own paid leave insurance program. The law looks a lot like Virginia's on paper, though Virginia's legislators appear to have learned from some of Maryland's shortfalls, enacting a cleaner paid leave program.

Here are the two biggest takeaways from what we learned in Maryland that apply directly to your planning:

**#1 – Coordinate PFML with what you already offer, or you'll end up paying for the same leave twice.** Most Maryland employers came into their program already providing some mix of sick leave, short-term disability, and FMLA-protected time off. The ones that didn't map those policies against the new benefit early wound up with employees stacking benefits or drawing duplicate wage replacement from two sources at once.

Now is the time to review your existing leave, disability, and paid time off policies for overlap and decide whether PFML will run as a supplement, an offset against other benefits, or as a replacement for what you already provide.

**#2 – Decide on State Plan versus Private Plan early, deliberately, and with real numbers.** The default option isn't automatically the cheapest or the best fit for your workforce. We've run the cost-benefit analysis for Maryland employers weighing self-insurance against the State Plan, and the right answer depends heavily on your workforce size, demographics, turnover, and existing short-term disability or leave benefits, not a one-size-fits-all recommendation.

Those lessons translate directly because Virginia's law follows a similar architecture.





## What Virginia's law requires

Virginia's Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program, signed into law last spring, creates a new mandate for public and private employers alike. Every county, city, and town

government is included; there's no carve-out for local government.

Starting in December 2028, eligible employees will be able to take up to 12 weeks of job-protected, paid leave per year for the following reasons:

- Welcome a new child
- Care for themselves or a family member with a serious health condition
- Support a next-of-kin service member
- Respond to a qualifying military exigency
- Access safe leave related to domestic or sexual violence (four-week max)

It should be noted that "family member" is defined broadly as spouses, domestic partners, children, grandchildren, grandparents, parents, siblings, and anyone who lives in the employee's home or depends on them for care.

While on leave, employees receive 80 percent of their average weekly wage, up to a cap tied to the state average, with a minimum weekly benefit of \$100. Leave can be taken intermittently rather than all at once, which makes a big difference for how you'll need to track and administer it.

## How you'll pay for it, and who decides

Every locality has two paths to compliance.

Path one is the **State Plan**, administered by the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). If you do nothing, this is where you land, and you get no say in the contribution rate or coordination with your entity's other benefit offerings.

Path two is a **VEC-approved Private Plan**, whether self-insured or carrier-based, that must match or exceed the State Plan's benefits. Choosing this route hands you more control over cost and design.

Either way, the cost can be shared. Employees can be required to pay up to 50 percent of the contribution through payroll deduction, with you covering the rest. Localities with 10 or fewer employees aren't required to contribute, but they still must withhold the employee portion, meaning even the smallest towns have compliance work to do.

## The timeline will move faster than you think

The 2028 benefit start date is deceptive. Most of the real work, and the real decisions, need to happen well before then. Consider the following:

- January 2027 – Collective bargaining agreements in effect after this date are subject to the new law's requirements, so contract negotiations happening right now must account for it.
- October 2027 – VEC publishes the State Plan contribution rate for the coming year, giving you your first real budget number.

- April 2028 – Payroll contributions begin.
- December 2028 – Benefits become payable to employees.

In other words, by the time contributions start, your locality needs to have already decided how it's complying, budgeted for it, updated payroll and leave policies, trained HR staff, and – if you're going the Private Plan route – completed a procurement and secured VEC approval. That's a lot to compress into 2027 for something happening in 2028!

## Bolton can help

At Bolton, we help public entities translate new mandates into concrete, budgeted, and detailed plans, and then we execute those plans. Whether VML members need a plain language briefing for your council or board, a cost comparison between the State Plan and a Private Plan tailored to your workforce, assistance navigating the VEC approval process, or a broader multi-year strategy that folds PFML into your existing benefits and leave picture, we've already done this work once in Maryland and we're doing it again in Virginia right now.

You can find us at this year's VML Annual Conference, where we'll be talking about exactly this. Or, reach out beforehand so we can start looking at your specific situation before the conference begins. The mandate is set. Your locality's preparedness is up to you.

**About the author:** *Bolton, a Community Business Member of VML, provides strategic benefits and HR consulting to private and public-sector organizations. Learn more at [boltonusa.com](http://boltonusa.com) or contact Consultant Liz Gardner at [lgardner@boltonusa.com](mailto:lgardner@boltonusa.com).*

# Bolton

## BENEFITS & HR CONSULTING

We help you navigate the complex world of employee benefits, actuarial consulting, and workforce strategy.

- Communications
- Health
- Investment
- Retirement
- Rewards
- Talent

[BOLTONUSA.COM](http://BOLTONUSA.COM)

## TIMMONS GROUP

By Aislinn Creel, PE

# Positioning Virginia municipalities for flood resilience



**T**HE THREAT OF natural disasters, particularly flooding, and the concept of building more resilient communities have recently gained significant support in the Commonwealth of Virginia. For Virginia's municipalities, the immediate opportunity is to translate state resilience priorities into locally adopted plans, fundable projects, and policies that reduce flood risk over time.

According to the Resilience Report 2025, produced by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Allstate, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, for every dollar spent on resilience efforts, communities can save an average of \$23 in future losses, with some studies climbing as high as \$30. Common consensus is that it is wise to prepare for future disasters.

Successful resilience planning requires an integrated approach. At the federal level, the National Resilience Guidance published by FEMA in August 2024 stresses the importance of a "multi-pronged approach and dedicated effort across the whole community," defining seven governing foundational principles for a more resilient nation:

1. Focus on the **Threats & Hazards** that represent the greatest risks.
2. Ensure resilience goals are **Human Centered**.
3. Propose strategies and solutions that are **Equitable & Just** and consider the needs of historically underserved and marginalized populations.
4. Apply **Adaptive** thinking to take advantage of evolving circumstances.
5. Utilize a **Collaborative** approach that engages multiple sectors in a data-driven and transparent process.
6. Identify **Sustainable & Durable** solutions to address current and future needs.
7. Acknowledge the complexity of **Interdependent** systems and seek resilient solutions that address hazards and risks while delivering multiple benefits.



A restored stream for a local community near Richmond. The stream, which was previously impacted by an eroding channel, was restored to create additional floodplain capacity. The change protected the surrounding apartment community and local standalone homes.

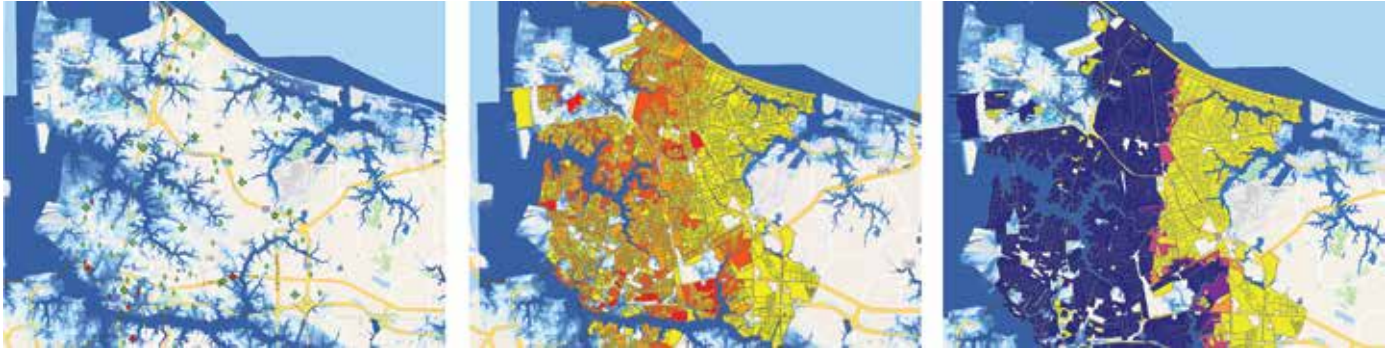
At the state level, this integrated approach is further modeled by the establishment of the Virginia Office of Resilience (VOR) in 2024, which operates under the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources of Virginia. The role of chief resilience officer was authorized in 2024 by HB1458, with the primary function being to coordinate efforts at the state level to carry out the VOR's vision and mission:

**Vision:** *A prepared Virginia that adapts to and thrives in an environment of evolving hazards to the benefit of all.*

**Mission:** *We prepare, support, and protect Virginians by ensuring an integrated partnership approach to address evolving hazards across the Commonwealth.*

To promote cooperation between state, federal, and local entities, VOR leads the Interagency Resilience Management Team (IRMT), which convenes quarterly. Together with VOR, the IRMT has identified 73 hazards organized into 13 categories. The team has further focused resilience efforts at the state level by identifying four priority areas: **flooding**, the **water system** (including water supply, treatment, and distribution), the **energy grid**, and **public health**.

According to the Virginia Office of Resilience's website, "VOR's goal is to provide 'safer homes, drier roads, and stronger communities' for all Virginians."



**Timmons Group worked with the City of Norfolk stakeholders to understand the necessary steps to incorporate FEMA National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System (CRS) requirements into the City's existing Watershed Master Plan. The approach above showcases existing and future condition models, using the latest data from the City of Norfolk's GIS resources.**

Fortunately for Virginia's towns and cities, the state has a head start on progress toward VOR's goals – especially in the context of flood resilience – with the establishment of the Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF) in 2020. The state's investment in flood resilience efforts comes at a critical time, as the future of federal funding and investment is uncertain. Programs such as the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant administered by FEMA, the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant administered by the US Department of Transportation, and others had gained traction in recent years but are now in jeopardy.

Administered by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the CFPF program has expanded substantially since the first awards in 2021, from initially funding 19 applications totaling \$7,796,040 in Round 1, to over \$315 million awarded through Round 6. Round 7 is expected to open on December 1, 2026, with applications due in early 2027. The fund supports local governments and tribes in planning and implementing flood prevention and resilience projects through capacity building and planning, studies, and projects. Key priorities for the CFPF include efforts that benefit the entire community, are nature-based, and align with local, regional, and/or statewide Resilience Plans. To be considered for project funding, an applicant must have an official, adopted Resilience Plan approved by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation within the last five years.

## Key strategies for tapping into state resources

There are a few action items that your community can take to benefit from the state's investment in resilience, summarized below.

### #1 – Understand the CFPF program priorities

A closer look at recently awarded CFPF grants can provide valuable insight for Virginia's municipalities to better position themselves for funding support. The following is a breakdown of Round 6 CFPF Awards:

- **Capacity building and planning** – A total of \$11.3M was awarded for capacity building and planning. Nearly two-thirds of the 25 awards support the development of Resilience Plans, encouraging municipalities to follow a systematic approach to identify resilience projects aligned with the CFPF program's priorities. Notably, the majority of funding (over 50 percent) for capacity building and planning went to one-fourth of the applicants for technology solutions to develop tools to manage and utilize flood-related data for informed decision-making. The remainder of the funding was allocated to staff training and/or new positions such as hiring floodplain managers.

- **Studies** – A total of \$8.5M was awarded to 15 towns, cities, and counties, and the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission. Most study scopes include conducting stormwater inventories, hydrologic and hydraulic analyses, and watershed modeling to study and reduce flood risk.
- **Projects** – A total of \$29M, ranging in size from \$178,000 to \$6.3M, was awarded to 13 other projects, funding the design and/or construction of drainage improvements, living shorelines, integrated green/gray systems, dam removal and rehabilitation, enhanced stormwater storage to alleviate flooding, and more.

### #2 – Align with state planning efforts

- **The Coastal Resilience Master Plan (CRMP):** The CRMP is a multi-phased effort focused on developing a “comprehensive path toward long-term resilience to protect people, homes, businesses, infrastructure, and ecosystems from the impacts of coastal flooding.” The state's coastal communities are home to 70 percent of the state's population, according to DCR. The CRMP is not just a static plan but also includes the interactive Coastal Resilience Web Explorer ([floodplan.dcr.virginia.gov/crwe](https://floodplan.dcr.virginia.gov/crwe)), which “allows users to visualize modeled flood hazards and impacts at a variety of planning horizons and geographic scales using maps and dashboards. It also presents a ‘living’ inventory of ongoing and planned flood resilience projects, initiatives, and funding opportunities.”
- **The Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan (VFPMP):** The VFPMP is “an actionable plan for state government to align and enhance the Commonwealth's policies and programs to mitigate the impacts of flooding on people, the economy, and the environment.” The plan is in development and will be completed by December 2026.



**An engineer and client discuss a stream restoration project in Waynesboro.**

### #3 – Utilize resources developed by the state

The Commonwealth of Virginia has invested a significant amount of resources into developing publicly available data for use in Resilience Planning and other applications. Examples include the Virginia Flood Risk Information System (VFRIS), the Environmental Data Mapper (EDM), the DCR Flood Resilience Open Data Portal, and the Virginia Geographic Information Network (VGIN). Using state-developed resources for local planning can minimize the fiscal impact on municipalities.

### #4 – Factor resilience considerations into existing activities

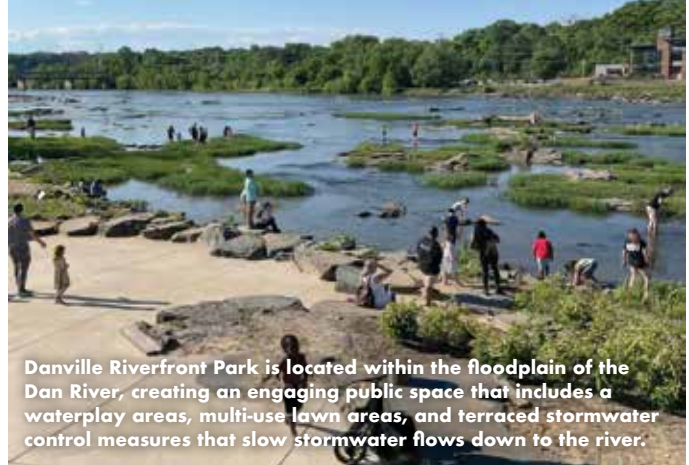
The first step of effective resilience planning is to perform a comprehensive document review, scouring Comprehensive Plans, Capital Improvement Plans, Economic Development Plans, Emergency Operations Plans, and other resources to consolidate a list of resilience projects. Hazard Mitigation Plans are valuable resources that include relevant local data sets and analyses of risks and vulnerabilities, as well as mitigation actions and strategies that can be used to extract resilience actions. The best place to start in identifying resilience projects is in your own municipal planning portfolio. Overlapping bridge and culvert inspection data with flood risk data is a great starting point for identifying your next transportation resiliency project. Repetitive service request and work order data to address nuisance flooding and storm sewer system maintenance is the perfect opportunity for your next drainage improvement study. As stated earlier, successful resilience solutions acknowledge the complexities of “interdependent systems.”

### #5 – Strengthen your community’s resilience through policy

Policy, procedures, and local ordinance revisions are an effective way to ensure the foundational principles of “equitable and just” and “collaborative” are realized. Local policy is, by nature, community-wide and encompasses multiple departments, so incorporating resiliency into existing or new local policies accelerates progress toward long-term objectives. For example, you can apply future scenario planning to your local Design Guidelines; rather than using outdated precipitation data, you can specify that designers account for future change scenarios and sea-level rise. Although this is not mandated at the state level, it is an approach to building resiliency into public projects at the planning and design stage that many jurisdictions are considering.

### #6 – Understand Nature-Based Infrastructure (NBI) and the role it plays in flood resilience

According to the CFPPF Grant Manual, “nature-based solution means an approach that reduces the impacts of flood and storm events through the use of environmental processes and natural systems. A nature-based solution may provide additional benefits beyond flood control, including recreational opportunities and improved water quality. This includes a project that reduces these impacts by protecting, restoring, or emulating natural features.” Nature-based infrastructure is a growing term that includes concepts of conservation, land acquisition, and buyouts to protect or restore natural areas, especially along coastlines, floodplains, and low-lying areas. Nature-based infrastructure can also include extensive design, retrofit, or conversion of existing systems, such as green infrastructure, dam removal, stream and floodplain restoration, and constructed wetlands. Finally, it can also include enhancements to existing systems, such as beneficial reuse



Danville Riverfront Park is located within the floodplain of the Dan River, creating an engaging public space that includes a waterplay areas, multi-use lawn areas, and terraced stormwater control measures that slow stormwater flows down to the river.

of dredged material to raise marsh elevations, establishing oyster reefs, submerged aquatic vegetation, and living shorelines. There are a wide variety of NBI applications for both coastal and inland areas that municipalities can capitalize on to help advance resiliency efforts.

## Positioning for what comes next

Long-term sustainability depends on resilient infrastructure, and successful resilience planning requires an integrated approach. While the future of federal investment in resilience projects may be uncertain, the state is providing many tools and resources for Virginia’s municipalities to both plan for and implement projects to mitigate flood risk. Now is a great time to leverage these efforts and align your municipal goals to position for flood resilience.

For dedicated support with your next resiliency-based project, reach out to Aislinn Creel, senior resiliency engineer, at [aislinn.creel@timmons.com](mailto:aislinn.creel@timmons.com).

**About the author:** *Aislinn Creel is a senior resiliency engineer with the Timmons Group.*

**EMPOWERING VIRGINIA'S  
CITIES & COUNTIES  
SINCE 1953**

**VML**

Civil Engineering & Surveying  
Traffic & Transportation  
Landscape Architecture  
Environmental & Cultural Resources  
Geotechnical Engineering  
Construction Materials Testing  
Water, Wastewater & Stormwater Design  
Technology & GIS  
Structures & Bridges  
Economic Development  
Right-of-Way Services

**TIMMONS GROUP**  
PROUD SPONSOR OF VML

**COME VISIT US AT THE  
VML ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

# Learning to love local government

**W**HEN I APPLIED for the University of Virginia Internship Placement Program, I hoped to gain experience in government, but it had not occurred to me that I would necessarily be interested in the work of *local* governments. Now, after a summer spent interning with the Virginia Municipal League in Richmond, I have a newfound understanding and appreciation for the work of municipal governments, how policy at the state level affects all Virginians, and the role of VML in advocating for localities.

When I started my Public Policy and Communications internship with the league at the beginning of June, Executive Director Michelle Gowdy and VML staff offered to help get me involved in the policy areas that I found most interesting. However, this being my first government-related work experience, I was willing to help wherever I was needed. This turned out to be a good decision, as I was immediately involved in meetings, projects, and workgroups with topics ranging from tree canopy conservation to the Governor's Regional Readiness Summit. I was impressed by the number and breadth of interests that the league represents and the degree to which any legislation passed by the General Assembly has a direct effect on the citizens of Virginia. At the end of my busy first two weeks, I had the privilege of attending VML's strategic planning meeting with the whole team. This experience gave me a deeper understanding of their organizational structure and the year-round work that the staff does to fulfill the organization's mission.

After I had become comfortable in my role, I was assigned several research projects, and I began to understand how legislation and policies benefit from having different perspectives involved in their crafting. For example, I did extensive research related to HB707 (Hayes), which would prohibit a public body from maintaining an official website for public use with a domain other than a .gov, .edu, or .museum domain. For that work, I researched domain expansions in other states, found the technical challenges of compliance with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and communicated with local government IT managers to learn about the financial implications of this change.

Among the things I learned were that among VML member localities:

- 13/27 cities do not possess a .gov domain
- 4/9 counties do not possess a .gov domain
- 119/170 towns do not possess a .gov domain

I was gratified when my research was used in a brief for the Joint Commission on Technology and Science.

I also completed research in other areas, including Virginia's upcoming election consolidation, state and local compliance with ADA

guidelines, and federal penalties on AI legislation.

In addition to my research projects, I had the opportunity to travel to member localities for meetings and events. I attended a VML Board of Directors meeting in Amherst, where I came to appreciate how the individual needs of each municipality do not define the league, but rather a desire for unity in representation through VML. Regardless of its size, every member locality has a voice and can be part of setting VML's priorities. I also traveled to Williamsburg and York County for a Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) event where I met with a dedicated group of emergency service providers. As part of this experience, I wrote a white paper for a request for the resumption of funds for the Wireless E-911 fund to continue the capabilities and services of our first responders. In doing this work, I came to appreciate that not every issue can be solved with a blank check. While more funding and support is useful in large cities like Norfolk and Richmond, smaller localities who receive large amounts of money often do not have the personnel or the expertise to implement large projects and rely upon assistance and guidance for fire prevention.

Before I wrapped up my internship, I was able to attend meetings of VML's Legislative Committee and all five of its Policy Committees. Sitting in on that process, watching months of research and consideration condensed into a single point in time, made it clear to me just how much groundwork goes into moving even a single policy idea forward. This is particularly impressive when one considers that much of the work rarely gets seen by the people it ultimately affects.

I came into this internship hoping to learn about policy and lobbying in the abstract, but I left it with a much more concrete understanding of why it's important to advocate from the local perspective. In fact, by the end of the summer I found myself evaluating ideas as a local official would: How will this affect me and my constituents, and where is the money for this coming from? I'd like to thank everyone at VML – especially Michelle Gowdy and policy staff Mitchell Smiley and Josette Bulova – who patiently answered my questions.



**About the author:** Jordan Feldman is a third-year undergraduate Government major at the University of Virginia. He is simultaneously pursuing an Accelerated Master's in Public Policy in the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy. Originally from Dallas, TX, Jordan is interested in the relationship between policy and how it affects communities large and small. He hopes to take his experiences and knowledge from this summer to inform him in future policy-adjacent roles in Virginia, Texas, and around the world.



**TIMMONS GROUP** PROUD SPONSOR OF VML

# EMPOWERING VIRGINIA'S CITIES & COUNTIES SINCE 1953

Read from Our Resiliency Experts

**www.timmons.com**

Emergency Management Applications  
Community & Stakeholder Engagement  
Resilient Infrastructure Planning & Design  
Vulnerability Analyses & Risk Assessments  
Flood Resilience & Watershed Management

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS A BALANCING ACT

Main Street and Data Center Alley.  
Real economic development balances them – not one at the expense of the other.

**CALL IN THE CAVALRY AND STAY FOCUSED ON THE DATA, STRATEGY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THAT DRIVES YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS.**

- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
- ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDIES
- FISCAL IMPACT STUDIES

SCAN TO LEARN MORE

**CAVALRYCRE.COM | CONTACT@CAVALRYCRE.COM**

**Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation**  
**(All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)**

1. Publication Title  
**Virginia Town & City**

2. Publication Number  
**6 6 1 - 0 4 0**

3. Filing Date  
**10/01/2026**

4. Issue Frequency  
**Monthly except Jan.-Feb. / July-Aug.**

5. Number of Issues Published Annually  
**6**

6. Annual Subscription Price  
**\$32**

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer) (Street, city, county, state, and ZIP+4®)  
**Virginia Municipal League / 13 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219-2105  
P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241-0164**

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer)  
**Virginia Municipal League / 13 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219-2105  
P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241-0164**

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank)  
**Publisher (Name and complete mailing address)  
Virginia Municipal League / 13 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219-2105  
P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241-0164**  
**Editor (Name and complete mailing address)  
Rob Bullington / 13 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219-2105  
P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241-0164**  
**Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address)  
Rob Bullington / 13 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219-2105  
P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241-0164**

10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.)  
**Full Name Complete Mailing Address**  
**Virginia Municipal League 13 E. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23219-2105  
P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241-0164**

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box ☒ None  
**Full Name Complete Mailing Address**

12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one)  
The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes:  
☒ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months  
☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

PS Form 3526, July 2014 (Page 1 of 4) (See instructions page 4) ISSN: 7530-01-000-9031 PRIVACY NOTICE: See our privacy policy on www.usps.com

13. Publication Title  
**Virginia Town & City**

14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below  
**October 1, 2026**

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation  
**Primarily membership throughout Virginia**

16. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below  
**October 1, 2026**

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership  
☒ If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. WF be printed in the **October 1, 2026** issue of this publication. ☐ Publication not required.

18. Signature and Title of Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner  
**Rob Bullington** Date **08/17/2026**

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

PS Form 3526, July 2014 (Page 2 of 4)

| 15. Extent and Nature of Circulation                                                                                                                                                        |  | 16. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below                |                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primarily membership throughout Virginia                                                                                                                                                    |  | Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months | No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date |
| a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)                                                                                                                                                   |  | 2,200                                                    | 2,210                                                       |
| b. Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b(1) through 15b(4))                                                                                                                                         |  | 2,200                                                    | 2,160                                                       |
| 15b(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)                       |  | 2,200                                                    | 2,160                                                       |
| 15b(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)                            |  | 0                                                        | 0                                                           |
| 15b(3) Paid Distribution Outside the State Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS® (a.g., First-Class Mail®) |  | 0                                                        | 0                                                           |
| 15b(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (a.g., First-Class Mail®)                                                                                                |  | 0                                                        | 0                                                           |
| c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b(1) through 15b(4))                                                                                                                                   |  | 2,200                                                    | 2,160                                                       |
| d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d(1) through 15d(4))                                                                                                                         |  | 0                                                        | 0                                                           |
| 15d(1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541                                                                                                                  |  | 0                                                        | 0                                                           |
| 15d(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541                                                                                                                       |  | 0                                                        | 0                                                           |
| 15d(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (a.g., First-Class Mail)                                                                                        |  | 30                                                       | 15                                                          |
| 15d(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)                                                                                                         |  | 0                                                        | 0                                                           |
| e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d(1) through 15d(4))                                                                                                                   |  | 30                                                       | 15                                                          |
| f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)                                                                                                                                                  |  | 2,230                                                    | 2,175                                                       |
| g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page 4))                                                                                                                      |  | 0                                                        | 50                                                          |
| h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)                                                                                                                                                                 |  | 2,230                                                    | 2,175                                                       |
| i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)                                                                                                                                              |  | 98.65%                                                   | 99.31%                                                      |

## Newport News Vice Mayor Bethany, Alleghany County Supervisor Howard selected for Virginia Hunt State Policy Fellows program

City of Newport News Vice Mayor **Curtis D. Bethany III** and **Courtney Howard**,



- Bethany -



- Howard -

supervisor for the Alleghany County Board of Supervisors serving the Clifton Forge West District, have been selected to join the second cohort of the Virginia Hunt State Policy Fellows. This bipartisan program of The Hunt Institute brings together local elected officials from across the Commonwealth to engage in productive dialogue on pressing issues in education policy.

"It's back-to-school time here in the Alleghany Highlands – for our children and for me, too!" Howard said in a statement. "I've always had a deep love of learning, and I'm so grateful to have been invited to participate in the second cohort of the Virginia Hunt State Policy Fellows during my first year in elected office."

Through this program, fellows will convene for a series of sessions designed to deepen their understanding of critical education topics, including early childhood education, K-12 systems, postsecondary attainment, and workforce development. They will engage with experts, legislators, and educators, working across party lines to identify strategies that improve student outcomes and strengthen education systems.

"The City of Newport News is committed to the belief that investing in the education of our young people means investing in the future of Newport News," Bethany said. "Projects like the construction of the new 600-student, state-of-the-art Huntington Middle School and initiatives like our Youth Career Program demonstrate that the well-being of our youth is among our top priorities. I am honored to join this cohort to further build on Newport News' commitment to helping students succeed and strengthening opportunities for families."

Throughout the program, fellows will participate in interactive discussions, professional perspective sessions with education leaders and students, and peer-to-peer exchanges that foster collaboration and inno-

vation. The fellowship is designed to provide practical tools and insights that participants can apply in their communities to strengthen education policy and outcomes.

"As we celebrate Governor Jim Hunt's legacy and The Hunt Institute's 25th anniversary, we remain committed to bringing together policymakers to advance education policy from cradle to career," said Dr. Javaid Siddiqi, president and CEO of The Hunt Institute. "Now more than ever, students of all ages need local leaders who understand that strong communities begin with strong education systems and opportunities. I am excited to welcome this second cohort of Virginia Hunt State Policy Fellows and look forward to the lasting impact they will make for communities across the Commonwealth."

### About The Hunt Institute

The Hunt Institute, an affiliate of Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, is a leader in transforming public education. Marshaling expertise from a nationwide partner network since its establishment in 2001, the institute brings together people and resources that help build and nurture visionary leadership and mobilize strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success. For more information, visit [www.hunt-institute.org](http://www.hunt-institute.org).

### York County welcomes Clayton as assistant county administrator/business advocate

York County has appointed **Bo Clayton** as its new assistant county administrator/business advocate.



- Clayton -

In this role, Clayton will lead business relations and major cross-departmental initiatives designed to strengthen service delivery and support economic and community development.

Clayton brings extensive leadership experience from both local government and a distinguished military career. He previously served as deputy city manager for Newport News since 2019, guiding major capital projects and initiatives, downtown revitalization, public safety coordination, and emergency response. Prior to his municipal service, Clayton held several senior positions in the U.S. Army, including garrison commander at Fort Eustis, where he oversaw operations supporting a community of more than 22,000, and senior leadership and command

roles with U.S. Special Operations Command.

County Administrator Mark Bellamy shared his enthusiasm for Clayton's appointment: "Bo is a proven leader with a long record of service, collaboration, and mission-focused results. His expertise in project coordination, strategic planning, and community support makes him an outstanding fit for York County. We are excited to welcome him and look forward to the positive impact he will have across York County."

Clayton earned a Bachelor's in Biology from Appalachian State University, a Master's in Administration from Central Michigan, and is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College. He serves on the ICMA Veterans Advisory Committee and is an ICMA Credentialed Manager.

### Virginia Beach appoints Archer as new Economic Development director

This summer, **Emily Archer** began as the director of Virginia Beach's Department of



- Archer -

Economic Development. Archer, a veteran of the department's leadership team, has served as the acting director for the past six months, providing steady leadership and guiding several initiatives throughout this period.

She brings more than 20 years of experience in both the private and public sectors, with extensive expertise in planning, project management, and community collaboration. During her 11 years with the city, Archer has authored several council-adopted plans, overseen major capital improvement projects, and worked across numerous departments and with community stakeholders on critical initiatives and public private partnerships. Her broad experience and professional training have made her a strong leader within the Economic Development department.

"Emily has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership and strategic insight during her time as acting director, and in her past roles with the city," City Manager Patrick Duhaney said in a press release. "We look forward to the continued progress and innovation she will bring to the department in her new role."

Archer holds a Master's in City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania and is a licensed landscape architect.

## Onaitis named Buena Vista city manager

The Buena Vista City Council has unanimously appointed **Krystal M. Onaitis**, MPA, as city manager following a competitive executive recruitment process. She succeeds Wayne Handley, who was serving as interim city manager.



- Onaitis -

“Wayne Handley stepped forward when the city needed steady leadership, and I am grateful for the commitment, professionalism, and service he has provided as interim city manager,” said Mayor Jesse Lineberry in a press release. “His work helped position Buena Vista for this transition, and the city council is confident that Krystal Onaitis has the experience and leadership needed to keep moving our community forward. We thank Wayne for answering the call to serve and look forward to working with Krystal as she begins this important role.”

Onaitis will be responsible for implementing the vision of city council and overseeing day-to-day operations, which includes supervising all department heads, public safety, finances, economic development, and major projects, along with regional initiatives.

Onaitis has over 15 years of local government and leadership experience. Throughout her career, she has successfully led organizations through periods of growth and change while strengthening operations, fostering partnerships, and delivering responsive, citizen-focused government services that meet both local and regional needs.

Most recently, Onaitis served as deputy county administrator for Goochland County, where she provided executive oversight of Community Development, Utilities, Parks and Recreation, Transportation, and other county operations while leading strategic initiatives and organizational improvements. Prior to joining Goochland County, she served as city manager for the City of Covington from 2019 to 2022, where she directed all city operations, implemented council priorities and regional priorities focused on economic development, managed organizational performance, and worked closely with elected officials to advance the city’s long-term goals.

Earlier in her career, Onaitis served in several leadership roles with the City of Richmond, including positions within the Mayor’s Office, the Department of Public Works, and the Office of the Deputy Chief

Administrative Officer for Operations. In those roles, she has developed extensive expertise in local governance administration, strategic planning, budget management, organizational performance, infrastructure planning, economic development, and inter-governmental collaboration.

A Virginia native, Onaitis earned a Bachelor’s in Political Science and a Master’s in Public Administration with a concentration in Public Policy from Virginia Commonwealth University’s L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs.

## Charlottesville selects McIlwee as director of Utilities, Walker as director of Office of Police Civilian Oversight

The City of Charlottesville has hired **Jason McIlwee**, P.E., as director of Utilities, also appointing James Walker as director of the Office of Police Civilian Oversight.



- McIlwee -

McIlwee succeeds Lauren Hildebrand, who is retiring after 19 years of dedicated service to the city. During her tenure, Hildebrand played a pivotal role in advancing the city’s utility infrastructure, strengthening system reliability, and leading the department through significant capital investments and operational improvements.

McIlwee brings more than 20 years of experience in utility operations, engineering, and executive leadership, including 16 years serving the City of Charlottesville. He has served as the city’s deputy director of Utilities (Administration & Engineering) since 2024, leading strategic planning, departmental operations, capital improvement planning, and administrative functions for one of the city’s largest departments.

“Jason has demonstrated exceptional leadership throughout his career and a deep commitment to serving the Charlottesville community,” said City Manager Sam Sanders in a statement. “His technical expertise and strategic vision make him well suited to lead our Utilities Department as we continue investing in reliable infrastructure and exceptional service for our community members.”

As deputy director, McIlwee oversaw the department’s five-year Capital Improvement Program totaling more than \$39 million and helped manage an annual operating budget exceeding \$70 million. Throughout his career, he has led major infrastructure initiatives involving water, wastewater, stormwa-

ter, and natural gas systems while focusing on operational excellence, environmental stewardship, and long-term planning.

Before returning to Charlottesville, McIlwee served as associate director of Utilities & Waste Treatment for Merck & Co., where he managed 24/7 utility and wastewater operations, led cross-functional teams, and oversaw complex industrial utility systems and labor relations. Prior to that, he held several engineering and management positions within Charlottesville’s Utilities Department, beginning with the city in 2008.

A licensed professional engineer in Virginia, McIlwee holds a Bachelor’s in Environmental Science from Virginia Tech and maintains multiple water, wastewater, and power plant operator licenses. He is an active industry leader, frequently presenting at regional conferences and publishing on utility leadership and system optimization.

The Charlottesville City Council also recently appointed **James Walker** as the permanent director of the Office of Police Civilian Oversight, following a recommendation from the Police Civilian Oversight Board (PCOB) and City Manager Sanders.

Walker has served as acting director since August 2025, overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Office of Police Civilian Oversight and supporting the board’s mission to provide independent, objective civilian oversight of the Charlottesville Police Department (CPD). During his time as acting director, he has strengthened the office’s operations, advanced proposed updates to the city’s police oversight ordinance, and fostered a collaborative working relationship with CPD while positioning the board for expanded community engagement.

PCOB Chair Dr. Jeffrey Fracher said, “James has been instrumental in jumpstarting the work of the PCOB, preparing the proposed ordinance changes, and forging strong cooperation with Chief Michael Kochis and the Police Department. He is extremely competent, proactive, conscientious, and committed to the city and our mission, and he meets or exceeds my standards on every measure.”

Before joining the City of Charlottesville, Walker built his career in public education at Prince Edward County Public Schools, where he held leadership roles focused on organizational operations, data analysis, and strategic planning. That expe-



- Walker -

rience has informed his approach to police civilian oversight, helping him strengthen processes, analyze information objectively, and foster collaboration among city leadership, CPD, and the PCOB.

Walker assumes the permanent role as the PCOB enters a new chapter with all eight board seats filled. The board continues its work to strengthen accountability, transparency, and public trust through civilian oversight, community engagement, policy review, and recommendations to city leadership and CPD.

### Town of Orange promotes McAloon to director of Economic Development



- McAloon -

The Town of Orange has promoted **Pat McAloon** to director of Economic Development, recognizing his exceptional leadership and the significant impact he has made since joining the town as Economic Development

manager in April 2026.

In just over three months, McAloon has become an integral member of the town's leadership team, helping to establish a more strategic and sustainable approach to economic development while advancing initiatives that will strengthen Orange's economy and enhance the quality of life for residents.

"Pat has distinguished himself as an innovative leader who understands that economic development is about more than recruiting businesses – it's about building partnerships, creating opportunities, and investing in the long-term success of our community," said Town Manager Christopher H. Snider. "His passion for Orange, collaborative leadership style, and commitment to finding solutions have made him an invaluable member of our organization. This promotion reflects both his accomplishments and our confidence in his ability to lead the town's economic development well into the future."

As the owner of a local inn, McAloon brings a unique perspective to his role, combining first-hand business experience with a personal investment in the town's continued success. His understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing local businesses has helped shape initiatives that support entrepreneurs, attract investment, and encourage sustainable economic growth.

McAloon is pursuing grant opportunities to support downtown beautification projects,

park improvements, and other community enhancements. He has worked closely with the town's Industrial Development Authority to develop Business Recruitment and Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) incentive programs designed to attract new investment while supporting existing businesses.

McAloon also oversees the town's BluDot platform, actively managing both the Open Rewards program and the town's business registry, creating valuable tools that strengthen engagement between the town and local businesses. In addition, he has taken a proactive approach to working with owners of vacant, underutilized, and blighted properties to identify redevelopment opportunities that encourage investment, revitalize key sites, and create new opportunities for businesses to establish or expand in Orange.

As director of Economic Development, McAloon will continue leading the town's business recruitment, business retention and expansion, redevelopment initiatives, grant development, strategic partnerships, and implementation of the town's long-term economic development strategy.

McAloon holds a Bachelor's in East Asian Studies from the College of William & Mary and a Ph.D. in Chinese Language Pedagogy from The Ohio State University.

### Durham appointed chief of police in South Hill

The Town of South Hill has appointed **Ryan W. Durham** as chief of police for the South Hill Police Department, effective January 2026. With nearly 17 years of dedicated service to the department and the community, Durham brings a wealth of experience, proven leadership, and a strong commitment to professional, community-oriented policing.



- Durham -

Durham began his career with the South Hill Police Department in 2009 after graduating from Longwood University and completing his law enforcement certification through the Central Virginia Criminal Justice Academy. Starting as a patrolman, he quickly established himself as a dependable officer known for his strong work ethic, sound judgment, and dedication to public safety.

During his time in patrol, Durham pursued specialized training in crash investigation and impairment detection, enhancing his technical skills and operational effective-

ness. His performance and investigative aptitude led to his promotion to detective, where he handled complex cases and achieved notable success. He also made department history as the first officer to graduate from the Virginia Forensic Science Academy, completing its 98th session.

Advancing through the ranks, Durham later served as lieutenant, overseeing both the Investigations and Operations divisions. In this leadership role, he was recognized for his strategic approach, commitment to mentoring personnel, and focus on maintaining high professional standards throughout the department.

Durham has consistently demonstrated commitment to leadership development and professional growth. His executive education includes completion of the Professional Executive Leadership School at the University of Richmond (51st session, 2022), the inaugural Command College at Liberty University's Leadership Institute for Tomorrow's Executives (L.I.F.T.E.) in 2025, and the FBI National Academy Session 295, also in 2025.

Throughout his career, Durham has received numerous honors, including the Honorable Service Award, Meritorious Service Award, Officer of the Year, and Supervisor of the Year. These recognitions reflect his dedication to excellence, ethical leadership, and service to the South Hill community.

As chief of police, Durham's leadership philosophy emphasizes integrity, accountability, empathy, and professional development. He is committed to strengthening community relationships while ensuring the department continues to deliver high-quality, modern policing services.

"Chief Durham's experience and vision position him well to lead the department forward," said Town Manager Keli Reekes in a statement. "We are confident in his ability to build upon the department's strong foundation and continue serving the citizens of South Hill with professionalism and integrity."

### Albemarle County Police Chief Reeves announces retirement



- Reeves -

Albemarle County Police Chief **Sean Reeves** has announced his retirement, effective October 1. His decision will conclude a distinguished career with more than 30 years of public service, including 25 years with the Albemarle County Police Department (with four as chief of police). Colonel Reeves

will remain on approved medical leave until that date. Deputy Chief Stewart served in the acting chief role until August 14, when Deputy Chief Jamerson assumed the role.

“Colonel Reeves built his impeccable 30-year career on the commitment of serving others,” shared Albemarle County Board of Supervisors Chair Ned Gallaway. “His leadership as chief of police will have a lasting positive impact on Albemarle County. While we hoped he would be chief for years to come, we wish him the best in the retirement he deserves and has earned. On behalf of the Board of Supervisors, we thank him for his dedicated service to the safety and security of our community.”

Reeves began his career as a police officer with Albemarle County in 2001 and advanced from patrol officer to chief of police by steadily advancing through roles in Investigations, Professional Standards, and Community Support. Before becoming ACPD’s sixth chief of police, Reeves played a pivotal role in several ACPD priority projects, including creating the Cybercrimes unit, developing a community coalition around mental health crisis response, advancing the body-worn camera program, and serving as the lead ACPD personnel in the county’s incident management teams for COVID-19, the At Ready Statue Removal, and the tragic events of August 12, 2017.

“During Sean’s tenure as chief, he has consistently exhibited leadership courage in ways that exemplify the mounting pressures that local government police face every day in our country,” added Albemarle County Executive Jeff Richardson. “Sean has leaned into data analytics to drive organizational performance and make a case for change, while accepting the realization that resources are finite and local government cannot address every need right now. Sean’s leadership courage has included facing these difficult circumstances both internally and externally and always embracing diversity and employee wellness as core principles. He will be deeply missed as a critical part of our organization’s leadership team.”

Reeves has worked closely with the community throughout his service, including liaising with the local Latinx population through the Community ID Card program, bike safety events, Cville Sabroso Festival, and other community events.

During his tenure as chief, Reeves modernized law enforcement practices to meet the needs of the growing community, championed initiatives to attract and retain high-quality police officers, updated departmental

policies and procedures to improve service delivery, and established an employee wellness program to ensure ACPD officers have access to the resources they need to effectively respond to calls for service and sustain long-term careers in law enforcement.

Reeves provided key leadership in launching the Human Services Alternative Response Team (HART), establishing the county’s co-response model to behavioral health crises through collaboration between law enforcement, fire rescue, and social services professionals.

Under his leadership, ACPD also advanced transparency by making departmental policies publicly available online and implemented improvements identified through the state accreditation process, resulting in the department’s successful reaccreditation.

Throughout his career with Albemarle County, Reeves worked with local, regional, state, and federal partners on public safety initiatives, including participation in the U.S. Department of Justice’s Project Safe Neighborhoods program to address violent crime.

### Town of Dumfries appoints Miller as chief financial officer



- Miller -

The Town of Dumfries has appointed **Garland E. Miller Jr.** as chief financial officer, effective August 10. Miller brings nearly three decades of financial leadership and public-sector experience to the position.

Miller has served the town as treasurer since October 2025, overseeing cash management, banking relationships, investments, revenue collections, and financial reporting. He has also managed the town’s DMV Select Office, maintained compliance with Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles requirements, and collaborated with town leadership, department directors, auditors, and residents to strengthen the town’s financial operations.

Before joining Dumfries, Miller served as deputy chief financial officer for Spotsylvania County, where he helped oversee a 28-member Finance Division responsible for accounting, budgeting, debt management, financial reporting, audits, grants management, capital improvement planning, payroll, procurement compliance, and risk management. He worked closely with executive leadership to implement strategic initiatives, improve financial systems, and enhance operational efficiency.

Miller previously served for more than

nine years as director of finance for Winchester Public Schools, where he managed operating, capital, and federal grant budgets and oversaw payroll for more than 825 employees. Earlier in his career, he spent more than 13 years as budget manager for Shenandoah County, coordinating the county’s annual operating and capital budgets, long-range financial planning, debt management, and capital improvement programming. He also served as Shenandoah County’s director of Economic Development.

“Garland’s extensive experience in local government finance, proven leadership, and commitment to fiscal accountability make him exceptionally well suited to serve as the town’s chief financial officer,” said Town Manager Tangelia Innis in a press release. “His expertise and dedication to the responsible stewardship of public resources will help strengthen the town’s financial operations as we advance our strategic priorities and serve our residents.”

As CFO, Miller will provide executive leadership for the town’s financial operations, including budgeting, accounting, treasury management, financial reporting, capital planning, debt management, procurement oversight, internal controls, and long-range fiscal planning. He will work closely with the town council, town manager, department directors, and community partners to maintain strong financial practices and support the town’s continued growth and investment.

Miller holds a Master’s in Business Administration from Averett University and a Bachelor’s in Economics from the College of William & Mary. He also earned a professional certification in Economic Development through the University of Oklahoma’s Economic Development Institute.

### Poquoson City Manager Wheeler to retire



- Wheeler -

Poquoson City Manager **James Randall “Randy” Wheeler** has announced his intention to retire from his position after 17 years of service to the City of Poquoson, effective March 1, 2027.

As conveyed by Poquoson Mayor David Hux, June 1, 2009, was a major milestone in the 51-year history of the City of Poquoson.

“We were blessed that Mr. Wheeler chose to accept our offer to become our seventh city manager,” Hux said in a statement. “Randy – accompanied by his wife, Starla,

who is a professional educator, and their two young sons, who went on to graduate from Poquoson High School – quickly became immersed into the community.”

As Wheeler progressed through his 37-year career in local government administration serving in multiple positions of increasing scope and responsibility (including 22 years as a chief administrative officer), he amassed extensive and varied experience and developed an expansive network of relationships across the Commonwealth. Highlights of his service to Poquoson include successfully navigating the severe economic recession of the late 2000s; implementation of sound and methodical financial practices resulting in a stable unassigned general fund balance and a fiscal stability reserve fund that led to an unprecedented AAA bond rating; the modernization of the Poquoson Middle School; the addition of two city parks; and the construction of a new Public Safety Building.

“In addition to his exceptional expertise specific to his role as city manager, Randy also excels in finance, budget development, and public relations,” Hux said. “He leads by example, from the front. During my 10 years of service on Poquoson City Council, including two years as mayor, Randy and I closely collaborated and have become partners in the leadership of the city as well as personal friends. As a result of his influence and tutelage, I have grown and developed as an elected public servant, which greatly benefits our citizens. As Randy completes his unusually lengthy 17-plus-year tenure as our city manager, the council and citizens of Poquoson hold him in the highest regard and extend our heartfelt gratitude for the immensely favorable effect his contributions have had for the betterment of the city. We wish him happiness and good health in his well-deserved retirement.”

### Leesburg Streets Superintendent Jackson retires; Markel appointed interim town manager

**Orland “OJ” Jackson**, a 26-year Town of Leesburg employee, has retired.

Jackson joined town staff in February 2000 as the superintendent of streets, buildings, and grounds for the town’s Public Works Department. When oversight of building maintenance became its own position in 2006, Jackson became streets



- Jackson -

superintendent, a position he held until his retirement.

As streets superintendent, Jackson supervised a staff of 30 that was responsible for keeping Leesburg’s 269 lane miles clean and maintained. His division oversaw ongoing maintenance, a work order system for town tasks, brush and leaf collection, sign repairs, special projects, and town events.

To Jackson, his greatest responsibility was to deliver superior customer service to town residents, remaining responsive to customer expectations. He prided himself on employee development, always working to train his employees up for the next position and promote from within whenever possible.

In addition to his service to the town, Jackson also proudly served the nation as a 20-year member of the U.S. Army, retiring in December 2003 as a sergeant first class E7. As a reservist during his two decades in the military, Jackson was stationed in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield from 1990-91. He was activated again in 2002 and was stationed for a year in Fort Lewis, WA, for Operation Noble Eagle.

Prior to joining town staff, Jackson spent 17 years in the private sector in the construction industry.

“What started as a job became a career. More importantly, a lot of my co-workers have become great friends and are like a second family,” Jackson said. “Over the years we have worked through every kind of weather imaginable and more emergency callouts than I can count. We all worked long hours, solved problems together, and did whatever it took to keep our streets safe and our community moving. Street maintenance work is not always easy, and it is not always noticed, but it matters. Every repaired road, every clear street, every late-night response, and every special event all made a difference to someone living in this community.”

“It’s been an honor to work with OJ and to see the positive impact he has had on Leesburg,” stated Public Works Director Renee LaFollette. “The depth and breadth of OJ’s experience in construction and maintenance, not to mention the leadership skills gained from his military service, have been well used and put to the test in his years with the town.”

The Leesburg Town Council has also appointed **Keith Markel** as interim town manager, effective October 5. The appointment is effective through June 30, 2027.

Markel will replace retiring Town Manager Kaj Dentler, who will remain in his current position until October 5. Dentler



- Markel -

has served as Leesburg’s town manager since 2014.

“The appointment of Keith as interim town manager will provide organizational stability and serve as an important bridge as we prepare for the election of a new town council and review of the upcoming Fiscal Year 2028 budget development process,” Mayor Kelly Burk shared in a statement. “During his time in Leesburg, Keith has been a reliable and capable leader, and I am confident he will continue to display those qualities in this new role. Leesburg is fortunate to have Keith on staff during this time of transition.”

Markel joined town staff in 2014 as deputy town manager. In this role, he has served as chief of operations, currently overseeing the town’s operational departments including Public Works, Capital Projects, and Utilities, as well as the Leesburg Executive Airport, Emergency Management & Security, and Sustainability.

Over the years, Markel has led the town’s Annual Legislative Team working with the General Assembly and has provided management oversight to several other departments, including Parks & Recreation, Thomas Balch Library, and Community Development. He has been a key member of the town’s Budget Team while coordinating services amongst all departments.

Prior to joining Leesburg, Markel served as the town manager of Lovettsville from 2007 to 2014. He began his career in local government with the City of Harrisonburg as a planner.

A Woodstock native, Markel holds dual Bachelor’s degrees in Public Administration and Political Science from James Madison University, and a Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Tech. He is a Credentialed Manager with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), serves on the Executive Board of the Northern Virginia Emergency Response System (NVERS), and is active in the Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA).

## 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](mailto:vtc@vml.org).

## Falls Church names Hendler-Voss city manager



The Falls Church City Council has selected **Seth Hendler-Voss** as the next city manager.

Hendler-Voss was chosen following a five-month national search and recruitment process, which began in March when previous City Manager Wyatt Shields announced his intention to retire after 23 years of service in the role. City council hired Raftelis to manage the recruitment process, which included input on the job description from focus groups and feedback from city staff and the community. More than 80 candidates applied and ultimately the council, community, and staff representatives gave Hendler-Voss the nod.

“Seth Hendler-Voss brings a remarkable depth of local government experience and a real passion for community to the City of Falls Church,” said Mayor Letty Hardi in a statement. “We conducted a thorough search and had the privilege of considering a strong field of candidates. Seth stood out for his ability to embrace growth while building on a sense of place that makes a city special. His collaborative leadership and proven record of turning ideas into results make him an excellent fit for The Little City. We’re delighted to welcome Seth and his family to Falls Church.”

Hendler-Voss has 20 years of public service in Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. Notable roles include town manager of Canton, NC, director of Parks and Recreation for Prince William County, planning manager and principal landscape architect for the City of Asheville, NC, and principal landscape architect for the City of Atlanta, GA.

In other public and private-sector roles, Hendler-Voss worked on core municipal issues including traffic calming, streetscape revitalization, deferred infrastructure maintenance, utility modernization, climate resiliency and low-impact development, and urban home repair for low-income seniors. He has also organized programs in underserved neighborhoods, advocated for anti-predatory lending legislation, and managed a rural home repair program.

Hendler-Voss received a Bachelor’s in Landscape Architecture from Penn State University and a Master’s in Public Affairs from Western Carolina University. He is also a graduate of the University of Virginia

Weldon Cooper Center’s Senior Executive Institute (SEI).

## Prince George County hires Webb as director of Planning and Zoning



- Webb -

Prince George County has appointed **William “Ligon” Webb II** as director of its Planning and Zoning Department. Webb began serving in the role on August 27.

Webb now leads the county’s planning, zoning, land-use, and development review functions. He will also work with the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, staff, and residents on the county’s community development priorities and the 2045 Comprehensive Plan.

Webb brings more than 20 years of experience in Virginia local government, planning, community development, and public service. Before coming to Prince George County, he served as planning director for Powhatan County and Madison County, town planner for the Town of Luray, and land-use planner for Rockingham County.

“I would like to welcome Mr. Ligon Webb to the Prince George County team,” said Interim County Administrator Kristen Pudlow. “His extensive government knowledge and experience allow him to make an immediate impact on county operations and the many projects taking place within the Planning Department. I know his time here will be well served and valued.”

Throughout his career, Webb has worked with elected officials, residents, businesses, and the development community to advance practical planning solutions. His experience in rural, suburban, and small-town communities across Virginia will support Prince George County’s work to manage growth, guide development, and maintain the community character valued by residents.

Webb’s public-service experience also extends beyond his professional planning career. He previously served on the Page County Economic Development Authority, including three years as chair, and on a Board of Zoning Appeals. After serving as Luray town planner, he was elected to the Luray Town Council, where he completed a four-year term. He currently serves as a Richmond City Council appointee to the Richmond Clean City Commission and on the Forest Hill Neighborhood Association Executive Board.

Webb earned a Master’s in Urban and Regional Planning and a Graduate Certificate in Public Management from Virginia Commonwealth University. He is a member of the American Planning Association.

## Virginia Women Leading Government selects Steele as next executive director of Virginia Women’s Municipal Leadership Institute



- Steele -

Virginia Women Leading Government (VWLG) has chosen **Carol Steele** of Gloucester to serve as executive director of the Virginia Women’s Municipal Leadership Institute (VWMLI). Steele most recently served as county administrator for Gloucester County, a position she held for five years, including her service as acting county administrator.

“With more than 40 years of local government experience, leadership roles in several professional organizations, and experience as an adjunct instructor at Old Dominion University, Carol is an excellent choice to lead and manage the institute,” said Bonnie Svrcek, current executive director. “Her passion for leadership development and commitment to mentoring future local government leaders make her exceptionally well suited for this role.”

Steele will work alongside Svrcek during the remainder of the 2026 program before assuming responsibility of leading the institute in January 2027.

Each year, VWMLI selects approximately 25 participants from communities across Virginia, representing both rural and urban localities. The institute provides connections, education, practical tools, and networking opportunities for women aspiring to become executive leaders in local government. Less than 20 percent of town, city, and county managers in Virginia are women.

Local government practitioners present workshops covering both technical competencies – such as budgeting, strategic planning, and organizational leadership – and essential leadership skills, including public speaking, communication, and navigating the unique opportunities and challenges of executive leadership. There is balance between learning quantitative and qualitative skills.

“I am delighted and honored to serve this highly regarded institute and to work with the talented, enthusiastic women who aspire to advance into executive leadership

positions in local government,” Steele said. “Helping participants develop their leadership skills while building lasting professional relationships across Virginia is an opportunity I greatly value.”

VWMLI is a collaborative project of Virginia Women Leading Government, a nonprofit professional organization, and the Virginia Tech Roanoke Center. Corporate sponsors also provide valuable support that helps make participation more affordable for each participant and their locality.

Applications for the 2027 program can be submitted online at [vwlg.org/apply](http://vwlg.org/apply).

For additional information, please contact Bonnie Svrcek at [bsvrcek@gmail.com](mailto:bsvrcek@gmail.com).

### Virginia Beach's Dyer appointed to Local Government Advisory Committee of the EPA



- Dyer -

City of Virginia Beach Mayor **Bob Dyer** has been selected to serve on the Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In August, the EPA announced the revitalization of the LGAC, an advisory group comprised of state and local officials who will help to advance the agency's core mission of protecting human health and the environment.

“We are proud to work with our state and local governments that are most closely connected to their communities' environmental issues,” said EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin. “Revitalizing the Local Government Advisory Committee ensures we are operating in lockstep to protect human health and the environment while powering the Great American Comeback.”

The LGAC will begin its new charter with a discussion of challenges local governments face when navigating the siting and development of AI infrastructure and data centers in a sustainable manner. This work will be discussed at a virtual public meeting this September, which will be published soon in the Federal Register.

The 22-member committee represents a broad range of communities across the country, including 13 new appointments and nine reappointments or continuing members. The committee will be led by Ohio's Clermont County Commissioner David Painter.

“The synergies between environmental regulations and ensuring responsible performance in future projects are essential to moving America forward while protecting our environment for future generations,” said LGAC Chair David Painter. “This is our number one goal. The combined expertise of these members, serving in an advisory role, will result in practical advice that the Federal EPA can count on to guide its future.”

Separately, the EPA is reviewing nominations for the Small Communities Advisory Subcommittee (SCAC) of the LGAC. The National League of Cities submitted nominations for this subcommittee to the EPA in January 2026, and the EPA hopes to make an announcement on those appointments in September.

### About the LGAC

Chartered in 1993 under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, the LGAC is comprised of elected and appointed officials at local, state, tribal, and territorial governments within the U.S.. The committee provides independent policy advice to the EPA administrator on a broad range of issues affecting local governments.

### Former Luray Police Chief Cook takes role as assistant town manager



- Cook -

The Town of Luray announced in July that **Carl S. “Bow” Cook**, its former police chief, will now serve as part-time assistant town manager. Cook retired from three decades in law enforcement on July 1.

“After many years of dedicated service to the town, Mr. Cook is transitioning into an administrative role, where he will continue serving the community in a new capacity,” the town shared in a statement. “His extensive knowledge of the town, strong communication skills, and commitment to public service make him an excellent addition to the administration team.”

Cook succeeds Michael Coffelt, who left the town in February for a role as deputy director of Public Works with Warren County. Lieutenant Lonnie Foster is now serving as the Luray Police Department's interim chief of police.

Cook started his career as a patrol officer and previously worked as a captain with the Page County Sheriff's Office and as a ser-

geant with the Stanley Police Department. He attended the Virginia Forensic Science Academy.

### West Point's Bowen completes FBI-LEEDA Leadership Program

The West Point Police Department recently announced that Sergeant **Kate Bowen** successfully completed the FBI-Law



- Bowen -

Enforcement Executive Development Association (FBI-LEEDA) Supervisor Leadership Institute. FBI-LEEDA is a nationally respected professional development program designed to prepare law enforcement leaders for the evolving challenges of modern policing.

FBI-LEEDA is dedicated to advancing law enforcement leadership through premier training, education, and networking. Its programs focus on strengthening leadership skills, enhancing organizational effectiveness, building community trust, and equipping officers with innovative strategies to meet the complex demands of public safety. Participants gain valuable insight into leadership, decision-making, strategic planning, communication, officer wellness, and the future of policing.

Sergeant Bowen's completion of this program comes at an exciting time in her career, following her recent promotion to the rank of Sergeant. Her commitment to continued professional development reflects the qualities that have made her a respected leader within the department and demonstrates her dedication to serving the citizens of West Point with excellence and integrity.

“The West Point Police Department is committed to investing in the professional growth of our officers,” said Police Chief Tim Sawyer. “Sergeant Bowen has consistently demonstrated outstanding leadership, professionalism, and a genuine commitment to our community. Completing the FBI-LEEDA Supervisor Leadership Institute is another achievement that will strengthen her ability to lead, mentor, and support the officers under her supervision. We are proud of her accomplishment.”

## Buena Vista receives Certified Crime Prevention Community designation

THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA has been recognized as a Certified Crime Prevention Community by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, becoming one of fewer than 20 communities in Virginia to receive the designation and the first in the Rockbridge area. The designation recognizes communities that demonstrate a comprehensive, collaborative approach to crime prevention through partnerships between law enforcement, local organizations, schools, businesses, and residents.

The Buena Vista Police Department began pursuing the certification in May 2025, dedicating more than a year to documenting existing initiatives, strengthening community partnerships, and expanding local crime prevention efforts before earning the designation. For the certification, Buena Vista documented 12 mandatory core elements, including community policing initiatives, neighborhood watch programs, school safety audits, and other established crime prevention efforts. These were supplemented by seven approved optional elements designed to address the unique needs of the Buena Vista community.

The certification process was led by Community Resource Officer Corporal Josh Guttman, who serves as Buena Vista's crime prevention specialist. To prepare for this role, Guttman completed more than 120 hours of specialized training, becoming the area's certified crime prevention specialist through the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Throughout the certification process, Guttman organized and documented the many crime prevention initiatives already taking place throughout Buena Vista while also expanding opportunities for community engagement. Existing efforts, including police-led presentations on topics such as scam awareness and



Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE), were incorporated into the application. He also helped establish new partnerships and programs, including working alongside law enforcement agencies in Lexington and Rockbridge County to create a regional chapter of TRIAD, strengthening collaboration with community organizations across the region.

At the time of the designation, Guttman noted, "This certification isn't just an award for the police department. It's a recognition of the entire Buena Vista community. It reflects the partnerships we've built with our schools, businesses, organizations, and residents, and everyone's commitment to making Buena Vista a safer place to live, work, and visit."

The designation remains in effect for three years, during which time the city will continue building on its crime prevention efforts to maintain the certification.

## Town of Keysville takes part in BOOMS community development pilot project

IN AUGUST, THE TOWN of Keysville participated in the Business Opportunities on Main Street (BOOMS) program.

The BOOMS pilot project is a regional community development initiative led by the Commonwealth Regional Council alongside partners Virginia Housing, Virginia DHCD, Virginia Main Street, and the Tobacco Regional Revitalization Commission. The program helps rural towns inventory historic downtown properties and build searchable databases for revitalization and grants. Place + Main Advisors provided statistical information on demographics and missed business opportunities based on the statistical information gathered.

The citizens of Keysville showed up in full force, with almost 50 participants – the most for this program in Virginia this year! Citizens walked the main business corridor with Place + Main and shared ideas on what they would like to see occupy vacant buildings. The advisors gathered over 50 ideas for each building and participants enjoyed refreshments provided by The Lemonade Shark after the walk concluded.



## Danville introduces Small Business Network

THE DANVILLE OFFICE of Economic Development & Tourism (DOEDT) hosted a small business breakfast on July 25, bringing together local entrepreneurs, business owners, and community members to officially announce the launch of the City of Danville's new Small Business Network.

The event served as an opportunity to engage directly with the small business community, gather feedback from consumers, and discuss ways to strengthen Danville's entrepreneurial ecosystem. More than 100 attendees participated, sharing ideas and insights that will help shape future small business initiatives. DOEDT summer interns Temilade Agboola, Cori Brown, Ellie Harvey, and Genesis Bond Hollingsworth led attendees through a series of interactive engagement boards, collecting input that will help shape the

future direction of the Small Business Network and its programs.

"Volunteering at the public input event was a wonderful reminder of how much this community rallies around local business owners," said Lauren Reynolds, Sage and Solstice Women's Wellness Spa owner and Small Business Network member. "It was inspiring to hear directly from neighbors about what they want to see open next and how we can keep Danville thriving."

The Small Business Network was created to better support and represent Danville's small business community. The network will help inform the development of future programs and resources to local small business ecosystem partners, create streamline processes for access to information and education for entrepreneurs of at all stages, and provide valuable feedback that can guide city policies affecting small businesses.

Samantha Bagbey, DOEDT project manager, remarked on the significance of the Small Business Network: "Danville has an incredible ecosystem for small businesses and entrepreneurs, but that does not always translate to the small business community. Our goal with the Small Business Network is to ensure small businesses have a true seat at the table, create a 'one-stop shop' to access all the available small business resources, and foster a safe, collaborative community for entrepreneurs throughout their journey."



## Big Stone Gap unveils historical marker for high school

A SPECIAL PIECE of Big Stone Gap history now has a permanent place of recognition in the heart of the town.

On August 8, community members, former students, local leaders, and town officials gathered in front of Big Stone Gap Town Hall to dedicate a new historical marker honoring James A. Bland High School, which once stood on the site where Town Hall is located today.

James A. Bland High School holds an important place in the story of Big Stone Gap. The educators who taught there, the students who walked its halls, and the generations of families connected to the school helped shape the community in lasting ways. Many former students went on to build successful careers, serve their communities, and make an impact well beyond Southwest Virginia.



MIKE STILL

## James City County achieves Virginia's first drone AED delivery in test flights

JAMES CITY COUNTY has completed its first successful drone deliveries of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs). The milestone is part of a research collaboration funded by the American Heart Association (AHA), with Duke University and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) serving as the study's lead institutions. The project aims to evaluate whether drones can improve cardiac arrest outcomes in rural communities.

When a cardiac arrest is reported, a drone carrying an AED may be dispatched alongside first responders to determine whether it can deliver lifesaving equipment more quickly and increase the likelihood that bystanders begin treatment before emergency personnel arrive. The American Heart Association emphasizes that early CPR and rapid defibrillation are critical links in the Chain of Survival. Research shows that every minute defibrillation is delayed decreases survival by approximately 7–10%.

Early test flights showed promising results. In one example, an AED delivered by James City County's Air10 drone reached a residence in two minutes and 30 seconds. The Fire Department's average response time to the same area is eight minutes and six seconds, meaning the AED arrived five minutes and 36 seconds faster than traditional responders. Findings like these highlight the potentially significant impact of faster bystander intervention facilitated by drone delivery.

"In cardiac arrest, minutes matter," said Fire Chief Ryan Ashe. "If we can get an AED to a bystander faster, that's a win. These trials are helping us understand how drones can support our firefighters and medics in real emergencies."

"Drones aren't replacing first responders – they're extending our reach," added Dr. Monique Starks of Duke University. "Getting an AED to someone even a few minutes sooner can make a real difference."

James City County is the first locality in Virginia – and only the second in the United States, after Forsyth County, NC – to

conduct real-world AED drone delivery trials as part of the RESTORE-CARE clinical study.

The AED drone delivery effort entered a pilot phase beginning August 1, following three testing phases. During the pilot phase, drone dispatches were limited to a five-mile radius surrounding James City County Fire Station 1 in Toano and occurred during limited hours as the county evaluated performance, reliability, and real-world response times. As testing progresses, the team will explore longer distances, additional drones, and future expansion based on results.

### How It Works

When dispatchers at the Peninsula Regional Emergency Communications Center receive a report of suspected cardiac arrest during pilot phase testing, they may send both first responders and an AED-equipped drone. The drone lowers the AED by tether, and dispatchers provide clear, audible instructions to support bystanders with no prior training.

### Background and Next Steps

These trials are possible through the James City County Police Department's Drone as First Responder (DFR) program, launched in April 2025 after receiving specialized FAA waivers. The DFR program enhances emergency response by providing real-time situational awareness and does not involve proactive surveillance.

The county will share updates as the study advances and will work with community partners to expand AED awareness and public education.

To learn more about the RESTORE-CARE study, visit [restorecarestudy.org](https://restorecarestudy.org).



## City of Norfolk comprehensive plan named APA Virginia's 2026 Plan of the Year

NFK2050, the City of Norfolk's comprehensive plan adopted by city council in December 2025, has been named the 2026 Virginia Plan of the Year for communities with populations over 100,000 by the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA VA).

This award recognizes the exceptional vision, community collaboration, and implementation-focused approach that define NFK2050, a 25-year roadmap designed to guide Norfolk's growth, resilience, and quality of life.

Norfolk was recognized for its strong commitment to accountability and implementation, including a public dashboard, clear metrics, and tools that integrate the plan directly into city decision-making. It was also recognized for its level of public engagement,

with more than 150 in-person events and over 2,100 community touchpoints gathered through workshops, open houses, youth sessions, digital tools, and grassroots outreach. The plan emphasizes intentional engagement with historically underrepresented communities to ensure that all residents have meaningful opportunities to shape Norfolk's future.

The award was formally presented at the APA Virginia Annual Conference in Danville.

To learn more about NFK2050, visit [norfolk.gov/NFK2050](https://norfolk.gov/NFK2050).



## Prince George County receives \$800,000 for water infrastructure projects

ON JULY 29, Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan presented \$800,000 to Prince George County's Utilities Department to support critical wastewater and sewer infrastructure improvements. Delegate Lindsey Dougherty also attended the event.

The funding was secured through the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations process. Prince George County was one of 14 projects

across Virginia selected to receive Community Project Funding for water management initiatives.

The funds will support the Beechwood Manor Asbestos Pipe Replacement project, which will modernize the county's community water system by replacing four miles of asbestos cement waterlines. The current pipes were originally installed in the mid-1970s. The project will help reduce the risk of service interruptions, water main breaks, and declining water quality while strengthening the long-term resilience of the county's owned and operated water system.

"These pipes are over 50 years old," said McClellan. "They're really at the end of their life and full of asbestos. We want to make sure that these pipes are replaced before failure so that residents can be sure they're getting access to clean and safe water."

"The Utilities Department is grateful for Congresswoman McClellan's support in securing funding for this critical project," added Rachael Lumpkin, director of the Utilities Department. "This investment will help us to achieve the first step necessary to replace aging infrastructure, improve system resilience, and better serve our residents for years to come."

The project will benefit approximately 600 Prince George County residents.



## City of Fredericksburg adds first electric vehicle to fleet

THE CITY OF FREDERICKSBURG has taken another step toward reducing emissions and advancing sustainability efforts with the addition of its first electric vehicle to the city fleet.

The Public Works Department recently added an electric truck to support the city arborist's daily operations of the Urban Forestry Program, marking the beginning of a broader effort to transition city vehicles and equipment away from traditional gas-powered options when practical. The move follows the department's successful transition of tree maintenance equipment from gas-powered tools to electric alternatives. The next step is evaluating hybrid/electric options for vehicles to support the team in their work throughout the city.

Through Virginia Clean Cities, Fredericksburg received a reimbursable \$10,000 grant that has been applied toward the

purchase of the vehicle. The grant's funds are supported through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program, a state-funded initiative available in select areas of Virginia including the Fredericksburg region.

"Transitioning our equipment and vehicles is an important part of the city's continued commitment to sustainability," said Director of Public Works Will Morris. "This electric truck allows us to reduce emissions while still providing the reliable service that our residents expect from our Urban Forestry team."

The addition of an electric truck reduces vehicle emissions. On average, a similar gas vehicle puts out 6.7 to 8.2 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year. This move is part of the city's ongoing efforts to help the environment.

The city established a vehicle replacement preference policy that encourages consideration of electric and alternative fuel vehicles for future fleet purchases, when feasible and appropriate for operational needs. This assists in moving toward a more sustainable fleet, which supports the city council's priority of working toward a carbon-neutral future. As technology and operational needs allow, replacing gas-powered vehicles with electric alternatives is one strategy the city is exploring to help reduce its environmental impact.



## Washington Manassas Airport celebrates ribbon-cutting for new ARFF Station 41

WASHINGTON MANASSAS AIRPORT, located in the City of Manassas, recently celebrated the ribbon-cutting of its new Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) Station 41, marking another major milestone in the airport's growth and transition to commercial air service. The new two-story, 4,596-square-foot facility was designed to enhance the airport's emergency response capabilities while providing firefighters with the resources needed to effectively protect the airport, its tenants, and the traveling public.

Station 41 features a day room, dining room, full kitchen, training room, office space, and three apparatus bays designed to accommodate the airport's three ARFF vehicles. The facility is currently staffed daily from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., supporting the airport's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of

aviation safety and emergency preparedness.

"This facility represents a significant investment in the future of Washington Manassas Airport," said Airport Director Juan Rivera. "As we continue preparing for commercial passenger service, ensuring our emergency responders have the facilities and equipment they need is essential. Station 41 strengthens our ability to respond quickly and effectively."

The station was designed by architect John Heltzel and constructed by Landivar and Associates. The \$1.15 million project was funded primarily by the airport, with AVPorts contributing \$600,000 toward the construction.

The completion of the station reflects the airport's ongoing investment in infrastructure that supports safety, operational excellence, and future growth. As the airport continues its transition toward commercial air service, projects like this ensure the airport is well positioned to meet the needs of passengers, airlines, tenants, and the surrounding community.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony brought together the Manassas City Council, Airport Commission, airport staff, project partners, ARFF personnel, and airport tenants to celebrate this important achievement and recognize the collaborative effort that made the project possible.

Mayor Michelle Davis-Younger and Washington Manassas Airport Chairman Rod Hall joined Rivera in thanking those who helped make the new hangar a reality and progress toward attracting new visitors and businesses to the city. Hall also encouraged attendees to stay tuned for more exciting news to come.

For more information about Washington Manassas Airport and its ongoing development initiatives, visit [flyhef.com](http://flyhef.com).



## Chesapeake honored with American Planning Association awards

THE CITY OF CHESAPEAKE Planning Department has received two statewide honors from the American Planning Association (APA).

The 2026 Jamestown Locality of the Year award recognizes Chesapeake's adoption of eight major planning documents over the last two years, including the Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan, the Industrial Waterfront Study, and the Trails and Connectivity Plan, among others. Chesapeake was recognized for its planning approach which includes a strong emphasis on public engagement, with tens of thousands of residents connecting through more than 100 community meetings throughout the process.

Additionally, Chesapeake Planning Administrator Kevin Finn has earned the APA 2026 Moeser Award for Distinguished New Professional. This honor recognizes early-career contributions, leadership, and a demonstrated commitment to planning best practices. Finn embodies the city's CARES philosophy and

is dedicated to helping the people of Chesapeake find their voice through the municipal planning process.

View the existing adopted plans by visiting [CityOfChesapeake.net/Planning](http://CityOfChesapeake.net/Planning).





## Blacksburg Public Arts Committee debuts interactive public art piece

A NEW TEMPLATE for creativity has been installed near the Blacksburg Armory: the Community Chalkboard Cube.

This interactive public art piece was established by the Blacksburg Public Arts Committee and facilitates a shared space for community conversation, collaboration, and creativity. The cube's prompt, "My Dream Is ..." invites the public to share their vision, wishes, and hopes with one another through written word, drawings, or collaborative artwork. Residents and visitors alike are encouraged to stop by and add art to the cube.

The Public Arts Committee promotes the creation of public art throughout Blacksburg by supporting projects that enhance public spaces, celebrate creativity, and strengthen the sense of community for residents and visitors.

## New LED lights coming to Wakefield

THE TOWN OF WAKEFIELD has announced the start of a streetlight improvement project that will replace existing high-pressure sodium (HPS) streetlights with new, energy-efficient LED fixtures throughout several areas of the community.

This project is part of the town's ongoing commitment to reducing energy consumption, lowering operating and maintenance costs, and improving the quality of street lighting for residents and visitors. LED streetlights consume significantly less electricity than traditional HPS fixtures while providing a longer service life, reducing maintenance needs and supporting the town's sustainability goals.

The new LED lighting will also improve visibility by providing brighter, more uniform illumination along roadways. These

enhancements are expected to improve safety and visibility for pedestrians and motorists traveling throughout the community.

Work will be completed in phases and efforts will be made to minimize disruptions to traffic and nearby properties while the upgrades are underway. These improvements represent an investment in a brighter, safer, more energy-efficient and sustainable community while enhancing nighttime visibility for everyone who uses Wakefield's roadways.



## Town of Clifton partners with Fairfax Tree Rescuers PRISM



THE TOWN OF CLIFTON has partnered with Fairfax Tree Rescuers PRISM to help fight invasive plant species in the area.

PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasives Species Management) refers to the joint work of government agencies, nonprofits, for-profits, and individuals all working together to control an invasive threat. In this case, the threat is eventual collapse of the tree canopy in the remaining natural areas of Fairfax, on public and private land, as mature trees are brought down and not replaced. Residential and commercial areas face the same risk when landowners don't recognize that English ivy and other invasive plants are damaging their property and putting their trees at risk for premature death.

The purpose of Fairfax Tree Rescuers PRISM is to help the community understand that risk and find strategies to mitigate it. This will require a concerted and long-term effort on the part of government agencies and volunteers working at every level, from countywide down to individual neighborhoods.

The program will encourage corporations, HOAs, and neighborhoods to adopt adjacent parks and VDOT rights-of-way to provide both volunteer and paid labor for invasives control. PRISM will conduct training both for volunteers and professional landscapers. Volunteers will also be conducting surveys of all the parks and monitoring progress. A small grant will be distributed as mini-grants to community associations and faith communities to help get started.

## A new gateway to the “Center of the Universe”

A NEW LANDMARK officially arrived in the Town of Ashland this summer as artist Harry McDaniel’s gateway sculpture was installed at the entrance to downtown along England Street.

Commissioned by the town’s Public Art Commission and funded in part through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the sculpture serves as both a welcoming gateway and a placemaking feature that reflects Ashland’s creativity, identity, and nickname as the “Center of the Universe.” Once complete, the sculpture will also be illuminated at night, creating a striking entrance to downtown after dark.

Public art is about more than aesthetics. It creates memorable places, strengthens community identity, encourages visitors to stop and explore, and helps

support the local businesses that make the downtown vibrant. Investments like this contribute to Ashland’s economic vitality while creating spaces residents can take pride in.



## Round Hill dedicates new fire and rescue station

IN JULY, OFFICIALS from the Loudoun County Combined Fire and Rescue System, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, and county administration joined first responders, local leaders, and community members for the official dedication ceremony of the new Round Hill Fire and Rescue Station #4.

This 20,500-square-foot facility, located at 41 W. Loudoun Street, replaces the previous station and includes a 2,500-square-foot community room, four apparatus bays, gear storage and decontamination rooms, bunk rooms for 14 fire and rescue personnel, an exercise room, and office space for both the Round Hill Volunteer and Loudoun County Fire and Rescue operations. This station houses Engine 604, Tanker 604, Brush 604, Medic 604, and Ambulance 604, staffed with career and volunteer personnel that remain ready to respond to emergency incidents 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Retired System Chief Keith Brower emceed the event, with statements from Catoctin District Supervisor Caleb Kershner, Department of Transportation and Capital Infrastructure



Deputy Director Scott Worrest, Systemwide Fire Chief James Williams, Round Hill Volunteer Fire Rescue President Rich Wolfe, and Round Hill Vice Mayor Isaac Pacheco. Each noted the hard work of all the county agencies and community groups involved in the planning, construction, and opening of the new station.

In lieu of a ribbon-cutting, fire and rescue personnel and local leadership participated in a traditional “uncoupling ceremony” replacing the standard ribbon and scissors with two sections of fire hose.

## Arlington among top digital counties in 2026

ARLINGTON COUNTY IS once again ranked among the top digital counties in the country.

The Center for Digital Government (CDG), in partnership with the National Association of Counties (NACo), has ranked Arlington No. 2 in their 2026 awards in the 150,000-249,999 population category.

This continues Arlington's recognition for its efforts in technology. This year's award marks the 15th time Arlington has been designated within the top three counties, earning the No. 1 ranking seven of those years.

"Arlington County is honored to be recognized in the 2026 Digital Counties Survey for our work in advancing how technology supports services and operations," said Holly Hartell, director and chief information officer for the Department of Technology Services. "It reflects the work we do every day to implement our mission, namely embracing technologies to achieve better business outcomes while incorporating innovation, security, and sustainability."

The annual award evaluates counties across their strengths in strategic planning, cybersecurity, digital services, organizational

technology leadership, data management, and innovation. It also highlights practices that help counties strengthen performance and navigate fiscal and operational demands.

Arlington's digital strategy defines a framework to provide individuals with access to the information they need, when they need it, and the way they want it. The county's technology investments focus on satisfying constituent needs, developing a "digital mindset" with a focus on the future, and utilizing technology to make a difference in people's everyday lives.

### About the Digital Counties Survey Award

The Digital Counties Survey Award provides an annual measure of performance and innovation in technology use by taking an in-depth look at the programs and plans of counties across the nation.

This year's award recipients reflect a continued shift toward stronger technology governance, improved constituent experience, data-informed decision-making, workforce readiness, and the responsible adoption of emerging tools.



## Callen's Cause painted crosswalk installed in Leesburg

A BLUE AND GREEN painted crosswalk in honor of the nonprofit Callen's Cause is the newest painted crosswalk in the Town of Leesburg. The crosswalk is located at the intersection of South King Street and the W&OD Trail, next to Georgetown Park.

Callen's Cause is a nonprofit headquartered in the Leesburg area that was founded by Sabrina and Robert Sullivan after they lost their first child, Callen, to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in April 2017. Blue and green are the colors of the organization, which raises money in support of research and technology to identify causes of SIDS with the goal of ultimately preventing it.

The town council originally approved the long-term installation of the Callen's Cause crosswalk earlier this year. All proposals for painted crosswalk installations go before the town council for approval. Any approved painted crosswalk is also subject to a license agreement with the town that requires the sponsor to be responsible for all funding and physical work for installation and maintenance of the crosswalk. More information on the Townwide Painted Crosswalk Policy can be found at [leesburgva.gov/awareness-displays](https://leesburgva.gov/awareness-displays).



## COMMUNITY BUSINESS MEMBERS

### Join VML

Set your organization apart in the local government marketplace of product, services, and ideas by joining the VML Community Business Membership (CBM) program. For more information contact Rob Bullington at [rbullington@vml.org](mailto:rbullington@vml.org) or check under the "Corporate Engagement" tab at [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org).



### DIAMOND MEMBER



[www.virginiahousing.com](http://www.virginiahousing.com)

### PLATINUM MEMBERS



**Dominion Energy<sup>®</sup>**

[www.dominionenergy.com/virginia](http://www.dominionenergy.com/virginia)



[www.obvio.ai](http://www.obvio.ai)



**VIRGINIA  
AMERICAN WATER**

[www.amwater.com/vaaw](http://www.amwater.com/vaaw)



[www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com)



[www.apus.edu](http://www.apus.edu)



[www.arrive.com](http://www.arrive.com)



[www.bgllc.net](http://www.bgllc.net)



[www.bluelinesolutions.org](http://www.bluelinesolutions.org)



[www.boltonusa.com](http://www.boltonusa.com)



[www.capresults.net](http://www.capresults.net)



[www.edmundsgovtech.com](http://www.edmundsgovtech.com)



[www.goldentranscription.com/](http://www.goldentranscription.com/)



[www.watersolutions.homeserve.com](http://www.watersolutions.homeserve.com)



[www.matternandcraig.com](http://www.matternandcraig.com)



[www.moseleyarchitects.com](http://www.moseleyarchitects.com)



[www.pmaarchitecture.com](http://www.pmaarchitecture.com)



[www.radarsign.com](http://www.radarsign.com)



[www.sparksatplay.com](http://www.sparksatplay.com)



[www.timmons.com](http://www.timmons.com)



[www.vacorp.org](http://www.vacorp.org)



[www.vig.coopercenter.org](http://www.vig.coopercenter.org)



[www.vt.edu](http://www.vt.edu)

SILVER MEMBERS

## COMMUNITY BUSINESS MEMBERS

### BRONZE MEMBERS



[www.allianceforthebay.org](http://www.allianceforthebay.org)



[www.cavalrycre.com](http://www.cavalrycre.com)



[www.corporate.comcast.com/company](http://www.corporate.comcast.com/company)



[www.ddallc.com](http://www.ddallc.com)



[www.glaveandholmes.com](http://www.glaveandholmes.com)



Expect More. Experience Better.

[www.kimley-horn.com](http://www.kimley-horn.com)



[www.mwcllc.com](http://www.mwcllc.com)



[www.reallycleanstreets.com](http://www.reallycleanstreets.com)



[www.siteco.us](http://www.siteco.us)



[www.spectrumpc.com](http://www.spectrumpc.com)



[www.t-l.com](http://www.t-l.com)



CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

[www.virginiareources.gov](http://www.virginiareources.gov)



## About the VML Community Business Membership (CBM) Program

As a CBM organization you hold a sustaining membership in VML and keep your firm or organization connected with the issues that are important to municipalities around you. Being a CBM places your organization at the forefront in the minds of VML members, ensuring you the visibility, access, and awareness that will help move your organization forward.

Scan QR code to view CBM program benefits.



VisitRichmondVA.com

# YOUR HOST DESTINATION FOR THE 2027 VML ANNUAL CONFERENCE



## FOLLOW US



/VisitRichmondVA



@VisitRichmondVA



@VisitRichmond

Scan to plan  
your trip!





# Let's Solve This.

Virginia Housing invests in the power of home by financing quality, affordable housing. Working with local governments, nonprofits, developers and REALTORS®, we're revitalizing neighborhoods and solving critical housing needs.

We're passionate about our public-private partnerships, so let's get started.

Learn more at:

[VirginiaHousing.com](http://VirginiaHousing.com)

