

Statewide Winner!

Jelena Ly

Edward W. Wyatt Middle School – City of Emporia

Teacher: Sutania McBean



If I were the mayor of Emporia, I would focus on combating food insecurity in our community. According to Feeding America statistics, Greensville County has a food insecurity rate that is approximately 14 percent, which is higher than the Virginia average. With our grocery options becoming limited in recent years, many residents must travel significant distances to access affordable, nutritious food.

The problem is particularly severe for elderly residents and those without reliable transportation. The economic challenges faced by Emporia – which has a poverty rate of around 13 percent – exacerbate this issue, as many families must choose between paying bills and purchasing healthy food.

I spoke with my friend, a former resident of Greensville County, about potential solutions. “We need more than just occasional food drives,” she said. “Emporia’s residents need sustainable access to fresh food year-round, especially for families with children and seniors on fixed incomes.” She also observed that “the community garden that some residents have proposed would be helpful, but it’s not enough to address the scale of the problem.”

After considering my friend’s input and researching successful models in similar-sized rural communities, I would implement a three-part solution. First, I would establish a permanent, year-round farmers’ market in downtown Emporia, providing a reliable venue for local farmers to sell produce directly to residents at affordable prices. Second, I would develop a mobile market program – essentially a grocery store on wheels – to visit underserved neighborhoods on a regular schedule. Finally, I would partner with the Virginia Cooperative Extension to expand community garden spaces and provide education on growing and preparing nutritious foods.

My approach addresses both immediate access needs and builds long-term food resilience in our community. While emergency food assistance through food banks remains important, these sustainable solutions would help reduce dependence on emergency services and empower our residents to maintain healthier diets. As mayor of Emporia, I would measure the success of the project by tracking improvements in food access, community health indicators, and reduced rates of food insecurity across all neighborhoods in our city.

Region 1 Winner!

John Sawyer

Gate City Christian School – Town of Gate City

Teacher: Pamela Vanover



Gate City has a population of over 2,000 people, but I notice around town that there is not all that much to do in terms of fun places. There aren't many places (like apartment complexes) where people who can't afford a home can live. Also, there aren't many clothing stores, malls, or buildings with multiple businesses. The ideas I will present can give this town a chance to be a place where you decide to lower your foot on the brakes and check out what there is to offer, rather than lowering your foot on the gas to get to the nearest shortcut to your humble abode.

Whenever my parents drive me through Gate City, I notice many abandoned buildings where there is a chance for new businesses to dwell that could even skyrocket the city's popularity. My idea is to let more people recognize this town as a wonderful place.

A local member of the Gate City community agrees with my idea of getting people to this town. But some of you might ask "how will we do that?" We could allow more spaces for rental homes, scatter a wide variety of restaurants, and let businesses that regular people would love to see here that could attract people from near or even far away. Another idea is to have many attractions like parks for the children (plus for kids who are in any way disabled), and even a public swimming pool! If we give all kinds of people places to feel welcomed with open arms maybe they will stick around and live here. This place can change within a few years from a population of just over 2,000 into a place with eight or even ten thousand people.

Finally, as a Christian, I would love to see more places where churches could be built, so that we can bring more people to the House of God where they are in a safe place. Overall, my ideas are to bring people to this town to realize that this is a beautiful place to love and experience rather than skipping over it.

Region 3 Winner!

Foster Pickett

Lylburn Downing Middle School – City of Lexington

Teacher: Spencer Golladay



How much effort does it take you to get to work or to school? How about getting to your home or to a friend's house? How long does it take you to get coffee from Pronto? Well, for a lot of people in Lexington it takes so much more effort than is necessary. Why? Because the roads and sidewalks downtown are so old that they no longer work for modern life. But with a few small adjustments, the sidewalks and roads in downtown Lexington could be so much more navigable. As your mayor, I propose limiting parking to one side of the streets downtown and moving potted plants and signs from the sidewalks to above the buildings and out of the way.

Our roads are too narrow for today's big cars. I ride down Washington Street almost every day, and I see drivers that look stuck at the corner near Sweet Things. When large trucks and SUVs are parked on both sides of the road, it can be difficult for two cars to pass each other. Drivers have only two choices: scratching the car on their left or scratching the car on their right. This problem could be solved very easily. The city should allow parking only on one side of the road.

However, the problem is not only with the roads. The sidewalks are not big enough either. They are not wide enough for two people to walk next to each other. Anyone who walks on Washington Street or Main Street notices that the sidewalks are narrow and blocked by numerous obstacles. We have potted plants, street signs, commercial signs, lamp poles, and stairs in the way. This problem can also be solved easily. The city should move the potted plants where they won't be in the way and hang the signs and lamps above the sidewalk.

The problems with our sidewalks are even worse for people in wheelchairs. There are other problems, too. We could do more for people in wheelchairs, such as curb cuts that help them cross the street from one sidewalk to another. For some people, better sidewalks are the difference between being stuck at home or being able to do what everyone else can.

When asked about limiting parking to only one side of the road, and moving obstacles in sidewalks to above the buildings, a Lexington city resident said, "Changes to our city sidewalks are long overdue! I think a proposal to limit street parking is a great start. Furthermore, opening the sidewalks by moving signs, and decorative plants seems a great way to encourage visitors to explore downtown Lexington businesses."

With some community help, these changes would be very easy to implement would increase the walkability and drivability of Lexington. As mayor of Lexington, I respectfully ask the city council to take action now.

Region 4 Winner!

Adrienne Eagle

Cornerstone Christian Academy – Town of Appomattox

Teacher: Kelly Peters



If I was a community leader, such as a mayor, I would want to solve the quality and services of health care because we live in a rural area with limited resources and options. The residents of Appomattox have trouble accessing specialized medical care and even sufficient basic health care providers. The limited public transportation options prevent people from traveling to specific health care facilities, including those in larger cities. Some areas of town have limited access to essential infrastructure like broadband internet which can also lead to problems accessing telehealth and other online health care resources.

People that I asked about our health care services problems feel that we need to find ways to build places such as walk-in clinics or even better doctors' and dentists' offices. They feel that we need to be provided with more and better support to invest in things like mobile clinics, decreasing medication costs, and improving insurance coverage. If we can get those kinds of things then it would be easier to improve the stability of our health care providers and be able to keep better doctors closer to us.

I feel like the community members' solutions sound amazing, and if I were mayor, I would try and figure out how I can make some, or even all, of them come true. I would also open a 24-hour emergency health care facility here. I feel that we need to figure out a way to fix the problems with health care in rural areas such as Appomattox. There is so much that can be done to improve health care in Appomattox that is being overlooked and pushed aside, and nothing is being done about it. The town of Appomattox needs to find a way to build all of this to provide the care and support that older ladies and gentlemen may need. I also think that in the near future Appomattox should build a hospital so that when there is an emergency the ambulance doesn't have to drive 30 minutes to the nearest hospital.

In conclusion I would like to improve the town of Appomattox's health care to benefit everyone but especially those who have a hard time traveling, bad health problems, or emergencies. I hope everyone agrees that we need better health care facilities, health care providers, doctors, and dentists. I believe that everyone should have equal options for good health care, but that you should also always pray to God for healing and health.

Region 5 Winner!

Caroline Le

Harper Park Middle School – Town of Leesburg

Teacher: Jean Austin



If I was mayor of Leesburg, I would focus on the traffic problem on Route 15. I asked Jean Austin, my civics teacher, why there is so much traffic on Route 15, and she told me that due to the merge of two lanes to one after passing Battlefield Parkway, a clog is formed and makes it harder to travel. This not only means longer waiting times, but it also hurts local businesses as many people who consider going north don't want to make the slow trek through rush hour traffic. This traffic also hurts local neighborhoods and development because, as Ms. Austin explained, heavy traffic discourages people from buying houses in the area.

To brainstorm some solutions to this problem, I asked a variety of community members what they would do for that specific area of Route 15 (because Route 15 is 791.7 miles long!). Many people suggested simply adding more lanes to the road. Others suggested building bridges over Route 15 to cut down on the number of traffic lights needed. Some suggested not allowing trucks to travel on the route.

After gathering these possible solutions, I started to search for articles and reports to find out what experts thought about the problem. I learned that this Route 15 debate has been a hot topic in our community, and many plans have been written up and revised. This can be seen in a documentation of a Board of Supervisors meeting, sent to me by Jeffrey Austin who works for Shirley Contracting, LLC. The document introduced several plans and highlighted the concerns of many citizens most of which dealt with safety. A part of the plan was to add more lanes to a majority of the route. However, I found this idea should be approached with caution. A report written by Norman Marshall of Smart Mobility, Inc. points out that widening the road can lead to backups in portions that are not expanded. He described this as "bottleneck-shifting". However, both reports did agree on the use of traffic calming measures like roundabouts.

After researching, I have come up with a probable solution that is a good mix of many ideas. I think it is important to add more lanes, but overdoing wouldn't be good. So, instead of adding more lanes to the parts south of Lucketts Road, all parts of the road north of Lucketts Road will be expanded to two lanes with medians added for safety. This means that cars will not need to merge into one lane. Roundabouts will also be added periodically at places like Montresor Road, Stumptown Road/Lucketts Road, and Spinks Ferry Road to remind drivers to slow down yet not stop the flow of traffic. Lastly, traffic calming measures like speed humps should be implemented in the town of Lucketts for pedestrian safety.

This project will affect the whole community. So, for the plan to work, I will need to talk and collaborate with town officials, contracting companies, residents, businesses, and other organizations and departments.

Region 7 Winner!

Noelle Harris

Edward W. Wyatt Middle School – City of Emporia

Teacher: Sutania McBean



If I were mayor, what would I do to help my community? First, I would have to ensure the safety of the community, especially for children and senior citizens who do not know what to do in unsafe situations and sometimes cannot do anything. This is important because everyone in a community needs safety. Even some adults cannot handle activities alone, and that is perfectly okay. If I were the mayor of this city, I would prioritize keeping everyone in my community safe to the best of my ability.

I questioned some people about their thoughts about our community's safety. Some responded that they felt safe, but others said they had problems they thought needed a solution. One person said that it is unsafe for anyone under 18 to stay out late. Their solution to this problem was a curfew for anyone under 18. This is a good solution because it might help kids not get in trouble or end up in violent or unsafe situations.

Another problem in our city is littering. To some people, this is not a big problem; it is just trash. But this is a problem because some animals get into other people's trash because they do not throw their trash in the trash bin. Also, the trash gets into the streets which is very unsafe because it could cause a car wreck.

My solution to the safety problem is to enact a curfew. Also, police officers should do more night patrols to ensure no minors are out alone late at night. For our litter problem, I would get people who care about the community (including myself) to help clean the city. It will be easier because the city is not very big. However, if people keep littering, I will have police issue penalties whenever they see someone litter. These are my solutions to issues that make our community unsafe, harmful, and an unpleasant environment. This is what I would do if I were mayor.

Region 8 Winner!

Ellie Stevens

Poquoson Middle School – City of Poquoson

Teacher: Joyce Alexander



If I were mayor, my head would be spinning in all sorts of directions. What should I do to satisfy the citizens of Poquoson? How should I make Poquoson a secure place? Are there any problems that are unknown? I am Ellie Stevens, and I have very strong opinions regarding the problems in the small town of Poquoson. One of the issues that we have in Poquoson is the lack of sufficient sidewalks. This affects many people who may walk to work, school, or even around the neighborhood. Without sidewalks, we're often forced to walk on the road, which can be extremely dangerous for pedestrians.

I spoke with my neighbor, Mrs. Paulette, who has lived in Poquoson for over 10 years. She informed me that we have to build more sidewalks and fix the ones we currently have. I agree with Mrs. Paulette. Building more sidewalks along Little Florida and Poquoson Ave would allow the children who bike or walk to school to have safe access for transportation. I brought this up with Mrs. Paulette and she thinks it would make our community a much safer place for pedestrians and possibly even encourage more people to walk instead of driving. She also said that having more crosswalks and pedestrian signals at very busy intersections would make Poquoson a much safer town.

Even though I think that Mrs. Paulette's ideas are quite good, I truly feel that we can do better. Along with filling and constructing sidewalks, we need to put improved lighting along the sidewalks. This would make them easier to use, especially in the morning or at night when it is dark. This will also alert walkers to sticks, rocks, or other things that may be in their way. Also, adding green spaces and benches to the sidewalks would make walking more pleasant and encourage more people to be outdoors. Poquoson is a beautiful city, and I would love to see others enjoying it as much as I do! If we all work together to maintain the beauty of Poquoson, the city will be a pleasant and enjoyable place to live.

In conclusion, improving the safety and walkability of Poquoson isn't just about the infrastructure; it's about gaining a sense of community and encouraging healthy lifestyles. By enforcing these changes, Poquoson can become a model for other small towns, demonstrating that thoughtful planning and community engagement can lead to a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment.