

VTC

VIRGINIA
TOWN & CITY

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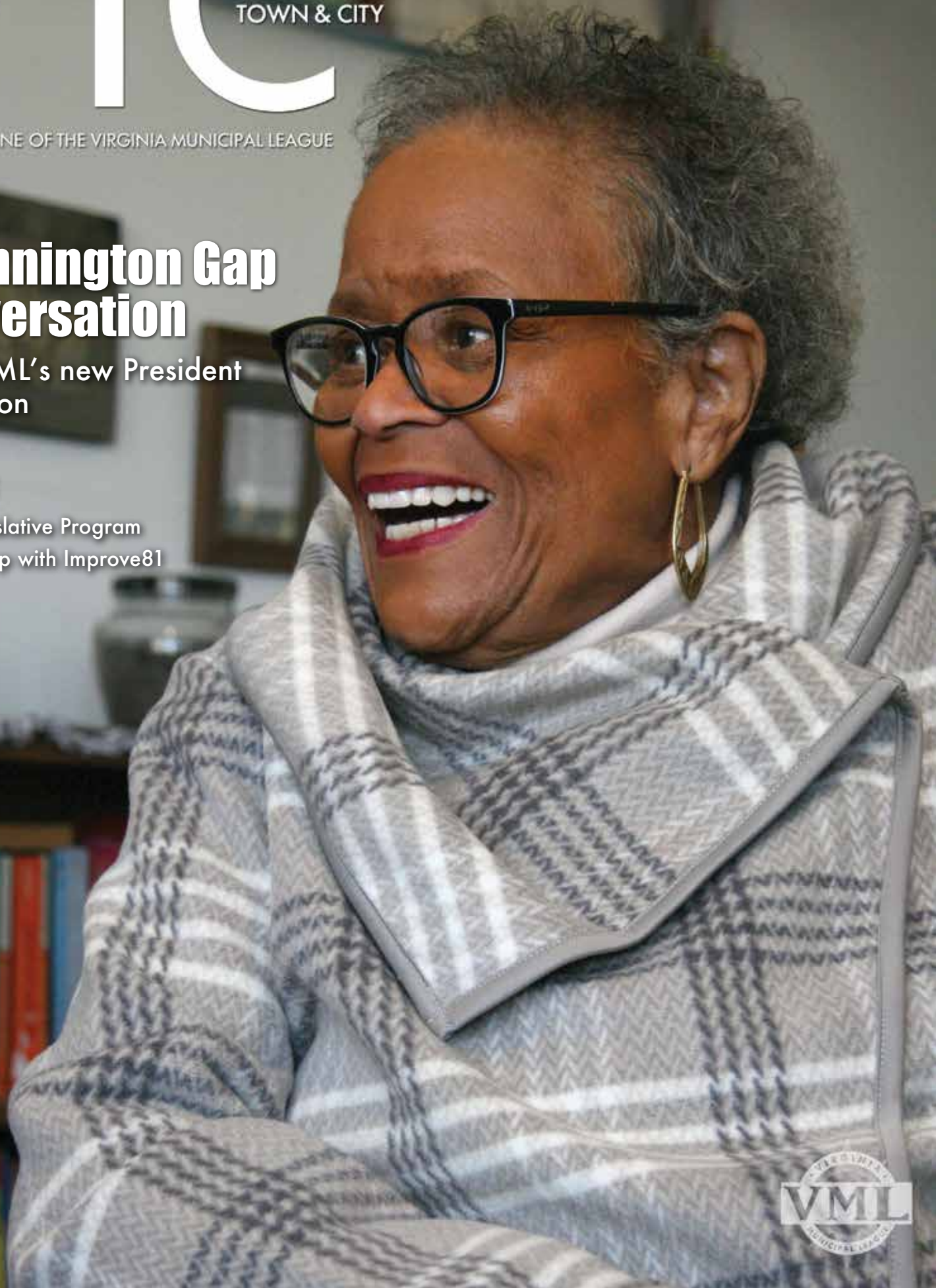
THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

A Pennington Gap Conversation

Meet VML's new President
Jill Carson

Inside:

2023 Legislative Program
Ramping up with Improve81





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THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

VOL. 57 NO. 10 DEC. 2022

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10

ABOUT THE COVER

“That’s what I do. I talk. A lot.” So says our new President and Town of Pennington Gap Councilmember Jill Carson. Find out what she has to say about her life, her adopted hometown, and her hopes for the future.

DEPARTMENTS

DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE 2
 PEOPLE 3
 NEWS & NOTES 7
 COMMUNITY BUSINESS MEMBERS 31

FEATURES

A Pennington Gap conversation

VTC travels to Southwest Virginia for a terrific visit with our new president 10

Improve81 ramps up

After 60 years, I-81 is finally getting some love! We look at projects and chat with program delivery director Dave Covington 18

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

General Assembly preview and 2023 VML Legislative Program

It’s that time of year again! Find out what’s important to localities 22

Put municipal methane to work for you

Preston Bryant from McGuireWoods Consulting explores new options to tap and sell biogas from municipal landfills and wastewater treatment plants 27

Get to know the 34th Annual Virginia Water and Wastewater Rate Report

Draper Aden Associates has produced this invaluable report for more than three decades. Find out what the latest has to say 29

2023 VML “If I Were Mayor” Essay Contest for 7th Graders

The deadline for entries is March 3, 2023. Get to know the rules and regulations 30



2



7



9



18



22



27



29



30

Around the Commonwealth in three days!

HOPE THAT EVERYONE had a safe and happy holiday season – Happy 2023! As I look back on 2022, I am grateful for VML staff and our members' patience and kindness towards each other during what was a frustrating and exhausting 2022 that saw us all getting back to something like normal only to be reminded again (and again) that COVID was still in our midst. However, things are much better than they were a year ago, so maybe 2023 is the year we finally bid adieu to the pandemic!

One of the highlights of 2022 for me came at the end of the year in the form of a crazy trip all around the Commonwealth. I began in the City of Fairfax on a Tuesday night, proceeded to Bristol on Wednesday, and then to Lynchburg by way of Pennington Gap on Thursday! Crazy routing, sure. But it was all for good reasons.

In the City of Fairfax, I was an honored to say goodbye to Mayor David Meyer and to provide Councilmember Jon Stehle (now VML's past president) with a "thank you" from VML for his service. I also got a chance to meet the new Mayor of Fairfax – Catherine S. Read. I saw Mayor Read again earlier this month when she attended the VML Local Elected Officials Conference here in Richmond. Welcome Mayor Read!

In Bristol, VML staff and I met with City Manager/Attorney and VML Board Member Randy Eads. It's always a pleasure to chat with Randy and hear about all the exciting things going on in Bristol – the new casino, Michael Waltrip's brewery (recommended!) and their new council. Thanks to Councilmen Hankins and Pollard who both attended the VML January training virtually – we look forward to meeting you in person! On a side note, while in Bristol we stayed at a country music recording studio-themed hotel that offered turntables and vinyl records for guests to have in their rooms during their stay. If you have lis-

tened to our podcast, the *VML Voice*, you would not be surprised to learn that VML's communications guy, Rob Bullington, took full advantage of this offer!

Also with us was our digital media expert and photographer, Manuel Timbreza. Manny and I had plans to hit the gym before we left town the next morning, but it was already feeling way too much like winter outside, so we opted to swing by a donut shop instead. Donut shops and gyms are kind of the same thing, right?

Our last stop (before the boys dropped me off in Lynchburg) was Pennington Gap and what fun we had! Town Manager Keith Harless and Vice Mayor and VML President Jill Carson are always hospitable hosts. It was so exciting to see the plans for the conference center at their town hall. When completed, this facility will be a great place for the region's localities and residents to gather – I can't wait to see this project to come to fruition! Keep an eye out for a story about this exciting project in an upcoming issue of *VTC*. After meeting Keith at the town hall, we proceeded to the Appalachian African American Cultural Center that is owned and managed by Jill and her husband Ron (thanks to Keith for the space heater!). At the center, we took a tour and got to hear about the tumultuous origins of the "Keith and Jill show"! Pennington Gap is a great place to visit, and everyone was so kind – thank you for the fond memories!

Unfortunately, as 2023 begins, we must pause our travels and stay hunkered down in Richmond for the General Assembly. Please review the 2023 VML Legislative Program and share it with your delegation as soon as you can! The full program is available at www.vml.org/advocacy/general-assembly/legislative-program.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Richmond for Local Government Day on January 19th. Happy 2023!



Rendering plan of Pennington Gap's new town hall and convention center depicting the new overlook back deck.



Flores joins VML staff as director of fiscal policy

Joe Flores joined the VML staff on January 9, 2023, as the league's director of fiscal policy. Prior to that, Flores was appointed senior policy advisor to the Department of Accounts by Governor Glenn Youngkin in January 2022, where he provided support to state agencies as they reported on their use of \$4.3 billion in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

Flores was appointed secretary of finance in July 2021 by Governor Ralph S. Northam, where he oversaw the Department of Planning and Budget, Department of Accounts, Department of Taxation, and Department of the Treasury, along with the Virginia Resources Authority and the Virginia Board of Accountancy. Previously, Flores served as deputy secretary of finance, where he helped lead Governor Northam's successful Medicaid expansion effort. Joe also served as deputy secretary of HHR for Governor Terry McAuliffe.

For two decades, Flores advised legislators in Texas, Minnesota, and Virginia on a breadth of fiscal policy issues in health and human resources, including a dozen years with Virginia's Senate Finance Committee. As a non-partisan legislative fiscal analyst, he was a resource to lawmakers, agency officials, advocacy groups, the media, and the public on issues related to health care, social services, public health, behavioral health, developmental disabilities, children, and adult services.

Flores provided leadership nationally on health care issues serving as the chair of the Coverage, Cost, and Value Committee (previously the Health Care Access and Financing Committee) for the National Academy for Health Care Policy (NASHP). He previously served as staff chair and staff vice-chair of the Health Committee for the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

Flores earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Texas A&M University, and obtained a Master of Science in Public Management and Policy from Carnegie Mellon University.

Thomas to serve as interim fire chief for the Charlottesville Fire Department



Interim City Manager Michael C. Rogers appointed **Michael L. Thomas** to lead the Charlottesville Fire Department (CFD) upon the departure of Chief Dr. Hezedean Smith who accepted a chief role in

Florida. Thomas has over three decades of Fire and EMS service experience and joined the department in June 2022 after retiring from the Lynchburg Fire Department. Chief Thomas, the first African American deputy chief in the department's 167-year history, joined CFD to serve as the deputy chief of community risk reduction. He assumed command of the fire department effective October 21, 2022.

Rogers stated that he was delighted to appoint Interim Fire Chief Thomas because of his years of experience and embrace of 21st-Century firefighting principles that have been adopted by the department.

Thomas holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and an Associate Degree in Fire Science. He holds certifications as a Fire Inspector, Fire Investigator, Certified LEO, Incident Safety Officer, has attended the National Fire Academy, and is near completion of ICMA's (International City/County Management Association) Professional Development Academy.

Manassas hires Mills as new fire chief



The City of Manassas has selected **Edward R. Mills III** to head Fire & Rescue Services. Mills comes to the city with more than 30 years of experience in Fire & Rescue services with the District of Columbia. Mills has a large variety of experience, including emergency management, EMS, working with the medical director, counterterrorism, and has been an assistant fire chief and an acting fire chief. He has extensive volunteer hours around the area.

In the 1980s, Mills volunteered with both the Manassas Volunteer Fire Company (MVFC) and the Greater Manassas Volunteer Rescue Squad (GMVRS).

Mills has a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of the District of Columbia. He has attended many career development courses, including the National Fire Academy, the Center for Domestic Preparedness, the Emergency Management Institute and the Department of Counter Terrorism Support with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Gordon appointed to FirstNet Authority Board



Renee Gordon, director of the City of Alexandria Department of Emergency and Customer Communications, has been appointed by U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo as a member of the board for the First Responder Network Authority.

According to the city's media release, the authority is an independent entity within the Department of Commerce. In March 2017, the Commerce Department and FirstNet announced a partnership with AT&T to build and operate the first responder network that public safety relies on for day-to-day operations, disaster response and recovery, and securing large-scale events.

The board oversees activities to ensure that the FirstNet Authority and AT&T develop and operate a nationwide public safety broadband network that will best equip first responders to save lives and protect communities.

As the director of the city department, Gordon is in charge of the city's communications center, which handles 911, 311 and non-emergency calls for police, sheriff, fire, and other local public safety departments.

Neal appointed as independent policing auditor in Alexandria



The Alexandria City Council has approved the appointment of **Kim Neal** as the city's new independent policing auditor. She will be responsible for leading the effort to conduct independent investigations of complaints and serious incidents,

PEOPLE

and will make recommendations on policing practices, policies, and procedures. She will also serve as the liaison to the Independent Community Policing Review Board.

Neal formerly was the director of the Office of Police Oversight Monitor for the City of Fort Worth, TX. As the first-named police monitor for the city, she established the agency's model of oversight and accountability for the Fort Worth Police Department. Neal also worked to design Fort Worth's first restorative justice mediation program and led the way to create the first law school externship program focusing on civilian oversight of law enforcement.

Prior to her appointment in Fort Worth, Neal was the executive director for the Citizens Complaint Authority in Cincinnati, where she oversaw the investigations of serious misconduct allegations by police officers. She also held senior-level positions in other major cities covering diverse policy areas such as employment, higher education, compliance, and ethics.

Neal earned her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Georgetown University and Juris Doctorate from the University of Baltimore School of Law.

Boyd named director of transportation and capital infrastructure in Loudoun County



Nancy Boyd has been selected as the new director of the Loudoun County Department of Transportation and Capital Infrastructure (DTCI). Boyd has served as acting director since May 2022.

- Boyd -

Prior to joining the Loudoun County government in June 2021 as the deputy director of DTCI, Boyd was an engineering manager for WSP USA, an engineering professional services firm. She also has held senior positions with the Washington State Department of Transportation.

As director of DTCI, Boyd will oversee the planning, design and construction of capital projects for the county as well as the county's transportation system, which includes transit and commuter services, long range transportation planning, and traffic engineering. Staff in DTCI also serve as technical advisors to the Board of Supervisors on matters relating to transportation, facility development, regional funding, land acquisition, project scheduling, and cost estimating.

Boyd holds a Bachelor's degree from Whitman College as well as accreditations as a professional civil engineer and engineering geologist.

Cornell-Titcomb appointed Leesburg deputy emergency management coordinator

Leesburg Town Manager Kaj Dentler announced in November that **Amy Cornell-Titcomb** had been hired as the Town's deputy emergency management coordinator.



- Titcomb -

Cornell-Titcomb most recently served as the emergency preparedness and all-hazards manager for the Prince William County Service Authority. She previously worked for the Utah Transit Authority overseeing its multi-modal transit system that covered 1,600 square miles of operations. In 2021 she was named to the International



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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 Rob Bullington at rbullington@vml.org.

Association of Emergency Managers "Top 40 Under 40" list for her region.

Cornell-Titcomb holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Utah State University, and Master's degrees in Intelligence Studies and Public Health from American Military University.

Cornell-Titcomb began her work with the town in late November.

Waltz returns to town manager role in Front Royal



- Waltz -

Joseph Waltz, the former town manager in Front Royal, was reappointed in November as the town manager.

Waltz worked for the town in several positions, including serving as the director of public utilities and the head of the electric service depart-

ment, before being hired as town manager in 2017. He left that position in 2019 to work for an electric cooperative in Ohio.

He began his career as a meter reader in Manassas and advanced to the position of director of fiber optic development by the time he left the city.

Brazle announces retirement as emergency medical services chief in Virginia Beach; Nedelka to serve as interim chief



- Brazle -

Virginia Beach Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Chief **Edward M. Brazle** has announced he will retire at the end of 2022. Chief Brazle first worked with EMS as a volunteer with the Kempsville Volunteer Rescue Squad in 1990 while on active duty as a naval officer. After he left the Navy in 1996, he was hired as the regulation and enforcement coordinator, later advancing to the division chief level at the EMS Department and went on to serve as chief of the operations, support services, and administration divisions. Brazle was appointed chief of the department in 2016.

Brazle had a leading role in the creation of the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) program, integration of career and volunteer medics, deployment of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) on police cars, advanced life support (ALS) capability on fire engines, new station construction, and the Air Medical Program. He was named to the City of Virginia Beach Employee Hall of Fame in 2013.

Acting Deputy Chief **Bruce Nedelka** has been appointed interim chief. Nedelka has significant leadership experience in EMS administration, regulation enforcement, training, recruitment, and media relations. He has served as the division chief and public information officer for the city since 2016 and has taught at the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio.



- Nedelka -

Nedelka has been appointed interim chief. Nedelka has significant leadership experience in EMS administration, regulation enforcement, training, recruitment, and media relations. He has served as the division chief and public information officer for the city since 2016 and has taught at the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio.

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Little-Hill hired as social services director in Chesapeake



Chesapeake City Manager Chris Price has appointed **Pamela T. Little-Hill** to serve as director of human services. She will replace Jill Baker, who is retiring.

Little-Hill has been the director of social services in the City of Portsmouth. Prior to coming to the City of Portsmouth, she worked for the Hampton/Newport News Community Services Board as the REACH director. She has an extensive background in the oversight of family service, crisis, benefit, mental health, and intellectual disability programs.

Little-Hill holds a Master's degree in Social Work from the City University of New York at Hunter College, and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from City University of New York at Queens College. She is a licensed master social worker in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Solis appointed deputy city manager in Chesapeake



City Manager Chris Price has named **Brian S. Solis**, AICP as deputy city manager for community development, effective in November. Solis will oversee the city's community development departments

including Economic Development, Planning, Development & Permits, and Parks, Recreation & Tourism.

Solis formerly served as both a current planner and a Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area planner with the city of Chesapeake and has spent the past 22 years in various roles with the City of Virginia Beach. He has an extensive background in capital program administration, innovation in local government and organizational strategic planning.

Solis holds a Master's degree Public Administration and a Bachelor's degree in Geography with an urban and regional planning emphasis from Old Dominion University. He is also a graduate of the LEAD Program at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia. Solis is certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and has been credentialed as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Associate by the U.S. Green Building Council.



Joni Sims Terry retires from the Virginia Municipal League

Joni Terry began working for the Virginia Municipal League in March 1978. At the time, Richard DeCair was the executive director, the first of four that she worked with during her 44 years and 9 months with VML. When Joni began with the league, VML's offices were in the Ironfronts Building on Main Street in Richmond. Morton Wallerstein, the first executive director of the league, and Howard Dobbins, who served as counsel for many years, had a law firm on the floor above VML.

Joni was hired as a Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) employee. CETA subsidized positions in state and local governments and some non-profits. It was hoped that CETA participants would gain marketable skills to build careers. In Joni's case, the program was an outstanding success! Indeed, during her nearly five decades of service, Joni became the backbone of the organization.

Over the years, VML changed a lot and so did the tools of the trade. Electric typewriters, fax machines, databases, computers, mobile phones...as office manager, Joni kept up with it all and ensured that VML was able to meet the needs of its members. Her organizational skills really shone at the annual conference. Each year, she tracked the registrations, produced the name badges, packed the materials for every participant and then delivered them to each person with a warm welcome and a smile. Joni was always respectful, helpful, and professional.

During her years at the league, Joni also served for a time as executive director of the Virginia Building Code Officials Association. She received the John Stutts award from the National League of Cities in 2003 in recognition of 25 years of service.

Joni has two children and – despite her youthful appearance – is a grandmother and great-grandmother! Her work ethic, calmness, resilience, and job skills will be missed. Most of all, her co-workers will miss her warm personality and commitment to the work of the league. But if anyone deserves a fantastic retirement, Joni does!

Roanoke County welcomes Poindexter as chief of police



Effective January 1, 2023 **Michael Poindexter** is Roanoke County's new chief of police.

Poindexter had been acting as assistant chief of police for the department since April 2022, as well as supervising the professional standards unit, the Roanoke County criminal justice academy, services division, and crime prevention. He has a broad range of experience in public safety, having dedicated 28 years as police commander, police sergeant, and police officer.

Poindexter holds a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Bluefield College and has participated in over a dozen trainings including Professional Executive Leadership School, Institute for Leadership in Changing Times, and Internal Affairs, Managing Citizen Complaints and Employee Discipline.

Poindexter is the fourth person to lead the Roanoke County Police Department since it formed in 1990.



The Podcast of the Virginia Municipal League

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Contact Rob Bullington, rbullington@vml.org to suggest topics, ask questions, or inquire about sponsorship opportunities.

Emporia awarded Community Development Block Grant

THE CITY OF EMPORIA was recently awarded one of ten Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) in the amount of \$1,350,000. Phase I of the South Main Street Neighborhood Improvement project will rehabilitate 13 single-family homes and substantially reconstruct two homes located on Zion Boulevard and Wadlow Streets and includes a few adjacent properties on Clay Street. Additionally, qualitative improvements to the storm-water drainage, street, and pedestrian systems will make the neighborhood more walkable and accessible for the community.



City of
Emporia
Virginia

Onancock holds first "Merry Mutts" parade



ONANCOCK IS A CHARMING town of 1,100 residents located on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Recently, the town invested in a new dog park with a full acre for large dogs and half an acre for smaller dogs. Both sides of the park have water and paw washing stations located within a fenced concrete entry vestibule.

During the annual Christmas season event in which Santa arrives by boat with his 16 kayaking reindeer leading the way, Nina, age 11, told Town Manager Matt Spuck that her dog loved the new park. She proposed that the town hold a dog Christmas Parade to celebrate.

Nina worked with her mom, dad, and sister to promote the event and arrange for judges and prizes for the lucky winners. Despite the short notice, Onancock's first "Merry Mutts" parade attracted about two dozen marchers, many in costume! Participants were encouraged to bring a donation for either the SPCA or the dog park.

Every small town has unique characteristics and events. Nina and the Town of Onancock have shown how some of the most special traditions begin. Here's hoping next year is even better!

Norfolk earns second consecutive GFOA Triple Crown Medallion

THE CITY OF NORFOLK received the Triple Crown Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for winning all three GFOA awards possible for exceptional financial reporting for fiscal year 2020.

Norfolk is one of only 317 government agencies across the United States and Canada, and one of twelve municipalities in Virginia to receive the 2020 Triple Crown Medallion. This is the second consecutive year Norfolk has received this prestigious honor.

The Triple Crown designation recognizes governments who have received GFOA's Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting (or Canadian Award for Financial Reporting), the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, and the Popular Annual Financial Reporting Award for a given fiscal year.

The GFOA is a professional organization of public officials united to enhance and promote the professional management of governmental financial resources by identifying, developing, and

advancing fiscal strategies, policies, and practices for the public benefit. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition for governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management.

Earning the GFOA awards consistently recognizes the commitment and hard work of Norfolk's Finance and Budget teams. Receiving all three awards and being recognized as a Triple Crown Winner signifies the city's dedication and efforts in upholding the highest standards among government finance officials across the country as well as providing meaningful information to residents in a clear, factual, transparent, and professional manner.

Learn more about the GFOA and find a full list of winners at www.gfoa.org.



Winchester offers updated African American Heritage tour

A REVISED VERSION of Winchester’s African American Heritage Self-Guided Driving Tour is now available at the Winchester-Frederick County Visitors Center.

“For too long, African American stories from the people of Winchester have not been told,” said Local Black History Task Force member Judy Humbert in a press release. “The places mentioned in the brochure are ones that we ride by all the time, and we don’t have any idea of the story behind these places. Once the stories in the brochure become public knowledge, they can be preserved for generations to come.”

Research for the first brochure, published in 2000, began in the 1980s, with growing interest in Black history programs planned by the Friends of the Handley Library and assisted by Ellsworth Turner’s donation of a lifetime collection of materials relating to African Americans in Winchester. Information in the brochure was researched over many years by Local Black History Task Force members with the support of Becky Ebert at the Stewart Bell, Jr. Archives at the Handley Regional Library. The new brochure was edited by Task Force member Ann Grogg and redesigned by Creative Design and Visitor Services Manager Renee Bayliss of the Winchester-Frederick County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The revised brochure has expanded information about several sites, such as Robert Orrick’s Home, Orrick Cemetery, and Douglas School, and several new sites, such as the Freedmen’s Bureau School and offices on Cork Street, Madison Briscoe’s Childhood Home, the King Hiram Masonic Lodge, and the Brown Family Home. For this edition of the brochure, the map and tour route were reorganized to accommodate new traffic patterns since the last update.

About the Task Force

The Local Black History Task Force promotes learning about and preserving Winchester’s African American history through public lectures and presentations, plays, and the installation of historic highway markers.



Loudoun County opens Hypothermia Prevention Shelter

ON NOVEMBER 15, 2022, the Loudoun County opened its Hypothermia Prevention Shelter for single adults aged 18 and older in the community who are experiencing a housing crisis resulting in homelessness. The shelter, which provides a warm indoor sleeping environment, meals, laundry, and shower facilities, is open from 5:30 PM to 7:00 AM, seven nights a week through March 31, 2023. The shelter also provides information on other community resources, such as food, clothing, medical care, mental health care, public benefits, obtaining an ID and employment opportunities.

The Hypothermia Prevention Shelter is located at the Loudoun Homeless Services Center in Leesburg. Due to limited space, all guests are asked to store personal belongings (outside of limited essential items) in secure storage on site.

Additionally, the following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for COVID-19 safety are required to be followed by everyone in the shelter:

- Temperature checks and COVID-19 symptom screenings are conducted by shelter staff prior to entry.
- Masks are always required unless actively eating, drinking, or sleeping. Masks are provided for anyone who does not have one.
- Frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer are encouraged.

Free bus transportation is provided daily from Leesburg and Sterling. The county will also provide limited morning transportation from the shelter, if needed.

The Hypothermia Prevention Shelter is operated by Loudoun County in partnership with Shelter House and the Loudoun County Continuum of Care (CoC). The CoC is a coalition of public, nonprofit and faith-based organizations that provide a variety of shelter and support services to those experiencing homelessness or people at risk of becoming homeless. Staff support for the CoC is provided by the Loudoun County Department of Family Services.

More information about services available to those experiencing homelessness in Loudoun County may be found at www.loudoun.gov/homelesservices.

**LOUDOUN COUNTY
HYPOTHERMIA SHELTER**

November 15, 2022 - March 31, 2023

**Loudoun Homeless Services Center
19520 Meadowview Court, Leesburg**

loudoun.gov/HomelessServices

Staunton Parks & Recreation receives VRPS award

IN NOVEMBER, THE CITY of Staunton's Parks & Recreation department was awarded by the Virginia Recreation and Park Society (VRPS) for the Gypsy Hill Gateway and Interpretive Signs project.

Judged by a jury of its peers, Staunton's Parks & Rec was awarded the 2021 Best New Renovation/Addition (Parks, Playgrounds, Blueways, Greenways or Trails) in the population 25,001-50,000 category for recent construction and renovations to the Gypsy Hill Park entranceway, historical signs behind the pumphouse and renovated spring boxes. Superintendent of Parks John Snyder was in attendance to receive the award on behalf of Staunton Parks & Recreation at the Virginia Recreation and Park Society's 68th annual conference in Virginia Beach.

"This project demonstrates what is possible when citizens and government come together with a shared vision for maintaining and improving a cherished community asset," stated Chris Tuttle, director of Parks & Recreation in press release.

The project was a multi-year effort from conception to completion. In 2018, interested citizens formed the Gypsy Hill Park Gateway Restoration Committee to create and implement a plan and raise funds for upgrading various elements at the park entrance. Hundreds of Staunton and area residents donated to the project, raising over \$240,000 in private funds. In addition, numerous local and regional contractors worked on the project, many of whom donated materials and services to the project.

This committee worked alongside Staunton Parks & Recreation and Frazier Associates architecture and planning firm who



donated design services to complete installation of the major new gateway sign, restoration of the existing gates and brick piers, installation of new historically styled fences and staircases, reconstruction of the wood shingled, peak roofs of the three historic spring boxes, installation of historically-style street lights and new brick sidewalks, restoration of the historic entry light, repairs and repainting of the Garden Center and installation of interpretive signs about the park. New benches were installed as was new landscaping with assistance of city horticulturist Matt Sensabaugh. Staunton's Public Works Department assisted in the installation of the large new gateway sign which was fabricated by Artesano Iron Works of Philadelphia, PA.

About VRPS

The mission of VRPS is to unite all professionals, students and interested lay persons engaged in the field of recreation, parks, and other leisure services in the Commonwealth of Virginia. For more information on the Society, visit their website at www.vrps.com.



Lynchburg Public Library hosts "Chase the Chill" event

LOCAL KNITTERS AND CROCHETERS have worked throughout the year to create hats, scarves, mittens, and other items for anyone who may be cold and in need of some warmth.

On January 5, the Main Branch of the Lynchburg Public Library hosted a "Chase the Chill" event where these items were made available for free without judgment or proof of need. The items were displayed outside of the library facing Memorial Avenue.

Additional donations of handmade items could also be dropped off at the Main Branch before January 5.

Learn more about "Chase the Chill" in Lynchburg at www.facebook.com/chasethechillynchburg.





One of Jill's proudest accomplishments during her time on council is support for the purchase and renovation of the historic Lee Theater in downtown Pennington Gap. Originally opened in 1947 and closed in mid-1970s, the theater was carefully restored and reopened in 2013 by the Town of Pennington Gap.

A Pennington Gap Conversation

Meet VML's new President Jill Carson

By VTC Editor Rob Bullington

Begin at the beginning: Roots

Jill Carson has accomplished so much for the Appalachian region and her home of Pennington Gap that it's somewhat surprising to learn she's a New England transplant. Yet, her sense of being an "outsider" has undoubtedly fueled her passion to bring positive change to the place she has called home for nearly 40 years. Part of what makes Jill so compelling is that she has been able to channel the marginalization others might have felt as a Black woman from New England moving to Appalachia into an identity that feels representative of the highest aspirations for her adopted home. She doesn't just touch the better angels of the region's nature, she lives them and insists (sometimes quietly, sometimes loudly) that others do the same. This gift has carried her voice well beyond her hometown and earned her accolades and admirers far and wide.

Speaking of "far and wide," it's a long drive from Richmond to Pennington Gap. After a night in Bristol, VML staff members Michelle Gowdy, Manuel Timbreza and myself drove the last 80 minutes the next morning. As we neared Pennington Gap, and increased in elevation, the late November views became more dramatic, and the bare trees and chilly air served as a reminder that autumn was done with this part of Virginia and winter was waiting in the wings.

First, we met with Town Manager Keith Harless at the town hall which is a

purpose-built warehouse the town purchased after their previous town hall was destroyed by a fire. Undaunted by their modest digs, town staff have plans for an outdoor meeting space behind the town hall overlooking the river and beautiful walking trail. Other plans include business incubators and training facilities on the property.

Keith led our two-vehicle motorcade to the Appalachian African American Cultural Center that Jill and her husband Ron Carson founded in the one room brick schoolhouse that Ron attended as a

child. The Carson's home is on the adjacent property and April, Jill's niece and neighbor, accompanied her aunt to greet us. Inside, we took time to view the diverse memorabilia on display. These included items such as historical photos and documents, recognitions from Congress and President Biden, jars of soil collected from sites of lynchings in the region, and – a recent acquisition – Alex Haley's desk from an estate sale in Tennessee. It was humbling to imagine the author writing *Roots* at this desk that had now found a proper home.

"Sometimes Ron likes to come down and lay his head on the desk," Jill told us. "He can feel the creative energy."

Keith wasn't altogether satisfied with the cold temperature in the building – the space heater was doing valiant but futile battle with the mountain air – but Jill in a lovely, warm wrap seemed unfazed. So, we dove into her life...

[This interview has been lightly condensed and edited]

VTC: Tell me about your childhood and your parents.

I grew up in Connecticut. My parents had a supper club where they had people like Nina Simone perform. My parents were very politically involved. I have one sister who is six years older than I am and her name is Jackie. It was my mother's idea to have a "Jack and Jill" but with two girls she did the best she could!

My mother and I moved to Boston after my father passed away. She wanted a change. I was about 15 years old at the time. My sister was engaged so she stayed in Connecticut. My mother enrolled me in the Jeremiah E. Burke High School for Girls.

Note: The Burke High School was first opened in 1934 and was named after a former superintendent of the Boston Public Schools. It was inaugurated as a girls only high school, and later became coeducational in 1972. Presently approximately 500 students are enrolled at the Burke High School, representing some of Boston's most promising youth from the high poverty neighborhoods within the Dorchester-Roxbury Grove Hall area of Boston.

VTC: Did you like the school?

I was at the age where you start talking to boys and stuff but there were no boys! My mother was very strict because this was a new place for her too. But I loved the school. I actually went to school with Donna Summer! When she decided to quit school, there was a lot of scuttlebutt; everybody talked about her quitting school and we wondered why and what she would do? We thought it was terrible, but she laughed all the way to the bank!

At the school, we put on operettas all the time. The head mistress was Dr. Lyons. She carried her little dog to school every day. The only sport we had was badminton, but I really did love going to school there.



When Jill met Ron

Jill and her husband Ron have been married 47 incredibly active years. They have two children that are (literally) spread across the state. Their son Kevin lives in Alexandria and their daughter Alexis lives in Bristol.

VTC: *It's a long way from Boston to Pennington Gap, how did you wind up here?*

I met Ron Carson. He lived nearby with his mother's oldest sister. I was walking my dog and – this is so corny – he said, “Would you like some peanuts?” He had a bag of peanuts. Later I said, “What kind of a line was that?” He said, “It worked I guess.”

We started dating. I remember one day in Boston he was telling me about Pennington Gap, and his aunt was embarrassed. She said, “Don't tell that girl about that place!”

At some point, after we got serious, he wanted to bring me to Pennington Gap so we drove here to meet his par-

ents. I remember coming across the mountains on the old road and I panicked. Not just because of roads themselves but also because of all the outhouses I saw! I was so scared, and I was thinking “His parents better have an indoor bathroom, or he may as well take me home now!”

Keith: City slicker profiling us!

Jill: Well, there was a store. Remember Keith? Nancy Baker had that store.

[For the record, Keith Harless, who claims to be from the area, could not remember the store that the “City Slicker” recalled perfectly.]

Well, I remember they had fruits and vegetables outside and there was a sign on a basket that said “P-A-R-E-S”.

[Nobody in the room knew what Jill meant, but Keith interpreted for us: “Pears”]

VTC: *So, despite the plumbing and spelling issues, you decided to move to Pennington Gap?*

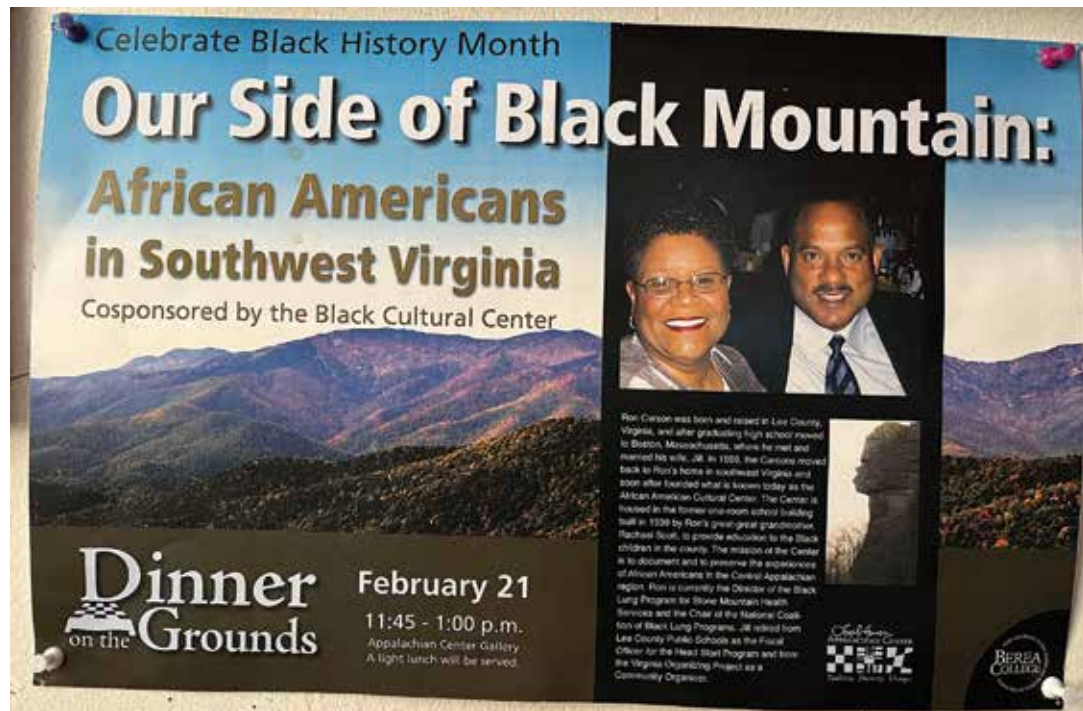
I worked for Prudential in Boston, and Ron and I had been married for about 13 years, and suddenly we realized we had no children. He was doing his thing, and I was doing my thing. We adopted our son Kevin and soon afterward Ron raised the possibility of moving here. That made us really think about things like how did we want to raise Kevin? At the time we didn't live in Boston proper, we lived in Framingham which is about 30+ miles west of Boston and commuted into the city on the Massachusetts Turnpike every day. It was exhausting.

So, when Ron proposed relocating to Pennington Gap, I didn't say “No” but I did want to think about it. We did a spreadsheet, “Pros and Cons” and Pennington won out. Of course, Kevin was a real big factor. On the negative side – Keith you may want to close your ears – there was so very little here to expose him to in terms of culture and education. So that that was a big concern.

Keith: [grumbles]

Jill: But then we said, “OK let's look at what's around here. Atlanta is within five hours, and we could take advantage of that. There are plenty of places closer than Richmond.”

[VTC Note: *This is true! Besides regional opportunities, those who want to travel do not lack for the means. In fact, Town Manager Harless has taken his daughters to Japan and Australia. It really is a small world, even if you come from a small town!*]



Jill: I said, “OK I'll try it for five years.” We came and lived with his parents while we built a house.

VTC: *The house I can see out the window now?*

Jill: Yes, the same one.

VTC: *What happened at the end of those five years?*

Jill: We couldn't afford to move! So, that wasn't happening. We had made our bed.

VTC: *What did you do when you first came to Pennington Gap?*

Well, I got pregnant with our daughter! I worked for Lee County public schools. I was the finance officer for the Head Start program and I also contracted with the Department of Health and Human Services which was great, it got me out of here and I traveled to Head Start programs around the whole country.

Ron worked for the Department of Social Services and Child Protective Services. When we were in Boston, before we came here, he was a warden at a prison, and he said Child Protective Services was worse!

I worked for the school system for about 10 years. Then I became a community organizer. That's when the trouble began for real! I got involved in the community because when I found something wrong, I found myself pulled into things in the community. That would have been in the 1990s.

VTC: *Is that when you started feeling like a local?*

Jill: Yes. When I worked as a community organizer because I built relationships with people. When I first came here, I wouldn't just walk up to somebody and say “Hi.” That wasn't the way of a Bostonian at all.

At first, I didn't trust people when they called me “Honey” and “Sweetie.” It took me awhile, but then I realized they were genuine, and I liked it. And then when we had kids in school, I really felt local.

VTC: *How did you get the idea of becoming involved with the town council?*

I got mad at something! I never went to council meetings or anything like that but one of the council members, Terry Pope, had contacted me and asked me to consider getting on the board of the IDA (Industrial Development Authority).

This next part involves Keith's mother, so he'll get mad at me.

When Jill met Keith

Despite the somewhat rocky beginning which Jill outlines below, the mutual respect and friendship between Jill Carson and Keith Harless is apparent to anyone who spends more than two minutes in their company. Though their backgrounds and demographics couldn't be different, their shared passion for their community makes them a perfect local government pairing. Also, in case you can't tell, they have fun poking fun at each other...

Jill: I was on the IDA. The county had closed one of the schools near here and there was someone who was interested in starting a restaurant in town, but they needed a range hood for their kitchen. So, we [the IDA] came up with the idea we should be able to get one at a good price from the closed school to help this person out. It seemed like everything was set. I went out of town for a bit but when I came back, we were told that the town council had decided we couldn't have the stove hood from the closed school. I was furious!

So, I went to a council meeting. Keith was on the council at the time. That's how we met. I said, "I have never been here before and I do not know the protocol, but I do want to speak to you. Do I have your permission to speak?" I was polite but...



Town Manager Keith Harless.

Keith: ...we have different versions of this story...

Jill: He was so mad at me! I was so mad at him. It was terrible. It got really ugly!

Keith: I knew it might be bad [to deny IDA the range hood], but it was personal to me because my mother who was in Stickleysville – that was the community I came from – was part of a group that took over the school to use it as a Community Center. So, they wanted to have the stove hood that would exactly fit. Those people needed help and they were going to give free meals and feed the community and have fundraisers and things like that.

And then I have someone like this coming out...

Jill: Someone like *this*!?

Keith: ...someone, and so they approached the council...

Jill: They? I was there by myself!

Keith: So, the council at the time felt like it'd be fair to let the community have the hood back so they could do something with it. We had the meeting, although the IDA didn't agree with us, and then they brought "hot shot" in there and she starts arguing...

Jill: [laughter]

Keith: ...the line that she used was "I cannot believe we're sitting here getting ready to do away with an idea to help businesses to argue over pots and pans!"

Jill: [laughter]

Keith: And when she said that I stopped talking because she and my sister were best friends and my sister was like, "Oh, I don't believe you and Jill don't get along!"

Jill: Oh, it was terrible!

Keith: And then she ran for council, and we wound up sitting beside each other.

VTC: Jill, what's your greatest hope for Pennington Gap's future?

Jill: My greatest hope for Pennington Gap is that it never loses Keith as Town Manager! Seriously, the guy is so valuable I can't begin to tell you. Of course, twelve years ago, I wouldn't have said that.

Keith: Actually, seven years ago when they hired me you voted "No."

Jill: I did! I did not like the process. They cheated! It had nothing to do with Keith. I just feel so strongly against the "good old boy" system, and I thought it was coming into play in that vote.

Keith: [Explaining to VTC] There was no protocol in place at the time, so they developed a new protocol to come up with a new position as assistant town manager. I had been on council 19 years, and we had six or seven projects that I knew all the players plus we were having issues with the current town manager. So, they were looking for someone to ease into that.

Jill: Yeah, I wasn't comfortable with it.

Keith: Sometimes those things pan out and sometimes they don't.

Jill: Well, in this situation I *guess* it did.

Why Jill ran for council

When Jill Carson won a seat on the Pennington Gap town council, she became the first African-American woman to serve in that capacity. Since then, she has served as Vice Mayor and is currently serving her fourth term.

VTC: What led you to run for council in 2010?

Jill: I didn't like the way they did business, so I said to myself, "Well if you don't like it, and you want to change it, then you run for office."

VTC: What do you remember most from the first time you ran for council?

Jill: Think about this: An outsider. A Black woman. I'm supposed to be in the kitchen somewhere! The thing that helped me was being a community organizer because I had to talk to everybody in the whole town and because that's what I do, I talk. A lot.

The best was campaigning, although it was exhausting. One time my daughter Alexis was riding around with me. I was so tired. I remember going to somebody's house and laying on their couch and going to sleep because I was exhausted.

Another time, I went by a house and the husband, wife, and their son were all sitting on their porch. So, I thought, "I'll take a shot at it, I'm almost done for the day." I pulled into their driveway, and they got up and yelled "What do you want!!!"

I thought, "Oh gosh, never mind."

It turns out all three of them were on the rescue squad and they became my best friends afterward.



Jill explains how Ron found his calling

Ron likes to brag that when he got out of high school, he worked in a coal mine. Really, he worked for like 10 minutes in that mine! If he had stuck with it, he would have been a fifth-generation coal miner. But he wasn't comfortable with the work.

During the time that Ron was working for social services, Dr. Art Van Zee approached Ron and told him that Saint Charles Community Health Clinic had received a grant for black lung benefits. He asked Ron if he would help them implement the grant.

Ron ended up taking on that challenge, but he had to start from ground zero. The whole thing just grabbed him because his grandfather and great-great grandfather had suffered from black lung disease, so he saw this as a way to help other coal miners get their benefits.

He ended up becoming the chair of the National Black Lung Coalition. He traveled all over the country to set up black lung benefits programs in every coal producing state. He helped miners get their

benefits by acting as an advocate for them in court. He was recognized by Congress for 30 years of service to coal miners. I traveled a lot with him and joined him in court many times.

When he retired from the clinic in 2018, I said "I can't imagine you walking away." But it's hard work and he had done so much.

Of course, over the past couple of months he's started getting requests to come help with some cases. So, he's getting his feet wet again but he doesn't have 10 minutes because he's so much involved with the 400 Years of African American History Commission.

Note: *The 400 Years of African American History Commission Act, signed into law January 8, 2018, established a 15-member commission to coordinate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in the English colonies. The Secretary of the Interior appointed 15 Commission members based on recommendations by Members of Congress, state governors, civil rights and historical organizations, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and the National Park Service. Among those appointed is Ron Carson, listed on the organization's website as "2nd Vice Chair, Founder, Appalachian African-American Cultural Center; CEO and President, Carson Black Lung Centers, Pennington Gap, Virginia."*

In the company of good troublemakers

I met Doctor Van Zee and his wife. I met Sister Beth Davies. That's who I attached myself to. Good people fighting the system. Oftentimes we had to bail Beth out of jail. I'd get a call: "Jill I'm in New Mexico, I'm in jail!"

They did good trouble.

- Jill Carson

THERE ARE SOME who are fortunate enough to simply read about the opioid epidemic or see news reports about it. They may enjoy two or even three degrees of separation from someone directly affected by it. But even for these people, the facts, the stories, and the reality are shocking, saddening and sobering.

Then there are those who are living on the front lines. Those who don't enjoy any degrees of separation. Those who come home to it every day, or don't come home at all.

Before it was an epidemic, this national crisis had its beginnings in places like Pennington Gap. We know now that Appalachia was specifically targeted by the opioid manufacturers who time and again put profit over people. We know this because, fortunately for all of us, the region had some people who recognized the crisis

early and began sounding the alarm nationally even as they tried to save lives locally. These people include...

Dr. Art Van Zee who questioned the commercialization of prescription drug he knew was destroying lives and didn't stay silent.

Sue Ella Kobak, a district attorney (and wife of Dr. Van Zee) who saw firsthand the rise in drug related crime and connected the dots to the rising abuse of prescription pain killers.

Sister Beth Davies who channeled years of experience fighting for Appalachia's coal miners to fight for the victims of drug addiction to care for them at their most vulnerable.

But of course, Van Zee, Kobak and Davies and their like didn't do it alone. They were supported by a cadre of fellow "troublemakers" across Appalachia. It will surprise no one that these troublemakers included Jill and Ron Carson. Their work continues to this day.

Following the increased attention that Hulu's adaptation of Beth Macy's *Dopesick* brought to the issue, Macy and show creator Danny Strong started a GoFundMe to support Sister Beth's clinic. Learn more at www.gofundme.com/f/nf4wch-helping-the-helpers.

JOHNATHON KELSO / THE NEW YORK TIMES



Dr. Art Van Zee



Sue Ella Kobak



Sister Beth Davies



Jill and Ron Carson sit in front of a few historical artifacts collected over the years. Prominently displayed is an old photograph of Ron's great-great-grandmother Rachel Scott, below, who built the building in 1939 as a school for African Americans. Photo by Kevin Ridder (2019) for the *AppalachianVOICE*.

Jill explains how the Appalachian African-American Culture Center came to be

When Ron started bringing me to visit his parents, we'd come up to the old school-house and he'd reminisce about the seven years he spent in primary school here. His great-great grandmother Rachel Scott built the school for the Black kids in the area. Prior to the school being built, there was a church that sat where our house sits today. It served as a church on Sundays and as a school during the week. We have the letter that one of the last teachers sent to Thurgood Marshall asking for his help because the church school was falling apart, and the kids had nowhere to go to school.

The school that Ron's great-great-grandmother started in this building had seven classes in one room. The teacher used cooperative learning in which the older kids taught the younger kids. After 7th grade they were bussed to James A. Bland High School in Big Stone Gap. The year that Ron was supposed to start at Bland they integrated the school. He says that at the time he was upset about it because he missed out on going to school with all the pretty Black girls!

[Note: The James A. Bland High School building later became the town hall for Big Stone Gap]

When we moved here in 1986, they were consolidating the schools in Lee County, and they were just going to tear the old school-house building down because there was no reversion clause in the deed to return it to the Carson family. I just said, "That's not acceptable!"

I picked up the phone and located the nearest branch of the NAACP. It turned out to be in Bristol. I called and I met with them. We went before the Board of Supervisors and with the plan of shaming them into doing the right thing. They held strong; they didn't feel like they had to turn it over to the community. This went on for ages! It was a long hard battle.

The NAACP came here and then we brought in TV cameras and told our story. We told about Ron's great-great grandmother and what the school had meant to the community. Initially the County agreed to give us the building but not the land. We finally got it, but it was a long battle.

We got the building and we said, "What are we going to do with it?" We had no idea. We had not given any thought to that at all. But we were fortunate enough to get a fellowship to Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, TN. People come from all over and you sit down, and you talk about your community and the challenges you face. Somebody said to us, "You know, very little if anything's been written about the experiences of African-Americans in the Appalachian region."

So, we came back and had a meeting at Ron's parents' house and invited people in the community to come and everybody thought that would be a good idea to gather and document the stories of African-Americans in Appalachia.

It started out with people in the community who volunteered to go out and talk to people and record those conversations using those big video cameras they had at the time. I can't begin to tell you how many videos we have! That's what we've been doing for the last 30 plus years.



Jill Carson

Lately, we've had a lot of demand for our anti-racism workshops. We address white supremacy and internalized racist oppression. We just got back a couple weeks ago from doing a workshop at a private school in Birmingham, AL.

We also go to meetings of the Appalachian Service Project that are organized by the United Methodist churches. They bring in youth from everywhere to help people work on their houses at the high school and college level.

I often say to Ron, "If we had stayed in Boston, we wouldn't have been doing any of this!"

We haven't regretted it at all. The people are great. It's the history here, not just Black history, but the history of the Appalachian region. It just grabbed me!



Alex Haley's desk.

Learn more

All the below resources are readily available online:

"A Nun, a Doctor and a Lawyer — and Deep Regret Over the Nation's Handling of Opioids" by Barry Meier. *New York Times*, August 18, 2019.

"Lingering Pain: Medical school alumnus helped spur a national movement against misused prescription opioids" by Dan Morrell. *THINK*, Spring 2022.

"Member Spotlight: Sister Beth Davies" by Sam Kepple. *AppalachianVoices*, April 8, 2021.

"The Appalachian African American Cultural Center: Preserving community history in Southwest Virginia" by Kevin Ridder. *AppalachianVOICE*, June 7, 2019.

"The Promotion and Marketing of OxyContin: Commercial Triumph, Public Health Tragedy" by Art Van Zee, MD. *American Journal of Public Health*, February 2009.

"What Is the Future of Black Appalachia?" by Oliver Whang. *New York Times*, September 26, 2020

Dopesick by Beth Macy. Little, Brown & Company. Originally published August 7, 2018

60 seconds with Jill Carson

Why the VML Board? I ran to be on the VML Board in 2012 because my buddy David Helms (former mayor of Marion and president of VML) told me to. He still calls me at least once a month. He called just the other day because his wife wanted to know if it was OK if they put my name on their church's prayer list. He checks on me all the time. I appreciate it.

Recent Honor: On October 22nd I served as the Grand Marshall of the Lee County Tobacco Festival. It all comes back to community organizing and relationships that I built here.

Proud Accomplishment: The restoration of the Lee Theater. So many people that were against it now say that it is the best thing that's ever happened to this town. [Note: Good things keep happening as the town recently received a DHCD grant to renovate the buildings across the street from the theater.]

VML Presidency Theme: Civility. It has to start somewhere, why not with us?

Favorite Food: Seafood but it doesn't always love me!

Least Favorite Food: Kale. That's my husband's favorite.

Someone who has inspired you: Dr. Art Van Zee and Sister Beth Davies. These are my best buddies and they've always inspired me [see sidebar on page 14].



Congratulations

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Ramping up with the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program

Improve81 Priorities

- Increase Safety
- Reduce Congestion
- Support Economic Development



AS A CRITICAL NORTH-SOUTH backbone of the East Coast's freight network, the I-81 corridor is vital to the efficient movement of goods through Virginia. Within Virginia, I-81 connects 30 colleges and universities, 21 cities and towns and 13 counties, and parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway. More than one-third of all trucks and nearly 50 percent of the state's value of goods are transported along the 325-mile corridor which spans three VDOT districts: Bristol, Salem, and Staunton.

The I-81 Corridor Improvement Program was created to implement "innovative, targeted improvements that will have a substantial effect on the safety and reliability of a critical portion of our nation's infrastructure." There are projects that will consist of both operational and capital improvements.

It's worth noting, that these projects represent the first substantial improvements to the I-81 corridor since it was completed in the 1960s! With all this new activity, we thought it would be a great time to feature some of the work being accomplished by the program.

In the rearview mirror

Bristol District / Marion (Exit 47 completed)

Excerpted from the Fall 2022 *81 Insider*



The Interstate 81 Corridor Improvement Program includes 34 ramp-extension projects with a common purpose: to enhance safety and traffic flow at interchanges. All of them extend acceleration or deceleration lanes to minimize conflicts between vehicles traveling at different speeds.

The largest and most challenging of these projects opened to traffic in late July 2022 at exit 47 (Marion) in Smyth County. Under

a \$7 million design-build contract, A & J Development and Excavation Inc. added 0.8-mile to the acceleration lane from Route 11 onto northbound I-81. Commercial trucks and other vehicles had struggled to reach highway speed from this interchange due to a long, steep grade.

Construction required crews to excavate roughly 78,000 cubic yards of earth and rock with carefully controlled blasting. "The work was confined between traffic barriers and a mountain side, creating restricted width. I-81 experienced a minor shift to allow for extra work area, but still the tight work area created many production challenges," explains Marty Holloway, VDOT Bristol District Engineer for Mega Projects.

Bristol District Design Engineer Robert Leonard adds, "We utilized 'slow roll roadblocks' during blasting and the contractor monitored the blasting effects and adjusted blast size so that material would not escape the work zone."

VDOT traffic engineers estimate that the project could reduce crashes by up to 77 percent, making it well worth the cost and construction challenges. "The opportunity to provide an extended acceleration lane that also can assist trucks in this very steep area was just simply too good to pass up," says Gene Holley, I-81 CIP Coordinator for the VDOT Bristol District. "The 'bang for the buck' was two-fold on this project and that provides quite a bit of satisfaction to all involved in delivering this project."

VDOT chose to deliver the northbound exit 47 improvements through a single-phase design-build method, which expedited the project and allowed the contractor to be involved in the design process.

In motion

Roanoke County and City of Salem (Exits 137-141 in process)

Excerpted from the Spring 2021 *81 Insider*



The first major widening project that is part of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program began construction in February 2022 under the direction of contractor Archer Western Construction LLC. The \$179 million design-build project will widen the interstate from two lanes to three lanes in both directions between exits 137 and 141 in Roanoke County and Salem. It is scheduled to be completed in early 2026.

The new lanes will be built at locations along I-81's right and left shoulders. Barrier walls were installed along the shoulders through the spring and summer of 2022.

Two lanes of I-81 traffic in each direction remain open during the project with periodic lane closures scheduled during nighttime hours or outside of peak travel times as needed to construct the project.

The project also includes replacing six bridges, widening two bridges and installing approximately 2.6 miles of sound barrier walls along northbound I-81. Improving the southbound exit 137 off-ramp intersection at Wildwood Road and adding interchange lighting at exits 137, 140 and 141 are also included in the project.

Just around the bend

Staunton and Augusta County 221-225 (widening for Spring 2023)

The purpose of this project is to address existing and future capacity needs along I-81 northbound and southbound between mile marker 221 and 225 in Augusta County near Staunton. The project maintains roadway and bridge safety features, improves operational safety by adding I-81 capacity, improves travel reliability for the public, limits impacts to existing access ramps, and repairs or replaces deficient bridge components within the project.

- Public Hearing Information from www.virginiadot.org

What I81 means to the region...

I-81 is essential to the economic lifblood of Augusta County and is instrumental to attracting new businesses and employers. Augusta County sits just about in the middle of the I-81 corridor, so our manufacturers are able to easily move products north and south and connect to major thoroughfares east and west. It parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway which brings in visitors daily and is important for the vibrancy it brings to tourism in our area.

- Augusta County Administrator Tim Fitzgerald

About the bridges...

This project widens and replace the decks for five bridges. Each one of these bridges has a unique set of key issues that are considered when developing widening and deck replacement solutions.

The most northern two in this area are over Lewis Creek – near mile marker 225. At this location, both the north- and southbound bridges are pre-stressed concrete girder spans. The remaining three bridges to be widened and have deck replacements are southbound steel girder spans over Route 250 (Richmond Avenue), over Augusta Woods Drive and the Buckingham Branch Railroad, and southbound over the ramp to Interstate 64 eastbound.

The existing bridge decks will be removed on all five bridges and the concrete or steel girders will be repaired as needed. Additional girders and substructure will be added for widening. Then, new concrete decks will be placed.

- Bridge Engineer Jean Uhl, VDOT Staunton District

How to keep the traffic moving...

Maintaining traffic flow takes a lot of careful thought and planning. The old structure typically continues to carry two lanes of live traffic with partial demolition while the other portion of the old structure receives new girders to widen the new deck. Then the lanes of live traffic are moved to the newly constructed portion while the old deck is removed, and the remainder of the new structure is completed. Bridge designers refer to this as staged or phased construction.

This busy area from mile marker 221-225 is particularly challenging. Where the ramp of I-64 merges into I-81, there is limited width available and clearance issues. The design will make the most out of all the space we have available. At the bridge where I-81 crosses over Route 250, the ramp from Route 250 onto I-81 must remain open to live traffic during construction. This requires coordination with VDOT's traffic engineering section to keep traffic flowing while providing a quality structure that will have a long service life.

- Bridge Engineer Jean Uhl, VDOT Staunton District



Catching up with Covington



Dave Covington is the program delivery director for Improve81. VTC was pleased to have the opportunity to chat with him by phone just before the holidays.

[This interview has been condensed and edited]

VTC: *Given that it's been 60 years since any significant work has been done on I-81, is it difficult to evaluate contractors, some of whom haven't worked on the I-81 corridor?*

Covington: When we look at their experience, we try not to discriminate and place higher value on a project that was on I-81 versus I-64 in Hampton Roads for instance. We are also very careful not to discriminate on out of state work. Let's say somebody has a lot of very similar experience in West Virginia, we're not going to hold that against them because a lot of the standards are nationalized. VDOT has our preferences about how we do things, but we just want to make sure that we're being fair to the entire region.

VTC: *Why did you choose to use a design-build process instead of a traditional design-bid-build process for some of your recent projects?*

Covington: Traditional design-bid-build is what you would normally think about in a VDOT highway construction project in which VDOT completes the design of the project – whether it's our internal staff or we hire a consultant. After the design is completed, we begin the utility relocation and right-of-way acquisition phase which, depending on the complexity of a project, can be six months to a year and a half. That process is rather complex and time consuming.

The design-build process generally tries to expedite project delivery. It marries the design phase to the construction phase and everything in between – including utility relocations and right-of-way acquisitions – into a single contract for a design-build offeror from a team of specialists with the contractor.

In these cases, VDOT completes about 20 -30 percent of the design so we can establish the scope of work. From there we develop

a set of technical criteria and put that out to the industry and receive statements of qualifications from teams of contractors and designers. Generally, we pick the three best teams that seem to have a good approach, available resources, and a good understanding of the project.

Each of the finalists then submits their technical proposal and their price proposal at which point we're not only evaluating the price, but we're also evaluating the quality of what the design-build teams offer. There's a technical score that's about 30 percent of the overall score and the price is about 70 percent of the overall score. So, whereas in a traditional design-bid-build process where we're only looking at price in a design-build process we're also looking at what innovations will provide value for the taxpayers.

We have another design-build delivery method that is a single phase in which we only look at price. The project in Marion was a single-phase process because it was a smaller, lower risk project. It's faster to get through the procurement process. Of course, the offeror must meet all the minimal qualifications.

VTC: *Is it tough to find contractors?*

Covington: It is a challenge but one of my initiatives from the very beginning was that I want to be highly competitive with other markets. One of the ways we have worked to attract those established firms is by highlighting the distinctive way VDOT will manage this program of projects. The way that we have been, and will continue to deliver the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program is reflective of my experience managing the Route 29 Solutions Program.

The Route 29 Solutions Program in the Charlottesville and Albemarle County area was termed a "flash track" program. This simply means that we were tasked with delivering a program of projects faster than fast. The program included 9 distinct projects with varying delivery methods to meet a total duration of 3 years. Although many people believed that this timeline was impossible, we achieved our goal by focusing intently on delivery and partnerships. At the core, we were hyper-focused on accountability, transparency, and trust. The construction industry took note of this success and is factoring it into





their decision making for the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program. So far, this has been a success.

When I stepped into this role on the I-81 corridor, my message to contractors was that we want to deliver projects just like we did in Charlottesville. We want to work with them to find solutions and drive innovation and make sure that everybody's needs are met. I think that's been a big message statewide and the result is we're getting seven or eight teams submitting applications for these design-build projects.

It also creates opportunities for smaller contractors. For example, the contractor working on Exits 137-141 has not done extensive work in Virginia, but they want to do a good job and they want to win another contract and have a sustainable relationship with I-81 and with VDOT. That is extremely important to me.

The same with the consultants. We've seen numerous consultants that have never had an office located along the I-81 corridor opening offices now in Roanoke, Winchester, Harrisonburg, and Bristol because they know that work is there and they're getting contracts.

VTC: *The I-81 corridor has some unique needs – blasting on sheer elevations next to traffic for instance. Has it been difficult to handle those challenges?*

Covington: You know, it hasn't. About 10 years ago we were doing the same sort of thing on Christiansburg Mountain, so we do have some of that expertise within the state. We also have contacts with contractors that have that experience outside of Virginia. We have specific requirements within our contract documents pertaining to blasting; including that the contractor must develop specific blasting plans, develop contingency plans, and have a certified blaster develop the plans and be on site during any blasting operations. Blasting plans and contingency plans must account for protecting the work zone and the travelling public. This is the process that was used successfully in Marion by A&J Construction out of Mount Crawford. They have a history of blasting work, they developed a good risk management plan, and they executed that plan well.

VTC: *How has the funding over the past four or five years allowed the larger projects to begin?*

Covington: The 2018 acts of the General Assembly that created the I-81 corridor improvement program used the regional fuel tax as the primary funding source. They studied multiple alternatives, one of which was a tolling scenario, but that did not look favorable because this isn't I-95 or I-64 in Hampton Roads or I-66. It just wouldn't generate enough revenue to deliver a program like we have now. It also was not a popular option. So, what ended up happening was the establishment of a regional fuel tax along the corridor, which has been modified so that only counties and cities through which I-81 passes now contribute to it.

The other funding source now is the Interstate Operations and Enhancement Program that is the general statewide tax that is distributed to each Interstate system in Virginia based on the truck traffic percentage of which I-81 has the highest. Those two things – the regional fuel tax and the Interstate Operations and Enhancement Program – those are our funding sources.

Also, we've leveraged federal loans with very low interest rates especially in rural areas to advance projects more quickly. Those loans will be paid back with the money that's coming from the regional fuel

taxes. We've also had some bond sales. Up to this point along the I-81 corridor they're not relatively extensive but we are incorporating bonds to help us to try to deliver projects more quickly.

VTC: *Improve81.org has a robust communication strategy with interactive maps, newsletters, podcasts, videos, documents, news stories, traffic alerts...I mean your site is a one-stop-shop for what's happening on the I-81 corridor. How did that all come together?*

Covington: When I came to this position in 2019, I carried the experience I had in Charlottesville working on the Route 29 Solutions program. That came on the heels of the cancelled Route 29 Bypass in a very politically active community. The cancellation of the Route 29 Bypass upset a large portion of the community, but made another large portion of the community very happy. This situation rapidly created divide in the community and we knew we needed to address that very quickly. A robust communication program was the right solution. The communication strategy and program focused again on accountability and transparency, and it worked extremely well.

When I first came to Improve81, one of the first meetings I held was with all the communications managers from all the three districts. For a couple of days, we sat around a conference room and developed ideas. That's how we came up with the communications program which led to the rather quick development of the Improve81.org website.

VTC: *You've told me before about your extensive private sector background in design in addition to your engineering background. How has that helped you?*

Covington: As an employee at a state agency a lot of times you take a path, and you generally stay on that path unless you do something to purposely get a different experience. I came into this having worked in design most of my career. But I'm also very close with the construction side, which is somewhat unique for engineers. My best days are when I'm working in the field with a contractor trying to solve problems to keep projects moving. Some engineers don't want to be in the field, they would prefer to stay in the office and perform design work, which is important. The challenge has been conveying issues that arise during construction back to design engineers so that they can develop more constructible designs. Diversity of experience has been a huge asset for me professionally.

VTC: *Any advice for those interested in getting into your line of work?*

Covington: For the past three years I've been a guest lecturer for classes at VMI. I've told my students to apply and think about risk management in everything they do. I want to empower young people to think about risk management a little bit differently than the textbook tells them how to do it. You can learn all the engineering components in school and through your first jobs in the industry where you have mentors that will teach you. But it's very rare that you will come across somebody in this industry that will give you a different perspective on how to evaluate and manage risk.



IMPROVE 81

2023 General Assembly Session preview

Dear Legislator:

Since 1905, the nonprofit Virginia Municipal League has worked in a nonpartisan role on behalf of Virginia's localities. Every year, the 38 cities, 170 towns and eight counties of the Virginia Municipal League make substantial financial commitments to administer a wide array of services on behalf of the state. Our member localities welcome opportunities in 2023 to partner with you to ensure that the Commonwealth works best for all its citizens.

The priorities in this 2023 Legislative Program reflect those of our member communities whose representatives worked through our five policy committees and legislative committee to develop positions on issues – and opportunities to address those issues – of statewide importance. As you meet the challenges of governing the Commonwealth, we ask that you keep these priorities in mind. Foremost among these are positions on topics that affect every Virginian: Education and Transportation.

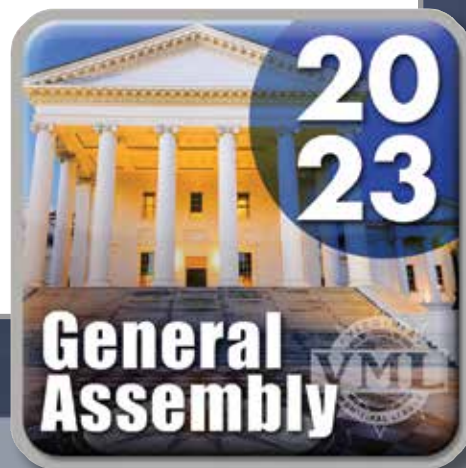
During VML's most recent Annual Conference in Richmond, our Board adopted a civility pledge we are urging our members to adopt as well. The purpose of the pledge is to ensure "mutual respect to achieve municipal goals, recognizing that patience, tolerance and civility are imperative to success."

In this spirit, VML members and staff look forward to working with you for a successful 2023 session of the General Assembly. We are here to help answer questions and provide the information you need when considering legislation and budget items. Please email, text, or call us as often as needed. We are always happy to join a meeting – whether virtual or in-person – or provide comments as we work to achieve our mutual goal of stronger communities. Thank you for your service to the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Jill Carson
President, Virginia Municipal League
Vice Mayor, Town of Pennington Gap



2023 VML Legislative Program

As approved by the VML Membership on October 3, 2022.

Guiding Principle: Local Authority

VML supports expanded local government authority and opposes any erosion of local authority.

I. Legislative Priorities

Support Public Education

- VML supports statewide authority for local governments to impose a one percent sales tax to help raise critically needed funds for school construction and renovation. For those already imposing an approved one percent sales tax for local or regional special funding needs, an additional one percent for school infrastructure funding should be authorized for school construction and renovation purposes.
- While VML supports opportunities for innovation in the Commonwealth's public education system, it opposes efforts by the state to limit local authority over management of local school districts; reduce or divert state funds and resources intended for local public schools to fund charter, college partnership laboratory schools, or other state initiatives; or otherwise proliferate the growth of state government initiatives that adversely affect the needs of existing public school systems.
- VML supports the school construction grant program and believes it should be consistently funded. Until revenue from the Gaming Proceeds Fund is sufficient to significantly help communities pay for school construction or renovation needs, the state should continue to use general funds to fill in the gap.

Marijuana: Clarification of Local Referendum and State Support

VML urges the General Assembly to clarify the cities, towns and counties referendum opt-out process by specifying that:

- Towns may hold concurrent referenda with their counties with the outcome of the town referendum binding within the town, and
- Only in the case of a town not holding a referendum would a county's referendum outcome affect a town's legal sales of recreational marijuana.

VML further requests dedicated and near-term financial state support to assist communities with the upfront, pre-implementation

administrative, health, and public safety costs incurred prior to the start of legal sales in localities. This includes training for local law enforcement, and other applicable local government personnel (taxation, code enforcement, zoning, etc.) on the new law and regulations.

VML urges the Cannabis Control Authority to begin its work as soon as possible to fill the regulatory vacuum. This work must include participation by local governments to clarify state and local roles and responsibilities pertaining to marijuana rules and regulations, including but not limited to, establishing enforcement guidance and training standards, guidance for marijuana equivalents, and eliminating ambiguity from local authority. VML supports the equitable implementation of this law.

Transportation Funding

The General Assembly must make transportation funding whole with a consistent and sufficient revenue source or with state general funds after discarding a dedicated transportation revenue stream as a part of the elimination of the state sales tax on groceries during the 2022 Session. A decent transportation system is fundamental for attracting and retaining businesses, residents, and tourism. If not addressed, this funding loss will have a long-term negative impact on transportation projects statewide. The rise in project costs due to increased inflation will compound this impact.

II. Legislative Program Items

(listed alphabetically)

Economic Development

VML supports local flexibility to promote economic development as our localities come out of this pandemic. A changed business landscape will necessitate a review of revenue sources to localities along with new ideas and actions that will broaden and diversify local revenue streams. Retention of current businesses and attraction of new businesses is vital, and we support continued grant funding for current businesses that are both efficient and effective.

The 2020 General Assembly-approved amendments to Code of Virginia § 2.2-3115 under the Conflict of Interests Act are creating a major deterrent to continued participation by citizen volunteers on local industrial development authorities and economic development authorities. VML supports transparency but also a balance in financial reporting requirements on citizen volunteers to ensure that economic development authorities and industrial development authorities continue to operate with interested and knowledgeable volunteers.

Funding of Community Services Boards and Behavioral Health Authorities

- VML supports sufficient and sustained state funding and technical assistance for community services boards/behavioral health authorities to implement STEP-VA requirements and to support the planning and implementation of Marcus Alert protocols. This funding should not come at the expense of other community-based service initiatives and requirements; nor should the burden of funding these state initiatives be shifted to local governments.
- Federal ARPA funds and robust state revenues offer an opportunity for the state to make new investments in the community and in the state hospitals.
- Investments must go to both build the network of community-based services and to assist state hospitals with their vital mission. This cannot be a zero-sum funding situation where one part of the system benefits at the expense of the other part of the system.

Land Use Control

Localities must maintain control of local land use decisions. Neither the state nor the federal government should usurp or pre-empt a locality's authority to make such decisions, nor should they impose requirements that weaken planning and land use functions. This includes all types of housing to include but not limited to short-term rentals.

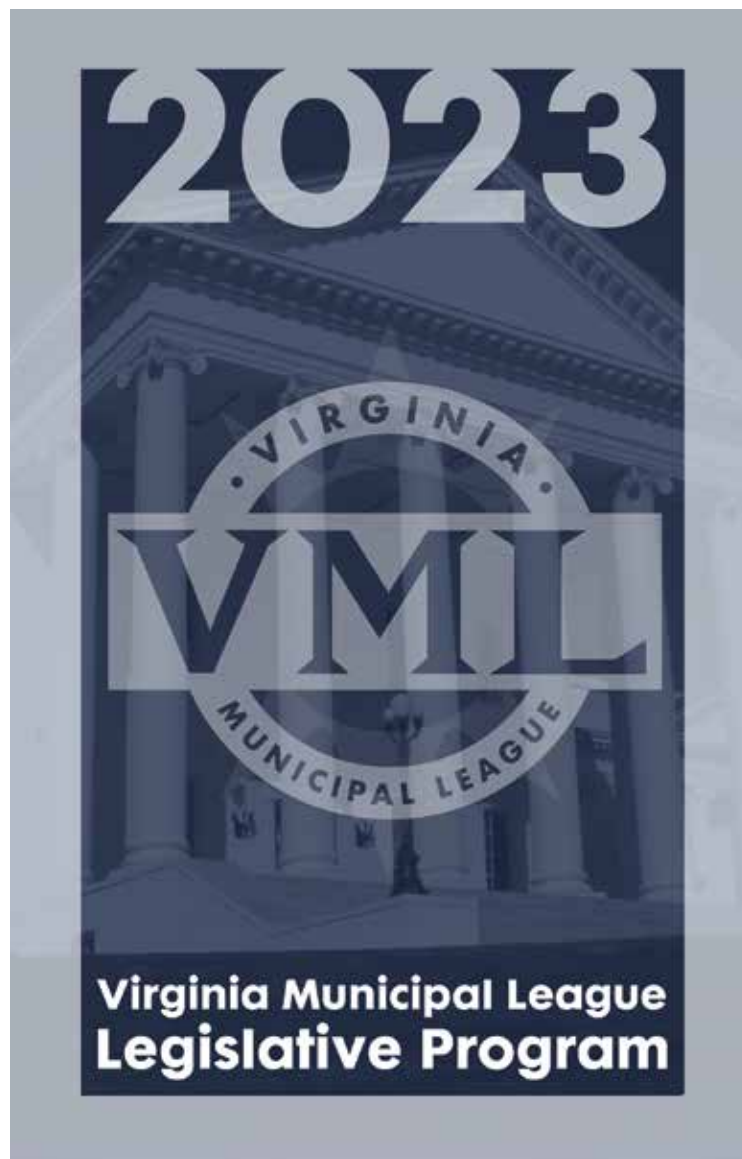
VML also supports local government authority to promote affordable and mixed income housing as well as the required infrastructure to facilitate in-fill development, redevelopment and mixing of uses. Any mandate from the state should include full funding for the locality.

Local and Regional Jails

- VML requests that the Code of Virginia be amended to require that jail per diem rates for all offenders held in a local or regional jail, including those awaiting sentencing or serving sentences in those facilities (tier I) and offenders required under the Code of Virginia to be moved to the Department of Corrections (tier II) be regularly adjusted for inflation in line with the Consumer Price Index so that per diem payments keep pace with actual costs, such as is done with other areas of the budget (e.g., Standards of Quality)
- Local and regional jails should have a choice as to whether they will keep state-responsible inmates (tier II) in their facility after the 60-days from the date of the final sentencing order. Willing facilities may contract with the state to keep such inmates past the 60-day period; those jails unable to keep state-responsible inmates due to space or resource limitations should not be compelled to keep state inmates past the 60-day period.

Local Excise Taxes

VML supports the statewide authority for local governments to establish an excise tax on the sale of vaping products. VML also supports the statewide authority for local governments to establish an excise tax on the sale of cannabis products.



Sovereign Immunity

Expanding liability and eroding immunities at state levels across the nation have had a chilling effect on the actions of local government officials contributing to local government insurance problems, creating immense financial risks (particularly for legal costs), and posing a substantial obstacle to the provision of needed public services.

The Virginia General Assembly should strengthen and must maintain the principles of sovereign immunity for local governments and their officials.

State Assistance to Local Police Departments (HB 599)

Almost 70 percent of Virginians live in communities served by police departments. The State created a program of financial assistance to local police departments (HB 599) when it imposed an annexation moratorium on cities more than 30 years ago. It has increasingly de-emphasized this funding obligation as a priority but has never compromised on the annexation moratorium. VML calls for the state to honor its commitment to local governments and public safety by funding the program as stipulated in the Code of Virginia or lift the moratorium on annexation.

State-mandated Exemptions to the Local Sales Tax

The Virginia Department of Taxation estimated that groceries and hygiene products represent approximately 20 percent of the sales tax base in Virginia. VML opposes any state-mandated exemptions to the local option sales tax unless the General Assembly can establish a viable revenue-replacement to local governments.

Stormwater Local Assistance Fund

VML urges the 2023 General Assembly continue to fund the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF) at \$50 million. SLAF funding provides grants for localities to make improvements to better manage stormwater-related problems such as run off, erosion, and localized flooding.

Swatting

VML supports legislation that provides law enforcement an additional tool to combat the act of making a hoax communication to 9-1-1 (or to a private citizen, who then communicates the false information to 9-1-1) regarding an immediate threat to human life with the intent of triggering an immediate and significant law enforcement response, usually involving a SWAT team (thereby known as “swatting”).

Taxing, Licensing, and Regulating Internet-Based Business and Services

State actions to regulate private enterprises employing a business model that emphasizes the use of the internet to either provide retail, facilities, or ride-sharing services must acknowledge local government interests and include local governments in the decision-making.

As general principles, VML believes state and local policies should 1) encourage a level playing field for competing services in the market place; 2) not provide a tax preference or tax policy advantage for one group at the expense of another group in the competitive field; 3) seek to preserve state and local revenue; 4) ensure safety, reliability, and access for consumers, providers, and the public; and 5) protect local government’s ability to regulate businesses whether they are traditional, electronic, internet-based, virtual, or otherwise.

VML also believes that the state should not prohibit the sharing of financial information between the Commonwealth and appropriate local authorities that is normally treated as a part of the public domain. VML further believes that the state should not prohibit a locality from exercising its authority to enter into voluntary collection agreements provided that such agreements include provisions to protect the public’s interest.

Water Quality Improvement Fund allocation for wastewater projects

VML supports the allocation of the mandated Water Quality Improvement Fund deposit (approximately \$131.0 million in Fiscal Year 2023) for wastewater infrastructure projects. Additional investment would help wastewater treatment plants across the Commonwealth meet increasing costs of necessary capital improvements.

Parks	Street Maintenance
Animal Control	Public Health
Police	Neighborhood Preservation
Elementary Schools	Recycling
Building Code Enforcement	Animal Shelters
Medicaid Eligibility	Cable Television Franchises
Libraries	Sidewalks
Water & Sewer Systems	Voter Registration
Public Transportation	Child Protective Services
High Schools	Courts
Fire Services	Zoning Enforcement
Health Clinics	Farmers’ Markets
Historic Preservation	Engineering
Storm Water Utilities	Consumer Protection
Behavioral Health Services	Energy Efficiency
Traffic Control	Community Festivals
After-school Programs	Social Services
Landfills	Industrial Development
Economic Development	Paratransit
Jails	Fire Marshal
Building Inspections	Electric Utilities
Emergency Medical Services	Comprehensive Planning
Housing Authorities	Senior Citizen Programs
Services for At-risk Youth	Community Development
Community Centers	Main Streets
Middle Schools	Kindergarten
Parking Enforcement	Elections Administration
Transportation Safety	Adult Protective Services
Historic Preservation	Welfare Administration
Building Permits	Juvenile Detention
Community Festivals	Airports
Medicaid Eligibility	Citizen Boards & Commissions

E-911



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Put municipal methane to work for you locality

New options to tap, sell biogas from municipal landfills and wastewater treatment plants.

LEGISLATION PASSED BY THE 2022 General Assembly may provide new opportunities for local governments and public service authorities to partner with natural gas utilities to capture municipal methane and process it for lower-carbon energy use.

The legislation, billed as the Virginia Energy Innovation Act of 2022, allows natural gas utilities to invest in infrastructure to capture, purchase, process, and distribute biogas from landfills and wastewater treatment plants, among other sources, to a utility's customers. The utility would be able to recover certain costs, subject to the State Corporation Commission's usual review and approval. Del. Israel O'Quinn (Bristol) and Senator Scott Surovell (Fairfax) sponsored the legislation.

Methane is a byproduct of some energy production, waste storage (landfills), waste treatment (wastewater plants), and certain agricultural practices (livestock). The federal government lists methane as the second-most abundant greenhouse gas, following carbon dioxide, and notes it is 28 times more harmful to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality reports that landfills are the second-highest source of human-caused methane emissions in Virginia, following coal mines.

Biogas from municipal landfills, wastewater treatment plants, and other sources can be safely used for heating and cooling, industrial uses, transportation fuels, and electricity generation.

Virginia has four natural gas utilities: Columbia Gas, Virginia Natural Gas, Washington Gas, and Roanoke Gas. Each utility supported the legislation and has interest in working with localities to explore possible infrastructure investments to capture and purchase municipal biogas as a supplement to natural gas.

A gas utility seeking to add biogas to its portfolio would first have to file a plan with the SCC, detailing its proposed investment, the biogas supply, the project schedule, methane reductions, rate benefits, and how it is in the public interest, among other things. No single project can exceed three percent of the utility's annual sales; multiple projects by a utility cannot exceed 15% of its annual sales.

About the author: *Preston Bryant is a senior vice president at McGuire-Woods Consulting where he works in the firm's Infrastructure and Economic Development group. He is a consultant with VML's policy team during the 2023 General Assembly session.*



Save the Date

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PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER
TO CONNECT VIRGINIA

Save the Date
2023

REGISTRATION AND RESERVATIONS OPEN FEBRUARY 1

Join us May 17-18 at the Hilton Short Pump in Richmond, Virginia for Broadband Together 2023. Once again we will explore topics that help us expand broadband throughout the Commonwealth.



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Get to know the 34th Annual Virginia Water and Wastewater Rate Report

HOW DO YOU COMPARE? That's a common question many public utilities face when considering how to set rates and fees for water and wastewater services. Virginia boasts more than 250 public providers of water and wastewater across every size and type of community, which can make benchmarking a challenge. Understanding water and wastewater trends across the Commonwealth is crucial for public utilities and municipalities, especially when they consider rate changes and evaluate capital recovery charges. This information is a primary reason the annual Virginia Water and Wastewater Rate Report is so highly anticipated.

Significant findings

Even as public utilities continue to face a challenging and uncertain environment, the results compiled in the Annual Virginia Water and Wastewater Rate Report provide valuable intel for planning and strategy. The two most significant findings from the 2022 survey are related to rate changes.

First, the average water rate across the Commonwealth increased by 2.1 percent in 2022 and the average sewer rate increased by 2.5 percent. Both the water rate and wastewater rate increases were slightly lower than the previous year. Since 2012, the average water rate increased by 3.4 percent per year and the average wastewater rate increased by 3.8 percent per year. These increases occurred across a control group of representative utilities that allows the report to extrapolate trends across the state.

Second, 43 percent of respondents reported a water rate increase in 2022 and 53 percent of respondents increased wastewater rates in 2022. Thus, slightly more than half of all providers that participated in the survey raised rates.

In addition to water and wastewater rates, the 2022 report also shares data for connection fees and capital recovery charges.

Coming challenges

Looking ahead, water and wastewater providers continue to face several challenges. Yet, a significant opportunity for increased resources and funding will come from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This federal funding will provide billions for fiscal years 2022 through 2026, including for water infrastructure.

Get the report

The *34th Annual Virginia Water and Wastewater Rate Report* was produced by TRC Companies. The 2022 Virginia Water and Wastewater Report and previous reports are available for download online at www.daa.com/resources/past-www-rate-reports-download.

For questions about the Water and Wastewater Report, please contact water@trccompanies.com.



Draper Aden Associates has produced the report for more than three decades and we know that it has become an essential resource for public utilities. That's why our team has remained committed to delivering this crucial information even after Draper Aden was acquired by TRC Companies in May of 2022. TRC Companies is a global professional services firm providing environmentally focused and digitally powered solutions that address local needs. The 2022 edition of the report was released publicly by TRC Companies in October 2022.

2023



Virginia Municipal League If I Were Mayor ESSAY CONTEST

Deadline to enter: Friday, March 3, 2023

The Virginia Municipal League (VML) invites all eligible* Virginia 7th Graders to join its "If I were Mayor" essay contest.

Regional winners selected from around the state will each receive a \$150 gift card and a plaque. One statewide winner chosen from the regional winners will receive a \$250 gift card and a plaque. The runner-up from the region that receives the statewide award will become that region's winner.

Winning essays will be featured in the May issue of VML's magazine *Virginia Town & City*.

*See first bullet under "Rules & Regulations" below for eligibility requirements.

2023 Essay Contest

Being a mayor or community leader is a challenging but rewarding job. It's challenging because you must balance the needs and requests of different people in your community who don't always agree with each other. It's rewarding because, along with your city or town council or county board, you get to be one of the people who ensures that the best solutions are used to address the problems that affect everyone.

VML wants to give you a chance to show what you would do to solve a problem in your community.

Here's how it works:

What's the problem? If you were a community leader like a mayor, what's a problem in your locality you would want to solve? It could be something big that affects the whole community or something small that affects only a few people. If you are having trouble thinking of something, ask an adult (teacher, parent, guardian, relative, friend) for ideas.

Listen to a community member: Tell someone (teacher, parent, relative, classmate, friend, etc.) about the problem and ask what they think should be done to solve it. Write down their answer in your own words. Feel free to ask more than one person to gather more answers.

Decide: Does the proposed solution sound like it would work? Or do you think there is a better way to solve the problem? It's up to you!

Put it all together: Write a brief (300-500 words) essay in which you:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Summarize the idea you heard to solve the problem.
3. Offer your opinion of how best to solve the problem. If you agreed with community member, explain why. If you think your idea will work better, explain why.

How to enter

All entries must be received by end of day on Friday, March 3. There are two ways to submit your entry:

Fill out and submit our online form:

- The form is available at www.vml.org/education/essay-contest.
- Copy and paste your essay into the "Essay" box in the form.
- You can do this yourself or you can have your teacher or someone else help you.
- After VML receives your entry, a confirmation email will be sent to the email address entered on the form.
- At the top of the form, you will need to provide your full name, the name and location of your school, and your teacher's full name and email address.

OR

Mail your essay with a filled-out entry form (visit www.vml.org/education/essay-contest) attached and mail to:

VML, Attn: 7th Grade Essay Contest
P.O. Box 12164
Richmond, VA 23241

Rules & Regulations

The contest is open to all Virginia students from VML member municipalities enrolled in the 7th Grade during the 2022-2023 school year.

If you are not sure if you live or go to school in a member municipality, check the list at www.vml.org/organization/local-government-members.

All essays should be typed. Handwritten essays must be legible to be eligible for review.

Only one essay may be submitted per student.

Entries will be judged based on content and style.

Essays must be submitted by the end of the day on Friday, March 3. Winners will be notified at the end of March. VML will present the awards to the winners at one of their local council or school board meetings.

VML retains the right to publish essays along with the names of each student.

Enter on-line at www.vml.org/education/essay-contest.



Join VML

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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.

Please note that each level of membership includes both year-round benefits as well as benefits specific to VML's Annual Conference held in the fall.



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