

"If I Were Mayor" Essay Contest Winners

THIS MONTH'S ISSUE of *Virginia Town & City* is focused on programs that serve young people in Virginia, so we feel it's fitting to feature the winners of VML's own program to benefit young people: The "If I Were Mayor" essay contest.

This is the fifth year of the contest and, as in prior years, hundreds of seventh graders from across the state submitted essays explaining what they would do if they were mayor or an elected leader of their locality.

And did those students deliver! As evidenced by their writing, these young people love their communities but are fully aware of the problems that need to be addressed. Fixing the roads, increasing access to quality health care, harnessing the power of volunteers, and improving education are just a few of the real-life, timely issues that the students discussed. The best among them went further and identified practical solutions to those problems and encouraged their audience to care about fixing them as much as they do.

The winners:

- **Statewide winner:** Maci Mitchell of Hamilton Holmes Middle School in King William
- **Region 1:** Virginia Elizabeth Stockner of E.B. Stanley Middle School in Abingdon
- **Region 2:** Maria Angle of Clifton Middle School in Covington
- **Region 3:** Kaitlyn Hull of Kate Collins Middle School in Waynesboro

- **Region 4:** Sadie Henshaw of Kenston Forest Middle School in Blackstone
- **Region 5:** Lily Konopka of Ronald Regan Middle School in Haymarket
- **Region 6:** Haylee Burnett of Auburn Middle School in Warrenton
- **Region 7:** Samera Blowe of James S. Russell Middle School in Lawrenceville
- **Region 8:** Luz Pinto Consuelo of the Academy for Discovery at Lakewood in Norfolk

Of the statewide winning entry from Maci Mitchell, VML President Anita James Price said: "Not only well written, but her points were well thought out as well! The items she identifies are certainly ones that her community clearly needs and have captured her attention. Education and infrastructure were topics that many of the writers identified, but Maci also recognizes the lack of health care in her town and makes it a priority. Congratulations to this future Mayor!"

In addition to a plaque, each regional winner received a check for \$150. The statewide winner received a plaque and \$250.



Statewide Winner

Maci Mitchell

Hamilton Holmes Middle School, King William, VA



HELLO MY NAME IS MACI MITCHELL. I live in Aylett, a small town in King William County. I think King William is a great place but it could be better with a leader like me. There are many things that I would change in King William if I were on the board of supervisors. My changes would include fixing the roads to make them safer, opening emergency care facilities that are open twenty-four hours a day every day, and to build an auditorium for the schools in our county and the community.

Out of all the changes I would make in King William, the most important to me is to open emergency care facilities in King William. We have no doctor offices that are open for twenty-four hours a day or open on the weekends. It takes thirty or more minutes to get to the nearest urgent care center. In a critical situation a person may need to be seen right away and can't wait thirty minutes. It could be a life or death situation and some people who do not have insurance will not call an ambulance. If we had an urgent care center in King William, people could get quicker treatment, which could save their life.

Another thing I would fix in King William are the roads to make them safer for cars and especially school buses. One of the biggest problems on the roads are all the potholes, so I would pave them. Also, I would make the roads wider to accommodate

both ways of traffic. Sometimes, it is not safe for buses to travel on the same road at the same time because the road is too narrow. Another problem we currently have is branches and trees that are not trimmed back and hit tractors, big trucks and buses. I would work with the county and VDOT workers to make sure our roads are always kept safe.

If I were on the board of supervisors I would want to build an auditorium for the schools and the community. If King William County had an auditorium, our schools could hold concerts and performances in there instead of performing in the gym or cafeterias in the schools. The community can also hold whatever they need like fundraising, family events and our annual Fine Arts Festival can be held in the auditorium. Plus an auditorium would be a good place for local people to show off their talent.

In conclusion, if I was on the board of supervisors I would fix the roads to make them safer, open emergency care facilities that are open twenty-four hours a day every day, and build an auditorium that the schools and community can use. Just these three changes can make a big difference in my community.



Region 1 Winner

Virginia Elizabeth Stockner
E.B. Stanley Middle School, Abingdon, VA



IF I WERE MAYOR I would focus on a blended business community. Where the arts, history, and industry work together to create a perfect place to live, work, and play. My hometown, Abingdon, VA is a small town with a population of 8,191. It is one of the oldest Virginia towns past the Blue Ridge Mountains, it has an array of opportunities for residents and tourists alike.

Abingdon was founded in 1778 and was a important gathering point for the battle of Kings Mountain. But, before the founding, it already had a rich history, in 1760 Daniel Boone named the area Wolf Hills, after his dogs were attacked by a pack of wolfs. In the twenty-first century the town sponsored a public art event which created 27 wolf sculptures, which were displayed around town. The wolfs later on were auctioned off with only a few remaining on display. As mayor I would try to work with our talented art community to create new wolfs to be displayed around town once more.

The Barter Theatre is Virginia's state theatre, is world renowned, and is found in Abingdon, VA. Robert Porterfield opened the theatre in 1933 during the great depression. It benefitted both the actors and the farmers by providing food for the actors and entertainment for the farmers. The Barter Theatre relies on both private and public

dollars to thrive. As mayor I would make sure I would connect the theatre community with potential business sponsors.

Many buildings in Abingdon are historic for different ways like the Fields Penne House or the Cave House. But unfortunately, some of these historic sites have fallen in disrepair. As mayor I would create a community fundraiser that would help raise awareness of local businesses and at the same time help save the historic sites of Abingdon.

As mayor I would expand utilities such as high speed internet access, natural gas, recycling trash pick up, and recruit high speed rail service to the area. Abingdon is a great retirement community, but it needs more kid and teen friendly entertainment centers. As mayor I would encourage the creation of a entertainment center with things for all ages such as an arcade, go cart racing, a putt putt course, etc. Also as mayor I would recruit more good paying jobs to diversify the community.

I believe as mayor Abingdon could work together to create perfect place to live, work, and play.



Region 2 Winner

Maria Angle
Clifton Middle School, Covington, VA



IF I WERE MAYOR, something I would do to make my city an even better place to live is deal with less litter and air pollution, education, and roadways and traffic. Mayors are here for us to help them and are willing to listen to there community. They help make things better and keep things that we want in mind to.

The first thing I would do is work with the litter and air pollution. We want the wild animals and everyone safe so that way there is no harm to someone or something. The litter and air pollution has gotten wild nowadays because no one cares anymore about what the living creatures out in the wild lives are like, they just care about their own life.

Another thing I would focus on is the education that the kids get these days. Parents are just letting their kids stay home, play video games, and not come to school and get their education. The kids have gotten lazier with Chromebooks and so have teachers it's like they just don't care anymore. There are no paper notes or writing in classes. You only really use the Chromebooks nowadays with all the technology there is. They need to do more hands on work white using Chromebook at the same time, I think. I have never really had a year that I feel like I'm not learning something. I feel like I'm learning how to use a Chromebook and how to get unblocked games. I think the teachers should also have to work more with

students one on one. That's why I would fix the education. Also we need to think of how we want our future generations. We want them to be able to help, not just to be all about technology and get the technology to do our jobs for us.

I would also really like to focus on the roadways and traffic. There have been bad accidents with cars and buses. I want everyone to be safe at all times while getting from point A to point B. We don't want people to get injured because there was someone drunk driving or being dumb. We want everyone to be safe so I think we should have people watching the roads at all times and not just worried about the way people look or dress. I think there should be a thing on buses to notify the police if their bus is being bad or if they get in an accident more than once. The buses and anything that has a kid in it is what we should really watch out for because those kids are our future generation. We should also be worried about the adults as well because they help make the future generation and help the kids in general.

As you can see I have things I would want to fix if I was mayor. I would be willing to take the time to focus on what people want. I want to focus on what my community wants. I would love to become a mayor one day, fix what I want fixed, and what the people would want fixed.



Region 3 Winner

Kaitlyn Hull

Kate Collins Middle School, Waynesboro, VA



WAYNESBORO WOULD BE A BETTER place if we had better schools. However to do that the schools would need more fundings, so how do we get more fundings for schools. If I were Mayor I would raise the amount of money that goes to the school board.

Waynesboro high school is in desperate need of a remodel. Just take this into consideration, if you have the oldest high school in the state would you want a new one? Most people would agree, but for the few who are still on the edge think about the fear you would have if you went to that high school, just knowing that it would collapse like a ceiling fan in the girls bathroom did. Just the thought of having to go there in two years makes me cringe.

A lot of people in Waynesboro are not the healthiest, so to prevent kids from turning out just as terrible I as Mayor would strongly suggest more encouragement for sports. Sports are a big part a healthy lifestyle especially for a kid. Right now in Waynesboro one of the worst reasons kids don't want to play a sport for their school is because of uniforms mostly for girls. Girls on sports

teams usually end up with the hand me down uniforms of the boys teams before them, causing the uniforms to be large, baggy, uncomfortable and sometimes smell. If I were Mayor would try my best to make sure that the new uniforms for girls teams are actually new and that the high school and the middle school put as much effort into the girls uniforms as they do for the boys.

If I were Mayor I would also give the schools more money for furniture like desks, tables, and chairs. At Kate Collins countless chairs, tables and desks have broken but since the school has no money for repairs they are forced to use those chairs and tables regardless. With more money the schools could buy more furniture and keep the school safer. Also if it's that bad at the middle school I can't even imagine what it's like at "the oldest high school in Virginia." In conclusion Waynesboro would be a better place if we just had better schools.



Region 4 Winner

Sadie Henshaw

Kenston Forest Middle School, Blackstone, VA



AS MAYOR OF THE TOWN of Blackstone, I want to focus my efforts on the Main Street Business District. I envision a beautiful downtown with an emphasis to improve traffic safety and provide an attractive area where people want to live and shop. Below I have outlined my action plan and vision for Blackstone.

The first part of my action plan focuses on improving the flow of traffic downtown. I will begin with a request for city council to place restrictions on all commercial truck traffic along Main Street, mostly, between Tavern Street and Nottoway A venue. I have witnessed on a daily basis, pedestrians dodging large trucks. I believe heavy trucks are especially dangerous and discourage people from stopping to shop. My priority will be to detour large trucks to the rear of businesses along Brown Street and to add signage at Maple Street to encourage people to use parking in the rear of businesses and to walk downtown.

The second part of my plan seeks volunteers and sponsors to beautify Main Street. I want to hold a contest where artists submit ideas for decorating local crosswalks to encourage awareness of pedestrians. Artists may also be hired to implement their ideas. Local artists and craftsmen will be commissioned to design and install unique bike racks, build a variety of benches, and to decorate trashcans. In exchange for their help, we can promote their crafts at an annual craft show and community festival.

The third aspect of my plan is intended to provide fresh quality foods and greenery for the community. I want to support a local

gardening initiative. I will approach local farmers and ask them to sponsor horticulture classes. In addition, I will call on volunteers to supply materials necessary for raised gardens, including soil compost, and fertilizer. The fruits and vegetables produced in the community garden will supply local restaurants or provide food for the needy. Our community garden will not only add beauty to the downtown, but also bring residents closer together. My plant a tree and flowers initiatives are designed to grab the attention of potential shoppers. Business owners will be supplied with planters outside of their shops to plant trees and flowers.

I believe that the residents of Blackstone should be more informed about meetings, festivals, contests, and other events. A community flyer and bulletin board to notify the people will be placed in the common area. Since the majority of residents acquire their news online, I will encourage a website to be made with town events and other community activities.

As mayor, I will be an effective leader, and I will strive to make a significant and lasting impression on the town. I will seek to implement the ideas I have outlined. I believe that together with City Council Members and volunteers, we can have a beautiful downtown where truck traffic is kept to a minimum, families can enjoy time together, and local business owners can profit.



Region 5 Winner

Lily Konopka

Ronald Regan Middle School, Haymarket, VA



BEING A MAYOR IS HARD, hard work. You must juggle many tasks, such as keeping your city clean, balancing a budget, and dealing with people who all want something different. I love my town of Haymarket, but it's not perfect. There are a couple of things that might need a little changing ...

If I was appointed as mayor, I would start by improving the school system. As students get older, school is no longer fun. It turns into more work/ and no play. I would like to find a way to make classrooms more interesting, so that students will learn more and stay engaged. This is important because the older you get, the more your grades and work ethic in school will affect your future. So, by keeping students social and engaged, we can help provide for them a better future.

The second thing I would do if I were mayor for a day would be to do something involving the community, such as a community garden or farmers market. In doing this, more people in our community can be involved. This would also be a great way to introduce healthy, fresh foods back into people's lives. This is important because just being outside and around other people can help make a friendlier community and provide many people with a good way to spend their day.

My third order of action as mayor would be to help clean up

our community. My town is not a dirty town by any means, but it could be cleaner.

I would try to start a committee of people dedicated to keeping our streets cleaner, and maybe even find a way to reward those who do the most. This is important because keeping our community clean is a good way to give back to the environment and fight back against pollution.

The fourth and final thing I would do as mayor for a day is try to open more bike paths, parks, pools, lakes, and ponds. Providing a way for people to spend time outside is a great way for them to do so. Just walking for 30 minutes every day is known to decrease risks of many diseases and it helps relax the mind. It is also a great way to get the exercise that most people don't get from sitting inside all day. People can also spend more time with family and friends or develop new relationships with people by going to a common area, like a lake or pool. This is important because I feel like most people in my town, especially students, don't spend enough time outside as they should.

By making these changes, I hope to have made Haymarket a better, cleaner, smarter town. I hope I gave people more opportunities to make our town, environment, and community a better place. I also hope I am re-elected next year!



Region 6 Winner

Haylee Burnett

Auburn Middle School, Warrenton, VA



IF I WERE MAYOR of the town of Warrenton, I would get to work right away with several initiatives that I believe will benefit the town. My first initiative is to start a neighborhood enhancement voluntary program to help many people by sustaining their neighborhood. I believe starting this program will benefit our community by maintaining our residential homes and getting rid of unwanted yard and household waste. This program will help many people keep their properties in beautiful condition so our people can be proud of where they live.

My second initiative is to engage and benefit our business community. I would sit down with the business leaders of Warrenton to develop programs that would train prospects on the non-academic skills needed to be successful in their industries. I believe this is a great idea for people to know what to do so they have a higher chance of keeping their jobs.

My third initiative is to benefit Warrenton's public schools by creating an after school facility that is opened to young and older kids, which will include fun and energetic activities for kids to have fun and get a chance to meet new people. I believe that social interaction is important for minors, so creating this youth facility will open new opportunities for kids and teens. There will be snacks provided like popcorn, fruit punch, cookies, and much more for when we watch movies in the movie area. Fun and physical ac-

tivities will be provided like rope swinging into foam pits, Water balloon dodgeball, an inflatable maze, four square and much more.

My last initiative is to start a program to end bullying. I believe this will make our schools and our communities a safer and better place for all ages. This program will meet once a week and help inform kids on what to do in case of a person trying to bully you. I believe this is healthy for the community to understand the importance of treating others the way you want to be treated, and I believe this committee will help the Warrenton schools and surrounding communities change the culture in how we talk to each other. This program will help exert an influence upon our town that promotes tolerance towards all.

In conclusion, I believe all these ideas will help benefit our community. These initiatives will help make Warrenton a better place. Helping our community with Neighborhood enhancement will make our neighborhoods cleaner and more enjoyable. Engaging our business community with trained prospects is a great way to help people be successful. Taking action in building an after school facility for minors to interact safely with each other as well as making our schools a better place with an anti-bullying program will help kids feel comfortable with going to school.



Region 7 Winner

Samera Blowe

James S. Russell Middle School, Lawrenceville, VA



IN THE TOWN OF ALBERTA our mayor is Ashley Diane I think she is doing a great job so far, but we still need improvements. If I were mayor of Alberta, I would build more stores, clean up Alberta, have more activities for us to do, and build more houses. As mayor my primary responsibility is to preside at council meetings. Also the mayor has to act as head of the city for ceremonial purpose. A mayor's job is to be head of the city, they officially speak for both the government and community whole. In all statutory cities, the mayor is the presiding officer and regular member of the city council.

The first thing I would do is build fast food places and a Food Lion or Wal-Mart because Alberta only has two stores and that is Family Dollar and Exxon. I think we need more than two stores because we have to drive all the way to South Hill or Lawrenceville just to get groceries. So, when Food Lion or Wal-Mart open people could work there so people could have more jobs and they can get money to help with their families and pay the bills they need.

The second thing I would do is clean up Alberta; it does need cleaning because we have big tree branches everywhere in Alberta.

We also have trash that people just throw outside. I don't think its right for people to treat the world like that. So, I would start a program where kids and adults can join together and clean up Alberta. It will be called "Go Green Alberta." I know people don't like cleaning, so everyone don't have to join in the people who would be cleaning are volunteers.

The third thing I would do as mayor is plan activates for people to do. Like a parade or a fair where kids can have fun and enjoy every other five months. Also I would build houses for the people who need homes. I would become a landlord and let them rent out the houses for \$110. I don't think it should cost a lot of money because people should only have to worry about their family.

In conclusion, if I were mayor I would do a lot of things to improve Alberta. I would clean Alberta, build more stores and houses, and plan more activities. Alberta would have more people if I do this stuff. Alberta could be a fun and great place today. We would have closer stores for people, nice houses for people to move in, and cleaner community. I got a question for you, would you do the same for your city.



Region 8 Winner

Luz Pinto Consuelo

Academy for Discovery at Lakewood, Norfolk, VA



BEING MAYOR OF A CITY is a big deal and a huge responsibility. As mayor, it's your duty to keep the city safe and successful. The mayor of Norfolk, Kenny Alexander, is doing a great job in doing that right now. If I were to be mayor of Norfolk I would also do things that would make the city of Norfolk a better place.

If I were mayor of Norfolk, I would try to resolve three of the biggest problems in Norfolk, flooding, crime, and pollution. Flooding is major in Norfolk, and to solve that problem, I would want to redesign the storm drain system or add more storm drains to limit flooding. As a citizen of Norfolk, I know that flooding can get really bad in certain areas and can prevent people from going to work, schools, and other activities. Also, according to the article by pilotonline.com, by 2030, Hampton Roads Homes could be underwater!

The next problem I would want to resolve is pollution. Pollution is a big problem in Norfolk and all around the world. In an article by ABC News Now, scientists took air samples of different zip codes all around VA and found out that the top 5 zip codes with the most "toxic" or polluted air are in Hampton roads, right near Norfolk. What I would want to do to prevent pollution is make more laws and enforce more laws about pollution. There are already laws that stop people from polluting, but the government

is not enforcing them on people. I would also consider banning or limiting the use of plastic bags because that is one of the biggest causes of pollution. Also, since Norfolk is near the coast, we don't want plastic bags affecting wildlife.

Another major problem in Norfolk is crime/violence. Compared to other cities in VA, Norfolk has a pretty high crime rate. Yes, the crime rate has gone down since 2017, but ifs still not where we want it to be. In the news, there's always some sort of crime or violence happening in Norfolk. According to the Norfolk Crime Mapping website, there have been 259 crimes reported in Norfolk currently. What I would want to do to change that is to have police patrol the neighborhoods with the most crimes reported. I would also want to hire more higher end and trained police who are more responsible. Mayor Alexander mentioned that one reason why the crime rate is so high now is because when 9/11 happened, police started being way more cautious and patrolling the cities military style. Now, they have stopped doing that so it's easier for people to commit crimes.

In conclusion, I would want to make a lot of positive changes to benefit the people of Norfolk because as Kenny Alexander has said, the mayor, "works for the people!"