

Built to serve

Steve Trivett is
VML's new President

Steven P. Trivett

Also inside:


Tax and revenue
challenges for Virginia's
local governments

Supreme Court 2024-25
term preview

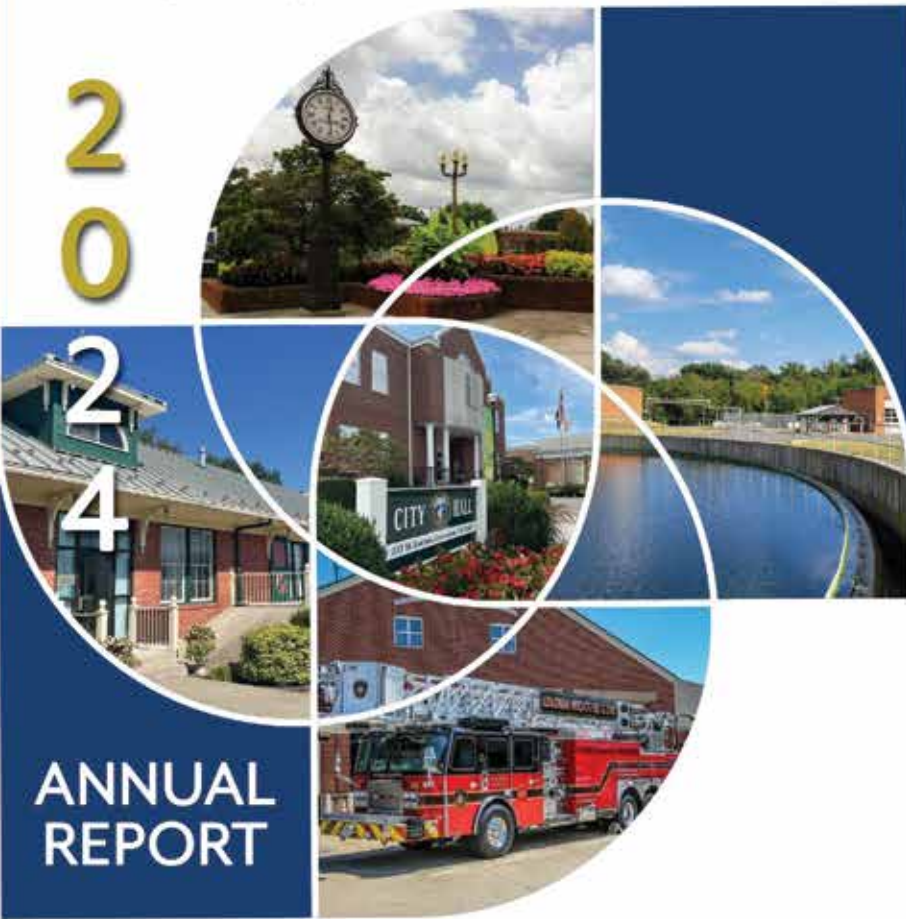


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BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT



ABOUT THE COVER

When Steve Trivett first ran for Ashland Town Council, he was working full time as a carpenter and homebuilder. His campaign flyer claimed that “the same type of cooperative strategies needed to build a home also lend themselves to the building of a community.” We couldn’t agree more! In fact, what is a gavel if not a fancy hammer? Learn all about Town of Ashland Mayor and VML President Steve Trivett inside.

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Built to serve: VML President and Town of Ashland Mayor Steve Trivett

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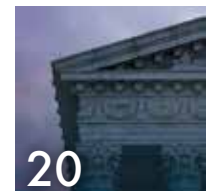
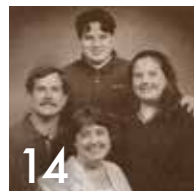
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Welcome Steve Trivett and 2025!

EACH YEAR AFTER the annual conference, I create a new folder on my computer with the name of the new VML President's locality. It's my way of starting a new year with a new President. Every time I see "Pennington Gap," I think of Jill Carson and what a great person and President she was even though her time in office was sadly short. I say this not only to remember her, but also to remind myself that my "Farmville" folder means that Vice-Mayor Reid was VML's President for almost two years! We learned a lot together. As I created the "Ashland" file for Mayor Trivett, I was aware that our time with Steve will be shorter and therefore we have a lot of work to do!

VML is excited to have Mayor Trivett from the Town of Ashland as our new President and we look forward to great things in 2025. Congratulations also to Dwayne Tuggle, Mayor of the Town of Amherst, who is our President-Elect and Kelly Burk, Mayor of the Town of Leesburg, who is our Vice-President.

As you will read in the article about Steve, he was initially a VML skeptic! I have not told him this, but right before he was sworn in a little birdie said to me, "You know Steve wouldn't attend VML events when he was first elected!" I am glad to have read his story and learned of his transformation. In the article, he correctly notes that a united voice at the General Assembly is important. For localities to succeed we all need to work together!

Mayor Trivett, along with Mayor Tuggle, attended the National League of Cities event in Tampa with me in November. It was a great time for these fellow VML board members to



meet people from all over the United States. VML hosted an event with West Virginia, Delaware, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Maryland. Having regional events allows us to talk over the borders and learn that we all care about the same things. These large events are over-stimulating at times but provide some great educational sessions.

Speaking of events, next up for VML is the Virginia's Local Elected Officials Conference on January 8 here in Richmond. I know that Steve and I both look forward to meeting a lot of new people and seeing some old friends. January 30 is Local Government Day (also here in Richmond) which gives all our members a great opportunity to show our General Assembly members that local governments matter and should be heard.

By the time you receive this magazine, the Governor will have announced his budget. While VML staff hopes for a little downtime during the holidays we will be poring over the numbers and proposals. Please make sure that you are signed up for *eNews* because it is sure to be full of good information about the budget and the upcoming session in the coming weeks.

I hope everyone has a happy holiday season. See you in 2025!



Learn more about these events and additional opportunities at www.vml.org

CALENDAR

- Jan. 30** **2025 Local Government Day** - Richmond Downtown Hilton, Richmond, VA. Registration and information at www.vml.org. (Also see page 11.)
- Oct. 12-14** **2025 VML Annual Conference** - Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, Roanoke, VA



Colonial Heights selects Caballero as assistant city manager



The City of Colonial Heights recently welcomed **Dr. Leonardo "Lenny" Caballero** as assistant city manager. Caballero will also oversee the city's economic development and tourism functions.

Caballero has extensive public service experience in the arenas of municipal government and higher education. He previously served as assistant city manager in Woodway, TX, where he aided the strategic executive management of the city, developing and implementing various policies, budgets, and ordinances. Other duties included developing and managing the city's economic development strategic plan, a comprehensive citywide master plan, tourism plan, marketing/branding/special events, and community relations.

Caballero began his career serving in the United States Navy as an electrical engineer. He was awarded two Naval Achievement Medals and served in Operation Desert

Storm. He attended Lamar University where he earned his Master's in Business Administration, as well as his Doctorate in Educational Leadership. Additionally, he has worked as an adjunct professor at Lamar University, Tarleton State University, Baylor University, and as a visiting fellow professor at the University of Pisa.

Roanoke names Turner new city manager



- Turner -

At its first meeting of December, the Roanoke City Council unanimously approved an employment agreement to appoint **Valmarie Turner** as city manager. Turner will begin her new role in mid-January.

Turner succeeds Bob Cowell, who resigned in June. Dr. Lydia Pettis Patton, an executive manager with the Berkley Group, has served as interim city manager during the transition.

Turner brings over 30 years of local government experience to the position with an extensive background in community and economic development, social and human

services programs, finance and procurement, and public improvement projects. Most recently, she served as deputy city manager for the City of Fairfax.

"We are excited to welcome Val Turner to the City of Roanoke," said Trish White-Boyd, councilmember and personnel committee chair. "Council was impressed by her demeanor and her experience with many issues facing the city, such as economic development, affordable housing, and homelessness. She has an excellent reputation as a leader, a team builder, and someone who builds collaborative relationships with stakeholders in the community. We are certain that Val will be an asset to the Roanoke Valley and are looking forward to her assuming her duties."

Turner held the position of department director for over a decade in multiple local governments across Florida before being appointed assistant/deputy county administrator for Loudoun County in 2017. In this role, she oversaw a range of departments and offices, including Human Services and Community Development; Finance and Procurement; Family Services; Housing and Community Development; Parks, Recreation, and Community Services; as well as



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the Office of Equity and Inclusion and the Office of Public Affairs and Communications. She also served as the acting director of the Department of Finance and Procurement. In addition to her role as deputy city manager in Fairfax, Turner was (and still is) the acting city manager during a transition of leadership.

Turner earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Economics with a minor in Business from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. She holds a Master's in Public Administration with a specialization in Public Policy from Walden University. Additionally, Turner has completed the Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center, and she is recognized as a Credentialed Manager by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). She is also a member of the Virginia Local Government Management Association, the League of Women in Government, and the National Forum for Black Public Administrators.

Craig is the new director of Fredericksburg's Community Planning and Building Department



- Craig -

Mike Craig is the new director of the Fredericksburg Community Planning and Building Department. A 10-year veteran with the city, Craig has spent more than 20 years in the public and private sectors focused on planning and economic development in the Fredericksburg region. He first joined the city in 2014 as the zoning administrator before being promoted to senior planner, and most recently, to principal planner.

In a press release, City Manager Tim Baroody noted, "After a national search, and interviewing multiple candidates, we are very pleased to welcome a local professional with excellent Virginia and city experience. Mike is a consummate professional and is highly regarded for his ability to take on challenging concepts and topics. As the city continues to evolve, balancing growth, historic preservation, and economic development through planning is more important than ever, and Mike has the skills needed to assist in managing all of the above."

Craig has a Bachelor's in History from the University of Virginia, a Master's in Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University, and is certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Manassas names Burke new city manager



- Burke -

The Manassas City Council has selected **Steve Burke** as the new city manager. Burke was chosen following an extensive nationwide search and will assume his new position on February 3.

Burke has more than 30 years of local government experience having held positions in Florida and Virginia. He is currently an assistant city manager for operations and director of public works in Manassas. He returned to the city in January 2024 after serving as town manager of Luray. He previously served as the City of Manassas' public works director from 2016 - 2018 and as the town manager for Front Royal.

In Manassas, Burke has led efforts to update the Pavement Management Plan, and to initiate the Utility Cost of Service and Rate Study. As town manager in Luray, he oversaw daily operations and zoning administration, developed and managed the annual operating budget and capital improvement budget, led community outreach, and coordinated the town's COVID-19 response. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from the University of Florida and is a registered professional engineer in both Virginia and Florida.

Burke succeeds Interim City Manager Doug Keen, who assumed the role after W. Patrick Pate left Manassas to become the city manager of Winston-Salem, NC, in November 2023. Keen will return to his position as assistant city manager and police chief.

Meadows to serve as interim city manager in Radford



- Meadows -

The Radford City Council contracted with the Berkley Group for an interim city manager and has selected **Craig Meadows** for the position. Meadows replaces City Manager David Ridpath, who is retiring

January 1.

Meadows has worked in the public sector for 34 years in North Carolina and Virginia and retired from Montgomery County after 14 years as county administrator. Throughout his career, he served in various leadership roles with local, state, and national organizations, including the New River Val-

ley Regional Water Authority, Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Board, and the Montgomery County Regional Tourism Board. Meadows has also served within the Virginia Local Government Management Association, International City/County Management Association, and the Virginia Association of Counties.

Meadows has a Bachelor's in Accounting from Gardner Webb University. He is a Certified Public Accountant, and a graduate of the municipal administration program at the University of North Carolina. He has a graduate certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Tech and is a graduate of the Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center.

Manassas Park appoints Cole city manager



- Cole -

Beginning January 13, **Carl Cole** will be the new manager for the City of Manassas Park.

Cole has over 25 years of public sector leadership experience, including 20 years in law enforcement leadership roles, with an extensive background in city management, economic development, and nonprofit direction. He previously served as a city manager in SeaTac, WA, and as the interim executive director of the Sound Cities Association, a nonprofit organization representing 38 cities in King County, WA.

"We are thrilled to welcome Carl Cole to Manassas Park," said Mayor Jeanette Rishell in a press release. "His extensive experience and dedication to public service will be invaluable as we continue to grow and develop our community."

Carl holds a Bachelor's in Psychology from Pacific Lutheran University and a Master's in Public Administration from the University of Washington.

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 Brian Ahnmark at vtc@vml.org.

Campbell named Appomattox town manager



- Campbell -

At its November 26 meeting, the Appomattox Town Council appointed **Michael Campbell** as the new town manager. Campbell will begin his new position with Appomattox shortly after the first of the year.

Campbell has a background in public works, construction management, and project coordination, and most recently was the director of public works and engineering for the City of Hopewell. He succeeds Terry McGhee, who stepped down in May. Director of Community Development and Planning Rob Fowler has acted as interim town manager since then.

In a press release, Appomattox Mayor Richard Conner said, "We are excited to welcome Mike Campbell to the Town of Appomattox. We have a lot going on, with more in the works, and council was impressed by Mike's experience in project management and his knowledge of the town and county. We are certain that he will be an asset to the community and are looking forward to him assuming his duties."

Conner also thanked Fowler for his service as interim town manager. "We appreci-

ate what Rob has done for the town during this transition period," he said.

Campbell started his career as a project manager in the private sector and then worked as both a project coordinator and construction manager for the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). He served as transportation manager for Goochland County and then as deputy director of public works and engineering for the City of Colonial Heights before assuming his position in Hopewell.

As the director of public works and engineering for Hopewell, Campbell supervised a staff of over 40 employees, managed a budget of over \$12 million, and oversaw the implementation of a Capital Improvements Plan of \$35 million. He also successfully secured federal and state grants for various capital projects.

Campbell earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration-Management from Western Governors University and is working on his capstone for a Master of Science in Management and Leadership. He has completed the Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia and is currently enrolled in the Master of Business Administration program at Longwood University. He is a Project Management Professional, a Certified Construction Manager, and is a member of the International City/County Management Association.

County of Prince George appoints Caceres as fire and EMS chief



- Caceres -

The County of Prince George has appointed **Pedro J. Caceres** as its new fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) chief. Caceres will officially begin the position on January 16.

Caceres, who began his fire service career as a volunteer firefighter in 1994, brings over 30 years of professional experience in public safety, most recently serving as battalion chief with the Wayne Township Fire Department in Indianapolis, IN. His background includes multiple leadership roles and significant experience in emergency response and community service. Caceres has deployed to multiple disaster sites across the United States. He has a proven track record of strategic leadership, including developing department-wide training programs, implementing fitness initiatives, and leading strategic planning efforts.

A graduate of Ball State University with degrees in Architecture and Environmental Design, Caceres holds advanced credentials including an executive certificate in Public Leadership from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and a



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locality or issue but the focus is always on Virginia and the local governments that make the Commonwealth work for everyone.

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Master's in Public Management from Indiana University.

Additionally, Caceres holds the Executive Fire Officer designation from the National Fire Academy and has been a member of the Federal Emergency Management Agency Indiana Search and Rescue Task Force One for 22 years.

Rickman named interim fire & EMS chief of Salem



- Rickman -

Salem City Manager Chris Dorsey has appointed Deputy Chief **Matt Rickman** to the position of interim fire & EMS chief for the City of Salem. Rickman takes over for Chief John Prillaman, who is retiring after more than 27 years of service to the Salem community.

Salem is currently involved in a search to find the city's next permanent fire and EMS chief.

"On behalf of our employees and citizens, I want to thank Chief Prillaman for his many years of service to all of Salem during the past three decades," Dorsey said in a press release. "I know he will be successful in this next chapter of life, and I am confident Matt Rickman will continue to ensure our citizens receive outstanding care in times of trouble as he leads this department on an interim basis."

Rickman, 41, joined the Salem Fire & EMS Department in July 2005 as a recruit fresh out of the Roanoke Valley Regional Fire-EMS Recruit School's #7 graduating class. Rickman has worked his way through the ranks over the past 20 years to earn the interim designation.

"I am humbled to serve the community in this capacity alongside all the men and women who are dedicated to saving lives," Rickman said.

Rickman became a full-fledged paramedic as he progressed through the firefighting ranks in Salem. He was promoted to senior firefighter in December 2008 and in November 2011, he was elevated to the rank of lieutenant and named the city's EMS coordinator. In 2012, Rickman was promoted to captain, and he was named Salem's deputy fire chief in 2015.

Rickman has a Bachelor's in Biology with a Chemistry minor from Radford University, and a Master's in Public Administration from Troy University. Rickman has also earned certificates in EMS Technology

and Firefighting & Prevention along with an Associate of Social Sciences in Fire Science degree from Virginia Western.

He is a graduate of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program, and he holds credentials from the Center for Public Safety Excellence as a Chief EMS Officer (CEMSO) and a Chief Fire Officer (CFO). He also serves on numerous statewide and regional boards including the governor's EMS Advisory Board, where he chairs the Workforce Development Committee.

Dantzler is Newport News' new city auditor

On December 2, **Tammie Dantzler** began her new role as city auditor of the City of Newport News.



- Dantzler -

Dantzler has a wealth of experience in public sector auditing and finance and will play a pivotal role in enhancing transparency, accountability, and efficiency within the city's operations.

Dantzler will report to the city council and lead the Office of the City Auditor. She will be responsible for providing independent and objective evaluations of city programs, operations, and finances. Her work will help guide the responsible use of city resources, ensuring accountability and transparency for all recipients of city funds.

"I am thrilled to welcome Tammie Dantzler to this important role in our city government," said Newport News Mayor Phillip Jones in a press release. "As we continue to strengthen the operations of our local government and uphold the highest standards of transparency, Ms. Dantzler's expertise and leadership will be invaluable. She brings a wealth of knowledge and a commitment to ensuring that taxpayer dollars are used wisely for the benefit of our community."

Dantzler has over 27 years of experience in various financial oversight roles. Her background includes leadership positions in both local government and nonprofit organizations, where she focused on financial management, internal controls, and risk assessment. She joins Newport News from the City of Norfolk, where she had served as city auditor since 2019.

Over her career, Dantzler has gained experience in all aspects of financial auditing, performance auditing, operational audits, and compliance. As Norfolk's city auditor, she led a team of nine audit professionals to provide transparency, accountability, and

leadership for the citizens of Norfolk. She reported directly to Norfolk's mayor and city council, overseeing the city's fraud, waste, and abuse hotline. Dantzler also executed an annual plan in accordance with the Government Auditing Standards.

Additionally, Dantzler serves as a master sergeant in the United States Army Reserve, 7/80th Transportation Battalion, where she is the Quality Assurance Program Non-Commissioned Officer-in-Charge (QA NCOIC). She began her undergraduate studies at Fayetteville State University before transferring to Morris College, where she earned her Bachelor's degree. She also holds a Master's from Claflin University and is currently pursuing her Doctorate at Antioch University. Her certifications include Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM), Certified Internal Auditor (CIA), and Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE).

McGuire sworn in as Alexandria police chief



- McGuire -

New City of Alexandria Police Chief **Tarrick McGuire** was officially sworn in by Alexandria Chief Circuit Court Judge Lisa B. Kemler on December 10.

Alexandria City Manager James Parajon appointed McGuire as police chief in November. McGuire comes from the Arlington Police Department in Texas, where he held various positions within a department of 900 employees, accumulating specialized experience in patrol, investigations, and community relations. Most recently, he held the position of assistant chief of police.

"Chief McGuire is a proven leader with more than two decades of experience who is realistic about today and optimistic about tomorrow," Parajon said in a press release. "While we know Chief McGuire is nationally recognized for his commitment to reducing crime through community relations, what I know is that he will take those skills and apply them in Alexandria – today, right now – and set us up for a better tomorrow."

McGuire now oversees a dedicated department of 322 sworn and 114 professional employees. His 100-day action plan outlines four pillars of focus, including detailed goals such as hosting community town hall conversations with residents, establishing an employee community relations board, assessing organizational wellness, and widely communicating key outcomes to the plan.

Colonial Beach hosts rural community development grant announcement

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA) Rural Development Virginia, led by State Director Perry Hickman, and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), represented by Community Development

Manager Rebecca Rowe, recently selected the Town of Colonial Beach as the location to announce a new phase of the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI).

This \$500,000 grant, awarded to DHCD's Mobilizing Main Street (MMS) program, aims to boost local economic growth. MMS offers a two-year training course based on the Main Street Approach to strengthen small-town economies, engaging non-profits and local governments statewide.

RCDI grants focus on economic development, affordable housing, and community facilities in towns under 50,000 residents. USDA Rural Development supports these efforts by funding infrastructure, business development, housing, and internet access to improve rural quality of life.

Downtown Colonial Beach, a 2022 grant recipient, has become a model for leveraging these funds. Past projects in Colonial Beach have included wayfinding systems, façade improvements, strategic planning, and placemaking. This effort has elevated the town as a leader in community improvement, strategic planning, and economic development.

The current grant initiative will benefit 10 communities in Central, Southside, Valley, and Southwest Virginia. DHCD's Virginia Main Street Program, active for 40 years, is working with an initial cohort with plans to complete the program by the end of December.



Community "bridge builders" celebrated in Charlottesville

New signs installed on Drewary Brown Memorial Bridge



LATE CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER Drewary Brown (1918-1998) has been honored by the City of Charlottesville with two new signs on the bridge that bears his name.

Drewary Brown grew up in Charlottesville and became a respected local leader during the push for civil rights. He helped start the Public Defenders' Office and the Monticello Area Community Action Agency (MACAA), which fights poverty and seeks to improve the lives of low-income people across the region.

Shortly after his passing in 1998, the Charlottesville City Council named the new West Main Street replacement bridge in his honor. Additionally, the city established a program to commemorate other like-minded community "bridge builders" with plaques placed on the bridge railings.

Since then, 37 plaques have been installed on the bridge to honor Charlottesville citizens who contributed to civil rights, justice, and equality issues and worked to unify the community. Honorees include people from varying racial, economic, and social backgrounds. In collaboration with the Charlottesville Bridge Builders organization, the city recently refurbished the name plaques, which were reinstalled on a brick wall at the east approach to the bridge.

On November 26, city workers positioned new signs at each end of the Drewary Brown Memorial Bridge to commemorate Brown's legacy. A formal ceremony is planned for later this year to celebrate the new signs and the accomplishments of all of the city's bridge builders.

For more information about the Charlottesville Bridge Builders, visit villebridge-builders.org.

Redevelopment plans make progress at historic Bontex site in Buena Vista

THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA has announced significant progress in redevelopment efforts for the Bontex or Georgia Bonded Fibers property, also known historically as the Columbia Paper Mill.

In a major milestone for the project, city staff submitted the site for registration on the state and national historic registers in 2023, and it was successfully added to both in 2024. This designation recognizes the historical significance of the property and opens the door for developers to access historic tax credits, a key tool to finance the redevelopment while maintaining the site's unique character.

The former Bontex plant, which spans over 87,000 square feet of interior space, was once a vital part of Buena Vista's economy. It began as a paper mill in the late 19th century before evolving into an industrial site for textile manufacturing under various ownerships, including Georgia Bonded Fibers and later Bontex. The property has been vacant since 2010, but the city has worked closely with the property owner over the last few years to establish a clear path forward for revitalization. Its long industrial history and prime location at the gateway to the city make the Bontex site a focal point for redevelopment efforts that could bring new life and opportunities to Buena Vista.

To support the project, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has allocated up to \$200,000 in technical assistance grant funds for site assessment and planning. The funding is from an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant awarded to DEQ in fiscal year 2022. Virginia DEQ chose this site based on its industrial past, significance for the community, and potential for redevelopment. Buena Vista's commitment to the site and the willingness of the property owner to collaborate and support these efforts were also factors in the decision to allocate grant funds for this work.

This grant will cover essential due diligence steps, including environmental site assessments, risk assessment evaluation, and site conceptual/reuse planning. In addition to environmental assessments, the project team is creating a historic resource survey, building reuse plans, and a market analysis to guide redevelopment efforts. These assessments are critical in determining the feasibility of future development and ensuring any potential environmental risks are identified and addressed. These findings will not only inform the redevelopment process but also position the city to pursue future funding for cleanup and development efforts, if necessary.

"We're excited to finally see progress on this site after so many years of vacancy and disrepair," said Kristina Ramsey, Buena Vista director of economic development. "This property has such a rich history and so much potential. This is just the first step to bring it back to life, improve the look of the gateway to our city, and create new opportunities for the community."

The redevelopment plan will include considerations for adaptive reuse of the property, potential state and federal grants, and historic tax credits. Furthermore, the city is exploring opportunities to create a recreational link between the site and the popular Chessie Trail and River Walk, enhancing connectivity and outdoor assets in the area.

While the Bontex property owner does not wish to sell, they are actively seeking to partner with an experienced developer on this project.



Virginia Beach recognizes historic African American communities with new neighborhood signs

SPEARHEADED BY COUNCILMEMBER Dr. Amelia Ross-Hammond, the City of Virginia Beach has instituted a program to install signs recognizing the rich history of the city's 14 historic African American neighborhoods.

The first of four planned signs was unveiled in the Beechwood community at a November 17 dedication ceremony.

Ross-Hammond observed that many long-standing African American neighborhoods lacked entrance signs designating their name and location. Concerned that the history of these neighborhoods could be forgotten by younger generations, she championed the sign program as a way of preserving their past and recognizing these neighborhoods as examples of Black economic self-empowerment.

"This isn't just Black history," explained Ross-Hammond. "It's American history. These neighborhoods played an integral role in the foundation of our city. These communities and the people who lived there over the years made a tremendous impact on Virginia Beach and beyond, from music and fashion icon Pharell Williams to State Senator Aaron Rouse."

At the end of fiscal year 2023-24 through budget reconciliation, each councilmember received a \$150,000 budget to use at his or her discretion for a project in their district. Ross-Hammond elected to use her funds not just for District 4, but to benefit historic African American communities throughout the city. Her hope is that the program helps to preserve the past, while also recognizing the resilience of these neighborhoods and their residents.

Signs of history

Signs at the threshold of four communities – Beechwood, Burton Station, New Light, and Queen City – are under construction. Plans call for additional funding in future budget cycles to construct or improve signs at all 14 historic African American neighborhoods in Virginia Beach.

The signs have a brick base and two columns flanking a concrete face. Each displays the name of the neighborhood and beneath it the words, "An African American Historic Community." Both are spelled out in oil-rubbed bronze lettering.

The sign at the Beechwood community is located at the corner of Pleasure House Road and First Court Road next to

Morning Star Baptist Church. Sign dedication ceremonies are also planned for the following sites, with dates and times soon to be finalized:

- Burton Station, located at the corner of Burton Station Road and Northampton Boulevard.
- New Light, located on Indian River Road just past Regent University near the intersection of Church Street and next to New Light Full Gospel Baptist Church.
- Queen City, located at the corner of Tamer Avenue and Queen City Road.



Background

The latter part of the 19th and early half of the 20th centuries – between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights movement – was a pivotal time that shaped Black Americans' identity and cultural impact in both the United States and Virginia. In response to social inequality and discriminatory laws during that period, Virginia Beach's historic African American neighborhoods were established to provide a sanctuary that fostered a sense of belonging, offered a means to build wealth, and served as a safe space to celebrate Black culture.

These communities were significantly affected by post-Civil War Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws, voter suppression, the Civil Rights Movement, and limited access to municipal services – events that impacted both individual livelihoods and the fate of the neighborhoods.

For more information about each of the 14 neighborhoods and updates on the sign installations, visit VirginiaBeach.gov/HistoricNeighborhoods.

Student mural project unveiled in Bridgewater

A NEW STUDENT ART MURAL has beautified a stretch of Riverwalk in the Town of Bridgewater.

Located beneath the Main Street bridge, the colorful artwork display brightens the underpass, shows off the artistic talent of young residents, and celebrates the North River and its role in Bridgewater life.

The town invited four schools to design and paint a panel for the mural project. Art students at John Wayland Elementary, Wilbur Pence Middle, Turner Ashby High, and Blue Ridge Christian schools all contributed to the display.

“Our students have been excited to work on this mural,” said Erin Whetzel, art teacher at Turner Ashby. “We greatly appreciate the opportunity that the Town of Bridgewater has given our art department and other area schools to help bring some extra color and life to the Riverwalk downtown, and most importantly, to give back to our community in the process.”

After the schools completed their pieces of art, the town finished the panels with protective coatings and installed them in frames alongside Riverwalk. The riverside area is subject to occasional flooding, so the use of panels - as opposed to painting murals directly on the bridge supports - ensures that the art panels can be removed for safekeeping in times when flooding is anticipated.



Town of Crewe receives GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award

IN NOVEMBER, THE TOWN OF CREWE received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Chicago-based Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA).

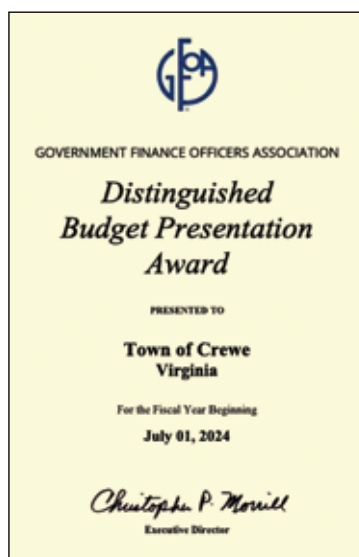
This award reflects the commitment of a governing body and staff to meet the highest principles of governmental budgeting. In order to receive the budget award, an entity must satisfy four nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation and be rated “proficient” in all four categories, and in the fourteen mandatory criteria within those categories.

There are over 1,700 participants in the GFOA Budget Awards Program. Award recipients have pioneered efforts to improve the quality of budgeting and provide an example for other governments throughout North America.

Crewe Town Manager Phil Miskovic said,

“Municipal budgets are more than line items; they’re policy documents that connect a town’s goals and strategies to the funding needed to achieve them. They make complex financial decisions digestible and understandable for the average person, while ensuring transparency and accountability in how taxpayer dollars are spent. A budget is how government translates priorities into action and keeps the community informed and engaged. Our new approach to budgeting is one of the several ways our town staff and leadership are moving toward a more forward-leaning government.”

This is Crewe’s first time receiving the GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. Both the Town of Crewe Fiscal Year 2025 Budget and Budget in Brief documents can be found on the town’s website, www.townofcrewe.com.



Nine Alexandria deputies graduate from inaugural Deputy School

ON NOVEMBER 25, nine Alexandria deputy sheriffs graduated from the Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Training Academy's inaugural Deputy School. Deputies Amaya, Jones, Koroma, Leiberg, Mills, Otieno, Tyler, Vasquez, and Washington were among the 24 members of Session 151 Deputy School, along with eight



Front L-R: Sheriff Sean Casey, Deputy Koroma, Deputy Otieno, Deputy Amaya, and Deputy Jones. Back L-R: Deputy Mills, Deputy Vasquez, Deputy Leiberg, Deputy Tyler, and Deputy Washington.

deputies from the Arlington County Sheriff's Office and seven from the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office.

Alexandria Sheriff Sean Casey and members of his command and training staff attended the ceremony in Ashburn, and Lieutenant Colonel Casey Lingan of the Fairfax County Sheriff's Office was the keynote speaker.

"Our primary responsibility is the safe and secure operation of the Alexandria Adult Detention Center, and this rigorous training emphasizes critical knowledge and skills necessary for our deputies to excel in their new careers," said Casey.

All graduates completed 10 weeks of training focused on jail operations and court security. Areas of focus included emergency vehicle operations, firearms training, physical fitness and wellness, control tactics, active bystandership, legal training, civil process, inmate supervision, cell and person searches, CPR and first aid, and serving diverse communities.

The new deputies will next complete field training at the sheriff's office before starting their regular assignments at the Alexandria Adult Detention Center.

A special event not to be missed!



LOCAL GOVERNMENT DAY

January 30, 2025

Hilton Richmond Downtown
501 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Scan QR code
for registration
and details.



Built to serve: VML President and Town of Ashland Mayor Steve Trivett

By VTC Editor Rob Bullington

ON A COLD MORNING in early December, I stood in the Town of Ashland’s bright and warm council chambers in the new town hall with Mayor Steve Trivett. As he looked out a window, Trivett explained that town staff would soon be contacting the owner of the building across the street to begin a conversation about façade grants. The building, currently home to multiple business including a Thai takeout restaurant, needed a bit of TLC. Relationships amongst the tenants, the owner, and the town were all good, but still, a façade grant might be just the thing.

Trivett mentioned that back when he was a high schooler, the same building was a local burger/sandwich shop with one particular “side item” being the pool table. “After school, a couple of us would catch a ride into town, eat a little, shoot a little pool, then hitchhike back to school for football games or other activities. Maybe not the smartest mode of transportation, but it was a fun way to practice ‘independence.’”

Ashland, a community of about 7,500 residents, is invariably described as “quaint,” “cute,” and “quirky”. The town is the very embodiment of Americana with a historic and picturesque private college (Randolph Macon), a “Center Street” flanked by rows of shops and restaurants bisected by an active rail line, a historic train station, eclectic artisans, and a feed store heated with big wood stoves that still serves as a hub of the community. Big annual events include Train Day, Light Up the Tracks, and the Christmas Parade.

I asked Trivett what defines “Ashland” for him.

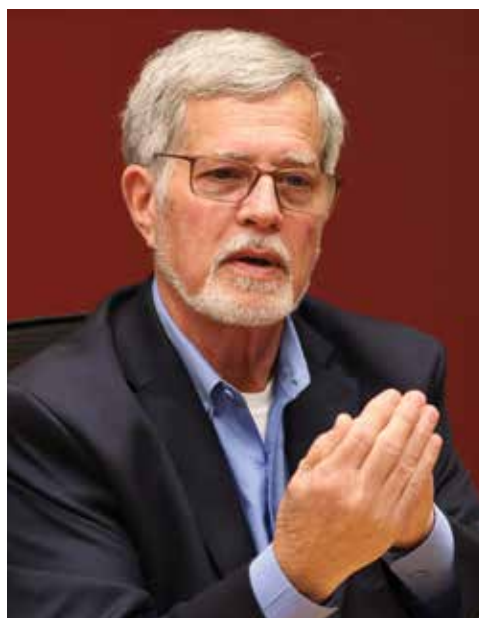
“Ashland has the kind of small-town charm where you can enjoy being comfortably uncomfortable. Let me explain...You know when you have a bunch of family and friends over for a holiday or special occasion? The house is full, you have to get more chairs and you’re bumping into people? That’s what I’m talking about, a very comfortable crowdedness because it’s about spending time with people you care about. Later, when the guests have left, you savor both the memory of the gathering, as well as getting your household back to normal!”

“Likewise, in Ashland, we truly like the hustle and bustle of our active town, especially hosting lots of downtown visitors during the holidays, Train Day, or parades. But, as in one’s home, it’s nice to enjoy a slower pace, when there isn’t a crowd. We treasure those slow-paced days strolling around town, greeting people we know, getting a bite to eat, running errands, or heading to the train station for a trip.”

“When you’re in Ashland,” concluded Trivett, “Ashland sets the pace; the world does not drive the pace of our town.”

Foundation: Being centered on the community

Situated about 20 minutes north of Richmond, the Town of Ashland regularly experiences influxes of people looking for small-town life in proximity to big city employment. This combination has kept property values relatively high. Ashland also has a history of being well-managed and served by responsible, civic-minded officials. For evidence of the town’s prosperity and stability, consider that it has not only a town manager but also two assistant town managers, a



The wonderful (but inconvenient) thing about trains

TRAINS ARE A DEFINING characteristic of Ashland. They literally run through the center of town. This can be a blessing, as when train enthusiasts from around the world journey to Ashland or visit virtually by logging into the live feed from the camera perched atop the train station. But it can also be a curse as residents were recently reminded when a train stopped dead on the tracks the afternoon of the Christmas parade.

Trivett explained the drama that ensued. “And so, for the first time in anybody’s memory, we thought we might have to cancel the parade! Families were gathered all along the east-west parade route but the freight train, resting solidly north-south, was not a welcome sight. There were over 100 parade units on floats, on foot, on horses, Shriners in the little race cars, antique cars, emergency vehicles, and so on, all ready to set out! In that moment, I recalled some recent political conversations I’d had about how extra-long and stopped trains posed a problem to the town’s public safety, traffic, and commerce. I wondered if maybe I’d said the wrong thing to the wrong railroad or Federal Railroad Administration person?”

“As it turned out,” concluded Trivett, “there was no grand conspiracy to thwart our small-town parade, just an overheated wheel that received a relatively quick fix. With the freight blockade ended, the parade charged down the street only a few minutes behind schedule!”



brand-new town hall, and an award-winning director of parks and recreation. Not bad for a town that’s barely 7 square miles!

Richard S. Gillis, a longtime mayor of Ashland, affectionately referred to his town as “The Center of the Universe” and the name stuck. Steve Trivett didn’t grow up in the exact “Center of the Universe”, but he was pretty close. His family lived in Richmond until he was about six years old at which time they relocated the family – Steve, his older brother and two older sisters – to the nearby Elmton community in Hanover County.

“I can’t say for sure, why we moved, but our neighborhood in Richmond’s Fan District was getting rough,” Trivett recalls. “We walked to William Fox Elementary with no issues, but a kid named Davis who ‘visited’ from the alley behind the rowhouses, once punched me in the stomach. It was one of those punches where you can’t breathe for a few moments. Other, older tough kids would get a soda on the corner then walk down the street, knocking the top off the

bottle on a street sign to sip and signal their toughness.”

Trivett describes his parents as solidly middle-class, blue collar. Both parents worked in Richmond. His father worked for the Brooks Gray Sign Company, doing whatever was needed in fabricating and installing signs, not to mention his specialty of heating and bending glass tubing to produce those wonderful glowing neon signs that are now few and far between. His mother worked at the Liberty Loan Company and later at Thalheimer’s Department Store.

In Elmton, Trivett began in a quaint, old four-room schoolhouse. When he got to Patrick Henry High School, he ran Cross Country and track. Trivett credits that experience in long distance running for a mindset of endurance that’s been a great asset throughout his life. During his final year, a friend on the team told him about a job opportunity to build houses for James B. Ferguson, a local contractor. Among young Trivett’s first jobs was digging the footing for a house on Race Course Street in Ashland. Trivett liked the physical work,

liked being outside and doing things with his hands; he enjoyed being part of homes coming together and feeling that deep satisfaction of a project that is done and done right. He liked it so much he turned down his acceptance to attend the University of Richmond and spent the next 30 years working for James B. Ferguson, most of those years as a foreman and a few as the only employee.

During this time, he volunteered with the Ashland Fire Department and through that connection met a local police officer named Edward Person and, more importantly, Person’s daughter Marilyn. The two hit it off, but Trivett was careful to remember that the father of the girl he was courting carried a gun!

Steve and Marilyn wed in 1979, welcomed their son Paul in 1982 and their daughter Dana in 1984. Marilyn got Steve to attend her nondenominational church. Faith has been a foundation of his life ever since. When the



Mayor Trivett outside the house on Race Course Street he helped build early in his career.

church's pastor retired suddenly following a heart attack, the church was without a leader for nine months and Trivett served as interim pastor. He found that he had a knack for public speaking and enjoyed it. He began to look for additional opportunities to serve and began volunteering for public school related initiatives and with Hanover's Habitat for Humanity.

In 2000, Trivett ran for a town council seat...and lost. "That was good for me in the long run, but it didn't feel good then," remembers Trivett.

I asked Mayor Trivett what gave him the inclination, not to mention the confidence, to run for council that first time.

For the inclination, Trivett observed: "My mom and dad were good parents, but not always good with each other. Nothing physical, nothing scary, but they argued a lot and I remember asking them at an early age about that. Also, I was the youngest child and had little say about anything. So, in learning how to get along with others, I sort of took on a nature of being a peace maker and that seems to have set a bit of a pattern for my whole life... trying to help people to get along and to bring positive things through cooperation."



The Trivetts circa 2000.



one that meant more time helping people in his community and less time swinging a hammer.

At that time, Hanover CSB wanted to expand from one group home to three. To do so, they would need to hire someone to manage the residential program. "I knew about all this because I was on the board," says Trivett. "They were talking about putting an advertisement out to find someone. And the residential coordinator, who I talked to a lot, said, 'You know Steve, this is probably a good job for you; we want somebody who knows the community because one of the hardest things to do is to convince people to allow a group home in their community and you seem to be good at getting people to get along with one another.'"

"But I was hesitant," remembers Trivett. "I thought it was kind of awkward. I was the chair of the organization and now I was going to cherry-pick a position. But eventually I said 'yes'. I had taken some psychology classes at VCU during my carpentry years and I thought this job was a way to get back to that interest."

Was the transition from construction manager to residential program manager difficult?



Maria Teresa and Walter Regirer

As for confidence, Trivett was quick to credit one of the clients he worked for during his years as a home builder. "We remodeled the home of Walter W. and Maria Teresa Regirer, owners of a couple of nursing homes in Richmond. He was from Poland and was a retired Lieutenant Colonel for the Judge Advocate General's Corps. Nobody could satisfy that guy! He was probably in his 70s at the time and he was gruff! For some reason, maybe it was my upbringing, he took a liking to me, and we had a mutual respect for each other. He even had me order a plaque with my name on it to put in the study we built for him. It had lots of cherry paneling, cherry trim and five-member crown molding. He said, 'Steve my study is like a museum piece!'"

Trivett continued, "Working for Walter Regirer was sort of an awakening for me. It made me think 'Steve you can do more, because you're able to get along with this man and to help other people understand what he wants. That's what you should be doing more of!'"

"Another person who instilled confidence in me was Bob Payne, an architect who designed many of the homes we built," recalled Trivett. "He told me that I was an 'ambassador' for Jim [the contractor] even if I wasn't conscious of it. He meant that I was the go-between to smooth the interactions between Jim and homebuyers. I created the right atmosphere of cooperation to get things done with satisfaction. That 'ambassador' idea kind of stuck in my head."

In 2003, Trivett worked to help Tim Ernst get elected to the Hanover County Board of Supervisors and Ernst later asked him to serve on the Hanover County Community Services Board (CSB). Trivett was eventually elected chairman of the Hanover CSB, a role that meant hearing the concerns of residents whose family members and friends desperately needed help. It was an invaluable experience for Trivett who was still building houses by day. But, at this point, Trivett was in his mid-40s and he realized he needed to find another career,

Telling "Untold Stories"

IN 2023, MAYOR TRIVETT was invited to be a panelist for a session of the "Untold Stories" series, an annual forum featuring Black and white panelists who grew up in Ashland and Hanover during segregation and desegregation. "They were looking for people to talk in an honest, straightforward manner about their personal experience of how it was as a member of the Class of '72," remarks Trivett. "I had the luck, if you want to put it that way, of being in the first integrated graduating class of Patrick Henry High."

Not long after that event, Trivett was invited to join the organizing committee for these forums, which he readily accepted. "Untold Stories has been focused on Black and white experiences and relations through the years," he says. "It provides an avenue to discuss wrongs of the past with the goal of better understanding now and increased racial harmony in the future. The forums vary a bit in the focus as being about experiences in education, community, sports, that sort of thing."



Watch the 2023 Untold Stories here >

Vision for 2025

“I would like to see every locality better understand the importance of staying united for local authority. We need to push good government up, because in my opinion for a while now the federal government has been pushing bad government down. I think around 2020, Virginia’s General Assembly began to adopt federal political practices. That’s the pitfall of doing things because you *can*, not because you *should*. I don’t want to see that happen on the local level. We need to be pushing the ‘We the People’ credo upwards to remind our state and federal lawmakers that they do their best job through conversation, cooperation, and collaboration with our communities.”



“So, my goal for the year is to remind our members that while they are looking to serve the needs of their communities, don’t lose sight of the ‘back story’ of local government unity as represented in VML. When we work together, we can accomplish more. If each locality asks their state representatives to carry a bill, that serves their local need, they should emphasize that their bill should not be a one-size-fits-all, State-wide bill that steps on either local government authority or our responsibility to serve our constituents. Each bill should be weighed to be sure there is no loss of local authority in the long run for the sake of short-term accomplishments in our individual jurisdiction.”

“As for VML, I want for us the same thing I want for our country. That we refrain from ‘thinking and doing’ in silos with the distraction of multitudes of sub-categories of issues and audiences where we can lose sight of the foundational

principles that unite us as an organization and as citizens. An example of sorts – when it comes to immigration, I don’t care whether someone understands and reads the U.S. Constitution in English, Spanish, Russian, or whatever...the value rests in the wonderful concepts, not in who’s reading it or what language they speak. The foundation we have in the Constitution is what unites us. For VML, that means honoring the principle of local authority across the Commonwealth, but not only for just our own locality. It also means knowing and advocating for, as much as possible, the principles and goals we as an organization agreed to as outlined in the VML Legislative Program each year. We need to let our legislators know that we’re willing and able to take the heat locally for decisions we make locally, so long as they don’t negate our authority to make those decisions.”

“I can give you a great example of how this all plays out. As you know, local governments are required by the state to have a comprehensive plan. Every jurisdiction is mandated to have one that is reviewed and updated, if needed, every five years. We log all those hours of public meetings, planning commissions, councils, boards inviting and listening to our citizens opinions and planning together for our community’s best future. That happens across the state of Virginia and, cumulatively, that’s got to be tens of thousands of hours. But once we get our comprehensive plans done, we certainly don’t want the General Assembly to pass a bill that throws all that time and work out of the window. And all that work wasn’t just on a lark!”

“Now, with the potential of all those lost hours on my mind, I went to the General Assembly last year to speak up for local governments exercising due diligence in maintaining comprehensive plans. I had about 30 seconds to speak before my time ran out. When I send emails, I get answers like ‘I’m sorry you’re not in my jurisdiction.’ I understand that, but if they have the power to vote on a bill that affects citizens across the state, shouldn’t they take time to consider viewpoints from across the state? If our local government Comprehensive Plans don’t hold weight, then neither do all the citizens that participated in creating those plans. I would urge members of the General Assembly to please consider how their actions affect all the localities in Virginia, not just the ones making a given request.”

“I don’t think the General Assembly is conscious of doing that necessarily. They are overworked by the sheer volume of bills they consider. But citizens and localities aren’t best served by a volume of bills. We are best served by the quality and actual efficacy of the application of bills. I’m thankful for VML’s history and ongoing determination to inform and support our legislators in passing such bills. I’m also very thankful to be part of what VML is so well-positioned to do for the Commonwealth of Virginia.”

“I did have some folks ask how I could make that switch,” recalls Trivett. “But I said, ‘Well community services boards take care of substance abuse services, mental health services and intellectual disability and after 30 years of construction working with all kinds of people, I’d been exposed to every bit of that!’”

Trivett became the Community Service Board’s residential services manager and during that time also served on Ashland’s Board of Zoning Appeals. He was later appointed to Ashland’s Planning Commission and then finally was appointed as the Ashland District Representative on Hanover County’s Planning Commission.

“Those were great years,” remembers Trivett. “I really enjoyed my work and had every intention of staying with the CSB until retirement...but then the 2008 recession happened, the money dried up, and the county privatized the position, so I was out of a job.”

Then, in a situation familiar to anyone who has taken a job because they needed it, not because they wanted it, Trivett took a job at a faith-based nonprofit that he describes as “the worst experience of my life!”

“I was told that everything in the group home I was going to manage was in good shape but that was not the case at all! Two of my staff had a conflict, so management ‘fixed’ that by demoting me.”

The situation became toxic and Trivett decided to resign.

“So, in 2012 the economy wasn’t great, I had no job, and a motley employment history. I got the eraser out, erased the board, and started anew. I decided to do the things that I’ve been saying I should do if I had the time. I went back to school at night and got a degree in Business Administration. I worked part time in the afternoons with the Greater Richmond Boys and Girls Club, and in the mornings I



The center of the Center of the Universe: Ashland's new town hall.

worked part time at Home Depot. Then I decided to run again for a seat on the town council and this time, I won! I took a job with Church Hill Activities and Tutoring (CHAT) to provide skill training and support for inner city youth in the Richmond area. I taught young people carpentry and woodworking. Working with those kids allowed me to draw upon my experiences as a home builder, an interim pastor, a community services manager...all of it.”

Trivett worked as a small business manager for CHAT until his retirement in 2020. Since being elected to council, he has served as vice-mayor and is now in his third term as mayor.

Growth: Welcoming new ideas and perspectives

Trivett's presidency of VML was not preordained. In fact, getting involved with VML was against his natural inclination to stay focused on his locality. “When I first got on council,” recalls Trivett, “the mayor at the time, Faye Pritchard, and other people were talking about VML and how going to the conferences were great opportunities to network. Well, that wasn't me – I didn't go on business meetings; I didn't go to conferences. I just went to work. I was hesitant to do it because in my mind, if two or three people in five are going, they can come back and they can share the information. Why should the taxpayers pay for me to go?”

But, as it had so many times before in Steve Trivett's life, his mind began to change, and new opportunities opened. “Then I guess as I started getting exposed to more of what VML is about, I realized that I'm on the same wavelength as VML. Local government matters, you know, and though specific topics of conversations might be about everything under the sun...still, local government matters!”

In 2017, Steve Trivett attended his first VML Annual Conference which was held in Williamsburg that year.

“I really enjoyed it. I met David Meyer who was the mayor of Falls Church, and we really connected! I often feel like although I have a breadth of job experience, I'm the least sophisticated, least educated, least ‘man of means’ of any mayor I know. It's not about

feeling inferior, just wondering if I sit down with people to talk, well, what are we going to talk about? What I found once I started having those conversations was that I enjoyed it. I realized that being involved in VML and going to the events was worth it because I was learning valuable things that I could bring back which also instilled more ‘value’ in me for the experience.”

So, Trivett was a relative newbie to VML in 2019 when several people suggested he try to serve on its board. “It sort of came out of a clear blue sky,” he recalls. “I think it came out of having those conversations with different people. I remember that one of them was board member Bill Rush [Town of Marion manager at the time], so I'll blame it on Bill!”

Trivett served on the Nominating Committee at the 2019 conference that was held in Roanoke and joined the VML Board of Directors the following year.

I observed that Trivett had quickly gone from being a VML skeptic to percolating to the top of the organization. “Yeah, that seems like a pattern for me,” he responded. “It doesn't always make sense to me, but that's what I seem to do. Like when I got on the Community Services Board and realized that everyone else serving on it were professionals and I wondered if I should even be there and in due time, they said, ‘we want you to be the chair.’ The same thing has happened to me so many times that sometimes I think maybe I'm just the least aware person in the room and nobody else wants to do it, so they all step back and I just don't notice.”

For all his humility, it's worth noting that Trivett comes across as anything but unaware. In fact, he comes across as exceptionally capable, reasonable, and attuned to his surroundings. So, I tried to put a different spin on why he keeps finding himself in positions of leadership. “You're like a bubble rising in a glass of champagne,” I suggested.

But Trivett was having none of my flattery.

“Yeah,” he responded, “if you go down to the James River and you see a little piece of Styrofoam litter bobbing about out there in the water, that's me!”

60 Seconds with Mayor Steve Trivett

Favorite food? Seafood in general. Scallops specifically. And if you wrap them in bacon, even better!

Least favorite food? This will ruin me with some folks, but hummus. I like most every kind of food, but I'm not a fan of hummus.

What about hummus wrapped in bacon? Sure, I can eat it if you wrap it in bacon. Or, if you cut up some scallops and throw them in there...and then just leave the hummus out.

In what kind of car did you learn how to drive? A Rambler Classic. Surprisingly, it was an automatic transmission. But the first car I ever bought was a 1973 Toyota Celica, and it was a stick shift. I was too embarrassed to tell the sales guy that I'd never really driven a stick before, so I learned how to on the drive back home. When I got home, I was a bit stressed but pretty good with the clutch!



Favorite book? Well, I don't want to present myself as overly holy, but I'd say the Bible. I used to read the Bible every morning, but I got lazy, so now I listen to an online daily audio Bible while commuting or walking, etc. That completes a yearly reading. As far as a favorite author, Edgar Allen Poe.

Favorite movie? Polar Express. I guess from taking the kids and grandkids. But I'm still a kid at heart and I really do like that movie.

Person from history you most admire? Abraham Lincoln. My mom said we were kin to him on the Todd side. I don't know whether that's true or not, but being more like Abe isn't a bad thing.

Someplace you've never visited that you would like to visit? I would like to see the Northern Lights and I've always wanted to go and see the pyramids and the Sphinx. So, I guess Egypt is on my list.

Do you have any hobbies? Woodworking, carpentry, that sort of thing for my family. I've been doing some remodeling of my sister-in-law's house. I rebuilt my daughter's barn a few years ago and now the project is re-siding her shed.

Do you follow any sports? I'm a Washington Capitals fan and have been from the beginning. My wife introduced me to hockey. Everybody says, "Your wife is so quiet." I say, "Go with her to a hockey game!" Though she doesn't yell any louder than I do!



Tax and revenue challenges for Virginia's local governments

In July 2024, CNBC named Virginia the top state for business in the country. This is the sixth time the Commonwealth has been ranked number one since the list began in 2007. Virginia was ranked number one for many reasons, with CNBC highlighting that divided government resulted in a budget that maintains state tax levels. In an interview with CNBC, Governor Youngkin cited \$5 billion in tax cuts since he assumed office as a significant factor in making Virginia a more business-friendly state. As such, it is likely that Virginia's CNBC ranking as "America's best state for business" will be used as justification for further tax cuts in the upcoming legislative session. However, while lower taxes may sound attractive, many of the essential functions of local government rely on revenue generated from them. What are the major challenges to local government revenues that could come up during the 2025 session?



The vehicle personal property tax (aka "the Car Tax")

One tax with major implications for local revenues that has been under fire is the Vehicle Personal Property Tax, colloquially known as the Car Tax. A controversial tax, according to Derrick Max of the Thomas Jefferson Institute, the Car Tax was first proposed to be eliminated in 1998 under the governorship of Jim Gilmore. Gilmore was successful in lowering the tax but was unable to fully eliminate it. Ever since, it has been "politically prudent to propose lowering or eliminating the tax close to election season," says George Mason Political Science Professor David Ramadan. So, Governor Youngkin finds himself the latest in a long line of Governors and prominent politicians who have proposed eliminating the Car Tax.

While the Governor and prominent Republicans would like to repeal the tax, it is unlikely that there will be any movement on the current iteration of the tax. The Commonwealth's localities offer plenty of reasons why. According to Todd Divers, Commissioner of Revenue for the City of Charlottesville, "eliminating the Car Tax would cost the city \$13 to \$16 million on the lower end of projections."

"Hampton generates \$15.7 million per year from the Car Tax," estimates City of Hampton Commissioner of Revenue Ross Mugler.

The foregone revenue would be even larger in the largest localities in the Commonwealth, such as Fairfax County. Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell has stated any proposal to elimi-

nate this tax would be "dead-on-arrival," in part because it generates \$3,500 per student in Fairfax County, or almost 18% of the county's total spending per student. Clearly, eliminating the tax would significantly worsen the county's offerings, as a \$3,500 loss per student per year would decrease its schools' ability to educate students.

Commissioner Diver suggests that there appears to be no avenue for the state to "make localities whole" and that he "doesn't see what has changed to make the General Assembly able to replace local government revenues from the Car Tax." In Diver's view, it is unlikely that the Car Tax will be eliminated or reduced in the upcoming legislative session because many local governments across the state rely on the tax for essential services, such as road service and public safety. Eliminating the tax would threaten localities' ability to perform these services, limiting their ability to help constituents.

Should the General Assembly and Governor decide to eliminate the Car Tax, there must be a procedure to fully reimburse localities. This can be in the form of allowing local governments to raise revenues through additional taxes or tax hikes, or by administering equal funds to localities from state coffers. In short, it would be irresponsible to propose eliminating the Car Tax without providing replacement revenue. Local government must continue to show Richmond that removing their sources of revenue without replacement will result in negative consequences for state legislators, the Governor, and their constituents.

The disabled veteran and surviving spouse property tax exemption

Another tax-related policy that significantly affects localities is the property tax exemption for disabled veterans and surviving spouses. This tax break exempts the real property of a disabled veteran from taxation when the property is their primary residence and they have been determined under federal law to have a “100% service-connected, permanent and total disability.” The exemption also applies to surviving spouses of such veterans who died on or after January 1, 2011, and who have not remarried.

While this tax break is an appropriate way to support those who have made such great sacrifices for our country, localities face significant revenue challenges because of it. Localities across the state find themselves struggling to award veterans this tax break while continuing to fund the vital services they provide residents. Localities that are home to high concentrations of veterans face enormous revenue shortfalls due to the exemption. The City of Hampton, for example, has a veteran occupancy rate of 17.3%. The city loses \$10 million in revenue each year due to tax exemptions for veterans.

According to Commissioner Ross Mugler, property and vehicle tax exemptions for veterans cost the City of Hampton \$8 million and \$2 million in lost revenue respectively in 2024. This is especially alarming when one considers that in 2011 the property tax exemption cost the city only \$277,000 in lost revenue.

Of course, Hampton is not the only locality facing significant challenges from this tax break. In 2023 Stafford County lost roughly \$20 million in revenue, or nearly 9% of its budget, the City of Virginia Beach lost \$21 million, and Fairfax County allocated nearly 5% of its budget to this exemption.

Unsurprisingly, the revenue shortfall from this tax exemption is not as pronounced in localities with smaller populations of veterans. The City of Charlottesville, for example, only saw about \$130,000 of revenue forgone in 2024 due to the exemption. However, as evidenced by Hampton’s experience from 2011 to 2024, demographic shifts over a relatively short span of time can have profound changes in how this exemption affects localities.

The exemption, as currently structured, means that those localities with a high concentration of veterans end up footing the bill at the expense of other important services. This method of administering this otherwise worthy tax break is unsustainable in the long term. The General Assembly and the Governor must partner with localities to determine the best way to right the ship and continue to support veterans across Virginia while also ensuring that local governments have the revenue necessary to perform the duties assigned to them.

Bottom line: It is simply unrealistic to expect localities to continue to fund the growing costs of this massive tax break without help from the state.

Other tax and revenue challenges on the horizon

Beyond the Car Tax and Veterans Property Tax Exemption, there are many other tax considerations to be aware of in the upcoming session. One notable tax increase that will be reconsidered in the upcoming General Assembly session is the 1% local option sales tax to raise revenue for public school funding.

This tax option has been a priority for local governments for some time now and will continue to be until a true resolution is reached. Many localities desperately need this tax option to continue providing quality education to their residents. As the Youngkin administration has proven hostile to this legislation, it is unlikely the reintroduced bill will be signed into law in the upcoming session. However, it may become a bargaining chip should the current administration wish to achieve a major tax victory before its time in office is up.

Outside the realm of specific taxes, the many unfunded mandates the General Assembly requires of local government puts significant strain on their budgets. According to Commissioner Mugler, the unfunded mandates in education are some of the biggest budget challenges faced by localities across the state. In some localities, up to 50% of their budget may go to education. Unfunded mandates requiring “wholesale changes in curricula” have continued to deplete the coffers of localities across Virginia. Additionally, at the beginning of his term Governor Youngkin agreed to the previous administration’s budget that would eliminate the local sales tax on food while holding schools harmless for the lost funds. In his last budget, however, Governor Youngkin proposed eliminating the hold harmless provision. According to Joe Flores, VML’s Director of Fiscal Policy, this was yet another example of the Commonwealth renegeing on promises made to local governments and in the state code.

The General Assembly must do better in working with local governments to allow them to continue providing essential services to constituents without being burdened by unsustainable state requirements without proper funding.

Don’t expect change...yet.

For the time being, it appears the tax policy and revenue landscape for local governments will remain relatively unchanged. The political makeup of the General Assembly and the Governor’s Office has not changed since the last session, and it is likely the two institutions will remain gridlocked on most issues related to taxation. Despite clear calls from localities to pass relief on veterans’ property tax exemptions and unfunded mandates, for example, it should not be expected that significant progress will be made.

Ultimately, there are many tax policy changes that will be discussed and enacted in the coming years, but the political forces at play this session point to a continued gridlock. That said, there must be stronger communication between the General Assembly and Virginia’s local governments to preserve the valuable services provided by localities and to address their growing revenue shortfalls. Collaboration between the General Assembly and localities on these issues will help towns, cities, and counties remain solvent which is the surest way to help maintain Virginia’s place as the top state for business.



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Supreme Court 2024-25 Term Preview: Important Cases for Local Governments

By McKaia Dykema and Stephanie Martinez-Ruckman

This article was originally published by the National League of Cities on CitiesSpeak at www.nlc.org/citiesspeak.

The 2024-25 United States Supreme Court Term officially kicked off on Monday, October 7. Several significant cases that could impact local governments and their interests are before the court this term. The National League of Cities (NLC), through partnership with the Local Government Legal Center (LGLC), has joined several amicus briefs supporting and advocating local government positions on key legal issues of relevance.

Cases of importance this term include questions of employment law issues related to Title VII and the Fair Labor Standards Act, environmental law and the permitting requirements under the Clean Water Act, the scope of authority for a federal regulation relating to “ghost guns,” when attorney’s fees can be assigned and The Americans with Disabilities Act. As the Supreme Court accepts additional cases to their current term docket, NLC will keep local leaders informed on important cases that impact local governments.

Ames v. Ohio Department of Youth Services

This case is related to an important employment law question under Title VII. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The specific issue is whether a plaintiff that belongs to the majority group of a class must show “background circumstances” supporting the suspicion that the defendant is an “unusual employer who discriminates against the majority.” This would be an additional element that the plaintiff must prove in addition to pleading the other elements of a Title VII discrimination claim.

This “background circumstances” test is one that the lower court found was required, given that the plaintiff was a member of the majority group in this case. The court explained that a plaintiff can meet this additional showing with evidence that a member(s) of the relevant minority group of the class made the employment decision at issue or by showing a pattern of discrimination by the employer against members of the given majority group.

As local governments collectively continue to be one of the largest employers in the country, this is an important case that could impact the expansion of local government liability. Lawsuits under Title VII are expensive to defend and resource intensive for local governments. A ruling that applies the background circumstances test would make it harder for employees in majority groups passed over for promotions or subject to adverse employment decisions to bring Title VII lawsuits.

EMD Sales v. Carrera

This is another employment law case related to the power burden of proof level that employers must satisfy to demonstrate the applicability of a Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA) exemption to overtime pay. Generally, under FLSA, employers must pay employees overtime pay at a rate and a half for all work done above 40 hours a week. However, there are a number of exemptions from the FLSA’s minimum wage and overtime requirements. The exemption relevant to this case is the “outside sales” exemption, which exempts employers from paying overtime for work done outside the office.

At issue in this case is the level of the burden of proof that must be demonstrated to show that the exemption applies. The parties disagree on whether the burden should be a “preponderance of the evidence” (the evidence shows more likely than not) or “clear and convincing evidence” (a significantly higher threshold).

This case directly impacts the burden of proof that local governments will need to show as an employer to demonstrate an exemption to overtime under FLSA. Claims under the FLSA are extremely common, and the burden of proof applies to each of the numerous exemptions. If the court finds that the higher standard of burden of proof applies, it will create significant financial implications for cities. Given the severe penalties for violating the rules under FLSA, there are significant potential liability issues at stake in this case for local governments.

City and County of San Francisco v. Environmental Protection Agency

The issue in this case is whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can impose generic prohibitions in their National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits without identifying specific limits to which pollutant discharges must conform.

Under the Clean Water Act (CWA), the EPA has the authority to issue National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits that contain pollutant levels to provide manageable and precise benchmarks for enforcement. Contrary to the requirements of the CWA and EPA guidance, the permits EPA regularly issue impose generic prohibitions against pollutant discharging in a manner that contributes to exceeding applicable water quality standards. The generic prohibitions that are used in the NPDES permits issued to localities around the country create uncertainty and increase the risk that local governments will be subjected to significant penalties. The generic water quality terms in the permits expose permit holders nationwide to enforcement actions while failing to tell them how much they need to limit or treat their discharges to comply with the CWA. A decision in this case would provide clarity to local governments on CWA requirements.

Garland v. VanderStok

The issue in this case is whether a weapon parts kit that has been designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive is considered a “firearm” regulated under the Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA). The GCA is the federal law that imposes licensing, background checks, recordkeeping and serialization requirements on persons engaged in the business of importing, manufacturing or dealing in firearms. In 2022, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) issued a regulation that clarified the definition of “firearm” under the GCA includes products and kits that can “readily be converted” into an operational firearm or a functional frame or receiver. These types of products are commonly referred to as “ghost guns.”

Ghost guns create significant public safety concerns for local law enforcement as they allow minors and felons who are otherwise prohibited from owning guns under the GCA to obtain them without any background checks or serialization requirements. This lack of serial numbers has created significant roadblocks for law enforcement in investigating violent crimes, as they cannot typically be traced. The Court will determine whether these “ghost gun” products are subjected to the requirements of the GCA or if these types of products do not meet the definition of a “firearm.”

Lackey v. Stinnie

The issue in this case involves the important question of deciding when attorney’s fees apply for plaintiffs in civil rights cases. Section 1988 of the U.S. Code provides that a prevailing party may collect attorney’s fees in certain civil suits (including Section 1983 actions). The Court will determine in this case what “prevailing” really means. The specific question is whether a plaintiff who obtains a preliminary injunction can obtain attorney’s fees under Section 1988 if there is never a permanent injunction or full ruling on the claim’s merits since the defendant voluntarily changed their conduct.

As local governments are party to civil suits (including under Section 1983 actions), a limitation in the award of attorney’s fees would result in a significant financial victory for local governments involved in these types of cases. Attorney’s fees can be as high or higher than the underlying liability or damages of a civil suit, and they regularly cost governments hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. If the Court rules that attorney’s fees are appropriately awarded only when there is a conclusive ruling, this would significantly reduce future potential civil litigation costs for local governments.

Stanley v. City of Stanford

This case presents a question of whether a former employee can sue their employer under The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for discrimination in post-employment distribution of fringe benefits if they no longer hold their job. Title I of the ADA prevents discrimination against individuals with disabilities regarding compensation and other terms of employment. Lower courts found that a former employee doesn’t qualify as an “individual with a disability” and therefore cannot bring suit for discrimination in post-employment distribution of fringe benefits.

Local governments are sometimes faced with difficult decisions when balancing the public fisc with other local government operations or initiatives. As local leaders continue to look for cost-saving mechanisms to balance their budgets, some may look to post-employment benefit liabilities as a place to potentially cut costs and fulfill their duties of fiscal responsibility. This case is important to ensure local governments have the flexibility and authority they need to make these difficult decisions without the threat of litigation.

About the Authors



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