

VTC

VIRGINIA
TOWN & CITY

VOL. 60 NO. 1 JAN/FEB 2025

THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

Talking Tappahannock

How is this small town
doing such big things?

Also Inside:

Cybersecurity checklist
for municipalities:
Where to begin?

Local Government Day
highlights



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THE MAGAZINE OF THE VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

VOL. 60 NO. 1 JAN/FEB 2025

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BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT



ABOUT THE COVER

How does a town less than three square miles and with fewer than 2,500 residents embark on not one, not two, but three (!) dream projects at the same time? Where did the political will and the funding come from? These are great questions, so we went there to get some answers. Find out what we learned inside.

DEPARTMENTS

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE 2
 PEOPLE 3
 NEWS & NOTES 6
 COMMUNITY BUSINESS MEMBERS 27

FEATURES

Talking Tappahannock: How is this small town doing such big things?

VTC editor and VML Voice host Rob Bullington and VML policy team member Mitchell Smiley traveled to Tappahannock in December to chat with Mayor Roy Gladding and Town Manager Eric Pollitt. What they learned could help other towns that want to move forward with projects that have sat idle too long. 14

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Cybersecurity checklist for municipalities: Where to begin?

VC3's Senior Manager of Managed Security Joe Penny provides some insights and a handy checklist for local governments that want to be better prepared to protect, detect, respond, and recover from cybersecurity threats. 23

Local Government Day Highlights

Photos taken at the event 24



Visit www.vml.org or scan the QR code to download the VML app.



2025 kicks off with some weirdness, chaos, successes, and a tragedy.

THE DAY BEFORE the 2025 General Assembly session started, I flew into Richmond and was given a reminder of the situation in the Richmond area when I saw that the airport had only portable bathroom facilities available. For those who remained blissfully unaware, the City of Richmond and portions of the surrounding counties were affected by failures of multiple systems that resulted in boil water notifications and a complete loss of water in some areas.

The next day, lobbyists from all over the Commonwealth saw photos of the porta johns and I was grateful to not have to attend the opening session! It was a weird way to start the session, but dare I say that this whole session has sort of been the same? Certainly, things have been chaotic and demanded even greater flexibility from those of us wrapped up in the work. Now, having just passed halfway through the session, I am pleased to report that VML's legislative priorities are doing OK (and we hope they will stay that way).

An alarming affordable dwelling unit bill that began as a mandate has been amended so that localities simply must provide consideration of them in their comprehensive plan; other bills related to FOIA fees and public meeting agenda requirements continue to be debated and then there are the bills related to photo speed enforcement cameras...those are keeping us up at night! The numerous bills that deal with photo speed enforcement cameras have some good ideas and some bad ideas. The worst of the ideas we've seen is an attempt to take the local revenues generated by the fines and give it to the state rather than allow localities to use it for road safety improvements. VML is working with our localities and the companies that provide these systems to make these bills more palatable.

You can follow all the action on these and other bills of concern to local governments in our newsletter *eNews*.

A big thank you to everyone who attended our Local Government Legislative Day on January 30. It was a lot of fun. It means a great deal to the General Assembly members to have local government officials and staff visit them. General Assembly members really do listen to their constituents more than they listen to us...

so thank you! It also energizes VML's lobbyists to have our members show so much interest in the work we are doing. If we've said it once, we can say it a thousand times: Your support makes all the difference in our work, and we truly appreciate you!

As we end this session, I am excited to share that VML is working on a summer event for elected officials as well as a Small Towns Conference to build on the success of last year's inaugural event. In coming months, VML staff will host webinars to update our members on the takeaways from the 2025 General Assembly session so that localities can prepare for the new and amended laws that may take effect on July 1. And, of course, there will be an issue of the magazine that reviews the actions of the General Assembly this year.

I also want to acknowledge that we have fielded a lot of questions about the Executive Orders coming out of the White House these past weeks. I attended a meeting in D.C. last week with many different states and the Intergovernmental Affairs Office of the White House. This was my first meeting with this office, but was a good chance to make contacts with those whose job it is to listen to state, tribal and local governments. VML will continue to keep the lines of communication open.

And speaking of communication...it's time again for the annual "If I Were Mayor" essay contest for 7th and 8th graders. Please encourage young people in your locality to submit entries. There are some great prizes including \$250 for the statewide winner! The deadline to enter is March 17.



In closing, I want to extend my sympathies to those affected by the tragic air disaster at DCA. My heart breaks for all those lives lost. Thank you to our first responders and everyone who has been working tirelessly to handle the aftermath of this awful situation in an appropriate and respectful manner.

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

CALENDAR

March 14

Municipal Autonomous Vehicle Forum - Free In-person event. MITRE Headquarters, Mclean, VA. Full details and registration on page 25.

March 17

'If I Were Mayor' Essay Contest Deadline - Open to all eligible Virginia 7th and 8th Graders. Information at www.vml.org.

Oct. 12-14

2025 VML Annual Conference - Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center



In Memoriam: Former Town of Dayton manager William "Bill" Thomas Sheppard III

William "Bill" Thomas Sheppard III, 85, of Cary, NC, passed away at Glenaire Retirement Community on December 23, 2024. Sheppard served as manager of the Town of Dayton for 20 years, during which time the annual October festival "Dayton Days" was started. The event continues to this day and is a revered community attraction.



- Sheppard -

Sheppard was born in Bridgeton, NJ, on August 11, 1939 to parents William T. Sheppard Jr. and Margaret Sutton Sheppard. He proudly served in the U.S. Navy for four years active duty and two years in the reserves. He was a member of the American Legion, the Ruritans, and the Eureka Lodge Masons.

Sheppard was an active member of White Plains United Methodist Church in Cary, NC and a former member of St. James UMC in Pleasant Valley, VA, where he served as worship leader and led in other capacities. His faith in Christ was a corner-

stone of his life and reflected in the way he loved his family.

Condolences may be shared at www.kygers.com.

In Memoriam: Former Culpeper Councilmember Robert "Bobby" M. Ryan



- Ryan -

The Town of Culpeper is deeply saddened by the passing of treasured former Councilmember **Bobby Ryan**. He was a dedicated and long-time member of the town council, serving from July 1994 to June 2002 (including a stint as vice mayor in 2000) and then again from July 2008 to December 2019. He was a past chairman of the Public Safety Committee and Town/County Interaction Committee.

Additionally, Ryan served on the Light & Power Committee, Personnel Committee, Parking Authority, Chamber of Commerce Board, Parks & Recreation Commission, and Culpeper Cable Commission. He also volunteered many hours with multiple local service organizations, including Culpeper

Renaissance, Inc. and Full Circle Thrift.

Ryan truly loved Culpeper, and his passing is a tremendous loss to the entire community. Mayor Frank Reaves Jr. said, "Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family, friends, and the entire community during this time of great loss."

Hozey to retire as Cape Charles town manager; Keurogljian to take over in April



- Hozey -

Cape Charles Town Manager **John Hozey** has announced his plan to retire in May 2025, with Dicran (Rick) Keurogljian set to assume the role in mid-April.

Hozey became town manager on March 5, 2020. Before his appointment in Cape Charles, Hozey enjoyed a lengthy career of public service at every level of government, from local to federal. His prior roles included deputy chief of staff for Alaska Governor Bill Walker, city manager for the City of Valdez, AK, administrative director for U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, and assistant borough



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manager for the Ketchikan Gateway Borough in Alaska. He was also a combat search and rescue pilot for the U.S. Air Force.

Hozey has a Bachelor's in Aeronautical Engineering from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a Master's in Public Administration from Central Michigan University.



- Keuroglian - announced the selection of **Rick Keuroglian** as Cape Charles' next town manager. Keuroglian is expected to start his employment in mid-April to allow an overlap with Hozey and ensure a smooth transition.

Keuroglian grew up in Maryland. He spent the last four years in Colorado as an assistant city administrator and town administrator. Before that, he ran a community development nonprofit in Georgia for more than a decade, advising/consulting county administrators, municipal leaders, and department heads on a variety of municipal functions.

Keuroglian has a Bachelor's in Sociology from Wofford College, a Master's in Public Administration from Augusta University, and is certified in urban planning and community development.

Manassas names Beale public affairs manager



- Beale - The City of Manassas has appointed **Jeremy Beale** as its new public affairs manager. With more than a decade of experience in communications and public relations, Beale is committed to delivering vital information to the local community while fostering strong community relations and trust.

The public affairs manager is appointed by the city manager to enhance communication, ensuring that residents, businesses, media, and city employees receive clear and timely information.

"I would like to thank Interim City Manager Doug Keen, the city's executive leadership, the city mayor, and city councilmembers for welcoming me into this role," Beale said in a press release. "I am eager to begin

my journey of service with the city and look forward to helping its community members along the way."

Beale has a robust background as a news reporter and communications liaison for local government and various organizations. He has covered several topics and industries, including public works, environmental sustainability, military affairs, law enforcement, education, and small business. Drawing from this diverse experience, he aims to enhance the city's online presence and outreach initiatives by building upon the existing communications foundation, while inspiring a new vision for communications and outreach in the city.

Beale holds a Bachelor of Science in Journalism from Liberty University.

James City County's Ruch installed as IAEM Region 3 president



- Ruch - James City County Deputy Coordinator **Sara Ruch** was recently installed as the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) Region 3 president and IAEM USA Council board member.

The IAEM, which has more than 6,000 members worldwide, is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to promoting the Principles of Emergency Management and representing those professionals whose goals are saving lives and protecting property and the environment during emergencies and disasters. IAEM Region 3 includes Virginia, West Virginia, Washington D.C., Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania.

Ruch's one-year appointment began on November 20, 2024. Ruch has worked as the deputy emergency manager for James City County since April 2017.

For more information on IAEM, visit www.iaem.org.

DeWitt to serve as Williamsburg interim commissioner of the revenue



- DeWitt - Williamsburg Assistant City Manager **Michele Mixner DeWitt** has been named interim commissioner of the revenue, effective January 2.

DeWitt fills the unexpired second term of Commissioner of the

Revenue **Lara Overy**, whose resignation was effective January 1. Overy announced her resignation in September, citing her relocation to James City County.

The Williamsburg-James City County Circuit Court granted a City of Williamsburg request to appoint DeWitt on December 11. The order allowed DeWitt the "privileges and protections afforded by law to elected or appointed constitutional officers" and granted the city's request not to hold a special election to fill the unexpired term. DeWitt was sworn into office on December 16.

DeWitt served as the city's economic development director for 16 years before her promotion to assistant city manager in 2021. She will maintain her position as assistant city manager while serving as the interim commissioner.

Prior to her roles with Williamsburg, DeWitt's public sector career has included work on the Middle Peninsula, West Point, and for the Commonwealth of Virginia. In Middlesex, she was the first environmental planner in a locality with 135 miles of shoreline. At the state level, she started as the manager of a new economic development program and managed several other economic development programs. DeWitt currently chairs the Williamsburg Area Transit Authority and is also a past president of the Virginia Economic Developers Association.

DeWitt is also a volunteer with, and former chairman of, Housing Partnerships. She is the current president of the Williamsburg Garden Club and serves on the finance committee of the Garden Club of Virginia. She holds a Bachelor's in City Planning from the University of Virginia and a Master of Public Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University.

DeWitt is also a volunteer with, and former chairman of, Housing Partnerships. She is the current president of the Williamsburg Garden Club and serves on the finance committee of the Garden Club of Virginia. She holds a Bachelor's in City Planning from the University of Virginia and a Master of Public Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Winchester Fire and Rescue Chief Jon Henschel to retire



- Henschel - On January 8, City of Winchester Fire and Rescue Department Chief **Jon Henschel** announced that he will retire effective April 1, 2025.

"After 27-and-a-half years of service to our community, I would like to thank Chief Henschel for his steadfast commitment to keeping Winchester residents safe," said City Manager Dan Hoffman in a press release. "We are a safer city because of his leadership, and we wish him the very best in retirement."

Henschel joined the Winchester Fire and Rescue Department in 1997 as a firefighter/paramedic and worked his way up the ranks to become fire and rescue chief in 2021. During his tenure with the department, Henschel brought many improvements to the organization, including establishing the Community Connect and the Community Assistance and Resource Engagement (C.A.R.E.) programs to help residents avoid fires and accidents. Henschel also addressed several public safety items to improve responses in the community, helped create a high school fire academy class, enhanced fire prevention and education for community members, and implemented the first fire department strategic plan.

Externally, Henschel strengthened the department’s relationships with local stakeholders, including Winchester businesses and nonprofits, improving the frequency and effectiveness of safety inspections throughout the city. Henschel also played an instrumental role in several capital improvement projects, including a new city-owned fire station and a strategic apparatus replacement plan.

“I am very appreciative of the overwhelming support I’ve received from our city staff, city council, community stakeholders, and our community members during the course of my tenure with the city,” Henschel said. “Our organization has thrived, and I am extremely proud of our department members and the services they provide daily in our community. I look forward to the next chapter in my life, but Winchester will always remain at the heart of it all.”

Henschel holds a Master’s in Organizational Leadership and Emergency Management. He is credentialed as a Chief Fire Officer and is a graduate of the Executive Fire Officers Academy. He has served as board president of the regional Emergency Medical Services Council for the last 12 years and previously served on the Governor’s Emergency Medical Services Board in Richmond.

Front Royal appoints Wilson as interim town manager



- Wilson -

During its January 9 work session, the Front Royal Town Council appointed **B.J. Wilson** as interim town manager. The council is searching for a permanent replacement following the departure of Town Manager Joseph Waltz on January 12.

Wilson has been a dedicated member

of Front Royal’s administration since 2008, beginning his tenure as finance manager. In 2016, he was promoted to finance director, where he played a critical role in enhancing the town’s financial management practices. In October 2024, Wilson was promoted to assistant town manager, further demonstrating his commitment to leadership and the betterment of the community.

“Having worked with Mr. Wilson since joining council in 2020, I have seen firsthand his dedication to the town and its citizens,” said Front Royal Mayor Lori Cockrell in a press release. “I have complete confidence that he will help provide stability for the staff, council, as well as our citizens during this transition. I am very grateful for his willingness to serve in this role and will support him in any way possible.”

Shippee named assistant town manager of Christiansburg



- Shippee -

The Town of Christiansburg has announced the appointment of **Scot E. Shippee** as its new assistant town manager. Shippee brings more than 25 years of engineering, leadership, and municipal experience to the position, along with a deep appreciation for the community he is proud to once again serve having begun his career in Christiansburg where he worked in engineering and administration from 1997 to 2006. He returns to the town after a successful career in both the private and public sectors, including leadership positions in the private sector and with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). His experience encompasses land development, transportation engineering, maintenance operations, and community engagement.

Town Manager Randy Wingfield said in a press release that “Scot’s professional background spans a variety of disciplines, offering a diverse skill set that will benefit the Town of Christiansburg. He is familiar with our community and understands its needs. It was important for us to hire a leader who can guide and grow Christiansburg with innovative ideas and a unique perspective. We believe Scot will do just that.”

Shippee holds a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Virginia Tech and has been a licensed professional engineer in the Commonwealth of Virginia since 2006.

Stephens retires as Wytheville treasurer



- Stephens -

After almost 40 years in the role, **Michael G. Stephens** retired as treasurer of the Town of Wytheville effective September 1, 2024. Stephens was first appointed as treasurer in March 1985. He was the first town treasurer to serve as president of the Treasurers’ Association of Virginia, serving from June 2023 through June 2024.

Longtime Assistant Town Treasurer Angela Pennington was appointed Wytheville treasurer following Stephens’ retirement.

Marsh to head Loudoun County Office of Real Property Asset Management and Planning



- Marsh -

Jacqueline Marsh has been selected as the first director of Loudoun County’s Office of Real Property Asset Management and Planning. Marsh, who currently serves as an assistant director in the county’s Department of Planning and Zoning, began her new role on January 2.

The Office of Real Property Asset Management and Planning was created in 2024 within the Office of the County Administrator to focus on the county’s land strategy and to manage the acquisition and disposition of land.

“Ms. Marsh has shown exceptional leadership since joining the county in 2016, demonstrated by her continual promotions within the Department of Planning and Zoning based on her excellent performance,” said County Administrator Tim Hemstreet in a press release.

Immediately prior to joining Loudoun County, Marsh was a planner with the City of Frederick, MD. Her previous experience also includes planning in other jurisdictions in Maryland and property appraisal roles in Pennsylvania.

Marsh earned a Master’s in Real Estate Development from the University of Maryland, a Master’s in Library Information Science from the University of Pittsburgh, and a Bachelor’s in Geography from Shippensburg University.

Lake Hampton resiliency project completed

HAMPTON CITY OFFICIALS cut the ribbon on December 13 to open Lake Hampton, marking the completion of the city’s first flagship coastal resiliency project.

Plans for the lake began three years ago as part of the Newmarket Creek Pilot Project Water Plan, which also includes the upcoming North Armistead Road Raising project (scheduled to start in 2025). By finding innovative approaches to mitigating stormwater and floods, the projects will reduce localized flooding and improve water quality, increase access to green space, enhance native wildlife habitat, and reduce transportation disruptions through a key corridor.

“It is no secret that Hampton residents regularly express concern over the frequency and severity of flooding events,” said Hampton Mayor Donnie Tuck in a press release. “These events may be simple nuisances most days, but sometimes they are more severe. Sometimes they threaten lives, property, and businesses. Both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that our world is changing in a number of ways related to living with water. We have no choice but to adapt.”

The Lake Hampton project, located off Freeman Drive, transformed an existing retention pond into a stormwater facility that stores the runoff from North Armistead Avenue and the nearby neighborhood. This project includes bioswales to improve water quality, the creation of wetlands and wildlife habitat, and a loop trail extension of the Waterwalk Trail.

“We are also celebrating this as a new recreational amenity,” City Manager Mary Bunting said. “People can enjoy the serenity of the water and a healthier lifestyle.”

Hampton found innovative financing methods for the Lake Hampton project, using Environmental Impact Bonds to leverage other grant opportunities, including one from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Mayor Tuck concluded, “We have learned many lessons since first making a commitment to be a leader in resiliency and adopting the ‘living with water’ philosophy. We are constantly adapting to the challenges we face. If we continue to follow this path, the future of Hampton will thrive with water.”



The VML Voice is the official podcast of the Virginia Municipal League. Each episode explores a different locality or issue but the focus is always on Virginia and the local governments that make the Commonwealth work for everyone.



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



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Leesburg celebrates completion of Mervin Jackson Park and community piano

AT A RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY on December 16, the Town of Leesburg celebrated the completion of Mervin Jackson



Park's east parcel, as well as the installation of the town's first community piano.

The new park amenity, which was officially completed on December 4, includes a brick patio, a surrounding seat wall with lighting, and a lighted pavilion.

The piano, located within the pavilion and painted by local artist Danielle Ferrin, is centered around the idea of finding harmony and unity within the gift of music. Colorful music notes, song lyrics, and peace doves were incorporated into the design. This project was inspired by other programs throughout the country to encourage and promote art and music for the enjoyment of the community.

Local band Frayed Knots had the honor of debuting the new piano, delighting the audience with a selection of Christmas songs to wrap up the celebration. Both the piano and park are now available for public use.

Herndon Police Department first in Virginia to receive KultureCity certification

HERNDON POLICE CHIEF Maggie DeBoard has announced that the Herndon Police Department (HPD), as part of an effort to promote inclusivity and accessibility for individuals with sensory needs, has become the first law enforcement agency in Virginia to train every officer in sensory inclusion in partnership with KultureCity.

As part of the certification process, HPD officers underwent training by leading medical and neurodivergent professionals on how to recognize community members with sensory needs, and how to handle a sensory overload situation. Sensory bags, equipped with noise-canceling headphones (provided by Puro Sound Labs), fidget tools, and verbal cue cards will be available in all HPD cruisers for community members who feel overwhelmed by the environment or emergency situation.

Learn more about KultureCity at www.kulturecity.org.



Emporia opens new dining establishment

CITY OF EMPORIA residents now have the option to "Eat Mor Chikin" at a brand-new Chick-fil-A location.

Following a ribbon-cutting ceremony on December 10, the restaurant opened to the public on December 12. Operator Jason Riddle has hired over 100 employees, including dozens of students from nearby Greenville County High School. Riddle – previously the operator of a Colonial Heights Chick-fil-A located within the Southpark Mall – worked for a decade to realize his dream of owning a freestanding Chick-fil-A.

Emporia City Manager William Johnson III initially met with Chick-fil-A representatives in 2019 to discuss bringing a franchise to the city. It's the first business to open on an eight-acre parcel that the city bought from a private landowner to generate economic development.

The Emporia franchise is participating in the Chick-fil-A Shared Table program, which donates excess food to soup kitchens and food banks. Riddle will also encourage his high school-age workers to apply for Chick-fil-A's Remarkable Futures scholarship initiative; his Colonial Heights team members were awarded a combined \$110,000 in scholarships during his tenure there.



KAYLA HARDERSEN

Virginia Main Street announces nine new designated communities

Resources will advance downtown revitalization and business development



THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING and Community Development (DHCD) has selected nine new community organizations for the Advancing Virginia Main Street (AVMS) designation. These communities will receive intensive services to help strengthen their downtowns, including market analysis, marketplace development, capacity building, design assistance, organization development, economic strategies, and façade renderings for redevelopment projects.

The new AVMS designated communities include the cities of Buena Vista, Covington, Galax, Hampton, Martinsville, Newport News, and Petersburg, and the towns of Clarksville and Colonial Beach.

Since 1985, DHCD has aided localities engaged in downtown commercial district revitalization through the Virginia Main Street program. Virginia uses the National Main Street Center’s comprehensive, incremental Main Street Approach to downtown revitalization, which is built around a community’s unique heritage, culture, and historic building attributes.

“Downtowns are the heart and soul of many communities

across the Commonwealth, and these newly designated communities are no exception,” said Secretary of Commerce and Trade Caren Merrick in a press release. “The Virginia Main Street program offers crucial investments to support their economic development while preserving the unique cultures and histories that make Virginia’s downtown areas such tourism destinations. Main Street investments are a key driver to making Virginia the best place to live, work, and raise a family.”

“The Main Street Approach is a time-tested, flexible framework to foster community-driven, comprehensive community revitalization,” said DHCD Director Bryan Horn. “We are extremely proud of our Virginia Main Street communities and are excited to be continuing a strong tradition of supporting local economies across the Commonwealth.”

Since 1985, Virginia Main Street communities have generated more than \$2.6 billion in public and private investment. New businesses locating, expanding, or relocating to Virginia Main Street communities have created more than 27,000 jobs.

For more information, visit www.dhcd.virginia.gov/vms.

New report shows Northern Virginia population growth has slowed since pandemic

Addresses affordable housing needs

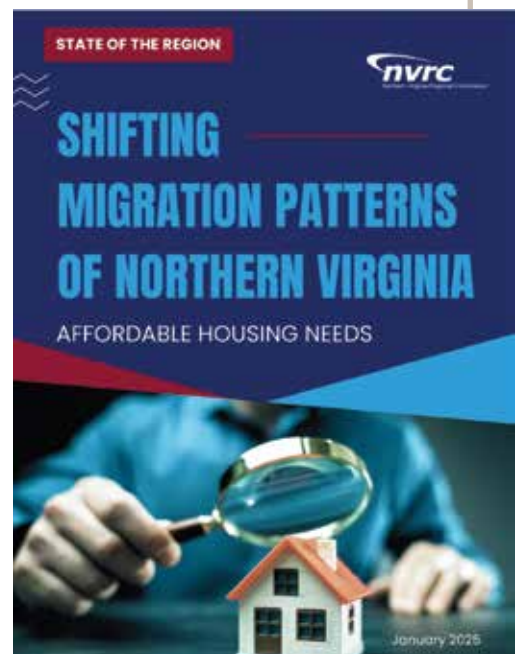
A NEW STUDY INDICATES that while the population in Northern Virginia continues to grow, the rate of that growth has slowed since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) recently released a new State of the Region demographic report titled *Shifting Migration Patterns of Northern Virginia: Affordable Housing Needs*. NVRC’s Senior Regional Demographer Jill Kaneff authored the report.

Since 2021, Northern Virginia’s population has seen annual increases; however, the growth is slower than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Shifts in domestic migration inflows and outflows are one of the primary drivers of the slower growth. The shifting migration dynamics uncovered in this report illuminate the challenges faced by the region, particularly the high cost of living and significant under-supply of affordable housing for young first-time home buyers with household earnings up to \$150,000. If left unaddressed by governments and the business community, migration shifts can have wide-ranging and significant impacts, including economic, tax revenue, and social equity impacts. The report discusses implications and solutions.

The study examines three largely unreported elements for Northern Virginia. First, it analyzes the volume of domestic migration into and out of Northern Virginia. Second, it investigates the specific locations within the U.S. that people are moving to. Lastly, it identifies the magnitude and extent to which housing affordability, income, and age of people are playing a role in the region’s domestic migration patterns.

The report and other demographic data can be found at www.novaregion-dashboard.com.



Falls Church enhances safety at trail street crossings

THE CITY OF FALLS CHURCH aims to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety with a street crossing improvement project at Berman Park.

Berman Park is a linear park in the center of the city, running between Ellison Street in the northeast to South Spring Street in the south. The park connects commercial properties and residential areas (single-family and multi-family) and is part of the city's network of green spaces.

In 2015, Falls Church adopted the Parks for People Plan as an element of the city's Comprehensive Plan, recognizing the important role that green corridors –

like Berman Park – play in providing safe pedestrian and bicycle transportation alternatives. A walking trail traverses the entire park. However, the park is split by several street crossings, which lack adequate pedestrian facilities and signage. The goal of the current project is to enhance safety for pedestrians and bicyclists using this trail.

The Berman Park Trail Improvements Project will ultimately update four of the trail's street crossings, specifically at Ellison Street, Kent Street, Irving Street, and South Spring Street. The new crossings will include high visibility markings to highlight the trail crossings and narrowed street cross-sections to shorten the pedestrian crossing distance.

Construction began in October 2024; three of the crossings are now complete, and the project is expected to wrap up in the spring/summer of 2025. Funding was provided by \$600,000 in federal Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Program funds awarded to Falls Church.



SafeHaven Empowerment Center opens in Newport News

THE SAFEHAVEN EMPOWERMENT Center, the vision of Super Bowl champion and former NFL player Antoine Bethea, officially opened its doors on December 5 in the City of Newport News.

The center provides vital resources and opportunities to at-risk youth and families in Newport News. In addition to fun activities for young people, such as sports and e-gaming, this transformative facility will offer educational support, mentorship programs, career development workshops, and wellness services, all aimed at helping young people build a strong foundation for success. The center is the realization of Bethea's commitment to giving back to his community and empowering the next generation of leaders – and the culmination of years of planning and collaboration between the Bethea Family Foundation and Newport News.

"I am proud to see the SafeHaven Empowerment Center become a reality," said Bethea in a press release. "This center represents more than just a building—it's a place where our youth can access the tools and guidance they need to achieve their full potential. It's a dream come true for me, and I'm excited to see how it will positively impact the lives of so many in Newport News."

Over the years, the Denbigh High School and Howard University alum has contributed time and resources to work with the city on several charitable initiatives. In December 2023, Newport News City Council voted unanimously to approve a partnership with the Bethea Family Foundation to bring SafeHaven to fruition.

The expansive facility aligns with the city's Youth T.H.R.I.V.E. initiative. This initiative is focused on improving the well-being and development of young people, particularly in ways that promote education, economic opportunity, and mental health. SafeHaven will serve as a resource hub for at-risk youth in the area, providing a safe space where young people can access programs, services, and support to help them thrive.

Through partnerships with local schools, businesses, and community organizations, the SafeHaven Empowerment Center is expected to contribute positively to the city's overall strategy for youth development, which includes providing safe recreational spaces, fostering leadership skills, and helping young people build resilience in the face of challenges.

"This is a transformative moment for our community," said Newport News Mayor Phillip Jones. "With the launch of the empowerment center, we have partnered with Antoine and the Bethea Foundation to take bold actions to address the needs of youth and families in our community. This initiative reflects our unwavering commitment to making Newport News an even better place to live, work, and raise a family. I am proud of the work that has gone into making this vision a reality, and I look forward to seeing the positive changes it will bring."

For more information about the SafeHaven Empowerment Center and the Bethea Family Foundation's initiatives, visit www.antoinebethea41.com.

THE SAFEHAVEN EMPOWERMENT CENTER

Manassas officers receive U.S. Attorney General's Award for Distinguished Service in Community Policing

ON DECEMBER 4, U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland announced the 21 recipients of the seventh annual Attorney General's Award for Distinguished Service in Community Policing, including two officers from the Manassas City Police Department.

Master Police Officer (MPO) Shauna Moller and MPO Thomas Rodriguez were both honored in the category of Innovations in Community Policing. This prestigious award recognizes law enforcement officers who demonstrate exceptional dedication to strengthening trust, promoting community engagement, and enhancing public safety.

"All 21 of today's awardees have demonstrated what community-oriented policing looks like in practice," said Garland. "They come from all different parts of the country. They represent communities of all shapes and sizes. Their typical days might not all look the same. But they are united by a deep commitment to protecting their communities."

MPO Moller was recognized for her work in mental health. Her efforts connected hundreds of Manassas residents to services in mental health and domestic violence support.

MPO Rodriguez was honored for his work with the Parent E3 education program, which brings together community resources and subject matter experts to present a topic to an audience of parents. The city received a VML Innovation Award for the program.

Manassas City Public Schools was a key partner in this initiative, creating a unique collaborative team between police department

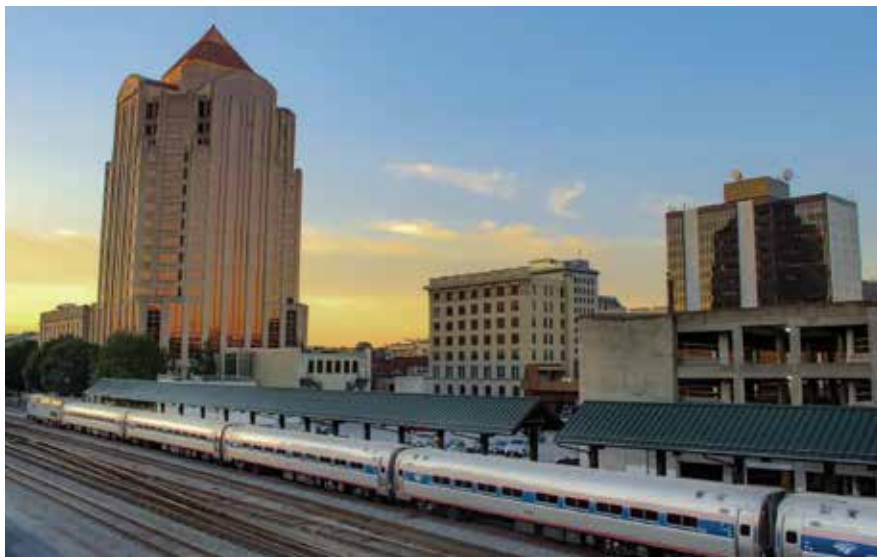
and school system. Rodriguez also helped provide presentations with English-to-Spanish interpretation to reach more Manassas residents.

"We stand in the presence of extraordinary individuals who exemplify the very best of what it means to protect and serve," said Principal Deputy Attorney Associate Attorney General Benjamin C. Mizer in a press release. "We celebrate a remarkable truth: the profound and positive impact that law enforcement officers and deputies have on the communities they serve every single day. These awards honor those who exemplify the very best of the profession and showcase these individuals as pillars of trust, empathy, and unity."



Roanoke selected for USDOT grant program

THE CITY OF ROANOKE looks to revitalize the area around its downtown Amtrak station, with help from a U.S. Department of Transportation grant.



Roanoke has been awarded a grant through the Build America Bureau's Innovative Finance and Asset Concession Grant Program (IFACGP). This three-year, \$50 million program helps public entities explore innovative financing and delivery opportunities for transit-oriented projects on public assets.

Through this program, Roanoke will evaluate city-owned properties within a half-mile radius of the Amtrak station. The goal is to develop a plan for the area, positioning the Amtrak station as a vibrant transit hub. Roanoke is one of 45 local, regional, and state public entities selected to receive assistance through IFACGP.

"We believe that this program has the potential to be a game-changer for Roanoke, and we are committed to working with the U.S. Department of Transportation to make the most of this opportunity," said Roanoke Director of Economic Development Marc Nelson.



Arlington County Board approves Gateway Park Master Plan

THE ARLINGTON COUNTY BOARD voted to adopt the Gateway Park Master Plan and Design Guidelines on December 14, approving a vision to revitalize a beloved public space into a more vibrant and welcoming hub for a wide range of visitors.

“Gateway Park has long been a landmark for Rosslyn and the county,” said Libby Garvey, chair of the Arlington County Board in a press release. “With this plan, we are building on its legacy to create a space that reflects the needs and aspirations of our dynamic community. We are deeply grateful for the collaboration between our dedicated county staff, the consultant team, and the community in crafting this exceptional design.”

Nestled in the heart of Rosslyn, Gateway Park is a 3.7-acre park just south of the Key Bridge, connecting Arlington County with Washington D.C. The plan builds upon policy recommenda-

tions outlined in the Rosslyn Sector Plan, with adjustments during the park master planning process to prioritize pedestrian safety. A key feature of the plan includes the replacement of the existing concrete bridge superstructure over North Fort Myer Drive with a modern pedestrian bridge that incorporates design principles.

Community feedback was integral in driving the direction of the plan. The robust public engagement process included a three-phase engagement plan where people shared their vision for the park, commented on draft concepts, and shared feedback on the final draft. Community feedback highlighted the need for Gateway Park to serve both as a space for daily activities and as a venue for special events.

Construction for the project is expected to start in 2026.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and City of Virginia Beach partner on oceanfront beach replenishment

BEACH REPLENISHMENT EFFORTS began in late December at the Virginia Beach Oceanfront. This joint environmental sustainability initiative, led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in partnership with the Virginia Beach Department of Public Works, aims to restore the coastline, eroded by severe storms, wind, waves, and flooding.

Beginning December 30, contractor Manson Construction Co. mobilized at Virginia Beach via the 37th Street access, establishing a work center for its construction crew, heavy machinery, support equipment and work trailer. Mobilization, lasting a few weeks, was a prerequisite for the actual beach replenishment starting in January. About 950,000 cubic yards of sand will be deposited between 15th and 45th streets for beach replenishment in the resort area before the initiative moves to Croatan.

Beach visitors are asked to stay on the boardwalk at the 37th Street access area or outside the safety fencing, while the contractor mobilizes equipment, places orange safety fencing, and installs signage. The beach will remain open throughout the beach replenishment outside of orange safety fencing areas.

The City of Virginia Beach estimates that its \$20.2 million investment in beach replenishment throughout the resort area since 2002 has averted more than \$1 billion in storm-related damages. Beach replenishment takes place every five to seven years; the last one was completed in 2019.

The USACE is leading the beach replenishment effort of this partnership and has contributed \$13.13 million (or 65% of the total) to the \$20.2 million total cost of the replenishment project, with the city investment at \$7.07 million (35% of the total and taxpayer dollars). Taxpayer dollars are being saved because placement of the sand is a beneficial use of dredged sand from the nearby Atlantic Ocean Channel in Norfolk. The channel is being dredged as part of the Norfolk Harbor Deepening Project that USACE is completing in partnership with the Virginia Port Authority.

Beach replenishment provides storm damage reduction protection to safeguard the city’s pump stations, seawall, and commercial and residential property, along with other infrastructure that would be subject to flooding without such an environmental measure. Additional benefits include protecting the beach’s coastline and longevity; defending the coastline against storms; improving the beach environment for recreational activity; attracting vacationers and economic development; and increasing land value of adjacent properties.

For further information about this project, visit www.virginiaBeach.gov/BeachReplenishment.



CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH

Williamsburg City Council approves African American Heritage Trail narrative

THE WILLIAMSBURG CITY COUNCIL unanimously voted to approve the narrative for the African American Heritage Trail (AAHT) on December 12.

Since 2021, the AAHT has been included in the city’s Goals, Initiatives, and Outcomes, a document that outlines the city’s workplan. Council’s approval comes after years of community collaboration, led by the voices and perspectives of the Williamsburg community.

“This is a council that embraces telling the whole story of Williamsburg, a story that has long been incomplete,” Williamsburg

Mayor Douglas G. Pons said in a press release. “Where we stand today reflects a deep commitment to acknowledging our shared past and creating a foundation for a fuller, more inclusive future.”

Earlier this year, the AAHT Advisory Committee selected JMI, a marketing and communications firm, to develop the narrative for the trail. JMI collected more than 50 personal stories from Williamsburg residents through the platform Share More Stories, facilitated community conversations, and connected with local historians and researchers to develop the narrative.

“Through these stories, we’ve created not just a trail but a deeper narrative, one that fills in the gaps of history and shapes a more complete understanding of Williamsburg’s role in the American story,” said James Warren, JMI’s vice president of brand strategy and founder of Share More Stories.

In working with JMI, the city and AAHT Advisory Committee aimed to develop an uplifting narrative for the trail that shares untold, undertold, underheard, and overlooked stories of people, places, and events that are important to the African American community in and around the city.

With the approval of the narrative, the advisory committee will now work with JMI to develop the trail’s signage. The trail’s estimated total cost is \$2.75 million. Through federal and local funds, the city has secured approximately \$875,000 for Phase 1, which includes the construction of the trailhead at Lafayette Street, a public restroom, and the first segment of the trail from Lafayette Street to Scotland Street. Funding sources to complete the final phase are actively being sought.

More information can be found at www.williamsburgva.gov/heritagetrail.



New park, art installation unveiled in Albemarle County

BISCUIT RUN PARK opened in Albemarle County on December 14. Located off Route 20, just south of Avon Street, the first phase includes 75 vehicle parking spaces, restrooms, and over eight miles of multi-use trails for hiking, biking, and exploring.

This park was made possible through a collaboration with the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Albemarle County holds a 99-year lease for this 1,200-acre property, ensuring it will remain a community treasure for generations.

Biscuit Run Park is the first of its kind in Albemarle’s development area. With 80% of the park remaining forested and protected natural heritage resources, it’s a haven for outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds. The park is open daily from 7 a.m. until dark.

Art installation to help visitors process grief

Albemarle County Parks and Recreation, in partnership with Hospice of the Piedmont (HOP), recently installed Telephone of the Wind in Darden Towe Park, a unique and peaceful space for community members to process grief and connect with lost loved ones.

Inspired by a Japanese concept, a disconnected phone allows individuals to speak freely, imagining their words carried away by the wind. Located along the Free Bridge Lane Promenade, the phone offers a quiet sanctuary for reflection and healing.

Telephone of the Wind provides a personal space for anyone navigating loss or seeking solace. The installation is open to the community at no cost.

To learn more, visit www.hopva.org/wind.



Harrisonburg opens human services center for the unhoused



THE CITY OF HARRISONBURG and Open Doors have partnered to open the Harrisonburg Navigation Center, offering vital support for the city's unhoused community and all those seeking human services guidance.

The center, located at 1111 N. Main St., includes an overnight low-barrier emergency shelter and daytime drop-in center for adults experiencing homelessness or other hardships. After a ribbon-cutting ceremony on December 18, the facility officially opened for service on December 23 – just before the arrival of the region's first significant winter weather. Daytime drop-in services began in January.

"After a long journey of construction, we are thrilled to finally reach this moment," said Harrisonburg Deputy City Manager Amy Snider, the Navigation Center project manager in a press release. "The Navigation Center represents more than walls and roofs – it symbolizes compassion, support and a new beginning for those in need."

Open Doors had been operating a temporary emergency overnight shelter in downtown Harrisonburg at the location of the former Virginia Quilt Museum. Moving forward, the new center will provide a lasting, reliable location for individuals to receive support services as needed.

"We are excited to expand our life-saving shelter program, as the Navigation Center will bring a new level of stability and ability to serve the unhoused," said Open Doors Executive Director Nate Riddle. "The addition of the daytime drop-in center will allow us to extend our life-changing mission through resource navigation available to all in our community."

The Navigation Center project is supported in part by \$5 million in funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), approved by Harrisonburg City Council in November 2021. Council had previously identified the need for a permanent, low-barrier shelter in its Harrisonburg 2039 Vision Plan.

"This center is something I and many in our community have been dreaming about for many years, so to see it come to fruition thanks to the hard work of so many in Harrisonburg is truly a blessing," Harrisonburg Mayor Deanna Reed said. "If we are to become a 'City For All' - where all people feel safe, valued and have abundant opportunity - that means no one can be left behind. And the Navigation Center will make sure those who need that extra support receive it and have that opportunity."

For many years, the city has worked closely with Open Doors for homeless services. The organization will receive \$100,000 of annual funding from the city to support operational expenses as part of a three-year contract. The city will be directly responsible for the expense of the utilities and the maintenance of the structure, its mechanical systems and its fixtures, such as kitchen and laundry equipment.

An existing building on the 3.68-acre property, formerly the Shenandoah Presbytery, was preserved and renovated to provide space for administrative offices and a clinic with exam space for routine healthcare for the unhoused. The shelter and drop-in center will operate out of the new connected addition to the existing building. The shelter, open every day from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m., will contain space for up to 80 congregant beds and four universal rooms, with other support facilities such as showers and a laundry room. Open Doors expects to operate the drop-in center Monday to Friday, except for major holidays, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Open Doors will partner with other local agencies, including Sentara RMH, the Suitcase Clinic for the Homeless, Strength in Peers, Mercy House, First Step, and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Community Services Board to provide on-site services.

Find more information on Open Doors and the nonprofit's mission at www.valleyopendoors.org.



Trees planted on Accomac Court Green

THE TOWN OF ACCOMAC will be a little greener come spring, thanks to the generous efforts of several in the community.

Outdoor Spaces by Kim Allen recently planted several trees on the Accomac Court Green. Allen herself donated the design for this project and completed the work of the planting itself. Fairdale Farm Tractor & Equipment Co. donated mulch to beautify the tree bases. The Accawmacke Garden Club and the Town Council of Accomac each contributed trees.

Drew Alvare of Hortco Garden Center discounted the Clerk's Office plantings. The Jefferson elm tree was provided by the Accomack County Public Works. Other specimens included a fringe tree, two willow oaks, a black tupelo, and a saucer magnolia, all from Ed Tankard's Nursery in Eastville.

Talking Tappahannock

How is this small town doing such big things?

By Rob Bullington



THE TOWN OF TAPPAHANNOCK is only 2.7 square miles and home to about 2,400 people. But as the gateway to the Northern Neck, situated as it is on the Rappahannock River at the intersection of routes 360 and 17, Tappahannock has a regional significance that belies its modest size.

This impression has only grown in recent years as the town council, working with their relatively young and new town manager Eric Pollitt, has embarked on several projects that are sure to increase Tappahannock's stature. These projects have been goals of Mayor Roy Gladding and the council for quite some time, and everyone involved is incredibly enthusiastic and excited to see them finally coming to fruition.

That this burst of energy should come so closely on the heels of the 2022 fire that destroyed a historic and vital portion of the downtown is perhaps no coincidence.

In a statement issued shortly after the fire, Mayor Gladding predicted, "New growth will emerge and flourish under the care of the citizens of Tappahannock and Essex County. Though it may not seem like it, an opportunity has been forced upon us as a community. We must take time to consider our choices as they will have a long-lasting impact on our community and way of life."

Suffice it to say that Pollitt, Gladding, and the town council have seized that opportunity and created some momentum for changes that will have positive results well into the future.

On a rainy day in early December, I traveled to Tappahannock with my VML colleague Mitchell Smiley to interview Pollitt and Gladding for an episode of VML's podcast the *VML Voice*. What follows are takeaways from that afternoon's conversation about the big projects Tappahannock has begun and some context on how the relatively small town is accomplishing such big things. Hopefully these insights will prove inspiring and useful to other small localities that are dreaming big.

But, before we dive in, let's meet our participants...

Mayor Roy Gladding

Gladding grew up in Tappahannock and then left to attend Ferrum College, where he earned a degree in public administration. The economy was rough when he graduated in the 1980s and he interviewed for several jobs without success. "Even the government wasn't hiring too much back then," he recalls. "There were big cuts everywhere." His father had an insurance agency in Tappahannock which had never particularly interested young Gladding, but when he returned to Tappahannock to take stock, his father asked if he'd like to try the insurance business. Roy thought, "I have to do something!" So, he tried it. "And almost 45 years later, that's where I am," concludes Gladding.

After he was established in the insurance agency, a couple of local businesspeople asked him to be on the planning commission. He served on that commission for several years. When the town went to alternate elections for the council he decided to run for a seat and won. He served on council from 1992 to 2002 and then was elected mayor. "I've been here ever since," he notes. "It's a great place to be."

Town Manager Eric Pollitt

Pollitt grew up in Richmond and completed his undergraduate studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he had a professor who was a former city manager. The professor discussed how in that position he was able to make an impact at the local level. "That's how I got interested in municipal management," recalls Pollitt.

Given his new passion for public administration, Pollitt decided to go to the University of Kentucky for graduate school because it was very strong in public finance and well-accredited. From there, he went to Massachusetts for an ICMA fellowship which was a one-year contract position. At the end of that year, Pollitt wanted to come back to Virginia. He worked in Fluvanna County for a while and ended up



becoming the town manager in Glasgow.

Glasgow was a great experience for Pollitt, but he and his girlfriend (now wife) wanted to find somewhere closer to friends and family before they settled down. When the town manager opportunity in Tappahannock came up, they visited, and it immediately felt like home. He went through the interview process and was thrilled to be selected for the position.

“That was four years ago,” recalls Pollitt. “I feel like we’ve made a lot of progress, and I give a lot of credit to the council. They’ve really been thinking about where the town can go and pushing the community forward.”



Check out the Talking Tappahannock episode of VML’s podcast – *The VML Voice* – to hear the conversation with Eric Pollitt and Mayor Gladding.

That forward thinking is now coming to life in the form of new parks and outdoor recreation, public boating infrastructure improvements, a planned waterfront restaurant, and more.

Project: Central Park

In 2021, the town was informed that St. John’s Church intended to sell some property adjacent to its downtown location. At the time, the town lacked a true park. There were some open spaces, but nothing with recreational amenities. Moreover, the council had heard from residents that a park should be a priority. The church property was deemed a great location.

After closing on the property in the fall of 2021, the town worked with its Main Street group and circulated a community survey to determine what amenities residents wanted in the new park.

“The number one thing was a playground,” notes Pollitt. “After that, a splash pad, pickleball courts, tennis courts, and an open space for recreation and events.”

The town hired a consulting engineering firm and outlined the features that residents most wanted. After more than three years of work, Tappahannock opened the park in the fall of 2024. A grand opening celebration is planned for the spring of 2025 when phase 2 is completed. As requested by the residents, Central Park features a playground, splash pad, and courts for pickleball and tennis. Pavilions, shaded seating, and a permanent restroom are coming in the spring of 2025, with live music amenities planned for the near future. The new park also includes dedicated power stations for food trucks to use during events.

“People have been very happy with the park,” Pollitt enthuses. “I can’t wait to see it open for a full summer!”





Project: “Fisher Property” acquisition leads the way to the past

Recently, the town acquired what the locals call “the Fisher Property” on the river next to the Rappahannock River Park. The acquisition expands the park and will provide more outdoor recreation opportunities. It will be the only place in town, and probably in the whole region, where the public will have direct access to the river. It is a great opportunity, not just for the citizens of Tappahannock, but the entire Essex County community and the region as a whole.

Gladding observes, “There are boat ramps and that type of thing. But for individuals to go down and watch the river, visit the shoreline, put their toes in the water, there really hasn’t been a good place until

now. When I was young growing up here, that area was a wonderful place for events. The Jaycees had picnics and speed boat races there and there was a wharf that extended out from the Fisher Property where people crabbed and fished in the 1960s and 70s until it was taken down.”

As a lifelong resident of Tappahannock, Gladding remembers when most of the businesses in town were locally owned. While he thinks the growth of chain stores is fine for tax revenue and employment, he’d like to see more of a balance between local and chain stores. He would also like to see the wharf rebuilt and come back as a community gathering place. He recalls that the original wharf was among many built for steamboats on the Rappahannock, of which only Saunders Wharf, north of Tappahannock, remains today.

Project: Hoskins Creek

In the fall of 2021, Tappahannock acquired a piece of property on Hoskins Creek in the heart of town. After demolishing and removing an old structure, the town was able to commence the Hoskins Creek Park Development Project. Phase 1 of the project, currently underway, includes shoreline stabilization, landscape enhancements, and the creation of an entrance road. The site will be developed with public boat access to the river, including a dock, public fuel stations, and finally a restaurant.

On December 11, 2024, the town announced that it would be partnering with Pack Brothers Hospitality to manage and operate the restaurant that will be located on the property. Founded by Randy and Brian Pack, the company has earned a reputation for creating “unforgettable experiences and a dedication to excellence in such iconic establishments as Smithfield Station and The Surry Seafood Company”. When operational, the new restaurant will feature not only “exceptional cuisine and a scenic dining experience but will also serve as a gathering place for residents and visitors in proximity to the

natural beauty of Hoskins Creek”. Pack Brothers Hospitality will also manage four lodging units housed above the restaurant, as well as the boating facilities.

When the project is completed, the public boating access with onsite fuel will be a place for people to access the town by water, which has been a huge desire not just for Tappahannock residents, but the community at large. “That’s one of the first things we talked about during my first few weeks with town,” Pollitt notes. “And now, along with the Fisher Property, we’ll have two places!”

Gladding chimes in, “You have a lot of people from Richmond that come to cottages that they’ve had on the river and passed down from generation to generation. Then you have people looking to get away from the urban areas and coming down and finding the small towns on the river with bed and breakfasts like our Essex Inn that are popping up. So, we’re seeing more and more diverse groups coming in, and that’s who we are trying to attract with facilities like the kayak launches we just added near Central Park. When Hoskins Creek is completed, people will be able to spend a day – or a couple days – with a place to stay, a place to eat, and a place to tie up their boat.”

Site of the Hoskins Creek Park Development Project.



How are they doing it all?

It's fair to ask how a town of relatively modest size and means could obtain the funds necessary to pull off several significant projects at the same time. So, we asked! Here's what we learned...

Taxes

Seeking revenue to pursue the projects that the town council wanted to implement, one of Pollitt's first tasks as town manager was to conduct an organizational assessment of tax rates. "I looked at where our tax rates were and I looked at other comparison communities – not just the meals tax, but also our garbage collection rate and then our lodging tax," explains Pollitt.

Until recently, the meals tax in Tappahannock was four percent. Pollitt's study determined that comparable towns in Virginia had a somewhat higher tax rate. That gave the town the confidence to raise the meals tax to six percent which, according to Pollitt, "was by far our largest source of local funds for the projects."

Increases in the local lodging tax and garbage tax followed, helping to generate more town revenue.

"Our lodging tax was two percent, and the average was six percent. So, we increased that too," notes Pollitt. "But also, the garbage tax hadn't been increased in almost 25 years. When garbage trucks cost about \$300,000, we have to make that up."

While virtually no one enjoys the prospect of paying higher taxes, Pollitt hopes that Tappahannock residents see and experience the benefits as the town completes its improvement projects. "I was the person that recommended all these tax increases, but hey – we did deliver on what the citizens wanted. It just took more resources than what was currently available."

At the same time as the tax rate increases, the town saw several real estate opportunities pop up during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We were trying to be advantageous of that because interest rates were low," Pollitt explains. "If all those properties popped up now at the same time, there's no way we could do it because since then the interest rates have tripled."



Grants

Pollitt notes that the town has benefitted from grant assistance, as well. "We leveraged what was available from the state and the federal agencies to make the most of what we've got to work with. The state grants were particularly helpful because they're a lot easier to work with than the federal agencies. Also, the regional planning district has helped us out a lot with getting assistance to acquire those grants."

For the Hoskins Creek Project, Pollitt knew that the town didn't have the resources to do that based on its population and tax base. "We would have had to significantly increase the real estate tax base to get the project done without any grant assistance."

Pollitt continues, "So, when we initially discussed the Hoskins Creek Project, we reached out to Louis Lawrence, who's our regional planning district director. I told him that our council was interested in the project, and we had a pending offer. We had a one-year study period and needed help identifying some grants we could use to help make it happen."

Lawrence came to Tappahannock and helped the town identify grants through the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), which helped with the acquisition of the property and the shoreline stabilization. The planning district also helped the town identify a grant through the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) which will help pay for the entrance road.

In the end, the town was awarded roughly \$200,000 worth of grants to reimburse the town for acquiring a roughly \$500,000 piece of property. The VDOT grant will cover about \$450,000 worth of expenses for the entrance road. "Of course, that means working with VDOT and building to their specifications, which can be a challenge at times," allows Pollitt.

Significantly, building the access road to VDOT standards does not necessarily mean that VDOT maintains that portion of the access. "It's optional," notes Pollitt. "We are building it to their standards in case council wants to donate it. But we have the option of keeping and maintaining it, as well."

"But the icing on the cake, depending on how you eat your cake, are the boating infrastructure grants," continues Pollitt. "We will be asking for a million-and-a-half dollars' worth of grants through the health department, but it's really administered through U.S. Fish and Wildlife. That's going to help pay for the concrete floating docks, the fuel station, and the sidewalks that are going to come off the dock, as well as a public restroom facility."

All told, the Hoskins Creek Project will utilize about \$2.2 million in grants.

Pollitt notes that funding projects with grants – 70 percent in the case of the boating infrastructure for Hoskins Creek, for example – can take more time. “Going through the grant process is why projects take so long sometimes. They do come with strings attached, and it’s definitely not been easy. I think if we could have paid it for it by just writing a check back in the fall of 2021, it probably would have been done by now. But we were working with other agencies.”

Tappahannock’s Hoskins Creek Project a great example of how there is often funding available to do things that localities might not necessarily think there’d be funding available to do. Localities should always check with their planning commissions, check with VML, and check with agencies that may be running grant programs, because half the time there are organizations who would love to give money to localities to do this.

- Mitchell Smiley, VML Transportation & Natural Resources Policy Manager

Timing

Sometimes local government is like a comedy: Timing is everything. Certainly, timing and a bit of luck have played a part in making Tappahannock’s dream projects move toward reality.

“We’ve been fortunate that some of this land became available and that when it did, we had the right council in place – the people that wanted to move forward with the projects,” concedes Gladding. “Also having Eric here, someone with a fresh perspective and the energy to push it along and do the leg work to get this really going. So again, timing! The council discussed what kind of manager we want to hire. We wanted a young manager. We did not want a manager who had been on the job 25, 30 years somewhere else, maybe ready

for retirement, looking for a place to kind of settle in and retire. We wanted to grow! This council wanted to pick up speed and expand and go forward.”

Of course, this wasn’t always the case. Gladding continues, “You go through periods where things really don’t change a whole lot, and then you get to a spell where it’s changing every other year, you see a lot of change. Our councils have always been conservative, some not willing to expand. They keep the machine running very well, but it stays kind of status quo for a time.”

For example, Gladding told us that in the 1960s the town had the opportunity to purchase the Fisher Property, but at the time a lot of people thought it was too much liability. “They didn’t want to fool with it back then,” observes Gladding. “But this time, when the opportunity came up again, we thought, ‘Do we want to wait another 100 years?’ We knew we might never get the opportunity again. This council has just had the vision to move forward and get these things done. They said, ‘Let’s take a chance. This is a smart thing to do for the community.’ Sometimes we’ve got more on our plate than we can eat, but you have to put it on there and then we’ll deal with it.”

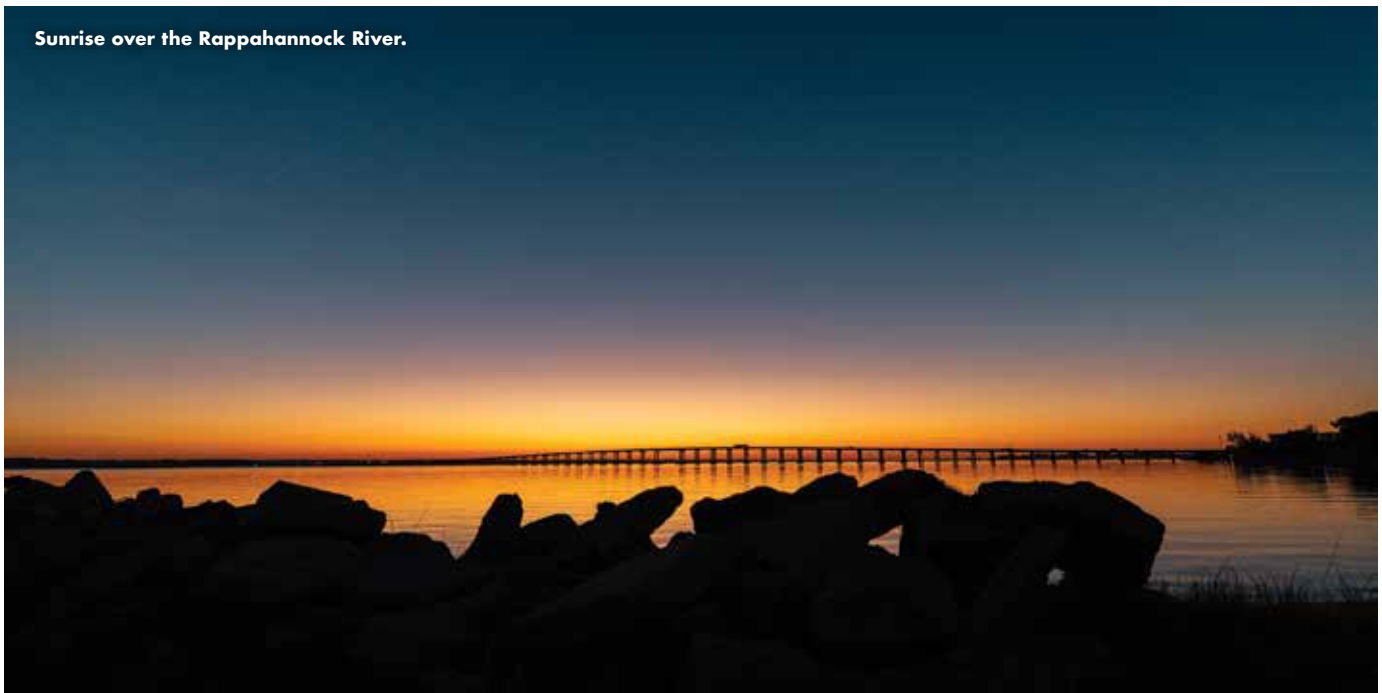
The element of good timing also applies to the grants the town was able to secure. Gladding notes, “There are certain grants at certain times available for things and we’re fortunate that tourism and water access grants are available. We’ve been very blessed that this is all tied together.”

Communication & Patience

A series of recent town council retreats has further opened the lines of communication for the governing body, enabling them to discuss big-picture aspirations beyond the grind of monthly action items. “It’s about having a space where council can talk about more than what we have on the agenda tonight,” says Pollitt. “Let’s talk about where we want to be in two to five years and let’s set some goals. Those goals can guide you when opportunities come up.”

Gladding concurs. “Because of the retreats that Eric started, with the council getting together and talking, everything is just gelling together very well. This council has a good idea of where they want to go over the next 5, 10, maybe 15 years. Better than in the past where

Sunrise over the Rappahannock River.



we weren't taking a long vision and weren't as comfortable talking about those things."

As Gladding observes, establishing common goals can help expedite forward progress, especially in a day and age when navigating change can prove challenging.

"The frustration of all of this is it just takes so much time to get things done anymore," says Gladding. "What used to take a year, now it takes two years. But the enthusiasm is there, and we want to keep moving."

One of the greatest feelings about all this is that we are doing what we told the citizens we were going to do. We told them we were going to get a park for the town. We've done that. We told them we were going to get water access. So, we're doing that. And that's the greatest feeling – to be delivering on all that. Even though it's taken us a little longer to get it all together than we wanted, it's going to be done very soon!

- Mayor Roy Gladding

What's next for Tappahannock?

Now that the town is well down the path of fulfilling some of the things that citizens have wanted for many years, we wanted to know what the future looks like? What are the council's 10 and 15-year goals?

By way of answering, Mayor Gladding spoke about the balancing act that would be needed to keep the small town feeling he cherishes while growing in the ways that most benefit the community.

"I want to be a place where the citizens have nice, safe neighborhoods to raise children and have access to services," began Gladding. "But, you know, citizens also need to be able to get groceries here and do as much shopping as they can here. It's bad that some of us must go to Richmond to get some of the things we need; people fuss about that all the time. But I tell them it takes customers and dollars and a workforce to bring certain types of employment here," Gladding explains. "We want to be a place that people enjoy coming to visit and see a different kind of way of life, see small-town life, and grow businesses here so we can expand and have jobs. That's the kind of place council wants to help create."

In thinking about the future, Gladding returns to the subject of the 2022 fire that gutted a key part of downtown. "It was hard to see all the stores that you'd gone to as a kid, the merchants, the husbands and wives that owned the stores, all of that wiped out and gone. It was devastating and traumatic for the community"

"But it's cleaned up. It's done," notes Gladding. "The biggest question people ask now is 'What are you going to do now?'"

"But the better question is, 'What are they going to do now?'" observes Gladding. "It's not the town's property. If it were the town's, we'd have some plans with it."

Instead, the decisions and the burden of those decisions will fall on the property owners. But Gladding does have some advice: "I tell them, timing is everything and there are hard questions that have to be answered: How much money do you want to spend right now to invest? What kind of buildings would you build? What kinds of tenants would you have so that you can get a return on your investment?"

"Those types of questions are still hanging out there and I don't think they've got enough answers there to proceed with anything," observes Gladding. "But it doesn't hurt that nothing is going on right



now. I'd rather have the owners have a good plan in place rather than rush in and put something up and that doesn't work."

So, what role does the town play in all this? According to Gladding the town is there to pursue projects that will reshape the town for the better so the property owners can build for the future, not the past.

"These projects that we've been talking about are going to bring people to town and create a quality of life that will justify putting in that new business or putting in that new rental property or whatever it's going to be. Because that's the way a town supports its community. We lay the foundations for the future."

About the author: Rob Bullington is the editor of VTC and the host of the VML Voice.

An advertisement for Hartman Executive Advisors. It features a blue paper airplane flying upwards and to the right, leaving a dashed white trail. The text reads: "ARE YOU GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENTS? ENSURE YOU ARE WITH STRATEGIC IT AND CYBERSECURITY LEADERSHIP". At the bottom, there is a logo for Hartman Executive Advisors, which includes a stylized blue 'H' and the text "HARTMAN EXECUTIVE ADVISORS CELEBRATING 20 YEARS". The website "hartmanadvisors.com" is listed at the bottom right.

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Cybersecurity checklist for municipalities: Where to begin?

“Where do I begin with cybersecurity?”

It's one of the most common questions we get from municipalities.

You know cybersecurity is important. You hear about ransomware, viruses, and cyberattacks nearly every day. And, you sense that your current cybersecurity defenses may not defend you in case the worst happens. Yet, you keep putting off improving your cybersecurity. Why? Often, it's difficult to know where you should begin.

As a way to start building a plan, we've distilled our tips, best practices, and recommendations into a checklist that cities, towns, and villages can use to score themselves, find cybersecurity gaps, and create an action plan.

Protect

This section is designed to allow you to evaluate how well you proactively identify weaknesses in your IT infrastructure and alert your municipality to security-related issues.

- **Employee policies and training:** Periodic training helps teach employees how to detect and avoid common cyber threats.
- **Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA):** MFA is the process of verifying your identity more than once when accessing a system. It helps lessen risks associated with weak passwords, social engineering, and phishing attacks because it requires an extra identity confirmation before letting someone gain access to your systems.
- **Antispam/ email filtering:** Basic antispam and email filtering tools prevent many potential phishing email messages from reaching your employees' inboxes.
- **Data loss prevention:** Are you monitoring for unauthorized or suspicious access to your data?
- **Software patching:** Do you regularly apply patches to your software?
- **Intrusion prevention:** These tools work with your firewall to detect and automatically prevent attacks related to specific vulnerabilities.
- **Change control policies and procedures:** These procedures include logging and understanding the repercussions of all changes made to your security equipment and applications.
- **Mobile strategy:** A well-defined mobile strategy may involve issuing work-only devices to employees or providing secure access to sensitive and confidential data if they are using a personal device.
- **Web content filtering:** Do you have special tools in place that proactively block employees from accessing malicious or risky websites?

Detect

- **Security scanning:** Are you conducting regular security scans of your systems to help identify vulnerabilities that you can then fix?
- **Dark web monitoring:** These tools provide real-time alerts when information from your municipality (such as administrative passwords) is found on the dark web so you can take proactive action against identity theft, blackmail, and more.
- **Intrusion detection services:** Do you have a tool in place to watch for suspicious network traffic?
- **Managed Detection and Response (MDR):** What tools do you have in place that are looking for security threats across your entire IT environment?
- **Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR):** What tools do you have in place to detect suspicious behavior and potential cyberattacks on endpoint devices like servers, desktops, and laptops before cyberattackers can strike?
- **Security Information and Event Management (SIEM):** SIEM software and tools identify the most important and critical security alerts received from different systems, collect log files from different sources (servers, firewalls, VPN, email, cloud services, EDR, etc.), and identifies anomalies (such as a user logging in from another country).

Respond and Recover

- **Data backup and disaster recovery:** Do you back up your data both onsite and offsite? Do you test your data backup routinely?
- **Offsite log retention:** Logs are used for evidence related to cyber incidents. Without this data, you will be unable to analyze the full nature of a cyberattack, deduce the source of the attack, and remediate effectively.
- **Incident response planning:** Have you developed a plan detailing how you respond to a cyberattack? This plan will help you react to an incident quickly, effectively, and with “muscle memory.”
- **Cyber liability insurance:** While cyber liability insurance can't prevent an attack, it is there to help you recover financially from the costs of recovery. Improving your security foundation will help you lower cyber liability insurance premiums.



About the author: Joe Penney is Senior Manager, Managed Security at VC3, where he ensures the alignment of cybersecurity measures with industry standards and champions continuous improvements to help VC3 clients remain safe and secure. He can be reached at joe.penney@vc3.com.

2025



EVENT HIGHLIGHT



Municipal Autonomous Vehicle Forum

Friday, March 14, 2025

MITRE Headquarters
7515 Colshire Drive, Mclean, VA 22012

A FREE IN-PERSON EVENT



MITRE welcomes all VML members to participate in this municipally-focused laboratory tour of MITRE's extensive transportation and AI facilities, followed by a deep dive discussion into the future of municipal autonomous vehicle policies and planning. Several of the nation's leading experts on autonomous vehicles and infrastructure will participate in a panel discussion and roundtable with VML members. The discussion will include lessons learned, an exploration of the Commonwealth's ongoing work with MITRE, and discussion of ongoing and future work with local governments and states around the country, including an upcoming Autonomy Blueprint for a VML member city.



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