

# VIRGINIA

TOWN & CITY

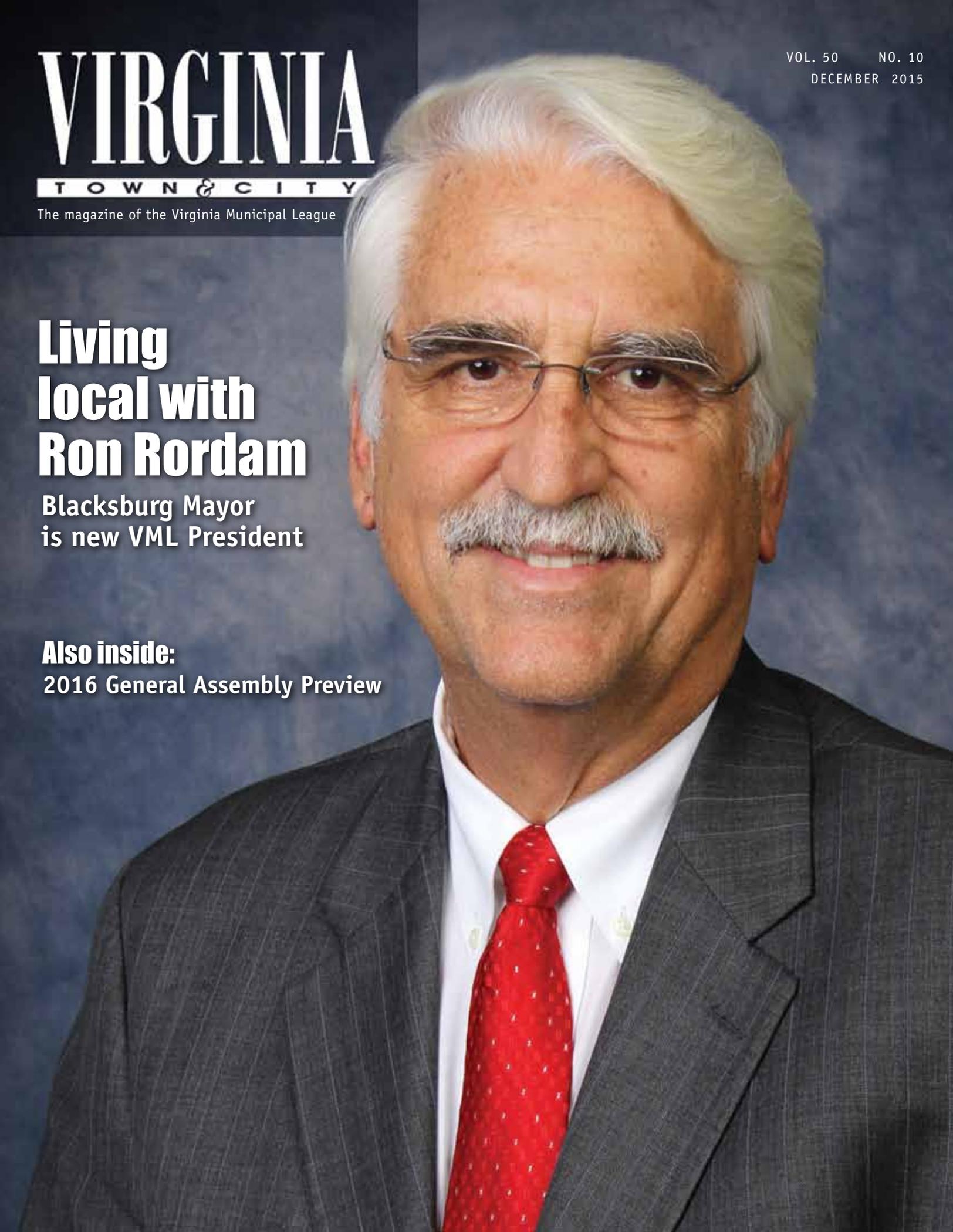
The magazine of the Virginia Municipal League

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DECEMBER 2015

## Living local with Ron Rordam

Blacksburg Mayor  
is new VML President

**Also inside:**  
2016 General Assembly Preview



# Celebrating 35 years of partnership, performance and strength

The 2014 - 2015 VML Insurance Programs Annual Report is now available. This year's report highlights the growth of the pool over the past 35 years, including the expansion of coverage, service and resources designed to meet the unique needs of our members. Read the report at: [www.vmlins.org](http://www.vmlins.org)

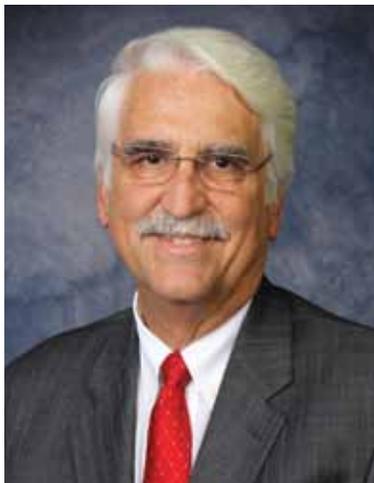


Annual Report **2014-2015**



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## About the cover

*Blacksburg Mayor Ron Rordam is the new President of the Virginia Municipal League.*

## Departments

- Discovering Virginia** ..... 2
- People**..... 3
- News & Notes**..... 4
- Professional Directory**..... 28

## Features

### Up Close with Ron Rordam

*Virginia Town & City* sits down for a candid Q & A with the new President of the League. The Blacksburg Mayor shares his thoughts on the greatest trends and challenges facing local government and why he thinks early childhood education may be the most important factor in moving communities forward.

*By Nancy Chafin*

Page 6



### All that glitters to behold

Hometown pride was on dazzling display to thousands of Virginians who toured the Governor's Mansion for the holidays. Nearly 200 towns, cities and counties sent hand-crafted local ornaments to adorn the holiday tree at the mansion. Each ornament uniquely honored the traditions and heritage of their communities.

Each ornament uniquely honored the traditions and heritage of their communities.

Page 10



### General Assembly 2016: The local agenda

The chief task before the 2016 General Assembly will be to pass a two-year budget for the state. VML's legislative agenda calls on the state to be a reliable funding partner in services that it requires the localities to carry out. While some issues are perennial, like state and local taxes, plenty are not. Three redistricting court cases could have a huge impact on how legislators will act. Here's a look at the key issues localities need to watch.

*By VML Legislative Staff*

Page 12



### Is your annual evaluation working for you?

Both administrators and elected leaders dread the annual performance appraisal of the local manager. Does it have to be this hard? Is there any good that can come from it? Hear one expert's advice – and your colleague's own views – on the good, the bad and the ugly of manager evaluations.

*By Rick Dacri*

Page 20

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# Big things are happening in Bristol

I RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to tour the city of Bristol with Councilman Guy Odum, the newly elected Chair of the VML City Section and I have to tell you, I was overwhelmed by the activity in this community.

Our first stop was the brand new Cabela's. This massive retail store is the anchor of The Falls development that will ultimately include one million square feet of retail space and approximately two million visitors annually. It takes great vision and fortitude to undertake and bring a project of this magnitude to fruition and the city of Bristol and its partners in this

museum. For more information, go to [www.birthplaceof-countrymusic.org](http://www.birthplaceof-countrymusic.org)

Bristol has a vibrant and active downtown. It is filled with interesting and unique shopping and restaurants. In addition, there is much activity going on to restore many of the older, historic areas of the community.

Before I headed out, Guy treated me to lunch at the Burger Bar. This diner that has been in Bristol since 1942 is known as the last place that Hank Williams, Sr. was seen alive. It is a Bristol classic and the burger was out of this world! For more information on the Burger Bar, go to [www.theoriginalburgerbar.com](http://www.theoriginalburgerbar.com).

Many thanks to Councilman Odum for showing me around this dynamic and engaging community. I look forward to my next visit to the city of Bristol. 



venture are to be congratulated for this accomplishment. For more on The Falls area, go to [www.thefallsbristolvirginia.com](http://www.thefallsbristolvirginia.com).

Certainly one of the highlights of my tour was visiting Highland View Elementary School and meeting with Principal Pam Smith. This is a school where 99% of the students qualify for a free lunch. How can students learn when basic needs like health and nutrition are not being met? This school takes a different approach from the traditional academics-only standard. With an innovative breakfast program and a comprehensive after-school program, Smith has developed an atmosphere that puts the child's needs first.

And the amazing part is that it is working on the academic side as well. For the first time since 2011, Highland View Elementary School gained full accreditation from the Department of Education. The staff members, who treat the children like family, get the credit for fostering an environment that is conducive for learning, even for the most challenged students. Principal Smith cites support from the Bristol community and beyond as one of the keys to the success of this school.

It takes strong leaders to build this kind of hope in an area that some would label hopeless. Pam Smith is an inspiring individual.

Next, our tour took us to downtown Bristol where we visited the Birthplace of Country Music Museum. I learned a great deal about the history of country music and its roots in southwest Virginia. The museum itself is beautiful and includes a variety of exhibits and interactive displays. When you are in this part of the world, I highly recommend that you make time for a stop at this terrific



**Anchored by the first Cabela's in the state, The Falls is a 140-acre development with over 1,000,000 square feet of retail space. With \$22 million in road improvements and over two million projected shoppers annually, the Falls is one of the top retail tourism developments in the state.**



**The 188 children who attend Highland View come from Bristol's most economically deprived neighborhoods. So the school administration focuses not just on academics, but on caring for the whole child. Last year, for the first time since 2011, the school earned full accreditation.**

**Roanoke County names new budget officer**



- Bever -

**Christopher Bever** is the new Director of the Office of Management and Budget for Roanoke County. Bever was previously Assistant Director of the Office of Management and Budget for the City of Alexandria. He brings 12 years of experience in capital and operating budget development; capital

improvement programming; funding strategies; operations analysis; and long-range fiscal planning.

**Winchester appoints new Human Resources Director**

**Paula Nofsinger** has been named Human Resources Director for Winchester. Nofsinger was previously the Director of Human Resources for Frederick County, Virginia. Prior to that, she was Director of Human Resources for Nortel PEC Solutions in Fairfax.

**Rockingham County appoints director of finance**

Rockingham County has appointed



- Davidson -

**Patricia Davidson** as the Director of Finance, effective January 4, 2016. Davidson currently serves as Director of Finance for Prince George County, a position she has held since June, 2009. Prior to working for Prince George County, Davidson worked as a cost accountant with several private sector companies in the Richmond and Hopewell areas.

**Alexandria fills three key positions**



- McIlvaine -

The city of Alexandria has named **Helen McIlvaine** as Director of Housing. McIlvaine joined the Office of Housing in 2006 as Deputy Director, where she worked with the Alexandria Housing Development Corporation, the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) and others to structure and finance projects that incorporate affordable housing. Prior to her work in Alexandria, McIlvaine was Director of Real Estate Development for the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia, and Executive Director of Catholics for Housing.



- Routt -



- Smedley -

The City has also announced that **Morgan Routt** will serve as Director of Management and Budget for the City of Alexandria. Routt served as Acting Director since April 1. Routt joined the city in 1999 as a Budget Analyst, and became Assistant Director in 2010.

**Capital Project on the Horizon?**

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## People

Prior to his work in Alexandria, Rountt worked for Prince William County's Office of Management and Budget and Department of Public Works.

**Corey Smedley** is Alexandria's new Deputy Fire Chief of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. Most recently, Smedley served as the Deputy Chief of the Prince George's County (Md.) Fire/EMS Department. He began his career with the department in 1995 as a firefighter, and has served in roles as varied as Fire Marshal, Special Events Coordinating Chair, and FedEx Field Stadium Commander.

### Leesburg promotes Haley to Deputy Director of Finance

Leesburg recently announced the promotion of **Lisa Haley** to Deputy Director of Finance and Administration Services. Since 2012, Haley was a Senior Management Analyst with the department. Prior to that, she worked as a management analyst in support of the federal government for eight years.



- Haley -

### Ashe named James City County Fire Chief

James City County has announced **Ryan Ashe** as the county's new Fire Chief. Ashe has been Acting Chief since June, following the retirement of former Chief Tal Luton. Ashe has been with the Fire Department since 2003. He is a certified Executive Fire Officer with the National Fire Academy and also a certified paramedic with the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians. Ashe completed the Hampton Roads Fire Officer Command School in 2006 and is on the Virginia Task Force 2 Urban Search and Rescue.

## Winn elected to NLC Board

VML EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Kimberly Winn was elected to the National League of Cities (NLC) 2016 Board of Directors last month at the 2015 Congress of Cities & Exposition in Nashville, Tenn. Winn, who will serve a two-year term, will play a key role in guiding the nation's largest and most representative membership and advocacy organization for city officials. Over the next two years, Winn will participate in six Board of Directors meetings at NLC convenings in Washington and across the nation.



- Winn -

"It is my sincere hope that we can find a way for Virginia localities to engage more fully in federal advocacy. I look forward to working with our partners at the NLC to advocate for the interests of the Commonwealth and our local governments," said Winn.

"National League of Cities' Board of Directors provides the critical leadership that enables our organization to strategically address the challenges facing our nation's cities," said National League of Cities (NLC) CEO and Executive Director Clarence E. Anthony. "As we look toward the future, the Board will play a central role in helping NLC better serve our members and will provide guidance as we advocate for cities before Congress and the administration."

In her role on the Board, Winn will help to guide NLC's strategic direction and set the organization's advocacy priorities and operational goals. Board members are selected by a 15-member nominating committee, and are confirmed by a vote by NLC's membership.

### Andrew named Chief Purchasing Officer for Leesburg

**Octavia Andrew** joined the town of Leesburg's Department of Finance and Administrative Services as Chief Purchasing Officer. Andrew has more than 10 years' experience in government procurement. She came to the town of Leesburg from the city of Hampton, where she was a Senior Buyer. Prior to that, Andrew held positions with the city of Richmond and Norfolk State University.



- Andrew -

### Danville names Larking as Interim City Manager

Danville City Council voted unanimously to name **Ken Larking** as Interim City Manager. Larking has served as Deputy City Manager since 2013. His appointment follows the November 30 retirement of City Manager Joe King, 65. King announced his intent to retire in June.

Prior to joining the city, Larking was Assistant County Manager in Moore County, N.C., for three years. Prior to that, he was Town Manager of Yadkinville, N.C.

## News & notes

### Front Royal inaugurates scholarships for trade education

The town of Front Royal announced in November that it will begin accepting applications from resident high school

seniors for two \$500 scholarships to pursue continued undergraduate or trade education at an accredited university, community college, or trade school.

"The town council determined that assisting with advanced education of our children was an essential

component to ensuring the future of the town," said Town Manager Steven Burke. "The town has been recovering from the economic downturn steadily, and the budget for FY15-16 offered the first opportunity to include funding for scholarships."

Mayor Timothy Darr said the council is “very excited to support the youth in our community by offering these scholarships and looks forward to this becoming a tradition in the future.”

The town intends to continue and hopefully expand this scholarship program with future budgets.

“Our hope is that our residents will see this investment in our community as

both beneficial to development of our future work force and as further reason for our youth to continue residing in our community,” said Burke.

## VBCOA elects officers; hosts awards and educational sessions

JOHN WALSH WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT of the Virginia Building and Code Officials Association at its annual business meeting Sept. 14 in Virginia Beach. Walsh is the Code Enforcement Operations Manager in the Department of Planning and Development Review in Richmond. Also elected were First Vice President David C. Beahm, Warren County Building Official; Second Vice President Gregg Fields, Alexandria Director of Code Administration and Pete Mensinger, Alexandria Special Projects Manager in the Department of Code Administration. Prince William County Code Compliance Supervisor Sean Farrell is the immediate past president.

The elections were part of the VBCOA’s annual school and conference, held Sept. 13-15. Henry Green, President of the National Institute of Building Sciences and International Code Council Secretary

Treasurer Dwayne Garriss were featured speakers at the conference’s awards banquet.



**Ron Clements of Chesterfield won the President’s Award.**

At the banquet, Farrell presented the President’s Award of Excellence to Chesterfield County Assistant Building Official Ronald Clements in recognition of invaluable service as a legislative liaison for VBCOA for the last decade and for representing VBCOA on the Housing Commission.

VBCOA Awards Committee Chairs Mike Williams and Paula Eubank presented service awards to Martinsville Deputy Building Official Kris Bridges; Frederick County Senior Building Inspector Delmar Fox, Moseley Architects Vice President Kenney Payne, and Department of Housing and Community Development Technical and Code Specialist Vernon Hodge.

Sessions on building and fire safety were held in addition to the annual business meeting and awards presentations. VBCOA is a “preferred provider” for the International Code Council and session attendees earned certification credit required by the ICC and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

More than 200 building code officials and inspectors from across the state attended the meeting.

VBCOA is an affiliate organization of VML. VML Director of Research Mary Jo Fields serves as executive director.



**VBCOA members catch up during a conference break. (L to R) Sandi Morris, DHCD; Christina Jackson, Norfolk; Paula Johnson, Prince William County; Elaine Gall, UVA; and Sean Farrell, Prince William County.**

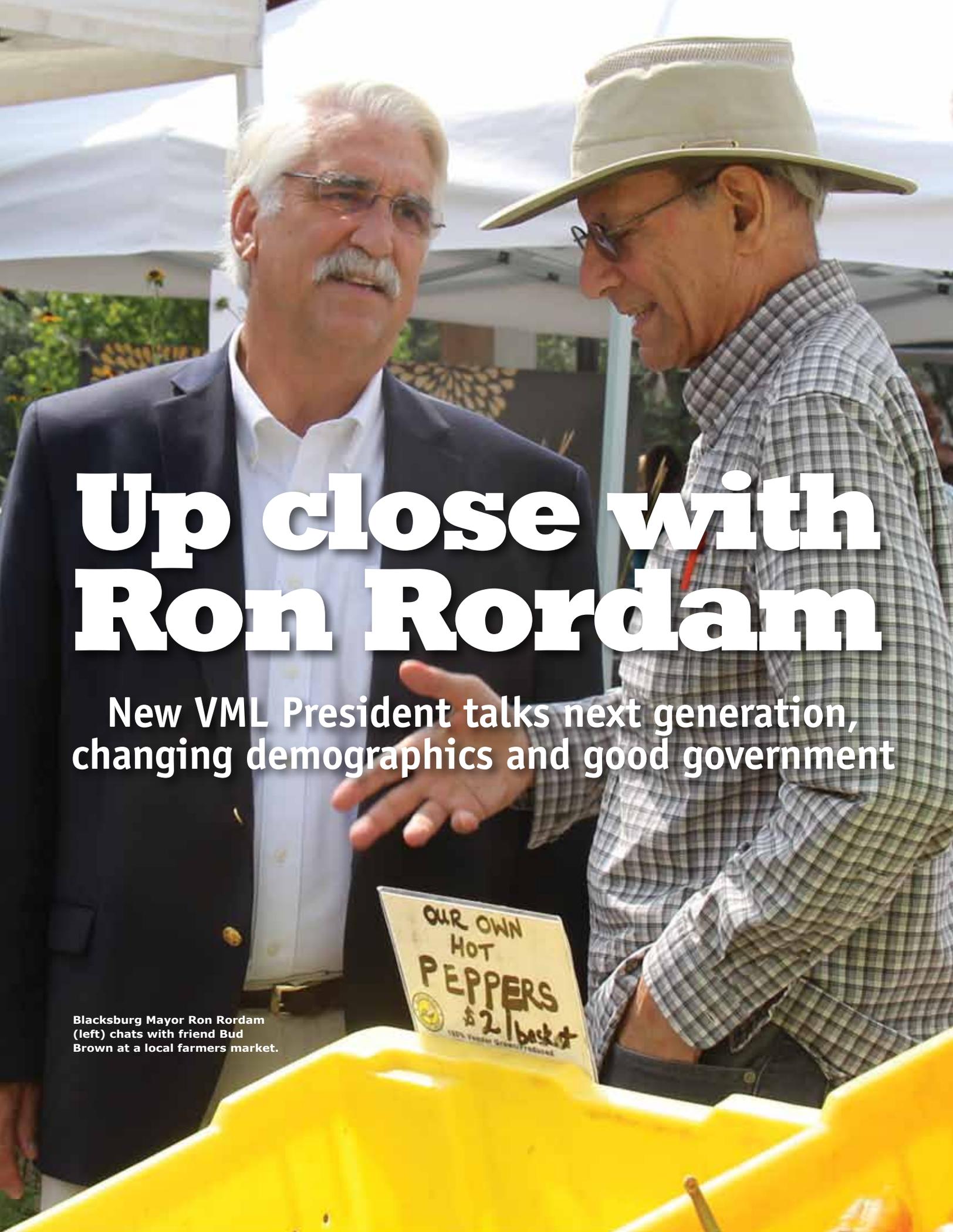
## Staunton children’s farmers market earns statewide recognition

A CHILDREN’S farmers market hosted by Staunton Parks and Recreation in 2014 has gained statewide recognition from the Virginia Recreation and Park Society (VRPS).



The VRPS presented the Staunton Parks and Recreation Department with an award for Best New Special Event for its children’s farmers market at the society’s annual awards presentation ceremony this month.

Last spring, area youth spent a May afternoon at a children’s farmers market, learning about gardening, “selling” their goods at the market and discovering the slippery world of worm farms. The market was divided into several stations for children to visit, including a life-sized farmers market stand, a vegetable painting station, and a sandbox garden station where children dug up and harvested veggies. City officials said the support of local businesses and organizations and lots of imagination were the keys to the event’s success.

A photograph of two men in conversation at a farmers market. The man on the left, Ron Rordam, has white hair, a mustache, and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt. The man on the right, Bud Brown, wears a wide-brimmed hat, glasses, and a plaid shirt. They are standing in front of a yellow bin containing produce. A sign on the bin reads "OUR OWN HOT PEPPERS \$2/basket".

# Up close with Ron Rordam

New VML President talks next generation,  
changing demographics and good government

Blacksburg Mayor Ron Rordam  
(left) chats with friend Bud  
Brown at a local farmers market.

**L**IVE LOCAL.” That’s a fitting motto for VML’s newest president, Blacksburg Mayor Ron Rordam. “Everyone should support our local businesses, schools, and neighborhoods,” says Rordam. “It’s how we support our citizens.”

A passionate advocate for early childhood education, Rordam has been Mayor of Blacksburg since 2006. He was first elected to Town Council in 1996.

In the 110-year history of the League, Mayor Rordam is the first Mayor of Blacksburg to serve as President of the League.

What inspires Rordam? How will he serve local governments throughout Virginia? *Virginia Town & City* sat down with Rordam to find out what makes him tick.

**VTC: How did your childhood experiences and upbringing shape and influence your decision to work in local government?**

**Rordam:** My family talked about issues around the dining room table and we were a fairly active political family. My father was a precinct organizer. He was involved in school issues.

My sister worked in Congress for several years. I also had a next door neighbor who was a state senator. He was a successful elected official with a keen political mind and I learned a lot from listening to him.

**VTC: Was there any one leader in local, state or national government who really inspired you to take up a career in local government?**

**Rordam:** One of the first campaigns I managed was Ken Hollis’ when we ran for Jefferson Parish Council, in my hometown. That was in 1978. He won that campaign and went on to serve on the Council and then two decades in the Louisiana Senate. He was a great friend, mentor, and also a great supporter of mine throughout his life. There were several impor-

**“Early childhood education is the key to a community’s success 15 to 20 years from now. We can’t leave our most valuable resource and our future workers behind.”**

## 60 seconds on Rordam

**Birthplace:** New Orleans, Louisiana

**Education:** B.A. in History from the University of New Orleans; M.A. in History from Virginia Tech

**Family:** Married to Mary for 35 years. Two sons: Landon in Arlington; Gardner and his wife Mary Katherine in Atlanta. Two grandsons: Taylor and Graham.

**Career History:** Owned and operated his own insurance agency for 31 years; Blacksburg Town Council, 1996 to 2006; Mayor, 2006 to present

### Civic involvement

#### Current

Executive Committee of VML from 2007 to present  
Active in the U.S. Conference of Mayors  
Montgomery/Virginia Tech Regional Airport Authority  
Mayor’s Task Force on Climate Protection and Sustainability  
Blacksburg/VPI Sanitation Authority  
Blacksburg/Virginia Tech Liaison Committee  
Greater Montgomery Liaison Committee  
Lewis Gale Montgomery Hospital Board of Trustees

#### Past Service

Chair of the Y at Virginia Tech  
Vice President and President of the Virginia Transit Association  
Alumni Advisory Committee to the Department of History at Virginia Tech  
Involved in the initial committee to revitalize the Lyric Theater in Downtown Blacksburg  
Founding Member of the Blacksburg Partnership  
Served on almost every town commission and advisory committee over the last 26 years.

**My family/wife/or kids would describe me as:**

I asked them to answer this one, and they said “always being there to help.”

**If I hadn’t gone into local government or insurance, I probably would have become a:** teacher.

**Most unusual question you’ve gotten as mayor:** One Easter morning, a citizen called and said there was a dead deer outside of their dining room window and it was “very visible from the dining room table.” What should they do? We came up with a quick solution.

**I’d prefer to forget about the time:** I made the Clerk angry by saying the main job of a clerk is taking minutes. I continue to try to forget that one.

**Last community project (outside Blacksburg) that blew you away:** Masonic Amphitheater in Clifton Forge built by Virginia Tech students and faculty.

**Favorite quote from an elected leader:** When asked why he changed his mind on an issue, Harry Truman said, “I would like to think I am smarter today than I was yesterday.”

**I wish I could have been at (historical event):** The Constitutional Convention of 1787. I would love to know how all those people with diverse backgrounds and opinions were able to compromise for the good of the whole.



**The Rordam gang: (L to R) son Gardner holding Taylor, daughter-in-law Mary Katherine, wife Mary, son Landon and Ron. Since this photo was taken, the Rordam’s have welcomed their second grandson Graham.**



**Growing up in Louisiana, Rordam’s family talked about issues around the dinner table and were active in local politics.**

tant stands he took on principal, not politics, that I continue talk about today. He died several years ago and I still miss him.

**VTC: If a young person today wanted to pursue a career in local government, what would be the most important skills to start developing?**

**Rordam:** Listening and building relationships. Those skills are vital to understanding others and seeing their point of view. You get over a lot of hurdles that way. Living in a college town and watching generations of college students, I am optimistic about the future. These students are collaborative and want to serve in the community.

**VTC: Aside from your own kids, are there any young people today who particularly inspire you?**

**Rordam:** In Blacksburg, it would be the younger council members and the young entrepreneurs I have met here. The young people on council broaden my outlook. As for the young entrepreneurs, I admire their optimism. They take risks. They’ve found new ways to get things done and that bodes very well for the future.

**“The most significant trend we face is the continued movement into activity centers - no matter the size of the locality.”**

**VTC: In the context of Virginia in the year 2015, what do you think is the most important thing municipalities need to focus on?**

**Rordam:** Often local government doesn’t look far enough ahead. As president of VML, one of the goals I will focus on is early childhood education. That’s the key to a community’s success 15 to 20 years from now. We can’t leave our most valuable resource and our future workers behind. If we are able to bring everyone along and have an even playing field,

everything else will fall into place – economic development, community engagement, the arts and sciences. It’s an investment in the future.

**VTC: What do you think citizens’ greatest misconception about their local government is?**

**Rordam:** That we are all powerful. It’s very normal for someone to have a suggestion for changes based on something that worked in another state. But Virginia is a Dillon rule state, so we are limited by what the state legislature allows. Banning plastic bags is a good example of a suggested initiative that we can’t start until the state charts a course.

**VTC: How can elected and appointed officials overcome that misconception?**

**Rordam:** Our job is to explain how things work and the structure of government. People are always surprised to learn the reasons behind things. It’s an educational process and it requires constant reinforcement. It requires us to be in touch with our citizens.

**VTC: What are you most proud of in your career?**

**Rordam:** We’ve tackled some very tough issues in Blacksburg, and weathered tragedies. I’m proud to say that the community has remained very civil and unified. That underlying unity has allowed a lot more to happen. Transparency, I believe, has been the key. I am most proud of the people of Blacksburg and how they have worked together over the years.

**VTC: What’s the biggest thing in your career that you wish you could go back and do differently?**

**Rordam:** A friend of mine often said, “I’d make the same mistakes all over again.” That has a deeper meaning. Mistakes are something we all make, and they become part of who we are. We learn from them and they help us grow. We are who



Ron and Mary on the front steps of VML headquarters in Richmond.

we are because of those experiences. So, to quote my friend, I'd make the same mistakes all over again.

**VTC: Compared to other states, what's the number one thing local governments in Virginia do really well?**

**Rordam:** Our system of manager/council form of government works very well. Other states have a mix of governing mayors and non-governing mayors. We are better off because we have more consistency in our form of local government.

**VTC: What is the biggest change/trend that local governments need to come to terms with for the future?**

**Rordam:** The most significant trend we face is the continued movement into activity centers - no matter the size of the locality, and the technology that is helping drive that move. From retirees to young professionals, more people are wanting to live in a setting where amenities are easily accessible. This move is creating a greater demand for the sharing economy, from Uber to AirBnB. Fiber infrastructure will be in demand to serve the new businesses in our core areas. What is the role of transportation if the predictions of driverless cars are accurate? We need a crystal ball to see all the possible

**"We've tackled some very tough issues in Blacksburg, and weathered tragedies. I am most proud of the people of Blacksburg and how they have worked together over the years."**

changes brought on by these trends, but they have to be acknowledged and planned for.

**VTC: With so many worthy causes in the Commonwealth, why did you choose VML to be one of your top priorities?**

**Rordam:** Every time I come away from a meeting with a group of fellow League members, I'm fired up. I'm impressed with their optimism. You have to be optimistic about your community and the future. You can't ignore challenges, but you must go after them in a positive way. **VTC**

**About the author**  
*Nancy Chafin is VML's Communications Specialist.*

**Rordam says the two most important skills that young people aspiring to civic leadership need to develop are listening and building relationships.**



# All that glitters to behold

## Local ornaments on dazzling display at Governor's Mansion

**N**EARLY 200 LOCALITIES commissioned one-of-a-kind ornaments to adorn the holiday tree at the Governor's Mansion this year. Each ornament is a tribute to the unique heritage of their communities.

Local artisans employed glass, wood, seashells, fibers, precious metals and locally grown materials. Many were hand-carved, hand painted or hand sewn. They depicted local historic landmarks, local industries and natural features of their region, such as rivers and mountains.

The theme "Celebrating Virginia's Localities" is a first for the Executive Mansion tree, which features a different motif every year. Executive staff enlisted the help of the Virginia Municipal League and the Virginia Association of Counties to collect the ornaments on behalf of the Governor's Mansion.

The response from cities, towns and counties was extraordinary. Many localities hosted contests inviting the community to submit ornaments, then selected one ornament to represent the locality. Local newspapers across the state featured the artists with their ornaments.

"When we displayed the full collection at the mansion, all the household staff, grounds crew and visitors had so much fun hunting for their hometown's ornament and, when they found theirs, they were so proud," said VML's Nancy Chafin. "It was touching to know that the ornaments weren't just special to the people who made them, but to everyone from their town."

In speaking with the artists and county officials, "We heard the background of what inspired the piece and who worked together to make it happen," said VACO's Amy Vealey. "We truly enjoyed getting to know the features of our member counties that are most important to the artist, and realizing, even more so than before, how great and beautiful our state really is."

Governor McAuliffe and First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe kicked off the holiday season on December 3 with an open house. Holiday tours continued throughout most of December. Thousands of visitors from Virginia and beyond streamed through the mansion where the tree was the main attraction.

For those who could not make the trip, photos of the ornaments are featured in online photo albums at [vaco.org](http://vaco.org) and on VML's facebook page.

Thank you to all of the localities that showed their local pride by crafting ornaments and making this year's holiday tree one of the best the Executive Mansion has ever presented to visitors nationwide. 



**Governor Terry McAuliffe welcomed VML President Ron Rordam and President-Elect Bob Coiner to the Executive Mansion to see the "Celebrating Virginia's Localities" tree.**



**Ornament from Town of Phenix.**



The nearly 200 ornaments were arranged on the Governor's dining room table before being placed on the tree. Photo courtesy of Michael White, Governor's Office.



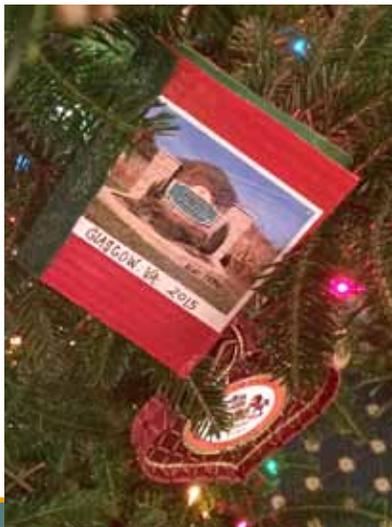
Town of Wachapreague



(L) Bath County (R) Town of Wytheville



Lancaster County and Town of Kilmarnock



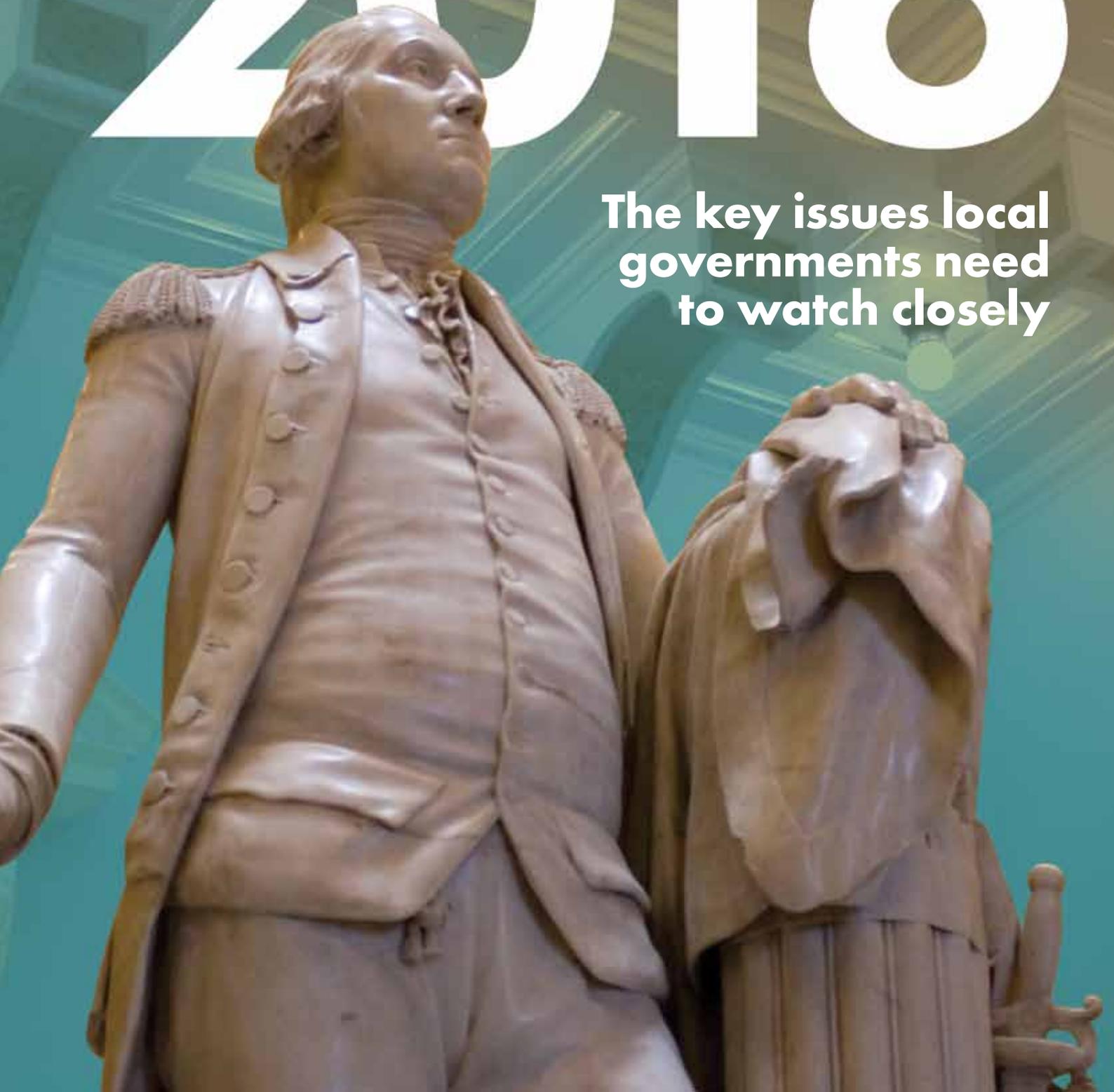
(Above) Town of Marion  
(Left) Town of Glasgow



Town of Eastville

# General Assembly 2016

**The key issues local  
governments need  
to watch closely**



**T**HE CHIEF TASK before the 2016 General Assembly will be to pass a two-year budget for the state. For Governor McAuliffe, this budget proposal will be his opportunity to make his mark in Virginia history. What will the budget show about the governor’s education priorities? How – and will – the state address deficiencies in funding for roads and transit? Or will Virginia localities continue to wait for adequate state resources to pay a reasonable share of the services that localities provide on behalf of the state?

VML’s legislative agenda calls on the state to be a reliable funding partner in services that it requires the localities to carry out, including educating our children, strengthening law enforcement, moving people and goods via roads and transit and improving water quality.

Some issues are perennial – like state budget, state taxes, and local taxes. This year, however, there are issues that add a new wrinkle. Three court cases dealing with redistricting could affect seats in the House of Representatives as well as in the General Assembly. The prospects of having to campaign again in 2016, which is a presidential election year with significantly higher voter turnout than in the odd-year elections, will supercharge skittish partisans on both sides of the aisle. VML’s challenge is to navigate through very choppy waves. At stake is the VML Legislative Program. Here are our priorities.

## Education funding position

The state has consistently underfunded the state Standards of Quality and other state accountability programs. VML supports a JLARC or other state study that examines the ways other states fund education and whether the Commonwealth should use a funding strategy that establishes a more realistic base foundation amount per pupil – plus add-on funding to reflect higher costs for educating at-risk, disabled, ESL, and gifted students, etc. as well as funding for capital costs. VML supports increased state funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative, the K-3 reduced class size program and Early Reading Intervention program. VML also supports increased state stipends for highly effective teachers in high-poverty schools, and other innovative programs.

### VML

**Supports JLARC study to examine how other states fund education**

**Supports increased funding for Virginia Preschool Initiative**

**Supports funding for K-3 reduced class size**

**Supports increased stipends for highly effective teachers in high-poverty schools**



## State assistance to local police departments (HB 599)

Almost 70 percent of Virginians live in communities served by police departments. The state created a program of financial assistance to local police departments, but has increasingly de-emphasized this funding obligation as a priority. VML calls for the state to honor its commitment to public safety by funding the program in FY16 and onward as stipulated in the Code of Virginia.

## State/local fiscal relationship

VML opposes changes in local taxing authority without first granting and providing alternative revenue authority with reliable, sustainable revenue sources. This includes, without limitation, the BPOL and machinery and tools taxes. Any efforts at tax reform should begin with a thorough examination of state tax reform and state spending reform. Local government representatives should be included on any “blue ribbon” commission or other body established by the state that has as its purpose changes to local revenue authority or governance.

### VML

**Opposes changes in local taxing authority without provision for alternative revenue**



## Transportation funding

VML recognizes the importance and critical support provided by the Commonwealth for local and regional transportation and transit capital needs. To that end, VML believes the projected decline in state funding over the upcoming biennium will negatively affect the movement of people and goods, thereby hindering economic development, jeopardizing public safety and degrading the quality of life in our localities.

The state should continue to financially support transportation and transit capital needs, exploring all options including the issuance of Commonwealth bonds.

## Water quality funding

VML requests the General Assembly to provide sufficient appropriations to the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF) to fulfill point source upgrade contracts with local governments as well as cost-share payments to farm operators for the implementation of agricultural best management practices. Additionally, VML requests the General Assembly to provide sufficient appropriations, including dedicated revenues to the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF) to address costs associated with permit requirements tied to federal Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) and new EPA regulations.

## Wastewater discharge and pollutant allocation limits

VML opposes any legislation that reduces or limits local government's sewage discharge capacity, including nutrient allocations, as such capacity and allocations are critical to our members' economic development efforts.

## Local fines and fees should remain local

VML calls for an end to the state seizure of local fines and forfeitures, which began in 2012 based on a misinterpretation of the Code of Virginia. After separate examinations, neither the State Inspector General nor the State Attorney General found any legal or policy justification for this seizure of local funds. Yet the seizure of funds continues, affecting the ability of affected communities to fund basic services such as public safety.

## First day introduction for bills with local fiscal impact

VML supports reinserting the requirement for first day introduction of bills with a local fiscal impact in the procedural resolution that governs the conduct of the General Assembly session. The intent is to provide local governments more time to assess the fiscal impact of proposed legislation.

## Price floor for regional gas taxes

VML supports an amendment to Virginia Code § 58.1-2295 which would establish a protective floor price for the 2.1 percent regional gas tax, much as was done for the statewide fuels tax in §58.1-2217. Such a floor concept is essential to provide a more stable, dedicated revenue source needed for long-term financing of regional projects.

### VML

**Supports price floor for regional gas tax**



## Fines and costs collections by treasurers

VML seeks the repeal of language in the 2014 and 2015 Appropriation Acts that effectively bars local treasurers from collecting delinquent fines and costs. Commonwealth's Attorneys should have the option to choose the most efficient and effective collection agent regardless of whether the agent is a public or private entity. VML does not support efforts to monopolize collection services.

## Line of Duty Act

The cost of the current Line of Duty Act is not sustainable for either the state or local governments. VML supports recommendations and options made by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission on the Line of Duty Act program that would ensure the fiscal sustainability of the program and ensure that the benefits are available to those who need and deserve them.

## Taxing, licensing and regulating Internet-based businesses and services

As general principles, VML believes state and local policies should (1) encourage a level playing field for competing services in the market place; (2) seek to preserve and/or replace local and state tax revenues; and (3) ensure safety, reliability and access for consumers, providers and the general public; and (4) protect local government's ability to regulate businesses whether they are traditional, electronic, Internet-based, virtual or otherwise. If the Commonwealth should take action to regulate private enterprises employing a business model that emphasizes the use of the Internet to either provide retail or facilitate lodging or ride-sharing services, then local government interests should be acknowledged and localities should be included in the decision-making.

## State Corporation Commission jurisdiction over local utilities

Because the State Corporation Commission lacks jurisdiction over local government utilities under the Virginia Constitution, the General Assembly should not enact any legislation that purports to grant the SCC any regulatory powers over local utilities.

## Workers compensation – Medical costs on a scheduled fee basis

Virginia should adopt Medicare-based fee schedules for setting medical provider fees in workers' compensation cases, instead of the prevailing community rate standard now used. This will make providing workers' compensation coverage more affordable and will adequately protect the financial interests of the medical providers of Virginia.

### VML

**Supports Medicare-based fee schedules in workers' compensation cases.**



## Municipal net metering

VML requests the General Assembly grant local governments the right to aggregate the electric load of their buildings, facilities, and any other governmental operations for the

purpose of net energy metering. Additionally, VML requests the General Assembly raise the net-metering limit from 1,000 kilowatts to 2,000 kilowatts for non-residential customers.

## Non-partisan redistricting that preserves jurisdictional boundaries

VML supports redistricting reform, including the use of a non-partisan independent commission to draw state legislative and Congressional lines based on specified and consistent criteria, including insofar as possible preservation of the integrity of existing city, town, county and precinct lines.

### VML

**Supports redistricting reform**

**Supports use of an independent commission to draw district lines**

**Supports preservation of existing city, town, county and precinct lines.**



## Regional greenhouse gas initiative and Commonwealth Resilience Fund

VML urges the General Assembly to address greenhouse gas emissions targets through a Regional Greenhouse Gas Inventory (RGGI) carbon credit auction, and/or a carbon emissions tax. All proceeds derived from the auction of credits should be used to establish the “Commonwealth Resilience Fund,” a special state dedicated fund to assist localities in addressing flooding, energy efficiency improvements, and economic development.



## Wednesday, January 27 Face to face with your legislators

VML'S 2016 SPECIAL legislative event will provide an outstanding opportunity for local government officials to interact with members of the General Assembly.

**Location:** Library of Virginia (adjacent to Capitol Square)

**Schedule:** 3 - 5:30 p.m. Keynote address and legislative briefings

5:30 - 7 p.m. Reception

**Quality reception.** We will once again host a high quality reception that will facilitate members of the General Assembly meeting with local elected officials. All legislators from both chambers will be invited by VML to attend the reception, which will be held in the foyer of the Library of Virginia adjacent to Capitol Square.

## Synthetic plastic microbeads

VML requests the General Assembly prohibit the manufacture and sale of personal care products and over-the-counter medicines that contain synthetic plastic microbeads. Toxins associated with microbeads, such as PCBs, have the potential to contaminate water supplies so that they exceed safe levels for consumption. Because sewage treatment plants are not equipped to remove microbeads from wastewater and large-scale removal of this pollutant from surface waters would be difficult and costly, the best solution is source reduction.

## Local authority to regulate plastic bags

VML requests the General Assembly grant localities the authority to regulate and curtail the use of retail plastic bags. This authority will provide local governments an additional tool to reduce litter and improve local water quality.

## What can you do to protect the rights of local governments?

The most important thing local leaders can do is attend VML Day at the Capitol and meet with your legislators in person to voice your concerns for your locality. VML Day is January 27. In addition to meeting with legislators in their offices, you will have the opportunity to speak with them at a reception that evening in the grand foyer of the Virginia State Library. For details on VML Day and to sign up, visit [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org).

Local leaders are encouraged to follow these issues throughout the session and write to your legislators as proposed legislation moves through session. Your best source for all legislation affecting local governments is VML's legislative updates in the eNews. To sign up to receive the eNews, go to [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org). You can also use the Bill Tracker on the state's legislative information services site: [www.lis.virginia.gov](http://www.lis.virginia.gov). 

**Register online at [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org)**

# Putting young voices into local government

## Eighth grade Town Council tackles issue with no easy answer

**I**FELT LIKE MY VOICE was heard.” This powerful statement came from an eighth grade student after participating in an innovative new program in Leesburg designed to connect youth to their local government.

The program came out of a collaboration between the Leesburg Town Council, the Morven Park Center for Civic Impact, and J. L. Simpson Middle School. The goal was simple – challenge eighth graders to learn about a current issue

**The students stepped into leadership roles and conducted a mock Town Council session in Leesburg Council Chambers about the SkatePark. Each student was assigned a role, including mayor, councilmembers, concerned citizens, town employees, and even media.**

facing the Town Council and provide their recommendation. The idea is that young citizens, not old enough to vote, should understand how their town government functions and have the skills to share their ideas and concerns about local issues.

Sixty eighth grade students from J. L. Simpson Middle School in Leesburg took part in this pilot program. When the opportunity to take part came up, the principal of Simpson Middle School, Chad Runfola, jumped at the chance. In his view, all students in his school deserve opportunities to be active members of their communities and make a positive impact. The students’ Civics and Economics teacher, Megan Baird, was enthusiastic about the opportunity to connect what they had been learning in the classroom to the real world.

The project focused on the issue of what to do with the local skate park. The future of the town’s Catocin SkatePark had come up for discussion at the Town Council and there were three main options to consider: (1) renovate it but keep it in the same location, (2) build a new facility on a different part of the same lot to allow for the adjacent rescue squad to expand their operation, or (3) build a new facility on the other side of town and sell or donate the existing skate park site. Each option came with its own trade-offs and consequences that the Town Council had been deliberating for months.

The eighth graders were tasked the same assignment as the Councilmembers – to decide which option would be best for the Town of Leesburg. Using a curriculum provided by the Morven Park Center for Civic Impact, they examined the issue to deter-

mine who the stakeholders were, how each option would affect the town budget, and whether or not the skate park should be scrapped and replaced with something different altogether.

When the project was first introduced, some students were immediately interested, as they were users of the skate park. Some had been unaware that such a resource existed in their town. Others were ambivalent, explaining how it didn’t affect them so why should they be concerned. It was the same as listening to a group of adults discuss the issue – some on each side and many in the unconcerned or neutral middle.

The project lasted several class periods, and included a special trip to the Leesburg Town Hall. For many it was their first visit. While there, the students met with town employees to learn about public services, the responsibilities of different departments, and how their work impacted citizens.

Then the students stepped into leadership roles and conducted a mock Town Council session about the Catocin SkatePark in the Leesburg Town Council Chambers. Each student was assigned a role, including Mayor, Councilmembers, concerned citizens, town employees, and even media. They took their seats, whether on the dais or in the audience, and met their adult counterparts who coached the students throughout the session.

The student mayor, assisted by the actual mayor, opened the session, moderated the discussion, and ensured that the proper procedures were followed. Additional students on the



**Mayor Kristen Umstadd helps “Mayor” Nicholas Maskalenko (plaid shirt, center) run the mock Town Council meeting.**



**Leesburg Parks and Recreation Director Richard Williams explains the Catoctin Skate Park to students at J.L. Simpson Middle School.**



**Clement Kyeremeh testifies before the mock Town Council meeting as his classmates listen.**

dais had the support of Vice Mayor Kelly Burk, Councilmember Katie Sheldon Hammler and Town Manager Kaj Dentler, among others. Students in the audience contributed by providing testimony, sharing concerns, and recording the session for the official town archives.

The mock session brought a new understanding of town government for the eighth graders. What many had seen as a legislative body that had nothing to do with them became a group that they understood and could interact with. It was an experience that is challenging to create in a classroom, but one that is important for students as they develop into active members of their communities.

After the field trip, each student crafted his or her own recommendation, shaped by individual research, deliberations, and time in the Council Chambers. They presented their final recommendations to the Town Council at a Civics Fair at the school in November. The school's seventh graders were invited to the fair to learn about their local government and prepare for writing their VML "If I Were Mayor" essays.

"We hope to expand this successful pilot program," said Councilmember Hammler, who initiated it with the goal of promoting VML's essay contest. "The program fills a gap in the current civics curriculum, which is geared towards SOL questions that focus on state and federal government. Yet, it is at the local government level that these young people will

have the greatest opportunity to have an impact. Our council feels strongly that we have a responsibility to prepare our next generation of local leaders."

The tenacity with which the students tackled this project is inspiring. They drew upon their critical thinking and creativity skills and produced informed and well-reasoned recommendations. The students' final recommendations were split between the three options. Those who favored keeping it in its current location cited budget and transportation concerns, while those who advocated for moving it saw the benefit of adding a skating facility to an already well-used recreation center. Some students created new suggestions, including identifying a previously un-thought-of location and creative design elements to attract a greater youth audience.

"The students really put a lot of serious thought and effort into their deliberations," said Kristen Umstadd, Leesburg's Mayor. "I look forward to seeing how their generation will become involved in and influence local government in the coming years."

This civics program exposed students to their town government. It valued their input as constituents and it demonstrated that they have a responsibility as citizens to be engaged in local issues. The outcome of a program like this can be seen in the students' continuing commitment to engaged citizenship, and there is a strong indication that this will happen. One student reflected on the experience, explaining, "My decision is important. I'll pay attention to local issues after this." Her comment demonstrates how learning experiences like this can change the way young citizens view their government and civic responsibilities, and is an encouraging sign for the future of our democracy.



**About the author**

*Abby Pfisterer is the Director of Civics Programming at Morven Park Center for Civic Impact. The Center for Civic Impact is a civics education initiative that inspires and prepares the next generation of engaged citizens.*



By Mary Jo Fields

# The trouble with old math

## It's time for a true accounting of the cost of educating Virginia's students

**T**HE STATE CONSTITUTION gives the General Assembly the authority to set the amounts that state and local governments pay for K-12 education. Virginia uses a complicated process to determine the costs for education. The state then assigns a portion of the costs to be paid by the locality and a portion to be paid by the state. The percentages assigned to each locality make up what's called the local composite index or LCI.

As an example, Accomack County's LCI for the upcoming biennium will be .3460, meaning that the county has to pay 34.6 percent of the required Standards of Quality (SOQ) costs recognized by the state, and the state pays the remaining 65.40 percent. Alexandria's LCI, on the other hand, is .8000, meaning that the city pays 80 percent of required SOQ costs, with the state paying 20 percent.

Statewide, SOQ costs are supposed to be shared on a 45 percent local, 55 percent state basis. If you look at total local and state funding for operation and maintenance of schools, in FY14, however, localities paid about 56 percent of the cost, with the state paying

the other 44 percent. The reason: The state funding formula underestimates the cost of meeting the SOQ and thereby minimizes the Commonwealth's responsibilities for funding K-12. In other words, the SOQs don't match up with the costs approved by the State Board of Education through the Standards of Learning and the Standards of Accreditation.

### Does this make sense?

Here's just one example of the problem. According to the local composite indexes below, the city of Richmond is deemed capable of paying a larger share of education costs than its surrounding counties.

**Richmond: 47.5% is local share of required education costs**

**Chesterfield: 35.1 %**

**Hanover: 42.8%**

**Henrico: 42.2%**

This is hardly reflective of the economic realities of the region.

### What are the Standards of Quality?

The Standards of Quality (SOQ) set minimum requirements that schools have to meet, much of it relating to staffing standards.

The LCI compares a locality's tax base (relative to its population and number of students in public school) to a compilation of all local tax bases (measuring statewide population and overall number of public school students). The index is supposed to show the revenue capability of local governments, highlighting revenue per person and per student. The index does not reflect differences in the cost of educating particular types of students, such as those who are economically disadvantaged, who are English language learners or who are in need of special education services. Nor does the LCI take into consideration the higher cost of living in some areas of the state.

The LCI is updated every two years; new figures were just released in November.

**The Local Composite Index is supposed to show the revenue capability of local governments, highlighting revenue per person and per student. The index does not reflect differences in the cost of educating economically disadvantaged students, English language learners and others with special needs. Nor does the LCI take into consideration the higher cost of living in some areas of the state.**

## Problems with the LCI

- The LCI is complex and not easily understood.
- A change to one division's LCI, particularly a larger division, can affect every other division's LCI, either positively or negatively. For example, when real estate values plunged after the housing bubble burst in 2008, real estate valuation in Fairfax County and indeed most of Northern Virginia fell more dramatically than in the rest of Virginia. The county's LCI fell dramatically as well. That change rippled across the state with many other localities seeing an increase in their LCI as a result even though a number of them also suffered a fall in property assessments and the other variables.
- Attempts to accommodate special circumstances in a single division or type of jurisdiction similarly can produce winners and losers. This results in a political paralysis where the General Assembly is wary of both intended and unintended consequences.
- The data used in the LCI is old from the get-go: the amounts for the true value of real estate, adjusted gross income and retail sales used to calculate the LCI for the 2016-2018 biennium will be based on 2013 data, and thus will be really dusty by June 30, 2018.
- The LCI was developed more than 40 years ago, in the 1970s. Under the LCI, the local true value of real estate, local adjusted gross income and local taxable retail sales are given weights that were based on how important these revenues sources were to total revenue sources at the time. The problem is that times have changed and the weights no longer reflect the reality of local tax bases.
- Adjusted gross income is used as a proxy measure for "other" taxes that make up the local tax base. However, the use of the adjusted gross income measures make some localities – those in which a large percentage of income comes from a relatively few wealthy individuals – look wealthier than they actually are. A good example is the city of Richmond. The city has fiscal challenges and the city school system has a high percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged and cost more to educate. Yet Richmond's LCI of .4756 is higher than the surrounding counties of Chesterfield (.3509), Hanover (.4283) and Henrico (.4219). Thus, according

to the LCI, the city is capable of paying a larger share of education expenses with local tax moneys than are those counties. In fact, since the city's LCI is larger than .4500 (the statewide local average), the city is deemed to be wealthier than the average locality in the entire state.

- The adjusted gross income figure is a proxy for a variety of other local taxes including personal property; BPOL; permits, fees and licenses; fines and forfeitures; charges for services; revenue from use of money and property; and other miscellaneous sources. Not all localities have equal access to the taxes/fees included in the "other" category. (Perhaps the case for using adjusted gross income in the LCI formula would be compelling if the General Assembly authorized localities to impose local income taxes or surcharges.)
- The LCI does not take into account other services (social services, public safety, health, etc.) that localities have to provide. JLARC found a high correlation between population density and local spending on public safety, public works and health and welfare, and suggested that the General Assembly consider adjusting the LCI to provide for a population density adjustment.

## Alternatives to the LCI

### A new funding model

Tinkering with the LCI to accommodate individual local circumstances will be difficult because almost any change will create winners and losers.

Instead of trying to change the LCI, VML advocates for a full accounting of what it actually costs to educate students. VML supports a study by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, or some other state agency, to review the methodologies other states use to fund education and to determine if the Commonwealth should use a funding strategy that establishes a more realistic base foundation amount per pupil. Add-on funding to reflect higher costs for educating at-risk, disabled, English language learners and gifted students as well as funding for capital costs would then need to be allocated on top of that base per pupil amount.

VML's 2016 legislative program promotes this approach as one of its education funding priorities.

If the state does not recognize the true costs of educating students based on the standards approved by the Virginia Board of Education, the funding pie will still leave too many school divisions hungry. Regardless of how many slices there are, the state will still be placing an inordinate burden on local governments. 

### About the author

*Mary Jo Fields is Director of Research for the Virginia Municipal League.*

### What's your local composite index?

**What portion of the costs of education does the state deem your locality should be able to (and must) pay?**

**You can find your LCI at <http://1.usa.gov/1TkGN5M>**

# A Manager's Performance Appraisal Prepare with Confidence



**I**MAGINE YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE for organizing the family vacation. It's all planned, and everyone piles into the car ready to go. From the back seat, you hear: "I want to go to Disney." "No, I want to go to the beach." "No, we always do what you want, let's go camping."

Your partner gently leans over and says: "I want to go for a romantic vacation, without the kids, and by the way, we should fly, not drive." And now, if things couldn't be worse, you know they will all judge you, and the quality of their vacation will be based on your decision.

Crazy? Is this scenario all that unrealistic? In fact, for many, this resembles the life of a local government manager. As one city administrator defined it, "multiple conflicting priorities," topped off with a performance appraisal.

## Powerful tool with benefits

As a manager, your job is to carry out the wishes of the governing board. But if you cannot find agreement on where you are going, who is driving, and who is in charge, you are on the road to dysfunctional government and a strained relationship with elected officials.

An evaluation of the manager – a process hated by most and ignored by others – should be an opportunity to both develop a manager's knowledge and move a community forward.

If we are able to step back from the report-card aspect of most appraisal processes and realize that a performance appraisal is simply a tool used by elected officials to ensure that community goals are being met, then one can appreciate the power of this tool.

### So why doesn't that happen?

One Pennsylvania township has a five-year plan in place that marries its business plan to its strategic and financial plans. The town is run like a private sector business according to its town manager. When the five-person, elected board hired the manager 11 years ago, board members recognized that a professional manager who embraced sound business and financial practices was needed to run their organization.

With a background in accounting, he pushed long-term planning with goal setting, and out of this process came the need for both strategic planning and an evaluation process. Nothing in business works effectively without clear direction and strategy, along with clearly defined metrics to measure progress.

But simply having a business plan does not ensure positive results. These five essential components found in most well-run communities should be present:

- Well-defined mission and vision.
- Clearly defined goals and expectations.

- Defined roles and responsibilities.
- Positive working relationships.
- A method to evaluate the progress and success of the manager.

**Mission and vision.** Defining who you are, what you believe, and where you are going – all rudiments of an effective strategic plan – are crucial. In one Vermont tourist community, administrators view their town as a business that is dependent on tourism and marketing to visitors, while still focusing on primary and secondary homeowners.

Elected officials always make decisions with an eye on this mission, keeping themselves focused and forward thinking. Managers and officials must regularly discuss their mission, vision, and strategy, while defining values that they believe, and from which they operate and conduct business. When mired in constant crisis or reacting to the day-to-day issues, communities can sacrifice their future and the opportunities this future presents.

**Goal setting.** The goal-setting process can be the most dynamic and harmonizing event that managers and governing boards experience. Many communities do it annually, while others do it after each new board is seated.

Here, the board can establish clear expectations and accountability standards for the manager, ensuring that he or she is aligned with the board's interests. Done well, this becomes a vibrant, proactive experience. Without it, people could find themselves sailing on a rudderless ship, destined for disaster.

**Clarity of roles.** Local governments work best when there is only one manager. Yet too often, councilmembers get confused about their role and think they, too, are the manager. Like the two-headed monsters of Greek mythology, they find

## Takeaways

1. The planning process is the foundation for an effective evaluation of the manager.
2. Evaluating the manager's performance is difficult when the role of the manager and the role of elected officials are ambiguous and unclear.
3. An uncomplicated performance appraisal process, based on a healthy, open relationship between the manager and the elected officials, is the basis of both open communication and clear accountability standards.
4. A link exists between strategic planning, goal setting, performance management, clear governance, and highly functioning local governments.

themselves moving in different directions. It doesn't work.

Good governance makes good government. One town manager quotes Plato when he discusses governance during board orientations. "To do one's own business and not to be a busybody is justice," which basically means justice is found in fulfilling your own role while not overstepping it.

Taking the time to define roles and adhering to them minimizes problems in the future and is essential to meaningful appraisals.

**Positive working relations.** I regularly tell people whom I work with that results can only occur if there are three elements in place: 1) a positive working relationship between the board and the manager; 2) a shared mission about what the locality is and what the locality wants to accomplish; and 3) a commitment to move forward together in a collegial manner.

With that foundation, communities can progress. But absent any one element, things come tumbling down. Relationships based on trust, respect, and confidence are essential.

Governing and managing are all about the relationship. Managers must know that they have the backing of the elected officials and vice versa.

**Evaluation process.** Putting in place a progressive process to evaluate the manager allows for healthy discussion; clarification of expectations; refocus of direction, if needed; and open communication. No business relationship can occur without accountability standards, and this is the power of the appraisal process.

**The manager and elected officials must have a shared mission about what the locality is and what the locality wants to accomplish.**



## What makes a good evaluation process?

**Agreement on the process.** Ideally, the governing board and the manager should come together to decide how to do this, when it should be done, and on what basis the manager will be evaluated.

While many shy away from evaluations, one Connecticut manager built the process into his contract to ensure he had open communication with “his new bosses,” to understand their viewpoints, and to make sure he was in sync with each of them.

When I have developed appraisals with managers and governing officials, I have found that simply discussing the process opens lines of communication, breaks down barriers, and often leads to discovering emerging new areas of communality.

**More than a form.** Good evaluations are simply conversations, not forms. In fact, the forms are often a distraction from what is truly important. A frank open dialogue, with all individuals participating, is much better than including a five-point Likert scale and boxes to check on a form.

Forms are good for clarity and record-keeping. They make the human resources professionals and lawyers happy, but they can never replace the feedback received during the appraisal interview. Good evaluations occur when people are talking and listening with each other, not when forms are written, read, signed, and forgotten in a file.

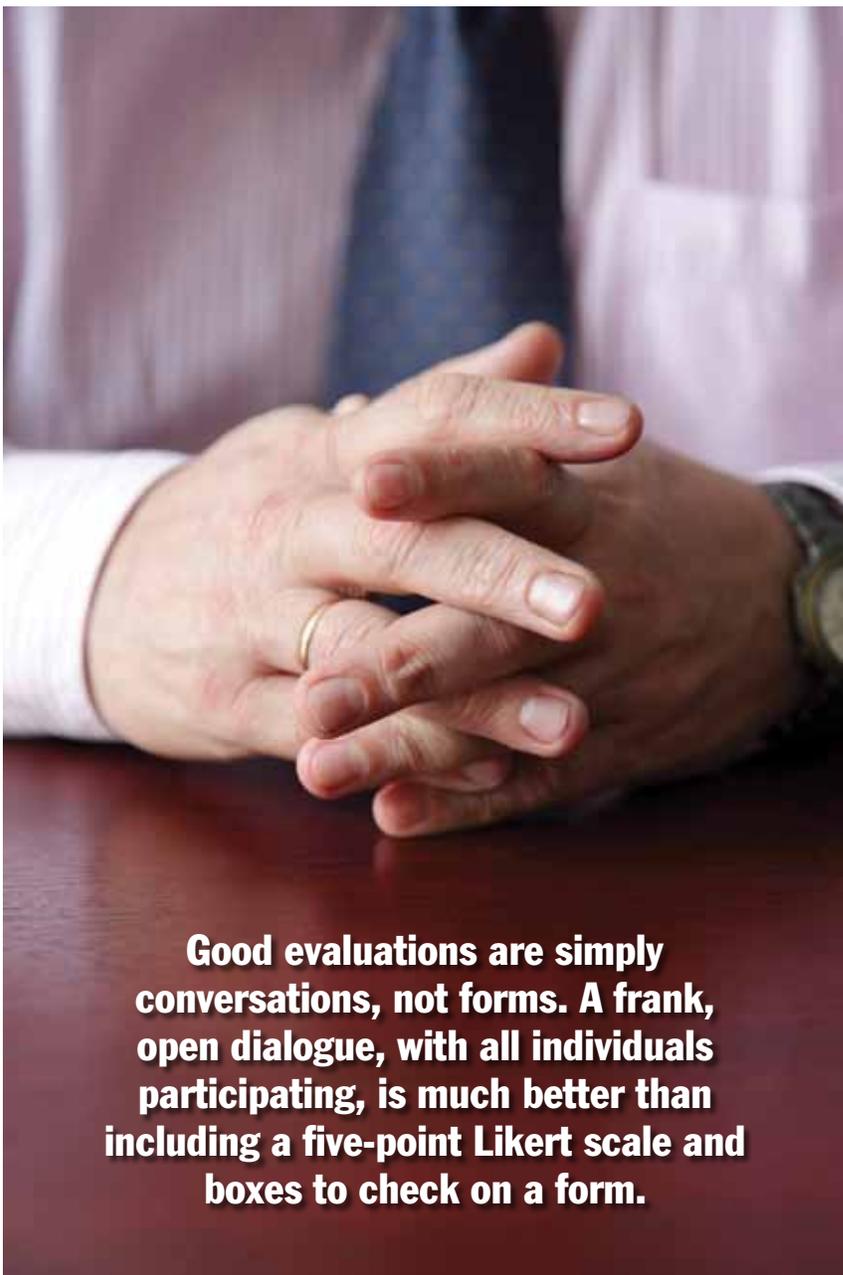
**Manager self-evaluations.** Managers should take time to both critically evaluate their own performance and that of their organizations. Elected officials readily admit that they do not know what managers do each day – and why should they?

It is not their responsibility to monitor everything the manager does. Managers should, however, communicate what they have done and more importantly, what they have accomplished during the period.

After all, they were hired and are being paid for accomplishments, not activities or simply showing up. A pinch of selfless self-promotion is also a good thing.

**Surprises should be left for birthday parties, not evaluations. Issues should be addressed as they occur – not stored in a gunnysack and saved for review time.**

**Review of goals.** As noted earlier, this is an ideal time to review progress on the manager’s goals and objectives. It is also



**Good evaluations are simply conversations, not forms. A frank, open dialogue, with all individuals participating, is much better than including a five-point Likert scale and boxes to check on a form.**

a period when new goals can be established. Goal setting is the heart of the appraisal process.

In one Connecticut town, every two years, the board, the manager, and the department heads get together for a formal goal-setting session. They incorporate a three-step process that includes:

1. Identifying the overarching issues facing the town. The top five umbrella issues nearly always include public safety, quality of life, infrastructure, education, and economic development.
2. Breaking down each issue using a modified SWOT analysis and then addressing what they want to focus on and improve upon the next year.
3. Coming up with 50 to 100 individual action items, prioritizing them, and then creating a workplan.

The manager and the department heads then allocate

responsibilities and time frames for completion. This plan forms the basis for the manager's and the department heads' performance appraisal.

**Development of the manager.** Having a manager with yesterday's ideas is like eating day-old bread. It won't kill you, but it also won't satisfy your palate.

The demands of running a multimillion-dollar business with staff, equipment, changing technology, constant changes in regulations and legislation, employees, unions, and resident demands requires a manager who is up-to-date, understands best practices, and manages with knowledge and confidence.

Ongoing professional development readies the manager. It must be a requirement of each manager and an essential component to discuss during the review process.

A performance appraisal cannot simply be a look back. What happened yesterday cannot be changed. The review must include a look forward, and one way to guarantee that a manager can get a community to where it wants to go is through professional development.

Managers need continuous skills training, exposure to new ideas and concepts, interaction with other successful managers, knowledge of changes in legislation and regulations, and awareness of emerging trends. Seminars, professional association programs, conferences, and college seminars are essential elements to this development process.

**Communication is the key.** Whether it is on or off the record, fluid, open, and meaningful dialogue that ensures that everyone is in the loop guarantees success. Managers must talk and listen to the board and vice versa.

The best reviews contain more conversation, with less emphasis on the forms; a clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities; well-defined goals and expectations; metrics and timeliness; and genuine respect and trust. When this is present, the appraisal process is working.

## Potential stumbling blocks

Unfortunately, too often these stumbling blocks can derail the process:

**Politics.** As I regularly find out from talking with managers and elected officials across the country, politics and everything that connotes often poisons the evaluation process. Conflicting agendas, singular motives, scores to settle, or an unwillingness to embrace the community's mission and vision make governing difficult, thwart consensus, and derail the process.

As one Florida councilmember stated: "Agendas by councilors prevent good evaluations." When politics gets in the way, managers become afraid to make bold moves. They fear losing their jobs and become too paralyzed to be effective, and then often shy away from addressing the difficult issues.

**Surprises.** Surprises should be left for birthday parties, not evaluations. The review process cannot endure many surprises. Issues should be addressed as they occur and not stored in a gunnysack and saved for review time.

The governing board and the manager must always be

## Managers want a governing board that provides clear expectations and accountability standards, understands their needs and expectations, and provides timely performance reviews.

transparent, open, and forthcoming. Matters that seemingly emerge from left field kill conversation, put people on the defensive, and serve no other purpose than to derail the process.

**Report-card approach.** A review is a development tool. It is a mechanism to plan for the future. It cannot be a merely a grading mechanism that reminds you of your past shortcomings. You can't be effective with a club over your head.

**Lack of differentiation between performance and personality.** Managers are hired to perform. While getting along and congeniality are important, the more critical piece is getting things done. Having a nice guy who accomplishes little is not an enviable standard.

That said, defining the important traits of a successful manager is important during the hiring process and reinforcing these during the appraisal process is appropriate.

## A successful relationship

Local government management can be difficult and complex. To be successful, the relationship between the manager and elected officials must be open and positive. Each must understand the other's roles and expectations.

The manager's job is to take care of everyone in the organization. Officials expect them to run and grow the business; carry out their mandates; recruit, retain, and develop the internal talent; and prepare the organization for the future.

See what Virginia mayors and managers are saying about performance appraisals. Page 24-25.

It is the role of the officials to take care of the manager in a supportive manner. Managers, like any employees, want their basic needs met and when they are not, resentment occurs.

They want a governing board that provides clear expectations and accountability standards, understands managers' needs and expectations, and provides timely performance reviews. Late reviews and salaries that fall below their peers are two areas that cause the greatest resentment resulting in breakdowns in the relations and turnover of managers.

Next vacation, when everyone happily piles into the car and agrees on a destination and driver, then and only then can it be viewed as a positive experience. Managing a city or county requires the same. And when that happens, everyone can enjoy the ride. 

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**Elected Officials:**

**As a mayor/councilmember, what do you ideally hope to get out of the city/town manager evaluation process?**



**Chris Snead**

**Council Member  
City of Hampton**

“As a councilmember, I hope that the evaluation process produces clarity of expectations of council’s policies, goals and objectives. I expect to receive the manager’s feedback on what she believes to be the difficulties, if any, to implementing council’s goals. I also want to make sure that the manager and staff believe in the direction that council is setting for the city, since their role is to implement those strategies. This should be a time for the manager to be completely transparent with the council and for the council to be open as well. This can be accomplished when performance evaluations are not rushed and ample time is made to communicate with all members of council as a body. Giving performance evaluations is usually uncomfortable for most.”



**Bob Coiner**

**Mayor  
Town of Gordonsville**

“Evaluating the town manager is one of the mayor’s and council’s most important jobs. A high quality and comprehensive evaluation process for the town manager helps develop and maintain a good council/manager relationship, provides clarity of roles, creates common understanding of the leadership being provided and provides a mechanism for public accountability. Performance evaluations are most effective when they are designed and used for communicating future expectations, not simply for reviewing past performance. As many town managers know, if you don’t know what the council expects, it is difficult, if not impossible, to meet those expectations. On the other hand, if the mayor and council fail to monitor progress towards its goals, it will not know when they have been successfully completed.”



**Lisa Merkel**

**Mayor  
Town of Herndon**

“In my view, evaluations should not be one-off events but should be the culmination of many conversations, discussions and interactions throughout the year. If our town manager is surprised by an issue raised during an evaluation, then frankly, we as a council have not been doing our job. Fortunately, in Herndon, my council colleagues and I have an excellent relationship with our town manager. We interact regularly, often daily, so that he is clear on our expectations and priorities. Additionally, we conduct a visioning retreat every other year, as a new council takes office. Ultimately, it’s about communication: we are communicating our expectations, on behalf of town citizens, and the town manager in turn is communicating his professional viewpoint and the progress he and staff are making on the goals we have established.”

**Managers:****What's the most useful feedback you have gotten or hope to get from your evaluation?****Eden Freeman**

**City Manager  
City of Winchester**

“I think any manager, but especially a new manager, would agree that a performance evaluation does more than give feedback on the manager’s performance. It’s also a critical communication tool between council and the city manager. Personally, I appreciate an evaluation that provides constructive feedback so I can continue to provide the best service possible to the council and the greater community. Coupled with a robust strategic plan (which Winchester has), a performance evaluation of the manager serves to document the progress of the city and its staff in achieving council’s adopted goals and objectives.”

**Bryan Hill**

**County Administrator  
James City County**

“The Board’s first year goals to administration were to be results oriented and build consensus to move items to closure, which is a major role a county administrator must play. One thing the Board requested was for me and the staff to pace ourselves as we have been very aggressive in trying to get county business completed. As we have achieved many successes during the past year, the feedback I have been provided is to keep James City County moving forward, ensure accurate dissemination of information and, most importantly, enjoy James City County as a great place to live, work and play!”

**Darlene Burcham**

**Town Manager  
Town of Clifton Forge**

“I think that most managers know what and when they are doing their jobs well, so I am less concerned about hearing feedback on the positives. What I find most helpful is the council’s identification of where the organization and I can do better, new issues that have cropped up that need attention and their blueprint for the future, so that I can better align resources to meet their goals.”

# From dump to destination

## Innovative partnership transforms forgotten area of Alexandria

**F**OUNDED IN 1749, the city of Alexandria has a legacy of being a gateway to our great country for new people and ideas, and an unmatched problem-solving spirit.

The new “innovation corridor” on Eisenhower Avenue in South Alexandria is a shining example of that tradition. Ten years in the making, the South Carlyle development is an interwoven public parkland, mixed-use development and – of all things – a wastewater treatment plant. The project harnesses landscape strategies to cap a contaminated site and transform an elevated parking deck into a vibrant public space. It includes a regulation size multi-purpose field and LEED certified platinum building. The development features irrigation and water services supplied by a new reclaimed water system. This development, a perfect fit for the innovation corridor and a great asset to the city and its citizens, was created from a unique partnership between Alexandria Renew Enterprises, Carlyle Partners, and the city of Alexandria.

This uncommon combination of program components was triggered by the simultaneous development of plans for a new mixed-use community on the northern half of the site and the expansion of the existing Alexandria ReNew municipal wastewater treatment plant onto the southern half of the

**Ten years in the making, the South Carlyle development is an interwoven public parkland, mixed-use development and – of all things – a wastewater treatment plant.**

site. The resulting plan creates an expansive athletic field located over wastewater treatment tanks.

As a vibrant pedestrian oriented environment, this urban village will feature distinctive architecture, a healthy mix of jobs, residences, and retail, linked by a network of plazas and parks.

The South Carlyle Strategy started with a vision by the leadership and citizen-led board of Alexandria Renew Enterprises (AlexRenew) to become much more engaged with the Alexandria community. AlexRenew is the urban water renewal facility in Alexandria that transforms the city’s dirty water into clean water and reusable resources, protecting



**Kids rush to inaugurate the multipurpose athletic field.**

the Alexandria community’s health and water environment. AlexRenew provides some of the most intense water cleaning technologies available per gallon of water on one of the smallest land masses in the country. AlexRenew is a creation of the Alexandria city council, and it acts independently as a public body. In addition to transforming Alexandria’s dirty water, it also does so for parts of Fairfax County, as its Chesapeake Bay watershed partner.

“With the Chesapeake Bay in decline, water utilities in the Bay watershed were asked to step up, invest in technology to make our water product even cleaner, and lead the way to a cleaner Bay for the Mid-Atlantic region,” said Karen Pallansch, Chief Executive Officer of Alexandria Renew Enterprises.

To help meet that request for cleaner water, AlexRenew looked to the South Carlyle site just west of its current campus. They started out with their own idea of solving the Bay problem by simply building tall tanks on the site, but then realized, thanks to their vision of community engagement and excellent advice from site developer Jeff Zell of Carlyle Partners, that they are an integral part of the community tapestry. AlexRenew’s investment in water cleaning technology needed to complete the tapestry in a way envisioned by the community.

What resulted was an integrated way to develop multiple parcels of land. The usable acreage on the South Carlyle site – about five in total – needed to: 1) accommodate the required technology AlexRenew needed to protect the Potomac River



**To celebrate the opening of the field, Congressman Don Beyer, Alexandria Renew leaders, Mayor Bill Euille and City Council members hold a banner for kids to run through.**

and Bay; 2) be developed for a mixed use development; 3) create and maximize green and park space; and 4) incorporate bike trails and a playground.

The five-acre site that was being developed was not without challenges – it had a wastewater treatment plant; and, as neighbors, a public safety and detention center, a national cemetery, a park, an existing residential building, and high powered government offices. The site also had contaminated soils from its previous uses as the city landfill and rail yards, high tension power lines, and resource protection areas that the developers had to contend with, as well as being very close to the Beltway.

AlexRenew worked with Carlyle Partners, and were ably guided through the process in partnership with city staff and strong leadership from city council. The three partners worked with a multidisciplinary team of architects, engineers, and others to turn the challenges into opportunities.

“We created a plan with innovative development strategies founded in environmental sustainability and cultural understanding, resulting in a comprehensive development that capitalizes on the positive features of the site while minimizing the constraints and creating innovations that ultimately benefit our community,” said Pallansch.



**Mayor Euille shakes hands with Benjamin Fiore-Walker, the Alexandria Town Crier. Fiore-Walker opened the field dedication ceremony with a proclamation, and Mayor Euille was a featured speaker.**

To address contamination from the previous industrial uses, the team capped the soil with above grade parking and created an elevated public landscape. This landscape, inspired by recent work at Lincoln Center in New York and Allianz Arena in Munich, changed the ground plane to conceal AlexRenew’s underground parking structures and parking for

the entire South Carlyle development, while open space was blended into the development above. With careful grading, the covering appears as a gentle slope. There is a seating area on a green connector deck between the lit turf field that was built on top of the nutrient management facility and the LEED platinum administrative building that will house AlexRenew’s administrative staff.

The gently graded seating area is for families to use and for viewing of sports and activities on the field. There is also a larger bike and pedestrian path that will wrap through the South Carlyle properties. This bike path will link the park west of the site to Eisenhower Avenue.

Another innovation for the site is the use of AlexRenew’s reclaimed water. The cleaned water made at AlexRenew through its community’s and customer’s investments is a great alternate for drinking water in a variety of non-potable uses, such as irrigation, fountain features, toilet flushing, and cooling. Thanks to a commitment from Carlyle Partners, AlexRenew’s reclaimed water will be a first for Alexandria and visitors to the area will see it in use as the site continues to be developed.

**To address contamination from the previous industrial uses, the team capped the soil with above grade parking and created an elevated public landscape. This landscape was inspired by recent work at Lincoln Center in New York and Allianz Arena in Munich.**

“This partnership not only overcame constraints of site, but also broke through constraints of soul. We could have found a million reasons not to do this project this way,” said Pallansch. “Instead, we honored our public stewardship foundations, our core values of civic duty and worked hard to make everyone’s vision a reality, being the innovative problem solvers – the qualities that founded our great city.”

On October 23, AlexRenew, Carlyle Partners, and the city of Alexandria hosted a field dedication with more than 200 attendees, featuring Congressman Donald Beyer and Alexandria Mayor Bill Euille. The following day, AlexRenew and the city hosted a Family Fieldfest, a day-long festival that featured businesses and nonprofits along Eisenhower Avenue and music, food, water education activities, and Alexandria’s nitrogen-eating mascot, Moxie. More than 500 Alexandria residents attended the Fieldfest.

“Water utilities are 99% invisible,” concluded Pallansch. “Today, thanks to the scores of people throughout our community who helped us, our water utility gets to throw off the Cloak of Invisibility and make the integrated community utility of the future today’s reality.” 

#### **About the author**

*Lisa Van Riper is Chief of Enterprise Communications for Alexandria Renew Enterprises.*

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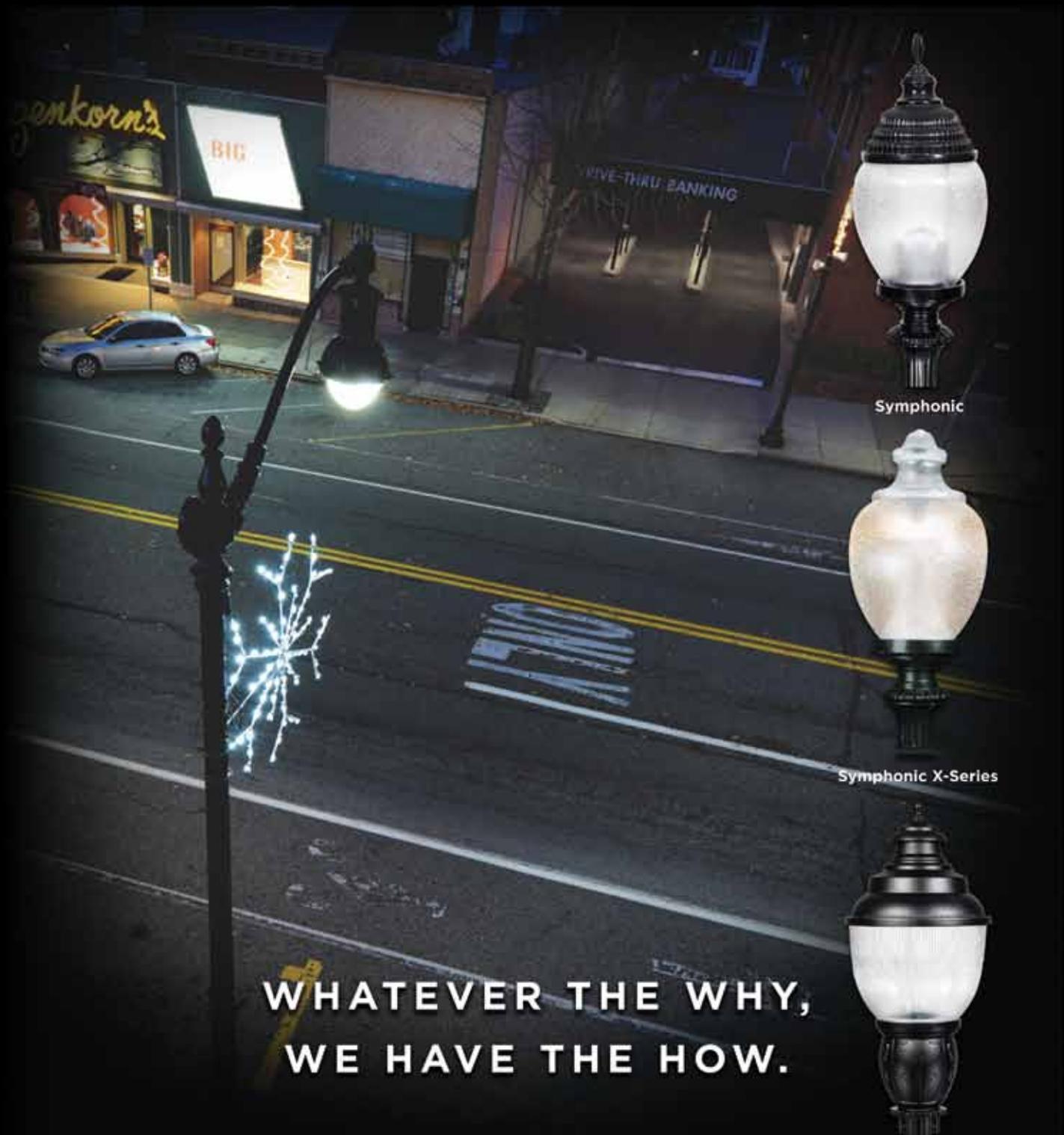
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