

# VIRGINIA

TOWN & CITY

The magazine of the Virginia Municipal League

## Re-imagine the place where you live

Take a page  
from Danville's  
brand makeover





# Policies

## Human Resources Services

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- Sample policies and procedures, interview questions;
- HR audits; and more.





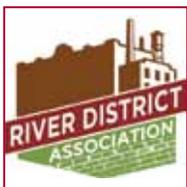
### About the cover

The water tower in Danville displays the city's new brand "Reimagine That." The icon represents a new identity that celebrates the spirit of the town and all that it is becoming.

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## Features



### Reimagine the place where you live

There's an art to rebranding your city or town and it can be learned. Take a look at how Danville created a brand that was believable, exciting and made the whole

city want to join in.

By Arnold Hendrix

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### Can you spot a structural deficit?

If you're an elected official who feels a little overwhelmed by the numbers, here's a guide to spotting one of the most important fiscal dangers – a structural deficit.

By Art Mead

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### When will the bus be here?

As society shifts to a car-lite lifestyle and expects more real-time information, this age-old question demands immediate answers. Transit mobile apps that can tell riders when, where and how long it will take

are becoming an expectation. Blacksburg Transit explains how to decide what you need in a mobile transit app and how to get it up and running.

By Ken Tucker

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### What's your FOIA IQ?

The rules and regulations under the Freedom of Information Act are enough to keep a local official up at night. This quiz will give you a hint as to whether you can put these fears to rest or if you need to go back to FOIA school.

By VML staff

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**Virginia Town & City** (ISSN0042-6784) is the official magazine of the Virginia Municipal League. Published 10 times a year at 13 E. Franklin St., P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, VA 23241; 804/649-8471. E-mail: e-mail@vml.org. Reproduction or use of contents requires prior approval of the Virginia Municipal League and if granted must be accompanied by credit to *Virginia Town & City* and the Virginia Municipal League. Periodicals Postage paid at Richmond, VA. (USPS 661040) Subscription rates: members - \$8 per year, non-members - \$16 per year. Single copies - \$2 each. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to *Virginia Town & City*, P.O. Box 12164, Richmond, 23241-0164.

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# Farmville Furnishing a modern community

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT it has been more than two years since we picked up and moved here from Kansas. We found a great school for the kids and a wonderful area to live in. Until now, we have been leasing a home, but it's time to settle down. We have found a home to purchase and we will be moving this summer.

One of the biggest challenges with moving is outfitting the new home with appropriate furniture. And, as everyone in Virginia knows, the place to go for furniture is Farmville. So, one day we loaded up the Winn family van and headed for Green Front Furniture ([www.greenfront.com](http://www.greenfront.com)).

I am not sure exactly what I was expecting, but I was truly shocked. We pulled up in front of a lovely store and went in. It wasn't long before we discovered that we were just in the rug portion of Green Front. After a nice young lady showed us the map of the warehouses where the furniture is, we headed out.

After just the first warehouse, the boys insisted that they were tired and hungry, so we had lunch at Charley's Waterfront Café ([www.charleywaterfront.com](http://www.charleywaterfront.com)) which is conveniently located right next to the main warehouses. Refueled by the lunch, we attacked two more warehouses before we gave up from exhaustion.

To treat the boys for hanging with us, we decided to



**Completed in 2006, Midtown Square is a mixed-use development adjacent to Longwood University. It has 416 student beds and 45,000 square feet of retail and commercial space.**

look for an ice cream shop. We stumbled upon a Sweet Frog (they didn't have those in Kansas so the boys really love it!). This particular location is in Midtown Square and I was impressed by this modern and obviously successful development.

Midtown Square is a mixed-use development that is adjacent to Longwood University. According to the developer's website, this project is in the location of a demolished shopping center. It includes 416 student beds and 45,000 sq. ft. of retail and commercial space. Midtown Square is a wonderful example of blending living space and retail space to serve the University and the community at large. For more on the Midtown Square development, go to [www.pinnacleconstructionva.com](http://www.pinnacleconstructionva.com). 



**Main Street in Farmville is home to charming boutiques, cafés and restaurants.**

## Suffolk names Deputy City Manager

**Durrell “Scott” Mills** has been appointed Deputy City Manager of Suffolk. Mills was Interim Deputy City Manager since June 2015. He has been with the city since 1987 when he was first employed by the Department of Planning, and has held various positions within that department including Environmental Planner, Principal Planner, Assistant Director and Director. He has also served on two previous occasions as Interim Deputy City Manager.

## Library of Virginia honors Virginia Women in History



- Crittenden -

**Flora Crittenden** and **Meyera Oberndorf** are among eight women being recognized by the Library of Virginia as part of its Virginia Women in History program.

Oberndorf was president of VML from 1995-96. She is the longest-serving mayor in the history of the City of Virginia Beach. Oberndorf died in 2015.



- Oberndorf -

Flora Crittenden worked for 32 years in the Newport News

Public schools as an educator and counselor. She also served as a Newport News City Council member from 1986 to 1990 and then in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1993 to 2003.

## South Boston appoints town manager

South Boston Town Council voted unanimously to appoint **Thomas Raab** as Town Manager. Raab has served as Finance Director since March 2015 and as Interim Town Manager since August 2015. He served on the South Boston Town Council from 1998 – 2005 and was a member and chairman of the Finance Committee for five years. He also served on the Town Planning Commission for eight years.

## David Butler appointed Mayor of Leesburg

The Leesburg Town Council appointed Council Member **David Butler** as Mayor in February. Butler fills the mayoral vacancy created when former Mayor Kristen Umstatt was elected to the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors. Mayor Butler will serve the remainder of the term which expires at the end of 2016. Butler was first elected to the Leesburg Town Council in 2008. He was reelected in 2012 and served as Vice Mayor from January 2013 to January 2015. Prior to his election to Town Council, Mayor Butler was a member of the Leesburg Planning Commission, the Utility Rate Advisory Committee and the Standing Residential Traffic Committee.



- Butler -

## Bruce Gemmill appointed to Leesburg Town Council

The Leesburg Town Council appointed **R. Bruce Gemmill** to fill the council seat vacated by Mayor David Butler upon his appointment as mayor. Council Member Gemmill’s term expires at the end of 2016. Gemmill has over 35 years of sales, marketing, public relations and business development experience. He is currently the Senior Vice President/Chief Marketing Officer for John Marshall Bank. Prior to his appointment to the Leesburg Town Council, Gemmill served as the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors representative to the Leesburg Airport Commission, on the Leesburg Commission for the Public Arts, and on the Leesburg Economic Development Commission’s Performing Arts Center Task Force.



- Gemmill -

## Vinton names Foster Police Chief

Vinton Town Council selected **Thomas Foster**, the son of five-term former Sheriff O.S. Foster, to head the town’s

police force. Foster, a graduate of the FBI National Academy and the FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development School, served with the Virginia State Police for 27 years where he supervised uniform patrol operations and criminal investigative units. He also worked as a public information officer and internal affairs investigator within the department. Foster replaces Chief Benjamin Cook, who retired in October to take a job as a security manager at LewisGale Medical Center.

## Frank Force passes away



- Force -

Former Williamsburg City Manager **Frank Force** died in December. Force served as City Manager from 1967 to 1991. Prior to Williamsburg, he filled that position in Radford, Va. During his

tenure in Williamsburg, Force oversaw the expansion of needed infrastructure while keeping the city debt free, and greatly enjoyed the relationships with those with whom he worked. In addition to leading various public service and charitable organizations throughout his career, Force served as the Virginia representative on the 1980 Commission on the Future of the South, appointed by Governor John Dalton.

## Mayor Thacker dies at 106

**Arthur Raymon Thacker**, Scottsville’s former longtime mayor and town icon, died February 21. Thacker served as mayor of Scottsville from 1966 to 1996 and was the state’s longest serving mayor at the time of his retirement. Thacker’s is widely credited for preserving the town and protecting it from floods that virtually washed away other Virginia communities. In 1989, he secured federal funds to build a \$4 million levee that has since prevented the disruptive and damaging floods that once threatened the town during rainy seasons. In 1994, he struck a deal to annex land from Albemarle County



- Thacker -

and grow the town from a little more than 105 acres to nearly 1,000. Thacker and his brother Homer are credited for the establishment of the Scottsville Volunteer Rescue Squad and Fire Department. He also helped establish the Scottsville Museum. Thacker retired as mayor in 1996 at the age of 86.

### Covington names city manager

The city of Covington has announced the appointment of **Richard Douglas** as City Manager. Douglas was previously Town Manager in Erwin, N.C. from 2013-16. Prior to that, he was Town Manager of Selma, N.C. He also has experience as a county administrator, regional planner, natural resources planner and analyst.

### Harrisonburg expands economic development office

Harrisonburg has hired **Peirce Macgill** as the assistant director of Economic Development, a new position to further promote the city as an active partner for businesses. Macgill will be active in business attraction, business expansion, and entrepreneurial initiatives. Macgill joins Harrisonburg after working for local governments in the Baltimore, Md., region for the past 15 years. Most recently, he served as the business development associate for the Anne Arundel County Economic Development Corporation in Annapolis, Md., since 2012.



- Macgill -

### Foerster retires after 40 years with Parks and Rec

After 40 years of service to the City of Harrisonburg, Director of Parks and Recreation **Lee Foerster** has announced he will retire June 30. Foerster started his career with the City in the 1970s as a member of the mowing crew, while working his way through college. After graduation, he became an athletic supervisor in 1976. He was promoted to athletic director in 1980

and parks superintendent in 1990. In 2001, Mr. Foerster was named director of Parks and Recreation. Under Foerster's leadership, a comprehensive Parks and Recreation master plan was developed in 2003 and updated in 2013. The plan provides a framework for new programs, facilities, and funding in the short and long term.

## Mover and Shakers

Do you know someone who's on the move? Send your announcements about new hires in local government, promotions, retirements, awards and honors to our editor at [nchafin@vml.org](mailto:nchafin@vml.org).

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## Harrisonburg hosts rain barrel workshop

THE CITY OF HARRISONBURG has joined with the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District to host a rain barrel workshop in March. During this workshop, participants will learn how to create, install and maintain a rain barrel.

City residents can receive a 20% credit on their stormwater utility fee for a properly installed rain barrel as part of the stormwater utility fee credit program. More than 63 property owners have received credit for properly installing and maintain a rain barrel.

Rain barrels can be attached to downspouts to capture roof runoff. Water stored in a rain barrel can be used to water gardens or lawns. Rain barrels can also help control stormwater runoff, which can cause erosion.

## Eight ways to celebrate Local Government Education Week in our schools

IN 2012 THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaimed the first week of April as Local Government Education week in honor of the formation of the Council-Manager form of government in the City of Staunton. The Civic Engagement Committee of the Virginia Local Government Managers Association has developed tools to engage students, our future leaders, in order to acknowledge good community building work, educate on the services provided by local governments, and to increase awareness of career and service opportunities with local government.

As part of this effort, VLGMA asks each locality's governing body to adopt a proclamation honoring this week. A template is provided on the VLGMA website: [icma.org/en/va](http://icma.org/en/va).

VLGMA urges localities to develop engagement plans to get schools and children involved. There are numerous resources posted on the website that include great elementary school level books, a high school teachers' resource guide with lesson plans and a report of various civic engagement best practices used by VLGMA members. Activities are not restricted to the first week of April but can occur throughout the year and be highlighted in April.

Here are eight great ways to get kids interested in local government:

1. Provide for all school and public libraries the elementary school level books, *Out and About City Hall* and *Kid's Guide to Local Government*.
2. Conduct guest readings of the books to elementary classes.
3. Encourage your schools to participate in VML's "If I were Mayor" essay contest next fall (go to [vml.org](http://vml.org)).
4. Conduct seventh grade online scavenger hunts to learn about public services.
5. Develop a high school service learning program.
6. Conduct mock council meetings.
7. Share the Teacher's Resource Guide from the VLGMA website. It includes sample lesson plans designed for upper middle/high school students, to be used as part of the curriculum for meeting civics/social studies standards of learning.
8. Be a guest speaker to middle or high school students regarding your service in local government or to discuss community projects (e.g. annual budget, redevelopment effort or capital infrastructure improvements) that the students will see occurring or read about in the news.

For additional great resources, go to the VLGMA website listed above or contact Cindy Mester, [cmester@fallschurchva.gov](mailto:cmester@fallschurchva.gov).

## Western Front Hotel in St. Paul is first recipient of Va. Tourism Growth Fund

GOVERNOR TERRY MCAULIFFE announced that the first recipient of the Virginia Tourism Growth Fund (VTGF) will be the Western Front Hotel in St. Paul.

The new boutique hotel's name honors the rich history of St. Paul and its legacy as a 19th century railroad town. Scheduled to open in the spring of 2017, the hotel will feature 30 standard rooms and six efficiency apartments, a restaurant, a rooftop deck and bar, and a gift shop featuring locally made art and home goods.

The hotel is the result of a total capital investment of more than \$7.2 million. The estimated number of jobs created is 10 full-time and 15 part-time jobs the first year, with an increase to 13 full-time and 20 part-time positions by the end of year two.

The Western Front Hotel will help to increase tourism in an area that is already rapidly growing thanks to new attractions like the Spearhead Trails, which offer more than 100 miles of trails. The hotel will also be the local home for kayakers, canoers, fishermen, and bio-educators

visiting the Clinch River. It will serve as an overflow from major events in other cities, such as races at Bristol Motor Speedway and Bristol Rhythm and Roots Festival. It will also serve the business and service travelers to the nearby Dominion Virginia Power's Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center.

### About the Virginia Tourism Growth Fund

The VTGF is a Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) program established to grow tourism development projects across the state. Projects can include new or expanded facilities or venues for lodging, recreation, entertainment, or epicurean, cultural, or destination retail products or services designed to attract travelers to the Commonwealth. Both nonprofit and for-profit private-sector businesses are eligible to apply. VTGF grant awards cannot exceed 15 percent of project cost, and there is a minimum 1:1 locality match of the VTGF grant award. The project must create net new jobs, and public financing cannot exceed 30 percent of the project cost.

## Historic Waynesboro theatre brought back to life

AFTER 16 YEARS OF DARKNESS, the lights are back up on the stage of the historic Wayne Theatre in Waynesboro.

Originally opened in 1926, the theatre was a movie and vaudeville house. When the Wayne first opened, it had 625 seats, with bronze chandeliers and a pipe organ in the orchestra.

Over the years, the theatre fell into disrepair and, in 2000, it was sold to the city for \$1. The city council at that time formed the Wayne Theatre Alliance to oversee the renovation. Over time, the WTA separated from the city as an independent operation, launching a fundraising campaign in 2007 and putting together a plan to see the theatre operate again.

The \$10 million facility re-opened this month, showcasing the 385-seat auditorium, the 100-seat cabaret, a 125-seat lecture hall and the state-of-the-art backstage and production areas.

In 1929, the Wayne first had the equipment installed to show "talking pictures," offering three shows a day. Today, the Wayne Theatre will honor that heritage with the "Classic Cinema Club" on Mondays. Beginning with the John Wayne classic "The Quiet Man" there will be a classic movie on the screen. The evening shows will include a discussion of the film. Other upcoming movies in the club include "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon," "Forbidden Planet"

and "The African Queen." During this first "preview" season, the showings will be a pay-what-you-will setup, with no advance tickets needed.

Beyond movies and musical performances, it will also be home to a popular local show the River City Radio Hour, which was previously held at a local church.

Several big name performances have already been booked. The Virginia Museum of Natural History plans to hold its 29th annual Thomas Jefferson Awards at the theatre March 24.

Photo courtesy of Mark Miller Photography.



# Why I focus on early childhood education



I'VE HAD A FEW PEOPLE ask me why, as mayor of a town, I decided to focus on early childhood education during my year as president of VML. Some have said education is really the work of school boards. Why not focus on some other topic that is more relevant to town government?

There is no topic more relevant to our town, city, and county's futures than education.

It's become a truism to the point of being more than a little bit hokey to say that "children are our future." Well, I am a proud Hokie and I know that the saying is true. Investment now, before children enter school already behind their peers, is a much better course than paying for remedial education, dropout prevention, and sadly and all too frequently, juvenile incarceration.

I decided to tackle this issue because we need to think differently about all our roles when it comes to early childhood education. Our schools do an excellent job with the resources they have and I am not advocating we interfere with their mission. I am advocating that we find ways to enhance the early childhood experience to build a strong, resilient community able to successfully meet the demands of the future. It is in all our interests that our future residents are well-educated, able to find and hold a job, understand the importance of civic engagement and feel comfortable being part of fabric of our town or city or county.

One of the keys to our success in the future is a qualified, trained, and educated workforce. That workforce will not be available if students do not graduate from high school ready and able to continue their education or begin their working career. And whether we like it or not, kindergarten now goes well beyond pasting cotton balls on pieces of paper or sprinkling glitter on popsicle sticks. Our children's academic career now begins in kindergarten and earlier.

**Whether we like it or not, kindergarten now goes well beyond pasting cotton balls on pieces of paper or sprinkling glitter on popsicle sticks. Children who participate in a high-quality preschool program have a better chance of tackling the academics they will encounter in kindergarten, and a better chance of reading at grade-level by the third grade.**

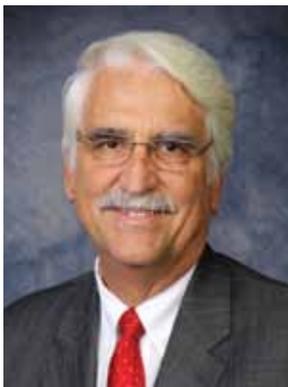
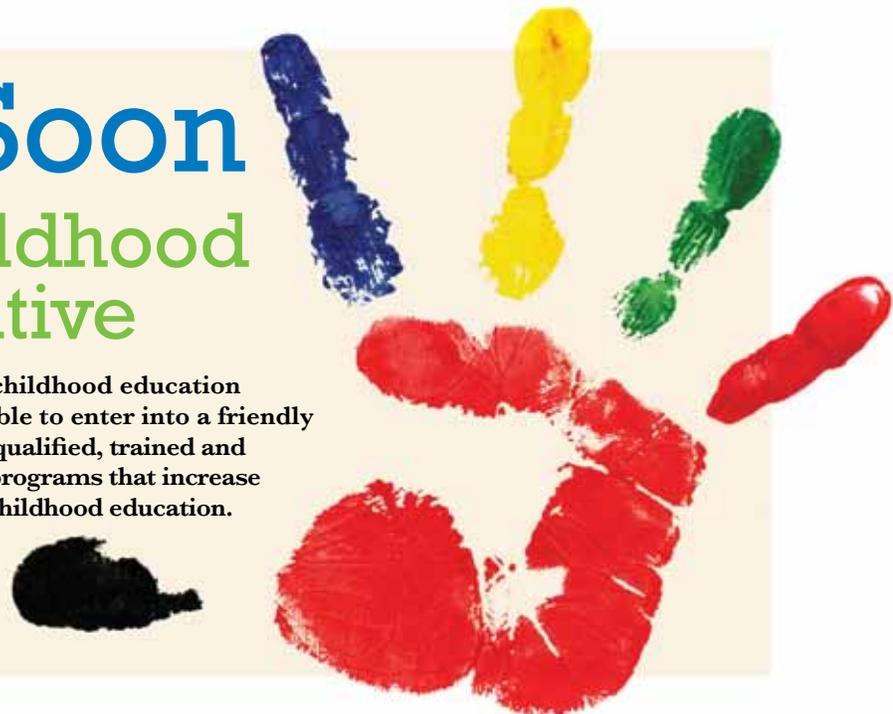
That is why pre-school is so important: Children who participate in a high-quality preschool program enter kindergarten ready to learn. They know how to play with others, how to listen, and how to be part of a group. They have been read to, learned to tell a story, participated in a play, listened to music and heard about the world outside their immediate boundaries. They have a better chance of tackling the academics they will encounter in kindergarten, and a better chance of reading at grade-level by the third grade. They are more likely to complete their secondary education.

As I said at our annual conference, I personally support

# Coming Soon

## VML's early childhood education initiative

**IN APRIL, VML WILL ANNOUNCE its early childhood education initiative. Cities, towns and counties will be able to enter into a friendly competition designed to promote the goal of a qualified, trained and educated workforce through specific practical programs that increase the involvement of local governments in early childhood education. Participating localities will be recognized at VML's awards luncheon in October in Virginia Beach. Look for details on how to sign up in the May issue of *Virginia Town & City*.**



**About the author**  
*Ron Rordam is Mayor of the Town of Blacksburg and President of the Virginia Municipal League.*

universal pre-kindergarten education. At the same time, I'm also a realist, and I know that isn't going to happen anytime soon. What I want to encourage are initiatives that we, as local officials, can take to work with our educators to create an environment to promote this goal of a qualified work force.

VML's early childhood education initiative, which will be rolled out in April, will encourage just that involvement. Cities, towns and counties will be able to enter into a friendly competition designed to

promote the goal of a qualified, trained and educated workforce through the implementation of specific policies and practical actions that increase the involvement of local governments in early childhood education. Participants will receive points for a range of activities and will be recognized at VML's awards luncheon on October 11 in Virginia Beach.

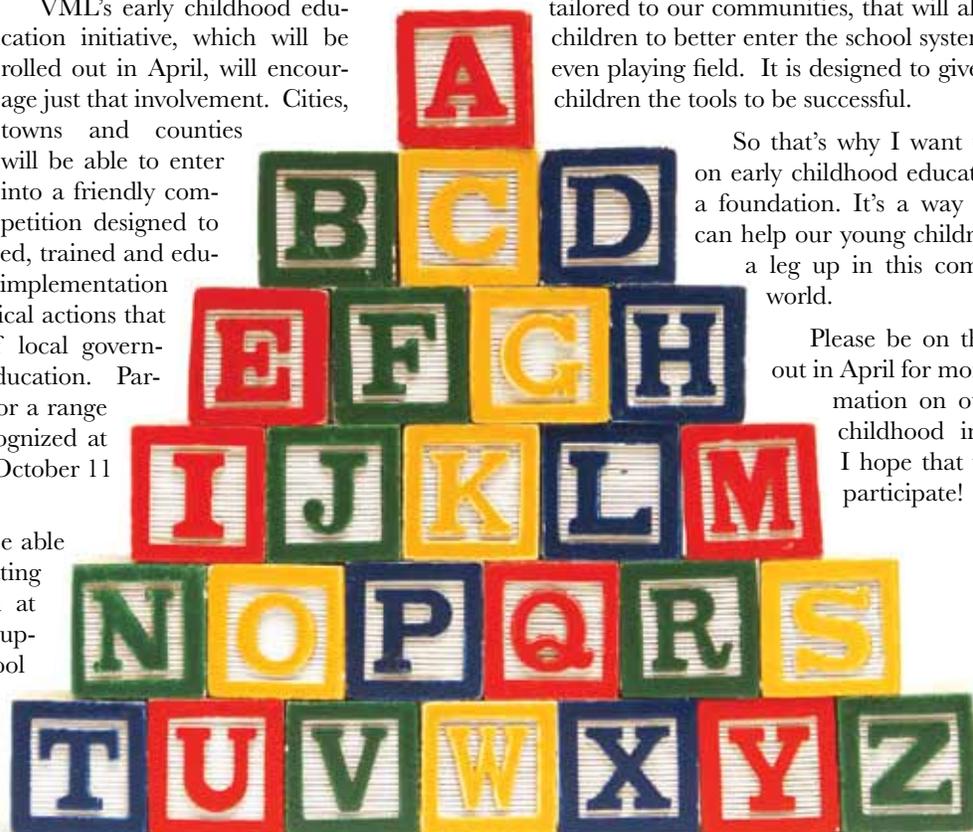
Local governments will be able to earn points by participating in reading programs aimed at preschoolers, by collecting supplies and books for preschool classrooms and by designing parks and recreation programs that introduce preschoolers to the wonders of the world around them.

They can exhibit art in town halls, recognize child care and preschool educators and develop field trips. These are just a few examples of the variety of activities that will count toward participation. And the program will be flexible; we want to encourage creative activities that can be shared with others across our state. I know that a number of local officials and local governments may already be undertaking ventures of this sort, and that is excellent. Those efforts will count as well.

To be clear, the goal is not to interfere with or supplant the current system. It is designed for us to find programs, tailored to our communities, that will allow our children to better enter the school system on an even playing field. It is designed to give all our children the tools to be successful.

So that's why I want to focus on early childhood education. It's a foundation. It's a way that we can help our young children have a leg up in this competitive world.

Please be on the lookout in April for more information on our early childhood initiative. I hope that you will participate! 



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# RE-IMAGINING DANVILLE

The former tobacco and textile town helps residents and visitors to capture the spirit of the town and all that it's becoming

By Arnold Hendrix

**T**AKE A DRIVE into the heart of Danville and you will come to a point where two historic districts – the Tobacco Warehouse District and downtown – are tied together by the Dan River. While downtown languished, the Tobacco Warehouse District could boast of a modest redevelopment, with a community market, concert pavilion and a state-supported science center.

Along the banks of the Dan River, federal money had been used to create a popular walking trail.

Six years ago, city leaders bet they could better redevelop downtown if it were marketed as one with the amenities provided by the Tobacco Warehouse District and the Dan River. With this strategy agreed upon, the “River District” was born.

It has been a winning bet.

Today, private investment is taking place as hoped, and it is outpacing public investment by threefold. Nearly 40 different businesses are flourishing in the River District, and more are coming. There are multiple restaurant choices. Entertainment, health and fitness, and educational opportunities are available.

To capture the spirit of the changes taking place in Danville, city leaders undertook an effort to officially brand the River District.

**“With this brand identity...we challenge everyone to see things not as they are, but as they could be.”**

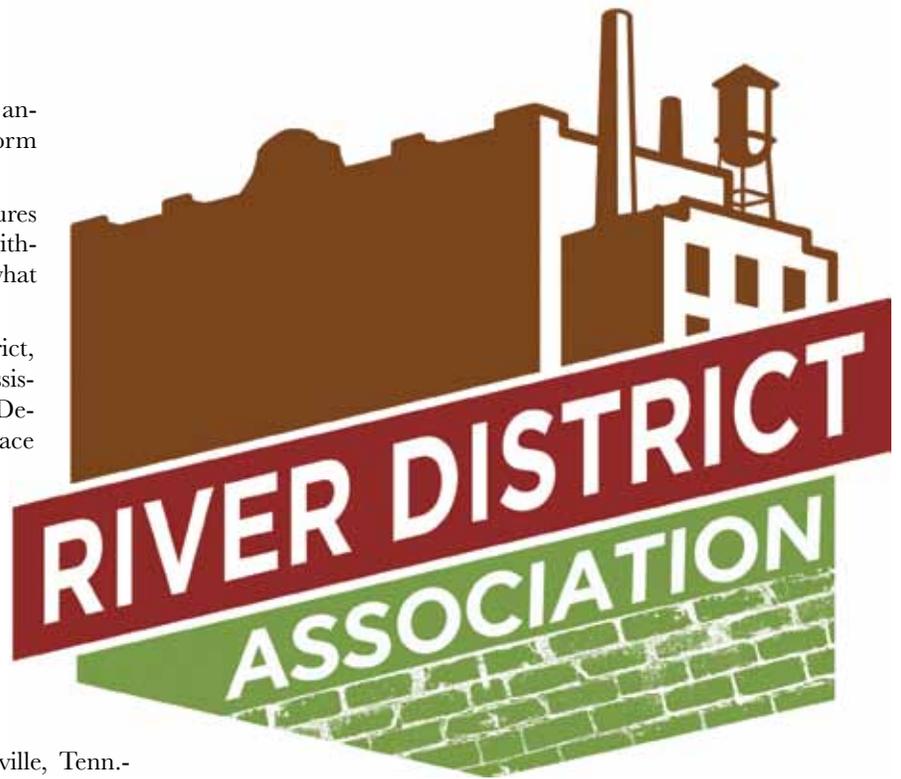
**- Corrie Teague, Assistant Director of the Danville Office of Economic Development**



On May 1, Danville will mark the one-year anniversary of the unveiling of a new branding platform for the River District.

The brand identity “Reimagine That” captures the spirit of Danville and sends a clear message with-in and outside the Danville community about what makes the district special.

“Our message is clear, ‘here in the River District, the status quo is a no go,’” says Corrie Teague, assistant director of the Danville Office of Economic Development. “We have a development model in place for the River District. We have had great success with it, and with this brand identity, we not only celebrate that success, but challenge everyone to see things not as they are, but as they could be.”



## “Do it up big” with the media, the events and the public

North Star Destination Strategies is a Nashville, Tenn.-based firm that has branded towns and cities across the nation for the purposes of tourism, economic development, or to create a consistent community-wide identity.

When it comes to unveiling your brand, North Star officials offer the following advice.

“Take a page out of Danville River District’s branding book. If you are going to publicly unveil your new downtown brand, do it up big! Make it fun. Get the media in on the action. Throw a party. Engage artists and include art. Have dueling pianos and free drinks. And slowly unveil your new logo using a giant crane, your historic water tower, shrouded artwork and a daylong media buildup.

“Even if people don’t like your logo, they’ll dig what you’re all about. (Although the Danville logo has been a big hit!) And isn’t that what “true” branding is anyway? Getting people to understand and dig what you’re about.”

In May of 2015, Danville leaders unveiled the new brand identity amid great fanfare that, with the generous assistance of the Danville Regional Foundation, included fireworks, free live entertainment by Dueling Pianos International, activities for kids, and giveaways, including t-shirts with the new logo and tagline. The logo was unveiled after being hoisted and affixed to a water tower so that it is seen for miles around.

The celebration continued long after the party that night ended.

Daily events and activities were held for another six days – all using the “Reimagine That” brand. For example: an annual spring river cleanup served as a way to “Reimagine the River;” a new concert series debuted as an occasion to “Reimagine Entertainment;” the Danville Family YMCA promoted a movie night as “Reimagine Family Time;” and restaurants joined to allow patrons to “Reimagine Nightlife,” with the first-ever River District bar crawl.

Teague and other City officials encouraged organizations and groups to not only embrace the brand identity during the weeklong events and activities, but to continue to use it.

“This process was not about a new advertising campaign with a logo and a slogan. It was about a believable, shared destination identity that frames the Danville River District. The brand concept is flexible enough for organizations and groups to adapt the message to what they are trying to do.

“We want the outside community – whether it is a business looking to expand or relocate or the creative class of young professionals looking for a walkable, urban experience – to know that we are pushing new ideas and championing change in the River District, so take a look at what we have to offer,” says Teague.

## How a brand catches on

Marketing experts advise localities to create a brand that can be shared by all. In Danville’s case, Reimagine That has been adapted to reimagine anything:

**Reimagine the River – an annual spring river clean-up**

**Reimagine Entertainment – a concert series**

**Reimagine Family Time – movie night at the YMCA**

**Reimagine Nightlife – restaurants join together to host first River District bar-crawl**

**Reimagine Living – a local realty company created a spin off logo**

When businesses and organizations start using your brand, you know it’s caught on!





**In this nighttime view of Danville’s River District, the iconic Dan River Research Building stands prominently in the background. It was the first textile mill building constructed for Riverside Cotton Mills, which later became Dan River Inc. Today, the building is being reimaged as a mixed-use facility. Once renovations are complete, the building will house an orthopedic clinic, specialty services for Danville Regional Medical Center, and retail leasable space to include a coffee shop, casual restaurant and general office space. Photo by Von Wellington.**

## Before the party

This year, the City is in the sixth year of its River District Development Project, which has garnered several awards, including the 2014 Achievement Award from the Virginia Municipal League.

The plan calls for strategic public planning and investment to spur private investment. In 2015, the city completed the fifth year of this award-winning effort. The public seeding has included:

- Repurposing of buildings for residential units and for locating, starting or growing businesses.
- Upgrading utilities and creation of public, outdoor Wi-Fi hotspots in the 300, 400 and 500 blocks on Main Street, with expansions coming.
- Providing additional parking and changing street traffic patterns to provide better access to businesses and parking lots serving stores on Main Street.
- Adoption of design guidelines for the look and feel of the district.
- Completion of two phases of streetscape improvements, including the JTI Fountain and Main Street Plaza.

The fountain and the plaza are where friends meet to take photos in front of the fountain, leisurely stroll along the spacious promenade connecting Main Street to Bridge Street, or simply sit and relax on the benches provided while watching the

fountain in operation. The fountain and plaza also provide a popular venue for a summer series of free, outdoor concerts featuring various jazz, rhythm and blues, and beach music artists.

By the end of March, the City will complete a pedestrian lane on the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Bridge to connect walking trails on the north and south side of the Dan River.

Later in the year, the City will install vehicular, directional and pedestrian signs in and outside the River District. Construction will start the next streetscape phase, which will be on Craghead Street – a major entry route into the River District.

Repurposing of buildings for residential units and for locating, starting or growing businesses continues. Among those is one of Danville’s iconic buildings – the Dan River Research Building. Built in the late 1880s, it served as the first textile mill for what would later become Dan River Inc. The company converted the building for use by its research division sometime in the mid-1900s. It closed in 2006 along with the rest of the company.

Now, this historic building is undergoing a transformation to a leasable medical and mixed retail space. Construction

**Your community brand is not who you say you are, but what people say about you when you are not around.**

began in early October and is on target to be completed by the end of the year. This project represents a smart adaptive reuse of an historic building, and it is expected to create a second wave of development in the River District. The City of Danville was instrumental in getting this project financed by proactively establishing a Community Development Entity to apply for and administer New Market Tax Credits.

## One unified message

The “Reimagine That” brand is designed to complement the city’s development plan for the River District. The conceptual process kicked off in the summer of 2013 when the City contracted with North Star Destination Strategies.

“We knew what we were trying to do in the River District was working, but the question was how to best tie all of this together into one unified message, and then use that message to our competitive advance,” Teague said. “We wanted the outside perspective of a company that conducts quantitative and qualitative research through data and talking to a lot of people. North Star did just that.”

Under the guidance of a local steering committee, North Star proceeded to develop a strategy to define and describe what is authentic, ownable and distinct about the River District.

## Research phase, focus groups

The first stage of the process was the research phase. In addition to gathering demographic and consumer data, North Star visited the community to hold focus groups with stakeholders and to conduct one-on-one interviews with local, regional and state leaders to gather their perspective of the progress in the district.

As North Star learned, like so many communities in this great nation, the industry that founded Danville disappeared along with the jobs and economy associated with that industry. What didn’t go away were the spirit of innovation and the attitude of determination that made Danville great initially and was the driving force behind making this defining Virginia Downtown great again.

Repeatedly, the words “adaptation” and “repurposing” were used during these interviews.

Based off its research, North Star developed a strategy for marketing the community with the creation of a brand platform. This platform read as follows:

“For those with an appetite for opportunity and momentum, Danville’s River District, with its stunning historic architecture along the Dan River, is a celebration of adaptation and repurposing that sparks progress with character and distinction.”

From this, Teague said, a brand narrative was created to “tell our story.” Creative deliverables focused on helping people see the possibilities of everything from a fresh perspective.

Creative details, such as a new logo, color scheme and tagline, were developed. The logo is an innovative mix of old and new with stylized illustrations of the city’s most iconic historic buildings on top. The bottom half of the logo is open to customizations with the River District version featuring an abstract illustration representative of both the Dan River and circuitry representing both the city’s position on the river and high-tech capabilities.

“The new creative elements gave our River District one story, one platform, one voice,” Teague said.

## The spirit of reinvention

An emotional connection exists between citizens and their community. When asked to describe their community in one phrase, most citizens will respond with something such as, “A great place to live, work and play.”

**The best identities are grounded in reality but aspirational in vision. They bridge the past and the present with an eye toward the future.**

However, as North Star officials point out, your community brand is not who you say you are, but what people say about you when you are not around. It is a combination of emotional and intellectual reactions to all the different experiences, marketing communications and behaviors people have encountered on behalf of your community.

Branding is the process a community embarks upon to change, refine or improve what people are saying. It is more than a logo and line. The best identities are grounded in reality but aspirational in vision. They bridge the past and the present with an eye toward the future. They are uncovered and brought to life through a process that unites rather than divides.

For Danville, the “spirit of reinvention” is that bridge between the past and the present with an eye for the future. As evident with the River District Development Plan, Danville is being creative and innovative in how it uses the tools and resources it has.

As Interim City Manager Ken Larking says, “It’s about transitioning from what was to what we can be ... and what we think is so great about the River District. People are beginning to see how important a vibrant River District is for the success of the whole city.”

“Reimagine That” is the credo for the way things work today in Danville. City leaders invite you to visit and meet the Danville spirit. 

### About the author

*Arnold Hendrix is the Public Information Officer for the City of Danville.*

# When will the bus be here?

## How Blacksburg Transit developed a powerful mobile app

“THERE’S AN APP FOR THAT.” In today’s world everyone has heard, and sometimes reluctantly realized, that information is now delivered in a different way than it was ten years ago. Consumers demand accurate, on-the-go, real-time information delivered to their personal mobile device on everything from the weather outside to the wait time at their favorite restaurant.

As many of us in public transportation have realized, that same desire for real time information extends to public transportation as well. In fact, today’s transportation apps have the ability to answer the age old question that all riders have while waiting at a stop: “When will the bus be here?”

Here’s what we all know about transportation apps:

- We have, or can get, real time data on bus location.
- We want to provide real time departure data to our passengers.
- We know that mobile device apps are the best delivery systems for that data.

Here’s what we don’t know about transportation apps:

- Is it more effective/efficient to buy an app off the shelf or develop the app yourself?

The answer to “buying” or “developing” a transportation app begins with another question: What data does the proposed app have to deliver to the transportation provider, and what data must the app deliver to the rider? The answer to this



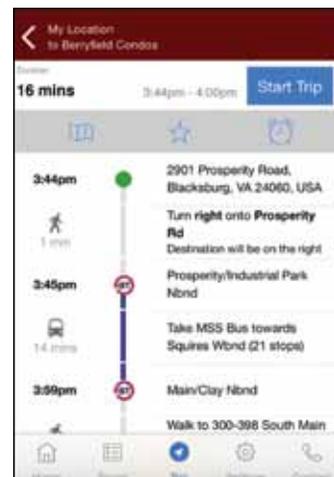
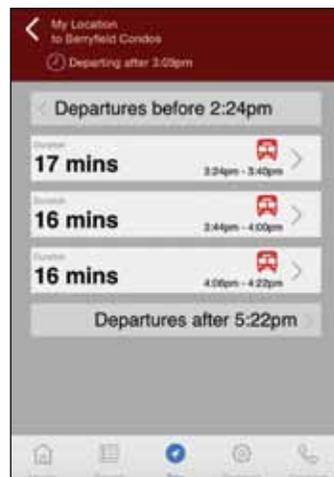
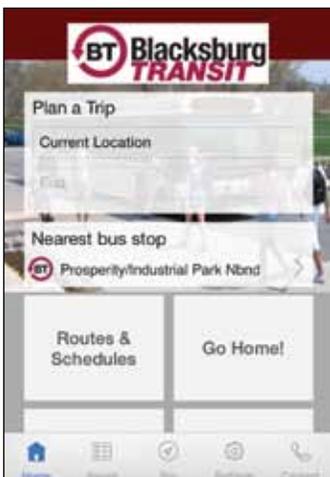
question will ultimately determine whether you buy an off-the-shelf app that meets some of your needs or develop your own app that meets all of your needs. What follows is our story and journey into the app world.

### Merge here: riders’ needs vs. transit’s needs

Like many public transportation providers across the country, Blacksburg Transit (BT) is challenged with providing services that satisfy the demands of the rider but at the same time are operationally efficient for the transit system. In BT’s service area, riders wanted more buses on the road during peak commute times and real-time accurate bus arrival/departure information delivered electronically in a user-friendly format. As a transportation provider, Blacksburg Transit wanted to deliver the right number of buses, to the right places, at the right times.

**The anonymous data that the app delivers back to Blacksburg Transit can be analyzed and used to place the right number of vehicles in the right places at the right time.**

This conundrum was tackled by BT’s Manager of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Tim Witten. Tim and his team started by developing a list of things the app needed to deliver. Tim and his team soon determined that while the list



**Now serving ...**

**Over 20,000**  
downloads since 2014

**7,000**  
average monthly users

(L to R) Home screen BT4U mobile bus app; data returned to rider – next three departures from their stop; trip planning from rider’s location to bus stop to final destination.

Try the App! It’s free. To see how it looks and works, you can download the app from the App Store or Android store by searching BT4U.

# Easy Rider

The current BT4U app provides riders with these convenient features:

- Plan your trip from start to finish using BT buses
- Find real-time bus, route, stop information
- Go now, or select a future departure/arrival time
- Detailed step-by-step instructions and maps for each part of a journey
- Save favorite trips for repeated use
- Many local destinations, including restaurants and retailers are pre-loaded for easy trip planning
- Handy “Go home” feature
- Alarm to remind you when to start your trip
- Contact BT from the app
- Visitor information

was pretty short (see paragraph above), it would be very complex to execute at the app level. After reviewing the existing off-the-shelf transportation apps, they realized these products could not deliver the data we needed or the rider wanted in the same package...so they decided to develop a custom-built app named BT4U.

The custom-built app, BT4U, was funded and developed as part of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Transit Investment in Greenhouse Gases and Energy Reduction (TIGGER) program to capture data that can be used to make proactive demand-based bus scheduling decisions and ultimately reduce the amount of fuel used and improve air quality. Using the \$1.85 million funding from this grant, our ITS department partnered with the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute and a local app developer to:

1. Develop the app.
2. Build the back-end systems to capture the data we needed as providers and at the same time deliver the data the riders needed.
3. Analyze the data for future “smart resource scheduling” of buses.

In April 2014, Blacksburg Transit launched the BT4U Mobile App, the latest phase in an existing suite of products that provide trip information to the customer in an accurate, easy to use and reliable manner.

## The Rider and the App

From a rider standpoint, there are many apps already on the market that provide bus arrival and departure times, however most have limited functionality and rely solely on historical data to guesstimate arrivals and departures. BT felt it was important to provide riders with accurate real-time information contained in a user-friendly trip-planning interface.

Three of the most unique features include a Go Home button, favorite trips and an alarm. When the “Go Home” button is selected by riders, having previously entered their home

address, the app will detect their current position and present them with options to get home. The “favorite trips” feature allows users to save repeat trips. The alarm reminds users when to start their trip.

## How the app serves Blacksburg Transit

From a system standpoint, the anonymous data that the app delivers back to BT can be analyzed and used to place the right number of vehicles in the right places at the right time. By employing this “smart resource scheduling” BT can reduce fuel consumption and greenhouse gases while delivering on customer demands.

The anonymous data collected behind the scenes in the app has the potential to change how the transit industry makes service decisions. Understanding how the rider uses transit, where they board, what their trip length is, where they exit and the times of day they make these trips can change how BT plans service in future years. It may mean that from 7:30 until 8:15 a.m. BT needs 36 vehicles to meet passenger needs, but from 8:15 until 9:45 a.m. only 25 vehicles are needed. By gathering this data BT hopes to make better, more informed planning decisions that will ultimately make the system as a whole more efficient, while also reducing greenhouse gases.

## Results

The BT4U app has proven more successful than originally expected, with over 20,000 downloads since April 2014 and around 7,000 monthly users. As a result, fewer trip planning calls are received by BT staff, allowing them to assist customers with other concerns.

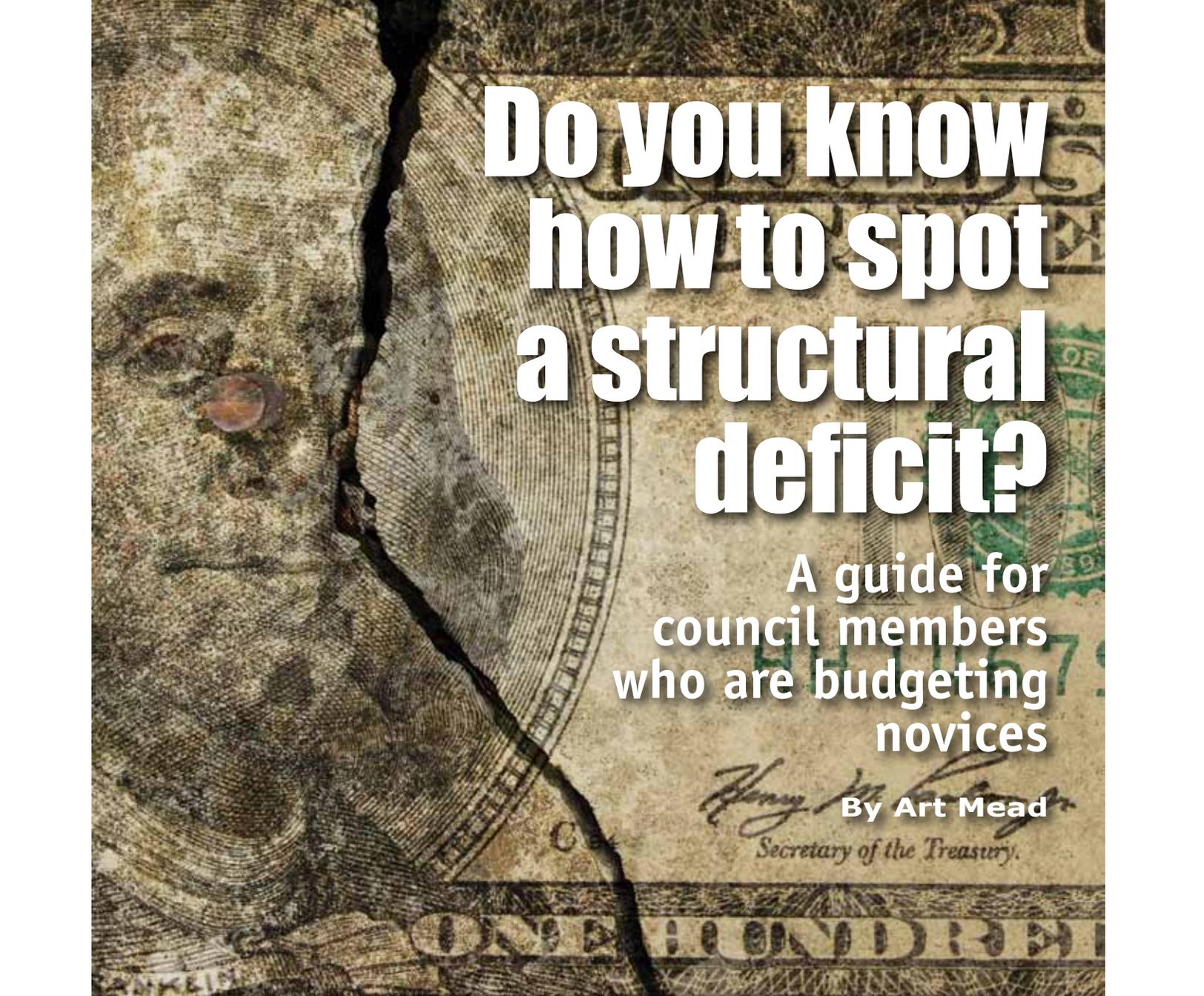


## To Buy It or Build It

Blacksburg Transit recommends that local transit systems develop a functional specifications list, cross-reference that against the products in the market, assess both your funding and development resources and last assess your internal staff abilities to keep a custom app working. That will answer the question whether to buy an off-the-shelf app or to custom build your own. 

### About the author

*Ken Tucker is the Communications and Customer Support Manager for Blacksburg Transit.*



# Do you know how to spot a structural deficit?

A guide for  
council members  
who are budgeting  
novices

By Art Mead

*Secretary of the Treasury.*

**W**hen I was first hired as a Town Manager thirty-five years ago, I was put in charge of a multi-million dollar budget with no in-house finance director. Armed only with college credits in Introductory Accounting and Governmental Accounting, I was well on my way to a time of budgetary baptism by fire.

Still today, the only qualifications required to serve as an elected member of a governing body in a Virginia local governmental jurisdiction are a minimum age and residency status. Indeed, the council/manager form of government almost encourages voters to disregard a candidate's lack of financial credentials because the jurisdiction's professional staff can provide the necessary technical support to elected officials.

As part of that "support," you will, no doubt, be provided pages and pages of financial reports. Despite possessing that data, it is not uncommon to feel disadvantaged because of relative inexperience in the municipal budgeting world. However, if this feeling leads to intimidation, your ability to effectively influence the process and benefit your constituents will be compromised.

## What is a structural deficit?

The structural deficit is a critical, but somewhat elusive concept that even the most experienced practitioners of governmental finance sometimes overlook or ignore ... at least until the opportunity to take less painful corrective action has passed. The retired Executive Director of a Virginia Planning District Commission had a favorite saying: "This is like rearranging deck chairs on the deck of the *Titanic*." He could have been referring to a town ignoring, or being unaware of, a structural deficit.

So what distinguishes a structural deficit from a simple deficit? The answer is largely timing. Falling victim to the narrow-minded perspective of examining only a single cycle (year) of your jurisdiction's budget can cloud an otherwise clear picture of a downward budgetary trend leading to potential insolvency. With any single fund within your larger budget, such as utilities, the fundamental question to ask is: Are our recurring revenues keeping pace with our recurring expenses, and is there evidence of a trend? (This may not suit an accounting textbook's definition, but will suffice for this discussion).

The Social Security Administration is a good example of a structural deficit at the national government level. Despite an accumulation of over two trillion dollars in its trust fund (indeed, probably because of this surplus), the underlying trend of not collecting enough money to cover the benefits paid out each year is not addressed by any corrective action in Congress.

Of course, an ultimate solution is already written into law. When the surplus of federal securities held in the trust fund is depleted, benefits will be reduced to an estimated 80% of that prescribed by the established formula, thereby balancing the Social Security Administration's budget. Meanwhile, the general fund part of the government must then refinance its debt obligations through the open market in the midst of an ever increasing deficit already approaching twenty trillion dollars – truly a painful corrective action of a structural deficit that will be felt nationwide.

## Structural deficits in three Virginia towns

Following are real examples of small Virginia towns that have either ignored or overlooked the evidence of a structural deficit, therefore delaying remedial actions by the jurisdiction's leadership. All of these examples occurred in the wake of the 2008-09 financial crisis:

### Town A - The perfect storm

Only a decade ago, Town A had unencumbered funds, or a surplus, equal to a full year of budget expenditures. During the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2014, the last dollar of that surplus was depleted and the town was left to close the year with several thousand dollars of accounts payable and no funds to pay these outstanding bills on time. Because of the town's financial trouble, none of the local banks were interested in extending credit to help the situation, even on a short-term basis.

I was asked by one official what the town should do if the next payroll came due and insufficient funds were in the town's checking account. Echoing the Social Security Administration example above, my response was that if they had 80% of the amount necessary, they should reduce pay checks for that pe-

**Falling victim to the narrow-minded perspective of examining only a single cycle of your jurisdiction's budget can cloud an otherwise clear picture of a downward budgetary trend. The fundamental question to ask is: Are our recurring revenues keeping pace with our recurring expenses, and is there evidence of a trend?**

riod by 20% and include an "IOU" for the balance with each employee's pay check. The town managed to make payroll by making it the top priority but fell severely delinquent on other obligations. Short-term relief came later as the rush of property tax payments arrived in the late fall. A close analysis revealed that Town A had experienced one of those perfect storms:

- Regional economic conditions had deteriorated thereby contributing to a decline in the town's revenues.
- Town leadership had experienced considerable volatility on both the administrative side and among the elected council.
- For at least one year the budget preparation process had been dominated by a single individual who had not been forthcoming with budgetary information until late in the budget review process.
- Through an unexplained oversight, total revenue projections missed their mark by more than 10%.

Town A's failure to acknowledge that a structural deficit had evolved within its budget, that is, recurring revenues were falling short of recurring expenses year after year (coupled with the absence of any surplus to buy time), brought the town's financial crisis to an immediate crescendo.

## Town B – An unlimited credit card

Unlike Town A, Town B did not suffer from a lack of available new credit. In fact, a local bank had extended a revolving line of credit to the town not unlike a household credit card. With no scheduled amortization of this debt, the town would close one fiscal year in the red and simply move on to the next year, in similar fashion to the federal government. It appears that a short-term loan given by the bank to the town in “anticipation of revenue” had occurred during the early fall of one year before the collection of property taxes allowed revenues to catch up with expenditures. However, as property taxes arrived in the town’s coffers, the short-term loan was NOT repaid.

Rather than declining revenues, Town B had instead fallen victim to unchecked expenditures. These expenditures were neither illegal nor hidden and the town purchased things that the citizenry welcomed. (Like many households, the town let the short-term pleasure of purchasing things outweigh the long-term burden of the resulting debt.) Ultimately, a change of administration occurred and the town’s leadership awakened to its grim fiscal reality. Corrective action required both expenditure cuts and revenue enhancements (i.e., tax hikes).

Like Town A, Town B also had failed to recognize a structural deficit. It was structural in that it continued over multiple years and showed no trend that might bring the budget back into balance. Only the proactive, yet painful, intervention of a new administration was sufficient to provide the necessary corrective action.

## Town C – Borrowing from Peter to pay Paul (and Paul doesn’t live here)

This municipality experienced a structural deficit in its Utility Fund and chose to balance the books by providing a cross subsidy from its General Fund. Whether this strategy was explained and understood by town citizens is not clear. The rub with this type arrangement is that the customers of a town’s utility are not always the same beneficiaries of the governmental services financed through the General Fund.

Most commonly, some portion of a town’s utility customer base lives outside the town’s physical boundaries. (On rare occasions, some part of a governmental jurisdiction will be served by a utility from outside the jurisdiction.) To presume that town tax payers are agreeable with funding services to those who live outside town limits – and thus, not contributing tax revenues to the General Fund – is questionable at best. Some jurisdictions address this issue with an out-of-town surcharge.

Many believe that government should be run like a business and a privately-owned utility would certainly not tolerate a structural deficit because it would be unsustainable as a business entity. Therefore, structuring an “enterprise fund” (such as a municipal utility) to be self-supporting is generally considered a best practice for ensuring its benefits are more transparent.

As varied as these three examples above are, they all share a common thread: corrective action is less painful if taken early.

Of course, recognition of the need for such action is an indispensable first step.

## A council member’s guide to good stewardship of public funds

Your constituents expect you to be a good steward of the public funds over which you have influence. By winning an election, you have become a fiduciary entrusted by the public to conduct their business and you cannot allow yourself to be hindered by apprehension or intimidation.

### Step 1 – Request a simple cash accounting. Keyword: simple

Request a simple cash accounting of the jurisdiction’s financial status on the most recent fiscal year closing date. This data should include:

- **Outstanding debt balances**, including those contained in bond issues, lease-purchase agreements, short-term loans and any other debt instrument or obligation.
- **All cash balances**, including any in escrow or designated accounts.

It is important to keep this cash accounting simple! For example, there is no need to include accounts receivable or to recognize depreciation allowances. It should be possible for the town’s own staff to provide this data no later than the end of July. (It can, of course, also be requested at a later date, even in later years.)

Keep this information in your personal records, along with a reminder on your calendar to request the same data in subsequent years. This annual request for data will produce the equivalent of a simple balance sheet, a valuable tool in revealing a trend if the town staff uses consistent criteria in assembling the data. (Guidelines found in publications by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board or the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts are likely to exceed these simple criteria.)

Two or more of these balance sheets can be compared to gain insight into how your jurisdiction’s finances are trending and end-of-fiscal-year comparisons also correspond best to audited data. But other comparisons can also be made. Rather than comparing successive months, compare the same month in successive years. In other words, it would be more instructive to compare December 2014 to December 2013 than to compare November 2014 and December 2014.

Many larger jurisdictions will already be producing monthly reports internally and some of these likely include the data described above. If not, you are legally entitled to receive it upon request. In fact, any citizen can request this type data via a Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. See VA State Code Section 2.2-3704.



## Step 2 – Insist on receiving a complete budget proposal by April 1 of each year.

Most jurisdictions, including towns, comply with this standard. (Those that do not are in violation of Virginia State Code Section 15.2-2503). While your administrator or manager is not required to deliver this document in a state of balance, it is recommended that the council add that expectation as an internal requirement. This provides a better starting point from which the council can do its work.

Despite having the three months of April, May and June, most governing bodies are not able to dedicate adequate attention to the budget without scheduling work sessions separate and apart from regularly scheduled meetings. Saturday work sessions are often among the most productive. February is not too early to start the process, by focusing on those parts of the budget puzzle for which data is already available.

Reminder: While work sessions are open to the public by state statute and FOIA, members of the public are not entitled to verbally participate. That is the function of public hearings.

Also, it is perfectly legal for the administrator or manager to spend “one-on-one” time with an individual member of the council. However, the wise administrator or manager will offer equal time to all of his/her elected bosses.

## Step 3 – Establish a surplus or “rainy day fund”

Most jurisdictions need to start their fiscal year with some level of surplus to avoid cash flow problems during periods when revenues do not keep pace with expenditures – a common occurrence in the fall of each year. Holding some level of cash reserves in general is also a prudent measure to protect against emergencies. Yet, none of this means that a jurisdiction cannot adopt official guidelines to define “how much surplus is enough.”

This recommendation is not mandated by state code and therefore would require support of a majority of the council to implement. However, the Commonwealth of Virginia does provide a strong example – the Revenue Stabilization Fund, better known as the “Rainy Day Fund.” Unfortunately, some jurisdictions suppress public discussion of surplus funds carried forward from one fiscal year to the next, but an open adoption of a “Rainy Day Fund” line item in the budget offers an opportunity to add structure and formality to a practice that the town may already follow in a casual way.

A “Rainy Day Fund” modeled on that of the State of Virginia would include formal triggers activating the transfer of funds in or out of this reserve account depending on financial events within the jurisdiction’s account balances. A withdrawal from the “Rainy Day Fund” raises a budgetary red-flag indicating an existing or developing deficit situation and it is likely to attract the attention of even the least attentive council member. The net result for all interested parties is greater accountability.

## Step 4 – Don’t be misled by the size of the numbers

This step is a word of caution rather than a recommendation. Do not allow yourself to be lured into a premature judgment based only on the limited knowledge of a bottom line. This can happen at either end of a spectrum.

At the upper end, one can be nearly awestruck by the enormity of a balance. Whether it is a million dollars, ten million dollars, or even the two trillion dollars held in the Social Security Trust Fund, the experience of some professional athletes or lottery winners who find themselves flush with cash only to fall into relative poverty is an appropriate analogy. Indeed, the two trillion dollars in the Social Security Trust Fund allows

**A withdrawal from the “Rainy Day Fund” raises a budgetary red-flag indicating an existing or developing deficit situation and it is likely to attract the attention of even the least attentive council member. The net result for all interested parties is greater accountability.**

elected leaders to ignore actuarial projections that show a disturbing structural deficit. The result? The ultimate corrective action that will be required to address the problem grows more daunting with each passing year.

At the lower end of the balance spectrum it is possible for repeated cash-flow shortages to shock those with a limited grasp of the larger budget picture. For example, it is possible for a town to experience a negative balance in its general fund and still finish the fiscal year in the black. When this is anticipated, it is usually possible to temporarily shift funds from another account into the general fund or to borrow funds “in anticipation of revenues,” bridging the cash-flow gap. However, a more comfortable solution is to work toward building a sufficient year-end surplus to finance the jurisdiction’s operations during such anticipated periods of cash-flow deficiency. (In the long-term, the jurisdiction can also develop a Rainy Day Fund policy to support it, as discussed above.)

Many people are not inclined to find budgets and financial reports interesting and that should not preclude them from serving as effective elected officials. However, it is in the larger community’s best interest that all those elected to public office possess a sufficient understanding of their respective jurisdiction’s budget. By taking these simple and proactive steps to examine your town’s budgetary trends, you will be able to make a more informed judgment and better serve your constituents.



### About the author

*Art Mead is the Assistant Director for the Southwest Virginia Office of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at University of Virginia. The article was edited by Travis Perry of the Weldon Cooper Center.*

# The biz plate special

## Norfolk Community Business Cafés showcase neighborhoods and inspire entrepreneurs

**W**HEN YOU HEAR CAFÉ, you probably think food, right? In Norfolk, the city has opened the doors on two cafes' where you won't find food but dishes of helpful business advice.

Community Business Cafés offer a menu of business, real estate and technical resources to entrepreneurs and developers. The Cafés take place bi-weekly in a relaxed atmosphere. Attendees can dive into specific topics, network and build relationships.

"The Cafés are at the heart of our comprehensive urban revitalization model," said Peter Chapman, Deputy City Manager of Economic and Community Development. "We have tremendous local, state and federal partners working with us to provide free resources and support. Each Café suits the specific character of the neighborhood, advancing the authentic and vibrant spirit we have in Norfolk."

In charting this endeavor, it was apparent that Norfolk needed to showcase each neighborhood in its authentic vibe. Norfolk conducted several "Better Block" demonstration projects, which gave community stakeholders an opportunity to transform vacant storefronts into pop-up shops and eateries to imagine the possibilities.

In the case of Park Place, soul food restaurants, new residents, a brewery and artisanal manufacturing are charting an "uptown funk" vibe attractive to existing small businesses and residents interested in entrepreneurship.

Norfolk launched its first Community Business Café in the Park Place neighborhood in 2015. The Café offers free services to Park Place residents interested in starting a new business, expanding an existing firm or relocating a business. Services

**The Cafés are at the heart of our comprehensive urban revitalization model.... Each Café suits the specific character of the neighborhood...."**

**– Peter Chapman, Deputy City Manager of Economic and Community Development**

include financial, marketing, management and technical assistance. It also provides entrepreneurs with the organizational framework, resource network, and motivation to build sustainable businesses in the community.

The city next targeted the Ocean View commercial corridor and in February opened the Ocean View Business Café.

Ocean View offers seven miles of coastline centered between Naval Station Norfolk and Little Creek Amphibian Base. This eclectic coastal village has undergone dramatic change.

East Beach, a 300-acre development, carries the label as one of the best designed coastal villages in the country. Upscale, but limited mom & pops have opened up.

In a city where thousands of active duty military men and women are making the transition to "veteran" each month, the Ocean View Business Café will offer a wealth of services to veterans. Veterans and returning service members bring unique skills and experiences to the civilian workforce and the City is committed to retain these talented veterans.

The city, which has been certified by Virginia Values Veterans (V3) since 2012, will continue to enhance existing veterans' programs by helping employers implement nationally recognized best practices in recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans and will assist veterans interested in opening a new business. (See V3 story on next page.)

The Ocean View Café will offer V3 trainings and identify existing veteran-owned businesses. By partnering with the SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development, the Cafés hope to maximize the availability, application and usability of all SBA programs for veterans.

Norfolk plans to open more Cafés in other key commercial corridors throughout the city in the future. The Community Business Café offers the right ingredients to achieve urban revitalization, job growth and opportunity for all residents. 

### About the authors

*Lori Crouch is the Corporate Communications Director for the City of Norfolk. Sarah Parker is the Assistant Director of Marketing for the City of Norfolk.*

**(right) Norfolk City Manager Marcus Jones meeting Park Place youth volunteering at the Community Business Café.**



**The kick-off event for the Park Place Business Café.**

# Recruiting veterans for local government jobs

## Localities discover the benefits of partnering with Virginia Values Veterans

**M**ORE THAN 20 cities, towns and counties have made a formal commitment to recruit veterans for their administration, police and fire departments, sheriff's office and other types of jobs. By partnering with Virginia Values Veterans (V3), they have learned that hiring veterans gives them a competitive edge in workforce development and can even attract businesses to their region.

Since becoming certified with V3 in 2012, the City of Norfolk has hired more than 250 veterans while the Norfolk Sheriff's Office hired an additional 100 veterans. In the past three years, Chesterfield County has hired more than 250 vets. In Loudoun County, the Sheriff's Office alone has hired almost 50 vets.

Founded in 2012, Virginia Values Veterans is a Virginia Department of Veterans Services program that helps employers understand, design, and implement nationally recognized

**“Generally veterans have been through a crucible of training and experiences that have helped them to develop discipline and leadership skills that are difficult to measure but invaluable to employers.”**

**- Bonnie Baker, Military and Veteran Affairs, City of Norfolk**

best practices in recruiting, hiring, and retaining veterans.

The program is free to join and approved by the Society for HR Management for continuing education credits. Just six



Sheriff Michael Chapman (left) and Sergeant Barry Dufek of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office recruit veterans for civilian staff as well as field and correctional deputies. Recruiting officers go to job fairs at military bases like Quantico and Camp Lejeune to connect with soldiers transitioning from active duty.



## Pete Garner

**Job Title:** Civil Engineer Officer, City of Norfolk

**Branch:** U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force

**Years of Service:** 23.5

**Deployments:** Kansas, Missouri, Virginia, Kuwait, Southwest Asia

**“The City of Norfolk is very open to hiring veterans and tries to do so whenever possible. It’s great serving the citizens of this city since so many of them are currently in the military, retired or support the military as civilians.”**

hours of training can certify HR staff and other officials in how to recruit, train and retain veterans.

The training helps employers gain “veteran cultural competency,” according to Andrew Schwartz, program manager of Virginia Values Veterans. HR professionals “have to know the mindset of the veteran to set them up for success. We teach HR staff to build a case for why vets improve productivity and efficiency.”

Knowing how to recruit veterans is essential in a city like Norfolk where, every year, more than 10,000 military personnel stationed in Hampton Roads transition from active duty to civilian life.

“We are working hard to make Norfolk a fantastic home for military and their families and this is one tool we use,” says Bonnie Baker with the city’s Department of Development, Military and Veteran Affairs office. A retired Colonel herself, Baker says the transitioning service members from the military make Norfolk “a great place to do business because we have a ready pool” of skilled workers.

Baker says veterans make great hires for many reasons. “Generally veterans have been through a crucible of training and experiences that have helped them to develop discipline and leadership skills that are difficult to measure but invaluable to employers.”

Sergeant Barry Dufek of Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office agrees. “Veterans’ tactical and leadership experience are a great asset. And they typically have a great work ethic.”

Of the roughly 50 veterans hired in the past three years, Dufek says they fill a variety of position from civilian staff to field deputies and correctional deputies.

Unlike Norfolk, where there is a large local pool of transitioning military, the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office has to go farther to connect with veterans. The Sheriff’s Office has a supplemental recruiting unit that travels to locations like Quantico, Va., and Camp Lejeune, N.C. to participate in job fairs.

“Our agency is in competition with many other agencies in NOVA, so we try to find transitioning soldiers looking for law enforcement careers,” says Dufek.

He says the department tries to send recruiters with military backgrounds to bases in their branch of the military – Marine to Marine and Army to Army, for example.

“These current employees can relate to soldiers and provide good information about why our department is a great place to work,” says Dufek.

The Governor’s office and the General Assembly have put additional resources into veteran workforce development. In 2015, the General Assembly appropriated \$100,000 to develop a pilot program specifically for internships and on-the-job training for transitioning service members.

Likewise, the Department of Defense issued a directive allowing military installation commanders to release transitioning servicemen and women to train in the private sector for up to six months prior to the end of their military service. Virginia is the first state to have a liaison between the military installations and private companies and municipalities to help facilitate these opportunities.

In addition to helping local veterans find good jobs, Virginia Values Veterans is also helping the state to attract new talent to Virginia. “We can advertise to transitioning members worldwide bringing them to Virginia for hard-to-fill jobs,” says Schwartz.

By providing attractive employment to more veterans, Virginia develops a stronger workforce and, in turn, can attract businesses to our state. It’s a win-win. 

### About the author

*Nancy Chafin is editor for Virginia Town & City.*



# WHAT'S YOUR FOIA IQ?

How well do you think you know the Freedom of Information Act? Do you know enough to stay in line with the rules? Or are you at risk of making a costly mistake? This quick quiz will give you a good idea whether you're up to speed or in need of a refresher.

*View the answers and scores on the following page*

1. **In the event of a personal emergency, can a council member attend a meeting electronically?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Under certain circumstances
2. **How many days does our locality have to respond to a records request under FOIA?**
  - a. 5 days
  - b. 10 days
  - c. 15 days
3. **Do we have to compile data that we have not previously maintained in order to fill a FOIA request?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. **For a first offense, what is the penalty for failure to comply with a provision of the Freedom of Information Act?**
  - a. \$500 – \$2,000
  - b. \$1,000 – \$4,000
  - c. \$2,100 – \$5,500
5. **Council created an advisory committee on the location of a new fire station. The committee does not include any elected officials, but is made up citizens from across the town. Is this committee subject to FOIA?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
6. **We had a major water leak that has rendered our council chambers unusable for several months. The only other room in the city hall large enough to accommodate the meetings is the courtroom, but recording devices are not allowed in that facility. Is that allowed?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. If certain circumstances are met
7. **Our chairman ruled that members of the public could not speak on a matter that our board discussed at a recent meeting. Didn't that violate the act?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
8. **Am I allowed to ask a records requester what he or she intends to do with the records?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. In certain cases
9. **May we refuse to disclose records that are still in draft form?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
10. **Which of the following types of documents is NOT exempt from disclosure?**
  - a. Medical records
  - b. Scholastic records
  - c. Employee salaries
  - d. Public library records of patrons and items they borrowed
11. **I am a member of council and I use my home computer and a gmail account to answer some of the emails I receive from residents of my city. Do I have to keep copies of these emails?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

## ANSWERS TO KEY FOIA QUESTIONS

### 1. In the event of a personal emergency, can a council member attend a meeting electronically?

- C.** If an emergency preventing the member's attendance arises on the day of the meeting; the member advises the public body of the emergency, and the public body votes to allow the members to participate. This exception can only be made by the same member twice in a calendar year or for 25% of the meetings, whichever is less.

There are other circumstances in which members of a public body may attend meetings electronically:

- The member has a permanent disability or temporary physical condition that prevents his or her attendance on the day of the meeting.
- A member of a *regional* public body lives more than 60 miles from the meeting location.

### 2. How many days does our locality have to respond to a records request under FOIA?

- A.** The initial response must be made within five business days of the receipt of the request, regardless of whether the custodian plans to provide the records, request more time to provide them or claim and exemption to all or a portion of the request. If the custodian fails to respond within the times required, the law considers that to be a denial of the request and makes it a violation of the act.

#### Obtaining a seven day extension.

If it is not practically possible to provide the records within the five days, the custodian may send a written response to the person explaining the conditions that make the response impractical. After that, the custodian will have an additional seven workdays to respond. He or she will still have a total of 12 workdays to respond.

In addition to the 12 days to reply, a public body may petition a court for even more time to respond to a request. The additional time will likely be granted if the public body can demonstrate that the volume of records requested is so large that it would disrupt its operations to respond in the prescribed time and that it is unable to reach an agreement for a time to respond with the requester. It is highly recommended that the public body attempt to work out an agreement for an extension of time with the requestor prior to petitioning the court.

### 3. Do we have to compile data that we have not previously maintained in order to fill a FOIA request?

- B.** No. The custodian is not required to create records if they do not exist. For example, if a request is for a list of trash collectors who do business in a locality, and the locality does not have such information, there is no requirement to create that list.

That said, there is a subsection of the Act that encourages public bodies to abstract or summarize information in a manner agreed to with the requester. For example, if the requester asks for the data to be sorted by a category – such as dollar increments low to high – and that is reasonably simple to accomplish – then the locality is encouraged to do so.

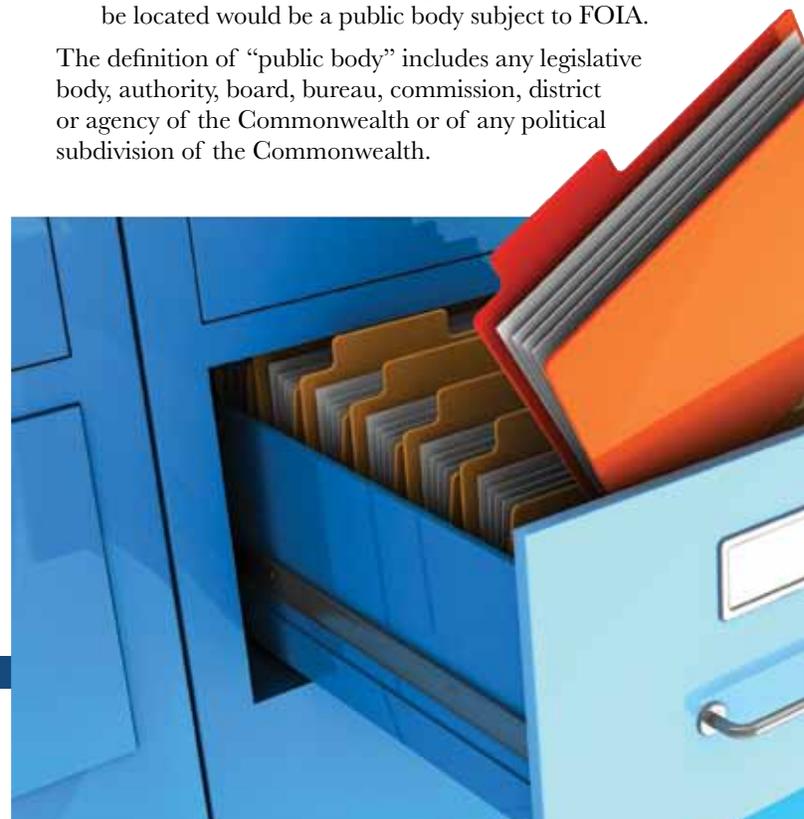
### 4. For a first offense, what is the penalty for failure to comply with a provision of the Freedom of Information Act?

- A.** If the court finds that an officer, employee or member of a public body willfully or knowingly made a violation, the court can impose a civil penalty of not less than \$500 nor more than \$2,000. That's for a first offense. For a second or subsequent violation, the penalty can be between \$2,000 and \$5,000. The penalty must be paid by the member of the public body and not from public funds.

### 5. Council created an advisory committee on the location of a new fire station. The committee does not include any elected officials, but is made up citizens from across the town. Is this committee subject to FOIA?

- A.** Yes. Likewise, a citizens' committee formed by the city or town to advise where a park or school should be located would be a public body subject to FOIA.

The definition of "public body" includes any legislative body, authority, board, bureau, commission, district or agency of the Commonwealth or of any political subdivision of the Commonwealth.



6. **We had a major water leak that has rendered our council chambers unusable for several months. The only other room in the city hall large enough to accommodate the meetings is the courtroom, but recording devices are not allowed in that facility. Is that allowed?**
- B.** No. Public bodies may not meet in a location where recordings are prohibited. If a courtroom, for example, has a standing order forbidding any form of recordation, public body meetings must be held elsewhere.
7. **Our chairman ruled that members of the public could not speak on a matter that our board discussed at a recent meeting. Didn't that violate the act?**
- B.** No. The act does not guarantee that the public be allowed to speak on every subject discussed at every public meeting. It only guarantees the public's right to be present. Many other statutes however, require public bodies to hold public hearings on specific matters.
8. **Am I allowed to ask the requester what he or she intends to do with the records?**
- B.** No. The Virginia Supreme Court has ruled that the motive for a request for records is irrelevant. Idle curiosity is sufficient. Even if the requester wants the records for commercial purposes or to use in a political campaign, the public body must make them available. The requester is not obliged to tell the custodian his or her occupation or to explain why the records are being requested.
9. **May we refuse to disclose records that are still in draft form?**
- B.** No, not any longer. When the act was first adopted, it specified that disclosure was limited to "completed acts or transactions." But a 1999 amendment to the act makes it clear that even unapproved drafts of the minutes of a public body must be disclose upon request.
10. **Which of the following types of documents is NOT exempt from disclosure?**
- C.** Even though salary information is a personnel record, the act requires disclosure of the position, job classification and salary or pay rate of any state or local public office or employee who earns more than \$10,000 per year.
11. **I am a member of council and I use my home computer and a gmail account to answer some of the emails I receive from residents of my city. Do I have to keep copies of these emails?**
- A.** Yes. E-mails that deal with public business are public records. E-mails kept on the home computer of a council member or local government employee that relate to the transaction of public business are public and subject to inspection and copying by a citizen who makes a request to see the records.



**YOUR  
SCORE**

### **8 - 11 points – Expert**

You know your FOIA facts! Proceed to the head of the class!

### **5 - 7 points – Par Performer**

You know some of the basics, but probably should brush up. Check out the trainings and resources below.

### **0 - 4 points – Novice**

You probably need a refresher course. See opportunities below.

### **Training and Resources**

VML offers FOIA training as part of its Institute for Local Officials. This event is July 22-23 in Richmond. See page 27 for details. You can also find the VML's 2016 FOIA/COIA guide online at [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org). Finally, check out all of the great resources from the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council at [foiacouncil.dls.virginia.gov](http://foiacouncil.dls.virginia.gov).

**April 8  
VLGMA meeting - Deputies,  
Assistants, and Others**

The Virginia Local Government Manager's Association Deputies, Assistants and Others will host a semi-annual meeting, April 8, 10 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in Yorktown. This meeting is geared toward deputy and assistant local government administrators and local government staff members. Registration is \$20; deadline is March 30. Go to [www.icma.org/en/va](http://www.icma.org/en/va).

**April 10-11  
VBCOA meeting**

The Virginia Building Code Officials Association will host their midyear conference at the Holiday Inn University and Conference Center in Charlottesville. For more information, go to [www.vbcoa.org](http://www.vbcoa.org).

**April 14-16  
Local Gov't. Attorneys  
Conference**

LGA's spring conference will be held at the Sheraton Virginia Beach Oceanfront Hotel. To register, go to [www.valga.org](http://www.valga.org).

**April 20  
General Assembly reconvenes**

The General Assembly returns to the Capitol on April 20 to consider amendments and vetoes sent down by Gov. Terry McAuliffe. Stay tuned for VML action items related to the reconvened session.

**April 21-22  
Clerks conference**

The Virginia Municipal Clerks Association will host its annual conference at a location near Dulles airport. A class in Six Sigma for the public sector will be offered. Registration ends soon. Go to [www.vmca.com](http://www.vmca.com).

**May 4-6  
VGFOA Spring Conference**

The Virginia Government Finance Officers' Association will host its spring conference at the Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront Hotel in Virginia Beach. To register, go to [www.vgfoa.org](http://www.vgfoa.org).

**May 19 - June 23  
VML Spring Regional Suppers**

VML will host six regional suppers throughout the state, providing local officials with latest news and developments affecting local government. Register for one near you at [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org).

# Eat and Greet

# SPRING



## Regional Suppers

Each spring and fall, VML hosts regional suppers around the state to give local government officials the latest news and developments affecting localities in Virginia. Elected and appointed officials from member localities are encouraged to attend one of these informative get-togethers.

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

May 19	Town of West Point	St. John's Episcopal Church
June 2	City of Winchester	The George Washington Hotel
June 15	Town of Big Stone Gap	Carmine's Visitor Center
June 16	City of Danville	Institute for Advanced Learning and Research
June 22	City of Suffolk	Hilton Garden Inn Chesapeake / Suffolk
June 23	Town of Gordonsville	Town Office

Regional suppers include presentations by VML staff and other subject experts on important issues for localities. Each supper starts at 6 p.m. and costs \$35.

## Want to see more jobs?

Go to [www.vml.org](http://www.vml.org) for the most comprehensive listings of local governments jobs throughout Virginia. Jobs in every discipline are added weekly. VML members can also post job openings at the site free of charge.

### **Construction Program Inspector (Senior), Harrisonburg**

Job Deadline: April 30. Full Time. Salary: \$41,017 - \$47,174. Full Benefits. Responsible for inspection of construction projects for specification compliance including water, sewer, street, sidewalk and related City capital infrastructure projects. Monitors and inspects contractor and private developer construction, erosion and sediment control, and stormwater management measures.

### **Director of Parks and Recreation, Harrisonburg**

Job Deadline: April 29. Full Time. Salary: \$77,854 - \$124,592. Full Benefits. Director of Parks and Recreation is responsible for supervising and directing the activities and use of public recreation facilities such as playgrounds,

parks, swimming pools, tennis facilities and recreation centers; evaluating the adequacy of existing parks and recreational facilities and works to secure needed alterations and additions.

### **Librarian, Petersburg**

Job Deadline: April 28. Full Time. Salary: \$39,147 - \$64,475. Full Benefits. Successful candidate will plan, implement, and manage a comprehensive program of library services to the citizens of Petersburg, especially children and teens. Coordinates and implements the Summer Reading Program, story times, and a diverse array of other programs. Works with area school personnel and other community agencies (including daycares). Requires a Master's Degree in library science.

### **Retirement Accountant, Roanoke**

Job Deadline: April 25. Full Time. Salary: \$38,598 - \$45,000. Full Benefits. Candidate will maintain financial records, primarily in the area of financial reporting. Compile and analyze financial information used in the preparation of complex financial reports. Prepare journal entries, financial reports, statements and verifies financial data.

## Marketplace

### **Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney II, Albemarle County**

Job Deadline: April 25. Full Time. Salary: \$72,958 - \$87,550 DOE/DOQ. Full Benefits. This position serves as a prosecuting attorney for the Commonwealth of Virginia in all criminal matters pending before the Albemarle County General District Court, Albemarle County Circuit Court, the Albemarle County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, and on occasion acts as special prosecutor in other jurisdictions within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **Public Works Manager/Director, Manassas Park**

Job Deadline: April 22. Full Time. Salary: \$92,000-\$112,000 - DOQ. The Berkley Group seeks a qualified, self-motivated applicant to serve as contract staff to the City of Manassas Park. The applicant should possess experience managing public works municipal operations including street maintenance, refuse/recycling collection/management, snow & ice removal, stormwater management, water/sewer system management, personnel management experience.

# If you're not getting it, you're not getting it.

## Don't be caught uninformed on local government issues!

The VML eNews gives you all the latest developments affecting local government – from legislation in the General Assembly and Congress to new grant opportunities and other resources available at the state and national level.

The eNews also notifies you of training and educational opportunities specifically for your field in local government.

It's the most comprehensive e-newsletter for local government officials.



The newsletter of the Virginia Municipal League

To get all the news you can't afford to miss, subscribe to VML eNews at [VML.org](http://VML.org).



# INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS

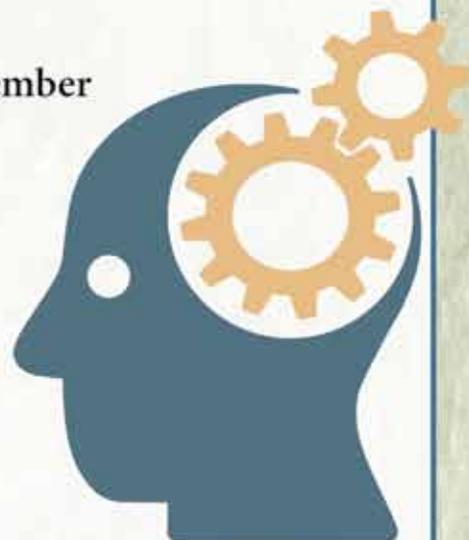
KEY TRAINING FOR NEW & VETERAN OFFICIALS ALIKE

**July 22-23, 2016**  
**Hilton Richmond Downtown**  
**501 East Broad Street**  
**Richmond, VA 23219**

This event replaces what was previously known as the Newly Elected Officials Conference and is open to newly elected officials and veterans alike.

## TOPICS

- Fundamentals of serving as a council member
- Making the most of meetings
- Budgeting
- Freedom of Information Act
- Conflicts of Interest Act
- Interacting with constituents
- Working with the media
- Public officials' liability

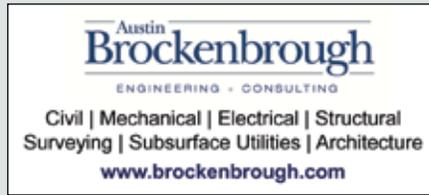


Attendees will earn 10 of the 40 hours required to achieve Level One (Local Government Basics) certification in the Virginia Leadership Academy.

Cost: \$175 for Members and \$75 for Guests

Hotel accommodations are available at the group rate of \$121/night.

For questions or more information, please contact Anita Yearwood, CMP, CGMP at (804)523-8534 or [ayearwood@vml.org](mailto:ayearwood@vml.org).



# Want to reach the local government executive market?

## Put "Virginia Town & City" to work for you.

Call Anita Yearwood at (804) 523-8534 and ask about Professional Directory and display advertising.



Start a *metamorphosis*  
**of your own.**



Join the growing number of Virginia communities using VHDA financing to bring about revitalization and affordable, quality housing. With our flexible new financing options, your plans for building a brighter future can begin to take flight. Contact VHDA's Director of Rental Housing Development, Dale Wittie at 804-343-5876 or [Dale.Wittie@vhda.com](mailto:Dale.Wittie@vhda.com).

 Follow VHDA's Blog: [vhda.com/blog](http://vhda.com/blog)



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