

# Blue Ridge LEADER & LOUDOUN Today

FEBRUARY 2024

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## NextEra Energy attorney elected to State Corporation Commission

BY AUDREY CARPENTER

A current NextEra Energy senior attorney and former legal advisor to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Commissioner Mark Christie was elected to the Virginia State Corporation Commission (SCC) Jan. 24 by the Virginia General Assembly.

### GOVERNMENT

Kelsey Bagot has been working for NextEra for 1.5 years. Prior to that she was the legal advisor to Christie for two years. Christie himself is a former SCC chairman.

Bagot is a Loudoun County resident and graduated from Harvard in 2014, according to her LinkedIn page. She has held 5 jobs in 10 years with her longest tenure being just under three years. The SCC position is a 6-year term starting April 1.

Just last month, the *Blue Ridge Leader*

reported on a current class action lawsuit against NextEra and a \$60 million bribery and corruption scheme involving a second energy company, FirstEnergy, which resulted in a 20 year prison sentence for an Ohio legislator and a \$230 million government fine: <https://blueridgeleader.com/company-to-build-transmission-lines-in-loudoun-has-history-of-legal-problems/>

NextEra and FirstEnergy are the two companies selected in December 2023 to build the highly controversial MidAtlantic Resiliency Link (MARL), an electrical transmission project that would build 130-miles of 500-kilovolt transmission towers and lines from Southwestern Pennsylvania, through West Virginia and Maryland to Virginia, along with a new 500/138-kilovolt substation.

MARL must get approval from the SCC, as well as other involved states, before construction can begin on the transmission towers, lines and substation.

Bagot is the attorney who wrote a Nov. 22, 2023 letter to FERC requesting that FERC allow reimbursement for costs that NextEra will incur for the MARL project before NextEra was even selected as the project's contractor. NextEra and FirstEnergy were not approved by PJM Interconnection, the region's electrical grid operator, as the contractors on the MARL project until Dec. 11, 2023.

Moreover, in her letter, Bagot asked for FERC to allow reimbursement to begin Jan. 22 in advance of the MARL project being submitted to the SCC for review. Bagot's letter can be seen here: <https://www.pjm.com/directory/etariff/Ferc->

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Dockets/7748/20231122-er24-472-000.pdf.

Ironically, in a Dec. 19, 2023 FERC meeting, Commissioner Christie criticized the very practice of FERC allowing companies reimbursement, or "incentives", in advance of projects being approved.

"First, the Commission's incentives policies for years have been ridiculously

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## Majority council vote clears way for Rt. 7/690 Interchange

BY VALERIE CURY

"I understand; and I hear you; and I feel you," said Purcellville Mayor Stan Milan at the Jan. 23 Town of Purcellville Town Council Work Session before his – and a majority council yes vote – to vacate "a

### GOVERNMENT

part of a plat on which is shown a 100-year flood plain easement." The vote to vacate was 5-2 with Council Members Chris Bertaut and Carol Luke voting no. Milan voted against his repeated promises to Purcellville citizens

in the Catoctin Meadows community to defend them.

Council Member Carol Luke said she had read a lot about the Rt/ 7690 Interchange. "I lived in a flood plain. I lived in a 100-year flood plain in Aldie and it did do the 100-year flood. It wasn't any fun. I know what it feels like.

"I know what it feels like to lose electricity for 3 days in an 1803 farm house. I know what it feels like to bail my basement all night long.

"This is on us. This isn't a joke and try

to get homeowners insurance when you live in a 100-year flood plain." Luke said she was lucky enough that her insurance had a tiny loop hole that "saved our goose."

"I totally think that the county wants what they want and I think we are letting down our citizens when we don't protect our rights and their property. Most of us have most of our money in our houses ... and you need to protect that.

"Don't go take all of my money out of my house. I want it and we don't want to

do that to you. I don't think it's right.

"As I read all the information that we have, all I can think of is bailing water all night and losing a whole lot. You can not afford to do this to people."

**Said Luke, "It's just the wrong thing to do** and I would say, since the county has used a flood plain survey from 1977 in order to come up with this plan – they owe it to the citizens of the town to do a current flood plain analysis." Luke said the residents "need to be thoroughly

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# “ IT'S LIFE CHANGING

Finally! A local Doctor is helping cancer survivors live lives free from the constant pain and suffering associated with  
**Peripheral Neuropathy!**

Irreversible is not a word you want to hear from your Doctor but it's a common one if you've been diagnosed with Chemotherapy-Induced Peripheral Neuropathy or CIPN.

John T. of Leesburg survived testicular cancer only to be living life in constant pain. He felt as though he were walking on pins and needles, becoming weaker and weaker every day. "I was beginning to be worried that one day I would be wheelchair-bound."

**Nearly half of the patients who undergo chemotherapy will develop Chemotherapy-Induced Peripheral Neuropathy or CIPN.**

Chemotherapy meds travel throughout the body and attack cancer cells; sadly they can also cause severe damage to healthy nerves. CIPN can begin within weeks of starting treatment and can worsen as treatment continues. A high number of really unfortunate people will be forced to endure the symptoms associated with CIPN for months, or even years after they've completed chemo.

When asked how CIPN was affecting his quality of life, he responded, "It was difficult to even walk up and down stairs and do other things we usually take for granted."

**The most common symptoms include:**

- **pain, tingling, burning, weakness, or numbness in arms, hands, legs, or feet**
- **sudden, sharp, stabbing, or shocking pain sensations**
- **loss of touch sensation**
- **clumsiness and trouble using hands to pick up objects or fasten clothing**
- **loss of balance and falling**

For some, their nerves will recover over time. For most, the nerve damage is 'irreversible.' John had been told just that by a series of Doctors and specialists. Essentially they could cure his cancer but couldn't fix the damage done by the drugs used to cure his cancer.

Then John made a call to Rachal Lohr of FIREFLY |Acupuncture & Wellness right here in Ashburn. Rachal and her team are using the time tested science of Acupuncture and technology originally developed by NASA that assists in increasing blood flow and expediting recovery and healing to treat this debilitating disease.

After a series of treatments John was taking stairs with stride!

"We have a beach house and it's up stairs. This morning I walked right down the stairs and got in the car," John shared.

**"I remember thinking 'That's become mighty easy for me', I didn't have to hold on to the handrail or anything! It's life-changing to have this mobility back!"**

Again and again, we meet with patients who were once diagnosed as "untreatable" or "incurable" but after receiving Rachal Lohr's treatments are now living lives free from pain and suffering. For almost 17 years she has been reversing the effects of CIPN and other varieties of Peripheral Neuropathy, including that is caused by diabetes without invasive surgeries and medications that come with uncomfortable side effects.

If you've recently beat cancer only to find that you're living a life in constant pain and discomfort or you're struggling with the same symptoms as a result of either Idiopathic Neuropathy or Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy, Rachal and the incredible team at FIREFLY can help!

Rachal Lohr is now accepting new patients but only for a limited time. In an effort to protect her patients, both current and future, she has made the difficult decision to limit the number of patients seen in her clinic.

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# From struggle to success



## Marie De La Fleur opens in Landsdowne

Six years ago, Natalie Ramos would have never expected to be opening a restaurant with her daughter. Six years ago on this very day, Ramos knocked on her neighbor's door and asked if she would help her boil pots of water so that she could give her 11-year-old daughter a bath.

It was a few weeks prior that LAWS Shelter gave Natalie gifts and food for her younger daughter for the Christmas holiday and Loudoun Cares would also aid in restoring the electricity and heat that was disconnected in the midst of the winter.

Today, as she gazes out of the window to the view of snow cascading over her window panes, she remembers the 17 staples left to her by the aftermath of domestic violence. She remembers asking God for strength and making a promise that if he helped her build a legacy, she would use it to change the world.

Her daughter Tiana shortly moved from Colorado back to Virginia to help her build the legacy she imagined.

Upon her arrival to Virginia, Tiana immediately used her culinary expertise she gained from the Culinary Institute of America to help her imperiled family; working side by side with her mother to make that dream a reality.

Today, Chef Natalie resides on the board of two non-profits that help those in a similar situation as her in the past, she has become the recipient of the Rising Star Award for the National Association of Women Business Owners, and her daughter, who has recently taken the helm of the family business, has received the award for Superior Service for the Small Business Awards for the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce.

Not only has this become a dynamic and phenomenal mother/daughter team, but the entire family contributes to the family business by giving their free time or by being employed directly by the company she has built, and her daughter continues to grow.

Through their catering company, Natalie and Tiana have donated in excess of \$250,000 in donations and services to churches, nonprofits, shelters, hospitals, teachers, schools, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and individuals not only needing but wanting to change their lives.

Natalie and Tiana Ramos added another chapter to their lives with the Jan. 16 grand opening of their restaurant, Marie De La Fleur, located at 19375 Magnolia Grove Square in Leesburg. They are located within the Landsdowne Woods Senior Living community.

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# How to cope when your pre-teen/teen doesn't want to spend time with you

BY MICHAEL OBERSCHNEIDER, PSY.D.

There is certainly a lot written on the Empty Nest Syndrome – the period of grief that many parents feel after their grown child leaves home – but there are far fewer articles on how parents can best navigate their pre-teen or teen's journey toward independence while still living at home.

The journey from childhood to adulthood is marked by significant emotional and developmental milestones, one of which is the onset of the "Separate Nest Syndrome." This term captures the essence of a phase in a pre-teen or teen's life where they begin to assert their independence, often distancing themselves from their parents and family.

The period can be challenging for parents who might feel a sense of loss, confusion and rejection as their once dependable and engaging child starts to pull away. It's a natural evolution in the parent-child relationship, but it can stir up emotions for both parties.

It's not uncommon for pre-teens or teens to spend more time in their room or with friends and less time

communally as a family member, and that can occur in several ways – from pre-teens or teens not wanting to sit down for family meals, to their not wanting to go on fun family vacations.

While this stage of parenting is a difficult one emotionally for parents, it's important to remember that the quest for independence in pre-teens and teens is a fundamental aspect of their growth – your child isn't selfishly doing this to you, they're doing this for themselves as part of their development.

It's during these years that our growing children start to carve out their identity, separate from their family. This process involves exploring personal interests, and relationships outside of the family unit. The preference for spending time with peers is a healthy developmental sign, as friends provide a mirror through which pre-teens and teens can see themselves as individuals, distinct from their role in the family.

In the era of digital connectivity, social media platforms like TikTok have become a ubiquitous part of pre-teen and teen life. These platforms offer more than just

entertainment; they provide avenues for self-expression, community building, and identity exploration. It's important to understand that they are using these spaces to navigate the complexities of social interactions and self-discovery in a digital age.

So, how do we manage the emotional bruising that can occur when our pre-teen or teen pulls away from us or the family? The separate nesting phase of parenting is a time for parents to come to terms with and accept their own feelings of loss or loneliness while appreciating that their child's independence is a sign of healthy growth. Recognizing and respecting this transition – and not over-personalizing it – is the first step in maintaining a positive relationship during this time.

In any healthy and important relationship communication is key. It's essential to talk openly with your child about the changes you're both experiencing. Approach conversations with empathy, an open mind, and a loving heart, ensuring that your child feels heard.

Work together to create the new normal. During this

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## Ask Dr. Mike

By Michael  
Oberschneider, Psy.D.

# Just like nothing (else) on earth: Leesburg Presbyterian Churchyard

BY TIM JON

I am not one to dwell in the past; in the performance of my six-day-a-week job, my colleagues and I generally work at such a frantic pace that we joke about forgetting our own names. That's not as far from the truth as you might guess, what with mail carriers expected to organize every letter, catalogue, magazine and parcel for roughly five hundred individual households.



TIM JON

Then we load the items into an antiquated – often cantankerous – vehicle and safely and correctly deliver each piece on a route stretching anywhere from 10 to 60 miles – all the while scanning hundreds of items along the way with a device many of us believe was constructed in Hades.

Having described the greater portion of my day-to-day work schedule, I also find it deeply therapeutic – perhaps even lifesaving – to find various means of stress relief – or de-compression – both after a particularly arduous day, and at the end of each work week. After serving – essentially – as the tip of a spear being thrust into the gearworks of time and space, I simply slow down – stop, even – long enough, not only to literally remember who I am, but to allow the past to catch up with me.



This long introduction pretty much describes each journey I take in approaching one of these stories. I step out of the continuously turning wheel of chronology and capture moments – both on camera and etched upon the soul – which remain – if I'm doing THIS job correctly – indelible, and immune to decay or mutation. Then, mission accomplished, I quite literally leap back into the spinning wheels of time and hurl myself headlong into the rapidly-approaching future.

Now, it's hard to deny the existence and importance of the past in a historic churchyard. Worn gravestones,

some dating back hundreds of years, carefully-tended grounds remaining essentially unchanged for a similar time period, and of course the house of worship – serving as a familiar landmark for the whole community.

When I last paid a visit to the Leesburg Presbyterian Church, artifacts from the past greeted me at my car door and accompanied my tour along the entire length. You see, much of the property at the local religious facility remains devoted to ancient burial plots – stretching from the parking lot on the west side of the Church to the walkway on the east side of the original brick structure.

The years can speak volumes. Many of the gravestones reveal a two-hundred-year-old chronology, and portions of the brick-and-mortar worship space date back to the Year 1804.

I find it far less pressing to succumb to present-day worries of grappling with malfunctioning technology and other cumbersome implements as I walk the grounds of an historic congregation, literally fertilized with the clay and dust of those who came before us. The uncounted remains beneath the heavy stones expressed absolutely no care for my recent tribulations, or my intermittent worries of the foreseeable future. I find it much easier to let go of the momentary rules, orders and

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# Milan and Rayner do a U turn

BY VALERIE CURY

For a third time since the council vote on Nov. 14, 2023, Council Member Chris Bertaut tried to get the majority of town council's approval to remove the Northern Collector Road from the 2009 Purcellville Town Wide Transportation Plan. At the Jan. 23 Town Council Work Session, the new majority on council voted 5-2 to wait years until a study is done before considering the removal of the Northern Collector Road. Council Members Carol Luke and Chris Bertaut voted against delaying the removal.

Just two months prior, in a Nov. 14, 2023, town council meeting, council voted to approve easements necessary to build a water tower near the Mayfair community – with the caveat of immediately removing the Northern Collector Road from the town transportation plan. Removing the NCR from the plan would make it more difficult in the future to extend Mayfair Crown Drive to Fields Farm Road.

**In addition, the County Department of Building and Development, Land Development Division has asked the applicant of the proposed Valley Commerce Center, which is across the road from Mayfair to put in an alignment for the Northern Collector Road. The potential alignment is directly across the road from Mayfair Crown Drive on the conceptual plat.**

In a memo on Sept. 8, 2023, county staff wrote, "Staff notes the proposed right-of-way dedication for future north collector road. Staff questions if a temporary turn around will be provided until such time that the future collector road is completed as a through road."

At the Nov. 14 meeting then Council Member Erin Rayner, a resident of Mayfair said, "If we vote to approve this [easement we need] immediate action to update the amendment to the Comprehensive Plan to say that road will not go through. We'll put it to an end – that argument. So, I think it's a good idea."

At the same meeting Mayor Stan Milan said he agreed with then Council Member Ron Rise Jr. who said the council should take immediate action after the easement is approved "to amend the Comprehensive Plan and update the 2009 Transportation Plan to reflect those intentions. We should make the intention clear that there's no intention to connect this road [Mayfair Crown Drive to Fields Farm Road which would also be known as the Northern Collector Road]."

Said Milan, "I would like to echo

the comments of Council Member Rise. It's imperative that we do make known that the intent is not to connect to the Mayfair Crown Drive."

At the Jan. 23 work session, Bertaut said he was bringing back the issue before council and "there is a list of changes that reference individual citations of the Northern Collector Road" as well as the mention of extending O Street.

O Street is currently a dead-end street, but Casey Chapman has spoken about his desire for the town to extend O Street from 21<sup>st</sup> Street through to Hatcher Avenue. Extending O Street would dump traffic from Chapman's approved Vineyard Square project onto Hatcher Avenue.

The Vineyard Square project was approved 13 years ago by the Lazaro council, and since Chapman has all the permits, he can build the project at any time.

Said Council Member Chris Bertaut at the Jan. 23 meeting, "This list is coming around the 3<sup>rd</sup> time to town council and the intent here is to amend not to revise the transportation plan, the difference being that in amending we simply take out dated or no longer functional references to projects or structures that either are not recommended by the comprehensive plan or perhaps should never have been there in the first place.

"One of the arguments we've heard on previous rounds of discussions is that we need to revise," Bertaut said, adding that would be a "top to bottom long range" goal." He said that completing a revised plan would take at least 2 years between putting the money into the budget and executing a complete revised plan.

Bertaut said the town didn't put the NCR into the 2009 Transportation Plan using any study. "They just copied and pasted from the county long range transportation plan. We just dropped it in place."

He said that to be consistent with the town's comprehensive plan – which was updated in 2020 – "there's a specific recommendation to remove the NCR from the town's plan. It says the town council does not approve of the NCR.

"So far we have had nothing but verbal assurances from our county elected officials that the NCR itself is dead. The county however has done nothing to remove the NCR from its own transportation plan."

"The action item here is to direct the planning commission to once again review the references to the NCR and

remove them where they do not make sense," said Bertaut.

Vice Mayor Erin Rayner said, "It's bad policy to ad hoc-ly [sic] remove something from our transportation plan."

**Cutting off further discussion Rayner then said,** "So, with that I move to end the consideration of the removal of the Northern Collector Road and O Street as referenced in the 2009 Transportation Plan and end considerations from the planning commission

regarding this topic until a new town wide transportation plan has been completed."

Her motion passed with a majority. Mayor Stan Milan, and Council Members Mary Jane Williams, Caleb Stought and Kevin Wright joined Rayner to shut down discussion and action from the planning commission about removing the Northern Collector Road and O Street from the 2009 Purcellville Town Wide Transportation Plan.

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# A Eulogy for Bad Larry

BY CHARLIE HOUSTON

I usually write about the imperative to save western Loudoun and address land use issues. A recurring theme has been populism – the county belongs to its people, not businesses or promoters. This, though, is about a particular person.

## OPINION

### Quality of Life

Everyone seems to know what “quality of life” means, but do we really?

Obviously “quality of life” in western Loudoun includes our farms and lands, the Blue Ridge, elbow room as opposed to dense development, peace and quiet.

I think our quality of life is superb, and part of what makes it so is the people who live here.

### Rescuing a Sheep

As I write this, a stray sheep – a ram – has escaped his paddock after his caretaker died and is wandering the neighborhood. Five or six people have jumped in to corral

Mr. Sheep, take him to a safe stall in our neighbor’s barn and start trying to find him a new home.

Knowing your neighbors and pitching in to help on something like this would have been unlikely inside the Beltway. It’s part of daily life here, though.

The Good and Not-So-Good

A good quality of life demands good people, and we are blessed. We are also blessed by having an extended circle of friends that goes much further than just people of similar upbringing, education, occupation and interests. We are enriched by some folks for whom “good” is not quite accurate. Such had been Mr. Sheep’s caretaker, Bad Larry.

### Bad Larry

Maintaining a farm of any size takes a lot of work, energy, time and knowledge. Add horses and pet goats and donkeys, and you need help. That’s why I hired Bad Larry some years ago.

Larry called himself “a hillbilly.” He was scrawny, slovenly and somewhat sneaky. Larry was not smart in a quantitative sense; he was probably one standard deviation short of mean IQ.

When your job is to muck stalls, feed horses and put out hay, lacking one standard deviation is not a problem.

### Larry Moves In

Larry lived with two other hillbillies in a shack north of Lovettsville. It was vile, as

were his house mates. Larry wanted out and asked if he could park a camper at our place for a while.

“Sure,” I said.

Larry’s camper was a rusty 1986 Dodge Caravan he parked next to a barn. It was his home and he had no complaints. I was glad to have farm help on the premises at all times.

Larry started with a good attitude and an acceptable work ethic. In addition to his barn work, he’d mow the lawn, bush-hog pastures, do basic carpentry, and so on. He amused me and was quite funny in a down-home way. I’ll never know if he planned his humor or if was accidental.

### Larry Could Be Funny

Here are actual conversations I had with him, word for word:

Charlie: “How far did you get in school?”

Larry: “My family wrote me out in the six-and-a-half grade.”

Charlie: “How old were you in the six-and-a-half grade?”

Larry: “Seventeen.”

Charlie: “Larry, you’re supposed to be raking the walnuts, not talking to them!”

Larry: “It’s okay if they don’t talk back.”

Charlie: “What’s up, Larry?”

Larry: “I need to get me a fat woman.”

Charlie: “Why on earth do you want a fat woman?”

Larry: “‘cause the regular ones won’t have nothing to do with me.”

Charlie: “Larry, how many brothers and sisters do you have?”

Larry: “Six or seven.”

Larry: “Sometimes I ain’t right in the head.”

Charlie: “What do you mean?”

Larry: “They tell me I got mental thinking confusion disorder.”

That was definitely true. Larry once said something about “smoking green cigarettes.”

“What’s a green cigarette?” I asked.

Larry suddenly spoke like an educated chemist. Using proper English and good grammar, he rattled off a list of chemicals he mixed into an elixir of illegal drugs, in which he soaked cigarettes.

### Why Bad Larry?

Larry did his chores at about the 70% level. He resented being told what to do. He was sticky-fingered and I learned the hard way not to leave cash on tables or counters.

However, the real reason we called him Bad Larry was to distinguish him from another Larry who helped us with plumbing, electrical stuff, carpentry, and more.

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## Medical treatment should be focused on treating all patients

Dear Editor:

I am writing regarding an email written by Sherita Hill Golden, PhD. Chief Diversity Officer at Johns Hopkins Hospital. Dr. Hill is the Director of the Diversity Equity and Inclusion office at Johns Hopkins. The email was sent to all Johns Hopkins faculty and was also shared online. In the email Dr. Hill Golden discusses “privilege.” She says “privilege” provides advantages and favors to those in the dominant group at the expense of those in other groups. She says privilege is characteristically invisible to people who have it. She goes on to say privilege is granted to people who have membership in one or more of the following groups such as white people, heterosexuals, males, and Christians, to name a few.

Her definition of “privilege” and her list of all those who are “privileged” causes concern. I would not want to be a patient in a hospital where faculty and staff, when treating patients, are taught to discriminate and put people into groups.

As the director of DEI, she has ranked people into separate groups. Inclusion should be her goal, not exclusion. A hospital is in business to treat all people who are ill, regardless of rank or status as determined by the office of DEI.

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## 45 days of early voting is excessive

Dear Editor:

Another commonsense bill was killed by democrats in our state Senate. SB 81 would have reduced our 45 days of early voting (first put into VA law in 2020 due to COVID) down to three weeks.

Our Senators Perry and Subramanyam sit on the Privileges and Elections subcommittee. Both of them, along with all the other democrats on the subcommittee, voted to kill the bill before even debating the merits.

Senators Perry and Subramanyam endorse the tired talk that reducing the number of days for early voting amounts to voter suppression. Really? It must be terrible to be a voter in our neighboring states.

Maryland and North Carolina permit early voting beginning the third Thursday prior to election day. That’s about 18 days. In Tennessee, early voting starts 20 days before election day. In West Virginia, it’s 13 days. In DC, 10 days. And in Kentucky, it’s 5 days.

The reality is that 45 days of early voting is excessive. Mainly, it’s a drain on the over-worked county General Registrars who run elections, their staff, and the election officers from each community who oversee and execute the election.

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were stunning. I had an amazing experience. I will definitely be doing further house renovation projects with them. I wholeheartedly recommend Granite Center to anyone who is looking for a team that will make a kitchen renovation the most easy and rewarding process!"

“The professionalism of the team is outstanding. The entire process was very efficient. They handled the entire process with diligence, attentiveness, and great communication. I had a hard time choosing because all of their designs were stunning. I had an amazing experience. I will definitely be doing further house renovation projects with them. I wholeheartedly recommend Granite Center to anyone who is looking for a team that will make a kitchen renovation the most easy and rewarding process!” – Happy Customer

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# Milan road blocks planning commission's Vineyard Square legal questions

BY VALERIE CURY

On Jan. 4, while working on updating the zoning ordinance, the Purcellville Planning Commission said they have asked several times for legal opinions on three items. The commission has asked, through staff, for the town attorney to render the legal status of the Vineyard Square project, "and we have not heard a response on that," said

## GOVERNMENT

Planning Commission Chair Nan Forbes. "We requested that the town attorney review the procedures followed by the county for Catoctin Meadows Lot 74, and render an opinion if all the proper steps were taken and in the proper order, and we have not heard a response on that."

A residence located on Lot 74 of the Catoctin Meadows Homeowners Association Subdivision, purchased by the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, was extinguished by then Zoning Administrator Don Dooley on July 12, 2022. Dooley who was also the Planning and Economic Development Director at

the time, extinguished Lot 74 with his signature on a plat titled dedication of right of way.

County Administrator Tim Hemstreet signed the deed of dedication to extinguish the lot on the same day. This was done without any notification, discussion or public hearings both at the Planning Commission and Town Council level. It was only discovered when citizens looked at a county map and could no longer find Lot 74 in the county records. Dooley resigned in December 2022.

The planning commission also requested a legal opinion on non-conforming lots – generally 25 ft. wide sliver lots – "and we haven't heard a response on that," said Forbes.

Planning Manager Boyd Lawrence informed the planning commission that the department "will not" forward any requests to the town attorney on Vineyard Square because the town staff believes that nothing has changed based upon the previous decision, and all permits are extended through 2025.

Lawrence said he was also informed by

the town manager that requests for legal opinions from the planning commission have to go through the mayor for permission because there is "an expense to get the service."

As of the end of December 2023 the legal department spending was at 43.4 percent of its budget.

Vice-Chair Ed Neham said he would like to know if the developers of Vineyard Square are still required to do all the things they were required to do before. "Are they vested? Did they spend the money they were supposed to spend? Did they get the permits and permissions they were supposed to get? Or will this be dragged out ad infinitum?"

Forbes added, "The reason we wanted to get further input from the town attorney is because there is a certain degree of ambiguity in the language of the code section 15.2-2209.1:1. It addresses the issue of the extension."

"What it says is not withstanding any time limits for validity set forth ... any subdivision plat valid under 15.22260 and outstanding as of July 1, 2020 and

any recorded plat or site plan valid and outstanding shall remain valid until July 1, 2025 or any such later date under local law.

"Then it goes on to say that not withstanding any other provision of this chapter ... any deadline in the exception permit or in the zoning ordinance that requires the land owner or developer to commence the project or incur significant expenses related to improvements for the project within a certain time is extended until July 1 [2025].

"So the issue," asked Forbes, "is what constitutes commencing the project? What is the definition of incurring significant expenses? And that has not been ascertained. The statute requires that – that be interpreted."

Forbes continued, "What milestone to the town explicitly or implicitly required the developer to commence the project? What constitutes commencement? Did the project meet all its necessary deadlines prior to July 1 [2020]?"

"What are the significant expenses?"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

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# Inching closer?

## Town of Leesburg to take up Compass Creek annexation issue Feb. 13

BY AUDREY CARPENTER

The Loudoun County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Jan. 16 to approve a mediated settlement regarding the annexation of Compass Creek, a retail and commercial center that includes a 323-acre Microsoft data center campus, Walmart and the Ion International Training Center in South Leesburg.

Since 2019, the Town of Leesburg and Loudoun County Board of Supervisors have been haggling over 402 acres within Compass Creek that the Town seeks to annex from the County to bring into Town limits.

Currently there are two data centers being built adjacent to the Ion International Training Center that the Town will be supplying water and sewer for. However, the tax revenue generated by those future data centers, along with the existing Walmart and AtHome Store that sit on current County-owned land, goes to Loudoun County. The Town believes it should receive tax income from



development it supplies resources for.

“The Town Council convened in a closed session Jan. 18 to speak with legal counsel regarding recent mediation efforts between the Town and County regarding the pending annexation proceedings. Any agreement would have to be approved by the respective governing bodies. A four-day hearing before the Commission on Local Government remains scheduled for early March, but

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

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## Rayner appointed Vice Mayor

BY VALERIE CURY

It is customary to appoint a new vice mayor every year for the Purcellville Town Council. At the Jan. 9 Purcellville Town Council Meeting Council

Member Erin Rayner was appointed Vice Mayor for the year.

The vote was 6-1 with then Vice Mayor Chris Bertaut voting no.

"I just want to remind the mayor,"



said Bertaut, "that Council Member Rayner is the individual who falsely accused him of taking peeping Tom

type pictures of her at a town council meeting. I just don't think she is the best person suited for the position."

Bertaut was referring to a town council meeting in July 2022 when Council Member Erin Rayner falsely accused then Council Member Stan Milan of "taking up close photos and videos" of her from the dais at a meeting. Rayner's letter accusing Milan of inappropriate behavior was read into the record by Council Member Mary Jane Williams, as Rayner was absent.

Replying to Bertaut's comment to Milan, Council Member Mary Jane Williams said, "I believe that Ms. Rayner is the best person for this, bringing in the business aspect working with EDAC. And my thought is to bring up the past - we're trying to move forward - is what we should do."

Milan said he needed fresh ideas and he knew where Rayner stands. "It's a confidant," he said.

In 2020 Milan, Williams and Bertaut ran together with then Mayor Kwasi Fraser on a slow growth platform against the heavily developer funded Rayner. Milan also ran for mayor on the same platform. Since that time, Williams and Milan have aligned themselves with Rayner and other pro-development council members.

Since 2020 to present Rayner has raised \$72,476 with \$32,000 coming from area developers including the developers of Vineyard Square and their affiliates. Through her campaign she donated \$10,178 to Caleb Stought. In his most recent campaign one of the owners of Vineyard Square held a fundraiser for him.

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# Transmission line route slated south of Rt. 7

BY AUDREY CARPENTER

Dominion Energy says it is proposing a final route for a new 10-mile 500/230 kV electric transmission line and two substations in Ashburn after months of

## GOVERNMENT

analyzing whether the line should go north or south of Rt. 7.

The transmission line would run on the south side of Rt. 7 between Belmont Ridge Road and Loudoun County Parkway. The "Aspen to Golden 500/230 kV Project" would connect two proposed substations in Ashburn. The Aspen

substation is along the W&OD Trail just east of Crosstrail Boulevard, and the Golden substation is located on the east side of Pacific Boulevard just north of the W&OD Trail.

The proposal does have an alternative that could involve a short segment crossing to the north side of Rt. 7 at the Claiborne Parkway interchange to avoid an approved residential development, but also would move the line closer to homes in Lansdowne and would require two Rt. 7 crossings.

Dominion said burying power lines

underground is not an option due to the number of circuits involved and thermal capacity concerns that make undergrounding impractical. Burying lines are also more expensive than installing them above ground.

Dominion plans to submit its proposal to the Virginia State Corporation Commission by the end of March. The SCC has regulatory authority over all energy providers in Virginia. It requires a certification for all transmission lines generating electricity at or above 138 kV.

Among other responsibilities, the SCC

validates the need for proposed electric transmission lines and approves routes and structures. In reviewing a proposed project, the SCC must consider whether potential impacts on scenic assets, historic districts, and the environment have been reasonably minimized.

Contact the Electric Transmission Project Team at: [powerline@dominionenergy.com](mailto:powerline@dominionenergy.com) or 888-291-0190. Learn more here: <https://engage.erm.com/sites/novareliability/downloads/Aspen-to-Golden-January2024-Boards.pdf>.

# Community weighs in at public hearing for Philomont Fire Station

BY REED CARVER

The Board of Supervisors, at their Jan. 10 public hearing, deferred a decision for a zoning Special Exception for a new fire station in the rural historic village of Philomont.

Earlier that night, the board considered a proposal for a new 18,800 sq. ft. Philomont Fire Station to be built on the 7-acre Horse Show Grounds located within the Village Conservation Overlay District and zoned Countryside Residential (CR1) which requires a special exception for this type of civil structure.

The current fire station has been in operation since 1956 with additions in the 70's and 90's and is located with two other historic community buildings, the Community Center, and the Philomont General Store.

Philomont residents have argued that the modernization through addition/renovation, designed by Bill Ridge, would retain the distinctiveness of the village better than a new station on the Horse Show Grounds. The addition to the existing 9,000 sq. ft. firehouse would add 12,000 sq. ft. totaling 21,000 sq. ft. Community support is reflected in a petition of 451 residents who do not want the new building.

During the county staff presentation, staff stated that adaptive re-use of the existing building is more in line with the Comprehensive Plan vision for Philomont; but it was too impractical. Staff said the intentions of the Comprehensive Plan can be satisfied because the architecture of the proposed new station is intended to break up its large profile, and blend with the area in using rural motifs.

Loudoun County Fire & Rescue Chief Keith Johnson said he believes the new

building proposal is optimal, because it's a one-story floor plan, and the existing facility has confines, and a temporary facility would be needed if it was renovated.

Chief Johnson reiterated in a later interview that a renovated station would share one of its entrances with the parking lot of the community center, creating hazards for children and possible delays. He acknowledged that in the renovation plan, fire vehicles could avoid the parking lot and exit directly onto Snickersville Turnpike in an emergency. Likely the vehicles would still pass through the parking lot on return.

Bill Ridge's renovation plan has two stories. Other two-story designs have been built in Ashburn, Sterling and other places, but Johnson said a one story design contributes to a faster response time, because stairs are slow. The problem could be solved by fire poles, but Johnson said they should be avoided because they have caused injuries and are especially dangerous at night.

At the Public Hearing two veteran firefighters said that the new station will meet fire department needs. John Myers, speaking for a firefighter's union, said response times are the top priority. "We want residents to sleep soundly, knowing help is just minutes away," he said.

Dulany Morison said the Horse Show Grounds are a contributor to Philomont's National Register of Historic Places designation, and it's a critical community space.

Jane Covington, speaking for the Heritage Commission highlighted the history of the Grounds. They were bought in 1962, with community money from fundraisers which were held with the collaboration of the Volunteer Fire Department and the community.

In a later interview Philomont resident

Madeline Skinner said the 7 acres were bought from farmer Frank Pierce. The PVFD bought the land for \$10 according to the deed. However, Skinner and Philomont resident Stephen Price said that the land was bought for \$4,800, with money raised from the community. The Ladies Auxiliary ran most of the fundraising events until 2012, and retired in 2017.

Since 2005, Covington said the relationship between the PVFD and the community changed. The PVFD leadership avoided cooperation with the community, and they were no longer connected.

PVFD Chief Richard Pearsall, and board chair Douglass Frost however gave a different explanation. In a later interview they explained that the shift was due to a lack of volunteers. Philomont had become more of a bedroom community, thus the transition to career staff was necessary.

Pearsall said at the Jan. 10 meeting, "I think it's time to move on ... I want to say this in bold letters, the Philomont Volunteer Fire Department wishes to reiterate that by an approved motion the existing

station is not, emphasis, is not being made available or offered for renovation or adaptation as a fire station ... It's privately owned by the fire department."

Frost said in an interview that the PVFD never said they would sell the existing station for renovation. They were just asked for the value, which they place at \$2 million. "We were never inclined to give them [county] that property," he said, "never as a donation. We don't want to materially change the existing facility."

Phil Ebaugh, a landscape architect, said that if a new station was built, "We're going to have this huge, abandoned building, doing nothing," referencing the current station if the firefighters move.

Erin Gable owns a house adjacent to the Horse Show Grounds. She thinks the proposed station would be "a monstrosity," and she is concerned that the presence of carcinogens and chemicals running off the property and entering groundwater could contaminate her well. The surrounding neighbors worry about the same impact.

Amanda Fallon lives in one of the oldest log cabins in Philomont, across Snickersville Turnpike from the entrance to the proposed station. "This will create light pollution and a lot of noise ... Please adhere to our county policies and zoning,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 »



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# Rt. 15 improvements move forward

BY AUDREY CARPENTER

At its Jan. 23 meeting, the Leesburg Town Council endorsed a \$2 million request for Regional Surface Transportation Program funding from the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority for Fiscal Year 2030 for the Rt. 15 bypass interchange at Edwards Ferry Road and Fort Evans Road project.

## GOVERNMENT

The project consists of the development of a new grade-separated interchange on Edwards Ferry Road at the Rt. 15 bypass and will include the intersection of Ft. Evans Road. New crosswalks and sidewalks will be built along with a new shared-use path along westbound Fort Evans Road.

The project area has experienced significant commercial growth with construction of shopping centers over the past few decades and, as a result, traffic volumes are beyond the capacity of the existing at-grade signalized intersections, the Virginia Department of Transportation said.

Currently, there is heavy congestion due to high traffic volumes on Rt.

15 during peak commuter periods, as well as heavy turn movements to and from Edwards Ferry Road and Fort Evans Road. The existing road network lacks continuous sidewalks and existing conditions do not allow bicyclists and pedestrians to safely cross Rt. 15, according to VDOT.

Rt. 15, a major commuter route, averages about 50,000 vehicles a day, Edwards Ferry Road about 28,000 and Fort Evans Road about 13,000, according to VDOT studies.

A total of \$181 million will be spent on engineering, construction, utility relocation and right-of-way acquisition, according to VDOT estimates. Build out is through 2030.

## Battlefield Parkway at Rt. 15

At the same meeting, the Council also endorsed a double roundabout and bridge design for the intersection of Rt.



15 at Battlefield Parkway. Three design options were evaluated - the double roundabout, a diamond design and a divergent diamond style.

Taking public input into account, the Council decided to select the double roundabout option. The design acts as a natural calming feature without the need for traffic lights. The traffic circles

will be on the east and west side of the bypass with a new overpass carrying Battlefield Parkway traffic over Rt. 15.

The project is estimated to cost \$60 million and is a number of years away from being built, according to Town staff. With the Council's approval, the design will be forwarded to VDOT for review and adoption.

## LSWCD partnering in program to offer water quality grant opportunities

The Loudoun County government and the Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District are partnering in a program to provide funding to homeowners interested in implementing water quality improvement projects on

their property or in their neighborhood.

They will be hosting an informational meeting about applying for grants for the projects on Tuesday, Feb. 6, at 6 p.m. at Rust Library, 380 Old Waterford Road NW in Leesburg.

Subject matter experts from the

Loudoun County Stormwater Management Program, LSWCD and the Virginia State Department of Forestry are scheduled to speak about the grant application process for eligible projects. The projects include:

- **Tree Planting:** Both riparian (streamside) and upland areas are eligible for funds to plant native species to reforest non-forested areas. These plantings help filter nutrients, trap sediment, provide shade and provide important

habitats while reducing mowing and maintenance costs associated with turfgrass. Planting areas can be as small as one-quarter of an acre or as large as three acres for any individual project.

- **Pet Waste Stations:** Pet waste stations are designed to encourage pet owners to pick up after their animals in public places to prevent waste from being transported off-site by stormwater runoff. Pet waste stations typically include a covered waste can and bags

for picking up the waste. Grants support regular maintenance fees to keep the cans empty as well as installation costs.

- **Livestock Exclusion Fencing:** Fencing helps to keep livestock out of waterways and prevents nutrient runoff from agricultural operations into the water. Farms under five acres that are not eligible for the state of Virginia's cost-share programs can access this funding.

In addition, information will be available about the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program, a water quality improvement cost-share program administered by LSWCD. VCAP funds projects to reduce erosion and runoff through actions such as rain gardens

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 »

## St. Louis Road over Goose Creek Bridge rehabilitation underway

Work is underway to rehabilitate the St. Louis Road (Route 611) bridge over Goose Creek, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The bridge, located between Rt. 50 and Welbourne Road/Millville Road (Rt. 743), was built in 1969 and averages 3,400 vehicles a day.

The rehabilitation project includes:

- Replacing the concrete beams with steel beams
- Replacing the concrete deck
- Repairing piers

During construction, St. Louis Road will be reduced to one lane of

alternating traffic at the bridge. Traffic will be controlled by temporary signals.

The \$4.3 million St. Louis Road over Goose Creek Bridge Rehabilitation Project is financed with federal and state funding, including State of Good Repair funds used for bridges.

The project is scheduled for completion in mid-2025.

Drivers are reminded to use caution when traveling in active work zones. Be alert to new traffic patterns and limit distractions.

You can get real-time traffic, work zone and incident information online at 511virginia.org, via the free mobile 511Virginia app, or by calling 511 in Virginia anywhere anytime.

# 2024 Governor’s Fellows Program applications now accepted

Gov. Youngkin has announced that applications are now being accepted for the 2024 Governor’s Fellows Program. The Governor’s Fellows Program is an opportunity for rising seniors and recent graduates to get a firsthand look at the executive branch in action. Since 1982, fellows have worked alongside the Governor’s Cabinet and staff, learning about state government and assisting in essential work for the Commonwealth.

**GOVERNMENT** “We are excited to welcome the next generation of leaders to kick off their careers with our administration,” said Youngkin. “The Governor’s Fellows Program is a unique opportunity for Virginia students to experience public service first-hand and gain essential work skills for their future.”

During their time in service to the Commonwealth, Governor’s fellows have the opportunity to learn from special guest speakers who are leaders in state government and beyond. Fellows also experience state government on the road, visiting state government agencies and historic sites that have shaped our

past and are improving our future.

“The Governor’s Fellow program is an experience I cannot recommend highly enough! It provided me with an enormous boost straight out of college that helped prepare and propel me forward into the role I have today,” said Max Berkmueller, 2023 Governor’s Fellow. “I loved how the program brought together people from various backgrounds and walks of life with different interests and goals into a fellowship where you can make some amazing connections and friendships.”

“The Governor’s Fellows Program gave me the invaluable experience of working first-hand with members of the Governor’s cabinet. I learned so much about not only the inner workings of state Government but also about myself as a professional,” said Josie Rao, 2023 Governor’s Fellow.

Qualified applicants must be rising college seniors, graduating seniors, or graduate students. All Virginia college and university students are eligible to apply. Virginia residents who attend out-of-state colleges and universities are also

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 >

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# Broadlands man released on bail charged with fatally stabbing dog

BY AUDREY CARPENTER

A Broadlands man has been charged with stabbing a dog to death while it was being walked by its owner in Falls Church on Jan. 14. This occurred while the man was out on bail for three retail burglaries that had occurred just six weeks earlier in Ashburn and Sterling.

Loudoun County District Court Judge Lorrie Sinclair-Taylor allowed the defendant to be released on bail for the alleged retail burglaries on Nov. 30, 2023, two days after being arrested.

Reyan Hassan Ibrahim, 25, was arrested after being apprehended by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority Police Department during a traffic stop near Dulles Airport. He is being held without bond at



Lucy shown left and horses from Wheatlands Farm in Purcellville.

the Arlington County Adult Detention Center for the stabbing offense.

Police say the assault to the dog occurred around 9:15 p.m. at the intersection of W. Broad Street and S. Maple Avenue while the dog was being walked by its owner. The dog was stabbed multiple times in an unprovoked attack and later had to be euthanized. Her name was Lucy and she was an older rescue dog. The dog's owner was not injured.

The next day the owner of Wheatland Farm, an equestrian center serving children with special needs and disabilities in the 15000 block of Berlin Turnpike in Purcellville, said she believed Ibrahim was on her property as well. Owner Muriel Forrest said the suspect was on her property on Jan. 12 and 13 and approached her horses and some other animals.

"He was very agitated and seemed to be concerned about one of the horses being possessed," Forrest said in a television interview. "That red horse, that horse is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

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# Local Film Fest celebrates the arts

BY LIZ TENNEY JARVIS

Each January for the last seven years, Purcellville area filmmakers have been featured at Purcellville's Cabin Fever Film Festival. The festival is an event sponsored jointly by the Franklin Park Arts Center and the Town of Purcellville's Arts Council.

Films ranging in length from one to 90 minutes are submitted for review and, if accepted, are shown in the auditorium at the Arts Center. For most filmmakers,

this is the first time they will see their work "on the big screen." The festival has been able to draw from an ever-increasing pool of local talent. The movies are created by a mix of amateur and more professional filmmakers.

Over the years, the Cabin Fever Film Festival has launched, inspired and encouraged scores of local filmmakers. Several participants who entered as high school student age filmmakers, have pursued the study of filmmaking in college and plan on it as a career.

Franklin Park Arts Center's manager, Elizabeth Bracey, said that the festival supports local filmmakers as well as local artists. According to Bracey, their mission is: Keeping You Connected to the Arts, and that goes for all mediums and across all programs. Bracey adds, "These filmmakers need a place to exhibit their films and hear and see audience reactions to their storytelling. It is critical to their development as directors and filmmakers."

Recognition has also been awarded across categories that included "Audience Favorite" and "The Natural World." In 2022, Visit Loudoun was a sponsor for the award for "Film Most Representing Loudoun County."

Beginning in 2022, a cash prize was given to the winner in each category. Winners also received an award created by a Loudoun-based artist. In 2022 and 2023, glassmaker G'Ann Zeiger was the artist chosen to design the first actual award "trophy." Zeiger says that it was an honor to have been commissioned for this endeavor which has led to more fused glass work.



Josh Ryan, Evan Jackson, Jennifer Porter, Guy Noffsinger and The Morrison Brothers

Zeiger describes this commission work for the festival as, "being allowed to create something in my medium to celebrate artists in another medium, an opportunity I don't see happen that often. And of course, Elizabeth Bracey and her dedication to promoting the arts and artists offered not just this opportunity but laid the groundwork for other artists to see the benefit of celebrating the filmmakers of Loudoun County." This year a new artist has been chosen to create the awards.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

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# Feb. 6 school board meeting open for public comment on FY25 budget

BY AUDREY CARPENTER

A special Loudoun County School Board Meeting will be held on Feb. 6 at 6:30 p.m. with a public hearing and Board adoption of the FY25 budget. Those wishing to participate should visit the Citizen Participation page of the LCPS website.

School Superintendent Dr. Aaron Spence introduced a \$1.8 billion budget to the new school board Jan. 18, a 9.4% increase from FY24. This proposed budget equates to \$21,789 per student.

The budget includes investments in the "One LCPS: 2027 Strategic Plan for Excellence" which focuses on empowering

students, recruitment and retaining staff, enriching the division, and engaging with the community.

"Our ability to offer attractive salaries and benefits packages bolsters our ability to recruit and retain an exemplary workforce," Dr. Spence said. The proposed budget includes step increases and top of scale payments and a 4% cost of living adjustment for the universal and auxiliary salary scales with an average 4% strategic teacher scale adjustment. Also included is the Governor's proposed initiative for a one-time 1% bonus payment to all eligible full-time employees. Personnel costs are 90% of the total school operating budget.

Sixty positions have been added to staff two new schools opening in the Fall – Watson Mountain Middle School at 41480 Steeplechase Dr. in Leesburg and Henrietta Lacks Elementary School at 41125 Collaboration Dr. in Aldie.

More than 100 positions have been added to directly support students who require additional resources, and 72.8 positions were added that will be school-based to support new initiatives, such as establishing a new Alternative School, beginning the transition of the STEP program to full day, providing additional Student Support Specialists, and providing flexible staffing for our schools.

Also included are funds to support ongoing or expanded School Board supported initiatives such as the next phase of the dual language immersion program and expansion of middle school intramural sports to all middle schools. The SEON also includes resources to launch the Health and Medical Science Academy and to continue making substitute teacher rates more competitive.

The public can view the presentation to the School Board or review the full FY 2025 Estimate of Needs on the Budget Information website. The Feb. 6 meeting will be held at 21000 Education Court in Ashburn.

## Authors to talk on educational equality at Goose Creek Friends Meeting

The Goose Creek Friends Meeting, located at 18204 Lincoln Road in Lincoln, is hosting a discussion by Larry Roeder and Barry Harrelson, co-authors of *Dirt Don't Burn: A Black Community's Struggle for Educational Equality Under Segregation*

on Saturday, Feb. 17, 2 p.m. at the Goose Creek Friends Meeting House. The authors explore the struggle for educational equality in Loudoun through the analysis of long-lost records of parent petitions and documents from Loudoun County Public Schools superintendents during segregation.

*Dirt Don't Burn* was published by

Georgetown University Press in November 2023, and is the first serious study of the impact of segregated education on the Blacks of Loudoun County. Larry Roeder and Barry Harrelson will have signed copies available for sale at the event.

Roeder and Harrelson have written this history within the context of similar experiences throughout Virginia and the USA.

Civil Rights attorney Christopher Brown of Alexandria, Virginia recently said "This book is a blueprint for how to succeed in providing equality and justice to everyone." Brown is the grandson of Edwin C. Brown Sr., who filed lawsuits

on behalf of the NAACP to get school districts to comply with Brown v. Board of Education. He also threatened to sue if the school district didn't provide flushing toilets for the Loudoun County Training Center in Leesburg.

Roeder is the CEO of the Edwin Washington Society, which for over a decade has been studying the history of segregated education in Loudoun. Most volunteers and contributors are based in Loudoun, and many are survivors of segregation.

The society is named after an

African-American student in Loudoun who asked to keep his job as a waiter while attending a school run by a Quaker during Reconstruction.

Goose Creek Friends Meeting, established in 1785, has met continuously since then in the community of Lincoln. Worship Sundays 9:45 - 10:45 a.m.; First Day (Sunday) School and Nursery begin at 10 a.m.

This event is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Carolyn Unger at [cbwunger@gmail.com](mailto:cbwunger@gmail.com) or 540-338-4620.



## Students encouraged to enter "If I Were Mayor" Essay Contest

The Town of Leesburg invites local 7th and 8th grade students to enter the Virginia Municipal League's "If I Were Mayor" essay contest.

Students are asked to identify a problem within their community, gather feedback from community members, and offer a proposed solution, which must be presented in a typed essay between 300 and 500 words.

Students must live in the Town of Leesburg, which is considered a VML member locality. All entries must be received by end of day on Monday, March 18. Visit <https://www.vml.org/Opportunities/Essay-Contest> for full details.

Regional winners selected from around the state will each receive a \$150 gift card and a plaque. One statewide winner chosen from the regional winners will receive a \$250 gift card and a plaque. The runner-up from the region that receives the statewide

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

## Call for local arts organizations to apply for funding

Local non-profit arts organizations are invited to submit requests for funding to the Purcellville Arts Council to be considered for inclusion in the Town's proposal for the Virginia Commission for the Arts Creative Communities Partnership Grant Program. Eligible arts organizations are encouraged to apply online by Sunday, March 3. The online form is available on the Purcellville Arts Council page of the Town website: <https://purcellvilleva.gov/669/Purcellville-Arts-Council>.

Through the Creative Communities Partnership Grant Program, the Virginia Commission for the Arts will match up to \$4,500 of tax monies given by independent town, city, and county governments to stand-alone arts organizations. Should the Town receive funding through the grant, a total of up to \$9,000 could be distributed to independent arts organizations that have applied for and been awarded support for arts activities within the town.

Eligible arts organizations interested in applying are required to submit the online application, the organization's W-9, and the organization's 501(c)3 letter. Eligible applicants must be 501(c)3 organizations that:

- focus primarily on the arts (i.e. production, presentation or support of dance, literary arts,

- media arts, music, theater or visual or related arts)
- are incorporated in Virginia
- have their headquarters and home seasons, or activities equivalent to a home season, in the state

Proposals must be for arts activities that will be held in Purcellville, Virginia between July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. Funding cannot be provided for payment to performers for specific performances or for school arts budgets or arts programming by local governments, committees or councils of government, nor departments such as parks and recreation.

The Purcellville Arts Council will review the funding requests and then share their recommendations of organizations to be included in their grant proposal to the Virginia Commission for the Arts Creative Communities Partnership Program with the Town Council.

Eligible arts organizations may either apply online or mail the proposal with all of the required information to Purcellville Arts Council, Attn: Creative Communities Partnership Grant, 221 S Nursery Ave, Purcellville, VA 20132 by Sunday, March 3.

For more information about the Virginia Commission for the Arts' Creative Communities Partnership Grant Program, visit <https://vca.virginia.gov/grant/creative-communities-partnership-grants/>.

**COMMUNITY WEIGHS IN**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

that you all approved, and keep our fire station where it is with an addition and renovation," she said.

Chris Baker said that anything that disrupts the nature of Philomont is an unpleasant prospect.

Drew Bishop, owner of the Philomont General Store said, "We don't have a consensus in the community ... I'm troubled by the fact that Bill Ridge's plan has not been considered."

Peter Weeks said he doesn't want the beautiful open area to be lost. Once it's lost it's gone forever and the development cannot be undone, he said.

Skinner said the feasibility study from 2023 was done on an earlier concept from Bill Ridge, not the one agreed to with Chief Johnson and DTCI in December 2022. It was

finally determined by county staff on Dec. 21, 2023, that an addition/renovation was feasible, and will meet all requirements. Skinner said, "We want nothing less for our fire staff, whom we respect and appreciate."

Architect Bill Ridge worked for 30 years for the Environmental Protection Agency developing designs that allowed renovation, while the employees remained in place to avoid impact to their daily work. "What I have proposed meets all of the standards, nothing is compromised, with the one exception that there will be stairs. A fire pole is faster to get to apparatuses than running down 75 feet of hallways."

County Administrator Tim Hemstreet said that a renovation would cost at least \$6 million more than building a new station on the Grounds. But, Ridge said, "The costs in the feasibility study were based

on a misunderstanding of my design. They had raised the level of the addition 8 feet, which created huge costs for 8 feet of fill and retaining walls, that were totally unnecessary."

Skinner argued that one of the hidden costs, if the new station is built on the Horse Show Grounds, is the very likely scenario that the county would need to acquire the current old firehouse property and pay for the maintenance and eventual renovation of the existing station.

Supervisor Caleb Kershner (R-Catoctin) said, "I don't believe frankly there's a perfect answer," but, he thinks there are deeper questions to be asked.

Supervisor Matt Letourneau (R-Dulles) said most people missed the fact that they could not adapt the current station because it was privately owned. "So,

the option to modify is not actually an option," he said.

Supervisor Laura TeKrony (D-Little River) said they need to look more closely at Bill Ridge's design. "Not having consensus in the community is not a good thing," she said, and she was not willing to move forward without it.

Loudoun County BOS Chair Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) said there were times when they thought there was no solution, like in Aldie, but eventually they found one. "I'm willing to give it two more months to see if anything else is possible," she said. "Building on the current fire station grounds is literally not an option."

The Special Exception will be on the March 13 Public Hearing agenda. In the meantime, the supervisors are going to look for another piece of land.

**MAJORITY COUNCIL VOTE**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

involved in what you are planning to do to their properties."

Council Member Chris Bertaut, who had to give his comments standing due to a leg cramp said he was "calling on my fellow members of the town council to vote against the vacation of the flood plain easement in Catoctin Meadows.

**"This vote is a test that will show whether each town council member has the best interest of our town and its residents in mind on whether we consider the desires of the county before we consider the impacts to residents.**

"The county has admitted the additional culvert does not solve the 100-year flood plain easement," Bertaut said.

"There's also the matter of truthful disclosure regarding flooding risk; the town and county are both guilty in withholding it.

**"And please stop pretending that there's been a negotiation in good faith going on"** with the county and the Catoctin Meadows Homeowners Association. "It's the county that broke off negotiations with the homeowners association."

Bertaut was referring to the last communication from the county's land acquisition manager which was June 26, 2023. Christopher Helmick wrote that things were changing regarding phasing of the Rt. 7/690 Interchange and once the county receives more details, they will get back to the Catoctin Meadows

Homeowners Association. This date was the last Catoctin Meadows heard from the county.

Bertaut continued, "The county's insistence on doing a flood plain study after the interchange is built makes it certain that other property transactions will occur without full disclosure to the buyers. That in itself will generate additional lawsuits against this town."

He said the town has heard that without the east bound exit ramp that public safety will suffer, "but no data has been provided to support this claim."

"Should we try to appease the county who claims funding for future road projects to be in jeopardy if we don't approve this vacation of easement – even though doing so opens the door to many lawsuits against the town for the vacation of these easements?"

He said the town has yet to send a revised flood plain map to FEMA– yet the town has known for years that the flood plain has changed. "This has an impact on homeowners insurance because FEMA is one of the regulatory bodies who specifies whether you're in a flood plain or not – and what your ability to get insurance is as a result of that."

Mayor Milan said, "I think there's been miscommunication on both parts of the county and the HOA. There's been no, in my understanding, fair negotiations on both parts. We need to have better communication and understanding from the county with them [Catoctin Meadows] speaking about the potential

condemnation of property ..."

Brian Green spoke in the citizen comment portion of the meeting. "What have we learned so far about this easement? We've learned that there's really no benefit for the town. It doesn't help us on traffic. It's going to be impacting our citizens. So why are we even vacating it? It doesn't make sense."

Green said the studies the county "has been using are old or ancient. We should ask the county for money to do a flood plain study from one side of the town all the way to the other – not just the area in question. Water doesn't just stop here; it runs throughout the town." Green also recommended asking the county to put funds towards reducing the town's water debt."

**Green concluded, "Your job is to look out for the town citizens."**

Ron Rise Sr. pointed out the omissions from the county at the Jan. 9 public hearing on the vacation of the easement. He said it was "impossible to negotiate in good faith when one party knowingly omits, neglects and or misrepresents the truth."

He said, "The area of flood plain easement to vacate was misrepresented by underestimating a much larger easement area required from the HOA property when using the updated 2013 FEMA models."

The floodplain area requested by Loudoun County to be vacated is 21,643 square feet or 0.4968 acres. However the county has the right to trim, cut, and remove trees, shrubbery, fences,

structures deemed by the county to interfere with the proper and efficient construction, operation and maintenance of the easements. They will also be dumping 24,604 cubic yards of structural fill into the overburdened flood plain which is part of the Historic Corridor Overlay District.

**Rise Sr. said the 2018 VDOT Value Engineering Study was left out**, which recommended not building Ramp C due to the lack of traffic volume during peak hours, at a cost savings of \$6 million taxpayer dollars.

Rise Sr. said the county neglected to point out the flood plain studies which identified 25 property owners who are affected by the updated 2013 FEMA regression model flows. To date none of the property owners have received official notice of flooding risk identified in the studies, and requested by the town in April 2020, said Rise.

Rise Sr. said the county also left out the Town's use of the county's updated 2013 FEMA flood plain mapping limits in zoning requirements to one of the 25 affected homeowners.

The vote paves the way for the county to take the property belonging to the homeowners in Catoctin Meadows via eminent domain. In the Jan. 9 public hearing and in emails received, most Purcellville citizens opposed vacating the easement.

Residents in attendance left immediately after the vote, and were visibly upset.

**2024 GOVERNOR'S FELLOWS**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

eligible. Both public and private college and university students are encouraged to apply.

The selection of fellows is based solely on merit. The Fellows Program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, religion,

sexual orientation, age, disability, or veteran status.

The deadline to apply for the Governor's Fellows Program is Monday, March 4. Interviews will begin on Monday, March 11. Applicants will be advised on decisions beginning on April 12. The program runs from June 3, through Aug. 2.

**LSWCD PARTNERING**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

and conservation landscaping.

Private residential, industrial, commercial and homeowner associations in Loudoun are eligible to apply for funds for the projects.

Loudoun County and LSWCD have often partnered in past years on water quality projects in the county. This year's effort has been enhanced with additional grant funding from the county and the addition of pet waste

stations as an eligible project.

Supporting local projects that enhance watershed conservation and promote watershed stewardship is part of the Environment and Energy Work Plan approved by the Board of Supervisors.

For more information about the county's environmental initiatives, visit [loudoun.gov/environment](http://loudoun.gov/environment).

# AITC announces new scholarship opportunity for students

The Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom is pleased to introduce the Doug Stoughton Memorial Scholarship opportunity for graduating high school seniors and current college students pursuing a future in agriculture or education.

**COMMUNITY**

Scholarship winners will receive \$1,000 to further their studies at a 2- or 4-year college or university. The scholarship was created in honor of the late Doug Stoughton, a past Virginia Farm Bureau Federation special programs director who had a

passion for furthering youth education in agriculture, and who left a lasting impression on both AITC and VFBF.

“Doug was very instrumental in advocating for AITC and agricultural literacy,” said Tammy Maxey, AITC executive director. “This scholarship allows us to honor his legacy and the impact he had, while providing an opportunity for students pursuing a career in agriculture or education.”

Interested students can apply online at [form.jotform.com/VaAITC/AITC-Scholarship](http://form.jotform.com/VaAITC/AITC-Scholarship). Applicants are required to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25 »

## Rock the Rink on Feb. 9

Come to Rock the Rink at the Bush Tabernacle Skating Rink located at 250 S Nursery Avenue in Purcellville. Starting at 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 9, enjoy

**COMMUNITY**

performances by Insert Title Policy, Eternal Moon, Blank Slate, and the Wickers. Tickets are \$10 in advance and at the door. Concessions will be available for purchase. Skating will not be permitted during the

concert. Purchase advance tickets online at: <https://www.bushtabernacle.com/events>.

Rock the Rink is hosted Purcellville Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, and continues the tradition of highlighting local performers. Sponsorship opportunities are available to support this event. For more information about Rock the Rink, visit <https://www.purcellvilleva.gov/1069/Rock-the-Rink>.

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**NEXTERA ENERGY ATTORNEY**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1  
generous to transmission developers while inflicting an ongoing victimization of consumers. I have repeatedly criticized these incentives – particularly the CWIP Incentive, Abandoned Plant Incentive, and RTO participation adder – in numerous cases since I joined the Commission,” Christie said.

The Blue Ridge Leader covered that story here: <https://blueridgeleader.com/ferc-commissioner-urges-reform-of-federal-transmission-planning-and-financial-incentives/>

“I don’t even know how this is legal or possible.”

The MARL project has drawn massive criticism from residents, business owners, farmers and conservationists. On Jan. 22, 170 people showed up to a meeting about the MARL project hosted by the Piedmont Environmental Council at Woodgrove High School in Purcellville. PEC hosted two similar meetings - one in Hillsboro on Nov. 30 and another in Upperville on Oct. 23.

A bus trip to Richmond is being hosted by the Coalition to Protect Prince William County on Jan. 31 to spend the day with state legislators to discuss data center development and legislation that’s been introduced to better regulate the industry. PJM Interconnection has said the MARL project is necessary, to a large degree, to provide electricity to Eastern

Loudoun’s data centers.

The Waterford Foundation, a community-based non-profit founded in 1943 to preserve rural, historic and open spaces in Western Loudoun, created a petition Jan. 24 to fight the MARL project: [https://www.change.org/p/oppose-500kv-transmission-lines-proposed-through-western-loudoun-and-waterford-nhl?fbclid=IwAR1MF9\\_u3K-BH5pqGB1nBXOp-czIi5eWv6SWQxDdufoi\\_OW6qF7icIjIz8k0](https://www.change.org/p/oppose-500kv-transmission-lines-proposed-through-western-loudoun-and-waterford-nhl?fbclid=IwAR1MF9_u3K-BH5pqGB1nBXOp-czIi5eWv6SWQxDdufoi_OW6qF7icIjIz8k0)

State Senator Russet Perry (D-Dist. 31) attended a meeting of concerned citizens on Jan. 14 in Waterford to discuss the MARL project. She said during that meeting that she lives in Round Hill and was concerned about the project’s path through Western Loudoun. She also said she and other legislators were working to ensure that the two open appointments on the Virginia State Corporation Commission were not solely chosen from among energy executives.

However, the Virginia General Assembly voted unanimously to elect Bagot to fill one of two vacant seats on the SCC from among an applicant pool of 23 candidates among the energy, banking/investment and insurance industries, according to the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee. Virginia is one of only two states that selects its utility regulators by legislative election, according to the SCC. Governors appoint utility regulators in 38 states, and voters elect the regulators

directly in another 10.

The Blue Ridge Leader asked Sen. Perry for comment on why she voted to elect Bagot, as well as State Delegate Marty Martinez (D-Dist. 29) and State Delegate Geary Higgins (R-Dist. 30).

Sen. Perry said, “Today’s votes were unanimous in both the House and the Senate after an extensive nomination process in both chambers. Ms. Bagot will be required to recuse herself from any case involving NextEra Energy projects and has given her personal assurances that she will do so. Additionally, she received a full legal and personal vetting from several environmental groups who gave their seal of approval. Locally, the Piedmont Environmental Council [PEC] did not take an official position on any SCC nominee. Her resume is impressive and she is highly qualified. In order to take on the SCC role she will have to leave her current position, and her assurances of recusal were absolutely necessary to receive my support.”

Del. Higgins said, “As you know the issue of the NextEra 500kV line is one of great concern not just to me, but to a majority of my constituents. Unfortunately the process for nominating these SCC judges left myself and members of



my party in the dark, so I was unable to play a role in the nomination or confirmation process for this position.”

Higgins further added, “I have received assurances from members of the Democratic caucus, who nominated Ms. Bagot, that she will recuse herself from all

cases involving NextEra. I hope this to be the case, and have no reason to believe it will not be. Given her pledge to recuse herself (and her legal requirement to do so), and the fact that she will also be leaving NextEra, I do not believe this nomination will impact the outcome of this proposal. I’ve been told that Ms. Bagot is thoroughly qualified, intensely vetted, and comes highly recommended by FERC Commissioner Mark Christie. My office will remain vigilant to ensure there are no conflicts and we will continue to advocate for routing this transmission line through the existing right of way.”

Several Republicans said they were locked out of the appointment process and unable to participate in the selection or vetting phases due to not having a majority of party members in the committee. They also said they had no forewarning that the vote was coming up the day and time that it did, which left several

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 »



## Franklin Park Arts Center

36441 Blueridge View Lane, Purcellville, VA 20132  
[www.franklinparkartscenter.org](http://www.franklinparkartscenter.org)      540-338-7973





### Love Entrances

**February 10 7:30pm Tickets: \$20/person \$30/couple, for ages 21 & up**

*Bring your valentine to an evening that celebrates love in all forms – romantic, family and friendship. Master Storyteller Sheila Arnold knows that love is on everyone’s mind in February – but also at other times of the year. This interactive program shares love through stories, skits, activities, poetry and song. The reception begins at 7:00pm, the theater will open for seating at 7:30pm and the program will begin at 7:45pm. Reception is included in the ticket; only water is permitted in the theater. There will be no intermission.*



## Music For Dessert Concert Series    Wednesday Nights 7:00pm    Tickets: \$15

*This live music series on Wednesday evenings features a variety of music genres. Each concert is 45-60 minutes and you can purchase a single in-person ticket or watch the livestream. The perfect date night event!*

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| <p><b>Peter Griggs</b><br/>February 7<br/>Contemporary &amp; Brazilian Guitar</p>  | <p><b>Pictrola</b><br/>February 14<br/>Bluegrass</p>  | <p><b>Damon Buxton</b><br/>February 21<br/>Classical Guitar</p>  | <p><b>Robbie Limon “Singers &amp; Songwriters”</b><br/>February 28<br/>Solo Guitar</p>  |
|---|--|---|--|

## Early voting for presidential primary has started

Loudoun County election officials remind voters that early voting for the March 5, 2024, presidential primary election began Friday, Jan. 19. Both the Democratic and

### GOVERNMENT

Republican parties are participating in the primary election. All registered voters are eligible to vote as Virginia does not register voters by party affiliation. At the polls, voters will indicate which ballot they would like to receive.

Early voting began Friday, Jan. 19, at the Office of Elections and Voter Registration, 750 Miller Drive, Suite 150, in Leesburg. Early voting hours are Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. The office will be closed Monday, Feb. 19.

### Expanded Early Voting Hours at Satellite Locations

Additional early voting sites at Carver Senior Center in Purcellville, Claude Moore Recreation Center in Sterling and Dulles South Recreation Center in South Riding will be in operation beginning Saturday, Feb. 24.

The Loudoun County Electoral Board approved expanded early voting hours at its meeting Jan. 17. The early voting hours at the satellite locations have been expanded to include weekdays, Monday, Feb. 26 through Friday, March 1. Early voting ends Saturday, March 2. Exact dates, times and locations are posted at [loudoun.gov/VoteEarly](http://loudoun.gov/VoteEarly).

### Voter Registration Deadline

The deadline to register to vote in the March 5 election or to update current voter registration information is Monday, Feb. 12. Voters may register after Feb. 12, 2024, and vote a provisional ballot. Information about Same-Day Voter Registration is available from the Virginia Department of Elections.

### Stay Informed

Text LCVOTES to 888777 to receive text alerts from the Loudoun County Office of Elections and Voter Registration or sign up for the Election Update category through Alert Loudoun, the county's email and text notification system.

Follow the Office of Elections and Voter Registration on Facebook and Twitter. LoudounCountyGovernment also posts general information on Facebook and Twitter.

More information about voting in Loudoun County is online at [loudoun.gov/vote](http://loudoun.gov/vote).

## Leesburg Movement requests sidewalk dining program be expanded

BY AUDREY CARPENTER

Expanding the sidewalk dining program on South King Street this summer in downtown Leesburg to Saturdays was brought up as an idea supported by Leesburg Movement at the Jan. 23 Town Council meeting.

### BUSINESS

The Leesburg Movement is an all-volunteer independent 501c3 chapter of the Main Street America program. The core group of 10 residents and business owners of the historic district are working to further the economic and cultural vitality of downtown through outreach and advocacy.

John Papp, a board member, said the organization recently surveyed 40 business owners about the idea. Currently, the sidewalk dining program only occurs on Friday nights. Papp said the survey showed more than 80% of downtown business owners and 85% of their customers supported the closure of South King Street to vehicle traffic on both Friday and Saturday evenings.

"The vast majority of people loved the idea," Papp told the Council. "We just feel it would be a great benefit to the community."

Other business owners would like to expand the road closures to other streets, Papp added. Expanding seating outside generates income for wait staff and for restaurants, and the pedestrian-friendly atmosphere drives visitors downtown.

Papp proposed that the expanded closure happen between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

In 2020, Leesburg began regular closures of South King Street between Loudoun and Market Streets. On Friday and Saturday evenings during the warmer months area became pedestrian-only, and some restaurants moved extra seating outside. Last year the Council decided to scale back the closures to Friday evenings only due to budget constraints.

The Council will consider the addition of Saturday nights again at a future meeting.

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**LETTER: MEDICAL TREATMENT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**

Are Dr. Hill Golden and the employees of the DEI department “equity” hires or are they “merit” hires? I would not want a physician, nurse, or any staff member providing care to me if they were hired based on any reason other

than qualifications. Claudine Gay from Harvard is an example of an “equity” hire. Things can go wrong quickly when hiring is based on “equity” instead of merit.

I am very disappointed to see that it appears that Johns Hopkins is going

down the wrong road of Diversity Equity and Inclusion by ranking patients based on “privilege” and taking the focus away from treatment for all.

Consumers will make their choices, just as they have with Bud Lite and Disney. It is much more difficult to do

that when it concerns medical care. I would not want to be in a facility where I could be viewed as “privileged” by the attending staff, and possibly have that influence my medical treatment.

*Damon Cable  
Purcellville*

**MILAN ROAD BLOCKS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8**

How has that determination been made?

Forbes said that those questions have not been addressed in the former town attorney’s letter.

“Those are the questions that need to be addressed with the town attorney. It’s not as simple as ‘Oh we have a letter from Ms. Hankins [the town’s former attorney].’

**“It is not as simple as everything is extended to July 1, 2025.** We are asking that those questions be addressed by the town attorney because they require an interpretation,” said Forbes.

“We are going through channels so we are conveying to you in this meeting that these are questions that we have had.”

Forbes said that the owner of Vineyard Square came to both the council and the planning commission with another plan [Plan B]. “So there are legal questions that arrive out of that. If there’s an intention to pursue a Plan

B for the development of the property does the process start over?”

The Chapman’s are floating the idea of reducing the 40 condos to 36, and separating the project into numerous large buildings.

“Do the plans run concurrently? Do we assume that approval for Plan A also applies to plan B even though it’s a different plan? There are a lot of moving parts with this.”

Staff said if the Chapman Vineyard Square project were to change, the developers would have to submit a new plan for approval and go through the process.

**Forbes said that an alternate plan raises a whole series of questions.** “I think there are legitimate legal questions that are out there that need to be addressed and they are not addressed particularly if Plan B is being floated.”

Neham said a process has been outlined for the commission to follow and asked staff to forward the planning commission’s request to the mayor.

**BROADLANDS MAN RELEASED, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14**

not human, it’s possessed,’ and he was walking toward it with a halter, so you know he clearly intended to act on this horse,” Forrest said.

The next day, Forrest saw the same man again, but noticed he had covered his face.

“Ski mask, glasses over the ski mask, dark pants, and he had some type of either machete or some long baton or something, hanging by his side. So immediately, we realized this was a problem,” Forrest said. She said he also occluded the tag on his white car which was captured on video driving from their farm by Forrest’s husband.

Later, the Forrests said they discovered four of their ducks were missing and turned up deceased, and a rooster had a neck injury. The Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office charged Ibrahim with trespassing and wearing a mask on private property.

According to Loudoun County District Court records, Ibrahim was out on

bond after being charged with three felony counts of destruction of property on Nov. 29, 2023. He allegedly caused \$20,000 in damage at a McDonald’s restaurant in Ashburn by destroying a drive-through menu at a McDonald’s in Ashburn.

The next day, Ibrahim was accused of breaking a bottle of wine, and hitting and shattering the front door of a Sheetz gas station with a wrench. In a separate incident later that day at a Chick-fil-A in Sterling, Ibrahim allegedly broke two glass entrance doors.

Ibrahim’s next court date is March 27 in Loudoun County District Court.

The *Blue Ridge Leader* reached out to Loudoun County Animal Services, which investigated the Purcellville incidents. “Sadly, I do not have anything to add to this due to the nature of the investigative process. Our hearts go out to Lucy’s family on such a senseless and terrifying tragedy and we are grateful that the suspect is in custody,” said Director Nina Stivley.



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## Winter weekend sale in Middleburg from Feb. 16 - 19

Join the town of Middleburg Feb. 16-19, for the 13th annual Winter Weekend Sale. During the Winter Weekend Sale, visitors will be able to hunt for some wonderful gifts for themselves and others while experiencing the small-town charm of Middleburg. Many local stores and restaurants will be providing special deals throughout the weekend. Just look for the blue and white balloons outside participating stores.

**COMMUNITY**

The 13th annual Winter Weekend Sale

is sponsored by the Town of Middleburg and the Middleburg Business & Professional Association.

The Winter Weekend Sale will be held Friday, Feb. 16 through Monday, Feb. 19. Business hours for the sale will be Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Sunday - Monday as posted by shops.

Visit [www.visitmiddleburgva.com](http://www.visitmiddleburgva.com) or [www.facebook.com/MiddleburgBusiness](https://www.facebook.com/MiddleburgBusiness) for event updates. For additional information, contact the Middleburg Town Office at 540-687-5152.

**LETTER: 45 DAYS.** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

This year alone there will be three elections, that's 136 days in the voting cycle and that does not include all the pre and post operations such as Logic & Accuracy testing, Canvass, and Provisional ballot hearings.

Commonsense is rare these days. Or at

least the ability to act on it. Senators Subramanyam and Perry fit the mold of politicians who are unwilling to take a stand for commonsense out of fear of what the far left will say.

*Michael McDaniel  
Leesburg*

**JUST LIKE NOTHING (ELSE).** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

taboos of my workaday world when in the company of such a healing audience.

Admittedly, I pick up many of my troubles almost as soon as I jump back into my 21<sup>st</sup> Century motorized vehicle – to return home and prep for the next day. But it seems the load got just a little lighter, and I can vividly recall the sensations of release from my recent visit.

Interestingly, to me at least, my former local theatre company – Not Just Shakespeare – rehearsed one of its last shows in one of the meeting-rooms of the Leesburg Presbyterian; you may – or may not – remember that in one of Shakespeare's most popular history plays the protagonist Henry V essentially spends his first scene in sounding out the stance of the

Church on the possibility of war against France.

He eventually gains their blessing to go ahead with the venture and the rest of the play deals with his effective leadership in the quest. The young King at several key junctures in the story asks himself, "Am I doing the right thing?" Henry – no doubt – had his own family of ancestors to answer for, as well as the entire nation back in England.

We all, I trust, ask ourselves this same question; I found, in rehearsal of this Play, and during respite from a hectic grind of daily mail duties, a suitable answer from the souls associated with the headstones at the historic place of worship at 207 West Market Street in Leesburg, Virginia.

**NEXTERA ENERGY ATTORNEY.** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

feeling they were in the dark in voting. Del. Martinez agreed and said he voted for the same reasons as Higgins and Perry.

The SCC chairs are full time positions, requiring Bagot to resign from NextEra. For some, that doesn't alleviate a perceived conflict of interest.

"I don't even know how this is legal or possible," said Jessica Buhl, a Prince William County resident who lives near the Prince William Digital Gateway data center project and actively follows data center and transmission development. She questioned why Bagot would even be considered given her position with NextEra and prior FERC role.

It was a sentiment echoed by many who say even with Bagot recusing herself from voting on NextEra submissions that come before the SCC, they are still highly skeptical of the ability of Bagot to be impartial in her SCC work related to energy projects.

"How would that work anyway?"

There's only three members on the SCC Commission. If she recuses herself and a tie happens among the other two Commissioners, then what?" asked Penny Harrington from Lovettsville.

According to the SCC, an alternative judge steps in should a tie occur.

Only one legislator out of 195 questioned Bagot about her ability to remain impartial after being so ingrained in the energy industry. Del. Tony Wilt (R-Dist. 26) asked, given her work with NextEra, if Bagot would be able to look at all energy issues from an impartial standpoint.

Bagot responded: "I will not have a bent one way or the other, but will be open minded and ask the right questions."

Sam Towell, of Richmond, was also elected to the SCC. He works as the associate general counsel for litigation at Smithfield Foods and previously served as the deputy attorney general for civil litigation under Attorney General Mark Herring from 2017 to 2021. Towell's term will begin March 17 and end Jan. 31, 2028.

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**ASK DR. MIKE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4**

phase of development finding shared activities is crucial. Engaging in shared interests can bridge the growing gap for your child and you, and provide opportunities for bonding. A shared hobby, or a sport event, can foster a sense of connection. As the old proverb goes, "If you can't beat them, join them," so inviting your pre-teen or teen's friends to activities will also likely be a supportive and welcomed move on your part.

It can also be beneficial to preserve family centered moments, like family dinners, which give you deliberate time with your child. Car rides are also a great time to connect with your pre-teen or teen.

It's also important to keep things in perspective. Although the separate nesting

**INCHING CLOSER, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9**

that could be changed in the event of an agreement," Town Attorney Chris Spera said.

A proposed resolution approving the voluntary settlement with the Town is set for the Board of Supervisors Feb. 6 Business Meeting, according to Leesburg District Supervisor Kristen Umstatt. The Leesburg Town Council is set to take up the matter at its Feb. 13 meeting.

A 7-hour mediation between the Town and the Board of Supervisors was held

phase of development may feel bad at times, it doesn't mean that you will no longer see or spend any time with your child. It means that the amount of time and the ways in which you spend that time will change. It's important to give them the space and privacy to grow, while also being there when they need you.

As challenging as it might be to watch our children grow up and become more independent, this is also a phase of development where parents could encourage responsible independence as part of the changing narrative. Supporting your child's decisions and providing them with age-appropriate responsibilities could serve to foster a sense of trust, respect and renewed closeness. Asking your pre-teen or teen for help around the house, or

Jan. 10 and included Leesburg Mayor Kelly Burke, Vice Mayor Neil Steinberg, Town Manager Kaj Dentler, Town Attorney Chris Spera and special counsel. The County team consisted of Supervisor Umstatt, Catoctin Supervisor Caleb Kirschner, County Attorney Leo Rogers and special counsel. All parties to the mediation were required to sign a non-disclosure agreement.

The Commission on Local Government (CLG) is scheduled to convene in Leesburg March 5-8 for four days of

participating in community service opportunities are great ways to connect.

Even with effort, patience and acceptance, the separate nest phase of parenting can still be a difficult time. If you find it to be especially challenging to navigate this phase, seeking support from other parents is probably a good idea. Also seeking support from a mental health professional can be helpful.

Okay, okay, just like the Empty Nest Syndrome isn't a clinical diagnosis, the Separate Nest Syndrome isn't one either. It's a fitting term I've coined to describe the very real feelings and natural phenomena that occur when our children begin to outgrow childhood.

This phase of development is a pivotal phase for both a pre-teen or teen's life

public hearings and oral arguments on the annexation. The CLG oversees disputes between localities, assists with negotiations, conducts act-finding hearings when necessary, and writes reports to assist courts in adjudicating disputes.

Detailed information on the annexation can be viewed here: <https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/sites/default/files/Docx/clg/pending-cases/leesburg-notice-to-commission-on-local-government-9-28-22.pdf>.

and a parent's life. It's about adapting to a new dynamic in your relationship, where you support your child's journey towards independence while maintaining a meaningful connection.

Embracing this phase with patience, and good communication can transform these challenging years into an enriching experience for both you and your child. Whether your child is 2, 14 or 35, he or she will always need you; and, appreciating how they need you differently throughout their development is what's most important.

*Michael Oberschneider, Psy.D. "Dr. Mike" is a clinical psychologist in private practice. He can be reached at 703-723-2999, and is located at 44095 Pipeline Plaza, Suite 240, Ashburn.*

**LOCAL FILM FEST, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16**

The 2024 awards for "Festival Favorite," "Mostly Likely to Break Cabin Fever" and this year's theme of "Connections" were made by Purcellville ceramicist and high school art teacher, Geoff DeMark. DeMark is a longtime participant in the Western Loudoun Artists Studio Tour along with his wife, Lori (a jewelry artist and an art teacher as well). DeMark originally was "drawn in" by ceramics after taking an art class as a student at Penn State.

DeMark received his Masters at Ohio State while working in mixed media. It

was then a trip to Tucson and tile work that returned DeMark to clay as his medium. DeMark, having started a family, made his way back to the East Coast and felt that in addition to teaching, he wanted his children to grow up in a creative environment – where he and his wife Lori would be continually creating their own art in their home studio.

DeMark also felt it was important to recognize the organizers and "thank Elizabeth Bracey for tapping into the creativity of all artists in our community." The end result are three awards consisting of a unique, one-of-kind plate. Each plate

depicts various raised faces/expressions in a swirling pattern with CFFF 2024 inscribed and glazed in the center.

Co-sponsor, the Town of Purcellville's Arts Council, has made it their years-long goal to support the arts and it endeavors to have Purcellville be a place where artists want to live and work. Amie Ware, manager of the town's Parks and Rec Division and liaison to the Arts Council said, "Some make us laugh, some make us think, and some have us sitting on the edge of our seats. There is so much talent right here in Loudoun County, and it is an honor to be able to focus on our local artists."

Further, Purcellville Arts Council member Karen Blodgett says that they offer a variety of activities throughout the year for all ages. "Having the Cabin Fever Film Festival in conjunction with the Franklin Park Arts Center starts the year off with contributions from amazing and talented local filmmakers and artists. It is a perfect beginning for the year to come. I encourage everyone to come and see the creative works of our local citizens!"

*Liz Tenney Jarvis is the former Chair of the Purcellville Arts Council and co-founder of the Cabin Fever Film Festival.*

**OPINION: A EULOGY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**

We nicknamed him Good Larry and those different appellations helped us avoid confusion.

**Bad Larry Gets Caught**

The infused cigarettes had clearly harmed Larry in his past. Sometimes those effects were still obvious. I don't remember the charge, but at one point Bad Larry got in trouble with the law.

I attended his trial as a character witness. I painted him in a good light, but the judge didn't buy it. He slammed down the gavel and a deputy led Larry

through a hidden door in the courtroom wall. I later found that the door led to a back corridor which took the newly-convicted to jail.

**The Insane Asylum Helps Larry**

Larry was transferred to Western State Hospital in Staunton. One cold, sleeting day three months later, I drove there and picked him up. He was much better, subdued, coherent, reasonably logical. He took another job close to us, and there was a room in the barn there that he could use.

In recent years, whenever we saw Larry

on the road, he'd wave cheerfully. Life seemed stable for him but now there will be no more waving or jesting. Mr. Sheep was on the loose because his caretaker died. That caretaker was Bad Larry.

Life in western Loudoun is enriched by idiosyncratic characters like Larry. I miss Sweet Corn Man, his brother Tater Bug, Shiftless Pete and others. I'm glad I once knew them.

*Charles Houston lives on a small horse farm outside Paeonian Springs and used to develop large office buildings for big corporations.*

**STUDENTS ENCOURAGED, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17**

award will become that region's winner.

"This is a great opportunity for our local 7th and 8th grade students to imagine themselves as mayor, identify an issue, and problem solve for their community," said Leesburg Mayor Kelly Burk. "I can't wait to read the great ideas that will come from the essays. If there is a really good idea maybe we can work together."

Winning essays will be featured in the May issue of VML's magazine Virginia Town & City.



**AITC ANNOUNCES**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

submit a high school transcript and two letters of recommendation.

Additionally, applicants will need to submit personal statements describing their extracurricular activities and community service, leadership experience, interest in agriculture and education, and how the scholarship will benefit them.

Applications are due March 31 and can be emailed to [aitc@vafb.com](mailto:aitc@vafb.com). Scholarship winners

will be notified by May 31.

For more information about this scholarship and other AITC initiatives, visit [virginia.agclassroom.org](http://virginia.agclassroom.org).

The Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that promotes a greater understanding and appreciation of agriculture through education and outreach activities. To learn more and support, visit [virginia.agclassroom.org](http://virginia.agclassroom.org).

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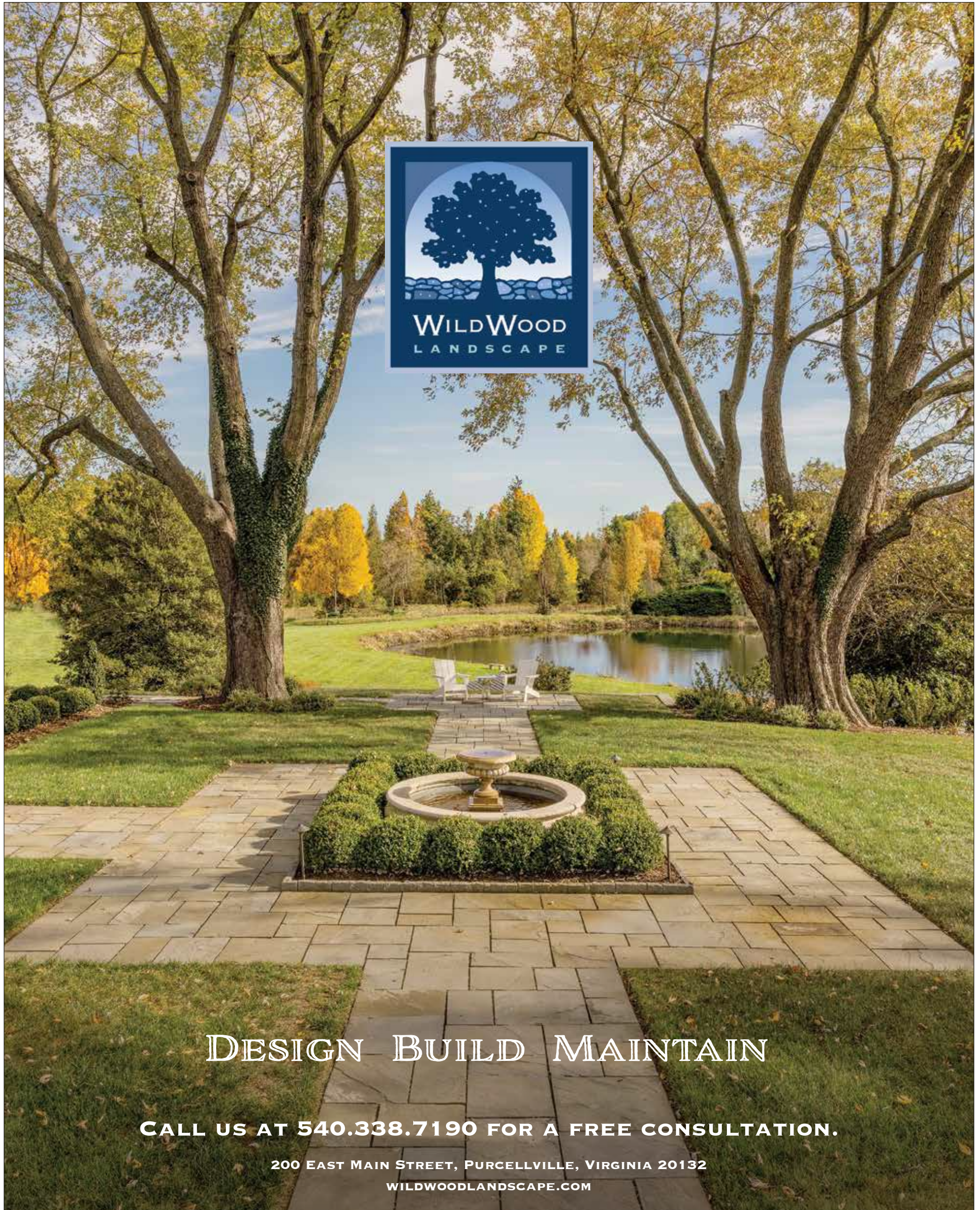
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