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# LOUDOUN Today

APRIL 2025

## Trapped in the Net: Officer Ben Nett's battle against political retribution

BY VALERIE CURY

Purcellville Police Officer Ben Nett has been the target of Internal Affairs investigations since announcing his candidacy for the Town Council. After securing a seat, the accusations intensified, culminating in recommendations for termination and placement on the Brady List by Commonwealth's Attorney Bob Anderson—driven by allegations from senior management in the Purcellville Police Department, certain members of senior town management, and his town council political opponent.

After over 20 years in national security with the U.S. Secret Service, the CIA, and the Department of Defense, Ben Nett transitioned into a second career with the Purcellville Police Department in June 2022. By December, he had graduated first in his class at the Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Training Academy.

In 2023, Nett was the co-lead investigator and arresting officer in a high-profile case involving a juvenile armed with a loaded, stolen handgun about to board a school bus bound for Blue Ridge Middle School. Nett also led several major financial crime investigations targeting Purcellville residents, which helped dismantle a nationwide theft and money laundering ring, culminating in a federal arrest in Miami.

In February 2024, he announced his candidacy for Purcellville Town Council, looking to bring his dedication and service to the community.

Shortly after his candidacy was



announced, things changed for this 2024 Officer of the Year. What followed was a series of events that would soon reveal a troubling pattern of politically motivated internal investigations and harassment, aimed at undermining his reputation and career, and also overturning an election.

Part of Officer Nett's campaign platform focused on streamlining local government, with particular emphasis on restructuring the Police Department. He argued that the department had become top-heavy and struggled to provide round-the-clock coverage. During his campaign, Nett pointed out that the position of Deputy Chief of Police was created in 2017 in response to a lawsuit filed by then-Chief Cynthia McAlister against two

of her Sergeants, and was an example of government largesse and unnecessary bureaucracy.

In July 2024, the first Internal Affairs investigation was initiated following an alleged complaint from a political opponent. The complaint accused Officer Nett of using his position to intimidate an opponent and discourage his candidacy. During the investigation, Nett was disarmed by the investigating Lieutenant and questioned in the suspect interview room at police headquarters.

The questioning extended beyond the scope of the complaint, with inquiries about which council members Nett had spoken to and whether he intended to remain with the Police Department if elected. Ultimately, the complaint was not sustained, yet Nett was denied a copy of the complaint—even after submitting a Freedom of Information Act request.

On Sept. 23, 2024, newly hired Deputy Chief Sara Lombrana called Officer Nett into her office to discuss a campaign door hanger featuring Nett and his running mates. She objected to, but did not dispute two claims: that the department was not providing 24/7 coverage and that the department was top-heavy, with four command staff members drawing six-figure salaries but contributing little to patrol and investigations.

The second Internal Affairs investigation occurred on Sept. 24, 2024, following a complaint about a dog locked in a car. When Officer Nett arrived, the dog was in the owner's arms outside the car,

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and licking her face. Upon arrival everything seemed fine and Nett chose not to activate his body camera. However, the caller later contacted the Police Department, complaining that no action had been taken. This led to an alleged Body Worn Camera violation, which is typically at the officer's discretion. Despite policy exceptions and verbal guidance from the former Deputy Chief, the allegation was sustained.

Further complicating the situation, another supervisor, with access to the department's camera uploads, had evidence showing command staff members not activating their cameras in similar circumstances. Despite objections from Nett's immediate supervisor, Deputy Chief Lombrana ordered the IA investigation to be sustained.

On Oct. 31, 2024, while on leave, Officer Nett received an email from Deputy Chief Lombrana reprimanding him for distributing "Junior Purcellville Police Officer" stickers at a community event 26 days earlier, while campaigning.

The stickers had been given to Nett by a Sergeant for the purpose of promoting

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**I started to move my foot from the gas to the brake as any normal person would do when they see brake lights in front of them but I couldn't. I couldn't feel my foot.**

**The car kept moving forward and I just couldn't get my foot on the brake. And CRUNCH! I finally came to a stop when I hit the car in front of me.”**

This tragic story was shared with us by Dan S., an Ashburn resident, who has peripheral neuropathy. And while no one was hurt in this accident, Dan S. had suffered almost every day of his life with tingling and burning in his feet until numbness set in and he could no longer feel even the brake pedal beneath his foot.

“The first stage is pain.” shares Rachal Lohr, Acupuncturist of FIREFLY Acupuncture & Wellness. “You feel burning, tingling, sharp pains, or you feel like you're walking on tacks or marbles. This pain eventually subsides and the numbness sets in. Unfortunately the numbness brings with it a whole other host of problems.”

This was the case with Dan. “I said I wasn't going to drive again. What if that had been a pedestrian?”

It is terribly common that peripheral neuropathy and its debilitating symptoms interfere with a person's ability to live their life. Dan was now reliant on his wife to drive him around, even the simple pleasure of cruising down to play golf or taking her out to dinner was outside his capabilities. And even more common, Dan's general practitioner and several specialists told him there was nothing they could do other than prescribe him pills that would ease the pain of his neuropathy.

**That's where Rachal Lohr and her staff at FIREFLY come in. “About 75% of our current patients come to us suffering from the same condition as Mr. Dan,” tells Rachal.**

“They're in constant pain from neuropathy and it prevents them from not only living their lives but more importantly, it prevents them from enjoying it.

Depending on the severity of their nerve damage, we typically see tremendous progress in 3-4 months of treatment. I like to say we're in the business of making your golden years golden.”

**“I can't lie,” confides Dan.**

**“I was skeptical at first. The folks down at my pain center told me there was nothing that could be done and then there's a doctor right here in Loudoun who tells me she can help. Turns out she was right! About three months after treatment I was able to confidently drive myself to my appointments!**

**My wife and I celebrated by buying ourselves a new car! It's hard to put into words how incredible this is, quite frankly [Rachal] gave me my life back.”**

While FIREFLY specializes in acupuncture and it's definitely part of their protocols in treating neuropathy, the real secret is in a more modern medical solution called ATP Resonance BioTherapy™. “This technology was originally developed by NASA to expedite healing and recovery” shares Taylor, a Senior Patient Care Coordinator at the clinic. “It's like watering a plant. ATP Resonance BioTherapy™ stimulates the blood vessels to grow back around the peripheral nerve and provide them the proper nutrients to heal and repair.”

You can learn more about Rachal Lohr and FIREFLY at [FIREFLYAcuAndWellness.com](http://FIREFLYAcuAndWellness.com). If you're ready to schedule a consultation call (703)263-2142 and do so quickly.

FIREFLY is a very intimate clinic and the staff takes pride in their ability to take their time with each patient so they are very limited in their ability to take on new patients.

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## Montana Cochran Crowned Miss Teen Virginia International 2025

During an inspiring weekend of competition, delegates from across the Northeast showcased their skills in interview, fashion, fitness, and public speaking. On March 2, Montana Cochran, representing Miss Teen Northern Virginia, was crowned Miss Teen Virginia International 2025.

Montana, the daughter of Allen Cochran and Nancy Griffith-Cochran of Stone Eden Farm in Hamilton, Virginia, is a senior at Loudoun Valley High School. She has been a dedicated Valley Viking cheerleader for four years and sings in the school's Honors Chamber Choir. She also is a member of the National Honor Society, the Student Council Association, and the Tri-M Music Honor Society. Additionally, she sings weekly for the teen faith mass at St. Francis de Sales.

Cochran said, "Being involved in school and extracurricular activities has shaped who I am today. Each experience helps me grow, whether it's through music,

leadership, or fitness. I believe in using my voice and talents to make a positive impact."

At home, Cochran and her family operate a sheep farm, which many in Loudoun will recognize from the family's annual sheep drive, a beloved tradition that has kicked off the new year for over a decade. People from all over the county and beyond attend, to watch the sheep drive which commences in the early cold hours of the morning.

"Our family's sheep drive is more than just a tradition. It's a way for us to bring the community together and celebrate the heart of who we are as a family and as members of this incredible community," Cochran said.

A passionate volunteer, Cochran has been involved in local hunger relief efforts and serving meals at the local shelter. For this year's pageant platform, she is



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## Troop 711 honors two new Eagle Scouts

On Jan. 4 BSA Troop 711 held a Court of Honor at the Trillium Gathering Building in Purcellville and presented two scouts with their Eagle Scout awards. Only five percent of scouts achieve this top honor. Over the last 20 years 108 scouts from Troop 711 have received this award, including these latest two—Gideon Loomis and Wade Reynolds.

Troop 711 Committee Chair, and former Troop 711 Scoutmaster Scott Walker, delivered the Eagle Charge and Elijah Loomis gave the benediction. Joel Hill was master of ceremonies.

Loomis received 32 merit badges that included Wilderness Survival, Canoeing, and Hiking. In addition, as a Senior Patrol Leader he organized and led a group of boys for a Dutch dropping outing where the scouts were dropped off at night and did night hiking to find themselves back at camp.

Loomis' Eagle project included working with the park rangers in organizing and leading a group of boys, constructing and installing park benches in Northern Virginia's Sweet Run State Park.



Gideon Loomis cooking cobbler for his crew at camp.



Wade Reynolds caving.

He said, "Scouting has so many opportunities where you can make a difference and also change yourself." He also shared how he was pushed beyond where he thought his limits were to be able to achieve his goals. Said Loomis, "And that was very rewarding."

Reynolds received 35 merit badges that included Wilderness Survival, Climbing, Hiking as well as Caving and Canoeing. He is an expert axe thrower and served as a Senior Patrol Leader leading the troop during a summer camp.

Reynolds' Eagle project was leading a team in re-constructing four fire circles at Bear's Den.

He said that scouting and being an

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 >

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# Barcelona, Price Inelasticity and Data Centers

BY CHARLES HOUSTON

A few days ago, I had lunch with my good friend Robert Rood. Usually, our conversations meander, but this time I had an agenda: vacationing in Barcelona. For my wife and me, it would be a new—and likely delightful—European destination. I wanted to hear more about it from someone with firsthand experience.

Robert and his wife, Byne, had spent ten days there last October—their third visit to the Spanish city. I was eager to hear their thoughts and impressions.

## Barcelona

Barcelona, like Paris with the Eiffel Tower or Cairo with the Great Pyramids, has a signature landmark: the breathtaking Sagrada Familia (Church of the Holy Family). Construction of this incredible cathedral began in 1882 and is still a few years away from completion. With spires reaching over 550 feet, the cathedral dominates the city skyline. Designed by famed Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi, the building is a masterpiece of extravagance and creativity.

Beyond the Sagrada Familia, Robert said that Barcelona offers much more: other

architectural gems by Gaudi, beautiful beaches, a charming old town with a tangle of narrow streets, and a vibrant culinary and nightlife scene.

The city sounded fabulous to me, and I wasn't alone in that sentiment—Barcelona endured twelve million tourists last year.

## The City Fights Back

Barcelona's overtourism can be measured quantitatively: ten million more visitors than residents. However, it's the subjective experience that matters more to citizens and visitors: Are the streets overcrowded? Do shoulder-to-shoulder crowds intrude on daily life?

For Barcelona, the answer is yes, this is a huge problem. The city has taken action to manage the influx of tourists. Last year, it raised its daily tourist tax from 2.75 euros to 3.25 euros per person. Using social media shorthand: BFD (Big Freaking Deal, meant sarcastically.)

Robert's response was telling. "I splurged on airfare and we flew Business Class. We stayed in a decent hotel, maybe three or four stars, dined wherever we wanted, and bought a few souvenirs. All in all, I probably spent \$10,000. Even

if you flew Economy and stayed somewhere cheaper, I don't see how a vacation there could cost a couple much less than \$5,000."

## Price Inelasticity

I have an Economics minor and I often use that lens to analyze issues. So I asked Robert if the tourist tax affected his decision-making. "What tourist tax?" he replied. When I explained the tax and its purpose, he shrugged. "A few bucks a day is diddly squat. I wasn't even aware of it."

This is a clear example of price inelasticity: the small increase in the tourist tax didn't affect behavior. Price elasticity, in contrast, is when a change in price significantly affects demand.

## Data Centers

Switching gears: only a troglodyte would be unaware of our growing issues with data centers. In eastern Loudoun County, residents began complaining about the overwhelming size and noise of these facilities. Eventually, their voices reached the ears of our Supervisors. Then came a sudden and new revelation: something very bad was headed our way.

Data centers are notorious energy hogs,

and the rise of artificial intelligence has made this issue unimaginably worse, as AI increases power needs by ten times. If all planned new data centers are built, their power needs will far exceed the total energy currently generated in the state. Add new data centers and AI, and this looming catastrophe has no easy solution; renewable energy won't make a noticeable dent in the problem. Can you visualize switching on the lights and nothing happens?

Meanwhile, the County would happily collect a second billion dollars annually from existing data centers, probably adding to the current quarter-billion dollars in the Fund Balance (unspent money) until they figure out how they can spend it. Spending seems to be an addiction.

## Help Arrives

A friend of mine serves on the board of Loudoun's Future, a PAC that proved effective in the 2023 local elections. The organization continues to focus on ensuring that Loudoun remains a great place to live. One of the PAC's key initiatives is addressing the data center dilemma through fiscal policy.

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# Something seems to be amiss in the Purcellville Police Department

BY LLOYD HARTING

Several news articles have been published in Loudoun County newspapers reporting on an internal affairs investigation that was recently conducted at the Purcellville Police Department. The newspaper articles identified by name the Purcellville Police Department employee who was the subject of the investigation, Police Officer Carl "Ben" Nett, and also revealed details of the internal affairs investigation including the allegations made against him.

However, law enforcement agency internal affairs investigations are by definition "internal" to the law enforcement agency and must not be revealed to the public, and internal affairs investigation information must not be disclosed to any person who does not have both lawful authorization and a "need to know" in order to receive it.

So this situation logically leads to asking the following question: "Who leaked the details of the internal affairs investigation to the press, and why did that person leak that sensitive and confidential

employee information to the press?"

The Purcellville Police Department prohibits disclosing the details of police department investigations, which includes employee internal affairs investigations. The Purcellville Police Department Regulations state in Section D (Administrative Activities), Subsection D-4 (Security of Official Records) the following: "Personnel shall not reveal police information except as provided elsewhere in this manual or as required by law or competent authority. Specifically, information contained in police records ... are to be considered to be confidential in nature. Indiscriminate and unauthorized disclosure of this or similar information reflects gross misconduct."

Also, Purcellville Police Department Policy #320 (Standards of Conduct) states in Section 320.5.6 (Unauthorized Access, Disclosure or Use) the following: "a) Unauthorized and inappropriate intentional release of confidential or protected information, materials, data, forms or reports obtained as a result of the member's position with this department. b) Disclosing of any police-related

information to any unauthorized person, including confidential information ... Disclosing confidential information to anyone except for whom it is intended or as directed by a supervisor or under the process of law."

Furthermore, Purcellville Police Department General Order #126 (Disciplinary Procedures) states in Section 126.1.8 (Disciplinary Records) the following: "The Chief of Police will maintain all documents relating to Internal Affairs investigations and will not place them in the concerned employee's personnel file ... Unless otherwise approved by the Chief of Police, records of disciplinary action will be kept in the employee's file and retained in accordance with The Library of Virginia Records Retention Schedule."

It appears that a disciplinary offense may have been committed by an employee of the Purcellville Police Department, so this apparent violation of the police department's directives must be investigated for the good order and efficiency of the police department.

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# “A large part of this comes down to philosophical differences” — Vice Mayor Ben Nett

BY VALERIE CURY

A public hearing on the draft zoning ordinance was held on March 11, during the Town of Purcellville Town Council meeting. The draft had previously been

### GOVERNMENT

approved by a unanimous vote of the Planning Commission on July 25, 2024. Following this, the Planning Commission recommended its approval with changes based on citizen

input, which were incorporated into the draft. The updated draft zoning ordinance was then presented to the Town Council by the Planning Commission on Oct. 8, 2024.

Ten speakers spoke at the public hearing. Purcellville resident Harvey Flynn said he didn't want to be in the Historic Properties Overlay District, and he said there was nothing historic about his property. He said 20 years ago it was

hard for him to get a building permit for his house from the Town and County.

Another speaker echoed that he didn't want to be in the Historic Properties Overlay District because anytime he wants to do something to his house he would have to come to the town and get permission.

Permits are already required for any additions or fences on a property. With the addition of the Historic Properties

Overlay District a Special Use Permit will be required to tear down a primary structure.

Former Council Member Joan Lehr stated that the council needed to reconsider the overlay district, arguing that “homeowners will have a burden.” While serving on the Town Council, Lehr voted for the unmandated utility upgrade to the town's system, which was operating

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# Do women still win custody more often than men during divorce?

BY MICHAEL OBERSCHNEIDER, PSY.D.

One of the most emotionally challenging aspects of divorce proceedings involves determining child custody. Historically, women have been awarded custody significantly more frequently than men, sparking important conversations about fairness and potential gender biases in family courts. Understanding why this happens, how decisions are made, and what's changing can empower both mothers and fathers to navigate the custody process more effectively.

## Ask Dr. Mike



DR. MIKE

Regarding the history of custody decisions, throughout much of the 20th century, U.S. family courts operated under the influence of the "Tender Years Doctrine," which presumed mothers

were inherently better caregivers, especially for young children. This assumption greatly favored mothers, often sidelining fathers from the parenting role post-divorce. Although this doctrine officially ended decades ago, the residual impact continues, subtly influencing custody outcomes even today.

By the late 20th century, the "best interests of the child" standard replaced the Tender Years Doctrine, moving custody considerations toward gender-neutral criteria. This change signaled a judicial recognition of the importance of both parents, reflecting evolving societal norms where fathers play increasingly active roles in parenting.

Today, courts across the U.S. adhere to the "best interests of the child" standard. Judges consider multiple factors, including the child's emotional attachment to each

parent, home stability, parental involvement in schooling and healthcare, work-life balance, and each parent's demonstrated willingness to foster a healthy relationship with the other parent.

Although officially gender-neutral, this standard frequently benefits mothers due to historical caregiving patterns. Courts closely evaluate who provided primary day-to-day care during the marriage, and because women traditionally fulfill these roles more often, they continue to benefit disproportionately in custody decisions.

But things appear to be shifting. Recent data indicate that approximately 70% to 80% of custodial parents are still mothers. Yet, there is clear evidence of a gradual shift occurring, with more fathers actively pursuing—and obtaining—shared or primary custody than ever before. Societal attitudes towards parenting have evolved significantly, and judges increasingly recognize fathers' contributions beyond financial support.

This shift varies across regions and states, reflecting different cultural and judicial attitudes. Some states,

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SUBMITTED BY JOSHUA WOLINSKI,  
EDWARD JONES FINANCIAL ADVISOR

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JOSHUA WOLINSKI

Let's look at these areas of need and some possible protection solutions:

- *Protecting your income* – An injury or severe illness could prevent you from working for some time. And if that happened, your family's finances could become strained. To help guard against this possibility, you may want to consider disability income insurance. Your employer may offer some type of coverage, but it's likely to be short term and may not be enough to help close the income gap you might face, so you may want to consider purchasing your own policy.

- *Protecting your family* – If you were no longer around, how would your family's lifestyle be affected? Could they stay in the same house? Could your children afford college or another type

of post-secondary education? If you have adequate life insurance, the answer to these questions can be "yes." Again, you might get some coverage from your employer, but it may be insufficient, so you may want to explore additional protection through a personal policy. In determining how much coverage you'll need, you'll want to weigh several factors: size of mortgage and other debts, number of children, spouse's income and needs, and the legacy you'd like to leave.

- *Protecting your goals* – You may have some important financial goals, such as sending your children to college and achieving a comfortable retirement. To protect these goals, you'll need strategies to help prepare for them, which could include investing in an education savings plan and contributing regularly to your IRA and 401(k) or other retirement plans.

- *Protecting your financial independence* – Hopefully, you will be able to remain financially independent your entire life. But this independence could be threatened by the need for some type of long-term care. Consider this: A private room in a nursing home costs, on average,

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## A Wild Ride with Heart: *One of Them Days* Review

Best friends (and roommates) Dreux and Alyssa are having a rough day.

And it's only 8 a.m.

After discovering that Alyssa's boyfriend blew their rent money, the women must race against the clock to secure \$1,500 before their merciless landlord evicts them. To make matters worse, Dreux's interview for her dream job is just hours away, and as the day spirals out of control, it becomes increasingly unlikely that she'll arrive in one piece.

Starring Keke Palmer and SZA, *One of Them Days* is a silly buddy comedy that takes you on a wild ride. Just when it seems like Dreux and Alyssa are about to catch a break, life hits them with another setback. From dealing with shady loan sharks to accidentally getting involved in gang activity, the series of unfortunate events feels relentless and leads to genuinely funny moments and a sense of escalating chaos that maintains high energy throughout the film.

Keke Palmer's performance as Dreux

steals the show, shining in both the dramatic and comedic moments. Her heartfelt portrayal instantly draws audiences in and makes Dreux easy to root for. As we watch the character navigate life in her rundown apartment, deal with a ruthless landlord looking to gentrify, and clean up after Alyssa's freeloading boyfriend, we can't help but feel for her. When it's revealed that she has an interview later that day to become the franchise manager for her restaurant, the stakes skyrocket. Suddenly, the mission to scrape together \$1,500 isn't just about avoiding eviction—it's about securing a future. Palmer balances Dreux's growing desperation with moments of humor and warmth, making her character feel authentic and layered.

At the heart of *One of Them Days* is the bond between Dreux and Alyssa. Though they're opposites and often get under each other's skin, their love for each other is undeniable and drives everything they do. Palmer and SZA effortlessly bring this chemistry to life, making their friendship feel authentic and deep. Dreux is practical and driven, while Alyssa is more carefree and impulsive—a combination that leads

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# Just Like Nothing (else) on Earth: Dunlop Mill Road

BY TIM JON

As far as I can tell, I've located at least one place in this ever-busier County where the 'rat race' doesn't exist—at any rate, I failed to spot any signs of the phenomenon. Now, there are plenty of spots in our locality where you can bank on a fair share of peace, quiet and relative solitude. The last time I made an early-morning drive along Dunlop Mill Road, I experienced virtually nothing else.

The visible stretches on either side of this narrow, gravel corridor seemed under a spell of silence and immobility—as if preserved for all time, yet outside any recorded history. I felt a bit like I'd broken in on someone else's distant memory. Rolling green fields, dawn's mist, unperturbed farm animals and ancient (to me, anyway) structures all stood out on an otherwise gray morning.

Merely re-immersing myself in the

experience—in this moment—lowers the blood pressure and relieves a bit of the stress alluded to in our opening steps of the story. And, yes, I'm sure someone has already tried and failed to put this kind of



TIM JON



therapy into pill form; mankind has a recurring habit of attempting to capture (and usually sell) the eternal—even if only a heartbeat at a time. I'm lucky: I already have all I need.

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# Loudoun Board of Supervisors passes data center zoning amendments

BY KATIE NORTHCOTT

At its business meeting on March 18, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors passed zoning amendments that will provide more oversight to data center development in the county.

The Board of Supervisors began discussions about changing data center zoning ordinances in the spring of 2022. At its Feb. 6, 2024, business meeting, the Board approved the project plan for a joint Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPAM) and Zoning Ordinance Amendment (ZOAM). The project plan split the project into two phases. The Data Center Standards and Locations CPAM and ZOAM are part of phase one.

The amendments would make it more difficult for developers to obtain approval for new data centers. Data centers would be designated as a conditional use in three place types where they are currently a core use and as a special exception use in three place types where they are currently a permitted use by-right.

The Board passed the CPAM and ZOAM with a 7-2 vote with Supervisors Caleb Kershner (R-Catoctin) and Kristen Umstatted (D-Leesburg) opposing the motion.

"I think a lot of folks came to this county. They sought to use our zoning ordinance, and now some of them are losing out. Some of them have had millions of dollars of investment and are going to be losing that investment, no doubt, to some degree," Kershner said. "I think this industry, if we continue down this path, will ultimately leave Loudoun County."

In response to Kershner and Umstatted's comments, Chair Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) spoke about the possible devaluation of residents' homes due to proximity to data centers.

"I say, 'This is what it does for your tax rate,' and they say, 'I don't care.' I have people say, 'I will pay more. Stop building these.' At some point, we just cannot ignore the voice of the people," Randall said. "No one can say that a county that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 »

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## Virginia Tech's Innovation Campus opens doors for technology and education

BY VALERIE CURY

On Feb. 28 a ribbon cutting was held to celebrate the opening of the first Academic Building on the 3.5-acre Virginia Tech Innovation Campus in Alexandria. The 11 story 300,000 square foot building is located in the Potomac Yard neighborhood. The first building opened in January 2025 and offers Virginia Tech graduate programs to include computer engineering and computer science, quantum computing, artificial intelligence and more.

The Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics is located on the fifth floor. The fourth floor houses various programs from the Pamplin College of Business, including the Online Master of Information Technology, as well as programs like the Executive Ph.D. and the Master of Science in Business Administration, with specializations in Hospitality and Tourism Management and Global Business Analytics.

The K-12 program space is on the second floor and the classes offers an introduction to computer science and STEM.



Building one of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus will support efforts to educate and train students for high-quality technology careers, with a focus on fields to include machine learning, wireless and next-generation technologies, quantum architecture, software development, and other tech disciplines. Additionally, the project fosters a partnership with Alexandria City Public Schools to strengthen STEM education.

Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R), and U.S. Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine (both D-VA), along with other elected officials and Virginia Tech leadership, participated in the grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Youngkin said, "Projects like this one last for a long

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

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# “There’s been just a colossal failure at the county level to the folks at Hiddenwood”—Eric Combs, Ashburn Planning Commissioner

BY SOPHIA CLIFTON

At the March 25 meeting of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, heated debates and detailed statistics underscored the controversy surrounding the Hiddenwood Assemblage project—a development proposal for properties along Hiddenwood Lane near Arcola that has become one of the most challenging cases reviewed in recent years.

## GOVERNMENT

The Hiddenwood Assemblage, a coalition of property owners, has long been pushing for a collective rezoning to facilitate the sale of their homes and escape the rapid spread of data center development. Once a quiet, agricultural community, the area is now increasingly surrounded by industrial construction. The group’s original proposal, which had envisioned three data center buildings totaling 756,024 square feet with a maximum

height of 55 feet, was narrowly approved by the Planning Commission after a marathon three-hour discussion that included two failed votes and a 30-minute recess for negotiations. The idea was spurred by the fact that the group had secured a buyer contingent on a zoning change.

Today, the residents find their property lines almost touching a newly approved data center building, while within a one-mile radius there are already four data centers and one substation in operation, with an additional 23 data centers and two substations approved or planned.

Last May, the Planning Commission narrowly approved the original data center application on a 4-3-1 vote. Notably, Chair Michelle Frank (Broad Run) and commissioners Madhava Reddy Madireddy (Dulles) and Robin-Eve Jasper (Little River) opposed the measure, while commissioner Mark Miller (Catoclin) was absent from the vote.

Following this, a four-hour public hearing before the Board of Supervisors led the Hiddenwood Assemblage to defer their application. The deferral was intended to allow further collaboration with county supervisors to address emerging concerns and refine the proposal.

In a significant shift during the March 25 meeting, the assemblage revised its application by eliminating data centers as a permitted use. The new proposal now permits 334,000 square feet of light and medium industrial as well as commercial space, with the maximum building height reduced to 39 feet—representing a 55.8% decrease in total square footage and a 29% reduction in height. This change not only lowers the development’s scale but also incorporates adjustments to previously agreed-upon mitigation measures designed to lessen the impact on Briarfield Estates. However, this change has

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## Purcellville Farmers Market returns April 26

Spring is here, and that means the return of the Purcellville Farmers Market. Mark your calendars for Saturday, April 26, as the market kicks off its season from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. Conveniently located behind Nostalgia Boutique at 142 E Main Street, this vibrant community event is ready to welcome back loyal shoppers and fresh faces alike.

Many of last year’s favorite vendors are making a return, offering their farm-fresh produce, handcrafted goods, and local specialties. Plus, Purcellville Farmers Market will have new vendors who will bring even more variety to this season’s market. Whether you’re looking for organic vegetables, artisanal bread, homemade jams, or farm raised meat, the Purcellville Farmers Market has something for everyone.

Market organizer Silas Redd shared his excitement for another season. Said Redd, “We’re thrilled to provide a space where small, local growers and artisans can showcase their goods while also creating an event that brings the community together. The market is more than just a place to shop—it’s a Saturday tradition that supports local businesses and fosters connections. We take great pride in seeing friends, neighbors, and families gather each week to celebrate the best of what our region has to offer. It’s incredibly rewarding to witness the relationships that form between customers and vendors, as well as the appreciation for locally sourced products.”

The market is not just about buying groceries—it’s about experiencing the rich agriculture that is slowly disappearing in Loudoun County. Whether you’re catching up with neighbors, meeting the people who grow your food, or discovering a new favorite

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

## Council majority votes to lower Purcellville’s real property tax rate

BY VALERIE CURY

At the Purcellville Town Council Special Budget Session on March 26, Mayor Chris Bertaut, Vice Mayor Ben Nett, and Council Members Carol Luke and Susan Khalil voted to lower the recommended real property tax rate from \$0.205 to \$0.192. The town budget process has just started.

## GOVERNMENT

The real equalized tax rate of \$0.192 reflects the equalized tax rate taking into consideration the 6% increase in the real estate assessments. Council Members Erin Rayner, Kevin Wright and Caleb Stought voted against, saying they would have to cut funds from the budget. Council will have to cut \$279,000 from the town’s FY26 \$35.9 million budget.

### March 25 Town Council comments

In the council comments portion of the March 25 Town Council Work Session Vice Mayor Ben Nett summarized the political movement that is being mounted against the council majority.

Disputing Council Member Erin Rayner’s version of hundreds and even thousands of speakers coming and speaking at the council meetings, Nett said the same several “familiar set of speakers are showing up—which is their right.”

Nett said, “This is about political power. Money versus the will of the majority as it relates to their vision for Purcellville as expressed in their Comprehensive Plan.”

He pointed out that the council minority “has come to believe that they don’t need to win elections to win

elections. If they can be mean enough, nasty enough, ruthless enough, disruptive enough, intimidating enough—if they can generate enough disparaging articles through their media allies, if they can sling enough mud on social media, then they can get council members to flip or quit, and move out of town even.”

Nett said that these tactics “have not worked and will not work” on his colleagues, Mayor Chris Bertaut, and Council Members Carol Luke and Susan Khalil.

He said the council majority will fulfill their campaign promises to the citizens of Purcellville. “We will through the budget process, which hasn’t even started, create a leaner more efficient government.”

Nett concluded by saying “those who have conspired to defame my character and I believe want to overturn the most recent elections ... will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law.”

“Citizens should offer constructive ideas on how together we must address the challenges before us. Those challenges are real,” Nett concluded.

Council Member Susan Khalil addressed the Main Street USA-Virginia Main Street program. She said, “When one hears the words Main Street USA one can’t help but envision a Hallmark town. Who wouldn’t want to live in a Hallmark town with cafes, a movie theatre and mom and pop merchants.”

Khalil said that “the name of the program leads us to believe that by adopting it we are on the way to turning Purcellville into Hallmark Purcellville.”

She said when you read all of the program, which has some positive aspects,

“there’s nothing more Main Street can do for our town that our current merchants and businesses owners can not do. If a building owner or owners’ desire to enhance their property or come together to enhance adjoining properties, we support that 100%. As long as it complies with our current Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan as supported by the residents of our town.”

Council Member Erin Rayner has said she wants affordable housing and condos in the area of 21<sup>st</sup> Street on the properties managed by her largest donor through his affiliates. Rayner and former Mayor Stan Milan said they wanted to turn 21<sup>st</sup> Street into a Gaslamp District, similar to San Diego’s Gaslamp District. For decades two apartments per building are allowed in the Historic Downtown area—where commercial and office are encouraged, to add to the percentage of commercial in the town.

Khalil said that Bia Kitchen, Enhanced Beauty and Wellness Clinic, and Catoclin Creek Distillery are good examples of redeveloping properties.

“If we have unattractive buildings in our town, it’s because the owners of those buildings so far have chosen to not enhance them.” Since the Main Street program focuses on pedestrian areas, it’s important to discuss a potential closure of vehicular access to 21<sup>st</sup> Street, with the business owners in that area to see if they are opposed to that, cautioned Khalil.

Regarding the budget season, Council Member Caleb Stought said, “When we manage the town’s money, we are managing, you, the tax payer’s money and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

**BEN NETT**, CON'T. FROM PAGE 1

ongoing community engagement. In the email, Lombrana wrote, "Behavior of this nature, particularly if part of a pattern, can result in adverse employment action up to and including termination."

On election eve, Nov. 4, 2024, Nett received an email from Lombrana informing him he was "randomly" selected for drug screening.

**On Nov. 19, 2024, following his Nov. 5 election victory**, Human Resources Director LaDonna Snellbaker sent Officer Nett an email requesting his resignation from either the Town Council or the Police Department. She cited Section 10.3.B.1 of the Town of Purcellville Employee Handbook, which states, "No employee shall continue in their position with the Town after election to any public office in the Town." This policy had been added during a revision of the Employee Handbook in July 2024 during the campaign period. The last revision was in 2005.

On Nov. 22, 2024, the Executive Director of the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council affirmed that Nett was exercising his rights under Virginia state law. Specifically referencing Virginia Code Section 2.2-3107 (B) (1) (ii), the director confirmed that the law clearly applies to Nett's situation, allowing him to remain a member of the Police Department while serving on the Town Council. The policy has since been removed because it is not legally enforceable.

During a Town Council Special Meeting on Jan. 8, Acting Administrative Lieutenant Mike Holman had a loud angry outburst when the new Interim Town Manager was appointed—violating the department's General Orders.

On Jan. 10, while on duty, Officer Nett attended a brief agenda work session at Town Hall, at the request of the Interim Town Manager, who has administrative control over the Police Department and to whom the Chief of Police reports directly.

Nett marked himself as being on "Directed Patrol"—the proper designation for marking a shift while in service. Directed patrols are used for activities such as observing traffic from a parked position, running errands, eating lunch, and other duties from which the officer can respond to a call for service at any time.

The aforementioned work session was the first reason for Nett's recommended termination and placement on the Brady List.

**On Jan. 15, two senior Town of Purcellville staff members** initiated a meeting with the Interim Town Manager and advocated eliminating the Purcellville Police Department in its entirety. They noted the Police Department has been the source of most of the HR complaints over the last decade.

On Jan. 28, just before midnight, unable to sleep and suffering from lingering flu-like symptoms—including temporary loss

of his voice—Nett emailed Acting Administrative Lt. Holman to notify him that he would be on sick leave, extending into his scheduled weekend off. Nett was also dealing with an aggravated knee injury, which was later diagnosed as "patellar tendinitis," with x-rays suggesting a possible slight meniscus tear.

On that same day, Nett communicated with both Mayor Chris Bertaut and Council Member Carol Luke, informing them that he was feeling unwell and unable to drive, making it unlikely that he would be able to attend the Virginia Municipal League conference scheduled for the morning of Jan. 30.

Originally, Nett had planned to depart on the evening of Jan. 29, after his shift, and take leave on Jan. 30. After a day of rest, Nett decided to travel to Richmond that evening with Luke. Due to his knee injury, she drove him both to and from Richmond.

**On Feb. 7, Acting Administrative Lt. Mike Holman instructed Officer Nett** to come to his office, where he was informed of two additional Internal Affairs investigations and corresponding Orders of Confidentiality. The allegations were related to Nett's attendance at the Jan. 10 agenda work session and his use of sick leave on Jan. 29-30. Holman refused to answer any questions, stating that the IA investigations would be handled by Sergeant Jessica Tacha of the Prince William County Police Department.

After further aggravating his right knee and facing the ongoing stress from the personal campaign against him, Nett notified the Police Department and the Town Manager, on Feb. 8, that he would be on sick leave until further notice.

At the conclusion of the Town Council meeting on Feb. 13, Acting Chief Lombrana approached Nett and handed him an envelope containing a memorandum from Acting Administrative Lt. Holman, who had just been promoted. The memorandum requested that Nett provide notice of his expected return to work by Monday, Feb. 17, and included threats of insubordination if he did not comply.

On Feb. 13, Nett attended a council meeting while on sick leave. Council meetings are scheduled to avoid conflicts with members' regular shifts and work responsibilities. Additionally, it's possible to be unfit for duty as a police officer and still be fully capable of attending and sitting through a council meeting.

**On Feb. 14, Officer Nett submitted a formal ethics complaint against Lombrana, Holman, and the Director of Human Resources**, and became the second sworn member to file a formal ethics complaint against Lombrana and Holman.

As instructed, Nett emailed Lt. Holman on Feb. 16—copying Deputy Chief Lombrana—to provide his expected return-to-work date of Feb. 27.

On Feb. 17, Lt. Holman texted Officer Nett's personal cell phone, instructing

him to respond by 2 p.m. or he would "be stopping by your residence." Officer Nett had already communicated with Lt. Holman, as instructed, providing his return-to-work date. Since Nett was under no obligation to respond to work calls or messages while on leave, he instead notified the Town Manager. Holman did not visit Nett's residence.

At 9:58 a.m., on Feb. 18, Lt. Holman emailed Nett, informing him that he was being placed on administrative leave and demanding that Nett turn in all issued PD property—including his badge, gun, uniforms, and credentials by 4 p.m. The memorandum stated: "By this action, your police powers and authority are suspended until such time as a determination is made regarding your ability to return to duty."

The memorandum explained that this action was being taken because Nett's "lack of a doctor's note constitutes insubordination. Insubordination is grounds for relief and possible termination."

However, this contradicted Lt. Holman's order from Feb. 13, to which Nett had already complied by providing his anticipated return-to-work date—an email to which Lt. Holman had not responded. That order explicitly stated, "You will not be able to return to duty until this physician's statement is provided." However, Nett had not yet returned to duty.

This was another reason in which Nett was recommended for termination and placed on the Brady List.

Forty-four minutes later on Feb. 18, at 10:42 a.m., Lombrana sent an email to the entire Police Department stating, "Officer Nett is relieved of duty and is on administrative leave" while noting he is not allowed in the Purcellville Police Department building unless accompanied by herself or Holman. Holman delivered the same message to Nett's residence, while Nett was at the pharmacy, alarming his wife.

Sixty-one minutes later, at 11:43 a.m., Nett received a voicemail, followed by an email at 11:50 a.m. from the Prince William County Sergeant regarding the Internal Affairs investigations initiated on Feb. 7—eleven days earlier.

**On Feb. 19, the Interim Town Manager and Town Attorney met** to discuss the targeting of Officer Nett and reviewed ethics complaints filed against Acting Chief Lombrana and Lt. Holman. Following the Town Attorney's advice, the Interim Town Manager emailed Lombrana, directing her to immediately reinstate Officer Nett to full duty until legal guidance and a formal investigation were completed. The directive also reminded Lombrana of the Town Code requirement to promptly transmit charges and witness information for proper investigation, stressing full compliance moving forward.

Lombrana did not comply with the lawful directive to reinstate Nett and in further defiance, Holman again texted

Nett's personal cell phone ordering him to respond to the Prince William County Police regarding the Internal Affairs investigations. However, based on the direction from the Town Manager, Officer Nett was instructed not to surrender his badge and credentials or participate in the inquiry.

On Feb. 21, the Town Attorney said he had reached out to the Prince William County Sergeant tasked by Lt. Holman with leading the IA. However, she stated that she no longer needed to discuss the matter—just three days after her initial outreach to Officer Nett.

On February 21, a courier delivered two memorandums to Officer Nett from Acting Chief Lombrana, notifying him of sustained allegations and an intent to terminate his employment. The memos, titled "Advanced Notice of Discipline," stated that Nett had five days to respond to the charges, with termination effective Feb. 28, if no response was received.

**Before the Feb. 25 Town Council meeting, Officer Nett was informed** by the Town Attorney that Commonwealth's Attorney Bob Anderson had placed him on the Brady List due to sustained charges from Acting Chief Lombrana and based on Council Member Erin Rayner's interview with Prince William's investigator.

Notably, Anderson's letter, dated Feb. 24, came two days before the Feb. 26 deadline for Nett's response to the charges pursuant to the Law Enforcement Officer's Procedural Guarantee Act. At the Town Council meeting, former Chief Cynthia McAlister, former Chief Barry Dufek, Acting Chief Lombrana, and Lt. Holman were present and observed directing smirks at Officer Nett.

Former Chief Cynthia McAlister and her husband attended the Purcellville March 25 Work Session, where they were seen clapping and mocking Vice Mayor Ben Nett. McAlister's husband also used foul language directed at Nett, and audible to this reporter who was seated nearby. McAlister also campaigned for the Stan Milan slate in the November 2024 election.

During the week of Feb. 26, the confidential Internal Affairs investigation of Officer Nett was leaked to two Loudoun newspapers. The leak detailed the allegations, which were meant to remain confidential, along with quotes from Commonwealth's Attorney Anderson's letter placing Officer Nett on the Brady List.

On March 19, nearly a month after the notice of termination and being put on the Brady List, Nett was given the opportunity to answer the sustained charges at a so called pre-disciplinary hearing at Prince William County Police Headquarters. There, Nett provided evidence with supporting affidavits demonstrating that all of the sustained charges against him were both unfounded and politically motivated.

REMEMBERING

# Kathleen M. Satterfield

Kathleen M. Satterfield passed away on Sunday, March, 2 from complications of Parkinson's disease. She is survived by her sister, Shirley Main (Pat), of Purcellville, Virginia. She was preceded in death by her father, Clifford D. McFall of Alexandria, VA, her stepmother Suelen Garrison of Sterling, VA, two brothers, Thomas McFall of Inwood, WV and Charles McFall of Winchester, VA, in addition to the many friends who have been by her side for decades.

Kathy was born in Torrance, CA and moved to Springfield, VA when she was very young. Later, her family moved to Leesburg, VA where Kathy attended Loudoun County High School, graduating in 1981.

Shortly thereafter, she started her life-long career at the United States Geological Survey in Reston, VA and remained there until her retirement after more than 30 years of service. She loved working there and made many lasting friendships which she carried into her retirement.

After retirement, Kathy kept herself

busy with part-time work and spending time with family and friends. She was a cat lover and was never without a furry friend by her side. Kathy was the consummate helper, always wanting to be of help to someone in any way she could. Whether it was a family member or friend, she would do anything from cleaning houses, running errands, babysitting, driving people around, you name it.



She loved the beach and traveled regularly to Virginia Beach with her sister and brother-in-law. She couldn't get enough of the boogie board and soaking up some sun. In her spare time, she enjoyed painting. She made many paintings that decorated her home and the homes of her family and friends.

family and friends.

A memorial service was held at the Hall Funeral Home, 140 S. Nursery Ave., Purcellville, VA on Thursday, March 13. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Parkinson's Foundation.

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## Wheatland Concert Series kicks off on April 12

Shiloh Manor Farm is gearing up for their spring chamber music recital and dinner on April 12, starting at 6 p.m. at 14781 Berlin Turnpike, Purcellville. This event is a wonderful way to celebrate spring. The quality of chamber musicians who have performed at the Wheatland Concert Series is outstanding, and it is hard to overstate the ensemble that will be performing at this concert.

Professor Mark Janello (harpichord) and Professor Nikia Borisevich (baroque violin) are welcomed back—from the Johns Hopkins University Peabody Conservatory—and

are joined by Dr. Joelle Arnhold on viola, Dr. Emily Konkle on second baroque violin and Mr. Peter Kebee on cello, performing works by Georg Phillip Telemann, Antonio Vivaldi and Johann Sebastian Bach.

During Intermission Chef Erik Foxx Nettnin will serve an authentic French dinner consisting of Onion Soup Gratinée, followed by Coq au Vin Blanc, chicken and spring vegetables sautéed in a white wine sauce, both served with paired imported French wine. Chef Erik's masterpiece Crème Brûlée will be served for dessert along with coffee and tea. Tickets are available at [www.shiloh-manor.com](http://www.shiloh-manor.com).

### COMMUNITY

## Harmony Middle School is performing the musical *Newsies*

*Newsies, Jr*, musical is coming to the stage at Harmony Middle School April 4-6. The show is set in 1899 New York City, where the newspaper sellers known as "newsies" fight wealthy newspaper magnates, like Joseph Pulitzer. The newsies' livelihood is threatened by the powerful newspaper

publishers raising their prices, costing the newsies more to buy the papers they are selling.

They learn that the best way to fight for their rights is to come together, and with the help of an ambitious young reporter they stand up for what

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 »

## A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: Oak Hill's bid for State Park Status

On March 24, Gov. Glenn Youngkin included the 1,240-acre Oak Hill State Park Plan, located in Aldie, in his budget amendments—sending them back to the General Assembly, following a private tour of Oak Hill with Delegate Geary Higgins. The language added in Youngkin's amendments "Authorizes consideration of the acquisition of Oak Hill State Park."

Said Youngkin, "In addition after careful consideration and I have to say an enormous amount of arm twisting and a site visit with Delegate Geary Higgins, our package of budget amendments includes language to authorize the consideration of establishing Oak Hill, the historic home of the Virginia governor and the fifth president of the United States James Monroe as a state park."

Oak Hill was the home of James Monroe, Virginia governor and the fifth president of the United States. The DeLashmutt family has owned Oak Hill since 1948.

Monroe served in nearly every major office in this country—from house of Delegates to Congress to the Senate and the presidency. He was Secretary of War and the Secretary of State; "he was everywhere



and doing everything," said Higgins.

"I have watched too many homes of historic importance go away and once they're gone, they're gone. There's no getting them back," he said.

"This is an opportunity that in my view is a once in a lifetime opportunity. It's an opportunity not just for the home but for 1,240-acres right in the center of Loudoun County to be preserved in perpetuity," said Higgins.

After receiving unanimous support in the House, the proposal failed in the Senate, as they refused to include the creation

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19 »

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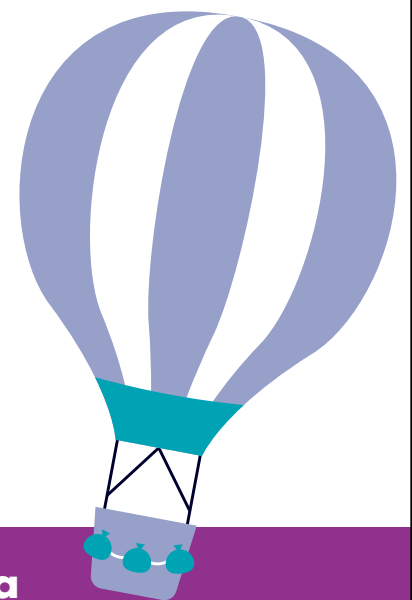
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# Pastor Michelle C. Thomas—Loudoun County’s ‘force to be reckoned with’

*Pastor, Entrepreneur, Historic Preservationist, Activist, Politician, Community Organizer, and More*

BY FLOYD NELSON

Many of us have heard the phrase, “a force to be reckoned with.” After all, the first records of the phrase date back to the late 1800s. When words and phrases exist in the American lexicon for more than a

hundred years, it should come as no surprise that phrase is a familiar one.

Some sources say the words—“a force to be reckoned with”—refer to “someone who is strong and cannot be ignored.” Other sources say these words are used “to emphasize that someone or something is very powerful or more powerful than you think—so you’d better be ready.” With all of that said, many of us have yet to encounter or experience this type of force—that is, until now.

Enter Pastor Michelle C. Thomas. An electrical engineer, her resume reveals that “Pastor Michelle” also serves as Founder and Senior Pastor of the Holy & Whole Life Changing Ministries International, the first church in Loudoun County founded by a Black woman.

She is president of the Loudoun NAACP and the first African American woman to be appointed a member of the Loudoun Heritage Commission. In fact, her current online information states that

Pastor Thomas is “5x CEO/Socioprenuer at Loudoun Freedom Center, NoVA Data Center Academy, M-Tech Services, LLC, NAACP Loudoun Branch, Holy & Whole Life Changing Ministries Int’l.”

In 2019, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam named Pastor Michelle to the Commission on African American History Education. The Commission is charged with reviewing Virginia’s history standards, and the instructional practices,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

## COLOSSAL FAILURE, CON’T. FROM PAGE 11

not quelled concerns. Two votes during the Planning Commission meeting ended in deadlocked ties, with vote counts such as 4-4 on motions to amend and forward the application.

The meeting also highlighted community response to the application. While nearly 150 residents attended the session—a 30% increase from previous meetings—there was notable silence from Briarfield Estates residents, the neighborhood directly north of the Hiddenwood properties. Commissioner Dale Polen Myers (At Large) pointed out this lack of response to the Board, saying, “That is so different than last time we were around here and it doesn’t feel like anybody is even taking that into consideration.”

In contrast, public comment submissions numbered 25, with an estimated 68% opposing further industrial development. Moreover, data from the session revealed that a recent petition circulated among Briarfield Estates residents recorded a 60% opposition rate, with 12 out of 20 households signing against the revised plan.

Concerns centered not only on the overall scale of the project but specifically on the easternmost of the three proposed buildings due to its close proximity to Briarfield Estates. Hiddenwood residents are also troubled by a separate data center project on the adjacent JK2 property—a permitted project that now threatens to transform open space into a multi-story

data center, just across their gravel road.

Gem Bingle, speaking to the Board on behalf of the Piedmont Environmental Council, said, “We are sad to see Hiddenwood back before the commission because this situation represents a profound failure of local zoning to prioritize the residents it’s intended, first and foremost, to serve. The long range planning, smart growth planning over the years, it’s flipped back and forth and we all see the outcome here, for this neighborhood’s unfortunate current circumstances.”

Bingol continued, “We feel it is vitally important to address the northern buffer between the site and the neighborhood which will be the greatest impact by such a change in the underlying zoning.”

Project Manager Allison Britain emphasized that the revised proposal does not align with the county’s General Plan. “Staff cannot support a recommendation of approval due to a number of outstanding issues and find the application is not consistent with the 2019 General Plan or the countywide transportation plan,” she said.

Walsh-Colucci Land Use Planner Michael Romeo pointed out that while the group has made significant cuts, the proposed footprints remain inflexible. “Even though we cannot really have much flexibility with the footprints, we have reduced the square footage by over 55% and we’ve also reduced the building height considerably down to 39 feet,” he said.

Romeo also stressed that the county General Plan prioritizes transitional areas

between conflicting land uses, a point that resonates with many commissioners given the proximity of industrial plans to residential neighborhoods. “The transition between the data center on the JK2 site versus the residential on Briarfield through Hiddenwood in what we’re proposing is a transition that we’ve worked hard on and hopefully this is up to the standard of the commission,” Romeo said.

Former chair Michelle Frank offered her thoughts on the land use, “I don’t wanna just move the problem to another community. And that’s where I was last year on this, and that’s where I remain still today. I don’t think we’ve gotten there yet. I do think the right solution here from a land use perspective is going to be something that’s a transition between the uses. Because you know, you draw a line and Hiddenwood Lane was the line and here we are. It didn’t work so well.”

During the session, Commissioner Myers noted that despite the mixed votes, the board remains committed to providing the residents with additional time and collaboration to refine the application. Commissioner James Banks (Algonkian) was absent, but the votes cast by the remaining members reflected a deep division on how best to proceed.

Commissioner Madhava Reddy Madireddy (Dulles), whose district includes the contested properties, was particularly critical of the revised proposal. “It’s a worse application than it was before,” he argued, stating that some of the important commitments

were removed in this new application. A motion by Madireddy to recommend denial of the application also ended in a 4-4 tie, highlighting the persistent split among the commissioners.

A subsequent motion by Commissioner Myers—to send the application forward for a future meeting with a clear mandate to address issues related to the easternmost building—passed unanimously 7-0 (with one abstention). Commissioners, including Eric Combs (Ashburn) and Robin-Eve Jasper (Little River), stressed that a comprehensive and collaborative approach is needed.

“There’s been just a colossal failure at the county level to the folks at Hiddenwood and we owe them anything that we can do to help them mitigate those impacts to the north,” Combs said.

“I think that we can get to a solution that’s an appropriate solution, not a compromised solution. But we can’t do it if we accept this application and send it forward to export the problem so we’re facing the same problem again with regard to Briarfield,” Jasper stated.

While the revised Hiddenwood Assemblage application represents significant changes in scale and intent, the latest commission meeting underscores that both community opposition and internal county divisions remain high. The process now moves forward with plans for further refinements aimed at better reconciling the needs of local residents with the county’s development strategy.

## FINANCIAL FOCUS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

more than \$116,000 a year, while the services of a home health aide are more than \$75,000 a year, according to Genworth, an insurance company. Medicare generally does not cover these costs or types of needs and would typically only pay for a short period. You might be left with significant bills or creditors and possibly dependent on family or loved ones. To help protect yourself from these threats, you may want to consult with a financial professional, who can offer long-term care solutions.

• *Protecting your legacy* – When you work hard your whole life, you may want to leave something behind to your loved ones. A comprehensive estate plan can help ensure your family – and the charitable groups you support – will receive the resources you’d like them to have. An estate plan can be somewhat complex, involving various documents and arrangements, including a will, living trust and various powers of attorney, so you’ll need to work with a qualified legal advisor, and possibly your financial professional.

As we’ve seen, “protection” can take many forms. So, try to follow all the protection strategies you need to enjoy the life you’ve envisioned for yourself and your family. Remember, your individual financial goals and questions deserve individual attention. If you think you might need specific financial advice, please reach out to a local financial advisor.

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**HARMONY MIDDLE SCHOOL**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

they feel is right. 66 students from the school are in the production singing, dancing, and leaping, or learning how to run lighting, cue mics, and move sets.

Under the direction of Harmony English teacher, Meghann Donohue,

voice coach Amanda Caravill, and school counselor and production manager Alysia Brown, students have been working since the beginning of December to master songs, such as “Seize the Day”, “Carrying the Banner”, and “King of New York”, and bring the period and their individual characters to life. For the first

time, a Harmony show has a dedicated dance crew, under the direction of Anastasia Kim, to perform lifts and acrobatic elements.

Parent volunteers and student tech crew have built a New York City skyline, with detailed backgrounds such as Medda’s vaudeville theater and the

dining room in Pulitzer’s upper East Side mansion.

“Seize the Day” and get tickets before they are sold out. Shows are Friday, April 4 at 7 p.m., Saturday, April 5 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. and Sunday, April 6 at 2 p.m. Ticket may be purchased at <https://www.lcps.org/o/hrm/article/2073350>.

**ASK DR. MIKE**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

such as Arizona and Florida, actively promote joint custody, while others maintain more traditional custody patterns.

In Virginia, custody decisions strictly adhere to the best interests standard, outlined explicitly in the state’s laws. Judges consider multiple practical aspects, such as the emotional and physical needs of the child, stability provided by each parent, and their willingness to co-parent effectively. Though Virginia courts do not explicitly favor mothers, the reality of traditional caregiving roles still tends to benefit women slightly in custody hearings.

For example, Virginia courts frequently highlight the importance of continuity in schooling, relationships, and community ties when determining custody arrangements. If mothers have been primarily responsible for maintaining these routines, this often weighs heavily in their

favor. Nonetheless, Virginia has increasingly embraced shared custody arrangements, especially when fathers present clear evidence of active and consistent involvement.

A pervasive misconception is that family courts explicitly favor mothers because of inherent gender bias. While outcomes may appear biased due to historical caregiving roles, modern judicial standards are intentionally neutral. Most judges focus carefully on the specifics of each case rather than preconceived gender assumptions.

That said, implicit bias can still exist. Fathers who demonstrate active involvement in parenting duties throughout the child’s life stand a far better chance of overcoming any lingering bias. Demonstrating clear, documented involvement and capability can effectively counter misconceptions that mothers are inherently better caregivers.

So, what tends to help or hurt divorcing men regarding their custody outcomes? Men who successfully secure favorable custody outcomes typically share common traits. Actively participating in parenting responsibilities—attending medical appointments, parent-teacher meetings, extracurricular activities, and daily caregiving—significantly strengthens their position. Courts value documented involvement, collaboration with the other parent, and clear evidence of stable home environments.

Conversely, men who have not been actively involved in their children’s daily lives or who demonstrate conflict or instability face significant disadvantages. Consistency and visible commitment are critical factors that help courts confidently award custody to fathers.

Custody dynamics continue to evolve, gradually balancing out as societal views about fatherhood shift. Fathers today

more often actively participate in parenting, challenging outdated stereotypes. The ongoing cultural and judicial shifts suggest that custody outcomes will continue to become more equitable, and these decisions will likely be driven by evidence-based assessments rather than gender roles.

Ultimately, both parents’ best strategy for increased custody is to actively document involvement in their children’s lives, coupled with showing a willingness to cooperate and co-parent respectfully. The courts increasingly reward demonstrated parenting commitment, regardless of gender, making fairness and the child’s best interests achievable goals for everyone involved.

*Michael Oberschneider, Psy.D. 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.*

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**, CONT. FROM PAGE 9

has the vast majority of the world’s data centers is not friendly to data centers.”

During the March 18 meeting, the Board heard 23 public comments on the zoning amendments and 20 public comments on power lines. After the input sessions ended, 27 speakers remained on the waiting list to address the Board.

The zoning amendments themselves were not very controversial. Most speakers addressed their comments toward a grandfathering resolution. The resolution allows data center developers that had applications approved before Feb. 12, 2025, to continue building. As of Dec. 1, 2024, 59.7 million square feet of data center development was in the pipeline for Loudoun County.

Prior to the March 18 meeting, the Loudoun Transmission Line Alliance and Piedmont Environmental Council sent emails to Loudoun residents prior to the meeting, encouraging residents to speak against the grandfathering resolution at the meeting. Additionally, Senator Russel Perry used her social media accounts to encourage Loudoun residents to oppose grandfathering.

“Grandfathering in these data centers means no public input, no hearings, no transparency,” Perry said.

Randall responded to Perry’s comments during the Mar. 18 meeting, saying she took personal offense.

“I take transparency and public comments very, very seriously,” Randall said. “And if somebody wants to have a discussion about how by-right administrative applications are done, we can have that discussion. But to say we’re not transparent is just wrong on its face.”

Loudoun residents responded to the call for public speakers, and the Board heard over 40 speakers at its March 18 meeting. Thirteen speakers spoke in favor of grandfathering, three spoke favorably of data centers, eight spoke against grandfathering and the expansion of the data center industry within Loudoun County, and 19 spoke against the Golden to Mars transmission lines.

Those in favor of grandfathering and growing the data center industry in Loudoun County mentioned benefits like lower tax rates, environmental benefits, and economic stability. Many speakers were concerned that failure to adopt a grandfathering policy would be unfair to businesses that had already invested much of their time and money into Loudoun County, deterring future data center developers from building in Loudoun.

Theo Stamatis, representing the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, explained that Loudoun County administrators plan to set the fiscal year 2026 property tax at the lowest rate in Northern Virginia. Additionally, the vehicle tax rate will decrease, and the school board’s budget will be fully funded. According to Stamatis, none of this would be possible without the data center industry in Loudoun County.

“The prosperity and stability we enjoy today in large part is a result of the historical and continued investment from data centers,” said Matt Leslie, a resident of the Catocin District. “Grandfathering is a fundamental commitment to fairness, ensuring that businesses that have invested in good faith under existing rules can proceed with certainty.”

Those opposed to grandfathering cited concerns such as health, lack of economic diversity in Loudoun County, and decreasing home values. One homeowner, Patricia Steggerda, brought a diagram to show how close one data center was slated to be built to her backyard. She said the data center would be barely 500 feet from her home.

“That will be very detrimental to all of our homes. And to our health, to the noise, to the light, everything,” Steggerda said. “This is one of the closest applications of the county that are going to be near the residents’ homes. It’s not right.”

Loudoun County resident Colleen David expressed concerns about data centers’ electromagnetic fields and their impacts on health, saying that the long-term impact of electromagnetic fields has yet to be researched

conclusively. She called on the Board to represent and advocate for Loudoun County residents.

“It is my firm understanding that the data center developers have engaged highly paid representatives and advocates that have one goal in mind: gain the approval of the projects by whatever means possible,” David said. “Therefore, if the majority of the county’s residents believe we have more than enough data centers, why are the individuals who are chartered to represent our interests entertaining exceptions and waivers on already agreed upon zoning assignments?”

During the Board’s discussion about grandfathering, Randall addressed the data center community. She said it was problematic that the Board was even having discussions about data centers being so close to homes.

“For years, the kind of handshake agreement was that we would say ‘yes’ to data centers all day long, as long as they weren’t near residences and in bucolic corridors and things like that,” Randall said. “We talk a lot about how much it costs for a data center to put an application in and what they do and all the things they go to. And we should talk about that. It’s a lot of money. But I’m not going to value a data center over a person’s home.”

Randall admonished leaders in the data center industry to police their community better. She said some data center developers get it “spot on correct” while others motivate these kinds of discussions.

The supervisors passed the grandfathering resolution with a 5-4 vote with Vice Chair Michael Turner (D-Ashburn) and Supervisors Sylvia Glass (D-Broad Run), Laura TeKrony (D-Little River), and Juli Briskman (D-Algonkian) opposed.

“I think it’s just a matter of time,” Kershner said. “It won’t happen next year; it won’t happen five years from now; it might not even happen seven, eight, nine years from now. But I think this industry, if we continue down this path, will ultimately leave Loudoun County.”

**OAK HILL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16**

of a new state park in their budget. The General Assembly is scheduled to vote on Youngkin's amendments on April 2.

Higgins and Youngkin met privately at Oak Hill on Monday, March 10 with the DeLashmutt family, Heather Richards the vice president for the Mid Atlantic region for the Conservation Fund which bridges the gap between private ownership and public ownership, and Acting Secretary Stefanie Taillon.

During the meeting, they toured the property and discussed the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to secure an important piece of Virginia's history. Recapping the meeting, Gov. Youngkin said, "Delegate Geary Higgins called me and invited me to go visit, and we had a quiet visit. For anybody who's worked with me, I need a business plan, and I want to see that it works, and then I can support it. Delegate Higgins has been an incredibly strong advocate for including [Oak Hill] in the budget."

family. We discussed the financials at length in the very room where the Monroe Doctrine was written. I was thoroughly impressed with the Governor's preparedness and in-depth knowledge of the entire plan.

"I could never give up on Oak Hill. If we did nothing, then President Monroe's home would have become just another



Delegate Higgins, who successfully secured local and state funding for Loudoun's Sweet Run State Park in the beginning of Youngkin's term, issued the following statement:

"I have been working with the Governor for the better part of the past year on making this Park a reality, and I am extremely grateful for his willingness to listen and his decision to support the Park. Two weeks ago, I invited him out to see the property and the vision, and we had a great visit with the DeLashmutt

Northern Virginia subdivision, lost forever. If passed in the budget, Oak Hill State Park will bring to life incredible historic events like the Monroe Doctrine, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Missouri Compromise to millions of people.

Higgins said the work begins now, because "we have got to advocate, and we need to get our friends out that are interested to advocate on behalf of this property and on behalf of the home that we include in this park."

Higgins urged action saying, "We need to be in touch with our Senators and even some of the ones that maybe are not our Senators, all of them, and express to them the need and the opportunity for this.

Loudoun County has allocated \$22 million and the Conservation Fund along with other groups have raised nearly \$25 million. The DeLashmutt is selling their property for \$20 million.

Higgins said, I want to thank the DeLashmutt's for their vision and their generosity and offering this to the state. The fact that they've done that is unbelievable opportunity for us to preserve the home of our fifth president James Monroe."

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**MONTANA COCHRAN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3**

advocating for Lyme disease awareness. As a young woman dealing with chronic Lyme disease, she has developed a deep commitment to raising awareness about Lyme disease and women's health. Over the coming year, she plans to focus her platform on educating others about Lyme disease and offering support to those affected.

"Living with Lyme disease has given me a deeper understanding of the challenges many face, and I'm determined to help others who may be struggling in silence. Awareness is the first step toward making a difference," she shared.

Cochran will represent Virginia at the Miss Teen International pageant in July 2025, where she will continue to inspire others with her resilience and advocacy for Lyme disease awareness.

The Miss Teen International pageant is part of the International Pageants system, which encourages personal and professional development while promoting young women as positive role models within their communities as they share their platform.

During the coming year, Cochran will continue to spread awareness of her Lyme disease and women's health platform. She is excited about pursuing collaborative efforts with organizations such as Lyme times, which shares current Lyme disease news and stories through social media, and supporting the National Capital Lyme Disease Association, which sponsors a 5K every spring to raise money for Lyme disease research and a cure.

She also plans to continue her volunteer efforts around hunger relief, especially around those with food sensitivities and dietary restrictions due to illnesses like Lyme disease. Cochran elaborated, "I can't imagine going to bed hungry every night, but to have dietary restrictions due to illness, is a situation that makes hunger relief more complicated. So, I tend to highlight gluten free, low sodium foods, and such in my collection efforts."

Cochran also looks forward to appearing at events throughout the state during the coming year to share the spirit of the commonwealth that, as a ninth generation Virginian, she holds so dear!

**EAGLE SCOUTS, CON'T. FROM PAGE 3**

Eagle has fundamentally prepared him to face any physical, mental or spiritual challenges that will come his way. Reynolds said, "The road to Eagle instilled grit and determination, shaping me into a paragon of youthful resilience,

leadership, and accomplishment, and has impacted my character for the rest of my life."

These young men have proven to be great leaders. If you see them around town please give them a shout out on their accomplishments.

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**PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5**

at just 40% capacity at the time.

This decision contributed to the town's current debt of tens of millions of dollars. Additionally, she voted for the six-story, 40-condo Vineyard Square development on 21st Street, although multi-family zoning is not permitted in the C-4 District. At the time, Lehr was a tenant of the Vineyard Square developer. In 2016 she ran against Kwasi Fraser for mayor.

Dan Reed expressed opposition to removing duplexes as a by-right use, stating that duplexes meet the needs of people. "What's the push to taking out duplexes—who are you pushing out of the Town?" he asked.

The draft zoning ordinance will require anyone who wants a duplex to obtain a Special Use Permit. The Planning Commission implemented this change in response to residents' concerns about increased density, noise and traffic, allowing them to have a say in the presence of duplexes in their neighborhoods.

Lawyer and developer Mark Nelis said he was pleased to see that the grandfathering provision is in the draft. He said the draft is exclusionary. "It is as if you want no more residents, no more people." Nelis objected to taking out duplexes as an allowed use. "Why are you deleting Planned Development Housing?" He also said the ordinance is overusing Special Use Permits.

Developer Casey Chapman said the draft is a downzoning, and is overarching and overreaching. He said it was poorly constructed and not well thought out.

Former Mayor Stan Milan said Council Member Erin Rayner and he wanted the downtown C-4 District to be developed as the Gaslamp District—and the draft ordinance "is a direct contradiction to that potential development. He said Casey Chapman wanted to put apartments there.

Milan was referring to Chapman's presentation of reducing his approved 40 apartments to 36. The C-4 District for decades has allowed in general 2 apartments per building, and focuses on retail and office space in the area.

Milan also objected to allowing citizen input through a Special Use Permit process for duplexes in neighborhoods, saying they should be an allowed use.

Council Member Erin Rayner called the ordinance "not ready for primetime." She is opposed to eliminating by-right duplexes in the R-3 area and supports attainable housing and diversity on 21st Street in the Historic Downtown. Rayner also advocates for adding apartments or condos in the Historic Downtown District without limiting the number per building.

Planning and Community Director and Zoning Administrator Summer

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25 »



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## Monk's BBQ: Purcellville's flavorful claim to fame at the auto show

BY VALERIE CURY

In the commissioners' comments portion of the Feb. 16 Purcellville Planning Commission meeting, Chair Ron Rise noted that his remarks that evening were largely focused on the Town of Purcellville. He said during the week of Feb. 6 he was invited to bring his 1970 vintage Corvette to the Washington Auto Show in Washington, D.C.

"What was great about that is meeting

and talking to so many people across our region—whether they be from Maryland, southern Virginia, West Virginia—all over." He said he met all kinds of people "young students who were in the automotive field from Chantilly—the amazing thing is I probably talked to 150 people.

"I told them that I was from Purcellville and I would ask them if they knew where Purcellville was and a lot of them said 'Yes.'

"I asked them, 'Well, what do you like

about Purcellville, and they said Monk's BBQ—every one of them. There wasn't one other comment besides Monk's.

"I should have been keeping tally. So, a big shout out to Monk's. At least the folks who were at the Washington Auto Show that I ran into remember Purcellville for Monk's." Rise said even people from Charlottesville said they come to Purcellville to go to Monk's.

"I think that's a great thing for our town for sure," he concluded.

VIRGINIA TECH, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

time, and we hand batons to each other in order to progress important things. This is a baton that has started before I became governor, and it's a baton that was passed to me, and it's one that I will look forward to passing on to our next governor to make sure that the Innovation Campus and all that it represents are flourishing."

Youngkin said the ribbon cutting ceremony "is a moment where technology and innovation are unleashing opportunity. I just happened to see a national headline that said 2025 is going to be the year that technology redefines the future. Now the reality is, I think every year is the year where technology redefines the future, but we have an opportunity here to continue to redefine that future every single year, profoundly changing the direction of so many important discoveries and applications."

He said Virginia has the talent, capacity, and the will to accomplish so much. He said that the first class started in 2020 with 75 "extraordinary students," before there was even a building. "Today there are 455 students in the program and it continues to grow."

"I say frequently that in Virginia, we don't follow, we lead." Youngkin said the leadership and the students are all leaders and, "I can't wait to see the future that all of you not only discover, but help define."

Youngkin said Sen. Warner has already had "an amazing impact on this project and on the Commonwealth of Virginia."

Warner said he increasingly recognizes that national security is not going to be defined by simply who has the most tanks and guns and ships and planes. It is increasingly a competition around technology, in particular with China, he said. "China is a great, great nation, and they are investing at a rate that, frankly, we used to invest in post COVID."

That's why the public, private partnership in innovation, around AI, around wireless, is so critically important—and it will take place at this innovation campus. That's what these students will be part of. He said the race for



both AI and who has enough energy to power that AI, will be probably the most determining factor of who wins in the 21st century.

Warner emphasized the importance of providing universities, consultants, and students with the necessary tools, including funding, to ensure that the U.S. can remain competitive with China. "It is important for Virginia. It is important for America. It is important for the world."

In introducing Sen. Kaine referred

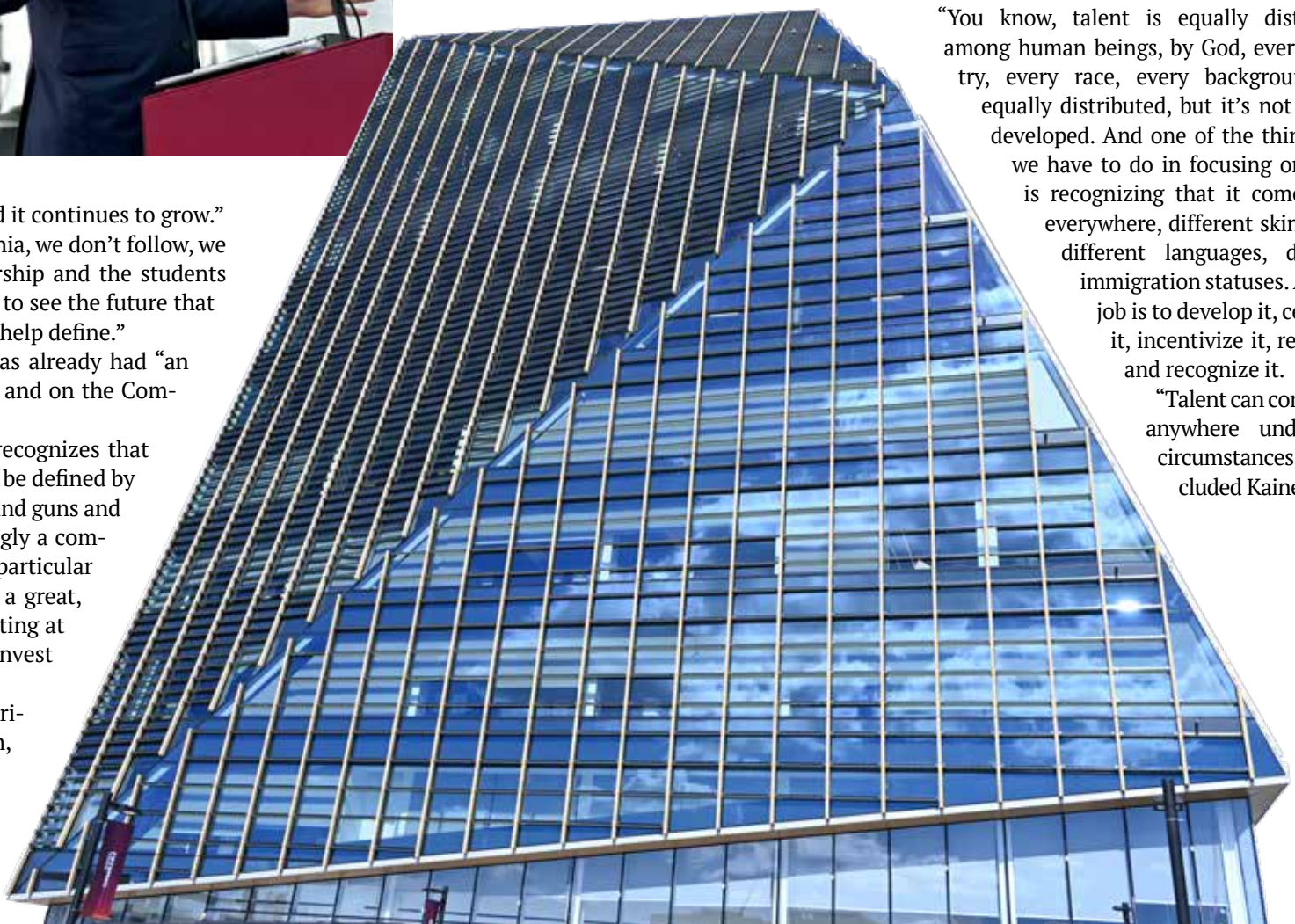
to as "the junior senator," Warner said they went to law school together but they didn't meet "in class, we didn't meet in the library. We met at a party, and we've been friends ever since."

"I love when Virginia Tech succeeds; I love when any Virginia University succeeds. But I got a particular, particular love for Virginia Tech," said Kaine. He said when he moved to Virginia he lived across the street from a hockey fanatic in Richmond, "when I came here to get married in 1984—and so I kind of got indoctrinated into hockey nation."

Kaine said there are three kinds of innovation—innovation in technology, innovation and cooperation, and innovation and talent.

"You know, talent is equally distributed among human beings, by God, every country, every race, every background. It's equally distributed, but it's not equally developed. And one of the things that we have to do in focusing on talent is recognizing that it comes from everywhere, different skin colors, different languages, different immigration statuses. And our job is to develop it, celebrate it, incentivize it, reward it, and recognize it.

"Talent can come from anywhere under any circumstances," concluded Kaine.



**PASTOR MICHELLE**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

buried her son who tragically died from a drowning incident five years ago.

“Let’s bury him in the place that I give my best care to,” she said.

Toll Brothers, the real estate developer who owned the land, donated it to the Loudoun Freedom Center. Now, the organization is responsible for its preservation. Pastor Michelle founded the Loudoun Freedom Center to be an educational nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and education of African American cultural sites, resources, and communities in Loudoun County.

“We are a continuum,” said Pastor Michelle. “Just as we reach back to our ancestors for our fundamental values, so we, as guardians of that legacy, must reach ahead to our children and their children. And we do so with a sense of sacredness in that reaching.”

Earlier this year her words were given even greater attention when she and JK Land Holdings CEO Chuck Kuhn signed an agreement to transfer 10 acres from the company to the African American Burial Ground for the Enslaved at Belmont, bringing the size of the site to 13 acres.

“I think that’s fascinating,” she said. “The descendants of enslaved people reclaiming property where their ancestors were forcefully held in bondage.

You know you do not find that story and only when we are able to tell our stories with truth and honesty, can we eradicate what we know is systematic racism and hate.”

There is an African proverb Pastor Michelle shared that seems to sum up an important part of her work: “Until the lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter.”

Said Pastor Michelle, “The story I am telling centers around the Freedom Center where the flagship project is the preservation of sacred ground for those who were enslaved, but it will be much more than that,” she said. “It will expand and be a place of facilities and walking trails that focus on learning, research, genealogy and even reconciliation.

“Thousands of Loudoun County students will come to the Freedom Center for education, learning and exploration. We must remember that Black history is a shared history and like the ‘Sankofa bird’ we must and will make these grounds a place of learning that includes all.”

The Sankofa bird is a symbol from the Akan people, an ethnic group from Ghana in West Africa. It depicts a bird looking back as it moves forward.

Well, there you have it—Pastor Michelle C. Thomas, truly is “a force to be reckoned with” but without a doubt, she is much more because she is “a lioness” and she has a story to tell.

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**JUST LIKE NOTHING (ELSE), CON'T. FROM PAGE 8**

Now, if your supply of time without end is running short, you just might be fortunate enough to scrounge a little bit up along Dunlop Mill Road in Loudoun County, Virginia. Just don't take it all; it seems to be regenerative—leave some for the 'next wave.' I think we're gonna need it.

You see, I also recall that we began our tale with reference to the seeming purposelessness in a great many of humanity's activities. I'll throw in a hinting reminder here: I don't remember the chapter, verse or exact wording, but I'm sensing echoes and vibrations of the spiritual lesson about the gain of temporal possessions, with the resulting loss of the eternal portions of one's being. Taking the application to today's subject matter, I wouldn't expect to find stretches like

Dunlop Mill Road strewn with dollar bills (or anything larger), but I might expect a discovery of something deeper and more meaningful.

And—when in doubt—just ask the cows along the roadside. They seem to understand more of the spiritual side of life than most of the humans I've come across in recent decades. These four-footed acquaintances appear content to live in the moment, and have perfected the art of merely 'being,' as opposed to the more 'manly' practice of constant competition and one-upmanship.

Now, the astute among us will probably note that I've included no specific directions on finding the subject of today's tale—namely, Dunlop Mill Road; the even more astute will be able to use their cerebral cortex and any web-based mapping system to quickly locate this little gem

of a dirt road. I'm hoping that only the most inquisitive in our group will actually decide to get in their vehicles and drive out to one end or the other of this short, but (to me) influential gravel corridor. Such healing powers—I figure—deserve a little privacy.

And, while we're at it, I could've named my story after my new car, or the brand of trousers I was wearing that morning, or the company that made my camera; perhaps one of these items led to my mysterious inner understandings of that adventure. Hmmm ... I'll have to drive that car some more, and continue wearing those particular pants, and I certainly wouldn't want to make any sudden changes in my photography equipment. Or just about anything else, come to think of it. As earlier stated, I have all the magical instruments I need.

And, you know? So do you: most

Loudouners drive a more expensive vehicle than mine, they most assuredly wear more trendy clothing, and their camera technology must far exceed mine in the ability to capture vivid images. So—my parting gift, as our story wends end-ward—is to seek out those local places that grab your attention—if you will, your own 'Dunlop Mill Road's for personal inspiration—Divine or otherwise.

You may just return home with vast treasures, albeit not of this Earth. And, that's pretty much the whole point, right?

There may even exist—within our souls—whether eternal or otherwise—virtual "Dunlop Mill Roads," for exploration at any time of our choosing—or perhaps without even the reference of time itself. After all, time is our creation and it is we who move.

**PURCELLVILLE'S PROPERTY TAX, CON'T. FROM PAGE 11**

it's important that we get it right." He said there are three topics that are critical. The first is that the town employees need a Cost of Living Adjustment. The budget proposal currently is for a 3% merit increase.

Stought said the town has to provide for their Capital Improvement Projects and said they have been delayed for years. He said the town has to stop relying on their reserves to balance the budget. He doesn't

want to pull from the General Fund.

"We are turning to our General Fund to start depleting it instead," said Stought. "We have been told we are just pulling money from the General Fund Reserves to make up for not raising utility rates. Given our fiscal policy for General Fund Reserves, we can afford to make withdrawals like this for a year or two max, and of course we'll then have to hike utility rates by 30, 40, or 50%, for the three years we

spent not raising them."

Mayor Chris Bertaut said in the town budget presentation "we have zero percent water and sewer increases and it's a balanced budget throughout.

"I'd also like to point out with respect to the issue of drawing down on reserves—our General Fund Reserve policy limit is four times the level that Fitch demanded the town have when they gave us a AAA+ rating.

"In other words, we keep 30% over and above our annual operating costs as a reserve policy over and above. We have many millions. So, let's not believe the sky is falling," said Bertaut.

"These next eight weeks will be a heavy lift for this council as we go through the budget with an eye toward preserving our vital infrastructure and services—while delivering top quality services to our residents and businesses," said Bertaut.

**PASTOR MICHELLE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17**

content, and resources currently used to teach African American history in Virginia.

Last year, the significance of Pastor Michelle's appointment to the Commission and her leadership with the NAACP came clearly into view when she confronted a situation where a teacher passed cotton around to students when teaching about the cotton gin and enslaved people. Pastor Michelle said it was "insensitive" and parents reached out to her saying their kids were "humiliated." Pastor Michelle called it "curriculum violence," where you have the curriculum that's teaching about the cotton gin and teaching about enslavement.

"There's something so disconnected and something that causes harm," she said. Pastor Michelle said that act is having kids relive a traumatic experience. "The kids

began making jokes about Black people being enslaved, and it was humiliating and deeply embarrassing for the students involved," Pastor Michelle said. "That's why they reported it."

With all her accomplishments and ever-ready to be on the forefront of challenging situations that ultimately help all people come together in respect and appreciation, there is one that stands out for her, the residents of Loudoun County and truly the nation as a whole—The "African American Burial Ground for the Enslaved at Belmont."

Located in Ashburn, the site is a historic cemetery for enslaved people from the nearby Belmont Plantation. The burial ground was rediscovered in 2015 and Pastor Thomas led the effort to reclaim the land. She even

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 »

**OPINION: AMISS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4**

Accordingly, the Purcellville Interim Town Manager should request another law enforcement agency to investigate this apparent violation of Purcellville Police Department directives in order to identify the offender (if any). Upon conclusion of that investigation, the investigating law enforcement agency should refer any identified offender to the Purcellville Town Manager for termination of the offender's employment on the grounds of having committed gross misconduct.

*Lloyd Harting is a former sworn federal and local law enforcement officer who lives in Purcellville.*

**PURCELLVILLE FARMERS MARKET, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11**

vendor, the Purcellville Farmers Market is a can't-miss destination.

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For more information and updates on vendors, special events, and seasonal offerings, visit [www.purcellvillefarmers.com](http://www.purcellvillefarmers.com). You can also follow along on Facebook and Instagram @purcellvillefarmersmarket to stay connected with the latest market happenings, vendor highlights, and special announcements.

**A WILD RIDE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**

to both hilarious and tense moments. Their dynamic feels genuine, and it's easy to believe they've been through years of ups and downs together.

However, I wish the writers had given Dreux more flaws. When everything falls apart, and the girls start attacking each other, it feels like a missed opportunity to show how both women contributed to the chaos. Since most of the trouble stems from Alyssa's mistakes—including her choice to trust her irresponsible boyfriend with their rent money—it's hard to see her side. If some of the unfortunate events had been entirely Dreux's fault, the fight would have felt more balanced

and nuanced, making it harder for the audience to immediately side with Dreux.

Adding this layer of complexity would have made their conflict more compelling and emotionally charged. It would have also deepened Dreux's character, showing that even someone as hardworking and responsible as her can make serious mistakes under pressure.

While not a "must-see," *One of Them Days* is a decent pick if you're looking for something light and funny to watch with friends. While the comedy feels over-the-top or corny at times, the film is still entertaining and interesting enough to draw audiences' attention

and keep them invested.

The chemistry between Keke Palmer and SZA adds warmth and authenticity to the story, making the characters' friendship feel believable and heartfelt. The fast-paced plot and series of escalating mishaps keep the energy high, even when the humor doesn't always land perfectly.

Ultimately, the film succeeds because it balances its chaotic humor with genuine emotional stakes—you care about Dreux and Alyssa and want to see them come out on top. It's not the kind of movie that will stick with you long after the credits roll, but it's a fun, easy watch that delivers some good laughs and heartfelt moments along the way.

**PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21  
Wilkes recommended letting the market decide the number of apartments, with no limits. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan, however, limits apartments in the Downtown C-4 District to two per building, which is the same per-building limit that has existed in the C-4 District for decades.

Rayner has received over \$25,000 in campaign contributions from affiliates of developer Casey Chapman, including his uncle and employees of his uncle's development company. Chapman manages the Vineyard Square property.

Rayner also wants to maintain two separate industrial areas—one with propane storage allowed and one without. However, the Planning Commission has recommended eliminating fuel storage in both areas due to its proximity to residential and commercial areas.

Vice Mayor Ben Nett said, "A large part of this comes down to philosophical differences as to how we want the shape of the town to be. I'll use the 'D' word—development."

Nett said he attended some Planning Commission meetings where citizens

voiced their concerns, and he understood that the residents' concerns were addressed at the time.

Council Member Caleb Stought said the Town might need cluster housing and Planned Development Housing for the future and didn't agree with moving them to legacy. "I can't understand why we are removing these tools from the toolbox." He also said the draft doesn't address affordable housing.

Mayor Chris Bertaut said on July 25, 2024, a number of recommended changes were brought to the Planning Commission's attention by both the staff and residents—and they were addressed.

"One of the reasons duplexes are such a hot topic is that there currently aren't many in town and the proposed change to the zoning ordinance changes them from a by-right use to one requiring a Special Use Permit."

"The reasoning behind this is that there are grave concerns by residents in those neighborhoods where duplexes may come into existence."

He said the residents "do not want redevelopment on a large cluster scale

within neighborhoods because of traffic concerns."

Bertaut said there was a similar concern factored into the limits on number of residences in the C-4 District. "We have some of the narrowest streets in town in our C-4 District. Some of the slowest traffic in town is in that district and if the proposal is to greatly increase the number of residential units that's right in that district—nowhere else—just in that district—I have to ask what the impacts are to traffic. People complain about it to a great degree."

Addressing the HPOZ, Bertaut said the only thing that changes is that if an owner wants to demolish a house, the owner needs to get a permit.

Regarding Planned Development Housing, Bertaut said the 2030 Comprehensive Plan clearly states that the Town's residents do not want to expand the town's borders, so there's limited opportunity. He said if needed PDH can be resurrected at any time, but right now it isn't needed.

Bertaut said putting PDH in legacy status protects the rights of those living in those neighborhoods.

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**BARCELONA**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Their immediate goal is to increase the personal property tax rate on data center equipment to a level that could influence data center behavior. One thought is to double the personal property tax rate from \$4.20 to \$8.40 per \$100 of assessed value, potentially through incremental steps. The idea is that higher taxes might reduce demand for new data centers while having minimal impact on existing ones, as these facilities generate so much profit that the increased taxes should barely register. This sounds good—if citizens get

specific benefits.

That tax increase should add another billion to County coffers. Unfortunately, I don't believe this idea will gain political traction.

**An Extra Billion? Spend It Wisely**

The county's attitude towards that money would likely be: "An extra billion? Let's spend it all!" There are some excellent ways to use this windfall thoughtfully. We could eliminate the car tax, reduce property taxes, or address the effects of new power transmission lines by burying select portions or by using more efficient conductors. The new money might also

support solutions for the overarching problem of inadequate power.

Will a tax increase on data centers deter new ones while not affecting the existing ones? Or would it be a mere drop in the bucket like the increased tourist tax in Barcelona? In either case, tax revenues from data centers would balloon and our vehicle taxes could be eliminated.

We should demand at least that.

*Charlie Houston is a retired office building developer with an insatiable wanderlust and a finite budget. He and his wife live on a small horse farm outside Paeonian Springs.*

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