



Purcellville Council deadlocks on Chief vote amid unacknowledged Grievance findings

BY VALERIE CURY

At its Oct. 14 meeting, the Purcellville Town Council deadlocked 3-3 on a motion to enter a closed session to consider applicants for the Chief of Police position and to receive legal advice on the matter. A subsequent motion to appoint Acting Chief Sara Lombrana also failed, with Council Members Erin Rayner, Kevin Wright, and Caleb Stought voting in favor, and Mayor Chris Bertaut, along with Council Members Carol Luke and Susan Khalil, voting against.

Vice Mayor Ben Nett recused himself from any discussion and votes, opting to err on the side of caution in response to an advisory opinion from the Loudoun County

Commonwealth's Attorney, who has taken the unusual step of involving himself in the matter—despite guidance to the contrary from both the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council and the Town Attorney.

Regarding whether Nett should leave the chambers during the discussion and vote, Town Attorney John Cafferky noted, "He has the prosecutorial power, I don't." In response, Nett excused himself from the room.

His exit drew laughter from the crowd—highlighting the ongoing breakdown in decorum and the increasingly unmanageable atmosphere among Rayner, Wright, and Stought supporters, including Council

Member Caleb Stought's wife, who was among those disrupting the meeting.

The room remained charged throughout the evening, as some in the crowd—including former Council Member Joan Lehr—engaged in obstreperous behavior, shouting, cursing, and disrupting the proceedings. Lehr, who served on the Lazo-era council that left the town with tens of millions in debt and the now-expired Vineyard Square project, left the chambers mid-meeting, declaring loudly, "I'm removing myself—you guys are a**holes."

Since the spring, the Town has been working with the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police & Foundation to identify and evaluate potential candidates for the

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Chief of Police position. A few of the initially identified candidates ultimately chose not to move forward in the process.

The stalemate prompted a strong reaction from Rayner, Wright, and Stought. "Why?" asked Rayner, challenging the decision not

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Court finds it has no jurisdiction in Purcellville Grievance Panel case

BY VALERIE CURY

Chief Judge Douglas L. Fleming Jr. ruled late Monday afternoon that he does not have jurisdiction to determine whether the Town of Purcellville followed its Employee Grievance Panel process in the case of former police officer Nett—leaving the next steps unclear despite the Town's own policy stating that the Chief Judge should decide in such circumstances.

On Friday, Oct. 24, Judge Fleming said he would issue a letter of opinion on Oct. 27 addressing whether the Town of Purcellville properly followed its Employee Grievance Panel process in Nett's case. He added that he would work on the

opinion over the weekend.

The Town of Purcellville's counsel petitioned the Chief Judge of the Loudoun County Circuit Court to determine whether the relief granted by the Panel complies with the Town's written policy. Nett, who was a Purcellville police officer, was relieved of duty on April 4 and later filed a grievance challenging his dismissal under the Town's Employee Handbook.

"The question of whether the relief granted by a panel is consistent with the written policy shall be determined by the Town Manager or their designee, unless the Town Manager or their designee has a direct personal involvement with the

event (s) giving rise to the grievance. In that case, the decision shall be made by the Chief Judge of the Loudoun County Circuit Court," according to the Town's petition for judicial review to confirm that the grievance process was properly followed.

In other words, because the Town Manager was involved in Nett's case, the Chief Judge is responsible for deciding whether the panel's relief aligns with Town policy.

The Panel was comprised of three members: Nett selected an attorney, the Town Manager chose a PhD, and the third panelist was jointly selected by the other two.

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200 years of Snickersville Academy

BY MELISSA HESS

This year marks the 200th anniversary of one of the oldest known surviving schoolhouses in Loudoun County—Snickersville Academy. A look at its history reveals how this humble log cabin helped shape Bluemont's history and contributed to the development of the village.

COMMUNITY

In the 19th century, Loudoun County was mostly family farms and small villages, with a local economy largely built on agriculture. Snickersville (now Bluemont) was one of these villages. Daily life centered on familiar places such as the general store, the church, and the schoolhouse. These community landmarks served as locations where people could meet one another, worship together, pick up supplies, or share the latest news.

Built in 1825, the Snickersville Academy occupied a central place in the life of the community. It was the village's first school and church. Built on a half-acre of land donated by Amos and Elizabeth Clayton, this modest one-room cabin provided generations of farm children with an education to help build their knowledge and develop practical skills. On Sundays, it was one of the earliest nondenominational or "free" churches in the area.

In rural Virginia, opportunities for a formal education were limited, so having a school in the area was important to farm families. In those days, children often walked long distances—sometimes two or three miles—to get to class. Being a student in the one-room Snickersville Academy meant learning side by side with children of all ages.

A single teacher taught the students, whose ages ranged from 6 to 16. Instead of paper, students used slates. Subjects focused on the three Rs—reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic, spelling, geography, history, and lessons in civic and moral development. Tuition was \$3 per semester.

Without a formal church in the village, the Snickersville Academy served as a place to gather for Sunday services and community fellowship. This continued for over 25 years. Later, in 1851, the village built a dedicated stone church that is now the Bluemont United Methodist Church, located a short distance down



the road from the Academy on Snickersville Turnpike.

When the Civil War came, life in the village changed. Children had greater responsibilities at home and had less time for school. In 1864, a conflict broke out on Snickersville Turnpike—one in which some of the local students took part. After the Civil War, Virginia set up public schools, and Snickersville Academy became one of them in 1870. This lasted until 1872, when the multi-room Mountain Shadow School opened on Snickersville Turnpike.

No longer used as a school, from 1872 until the 1940s, the building was converted into rental housing. In the 1940s, the Academy transitioned into a private residence and the home of Susie Neal, who raised her family there. Her descendants continued to live in the house into the 1970s.

The Hatcher family, who were the owners of the mountain farm that included the Snickersville Academy, generously donated the cabin to the Friends of Bluemont in 2010. Founded as Friends of Bluemont in 2003 and established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the organization was rebranded in 2018, and is now known as Bluemont Heritage at www.bluemont-heritage.org.

With its rich history, Snickersville Academy is more than just a building. The Academy helped lay the foundation for the village of Bluemont we know today.

Remember, when you are driving in the area and pass by Snickersville Academy take a look and you can reach it from Snickersville Turnpike (Rt. 734) just west of Clayton Hall Road (Rt. 760) on the left when traveling west. There is a historic marker near 33685 Snickersville Turnpike, in Bluemont.

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“Let the mountains stand as they are” – BOS discusses Mountain Overlay District policies

BY GRACE BENNETT

As the fifth in an extensive chain of eight meetings hosted by the Board of Supervisors, staff and representatives gathered on Sept. 30 to discuss western Loudoun rural uses and standards. Staff hoped to receive stakeholder input to inform future changes to the Zoning Ordinance and General Plan—a task begun with a meeting in November of 2024.

GOVERNMENT

Conversation up until this point had already addressed a litany of topics (and grievances) raised by the community. Liveries, stables, outdoor recreation, agricultural processing, tenant housing, farm lodging, agritainment, sawmills, building code exemptions, conservation easements, wineries, breweries, limited distilleries ... all received attention within the past year.

Now, the Board was on to discussing the standards and costs of mountainside development, feature protections, tree clearing and land disturbance, and the regulations surrounding signs for businesses.

The first step lies in understanding the significance of changes being made to the 2019 Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance.

The 2019 Comprehensive Plan is, according to the information item outlined by staff, the “guiding document for land use policy in Loudoun County.” Its objective is to “foster land use patterns that safeguard natural, cultural, and agricultural resources ... [it] provides a framework for managing development in environmentally significant locations to protect steep slopes, moderately steep slopes, and mountainside areas.”

The Loudoun County Zoning Ordinance is broader in scope. It “currently maintains a comprehensive framework for the regulation of the MOD (Mountain Overlay District) and Signage.”

The issue, however, is that such guidelines—while helpful in extreme circumstances—can often act as an overly restrictive barrier to property owners. Many attendees of the Sept. 30 meeting reported horror stories of waiting months at a time for permits and paying a fortune to do something as simple as building a shed or chicken coop.

“We hamstring people to come through a process that takes twelve to eighteen

months to come through with the specs of almost any kind,” observed Mark Miller (Catoctin).

Casey Chapman, a residential representative, stated, “I think it is a fair ask that we don’t overregulate or overcomplicate to the point where people cannot afford or even be able to—under new regulations—drive an outcome that is beneficial to their planning, their legacy farm, or their family.”

When a property owner is forced to consider grading permits, land disturbances, tree coverage, slopes, drainage, conservation, permeable surfaces, and wildlife habitat preservation, it’s no wonder that so few personal projects are undertaken.

Recognizing this fact, staff is bringing the issue to the Board to present the possibility of special exceptions, simplification of the process, and increased flexibility with a set of clarified guidelines.

After discussing the difficulties of those restrictions, staff turned the conversation to mountainside feature protections. Current regulations state that all natural springs must be given a 300-foot setback for the sake of ecological protection. Staff asked if this setback is too strict and, if so, whether it should be reverted to the rule-set from 1993 that placed setbacks at 100 feet.

Robert Wilbur, a conservation specialist and soil scientist, was adamant. “I would just like to put in that the 300-foot setback, especially in a sensitive region, really makes sense from a conservation perspective,” he said. Wilbur added that it was vital to “[make] sure that flexibility doesn’t become a loophole.”

Several attendees and Board members appreciated the professional input. Chapman expressed that “it would also be acceptable on a case-by-case basis to provide the flexibility ... to look at two different studies done by other experts to see if there is an impact to make a final determination.”

Caleb Kershner (Catoctin) pointed out the restriction as being rather “draconian.” Three hundred feet, he explained, would be the length of a football field.

Staff promised to provide their reasoning in their next report. But for now, the goal was to listen rather than come to a

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Loudoun County Supervisors Review town project requests

BY KATIE NORTHCOTT

On Oct. 14, Loudoun County staff presented an overview of requests for project funding from towns within the county to the Finance/Government Operations and Economic Development Committee.

The county staff facilitates a formal project request process with the towns within the county every year. The general criteria for the project include capital improvements to facilities owned by the county or located within a town, but operated by the county and local pedestrian or transportation related improvements that benefit the county.

After collecting capital projects, staff makes recommendations to the county Board of Supervisors based on funding availability, project readiness, potential for state or federal funding, the necessity of county funding for development, and whether the funding request is required for project completion. These projects will be a part of the development of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027-FY 2032 proposed Capital Improvement Program.

The county asked for capital project requests in July with a submission deadline of Aug. 29. Staff presented 11 project requests to the committee on Oct. 14. The funding requested totaled \$89,969,952.

Hillsboro requested \$120,000 for a renovation of Old Stone School's east wing and \$275,000 for an outdoor visitor and pedestrian/bike comfort station for a total of \$395,000.

Leesburg requested \$26 million for improvements to the South King Street/Route 15/Route 7 Bypass Interchange and \$42 million for improvements to the Battlefield Parkway/Route 15 Interchange for a total of \$68 million.

Lovettsville requested \$266,952 for a quarter branch watermain replacement, \$1 million for the construction of a Lovettsville Wastewater Treatment Plant Equalization Basin, and \$308,00 for the construction of a water tower for a total of \$1,574,952.

Middleburg requested \$1,500,000 for South Madison Street safety and connectivity improvements.

Purcellville requested \$1 million for improvements to the Route 287/Eastgate Drive intersection and \$14 million for the construction of the Short Hill Wells Ground Water Treatment Plant for a total

of \$15,000,000.

Round Hill requested \$1,500,000 for the construction of a new regional water plant to replace the Evening Star Water Treatment Plant.

Generally, the supervisors were receptive to the towns' requests. However, Board of Supervisors Chairman Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) commented that it was "a pretty big price tag for one year" and wanted to know what the county's top priorities should be.

She said she wanted to focus on improving the county's most dangerous intersections and emphasized the importance of the water system improvements.

"If we do not have \$89 million, I'd like to be able to focus money on places where we see higher serious accidents or fatal accidents or danger points," she said. "When it comes to the water, ... it is so important that we get this right because people have to have safe drinking water."

Randall wanted to know which of the towns would lose matching funds if they were unable to move forward with a project and if the towns had pursued other means of garnering funds for their road projects.

Supervisor Koran Saines (D-Sterling) initiated a discussion about the amount of requests for water treatment plant funding (three of the six cities asked for funding for water treatment plant projects). County Administrator Tim Hemstreet expressed that the uptick in water treatment plant projects could be due to rate increases.

"In order for the smaller municipal systems to be able to afford the level of improvement, pushes their water and sewer rates up there pretty high," Hemstreet said. "The requests, in a lot of ways are being driven to lower that rate pressure."

Hemstreet suggested a coordinated effort to improve the county's water systems rather than adopting a whack-a-mole approach. However, he did not think county staff would have enough details to move forward with that kind of effort in the FY 2027 budget.

"If we're looking at an investment of county taxpayer money into these enterprise systems, is there a better way for the county to utilize taxpayer funding which benefits the rate payers in these smaller municipal systems but at the same time,

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The Waterford—Paeonian Springs Project Needs to be Flushed

BY CHARLES HOUSTON

This County-Loudoun Water idea faces near-unanimous opposition, based on survey results and even door-to-door canvassing. Almost every day some new and odious problem pops up. Most recently the groundwater crisis has sounded a countywide alarm. It's a special problem for this County scheme.

OPINION

I'm finding it hard to write an update given the almost daily discovery of more problems. Instead, I'm going back to the beginning and sharing eloquent letters from two neighbors, which capture objections from a personal perspective.

Two problems? Don't create a third.

Clarkes Gap Road, which runs between Paeonian Springs and Waterford, is a beautifully scenic, winding drive. I have a

farm with cattle, horses, and one donkey to keep our disabled cow content. I have lived there for 32 years.

Many years ago, I planted trees to help contain the rushing, tumbling Catoctin Creek that ran through our farmland. The springs below the ground filled a cistern where the animals drank.

When the adjacent community of Beacon Hill was developed, I was told that it would NOT affect my springs or water table. This was NOT true. The Catoctin Creek that once rushed and tumbled through is now a dry bed. The cistern I enclosed to water our livestock is now empty and unusable.

Now the county tells us that they are going to tap our water supply by drilling additional wells on neighboring properties extracting 600,000 gallons per day from the aquifer, an aquifer that may or may not be able to sustain it for any length of time. The county plans on having Waterford residents cap their existing (though viable) wells and charge them to hook up to the new system. If the aquifer is drained, I wonder how I will water our livestock? What will happen to the property values of the homeowners along and behind the road?

We DO want our neighbors at both ends of Clarkes Gap to have a positive solution to their septic and water issues. Every home needs safe, good water and septic system. We DO support more cost effective and less impactful small-scale solutions to improve our water/wastewater system for the benefit of all present Loudoun County residents. And there is hope.

The solutions lie in addressing each Village's issues separately without creating a third problem with the digging up two miles of Clarke's Gap Road. There are less invasive, less expensive, and more sustainable solutions to the problems in both Villages. These and other methods must be explored.

We DO NOT support the agenda proposed by Dewberry and Loudoun Water for our area, as we have already personally witnessed the devastating impact that will cascade through our fragile environment from this proposed project. We do NOT want Loudoun County to spend additional funds on the Waterford, Paeonian Springs tie-in project.

KILJOY'S County



Loudoun's groundwater crisis can't wait for another drought

BY JOHN LOVEGROVE, CHAIRMAN, LOUDOUN'S FUTURE PAC

Clean, reliable water is something most of us take for granted. In western Loudoun, that assumption is no longer guaranteed.

A new groundwater study from the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition confirms what many residents and farmers have already experienced: our wells, springs, and ponds are drying up, and without action, the problem will grow worse.

The 57-page study, which analyzed decades of data, found that groundwater levels across western Loudoun have dropped between 10 and 40 feet since the 1980s. More than 3,200 wells have been abandoned, and hundreds more have gone dry. Farmers are already hauling water to livestock and feeding hay months earlier than usual because of drought conditions. Loudoun's groundwater system—the main source of drinking water for tens of thousands of residents—is no longer sustainable under current practices.

Climate change is accelerating this decline. Hotter summers, record humidity, and prolonged droughts have become the new normal, reducing the amount of rainfall that can soak into the ground and replenish the aquifer. Development and paving compound the problem by sealing the soil, preventing recharge, and increasing demand. Each new subdivision adds wells that compete for a limited supply.

Nearly half of Loudoun's wells are within 200 feet of another, and most are within

500 feet. When one homeowner pumps water, it affects the supply for neighbors. It is like drawing from the same bucket—too many straws, not enough water. Drilling deeper is not a solution. Below about 1,200 feet, the fractures in the bedrock are closed, and there is no additional water to reach.

The science is clear, but Loudoun's response has fallen behind. The County has required detailed groundwater studies for decades, yet much of that data has never been fully analyzed. A network of 35 to 40 monitoring wells was planned years ago, but only 14 are active today. Meanwhile, neighboring counties such as Fauquier and Prince William are using real-time data to guide water management decisions. Loudoun, despite having more information, has done less with it.

This is no longer a distant concern. Thousands of Loudoun households could see their wells run dry within the next decade if the County does not act. Replacing wells is expensive, and as the problem grows, the economic impact will spread. Even residents who rely on public water will feel the effects through higher costs and potential limits on future growth. Doing nothing will cost far more than taking action now.

The stakes extend beyond private households. Groundwater depletion threatens Loudoun's \$50 million rural economy, built on farming, livestock, and agritourism. It also affects our streams and

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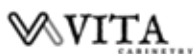
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Protecting the Mountainside is the Final Battle

BY AL VAN HUYCK

One advantage, or perhaps disadvantage, of having lived in Loudoun County for 36 years many of which have been devoted to sustaining the quality of life and preserving the unique assets of the County, is you remember the lost battles.

In 1991 Loudoun was largely green fields, productive farms, and hosted many historic assets. But already the powerful development interests were massing at our border. Over the next 10 years development began to occur in earnest.

The Comprehensive Plan of 2022 laid out a fresh vision whereby Eastern Loudoun would develop as low density family oriented planned communities with excellent amenities. And this was largely achieved. A transition area was created that would permit compact residential development with at least 50% open space surrounding them. And

several were built. And the 200,000 acres of the West would be a permanent rural area, based on a strong rural economy, and clustered housing based on a density of 10 acres (now 5). And Loudoun's mountains would be restricted from development to serve as the backdrop to our beautiful County.

Since then, one by one, this unique vision of Loudoun has changed, and development battles lost. Metro has been built with a yet to be realized vision of massive residential and commercial development. The decision to seek needed affordable housing by letting developers build to here-to-for unacceptable densities with compromised quality-of-life standards. The massive miscalculation on allowing data centers by right throughout most of the East. All of which accelerates development in the Rural Area zones as families seek relief from the deteriorating quality of life in

the East.

Essentially, Loudoun County has changed the fundamental goal from preserving our once beautiful and unique County to prioritizing the monetization of the land for the private gain of the property owners at the expense of the public at large.

Which brings us to the last great battle, the restrictions on mountain side development which are now under attack around the zoning regulations debate. The original vision was the mountains serve as the backdrop of the County. How many of us over the years as we drove up the Toll Road enjoyed seeing our Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance and know we were almost home. Do we want to see the scars of clear cutting, the lights of residents and commercial building shining down on the valley? Do we want the historic features of the mountains to be compromised with new

development? Is this not enough to require their protection, but there is much more?

The Blue Ridge Mountains provide huge environmental gifts to our County. The trees clean our air and produce oxygen; they are the main source of our groundwater. They support the diversity of wildlife and birds, trees and flowers. They are a source of recreation for hikers, horseback riders, birders, and naturalists. Once this fabric is torn by development it can never be repaired. As being proven even now as citizens are seeking to deny the large Eastwind Blue Ridge Hotel.

We have lost the development battles for the Urban, Suburban, and Transition areas. We are slowly losing the battle for the Rural area, but we can win the battle for the Mountainsides if all the citizens East and West rise and say our mountains are too important to sustain more development.

Let's strive for national unity

Dear Editor:

As Loudoun County approaches the finale of the 2025 election cycle, our communities and the nation writ large continue to be immersed in what author Deborah Tannen described as The Argument Culture. Public discourse has devolved into a war between two opposing

factions represented by Democratic and Republican cabals whose hacks serve their personal interests vice the citizens they are supposed to represent.

George Washington's 1796 farewell address referred to political parties as dangerous and divisive, believing they would subvert government and empower "cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men" to seize power and threaten national unity under the guise of serving popular causes.

Washington warned that competing parties would be concerned about securing and maintaining power, ignoring the public interest. Their partisanship, he believed, would eventually fuel division and disunity, making the country vulnerable to foreign manipulation.

Furthermore, Washington predicted contentious and long-term party rivalries could allow the leader of a "prevailing

faction" to take advantage of circumstances to elevate his own position "on the ruins of public liberty." Sound familiar?

I am not a Democrat, a Republican, a conservative, or a liberal. I am an American who feels privileged with the choices our country provides if we don't let the Party elites steal our freedoms.

I am a retired military combat veteran and government official who served under every president from Kennedy to Obama. I considered those ten men to be "the" president, not "my" president as in a party affiliation. I provided all of them my professional capabilities and loyalty.

It's time for Americans to heed Washington's prescience and eliminate the Republican and Democratic Parties from the institutions of governance at all levels. A third party suggested by Senator Joe Manchin is not the answer.

Electing independent and unaffiliated Americans to represent Americans and perform the functions of governance is a goal we must achieve.

Impossible? No. Difficult? Yes. But we have to try. With the help of astute, independent neighbors in Hillsboro, I will write more on these pages how Washington's vision of national unity can be extracted from the grasp of the "Two-Party System."

Chip Beck
Hillsboro

My dad, Delegate Geary Higgins

Dear Editor:

You've likely seen the attack ads about my dad, Delegate Geary Higgins, lying that he sold out his neighbors promoting data centers. It's tough to beat an incumbent with a family, solid character, and a legacy of service. Can't compare resumes, right? Can't lean on a non-existent reputation.

Best chance is to spin a web of lies and hope something sticks. It's not the high road, but it's seemingly the path John McAuliff has taken.

For context, the National Electrical Contractors Association is a nonprofit association representing IBEW electrical contractors. NECA provides various services to its members including safety education and labor relations. My father was a salaried employee there for 37 years. He made an honest living for his family, proudly representing contractors doing all kinds of electrical work. Remind me why we're demonizing nonprofit employees for settling labor disputes?

Before the smear campaign, my father's opponent mentioned new ads were coming. "Nothing personal," he added, suggesting dad should brace himself ... Just planning to tarnish 25 years of public service by branding dad a crook. Just

impugning decades of trust by claiming he endangered his community for money when he never approved of—or profited from—the irresponsible placement of any data center.

This district's not a political stepping-stone for my father—it's his home. He won't have the luxury of packing a carpet bag and heading to another opportunity. This precious place, with its small-town fairs, parades, and football games, is his life. It might not be personal to his challenger, but it's deeply personal to Geary Higgins.

His adversaries can call him radical, photoshop MAGA hats on him, attack his values, or fear-monger nonsense about jailing doctors. I've watched all that since I was a kid. But I've never seen anyone flat-out lie about his integrity and recklessly drag his reputation through mud. We've seen plenty of that nationally, but not in our hometown. It's lazy, sleazy, underhanded politics, and it has no place here.

The latest lie—that dad supports defunding the Purcellville police—is laughable considering the threat on dad's life made recently by the opposition. As a Purcellville resident, I can officially debunk that accusation. Friends, we're dealing with a pathological liar—spewing falsehoods faster than can be refuted. Anyone interested in the truth about dad can find the facts at GearyHiggins.com.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

Proven Leadership for Western Loudoun: Why Geary Higgins Has Earned Our Vote

BY LISA HARCROW

Have you enjoyed the last four years in Virginia with record breaking job growth, year over year surpluses, and record economic investments? If so, vote for Geary Higgins. Or, would you like to go back four years ... with closed schools, churches and businesses, a wrecked economy, a failing education

system, mask mandates and unconstitutional gathering restrictions that pitted neighbor against neighbor? If so, then John McAuliff would be your guy.

Delegate Geary Higgins has served a majority of this House district for more than 14 years. He is not some unknown quantity that makes empty promises, he is a pragmatic and honest public servant who gets things done for us. His record of accomplishments is long—he has fought hard for us and delivered commonsense solutions, time and time again.

As a School Board Member in Loudoun, he increased teacher pay and

pension benefits, brought Lacrosse to the County, and created the Academies of Loudoun STEM School. Geary Higgins believes that schools should prioritize academic excellence and should educate, not indoctrinate, students, and that parents have a right to a seat at the table when it comes to their children's education.

During his eight years on the Board of Supervisors, he helped to grow Loudoun's commercial/industrial tax base from 18% to 38% and he lowered the residential real estate property taxes every year for eight years. Not just the percentage either, but the actual effective rate. At the same time, Loudoun became the number one county in Virginia for agritourism, wine production, equine, and number three in cattle production.

As a supervisor, he had the courage to say no, and was the strongest voice for protecting our rural way of life in Western Loudoun. He stopped the huge

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 »

Why Save Rural Loudoun Endorses John McAuliff for Delegate

BY JOHN ELLIS

Save Rural Loudoun is a non-partisan, community-based organization focused on local issues that matter to citizens of all political persuasions, including preserving Loudoun's farms and farmland and protecting its natural resources. In the past, we have not endorsed candidates for public office out of concern

that it might be perceived as showing partisan preference.

We recognize, however, that elections matter. We are frankly frustrated that candidates often offer empty lip service on rural and small town issues, while accepting large campaign contributions from outside development interests and, once elected, putting those interests above the interests of their own constituents. Every year, development is consuming more and more local farmland and natural areas, slowly chipping away at the rural character that makes Loudoun so special.

We can no longer sit on the sidelines.

We believe it is our responsibility to help voters understand the choices they make on the local issues that matter to them.

In the past, we have worked closely with officials of both parties. For example, we supported Republican County Supervisor Buffington's efforts to provide financial support for conservation easements and we supported Democratic County Supervisor Randall's and Supervisor Tekrony's efforts to preserve prime farming soils.

In advance of this year's campaign in Virginia House of Delegates District 30, serving western Loudoun and Fauquier counties, Save Rural Loudoun sent a questionnaire to both candidates, asking them to clarify what they would do to address falling water tables, traffic on rural roads, rising electricity costs, and support for local farmers.

Incumbent Delegate Geary Higgins informed us verbally and in writing that he did not have time to answer our questions. Candidate John McAuliff provided

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25 »

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Just Like Nothing (else) on Earth: Potomac Crossing Park

BY TIM JON

My memory mostly consists of an immersion in green. The lands lying between the paved (or mown) surfaces and the Potomac River in northeast Leesburg strike me—during the growing season, anyway—as a riot of growth and fertility.

I've traipsed many of the trails under the jurisdictions of Balls Bluff Regional Park and—a bit further

downstream and in the direction of our nation's capital—Red Rocks Wilderness Overlook Regional Park.

Between these two juggernauts of outdoor space lie a handful of preserves set aside by the County Seat, and administered by its Parks and Recreation Department: Veterans Park near Ball's Bluff, Edwards Landing, closer to Red Rocks, and in the middle of these two we find Potomac Crossing Park. Like I said, that's a lotta ground, and during the warm-weather months,

that's an almighty lotta green.

My most recent foray into the relative wilds of these nearby river parks took me to the midpoint in the collection—Potomac Crossing—just off Shanks Evans Road, off Battlefield Parkway—in the upper right-hand-corner of your Leesburg map.

The visit began innocently enough, with a quick perusal of the Park placard—with a general lay of the land, and to me—an intimidating number of trails, in very curvy lines of differing colors—which always look vastly different than the actual 'boots on the ground' visual experience of moving through the acreage. Yes, I saw the trails clearly enough: an earth-toned path roughly shoulder-width, beckoning ever forward.

That's when—again, for me—the innumerable (and clonelike) trees and virtually impenetrable undergrowth take over. And for one suffering from (or enjoying, depending on your point of view) periodic spells of vertigo, the vegetation almost seems to take on the characteristics of two or four-legged creatures—independently moving like the dreaded apple orchard in the film, "The Wizard of Oz."

But I soldiered on, until (at least I think) my trail linked up with that of Balls Bluff Park to the north, then reversed course



and—more or less—met another connection with Edwards Landing in the south, with some at least partial Potomac River views along the way. And, I'm not sure if the relatively earth-bound members of the forest were enticing me further into their world, or if they were actively shooing me away—back to the familiar ground of the parking lot—but some of my senses kept telling me that "Those trees are moving again!" And, indeed they were, as all things remain relative. Those smaller bushes weren't fooling me, either.

But, lo and behold, my way out of the forest became apparent, as an increasing amount of light shone through the leaves with each set of steps, and as civilization

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 »

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SUBMITTED BY JOSHUA WOLINSKI,
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and coverage for your work, home or pets. It's a holistic approach—looking at your trip from a variety of angles.



JOSHUA WOLINSKI

It's wise to apply that same holistic thinking when you plan for your financial future—that is,

bringing into the picture all elements of yourself.

Here are some things that may affect your financial strategy:

- *Your views on helping your family* – Your decisions about helping your family are clearly going to be a major part of your financial strategy, and this is true at virtually all stages of your life. When your children are young, you'll need to decide if you're going to save money

for their college education, and if so, how much, and in what investments. When they're young adults, you may also need to decide how much financial support you're willing to provide for major expenses such as down payments on a new home or a new car. And when you're drawing up your estate plans, you'll need to consider how and when to distribute assets to your children, grandchildren or other family members.

- *Your personal beliefs* – As someone with civic, ethical and moral concerns, you may feel compelled to make charitable gifts throughout your life and then make philanthropy part of your legacy. To accomplish these objectives, you'll want to include gifting techniques in your financial strategy today and your estate plans for tomorrow. Of course, for the estate-planning component, you'll need to work with your tax and legal advisors.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21 »

BOS votes to pursue eastward move for county government center

BY SOPHIA CLIFTON

On Oct. 14, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors took a significant step toward relocating its Government Center from Leesburg to eastern Loudoun, voting 4-0-1 at the Finance, Government Operations and Economic Development Committee meeting to direct staff to pursue potential partnerships and sites for a new 300,000–400,000-square-foot facility near the Silver Line corridor.

The decision advances what has been years of discussion over how to modernize the county's aging core offices while responding to population growth and development shifting eastward. County staff said they will now refine cost estimates, site options and delivery methods for the board's future consideration.

The presentation to the board was brief, but its implications were far-reaching. "Today staff is requesting the board's guidance of which option you want us to further develop," staff contacts Rosario Li Rocchi and Jacqueline Marsh, from Real Property Asset Management and Planning, told supervisors. "Based on the

board's directions, staff will finalize the program and bring forward costs, schedule, and delivery recommendations for the board's consideration."

Supervisor Matt Letourneau (R-Dulles) was among the first to react. "Yeah, um, okay—well, this seems like kind of a big deal," he said, adding that he was "a little bit surprised by the outcome."

Letourneau questioned how staff concluded that moving east could be less costly than building on the county's own land at Sycolin Road near Leesburg. "We already own that land," he said. "So what factor does actually—like, say we're trying to acquire land ... in the Ashburn or eastern Loudoun area—I mean, that has to be a pretty significant expense. So how does it come out that it's not cheaper to build on the land that we already own?"

Rocchi responded that the comparison was based on a high-level analysis of two broad options: building multiple smaller buildings on county-owned land versus partnering with a developer to construct a single consolidated facility on land already zoned and entitled for office use. "We believe that by leveraging a partner ...

their ability to move quicker than we can—that all equals a lower cost, potentially," Senior Deputy County Administrator Erin McLellan explained.

"If, in fact, they are not more advantageous," McLellan added, "the board does own the property in Leesburg. We could pivot to that."

Letourneau acknowledged that any move would need to account for both development realities and resident convenience. "In terms of my preference, I certainly think if we're going to deviate from Sycolin, I would want it to be sort of in the Ashburn area ... somewhere in that vicinity of those two [Metro] stations," he said.

He predicted concern from western Loudoun representatives: "We may hear from our colleagues from the West a little bit on this, who have some concerns about geographic centrality." Still, he noted, "there's also a lot of services beyond the Board of Supervisors that people come to this facility for, and the geographic density is more relevant for that conversation."

Supervisor Sylvia Glass (D-Broad Run) and others voiced interest in the efficiency of a single consolidated building.

The staff's presentation estimated the county could save millions in leasing costs by co-locating departments now spread across 18 leased sites.

Executive Director for Economic Development Buddy Rizer, who was called up during the discussion, said he saw upside potential in the move. "I love the idea of having an anchor to kick off a development," he said. "Of all the things I worry about, running out of office space is not one of them. We're spending a significant amount of time right now trying to find anchors to get, you know, really three developments kicked off in a major way."

Chair Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) said her primary concern was ensuring accessibility for all residents. "As chair of the county, I think it is my job to think about everybody in the county," she said. "And I do think people who are in the West, if you're looking to build more east, it is a long way to come."

Randall suggested that the decision need not be all or nothing. "Even if we put most of the court services here, it would still be logical to have some county

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 »

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Youngkin adds Oak Hill to final budget at Higgins' urging county government center

On Oct. 15, Gov. Youngkin has pledged to include the Oak Hill State Park Plan in his final budget proposal to the General Assembly ahead of the 2026 Session at the urging of Delegate Geary Higgins, following extensive discussion.

GOVERNMENT

Youngkin made the following statement on video alongside Higgins, "I have been so excited about this project since we first started talking about it, and I am giving my commitment, today, that I will include in my introduced budget in December, authorization for the state to fund its portion of acquiring this historic property and establishing a new State Park in Northern Virginia."

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 Governor Youngkin for almost two years to turn President James Monroe's home Oak Hill into a State Park, and I am grateful that today, he is reaffirming his commitment to this future park, Loudoun County, and our Commonwealth.

"I also want to again thank the DeLashmutt family for their continued generosity in making this historic property and 1,240 acres available, as well as the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors and The Conservation Fund for their work to make this financially possible.

"True to my word, I did not give up on Oak Hill, and now with Governor Youngkin's commitment, we can be sure it will be back next session. I hope my Democrat colleagues in the Virginia General Assembly will do the right thing: support Oak Hill and preserve this piece of history for future generations."

Finding gratitude and harmony this Thanksgiving

BY MICHAEL OBERSCHNEIDER PSY.D.

Have you ever left a holiday gathering feeling drained—not from the food, but from the tension in the air or from disagreements over sensitive topics? In a time when heated debates about politics, money, and religion often overshadow the joy of togetherness, Thanksgiving can easily become a source of stress instead of gratitude.

This year, what if we chose a different path? What if we focused on getting along rather than being right, embracing gratitude even when we don't see eye to eye, and savoring the moments with those we care about?

The key to a peaceful and meaningful Thanksgiving is to prioritize harmony over disagreement. Avoiding

divisive topics at the table, especially politics, can keep the mood light and joyful. Instead, choose conversations that bring laughter, shared memories, and understanding. After all, the goal is to connect, not to convince.

Even when perspectives differ, there is much to appreciate—family, health, friendship, and community. Practicing gratitude reminds us that no matter what our differences, we share many common blessings. Gratitude invites patience, kindness, and grace, creating an atmosphere where everyone feels valued. Let's strive to embrace gratitude over differences.

It's important to also remember that there are many who are alone, struggling, or less fortunate during this season. Volunteering can be a wonderful way to give back, extend kindness, and truly embrace the spirit of being thankful. Whether helping at a food bank, delivering meals to those in need, or simply reaching out to neighbors who may be isolated, these acts of service deepen our own gratitude and connection to community.

Quality connection requires presence. This means putting aside smartphones and devices and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25 »

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County PC to review Valley Commerce Center rezoning Nov. 13

BY VALERIE CURY

As of press time, the Valley Commerce Center rezoning application (LEGI-2023-0080), proposing a change from Joint Land Management Area-3 (JLMA-3) to Planned Development-Industrial Park (PD-IP), is tentatively scheduled for discussion at the Nov. 13 Planning Commission work session.

GOVERNMENT

Applicant Chuck Kuhn, representing 17110 Purcellville Rd. LLC, has submitted updated proffers that include enhanced buffering along Purcellville Road and portions of the property boundary adjoining Wright Farm. The applicant is also committing to limit building heights to 32 feet along Purcellville Road and 40 feet along the Wright Farm boundary.

Additional revisions include a study—and potential installation, pending VDOT approval—of a crosswalk on Purcellville Road to connect the Mayfair community with sidewalks along the proposed development. Exterior lighting would be limited to a height of 25 feet and directed inward and downward.

The applicant has offered to monitor wells in the Wright Farm community for two years and mitigate any identified impacts. The proposed total building area has been reduced from approximately 1.27 million square feet to 986,000 square feet, which the applicant estimates would lower traffic generation by 23%.

Transportation-related commitments now include increasing the applicant's contribution for the Hirst Road/Hatcher Road/Purcellville Road traffic signal from \$91,100 to \$500,000, and providing a northbound left-turn lane on Purcellville Road at Mayfair Crown Drive. The proffer statement also includes dedication of a 70-foot right-of-way for the future Purcellville Northern Collector Road and construction of a six-foot sidewalk with curb and gutter if the NCR will be required by the County.

The original proposal seeks approval for up to 1,274,892 square feet of industrial development, along with a zoning modification to waive certain road, water, and wastewater infrastructure requirements.

The property, located in the County just outside Purcellville's boundary, is currently zoned JLMA-3 (Joint Land Management Area – residential), which allows up to 39 homes. Loudoun County planning staff has recommended against approving the rezoning request, citing inconsistencies with the County's 2019 General Plan and the Purcellville Joint Land Management Area designation for lower-density residential use.

Staff has also raised concerns about the development's compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods, noting that the impacts of industrial zoning "are not adequately mitigated given the immediate proximity to residential uses." The project site directly borders established

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MOUNTAIN OVERLAY DISTRICT POLICIES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

consensus, and Robin-Eve Jasper (Little River) encouraged putting off a decision until the Board could be properly informed on the semantics of the setback.

Peter Weeks, representing the agricultural sector, made a statement as soon as discussion turned to tree cover clearing and land disturbance. "We don't want to have excessive clearing of trees on the mountains," he declared, "period."

Wilbur offered elaboration. "The reality is that when you take something down, there's a lag time, even in the best-case situations, to restore the value that [the land] had." Even with optimal replanting conditions, he explained that it would take 30 years for a plot of land to recover its ability to provide the same environmental services as before.

The Board understood their meaning and expressed hesitation to remove established root systems and mature trees—even with the promise of planting more trees elsewhere. Staff is taking their collective input into consideration for outlining the conservation requirements for building new structures on the mountainside.

Signage, thankfully, proved to be a far simpler topic. The meeting attendees were unanimous: the current rules should be kept with no further restrictions imposed or removed.

"I would sure like to see our sign ordinance that we have in place work before we go and change it," remarked Mark Miller. Donnie Walker, a resident of the Catoctin district, added that he'd collected feedback

from neighbors and found that people are saying that they have no issues with the current ordinance.

Todd Henkle, the owner of Lost Creek Winery, summarized the difficulties of reconciling tourism and business-owning with a short speech by the podium.

"Like many here, I'm a conservationist at heart and want to protect the beauty and tranquility of western Loudoun," he said. "But I'm also a businessman who knows thriving agricultural enterprises which include vineyards, wineries, and their partners are essential to preserving open space and resisting unchecked sprawl. "These businesses are very hard to run, but they're a huge part of why we live, work, and raise our families here in Loudoun County.

"So if you're a wine lover in this room, take this with you: Loudoun County, and Virginia as a whole, isn't capable of making wine. It is capable of making world-class wine. Wine that commands global attention. Those bottles won't come from the valley floor or a thin strip along the Potomac or a forgotten block of land next to Dulles Airport. These wines will come from the slope soils and elevations of the MOD."

Speaking beyond business and tourism, attendee Scott Seeberger insisted that western Loudoun's Mountain Overlay District is integral to the community's legacy. "To weaken protection here is to erode not only our environment," he said, "but also our identity and responsibility to future generations."

Following the most recent Oct. 22 meeting, staff will compile feedback and return to the Board of Supervisors on Nov. 5 to discuss food service.

Miller's Eklektik Kitchen brings global flavor and heart to every cookie

BY VALERIE CURY

Few scents say fall like warm spices wafting from fresh-baked cookies, and this season, Loudoun County baker Paula Miller is giving autumn a sweet twist with her newest lineup of French-inspired cookies. But for Miller, the story isn't just about flavor—it's about family, heritage, and connection.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Paula Miller grew up in a vibrant, multicultural neighborhood where food was central to every gathering. With Jamaican and

COMMUNITY

Caribbean dishes as the backdrop to family celebrations, she developed a deep appreciation for the role food plays in bringing people together. Ironically, it wasn't until later in life—after meeting her husband, Patrick Miller, and sharing meals across their Air Force travels—that Paula's true passion for cooking began to emerge.

"I always say, 'Taste the flavors... Stir the soul,'" Miller said. "It's more than a motto. It's the guiding principle of my cooking, where love, tradition, and togetherness are always in the recipe."

That belief became the foundation of **Eklektik Kitchen**, a Waterford-based baking business known for its cream-filled cookies that fuse global inspiration with



homemade charm. At the heart of Eklektik Kitchen is Miller's desire to share the warmth and joy of her family's food traditions—something she passed down to her five children, now spread across the country, who still turn to her cookies for a taste of home.

This fall, Eklektik Kitchen is unveiling its newest seasonal collection: **The Crumble and Crackle Collection**, featuring creatively named cookies that are as fun as they are flavorful: Crumb and Circumstances, Spice of Entitlement, Fudge It (Fall Remix) and Gourd Behavior.

The collection officially launched in September at the Purcellville Farmers Market located at 142 East Main Street, from 8–11 a.m. behind Nostalgia Boutique.

In addition to fall treats, Eklektik Kitchen is also preparing to debut an International Flight of Cookies, allowing customers to "taste the world from home."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 »

Purcellville ribbon cutting celebrates opening of The Carriage House B&B

On Saturday, Oct. 11, town officials and community members gathered for a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the grand opening of The Carriage House Bed & Breakfast, located at 200 S. 20th Street in the heart of downtown Purcellville.

Owned and lovingly restored by Bill and Laraine Homback, The Carriage House is a charming 1937 cottage that blends rustic



elegance with modern comfort. The couple's passion for craftsmanship is evident throughout the home, with rich wood-working details and custom touches in every room.

The B&B features three beautifully appointed bedrooms: the "Cottage" master suite, the "Cozy Queen," and a third room with double twin beds—perfect for families or small groups. A highlight of the home is the inviting game room, complete with a full-size pool table, adding a fun and relaxed vibe to the space.

Guests can enjoy a private fenced yard with ample seating, a fire pit for cool evenings, and a spacious patio—ideal for relaxing or gathering. The Carriage House offers generous on-site parking, complimentary Wi-Fi, and a convenient self-service coffee bar. As a full-home rental, it's pet-friendly and designed for comfort, making it a great getaway option in downtown Purcellville.

The only problem guests might face? They won't want to leave.

For more information or to book a stay, visit www.carriagehouse1937.com, or call 571-439-4075.

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COUNTY PC, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

residential communities, including Wright Farm and Mayfair, which would experience the visual, traffic, and operational effects of large-scale industrial activity nearby.

Traffic impacts remain a significant issue. A 39-home residential development currently permitted on the property would generate an estimated 32 trips during the morning peak hour, 41 during the evening peak, and about 424 total trips on an average weekday.

By comparison, the proposed 1.27 million-square-foot industrial park is projected to generate approximately 433 trips during both morning and evening peak hours and 3,527 total weekday trips—representing a substantial increase in vehicle traffic on local roads already near capacity.

In addition, County staff and community members have expressed concern over the applicant's proposal to rely on private wells rather than public water service. The Hydro-geologic Report prepared for the site warns that high-capacity groundwater withdrawal for a project of this magnitude could lead to significant aquifer drawdown, resulting

in neighboring wells running dry, sediment intrusion, declining water quality, and long-term depletion of the groundwater supply. Overuse of groundwater may also reduce flow to nearby springs, wetlands, and streams, potentially altering local ecosystems.

The report cautions that recovery from such depletion could take decades or may never fully occur. County staff have concluded that industrial development of this size would be more appropriate within the Town of Purcellville, where public infrastructure already exists to support it.

Since 2015, the property has twice been proposed for annexation into the Town of Purcellville—both times rejected by different Town Councils following strong community opposition to annexation and higher-density development.

If the rezoning were to be approved, it could set a significant precedent for other undeveloped parcels within the County's Joint Land Management Area. Granting industrial zoning for one site could lead to a cascading effect on other neighboring properties in Western Loudoun.

BOS VOTES TO PURSUE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

services in this building," she said. "People can pay their taxes here ... It doesn't seem to me that this feels very all or nothing."

Staff reiterated that flexibility was possible. "We believe that this entire building will likely be needed for the growth of the courts," McLellan said. "However ... If the board wants us to pursue what it would look like to have a smaller version of, say, Commissioner or Treasurer here to receive walk-ins that are in the Leesburg area, we can certainly do that."

Randall also pointed to the county's ongoing investments in regional service centers: "When I came to this board in 2016, I strongly encouraged regional district offices so that people don't have to come into this building whenever they want to have meetings with their supervisors or meeting with staff," she recalled. "And that was roundly and completely put down in my first 15 minutes in office."

McLellan responded that "we are in the process of doing that for all of the districts," and mentioned upcoming service centers in Dulles South and eastern Loudoun, as well as plans to identify a site in the west.

Supervisor Koran Saines (D-Sterling) wondered how Option 2 would affect previously planned buildings on the Sycolin Road Government Support Center. "If we were to pick Option 2," he asked, "then that means really buildings 2, 3, and 4 probably would not happen anytime soon ... would that be accurate?"

"For now, I would say that the analysis shows that, yes," staff replied. "However, our space pressures are such that we do anticipate building all of those."

Randall later asked about height limits at Sycolin Road. "Do they have a height restriction?" she said. "What I'm getting at is I think that the building that might be around a metro station will have to be more than four floors." Staff confirmed the JLMA zoning limits building height to "35 to 45 feet," leading Randall to observe that "that, to me, that's restrictive ... for what we want and the square footage that we want."

That restriction, she said, helps explain "why it would be more efficient for us and probably a quicker process" to pursue a site near Metro access. "My two cents," she concluded, "is that we go for the eastern Metro area ... and I will have my cup half full and hope that it will inspire other growth in that area."

Supervisor Juli Briskman (D-Algonkian) moved that the committee "recommend that the Board of Supervisors direct staff to pursue Option 2 and develop options, seek potential partnerships to relocate the Government Center east of Leesburg, and accommodate a building size of approximately 300,000 to 400,000 square feet." Letourneau seconded.

"I think that we have talked through most of the details on this," Briskman said. "I'm excited about it ... I have a feeling this building is going to fill up really, really fast."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25 »

Eyetopia’s 23-year celebration brings art, vision, and community into focus



Eyetopia, a Loudoun favorite celebrated for its bold, unique and high quality eyewear and personalized care, marked 23 years of vision and style on Oct. 18 with a ribbon cutting that fused creativity, community, and color.

The event unveiled a new chapter for the boutique optical

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

Shiloh Manor Farm hosts 1825-inspired barn dance and Virginia feast

On Saturday, Nov. 15 at 6:30 p.m., Shiloh Manor Farm located at 14781 Berlin Turnpike in Purcellville, will host a one-of-a-kind evening that turns back the clock to 1825, complete with an old-fashioned barn dance and a traditional four-course Virginia dinner.

Inspired by the legendary hospitality of early Virginians, the event brings together

history, music, food, and community for an immersive holiday celebration. Guests will enjoy an elegant meal based on 19th-century recipes, followed by live English country dancing accompanied by musicians playing historic instruments including the hammered dulcimer, harp guitar, and cello.

The dances—simple, joyful, and easy to learn—will be led by members of the English Country Dance Society from Glen Echo, Maryland. Couples experienced in the dances will also be on hand to help guide newcomers through classic figures like the Virginia Reel.

Holiday barn dances were once a cherished tradition across rural Virginia, when

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

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Also, many thanks to you, our neighbors, for your support throughout this year. Happy Thanksgiving!



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JUST LIKE NOTHING (ELSE), CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

neared, the trail widened and eventually I could make out the children's playground apparatus and the park pavilion, and yes, my beloved vehicle with a half-cup of iced coffee. But, the world of green had done its work. Close my eyes, remember the few visual signals of trail, leaves, tree limbs and uneven ground—and I'm back in the swirl of every imaginable tint of that wonderful color. May it ever be so.

I fervently hope even after I'm too old to get out and ramble on those (and of course, many other) local trails, I can at least walk the nearby neighborhoods, and enjoy the familiar, annual riot of growth and green, almost within reach. And, if I live long enough to only be able to enjoy it on an overhead map, so be it.

Local, State and National Parks, to me, and

hopefully anyone possessing a soul—should remain inviolable, and beyond price. If I should witness the loss of the world of green, with its confusing network of trails, its swirl of colors—and yes, its 'walking trees'—I'm certain I'd feel as if I'd lived too long. The very nature of Nature to me, is its very 'ungovernability.' It's wild, so Let It Be.

And, while I find myself in a bit of an unusual situation—perched atop a soapbox—I'd like to commend the foresight of the local committees, Town Councils, County Supervisors, State Legislators and National Representatives who possessed not only the foresight and intelligence to plan for these natural amenities, but the courage, determination and hard work to carry these projects through to completion. Ladies and gentlemen, let's keep going.

LOUDOUN'S GROUNDWATER CRISIS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

rivers, which rely on groundwater for steady flow. Lower water levels mean more "non-flowing" days, harming aquatic life and reducing water supplies for eastern Loudoun and beyond.

Loudoun's Future PAC believes that water security is the most urgent issue facing our county. We are calling on the Board of Supervisors and County staff to act decisively. The County must complete its groundwater monitoring network, analyze existing data to identify high-risk areas, and update land-use and development policies to reflect the limits of our water resources.

Smart growth starts with smart water management. Before approving the next subdivision, we must ensure there is enough groundwater to support it. That is not anti-growth. It is responsible planning.

Every Loudoun resident has a stake in this issue, whether you drink from a private well, run a farm, or pay taxes. Protecting

groundwater is not just about the environment. It is about protecting our families, our economy, and our future.

Loudoun cannot afford to wait for the next drought to remind us that water is the foundation of everything we value.

A 20-year Loudoun resident, John is an engineer and a member of the County's Facility Standards Manual Committee. He has worked for the Navy and the Intelligence Community as a systems engineer, as well as with a number of railroads around the world, including the Washington Metro, on signal engineering. His first involvement in Loudoun politics and land-use issues was the conceptual Hillsboro Bypass, followed by the proposed Short Hill Data Center, the Comprehensive Plan, and the Zoning re-write. John brings detailed knowledge of the technical issues surrounding data centers as well as county-wide land use, planning and zoning. He lives in Hillsboro with his wife, four horses and various pets.

MILLER'S KITCHEN, CONT. FROM PAGE 17

Highlights include:

- *Panna and Zest*—An Italian lemon sugar cookie with panna cotta filling and milk chocolate
- *Almond Galette Crème Brûlée*—A rich French-inspired delicacy
- *Matcha Vanilla*—A nod to Asia, filled with white chocolate cream
- *Ube Dream*—A purple-hued cookie with ube cream cheese filling

- *Island Silk*—A Coconut sugar cookie with creamy coconut filling

Miller is mindful about her ingredients. She uses a custom whole wheat blend that includes grain from a local farmer, non-GMO eggs, and even makes her own brown sugar using cane sugar and organic molasses. Gluten-free and protein-rich options are currently in development, a nod to her ever-expanding customer base.

With every batch, Miller continues to stir memories and make new ones—one cookie at a time.



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FINANCIAL FOCUS®, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

- *Your purpose in life when you retire* – Having a purpose can bring fulfillment beyond financial security. Leading up to retirement, your purpose may involve providing for your immediate family, bringing value to your profession or contributing to your community. When you retire and step off your career path, you're entering a new world of possibilities. How will you define, and live out, your new sense of purpose at this stage of your life? Do you seek to broaden your horizons by traveling around the world? Or spend more time volunteering? Can you pursue hobbies that give you a chance for self-expression? Each of these choices will carry different financial implications for how much you'll need to accumulate for retirement and how much income you will need to take out each year from your retirement accounts, such as your IRA and 401(k).
- *Your health* – Your physical and mental health can play big roles in your financial plans and outlook. On the most basic level, the healthier you are, and the better you take care of yourself, the lower your health care bills will likely be during retirement, which will affect the amount you need to put away for

health care. And you also may need to prepare for the costs of long-term care, which can be enormous—in fact, a private room in a nursing home can easily cost \$100,000 per year, according to Genworth, an insurance company.

It can be challenging to weave all these elements into a single, unified vision, so you may want to get some help from a financial professional. But, in any case, be prepared to look at your situation holistically because, when putting together a lifetime's financial strategy, every part of your life matters. 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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Tyler Richardson, President, Sky Hound

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Sarah Huntington & Jim Hanna



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Saturday, December 13 at 6 PM

The parade will usher Santa and his friends down King Street through Historic Leesburg. Parade begins at Ida Lee Park and ends at Fairfax Street. Parade participation is free and open to the public.



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COURT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

On June 28, the Grievance Panel found Nett innocent of all five allegations, citing the “greater weight of the evidence” as the basis for its decision.

The Panel noted that the Town “went so far as to suggest that Mr. Nett should be terminated for emailing, rather than calling, his supervisor,” referring to a November 26, 2024 memorandum circulated by Lt. Michael Holman. The Panel said that memo “does not appear in the Department General Orders, the Handbook, or elsewhere as a formal requirement.”

The Town failed to provide any report

from the Prince William Police Department regarding its investigation into the allegations, nor did it present any witnesses from the department to testify before the Grievance Panel about the inquiry into whether Nett was ill—a central charge that allegedly prevented him from performing his duties.

Investigators from Prince William County didn’t interview anyone who spent considerable time with Nett at the Jan. 29–30 conference, except for his political opponent, Council Member Erin Rayner, who said she was with him for about five minutes. “The Panel finds that

the greater weight of the evidence shows that Mr. Nett was, in fact, sick and unable to perform his duties as a police officer on Jan. 29–30,” according to the Panel.

Acting Chief Sara Lombrana also improperly opened an internal affairs investigation with Prince William County without authorization from her supervisor. Lombrana dismissed the requirement under Police General Orders that she obey her supervisor’s instructions, saying, “I didn’t feel that I should.” According to the Panel, “Chief Lombrana’s cavalier refusal to follow the orders of the Town Manager constitutes, at least, continued

and ongoing insubordination and should be of grave concern to Town residents.”

The Commonwealth’s Attorney placed Nett on the Brady List; however, the Employee Grievance Panel concluded that “it is clear to this Panel that Mr. Nett was not guilty of any malfeasance in connection with the events listed in Mr. Anderson’s Brady List letter.”

The Panel further found that Acting Chief Lombrana and Lt. Holman “demonstrated that they failed to follow the progressive and proportionate disciplinary requirements in violation of both the Handbook and the General Orders.”

THE WATERFORD, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

This costly project threatens the beauty of our scenic byway, the aquifer along the byway, farms, and even the future of our water supplies in both villages of Paeonian Springs, Waterford, and the homes and farms in-between.

Don’t create a third problem or we’ll be up a dry creek without a paddle. Interested in knowing more? <https://www.savethebyway.org/> —Thomas Walker

**We Don’t Want Your Solution:
It’s a terrible idea.**

We want safe, clean water and septic: everyone does. Our house in the village of Paeonian Springs has serious septic issues that necessitate an immediate and expensive solution. But we don’t want the county’s project. Why not?

We are not opposed to improvements that are beneficial to our community. Everyone deserves access to water and waste removal. We do,

however, disagree with the present Paeonian Springs/Waterford Interconnector plan. We own a house in the village of Paeonian Springs that has a septic issue. The proposed solution will not solve our present problem. In fact, it will force us to undo our present renovation if this project is approved.

Our initial concern started with the lack of transparency of the Dewberry’s and Loudoun Water’s agenda. They were well into the feasibility study before most residents learned of the plan through word of mouth within the community, without official notification to the residents. In fact, the proposed Interconnector Water-Sewer System failed to comply with its own proper protocol. This alone should be a red flag. What other surprises are in store if we continue on this course?

We are also disturbed by the high probability that the County will force residents to hook up at the cost of \$15 K per homeowner, both septic and water.

Worse, there have been several incidents where new, higher water flows from a public system have caused old pipes to burst, requiring re-plumbing of the entire house, over and above the \$15,000 hookup fee. [*Houston: The water and sewer hookup costs for Paeonian Springs could be up to \$30,000, while hooking up to a water system could cost Waterford residents up to \$15,000.*]

This proposed Interconnector water-sewer system between the Village of Waterford and Paeonian Springs has also failed to consider the environmental impact on the community.

This proposed Interconnector threatens to deplete the aquifer and future water supplies in the farmland between the villages and thus, both villages of Paeonian Springs and Waterford. In the process it will permanently damage the Clarkes Gap Road scenic byway and cause a three-year commuter nightmare during construction.

We do support more cost effective, timely, and less impactful small-scale solutions to improve our water/waste-water system. The solutions should solve each Village’s specific problem without involving Clarkes Gap Road. The Waterford Preservation Group has researched less expensive, quicker, and sustainable solutions to the problems in each Village. These and other methods must be explored.

As a homeowner in the village of Paeonian Springs I am asking Loudoun County to take back this solution. We don’t want it.—Jayne Walker

A former office building developer, Charles Houston has been involved in countless efforts to preserve western Loudoun. Unfortunately, residents almost always lose, a testament to the power of greedy promoters and the unwillingness of our government to stand up for us.

EYETOPIA’S 23-YEARS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

practice, introducing a refreshed children’s brand identity, highlighted by the whimsical and artistic new “Kid Seen” logo, designed by the young local artist Brady Wiley. The colorful logo reflects the individuality and imagination that Eyetopia’s children’s eyewear line is known for—frames that capture the personality and imagination of every youngster.

Guests gathered at 11 a.m. for the celebration, which also highlighted the evolution of MEYEHAUSE—Eyetopia’s boutique house brand that has been taking shape since 2002. Born from years of curating beautiful glasses for beautiful people, MEYEHAUSE reflects the company’s pride in truly knowing its clients. The brand goes beyond frames, celebrating eyewear as both art and function, with designs sourced from around

the world and crafted to help every client see—and be seen—at their best.

Owner and CEO Paige Buscema launched Eyetopia 23 years ago with a simple vision—to do optical the way it should be done. That philosophy—centered on integrity, service, and helping every client discover their own exceptional style—has shaped the business into a Loudoun mainstay.

Beyond its award-winning optical services, Eyetopia has become a destination for style—curating distinctive jackets, handcrafted leather purses, and jewelry reminiscent of haute couture for its fine quality and individuality. In this newest chapter, Buscema and her team continue to fuse artistry and expertise to help clients show up better than ever.

Eyetopia is located at 223 Loudoun Street SE in Leesburg. To find out more go to ShopEyetopiaInc.com.

SHILOH MANOR FARM, CON’T. FROM PAGE 19

neighbors would gather to give thanks for the harvest, celebrate the coming year, and enjoy a festive meal and merriment. Shiloh Manor aims to revive that spirit with attention to historical detail—and a bit of humor.

Chef Erik’s menu for the evening draws inspiration from *Housekeeping in Old Virginia*, an 1879 cookbook written by Marion Cabell Tyree, granddaughter of Patrick Henry. The evening begins with baked Virginia oysters and apple brandy-glazed quail, followed by a salad of fall greens and vegetables with a walnut sherry vinaigrette. The first two courses will be paired with an unoaked French Chardonnay.

The main course features Virginia ham and Loudoun County roast beef with mashed potatoes and succotash, served alongside a robust imported Italian Chianti. For dessert, guests will enjoy Mackintosh apple pie with Shiloh Farm’s homemade vanilla ice cream. A vegetarian menu is available upon request.

While elaborate European dances like the minuet were sometimes performed among the gentry, most Virginians preferred more approachable social dancing during holiday gatherings. English line dances such as the Virginia Reel—fun, inclusive, and rooted in 17th-century folk traditions—were common across the countryside.

To preserve the intimate and festive atmosphere, seating is limited to 40 guests. The smaller group allows for attentive service and plenty of room for dancing. For tickets go to Shiloh-Manor.com.

And for those who are a bit shy on the dance floor, the hosts joke that a glass of homemade apple toddy or traditional eggnog may help loosen stiff joints and raise confidence.

The evening promises a memorable blend of fine food, historic charm, and community spirit—celebrating the close of 2025 and the promise of a new year, just as Virginians once did two centuries ago.

OPINION: GEARY HIGGINS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

AT&T “switching facility” on top of Short Hill Mountain. He voted against data centers proposed in the wrong places, and fought hard to keep them out of the transition zone and the west. He’s the very reason our district is not full of data centers.

More recently, as a Delegate, he stopped a new transmission right-of-way from being cut right through the center of Western Loudoun and ensured that it would be built in the existing right-of-way—saving countless homes, farms, and historic sites.

His conservation and preservation record is second to none. He worked with three Governor’s to bring the Sweet Run State Park to Loudoun. He secured emergency funding for the Waterford Foundation when the Fair was postponed due to a hurricane, as well as funding for the rehabilitation of the “Old Mill”.

Geary Higgins served 10 years on the Loudoun Museum Board and secured County funding for it. He secured VDOT funding to save the John Lewis Bridge, personally donated the E. E. Lake Store to the County, put the Village of Bluemont on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places, and helped Morven Park with approval of their projects.

After partisan Democrats spitefully killed the Oak Hill State Park plan for President James Monroe’s home last session in Richmond, Geary Higgins convinced the Governor to include Oak Hill in his final budget this December.

Geary Higgins supported and worked with Mayor Roger Vance to bring traffic calming to Hillsboro, speaking to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) in support. It was his initiative that brought the round-about to the intersection at the Berlin Turnpike and the Charles Town Pike (currently under construction), and he worked with then Supervisor Buffington for the improvements on the shared Berlin Turnpike and Route 7 bypass in Purcellville.

As our Delegate, he passed bills to: notify parents of opioid overdoses at schools, ensure homeschoolers could participate in JROTC, free up VDOT funding to preserve our gravel roads, remove toxic food dyes from our kids’ school lunches, improve worker safety, and allow individuals with developmental disabilities to curbside vote.

Finally, you may have seen two recent mailers his opponent John McAuliff sent out.

One mailer claims that Geary supported

the elimination of the Purcellville Police Department. That claim is categorically false, and nothing could be further from the truth. Geary Higgins has always supported the Purcellville Police, and law enforcement in general.

He has received endorsements from all law enforcement entities who make endorsements: Loudoun Sheriff Mike Chapman, Fauquier Sheriff Jeremy Falls and the Police Benevolent Association. John McAuliff is lying about Geary, because he couldn’t find a single member of local law enforcement to support him, so he filmed his lousy attack ad with a failed Democrat politician from Virginia Beach.

The other mailer his opponent sent touts his endorsement from “Save Rural Loudoun.” This group claims to be “non-partisan,” and asserts that this is the first time that they have endorsed a candidate.

I asked Delegate Higgins how any group claiming to “save” rural Loudoun could ever possibly endorse against our strongest fighter for preserving rural Loudoun. Well, he sent me their questionnaire, and virtually all questions applied to local county zoning authority and had nothing to do with state legislative issues. Geary told me that he thoroughly explained this to them in a lengthy discussion at their booth during the Bluemont Fair, while discussing with them all the ways he can help them preserve rural Loudoun.

Save Rural Loudoun is led by liberal former candidate John Ellis, and it seems the whole endorsement process was a sham in order to provide an in-kind contribution to a fellow Democrat. Look for yourself on social media. Ellis was liking and commenting positively on McAuliff’s ads, before the endorsement.

In fact, according to VPAP, nearly all of his board members and he have only ever donated to Democrats. You can see why Delegate Higgins didn’t spend hours off the campaign trail filling out a survey for a predetermined endorsement.

This election, I hope you’ll block out the lies and noise, and vote for someone who’s been there for us, and delivered actual results for Western Loudoun and Fauquier Counties.

Lisa Harcrow and her husband live in Town of Purcellville where they’ve raised their three sons, who are all current and former LCPS students. She is a marketing professional and advocate for excellence in education.

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PURCELLVILLE COUNCIL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to move forward. Mayor Bertaut responded, “It concerns matters that were discussed in a closed session.”

Rayner pushed back, replying, “Yes, and obviously our Town Attorney has more to say to us and you don’t want to hear that.” At that point, Interim Town Manager Diana Hays interjected, noting that the item had originally been placed on the agenda as an action item, but was moved to closed session at the request of the mayor. This change was made because the matter involved personnel issues.

Quickly, Stought made a motion to appoint Lombrana as Chief of Police. The motion failed, with Bertaut, Luke and Khalil voting no.

Rayner said, “I am unclear why you do not want to hear the legal advice from our lawyer in closed session regarding this matter. I believe it’s pretty ignorant of you not to hear it.” She also said the Town Attorney’s job “is to give us legal advice and you are refusing to hear it.”

Trust the attorney—unless you don’t like the answer

On Oct. 6, Council Members Erin Rayner, Kevin Wright, and Caleb Stought filed a petition for declaratory judgment in Loudoun County Circuit Court—asking a judge to decide whether adopting the Town’s annual budget requires a supermajority vote.”

The legal action stems from their failed attempt earlier this year to raise taxes and utility rates as part of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. The proposal included an increase to the real estate tax rate and steep, double-digit hikes to water and sewer rates. It was rejected in a 4–3 vote, with Bertaut, Nett, Luke, and Khalil voting against all increases and instead approving rate reductions.

The petition is notable not only for its potential impact on the upcoming FY27 budget cycle, but also for highlighting a broader contradiction in how Rayner, Wright, and Stought approach legal advice from the Town Attorney.

During the Oct. 14 meeting, the three repeatedly chastised their fellow council members for not wanting to listen to the Town Attorney’s legal guidance on the police chief appointment. Yet in filing their petition, they are now openly defying that same attorney’s longstanding interpretation that the budget may be passed by a simple majority vote.

This is not the first time they have disre-



garded the Town Attorney’s legal advice. In late 2024, just before the new council took office, a former mayor was appointed to the Planning Commission in anticipation of a vacancy that would not exist until Jan. 1. In January 2025, the Town Attorney advised that the appointment was invalid, citing the absence of an actual vacancy at the time, a violation of an attorney general’s opinion, and conflicting court rulings. Despite this guidance, Rayner, Wright, and Stought voted against repealing the appointment. It was ultimately rescinded by Bertaut, Nett, Luke, and Khalil.

Town Attorney John Cafferky has addressed the budget vote on multiple occasions, including during the June 17 Special Budget Work Session. At that meeting, he explained that after the Council voted to lower the real estate tax rate a few months earlier, he had “both the opportunity and the responsibility to look into it further.”

On June 17, after reviewing Code § 15.2-2503 and § 58.1, which govern local budget

and tax procedures, Cafferky concluded that a supermajority is not required to adopt the town budget.

Cafferky stated that his interpretation was consistent with that of “your previous town attorney.” He also clarified that because adopting the budget is not the same as imposing a new tax or establishing a new category of taxation, it does not rise to the level that would require a supermajority vote under Virginia law.

Despite this consistent legal guidance, Rayner, Wright, and Stought are now asking a judge to override that opinion—underscoring the disconnect between their public demands for legal adherence and their own actions.

The report they don’t want to talk about

On June 28, the Town of Purcellville Employee Grievance Panel issued a unanimous decision, which is publicly available, finding that Officer Ben Nett, who also serves as Vice Mayor, was cleared of all charges brought against him. The Panel determined this based on the greater weight of the evidence. As part of its ruling, the Panel ordered Nett’s reinstatement with full back pay and reimbursement of reasonable attorney’s fees.

They also found the placement of Nett on the Brady List, as designated by the Commonwealth’s Attorney, to be unwarranted, concluding that he was not guilty of any malfeasance in connection with the events cited in the Brady List letter.

The Panel identified multiple instances in which Lt. Holman and Acting Chief Lombrana failed to follow formal policy or implement proper procedures related to the charges against Nett. It also noted that the Town had not updated its General Orders.

In one example, the Panel stated, “The Town failed to provide evidence that Lt. Holman is empowered to change formal Department policy at his whim.” In another,

Lt. Holman instructed Nett—who was on sick leave—to call him; Nett responded by email. The Panel concluded that this did not constitute a violation of department rules or regulations.

Testimony from Lt. Holman and Acting Chief Lombrana revealed they failed to follow “the progressive and proportionate disciplinary procedures required by the Town Handbook and General Orders”—a core requirement designed to ensure fairness in disciplinary actions.

One example was when Lt. Holman placed Nett on administrative leave immediately after he allegedly failed to provide a doctor’s note for sick leave—even though, under town policy, such documentation is only required upon an employee’s return from sick leave. At the time, Nett was still out. Lombrana testified that, in Nett’s case, a single failure to submit a doctor’s note was considered sufficient “insubordination” to justify termination.

The Panel also noted that Acting Chief Lombrana refused to follow the town manager’s directive to reinstate Nett, despite the fact that he is her supervisor, as required under the department’s General Orders. Lombrana testified that she “didn’t feel that I should.” The Panel described her refusal as “cavalier” and stated that her continued insubordination “should be of grave concern to Town residents.”

The breadth of issues detailed in the Employee Grievance Panel report may explain why Bertaut, Luke, and Khalil opposed the appointment—and why they refused to engage in further discussion behind closed doors. The Panel’s findings suggest deeper concerns not just about individual conduct, but about leadership, accountability, and a process some officials may no longer trust.

The Blue Ridge Leader contacted Dana G. Schrad, Executive Director of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police and a participant in the selection process, multiple times to ask whether she had reviewed the Town of Purcellville Grievance Panel report. She did not respond.

LETTER: MY DAD, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Meanwhile, House District 30, Geary Higgins would never sell you out. You’ve been his passion project since before I was born. He’s the same honest man he’s always been—dedicated to your wellbeing and the good of our region. Don’t let someone waltz into town with a smile and tell you any different. You’re too smart for that, and you deserve better.

Megan Thomas
Purcellville

LOUDOUN COUNTY SUPERVISORS REVIEW, CON’T. FROM PAGE 5

provides a little more stability for the water systems themselves?” Hemstreet said.

Supervisor Matthew Letourneau (D-Dulles) said he would evaluate the projects for funding based on which projects were addressing the most critical needs. He agreed about the importance of the water system. He also said the county’s most dangerous interchange was at the top of his priority list.

“Consistently, the most dangerous intersection in the

county—number one or number two—year after year after year, is Loudoun County Parkway and Route 50,” Letourneau said. “I will not support a dime to any other interchange in the county until we address the one that has been on our books for over a decade.”

Supervisor Caleb Kershner (R-Catoctin) was unable to attend the meeting, but Supervisor Juli Briskman (D-Algonkian) shared a statement he made to in an email indicating that he supported most of the project proposals, but thought Purcellville’s “need a little bit of work.”

FINDING GRATITUDE AND HARMONY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

giving loved ones our undivided attention. Whether enjoying a movie or a football game together, going for a walk outside or exercising, cooking, or shopping together, limiting distractions enriches our shared experiences and deepens bonds. Let's strive to be fully present by unplugging from our devices.

Enjoy food and drink in moderation to stay energized and comfortable throughout the day. After the meal, a group walk, a nap, or a gentle activity can refresh both body and mind, enhancing the holiday spirit. Let's strive to cultivate moderation, rest, and movement.

Thanksgiving is a perfect time to serve

others and reflect with optimism on our lives. Are your relationships healthy? Are you finding balance? Positive reflection helps us grow and prepare for the months ahead. Let's strive to give back and to reflect positively.

This Thanksgiving, choose gratitude, connection, and peace.

"Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."—Melody Beattie

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

BOS VOTES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

And I'm really excited about us helping inspire growth over by the Metros."

She added a personal priority: "I am super psyched about the potential childcare center ... I will be advocating that our employees have a childcare center in their new building. I think that it is important for life-work balance."

Chair Randall echoed that enthusiasm: "Ditto with the childcare facility and the café and all the things—our employees deserve to have all the things."

With little further debate, the

motion carried 4-0-1, with Supervisor Kristen Umstattd (D-Leesburg) absent.

Staff will now begin site screening and outreach to potential private partners, reporting back with specific locations, costs, and financing options. The staff presentation noted that a site will need to be identified "in the next year to facilitate a 2030 movement of staff."

For Briskman, the move represents both a practical and symbolic step forward: "Whether I'm here or not," she said with a smile, "we'll have future supervisors in a beautiful building."

OPINION: JOHN MCAULIFF, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

concrete answers to each question.

We are disappointed that Mr. Higgins could not find time to explain his positions to the voters. In the absence of a direct response, we reviewed information on his campaign website and his record as a Loudoun County Supervisor and Delegate in the state legislature to fill in the information gaps.

We can confirm that there are at least two issues on which the candidates agree. Both are committed to preserving western Loudoun's gravel roads and both support the creation of a state park at Oak Hill. We appreciate these commitments, while recognizing that neither of these issues addresses the most fundamental threats to our rural areas and small towns.

We consider the long-term drop in our water tables and risk that large numbers of rural households may lose their wells to be a critical threat. Mr. McAuliff proposes to create a state "water

management area" in western Loudoun and Fauquier, which would empower the state to restrict development in areas whose underground water resources are at risk. Save Rural Loudoun strongly supports this proposal.

We do not know what position Mr. Higgins might take on this issue. We are concerned, however, by his past support for more development in and around the historic village of Lucketts, whose water sources are threatened by falling water tables in sensitive karst terrain.

We were also disappointed that, while serving in the state legislature, Mr. Higgins went out of his way to lobby our County Board of Supervisors against their initiative to preserve prime farming soils.

With respect to rising electricity rates, which are primarily due to exploding data center demand, Mr. McAuliff proposes to establish a separate rate category for "high volume users." This would enable electric suppliers to charge a higher rate on

data centers' electricity use and maintain lower rates for citizens and other businesses. We strongly support his proposal.

We do not know what position Mr. Higgins might take on this critical issue either. However, we are concerned that he has accepted large campaign donations from Dominion Energy and other energy sector companies. Mr. McAuliff, on the other hand, has pledged that he will not accept donations from Dominion.

With respect to local farming and agritourism, Mr. McAuliff pledges support for a longstanding request from the Virginia Farm Bureau to establish a northern Virginia processing plant in Fauquier County. He also proposes to create a state agritourism tax credit to support new rural small businesses.

Based on what we know of the candidates' positions on these issues, we believe rural and small town voters have a clear choice in this election. Mr. McAuliff has made specific, concrete commitments

to address falling water tables, prevent data-center driven electricity price inflation, and support farming. Mr. Higgins has not.

For that reason, Save Rural Loudoun endorses Mr. McAuliff for Delegate. We want to stress, again, that this endorsement is based solely on the candidates' positions on issues that matter to us and has nothing to do with their party affiliations.

Voters often express a sense of futility about efforts to preserve rural areas. Elections are an opportunity to build local governments that are more responsive to our concerns. However you vote, please make your voice heard!

John Ellis is Chairman of the Board of Save Rural Loudoun, a registered 501(c)(4) non-profit, non-partisan community organization. He is also a member of the board of the Between the Hills Conservancy, an official "friends organization" for Sweet Run State Park.

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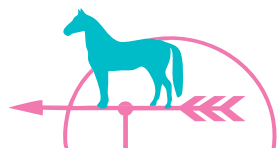
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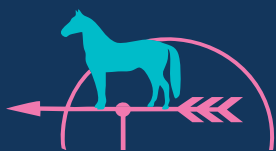


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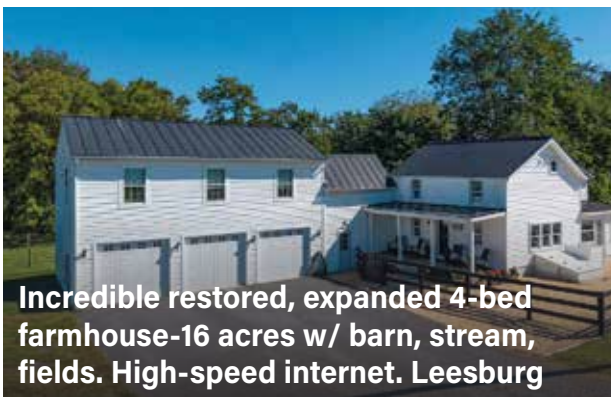
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