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– View from the Ridge –

Purcellville isn't corrupt—it's being sabotaged

BY VALERIE CURY

OPINION

The divide in Purcellville is not between honest governance and corruption. It is between a majority fulfilling the will of the voters and a very well-connected political minority determined to reverse the outcome of an election.

Purcellville is being portrayed as a town unraveling, plagued by misconduct and unprecedented corruption. Senator Russet Perry amplified that narrative with a public statement portraying the town as ethically collapsing. Yet despite the seriousness of those claims, Senator Perry's office never contacted the one person who could have provided an accurate, firsthand account of the town's operations—the Mayor. Not once.

That omission says a great deal about what is really happening here.

Mayor Christopher Bertaut's response to Senator Perry provided the clarity missing from the conversation. The Town Council majority has been voting openly, transparently, and entirely within the authority granted by Virginia law.

They are executing the agenda they

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

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VOTED BEST OF LOUDOUN

GRIEVANCE PANEL DECISION
Page 27

The fight against price gouging: affordable housing discussions continue

BY GRACE BENNETT

On November 18, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors convened to discuss the current state of affordable housing applications. The pilot program for attainable housing—approved in October 2025—is being polished to ensure that its draft policies are as beneficial as possible for residents in the area.

Housing, Chair Phyllis J. Randall (D-At Large) communicated, is no small matter within Loudoun County. "This is one of the largest discussions we're going to have to address this year as we go down to the general assembly," she forewarned.

Finances are becoming increasingly problematic for residents. Randall added, "Between 2020 and now, rent has gone from $1,618 to $2,310 [per month]—in five years … people can't afford to live here, and that's true all over the Commonwealth."

The attainable housing program is attempting to combat the rise in costs to provide a greater number of homes at lower prices in the metro area. The current price trajectory portends doom for rental properties.

"My concern here is that we'll end up seeing fewer rentals ultimately because fewer units will go into the rental market," said Matthew F. Letourneau (R-Dulles).

"We have got to do something because what's happening right now is price gouging, is rent gouging, and going up 40 percent in 5 years is unsustainable," agreed Randall.

Attendees—the Board and Staff alike—were unanimous that the County support statewide anti-rent-gouging programs, even if no rent stabilization process is being established.

The most recent developments on the affordable housing legislation have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

p. 24 local business holiday greetings

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Ashburn and Purcellville natives part of VMI Army ROTC team

COMMUNITY

For the second year in a row, the Virginia Military Institute Army ROTC Ranger Challenge team won the bronze medal at Exercise Cambrian Patrol, the British Army's premier patrolling event held Oct. 3-12 in the Brecon Beacons, a mountain range in Wales in the United Kingdom. Last year was the team's first year to compete, and the first ROTC unit from the United States to participate.

Ranger Challenge is the "varsity sport" of the Army ROTC program, and is made up of eight cadets who tried out for the team last spring. Members include team captain James Aldinger '26, from Arlington, Virginia; Owen Brunk '26, from Portland, Connecticut; Gavin Hudson '26, from Locust, North Carolina; Jackson Karam '26, from Ashburn, Virginia; Colin Russell '26, from Midlothian, Virginia; Bradford Seery '26, from Chesapeake, Virginia; Raymond Moffett '27, from Purcellville, Virginia; and David Townsend '27 from Crozier, Virginia.



Photo: VMI Army ROTC.

Members of the VMI Army ROTC Ranger Challenge team display their patriotism at Exercise Cambrian Patrol in the Brecon Beacons, a mountain range in Wales.

The team was coached by Sgt. 1st Class Robert Bain, military science instructor; Capt. Tyler Brians, assistant professor of military science; Capt. Pauline Johnson, assistant professor of military science and officer in charge of Ranger Challenge; and Capt. Christopher Lopez, military science instructor.

ECP is a continuous, 48-hour long-range international military patrol exercise across rough terrain. It originated in 1959 when a group of Welsh Territorial Army (now Army Reserve) soldiers designed a weekend training event which included long distance marching and a shooting competition. ECP is both mentally and physically demanding, and considered to be one of the most difficult and esteemed of military competitions.

Participants carry 80-pound rucks, get limited sleep, and have minimal food. It is open to regular military, reserve military, and ROTC units. Units outside the U.K. must first qualify by winning a similar competition in their home country. This year, over 125 teams from more than 30 countries competed at ECP.

VMI faculty member, Maj. Alex Paul, assistant professor in the Department of History, knows first-hand the challenging conditions in Brecon from his time serving in the British Army. As a young infantry soldier, he spent several weeks training there.

Prior to the VMI team leaving for Wales, Paul met with them to help prepare them for what they could expect. He emphasized how quickly conditions in the area could turn dangerous. "The rain doesn't just fall, it comes sideways. The cold, the wet, and the wind together are unforgiving.

You have to look after yourself and your kit, but more importantly, you have to look after each other." Paul's message to the cadets was clear, "Preparation and vigilance matter, but resilience and camaraderie are what see soldiers through the toughest conditions. Hot drinks, dry socks, and humor will get you through more than you realize." Learning of the teams' success at ECP, Paul shared he is very proud of them.

According to Brians, Cambrian Patrol is an extremely challenging training event that even active duty Army teams would be hard-pressed to perform well. "Many of the tactics and skills that teams are assessed on during the event require specialized training. For VMI's team to arrive at the exercise with only one month of training and earn bronze is truly exceptional. As a coach, I'm extremely proud of the team and respect their grit to remain focused on the mission even during adverse conditions. Most countries only send their best soldiers, and our ROTC team outperformed many of them."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 »

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Tourism zone for thee—but not for me

BY VALERIE CURY

In 2012, the Purcellville Town Council created a Tourism Zone within the C-4 Historic Downtown District, designating five contiguous parcels along North 21st Street—130 to 144 N. 21st Street, plus a few rear lots under the same ownership—as the "Old Town Tourism Zone."

The ordinance granted those parcels regulatory flexibility—effectively loosening zoning constraints—and economic incentives, including the potential waiver of hookup fees, real estate taxes, meals tax, and occupancy taxes for up to nine years, if the owner invested in a qualifying redevelopment project. Monetary grants from the Town were also permitted.

GOVERNMENT

The incentives were structured to help the property owners of the Vineyard Square project—including a member of the Chapman family—to pursue a boutique hotel on the site. All incentives were tied to that hotel concept, including a required minimum investment of $250,000.

Over the years, however, the project—known as Vineyard Square—drifted far from that original vision. The hotel plan was abandoned and replaced with a six-story mixed-use approved project featuring ground-floor commercial space and 40 residential condominiums on a one-way single- lane street. This development project was approved by the then Lazaro Council.

A later attempt to "compromise" by reducing the residential unit count from 40 to 36 and dividing the project into several residential buildings was discussed but never approved. The C-4 District is intended to serve as one of the Town's primary business districts.

Importantly, the C-4 zoning code prohibits multi-family housing. A residential condominium development would not have been allowed unless the Town had used the Tourism Zone to grant exceptions—and it did not—or unless a Town Council voted to approve it—which they did.

Despite this "compromise," no construction ever began. Under current zoning, any redesign would have required a new site plan and new permits—an uphill process given that multi-family housing is not permitted in the C-4 District—and would never have been approved by the majority on Town Council.

Now, after more than 15 years of delays, the project's permits and site plan have officially expired. According to the Purcellville Planning Department, the site plan (TP-14-13) expired on July 1, 2025. Its final extensions stemmed from a temporary statewide COVID-19 measure that kept certain development approvals valid longer than usual. That grace period has ended, and no further extensions are allowed under local regulations.

If the property owner—or any future developer—wishes to pursue a new project, they will need to submit a completely new application that complies with the current zoning code, including the prohibition on multi-family housing in that area, and meet all standard design and review requirements.

Meanwhile, Town Council members—Erin Rayner, Kevin Wright, and Caleb Stought—have indicated support for not only retaining the Tourism Zone but expanding it to cover the entire C-4 District.

According to publicly available campaign finance disclosures, one of Rayner's largest sources of campaign contributions came from companies affiliated with Casey Chapman, a relative, and a few of that relative's employees. Chapman serves as manager of the former Vineyard Square project. Rayner also transferred roughly $10,000 of her campaign funds to Council member Stought.

Other council members, along with many residents, question whether the town should continue a policy that grants unique exceptions to a narrow group of properties—particularly when the project the incentives were created to support never materialized, and when Purcellville carries approximately $48 million in debt despite having only about 9,000 residents. Critics argue that maintaining or expanding the Tourism Zone would amount to a special carve-out rather than an equitable development strategy for the entire town.

With Vineyard Square officially expired and the original justification for the Tourism Zone gone, the question now before Purcellville is whether to preserve incentives for a single property owner or restore consistent zoning across the Historic Downtown.

The Town Council is expected to take up the matter in December and may move the issue to a public hearing.



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Pandora and her Box

BY CHARLIE HOUSTON

OPINION

Zeus directed that Pandora be created as Earth's first human female. He imbued her with many fine attributes—beauty, intelligence, grace and so forth. Zeus, like many Greek gods, enjoyed stirring up earthly trouble and watching the ensuing spectacles. In Pandora's case, he also gave her a deep curiosity. He sent her a jar, which later was usually called her "box."

As expected, Pandora soon opened that box and a host of evils surged out. One of them was Apate, goddess of illusions and deceptions. Her fellow escapee from the box was Dolos, god of deception and guile. Both were associated with strife, and that brings us to 2025.

Strife Reigns in Loudoun

About six months ago, some residents of the Waterford/Paeonian Springs met with Board of Supervisors Chair Phyllis Randall. The group began the meeting by listing many significant reasons why they opposed a County plan called the "Paeonian Springs and Waterford Interconnected Community Water and Wastewater Systems project." That's such a mouthful that even bureaucrats haven't condensed it into an acronym, but I can: PSWICWWS.

The County then hosted a public meeting on October 18. The room was packed, mostly with opponents to PSWICWWS.

The Tail Wags the Dog

A handful of residents in Paeonian Springs lack decent sewage service and a similar handful in Waterford have a problem with water quality or quantity. Trying to get exact numbers has not worked, but we estimate that about 27 houses are impacted. Together, there are around 280 lots in the two villages.

The Project is the Problem

The PSWICWWS project is a grotesque scheme to help those 27 houses by building a $60 million utility project that connects the villages via 2.5 miles of piping in new trenches along Clarkes Gap Road, constructs a water plant and expands the existing sewer plant in Waterford. It could lead to residents being forced to connect, which could cost each of them some $18,000 or more in Waterford (only for water) and $36,000 in Paeonian Springs (for water and sewer.)

Why "grotesque?" Start with the possible costs to residents. The County has the legal power to force people to connect, even against their will. The plan includes five or six massive wells on what's now private property, but the government's power of eminent domain could trump individuals' property rights. Chair Randall assured the crowd that the she's loathe to use eminent domain, and that connecting would be voluntary. That's sweet to hear, but a verbal promise could be reversed at any time, such as when PSWICWWS arrives at a go—no go point.

Worse, we believe that those big wells will extract 600,000 gallons of water per day from an aquifer that's already up to forty feet below normal. Currently the villages rely on septic drainfields, where the discharge is filtered as it seeps

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 »

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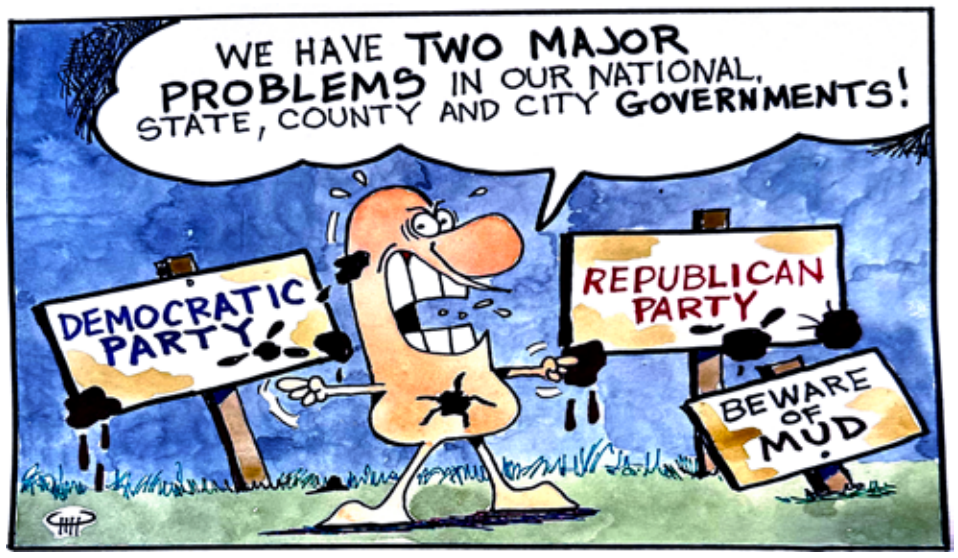
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KILJOY



Rural Loudoun County on Trial

BY SENATOR DICK BLACK (RET.)

OPINION

The trial of Kwasi Fraser is not about him—it is an epic battle over lucrative land deals.

Back when slow growth struggles dominated county politics, a majority on the Purcellville town council planted a time bomb that was designed to eventually force voters to accept high-density development inside expanded town limits.

They purposely built a sewage treatment plant far larger than the existing town limits would ever use and more expensive than the town could afford. They thought the heavy debt would drive up taxes until exhausted taxpayers quit fighting and allowed the town to expand its boundaries. Then, they could sell the excess sewage capacity in order to pay down the debt. That would make fortunes for land speculators.

But voters had different plans. They drafted Kwasi Fraser, a political novice, to run for mayor. Fraser promised voters that he would keep taxes down, reduce the debt, and not extend sewage beyond the existing town boundaries. That required fiscal austerity, which is always a struggle.

Kwasi won a stunning upset victory and, like George Bailey in the movie It's a Wonderful Life, Kwasi Fraser went on to keep Purcellville a clean, wholesome, rural town.

Mayor Fraser became Loudoun County's first African American mayor. He was a corporate executive who held a Bachelor in Engineering Degree from prestigious Stony Brook University and an MBA from Rutgers. He was imminently qualified and ran the town like an expert.

Throughout his tenure, the growth battle over sewage and development simmered. Nonetheless, when Mayor Fraser retired eight years later, the town had 200 new businesses, meals tax revenues had doubled, the debt had shrunk from $61.1 million to $52.5 million, the streets were safe, and Purcellville had earned a AAA bond rating from Standard & Poor's.

Kwasi never raised property taxes in eight years. He did exactly as he had promised.

Two years later, when the town manager left, Kwasi was hired to replace him. But just two months afterward, he found himself indicted by a grand jury. The charges read, "rigged gov't bidding" and "commercial fraud against the government." Sounds serious, but here's the rest of the story.

The big kerfuffle is over a tiny personal services contract for just twelve thousand dollars—about the cost of replacing a worn-out air conditioner. No one stood to make a dime except the fellow who did the study for the town.

Rigged government bidding? Commercial fraud? Give me a break. This case is about land speculators fighting to extend sewage treatment beyond Purcellville's present boundaries so that high-density expansion can begin.

When a land owner applied to incorporate a large tract of land within the town boundaries, he hoped for a major increase in zoning density. But Mayor Fraser during his tenure as mayor, and more currently the town council majority this year voted it down—again under a different

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 »

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— It Seems to Me —

A clear and present danger in Western Loudoun

BY JOE LAFIANDRA

OPINION

Most people are not fully aware of the danger of injury or death from falling trees in Western Loudoun. Before your eyes glaze over and say "Another thing to worry about" consider the following deaths from falling trees in Loudoun County:

1. St. Francis de Sales Church pastor, Michael Kelly, in Hamilton, in 2008.
2. A seven-year-old girl in Purcellville, in 2018.
3. A fifty-two-year-old woman in Leesburg, in 2019.
4. A thirteen-year-old girl in Purcellville, in 2019.

While your odds of being injured or killed in this manner are low, the present danger of falling trees in rural areas is not being addressed properly by authorities.

Perhaps, I am being overly cautious because I have personally been involved with this problem over the years. In fact, one recent situation that I will present in detail, has gotten my attention. But first let me tell you about my own experiences.

I was born and grew up in the South Bronx where there were no trees for blocks and I mean, no trees. In my teen years, we moved to a house in the North Bronx where there were farms and trees. Our house was one of two identical homes with a common driveway. During a hurricane, a large tree approximately two feet in diameter, fell luckily, in the driveway. Our house had some minor damage from some branches.

Later in life, when my family moved to Long Island, I had a similar experience. My wife and kids were about to move into a new development, when a hurricane crossed the Island. I was again lucky, several large trees fell on houses being built, but none on my house. It was close, the trees fell away from my house.

Yes, there's more. A woman was killed by a falling branch on Long Island when she was driving on a main road close to my home. While hiking in a park in Philadelphia, a large branch fell on a path that I was on moments earlier. There was no wind or storm at the time.

In the December 31, 2008 incident, I found out later, that I was a few minutes on the road behind Father Kelly. I was about to turn on Harmony Church Road on my way to Southern Virginia when my wife announced that she forgotten her cell phone. We turned around, picked up her phone and proceeded on our journey only to find that the road was blocked ahead with fire and rescue equipment. That was when the tree fell on him.

My recent experience started this year in August, when traveling North on Lincoln Rd., just South of the border of Purcellville. I was stopped by a tree trimming crew as they cut branches from a 50 ft. tree on the right side of the road.

A few days later, I looked up as I again travelled North on Lincoln Rd. passing the same tree. I noticed that one large branch had not come down-instead it was suspended by a thin sliver of wood hinge on one end and thin lower branches at the other. The branch was about 8 in. in diameter, 10 ft. long and 25 ft. in the air. It was partially over the roadway that hundreds, probably thousands of cars use daily to get into Purcellville.

Because of my history of falling trees, I proceeded to call several utilities and agencies to make them aware that this hazard existed. These calls included,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 »

Loudoun's water plan risks drying up our future

LETTER

Dear Editor:

Here in Western Loudoun, we are reckoning with our effect on the water table and its remaining resources. The Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition recently published a groundwater study which found that the water table has decreased between 10 and 40 feet over the past 20 years. We already feel some of the effects.

There are several residents in Paeonian Springs who experience challenges disposing of wastewater, as well as a handful of residents in Waterford who struggle to access enough potable water for their needs.

Loudoun County has proposed a plan they estimate will cost $60 million dollars. They would drill up to five supply wells along Clarkes Gap Road to produce enough water to fill an Olympic sized swimming pool every day. To support those wells, the County would also construct a water treatment facility, one or more pumping stations, water mains, and forced mains, which would pump clean water uphill to Paeonian Springs, so the wastewater can flow back down to the treatment plant.

The County plans to use eminent domain to take as many as 20 acres along Clarkes Gap Road, an officially designated Virginia Byway. They would remove frees and level hills to make way for the construction along Catoctin Creek. Waterford is a National Historic Landmark and Paeonian Springs is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This massive construction project is estimated to take at least eight months and would make Clarkes Gap Road unrecognizable.

There is no plan to mitigate the harm this could do to the current residents. Removing that much water every day will likely lower the groundwater beyond the draw points for many of our wells. How will Loudoun County then supply water to those whose access they have cut off? Catoctin Creek could experience seasonal dry spells. On the northern edge of Waterford, there are concerns that the wastewater discharge would be more than the stream base flow into the Potomac River.

Loudoun County's proposed solution is not only convoluted but would cause irreparable harm to the entire area. Wells would dry up, and land values would decline. Traffic during the proposed construction would be nightmarish for our many commuters. It would also be costly, time consuming, and forever alter our beautiful landscape.

No person should be denied fresh water, and we should all be able to dispose of wastewater safely to protect our communities. In the past, separate solutions would have been developed to address each of these very serious but very different problems.

Loudoun County must develop separate plans to meet the needs of its citizens. A plan which does not propose such a great amount of damage would be a nice start.

Nan Cross
Waterford

County programming moves to Comcast HD Channel 1075

GOVERNMENT

Comcast will discontinue Loudoun County Government programming on the current standard-definition Channel 23, that became effective Nov. 25. County government programming, including Board of Supervisors meetings, Planning Commission sessions, and announcements about county programs and services, will now be available in high definition on Comcast Channel 1075.

Under the county's franchise agreement with Comcast, non-commercial public, educational, and government (PEG) channels are provided for local government programming. With the introduction of a high-definition channel, Comcast is permitted to discontinue the standard-definition Channel 23. Comcast customers will receive direct notifications about this change.

Verizon FIOS customers will continue to receive Loudoun County Government programming on Channel 40 in standard definition. There are no planned changes to the Verizon channel at this time.

All Board of Supervisors and committee meetings, as well as Planning Commission sessions, are also live streamed online at loudoun.gov/meetings for residents who prefer to watch remotely.

For additional details on Loudoun County's cable TV franchise agreements, go to loudoun.gov/cable.

TLUC talks rural zoning on food trucks, wineries and restaurants

BY SOPHIA CLIFTON

GOVERNMENT

Anyone driving past a Loudoun winery on a sunny Saturday can almost always spot a band, a long line for snacks and sometimes even a food truck or two parked in the gravel lot. County planners and the Board of Supervisors spent their Transportation and Land Use Committee meeting on Nov. 5, talking about exactly that.

Throughout the meeting, the key question under discussion became: How can county staff best update the rules that govern food service, food trucks, short-term events and other uses in western Loudoun's rural areas so farms and agritourism businesses can survive, without turning country roads into party corridors?

The session, the seventh of eight planned stakeholder meetings, focused on Western Loudoun Rural Uses and Standards under a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Zoning Ordinance Amendment.

Staff told the committee that the topics for this meeting were "Food Service, Food Trucks, and Farm Winery, Limited Brewery, and Limited Distillery Events." The meeting was open to invited stakeholders from business, agriculture/conservation, and residential sectors. The goal? Make the rules clearer and fairer for farmers, wineries, breweries and the residents who live next door. Staff say it's about finding a balance between supporting rural businesses and protecting the countryside people moved here for, or as one report described it, "the agricultural landscape."

Many of Loudoun's agribusinesses do more than sell a product; they offer an experience. Staff told the committee that food service "not only enhances the visitor experience but also functions as a key revenue generator" for wineries, breweries and farm operations.

At the same time, the ordinances are two decades old in places and leave gaps. For example, food at licensed farm wineries has been limited mostly to prepackaged or reheated items, but some business owners say this rule chokes real, sustainable food service.

On the opposite side, neighbors are worried about noise, traffic, amplified music and big wedding-style events in places that weren't built for them. Planners and stakeholders repeatedly circled back to the same question: How do you let a local Loudoun farm feed customers and host a few weddings a year without creating a commercial hub that overwhelms the rural road network and nearby homes?

One of the meeting's liveliest debates was about food trucks. Under the current county rules, mobile vendors must be removed from a site at the end of each day. In practice, however, many food trucks show up at the same winery or farm every weekend and stay all season. They operate much like a fixed restaurant but without meeting restaurant standards for parking, septic capacity, restroom access and noise mitigation.

Staff asked a blunt question: Should the daily-removal rule be deleted so food trucks can stay on site with only an annual health permit? If so, should those permanent food trucks then be regulated like restaurants?

The presentation asked whether long-term trucks should face the same rules for hours, setbacks, parking and minimum lot size as rural restaurants. That's a big change: It would give vendors more predictability while potentially creating new infrastructure and buffering expectations for hosts.

Another practical issue during the meeting was the question, "What foods should be allowed as part of winery or brewery operations?" County staff suggested making accessory food sales more explicit (and allowing expanded food service where the Health Department signs off), and even floated the idea of a local-sourcing requirement.

For example, one requirement could be that 25% of the food served needs to come from the farm itself. Another could be that 50% of the food served needs to come from the farm itself or at least other farms within Loudoun County.

A final requirement suggested was that 75% of the total food served needs to come from the farm itself, other Loudoun farms or Virginia producers. County staff agreed these kinds of rules would help keep money in the local food economy, but it could also be tricky for smaller operations to meet.

Planners also considered whether to permit detached kitchens, like a separate

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Just Like Nothing (else) on Earth: Waterford Revisited

BY TIM JON

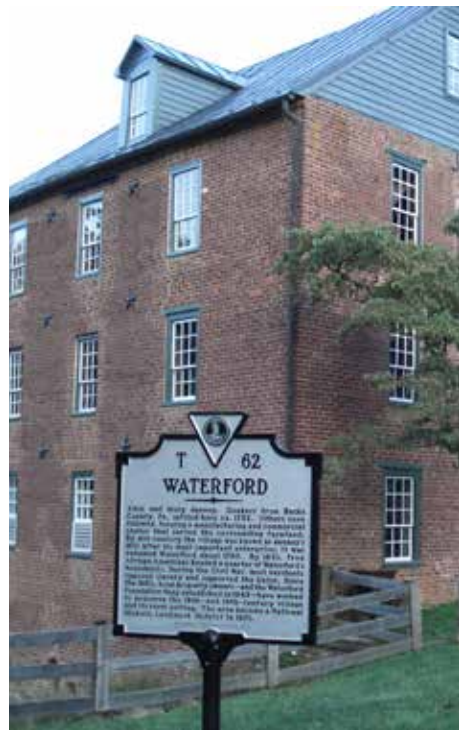

TIM JON

My Walk in Waterford: The Movie; imagine taking an early-morning stroll around an historic village, on a beautifully refreshing day, and you've got the whole place to yourself. This was my experience in a nutshell the last time I visited the quiet little community nestled in the heart of north central Loudoun County. Why don't you come along, it's not too late to join me; the palpable hush of daybreak urged me to step softly so as not to disturb the residents—some just a few feet from the sidewalk along the streets.

I had the feeling there was a bit of mutual self-consciousness going on, but—as an outsider—I assume mine weighed heavier. Except for the few early risers on that peaceful morning, only the universe was watching; I was starring in the greatest moving picture never filmed (so are you, by the way); I did, though, empty my camera's digital card; these images could serve as still shots from the leading actor's point of view. I (we) could barely take a step or two without feeling the impulse to capture another perspective; you see, the entire Village has enjoyed National Historic Landmark District status since 1970.

And, I guess a few of the natives may even come to take some of these sights for granted (well, maybe the sight of a crazed photographer (and his highly imaginative followers) walking the streets at dawn will sharpen their appreciation): for me—these sights were as if newly created to welcome my discoveries: the early morning sunshine on the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 »







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SUBMITTED BY JOSHUA WOLINSKI, EDWARD JONES FINANCIAL ADVISOR

Giving to charity feels good, but understanding the tax benefits can benefit both the charity and you. Whether you donate regularly or are planning your first gift, knowing how charitable tax deductions work can help you make informed decisions while supporting causes you care about. Here are things to consider:


JOSHUA WOLINSKI

The basics: Itemizing vs. standard deduction: To benefit from charitable tax deductions, you need to itemize your deductions on your tax return. Everyone automatically receives a standard deduction, which in 2025 is $31,500 for married couples filing jointly or $15,750 for single filers. You'll only benefit from itemizing if your total deductions, including charitable gifts, exceed these amounts.

For many people, charitable donations alone won't push them over the standard deduction threshold. However, when combined with other deductible expenses like mortgage interest or state and local taxes, itemizing can make financial sense.

If you give regularly but don't usually exceed the standard deduction, consider "stacking" your donations. Instead of donating $5,000 annually, you might donate $15,750 in one year to exceed the itemization threshold, then take the standard deduction in subsequent years.

Ensure your donation qualifies: To claim a deduction, you must give to a qualified charitable organization recognized by the IRS. You can verify an organization's status on the IRS website or ask the charity for their determination letter. Donations to individuals, even those in need, don't qualify for tax deductions.

Additionally, you can't receive personal benefits in exchange for your donation. If you give $500 to a charity but receive concert tickets worth $200, your deductible

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 »

Public comment on St. Louis Road Speed Study due by Dec. 17

Loudoun County is hosting a public input meeting on Dec. 3, on the Speed Management Study of St. Louis Road (Route 611) within the village of St. Louis. The purpose of this study is to assess existing travel speeds on St. Louis Road and recommend speed management countermeasures, where applicable, to encourage motorists to comply with the posted speed limit to enhance safety along the corridor.

GOVERNMENT

The St. Louis Road Speed Management Study public input meeting will be held Wednesday, Dec. 3, at 6 p.m., at Banneker Elementary School, 35231 Snake Hill Road, in Middleburg. Parking is available on-site.

Residents may provide input at the meeting or through the online comment form that will be available at loudoun.gov/StLouisSpeedStudy following the Dec. 3 meeting. All comments must be received by Dec. 17. Comments will be shared with the Board of Supervisors. For those without access to the internet, comments may be provided by phone at 703-737-8624.

This speed study is being conducted as a result of feedback gathered during the drafting of the St. Louis Village Plan, which was approved by the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors on September 10, 2025. During this process, concerns were raised about speeding along St. Louis Road and Snake Hill Road (Route 744) within the village of St. Louis.

Anyone who requires an accommodation for any type of disability or needs language assistance to participate in the meeting may call 571-627-7108 or send an email. Three business days' notice is requested.

More information about the Speed Management Study of St. Louis Road is available at loudoun.gov/StLouisSpeedStudy.

Leesburg's second draft zoning ordinance released for comment

The second draft of the Town's new Zoning Ordinance has been released. The draft will be available online for public review and comment through the end of year at https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/leesburg-va/.

GOVERNMENT

The majority of the new draft Zoning Ordinance was released to the public on March 6, 2025. Since then, the Planning Commission and Town staff have held public meetings twice a month to review, revise, and in some sections add draft language. The following sections are now included with the second draft Zoning Ordinance:

- Section 5-7: Crescent District
- Section 19-2: Tree Canopy Conservation
- Division 21: Signs
- Division 23: Attainable Housing

"Rewriting the Zoning Ordinance is a large task and we are excited to reach this latest milestone of releasing a complete draft that reflects public and Planning Commission input," said James David, Leesburg's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 »

Del. David A. Reid announces Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund Grants

Delegate David A. Reid (HD-28-Loudoun), Vice Chair of the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund Advisory Committee, announced today that the Committee reviewed 60 proposals and approved 43 projects, providing more than $280,000 in grants to support Chesapeake Bay education and restoration initiatives across Virginia. The funding, which comes entirely from the sale of Chesapeake Bay license plates, will support efforts to improve water quality, promote conservation, and increase public awareness of Bay stewardship.

Among the approved proposals are five benefiting Loudoun and Fauquier Counties, including:

- Goose Creek Association – $3,498
- Loudoun Soil & Water Conservation District – $4,295 and $3,000 (two projects)
- Izaak Walton League of Virginia – $12,450

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 »



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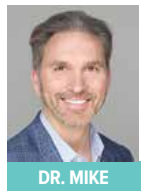
Tech-Free January: Let's unplug and recharge for 2026

BY MICHAEL OBERSCHNEIDER, PSY.D.

Each year, "Dry January" sweeps wine, beer, and liquor glasses off the table. But what if this year's reset is about screens instead? Enter: Tech-Free January—a modern cleanse for your screen-weary soul.

Screens, Screens, everywhere: Let's face it—screens are everywhere. Computers, tablets, and smartphones follow us wherever we go. Research shows that 89% of adults check their phones within the first 10 minutes of waking up—a number that's rising. Seventy-five percent feel uneasy leaving their phone behind, even briefly, and 57% say they're addicted to their phones.

Ask Dr. Mike



DR. MIKE

Alarmingly, 27% admit to using their phones while driving -- and I suspect the real numbers are even higher. For kids, all that glowing and gaming can mean less sleep, spotty focus, and shaky social skills. Many teens know the "swipe life" too well, with social media drama sometimes sparking real-life compulsive use and anxiety.

Why is this a problem? Numerous studies have shown the negative impact of excessive screen time on children, teens, and adults—from altering brain chemistry and mood to affecting social, emotional, learning and attentional functioning. Too many screens simply aren't good for us.

Time for a digital detox: Tech-Free January isn't a war on gadgets; it's an invitation to press "pause" and zoom in on the joys of offline, in-person living. Think of it as a spa month for your mind, or a reset button for your relationships. With just a few small adjustments, you might see your screen habits in a new light—and even prioritize real-life experiences more after January.

Find what works for you and stick to your detox plan. Screens are part of everyday life, so abstaining completely for a month isn't realistic for most. It's about finding that sweet spot for growth. For kids, maybe it's no gaming for a month or only gaming on weekends. For teens, maybe it's no social media for a month or limiting it to an hour a day. For adults, it might mean putting work down, prioritizing personal and family time, and checking your phone or going online only when necessary.

If you relapse, don't worry. Forget guilt. Relapses are plot twists, not bad endings. Research shows that self-kindness fuels comebacks. Dust off, recommit, and remember why you started. It's not about being perfect with technology—it's about being more mindful.

So January ends … what next?

Practice awareness: Don't reach for your phone out of boredom, stress, or habit. Find healthy replacements—connect with others in real time, go for a walk, organize, work out, and bring these habits into the rest of the year. Is anything really so urgent that you need to check your phone while driving or at an intersection?

Set screen hours: Schedule your swipes; don't let them schedule you. Technology should complement our lives, not dominate them.

Pick your no-tech zones: Bedrooms, dinners, maybe even the bathroom. Make your morning or evening routine less about screens and more about being present with yourself and others.

Try new hobbies: Anything goes—paint, skate, build, work out, or bake.

Make rituals: Board games, hikes, wild stories—anything that brings the family together. It may not feel natural at first, but reality is better than virtual reality.

Let's Go: Tech-Free January isn't about flawless execution—it's about curiosity, joy, and learning as you go. Unplug for just a month, and you might rediscover deeper connections, better sleep, improved mood and energy, and a creativity spark that's long overdue. Noted psychologist Jean Twenge compares screens to sugar—fine in moderation, but rough in excess. I couldn't agree more. This January, I invite you to find out how sweet life tastes with a little less tech.

Michael Oberschneider Psy.D., "Dr. Mike," is a clinical psychologist in private practice. He can be reached at 703-72302999, and is located at 44095 Pipeline Plaza, Suite, 240, Ashburn.

Shiloh Manor Farm hosts evening of Baroque music and fine dining

Soprano Kerry Holahan will return to the Wheatland Concert Series at Shiloh Manor Farm on Saturday, Dec. 13 at 6 p.m., offering an intimate evening of Baroque music and fine French cuisine. To sign up, go to www.shiloh-manor.com.

Holahan, known for her performances with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Folger Consort, and the National Cathedral Choir, will present a stirring program of arias from Handel's Messiah. She will be accompanied by harpsichordist Professor Mark Janello of The Johns Hopkins University Peabody Conservatory, cellist Peter Kibee, and Holly Nelson on Baroque violin, bringing together a distinguished ensemble devoted to historically informed performance.

COMMUNITY

During intermission, guests will be treated to an authentic French wild-game dinner prepared by Chef Erik Foxx Nettnin. The meal will begin with Gougère du Champignon, a savory tartlet filled with sautéed fall mushrooms, followed by Rillettes du Sanglier, a classic wild boar pâté.

The main course, Steak Chevreuil au Poire, features tender elk steak in a peppercorn cream sauce, accompanied by garlic mashed potatoes and caramelized roasted Brussels sprouts. Dessert will be a traditional Crème Brûlée. A vegetarian option is available upon request, and the meal will be paired with a fine imported Cabernet Sauvignon.

The focus of the evening, Handel's Messiah, emerges from one of the most remarkable creative episodes in Western music. Born in 1685 in what is now Germany, Handel achieved great success in England writing operas for the aristocracy.

By the 1740s, musical tastes had changed, and his fortunes declined. Encouraged by his friend Charles Jennens to set scriptural passages reflecting on the life and mission of Jesus, Handel entered a period of extraordinary inspiration. In just 24 days, he completed the 53-movement, 260-page oratorio. According to early accounts, friends found him weeping during composition, claiming he saw heaven open. He concluded the manuscript with the words "Soli Deo Gloria," meaning "To God alone the glory." Nearly three centuries later, Messiah remains one of the most cherished and frequently performed works in the world.

The Wheatland Concert Series was created during the difficulties of the pandemic to bring people together through beauty, community, and shared experience. The ancient stone walls and hand-hewn timbers of Shiloh Manor Farm provide a setting that emphasizes the enduring nature of fine music and memorable meals enjoyed in good company.

Tickets for this limited-seating event are available at www.shiloh-manor.com, and early reservations are encouraged.

Pop-Up exhibit to showcase Town's cultural gifts

The public is invited to a pop-up exhibit at the Donaldson Log Cabin on Friday, Dec. 5, that will feature some of the memorable and meaningful gifts presented to the Town of Leesburg over the years.

Leesburg has built relationships with cultures and cities around the world, and these cultural partnerships have resulted in the exchange of many thoughtful gifts. These items reflect the diverse histories, traditions, and friendships formed across continents.

COMMUNITY

In addition to gifts exchanged through these relationships, Thomas Balch Library also receives personal donations and gifts from community members. A selection of these recent acquisitions will be on display as part of the pop-up exhibit.

The event will be held in conjunction with Leesburg First Friday, with visitors welcome to stop by the Donaldson Log Cabin, located at 14 Loudoun Street SW, between 5 and 7 p.m.

For more information, call 703-737-7195 or email balchlib@leesburgva.gov.



Warner & Kaine announce $70 million to modernize buses

U.S. Sens. Mark R. Warner and Tim Kaine (both D-VA) announced almost $70 million in federal grant funding to improve Virginia's bus systems and reduce their emissions. This funding is awarded through the Department of Transportation's FY25-26 Low- or No-Emission Program and FY25 Buses & Bus Facilities Program, which is made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that the senators helped negotiate and pass.

GOVERNMENT

"Reliable access to public transportation is vital to Virginians, and we're thrilled to announce this funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that will modernize and electrify buses across the Commonwealth's cities and rural communities, increasing their efficiency, boosting accessibility, and reducing operating costs and environmental risk," said the senators.

The program grants will be distributed as follows:

The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation will receive $8,621,909 for Phase III of the VA Rural Transit Asset Management and Modernization Program, which purchases or

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19 »

A garden full of gratitude



Kenneth Culbert Elementary School was all smiles and tiny shovels on Saturday, Nov. 15, as students, families, and community partners gathered to break ground on the school's brand-new Garden Lab—an outdoor learning space that promises to bring science, nature, and healthy habits to life.

The project, part of Loudoun County Public Schools' Green Teams Initiative and cheerfully titled "From Seed to Salad: Growing Together," is being made possible through a partnership with several local businesses, including Wren's Rest Gardens, Abernethy & Spencer Greenhouse & Garden Center, Southern States, and Fielder's Choice Baseball and Softball.

COMMUNITY

Beginning in fall 2025, the school's inner courtyard will bloom into a hands-on learning hub where kindergarten, fifth-grade, and special education students can dig into real-world STEM lessons.

As they plant, water, and harvest a living salad garden, students will explore the plant life cycle, sustainable gardening practices, nutrition, and the joys of growing food together. The project encourages cross-grade mentorship and will bring in local gardeners, nutritionists, chefs, and families to help nurture young learners. Planned milestones include winter crop planting, indoor seed starting, spring transplanting, and a delicious "Plant to Plate" Family Night in June.

Kenneth Culbert Elementary extends a heartfelt thank-you to everyone who helped make this project possible. A special shout-out goes to Wren's Rest Gardens, the lead sponsor, whose expertise and generosity have rooted this project from the start.

Additional thanks go to Abernethy & Spencer Greenhouse & Garden Center, Southern States, and Fielder's Choice Baseball and Softball, along with the many volunteers and families who showed up ready to dig in. Their enthusiasm is planting the seeds for a future filled with hands-on learning, healthy habits, and strong community connections.

"There's so much that one can learn from gardening that applies to many other situations in life; whether it's students understanding what it takes to bring food to their plate every single day, applying science they've learned in the classroom to the real world, or grounding themselves in the cycles of nature. I am honored to support this project that inspires lifelong learning with the Kenneth Culbert Elementary Garden Lab," said Lana Rohrmeier, owner of Wren's Rest Gardens.

With the first shovels lifted and the soil officially turned, Kenneth Culbert Elementary's Garden Lab is now on its way—and excitement is already sprouting. If the joy at the groundbreaking was any indication, this sunny courtyard classroom is about to become one of the school's happiest and most inspiring places to learn and grow.



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TLUC, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

outdoor kitchen or food prep trailer, if they meet health requirements. Such a proposal could let small farms offer real meals without building a full commercial kitchen.

Another central focus of the committee meeting was events, as weddings, ticketed festivals and private parties pay the rent for many wineries and breweries. Staff pointed out that the current ordinance only allows special events through a temporary zoning permit (with limits like ten events a year and a 14-day duration per event), which some businesses say is too restrictive given their business models.

At the same time, staff acknowledged the need to clearly distinguish "special events," like a private 300-person wedding or ticketed festival, from routine activities like a weekend tasting with a small band. They suggested defining events by whether they are ticketed or reserved and then, if events are allowed more broadly, building rules to mitigate impacts—hours, noise limits, parking and setbacks.

Local agricultural groups and business stakeholders have pushed for more flexibility—arguing that today's small-scale, parcelized farms need the ability to diversify income through food service and events to stay afloat.

The Piedmont Environmental Council and other conservation-minded groups have urged careful attention to rural character and traffic impacts, asking the county to avoid rules that could enable denser, urban-style uses in the Rural Policy Area.

Even while advocating for environmental mindfulness, these groups still support the county's initiatives to help boost agritourism. "For many rural businesses, the ability to offer food alongside farm products or craft beverages is key for a high-quality experience for customers, so it is vital that the county supports this use," the Piedmont Environmental Council wrote in a recent newsletter.

The Nov. 5 discussion did not adopt any final rules, or take a formal vote—it was an information and stakeholder-input session only. According to staff, the input from this TLUC meeting and other sessions will guide the drafting of specific zoning and comprehensive plan amendments.

The committee will hold a "Direction" meeting in December 2025 to give staff guidance on this topic. After that, staff will write draft ordinance text for review by the Planning Commission and a Zoning Ordinance Committee, followed by public hearings. Loudoun's online project page notes that adoption of the finalized changes is anticipated in early 2027.

For owners of small farms, wineries or breweries in Loudoun, the message from county staff and many stakeholders is hopeful: The county wants to remove some awkward restrictions that make it hard to offer food or host events, while trying to protect neighbors from the downsides of commercial-scale use. For residents worried about noise and traffic, the county is signaling that it wants rules that will protect rural character and set limits on hours, parking and setbacks.

Loudoun officials repeatedly emphasized they want solutions that are "reasonable" and "context-sensitive," language lifted straight from Virginia law and the county's own planning documents. Ultimately, the rewrite is a balancing act: Keep the farms alive, and keep the countryside livable.

OPINION: RURAL LOUDOUN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

owner. Voters elected them to preserve Purcellville's small-town atmosphere and that's just what they did.

I've never interfered with local land use issues; those are for residents to decide. But as a career prosecutor, I've always hated political trials; I don't want innocent men imprisoned for personal gain.

I'm not suggesting that particular land owners are behind these charges, but I know how money clouds people's judgments.

Maybe there's a surprise up their sleeves, but as near as I can tell, Kwasi Fraser committed no crime. By law, he is presumed innocent unless proof beyond reasonable doubt can be adduced at trial.

Someone complained about me questioning the charges against Mr. Fraser, but that same critic admitted that there are, in fact, property owners trying to annex properties into the town in order to up-zone them and sell the properties for significant financial gain.

And that is exactly my point. In a nation where the presumption of innocence is sacrosanct, we must look hard and long before jumping to conclusions.

Kwasi had scarcely begun his job. He had only had time to approve a single contract and that was so small that he could have awarded it as a sole-source contract without any competition at all. Now how do you make a grand jury case out of that?

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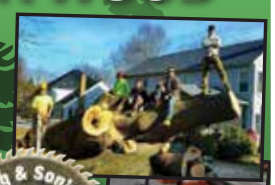
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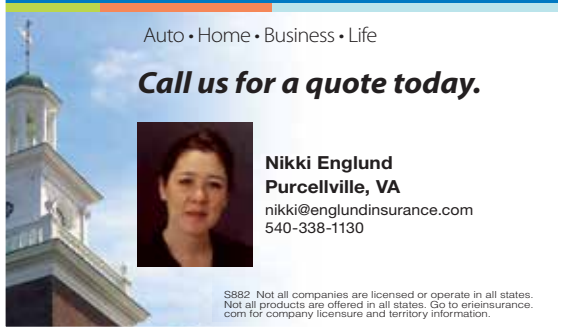
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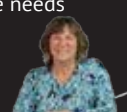
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OPINION: PANDORA, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

downward. This recharges the aquifer. Under PSWICWWS, though, discharge would be piped away to the Potomac. Thus, no recharging and further depletion of our water resources.

Impressions of a Meeting

A homeowner who may be affected had a clear, cynical take on the October 18 public meeting run by the County: *I found the politicians to be defensive and disingenuous. Phyllis is personable and says all the right things to make others feel heard and validated, but the reality is they are only considering a solution to the problem that will require eminent domain! So, I can't trust her when she says that is a last resort. Finding a solution begins with defining the problem/question, and that hasn't been done.*

Supervisors Randall and Caleb Kershner get credit for standing before a clearly skeptical group. Randall handled it with her usual aplomb but Kershner seemed tense, angry, hostile, disrespectful. Ironically, he had begun by urging everyone to "keep an open mind," but his mind seemed closed.

Bureaucrats

I've dealt with many of them over the years, often in approving development plans. All of them were characteristically pleasant, some were really smart, some weren't. The ones assigned to PSWICWWS were pleasant and intelligent: Ernie Brown and Scott Finchman.

They were also skilled in presenting the project in a benign manner and soothingly deflecting criticism. Still, it's difficult to get past the fact that they are promoting PSWICWWS and we oppose it.

WPG

After PSWICWWS hit the news, a group of citizens were dismayed at what it could mean for them, and formed the Waterford Preservation Group. Since its concern is both villages, property along Clarkes Gap Road and nearby areas, a broader name would have been more accurate. But it is what it is.

Dueling Surveys

WPG's website (SavetheBywy.org) includes an introduction to surveys that ask if the reader supports or opposes the massive project. Results? Over 95% opposed. The County had run an earlier survey that showed 77% approval. How could the results be so diametrically opposed? The introduction to WPG's survey included the potential costs to residents, while that was probably omitted in the County survey. Is there a way to reconcile the differing results? I doubt it, so just look to the intensity and extent of citizens' opposition.

The Public shoulda been involved much earlier. When I was in my twenties in Atlanta, I somehow got on lists for opinion panels. I'm always happy to give an opinion (Duh,) especially for money. One such panel was sponsored by McDonald's. The fast-food giant was considering adding pizza slices to its menu. After sampling a few, we rendered unanimous verdicts: "It tastes like cardboard" and "Are you kidding?"

McDonald's killed the project and that's what the County should do with the Paeonian Springs and Waterford Interconnected Community Water and Wastewater Systems project," succinctly PSWICWWS.

A former office building developer in Atlanta. Charlie Houston and his wife live on a small horse farm just south of Waterford. He is content with his well and septic system. He's not content with the way business interests in Loudoun always seem to trump populist positions.

OPINION: IT SEEMS TO ME, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

VDOT, Verizon, 911 (sheriff), Purcellville Fire and Rescue and Dominion Electric. I was either told "We will look in to it" or "We will send somebody." Some of the agencies did sent representatives to the site and all acknowledged that the branch was a possible hazard but again nobody did anything.

I felt that we were on borrowed time. There hadn't been any storms for weeks. That branch was going to come down soon or later.

Finally, I contacted Loudoun County Supervisor Caleb Kershner's office and spoke to staff member Arlee Harris. She was instrumental in having VDOT show up with a tree trimming crew to finally remove the dangerous branch.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to Kershner's office and also to my Brown's Farm neighbor near the tree for their persistent efforts to monitor and remove this danger.

So, what have I learned from this incident? Be prepared for a lot of finger pointing and excuses. Don't expect someone else to notify the proper authorities when a hazard to life and limb exists.

Joe LaFiandra writes an occasional column, "It seems to me" for the Blue Ridge Leader.

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Barter Players: I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas

Sun., December 21 at 3:00pm
Tea Times at 1:30 & 4:00pm
Tickets: $12 (Show), $20 (Show + Tea)



The professional touring company, Barter Players, are back with a whole new musical for the holidays. It's Christmas time at the Ypsilanti Zoo, and everyone there eagerly anticipates the birth of Bella, the zoo's first baby hippo. Seven-year old Lois Jean, the zookeeper's daughter, is especially excited — she's counting on Bella to reunite her family in time for the holidays. Then the unexpected happens, and only one person can prevent tragedy. Will Santa arrive in time to save Bella—and Christmas? A heartwarming musical adventure for the whole family!

Holiday Tea: *Bring your special guests to our Holiday Tea inspired by all things HIPPO! There are two seatings — one before the show, and one after the show — to accommodate 30 people each. You must pre-register; fee includes tea, finger foods, craft and ticket.*

Blue Sky Puppets: Pigs at the Pole
Wed., December 10 at 10:00am Tickets: $5

Santa's in trouble...the elves have the flu...presents need to be made...he calls for help!!! Who responds??? OH NO!! It's The Three (not so) Little Pigs!!! These pigs have a lot to learn about cooperation and working together. This modern show features remote control cars, electric guitars, and a vegetarian wolf. It's filled with audience participation, laughs, and a wonderful message.

A Celtic Christmas with Cassie and Maggie
Sat., December 20 at 4:00pm Tickets: $25

Nova Scotian sisters Cassie and Maggie have been lighting up the world with their unique blend of traditional and contemporary Celtic instrumentals and vocals. Appearing on stages across North America, the UK, and Europe the sisters have enchanted audiences far and wide with lively fiddle, piano and guitar arrangements, stunning sibling vocal harmonies in both English and Gaelic, all complemented by their intricate and percussive stepdancing style. A lively Christmas concert that will add joy and gladness to your holiday! Reserved Seating. Sponsored by the Friends of Franklin Park Arts Center.

Laser Light Show: Winter Holiday Adventure
Tues., December 30 at 3:00pm Tickets: $10

Step inside our theater for this 40-minute laser sing-along show. The stage will be bursting with colorful animations set to a medley of holiday classics and recent smash hits! Meet the star of the Winter Holiday Adventure, our friend Squeaky the laser penguin. Wear your New Year's Eve party attire and start the count down early.

9th Annual Cabin Fever Film Festival call for submission

COMMUNITY

Quiet on the set! Local filmmakers are encouraged to submit their work for the ninth annual Cabin Fever Film Festival, co-hosted by the Franklin Park Performing and Visual Arts Center and the Purcellville Arts Council. The festival celebrates films created by Loudoun County residents and remains Purcellville's only dedicated film festival.

The two-day event will begin on Friday, Jan. 30, 2026 at 7 p.m., with a reception held during the evening screening. The festival continues on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026 at 10 a.m., when awards will also be announced. A full schedule of screenings will be posted online on Jan. 14, 2026. Audiences are invited to shake off the winter blues and enjoy this long-standing showcase of local creativity.

This year's festival theme, "Independence," honors the nation's 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Winners in the categories of Best in Theme, Festival Favorite, and Most Likely to Break Cabin Fever will each receive $500 and a hand-crafted gift from a local artist. Festival organizers are proud to partner with Loudoun VA250, which will sponsor the Best in Theme award.

Entries must be between 1 and 60 minutes in length and submitted in mp4 digital format on a flash drive. All genres—including live action, stop motion, and animation—are welcome, provided content

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 »



Rotary Club of Purcellville donates $6K to Legacy Farms

COMMUNITY

The Rotary Club of Purcellville has awarded a $6,000 donation to Legacy Farms, a local nonprofit organization dedicated to providing apprenticeship-style learning and job opportunities in a neurodiverse community. The donation will support Legacy Farms in its mission to offer targeted, custom-designed apprenticeships to neurodiverse individuals, helping them perform essential organizational tasks in the garden, the community, and for organizational management.

The funds were raised at the Rotary Club's annual golf tournament, a successful event that brings together community

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

WARNER & KAINE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

improves current buses to increase performance, update technology, and reduce risk to the environment in rural Virginia.

The City of Alexandria (VA-08) will receive $10,939,552 for its DASH Bus Fleet Replacement & Facility Rehabilitation project, which aims to transition the city to 100% zero-emission buses as well as purchase and build necessary transit facilities to support its growing fleet.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority will receive $50,322,380 for the procurement of low-emission transit buses, which will serve communities throughout the DMV and reduce the harm from toxic emissions in the region.

Last year, the senators announced over $50 million in federal funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Low- or No-Emission Program for Fairfax County to purchase new low-emission hybrid buses under the county's fleet replacement plan. In 2023, they secured more than $171 million in funding to invest in American-built, low-emission buses and bus facilities.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has brought billions of dollars in investments to Virginia, including resources to repair roads and bridges, expand broadband access, improve airports, ports and waterways, and modernize public transportation.



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FINANCIAL FOCUS®, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

amount is only $300.

How much can you deduct? The IRS limits charitable deductions based on your adjusted gross income (AGI). For cash donations to public charities, you can typically deduct up to 60% of your AGI. If you donate stocks or other appreciated assets you've held for more than a year, the limit is generally 30% of your AGI.

If your donation exceeds these limits in a single year, you can carry forward the unused portion for up to five years.

What to donate: Think strategically about what you donate. While cash is easiest, donating appreciated stocks can provide additional tax benefits since you avoid paying capital gains taxes on the investment's growth.

Keep good records: Documentation matters. For donations under $250, a canceled check or receipt works fine. Cash donations of $250 or more need written acknowledgment from the charity. For larger non-cash donations of property exceeding $5,000 in value, the IRS requires a qualified written appraisal. Keep these records with your tax documents in case the IRS requests proof. See IRS Publication No. 526 and No. 561 for information on charitable contributions and valuing donated property.

The bottom line: Charitable giving may start with your heart, but understanding the tax implications helps you give more effectively. Work with a tax professional and a financial advisor to develop a giving strategy that aligns with both your charitable goals and financial situation. With thoughtful planning, you can maximize both your impact on causes you care about and the tax benefits you receive.

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.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor.

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VMI ARMY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Hudson, a psychology major from Locust, North Carolina, stated the event was grueling, but he was thankful for the opportunity to participate. "I couldn't ask for a better group of guys to compete with. I have nothing but respect for this team. We all had to lean on each other and use our different skill sets to get the job done. Completing the Cambrian Patrol is an accomplishment in itself, and to be able to earn a medal with these guys is something special."

Seery, an international studies major from Chesapeake, Virginia, also competed in Wales last year. He agreed with Hudson that their accomplishment was very much a team effort. "Each of the eight members of the team did their part and pulled their own weight to help make this year another success. Without the help from all our coaches, and the support from the administration, our success would not have happened."

Tryouts for next year's Ranger Challenge team will be held in the spring.

LEESBURG, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Director of Community Development. "There is still work to be done and more review and feedback from members of the community will make the next draft of the Ordinance even stronger."

The Leesburg Planning Commission will continue its ongoing review of the draft Zoning Ordinance Rewrite at their regularly scheduled work sessions through winter 2026. Schedule and meeting packets are published online at www.leesburgva.gov/pc. The public is invited to attend work sessions and future public hearings.

The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite project began in July 2023 and is expected to be completed with the adoption of the new Zoning Ordinance by the Town Council in 2026. Up-to-date project information is available at www.leesburgva.gov/zoningordinancerewrite, including a link to sign up for email notifications about the project.

Loudoun County Human Services grant application process open

Loudoun County's annual Human Services Nonprofit Grant Application for community nonprofit organizations is now open with the Fiscal Year 2027 (FY 2027) application available at loudoun.gov/NonprofitGrants.

Nonprofits certified as 501(c)3 organizations that provide services to Loudoun County residents in the areas of need identified and approved by the Board of Supervisors for FY 2027 are eligible to apply for funding.

- **Crisis Intervention and Diversion:** Services provided to individuals and families in crisis to overcome immediate problems and reduce or prevent the need for more restrictive and expensive higher-level services.
- **Improved Quality of Human Services:** Services and opportunities provided to individuals, organizations and communities that enhance the quality, accessibility, accountability, and coordination of services provided by community organizations.
- **Long-Term Support:** Services that focus on assisting individuals who have continuing, long-term support needs to remain healthy, safe, and independent in the community.
- **Prevention and Self-Sufficiency:** Services focused on assisting individuals and families in becoming and/or remaining independent and stable, and providing tools, skills, strategies and resources to individuals and families.

The Board of Supervisors has approved changes in the FY 2027 grant application process, including:

- The maximum award amount for the standard nonprofit grant application has been increased for FY 2027 from $113,000 to $135,000 following feedback from the nonprofit community on funding limitations.
- Nonprofits will be asked to select only one area of need in their grant application.
- Nonprofits will have the option of selecting optional need categories, including education access, food security, health care access, housing assistance, mental health supports and workforce development.

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OPINION: VIEW FROM THE RIDGE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

campaigned on—voting against an unwanted industrial annexation, lowering rather than raising taxes, and promoting managed, community-supported growth. The minority, meanwhile, has continued pushing for annexations the public opposes and higher taxes justified by warnings of an impending "fiscal cliff," despite financial data showing stability rather than crisis.

This minority is not operating in isolation. Council Member Erin Rayner previously served as campaign manager for Chief Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Nicole Wittmann—the same official who, on Nov. 20, appeared in court and participated in a sidebar discussion with the judge and the prosecuting attorney that they were moving forward with a recall petition that had just been filed seeking the removal of Vice Mayor Ben Nett from the Town Council.

This connection is worth noting not because it suggests wrongdoing, but because it illustrates how deeply intertwined political networks are with the legal actions being used to pressure the council majority.

Concerns have also been raised by individuals familiar with recent events about communications between the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office and town leadership—including reports that the new town manager was warned not to make administrative changes.

These accounts, whether formal or informal, reinforce a growing unease in the community about how legal authority is being applied in Purcellville. Residents deserve clarity about whether such conversations occurred and why.

The handling of the Grievance Panel's decision regarding Vice Mayor Ben Nett fueled further concern. A duly constituted Panel reviewed the charges, followed town policy meticulously, cleared the Vice Mayor, and ordered his reinstatement with full pay and benefits. Yet Nett remains in limbo six months after the Grievance Panel ordered his immediate return to duty.

The acting town manager then declined to affirm that the relief granted by the Panel (reinstatement and back pay) was consistent with the Town's Grievance Process—despite warnings that withholding affirmation could expose the acting town manager and the Town to severe legal risk.

Weeks later, with only one working day before a new interim town manager—selected by the majority—assumed office, the acting town manager abruptly elevated the matter back to the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, the same office already entangled in the political turmoil.

Just days later on Nov. 24, the Special Prosecutor appointed to review the matter—Eric Olsen, Commonwealth's Attorney for Stafford County—issued a procedural determination regarding the Grievance Panel.

Olsen concluded that the Town of Purcellville's grievance process had not strictly followed the procedures outlined in the Town's own written policies, the Commonwealth's State Grievance Procedure, or the governing provisions of Virginia law. This is the same prosecutor pursuing felony charges against both Fraser and Nett—now taking a central role in the latest effort aimed at pushing Nett off the Town Council.

His finding did not address the merits of the allegations against Nett, nor did it reach any conclusion about whether misconduct occurred. Rather, it underscored that the process used by the Town was inconsistent with formal requirements—even though, ironically, the Town had retained an attorney through its insurance carrier to follow a grievance process that was intended to be fully compliant.

Olsen issued this procedural determination only after filing to remove Nett from the Town Council based on a recall petition—and before that petition even reached a courtroom—adding yet another layer of uncertainty to an already politically charged situation.

Meanwhile, council meetings have become stages for a cluster of individuals including Erica Stought, the wife of Council Member Caleb Stought, who regularly shout accusations, bully, curse, disrupt proceedings, and spread narratives designed to portray the town as ungovernable. They also flood social media, not with constructive debate, but with falsehoods and distractions that divert attention from real issues. Chaos is not arising spontaneously—it is being curated.

Council Members Rayner, Wright and Stought sit back smirking as their ally, Stephanie Marut, proudly defends using profanity at the microphone—boasting that it's her First Amendment right and taunting the majority by saying they can't do anything about it.

This ongoing campaign of manufactured disruption extends beyond meetings—they opposed the appointment of town manager Kwasi Fraser, an eight-year former mayor and slow-growth, low-tax advocate who is now on administrative leave while charges remain pending trial.

A newly appointed interim town manager has been in place for only a short time to maintain continuity of operations, yet the attacks and legal pressure continue, illustrating how political agendas are being weaponized to destabilize lawful governance.

Rayner, Wright and Stought have recently sued the Town, asking a judge to rule on whether the Town Council needs a super-majority vote to pass the budget—even though they have been told by multiple attorneys that they don't.

They voted against last year's budget after arguing for substantial tax increases, warning residents that without them the Town risked financial crisis. This continues to support their broader narrative that the only solution is to grow the Town.

When the town attorney speaks, both the council and the audience are expected to listen quietly. But the moment his advice conflicts with the minority's narrative, they can't help themselves— they jump in, and their supporters in the audience do the same.

Also, when an elected official used his brief time during citizen comments to share the work he has been doing for the Town, they went after him with the same hostility. It's become a pattern—if they don't like what they hear, they don't just shout it down; they escalate. They scream, curse, spread false claims, and try to intimidate anyone who challenges them.

Senator Perry's portrayal of Purcellville as a community in freefall overlooks the simplest truth—the majority is governing transparently, while a well-connected faction is working tirelessly to manufacture the appearance of crisis. Their strategy is clear—create enough noise, enough fear, and enough legal entanglement that the public begins to question the legitimacy of those they elected.

Purcellville is not suffering from corruption. It is enduring a coordinated campaign to redefine truth, undermine lawful governance, and use legal pressure to force politically unpopular goals—annexations, zoning that is not in compliance with the Town's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance, higher utility rates and taxes, and policies that seem designed to benefit a favored developer rather than the broader community.

Residents deserve leadership grounded in reality, not theatrics. They deserve debate, not destabilization. They deserve a town where institutions are strengthened, not used as leverage.

And above all, they deserve this to be said plainly—Democracy does not fail when people disagree—it fails when those who lose decide to weaponize the system until the truth breaks. And Purcellville will not break simply because a circle of powerful voices wants it to.

ROTARY CLUB, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

members to support local causes. Legacy Farms was one of the principal recipients of this year's tournament.

"We are thrilled to support Legacy Farms and their important work in our community," said Michael Cauldwell, President of the Rotary Club of Purcellville. "Their commitment to providing opportunities for neurodiverse individuals aligns perfectly with the Rotary's mission of service and community support."

The presentation of the $6,000 check took place on Oct. 16, at the Loudoun Golf and Country Club. President Michael Cauldwell presented the check to Sapna Hencinski of Legacy Farms.

Legacy Farms, established in 2012, offers a range of apprenticeships, including gardening, photography, art, video projects for social media, fund drives, sales and delivery, and project coordination. They partner with community organizations, learning centers, trade schools, and college students to provide a mentor/apprentice style of skills sharing for real-world, on-the-job learning.

For information about the Rotary Club of Purcellville, email Sally Corsen at scorsen@maidbrigade.com. To learn about Legacy Farms email info@legacyfarmsvirginia.org.

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EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

9TH ANNUAL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

remains appropriate for this family-friendly event. The entry fee is $10 for the first film and $5 for each additional submission.

The deadline for submissions is January 7, 2026. Films may be dropped off at the Franklin Park Arts Center, located at 36441 Blueridge View Lane, Purcellville, VA 20132. Applications may be completed and fees paid at drop-off, and the application is also available online at www.franklinparkartscenter.org.

Key dates are: Jan. 7, 2026: Submission deadline, Jan. 14, 2026: Slate of films announced, Jan. 30–31, 2026: Festival screenings and awards.

Filmmakers must submit a completed registration form along with their film and entry fee. Payments may be made by cash, check (payable to County of Loudoun), or credit card. Franklin Park Arts Center is open Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

For questions, please contact Elizabeth Bracey, Manager, Franklin Park Performing and Visual Arts Center, email Elizabeth.Bracey@loudoun.gov, or phone 540-338-7973.

JUST LIKE NOTHING (ELSE), CON'T. FROM PAGE 10

dewy surfaces lent a magical sheen to just about everything in view. Or, maybe I had good coffee (hope you liked it too).

In any case I thoroughly enjoyed my solitary exploration—mostly along Main Street and Second Street—past the local Post Office (overseen by a guy whose friendship goes back far enough to embarrass both of us), the historic marker just off Second and Main (reminding us that this Village dates back to … well, let's see—right around 1733—even I wasn't around at that time), private homes, a few one-of-a-kind stores (the diametric opposite of the retail conglomerates), and a scattering of mysterious-looking storage buildings (at least that's the direction my imagination led): virtually every molecule a piece of history—including those lugged around by an aging storyteller.

On such a bright, fresh morning we were all as if newly-minted in our advanced age—enjoying the mere experience of existence. Like I mentioned earlier, I drink effective coffee.

Now, you'll remember, I've written of Waterford in previous editions of this series: one of my first stories in this collection focused on the historic 2nd Street School—with which I shared a 10-year relationship (now over 25 years!), and much more recently, the experience of discovering the ancient Fairfax Meeting House at the end of my journey along Old Waterford Road, starting from my home in Leesburg.

You may also recall my early-morning stroll around the well-known Waterford Mill at the sharp bend as Main Street comes in from the north west.

But this was my first real chance to take—essentially—a private walking tour around this unique Village. And it was good. The small herd of deer grazing in one of the open meadows even seemed to approve. I made my way up to Bond and Liggett Streets—getting some nice images of the sunlight coming through the windows of John Wesley Church (constructed, by the way, around 1890); universal serendipity continued—just like you'd expect in a good movie.

As I reversed course and slowly made the return to my car, a magical suspension balanced in the air; I believe some of the stardust even accompanied me on the drive home, and … there … I just flicked it off my shoulder, for the sanitation engineers to acquire on garbage day.

Find the miracle and spread it around. And don't forget your coffee … and the screen goes blank and turns to white light, fading out as the movie theater lights come up; we stretch, stand and don our outer apparel, sharing reactions to this— the latest release from Tim Jon. Heading outside, we collectively wish that—at least in this case—life could be just like it is in the movies.

And, now it is …

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AFFORDABLE HOUSING, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

involved Board discussions on language accessibility, power/energy distribution, and generators—although Staff documentation covers more general issues such as application qualification criteria and timelines.

Language accessibility has been brought up several times over the course of multiple meetings. One of the Transportation and Land Use Committee representatives lobbied for "a bill to ensure that the five most-spoken languages are translated within the summaries on lease agreements. This was a bill that passed the general assembly and was vetoed [because] there were already bills that passed the general assembly requiring summaries to be provided for lease agreements.

"However, it is important to note that there were no translation requirements in those bills. This bill—or the bill that was vetoed—would have required that translation aspect occur."

Members of the Board agreed that they would plan to review language accessibility as conversations continue into the future.

Awareness is rising regarding energy for affordable properties, too. There needs to be a "middleman" or a representative to ensure that power is appropriately distributed to areas with land use applications.

On the subject of power and electricity, meeting attendees discussed the policies surrounding tier four backup generators. Conversation on this topic was brief, but it was made clear that tier four backup generators should be used only in emergencies due to their low financial sustainability despite being known as cleaner power sources.

Staff documentation addresses other semantics of affordable housing legislation. Recent clarifications have been made to its guidelines to say that a missed deadline on the part of an external referral agency will not prevent an application from moving forward.

So, for example, if the Virginia Department of Transportation fails to meet an expedited deadline, then the individual applicant will not be delayed or canceled. Application qualification criteria are being worded more in favor of individuals, too, by stating that Staff will adhere to established deadlines.

"There seems to be an emerging belief that might be true for some localities—although absolutely not true for Loudoun County, for Fairfax County, for Arlington County—that municipalities do not want to build housing or attainable housing," said Randall. She confidently concluded: "That is just not true."

Discussions on affordable housing legislation will continue through December and into 2026. The Board of Supervisors and relevant Staff are committed to providing financially viable properties for all of Loudoun County's residents and residents-to-be.

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PRCS to host second Annual WinterFest at Hanson Park

COMMUNITY

Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services invites the community to celebrate the season at the second annual WinterFest, featuring ice-themed activities, a winter market, free children's activities, and more.

WinterFest will take place Saturday, Dec. 6, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Hal and Berni Hanson Regional Park (23394 Endeavor Drive, Aldie). The event is free and open to all; no registration is required.

This family-friendly festival offers activities for all ages, including ice sculptures, miniature train rides, visits with Santa and appearances by winter characters, music by DJ BiFocals and DJ Skylarr, food trucks (food available for purchase), and a variety of retail and craft vendors—perfect for holiday shopping. Visitors can also explore an interactive walking path featuring local nonprofit organizations.

For a complete schedule of entertainment, vendor listings, nonprofit partners, and transportation details, visit loudoun.gov/WinterFest. Please note: In the event of severe weather, WinterFest may be canceled.

Arriving for PRCS WinterFest:

- Free parking is available beginning at 9:30 a.m. Parking within Hal and Berni Hanson Regional Park will be based on availability.
- Please follow all signage to enter Hal and Berni Hanson Regional Park at Hanson Park Drive near Hanson House.
- When coming from Ryan Road, this will be the second park entrance on your left.
- When coming from Northstar Boulevard, this will be the first park entrance on your right.
- The Creighton Road entrance on the north side of the park will be for the off-leash dog area and disc golf patrons only. There will be no access to the remainder of the park. To enter WinterFest, use the Evergreen Mills Road entrance.
- The parking lots at The Lodge at Hanson Park and the Hanson Park Nature Center will be closed for event activities.
- Parking (on grass field) near the main event space will be first-come, first-served.
- Street parking on Evergreen Mills Road and along

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 »

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DEL. REID ANNOUNCES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

- John Marshall Soil & Water Conservation District (Warrenton) – $6,352

"These local projects reflect the power of community-based conservation," said Reid. "Every dollar generated through the Chesapeake Bay license plate program helps protect one of Virginia's most valuable natural resources. From stream restoration and watershed education to soil and water management, these grants strengthen our shared commitment to the health of the Bay for future generations."

Delegate Marty Martinez (Leesburg) added: "These investments will have a lasting impact right here in Loudoun County. Local organizations like Goose Creek Association and the Loudoun Soil & Water Conservation District are doing critical work to preserve our waterways and natural resources, and this funding helps them with those efforts."

Delegate-elect John McAuliff (Loudoun and Fauquier) commented: "I'm encouraged to see this kind of local commitment to Bay restoration. Protecting the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries next to our homes and farms is essential not only to our local environment and quality of life, but to the long-term economic vitality of our region."

The Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund was established by the General Assembly in 1992 and is administered by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Revenue from the sale of "Friend of the Chesapeake" license plates supports grants for educational and restoration projects that advance Bay cleanup and conservation goals.

Virginians can support future projects by purchasing or renewing a Chesapeake Bay license plate through the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles.

LOUDOUN COUNTY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

Applications must be submitted by 4 p.m., Friday, Jan. 23, 2026. The amount of funding for FY 2027 will be determined by the Board of Supervisors as part of the county's adopted FY 2027 budget. In FY 2026, the budget for human services nonprofit grant funding was $2.9 million.

Loudoun County has two options for organizations seeking local tax funds through the FY 2027 Human Services Nonprofit Grant process:

- The standard nonprofit grant application process is for organizations seeking awards of $5,001 - $135,000; organizations will be awarded proportional funding.
- A mini-grant process provides a simplified application for organizations applying for a grant of $5,000 or less; organizations will be awarded the full amount requested. The mini-grant program is designed for innovative small-scale projects and new or small organizations that may lack the capacity to write a larger grant.

Pre-Application Information Webinar Dec. 9

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to participate in a pre-application information webinar hosted by the county scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2 – 3:30 p.m. The webinar will include instructions on how to apply, changes for the FY 2027 process, and a Q&A. Information on how to access the webinar is available at loudoun.gov/NonprofitGrants. The webinar will be recorded and posted at loudoun.gov/NonprofitGrants.

Anyone who requires a reasonable accommodation for any type of disability or who needs language assistance to participate in the application process should contact nonprofits@loudoun.gov.

For more information, visit loudoun.gov/NonprofitGrants or send an email to nonprofits@loudoun.gov.

ANNUAL WINTERFEST, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

park roads is prohibited and towing will be enforced.

Parking Shuttle Service: Free PRCS shuttle service will be available for parking lots farther from the main event space.

- Shuttles will drop off at both The Lodge at Hanson Park and the Hanson Park Nature Center.
- Shuttle stops include Championship Plaza and parking lots by fields RF6 and RF7.
- Shuttle service will not begin on the south side of Hanson Park until all parking lots on the north side are full.
- Foldable strollers are permitted on PRCS shuttles.

Accessible Parking: Accessible parking is based on availability. PRCS shuttles are accessible.

In the case of severe weather, a cancellation notice will be posted on the Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services Facebook page.

Before publishing the Grievance Panel's full decision, readers should be aware of a recent procedural update. On Nov. 24, Special Prosecutor Eric Olsen, the Commonwealth's Attorney for Stafford County, issued a determination stating that the Town of Purcellville did not strictly follow the technical requirements of its grievance procedures as outlined in Town policy, the State Grievance Procedure, and Virginia law. His finding did not evaluate the truth of the allegations against Vice Mayor Ben Nett and did not reach any conclusion about whether misconduct occurred. It was limited strictly to process, adding a new procedural wrinkle to an already contentious situation.

With that context in mind, the complete Grievance Panel decision—addressing the substance of the allegations—appears below.

TOWN OF PURCELLVILLE
EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCE PANEL

In re: CARL BENJAMIN NETT,

Employee.

UNANIMOUS DECISION[1]

This matter came before the Town of Purcellville Employee Grievance Panel ("Panel") for a hearing on June 25, 2025 ("Hearing") concerning the termination of Mr. Carl Benjamin Nett ("Grievant" or "Nett") from the Town of Purcellville Police Department ("Department" or "Town") on or about April 4, 2025. In accordance with the grievance procedures set forth in Town of Purcellville Employee Handbook ("Handbook")[2] and Va. Code Ann. § 15.2-1507, the Panel makes the following unanimous decision:

I. DID THE EMPLOYEE ENGAGE IN THE BEHAVIOR DESCRIBED IN THE WRITTEN NOTICE?

No. Based on the greater weight of the evidence, Mr. Nett did not engage in the behavior described in the written notices from the Department to allegedly justify his termination. Interim Police Chief, Ms. Sara Lombrana's, April 4, 2025 Notice of Dismissal / Termination[3] identifies five (5) primary grounds for terminating Mr. Nett: (A) attendance at a January 10, 2025 "Agenda Planning Session" for the Town Council between 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. while in uniform and marked out for "directed patrol"; (B) Mr. Nett's alleged abuse of sick leave when he attended the

[1] This version corrects typographical errors concerning the date of the Planning Session on January 10, 2025. The earlier version of this Unanimous Decision is hereby rescinded and this Unanimous Decision shall take its place.

[2] Town Exhibit 2.

[3] Ms. Lombrana's April 4, 2025 Notice of Dismissal also incorporates her two memoranda titled "Advanced Notice of Discipline" dated February 21, 2025. *See* Town Ex. 8 (Grievance Record, Notice of Dismissal / Termination (April 4, 2025) ("Copies of those February 21 Memorandums [sic] are enclosed and are incorporated into this Memorandum.").

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

Virginia Municipal League ("VML") conference on January 29-30, 2025 in Richmond; (C) alleged failure to cooperate with the Prince William County Internal Investigation ("IA Investigation") into Mr. Nett concerning his attendance at the VML conference and attendance at the January 10, 2025 planning conference; (D) failure to "to submit a doctor's note to resume work following three consecutive days of sick leave" for February 8-9, 12th and/or 13th; and (E) being placed on the Brady / Giglio list by Mr. Robert Anderson, the Commonwealth's Attorney for Loudoun County. In connection with these five (5) grounds, the Town has suggested in letters and during the Hearing that Mr. Nett's conduct is tantamount to lying, insubordination, and other types of dishonesty. The Town went so far as to suggest that Mr. Nett should be terminated for emailing, rather than calling, his supervisor based on issuance of a November 26, 2024 memorandum circulated by Lt. Michael Holman, which does not appear in the Department General Orders, the Handbook, or elsewhere as a formal requirement. As explained below, no allegation made by the Town in writing or otherwise is supported by the evidence.

A. JANUARY 10, 2025 "AGENDA PLANNING SESSION"

The Town alleges that based on a complaint made by a Purcellville resident, Mr. Nett attended an agenda planning session on January 10, 2025 between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. in connection with his role as a member of the Town Council while on duty as a Purcellville Police Officer. It is undisputed that Mr. Nett "marked out" as on directed patrol for the hour he spent at the planning meeting. Town Exhibit 13 shows Mr. Nett at Town Hall, in uniform, with his work computer open in front of him.

The Town argues that Mr. Nett being in uniform while at the meeting indicates some sort of malfeasance. To the contrary, the Panel finds that Mr. Nett being in uniform, in public, with his computer open, and his radio on demonstrates that Mr. Nett was being open and transparent about his attendance. It shows that he believed he was doing nothing wrong. Had Mr. Nett

“Importantly, the Town does not have a policy for how, when, and what responsibilities a police officer has when on directed patrol. On cross-examination, Lt. Holman admitted that there was no formal policy about directed patrol and that, despite being Mr. Nett’s supervisor, never trained Mr. Nett about proper or improper usage of directed patrol.”

believed he needed to conceal his attendance, Mr. Nett would not have been so obvious about his attendance. Moreover, the fact that Mr. Nett is in his uniform, with his computer open in front of him, and with his radio on indicates that he was ready to respond to any emergency that might arise while he was on directed patrol.

Importantly, the Town does not have a policy for how, when, and what responsibilities a police officer has when on directed patrol. On cross-examination, Lt. Holman admitted that there was no formal policy about directed patrol and that, despite being Mr. Nett’s supervisor, never trained Mr. Nett about proper or improper usage of directed patrol. Hr’g Tr. 115:13-16.[4] The Panel heard testimony that directed patrol is appropriate when taking lunch or running other types of errands while on duty so long as the officer remained on call and available to immediately respond. Hr’g Tr. 14:22-15:15. Without a formal policy or any training whatsoever about directed patrol, it is impossible to find that Mr. Nett’s actions on January 10, 2025 constituted a violation.

Furthermore, the Panel finds that the Department should have implemented clear policies and procedures governing Mr. Nett’s dual role as police officer and Town Councilman. Contrary to the Town’s suggestion, the Panel finds that it was incumbent upon the Department—not Mr. Nett—to implement appropriate policies and procedures to address this unique situation. This could and should have been done by Lt. Holman, Ms. Lombrana, or other supervisors.

B. “SICK LEAVE” FOR THE VML CONFERENCE, JANUARY 29-20, 2025

The Town alleges that Mr. Nett lied and was not “sick” when he took sick leave and attended the VML conference on January 29-30, 2025. All of the Town’s evidence in support of this allegation stems from one person, Ms. Erin Raynor, a member of the Town Council and

[4] *See* Partial Hearing Transcript, June 25, 2025 (“Hearing Transcript”) 115:13-16 (Q [MR. COOK]: Okay. Have you ever provided training to your subordinate officers on what directed patrol is? A [LT. HOLMAN]: I have not, no.”).

“Nevertheless, the Town’s counsel stipulated during the Hearing tht Ms. Raynor was the sole source for the Prince William IA investigation’s determination that Mr. Nett was not sick while in Richmond.”

member of the opposite political faction of Mr. Nett. Ms. Raynor testified that she saw Mr. Nett in Richmond on the evening of January 29th and that he was talking on the phone and drinking a drink. She acknowledged that she could not hear him speaking, but saw him speaking. On January 30, 2025, Ms. Raynor testified that she spoke with Mr. Nett at approximately 2:30 p.m. for five minutes and that he seemed “fine.” It is also significant to the Panel that Ms. Raynor was interviewed by the Prince William Police Department in connection with its IA investigation. In a serious factual deficiency, the Town failed to produce any report from the Prince William Police Department about its findings or any witness from Prince William Police Department to testify about its IA investigation. Nevertheless, the Town’s counsel stipulated during the Hearing that Ms. Raynor was the sole source for the Prince William IA investigation’s determination that Mr. Nett was not sick while in Richmond.[5]

Mr. Nett, on the other hand, explained in great detail that he was recovering from flu-like symptoms and was suffering from leg pain that prevented him from performing his duties as a police officer. Mr. Nett’s testimony was corroborated by the fact that he was driven to Richmond by his Town Council colleague, Carol Luke. Ms. Luke testified that Mr. Nett asked her to drive them to Richmond either late on January 28th or early on January 29th, which is consistent with when Mr. Nett submitted his sick leave notice. Ms. Luke testified that Mr. Nett told her that he could not drive because of pain in his knee. She also testified that he was not feeling “great” and may have been in significant pain. She also testified that Mr. Nett’s sickness could not be determined solely from visual observation. Ms. Luke testified that she, Mr. Nett, and others were mostly stationary at the VML conference.

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[5] *See* Hr’g Tr. 219:18-22: (“MR. WRIGHT: Do you…are you stipulating that the Prince William County finding was based on Ms. Raynor’s testimony, and that’s the only thing? MR. SPROUL: I’m willing to stipulate to that, yes.”).

“Thus, the Panel has multiple pieces of evidence to support its findings that Mr. Nett was, in fact, sick and not fit for duty on January 29-30, 2025.”

Ms. Luke's testimony is also consistent with the March 19, 2025 transcript of the Pre-Disciplinary Hearing offered by the Town as an exhibit and entered into the record. *See* Town Ex. 20. The March 19, 2025 transcript is a record of Mr. Nett's version of events and contains a recitation of affidavits[6] from the Mayor of Purcellville, Chris Bertaut, Ms. Luke, and Ms. Holly Davis, a work colleague of Ms. Luke. *Id.* The March 19, 2025 hearing took place with at least one officer from the Prince William Police Department involved with the IA investigation, First Sergeant Jessica Tacha. The March 19, 2025 hearing transcript is consistent with Ms. Luke's Hearing testimony and with Mr. Nett's Hearing testimony. Moreover, it offers additional consistent statements from Mr. Bertaut and Ms. Davis.

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 January 29-30, 2025. Mr. Nett's testimony, plus that of Ms. Luke, is corroborated by the March 19, 2025 hearing transcript which contains statements from Mr. Bertaut and Ms. Davis. The Panel found the testimony of Mr. Nett and Ms. Luke to be highly credible and consistent. Thus, the Panel has multiple pieces of evidence to support its findings that Mr. Nett was, in fact, sick and not fit for duty on January 29-30, 2025. While the Panel understands that Ms. Raynor belongs to a political faction which opposes that faction led by Mr. Bertaut, Mr. Nett, Ms. Luke, and Ms. Susan Khalil, the Panel believes that Ms. Raynor testified honestly about her observations of Mr. Nett. Nevertheless, in contrast to Ms. Luke (who drove two hours with Mr. Nett to Richmond) and Mr. Bertaut who was with Mr. Nett on January 29-30, 2025, Ms. Raynor's testimony is less reliable that the other evidence showing that Mr. Nett was suffering the ailments, to which he testified.

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[6] Because this transcript was offered by the Town and Mr. Nett did not object to its admission, the Panel understands that both parties believe its contents are true and accurate recitations of the statements made at the March 19, 2025 pre-disciplinary hearing. Neither party raised a hearsay objection to Town Exhibit 20.

“The Prince William investigators failed to interview any of the other individuals who were with Mr. Nett on January 29-30, 2025: Ms. Luke, Mr. Bertaut, and Ms. Khalil. This failure to consider evidence other than Ms. Raynor’s statements show that the Prince William IA investigation at best, was not sufficiently thorough to be reliable.”

The Panel, however, does not find the Prince William IA investigation, or any documents or judgments based off of it, to be credible. First, the Town failed to provide a copy of the IA investigation to the Panel. Second, what facts the Panel has about the IA investigation indicate that Ms. Raynor was the only source for its conclusions that Mr. Nett allegedly was not sick and unfit for duty while in Richmond, as stipulated by the Town's counsel at the Hearing. The Prince Willlliam investigators failed to interview any of the other individuals who were with Mr. Nett on January 29-30, 2025: Ms. Luke, Mr. Bertaut, and Ms. Khalil. This failure to consider evidence other than Ms. Raynor's statements show that the Prince William IA investigation at best, was not sufficiently thorough to be reliable. The Panel makes no finding about the motives of the Prince William County officers involved with conducting the IA investigation or preparing the IA report.

C. Alleged Failure to Cooperate with the Prince William County Internal Investigation

The Town alleges that Mr. Nett refused to participate in the IA investigation concerning his taking sick leave to attend the VML conference and the January 10, 2025 planning conference as described above. Based on the evidence presented at the Hearing, the Panel can only identify a single instance, February 7, 2025, when Mr. Nett was asked to comply with the Prince William County investigation. Ultimately, the Panel finds that Mr. Nett did meet with Prince William County Officers on March 19, 2025 and satisfied his obligations to do so. *See* Town Exhibit 20 (March 19, 2025 Pre-Disciplinary Hearing).

While there is no doubt that Mr. Nett's participation was late, the Panel finds that there were several extenuating circumstances that justify his late participation. First, Mr. Nett went on sick leave the following day, February 8, 2025. *See* Town Exhibit 23 (Nett Feb. 8, 2025 Email). Mr. Nett testified, and Lt. Holman confirmed during his testimony, that Mr. Nett transmitted an email to Lt. Holman that Mr. Nett would be on sick leave until approximately February 28, 2025.

“Despite the compaint having clear political implications, Mr. Nett testified that Lt. Moskowitz placed Mr. Nett in a witness room, took his service weapon, videotaped Mr. Nett, and asked Mr. Nett if he planned on staying with the Department now that he had been elected to Town Council. The day before the election, November 4, 2024, Mr. Nett was subjected to a “random” drug test.”

In support of his sickness and otherwise not being fit for duty for an extended period of time, Mr. Nett provided convincing testimony that he felt targeted by Department personnel because of his dual role as police officer and a Town Councilman. Among other things, Mr. Nett cited an IA investigation due to his alleged failure to turn on his body camera when responding to a call about a dog locked in a car and when he arrived the situation was resolved, thus obviating any need to turn on his body camera. Mr. Nett also testified that he felt he was under increased scrutiny. A prime example of this is when Lt. Moskowitz interviewed Mr. Nett in connection with a complaint made by Mr. Nett's political opponent, John Mark Gardner of alleged "intimidation." Despite the complaint having clear political implications, Mr. Nett testified that Lt. Moskowitz placed Mr. Nett in a witness room, took his service weapon, videotaped Mr. Nett, and asked Mr. Nett if he planned on staying with the Department now that he had been elected to Town Council. The day before the election, November 4, 2024, Mr. Nett was subjected to a "random" drug test. While the Panel makes no finding that the random drug test was improper, it is reasonable for Mr. Nett to feel targeted under the circumstances. Following the election, Ms. LaDonna Snellbaker told Mr. Nett that he was not allowed to be a police officer and a member of Town Council and asked him to resign. It is also significant that in July 2024, after Mr. Nett had announced his candidacy for Town Council, the Handbook was changed to prohibit Mr. Nett from simultaneously serving as a member of town council and as a police officer.[7] Mr. Nett also testified that he felt targeted because his political opponent's campaign signs were placed in front of the Department headquarters. While it is true that the Department does not own the complex in which it is situated,

[7] The legal issue as to whether Mr. Nett is able to simultaneously serve as a Town Council member and as a police officer under Virginia law is disputed by the parties. However, as it is not a grounds for Mr. Nett's termination, the Panel does not decide the issue. It is significant, however, that Mr. Nett testified that he decided not to resign based on a legal opinion from COIA (State and Local Government Conflict of Interests Act). Mr. Nett did not move his correspondence with COIA into evidence. Thus, the Panel relied solely on Mr. Nett's testimony about this issue.

“...Putting aside the legal issue of whether or not Chief Lombrana improperly opened the IA investiation, the Panel finds it signifcant that he [Mr. Nett] received a “recommendation” and “advice” from the Town Manager—Chief Lombrana’s superior—not to participate because the investigation was not authorized.”

the Panel finds that this factor, reasonably contributed to Mr. Nett's feeling of being targeted at the Department. The Panel finds that these factors above, combined with the IA investigations into his VML trip and the January 10, 2025 planning meeting, and the subsequent memoranda, suspensions, and other actions taken in quick succession by the Department reasonably support Mr. Nett's feeling that he was being targeted at work. Mr. Nett testified that he was ill and unable to perform his duties because of the pressure(s) and targeting that he had experienced since his election to Town Council. The Panel finds Mr. Nett's testimony credible and factually unchallenged by the Town.

Second, Mr. Nett's delayed participation was justified because the Town Manager, Kwasi Fraser, testified that he "recommended" and gave "advice" to Mr. Nett not to participate in the IA investigations from Prince William County because Mr. Fraser had not authorized them. Putting aside the legal issue of whether or not Chief Lombrana improperly opened the IA investigation, the Panel finds it significant that he received a "recommendation" and "advice" from the Town Manager—Chief Lombrana's superior—not to participate because the investigation was not authorized.

Accordingly, the Panel finds that Mr. Nett ultimately *did* participate with Prince William County's IA investigation and that his delayed participation was justified based on both his illness arising from being targeted as a police officer by the Department and the recommendations and advice from the Town Manager not to participate in the AI investigations. The Panel finds that given the circumstances, Mr. Nett could reasonably attend a Town Council meeting on the evening of February 13, 2025 and still be sick and otherwise not fit for duty as a police officer.

“Thus, the Handbook required Mr. Nett to provide a doctor’s note before returning to work. The Handbook does not require Mr. Nett to provide a doctor’s note while he is sick, ill, or otherwise not fit to perform his duties as a police officer.”

D. ALLEGED FAILURE TO SUBMIT A DOCTOR’S NOTE FOR FEBRUARY 8-9, 12, 2025

On February 8, 2025, Mr. Nett informed the Department that he would be on sick leave “until further notice.” Town Ex. 23 (Nett Email Feb. 8, 2025). On Thursday, February 13, 2025, Lt. Holman transmitted a memorandum to Mr. Nett directing him to provide “a physician’s statement” “by Monday, February 17, 2025, your next scheduled work day.” Town Ex. 8 (Grievance Record, Holman Mem. Feb. 13, 2025). Mr. Nett testified, and Lt. Holman confirmed in his testimony, that Mr. Nett transmitted an email to Lt. Holman on Sunday, February 16, 2025 informing Lt. Holman that Mr. Nett would be on sick leave through approximately February 28, 2025.

It is undisputed that Mr. Nett would have to provide a doctor’s note concerning his sick leave absence before he returned to work for his planned extended absence in February 2025. Section 6.7(B) of the Handbook states that:

> A physician's statement is required for a period of sick leave of three (3) days or more and must be given to the employee’s supervisor with a copy sent to Human Resources. Employees failing to provide documentation will not be permitted to return to duty until property medical documentation is obtained.

Thus, the Handbook requires Mr. Nett to provide a doctor’s note before returning to work. The Handbook does not require Mr. Nett to provide a doctor’s note while he is sick, ill, or otherwise not fit to perform his duties as a police officer. The Handbook also does not state that failure to provide a sick note constitutes “insubordination.” Rather, the Handbook simply prevents an employee, such as Mr. Nett, from returning to work until such time as he provides a doctor’s note.

In that regard, the Panel finds that Lt. Holman’s requirement that Mr. Nett provide a doctor’s note by February 17, 2025—within a period when Mr. Nett stated that he would be on sick leave—to be in violation of the Handbook. Moreover, Mr. Nett did not ignore Lt. Holman’s

"...the Panel finds that Mr. Nett was not required to provide a doctor's note until he returned to work according to the terms of the Handbook and that Lt. Holman's providing of only two (2) business days for Mr. Nett to provide the note was unreasonable."

February 13, 2025 memorandum. On February 16, 2025, Mr. Nett informed Lt. Holman that he remained ill and would be returning to work on February 28, 2025. The Panel also finds that the time period which Lt. Holman required for Mr. Nett to provide a doctor's note to be unreasonable. The Panel heard testimony that Lt. Holman's February 13, 2025 memorandum was delivered to Mr. Nett after the February 13, 2025 Town Council meeting, at approximately 8 p.m. Thus, Mr. Nett was provided with two working days—February 14th (Friday) and February 17th (Monday) by which to obtain a doctor's note. The Panel finds the time frame to be patently unreasonable considering the circumstances of this case. The following day, Lt. Holman transmitted a memorandum dated February 18, 2025 placing Mr. Nett on administrative leave for failing to provide a doctor's note and "insubordination." *See* Town Exhibit 8 (Grievance Record, Holman Mem. Feb. 18, 2025).

Accordingly, the Panel finds that Mr. Nett was not required to provide a doctor's note until he returned to work according to the terms of the Handbook and that Lt. Holman's providing of only two (2) business days for Mr. Nett to provide the note was unreasonable. Before Mr. Nett could provide the note in accordance with the terms of the Handbook, he was placed on administrative leave by Lt. Holman and he never returned to work. Therefore, no note was required.

E. PLACEMENT ON THE BRADY / GIGLIO LIST

Chief Lombrana's April 4, 2025 Memorandum terminating Mr. Nett cited his "being placed on the Brady / Giglio List ("Brady List") make it such that you [Mr. Nett] are no longer suited for employment as a Police Officer within this department..." *See* Town Ex. 8 (Grievance Record, Lombrana Mem. Apr. 4, 2025). On February 24, 2025, the Commonwealth's Attorney for Loudoun County, Virginia, Bob Anderson, transmitted a letter to acting Chief Lombrana, which placed Mr. Nett on the Brady List. The Panel heard testimony that placement on the Brady

“...the Panel has determined that Mr. Nett was truthful and justified in taking all of the actions alleged in Mr. Anderson’s February 24, 2025 Brady List letter.”

/ Giglio list is effectively a death sentence for police officers because it renders them unable to testify in court.

Mr. Anderson's February 24, 2025 letter identified three grounds for placing Mr. Nett on the Brady List: (1) his attendance at the VML conference when Mr. Nett allegedly was not sick; (2) Mr. Nett's failure to provide a doctor's note for his absences on February 8-9, and 13, 2025 while Mr. Nett attended a Town Council meeting on the evening of February 13th; and (3) for attending the planning meeting on January 10th having marked on out "directed patrol." For the reasons set forth above, the Panel has determined that Mr. Nett was truthful and justified in taking all of the actions alleged in Mr. Anderson's February 24, 2025 Brady List letter. The Panel is unaware of the evidence that Mr. Anderson considered when making his determination that Mr. Nett should be on the Brady List; however, 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.

Furthermore, being placed on the Brady List does not require termination from the Department. The Panel heard testimony that while being on the Brady List may prevent Mr. Nett from being able to testify in criminal matters, the Panel also heard testimony that being placed on the Brady List would not prevent such an officer from performing non-testimonial, valuable functions for the Department. Accordingly, the Panel finds that Mr. Nett's placement on the Brady List, alone, does not justify his termination.

F. OTHER ISSUES

To the extent that the Town suggests that there are other issues justifying its termination of Mr. Nett not mentioned above, the Panel has considered them and finds that the Town did not provide sufficient evidence to justify its termination of Mr. Nett in writing or through oral evidence at the Hearing. For example, to the extent that the Town contended that Mr. Nett should have followed Lt. Holman's November 26, 2024 memorandum (Town Ex. 15) directive to call rather

> *...the Panel finds that Mr. Nett experienced targeting based on his roles and police officer and Town Councilman.*

than email when taking sick leave, the Panel finds that it was unreasonable for Mr. Nett to be required to do so. Lt. Holman testified that he issues approximately 30 similar memoranda each year, which officers are required to follow. The result is a byzantine system of letters which could number in the hundreds in a short period of years. To the extent that the Department had an official policy for notification for sick leave, the Department could and should have updated its General Orders, which it does from time to time for other issues. *See, e.g.*, Town Ex. 3 (General Orders § 135 (Updated Nov. 6, 2024)). The Town failed to provide evidence that Lt. Holman is empowered to change formal Department policy at his whim. Regardless, while the Panel takes no position about his ability to issue a policy directive to the Department, the Panel finds that failure to call rather than email is insufficient to rise to the level of a violation of Department rules and regulations.

II. DID THE EMPLOYEE'S BEHAVIOR CONSTITUTE MISCONDUCT OR WAS IT IN VIOLATION OF THE LAW?

No. Based on the evidence presented to the Panel at the Hearing and for the reasons set forth above, the Panel finds that Mr. Nett's actions did not constitute misconduct and did not violate the law. To the contrary, as explained below, the Panel finds that Mr. Nett experienced targeting based on his roles as police officer and Town Councilman.

III. WAS THE DEPARTMENT'S DISCIPLINE CONSISTENT WITH LAW AND POLICY AND WAS THE DEPARTMENT'S DISCIPLINE REASONABLE?

No. Even assuming that Mr. Nett violated some Department rule, memorandum, or policy—which this Panel does not find—the Department's disciplinary steps were in violation of the Handbook and Department General Orders. The Handbook requires that discipline be "imposed fairly and impartially, and shall be proportional to the seriousness of the issue being addressed." Town Ex. 2 (Handbook § 13.1). The Department's General Orders further state that "[t]he severity of the disciplinary action will be determined by the severity of the misconduct.

“Testimony from Lt. Holman and Chief Lombrana demonstrated that they failed to follow the progressive and proportionate disciplinary requirements in violation of both the Handbook and the General Orders.”

Generally, the severity of the discipline progressively increases with repeated or multiple infractions." *See* Town Ex. 3 (General Orders § 126.1.4). Both the Handbook and General Orders contain a progressive scale of discipline which starts with several levels of: (1) oral counseling; (2) oral reprimand; (3) written reprimand; (4) suspension; and (5) disciplinary demotion; and (6) dismissal.

Testimony from Lt. Holman and Chief Lombrana demonstrated that they failed to follow the progressive and proportionate disciplinary requirements in violation of both the Handbook and the General Orders. *See* Hr'g Tr. 143:8-146:4; 234:19-235:21. For example, documentary evidence shows that Lt. Holman jumped immediately to administrative leave when Mr. Nett allegedly failed to provide a doctor's note for sick leave. Interim Chief Lombrana testified that failing to get a doctor's note a single time was sufficient "insubordination" to justify termination. Hr'g Tr. 235:15-21. Even if the Town were able to establish by the greater weight of the evidence that Mr. Nett violated a policy or procedure, which it did not, any such violation would be *de minimus*, justifying an oral reprimand or at worst a written reprimand. The Town's actions with respect to Mr. Nett were unreasonable.

IV. DO MITIGATING OR AGGRAVATING CIRCUMSTANCES EXIST?

Yes. Even if the Town had provided sufficient evidence to find that Mr. Nett violated a Town or Department policy or rule, which the Panel does not find, the Panel finds that the Department applied discipline against Mr. Nett in an inconsistent manner and with an improper motive.

A. THE DEPARTMENT APPLIED DISCIPLINE IN AN INCONSISTENT MANNER

The difference in the application of discipline between Mr. Nett, Lt. Holman, and Chief Lombrana demonstrates that the Department metes out discipline in an uneven fashion. Chief

> *Chief Lombrana admitted in her testimony that she willfully refused to reinstate Mr. Nett after having been directed to do so by her superior, the Town Manager, Mr. Fraser... 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.*

Lombrana admitted in her testimony that she willfully refused to reinstate Mr. Nett after having been directed to do so by her superior, the Town Manager, Mr. Fraser. Ms. Lombrana stated:

> Q [Mr. Cook]: Okay. So, under the police general orders, you're required to obey instructions from a supervisor; aren't you?
>
> A [Lombrana]: Sure.
>
> Q: You're a police officer, right, Chief?
>
> A: I am.
>
> Q: So you're required under the general orders to follow the town manager's instructions; correct?
>
> A: Sure.
>
> Q: And you disobeyed the town manager's instructions?
>
> A: I didn't feel that I should.
>
> Q: Right. So you disobeyed his instruction because you didn't feel like…
>
> A: Okay. We'll go with that.
>
> Q: Am I right?
>
> A: Sure.

Hr'g Tr. 212:14-213:9.[8] With this admission, 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. *See* Town Ex. 3 (General Orders, Regulations § E-1 ("Except as otherwise stated herein, defiance of lawful authority or disobedience to orders constitutes insubordination.")); *id.* (General Orders, Regulations § A-8 ("An employee shall know the relative positions in the structure; to whom the employee is immediately responsible; and those persons who are accountable to the employee.")). According to Interim Chief Lombrana's testimony, insubordination is automatic grounds for termination. Hr'g Tr. 234:18-19 ("That's insubordination, which is automatic grounds for termination."). Also, as stated above, Chief

[8] *See also* Hr'g Tr. 211:18-212:1 (Q [Mr. Cook]: Did the town manager direct you to reinstate Officer Nett during the pendency of the investigation? A [Lombrana]: Yes. Q: Did you do that? A: No.").

> *In Interim Chief Lombrana's case, her disregard for the Town Manager's order to reinstate Mr. Nett was flagrant and ongoing, yet she has faced no punishment...in a particular moment of candor, Chief Lombrana admitted that the process against Mr. Nett involved politics.*

Lombrana and Lt. Holman failed to follow the progressive and proportional disciplinary requirements in the General Orders and the Handbook. Yet, despite these serious violations, to date, it appears that no action has been taken against either Chief Lombrana or Lt. Holman.

Mr. Nett was terminated and placed on the Brady List for minor, disputed alleged violations. The actions taken against Mr. Nett have serious, life-long implications for him and his family. At the same time, supervisors in the Purcellville Police Department display insubordination to superiors and ignore important disciplinary regulations. In Interim Chief Lombrana's case, her disregard for the Town Manager's order to reinstate Mr. Nett was flagrant and ongoing, yet she has faced no punishment. Interim Chief Lombrana displayed the worst type of leadership—one set of rules for rank and file officers and a different set of rules for higher ranking supervisors.

B. THE DEPARTMENT'S ACTIONS WERE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED

The Town opened its case by calling Mr. Nett as its first witness and examining him about his campaign for Town Council in 2024 and by presenting exhibits showing campaign-related documents from Mr. Nett and his slate of running mates for Town Council. The Panel heard evidence from nearly every witness that Town politics are dysfunctional. As explained below, the Panel finds that these political divides motivated the Department to terminate Mr. Nett because of his election to Town Council and campaign promises for reorganization of the Police Department—including elimination of Chief Lombrana's then Deputy Chief position. Hr'g Tr. 66:8-15; 196:1-9.

Chief Lombrana's testimony was evasive, argumentative, contentious, and inconsistent. Her demeanor was arrogant and disrespectful to the Panel which contributed to the Panel giving little probative weight to her testimony. Significantly, however, in a particular moment of candor, Chief Lombrana admitted that the process against Mr. Nett involved politics. *See* Hr'g Tr. 167:1-

> *'I mean, we're here, right? I mean, there's... no secret that politics are involved.'*

2, 4-5 ("I mean, we're here, right? I mean, there's…no secret that politics are involved."). Chief Lombrana then attempted to recant but then admitted to her statements after Panelist Buss asked to have her comments read back by the court reporter:

> WITNESS (Lombrana): I did say that. That's…that is why we're here.
>
> MR. WRIGHT: That's really serious…
>
> MR. BUSS: Yeah.
>
> MR. WRIGHT: Ms. Lombrana.
>
> WITNESS: It's Chief Lombrana, actually, and I really don't like the way you're trying to trip me up.
>
> MR. WRIGHT: I'm not tripping…
>
> WITNESS: I know…
>
> MR. WRIGHT: Its your testimony.
>
> WITNESS: I know what I said. And I said, we're here because he's a council member and he's also an officer. We wouldn't be having conversations about council if he wasn't a council member - - that's not a secret.
>
> * * *
>
> MR. WRIGHT: I don't think you're appreciating what you just said, Chief, that we wouldn't be sitting here if he wasn't on the town council.

Hr'g Tr. 168:1-16; 168:21-169:2. Chief Lombrana shouted over the Panel when it tried to ask questions. *Id.* 168:21-169:22. When the court reporter read Ms. Lombrana's words back to her, Ms. Lombrana again tried to equivocate:

> WITNESS: (To the Court Reporter) Did I say that, that he was terminated because of politics?
>
> COURT REPORTER: I asked you why you felt that she…because of the nature of Mr. Nett's role as a police officer and a council member…
>
> WITNESS: Go back…
>
> COURT REPORTER: That's why we're here, right? I mean, that's what would be. There's no secret politics are involved.
>
> WITNESS: Politics are involved in the fact that we're investigating an internal affairs investigation that has to do with the police

“ ...In short, Chief Lombrana acted as judge, jury, and executioner for Mr. Nett by prematurely informing Mr. Anderson’s office of the allegations against him. ”

> department. It has to do with Officer Nett, not town council member Nett, okay? And the waters are very muddy here.

Id. 170:7-22. Chief Lombrana’s admissions and demeanor discredit the process against Mr. Nett and undermine the Department’s professionalism.

Furthermore, Chief Lombrana testified that she had several years of investigative police experience, yet she failed to conduct a thorough investigation into the circumstances. Hr’g Tr. 227:21-228:1. For example, Chief Lombrana did not interview Mayor Bertaut, Councilwoman Luke, Councilwoman Khalil, or other individuals that were in close proximity to Mr. Nett at the VML conference. Moreover, Chief Lombrana testified that she relied entirely on the findings of the Prince William IA investigation report, which the Town’s counsel stipulated used Councilwoman Raynor as its single source for the VML conference issue. Also, based on this underdeveloped report, Chief Lombrana testified that she informed Bob Anderson’s office of the allegations against Mr. Nett before any adjudicatory body had an opportunity to determine the veracity of the allegations. In short, Chief Lombrana acted as judge, jury, and executioner for Mr. Nett by prematurely informing Mr. Anderson’s office of the allegations against him:

> Q [Mr. Cook]: Okay. So at the time that you contacted Commonwealth’s Attorney Anderson, you understood that part of what you were asking Anderson to do, was determine whether he should put…whether Anderson should put…Nett on the Brady list; right?
>
> A [Lombrana]: Correct.

Hr’g Tr. 189:6-12. The Panel finds that there would be no reason for Ms. Lombrana to inform Mr. Anderson’s office about the allegations at this time except that she wanted Mr. Nett to be on the Brady List. Among other inconsistencies in Chief Lombrana’s testimony is that she was certain Mr. Nett was lying about this sickness at the VML conference, but later testified that she could not determine whether an officer can fulfill police duties with an injured leg that prevents an officer from driving because she is not a medical professional. Hr’g Tr. 210:19-211:2.

> *Another factor into the political nature of the investigation is Chief Lombrana's testimony that before she approached Prince William County to conduct the IA investigation, she approached the Fairfax County Chief of Police. Chief Lombrana testified that the Fairfax Police Chief would not conduct the IA investigation into Mr. Nett because of its clear political nature.*

Chief Lombrana's testimony was further undermined by her inability to specify instances when Mr. Nett allegedly lied. Hr'g Tr. 200:6-207:21; *see also id.* 202:3-8 ("Q [Mr. Cook]: But you told me he lied when he said he was sick. Tell me what information you have to indicate that he was not sick? A [Lombrana]: I don't have any."). During her testimony, she could only credibly identify his taking sick leave to attend the VML conference as a time he allegedly "lied." However, as discussed above, the evidence presented at the Hearing shows that Mr. Nett did not lie because he was sick and unfit for duty due to his knee injury. Moreover, the Prince William County IA investigation was premised only on Ms. Raynor's version of events which omitted key information that may have exonerated Mr. Nett if considered.

Another factor into the political nature of the investigation is Chief Lombrana's testimony that before she approached Prince William County to conduct the IA investigation, she approached the Fairfax County Chief of Police. Chief Lombrana testified that the Fairfax Police Chief would not conduct the IA investigation into Mr. Nett because of its clear political nature. *See* Hr'g Tr. 166:5-21; 171:13-172:10. Still more, the close proximity of Erin Raynor, a member of a rival political faction to that of Mr. Nett, with that of the office of Commonwealth Attorney Bob Anderson cannot be ignored. Ms. Raynor testified that she was formerly the campaign manager for Nicole Wittmann. According to Ms. Raynor, Ms. Wittmann is the deputy Commonwealth's Attorney for Loudoun County, a direct subordinate to Mr. Anderson. Ms. Raynor testified that she and Ms. Wittmann remain friends, but strenuously denied discussing Mr. Nett with Ms. Wittmann.

The timeline of events between when Mr. Nett was first informed about disciplinary action against him and his ultimate placement on the Brady List is of serious concern to the Panel. The Panel heard evidence of the following chronology of events:

> *Accordingly, for the reasons set forth above and based on the evidence presented at the Hearing it is hereby: ORDERED, that the Town's action to terminate Mr. Nett is hereby REVERSED...*

- February 13, 2025 (Thursday): Lt. Holman transmits his February 13, 2025 memorandum to Mr. Nett requiring a doctor's note by February 17, 2025.

- February 16, 2025 (Sunday): Mr. Nett responds to Lt. Holman that Mr. Nett would be taking sick leave through February 28, 2025.

- February 18, 2025 (Tuesday): Lt. Holman transmits his February 18, 2025 Administrative Leave memorandum to Mr. Nett placing him on administrative leave and stating that "[l]ack of doctor's note constitutes insubordination."

- February 21, 2025 (Friday): Chief Lombrana transmits her First and Second Advanced Notices of Discipline to Mr. Nett and stated her intention to terminate Mr. Nett's employment.

- February 24, 2025 (Monday): The Commonwealth's Attorney for Loudoun County Virginia, Robert Anderson, transmits his letter placing officer Nett on the Brady List.

Chief Lombrana was unable to state with specificity when she received the IA investigation report from the Prince William Police Department and was further unable to state when she contacted Mr. Anderson's office about it. Mr. Anderson's office had little choice but to place Mr. Nett on the Brady List based on the information provided by Chief Lombrana which has now been shown to be incomplete and flawed.

V. CONCLUSION

The Panel appreciates the opportunity to serve the community in this important capacity. The Panel recognizes both counsel for the Town and Mr. Nett for presenting the strongest cases possible for their respective clients with the utmost professionalism.

VI. ORDER

Accordingly, for the reasons set forth above and based on the evidence presented at the Hearing it is hereby:

ORDERED, that the Town's action to terminate Mr. Nett is hereby **REVERSED**, and it is further;

> *"ORDERED, that the Town shall reinstate Officer Nett to his former position with the Department with back pay and any applicable benefit as provided by the Handbook and applicable law..."*

ORDERED, that the Town shall reinstate Officer Nett to his former position with the Department with back pay and any applicable benefit as provided by the Handbook and applicable law; and it is further

ORDERED, that in accordance with Handbook § 14.10(H), Officer Nett substantially prevailed in this matter and: (i) the Town shall pay Officer Nett's reasonable attorneys' fees arising from and related to his termination of employment from the Town; and (ii) within fifteen (15) days following the date of this Decision, Officer Nett shall submit a petition for the award of reasonable attorneys' fees which shall include an affidavit itemizing the services rendered, time billed, and hourly rate not to exceed $144 per hour.

SO ORDERED.

Dated: June 28, 2025

David R. Buss

David R. Buss, Ph.D. Panel Chairman

Brian K. Wells

Mr. Brian K. Wells, Panelist

Jonathan R. Wright

Mr. Jonathan R. Wright, Panelist

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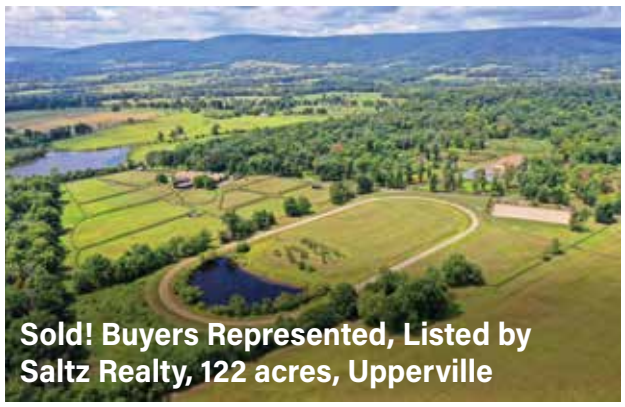
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