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# Today

## Citizens Make Voices Heard on Golden to Mars Power Lines at BOS Meeting

BY KATIE NORTHCOTT

On Tuesday, March 17, over 30 Loudoun County residents chose to spend part of their St. Patrick's Day speaking to the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors.

The majority of citizen comments concerned Dominion Energy's proposed Golden to Mars transmission line. The line is the third and final step of Dominion Energy's Loudoun Reliability Loop, a 500/230 kilovolt transmission line loop near Ashburn.

The first part of the project was approved by the Virginia State Corporation Commission on April 5, 2023. The second was approved on Feb. 19, 2026. The Golden to Mars project was submitted for approval on March 28, 2025 and is currently under review. The third step in this project has received significant community pushback due to its proximity to residential and school property.

"Can we afford to introduce another potential health burden into the communities where we live? Where we

raise our children and care for our seniors?" Loudoun County resident Bhavna Chendok said at the March 17 meeting. "I understand that this infrastructure is needed. We are not opposing the project, but asking that it be built responsibly."

At a business meeting on Jan. 21, 2025, the BOS voted to affirm that its preferred alignment of the Golden to Mars transmission line was "Route 4". Part of Route 4 runs east of Rosa Lee Carter Elementary School and Rock Ridge High School and eventually proceeds south near the edge of a floodplain near homes in Loudoun Valley Estates.

According to the Jan. 21 staff report, Dominion Energy said that running the lines underground would not be "feasible." Since then, residents of Loudoun Valley Estates have asked Dominion to reconsider the feasibility of underground lines, showing up to BOS and SCC meetings in large numbers.

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## Army Plan for Middleburg Training Center Raises Local Concerns

BY SOPHIA CLIFTON

A plan by the U.S. Army to purchase the historic Middleburg Training Center, a private horse-training facility in Loudoun County, has raised concerns among local leaders, trainers and businesses.

The 149-acre center, built in 1956 by philanthropist Paul Mellon, is widely regarded as one of Virginia's premier thoroughbred and steeplechase training venues. The facility includes multiple

barns, more than 200 stalls, dozens of paddocks and a 7/8-mile racetrack on rolling Loudoun County land. Horses train there daily, and the center has hosted top-level competitors preparing for major races.

The property's current owner, businessman Chuck Kuhn, has invested significantly in restoring the facility and placed it under a conservation easement to prevent development.

Local officials and equine industry

advocates warn that converting the property to military use could disrupt Loudoun County's equine economy, which is estimated to generate roughly \$180 million annually and support about 3,000 jobs. Industry leaders describe the training center as a key piece of infrastructure supporting breeders, trainers, veterinarians and related businesses.

They also point to Virginia's thoroughbred residency program, which

has helped retain young racehorses in the state and contributed substantial economic activity and job creation. The loss or alteration of the Middleburg facility, they argue, could weaken that network and force horse operations to relocate outside Virginia.

Concerns have also been raised that relocating training operations would result in the loss of jobs, tax revenue and industry expertise that support

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## A Berry Big Weekend as Lincoln Strawberry Festival Returns with a New Queen

BY VALERIE CURY

A sweet new tradition is taking root in western Loudoun County—one that blends community pride, local agriculture, and opportunity for young women into a celebration as charming as it is meaningful.

On a lively March evening at Endhardt Winery, the Lincoln Strawberry Festival marked a milestone moment—the crowning of its very first Miss Lincoln Strawberry Festival.

The inaugural title was awarded to Montana Cochran, a lifelong Lincoln resident whose deep roots in the community made her a natural choice.

Cochran, a ninth-generation Virginian and familiar face at the area's beloved sheep drive, brings both local heritage and impressive credentials to her new role.

A former Miss Teen Virginia, she has also held titles including Miss Loudoun County Teen and Miss Northern Virginia Teen. Yet beyond accolades, it is her connection to the land and community that stood out most during the evening's celebration.

"This title is so near and dear to my heart," Cochran shared after being crowned. "I'm looking forward to serving Lincoln and western Loudoun during the next few months to celebrate agriculture, community—and most importantly—strawberries."

Her ambassadorship comes at a pivotal time for the festival itself. Now entering its third year, the Lincoln Strawberry Festival has quickly evolved from a small hometown gathering into a signature spring event in Loudoun County. What began as a grassroots effort has blossomed into a multi-day celebration drawing families, farmers, and visitors eager to experience the region's agricultural heritage.

The addition of the Miss Lincoln Strawberry Festival title represents more than ceremony—it signals the continuation of a scholarship initiative aimed at supporting young women across the region.

Beginning next year, organizers plan to implement a formal application and interview process open to participants from Loudoun and neighboring Clarke County, expanding both the reach and impact of the program.

The Wegmeyer Farm Foundation, founded by Harriet and Tyler Wegmeyer, celebrates the "natural wonder and taste of the strawberry" and goes beyond farming to provide educational opportunities for local students while lifting up other nonprofit organizations.

Harriet Wegmeyer, a driving force behind both the festival and the scholarship program, emphasized the importance of creating meaningful

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# Rayner et al Tax Vote Dispute Returns to Court

BY VALERIE CURY

Loudoun County Circuit Court is expected to hear arguments in mid-April in a revived legal challenge filed by Purcellville Town Council members Erin Rayner, Kevin Wright, and Caleb Stought, who are seeking a judicial determination on whether a supermajority vote is required to approve local tax rates.

The case, which is currently scheduled for a hearing around April 15, stems from a dispute over how many votes are needed for the Town Council to adopt or modify tax rates—an issue with significant implications for Purcellville residents as the town approaches fiscal year 2027 budget deliberations.

The three council members initially filed the civil action in October after being on the losing end of a tax-rate vote that passed by a 4-3 majority. The plaintiffs argued that state law requires a two-thirds supermajority for such actions and asked the court to clarify the proper legal standard before future votes occur.

At the time of the disputed vote, then-Town Attorney John Cafferky advised that Virginia law requires a two-thirds vote only to impose a new tax, not to adjust an existing rate—an interpretation consistent with prior legal guidance provided to the town.

In a Jan. 23 hearing, Judge Stephen E. Sincavage dismissed the initial complaint, ruling that it failed to meet the legal threshold for a declaratory judgment. The court found the filing did not sufficiently demonstrate that the plaintiffs' rights had been denied or infringed.

Representing the town, Robert Sproul argued the court could not retroactively rule on a past vote or issue advisory opinions on hypothetical future actions—positions the court ultimately accepted in sustaining the town's demurrer.

However, Sincavage granted the plaintiffs leave to amend their complaint, allowing the case to move forward if deficiencies were corrected. The revised filing has now set the stage for the upcoming April hearing.

The three council members are represented by Bryan S. Turner and Sarah Bruns of the Marquis Law Group, a Leesburg-based firm. State Sen. Russet Perry is also a member of the firm and recently sponsored legislation directly affecting the Town of Purcellville.

That legislation, Senate Bill 648, introduces a series of targeted governance and oversight measures applicable only to towns within Planning District 8 with populations between 8,000 and 10,000—criteria that currently apply to Purcellville.

SB 648 includes provisions that would:

- Require the automatic suspension of elected town officials charged with felony offenses, with courts authorized to appoint temporary replacements
- Mandate a comprehensive, state-directed study of the town's debt, infrastructure, utilities, and long-term liabilities, to be completed by July 1, 2027
- Require the town to adopt a remedial plan based on the study's findings
- Restrict Town Council voting to items published at least three days in advance, unless altered by a three-fourths supermajority
- Grant residents expanded legal standing to challenge council decisions, including guaranteed priority court scheduling and potential reimbursement of attorney's fees

The legislation is scheduled to sunset on July 1, 2028, approximately one year after the next town election.

Critics have raised concerns that the mandated study could shift accountability for controversial fiscal decisions—such as tax increases or development approvals—onto state-directed recommendations, rather than locally elected officials.

The town already contracts with Davenport & Company for financial advising and Stantec for utility-rate analysis and recommendations.

The overlap between the council members' legal challenge, their representation by a firm tied to the bill's sponsor, and the passage of legislation

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## Valley Commerce Center Rezoning is Wrong for Western Loudoun

Dear Editor:

The upcoming Loudoun County Board of Supervisors public hearing on April 15 regarding the proposed Valley Commerce Center development highlights an important decision facing the County: how to balance economic growth with long-term planning, environmental sustainability, and the character of existing communities.

The proposal would rezone land near Purcellville to allow nearly one million square feet of industrial warehouse development along with other industrial uses. While economic development has its place, this project raises serious concerns that deserve careful consideration.

Much of the discussion has centered on a simplified comparison between residential and industrial water use,

suggesting that homes built under current zoning might collectively use more water than the proposed industrial project.

However, this comparison overlooks a critical hydrogeologic reality. Residential development typically relies on many individual wells pumping intermittently across a site, while industrial facilities rely on one or more high-capacity wells pumping at sustained rates.

In fractured bedrock aquifers like those in western Loudoun County, concentrated pumping can create localized drawdown effects that may impact nearby residential wells in ways distributed residential use does not.

Large warehouse facilities also require extensive fire suppression systems that can demand very high short-term water flows during emergencies, placing additional stress on aquifers with limited storage capacity.

Beyond water concerns, the scale of this project raises broader planning issues. Nearly one million square feet of industrial development would introduce heavy truck traffic, extensive nighttime lighting, and large industrial buildings into an area surrounded by

residential communities.

This would significantly alter the rural character that Loudoun County's Comprehensive Plan seeks to preserve.

Importantly, the concerns are not abstract. In a 2024 survey of homeowners and residents in the Mayfair, Wright Farms, and Chestnut Hill communities, 93 percent of respondents opposed the project, citing concerns about groundwater availability, traffic, light pollution, and the loss of rural character.

Homeownership is more than a financial investment—it represents stability, community, and the pride many families take in building their lives in a place they value.

Introducing large-scale industrial development into established residential areas risks undermining that sense of place and the expectations homeowners relied upon when they chose to live there.

Rezoning decisions also set precedent. Approving a project of this scale in a rural residential area could encourage similar industrial rezonings in nearby areas over time.

As Loudoun County continues to

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### Thriving after gray divorce

SUBMITTED BY JOSHUA WOLINSKI,  
EDWARD JONES FINANCIAL ADVISOR

There's a growing trend of divorce among those ages 50 and older, often called "gray divorce." While finding yourself in this situation can feel overwhelming, it also can be an opportunity to reclaim your independence and create a life that reflects your dreams and values.



JOSHUA  
WOLINSKI

Today, one-third (36%) of divorcing adults are 50 or older (The Journals of Gerontology, 2022) and 77% of women who experienced gray divorce remain single 10 years after divorce ("Repartnering following gray divorce," 2019). While that might sound surprising, many women view this as a time to focus on goals, dreams and well-being without compromise.

Of course, there are financial realities to consider. Women older than 50 often experience a 45% drop in their standard of living after divorce (compared to 21% for men), and household income can fall by 23% to 40% in the first year

("The Economic Consequences of Gray Divorce for Women and Men," 2020). So, building financial confidence isn't just important; it's empowering.

If you are 50 or older and recently divorced, take the following steps with your financial advisor. You don't have to do it all at once; small steps can help lead to greater financial security over time.

- 1. Find a financial advisor who truly listens.** If you've ever felt unheard or dismissed, don't settle. Your future deserves someone who respects your voice.
- 2. Get clear on your finances.** List your assets, debts, income and expenses to understand your financial situation — the first step toward taking control.
- 3. Create a flexible plan.** Include your current needs, short-term goals and retirement aspirations. Instead of feeling intimidated, you can let a financial advisor help make this simple and manageable.

**4. Learn about money.** Read, attend workshops and join online communities focused on women and finance. Every bit of knowledge adds confidence.

**5. Build an emergency fund.** Work toward having three to six months of living expenses in a low-risk, liquid account. This may take gradual, consistent contributions, but ultimately, this cushion can help provide a sense of security as you navigate your new circumstances.

**6. Review insurance and your employer benefits.** Make sure your medical insurance coverage is adequate. Consider long-term care insurance to help preserve your retirement assets.

**7. Estate planning.** Work with an attorney to review beneficiary designations on bank and brokerage accounts while updating your will, powers

of attorney and, as needed, a revocable living trust.

**8. Social Security.** If you were married 10 years or longer, understand your rights to Social Security benefits from your ex-spouse.

Rather than being the end, gray divorce can represent a new chapter. The future is yours to shape, and it can be as bold, bright and fulfilling as you want it to be. 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.*

*Edward Jones, Member SIPC.*

*Joshua Wolinski | (540) 338-2291 | [joshua.wolinski@edwardjones.com](mailto:joshua.wolinski@edwardjones.com).  
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## Just Like Nothing (else) on Earth: The Union Cemetery

BY TIM JON

I was on a recent foray into our area's attractions of interest, when a unique portion of our locality's past sort of reached out and joined in on the visit: on my first-ever official tour of Union Cemetery in Leesburg, I suddenly found myself in the mythically named Potter's Field.



TIM JON

This was the title given—back in the 1800's—to a plot of land that—now—looks nothing like a graveyard. The acreage in question lies just off the corner of Catoctin Circle and East Market Street—taking up a portion of what would eventually become the Leesburg Plaza Shopping Mall.

In all my years as local News Director at Wage Radio in the County Seat, I must have heard mention of such a place, but when I found myself standing next to an historical marker in Union Cemetery, it was like undiscovered country.

The vault I paid homage to that day—according to Town records—includes the remains of 300-some individuals, taken from their original resting place, eventually to be re-interred on the other side of the community.

'Why were they moved?' You just asked the same



question I put to myself on the day of my visit.

"The name of progress," would be my best answer. The placard at the Cemetery stated that a need arose in the early 1980's to widen East Market Street at the location—as well as compelling leverage to develop the property.

You see, this acreage—when designated as Potter's Field—essentially burial placement for those without the means for interment in an established cemetery—the land lay outside the official Town boundaries.

So, for over a hundred years up until the early

1950's—those of indigent status laid the remains of loved ones in the local plot set up for this use.

But, "Things change," as even those unconscious of history know, and the Town officials thankfully exercised the foresight to "excavate" and "recover" the remains of those whose souls had long departed.

The completed vault took its final resting place—at least for the foreseeable future—just a few years prior to this writing, having spent the intervening time in another site at the Cemetery, deemed less than satisfactory by local citizens.

And, letting as much of this information as possible sink into my thoughts and feelings—back on that day of my first visit—how did all this affect me? I felt a high degree of empathy for those whose physical effects came to lie under the new Memorial.

Having lived for quite some time as a 'starving artist,' I was never that far from indigence myself, escaping by the chance of fortune as much as anything else. So, I felt (even if only imagined) a kinship with those who number among the subject matter of today's story. I also sensed a touch of gratitude for the elected leaders, back in the day, who took the trouble to set up the original Potter's Field on the edge of Town.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

## April Community Meetings on Western Loudoun Groundwater



The Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition has scheduled three public meetings to present and discuss information on the issue of the groundwater supply in western Loudoun County.

**COMMUNITY**

Groundwater is the only source of water in western Loudoun for all uses—residents, farmers, businesses, towns, and the environment. Strong scientific evidence suggests that the supply of groundwater is diminishing faster than it is being

replaced, presenting a serious problem for everyone in western Loudoun.

The meetings will be held in Purcellville, Lucketts and Middleburg.

The three meetings are open to the public at no charge and will be held at the following times and locations:

**April 6, 6:30 p.m.**  
Woodgrove High School  
36811 Alder School Road, Purcellville, VA

**April 13, 7 p.m.**  
Lucketts Community Center  
42361 Lucketts Road, Leesburg, VA

**April 20, 6:30 p.m.**  
Middleburg American Legion  
111 The Plains Road, Middleburg, VA

There is no charge to attend but reservations are requested to estimate seating. To RSVP scan this QR code or go to [www.LoudounCoalition.org](http://www.LoudounCoalition.org).

## Tourism Zone Claim Challenged, Then Later Downplayed as Terminology

BY VALERIE CURY

At the Jan. 13 Purcellville Town Council meeting, Council Member Erin Rayner spent much of her council comments citing what she described as a Tourism Zone in the Town of Leesburg, using it to justify retaining and expanding Purcellville's own Tourism Zone. She said Leesburg had adopted such a zone "a couple years ago" and stated she had researched the issue and contacted Leesburg's Town Council directly to ask why it had been enacted.

**GOVERNMENT**

At the same meeting, Rayner emphasized her claim of precedent and challenged Mayor Chris Bertaut when he asked for clarification—"It's a shame you didn't come prepared knowing that Leesburg has one," and added, "Why should I do your work for you?" Her statements framed the zone as a researched, verified policy used elsewhere, despite there being no Tourism Zone in the Town of Leesburg.

At the Feb. 10 Town Council meeting, Bertaut directly refuted those statements. "I researched this thoroughly." He confirmed that Leesburg does not have a Tourism Zone, explaining that he reviewed their town code and zoning ordinances and consulted both the planning and economic development departments.

"I do not buy the argument that we need it as a tool in the tool kit," Bertaut said, noting the Town of Purcellville Tourism Zone ordinance had been in place for 14 years without ever being used.

"I also spoke to their planning and zoning department—they do not have a Tourism Zone. The department told me to check with their economic development department and they said it is mentioned in their strategic plan but there is no real urgency to act on it," Bertaut said.

The incentives, tax waivers, and regulatory flexibility often cited as necessary were not used and, according to the mayor's review, never existed in Leesburg.

Bertaut said that Leesburg successfully brought in a boutique hotel without any special financial incentives, showing that the precedent cited did not exist. "It was brought in without a Tourism Zone, without incentives, because the people who wanted to build Hotel Burg knew it was a good business decision."

Rayner later said, "I misspoke ... it was more nomenclature."

Purcellville's Tourism Zone, enacted in 2012 under the Lazaro administration, applies to a limited number of parcels along North 21<sup>st</sup> Street, owned by the same owners, and was used for a single redevelopment project—a boutique hotel that was never built.

The ordinance allows for unusual regulatory flexibility and potential tax waivers, including utility fees, real estate taxes, meals taxes, and occupancy taxes, for up to nine years, contingent on a minimum private investment of \$250,000.

During the Feb. 10 meeting, the council voted 4-3 to rescind the Tourism Zone ordinance. Mayor Bertaut, Vice Mayor

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## Parenting Teens: A Local Psychologist's Guide to Staying Sane

BY MICHAEL OBERSCHNEIDER, PSY.D.

Imagine the scene: You're idling in the school pickup line, heart full, ready to hear about the day. Your teenager climbs in, tosses their backpack like it's made of lead, and the "interrogation" begins.

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DR. MIKE

You: "Hey! How was your day?"

Them: "Fine."

You: "How was the math test?"

Them: "I don't know."

You: "Anything interesting happen at lunch?"

Them: (Sighs, checking a phone) "No."

You: "Do you have a lot of homework tonight?"

Them: "Maybe."

The silence that follows is so heavy you could hang your coat on it. You wonder if you've been replaced by a stranger or what you did wrong. But then, a miracle occurs.

Your daughter looks up, eyes bright, and lovingly says the magic words: "Can we go to Starbucks?"

For your teenage son who hasn't done his chores after repeated requests—he may suddenly need you to cook something, drive him somewhere, or help with something else. Once the connection or need is met, he might retreat again into monosyllables or grunts.

Welcome to what I call *the Push-Pull Years*—a time when your teen alternates between wanting little to do with you and needing you all at once.

So, why is this happening, and are you a bad parent? Definitely not. Clinical research shows the adolescent brain is essentially a house under major renovation. The prefrontal cortex—the part responsible for judgment, impulse control, and reading social cues—is temporarily closed for construction and won't fully mature until the mid-twenties. Meanwhile, the amygdala—the brain's emotional processing center, is working overtime.

Add in all of the demands in their lives—shifting hormones, academics, after school activities, the friendship and social landscape and constant

social media pressure, and it's no wonder they're exhausted and your exhausted.

With everything going on in their heads and lives, what feels to you like simple conversation can feel to them like a cross-examination. They're not necessarily being defiant; they're often just out of bandwidth.

As parents, we naturally long for the way things used to be—the days of long talks, family dinners, hugs, and hearing "I love you" on repeat. But the secret to surviving the teen years isn't wishing for what was, it's meeting them where they are.

**For your daughter:** If she wants to go to Starbucks, take her. Agree on a budget if you need to, but remember—the "Pink Drink" isn't the point; your presence is.

**For your son:** If he starts talking while you're trying to watch the news or go to bed, give him ten minutes. If he's gaming, sit nearby for a bit without peppering him with questions.

And don't take car time for granted. I often tell parents to stop complaining about being their teen's chauffeur—it's a short-term gig with an expiration date.

When you're driving and they're sitting beside you (or behind you with friends), you're a fly on the wall. Teens often find direct eye contact intimidating; side-by-side interactions lower their guard. You'll learn more in one twenty-minute drive than through a week of formal check-ins.

**How to Support Them (and Save Your Sanity)**

- **Don't take the bait.** When they're sharp or snarky, remember the brain is under construction. Take a breath. Don't let their emotional dysregulation trigger yours.
- **Value parallel moments.** Sometimes sitting in the same room—each on your own device or reading—is a quiet win. It's about being near each other, not always doing together.
- **Be the safe harbor.** Let them know you're there when they're ready to talk, but don't force the door open.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

# Purcellville Council Approves Donation for Fireman's Field Upgrades

BY VALERIE CURY

The Purcellville Town Council voted unanimously March 10 to approve a donation that will fund safety and aesthetic improvements at historic Fireman's Field.

The project, funded by EE Reed East Coast, which specializes in industrial building construction and data centers, will replace the baseball field's aging warning track, with the company providing all materials, labor, and equipment at a savings to the town of \$189,000.

Fireman's Field is known as Virginia's oldest baseball field and is a designated historic landmark. The current warning track was installed over 30 years ago and consists of a concrete base topped with a rubberized surface. Officials say years of wear have left the playing surface in declining condition, raising concerns about player safety.

Under the approved plan, the existing track will be removed and replaced with a standard professional-style design made of a gravel base topped with brick dust, a change expected to make the area safer and more visually appealing.

According to a March 13 Cannons' press release, the effort began in November during a conversation among members of the Purcellville Cannons organization. Angela Kable Johnson, the team's board secretary and photographer, recalled her immediate reaction when the issue of cost arose: "Hold up ... I think I can get this done through a community project and donation."

Kable Johnson later connected the project with EE Reed East Coast through professional and personal contacts. After meetings and site visits, the proposal moved forward with support from company leadership. Chief Operating Officer Doug Meadows responded to the idea with a succinct endorsement, according to organizers: "Absolutely!"

At the Town Council meeting, Purcellville Mayor Chris Bertaut thanked EE Reed East Coast, the Cannons, town staff, and Interim Town Manager Tony Sabio "for pulling together this partnership between the Cannons and the town in helping to bring in this very, very generous donation." He added, "I look forward to many, many years of team

play by the Cannons and other teams who play on this field."

Construction is expected to begin soon.

The press release notes that the project comes as the Purcellville Cannons prepare for their 10th season at Fireman's Field. Kable Johnson said the team continues to draw strong support from the local community.

Cannons manager Brett Fuller said he is "extremely excited" for the warning track project to begin, adding that it will give players "the opportunity to experience playing on the best all-natural baseball facility in Virginia."

The Cannons open their 2026 schedule May 27 with an exhibition game against the Gaithersburg Giants, followed by their home opener May 29 at Fireman's Field.

More information about the team, including volunteer opportunities, host families, and the upcoming season, is available at [www.purcellvillecannons.org](http://www.purcellvillecannons.org).

This donation took a political turn after Mayor Chris Bertaut posted about the project on his Facebook page. In his post, Bertaut said, "Town Manager Tony Sabio began discussions with the Cannons' owner, Brett Fuller, which helped develop the partnership that brought in this generous donation." He also thanked EE Reed East Coast and the Cannons for "pulling together this partnership to support our historic field."

Kable Johnson responded in a Facebook post disputing that characterization. On March 24, Kable Johnson also attended a Purcellville Town Council meeting and reiterated what she wrote in her post. She wrote that the Town Manager "had ZERO involvement in securing the generous donation from E.E. Reed East Coast" and added that she "alone initiated the conversations, arranged the meetings, and personally facilitated the entire process that led to this wonderful gift for THE CANNONS."

She added that she was "appalled and frankly insulted" by the mayor's post and "expects—and demands—a prompt, public correction and apology" for what she described as an "inaccurate post." Kable Johnson also stressed, "Credit belongs where it is earned, not twisted

to score cheap political points or shield an employee."

Her post emphasized her personal role and that of her daughter, stating, "I alone initiated the conversations, arranged the meetings, and personally facilitated the entire process that led to this wonderful gift for THE CANNONS."

"The emails asking for the donation were between me, my daughter Marie (the Real MVP and Employee of EE Reed) and the COO of EE Reed. The Town's only role was the basic legal requirement since they own the property. That's it."

Bertaut's post thanked EE Reed East Coast, the Cannons owner Brett Fuller, the Cannons organization and Town Manager Tony Sabio, who "began a new relationship with the Canons by picking up the phone and starting direct talks

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

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# Supervisors Endorse Western Loudoun Recreation Complex Design

BY SOPHIA CLIFTON

Members of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors' Finance/Government Operations and Economic Development Committee voted March 10, to advance the design of the long-anticipated Western Loudoun Recreation Complex, moving the project one step closer to construction while also discussing rising costs and community needs.

## GOVERNMENT

The committee unanimously recommended that the full Board endorse the project's major design elements and allow staff to proceed with final design work, marking a significant milestone for a facility years in the making.

"This item seeks the finance committee's recommendation for the Board of Supervisors' endorsement of the major design elements for the Western Loudoun Recreation Project," Assistant Director, Facilities Capital Projects Don Bredice told supervisors at the outset of the presentation.

Planned on a 142-acre site west of Purcellville, the complex is designed to serve a growing population in western Loudoun County that has long lacked access to a full-service recreation center. The project combines indoor and outdoor amenities, including athletic fields, courts, trails, and a three-story recreation building featuring aquatics, fitness, and youth programming.

Staff emphasized that public input has played a central role in shaping the design. "The project team facilitated three public information meetings ... Each meeting was followed by a public comment period ... The input received ... informed the project's design," Bredice said.

The proposed complex reflects a deliberate effort to balance active recreation with preservation of the site's natural features.

Design manager Marissa King explained that "major site elements inform the layout," including wetlands, historic structures, and tree lines. The plan incorporates "low impact site features, such as boardwalks and natural trails" to protect those areas.

At the heart of the project is a three-story recreation center intended as a hub for community activity. The building will include "the gymnasium, fitness center, indoor running track, a competition pool with spectator seating, [and a] leisure pool."

The outdoor amenities are equally expansive, with baseball and softball fields, soccer and multi-use fields, tennis and pickleball courts, a playground, and open lawn space.

That open space was a key priority for staff.

"One of the things that we hear a lot of is ... we don't have a lot of space that is not already programmed for ballfield use," said Steve Torpy,

director of Parks, Recreation & Community Services. "So having some programmed open space where somebody can just go and toss a Frisbee around ... would not be something that we would necessarily have programmed."

Much of the committee's discussion focused on how well the design reflects actual recreation demand in western Loudoun.

Supervisor Matthew Letourneau (R-Dulles) questioned the large number of pickleball courts—12 in total—calling it "more than we have anywhere else in Loudoun."

Staff responded that the number is driven by usage data and local interest.

"We have a large component of Western Loudoun pickleball players," Torpy explained, noting strong participation at existing facilities like Franklin Park and the Carver Senior Center.

The broader mix of athletic fields was also carefully considered, staff said, with a focus on serving local leagues rather than attracting large regional tournaments.

"The first and foremost approach that we're taking is to take care of the youth leagues," Torpy continued. "Large scale tournaments ... traditionally don't want to go out West because of the lack of hotels."

Supervisors also raised the growing demand for cricket facilities, a need that extends across the county.

"I actually believe we should try to just have a dedicated cricket field," Chair Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) said, noting that "pickleball is big, but cricket is big also."

Staff indicated that the rectangular fields could be configured to accommodate cricket play if needed.

While the design received broad support, the project's rising cost prompted candid discussion.

Randall asked staff to explain what she described as a dramatic increase—from roughly \$73 million to more than \$260 million.

"For public consumption, why is that escalation so significant and so quick?" she asked.

Staff attributed the increase largely to early estimating errors and evolving project scope.

"The original estimate ... was a very preliminary estimate that did not factor in a lot of what we now know about the site," said Scott Worrest, deputy director for DTCl. He added that it "utilized low dollar per square foot cost" and included "errors that we found as we went through this."

Additional factors included combining the recreation center with the Fields Farm Park project and incorporating new features such as dedicated teen spaces.

**SUPERVISORS ENDORSE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16**

“I really do appreciate the honest answer,” Randall said. “Staff are human beings ... we make mistakes sometimes.”

At the same time, she stressed the importance of accountability.

“Price matters when you’re making these decisions,” Randall said, calling the increase “a huge ... not a small escalation.”

Despite concerns about cost, supervisors expressed strong support for moving the project forward, citing the lack of recreation facilities in western Loudoun.

Letourneau noted that restarting the project elsewhere would likely be more expensive and time-consuming.

“We’ve done an analysis... and [it is] on par with where it should be,” Worrest said, adding that relocating would set the project back “years, years, years.”

Letourneau framed the project as an equity issue for the county.

“We do have a big part of the county that is just not covered by this type of facility,” he said.

He added that while neighborhood concerns are inevitable, similar

facilities have ultimately become valued community assets.

“There’s generally neighborhood concerns about almost everything that we build,” Letourneau said. “Usually, the county especially finds a way to be a good neighbor.”

Construction on the Western Loudoun Recreation Complex is currently anticipated to begin in early 2027, pending final design approval and funding.

As the committee voted unanimously to advance the project, supervisors reflected on the broader role recreation centers play in community life.

Supervisor Juli Briskman (D-Algonkian) described visiting existing facilities and seeing “birthday parties just churning through there” and families gathering for swim programs, calling it “fantastic” and something to be “really proud of.”

With its combination of indoor and outdoor amenities, environmental sensitivity, and community-driven design, the Western Loudoun Recreation Complex is poised to become a similar hub for residents in the county’s western reaches.

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# Belmont Ridge Middle School student wins LCPS spelling bee

Vikyath Tanamala, a sixth grader from Belmont Ridge Middle School, won the 44th Annual Loudoun County Public Schools Regional Spelling Bee on Thursday, March 12, at Rock Ridge High School.

Tanamala earned the title after 16 rounds of competition, edging out Dhiya Sudhakar, a sixth grade student from Gum Spring Middle School. This is

the second year in a row that Tanamala has won the regional bee.

The winning word was *peccant* (adjective), meaning guilty of moral offense; sinning; corrupt.

Both students now advance to the Scripps National Spelling Bee, scheduled for May 25–28, at DAR Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. Students from across the nation will compete on



national television, showcasing their spelling and vocabulary skills.

“The Spelling Bee is a great reminder of how powerful words can be,” said Superintendent Dr. Aaron Spence. “When students study and practice, they’re building confidence, strengthening their communication skills, and discovering the joy of learning. We’re proud of every student who stepped up to compete.”

To learn more about the LCPS Regional Spelling Bee, visit [lcps.org/spellingbee](http://lcps.org/spellingbee). For information about the Scripps National Spelling Bee, visit their website.

# Loudoun Kids Hit a Home Run with Farmer Trading Cards

This spring, elementary students across Loudoun County are swapping more than just stickers—they’re trading stories about the people who grow their food.

From March 23–27, Loudoun County Public Schools will host the beloved Farmer Trading Card Program, a hands-on initiative that introduces students to local farmers, healthy eating, and the journey food takes from farm to table.

The program’s timing couldn’t be more perfect—coinciding with Major League Baseball’s Opening Day, adding a collectible twist to the classroom.

The cards feature real Loudoun County farmers

sharing their stories through short, engaging videos. Students can learn what each farmer grows, how they got started, and why they love their work. Then, they can collect the physical trading cards distributed through school lunches, making lunchtime a little more exciting and educational.

Buddy Rizer, Executive Director of Loudoun Economic Development said, “A lot of us remember collecting trading cards as kids, swapping them, showing them off, and learning the stories behind our favorites. These farmer trading cards tap into that same



CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 »

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# Wheatland Concert Series features Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' with dinner

The Wheatland Concert Series will present a spring program on April 11 beginning at 6 p.m., featuring a string quartet and harpsichord performing selections from *The Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi. The evening pairs live music with a multi-course dinner prepared by Chef Ian of Magnolias at the Mill.

The menu opens with vol au vent, a puff pastry filled with chicken and mushrooms in tarragon cream sauce. The main course features braised short rib with truffle risotto and baby carrots, finished with a red wine demi-glace. Dessert is lemon cheesecake with blueberry compote, served with coffee or tea. French wines selected by the chef accompany the meal.

Tickets are \$155 per person, inclusive of wine, tax and gratuity. Reservations are required and can be made online at [shiloh-manor.com](http://shiloh-manor.com).

Born in Venice in 1678, Antonio Vivaldi was trained as a violinist by his father and later ordained as a Catholic priest. Health issues led him away from clerical duties and toward music, where he built his career. He spent much of his life at the Ospedale della Pietà, where he trained and composed for young female musicians, helping

elevate the ensemble to international recognition.

Vivaldi gained wider acclaim in 1711 with the publication of *L'estro armonico*, which helped define the three-movement concerto form of the Baroque period. He later worked in Mantua, where he composed operas and concertos, including *The Four Seasons*, now among his most recognized works.

Composed as a set of four violin concertos, *The Four Seasons* is known for its vivid musical imagery. Each piece reflects a different season, incorporating sounds that evoke nature, weather and daily life. Vivaldi also wrote accompanying poems intended to align with the music.

Over his lifetime, Vivaldi composed more than 500 concertos and dozens of operas, along with sacred choral works and chamber music. After a period of success, his fortunes declined, and he died in Vienna in 1741. His music was largely forgotten until a revival in the 20th century restored his reputation.

Selections from *The Four Seasons*, including the "Spring" and "Summer" concerti, will be featured in the upcoming Wheatland performance.



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## Woodgrove High School Presents *Legally Blonde the Musical*

Woodgrove High School is in the midst of preparations for its Grove Theatre spring production, *Legally Blonde the Musical*. *Legally Blonde* follows the iconic story of sorority girl Elle Woods, who applies to Harvard Law in order to win back her ex-boyfriend—but ends up finding herself and discovering her passion for law along the way. This comedic, high-energy show about self-discovery is a must-see.

Woodgrove is a participant in the National Capital Area Cappies, a theatre and journalism program for



During a cast photoshoot, Mai Sylvester, Amanda Dickson, Lauren Pyles, and Arabella Horton shine as sorority girls around Molly Den Herder's Elle Woods.

high school students across Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, DC that evaluates and presents awards for excellence in acting, crew, student critics, and overall production. Woodgrove will be competing against over 50 other schools this Cappies season.

Student leadership is a very important part of the Cappies program, with the majority of the show being student-driven. These student leaders take on significant responsibility and are currently working hard to make the show the best it can be.

Sophie Brzozowsky, Musical Director, said, "I make rehearsal tracks for all the songs in our show and work to teach all the songs during rehearsal. The Cappies aspect of the show motivates me to put in as much work as possible."

Artistic Director Gracie Vosburgh said, "My job as Artistic Director is to create a strong visual vision. I designed the set, working with tech leadership to figure out their needs."

Sophomore Molly Den Herder, who plays the beloved golden-haired protagonist Elle Woods, loves how fun and engaging *Legally Blonde* is. "The experience has been amazing; the cast and crew are incredibly talented and supportive. I love the large choreographed numbers in the show," Den Herder said.

Director Beverly Pruzina shared her appreciation



Molly Den Herder and Abraham Perdomo Pacheco smile as Elle Woods and Emmett Forrest during a cast photoshoot.

for the show and the NCA Cappies program. "There is such a special reward for all schools who participate in Cappies NCA," Pruzina said. She is excited to see her students' work come together during performances. "Opening Night, I sometimes can't sleep because I'm so excited for my students."

Be sure to bring your friends and family—and wear your pink—to see Woodgrove's *Legally Blonde* at 2 p.m. on April 11 and 12, or at 7 p.m. on April 9, 10, and 11. Tickets are available online at The Grove Theatre's website, woodgrovetheatre.com.

### OPINION: THE OWLS SAYS... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Georgia counties were overseen by "Commissioners of Roads and Bridges." (Today, they are simply County Commissioners, equivalent to our Supervisors.) During the Roads-and-Bridges era, Georgia's county governments had relatively narrow duties, much akin to Maslow's safety needs. Later Boards of Supervisors in Georgia began to meet higher levels of needs as society demanded more.

That leads to a basic question: How much governmental activity is too much? Today that question is especially important in Loudoun.

#### Loudoun Reaches for the Top

Our wealthy and educated citizens may want a lot from our government, or at least the Supervisors think so. However, reaching for the top comes at a real cost—to our wallets.

The late US senator William Proxmire awarded an annual Golden Fleece Award to the most boneheaded expenditure by the federal government. These days that cudgel has been picked up by Kentucky senator Rand Paul, who releases an annual "Festivus Report" that shines a light on a multitude of fiscal waste, such as a million bucks to study ferrets binge-drinking alcohol or \$14.6 million to study monkeys playing the Price is Right game. "Festivus" means humorous and in Rand's case, it's humor with a fiscal bite.

#### A Severus Look at Loudoun's Spending

"Severus" is the antonym of Festivus, so it means harsh, serious, stern, and that's the way I react to

County spending. Its fiscal recklessness especially angers me when I look at my property tax bill.

Let's start with an overview.

With the exception of one seat, our current Board is the same now as it was after the 2019 elections. I'll start with January 1, 2020 as the beginning of my analysis and January 1, 2026 as the end point. During that period Loudoun's population grew by 5.9% and the Consumer Price Index rose 26.1%. Those are additive, so start with 32% as understandable growth in County spending. However, proposed spending by the Board actually increases by 78% over that period. Thus, spending would be 243% more than it should have been expected. Remember, you're paying for this.

Look at some examples of proposed spending increases compared to last year and you'll grasp the problem:

While inflation was only 2.4%, the County proposes increasing compensation by 6.25% for its general workforce, 8% for Fire & Rescue and 8.75% for Sheriff's deputies.

Adding 187 new employees County-wide, while our population growth was essentially stagnant, at only 1%. Apparently, bureaucrats want more bureaucrats.

A number of especially irksome items are proposed. Try these: Buying "microtransit" vehicles. Increasing spending on County administration by 15%. My blood is a boil, but I continue:

A 17% increase in employees in the Parks and Recreation department.

An "enterprise data warehouse," whatever that is. Ditto "remote site connectivity." Wouldn't smart

phones suffice?

A \$100 million cost overrun for the Western Loudoun Recreation Complex, for a new total cost of \$291 million. (Expect more cost overruns before this turkey opens.) The project would surely be near the pinnacle of Maslow's pyramid of needs ... as a luxury at taxpayers' expense.

I think the budget document is around 300 pages, and probably chock full of more things that would make us choke.

(A personal note on that new rec center and on the more than \$200 million cost of new high schools: Private sector development procedures could cut those costs by as much as half. Our Atlanta development firm produced that kind of result on a number of government projects, from a public safety complex in Florida to student housing and academic buildings for Georgia universities.)

Given that experience, this assumption in Loudoun's proposed budget blew my mind: A standard construction-in-progress contingency of 40%. That is absolute lunacy! Taxpayer rape! While development budgets should include contingencies, they are usually in the 5 - 10% range.

#### LCPS

I critiqued our out-of-control School Board last month. You'll find its spending misdeeds at <https://blueridgeleader.com/my-conversation-with-momus/> Here are two major examples: Loudoun plans on spending \$25,000 per student; Fairfax spends

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 »

# Consultant Outlines Utility Rate Approach at Purcellville Work Session

BY VALERIE CURY

At a March 24 work session, the Purcellville Town Council heard a presentation from David Hyder, senior principal with Stantec Financial Services Group, on recommended water and sewer utility rates for the FY27 budget.

## GOVERNMENT

Hyder explained that the town maintains water and sewer enterprise funds. "What that means," he said, "is the town operates the systems like a business. The revenues that are generated need to cover the expenses of the utility."

Hyder said his analysis uses a 10-year projection period. "The process we use is to first identify what it costs to operate and maintain the water and sewer systems, and that is identified in the revenue requirements," he said.

Those revenue requirements include "your operating expenditures, a forecast of capital investments—meaning what you need to spend in the future—as well as paying off any debt service you might have incurred in the past," Hyder said. That analysis, he added, provides "the forecast of what you have spent in the past," while Stantec also projects future revenues.

"We anticipate—what is our demand going to be in terms of revenues, and are our revenues in line with our expenses? Are we falling within our reserve target? Are we able to maintain adequate reserves in the system?" Hyder said.

Hyder said the analysis also considers whether additional debt service will be required. "It is a cash flow analysis. We are looking out over a 10-year projection period," he said.

To develop that projection, Hyder noted that assumptions must be made. "We have to do some assumptions," he said, explaining that Stantec evaluates financial stability in part by maintaining reserve targets.

Hyder said the firm aims for a minimum reserve equivalent to nine months, or approximately 75% of a 12-month target. He added that usage assumptions are also factored into the model, with typical residential

consumption estimated at 8,000 gallons per two-month billing cycle, or about 4,000 gallons per month.

Hyder said the analysis assumes that meals tax contributions from the General Fund will end after FY27. "So that is included in the FY27 budget," he said.

Based on historical trends, Hyder said Stantec projects a continued decline in water usage of about 1% per year. "We're still assuming you are continuing to see the reduction in use going forward," he said, adding, "Customers are using less and less water."

For future capital investments in the system, Hyder said the town would need to rely on borrowing. He noted that projections assume 30-year loans at an interest rate of 5%.

"Rate increases gets you additional revenues given your current rates and demand on the system," Hyder said. He explained that a 1% increase in water rates would generate approximately \$25,000 annually, while a 1% increase in sewer rates would generate about \$38,000 per year.

Hyder added that one of the primary drivers in the financial planning process each year is the scale of planned capital projects.

Hyder said the town's long-term planning is driven in large part by its capital improvement needs. "We are looking at a Fiscal Year 27–37 capital improvement plan that the town has identified necessary and essential CIP for the water system of \$65 million, and on the sewer side—it's \$13 million," he said.

"Given the condition of the utilities, we are anticipating that borrowing is going to be necessary for each of these capital projects."

Hyder said rising costs are also a factor in the town's rate considerations. "We are seeing a doubling of the cost to operate the water system," he said.

Comparing Purcellville's proposed rates to nearby localities, Hyder noted that for a customer using 4,000 gallons per month, "you would be right in line

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 >

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**ARMY PLAN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

rural economies in Loudoun and neighboring counties.

On March 26, U.S. Rep. Suhas Subramanyam raised the issue on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, emphasizing the facility's long-standing role in the region. He described the training center as "a bedrock of the town's local economy since its establishment in 1956" and "one of the leading horse training facilities in the country and a major driver of the local economy."

Subramanyam noted that no comparable facility exists nearby and urged that any potential transfer include community input and consideration of alternative sites. He warned that moving forward without such consideration

could result in the loss of jobs and significant economic impact.

Local equestrians have also mobilized, holding community meetings in the Middleburg area. A large turnout at a March 4 meeting in Upperville reflected widespread concern within the equine community.

Industry representatives note that the Army's Caisson horses—used in military funerals at Arlington National Cemetery—are already housed in Loudoun County at an existing facility. They argue that the Middleburg site may not align with the specific needs of that program and could require significant modifications.

Some industry figures have also questioned whether the property is an appropriate or cost-effective

acquisition for the Army, suggesting that alternative locations could meet military needs without displacing an established equine operation.

Kuhn has received a purchase offer from the Army and has indicated that local stakeholders have been given an opportunity to submit competing bids. He has said the decision timeline is limited, with a deadline approaching.

Local leaders have emphasized that their concerns are not about the Army's presence in the region, but rather the suitability of this particular site. Many have expressed support for accommodating the Caisson unit elsewhere in Northern Virginia without disrupting the existing equine infrastructure.

County officials and industry groups have called for additional study before

any transfer proceeds, noting the broader economic impact of the equine sector. They emphasize that the industry supports a wide range of jobs and services beyond horse training itself.

The Army has released limited public information, stating only that it is evaluating options for long-term stabling near Washington, D.C. The Caisson Detachment requires a specialized facility, though local leaders argue that alternatives could be developed without affecting the Middleburg site.

With a decision expected soon, local officials and residents say they are continuing to monitor the situation closely and advocate for a solution that balances military needs with the preservation of Loudoun County's equine heritage and economy.

**OPINION: LOSING THE HEART OF PHILOMONT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**

to have taken a back seat.

In 2015, when this parcel was offered to the county by the Philomont Volunteer Fire Department Board, I did not anticipate that the county would abandon our existing, well-constructed seven-bay firehouse that could have been renovated, in favor of a project approaching \$30 million—particularly one that may not match the lifespan of the current facility and reflected a decision that failed to consider community input or the loss of a valued public space.

The county's reliance on "Special Exceptions" has raised additional concerns. Zoning restrictions prohibit a firehouse as a permitted use on this site, and the Comprehensive Plan for Rural Historic Villages calls for new construction to be "compatible" with surrounding structures. These guidelines were ignored.

It is difficult to see how a 19,305-square-foot building aligns with adjacent historic properties, including a 1700s log cabin, an 1800s stone chapel, and other longstanding homes.

Residents supported an alternative—expanding and renovating the existing firehouse. This approach would have met safety needs for Loudoun County Fire and Rescue personnel while preserving the character of the village, saving taxpayer dollars, and maintaining

the Historic Horse Show Grounds.

The long-term impacts are already being felt. Several neighboring homeowners chose to sell and relocate prior to construction. Others now face ongoing disruption from construction activity and uncertainty about future property values. Potential blasting is not off the table.

A large, continuously operating facility—with increased noise, lighting, and water usage—will change the character of the historic community of Philomont.

Water resources are another concern. No well draw-down test was conducted, despite the site's elevation and the close proximity to neighboring wells—some within 300 to 500 feet.

Nearby residents rely on shallow wells, and one home within 300 feet depends on a century-old spring—now vulnerable to the strain of a massive, high-water-use structure. This raises valid questions about both water quantity and quality.

There have been many frustrating aspects to this situation—too many to list here. If the county had chosen to renovate and expand the existing firehouse, the PVFD should have returned the Horse Show Grounds to the community.

The property was originally paid for through local fundraisers and donations, and it should have

remained a shared community green space for the residents who made it possible.

Finally, questions remain about the future of the existing firehouse property. At public meetings, the PVFD repeatedly said that residents would have input on what happens next to the existing firehouse.

To date, however, those commitments have not been realized. Emails have gone unanswered. Questions raised at PVFD board meetings have been met with complete silence.

Greater transparency, responsiveness, and meaningful engagement with the community will be essential moving forward. After all, the community's fundraising and volunteer efforts over decades made this facility possible and should warrant a voice in its future.

Philomont is on the National Register of Historic Places, and decisions made today will shape its future for generations. The question now is not just what has been lost—but what kind of community will be left behind, and whether residents will have a meaningful voice in protecting it before more is gone for good.

*Madeline Skinner is a resident of Philomont and is very active in multiple preservation and conservation organizations.*

**RAYNER ET AL., CON'T. FROM PAGE 4**

specifically targeting Purcellville introduces a complex intersection of legal and political dynamics.

As the April hearing approaches, the case represents the latest in a series of disputes following the 2024 election, when the three council members bringing the lawsuit lost their governing majority.

Since that shift, council proceedings have been marked by repeated legal challenges, procedural conflicts, and sharply contested claims surrounding fiscal decisions and council authority, contributing to a period of sustained instability in the town's governance.

**JUST LIKE NOTHING (ELSE), CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10**

Be it known that the deed allowed the placement into the local gravesite—of remains of different races—although divided between "White persons," and "persons of color." The plot included interment for the victim of an historic tragedy at the site as well; the body of 1902 lynching victim Charles Craven represents one of the hundreds buried in Potter's Field.

By the time I had assimilated all this information—and the emotional and spiritual processing associated with it—the sun had traveled far in the sky, as I stood at the other edge of Town.

Now, I already mentioned that the original planners

of the local burial place took steps to keep a physical division between the remains of 'races' of humans; one of the last lines on the historical marker in Union Cemetery reads, "The remains recovered in 1983 were reburied together."

Letting this message sink in again—today, as I still struggle to do justice to this story, and to make complete sense out of my life, our lives, our time together in Loudoun County—I, at least, enjoy a bit of satisfaction: the study of history is not always pleasant—we may learn about painful—seemingly hopeless times in the human experience—but there is always room for—and reason to hope for—Grace.

**TOURISM ZONE CLAIM CHALLENGED**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

Ben Nett, and Council Members Carol Luke and Susan Khalil voted to rescind it. Council Members Rayner, Kevin Wright, and Caleb Stought voted against.

The vote reflected the council's desire to ensure that any future redevelopment complies with current zoning and fiscal responsibility, rather than rely on broad exceptions that could apply unevenly to different property owners.

**LETTER: REZONING**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

grow, maintaining consistency with adopted planning policies and protecting shared environmental resources—and the communities built around them—will be essential.

The Valley Commerce Center proposal, as currently envisioned, does not meet that standard—but 39 by-right homes do.  
*Michael Parish  
Purcellville*

**CONSULTANT OUTLINES**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

with Middleburg” under the suggested combined water and sewer rates.

Mayor Chris Bertaut asked Hyder to compare the capital improvement project forecasts used in FY25, FY26, and FY27 and how they differed. Hyder said he did not have that information available.

Liz Krens said she would need to research those figures. She added that capital improvement costs are increasing each year as the town identifies new projects.

Krens also noted that the town's fiscal policy sets a reserve balance target at 100%, while the Stantec models assume a 75% reserve level.

Krens said the town has consulted with Davenport & Company, its financial advisor, regarding reserve targets. She said the town would prefer to maintain its 100% reserve policy, “with the understanding that we are probably going to dip below that for a period of time while we increase the rates—while we get our revenues to the point where you have a self-sustaining system.”

Council Member Erin Rayner said the town's current situation reflects years of underpricing utility rates. “We have been undercharging for years and not doing the right thing for 10 years. We have not raised rates appropriately and this is what we have now,” she said. “So every bill our citizens get—yes, they are very high. We are complaining, but we are undercharging by almost \$20 under our operating costs.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 >

**Combined Bill Impacts (Suggested FY 27)**

Monthly Bill*	Current	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Water	\$48.05	\$62.47	\$79.34	\$107.11	\$139.24	\$164.29
\$ Change		\$14.42	\$16.87	\$27.77	\$32.14	\$25.05
Sewer	\$85.69	\$104.53	\$124.41	\$145.55	\$149.92	\$154.42
\$ Change		\$18.85	\$19.88	\$21.14	\$4.36	\$4.50
Total	\$133.74	\$167.00	\$203.75	\$252.66	\$289.16	\$318.71
\$ Change		\$33.26	\$36.75	\$48.91	\$36.50	\$29.55

\*Assumes residential customer user 4,000 gallons per month

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**A BERRY BIG WEEKEND**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

opportunities within the community. During the event, she highlighted the foundation's growing portfolio of scholarships, which already includes awards for student artists and high school community contributors.

The crowning ceremony itself reflected the warmth and humor of a close-knit community. Hosted by members of the Lincoln Community League, the evening included heartfelt thanks to organizers, volunteers, and longtime supporters who have helped shape the festival's growth.

Attendees gathered for photos, conversation, and celebration—underscoring the sense that this was not just an event, but the continuation of a shared story.

That story will unfold further this May when the festival returns for its full weekend lineup, scheduled for May 15–17. Festivities will kick off with the “Berry Important Person” Denim Gala, an evening of dinner and community connection.

The weekend will then burst into full flavor with strawberry-themed competitions, including pie- and ice-cream-eating contests, live music, and family-friendly activities.

Sunday's highlights include a pancake breakfast, a strawberry toddler fashion show, and opportunities for visitors to pick their own berries—an experience that connects attendees directly to the agricultural roots the festival celebrates.

In just a few short years, the Lincoln Strawberry Festival has become more than a seasonal attraction. It is a reflection of a community investing in itself—honoring tradition while creating new pathways for growth. With Cochran as its first ambassador and the scholarship program, the festival is poised to deepen its impact even further.

For Lincoln and the surrounding countryside, it seems the future is looking bright—and just a little bit sweeter. For more information go to [LincolnStrawberryFestival.com](http://LincolnStrawberryFestival.com).

**ASK DR. MIKE**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

When they finally do talk, listen more and lecture less.

- **Celebrate the bright spots.** When they light up for a Starbucks, Chick-fil-A, or Chipotle run, or share a random joke, pause what you're doing if you can. Those fleeting moments are their invitations in.

Parenting a teenager is a wild, exhausting, and beautiful ride—a season of letting go while holding on tight. You're likely doing better than you think. And even if they'd rather die than admit it in public, you're still the most important person in their world.

“Teenagers are like cats. They come to you when they want attention, disappear when they don't, and secretly love you the whole time.” — Anonymous

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

**FIREMAN'S FIELD UPGRADES**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

with the Canons owner, Brett Fuller last fall.”

Council Member Susan Khalil offered an additional perspective in her post, stating, “Never did the Mayor say that our Town Manager secured the donation from EE Reed. He gave credit to the Town Manager for opening up communication with the Cannons, which helped make the donation possible.

“Those posting criticism have not hesitated to degrade our Town Manager at every turn, so it is no surprise that they would not want to see him receive credit for facilitating a valued town partnership.”

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**OPINION: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE KIDS**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**From Active to Sedentary**

Childhood used to be physical. We rode bikes, played pickup games, climbed trees, and solved our own problems. Parents didn't script every moment or hover over every decision. We learned independence the old-fashioned way—by falling down and getting back up.

Today, childhood is carefully managed, scheduled, and sanitized. Kids move from one tightly controlled activity to another, often with little room for imagination or autonomy. “Play” is increasingly digital, not physical. Independence is replaced by constant supervision, and confidence too often gives way to fragility. Even well-meaning parents sometimes make things worse from the sidelines.

**The Collapse of Community**

Equally troubling is the loss of community. A generation ago, most families were anchored by shared institutions—churches, civic groups, sports leagues, or neighborhood traditions. These weren't just activities; they were character factories. Kids learned responsibility, teamwork, service, and leadership by showing up and being accountable to others.

Over time, trust in these institutions eroded. Scandals, lawsuits, and polarization drove families inward. The vacuum didn't stay empty for long. It was filled by social media, video games, and online “communities” that offer connection without commitment. Kids are more connected than ever—and lonelier than ever. The places that once built character now compete with Fortnite lobbies and Snapchat threads.

**The Digital Damage**

Technology itself isn't the villain, but its grip on childhood is unprecedented. Kids no longer gather at the park; they gather online. Constant connection has replaced presence.

The consequences are visible everywhere. Childhood obesity has surged. Anxiety and depression are rising. Teachers report shrinking attention spans and increasing behavioral challenges. Today's kids have unlimited access to information—but information alone doesn't build wisdom, confidence, or character.

**What We've Lost**

We've traded independence for supervision. Free play for screen time. Community for isolation. In the process,

we've stripped kids of the very tools they need to thrive—confidence, resilience, and belonging.

It's not that kids have changed. It's the world we've handed them.

**The Way Back**

We don't need to recreate the past—but we do need to reclaim its best lessons.

That means strengthening, not dismantling, institutions that teach responsibility, service, and moral clarity. It means giving kids room to roam, to struggle, and to learn from their mistakes. It means choosing outdoor play and real friendships over another hour on a screen.

Most of all, it means remembering an old truth we've allowed ourselves to forget: **it takes a village to raise a child.**

Kids raised by a wider community—neighbors, coaches, mentors, and peers—gain accountability, belonging, and purpose. Shared responsibility doesn't just build stronger kids; it builds healthier families and communities.

And we need to stop outsourcing childhood.

We cannot hand it over to iPads, Xboxes, or TikTok. We cannot expect politicians or tech companies to fix what we've broken. Raising kids isn't

the government's job—it's ours.

Every generation worries about the next. But today's kids aren't weak by nature. They're growing up in an environment that makes strength harder to develop. If we don't change that environment, we'll keep raising kids who are more anxious, more dependent, and less prepared for life.

The solution isn't complicated. It's community. It's discipline. It's letting kids be kids again—free to play, free to fail, and free to grow.

Because if we don't fix what we've broken, we'll hand the next generation a future they're not ready to carry.

*Ken Falke is the founder of four award winning companies, two for-profits and two nonprofits. He is also a 21-year veteran of the US Navy Special Operations Explosive Ordnance Disposal community. Falke is currently the chairman of Boulder Crest Foundation, an organization focused on the teachings of posttraumatic growth. He is also the co-author of “Struggle Well: Thriving in the Aftermath of Trauma” and the author of “Lead Well: 10 Steps to Successful and Sustainable Leadership.”*

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**THE OWL SAYS....**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

\$20,000, Fauquier \$17,000. Then, Fairfax spends 82% of its budget on instruction, compared to Loudoun's shameful 64%. Minerva would conclude that Loudoun's school system is overfull of bureaucrats and bloat.

Since schools consume 50% of County tax revenues, we must examine both LCPS and County spending to understand that citizens are sinking in fiscal quicksand.

Have fun, but have antacids nearby.

**The Owl**

Minerva's symbol is the owl.

**TRADING CARDS**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

excitement while letting students see and hear directly from the people who grow their food right here in Loudoun."

This year's lineup of farmers is as diverse as the county itself:

- Farmer Brandon: Terra Farms
- Farmer Dave: Planetary Farms
- Farmer Eliza: Savanna Institute
- Farmer Elly: Pepper Goose Farm
- Farmer John: Rock Croft Farm
- Farmers Katie and Corinne: Beaux Reves Equestrian
- Farmer Lana: Wrens Rest Gardens
- Farmers Naomi and Sydney: Future Farmers of America

Elizabeth Frimpong of LCPS School Nutrition Services said, "School meals are a great opportunity to educate beyond the cafeteria. Students are excited to collect the cards, watch the videos, and recognize the farmers who help provide fresh, local food for our community."

The program goes beyond

**CONSULTANT OUTLINES**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

Council Member Kevin Wright said the rates are not terrible "especially when you look at the other towns." He added, "I hate to say it, but the sooner we start collecting what we are supposed to be collecting—the better off we're going to be."

CIPs and their associated costs are inherently subject to change.

(Hence, "wise as an owl.") The bird represented studious observation and deep thought, but it remained generally silent.

I guess I have failed the Owl Test of reticence.

*Charlie Houston and his wife live on a small horse farm south of Waterford. His interest in classical mythology comes from his father, who retired from a law career to become a university Professor of the Classics. Houston notes that classic myths were tangible part of ancient Hellenic life, which became the foundation of western civilization.*

fun—it's a sneak peek into the many paths a career in agriculture can take. Some farmers come from generations of farming families, while others swapped different careers to follow their passion for growing food locally.

Chris Blosser of Loudoun Economic Development added, "Agriculture today is technology-driven, entrepreneurial, and deeply connected to sustainability. By introducing students to farmers with diverse backgrounds and experiences, we're planting seeds early and showing kids there are many ways to build a future in agriculture right here in Loudoun."

As a special bonus, this year's featured farmers will be recognized during halftime of the April 25 Loudoun United FC match. Fans can meet the farmers and get autographs on their trading cards—a home run for both students and families.

For more about the farmers and the program, visit LoudounFarms.org.

Long-term municipal estimates—particularly over a 10-year horizon—are not fixed and may evolve due to shifting community needs, regulatory changes, and advancements in technology that could reduce future costs.

The estimates for capital improvement projects do not factor in potential grant funding and are instead based on loan financing.

**POWER LINES**, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"The community has come together in a way I don't think Loudoun's ever seen before," said Victor Block, Loudoun Valley Estates HOA President, speaking at the March 17 meeting. "Thousands of families, people who have never attended a public meeting, never written a public comment, never spoken in public showed up."

Before the public comment session on March 17, Supervisor Koran Saines (D-Sterling) reminded the SCC would make the decision about the project, not the BOS.

"The Board has no authority to approve or deny the project. That holds with the State Corporation Commission," Saines said. "All of us on this dais continue to support undergrounding transmission routes, as we have from day one. Now [an undergrounding] bill is in front of the governor. She has 30 days to sign the bill, veto the bill, ... or make amendments and edits and send it back to the General Assembly for more discussion."

The bill Saines referred to is HB1487. If signed, it will allow up to four qualifying transmission line projects "to be constructed in whole or in part underground as part of the pilot program for underground transmission lines and to provide an expedited review of any such application."

Block thanked the Board for its support and argued that the Dominion had conducted itself improperly and had manipulated the situation. Loudoun County resident Madison Taggart agreed.

"As Dominion's own records show, this timeline has been manufactured. Jacob Rosenberg, Dominion's project lead, testified under oath that Golden to Mars was 'the most complex segment' of their entire portfolio. He explained how that complexity 'informed the order of operations,'" Taggart said. "Translate that: Dominion knew this segment was hard, and they filed it last on purpose."

Taggart said that Dominion had manufactured a "crisis" that left the company insufficient time to explore undergrounding the lines. Taggart said that Dominion could have filed earlier to have the project approved and would have had more time to conduct underground feasibility studies.

"Instead, they created artificial urgency by filing last. Then, pointed to that urgency as a reason to skip underground," Taggart said. "That's not engineering; that's a manufactured crisis."

Block urged the Board not to allow any above ground power lines because it would validate Dominion's alleged manipulation.

"The way Dominion has conducted themselves throughout this process is wrong, and

this county cannot signal that that's acceptable. Not for this project, not for the next one," Block said.

Loudoun Valley Estates resident Bryan Turner asked the Board to accept an easement that could help protect Loudoun Valley Estates. Easements are created when an individual gives someone else the right to use their property in a defined way.

"Our community is prepared to do its part. We will support the county by entering into the necessary easements," Turner said. "We respectfully ask the board to move forward with securing all eight easements and ensure that Loudoun County, not outside interests retain control over whether power lines go underground or do not go in at all."

Former Virginia Delegate Geary Higgins urged the Board to construct a coherent energy policy. He said if the BOS and the state itself failed to adopt a coherent policy, they would deal with this same problem "over and over again".

"We don't have a coherent energy policy. As a result, we've been relying on renewables, which has caused us to be the largest state importing power in the nation at 40%," Higgins said. "All these wires that are being strung all over the place are being strung to bring power to Virginia because we don't generate our own power."

In addition to speakers addressing the transmission line project, multiple public speakers at the March 17 meeting addressed upcoming proposed policy changes to Western Loudoun rural zoning policies.

Tia Earman spoke on behalf of the Piedmont Environmental Council about how the upcoming changes might impact those living on gravel roads. She said that the changes might allow breweries to put unrealistic traffic burdens on gravel roads as breweries will be allowed to host unlimited events with unlimited guests.

Bridgette Smith of Loudoun County Wineries and Wine Growers Association encouraged the BOS to support the proposed changes that would allow private parties and events to be classified as an accessory use for craft beverage businesses. This would mean the events would not face limitations provided they are consistent with Virginia's alcohol laws.

"Private parties and events are not a side business for Loudoun's craft beverage producers. They're essential to how we sell wine," Smith said. "Between 80 and 85% of craft beverage businesses in Western Loudoun have private events space for weddings and corporate gatherings, and 60-65% hold ticketed events."

Loudoun County resident Nancy Deliso agreed.

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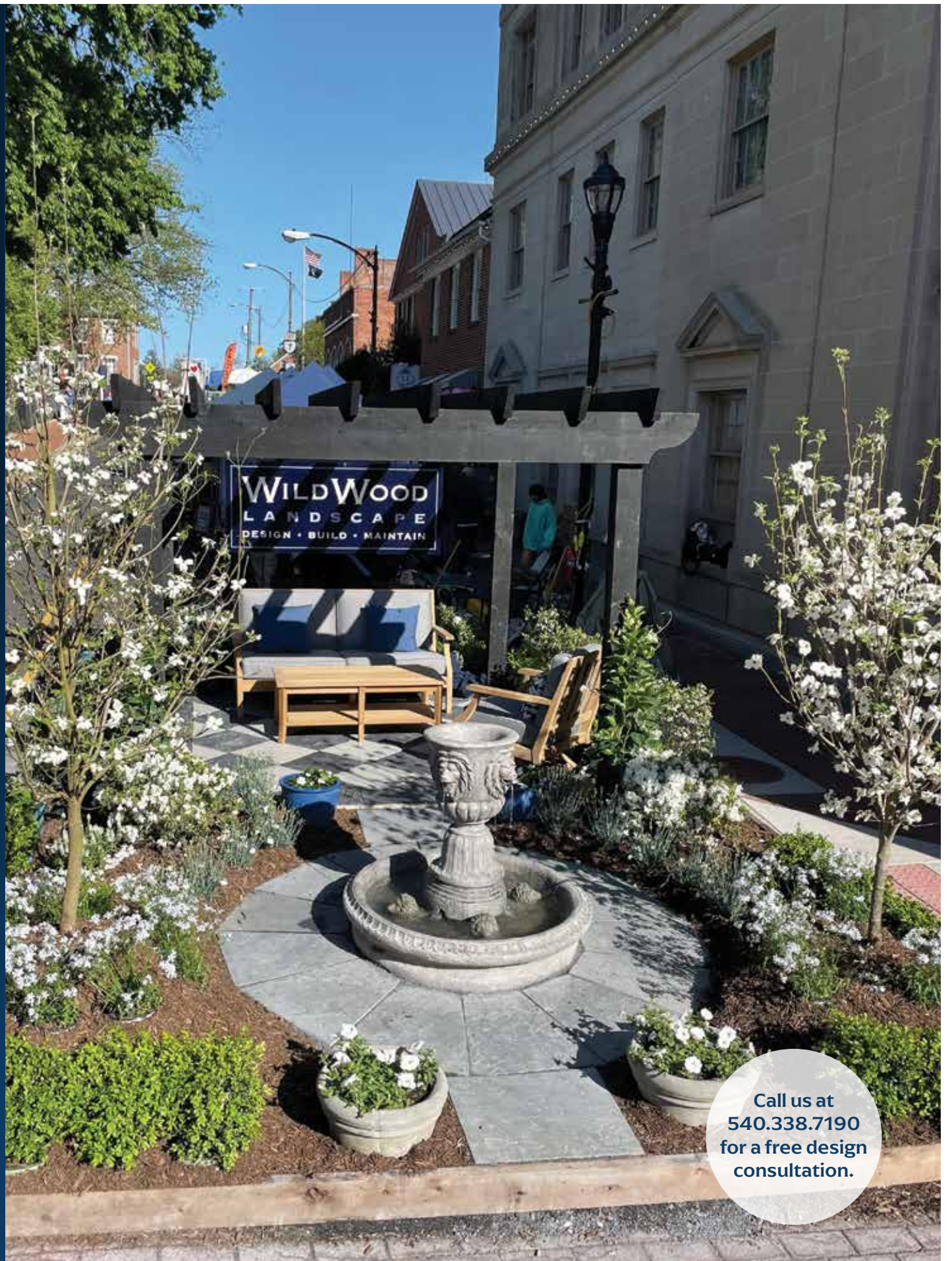


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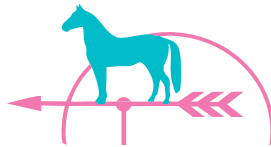
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