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Nov.3 is Election Day
Mayoral and Town Council Candidates on Purcellville's Future
Page 10

"Temporary" Turbines Could Run Until 2040 as Sterling Residents Want Answers

BY VALERIE CURY

GOVERNMENT

For nearly too long, Sterling residents living near Vantage Data Centers' VA2 campus have complained about a persistent high-pitched noise, questioned the effects of the facility's emissions on their health and asked why an on-site natural gas power plant was allowed to begin operating so close to their homes.

On Aug. 24, many of those residents came to Park View High School looking for answers.

Supervisor Koran Saines (D-Sterling) called the town hall, bringing together representatives from Loudoun County, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and Vantage Data Centers for more than two hours of questions from residents.



The 800,000-square-foot Vantage facility on Glenn Drive is unlike any other data center operating in Virginia. Rather than receiving its primary power from the electric grid, it is powered by eight on-site natural gas turbines, generally with seven operating at a time.

What was described as temporary power, however, could remain in place for years.

Misty Allen, Vantage's vice president of public policy for North America, told residents the facility currently sits in "Batch 11" of Dominion Energy's interconnection queue.

"If nothing changes over the next couple of years," she said, "we will need to have the power supply from the temporary turbines until approximately 2040."

That drew concern from residents who have already spent too much time listening to what they describe as a persistent whine that can be heard inside and outside their homes.

Saines began the meeting by explaining how the facility reached this point.

The data center itself was a by-right use. In March 2023, the Board of Supervisors approved an application allowing greater density on the property. According to Saines, after that vote Vantage learned that Dominion would not be able to provide grid power for several years.

Vantage subsequently submitted a revised site plan that included an expanded equipment yard, utility equipment and a natural gas facility. County staff administratively approved the change in October 2023.

"At no point was the board or myself, or even those who were attending community meetings, made aware of this administrative change," Saines said.

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VOTED BEST OF LOUDOUN

The Politics Behind Purcellville's "Non-Partisan" PAC

BY VALERIE CURY

OPINION

Citizens for Purcellville describes itself as a political action committee formed to "research and disseminate factual information about local issues and candidates" so voters can make informed decisions.

It also says it is "not aligned or affiliated with any particular candidate or campaign."

Those are important representations from an organization seeking to influence voters. They create a standard against which its own words and political activity should be measured.

Citizens for Purcellville was organized in June 2025 and is led by Director Josh Shields, a supporter of mayoral candidate Erin Rayner and a regular presence at Purcellville Town Council meetings. The *Blue Ridge Leader* has repeatedly witnessed Shields yelling, using profanity and participating in disruptions during council meetings.

Members of the PAC also maintain a significant presence across multiple Facebook pages and groups, including the private Facebook group "Purcellville Matters Uncensored," which was started by developer Sam Chapman. Those platforms provide another avenue for many of the same political messages and allegations that appear in Purcellville's ongoing political debate.

The organization's website, under a section titled "Troubling Times," makes a series of serious accusations against Mayor Chris Bertaut and members of the Town Council majority. It says Bertaut's leadership has caused "division and distrust," and promises future articles about what it calls the "misdeeds of certain council members."

The question is whether those accusations withstand the same factual scrutiny the PAC promises its readers.

The Nett Removal Proceeding

The PAC states that Vice Mayor Carl "Ben" Nett "was found by a jury to have committed

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Purcellville's 23rd Annual Tag Sale Returns Oct. 10—Rain or Shine

Communitywide Event Brings a Day of Treasure Hunting, Shopping and Exploring Purcellville

Clear out the closets, search the attic and get ready to hunt for treasures. Seller registration is open through Monday, Sept. 21, at PurcellvilleVaTagSale.com.

On Saturday, Oct. 10, Purcellville becomes one giant treasure hunt as the 23rd Annual Purcellville Tag Sale returns—rain or shine— or a day of bargain hunting, vintage finds, antiques, collectibles and those completely unexpected discoveries that make the hunt half the fun.

For more than two decades, the Tag Sale has brought sellers, shoppers, families and visitors together for one of Purcellville's most anticipated fall traditions. Driveways, yards and gathering spots across the community become miniature marketplaces as shoppers crisscross town searching for the next great find.

Furniture, artwork, toys, clothing, home decor, antiques, handcrafted pieces, collectibles—and probably a few things nobody knew they needed until they saw them—are all part of the adventure.

"There's an excitement to the Tag Sale that you really can't recreate," said organizer Silas Redd, owner of Nostalgia Boutique and Mister on Main. "You start the morning thinking you're looking for one thing, and by the end of the day you've discovered something you never expected, visited a shop you've never been in and probably met a few new people along the way. That's what makes this event so much fun and why people come back year after year."

The Tag Sale has grown well beyond the traditional neighborhood yard sale. It now draws shoppers from across Loudoun County and the surrounding region, many of whom spend the day exploring Purcellville's neighborhoods, downtown shops, restaurants and other local businesses.

For sellers, the event is an opportunity to clear out unused items, make some extra money and put those belongings into the hands of someone who can give them a new life. For shoppers, it is the thrill of the hunt—and the possibility that the next stop could hold the find of the day.

The first 40 registered participants will be featured on the printed Tag Sale map distributed to shoppers, helping visitors plan their routes and find participating sellers throughout the community.

"The Tag Sale really captures the spirit of Purcellville," Redd said. "It brings people outside, gets them talking to one another and introduces visitors to businesses and parts of town they may not have discovered before. Whether you're selling, shopping or just coming out to see what you can find, there's a place for everyone."

The 23rd Annual Purcellville Tag Sale is made possible with the generous support of sponsors Bank of Clarke and WildWood Landscape, whose support helps continue a tradition that has become part of Purcellville's fall calendar.

Organizers also extend a special thank you to Virginia Montessori Academy for its support and assistance with this year's event.

The Tag Sale will be held Saturday, Oct. 10, rain or shine. For information or additional details, text Silas Redd at 540-751-8252 or email ShopAtNostalgia@gmail.com.

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The Coolest Place I Almost Didn't Discover

BY RIA NARAYAN

Apparently, I used to take 20 minute showers. I mean, doesn't everybody? And if they don't, they should, right? Well, not according to Mommy Dearest. She'd constantly hound me for using all of Loudoun County's water supply.


RIA NARAYAN

So I decided to challenge her, and for that I needed to do a little digging.

Turns out, Loudoun's water comes from the Potomac River and Goose Creek, and when Loudoun needs some backup, there's Beaverdam Reservoir. And would you believe it? Beaverdam Reservoir has been around since good ol' 1972, but its brand new Reservoir Park opened in 2024.

Never heard of it? Yeah, me neither, until two years ago when my mom was bragging to other parents about the new park being built right here in our neck of the woods. At the time, no biggie. I was not invested. I had indoor playgrounds to go to and, honestly, places to be.

Fast forward two summers of kayaking, hiking and enjoying nature while my mom reminds me of my growing list of accomplishments apparently required by age 9. Math guru? Python coder? Luckily, I discovered another benefit to kayaking. When she gets going, I just paddle ridiculously loud and tune out the bologna. Trust me, she gets it, and I'm one smart cookie.

Now, let's get back to how Beaverdam Reservoir, located between Evergreen Mills Road and Northstar Boulevard, became the coolest place around town I almost didn't discover. But here's the kicker. Beaverdam Reservoir is part of Loudoun's drinking water system.

And here I was, Princess Ria, ahem, draining my favorite new hangout's water.

My heart sank.

The shame. Oh, and letting Mom win.

Sooo I cut my showers short and pretended like it was my idea anyway. Being that I now saved Loudoun County's drinking water all by myself, hold the applause, I could now go enjoy my new hidden getaway.

The park is surrounded by oak and hickory trees, beautiful trails and two waterfront boardwalks. But on a hot August day, my vote is grabbing a life vest and going kayaking, canoeing or stand up paddleboarding.

Shout out to Independence High School because the last time I went kayaking, I saw a rowing team for the first time. I thought they were uber cool until my mom awkwardly paddled our kayak toward the coach to applaud him and ask if I could join.

We couldn't look normal after that.

But maybe now I'll become that champion rower, math genius, come Python super coder who predicted her life waaaay early.

Seriously, though, add in the wildlife, from bald eagles above the water to carp and catfish below, and channeling my rising fourth grade wisdom, I knew I was onto something.

While I originally came here for a fun place to paddle and chill out, I discovered this wasn't just a special place for kids. Everyone gets to enjoy it, and somehow we get to share it with all this wildlife too!

So let's rewind. Remember, this beautiful place is also part of Loudoun's water system.

Now, would you fall to the floor if I told you there is a proposal for 12 data center buildings on about 325 acres nearby? Then I learned something that really got my attention. The developer's own website says the entire property is in something called a Reservoir Protection Area.

To be fair, the developers say they have a plan. They say they'll treat stormwater on the property and keep checking the water before and after they build. But I still have one pretty big question. Should we really build something THAT big inside a Reservoir Protection Area? And how do we make sure places like Beaverdam stay protected?

Because remember, we're talking about, umm... hello, drinking water.

So here is my take. Beaverdam shows what Loudoun can preserve and create for families. But it also made me wonder if what we build today changes what kids like me get to enjoy tomorrow.

Besides, I can now add fortune teller to my growing resume, and that makes me wonder: Will Beaverdam Reservoir still be what it is today for the kids of tomorrow, or for me when I'm an adult?

Will we still have places like this?

No beavers were harmed in the making of this article, but I can't speak for their future.

Ria Narayan may only be 9, which means she doesn't have a driver's license or a vote, but that hasn't stopped her from having something to say. With plenty of questions, plenty of curiosity and her own point of view, Ria's Loudoun Lens shares Loudoun as she sees it.

New Town Manager Reverses Nett Reinstatement Days After Taking Office

BY VALERIE CURY

The year-long battle over the reinstatement of Purcellville Vice Mayor Carl Benjamin "Ben" Nett has taken yet another turn.

Less than two weeks after former Interim Town Manager Anthony Sabio ordered the Town to implement a unanimous Employee Grievance Panel decision reinstating Nett to his job with back pay and benefits, newly appointed Interim Town Manager Michael Rogers reversed that directive.

GOVERNMENT

Rogers became interim town manager Aug. 3. Ten days later, on Aug. 13, he issued a one-page order declaring that Sabio lacked authority to act and directing Town employees to take no action to implement the Grievance Panel's decision.

"Accordingly, the August 1 directive is hereby rescinded, and no action shall be taken to implement the Grievance Panel's decision," Rogers wrote. "Therefore, Carl Benjamin Nett is not reinstated as an employee of the Town of Purcellville."

The reversal is the latest development in a case that began with Nett's termination from the Purcellville Police Department, proceeded through an evidentiary grievance hearing and a unanimous 21-page decision clearing him of the allegations used to terminate him, and has since become entangled in litigation over competing interpretations of Virginia law.

What began as an employee grievance has become something much larger: a continuing legal and political battle over whether the Panel's order reinstating Nett will ever be implemented.

What Sabio Actually Decided

The distinction between the Grievance Panel's decision and Sabio's Aug. 1 determination is critical.

Sabio did not rehear Nett's case. He did not independently decide whether Nett should have been terminated.

The Grievance Panel had already decided those questions.

After an evidentiary hearing, the independent three-member Panel unanimously found that Nett did not engage in the behavior alleged by the Town, did not commit misconduct and did not violate the law. It reversed his termination and ordered him reinstated to his former position with back pay, applicable benefits and qualifying attorney's fees.

Sabio addressed a narrower administrative question: whether the relief awarded by the Panel was consistent with the Town's written personnel and grievance policies.

Virginia Code §15.2-1507 provides that grievance panel decisions are final and binding and assigns the chief administrative officer responsibility for determining whether the relief granted is consistent with written policy, unless that official had direct personal involvement in the events giving rise to the grievance.

Sabio emphasized that he had none.

"I was not employed by, appointed to, or acting on behalf of the Town of Purcellville during the investigation, employment action, grievance filing, panel-selection process, evidentiary hearing, or issuance of the Panel Decision," Sabio wrote.

After reviewing the Town's Employee Handbook and grievance procedure, the Panel decision, and the pending enforcement action, Sabio determined that the relief awarded by the Panel was consistent with the Town's written personnel and grievance policies.

Effective at 8:45 p.m. Aug. 1, Sabio ordered Nett restored to Town employment.

Council Member Erin Rayner met The Bobb Group at a conference before the Town retained the firm to recommend an interim town manager. The firm presented Michael Rogers as its sole candidate. He took office Aug. 3.

Ten days later, Rogers rescinded Sabio's directive.

Special Prosecutor Steps In

Between those two actions came an Aug. 11 letter from Stafford County Commonwealth's Attorney Eric Olsen, serving as special prosecutor in matters involving Nett.

Olsen wrote Town Attorney Robert Sproul that he had learned that Sabio, "as he departed his role as Interim Town Manager," had attempted to reverse an earlier determination Olsen made concerning Nett's grievance.

Olsen asserted that the Town's grievance procedure did not comply with Virginia law, that the Panel therefore lacked authority to hear the grievance and that its decision was a nullity.

That assertion stands in contrast to the history of the Town's grievance procedure and the process used in Nett's case.

The Employee Handbook containing the

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Power to the People

BY CHARLIE HOUSTON

OPINION

Most of us do not remember this slogan from the late 1960s counterculture days. This was a dark time for the country, and "Power to the People" became a slogan for protesters against the Vietnam War, "the system," and "the Man."

There were many iconic photographs of a protester raising a clenched fist and holding a sign. Protesting males usually had long hair or an Afro; women had lank hair and wore uber-casual clothing.

It's been years since I've heard that slogan, but now, consider "Power to the People" literally—and not in anger—as the political philosophy we call "Populism."

Ancient History

In classical Athens, power rested with male citizens, who could vote directly on laws, wars and more. Today, that concept of direct democracy can be seen in some parts of New England and especially in the very rural Swiss canton of Appenzell.

While direct democracy would seem to be pure populism, it wasn't. Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle believed that direct democracy could become mob rule when the populace was sufficiently stirred up by bad actors.

Very ancient Rome was ruled by monarchs—kings. Later, in its classical era, government was anti-monarchial, with authority vested in two consuls. It changed again during the Roman Empire, when various Caesars ruled.

Notably, in both Athens and Rome, ambitious politicians would demagogue the citizenry and manipulate the resulting rage to their own ends. Sound familiar?

Our Founding Fathers

Jefferson, Madison et al feared direct democracy, which they felt could lead to mob rule. Their answer? Create a Republic with many checks and balances.

I fear that today, people don't realize their genius.

Populism Perverted

Louisiana's notorious politician, the late Huey Long, linked a populist message with his authoritarian rule. Today we hear some politicians using populism as a rationale for "seizing the means of production." That phrase is classical Marxism, and we need to beware of it. Other politicians speak of giving power to "the working class," but seem to

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Reasons to Vote for Erin Rayner, Kevin Wright and Their Team

LETTER

Dear Editor:

I had planned to let the blank space beneath this headline speak for itself. But on further consideration, perhaps the reasons deserve to be spelled out:

These are my opinions and observations.

Continued chaos at Town Hall.

A ballooning Town budget—with plenty of credit taken for Town accomplishments, but plenty of blame directed elsewhere when it comes time to explain the costs.

More taxpayer dollars consumed by legal disputes instead of finding ways to work through disagreements and govern.

Blame the former four-term mayor, even though during his tenure the Town's approximately $61 million debt was reduced by roughly $10 million.

Bigger government. Bigger spending. Take the credit. Blame others.

Let the county roll right over us.

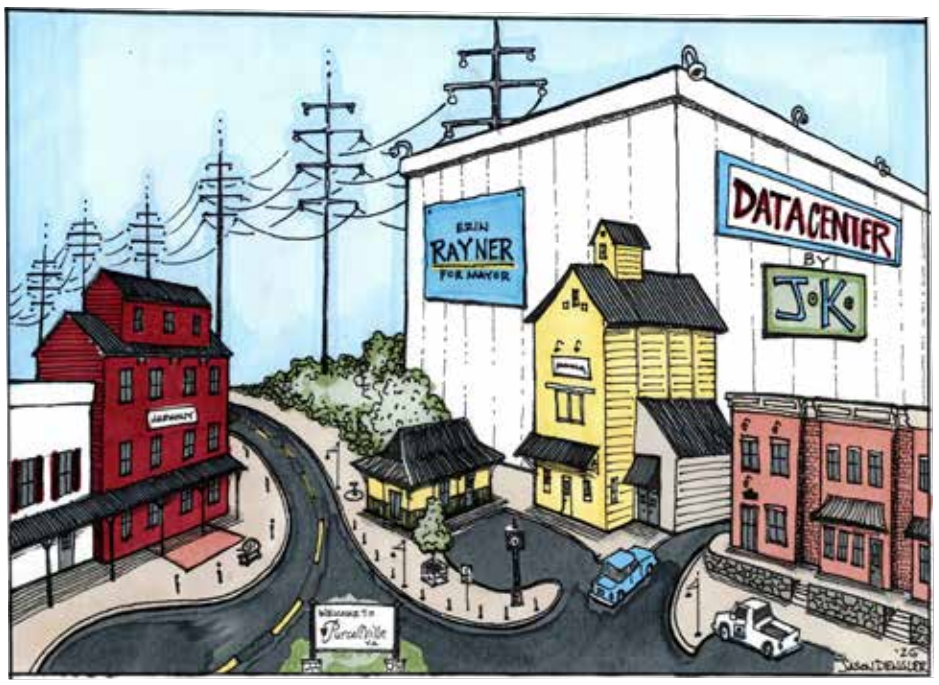
More spending and fewer questions about who ultimately pays the bill.

Annexations and concessions to developers that could bring more growth and density to Purcellville.

Zoning changes that could threaten the small-town character generations of residents have worked to preserve.

More manufactured urgency to justify higher taxes.

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Getting Old Doesn't Give You a License to Be Rude

BY KEN FALKE

OPINION

I was recently standing in a local grocery store when I overheard something that stuck with me.

An older woman was talking to what appeared to be her adult daughter. At one point, the woman said, quite matter-of-factly, "I don't give a s**t what people think."

I've heard older people say some version of this many times. It has almost become a cultural cliché: *I'm old. I've earned the right to say whatever I want. I don't care what anybody thinks.*

But hearing it in a crowded grocery store made me stop and think. When did getting older become an excuse for becoming rude?

Somewhere along the way, we began confusing getting older with earning the right to disregard everyone around us. We excuse the short temper, cutting remark, condescending tone and unnecessary criticism with a shrug: *That's just the way she is.* Or, *He's earned the right to say whatever he wants.* They haven't!

Getting old may bring gray hair, slower steps, a few more aches and pains and perhaps a lower tolerance for foolishness. It may give you decades of experience and a lifetime of stories. But it does not give you permission to treat other people badly.

In fact, I would argue the opposite. The longer we live, the more responsibility we have to demonstrate the character we spent a lifetime developing.

I was reminded of that recently while reading *Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi. It is a beautifully written novel, and I highly recommend it. At its heart is Theo, an older man who moves through a community with remarkable warmth, generosity and curiosity. Through seemingly small acts of kindness, he changes the lives of people around him.

That is the lesson I took from the book: age can make us smaller, more cynical and entitled—or it can make us kinder, wiser, and more generous.

Theo reminds us that getting older is not about caring less about other people. It can be about caring more. There is an enormous difference between not living your life for other people's approval and not caring how you treat other people. One is freedom; the other is selfishness.

Reputation is not what we say about ourselves. It is what other people experience

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Publisher & Editor
Valerie Cury

Creative Department
Pam Owens, Layout/Design

Cartoonist
Chip Beck

Advertising
Sabine Bibb
SabineBibb@gmail.com 571-437-9953

Tonya Harding
THarding455@gmail.com 703-314-5200

Boo Bennett
BRLBooBennett@gmail.com 571-508-9895

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Editorial
(Letters to the Editor & Press Releases)
Editor@BlueRidgeLeader.com

Hot News Tips
Valerie Cury
Email: Editor@BlueRidgeLeader.com
Phone: 703-943-8806

Mailing Address
PO Box 325
Purcellville, VA 20134-0325

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Quit, Flip, or Get Destroyed

BY PURCELLVILLE VICE MAYOR BEN NETT

OPINION

Susan Khalil has resigned from the Purcellville Town Council, citing what she described as the extraordinary hostility and nastiness of the political opposition—and the toll that environment has taken on her health, personal life, and professional life.

I'm disappointed by Susan's decision, but I understand it.

I've highlighted much of the behavior she referenced in compilation videos posted to my YouTube channel, Alive With Ben Nett.

In my view, the conduct speaks for itself: rudeness, profanity, personal attacks, vulgar gestures, inflammatory accusations, and the repeated circulation of disproven allegations. Much of the same behavior continues online, where the same political faction has built and populated social-media platforms devoted to Purcellville politics.

Until recently, that faction enjoyed a monopoly on Purcellville's social-media conversation. There is a simple reason for that. Many of us have jobs, families, responsibilities, and lives outside local politics. We have little interest in spending our evenings publicly insulting neighbors because we disagree about small-town government.

Why would we?

Purcellville holds elections every two years, with enough seats regularly coming before voters to change the direction of the Town if residents are dissatisfied. Elections are supposed to resolve political disagreements.

But elections require patience—and, more importantly, accepting the results.

What Is This Really About?

In my view, the central issue underlying much of Purcellville's political conflict is development.

The pro-development faction lost important political ground in the 2024 election. I believe the results reflected something fairly straightforward: many Purcellville residents do not want the Town annexing additional land so that large-scale commercial and industrial development can gain access to Town infrastructure, including wastewater capacity and already-strained water resources.

That concern necessarily includes the possibility of future data-center development. Once land is annexed and development rights are established, decisions made today can be extremely difficult to reverse tomorrow.

And the financial stakes are enormous.

Land in Loudoun County can be extraordinarily valuable. What I initially regarded as an ordinary disagreement over small-town policy increasingly looked to me like a political battle involving potentially hundreds of millions—or even billions—of dollars in future development value.

That kind of money creates powerful incentives.

It also raises legitimate questions about the relationship among developers, landowners, political campaigns, elected officials, and the institutions responsible for informing the public.

Susan Khalil Is Not the First

Susan Khalil is not the first elected member of the Purcellville Town Council to decide that public service was simply no longer worth the personal cost. Two council members before her also resigned. One eventually moved out of Town.

Two other council members who faced intense political pressure remained in office but dramatically changed course. This wasn't simply a matter of reconsidering one or two issues. In my view, their positions shifted fundamentally from the platforms on which they had campaigned and been elected.

That history has taught Purcellville's most aggressive political activists an unfortunate lesson: you do not necessarily have to defeat someone at the ballot box to defeat them politically.

Instead, you can attempt to make public service unbearable.

Disrupt public meetings. Attack relentlessly. Flood social media. Target reputations. Pressure families and employers. Repeat allegations until people assume they must be true.

Eventually, some people quit.

Others surrender.

Others change sides.

I Haven't

Those tactics have not worked on me.

I have endured hateful comments at public meetings, widespread attacks on social media, anonymous threats, administrative proceedings, termination from my police position, criminal charges, and an extraordinary level of legal and political conflict for such a small town.

I dispute the allegations against me and maintain my innocence.

I also believe the actions taken against me form part of a much larger pattern of politically motivated misconduct.

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Purcellville Is More Than a Few Blocks of North 21st Street

BY RONALD B. RISE

OPINION

Councilmember Erin Rayner recently wrote that Purcellville's downtown is "waiting" and needs to be brought back. I agree that our historic downtown should remain strong, attractive and economically healthy. Where I disagree is with the premise that a few blocks of North 21st Street represent a neglected center of town waiting for government to rescue it.

Walk North 21st Street and you will certainly see vacancies and properties with redevelopment potential. But keep walking.

You will also see Nichols Hardware, a Purcellville institution serving this community since 1914; Magnolias at the Mill; BIA Kitchen; Monk's BBQ; Tipped Cow Creamery; It's Bazaar on 21st Street; Southern States; and other businesses and organizations whose owners have invested their money, employ people, attract customers and contribute to Purcellville every day.

Those businesses deserve recognition before their neighborhood is characterized primarily by empty storefronts and buildings "waiting years for someone to care about them again."

North 21st Street is important. It is not, however, the whole of downtown, and it certainly is not the whole of Purcellville.

Purcellville's existing Downtown Master Plan understood that distinction. The 2005 plan looked beyond a single street and addressed the Depot area, the commercial area between 21st Street and Hatcher Avenue, Main Street east and west of 21st Street, and the Town Hall/Tear Drop area. It identified East and West Main Street as principal gateway corridors into downtown. That plan remains identified by the Town as part of Purcellville's comprehensive planning framework today.

That raises a question residents and business owners should ask before the Town spends another dollar on a new downtown master plan:

What, specifically, is broken in the plan we already have?

This is not a small question. Town records show that consultant quotes submitted for a proposed new Historic Downtown Master Plan ranged from $100,000 to $350,000. Before existing businesses and residents are asked to fund a six-figure planning exercise, the Town should identify what recommendations in the existing plan no longer work, what measurable problem a new plan will solve, and why those issues cannot be addressed by updating the portions that actually need updating.

Planning is not free. Every dollar spent studying downtown is a dollar collected from taxpayers or unavailable for another public need. A new plan may ultimately be justified, but "we need a new master plan" should be the conclusion of an analysis, not the starting assumption.

The same care should apply when discussing zoning.

Rayner wrote that the recently adopted zoning ordinance "downzoned" parts of downtown and now allows no more than two apartments per building. That description leaves out an important part of the zoning history.

Under the former ordinance, an apartment dwelling was permitted in the C-4 and MC districts, but a multiple-family dwelling was not. The former ordinance defined a multiple-family dwelling as a building designed for or occupied by three or more independent families. Read together, those provisions effectively limited a building in those districts to no more than two dwelling units.

The new ordinance did not invent that limitation. It made it clear.

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Chris Bertaut

CANDIDATE FOR MAYOR

Chris Bertaut moved to Purcellville with his family 22 years ago, drawn to its small-town character, close-knit community and youth sports. A widower and father of two Loudoun Valley High School graduates, Bertaut enjoys time with his sons, who are helping him sharpen his skills in the kitchen, while Dad still comes in handy when a car needs attention or something needs fixing—and you might just find him at the grocery store at 10 p.m. picking up something for their next meal.

He works in telecommunications and information technology. He has been a Boy Scout leader, a Sunday School secretary and his HOA President. He has served on the Town's Economic Development Advisory Committee and continues to serve on the Planning Commission. Bertaut is also on the Planning Coordination Advisory Committee for the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, and represents Purcellville on the Town's Association of Northern Virginia. Bertaut was elected to Town Council in 2020 and has served as mayor since 2025.

Blue Ridge Leader: What are your three top priorities for the Town of Purcellville?

Chris Bertaut: My priorities are effective and responsible government, protecting Purcellville's small-town character, and ensuring fiscal discipline and operational efficiency.

First, I will restore stability, professionalism and respect for the rule of law to Town government. Our democratic process depends on respecting lawful decisions, even when we disagree.

Since the 2024 election, disruption, cursing and litigation by my opponent and her supporters have divided our community, distracted Town staff and imposed substantial legal costs on taxpayers. I will continue moving Purcellville forward with civility, stability and mutual respect.

I will focus on serving residents and encourage broader participation on Town committees. Good government should reflect the entire community, not the loudest voices.

Second, I will continue to protect Purcellville's character. Our Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance reflect our community's vision. I will oppose growth inconsistent with them while supporting economic development that strengthens our commercial base without sacrificing that vision.

I will continue encouraging developers to bring proposals before the public early. Residents deserve a voice in development decisions—no backroom deals. I receive no campaign contributions from developers; my opponent has.

Third, I will continue making Town government more efficient and financially sustainable by streamlining operations, strengthening accountability, supporting professional administration and right-sizing the budget while protecting essential services.

Purcellville needs leadership that brings people together, respects the law, protects our community and remembers that every dollar belongs to taxpayers. That is the standard I uphold.

BRL: Under what circumstances would you support annexing land into the Town of Purcellville?

CB: We must honor Purcellville's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance, which reflect years of public input and a clear community vision: preserve our small-town character, sustain what we have and do not expand simply for growth.

I do not support annexation as a tool to "control" land use. Annexation allows significantly greater density and development, increasing demands on water and sewer systems, roads, staff and public safety, while one-time utility connection fees do not cover long-term costs.

One annexation brought Purcellville approximately $12 million in one-time utility connection fees, yet did little to reduce long-term debt or offset ongoing Town costs.

On my eighth day as mayor, I voted to end the Valley Commerce Center annexation request, which sought to bring approximately 117 acres into Purcellville for a 1.2-million-square-foot industrial development.

Residents had opposed annexing the property for more than a decade. My opponent voted against ending the annexation request, later did not oppose the County's rezoning, and voted against removing the Northern Collector Road from the Town-Wide Transportation Plan.

Now that the County has rezoned the property, development and uses are limited by its private water supply to 45,000 gallons per day. I will not support annexation to provide Town utilities and enable greater density or intensity. I ask my opponent to make the same commitment.

Purcellville should not enable urban development to creep west. Growth outside our boundaries is not a reason to move them.

Annexation must meet a high bar: a compelling public benefit, such as parkland, with long-term costs fully addressed—not passed to our residents.

Annexation should be the exception, not a growth strategy.

BRL: How important is the Town's Zoning Ordinance, and are there changes you would like to see?

CB: The Zoning Ordinance is one of our most important tools for protecting Purcellville's future. The Comprehensive Plan reflects the community's vision; the Zoning Ordinance gives that vision force by determining what can be built, where and at what density.

I worked on rewriting our Zoning Ordinance and voted to enact it. My opponent voted against it. My responsibility is to Purcellville residents, not those seeking greater density.

In the R-3 residential district, duplexes now require a Special Use Permit, ensuring case-by-case consideration and a public hearing where neighbors can weigh in before greater density is introduced.

Purcellville's historic downtown is small, with narrow streets and limited parking. We maintained the 2½-story height limit and two residential units per building because revitalization does not require sacrificing downtown character.

Commercial rezoning at the Main Street/East Colonial Highway traffic circle would allow more intensive development, increasing traffic and infrastructure needs in an already congested area and potentially requiring a traffic signal on the Southern Collector Road.

I am open to changes that clearly benefit the Town, but I will not rewrite the ordinance to accommodate individual proposals or create greater density simply because someone requests it.

I oppose data centers in Purcellville and western Loudoun. An undeveloped 18-acre property near St. Francis Court has been zoned PD-GI since 1993, making data centers a by-right use. The Board of Supervisors can change that zoning but has not.

A majority of the Board, including our Supervisor, recently voted to rezone the Valley Commerce Center property for intensive industrial development, despite its inconsistency with the County's Comprehensive Plan and strong resident opposition.

Protecting western Loudoun means honoring the community's vision in land-use decisions. I will continue to oppose data centers, inappropriate industrial development, and the expansion of Purcellville's boundaries—developments that threaten the town's small-town character.

BRL: Do you believe the Town has made sufficient investments in utility infrastructure over the past several years? What improvements would you prioritize moving forward?

CB: Yes. Purcellville has made substantial investments in water and wastewater infrastructure, and the work continues.

Increasing the Town's potable-water storage capacity by almost 30% without new debt is a major accomplishment. Beginning less than six years ago and expected to be completed this year, the project strengthens our water system as availability becomes a growing concern.

The Town also funded improvements to Hirst Reservoir, the top-ranked reservoir priority, and advanced Phase 1 of replacing approximately 5,000 feet of cast-iron water main. Both projects began under Mayor Kwasi Fraser's leadership, with construction continuing after he left office.

Purcellville also replaced water and sewer lines along 21st Street less than a decade ago and protected a future water resource on the Aberdeen property. With proper maintenance and responsible growth, these investments will serve residents for decades.

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Erin Rayner

CANDIDATE FOR MAYOR

Erin Rayner has lived in Purcellville for nine years with her husband, Kristian, their two daughters, and doodle Wilson. She has served on Town Council for almost five years, including one year as Vice Mayor. Rayner's community service includes Virginia Regional Transit, the Committee for Dulles, the Purcellville Business Association, and the Purcellville Rescue Squad.

She is also a founding member of the Purcellville Main Street Organization, a former president of the Mountain View Elementary School PTA, and a governor-appointed member of the Virginia Council on Women.

Rayner enjoys supporting local businesses, spending time with her family, and fulfilling the terms of her lifelong indentured servitude to her daughters—primarily as chauffeur, snack provider, personal assistant, and enthusiastic spectator at an alarming number of activities.

Blue Ridge Leader: What are your three top priorities for the Town of Purcellville?

Erin Rayner: We need to focus on getting the basics right. First, restoring stable, professional, and transparent Town government. Residents and staff deserve consistent leadership, respectful public meetings, and accountable decisions.

Second, ensuring the financial and infrastructure health of our town. We closed FY 2026 with roughly a $1.9 million General Fund deficit plus utility fund shortfalls, and S&P downgraded our bond rating with a negative outlook over utility instability. That must be turned around with a disciplined, multi-year plan, with utility rates aligned to the real cost of running the system so we stop leaning on reserves to cover debt service.

Third, protecting the quality of life that makes Purcellville special: a strong police department, thriving local businesses and downtown, and growth consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and supported by available infrastructure. Residents depend on these core services and deserve stability, balance, and long-term planning.

BRL: Under what circumstances would you support annexing land into the Town of Purcellville?

ER: Purcellville should approach any annexation cautiously, evaluating each proposal on its long-term impact on residents, infrastructure, finances, traffic, and water resources. It should never be viewed simply as a way to grow the tax base. On the most recent application, I did not vote to approve the Valley Commerce Center project; I voted to ensure Purcellville had every opportunity to protect its interests first.

My concern was that ending the Town's review early would shift the decision entirely to Loudoun County, which is exactly what happened. The County approved it, and the Town lost its chance to influence the design, negotiate community benefits, or secure infrastructure improvements.

My standard is straightforward: I'd only support annexation if it clearly serves the town's long-term interest, if the infrastructure supports it, traffic is manageable, it fits our Comprehensive Plan, and residents have had a real say. The burden is on the applicant to prove that. However, the better way to relieve annexation pressure is to fully use the commercial land we already have.

BRL: How important is the Town's Zoning Ordinance, and are there changes you would like to see?

ER: It's one of the most important tools we have to control development in our town. Our Planning Commission worked hard rewriting the ordinance to align it with the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, but the final version departed in important ways from the recommendations of our zoning consultant and planning staff. The result downzoned parts of our downtown in ways that didn't make sense, allowing only two-and-a-half-story buildings and no more than two apartments per building regardless of size, in direct conflict with the Comprehensive Plan, which allows three stories and historically three to five apartments. Good intentions aren't enough when decisions don't hold up to scrutiny.

As mayor, I'll push for an ordinance faithful to that plan, one that protects the scale of our streets, keeps building heights in our historic corridor feeling like Purcellville, and uses the overlay districts our experts designed to fit each neighborhood. Updated design guidelines must go hand in hand with that. If we want new buildings to look like they belong here, we have to say so in writing.

BRL: Do you believe the Town has made sufficient investments in utility infrastructure over the past several years? What improvements would you prioritize moving forward?

ER: No, and the town's own Capital Improvement Plan proves it. We're facing roughly $80 million in capital projects over ten years, and many critical water and wastewater fixes have sat on the list for years, delayed until they became urgent. That's not planning; that's deferral. For most of a decade, our adopted water and sewer rates came in below what our own consultants recommended, not even covering day-to-day operations, let alone debt service or capital improvements. That's how we ended up dipping into reserves to keep the utility funds afloat.

For five years I raised concerns about drawing down reserves before it hit our bond rating, and this year that came true when S&P lowered our rating.

Going forward, I'd prioritize a long-range capital plan for water and sewer, phased rate adjustments that reflect the true cost of service, and a disciplined CIP schedule delivering the improvements the system needs. Residents deserve a transparent plan that ties every dollar to a real need, funded like we mean it.

BRL: Residents and businesses collectively pay more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County. Do you believe the town is receiving an adequate return on that investment?

ER: Yes, and it's important to understand how that money works. The taxes Purcellville residents pay Loudoun County aren't a check the town writes; they're the county's share of a combined tax bill, funding services residents use every day. The largest is public education. Loudoun County Public Schools is the single biggest expense in the county budget, and our children attend those schools. County taxes also pay for fire and rescue, the Sheriff's Office and jail, libraries, animal control, elections, community centers, and social service programs, none of which the town provides.

The return isn't a cash transfer back to Town Hall; it's the full range of county-scale services impossible to deliver at the town level. Our town taxes, by contrast, fund police, street and sidewalk maintenance, trash and recycling, parks and recreation, zoning, and community development. Residents pay two governments for two different sets of services, and Purcellville sees real value from both. As western Loudoun's economic hub, Purcellville generates significant value for the county, and my job as mayor is to advocate loudly so our community gets its fair share.

BRL: How would you assess Purcellville's long-term financial outlook?

ER: Candidly, it needs work, and I won't pretend otherwise. We ended FY 2026 with a General Fund deficit approaching $2 million, deficits in both utility funds, and a negative outlook from S&P warning our rating could drop further without a credible plan to restore balance. It takes aligning utility revenues with actual system costs, reducing reliance on interfund transfers and reserves, adopting a disciplined multi-year capital plan, and growing our commercial tax base by filling vacancies and supporting existing businesses.

We must continue scrutinizing spending while ensuring recurring revenues can support the services and infrastructure residents expect. With steady management and honest budgeting, Purcellville's long-term outlook can be strong, but it requires the discipline to plan for the future, not just the next budget cycle.

BRL: How would you encourage economic development?

ER: Economic development starts with taking care of the businesses we already have. Before we chase anyone new, we should show up for the shops, restaurants, and local owners who took a chance on Purcellville, cutting red tape, streamlining permitting, and making Town

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CANDIDATES FOR TOWN COUNCIL

Sam Brown



Sam Brown's roots in Purcellville stretch back generations, and farming, family and stewardship have shaped much of his life. He was a member of the first graduating class of Loudoun Valley High School in 1966 before attending Guilford College and spending nearly a decade working in orchards in Michigan.

Brown eventually returned home to Purcellville, where he built a life in agriculture, growing everything from apples, blackberries and peaches to pumpkins and Christmas trees alongside his wife, Uta. A lifelong resident with a deep attachment to the land and community, he placed his 90-acre family farm into conservation easement, preserving it for generations to come.

Blue Ridge Leader: What are your three top priorities for the Town of Purcellville?

Sam Brown: My family has been part of this community for more than 250 years. I have watched Purcellville grow and change, and I understand that change is inevitable. But losing the character of our town is not. My first priority is protecting what makes Purcellville special.

I will support our Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance, and oppose unnecessary annexations and excessive density.

I have tried to live by that principle myself. Although approximately 40 acres of my property were once zoned for hundreds of townhouses, I chose instead to place our entire 90-acre farm into conservation easement. Once open land is developed, we cannot get it back.

My second priority is responsible stewardship of taxpayers' money. Farming teaches you to plan ahead, live within your means and take care of what you have. Town government should operate with the same common sense. We need to control spending, eliminate waste and deliver value for every taxpayer dollar.

My third priority is honest, transparent and respectful government. Transparency means being upfront about our challenges, presenting facts and choices clearly, and explaining the consequences without using fear or exaggerated claims.

I am not running because I want Purcellville to become something different. I am running because I value what it already is and want to protect its future. I want future generations to be just as proud to call Purcellville home.

BRL: Under what circumstances would you support annexing land into the Town of Purcellville?

SB: I would support annexation only in exceptional circumstances when there is a clear and lasting benefit to Purcellville residents.

I have lived here long enough to hear many arguments for annexation. One of the most common is that growth will strengthen Purcellville financially.

What I have watched instead is the size and cost of Town government and infrastructure demands increase as

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Paul McCray



Paul McCray moved to Purcellville with his family in 2003 while managing the W&OD Trail. He retired as the Operations Director for NOVA Parks in 2011 and now works part time as a Historian for that agency. He serves on the Purcellville Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. In his spare time McCray writes about local history for Loudoun publications and gives presentations about the history of Purcellville and the W&OD Railroad.

Blue Ridge Leader: What are your three top priorities for the Town of Purcellville?

Paul McCray: Hiring a town manager who has relevant experience, high ethical and moral standards and commitment to the town is the highest priority for Purcellville. The lack of a qualified, long-term town manager has been part of why decisions are not being made in the best interests of Purcellville.

One of my priorities is to spend taxpayer dollars more carefully. There's been too much waste and for the fiscal year which just ended, the mayor and his majority ran a deficit of $2.7million. Purcellville needs a stable revenue stream rather than the chaos in recent years from arbitrary budget cuts and fee reductions.

Another urgent need is a traffic study for the town, especially to gauge the effects of the 690interchange. While it's likely to relieve the congestion on Main Street, it could also create gridlock on the west side of town.

BRL: Under what circumstances would you support annexing land into the Town of Purcellville?

PM: I would only support annexing land if it was a positive move for the Town and I would set a high bar for annexation. There must be a net gain from revenue sources such as real estate taxes, meals taxes, sewer/water connections and utility fees. Traffic in town should not be affected. Additional maintenance and police expenses should be more than covered by the revenue increase. Current town residents should benefit from an annexation and not be harmed.

BRL: How important is the Town's Zoning Ordinance, and are there changes you would like to see?

PM: I believe the downzoning of the downtown business district has made the chances of reasonable revitalization difficult and kept new businesses establishing storefronts in that area. The reduction of living spaces in commercial buildings takes away a revenue stream small businesses often rely upon, not just now but in Purcellville's past.

I'd like to review the inclusion of certain neighborhoods in the historic district to verify that the status is correct.

I believe the exclusion of new duplexes in town prevents affordable housing opportunities and given housing prices, this reduces the chance of someone living in Purcellville. Parking problems are often mentioned as an issue but with strict site standards this could be avoided.

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Greg Paris



Greg Paris grew up in the small town of Hershey, Pennsylvania, where riding bikes through the neighborhood, pickup games with friends and knowing your neighbors shaped his appreciation for close-knit communities.

Paris later built a career in technical communications, government contracting and business development, experience that has taught him how to solve complex problems and balance competing priorities.

He and his wife are raising their two children in Purcellville, where he is active in his church and enjoys reading and volunteering. Paris says he hopes to help preserve the small-town character and sense of community that drew his family to Purcellville.

Blue Ridge Leader: What are your three top priorities for the Town of Purcellville?

Greg Paris: My three priorities are protecting Purcellville's future, strengthening the Town's financial position, and making local government continue to work better for our community.

First, I want to preserve the qualities that make Purcellville a special place to live. Growth and development decisions made today will shape this town for decades. I will support our Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance, oppose unnecessary annexations and inappropriate increases in density, and ensure residents have a meaningful voice in major land-use decisions. Economic development should complement our community—not redefine it.

Second, I will bring a strong taxpayer focus to every financial decision. Town government must distinguish between what we need and what we would like to have. Before asking residents or businesses for more, we should examine spending, staffing, contracts and operations to ensure resources are used wisely. We must also address utility and infrastructure needs responsibly while protecting affordability.

Third, I want Town government to be professional, efficient and focused on results. Residents should expect clear processes, timely answers and consistent treatment. Town staff should do their jobs without being pulled into political disputes, while elected officials focus on policy, oversight and serving the public.

Purcellville needs disciplined government, thoughtful leadership and elected officials who serve the entire community. I want to preserve what generations of residents have built here while making responsible decisions that leave Purcellville stronger for our children and the generations that follow.

BRL: Under what circumstances would you support annexing land into the Town of Purcellville?

GP: I would support annexation only when there is a compelling public benefit to Purcellville residents and the long-term financial and community consequences are understood

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CANDIDATES FOR TOWN COUNCIL

Mitch Seipt



Mitch Seipt has lived with his wife and three children in the Old Dominion Valley neighborhood in Purcellville since 2016. He is starting his 20th year with LCPS as a middle school history teacher, dean, and assistant principal. In his spare time, he enjoys volunteering as a youth sports coach, election officer, marching band parent, and church volunteer. His happy place is sitting by a campfire and he is on a quest to visit all 63 national parks.

Blue Ridge Leader: What are your three top priorities for the Town of Purcellville?

Mitch Seipt: The number one priority for our town must be to hire a qualified and capable town manager. The past ten years have seen a revolving door of town managers, and this constant change has led to a lack of coherence and direction for our town staff and a lack of clarity and transparency for our citizens. We need someone with the expertise and the experience to help guide Purcellville in a positive direction, to implement the vision of the town council and the citizens it represents, and to coordinate and oversee all the various departments and programs that help make our town such a special place.

My second priority is to restore trust between council, staff, and citizens. I believe that our town government must be open, transparent, and upfront in how we conduct town business. We need to follow protocol and procedure and give Purcellville the good governance that the citizens have been craving. If elected, I promise to listen to citizens' concerns and honestly consider the recommendations of town staff and outside consultants. I will respond to emails and will welcome conversations over a cup of coffee. I also want to help bring down the temperature at council meetings. I will come to the dais with an open mind and will promote cooperation and compromise when there is disagreement about the path forward. I promise to work with all members of council to help move our town in the right direction.

My third priority is to support efforts to revitalize our iconic downtown. One of the first actions that I would propose would be to reestablish Purcellville's participation in the Virginia Main Street program. The decision to end council support from this program was shortsighted. Virginia Main Street affiliation provides our small businesses with access to grant programs and community networks at a negligible cost. I would also like to help our business and property owners to make our storefronts more attractive to potential businesses. Some of that work is aesthetic and some would involve some investment in infrastructure—expanding parking options, increasing crosswalk safety, etc. Our small businesses are what make Purcellville unique—let's show them some love.

BRL: Under what circumstances would you support annexing land into the Town of Purcellville?

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Hank Speckhardt



Hank Speckhardt grew up in a small town in upstate New York and spent more than two decades building a career in the insurance industry before becoming a successful business owner and entrepreneur.

He moved to Purcellville to be closer to his mother, a longtime resident, and found in the town the same sense of community and small-town connection he has valued throughout his life. Now semi-retired, Speckhardt wants to put his experience evaluating risk, managing resources and building businesses to work for the community he now calls home.

He is running for Town Council because said he believes Purcellville's character and quality of life are worth protecting—and that its future should be shaped by the residents who live here.

BRL: What are your three top priorities for the Town of Purcellville?

Hank Speckhardt: My priorities are protecting Purcellville's character, continue bringing greater fiscal discipline to Town government, and making sure residents remain at the center of the decisions we make.

I spent more than 20 years in the insurance business and later owned and operated my own agency. When you run a business, every decision has consequences. You learn to evaluate risk, control costs, plan for the future and understand that you are accountable for the results. I want to bring that mindset to Town Council.

I will protect the qualities that make Purcellville such a desirable place to live. Our Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance represent years of community input. Growth should occur within that framework, not continually require changing it.

I will bring a business owner's discipline to Town finances. Before increasing taxes, utility rates, staffing or spending, we should understand the need, examine alternatives and determine whether there is a more efficient way to accomplish the goal.

I will continue to listen to our residents, honor the commitments I make and remain accountable to the people I represent.

I did not move to Purcellville hoping it would become something else. I chose it because of what it already is. I want to help ensure the qualities that attract families here remain for those who come after us.

BRL: Under what circumstances would you support annexing land into the Town of Purcellville?

HS: Annexation can bring development and new revenue, but it also brings continuing and growing costs for infrastructure and Town services and can change the small-town character residents value. The question is whether the long-term benefits to Purcellville justify those costs.

Annexation also changes more than a balance sheet. It expands the physical footprint of Purcellville and can create

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Kevin Wright



Kevin Wright is a third-generation resident of western Loudoun and has lived in Purcellville for over 50 years. He retired in 2023 from Loudoun County Fire and Rescue after 34 years of service. With over 40 years in public service, Wright has also volunteered with the Purcellville Volunteer Fire Company and Rescue Squad. He has remained active by volunteering with Special Olympics, youth sports, and various community events. He enjoys offshore fishing, carpentry and spending quality time with his family. Wright said he is running for re-election to the town council to continue his commitment to public service and to help ensure a bright future for the community.

Blue Ridge Leader: What are your three top priorities for the Town of Purcellville?

Kevin Wright: Stabilization of the Town Manager Position: It's essential to have a qualified Town Manager with the necessary experience to effectively guide both the town and its staff into the future. Stability in this role is crucial for building confidence among residents, staff, and the council.

Restoring Trust and Ethics: Ensuring that residents feel confident their council is acting ethically and in their best interests is paramount. Rebuilding this trust must be a top priority.

Updating Town Policies and Charter: Many of our existing policies and sections of our charter are outdated and require urgent revision. Addressing these updates will ensure our governance remains relevant and effective.

BRL: Under what circumstances would you support annexing land into the Town of Purcellville?

KW: I believe that each annexation application should be thoroughly evaluated and follow established processes. History has shown that rejecting an application does not necessarily prevent development; in fact, considering a proposal can lead to negotiations that produce positive outcomes for the town while minimizing adverse effects. If, after careful evaluation, an application is determined to be not in the best interest of the community, it can be justifiably rejected.

BRL: How important is the Town's Zoning Ordinance, and are there changes you would like to see?

KW: The Zoning Ordinance is among the most vital tools for any community. When crafted with foresight and aligned with established best practices, it plays a crucial role in fostering economic vitality while preserving the charm and quality of life that residents value.

While Purcellville's current Zoning provides a solid foundation, several areas warrant reevaluation. Certain provisions seem to contradict the goals outlined in the Comprehensive Plan and may be overly restrictive, ultimately hindering economic development and the availability of attainable housing within the town.

For instance: Downzoning of Residential Dwellings

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SAM BROWN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

Purcellville has grown.

Growth has costs. More development means greater demands on water and sewer infrastructure, roads, public safety, staffing and other Town services. One-time fees are just that—one time—while the costs of providing services, maintaining infrastructure and treating water continue year after year.

Before looking outside our boundaries for more land to develop, we should recognize the opportunities already within Purcellville. I support development and redevelopment consistent with our existing zoning. A large property along 21st Street, in one of our main commercial hubs, has sat largely underdeveloped for well over a decade and is a good place to start. We can strengthen our commercial base without continually expanding the Town's boundaries.

Every annexation moves Purcellville outward and can permanently change our town. I do not want Purcellville to lose the qualities that have made it a real community.

Owning property outside Purcellville does not obligate the Town to annex it or extend Town utilities to increase its development potential.

Annexation would have to solve a real Town need, provide lasting value to residents and make financial sense—not simply create another opportunity for development.

Our first obligation is not to make Purcellville bigger. It is to take good care of the town we have.

BRL: How important is the Town's Zoning Ordinance, and are there changes you would like to see?

SB: The Zoning Ordinance is extremely important because it provides certainty for residents and property owners about what can be built where.

Over the decades, I have attended Comprehensive Plan rewrites and Zoning Ordinance reviews and watched residents devote countless hours to them. The Comprehensive Plan establishes the community's vision, and the Zoning Ordinance puts that vision into practice.

When someone buys a home, raises a family or invests in property, they should have a reasonable understanding of what can be built around them. Zoning should provide predictability—not become a moving target depending upon who owns property or what a developer wants to build.

I support development or redevelopment consistent with existing zoning. What I do not support is changing the rules to accommodate a development proposal, increase density or grant development rights the community never intended.

That does not mean the Zoning Ordinance should never change. I would consider a change when there is a demonstrated need and it benefits the community as a whole. Any change should occur openly, with public participation.

We should respect the work residents have put into establishing our community's vision rather than asking them to defend it every time someone wants an exception. Continual exceptions can change the character our community has worked to preserve.

BRL: Do you believe the Town has made sufficient investments in utility infrastructure over the past several years? What improvements would you prioritize moving forward?

SB: Purcellville has made important investments in its water and wastewater infrastructure, but these systems require constant attention and long-term stewardship.

The improvements to Hirst Reservoir are a good example. Protecting and maintaining this water resource strengthens the system. The Town has also begun replacing aging portions of the water transmission system.

As a farmer, I understand the importance of taking care of what sustains you. We should identify infrastructure needs based on condition and risk, address the most important first, and plan ahead.

We should continue to reevaluate our infrastructure needs, prioritize investments carefully and remember that every dollar ultimately comes from the people we serve.

Growth matters, too. Every new development places additional demands on water, wastewater and Town services. We should maintain and strengthen infrastructure for the people and businesses already here—not continually expand it to accommodate greater density.

Good stewardship means taking care of what we have, investing wisely and leaving reliable infrastructure—not unnecessary financial burdens—for generations to come.

BRL: Residents and businesses collectively pay more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County. Do you believe the Town is receiving an adequate return on that investment?

SB: More than $18 million a year is a substantial contribution, and Purcellville residents should see meaningful benefits from those taxes. We benefit from County schools, libraries, parks, public safety and other important services.

At the same time, Purcellville is a small town that hosts five County public schools and other County facilities. Those facilities depend on Town roads, utilities and infrastructure, creating opportunities for the County and Town to work together on investments that benefit both.

I would like to see cooperation on water and wastewater infrastructure, stormwater, transportation and environmental needs.

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PAUL MCCRAY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

BRL: Do you believe the Town has made sufficient investments in utility infrastructure over the past several years? What improvements would you prioritize moving forward?

PM: Purcellville has been unable to make necessary improvements in its utility infrastructure because most of the council majorities over the last ten years have not increased wastewater and water fees to keep up with inflation and the cost of repairing the system. Until the fees increased this year, it cost the town almost $10 more to deliver 1,000 gallons of water than residents paid for the service. The wastewater system has had a similar deficit.

The fee increases for the next few years which were approved by the majority of the council will move the system towards sustainability and should be allowed to take place.

BRL: Residents and businesses collectively pay more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County. Do you believe the town is receiving an adequate return on that investment?

PM: I believe Purcellville residents and business owners receive their fair share of county benefits from the taxes they pay. We get numerous services from Loudoun and have been the recipient of many grants. The Sheriff's Office backs up our police department when necessary. Fire and Rescue provides emergency services. The Building and Development Department handles project review for new construction and renovation within town. Parks, Recreation and Community Services runs the community center, maintains Fireman's Field and is building a regional recreation center just outside of town. Human Services manages public health, family services and aging programs for our residents in need. The Carver Senior Center is provided by Loudoun County.

Approximately 30% of the taxes Purcellville residents pay to the county go to the public school system and the public schools in town pay the highest rate for all the water they use.

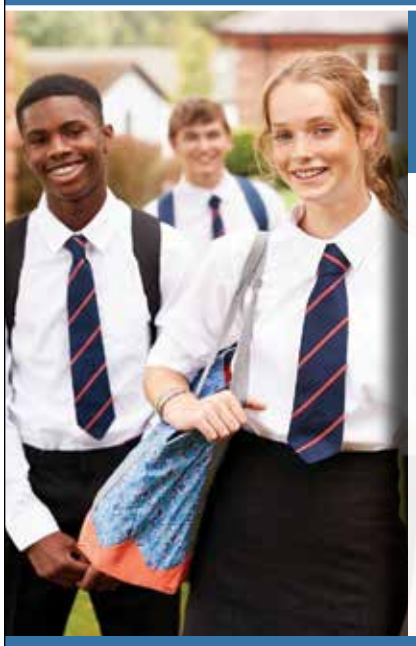
Many of the road improvements in Purcellville are made possible with grants from the county, including the new 690/Purcellville Road interchange, the improvements to the Berlin Turnpike interchange and the roundabout at Eastgate Drive.

I also believe that we can ask more of the county, especially for help with our water/wastewater system. And I believe that the Loudoun Board of Supervisors and county staff want to help the town.

BRL: How would you assess Purcellville's long-term financial outlook?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21 »

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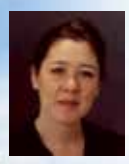
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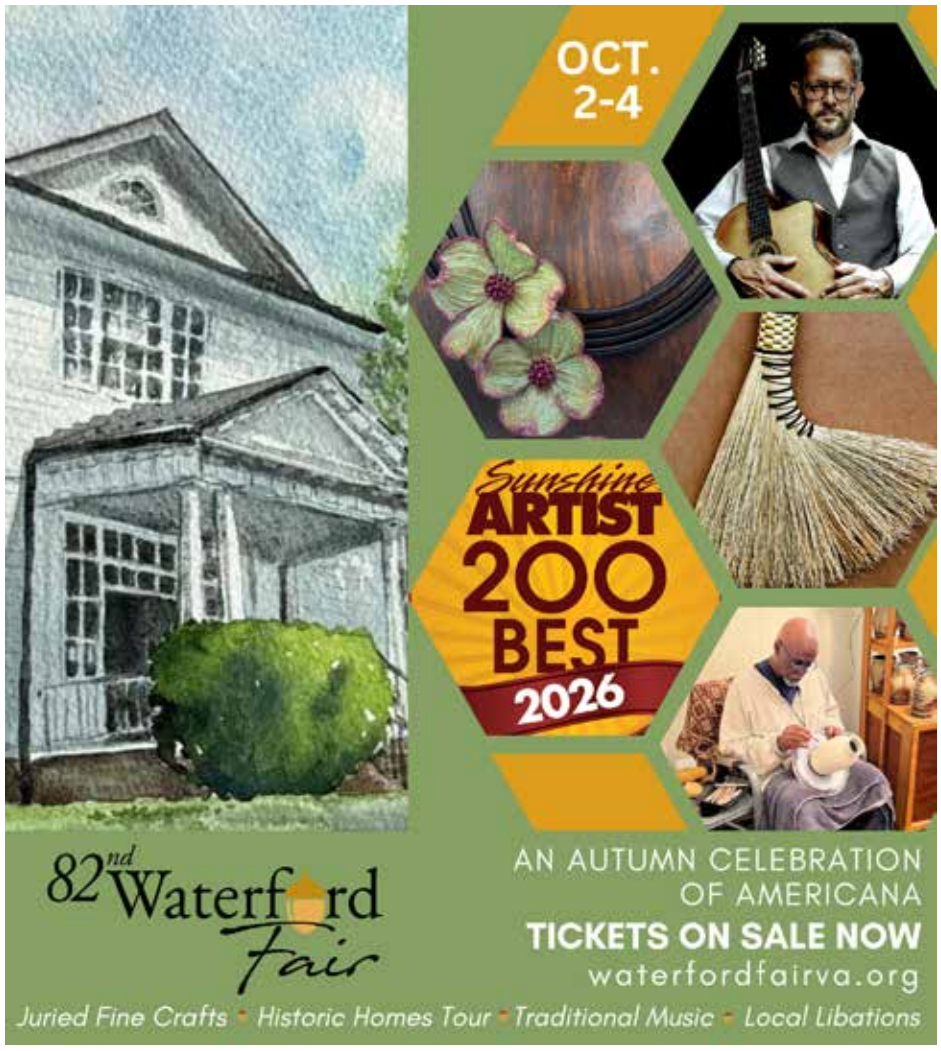


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SAM BROWN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

When an investment serves County facilities as well as Purcellville residents, sharing responsibility makes sense.

Purcellville and Loudoun County should be good partners. Our residents contribute substantially to the County, and I will work to ensure their interests and our town are heard.

BRL: How would you assess Purcellville's long-term financial outlook?

SB: Purcellville will have a strong financial future if we are disciplined about how we spend today. Town government has to distinguish between what it needs, what it wants and what it can afford.

We have challenges, particularly with our water and wastewater systems, but the answer cannot always be higher taxes, higher utility rates or more development.

Before asking residents and businesses to pay more, we should examine expenses, find efficiencies, prioritize capital projects and pursue outside funding.

New development may generate revenue, but it also creates long-term costs for water, wastewater, roads, staffing and other services.

For as long as I can remember, I have heard that more growth will reduce debt and ease the burden on taxpayers. I have watched Purcellville grow, and I have watched the costs grow with it. That experience has taught me that growth is not a substitute for sound financial management.

Purcellville's financial future should be built on responsible spending, careful planning and living within our means while protecting services residents depend upon. We can be financially strong without becoming a bigger, denser or more expensive town.

BRL: How would you encourage economic development?

SB: Purcellville is already a place where people want to invest and do business. Our low commercial vacancy rate is evidence of that success. We should build on it by keeping Town government responsive, processes straightforward and our rules clear and consistent.

I believe some of our best economic-development ideas come from the people who live here. Purcellville has creative residents, business owners, volunteers and Town committees with the talent and energy to organize events that bring people together, attract visitors and support businesses.

Town government should encourage those ideas and help people make them happen rather than assuming every good idea requires a new government program or additional staff.

Our small-town character, surrounding countryside and strong sense of community are economic assets. Economic development should strengthen those qualities, not replace them.

A vibrant local economy is about more than growth. It is about giving people reasons to come to Purcellville, enjoy themselves, support our businesses and help our community and families thrive.

MITCH SEIPT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

MS: Any proposed annexation must be carefully considered, weighing the costs and benefits of expanding the area for which our town is responsible. We would need to be open and transparent about the intended uses for any proposed annexation and give the citizens ample time to voice their opinions and concerns. I believe that consideration of annexation is only appropriate when there is a clear and unambiguous benefit to the future of Purcellville either in terms of significant tax revenue or access to considerable water resources.

BRL: How important is the Town's Zoning Ordinance, and are there changes you would like to see?

MS: Purcellville's Zoning Ordinance is a comprehensive set of guidelines that is critical to ensuring that Purcellville remains Purcellville. Zoning enforcement helps to guide our infrastructure development, protect property values, and promote general safety by providing clear and consistent expectations for citizens and businesses. While I do not have any specific changes that I would like to see at this time, I believe that our small business community would benefit from increased partnership and collaboration with town staff to help ensure that proposed updates and renovations are considered in a timely fashion with consideration for how these proposals might benefit our town as a whole.

BRL: Do you believe the Town has made sufficient investments in utility infrastructure over the past several years? What improvements would you prioritize moving forward?

MS: No, I do not believe that Purcellville has made sufficient investments in utility infrastructure in recent years. We have been doing some combination of "kick the can down the road" and "patch and pray" for far too long. The burst water pipes and boil water advisory in the past year are symptoms of a much bigger problem. It is the responsibility of the mayor and town council to be forward-looking and proactive to ensure that we are ahead of these issues. At the top of the list is the infrastructure of our water and sewer system. We need to prioritize many long-deferred projects in this area.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19 »

MITCH SEIPT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

BRL: Residents and businesses collectively pay more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County. Do you believe the town is receiving an adequate return on that investment?

MS: We benefit from our partnership with Loudoun County in so many ways. We have one of the top school systems in the Commonwealth and are fortunate to have five beautiful LCPS campuses in our town limits. Not only do our children receive an excellent education from our dedicated teachers, but also access to a wide variety of supports and resources that are available through the network of our school division. Purcellville residents also benefit from access to the vast opportunities provided by Loudoun's outstanding Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services. Along with support from the county related to transportation, infrastructure, and public safety, I believe that we have the best of both worlds—a wonderful town and a well-resourced county. If elected, I would work to reestablish relationships and trust with county leadership to find additional ways to foster partnership with the county to increase these benefits for the residents of Purcellville.

BRL: How would you assess Purcellville's long-term financial outlook?

MS: Our financial outlook has not been moving in the right direction, as evidenced by the downgrading of our bond rating this spring. At the heart of the issue are council decisions over the past decade to subsidize water and sewer costs by shifting money from the general fund and the meals tax fund. Utilities should not be used as political tools to try to win votes. I was encouraged by the decision of the council this spring to commit to a five year plan that gets us closer to a point where our water and sewer treatment plant is financially self-sustaining. This is a good first step towards bringing us back to a positive financial outlook, though I fully understand that our water bills are going to hurt for a while. Unfortunately, the citizens of Purcellville are paying for the financial neglect of previous administrations. Purcellville is the social and economic hub of Western Loudoun, and we need to explore ways for the town to raise revenue by supporting our local businesses and encouraging tourism in Purcellville.

BRL: How would you encourage economic development?

MS: Our small business community is a big part of what makes Purcellville special and unique in Loudoun County. The small businesses, restaurants, and shops help residents

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »





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CHRIS BERTAUT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

My priority is addressing remaining utility needs based on condition, risk and urgency, while pursuing grants, low-interest financing and outside funding before turning to higher rates.

That includes replacing the second half of the water main that failed in 2025, which had not been identified as a priority. Projects should be reevaluated annually as demand and system reviews identify changing needs.

The responsible path is to protect our resources, maintain our infrastructure and manage growth so we do not continually create new demands.

BRL: Residents and businesses collectively pay more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County. Do you believe the town is receiving an adequate return on that investment?

CB: Purcellville and Loudoun County share an interest in a strong community. With more than $18 million in County real estate taxes generated here annually, we should identify opportunities to increase County investment in Purcellville.

We can strengthen our partnership through land-use decisions that respect planning principles for Purcellville and the surrounding area.

Purcellville hosts five County public schools serving the Town and western Loudoun, relying on Town roads, utilities and stormwater infrastructure. That creates opportunities for shared investment.

Water quality is one example. When per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) were detected in a Town well serving a school, Purcellville shut it down to protect residents and students. Addressing PFAS and other emerging contaminants can be extremely expensive and is an appropriate area for Town-County partnership.

I see opportunities for greater partnership in utilities, PFAS remediation, stormwater and environmental protection, and transportation. We can work together without sacrificing the Town's small-town character or accepting growth inconsistent with our community's vision.

BRL: How would you assess Purcellville's long-term financial outlook?

CB: I am optimistic about Purcellville's long-term financial outlook, provided we continue making disciplined decisions and address utility needs responsibly.

S&P downgraded Purcellville's general obligation debt rating from AAA to AA+ in May, citing operating imbalances in the water and sewer funds and $63 million in planned borrowing through FY31.

At the same time, S&P described the Town's reserve position as "exceptional," with reserves increasing from approximately $10.2 million in 2023 to $11.5 million in 2025.

Our Capital Improvement Plan is a long-range planning document, not a debt schedule. Projects are continually reevaluated and can be modified, deferred or funded through sources other than Town borrowing, such as the $7 million PFAS-treatment grant we received.

The Town is entering an important financial transition. The Fireman's Field mortgage ends in 2027, and General Fund debt is scheduled to be fully retired by 2034, creating greater flexibility.

Our greatest challenge is the long-term health of the water and wastewater systems, but the answer is not simply higher utility rates and more growth. Before asking residents to pay more, we should validate capital needs, improve efficiency and pursue outside funding.

Growth is not a substitute for sound financial management. New development creates additional infrastructure and service demands and does not automatically improve finances.

Purcellville has declining debt obligations, substantial assets and financial tools available. We can meet our obligations, invest wisely, protect residents and businesses, and preserve the small-town character that makes Purcellville home.

BRL: How would you encourage economic development?

CB: I would continue encouraging economic development by keeping taxes low, providing efficient Town services and removing unnecessary red tape so businesses can open, operate and invest with confidence. Economic development should follow our Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance, not depend on greater density or intensity.

That is especially important in our Historic Downtown. A significant portion of 21st Street has remained undeveloped under the same ownership for more than 15 years. The Town cannot force redevelopment, but neither should inactivity cause us to abandon our vision for a historic commercial downtown. Redevelopment should strengthen the area as a commercial center—with shops, restaurants and businesses complemented by limited residential uses—not turn it into a residential center.

Community events are also economic development. Purcellville's residents, businesses, civic organizations and volunteers bring people together and give visitors reasons to return. Maybe our next tradition is a community spaghetti cook-off—count me in!

A vibrant community grows from the energy and initiative of its people. The goal is a Purcellville where businesses thrive, residents enjoy their town and visitors want to return.

PAUL MCCRAY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

PM: Purcellville has a lack of revenue problem. Taxes and fees have not kept up with costs of running the town and this was compounded a year ago when the council majority cut both knowing that vital services and projects would be sacrificed. Important staff positions were cut, important water and waste water upgrades were deferred and our emergency reserves were reduced.

Other cuts over the last year have harmed the town. Cutting the IT staff when computer systems in towns across the country are being attacked puts us at risk. Removing vital utility upgrades creates potential hazards for our water and environment.

Stabilizing the fees in the water and wastewater departments will allow the money taken from the general fund to stay there and build back our town's capabilities.

BRL: How would you encourage economic development?

PM: I will communicate with business and property owners to learn about their goals and needs.

The town should develop relationships with brokers who help small businesses find storefronts.

I support bringing back the position in Zoning and Planning which helps prospective and current businesses navigate the requirements of opening a business in Purcellville.

I will move to have Purcellville rejoin the Main Street Virginia program. The organizers of Purcellville Main Street have shown that people want to attend events in our historic downtown, bringing sales to the small businesses there. Town participation in this program allows Purcellville Main Street to access grant opportunities which would help revitalize the downtown and the businesses…something which is sorely needed. The only cost to the town is a few staff hours.

GREG PARIS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

and responsibly addressed.

Annexation should never be viewed as a way to generate one-time revenue or facilitate additional development. Connection fees are one time payments, while the obligations created by growth can remain with taxpayers and utility customers for decades. Roads, water and wastewater infrastructure, public safety and other Town services carry continuing costs.

But finances are only part of the equation. Annexation can permanently change the character, density and physical footprint of Purcellville. Once development occurs, we cannot simply restore the town we had before.

Before considering annexation, I would ask: What lasting benefit does it provide residents? What will it cost long term? Do we have the infrastructure and utility capacity to support it? Is it consistent with our Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance? Will it preserve our small-town character?

If those questions cannot be answered convincingly, I would vote no.

There may be exceptional circumstances where annexation serves a genuine community need, such as land for a park, provided costs are responsibly addressed and taxpayers and utility customers are protected.

Purcellville does not need to grow outward to succeed. Our responsibility is to protect and strengthen the town we already have.

BRL: How important is the Town's Zoning Ordinance, and are there changes you would like to see?

GP: The Zoning Ordinance is fundamental to protecting Purcellville's future because it puts our Comprehensive Plan into practice and establishes the rules that guide how our town develops.

I learned early that land-use decisions can shape a community for generations. Growing up in Hershey, Pennsylvania, I watched residents oppose a large residential development proposed for one of our community's largest farms. More than 35 years later, that property remains open space.

I see the same responsibility here in Purcellville. Residents spent years participating in our Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance processes. Those rules should provide predictability for homeowners, businesses and property owners, so people understand what may be built around them.

I support appropriate development and redevelopment within our existing zoning and correcting provisions that are unclear, outdated or have unintended consequences. But there is a difference between improving the ordinance for the entire town and changing it to accommodate an individual development proposal.

One increase in density may seem insignificant, but repeated across Purcellville, such decisions can bring more traffic, greater demands on infrastructure and utilities, and ultimately a different town.

As a father raising two children, I think about what Purcellville will look like 20 years from now. Our zoning should reflect the community's vision, not be continually changed to accommodate requests for greater density.

Once we change Purcellville's character, we cannot simply change it back. I intend to protect what brought families like mine here in the first place.

BRL: Do you believe the Town has made

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »





GREG PARIS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

sufficient investments in utility infrastructure over the past several years? What improvements would you prioritize moving forward?

GP: Purcellville has made important investments in its water and wastewater systems, and we are continuing the long-term work of maintaining and strengthening this essential infrastructure.

The Town's new water tower, now nearing completion, will increase storage capacity, improve water pressure and strengthen system reliability.

We should prioritize projects based on condition, risk and need, replace aging infrastructure strategically, improve efficiency and aggressively pursue grants and outside funding before asking utility customers to pay more.

As a Council member, I will ask tough questions, insist on sound data and ensure our utility investments protect these essential systems and the people who pay for them.

Additional development creates additional demands on water, wastewater and other Town services. We should not expand infrastructure simply to enable greater density and then ask residents to pay for the consequences. Growth must fit the capacity and character of our community, not the other way around.

BRL: Residents and businesses collectively pay more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County. Do you believe the town is receiving an adequate return on that investment?

GP: Purcellville residents and businesses contribute more than $18 million annually in Loudoun County taxes and, in return, benefit from County schools, public safety, libraries, parks and other services.

At the same time, Purcellville hosts five County public schools and other facilities that rely in part on Town infrastructure. Where those responsibilities intersect, we should pursue opportunities to coordinate investments that serve both the Town and County.

Water and wastewater infrastructure, stormwater management, transportation and environmental protection are areas where our interests overlap and where we should build a strong case for County investment.

Purcellville's success contributes to the strength of western Loudoun. As a Council member, I will foster a constructive partnership with the County while making sure Purcellville has a strong voice in decisions that affect our residents and our future.

Our residents contribute substantially to Loudoun County. I want us to be equally effective at bringing resources and investment back to the community, particularly where partnerships can help offset infrastructure costs that would otherwise fall on Purcellville residents and utility customers.

BRL: How would you assess Purcellville's long-term financial outlook?

GP: Purcellville's long-term financial strength requires thoughtful planning and sound decisions. We have valuable assets, important investments underway in our water and wastewater systems, and opportunities to make Town government even more efficient.

My professional experience has taught me to understand a problem before committing to a solution. What do we truly need? When do we need it? What can be done more efficiently? What outside funding is available before asking residents and businesses to pay more?

We should carefully evaluate capital projects, control operating costs, pursue grants and low-interest financing, and ensure taxpayers receive value from every dollar spent. Higher taxes and utility rates should not be our first response to financial pressure.

Purcellville can benefit from thoughtful redevelopment within our town, consistent with our zoning. Expanding our borders is not a financial strategy; new revenue comes with long-term costs for infrastructure and services, and can erode the small-town character we value.

With disciplined spending, sound capital planning and responsible growth, we can protect taxpayers while preserving the Purcellville we value for our families and those who will call it home tomorrow.

BRL: How would you encourage economic development?

GP: Economic development should build on Purcellville's strengths—a strong community, a diverse mix of successful businesses, a historic downtown and a quality of life that makes people want to live, visit and invest here. Our low commercial vacancy rate shows that businesses see value in being here.

My experience in business development has taught me that businesses value predictability, responsiveness and clear rules. Town government should provide timely answers, remove unnecessary administrative obstacles and apply our standards fairly and consistently.

I want businesses of all sizes to succeed here—from locally owned shops and restaurants to supermarkets, professional services and national businesses. A healthy local economy depends on a diverse commercial base.

Our community events are fun. They bring people together, welcome visitors and give them another reason to discover Purcellville and our businesses.

Purcellville does not need to become bigger to become stronger. We should build on what makes this town special and create an environment where businesses can start, invest, grow and stay.

MITCH SEIPT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

to avoid costly trips to Leesburg and Ashburn and bring tourists and customers into our town, generating significant tax revenue. Town council and town staff need to support our business community. We need to work together to revitalize our Main Street and 21st Street business zones. There are unfortunately multiple empty store fronts and buildings in need of repair. As a town, we can and should support efforts to revitalize our downtown and make it an attractive location for prospective businesses. We also need to partner with Purcellville Main Street, VDOT and Loudoun County to explore options for traffic mitigation and to explore options for parking downtown. All of us have been mired in our afternoon traffic debacle and all of us have struggled to find a parking spot when trying to visit our downtown businesses. I would also like to re-evaluate our meals tax, which is among the highest in Loudoun County. If we can stabilize our water situation, we can stop borrowing from the meals tax fund and make our restaurants more attractive to customers and tourists.

KEVIN WRIGHT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Above Commercial Properties: The current restrictions limit the renovation potential of several buildings in the downtown area. Allowing residential units above commercial spaces would not only generate additional income for property owners, helping to offset building costs, but also reduce leasing costs for commercial spaces. This change would benefit both new and existing small businesses while creating more accessible housing options.

Elimination of Duplex-Style Homes: The prohibition of duplexes in many areas, including those that currently have such homes, restricts our ability to provide diverse and attainable housing options.

By addressing these issues, we can better align our Zoning Ordinance with the community's needs and desires, ultimately enhancing our residents' quality of life.

BRL: Do you believe the Town has made sufficient investments in utility infrastructure over the past several years? What improvements would you prioritize moving forward?

KW: The straightforward answer is: no.

Past councils have not adequately listened to our knowledgeable staff and paid consultants regarding the urgent need for sufficient funding for the town's utility infrastructure. As a result, the replacement and upgrade of critical infrastructure have been consistently deferred, leading to higher costs and an expanding list of necessary improvements.

Our staff and consultants have maintained a priority list for these upgrades, and it's essential that we start allocating the necessary funding to address and reduce this backlog.

While there's no easy solution to avoid raising utility rates, we can explore alternative revenue sources to help mitigate these necessary increases.

To begin, we must focus on re-establishing our relationship with the County. Building trusting and collaborative partnerships with both the county and state could unlock potential financial support opportunities.

Additionally, we should recognize that neighboring towns face similar challenges. By collaborating with these communities, we can develop solutions that benefit everyone involved.

BRL: Residents and businesses collectively pay more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County. Do you believe the town is receiving an adequate return on that investment?

KW: Each resident and business may have their own perspective on whether the services they receive from the County justify the tax dollars paid.

If we're comparing the services available to residents and businesses in Purcellville with those outside the town, I would argue that we receive an equivalent, if not superior, level of services. For instance, the County operates a 24/7 staffed fire and rescue station right within our town, alongside two high schools, two elementary schools, and a middle school, all conveniently located within walking distance of many homes.

Additionally, Purcellville boasts a library and a community center, both easily accessible to our residents. Our close proximity to Franklin Park, along with the upcoming extension of the Franklin Park Trail and the Western Regional Recreation Center, further enhances the county funded amenities available to our community.

Considering these factors, I believe that the town's residents and businesses are receiving a significant return on their investment

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

HANK SPECKHARDT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

development and density that permanently alter the character of the town.

I support the right to develop property consistent with existing zoning. Owning property outside Town does not create an entitlement to annexation or Town utilities to increase its development potential.

I would consider annexation where there is a compelling public benefit—such as land needed for recreation or another genuine Town purpose—and where taxpayers and utility customers are protected from the long-term costs.

Purcellville should not measure success by how much land it adds. Success is making the town within our existing boundaries stronger.

BRL: How important is the Town's Zoning Ordinance, and are there changes you would like to see?

HS: Good zoning creates certainty. Residents, businesses and property owners should be able to make long-term decisions knowing there are established rules governing what can be built around them.

That principle is very familiar to me from business. You can operate successfully under rules you understand, even when you may not agree with every one of them. What is difficult is investing when the rules continually change.

Our Comprehensive Plan establishes the community's vision, and the Zoning Ordinance provides the framework for implementing it. I support development and redevelopment that respects that framework.

I am not opposed to changing the ordinance when a provision is outdated, unclear or creates an unintended result. But changes should solve a legitimate community-wide problem, not simply make a particular development proposal possible.

We also have to look beyond each individual request. A small increase in density may seem harmless in isolation. Repeated across town, those decisions can create substantially more traffic, infrastructure demands and pressure on Town services.

Zoning predictability for our residents who have already invested in their homes, businesses and community matters. Just look at eastern Loudoun and all the long-term communities who now have data centers in their back yard.

I want Purcellville to remain a place where the rules are clear, fairly applied and changed only when doing so serves the broader interests of the town.

BRL: Do you believe the Town has made sufficient investments in utility infrastructure over the past several years? What improvements would you prioritize moving forward?

HS: Purcellville has made meaningful investments in its utility systems. Maintaining critical infrastructure is an ongoing responsibility.

We should have a clear understanding of the condition of our infrastructure, identify the components presenting the greatest risk and prioritize investments accordingly.

Aging infrastructure should be replaced because its condition and importance justify replacement—not simply because a project appears on a wish list.

We need to evaluate how projects are financed. Before placing additional costs on utility customers, I want us pursuing grants, low-interest financing and other outside funding while continually looking for operating efficiencies.

Finally, infrastructure planning and land-use planning cannot be separated. Greater density creates additional demands on systems that are expensive to expand and maintain. We should not create unnecessary infrastructure obligations through development and then expect existing customers to absorb the cost.

Good infrastructure management is good risk management: understand what we have, identify vulnerabilities, address the greatest risks first and continue planning ahead.

BRL: Residents and businesses collectively pay more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County. Do you believe the Town is receiving an adequate return on that investment?

HS: When Purcellville residents and businesses contribute more than $18 million annually in real estate taxes to Loudoun County, it is reasonable to ask whether our community is receiving appropriate value in return.

The question is not whether Purcellville benefits from County services—we do. The question is whether we are making the strongest case for County investment where Town and County responsibilities intersect.

Purcellville hosts five County public schools and other public facilities that rely on Town roads and infrastructure. Where Town investments also serve County facilities and County residents, I believe there is a strong case for working together on the cost.

Water and wastewater infrastructure, stormwater, environmental projects and transportation are obvious areas for cooperation.

In business, good partnerships work when both sides understand what they contribute and where their interests overlap. The same should be true here.

As a Council member, I will work constructively with Loudoun County to advocate for Purcellville's needs and pursue investment in infrastructure that benefits both communities.

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Bluemont Goes a Little Wild for the 56th Annual Bluemont Fair

Black bears, local artisans, music and Revolutionary War history take over Sept. 19–20

For one weekend in September, the village of Bluemont will once again become one big fairground—filled with music, artists and artisans, food, history, children's activities and a few black bears. At least in spirit.

The 56th Annual Bluemont Fair returns Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 19–20, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., continuing a western Loudoun tradition that has brought the community together since 1970.

Each year, the fair celebrates a theme connected to the region. For 2026, organizers have chosen one of the Blue Ridge Mountains' most recognizable residents: the black bear.

Local artist Sara Parella created this year's black bear image, which will appear on commemorative posters, shirts, glassware and other fair merchandise.

But the real attraction is Bluemont itself.

The fair spreads throughout the historic village, transforming streets, buildings and fields into spaces for juried crafts, quilts, artisan demonstrations, live

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KEVIN WRIGHT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

compared to many other areas.

BRL: How would you assess Purcellville's long-term financial outlook?

KW: The current status and trajectory of Purcellville's financial outlook are deeply concerning. Under the leadership of the current mayor and the majority members of the Council, the town's previously strong financial position has been drastically weakened. Their actions have led to a downgrade in the town's credit rating, resulting in higher interest rates for necessary loans, which could cost residents and businesses millions over the life of those loans.

Warning signs regarding the need to address our utility rates and aging infrastructure have been evident to previous councils for years, yet little action has been taken. In 2024, the Council recognized these issues and began implementing necessary measures. Unfortunately, over the past two years, the current council's actions have reversed that progress and jeopardized the town's financial stability.

However, there is an opportunity to change this trajectory and restore a brighter outlook if residents elect leaders who demonstrate common sense, engage with staff, consultants, residents, and business owners, and adhere to best practices.

Despite these challenges, I remain optimistic about Purcellville's future. Achieving a better financial outlook will require leaders who are committed to collaboration, open dialogue, and actively addressing the issues that hinder the revitalization of our downtown and the attraction of new small businesses and tourism.

BRL: How would you encourage economic development?

KW: There are several effective ways the Council can foster and stimulate economic development.

First and foremost, it is essential to maintain open lines of communication with business and commercial property owners. By listening to their needs and understanding the challenges they face, we can better support their economic growth.

Additionally, we need to address the discrepancies between the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinances—variances that hinder the revitalization of our Downtown area.

I also believe it's important to establish a dedicated staff position focused solely on promoting Purcellville. This role would attract new businesses that complement our existing community and help increase tourism.

HANK SPECKHARDT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

BRL: How would you assess Purcellville's long-term financial outlook?

HS: Financial strength is not determined by how much money you can raise. It is determined by how responsibly you manage what you have and how well you prepare for what is coming.

That is one of the most important lessons I learned owning businesses. You cannot solve every problem by charging customers more. You have to control expenses, distinguish necessities from wants, anticipate future obligations and make investments that produce lasting value.

Our water and wastewater systems present significant long-term challenges, but higher rates should not automatically be the first answer. We should validate capital needs, examine operating costs, pursue outside funding and make sure projects occur when they are actually needed.

I am equally skeptical of the idea that substantially more growth will solve financial problems. Development creates new costs and liabilities. A business would never evaluate an expansion by counting the new revenue while ignoring the expenses. Town government should not either.

We need disciplined spending, careful capital planning and a realistic understanding of future obligations. That approach can strengthen Purcellville's finances while protecting affordability and our small-town character.

BRL: How would you encourage economic development?

HS: As someone who has owned businesses, I know government does not create successful businesses. Entrepreneurs do. What government can do is create an environment where they have a fair opportunity to succeed.

Businesses need predictability, reasonable taxes, efficient services and a government that respects their time. If someone wants to open or expand a business consistent with our zoning, Town processes should be understandable, timely and consistent.

We should also recognize what we already have. Purcellville's low commercial vacancy rate tells us businesses want to be here. Our goal should be to build on that strength, not assume economic development requires greater density or a larger Town government.

I want a diverse commercial community—locally owned businesses, restaurants, professional services, retailers and larger businesses all contribute to our economy.

We should continue supporting the events and activities that bring people into Purcellville, support our businesses and bring our community together. Economic development should strengthen both our local economy and the community that makes people want to be here.

OPINION: GETTING OLD, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

from us. It is how we treat the waiter when the food is wrong, the young person who doesn't know what we know, or the receptionist, cashier, flight attendant, neighbor or stranger who happens to inconvenience us.

And yes, it is how we behave when we are tired, frustrated or angry. Anyone can be kind when life is going their way. Character reveals itself when it isn't.

We live in a culture that increasingly celebrates being loud, blunt and unapologetic. Somehow, rudeness has been repackaged as honesty. Cruelty gets called toughness. Arrogance gets mistaken for confidence. We tell ourselves we are simply "speaking our mind" when we are often just being inconsiderate.

There is nothing courageous about making someone else feel small. There is nothing strong about humiliating a person who has less power than you. And there is certainly nothing admirable about reaching old age and becoming the person everyone hopes won't sit next to them at dinner.

Age should make us wiser, not meaner. Experience should make us more patient, not more entitled. A lifetime of mistakes should make us more forgiving of the mistakes of others.

That doesn't mean we have to agree with everyone. It doesn't mean surrendering our convictions or stopping our hard truths. We can be direct without being disrespectful. We can disagree without being disagreeable. We can set boundaries without insulting people.

The difference is character.

And character matters because, in the end, very little of what we spend our lives chasing will matter nearly as much as we think it will.

Someday, if we are fortunate, people will gather at our gravesite. They may talk about our careers, the houses we lived in, the awards we received, the money we made or the titles we held.

But after a while, those details fade. What remains are the stories. What kind of parent were you? What kind of friend were you? Did people trust you? Did you make people feel valued? Did you keep your word? Did you show up when someone needed you? And perhaps most importantly, how did you make people feel when they were around you?

That is when character becomes your reputation. And your reputation is built one interaction at a time. You don't get to retire from that responsibility. You don't get a senior discount on decency. You don't get a lifetime exemption from saying "please," "thank you," "I'm sorry," or "I was wrong."

Getting older is a privilege. It is an opportunity to become a better version of yourself, pass along hard-earned wisdom and leave behind an example worth following.

So perhaps as the years accumulate, we should ask ourselves a simple question: Am I becoming someone people respect more because of how I treat them, or someone they

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"TEMPORARY" TURBINES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Residents did not begin learning what the change meant until the turbines were operating.

Saines said that in March 2025, after neighbors complained about noise, County zoning staff investigated. Initially, officials believed residents might be hearing construction or testing of backup generators.

Instead, they discovered that the continuing noise was coming from the natural gas turbines being used as the facility's primary power source.

By May 2025, Vantage had confirmed that the persistent humming originated from the turbine plant.

That history frustrated several residents, including one man who said he attended a Vantage community meeting in October 2022.

"There was no mention of turbine engines on the site there," he said.

He questioned why Vantage did not return to the community after deciding to install an on-site power plant.

"Because we would have all opposed it," he said, adding that residents now have to live with the consequences.

He described the facility as a "huge nuisance" affecting residents' health, well-being and property values.

Allen said she was not with Vantage in 2022 but told residents the company is now committed to better community engagement.

For many residents, however, the question was no longer simply how the facility had been approved. It was whether existing standards adequately protect the people who live around it.

County Acting Zoning Enforcement Division Manager Amanda Johnson said the residential noise limit is generally 55 dBA and explained that inspectors must follow specific procedures governing where, when and how measurements are taken.

Since early 2025, County staff have conducted approximately 132 individual noise readings on 20 inspection dates. Some readings exceeded the residential limit, but the County determined those measurements could not be used to establish violations because other sounds—including traffic, aircraft or outdoor activity—affected the readings.

Johnson said the County has also conducted unannounced late-night and early-morning inspections in an effort to isolate the Vantage noise when traffic and other background sounds are reduced.

Yet residents repeatedly questioned what it means for a facility to remain technically compliant while producing a sound that has changed daily life in their neighborhoods.

One resident put the issue directly to Vantage.

The company, she noted, has repeatedly emphasized that the facility has remained within the County's 55-decibel standard. But only after residents began complaining did Vantage install acoustic panels, louvers, baffles, skirting and other noise-reduction measures.

"So which failed here," she asked, "Vantage's original engineering, or a county standard that allowed this level of community impact while the facility remained technically compliant?"

Allen acknowledged that it was a fair question.

Vantage has spent approximately $15 million on noise mitigation, she said, including acoustic blankets around turbine equipment, redesigned vent hoods, sound baffles, wall panels and modifications to exhaust fans.

The company's testing has measured noise reductions ranging from two to six dBA, Allen said, and additional mitigation is continuing.

Another resident acknowledged that conditions have improved but said the high-pitched whine remains, particularly on humid days and when winds carry the sound toward area homes.

Resident Craig Dobbs focused on the character of the noise rather than simply its volume.

"Your noise is at 2.8 kilohertz," he told Vantage representatives. "It is heard all the way over half a mile away."

He said the sound falls within a frequency range to which human hearing is particularly sensitive.

Allen acknowledged that Vantage is still trying to identify and address the tonal component of the noise, calling it an "engineering challenge."

Health concerns brought some of the meeting's most emotional testimony.

One Sterling mother, fighting back tears, told officials that her 2-year-old son has chronic upper respiratory problems.

"I feel really my confidence in living in this area is shaken every day," she said.

She asked whether anyone is tracking health changes among people living near the area's growing concentration of data centers—253 and counting.

"Thinking about what the health effects are going to be to my son, and I'm sure anyone who's here who has children feels the same way," she said.

Monitoring pollution after the fact, she said, would provide little comfort if children were already suffering health effects.

"Who is keeping track of the health changes to the populations around here?" she asked.

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Carver Alumni to Celebrate Emancipation Day in Purcellville



The Carver Alumni Association will bring the community together in Purcellville on Sept. 19 for its annual Emancipation Day celebration, continuing the organization's work to preserve local Black history and support residents across generations.

The celebration will begin at 11 a.m. at the Carver Community Center, 200 Willie Palmer Way in Purcellville, and will feature guest speakers, gospel choirs, an Emancipation roll call, door prizes, vendors and a free lunch.

The program will also include remarks from Purcellville Mayor Chris Bertaut and a speaker addressing Juneteenth. An auction and 50/50 raffle are also planned.

The Carver Alumni Association traces its beginnings to 2009 and received nonprofit 501(c)(3) status in 2012. Its members include former students of

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OPINION: POWER TO THE PEOPLE,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

want to be in charge of those workers. That's Leninism.

Populism as a Belief

My ideal would be a republican form of government where those in government truly served the citizens first, not business or Labor. I'd add one proviso: Term limits. Aside from that point, the only thing needed is an attitudinal change, not just by elected politicians but by the government staff.

Locally, the County periodically surveys its residents, but the latest polls mean nothing. Earlier polls did.

The most recent polls asked questions like these: Do you like Loudoun? Are parks nice? Is housing expensive? Almost as a footnote, the survey mentioned a few areas where residents saw problems.

Earlier polls skipped the feel-good questions and focused on problems cited by residents. Traffic and excessive growth were almost unanimously cited as complaints. (Today, data centers would be at the top of the list.) Obviously, nothing was done to alleviate residents' main concerns. Has growth slowed? No. Is traffic better? No.

Seeing the major complaints feels more important than getting the "feel good" answers to the revised poll.

County Staff

Friends of ours complained to the County that their next-door neighbor was running a heavy construction business on a lot with residential zoning. Worse, his big machines were cranked up at around six o'clock in the morning. A zoning staff member arrived, heard my friends' complaint and then went to see the contractor. Perversely, he spent that time suggesting zoning loopholes the contractor could use.

I recall that despite giant dump trucks and such, the County guy deemed the construction operation a "small business" and thus permitted by zoning. It's hard to think that a yard full of heavy construction equipment is a "small business."

The staffer should have come at the problem from a different direction, and thought to himself, "This is a bad situation. How can I protect the poor homeowner?"

That's what I mean by an attitudinal change.

Stakeholders

County government is supposed to be governed by our General Plan (which has a statutory requirement to be updated every five years, and it's been six years since it was passed) Next came a new zoning ordinance a few years later.

For each of these undertakings, the Board appointed a group of people to do the initial work. A "Stakeholders Committee" handled the General Plan, and the Zoning Ordinance Committee worked to create a zoning ordinance that embodied the ideas in the Plan.

Well-meaning supervisors envisioned these committees as being comprised of every group that had a stake in the outcome. The Stakeholders Committee ended up being heavily weighted towards business interests. The Zoning Ordinance Committee included developers and their cronies, who formed a majority.

This was very bad.

Both documents have serious flaws that hurt residents. For example, breweries are considered agriculture while "farm" is not one of the defined terms. There was heated debate about that as business members fought against such a definition.

A Second Chance?

The zoning ordinance always needs refinements or updates, and the General Plan is supposed to be updated every five years. I suggest the relevant committees be comprised of nine residents, none of whom have ties to business, and that those committees may have "advisory panels" of up to five business experts.

That would be populism as it should be.

Despite his MBA, a career developing office buildings, and being a capitalist, Charlie Houston has evolved into a populist.

"TEMPORARY" TURBINES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Deputy Director Jonathan Rak said DEQ has placed a temporary air-quality sensor near the Vantage facility as part of a broader data center monitoring project in Loudoun.

Data collected from June through mid-August showed air quality within what DEQ considers the safe range except during periods affected by Canadian wildfire smoke, Rak said.

DEQ also responded after Vantage's diesel backup generators ran for more than 24 hours during a July incident. Inspectors observed visible emissions from one generator that appeared to exceed permitted levels, although wildfire smoke made the measurement difficult. DEQ subsequently issued a warning letter requiring Vantage to inspect and maintain the backup generators.

Another resident questioned DEQ about its ability to reach conclusions involving human health, noting that the agency does not employ physicians or medical experts.

Rak said DEQ relies on health standards established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and focuses on collecting actual air-quality measurements that can be used by those evaluating potential health effects.

Sterling School Board representative Amy Riccardi broadened the discussion beyond noise measurements and individual permits.

When she ran for School Board, Riccardi said, transmission lines and data centers "were not on my bingo card." They have since become issues consuming a significant amount of her time.

She said residents came to Loudoun for green spaces and quiet, but have watched trees disappear, power infrastructure expand and data centers rise near neighborhoods and schools.

"I feel like we've missed the bigger issue," Riccardi said. "We have seriously diminished the quality of life here in Loudoun County."

She called for larger changes rather than continuing to address problems one at a time after they occur.

"I love AI and I love technology like everybody else does, but there's a place for these," she said, "not sitting across from people's homes, not running power lines through our school campuses, not running transmission lines through our neighborhoods."

Vantage said the lines it is considering to bring additional electricity to VA2 would be distribution lines, not large transmission lines, and that the company hopes to place as much of them underground as possible.

The company is also exploring bringing power from another Vantage campus, which could allow at least one of the seven regularly operating turbines to be shut down.

Saines said the County has formed a working group to review noise standards, including turbine use and tonal frequencies, with recommendations expected to reach the Board of Supervisors.

He is also pursuing changes that could place limits on how long emergency generators operate and said he wants state law changed to require public hearings for permits involving gas turbines and backup generators.

The County has already changed its rules so that a similar natural gas generating facility could no longer receive the same type of administrative approval used for Vantage VA2.

But those changes came after the Sterling facility was approved.

One resident summarized that chronology in a single observation: development came first, impacts came second and protections arrived third.

That remains the dilemma facing the neighborhoods surrounding VA2.

Vantage says it is complying with existing standards and continuing to spend millions of dollars reducing the impact of the facility. County and state officials say they are monitoring conditions and considering stronger regulations.

Residents, meanwhile, are still living beside seven operating natural gas turbines that they never expected to be there—and which, absent a faster connection to the electric grid, could remain their neighbors until 2040.

BLUEMONT FAIR, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

entertainment and activities for nearly every age.

Visitors can browse handmade goods and regional art before heading off in search of something to eat—whether from a food truck, the bake sale, gourmet coffee truck or vendors offering farm-fresh treats. Adults can stop by the beer and wine garden, while aspiring bakers and pickle makers can test their talents in the always-popular pickle and pie contest.

For younger fairgoers, the Children's Fair will feature a free petting zoo and free face painting, along with pony rides, a scavenger hunt, rock climbing and other activities.

And there will be plenty of music.

Performers will take to three stages throughout both days, with a variety of live entertainment, including a chance for visitors to try some line dancing.

Art will have a special home as well. For the second year, the fair will present its selectively curated art show upstairs at the historic E.E. Lake Store, showcasing work by some of the region's celebrated artists.

A Step Back in Time

This year's fair will also give visitors an opportunity to explore Loudoun County's connection to the Revolutionary War.



The Plaster Museum in the center of the village will host "The Revolution: An American Mosaic," an exhibition highlighting elements of Loudoun County's participation in the war.

Nearby, reenactors from the Sons of the American Revolution will bring some of that history to life with demonstrations in the field near the Montessori school.

The fair's traditional demonstrations will return as well, including blacksmithing, beekeeping, model trains and artisans showing visitors how their work is done.

Behind the music, food, art and festivities is something that has kept the Bluemont Fair going for more than half a century: the community itself.

The fair is entirely volunteer-led, with residents gathering for meetings and planning sessions throughout the year and volunteers filling every leadership position.

Since its beginning in 1970, the annual gathering has become far more than a two-day event. It is one of the traditions that helps bind the Bluemont community together—while inviting thousands of others to experience the character of the historic village.

And for one weekend this September, that village will once again be filled with artists, musicians, history lovers, children, neighbors, visitors and, this year, bears.

Admission is $10, with children ages 9 and younger admitted free. The fair runs from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 19–20. Pets are not permitted, except service animals.

PURCELLVILLE IS MORE THAN A FEW BLOCKS,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

The Planning Commission's own record is especially instructive: the Commission voted to "retain" the rule allowing up to two apartment units in a C-4 building while not permitting an apartment building.

Retain means preserve an existing rule, not create a new restriction.

There is a legitimate policy debate to be had over whether Purcellville should allow more residential density downtown. If someone believes three, five or more apartments should be permitted in a building, make that case openly. Explain the effect on water and sewer capacity, parking, traffic, infrastructure, neighboring properties and the character residents have repeatedly said they value. Then let the community weigh the benefits and costs.

But that is a proposal to change Purcellville's policy going forward. It should not be presented as simply restoring a development right that the new zoning ordinance took away.

And the discussion must include the entire town.

Loudoun County's 2026 assessment data identify 2,913 residential parcels in Purcellville and 252 commercial and industrial parcels. Those residential properties, together with businesses along East Main Street, West Main Street, Hirst Road and elsewhere, all contribute to the tax base and all have a stake in how limited town resources are spent.

A mayor is elected to represent all of them.

We should continue improving North 21st Street. We should support property owners who want to reinvest, fill vacancies, improve pedestrian connections and preserve the historic buildings that make Purcellville distinctive.

But we should begin by recognizing what already works.

Before spending $100,000 to $350,000 on another master plan, tell taxpayers precisely what the existing plan fails to accomplish. Before describing downtown as waiting to be brought back, acknowledge the successful businesses already bringing people there. And before proposing greater density, explain honestly that it is a policy change and discuss its townwide costs as well as its benefits.

Community-led planning should start with the community that is already here.

Purcellville does not need to be "brought back." It needs thoughtful stewardship of what generations of residents and business owners have already built—and a vision broad enough to include the entire town.

Ronald B. Rise is the former Chair of the Purcellville Planning Commission and is a Retired Aerospace Engineer and Business Owner.

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NEW TOWN MANAGER REVERSES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Town's grievance procedure had been certified by the Loudoun County Circuit Court in 2005. According to then-Town Attorney John Cafferky, because the grievance procedure had not substantively changed by 2024, other than minor formatting changes, it did not need recertification.

Before the grievance process began, Cafferky recused himself from evaluating the legitimacy of the investigation into Nett because neither he nor the Town Manager had been informed of the investigation before Nett was placed on administrative leave. Sproul was then hired. He spent approximately four months developing and overseeing the process, in part because the Human Resources Department had failed over the years to maintain the required list of Grievance Panel members.

The grievance proceeded to an evidentiary hearing before the three-member Panel and a unanimous decision ordering Nett reinstated. Sproul later became Purcellville's Town Attorney.

Olsen, however, subsequently reached a different conclusion about the validity of the grievance process.

"That decision should have ended the matter, for only an action brought before a Court of competent jurisdiction could reverse it," Olsen wrote of his own November 2025 determination.

On Aug. 11, Olsen asked Sproul to advise him whether Purcellville intended to implement Sabio's directive and requested an answer by Aug. 14, despite Sproul's recusal from the Nett grievance matter after having spent months overseeing and developing the grievance process that led to the Panel's decision.

Nevertheless, Sproul advised that the Town should not implement Sabio's directive.

Rogers acted Aug. 13.

His reversal specifically cites Olsen's letter.

"After reviewing the facts surrounding this matter, including the attached letter from Special Prosecutor Eric Olsen, it is clear to me that the Interim Town Manager did not have authority to act with respect to the Grievance Panel on August 1, 2026," Rogers wrote.

Rogers's one-page directive does not independently analyze the Grievance Panel's findings or the evidence heard by the Panel. It also does not address the Panel's findings regarding the political circumstances surrounding Nett's termination.

The Panel Found Political Motivation

The Panel's findings are central to understanding why the continuing battle over Nett's reinstatement is more than an ordinary employment dispute.

Political targeting was not merely alleged by Nett.

After hearing the evidence, the Grievance Panel made its own findings.

The Panel found that a succession of internal investigations, increased scrutiny, disciplinary actions and other events occurring after Nett's election to Town Council "reasonably support Mr. Nett's feeling that he was being targeted at work."

It found Nett's testimony about that targeting "credible and factually unchallenged by the Town."

But the Panel went considerably further.

It devoted an entire section of its unanimous decision to **"THE DEPARTMENT'S ACTIONS WERE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED."**

"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," the decision states.

The Panel also found that the Department failed to follow the Town's progressive and proportional disciplinary requirements and treated Nett differently from supervisors.

It was equally unequivocal about the allegations used to terminate him.

"No," the Panel answered when determining whether Nett engaged in the behavior described in the written notices used to justify his termination.

"No," it answered when determining whether his behavior constituted misconduct or violated the law.

The Panel ultimately ordered his termination reversed and directed the Town to reinstate him to his former position with back pay and applicable benefits.

A Decision That Still Has Not Been Implemented

More than a year later, that has not happened.

Implementation stalled after the Panel issued its unanimous decision.

Documents previously obtained by the *Blue Ridge Leader* showed that by November 2025, then-Interim Town Manager Diana Hays had received legal advice and guidance concerning the Panel decision from Sproul, former Town Attorney John Cafferky and the Town's insurance counsel.

Sproul told Mayor Chris Bertaut that the attorneys had provided Hays with advice and guidance but could not force her to make a decision.

Cafferky told Hays she needed to act.

No decision came.

Olsen subsequently issued his determination challenging the legality of the grievance process itself.

The dispute moved into the courts.

Then came Sabio.

With no prior involvement in Nett's investigation, termination, grievance or hearing, Sabio made the administrative determination Aug. 1 that the relief ordered by the Panel was consistent with the Town's written policies.

He also directed officials previously involved in the underlying personnel dispute to have no discretionary role in implementing his decision. Those officials, Sabio ordered, "shall not delay, condition, reinterpret, or modify the reinstatement."

For the first time in more than a year, the Town had an administrative directive ordering the Panel's relief implemented.

It lasted 12 days.

More Than an Employment Dispute

There are now competing legal positions over who had authority to act.

Olsen maintains that the grievance process itself was legally defective, that the Panel's decision was a nullity and that his November 2025 determination could only be reversed by a court of competent jurisdiction.

Sabio concluded that his responsibility as the Town's chief administrative officer was limited to determining whether the relief awarded by the Grievance Panel was consistent with the Town's written policies. He determined that it was.

Rogers has now sided with Olsen's position and rescinded Sabio's directive.

Those legal questions may ultimately be resolved by a court.

But the documented history remains.

Three Panel members heard the evidence. They unanimously rejected the allegations used to terminate Nett. They found that he had not committed misconduct or violated the law. They found that Town disciplinary policies were not followed. They also expressly found that political divisions motivated the Department to terminate him following his election to Town Council.

They ordered him reinstated. More than a year later, he still has not been.

Nett's reinstatement lasted just 13 days before it was rescinded. The dispute remains unresolved, with competing legal positions over the validity of the Panel's decision, the authority to implement it and the relief awarded to Nett.

OPINION: THE POLITICS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

violations of Virginia Conflict of Interest Laws and Town Policy and Procedures by clear and convincing evidence," at a civil trial.

PAC Director Josh Shields was active in the effort to remove Nett from office. The removal proceeding ultimately went before a jury. Nett was not removed.

The PAC also tells readers that Nett and former Mayor and Town Manager Kwasi Fraser "have been suspended from their roles as public officials by court order."

Their suspensions resulted from SB 648, a new temporary Virginia law that applies only to Purcellville and requires the suspension of Town officials upon being charged with specified felonies.

The suspensions were triggered by the filing of charges—not by findings of guilt. Neither suspension constituted an adjudication of the criminal allegations.

A criminal charge is not a conviction. A statutory suspension is not a finding of guilt. When an organization promises voters "factual information," the facts cannot stop where the preferred narrative begins.

No Finding of an Open-Meeting Violation

Citizens for Purcellville also alleges that Bertaut, Vice Mayor Nett, and Council Members Carol Luke and Susan Khalil violated open-meeting requirements by conducting coordinated council business outside formal meetings.

The PAC cites prepared statements, council members voting together and matters being added to meeting agendas. These are ordinary functions of elected government.

Similar allegations have been repeatedly raised during Town Council meetings: questions about supposed "secret meetings," demands to know when council members discussed an issue, or suggestions that arriving at a public meeting with notes or a prepared statement demonstrates prior coordination. But repetition does not transform an allegation into an established fact.

Bertaut, Nett, Luke and Khalil have not been charged with violating Virginia's open-meeting laws, the allegations have never been adjudicated in court, and no authoritative body has found that they violated the law.

There is a fundamental difference between an allegation and a finding of wrongdoing. Repeating an allegation at council meetings, online or elsewhere does not erase that distinction.

A "Neutral" Moderator?

Citizens for Purcellville is also organizing a September candidate forum that it describes as "non-partisan."

In an invitation to the Blue Ridge Leader and other media outlets, Shields wrote that "to ensure impartiality, a neutral moderator will facilitate the event."

The PAC selected Riverside High School teacher Ben Freeman.

Freeman, a Purcellville resident, signed a petition seeking the recall of Mayor Chris Bertaut, who is now running for reelection.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29 »

OPINION: THE POLITICS, CON'T. FROM P. 28

The recall effort never went to court and did not result in Bertaut's removal.

That history is relevant when Freeman is being presented to voters as a "neutral" moderator.

The Blue Ridge Leader will not participate in the forum. For the past year and a half, this newspaper has witnessed the shouting, profanity, disruptions and extraordinary political hostility from Rayner's supporters that have consumed Purcellville Town Council meetings.

We have witnessed the mocking of the mayor and members of the council majority, the shouting and cursing from the audience, including by the PAC's director, and repeated efforts to disrupt and derail the business of the Town Council—all without objection from Council Members Rayner, Kevin Wright or Caleb Stought.

Those realities cannot simply be erased by attaching the words "non-partisan" and "neutral" to an election forum.

Advocacy is not impartiality, and an allegation is not an established fact. Repetition is not proof. Political opinion should not be presented as factual research.

"Factual." "Non-partisan." "Neutral." Those words carry meaning. Citizens for Purcellville is not simply a civic organization; it is a political action committee. Its own record tells voters what those words are worth.

OPINION: GETTING OLD, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

tolerate because they feel obligated to?

Because one day, we will all be remembered by someone. The question is not whether they will remember how old we were. They will remember who we were.

And long after the dates on our gravestone are forgotten, our reputation may be the most enduring thing we ever leave behind.

Ken Falke, is a 21-year veteran of the US Navy Special Operations Explosive Ordnance Disposal community. Falke is a serial entrepreneur and the chairman and founder of Boulder Crest Foundation, an organization focused on the teachings of posttraumatic growth. He is also the author of "Struggle Well: Thriving in the Aftermath of Trauma" and "Lead Well: 10 Steps to Successful and Sustainable Leadership.

ERIN RAYNER, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Hall a partner, not an obstacle. From there, our downtown is the real opportunity.

Walk down 21st Street and you'll see too many empty storefronts and historic buildings waiting years for someone to care about them again. I want to fill those spaces with local small businesses, not big-box development, and do it right, with the community at the table from the start. We have direction in our 2030 Comprehensive Plan; we lack the tools to carry it out. I'd focus on zoning faithful to that plan; an updated downtown master plan for storefronts, streetscapes, and parking, like Leesburg has done well; and putting our existing assets to work:

The Economic Development Advisory Committee, the Purcellville Main Street Organization I helped found, and rejoining the Virginia Main Street Program. We also have to invest in our community and be proud of it, promoting our events and championing what makes this town special. A thriving commercial property doesn't just pay real estate tax; it generates sales, meals, and business license revenue and creates jobs, broadening the tax base and easing the burden on residential taxpayers. A mayor should be Purcellville's biggest cheerleader.



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OPINION: QUIT, FLIP, OR GET DESTROYED,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Those are serious allegations, and I understand that serious allegations require evidence.

That is precisely why I have been documenting what happened.

My ongoing video series, The Battle of Purcellville, was created not merely for public consumption but to organize and present information concerning what I allege constitutes a broader, interconnected conspiracy involving multiple parties. I have provided this information to federal authorities.

People can examine the evidence and reach their own conclusions.

I particularly encourage viewers to watch "S.G. Revealed" on my YouTube channel, Alive With Ben Nett. It explains why I believe significant questions remain unanswered about the investigations and prosecutions involving me. "S.G." is one of my supposed political opponents, who I have been charged with targeting via law enforcement databases. Those charges are premised on a lie, and are the reason I continue to express my desire for a formal federal criminal civil rights investigation while fully cooperating with investigators.

I Know Something About Investigations

I don't make these allegations casually.

I spent years working in national-security positions, including federal law enforcement with the U.S. Secret Service. I began a new adventure with the Purcellville Police Department and was named Purcellville's 2024 Police Officer of the Year after stopping what I believed to be a potential school shooting at Blue Ridge Middle School and disrupting a nationwide theft and money-laundering operation.

Investigating complicated events, evaluating evidence, identifying inconsistencies, and connecting people and conduct are not foreign concepts to me.

That background is one reason I refused simply to accept what was happening around me without asking questions.

The Saddest Part

This is what troubles me most.

I have devoted virtually my entire adult life to public service—to my country, my Commonwealth, and my community.

As a Purcellville police officer, I would have risked my life to protect any member of this community, including people who later became my fiercest political opponents.

That obligation never depended upon someone's politics.

The same was true during my federal service. Whether I was protecting a Republican president or assigned to Democrat presidential candidates, the mission came first. During my service in Afghanistan with the CIA, I accepted risks that could have cost me my life.

That was the standard by which I tried to live: duty before politics.

Yet a relatively small group of people has worked relentlessly to portray me as someone I do not recognize.

I believe some officials who swore the same oath I did—to uphold the Constitution and protect the rights of Americans—ultimately violated my civil rights under color of law. Those allegations will be tested through the appropriate legal processes and judged on the evidence.

Perhaps they expected me to quit.

Perhaps they thought I would go away, run out of money, or simply become too exhausted to continue fighting.

They miscalculated.

I have faced serious threats and dangerous circumstances before. I will not be intimidated into abandoning lawful efforts to defend my reputation, assert my rights, present evidence, and seek accountability through the courts and appropriate investigative authorities.

November Is About Purcellville's Future

As I wrote recently to the residents of Purcellville, I am not on the ballot this November.

But the future direction of our Town certainly is.

Voters should understand that the disputes surrounding the Town and its officials may continue well beyond Election Day. Erin Rayner may be involved in litigation and court proceedings connected with these matters extending well beyond the next mayoral term.

Her anticipated court involvement begins this fall, days before the election, in connection with my criminal case.

I allege that Erin Rayner played a central role in initiating the State Police investigation involving me with false allegations, and that allegations attributed to her were also used in employment proceedings against me. I dispute those allegations and contend that the actions taken against me were politically motivated.

Those questions will ultimately be resolved through evidence, testimony, and legal proceedings—not social-media campaigns.

Civil litigation is also foreseeable.

That matters because elections have consequences beyond personalities. They affect governance, public confidence, development policy, infrastructure, Purcellville's long-term direction, and, quite significantly, the Town's legal exposure.

Residents therefore deserve to know what they are voting for—and what disputes may follow the people they elect, and what liabilities the people they elect may bring upon the Town's taxpayers.

Susan Khalil's resignation should be a warning about something larger than one council member.

No community benefits when participating in local government becomes so personally destructive that reasonable people decide public service isn't worth it. No faction should be able to accomplish through intimidation, harassment, or relentless personal attacks what it could not accomplish through persuasion and elections.

Purcellville belongs to its residents.

Political disagreements should be settled with facts, open debate, due process, and ultimately ballots—not by making public life unbearable for anyone who refuses to fall in line.

CARVER CENTER,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

Carver Elementary School in Purcellville, but membership is open to anyone interested in helping the organization continue its work.

Preserving the history of Carver and Black history in Loudoun County is central to the group's mission. The organization also works to carry that history forward through service to the community, including annual scholarships, assistance to senior citizens, school supplies for students and programs supporting young people.

"Even though we are a small organization, we will do as much as we can to accomplish our mission in the community," said Garry Smith, treasurer of the Carver Alumni Association.

The annual Emancipation Day celebration is part of that mission, combining remembrance of the past with fellowship among today's community.

The day's program will open with a welcome and prayer, followed by an Emancipation roll call. Gospel music, guest speakers and door prize drawings will be interspersed throughout the program, with a prayer before the free community lunch.

Following lunch, the program will continue with additional speakers and gospel music, including remarks focused on Juneteenth, before concluding with comments from participants.

For the Carver alumni, the event is also an opportunity to invite more people to become involved in the organization and help ensure its work continues.

Smith said membership is open to anyone who wants to participate and help make the organization successful.

The celebration is free and open to the community, with seating available for approximately 100 people.

The Carver Alumni Association's Emancipation Day Celebration will be held Saturday, Sept. 19, beginning at 11 a.m. at the Carver Community Center, 200 Willie Palmer Way, Purcellville.

LETTER: REASONS TO VOTE,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

More residential density in a town already facing the challenges of traffic, infrastructure and the increasing cost of providing services.

More politics, division and dysfunction at a time when Purcellville desperately needs professionalism, stability, fiscal discipline and common sense.

More litigation. More spending. More development. More government. More division. More chaos.

On second thought, perhaps the blank space would have said it better.

Damon Cable
Purcellville



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