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'Democracy Thrives In Sunshine'

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Voting to Redistrict Vs. Trump Begins

Early Voting for Special
Election Starts Friday

BY NICHOLAS F. BENTON
FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS

Virginia voters will head to the polls starting this Friday, March 6, to weigh in on a plan to redraw the state's congressional map in response to GOP gerrymanders in other states.

Yesterday, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled that the referendum election will proceed, staying the circuit court's injunction that had temporarily blocked it.

The Supreme Court did not decide whether the amendment process was constitutional, according to a report by pro-Democratic Party attorney Mark Elias. "Instead, it relied on a long-standing principle in Virginia law: Courts generally do not use injunctions to stop elections before they happen," he wrote. "The reasoning goes back over a century — elections are considered a political process, and courts typically review their legality after the voters have acted, not before.

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Meridian High

Student Newspaper,

The Lasso, P. 14-15

Camps & Schools

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ART FOR JOY'S SAKE



AT LAST WEEKEND'S Opening Night reception hosted by Falls Church Arts at its 700 W. Broad Gallery featured works that "bring joy." That's what two smaller items placed in the center of the space did for the packed house which attended. The exhibition continues through the month. (Photo: FCNP)

F.C. Announces Real Estate Assessments Up 6.9%

BY NICHOLAS F. BENTON
FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS

City of Falls Church real estate assessments jumped by 6.9 percent in the past year, almost double what its neighbors in Arlington and Fairfax have reported, according to a press release issued by the F.C. City last night. An increase of 6.5 percent in commercial property values, bucking the regional trend, accounts for

most of the significant overall net growth.

Just before the *News-Press* went to press, the City of Falls Church released the results of the City's real estate assessor showing the total taxable assessed value for all properties within the City as of January 1 standing at \$6,858,095,600. After adjustments, the number represented an overall increase of \$445.4 million, or 6.9 percent, increase from the year

earlier. Market value growth accounted for 5.3 percent and an increase due to new construction 1.6 percent.

The City reported that individual assessment notices were mailed to property owners this week.

The City's report is based on the work of its new real estate assessor Darius Gould, who replaced Ervving Bailey in that post in recent months. Last fall, Bailey left his posi-

tion in Falls Church to become the deputy director of assessments in Arlington.

The current report includes the news that overall residential real estate values rose 7.2 percent (6.2 percent market growth and 1.0 percent new construction) over the past year.

Single-family homes and townhomes experienced varied

Continued on Page 4

FALLS CHURCH NEWS BRIEFS

F.C. School Board Told It Can Work With Less

At its final budget work session last Tuesday, the Falls Church School Board heard from the F.C. system's chief operating officer Alicia Prince concerning updated revenue projections data from the City government.

Under the current revenue-sharing agreement with the City, the schools will receive a \$2.3 million in additional funding out of the City's projected revenue surplus during the current fiscal year.

She also reported that the schools' initial call for a funding increase for the coming fiscal year of 5.02 percent over the current year is not likely to be met by the City, which now projects funding for a 4.1 percent increase, the resulting \$500,000 gap.

But she advised that the district leverage natural staff attrition at the elementary level and streamlining contracted labor relations services will close that gap.

Virginia Legislature OKs Path to Fairfax Casino

Legislation that would pave the way for a casino in Fairfax County is heading to Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger, who could sign, amend or veto it. The Virginia House of Delegates passed SB 756 from Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell by 62-32 yesterday, advancing a legislative effort that has gained momentum over the past few years alongside increasingly vocal opposition from many local residents and elected officials.

If signed into law by Spanberger, Fairfax County will join Norfolk, Petersburg, Bristol, Portsmouth and Danville on Virginia's list of localities eligible to host a casino.

F.C. Community Band At Meridian High Saturday

The Falls Church Community Band presents "A World Mosaic of Dance and Music" this Saturday, March 7 at 7:30 p.m. at Meridian High School. Promised is an "unforgettable evening of music and dance" as the band will take the audience on a journey around the globe, celebrating diverse cultures through dynamic and colorful performances.

The program features special guests including a featured set performed by the Washington Balalaika Ensemble, acclaimed trumpet soloist Ryan Fuhrman, and talented Irish dancers from the O'Neill James School of Irish Dance. Admission is free.

F.C. Council Poised to Pass Scooter Pilot Program

At its business meeting this Monday, March 9, the Falls Church City Council is poised to grant approval for a one-year pilot program to allow "shared mobility device," i.e. mostly scooter, options in the Little City.

At its work session this week, the Council learned the parameters of a proposed pilot program as presented by City environmental planner Kurt Lawrence. Under the "shared mobility device" categorization are motorized skateboards, scooters, bicycles, or electric power-assisted bicycles.

These devices are typically shared among riders, operated by private companies, enabled by technology or apps, often deployed as fleets of devices throughout a geographic area, and frequently "dockless," meaning that they park in public spaces and "lock" to themselves in an app. The typical cost of an e-scooter ride involves a \$1 unlock fee and a fee ranging from \$0.45-\$0.50 per minute. Given an average trip distance of a mile, and trip duration of 15 minutes, the average cost of a single ride can equal \$8.

In a modification from an earlier proposal, the minimum age for legal use of such a device will be 18, not 16, in the City, the staff report advises. At Monday's work session, Council member Justine Underhill expressed "disappointment" at the 18 year minimum age, noting it would preclude use by most high school students, and that it runs contrary to the 16 year minimum age for legally driving a car.

F.C. Council Mulls Strategic Priorities, Adoption Monday

A set of strategic priorities that emerged from the Falls Church City Council's annual retreat last month may be voted on at the City Council's business meeting this Monday.

According to City Manager Wyatt Shields, "These priorities will help inform the Council's deliberation of the proposed FY2027 budget between March 23 and May 11." The Council discussed the matter at its public work session this Monday.

This resolution is an opportunity for Council to articulate key priorities for change in the City

over the coming two fiscal years. Doing this at the beginning of the term helps the City Council organize its work, inform the public on key areas of policy and programs that the City Council seeks to advance, and provides clarity to the City Manager and staff on the governing body's priorities, Shields said in a staff report to the Council. "The Strategic Priorities might also be described as the City Council's "Change Agenda" for the coming term."

The key priority areas of interest emerged from the planning retreat were Housing, Transportation, Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability, with Responsive Government added to the list during a follow on Council discussion.

The draft vision statement includes the following core values: Small-Town Character in an Urban Setting, Economic Sustainability, Environmental Sustainability, Inclusiveness and Social Sustainability, Education, Mobility and Accessibility, Public Health and Safety, and Responsive and Accountable Governance.

The proposed City Council Strategic Priorities for FY2027-28 are strongly aligned with the broader vision and objectives set forth in the Comprehensive Plan, Shields pointed out.



CELEBRATING THE 25TH anniversary of the establishment of Freddie's Beach Bar, Northern Virginia's only gay bar, located in Crystal City, was a hugely attended event at the establishment Sunday night. In this photo, l. to r., are Ezra Solomon, Freddie Lutz (the owner), Lou Chibbaro of the Washington Blade, Nicholas Benton of the Falls Church News-Press and David Hoffman. (Photo: News-Press)



APPEARING AT HIS FIRST public event since retiring from the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and moving into the City of Falls Church, veteran lawmaker John Foust (right) chatted with F.C. City Manger Wyatt Shields (left) at the F.C. City Council meeting last Monday. (Photo: News-Press)

Virginia Supreme Court Ruling, Special Election Going Ahead

Continued from Page 1

The state supreme court cited precedent explaining that even if an election may ultimately be invalid, the judiciary should not prevent people from going to the polls. If the amendment is later adopted, courts can then determine whether the process complied with the Constitution and whether the result is valid.

“Importantly, the Court emphasized that the underlying constitutional challenges are still very serious and remain pending. The stay only means the election will occur — not that the legal arguments against the process have been rejected,” Elias wrote yesterday.

So, any registered voter will be able to cast an early ballot for the April statewide referendum that would allow for a U.S. congressional redistricting in time for this November’s critical midterm elections. The culminating election day will be April 21.

The ballot measure is in the form of an amendment to the Virginia constitution. The ballot question reads, “Question: Should the Constitution of Virginia be amended to allow the General Assembly to temporarily adopt new congressional districts to restore fairness in the upcoming elections, while ensuring Virginia’s standard redistricting process resumes for all future redistricting after the 2030 census? Vote Yes or No.”

In Falls Church, early voting is done during normal business hours at the Voter Registrar’s Office at City Hall, 300 Park Avenue. Falls Church’s voter registrar David Bjerke confirmed to the News-Press that his office will be open beginning at 8 a.m. this Friday for any registered voter who wishes to cast a ballot in that election. He added that his office has already mailed out over 1,000 ballots to residents who signed up to receive mail-in ballots.

If the Yes votes win this

upcoming election, new maps developed by the Democratic majority in Richmond could give Democrats the majority based on past voting patterns in 10 of the 11 U.S. congressional seats in the state.

That could mean that Democrats will pick up four more seats in the U.S. House of Representatives from Virginia than they currently hold.

That would help counter Trump’s unprecedented mid-decade gerrymanders in GOP-controlled states, including Texas, North Carolina and Missouri. Florida Republicans are also set to begin their own redistricting special legislative session in April.

If approved by voters, the new redistricting map would move the City of Falls Church into a newly configured 7th District that is currently represented by no one. U.S. Rep. Don Beyer, the Falls Church

native who has represented the Little City since being elected to Congress a decade ago will no longer represent Falls Church, as the boundaries of his 8th District would be shifted eastward into central Arlington.

Advocates for a Yes vote on the ballot measure that goes to voters beginning this Friday emphasize that it is a temporary, but imminently necessary measure. If passed, it would result in heavily gerrymandered districts to counter Trump moves elsewhere, but could be undone once that threat passes in time for the normal redistricting process that takes place every decade following a national census.

Meanwhile this week, the U.S. Supreme Court (SCOTUS) declined to hear two petitions Monday brought by a leading advocacy group for more restrictive voting rules, which had asked the nation’s highest court to weaken a key federal

voting law.

In one petition, related to access to the state voter rolls of Michigan, the Public Interest Legal Foundation (PILF) asked SCOTUS to reinterpret aspects of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) designed to expand voting access as, instead, a mandate for aggressive voter purges.

The NVRA, also known as the “Motor Voter” law which passed in 1993, is one of the most significant voting rights laws passed since the Voting Rights Act was enacted in 1965. Among several other provisions, it requires states to make “reasonable” efforts to maintain accurate voter rolls.

But PILF has long sought to firm up the definition of “reasonable” in the NVRA’s language, and argued to SCOTUS that “reasonable” demands far more aggressive removals than states already do.



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F.C. Assessments Jump 6.9% According to New City Hall Report

Continued from Page 1

changes but overall increased by 8.1 percent and 7.0 percent, respectively. Residential condominiums have also seen varied changes but an overall 3.2 percent increase.

Overall commercial property values 6.5 percent (2.3 percent market growth and 4.2 percent new construction). Multi-family property values experienced growth of 6.3 percent (4.8 percent market growth and 1.4 percent new construction) over the past year.

Valued at \$102.3 million, new construction accounts for 23 percent of the increase in assessed value. Residential new construction contributed \$43.2 million to this growth while commercial and multi-family new construction accounted for the remaining \$59.2 million of growth.

These assessments will be folded into the City's annual budgeting process, forming the basis of the City Manager's recommended budget due later this month, and the subsequent City Council deliberations that will lead to an eventual Fiscal Year 2027 budget adoption in May.

As set forth in the Virginia Constitution,

real estate is to be assessed at 100 percent of fair market value. According to City Hall, the City's Office of Real Estate Assessment calculates property values annually using mass appraisal techniques that are standard in the real estate assessment industry.

City Hall noted that the notice of assessment is an appraisal of the fair market value of the property and not a tax bill. Property tax payments based on these new assessments and City Council establishment of a new fiscal year budget this spring will be due in two installments next December the following June. Public hearings on the budget will be held in 2026 on Monday, April 13, Monday, April 27 and Monday, May 11 at 7:30 p.m.

City Hall announced that Individual property assessments will be mailed imminently. It has added that homeowners who wish to verify the accuracy of their assessment should contact the Office of Real Estate Assessment. Any disagreements with the value determined by the assessor can result in an appeal to the assessor or the City's Board of Equalization.

The deadlines for assessment appeals are April 15 for an Office of Real Estate

Assessment review, and June 5, 2026 for a Board of Equalization review.

Critter Corner

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See your Pets in the News-Press

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A hot bowl of pho at Eden Center. Voted best shopping center in the DMV!

2026 RainSmart Grants



The Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) announces 2026 grants to conserve water, reduce stormwater runoff, and protect local streams in the City of Falls Church.

- Rain Barrels: \$50 for each of up to 2 barrels
- Rain Gardens: NEW grant increase; \$3,000 or 50% of cost whichever is less



See the VPIS website for information: vpis.org/environment/rainsmart-program

PLEASE DON'T EAT YOUR CHILDREN, CULT CENTURY, & OTHER 2025 ESSAYS

CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONTEMPORARY HISTORY



Nicholas F. Benton

FOUNDER & EDITOR OF FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS



Nicholas F. Benton

Editor-in-Chief of Falls Church News-Press

with Lou Chibbaro Jr. Senior Reporter for The Washington Blade



One More Page BOOKS



Thursday March 12th at 7pm

Will Law Enforcement Be Ready for November?

NICHOLAS F. BENTON

FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS



I had a solemn conversation with a leading regional law enforcement official this week, and asked him whether there have been any conversations among the scores of local and regional public safety agencies he's constantly in touch with about a possible scenario for the November midterm elections.

That "worst case" scenario would, I suggested, involve federal forces like ICE seeking to enforce a presidential edict to cancel the elections by showing up at polling places to block public access to voting.

Surely, there is enough buzz in the press and online about such a possibility nowadays that no one, even my friend in this case, can claim to be entirely unfamiliar with the notion.

He said that there have been no such discussions. But he added that he, his agencies, and others like his are "duty bound" and "sworn" to protect the citizens of the local or regional jurisdictional entities they are hired to perform any and all such functions.

Since all elections in the U.S. are run by localities and not the federal government, it could be assumed that he was suggesting the natural role of his and other entities would be to protect the public's right to vote against any outside incursion.

That's surely encouraging, but not so much is the admission that there have been no explicit conversations among his circles about this matter.

This is despite the fact that following two extraordinary events in the Washington, D.C. region in the last couple dozen years, the 911 attacks of 2001 that included a plane flying directly into the Pentagon and the violent insurrection against the nation's capitol in D.C. on January 6, 2021, extraordinary efforts have led to a far greater communications integration among the 40 to 50 separate public safety entities that serve in the Northern Virginia segment of the D.C. area, alone.

My friend's hand held device is able to access the channels of any of those entities at any given time,

he said.

But in a private call just last week being reported in the media, Department of Homeland Security official Heather Honey's vow to election officials around the country that ICE would not be at the polls in November has left some important people quite unconvinced.

According to a report on the call in the online news outlet Bulwark, "Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes, who was on the line, waved away Honey's promises as empty on account of her past efforts pushing the Big Lie that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump."

Fontes told Politico, "I can't depend on an election denier like that for the truth under any circumstances." Honey was an activist in Pennsylvania whose research Trump attempted to use to overturn the 2020 election.

After all, Trump has already called to "nationalize" elections, and Republicans in the House passed the SAVE America Act, which stipulates national voter ID requirements to stem voting by "illegal aliens," as the president alleged is happening in his State of the Union speech.

In his opinion piece in this Tuesday's *Washington Post*, veteran columnist Keith B. Richburg offered the sobering notion that "People Power Is Not What Ends Dictatorships," as read the piece's headline. It appeared in the context of deliberations about the future of Iran, but the subject matter should be applied equally domestically.

Public uprisings, in and of themselves, have been unsuccessful in overthrowing repressive regimes, he pointed out, citing Tiananmen Square among other examples. On the other hand, the case of the successful 1998 overthrow of strongman Suharto in Indonesia that he witnessed first hand was different.

"Thousands of protesters armed with Molotov cocktails had been facing off against heavily armed riot police in Jakarta. When the marines showed up, I was expecting a bloodbath. But, surprisingly, the marines inserted themselves between the protesters and the police, backs to the protesters, daring the police to fire. Some scuffles ensued, but the marines ultimately forced the police to back off. At that moment, it became clear that Suharto was finished."



A Penny for Your Thoughts

By Penny Gross

Former Fairfax County Supervisor

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) may have been banned from consideration in government by the Trump Administration, but banishment does not diminish their value as compass points in the social compact. This week's column discusses a potpourri of items that each have a connection, however cursory, to DEI.

Communities are reliant on small businesses that often are owned and managed by our immigrant neighbors seeking their American dream. A notable example is Andy Shallal, founder of the popular Busboys and Poets cafes in the metropolitan area. Andy's new book, "A Seat at the Table: The Making of Busboys and Poets," outlines the challenges facing an 11-year-old boy from Iraq whose family could not return home when the political winds changed for his diplomat father. Andy had to adjust to a new language, new customs and culture, even new foods. Andy is very frank about navigating, with mixed success, the types of negative encounters that many young immigrants face in America. With grit and perseverance, Andy decided that his path to maturity and success centered around food, but he wanted his food to do more, to bring people together, to stimulate discussion and debate, ultimately to make people think more broadly about community, politics, and

geopolitics, especially American interference in the Middle East. Andy's anger is on display in his book but is consistent for those who have known him for many years. I was disappointed only that his book ends in 2005 when the first Busboys and Poets opened in D.C. He has so many stories to tell; I hope he writes a Part 2.

A younger reader noted concern that Jesse Jackson's passing, especially during Black History Month, didn't receive the kind of coverage that the civil rights icon should have gotten. Although illness quieted his voice in the past decade, Jackson worked tirelessly to continue the civil rights work of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others. Like many Black pastors, he was blessed with an ability to communicate, to turn a phrase into a mantra. "I am - somebody" inspired generations of young people to view themselves in a positive light, with a future they could create for themselves and their families. At the 1988 Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, Jackson wowed the delegates, finishing second only to the eventual standard-bearer, Michael Dukakis. As I walked back to my hotel that evening, I noticed a "Jesse" campaign poster on the sidewalk. Whoever dropped it probably rued the loss, as it bears the signatures of civil rights exemplar John Lewis and

Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson. The framed poster hangs in our family room where it reminds me of a turning point in this nation's history, thanks to the unrelenting efforts of Jesse Jackson.

Local residents were alarmed by the January 19 failure of the Potomac Interceptor (PI) sewer line that released hundreds of millions of gallons of raw sewage into the Potomac River. The 54-mile PI carries wastewater from Northern Virginia, suburban Maryland, and the District of Columbia, and runs from the Dulles area to the tertiary wastewater treatment plant at Blue Plains. The 72-inch pipe that failed is 16 feet below ground, and the break occurred just days before the "snowcrete" blizzard incapacitated the metro area. DC Water crews installed a bypass system with multiple pumps in just five days and no raw sewage flows have occurred since February 9. The break is far downstream of the major drinking water intakes on the river; DC Water monitors six sites daily and bacteria counts from the break have decreased significantly. Additional analysis is needed to determine longer term environmental impacts like harmful algal blooms and fish kills when the weather warms. At present, public health officials caution that people and pets should stay out of the river and wash thoroughly if exposed accidentally. Environmental restoration plans are under review and will begin after the pipe is repaired and sewer flow is restored.

CITY OF FALLS CHURCH CRIME REPORT

Week of Feb 23 - March 1, 2026

Destruction of Property, N Washington St/Gresham Pl, Feb 23, 9:30 a.m., a report for graffiti was taken.

Fraud, W Broad St, Feb 27, 3:14 p.m., officers responded to a call for service of a male attempting to open a

bank account with suspected fictitious identification. A black male, 40, of Van Nuys, CA, was arrested for Possession of Fictitious ID Card and Possess ID to Establish False Identity.

Identity Theft, W Annandale Rd, Feb 28, 11:06 p.m., victim reported a credit card and loan were fraudulently opened in their name.

Destruction of Property, W Broad St, Mar 1, 7:19 a.m., four reports for graffiti were taken.

Fraud - Credit Card, West Falls Station Blvd, Mar 1, 6:00 p.m., victim reported several fraudulent charges were made using their missing credit card.

2026 Issues Coming Soon:

3/12: Spring Arts & Entertainment Preview

3/26: Spring Home & Real Estate Edition

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EDITORIAL

Sic Semper Tyrannis, Indeed!

"Sic Semper Tyrannis!" This is the Latin motto that translates, "Thus Always to Tyrants," that appears on the state flag of Virginia, and it could not be more apropos as a rallying cry for the special statewide election that commences with early voting this Friday (see story, Page 1).

The motto was adopted by the Commonwealth of Virginia way back in 1776 as a rallying cry for the American revolution as proposed by George Mason to the Virginia legislature then. It is usually attributed to the cry by Marcus Brutus as he plunged a deadly dagger into Julius Caesar in ancient Rome, as memorialized in Shakespeare's play about Caesar.

The statewide referendum would, if "Yes" votes prevail, permit a temporary redistricting of Virginia's 11 U.S. congressional districts to offset the same kind of moves ordered by President Trump for predominantly Republican-controlled states from Texas to Florida. If it passed in Virginia and effectively nullified Trump's move to fix this November's midterm elections, it would, indeed, be like Virginians sticking a dagger into the tyrant Trump.

We suggest that voters should think of it that way when they go in to cast their ballots between this Friday and April 21.

True, that Virtus, the goddess of virtue, who stands atop a slain tyrant in the image that accompanies the state motto on the flag of Virginia, is holding a long spear in one hand, and a sheathed sword in her other. Still, the dagger notion can apply. After all, Virtus is a mighty warrior, a precursor representation of the virtue and might of women as we note during this Women's History Month. The flattened tyrant, on the other hand, is shown with his crown having toppled off his head.

We are heartened by the electoral returns of U.S. citizens since Trump was returned to the White House just over a year ago, a year of unprecedented gains for Democratic lawmakers that began almost immediately, and was surely reflected in Virginia last November when all three statewide offices were flipped from Red to Blue, from Republican to Democratic, and the majority for Democrats in the House of Delegates was considerably expanded.

Of the many special elections in the recent period that have shown formerly Republican districts flipping to Democrats all across the U.S., none can be considered more important than this week's U.S. Senate primary election in Texas, where it was not just that State Sen. James Talerico defeated U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett in the Democratic primary, but that the voter turnout was so unprecedentedly high for such an election, with way more voters turning out for the Democratic primary than for the Republican one held the same day.

Winning the "Yes" votes in this current Virginia special election is a key to retaking the nation for sanity and democracy, a true electoral dagger into the heart of our current tyrant.

PLATFORM

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WHERE THEY FELL



WHAT THEY CLAIMED



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Falls Church News-Press

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The Case for Shadows, Highlights and the Human Hand

BY FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS

There is a moment in every introductory drawing class when the world quietly shifts.

It happens somewhere between the first awkward still life and the realization that you've been looking at things all wrong. The professor dims the lights, turns a single lamp toward a plaster cube or a crumpled piece of fabric, and says: "Don't draw the object. Draw the shadows."

At art school, that lesson felt almost mystical. We were not being taught how to copy a thing. We were being taught how to see.

The first technical skill you learn in drawing is not anatomy or perspective. It's value, shadows and highlights. Light falls across an object and suddenly it isn't a "cup" anymore. It becomes a series of tonal shifts, edges, gradations and contrasts. The brightest highlight might be no larger than a fingernail. The darkest shadow might hold the entire weight of the composition.

Once you learn to see that, you cannot unsee it.

You begin noticing how afternoon light turns sidewalks lavender. You study the way a face changes under a streetlamp. You realize that depth is not an illusion, it's an observation. The world stops being flat. It becomes dimensional, layered, alive.

That training, the tactile discipline of pencil against paper, changes more than your artwork. It changes your worldview.

Recently, I read about parents opting their children out of school-issued laptops and asking for pen and paper instead. In an era when screens mediate nearly every experience, that decision struck me as more than nostalgic. It felt important.

There is something profoundly valuable about tactile objects, about the resistance of paper and the drag of graphite. When you draw, you are translating perception into motion. The instrument matters. The smudge of charcoal

matters. The mistake you cannot simply "undo" matters.

Art school drilled that into us. You sharpened pencils with a blade. You stretched your own canvases. You mixed your own paint and learned that ultramarine behaves differently than burnt sienna. These weren't quaint rituals. They were lessons in attention.

Because when you are forced to slow down and truly look, you discover nuance.

And nuance is something we are in short supply of these days.

Maybe this is a metaphor for life in general, things aren't always just black and white but have shadows and highlights, and are far more complex than a simple copy, paste, done, move on. They require us to pause, to really look, to sit in the uncertainty between extremes and notice the subtle transitions. Just as a drawing gains depth from the tones between the brightest highlight and the darkest shadow, our experiences gain meaning in the in-between moments, the doubts,

the contradictions, the layers we don't immediately understand.

Seeing shadows and highlights trains your brain to recognize complexity. No object is one color. No person is one dimension. No issue is entirely light or entirely dark. There are gradations everywhere, and artists are trained to find them.

This is why I challenge everyone, not just aspiring artists, to study aesthetics. Take a drawing class. Visit a museum and stand in front of one painting for longer than feels comfortable. Pick up a pen, pencil, crayon, paintbrush, whatever it may be, and simply create.

It does not have to be good. In fact, it probably won't be. And that's fine.

Everything every artist has ever made wasn't perfect. Sketchbooks are full of awkward hands, crooked buildings and failed experiments. The masterpieces came later, and only because the imperfect pages came first.

Children understand this instinctively. They draw without apology.

They color outside lines. They build worlds with crayons and cardboard. Somewhere along the way, many adults lose that freedom.

But here's a secret: adults who are artists are just kids who never let their creativity be beaten out of them.

For parents looking through camps and school programs, that idea matters. The best programs give kids time with real materials and the freedom to experiment. Those experiences build observation, patience and imagination. And those skills lead to real careers.

Not every child will grow up to be an AI hedge fund manager or a coder staring at a screen all day. Some will become architects, designers, filmmakers, engineers, illustrators, photographers, product designers, teachers or urban planners. If you want to understand the world more deeply, start by drawing it.

Look for the shadows. Find the highlights. Pick up something that leaves a mark and create.



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When School Lets Out, The Real Summer Curriculum Begins

BY FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS

Across Falls Church, Alexandria and Northern Virginia, local camps give kids a chance to try new things from sailing and theater to music, gymnastics and outdoor adventure.

When the school year ends in Northern Virginia, classrooms empty out but learning doesn't stop. It just moves somewhere else.

Some kids head for sailboats and learn to read the wind. Others step under stage lights for the first time. Some pick up instruments, tumble across gymnastics floors, or spend long summer afternoons running through fields and wooded trails.

Across Falls Church and nearby communities, a network of camps fills the summer months with a different kind of education — one built on exploration, creativity and confidence.

Programs run by organizations such as Congressional Camp, Westminster School, Capitol

Debate, Brendan Sailing, Choralis Foundation, Creative Cauldron, KiPS Family Gym, Ooorlaaamusic and the Little Theatre of Alexandria have become fixtures for families looking to give their children something more than just time off from school.

For many kids, summer camp is where they discover what they love.

A Falls Church Tradition

Few camps in the region have the history of Congressional Camp, held on the wooded campus of Congressional School in Falls Church.

Founded in 1940, the camp has welcomed generations of Northern Virginia families. Today, children ages four through fourteen spend their summer days swimming, playing sports, exploring nature and trying new activities across the school's 40-acre campus.

A typical day might include time at the pool, arts and crafts, outdoor adventure activities and games on the athletic fields. Many campers return year after year, creating a tra-

dition that stretches across decades.

The formula is simple: give kids space to explore and the chance to try things they might not encounter during the school year.

Turning School Campuses Into Summer Playgrounds

Nearby, the Westminster School transforms its campus into a lively summer hub through its Camp Griffin programs.

The camps combine recreation with hands-on learning. Children rotate through sports, creative activities, science projects and outdoor games, often with weekly themes that keep each session fresh.

The idea is that summer should feel different from school while still offering meaningful experiences.

Kids try new activities, meet children from different schools and develop teamwork in a relaxed environment.

Capitol Debate: The Summer Argument That Actually Helps

Not every summer skill is physical — sometimes it's learning how to think on your feet, speak clearly,

and hold your ground.

That's the pitch behind Capitol Debate, which runs public speaking and debate camps in the region, including programs hosted on nearby college campuses such as American University in Washington, D.C. and Marymount University in Arlington.

For middle and high school students, the camp is built around argument structure, critical thinking, speech delivery, and confidence in front of a room — skills that travel well, whether a student ends up in student government, Model UN, presentations, interviews, or just wants to be less terrified of raising a hand.

In a summer landscape full of "try everything," Capitol Debate is more like: try the thing that makes everything else easier speaking up.

Learning Confidence on the Water

For some campers, summer means heading for open water.

Brendan Sailing, a non-

profit organization serving the Washington region, teaches sailing to young people with learning differences such as ADHD or dyslexia.

The program uses sailing as a way to build confidence and independence. Participants learn to steer boats, manage sails and adjust to changing weather conditions while working closely with teammates.

Out on the water, every person plays a role. Success depends on communication, patience and cooperation.

For many participants, the lessons extend far beyond sailing.

Music That Brings Kids Together

Music programs also play an important role in the region's summer offerings.

The Choralis Foundation, a Northern Virginia choral organization, provides opportunities for young singers to develop their voices while learning the discipline of ensemble performance.

Students work with professional

Continued on Page 11

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Northern V.A. Camps Give Kids a Summer of Discovery

Continued from Page 10

musicians and conductors while rehearsing music that often culminates in public performances.

Another opportunity for aspiring musicians comes from Ooorlaamusic, which introduces children to instruments, rhythm and collaborative music-making.

For many students, summer music programs provide their first real chance to explore creative expression outside the classroom.

Sometimes those early lessons lead to lifelong interests.

When Creativity Takes the Stage

Theater camps give young performers a chance to explore storytelling and performance.

In Falls Church, Creative Cauldron offers camps focused on acting, musical theater and stage production. Students rehearse scenes, learn choreography and develop characters before performing for family and friends.

Just down the road, the Little Theatre of Alexandria continues a long tradition of youth

theater education. One of the region's oldest community theaters, it introduces children to acting, stagecraft and the teamwork that goes into producing a show.

High Energy Summer Days

Not every camper wants to spend the summer on stage or in a rehearsal room.

Programs like KiPS Family Gym offer a more active alternative. Known locally for its gymnastics and movement programs, KiPS runs camps that combine physical training with games, obstacle courses and open play.

Camper develop balance, strength and coordination while staying active throughout the day. For energetic kids, it's an ideal outlet.

Why Camps Still Matter

Summer camps remain a staple for many families because they offer something increasingly rare: the freedom to try new things.

Away from screens and daily routines, children experiment. They meet new friends, tackle unfamiliar challenges and develop confidence in their abilities.

Emphasizing experience and discovery it's more just a place to spend the day.

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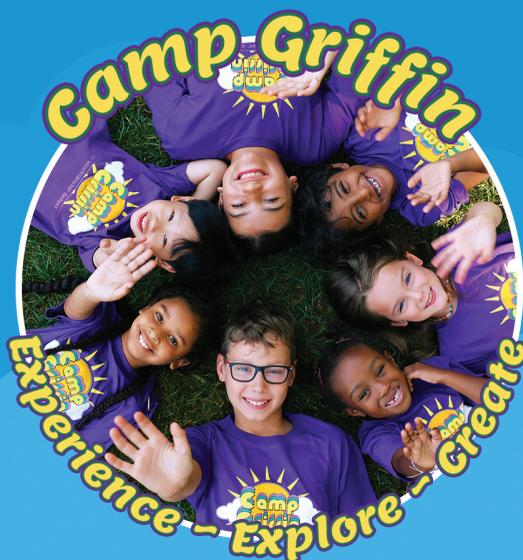
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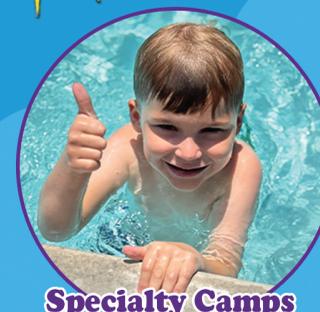
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Building Friendships

Teachers Don't Teach Climate Change & Parents Wish They Did

BY FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS

Students today are growing up in a world shaped by rising temperatures, extreme weather and global debates about energy and the environment. Yet many students never learn the basics of climate science in school.

A widely cited NPR/Ipsos national survey found that 55 percent of teachers say they do not teach climate change in their classrooms, even though the scientific consensus on the issue is well established. At the same time, 84 percent of parents of children under 18 — roughly four in five — say schools should teach about climate change.

The numbers reveal a gap between what families expect schools to cover and what actually appears in the classroom.

Researchers say several factors contribute to the disconnect. Teachers often report a lack of time, training or curriculum materials. Some say they avoid the topic because it has become politically

sensitive in parts of the country.

“Teachers told us they worried about controversy or pushback from parents or administrators,” NPR reported in its coverage of the survey. “Others said they simply don’t feel adequately prepared to teach the science.”

Studies also suggest preparation is a real challenge. A study published in the journal *Science* found that while many science teachers attempt to cover climate topics, misunderstandings about climate systems and human influence can lead to incomplete or inaccurate explanations.

For students, the result can be confusing. Climate change is one of the most frequently discussed global issues in news coverage, online media and political debates, yet many students receive little structured instruction about the science behind it.

But climate change is only one example of topics that have become inconsistent or reduced in modern classrooms.

As schools focus heavily on standardized testing in reading and math, many subjects once considered essential to a well-rounded education have been pushed aside or reduced in scope.

Civics education is one of the most notable casualties.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called the “Nation’s Report Card,” only 22 percent of eighth-grade students scored at or above the proficient level in civics on the most recent national assessment. Scores also declined compared with earlier years.

Educators warn that limited civic education leaves students less prepared to understand government, evaluate political information or participate effectively in democracy.

Media literacy is another subject gaining urgency but not always classroom time.

Students consume vast amounts of information through social media, video platforms and online

sources. Yet many schools still lack formal programs that teach students how to evaluate sources, detect misinformation or distinguish credible reporting from online rumors.

Personal finance education has also long been overlooked, although that is slowly changing.

A national survey by the Council for Economic Education found that 35 states now require a personal finance course for high school graduation, a major increase over the past decade.

Still, advocates say many students graduate without practical knowledge about credit cards, loans, savings or budgeting.

Life skills courses once grouped under “home economics” have also declined.

Today these classes, often called Family and Consumer Sciences, may teach cooking, nutrition, childcare, budgeting and career preparation. However, the programs face staffing shortages and reduced class offerings in many districts.

Educators say these practical courses help students build independence and prepare for adult responsibilities.

Taken together, the trends raise a broader question about what students should learn in school and what knowledge is essential for navigating modern life.

Parents, according to the NPR/Ipsos survey, appear ready for schools to step in.

Whether the subject is climate science, civic knowledge, financial literacy or media awareness, families increasingly want schools to equip students with the tools to understand the complex world they are inheriting.

The debate over what belongs in the curriculum will continue. But parents’ message in national surveys is increasingly clear: students need more than test preparation. They need the knowledge and skills to understand the world they are growing into — and the confidence to shape it.



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F.C.'s Affordable Virginia Village Housing Plans Tee Off

BY NICHOLAS F. BENTON
FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS

The City of Falls Church's first effort in over a dozen years at a major project to increase its affordable housing stock, centering redevelopment of the 4.5 acres currently constituting the Virginia Village gaggle of 20 fourplex units off S. Maple Ave., was teed up to move ahead at a joint meeting of the F.C. City Council, Planning Commission and Economic Development Authority at City Hall this Monday night.

With the City's total number of housing units listed as "affordable" currently stands at 336, down from 471 units in 2012, and 63 of those set to lose "affordable" status when agreed to terms with developers expire in the next decade, and with average home values in Falls Church being now above \$1 million, the highest in the region, City leaders' long-held commitment in principle to affordable housing is now sitting on the cusp of a true crisis, reflective of the crisis of housing affordability facing the region

and the nation as a whole.

Now, in order to hit deadlines for tax credits coming up, F.C. City Manager Wyatt Shields and the leadership on the City Council advocated pressing ahead aggressively with Virginia Village redevelopment plans, even though what, exactly, could wind up happening to that property has yet to be determined.

The challenge now is to codify in City planning documents – Comprehensive Plan and Small Area plans – what is allowable at the site, to begin notifying the tenants currently occupying units on the site, and neighbors to the site, what may be happening going forward.

City officials were quick to explain that when that property is redeveloped, that the existing tenants, all renting at "affordable housing" rates, would be helped with relocating to other affordable units in the City for as long as it will take whatever new is put there to be completed.

Observers have noted that the options for redevelopment of the

site are myriad at this stage. While Shields himself is on record saying he hopes a new large scale, affordable unit apartment building will go there, others have mulled just how big such a structure might be, whether there could be two of them, whether there be a mix with market-rate single family homes to help offset the cost of an affordable unit building, whether there will be park space included at the site, and more.

"There are strong opinions on uses," Planning Commissioner Robert Kravinsky said.

"We need to be ambitious in this," added Planning Commissioner and former City Council member Phil Duncan.

Jim Coyle, chair of the Economic Development Authority, said that this issue has been around for years, and that he "has been looking for a roadmap for a long while."

Council member Justine Underhill commented that a wide and comprehensive effort to notify all the stakeholders in this development needs to be undertaken because usually "only a very small,

self-selected group shows up for meetings," such that the City could get a "narrow view of community feedback."

Deputy City Manager Cindy Mester stated that letters have already been sent out to everyone in the area as well as the current 81 residents of the Virginia Village.

Planning Commissioner Tim Stevens said "it seems a little rushed to me, but if there are deadlines for going after loans then I understand."

The City's new Director of Planning Matt Mattauszek said the timing is crucial, that it has been "like threading a needle" to ensure that deadlines are met. He said that staff is pressed by a March deadline for seeking tax credits, adding "there are no great crystal balls at this point" as to how it will turn out.

City Housing and Human Services director Dana Jones affirmed that outreach to current residents at the site has already started, including with residents of the Winter Hill apartments and the Tinner Hill Heritage Foundation.

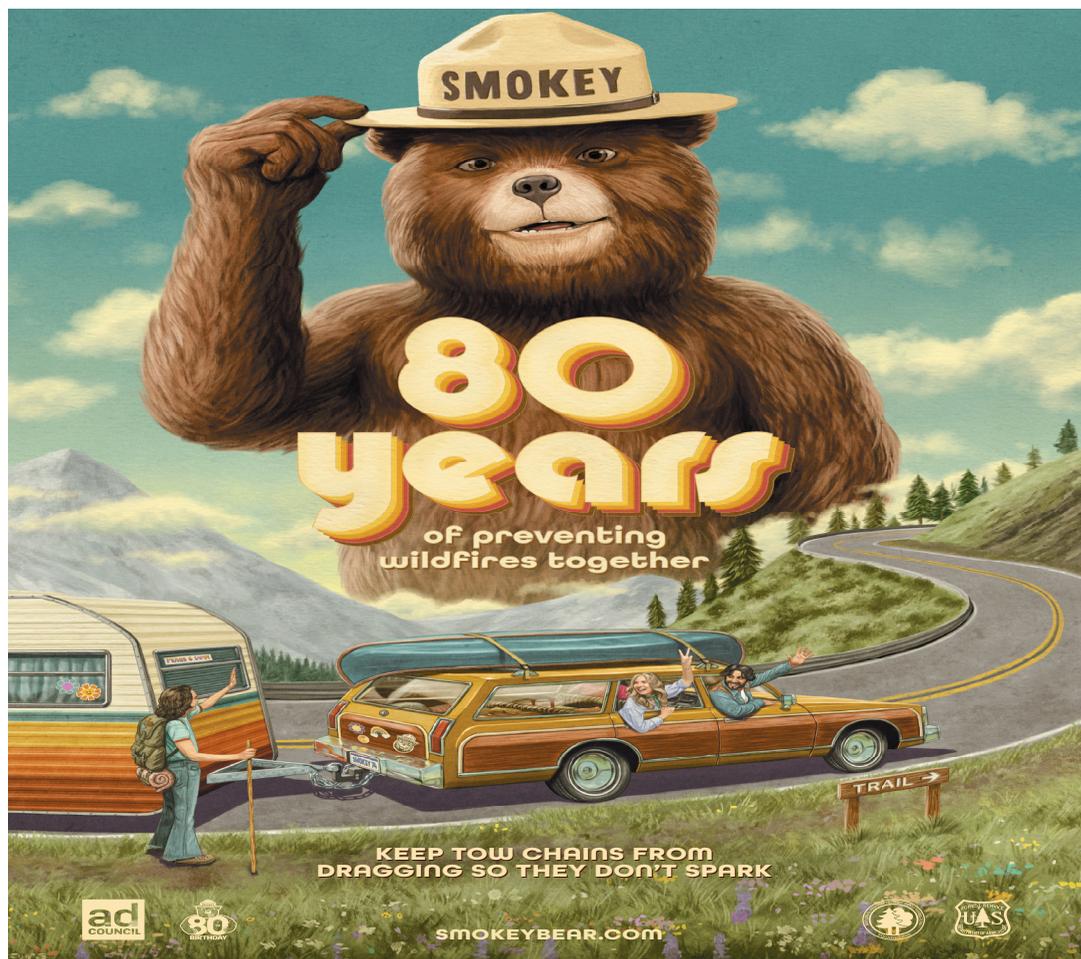
She noted that many living at the Virginia Village now have incomes at "way below" 60 percent of the median area income.

City Planner Jack Trainor said the meeting was designed to gain insights for "initiating a resolution request" impacting small area plans, a designated planning opportunity area group and the so-called Virginia Village Acquisition Strike Committee (such efforts have led so far to the City's acquisition of nine of the 20 fourplexes at the site). He suggested that real progress in that process will be evident by this July.

Council member Arthur Agin said it is important to "make sure we are pushing the envelope" to get this done.

Mayor Letty Hardi and Vice Mayor Laura Downs stressed that the effort needs to be "appropriately ambitious," but that it needs to be stated "loud and clear" that any displacement of residents is still several years away."

"Remember, we have to make sure that whatever we set out to do will be financeable," she said.





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IB team reevaluates FCCPS

BY MARGARET ASHBROOK

IB schools worldwide are evaluated once every five years to ensure the standard qualifications required for the IB programme are being followed. The other primary purpose for the evaluation is to provide a score which reflects the schools' mastery of the programme.

Evaluations are less about concerns regarding removal or poor program application, and more about learning how the school can adapt to changes in the programme and what other schools are doing.

Meridian has long enjoyed the distinction of being the first school in Virginia to adopt the IB programme in 1981 under the directive of then-principal George Thoms.

On Monday and Tuesday, the IB team visited Jessie Thackery Preschool, as well as Mount Daniel and Oak Street Elementary

Schools. On Wednesday, all evaluators met at Meridian High School for a meeting with the administrative team of the entire division, including Superintendent Dr. Terry Dade, school board members, and programme leads.

"Based on the awesome work our educators and students do, we're not worried," IB programme coordinator Josh Singer commented. "They're going to come in and know that we're doing a great job implementing the programme, and that we have our unique Meridian flair to it, but that we're doing it."

At the conclusion of the 2023-24 school year, Singer met with other coordinators and central office leaders to prepare for this evaluation. In January 2025, teachers and school leaders began to work on reflective documents assessing the application of IB's criteria for educational standards. The same criteria is also assessed during the in-person visits design-

ated for FCCPS's evaluation.

However, at Wednesday's meeting, a large topic of conversation was the application of IB for students in special education programmes and parents' concerns with the prestigious and selective nature of the programme. The concern was not met with a clear answer nor ideas for change during the duration of the meeting.

Students then led the evaluators on a guided tour through both Meridian and Henderson. The Lasso followed Meridian student ambassador Carter Chirico and Henderson ambassador Rosa Fiddy. The purpose of the tour was to highlight where to find classes for each subject, what certain spaces were used for, and student opinions on everyday life at school.

On Thursday, evaluators were in and out of classrooms, meeting with students and educators to reach a more personal understanding of the culture at Meridian. On



Meridian's rigorous IB curriculum is one of its most enticing factors. (Photo via mhs.fccps.org)

Friday, the coordinators, school leaders, and evaluators met for a time of feedback and reflection of their week.

After the final bell on Friday afternoon, Meridian faculty and staff were invited to a debrief at the Learning Stairs with both the IB evaluators and school administration. During the ten-minute meeting, Principal Laub complimented the entire staff on an

overwhelmingly positive evaluation from the team, supported by enthusiastic remarks from the lead IB evaluator as well as Superintendent Dade, who joined in via teleconference.

"Evaluation' seems kind of harsh. Really, what it is is an opportunity to celebrate the things we do as an IB school, and to showcase to people all the great stuff we do," said Laub.

Mustang Mug closure highlights nationwide challenges

BY ALBA SELLE

In 2021, the unveiling of the Mustang Mug sparked joy and excitement among students, with the community style 'cafe' appealing to tired and hungry teenagers who could enjoy affordable snacks and drinks between classes.

After its initial opening, the "Mug," as it is commonly known,



The Mustang Mug bustles with activity as students order snacks during Mustang Block. (photo by Alba Selle)

has opened and closed sporadically due to issues with hiring food service workers. The Mug opened in February after six months of closure because the cafeteria was understaffed.

The Mug is run by food service staff who rotate between operating the cafeteria and the Mug. However, when food services face staff shortages, priority is given to the cafeteria. The closure results in upset students and staff who rely on the Mug for their meals.

"It's so annoying that the Mug was closed for so long, but at the same time I am glad it opened because I don't eat breakfast in the morning so I literally go and get something every single day after Stable," senior Muriel Anderson commented.

Food Service Director Richard Kane manages staff and hiring for the cafeteria in cooperation with Principal Peter Laub. Mr. Kane works to notify Principal Laub about possible closures or changes to the Mug or cafeteria.

"We work with him like it's collaborative, but he tells me what's going to be for lunch. He sets the prices. He's sort of like a shop within a school," Principal

Laub noted.

At the beginning of the 2026-27 school year, a post on Schoology noted that the Mustang Mug would be closed temporarily. However it took until Feb. 3 for the Mug to reopen for the year.

"For the last couple of years we would get notes sometimes if they had an employee out, Mr. Kane would let us know...and we would post on Schoology," Principal Laub explained.

However, Mr. Kane recognized the difficulties in opening the Mug due to staffing shortages.

"It is not a new issue. It is always a challenge hiring employees. We live in a very affluent area, which makes it hard to get people...our staff is mostly part time and everybody wants full time," he noted.

Since food service positions are part time, workers will often alternate between working in transportation and in the cafeteria.

"We even share staff with transportation so they can get full time hours...which makes it kind of difficult because nobody wants to work between two departments," Mr. Kane explained.

This challenge is not unique

to Meridian, and can be tied to a downward trend in hiring food service workers nationwide. In 2024, UC Berkeley conducted a study featuring their findings on the issue. "The number of food service workers has declined over the past decade, although not uniformly across states."

"It's a nationwide issue, transportation and food services across the country are having a hard time retaining and attracting employees," Mr. Kane indicated.

The study notes how these issues are largely a result of the job's low wages, often disproportionate with increasing living costs.

"A lot of it is because it is not a living wage. Falls Church has done things to address that, but still, a lot of employees come here thinking that it's going to be heat and serve, and we cook a lot from scratch cooking, where Fairfax and other schools do not."

The starting salary for a food service worker at FCCPS is \$16.62/hr, which is slightly below national average of \$17.45/hr as outlined by data collected by ZipRecruiter.

Mr. Kane is working to address

New attendance policy implements strict consequences

BY EVI STEVENS

On Jan. 14, the Meridian High School administration released an announcement establishing a stricter policy regarding student attendance.

This policy reinforces prior methods used to address absences, including alerting parents during the day if a student has an unexcused absence for one or more classes. Other methods also include sending attendance notifications to parents once a student reaches a significant amount of full day absences, both excused and unexcused. Administration will also send parents a detailed

breakdown of individual classes in which students have been marked unexcused. However, the most significant change is how strictly the consequences are now being enforced.

In the past, if a student had unexcused absences, school administrators would often send emails to parents informing them of their child's attendance. Consequences were seldom enforced, and the problem often only escalated if students reached an extensive number of unexcused absences.

According to the email sent by administration to students and parents, "Unexcused absences

and skipping class are violations of the FCCPS Code of Conduct. When students are found in violation of this policy they may be subject to disciplinary action (e.g., detention)."

Students have already started receiving emails about mandatory detentions due to unexcused absences.

According to sophomore Anastacia Gjorgijevski, "I received an email from admin stating that I had to go to detention because of an unexcused absence, but when I went to it I was told that I only had one unexcused absence, so I didn't have to go to

detention." Statements like this raise the question of if the new policy really will be enforced as strongly as Meridian admin has suggested.

Meridian staff seem to generally be in favor of the new policy. "I think it's a good idea.

Attendance is important and honestly, for safety reasons, it's good to know where our students are," guidance counselor Mr. Brad McAdam said.

Unlike staff, the student body has mixed opinions on the new policy, with many frustrated, but some recognizing the possible positive effects that could come

as a result of enforcing proper attendance.

Junior Aldyn Freisen shared her opinion on the policy, stating, "I personally don't like it because I don't enjoy going to Stable Group, but I guess it's good that they're enforcing it."

Although there have been mixed opinions from students and administrators regarding the new policy and different views on the effectiveness of the newly enforced consequences, it appears the policy is here to stay.

Mustang Swimming places 6th at State Championship

BY LILIANE BONNENFANT



Senior Ryan Southern (furthest lane) swims butterfly (Photo courtesy of Valeria Wright)

On Feb. 19, the Meridian Swim and Dive team competed at SwimRVA in Richmond at the VHSL Class 3 State Championship. With many personal bests and high rankings, the Mustangs are extremely proud of their performance, placing 6th overall in the meet. They finished with a total of 352.87 points.

One of the most impressive records was that of senior Ryan Southern, who won the 100 Yard butterfly event. He not only placed

first in the preliminaries (morning races, where everyone swims regardless of their time) with a time of 49.71 seconds, but also placed first in the finals (after the preliminaries; in the evening when the top swimmers compete for a ranking) with an even faster time, 49.11 seconds. Southern's impressive time set a new VHSL Class 3 Record, making him the champion of the 100Y fly. He will continue his swimming career at the University of Delaware next

season.

"A lot of the swimmers on the team have spent a lot of time and effort working towards competing. I know a lot of the states team was super excited to be able to compete, and it was a privilege to be able to race with the Meridian team for the last time in my high school career," Southern reflects.

The Women's 400 Yard freestyle relay also performed exceptionally at the meet, placing 7th overall in the state. This relay team consists of junior Valerie Katen, sophomore Maisie Storm, junior Aileen Storm, and senior Mykl Skelton. Their time was 3:55.83, which gave them a score of 24.00, allowing the swimmers to contribute 264 NISCA Points to the team.

Aileen Storm opened the race, swimming a split of 59.60 seconds for the first 100 yards. Maisie Storm swam second with her split taking only 58.63 seconds. The third leg was Skelton, who kept her relay on pace, swimming her 100 yards with a time of 59.83 seconds. Last was the anchor, Katen. As the fastest member of the relay, the girls were relying on her to take the

team home. Katen finished with the fastest time yet, 57.77 seconds, securing the top 10 podium for the relay.

"A big part of swimming is your mental game. I always make sure to go into a meet feeling confident, which means a healthy meal before drinking lots of water and always warming up before the races... I made sure to stick with my team, know my worth and just give it my all." Katen explains. As the anchor, Katen often feels a lot of pressure, since she is responsible for finalizing her relay's performance.

Along with Southern in the 100 Yard Fly event, sophomore

Josiah Sturgill placed 3rd overall, his time being 50.40 seconds.

This was a personal best for Sturgill, and he dropped a total of 0.03 seconds to make it onto the podium.

For the 2025-2026 season, The Mustang's top swimmers consist of (1) Southern (2) Sturgill, (3) Ty Schmittel, (4) Katen, and (5) Storm. All five of them gained more than 350 points each throughout the 2025-2026 season. Southern had a total of 642.80 pts, Sturgill had 599.35 pts, senior Ty Schmittel with a total of 451.45 pts. Katen gained 440.20 pts throughout her season, and Aileen Storm had 390.45 pts.



Sophomore Valerie Katen dives into the water, preparing to commence her race (Photo courtesy of Valeria Wright)

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LEGAL NOTICE

Volunteers who live in the City of Falls Church are needed to serve on the boards and commissions listed below. Contact the City Clerk's Office (703-248-5014, cityclerk@fallschurchva.gov, or www.fallschurchva.gov/BC) for an application form or more information. Positions advertised for more than one month may be filled during each subsequent month.

Architectural Advisory Board
Arts and Humanities Council of Falls Church
City Employee Review Board
Economic Development Authority
Environmental Sustainability Council
Board of Equalization
Historic Architectural Review Board
Human Services Advisory Council
Public Utilities Commission
Towing Advisory Board
Urban Forestry Commission

Regional Boards/Commissions
Coordinating Council for the Aging and Adults with Disabilities
Fairfax Area Disability Services Board
Health Systems Agency of Northern Virginia

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA**

The following was given first reading at the September 8, 2025, City Council meeting. Public hearing, second reading, and possible City Council action is scheduled for Monday, March 9, 2026 at 7:30 p.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard.

(TR24-28) RESOLUTION TO AMEND THE CITY OF FALLS CHURCH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO UPDATE CHAPTER 8, "COMMUNITY BUILDING BLOCKS: COMMUNITY FACILITIES, INFRASTRUCTURE, UTILITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES"

The following was given first reading at the February 9, 2026, City Council meeting. Public hearing, second reading, and possible City Council action is scheduled for Monday, March 9, 2026 at 7:30 p.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard.

(TO25-22) ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CODE OF THE CITY OF FALLS CHURCH CHAPTER 48, "ZONING," SECTION 48-2, "DEFINITIONS," SECTION 48-3, "GENERAL REGULATIONS," SECTION 48-1101, "GENERAL REQUIREMENTS," SECTION 48-1106, "TREE CANOPY REQUIREMENTS IN NON-RESIDENTIAL ZONING DISTRICTS," AND SECTION 48-1135, "PRELIMINARY SURVEY DOCUMENTS," TO INCREASE MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR TREE CANOPY COVERAGE WITHIN NON-RESIDENTIAL ZONING DISTRICTS

All public hearings will be held in the Council Chambers, 300 Park Avenue, Falls Church, Virginia. All persons desiring to present their views on the items will be heard. Comments may also be sent to cityclerk@fallschurchva.gov. Remote participation information at www.fallschurchva.gov/publiccomment. For copies of legislation and other information, contact the City Clerk's office at 703-248-5014 or cityclerk@fallschurchva.gov or visit www.fallschurchva.gov/councilmeetings. The City of Falls Church is committed to the letter and spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request a reasonable accommodation for any type of disability, call 703-248-5014 (TTY 711) or e-mail cityclerk@fallschurchva.gov.

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**PUBLIC NOTICE
CITY OF FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA
PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING**

A Planning Commission public hearing and possible recommendation to City Council is scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2026 at 7:30 p.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard, on the following:

The Proposed Fiscal Year 2027-2032 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) identifies capital needs of the community and indicates how these needs will be funded over the next six-year period. The CIP is updated annually and is subject to change with each update. Following the public hearing on March 4, the Planning Commission will submit its recommendations to the City Council, for consideration and subsequent adoption of the Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget and Fiscal Year 2027-2032 Capital Improvements Program. The proposed plan and more information may be found at www.fallschurchva.gov/CIP.

The materials for the above item will be available on the city's webpage prior to the public hearing: <http://www.fallschurchva.gov/PC>. All persons desiring to present their views on the items will be heard. For copies of materials and other information, contact Jack Trainor jtrainor@fallschurchva.gov.

All public hearings will be held in the Council Chambers, 300 Park Avenue, Falls Church, Virginia. All persons desiring to present their views on the items will be heard. Comments may also be sent to jtrainor@fallschurchva.gov. Remote participation information at www.fallschurchva.gov/pc. For copies of legislation and other information, contact Jack Trainor jtrainor@fallschurchva.gov. The City of Falls Church is committed to the letter and spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request a reasonable accommodation for any type of disability, call 571-421-7943 or e-mail jtrainor@fallschurchva.gov.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) of the City of Falls Church, Virginia will hold a public hearing on March 12, 2026, at 7:30 PM in the Council Chambers, located at 300 Park Avenue, for consideration of the following item:

-Variance application V1676-26 by Stephen and Toby Hedger, (Applicants and Owners), for a variance to Sec. 48-238(3)(a) to allow a front yard setback of 24 feet instead of the 30 feet minimum allowed along Hillier Street to construct a sunroom and foundation at 116 South Oak Street, RPC#52-206-048 of the Falls Church Real Property Records, zoned R-1A, Low Density Residential District.

- Variance application V1677-26 by Andrew and Virginia Wright, (Applicants and Owners) for a variance to Sec. 48-263(3)(a) to allow a side yard setback of 9 feet instead of the 10 feet minimum allowed to construct a rear covered porch at 928 North Quesada Street, RPC#53-218-034 of the Falls Church Real Property Records, zoned R-1B, Medium Density Residential.

- Variance application V1678-26 by Michael and Molly Novotny, (Applicants and Owners) for a variance to Sec. 48-238(3)(a) to allow a side yard setback of 3.1 feet instead of the 10 feet minimum allowed to reconstruct an addition at 319 N Maple Avenue, RPC#51-108-039 of the Falls Church Real Property Records, zoned R-1A, Low Density Residential.

Public comment and questions may be submitted to zoning@fallschurchva.gov until 4:30 pm on March 12, 2026. Agenda and application materials will be available the week prior to the scheduled hearing at: <http://www.fallschurchva.gov/BZA>

Information on the above application is also available for review upon request to staff at zoning@fallschurchva.gov.

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AUCTIONS

PUBLIC AUCTION! Ashby's Inc/Crenshaw Corp Retirement Auction. Metalworking Eq, Forklifts, Service & Shop Eq, Mar 11, 10am. Online Only. Richmond, Va. Bid at motleysindustrial.com. VAAAL#16/NCAL#5914.

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LEGAL NOTICE

**NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC OF A PETITION BY VIRGINIA ELECTRIC AND POWER COMPANY
D/B/A DOMINION ENERGY VIRGINIA FOR REVISION OF RATE ADJUSTMENT CLAUSE: RIDER E, FOR THE
RECOVERY OF COSTS INCURRED TO COMPLY WITH STATE AND FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS
CASE NO. PUR-2026-00006**

On January 23, 2026, pursuant to § 56-585.1 A 5 e of the Code of Virginia (“Code”), the directive contained in Ordering Paragraph (6) of the Final Order issued by the State Corporation Commission (“Commission”) on September 23, 2025 in Case No. PUR-2025-00017, and the Commission’s Rules Governing Utility Rate Applications and Annual Informational Filings of Investor Owned Electric Utilities (“Rate Case Rules”), Virginia Electric and Power Company d/b/a Dominion Energy Virginia (“Dominion” or “Company”) filed with the Commission a petition (“Petition”) for an annual update with respect to its rate adjustment clause, designated Rider E, for the recovery of costs incurred to comply with state and federal environmental regulations at the Company’s Bremono, Chesterfield, Clover, and Mt. Storm Power Stations. Dominion states that it is filing this annual update to inform the Commission of the status of the environmental project located at the Mt. Storm Power Station, including projected expenditures, and to present costs associated with other environmental projects previously approved by the Commission. The Company also provides the proposed cost allocation, rate design, and accounting treatment for service rendered during the proposed rate year, which commences on November 1, 2026, and extends through October 31, 2027 (“Rate Year”), as related to the proposed Rider E.

The Company continues to seek to recover three general categories of costs that it asserts have been incurred to comply with state and federal environmental laws and regulations: (i) asset retirement obligation (“ARO”) expenses associated with existing assets that must be closed; (ii) newly constructed assets and associated expenses; and (iii) ARO expenses associated with the newly constructed assets.

Dominion proposes a total revenue requirement of \$42,496,963 for the Rate Year. If the revised Rider E for the Rate Year is approved, the impact on customer bills would depend on the customer’s rate schedule and usage. According to the Company, implementation of its revised Rider E on November 1, 2026, would incrementally increase the monthly bill of a residential customer using 1,000 kilowatt hours per month by \$0.06, compared to the current Rider E.

Further details of the Company’s proposals are set forth in the Company’s Petition. Interested persons are encouraged to review the Company’s Petition, testimony, and supporting documents.

TAKE NOTICE that the Commission may apportion revenues among customer classes and/or design rates in a manner differing from that shown in the Petition and supporting documents and thus may adopt rates that differ from those appearing in the Company’s Petition and supporting documents.

The Commission entered an Order for Notice and Hearing in this proceeding that, among other things, scheduled a public hearing on Dominion’s Petition and assigned a Hearing Examiner to conduct all further proceedings in this matter on behalf of the Commission. A hearing for the receipt of testimony from public witnesses on the Company’s Petition shall be convened telephonically by the Hearing Examiner at 10 a.m. on June 22, 2026. On or before June 15, 2026, any person desiring to offer testimony as a public witness shall provide to the Commission: (a) your name, and (b) the telephone number that you wish the Commission to call during the hearing to receive your testimony. This information may be provided to the Commission: (i) by filling out a form on the Commission’s website at scc.virginia.gov/case-information/webcasting; or (ii) by calling (804) 371-9141. This public witness hearing will be webcast at scc.virginia.gov/case-information/webcasting.

Beginning at 10 a.m. on June 22, 2026, the Hearing Examiner appointed to this case will telephone sequentially each person who has signed up to testify as provided above.

On June 22, 2026, at 10 a.m., or at the conclusion of the public witness portion of the hearing, whichever is later, in the Commission’s second floor courtroom located in the Tyler Building, 1300 East Main Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, the Hearing Examiner will convene the evidentiary portion of the hearing to receive testimony and

evidence related to the Petition from the Company, any respondents, and the Staff of the Commission (“Staff”).

To promote administrative efficiency and timely service of filings upon participants, the Commission has directed the electronic filing of testimony and pleadings, unless they contain confidential information, and required electronic service on parties to this proceeding.

An electronic copy of the public version of the Company’s Petition may be obtained by submitting a written request to counsel for the Company: Elaine S. Ryan, Esquire, McGuireWoods LLP, Gateway Plaza, 800 East Canal Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, or eryan@mcguirewoods.com. Interested persons may also download unofficial copies of the public version of the Petition and other documents filed in this case from the Commission’s website: scc.virginia.gov/case-information.

On or before June 15, 2026, any interested person may submit comments on the Petition by following the instructions found on the Commission’s website: scc.virginia.gov/case-information/submit-public-comments. Those unable, as a practical matter, to submit comments electronically may file such comments by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the State Corporation Commission, c/o Document Control Center, P.O. Box 2118, Richmond, Virginia 23218-2118. All such comments shall refer to Case No. PUR-2026-00006.

On or before April 10, 2026, any person or entity wishing to participate as a respondent in this proceeding may do so by filing a notice of participation at scc.virginia.gov/clk/efiling. Those unable, as a practical matter, to file a notice of participation electronically may file such notice by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the Commission at the address listed above. Such notice of participation shall include the email addresses of such parties or their counsel, if available. The respondent simultaneously shall serve a copy of the notice of participation on counsel to the Company, any other respondents, and Staff. Pursuant to 5 VAC 5-20-80 B, *Participation as a respondent*, of the Commission’s Rules of Practice and Procedure, 5 VAC 5-20-10 *et seq.* (“Rules of Practice”), any notice of participation shall set forth: (i) a precise statement of the interest of the respondent; (ii) a statement of the specific action sought to the extent then known; and (iii) the factual and legal basis for the action. Any organization, corporation, or government body participating as a respondent must be represented by counsel as required by 5 VAC 5-20-30, *Counsel*, of the Rules of Practice. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR-2026-00006. For additional information about participation as a respondent, any person or entity should obtain a copy of the Commission’s Order for Notice and Hearing.

On or before May 8, 2026, each respondent may file with the Clerk of the Commission, at scc.virginia.gov/clk/efiling, any testimony and exhibits by which the respondent expects to establish its case. Any respondent unable, as a practical matter, to file testimony and exhibits electronically may file such by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the Commission at the address listed above. Each witness’s testimony shall include a summary not to exceed one page. All testimony and exhibits shall be served electronically on the Staff, the Company, and all other respondents simultaneous with their filing. In all filings, respondents shall comply with the Rules of Practice, as modified herein, including, but not limited to: 5 VAC 5-20-140, *Filing and service*, and 5 VAC 5-20-240, *Prepared testimony and exhibits*. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR-2026-00006.

Any documents filed in paper form with the Office of the Clerk of the Commission in this docket may use both sides of the paper. In all other respects, except as modified by the Commission’s Order for Notice and Hearing, all filings shall comply fully with the requirements of 5 VAC 5-20-150, *Copies and format*, of the Rules of Practice.

The public version of the Company’s Petition, the Commission’s Rules of Practice, the Commission’s Order for Notice and Hearing, and the public versions of other documents filed in the case may be viewed at: scc.virginia.gov/case-information/.

David No Match For Goliath: Meridian Boys Fall to Petersburg In State Quarterfinals

RYAN MCCAFFERTY

The moment Ty White was announced as the new head boys' basketball coach at Petersburg High School last summer, the rest of Class 3 knew it would require a miracle to beat the Crimson Wave. In Tuesday night's State Quarterfinals, the Meridian Mustangs couldn't get one, ending their season with a 102-45 loss.

"We did all we could do," head coach Jim Smith summed up. "It wasn't about us tonight. They're just a really great team."

There's no overstating the juggernaut Petersburg is. They have Oklahoma State commit Latrell Allmond, the No. 24 ranked recruit in the nation. They have King Bacot, the No. 1 player in the Class of 2029 and younger brother of former North Carolina star Armando. And they have White, who won seven Class 2 State titles during his time at John Marshall High School.

Meridian, for as impressive as Smith's program is, does not have those resources. What it does have is a bunch of small-town kids who gave it their all until the bitter end.

Sometimes, sports are about more than wins and losses. Especially at the youth and high school level, they're about culture. They're about the growth of boys into young men as they learn how to be part of something bigger than themselves, and they're about keeping a constant identity of hard work and resilience no matter who comes and goes.

That identity was on display all

year at Meridian, a school that lost four 2025 starters to graduation. Will Davis, the lone exception, was joined by returning rotational pieces Marques Myles and Mason Pye, while for everybody else, it was plug-and-play. After 22 games, that next-man-up mentality had taken the Mustangs back to the State playoffs.

They lost in a tough one against Skyline in the Regional Finals last Thursday, setting up their date just south of Richmond. The result wasn't much of a surprise: the Crimson Wave led 21-11 after a quarter and 49-22 at halftime en route to the 57-point win.

Davis scored 15 points to lead the team in his final high school game, while Lukas Wansley added 10. Meridian's season comes to a close with a total record of 18-6, and Tuesday's result takes nothing away from it. The heart the Mustangs showcased throughout the year is to be commended, and everything they achieved was earned the hard way.

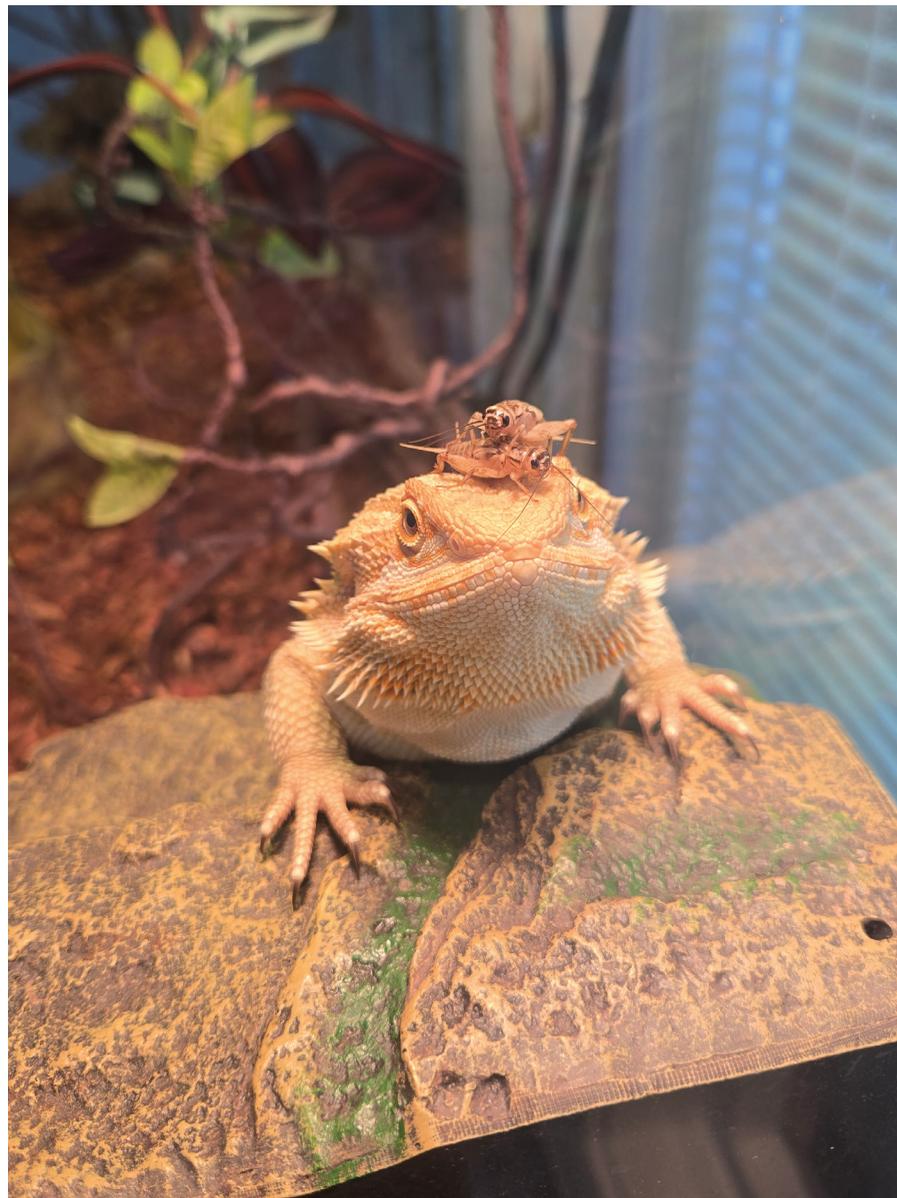
"I said at the start of the year that if we end up playing Petersburg, we'll have had a great year," Smith told NOVA Legends' Julian Brown in an interview this week. "Little did I know at the time that we would, and we did."

Meridian's boys may have been outmatched against a team like Petersburg, but simply having the opportunity to compete against them was an honor. A few years from now, these kids from a small school in the Little City might very well get to say they played in a State playoff game against NBA Draft picks.



Meridian finishes season 18-6. (Photo: Regan Davis)

CRITTER CORNER



THIS IS TRE, a 10 month old bearded dragon. He has three legs and enjoys climbing and running around. His owner, Oliver Swiney, is proud that Tre doesn't let his missing leg hold him back.

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FALLS CHURCH BUSINESS NEWS & NOTES

America's 250 Trivia Night

Solace Outpost and the Falls Church Chamber are hosting a trivia night with all things American – fashion, sports, and more – on Monday, March 9, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. This is in celebration of America's 250 anniversary, and the public is invited to join in the fun competition. There will be prizes and of course a great menu of food and brews at Solace.

Business Awards Gala Tickets

The Falls Church Chamber of Commerce will hold its Annual Business Awards Gala on Thursday, March 19, 6:30 – 10:00 p.m. at the State Theater. The theme of the Stars and Stripes Ball is America's 250th anniversary and guests are encouraged to dress to the theme as they wish. This is a community celebration of local businesses, several of whom will receive awards. The evening includes food, a silent auction, live auction, and live music by Groove Jet. Tickets are on sale on the Chamber website, www.fallschurchchamber.org and <https://event.auctria.com/59211b73-693a-408d-94d0-3808c04fa4bf/>.

Welcoming Falls Church

This weekend, volunteer to help a family move. One of the families welcomed in Welcoming Falls Church's Welcoming Refugees initiative will move from one apartment in Falls Church to another on Saturday, March 7. This is during Ramadan, so they need a team of volunteers to help the family with the move. Contact them at info@welcomingfallschurch.org for information and to join in.

Small Business SEO & Social Selling

The Mason Small Business Development Center will host a seminar on the power of SEO and social media on Wednesday, March 11, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Website optimization, social selling digital channel strategy and other topics will be covered. Register at <https://clients.virginiasbdc.org/workshop.aspx?ekey=110460009> to receive the meeting link.

Helen Hayes Nominations for Creative Cauldron

Creative Cauldron artists have received five nominations for recent productions for the 2026 Helen Hayes Awards. Congratulations go to Nadia Palacios, Julian Kelly, Lynn Joslin, Susan Derry, and Matt Conner. The Helen Hayes Awards will be held on Monday, May 18 at The Anthem in Washington, DC.

Virginia Startups: Give Your Best Elevator Pitch!

Virginia Business Magazine is holding its annual Elevator Pitch. Applications are open for those with start-up businesses less than 5 years old and less than \$50 million in annual revenue. The top 12 selected will be invited to showcase their vision and pitch the business to an audience of business leaders and investors. They may also be featured in the June issue of *StartVirginia* for entrepreneurs. The deadline to complete the survey at https://virginiabusiness.com/start_virginia/ is 11:45 pm on Monday, March 30.

FCCPS Job Fair

You are invited to attend the Student Job Fair taking place at Meridian High School next Thursday, March 12 from 11:45 a.m. - 1:45 p.m. The purpose of the event is to connect high school students with local businesses and organizations who offer summer, seasonal or part-time employment opportunities. Please complete the form Meridian High School Student Job Fair - Interest Form if you would like to attend or share information about open positions.

► *Business News & Notes is compiled by Elise Neil Bengtson, Executive Director of the Greater Falls Church Chamber of Commerce. She may be emailed at elise@fallschurchchamber.org.*

Our Man In Arlington

BILL FOGARTY

Today's column marks a bit of a change, as promised by my first column of 2026. That is, I am finally getting around to soliciting "guest columns" from others in Arlington. I am grateful for the wonderful opportunity, provided by the *Falls Church News-Press*, to write about the Arlington community on a weekly basis. My goal is to bring other Arlington voices into this space. So this month I have asked Nina Janopaul to take on the challenge of writing about 500 words, with a broad charge to contribute some reflections on life in Arlington. Nina is the former CEO of True Ground Housing Partners (formerly the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing) and a proud resident of Arlington for over 40 years.

Another View From Arlington: by Nina Janopaul

Arlington County today has an urban vibe. Its 26 square miles are divided by corridors of high-rises and busy Metro stations. However, Arlington often feels like "Mayberry" to me—the fictional small town depicted in the 1960s TV show. As I scan the aisles at the grocery store, or attend a public event, I recognize a surprising number of faces: neighbors and church members along with elected officials and nonprofit leaders.

Arlington earned acclaim for its "smart growth" plans that promoted dense commercial and residential development starting in the 1970s. The population has increased by 57% since 1980, to almost 250,000. Today, 73 percent of Arlington homes are in multifamily properties. According to the County's 2025 profile, an average of 79 newcomers migrate to Arlington every day.

How can such a thriving urban community feel so intimate? For me, this starts with the County government. Elected officials are hard—showing up at community events regularly. The County and the School Board invite citizens to join commissions and advisory committees on dozens of topics, from housing to school health to LGBTQ+ to veterans affairs. Any resident, new or old, can find a voice in the "Arlington Way"—a form of citizen engagement that seeks

direct input on all major decisions. In contrast, Fairfax County, with a population of 1.19 million spread over 395 square miles, engages citizens with a more structured approach than Arlington, out of necessity due to the scale and distances covered.

In addition, Arlington hosts a strong roster of nonprofit organizations, both well-established and new. The NAACP in Arlington was established in 1940 and played an important role in leading the desegregation of Arlington's public schools. It remains a voice for diversity in Arlington. The well-organized Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) serves 4,200 families weekly with the help of dozens of volunteers. My church, St. George's Episcopal, operates the oldest food pantry in the County, run by a handful of loyal volunteers. Both donors and volunteers are welcome for dozens of wonderful causes in the County.

The Arlington Community Foundation provides a searchable directory of 100+ nonprofits serving Arlington on their website. Volunteer Arlington maintains a similar list along with volunteer opportunities. Become a tutor? Fund a poverty program? Help dogs get adopted? There are many ways to engage.

Arlington's commitment to walkability and parkland also promotes neighborliness. I know many fellow dogs (and their owners) from our daily walks. I enjoy seeing families at the sandbox in our local park. On sunny days, I greet athletes on the County's many courts and bike paths.

I am excited to meet new, young residents who jump into commissions or volunteer roles. Some share their expertise from a federal job. Others volunteer in a totally different new area—like coaching a youth team or training to be a master naturalist. The new YIMBY group of Arlington is mostly composed of young renters, advocating for more housing.

Arlington residents can make a difference—whether in policy or service delivery. Neighbors greet each other in the library and on the pickleball court. Along the way, Arlingtonians build an in-person social network that bucks the loneliness epidemic plaguing much of our nation. I cherish the combined benefits of urban life—such as public transit and great coffee shops—along with the intimacies of a small town.

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