The C&O Canal National Historical Park celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Last weekend, parts of the Billy Goat Trail were closed due to high water.
Celebrity Bird

A male Painted Bunting, sporting colors that must be seen to be believed, has been hanging around in Potomac, just south of the Great Falls Tavern, causing quite a stir. Word spread via list-servers and Facebook groups, bringing flocks of hopeful birders to the C&O National Historical Park. I visited twice, but missed the bird both times. By presstime, I might well have made another attempt.

“It was a delight to see this vibrant male Painted Bunting at Great Falls this morning, a life for me,” birder and photographer Kojo Baidoo said. “This bird enjoyed quite a bit of fame today; after being absent early, he was found in the same place mid-morning and soon attracted a crowd of birders, which in turn attracted curious non-birders who had come to see the falls,” said photographer and birder Kojo Baidoo.

Painted Buntings are related to cardinals, but normally winter in southernmost Florida, southern Mexico or Central America. Advice from Cornell on spotting the bird in its expected habitat also applies to searching for this specimen: “Painted Buntings spend a lot of time hidden in dense habitat so patience might be necessary; however, the wait will be worth it when you finally spot this gem, surely one of North America’s finest songbirds.”

When Will Those School Bells Ring?

By Peggy McEwan
Potomac Almanac

ow that we have rung in the new year and the COVID-19 vaccine is becoming available, will Montgomery County Public Schools return to in-class instruction soon?

Most likely, the answer is no. In a Dec. 15, 2020 statement, from the Montgomery County School Board said in part, “Delay of Return to In-Person Learning WHEREAS, The Board of Education is committed to the health and safety of the Montgomery County Public Schools students, staff, and community; and WHEREAS, On November 10, 2020, the superintendent of schools proposed a framework for a safe return to in-person learning that would begin with special student populations on January 12, 2021, if health metrics are met; and WHEREAS, The Board of Education has adopted a health metrics framework that was developed in collaboration with local health officials, and is aligned with the Maryland guidelines framework, that provides guidance for a safe return to in-person instruction; and WHEREAS, Current and forecasted COVID-19 health metrics do not indicate that Montgomery County will reach the health metrics established by the Board of Education; now therefore be it RESOLVED, The Board of Education will meet on January 12, 2021, to determine if health metrics can be met by February.”

The caveat is, “Current and forecasted COVID-19 health metrics do not indicate that Montgomery County will reach the health metrics established by the Board of Education.”

The BOE Dec. 15 “Reaffirmed the health metrics threshold of a 14-day new case rate below 15 cases per 100,000 residents and the test positivity rate below 5 percent.”

These metrics are aligned with those recommended by the state and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Current metrics are moving farther away from those determined by the Maryland State Board of Education for safe school opening.

The Montgomery County COVID-19 Surveillance website reports the situation with “a very high risk of transmission” with 41.3 cases per 100,000 based on information from Jan. 3. That is many more than the BOE determination of 15 cases per 100,000 needed for opening schools. Test positivity rate is 7.6 percent, well above 5 percent.

Karen B. Salmon, Maryland Schools Superintendent, requested that the Maryland Department of Health, “include teachers, school staff and early childcare professionals as the first priority in the plan to start COVID-19 vaccinations for essential employees in Maryland.”

“Prolonged school closures have resulted in our children experiencing diminished academic achievement and social-emotional distress,” she also said in her statement.
Committee, ZTA-20-01, Solar Col

Key Dates

Thursday, Jan. 7, 2021, 7:30 p.m.

The second priority group in-

January 6-12, 2021

January 7-10, 2021

For the first time in a decade, the Potomac River’s health grade, an overall score of 85 percent, will have increased to a

zoning Board, City Council, and

Public hearings will start in

March. The proposed cold storage

municipalities. The proposal will

Climate Change

Funding:

The Montgomery County Council is

TV series will be broadcast on

Montgomery County SWAT Team

While in his room, he

1:00 p.m.

January 6, 2021

in a Public Safety

January 14, 2021, 7:30 p.m.

January 15, 2021

January 16, 2021

January 19, 2021, 10:00 a.m.

January 19, 2021, 4:30 p.m.

January 20, 2021

January 21, 2021

January 22, 2021

January 25, 2021

January 26, 2021

January 27, 2021

January 29, 2021

January 30, 2021

January 31, 2021

February 1, 2021

February 2, 2021

February 3, 2021

February 4, 2021

February 5, 2021

February 9, 2021

February 10, 2021

February 11, 2021

February 12, 2021

February 16, 2021

February 17, 2021

February 18, 2021

February 19, 2021

February 22, 2021

February 23, 2021

February 24, 2021

February 25, 2021

February 26, 2021

February 27, 2021

February 28, 2021
**January 2021 Newsletter**

**VIRTUAL MEETING**

Wednesday, Jan. 13 at 7:30 p.m. via ZOOM
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85090450777?pwd=OHRtCExUbOhYlJU5dN4UAV2STBuT09

or call in with 301-715-8592 (Meeting ID = 862 9004 2077, Passcode: 004225)

No advance registration required. A recording of this meeting will be available on our website: www.WMCCA.org

**SPEAKER:** Dr. Andew Lazur, Statewide Water Quality Specialist, with the University of Maryland Extension

Join us for a discussion on septic systems, wells, and their stewardship. Dr. Andew Lazur is a Statewide Water Quality Specialist with the University of Maryland Extension focusing on private wells, drinking water, and stormwater system education. He has been involved in the aquatic science field for over 35 years having worked in aquaculture, ornamental aquatic species, pond management, and water quality issues related to stormwater management. His passion is to help others learn about water quality and increase the adoption of practices that are beneficial to environmental and public health.

**Are “Stream Restorations” Damaging to Our Streams?** submitted by President Ken Bawer

“To date, the County has completed stream restoration projects, restoring almost 30,000 linear feet of streams...” per the latest report on meeting our M4 Permit. The inconsistencies that are present are such that these projects may convert our natural stream valleys into engineered stormwater conveyance systems, addressing the root cause of the problem – stormwater fire-hosing into streams from developed areas — including access roads, sidewalks, driveways, etc. They address the symptoms (stream bank erosion), but not the cause in an effort to check our M4 Permit box.

Every year, the County spends millions of taxpayer dollars on so-called “stream restoration” projects. First and foremost, the term “stream restoration” is a misnomer since some of these projects may not actually restore streams. See examples of destructive “stream restoration” projects here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Zv7SegchX-4Nvak8tSS4VfJb4bdTGsty/view?usp=sharing

“A stream restoration,” as defined by Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) for M4 Permits, may include stormwater management engineering practices that use heavy equipment such as bulldozers and backhoes to modify a stream channel. Typically, this involves placing heavy equipment from outside sources to armor-plating sections of the stream bank, changing its stream’s natural meander pattern based on theoretical mathematical formulas, and air pollution and increased risk of flooding and water pollution. The proposal would also negatively impact dozens of community resources including schools, parks, and hospitals, not to mention the numerous environmental concerns.

**County Council Hearing on Sewer Category Change Requests** submitted by Susanne Lee

A public hearing will be held on Jan. 12, 2021 at 1:30 pm regarding five sewer category change requests for properties located in the Potomac Subregion. They are located at 10400 Boswell Lane, 10401 Boswell Lane, the 12000 block of Firetary Meeting House Rd, 9701 Watts Branch Drive, and 10401 Ulman Road. The County Executive has recommended approval of the request for 10400 Boswell Lane and disapproval of the requests for the other properties. It appears that his recommendations are consistent with the law and policy governing sewer use contained in the Potomac Subregion Master Plan, the County Water and Sewer Plan including the Piney Branch Limited access policy, and the Maryland Smart Growth statutes. WMCCA plans to testify at the hearing in support of the County Executive’s recommendation. The package describing these requests can be found here: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Council/Resources/Files/agenda/2020/20201228_20201228_Q2.pdf

**Fallsreach Restoration Project.** A basketball court built in the floodplain was protected by armor-plating the stream bank. Note the total removal of plants and the newly engineered stream channel.

**Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 20-08 Continuing Care Retirement Community** submitted by Susanne Lee

The planning school board’s edgy proposal to use a redefinition of Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) to allow and promote construction of duplexes and triplexes in the County’s remaining low-density zones has arrived at the County Council. A Council public hearing is scheduled for Jan. 19, 2021 at 1:30 pm.

WMCCA supports efforts to address senior housing needs documented in Montgomery Planning’s recommendation for workforce affordability and aging in place were major themes. Our area had already been inundated with facilities, with more on the way, even before the pandemic raised serious issues regarding reliance on congregate living settings for housing seniors. This developer-driven proposal would turn the State law-based definition of a CCRC on its head and appears to be targeted at allowing development such as Heritage Gardens on South Glen Road – a townhouse development (units starting at $1.25 million) in a single-family RE-2 (2 acre) zone.

WMCCA is working with the Greater South Glen Neighborhood Association to oppose the ZTA, including testifying in opposition at the upcoming hearing. Information regarding the ZTA appears here: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Council/Resources/Files/agenda/2020/20201228/20201228_Q2.pdf

**REMINDER: IT’S TIME TO RE JOIN YOUR MEMBERSHIP**

Please buck up or become a new member of WMCCA. Go to our website www.wmcca.org to download a membership form or join using PayPal: Individual: $25 / Family: $50. We welcome donations to our Legal Fund. While we try mightily to get the money back from our litigations, sometimes it is unavoidable and highly effective. Contributions from members enabled us to join efforts to successfully fight the Brickyard Road soccerplex, the Old Anglers Inn event complex, and the Heritage Gardens townhouse development on South Glen Road. If you have any issues or concerns in your neighborhood, please contact WMCCA.

**Website Assistance Needed** by Peter Poggi

WMCCA is looking for someone to help modernize our website.

**While the current www.wmcca.org website has served us well since 2000, it was built upon an outdated Microsoft Frontpage 2003 platform, written entirely in HTML using frames, and reliant upon one individual. Our objectives are twofold. First and foremost, we need to have a trained backup who will share responsibility for maintaining the current site alongside our current website administrator. Once familiarized with the site, this responsibility will require just 1-2 hours a month for upkeep of less than 30 minutes monthly. Our second goal is to identify and begin transforming the site to a more maintainable and modern template platform. This will require gaining an understanding of the existing website design/development methods, and a familiarity with available hosting options. Please contact Peter Poggi peter.poggi@yahoo.com**
Gentle and Subtle Resolutions for 2021

By Marilyn Campbell

For 2021, local mental health professionals advise being gentle with yourself when creating the daily schedules and resolutions that often come with the beginning of the New Year. As many are feeling drained and defeated after a tumultuous 2020, making tiny, downsized resolutions can offer reassurance and hope as we embark on a new year.

“The year 2020 really highlighted that we can’t control what happens, but we can control how we respond,” said therapist Marla Zomety, manager of the Wellness, Health Promotion for Fairfax County. “We are resilient and we can learn how to adjust based on the changes that are presented to us. It is okay to grieve things that did not turn out how we wanted, we can grieve and move forward.”

One routine by making a small change to one’s day, advises Karina Guzman, Director of Wellness, Prevention and Education at Marymount University. “It might be helpful to create a simple daily routine or make uncomplicated new year resolutions focused on being present,” she said.

“Meditating, practicing gratitude and staying connected with our support networks like friends and family are quick and free activities to incorporate. They can be done at your own pace and are easy to include into a daily routine long-term.”

Simple daily routines are great for producing structure. “Most people thrive on having structure in their daily lives and find that it makes them feel more productive, which then helps their mood and feeling good about themselves,” said Bethesda therapist Carol Barnaby, LCSW.

“A great way to add structure is to think about what your goals and responsibilities for yourself daily actually. Then make a plan for your day that includes your goals. Make sure the goals are small and specific.”

Some have created broad and generalized goals like getting fit in 2021, but Zomety suggests starting with a purposeful, meaningful and achievable goal. “Instead of focusing on a resolution, which is something that typically focuses on what is lacking, in 2021, perhaps set an intention,” she said. “An intention helps us to focus and it is mindful that we are on a journey. What do you aim to do more of this year? Intentions can give you a sense of purpose, and focus on what is motivating you. Maybe your intention is to slow down or to continue to form deeper and meaningful relationships? Maybe your intention is to be more present in certain situations, or be more holistic in your health and well-being. Setting an intention will help you...identify your actions and navigate your response when faced with adversity.”

For those who’ve created broad and generalized goals like getting fit in 2021, Zomety suggests replacing those with purposeful, meaningful and achievable goals. “Instead of focusing on a resolution, which is something that typically focuses on what is lacking, in 2021, perhaps set an intention,” she said. “An intention helps us to focus and it is mindful that we are on a journey. What do you aim to do more of this year? Intentions can give you a sense of purpose, and focus on what is motivating you. Maybe your intention is to slow down or to continue to form deeper and meaningful relationships? Maybe your intention is to be more present in certain situations, or be more holistic in your health and well-being. Setting an intention will help you...identify your actions and navigate your response when faced with adversity.”

Practical resolutions might feel comforting in this year of uncertainty, says psychologist Jerome Short, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology at George Mason University. “Small changes, evaluate, adjust, and praise yourself for improvements, he said. “It may help to have a daily schedule, usual healthy meals and exercises, and specific times alone and with others. Paring down ambitious resolutions to those that are practical can feel satisfying this year,” suggests Short.

“Declutter your house, wear a basic wardrobe, and eat simple meals. Share work and household tasks with others,” he said. “Evaluate when you work most efficiently and what energizes you. Make sure you have time for breaks and enjoy your five senses with favorite sights, sounds, foods, and hugs.”
Help save these historical papers. If your child, dog, mother, father, neighborhood, school has been featured, you understand the value of a local community newspaper.

Thank you for helping to keep your community dialogue alive throughout Northern Virginia and Potomac, Md. All funds will be used to continue providing vital community dialogue and meeting obligations to our loyal and patient employees, contractors and suppliers due to continuing loss of advertising.

The pandemic has crushed many newspapers across the country, and one of America’s oldest newspapers and its affiliated Connection Newspapers, websites and digital media is at risk. The Northern Virginia, DC, and MD area’s best read and most trusted source for community news, which includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Connection Newspapers in the metropolitan region. The pandemic has hit small businesses hard, which in turn has reduced advertising revenue that keeps these local newspapers alive to provide hyperlocal news to residents.

Connection Newspapers has been offering these local newspapers to residents for over 200 years - countless residents have grown up with this local paper covering significant moments in the life of your family and children, news, sporting events, school activities, and even pictures of your dogs and cars. Internet news and large national newspapers do not provide the local connection or historical connection that local papers like Connection Newspapers provide.

Visit connectionnewspapers.com or https://www.gofundme.com/f/save-americas-oldest-newspaper

Connection Newspapers.... Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette, Centre View, Potomac Almanac

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Pictured: One of the several historical buildings that has housed the Alexandria Gazette Packet since its 1784 founding.