

Great Falls CONNECTION

From left, members of the GFCA Land Use and Zoning Committee, Bill Canis, Niamh DiOrio with Finn, John Milks, Julie Ben-Achour, Ruth Carver, Jennifer Falcone, Peter Falcone, Karen Washburn, Judy Fennimore, and Rob Fennimore gather at the village marker on Friday, Jan 21, 2022.



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NEWS



From left, members of the GFCA Land Use and Zoning Committee, Bill Canis, Niamh DiOrio with Finn, John Milks, Julie Ben-Achour, Ruth Carver, Jennifer Falcone, Peter Falcone, Karen Washburn, Judy Fennimore, and Rob Fennimore gather at the village marker on Friday, Jan 21, 2022.

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Looking Back And Ahead

Great Falls Citizens Association releases special report on land use issues.

MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Great Falls Citizens Association released its Special Report: Land Use & Zoning Highlights, 2021 Year in Review. Authored by Jennifer Falcone, chairperson of GFCA's Land Use & Development Committee, and GFCA member Peter Falcone, the report described how the committee tackled several Great Falls land issues in 2021. However, many of the most challenging matters remain at the forefront of the committee's 2022 agenda.

The Year in Review highlights that residential and commercial expansion continues in Great Falls and Fairfax County. "In one day in December 2021 (12/08/2021), more than 60 building permits were filed with Fairfax County for projects valued at more than \$14M in total."

The report stated that this trend would likely drive demand for new residential construction, including

in-fill and by-right development within larger lots in Great Falls. The report cited concerns that increased density and land use in Great Falls could have unintended effects similar to those in other Northern Virginia and Washington metro areas — increased traffic congestion and air pollution. A second impact was that rainwater runoff increases as impermeable hardscapes increase with construction. It diminishes water quality and reduces options for outdoor recreation.

The infrastructure required to accommodate and support such patterns has unintentionally depleted public resources and negatively affected public health and well-being. This section in the report read: "Even at low densities, poorly planned development can fragment natural habitats, greatly reducing the value of remaining open spaces for biodiversity, recreation, and other uses."

In the report's section, In-fill and SEE LOOKING BACK, PAGE 9

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NEWS

Brabrand: 'Stay the Course'

We have a right to do things up until that right impinges or infringes on the rights of others.

MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Superintendent Scott Brabrand invited families to a virtual community town hall and question and answer session Monday evening, Jan. 24. Throughout the hour, Brabrand and others discussed the latest pandemic information, the rationale and science behind the division's COVID-19 mitigation strategies, and the lawsuit filed by the Fairfax County school board in collaboration with six other Virginia county school boards in response to the governor's Executive Order on mask opting.

At one point, answering a person's question about FCPS taking away students' rights to opt-out of mask-wearing, Brabrand said that the pandemic had required a collective sacrifice for our community, our country, and our world.

"I'm frustrated too. I want to see the COVID cases go down, but I also believe our responsibility is to all of our students. And



Students, parents, and guardians arrive masked at FCPS' McNair Farm Elementary School.

we have to do the appropriate balancing of individual rights. Our whole country was formed on this balancing act of individual rights and balancing those with the rights of others. I have a right to do things up until that right impinges or infringes on the rights of others," Brabrand said. He added that FCPS is committed, as they have been since the pandemic began, to moving out and through the pandemic together.

Dr. Michell Boyd, assistant superintendent for special services, FCPS, Dr. Nardus King, interim chief equity officer, FCPS, Benjamin Schwartz, MD, Fairfax County Health Department, and Russell Libby, MD, head of Virginia Pediatric Group, were among the guest speakers.

Brabrand said that as students returned to school on Tuesday for in-person instruction, the division had been successful throughout the pandemic, never having to close a school due to public transmission of COVID within

a building.

"Our COVID transmission rates have been extremely low, less than one-half of 1 percent," Brabrand said. "My message to you remains a simple one. Stay the course. We must stay the course here at FCPS and continue to utilize the safety mitigation strategies around the COVID-19 pandemic that have allowed us to continue to have a school environment that is safe for students and our staff."

According to Brabrand, they, and others — parents, guardians, and students — must think about the needs of everyone as the division moves forward. "That's our hope tonight," said Brabrand. "You will listen with open minds and open hearts, and we'll continue to have a door here for you at FCPS."

Boyd said that despite the high COVID transmission rate in the county and across Virginia, FCPS had zero COVID outbreaks since returning from winter break and only



FCPS family, Aruna and Rushi Patel with their daughter. "We are in favor of masks staying on. We definitely agree as it is for everyone's safety."

36 outbreaks with 151 cases in the 2021-22 school year. With over 200,000 students and staff at FCPS, Boyd said that this did not occur in isolation.

"Universal masking is recommended," at times of high levels of community transmission, said Boyd. The CDC recommends universal mask wearing indoors for staff and students ages two and above regardless of one's vaccination status.

"The recommendation from our federal health authorities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is that everyone wears masks at this time," Boyd said. She added that the Northern Virginia health directors recommended that their Virginia superintendents talk about the importance of

SEE BRABRAND, PAGE 8

FCPS Takes Legal Action Challenging Gov. Youngkin

County School Board files suit jointly with six other boards.

MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

On Monday, Jan. 24, seven school boards, including five in northern Virginia: Fairfax County, Falls Church City, Alexandria City, Arlington County, and Prince William County, as well as the cities of Richmond and Hampton, jointly filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Gov. Glenn Youngkin's (R) Executive Order that would allow parents to send children to school without wearing masks.

According to the order, "Parents of any child enrolled in a(n) elementary or second-

ary school or a school based early childcare and educational program may elect for their children not to be subject to any mask mandate in effect at the child's school or educational program."

Gov. Youngkin wrote in the order, citing § 1-240.1 of the Code of Virginia, that "a parent has a fundamental right to make decisions concerning the upbringing, education, and care of the parent's child."

The online FCPS statement, which was posted on Monday, Jan. 24: "At issue was whether locally-elected school boards have the exclusive authority and responsibility



FCPS regulation requiring universal masking remains in effect in accordance with state law. Students must adhere to the requirements of Regulation 2109.2. Face masks are included in the student dress code and failure to comply remains an SR&R violation.

SEE FCPS, PAGE 8



Superintendent Scott Brabrand is pictured here with two pupils, one of whom is holding a vaccination card. FCPS is working toward a time when they can begin to scale back safety measures, like universal masking, but that time has not yet arrived.

OPINION

Protecting Student Learning

BY DEL. KENNETH R. "KEN" PLUM

Last week I spoke to the members of the House of Delegates about my concerns of protecting student learning under the new administration in Richmond. The Governor's first Executive Order raised more questions than answers as to the intent of the order. Entitled "Ending the Use of Inherently Divisive Concepts, Including Critical Race Theory, and Restoring Excellence in K-12 Public Education in the Commonwealth," its opening page has little with which I would quarrel: "The foundation of our educational system should be built on teaching our students how to think for themselves."

The following three pages of directives set the administration on an investigation to find Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the curriculum even though it is not taught in the public schools. The 14 directives have the staff looking in every document, every file folder, and seemingly behind every nook and cranny to root out CRT. This wild goose chase called for in Executive Order One to find something that does not exist is akin to the calls for a forensic audit of



all election results to support the Big Lie that fraud and corruption in the last presidential election allowed the election to be stolen.

My red warning light goes off with the Executive Order for in Virginia we have gone down such a path in the past much to the embarrassment of the state in the eyes of the Nation. The Lost Cause was an effort on the part of the Southern states to justify the Civil War, glorify the participants, and claim the high ground for it having been fought. All those Civil War monuments that have been removed in the past couple of years for the false narrative they helped to promote were part of the Lost Cause movement.

Virginia's contribution to the Lost Cause effort to give a different meaning to the causes of the Civil War was the establishment by the General Assembly of a legislative commission to oversee publication of new textbooks on Virginia history and government. The Commission realized many difficulties in trying to have professional historians and teachers cooperate in writing a selective history of the Commonwealth. One legislative member of the Commission explained that "we want to emphasize the

greatness of Virginia and take out any reference to poor people."

One historian wrote that the textbooks "portrayed Virginia's white leaders in unfailingly flattering lights, its enslaved residents as happy and contented beneficiaries of benign masters who civilized and Christianized them, and its Indians as savage barbarians in some contexts or as primitive simpletons in others." (Tarter, *The Grandees of Government*, University of Virginia Press, 2013)

My personal experience with state-written textbooks came in the mid 1960s when as an intern teacher I refused to use the textbook for it left out so much of Virginia history including the slave economy, the resulting Civil War and the Jim Crow era and its consequences. Objections by educators, ridicule in the press, and embarrassment by state officials led to these books being abandoned.

Executive Order One seems obsessed with what it calls "inherently divisive concepts." Considering history that is truthful in our highs and lows can lead to better understandings and a stronger more inclusive state than can efforts to ignore, white-wash or mislead in our history. We do not want politicians writing our textbooks!

SENIOR LIVING

Romance and Intimacy after 60

Reviving and developing romantic relationships in the golden years.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Erika, a 63-year-old practicing attorney who lives in McLean, says that she and her husband of 33 years are living as though they are roommates. "We have separate bedrooms," she said. "We really don't talk except for superficial conversations about politics. I'm lonely so much of the time."

With the goal of restoring the romance and intimacy that they once shared, Erika and her husband have begun couples counseling. From scheduling date nights to overcoming resentments that hamper affection, local therapists say those over 65 can harness their maturity and life experience to revive or create healthy relationships.

"Although challenges exist, so does your interest in romance and intimacy," said Brandon Keene-Orton, Assistant Professor of Counseling at Marymount University. "Don't let existing stigmas harm your sexuality."

Some older couples no longer have parental responsibilities like driving car pools and coaching little league games, which creates space for satisfying romantic relationships.

"With the worries from raising young children behind them, increased free time, new and old love relationships can be life enriching," said Linda McKenna Gulyn, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at Marymount University and the creator of a "Sexuality in Older Adulthood" in her Adulthood and

Aging class. "In older adulthood – as it was in previous years – intimacy and closeness, which

may include sexual intimacy, are vital for a long and healthy life."

Some seniors lack an interest in romantic relationship because of the belief that such connections are not attainable, suggests Alexandria therapist Mark Anderson Ed.D. "As we age our bodies change and our sexual abilities change," he said. "Many people find it very difficult to talk openly with their partner about these changes. It makes them feel like they're letting their partner down, like they're broken or useless."

Redefining romance and tailoring it to meet the specific needs of both people in a relationship can ease apprehension and restore a desire to pursue a satisfying relationship.

"The focus of sex tends to shift towards intimacy and deep connection as the focus of fulfillment at this stage of development, which is a welcome shift for many couples," said sex therapist Joanne Bagshaw, Ph.D., who is also a Professor of Psychology at Marymount University.

Broken trust and ineffective communication have the power to destroy intimacy. "Every couple, no matter how compatible, have some issues or areas of conflict," said Anderson. "If the couple isn't able to work through these issues with a therapist or on their own, they can build up hurts and resentments that are hard to let go of. These hurt feelings create a distance between the partners that gradually erodes their sense of connection and intimacy."

Working through a source of contention in a way that makes both people feel heard and understood can reinforce the bonds that hold

together a romantic relationship. "Be candid about your needs. Do not listen to respond, listen to understand," said Keene-Orton. "From there, healthy, honest, and forward conversations can make you and your partner reignite and maintain the flame."

The ability to trust one's a vital part of any romantic relationship, advises Anderson. "If a partner loses the sense that they trust their partner, that they are no longer emotionally and physically safe, it creates a barrier to intimacy," he said. "The loss of trust may come from a major event like infidelity or may build slowly because of a series of small issues where someone feels that their partner doesn't have their back."

"When trust is restored, couples can begin to really talk about what's happening, or not happening, in the bedroom," he continued. "They can open up about their feelings, fears, shame, and confusion. Then, instead of being a source of conflict, it becomes an opportunity for the couple to work together to regain that sense of love."

Rather than thinking of a sudden relationship overhaul, take small steps to create intimacy. "Spend time together to build a connection," said Bethesda therapist Carol Barnaby. "Seniors who have been together for a long time often have to work to maintain their relationship, realizing that the person you are with is probably not the same person as when you began your relationship."

While people change over time, the aspects of the initial attraction might remain the same. "We should also take a look at some of the romantic characteristics that you've enjoyed in the past and now miss," said Anderson. "Try to recreate those."

Great Falls CONNECTION

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Contemporary Chamber Opera Takes Center for the Arts

"Three Decembers" from Virginia Opera delves into a family trying to cope and reconcile.

BY DAVID SIEGEL
THE CONNECTION

Virginia Opera offers audiences a modern family drama exploring often unseen sides of contemporary family life. "Three Decembers," is an intimate, chamber opera based upon an unpublished play by multi-Tony Award recipient Terrance McNally. His librettos for "Kiss of the Spider Woman" and "Ragtime" won Tony Awards.

SEE "THREE DECEMBERS", PAGE 11

WHERE AND WHEN

Virginia Opera presents "Three Decembers," at Center for the Arts, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030. Performances: Saturday, Feb 5, 2022, at 8 p.m. and Sun, Feb 6, 2022, at 2 p.m. Tickets: \$110, \$70, and \$40. Call 703-993-2787 or visit www.cfa.gmu.edu. Notes: Sung in English with English Subtitles. There will be a pre-performance discussion. Patrons required to provide proof of vaccination or a negative COVID PCR test taken no more than 72 hours before the performance or negative Rapid Antigen test within 48 hours. Patrons will be asked to show proof of vaccination, or the negative test, with a photo ID prior to entering the theater. Masks will be required while in the theater. For more information visit www.cfa.gmu.edu/plan-your-visit/what-expect.

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Republicans are hoping to spend \$150 million to create 20 new charter schools, but they'll be facing opposition in the Senate Education Committee, which has nine Democrats and only six Republicans.



One issue where Democrats and Republicans might find common ground is banning political contributions from public utilities.

Era of Divided Government

Mask mandates, anti-racist curriculum and campaign finance on the agenda.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
THE CONNECTION

Virginia is under new management, and it's a sharp turn from how things have worked in the commonwealth for the last two years. Republicans are now in control of the Executive Mansion and the House of Delegates. But Democrats still control the state Senate, ushering in a new era of divided government. The 2022 General Assembly session has just started, and already Democrats and Republicans are fighting over everything from mask mandates and anti-racist curriculum to marijuana legalization and voting rights.

"It's quite dysfunctional from a policymaking standpoint," said Jennifer Victor, associate professor of political science at George Mason University's Schar School Policy and Government. "It's a very antagonistic form of politicking that is unfortunately quite common across state legislatures, and it's one of the unfortunate consequences in the partisan and polarized era that we're living through."

On the campaign trail, Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin often talked about what he called his "day-one agenda," things like banning critical race theory from schools and getting rid of mask mandates. Shortly after his inauguration as governor, he signed executive orders to deliver on both of those campaign promises although the details of how that might actually work remain unclear. Critical



Gov. Glenn Youngkin began his day one agenda by issuing executive orders to ban critical race theory from public schools and allow parents to decide whether their children wear masks in schools.

race theory isn't actually taught in Virginia schools, and many local school board members reject the idea that a governor can dictate covid protocol to school divisions.

"Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) will continue to abide by the health and safety guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Alexandria Health Department (AHD) and continue to require all individuals to wear masks that cover the nose and mouth in ACPS schools, facilities and buses," wrote Superintendent Gregory Hutchings in an email to parents last weekend.

EDUCATION IS AT the top of the agenda for the new administration, although the new governor will likely hit a roadblock when

his initiatives face the cold hard reality of the Senate committee system. During a speech to a joint assembly earlier this week, Youngkin announced he wanted to spend \$150 million to create 20 new charter schools. But the Senate Education Committee has nine Democrats and only six Republicans. So getting a bill expanding charter schools to the Senate floor would require two Democrats on the committee to cross over and vote with the Republicans, which seems unlikely.

"If you look at some of the charter schools, you're going to find that some of them are mostly students who are African American," said Sen. Louise Lucas (D-18), chairwoman of the Senate Education Committee. "I don't like sepa-

rating students. I think there ought to be a blend, and I think students ought to be able to have interaction among students other than students who look just like them."

Although critical race theory is not taught in Virginia schools, Republicans have been critical of the anti-racist teacher training that emerged after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. During his speech to the joint assembly this week, Youngkin said his executive order was intended to prohibit what he called "inherently divisive concepts in schools, including critical race theory." Members of the Legislative Black Caucus say they're skeptical that the new governor is interested in making sure students understand some of the more unsavory chapters of race relations in Virginia history.

"If you don't want the truth taught, just say that's what you don't want," said Sen. Mamie Locke (D-2). "If you are going to stand there and say you want to teach the good, the bad and the ugly of Virginia history and then sign an executive order saying we are going to ban critical race theory, you're being a hypocrite."

CAMPAIN FINANCE REFORM may be one issue where members of opposing parties can come to some kind of agreement. For example, Democrats and Republicans joined forces to reject a bill that would have put limits on campaign contributions. Currently, Virginia has no limits on the amount of money that donors can contrib-

ute. Some senators were interested in setting some kind of limit, and two separate bills would have set a ceiling of \$20,000 or \$25,000. A bipartisan coalition emerged to kill that idea.

"Contributions are speech," said Sen. Jill Vogel (R-27). "When you set up artificial barriers to speech people find ways around it."

Virginia and 10 other states had no limits on contributions from individuals in state races in 2019, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

On the campaign trail, Youngkin said he would disrupt entrenched interests in Richmond. He might have an opportunity to do that if lawmakers are able to put together a bipartisan coalition to prohibit campaign contributions from public utilities. Sen. Chap Petersen (D-34) is working with Del. Lee Ware (R-65) to ban campaign cash from public utilities, including Dominion Energy, which has long been a major force in Virginia politics and a generous donor. Petersen and Ware say it's a bad idea to have a utility that is regulated by the state to have so much influence over lawmakers.

"I can get a portion of my caucus. I can't get them all. I certainly can't get the ones who are more senior in leadership," said Petersen. "But I need -- we need, the commonwealth needs -- the new governor to take a firm stand on this issue and my hope is that will change the dynamic."

A spokeswoman for the governor said Youngkin will review all legislation that comes to his desk.

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Northern Virginia Faces Loss of Legislative Experience

Redistricting Creates Opportunities and Forces Change.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Redistricting maps, used for voting for Virginia's Senate and House seats, were finalized by the Virginia Supreme Court on Dec. 28, approving the map plan developed by Special Masters appointed by the court.

The effort followed analysis of 2020 U.S. Census data which documented population shifts, making it necessary to adjust districts to maintain roughly the same population sizes in each, in keeping with the one person - one vote concept. Virginia's redistricting commission, in its first year, was not able to come to agreement, moving the process to the State's Supreme Court.

Virginia's Constitution allows, but doesn't require, consideration of the addresses of incumbent legislators, who must live within the district they represent. They were not considered in the maps approved by the Supreme Court in December. As a result, several new Districts created have two or more incumbents.

State-wide, seven Senate districts and 19 House districts have more than one current legislator living in them. Eleven Senate districts and 23 House districts have no incumbents. While this provides opportunities for new candidates with new outlooks, it also means the loss of many experienced legislators.

In the northern Virginia area, the two Senate Districts which have pairs of incumbents include the two most senior Senators in the General Assembly, Richard Saslaw (1980) paired with Dave Marsden, and Janet Howell (1992) paired with Jennifer Boysko.

In the House there are four northern Virginia pairings, impacting incumbents, Kathleen Murphy and Rip Sullivan; Dave Bulova and Dan Helmer, Kaye Kory and Marcus Simon; and Eileen Filler-Corn and Kathy Tran.

Each of these House incumbents received significant majorities in their last election, held November 2021, capturing from 53 to 72 percent of the vote. Two area Senate districts and three House districts have no incumbents.

Current incumbents continue to represent their prior constituencies until the next election. The date of that election is unclear, awaiting determination of a lawsuit in the federal appeals court, which could require House incumbents to run again in 2022 within the newly mapped territories.

Virginia's principles of redistricting

Voting districts have been a contentious area in U.S. politics. The U.S. Constitution does not address state legislative redistricting creating an area of political



Senator Richard Saslaw (D-35th), the most senior VA senator, and former House Speaker, Delegate Eileen Filler-Corn (D-41st) both face potential primary campaigns with other incumbents after redistricting paired them with other incumbents (Shown at 2020 public hearing)



Senator Janet Howell, second most senior senator, and member of the powerful Finance and Appropriations, Privileges and Elections, and Rules Committees, is another area senator paired with another incumbent in the new redistricting map. Shown at 2019 campaign event

ical maneuvering. Supreme Court rulings have helped to set precedent, including that "the Equal Protection Clause demands no less than substantially equal state legislative representation for all citizens, of all places as well as of all races." The Voting Rights Act of 1965 mandates that electoral district lines cannot be drawn in such a manner as to "improperly dilute minorities' voting power." In a 2019 case, the Supreme Court held that the Republican led House of Delegates did not have the legal right to challenge a lower court opinion that struck several district maps in the Commonwealth they had drawn, as an unconstitutional racial gerrymander.

The Virginia Constitution outlines four principles in its redistricting criteria:

1. Population equity - "Every electoral district shall be composed of contiguous and compact territory" Va. Const. Art. II, § 6. Every electoral district shall be drawn in accordance with the requirements of federal and state laws that address racial and ethnic fairness, including the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States

2. Voting Rights and political participation - provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended, and judicial decisions interpreting such laws. Districts shall provide, where practicable, opportunities for racial and ethnic communities to elect candidates of their choice." Va. Const. Art. II, § 6.

3. Communities of interest - "Districts shall be drawn to preserve communities of interest." Va. Code § 24.2-304.04(5).2

4. Political neutrality - "A map of districts shall not, when considered on a statewide basis, unduly favor or disfavor any political party." Va. Code § 24.2-304.04(8).

5. The Commission may review political data to ensure compliance with this political neutrality provision and may consider incumbent addresses as part of the drafting process.

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FCPS Takes Legal Action Challenging Gov. Youngkin's Ex. Order No. 2

FROM PAGE 3

conferred upon them by Article VIII, § 7 of the Constitution of Virginia over supervision of the public schools in their respective communities, or whether an executive order can unilaterally override that constitutional authority," the statement read. Also at issue is whether a governor, through executive order, could rescind a lawfully adopted statute, Senate Bill 1303, without the Virginia General Assembly's legislative action.

Former Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam (D) signed Senate Bill 1303, on March 30, 2021, and as approved, it expires on August 1, 2022. The approved bill requires that each school board offer in-person instruction to students five days a week. "Each school board shall also provide that in-person instruction" in a manner in which it adheres, to the maximum extent practicable, to any currently applicable mitigation strategies for early childhood care and education programs and elementary and secondary schools to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 that have been provided by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."

Monday, Jan. 24, marked the first day that

Gov. Glenn Youngkin's Executive Order went into effect, but students were not in schools because of a professional development day in FCPS.

The moment had not come for schools to eliminate universal mask wearing, a critical component of layered health and safety mitigation strategies, school districts assert.

The Virginia Health Department stated on Monday, Jan. 24, that COVID-19 transmission rates remained high. Hospitals around the state had a reported seven-day case average of 3,804 patients. Two weeks earlier, on Monday, Jan. 10, and five days before Youngkin signed Executive Order Number Two, Gov. Ralph Northam had issued a limited state of emergency for hospitals already overburdened by historic coronavirus case-load increases. Hospitals had entered crisis level, and the CDC continued its recommendation to retain universal mask-wearing as part of layered health and safety mitigation strategies.

"School divisions need to continue to preserve their authority to protect and serve all our students, including our most vulnerable, who need these mitigation measures, perhaps more than anyone, to be able to con-



The Kaetzels: Connor (17), Sydney (15), and Logan (12), masked and ready for school. Connor and Sydney attend Yorktown High School, and Logan attends Williamsburg Middle School in Arlington. All nod affirmatively to the question of whether they expect some kids to arrive at school on Monday without masks.

tinue to access in-person instruction," stated the FCPS Jan. 24 announcement.

School boards had been placed in a "legally untenable position" and were confronted with an executive order that conflicted with the constitution and state law.

Arlington Public Schools (APS) became the first district to announce they would continue to require all staff and students to wear masks inside on school grounds and

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION



The first day of the Governor's order relaxing the school mask mandate is over but these Williamsburg Middle School students are walking home after school still wearing their masks.

buses as part of their layered approach to safety. In its online posting announcement, APS noted, "The federal requirement from Feb. 2, 2021, is still in place on all forms of public transportation. Anyone riding a school bus is therefore required to wear a mask when riding on our school buses to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

Brabrand: 'Stay the Course'

FROM PAGE 3

universal masking during high transmission. The Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics continues to strongly recommend that children wear masks in school when infection is high.

Boyd acknowledged that, at times, students wear their masks incorrectly and have to be reminded to pull them up. "But by and large, we want to celebrate that FCPS students have stepped up and have answered the call to keep themselves safe, to keep their friends safe, and to keep their community safe," she said.

Concerning the problems associated with student face mask compliance, FCPS will continue to handle them in a tiered fashion, "in a caring manner and in our caring culture," according to Boyd. She defined her efforts as being directed toward informing and educating rather than engaging in confrontation.

Students would first be redirected to wear their masks and may be redirected as staff worked with them. If there were still compliance challenges, staff would solicit the support of student service personnel, followed by engaging in conversation with parents and guardians.

"If FCPS exhausted this tiered approach to redirecting and supporting students ... students who would not comply would be excluded from in-person instruction," said Boyd. Such does not include students with religious or medical exemptions.

Face masks are included in the student

dress code and failure to comply remains an SR&R violation. According to FCPS, "Intentional removal of or refusal to wear a face covering during the times face coverings are required by all students will be treated as a violation of Regulation 2613."

Brabrand shared his concerns around the governor's Executive Order Number Two, stressing that Senate Bill 1303 says they should be providing in-person instruction following CDC guidelines." In the end, we will respect the legal process, and we are confident that we have a strong legal case. ... Now at the height of the number of cases per 100,000, the largest ever seen in FCPS," the best course is staying the course, requiring masks.

Brabrand assured the community FCPS would work with them and produce a roadmap toward more flexible mitigation strategies, including those for more flexible mask-wearing as transmission eases.

Q&A

Three thousand eight hundred people were online for the town hall during the Q and A. (Content slightly edited for clarity and length.)

Q: Has the school district attempted to limit harassment to students, parents, and staff concerning mask use?

A: Brabrand: We continue to work with our principals, Office of School Safety and Security. We have a strong relationship with our Fairfax County Police Department, and we have an SRO (school resource officer) in

all our middle and high schools.

Q: Clarification on the type of masks is requested.

A1: Schwartz: The CDC document talks about the importance of a mask fitting well, having multiple layers, and a mask that a child will wear effectively and consistently. While KN95s and N95s have a higher filtering ability, if they don't fit or if children don't wear them consistently, they will not be effective. (The) CDC wasn't recommending that children do not wear cloth masks, but rather that they wear the best mask with the best filtering capacity that they can wear consistently, effectively, and without any gaps around the sides.

A2: Russell Libby, MD: But with kids, they scream, they yell, they laugh, they talk, they sing, they do all the things that will generate the flow of potentially infected or virus-carrying particles in their breath that will be there for others to catch. And wearing that mask is most prominently intended to help reduce the spread from someone who's asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic but carrying that virus. It might then infect someone else who would go home and infect their family, grandparents or others.

(Kids) carry a significant burden that we impose upon them by questioning and trying to undermine the real public health that all of us are here to advocate. They think they bought something home to their families that infected someone that killed someone. The potential for harm is so much greater

than the potential for good.

Q: You are taking our kids' right to choose, and I don't feel that is right.

A: Brabrand: I think part of the pandemic is particularly hard for people balancing individual rights for how I want my child to go to school, with those rights' impact on the rights of other children, who also have a right to go to school and to go to school in a safe environment.

Brabrand ended the town hall saying that the pandemic caused more fatalities and casualties, than the number experienced during World War Two in wartime casualties. (World War II, 405,399 U.S. deaths. COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. Deaths are more than 850,000)

"If this were a war, this is one of the most significant attacks on our country that we've ever endured. And so, we are facing that challenge between life and liberty that is fundamentally rooted in our own origin story as a country. I'm confident that we can continue to stay together, to work together, and to communicate the very latest in science and how to get us through this pandemic," Brabrand said.

"I'm just going to commit to you as I continue to finish my final year as superintendent and in my final year over a span of 30 years in Fairfax County, to work with all of you, to listen whether you agree with me or not, that I'm coming to you with a humble heart, with a servant's heart to support your kids, (and) to support our staff that supports your kids," Brabrand added.

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Razing the Marmota barn and silo.

Looking Back and Ahead

FROM PAGE 2

New Residential Construction, the authors described how the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan considered both the county's growth and its shrinking vacant land supply. Available residential land will be nearly depleted by the turn of the century if current trends continue. The report claims that the county rejects few plans. County officials may use special exceptions, permits, and zoning amendments known as "up-zoning" to support those seeking changes in zoning restrictions. "Larger lots are being subdivided and contribute to increased density. Residents of Great Falls are now experiencing this effect, notwithstanding the way the Comprehensive Plan characterizes this community," stated the report.

The report addressed issues with five site-specific developments, beginning with the Rivermont subdivision in the heart of Great Falls. GFCA's main concern was problems controlling large amounts of runoff from the site to nearby Walker Lake. GFCA discovered, the report says, that the developer did not have a county record of non-compliance even with numerous code violations reported by neighbors.

A second development project discussed was the recently built Hortense Place subdivision off Georgetown Pike near Fairfax County Park Authority's Ob-

servatory Park at Turner Farm. It prompted GFCA and the developers to meet in 2021 to discuss the proposed installation of non-conforming brick columns along the Pike's frontage and 22 non-compliant exterior light fixtures on those columns. "GFCA engaged with the property owners to inquire about plans and advise that this additional proposed lighting on the trail outside of the subdivision could interfere with the nearby Turner Farm Observatory activities as well as affect driver vision along Georgetown Pike after dark," according to the report.

Cornwell Manor Farm, a significant historic property, is another project the report reviewed. The 19th-century manor house is surrounded by cleared land and site development. "Preservationists are concerned over the effects this might have on this heritage resource and the resulting transformation of the eight-acre parcel," stated the report.

A Special Permit Application for a so-called convent/monastery/nunnery at 815 Walker Road was also cited as a concern. The report said, "This effort resulted in an unprecedented action by GFCA to join an appeal application before the County's Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) to challenge the Zoning Administrator's Use Determination that described the project as a "convent" although its proposed

residents would not be members of an enclosed religious order who have taken solemn religious vows."

However, "the watershed event of 2021 was the transfer of ownership to Toll Brothers of the historic Marmota Farm," a 22-acre tract at 9800 Georgetown Pike. Work on the site, bounded by the Innsbruck neighborhood and the Fairfax County Park Authority's Grange and Old Forestville Schoolhouse, began in 2021.

Fairfax County Land Use officials approved the plan for the development of Marmota in 2006. With approved "grandfathered" stormwater management standards by right, the project prompted GFCA and the surrounding community to action. GFCA insisted on having the stormwater management calculations reviewed. Their efforts resulted in changes to the site plan and a new roadway entrance connecting the development to Georgetown Pike listed on the National Register of Historic Places. GFCA also took issue with development's impact on the Pike's scenic watershed.

A prominent Southern Red Oak on the right-of-way of Georgetown Pike has been saved for the time being after GFCA hired two independent arborists to oppose the county's tree-cutting decision. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) says the tree is in

SEE LOOKING BACK, PAGE 10

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NEWS

Looking Back and Ahead

FROM PAGE 9

its right-of-way, and the county's opinion is irrelevant.

Other efforts included GFCA's land-use actions at the 62-unit IntegraCare assisted living facility on Walker Road, ensuring the site development was compatible with the area's character, tree preservation, and effective stormwater controls.

Begun in 2021 is a Brightview Senior Living facility being proposed for the current site of Wolftrap Nursery on Leesburg Pike, zoned R-1. It is planned as a continuing care facility to accommodate 172 residents. It would be situated adjacent to two R-2 zones to the south and an R-1 to the east.

According to the report, three new residential subdivisions along the historic Georgetown Pike are expected to impact the road's historic viewshed. Trees and natural vegetation along the Pike's "summer roads" are removed for subdivision, land clearing, and site development.

As for GFCA's action concerning Zoning Administration, the report told how GFCA joined other community groups in opposing a proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment that would have restricted the display of the American flag. That provision was ultimately revised.

GFCA and other organizations also objected to removing public hearings from the agritourism ap-

plication process and the absence of safety requirements for such buildings.

In the final section of 2021, Environmental Issues Affecting Land Use, the report described how GFCA submitted comments to Fairfax County's Environmental Quality Advisory Council highlighting several key concerns, including maintaining a balance between development and environmental protection, reviewing stormwater management oversight policies, measuring the impact of land development on tree canopy preservation, and strengthening the review of development site plans.

GFCA supported a Dark Sky Preserve around the county's observatory in Great Falls and increased oversight of outdoor lighting requirements. The proposed changes would protect the Observatory at Turner Farm Park.

This action stemmed from GFCA's 2020 request to the Planning Commission for a zoning amendment to help protect the night skies near the Great Falls Observatory.

In the section, The Way Forward, the authors stated that GFCA would continue its voluntary efforts to monitor land use and zoning issues while protecting its community's vital resources.

Membership in the GFCA is open to all Great Falls residents. If you are concerned about issues mentioned in the report, contact zoning@GFCA.org.

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CALENDAR

NOW THRU JAN. 30

Paint & Pen. 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. At Jo Ann Gallery Reston Community Center, Lake Anne, 1609 Washington Plaza N, Reston. Two Artists, One Show with paintings by Angie Magruder and drawings by Bob Biedrzycki. Visit the website: www.restoncommunitycenter.com

NOW THRU FEB. 1

Mah Jongg Lessons. 6:30-9:30 p.m. At Temple Rodef Shalom, 2100 Westmoreland Street, Falls Church. Mah Jongg beginner class, Jan. 18, 25 and Feb. 1 6:30-9:30 p.m. \$90. Send non-refundable check to WoTRS, Attention Iva Gresko, Temple Rodef Shalom, 2100 Westmoreland St, Falls Church, VA 22023. Include email address, home address, and telephone numbers. Check is your registration. Enrollment limited. Masks required.

NOW THRU FEB. 6

"The Dinner Party." Presented by Vienna Theatre Company. At Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry St., SE, Vienna. Performance Dates and Times: 8 p.m.: Fridays and Saturdays: January 28, 29; Feb 4, 5; 2 p.m.: Sundays: Jan 30, Feb 6. In Neil Simon's farcical take on love, marriage, divorce, and what comes after, six strangers are invited to a mysterious dinner party. They do not know who the other guests will be or why they have been invited. Tossed together in a private dining room, they have a sneaking suspicion that this unorthodox dinner party will forever change their lives. Visit www.viennatheatrecompany.org for more details or email vtcshows@yahoo.com.

NOW THRU FEB. 12

Traveling While Black: Virtual Reality Experience. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. In "Traveling While Black VR," the immersion of 360° footage draws viewers into living history lessons told around a booth in Ben's Chili Bowl. The Washington, D.C. restaurant has been a mainstay of the African American community since 1958, bearing witness to significant Civil Rights milestones that are woven into the film

in powerful snippets of footage. The Traveling While Black VR experience/film was directed by Academy Award-winning director Roger Ross Williams.

NOW THRU FEB. 13

"Every Brilliant Thing." At NextStop Theatre, 269 Sunset Park Drive, Herndon. Guided by an unnamed narrator, the audience is drawn into the story of a young boy who tries to cure his mother's depression by creating a list of all the most wonderful things in the world. Visit www.NextStopTheatre.org.

NOW THRU FEB. 19

New Art Exhibits. At McLean Project for the Arts, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Give and Take: Building Form (Emerson Gallery) will feature abstract wood sculpture by Emilie Benes Brzezinski, Rachel Rotenberg, Foon Sham, and Norma Schwartz, while the Atrium Gallery will feature Intersectional Painting: Works by Sheila Crider. Both exhibitions run through Feb. 19, 2022. Visit www.mpaart.org/ or call 703-790-1953 for gallery hours.

NOW THRU FEB. 27

"Winter Winds" Art Show. 12-5 p.m. At Reston Art Gallery and Studios, 11400 Washington Plaza W, at Lake Anne, Reston. See the season's sentiments depicted in oil, acrylic, and watercolor paintings, mixed media collage, metal mobiles, and more, created by the eight artists of RAGS. Open weekends, 12-5 pm, through February 27, located at the "ART" sign on Lake Anne Plaza. Visit the website: www.restonartgallery.com.

FRIDAY/JAN. 28

Old Firehouse Center 5th & 6th Grader Party
A Snowy Shindig, 7-9:30 p.m. At Old Firehouse, McLean. Old Firehouse 5th and 6th Grader Parties are themed and decorated accordingly. Free catered food and beverages will be distributed to participants. Parties feature a DJ, an open dance floor and a variety of activities. Pre Registration is recommended. Visit www.mcleancenter.org or call 703-790-0123, TTY: 711.

"Three Decembers"

FROM PAGE 5

"'Three Decembers' is proof that opera is not all about powdered wigs and ball gowns. Opera, at its core, tells a story, and this story is both modern and relevant," said Peggy Kriha Dye, General Director/CEO, Virginia Opera.

"Three Decembers" centers on annual Christmas letters written over three decades by a Broadway diva to her two children. It is a family estranged from each other; yet trying to find an ounce of acceptance, perhaps reconciliation. The opera takes on issues including AIDS, addiction, and interpersonal dishonesty as the family struggles with their relationship.

The time settings are December 1986 (Ronald Reagan was President), December 1996 (Bill Clinton was President) and December 2006 (George H. Bush was President). With music that moves from sweet ballads to stormy, the score is rich with emotions and bold directness as composed by Jake Heggie. Libretto is by Gene Scheer.

"Adding this work to our repertoire continues a longstanding tradition of bringing our audiences a variety of fresh and compelling operatic experiences," said Adam Turner, Artistic Director, Vir-

ginia Opera. "Jake Heggie is one of this generation's leading American composers, with critically-acclaimed works like 'Dead Man Walking' and 'Moby-Dick' regularly programmed by opera companies all over the world."

"Having the opportunity to introduce our audiences to the musically rich and dramatically compelling world of Jake Heggie's voice is something I've been looking forward to for many seasons," noted Turner.

The production stars Tony Award winner ("Contact") mezzo-soprano Karen Ziemba as the challenging mother Madeline. Her children are Charlie (baritone Efraín Solís) and Beatrice (soprano Cecilia Violetta López).

In a conversation, Ziemba described her character Madeline as "a good person, but a person with flaws." She is a "Broadway diva who is away from her children many a December ... always working." Keeping in touch with her children through letters is not easy and it brings distance and resentments. As the opera progresses through its 90 minutes, unexpected dark family secrets are exposed to the harsh light of day.

A most intriguing family saga awaits as Virginia Opera's "Three Decembers," takes the Center for the Arts stage.

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Not Bad, Considering



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

By the time this column prints, a month or so after I wrote it, I will be approximately one month into my three-month warranty extension. That meaning, as I'm regularly able to joke – THANK GOD!, that my end of December quarterly scans indicated tumor and bone weakness as stable. Not that I have a clue how quickly my fortunes could change but, I figure I have at least until my next quarterly scans in March before there might be a metaphorical fan involved. Since my oncologist is not in the predicting business nor inclined to discuss scenarios either, my life as a stage IV papillary thyroid cancer patient will continue to be one gigantic/on-going wait and see.

Which for the past nearly 13 years – from my initial late Feb., '09 diagnosis to the present has been my m.o. And quite thankfully/amazingly, my 'operandi' continues. And since I'm not, as it concerns my cancer diagnosis/evolution from non-small cell lung cancer to papillary thyroid cancer, a particularly deep thinker, or even much of a researcher into similar case studies, I sort of roll merrily/naively along. Though I wouldn't quite characterize my 'roll' as care-free and unencumbered; nonetheless, I am rarely bogged down or depressed by most of it.

As for the least of it, as a cancer patient I am part of unfortunately a much larger group of similarly disease-impacted people. We all share a mostly unspoken bond and I'd like to think, there is strength in our numbers. Whenever I meet/have met a cancer patient, there is, as you might imagine, an immediate connection of shared experiences. Whether the cancer is the curable variety – as generally speaking, papillary thyroid cancer is supposed to be, or the terminal type – like my original stage IV non-small cell lung cancer diagnosis was "prognosed," ("13 months to two years" I was given), once cancer is added to your everyday vocabulary, life takes on a whole new meaning, dare I say, urgency.

As an example: both my parents lived into their mid-80s, and were mostly healthy, no cancer. Given that we're related by birth, I figured I'd have a similar life expectancy. Then a month or so after my widowed mother died in early Dec. '08 at age 86, I experienced a pain in my left rib cage. A few days later the pain had migrated to my right rib cage. By the weekend, I could barely bend over at the waist and had difficulty inhaling. Even I had to admit there was "something rotten in Denmark." Later that New Year's Day, I went to the Emergency Room and the rest as you regular readers know, is cancer. I was age 54 and not quite six months and about to be diagnosed with a "terminal" form of lung cancer. Age 86? I'd be lucky to reach age 56. Based on the prognosis I received from my oncologist in late February, '09, I just lost 30 years of my life.

Yet here I am, almost 13 years later, and still droning on about being an active cancer patient. Too bad for you. Perfect for me, however. Who would have thought? In talking with my oncologist over the years and living and learning - and processing all the information I've been given; I've managed somehow to survive. I know Lou Gehrig was "the luckiest man on the face of the earth," but given my original diagnosis and subsequent prognosis, to still be alive and reasonably well in 2022 is nothing short of a miracle. I've been pretty lucky, too.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.



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