

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

FEBRUARY 29, 2024



Mount Vernon, the estate of George and Martha Washington, was originally rescued for restoration in 1858, and has recently begun a new project to reinforce its foundation.



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE GAZETTE

Costumed interpreters assist visitors and explain plantation life, Erin Hajduk Jones, Arlington; Larry Porter, Alexandria; Rose Gunthorpe, Alexandria.

Mount Vernon Celebrates 18th Century Style

George Washington honored with food and a look back in history.

BY SUSAN LAUME
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Not many could have a 297th birthday and have hundreds show up at the house to celebrate. President George Washington is one of those few, still remembered and admired, more than two hundred years after his death in December 1799 at age 67. His restored estate at Mount Vernon again hosted an event in celebration of surveyor, military man, army general, statesman, first United States President, and farmer, and provided celebrants with a view back into his life and times.

Along with birthday cake, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union, which owns and maintains Washington's former estate, organizes the public party, free to all to attend on Washington's birthday, February 22; an annual celebration with corporate sponsorship. As on normal operation days, the estate is open for tours of the mansion, along with the Presidential Library, museum, and leadership institution.

A highlight of the event is an opportunity to enjoy the breakfast reported to be Washington's favorite, hoecakes and honey, prepared in a clay oven typical of those found up and down the East Coast in those times. Chef Justin Cherry, owner of Half Crown

Bakehouse, with help from his parents Louann and Ken, has hoecakes and wheaten bread with salted pork fat on offer for a colonial food experience.

Cherry, who researched 18th century foodways in a fellowship at Fred W. Smith Library at Mount Vernon, explains that similar ovens were common in the colonies and in New France. Cherry says, made from no special pattern and of varying sizes, the ovens were generally about 4 1/2 feet in width by 6 feet in length, with a wall 8-inches thick, and a bottom of about 18 inches of clay reinforced with planks of wood. His hoecakes are made with a combination of white flint corn and roasted yellow flint corn, plus salt and pork

fat; true to recipes of the time. Flint corn isn't sweet, but has a robust, earthy flavor, well suited to grits and cornmeal cakes. A honey and butter mixture, kept warm by the oven, tops the cakes, and creates a hearty morning meal. Colonials would have eaten this meal between 7 and 8 a.m., with their next meal, termed dinne' between 2 and 3 p.m.; supper time was typically not until 8 or 9 p.m., following a light meal, tea, between dinner and supper.

The Mount Vernon ladies purchased the mansion and 200 acres of farmland and forest in 1858 for \$200,000. The seller was the last private owner, Washington's great

SEE GEORGE WASHINGTON, PAGE 5



Steve Sellenberger, Alexandria, takes a culinary step back in time and declares the hoecakes, "good, very good, with a corn-ie taste".



Foreground, yellow roasted and white flint corn meals await mixing and baking to produce hoecakes; cheese and ham smoked and aged for preservation were 18th century foods; and loaves of wheaten bread baked in the clay oven are ready for purchase.



A black metal brazier, like this one, would have been used by continental army officers to heat up to four small pots for food or hot beverages during encampments.



Chef Justin Cherry, of Half Crown Bakery, presents traditional colonial foods cooked in clay ovens typical of the colonies.

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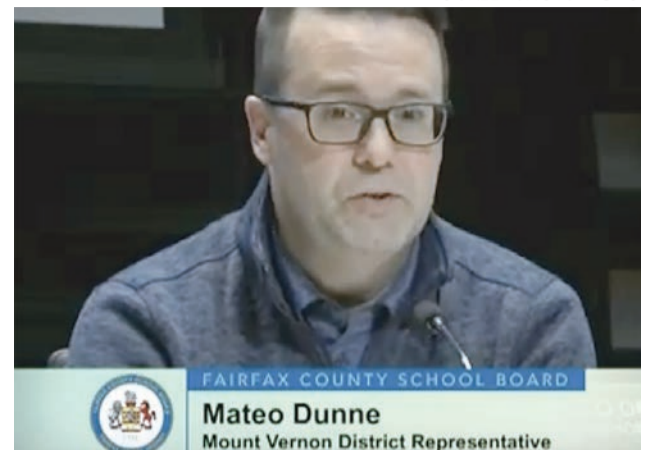




Michelle C. Reid, Superintendent



Karl Frisch, chair, Providence District



Mateo Dunne, Mount Vernon District

School Board Approves \$3.8 Billion Budget

Mateo Dunne proposal not to increase pay for top division leadership rejected by Board; Supervisors will influence budget.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

On Thursday, Feb. 22, the twelve-member Fairfax County School Board approved the Fiscal Year 2025 Advertised Budget 11-0 with one abstention.

The Advertised Budget totals \$3.8 billion. It includes an increase of \$301.8 million, or 8.6 percent, over the FY 2024 Approved Budget. The Fairfax County School Board and Dr. Michelle Reid, division superintendent, requested an additional \$254.0 million, or a 10.5 percent increase, from the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

The budget includes a 6 percent compensation adjustment for all employees up and down the pay scale.

Ricardy Anderson (Mason), Karl Frisch (Providence), Melanie Meren (Hunter Mill), Rachna Sizemore Heizer (Braddock), Sandy Anderson (Springfield), Seema Dixit (Sully), Robyn Lady (Dranesville), Marcia St. John-Cunning (Franconia), Kyle McDaniel (at large), Ryan McElveen (at large), and Ilryong Moon (at large) voted yes. Mateo Dunn (Mount Vernon) abstained.

Before the vote, Dunn moved to amend the main motion to exclude the 25 highest-paid FCPS employees, including the superintendent, from salary increases.

Dunn said he wanted to focus more on school employees struggling financially because of their low salaries yet contributing the most on the front lines with children daily. In his experience, you don't give the same raise to everyone because some people are underpaid compared to the market, he said. Some are grossly underpaid.

"So rather than give everyone the same raise and have some people remain grossly underpaid, you try to level out those differences, so everyone is basically in a better situation," Dunn said.

Drawing attention to leadership in the federal government, Dunn looked at the pay for most of Fairfax County's school division senior leadership and the fact the division

has a three-and-a-half billion dollar budget. "Most of our senior leadership at FCPS earn more than the leadership of the Department of Defense, which has a \$1 trillion budget. So if our CFO is getting paid more than the CFO of the Pentagon, I think that's a problem," Dunn said.

Chair Frisch asked for a second on Dunn's motion; no one seconded, thereby killing the motion.

Reid spoke before the main motion vote. The county has high expectations for its school division, she said. Reid called Fairfax County Public Schools not only "a premier division in Virginia; it is one of the preeminent divisions in this country," according to Reid. "Everybody that's part of the Fairfax County staff family puts their all into their work," she said.

Fairfax County has gradually fallen further behind in its pay scale, not just in the region but across the country, she said. "And it impacts not just recruitment but retention. As hires get into different roles, they see that they can earn a greater wage elsewhere. That's a disincentive to stay," said Reid. "We rank seven out of eight in the regions around us, and that's not acceptable."

The school board hired Reid in 2022 at a salary of \$380,000 a year. Six percent of that would be a \$22,800 raise.

Karl Frisch said, "We cannot retain a world-class school system without making sure we retain and recruit world-class staff. We must be competitive locally and nationally. ... This bare-bones budget is a start."

The division's Office of Communications released a statement on Friday, Feb. 23: "The State of Virginia has historically underfunded FCPS by continuing to use outdated staffing formulas that leave school districts around the Commonwealth lacking the meaningful support needed for excellence in public education. Virginia provides less funding per student than many neighboring states, including Maryland, Kentucky, and West Virginia. Additionally, the county transfer to FCPS over the five-year period (FY 2019-23) has averaged 52.6 percent of

FY25 REVENUE OVERVIEW

FY25 SUMMARY	CHANGE FROM FY24 (\$ in millions)
State Revenue*	\$42.2
Federal Revenue	\$2.3
Beginning Balance and Other Revenue	\$3.3
County Transfer Request	\$254.0
Total FY25 Projected Revenue Increase	\$301.8

*Based on combined impact of the Governor's Introduced Budget and additional funding anticipated by FCPS.

FY25 Revenue Overview

the county's disbursements. The county's FY 2025 budget proposal provides FCPS 51.4 percent, a difference of \$63 million. The school division's local transfer request for a 10.5 percent increase is less than requests from Loudoun County Public Schools' (11.3 percent) and Prince William County Public Schools' (10.6 percent). There are no new initiatives included in the FCPS Advertised Budget request."

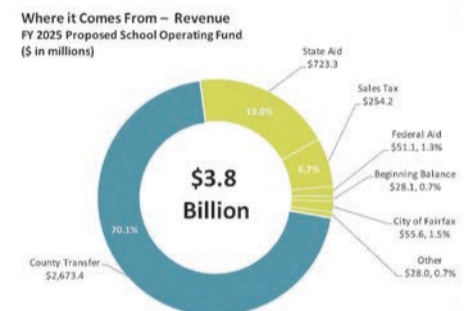
Key highlights of the adopted Fairfax County Public Schools Fiscal Year 2025 Advertised Budget: FCPS enrollment is expected to increase 2.3 percent since FY 2023. Growth is also seen in the number of students receiving additional services. Student enrollment in free and reduced-priced meals is expected to increase by 19.4 percent, English for Speakers of Other Languages by 12.9 percent, and special education by 10.7 percent. Preschoolers receiving special education will rise 47.2 percent.

The budget considers the expansion of preschool, intensive family engagement, updated technology, green school initiatives, increased mental health services, and additional support for athletics and fine arts.

"We appreciate our longstanding and collaborative partnership with the Board of Supervisors," said Reid. They are strong supporters of our schools and our students."

However, during the Tuesday, Feb. 20, Board of Supervisors meeting, Chairman Jeff McKay and some supervisors questioned the School Board FY 2025 Advertised Budget.

McKay said that he "expected a difficult budget." Speaking to the school board's re-



Snapshots

FCPS enrollment is projected to increase 2.3% since FY 2023. Student enrollment in free and reduced-priced meals is expected to increase by 19.4%; English for Speakers of Other Languages by 12.9%; and special education by 10.7%. Preschoolers receiving special education services will rise 47.2%.

The Advertised Budget of \$3.8 billion includes an increase of \$301.8 million, or 8.6 percent, over the previous budget. Schools seek an additional \$254.0 million, or 10.5 percent increase, from the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

quest for a funds transfer of \$165 million, he described it as "unrealistic."

Supervisor Dan Storck (Mount Vernon) said that the FCPS Board request "is undoable, and they must look to reduce."

Supervisor Jimmy Bierman (Dranesville) questioned, "If we fund a school transfer of \$165 million, what is the comparison of teacher pay to county pay?"

The FY 25 Budget Calendar shows a joint Fairfax County School Board and Board of Supervisors meeting on Feb. 27 to discuss the budget and tax rates. On March 5, the Board of Supervisors advertises the tax rate. On April 16-18, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors holds three days of public hearings on the budget.

See the budget calendar for all dates leading up to when the school board adopts the FY2025 Approved Budget on May 23.

The next regular board meeting will be held on Thursday, March 7, at Luther Jackson Middle School at 7 p.m.



PHOTO BY KEITH RAMOS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



PHOTO BY KEITH RAMOS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

American Woodcock

Banding woodcocks helps in studying the birds.

Acrobatic Avians Are Active Now

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

They are the dazzling Casanovas of the bird world, American woodcocks, sandpiper-like, rotund, tawny brown birds with a three-inch bill. The males woo females – and enthrall their human fans -- with their elaborate whirl-a-gig and plummeting “sky dance.”

In the spring at dawn and dusk, usually late February to March in Northern Virginia, woodcock wonders ensue. Male woodcocks give a buzzy “peent” call and launch into the air in a twisting flight display and then spiral down to the ground. As they ascend, they make a twittering sound, which is produced by the air moving between their outer wing feathers. As they zigzag down, they chirp and land, ideally near an interested female.

These six-to-seven-ounce birds have also been called timberdoodles, Labrador twisters, night partridges and bog suckers. Plump, short-necked birds, woodcocks can be difficult to see on the ground because their brown and gray tones camouflage the bird among the leaves, grasses and woody materials. They probe the soil searching for earthworms and other invertebrates.

Woodcocks choose forests, forest edges, shrubby areas near fields and wet meadows for their mating sites. Females make a shallow depression for a nest in the leaf and twig litter and lay from one to five eggs. “Males mate with multiple females and give no parental care,” says Cornell University’s All about Birds. Young woodcocks can search for their own food in three to four days.

Population Declines

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, woodcock numbers “had a signif-



PHOTOS BY ED EDER

American Woodcock

To See Woodcocks

Huntley Meadows Park has six woodcock walks scheduled in March. Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes>.

Occoquan National Wildlife Refuge has no organized walks. The visitor center is open Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Read this story online to see a video of the Woodcock Walk

icant negative trend over the most recent 10 years (2013–2023),” declining 1.18 percent each year in the eastern U.S. The North American Breeding Bird Survey also shows a drop in their numbers between 1966 and 2019.

Hunted in Virginia

Virginia’s Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) classifies American woodcocks as game birds and allows them to be hunted between Nov. 10 and 27 and

Dec. 26 to Jan. 21. DWR’s “bag limit” allows one to kill three per day or nine in possession. “Possession” refers to those you have on your person, in a vehicle or in your home.

Where to See Them?

Lucky woodcock loyalists and woodcock newbies may see these birds at Huntley Meadows Park and the Occoquan National Wildlife Refuge this time of year. There are records of woodcocks at Theodore Roosevelt Island, Great Falls Park and Dyke Marsh, say National Park Service officials. They may be in other areas, but not documented.

Weather can be a factor in seeing or hearing them, says P.J. Dunne, staff naturalist at Huntley Meadows Park. He reports, “Wind higher than around 10 or 15 miles per hour tends to keep the woodcocks from displaying. As part of their mating flight, they can fly as high as 300 feet. Once they clear the tops of the trees, the wind wreaks havoc on their flight. They prefer calmer conditions, where the

flight and the sounds they make with their wings and vocalizations are easier heard by the females.” Heavy rains can deter them as well. Cold weather can push their mating and breeding a few weeks beyond their normal mating display period, late February into mid-March.

At Huntley Meadows Park, woodcocks typically display mating behavior in the meadows accessed from Kings Highway. Dunne says, “The mating flight of the woodcock is an amazing experience and can only be seen after the park is normally closed. Visitors have come up to me many years after their first experience seeing the woodcock flight on one of our programs and said it is an experience they will never forget and they can’t wait to see them again.”

Conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote that the woodcock’s mesmerizing, mating sky dances were “a refutation of the theory that the utility of a game bird is to serve as a target or to pose gracefully on a slice of toast.”

George Washington Honored with Food and a Look Back in History

FROM PAGE 1

grand-nephew, John Augustine Washington III. Along with preservation of the President's many papers, the estate has restored the grounds to give 21st century visitors a sense of what the grounds were like in the 18th century as a working plantation. Along with extensive kitchen and fruit gardens, and restored working buildings, such as the blacksmith, smoke, kitchen, carriage, and wash houses, visitors can learn more about the family's life and the lives of enslaved and indentured servants, and how they lived and worked at the plantation. Livestock, including Hog Island sheep and Devon oxen, create a window into farm life. Costumed interpreters explain plantation practices.

George and Martha Washington are buried on the grounds, about 50 yards from a cemetery where some of the plantation's enslaved people were buried. Seventy unmarked graves of enslaved people at Mount Vernon were documented through 2017 as a survey sought to commemorate the lives of individuals who lived and died at Mount Vernon.

Washington completed slave inventories in 1786, after he returned from the Revolutionary War, and in 1799 to write his will. When Washington died in 1799, there were more than 300 enslaved people at Mount Vernon.

Those who missed the opportunity to sample hoecakes and honey on Washington's birthday can find Chef Cherry back at his oven



Mount Vernon musician Don Francisco organizes his militia troop for a march on the estate's bowling green, which the participants opted for over more dancing.

on the bowling green on several upcoming dates from March thru December this year.

on the bowling green on several upcoming dates from March thru December this year.



Meghan Bannon, a livestock handler with 15 years experience at Mount Vernon, poses with Spot, a Devon Ox, a heritage breed.



Oxen Spot and Nox, four-year-old half brothers, await main ox driver Steve Kodak making adjustments to their yoke before taking a slow walk to the blacksmith shop, stopping to educate interested visitors about their breed and use at the farm.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE GAZETTE

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Rotary



The Rotary Club of Mount Vernon, VA

The Mount Vernon Rotary Club, in 2021, initiated the "You Make a Difference Award" to support community service by organizations in the Mount Vernon area.

Specifically, the purpose of the Mount Vernon Rotary "You Make A Difference" Award is to:

- 1) Recognize individuals and organizations who supportservice to others
- 2) Support community service within the Mount Vernon areaThis local support is consistent with the Rotary International Motto: "Service Above Self."

A single award and associated grant of \$1000 will be presented once a year. The goal is to recognize a single individual who sustains community service and to contribute financial support to keep that service continuing.

Nominations will be accepted until noon on Friday, March 29, 2024. To receive a nomination form or more information, email MVRotaryVA@gmail.com

Rotary is where neighbors, friends, and problem-solvers share ideas, join leaders, and take action to create lasting change. Visit www.rotary.org for more information.

The Rotary Club of Mount Vernon meets via Zoom on Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 7:30. To request an invitation link email mikej1013@verizon.net

Six in 10 People with Dementia Will Wander

Alzheimer's Association offer tips to prepare for this emergency situation.

On March 7, 2023, Fairfax County Police on alerted on Twitter: “#Missing 79-yr-old Catherine Hudgins last seen 1:20 pm leaving the 2200 block of Colts Neck Rd in Reston. 5'7", 162lbs, grey hair, brown eyes, gray jacket, blue jeans, gray sneakers. Endangered due to mental &/or physical health concerns. Call 703-691-2131. #FCPD”

The alert was like a bolt of electricity throughout Northern Virginia where so many people know and love the former Hunter Mill Supervisor Cathy Hudgins. Fortunately, a police license plate reader led authorities to a bus driver who had seen Hudgins. The information led to finding her safe and returning her to her home.

While many episodes of wandering don't get farther than the driveway or a helpful neighbor, not all end happily.

Wandering and getting lost is common among people living with Alzheimer's or other dementia and can happen during any stage of the disease. Six in 10 people living with dementia will wander at least once; many do so repeatedly. Although common, wandering can be dangerous — even life-threatening — and the stress of this risk weighs heavily on caregivers and family.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, on Feb. 8, Judy Hollon, a woman with dementia, wandered from home and was found deceased in the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. Just a few weeks earlier, Eucharia Eleweanya, also a woman with dementia, wandered from her home in Prince George's County and was found deceased a week later.

“Anyone who has memory problems and is able to walk is at risk for wandering,” said Cindy Schelhorn, senior director of communications and marketing with the Alzheimer's Association National Capital Area Chapter. “Even in the early stages of dementia, the person can become disoriented or confused for a period of time and may not remember his or her name or address.”

Behaviors that may indicate an increased risk of wandering include:

- ❖ Forgetting how to get to familiar places
- ❖ Talking about fulfilling former obligations, such as going to work
- ❖ Trying or wanting to “go home,” even when at home

The stress experienced by families and caregivers when a person living with dementia wanders and becomes lost is significant. Planning ahead and being prepared is critical when this dangerous — and potentially fatal — situation occurs. When preparing an emergency plan, be sure to:

- ❖ Ask neighbors, friends and family to call if they see the person alone.
- ❖ Keep a recent, close-up photo and cur-

rent medical information on hand to give to police.

- ❖ Know your neighborhood and any dangerous areas nearby, i.e. bodies of water, dense foliage, bus stops or busy roads.

- ❖ Create a list of places where the person may wander, including past jobs, former homes, places of worship, or a favorite restaurant.

- ❖ Consider enrolling the person in a wandering response service.

“When a memory-impaired person goes missing, don't wait. Begin looking immediately,” said Schelhorn. “Many people who wander are found within 1.5 miles of where they disappeared. If the person isn't located within 15 minutes, call 911 and report that a person with Alzheimer's disease or dementia is missing.”

Wandering situations can happen even to the most diligent of caregivers. Following are strategies to help lower the chances of a wandering incident:

- ❖ Identify the time of day the person is most likely to wander. Plan activities, such as folding laundry or preparing dinner, to keep the person engaged and reduce anxiety, agitation and restlessness.

- ❖ Reassure the person if he or she feels lost, abandoned or disoriented. If the person wants to “go home” or “go to work,” use communication focused on exploration and validation. Refrain from correcting the person.

- ❖ Ensure all basic needs are met, including toileting, nutrition and hydration.

- ❖ Avoid busy places that are confusing and can cause disorientation.

- ❖ Use devices that signal when a door or window is opened. This can be as simple as a bell placed above a door or as sophisticated as an electronic home alarm.

- ❖ Do not leave someone with dementia unsupervised in new or changed surroundings. Never lock a person in at home or leave him or her in a car alone.

- ❖ If the person is no longer driving, remove access to car keys — a person with dementia may not just wander by foot. The person may forget that he or she can no longer drive. If the person is still able to drive, consider using a GPS device to help if they get lost.

The Alzheimer's Association can provide families and caregivers with additional guidance on keeping people with memory issues safe. For more information, call the Association's free 24/7 Helpline at 800-272-3900 or visit alz.org/safety.

About the Alzheimer's Association

The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to lead the way to end Alzheimer's and all other dementia — by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia.

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Address: 8333 Richmond Highway, Suite 325, Alexandria, VA 22309
Phone: 703-704-6216, TTY 711
Operating Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.* Programming for South County Senior Center at the Original Mt. Vernon High School will be temporarily relocated due to renovations. Contact the center for details.

SULLY SENIOR CENTER

Address: 13800 Wall Road, Herndon, VA 20171
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Address: 8100 Braddock Road, Annandale, VA 22003
Phone: 703-321-3000, TTY 711
Operating Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

St. Patrick's Day SoberRide

A local nonprofit organization will sponsor free safe rides to would-be drunk drivers throughout the Washington-metropolitan area during St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

Offered by the nonprofit Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), the 2024 St. Patrick's Day SoberRide program will be in operation beginning at 12 p.m. noon Sunday, March 17 (St. Patrick's Day) and operate until 12 a.m. midnight on Monday, March 18 as a way to keep local roads safe from impaired drivers during this traditionally high-risk period.

During this twelve-hour period, area residents 21 and older celebrating with alcohol may download the Lyft app to their phones then enter the SoberRide code in the app's 'Payment' tab (under the 'Add Lyft Pass' option) to receive their no-cost (up to \$15) safe transportation home. WRAP's 2024 St. Patrick's Day SoberRide promo code will be posted at 11 a.m. on Sunday, March 17 on www.SoberRide.com.

“Nearly half of U.S. traffic fatalities during St. Patrick's Day involve drunk drivers according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration,” said Kurt Erickson, WRAP's President.

During the 2023 St. Patrick's Day campaign, over 900 people in the Washington-metropolitan area used WRAP's SoberRide program rather than possibly driving home impaired. The charity also offers its SoberRide program on Cinco de Mayo, Independence Day, Halloween and the winter holidays through and including New Year's Eve.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAIRFAX COUNTY

George Mason University's honeybee hives at the landfill.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAIRFAX COUNTY

Native meadows on a landfill slope.

A New View of the Landfill

Grassland at the I-95 landfill provides habitat for ground-nesting birds and other wildlife.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
THE GAZETTE

A landfill can be more than a garbage dump. It can be a place of ecological renewal. The latest example at Fairfax County's I-95 landfill is a plan to protect some of the landfill's grassland habitat for ground-nesting birds and other wildlife.

On Feb. 20, the Board of Supervisors directed the county staff to identify a no-mow area and develop a plan to avoid mowing during grassland birds' ground-nesting season, generally between April 1 and mid-July. Supervisors Dan Storck, James Walkinshaw and Jeff McKay proposed the initiative or "board matter," recommended by the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia. Supervisor Storck offered, "I was pleased to bring this Board matter to my colleagues and received unanimous support. The County continues to lead on environmental and climate issues and becoming a leader in landfill grassland management to protect ground-nesting birds is just another example."

The directive recognizes that some mowing is needed for inspecting the landfill cap, accessing gas wells and accommodating stormwater drainage. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality requires mowing at least once a year. Managers seek to discourage trees from taking root and disrupting landfill caps.

"We are looking forward to developing a mowing schedule that helps protect nesting habitat for grassland species at the I-95 landfill complex," explained Eric Forbes, deputy director, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services. "For the mowing schedule change, we will be doing a pilot to see how we can manage the landfill functions at the site and evaluate any potential operational issues."

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GRAYSON SMITH, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Bobolinks fly up to 12,500 miles roundtrip to and from South America every year and seek out fields of tall grasses, finding them at the landfill. The female bobolink makes a depression in the soil and builds a nest on the ground.

Grasslands Are Rare

Of the United States' historical 550 million acres of grasslands, fewer than 40 percent exist today. Justin Folks, with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, has noted that much of today's Virginia croplands were grasslands before European colonization and now grassland acreage in the state may be less than .0001 percent.

Part of Fairfax County's 250-acre-closed, I-95 landfill, though created by people, is in effect a grassland, a rare habitat in Fairfax County. The landfill's meadow and grassland and other habitats support over 126 bird species according to ebird.org, including grassland specialists like bobolinks, dickcissels and grasshopper sparrows, plus other wildlife species found nowhere else in Northern Virginia. In Virginia, over 50 bird species rely on grasslands.



DAN SUDIA, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Dickcissels also come north in the spring from the tropics and find grassy fields at the landfill. These sparrow-like birds also build nests on or near the ground, well concealed in dense vegetation.

"The I-95 landfill provides the biggest patch of grass in eastern Fairfax County. The birds have found it and breed there in good numbers."

— Greg Butcher, ornithologist

Grassland Birds Declining

Grassland birds are among the most imperiled group of birds, reports the National Audubon Society. Their population has dropped by 53 percent since 1970, according to the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative.

Local bird watchers have especially delighted in seeing bobolinks and dickcissels, two ground-nesting birds, among others, at the landfill.

Bobolinks fly up to 12,500 miles roundtrip to and from South America every year and seek out fields of tall grasses. Sporting a bright yellow "cap," the male perches on the grasses, flutters and sings. The female bobolink makes a depression in the soil and builds a nest on the ground.

Information

- ❖ Fairfax County Landfills, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/recycling-trash/locations-hours>
- ❖ GMU Honeybee Hives, <http://bees.gmu.edu>
- ❖ Smithsonian Guidelines for Grassland and Shrubland Birds, <https://www.vaworkinglandscapes.org/education/resources/field-management-guidelines-for-grassland-birds/>
- ❖ Audubon Grassland Birds Report, <https://www.audubon.org/our-work/prairies-and-forests/grasslands-report>

Dickcissels also come north in the spring from the tropics and find grassy fields. These sparrow-like birds also build nests on or near the ground, well concealed in dense vegetation. "Male dickcissels are aggressive defenders of their primary territory, keeping a close eye on their immediate neighbors by confronting each other at territorial boundaries," reports All about Birds.

Auduboner Greg Butcher, an ornithologist, commented, "The I-95 landfill provides the biggest patch of grass in eastern Fairfax County. The birds have found it and breed there in good numbers. By mowing less, we can keep grassland birds in eastern Fairfax County."

More "Greening" of the Landfill

Toward the end of 2024, the county will install a five-megawatt solar field with pollinator-friendly, native vegetation under the panels and energy production beginning mid-2025.

The county started a honeybee and pollinator habitat project in 2017, converting five acres of turf into native meadow habitat. George Mason University installed 24 European honeybee hives at the landfill, led by Director Germán Perilla. The project's website cites as the purpose "to assess the connections between honeybees and their local environment, specifically with regard to the pollen resources they use and contaminants that they might introduce to and accumulate within their hives."

250 Years Of Revolutionary History

BY DEL. PAUL KRIZEK

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, I wanted to highlight another anniversary in Virginia's revolutionary history.

This May 6 will mark 250 years since our predecessor, the Virginia

House of Burgesses, was dissolved in 1774. George Washington was one of many revolutionary figures who served in the House, holding office from 1758 until he was appointed commander-in-chief of the Continental Army in 1775. The watershed decision to dissolve the House came after burgesses adopted resolutions in support of

Boston following the harsh British response to the Boston Tea Party. The House served at the call of the British-appointed colonial governor, who abruptly ended session as punishment for such a clear display of revolutionary sentiment.

But a number of burgesses remained in Williamsburg, asserting that they had been properly elected

and could not be dismissed so easily. They moved to a small tavern and continued their duties there, eventually passing a resolution to convene a meeting in August of 1774 that would become the first Virginia Revolutionary Convention.

Despite gaining a reputation as a reserved and cautious legislator during his fifteen years of service, Washington joined the remaining burgesses and became a member of that first Revolutionary convention. It was a bold choice, one that came with many risks, but it represented his full commitment to revolution, a decision that would define the rest of his life.

Here in Virginia, the dissolution of the House of Burgesses paved the way for our first state constitution and the transformation from the colonial House of Burgesses into the House of Delegates, both of which were laid out in the fifth Virginia Convention.

Washington was leading the Continental Army by that point and could not participate, but he had already helped lay the groundwork as part of the initial spirit of revolution in Virginia in 1774, 250 years ago.

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Bills To the Governor

Governor can sign, veto, amend or take no action on bills that reach his desk. Read on to see what happens next in each case.

BY SENATOR ADAM EBBIN

With the last two weeks of session finally upon us in Richmond, the Senate and House are hard at work. More than 400 bills have passed through both chambers, and more than 700 are still under consideration. In the waning days of the session, the bills passed by the Senate and House will be transmitted to Governor Youngkin.

The governor has provided little in the way of a preview of what legislative actions he may take, including whether he will sign, amend, or veto bills that would increase the minimum wage and better protect communities from gun violence. Like most Virginians, I hope Governor Youngkin will allow these important bills to become law this year.

As part of the legislative process, the Governor of Virginia can take four actions on bills that reach their desk:

❖ **Sign:** Legislation that is signed into law by the governor will go into effect on the next July 1st, unless otherwise provided for in the bill.

❖ **Veto:** When a governor vetoes a bill, it is transmitted back to the legislative chamber in which it was introduced. That chamber, whether the Senate or the House, may vote to approve, or reject, a veto from the governor by a simple majority vote in both chambers. At least two-thirds of the members elected to a given chamber can vote to enact a bill notwithstanding a veto from a governor (a.k.a., an override of the veto). In the Senate, this requires at least 27 Senators; in the House, at least 67 votes are required. Because of the high threshold voting requirement, and the near evenly-divided General Assembly, overrides of gubernatorial vetoes are rare in recent Virginia history.

SEE GOVERNOR, PAGE 11

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ENTERTAINMENT

NOW THRU APRIL 15

Exhibit: "Searching for Truth in the Garden" at Freedom House Museum. At Freedom House Museum, 1315 Duke Street, Alexandria. Gonzaga High School's groundbreaking research on slavery, "Searching for Truth in the Garden," found new life at the Freedom House Museum. The traveling exhibition, on view through April 15, 2024, delves into the life of Gabriel, a teenager enslaved at Washington Seminary (now Gonzaga) in 1829. Gabriel's story offers a poignant lens through which to examine the complexities of slavery and its lasting impact.

WEDNESDAYS THROUGH SATURDAYS

Tours Aboard Tall Ship Providence and Sen. John Warner Maritime Heritage Center. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Alexandria's Waterfront Park, 1A Prince Street, Alexandria. Guests of all ages are recruited into the Continental Navy aboard Tall Ship Providence with legendary Captain John Paul Jones. Recruits are assigned jobs on the ship, learn where they will work and live, how to load a cannon, etc... Tours conclude in the Naval History Theatre with a film about the ship. The Heritage center is a floating museum on the Alexandria waterfront. Visit <https://tallshipprovidence.org/>

NOW THRU MARCH 31

Christine Ruksenas-Burton Exhibit. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Christine Ruksenas-Burton's body of work is composed of hard-edge color field linear abstractions, a style rooted in a movement that began in New York City in the 1940s and pioneered by Mark Rothko, Josef Albers, Carmen Herrera, Fanny Sanin, Barnett Newman, Ellsworth Kelly and Clyfford Still.

NOW THRU MARCH 2

Native American Culture & Experience Exhibit. At Nepenthe Gallery, Hollin Hall Shopping Center, Alexandria. This special exhibit includes works by renowned photographer, Cara Romero, and historical painters, Bryant and Pamela White, among others. The exhibit will be up until March 2nd at Nepenthe's flagship gallery at the Hollin Hall Shopping Center in Alexandria.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 28

Burke Book Club: "Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison. 3:30 to 5 p.m. Virtual via Zoom. In honor of Black History Month, join a virtual Zoom discussion put on by Ellen Coolidge Burke Branch Library on the 1952 classic novel, "Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison. This program will take place by Zoom and registration is required. After registering, you will be emailed the link to join this Zoom meeting. If you have questions about the program or need help with set up, please contact Caroline at cpak@alexlibraryva.org. Visit alexandrialibraryva.org

THURSDAY/FEB. 29

African American Film Series: "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." 2-4 p.m. At Ellen Coolidge Burke Branch Library, 4701 Seminary Road, Suite 104, Alexandria. In honor of Black History Month, the library will be showing a series of films through-

out the month. Visit alexandrialibraryva.org.

MARCH 1-31

Woodlawn Needlework Show.

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Woodlawn Plantation. Tuesday, February 27th at 10:00am - 1:00pm - Lotus Leaf Mat Workshop with Youngmin Lee (Fee \$165, includes materials)

Learn traditional Korean needlework techniques at this in-person workshop conducted by renowned textile artist, Youngmin Lee. This workshop will teach you how to construct a lotus leaf shape Sangbo (covering bojagi) that you can use in daily life. Gamchimjil and Kkojipgi techniques and the Yeonbong (Lotus Bud Knot) technique will finish this simple and organically-shaped bojagi with raised line composition.

Every Wednesday and Friday at 2:30pm in March - Special Tours of 61st Anniversary Woodlawn Needlework Show (Fee: \$18, includes Needlework Show Admission)

Join the special tour for a brief history of Woodlawn while discovering the unique stories behind many pieces of the Needlework Show as a Woodlawn guide and Nelly's Needlers expert lead visitors through the house.

Saturday March 16th, Monday March 25th, and Wednesday March 27th at 3:30pm - Beginners Needlework Techniques (Fee: \$25 per class or \$65 for all three, includes Needlework Show Admission and supplies)

Join members of Nelly's Needlers to learn the basics of three fundamental needlework techniques; counted cross-stitch, canvaswork (needlepoint), and surface embroidery.

March 16- canvaswork coasters
March 25 - cross-stitch towel
March 27 - embroidered hat
Virtual Programs
(All virtual programs are free, with a suggested donation to support Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House)

Saturday, March 23rd at 4:00pm ET -What Linens Know with Ruth Tabancay

Enjoy a fascinating virtual presentation by multi-disciplinary artist Ruth Tabancay as she discusses "What Linens Know" on exhibit at the Woodlawn Needlework Show. Ruth's exhibit is an unique spin on this year's theme, "Needlework in Everyday Life" as she examines the uses of vintage linens in everyday living and embroiders a lasting memory of the remains.

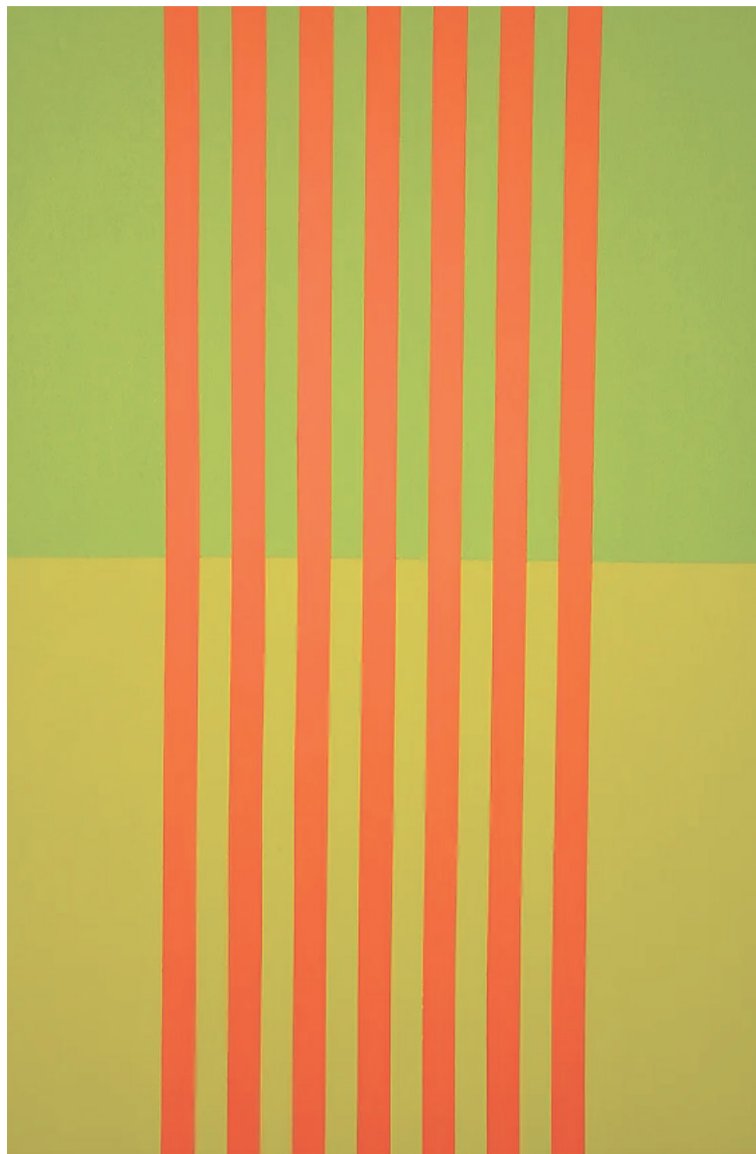
MARCH 1-30

"The Power of Two" Exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans gallery, 2704 Mount Vernonn Ave., Alexandria. Features art that showcases two related items in one piece of art; for example, two-of-a-kind, complementary items, double-exposures, duos, twins, or multiple generations. "Double your pleasure, double your fun." Opening Reception: Friday, March 1, 7-9 p.m. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. (Closed Sunday, March 31). Details: DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

FRIDAY/MARCH 1

Welcome Nepenthe Old Town.

4-7 pm. At 108 N. St. Asaph Street, Alexandria. Join Wine Gallery 108 and Nepenthe Gallery's featured fe-



The Christine Ruksenas-Burton Exhibit will be held now through March 31, 2024 at The Athenaeum in Alexandria.

male artists for a wine and cheese reception.

SATURDAY/MARCH 2

Stuff the Bus. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Mount Vernon Shoppers, 7660 Richmond Hwy., Alexandria. Stuff the Bus is a partnership between Fairfax County Government and local nonprofits to help restock the shelves of food pantries during the winter months after the holidays. Since launching in 2011, Stuff the Bus has collected more than 281,500 pounds of food to feed people experiencing food insecurity in Fairfax County. You can help Stuff the Bus and Un-Stuff the Bus for United Community by volunteering on March 2 or dropping off food donations at the Mount Vernon Shoppers.

MARCH 5 THRU APRIL 28

Mosaics by Nina Tisara and Photographs by Steven Halperson. At Green Spring Gardens, 4601 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. The Opening Reception is Sunday, March 10, 1-3 p.m. The mother-son team had worked together at Tisara Photography in Old Town for three decades. Steven now manages the Alexandria portrait studio as well as creating painterly photographic images and unique etched copper art. Nina creates intricate mosaics of unglazed porcelain tile which are widely exhibited and collected. Their work may also be seen by appointment at Serenity Place

Gallery, Nina's in-home gallery,

FRIDAY/MARCH 8

Women's Leadership Forum.

7:45-10:30 a.m. At The Westin Alexandria Old Town, 400 Courthouse Square, Alexandria. The forum will bring together women (and men) at all stages of their careers for an interactive, "straight talk" panel discussion filled with inspiration and insight. Cost is \$80 for Members | \$105 for Prospective Members.

MARCH 12-18

Spring Book Sale - At Beatley Central Library, 5005 Duke Street, Alexandria.

The Friends of Beatley Central Library will hold their Spring Book Sale from Tuesday, March 12 through Monday, March 18. Members' Preview on Tuesday, March 12, 3:00 -7:30 p.m. (\$15 memberships available at the door); Wednesday, March 13, 10:00 a.m.-7:30 p.m.; Thursday, March 14, 10:00 a.m.-7:30 p.m.; Friday, March 15, 10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Saturday, March 16, 10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Sunday, March 17, Half Price Day, 1-4:30 p.m.; Monday, March 18, \$10 Bag Sale, 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. \$4 or less, unless specifically marked: hardbacks, paperbacks, children's books, and media. All genres. Visit www.beatleyfriends.org

WEDNESDAY/MARCH 13

Potomac Harmony Chorus Concert. 7:30 p.m. At The View Alexandria

(formerly The Hermitage), 5000 Fairbanks Avenue, Alexandria. The Potomac Harmony Chorus invites you to their upcoming free performance as they prepare for regional competition. This will be the first competition for Potomac Harmony following the hiring of their new director, Allison Lynskey. As part of their preparation, they will host a Friends & Family night to hone their skills in full costume and make up in front of a live audience. Contact Jackie Bottash, backrowlead@aol.com

THURSDAY/MARCH 21

2024 General Assembly Breakfast.

8 a.m. to 10 a.m. At The Hilton Alexandria Old Town, 1767 King Street, Alexandria. Join in a timely conversation with our General Assembly delegation where they will discuss the 2024 session and the opportunities and challenges currently facing the Commonwealth. Sen. Adam Ebbin and Del. Elizabeth Bennett-Parker will attend.

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

Historic Garden Week Old Town.

Take a behind-the-scenes peek into the spectacular homes and gardens of six historic Old Town Alexandria properties kicking off the Garden Club of Virginia's historic annual statewide tour. Offering a glimpse into the town's storied past, the tour features homes dating from 1785. Expertly updated, tastefully furnished, and filled with spectacular floral arrangements designed by blue ribbon garden club members, each property features lovely, curated gardens filled with bountiful Spring flowers timed to bloom in concert with the tour. Tickets include admission to five private homes and gardens, Lee-Fendall House, a one-time private home with a rich history that now houses a museum and garden, as well as six nearby public properties, including: Mount Vernon, River Farm, Carlyle House, Gunston Hall and Green Spring Gardens. Advance tickets are \$55 online at www.vagardenweek.org and may be purchased tour day at the Alexandria Visitor's Center located at 221 King Street.

The Garden Club of Virginia's (GCV) eight-day statewide tour from April 20 to 27 includes 170 private properties throughout Virginia. The Old Town Alexandria tour is hosted by the GCV's two local garden clubs, Hunting Creek Garden Club and Garden Club of Alexandria. For more information, visit www.vagardenweek.org

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

Third Annual ALX Dog Walk.

8 a.m. to 11 a.m. A 2-mile dog walk and celebration is back in Old Town Alexandria. Walkers meet at Oronoco Bay Park in Alexandria for an unforgettable experience. Walk and spread awareness about the importance of plastic-free and sustainable living. It's time to educate the community and make a positive impact. Pre-event registration check-in on Wednesday April 17th, from 12 pm to 7 pm to check-in and collect your sustainable Goodie Bag, t-shirt and doggie bandana, treat, and more. Register now! www.alxdogwalk.com/register

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LETTER

Is This Acceptable?

If you have driven down Sherwood Hall Lane on a Saturday morning you have most likely seen the anti-choice protestors who congregate in front of the medical building.

Protestors set up tables with donuts and coffee, park in the medical building and bank parking lots, and block the sidewalk. They set up signs and banners with pictures of supposedly aborted remains which are extremely graphic in nature. They block pedestrians and vehicles on private property while pressuring people to take brochures. They follow people into the building and stand on the sensors that allow the doors to close in order to verbally abuse and intimidate patients. In the past few weeks they have brought in bull horns and microphones to amplify their message which has angered the people who live in the townhouses next door.

We write this simply to ask the community if this is acceptable? Is it ok for this behavior to be normalized, and if not then how do we come together as a community to protect people's right to privacy and decency?

We champion the right to protest and have participated in peaceful protests in the past, but we feel that in this case the line between protesting and harassment has been crossed and it affects all of us.

Nearby Neighbors
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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
 Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. Assistance League's programs touch the lives of hundreds of children in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email info@alnv.org, or visit www.alnv.org.

Fed Up: Fairfax Connector Workers on Strike

Union cites unfair labor practices and Transdev's 'slow-walking the talks.'

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Workers from Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), Local 689, representing the 683 bus operators and mechanics for the Fairfax Connector, went on strike just after midnight on Thursday, Feb. 22. The Amalgamated Transit Union (AFL-CIO/CLC) is the largest labor organization representing transit workers in the U.S. and Canada. The strike is still going on as of Tuesday morning, Feb. 27.

The call to strike came after months of talks, beginning in October 2023, about a new labor contract with the contractor, Transdev Services, Inc., which failed to produce an agreement despite 12 bargaining sessions. Fairfax Connector drivers and mechanics have been working under an expired contract since December 2023.

"Despite 12 bargaining sessions, a vast divide between the Union and the company remains due to Transdev's slow-walking the talks and, for the most part, its refusal to engage in meaningful discussions on key economic issues," says the Union's press release dated Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2024.

Two hours after the strike began, at 2 a.m., picketers took to the lines at the three Fairfax County-owned garages of the Fairfax Connector, the Herndon Garage at 268 Spring St., Herndon; the Huntington Garage at 8101 Cinder Bed Rd., Lorton; and the West Ox Garage at 4970 Alliance Dr., Fairfax.

ATU Local 689, said, "The Union remains committed to bargaining in good faith to reach a tentative agreement on a new contract and intends to continue to meet with Transdev even while on strike."

Transdev Services, Inc. accepted a contract award from the County of Fairfax on April 17, 2019, for the operation and management of the Connector Bus System (a fixed-route bus service known as "The Connector") for five years from the date of the award, with the option to renew for an additional ten-year period. The contract expires on April 17, 2024, according to the county.

The Political and Communications Director of ATU Local 689, Matthew Girardi, said in an email that all bus service had stopped at 9:45 the morning of Feb. 22. "We hope that Transdev finally comes to the bargaining table with a fair offer and that Fairfax officials weigh in on the side of workers who have been operating under an expired con-



Connector buses are not running, impacting commuters.

tract for months. If not, we will continue to picket from 2 a.m. to 7 p.m."

Jeff McKay, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, said in a statement the morning of Feb. 22 that he had communicated with the county executive Bryan Hill and his team during the negotiations and knew there was a deadlock. McKay said he did not know a strike would happen.

The strike left "almost 26,000 daily users of the Connector without the service they rely on," according to McKay. "To be clear, the county is not a party to these negotiations, and it would be inappropriate for me to interfere," McKay said.

The Union said on Feb. 21 that it had taken "extraordinary strides to avert a strike," such as consistently providing fair contract proposals to both sides and the public, involving a federal mediator in negotiations, and meeting with Fairfax County officials. "However, because of Transdev's unfair labor practices and regressive bargaining, as well as Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chair Jeff McKay's refusal to weigh in, a strike was unavoidable."

In his Feb. 22 statement, McKay said he fully supports "the ability of Connector drivers and mechanics to be treated and compensated fairly." McKay added that he "supports the ATU Local 689's right to advocate on behalf of their members and hopes the Union and Transdev can reach an agreement on a contract that is in line with similar transit services in neighboring jurisdictions and respects the exemplary work of drivers and mechanics."

the amendment is rejected, the House and Senate can also vote to pass the underlying legislation notwithstanding the objection, or amendment, of the governor. Such an action requires approval of at least two-thirds of the members elected to each legislative chamber, akin to a veto override.

❖ **Take No Action:** Though historically rare, the Governor of Virginia need not sign a bill in order for it to become law. As a matter of fact, any bill sent to the governor's desk will become law if it is not acted on.

As the work of the 2024 session contin-

"Additionally, while transit service is essential, the cost is ultimately borne by our residents and must also be considered in these negotiations," McKay said. "Connector service needs to be sustainable, not just now but in the future."

The Union is demanding improved wage increases, 40 hours of scheduled work and pay at eight hours a day/five days a week, and a defined retirement benefit, not the 401(K) match system that has resulted in the majority of Fairfax Connector workers "having zero retirement," according to its Feb. 23 statement.

The Union cited Transdev's failure to provide financial information to the Union during the contract talks and surveillance of employees during the strike authorization vote conducted on Dec. 27, 2023 as unfair practices.

According to the Union, Transdev's latest contract proposal at the end of January ignored most of the Union's key priorities. While it included wage increases for bus operators, due to the high cost of living in Fairfax County, Transdev must provide more than wage increases to ensure an improved quality of life for its employees, the Union said. Local 689 insists on improved benefits for workers so they can live where they work and retire with dignity.

The Union reportedly has yet to hear back from Transdev on the latest proposal provided to the company earlier this month. The most recent bargaining session was Friday, Feb. 16.

On Friday, Feb. 23, John Costa, international president of the Amalgamated Transit Union visited all three Fairfax County picket lines in Herndon, Lorton and Fairfax. He was there to fire up the Union's 650 Fairfax Connector bus operators and mechanics on the second day of their strike. Costa called out Fairfax County Supervisor Jeff McKay.

Liz Shuler, president of the AFL CIO, visited the picket lines. She posted on X, "Everyone should be able to live where they work and retire with dignity. Fairfax Connector @ ATULocal689 bus drivers are essential workers who deserve retirement security, fair wages, and good benefits."

Commuters seeking information about Fairfax Connector's operating status can visit the county's website. Passengers can also receive updates by calling Fairfax Connector customer service at 703-339-7200.

Transdev did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

ues towards its end point, please keep in mind that the final step in the process is the governor, who must take action — or take no action — on all bills within 30 days of adjournment of the General Assembly.

The General Assembly will then reconvene on April 17 to vote on any vetoes and amendments proposed by Governor Youngkin. I look forward to updating you further on these and other bills as we move toward the end of the legislative session.

It is my continued honor to serve the residents of the 39th Senate District.

A Rocky Road Ahead



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

According to my most recent lab work, which depending on the month/cycle may include orders from four doctors: internal medicine, endocrinology, oncology and now nephrology (kidney specialist) as well, my health is in play, if you know what I mean?. As a result, I am getting some kind of medical assessment every four weeks. These results have been particularly scary for the past few months as I have been off my cancer medicine as if I were in remission. But I haven't been nor am I. I may be in trouble (not as amazingly healthy as I mostly have been these last 15 years) though.

It appears I may be sliding down that slippery slope that I've written about in recent columns: stage IV chronic kidney disease is now complicating my stage IV papillary thyroid cancer. And why this combination is so bad, so far as I understand, is the medicine I take (have taken daily for over three years) which has kept the thyroid cancer in check has been/is damaging my kidneys. Damaging enough that to avoid renal failure/ needing to go on dialysis, I'm off my daily pill. Which means that my thyroid cancer is not being treated anymore. And untreated cancer is generally not going to maintain the stable status quo that I've come to appreciate (as I've said repeatedly over the years: "stable is my new favorite word. Stable is not the problem"). Due to this totally expected kidney side effect, my thyroid cancer is now being viewed/described as the underlying disease. Cancer as the 'underlying disease,' that can't be good. Cancer is typically the "big dog." Now there is another 'big dog' (figuratively speaking) on "the porch:" chronic kidney disease. Unfortunately, most porches are not made to handle two dogs — if you get my drift?

A major problem of kidney disease is that it can't be reversed, it can only be maintained. The damage is irreparable. Right now, my kidney function is 25% of normal. And that's significant enough to stop the medicine that, despite its success in treating my thyroid cancer, it's simultaneously leading me down the garden path pass the porch to God probably knows where. What happens next, most immediately is another lab appointment, a PET scan — moved up from its previously scheduled early June appointment, and a first-time, face-to-face appointment with a nephrologist I've never met and who is new to my presumptive medical team. In the interim, the nephrologist has told me to reduce my daily fluid intake to two liters in an attempt reduce the stress on my kidneys by minimizing their workload, so to speak. A workload that has been overwhelmed by years of chemotherapy for non-small cell lung cancer stage IV, which didn't exist while a slow-moving thyroid cancer went unknown/untreated. And if you didn't know, chemotherapy, if filtered through the kidney (some aren't, most are) is extremely damaging to the kidneys. But a diagnosis of cancer often comes with a heavy dose of chemotherapy. The doctors sort of must let the chips lie where they may because they have to treat "the big dog," first and foremost, and cancer is the biggest dog around, on or off the porch. It's sort of a "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead." type mindset.

Oddly enough, I am living proof. Despite the doctors' worst efforts, I likely was infused with the wrong chemotherapy for nearly 10 years and though I have lived to bemoan it, I am nonetheless finally "side-effected" by it and the consequences at this late date are discouraging. (You can't undo the ravages of chemotherapy either. As Curly Howard of The Three Stooges said in an episode when they were tree surgeons: "We kill or cure.") As it appears recently, I am not cured, far from it in fact. I mean, a positive attitude can only do so much, and after surviving 15 years I may have hit the limit.

I guess you could say, to what I know to be the truth: I am between a rock and a very hard place. It reminds me of another Three Stooges line. In an episode when the Stooges were to be executed for something, Curly was asked how he like to die; either to be burned "at the stake or have his head chopped off." His answer was in a column a few weeks ago which is not relevant here. What is relevant is the bad choice he had. Regardless, it was going to be an unhappy end. And I fear that my end, having to choose between thyroid cancer and chronic kidney disease will be unhappy as well. For the moment though, life goes on, and I'm definitely happy about that.

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

Governor

FROM PAGE 8

❖ **Amend:** If a governor wants to change legislation that has reached his desk, they can propose an amendment to that bill. If they so choose, the bill is then transmitted back to the legislative chamber in which it was introduced. That chamber, whether the Senate or the House, may vote to approve or reject the proposed amendment from the governor by a simple majority vote. If



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