

THE CONNECTION

CENTRE VIEW ♦ Chantilly ♦ Great Falls ♦ Herndon ♦ McLean ♦ Oak Hill ♦ Oakton ♦ Reston ♦ Vienna

A blue heron basks in the sun along the Potomac River. The Potomac Conservancy gave the Potomac River a B grade in its recent report card.

Grading Health Of the Potomac

PAGE 8

50 Cents on the Dollar

PAGE 3

Grandfathered Data Centers Crowd Future School

PAGE 4

ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 16 ♦ CLASSIFIED, PAGE 18

PHOTO BY JOHN BRIGHENTI

DECEMBER 3-16, 2025

ONLINE AT WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

McLean Rotary's Jingle Bell 5K Run/Walk



Register

**Saturday, December 13th, 2025
8:30 AM**

**McLean High School
(Start & Finish at Stadium/Track)**

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event. Or via email calendar@connectionnewspapers.com.

ASSISTANCE LEAGUE OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Assistance League of Northern Virginia invites community members to support its November Wish List, which is focused on long sleeve shirts for elementary students. Colder weather means students need warmer clothing. Many people will simply rotate in warmer clothes from off-season storage or head to the store for new items. But many low-income families don't have that luxury, and affording new clothing can be challenging, especially with food costs up and a tight job market.

Your contribution from the wide selection of wish list items for boys and girls can allow the students we serve to share in the spirit of Thanksgiving as the holiday approaches. Use this link <https://tiny.alnv.org/eal> or scan the QR code on the flyer to make a selection. Please select the Assistance League of Northern Virginia as the shipping address to assure prompt delivery. If you would prefer not to order through Amazon, you can pay by personal check for these items. Please send your check, made out to ALNV, to P.O. Box 209, Herndon, VA 20172 and include "Wish List/month" in the memo

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 5



December 12, 13, 14

DULLES EXPO CENTER • NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Featuring one-of-a-kind art, jewelry, clothing, furnishings, pottery décor, painting, and more, from 325 juried artists!

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Fifty Cents

Last week, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors reviewed the findings of a new “Revenues and Returns” analysis prepared by the University of Virginia’s Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service and commissioned by Fairfax County. The analysis provides an updated snapshot of how much revenue Fairfax County generates for the state and how much of it returns to the county through direct and indirect appropriations.

The numbers show that Fairfax County contributes a significant portion of the state’s General Fund (~20%). Yet receives back half of what it generates. For every \$1 Fairfax County produced in revenue, it received ~\$0.50 in return. This total reflects both direct aid, about 21.2 percent (e.g., K-12 funding), and indirect or other state support, about 29.5 percent (e.g., Medicaid funding), totaling roughly 50.7 percent. The analysis also makes clear that Northern Virginia is a key driver of the Commonwealth’s revenue; without the contributions of this region, the state’s financial landscape would be significantly different.

This analysis provides important context for Fairfax County and neighboring jurisdictions as we continue working in partnership with state leaders to explore solutions that ensure a fair and sustainable approach to funding critical core services like public education.

Key takeaways (FY 2024):

- ❖ Fairfax County is Virginia’s largest locality, with about 1.15 million residents — roughly 13% of the state’s population.
- ❖ The county generated approximately \$5.77 billion in General Fund revenue (20.7% of the state total).
- ❖ State General Fund appropriations benefiting Fairfax totaled about \$2.93 billion, or 11.1% of statewide spending.
- ❖ For every \$1 contributed, Fairfax County receives roughly \$0.50 back.

Regional Comparisons:

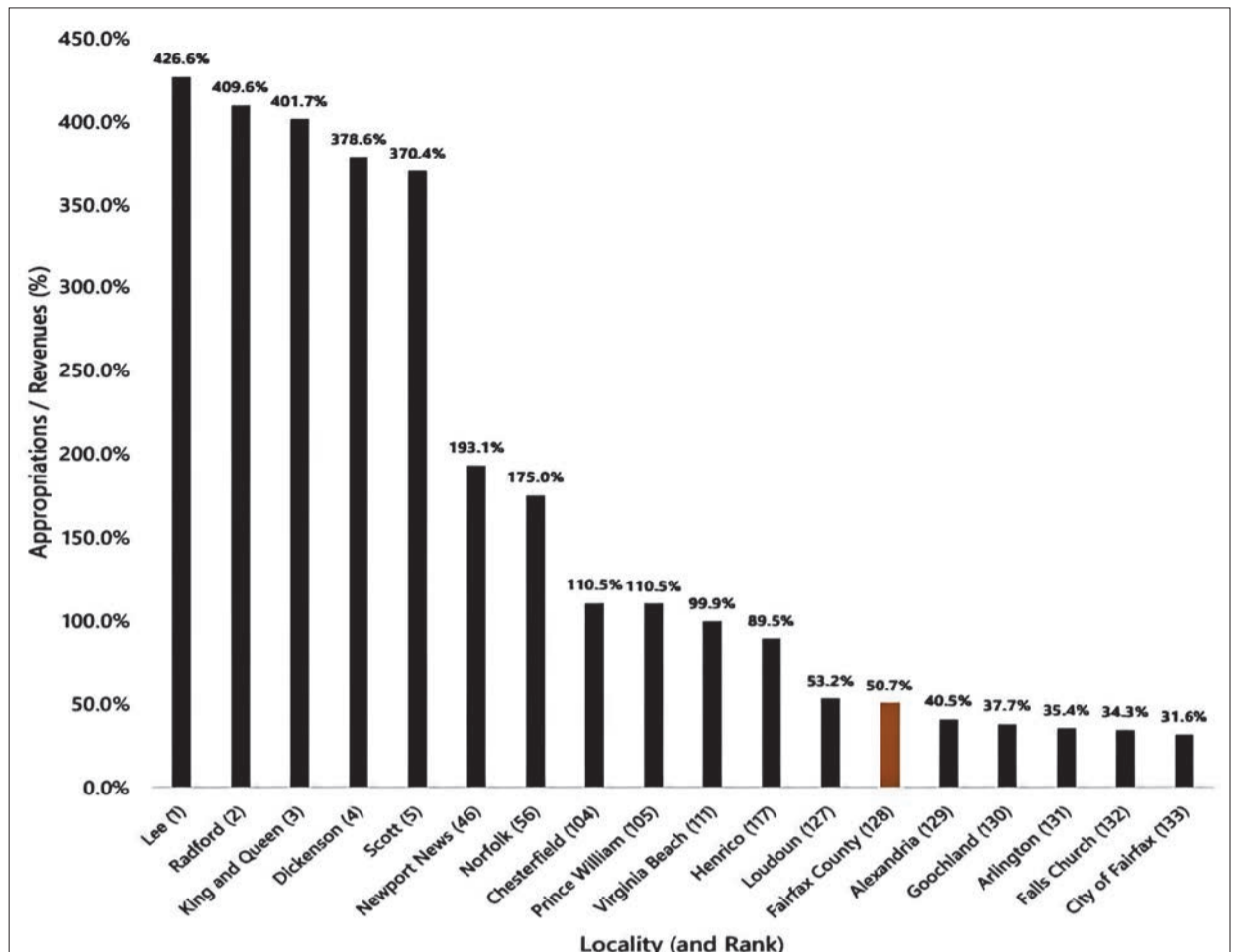
- ❖ Arlington County: \$1.406 B generated; \$0.498 B received (approximately \$0.35 per \$1)
- ❖ Loudoun County: \$2.092 B generated; \$1.114 B received (approximately \$0.53 per \$1)
- ❖ Prince William County: \$1.405 B generated; \$1.552 B received (approximately \$1.10 per \$1)

The analysis also includes a breakdown of how this revenue is generated. This chart shows the estimated \$5.77 billion Fairfax County contributed to the state by category, highlighting the major sources of General Fund revenue, see chart.

SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY

See the full, 80-page report here

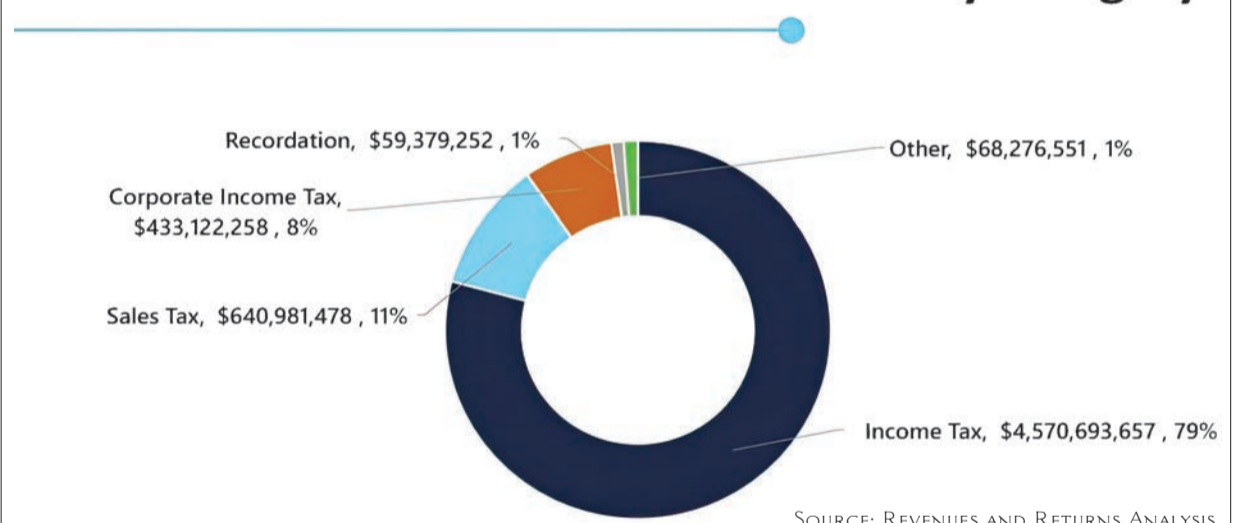
https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/economic-initiatives/sites/economic-initiatives/files/Assets/eic_materials/November_25_2025/FairfaxCounty_RevReturnAnalysis_2025-11-20.pdf



SOURCE: REVENUES AND RETURNS ANALYSIS

Fairfax County Appropriations as Percentage of Revenues (FY 2024): Fairfax County receives approximately 50 cents back on each dollar contributed to Virginia revenues and ranks 128th out of 133 localities. City of Alexandria received approximately 40 cents and Arlington County approximately 35 cents back on each dollar contributed to Virginia revenues.

Fairfax County – Estimated \$5.77 Billion General Fund State Revenue Generated by Category



SOURCE: REVENUES AND RETURNS ANALYSIS.

Estimated \$5.77 billion in state General Fund revenue generated by Fairfax County, by category.

Hypothermia Season

As colder weather sets in, people experiencing homelessness urgently need safe shelter and support.

There were 1,322 people experiencing literal homelessness in Fairfax County on the night of the 2025 Point in Time Count. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/point-time-count-2025>

The county’s services for those experiencing homelessness include:

- ❖ Six shelters for adults and families. Call Fairfax County Coordinated Services Planning at 703-222-0880 (TTY 711) to request a bed or outreach if you are unsheltered. Or, go directly to the nearest shelter.
- ❖ A 24-hour hotline for victims of domestic violence: 703-360-7273, TTY 711.

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At Risk?

If you see someone you think is at risk for hypothermia, call 703-691-2131 TTY 711. This is the non-emergency police number. A police officer will respond and conduct a wellness check.

tic and sexual violence: 703-360-7273, TTY 711.

Fairfax County’s Hypothermia Prevention Program runs from Dec. 1 to March 31 and helps to ensure no one experiencing homelessness sleeps outside during the winter. The program provides warm shelter,

food, clothing, connections to supportive services and more for unhoused individuals. Overflow shelter capacity is available if unseasonably cold weather occurs. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/hypothermia-prevention-program>

The Hypothermia Prevention Program is operated in partnership with nonprofits, faith organizations and community groups.

Unhoused adults in need of immediate shelter can go to any of the adult shelters or one of the regional Hypothermia Prevention Program locations. Adults with children should contact Coordinated Services Planning; county staff will connect the family with appropriate shelter and resources. 703-222-0880, TTY 711, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

You can support these efforts by making financial contributions and donating essen-

tials like clothing, furniture, school supplies and funds to participating nonprofits. Volunteering at shelters or contributing to prevention programs can also make a tangible difference in helping those who are experiencing homelessness.

❖ A list of nonprofit partners seeking financial help, and donations of clothing, furniture, school supplies and more, is here: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/nonprofit-partners>

Job training, shelter support, fundraising and other assistance is needed across the county. Volunteer opportunities can be found on the Volunteer Fairfax website.

If you see someone who is unsheltered and you think is at risk for hypothermia, call 703-691-2131 TTY 711. This is the non-emergency police number. A police officer will respond and conduct a wellness check.

New High School: In the Impact Zone?

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

On Sept. 10, 2024, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors passed a new zoning ordinance for data centers, significantly strengthening noise requirements by mandating both pre- and post-construction noise studies to ensure that all facility operations comply with the County's Noise Ordinance. The Noise Ordinance applies a 60 dBA limit to industrial noise reaching non-residential uses such as schools, parks, and places of worship and it requires all operating equipment to be fully enclosed or screened to reduce noise impacts.

Sound at or below 60 dBA is not linked to damage to human hearing.

But the new requirements do not apply to data centers in the pipeline, and that includes data centers across the street from the newly purchased Western High School in Herndon. Less-restrictive grandfathered Fairfax County zoning ordinances allow data centers across the street from Western High School to expose students and staff to greater environmental health hazards, including chronic noise pollution.

The controversy over this grandfathering exemption was a contested issue at the time.

"Last year, I opposed exempting data center proposals in the administrative approval pipeline from meeting the new requirements if they had submitted plans before the updated zoning requirements took effect," Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill), said on Monday, Dec. 1. "However, my amendment was unsuccessful. I continue to support tighter regulations of data centers through our zoning ordinance and other tools available at the local level, including making data centers in all industrial districts subject to approval by special exception."

Supervisors voted 8-2 for the new zoning ordinance for data centers with Alcorn and Andres Jimenez (Mason) voting no. Alcorn and Jimenez said at the time the new regulations did not go far enough to protect residents, particularly concerning pending data center applications that were not subject to the new, stricter rules.

This unsuccessful amendment means the data centers near Western High School are proceeding under the less restrictive rules,



The new FCPS Western High School property (in background), including its athletic fields, will be exposed to continuous industrial noise and toxic emissions. The school is located just across McLearn Road from the Menlo Digital VA1 center (sign pictured), data center scheduled to deliver powered shell by summer 2026.



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON

The excavator digs in at Menlo Digital VA1, 48 MW one-building facility, directly across McLearn Road from the new FCPS Western High School athletic fields (pictured left).

contributing to environmental and health concerns for the school's future students.

By exempting these data center complexes, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors has allowed an industrial legacy of noise and toxic emissions to be permanently locked in next to existing schools and, unexpectedly, FCPS's newest high school.

Earlier this week, Alcorn added: "Next Tuesday, the board will be voting on updates to data center guidance in the Comprehensive Plan's Policy Plan, and these updates identify and provide important policy guidance for data centers coming through future rezoning and special exception reviews." Future relief is possible but would arrive too late for the future students and staff of the Western High School campus.

The \$150 million purchase of the Western High School campus means the School Board proceeded despite the clustered operation of up to ten data center buildings across four complexes located on

SEE NEW HIGH SCHOOL, PAGE 12



SOURCE: FCPS VIDEO

The former King Abdullah Academy was purchased for \$150 million in a process that FCPS Chief Operating Officer Joe Dunne described as "below the radar" to avoid competitive bidding. The School Board approved the binding contract for the purchase on June 12, 2025, without a dedicated public hearing. The vote that day, June 12, was the first time the pending purchase could be discussed publicly.

BULLETIN

FROM PAGE 2

line. (E.g., if you order in November, write Wish List/November). Join Assistance League in celebrating the essence of Thanksgiving by providing basic essentials to those who need it most. Assistance League, an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization serving children in need across Northern Virginia, is extremely thankful for all contributions, no matter how big or small.

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

Would you like to help a neighbor feel less lonely? Will you help someone get much-needed groceries? Form new connections and make a meaningful difference. Older adults in the Annandale, Falls Church, and Alexandria regions are waiting for volunteer social visitors and grocery shoppers. If you can give the gift of your time, consider providing invaluable support to someone in your community. Learn more about Volunteer Solutions at bit.ly/FXVSVOL or email VolunteerSolutions@FairfaxCounty.gov or call 703-324-5406.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Parent Support Partners, a service of the Healthy Minds Fairfax initiative, are all parents who have received training and are qualified to offer education, support and assistance at no cost to families or caregivers. They provide reliable information that families can use in decision-making and are familiar with services and resources that can help families in distress. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/healthymindsfairfax or www.nami-northernvirginia.org/parent-peer-support.html.



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From the Caregiver, Vanessa Vidaurre

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From the Resident, Joyce Zeigler

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Encore Dancers Will Celebrate Three Decades

Performers dazzle in holiday show, 'The Christmas Wish.'

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

When Daniel was a boy, Santa didn't bring him his Christmas wish. Now grown, he manages a hotel in New York City. But his job consumes his time, and his love for the holiday season and its festivities has seriously dimmed. So when an elf named Felix goes there to grant his long-forgotten childhood wish, problems and hilarity ensue.

That's the premise of Chantilly-based, Encore Theatrical Arts Project's upcoming Christmas show, "The Christmas Wish." A Broadway-style extravaganza featuring dazzling dances, colorful costumes and elaborate sets, it'll be presented at Northern Virginia Community College's Richard Ernst Theatre, 8430 Center Drive in Annandale.

"The dancers have been rehearsing 20-25 hours/week since the end of July and are really incredible," said Encore founder Raynor van der Merwe. "They're high achievers and such a hardworking, passionate group. I'm so lucky to work with them."

The curtain rises Saturday, Dec. 13, at noon, 4 and 7:30 p.m.; Sunday, Dec. 14, at noon and 4 p.m.; Friday, Dec. 19, at 7 p.m.; Saturday, Dec. 20, at noon, 4 and 8 p.m.; and Sunday, Dec. 21, at noon and 4 p.m. Tickets are \$27-\$40, with Girl Scout packages available, via www.encore-tap.org or call 703-222-5511.

Centreville High grad and Encore alumnus Paige Williams wrote the script, for the second year in a row. Most of the scenes take place in the hotel lobby and in Santa's workshop at the North Pole.

And joining the 26-student cast are professional actors Logan Dolence as Daniel and Matty Rafanelli as Felix. "The storyline is so entertaining, and our guest performers have the most amazing singing voices," said van der Merwe. "There's great music and dancing, and the whole show is joyful, entertaining and uplifting."

It's special, as well, because it's Encore's 30th anniversary Christmas musical. And to celebrate, there'll be a 6:30 p.m. reception



Back row, from left, Clarissa Yeager, Wynter Smith, Adeline Raines, Claire Youk and Dewi Vollmer; middle row, from left, Lexi Platenberg, Saaya Patel, Kiera Raines and Emma Packard; and front row, from left, Layla Oliver, Nadiya Vandrapu and Daniella Serna.

for Encore alumni and their families before the Dec. 20 show. The alumni will also perform the iconic number, "We Need a Little Christmas," together onstage.

Clarissa Yeager, a dancer for 12 years – six with Encore, plays the role of Jessica, a hotel staff member. "She's passionate about her job, but a little forgetful," said Yeager. "She's also a jokester and a fun person to be around. I really like her; I have lots of choices in how I can portray her. And her relationship with Daniel is insightful because it shows his character."

Her favorite song is "Let Yourself Go," danced by the hotel doorman and maids. "It's an old-school, classic, musical number that's really fun," said Yeager. "There's a lot going on, and it's very festive and upbeat." She plays the doorman in this dance and gets to wear one of the costumes she likes best – a fancy top hat, red jacket and black pants with a red-stripe down each leg.

She said this show has "a lot of magic and is perfect to see this time of year to get you into the holiday spirit. When I watched it for the first time, I thought it was awesome, and I wanted to be up on stage doing that too. And now, I get to make other people in the audience feel that way, too. I get to share something everyone can enjoy and be a part of. The whole time, the show transports you into a Christmasy world. And it feels like you're seeing the 'Virginia Rockettes.'"

Chantilly High senior Nadiya Vandrapu, an Encore dancer for seven years, portrays Stephanie, Daniel's head of staff at the hotel. "She's trustworthy and is the only person who can handle him [and his temper]," said Vandrapu.

"And she makes sure everything runs smoothly whenever he's away. She's hardworking and patient, and can be clumsy, but she's well-meaning and also bubbly and outgoing."

Enjoying her role, she said Stephanie has lots of costume changes and funny scenes – including one where she's dressed as Frosty the Snowman. "I can have lots of creativity with the way I play her," said Vandrapu. "And her different costumes show all the jobs she's doing and the depth of her character."

She particularly likes the number, "Curtain Tap," a tap dance where the curtain's closed and the audience can only see the dancers'



Back row, from left, Claire Youk and Adeline Raines; middle row, from left, Clarissa Yeager and Dewi Vollmer; and front row, from left, Nadiya Vandrapu and Saaya Patel.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BECCA PERRON

Back row, from left, Lexi Platenberg, Wynter Smith and Kiera Raines; and front row, from left, Daniella Serna, Layla Oliver and Emma Packard.

feet in fuzzy, cartoon-character and animal slippers. "I'm Elmo," she said. "It's an Encore classic, and I like hearing the audience's reaction to it. They did it in my first year here, so I'm glad I can do it for my last year, as well."

Vandrapu said this show is "fun for the whole family – not just kids,

but parents, too, for different reasons. There's singing, dancing and acting for everyone, and adults will also appreciate our professional level of dancing. It's a wonderful way to get into the Christmas spirit and a fun, holiday activity to participate in."

SEE ENCORE DANCERS, PAGE 11



Back row, from left, Clarissa Yeager, Adeline Raines and Claire Youk; middle row, Dewi Vollmer; and front row, from left, Nadiya Vandrapu and Saaya Patel.



Lillian Thompson, of Lorton, with Bell of the Ball



Clare Bonomi, of Mount Vernon, with RJ

Holiday Dress-up

BY SUSAN LAUME
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Horses and riders of Tamarack Stables in Lorton were among those dressed for the season recently. The riding group donned costumes to add to the

fun of their event at Laurel Hill Equestrian Center in Lorton.

The horse and rider teams participated in western games, including fast gallops, weaving, barrel circling, and keyhole.

Apparently, horses enjoy dressing for the holidays too.

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The Potomac River, Stuck at a B Grade

A grade of B sounds OK, but the details are daunting.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

The Potomac Conservancy gave the Potomac River a B grade in its recent report card, the fifth B in ten years. And while a B is better than the D the river got in 2011 or the C in 2013, the river is “showing no overall improvement in a decade,” the Conservancy announced. “The Potomac’s overall health has stopped improving.” The river is still not safe for swimming or fishing, concludes the analysis.

Dubbed “the nation’s river,” at least the Potomac is not an “open sewer,” as the Washington Post denounced in 1951 or “a national disgrace,” as President Lyndon B. Johnson lamented in 1965.

The Potomac River watershed drains 14,670 square miles in four states, a watershed with a population of around seven million people. It supplies drinking water to five million people. Of the total population in the watershed, 81 percent live in urban areas. In Northern Virginia, it forms the eastern border of the city of Alexandria and Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William counties.

In a separate, recent Conservancy report, Belin wrote, “Extreme droughts and flooding are becoming the new norm, degrading stream health and community safety. And powerful interests are moving fast: rolling back federal protections, slashing conservation funding and allowing for unchecked data center sprawl.”

The report card uses six indicators: pollution, fish, habitat, land, people and climate.

The Good News

Labeled as “good news,” the report card shows a steady decline in nitrogen, phos-



The Potomac River viewed from Collingwood Park.



Several groups collect trash like this along the river’s shoreline multiple times a year.

phorus and sediment and an increase in river-related recreation, up ten percent since 2020.

Over one-fifth of the land in the watershed is protected from development.

The River’s History

In “The Potomac River, A History and Guide,” published in 2012 book, author Garrett Peck traces the river’s natural and human history, from its origin as a trickle at the foot of West Virginia’s Backbone Mountain 3,140 feet above sea level to its mouth at the Chesapeake Bay.

Here are a few facts from the book.

The Potomac River:

- ❖ is 383 miles long and flows “through some of the oldest land in the world”;
- ❖ is “spared from channelization that permanently scarred so many of our nation’s rivers”;
- ❖ in the Alexandria-Mount Vernon area is tidal;
- ❖ has five remaining lighthouses, including Jones Point on the southern end of Alexandria.



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

SEE THE POTOMAC RIVER, PAGE 9

The report card indicates that river-related recreation is on the rise.



PHOTO BY JENN LOVING

A volunteer collects trash at one of Potomac Conservancy’s Potomac River Clean Ups



Many people find sitting by the river relaxing.



PHOTO BY JOHN BRIGHENTI

Fall colors reflect on the Potomac on a calm morning Autumn morning

The Potomac River, Stuck at a B Grade

FROM PAGE 8

Runoff Is Rising

As for bad news, polluted stormwater runoff is increasing and is the only source of pollution that is on the rise. When runoff flows over paved and hardened surfaces, it carries pollutants like oils, fertilizers and trash. Urban and agricultural environments are major contributors to polluted runoff.

Pollution is exacerbated by continuing forest loss and extreme weather, like droughts and downpours. Pollution is “driven by policies that tolerate industrial agriculture, unchecked development and reckless deforestation,” the report contends.

At a Nov. 12 press conference, Michael Nardolilli, Executive Director of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, attributed polluted stormwater to dense development’s widespread impervious surfaces. Hedrick Belin, president of Potomac Conservancy, stressed the goal of having rainwater naturally infiltrate into soils instead of washing off hard surfaces.

Some Fish Are Struggling

Populations of striped bass, white perch and small mouth bass have steadily dropped over the past 20 years. Striped bass got a D-grade and both white perch and smallmouth bass got a grade of D+. Shad populations are unstable.

Invasive fish like blue catfish are pushing native species out of their traditional habitats. Chesapeake Channa, invasive northern snakeheads, “have established a firm foothold in the watershed,” the report asserts.

“Consuming fish remains illegal for communities who live in and around Washington, D. C.,” says the report.

Habitats

Land use and river quality are inextricably linked. “Our forests and wetlands are not decorative — they are defenders,” the report maintains. “They filter pollutants, protect against flooding and offer sanctuary to people and wildlife alike. ... Restoring and protecting our land is not just about beautification — it’s about repair, reconnection, and power.”

Forested buffers garnered an A grade. There’s been “an uptick in installed forest-

ed buffers over the past three years,” but all states lag behind in their watershed implementation plan goals for forest buffers, falling 132,645 acres short.

In implementing best management practices for land, the report concludes that Maryland and Washington, D.C. “have made strides, while Virginia lags far behind,” calling these disparities “political” and the choices communities have made. Best management practices are measures set by the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership to protect and restore water quality.

The river’s wetlands, forests and shorelines are at risk by development and poor planning. “The Potomac’s habitats — its wetlands, forests and shorelines — are being pushed aside by unchecked development and fragmented planning. When ecosystems are broken, so is our ability to breathe, cool down, grow food and find peace. True restoration goes beyond conservation — it requires reinvestment in places where both ecosystems and communities have been neglected,” the report argues.

The report gives stream water quality a grade of C+, tidal water quality a C- and underwater grasses a C- grade.

Warnings

Global warming is changing the climate, leading to warmer air and water temperatures, longer droughts and more severe rain storms that stress the river’s ecosystems.

Rising sea levels mean more local flooding. By 2080, Washington, D.C., could have water levels 1.3 to 4.3 feet higher than today. Among the suggested solutions are restoring wetlands, reestablishing stream connectivity and upgrading stormwater systems. Other solutions include holding polluters accountable, implementing “nature-based solutions” and reclaiming public spaces for community use.

Belin is hopeful. He said via email, “We’re not just protecting forests or pulling trash. We’re safeguarding a river that over five million people depend on for drinking water and outdoor enjoyment. We’re building trust that community-led conservation can solve big problems. We’re restoring hope.”

The report: <https://potomacreportcard.org/>



NOTICE OF WATER RATE AND BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

December 11, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.

At 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 11, 2025, Fairfax Water will conduct a public hearing on its Proposed Schedule of Rates, Fees, and Charges. The hearing will be held in Fairfax Water’s offices at 8570 Executive Park Avenue, Fairfax, VA.

The proposed changes, to be effective April 1, 2026, include the following:

- An increase in the Availability Charge from \$4,930 to \$5,090*.
- An increase in the Local Facilities Charge from \$24,290 to \$24,850.
- An increase in the Service Connection Charge from \$1,840 to \$1,960*.
- An increase in the Account Charge from \$48 to \$50.
- An increase in the Quarterly Service Charge from \$16.55 to \$17.55*.
- An increase in the base Commodity Charge from \$4.03 to \$4.35 per 1,000 gallons of water.
- An increase in the Peak Use Charge from \$4.15 to \$4.20.
- An increase in the Turn Off / Turn On Charge from \$58 to \$61.
- An increase in the Fees for Use of Fairfax Water Fire Hydrants to include the increase in the Commodity Charge and Peak Use Charge.
- An increase in the Overhead Charges for Materials from 12% to 14%.
- An increase in the Installation of Sewer Use Meter Charge Inspection Fee from \$47 to \$48.
- New proposed rate: After Hours Service Restoration Charge of \$58.

*Charges reflect fees associated with a standard 5/8” residential meter. Changes in charges for larger residential and commercial meters are reflected in the Proposed Schedule of Rates, Fees, and Charges.

Fairfax Water is also proposing a \$253 million budget for calendar year 2026.¹ Water sales are expected to provide \$222 million and the remaining \$31 million is expected from connection charges, investment income and other sources.

The major areas of operation and maintenance expense are:

Category	-- \$1,000s --	
	2025	2026
Personal Services & Employee Benefits	\$ 73,630	\$ 81,178
Power and Utilities	14,489	15,070
Chemicals	15,134	16,089
Purchased Water	8,712	9,313
Supplies and Materials	6,981	8,080
Insurance	1,066	1,410
Fuel	793	885
Postage	675	692
Contractual Services	15,510	15,650
Professional Services	2,194	2,310
Other	2,866	3,270
Sub-Total	142,050	153,947
Transfer to Improvement Fund	(12,005)	(12,104)
Total	\$ 130,045	\$ 141,843

Net revenues are expected to be appropriated as follows:

Debt Payment	\$54,018,574
Improvement Fund	\$11,000,000
General Fund	\$45,492,000

¹ Fairfax Water’s Board will continue to monitor economic factors and review revenues and expenditures at mid-year to determine if additional action is needed.

Visit fairfaxwater.org/rates to view a copy of the proposed changes.

Those wishing to speak at this hearing or desiring a copy of the proposed changes should call Ms. Jessica Love at 703-289-6029. Interested parties may submit written comments to PublicHearingComments@fairfaxwater.org or mail written comments to:

Fairfax Water
Public Hearing Comments
8570 Executive Park Avenue
Fairfax, VA 22031

All written comments must be received by close of business on **Wednesday, December 10, 2025** to be included in the record of the public hearing.

Donation To Fund Historical Signage

After 77 years, new trail to connect Route 7 severance at Colvin Run Mill, rail to river.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

From left, Tim Hackman, Dranesville representative to the Park Authority Board; James Waller, member of the Friends of Colvin Run Mill; Deana Fernandez, co-chair of Mingle at the Mill; Beth Rafferty, co-chair of Mingle at the Mill; Kiersten Fiore, site manager of Colvin Run Mill; Dan Dyke, member of FO-CRM; Jen Cleveland, executive director of the Celebrate Great Falls Foundation; Melissa Whitson, board member of the Celebrate Great Falls Foundation; Mary Whitson; and Gene Bacher, member of FOCRM.



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

The “Tunnel to Nowhere,” located under Route 7 and visible from Colvin Run Mill Historic Site at 10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls, will soon be connected to the new trail, anticipated to be completed in late 2026 or early 2027.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

A \$5,000 check presentation by the Celebrate Great Falls Foundation to the Friends of Colvin Run Mill (FOCRM) on Tuesday, Nov. 18, marked the funding and launch of the Colvin Run Mill Trail Improvements. The project is designed to restore a critical connection severed since the Route 7 realignment in March 1948, a separation that has lasted for over three-quarters of a century.

According to the Fairfax Park Authority Board agenda for Nov. 12, the board approved the project.

ect scope for the Colvin Run Mill Improvements. The plan includes approximately 800 linear feet of natural-surface trail and the construction of a 50-by-5-foot pedestrian bridge in Colvin Run Mill Park, with an estimated completion window of late 2026 or early 2027.

This new trail and bridge segment link the previously installed VDOT-constructed pedestrian tunnel under Route 7, which re-established the connection between the historic mill site and the larger parkland to the south.

The Colvin Run Mill Trail Improvements are essential because they use the new Route 7 tunnel to connect the mill property to the

existing trails in the Colvin Run Stream Valley Park. This segment provides the Rails to River vision, prioritizing outdoor access and options for running, cycling and dog walking, changing everyday life, especially for those living close to the trail.

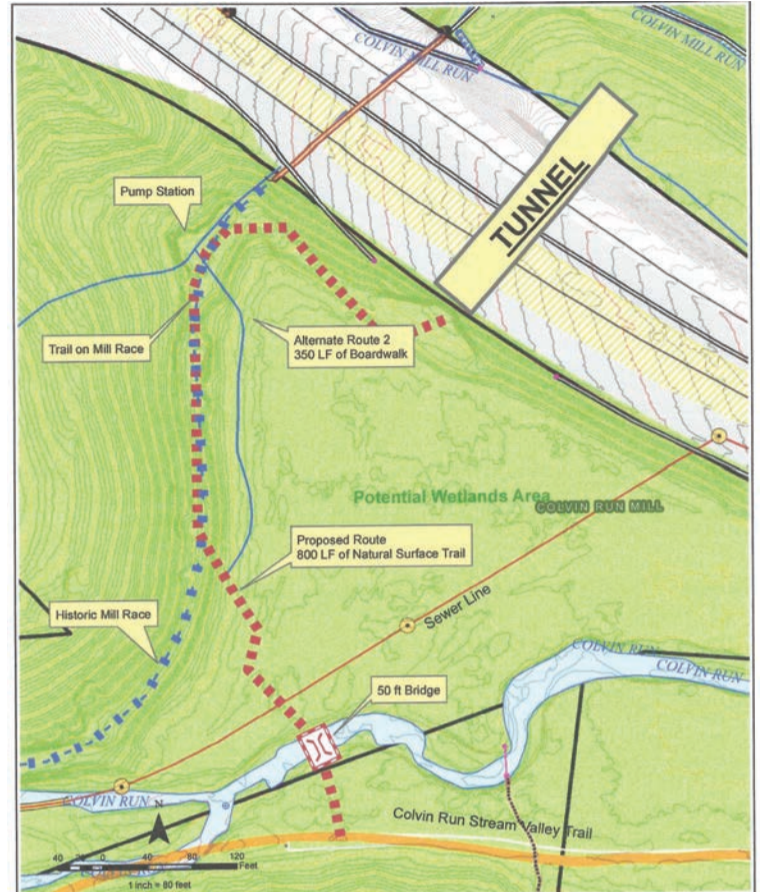
The Celebrate Great Falls Foundation donation will support enhancements, including signage, that complement the larger Colvin Run Mill Improvements. The signage will be used to interpret the historical significance of the Colvin Run Mill site.

Jim Waller, a member of the Friends of Colvin Run Mill, said signage could indicate trail access



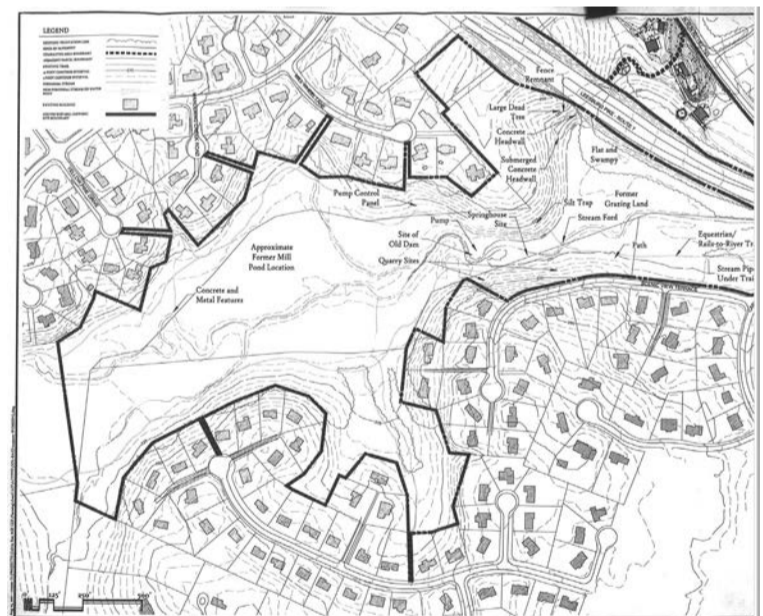
PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Jim Waller, member of the Friends of Colvin Run Mill (plaid shirt), holds the map of the new trail up to show those gathered at the check presentation, with Tim Hackman, Dranesville representative to the Park Authority Board (blue coat).



SOURCE: TUNNEL TRAIL 2025 FCPA, BOARD AGENDA ITEM NOV. 12, 2025

A section of the map from the Nov. 12 Park Authority Board agenda shows the route of the new trail in relation to the tunnel.



SOURCE: CULTURAL LANDSCAPE MAP 2010

The cultural map shows the Colvin Run Mill Historic Site area (upper right), the Leesburg Pike (Route 7) alignment, the Equestrian/Rails-to-River Trail and the approximate former mill pond location, old dam site, and quarry sites.

and the historic sites, such as remnants of the old dam and the quarry, which may have supplied the stones for the mill foundation.

Tim Hackman, Dranesville representative to the Park Authority Board, underscored the project's importance to regional connectivity. Hackman explained that the trail down in the valley along the Colvin Run Stream Valley is called

the Rails-to-River Trail because it doesn't just start at the east end of Lake Fairfax. “It begins at the W&OD Trail near the trail entrance at Michael Faraday Court in Reston, which is the ‘rail’ end, running toward the Potomac River/Difficult Run.”

Hackman (blue-capped) said that he is giving the Route 7 tunnel a new name: “The Tunnel to Run.”

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Encore Dancers Will Celebrate Three Decades

FROM PAGE 6

Playing Chilly the Elf is Chantilly senior Claire Youk. She's been dancing since age 6 when she joined Encore. "Chilly's in charge of North Pole security, and Felix is her best friend, although they have more of a sibling dynamic," said Youk. "Felix has all these crazy ideas about granting Daniel's wish – even though he's now a grown man. And when Felix leaves the North Pole to do it, she covers for him and then goes to New York to bring him back."

"So Chilly is mainly annoyed," continued Youk. "She's a level-headed, no-nonsense person who takes her job very seriously and doesn't want to get into trouble with Santa Claus. I love playing her because being annoyed onstage is a different emotion from when I'm dancing and being happy."

Youk's favorite song is "Once-A-Year Day," sung by the elves. "It's chaotic and has lots of props, flips, falls and tricks, so we have to be on top of everything while we're dancing," she explained. "We wear multicolored costumes that are only in that one number. And that

song showcases the elves in the workshop."

Calling "The Christmas Wish" unique, she said, "You can't get a high-production, Broadway-type, Christmas show around here except for Encore's. And it's done by students who are really well-trained dancers. The plot changes every year, so it's always different. And you can see this show multiple times and still see new things each time."

Chantilly senior Adeline Raines portrays Annie the Elf. "She's friendly and also curious," said Raines. "When an alarm sounds at the North Pole, she asks her friends if they know what's happening. But she stays calm and relaxed, instead of worrying. Last year, I played a shy character, so it's fun to play someone more outspoken."

Dancing since age 3 and with Encore since age 7, she, too, loves the style of dance they do, plus the camaraderie they feel. "We're all excited to be onstage together," said Raines. "It's long hours, but fun long hours. My favorite number in the show is the 12-minute finale. We did this my first year in company, so it's full circle for me.

There are lots of different sections with different costumes – plus jazz, tap and ballet – all within the same dance."

Raines said people will enjoy the production's funny storyline and appreciate that it's different from other holiday shows. And, she added, "The reindeer costumes are really cute. It's fun to see them dancing onstage because they add such variety to the show." There's also a sense of excitement among the Encore dancers because "The Christmas Wish" marks three decades of this special event.

Reflecting on how it feels to celebrate 30 years of Christmas spectaculars, van der Merwe said, "I never slowed down or stopped to think about where I was in my journey. And then suddenly, here we are. So this has been a nostalgic time, as I've been going through old photos and videos for the reception."

And I have an immense feeling of love and gratitude for what I get to do and for all the amazing people who've passed through this company – and especially those who supported me at the beginning."



PHOTO COURTESY OF BECCA PERRON

In no particular order, Sofia Martinz-Garcia, Daniella Serna, Wynter Smith, Kiera Raines, Amelle Ahmed, Manasvi Singh, Layla Oliver, Lexi Platenberg and Emma Packard.



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New High School: In the Impact Zone?

FROM PAGE 4

and in the vicinity of McLearen Road and EDS Drive in a Greater Herndon industrial park, exposing the school community to potential environmental risks.

Neither the School Board nor the County has released health impact studies addressing the long-term effects of this industrial proximity on a school environment.

Instead of complying with the 2024 Zoning Ordinance Amendment (ZOAM) that Fairfax County Board of Supervisors approved on Sept. 10, 2024, that introduced more detailed use standards for data centers, grandfathered, less-restrictive Fairfax County zoning ordinances allow facilities across the street from Western High School and two other schools to expose students and staff to constant noise.

Constant Hum from HVAC Systems

Continuous noise emanates from data centers' massive HVAC cooling systems. This low-frequency hum is regulated by Fairfax County Code, Chapter 108.1, Article 4, Section 108.1-4-2 (Maximum Sound Levels Table), which sets a 60 dBA noise threshold.

The 2024 Zoning Ordinance amendments specifically require noise studies for data centers to "comply with the Noise Ordinance, Chapter 108.1 of the County Code," as cited in Noise Study Requirements Data Centers Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Fairfax County. The intermittent generator tests, however, are far louder, often 85 dBA or higher close up, comparable to a garbage disposal, as cited by industry data detailing the sound profiles as verified by Woodstock Power: "Generator Noise: Controlling The Volume" and are not subject to Fairfax County's 60 dBA noise ordinance restriction.

The school board's acquisition of the former King Abdullah Academy property earlier this year could place hundreds of students and staff members in the "immediate impact zone" of upwards of 10 data center buildings across four complexes located on and around McLearen Road and EDS Drive in a Greater Herndon industrial park.

A YouTube School Board Meeting Recap, June 12, 2025, stated the acquisition would represent a potential savings of \$281 million compared to new construction, with the closing scheduled no later than Aug. 14, 2025. Mateo Dunne, the Mount Vernon District representative, advocated for the purchase. He said it represented



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON

Grandfathered under pre-2024 zoning, data center facilities such as Renaissance Park (approximately 1,800 feet away from the Western High School) are not required to adhere to the current mandatory 300-foot generator setback or pre-construction noise studies that might have safeguarded students and staff at the new Western High School.

"an amazing opportunity to save nearly \$300 million," compared to building a new school at approximately. FCPS School Board Vice Chair Sandy Anderson (Springfield District) introduced the motion to purchase the property at the FCPS School Board's June 12, 2025, calling it a "unique opportunity" and an "elegant solution" to the problem of overcrowding.

The Connection asked Fairfax County Public Schools about noise studies for the new Western High School and Rachel Carson Middle School. The two schools are adjacent to each other. FCPS provided the following statement via email on Dec. 1, 2025. "FCPS has not commissioned any noise studies at Carson MS or the Western HS site. If at some point in the future it is determined that a study of ambient noise at one or both sites is warranted, FCPS would engage a qualified third-party acoustician to evaluate conditions and, if findings were not in keeping with applicable standards, recommend remediation methods to bring indoor sound levels within acceptable levels. Any FCPS project at either such site would in all events adhere to applicable federal, state, and local codes, standards, and requirements."

Missed Warnings?

Did the Fairfax County School Board's quick purchase of the Western High School property prevent FCPS from observing possible risks from the proximity of the data centers? Some warnings were publicly available before the board's vote to approve the purchase in June 2025, evident in cases ranging from Dafter Township in Michigan to a noise study by a former NASA scientist and a judge's retraction of Prince William County's Digital Gateway project.

Dafter Township is a small civil township, with a population of 1,327, located in Chippewa County in the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It's possible it demonstrating adverse impacts of low-frequency ambient noise from data centers.

Two weeks before the FCPS School Board voted to purchase the former King Abdullah Academy, WCMU Public Radio reported on a situation in Dafter, with Township Supervisor Bob Brown addressing noise from cooling fans powering massive banks of computers in a data center-like operation in his community.

"You don't know what you don't know until you know it," Brown is quoted as saying.

The superintendent at the Mich-
SEE NEW HIGH SCHOOL, PAGE 13



The first phase Renaissance Park campus involves a large, multi-story data center building with a maximum height of up to 102 feet, with an electrical substation constructed on site to power the campus. Residents of Foster Glen specifically raised concerns about the proximity of a planned Dominion substation, arguing the 100-foot buffer was insufficient.

New High School: In the Impact Zone?

FROM PAGE 12

igan school, Lake Superior Academy, voiced concerns about the incessant low-frequency hum. “The students often, daily, say, ‘When is this going to stop?’ Our special needs students, some will come out(side) and cover their ears.” Superintendent Susie Schlehuber said. “The sound is constant.”

Local Expert Warning

Dr. Larry J. Zaragoza, D. Env., chair of the Fairfax County Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC), addressed policy recommendations in Data Centers: VA DEQ Request for Comment and Future Planning (March 13, 2023 Memo). According to the memo, EQAC consistently demanded stricter environmental controls on data centers, forewarning the need to “minimize the impacts of data centers on community health and the environment.” On June 25, 2025, in a presentation before the Sully District Council of Citizens Associations, Zaragoza recommended that the county review the noise ordinance and consider a 55 dB (day-night sound levels) average upper limit noise limit for outdoor residential areas.

In Prince William County, former NASA scientist Dr. John Lyver noted that, among the multitude of concerns surrounding data centers, noise pollution had emerged as the most pressing issue in the region. Lyvers said in his Data Center Noise Report that, with the impact of the Devlin Technology Park in 2023, up to nine data centers located near Chris Yung Elementary School converge, creating additive, compounded noise. A lawsuit regarding Devlin Technology Park failed, the Prince William Times reported.

However, in a separate suit involving a different data center development, 19 months after the Prince William County Board of Supervisors approved the development, Digital Gateway, a judge ruled the approval of the project was void.

“Judge Kimberly A. Irving decided the county did not comply with state and local codes in regards to notifying the community about public hearings,” WUSA9 reported. The successful lawsuit by the primary plaintiff, a small homeowners’ association against the Digital Gateway rezoning, set a precedent. The suit states the challenge was based on “deficiencies in the advertised notices under Va. Code 15.202204 because the proposed zoning was not timely advertised and the ‘proposed plans,

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Residents of the Foster Glen townhome community live adjacent to Starwood’s Renaissance Technology Park at 13860-13876 Redskin Drive. Approved under grandfathered code in July 2022, the four data center buildings and a substation with only a 100-foot buffer from the residential property line. A 300-foot generator setback is mandated as of Sept. 11, 2024, by Fairfax County.



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON

ordinances or amendments’ referenced by the advertised notices were not available to the public in a timely manner, as contemplated by the statute.”

But the Virginia Court of Appeals stayed that decision in late October and construction will be allowed to move forward while challenges proceed.

Responses

A proactive, aggressive noise mitigation strategy is part of a recent response to the controversy surrounding data center expansion in Fairfax County, particularly regarding facilities near residential areas and environmentally sensitive sites. The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority announced that on Nov. 21, 2025, leaders from Fairfax County government, the Economic Development Authority, Penzance, and Amazon Web Services (AWS) broke ground on the Chantilly Premier project.

The project was the target of opposition by nearby residents. See <https://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2023/jul/19/residents-why-would-we-want-this/>

According to the press release by Penzance on Nov. 21, Penzance and AWS “committed to sustainable construction practices and environmental performance standards that exceed typical data center benchmarks.” The release

states the facility will use “acoustically enclosed generators” and notes the project is designed to achieve “Sound levels of approximately 40 dBA during full operations, or a ‘quiet’ level consistent with small town outdoor environments or open office indoor settings.” Additionally, the facility will use “specialized diesel generators to reduce particulate matter and noxious emissions by 90%,” Josh Weissman, AWS director of Data Center Delivery, says. “We’re continually innovating to ensure our data centers fit responsibly into the communities we call home.”

Meanwhile, five miles away at the McLearen Road/EDS industrial park in Herndon, upwards of 10 grandfathered data centers in four complexes are clustered near Western High School, Rachel Carson Middle School, Nysmith School, and the Foster Glen townhome community. One complex is the Renaissance Technology Park campus, which includes four data centers.

It presents a visual industrial presence to the townhome community, altering its suburban setting. What is just outside some residents’ kitchen windows is not a single building, but rather one of the largest data center complexes in Fairfax County. The first phase includes a data center building with a maximum height of 102

feet (10 stories) and an expanded multi-acre electrical substation constructed on the site to power the campus. Residents of Foster Glen specifically raised concerns about the proximity of a planned Dominion substation, arguing that the 100-foot buffer was insufficient and that the planned tree planting was inadequate.

The Renaissance Technology Park data center campus presents a visual industrial presence that alters its suburban setting. What is just outside the kitchen windows is not a single building, but an industrial park, one of the largest data center complexes in Fairfax County.

The first phase includes a data center building with a maximum height of 102 feet (10 stories), and an expanded multi-acre electrical substation constructed on the site to power the campus. Residents of Foster Glen specifically raised concerns about the proximity of a planned Dominion substation, arguing that the 100-foot buffer was insufficient and that the planned tree planting was inadequate.

\$150 Million Vote and Abstaining Members

Fairfax County School Board representatives stated they had to pursue the acquisition of the former King Abdullah Academy “below the radar” to avoid jeopardizing their chances against private

developers who were also interested in the property for housing, data centers, or other uses. The board argued the secrecy was necessary for fiscal responsibility.

Secrecy was maintained right up to the June 12, 2025, School Board meeting, and the board formally voted on the contract, leaving the community with virtually no time for public comment. The pending purchase was not publicly discussed until the June 12, 2025, School Board meeting. The vote to approve the \$150 million acquisition (9-0 with three abstentions) was the first time the deal could be publicly acknowledged.

The three board members who abstained were At-Large Representative Ilryong Moon, Rachna Sizemore Heizer (Braddock District), and Melanie Meren (Hunter Mill). After the purchase, Melanie Meren (Hunter Mill) expressed concern, stating, “There hasn’t been a public announcement that we even bought this school. ... We need to do our responsibility so the Board of Supervisors knows that we know what we’re doing with the money.” Other critics complained that the acquisition of a major new high school was kept secret while the community was engaged in a lengthy, county-wide Boundary Review Advisory Committee process. This purchase instantly impacted the community’s work on existing high school boundaries.

A Season of Warmth

Neighbors in Potomac and Great Falls join forces to keep children warm through Catholic Charities.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

On a crisp November morning, two friends stood at a Catholic Charities distribution site as winter coats were handed out to families living below the poverty line. They watched as parents who had been waiting for hours finally received warm clothing for their children.

The effort was in support of Keelin's Closet, a nonprofit founded by Paul Gallagher, a Boston College student who partners with Catholic Charities. He created the organization to honor his mother, Keelin, whose lifelong compassion for children inspired him to start a small local coat drive.

Michelle Lee of Potomac and Paige Cassidy of Great Falls had come to drop off winter wear that their own children had outgrown. Between them, they carried bags stuffed with coats and jackets from brands like Patagonia, The North Face, Burberry, and even Moncler.

The two watched parent after parent select outerwear their children needed to stay warm through the bitter cold and biting winds. But then they saw a young mother

reach the front of the line only to be told that all of the coats had been distributed. The woman's shoulders sank. That image — a mother with tears in her eyes because she couldn't afford to purchase a coat for her child — was etched in their memory.

They didn't realize at first that they'd both been moved by the same moment, or that the same organization had drawn them in. This year marks the charity's third season — modest but meaningful — and its impact continues to grow.

Lee and Cassidy reconnected months later over coffee after a morning of tennis. Their conversation wandered. It was the usual talk about school schedules, holiday plans, and the steady stream of donation requests for crises overseas. Then Lee said, almost off-

handedly, "It's easy to feel like you can't do enough."

This year, they decided to do more than volunteer. They're helping Keelin's Closet collect new coats and cold-weather gear that will be distributed to children and families living below the poverty line before the worst of winter hits.

The process is simple: donors can order from Keelin's Closet's Amazon wish list and have a coat shipped straight to the cause. No

How to Keep A Child Warm

Support Keelin's Closet

Now in its third season, Keelin's Closet provides new coats and cold-weather gear for children in the D.C. metro area.

Scan the QR code (QR code placeholder) or visit: [Link to Amazon Wish List](#)

Instagram: [@keelinscloset](#)
For more information or to host a mini-drive, email: info@keelinscloset.org

paperwork. No complicated forms. Just a few clicks that turn into warmth for a child. Items on the list start as low as \$10.

"We get so many requests to send money to faraway places," said Cassidy. "This is something tangible — something easy you can do that makes a difference for a child right here."

Lee nods. "Last year, when we helped hand out coats, we saw what a difference it made. Parents were crying. Kids were putting their new coats on right there, zipping them up with these huge smiles. It's such a small act, but it changes everything for them."

Lena Peroz, a mother who received one of those coats, says her daughter still wears it proudly. "It's more than a coat," she says softly. "It's the feeling that someone cared enough to see us."

As the cold settles in again, the women hope others will join them not with fanfare, but with quiet generosity.

Because sometimes, hope looks like something simple: a child walking to school in frigid temperatures, wearing a coat, gloves, and a knit beanie to keep warm.

Donate a coat from Keelin's Closet's Amazon Wish List



CONTRIBUTED BY PAIGE CASSIDY

Paige Cassidy of Great Falls is helping raise awareness for Keelin's Closet and the urgent need for warm coats for children this winter. Their support is bringing the organization closer to its goal—and to keeping local kids warm.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY KEELIN'S CLOSET

Paul Gallagher delivers bags of coats he collected during Keelin's Closet's very first year. His leadership helped launch a tradition of warmth and generosity that continues to grow every winter.

"Everything is so expensive right now, and the need is really dire. It takes only a moment to help. A warm item costs only a few dollars, which isn't much for most of us, but it can mean everything to a child trying to stay safe in the cold."

— Michelle Lee

FCCPD Victim Services Holiday Gift Card Drive

The Fairfax County Police Department's Victim Services Division has launched its 12th Annual Holiday Gift Card Drive, an initiative dedicated to supporting child victims and witnesses of domestic violence, sexual violence and families grieving the loss of a loved one to homicide.

So far in 2025, the Victim Services Division has worked with 456 child victims and witnesses, each navigating the aftermath of

trauma with the help of compassionate advocates dedicated to restoring safety, stability and hope.

Each year, Victim Specialists with the Division work with hundreds of children who have experienced unimaginable trauma. The Holiday Gift Card Drive offers the community a meaningful way to help restore moments of joy and normalcy during the holiday season.

"Gift cards allow parents and caregivers

to create meaningful holiday experiences for their children — choosing the toys, clothing, or treats that make the season special," said Saly Favez, Director of the Victim Services Division. "It's a small gesture that reminds families they are not alone and that their community truly cares."

All donated gift cards will be distributed to families during the Division's annual Breakfast with Santa event on Friday, Dec. 20.

How to Contribute

Community members are encouraged to donate gift cards in any amount. Popular options include Target, Walmart, Giant, Amazon and Visa.

Donations can be dropped off or mailed to:

Saly Favez, Fairfax County Police Department – Victim Services Division
12099 Government Center Parkway
Fairfax, VA 22035

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Cancer Kicks, Teen's Nonprofit

Pink shoes inspire action, not inertia.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The creation of the nonprofit corporation Cancer Kicks is an act of profound love by a teenage son for his mother, but getting to the point of operation proved an exercise in prioritizing action over inertia and sourcing assistance.

Owen Singer, 16, a student at Langley High School in McLean, class of 2026, manages a sophisticated enterprise that demanded a trade-off. The mission took precedence over the typical high school experience.

"It's pretty much been instead of either hanging out with friends or just having free time playing video games, sports, whatever else that might be," Owen said, noting that he drew a hard line at protecting his academics while developing the nonprofit. The work isn't just a hobby; it's a demanding job. "You prioritize at some point," he said.

When Owen's mother was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 2019, he was just 10 years old. His family instinctively created a protective shield, absorbing the emotional impact of chemotherapy and treatments so that Owen and his younger brother only saw the determination, not the struggle.

That shield shattered in 2023 when the cancer returned. Owen was old enough to see his mother's struggle and the sheer, exhausting toll of the battle. He recalls this second diagnosis as the turning point — the moment he chose to act. But first, he observed. During every chemo session, Owen witnesses a ritual unfold. His mother would deliberately lace up her pink tennis shoes and pack a special, familiar blanket. These were not just items; they were a safe harbor amid reality.

"I saw that every chemo session, she would bring comfort items, always wear



PHOTO COURTESY OF CANCER KICKS

McLean teen nonprofit founder, Owen Singer and his mom work Cancer Kicks, a mission-driven charity to support breast cancer warriors and fund the Breast Cancer Research Foundation.

pink shoes to symbolize what she was going through," Owen reflected. "I wanted to do something that could help, not just her, but other people."

Comfort matters when you are fighting for your life, and the people around you need a tangible way to show they care. The idea for CancerKicks was born in that observation.

However, while Owen recognized the immense power of personalized comfort items, he also wanted to raise money for breast cancer research. He envisioned a source where every product sold served a dual purpose — a "double good."

"A give back as well as a support for the person going through chemo," he explained.

This led to the mission statement that now drives his 501(c)(3) nonprofit: "Your Purchase. Their Comfort. Our Cure." Every purchase of a personalized pair of shoes or slides, a blanket, and other products delivers

comfort to breast cancer patients and their family members while also directing 100 percent of the profits to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation.

There is, though, the tedious truth to translating that powerful idea into a sophisticated, legally compliant operation. It demanded more than heart for Owen; it required relentless stamina. Owen found his life partially consumed by the less glamorous work toward entrepreneurship, and it demanded balance.

In high school, Owen drew a hard line on academics but admitted the mission to secure nonprofit status for his business model, which forced a serious prioritization of time to navigate the bureaucratic maze of establishing a tax-exempt organization. "I would never want to have to go through that again," he confessed.

His mother, who was his initial inspiration, stepped into the role of co-pilot, helping him navigate the complex forms and make corrections over many months, eventually securing registration about a year and a half ago, aided by pro bono legal assistance, according to Owen.

Today, Owen manages a sophisticated, functioning business. He handles product sourcing and custom production, manages the website, and uses Instagram and Etsy for marketing and community building around his mission.

The personalized aspect, allowing purchasers to tailor a blanket, shoes, whatever, is what sets the Cancer Kicks products apart, providing a tangible way for supporters to ensure a patient knows they are special to someone and not fighting alone. And Owens' first supporter is still his best collaborator.

Owen said his mother, thrilled with the mission and the dedication of funds to breast cancer research, serves as his primary product tester. "She was my test mule for products, trying them on," Owen said, noting that she also helps with design choices.

With high school graduation and college visible on the horizon, Owen, a junior, is

planning ahead for Cancer Kicks' longevity. He has his eyes on his younger brother to carry on the business, ensuring the legacy of personalized comfort and fundraising continues and securing his goal: to provide comfort to cancer fighters and fund research to find a cure. The young entrepreneur has proven that the greatest comfort in the face of fear is often the decision to act.

"The amount that we've donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation is about \$2,800 plus around another \$1,000 coming in the next few weeks as it clears the systems," Owen announced on Nov. 3. Shop and help find a cure at <https://www.cancer-kicks.org/>.

Owen's Five Steps to Founding a Nonprofit Corporation

Owen Singer's journey points to the greatest comfort in the face of uncertainty is not inertia. As a 16-year-old managing a fully operational 501(c)(3), he offers five foundational steps for entrepreneurs of any age who hope to turn inspiration into impact.

Refine Your Core Idea: "It can't just be something a lot of people already do. When I looked around, there were a ton of people doing cancer support, but it was unclear if they were for profit, customizable, or all that." Make your concept clear and distinct.

Navigate the Legal Process: The legal process is the toughest part, but it's non-negotiable. "You have to go through the entire legal process to secure your tax-exempt status. Get professional help if you can."

Establish Your Product/Service Model: This is the stage for designing products or setting up your service, whatever you're trying to do.

Manage Sourcing and Inventory: This step involves the daily grind of production, ensuring you can deliver on your promises efficiently once orders start coming in. Focus on Spreading the Idea:

Finally, you have to get the word out, "posting and spreading your message." That is how to build a community support around your mission.

Langley Senior's Anti-Vaping Campaign on TikTok

3 Million Views, Relatable, Authentic Content.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Langley High School senior Rujvi Thakkar is battling the teen vaping crisis with an unconventional weapon: social media. Her initiative, CleanLungs, she said, launched in April 2025, has earned more than 3 million views on TikTok and Instagram. The group's digital success, coupled with local partnerships, represents a new peer-to-peer strategy against rising teen substance use.

The student-led advocacy campaign

leverages authentic, relatable content, attracting more than 21,000 followers and establishing a continuous educational resource. This approach, which focuses on the lived experience of addiction, is proving to be highly effective.

Thakkar explained that she is driven by the firsthand impact of nicotine use on her peers. She created CleanLungs to address the lack of public understanding of the long-term effects of newer vaping products.

"A lot of younger people have access to nicotine, and that is one reason why it spreads," Thakkar said, framing her mission as an urgent educational need.

She points out that many students are



PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.TEAMCLEANLUNGS.COM

Rujvi Thakkar launched CleanLungs in April 2025

unaware of the potency of what they use. "Just one vape pod contains the same nicotine as an entire pack of cigarettes," according to her website, www.teamcleanlungs.com

For Thakkar, the movement is personal. The senior felt compelled to act after seeing friends struggle to quit without support. "I've had friends struggle with nicotine addiction, and I've seen how hard it is to quit when no one is talking about it without judgment," she states on the organization's website.

In addition to her viral online presence, Thakkar said her in-person efforts include workshops and the distribution of more than 500 prevention kits, a commitment recent-

ly recognized with a mayoral proclamation in the City of Fairfax. She has reached more than 1,600 students across Virginia to raise critical awareness about youth vaping and nicotine addiction.

The initiative's rapid expansion, in partnership with local groups like 10-7 Farms, demonstrates a successful new peer-to-peer strategy for tackling the growing crisis of teen substance use.

Thakkar is now focused on the next phase of CleanLungs: expanding outreach in college towns to address substance use at the post-secondary level.

Ultimately, her core message remains one of empowerment for her peers. "The most important thing is knowing that it's bad for you and knowing that you are in control of your own decisions," Thakkar said, signaling that her advocacy is just beginning.

ENTERTAINMENT

HOLIDAY LIGHT SHOWS AT NOVA PARKS
Drive, Walk and Skate into the holidays with three unique holiday light show experiences. Tickets for the 2025 holiday season are now on sale and all 3 NOVA Parks light shows will be open as of November 15.

Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights

Walk a sparkling half-mile garden trail while sipping on a hot beverage for an enchanting evening at Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights in Vienna.

Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights is an elegant garden trail aglow with countless sparkling lights, perfect for a date night or family holiday outing. The half-mile walk through the enchanting Meadowlark Botanical Gardens (Vienna, VA) features lighted nature themes and animated displays along a paved wheelchair and stroller-accessible trail. Stay warm by sipping on a hot beverage (with or without spirits) as you walk and s'mores to finish out the evening. Treat your pup to their favorite walk of the year on specific dates. The Winter Walk of Lights is illuminating the gardens for its 14th season, bringing joy to more than 100,000 visitors each year.

Open nightly Nov. 7 through Jan. 4. Capacity is limited; reservations are required to ensure access on a specific date. Prices range \$19-24 per person; promo codes available for specific dates. Visit winterwalkoflights.com for details.

Bull Run Festival of Lights

Drive through 2.5 miles of dazzling lights at Northern Virginia's largest drive-through light show at the Bull Run Festival of Lights in Centreville.

Experience the magic of the holidays at the Bull Run Festival of Lights, Northern Virginia's largest drive-through holiday light show! A family favorite for three decades, the Bull Run Festival of Lights dazzles with a 2.5-mile display of holiday and fairytale vignettes. Enjoy time with family while staying warm and cozy as you slowly drive through the animated displays in Bull Run Regional Park. New displays are added every year—drive through the Winter Wonderland where it's always snowing and see the tallest light display yet.

Open November 14 through January 4. \$30 per vehicle online; additional discounts available for specific dates with promo code. Visit bull-runfestivaloflights.com for details.

Ice & Lights – The Winter Village at Cameron Run

Skate and explore a winter village wonderland for a playful outdoor experience at Ice & Lights – The Winter Village at Cameron Run in Alexandria.

Just minutes from Old Town Alexandria, enjoy ice skating amidst a winter wonderland at Cameron Run Regional Park (Alexandria, VA). Ice & Lights offers a fun, unstructured outdoor family experience to explore unique light displays, snap family pictures or selfies with a variety of displays, and take a spin on the outdoor ice rink.

Tickets are available for the Village Only or Village and Ice Skating. The Winter Village opens November 15 and nighttime ice skating begins November 28. Daytime ice skating begins December 6. Prices range \$9-24 per person depending on activity and date. Capacity is limited; reservations are required to ensure access on a specific date. Ice skating reservations are required. Visit cameroniceandlights.com for details.

Visit novaparkslights.com for more information and to purchase tickets.

HOLIDAY LINEUP AT MCLEAN COMMUNITY CENTER

The McLean Community Center is thrilled to announce a joyous lineup of holiday and Winter programming guaranteed to spark wonder, laughter, and festive spirit for the whole family. Whether you're a fan of soulful seasonal tunes, a Holiday Craft Show tradition, or charming musicals, there's something for everyone to enjoy this season!

Begin the season celebration with a three-day indoor juried Holiday Art & Crafts Show, December 5-7, featuring 80 regional artisans offering pottery, glass, jewelry, décor, fine art, foods, and more, with live music and an on-



A three-day indoor juried Holiday Art & Crafts Show takes place Dec. 5-7, 2025 at the McLean Community Center.



Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights is an elegant garden trail aglow with countless sparkling lights, perfect for a date night or family holiday outing.

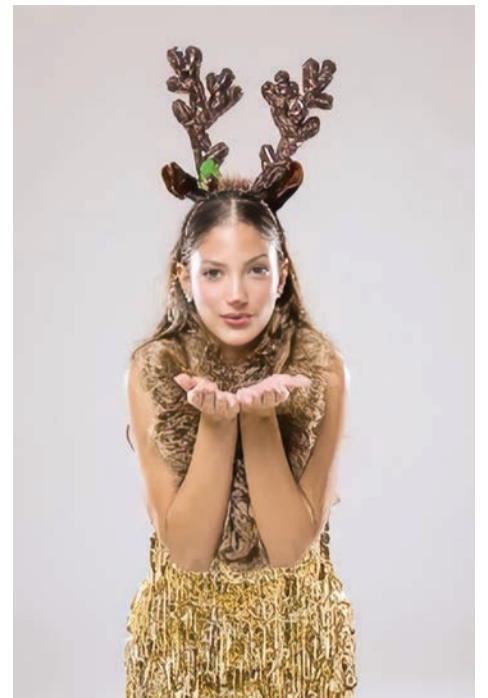


The Capital Art & Craft Festival (www.CACF.art) Dulles Expo Center, Friday, Dec. 12 and Saturday, Dec. 13: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sunday, Dec. 14: 10 a.m. -4 p.m. Senior discount available; children under 12 free.

site café. Then join us on Saturday, December 13, from 10 a.m.–noon for Milk and Cookies with Santa, complete with classic cookie decorating, winter crafts, hot chocolate, photos with the jolly guy himself, and a chance for kids to create their own stuffie friend. Finally, ring in the new year at the 5th Annual Winter Block Party on Saturday, January 3, from 1-4 p.m., with firepits and s'mores, hot choco-

late, ice carving demos, a children's business fair, and a full afternoon of food, crafts, and entertainment.

The Alden Theatre is celebrating the holiday season with a festive lineup sure to delight all ages. On Saturday, December 13 at 4 p.m., experience KEVIN!!!!—a hilarious, one-hour theatrical reimagining of the holiday classic, Home Alone, by Recent Cutbacks, featur-



The Metropolitan Follies will perform on Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025 at the Old Town Fairfax Festival of Carols & Lights in Fairfax.

ing puppets, live projections, foley effects, and a four-person choir. Then, on Saturday, December 20 at 7 p.m., groove to Sounds of the Season: A Lil' Maceo Holiday, a high-energy concert starring saxophonist Lil' Maceo, gospel violinist Eric Taylor, and friends. On Monday, December 22 at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m., enjoy I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas by The Barter Players—a heartwarming musical about family, hope, and one special hippo. The 11 a.m. show will be ASL-interpreted and sensory-friendly. On Sunday, Jan. 4 at 2 p.m., the audience-favorite Furia Flamenca is back with a show for the whole family. "A Trip to Spain" introduces children to flamenco music and dance, shares some of the art form's history and invites audience members to participate in flamenco-making. Tickets for Alden shows are on sale now at aldentheatre.org.

NOW THRU DEC. 25

Photos with Santa. At Tysons Corner Center, Lower Level, McLean, near Wasabi. Make magical memories with Santa! Walk-ins are welcome, or reserve ahead to skip the line and receive a free personalized digital message from Santa (powered by Portable North Pole). Visits are free, photo packages available for purchase.

NOV. 6 TO FEB. 24, 2026

Bernie Boston, A Retrospective Photography Exhibition. At Pleasant Grove Church and McLean Community Center. Presented by McLean Project for the Arts and The Friends of Pleasant Grove. Sponsored by The Friends of Historic Pleasant Grove, 8641 Lewinsville Road, McLean. Visit www.historicpleasantgrove.org.

DEC. 4-6

Winterfest. 5-9 p.m. At Brown's Chapel Park, Reston. This three-night event at Brown's Chapel Park in Reston is the perfect kickoff to the holiday season, with a walk-through trail with thousands of festive holiday lights and other holiday activities. In addition to the light displays, fire pits with s'mores, Enchanted Forest and lots of food and vendors.

DEC. 4-7

Tysons Library Quarterly Book & Media Sale.

At Tysons Pimmit Regional Library 7584 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church. Huge selection of books and media for all ages and interests. Thursday, Dec. 4, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Friday, Dec. 5, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 6, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 7, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.: Bag sale. \$10

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ENTERTAINMENT

for a full grocery sack or half price if less.
Visit <https://www.tysonslibraryfriends.org/>

DEC. 4-21

“Birthday Candles.” At 1st Stage, Tysons Corner. Ernestine Ashworth spends her 17th birthday agonizing over her insignificance in the universe. Soon enough, it’s her 18th birthday. Even sooner, her 41st. Her 70th. Her 101st. This poignant and funny play takes its audience through the highlights, heartbreaks and extraordinary moments that make up one woman’s ordinary life. Show times as follows: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays at 7:30 p.m., Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m. General admission tickets are priced at \$25 (limited availability), \$40 (limited availability), and \$55. Student, educator, and military tickets are \$15. Tickets can be purchased online at www.1ststage.org or by calling the 1st Stage box office at 703-854-1856.

DEC. 5-7

Norwegian Christmas Festival. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Norway House, 3846 Meredith Drive, Fairfax. Shop indoors for Norwegian giftware, Christmas decor, chocolates, cheeses, fresh lefse. Reserve entry time at [https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0F4E-AEA62EA46-58479328-norwegian#/. Visit without reservations outside fun with Fjord horse Sofie, Viking craft demos, kid’s music corner and more.](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0F4E-AEA62EA46-58479328-norwegian#/)

DEC. 5-28

Very Artful Holidays. McLean Art Gallery December Show. At Chesterbrook Shopping Center, 6224 Old Dominion Drive, McLean. Opening Reception Friday, Dec. 5, 5-8 p.m. Featuring 200 works from local artists, life music, unique holiday gifts, wine.

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

Jingle on the Lake Christmas Festival. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Lake Anne Plaza, Reston. Join the Reston community for a day-long holiday celebration, starring Santa himself with a fleet of decorated boats, Santa’s elves on paddleboards and the graceful Vienna Singing Princesses! Rumor has it that the Grinch (played by talented theater student Liam Birch) might attempt to steal Christmas again...but Santa (played by genial neighbor George Broderick) and the kids know how to deal with him... Calling on kids of all ages to come greet Santa and have great fun! Shop the Christmas market on the plaza and at the Reston Community Center for unique gifts, participate in several children’s activities, enjoy hot chocolate, food, treats, ballet and choir performances, and more, in the picturesque heart of Reston.

SCHEDULE:

10 a.m.- 4 p.m.: Christmas Market
11:40 a.m.: Lake Anne Elementary School Choir
12 p.m.: Boat Parade and Santa arrival
12:45 p.m.: Vienna Singing Princesses
1:30 p.m.: Sunrise Valley Elementary School Choir
2:15 p.m.: SLHS A Capella groups
3:00 p.m.: Reston Conservatory Ballet

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

Christmas with Fairfax Choral Society. 3 p.m. At Annandale United Methodist Church, 6935 Columbia Pike, Annandale. Join in an afternoon filled with beautiful music, festive spirit, and uplifting performances by the Symphonic Chorus, Concert Choir, and Master Singers.

DEC. 6 & 13

Tours Through Christmas Past. Noon to 2 p.m. At Ratcliffe-Allison-Pozer House, 10386 Main Street, Fairfax. Free tours and family activities through 200 years of history.

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

Wolf Trap’s Holiday Sing-a-Long. 4 p.m. At Wolf Trap’s Filene Center, McLean. This musical celebration will include a performance from “The President’s Own” and local choir groups for a festive evening of Sing-A-Long Christmas carols and Hanukkah songs. Here’s



The “Holiday Spectacular” and “Tiny Tots” takes place on Thursday, Dec. 11, 2025 at Chantilly High School.



The Bull Run Festival of Lights runs now through Jan. 4, 2026.

a few things to know before you go: New, unwrapped toys will be collected for Toys for Tots at the entrance of the Filene Center. Donations are voluntary and not required. Bring a bell for the Jing-A-Long during the singing of “Jingle Bells.”

Join in the tradition of the candlelight procession while exiting the Filene Center during the last verse of “Silent Night.” Battery operated or LED candles are preferred.

This event is free, but registration is required.

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

“It’s a Wonderful Life.” 4 p.m. At Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry St., SE, Vienna. Vienna Theatre Company is getting into the spirit of the season with a special holiday production of “It’s a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play”. The audience will be immersed in the world of Bedford Falls as this theatrical adaptation of the classic film is presented as a live 1940s radio broadcast, following the story of George Bailey, a man on the brink of despair on Christmas Eve, who is shown

the impact of his life by his guardian angel, Clarence. Tickets are available at the door only - \$5 children; \$10 Adults; \$8 Seniors. Visit www.viennava.gov/theatre.

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

Traveling Players’ Commedia Christmas Carol (2024). 7 to 9:30 p.m. At Traveling Players Studio, Tysons Corner Center. This live screening event includes a free drink with every ticket and a talkback after the film with Artistic Director Jeanne Harrison and the cast.

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

Old Town Fairfax Festival of Carols & Lights. 4 p.m. At Old Town Square, 10415 North Street, Fairfax. Featuring the Metropolitan School of the Arts’ Metropolitan Follies. Visit www.metropolitanarts.org.

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

Holiday Maker Market and Artisan Fair. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Nova Labs Makerspace, 3850 Jermentown Road, Fairfax. Discover a

wide variety of handmade gifts perfect for spreading holiday cheer. From one-of-a-kind home decor, wood-turned bowls, crafts, cooking accessories, toys, and chainmail dragons. You’ll find something special for everyone on your list. Visit market.nova-labs.org.

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

Living Nativity. 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. At St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, 6320 Hanover Ave., Springfield. Come meet Baby Jesus and pet Delilah the Camel and other animals. Bring family and friends to enjoy the greatest story of all times and live music and refreshments. This event is free. If possible, bring a new toy to donate. Donations of toys will be distributed to local organizations that help families in Springfield. All are welcome! Visit <https://www.saintchristophers.net/>

SATURDAY/DEC. 6

Winter Wonderland. 12-3 p.m. At The Boro Tysons: 8350 Broad Street, Tysons. The Boro, SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 19

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Published by
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Alexandria, Virginia 22314

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NEWS DEPARTMENT

fairfax@connectionnewspapers.com

Mary Kimm

Editor and Publisher

mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com

Bonnie Hobbs

Community Reporter

703-778-9415

bhobbs@connectionnewspapers.com

Mercia Hobson

Staff Reporter

mhobson@connectionnewspapers.com

Mike Salmon

Contributing Writer

miksalm6922@gmail.com

ADVERTISING

For advertising information

sales@connectionnewspapers.com

703-778-9431

Debbie Funk

Display Advertising/National Sales

703-778-9444

debfunk@connectionnewspapers.com

David Griffin

Marketing Assistant

703-778-9431

dgriffin@connectionnewspapers.com

Classified & Employment Advertising

703-778-9431

Editor & Publisher

Mary Kimm

mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com

@MaryKimm

Publisher

Jerry Vernon

703-549-0004

jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com

In Memoriam

Managing Editor

Kemal Kurspahic

Production Manager

Geovani Flores

CIRCULATION

Circulation Manager

Ann Oliver

circulation@connectionnewspapers.com

ENTERTAINMENT

FROM PAGE 17

Tyson's destination for luxury urban living, invites the community to celebrate the holiday season at Winter Wonderland, a festive afternoon filled with seasonal cheer in Boro Park. Guests are welcome to enjoy interactive activities, sweet treats, live entertainment, and special character appearances, creating memorable moments for families and friends.

Meet Santa: Snap magical photos with Santa in front of The Boro's festive gingerbread house holiday installation.

Festive Beats: Enjoy holiday classics and seasonal favorites throughout the event.

Holiday Crafts: Guests can decorate festive stockings and create their own magical reindeer food mix to take home.

Sweet Treats and Giveaways: Complimentary Santa hats, gingerbread men, candy canes, and other festive surprises for all ages.

Hot Chocolate Bar: Warm up with hot chocolate provided by Bluestone Lane.

Glitter Tattoos: Sparkling designs available for children and adults.

Gingerbread Inflatable Slide: Slide into holiday fun in a whimsical gingerbread setting.

SANTA'S COMING TO TOWN!

Holiday Schedule for the Burke Volunteer Fire & Rescue Department.

Wednesday, Dec. 3: 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Bring your family and friends to the Santa Meet & Greet in the Banquet Hall at 9501 Old Burke Lake Road, where smiles, laughter, and holiday cheer are guaranteed. Snap a photo with the jolly man himself. Share your Christmas wishes. Create memories you'll cherish forever.

SANTA RUN SEASON BEGINS Saturday, Dec. 6: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Santa and his jolly elves will kick off the 2025 Santa Run season by visiting Burke Lake Road between Lee Chapel/Burke Center Parkway and Burke Road, including Shiplett Boulevard (north of Capella Avenue, Lincolnwood Court, Woodedge Drive, Burke View Avenue and Court, Robby Court, Blincoe Court, Burke Towne Court, Hillock Court, Coffer Woods Place, and Burke Manor Court.

Saturday, Dec. 6: 3 p.m. – 7 p.m. Once Santa and the reindeer are recharged, they will be ready to visit the neighborhoods and streets off Zion Drive from Guinea Road to Jib Lane, including Falmead Road (off Guinea Road), Starboard Drive, Wood Wren Court, and Sandy Lewis Drive.

Sunday, Dec. 7: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Santa and his hoofed helpers will start off today by visiting the following: Burke Lake Road from Lake Braddock High School to Braddock Road, including streets off Signal Hill and Parliament Drive. Braddock Road from Guinea Road to Dansbury Forest Drive, including streets off Southampton Road, Dunleigh Drive, Bradfield Drive, and Woodland Way.

Sunday, Dec. 7: 3 p.m. – 7 p.m. Once Santa and the reindeer are recharged, they will be ready to visit the following: Lee Chapel Road from Burke Lake Road up to and including Goldfield Lane including Wooden Glen Avenue, Covered Bridge Road, and Ironmaster Drive (up to Meadowrill Lane). Shiplett Boulevard between Burke Lake Road up to and including Capella Avenue. Old Keene Mill Road between Sydenstricker Road and Burke Woods Drive including Burke Wood Drive, Four Oaks Lane, Silas Burke Street, Torrence Street, and Koziara Drive (up to Glenway Court).

Wednesday, Dec. 10: 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Bring your family and friends to our 2nd Santa Meet & Greet in our Banquet Hall at 9501 Old Burke Lake Road, where smiles, laughter, and holiday cheer are guaranteed. Snap a photo with the jolly man himself. Share your Christmas wishes. Create memories you'll cherish forever.

See the full schedule and plan your festive fun today at <https://bvfrd.org/santa/>

DEC. 6-7

Holiday Train Show. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. The Fairfax Station Railroad Museum will host its 34th annual holiday train show on Saturday, December 6th (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and Sunday, December 7th (noon to 4 p.m.) with a multitude of model trains to include N(NTRAK), HO (PMC), LEGO, G

(WVMGRS) scales and the European Train Enthusiasts (ETE) group will display in a multitude of scales. Visit our gift shop for holiday gift items. Santa is planning a stop on both days! Adults as well as children 13 and over, \$6; children 5 to 12, \$3; 4 and under, free; museum members, free. Information on the museum and show can be found on the web: www.fairfax-station-railroad-museum.org; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FFXSRR>, or call 703-425-9225.

SUNDAY/DEC. 7

Metropolitan Follies. 11:30 a.m. at Kingstowne Towne Center, Kingstowne. Featuring the Metropolitan School of the Arts' Metropolitan Follies. Visit www.metropolitanarts.org.

SUNDAY/DEC. 7

Victorian Christmas. Noon to 3 p.m. At Historic Blenheim in Fairfax City. Featuring the 8th Green Machine Regiment Band. Visit www.fairfaxva.gov.

SUNDAY/DEC. 7

McLean Winterfest Parade with Block Party.

The festive day kicks off with the pre-parade showcase at 2:30 p.m. at the Langley Shopper Center on Old Chain Bridge Road. This popular event will feature local dance groups and other performing artists, bringing energy and movement to Downtown McLean. The McLean Winterfest Parade begins at 3:30 p.m. on Old Chain Bridge Road. This year we encourage participants to embrace the spirit of the season by showcasing the "warmth and magic of sharing with others" experience creative floats, performances, and decorations. The parade will feature marching bands, community groups, schools, non-profits, and local businesses all coming together to spread holiday cheer. Immediately following the parade, the celebration continues with the debut of the Winterfest Block Party at the Langley Shopping Center, starting at 5:00 p.m. This festive gathering is designed to extend the joy and create a full evening of fun for all ages, featuring:

A special appearance by and free photos with Santa Claus.

Live music and entertainment.

Fun activities, arts, and a collection of food vendors offering savory and sweet treats.

MONDAY/DEC. 9

Jubilo Jubilo – A Celebration in Song. 7 p.m.

At Annandale United Methodist Church, 6935 Columbia Pike, Annandale. Experience the magic and spirit of the holidays as the Fairfax Choral Society Youth Choirs share selections that celebrate hope, wonder, and jubilation. This cherished annual tradition is the perfect way to welcome the season with family and friends.

THURSDAY/DEC. 11

"Holiday Spectacular" and "Tiny Tots." At Chantilly High School. For 45 years, Chantilly High School Theatre has delighted young audiences with Holiday Spectacular and Tiny Tots, a beloved holiday tradition. This year, they present Holiday Spectacular and Tiny Tots with the entire Performing Arts Department — Band, Choir, Theatre, and Orchestra — featuring over 250 student performers!

Performance Dates:

Holiday Spectacular: Dec. 11, 7 pm and Dec. 12, 7 pm

Tiny Tots: Dec. 11, 9:30 am, 11 am and 12:45 pm

Location: Chantilly High School Auditorium.

Tickets: Chantillydrama.org.

DEC. 12-14

The Capital Art & Craft Festival (www.CACEart) will feature handcrafted, one-of-a-kind art in more than a dozen mediums including glass, jewelry, leather, paintings, prints, photography, pottery, wearable art and wood. This winter show is known for being a treasure trove for holiday shipping with artists from throughout the country selling items that cannot be found in department stores. Free parking is offered at the Dulles Expo Center. Dates: Friday, Dec. 12 and Saturday, Dec. 13: 10

a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sunday, Dec. 14: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Tickets: \$10 in advance; \$12 at the door. Senior discount available; children under 12 free. Ticket information: www.CACEart

DEC. 12 TO JAN. 3

Benjamin's Winter Circus Adventure. At Dulles Town Center, Dulles. John Davenport, the ringmaster for this winter spectacular, is a third-generation circus performer and is bringing his show to Dulles Town Center for the winter season to keep the family Christmas traditions going. Those who attend this 90 minute circus spectacular will see a showcase of performers from around the world as they defy gravity, entertain the big top and have the crowd asking for more. While maintaining the charm of a traditional circus, Benjamin's Winter Circus Adventure is also introducing motorbikes, extreme riders and more thrilling acts to keep everyone on the edge of their seats. Visit benjaminscircus.com.

SATURDAY/DEC. 13

Historic House Tours. 10:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

At Sunrise at Silas Burke House, 9619 Burke Lake Road, Burke. Members of the Burke Historical Society will be leading free tours of the historic house located on the grounds of Sunrise at Silas Burke House. Reservations are not required. Email: burkehistoricalociety@hotmail.com

SATURDAY/DEC. 13

Vienna-Falls Chorus celebrates the Holidays.

At American Legion Post 177 3939 Oak Street, Fairfax. Family Friendly Matinee featuring Crafts, Holiday Market, Photobooth Doors open at 1 p.m. Show starts at 2 p.m. Tickets \$10 for 14 and up. Evening Dinner Show featuring Pasta Buffet, Salad Bar, Dessert at 6 p.m. Show starts at 7 p.m. Tickets \$30. Visit www.viennafalls.org

DEC. 13-14

Mia Saunders Ballet Presents The Nutcracker. 3 p.m.

At Centreville High School, 6001 Union Mill Road, Clifton. The Mia Saunders School of Ballet (MSB) invites the community to celebrate the holiday season and join in its cherished "Season of Giving" with the 31st annual production of The Nutcracker. This year's production continues MSB's long-standing tradition of giving back to the community. Proceeds from ticket sales, program boosters, and advertisements will benefit the Centreville High School Drama Boosters and the PCD Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to improving diagnosis, care, and research for primary ciliary dyskinesia (PCD). Tickets are \$10 for children ages 5 and under and \$12 for ages 6 and up. Tickets can be purchased online or at the door. For more information, visit www.miasaundersballet.com.

SUNDAY/DEC. 14

Vienna Boys Choir Christmas in Vienna. 4 p.m.

At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Admired across the globe for their pure sound and technical mastery, the cherubic ensemble features boy sopranos and altos from ages eight to 14, representing 31 countries, and harmonizing their incredible vocals in captivating performance. Built on six centuries of tradition, the Vienna Boys Choir counts Joseph Haydn and Franz Schubert among its illustrious alumni.

SUNDAY/DEC. 21

Holiday Hands On Day. 1-4 p.m.

At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Join Fairfax Station Railroad Museum as they close out 2025 with a Holiday Hands On Day. Join Conductor Mario as he shares his trains. The young and young at heart will be encouraged to be an engineer and allowed to drive the trains. Enjoy holiday crafts, a Reading Circle with a local author (reading of the book *Elike* and the Magic Train is from 2 to 2:30) and more! Admission: Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, \$3; ages 13 and older, \$5, \$6 for special events. Seniors, \$4. Military both active and retired, \$4. 703-425-9225.

A Key Moment



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

So, this is what it feels like to be self-sufficient. I've rarely experienced a moment of pride like this. Why? Because if this "it" had to do with yours truly using his hands to solve a problem, the problem usually remained unsolved. As an adolescent, I remember my father having a toolbox in the house, but its purpose escaped me. As a result, I, nor my brother, Richard was groomed for home/car/computer repair. Typically, then and now, if I had a problem that involved using my hands, it pretty much meant using my fingers to make a call to a person or a service to do what I couldn't. But not last Sunday. I faced my problem with a can-do approach rarely seen in my problem-solving history. What was it I fixed? I replaced the battery in the key fob of my 2022 Audi Q3. A first in my 20-plus years of Audi ownership.

As with these many tasks (car, computer, household), I am unhelpful, shall we say. In addition, not only am I incompetent, but mostly I'm just not that interested. As the second son of Barry and Celia Lourie, renters until my father retired at age 70, I was not really exposed to any household/honey-do-type chores. My sole job was taking out the rubbish from under the kitchen sink and depositing it in the "rubbish pale" buried in the ground downstairs/outside near the side entrance to our second-floor home. Occasionally I had to take out the trash "canned up" behind the garage and drag it out to the front of the house for the weekly trash pick-up. That was pretty much it. If anything needed to be fixed, a call was made and arrangements were soon to follow. My primary pursuits were sports and chocolate. (Not lawn care either as we were renters and as such, it was not our responsibility.)

It wasn't until I was married at age 24 that my deficiencies really became apparent. It wasn't so much a problem for me as I had spent my entire life birth to wedding, not having and/or not being able to do anything constructive around the home, car and nowadays, the computer. However, it was much harder on my wife Dina. Her expectation was that as a man I had some intrinsic God-given abilities to be useful. It was a disappointment (I'm moderating her reaction) when she realized that I had no such abilities.

Having spent years showcasing how little I could do, this particular key-fob problem presented an opportunity. Moreover, on the face of it, changing a battery didn't seem insurmountable. In fact, when this key-fob issue arose previously (batteries do run out), I took the key-fob to the dealer, and they happily obliged my incompetence and changed the battery for me. However, not being a complete dunce, I did pay attention as the service person swapped out the battery on my key fob. I have to admit; even by my standards, the battery replacement didn't seem all that complicated. After all, I'm not a complete idiot, despite what some of you regular readers may feel, so I decided I'd give "it" a try.

First, I looked at the key fob to see what I could see. I saw nothing, as in any clues as to how I might solve this problem. I poked and prodded and nothing. Moreover, there was no indication that there was any hope for a future with my changing this battery without some kind of help. Vowing to move on, I asked myself: where might there be information about my car's key fob; And it hit me, just like I was a character on one of those old "Firesign Theatre" albums: the owner's manual. Ta da. Success. Not so fast. I couldn't follow the diagrams (though I could follow the table of contents). As has occurred many times before with me, following written how-to directions like this is next to impossible. Let me clarify, following directions/diagrams presented in this two-dimensional way is not next to impossible, it is absolutely/unequivocally impossible - for me. And as soon as I realized, what I was up against, I closed the owner's manual in disgust. Down but not yet out, I sat back in my driver's side seat and thought. Then it came to me: the internet. There are sites to show people how to do almost anything. Replacing a key-fob battery is child's play (except this child couldn't play). I got out of my car and walked into my house and turned right toward my home office. The one with the computer/internet. I sat down and cautiously typed in "How to change the battery in the key fob on a 2022 Audi Q3?" And there the headline popped up on my computer screen: "Changing the battery in a key fob" I clicked on the top entry and viola, a video began. The simple words of wisdom I heard from the host, while he actually, in front of my eyes, changed the battery gave me hope. Hope that one day I could change/replace the battery. And as it turned out, this was that day.

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

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