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# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Erik C. Johnston  
Director

## DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

TO: Members of the Commission on Local Government  
FROM: J. David Conmy, Local Government Policy Administrator  
DATE: December 23, 2020  
SUBJECT: Draft Agenda, Materials, and Other Items of Interest

**Please find enclosed the following:**

1. Draft agenda for your regular meeting to be held on Tuesday, January 5, 2021, at 11:30 AM **(please note the later than normal start time and that this meeting will be held electronically via Google Meet);**
2. Commission on Local Government Electronic Meeting Information and Rules;
3. Draft minutes for your last regular meeting held on November 12, 2020;

**Other Items of Interest:**

1. Upcoming events of interest; and
2. Various newspaper articles of interest.

In addition, recent issues of VACo *County Connections* and VML *eNews* can be accessed on the web at:

- <http://www.vaco.org/newsroom/county-connections/>
- <https://www.vml.org/publications/enews/>

If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact me at (804) 371-8010 (office), (434) 825-0353 (cellular), or [david.conmy@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:david.conmy@dhcd.virginia.gov).

I look forward to seeing –digitally - on January 5<sup>th</sup>!

Enclosures

Partners for Better Communities



[www.dhcd.virginia.gov](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov)



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## DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

### AGENDA

#### Regular Meeting

#### Commission on Local Government

11:30 a.m., January 5, 2021

**\*This meeting is to be held electronically (via Google Meet), pursuant to [§ 4-0.01 OPERATING POLICIES of Chapter 1289 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly, as amended.](#)**

#### Electronic Meeting Details:

- The link for entering the electronic meeting and access to meeting materials can be found by navigating through the following two pages:
  - [Virginia Regulatory Town Hall website](#)
  - [Commonwealth Calendar](#)
- All meeting participants are asked to mute their devices upon entering the meeting space and only unmute themselves when called upon by the Chair.
- Please contact Cody Anderson ([cody.anderson@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:cody.anderson@dhcd.virginia.gov)) to pre-register your attendance, if you plan to speak during the Public Comment Period of the agenda, or if you need additional services to accommodate your attendance/participation.

#### Call to Order

#### I. Election of Officers for 2021

#### II. Administration

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| A. Approval of the Draft Meeting Agenda                            | (Chair)     |
| B. Approval of Minutes of the Regular Meeting on November 12, 2020 | (Chair)     |
| C. Public Comment Period   | (Chair)     |
| D. Policy Administrator's Report                                   | (Mr. Conmy) |

#### III. Municipal Utility Data Report

- |                                       |                |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| A. Staff Presentation                 | (Mr. Anderson) |
| B. Commission Deliberation and Action |                |

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**IV. Fiscal Stress Report for 2018/2019**

A. Staff Update (Mr. Akbor)

**V. 2021 General Assembly Session**

A. Preliminary Staff Update and Bills of Interest (Mr. Conmy)

B. Fiscal Impact Analyses (Mr. Akbor)

**VI. Schedule of Regular Meetings**

A. Staff Presentation (Mr. Anderson)

**VII. Upcoming Events of Interest**

A. Staff Presentation (Mr. Conmy)

**VIII. Other**

**IX. Adjournment**

DRAFT



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DEPARTMENT OF  
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## Commission on Local Government

November 12, 2020

2:00 P.M.

Digital Meeting Only

**Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency and the need to provide social distancing and prohibit large gatherings, the meeting was held electronically in accordance with the State of Emergency Declared by the Governor and the 2020 amendments to the 2020 Appropriations Act. The meeting was held via Google Meet.**

### Members Present

R. Michael Amyx  
Stephanie Davis, PhD, Vice Chair  
Diane M. Linderman, PE  
Rosemary M. Mahan, Chair  
Kimble Reynolds, Jr.

### Members Absent

### Call to Order

The Commission on Local Government (CLG) Chair, Ms. Rosemary Mahan, called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Mr. David Conmy, Local Government Policy Administrator for the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) noted that due to the Governor's Declared State of Emergency due to COVID-19, it is impracticable and unsafe for the Commission on Local Government to assemble in a single location, so the Commission meeting is being held electronically, by video conference and telephone options, pursuant to 2020 Amendments to the 2020 Appropriation Act. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss or transact the business statutorily required or necessary to continue operations of the Commission on Local Government and the discharge of its lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities. The public is welcome to use the link and phone number options made available by staff to attend the meeting electronically. The Commission on Local Government will make available a recording or transcript of the meeting on its website in accordance with the timeframes established in Sections 2.2-3707 and 2.2-3701.1 of the Code of Virginia.

## Administration

A motion was made by Ms. Linderman and seconded by Mr. Reynolds to approve the draft agenda. The motion passed (Yea: Amyx, Davis, Linderman, Mahan, Reynolds; Nays: None).

A motion was made by Ms. Linderman and seconded by Ms. Davis to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting on September 17, 2020. The motion passed (Yea: Amyx, Davis, Linderman, Mahan, Reynolds; Nays: None).

A motion was made by Mr. Amyx and seconded by Ms. Linderman to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting on October 14, 2020. The motion passed (Yea: Amyx, Davis, Linderman, Mahan, Reynolds; Nays: None).

Ms. Mahan opened the floor to receive comments from the public. No one from the public appeared before the Commission. The public comment period was then closed.

Mr. Conmy gave an update on the Martinsville Reversion case and noted that parties had notified staff that they were working on a joint legislative package to assist in relation to the reversion of Martinsville.

Mr. Conmy gave the Commission an update on deadlines for Conflict of Information Act trainings and requirements that are approaching.

Mr. Conmy updated the Commission on staff efforts on programs to help combat challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that the Municipal Utility Relief Program had been established by the 2020 Appropriations Act, which requires an anonymized report from all municipal utilities to be submitted to the Commission.

Mr. Conmy briefly presented various news articles of interest to the Commission.

Mr. Reynolds declared that, as a result of code section 15.2-2906, the canons of conduct numbers 1, 2, 3, and 9, and in an effort to avoid the appearance of impropriety in regards to the Martinsville Reversion case, that he would be recusing himself from review of the case.

2020 Cash Proffer Survey and Report (Draft)

Mr. Cody Anderson, Legislative Affairs and Boards Coordinator at DHCD presented the Cash Proffer Survey Report to the Commission. The report details the collections and expenditures of cash proffers from every locality statewide.

A motion was made by Mr. Amyx and seconded by Mr. Reynolds to approve the Cash Proffer Survey Report. The motion passed (Yea: Amyx, Davis, Linderman, Mahan, Reynolds; Nays: None)

Schedule of Regular Meetings: Proposed 2021 Schedule

After discussion, the schedule of meetings for 2021 was established as follows: January 5<sup>th</sup>, March 25<sup>th</sup>, May 13<sup>th</sup>, July 8<sup>th</sup>, September 9<sup>th</sup>, and November 4<sup>th</sup>. All meetings will be held at 11:00 a.m. with the exception of the January 5<sup>th</sup> meeting which will be held at 11:30 a.m. A motion was made by Ms. Davis and seconded by Ms. Linderman to approve the established schedule of meetings. The motion passed (Yea: Amyx, Davis, Linderman, Mahan, Reynolds; Nays: None).

Upcoming Events of Interest

It was noted that the Virginia Governor's Housing Conference would be taking place from November 18<sup>th</sup> through November 20<sup>th</sup>.

Other

There was no other business.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. Amyx and seconded by Ms. Linderman for adjournment. The motion passed and the Commission adjourned at 2:41 p.m.



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## DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

### Commission on Local Government

#### Adopted 2021 Meeting Schedule

*All meetings held at 11:00 a.m. on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday in odd-numbered months unless otherwise noted  
Includes dates related to the Commission's adopted review schedule for the Martinsville Reversion case*

- Tuesday, January 5, 2021 (11:30 a.m.)
- Monday March 22, 2021 – Wednesday March 24, 2021
  - Martinsville Reversion: Oral Presentations (time to be determined)
- Wednesday March 24, 2021
  - Martinsville Reversion: Public Hearing (time to be determined)
- Thursday, March 25, 2021
  - Regular Meeting and Special Meeting
- Thursday April 22, 2021
  - Martinsville Reversion: Special Commission Meeting
- Thursday, May 13, 2021
- Thursday, July 8, 2021
- Thursday, September 9, 2021
- Thursday, November 4, 2021

Meetings will be held electronically during the Governor's declared state of emergency.  
In-person meetings (held at Virginia Housing Center in Glen Allen) will commence at the end of the declared state of emergency.



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DEPARTMENT OF  
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## Commission on Local Government

### Upcoming Events of Interest

- Beginning of General Assembly Session  
Wednesday, January 13, 2021
- VACo/VML/VAPDC/VA Rural Center Local Government Day at the Capitol  
Thursday, January 28, 2021  
Webex Online Platform



# news leader.

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## LOCAL

# Augusta County defers appeal for courthouse expansion project

**Monique Calello** Staunton News Leader

Published 2:50 p.m. ET Nov. 9, 2020 | Updated 3:12 p.m. ET Nov. 9, 2020

STAUNTON – Two days after Staunton Historic Preservation Commission unanimously denied Augusta County's application for a Certificate of Appropriateness on nine buildings related to the Augusta County Courthouse project, the county filed an appeal of the commission's denial with Staunton City Council.

In accordance with the Staunton City Code, the appeal was due to be scheduled for the Nov. 12 city council meeting, but when the City of Staunton posted the meeting agenda, the appeal wasn't on it.

According to Staunton City Manager Steve Rosenberg, on Nov. 4, Augusta County requested a deferral of the appeal until the regularly scheduled meeting of Staunton City Council on Dec. 10.

The requested deferral has been accommodated by the City of Staunton, Rosenberg said.

"The deferral resulted from conversations between County Administrator Tim Fitzgerald and me, in which we discussed the benefit of additional time to both the city and the county, given the significance of the matter and the preparations required for it, before the appeal is scheduled for a hearing before council," said Rosenberg.

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In advance of the Historic Preservation Commission's review and then denial of the courthouse expansion proposal, the commission received 38 emails from citizens, a petition signed by 3700 people opposing the county's proposal and a letter from Preservation Virginia in response to the courthouse and Echols building renovation, the demolition of eight buildings and closing of two city streets that were entered as public record.

Staunton City Council has the power to reverse or affirm the commission's denial and allow the county to move forward with their expansion plan, as is or with modifications.

If city council fails to approve the application, an appeal may be filed by Augusta County with the Staunton Circuit Court within 30 days of Staunton City Council's decision in December.

The News Leader reached out to City of Staunton administration, Staunton City Council, Augusta County Board of Supervisors and Augusta County Administration for more information.

**More:** Staunton Historic Preservation Commission denies county's courthouse expansion proposal

**More:** Augusta County appeals historic commission's decision on courthouse

*Reporter Monique Calello can be reached at [mcalello@newsleader.com](mailto:mcalello@newsleader.com). Follow her on Twitter @moniquecalello.*

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT & POLITICS GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

# After deep budget cuts, Norfolk has ended up with a surplus of money. So why are the libraries and rec centers still closed?

By RYAN MURPHY

THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT | NOV 17, 2020



FEEDBACK

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A closed sign hangs on the door of the Van Wyck branch of the Norfolk Public Library on Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2020. The branch offers grab-and-go service on Mondays and Fridays. (Kaitlin McKeown/Virginia Media)

**FEEDBACK**

A better-than-expected budgetary briefing Saturday prompted several Norfolk City Council members to ask why the city isn't using millions of dollars it had left over last year to reopen libraries and recreation centers.

Hefty budget cuts — which included shuttering libraries and rec centers for an indefinite period and laying off or furloughing staff — combined with better-than-expected tax revenues meant that the city ended the last fiscal year in July with \$3.6 million on hand, budget director Greg Patrick told the council during its retreat Saturday.

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00:32

10:45

Patrick also said new projections indicate the city might finish the current year with around \$2.5 million more than it expected when it made its budget in the spring while in the early throes of the pandemic.

But that current-year surplus could evaporate with even a tiny change, Patrick warned.

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unexpected expenses.

But that didn't sit well with a few council members who thought it would be better to pump that money back into services for the city's residents, such as reopening some closed facilities.

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00:39

02:04

FEEDBACK

Andria McClellan said she's had a hard time answering questions from her constituents about why Norfolk's libraries and rec centers remain largely closed while those kinds of facilities have opened in other cities.

"We haven't touched our economic downturn reserve. If this isn't an economic downturn, I don't know what is," McClellan said.

Councilman Tommy Smigiel, noting that \$3.6 million is equivalent to a 2-cent hike on real estate tax rates, agreed with McClellan. He said he wanted to see money go back into public-facing services like libraries and roads.

"I'd rather (taxpayers) see this money," he said. "They don't want to see it stored

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The budget director and the city manager pushed back against the idea of using the money to fund an ongoing expense like the operation of a library.

They warned that if Norfolk funds ongoing expenses — like opening libraries and bringing back staff — this year, the city will be back in the same position next year, trying to figure out how to pay for continuing costs once the \$3.6 million pot of money is gone.

“I cannot entertain any conversations about bringing furloughed employees back, because that’s ongoing,” Filer said. However, he said a one-time project like resurfacing a road could be funded with that money without putting pressure on future budgets.

Councilman Martin Thomas echoed those concerns, saying the best thing to do in the long term is to save the money to keep from endangering things like the city’s bond rating, which would cost Norfolk in the long-run in the form of higher interest rates.

FEEDBACK

LATEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

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1h

After deep budget cuts, Norfolk has ended up with a surplus of money. So why are the libraries and rec centers still closed?

NOV 17, 2020

Ultimately, nothing was decided. Filer said he would come back to council with some ideas on how to use some or all of the money on one-time projects.

The presentation Saturday also forecast more budget issues on the horizon. With the current level of services, Patrick said the city would need \$22 million more in revenue

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investigation into allegations of mismanagement

NOV 17, 2020

Norfolk councilwoman Angelia Williams Graves running for open state delegate seat

NOV 16, 2020

Charges dismissed against state Sen. Louise Lucas, all others in vandalism of Portsmouth's Confederate monument

NOV 16, 2020

If the city expected to fully reopen all facilities, it would be even more.

“This is a heavy piece of reality,” Filer told the council.

Ryan Murphy, 757-739-8582, [ryan.murphy@pilotonline.com](mailto:ryan.murphy@pilotonline.com)

FEEDBACK



Ryan Murphy



Ryan Murphy covers the city of Norfolk. He is a native of Hampton Roads and spent 3½ years at the Daily Press in Newport News before coming to the Pilot in January 2017.

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## LOCAL NEWS

# Proposed school merger between Alleghany County and Covington goes before state education board

Board set to make decision about merger early next year

**Annie Schroeder**, Reporter

Published: **November 19, 2020, 7:52 pm**

Tags: **Covington, Alleghany County, Schools**



**COVINGTON, Va.** – School leaders with Alleghany County and the City of Covington made their first case for a proposed merger to the Virginia Department of Education Board Thursday.

Earlier this year the plans were approved by the localities. Top state educators had questions about how division leaders plan on transitioning their students who may be on different levels of learning.

“Both school divisions have always had academic excellence as their goal and have worked hard to provide an outstanding education for our students and that is the goal for this combined school division is to offer more opportunities to our students,” Covington superintendent Melinda Snead-Johnson said.

The department of education is set to discuss the merger again at one of its meetings in January.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



### [Annie Schroeder](#)

Annie Schroeder joined the 10 News team as a reporter in June 2020 and is no stranger to Southwest Virginia.

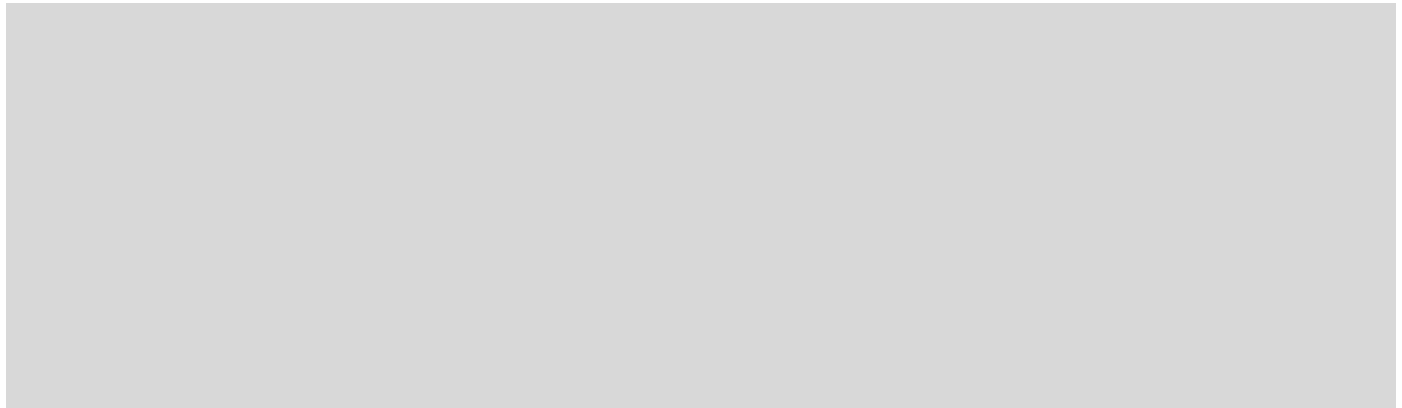
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HEALTH & MEDICINE NEWS

# An eviction 'tsunami' in Virginia could be coming after the new year, advocates

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Ricky Johnson, 67, of Virginia Beach poses for a portrait outside his home at a trailer park in Virginia Beach on Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2020. Johnson, a Vietnam veteran, was almost evicted last week after being unable to pay rent due to COVID-19, but was able to convince a judge to halt the eviction and have United Way cover the back rent. (Hannah Ruhoff / The Virginian-Pilot)

**FEEDBACK**

**VIRGINIA BEACH —** Ricky Johnson was on the fast track to living on the streets for Thanksgiving, during the worst part of the worst pandemic in more than a century.

Johnson, a 67-year-old Vietnam vet, has lived in his mobile home for seven years and never had a problem making rent. Until the coronavirus. He still gets his Army pension and disability money, and so does Mike, his brother and roommate. But people are afraid of letting strangers into their home, so the odd jobs Ricky Johnson used to do to make ends meet, such as house repairs and renovations, have dried up.

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FEEDBACK

Now the Johnson brothers are \$2,600 behind, and their landlord is suing to evict them.

They're but two of thousands of Virginians facing eviction as an economy crippled by COVID-19 squeezes landlords and tenants alike. Since the spring, the state and federal governments have stepped in, giving people money to cover rent and, in some cases, blocking landlords from evicting them. Housing advocates lauded those measures but say they won't be enough to stave off a looming eviction crisis they say

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“The tsunami is brewing,” said Christie Marra, director of housing advocacy for the nonprofit Virginia Poverty Law Center. “We are in the middle of a pandemic that you can only be secure from if you stay home.”

Even before the pandemic, eviction rates in Virginia are among the highest in the nation, according to 2016 data released by Princeton University’s Eviction Lab in 2018. Four Hampton Roads cities — Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk and Chesapeake — were ranked in the top 10 in the country among large cities. Virginia Beach was No. 15.

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FEEDBACK

But eviction lawsuits plummeted during the pandemic when the state Supreme Court declared a “judicial emergency,” ordering non-essential, non-emergency court proceedings be postponed, according to Virginia Court Data, a private group that makes case records searchable statewide since the state court system doesn’t.

Eviction lawsuits have increased each of the past three months, although they’re still well below normal, according to the group’s data.

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banned many evictions, so long as tenant signed an affidavit under penalty of perjury swearing they couldn't pay rent or had lost money during the pandemic. That moratorium expires on Dec. 31, a deadline that led state lawmakers to step in.

The most recent protections came last week when Gov. Ralph Northam announced that, starting Jan. 1, landlords would have to give their tenants 14 days notice before suing to evict them, instead of the normal five days. Plus, the new law forces landlords, not tenants, to take on the burden of applying for state money that can be used to cover back rent before trying to evict.

That's key, housing advocates say, because landlords' applications to the Virginia Rent and Mortgage Relief Program are getting processed much faster than renters'.

Patrick McCloud, CEO of the Virginia Apartment Management Association, said many of the landlords he represents are doing that already. But, he added, the government shouldn't be forcing them to because they're not the ones who owe money.

FEEDBACK

## 'When the money runs out'

The new state protections will only exist as long as there's taxpayer money for rent. Once that runs out, the protections evaporate and landlords can, in effect, evict tenants as they normally would.

And renters are gobbling up the pool of rent money faster than ever. Officials had paid out \$23.9 million to people for their rent through Nov. 4, according to the most recent data from the state Department of Housing and Community Development.

That's about 80% of the roughly \$60 million in the federal CARES Act program state

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But payments through the Rent and Mortgage Relief Program have increased exponentially as state and local government officials have worked out kinks and staffed up. In July, the first month of the program, state officials gave out \$1.4 million to cover back rent and mortgages. In a recent month-span of the program, they gave out \$9.6 million.

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There's a \$30 million pot of federal money that doesn't have to be spent by the end of the year, the Virginia Poverty Law Center's Marra said, and lawmakers in Richmond allocated another \$12.5 million in state money that can also be used into 2021. Still, Marra said, \$42 million won't be nearly enough to cover the need, which she thinks will last for two years as the country deals with the pandemic and the economy slowly recovers.

FEEDBACK

"I'm very, very worried about what's going to happen when the money runs out."

Thaler McCormick heads ForKids, one of some 30 organizations across the state determining whether applications are eligible for the CARES Act rent bailouts. ForKids, a Norfolk-based nonprofit that provides homeless services, assesses applications from Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Chesapeake and Suffolk.

Through Nov. 20, ForKids has paid out \$3.4 million to 900 households, out of the

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completion. On average, ForKids pays an  
McCormick thinks that money has, in effect, already been spoken for.

And the need keeps coming. ForKids received 6,659 calls to its housing crisis hotline in October of last year. This October, that number nearly doubled, to 12,724. McCormick said there are no signs of slowing.

McCloud, with the apartment management group, said he thinks the current pot of money is enough to get landlords and tenants through the next few months. By then, the market will have had a chance to correct itself, through a rebounding economy, renters seeking out apartments that cost less, or both.

But, McCloud added, he doesn't think there's a growing tinderbox of delinquent renters waiting to explode into an eviction crisis. He heard those predictions in the spring, and then in the summer. The dire warnings never materialized into an explosion. McCloud said the vast majority — some 90% — of renters at “professionally managed properties” are paying and caught up on their rent, only a slight decrease from pre-pandemic levels.

But those statistics only cover a certain type of landlord, those who tend to own fewer properties and care about their tenants, Marra said. What McCloud's numbers don't cover are slumlords or out-of-state companies with hundreds, or thousands, of units. The latter use automated systems that mindlessly send out legal notices and file eviction suits without trying to work with their tenants.

“Then the tsunami happens because the machine keeps going,” she said.

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## 'Don't give up'

It looked as if Ricky Johnson would get caught in the path of that wave when his landlord, Rhema Associates Inc., sued him and his brother last month in Virginia Beach General District Court, one of the first steps property owners have to take to evict tenants. On Nov. 10, the company won its case when a judge awarded them possession of the property.

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That cleared the way for Rhema Associates, a property management company, to have the Virginia Beach sheriff physically kick the Johnsons out of their home, which was supposed to happen Nov. 20, Ricky said.

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## judge to vacate a previous ruling and con

So they have a home through the holidays. Johnson said the brothers, who have been roommates for years, had no backup plan and probably would have been homeless and living on the streets had they been evicted.

On Wednesday, a man who answered the phone at Rhema Associates identified himself as a property manager and said the company hadn't tried to evict Johnson. When he was told court records showed the company had filed an eviction lawsuit against him and his brother on Oct. 21, the man admitted that was true. But, he added, the company had since set up a payment plan with Johnson and that "we're all good." When asked for his name, the man hung up.

Johnson's neighbor, Malerie Malone, said Rhema is lying. There is no payment plan and never was. Malone, whose landlord is also Rhema, has been helping the Johnson brothers fight eviction as well as get food stamps and government money for gas as the pandemic has taken its toll. She went to their two court hearings and even addressed the judge when Ricky couldn't read the papers he'd brought to court because he didn't have his glasses.

What actually happened, Malone said, was the judge reversed the earlier court decision awarding possession of the apartment to Rhema, citing the new state protections enacted by the governor the day before. Moreover, the United Way of South Hampton Roads agreed to pay the Johnsons' back rent, plus what they owe through November.

FEEDBACK

### LATEST

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NOV 29, 2020

An eviction 'tsunami' in Virginia could be coming after the new year, advocates

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NOV 28, 2020

## How Virginia is trying to help residents affected by the coronavirus pandemic

NOV 26, 2020

## EVMS leaders fear Sentara is trying to force the school to merge with ODU, emails show

NOV 25, 2020

Malone said she wants other people facing eviction to know they have tools they can use to fight getting thrown out on the streets. When she was in court with the Johnsons, she noticed that so many people don't know there are protections, and the judges either don't know about them or don't bring them up before siding with landlords.

"Don't give up. Don't go down without a fight," she said.

Marra said she hopes the pandemic and resultant recession teaches us to treat housing not as just another good, like a TV or even a car. Human beings are entitled to have a roof over their head, a home.

"Housing isn't a commodity, right? Housing is a human need."

*Jonathan Edwards, 757-739-7180, [jonathan.edwards@pilotonline.com](mailto:jonathan.edwards@pilotonline.com)*

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Jonathan Edwards



Jonathan Edwards covers the Norfolk justice system. He was a Livingston Awards for Young Journalists finalist in 2018, and has won numerous state awards covering public safety. He joined The Pilot in 2015 and previously worked at the Lincoln Journal Star in Nebraska. He

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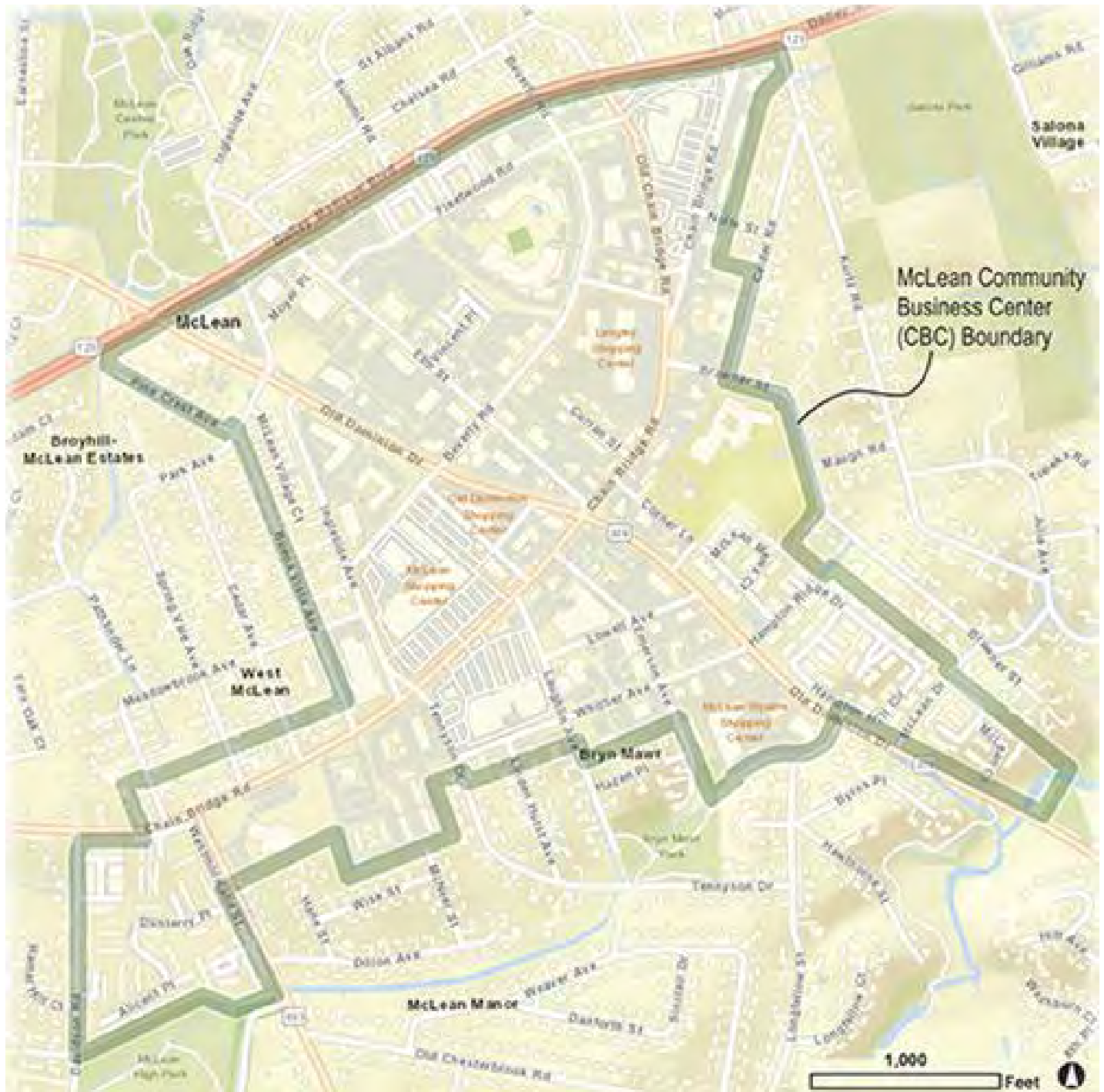
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## City status for McLean? One civic group wants to take a look


by BRIAN TROMPETER, Sun Gazette Newspapers  
Dec 9, 2020



Map shows boundaries of the McLean central business district. (Fairfax County government)

It wouldn't be easy, inexpensive or likely politically popular with Fairfax County officials, but McLean Citizens Association (MCA) board members said Dec. 2 they would like to explore the idea of making McLean a city.

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The state law that for more than three decades has prohibited the incorporation of new cities, expires in 2024. MCA president Robert Jackson broached the topic of whether McLean might want to separate from Fairfax County after that expiration date.

Jackson suggested, and the board concurred, that MCA in January should form a community-wide committee to examine the feasibility and desirability of doing so. The Virginia Commission on Local Government may be able to assist in that effort, he added.

“I know a lot of people sometimes – and I’m one of them – feel that Fairfax County’s just so big that it’s hard for the county government to be responsive to various communities in the county,” he said. “There [are] issues of some frustration. It’s not that we expect to get our way all of the time, but there have been some issues raised.”

Recent topics of concern among McLean residents have included planning efforts for the Community Business Center, McLean High School overcrowding and lack of trail and street maintenance by the Virginia Department of Transportation, Jackson said.



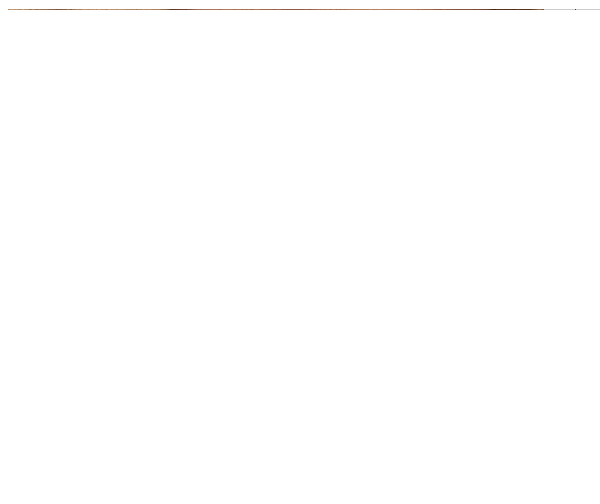
Becoming a city by no means would be a free endeavor for McLean, which would have to implement its own governmental structure – complete with mayor/council, police, parks, schools, etc. – and a tax structure to support it, Jackson said.

“The costs would have to be examined, as well as what some benefits are,” he said. “I can’t imagine this would be a way to reduce taxes. It’s more of a control-your-own-destiny thing.”

The current statute against forming cities has been on the books since 1987, when state legislators limited cities’ ability to expand their territories, said MCA board member Merrily Pierce. McLean residents have mulled achieving city status for decades, she said.

Cities have more authorities than counties, although the latter caught up somewhat this year with legislation passed by the General Assembly.

Towns in Virginia are parts of counties, but have an additional layer of government to provide extra levels of service. Town residents pay taxes not only to their locality, but to the surrounding county as well.



That arrangement allows towns to let counties shoulder the administrative burden of services that are too large (e.g., school systems) or too expensive and specialized (e.g., police helicopter, SWAT and K-9 units) for small localities to consider.

Unique among the 50 states, Virginia’s cities are independent entities and provide their own services. Some, however, have contractual arrangements with their surrounding counties for some services.

The town of Fairfax became a city in 1961 and since 1962 has had a partnership with Fairfax County Public Schools in which the latter provides staffing, curriculum, transportation and meals, while the city must manage, renovate and provide capital improvements at the four city-owned school buildings.

The town of Falls Church became a city independent of Fairfax County in 1948, and its school system became a separate entity the following year.

Both the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park separated from Prince William County in 1975. By contrast, Alexandria became an independent city in 1870, splitting from Alexandria County (renamed Arlington County in 1920).

MCA board member Martin Smith said he supported efforts to investigate forming a city of McLean.

“There are a lot of angles to it, but that’s why we start early, right?” Smith said. “I think it’s a great idea to at least look at it.”

McLean residents would have to file a lawsuit with the state to start the process – assuming the General Assembly does not change the law before it expires, Jackson said.

That prospect worried board member David Fiske, who said Fairfax County officials might lobby against the proposal if MCA started its efforts too soon.

Tyson's residents – some of whom belong to MCA – also might want to see that urban center break away from the county, MCA members said.

The thought of losing both McLean, with its high-value real estate, and Tysons, with its massive revenue-generating presence, might give county financial officials heart palpitations.

“I would think that this is going to scare the bejesus out of the county supervisors when they get wind of it, because it would be a significant portion of revenues of the county,” said Jim Beggs, who chairs MCA’s Education and Youth Committee.

Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville), a McLean resident and former MCA president, said it’s highly unlikely McLean ever would become a city. Fairfax County officials years ago entertained the idea of pursuing city status, but discovered the cost of doing so – especially taking over VDOT’s responsibilities – would be exorbitant.

“It’s going to play itself out as it should,” he said of MCA’s city proposal.

Most people who live in Fairfax County do so to enjoy its excellent services, current pandemic-related hiccups with the school system notwithstanding, Foust said.

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# Hampton Roads Planning District Commission offers relief funds for past-due utility bills

By MAGGIE MORE  
VIRGINIA GAZETTE | DEC 21, 2020



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Because a farmhouse sink isn't designed with faucet holes, the faucet and sprayer need to be installed on the counter behind it. (BestReviews)

Hampton Roads residents and business owners with past-due utility bills can now apply for assistance in funding, according to a news release from the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission.

Through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act and a statewide Municipal Utility Relief Program, there are already utility relief funds available in Chesapeake, Hampton, James City, Newport News, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg and York.

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To qualify for the funds, the residents or businesses must have “overdue direct charges” that occurred between March 1 and Dec. 30. Residents applying must certify that they experienced difficulties related to COVID-19 that affected their ability to pay the bills.

Those difficulties include layoffs, job losses due to employment closings, reduced hours, loss of child support or having to stay home to care for children for reasons related to the pandemic, the release states.

Those who contracted COVID-19 and had to stop working, those who cannot find work due to the pandemic, and those who are at high risk of illness and could not go into work, also all qualify to apply for the funds, according to the release.

The utility relief only applies to water and wastewater/sewage bills, not other utilities such as heating or electricity.

“We are urging qualifying Hampton Roads residents and small business owners to apply for this funding today, not tomorrow,” Edward G. Henifin, general manager of [Hampton Roads Sanitation District](#), said in the release. “The process is quick and easy, but the funds are only available for a limited time.”

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According to the release, “local utilities will provide assistance to residents and businesses with COVID-related overdue balances until Jan. 27, 2021, or until the funding runs out.” There is compiled information for each locality at [hrutilityrelief.com](#), the release states.

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James City County did not list a deadline other than the general HRPDC deadline of Jan. 27. Residents can go to [www.jamescitycountyva.gov/jcsa](http://www.jamescitycountyva.gov/jcsa), email [jcsa@jamescitycountyva.gov](mailto:jcsa@jamescitycountyva.gov) or call 757-259-5416 to contact Sarah Darber from the James City Service Authority about funds.

**Williamsburg residents** must fill out an intake certification form, available online at [www.williamsburgva.gov/utilityrelief](http://www.williamsburgva.gov/utilityrelief) or in-person at the Municipal Building, 401 Lafayette St., Williamsburg. The form must be returned to the city by Jan. 13, and can be submitted via email to [water@williamsburgva.gov](mailto:water@williamsburgva.gov), mailed to the Municipal Building, or placed in the drop-box outside of the Municipal Building.

York County residents must apply by Jan. 11, and can email [utility@yorkcounty.gov](mailto:utility@yorkcounty.gov) or call 757-890-3702 to contact York County Utility Billing.

Newport News Waterworks customers living in James City and York counties can contact [www.nnva.gov/waterworks](http://www.nnva.gov/waterworks), email [wwcs@nnva.gov](mailto:wwcs@nnva.gov) or call 757-926-1000.

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Poquoson residents must apply by Jan. 14, Virginia Beach residents by Jan. 17, Chesapeake residents by Jan. 20 and Suffolk, Portsmouth, Newport News and Hampton residents by Jan. 22.

More information about Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach utility relief programs is available at [hrutilityrelief.com](http://hrutilityrelief.com).

Though information is not currently listed on the website, the HRPDC states that residents of Franklin, Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Smithfield, Southampton and Surry can check back for more information on water and wastewater utility relief as it becomes available.

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“The application process is simple and requires little time and documentation,” said Whitney Katchmark, a principal water resources engineer with the HRPDC, in the release. “We want residents to take advantage of this relief program now because once the funds are gone, they’re gone.”

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Maggie More



Maggie More is an intern with The Virginia Gazette and covers anything the newspaper will let her cover, but she especially loves stories about community and science. She graduated from William & Mary in 2020, where she was Digital Media Editor for the Flat Hat. She enjoys movies, most books and really bad puns.

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