

The Hon. Judge David Williams, retired chief judge of the 21st Judicial Circuit, is enjoying retirement after a 42-year legal career, including 30 years spent on the bench. Williams became a judge at the age of 35 and retired at 67.

Fairness, honesty, and a little bit of grace: revered judge looks back on his career

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

After more than 30 years on the bench, David Williams retired as the judge of the Henry County Circuit Court in February.

A Henry County native, Williams, now 67, did not set out to pursue a career in the field. However, he worked as a lawyer, prosecutor, then judge, and even oversaw the construction of a new county courthouse.

After graduating from Drewry Mason High School, he spent two years at what is now Patrick & Henry Community College before going to Virginia Tech, where he earned a degree in psychology.

Initially, Williams said he intended to pursue a post-graduate degree in psychology and even applied for a program. Then he took the LSAT, “and it turned out my LSAT score was considerably higher” than his psychology score. So, he decided to go to law

school, and enrolled at Campbell University in North Carolina.

“The folks at Campbell were very kind to me,” Williams recalled. They gave me a nice scholarship.”

After graduating, Williams returned to the area, living with his grandmother as he searched for a job. He applied for a position as an assistant commonwealth’s attorney at the Martinsville office, but several months passed and he did not receive a reply.

One day, Williams recalled going to a local restaurant to pick up some chicken. There, he had a chance encounter with Randy Smith who was then-Commonwealth’s Attorney John Marley’s assistant. Smith informed Williams that, after his interview, “We decided to hire you on the spot. I just haven’t sent the letter out yet.”

Williams said he returned to his grandmother’s house with

See **Fairness**, page 7

County challenged on lack of diversity, transparency in leadership selection

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

When Dale Wagoner becomes the next Henry County Administrator, he will be another in a succession of white men who have held the job.

Wagoner, like other county administrators before him, was appointed internally to the position and without a public application process. He will take over the position later this year, following the retirement of current County Administrator Tim Hall effective July 1. Hall has served in his current role since 2012.

At its March 22 meeting, the Henry County Board of Supervisors heard from Joyce Staples, a resident of the Blackberry District, who said she spoke on behalf of “leaders and concerned citizens in the African American community” and challenged the county on its selection and appointment process for those in leadership roles.

Staples began her presentation by clarifying that her words were “not meant as a personal attack on any individual” but

rather “intended to put a spotlight on an inequitable and unjust structure currently in operation within Henry County,” in the spirit of continuing to evolve and grow as a community.

“We want to convey our disappointment, not with the appointment of Mr. Wagoner, but with the process that led to the appointment,” she said, and added, “there is a certain reputational risk associated with me speaking this evening, but because we strongly believe the process is flawed, we say enough is enough and choose to speak out.”

She said that, in the last 20 years, the county administrator position has been open on three different occasions. “Each time, it has been filled from within the organization, by a white male with no announcements, job postings, or a single advertisement.”

While “leadership would argue they chose the best man for the job on each occasion, and that may be true, with such a closed and secret process, how can they

See **County**, page 3

Pay raises, decreased school funding, meals tax hike proposed in county budget

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

The Henry County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday received a proposed budget for fiscal year (FY) 2022-2023 which included pay raises for teachers and county employees, full funding of operational requests from the school system, and a 2 percent increase in the meals tax.

This year’s budget was “especially difficult,” Henry County Administrator Tim Hall said. “We’re taking some chances here.” He presented the proposal on behalf of the budget team which included Deputy County Administrator Dale Wagoner, Director of Finance Darrell Jones, Deputy Director of Finance Richard Stanfield, and Director of Human Resources Michelle Via. The team, Hall said, also consulted with department heads and constitutional officers when crafting the budget.

When the budget process began at the beginning of the year, Hall said the county was \$13 million

out of balance, a situation he called “ulcer-inducing.” However, a \$3 million increase in local revenues, due mainly to increases in sales and meal tax revenues as well as an additional \$3 million which will come from the Compensation Board, helped to close the gap. Ultimately, Hall said, he was presenting the board with a balanced budget.

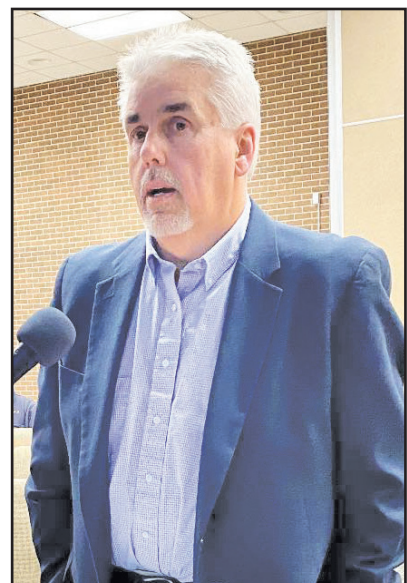
The recommended advertised budget for FY22-23 is \$18,921,961, a 13.1 percent (or \$22,084,555) increase over the current year budget of \$167,837,406.

Hall said the “vast majority” of the increase was due to a hike in funding requests from the school division and from the sheriff’s office.

School funding

“Our biggest cost center is education,” Hall told the board. The school board’s budget request, Hall said, seeks total local contribution of \$20,321,619, an increase of \$947,842 over the current fiscal year. Rather than increasing the local funding, however, the county

See **Pay Raises**, page 8



Henry County Administrator Tim Hall told the board that this year’s proposed budget included no new capital, which he noted could be a “recipe for disaster.” It also does not include any costs associated with reversion, outside of a proposed increase in the board’s professional legal category.

Magna Vista students create news network



The founders of Magna Vista Network (MVN), Aniya Penn (far left), Kolby Davis, Alaynah Koger, and Jaydon Carter, all seniors at Magna Vista High School, spoke to the Henry County School Board on April 7 about the creation of their student news network and the various ways they share important information with their peers.

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

Four students at Magna Vista High School found a creative way to share and discuss important topics with their peers. Since 2019, the group has worked to develop an entirely student-run news network, Magna Vista Network (MVN), which includes a podcast, a newsletter, and a YouTube channel.

Alaynah Koger, Jaydon Carter, Kolby Davis, and Aniya Penn, all seniors, began MVN—then called Magna Vista TV, or MVTV—during their sophomore year.

“It’s all student created, curated, edited, everything,” said Magna Vista Instructional Resource Technology Teacher Arrica Agee. “They do it all. They’re so motivated and self-driven. They’re just awesome people. All four of them are leaders, and they’re going to go far in life.”

Agee said that, because of the

group’s age, their opinions tend to be dismissed. People think “because they’re high schoolers, they don’t have an educated opinion, but I beg to differ. These guys are more well-educated on these issues than a lot of adults that are giving their opinion on national platforms, and no one ever asks their opinion.”

Penn covers special events. “I relay positive messages to our student body and I am in charge of the 701 Magna Vista Network cartoon,” she said.

Davis said he covers weekly weather and hosts the network’s podcast, “What’s the Issue?” as well as doing other work, including research, to help further MVN.

Koger said she writes and edits the network’s articles, does daily announcements, and is in charge of communications.

Carter said he primarily works behind the camera, creates graphics, and is in charge of maintaining the network’s website.

Carter explained that the idea for the network came about because it was difficult to hear the school’s morning and afternoon announcements. The group took the idea of MVTV to their principal who, Carter said, loved the idea.

“We started recording on our phones,” he said, editing the material on school laptops and posting it to the TVs in the school cafeteria. Eventually, the school purchased the group a camera.

“Once COVID hit, we weren’t able to do that anymore because all of our content was broadcast in the school and nobody was in the school,” Koger said. “We decided we needed to make our content more accessible if we wanted to continue with this idea.”

The group then decided to start a website, and MVN was born.

“They talk about issues they’re concerned about,” Agee said. “Really

See **Magna Vista**, page 4

Proposed budget holds the line on PSA rates

Callie Hietala
Staff writer

The Henry County Public Service Authority (PSA) is on track to go an entire decade without increasing rates, should it approve the budget presented by PSA General Manager and County Administrator Tim Hall. The proposed spending plan does not include a rate increase for the 2022-23 fiscal year.

“Staff is not recommending any adjustment to PSA rates for the next fiscal year,” Hall said. “However, we do think it’s a good idea to proceed with a rate study.”

Currently, residential

users are charged \$30 per month, and non-residential users \$45 per month, based on 4,000 gallons per month. Institutional users are charged \$65 per month based on 6,000 gallons a month.

As Hall noted, the current rates place the county in the middle, if not below, the state average.

Hall recommended a rate study in the coming year so that data would be available should the PSA need to increase rates in the future.

“Things can move quickly,” Hall said, “as we have seen in the last 6- or 8-months. The team that put this together recom-

mends you go ahead and budget for that, and proceed with that just so you can have the data available should you have to do it quickly. It’s better to have that information at your fingertips than to have to go out and find it when you need it.”

The last rate study, according to the budget document, was completed in 2013, “and clearly, we’ve done an extraordinary job in managing our business since then. But costs continue to rise, and adjustments in revenue should be considered,” Hall said.

Gerry Lawicki, chairman of the PSA board, asked if the low rates exclude the agency from

certain federal projects.

“They probably would be if we pursue those. We’ve had that before. We have been told in conversation with some folks that that could be a drawback if we want to borrow money,” Hall said. “The people that loan you money want

See **PSA rates**, page 3



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

(Event information/calendar items must be received by 5 p.m. on the Tuesday before the desired publication date. Email to newsreporter@theenterprise.net)

Saturday, April 23

Piedmont Arts is hosting Earth Day Family Day from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. at the Gravely-Lester Art Garden (207 Starling Avenue, Martinsville.) Celebrate Earth Day with this fun family day for all ages. Visitors will create crafts using recycled materials and complimentary snacks will be provided.

Join the Virginia Museum of Natural History from 6:30-10 p.m. for its annual Grapes and Grains fundraiser. The evening will include wine and whiskey tastings, a menu of heavy hors d'oeuvres, music, and a silent auction.

Infinity Acres Ranch (136 Joppa Road, Ridgeway) is hosting the Infinity 5K Ranch Run. Participants will race around the ranch. There is also a 1-mile and done run for those who want to spend more time visiting with animals on the ranch. For more information or to register, visit InfinityAcres.org or call (276) 358-2378.

The Spencer-Penn Centre is hosting its 11th annual Pig Cookin' Competition from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. This free event includes a barnival, vendors, cruise-in, silent auction, and more. BBQ will be available for purchase. Contact the Centre at (276) 957-5757 with any questions.

Household Hazardous Waste Day will be held from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. at 2285 Fairystone Park Highway. This service is free to all residents of Martinsville and Henry County. Items to bring include solvents (paint thinner, turpentine, etc.), paints, fuels, lead acid batteries, cell phones, printer cartridges, and similar items.

The Martinsville-Henry County SPCA (132 Joseph Martin Highway, Martinsville) will host a Kitten Shower from 12-4 p.m. The SPCA conference room will be open for donation drop-off. Those interested in helping also can visit the SPCA's Amazon wish list for easy online shopping: <https://www.spcamhc.org/donate/spca-wish-list>.

Sunday, April 24

In honor of Garden Week, join Sue Rosser, Restoration Committee liaison of the Garden Club of Virginia, for a special presentation, "Restorations of the Garden Club of Virginia" at the historic Henry County Courthouse (1 East Main Street, Martinsville). This talk is free and open to the public.

Wednesday, April 27

The American Red Cross is hosting a blood drive at the Martinsville Elks Lodge (300 Fairy Street Ext., Martinsville) from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. To schedule a donation, visit redcrossblood.org.

Thursday, April 28

Join Magna Vista Agriculture for its Spring Agriculture Festival from 4-7 p.m. at Magna Vista High School's greenhouse, garden, and barn. Attendees will enjoy a petting zoo, games, prizes, raffles, plant sales, and local vendors. Palumbo's Hoagie House will be on hand serving food. Admission is \$5 and children under 4 are free. Proceeds support Magna Vista's agriculture program.

Friday, April 29

Patrick & Henry Community College will host a diversity, equity, and inclusion forum in the Frith Exhibit Hall on the P&HCC campus. Participants will engage in healthy dialogue in a facilitated discussion about diversity, equity, and inclusion. The forum will take place from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. and lunch is included. The cost is \$100. To register, visit ph.augusoft.net or call (276) 656-0260.

Kick back in the Art Garden at Piedmont Arts (207 Starling Avenue, Martinsville) for the museum's annual Garden Party. The all-female trio After Jack will perform folk songs from the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Bring a lawn chair or blanket for seating. Tickets available at PiedmontArts.org.

It's story time with Dreama at the Spencer-Penn Centre (475 Spencer-Penn Road, Spencer.) The fun begins at 11 a.m. in the Hylton Library. This week's story time theme is April Showers Bring...

Friday, April 29 through Sunday, May 1

Tickets are available at the SPCA for the Belk Charity Sale. Tickets are \$5 each and are redeemable at Belk for \$5 off your purchase with an extra 25 percent off April 29-May 1 only. The \$5 purchase is given directly to the SPCA.

Saturday, April 30

The Blackberry Baptist Church (3241 Stones Dairy Road, Bassett) is hosting a cruise in from 8:30 a.m. until 12 p.m. Breakfast will be provided at the church.

The Charity League of Martinsville and Henry County

is hosting a Spring Fling fundraiser at the Smith River Sports Complex (1000 Irisburg Road, Axton) to help raise money for area youth. Live music by Riggs Roberson & Co., food trucks, vendors, petting zoo, children's activities, and more! Adult tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door. Children under 12 are admitted free! Contact a Charity League member for tickets or message the Charity League on Facebook.

Saturday, May 21

The Martinsville-Henry County SPCA will be at Petsense in Martinsville from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. for an adoption event. Come meet some of the furry friends available for adoption from the shelter!

ONGOING

The Magna Vista Horticulture Spring Plant Sale is open. Weekday hours are 9-3 p.m., and some additional hours will be held. For complete information, sales, and additional hours, visit the Magna Vista Horticulture Facebook page.

The Louise R. Lester Spay/Neuter Clinic is hosting wellness clinics every Tuesday. Clinics are by appointment only—no walk-ins will be accepted. Call (276) 638-7297 to schedule your appointment. Beginning in April, the clinics will be held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, rather than weekly.

Henry County Parks & Recreation invites you out for a trek along the trail. Meet as a group and walk along a different trail each week. Explore the trails of Martinsville-Henry County, make new friends, and get some fresh air and exercise. Call the HCPR Senior Services office at (276) 634-4644 to find out where the week's trek

is happening. Trail Trekkers meet Thursday of each week (weather permitting) at 1 p.m. in the fall and winter and 9:15 a.m. in spring and summer.

The Blue Ridge Regional Library offers free one-day passes to the Virginia Museum of Natural History and the Henry County YMCA with your library card. The passes are good for one day and exclude special events. There is a wait period before you can check out the pass again. For more details and exclusions, visit brrl.lib.va.us.

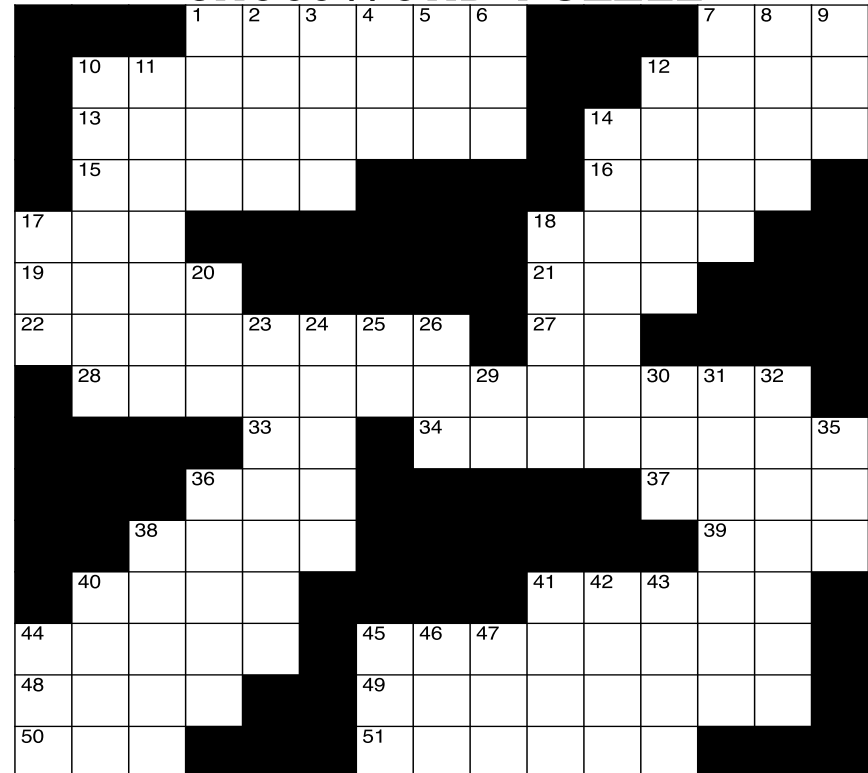
The Fontaine Ruritan Club hosts Bingo every Tuesday at 1903 Joseph Martin Highway, Martinsville. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and games begin at 7. Money from Bingo supports community service awards, scholarships, and other community efforts.

MHC Coalition for Health and Wellness offers no contact Medicaid application assistance for eligible Virginia residents from birth to 64 years of age. No sign-up fees, no premiums, no deductibles. Including Children's Medicaid/FAMIS, Pregnancy Medicaid and Adult Health Care -19 to 64 years old. Questions can be answered, and applications completed by phone. In-person application assistance is available from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Thursdays at The Community Storehouse.

Call or text Ann Walker 276 732-0509 to see if you qualify.

The Henry County Adult Learning Center offers free in-house and online classes to help prepare for college, career, or earn your high school equivalency or GED. Classes can help improve your digital literacy, job skills, English language skills, and earning potential. Contact the Center for Community Learning (15 Primary School Road, Collinsville) at (276) 647-9585.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| CLUES ACROSS | gate police (abbr.) | CLUES DOWN | 25. One's mother |
| 1. A woman of refinement | 34. Begrudged | 1. Inspiration | 26. To do it is human |
| 7. Body part | 36. Popular sports league | 2. Resembling wings | 29. Atomic #10 |
| 10. One who imitates | 37. Autonomous republic of Russia | 3. Form of Persian | 30. Used to write |
| 12. Tropical Asian starlings | 38. Double-headed drum | 4. Consumed | 31. The branch of medicine concerned with the ear |
| 13. A type of delivery | 39. Type of light bulb | 5. Extinct flightless bird of New Zealand | 32. Adversaries |
| 14. W. Australian capital | 40. Czech River | 6. Sea eagle | 35. Have already done |
| 15. Many wombs | 41. Male servants (Span.) | 7. Jaguarundis | 36. One of conspicuous wealth |
| 16. Wings | 44. Previously | 8. Poker stake | 38. It flies over sporting events |
| 17. Expression of amusement | 45. Minor | 9. Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! | 40. Geological times |
| 18. Brews | 48. Metrical foot | 10. South American nation | 41. Net |
| 19. Mild yellow Dutch cheese | 49. Days that follow Mondays | 11. A colorless, odorless gas | 42. Musical phrase |
| 21. Mild expression | 50. Small European viper | 12. Disturbance | 43. Chadic dialect |
| 22. Solitary | 51. News shows have one | 14. Artist's tool | 44. Private Internet Access (abbr.) |
| 27. Distance to top | | 17. Polish peninsula | 45. Lizard genus |
| 28. The rebirth of a soul in a new body | | 18. Ottoman military leaders | 46. Woman of the church |
| 33. Police who investi- | | 20. Bird-like dinosaur | 47. Having ten |
| | | 23. Drinking glass | |
| | | 24. Central Florida city | |

WEDDING

Willard – Ruimerman



Kimberlie Willard and Andrew Ruimerman were married April 9, 2022, on the ridge at Glenburn Farms in Vinton, VA.

Chris Karol officiated the ceremony. The bride is the daughter of Larry and Pam Willard of Bassett, VA. The bridegroom is the son of Tom Ruimerman and Janet Weidner of Chilmark, MA.

The bride was escorted by her father. She wore an ivory Omelie Bridal Pandora gown trimmed with beads and lace. Her hair was adorned with her mother's hair comb and the cathedral veil complemented the train of her gown. Her jewelry consisted of pearl earrings along with a pearl bracelet given to her by the groom. She carried a bouquet of Gerbera Daisies and Roses.

A reception followed inside at The Braeloch which is surrounded by beautiful mountain views. After the couple's introduction and first dance, the bride changed into a vintage going away dress and the newlyweds left for Florida.

The bride and groom are graduates of Roanoke College. The couple initially met at the college campus in 2016 and were engaged on February 13, 2021. They celebrated their engagement at Hamlet Vineyards, VA.

The bride is an insurance agent at Willard Insurance Agency Inc. located in Rocky Mount, Virginia.

The groom is employed by Cardinal Logistics as the Senior Operations Coordinator at the Rocky Mount, Virginia location.

The couple reside in Rocky Mount, Virginia.

Submit your community

news and photos to

newsreporter@theenterprise.net

PSA rates from page 1

your rates to be sufficient to get an adequate return ... In the past we have had rates that did not meet that threshold."

The overall proposed budget amount--\$11,976,319—is a 5.2 percent decrease over last year's \$12,635,578, Hall said. Much of the decrease, he explained, is because there are fewer capital needs in this year's budget.

The capital improvement projects that are included in the upcoming fiscal year include \$22,000 to replace an equipment trailer; \$159,000 to replace three trucks; \$250,000 for the continuation of system-wide water line rehabilitation; \$50,000 to continue the large meter replacement program; \$100,000 to address water and sewer line extensions throughout the system; \$168,000 to implement an Inflow and Infiltration Flow Study; \$127,000 to continue a repair and maintenance program for water storage tanks; and \$35,000 to revamp the website.

Budgeted expenses include fuel which, Hall said, is a "wild guess cat-

egory. We have put what we think is an adequate amount in each department's cost center." An additional amount has also been set aside in case the cost of fuel "goes crazy," he added.

The cost of uniforms also increased, as has the cost of travel for continuing education requirements in several departments. "In the past two years," much of the continuing education classes were done virtually, but now are beginning to return to in-person. Lab costs also are increasing due to required biennial testing, along with the costs of temporary help in engineering and mapping, "simply because of the number of projects and the lack of personnel to do them," Hall said.

The budget proposal includes increasing a current part-time secretarial position in Regulatory Compliance to a full-time position to provide additional back-office support and to reinvigorate the back-flow prevention program which, Hall said, has gone dormant.

The budget also includes the PSA shar-

ing in a number of costs, including the cost of a second employee in Human Resources (HR), who will split their time between the HR and Finance Departments. Additionally, staff proposed the PSA begin paying a proportional share of the maintenance costs of the county administration building.

"PSA has been in this building for more than 25 years and has never paid rent," Hall said. "We bring to you the idea that perhaps that needs to start."

According to a study conducted by Deputy County Administrator Dale Wagoner of the building's square footage, the PSA takes up about 18 percent of the office space. "Based on the market rate of that, we figured that would be about \$150,000 annually," Hall said.

The proposed budget includes an average 6 percent pay raise for employees, matching the request in the county budget for county employees. "However, it does not match the cost of living and inflation, which I just saw this morning is at 8.5



Henry County Administrator and PSA General Manager Tim Hall said the proposed PSA budget does not include a rate increase for customers. The overall budget is a 5.2 percent decrease over last year's, which Hall attributed in part to the decrease in proposed capital projects.

percent. It's gone from 7 to 8.5 in the last couple of weeks," Hall said.

He added that the county is "seeing people leaving our employment for other jobs that pay more money," which the pay increase is trying to combat. "We never used to lose people. We may have paid right at market or perhaps a little below market, but our benefits were such that people wanted to be in these jobs. What we're seeing now is that's not the case."

Hall said the county

has done a great job of recruiting companies to come to the area. He noted the average manufacturing wage in the community has increased from \$16 to \$21 per hour. "Our people are going to work for the people we've recruited because we haven't been able to keep up with those numbers," he said. "We need to try to incrementally get the pay up for our folks."

The budget narrative stated that the county and school board are working to develop a com-

ensation study, which will include PSA should it come to fruition. "It's imperative that the county and PSA implement whatever the compensation study recommends," the narrative stated. "To do otherwise means the money to do that study was wasted, and it tells our employees that we aren't serious about their compensation."

The PSA board unanimously voted to hold a budget work session at its next regular meeting on May 16.

County from page 1



Joyce Staples spoke to the Henry County Board of Supervisors at its regular March meeting about what she called a lack of a transparent, public selection process for leadership roles in the county, particularly that of County Administrator. She also cited a lack of diversity in county leadership.

possibly know they hired the best person for the job," Staples asked. "Why not validate the selection process that considers applicants from outside the inner circle, including individuals with experiences from other areas, other cultures, and possibly consider someone with a different ethnicity or gender? This is our moment to be more transparent."

Staples said the nation is "in the midst of a national reckoning. At last, people have recognized that diversity of background begets diversity of thought, which makes for more dynamic, and fruitful organizations."

She said that studies indicated that diverse teams are 87 percent better at making decisions, diverse management teams lead to 19 percent higher revenues, and gender diverse companies are 15 percent more likely to see higher financial returns.

"As Americans, this is our moment to embrace the changes around us and to build a more inclusive environment for ourselves and our children," Staples said. "We cannot simply abide by the status quo and allow these entrenched bias practices to continue. We have to face these hard truths about our own unconscious bias practices to continue. We have to face these hard truths about our own unconscious biases and actively work against the desire to lean into what's comfortable instead of doing what's right."

Hall said that while the Board of Supervisors hires the county administrator and county attorney, the Deputy County Administrator is traditionally hired by the county administrator without direct input from the board. "However," he said, "there is dialogue with the board as the process plays out."

He said that the last two deputy administrators (Hall and Wagoner) came from within the organiza-

tion. Hall was promoted to the deputy position in 2002, when then-County Administrator Sid Clower was caught in an embezzling scheme and fired. Clower was originally hired from outside the organization to manage the Public Service Authority (PSA), and then was later tapped by the supervisors to take on the dual roles.

Then-Deputy County Administrator Benny Summerlin was promoted to Clower's position. Hall took over as administrator after Summerlin's death in 2012.

"I think it was a very tumultuous time for everyone in county government, given the circumstances under which the previous administrator left," Hall said. "I don't know if Benny considered advertising the deputy position at that time; all I know is he asked me to step up and I did so."

Hall said as administrator, "I thought it was essential to hire from within because one, we had a great candidate in Dale Wagoner, and two, the psyche of our employees was in disarray because we'd all seen one of our best friends, and our leader, pass away."

However, he noted, "I removed myself from any part of the decision to hire (Wagoner) as county administrator and the decision to advertise internally for the ... position. I won't be here for what comes next and I shouldn't stick my nose where it didn't belong."

In his view, Hall said "hiring from within is the best way to go, if possible. If the county administrator has done his or her job well, then there will be people within the organization who are capable of advancing. If there are qualified internal candidates, and the decision is made to go outside the organization, then those internal candidates will feel their work to improve their skills and knowledge was wasted, and we run the

risk of that employee going elsewhere."

Hall said the county's administration emphasizes "succession plans within our departments for seamless transitions and continuity of service. But if there is a position without a candidate-in-waiting, we advertise externally and we have filled department head positions externally in the past."

Currently, the county does not have any people of color serving as department heads, nor does the county "have enough people of color in our organization. We want and need more of them. But so do all other local governments, especially those in rural areas of the Commonwealth," Hall said.

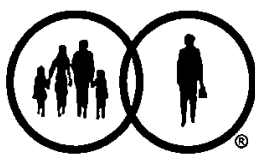
Wagoner agreed that there is "considerable value in succession planning to ensure uninterrupted delivery of service to our citizens," though "there are also situations and opportunities when hiring from outside the organization is desired."

For many years, he said the county "has struggled with recruiting for positions at all levels of the organization. Employees are often expected to handle many responsibilities that transcend traditional departmental silos. Finding individuals who can fill positions with various skills and assorted knowledge for the jobs are usually those who have gained the knowledge from working for the organization."

Ultimately, Wagoner said the county "can do a better job addressing diversity and inclusion, and I look forward to having those discussions with the Board of Supervisors as we continue to make our community a great place to live, work, learn, and play."

Jim Adams, chairman of the board of supervisors, said that the board listens to all comments during matters presented by the public and the information shared during that time "gives the board a basis for future consideration in matters of projects or policy."

PATRICK COUNTY FAMILY PRACTICE, P.C.



RICHARD C. COLE, M.D., FFAFP
RALPH L. KRAMER, M.D.
KIMBERLY D. COMPTON, PA-C
JAMIE F. WHITLOW, PA-C
TIMOTHY BLACK, FNP-C
MEAGHAN N RADFORD, FNP-C

DANA S. MABE, FNP-C
PAMELA WRIGHT, FNP-C
BRITTNEY DILLON, FNP-C
KAITLYN G. COBLER, FNP-C
ELIZABETH SHOCKLEY, FNP-C

April 4, 2022

Dear Patients,

It has been my pleasure to serve our community for the past 24 years, first as an obstetrician/gynecologist with a small amount of family medicine that slowly developed into family medicine full time. I have had the privilege of meeting a great many people and developing lifelong friendships with many patients. But now is the time for me to retire and pass along my patients to the other competent providers here at Patrick County Family Practice.

Please know that your medical records are safely on file here at Patrick County Family Practice and remain confidential as per federal law. If you decide to take on a new physician outside of our practice, then you can follow the traditional routes to have your records transferred.

Over the past 24 years I have watched many families in the area grow and have shared heartache and joy with hundreds of patients. I appreciate your loyalty throughout the years and will take the memories of all that I have experienced with me into my retirement.

If you have any questions, you can contact Patrick County Family Practice at 276-694-4466 or at www.patrickcountyfamilypractice.com.

My retirement is effective April 28, 2022.

If I do not have an appointment to see you before April 28th, I wish you health and happiness.

Sincerely yours,

Ralph L. Kramer, M.D.
 Ralph L. Kramer, M.D.

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OPINION

Seven easy steps to become a billionaire

These days, it seems as though everyone who's anyone is a billionaire. But how do you become a billionaire yourself?

Studies have shown that there are just two key differences that separate a billionaire from a "normal" or "inferior" person. The first difference is having billions of dollars. The second difference is having followed the seven easy rules laid out in the guide below. With my help, you too can become the next Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, or Warren "Jimmy" Buffett!

Step one: Get plenty of sleep
 "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." Benjamin Franklin said that, and he should know a thing or two about success; after all, he became one of our nation's most beloved Founding Fathers despite being an unrepentant pervert.

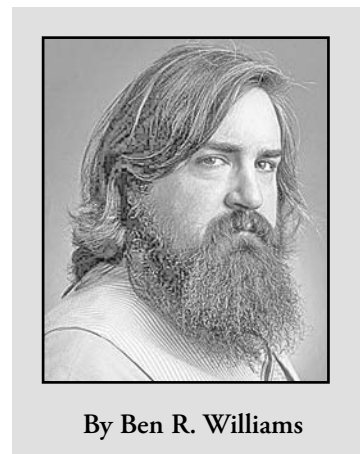
But Benjamin Franklin's words are as true today as they

were when he first muttered them to an elderly woman he was drunkenly hitting on: if you want to become a billionaire, make sure you get a good night's sleep and wake up early in the morning. As the saying goes, "the early bird gets the worm." Just ask any worm farmer, most of whom are billionaires.

Step two: Maintain a healthy diet

Have you ever seen Jeff Bezos eating a huge pile of nachos? Just going to town on them, just wrecking those nachos, cheese and jalapeño slices flying from his mouth as he tears into the nachos with crazed abandon? While many of us have seen this as part of a recurring dream, we realize it's not an accurate depiction of reality. Billionaires keep a healthy diet, drinking special probiotic shakes and eating secret vegetables that taste better than our poor people vegetables. Be sure to eat healthy if

you want to join the ranks of the billionaires!



By Ben R. Williams

Step three: Be born to parents who co-owned an Apartheid-era emerald mine

While Elon Musk got to where he is through hard work and sheer grit, it certainly helped that his father Errol Musk owned half of a Zambian emerald mine and was unspeakably wealthy. If your parents don't own an emerald mine, don't fret; a diamond mine is perfectly acceptable. Of course, if you don't have preposterously wealthy parents but only ridiculously wealthy par-

ents, you can simply go the Jeff Bezos route. He started Amazon with nothing more than gumption, a strong work ethic, and a quarter million dollar loan from his father.

Step four: Understand that other people aren't real in the same way you are

"Solipsism" is the philosophical idea that a person cannot be certain that anything outside of their own mind exists. From there, it's just a hop, a skip, and a jump to understanding that you're the only real person and everyone else is, at best, a series of tools to be used to improve your own position. That may sound sociopathic, but it helps to remember that the people who might consider you a sociopath don't have rich inner lives in the same way you do.

Step five: Crush all who oppose you

Once you start leveraging your parents' millions into billions, you may find that pesky folks like "progressives" and "union leaders" and "OSHA inspectors" are always trying to rain on your parade. Don't worry; simply use your vast

wealth to either pay them off or grind them into the dirt like the wretched worms they are. You are a giant treading the Earth, a capricious demigod with one hand open in offering and the other curled into a fist, fully prepared to mete out justice depending upon your whims. You will see those who stand against you cower in fear, and you will delight at the lamentation of their women.

Step six: Go to outer space

Anyone can be a billionaire, but only TRUE billionaires go to outer space. This is because their inexhaustible wealth has so distanced them from their fellow man that they can only find comfort in the howling, empty vacuum of the cosmos, a cold and bleak expanse that mirrors the billionaire's own heart. It is only in space that the billionaire can find peace; he must aim his jaded, yellow eyes on the swirling galaxies and see them for himself, for whatever in creation exists without his knowledge exists without his consent.

Step seven: Drink plenty of water

Hydration is important!

Magna Vista from page 1

important stuff that people don't really take time to ask others or even listen to. They just care."

Important, too, Agee said, is how the students communicate the information to their peers. "They're putting it in terms that people their age will understand," she said.

Koger said that some of MVN's content includes a newsletter containing the group's articles, the 701 Show, which is a cartoon, and the "What's the Issue?" podcast, "where we talk about important issues most people wouldn't want to talk about."

Carter showcased three newsletters, which include topics like Black History Month, Women's History Month, and mental health awareness.

He said in Black History Month, the team highlighted Black trailblazers, Black-owned businesses, and Black student athletes.

For Women's History Month, Carter said, the group highlighted the struggles women face in our society.

Davis said a special commemorative issue was created for Nick Pruitt, a fellow student who died in a car crash last year. "It was to honor the things he loved in life. It was to show that we love him, we'll always love him, and we'll always remember him because he's a part of Magna Vista, and he's a part of us."

Penn said that the animated 701 Show covers daily announcements, special news within the school, and the weather.

"Recently, we've been doing interviews because we want to get active in our Warrior community," she said. In one video, the crew asked Black student athletes to describe themselves in one word. In another for Women's History Month, the focus was on women in power, including teachers and guidance counselors, also challenging them to provide one-word descriptors.

Davis said their "What's the Issue?" podcast is a space to have "real, honest, and raw conversations about the

issues facing our community. People our age, people who aren't our age, people in our country—we've talked about women's inequality in the world, we've talked about the struggles and stigma around mental health, how it affects both men and women, we've talked about the struggles people of different races, backgrounds have to go through. We have open and raw conversations because in order for the world to ever change, we have to be willing to come to a table and have conversations about what matters."

He said that each podcast opens with a trigger warning about what issues will be discussed because, "we understand while these conversations need to be had, we understand they may not be what everybody wants to hear."

In keeping with the theme of the videos they showed the board, each MVN student chose one word to describe how they felt about the network they had created during their time at Magna Vista.

Penn opted for the word "proud. I'm very proud to look back at where we started and where we are now ... and how we used what was around us and adapted to it and really changed things."

Davis said he was thankful.

"I'm thankful for all the amazing opportunities we've gotten to over these past few years, for all the amazing stories we've gotten to cover and all the wonderful people we've gotten to meeting. I'm thankful for the chance to come here today and present to you something that's so important to each of us."

Koger's word was "motivated."
 "I feel motivated that I've had the opportunity to be part of something like MVN, and I have so many resources that I can now take within me to other parts of my life."

Carter chose the word "optimistic. I really hope that MVN will keep going and even become county-wide."

Davis said that his experience with MVN has affected his post-graduation aspirations. "I plan on being a double

major in political science because I want to help make an impact in the world, because I've seen through this that if you're willing to talk to people you can really make a difference in the world."

"I think a huge reason that, hopefully, this is their legacy and it carries on is because you see a big difference between students who are exposed to this level of thinking in high school" and those who are not, Agee said. Even looking at students before and after the pandemic, a difference is noticeable, she said.

"A lot of underclassmen we see now are disassociated with people and things and issues going on around them, so hopefully this will open their eyes too, that it's not just something they're seeing on the news, but things their peers are struggling with," she added.

Penn said that MVN will continue after the four founders graduate, adding that the group is mentoring several freshmen to take up the torch, and a number of other students also are a part of the effort. The MVN website lists Leah Penn and Shanyah Spencer as the other members of the MVN team.

"The legacy will live on for years to come," she said.

MVN can be accessed through the MVTV tab on Magna Vista's website, www.henry.k12.va.us/magnavista.



An image from MVN's 701 Show includes the animated versions of the current MVN student team.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Easter: just another Sunday for Christians

A number of people will never understand how the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth has come to involve a bunny and colored eggs. What I don't understand is how the sacred day has been turned into a raffle to win a fishing trip?

As an Easter promotion a religious sect in Axton, VA offered Easter comers the chance to win a half-day fishing charter for 4 people on Smith Mountain Lake. We all know that church attendance has gone down over the past two years, but I don't think that this is the answer to that problem.

Someone might say, "Hey, several of Jesus' apostles were fishermen. What better way to be closer to Jesus than to go fishing?" How about we make our work what He intended it to be? "And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). In order to be like Jesus why don't we start teaching on the things He taught on like lifelong monogamous marriages (Matt. 19:1-9)?

Christians often become incensed over anything from the LGBT community, but they don't bat an eye at America's astronomical divorce and adultery rates. In the Book of Matthew Jesus' first public words were, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Repentance is hardly discussed in 2022.

To this fishing trip raffle I say: people won with gimmicks will only be kept with gimmicks. This is nothing akin to Jesus feeding the five thousand. Even after Jesus fed the five thousand He realized that there were a number of people following Him simply in hopes of receiving free food. He rebuked those people and many of them quit following Him: "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled... From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:26, 66).

An advertisement for this Easter Sunday service was posted

to Facebook telling parents that their kids could take a picture with the Easter Bunny, hunt eggs, eat at a candy station, and get balloon animals. The one thing that they did not advertise was if they would be observing the Lord's Supper.

Many American sects only observe the Lord's Supper annually or bi-annually at Easter and Christmas. The one day of the year marked to remember His resurrection and this particular sect did not even mention His memorial feast. American sectarians are the embodiment of Paul's words in 1Corinthians 3:1: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ."

For me, and fellow members of the body of Christ, April 17th was just another Sunday. The Christian life is supposed to be lived daily, not just weekly, and certainly more than once a year.

Caleb Robertson,
Martinsville

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Letters to the Editor Guidelines

Henry County Enterprise welcomes letters to the editor and/or reader viewpoints of 500 words or less. Submissions may be edited for clarity, length, legal ramifications or general taste at the editor's discretion. We reserve the right to refuse to publish submitted letters for the same reasons. All letters must be signed by an individual and include community. Letters that do not meet these guidelines will not be considered for publication. Viewpoints and opinions expressed in letters selected for publication are the opinions of the writers, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Henry County Enterprise.

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OBITUARIES

Jennie Merriman Cox

Jennie Merriman Cox, 75, of Ridgeway, VA passed away on Tuesday, April 19, 2022. She was born on April 20, 1946, to the late Marian "Sprig" Merriman and Sallie Ruth Jones Merriman. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her brothers, Steve Merriman and Tim Merriman.



(Kim). Also surviving are several nieces and nephews.

Visitation will be held from 1 to 2 p.m. on Friday, April 22, 2022, at Norris Funeral Services. A funeral service will be held 2 p.m. on Friday, April 22, 2022, at Norris Funeral Service with Kelly Ratcliff officiating. Entombment will follow the service at Mountain

View Cemetery.

Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Cox family. Online condolences may be made at www.norrisfuneral.com.

Myrtle Ann Young Long

Myrtle Ann Young Long, 78, of Martinsville, VA passed away on Saturday, April 16, 2022. She was born in the Figsboro area of Henry County on April 26, 1943 to the late James "Melon" and Irene Hundley Young. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, Arthur Long.



loving and caring person and she loved her family deeply.

Ann was known to her nieces as "Annie Pannie" or Aunt Ann, and to her granddaughter, as "Mimi." She is survived by her daughter, Elizabeth Long Smith (Gary) of Martinsville, VA; two brothers, Wayne Young (Ruth) of Martinsville, VA and Wendell Young

(Virginia) of Martinsville, VA; precious granddaughter, Maggie Ann Smith of Martinsville, VA; nephew; Dwayne Young (Linda) of Bassett, VA; six nieces, Betsy Roberts (Rob), Wendy Gaudin (T.A.), Susan Adams, Mary Beth Owens, Jennifer Custer (Kelly), and Joni Bryant; and several grandnieces and grandnephews.

A funeral service was held on Wednesday, April 20, 2022, at McCabe Memorial Baptist Church, with Dr. G.H. Vaughan officiating.

Memorial donations may be made to McCabe Memorial Baptist Church, 107 Clearview Drive, Martinsville, VA 24112.

Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Long family. Online condolences may be made at norrisfuneral.com.

Ann lived in Figsboro until 1988, then moved to the city of Martinsville. She was a member of McCabe Memorial Baptist Church since 1956. She served in numerous positions and was a member in several groups at church such as preschool teacher, preschool choir, the baptismal committee, property committee, nominating committee, sang in adult choir for 44 and a half years, helped with GAs, was active in the Women's Mission Prayer group, the Young at Heart Group, Kid's Klub, and was the youth department secretary for many years. She previously worked at Pannell Knitting, the Midget Market, Common Fair Restaurant, and retired from Pulaski Furniture in 1999.

Ann loved to bake for family and friends, kept a small garden and loved to can and freeze, especially her mother's recipe for 14 day pickles. She was a

Dr. George P. Scouras

A celebration of life service for Dr. George P. Scouras were held on Saturday, April 23, 2022 at Christ Episcopal Church, 311 East Church Street, Martinsville, Va.



Arrangements are by McKee-Stone Funeral Home-Martinsville, VA.

To express condolences online, please visit www.collinsmckeestonemartinsville.com.

Dwight Cecil Wright

Dwight Cecil Wright, 75, of Critz, VA passed away Wednesday, April 13, 2022, at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital. He was born September 18, 1946, in Eden, N.C. to the late Byron Cecil Wright and Eva Wilcox Wright Cooper. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his brother, Phillip Wright.



Burris (Justin); grandchildren, Jessica, Victoria, and Tiffany Wright, Payton, Austin, Ethan, and Colton Errichetti, Sophie and Oliver Brannock, Rosie and Eva Wright, and Easton and Barrett Burris; great-grandchild, Alexander Boyd; and brother, Leslie Wright (Jewel).

Mr. Wright attended Drewry Mason. He worked in the furniture industry for over 50 years working for American Furniture in Martinsville and later retired from Shenandoah Furniture in Collinsville. He was a devoted family man and dearly loved his children and grandchildren. He loved Jesus and spent his mornings reading the Bible and watching the sunrise. He was a member of Nettle Ridge United Methodist Church.

The funeral was held on Monday, April 18, 2022, at Nettle Ridge United Methodist Church in Stuart, VA, with pastors Michael Morrison, Shaun Draughn, Ronnie Gibson, and his son, Chris Wright officiating. Burial will be at Nettle Ridge United Methodist Church Cemetery.

Memorial donations may be made to Nettle Ridge United Methodist Church, 70 Nettle Ridge Loop, Stuart, VA 24171 or the American Heart Association, P.O. Box 840692, Dallas, TX 75284.

Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Wright family. Online condolences may be made at norrisfuneral.com.

He is survived by his wife of 47 years, Diane Doss Wright; children, Dwight Wright, Jr. (Jerrie), Susanne Errichetti (Joey), Sarah Brannock (Daniel), Christopher Wright (Emily), and Emily

Claudia Ward Perez

Claudia Ward Perez, 66, of Fieldale, Virginia passed away Sunday, April 10, 2022, at SOVAH Health of Martinsville. She was born July 13, 1955, in Los Angeles County, California to Viola Beatrice Pennington Ward and the late William "Bill" Ward. She was a CPA, built houses, enjoyed sewing, painting, knitting and woodworking.

vived by a son, Robert Eugene Perez, II (Laura); sisters, Debbie Prophet, Diane Potoski, Jeanette Ell and Ruth Ann Ward; brothers, Ralph Hernandez and Bill Ward; five grandchildren and one great-grandson.

There are no services planned at this time.

Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is serving the family. Online condolences may be made at www.wrightfuneralservices.net.

In addition to her father, she was preceded in death by her husband Robert Eugene Perez.

In addition to her mother, she is sur-

William C. Moyer

William Cecil Moyer, 51, of Axton, Virginia passed away Tuesday, April 12, 2022, at SOVAH Health of Martinsville. He was born January 28, 1971, in Martinsville, Virginia to the late Dock William Moyer and Lula Ann Moyer Moyer. He was a Dallas Cowboys fan, enjoyed races and spending time with family and friends.

He is survived by his brothers, Bob Moyer, Rontae Moyer and Tyrone Moyer; and a host of nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles and other family and friends.

All services will be private. Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is serving the family. Online condolences may be made at www.wrightfuneralservices.net.

Motorcyclists to honor fallen Marine and fund scholarship



For more than a decade, the Cpl. Jonathan W. Bowling Memorial Bike Ride has been drawing motorcyclists from all over the country to Patrick County, Virginia. The annual memorial motorcycle ride which will be held on Saturday, April 30 is not only a way for fellow veterans and servicemen to remember fallen Marine Jonathan Williams Bowling, it is also a chance for these men and women to continue his legacy of serving and giving back to the community.

The event begins at 10 a.m. at Patrick County High School, 215 Cougar Lane, in Stuart, Virginia and features live music, food, and door prizes. The ride begins at noon. Registration is \$15 per vehicle, and each entrant has a chance to win prizes.

Trophies are given for the farthest traveled bike. All the proceeds from the ride will go toward the Corporal Jonathan W. Bowling Memorial Scholarship which was established to honor his legacy and provide a Patrick County student with funding to attend Patrick & Henry Community College.

Bowling was a police officer, firefighter, elder at his church, and a corporal in the United States Marines. In 2005 during deployment in Iraq, he gave the ultimate sacrifice. Because Bowling was also an avid biker, the Chapter 11 Red Knights Motorcycle Club formed an annual bike ride to preserve his memory.

"Every year, we are touched by the number of riders who come to honor the life

and legacy of Corporal Jonathan Williams Bowling," said Tiffani Underwood, director for P&HCC's Foundation. "Through the Bowling Memorial Scholarship, the memory of this true American hero can continue to inspire and empower students. P&HCC is honored by this gift and honored to participate with the Bowling family to preserve Corporal Bowling's memory."

Each year, the Corporal Jonathan W. Bowling Memorial fund provides money for two Patrick County students to attend P&HCC. Students with a desire to enter into public service are given priority. To learn more about the ride, the scholarship, or Bowling's life visit www.cpljonathanbowling.us.

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Congressional staff plan April visits

Staff from 9th District U.S. Rep. Morgan Griffith's office will be available this month in Patrick County and Martinsville.

Staff will be available April 27: In Martinsville, from 10 – 11:30 a.m. in the City of Martinsville City Hall,

Council Chambers 2nd Floor, 55 W. Church Street, Martinsville, VA 24112.

In Patrick County from 12:30 – 2 p.m. in the Patrick County Administration Building, Conference Room, 106 Rucker Street, Stuart, VA 24171.

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Pay Raises from page 1

is recommending decreasing funding for the division in the coming year.

The proposed budget recommends a total local contribution of \$18,712,619, down from the \$19,373,777 it allocated to the schools in the current year. The budget narrative states that “we (the county) are required to provide \$15,951,224 in local funding, and this budget exceeds that requirement.”

Despite the decrease in local funding, Hall said staff was recommending full funding of the division’s key operational requests that include a 7 percent pay raise for teachers (with a 3-step adjustment), increasing pay for full-time bus drivers and aides by 10 percent, increasing pay for administrators by 7 percent, increasing supplements for coaches and sponsors, and adding three coordinator positions, 13 regular positions, three special education and related service positions, and five special education paraprofessionals.

The reduction in local contribution, Hall said, comes in the area of facilities.

“Within their budget, the school board asked for a significant increase in local funding for facilities. They’re also going to get a substantial increase from the Commonwealth for facilities,” Hall said.

The schools budgeted \$5,976,526 for facilities in the upcoming fiscal year, more than double this year’s \$2,144,000.

“We think, if we remove money from the local contribution to facilities, it will be easily back-filled by the sales tax revenue, the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) money, and additional money from the Commonwealth,” Hall said.

Hall said the county anticipates the 1 percent sales tax increase will generate \$5 million in FY21-22 and another \$4.7 million in FY22-23, for a total of \$9.7 million in facility revenue for the school division. Additionally, he said, \$30 million in ARPA funding has been allocated to the county schools, and \$3 million or more for facilities is anticipated to come from the state.

The county’s proposed budget includes only \$535,000 allocated to the schools for facilities. Of that, \$500,000 is for general needs not met in other facilities funding, and \$35,000 is allocated to purchasing new scoreboards for the elementary schools, which are used by the county’s Parks and Recreation teams.

Garrett Dillard, of the Iriswood District, made the request for scoreboards at the board’s budget work session.

“Inevitably,” Hall said, “we’re going to get an outcry from some folks that we are not fully funding the school board ... but it requires explanation.”

“The Commonwealth’s Local Composite Index (LCI), which is the Commonwealth’s unbiased analysis of a locality to pay for its education,

our LCI has gone down, which means the Commonwealth believes we have a reduced ability to pay for schools. In fact, the City of Martinsville’s LCI is now higher than Henry County’s LCI,” meaning that the city was better able to pay for its education than the county, Hall said.

“This should bring into question the city’s reversion point that it can no longer afford to educate its students,” he said.

“It’s often cited by critics that we’re 131 of 132 in how we fund schools. That is one metric,” Hall said. “But what that metric does not show, localities get no credit for any debt service that they are paying on behalf of the school system, so that means all \$23 million of local money that went into Meadow View Elementary School, we don’t get credit for that.”

Hall said, should the board want to explore fully funding the facilities request before finalizing the budget, it would equate to a 5.5-cents increase on the real estate tax.

ARPA funds

Hall said the county hired an outside expert to assist with ARPA spending, reporting and tracking.

The budget narrative states that the county was allocated approximately \$9.8 million in ARPA funds and treasury regulations allow localities to designate up to \$10 million in revenue loss with relatively simple reporting and documenting required.

He said that “ARPA allows you this year to take the total amount you have been given and shift it into your regular budget and tell the fed we’re using all that money for salaries and benefits. In fact, they encourage you to do it that way. If you choose not to do it that way, the reporting requirements, the paperwork and the paper chase is much more difficult than putting it in your regular budget.”

Therefore, Hall said, staff was recommending putting the ARPA funding into its regular budget to cover salaries and shifting a comparable amount of money out of the budget to cover ARPA-related projects.

The narrative indicates that the county recommends using the revenue-loss model with approximately \$8.1 million for FY22-23 and \$1.7 million in the current year budget.

“This strategy allows Henry County to use the ARPA money on general government services for salaries and benefits. The local money freed up by this action would then be set aside in a new account for future ARPA-related projects,” the narrative stated.

Pay raises

The proposed budget includes a 6 percent pay raise for county employees. Last year, Hall said, the board approved a 5 percent increase. He said the board



The Henry County Board of Supervisors were presented with a proposed budget on Tuesday which included a 2 percent meals tax hike, pay raises for county and school division staff, and a decrease in local funding for the school division.

emphasized improved employee treatment at its planning sessions over the last few years.

“We are losing people at a phenomenal rate,” Hall said, adding that in 2021, the county lost 19 people to retirement or to other opportunities.

He said the county has done an excellent job of bringing in new companies that pay good wages. “What we have failed to do is match those increased wages from the private sector.”

He noted the proposed raises fail to match the rate of inflation.

In addition, Hall said staff recommend two new staff positions, an additional maintenance worker for Parks and Recreation and a full-time staffer, whose time would be divided between Human Resources and the Finance Department.

Adult Detention Center

The budget narrative states that the county anticipates a first-year operational budget of \$11,572,015 for the new jail, which should be mitigated somewhat by the elimination of the need to outsource inmates and by selling some beds to other localities.

Overall, the budget for the law enforcement is increasing from \$15,937,910 to \$19,704,922, largely due to the need for additional personnel and operational costs of the new facility. Thus far, the narrative stated an additional 79 employees have been hired, and 12 more are recommended in the coming fiscal year.

In January, the board adjusted the salaries for law enforcement and Public Safety staff, using \$1.2 million in funds from fund balance. That amount, the narrative noted, now becomes an ongoing budgetary obligation.

Tax hike

“I know that I have had conversations with several of you leading up to January and February trying to warn you of the number, if any, of suggested tax increases we were going to bring to you,” Hall told the board. “I’m really proud to say that we have that down to one.”

The proposed budget includes a recommended 2 percent increase in the county meals tax, from the current 4 percent to 6 percent. “In easy math, if you spend \$1 to eat, you’re going to spend two more cents in taxes,” Hall said.

“You make a conscious decision to go out to eat,” he said. “By making that decision, you are essentially saying I’m willing to pay the cost of that tax burden. This is a user tax. People that come through town will pay it, we don’t have to worry about educating their kids or incarcerating them, they eat and they move on. This is really a user tax. You can choose to participate or not, based on whether or not you want to go out to eat.”

He said the hike “is the best alternative we have to spread the tax burden not just among our citizens, but the residents who come from other localities to eat at our restaurants.”

Hall said another reason staff focused on that particular tax is because the General Assembly gave localities the authority to institute an increase on the tax by up to 6 percent. “I would anticipate that authorization will go away pretty soon. I

think that will probably be pulled back by Richmond and that revenue stream will probably be taken from localities. So, I think we need to move this number, to get it on the record and to move forward.”

Hall said staff estimated the increase would generate \$1.2 to \$1.3 million over the year. It is the only tax hike staff was recommending.

Reversion

Hall said the county did not budget for any reversion costs in the next fiscal year. The county has consistently stated that the estimated costs of reversion would equate to an 8-cents increase on its real estate tax.

He explained that the primary reasoning behind the decision was the recently-passed legislation requiring a referendum within Martinsville on the issue of reversion.

“That ballot initiative, there’s a deadline I think of June 15 for the courts to act to add that to their ballot. If it does not get added by that deadline, then in cannot be on the Nov. ’22 ballot, it has to be on the Nov. ’23 ballot. So we are rolling the dice. We’re anticipating no real action that costs us money with regard to reversion in the next 12 months. If that changes, then this will need to change as well.”

The budget narrative states that staff recommends an increase in the board’s professional legal category based on the continuation of the reversion process. The narrative stated the county has spent \$264,789.64 in legal fees and associated costs related to reversion.

A roll of the dice

“We are not recommending any new capital in the next fiscal year,” Hall said. “That is a recipe for disaster. You might get away with it once, but maybe not.”

He said that the county was hopeful that “once the dust settles and we can grasp our ARPA money and really decipher where we can spend that money, then we can use that for some capital, but from a budgetary standpoint we have no capital items in the budget.”

Hall reiterated that the decision not to allocate any money for reversion was a risky choice as well. “I don’t know where this will end. I’m just taking an educated guess and an educated prayer that there will not be a demand on us in the next 12 months to provide revenue to absorb offices to do all these expansions. They’re inevitable, they are coming, I don’t think, unless the city changes its mind or the voters go against it, that reversion is off the table. At some point that will be revenue you have to generate, unless the city residents vote against it.”

Next steps

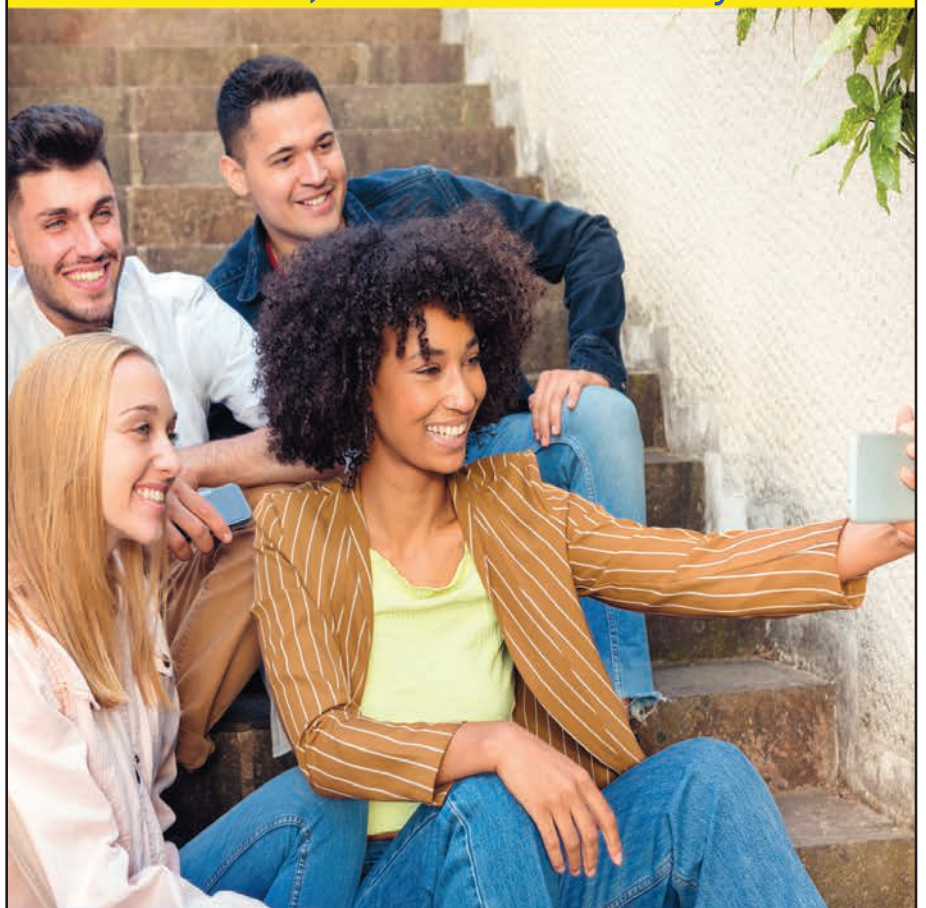
The Board of Supervisors has the authority to make any changes deemed necessary to the proposed budget. A public hearing on the school and total county budgets is scheduled for May 9 at 7 p.m. The board is slated to adopt the budgets on May 24, and appropriate them on June 28.


A copy of the full document is available at www.henrycountyva.gov and can be viewed in the County Administrator’s office, 3300 Kings Mountain Road, Collinsville.

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