

Be Independent

The Fairfax Independent

The Independent News Press Publication
Publisher of The Fairfax Independent Since 2024

FREE PRESS CIRCULATION
Vol. 2 No. 11 | DECEMBER

~ The Independent News Press ~

fairfaxindependentnews.press

Old Glory DC Brings Big-Time Rugby to Fairfax

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Rugby fans across the DMV have something huge to cheer about: Old Glory DC is officially bringing all 2026 home games to George Mason University in Fairfax—and the move promises to energize not just the team, but the entire region.

“This is a milestone in our community. The first pro sports team in Fairfax since 1976. When the NASL’s Washington Diplomat played at Woodson High School,” city resident, Chap Petersen continued “as a long-time rugby player, I am very excited to see OG drop anchor here.”

Fresh off back-to-back playoff runs and stepping confidently into its eighth Major League Rugby season, Old Glory is doubling down on community, accessibility, and regional growth. Their new home at George Mason Stadium offers the perfect backdrop for that mission: a natural Bermuda grass pitch, a 4,500-seat bowl built for atmosphere, and a field-level VIP area that puts fans closer than ever to the action.

One of the most exciting aspects of this partnership is how it opens the door to even more fans across D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia. Conveniently located just off the Vienna/GMU Metro stop, George Mason Stadium is an easy ride on the Orange Line, followed by a free CUE Bus shuttle straight to the gates. Drivers can celebrate too—tailgating is on, offering a festive, rugby-loving atmosphere before every match.

And the fan experience is getting a boost. Expect an expanded Beer Garden, upgraded food and beverage concessions, and a vibrant Merchant’s Row packed with local pop-up vendors from across the region. Game day won’t just be a match—it’ll



Old Glory DC’s Tevita Naqali is lifted up for a “line out” as the ball is inbound against NOLA Rugby Club. The match was played at George Mason Stadium on May 13, 2025. Old Glory DC won the match 27-14. (Image courtesy Old Glory DC)

be a community festival.

Old Glory leaders have long envisioned a deeper partnership with George Mason, and now that dream comes to life. “Old Glory DC is excited to bring professional rugby to George Mason University,” said Chris Dunlavey, Chairman of Old Glory DC. He noted that the team has trained at Mason for years, making this move feel like a natural next step in connecting with students, local businesses, and fans.

George Mason’s Director of Athlet-

ics, Marvin Lewis, echoed the excitement: hosting Old Glory on campus aligns with Mason’s mission to offer world-class sports experiences while fostering community spirit across Northern Virginia.

Fairfax City is already gearing up to welcome rugby fans with open arms. Stephanie Gerson, tourism specialist for Fairfax City Economic Development, celebrated the opportunity to connect visitors with the charm of Old Town Fairfax—encouraging supporters to stay, dine, and explore before and after matches.

This isn’t just a venue change; it’s a bold investment in regional sports culture. With enthusiastic partners—from local government to campus leadership to neighborhood businesses—Old Glory DC is primed to grow the game in meaningful, sustainable ways.

Get ready to talk about ruck, maul, and scrum during a season filled with unforgettable fan moments both on and off the pitch. Rugby fans can purchase tickets by visiting the Old Glory DC website at <https://oldglorydc.com>

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Mackenzie’s Tunes & Tonics:
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Drinks, and Live Music

Ken Burns Reimagines the American Revolution in Epic New PBS Series

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

"History isn't just what we're taught—it's what we discover."

Ken Burns, the master of American storytelling, is back. This November, PBS premieres his latest documentary, *The American Revolution*, a six-part, 12-hour series that promises to challenge everything you thought you knew about the nation's founding.

Burns is famous for epic documentaries like *The Civil War* and *Jazz*, and this project is no different in scale—but it's bolder in perspective. Rather than focusing solely on the "great men" of history, the series highlights the untold stories: the everyday people, enslaved Africans, indigenous

nations, and communities caught in the upheaval of war. The Revolution, Burns argues, was not just a fight against Britain—it was also a civil war, a local conflict, and a global struggle.

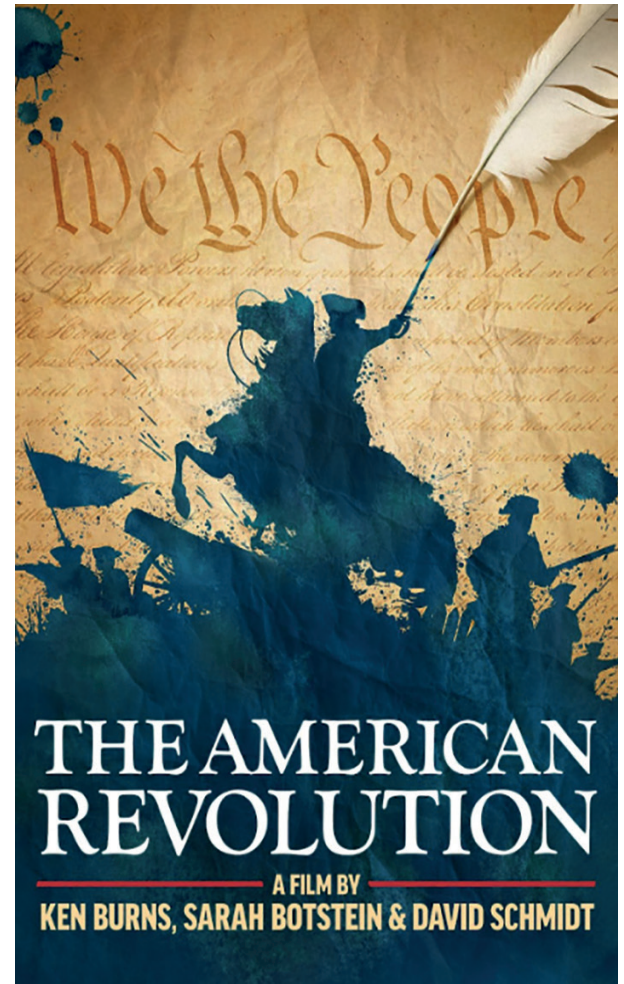
Through meticulous research, filming at historic sites, and innovative visual storytelling, Burns and his team recreate 18th-century America. A diverse ensemble of voice actors delivers letters, speeches, and personal accounts, making the history feel intimate and immediate. Maps, period imagery, and cinematic landscapes make the Revolution tangible, not just a series of dates and battles.

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary in 2026, this series arrives at a moment of reflection. Burns reframes familiar myths, examining the

Revolution's impact on indigenous peoples, enslaved individuals, and women, while showing the larger global context often overlooked in textbooks. It's both an educational journey and a cultural conversation starter.

The six-part series airs over consecutive nights on PBS starting November 16, 2025. For viewers short on time, each episode stands alone, offering a deep dive into different aspects of the Revolution. Streaming is available through the PBS website and app.

Ken Burns proves once again that history isn't just behind us—it's alive, complex, and endlessly fascinating. And it turns out that Americans have been fighting each other from the beginning!



American Democracy Student Tour – A 5-Day Journey Through U.S. History

The American Democracy student tour by Colonial Connections offers a fast-paced, immersive look at the places where America's ideals were born. Over five days, students explore historic Virginia, Washington, D.C., and George Washington's Mount Vernon, experiencing democracy where it first took shape.



Colonial Hauntings ghost walk.

Day 3 – Washington, D.C. Begins

The group travels to D.C. to visit Arlington National Cemetery, the National Archives, and major monuments and memorials on the National Mall. After dinner inside Union Station, students check in at their D.C. hotel.

Day 4 – Government & Museums

The day starts with walk-bys of the White House, Capitol, and Supreme Court, followed by time in a Smithsonian Museum. Students then visit the Holocaust Museum, tour the Jefferson and FDR Memorials, enjoy dinner, and end the night with a scenic nighttime monument tour.

Day 5 – Mount Vernon

The final day takes students to George Washington's Mount Vernon, where they tour the mansion, grounds, and the interactive Reynolds Museum. After lunch on the property, the group departs for home.

Day 1 – Jamestown

The tour begins at the Jamestown Settlement, where students explore re-created colonial sites, Powhatan dwellings, and full-scale ships from 1607. After dinner, an interactive program on early American medicine gives students a vivid look at 17th-century medical practices.

Day 2 – Colonial Williamsburg & Yorktown

Students spend the morning in Colonial Williamsburg, visiting historic buildings and learning about debates that sparked independence. After a colonial tavern lunch, the group travels to Yorktown to explore the American Revolution Museum and its outdoor living-history areas. The evening ends with a candlelit

What's Your Cathedral Story Washington National Cathedral

What is your cathedral story America250 is a project by the Washington National Cathedral and America250 to collect personal stories, experiences, and oral histories related to the cathedral in honor of America's 250th anniversary. The project invites people to submit videos, photos, and other creative works to share how their lives have been touched by the cathedral, which will be used to create a portrait of America and its history.

Check out our series of stories, experiences, and oral histories, told directly by those whose lives Washington National Cathedral has touched, across the globe! If you are interested in sharing your own Cathedral story, you're invited to submit it to us using this link: <https://cathedral.thankview.com/video/request/6619622bae34d>

Honor the Semiquincentennial by Giving Back in Your Community



America Gives is an initiative that challenges businesses, non-profits, schools, youth groups, faith-based networks, and organizations of all kinds to commit to increasing their level of volunteering and impact starting on January 1, 2026. Together, we will build on America's legacy of giving back and inspire a renewed culture of service for years to come.

For more information, please visit the following website at <https://america250.org/america-gives>

The Fairfax Independent

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The Fairfax Independent, your
source for local news, stories,
and community updates.
Established in our beloved City
of Fairfax and
operating since July 4, 2024, The
Fairfax Independent part of a
consortium of local newspapers
published by The Independent
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DEAR READERS & FRIENDS:

On behalf of Steve, Chap, and Paul,
Happy Thanksgiving to you and your
family.

This is our 11th and final edition of
2025. It has been an exceptional
year for our newspaper with talent-
ed writers coming on board, our sales and
marketing team built up to 5 of us, and the
eternal support from the ownership group
of our newsroom and business support.

I am thrilled to see so many City
businesses showcasing during our holi-
day promotion so that we can get their in-
formation out to almost 15,000 mailboxes
in Fairfax City and almost 6,500 mailboxes
in the Town of Vienna along with 500
pieces at 10 locations from Maple Ave to

Chain Bridge. I cannot thank our business
advertisers enough for partnering with us.

I am so proud of our team with the
writing team leading our newsroom and
our newly arrived account manager whom
we will introduce in the new year. A huge
shoutout to Layla Mohran for her writing
win and making tracks to head off to study
journalism after she graduates from Mar-
shall HS this final year. I am delighted to
welcome Fairouz Ouikhlfen, a fellow Patri-
ot, to our writing team. She will be cover-
ing Richmond and Tysons/Falls Church.

And finally, this year's heavy weight,
Agung Setyawan, our newspaper layout
production leader who works into the
wee hours of the morning and sometimes
goes without sleep to wrap up a single edi-
tion within 24 hours. Despite the fatigue

pressure points, Agung has always been
a happily predisposed team player. Con-
gratulations to Agung on his academic
accomplishment and graduating with
Cum Laude distinction with a Master's in
Communication Science, within the Facul-
ty of Social and Political Sciences at Se-
belas Maret University (UNS) in Surakarta,
Indonesia, on October 25, 2025.

On behalf of everyone at The Inde-
pendent News Press, we wish our dedi-
cated readers; our generous donors; our
insightful guest writers; and everyone
who wants to see us shine or burn - a
wonderful, peaceful, and thankful time of
the year.

With gratitude, Tania Hossain
Editor & Publisher

Congratulations
Agung Setyawan!

Agung Setyawan, a member of The Independent
News Press' artwork and production team,
earned a Master's degree on October 25,
2025. He graduated Cum Laude from the Master's
Program in Communication Science (Postgraduate/
S2) at Sebelas Maret University (UNS) in Surakarta,
Indonesia. His degree completion took him less than
2 years to complete.



Photo right: Dr. Didik Gunawan Suharto, S.Sos., M.Si., the Dean of the Faculty of
Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) at Sebelas Maret University (UNS), congrat-
ulates Agung Setyawan during the graduation ceremony on October 25, 2025.

Welcome Fairouz Ouikhlfen!



Fairouz Ouikhlfen (fae-
rooz whee-kell-fin) is an
undergraduate literature
student studying in the hon-
ors program at George Mason
University. She is from Tysons
Corner and is an alumnus of
the NICU at Medstar George-
town University Hospital. She
plans to pursue an English

MA and PHD in 20th-century
transatlantic modernism and
memory studies. She plays
the flute and is studying her
ancestral language of Chleuh
Berber, as well as improving
her French and German. Fair-
ouz enjoys shopping (win-
dow and otherwise), cooking,
re-watching Gossip Girl, and

taking public transit.

We are thrilled to wel-
come our newest writer on
the editorial team! Fairouz
will be covering Tysons / Pim-
mit / Falls Church. Yes! We
have made it to Falls Church
and are thrilled to have our
first area writer onboard.

Congratulations to Layla Mohran

Congratulations to
Layla Mohran, an il-
lustrious member of
our team, on garnering the
VAJTA first place award in
the sports writing catego-
ry. The Virginia Associa-
tion of Journalism Teach-
ers and Advisers (VAJTA)
is a state affiliate of the Journalism Ed-
ucation Association (JEA). VAJTA is a
professional organization of journalism



teachers and advisers com-
mitted to the highest stan-
dards of excellence in jour-
nalism. Its purpose is to act
as a continuing resource for
beginning and experienced
teachers/advisers, to pro-
vide information and training
opportunities, to serve as
a vehicle for communication between
VAJTA and other groups, and to act as
an advocate for scholastic journalism.

Virginia Democrats Sweep Historic Statewide Elections On November 4

BY CAROLINE CHU

Virginia elected Democrats to all state offices and flipped multiple Republican seats in the House of Delegates, acting in accordance with the blue wave currently sweeping through the country.

The statewide elections were rife with historical significance, as the Democratic ticket broke multiple racial and gender barriers through their respective victories. Former Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger (D) was elected as governor, ousting incumbent Lieutenant Governor Winsome Earle-Sears to become the first woman to hold the gubernatorial office in Virginia.

State Senator and Lieutenant Governor-elect Ghazala Hashmi (D-Chesterfield), is the first Indian and Muslim woman to be elected to an American state office after defeating conservative talk radio host John Reid. Despite the release of controversial text messages from 2022, former Delegate Jay Jones (D-Norfolk) bested incumbent Jason Miyares, becoming the first African American man to serve as Virginia Attorney General.

All three statewide candidates - Democrats were elected by a comfortable margin, with the most competitive race of Attorney General decided by approximately 6 percentage points (Jones garnered 53 percent of the vote, whilst Miyares received the remaining 46.6 percent). Spanberger and Hashmi won by approximately 15 and 11 percentage points respectively.

While these victories themselves were widely expected, polls leading up to the November 4th elections neglected to predict the sheer decisiveness of these results - this lack of foresight can be attribut-

ed to the unanticipated Democratic turnout across rural, traditionally Republican-voting regions, as well as the even more explosive turnout in Northern Virginia. This effect was then compounded by the lower-than-expected Republican turnout demonstrated throughout the state, ultimately resulting in swift Democratic victories.

According to the New York Times, nearly all 133 Virginia localities voted more Democratic in the governor's race compared to the 2024 presidential election; Mecklenburg, Appomattox, Northumberland, Lancaster, and Charlotte were the only exceptions, and each shifted Republican by margins ranging from only <0.1 to 2.1 percentage points. In heavily red Southwest and South Virginia, Republican votes have broadly fallen compared to the 2021 elections, albeit by a modest amount. In Pittsylvania and Wise, two localities with strong Republican presences, the number of Republican votes decreased by approximately 10 percent as Democratic votes increased by 15.1 percent and 27 percent respectively. Of course, Pittsylvania and Wise still leaned strongly Republican - however, the noticeable drop between Youngkin's and Earle-Sears's turnouts, and the surge between McAuliffe's and Spanberger's, was an evident pattern reflected throughout the entire region.

Elsewhere, the Virginia House of Delegates saw similarly significant gains for the Democrats. 13 seats were flipped from Republican to Democratic control, amounting to a total of 64 Democratic seats when combined with the seats retained by the political party.

"Together, we built what will be a historic, enduring majority," House Speaker Don Scott (D-Portsmouth) said in a press confer-

ence on November 5th. "The largest Democratic majority in three decades. And I hate to tell y'all, but we're just getting started."

House elections also yielded noteworthy outcomes for women. Of the 100 available seats in the House of Delegates, a record 42 seats are now held by women, marking a historic new milestone. This number is markedly skewed in favor of the Democrats, with 37 of the 42 female delegates being Democratic. Critically, Democrats now control both the House of Delegates and the State Senate, giving them the opportunity to push their legislative agenda without obstruction by incumbent governor Glenn Youngkin. Scott stressed that House Democrats will focus their efforts on the tangible concerns voters have raised, citing housing costs, healthcare costs, education, and public safety. "We're going to listen to the voters, they already told us what the priority should be," he said.

The overwhelming success of Virginia Democrats marks a significant departure from the 2021 elections four years prior, where Republicans swept all three state offices. This result is relatively in line with Virginia's past voting behavior - historically, the state has not maintained strict party loyalty, especially with regards to the governor's office. Since 1977, Virginia has consistently elected a governor from the opposing party of the sitting president, with a sole exception occurring in 2013, when Democrat Terry McAuliffe was elected while Democratic president Barack Obama was in office.

However, the mass consolidation of Democratic power across legislative and executive lines, as well as the sheer scope of these Democratic victories, may indicate the influence of other factors

on recent election results. In Northern Virginia, where over a third of Virginia's population is concentrated, the Trump administration's federal layoffs and the recently-ended government shutdown were sources of tension for hundreds of thousands of federal workers. In capitalizing on these issues, Virginia Democrats may have been better able to attract voters. "These districts filled with folks who made the government work said, 'we don't want any more of that,'" House Democratic Caucus Campaign Chair Dan Helmer (D-Fairfax) said. "It is their pocketbook, it is their economy, it is their jobs that have been under assault by the White House."

The financial difficulties recently experienced in rural Virginian communities, which are linked to the Trump administration's policies, have taken on a distinctly different flavor. "There's something going on in this country, and y'all are missing it," Scott said. "If you're not paying attention, rural communities are feeling the pain too, and they're gonna start holding somebody accountable. They like Trump... they might not get rid of him. But they're gonna get rid of all these other jokers, and that's what they did."

Despite their collective victory, Virginia Democrats have a tough task ahead of them; they will have to navigate continued issues with the Virginian economy, financial constraints, and shifting federal policy, as well as pressure to take full advantage of the Democratic sweep. During her victory speech in Richmond on November 4th, Spanberger emphasized her commitment to taking immediate action to help Virginia. "Now that the campaign is over, the real work begins. This was never just about winning an election. It was about what comes next," she said. "It's about governing."

This Holiday Shopping Season Breaks Into A Trillion!

BY LAYLA MOHRAN

The holiday season has officially crept up onto our calendars, bringing the winter spirit to the community. Front steps, no longer engulfed in Halloween decorations and pumpkins, are decked out with snowmen and winter decorations.

With the end of the government shutdown and the holidays like Black Friday and

Christmas around the corner, spending and shopping will skyrocket. In fact, spending on holiday shopping has reached a national high of \$1 trillion. The past few years, the US has experienced this extreme surge in spending during the holiday season. According to the National Retail Federation, spending is estimated to reach between \$1.01 trillion and \$1.02 trillion in the months of November and December, a 4.2% spending increase from last year's 3.7%.

According to Roanoke College, each person in Virginia, on average, spent \$1,086 during the holidays last year. However, despite the pattern of high spending, there may be a smaller amount here in Northern Virginia this year. Northern Virginia, specifically the DC area, has the largest number of federal workers in the US. With the recent government shutdown ending and workers now receiving their back paychecks,

this could create stronger spending habits locally this holiday season.

The holiday spirit and shopping habits are expected to be robust in our area. The search for discounts, sales, and deals are endless - shop Old Town Fairfax, Tysons Mall, Mosaic, Church Street, Fair Oaks Mall and so many other wonderful shopping spots this holiday.

Virginia Lawmakers Attempt Unprecedented Mid-Decade Redistricting

BY FAIROUZ OUIKHLFEN

In a move stirring intense political debate, Virginia Democrats in the General Assembly are pushing a constitutional amendment that, if approved, would let legislators redraw the state’s 11 U.S. House districts before the usual post-census cycle. The effort, aimed at reshaping Virginia’s representation for the 2026 midterm elections, has sparked both praise and fierce criticism across the Commonwealth.

The proposed amendment (HJR 6007) sponsored by Del. Rodney Willett, D-Henrico, that passed 51-42 along party lines, would grant the General Assembly explicit authority to redraw congressional boundaries outside the typical decennial redistricting cycle. “This resolution, most importantly, keeps Virginia’s options open, it’s creating an option,” said Del. Willett from the House Floor, “if it is approved by us and approved by the voters, an option for the reconsideration of the congressional district lines.” gives Virginians choices, Importantly, the amendment is temporary: it would remain in force only through 2030. Del. Willett reiterated that

the 2020 commission — a bipartisan body created by voters to draw districts every ten years — would not be abolished, under the current proposal.

Timeline of Key Dates

- Every 10 years
 - Virginia’s regular redistricting cycle, as required by the Code of Virginia.
- April 2, 2026
 - Deadline for congressional candidates to file for the 2026 election.
- April 22, 2026
 - Last possible day for the statewide vote on the proposed redistricting amendment.
- June 16, 2026
 - Virginia’s 2026 congressional primary election date.
- Before the 2026 Congressional Primary
 - The statewide vote on the amendment must be held before this date.

Supporters of the amendment say the move is a response to what they describe as aggressive redistricting efforts happening in several Republican-led states. Their argument is essentially: if other states are shifting their maps mid-cycle to

gain an edge in the U.S. House, Virginia shouldn’t sit back and risk its influence being diluted. “Virginia cannot afford to sit on the sidelines while Donald Trump tramples on our Constitution,” said House Speaker Don Scott, D-Portsmouth. “Not one of them said his name today. They are terrified of him. We had to give voters the option to make a change if they so wanted,” dismissing Republican’s accusation that this was nothing short of power grab.

In their argument, Republicans have pointed out that Virginians explicitly voted for a bipartisan commission to take this process out of politicians’ hands. Letting lawmakers jump in and redraw the lines whenever they have the votes, they argue, undermines the reform voters overwhelmingly supported just a few years ago. “This resolution is nothing more than a partisan power grab by the majority party to overturn the will of Virginia voters,” said Del. Chris Obenshain, R-Montgomery. Some GOP leaders have warned that legal challenges are almost certain if the amendment continues to move forward.

As of now, the amendment has

passed both chambers once, but that’s just the first step. Virginia’s Constitution requires the legislature to pass it again in its next session—expected early in 2026—before it can be sent to voters for final approval in a statewide referendum.

If voters approve the amendment, the state could move quickly to draw a new congressional map in time for the 2026 elections. That could shift which communities are grouped together and even change who represents large parts of Northern Virginia, Richmond’s suburbs, Hampton Roads, and beyond.

For many Virginians, the issue boils down to a simple but important question: should politicians be allowed to redo the district map when the political winds change, or should these decisions stay tied to the once-a-decade rhythm the census has set for generations? No matter where one stands, it’s clear that the coming months will be pivotal. Virginia is stepping into the middle of a national tug-of-war over political power, and voters may soon get the final say on how the Commonwealth draws its lines.

The 2025 Turnaround Candidate Who Became Virginia’s Next Next Attorney General

BY HANNAH LEE

On November 4, the Commonwealth experienced a state-wide sweep of Democratic victories amidst its elections for new state offices, drastically shifting the balance of Virginian politics. The election selected the first female Governor, the first Muslim and South Asian Lieutenant Governor, and the first African American Attorney General—all Democrats—and shifted the political majority of the Commonwealth to the Democrats, with the party holding a final 64 of 100 seats in the House of Delegates.

Within the position of the Attorney General, however, these results may come as a surprise following the October 3 release of correspondence by the National Review, in which elected official Jay Jones texted a Republican dele-

gate in the Virginia House of Representatives his violent desires towards Todd Gilbert, the Republican, then-Speaker in the House. Creating a hypothetical situation placing Gilbert alongside two historical, nefarious dictators, Jones wrote Gilbert would get “two bullets to the head” if there were “three people” and “two bullets”. He also described Gilbert and his wife as “breeding little fascists” in reference to their children. Jones confirmed the authenticity of the texts in a statement to Virginia Scope.

The release of this correspondence sparked controversy throughout the Commonwealth, particularly in light of the approaching election. While this may have been expected to dissuade most voters, perhaps to the extent of securing incumbent Jason Miyares a consecutive term, Jones managed to secure his victory with 52.9% of votes,

winning by a margin of 6%. Support for Jones primarily stemmed from historically Democratic counties in Northern Virginia, Albemarle County, which houses the University of Virginia, and the Southeast Region, where Jones formerly served as a delegate. Despite this support, however, a majority of counties in the state leaned red in favor of Miyares. This arises as a contradiction to the general partisan sentiments of voters, with the election of other positions experiencing statewide votes of blue.

However, as observed in the overall election, Democrat voters experienced a much greater turnout than that of Republicans, particularly in comparison to the 2021 election that secured Republican Glenn Youngkin his title as Governor. Statistics by the Virginia Public Access Project observed an overall increase in turnout per locality com-

pared to the 2021 elections followed by a partisan shift towards the Democratic Party in every state jurisdiction. Such a shift can also be attributed to other political factors, including the government shutdown, which has significantly affected the dense population of government workers in the Washington, DC suburbs, and indictments of President Donald Trump’s administration.

Following his election, Jones released his victory speech, pledging to fight Trump’s administration: “Donald Trump, MAGA and those corporate special interests believe that Virginia’s government should be beholden to them,” Mr. Jones said on Tuesday night, after the election had been called in his favor. “But tonight we sent a loud message to them and to every single person across this country: Virginia belongs to the people.”

A Decrease In Holiday Flights

BY LAYLA MOHRAN

In the current time of the longest government shutdown in American history, there have been staffing and resource shortages nationwide.

Two days after Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy called for the cancellations of the flights on Nov. 7, The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced that the staffing shortage has led to the cancellation of hundreds of flights across the country, translating to a 10% decrease

in flights at the 40 busiest airports in America. Originally, the cuts were meant to stay at a 4% decline, but it skyrocketed to a high of 10%, causing thousands more flights to be cancelled and delayed.

For example, Dulles International, Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, and Baltimore/Washington International (BWI) Airport have experienced this significant decline in flights. Thousands of passengers' flights have been canceled due to the shortage and concerns regarding the holiday season have risen. Ac-

cording to USA Today, 2,000 flights were canceled by 2pm in just one day. According to NBC Washington, on the day of the FAA's new reduction, Washington Reagan National was met with 37 flight cancellations, the highest amount in one airport globally that day. On that same day, Dulles experienced 21 cancelled flights and BWI had 22 cancelled. According to Patch, on Nov. 11, Dulles had 15 cancelled departing flights and 17% delayed flights.

"Flight cancellations will not immediately cease when the government shutdown ends.

Although the Senate passed a deal on Nov. 10 to reopen the government, Secretary Sean Duffy warned that controller staffing and flight operations won't revert to normal overnight — it will take time for the system to recover."

The Upgraded Points survey shows 74% of people won't fly at all this holiday season, and a portion are specifically choosing road trips to avoid airport stress. Amongst those who will be flying, have expressed a strong preference for domestic travel as high as 90% according to the Hopper Media Center.

America's Drug Affair: Why America Allows Drug Companies to Advertise Directly to Consumers

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

In most of the world, turning on the TV and seeing a prescription drug commercial is unheard of. In the United States, it's a daily occurrence. From medications for chronic illness to treatments for rare diseases, pharmaceutical ads appear across TV, social media, radio, and print, encouraging people to "talk to their doctor" about a specific brand-name drug.

The U.S. is one of only two countries—alongside New Zealand—that allow direct-to-consumer (DTC) pharmaceutical advertising, and the practice has become a defining feature of the American healthcare landscape. Its supporters argue it educates patients and empowers them to seek care. Critics say it drives up costs, overmedicalizes everyday life, and can sometimes mislead patients. The debate is both complex and consequential.

Until the 1980s, drug promotion in the U.S. was focused almost exclusively on doctors. That changed when pharmaceutical companies began testing the idea of speaking directly to consumers. Early ads were mostly print-based and carefully worded, but as cable TV expanded, so did the opportunity for mass communication.

A major shift came in 1997, when the FDA revised its guidelines, allowing drugmakers to mention a medication's

name and purpose without listing every risk in the ad itself—as long as they clearly directed consumers to where full safety information could be found. This opened the floodgates, and the pharmaceutical advertising market exploded.

Today, drug companies spend billions each year on consumer-facing ads, rivaling budgets in the automotive and tech industries. And thus began, America's drug affair of self medicating.

Education Shakeup Could Affect Millions of Student-Loan Borrowers

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Millions of Americans with federal student loans may soon see big changes. President Trump has ordered a major downsizing of the U.S. Department of Education, which oversees \$1.5 trillion in student debt for over 40 million borrowers.

Some responsibilities—including loan servicing—could move to other agencies like the Small Business Administration or Treasury. While the administration says programs like Pell Grants and loan forgiveness will continue, experts warn that the transition could cause delays, confusion, and uncertainty for borrowers.

The good news: your existing loans

don't vanish, and the terms you agreed to remain legally binding. The bad news: how those loans are serviced could change, potentially affecting income-driven repayment, forgiveness programs, and processing of new aid applications.

Borrowers need to watch for communications from loan servicer about any changes; keep records of loan documents, payments, and program enrollment; and programs like income-driven repayment or public-service forgiveness may be affected.

As the nation watches the Department of Education undergo a historic shakeup, one thing is clear: federal student loans will continue to touch millions of lives, whether the structure managing them looks familiar or not.

A Tradition of Light: The National Christmas Tree

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Each year, as winter settles in and the days grow shorter, one of America's most cherished traditions brings warmth and brightness to the nation's capital. For more than a century, the National Christmas Tree has stood as a symbol of hope, unity, and the simple joy of gathering together during the holiday season.

What began in 1923 with President Calvin Coolidge lighting a modest balsam fir on the Ellipse has grown into a beloved annual celebration. Today, the National Christmas Tree is more than just a display—it is a month-long experience that draws visitors from across the country, including many families from our own community.

This year's tree continues that legacy, standing tall near the White House and decorated with hundreds of lights and ornaments crafted by artists and students from every U.S. state, territory, and the District of Columbia. The lighting ceremony, which blends music, storytelling, and goodwill, showcases a diversity of voices and traditions that reflect the very best of America.

For many families, visiting the tree is a cherished holiday ritual. It offers a chance to pause the seasonal rush and share a moment of connection. The combined effect of the soft light, the festive displays along the Pathway of Peace, and the majestic historic monuments creates an atmosphere that is both comforting and feels outside of time.

Spanberger Warns of Looming Energy Crisis, Says Data Centers Must “Pay Their Fair Share”

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Governor-elect Abigail Spanberger is raising alarms about what she calls a “coming energy crisis” in Virginia, pointing to the rapid expansion of data centers as a central driver of rising electricity demand and higher costs for residents. In a series of recent interviews and policy statements, Spanberger outlined her belief that without intervention, Virginians could soon face significant challenges related to energy affordability and grid reliability.

Northern Virginia hosts the world’s largest concentration of data centers—vast warehouses of servers that power cloud computing, streaming services, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence. These facilities consume extraordinary amounts of electricity, and their growth has outpaced the state’s ability to build new power generation and grid infrastructure.

Virginia does not have a comprehensive statewide data center land-use regulation since localities are making their own rules around where and how data centers can be built. A data centers study published on December 9, 2024 by the Virginia General Assembly found that state intervention “is not currently warranted,” since land-use decisions are traditionally local in Virginia.

The same report found that Northern Virginia’s share of global capacity is 13% of all reported data center operational capacity globally. Furthermore, the report states that Northern Virginia accounts for 25% of data center capacity in the Americas.

A Prince William County study shows that Northern Virginia, mainly Loudoun, Fairfax, and Prince William counties, has 180 data center sites. And the Virginia Economic Development Partnership says that Virginia is home to approximately 150 hyperscale data centers.

Northern Virginia data center market capacity is more than twice as large as Beijing, one of its closest competitors in terms of megawatts.

While data centers provide major tax revenue and economic activity, Spanberger argues they are not bearing the full cost of the strain they put on Virginia’s electric grid.

“We have to be clear-eyed about the fact that we will have an energy crisis headed into the future,” she said recently, warning that ordinary ratepayers should not be forced to subsidize infrastructure expansions built primarily for massive corporate power users.

Spanberger’s plan calls for large energy consumers—especially data centers—to pay more toward the cost of new transmission lines, substations, and generation capacity required to support their operations. She says this would help

prevent residential customers and small businesses from facing escalating bills as utilities scramble to meet demand.

Her proposal includes increasing in-state power generation, including clean energy sources; encouraging data centers to build on-site or dedicated renewable generation paired with battery storage; modernizing the state’s electric grid to handle rising demand more efficiently; expanding energy-assistance programs for low-income households struggling with utility payments; and addressing cross-state regulatory barriers that slow energy development.

[Editor’s note: The JLARC report reference in this article is available on the following Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission website at <https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt598.pdf>. We will continue writing about data centers in conjunction with energy consumption, taxation, and development.]

Regional Leaders Back Long-Term Metro Funding Plan

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

A major push to secure long-term, dedicated funding for Metro took an important step forward this week, as leaders from across the Washington region jointly endorsed a proposal aimed at modernizing the transit system.

On Monday, November 17, 2025, both the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) boards voted unanimously to support recommendations from the DMVMoves Task Force. The plan calls for \$460 million in new annual capital funding for Metro starting in fiscal year 2028.

Metro officials say the added funding would help tackle long-needed upgrades: replacing aging equipment, improving safety, upgrading signals, and investing in a more modern rail fleet. “This is a pivotal moment for our region,” Metro General Manager and CEO Randy Clarke said. “A reliable and well-funded Metro system is essential to our region’s economic vitality.”

Under the plan, the region’s three main jurisdictions — D.C., Maryland, and Virginia — would each contribute a share of the new funding:

- ▶ D.C.: about \$173 million annually
- ▶ Maryland: about \$152 million
- ▶ Virginia: about \$136 million

The task force recommends the funding increase by 3 percent each year to keep pace with long-term needs.

The proposal will focus on developing bus-priority corridors on heavily traveled routes; creating more consistent fare discounts for low-income riders; making rides free for children; and improving real-time information and standardizing bus stop designs. These changes aim to create a smoother, more connected network among the region’s 14 transit systems — from Metro to VRE, MARC, and local bus services.

While the vote was unanimous, not every leader was fully enthusiastic. D.C. Councilmember Phil Mendelson abstained during COG’s discussion, citing concerns about the city’s fiscal strain and the size of its contribution.

But many officials said the plan represents a milestone in regional cooperation. Fairfax County Supervisor Rodney Lusk, who chairs the COG board, called it “a huge step that will serve our communities for years to come.”

Transit advocacy groups also applauded the move. Jason Stanford of the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance called the plan “critical to the quality of life across the region,” while Bill Pugh of the Coalition for Smarter Growth said his organization “strongly supports” the recommendations.

The endorsement from COG and WMATA doesn’t make the plan law — that responsibility now falls to lawmakers. Legislative action will be required in the D.C. Council, Maryland General Assembly, and Virginia General Assembly to make the funding official.

COG Executive Director Clark Mercer emphasized the importance of follow-through. “This time, we hold ourselves accountable to delivering our shared vision,” he said.

The Epstein Files Transparency Act Passed 427 - 1 Vote

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The Epstein Files Transparency Act, approved overwhelmingly by the House in November 2025 with a 427–1 vote, is designed to make nearly all government documents related to Jeffrey Epstein publicly available. Under the law, the Department of Justice is required to release all unclassified Epstein-related files within 30 days.

The Act sets strict limits on redactions, allowing them only to protect the identities of victims or sensitive information connected to ongoing legal investigations. Supporters argue that this legislation is a crucial step toward accountability, ensuring that previously hidden documents — such as court filings, flight logs, financial records, and interview transcripts — become accessible to the public.

Lawmakers and advocates hope the release mandated by the Act will shed light on Epstein’s network, his associates, and the circumstances that allowed his crimes to continue for years. By codifying a firm deadline and limiting redactions, the law aims to prevent government agencies from delaying or censoring information, providing a more transparent record for journalists, researchers, and the public.



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Layered. The Most Beautiful Desserts

BY BETHANY HAN

It's been almost three months since Layered., the most popular new cafe around, had its soft opening. It's no wonder, with its calming biophilic interior, expansive drink menu, and artisanal dessert selection, that crowds snaked around the cafe in lines and the menu sold out almost daily. The realistic fruit desserts would be enough to draw the multitudes inside the doors, especially with trending reels showing influencers crunching into "L.A.'s most beautiful desserts" creating a frenzy on the Internet and cravings in scrollers, but what really seems to make Layered. distinct from the many cafes in the DMV is the sheer quality of it all. The chefs are trained by Michelin chefs, and "luxury isn't about price - it's the hands that made it" (according

to their Instagram page). Each dessert and drink is crafted with care and incorporated with layers. "Of course we value our product and we want to make sure everything tastes good, but we also want to make sure that everyone has a good experience," the owner, Choi, said. The drinks are fancy, the desserts are beautiful, and the atmosphere is sprinkled over with live piano music. In other words, Layered. is a whole experience in itself.

When Layered. first soft-opened in August, it was so wildly successful that it was startling. The desserts sold out in 48 hours. "It was great that we did a soft opening because people were very understanding that we were still opening the business [and had] a lot of things to kind of figure out still," said Choi. Now, the kinks have been worked out, more

staff have been hired, and production has been increased to keep up with the insane demand. It was time for the grand opening. "We significantly changed our menu, our recipes, our interior design. We introduced a lot of new desserts as well... and once we were able to keep up with the product, then we decided we should do our grand opening." It's still Layered., but better, with its signature desserts now available all day long instead of in certain drop periods. And a grand piano.

What may not be known about the cafe is that it shares an owner with similarly bustling cafe Chateau de Chantilly. Something that both establishments clearly share is the ability to create community through intentional space-building. While the two places couldn't be more different

interior aesthetic-wise ("Chateau is more of a maximalist vibe...and we decided to go with Layered. [to] have a little bit of a different ambiance"), they both prioritize making customer experience a priority, through both food and space. As Choi said, "of course we value our product and we want to make sure everything tastes good, but we also want to make sure that everyone has a good experience." As for the future of Layered.? They're planning to expand. They're already scoping out new areas, training up staff, and preparing for potential new locations. "Hopefully we are prepared and the community loves us enough for us to have the demand to open up another store." From the amount of support and business said community has already provided, one thing that is for sure is that Layered. will grow to be a vital part of the Fairfax community.



Winter Holiday Markets

- Downtown Holiday Market: Features two blocks of F Street NW, from 7th to 9th Streets, with vendors selling artisan and unique gifts.
Dates: November 17–December 23, 2025
- DC Holiday Market at Dupont Circle: Takes place at a new location on New Hampshire Ave NW, just north of Dupont Circle.
Dates: November 14–December 23, 2025
Hours: Monday–Friday, 12 PM–8 PM; Saturday/Sunday, 11 AM–8 PM
- Old Town Alexandria Christmas Market and Holiday Craft Show: Located at John Carlyle Square.

- Date: December 13, 2025
- Holiday Maker's Market at Port City Brewing: A market with various vendors.
Dates: December 5–December 21, 2025
- Del Ray Artisans' 30th Annual Fine Art & Fine Craft: A holiday market hosted by Del Ray Artisans.
Date: December 7, 2025
- Norwegian Holiday Festival & Bazaar: An event with a variety of goods.
Dates: November 22–24
Location: Norway House
- Heurich Christmas Market: Hosted at the Heurich House Museum.

- Dates: December 6–December 13, 2025
- City of Fairfax Holiday Market: Features crafts, food, and festive activities.
Dates: December 5–7 and December 12–14, 2025
Location: Old Town Square
- Northern Virginia Christmas Market: Features over 300 artisan vendors.
Dates: November 10–12, 2025
Location: Dulles Expo Center
- Hidden Gems Farm: A farm with a holiday market and events.
Dates: December 1–24, 2025
Location: Hidden Gems Farm

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Monday, December 8th
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membership is not required Cash Bar*

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Mackenzie's Tunes & Tonics: Fairfax City's Spot for Food, Drinks, and Live Music



Josh and Mackenzie Alexander (Tania Hossain/TINP)

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Mackenzie's Tunes & Tonics is located at 3950 University Drive was up for approval on November 18, 2025! So we went over to chat with Josh Alexander, the illustrious owner who expressed great joy about moving on as a speakeasy dive to a place where people can create their own experiential events while enjoying fine dining.

"There was no real signage outside, just if people knew that it was here. It was here, you know, a true speakeasy back from, you know, the 20s or whatever you had to, you know, whisper, you know, secret password," shared Josh.

Mackenzie's menu takes comfort food classics and gives them a modern twist created by their executive Chef Joe Sullivan whose expertise lies in transforming food and beverages into memorable experiences for their customers. Josh worked with Joe and have become close friends since their days at the legendary Coyote Grille and from working together

at other well known dining establishments in the City.

Some of the must-try dishes include Nashville Hot Chicken Sandwich a spicy, crispy handful that is perfectly paired with cole slaw and the Smash Burger a juicy, flavorful stacked with fresh toppings - the recommended favorite and hospitable host, the 10-year old Ms. MacKenzie herself who welcomed me and then went off to take care of homework.

"I grew up watching Cheers," recalled Josh "I still watch it" as we delved into the rest of the story. "I want to build a community where people come here to be happy and be friends. I wanted to have a place like Cheers. You won't get that at corporate chains."

Josh shared the devastation of COVID and the shutdown of small businesses. "We have to build that back up again. I have a lot of support that many small businesses did not and don't. My music stage is supported by the Songwriters' Association of Washington." One

of Mackenzie's biggest draws is its live music. Local musicians perform regularly, creating a lively, engaging atmosphere. From acoustic sets to full-band performances, the music adds energy and makes every visit feel special.

The bar at Mackenzie's is just as impressive as the kitchen, hence tonics made it up on the sign. Their cocktail menu features both classic favorites and innovative drinks crafted with fresh ingredients.

"We are an outpost for Sojourn Fermentory, a brewery located in Suffolk which is owned by Fairfax City people." Josh said proudly "I try to carry as many of their beers as we can." Josh highlighted that the Midnight lager was super popular, very unique and hard to even keep on tap because they run out all the time.

Highlights include their Signature Cocktails - Unique creations that reflect the season and the bartender's creativity; Craft Takes on Classics - Martinis, mojitos, and old-fashioneds elevated with inventive twists; and Local Beer & Wine Options - Perfect for those who prefer something simple but high quality. Josh highlighted that they are very famous for their old fashioned and Manhattan gimlets, and what's very, very popular right now made with local honey.

The restaurant's dog-friendly patio also makes it a fun spot for socializing, whether you're stopping by for dinner, drinks, or just enjoying the live tunes on a warm evening. Josh also hosts bartending classes twice a year along with cocktail and whiskey classes - so you definitely want to keep an eye on their website at <https://mackenziesffx.com>.

Mackenzie's isn't just about great food and drinks—it's about giving back. The restaurant participates in programs like Pathfinder Kitchen, a Fairfax County initiative that provides culinary training and job skills to individuals diverted from incarceration.

"I've partnered with Brightpaths, once we did a training class for people to get their food manager certification. I've done classes for the Girl Scouts," Josh shared a couple of community impact work they have done. Certainly, diners can feel proud knowing that their visit

supports a business committed to making a community impact.

In wrapping up this interview, we asked Josh what he loves about owning MacKenzie's and what he loves about being a business owner in the City.

"I spend 6 - 7 days here. I want to have fun while I am here and I want people to create their own space from private events to business networking. If anyone brings me an idea, let's make it work. Let's make it happen. This space is flexible and people don't have to fit in a cookie cutter," chatted Josh with a twinkle in his eyes. He shared that one of the biggest plus is their 500 free parking spaces. !

As for his love of the City, Josh bought his home in 2012, has worked in the city since 2005 and went to George Mason. "I was actually born first living in Fairfax Square but we moved to Falls Church and the rest of the family still lived here in Fairfax," Josh shared as he got a bit emotional. "Oh, boy! I love this little city. I went to Edwin Gonzalez's retirement last night at City Hall. 32 years with the City of Fairfax - standing ovation - amazing."

Josh loves working with City of Fairfax staff. Talking about the respect and admiration he had for Gonzalez during their work at the Asian Festival, Josh shared that Gonzalez's support for the event was critical to the success of the event and he made working with him fun. Edwin Gonzalez worked for the City's Public Works Department and supported the festival for 4 years working with Josh, including when he served as the Chair of the Old Town Fairfax Business Association.

On November 18, 2025, City of Fairfax Council voted to approve the special permit for dancing and more fun to be had at Mackenzie's Tunes & Tonic. Josh is planning evenings for dance, 20s themed roaring holiday party, a who dunnit murder mystery dinner - that man had endless dreams for his beloved community space.

A ribbon cutting is scheduled for December 4 at 4 pm and Josh & Ms. Mackenzie invites everyone to come and celebrate! Mackenzie's Tunes & Tonics is a must-visit destination in Fairfax City. But for city folks, it is our cheerful place to dine, dance, and drink with friends and family.

Form 1099-MISC threshold rises from \$600 to \$2,000

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) into law, significantly changing taxes, especially for Northern Virginia's gig workers, contractors, and small business owners.

The OBBBA makes permanent sever-

al 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) tax cuts and overhauls income reporting for contract work and digital payment platforms (e.g., PayPal, Venmo).

Key changes include higher income reporting thresholds for federal tax forms. Starting with the 2026 tax year, the Form 1099-MISC threshold rises from \$600 to

\$2,000, with inflation adjustments beginning in 2027. Form 1099-NEC, used for independent contractors and gig workers (like local rideshare drivers and freelancers), will also follow these new rules.

Northern Virginia, with its above-average concentration of freelancers and independent contractors, will acutely

feel these changes. Nationally, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates 16.5 million Americans (10.4% of the workforce) are self-employed. Local tax professionals stress that despite the higher reporting thresholds, all taxable income from side gigs and businesses must still be reported on state and federal returns.

NATIONAL WRITE A BUSINESS PLAN MONTH

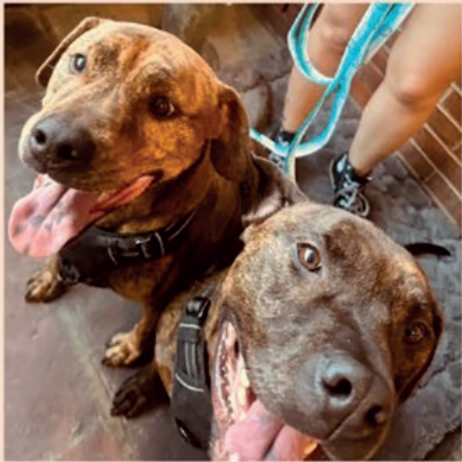
National Write a Business Plan Month in December encourages anyone thinking about starting a business to start with a plan. Your business plan is the foundation of your business. Learn how to write a business plan quickly and efficiently with a business plan template by visiting the US Small Business Administration website at <https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/plan-your-business/write-your-business-plan>





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To: Mayor, City Council, City Manager, Public Works Director

15 SEPTEMBER 2025

FROM: R. O DICKSON

SUBJ: TRAFFIC OPTIMIZATION STUDY

I have been in communication with Mr. Douglas Kennedy from Pennoni Associates, formerly Patton Harries Rust and Associates with the intent of trying to understand why the City of Fairfax appears to have some of the most congested roads in the region. In this quest I have been asking one simple question and that is "How often should the City of Fairfax be conducting a "Traffic Optimization Study?" The answer I received is annually. During the Small Area Plan presentation earlier this year by Mr. Paul Nabti I asked when the last study was done, to my great surprise Mrs. Wendy Blocker-Sanford told us the last study was done in 2012. That being the case it appears to me that the City of Fairfax is well behind the power curve by some

thirteen years. If my assumption is correct when will the next "Traffic Optimization Study" be conducted? I thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Best regards,

R. O Dickson

Cc: Mrs. Tina Disch, Executive Director, Old Town Fairfax Business Association

Mrs. Jeanne Winslow

[Editor's note: We are publishing this letter from City of Fairfax business owner, R. O Dickson to City officials because he has not received a response to his inquiry. In addition, we have been writing about the development at 3033 Chain Bridge Road. Fairfax City would be the cut through for traffic going towards Richmond and other parts west from that development.]

Festival of Lights and Carols

NEXT DATE: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 06, 2025 | 12:00 PM TO 06:00 PM

40th Annual Festival of Lights and Carols

Celebrate the holiday spirit as Downtown Fairfax transforms into a winter wonderland aglow with sparkling tree lights and festive cheer! Enjoy live holiday music, complimentary s'mores, warm cider, children's crafts and activities, and much more!

Don't miss Photos with Santa from 3-5 p.m.—a perfect chance to capture those holiday memories! Then, join us at 5:30 p.m. for the Tree Lighting Ceremony, complete with joyful caroling as we light up the night.



Performance Schedule

- ▶ Noon - Daniels Run Singers, Daniels Run Elementary School The Fairfax Choral Society Youth Choir
- ▶ 1 p.m. - George Mason University Tuba Euphonium Ensemble
- ▶ 2 p.m. - UUCF Handbell Choir
- ▶ 3 p.m. - Girl Scouts of Fairfax City
- ▶ 4 p.m. - The Metropolitan Follies
- ▶ 5 p.m. - Vienna-Falls Chorus
- ▶ 5:30 p.m. - Tree Lighting Ceremony and Caroling

Fairfax City Council Appoints Daniel Alexander as City Manager



PUBLISHED ON NOVEMBER 18, 2025 - CITY OF FAIRFAX NEWS RELEASE

At its Nov. 18 meeting, and following a national search, the Fairfax City Council introduced Daniel C. Alexander as the new city manager. Mr. Alexander currently serves as a deputy county executive in Prince William County, Virginia, where he has overseen a portfolio of 15 public safety and community services agencies since February 2022. His employment with Fairfax City will begin Jan. 5, 2026.

In his new role, Mr. Alexander will implement the mayor and the city council's policies and provide management and administrative support to all city departments, offices, and agencies, overseeing a staff of more than 600 employees.

"After a wide-ranging search and careful deliberations, the city council has selected a candidate that brings a great deal of experience in local government to our city," said City of Fairfax Mayor Catherine Read. "Mr. Alexander is a seasoned professional who understands the demands of running municipal operations and will be a steady leader for our very capable leadership team and employees. We look forward to working with him."

Mr. Alexander has three decades of public service experience with six local government organizations. In his role as deputy county executive, Mr. Alexander has provided strategic leadership and administrative oversight for the Safe and Secure Community quadrant of Prince William County government, which encompasses five county departments and 10 liaison entities, representing more than 2,600 professionals and an annual funding base exceeding \$500 million. He helped establish the Office of Community Safety to lead prevention and intervention efforts grounded in engagement, data, and systems coordination.

Prior to joining Prince William County, Mr. Alexander spent more than 18 years as an agency chief in three different jurisdictions and also served as acting assistant city manager in Cape Coral, Florida. He has led complex organizations through periods of growth, modernization, and cultural transformation. He holds both a Master of Arts in Public Administration and a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice from the University of Florida and is a graduate of the FBI National Academy.

"I am humbled and honored by the council's trust and excited to serve the City of Fairfax," Mr. Alexander said. "This is a community that enjoys great leadership, strong civic spirit, and dedicated employees. I look forward to working with the council, supporting our talented staff, and engaging openly with residents to keep our city moving forward."

Melanie Zipp, who has served as acting city manager since November 1, will resume her regular responsibilities as assistant city manager upon Mr. Alexander's arrival.

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The Willard-Sherwood Health and Community Center: A Nice-to-Have Project?

BY SUSAN HARTLEY KUILER AND JUDY FRASER
FAIRFAX CITY RESIDENTS

After the Council’s vote to increase the real estate tax rate to \$1.055 last spring, many residents are taking a more critical look at which recommended capital improvements are “nice-to-have” projects, such as the extensive recreational component of the Willard-Sherwood Health and Community Center, and which are “must-have” projects, such as replacing the high school roof and renovating the elementary schools.

According to Katy Johnson, “This past budget cycle was an eye opener for many residents. Our Arts had to beg for the small funding they depend on. Our Renaissance Housing program was completely cut. I could go on, but you get the picture.”

Other residents, however, disagree. D.T. “Tom” Ross, former City Council member, wholeheartedly supports the proposed capital improvements, arguing

that “communities thrive when they invest in community services and infrastructure.” Further, he voiced the opinion that “the Willard-Sherwood Center is being shared with the County in a favorable cost sharing arrangement that will benefit both the City and the County.”

Ms. Johnson, however, remains unconvinced that City residents can afford to bear the financial burden of funding the extensive wish list of projects and expressed concerns about the impact on the city taxpayers over time. She pointed out that the city’s population is about 25,000 or 0.02% of the county’s population of almost 1.2 million people. Nevertheless, the city “will be paying more than 40% of the cost [of the Willard Sherwood Health and Community Center], taking on 20 years of debt”. She added, “This Center will serve only a fraction of our [city] population. This is not a good deal for the City of Fairfax no matter how you spin it. These services are important, absolutely, but the level of financial commitment is not prudent for a City of our size to commit to

without being fully aware of how we will be paying for it which, unfortunately, is by way of our taxes being raised a significant amount for not many more services than we already have access to”.

Jeb Mann, a long-time resident, noted that formal and informal recreational facilities abound in the city at private gyms and clubs, as well as in the surrounding region. To his point, Oakmont, Wakefield, and Providence Recreation Centers are easily accessible by car, bike, scooter, or bus from the city and offer extensive services and classes at a reasonable cost.

Indeed, in recent social media posts, city residents noted that local businesses already offer many of the fitness services that the Center would provide. For example, Planet Fitness offers low-cost fitness memberships starting at \$15 per month. The Silver Sneakers program offers seniors a no-cost health and wellness program with locations to choose from in the city. The Down the Line (DTL) Sports Center offers indoor pickle ball. Orange The-

ory offers fitness programs. Lifetime Fitness offers a basketball court, swimming pools, bocce and pickle ball, day care, and classes for all age groups. City residents also have access to the fitness centers at George Mason, and swimming pool and golf at the County’s Oakmont Rec Center, which also offers drop-in day care.

Mr. Mann summarized the situation: “Bottom line: The City of Fairfax is heading on the fast train to financial ruin. It is time to put the brakes on. We cannot afford “nice-to-have” projects and services. We must begin living within our means or many residents and local businesses will be priced out of the city.”

City residents have time to voice their concerns to the City Council. As Katy Johnson, a long-time city resident, noted, “The good news is that for the planned Willard-Sherwood Health and Community Center, there are ‘exit ramps’ built into every phase of this project that allow the City to terminate it. I hope the City Council takes one of those exit ramps.”

Fairfax City Council Approves Ban on Firearms at City-Permitted Events and Parks

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

On October 28, 2025, the Fairfax City Council unanimously approved a revised gun ordinance that prohibits its firearms in additional public spaces, including city-permitted events and public parks.

This ordinance builds on Virginia’s 2020 law (Code § 15.2-915), which grants localities limited authority to ban firearms

in certain public places. Fairfax’s move reflects a broader trend among Northern Virginia cities seeking tighter restrictions on where guns may be carried.

Councilmembers said the changes bring Fairfax more in line with neighboring Fairfax County, improve public safety, and clarify enforcement. Councilmember Thomas (Tom) Peterson, a key supporter, said “My commitment to our community is to ensure safety for all. That should not

come at the unreasonable expense of citizens’ rights, but I believe the narrowness of this issue mitigates against that potential.”

The ordinance expands existing firearm restrictions (originally adopted in 2021) to cover sidewalks, roads, and rights-of-way adjacent to permitted public events; clarifies language about parks to align with county-level rules; raises the penalty for violations from a Class 4 misdemeanor (fine only) to a Class 1

misdemeanor, which can include jail time; allows the City Manager to use security measures (like metal detectors or security personnel) to enforce the ordinance; provides exemptions, including for law enforcement, ROTC programs, historical reenactments, and unloaded firearms at educational events; requires signage at restricted areas to alert the public; and sets the ordinance’s effective date as January 1, 2026, earlier than a previous proposed date of July 1.

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Robert Golden 703-473-7462



FY 2027 Proposed Budget Calendar



The City of Fairfax Council held its annual Budget Retreat on November 8 followed by consideration of budget guidelines and process on November 18.

February 24, 2025 - Presentation by the City Manager on the proposed FY 2027 Operating and CIP Budgets.

March 3, 2025 - FY 2027 Budget Presentation by Schools.

Fairfax City Releases Draft 2026 Legislative Program

The City of Fairfax has released the preliminary draft of its 2026 Legislative Program, laying out its state-level priorities ahead of the 164th Virginia General Assembly session.

Key Dates & Process:

- ▶ November 4 Work Session Introduction on City Legislative Program Process
- ▶ November 7 Regional Legislative Liaison Meeting
- ▶ November 18 Public Hearing on Proposed City 2026 Legislative Program
- ▶ December 1 All requests for draft legislation to be prefiled with Department of Legislative Services by 5:00 pm
- ▶ December 2 Work Session City's Proposed 2026 Legislative Program
- ▶ December 10 Consideration of the City's Proposed 2026 Legislative Program

▶ January 14 The 164th Virginia General Assembly will convene on January 14, 2026 and adjourn on March 16, 2026 (60 Days)

Highlights Of Major Priorities in the Legislative Program

- 1. Education Funding**

Fairfax City emphasizes the need for increased state funding for K-12 education, noting that the cost of providing high-quality instruction continues to outpace what the Commonwealth provides. The city supports reforms aligned with recommendations from the Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to better match state funding with local costs.
- 2. Local Revenue & Tax Authority**

The City is calling for authorization of a local 1% sales/use tax to support schools, asking for legislation similar to 2024's SB 14 and HB 805. There is a push for expanded local control, particularly around housing: Fairfax supports giving localities the power

to pass anti-rent-gouging ordinances, capping rent increases (e.g., at CPI or 7%, whichever is lower) while allowing exemptions and civil penalties.

- 3. Affordable Housing & Tenant Protections**

The City is advocating for additional state funding to support the development of affordable, accessible, integrated housing. It also asks for stronger protections for renters to prevent displacement, especially in high-cost areas like Northern Virginia.
- 4. Environmental Sustainability**

Fairfax calls for increased state investments in stormwater resiliency, particularly through the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF). The City also wants more "local flexibility" to protect its natural and historic resources, promote green development, and mitigate environmental damage linked to redevelopment.
- 5. Public Safety & Funding**

The program supports full, sustained

state funding for local law enforcement, including programs like HB 599 (state aid to local police). It also requests broader authority for local traffic enforcement tools, such as speed cameras.

- 6. Charter Amendments**

Fairfax is proposing three specific changes to its City Charter for the General Assembly's consideration: Cap the transient-occupancy (hotel) tax at 4%; change the election timing and terms for the Mayor and City Council; and limit compensation for board and commission members to no more than \$50 per meeting.

[The City of Fairfax 2025 Legislative Program is available on the following City website at https://fairfax.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?clip_id=4374&meta_id=127652&view_id=13&utm_source= Residents can view the recording of the November 18 meeting on the following City Meetings website at <https://www.fairfaxva.gov/Government/Public-Meetings/City-Meetings/>]

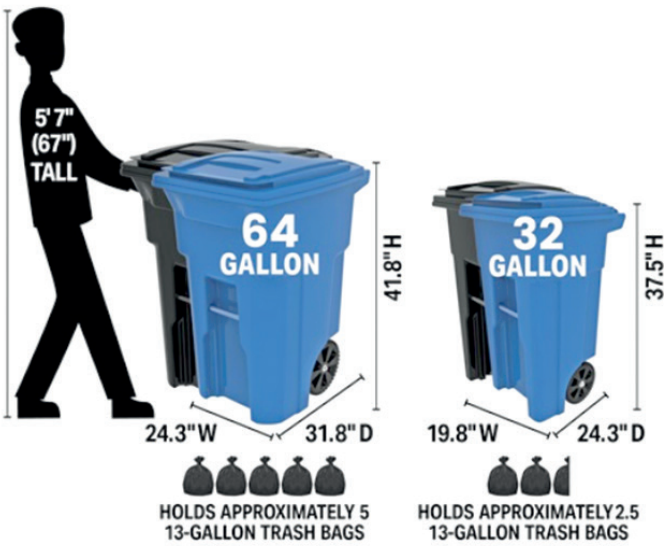
Fairfax City Expands Trash and Recycling Cart Rollout

**ADAPTED FAIRFAX CITY
GENERAL NEWS**

Fairfax City is enhancing its solid waste collection program with the introduction of new trash and recycling carts beginning January 2026. This citywide initiative aims to improve collection efficiency, safety, and service quality for residents.

In response to community feedback, the city has expanded the program to provide even greater flexibility. In addition to the standard 64-gallon carts, residents can now request smaller 32-gallon carts for trash, recycling, or both. Residents who prefer not to receive new carts may opt out of the program entirely.

The new wheeled, lid-



Updated program includes more size options and opt-out option

ded carts are designed to improve curbside collection across the community by reducing windblown litter, protecting recyclables from rain and snow, and improving safety for collection crews. Standardizing carts citywide will also streamline collection routes, reduce maintenance needs, and help ensure the continued delivery of efficient, reliable service. For more information about the cart program, FAQs, and the rollout timeline, visit fairfaxva.gov/carts.

9th Annual Holiday Market (Dec. 5-7, 12-14)

Discover unique, handcrafted gifts and support local artisans during the first two weekends of December in Downtown Fairfax! Each weekend features a rotating lineup of talented craft vendors—so there's always something new to explore.

As you shop, enjoy festive live entertainment and holiday cheer throughout the market!

Visitors can explore a wide variety of handcrafted goods, from jewelry and artwork to home décor and gourmet foods. Whether you're hunting for the perfect gift or simply want to soak in the holiday spirit, the market offers something for everyone.

In addition to shopping, attendees can enjoy live entertainment, festive decorations, and interactive activities for children. Local food vendors



will be on hand with seasonal favorites and warm beverages to keep you cozy as you browse.

- Event Details:**
- ▶ Dates: December 5-7 & December 12-14
 - ▶ Location: Old Town Square, 10415 North St., 22030
 - ▶ Days & Time:
 - ▶ Fridays: 5 p.m. - 8 p.m.
 - ▶ Saturdays: Noon - 6 p.m.
 - ▶ Sundays: Noon - 5 p.m.

The Fastest Growing Religion In The World

BY LAYLA MOHRAN

According to Pew Research Center's 2024 study, the three Abrahamic Religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam represent 65% of the American population.

Globally, Islam has been growing for years, living in unity with all religions. Communities of different backgrounds and religions have come together to care for one another and bond over the desire for unity. With America having a 52.7%

ethnic fractionalization in 2025 (World Population Review), it's important to acknowledge significant growth in one of these three Abrahamic Religions.

Islam, the last of the three, is the fastest growing religion in the world, especially having an influence on the youth of today. Islam the youngest group of followers compared to the other major religions. This allows for the spread of the religion to reach more groups than ever before. In fact, Islam is growing faster than the entire world's population (Pew

Research Center).

This is due to a number of factors, one of which is high retention rates. Most people born Muslim stay Muslim. Not only has the number of Muslims increased, but so has its representation in leadership across America. For example, Virginia's state senator, Ghazala Hashmi, is the first ever Muslim and South Asian American to be a part of the Virginia Senate. And New York's new mayor-elect, Zohran Mamdani, is also the first Muslim and South-Asian to be the mayor of New York. He is also the

youngest mayor that New York has seen in over a century.

As of recent studies from the World Population Review, Virginia is the eighth most Muslim populated state in America. According to The Association of Religion Data Archives 2020 study, Fairfax County and the DC Metro area is home to about 70,000 Muslims. Muslims are a large percentage of the people around us, living with everyone of all diverse backgrounds, continuing to thrive as a part of the northern Virginia community.

Manny's Feeding Our Neighbors Thanksgiving Dinner

The Virginian, in conjunction with Vienna Business Association and One Neighborhood Foundation, is hosting a Thanksgiving Dinner for people in our community who are food insecure, homeless, furloughed, or alone for the holidays. If your organization works with

people who may fall into these categories, please let them know, and please give us a general headcount of how many folks this might be.

Thanksgiving dinner is available for individuals and families, and is available

for take-out and dine in on Thanksgiving Day - November 27, from 1 - 5 pm.

Residents can make a donation, checks and cash can be dropped off at The Virginian Restaurant (made payable to One Neighborhood Foundation) or

donate via venmo @OneNeighborhood (please reference The Virginian Thanksgiving). Volunteers can sign up to help as well. More information is available on the following Virginia Business Association website at <https://viennabusiness.org>

Social Security Recipients to See 2.8% COLA Increase in 2026

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has announced that beneficiaries will receive a 2.8% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) beginning in January 2026.

The adjustment will affect roughly 71 million Americans who receive Social Security benefits, including retirees, survivors, and disabled workers. In addition, about 7.5 million people receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) will also see their monthly payments rise by the same percentage.

For the typical Social Security retiree, the increase

will amount to an estimated \$56 more per month, offering a modest boost to help cover everyday expenses such as groceries, utilities, and healthcare.

Beginning in 1975, Social Security started automatic annual cost-of-living allowances. The change was enacted by legislation that ties COLAs to the annual increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI-W).

The new rates will take effect automatically at the start of 2026, and beneficiaries will receive notices by mail and through their online Social Security accounts detailing their updated payment amounts.

National Rugby Day In Fairfax City

REPUBLIC CITY OF FAIRFAX
SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Tonight, Mayor Catherine Read declared Nov. 25, 2025, as National Rugby Day in #FairfaxCity, encouraging the #FairfaxCity community to welcome Old Glory DC and to embrace the values of teamwork, respect, and community that rugby represents. Representatives from Old Glory DC, Fairfax City Economic Development and Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce received the proclamation.

Rugby, created more than 150 years ago by an English student who defied convention, has been a growing force in the metro DC area – and now has come to our community with fervor. Old Glory DC, the DC area's first pro team, will begin holding home games at George Mason University's Fairfax Campus next year.

This will not only be a boon for rugby fans and Fairfax City as a whole, as Old Glory DC will



Representatives from Old Glory DC, Fairfax City Economic Development, and Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce received the proclamation from Mayor Read.

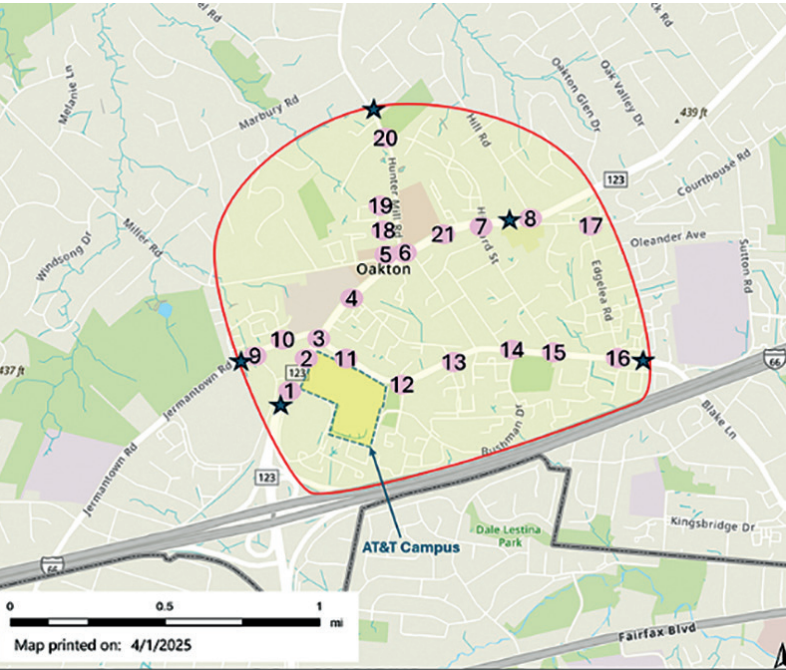
partner with the city to share the spirit of pro rugby and the spirit of its fans throughout the community, as they settle into their new home stadium right next door to the city.

Rugby was launched in 1823 by a Rugby School student who defied convention and picked up the ball. The first official rules were

written two decades later, followed by the Rugby Football Union 30 years after that. This dynamic sport encourages mutual respect and friendship on and off the field.

National Rugby Day encourages us all to celebrate the sport's history and future, as rugby unites us behind our home team and bolsters participation worldwide

Fairfax County Launches Major Study to Improve Safety and Traffic Flow in Oakton



[Oakton Congestion and Safety Study: Source & Legend - FCDOT website at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/study/oakton-safety>]

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Fairfax County has launched a new transportation study aimed at improving safety and addressing chronic traffic congestion along a key stretch of Chain Bridge Road (Route 123) in conjunction with the 3033 Chain Bridge Road development. The Oakton Congestion & Safety Study, led by the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT), will evaluate roadway changes, pedestrian safety upgrades, and multimodal improve-

ments as growth and redevelopment continue in the area.

The initiative comes as residents, local organizations, and county leaders express growing concern about the safety and usability of roads surrounding the former AT&T Oakton campus. That redevelopment project — approved by the Board of Supervisors earlier this year — triggered a directive for FCDOT to examine how increased traffic could impact nearby neighborhoods.

County officials say the goal of the study is clear: identify solutions that improve mobility while making Oakton’s roads safer for drivers, walkers, bicyclists, and transit users.

The study covers roughly one mile of Chain Bridge Road, beginning near Jermantown Road and extending north. Several intersections and neighborhood streets fall within the analysis area, including, Chain Bridge Rd at Jermantown Rd; Chain Bridge Rd at Blake Ln; Chain Bridge Rd at Miller Rd; Hunter Mill Rd; Local streets such as Edgelea Road, Borge Street, and Hibbard Street. This corridor has long been known for heavy traffic volume, limited pedestrian crossings, and discontinuous walking/biking infrastructure.

FCDOT will examine a range of potential improvements, including, adjustments to lane configurations; new or modified road connections; safer pedestrian crossings, bus stop upgrades; sidewalk and bicycle network enhancements.

The study will also produce planning-level cost estimates and potential timelines, helping county leaders prioritize both near-term and long-term projects.

On November 13, 2025, FCDOT held the first in its series of community workshops at Oakton High School, inviting residents to map out concerns and propose ideas. The workshop began with a presentation before attendees broke into groups to identify areas where congestion and safety issues are most acute. About 65 residents, primarily Oakton residents, attended that evening.

The breakout sessions produced numerous conversations from building a tunnel underneath Oakton mirroring 123 above; to creating a one way circular traffic flow to bypass the Hunter Mill & 123 intersection from Jermantown Road to Sutton Road; to installing roundabouts at pertinent points to move traffic efficiently at choke points.

Daniel Fong, owner of two homes in Oakton at either end of 123 shared “People feel like they need to be heard on this issue,” when asked about how he thought the meeting went. “The government needs to keep us updated and also listen to what residents are saying.”

County staff described the event as a “critical step” in shap-

ing the study’s recommendations. Additional public feedback opportunities are expected as the study progresses.

With redevelopment projects — including the former AT&T campus known as 3033 Chain bridge development — expected to bring new residents and activity to Oakton, county transportation planners say the study will help ensure infrastructure keeps pace with community needs.

At the same time, they acknowledge the challenges ahead. Any major roadway changes along Route 123 will require coordination with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), which controls the state highway.

FCDOT plans to refine its recommendations through early 2026, incorporating community feedback gathered so far. The final study will outline a phased approach, detailing which improvements could be implemented quickly and which may require more extensive design and funding.

Residents will have additional opportunities to weigh in as draft recommendations are released.

Fairfax City Advances Jermantown Road Improvement Project

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Fairfax City is moving forward with a major upgrade to Jermantown Road, targeting the 0.8-mile stretch between I-66 and Route 50. The project, funded largely through a \$21 million grant from the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA), aims to improve traffic flow, increase safety, and create a more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly corridor.

The initiative comes in response to ongoing concerns about congestion, crash rates, and unsafe pedestrian cross-

ings along the busy corridor, which currently carries roughly 14,000 vehicles per day. Residents and city planners have noted the challenges posed by more than 30 driveways within this short section, limited bike facilities, and a lack of consistent pedestrian amenities.

The planned improvements include the installation of a landscaped median, dedicated turn lanes, and modifications to driveways to reduce conflict points. The city also plans to enhance intersections, including Gainsborough Court and Orchard Street, to improve traffic flow and safety.

Pedestrian and bicycle facilities will be significantly upgraded, with a 10-foot shared-use path along the east side of Jermantown Road, rapid-flashing beacons at key school crossings, a pedestrian island at Carol Street, and improved street lighting. Transit users will benefit from upgraded bus stops featuring shelters, seating, bike racks, and trash receptacles. The project also includes planting over 100 trees and shrubs to improve aesthetics and environmental quality.

City officials plan a public hearing on December 9, 2025, to allow residents to formally comment on the design. Right-

of-way acquisition is expected in 2026–2027, with construction scheduled from 2027 to 2029. The project is expected to enhance safety, reduce congestion, and provide better options for walking, biking, and transit users along the corridor.

Community input has played a key role in shaping the project, which reflects priorities outlined in Fairfax City’s Comprehensive Plan, Multimodal Transportation Plan, and the Kamp Washington Small Area Plan. City planners hope the improvements will make Jermantown Road a safer, more accessible, and visually appealing corridor.

Residents Shape Fairfax Urban Forest Plan at Final Public Meeting

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

On October 23, 2025, Fairfax residents turned out in strong numbers for the city’s fourth and final public meeting on the draft Urban Forest Master Plan. Held at the Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center, with a virtual option for remote participants, the meeting gave the community a chance to review the draft plan and share input that will help guide the city’s tree and green space strategy for the next 20 years.

The evening began with an open-house session where attendees explored display boards detailing the current state of Fairfax’s urban forest, including tree canopy coverage, invasive species, and



existing policies. City staff then presented the draft plan, highlighting key goals such as tree protection, equitable canopy growth, and community engagement.

Residents provided robust feedback. Many called for stronger protections for trees on private

property and more aggressive strategies to address invasive plants. Others emphasized the importance of ensuring that new tree plantings benefit all neighborhoods fairly, particularly those with limited existing canopy. Questions about long-term funding, staffing, and opportunities for volunteer

involvement were also prominent.

The public comment period remained open through October 29, allowing those unable to attend the meeting to submit input online. City staff will review all feedback before presenting the refined plan to the Planning

Commission in December 2025, followed by City Council consideration in January 2026. More information is available on the following Urban Forest Master Plan website at <https://www.fairfaxva.gov/Events-directory/Environment-Sustainability/Urban-Forest-Master-Plan-Public-Meeting-4>



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Move Fairfax City: Safe, Walkable, Thriving

MOVE FAIRFAX CITY: PROJECT UPDATE AND OVERVIEW

October 27, 2025, Update: Phase 1 of public engagement for the Move Fairfax City plan has been successfully completed. We extend our gratitude to everyone who shared their feedback, both online and in person. This input is crucial and will directly inform the development of future recommendations and priorities for the project.

Public Engagement Highlights:

An open house was held on October 8 at the City of Fairfax Regional Library. You can watch a short video summary on the following YouTube post <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pczVh5Fpnzk>

In addition to community feedback, the plan’s recommendations will be grounded in a thorough analysis of existing conditions, current challenges, and future opportunities.

About Move Fairfax City:

The City of Fairfax was awarded a federal Safe Streets for All grant to develop Move Fairfax City, a comprehensive plan aimed at enhancing transportation

safety and walkability across the city, with a focus on Old Town Fairfax.

This plan consists of three integrated components:

Citywide Safety Action Plan: Develops recommendations to improve roadway safety and reduce deaths and serious injuries for all road users, including drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.

Citywide Pedestrian Master Plan: Prioritizes recommendations for pedestrian improvement projects throughout the city.

Old Town Fairfax Circulation Study: Evaluates the feasibility of alternative traffic circulation patterns and pedestrian improvements—including those proposed in the Old Town Fairfax Small Area Plan—to identify a preferred network and streetscape design for implementation.

These three plans will work in tandem to create a safe, walkable, and thriving Fairfax. More information is available on the Engage Fairfax website at engage.fairfaxva.gov/28847/widgets/101641/documents/73660

Providence Players of Fairfax: 28 Years of Heartwarming Community Theater Magic

BY PHILLIP KIM

For 28 years, the Providence Players of Fairfax have been a cornerstone of the Northern Virginia arts scene, evolving from a simple PTA fundraiser to an award-winning community theater company. This holiday season, local audiences are invited to experience their latest production, "A Sherlock Carol," a festive whodunnit sure to delight.

The journey of the Providence Players began modestly. As current president Kevin Harnisch, a founding member, recalls, "We started off as a PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) fundraiser event at our local Mantua Elementary School. We did 'You Can't Take It With You' and it was supposed to just be one show. It was so well-received, so we did one more show." This initial success blossomed,

moving them from the elementary school to Frost Middle School, and eventually leading to a remarkable partnership with Fairfax County to renovate the James Lee Community Center theater. Harnisch fondly notes, "We're happy to say that we've been in there now for about 23 or 24 years, producing award-winning shows."

The company prides itself on its inclusive nature and deep community ties. "We like to say we are a very large, big tent that welcomes people of all capabilities and backgrounds," explains Harnisch. This philosophy extends to their volunteers and their commitment to giving back. Beyond captivating performances, Providence Players actively supports organizations like Young Hearts, a leukemia research foundation, and the Tinner Hill Foundation. "It's a wonderful thing to put on the productions and bring live theater

to the community, but we also are very committed to supporting our community," Harnisch emphasizes. They also offer a free preview night for underserved communities and educators, and provide scholarships to local graduating seniors, including the recently renamed Gerry Connolly Scholarship.

Multiple WATCH awards and Ruby Griffith honors grace their shelves, yet Harnisch insists, "We do it for our love of the community and promoting the shows. The rest of it is icing on the cake... it's nicer to give back to the community."

The choice of "A Sherlock Carol" for their holiday show reflects a thoughtful strategy. "Whodunnits are very appealing audience-pleasing shows," Harnisch states. He explains that after the challenges of recent years, "It's been a slow pro-

cess to build the audiences back up to pre-COVID levels... You look at A Sherlock Carol and The Mousetrap, those are recognizable names and themes." This well-known story provides a welcoming entry point for audiences. Harnisch enthusiastically encourages everyone to attend, saying, "A Sherlock Carol, the holiday show, would be a wonderful family event. I encourage families to come see a great show and learn more about Providence Players."

"A Sherlock Carol" runs from December 12 to December 21, 2025, at the state-of-the-art James Lee Community Center Theater, located at 2855 Annandale Rd, Falls Church, VA. This promises to be a fantastic opportunity for residents to support local theater and enjoy a classic mystery with a festive twist. Readers can find ticket information on the Players website at <https://www.providenceplayers.org>.

BestCrosswords.com "Fall Flavors" by Sam Brody on 11/17/2025

ACROSS
1-Weep; 4- Forbids; 8- Big fuss; 14-Wedding vow; 15- Zone; 16- Fall fruit in pies and cider; 17-Tree bark much used in baking; 19-Abhor; 20- Leg joint; 21-Assortment for a color printer; 23- "Cool!"; 24- Some whiskeys; 26- _ of honor; 28-Aromatic flower buds used in mulled wine; 31-Targets of a crime; 34- Place to attach a small mike; 35- Singer-songwriter Barreilles; 36- Siestas; 38- Bicycle pump's output; 39- Omnipresent fall squash; 42- See 52-Down; 43- Baby carriage, to a Brit; 45-Takes to court; 46- Major Japanese port city; 48- Brief rainfalls; 50- Seed that may be grated over hot chocolate; 51-Maker of foam dart shooters; 52- Sheet of glass; 53- Seasonal sleigh driver; 56- Store; 58- Revise; 62-Words when raising a glass; 64- Dried unripe berries also called Jamaica peppers; 66- Root that may be candied or powdered; 67- Swedish furniture giant; 68- Very long period; 69- Unwavering, as a stare; 70-Endure; 71- Explosive material;

DOWN
1- Unwell; 2- Norse god of war; 3- Skeleton component; 4-Sheepish sound?; 5- Military forces; 6- Bright hues; 7-Went down; 8- Owned; 9- Gift giver's exhortation; 10- Chose to join; 11- Entreaty; 12- "_we forget"; 13- Concerning; 18- Gall; 22-Smug smiles; 25- Cry of pain; 27- Smoothie berry; 28-Applaud; 29- Hideouts; 30-Winfrey with a book club; 31- E-cigarettes, familiarly; 32- Sir's counterpart; 33-Wagon-wheel part; 35- Small blue cartoon characters who live in mushroom houses; 37-Antlered deer; 40-Tech company's client; 41- Person, place, or thing, grammatically; 44- Movie technique to briefly show time passing; 47- Very inclined; 49- Relative of a stoat; 50- Italian city said to be the birthplace of pizza; 52-With 42-Across, common clothing pattern; 53- Droops; 54- Plugging away; 55- Zero; 57- Icy precipitation; 59- Nutrition regimen; 60- Desktop symbol; 61- Collapsible shelter; 63-Attempt; 65-Took a load off;

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8 Wonderful Winter & Holiday Traditions

BY CAROLINE CHU

Christmas in Middleburg

Each December, Middleburg transforms into a picturesque winter holiday destination. The quaint town offers a month-long celebration filled with festive activities perfect for all ages. The holiday season kicks off with the Christmas Tree Lighting on December 5th; this event is followed by the famed Middleburg Hunt Review and mile-long Christmas Parade on December 6th, which includes jolly carolers, food trucks, and shopping in the historic town. Special events like "Jingle in the Burg" on December 13th emulate the charm of a Hallmark Christmas movie through live renditions of "A Christmas Carol" and performances by dancers, actors, and musicians. Families can also enjoy horse-drawn carriage rides, the Jingle Paws dog parade, and complimentary hot cocoa as they explore what Middleburg has to offer. More information: <https://christmasinmiddleburg.org/>

National Christmas Tree Lighting

Washington DC's most iconic holiday tradition returns this year on December 4th with the lighting of the National Christmas Tree, a spectacular display that attracts visitors from across the country. The towering tree, which is decorated by thousands of specially-made lights and ornaments that represent American states and territories, has held a place in American holiday tradition for over a century. In addition, multiple musical performers showcase their talents during the lighting ceremony, entertaining viewers

with catchy music that ranges from jazz to country. More information: <https://thenationaltree.org/>

ZooLights at the National Zoo

Visitors can come to Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington D.C. to marvel at dozens of hand-painted lanterns depicting different wildlife, enjoy live musical performances on weekends, and eat sweet treats while exploring fun attractions like the new adventure maze and the beloved Speedwell Foundation Conservation Carousel. Special events also include Members Nights (December 9-11) with free hot cocoa and exclusive nighttime animal viewing, and an adults-only Date Night on December 17 for couples seeking a romantic evening under the winter lights. As a bonus, revenue generated by Zoolights supports the Zoo's vital mission to save species and protect habitats worldwide. More information: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/visit/events/zoolights>

Old Town Alexandria Holiday Activities

Old Town Alexandria does things right when it comes to the holidays! The city hosts a number of exciting holiday events, each offering its own charming appeal. The Scottish Christmas Walk Parade, held this year on December 6th, showcases bagpipe bands, Scottish clans in traditional wear, and Scottish Terriers and hounds, paying tribute to the city's Scottish heritage. Other notable events include the Annual Santa Railway Express Train, now in its 19th year running, and the 25th annual boat parade of lights sponsored by Amazon. The city wraps up the

holiday season on New Year's Eve, with two dazzling fireshows shows that can be seen over the Potomac River. More information: <https://www.visitalexandriava.com/>

Kwanzaa at the Alexandria Black History Museum

Join Historic Alexandria at the Alexandria Black History Museum on December 13 for an exciting Kwanzaa celebration! This two-hour workshop from 12:00-2:00 pm invites participants to explore the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa (Nguzo Saba) through a variety of methods that include hands-on art, storytelling, and the creation of personal vision boards that reflect the values of unity, purpose, and joy. Attendees will also have the chance to enjoy traditional Kwanzaa refreshments. Tickets are \$15 per person. More information: <https://apps.alexandriava.gov/Calendar/Detail.aspx?si=61417>

National Menorah Lighting

First beginning in 1979, the National Menorah Lighting ceremony is a beloved tradition for Jewish observers in Northern Virginia and Washington D.C. Taking place on the Ellipse across from the White House, the ceremony features performances by the Military Bands of the Military District of Washington, essay-readings by winners of the "Mendy Deren National Menorah Essay Contest," and appearances from prominent guests, which have included the President, Vice President, and Congress in the past. Thousands of people attend annually to enjoy the lighting of the world's largest menorah and share fellow-

ship with others through music, food, and entertainment. This year's ceremony will be hosted on December 14th. More information: <https://nationalmenorah.org/>

Winter Sledding

Snow is a classic staple of Virginia winters. When the snowflakes starts falling, suit up and head to one of Northern Virginia's sledding hills to begin the perfect seasonal tradition with friends or family. Westgate Park in McLean offers a fast, open slope perfect for families, while the popular "Mount Reston" (aka the hill behind the Unitarian Church on Wiehle Ave) has a steep slope with plenty of room to pick up speed. Lake Fairfax Park's rolling hills offer a short, exciting experience perfect for kids. More information: <https://www.fxva.com/blog/post/best-sledding-spots-in-fairfax-county/>

Bull Run Festival of Lights

The Bull Run Festival of Lights consists of a dazzling 2.5-mile drive-through holiday light show that features 40,000 animated lights. The festive displays include beloved characters and scenes such as penguins, snowmen, candy canes, jumping deer, Santa's workshop, Frosty the Snowman, tin soldiers, elves, and Santa himself, which all visible from visitors' car windows. After the light show, guests can explore the Holiday Village. This attraction is complete with bonfires, s'mores, holiday merchandise, making it the perfect winter holiday tradition for the whole family. More information: <https://www.novaparks.com/events/bull-run-festival-of-lights>

National Mason Jar Day (November 30)

Celebrates the invention of the Mason jar, which made home canning safer and more efficient with its screw-on lid and airtight seal. Celebrates the ingenuity of John Landis Mason, who patented the jar in 1858. And acknowledges the jar's versatility today for canning, food preservation, and countless other uses, from drinking glasses to decor.



Meadowlark's Winter Walk

Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights is an elegant garden trail aglow with countless sparkling lights. Take an evening stroll through the enchanting Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, adorned with lighted trees and displays featuring nature, winter, and holiday themes. The half-mile paved trail is wheelchair and stroller accessible.

Sip on a cozy, hot beverage (with or without spirits), or try the new chilled Amaretto Snow Globe for a festive twist, as you walk through the twinkling lights. Don't forget to roast marshmallows for your s'mores to finish out the evening. Plus, pick up your limited-edition 2025 holiday ornament to remember this magical experience.

The Winter Walk of Lights is illuminating the gardens for its 14th season, bringing joy to as many as 110,000 visitors each year.

Ticket and information is available on Meadowlark's website at <https://www.novaparks.com/events/winter-walk-of-lights>



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Costello College of Business Hosts First-Ever AI Symposium

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

On October 22, 2025, the Costello College of Business at George Mason University hosted its inaugural Artificial Intelligence Symposium, welcoming students and local business community members to the Fairfax campus.

As attendees arrived, an AI-generated voice greeted the audience: "The future isn't written by algorithms. It's co-authored by people bold enough to lead them." This opening set the tone for an evening focused on how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping our workplaces, education systems, and leadership frameworks.

In his opening remarks, Patrick Soleymani (BS Management '07, MBA '09), Associate Dean for Outreach and Strategic Engagement at the Costello College

of Business, reflected on AI's growing influence:

"Artificial intelligence is no longer an emerging concept — it's a transformative force shaping every industry, discipline, and leadership decision." He emphasized that the symposium's goal was to bring together voices from academia and industry to explore how AI is changing the way we work, learn, and lead.

The evening featured two panel discussions, each with a distinct focus:

► **Panel 1 — Technological Implications of AI**

Moderated by Cheryl Druehl, Senior Dean for Faculty Affairs and Research at the Costello College, this panel included: Rajiv Shenoy, Partner and Associate Director at Boston Consulting Group and James Suh, CTO/CIO of NABA Inc., and CEO & Co-Founder of

Nashville Analytics.

Shenoy noted that while "AI can't compete with human creativity," integrating AI is vital to upskilling, and those unwilling to adopt it may be replaced. Suh shared that NABA prioritizes hiring "hyper-curious" employees—emphasizing adaptability over fixed expertise.

► **Panel 2 — People, Policy & Leadership in AI Adoption**

Moderated by Ajay Vinzé, Dean of the Costello College, this panel featured Tasha Austin-Williams, Principal at Deloitte, Guylaine Sainte Juste (BA International Relations '94), President & CEO of NABA Inc. and Amarda Shehu, George Mason's first Vice President & Chief AI Officer.

Sainte Juste observed, "This technology will move us from a world of expertise to a world of adaptability." Shehu

described GMU's efforts to provide faculty, students, and staff secure and user-friendly access to AI tools, paired with innovative curriculum development.

Throughout the evening, the recurring message was clear: The era of AI is here. The focus is no longer on if AI will affect our lives—but how we will engage with it. The symposium underscored the importance of embracing technology proactively, cultivating adaptability, and inclusive design and collaboration.

As Soleymani said in closing - "Whether you're in academia, business, or government, the future of AI requires bold thinking, inclusive design, and ongoing collaboration." He affirmed that the Costello College of Business is committed to equipping students and faculty not just to keep pace with AI—but to lead with it.

Patriots on the Rise: George Mason Athletics Shines

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

George Mason University's sports programs are making headlines this season. The men's basketball team is off to a perfect 5-0 start, including a 79-57 win over Jacksonville on November 18, while the women's basketball team made history earlier this year, winning their first Atlantic 10 Tournament title and earning the program's inaugural NCAA Tournament berth.

Beyond the scoreboard, Mason Athletics is enhancing the fan experience. Season ticket prices have been updated — non-premium tickets now \$30, premium \$136 — and seating arrangements refreshed to bring fans closer to the action. The athletic department's focus remains on supporting student-athletes, competing at a high level, and engaging the Northern Virginia community.

Upcoming highlights include the men's basketball team heading to the Sunshine Slam in Daytona Beach and the women's volleyball squad preparing for the Atlantic 10 Tournament. With momentum on the rise, now is the perfect time for locals to catch a game, cheer on the Patriots, and experience the excitement building at George Mason sports this season.

GMU and King's College London Take on AI Romance Scammers

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Online dating just got a lot trickier, especially for older adults. Scammers are now using AI to create ultra-realistic "romantic" personas, and George Mason University (GMU), teaming up with King's College London, just snagged a \$100,000 Google award to fight back, announced

last October.

The project, Scammed by Love, will study how AI-driven romance scams trick seniors across 13 countries — and then teach them how to spot a fake profile before their hearts (and wallets) get stolen.

"Scammers aren't just catfishing anymore," says GMU researcher San-

chari Das. "They're building entire personalities from scratch. It's like Tinder meets The Matrix."

The plan: surveys, workshops, and snazzy guides to help older adults date online safely — without ending up in a real-life soap opera they didn't audition for. Because while love may be priceless, falling for a scam shouldn't be.

Ella Semple Named to A-10 Women's Cross Country All-Academic Team

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

George Mason University graduate student Ella Semple has been named to the Atlantic 10 Conference Women's Cross Country All-Academic Team for 2025.

Semple, pursuing a Master's in Management with a Business Analytics certificate, excelled both academically and athletically. She captured the individual 6K title

at this year's A-10 Cross Country Championships in Cedarville, Ohio.

The All-Academic Team honors student-athletes who achieve excellence in the classroom and on the course. Semple's recognition highlights her dedication and sets a strong example for future Patriots. Congratulations to Ella Semple for representing George Mason with distinction both on and off the course.



Democrats’ 2025 Legislative Push: Starting with HB 1

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

In the 2025 session of the Virginia General Assembly, Democratic legislators made an unmistakable push on cost-of-living issues, advancing a slate of policy proposals aimed at easing financial pressure on working families. But many of their marquee bills – from minimum wage hikes to paid leave and drug-price reform – were vetoed by Governor Glenn Youngkin.

HB 1: Minimum wage; increases incrementally to \$15.00 per hour by January 1, 2028 has been reintroduced by Delegate Jeion Ward (D - City of Hampton). Should this bill pass, it will increase the minimum wage incrementally to \$15.00 by January 1, 2028 and then index future increases to the consumer price index (CPI) which means increases will not need any further legislation.

Having won all statewide races, with 21 State Senators and 64 State Delegates, the Democratic Legislators are moving along the rest of their priorities with full speed. Here are a few highlights from the

list of pre-filed bills along with counterparts to several from the Senate.

Paid Family and Medical Leave (HB 2531)

Would create a statewide insurance fund to allow workers up to 12 weeks of paid leave at up to 80% wage replacement for major life events (illness, caregiving, childbirth).

Prescription Drug Affordability Board

Proposal to create a nonpartisan board to analyze drug pricing and set payment limits in state-sponsored health plans to make prescription drugs more affordable for Virginians.

Worker Protections and Labor Reform

Bills to strengthen overtime rules, address misclassification, and enforce labor standards intended to improve workplace fairness and protect vulnerable workers.

Local Revenue Tools for School Construction

Proposal to allow localities to levy a 1% sales tax for school construction and

maintenance in order to address aging infrastructure and improve education facilities without solely relying on state funds.

Key Constitutional Amendment Proposals (HJ1–HJ4)

► HJ1 – Fundamental Right to Reproductive Freedom

This amendment would add a new section (11-A) to Virginia’s Bill of Rights declaring that every individual has a “fundamental right to reproductive freedom.” That includes decisions about prenatal care, childbirth, contraception, abortion, miscarriage care, and fertility treatment. The amendment says the state cannot block or burden that right unless there’s a compelling interest and it uses the least restrictive means. It also protects people from criminal penalties for seeking or helping someone else get reproductive care.

► HJ2 – Right to Vote / Voter Qualifications

This resolution would amend the Constitution to state that every person who

meets the basic constitutional qualifications to vote has a fundamental right to vote – with limited exceptions. It explicitly clarifies that people convicted of a felony should regain the right to vote automatically upon release from incarceration, without needing a separate restoration process, and that people adjudicated to lack capacity to vote can regain voting rights once their capacity is restored.

► HJ3 – Marriage Equality

This amendment would modernize Virginia’s constitution to guarantee that “marriage between two adult persons” is recognized, eliminating any bans or restrictions based on gender.

► HJ4 – Apportionment / Congressional Districts

This resolution would change how Virginia’s constitution handles apportionment of congressional districts and place limits on the General Assembly’s power to redraw these districts. The goal is to set clearer rules around redistricting and prevent partisan overreach.

Virginia’s 75th Governor Will Be Inaugurated Saturday, January 17, 2026

Since the late 19th century, citizens of the Commonwealth and public officials have come together every four years in Capitol Square to witness the governor take the oath of office. Virginia’s Inauguration, per the Constitution of Virginia, (Article V, Section 1), is held on the Saturday succeeding the second Wednesday in January. The ceremony is an official function of the Gen-

eral Assembly sitting in Joint Session.

Many of the traditional activities associated with gubernatorial inaugurations include: receptions at the Executive Mansion; inaugural balls; a parade with bands and local organizations; the governor-elect’s prayer breakfast; the key transfer between outgoing and incoming governors; and an inaugural speech deliv-

ered from the Capitol Portico broadcast via radio, television, and the internet.

Historical information on Virginia’s inaugurations can be seen in the Library of Virginia exhibit <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/1QVRlwU9X5bWKA>. It includes inaugural ephemera (tickets, passes, invitations, souvenirs), photographs, videos and radio broadcasts. In addition,

there is a blog post about the exhibit that includes links to C-SPAN’s video archive of inaugural ceremonies from 1990 to 2014.

Readers can listen to the Library of Virginia blog post on Virginia’s inaugurations from 1942 - 2010 <https://uncommonwealth.lva.virginia.gov/blog/2017/11/29/taking-office-inaugurations-of-virginia-governors-1942-2010/>

Virginia Takes Major Steps Toward a Blockchain-Ready Future



BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Virginia lawmakers are preparing for another active year in blockchain policy, with several technology-focused bills expected to return – or advance – in the 2026 General Assembly session. Momentum from recent studies, partnerships, and previously introduced legislation suggests that the Commonwealth may soon adopt some of its most significant blockchain laws to date.

One of the strongest candidates for passage is the Virginia Decentral-

ized Autonomous Organization (DAO) Act, which was introduced in 2025 as HB 1796. The bill would give legal status to DAOs – business entities governed by smart contracts rather than traditional management structures. The proposal passed the General Assembly earlier this year but was ultimately vetoed by the governor. Because the bill includes a re-enactment clause, legislators are expected to take it up again in 2026.

Another initiative likely to advance is the creation of a Blockchain & Cryptocurrency Commission, a body

first recommended in state studies completed in late 2024. The commission would provide ongoing expertise to lawmakers as they navigate the fast-changing digital-asset landscape. Early budget documents have already set aside funds for this work, signaling bipartisan interest in keeping blockchain policy on the legislative agenda.

Virginia’s growing blockchain community, including groups like the Virgin-

Fairfax County Voters Approve \$460 Million School Bond

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

Fairfax County voters overwhelmingly approved a \$460 million school bond referendum on November 4, authorizing major investments in school construction, renovations, and critical infrastructure upgrades across Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS). The measure passed with roughly 71% support, continuing the county's long-standing practice of using voter-approved bonds to maintain and modernize school facilities.

The 2025 bond package will fund a wide range of projects outlined in the FCPS Capital Improvement Program, including site acquisition for a future high school in western Fairfax County, planning and design for large-scale renovations, and modernization efforts at several aging elementary and secondary schools. Planned work includes updates to Cub Run Elementary School, Union Mill Elementary School, Centre Ridge Elementary School, and major projects at Twain Middle School and Centreville High School.

Officials note that bond financing allows the county to spread the cost of major capital improvements over time, while preserving the school division's operating budget for classrooms, teachers, and student programs. Fairfax County retains a triple-A bond rating, enabling it to borrow at favorable interest rates.

In addition to large construction projects, the bond will support security upgrades, energy-efficient building improvements, and long-deferred maintenance

such as roofing and HVAC system replacements. FCPS leaders say these improvements are essential to ensuring safe, modern learning environments for the district's growing and diverse student population.

Implementation of the bond projects will be phased over several years, following planning, community engagement, and design. Project updates are available on the FCPS Capital Improvement Program website at www.fcps.edu/capital-improvement-program.

FCPS Celebrate Strong Performance as Virginia Prepares for Major SOL Changes

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) continues to stand out academically as statewide changes to the Standards of Learning (SOL) system begin to take shape. Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid recently reaffirmed that FCPS students are performing at exceptional levels—remaining highly competitive both nationally and globally—even as Virginia prepares for significant shifts in testing expectations.

This year, 262 FCPS students were named National Merit Semifinalists for the Class of 2026, a remarkable 40% increase over the previous year. The district credits this growth to strong in-

structional programs, engaged families, and a commitment to high academic standards.

The Virginia Board of Education recently approved a plan to raise the cut scores—the minimum scores students must achieve to be considered proficient on SOL tests. These changes are designed to align Virginia more closely with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which uses a more rigorous definition of proficiency.

While the higher cut scores have been approved, the state will phase them in gradually, with major changes expected to roll out beginning in the 2026–27 school year. The board has

indicated it does not plan to apply the new, stricter proficiency standard all at once, giving school divisions time to adjust.

Virginia recently updated the academic standards for both Math and English, with the first tests based on these revisions scheduled for Spring 2025. FCPS, like other districts, is working within a tight timeframe to adjust curriculum and ensure teachers and students are ready for the new expectations.

Alongside the academic updates, several administrative shifts are planned:

- SOL scores will count as at least 10% of a student's final course grade.
- All SOL assessments will be adminis-

tered within the last two weeks of the school year, standardizing the testing schedule statewide.

- If an SOL exam is used by any students for verified credit, the test must be administered to all students enrolled in that course.
- The traditional 0–600 scoring scale will be replaced with a simplified 100-point scale.

These changes aim to make test scores easier for families to interpret and to align SOLs with other commonly used grading systems. More information is available on the FCPS's website at <https://www.fcps.edu/student-tests-and-assessments/student-assessment-details/sol-assessments>

FCPS Enters Phase 2 of Its Countywide School Boundary Review

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) has officially entered Phase 2 of its comprehensive 2024–2026 school boundary review, marking the first districtwide effort in nearly 40 years to re-evaluate how students are assigned to schools. The multi-year process aims to address overcrowding, improve equity, and simplify feeder patterns across the county's 198 schools.

The boundary review, which began in 2024, is part of the division's long-term strategic plan and responds to shifting enrollment patterns, transportation challenges, and growing concerns about neighborhood cohesion. School officials say the goal is to create a more logical, balanced, and sustainable map of atten-

dance zones countywide.

Phase 1 of the review, completed earlier this year, focused heavily on community outreach. FCPS held more than a dozen in-person and virtual meetings and collected over 12,000 comments through its interactive "Boundary Explorer" tool. Residents highlighted concerns about overcrowded schools, long bus rides, and neighborhoods split between multiple school pyramids.

Parents also called for clearer explanations of how draft scenarios were developed, urging the district to share more data and assumptions behind proposed changes.

Beginning this spring, FCPS launched

Phase 2 with a new round of hybrid community meetings held between May and June. During these sessions, families reviewed preliminary boundary concepts and offered feedback directly to district staff and the consulting team leading the analysis.

A second series of meetings will take place in the fall, when FCPS is expected to unveil an updated draft map known as "Scenario 4." Officials say this version will reflect the thousands of community comments gathered to date. Meeting materials will include detailed breakdowns of how potential changes could affect individual school pyramids, student travel times, and enrollment projections.

FCPS has emphasized accessibility throughout the process, offering transla-

tion services, childcare, live virtual feeds, and online comment tools to ensure broad participation among the county's diverse population.

A final recommended boundary scenario is expected to be completed by late 2025. The School Board will hold public meetings and vote on the proposal in winter 2026. If approved, new boundaries would take effect in fall 2026.

Families are encouraged to track upcoming meetings, review draft maps, and submit comments through the Boundary Explorer tool. Fairfax residents can stay engaged by visiting the following FCPS Boundary Review website at <https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/maps/2024-2026-boundary-review>

City of Fairfax School Board Appoints Dr. Dustin Wright Superintendent

**WRIGHT WILL BEGIN DECEMBER 1
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The City of Fairfax School Board announced tonight at their regular school board meeting that it will appoint Dr. Dustin Wright as Superintendent, effective December 1, 2025.

Dr. Wright brings nearly two decades of leadership across Northern Virginia. He began as a teacher at Rachel Carson Middle School and served as assistant principal at Fairfax Villa Elementary School and the City's Daniels Run Elementary School.

He went on to be principal at Olde Creek Elementary School and Franklin Middle School before division-level roles, including Executive Director of Strategy and Planning for Fairfax County Public Schools and, most recently, Chief of Schools for Falls Church City Public Schools. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from George Mason University and has served as an adjunct professor.

Dr. Wright and his wife, city residents for the past 17 years, have three children and are active members of the City com-



Photo Courtesy FCPS

munity.

"As a city resident and city student parent, Dr. Wright understands our schools as a community member, neighbor, and educator," said Carolyn Pitches, School Board Chair.

"Throughout his career, Dustin has been recognized for his collaborative approach, his ability to bring coherence to complex systems, and his deep commitment to the success of every student. He is known as an innovative systems-thinker, a trusted partner to school leaders, and a visible, approachable leader who listens deep-

ly and acts decisively. His leadership has been guided by a clear sense of mission: that education has the power to transform lives, families, and entire communities.

"I'm honored to serve the City of Fairfax and give back to the community that has shaped my family," said Dr. Wright. "My focus is clear: advance elementary renovations, support student success in every school, and strengthen partnerships with families, staff, and City leaders. In the months ahead, I'll listen across the City of Fairfax Schools community to learn from our successes and understand our challenges as we move Fairfax forward."

Fairfax HS Field Hockey Lions Roar With Domination

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The Fairfax High School field hockey team has been nothing short of spectacular this season, asserting themselves as one of the most dominant forces in the Patriot Region. Through a combination of skill, cohesion, and unshakeable focus, the Lions have built an 18-5 overall record, and an unblemished 9-0 mark in the Patriot Region, putting them firmly in the conversation as serious state-playoff contenders.

At the heart of this success is Head Coach Mackenzie Anderson, who leads a coaching staff that includes assistants Rachel Cooke and Rylie Flick. Under her leadership, the Lions have developed a style of play that is both disciplined and dynamic – a blend that makes opponents work for every inch of the pitch.

What makes this Fairfax squad especially dangerous is how well the players operate as a unit. Midfielders orchestrate plays with sharp, accurate passing, while forwards consistently make timely runs into scoring positions. On defense, the back line guards aggressively, and the goalkeeper has delivered in clutch moments, preserving slim leads with composure.

Seniors on the team are frequently praised for their leadership. They've taken younger players under their wing,

helping them adapt quickly to varsity-level intensity. According to Coach Anderson, this veteran presence has been "invaluable in building a culture of accountability and belief."

Coach Anderson's approach is grounded in fundamentals – but she also encourages creativity and risk-taking when the moment calls for it. She tells her players constantly that talent wins games, but togetherness wins championships. Her philosophy has clearly resonated: Fairfax's wins haven't just come in blowouts, but in tightly contested matches where mental toughness made the difference.

Her assistants, Cooke and Flick, are equally vital. Cooke's strategic insights help in-game execution, while Flick often works one-on-one with younger players to improve their technical skills. The synergy among the coaching staff seems to be a huge part of why the team remains so consistent under pressure.

With their current momentum, the Lions are in a very strong position for the postseason. A perfect regional record gives them confidence, but also sets high expectations: the team appears intent on winning the Patriot Region and making a serious push for a state championship. Fans are buzzing - 2025-2026 season could very well become one of the most memorable in program history for the Lions to roar about.



Oakton HS Girls Flag Football Team and coaches. Image Courtesy: Superintendent Weekly Reflections (November 19, 2025)

Oakton Cougars Undefeated and Eye County Championship

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The Oakton High School girls' flag football team has turned heads this season, finishing the regular season undefeated at 8-0 in Tyson's Pod and securing the top seed for the Fairfax County championship tournament. The Cougars' perfect record reflects a team firing on all cylinders – combining speed, discipline, and an unshakable sense of unity.

Oakton's undefeated streak was marked by consistent, commanding performances week after week. Key victories over strong competitors like Madison Warhawks (5-2-1) showcased the Cougars' ability to control games from start to finish. Whether executing precise passes, maintaining tight defensive coverage, or avoiding turnovers, the team consistently executed their game plan with poise.

"Congratulations to Oakton High School on making history as the first-ever FCPS girls flag football champions!!" shared School Superintendent, Dr. Michelle Reid in her weekly reflections. "With

college scholarships already available and Olympic inclusion coming in 2028, there's never been a better time for our student athletes to get in the game!"

Several elements have set Oakton apart this season - mix of experienced upperclass players and talented newcomers provided leadership and fresh energy on the field; the staff emphasized fundamentals – crisp passing, smart defensive positioning, and situational awareness – giving the Cougars a competitive edge; players' support for one another on and off the field has been a defining factor, allowing them to maintain focus even in tight situations; and Oakton's conditioning enabled them to dominate in the second half of games, often pulling away when opponents showed signs of fatigue.

With their undefeated regular-season secured, Oakton now turns its attention to the county championship tournament. The challenge ahead will be different – stronger opposition, higher stakes, and no margin for error. But if their season to date is any indication, the Cougars are ready.

Historic Kickoff: James Madison High School Launches First-Ever Girls Flag Football Season

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

VIENNA, VA — On a crisp Tuesday evening, history was made: thirty-eight girls from James Madison High School took the field in the school's very first flag football games, officially representing Warhawk Nation. The moment marked the culmination of weeks of preparation and signaled a significant step forward in high school athletics in Northern Virginia.

Under the guidance of Head Coach Justin Bowen, the team has been practicing six days a week since mid-September — honing skills, building strategy, and building stamina, all while balancing schoolwork and outside responsibilities. Bowen, along with the players, has worked tirelessly to lay a strong foundation for the program.

The Warhawks split their opening matchups: they secured a win over Langley High School, but fell to cross-town rival Oakton High School. Despite the mixed results, the excitement and energy surrounding the team were unmistakable. For these student-athletes, the significance of the moment transcended the scoreboard.

Flag football's rise across the



U.S. has been meteoric, fueled by its non-contact format, gender inclusivity, and institutional support. While the Virginia High School League (VHSL) has yet to sanction the sport officially, Fairfax County is already a vibrant hub: there are 51 club teams in the state, with 25 of them at Fairfax County high schools alone.

Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid said, while attending a flag football clinic, "I'm so excited to see Girls Flag Football take off at FCPS and I'd like to thank the Washington Commanders for supporting this important initiative. We know that sports offer a number of benefits. Beyond physical fitness, sports also build resilience, teamwork, positive mental health, and help students feel a sense of belonging. With a growing nationwide number of collegiate teams, it's also a great opportunity for scholarships."

For the Madison Warhawks, launching this program now feels especially timely. According to the team's website, the girls aren't just playing — they're building a legacy. Parents, students, and administrators alike are watching closely, hopeful that this marks the start of many seasons to come.

Monumental Sports Network Expands: More Ways for DMV Fans to Watch the Wizards, Capitals, and Mystics

If you're a fan of local sports in the D.C. area, exciting changes are coming to how you can watch your favorite teams. The Monumental Sports Network (MNMT) — home of the Washington Wizards, Capitals, Mystics, and more — is expanding access, improving its streaming features, and offering some fun new ways to enjoy games.

Here's what fans need to know. More Access for Fans

MNMT has partnered with DIRECTV's My-

Home Team, a streaming bundle that brings the network to more homes across D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. If you subscribe, you can catch live games for just \$19.99/month in addition to your DIRECTV package.

For those who prefer streaming directly, the Monumental+ subscription has been lowered to \$179.99 per year, making it easier than ever to watch every game live or on-demand on your favorite devices, from iPhone and Android to Apple TV, Roku, Chromecast, and more.

PUZZLE SOLUTION: "FALL FLAVORS" BY SAM BRODY ON 11/17/2025

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Wizards and Capitals Stay in D.C. with Major Arena Upgrade

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Fans of the Washington Wizards and Capitals can breathe a sigh of relief: both teams will remain in the nation's capital for the long term. Talks about a possible move to a new arena in Northern Virginia have officially fallen through, and a new agreement ensures the teams stay anchored in Downtown D.C..

Under the deal, the city and team owners have committed \$515 million to modernize Capital One Arena, home to both the Wizards and Capitals, according to ESPN. The renovations will update facilities, improve fan experiences, and ensure the arena meets modern standards for professional sports venues.

The agreement also includes a new long-term lease for the teams, providing

stability for the city's pro sports scene and reassuring local businesses and residents that the arena will remain a hub of activity for years to come.

As part of the modernization plan, the arena's footprint will expand, and the surrounding Chinatown and Gallery Place areas are set for development. Plans include improvements to public spaces, additional retail and entertainment options,

and infrastructure upgrades to make the area more vibrant and accessible.

For fans, this means better game-day experiences, more amenities, and the continued excitement of having both the Wizards and Capitals right in the heart of D.C. With this deal, the city secures its sports future while breathing new life into one of its busiest downtown neighborhoods.

Virginia Rolls Out New Mobile ID Option for Residents

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Virginia residents now have a new way to carry their identification: on their smartphones. The Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles has launched Virginia Mobile ID, a digital version of a driver's license or state ID that can be used in many everyday situations.

According to the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police and Foundation, the General Assembly adopted legislation in 2017 (Code of Virginia § 46.2-230) that authorizes the use of electronic creden-

tials. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) already accepts mobile IDs at security checkpoints at more than 230 U.S. airports including six in Virginia. This isn't just a trend; it's the future of identity management, with more than half of U.S. states projected to offer mobile IDs later this year.

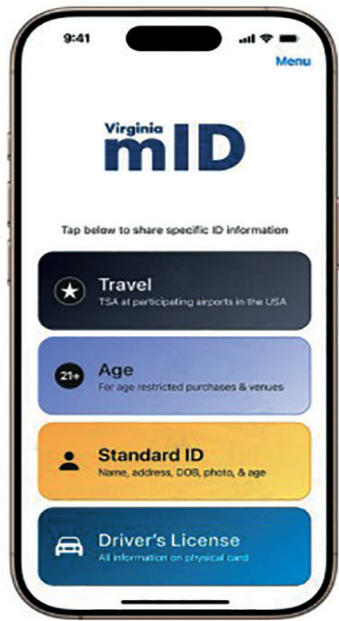
The Mobile ID, accessed through a free app, allows users to scan the barcode on their physical license and then complete a quick facial verification to confirm their identity. Once set up, the app displays a secure QR code that can be scanned when ID is required.

For now, Mobile ID is accepted at TSA airport checkpoints, all Virginia DMV customer service centers, participating Virginia ABC stores, and by Virginia State Police and several local law-enforcement agencies. The DMV plans to expand its use to additional retailers and restaurants in the future.

Officials say the new digital option offers added privacy: instead of showing all your information at once, you can choose to share only what's necessary—such as confirming you are over 21 without revealing your exact birthdate or address.

Residents should note that the Mobile ID is not a replacement for the physical card. You still need to carry your standard driver's license, as not all businesses and agencies can accept the digital version yet.

The Mobile ID app is available for both Apple and Android devices. The DMV emphasized that it does not track when or where users present their digital ID. More information is available on the DMV's Mobile ID website at <https://www.dmv.virginia.gov/licenses-ids/mobile-id>



Chinese Satellite's Laser Outperforms Starlink in Stunning Space-Tech Breakthrough

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

In a development that has captured the attention of the global space community, Chinese researchers have reportedly achieved a major leap in satellite communications by firing a 2-watt laser from a satellite 36,000 kilometers above Earth—and transmitting data five times faster than SpaceX's Starlink network.

The accomplishment, which some observers have compared to technology straight out of Star Wars, marks a significant advance in the race to build faster, more efficient space-based communications systems.

Chinese research teams, led by Professor Wu Jian of Peking University and Professor Liu Chao of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, reported a substantial data transmission breakthrough. A satellite involved in their project successfully used a tiny infrared laser—comparable in brightness to a household candle—to send data to a ground station at a speed of one gigabit per second. This speed represents a significant improvement over the few megabits per second typically achieved by Starlink in similar uplink scenarios.

The secret behind the achievement

lies in a combination of two cutting-edge technologies. The first, adaptive optics, compensates for the blurring effects of Earth's atmosphere on the laser beam. The second, known as mode diversity reception, helps capture the scattered fragments of the signal that would normally be lost. Together, these techniques allowed researchers to recover more than 90 percent of the transmitted data—an impressive feat given the extreme distance between the satellite and the ground.

What makes the breakthrough even more remarkable is that the satellite sits in geostationary orbit, a location more than sixty times farther from Earth than Starlink's low-orbit satellites. Despite this vast distance, the low-power laser still outperformed Starlink's radio-frequency-based system.

Experts say the technology could pave the way for a new era of high-speed laser communications in space, potentially reducing the need for massive satellite constellations. Fewer satellites could mean lower launch costs, reduced space clutter, and more energy-efficient systems. And by-passing earth's strata and possibly making fiber optics as old as cable wiring within the next decade. Today, it appears to be a very real glimpse into the future of global communications.

Big Trends in Holiday Tech (2025)

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Holiday electronics for Christmas 2025 are shaping up to be really exciting — there's a mix of big-ticket next-gen stuff and clever, underrated gadgets.

AI Smart Assistants

Mini A.I. devices (like the Humane AI Pin or Rabbit R1) are trending as compact "pocket assistants" that do more than just listen — they learn.

Next-Gen Audio

Premium noise-canceling headphones are leveling up. For example, Sony's WH-1000XM6 features a new QN3 chip and improved mic setup. Portable speakers are

also getting smarter and more robust.

Eco-Focused Smart Home

Smart lighting (LED strips, panel lights) and energy-efficient devices (smart thermostats, solar-powered cameras) are very popular.

Wearables Without Bulk

Fitness rings (very discreet health trackers) are emerging as an alternative to bulky smartwatches.

Portable Projectors

Compact, battery-powered projectors (especially laser ones) are great for on-the-go entertainment.

Foldables & Flagship Phones

Foldable phones are back in a big way. The iPhone 17 is out for 2025, which could make it a top gift for Apple fans.

From Page 22 → VIRGINIA...

ia Blockchain Council, is also pushing for "green mining" incentives—a policy that would encourage cryptocurrency mining operations to use renewable energy. Advocates say such incentives could attract investment while keeping energy use in check.

Lawmakers may also consider an innovation sandbox, a regulatory test environment designed to help startups experiment with blockchain and Web3 tools under limited supervision. Similar sandbox models in other states have helped accelerate economic development by lowering barriers for early-stage companies.

Concerns about consumer protection, cybersecurity, and energy consumption—along with the possibility of additional gubernatorial vetoes—could shape debate in the upcoming session.

In 2025, Virginia is not just studying blockchain — it's actively building a framework for decentralized organizations (DAOs), pushing policy partnerships, and educating the local community. With JCOTS, the VBC, and legal/consulting allies all working together, the state appears to be laying serious groundwork for blockchain innovation.

Rising Cyber Scams from Asia Pose Growing Threat to Northern Virginia Residents

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Northern Virginia residents are increasingly at risk from sophisticated online scams originating in Southeast Asia and parts of East Asia. From fraudulent cryptocurrency investments to romance scams, these schemes are targeting local individuals, often with devastating financial and emotional consequences.

Experts say the most common scams targeting Americans include:

- ▶ Romance Scams (“Pig-Butchering”): Scammers build online relationships through social media or dating apps before persuading victims to send money or invest in fake cryptocurrency

opportunities.

- ▶ Investment and Crypto Fraud: Fraudulent platforms promise high returns but disappear once victims transfer funds.
- ▶ Forced-Labor Scam Centers: Some operations, primarily in countries like Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, coerce people into running scams, often under threat of violence.
- ▶ Identity Theft and Impersonation: Scammers use stolen information or pose as government officials or legitimate companies to steal money or sensitive data.

Northern Virginia’s population—tech-savvy, relatively affluent, and often connected to government and finance sectors—makes it an attractive target. Scammers frequently use U.S.-based apps, websites, and social media platforms to reach victims in the region.

The Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office announced the seizure of approximately \$1.4 million in cryptocurrency that had been stolen as a result of a “pig butchering” scam. One of the first and the largest seizures of its kind in Virginia, highlighting the LCSO’s commitment to pursuing justice on behalf of victims of financial and cybercrimes.

“This seizure sends a clear signal to

bad actors that we will not allow our citizens to be taken advantage of and will do everything possible to get their money back,” said Sheriff Mike Chapman. “If you commit fraud, especially a fraud of this magnitude, know that Loudoun County is coming for you.”

Nationwide, Americans lost an estimated \$10 billion in 2024 alone to scams linked to Southeast Asia. While exact figures for Northern Virginia are not publicly released, According to the FBI’s IC3 report, Virginia reported \$265,073,590 in cybercrime related losses in 2023. And according to the WTOP report on April 27, 2025, “Cybercrooks scammed DC, MD, and VA out of \$848 million in 2024.

Meta Ray-Ban Smart Glasses Advances

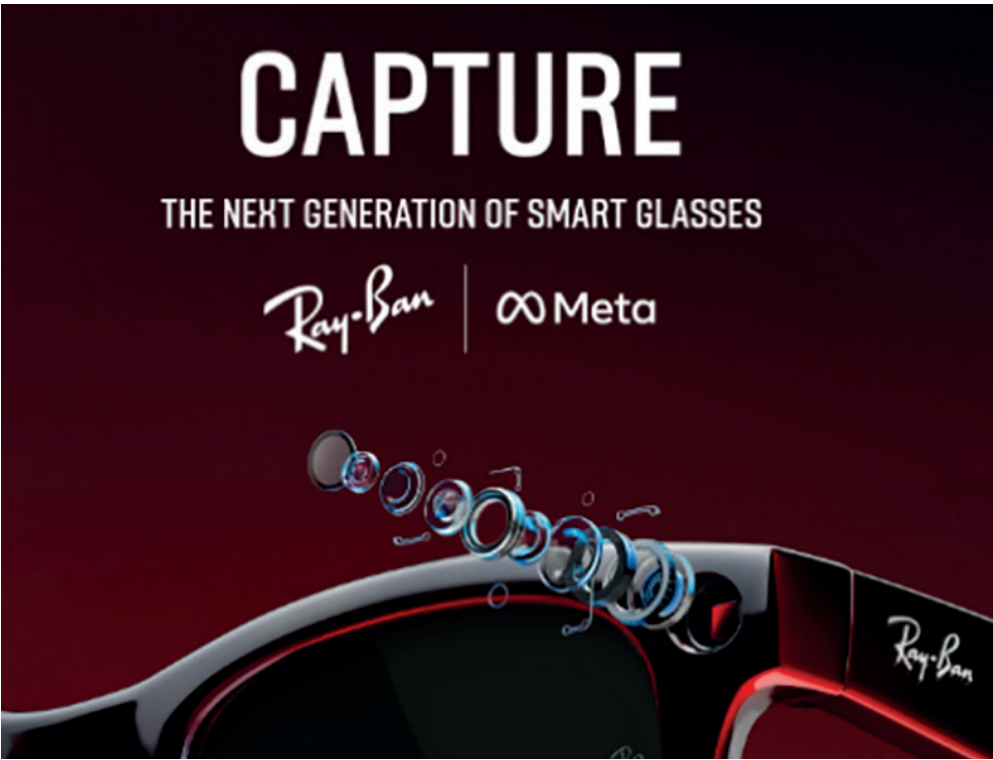
BY TANIA HOSSAIN

A familiar sight around town — Ray-Ban sunglasses — is getting a 21st-century upgrade thanks to Meta’s smart glasses, bringing together classic style and new artificial intelligence (AI) features that could change how we capture moments and stay connected.

The glasses are part of a collaboration between Meta and Ray-Ban, combining timeless frame designs with built-in technology. One model is the Ray-Ban Meta Wayfarer (Gen 2), which offers features like hands-free photo and video capture, open-ear audio, voice commands, and an AI assistant — all tucked into something that looks just like a pair of regular sunglasses.

Meta Notes Key Features:

- Built-in Camera: There’s a 12-megapixel, ultra-wide camera on the front, so wearers can easily take photos or record short videos without digging out their phone.
- Open-Ear Sound: Instead of traditional earbuds, these glasses use speakers built into the arms, letting you hear your surroundings while listening to music or taking calls.
- Meta AI (“Hey Meta”): You can talk to the glasses — ask questions, ask for help,



or even get information about what you’re looking at.

- Live Streaming: One of the newer versions allows live streaming of what you’re seeing directly to Facebook or Instagram.
- Smart Charging Case: The glasses come with a sleek case that holds extra charges, giving users up to 36 hours of use before needing to plug in.
- Water Resistance: They’re built to handle a little rain or sweat, with an IPX4 water-resistance rating.

A recent update has added more powerful AI capabilities. According to TechCrunch the glasses can now recognize objects in real time and respond when you ask Meta what you’re looking at, according to TechCrunch. It can translate spoken language on the fly (English with Spanish, French, or Italian), using the glasses’ speakers to share the translation. And it can scan QR codes through the camera, then send the link or information directly to your phone.

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Treating the Surreal

BY FAIROUZ OUIKHLFEN -
A PERSONAL STORY

Rogers Behavioral Health, the famed and lauded 'final destination' treatment center in the OCD treatment community of families, doctors, patients, and advocates, was my last resort before I deferred starting college. I was 17 years old and had never spent that much time away from home before. I was so terrified to be driven from Milwaukee to Oconomowoc that my stomach would drop, and I thought my life would end right there in the car, but I had no other choice, as someone who wanted a normal life as badly as I did.

My parents couldn't stay home to

take care of me, and when they did, we would fight and exhaust each other because my ever-changing moods in a crisis state weren't something they could deal with. I'd done outpatient, where you go to therapy sessions regularly but you still live your regular life by going to school and work when you're not in a session, and partial hospitalization, where therapy groups at a hospital center stand in place of a school day, but had never escalated to this level where I'd be living in a facility 24/7 where the treatment of my illness completely took over my life.

At Rogers, I was able to practice socializing freely with people my age, whom I didn't have to explain my non-normalcy to. From 7:00 in the morning (we were

only allowed to sleep late on the week-ends) until 10:00 or so at night, I worked like I lived in some high-level army regime. I did everything, literally everything, that scared me. I had no distinction for the line between normal anxiety and not because I had no self. I had to build a self. It was painful; sometimes I gave myself unnecessary pain, but it was necessary to wipe the slate. I'm combative, so it was kind of fun having a sparring partner in my head. Every moment was a chance to push farther, to see if I could dissipate the mist and fog that rose in my mind every time I got stressed. To see how clean and new I could make my mind work.

Medication was administered in the locked cabinet behind the RN's desk. The doctors were experimenting, and it left everyone anxious. A lot of our time waiting there was waiting a month or two (in my case, September to early November) to see if the hunch your doctor had was going to really work. You swallowed your pill determinedly, staring at the floor, or the shiny reflection of the cabinets above your head, or the big monitor that for a fleeting moment displayed all the details about your fellow patients they held close to them even when everything they owned: their toothbrush, their autonomy, their personal style, had been ripped away. I remember standing there at 9:00 when the night was winding down, doing my homework sent from my English teacher (funnily, essays on *The Metamorphosis*), the only subject the doctors had deemed untaxing enough for me to continue with while away and thinking that this couldn't be my forever.

Everything normal seemed so wrong at that time. My brain was lighting up at the wrong times, sounding the alarm for the wrong things. It's a misproportion of danger and risk, strengthened by obedience of the sufferer and those around them, until

the world seems a snowglobe of glass they are trapped in and all they can do is watch the snow fall as reality fades away. You can't break out. The refusals to stay within the walls can feel stark naked and dramatic, but the change is slow and monotonous as one realizes how sheltered and hermit-like they really were.

One of my doctors told me it was impossible to bring a Y-BOCS (Yale-Brown Obsessive-Compulsive Scale) score down to 0. But I did. I had a lot of work to do on becoming a 'real person,' but I had sterilized the whole of me with what felt like bleach foamer. Adolescence and early young adulthood are tumultuous and destabilizing in general, but it is important to not mistake or obscure one's serious struggles as they will not be fixed, but be worse when one wakes up on graduation day. Science has proved that the prevalence of obsessive compulsive disorder, often present in childhood, but severe episodes of which are often caused by a great external stressor (in my case, adolescence, and the global pandemic), is rooted in genetics. The experience we went through seeking help in my late adolescence, is corroborated by everyone in my family, as surreal, but as for my mind? It just got unlucky. The point is to catch bad luck and turn it into something good that can make you stronger instead of carrying your weaknesses with you in your backpack like a detonator waiting for something inciting to be activated within its presence.

Though the decisions I had to make in my adolescence have taken a few years to stop reverberating through my life, I don't regret or wish it away, even though sometimes I think I do. I feel sorry for my past self, the hardship I had to go through that no one deserves, but I would rather have done it then be someone who didn't have an intimate relationship with fear.



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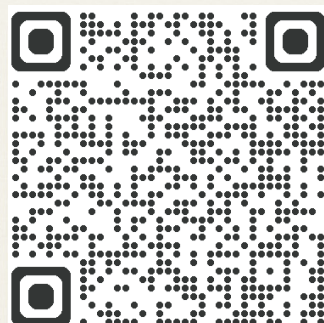
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Where Virginians Should Begin Their Health Insurance Search

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

As open enrollment approaches, many Virginians once again have the annual opportunity of choosing a health insurance plan. With multiple providers, complex terminology, and a limited window to sign up, it can be difficult to know where to begin.

Fortunately, the Commonwealth now offers a streamlined starting point for all Virginians seeking affordable, comprehensive coverage by visiting Virginia's Insurance Marketplace online at <https://www.marketplace.virginia.gov/>. Unlike the federal exchange that previously served the state, Virginia now operates its own system dedicated to connecting residents with Affordable Care Act (ACA) health plans.

This marketplace allows individuals

and families to compare plans, check eligibility for financial assistance, and enroll in coverage. For most Virginians who do not receive insurance through an employer or a public program like Medicaid, this is the central hub for exploring health plan options.

The marketplace is also the only place where residents can access federal financial help, including premium tax credits that lower monthly costs and cost-sharing reductions that reduce deductibles and copays for eligible applicants. Many Virginians qualify for these savings, even those with moderate incomes who may assume they do not.

For residents who prefer personal assistance, Virginia offers a network of certified navigators and assistants trained to help people understand and enroll in marketplace plans. These spe-

cialists can explain differences between plans, answer questions about coverage, and guide families through the application process at no cost.

Nonprofit organizations across the state, including community groups and local health-advocacy organizations, also provide free enrollment support during open enrollment.

Some Virginians may qualify for low- or no-cost coverage through Medicaid or FAMIS, the state's program for children. Eligibility depends on income, household size, and other factors. Residents unsure whether they qualify are encouraged to check their status while shopping for coverage; applications for marketplace plans and Medicaid are interconnected, allowing Virginians to be routed to the correct program automatically.

Open enrollment generally runs from early November through mid-January each year. During this period, residents can enroll in a new plan or make changes to their existing coverage. Outside of these dates, only individuals with qualifying life events—such as losing employer coverage, moving, or having a child—are eligible to sign up.

With Virginia now operating its own health insurance marketplace, residents have a more localized, responsive system for finding healthcare coverage that fits their needs and budget. Whether purchasing insurance for the first time, reviewing options for the coming year, or seeking help understanding financial assistance, Virginians have a clear starting point for navigating the complexities of health insurance instead of going uninsured.

Staying Healthy This Winter

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

As temperatures drop and daylight hours grow shorter, winter brings a unique set of health challenges for our community. From seasonal colds to dry skin and the winter blues, it's important to take a few simple steps to stay well during the colder months. Local health professionals remind us that a little preparation can go a long way in keeping families healthy all season.

Eat for Immunity

Winter is prime time for colds and flu, so supporting your immune system through nutrition is essential. Foods rich in vitamin C—such as oranges, berries, and leafy greens—help strengthen defenses. Vitamin D is also important this time of year, since we get less sunlight. Eggs, fortified dairy, and fatty fish are all helpful sources.

Warm soups, whole grains, and root vegetables make comforting, nutrient-dense meals that keep energy levels steady. Don't forget to drink plenty of fluids; dry winter air can lead to dehydration without us realizing it.

Keep Moving

Cold weather can tempt us to stay

indoors, but regular physical activity remains one of the best ways to boost immunity and lift our mood. Short walks, indoor workouts, or even stretching routines can make a noticeable difference. Local fitness centers, community centers, and parks often offer winter-friendly programs to help residents stay active safely.

Care for Your Skin

Low humidity and brisk winds can leave skin feeling dry and irritated. Dermatologists recommend using thicker moisturizers during the winter and running a humidifier at home to replace lost moisture in the air. Even though the sun feels weaker, applying sunscreen is still important—UV rays reflect off snow and can still cause damage.

Rest Well and Manage Stress

Winter tends to disrupt sleep patterns, and ongoing stress can take a toll on your immune system. Try to keep a consistent sleep schedule and limit screen time before bed. Many residents also find simple practices—like enjoying a warm cup of herbal tea, practicing deep breathing, or reading before bedtime—help promote relaxation.

Stay on Top of Prevention

Good hygiene remains one of the

best defenses against winter illnesses. Wash hands frequently, disinfect commonly touched surfaces, and stay home when feeling unwell to prevent spreading germs. Local health experts also encourage residents to stay current on recommended vaccinations, including the seasonal flu shot.

Support Your Mental Well-Being

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and general winter gloom are common this time of year. Getting outside for nat-

ural light, even briefly, can make a noticeable difference. Social activities, community events, and hobbies can also keep spirits high during the darkest months.

Dress for the Weather

Layering remains the simplest way to stay warm and safe. A good rule of thumb is to wear a moisture-wicking base layer, an insulating middle layer, and a wind-resistant outer layer. Hats, gloves, and scarves protect extremities from heat loss and help prevent cold-related health issues.

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Hello from the Other Side

COMMENTARY BY CHAP PETERSEN

REPUBLICATED FROM
THEVIRGINIASTTORNEY.COM

It's been a month since I've sent out a newsletter. Since that time, Virginia has seen a statewide election and the Federal shutdown has come and gone. And UVA is on the verge of going to the ACC championship in football.

Twenty-four years ago, when I entered the Assembly as an unlikely Democratic challenger, the Republicans controlled 66 seats in the House of Delegates, as well as the State Senate — and 8 of 11 Congressional seats.

Today, the state has completely flipped. The Democrats control all statewide offices,

the State Senate and 66 seats in the House of Delegates. Notably, the Democrats control the state politically, because they control it economically (they have a monopoly on all high-wealth legislative districts).

One of the great ironies has been the Virginia Republicans who for years failed to support campaign finance reform legislation, even though they would have been the biggest beneficiaries. (Super-size donors in Virginia lean pretty far left).

With a 2-1 deficit in the House and no statewide officials, the Republicans can finally wake up and realize: they have no power and thus no reason to defend the establishment on issues like data center proliferation.

The Republicans would be facing a life sentence of oblivion but for one fact ...

The Democratic Party wins elections by capitalizing on hatred of Donald Trump.

Wash, rinse, repeat.

Meanwhile, the Party moves on an inexorable path towards a socialist worldview, as witnessed by the recent election of Socialist Democrat Zohran Mamdani as Mayor of New York City.

His election is not an anomaly. Rather it is the future, as young people, edified by modern academia, seek leaders who will reflect these values on a national stage.

A foreshadowing occurred in the last couple weeks, as eight U.S. Senators "crossed over" and voted to end the Federal shutdown, an eminently logical move to give relief to unpaid Federal workers.

Immediately, these selfless leaders were attacked for being "traitors" or "sell-outs" or even "Republicans." Of course, the critics weren't concerned about the merits of the reopening deal, rather the fact that it allowed the Repubs to "win" the shutdown fight.

(In that way, the Federal government closure was a perfect mirror to the COVID19 shutdown, in which the same activists told us that reopening schools while Trump was President would "give him a win" — the fact that children were being denied an education was a mere detail).

Left-wing dominance leads to dis-sension; socialism leads to misery. Each principle has been proven again and again. And that may be the sole hope for Republicans in Virginia.

10 Winners and 10 Losers 2025 Virginia Election

COMMENTARY BY CHRIS SAXMAN

REPUBLICATED FROM
VIRGINIA FREE - 11/12/2025

WINNERS

- Abigail Spanberger** - the former congresswoman ran a virtually mistake free campaign. Smart, disciplined, and organized Spanberger ran up the margin of victory through an onslaught of TV ads and message consistency. In a sea of chaos, she offered boring but good. Suburban voters like that and Virginia suburban voters can't stand Donald Trump. See lessons below. Spanberger made history as the first female governor in Virginia and she has a real opportunity to be one of the best given all the challenges ahead. If her campaign is an indication of her upcoming fast four year term, Spanberger should over perform expectations.
- House Speaker Don Scott** - wow - the onslaught of commercials by House Democrats was impressive was due to the fundraising prowess of the Speaker. Those ads also mirrored the messaging of Spanberger. No wonder Democrats won swing voters almost 80/20 which piled up 13 new House Democrats. That makes 64 out of 100. Speaker Scott looks to be in firm control of the Virginia House well into the next decade. Savvy, pragmatic, and

strategic. Now that's a trifecta.

- Affordability** - what's President Trump focusing on this week? Affordability. When state and city campaign themes change messaging in the White House? Yeah, that's called Winning. His ideas are unaffordable - tariffs, tariff rebates, and pressuring the Fed to cut interest rates (shhh.. don't tell Heritage), but will Democrat ideas be any better? Republicans in the midterms better be praying that the Supreme Court tosses Trump's tariffs. And don't get me started on 50 year mortgages...Alex, I'll take Dumb and Dumber for \$800, please.
- Legislative Black Caucus** - a DOMINANT force in the Democratic Party whose power grew by leaps and bounds through fundraising and electoral successes. Force = Mass x Acceleration. The LBC is a FORCE in Virginia and will be.
- State Senator Ghazala Hashmi** - Never debated her opponent and still won Lt. Governor by over 10 points.
- Former Delegate Jay Jones** - overcame his self made storm and won the Attorney General's race by almost 7 points.
- Pollster Chaz Nuttycombe** - Dial up an award for the Most Accurate Pollster and drop it off it at State Navigate. Nuttycombe called it throughout the

cycle accurately and blew the doors off the academic pollsters. There really should be some regulations drawn up to mitigate the mistakes and likely intentional falsehoods that permeate public polling. Amanda Iovino also gets a gold star on the forehead for her internal polling which lined up with Nuttycombe's. Everyone else can go pound sand. Obviously, Democratic campaign pollsters are winners here, too. See Spanberger above.

- Politics 101:** Campaigns with the fewest mistakes usually win. Sales growth (fundraising) covers a multitude of sins (h/t Grandpa Brown)

Staying the EFF on message is Job #1 on growing sales. It's still the economy. Government shut downs NEVER work - especially in Virginia. Ask Ken Cuccinelli. You are never OUT SPENT - you are OUT RAISED. That means you were OUT WORKED.

More money means more ads means more ad impressions. It's just math. Don't wear hats and scream at hecklers.

- Econ 101:** Still undefeated after all these years, Econ 101 is grounded in Supply and Demand. Things are unaffordable because Demand is ahead of Supply - especially on Housing. I

warned of housing costs back in the 2023 legislative cycle and it has only gotten worse. Apartments are but a band aid and policy makers had better get ahead on one of the primary elements to the American Dream - owning your own home.

- Local Governments** - the real battle ahead is not going to be between Democrats and Republicans, it will be State vs Local decision making. From energy supply and delivery to housing construction to education policy to tax policy, Local Governments are going to be final deciders. In the battle between Abundance & Affordable (YIMBY) vs. No Thank You (NIMBY), take the NIMBYs to cover. Until the connection is made between Supply and Demand with folks voting in favor of lowering costs vs. direct subsidies, this will only get worse. #BoomersVsGenX/Z/ Millennials.

[Editor's Note: Chris Saxman is the Executive Director of Virginia FREE a non-partisan, non-profit established in 1988 that informs the business community in order to advance free enterprise and responsible, pro-business government. We published the winners section. Readers can continue with the entire article by visiting the following Virginia FREE website at <https://www.vafree.org/p/10-winners-and-10-losers-2025>]

Explore Virginia's History in Celebration of America's 250th

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Virginia is inviting residents and visitors to embark on a first-of-its-kind historic journey across the Commonwealth in celebration of America's 250th anniversary. Starting November 11, 2025, the Virginia 250 Passport program will allow travelers to explore 70 of the state's most treasured historic sites — from the Shenandoah Valley to Virginia's coastal shores.

The initiative is a collaboration between the Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC), Colonial Williamsburg,



George Washington's Mount Vernon, Monticello, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, and supported by the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) and the Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission.

The passport, a free 64-page booklet, serves as both a travel guide and keepsake. Visitors can collect stamps at participating destinations, with five stamps qualifying them for prize drawings — including year-long museum memberships and cash prizes up to \$2,500. Passport holders also enjoy up to 15% off admission at participating sites.

Highlights Across Virginia

- ▶ Central Virginia: Montpelier, Poplar Forest, Patrick Henry sites, and the John Marshall House.
- ▶ Northern Virginia: Historic Alexandria (Gadsby's Tavern, The Lyceum, Black History Museum), Gunston Hall, and the National Museum of the Marine Corps.
- ▶ Shenandoah Valley: Belle Grove Plantation, Frontier Culture Museum, Museum of the Shenandoah Valley.
- ▶ Southwestern Virginia: Birthplace of Country Music Museum, Blue Ridge Institute & Museum, Edith Bolling Wilson Birthplace.
- ▶ Tidewater/Coastal Virginia: Bacon's Castle, Colonial National Historical Park, Fort Monroe, Stratford Hall, Mariners' Museum.

"This passport program is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to connect with Virginia's rich history while celebrating a milestone in our nation's story," said Jamie Bosket, President & CEO of VMHC.

The passport is available at major historic sites, select VA250 events, and all 12 Virginia Welcome Centers. Only 250,000 copies are being printed, making it a limited collectible. Local schools are also encouraged to use the passport as an educational tool to engage students in hands-on history.

Whether you're a history enthusiast or just looking for a unique family outing, the Virginia 250 Passport offers a way to explore the state, reflect on the past, and celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary.

Determined. The 400-year Struggle for Black Equality

Step into the Freeman Store & Museum's exhibit room for a unique opportunity to be inspired, moved and connected to Virginia's history.

Four centuries of Black history in Virginia are traced through stories of extraordinary individuals who struggled for equality and, in the process, profoundly shaped the nature of American society and the meaning of our collective ideals.

Developed by the Virginia Museum of History & Culture and on loan for Historic Vienna, Inc. This exhibit will be on display at the Freeman Store & Museum for a limited time only. View it November 15 thru December 21

The Freeman Store & Museum

131 Church Street NE
Vienna, VA 22180
<https://historicviennainc.org/museums-projects/>

The Mosby Oak: Oakton's Historic Sentinel

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

In Oakton, Virginia, a single tree carries centuries of history. The Mosby Oak, near Hunter Mill and Chain Bridge Roads, isn't just a massive, ancient oak—it's a living witness to the Civil War and the legendary "Gray Ghost," John S. Mosby.

Over 400 years old, the oak served as a rendezvous point for Mosby's Rangers, guiding their daring raids and narrow escapes. One famous story tells of Mosby trying to capture a Union sympathizer, Alexander Haight, beneath its branches—though Haight managed to slip away.



the recent renaming of Mosby Woods Elementary School.

Today, the Mosby Oak is both a historical landmark and an educational resource. Guided tours and historical "staff rides" bring its stories to life, letting visitors experience firsthand the landscape that shaped local Civil War history.

Standing beneath its sprawling branches, it's easy to see why this tree is more than a landmark—it's a living bridge between past and present, reminding residents that history lives on, quietly, in the shadows of the trees around them.

The oak also inspired Oakton's name, highlighting its deep roots in the community. Yet its connection to Mosby, a Confederate officer, has sparked modern debates about commemoration, including

Join a Local Committee



As the excitement and energy has been building around the semiquincentennial builds across Virginia and the nation, counties and cities in Virginia are busy forming their own VA250 committees to plan local and regionally focused events and to work with the state level commission.

For more information, please visit <https://va250.org/va250localcommittees/>



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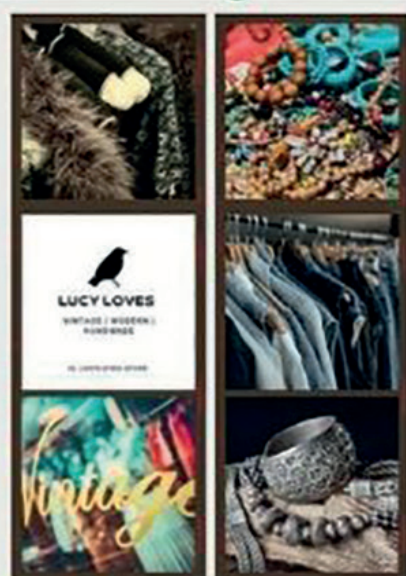
10414 MAIN STREET, FAIRFAX

Discover unique styles and express your individuality with our vibrant collection!

Shop our large selection of the greatest hits in fashion through the decades. Find pre-loved, curated, and upcycled clothes, gifts, and accessories for men and women. We also consign!

CONTACT US:

ig: lucyloves.store
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MODE ON MAIN
by MARA

Mode on Main by Mara is a small, women-run boutique where every piece is handpicked with love. Shoppers find vintage clothing, one of a kind jewelry, and thoughtful gifts such as winter accessories, candles, and self-care treats. It is a warm space that makes holiday shopping feel personal and meaningful.



Penny Pincher Jewelry Estate & Fine Jewelry

Since 2007, we have been serving Fairfax buying and selling estate jewelry, new fine jewelry, and rare coins.

10409-A Main St. in Historic Downton Fairfax City
Plenty of Parking in our adjacent lot.

Open Tues-Sat 11-7. PennyPincherJewelry.com



We are a traditional barbershop in the heart of Fairfax City. We believe that everyone deserves a place to go to where they can get pampered and enjoy the charm of an old school barbershop. Our talented barbers are well skilled in straight razor shaves and classic cuts. It's here you'll find great conversation, excellent customer service, and most importantly, pride in our work!



Stablished in August 2014, Mobius Records is a mom-and-pop record shop located in the heart of Fairfax City, VA. We specialize in new releases and reissues across all genres — there's a little something here for everyone!