

The Oakton & Vienna Independent

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Crossing Guards Temporarily Return to Fairfax County High Schools

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

FAIRFAX, VA – Crossing guards are temporarily returning to several Fairfax County public high schools following concerns about pedestrian safety and traffic conditions around county schools. On Sept. 2, the Fairfax County Police Department announced that crossing guard services would be restored at locations that previously had coverage. The announcement came as county officials continued evaluating options for student and pedestrian safety.

The restored coverage includes 10 high schools and 11 crossing locations. Schools receiving coverage include Edison, Chantilly, Oakton, McLean, West Potomac, Centreville, West Springfield, South Lakes, Annandale and South County. Two of the covered crossings are

located near South Lakes High School.

The temporary restoration followed a decision earlier in the year to eliminate funding for police crossing guards at high schools as part of Fairfax County's budget. The county had been considering ways to address traffic and pedestrian concerns while also managing its budget. Crossing guard services at elementary and middle schools were not affected by the cuts.

The discussion gained additional attention after a 16-year-old student was struck by a vehicle near South Lakes High School. According to FFXnow, the student was not in a crosswalk or at a location previously staffed by a crossing guard. County officials nevertheless continued evaluating safety conditions around schools.

The county is considering longer-term

solutions, including additional crossing guards and infrastructure improvements. Fairfax County Police are expected to provide an assessment and recommendations as officials determine future coverage.

The issue drew an unusually strong response at the Board of Supervisors' Sept. 15 public hearing. More than 50 students, parents, educators and residents testified, with the hearing stretching for more than two hours as speakers waited for their turn. Some parents questioned why the Board continued with other portions of its meeting while residents waited to speak about school safety. "It's unacceptable that we've been sitting here this long," parent Valisha Jackson told the Board.

The lengthy hearing underscored the level of public frustration surrounding the earlier decision to eliminate high-

school crossing guards. The elimination of crossing guards took effect when students started returning to school and commuters went back to work.

The Board ultimately approved \$707,908 to restore 11 crossing guard positions at 10 high schools, including Annandale, Centreville, Chantilly, Edison, McLean, Oakton, South County, South Lakes, West Springfield and West Potomac.

The funding was included in the county's FY 2026 Carryover Budget Package. The positions had been eliminated as part of cost-saving measures in the FY 2027 budget, but the county temporarily restored coverage while it evaluated the affected crossings. The September vote made the funding permanent and returned it to the county's baseline budget for future years.

Oakton Congestion and Safety Study

Join Us for an In-Person Community Meeting!
Monday, October 5th, 7-9 PM | Oakton High School Cafeteria (2900 Sutton Rd, Vienna, VA 22181)



Meeting Purpose
The Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) will be conducting Meeting 3 for the Oakton Congestion and Safety Study. The study will evaluate different roadway improvements and develop a list of recommendations, considering impacts to bicycle, pedestrian, and bus networks, and safety for all roadway users in the study area.

This meeting will cover survey feedback, future baseline and alternatives analysis, and active transportation recommendations. It will begin with a presentation, followed by discussion.

Fairfax County is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination in all county programs, services, and activities. For accommodations, please call FCDOT at 703.877.5600

Oakton Congestion and Safety Study Moves Forward with Third Public Meeting

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

OAKTON, VA – The Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) is continuing its work on the Oakton Congestion and Safety Study and will host its third public meeting on Monday, October 5, from 7 to 9 p.m. The meeting will take place in the Oakton High School cafeteria.

The study is focused on examining transportation conditions in the Oakton area, including congestion, traffic

safety, and opportunities to improve transportation options for people who walk, bicycle, and use other forms of active transportation.

During the upcoming meeting, FCDOT staff will present the results of the study's first public survey, discuss the transportation analysis conducted for potential future traffic scenarios, and present proposals for active transportation improvements.

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When Did Data Centers Get So Unpopular?

The Woman Who Refused to Be the First

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Susan Fowler was twenty-four when she joined Uber as a site reliability engineer in 2015. She had already spent much of her life pushing through doors that were supposed to remain closed. Raised in rural Arizona, she taught herself enough to get into the University of Arizona and eventually transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied physics and graduated in 2014.

Then came Uber.

On her first day working with a new team, Fowler says her manager sent her sexually inappropriate messages through the company's internal chat system. She saved screenshots and reported him to Human Resources.

The response stunned her.

She was told it was his first offense and that he was considered a high

performer. Rather than removing him, Uber gave her a choice: transfer to another team or remain and potentially receive a poor performance review from the manager she had reported. She transferred.

Then she began talking with other women. What she discovered changed the story. Other female engineers told her they had experienced similar behavior from the same manager and had reported it before Fowler ever arrived. Yet, according to Fowler, they had also been told it was his "first offense."

That detail became central to her account: if every woman was told she was the first, the pattern could continue indefinitely. Fowler documented everything—messages, emails, dates, conversations and decisions. When she believed she was being retaliated against, she reported those incidents too. Eventually, she decided the internal system was not going to tell the story for her.

On February 19, 2017, Fowler published a detailed account of her year at Uber on her personal blog. The post quickly became a major Silicon Valley story. TIME later described her as the engineer whose blog post exposed serious dysfunction at Uber and contributed to the company's decision to fire more than 20 employees.

Uber commissioned an investigation led by former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and adopted recommendations addressing workplace culture, accountability and harassment. Travis Kalanick resigned as CEO in June 2017.

But Fowler's impact did not stop with Uber. Her experience also drew attention to forced arbitration—contract provisions that can require employees to resolve workplace disputes privately rather than in court. In 2017, TIME reported that roughly 60 million American workers were subject to mandatory arbitration clauses.

In 2017, Fowler was named one

of TIME's "Silence Breakers," the group selected as the magazine's Person of the Year for their role in bringing sexual harassment and assault into public view.

Then came a significant legal change. In 2022, Congress enacted the Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act. The law generally prevents employers from enforcing pre-dispute arbitration agreements for claims involving sexual assault or sexual harassment, giving individuals the choice to pursue those claims in court.

Fowler's story is ultimately about documentation, persistence and the power of making information public.

She was told she was the first. Then she discovered she wasn't. So she kept the evidence, told the story herself, and helped turn a private workplace complaint into part of a much larger national conversation about accountability.

Gloria Steinem: A Voice That Changed America



"The truth will set you free, but first, it will piss you off" was first documented at a Stanford University "Herstory" event in 1998. Image of Gloria Steinem public domain.

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

For more than half a century, Gloria Steinem has been one of the most recognizable voices in the American movement for women's rights. A writer, journalist, organizer and activist, Steinem helped bring issues affecting women into the national conversation and became an important figure in the modern feminist movement.

Steinem was born on March 25, 1934, in Toledo, Ohio. Her childhood was far from conventional. Her father, Leo, was a traveling antiques salesman, and the family spent much of Steinem's early life traveling around the country. Her mother, Ruth, had worked as a journalist but struggled with mental illness. After Steinem's parents separated when she was 10, young Gloria spent years helping care for her mother.

Those experiences appear to have influenced Steinem's understanding of how limited choices could shape a woman's life. She later attended Smith College, where she studied government, and then spent two years in India on a fellowship. The experience exposed her to grassroots organizing and helped deepen her interest in social and political change.

Steinem became increasingly involved in the women's movement during the late 1960s and 1970s. She advocated for equal opportunities for women in education and employment and spoke publicly about issues including reproductive rights, discrimination and violence against women. Her writing and speeches made her a familiar presence in American media.

In 1972, Steinem helped launch Ms. magazine, which provided a prominent platform for women's perspectives and feminist ideas. The publication became influential in shaping public discussions about gender, family, work and equality.

Steinem was also active in building organizations designed to turn activism into lasting change. She was a co-founder of the National Women's Political Caucus and helped establish the Women's Action Alliance. She later became involved with Voters for Choice and the Women's Media Center, among other organizations.

Her influence has extended beyond the United States. Steinem has spoken

and written internationally about human rights, democracy and equality. She has also received numerous awards for her journalism and activism, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013.

For younger generations, Steinem's career offers a reminder of how journalism, community organizing and civic participation can work together. Whatever one's views on individual issues, her life illustrates the impact a determined public voice can have when it remains engaged over many decades. Her career is part of a larger American story about changing attitudes toward women and the continuing debate over equality and opportunity.



America's Time Capsule is a once-in-a-generation national record created to mark the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Led by America250,

this official project has preserved a representative snapshot of the United States at 250 years to be seen in 2276, when America celebrates its 500th anniversary. On July 4, 2026, the capsule was ceremonially buried at Independence National Historical Park, where it will remain sealed for 250 years as an enduring gift from today's Americans to future generations.

The Oakton & Vienna Independent

The Independent News Press
3976 Chain Bridge Road,
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The Oakton & Vienna Independent, your source for local news, stories, and community updates. Established in our beloved City of Fairfax and operating since February 1, 2025,

The Oakton & Vienna Independent part of a consortium of local newspapers.

Steve Chang, CEO
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DEAR OAKTON & VIENNA RESIDENTS:

It is with great excitement that we are mailing the October edition of *The Oakton & Vienna Independent* to your mailboxes. This edition will not be available in Town of Vienna mailboxes because of our limited funding.

Towards the end of 2023, Chap Petersen of Fairfax City after talking about a local newspaper for about 5 years, threw a hail mary right before Christmas. I happen to catch that ball and have now become the accidental publisher of The Independent News Press.

In 2025, we ran a trial run in the Town of Vienna and received a ton of accolades so we hustled and started circulating to town mailboxes since September of 2025. Oakton residents had 5 pickup locations.

Then last month, a Town of Vienna reader suggested that Oakton residents should also get a turn at getting their

local newspaper in the mail. As we were drinking our unusual bi-monthly coffee, he suggested that Oakton and the Town of Vienna could switch months. So that is how we ended up in your mailbox.

Such a brilliant idea! I love that our readers help us navigate so many things so we can keep our newspaper free circulating. Having said that, if every household in the Town of Vienna and Oakton sent in \$50 per year, I would not need to run around for funding this paper. \$50 is just one cup of coffee a month and I understand that it can also be a tank of gas for some.

As always, thank you to our friends—our loyal donors, guest writers, advertisers, and everyone who sends us leads, tips, story ideas, encouragement, and kind words. We continue to need financial support from our owners to keep this newspaper operating, and I want you to know that I take every dollar you send us to heart. Your support has helped us reach 100,000 readers, and that is something I never take for granted.

Thank you all our readers for continuing to welcome The Independent News Press into your homes and communities. We are grateful for the opportunity to tell the stories that inform, connect, challenge, and celebrate the people who make our community unique. We put in a lot of labor of love into this newspaper from sleepless nights in 3 time zones for our production team to locally, newsroom writers balancing a multitude of things in their lives while writing for our editions. Reader support and kind words are greatly appreciated.

Our community belongs to all of us, and the conversation about its future should include all of us. Be sure to write to me with ideas, stories, and conversations you would like to see in our newspaper at info@theindependentnewspress.com | (703) 282-3813 (call or text).

With gratitude,
Tania Hossain, Publisher
The Independent News Press

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Abby Dennis
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Mark Dreisonstok
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Tania Hossain
Morgan W. Jameson
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Kennedy Center Closes Main Building for Renovations

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., has closed its main building to the public. The closure followed a September 15 vote by the board of trustees to shut the building for roughly two years for extensive repairs, with doors locked later that day.

Officials cited serious safety concerns after plaster fell 60 feet from the Grand Foyer ceiling during a September 4 storm. Further inspection revealed water damage and deterioration in electrical systems, the garage, plumbing, and HVAC

infrastructure requiring major repairs.

The closure intersects with an ongoing legal dispute involving President Donald Trump, who became board chairman in 2025. A federal judge recently blocked efforts by Trump's allies to add his name to the building without congressional approval.

Trump suggested the repairs could cost hundreds of millions and raised the possibility of demolition. In response, a federal judge ordered 30 days' notice before any major physical changes occur. No demolition has taken place.

Programming continues at the adjacent REACH facility, while the National Symphony Orchestra and other productions will perform off-site. The Kennedy Center Honors and Mark Twain Prize will also proceed as planned.

Although the main building is closed, the Kennedy Center has not completely ceased operations. The REACH, an adjacent arts and education facility, is scheduled to continue programming, while the National Symphony Orchestra and some other Kennedy Center productions are expected to perform at off-site venues. The Kennedy Center

Honors and Mark Twain Prize are also planned to continue.

Staffing and finances remain under pressure. Over a dozen employees were laid off on September 18 amid earlier departures, and internal projections indicate substantial revenue shortfalls.

While the main building undergoes its planned two-year renovation, the institution continues operating at reduced capacity through off-site venues. The long-term future of the facility remains subject to pending litigation and funding decisions.

Fairfax County Voters to Decide \$255 Million in Bond Questions

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

FAIRFAX, VA — Fairfax County voters will decide two bond questions totaling \$255 million during the November 3, 2026, general election. The proposed bonds would provide funding for parks and park facilities and for community health and human services facilities.

The first referendum would authorize Fairfax County to borrow up to \$180 million for parks and park facilities. The second would authorize up to \$75 million for community health and human services facilities.

\$180 Million for Parks

The official ballot language for the parks bond question reads:

"Shall Fairfax County, Virginia, contract a debt, borrow money, and issue bonds, in addition to the parks and park facilities bonds previously authorized, in the maximum aggregate principal amount of \$180,000,000 for the purpose of providing funds, with any other available funds, to finance, including reimbursement to the County for temporary financing for, the Fairfax County Park Authority's cost to acquire,

construct, develop, and equip additional parks and park facilities, to preserve open-space land, and to develop and improve existing parks and park facilities?"

The proposed funding could therefore be used for acquiring open-space land, developing new parks and facilities, and improving existing Park Authority properties.

\$75 Million for Health and Human Services

The second question concerns community health and human services facilities. Its official ballot language reads:

"Shall Fairfax County, Virginia, contract a debt, borrow money, and issue bonds, in addition to the community health and human services facilities bonds previously authorized, in the maximum aggregate principal amount of \$75,000,000 for the purpose of providing funds, with any other available funds, to finance, including reimbursement to the County for temporary financing for, the cost to provide community health and human services facilities, including the construction, reconstruction, enlargement, and equipment of existing and additional community

health and human services facilities and the acquisition of necessary land?"

The proposal would cover construction, reconstruction, expansion and equipment for existing or additional community health and human services facilities, as well as the acquisition of necessary land.

General obligation bonds allow the county to borrow money for major capital projects and repay the debt over time. The two questions are separate, meaning voters can vote independently on the parks proposal and the community health and human services proposal.

Fairfax County officials have described the bond program as part of the county's long-term capital planning. If approved, the bonds would provide financing for the specific purposes outlined in each referendum.

The \$180 million parks proposal and \$75 million community health and human services proposal together total \$255 million. Voters will decide both questions on the November 3, 2026, ballot.

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Spanberger’s Data Center Framework Raises Concerns

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

RICHMOND, VA — Governor Abigail Spanberger announced Friday, September 18, 2026, a sweeping Virginia Data Center Accountability Framework, accompanied by Executive Order 22, that would significantly change how Virginia handles the rapidly expanding data center industry.

“Virginia should be leading the nation in setting the highest standards for this industry,” Spanberger said in announcing the framework.

The proposal comes as Virginia continues to experience rapid growth in data center development, particularly as demand for computing capacity has accelerated with artificial intelligence. The expansion has also generated debate over electricity demand, utility costs, water use, land use, noise and environmental impacts.

The framework focuses on increasing transparency, strengthening environmental protections, lowering energy costs, advancing clean energy and grid reliability, and delivering greater benefits to Virginia workers and communities.

For Fairfax, the announcement raises an immediate question: What does it mean for data center projects that are already moving through the approval process? That question is particularly relevant to two local developments — the proposed Vienna Cloud project on Quantum Drive in Vienna and the Edsall Data Center Substation associated with Plaza 500.

One of the most significant proposals would eliminate by-right approval for data centers using more than 25 megawatts of electricity, requiring local approval for those facilities. The framework also proposes removing future large data centers from Virginia’s fast-track permitting process.

The Governor is also seeking greater transparency. Executive Order 22 prohibits state agencies from entering into or requiring non-disclosure agreements for commercial data center projects, while proposed legislation would extend that prohibition to local governments. The framework also calls for stronger community engagement and tools allowing localities to negotiate

community-centered agreements with developers.

Another major component addresses costs and environmental impacts by ensuring developers pay more for electricity demand and meeting stricter standards for water, efficiency, backup power, and noise.

In Vienna, developer Serverfarm is seeking Fairfax County approval to redevelop 7980 and 7990 Quantum Drive into a two-phase facility called Vienna Cloud, with a planned capacity of 50 megawatts (15 MW for NVA1 and 35 MW for NVA2). Serverfarm describes the project as a site modernization featuring water-free, air-cooled chillers, visual screening, and improvements to Quantum Field. However, the project faces opposition from groups like Nature Forward, and county records show its applications are currently awaiting resubmission.

Meanwhile, the situation at Plaza 500 differs. While the data center campus itself received county approval, the proposed Edsall Data Center Substation

remains subject to Fairfax County’s 2232 public-facilities review. The Save Bren Mar community group argues the substation should be denied to allow reconsideration of the associated infrastructure.

Importantly, Spanberger’s announcement does not establish a statewide moratorium or automatically force active proposals to restart their approval process. While Executive Order 22 enacts immediate administrative directives, major policy shifts require legislative action in 2027, it can take 6 months to a couple of years for these directives to get implemented.

The Governor’s new initiatives have met with skepticism from the Coalition to Protect Prince William County, a leading grassroots organization focused on data center development.. Their media release states “Imagine your house is on fire. You dial 9-1-1, and instead of a legion of firetrucks coming down your driveway to save your home, your family, all you own and care about... They show up with a spray bottle, and an ‘ACTION plan’ that won’t be implemented for 6 months to two years.”

NCAA Eligibility Fight Opens New Chapter

BY OWEN KORZAK

A Louisiana judge’s ruling against the NCAA has opened the door for former professional athletes to return to college sports, creating another challenge to the NCAA’s evolving eligibility rules and controversy.

East Baton Rouge Parish Judge William Jorden issued a preliminary injunction Sept. 3 preventing the NCAA from blocking former professionals from competing for Louisiana State University.

Among those players are former NFL athletes Zxavian Harris and Dae’Quan Wright, who both attended Ole Miss before declaring for the 2026 NFL Draft. Harris had signed with the New Orleans Saints after going undrafted. Wright spent time this offseason with the Philadelphia

Eagles and Cleveland Browns. Both testified that they would have remained in

college had they known they would later have another season of eligibility.

The NCAA has allowed athletes an additional season of competition under recently adopted rules, but players who had already entered professional sports found themselves caught between the old and new eligibility standards.

The SEC has opposed LSU’s attempt to add former professionals, arguing that its member schools must follow conference eligibility rules. The conference also adopted potential penalties for programs that use former professional athletes.

The ruling does not settle the larger dispute. The SEC has filed a separate federal lawsuit against LSU, meaning the former NFL players’ eligibility remains part of an ongoing legal battle. For the NCAA, the case is another example of how quickly college athletics is changing as courts, conferences and athletes continue to challenge traditional eligibility rules.

One time \$1M to FCPL in Carryover Budget

BY DARIA PARNES

FAIRFAX, VA — FCPL Library Director, Eric Carzon said he was thrilled to announce that County Executive Bryan Hill chose to put a \$1 million one-time addition to the FCPL FY2027 into his carryover budget package recommendation. It has been well received by the Board of Supervisors so far, and action on the package will occur on September 15th. Once approved, the proposal would bring the FCPL library collection budget for FY27 to \$5.1 million, a starting level that has not been seen in more than a decade.

The proposed funding is intended to increase the number of titles and copies acquired across all 22 branch locations, expanding physical inventory and addressing hold times for requested titles.

This additional money would

enable the timely purchase of new fiction as well as a wide array of consistently requested fiction and nonfiction that the library has not been able to purchase enough copies of, such as:

- Workforce preparedness and career development including job search, resume, and interview guides.
- In depth resources for high demand, economically relevant fields such as software development and artificial intelligence.
- Nonfiction eBooks in addition to the increasingly popular eBook fiction and best sellers.
- Other resources such as children’s materials, world languages, and adult fiction, that have lagged will be brought up to date.

Securing this funding early in the fiscal year allows library staff to utilize vendor pricing structures and promotional options during procurement.



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\$3.7 Million Quantum Technology Investment Includes City of Fairfax

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

CITY OF FAIRFAX, VA — The City is among five Northern Virginia localities included in a nearly \$3.7 million investment to develop the region’s workforce for the growing quantum technology industry.

The Virginia Quantum Hub received \$3,684,912 through the state’s Growth and Opportunity for Virginia (GO Virginia) program. The regional initiative includes Fairfax City and the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William. It is led by George Mason University’s Quantum Science & Engineering Center.

The investment is intended to build a workforce pipeline, expand access to quantum technology and strengthen partnerships between universities, community colleges, businesses and

local governments. State officials said the project addresses significant demand in the region, with more than 1,100 quantum-related jobs currently open in Northern Virginia.

Over the next three years, the Virginia Quantum Hub is expected to train more than 1,000 students and incumbent workers, award more than 1,200 credentials, place 375 people in quantum-related jobs and internships, and reach more than 30,000 secondary students through teacher training and immersion programs.

A central part of the project will be a four-tier quantum workforce pipeline, beginning with George Mason’s middle and high school teacher training and student immersion programs and continuing through college-level education and workforce training.

The project also includes a new Quantum Technician Lab and bootcamp at Northern Virginia Community College’s Manassas campus, along with courses designed to help workers already employed in the region’s technology sector develop quantum-related skills.

At George Mason University, the initiative will support a new master’s degree program in Quantum Science and Engineering, described by the project organizers as the first program of its kind in Virginia.

The Hub will also develop shared regional infrastructure centered around an open-architecture quantum computer, giving students, researchers and industry partners access to quantum computing resources.

Another component is an industry

partnership program bringing employers and academics together to help shape curriculum, develop technology and pursue federal research and workforce grants.

The regional coalition includes five economic development authorities, three school divisions and higher education partners including Northern Virginia Community College, Marymount University and Virginia Tech. Industry partners including Leidos, Aliro Quantum and IonQ have committed more than \$1.3 million in in-kind support, according to GO Virginia Region 7.

The Virginia Quantum Hub was the largest of four GO Virginia projects announced in September, with the state awarding more than \$6.2 million across the four initiatives.

Dominion–NextEra Merger Puts Prince William’s Power Future Under Scrutiny

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

RICHMOND, VA — A proposed merger between Dominion Energy and NextEra Energy is drawing scrutiny across Virginia as the State Corporation Commission considers how the transaction could affect electric rates, infrastructure and the Commonwealth’s rapidly growing demand for power.

The proposed acquisition of control of Dominion Energy Virginia is before the SCC in Case No. PUR-2026-00112. Dominion and NextEra filed their petition July 15. The SCC has scheduled the evidentiary hearing to begin Nov. 17, 2026, at 10 a.m. Case information is available on the following SCC website at (<https://www.scc.virginia.gov/about-the-scc/dominion-nextera-merger-updates>)

The merger comes as Virginia faces a major increase in electricity demand, driven in part by the expansion of data centers and other large electricity users. The impact is especially visible in Northern Virginia,

but the infrastructure needed to supply that demand reaches across the Commonwealth. The SCC is reviewing major transmission proposals in areas including Prince William, Loudoun, Fauquier and Frederick counties, among others.

Dominion and NextEra say combining the companies would provide greater financial resources and scale to meet Virginia’s energy needs. They have also proposed additional benefits for Virginia customers, including residential bill credits, increased funding for Dominion’s EnergyShare assistance program and employment commitments.

The companies say Dominion Energy Virginia would remain separately regulated and accountable to the SCC.

A major issue for regulators and customers is how the costs of expanding the electric system will be allocated.

Large transmission, generation and

distribution projects require substantial investment. With data centers consuming increasing amounts of electricity, consumer advocates and community organizations have questioned whether large customers are paying their appropriate share of the infrastructure costs required to serve them.

Virginia has already established special rate structures and protections for large electricity users.

Prince William County illustrates the broader debate. The Coalition to Protect Prince William County has opposed aspects of data-center development and related transmission infrastructure. In a Sept. 8 statement, the Coalition urged the SCC to examine the relationship between data-center demand, Dominion’s long-term power planning and future grid construction.

The Coalition has also raised concerns about proposed data centers entering utility planning processes before local land-use decisions have been finalized. Those claims are the

Coalition’s position and have not been presented here as findings by the SCC.

The merger itself would not approve individual data centers, transmission lines or substations. Those projects remain subject to separate regulatory and local processes.

However, the SCC’s review provides an opportunity to examine how the proposed ownership change could affect Dominion’s ability to finance and build infrastructure and how Virginia protects customers as electricity demand grows.

The public can participate in the SCC process. An in-person public-witness session is scheduled for Nov. 5 from 2 to 5 p.m. at the SCC’s second-floor courtroom, 1300 East Main St., Richmond. Written comments are due Nov. 9.

The Nov. 17 evidentiary hearing will be webcast on the following SCC website at (<https://www.scc.virginia.gov/about-the-scc/dominion-nextera-merger-updates>)

SweatHouz Brings Contrast Therapy and Wellness to Fairfax

BY JACQUELINE DONALD

MOSAIC, VA — Fairfax and surrounding communities have a new way to incorporate wellness and recovery into their routines at SweatHouz, a wellness studio offering contrast therapy and private luxury suites.

SweatHouz, located in the Mosaic District, has several locations throughout the DC metro area, including Fairfax. The studio provides a contrast therapy experience that combines deliberate exposure to heat and cold through services including an infrared sauna, Vitamin C

shower, and cold plunge. Contrast therapy is available at all SweatHouz locations.

The concept behind contrast therapy is based on the body's response to exposure to heat and cold. Supporters of the practice say alternating between these temperatures may help promote relaxation and recovery, improve circulation, support muscle recovery, and contribute to an overall sense of well-being.

What sets SweatHouz apart from many other wellness businesses is its focus on providing each customer with a private luxury suite. The goal is to create

a comfortable and personal environment where guests can take time away from the demands of their daily routines.

Kevin, a local studio manager, shared that making wellness a priority is an important first step for people who may find it difficult to make time for themselves. Rather than waiting for the perfect time to begin a wellness routine, he encourages people to simply get started and explore activities that are new or outside their normal routines.

Another area of focus is reducing screen time. With many people spending

significant portions of their day scrolling through social media and using digital devices, being mindful of screen habits can create more opportunities to participate in activities that are relaxing, enriching, and beneficial to overall well-being.

The owners' vision for SweatHouz is to create a wellness space where people can step away from the busyness of everyday life, reset, and recharge. For Fairfax residents looking for new ways to make wellness part of their routine, SweatHouz offers an opportunity to slow down, disconnect, and dedicate time to personal recovery and relaxation.

The Happy Cat Hotel & Spa Brings Cat-Focused Boarding and Grooming

BY JACQUELINE DONALD

CITY OF FAIRFAX, VA — Cat owners in Fairfax now have a new option for boarding and grooming with the opening of The Happy Cat Hotel & Spa on August 15, 2026 and is located at 3220 Blenheim Blvd, Fairfax, VA 22030.

Brittni Loutzenheiser is the co-owner of the newly opened Happy Cat Hotel & Spa Fairfax and which she operates with her husband, Nicolas Martinez. The hotel offers specialized boarding and grooming services designed specifically for cats. The Fairfax location is part of a growing franchise with additional locations in Alexandria and cities across the country, including locations in New Jersey, New York and New Mexico.

Unlike traditional pet boarding facilities, The Happy Cat Hotel & Spa is designed with the unique needs of cats in mind. The hotel features 31 individually themed rooms, giving cats more space to move around and explore during their stay. Some rooms are approximately 40 square feet and can accommodate up to three cats, while a larger room can accommodate up to five.

Each room is equipped with a litter box, water and food trays, while owners only need to provide their cat's food. Meals are served throughout a cat's stay, and medications can also be administered when needed.



Image courtesy Happy Cat Hotel & Spa

One of the hotel's features is its focus on enrichment. Each cat receives 15 minutes of enrichment time, allowing them to leave their room and explore designated areas of the hotel.

Owners can also stay connected with their pets while they are away. Every room has a webcam that clients can access if they choose. The hotel also provides owners with photographs and updates about how their cats are doing during their stay.

The rooms encourage cats to explore with perches and outdoor-facing windows, complete with a bird feeder and one-way film for bird watching.

Another window allows cats to see into a neighboring room, providing additional visual stimulation while maintaining separate accommodations.

Grooming frequency depends on coat length: medium to long-haired cats need grooming every 8 to 12 weeks, while short-

haired cats require less frequent visits.

The idea for the business grew out of the owners' experience operating a pet-

walking and pet-sitting business. They noticed that dogs often received more attention in the pet-care industry and recognized that cats have different needs, particularly when it comes to grooming and boarding.

The Happy Cat Hotel & Spa was created with the goal of giving cats a comfortable environment designed specifically for them while providing owners with reassurance when they are away.

The Happy Cat Hotel & Spa offers feline-focused boarding, enrichment, grooming, and remote check-ins to give cat owners peace of mind while away.

Fiesta Fairfax: Old Town Square, 10415 North Street, 22030

Saturday, October 03, 2026 | 02:00 PM to 07:30 PM

Fiesta Fairfax is a community celebration observed during Hispanic Heritage Month and includes cultural performances, music, food vendors and educational exhibits highlighting the contributions and experiences of the Hispanic, Latino and Latinx community. The Old Town Square Stage will host folklore dance performances from various countries and live music to practice your dance moves!



Event information, including programming and cancellations are available on the following website at www.fairfaxva.gov/Events-directory/Parks-and-Recreation/Cultural-Arts/Monthly-Celebrations/Hispanic-Heritage-Month-Events/Fiesta-Fairfax

Area Top Fall Festivals and Events

COMPILED BY AYA AMER

all festivals and events are coming up around the D.C., Maryland and Virginia area. Here are five events to check out this fall.

Fall Bird Walk | Washington, D.C.

The U.S. National Arboretum will host a Fall Bird Walk on Oct. 3 from 9 to 11 a.m. The guided walk, led by DC Bird Alliance guides, will take participants through the Arboretum's 451 acres while teaching bird identification tips during fall migration. The event will meet at the Visitor Center/ Administration Building at 3501 New

York Avenue NE. Admission is free, with registration available through Eventbrite.

Maryland Renaissance Festival | Annapolis, Maryland

The Maryland Renaissance Festival will run on 19 selected days from Aug. 29 through Oct. 25 at Revel Grove, 1821 Crownsville Road. The festival is open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and recreates a 16th-century village with more than 200 entertainers, shops, food and performances. Activities include armored jousting, stage shows, music and dancing. Adult tickets for ages 16 to 61 are \$31 before taxes and fees, while children ages

7 to 15 are \$17. Parking is free.

Providence Fallfest | Fairfax, Virginia

Providence Fallfest will take place Oct. 10 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Jim Scott Community Center, 3001 Vaden Drive. The free, family-friendly event will feature performances, games and other community activities. Admission is free and open to the public.

Annual Halloween Carnival | Fairfax Station, Virginia

The Fairfax Station Railroad Museum will hold its Annual Halloween Carnival on Oct. 25 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 11200

Fairfax Station Road. The event will feature Halloween games, prizes, costumes and activities for families. Admission is donation-based, with a suggested donation of \$20 for a family of four.

Oktoberfest Market | Fairfax, Virginia

The Oktoberfest Market will take place Oct. 17 at Fairfax Corner, with the venue listing showing hours from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The outdoor market will feature local craft beer samples, hand-braided pretzels, more than 40 local artisans, live music and cocktail sip-and-stroll options. Admission is free, while food, drinks and crafts are available for purchase.

BOOK SALE OCT. 14 - 17



Oakton Library
10304 Lynnhaven Place
Oakton VA 22124

Wed Thur Fri 10 - 5:30
Saturday 10 - 4:00

All Ages
Fiction & Non-Fiction
CDs, DVDs, Audio Books
Giftable, Unique
Puzzles

No donations after Oct. 3
Donations resume Oct. 20

friendsofoaktonlibrary.org
friendsofoaktonlibrary@gmail.com



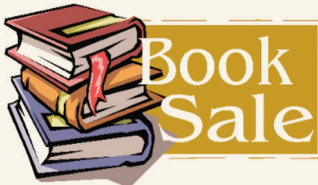
Fairfax County Public Library
12000 Government Center Pkwy
Suite 324
Fairfax, VA 22035
fairfaxcounty.gov/library



To request reasonable ADA accommodations or alternative format of materials, call 703-324-8390 or TTY 711



The City of Fairfax Regional Library Book Sale



The City of Fairfax Regional Library book sale is scheduled for October 22-25, 2026, at the City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North St., Fairfax, VA 22030.

Fall Donated Books Sale

Thursday, Oct. 22

12:00-3:00 PM

Preview sale — \$30 admission, prepaid through PayPal

Friday, Oct. 23

10:00 AM-3:00 PM

General/open sale — free admission

Saturday, Oct. 24

10:00 AM-3:00 PM

General/open sale — free admission

Sunday, Oct. 25

10:00 AM-3:00 PM

\$8 grocery-bag sale

The Sunday bag sale excludes children's books. The regular sale accepts cash, check, or credit card (with a \$10 minimum).

One thing to note: the Fairfax County Library's official Friends page confirms that the group holds two major sales annually, but it doesn't currently display these October dates itself. The October 22-25 schedule is currently listed by BookSaleFinder, so I'd recommend confirming with the Friends before making a special trip. Their contact is 703-293-2132 or folfairfaxcity@gmail.com.

Oakton Community Park Plans Move Forward

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

OAKTON, VA – Plans to enhance Oakton Community Park are moving forward, with a new pavilion at the center of the first phase of improvements.

The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) has developed preliminary designs for the pavilion, which was publicly presented at Oakton Day in the Park in August. The project is being supported by an anonymous lead donation. FCPA is now working on cost estimates as the community considers the next steps.

The proposed pavilion is intended to provide a permanent, covered gathering space for neighborhood events and programs at the nearly 10-acre park. The improvements build on the park's existing role as a community gathering place, which includes the Historic Oakton



Image of Oakton Community Park sign - public domain

Schoolhouse, recreational fields, a playground, parking and wooded areas.

A second phase envisioned by the

Greater Oakton Community Association (GOCA) would add water service, restrooms and a small kitchen. Those improvements would require additional

fundraising through a community-led capital campaign.

The project has evolved from earlier park planning that identified pavilions and a woodland picnic area as appropriate features for the property. The current proposal, however, is a newer design and should not be confused with the original master-plan drawings.

Residents will have an opportunity to see the latest proposal and hear directly from FCPA representatives at a community meeting on Monday, October 19, at 6 p.m. at the Historic Oakton Schoolhouse, 2841 Hunter Mill Road.

Community members are expected to have an opportunity to discuss the pavilion's location, design, costs, future amenities and how the improvements could affect the park's use.

Borge Street Park Playground Renovation Underway in Oakton

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

OAKTON, VA – Families who frequent Borge Street Park will have to wait a little longer to enjoy the neighborhood playground, as Fairfax County has begun a renovation project expected to be completed later this year.

Construction on the playground at Borge Street Park, 3030 Borge Street, began in late August. The playground is currently closed while crews carry out the improvements, which are designed to modernize the play area and improve accessibility for children and families.

The Fairfax County Park Authority has identified the project as part of its ongoing effort to renovate aging playgrounds throughout the county. The work includes new play equipment and accessible features intended to provide a more inclusive experience for children with different abilities.

The playground is expected to remain closed through the construction period, with reopening anticipated in December 2026, although the schedule could change depending on construction conditions.

Borge Street Park is a 3.6-acre neighborhood park serving the surrounding Oakton community. In addition to the playground, the park provides neighborhood open space and opportunities for residents to enjoy the outdoors.

The playground renovation comes as the broader area around Borge Street continues to see changes. A separate, longer-term proposal connected to redevelopment of the former AT&T Oakton campus has included plans for additional park space adjacent to the existing Borge Street Park. Previous plans have called for approximately 0.7 acres of additional parkland, including play features and areas for passive recreation.



Freeman Store & Museum
presents the

Used Book Cellar 10th Birthday Party!



**Saturday
October 17
10am-4pm**

Freeman Store & Museum
131 Church Street NE, Vienna





Special Deals!
Fall Photo Op

Kids Crafts!
Family Fun

Rain or Shine Event



FreemanStore_Museum

Groundbreaking: Willard-Sherwood Health & Community Center



Willard-Sherwood redevelopment construction: early September 2026 (image TINP)

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2026 | 10:30 AM
3750 BLENHEIM BLVD, FAIRFAX

Community members are invited to attend and join City and County representatives in commemorating the start of construction on this important project. The development of the center is a joint project of Fairfax City and Fairfax County to create a modern, centrally located facility that integrates health and human services programming and provides a community center serving both communities.

The center represents a significant investment in the health and well-being of residents in both communities. Developed as a joint project of the City and County, the new facility will provide

a modern, centrally located space that integrates health and human services with community programming and resources.

The center is designed to improve access to services while providing welcoming spaces for community activities, programs, and events. By bringing these services and opportunities together in one location, the facility will strengthen connections among residents and support the diverse needs of the communities it serves.

The groundbreaking marks an important milestone in the development of this new community resource and reflects the City and County's ongoing commitment to collaboration and investment in the region.

Years After Approval, 444 Maple Avenue Moving Along

BY MORGAN W. JAMESON

TOWN OF VIENNA, VA — At her drop-in at Nozzo Pazzo on September 2, Mayor Linda Colbert announced that 444 Maple Avenue had submitted its building permit application with the town and Fairfax County.

The 444 Maple Avenue project, at the intersection of Maple Avenue and Nutley Street, was approved by the Vienna Town Council in October 2018. Plans call for a four story mixed use development with 151 apartments and approximately 20,000 square feet of ground floor retail.

The former Vienna Wolf Trap Hotel and Tequila Grande restaurant were demolished in 2022 to make way for the project. More than four years later, the approximately 2.75 acre property remains vacant.

The delay has increasingly

drawn attention from town officials. In 2024, Vienna issued a zoning violation after determining the property was not complying with its approved site plan because construction had not begun following demolition.

Earlier this year, beginning construction on 444 Maple was identified as a Town Council priority, with officials calling for the developer to either move forward or vacate its permit.

Despite the delays, the approved development remains active. Fairfax County property records, updated Aug. 31, continue to identify Vienna Development Associates LLC as the owner and classify the site for future multifamily and retail development.

The project also includes a \$170,000 developer contribution toward improvements to traffic signals along Maple Avenue and Nutley Street.

Nearly 3,000 Homes Proposed Near Dunn Loring Metro

BY MORGAN W. JAMESON

One of Merrifield's largest apartment communities could be transformed into a new neighborhood with nearly 3,000 homes under a redevelopment proposal moving through Fairfax County.

The Merrifield at Dunn Loring Station Apartments currently contain 706 rental units in more than 50 buildings constructed in 1968. The approximately 35 acre property sits within a half mile of the Dunn Loring Merrifield Metro station, placing it in an area where county planning policy encourages higher density development near transit.

Malkin Properties is seeking to redevelop the property with up to 2,975 multifamily units and 25,000 square feet of neighborhood serving retail.

The numbers illustrate the scale of the proposal. If fully built, the redevelopment would add as many as

2,269 homes to the property, increasing the existing housing count by more than 320%. Buildings would range from five to 13 stories.

Redevelopment would occur in phases across seven development blocks rather than demolishing the entire community at once. Plans also call for approximately 7.8 acres of urban parks and recreational spaces, including an expansion of Hartland Green Park.

Transportation improvements are another major component. A planned segment of the Merrifield Ring Road would become a two lane multimodal street connecting Hartland Road with Park Tower Drive. New sidewalks, bicycle facilities and internal streets would create additional connections through the property and toward Metro.

But before thousands of new apartments can be built, hundreds of

existing homes will eventually have to be removed.

County staff found that rents at the existing community generally serve households earning between 71% and 80% of the area median income. That makes displacement and affordability significant considerations as Fairfax weighs the benefits of adding substantially more housing near Metro.

The developer has proposed phased construction and a relocation program for existing residents, including opportunities to move elsewhere within the community when possible. County staff has recommended that future development applications include commitments addressing relocation assistance and replacement of existing affordable housing.

The proposal is also notable for what it does not include. Despite the property's proximity to Metro, commercial development would remain relatively

limited. The requested 25,000 square feet of retail is intended primarily to serve residents and activate portions of the new neighborhood.

The Fairfax County Planning Commission recommended approval of the Comprehensive Plan amendment July 22. The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to consider the amendment Sept. 15.

That vote would establish the planning framework for redevelopment, but it would not authorize construction. A separate rezoning application proposing the 2,975 apartments and retail space will require additional county review and public hearings.

For Merrifield, the proposal represents a substantial change to a community built nearly six decades ago: replacing 706 garden apartments with a denser neighborhood containing more than four times as many homes, new parks and stronger connections to Metro.

Fairfax Voters Face Federal Races, Constitutional Amendments and Bond Questions

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

FAIRFAX, VA — Fairfax County voters will head to the polls Nov. 3 to decide federal races, three proposed amendments to the Virginia Constitution and two major county bond referendums.

All Fairfax voters will see the U.S. Senate race, where Democrat Mark R. Warner faces Republican Bert Mizusawa, along with any qualified write-in candidates.

Voters will also choose a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Fairfax County is divided among the 8th, 10th and 11th congressional districts, so the candidates on the ballot vary by address.

The ballot also includes three proposed amendments to the Virginia Constitution.

The first concerns reproductive healthcare, including prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, contraception, abortion, miscarriage management and fertility care. The proposal would establish constitutional protections for covered decisions, while including provisions concerning abortion later in pregnancy.

The second amendment concerns marriage. It would remove Virginia's constitutional prohibition on same-sex marriage and establish that two adults may marry regardless of sex, gender or race.

The third amendment concerns voting rights. It would establish voting as a fundamental right and provide for automatic restoration of voting rights after a person convicted of a felony is released from incarceration. It would

also revise existing constitutional language concerning voting eligibility and capacity.

Fairfax County voters will also decide two bond questions totaling \$255 million.

The first would authorize up to \$180 million for parks and park facilities. Proposed projects include recreation-center renovations, deferred maintenance, new and renovated parks, land acquisition and other park improvements. The program includes plans for major recreation-center work, including the replacement of Audrey Moore Recreation Center.

The second would authorize up to \$75 million for community health and human-services facilities. The funding could support construction, renovation, expansion, equipment and land acquisition. One project identified in the county's capital planning is modernization of the JoAnne Jorgenson Public Health Laboratory.

Residents of the Town of Herndon will have additional local races, including the mayor and Town Council.

Unlike odd-numbered election years, there are no regular Fairfax County Board of Supervisors or School Board elections on the 2026 ballot.

Early voting began Sept. 18, and Election Day is Nov. 3. The deadline to register or update voter registration and to request a mailed ballot is Oct. 23.

Fairfax County voters can review their individual sample ballot through the Office of Elections before voting, since congressional and local races vary by residence.

November 3, 2026 General and Special Elections

EARLY VOTING PERIOD

- Friday, September 18 - Saturday, October 31, 2026
- Fairfax City Hall opens from Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., excluding holidays
- Two Saturdays, October 24 & October 31, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- Two Sundays, October 18 & October 25, 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

No appointment is required. Please bring an acceptable form of ID.

DEADLINE TO APPLY FOR A BY-MAIL BALLOT

- Friday, October 23, 2026
- Applications must be received by 5:00 p.m.

DEADLINE TO REGISTER OR UPDATE REGISTRATION INFORMATION



- Friday, October 23, 2026
- Applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. for in-person or by 11:59 p.m. for online registrations.
- Applications submitted by mail must be postmarked by the deadline.

ELECTION DAY

- Tuesday, November 3, 2026
- Polls are open from 6:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

More information about County's election is available on the Fairfax County's Election website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections/office-elections



Saturday, October 3rd, 2026 - 11:00 AM to 7:00 PM

Saturday, October 3, 2026 • 11:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Church, Dominion, Mill & Town Green • Vienna, VA

Vienna Oktoberfest: A Taste of Autumn

This event, presented by the Vienna Business Association in partnership with the Town of Vienna is taking place on Saturday, October 3 from 11 AM - 7 PM in Vienna.

Every fall, Vienna, Virginia, comes alive with the sights, sounds, and flavors of Oktoberfest. This popular community celebration brings together families, friends, and visitors for a festive day filled with German-inspired food, live music, dancing, and plenty of fun.

Held in the heart of Vienna, the event captures the welcoming spirit of this Northern Virginia community. Visitors can enjoy traditional favorites such as sausages, bratwurst, pretzels, and other German-style dishes while listening to lively music and enjoying the festive atmosphere.

Whether you're a longtime Vienna resident or visiting from elsewhere in the Washington, D.C., area, Vienna Oktoberfest is a wonderful way to welcome the fall season, enjoy good food and music, and celebrate the community.

Join for a traditional Oktoberfest Festival with beer, wine, food, entertainment, craft vendors and games and activities for kids and families. More information on the event is <https://viennaoktoberfest.org>.

“Blithe Spirit” Mixes Halloween Chills and Drawing Room Comedy

BY MARK DREISONSTOK

Halloween started early at the Little Theatre of Alexandria in Northern Virginia in its September production of Noël Coward’s “Blithe Spirit,” a play successfully blending chills with a classic English 1930s-era drawing room comedy.

In this supernatural story (which Coward in understatement called an “improbable farce”), Charles Condomine and wife Ruth, along with their friends Dr. and Mrs. Bradman, hold a séance channeled by Madame Arcati, a medium. The purpose, unbeknownst to the medium, is to provide Charles, a writer, with material for a writing project about a fake but homicidal medium. Madame Arcati, however, turns out to be a real medium, highly successful in conjuring up Charles’ deceased first wife, the alluring Elvira.

The ghost of Elvira variously taunts and flirts with her erstwhile husband to the dismay of the disbelieving Ruth, who is convinced her husband is either suffering a nervous breakdown or descending into alcoholism. Unfortunately for Charles, he is the only one who can hear and see the

apparition of his first wife. Ruth, however, slowly begins to believe in the existence of the ghost ... and that Elvira might be plotting the early, unnatural demise of Charles!

The play contains witty dialogue (as when Charles is speaking to Elvira but Ruth assumes he is talking rudely to her). At the same time, this production (directed adroitly by Ward Key) had many uncanny moments: the eerie make-up of Elvira as well as poltergeists at one point wreaking havoc on physical objects in the drawing room in which this comedy’s dry lines were delivered.

Eric Kennedy was excellent as Charles, at various moments imperious, bewildered, and distraught by Elvira’s return from the grave. Eleonore Tapscott enjoyed an excellent comic turn as Madame Arcati, bringing physical as well as verbal humor to her part. Sarah Cusenza shone as Ruth, especially in the scenes in which the unearthly visitation of Elvira forced upon her character the realization that her marriage was far from ideal. Much of the energy which drove the production belonged to Katie

Weigl as Elvira, who brought out the vivacious nature of her character: Elvira’s playfulness, superficiality, vulnerability, and vindictiveness.

Readers who missed the show may be interested that its “blithe spirit” is still in the ether. We refer not to Elvira but to a highly enjoyable over-the-airwaves 2008 incarnation courtesy of BBC Radio at YouTube: Blithe Spirit (2008) by Noel Coward, starring Roger Allam and Maggie Steed The audio version retains the fun humor-and-thriller blend of the stage

work while presenting a fast-moving streamlined version, cutting the play’s nearly three-hour length in half to ninety minutes. The BBC version also gives the play fast-moving action by pulling the action out of the Condomine drawing room into garden paths, country lanes, and even a medium’s dwelling. This highly enjoyable spooky listening experience in a darkened room must suffice in anticipation of the next stage revival of this ghostly tale with an ability to cast insightful light on the social, romantic, and all-too-human relationships of the living.



50th Annual Fall Festival
Saturday, October 10, 2026 | 10:00 AM to 05:00 PM
Downtown Fairfax | 10415 North Street

What started out as a small market for artisans to display their wares has grown into a festival with more than 400+ art and craft vendors, informational vendors, food vendors, children's activities, multiple stages of entertainment, beer gardens, and more! Even though this event has grown immensely since its inception, it still holds that same hometown festival feeling. We look forward to hosting you in our historic downtown area!

BestCrosswords.com - "The Theory of Relatives" by Barb Olson on 9/4/2026 [moderate]

Across

1- Like a weeper's mascara, maybe; 8- Colourful Mexican shawls; 15- Queen of England, since 2023; 16- "Volunteers?"; 17- Part 1 of a Robert Heinlein quote; 18- Green Gables girl's locks; 19- Inflexible; 20- Musicians playing the duck in "Peter and the Wolf"; 22- Barr's "Roseanne" surname; 24- Tolkien evil goblin; 25- Dynamic start?; 28- Language suffix; 29- The quote, part 2; 32- Breaks down; 34- 180° from WSW; 35- Ready to play one's part; 36- The quote, part 3; 40- Web-related prefix; 43- Rt. ____ Prime Minister; 44- Some Morse Code clicks; 48- The quote, part 4; 52- Montreal Canadiens grp. until 1917; 53- Buckingham Palace "thrones"; 54- Swimmer Thorpe the "Thorpedo"; 55- Tot's jumpsuit; 57- Slangy "superlative!"; 60- Mortimer Adler's "How to ____ Book"; 61- America, in Acapulco; 63- End of the quote; 65- Less reputable; 66- "You agree, no?", online; 67- Bad traits for "Idol" contestants; 68- Shampoo brand meaning "grace";

Down

1- Less abundant; 2- Hit maker?; 3- Letter-shaped metal attractor; 4- Grow softer, on a score: Abbr.; 5- Engineless plane; 6- Right angle shape; 7- "Banana Boat" refrain; 8- Buddhist awakening; 9- Tenor Caruso; 10- Canadian Club products; 11- Took part in Sober October; 12- Have title to; 13- Palindromic Dutch city; 14- DOS part: Abbr.; 21- Royal Albert dinnerware, e.g.; 23- ____ and beef (surf and turf); 26- Nunavut explorer John ____; 27- Argos' prov.; 30- Article in Le Devoir?; 31- Poppy mo.; 33- "From what I can see ..."; 37- To mate; 38- Argos, on scoreboards; 39- Like some vbs.; 40- Argos' grp.; 41- "Hoo" header; 42- Bond before Craig; 45- "An American ____" (Gene Kelly musical, 1951); 46- What a good sleuth connects; 47- "Always in season" dessert brand; 49- Drip coffee brewing need; 50- Farmers who make a bundle?; 51- Interrupt rudely; 56- Rough yard?; 58- Ukrainian singer who covered "Wicked Game"; 59- Snowbirds mil. group; 61- Record ending; 62- Floral ring around the collar; 64- "Cheerleader" singer from Jamaica;

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America's Beloved Dolly Parton: A Life of Music, Magic, and Giving

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Dolly Parton was much more than a country music superstar. Born in 1946 in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, she grew up in a large family with very little money. Those humble beginnings shaped the woman she became. Throughout her extraordinary career, Dolly remained connected to her roots and built a lifestyle around music, hard work, family, humor, business, and helping others.

Dolly was instantly recognizable for her enormous blonde hair, sparkling clothes, colorful makeup, and larger-than-life personality. But beneath the glamour was a talented songwriter and businesswoman who understood the importance of staying true to herself. She wrote thousands of songs, including "Jolene," "9 to 5," and "I Will Always Love You," while also becoming a successful actress, producer, entrepreneur, and philanthropist.

One of Dolly's most visible accomplishments was Dollywood, the

theme park in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. She became a partner in the park in 1986, helping transform it into a major attraction celebrating the music, food, crafts, history, and culture of the Smoky Mountains. Today, Dollywood is not simply an amusement park. It combines roller coasters and family attractions with live entertainment, traditional Appalachian crafts, festivals, and Southern hospitality. The park also provides jobs and economic activity in the region that Dolly has always considered home.

Perhaps an even more lasting part of Dolly's legacy is Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Started in 1995, the program provides free, high-quality books to young children, encouraging families to make reading part of everyday life. What began as a local effort in Tennessee eventually expanded around the world. By 2026, the program had distributed more than 300 million books to children.

Dolly's connection to Virginia is particularly significant. In 2024, Virginia established the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Virginia Program, creating

a statewide initiative to encourage reading among preschool-age children. Participating children from birth through age five can receive one age-appropriate book each month at no cost to their families.

The program was already making a substantial impact. Virginia's 2024 annual report recorded 74 participating local programs, 69,664 registered children, and 750,335 books sent to Virginia children. For families across the Commonwealth, Dolly's legacy can therefore arrive in the mailbox every month in the form of a colorful new book.

Dolly was also known for her wonderful sense of humor. When people worried about her health, she famously joked, "I ain't dead yet." That playful spirit was part of what made her so memorable: she could be glamorous without taking herself too seriously.

Dolly Parton died on August 25, 2026, at age 80. Her legacy reaches far beyond her music. Through Dollywood, the Imagination Library, and decades of generosity, Dolly created something that

reflects the values she learned growing up in Tennessee: dream big, work hard, laugh often, and help give the next generation a chance to dream, too.



Miss Dolly unveils nose art at McGhee Tyson ANG Base. (source: 10/10/2018: Defense Visual Information Distribution Service)

Electric Bull: Maple Avenue Is About to Get a Lot Hotter

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

VIENNA, VA — Get ready for a new kind of steakhouse. Electric Bull, the latest project from Taco Bamba founder Victor Albisu, is coming to 176 Maple Ave. W., just a few doors from his popular Vienna restaurant.

But don't expect a conventional steakhouse.

Electric Bull is being designed as a South American-inspired grill, butcher shop and neighborhood gathering place rolled into one. Albisu is partnering with acclaimed chef and butcher Justin Severino, while chef Adam Hoffa will lead the kitchen.

At the heart of the concept is fire. The menu is expected to feature steaks and butcher's cuts cooked over live flames, including South American favorites such as picanha and skirt steak. House-made sausages and charcuterie will also play a starring role.

And diners won't be the only ones taking

home the goods. The restaurant plans to include a butcher counter, where customers can purchase steaks, sausages, charcuterie and other provisions to grill at home.

The menu promises plenty beyond beef, with early previews including oysters, ceviches, crudos, tartare and Argentine-style dishes such as fugazzeta, a cheesy pizza topped with caramelized onions.

Albisu's culinary résumé makes the concept a natural fit. Before building the Taco Bamba empire, he operated the Argentine-inspired Del Campo in Washington, D.C., and famously defeated Bobby Flay with his rolled skirt steak on *Beat Bobby Flay*.

Electric Bull is expected to seat about 80 people and include a bar and outdoor dining.

The opening has been delayed from its original 2025 target and is now anticipated for fall 2026.

One thing is certain: Maple Avenue is about to get a lot hotter.

Knives Out
Mystery/Thriller PG-13

NOW SHOWING

ARTScreen
A Film Series Celebrating the Arts

City of Fairfax
Commission on the Arts

Knives Out
Mystery/Thriller PG-13

DOORS OPEN AT 6:30 PM | FILM STARTS AT 7 PM
OCTOBER 23, 2026

Stacy C. Sherwood Center | 3740 Blenheim Blvd, Fairfax, VA 22030
fairfaxva.gov/culturalarts

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Books for Healing, Understanding & Empowerment: Domestic Violence Awareness Month

COMPILED BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Five recommended books offering insight, support, and encouragement for survivors, families, and community members. These books are available in the Fairfax County Public Library and places where books are sold.

1. *Goodbye, Sweet Girl* – Kelly Sundberg

A powerful memoir about surviving domestic violence and finding the courage to leave an abusive relationship. Kelly Sundberg describes the complexities of love, fear, motherhood, and recovery while rebuilding her life. The book can help survivors recognize unhealthy patterns and feel less alone in their experiences.

2. *No Visible Bruises* – Rachel Louise Snyder

This book examines domestic violence through survivor stories, research, and reporting. Rachel Louise Snyder explores the dynamics of abuse, coercive control, and the challenges survivors face when seeking safety. It provides readers with a broader understanding of domestic violence and the social systems that can either help or hinder survivors.

3. *Crazy Love* – Leslie Morgan Steiner

In this memoir, Leslie Morgan Stein-

er shares her experience of becoming involved in an abusive relationship and the difficult process of recognizing and leaving it. Her story explores fear, isolation, shame, and recovery. The book offers survivors and supporters insight into why leaving an abusive relationship can be complicated.

4. *The Verbally Abusive Relationship – Patricia Evans*

This practical self-help book focuses on recognizing verbal and emotional abuse. Patricia Evans describes common patterns of harmful communication and provides language that can help readers identify behaviors they may have experienced. It is designed to help people understand abusive dynamics, establish healthier boundaries, and regain confidence.

5. The Journey from Abandonment to Healing – Susan Anderson

Susan Anderson offers guidance for people recovering from painful relationship loss and abandonment. The book focuses on emotional recovery, rebuilding self-esteem, and developing a stronger sense of independence. While it is not specifically about domestic violence, its self-help approach may be useful for survivors rebuilding their lives after an abusive relationship.

BestCrosswords.com - "The Theory of Relatives" by Barb Olson on 9/4/2026 [moderate] (solution)

Across

1- Like a weeper's mascara, maybe; 8- Colourful Mexican shawls; 15- Queen of England, since 2023; 16- "Volunteers?"; 17- Part 1 of a Robert Heinlein quote; 18- Green Gables girl's locks; 19- Inflexible; 20- Musicians playing the duck in "Peter and the Wolf"; 22- Barr's "Roseanne" surname; 24- Tolkien evil goblin; 25- Dynamic start?; 28- Language suffix; 29- The quote, part 2; 32- Breaks down; 34- 180° from WSW; 35- Ready to play one's part; 36- The quote, part 3; 40- Web-related prefix; 43- Rt. ____ Prime Minister; 44- Some Morse Code clicks; 48- The quote, part 4; 52- Montreal Canadiens grp. until 1917; 53- Buckingham Palace "thrones"; 54- Swimmer Thorpe the "Thorpedo"; 55- Tot's jumpsuit; 57- Slangy "superlative!"; 60- Mortimer Adler's "How to ____ Book"; 61- America, in Acapulco; 63- End of the quote; 65- Less reputable; 66- "You agree, no?", online; 67- Bad traits for "Idol" contestants; 68- Shampoo brand meaning "grace";

Down

1- Less abundant; 2- Hit maker?; 3- Letter-shaped metal attractor; 4- Grow softer, on a score: Abbr.; 5- Engineless plane; 6- Right angle shape; 7- "Banana Boat" refrain; 8- Buddhist awakening; 9- Tenor Caruso; 10- Canadian Club products; 11- Took part in Sober October; 12- Have title to; 13- Palindromic Dutch city; 14- DOS part: Abbr.; 21- Royal Albert dinnerware, e.g.; 23- ____ and beef (surf and turf); 26- Nunavut explorer John ____; 27- Argos' prov.; 30- Article in Le Devoir?; 31- Poppy mo.; 33- "From what I can see ..."; 37- To mate; 38- Argos, on scoreboards; 39- Like some vbs.; 40- Argos' grp.; 41- "Hoo" header; 42- Bond before Craig; 45- "An American ____" (Gene Kelly musical, 1951); 46- What a good sleuth connects; 47- "Always in season" dessert brand; 49- Drip coffee brewing need; 50- Farmers who make a bundle?; 51- Interrupt rudely; 56- Rough yard?; 58- Ukrainian singer who covered "Wicked Game"; 59- Snowbirds mil. group; 61- Record ending; 62- Floral ring around the collar; 64- "Cheerleader" singer from Jamaica;

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Fairfax Schools Take Learning Outside the Classroom

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

FAIRFAX, VA — Nine Fairfax schools are among 118 Virginia schools recognized for hands-on environmental education during the 2025–26 school year.

Forget four walls and rows of desks. At schools across Fairfax County, the great outdoors is becoming part of the lesson plan.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) recognized 118 schools representing 43 school systems through its Virginia Naturally School Recognition

Program, the largest number recognized since the program began in 2000. Thirty schools received recognition for the first time, while returning schools continued building environmental education programs. Together, the schools represent more than 77,000 students participating in environmental awareness and stewardship activities.

Fairfax County Public Schools had nine schools recognized: Westfield High School, Haycock Elementary School, Terra Centre Elementary School, Clearview Elementary School, Terraset Elementary School, Westlawn Elementary School,

Providence Elementary School, Belvedere Elementary School and Katherine Johnson Middle School. Their years of recognition range from one to 13, with Katherine Johnson Middle School reaching 13 years!.

Virginia Naturally looks for schools that make environmental learning active and relevant. Students participate in authentic, hands-on experiences connected to environmental or sustainable education, civic engagement and STEM. Schools also demonstrate learning experiences outside the classroom that connect fieldwork to what students are studying.

That might mean exploring a habitat, studying wildlife, working in a school garden, examining water quality or investigating a local environmental issue. A schoolyard can become a laboratory, giving students the opportunity to see science in action.

The program also provides ongoing recognition. Schools receive certificates and digital badges, while additional milestones include a wooden plaque after the first year, a letter from the DWR director after five years and a metal schoolyard sign after 10 years.

FCPS Advances 2023–2030 Strategic Plan

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

FALLS CHURCH, VA — Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is continuing to implement its 2023–2030 Strategic Plan, which provides a framework for the school division's goals, priorities and decision-making through the end of the decade. The plan focuses on student achievement, school environments, access to opportunities, community partnerships and preparation for the future. FCPS describes the plan as a way to establish shared priorities while providing measures that can be used to monitor progress over time.

The strategic plan is organized around five student-centered goals. The first, "Strong Start: PreK-12," focuses on students building the knowledge and skills needed to progress through school. The second, "Safe, Supported, Included, and Empowered," addresses students' school experiences and the environments in which they learn. The third, "Academic Growth and Excellence," focuses on academic progress and achievement. The fourth, "Equitable Access and Opportunity," addresses students' access to educational programs and opportunities. The fifth, "Leading for Tomorrow's Innovation," focuses on preparing students for future education, careers and other opportunities.

Each goal contains specific measures that FCPS uses to track progress. These measures cover areas such as academic performance, attendance, student engagement, school climate, access to programs and preparation for life after

graduation. The measures are intended to provide information that can be reviewed as the plan moves forward. FCPS publishes annual reports connected to the five goals, allowing the school division and School Board to review information related to the plan's progress.

Four additional pillars provide support for the five student-centered goals. The first pillar, "Differentiated and Culturally Responsive Learning Environments," focuses on creating learning environments that recognize different student needs and experiences. The second, "Vibrant Home, School and Community Partnerships," emphasizes relationships among students' families, schools and community organizations. The third, "Diverse, Adaptive and Supported Workforce," focuses on FCPS employees, including efforts related to recruiting, developing and supporting the school division's workforce. The fourth, "Culture of Equity, Excellence and Accountability," focuses on using data, resources, partnerships and continuous improvement to support the school division's work.

The development of the strategic plan included a community engagement process that began in August 2022. According to FCPS, the process included more than 124,000 engagement touch points involving students, families, staff and community members. The school division also reported that the process included 11 planning teams, surveys and community meetings. Feedback collected during the process was used to help identify priorities and shape the goals

included in the final plan.

The plan also includes an emphasis on equity and accountability. FCPS identifies equity commitments within the strategic plan that address differences in student experiences and access to educational opportunities. The plan calls for the school division to examine data and use that information when making decisions. Annual reporting provides one method for reviewing whether progress is occurring in the areas identified by the plan.

Implementation of the strategic plan is expected to continue through 2030. During that period, FCPS will continue reporting information related to its five

goals and associated measures. The reports give families, students, employees, community members and School Board representatives information they can use to follow the school division's progress.

The strategic plan does not represent a single-year initiative but rather a long-term framework for FCPS. Its goals establish areas of focus for the school division, while the accompanying measures and annual reports provide information about implementation. As FCPS continues working toward the 2030 timeframe, updates to the plan and progress reports will provide additional information about how the school division is addressing its stated priorities.

FCPS Educational Technology Review

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

FALLS CHURCH, VA — Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) has established an Educational Technology Review Committee (ETRC) to examine the school division's use of educational technology and provide recommendations to the Superintendent. The committee is tasked with considering whether technology is being used in ways that are responsible, effective, equitable, safe, secure and appropriate for students' developmental levels.

During the 2026–27 school year, the committee is reviewing several areas of educational technology. These include artificial intelligence, student access to electronic devices, digital literacy, technology use in classrooms and professional learning for staff. The committee is also considering how technology access and use may affect different groups of students, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners and students who have limited technology access outside of school.

Oakton Teams Head Into Key Stretch of Fall Season: Go Cougars!

BY ABBY DENNIS

OAKTON, VA — The leaves are beginning to turn, Friday-night lights are getting brighter and the stakes are rising at Oakton High School.

With the fall season moving toward its decisive weeks, the Cougars are preparing for a crowded schedule of Concorde District showdowns, with football, volleyball, field hockey and cross country all heading toward important postseason competition.

For Oakton football, the October schedule promises plenty of excitement!

Senior quarterback Jack Martin is at the controls of a Cougars offense that will face some of its biggest challenges of the season. Collin Henriques provides a dangerous target at receiver, while Deylen Jones continues to make an impact on both sides of the ball. On defense, Brayden

Vazquez has emerged as an important playmaker.

The Cougars host South Lakes at 7 p.m. Friday, Oct. 9, before traveling to Westfield on Oct. 16. Then comes one of the most anticipated nights on the fall calendar: Homecoming against Chantilly at 7 p.m. Friday, Oct. 23.

Oakton will close the regular season with back-to-back tests, hosting James Madison at 7 p.m. Oct. 30 before traveling to Centreville at 7 p.m. Nov. 6.

While football takes center stage on Friday nights, Oakton volleyball is building toward its own postseason push.

The Cougars face Westfield on Sept. 24 at 7:15 p.m., followed by home matches against James Madison on Sept. 28 and Centreville on Oct. 5. South Lakes, Chantilly and Westfield are also on the October

schedule before Oakton travels to James Madison on Oct. 22.

At the net, Oakton will look to combine strong front-row play with the defensive discipline needed to survive long rallies and tight district matches. Every point becomes increasingly valuable as teams position themselves for the district tournament.

Field hockey has provided another reason for Cougar fans to be optimistic. Giselle Liu has been a major offensive contributor, while Daniella Rubano has helped create scoring opportunities. Seniors Haven Thomas and Taylor Zimmerman have shared duties in goal, giving Oakton experience at the defensive end.

The Cougars host James Madison at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 24, then face Leonardtown at 11 a.m. Oct. 3, Yorktown at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 5 and Wakefield at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 13.

Away from the traditional Friday-night spotlight, Oakton's cross-country runners are quietly preparing for the meets that matter most. As district and regional championship competition approaches, runners will be looking to turn months of training into strong postseason performances.

And throughout it all, the Oakton community will have plenty of opportunities to rally around its athletes. Homecoming Spirit Week runs Oct. 19-23, building toward the Chantilly football game, with the Homecoming Dance scheduled for Oct. 24.

For the Cougars, autumn is no longer simply about getting games on the calendar. It is about finishing strong.

The next few weeks will bring rivalry games, packed stands, long rallies, close races and postseason pressure — exactly the kind of moments that can define a fall sports season at Oakton.

James Madison Warhawks: October Brings the Heat

BY ABBY DENNIS

VIENNA, VA — The fall sports season is entering its most important stretch for the James Madison Warhawks, with district matchups, postseason positioning and championship aspirations coming into sharper focus.

Across the football field, field hockey pitch, volleyball court and cheer competition floor, Madison teams are preparing for a busy slate of October competition. Here's a look at what's ahead for the Warhawks.

Football: District Football Takes Center Stage

Madison football heads into the final weeks of September with a 3-1 record, including three consecutive victories after an opening-night loss to Stone Bridge. The Warhawks most recently defeated Hayfield, 35-14, on Sept. 18.

The next test comes Friday, Sept. 25, at 7 p.m., when Madison travels to George C. Marshall for a Concorde District matchup.

Senior running back William Helvey will be one of the players to watch as Madison continues to emphasize physical football, disciplined execution and controlling the line of scrimmage.

The October schedule gets even more demanding:

- Friday, Oct. 9 — 7 p.m.: vs. Westfield
- Friday, Oct. 16 — 7 p.m.: vs. Centreville
- Friday, Oct. 23 — 7 p.m.: at South Lakes
- Friday, Oct. 30 — 7 p.m.: at Oakton
- Friday, Nov. 6 — 7 p.m.: vs. Chantilly

The Oct. 9 Westfield game also serves as Madison's Homecoming football game, with the school's Homecoming Parade scheduled for 2 p.m. that afternoon.

Field Hockey: Precision When It Matters

Madison field hockey is also moving into a critical portion of its schedule. The Warhawks have already produced some impressive results this season, including a 6-0 victory over Westfield on Sept. 14 and a 6-0 victory over Chantilly on Sept. 16.

Among the upcoming dates are Tuesday, Sept. 29, when the varsity squad takes the field at 7:30 p.m., followed by another varsity matchup on Thursday, Oct. 1, at 7:30 p.m.

With penalty-corner execution, defensive communication and finishing ability becoming increasingly important, Madison will look to turn its regular-season success into postseason momentum.

Volleyball: Building Toward the District Playoffs

Madison volleyball is entering the final portion of the regular season with plenty of opportunities to sharpen its game before district competition.

The Warhawks have already faced several Concorde District opponents, including Westfield, Chantilly and South Lakes, making each remaining match an important opportunity to establish consistency and confidence.

On Thursday, Sept. 24, Madison hosts Centreville, with the varsity girls match scheduled for 7:15 p.m. The school also has a boys varsity volleyball matchup scheduled for Monday, Sept. 28, at 7 p.m.

As the playoffs approach, Madison will look for aggressive net play, strong serving and composure in tight sets.

From Page 16 → FCPS...

One area of discussion is whether families should have options to prevent FCPS-issued devices from being taken home. The committee is also reviewing possible guidelines for developmentally ap-

propriate technology use, including screen-time considerations by grade level. Other topics include application management, internet filtering, student access to artificial intelligence and digital literacy education.

The committee began meeting in July 2026. Its members include indi-

viduals representing different areas of the school community, and meetings include opportunities to review information, discuss questions and provide feedback. The committee is expected to submit interim recommendations to the Superintendent by Oct. 31, 2026, followed by a final report in April 2027.

The committee's recommendations will provide information for FCPS as the school division continues to review how educational technology is used in schools. Final decisions regarding proposed changes will depend on the appropriate FCPS and School Board processes.

Commanders Drop Season Opener After Slow Start

BY OWEN KORZAK

WASHINGTON, DC – The Washington Commanders opened the 2026 season with a 24-22 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles, falling just short of a comeback in a game that exposed both the potential and growing pains of Washington’s new-look team.

The Commanders trailed for most of the game but had a chance to tie the game with just over a minute remaining. Jayden Daniels found rookie Antonio Williams for a one-yard touchdown, cutting Philadelphia’s lead to 24-22.

Washington went for two, but Daniels’ pass to tight end John Bates was stopped short of the goal line. The Commanders then attempted an onside kick, but Philadelphia recovered and kneeled out the remaining time.

The late-game opportunity came after an inconsistent offensive performance. Washington managed only 50 yards across its seven non-scoring drives, struggling to consistently move the ball against Philadelphia’s defense.

However, there were signs of what the offense can become. Washington

rushed for 132 yards, and Daniels finished with 164 passing yards and two touchdowns without throwing an interception. After falling behind 14-3, the Commanders put together a 12-play, 67-yard touchdown drive before halftime. Daniels also completed nine of 11 passes during Washington’s final two drives.

The defense created problems of its own for Philadelphia. Jalen Hurts was sacked three times, and Washington forced the Eagles to punt seven times. Rookie Sonny Styles recorded the first sack of his career and added two tackles for loss.

However, Philadelphia’s chunk plays proved costly. Dontayvion Wicks caught a 64-yard pass that set up Philadelphia’s first touchdown, while Saquon Barkley broke a 42-yard run.

The Eagles totaled 318 yards, with more than half coming on just four plays.

Washington ultimately had opportunities to win but could not capitalize. At 0-1, Washington leaves Philadelphia knowing it can compete with one of the NFC’s top teams, but also knowing it cannot afford the same mistakes in close games.

George Mason Athletics Enters Busy Stretch of Fall Season

BY OWEN KORZAK

George Mason athletics enters October with several teams competing across the country, giving the Patriots a busy stretch of the fall sports calendar.



Mason Men’s Soccer are looking to build momentum after a difficult opening stretch. The Patriots will play their first four games of the month at home after traveling throughout the east coast. The men’s soccer team has seven regular-season matches scheduled in October, beginning with a home matchup against Duquesne on Oct. 3. The Patriots will then host Loyola Chicago on Oct. 7, Stony Brook on Oct. 11 and George Washington on Oct. 17. Mason will travel to La Salle on Oct. 21 before returning home to face Rhode Island on Oct. 25. The Patriots close the regular season at VCU on Oct. 31. The Patriots hope that this can kickstart a run after winning just one of their first six matches.

While men’s soccer works to find consistency, Mason’s women’s soccer team has gotten off to a stronger start at 4-2-2. They look to ride their momentum into conference play. Mason hosts Richmond on Oct. 3 and Duquesne on Oct. 11 before traveling to George Washington on Oct. 8 and St. Bonaventure on Oct. 17. The Patriots then return home for games against Rhode Island on Oct. 22 and La Salle on Oct. 25.

While soccer has a packed October, women’s volleyball, who are off to a fiery 7-2

start, will have a similarly demanding conference schedule. The Patriots travel to Davidson for two matches on Oct. 2-3 and Fordham on Oct. 10-11. Mason returns home for a two-match series against VCU on Oct. 16-17 before traveling to Saint Louis on Oct. 23-24. The month concludes with a road matchup against George Washington on Oct. 28 and a home series against Dayton on Oct. 30-31.

That schedule will test the Patriots, as they will have several opportunities to establish itself in Atlantic 10 play. The Patriots began conference play in late September against Rhode Island, making October the first full month of league competition.

George Mason will also have men’s golf competing in October. Coming off a program-best second-place finish at the 2026 Atlantic 10 Championship, the Patriots will compete at the Nemaquin Collegiate Invitational in Pennsylvania on Oct. 5-6 before finishing their fall schedule at the Moraine Intercollegiate in Ohio on Oct. 12-13.

With conference play taking center stage, October will provide a clearer picture of where several George Mason teams stand heading toward the postseason. Men’s soccer, women’s soccer and volleyball will all face important conference matchups, while men’s golf will look to build on its record-setting 2025-26 season.

Previous Old Glory DC Coach Simon Cross Transitioning to Spearhead Young Glory Academy Expansion

BY ABBY DENNIS

CITY OF FAIRFAX, VA – Old Glory DC has announced a decisive organizational choice to transition Head Coach Simon Cross of the Major League Rugby squad to now serve as the Director of Rugby Development and Player Pathways for Young Glory. Stepping down from his coaching role that has led his team to consecutive playoff appearances over three seasons, he will now take charge of a major evolution in the club’s youth subdivision.

Cross’s shift in role comes from the Young Glory initiative that commenced for the 2026/27 fall season that serves as an extended branch off the Major League Old Glory team, aiming to turn all the effort the community has put in into an elite Performance Academy designed to identify and cultivate local athletic talent across the DMV region. The specifics of the program targets high-performance male athletes aged 16 to 18, along with select 15-year-olds starting from mid-September and ending in mid-January. Training will take place three days a week split between two different fields, and



more information can be found on the team’s official website.

Within the academy, the curriculum will rely heavily on essential rugby fundamentals like handling, tackle safety, and offloading, alongside extensive strength and conditioning. Furthermore, to ensure maximum safety, contact techniques will be taught and trained on wrestling mats. The program is specifically designed to accommodate multi-sport athletes without interfering with traditional high-school sports schedules, and efforts or even underway for the future girls’ programming, which will broaden the scope of their academy exponentially.

By committing dedicated leadership to this community-driven development, Old Glory DC strives to build a sustainable hometown pipeline directly to the professional pitch. Reflecting on this goal, Cross has further expressed enthusiasm for being able to harness the athletic potential of the region, stating that his primary mission is to help find local talent and create an environment where young players can flourish.

When Did Data Centers Get So Unpopular?

BY CHAP PETERSEN
REPUBLICATED FROM
THEVIRGINIAATTORNEY.COM

The last few months have seen one of the sharpest U-turns in American political history, as elected officials — who formerly fell at the feet of data center developers — are now suddenly opposed to those earth-hugging giant boxes.

Four years ago, there were nearly zero supporters on my bill to put modest controls on data centers (h/t Danica Roehm). It died on a 12-3 vote in the Rules Committee, where it had been deposited by my own Caucus leadership.

A few months later, I was hired to slow down the Digital Gateway project,

which sought to put 37 data centers by the historic Manassas Battlefield. We reached out to every Virginia lawmaker on Capitol Hill. Guess how many returned our call? (It rhymes with “hero”)

Now standing up to data centers is all the rage. What happened?

Lots of talk about enviro factors: water, power lines, noise. But in my mind, the answer is more human: data centers are ugly and they represent an intimidating future where knowledge and effort are replaced by an algorithm.

Let’s start with beauty. For all of history, man has been defined by what he builds: for the Egyptians, it was the pyramids, for medieval Christian,

cathedrals, for Americans, soaring skyscrapers like the World Trade Center.

These buildings defined our world. Their construction thrilled us; their destruction shocked us.

Second, the data center boom is driven by AI, which has pushed the stock market to dizzying heights. (For those of us who lived through the “dot com” boom of the late Nineties, this is familiar territory). But there is doubt.

Yes, the US should lead the world in technology. But what is the final goal for AI: are we trying to make ourselves irrelevant? What controls exist to ensure that creative and critical thinking remain essentially human activities?

In terms of the legal choices, I believe in “an equal playing field” for all industries.

That means ending the data center sales tax exemption which is currently costing the state \$2 billion a year. Also data centers should provide for their own power and water, so they don’t starve neighboring communities. A data center moratorium is more problematic, if only because there are so many permitted or “by right” projects already in the pipeline. (The critical issue will be powering them all).

Regardless, it’s fascinating to see data centers at the heart of a national conversation on energy, environment and ethics. Who knew??!!

Human vs. Robot: A Fight That Looked Like Science Fiction



BY TANIA HOSSAIN

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — Science fiction took a strange step toward reality Friday when creator and influencer Frankie LaPenna climbed into a fighting cage with a six-foot humanoid robot.

The unusual matchup, organized by robotics company REK, was billed by the company as the first human-versus-humanoid-robot fight. The event took place in San Francisco as part of REK’s effort to develop a virtual-reality combat game in which humans remotely pilot humanoid robots.

LaPenna initially appeared to have the advantage. Wearing protective gear, he moved toward the machine and landed several punches to its body and head. The robot, however, quickly demonstrated that its greatest weapon might be its legs.

The machine responded with powerful

kicks, repeatedly driving LaPenna backward. In one of the most dramatic moments captured on video, a kick sent the influencer flying across the cage and crashing onto the mat. The footage shows him getting back up and continuing the confrontation.

The robot was not acting independently. A human pilot controlled the machine remotely, making the event less a battle between human intelligence and artificial intelligence than a demonstration of what a human-operated humanoid robot can physically do.

REK says the matchup represents a new form of entertainment built around humanoid robots. The company has previously staged robot-versus-robot competitions, but putting a human inside the cage provided spectators with a very different reference point for the machines’ size, balance and physical power.

For now, the spectacle remains closer to experimental entertainment than traditional combat sports. But for those watching from the stands—and millions more seeing the footage online—the image of a person being knocked across a cage by a humanoid robot was unmistakably futuristic.

And perhaps that is what made the fight so memorable: for a few minutes in San Francisco, science fiction looked surprisingly real.

Flock Cameras Spark Community Conversation

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

CITY OF FAIRFAX, VA — Flock Safety cameras are becoming an increasingly visible part of the Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia region, including Fairfax County and the City of Fairfax.

The cameras use automated license-plate recognition technology to photograph passing vehicles and record information such as license plates, vehicle characteristics, time and location. Police departments say the technology can help recover stolen vehicles, locate missing people and assist with criminal investigations.

In the City of Fairfax, police use Flock and Axon license-plate recognition technology. City officials say the system does not use facial recognition and does not identify a driver’s face, race or gender. The city has reported cases in which license-plate technology helped investigators identify vehicles

connected to burglaries and other crimes.

Fairfax County also uses license-plate reader technology and reports that it has helped recover stolen vehicles and make arrests. At the same time, the county has been reviewing privacy and data-sharing issues surrounding the technology.

The debate has taken a different turn nearby. On September 15, 2026, the Arlington County Board directed the county to discontinue its use of 41 county-leased Flock cameras and remove them from public property. Officials said the decision followed concerns raised by residents, while noting that the county had received no reports of misuse.

As Flock cameras continue to appear throughout the region, communities such as Fairfax face an ongoing conversation about public safety, privacy, transparency and how technology should be used on local roads.

A Missing Link Is Finally Open: Government Center Parkway

BY DARIA PARNES

FAIRFAX, VA. — A long-planned piece of Fairfax's transportation network is finally in place. A new stretch of Government Center Parkway connecting Fairfax County and the City of Fairfax is now complete.

Local and regional officials gathered Thursday, Sept. 10, near Government Center Parkway and Jermantown Road for a ribbon-cutting ceremony marking the completion of the extension.

The project fills a gap in the local road network between Stevenson Street in Fairfax County and Jermantown Road in the City of Fairfax. It provides a new east-west connection through an area that includes residential neighborhoods, businesses and community destinations.

The completed roadway includes three lanes, a center median and turn lanes, as well as sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks and on-road bicycle lanes. Lighting and landscaping are also part of the project.

The new connection gives motorists another route between Fairfax County and the City of Fairfax. The sidewalks, crosswalks and bicycle lanes provide facilities for people traveling through the corridor without a car.

The project has been in development for several



Left to right, Braddock District Supervisor Rachna Sizemore Heizer, Fairfax County BOS Chairman Jeff McKay, City of Fairfax Mayor Catherine Read and NVTA Chief Executive Officer Monica Backman (TINP / Parnes)

years. According to the City of Fairfax's project schedule, design work began in 2017, followed by right-of-way work in 2021. Construction began in spring 2025.

Funding came from both state and regional sources. The project received funding through the Virginia Department of Transportation's SmartScale program, while the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority contributed more than \$3.5 million in Regional Revenue and Local Funds.

NVTA lists the total project cost at approximately \$7.07 million.

The project involved the City of Fairfax, Fairfax County, VDOT and NVTA, reflecting cooperation among local, regional and state agencies on transportation improvements in Northern Virginia.

For residents and businesses in the surrounding area, the most immediate change is the addition of a new road connection where there was previously no direct link between Stevenson Street and Jermantown Road.

The extension also adds pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to the corridor. Sidewalks run along the roadway, with marked crossings for pedestrians, while bicycle lanes provide designated space for cyclists.

The project comes as development and transportation improvements continue in the Fairfax Center area and surrounding communities.

With construction now complete, Government Center Parkway provides another east-west route through the area and adds a new connection to the existing network of roads, sidewalks and bicycle facilities.

The ribbon-cutting marked the end of a project that began with design work nearly a decade ago and moved through right-of-way acquisition, funding and construction before opening to the public.

From Page 1 → OAKTON...

Following the presentation, attendees will have an opportunity to participate in a question-and-answer session and community discussion. Public input is an important part of the study process, giving residents, businesses, commuters, and other stakeholders an opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives regarding transportation conditions in the Oakton area.

FCDOT will also solicit additional feedback through an online survey, which is expected to be posted on the study's webpage closer to the date of the meeting. Residents who are unable to attend the meeting in person will therefore have another opportunity to provide comments and participate in the planning process.

The information gathered during the meeting and through the online survey will contribute to the next phase of the study. Following the public meeting, FCDOT plans to use the transportation analysis, along with feedback from residents and other stakeholders, to develop an additional traffic scenario for testing. The additional scenario will allow the county to further

examine potential transportation changes and their possible effects on traffic conditions and safety.

Residents interested in learning more about the study can review information from previous meetings, study materials, and other updates on the Oakton Congestion and Safety Study webpage on the Fairfax County Department of Transportation website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/study/oakton-safety

County officials encourage community participation to help provide transportation planners with a better understanding of how congestion, roadway design, pedestrian and bicycle conditions, and other transportation issues affect people who live, work, travel, and attend school in the Oakton area.

Anyone with questions about the study or who would like to discuss the project can contact Tim Kutz, a transportation planner with the Fairfax County Department of Transportation's Transportation Planning Section. Kutz can be reached at (703) 877-5674 or by email through the county's transportation planning office.

Notes to the Editor: Thank you for your kind words Mr. Smith!



Thank you for your recent articles about Communism in the September 2026 edition of The Fairfax Independent. Although I don't expect the leftist residents of this area to have enough humility or self-reflection to recognize the similarities between their own ideology and that of Communist regimes. I have added your recommendations to my reading list.

I've been reading your paper ever since I moved into the city. I was surprised to find that it's not yet another collection of leftist slogans and dogma masquerading as a newspaper. I appreciate that you specifically seem to write rational neutral articles. For example, I noticed that you didn't perpetuate the myth that local honey helps to remediate allergy symptoms. I have family members who are general practitioner doctors who fail to do that.

I also appreciated Amini Bonane's "The Courage to Speak". I'm glad that you found your courage to speak. I hope to see more articles that might help to keep Northern Virginia from turning into New York, San Francisco, Baltimore, Seattle, Chicago, etc.



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30 Years Later, Dusty Turner Remains at the Center of a Virginia Murder Case

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA — More than three decades after Jennifer Evans disappeared from a Virginia Beach nightclub, the legal case surrounding her death continues to draw attention because of conflicting accounts, a recanted confession and a series of court decisions that ultimately left Dustin “Dusty” Turner’s convictions intact.

Evans, 21, disappeared in June 1995 after meeting Turner, then a Navy SEAL trainee, at The Bayou nightclub. Turner and fellow SEAL trainee Billy Joe Brown were later prosecuted in connection with her death. Evans’ body was recovered nine days after she disappeared.

Brown was convicted in 1996 of first-degree murder, abduction and attempted rape. Turner was tried separately in the Circuit Court of the City of Virginia Beach and convicted Sept. 5, 1996, of abduction with intent to defile and first-degree murder. He received an 82-year sentence.

Turner maintained that Brown was

responsible for Evans’ killing. Brown initially gave investigators and the courts accounts that implicated Turner.

The case took a major turn years later.

In 2002, Brown gave a recorded statement saying that he alone had killed Evans. He formalized that account in a 2003 affidavit. Turner subsequently sought a writ of actual innocence based on the newly discovered evidence.

During a 2008 evidentiary proceeding in Virginia Beach Circuit Court, Brown again testified that he had acted alone. The court found Brown credible in stating that he independently committed the murder and that Turner had played no role in killing or restraining Evans.

In August 2009, a three-judge panel of the Virginia Court of Appeals granted Turner a writ of actual innocence and ordered his murder and abduction convictions vacated.

That decision did not stand.

The Commonwealth sought rehearing, and in June 2010 the Court of Appeals, sitting en banc, reversed the earlier ruling. The court concluded that Brown’s account did not establish that Turner could not legally have been guilty of abduction. The court dismissed Turner’s petition.

Turner then appealed to the Supreme Court of Virginia.

On Sept. 16, 2011, the Supreme Court affirmed the en banc Court of Appeals. The justices held that Turner had not satisfied Virginia’s statutory requirements for obtaining a writ of actual innocence. His convictions therefore remained legally valid.

The case returned to public attention in 2026 when the Virginia Parole Board voted 3-2 to grant Turner parole after he had spent roughly 30 years in prison. He was released March 5.

His freedom was short-lived. On April 21, he was arrested for an alleged parole violation involving disclosure requirements connected to his criminal

and registered-sex-offender status. A hearing officer later found probable cause for the alleged violation.

The Parole Board subsequently ordered Turner released again, and he left jail May 20. His parole supervision was transferred to Indiana.

As of September 2026, Turner remains legally convicted of first-degree murder and abduction with intent to defile. He has not received a judicial declaration of actual innocence.

At the same time, the 2008 Virginia Beach Circuit Court finding concerning Brown’s recantation remains part of the record: that court found Brown credible when he said he acted independently in Evans’ murder and that Turner did not participate in the murder or restrain Evans.

Those two facts—the circuit court’s credibility finding and the appellate courts’ refusal to overturn Turner’s convictions—are central to understanding a case that has remained unresolved in the public eye for more than 30 years.

Spanberger Appointed Five to Virginia Parole Board

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

RICHMOND, VA — Governor Abigail Spanberger appointed five members to the Virginia Parole Board on March 4, 2026, according to records submitted to the General Assembly. Her administration announced the appointments publicly March 10.

The appointees are Shannon Dion, Valerie Boykin, Dr. Kecia Brothers Hayes, the Rev. Tyrone Nelson and Bishop Kevin White. Dion was selected to serve as chair.

The appointments were communicated to the General Assembly March 6. Virginia law requires Parole Board members to be appointed by the governor and confirmed by the General Assembly. Members serve four-year terms and serve at the pleasure of the governor.

Dion has worked in Virginia’s criminal justice system for nearly 25 years. Her previous positions include assistant

Commonwealth’s attorney in Richmond, work with the Virginia Attorney General’s Office and director of the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. She has served as director of the Virginia Victims Fund since 2023.

Boykin previously served as director of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice and works as a consultant on juvenile and criminal justice matters. Brothers Hayes serves as the department’s director of reentry services.

Nelson is pastor of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church and has served on the Henrico County Board of Supervisors since 2011. White is a pastor in Portsmouth.

The Virginia Parole Board reviews cases involving people who meet parole eligibility requirements under state law. Its duties include deciding whether to grant or deny parole and addressing certain matters involving parole supervision and violations.

Fairfax Circuit Court/ Sully District Expungement Clinic

Pre-Registration is Required! Click here to submit the pre-registration form

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit/criminal-case-information/expungement>

DEADLINE:
October 9, 2026, at 4:00 PM
WHEN:
Saturday, October 17, 2026, 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

WHERE:
Mt. Olive Baptist Church, 6600 Old Centreville Rd, Centreville, VA 20121

Criminal charges that did not result in conviction can hinder a person’s ability to obtain employment, housing, and other benefits. Pre-register for the Fairfax Circuit Court/Sully District Expungement Clinic. Only charges filed in Fairfax County or the City of Fairfax are eligible.

5 Fun and Exciting Fall Foliage Locations to Visit This Year

COMPILED BY KATE HOELZ

As winter approaches, autumn colors peak across Virginia, starting in Southwest Virginia's Appalachian mountains and moving east to the Tidewater region. In Northern Virginia and the Fairfax area, foliage will peak around November 6, according to Explore Fall.

Fall fanatics looking for the ideal local locale to observe fall foliage may wish to consider the following:

KING STREET MILE - The King Street Mile is located in Old Town Alexandria. This historic street is home to centuries-old architecture, and over 200 small businesses. Seasonally decorated storefronts border brick-lined

sidewalks wreathed in the fall foliage from the trees that run along the length of the street.

PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK - With a unique ecology that bursts into vivid colors in the fall, Prince William Forest Park is home to hiking trails, campgrounds, bike paths, and more. It is open year round from sunrise to sunset. Pets are welcome, but must be kept on a leash of no more than 6 feet. There is an entrance fee of \$10-20.

BURKE LAKE PARK - This Fairfax County Park is a year-round favorite, but it comes to life in the fall. Nestled within 888 acres of water and woods are campgrounds, rec centers, and 4.7 miles of beautiful trail lined with red maples

and beech trees. The park is open 24 hours a day, and admission is free. Burke Lake Park is also a popular spot for pets. Dogs are welcome, and many pet owners take advantage of the park's rambling trails to give their furry friends some exercise.

GREAT FALLS PARK - Located in nearby McLean, this gorgeous state park offers a striking picture of the Potomac framed by a flaming arch of autumn leaves. Only fifteen miles from the Capital, this park spans an impressive 800 acres. It is open to dogs, with picnic tables and public restrooms on site. There is an entrance fee of about \$10-20 (for a Standard Pass). All digital passes must be purchased before visiting the park. There are physical passes available to be

purchased on location, but the park does not accept cash.

GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY - Another McLean contribution, George Washington Memorial Parkway provides a variety of trails for hiking and biking beneath a canopy of beautiful fiery leaves. The park is open to dogs, but they must be kept on a leash of no more than six feet. George Washington Memorial Parkway is known for its scenic recreational driving route, dotted with important historical sites and local wildlife. The Parkway is an excellent way to take in the fall foliage from the comfort of one's vehicle. Admission is free, and the Parkway itself is typically open 24 hours a day, although most of the connected sites are open from 6 AM to 10 PM.

Tea Around the World: Wellness Benefits

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

For thousands of years, tea has been more than a beverage. Across cultures, it has been part of ceremonies, hospitality, social gatherings, and daily routines. Today, research is exploring why tea may also have a place in a health-conscious lifestyle.

Many teas contain polyphenols—naturally occurring plant compounds with antioxidants and other biological properties. Studies have examined tea consumption in relation to cardiovascular health, blood pressure, metabolic health, and longevity. The evidence is promising, although researchers distinguish between associations found in population studies and effects demonstrated in clinical trials.

Green Tea: Rich in Plant Compounds

Green tea is particularly rich in catechins, including epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG). These compounds have been widely studied for their potential cardiovascular and metabolic effects.

A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials found that green tea and its catechins produced modest reductions in blood pressure and total and LDL cholesterol. Other studies have associated regular tea consumption with lower cardiovascular risk, although much of this evidence is observational.

For everyday wellness, green tea

is also a naturally low-calorie alternative to sugary beverages.

Japan: Matcha and Mindful Energy

Matcha is a finely powdered green tea traditionally associated with Japanese tea culture. Unlike brewed tea, matcha involves consuming the entire leaf, providing concentrated amounts of tea compounds.

It also contains caffeine and L-theanine, an amino acid naturally found in tea. Researchers have studied this combination for potential effects on attention and cognitive performance, although the evidence does not support using matcha as a treatment for cognitive conditions.

Its wellness appeal may also come from the ritual itself: preparing and drinking matcha encourages a slower, more deliberate moment in the day.

India: Chai and the Benefits of Spice

Indian chai combines black tea with spices such as ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, and black pepper. Black tea provides polyphenols and caffeine, while the spices contribute additional plant compounds.

Ginger, for example, has been studied for nausea and certain digestive symptoms. However, evidence for individual



ingredients should not be interpreted as proof that chai prevents disease.

Because traditional chai can contain substantial added sugar, using less sugar can make it a more everyday-friendly choice.

Morocco: Mint Tea and Social Wellness

Moroccan mint tea traditionally combines green tea, fresh mint, and sugar. Green tea provides polyphenols, while mint contributes its distinctive flavor and aroma.

Reducing added sugar can lower the beverage's calorie content without losing the character of the drink.

Tea also has a less measurable but meaningful role: in many cultures, it creates opportunities for conversation, hospitality, and connection. Wellness can include social well-being as well as nutrition.

South Africa: Caffeine-Free Rooibos

Rooibos comes from *Aspalathus linearis*, rather than the traditional tea plant *Camellia sinensis*. Naturally caffeine-free, it contains compounds such as aspalathin.

Preliminary laboratory and human research has investigated rooibos for

antioxidant and cardiometabolic effects, but its clinical evidence is less established than that for green or black tea.

Still, unsweetened rooibos is a flavorful caffeine-free option, particularly in the evening.

Hibiscus: A Promising Herbal Tea

Hibiscus has attracted scientific attention for its potential effects on blood pressure. A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized trials found that hibiscus consumption was associated with reductions in blood pressure, particularly among people with elevated blood pressure.

The findings are encouraging, but hibiscus should not replace prescribed medication or medical care.

Tea isn't a miracle cure, and different varieties have different levels of scientific evidence behind them. But unsweetened tea can be a low-calorie beverage that provides hydration, plant compounds, and—depending on the variety—caffeine.

From Japanese matcha and Chinese green tea to Indian chai, Moroccan mint tea, South African rooibos, and hibiscus, tea traditions offer a simple wellness lesson:

Wellness doesn't always have to be complicated. Sometimes it begins with boiling water, choosing a favorite cup, and taking a few quiet minutes to enjoy it.

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