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COMPLIANCE CONUNDRUM

Virginia Department of Education report points out ADA shortcomings at six Bristol, Virginia, school buildings

BY DAVID MCGEE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Va. — Teachers in a Virginia High School special-needs classroom must use a homemade wooden ramp to push wheelchair-bound students up into a cramped restroom or change the students' diapers.

In another part of the building, a series of ramps take the place of an elevator as the lone interior connection for wheelchair-bound students, family or staff between the majority of the school and the band room, gym and auditorium.

At Washington-Lee Elementary, anyone in a wheelchair must go outside and down a steep sidewalk to reach lower levels of the school. Built into a hillside, the school has four levels and no elevator.

At Washington-Lee, Highland View and Stonewall Jackson elementary schools, don't bother looking for a handicapped-accessible bathroom — they don't exist. That's why all students who require one attend Van Pelt Elementary, which has one such restroom for each gender.

At Virginia Middle School, a person entering the school through the main entrance is immediately faced with up and down stairways — forcing anyone in a wheelchair to go around the building to another entrance.

None of Bristol, Virginia's six public school buildings even remotely comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. They are grandfathered in until significant construction occurs within their walls. So work has long been delayed because it would trigger federal requirements to come into compliance and the city simply cannot afford to pay that bill.

But plans to start improving four city elementary schools this summer will change all that.

A new 104-page report from the Virginia Department of Education points out those shortcomings and many, many more while estimating the cost to address them all could range between \$33 million and \$64 million — substantially higher than previous estimates ranging between \$11 million and \$40 million for the elementary schools.

Currently, only Van Pelt Elementary, Virginia Middle and Virginia High School have any handicapped-accessible facilities, but



Washington-Lee Elementary School is built on four levels with few ramps, making access difficult for mobility impaired students, faculty and visitors.

All Bristol Virginia schools need to have ADA-compliant push bars on the exterior doors, yet many doors have older, non-compliant push bars.

An ADA-noncompliant bathroom with a narrow door in one of Washington-Lee's classrooms. Students who require one attend Van Pelt, which has one for each gender.

Traditional twist classroom door knobs need to be replaced with ADA-compliant levers in many of the older Bristol Virginia schools.

ONLINE
» To read the Virginia Department of Education's evaluation of Bristol Virginia schools, go to **HeraldCourier.com**.

Police: Machete used in attacks on trail

BY ROBERT SORRELL
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A machete-wielding man attacked two people along the Appalachian Trail in Southwest Virginia, authorities said Saturday.

Early in the morning, two hikers reported to the Bland County Sheriff's Office that there was a man with a machete assaulting people in Wythe County, according to a news release from Wythe County Sheriff's Office Major Anthony Cline.

"There was a male and female injured in the assaults," the release states.

One of the individuals may have been assaulted on the Smyth County portion of the trail. Smyth County Sheriff Chip Shuler confirmed his office was assisting in the investigation.

See **MACHETE**, Page A5

Agencies probing reported murders

BY ROBERT SORRELL
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Authorities from several agencies continue to put together the pieces of a case involving multiple murder charges in the rural community of Mendota, Virginia.



Wright

James Michael Wright, 23, was arraigned Friday on three counts each of capital murder, concealing a body and use of a firearm in the commission of a felony.

Washington County Sheriff Fred Newman has declined to release any details in the case and said Saturday he expects to hold a press conference on Monday. He has confirmed his office

See **MURDER**, Page A5



Thank you, **Alan Linkous**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier.



SPORTS
Former Tennessee football players take part in camp for area kids at VHS » C1

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ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Bristol Virginia School Board members listen during a public forum on city school issues Thursday night at Highland View Elementary School.

Schools

From Page A1

none of those buildings are close to being fully compliant with the federal standard. The report estimates it will require more than \$33 million in improvements to bring those three schools into full ADA compliance and address other structural or facility concerns.

The state report was the result of four state officials touring all six city school buildings in late March, at the request of local school officials.

It recommends closing Highland View and Washington-Lee elementary schools due to the substantial costs to renovate them into ADA compliance and make other changes. During their review, state officials uncovered a nearly identical 1997 state recommendation to close those same schools.

It showed the need for “major renovations at three of the four elementary schools or replace the buildings,” according to the state report’s executive summary.

“As the team began to develop the school facility options contained in this report, overriding considerations included lack of meeting the American with Disabilities Act, the physical condition of the facilities, current traffic issues with buses and cars sharing the same spaces and safety on smaller sites and how to more efficiently utilize the existing school sites, or whether to abandon those in favor of other options,” according to the report.

This is the third in a dizzying array of studies during the past year estimating elementary school repair and improvement costs ranging between \$11 million to more than \$40 million. Those numbers have been publicly challenged by Mayor Kevin Mumpower as over-inflated, but he also cited the need to address immediate needs.

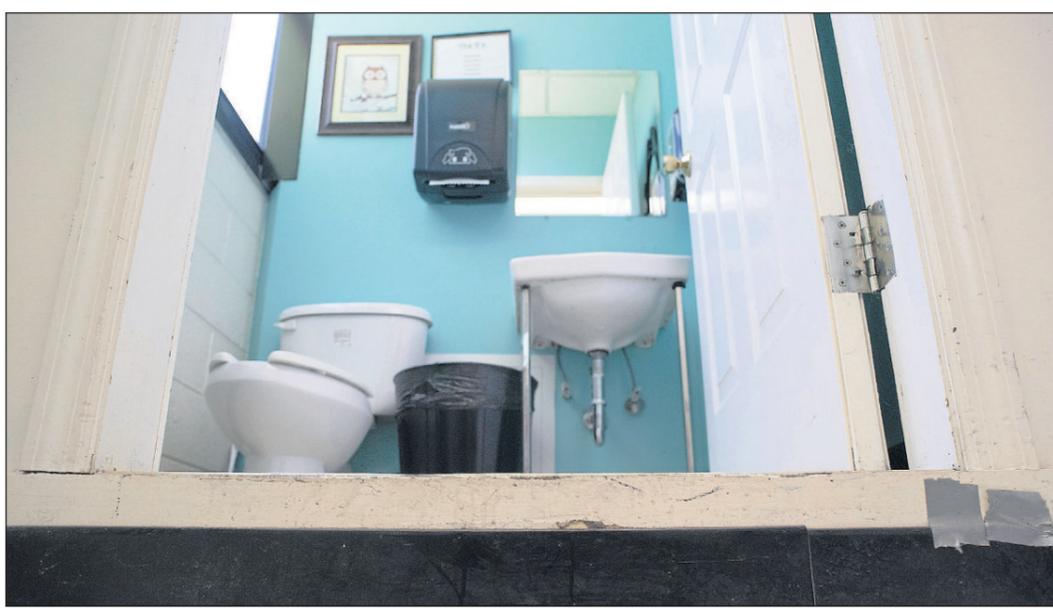
“The Department of Education uses real numbers. Any school built in the commonwealth or any renovation to a school, those financials have to be reported to the Department of Education,” Superintendent Keith Perrigan said. “So they’re able to provide estimates of new builds and renovations using actual numbers from real projects that have happened all over the commonwealth. We have three experts who work in the field who provide numbers. Because the mayor doesn’t agree with them doesn’t make them wrong.”

A breakthrough deal

The report was released last Monday, the same day a coalition of City Council and School Board members reached a tentative deal to allocate \$200,000 for some projects to address basic accessibility and safety needs at four city elementary schools.

“This is a sign of what can happen when City Council and School Board get together, and we put our differences aside, make sure we have the city’s best interest at heart, so you’ll see some improvements immediately in our current schools starting really soon,” Councilman Anthony Farnum said.

While it signals a baby step toward bridging what has become an ever-widening chasm



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A step to the bathroom in the special-needs classroom at Virginia High requires a ramp for wheelchair-bound students.

Bristol Virginia School Cost Estimates by Study

School	VDOE	Thompson & Litton	Mosely
Highland View	None given	\$2.2 million	\$7.54 million
Stonewall Jackson	\$11.76 million	\$1.57 million	\$10.36 million
Van Pelt	\$9.84 million	\$4.98 million	\$15.34 million
Washington-Lee	None given	\$4.21 million	\$8.74 million
Virginia Middle	\$8.2 million	Not included	Not included
Virginia High	\$15.33 million	Not included	Not included

The Virginia Department of Education does not recommend investing in Highland View or Washington-Lee.

Thompson & Litton and Mosely Architects were only asked to assess the needs of the elementary schools.

between the city’s two elected bodies, it is literally a drop in the bucket.

The \$200,000, which must still be approved by the council, is expected to fund construction of security vestibules inside the entrances of all four elementary schools and create one male and one female handicapped-accessible restroom at each building. Plans are to establish a locked vestibule area so that anyone who visits a school building is buzzed into that area first but not allowed to proceed until their identity and purpose are verified by a receptionist or other school official.

One appropriation is to come from the current fiscal year’s operating budget and the other from the 2019-20 spending plan, City Manager Randy Eads said.

“A \$100,000 appropriation will come to the council on May 28. We haven’t worked out the details on the other \$100,000, but I anticipate it will be sometime in July,” Eads said. “It will be based on School Board needs as to when they need that [second allocation].”

Bristol’s elementary conundrum

All of this angst arose amid a 2018 School Board effort to address its elementary school conundrum.

The city currently has about 1,100 elementary students between pre-kindergarten and fifth grade. More than 470 attend Van Pelt, the city’s newest school built in 1974, while the remaining 630 attend Highland View, Stonewall Jackson and Washington-Lee, which range from 82 to 51 years old.

At the center of this long-running discussion is the School Board’s expressed desire to retain Van Pelt, close its three oldest, smallest, most challenged elementary schools and construct a building to accommodate those students. The board made that decision in 2011, but without the ability to generate its own funds and the city’s mounting debt from The Falls commercial center and the

solid waste landfill, it remained on hold.

In 2017, as new city leadership began addressing the financial challenges, the School Board directed Perrigan to revive its “two school model” and try to identify a way to make it a reality.

The result was a 2018 proposal to build that school on city-owned property adjacent to the existing Van Pelt Elementary, a site chosen primarily because the land would be free — a key consideration for the financially challenged city.

The proposed \$18.5 million, 86,500-square-foot building was designed by J.A. Street after the board reached an agreement under the Virginia Public Private Education and Facilities Act of 2002. It would allow the private contractor to build and own the building while the city made payments for 30 years until it, ultimately, owned the facility.

However, a split City Council rejected the proposal in a 3-2 vote last November with Mayor Mumpower, Vice Mayor Kevin Wingard and newly appointed Councilman Anthony Farnum voting against the plan — primarily because of the long-term \$37.6 million price tag and community concerns about placing all elementary students at the far eastern portion of the city. Council members Bill Hartley and Neal Osborne voted for the project.

School officials didn’t take that defeat well and have continually offered up sharp criticism, arguing it would eliminate the three worst buildings from the equation and the payments could have been made through operational savings of closing three older buildings and reduced staffing.

Last Monday, the board agreed to leave the PPEA agreement with Street open, in case any progress might occur.

What prior studies show

While the state study’s cost estimates are breathtaking, it is far from the first time such large numbers have been discussed.

A September 2018 study by

Mosely Architects of Richmond provided a wide range of options from minimal fixes to complete overhauls that upgraded all four elementary buildings to 21st century standards. Those estimates ranged from \$13.96 million to slightly more than \$42 million.

Options included closing Highland View, consolidating those students with Van Pelt by adding a wing and renovating the other three elementary buildings at a total cost of \$39 million. Another option was to close Highland View, renovate the other three elementary buildings, move fifth grade to Virginia Middle School and eighth grade to Virginia High by adding a wing, at a total cost of \$41 million. Yet another option was to do all of option two but repurpose existing space at the high school, which brought the total cost to \$34.7 million.

All were dismissed as unaffordable.

After its November vote, the council directed school leaders to come back with a more reasonable set of estimates and a prioritized list.

The school division then commissioned Thompson & Litton Architects to evaluate its buildings and develop recommendations to make all four elementary schools “safe, accessible and functional.” That firm’s March 2019 report provided detailed estimates of a range of items, including asbestos abatement, installing security vestibules, making doors, entrances and restrooms ADA compliant, adding elevators at Washington-Lee and Highland View, as well as making repairs to sidewalks, floors and addressing other structural issues.

The total cost was \$12.97 million with a recommendation to add 25 percent to cover cost over-runs, architect and permit fees and other soft costs, bringing the total estimate to more than \$16.2 million.

Among \$2.2 million in proposed changes at Highland View

Individual School Needs

Washington-Lee Elementary

Grades PK-5; current enrollment 192 students; site acreage: 15.5 acres
Constructed in 1968

- » Site needs vehicular traffic improvements for car student drop off.
- » Heating and cooling of spaces cannot be regulated easily.
- » ADA building and site upgrades needed.
- » Site has poor drainage with water infiltrating the building.
- » Sidewalks from the bus drop off to the upper level of the school are in poor condition, and there are no handrails at these stairs.
- » Windows are past their useful life.
- » Water pipes need to be replaced.
- » Bathrooms need ADA upgrades.
- » The main entrance has no security vestibule.

Stonewall Jackson Elementary

Grades PK-5; current enrollment 255 students; site acreage: 8.6 acres
Constructed in 1948

- » Site needs vehicular traffic improvements since there is no separation of bus and car traffic.
- » The elevator is old and parts no longer available.
- » The preschool classrooms do not have an interior entrance to the cafeteria.
- » Students either walk outside or go up a level then back down to the ground floor in inclement weather.
- » ADA building and site upgrades are needed.
- » Boys and girls bathrooms are in need of ADA upgrades.
- » The tennis courts are being used as a hard play surface.
- » The courts are cracked and in need of repair or replacement.
- » The main entrance is not accessible, and there is no security vestibule.

Van Pelt Elementary

Grades PK-6; current enrollment 469 students; site acreage: 13 acres
Constructed in 1974

- » The office is not located adjacent to the main entrance, and there is no security vestibule.
- » Boys and girls bathrooms are in need of ADA upgrades.
- » Two classrooms were converted into a cafeteria. It is undersized for the school’s enrollment.
- » Classrooms are in open concept pods, are noisy and the teachers have built “walls” using bookcases and cubbies, creating an unsafe setup.

Highland View Elementary

Grades PK-6; current enrollment 188 students; site: 5 acres
Constructed in 1937

- » The building is in poor condition with structural issues, deteriorating wooden windows and vinyl asbestos tiles flooring in places.
- » There is no security vestibule at the main entrance.
- » ADA building and site upgrades are needed.
- » Classrooms are undersized per VDOE Guidelines for School Facilities in Virginia’s Public Schools.
- » Site needs vehicular traffic improvements for bus drop off.
- » Heating and cooling of spaces cannot be regulated.
- » Site acreage is deficient for an elementary school of this size.
- » Boys and girls bathrooms are in need of ADA upgrades.

Virginia Middle School

Grades 6-8; current enrollment 497 students; site acreage: 5.3 acres
Building constructed 1914; additions and renovations 1947, 1965, 1994.

- » ADA building and site upgrades are needed.
- » Boys and girls bathrooms are in need of ADA upgrades.
- » Accessible bus drop off is on a main road.
- » Site acreage is deficient for a middle school.
- » There is no security vestibule at the main entrance.
- » The office is not at the main entrance; it is up a half level.

Virginia High School

Grades 9-12; current enrollment 670 students; site: 25 acres.
Main high school building constructed 1954; additions and renovations 1958, 1973 and 1981.

- » Boys and girls bathrooms are in need of ADA upgrades.
- » HVAC system needs to be upgraded or replaced.
- » ADA building and site upgrades are needed.
- » There is no security vestibule at the main entrance.
- » Roof is leaking in multiple locations and in need of replacement.
- » The main office is not at the main entrance.

Source: Virginia Department of Education 2019 report

“The hard part for us is figuring where we go next, not knowing what monies we have. For example, if they [council] said you have X amount of dollars for ADA then that gives us some direction of what to look at to do next. The money drives everything.”

— Randy Alvis, Bristol Virginia School Board chairman

Upgrades

From Page A8

are asbestos abatement, installing an elevator, upgrading the kitchen, improving the gym, addressing structural issues where water is seeping into walls, replacing ceiling tile, upgrading electrical service, adding air scrubbers, upgrading HVAC and making interior safety improvements.

Included in the \$1.58 million for proposed changes at Stonewall Jackson are asbestos abatement, a hallway to connect kindergarten to the cafeteria, a series of repairs to walls and stairs, upgrading restrooms to ADA compliance, security improvements, a new intercom, ceiling tile, lighting and upgrading the fire alarm system.

Included in \$4.2 million in proposed changes at Washington-Lee are replacing asbestos floor tile, installing an elevator, addressing drainage issues, upgrading restrooms to ADA compliance, constructing a classroom addition to replace rooms displaced by the elevator and security improvements.

Included in proposed upgrades for Van Pelt are \$2.9 million to build partition walls throughout the building, relocate the office, make restroom's ADA compliant and add a fire alarm system. Adding four classrooms at Van Pelt to accommodate students from another school would add \$2 million to the final total.

State report suggests more options

The state Department of Education's 104-page report addresses shortcomings of all six buildings. It includes an overview of the challenges found at each, proposed solutions, including cost estimates based on statewide averages for similar school construction projects, reviews of transportation and operating costs and a detailed review of the buildings, including photographs of specific findings at each.

In summary, the report urges closing Highland View and Washington-Lee as soon as possible and proposes four options regarding renovations at the other buildings and the need to build an elementary school.

In every scenario, Virginia High renovations are forecast to cost \$15.33 million, Virginia Middle renovations are pegged at \$8.2 million and Van Pelt renovations estimated at \$9.84 million, which includes building a new cafeteria since the current cafeteria is in a former classroom space and judged to be too small for the number of students.

"We are partially handicap accessible but not fully. Some of our doors have the right handles, some do not. Some of our doorways are the right width, some are not," Perrigan said. "Our bathrooms might have a bar in the right place but the center hole for the toilet is off by 3 inches. The center of a normal toilet should be 12 inches from the wall but an accessible toilet should be 15 inches. Just putting up a bar doesn't make it handicap accessible. There are a lot of criteria that go into restrooms."

Option one is to renovate Van Pelt and change grade structure to K-2, build a new elementary school with grades 3-5 on the adjacent site, abandon the other three elementary schools, and renovate Virginia Middle and Virginia High at a total cost of \$54.6 million.

Option two includes renovating Van Pelt, renovating Stonewall Jackson and building an addition to increase student capacity, abandoning the other two elementary schools, renovating Virginia Middle and Virginia High at a total cost of \$48.05 million.

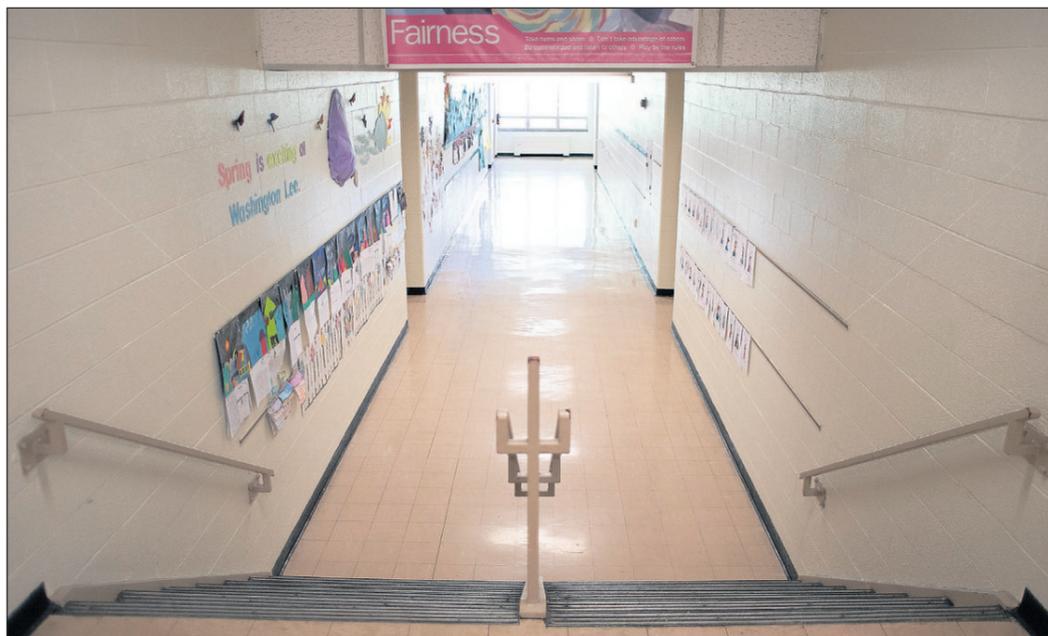
The estimated cost to renovate Stonewall Jackson is \$14.66 million.

Option three includes renovating Van Pelt, building a new Stonewall Jackson on the adjacent baseball field then demol-



A long, winding wheelchair ramp is next to a set of stairs at Virginia High School, but some sections of the school have no ramps from level to level.

ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER



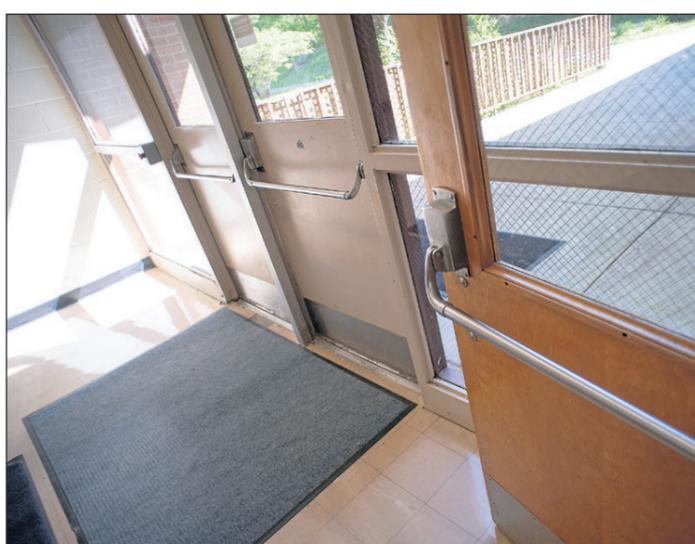
A flight of stairs but no access ramp requires mobility impaired people to use the exterior doors to gain access to some levels of Bristol Virginia's Washington-Lee Elementary School.

ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER



Washington-Lee Elementary School in Bristol, Virginia, still has asbestos-based floor tiles.

ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER



Many doors at Bristol Virginia school buildings have older, non-compliant push bars such as these at Washington-Lee Elementary School.

ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

ishing the existing Stonewall Jackson once the new facility is complete, abandoning the other two elementary schools, and renovating Virginia Middle and Virginia High at a total cost of \$56 million.

Option four includes renovating Van Pelt and Stonewall Jackson, building an elementary school with a 425-student capacity, abandoning the other two elementary schools, and renovating the middle and high schools at a total cost of \$64.22 million.

Cost of non-compliance

Local officials don't yet know the federal timeline for bring-

ing buildings into ADA compliance after construction occurs inside the buildings, or what, if any, penalties they could ultimately face if those deadlines aren't met.

"I don't know what that clock is but I know it starts once we start making changes inside our buildings," School Board Chairman Randy Alvis said.

Eads, who also serves as city attorney, said he plans to research those questions.

As an example of what can happen, court documents accessed from the ADA.gov website show the Justice Department took action against the village of Byesville, Ohio,

for non-compliance. In 2016, it entered into a settlement agreement to address a wide range of issues at town buildings, sidewalks and public parks because barriers kept handicapped individuals from "participating in its programs and services."

That agreement identified more than 120 specific instances, including toilets, parking lots and sidewalks, curbing building access, door knobs, doorways, signs and counters that had to be modified or replaced. Court documents don't reflect a financial penalty but included a three-year timeline with constant federal oversight.

Where do we go from here?

The superintendent said the school system is willing to rehabilitate its older elementary schools but doesn't view that as the best approach.

"If they give \$1 million to \$2 million a year for the next seven years we will absolutely spend it to the best of our ability, but I don't think that's a good use of taxpayer dollars," Perrigan said. "At some point, their [buildings] end of life is going to come and the state has been recommending since 1997 that Highland View and Washington-Lee's end of life has come — those are experts not just School Board members."

The three council members who agreed to the \$200,000

allocation have jointly pledged to work with the School Board to determine the best path forward and the mayor has repeatedly said the city should set aside funds every year toward school capital needs.

"I think the name of the game is dialogue," Osborne said. "That's how we got this far. It's [\$200,000] a small step, but the end game is going to be we're going to have to find a way to do a new school. We can't sustain paying \$200,000 a year forever to fix these things because that's just not feasible. I think we have to find a way to do a new school."

Osborne said that solution should come sooner rather than later.

"We can't put this off another year or two. I'd like to talk about this over the next six months and find something," Osborne said.

Perrigan continues to champion the plan to build an elementary school and close the three older buildings.

"From that standpoint, it just continues to make sense to me that our budget-neutral option to deal with some of the improvements at other schools is going to be the most efficient model," Perrigan said.

The city manager intends to propose one possible solution to the elementary issue at Tuesday night's City Council meeting

"I know Dr. Perrigan is continuing to look at a couple of different options. We hope to have all of this resolved by November," Eads said. "We've already done the [PPEA] process for the one new school at Van Pelt, and there are discussions on how we handle Highland View and Washington-Lee. There are discussions about whether we renovate all the schools that have been presented. It's just a matter of what will be the most financially responsible solution for the city."

Alvis said the board ultimately relies on the city.

"We're not the funding agency. The monies we ask for and that are appropriated to us from the city is what we operate on," Alvis said. "It depends on the city's finances for those projects. It's great we're going to get started with this \$200,000, but we're going to have to have some called meetings and have discussions about where do we go from here. It's an excellent first step, but there is so much that needs to be done."

Alvis said the board's task of addressing ADA issues would be simpler if there was an annual allocation.

"The hard part for us is figuring where we go next, not knowing what monies we have," Alvis said. "For example, if they [council] said you have X amount of dollars for ADA, then that gives us some direction of what to look at to do next. The money drives everything."

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Remember to set your
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AP



**Wise
Central
wins
35-21**



**Patrick
Henry
moves
to 9-0**

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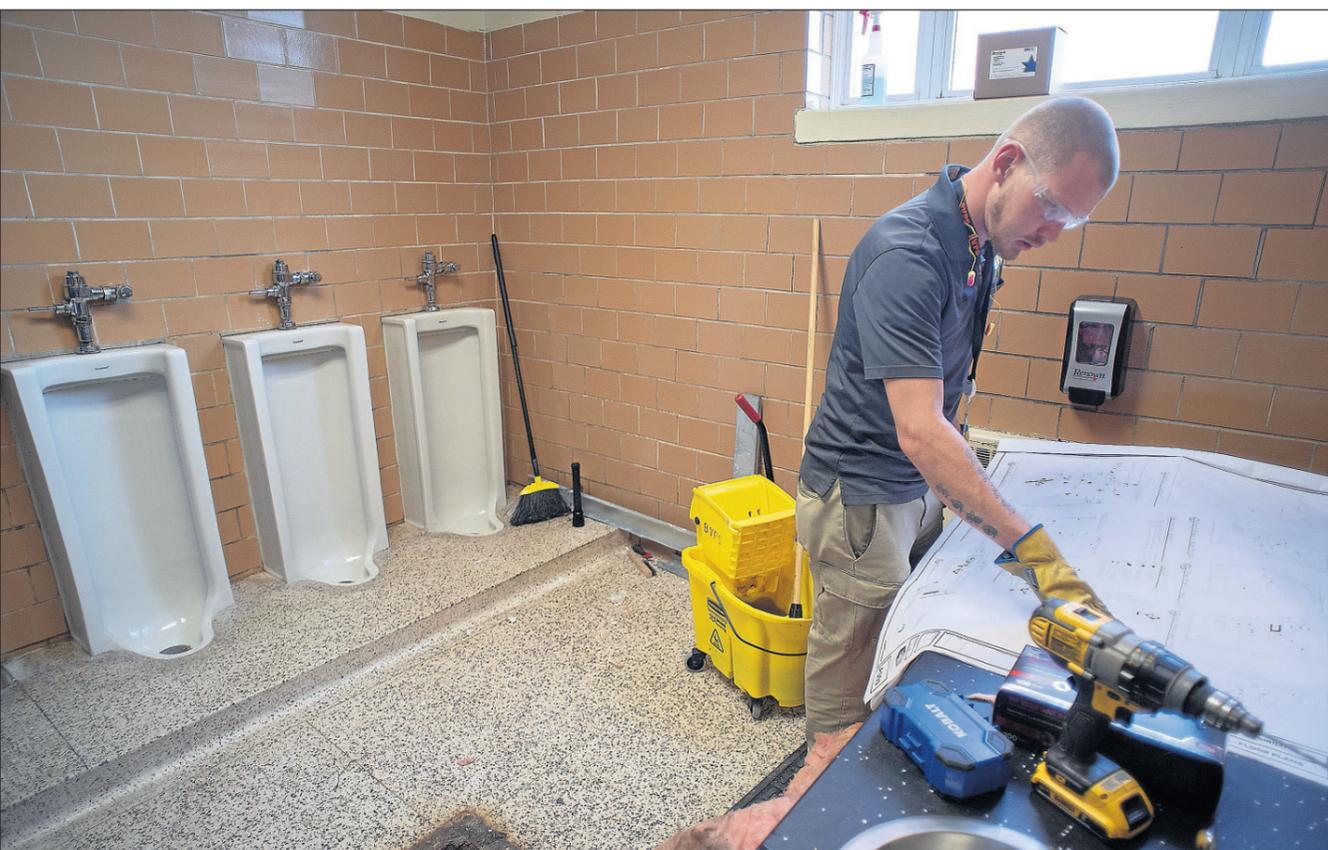
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BRISTOL VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Bristol Virginia Public Schools employee Chad Sherfey checks blueprints Tuesday as he works on renovating a bathroom at Highland View Elementary.

\$3 million suit filed against Sullivan, sheriff, others

BY LURAH LOWERY
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A \$3 million class-action federal lawsuit has been filed against Sullivan County, Sheriff Jeff Cassidy, Chief Jail Administrator Lee Carswell, former corrections officer Christopher Sabo and other unnamed Sheriff's Office employees over the assault of an inmate last year.

Sabo was charged with assaulting Travis Bellew on Oct. 29, 2018. A lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Greenville earlier this week claims Sabo "without warning or provocation" violently knocked Bellew to the floor and into a closet, out of camera view. During the altercation, Bellew hit his head on a mop bucket and Sabo beat him "about the head and body with his closed fists," according to the suit.

Sabo pleaded guilty to the assault charge, according to the lawsuit. Online court records indicate he was placed on pretrial diversion.

Sabo's conduct was largely due

See **LAWSUIT**, Page A5

ONLINE
At **HeraldCourier.com**:
» View the \$3 million class-action lawsuit.
» Find a link to our

recent "Critical Mass" series on the jail overcrowding problem in Sullivan County and Bristol, Virginia.

PROGRESS REPORT

ADA, safety upgrades underway at two city elementary schools

BY DAVID MCGEE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Va. — Improvements continue at one city Bristol, Virginia elementary school and began this week at another.

The steel framework of a new security vestibule — the city's first — is in place at Van Pelt Elementary and awaiting the bulletproof glass and doors that complete it. A few miles away, school division

workers are performing the first restroom upgrades at Highland View Elementary to bring those facilities into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Similar work is scheduled to occur at all of the city's elementary schools. City Council previously approved \$200,000 toward those projects, but the lone submitted

See **SCHOOLS**, Page A11



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Van Pelt Elementary School Principal Jared Rader gestures to the new security vestibule being installed in the school's front entry.

INSIDE



Author, former radio host
to speak at church » A7

Thank you,
**Willie
Copenhaver**,
for subscribing
to the Bristol
Herald Courier.



GOP's Trump support solid in hyper-partisan era

BY LISA MASCARO
AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON — The more concrete the testimony in the impeachment inquiry, the more solidly Republicans are sticking with President Donald Trump.

Witness after witness in closed-door House hearings is corroborating the core facts that Democrats say make a strong case against the president.

Trump pressured Ukraine, an American ally, for an investigation of Joe Biden, his family and the Democrats. At the same time, the Trump administration withheld military assistance for the young democracy as it confronted Russian aggression.

For Democrats, it adds up to nothing short of a brazen abuse of power, a quid pro quo, swapping U.S. for-



**IMPEACHMENT
INVESTIGATION**

AP Analysis

eign policy and funds for personal political gain.

"I don't think there is any justifying this president's misconduct," Rep. Adam Schiff, the chairman of the Intelligence Committee leading the inquiry said in an interview.

Republicans are having none of it. Trump says it's all just a "witch hunt," and his supporters agree.

"The American people see this for what it is," said Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, the top Republican on the

See **GOP**, Page A5



AP PHOTO/PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVALS

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (center) is joined by fellow Republican lawmakers as he walks up to the podium to begin speaking during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington on Thursday.

INSIDE

» AP-NORC poll: More support than oppose impeachment probe. **A5**
» During rally, Trump lashes out at Dems after impeachment vote. **A6**

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Schools

From Page A1
bid was \$466,000. At that point, council members agreed to fund two additional school maintenance positions to allow the division to perform much of that work.

“Van Pelt did receive a [state] safety grant for \$83,000 for a safety vestibule there,” Superintendent Keith Perrigan said. “The other three elementary schools were not eligible for the safety grant because there is a potential they will be closed within the next five years — which is a criteria of the grant.”

School officials are currently reviewing a series of options to close either two or three of the city’s older elementary schools and build a new school, either near the center of the city or adjacent to Van Pelt in the area of Interstate 81’s Exit 7.

The state grant also requires that a contractor perform the installation, Perrigan said. School maintenance workers spent much of the summer relocating the Van Pelt office from the center of the building to the main entrance as part of improving safety and restricting access.

“The glass doors are on order so, because it was part of the safety grant, the metal and the glass work has to be performed by the contractor,” Principal Jared Rader said. “We’ve heard so many positives from parents already recognizing it’s better to not have the office in the center of the building.”

Once the vestibule is complete, a visitor has to identify themselves on camera and be buzzed into the vestibule, where school staff can further identify the individual before allowing access into any other part of the building.

Rader said he also placed this new office along the front of the school so he could have a clear view of everyone who approaches the main entrance.

Plans for the secure vestibule at Highland View have been sent out to vendors and that installation is expected to begin around Dec. 1, school maintenance, transportation and facilities Director Bill Buckles said.

“The welded steel work is farmed out,” Buckles said. “We’ll do the ADA, we’ll get the [frame] made up and we’ll come in and do the installation of the welded steel and the glass comes in after that ... it’s a four- to six-week lead time on [bulletproof] glass because it has to be cut to the exact measurements of the steel frame.”

Each school will also receive new cameras, badge readers and interlocks to further improve security.

Meanwhile, the restroom upgrades for one fully accessible boys’ and girls’ restroom began this week. “The demo work has begun in the boys’ restroom, and once we finish we’ll go down and start on the girls’ restroom,” Buckles said.

“There are two boys’ and two girls’ restrooms here, so we’re real careful in shutting them down.”

Once restroom updates are completed at Highland View — likely by mid-November — similar work is expected to begin at another school.

The division has also been approved for a \$65,000 Community Development Block Grant to repair the elevator at Stone-wall Jackson, but those funds haven’t yet come through, Perrigan said.

‘Unacceptable’: Trick-or-treater injured in Chicago shooting

The Associated Press
CHICAGO — A 7-year-old girl out trick-or-treating in a bumblebee costume on Chicago’s West Side was critically injured when she was shot in the neck by someone firing from across the

street at a gang member, police said.

The shooting Thursday night was another grim example of children in the city being caught in the crossfire while doing normal activities like walking down

the street, sitting on a porch or laughing with friends inside a house.

Investigators think the 7-year-old girl was shot in a gang-related attack. The man believed to be the target was a 30-year-old shot

in the hand, police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said.

A juvenile identified as a person of interest in the shooting was taken into custody Friday, and detectives were interviewing the individual, Guglielmi said.

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SPORTS » B1



Abingdon tops Patrick Henry in benefit game at historic Latture Field

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VIRGINIA BUSINESS COLLEGE



Gene Couch, president of the Virginia Business College, points out changes and renovations being made on campus in preparation to open in 2020.

ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Economy

Dems see opening for 2020, but resist cheering recession

BY JULIE PACE
AP Washington Bureau Chief

PROLE, Iowa — Campaigning under the stifling August sun, Joe Biden assailed President Donald Trump's trade war with China, accusing him of squandering a strong economy and putting Americans' financial security at risk.

But he was quick to add that he was not hoping for the worst.

"I never wish for a recession. Period," the former vice president and current Democratic presidential candidate told reporters in Prole, Iowa.

Biden's comments highlight the delicate balance for Democrats as the U.S. economy flashes recession warning signs. In town halls and speeches across the country this week, candidates leveled blame on Trump, arguing that his aggressive and unpredictable tariff policies were prompting gloomy economic forecasts. Yet they also strained to avoid the appearance of cheering for a downturn that would inflict financial pain on millions of Americans, but potentially help their party's political fortunes in 2020.

For more than two years, the combination of solid growth, low unemployment and a rising stock market has been a bulwark for Trump, helping him maintain the support of many independents and moderate Republicans who are turned off by his incendiary statements and pugnacious personality. According to a new

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ELECTION 20

ON THE CLOCK

New college resubmits application to open for classes in a year

BY DAVID MCGEE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BRISTOL, Va. — Virginia Business College is now on the countdown clock in anticipation of opening for classes a year from now.

College officials recently resubmitted an application for certification by the State Council on Higher Education in Virginia and hope to gain preliminary approval this fall, school President Gene Couch told the Bristol Herald Courier on Thursday.

The college — which is being established on Virginia Intermont College's former Moore Street campus — previously withdrew its approved application because it included an aggressive timetable that included classes beginning this fall.

"We voluntarily withdrew our application from SCHEV. ... It allowed us to say, 'Here is what we want to do and are going to do,'" Couch said. "The process has three stages or phases. Phase one is the initial application. Part two is very detailed, all the way to a catalog to develop policies and materials around that. We submitted that July 31. They [council] have meetings in September and October, and we are hopeful we're on one of those and — hopefully at that point — receive provisional approval."

Council spokeswoman Laura Osberger



Roofers work on the library of the Virginia Business College on Virginia Intermont's former campus.

ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

confirmed that the application has been received but said it's not certain when it might appear on an upcoming council agenda.

The previous application was submitted last fall and received preliminary approval in March. Couch said he saw a "real problem" in trying to get everything in place so quickly.

If the school receives provisional ap-

proval, it can begin to recruit and fill management and faculty positions and begin recruiting students while completing repairs to campus buildings.

Couch said they opted not to resubmit the same application, instead submitting a new document with new plans and information.

See **BUSINESS**, Page A9

Thank you, **Barbara Wampler**, for subscribing to the Bristol Herald Courier. **Weather » A10**



INSIDE



Leaders form panels to create day center » A3

Fans choose sides in the 'Chicken Sandwich War'

BY KATIE WORKMAN
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — A nation already polarized finds itself divided once again, but this time politics isn't at the heart of it: The blame lies squarely on a fried piece of poultry.

People are choosing sides and beefing over chicken, thanks to Popeyes' release of its crispy chicken sandwich and the social media

debate that has followed. With just one addition to a fast-food menu, the hierarchy of chicken sandwiches in America was rattled, and the supremacy of Chick-fil-A and others was threatened.

It's been a trending topic on social media, fans have weighed in with YouTube commentaries and memes, and some have reported

See **CHICKEN**, Page A9

SOLD OUT

» The Popeyes on Euclid Avenue in Bristol, Virginia, had run out of their chicken sandwiches by Thursday evening.

INSIDE

» OPINION: Popeyes chicken sandwich is an economic indicator. **A8**

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Business

From Page A1

Included is a list of the school's recently appointed seven-member board of directors, chaired by Dale Cook of CSE Insurance in Abingdon.

Other board members include Connie Hearl, senior vice president of marketing and business development for Elevation Energy and Communications of Abingdon; Ken Heath, executive director of community and economic development for Marion; Stan Hickson, president of Ballad Health's Southwest Virginia market; Chad Keen, president and CEO of Keen Promotions and a member of the Bristol Tennessee City Council; Jing Zhang, of ownership group U.S. Magis International; and Zhiting Zang, the college owner and principal of U.S. Magis International.

The private college intends to offer a bachelor's degree in business with seven concentration tracks, including accounting, business analytics, entrepreneurship, human resource management, information technology management, management/leadership and marketing.

VI closed in May 2014 after losing its accreditation amid growing debt and sharply declining enrollment. The buildings have been empty since, but the campus has been a "beehive"



ANDRE TEAGUE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Framed by books in the library from the former Virginia Intermont, a contractor works on a window frame at the college.

this summer as workers strive to bring it back to life, Couch said.

"In the last three or four months we've been putting roofs on, putting windows in, working on electrical systems, and we're putting in water now — bringing it back to life," Couch said. "It's a beehive of activity. Parking lots are essentially done."

A fence is also being installed around the campus, and sprinkler systems have been upgraded as part of investments totaling \$600,000 so far.

The new college intends to use seven existing buildings, including the library, the former

science building, which is being renamed Blue Ridge Hall and will be the primary academic classroom building; the health and fitness center is the former gym; the renamed Commonwealth student center; the Holston Hall residence center and the former Harrison-Jones Auditorium is being renamed Bristol Hall.

The former president's home across Moore Street from the main campus serves as the administration building.

Some of VI's historic buildings, including Main Hall, won't be used initially, but will remain

and are being shored up with roof and other structural repairs. Couch said some of the college's other real estate holdings may ultimately be used as well.

"We want to offer a private school education and a public school cost," Couch said. "Our price point is lower than a typical private school and more in line with public colleges and universities."

Couch said they don't yet have a goal for the size of the first class and admitted recruiting to a new entity will be challenging. "Here's a complicating factor. Many students plan on federal

financial aid," he said. "You're not eligible for financial aid until you receive your accreditation, which is SACS-COC [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges]. SACS-COC, you're unable to receive your full or provisional accreditation for about 3.5 years. So you're up against it."

The expectation is to primarily recruit students within a two-hour area, but the college might also become home to a number of international students.

"That will be an element of our recruiting plan. We would have a connection to China and if they [students] have ability and interest," Couch said, adding that most Americans take the value of a degree from a U.S. school for granted. "Even with a bachelor's degree in business, if you are an international student you have that, it sets you apart. ... Internationally, it is recognized as a valuable credential."

The school currently has but three employees, including its president, but they hope to have a number of vice presidents and other personnel in place by January.

It does, however, have school colors of purple and gray, which will soon replace VI's black and gold.

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Chicken

From Page A1

long lines just to get a taste of the new sandwich.

"Our grandchildren will ask us where we were when the great Chicken War of 2019 began," Twitter user @MilesRodrigo1 declared.

While Popeyes has been selling chicken for a long time, the chain was a contender in the bone-in, skin-on, fried-chicken space, not the fried, boneless, skinless cutlet on a bun.

Popeyes announced the

new sandwich on Twitter last week with hyperbole that would soon define the social media commotion to come: "Chicken. Brioche. Pickles. New. Sandwich. Popeyes. Nationwide. So. Good. Forgot. How. Speak. In. Complete. Sandwiches. I mean, sentences."

And from that moment, it was ON. People began ardently advocating for their favorite sandwich, whether it be the new-kid-on-the-block Popeyes one, or the OG Wendy's or Chick-fil-A versions.

And the social media

managers for the companies reveled in the green light to talk smack to each other.

"We Didn't Invent The Chicken, Just The Chicken Sandwich!" Chick-fil-A bragged on Twitter. "Bun + Chicken + Pickles = all the (heart emoji) for the original."

To which Wendy's responded: "Ya'll out here talking about which of these fools has the second best chicken sandwich?"

Popeyes' quick retort: "Sounds like someone just ate one of our biscuits. Cause ya'll looking thirsty."

(Which frankly seemed as if they were bragging about dry over-salted biscuits? Wendy's thought so, too, tweeting, "lol, guess that means the food's dry as the jokes.")

As the week wore on, people debated on social media, in chat rooms, in person.

And even though the topic was the chicken, there were political overtones, with some throwing their backing to Popeyes because they disagreed with Chick-fil-A's opposition to LGBTQ rights and its chief execu-

tive's derogatory comments about same-sex marriage. (Though the chain has insisted that it has "no political or social agenda.")

Even the weighty New Yorker chimed in: Food writer Helen Rosner called Popeyes' new edition "simply beautiful" in a commentary titled "The Popeyes Chicken Sandwich is Here To Save America."

But why has the meager poultry sandwich riveted a nation so? Why do people have such intense feelings?

Nancy Hopkins, former food director of Better

Homes & Gardens magazine, and a veteran food editor for over 20 years, has this to say: "America loves anything crunchy, salty, crackly, and good. And Americans love chicken just about any way."

Still, Chick-fil-A, Wendy's and other restaurants have their devoted fans, and the Great Chicken Debate is far from being settled.

Perhaps that's fitting in this day and age. As Twitter user @cHolidaydds said: "There's nothing more American than being divided over something. This week it's a chicken sandwich."

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