

Fatal crash closes Abel Lake lot

VEGETATION TO BE
CLEARED FROM SITE
OF COLLISION THAT
KILLED CFHS STUDENT

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Stafford County's Abel Lake boat ramp and its parking area at Kellogg Mill Road are closed until further notice.

That decision came quickly on Tuesday, after Stafford's Board of Supervisors heard from a group of Colonial Forge High School students who delivered emotional public statements after the death of classmate Helen Wang.

The 17-year-old junior was killed Thursday—her birthday—when the car she was driving collided with a truck as she attempted to turn onto Kellogg Mill Road from the boat ramp's parking area.

A 17-year-old boy riding in the car was transported to a local hospital with non-life threatening injuries and later released, the Sheriff's Office said.

Tuesday's decision by county supervisors was made primarily for roadway and public safety concerns, but it will also give county officials time to clear from the area overgrown vegetation and other line-of-sight obsta-

cles. Excessive tree limbs, high grass and overgrown vegetation were all cited during Tuesday's meeting as possible contributors to the fatal collision.

Supervisor Mark Dudenhefer, who lost his own 18-year-old daughter, Emily, in a January 2004 accident on Mountain View Road, said, "The most important aspect of government is public safety. That's our No. 1 priority. We need to be much more aggressive than we are now. We are failing these kids."

At the conclusion of the public hearing, Supervisor Meg Bohmke urged the board to take immediate action.

"Cut the trees down tomorrow," Bohmke said.

Supervisor Jack Cavalier added, "This needs to be done now. There's no reason why we can't send work crews out there tomorrow."

Chairman Gary Snelings issued the directive to county officials to close the area immediately.

Jeff Adams, who lives on Kellogg Mill Road, said within the last 10 years, he's seen many fatalities along the dangerous stretch of road that he's lived on for the last 40 years.

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“I’ve had Colonial Forge students killed to the left of my driveway—I’ve had Colonial Forge students killed to the right of my driveway,” said Adams. “We’ve had the same narrow bridge here for 40 years and they haven’t cleared the vegetation in that area for 40 years, either.”

Adams said he uses caution pulling onto Kellogg Mill Road.

Because of the overgrowth of vegetation, Adams said he never looks to the left because he cannot see vehicles coming in his direction.

“I roll down my windows, turn off my radio and listen,” Adams said. “If I don’t hear a car on the bridge, I know it’s safe to turn onto the road because of the sound. I never have confidence in vision.”

During Tuesday’s public hearing, Alexis Eileen Surman, a Colonial Forge senior, pleaded, “Our roads are God-awful. The roads are the worst I’ve ever seen. Instead of waiting for someone to die again, we need to take care of this now.”

Another Colonial Forge senior—Emily Elizabeth Imes—said as soon as the incident happened, her feelings went immediately to anger. Imes feels county officials are not directing enough attention toward the safety of area roadways.

“I knew that the past four years that I have lived here, I’ve known of so many accidents, so

many that have resulted in deaths, so many that put people on life support, and they still haven’t done anything about it,” said Imes. “What the county plans on doing at Courthouse Road—without being too rude about it—the choices that they’re making with where they’re putting their money for construction is dumb, and I feel they really need to think it through.”

Alexis Eileen Surman, a senior at Colonial Forge, was at Abel Lake’s waterfall Thursday when the wreck occurred.

“It makes me real angry, because last year there was a head-on collision and nothing was done, and now we have to go through the process again,” she said. “The roads around here are awful. There are potholes everywhere. Students are driving these roads. Closing [the boat ramp] is the best thing they can do for now.”

Michael Paul Simpson, a former Colonial Forge student, who was a classmate and friend of Wang, said he was thankful that the supervisors were having this conversation, but said he was disappointed that the discussion was happening under such adverse circumstances.

“Ask any high-schooler. They will tell you where roads need improvement,” said Simpson. “I ask that moving forward—because it’s too late now—that we take this opportunity to have these discussions before this happens again.”

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OVERGROWN VEGETATION CLEARED AT CRASH SCENE

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON
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Crews from the Virginia Department of Transportation's Fredericksburg District spent Wednesday clearing trees, brush and vegetation along Stafford's Kellogg Mill Road in the vicinity of a fatal May 16 car crash that claimed the life of a local teenager.

Helen Wang, a 17-year-old Colonial Forge junior, was killed when the car she was driving collided with a truck as she attempted to turn onto Kellogg Mill Road from the Abel Lake boat ramp parking area. The Sheriff's Office reported a 17-year-old boy riding with Wang that day was transported to a local hospital with non-life threatening injuries and later released.

"Our district traffic en-



Wang

gineer, who has several decades of experience, is on site today," Kelly Hannon, VDOT's Fredericksburg District communications manager, said Wednesday. "He's there to ensure the motorists have a clear line of sight as vegetation is being cleared."

Hannon also reported that a VDOT roadside program manager was on the scene Wednesday, providing direct oversight for the work crews.

During Tuesday's board meeting, Stafford supervisors heard from a group of Colonial Forge High School students who voiced their concerns with the dangerous road conditions in the county.

The emotional statements addressed the potholes, road hazards and obstacles on county roads the students said they encounter every day driving to and from school.

In the case of the May 16 crash, tree limbs, high grass and overgrown vegetation were all cited during Tuesday's meeting as possible contributors to the fatal collision. Those conditions prompted Supervisor Gary Snellings to direct county officials to close the boat ramp area immediately.

VDOT conducted daily vehicle counts for Kellogg Mill Road between Poplar and Mountain View roads from 2000 to 2018. In 2000, 1,400 vehicles traveled that stretch of roadway daily. In 2018, the daily vehicle count in the

same area had risen to 3,900.

VDOT also reported that on the 1.15-mile stretch of Kellogg Mill Road between Abel Drive and Lake Forest Drive, 12 crashes occurred between Jan. 1, 2016, and Dec. 31, 2018. Three of those crashes involved injuries and nine involved property damage. The May 16 crash was the only recorded fatality on that stretch of roadway in VDOT's three-year tracking period.

VDOT's Fredericksburg District maintains 1,621 lane miles of state roads in Stafford, 1,849 miles in Spotsylvania County, and 1,331 in Caroline County.

The transportation agency has a regular schedule for maintaining roadway right-of-ways, but also relies on the

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public for input to help fix hazardous roadways or roadside hardware—such as signals, signs and guardrails—that is damaged or out of service.

“VDOT clears roadway right-of-ways three times annually—in May, July and in September—but will deviate from that schedule when a safety concern is reported to us,” said Hannon. “It’s extremely helpful if someone is coming out of their



A tire rut is still evident at the scene of the fatal crash in Stafford County.

street and they see something that’s not right, they should contact us. We will send the appropriate crew out to take care of it.”

Residents can report roadway issues online at

my.vdot.virginia.gov, or by calling 800/367-7623.

Once the crash investigation is completed, VDOT will determine if further safety improvements—such as signs, pavement markings or other devices—are needed.

Stafford plans to pave the gravel entrance to the boat ramp. County officials said that both the ramp and the parking area will remain closed until work in the area is completed.

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Stafford County officials reopen Abel Lake boat ramp, parking area

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Stafford County's Abel Lake boat ramp and its parking area at Kellogg Mill Road have been reopened.

The area had been closed since May 23, the day Stafford's Board of Supervisors heard from a group of Colonial Forge High

School students following the death of classmate Helen Wang.

The 17-year-old junior was killed May 16 as she attempted to turn onto Kellogg Mill Road from the boat ramp's parking area. The teen's car collided with a truck. Another 17-year-old passenger who was traveling with Wang was

transported to a local hospital with non-life threatening injuries and released.

"County officials have finished paving the entrance to the parking area along with working with VDOT to remove and clear trees and brush to improve the sightlines along the road," reported Andrew Spence, Stafford's

community engagement program director. "This project was completed to improve the safety and visibility at the entrance to aid in the prevention of further accidents."

Tree limbs, high grass and overgrown vegetation were all cited during the May 23 meeting as possible contributors to the crash.

Supervisor Gary Snellings acknowledged both VDOT and county officials for turning the roadway safety improvement project around quickly.

"They've made the area safer than what it was before," said Snellings.

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Community gathers to celebrate teen's life

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
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Standing on a platform before guests assembled in a pavilion at Curtis Park in Stafford, James Wang held up three Chinese characters.

The characters represented the Chinese name of his daughter, Helen Wang, who died May 16—her birthday—when the car she was driving collided with a truck as she attempted to turn onto Kellogg Mill Road from the Abel Lake boat ramp parking area.

Helen's grandfather gave her the Chinese name when she was born 17 years ago in Beijing, Wang said.

"We were never 100 percent for sure what the name meant,"

he said.

He and his wife, Felicia, gave their second-born daughter the English name "Helen" when they applied for her American passport. It's the name by which she was always known to her family and friends.

But after Helen's death, her father started to research the meaning of her Chinese name. He shared what he learned to the more than 100 people gathered Sunday afternoon for a celebration of Helen's life.

"It means 'a person with strong, beautiful feathers in heaven,'" Wang said. "What a coincidence that the name given 17 years ago means she's an angel."

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Ashley Wang listens to speakers at a memorial gathering for her older sister Helen on Sunday.

Wang said his daughter had a mission on earth during her short life. That mission, echoed by speaker after speaker, was to spread kindness.

Friends, family, teachers and employers described Helen as “the sweetest and brightest soul” they had ever met, someone who “made people feel important,” whose laugh and smile were contagious and who always left people feeling better than they did before.

“She was ‘the glue’ that made everything work,” said Andy Bertolet, Helen’s swim coach from the age of 8 until she moved to Stafford from Spotsylvania at age 14. “She just fit in and filled all the gaps. She did the hard work with a big, giant smile on her face and dragged five, six, seven people up with her.”

“We could all use more Helen,” Bertolet continued.

Her death has also sparked a youth-led movement to improve the safety of Stafford’s rural roads.

Immediately following the accident, a group of Helen’s classmates at Colonial Forge High School attended a Stafford Board of Supervisors meeting to voice emotional concerns about dangerous road conditions.

In response, the county closed the Abel Lake boat ramp and VDOT cleared overgrown vegetation that had obscured sight lines.

Colonial Forge students also worked with students from other county high schools to put together a survey requesting input from local drivers on the worst county roads. The survey has more than 1,000 responses.

“I’ve been so pleased and impressed with the young adults who have led this [road safety] move-



Isabella Motta (left) and Marie Sampson dance during a gathering for their friend, after being encouraged by Wang’s swimming coach Andy Bertolet.

ment,” said supervisor Tom Coen, who teaches A.P. government at Colonial Forge. “They have made a difference and they’ll continue to make a difference.”

The Stingrays swim team also established a Helen Wang Memorial Scholarship, which in two days raised more than \$6,000 from the community.

It now has \$31,000, said Danielle Euker, whose daughter Moira was Helen’s teammate on the Stingrays.

It will be presented to a team member who demonstrates sportsmanship and volunteerism in the spirit of Helen, Euker said.

“Helen wanted to change the world and she already is,” she said.

The weather Sunday afternoon ranged from drizzle to downpour, but guests wearing yellow—Helen’s favorite color—and bouquets of sunflowers—her favorite flower—made it seem like “just like a sunshine-y day,” said Euker, who organized the celebration with the Wang family.

“Helen always brought the sunshine,” she said.

Guests at the celebra-



Jade Avillo, who was a passenger in Wang’s car when it was struck on May 16, recounts happy memories of his friend. She died on her birthday.

tion were asked to take home packets of sunflower seeds, which were donated to the event by Lowe’s and American Meadows.

“Go home and plant a little bit of Helen,” Euker said.

Helen’s older sister, Lilly, wrote a song for the sibling she said was her best friend and will always be her role model.

She performed the song, called “Sunflower,” at the celebration.

“You’re a sunflower, a little funny / Even all the stars don’t glow as lovely,” she sang. “I’ll keep going

just like you do, this sunflower’s waiting for you, waiting for you.”

Colonial Forge student Jade Avillo was in the car accident with Helen. He shared what she said to him in one of the final moments of her life.

She told him she was happy.

“She said, ‘I’m content with life,’” he said. “So I wanted to share that with all of you. She was at peace.”

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Road improvement a focus in Stafford

BY SCOTT SHENK
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Stafford officials have completed a yearlong study of the county's roads in an effort to find out where improvements are needed and how to fund nearly \$200 million in projects the study selected.

The Board of Supervisors will discuss the study at its meeting Tuesday, and eventually determine whether to pursue the projects.

"It's important to move this forward," said Supervisor Mark Dudenhefer, who, along with fellow Supervisor Wendy Maurer, served on the task force that produced the report. Keith Dayton, who recently retired as deputy county administrator, was the project manager.

ROAD PROJECT LIST

The below 10 projects were targeted for improvements. Three other road projects will be studied further because of high cost estimates, while one other road project was not recommended for improvements at this time.

1. Butler Road segment widening: estimated cost of \$18.9 million
2. Shelton Shop Road widening/reconstruction: \$32.3 million
3. Morton Road widening: \$6.46 million
4. State Route 610 segment widening: \$4.5 million
5. Onville Road segment widening/reconstruction: \$15.7 million
6. White Oak Road segment widening: \$33.8 million
7. Layhill Road widening: \$8.5 million
8. Mountain View Road segment reconstruction: \$26.2 million
9. Enon Road segment widening: \$8 million
10. Leeland Road widening: \$5.3 million

The task force study started with a list of more than 200 roads. Interstate 95, U.S. 1, U.S. 17, State Route 3 and subdivision streets were not part of

the study. The study eventually whittled the list down to 114 roads and road segments.

The study focused on traffic

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counts; road width and shoulders; crash rates; and potential for future growth. Those factors were used to produce scores to rank the roads and segments most in need of work.

“We wanted to put hard data in, not just whims,” Dudenhefer said, explaining that too often people complain about road issues without any hard evidence to back it up.

The supervisor noted that the recent death of 17-year-old Colonial Forge student Helen Wang, whose car was hit as she pulled from the Abel Lake boat ramp onto Kellogg Mill Road, brings the road improvement issue to the forefront. Dudenhefer’s 18-year-old daughter, Emily, died in a 2004 crash on Mountain View Road.

The study was influenced by the county’s 2004 Youth Driver Task Force, which formed in response to deadly crashes involving young drivers. The task force focused on addressing some of the county’s dangerous rural roads, many of which have

The study was influenced by the county’s 2004 Youth Driver Task Force, which formed in response to deadly crashes involving young drivers.

been improved as a result. The last project from that study, a section of Brooke Road, is under construction now.

The new study pinpointed 14 roads or road segments for major reconstruction. Three of the projects will be studied further because of high cost estimates, while one was not selected for work at this time. The remaining 10 projects have a total combined estimated cost of \$189.6 million.

Another 36 roads were targeted for widening, with an estimated cost of \$10.1 million.

The widening work, called wedge widening, involves paving existing shoulders, a much more affordable approach compared to adding lanes.

The segment of Butler Road near the U.S. 1 intersection in Falmouth topped the list for con-

struction improvement needs.

The task force suggested widening the road from two to four lanes from the intersection to Castle Rock Drive, across from the YMCA. That work would cost an estimated \$18.9 million.

Shelton Shop Road ranked second on the list. The task force recommended a combination of widening a section from two to three lanes and reconstruction between Courthouse and Mountain View roads. The work would cost an estimated \$32.3 million.

Others making the list for major construction work include segments of White Oak Road, Mountain View Road and State Route 610.

Finding a way to pay for all of the work could prove challenging.

“It’s a lot of money,” Dudenhefer said.

The supervisor said they will look at various ways to pay for the work, with a bond referendum—something the county used to fund projects from the 2004 task force—being one possibility.

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Stafford students target dangerous county roads

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

A group of local teens are taking action in the wake of classmate Helen Wang's death.

Wang—a 17-year-old Colonial Forge junior—was killed when the car she was driving collided with a truck as she attempted to turn onto Kellogg Mill Road from the Abel Lake boat ramp's parking area.

The crash not only caused immeasurable sorrow among Wang's family, classmates and members of the community, but it also motivated a group of students to work toward improving roadway safety in the county.

The local student movement, called Changing Stafford's Roads, emerged soon



Michelle Snow (center) speaks to the group of concerned students during their meeting at Colonial Forge High.

after Wang's death.

The crash prompted county supervisors to immediately close Abel Lake's boat ramp

access to allow the Virginia Department of Transportation time to clear tree limbs, high grass and overgrown

vegetation—all cited as possible contributors to the fatal collision. County officials also chipped in on the safety improvement by paving the gravel entrance to the boat ramp.

"What they did with Abel Lake was great, because they paved that, and they cleared the vegetation, but that's only one spot in this whole community where there are so many bad roads," said Kaitlyn Fulmore, a rising senior at Colonial Forge High School. "Just because that one's fixed doesn't mean other people aren't going to have other problems on different roads."

Crystal Alvililar, the adult liaison for the group, said Changing Stafford's Roads

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was formed to accelerate the movement for roadway safety improvements throughout the county.

Alvillar's son Jade was a passenger in Wang's car on the day of the crash. Both Crystal Alvillar and her husband saw the student group as "an opportunity to prevent crashes like this from happening to another family," she said.

"Whether it be a child or an adult, we were determined," said Alvillar.

After forming their group, the teens developed a roadway safety survey to send to their peers and other road users through social media to gain input on hazardous road conditions in the immediate vicinity of their high school. The results of their work were shared with Stafford's Board of Supervisors during a June 4 meeting.

Students told the supervisors that over 1,300 survey respondents had shared their views on hazardous roadways in the county that have limited sight distances, high vegetation growth, damaged signs, potholes and other issues.

Although the survey garnered a large number of responses, its scope was limited to the vicinity of Colonial Forge. The teens decided to broaden the reach of a new survey to include the entire county.

On Monday, the Changing Stafford's Roads group met at Colonial Forge to fine-tune its strategy and determine the next steps.

Rising senior Charlotte Vazquez said the meeting was an opportunity to "start prioritizing exactly what we want to do by developing a mission statement for the group, reorganizing the survey data, and creating a new survey to reach all of Stafford."

Alvillar said the new survey is expected to be ready July 1 and will remain open for input until Sept. 15.

The group also discussed leadership roles and the establishment of several subcommittees to oversee and manage county safety and surveys, government affairs, social media and meeting planning. A team was also formed to ensure that signs with the motto, "Clear the Trees for Helen Please" are placed—legally—in key locations within



PHOTOS BY SUZANNE CARR ROSSI FOR THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Kaitlyn Fulmore (right) speaks to a group of students from Colonial Forge seeking to identify hazardous road conditions.

the county.

Stafford County Supervisor Tom Coen, who teaches government at Colonial Forge, is assisting the group as an academic advisor. Coen is also helping the students expand the survey's reach through the county school system.

Coen said his role in the process is to "help the students, mostly behind the scenes."

"My goal is not to run it, it's to be helpful," said Coen.

Stafford County Supervisor Mark Dudenhefer also met with the teens prior to Monday's meeting.

"I emphasized there are no quick fixes to major road improvements," Dudenhefer said.

Dudenhefer said he asked the students to support his efforts to get a roadway safety improvement and congestion bond referendum on the ballot and get it passed in November.

In January 2004, Dudenhefer's 17-year-old daughter, Emily, was killed when the driver of the car she was traveling in ran off Mountain View Road. Since then, Dudenhefer has been a vocal advocate for improving the county's roadways.

Dudenhefer told the students, "Don't let your elected officials forget that road safety is one of their critical responsibilities."

Since January, VDOT's Fredericksburg District has received more than 2,900 work requests from area motorists and residents through its Report a Road Problem campaign.

"If a stop sign is down, or it's a tree in the road, or flooding in the road—anything that's eminent danger, the call center will do a work request, but then they call our Emergency Operations

Centers that we have and they then call the superintendent on the phone and dispatch them out to take care of them immediately," said Marcie Parker, VDOT's local district engineer.

For grass mowing and vegetation removal, Parker said the agency tries to mow primary miles—those routes numbered 600 or below—three times a year, and secondary roads twice a year.

For areas that are not routes, it is up to the property owner to keep the vegetation and debris in check.

"Abel Lake is not a state road in there, so that would be considered more of a commercial entrance," Parker said. "However, based on the outcry and just the emotions of the situation and the board meeting... we said that we would help out the county—since it was county property—and that we would go take care of it at that point in time."

Andrew Spence, Stafford County's community engagement director, reported the county's Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities Department maintains the majority of entrances to facilities that have boat ramps or public car access areas and that each facility has its own mowing schedule.

The Changing Stafford's Roads group will provide Stafford supervisors an update on its progress at the next board meeting June 18.

"We're trying to get attention to the conditions of the roads," said rising senior Isabela Motta. "Helen is our sole purpose for doing this."

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Stafford may send road plan to voters

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON

THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Stafford County residents may have an opportunity to vote for improved, safer roadways this fall.

On July 2, county supervisors will vote to send a proposed \$50 million road bond referendum to Stafford Circuit Court, with hopes it will be placed on November's ballot. If the referendum passes, the stage will be set to continue much needed upgrades and repairs on some of the county's most hazardous roadways.

During their June 18 meeting, supervisors huddled over three transportation improvement options prepared by county

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officials. The proposals ranged in cost from \$50 million to \$70 million.

Supervisor Mark Dudenhefer preferred the \$70 million proposal, but did not receive support from his colleagues. Supervisor Jack Cavalier then recommended approval of the \$50 million option—which the board ultimately supported—noting the only difference was the plan deferred work on southern Stafford's White Oak and Butler roads.

The recommendation for White Oak Road is to eventually widen it to four lanes to Little Whim Road, then taper to three lanes to Ferry Road. The Butler Road widening would eliminate a two-lane "pinch point" between Castle Rock Drive and the U.S. 1 intersection, but ran into problems due to the historic cemetery on the grounds of Falmouth's Union Church.

"Butler Road got dropped out at the very beginning due to the slave cemetery close to the road," Cavalier said. "Rather than make that disturbance—as well as some other obstacles along that path—Butler Road came off, right off the bat."

The proposed referendum has also garnered the attention of Changing Stafford's Roads, a local teen road safety group formed following the death of Helen Wang, a 17-year-old Colonial Forge High School junior. She was killed May 16 when the car she was driving collided with a truck as she attempted to turn onto Kellogg Mill Road from the Abel Lake boat ramp parking area.

"If it makes our commute safer, it will be a good thing," said Charlotte Vazquez, 17, a member of Changing Stafford's Roads and friend of Wang's.

She said the group noted that Stefaniga Road is not included in the proposed referendum projects.

"We drive that road a lot, and so do a lot of Mountain View students," said Changing Stafford Roads member Aidan Terlizzi, 17, who cited the road's tight and blind corners, edge drop-offs and hilly terrain as hazards.

Vazquez said the group will launch its own county-wide survey in July seeking input from students



STAFFORD COUNTY

Stafford County recently worked with the state highway department to widen and repave Andrew Chapel Road between Courthouse and Brooke roads.

and other drivers on road hazards. A similar survey was launched by the group shortly after Wang's death, netting over 1,300 responses. The group plans to use data from the survey to help county officials identify additional danger spots in the county.

"If the survey results don't match what's in the referendum, we're taking that to the Board of Supervisors," Vazquez said.

The group's survey will run through August.

Supervisor Meg Bohmke said the county has recently addressed many road concerns, but says November's referendum shows "we have more work to do."

"We have completed many road projects, maximizing taxpayer dollars by using a combination of revenues which includes state Smart Scale funding, revenue sharing, gas tax, impact fees and bonds," said Bohmke. "By passing this bond, the Board of Supervisors will continue to leverage every taxpayer dollar and obtain funding from other sources as we look at individual projects."

One example of leveraging funds came last week when county officials announced the results of a project to widen Andrew Chapel Road between Courthouse and Brooke roads that was accomplished in partnership with the Virginia Department of Transportation.

"With the road already scheduled to be paved this summer by VDOT, Stafford invested around \$124,000 of its state secondary road funding to widen the shoulders of Andrew Chapel Road by slightly more than one foot on each side," a county news release noted. VDOT then applied a fresh layer

of asphalt across the road's edge expansion and installed new pavement markings along the upgraded stretch of road.

The motivation for the bond referendum largely came from an April 2018 county comprehensive road evaluation. That study targeted 114 area roads—or segments of roads—that met a specific set of criteria.

Cavalier said that study was the basis for setting the gears in motion to seek approval from voters in November's general election.

"We were waiting for finalization of the study," said Cavalier. "To get on the November ballot, we have to approve it no later than July 2. It's do it at that point or it doesn't get put on this year. It'll have to wait until next year."

Work on the 2018 study began three years ago when VDOT began collecting traffic count numbers at 2,200 roads and road segments in the county. Interstate 95, U.S. 1 and 17 and State Route 3, subdivision streets and roads with traffic counts below 1,000 vehicles per day were not included.

Ultimately, the study was limited to only "those roads having the greatest impact on county motorists, as well as those roads which could be addressed with the funding resources available to local government."

In the end, 114 roads or road segments were analyzed for the study.

The Sheriff's Office and VDOT provided additional information on the identified segments, including accident, injury and fatality rates. Satellite images were also used to examine the physical characteristics of the roads to check for the presence—or lack

of—roadway striping on those roadways. Each segment was also reviewed to assess the potential for increased traffic in future years.

Using all of these variables and other information, scoring thresholds were established in comparison with statewide averages, then roads were evaluated, scored and ranked based on congestion, safety, road characteristics and the potential to handle future traffic.

The last time Stafford residents were asked to consider a local bond referendum to make transportation improvements in the county was in November 2008.

The 2008 referendum targeted 19 road projects at an estimated cost of \$145 million, with \$68 million of that coming from bond proceeds. Although the bond amount was set at \$70 million, only \$24 million worth of bonds were sold. The county spent an additional \$16.4 million on the projects.

A total of 43.5 lane miles were improved out of 55 total miles on the list, an 80 percent completion rate. Fifteen projects were completed at a total cost of \$140 million, with nearly \$100 million leveraged from state and federal funds, along with \$40.4 million from local funds.

As for the need for a new roadway improvement bond, Cavalier said it comes down to cost and the number of projects in the area.

"These should not be a burden financially on local citizens," Cavalier said. "We shouldn't pay out of operational costs each year. We had to do a bond to pay the debt on these."

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2008 REFERENDUM STATUS

BROOKE ROAD

Reconstruct a three-mile stretch around Eskimo Hill Road and horizontal roadway realignment one half mile east of Raven Road. Project is underway and is nearing completion.

JEFFERSON DAVIS HIGHWAY

Intersection improvement at Potomac Creek Drive. Project is underway.

POPLAR ROAD

Reconstruct two lanes approximately one mile north of Kellogg Mill Road (completed) and horizontal roadway realignment work a quarter of a mile south of Mountain View Road. Project is underway.

MOUNTAIN VIEW ROAD

Two lane reconstruction one and a half miles north of Centerport Parkway (completed), intersection improvement a quarter mile north of Joshua Road (completed), and intersection improvement a quarter mile north of Kellogg Mill Road (no work done to date).

TELEGRAPH ROAD, NEAR WOODSTOCK LANE

Tree removal, establish clear zone, signage improvements (completed). Additional

work at intersection is currently in design.

ROCK HILL CHURCH ROAD

Roadway horizontal realignment work south of Dunbar Drive (completed).

WARRENTON ROAD

Road widening between McLane Drive and Village Parkway (completed).

GARRISONVILLE ROAD

Widen road to six lanes from Onville to Eustace roads (completed).

FERRY ROAD

Lane reconstruction from State Route 3 to Colebrook Road (underway).

COURTHOUSE ROAD

Widen the road to four lanes from Cedar Lane to just west of Ramoth Church Road to Shelton Shop Road (underway) and replace bridge at Hamm Lane (no work done to date).

KELLOGG MILL ROAD

New two-lane road west of Ramoth Church Road (no work done to date).

TRUSLOW ROAD

Two lane reconstruction from Berea Church Road to Plantation Drive (completed) and Cambridge Street to the Interstate 95 bridge (no work done to date).

2019 PROPOSED REFERENDUM

SHELTON SHOP ROAD (\$22.7 MILLION)

Widening from a two to three lane section from State Route 610 to Mountain View Road to alleviate the intersection and road geometry related accidents.

MORTON ROAD (\$6.46 MILLION)

Increasingly congested east-west access road to U.S. 1 and Interstate 95, with high peak traffic periods. Modifications to alleviate congestion and accidents.

GARRISONVILLE ROAD (\$34.5 MILLION)

From Eustace to Shelton Shop Roads, continuation of improvements, extending six-lane section to Shelton Shop.

ONVILLE ROAD (\$15.7 MILLION)

Correction of congestion related accidents near State Route 610 and road geometry accidents farther north.

LAYHILL ROAD (\$8.5 MILLION)

Increasingly congested east-west access road to U.S. 1 and Interstate 95, with

high peak traffic periods. Modifications to alleviate congestion and accidents. Mountain View Road (\$26.195 million)

From Kellogg Mill to Choptank roads, with highest traffic use between Stephaniga and Choptank roads. Use two-lane reconstruction and safety widening.

ENON ROAD (\$8 MILLION)

Intersection and widening improvements to alleviate safety and congestion problems. The 2018 Smart Scale application was successful in increasing available funding.

LEELAND ROAD (\$5.27 MILLION)

Intersection and widening improvements to alleviate safety and congestion problems from Jillian to Portland drives. A 2018 Smart Scale application was unsuccessful.

ADDITIONAL PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

94.76 miles of road safety widening projects in coordination with VDOT at a proposed cost of \$9.94 million.

Death of teenager inspires students to make roads safer



FILE / PETER CIHELKA / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

James Wang and his wife, Felicia, watch a video during a gathering for their daughter Helen at Curtis Park on June 9.

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Although tragedy shook their lives, a group of area teens rebounded and found ways to improve some of the county's most dangerous roads.

Colonial Forge High School student Helen Wang, 17, lost her life May 16 when the car she was driving collided with a truck on Kellogg Mill Road.



FILE / SUZANNE CARR ROSSI / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Following the death of Helen Wang, a group of students from Colonial Forge developed a roadway safety survey.

WEDNESDAY >> The top 10 local news stories of 2019.

"It makes me real angry, because last year there was a head-on collision and nothing was done, and now we have to go through the process again," Surman said.

"The roads around here are awful," Surman continued. "There are potholes everywhere and students are driving these roads. Closing [the boat ramp] is the best thing they can do for now."

Four days later, the Board of Supervisors did just that.

At their May 21 meeting, Supervisor Gary Snellings not only closed the parking area, he also ordered the vegetation in the area to be cleared to improve the line of sight for motorists. The following day,

Helen had turned onto the road from Stafford's Abel Lake parking area.

In the aftermath of her death, tree limbs, high grass and overgrown vegetation were all cited as contributors to the crash, which may have limited the young woman's line of sight.

Helen's death had a tremendous effect on her family, friends and classmates at Colonial Forge.

Alexis Eileen Surman, then a senior at Colonial Forge, visited Abel Lake the day after the crash.

► FROM AT

crews from the Virginia Department of Transportation's Fredericksburg District cleared trees and brush along Kellogg Mill Road in the vicinity of the fatal crash.

During the same meeting, supervisors heard from a large group of Colonial Forge students who voiced their concerns regarding the dangerous road conditions in the county. Their emotional statements cited the countless potholes, road hazards and obstacles on county roads that students encounter every day driving to and from school.

The students were part of a local youth movement formed by Colonial Forge students called Changing Stafford Roads. The group, formed less than one week after Helen's death, has one unified purpose: improving the safety of area roads.

One of the first tasks the students undertook after Helen's death was conducting a high school-level survey requesting input on the most dangerous county roads. The survey had more than 1,000 responses, but the group wasn't satisfied.

They regrouped and broadened the survey's reach to get a fuller picture of the situation by targeting a broader audience.

"The first survey was done after the accident, so it only took place in area schools," said Colonial Forge senior Rebecca Chung, who is a member of Changing Stafford Roads. "The second survey targeted more of the motorists in Stafford



FILE / JAMES SCOTT BARON / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Students rallied to the cause of road safety following the death of Helen Wang.

County who are adults."

The problems cited in both surveys found overgrown vegetation, sharp curves with limited views, potholes, a lack of speed limit signs and dangerous pavement edge drop-offs as problems on area roads.

The group compiled the results and presented its findings to county supervisors.

"I think they're hearing what we're saying, the struggle becomes how do you convert that into action," said Colonial Forge senior David Sousa.

Tom Coen, a county supervisor, as well as an advanced placement government teacher at Colonial Forge, has been a mentor for the group.

Coen said the group has had tremendous success in the way it approaches various roadway safety issues, including the county's \$50 million road bond referendum that was on

the November ballot. Coen said Changing Stafford Roads members went door to door raising awareness of the referendum and handed out literature to voters at the polls on Election Day.

"They had an impact on that," Coen said. "They have a great influence. They brought it up and kept it on the forefront, and that was very helpful."

Over the last several months, the group also met with several elected and local officials, including Sen. Richard Stuart.

Stuart is helping the group introduce a roadway safety improvement bill, which contains a provision allowing local land owners to clear vegetation from areas that restrict a driver's view through a permit process with VDOT. Stuart said he is impressed with the group and commends them for "trying to make the best out of a real

tragic situation."

"I thought it was a really good idea, so we put a bill in," said Stuart. "They're coming to Richmond to testify when it's assigned to committee and put on the docket."

Members of the group continue to bring relevant local information to their peers. They follow transportation-related issues from Board of Supervisors' meetings and put them into easily understandable terms on social media sites.

For the long term, the group hopes to create a newsletter and produce educational podcasts.

"We're making sure transportation information that affects their daily lives gets to them, instead of finding out about it a year down the line," said Chung.

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