

# Rappahannock News

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## How Big Washington swiped Little Washington's Post Office

A top U.S. Postal Board official weighed in on site selection — prompted by an influential Rapp resident who was former chairman of the postal service governing body

BY JOHN McCASLIN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

**T**he historic town of Washington Post Office barely serves 300 customers per day, yet one of the top U.S. Postal Service officials in the United States weighed in on its future

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**In an email, Julie Moore, longtime Secretary of the United States Postal Service Board of Governors, inserted herself into the site selection process of the Washington Post Office, incorrectly stating that a “majority of the community” preferred that the post office be moved “outside the town limits.”**

location that now apparently will take it out of the county seat for the first time in 215 years.

Julie Moore, who until July 2018 was the longtime Secretary of the United States Postal Service Board of Governors, wrote Dec. 20, 2017 to USPS site selection specialist Rick Hancock that she received word from James C. Miller III, a former U.S. Postal

Board Chairman and resident of Rappahannock County, that a “majority of the community” preferred that the post office be moved “outside the town limits.”

Despite Moore’s assertion, no survey was ever conducted by the U.S. Postal Service, the Washington Town Council, or

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## It’s official: After 215 years in county seat, Washington Post Office moving to highway

BY JOHN McCASLIN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

The U.S. Postal Service says the decision is final to move the Washington Post Office into a new 3,000 square foot facility to be built two miles south of the county seat on Bank Road, just across from Union Bank & Trust.

North Carolina based USPS real estate spe-

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## SWIPED

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Rappahannock County government to determine citizen preferences for a future post office site. Miller acknowledged in a telephone interview Tuesday that the secretary's statement was based on his own informal survey of bank customers and employees.

"It feels like a slap in the face to the residents of Washington and Rappahannock County when someone with the Postal Service in Washington, D.C., makes a decision and disregards the wishes of the local population," Washington Mayor Fred Catlin said this week about Secretary Moore's involvement in the site selection process.

"I received a call from former [Postal Board Chairman Miller], who wanted to make sure you were aware that quite a few in the community of Washington, VA are concerned that a new site selected for the Post Office might not be sufficient to include ample parking, access for larger vehicles, and be in a location that those who do not live in the town of Washington would find convenient," Hancock was told by Moore, who was appointed Postal Board Secretary in April 2008 until her retirement last summer.

"I believe you are currently working on the site selection, and I have no doubt that you are listening to the community, but I told him [Miller] I'd pass on the comments," she told Hancock, who from his Greensboro, N.C., office steers site selection of postal facilities throughout the southern region of the U.S.

Miller's name in Moore's letter was blacked out by the Postal Service before it was provided to the Rappahannock News. It was among several thousand pages of correspondence surrounding the future site of the Washington Post Office obtained by this newspaper under the Freedom of Information Act.

"He," Moore told Hancock of Miller, "believes you are going to discuss the options with the city [sic] council on Jan. 8 [2018], and offered to further share the non-town residents' thoughts as he does not believe the city [sic] council speaks for the majority of the community.

"[Miller] would be happy to meet with you around that time if you think it would be helpful," Secretary Moore continued. "[Miller] made a point to tell me that there is no particular site this group of citizens is advocating, but they would like it on a major road just outside the town limits near other major locations (schools, etc) with ample parking."

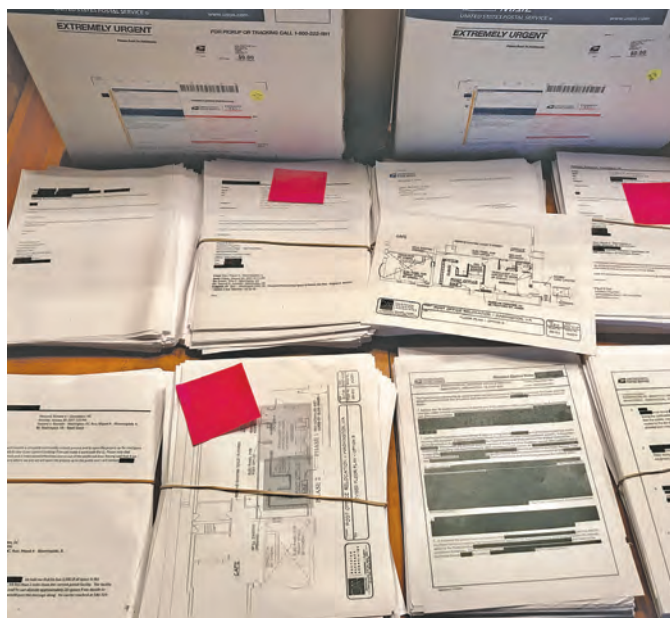
Moore, who could not be reached for comment this week, then stressed: "This is in no way intended to interfere with any site selection you find appropriate, and [Miller] conveyed that as well. It is just to ensure you are aware of these issues before you make your final selection. Thank you. Julie Moore."

Hancock later that day wrote back to Moore that he "would be glad" to meet with Miller, and told her that any "site selection will take into consideration the issues you referenced," as well as "operational and economic considerations."

In previous public comments, Hancock said Postal officials desired to keep the post office inside Washington town limits once it vacated its Main Street location, where the lease is expiring.

The town of Washington, working diligently to keep its centuries-old post office, offered the USPS several alternatives for a new location, from existing buildings to a vacant lot at the town's entrance — only feet from Highway 211 — where a new facility could be built.

As for potential sites south of the town, Hancock went so far as to caution U.S. Postal headquarters at L'Enfant Plaza in Washington, D.C.: "Please note that Washington is very



BY JOHN MCCASLIN

**Thousands of pages of USPS correspondence surrounding the future site of the Washington Post Office, obtained by the Rappahannock News under the Freedom of Information Act.**

**Washington Mayor Fred Catlin:**  
**"It feels like a slap in the face to the residents of Washington and Rappahannock County when someone with the Postal Service in Washington, D.C., makes a decision and disregards the wishes of the local population."**

small and 2 miles would effectively put us out of the preferred area."

### "I DID NOTHING IMPROPER"

Reached this week, Miller told the News that he saw nothing wrong with his reaching out as a "private citizen" to Moore and having her weigh in on the process.

"I did nothing improper with that," Miller said, adding: "I got involved because it seemed to be a bad rush to try to impose on the Postal Service a suit of clothes that didn't fit well."

"I had something to say like anyone else," he stressed. "I would not hesitate if I saw a problem — when there was the danger of a wrong decision for the wrong reason — to bring it to the attention of anyone."

Miller said he told Moore: "Don't just take representations made by a few people as being

reflective of the views of everybody else."

As for Moore's contention that a "majority of the community" wanted the post office moved out of the town, Miller believed the secretary based her statement on his own informal polling of customers and employees of the Main Street post office whenever he conducted business there.

About three weeks after Moore relayed Miller's preference for the highway location, Hancock received another letter, this one from Miller's wife, Demaris, stating that she was "one of the majority of the 22747 postal patrons who do not live within the Town of Washington. What happens to that Post Office is our business too."

"I do not shop in town, as all the little boutiques are expensive and cater to tourists," she wrote the USPS official. "I do not

dine in town, except at the Country Cafe, next door to the Inn, but I have been told that it will not be there much longer. I used to bank in town, on Gay Street, but the bank moved out to Highway 211 when they were told that a drive-in teller did not suit the ambience of the town . . .

"When we visit the current Post Office, my husband [James Miller] and I often have some difficulty parking," Mrs. Miller continued. "When the Inn holds 'special events,' some of the Postal trucks have to park on the street to load and unload."

She concluded: "If the town wants to have a cute, little, architecturally-acceptable Post Office, let then have a little contract office there like the one at seaside [sic], Florida."

As it was, the USPS announced Sept. 1, 2018 and again last week that the post office would be leaving the county seat for the first time in 215 years.

### THE DECISION

Hancock confirmed in an earlier telephone interview with the Rappahannock News that it was "people at the top" of the Postal Service who made the "operational decision" to move the post office to Bank Street, two miles south of the county seat off Highway 211 and close to the elementary school, which Moore stated Miller desired for some reason.

Five days before the USPS announced its move, Hancock wrote to U.S. Postal Customer Service Manager Timothy Talley in Arlington: "Due to the Political nature of the project we would like the final decision to be from Mr. [Jeffrey] Becker [Northern Virginia District Manager] and Dennis [Vorhees, Manager Post Office Operations, Merrifield, VA] or yourself."

"In addition I recommend that we address the decision proactively with the [name blacked out by the USPS] and the locals including a news release. There will be push back on the decision to

move out of the downtown area," Hancock warned.

"It's kind of like David and Goliath where Goliath, in this situation, is wielding great power and influence over the fate of our little town post office and the customers trying to keep it here," said Washington Vice Mayor Mary Ann Kuhn. "We may be the underdog now but we are going to continue to fight to keep it in town."

### THE SYSTEM

The Board of Governors, in which Moore and Miller both served in leadership positions, was established by the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. It is comparable to a board of directors of a private corporation and includes nine Governors who are appointed by the U.S. President with the advice and consent of the Senate.

The nine Governors select a Postmaster General, who becomes a member of the Board, and those ten select a Deputy Postmaster General, who also serves on the Board. The Postmaster General and Deputy Postmaster serve at the pleasure of the Governors.

A career Postal official, Moore previously oversaw all internal and external communications for the USPS and served as Manager of Compensation for all its employees, designing and implementing national pay and benefit policies.

Miller, apart from being past chairman of the Postal Board of Governors, was former director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and former chairman of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission under President Reagan.

The Washington Post Office, among the oldest in the country, was established Oct. 1, 1804, the same year the Lewis and Clark Expedition was launched and Thomas Jefferson defeated Charles Pinckney in the U.S. presidential election. It has moved an estimated four or five times over the past 215 years, although it has always been centrally located within the town's boundaries.



# Unique cast of characters makes early morning inspection in Amissville

Cappiali: 'Whether I'll ever be in compliance is like buying a lottery ticket, you have hope'

BY JOHN MCCASLIN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

It was an unusual gathering for such a frosty Tuesday morning in Rappahannock County, as John and Beth Cappiali and their grown son "Little John" welcomed two distinct groups of people — agreed beforehand to be kept separated — to inspect their frozen property seven miles east of Washington on Highway 211.

One group consisted of Rappahannock County Administrator Garrey Curry, equipped with a camera, accompanied by County Zoning Administrator Michelle

BY JOHN MCCASLIN

**Rappahannock County Administrator Garry Curry, Amissville resident John Cappiali, County Zoning Administrator Michelle Somers, and Rappahannock County Sheriff Connie Compton take an inspection tour early Tuesday morning of Cappiali's property and its contents.**

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# INSPECTION

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Somers, who carried a clipboard.

The other group was Cappiali's attorney, Sylvia Sevilla, and David Konick, counsel to the Cappiali's neighbor across the four-lane highway — Jeremiah "Jack" Atkins — who claimed in an earlier court filing the couple had effectively created a junkyard on their property.

On hand to keep the peace was Rappahannock Sheriff Connie Compton, who did her best to keep warm.

Atkins, a part-time Rappahannock County building official, filed a complaint in Circuit Court on October 12 demanding enforcement of the county's zoning ordinance against the Cappialis, who he claimed had created a dumping ground while operating two contracting businesses.

The lawsuit, filed by Konick, originally named the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors, Zoning Administrator Somers, and County Attorney Art Goff. However, Rappahannock County Circuit Court Judge Jeffrey Parker recently sustained a demurrer filed on behalf of the county government and released them from the suit.

That said, the judge allowed a follow-up inspection of the property by both the county and the opposing lawyers, in part to demonstrate whether the numerous vehicles parked on the property were legally licensed and operable.

Atkins, in his suit, claimed the Cappialis and their businesses "moved a variety of construction materials and other debris, used and inoperable construction equipment and motor vehicles, onto the Subject Property in willful and wanton violation of Chapter 143 and 170 of the Rappahannock County Code."

Furthermore, he

contended, the Cappialis expanded their activities despite being served with three letters of violation from the county since October 2016.

Cappiali told the Rappahannock News that in the months since the lawsuit was filed he's removed "tons" of debris from the property, much of it, he said, previously dumped there by the former landowners going back 70 or more years.

On Tuesday, for example, before the snow started flying, he pointed to the trunks of two large trees that had grown up through tires dumped there decades ago.

Cappiali said he's been hauling numerous loads of debris to a single recycling center in Culpeper, which provides him with a receipt of the disposed contents for each visit.

"I've made 22 trips bringing cars, trucks, scrap metal," he said, "the lightest trip 1,800 pounds, the heaviest over 7,000 pounds," including six inoperable cars and three pickup trucks. "So clearly I've cleaned up a significant amount."

During Tuesday's inspection, Cappiali, 54, personally led Curry and Somers from one large truck, trailer, piece of machinery and storage container to another — equipment of every shape and size, some in working order some not, that are stored throughout the 18 acre property.

In addition, Cappiali climbed behind the wheel of several vehicles and successfully started their engines. Other inoperable vehicles and pieces of equipment he singled out would soon be on their way to the scrap yard.

"Some stuff is just to rough to fix, there's no argument," Cappiali told Curry, to which the administrator replied: "All I know is we've got an ordinance, we have words in the book, and we try to go by those the best we can."

Curry took pictures with



BY JOHN MCCASLIN

**Amissville resident John Cappiali (forefront) explains to Rappahannock County Administrator Garry Curry the various pieces of equipment he stores on his 18 acres that borders Highway 211.**

his camera of license plates, permits and stickers for each vehicle, while Somers took accompanying notes.

Cappiali's son "Little John," meanwhile, followed on foot by several hundred yards as he led attorneys Konick and Sevilla on their own inspections of the property.

Cappiali showed Curry and Somers one newly cleared site where he proposes building a 50 x 100 foot Quonset hut — "to store all the little stuff that's out here" — as well as a 120 x

120 foot repair shop.

Among the more intriguing pieces of equipment parked on the property are two former Rappahannock Regional Solid Waste Management roll off containers purchased from a seller in Manassas, which Cappiali will use to store and haul compost, and a former 1985 Orleans (Va.) Fire Department brush truck, with only 18,000 original miles.

"I own my own fire truck!" an amused Cappiali told the group.

**"I've made 22 trips bringing cars, trucks, scrap metal...So clearly I've cleaned up a significant amount."**

Meanwhile, Cappiali late last week filed the required paperwork with the county government to designate his property a "Contractor's Yard," which by code would allow for the storage of designated pieces of equipment on the property.

"To be in compliance, [it's] one of the things they [the county] asked me to do," he explained. "Whether I'll ever be in compliance is like buying a lottery ticket, you have hope."

The Planning Commission, Somers told this newspaper, will review Cappiali's application at their next meeting in February.

"If they deem the application complete they have two options at that point: they can hold a public hearing, or they can go ahead and make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors without a public hearing (per RCC 170-55.E). If the Planning Commission holds a public hearing, which would be the following month (March), they would hear from the public and then they would send a recommendation to the BOS with possible conditions for the permit," Somers explained. "At this point the BOS would then hold their public hearing and make a decision with any conditions they set for the permit."

"When deciding to approve or deny the permit factors to consider would be: compliance with Rappahannock County Code, public input, VDOT comments and/or recommendations."

Said Cappiali: "I would probably say 80 percent of the contractors that live in this county do not have one of these [permits] nor have

they been asked to have them. I'm not going to argue whether or not I'm being singled out, it feels that way a little bit."

At which point Cappiali revealed that last Wednesday night, while in the process of cleaning up his property, he and his son were burning stumps in a single bonfire.

"At 11 o'clock . . . we had a visit from the sheriff's office, the state police, and an Amissville fire truck. They said that somebody driving by called on their cell phone to say that a house was on fire," he recalled. "It was raining . . . and they looked with the big spotlights, and they walked around it, and there's no tires in it, there's no furniture, no plastic or anything like that."

"And they said, 'That's the way it's supposed to be done! You cleared everything around it, you're not burning trash, you're burning what you're supposed to burn. And sorry to get you up and out,'" he quoted the emergency respondents as saying. "My first assumption was [it was] Jack Atkins [who called] because he happens to live across the street and he happens to be the head [president] of the Amissville fire department, and that's who showed up. But I will go with what the police said, and they said it was a random call."

"I'm trying to be in compliance with the law," Cappiali concluded. "I see people all the time, in stores, people I've met, friends. They all tell me the same thing . . . 'Why are they bothering you? Why do they care? It's your property. You can do what you want to do. You're not doing anything that's soaking into the ground, and contaminating anything, you're not pumping chemicals into the ground and burying radioactive waste.'"

Bottom line, Cappiali says he's cleaning up the property, but he has "a lot of stuff."

# The circus has not left town

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## Board of Supervisors meeting once again turns contentious

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BY JOHN MCCASLIN

*Rappahannock News staff*

A clown and a seal have now joined the circus act otherwise known as the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors.

As discussion took place Monday evening on possible future scenarios for hiring a deputy county attorney, and members debated whether to go into closed session to further discuss the matter,

**Supervisors consider  
measure to boost local  
agriculture ➤ A5**

Supervisors Ron Frazier (the “clown”) and John Lesinski (the “seal”) had this rather unorthodox exchange, while BOS Chair Roger Welch (let’s call him the “ringleader”) tried keeping the pair apart with his worn down whip:

Lesinski: I don't have a desire to go into closed session and hear this all over again.

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# CIRCUS

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Frazier: Well if you are going to sit there and be a clapping seal then be one, I'll get you a ball.

Welch: Mr. Frazier!

Lesinski: That's a really rotten thing to say.

Frazier: It's not, we have been entrusted by the people of this county to be their representatives and you don't care if this happens.

Lesinski: That's not true, that's absolutely not true. Once again you think that your opinion matters more than everybody elses. And you think that if you are louder and that you talk longer and get angrier that your opinion makes a bigger difference, that you are smarter, and you have been around longer than

## VIDEO ON RAPPNEWS.COM



To watch an unedited video of Monday's Board of Supervisors meeting, go to

**rappnews.com/video**, or on the newspaper's YouTube channel at [youtube.com/RappNewsPlus](https://youtube.com/RappNewsPlus)

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everybody else.

Frazier: Mr. Chairman.

Lesinski: Oh, I'm just a clapping seal Mr. Chairman, just ignore me down here, I've got a ball on my nose.

Welch: Let's go to recess.

Frazier: This is an example, sir.

Welch: Let's go to recess, it looks like it was working both ways down here.

Frazier: Well, I've taken a lot over the years, and you have sat there and allowed it to happen.

Lesinski: I've never called you a name before Mr. Frazier, that's new territory, congratulations.

Frazier: I did not say that you were a clapping seal . . .

Lesinski: Don't try and backtrack on this. You just took it to a whole different level calling people names.

Frazier: I didn't . . .

Lesinski: You call your fellow supervisor a derogatory name like a circus animal or something like that, maybe I should call you a clown.

Frazier: If you like to sit there and have [inaudible] by somebody else . . .

Lesinski: I didn't cut you off, when you went on and on and on here, with our council, berating him. I've seen this show before, I've seen this shitshow before . . .

Welch: I'd like to call the meeting back to order.