

# Basketball

Carlisle boys ready to play a lot of games in a short amount of time. **SPORTS**



## Saving our Christmas.

HOLLY KOZELSKY, PAGE B7

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# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

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**MOSTLY CLOUDY 48 • 33** FORECAST, A2 | **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020** | martinsvillebulletin.com

## Their shot is blocked

**1ST IN A SERIES:** Locked up and locked down Sports in prison — particularly basketball — have a powerful impact on those behind bars. But the pandemic has stalled that rehabilitation, too.

**PARKER COTTON**  
Lee Newspapers

Curtis Artis estimates he read 100 books a year while in prison.

During the four years he was incarcerated following a conviction for marijuana distribution, Artis believed reading was the best way for him to prepare for life back on the outside.

"Books on individuals who had changed their lives or how to become successful," said Artis, 54, who now works as an employment specialist with Pittsylvania County Community

Action, where he helps fellow ex-offenders. "You get the books that you need that can help you become a better person, that you can learn from."

While reading took up the bulk of his time — roughly three or four hours per day — Artis also agreed to coach football and basketball teams at the request of his peers at FCI Beckley in West Virginia.

He was a junior defensive back on the 1982 George Washington High School football team that won the AAA state title, so he was an appro-

priate choice as a coach given his experience. He said sports were a meaningful part of his life growing up, but they were not his focus as an adult.

Nevertheless, he recalls coaching two prison football championship games in the snow, losing both times in the final minute. Although sports may not have been a substantial part of his prison experience, Artis understands the positive effects they can have on others who are incarcerated.

Please see **PRISON**, Page A8



**PARKER COTTON, REGISTER & BEE**

Inmates at Coffeewood Correctional Center, near Culpeper, compete in a basketball game on March 5, just a few days before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Typical solar farm panels.



**BILL WYATT, MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN**

Sign at entrance to Beaver Hills Golf Course.

The last public golf course in Henry County, Beaver Hills, is one of three that likely soon will go from fairways to solar arrays.

**BY BILL WYATT**  
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

Unlike Chatmoss and Forest Park Country Clubs in Henry County, the Beaver Hills Golf Course is not surrounded by homeowners who relish their backyard views of beautifully manicured fairways.

Beaver Hills is known as the "Rock Pile" by mostly blue-collar duffers who have bent irons and chipped woods from the often harsh conditions presented by the land that lies near a former rock quarry off Kings Mountain Road in Collinsville.



**Lester II**

Beaver Hills is just one piece of the landscape of Martinsville and Henry County that is about to change. There are no fewer than four projects in the works to generate energy from more

than 3,000 acres of open spaces, some of it formerly used for bucolic recreation. But none is as contentious as a proposal to build a solar farm where Henry County's last public golf course now stands.

Beaver Hills Golf Course has been in operation for 75 years and was designed by Ferdinand Garbin, a golf course architect who designed and remodeled more than 100 golf courses, mostly in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and Virginia.

Beaver Hills Golf Course has been in operation for 75 years and was designed by Ferdinand Garbin, a golf course architect who designed and remodeled more than 100 golf courses, mostly in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and Virginia.

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**2 residents of Henry County die from COVID-19.** A3

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MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

# Axton solar project moving forward

BY BILL WYATT  
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

Other than the golf courses planned for a new solar future, there is another proposed solar farm under development for Henry County.

This one, which first came to light in 2019, is at the eastern end of Henry County that spills over into Pittsylvania County that

would be more than seven times larger than Green Acres, White Stripe and Lynwood golf course projects combined.

Owned by Vesper Energy, The Axton Solar Project involves 1,237 privately owned acres in Henry County, 1,423 acres in western Pittsylvania County and is rated as a 200 megawatt facility with an expected 35-year lifespan.

“We’ve got zoning approval in Pittsylvania County and expect to go through the process in Henry County in January,” Vesper Energy President and CEO Craig Carson said. “We hope to start construction at the end of 2022 or early 2023 and be operational by the end of 2023.” Appalachian provides power to Henry County, and Dominion Energy is

the provider for Pittsylvania County. Carson said he didn’t have a buyer agreement in hand but expected to have one or more by the middle of next year.

“This is a great project, and we’re really excited,” Carson said. “We have over 3,000 megawatts in our portfolio, and this is one of the larger projects—and it’s just a great place to be in Virginia.”



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Map of the Henry County portions of the Axton Solar project.

Bill Wyatt is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. He can be reached at

276-638-8801, Ext. 236. Follow him @billdwatt.

## Course

From A1

Now the roughly 5,900 yards he drew up to play to par 71 are about to become something quite different.

### Where this started

The road to this plan for Beaver Hills actually starts about five miles away at the old Bassett Country Club.

In September, representatives with a development company called North Carolina Renewable Energy conducted a sparsely attended community meeting at the Heritage Conference and Event Center, which is located on the grounds of the former Bassett Country Club.

For 88 years there was a 9-hole golf course on that site, operating until 2014, when it closed because of a decline in membership and was sold to The Lester Group.

“With its long history, the property has become an asset to the community,” George Lester, board chair and then CEO of The Lester Group, said at the time. “Our goal is to preserve the property for the use of the community.”

In October, the Henry County Board of Zoning Appeals approved that “use of the community” as a solar farm.

Representatives of NCRE describe the converted property as open land with anti-glare and anti-reflective panels that stand 8 to 12 feet high that produce noise comparable to a refrigerator, have no emissions or waste and are protected from view by a natural buffer of at least 100 feet and, in some areas, 300 to 400 feet wide and contained within a fence.

The energy the panels collect is tapped by a buyer such as Appalachian Power at the proposed Beaver Hills project and is transmitted through power lines to larger grids where it is then distributed and resold to businesses and homeowners.

The concept has been growing as carbon-neutral energy sources are needed. The Energy News Network, a nonprofit news site reporting on the transition to clean energy, reported a year ago that developers had filed notices to build 62 solar farms in Virginia, most of them in rural counties where land is open and real estate prices are low.

There even is a huge development underway near Axton, but until now, these solar efforts were not part of golf course communities and suburban neighborhoods around here.

### From Bassett to Beaver Hills

The 36-acre site in Bassett will be renamed “Green Acres” and is expected to generate 5 megawatts of electricity. That’s enough to power about 1,000 homes, and Appalachian Power already has agreed to purchase the electricity.

No one spoke in opposition to the project at the public hearing before the Henry County Board of Zoning Appeals in September, despite about 25 property owners who live either next to or across from the proposed facility.

“It’s good to see this,” BZA member Robert G. Clark said during the meeting. “I played that course for probably 25 years, and it hurts now to see the condition that it’s in.”

Lester, who retired as CEO in 2018, also co-owns with Randolph Isley the Beaver Hills Development Corp., which controls 120 acres that include Beaver Hills Golf Course.

The course’s only neighbors to speak of are apartment dwellers at The Traces, an apartment complex also owned by Lester properties, and Kings Grant, a retirement community owned by Sunnyside Presbyterian Home in Harrisonburg.

Developers of a proposed solar farm at Beaver Hills say they have met with Kings Grant officials and have agreed to address a drainage



BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Council member Danny Turner listens to a presentation on a proposed solar power facility by Garrett Cole, a power supply consultant for GDS Associates, Inc.

issue that currently exists near the adjoining properties.

The only opposition that has presented itself at two public meetings has been in the form of a self-perceived jilted golf course manager with a handful of signatures from local golfers and a member of the Martinsville City Council.

### A different plan

At the end of 2019, Isley said he and Lester expected to shut down Beaver Hills because they couldn’t find anyone to lease the property and operate its golf course.

Not as many people were playing the sport, and the cost of maintaining the course and generating play was becoming less of a draw for management companies or individuals looking to invest in the game.

Then, at the last minute, William McLawhorn offered to lease the course and try to restore it to some semblance of its former glory.

“Our philosophy is to put effort into it and to make it better and give it as much love as possible,” McLawhorn said at a ribbon-cutting ceremony in January.

He signed a 1-year lease with Beaver Hills Development Corp., and before his first summer season was finished, he found out Lester and Isley had other plans once his lease ran out.

“From tee to green, the course is in the best shape it’s ever been,” McLawhorn said. “I’ve got \$50,000 in expenses and \$30,000 in chemicals on the greens.”

He said he was prepared to discuss a renewal of the lease and extend it for another year.

“The meeting never happened,” McLawhorn said. “Nobody in their right mind would have taken this on for only one year.”

Andrew Palmer, a commercial leasing manager for The Lester Group, was credited at the time with being instrumental in keeping Beaver Hills Golf Course open, but he said an agreeable arrangement with McLawhorn had become unattainable.

“William is four months behind on his rent, and we have a pending unlawful detainer case against him,” Palmer said. “Our court date [with McLawhorn] for non-payment of rent is set for Jan. 13.”

### An idea from Japan

This golf course-to-solar-farm approach is hardly a new concept. Its inception goes back nearly 30 years to Japan.

Golf was a very popular sport in Japan during the 1980s, when a round on a public course had to be scheduled a week or more in advance and cost as much as \$300.

But today the popularity of the sport has declined dramatically. So much so, many courses are being

abandoned.

Goodnet, a news site founded by Shari Arison to monitor creative uses of green energy, reported in January that Kyocera, known in the U.S. mostly as a cellular telephone manufacturer, has converted about 60 golf courses in Japan into solar power plants.

Golf Course Industry, a trade publication, used as a resource for superintendents and other golf professionals, also reports golf courses all across the U.S. are becoming sites for solar energy.

Abandoned or closed facilities obviously are not producing income, but even for many that are, solar leasing companies are outbidding the traditional forms of revenue.

### ‘White Stripe’

Beaver Hills Development Corp. has entered an agreement with NCRE that could become a long-term lease set to begin when McLawhorn’s lease expires at the end of the month.

NCRE’s plans call for a solar farm at Beaver Hills that is almost three times the size of the one it will build at the former Bassett Country Club.

“It’s a 120-acre site, AEP will be the purchaser, and 43,000 modules will produce 14 megawatts,” said Arick Wilson, a permitting and economic development manager with NCRE. “It is already zoned right, but we need a special-use permit.”

And NCRE’s agreement with Beaver Hills Development becomes null and void if NCRE fails to gain approval to convert the golf course to a renewable energy source.

The Beaver Hills project has been dubbed “White Stripe” and had been slated for a public hearing in front of the Henry County BZA on Wednesday, but that meeting recently was changed to 1 p.m. Tuesday at the Henry County Administration building.

“Trying to get away from the holiday,” said Lee Clark, the county’s director of planning, zoning and inspection.

### A good fit?

The notice of the hearing states that a special-use permit is being sought “to allow the construction of a Large Scale Solar Energy Facility at 325 Beaver Hills Club Road ... on what is currently the Beaver Hills Golf Course.”

The notice also states that the purpose of the hearing is to receive citizens’ input, but don’t look for a horde of disgruntled property owners or golfers showing up and demanding to be heard because their rights are being trampled.

That’s because “no public comments will be taken during the meeting and attendance will be

limited to 10” because of the Declaration of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anyone wishing to make a comment must email publichearing@co.henry.va.us or call 276-634-4699 no later than 9 a.m. Tuesday.

“All comments received will be read during the public hearing on this date at 1 p.m.,” the notice states.

A post on the Beaver Hills Golf Club Facebook page says, “This is the opportunity for the people of Martinsville and Henry County to fight for your one and only public golf course... do not let our quality of life and businesses be forced to close.”

Martinsville City Council member Danny Turner attended the community meeting in September at Bassett.

“This property [Beaver Hills] is in the middle of everything—Kings Grant, [Henry County] Administration Building, courthouse, industrial complex, community college,” Turner said. “It’s not a good fit.”

### The city’s deal

Turner also was alone in opposition to the proposed development of an 8-megawatt facility at the former 458-acre Lynwood Golf and Country Club on the Dupont Road.

In July, City Council voted, 4-1, to authorize City Manager Leon Towarnicki to draft a power purchase agreement allowing the city to tap in and purchase electricity produced by a new solar farm there. The proposed production at Lynwood would be larger than Bassett but smaller than Beaver Hills.

“This could be a showcase project,” said Garrett Cole, a power supply consultant for GDS Associates, Inc. “Local solar project feasibility has improved drastically due to significant price improvements and larger project size opportunities.”

Cole said a request to build a standalone solar facility was sent out, and about 26 developers responded. GDS will evaluate the responses and recommend a developer to the city.

When this solar farm would be completed, the city then would be a buyer of the electricity, just as AEP will be for Green Acres and White Stripe, if approved.

Turner described the city’s participation as a “bad investment” and compared it with a controversial long-term contract the city currently has with AMP-Ohio, the city’s primary supplier of electricity.

Although the cost of the electricity is not expected to be as high, the cost of transmission is expected to be a fraction of what that delivery charge is from someone like AMP Ohio.

## Support our journalism

The Martinsville Bulletin takes public service journalism like this very seriously. Our reporters watch what is happening in the community and seek to keep you informed about how decisions are made, who is making them and how they might affect you. This package about development plans for solar energy is a great example.

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### ‘What we used to make’

Tim Barker, head of development for NCRE, says the construction and build-out process usually takes about 25 weeks. That’s what he sees for Beaver Hills.

“We’re hoping to begin work in the second-half of 2021,” Barker said.

Although there will be traffic related to the construction, once the solar farm is operational, Barker said neighbors might see one pick-up truck per week.

There is virtually no noise, and barriers will be constructed around the property so that it will be essentially hidden from view.

Once the farm is operational, the lifespan of the system is estimated to be 35 to 40 years.

All three golf-course sites in Henry County are estimated to produce a combined 27 megawatts, enough to power about 5,400 homes.

Farm Progress, an online news site produced by Informa, an international research group, reports solar companies are offering to lease land that is open and with exposure to plenty of sunshine at rates of \$800 to \$1,200 per acre annually.

NCRE held a second meeting in November at the Heritage Conference and Event Center in Bassett concerning the Beaver Hills project. The meeting was attended by two NCRE presenters, McLawhorn and his mother, Isley, Palmer and the Martinsville Bulletin.

An abbreviated repeat of the presentation at the first meeting was made, followed by about 30 minutes of debate between McLawhorn and Isley and Palmer.

“I’m not against solar farms,” McLawhorn said. “It’s just that Beaver Hills is our only public golf course. This has nothing to do with my personal running of the business. I just hate it for the community.”

Said Isley: “You came to us. We didn’t come to you, and now you’re not current. You’ve got a 1-year lease, and we’ll go to court on Jan. 13 and handle it then.”

During that meeting Isley said he and Lester expected to make \$120,000 a year at Beaver Hills once the golf course was converted to a solar plant.

That’s \$1,000 per acre annually. “It’s more in line with what we used to make when golf was going good,” Isley said. “A lot of country clubs are gone, the young folks are not playing, and the older folks are dying.”

Bill Wyatt is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. He can be reached at 276-638-8801, Ext. 236. Follow him @billdwatt.

FIVE PEOPLE WHO MADE EXEMPLARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO REGION IN 2019

» INSIDE



LATE RUN LIFTS BULLDOGS OVER MAGNA VISTA

» SPORTS

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

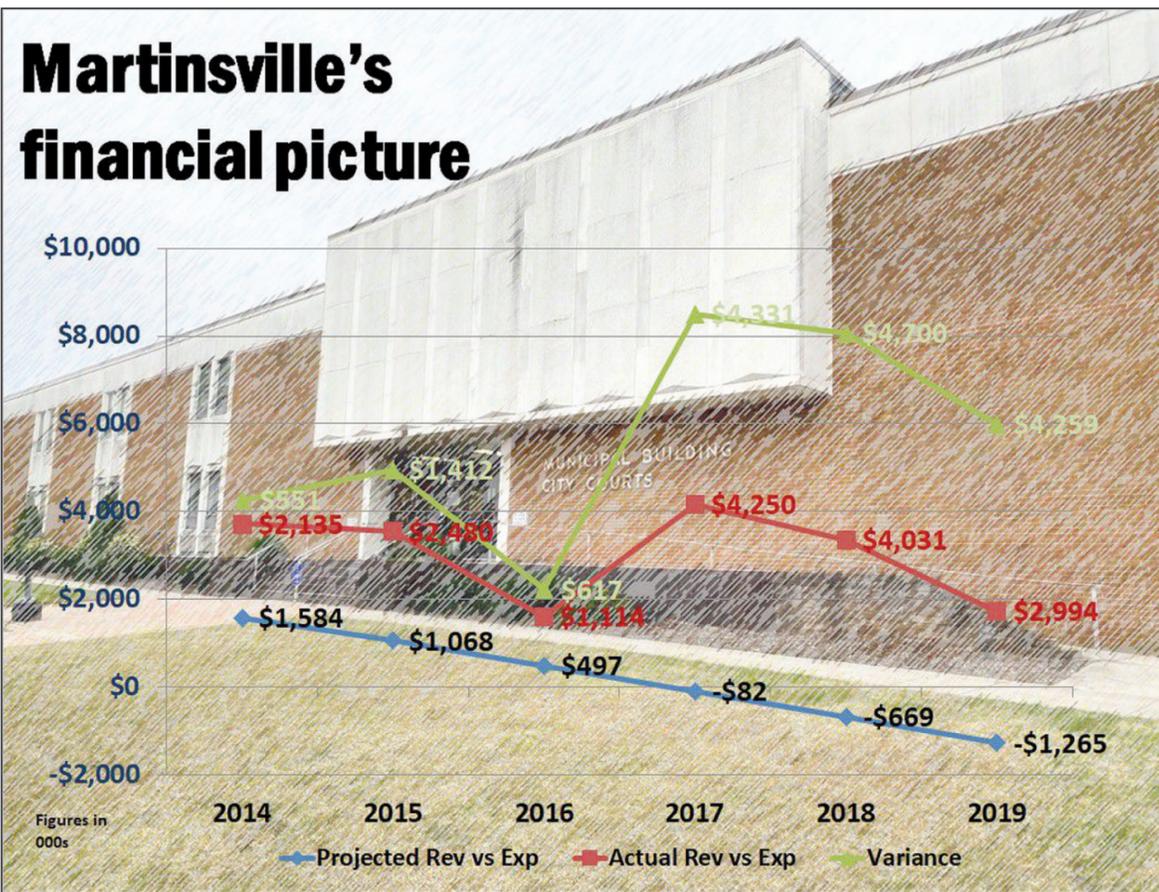
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Sunday, January 5, 2020 • MARTINSVILLEBULLETIN.COM • Martinsville, Virginia \$2

## Is reversion necessary?

Surplus of revenue has Martinsville commissioner of revenue questioning city's plans

### Martinsville's financial picture



By Bill Wyatt  
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

Martinsville Commissioner of Revenue Ruth Easley has analyzed reversion and its effects from cover to cover, and, to her, the results are clear:

Martinsville is not broke, and a rush to reversion is not necessary and could be borderline irresponsible.

The dire financial picture painted as the underpinning of a vote by Martinsville City Council to revert – to relinquish being a city and become a town in Henry County – was not really accurate, Easley said, and she suggested other options should be considered before taking this long-discussed and what she called “nuclear” step.

“We can consolidate services and Martinsville could be vibrant again and not be a burden on the county,” Easley said. “I don’t think Martinsville will hit the number in the projections in order to make reversion viable.

“At some point during the presentation [at the most recent city council meeting], the light bulb went on — we are only talking about the real estate tax,” Easley said after reviewing the results of a study that previously had not been available to her, the media or the public.

Easley was hired as a deputy commissioner in 1998 and was elected commissioner in 2001. She is responsible for the real estate tax records and assessing the value of businesses and personal property, so such analysis is her forte.

“City leaders have been kicking around the idea of some kind of reversion or consolidation action with the county since the late 1950s based on old records that my predecessors left in their files,” she said. “The last reversion study in November 2013 projected that the city would be bankrupt by this year.

“Quite the opposite has come to fruition.”

During the presentation and public hearing last month that led to the vote by council to ask the state to begin the review process that leads to approving reversion, the public heard for the first time that the city budgets that have been described as being in decline were in fact quite solvent.

A representative of Martinsville’s auditing firm told council members that his company’s audit showed expenses were \$2 million less than had been expected and that revenue was \$1 million more than expected for fiscal year 2019, leaving the city with a \$3 million windfall.



LEFT: Martinsville Commissioner of Revenue Ruth Easley speaks to City Council last month about reversion. She is against it. RIGHT: Stephen Piepgrass, an attorney with the firm Troutman Sanders, which was hired by the city of Martinsville to consult and represent on matters concerning reversion, tells City Council how his firm sees various aspects of that process.

SEE REVERT | A7

## Carver cafeteria and teacher pay pitched to board

Speakers urge Henry County School Board to fund renovations to cafeteria in next budget

By Kim Barto Meeks  
kim.meeks@martinsvillebulletin.com

A former Henry County School Board chair urged the current board to take action on renovating the kitchen and cafeteria area of G.W. Carver Elementary School. Speaking during the public

comment period of the school board’s monthly meeting on Thursday evening, Curtis Millner said he was “upset” at the state of the facility, which he said has “the smallest kitchen area of any of the schools.”

Millner attended Carver when it was a segregated high school and was graduated in 1960. “The

### Inside

» Henry County School Board sets school calendar, including first day of school, elects new officers. **A3**

cafeteria has not changed since then,” he told the board. “When new kitchen equipment has come in, there’s no place to put it, so it is put in the cafeteria. Cafeteria tables are put out in the hallway.

“Those children deserve a place to eat, the same as the rest of our children. Our cafeteria workers deserve the same place to work as the workers at other schools,” he said.

School officials said later that the work is planned for the next fiscal year, which starts in July, if the budget allows.

Millner first was elected to the school board as the Iriswood district representative in 2002 and served for 16 years, including four

as chair and one as vice-chair. He decided not to run for re-election after his fourth term.

Board members typically do not respond directly to speakers during the public-comment period. However, later in the meeting, several school board members expressed support for the Carver project and noted it is still on a list of planned capital improvements for next year.

SEE BOARD | A5

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50 HIGH | 31 LOW

### WEATHER

Today will be mostly sunny and cooler, and tonight will be clear.  
For detailed weather information, see Page A2



Martinsville police officer released from hospital.  
Page A3



# Revert

From Page A1

In 2018 Martinsville had been projected to lose \$668,701, which requires council members to go into reserves to balance their budget.

Instead, there was a surplus of just more than \$4 million.

In 2017 Martinsville had been projected to lose \$81,862 but ended with a surplus of \$4.2 million.

"We are not broke," Easley said. "Leon [City Manager Leon Towarnicki] said it the other night at the meeting."

Towarnicki reiterated his statement in an email: "The city isn't broke and, in fact, continues to maintain the policy-directed fund balance and cash reserve balances. Neither council nor the city administration would ever allow the city to move to a position of financial instability."

## So why is reversion necessary?

"There are a number of issues the city faces that long-term are difficult to address by maintaining the status-quo," Towarnicki said. "The city, as are other cities in Virginia, faces an annexation moratorium that prevents expansion and growth that comes with expansion."

"While revenue is generally stable from most traditional sources, prospects of sustained substantial growth are limited due to ... an aging population and housing stock, limited opportunity for new residential construction, and long-term projections of continued population decline."

Then there are the issues of an aging infrastructure and increasing costs.

"It makes it difficult year after year to adequately fund essential services and capital needs," Towarnicki said. "In the past several years the city has contracted some of its services out, eliminated personnel when possible, and delayed capital needs, and those efforts have allowed us to produce balanced budgets."

"We can continue doing the same for years to come, gradually ratcheting back expenditures to match increasing costs, but that leaves no room for anything else - other infrastructure needs, 'quality of life' projects, paving, new construction, and adequate school funding."

## Facing those issues

Easley says it comes down to dealing with your own problems instead of using a scheme such as reversion to pass off the responsibility.

"When I first came here in 1998, we were borrowing money to meet payroll," she said. "We don't do that anymore. Joe Cobbe [former mayor] said we needed to build up a reserve to be able to use when we need it. We are meeting our obligations."

Assistant City Manager and City Attorney Eric Monday, in his recent presentation to city council, reaffirmed that the city could operate indefinitely without changing anything.

"We just don't have anything to do any extra," he said.

Said Easley: "So who does? There are eight cities in Virginia smaller than the city of Martinsville. There are 22 counties in Virginia with a smaller population than the city of Martinsville. The cities are all making it, and the counties don't have a choice."

"Do we need to pull the trigger now? When the city of Clifton Forge and the county of Alleghany reached a voluntary settlement to revert Clifton Forge to town status in October



BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

## Martinsville City Council discusses the issue of reversion.

2000, I talked to the commissioner in Alleghany, and no one had a clue [what the specific effects of reversion would be]," she said.

Easley says the comparisons between Martinsville and other cities that have reverted are not accurate, and the population of the city involved has a direct effect on whether reversion is beneficial or not. In addition to Clifton Forge, Bedford and South Boston also have gone through reversion.

"Of the cities in Virginia that have reverted to a town, all of them had less than half the population of the city of Martinsville," Easley said.

## What was done

Towarnicki says he made an attempt to address Easley's concerns at that last council meeting.

"When the auditors do the reversion financial studies, they typically take the current budget year and four or five prior years of data," he said. "They develop trend lines from the historical data and then project that forward to create a picture of what the situation may look like if you remain on that same course."

"What they cannot account for are changes that are made. The last study updates were done in 2012. Since that time, the city has implemented several different utility rate and tax increases that have impacted revenue, and several things have been done to reduce expenses."

"Also, the city's conservative budgeting philosophy typically results in expenditures generally a little less than expected and revenue slightly more than expected. Those gaps have been narrowing over the years."

"Perhaps an easier way to say it is eventually, we run out of good options that in prior years have had a positive effect on the budget."

"Eventually, those options cease to exist and the hard choices of continuing to raise taxes and rates along with eliminating or curtailing services have to be made."

## 'Declaring bankruptcy'

Easley is now in her fifth term as Martinsville's commissioner and said she considers reversion akin to shirking responsibility.

"Reversion is like declaring bankruptcy without cutting up your credit cards. It comes down to leadership and having to make hard choices," she said.

"If you have a roof on your house, and you know in 20 years it will need replacing, do you ignore it or do you save a little every year to pay for it, or maybe you take out an equity loan to pay for it."

"City Council has kicked this can down the road too many times."

All current council members have indicated they were stepping up this time and doing what other councils didn't have the guts to do by voting to revert, but Easley says they are taking the easy way out.

## A different plan

"The best option would be for Martinsville and Henry

County to become one big city," she said. "Becoming one county with no towns would be better than reversion, but cities have much better taxing authority."

"There is the cigarette tax [counties cannot tax cigarettes, but cities can] raising the meals tax without having to have a referendum, and other local options. It would be one umbrella - one tax."

Easley admits the notion of either one big city or a county with no towns is probably too farfetched for narrow-focused leaders, but she offers data to support her opinion.

"The city gets \$626,428 a year in personal property tax relief [from the state of Virginia]. In the city, real estate taxes and personal property taxes will go down for qualifying vehicles, but boats, RVs, buses, heavy-duty trucks and anything titled in a business's name will go up. It's complicated," she said.

And it gets worse. The city has a depreciation schedule that is more favorable to businesses than Henry County, particularly a business that buys equipment and holds on to it. While the city and its team of lawyers recently presented what they think will be the effects of reversion to the residents of Martinsville, Easley says, the effects of reversion will be very unkind to businesses within the city limits.

"There are people that do business in the city and have come in my office and asked us to analyze their tax situation before and after reversion, and it's not good," she said.

Easley stopped short of saying there would be a mass exodus of the businesses in the city, but she admitted it's the nature of a business person to migrate to a place where taxes and expenses are the most favorable. Easley said most frustrating for her is City Council's willingness to take the word of out-of-town lawyers and accountants while not including or even considering the information she has to offer.

"No one, other than members of City Council and your appointed employees, have actually had the opportunity to study this information. Previous studies during the last 20 years have failed to include input from the constitutional officers and schools that are impacted by a reversion decision, which have resulted in some inaccurate assumptions," said Easley at the public hearing on reversion.

## Why the rush?

In March, Easley provided City Council with an unsolicited analysis of the impact a reversion would have on both city and county residents and businesses. She used the old reversion study estimates because the city administration would not release the latest figures and the actual assessments from her office during the same time frame.

Monday didn't release the consultants' reports until after they had been presented to City Council dur-

ing the public hearing and the vote on reversion had taken place.

"I have not been able to update that analysis with updated projections from the current reversion study because it has not been made public," Easley told City Council. "My March 2019 analysis indicated that the tax impact of reversion would increase the tax liability of city businesses, county residents, any resident in a potential annexed area and possibly city personal property owners of vehicles that qualify for the personal property tax relief provided by the state."

To consider only how the real estate tax is effected is not looking at the whole picture, she said. And now that the studies have finally been made public, Easley said she wonders why City Council is in such a rush.

"The financial studies ... are actually a good assessment tool," Easley said. "They give City Council and city residents a view of what our financial future might look like if we don't make the right choices down the road."

## 'Nuclear option'

Easley was one of only three people who spoke at the public hearing on reversion, and she was the only speaker to oppose it.

"Mayor [Kathy] Lawson has requested discussions with the Henry County Board of Supervisors, and Chairman [Jim] Adams has responded that they are willing to discuss school consolidation or maybe a contract for services. Shouldn't this discussion be exhausted before resorting to a more nuclear option of pulling the trigger on a reversion action?," Easley said in her comments to city council.

"Maybe a successful discussion on schools would then lead to other discussions that mutually benefit both localities that doesn't result in a contentious reversion action, which in the long run only benefits the legal firms that are hired to referee the process," Easley told City Council.

After she finished speaking, council voted unanimously, 5-0, to begin the process of reversion.

The next morning, the latest financial studies were posted to the city's website, and Easley was analyzing the new numbers. She said nothing significant in her analysis had changed.

"The schools should consolidate," said Easley. "Our local share for the school system is about the same as what we receive in revenue from the real estate tax."

"The school population is what it is because Henry County has more younger people, and many city residents send their children to county schools."

She was asked if her motivation in opposing reversion might be because her job would be eliminated in the process.

"I'm not at the table, but I'm on the menu. I could be replaced at the next election," Easley said.

"I'm more worried about the seven people that work in this office."

Let us show you America

## 2020 TOUR SCHEDULE

Date	Tour	Per Person Price
Jan 6	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Jan 13	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Jan 27	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Feb 10	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Feb 14-17	Daytona 300 / Daytona 500	995
Feb 16-18	Wind Creek Casino & Resort / Bethlehem Pa	395
Feb 24	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Feb 28	Southern Spring Show / Charlotte NC	70
Feb 29	Southern Spring Show / Charlotte NC	70
Mar 1-4	Atlantic City / Resorts Casino & Hotel	495
Mar 5-7	Philadelphia Flower Show	575
Mar 6-8	Winter Wildlife Cruise / Virginia Beach Va	460
Mar 6	Southern Spring Show / Charlotte NC	70
Mar 7	Southern Spring Show / Charlotte NC	70
Mar 14	Highland Maple Festival	65
Mar 16	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Mar 16 - 22	Baseball Spring Training / Florida	1695
Mar 21	Highland Maple Festival	65
Mar 21	Spring Shopping / Asheville Outlets	60
Mar 23	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Mar 30 - Apr 5	Travel Like a Rock Star	1985
Apr 3-4	"Esther" / Lancaster PA	435
Apr 3-5	Washington DC / Cherry Blossom Festival	475
Apr 4	Biltmore House / Festival of Flowers	105
Apr 4-10	Charleston / Savannah / Jekyll Island	1750
Apr 5-7	Wind Creek Casino & Resort / Bethlehem Pa	395
Apr 13	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Apr 16-May 2	Southwest & California / Motorcoach	3350
Apr 18	Biltmore House / Festival of Flowers	105
Apr 18-27	Mississippi River Cruise	6850
Apr 21-30	Texas "The Lone Star State"	2055
Apr 27	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Apr 30-May 3	Kentucky Derby / Louisville	2945
May 2	Billy Graham Library / Botanical Gardens	65
May 4	Andy Griffith Mayberry / Mt Airy NC	65
May 5-8	Cape May New Jersey	995
May 5-8	Tulip Festival / Holland MI	865
May 5-24	San Francisco CA / Pacific Northwest	3595
May 6	Shatley Springs	70
May 9	North Carolina Zoo / Asheboro NC	60
May 11	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
May 12-18	Texas Baseball / Two Stadiums	1895
May 13-15	Enchanting Wilderness & Waterfalls	775
May 13-16	Creation Museum / Ark Encounter	650
May 14-16	"Esther" / Lancaster PA	595
May 15-17	New York City / Springtime	1050
May 16-17	Tangier Island / Monticello	370
May 17-23	Best of Ozarks/Branson/Eureka Springs	1450
May 18	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
May 18-20	Wind Creek Casino & Resort / Bethlehem Pa	395
May 22-24	Nashville TN / Music City USA	895
May 30-Jun 15	Newfoundland/Labrador/Nova Scotia	3325
June 1-9	Castles, Capitols & Countryside	1595
June 2-5	The Walking Dead & Tombstones	875
June 5-10	New Hampshire / Purple Moose Tour	1325
June 7-11	Trapp Family Lodge / Vermont	1750
June 7-13	Michigan & The Grand Hotel	1795
June 11-14	Mystery Tour...SSSHH! It's a Secret	710
June 12-13	"Esther" / Lancaster PA	435
June 12-14	Washington DC / Our Nation's Capital	450
June 12-22	Nova Scotia & The Atlantic Provinces	1995
June 14-17	Atlantic City / Resorts Casino & Hotel	495
June 14-20	Plymouth Rock 400th Anniversary	1550
June 15	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
June 15-19	Florida's NE Shore / Amelia Island	895
June 17-28	Americas Southwest Fly / Land	3235
June 21-17	Niagara Falls / Montreal / Quebec	1295
June 23-26	Pennsylvania's Caverns & Taverns	1010
June 24-27	Florida's Holyland / Orlando	645
June 25-27	Chincoteague Island	640
June 28-Jul 7	Hawaii/Honolulu/Waikiki	4435
June 29	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
July 1-5	Niagara Falls / USA / Erie Canal	815
July 3-11	Baseball/West Coast/Phoenix/LA/SF	3485
July 4-11	New England Summer / Martha's Vineyard	1525
July 5-19	Canyonlands / Our Most Scenic Tour	2875
July 5-Aug 2	Alaska & Canada Fly / Land	6125
July 9-11	Bible Museum / Washington DC	525
July 12-24	Cowboy Country/South Dakota/Wyoming	2735
July 13	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
July 19-22	Wind Creek Casino & Resort / Bethlehem Pa	395
July 19-26	Canadian Rockies VIA Rail / Fly / Land	7225
July 27	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
July 29-Aug 1	Amish Acres Festival / Indiana	650
July 31-Aug 2	Explore Nashville "Music City" USA	725
Aug 4-23	San Francisco CA / Pacific Northwest	3595
Aug 5-9	Baseball / Three Stadiums	960
Aug 6-8	"Esther" / Lancaster PA	595
Aug 8 - 9	Tangier Island / Monticello	370
Aug 10	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Aug 10-13	Culinary Tour / Pigeon Forge TN	995
Aug 10-21	Great Lakes	2650
Aug 13-17	Elvis / Tupelo / Memphis	1150
Aug 17-21	Wind Creek / Foxwoods / Dover Downs	750
Aug 18-22	Wisconsin / Racine / Milwaukee	1025
Aug 22-23	Smoky Mountain Railroad / Cherokee	545
Aug 23-29	Pioneer Woman & Magnolia Market	1635
Aug 24	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Aug 31-Sept 12	Germany's Cultural Cities / Oberammergau	895
Sept 2-5	Creation Museum / Ark Encounter	650
Sept 2-6	Mystery Tour ...We're Still Not Telling	875
Sept 4-6	Ohio Amish	745
Sept 5	North Carolina Zoo / Asheboro NC	60
Sept 6-8	Wind Creek Casino & Resort / Bethlehem Pa	395
Sept 6-12	Niagara Falls / Montreal / Quebec	1295
Sept 6-12	Best of the Ozark/Branson/Eureka Springs	1450
Sept 10-13	Myrtle Beach SC	625
Sept 11-13	Washington DC / Our Nation's Capital	450
Sept 12-13	Atlanta Braves Baseball	395
Sept 12-19	Trains of New England	2085
Sept 14	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Sept 14-19	Agawa Canyon Canadian Train	1155
Sept 14-26	Nova Scotia & New England / Fall	1975
Sept 17-19	"Esther" / Lancaster PA	595
Sept 18-19	Tygart Flyer / Gandy Dancer / Elkins WV	405
Sept 18-20	Loretta Lynn's Homeplace / Pikeville KY	495
Sept 19-25	New England / Fall	1295
Sept 25-27	Neptune Festival / Virginia Beach	575
Sept 26-27	Andy Griffith's "Mayberry Days" Mt Airy NC	65
Sept 27-30	Resorts Casino & Hotel / Atlantic City MJ	495
Sept 28	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Sept 29-Oct 2	National Quartet Convention / Pigeon Forge	825
Oct 2-3	"Esther" / Lancaster PA	435
Oct 2-4	West Virginia Haunts	525
Oct 2-5	Talladega Superspeedway	995
Oct 3	Brushy Mountain Apple Festival	95
Oct 3-19	Southwest & California / Motorcoach	3350
Oct 4-8	Niagara Falls / Toronto	950
Oct 5-11	New England in the Fall	1295
Oct 7	Shatley Springs	70
Oct 7	Cass Railroad / Cass WV	105
Oct 7-11	Shipshevana / Indiana Amish	925
Oct 9-11	Nashville TN / Music City USA	725
Oct 9-14	Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta	4410
Oct 10	Billy Graham Library / Botanical Gardens	65
Oct 10	Cass Railroad / Cass WV	105
Oct 12	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Oct 13-16	Rockin' the Boardwalk / Virginia Beach	1025
Oct 17	New River Gorge Bridge / Bridge Day	80
Oct 17	Carolina Balloon Fest / Statesville NC	70
Oct 19-23	Wind Creek / Foxwoods / Dover Downs	750
Oct 26	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Nov 6-8	Sunshine Tours Family Reunion	710
Nov 12	Southern Christmas Show / Charlotte NC	70
Nov 12-15	Biltmore / Smoky Mountain Christmas	880
Nov 13	Southern Christmas Show / Charlotte NC	70
Nov 14	Southern Christmas Show / Charlotte NC	70
Nov 14	Concord Mills / Bass Pro Shop	50
Nov 15-18	Wind Creek Casino / New York City	575
Nov 16	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Nov 23	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45
Nov 25-28	Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade	1450
Dec 1	Lights at Tanglewood Park / Hanes Mall	50
Dec 1-3	Blue Christmas at Graceland	1150
Dec 1-5	Christmas Mystery	1495
Dec 2-6	Charleston / Savannah at Christmas	1125
Dec 3-7	Norman Rockwell Christmas	1195
Dec 4-6	Christmas at Myrtle Beach	475
Dec 4-6	New York / Radio City Christmas Show	1250
Dec 5	Charlotte Premium Outlets	50
Dec 5	Christmastown USA / McAdenville NC	45
Dec 5	Grove Park Inn / Gingerbread Competitor	105
Dec 5	Biltmore House & Gardens / Christmas	105
Dec 6-12	Branson MO / Ozark Christmas	1335
Dec 11-13	New York / Radio City Christmas Show	1250
Dec 11-13	Nashville / Country Christmas / Opryland	1150
Dec 12	The Polar Express	95
Dec 12	Biltmore House & Gardens / Christmas	105
Dec 14	Mardi Gras Casino / Cross Lanes WV	35
Dec 26-31	Florida / Christmas at Disneyland	1675
Dec 28	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee NC	45

All Pricing listed is for 2 guests per room - Double Pricing. Single, Triple and Quad pricing vary. All tours include round-trip Motorcoach transportation by Modern, Air-Conditioned, DVD and restroom equipped Deluxe Motorcoach. Hotel accommodations and Admission to all listed attractions. Baggage handling is provided at each night's lodging as indicated in the catalog. Please refer to our cancellation policy in the 2020 Catalog of Tours or on our website. Call the office if you have any questions.

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**NASCAR RALLIES AROUND WALLACE ON RACING'S DARKEST DAY » SPORTS**



# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY FOR 130 YEARS

Tuesday, June 23, 2020 • MARTINSVILLEBULLETIN.COM • Martinsville, Virginia \$1.50

## PRIMARY ELECTION DAY

**Polls open:** 6 a.m.-7 p.m., today  
**Photo ID:** Required for this election  
**Note:** You may vote in only one party's primary if your polling place is having both.

### ON THE BALLOT

#### Republican primary for U.S. Senate

All precincts will be open for that  
**CANDIDATES:** Alissa Baldwin, Daniel Gade, Thomas Speciale.

#### 5th Congressional District Democratic Primary (in affected districts)

**CANDIDATES:** R.D. Huffstetler, John Lesinski, Claire Russo, Cameron Webb.

#### 5th District precincts in Henry County

- » Axton (302), Axton Elementary School
- » Irisburg (303), Freedom Baptist Church
- » Mount Olivet (304), Mount Olivet Ruritan Building (NOTE: Voters living on Cabell Street are in the 9th Congressional District)
- » Mountain Valley (305), Mountain Valley

#### Leatherwood Club

- » Mountain View (405), VFW Building
- » Dyers Store (505), Dyers Store Fire Department
- » Ridgeway No. 1 (603), Ridgeway Library

#### COVID-19 GUIDELINES

- » Voters must wear a mask. If one a mask is forgotten, one will be provided.
- » Social distancing of 6 feet between voters will be observed.



# City threatens suit in racial argument



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Henry County businessman Ray Reynolds



RICK DAWSON/SPECIAL TO THE BULLETIN/

Martinsville Council Member Jennifer Bowles

Martinsville City Attorney Eric Monday is threatening a Henry County business owner with a lawsuit and jail over a cellphone conversation about race with a member of city council.

By Bill Wyatt  
 bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

A member of the Martinsville City Council and a business owner from Henry County had a private cellphone conversation about finger-pointing racial issues in which they disagree about what was said.

But at least the council member's version of that conversation has prompted Martinsville Assistant City Manager and City Attorney Eric Monday to make this a public issue by threatening the business owner with a lawsuit at taxpayers' expense to force him to stop his comments about the



(RIGHT) Letter from City Attorney and Assistant City Manager Eric Monday (ABOVE) to Ray Reynolds.

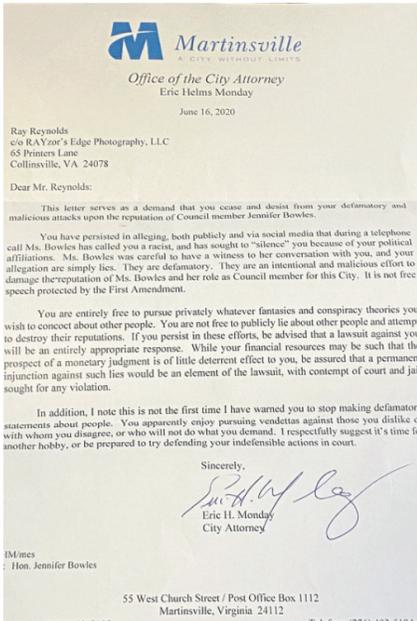


PHOTO SUBMITTED

## Drake expands in Henry County

Fiber company will add a new facility and 30 more jobs in Ridgeway.

Staff report

Drake Extrusion is investing in a new manufacturing facility in Henry County that will bring in 30 jobs to expand its position in the colored yarn and fiber industry.

A release from the governor's office on Monday said Drake, which employs 187 at the 790 Industrial Park Drive in Ridgeway, would invest \$6.9 million and take over a vacant building on that same road.

Henry County is investing \$342,221, which includes local Enterprise Zone grants and cash from the Harvest Opportunity Fund, as an incentive, and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership worked with the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation to provide a \$90,000 grant from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund to assist Henry County, the release said.

Drake is also eligible to receive state benefits from the Virginia Enterprise Zone Program.

Drake has been part of Henry County's manufacturing scene since 1995. The address of the building it now will occupy was not specified, but that building is said to be 120,000 square feet.

SEE **DRAKE** | A5

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### WEATHER

Mostly sunny with thunderstorms possible. Cloudy and humid tonight.  
 For detailed weather information, see Page A2



CVS offers drive-thru virus testing in Martinsville.  
 Page A3



## Obituaries

### Lucille Amburn Weaver

June 20, 1934 - June 21, 2020



Lucille Amburn Weaver, 86, of Martinsville, Va., passed away Sunday, June 21, 2020. She was born June 20, 1934 in Surry County, N.C. to the late Pearl Amburn and Ernest R. Amburn. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, Kenneth L. Weaver; sisters, Amanda Turner and Susie Scott; and brothers, Manford Amburn, Bill Amburn, and Russell Amburn.

Lucille was a member of Woodland Heights Free Will from Leggett's Department

Baptist Church and retired Store.

She is survived by her daughter, Teresa Wingfield (Kim) of Martinsville, Va.; son, Michael L. Weaver of Hendersonville, Tenn.; grandchildren, Amy Mitchell (Jordan) and June Wingfield; and great-grandchildren, Sydnor Mitchell and Maidei Mitchell; special little ladies, Sarah Campbell and Katie Baker; sisters, Dorothy Jackson and Georgia Earles; and brothers, Ernest Amburn and Jimmy Amburn.

Due to COVID-19 the family will have a graveside service at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, June 24, 2020, at Roselawn Burial Park with Pastor Stanley Waddell officiating.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Woodland Heights Free Will Baptist Church, 1995 Old Chatham Rd., Martinsville, VA 24112.

Norris Funeral Services, Martinsville, VA is serving the Weaver family. Online condolences may be made at [www.norrisfuneral.com](http://www.norrisfuneral.com)



### Curtis R. Bullins

Curtis R. Bullins, 74, of Martinsville, Virginia, passed away on Monday, June 22, 2020. Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is handling arrangements.

### Patricia Littles

Patricia Littles, 75, of Bassett, Virginia, passed away on Sunday, June 21, 2020. Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is handling arrangements.

### Doris Martin

Doris Martin, 84, of Martinsville, Virginia, passed away on Monday, June 22, 2020. Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is handling arrangements.

### Sylvia Wade

Sylvia Wade, 83, of Axton, Virginia passed away on Monday, June 22, 2020. Wright Funeral Service & Crematory is handling arrangements.

## Suit

From Page A1

council member — the propriety of which some could question.

Ray Reynolds, 59, a photographer and construction contractor in Henry County, is an admitted outspoken supporter of President Donald Trump who said he has been called a racist in public forums because of that affiliation.

Reynolds said he reached out to Martinsville Council member Jennifer Bowles, an African-American, as a friend to ask her if she could help to defuse the escalating comments about his reputation.

"It started with threats, and then my truck was vandalized," Reynolds said. "Some people that don't like [President Donald] Trump are trying to get rid of Trump business people."

Reynolds, who on Saturday attended Trump's campaign rally in Tulsa, Okla., says he has traveled 97,000 miles in 15 states to attend 71 Trump events. He told the Claremore Daily Progress in Claremore, Okla., on Saturday that he had been attacked in Martinsville because of his support for Trump.

"You've even got people in government who think you're racist because you support Trump," Reynolds said. "Trump is not racist — Trump supporters are not racist — we are all one."

Reynolds said people he had considered friends were commenting on social media about burning down businesses and accusing him of things he has not done.

"People started writing negative reviews on me with the Better Business Bureau, people I've never worked for or worked for me," he said. "The BBB finally removed them [the remarks]."

Reynolds said, when he

called Bowles, "She said, 'I'm not going to help you because you're racist.' That's when I started fighting back."

"I put their names on Facebook, telling everyone what they said, and they got upset."

That includes a 30-minute video in which he named Bowles and other people in the community whom he said had made derogatory remarks either to him or about him.

"All claims made in the video are false and untrue," Bowles said via text message in response to questions from the Bulletin. "Other statements made in private messages that I've seen are also untrue and false."

"I do not have any further comment beyond stating they are false."

### The letter from the city

This past week Reynolds received a letter from City Attorney Eric Monday that was "a demand that you cease and desist from your defamatory and malicious attacks upon the reputation of Council Member Jennifer Bowles."

"You have persisted in alleging, both publicly and via social media that during a telephone call Ms. Bowles has called you a racist and has sought to 'silence' you because of your political affiliations," Monday wrote.

"Ms. Bowles was careful to have a witness to her conversation with you and your allegation[s] are simply lies."

Reynolds claims to have multiple witnesses to his side of the conversation, too, but Monday called Reynolds' comments defamatory and an intentional and malicious effort to damage the reputation of Bowles and her role as a member of city council.

Said Monday in his letter to Reynolds: "It is not free speech protected by the First Amendment."

### Threat of jail

Monday advised Reynolds that he was free to "pursue privately whatever fantasies and conspiracy theories" he wished to "concoct about other people," but he was "not free to publicly lie about other people and attempt to destroy their reputations."

Monday then warned Reynolds that if he continued, a lawsuit would include the possibility of Reynolds' being jailed.

"While your financial resources may be such that the prospect of a monetary judgment is of little deterrent effect to you, be assured that a permanent injunction against such lies would be an element of the lawsuit, with contempt of court and jail sought for any violation," Monday wrote.

"Eric Monday is a bully," Reynolds said. "He thinks he can silence me because I'm a Trump supporter."

"He thinks he can bully me and make me afraid and scare me with his tactics."

"Ask her [Bowles] if she was aware she was on speaker phone. She says she has a witness — well I've got witnesses, too."

### 'Way out of line'

Norm Pattis, a nationally recognized trial lawyer with the Pattis & Smith Law Firm in Connecticut, called Monday's actions "a ridiculous case of racial pandering, and the city attorney [Monday] is way out of line."

"It's not a crime to ask someone to refrain from bullying," Pattis said.

"If the council member refuses to help the businessman [Reynolds], well, shame on her. The businessman should not call her again, but to suggest that a white man asking a Black Lives Matter sympathizer for assistance to stop threats of violence is criminal is ridiculous."

Monday said he sent the

letter to Reynolds in his capacity as city attorney for Bowles in her capacity as "an elected leader of the city."

"I'm not aware of any recording of the conversation; I understand Ms. Bowles has a witness," Monday said. "The letter itself references the claims Mr. Reynolds made, and apparently continues to make, about Ms. Bowles — that she called him a racist and threatened to silence him for his political views."

"Mr. Reynolds' claims are untrue, and he should stop making them."

### Personal history

Reynolds claims Monday's threats of legal action toward him are personal and stem from a disagreement over a construction job Reynolds did in the city nine years ago.

Monday's letter confirms a prior relationship.

"In addition, I note this is not the first time I have warned you to stop making defamatory statements about people," Monday wrote. "You apparently enjoy vendettas against those you dislike or with whom you disagree, or who will not do what you demand."

"I respectfully suggest it's time for another hobby, or be prepared to try defending your indefensible actions in court."

Reynolds said he called Bowles while she was at work at her private employer and requested her assistance as a friend, not as a member of city council.

Monday says he is acting in his capacity as city attorney and representing Bowles in her capacity as a council member making any potential costs of litigation the responsibility of the city and ultimately its taxpayers.

Bill Wyatt is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. He can be reached at 276-638-8801, Ext. 236. Follow him @billwyatt

## Drake

From Page A1

"Drake Extrusion has a long history of success in Martinsville-Henry County, which has fostered an impressive business climate, infrastructure, and workforce for its growing cluster of manufacturers," Gov. Ralph Northam

said in the release. "We thank the company for its long-term commitment to Southern Virginia, and for choosing to expand and create new jobs amid these challenging times."

Drake's facility in Henry County is the only one in the U.S. for parent company Duroc AB, which is an international producer of polypropylene fiber technology, the company

said.

The company's products help create residential upholstery, home furnishings, automotive, floor covering and geotextiles.

"We continue to grow our business here in large part due to our tremendous workforce and the strong support we receive from our local governments," Drake Extrusion CEO John Parkinson said

in the release.

Drake will use the Virginia Talent Accelerator Program in the community college system to help recruit its new employees. The types of jobs and potential salaries were not specified in the release.

"Drake has been a strong and consistent member of our business community for many years," Jim Adams, chair of the Henry

County Board of Supervisors, said in the release.

"Drake Extrusion's continued growth in Henry County is welcome news," said Larry Ryder, Chair, Martinsville-Henry County

EDC Board. "It's especially encouraging in this current climate for Drake to be adding both new equipment and jobs. That bodes well for Martinsville-Henry County's future."

## Warner challenges eventual foe to 3 debates

By Justin Mattingly  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Once Republicans in Virginia decide on their nominee to run against Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., in November, the incumbent wants to debate the GOP nominee three times.

Warner's campaign announced Monday that it is challenging the winner of Tuesday's GOP primary to three general election debates, including one at a historically black college focused on racial equality and justice.

The former governor narrowly won re-election in 2014, but his seat in the U.S. Senate is considered safer this election cycle due to his advantages in name recognition and fundraising and the high turnout that a presidential election brings, which traditionally boosts Virginia Democrats.

"Virginia voters deserve nothing less from their leaders than open and spirited debates that address the issues facing all Virginians and it's our hope that the eventual Republican nominee



Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., was first elected to the Senate in 2008. He won a close race against Republican Ed Gillespie in 2014 but has far outpaced his potential GOP rivals in fundraising this cycle.

will agree in good-faith to meet Mark on the debate stage," said Warner spokeswoman Kate Waters.

Tuesday's primary features three candidates, Nottoway County civics teacher Alissa Baldwin, American University professor Daniel Gade and Army reservist Thomas Speciale, all of whom are seeking elected office for the first time.

The primary is the only statewide contest set for Tuesday.

Gade, an Army veteran, has raised substantially more money than Baldwin or Speciale, according to the Virginia Public Access Project.

VPAP reported Monday that Democrats, despite not having a statewide race, have applied for nearly twice as many absentee ballots for Tues-

day's elections as Republicans (118,181 compared with 59,393).

As of Monday morning, 21,736 Republican ballots have been cast by mail, compared with 60,405 from Democrats. The number of in-person absentee ballots cast is closer — 5,329 for Democrats and 5,201 for Republicans.

Polls open Tuesday at 6 a.m. and close at 7 p.m.

### IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS



In light of the impact from COVID-19 and to ensure the safety of our team, the call center staff now is working remotely. Response time to phone calls and the ability to speak to a live agent have been impacted. We ask that during this time requests be made online or through our automated phone system:

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In order to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus we ask all visitors to make an appointment with The Martinsville Bulletin prior to arrival.

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