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THURSDAY, JULY 16, 2020

Culpeper joins PurduePharma national opioid class action suit

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION

CULPEPER STAR-EXONENT

Culpeper Town Council Tuesday night voted to file a \$4.6 million claim for damages as part of the ongoing class action National Prescription Opiate Litigation in which thousands of localities nationwide have sued now-bankrupt Purdue Pharma for its lead role in the opioid crisis.

At least 430,000 deaths in the U.S. since 2000 have been

linked to overdoses from opioids, including prescription pills such as OxyContin and Vicodin along with heroin and fentanyl. U.S. attorney generals are among those trying to reach a nationwide settlement.

"The opiate epidemic has had a significant and costly negative impact both nationally and locally," Town Treasurer Howard Kartel told council, reading from a report. "This epidemic is

believed to be a result of inappropriate actions by opioid manufacturers, distributors and retailers whose actions have damaged communities throughout the United States, including the town of Culpeper."

The town's claim against Purdue Pharma seeks money in already-incurred and future damages and abatement costs for the period spanning 2003 to 2040. The estimates are based on ap-

proximate costs for child welfare and adolescent services, drug treatment programs, education and prevention initiatives, healthcare, law enforcement and criminal justice and lost tax revenue.

The town will file as part of a Consolidated Claim being administered by an Ad Hoc Committee formed to represent governmental and other contingent litigation claimants.

Kartel told Culpeper Town



Pill bottles are left in protest outside the headquarters of Purdue Pharma in 2018, in Stamford, Connecticut.

Council it's "hard to suggest" the town would receive the entire \$4.6 million and that

it could instead receive "pennies on the dollar." Either way, the town has to be part of the claim to receive any potential relief. Councilman Pranas Rimeikis voted against joining the suit and Councilman Jon Russell was absent.

"What do we have to do with the money if we get it?" asked Mayor Mike Olinger.

Town Manager Chris Hively said any award from

See **OPIOIDS**, Page A5

CULPEPER HALL-OF-FAMER'S FAMILY HELPS MARK HISTORY



Ronald Hill and family members wave to the crowd after a video was shown honoring his great-great-uncle Pete Hill, a Hall-of-Fame baseball player from Culpeper at the new ballpark in Fredericksburg on Tuesday, July 14. Visitors watched from blankets on the field.

Fredericksburg ball club celebrates legacy of Jackie Robinson at new stadium

BY HAILEY BULLIS

THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Fredericksburg Nationals owner Art Silber had wanted to celebrate his 80th birthday by skydiving into a packed stadium and landing somewhere between center field and home plate.

With the 2020 minor league baseball season canceled amid the coronavirus pandemic, that dream was no longer possible.

Instead, on Tuesday, the Fredericksburg Nationals hosted a Jackie Robinson Legacy Night at the team's new stadium by the Fredericksburg Expo Center.



The FredNats celebrate owner Art Silber's 80th birthday by unveiling the new Jackie Robinson Way sign.

The event included a screening of the movie "42," in honor of the baseball legend.

"We don't have a baseball season, but we have a spectacular ballpark," said Silber.

Silber said he has looked up to Robinson since he was 7 and he lived half of a block away from Ebbets Field. Silber, who grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y., went to the first game Robinson played for the Brooklyn Dodgers, when he officially broke color barrier.

Silber has been a fan of Robinson ever since.

"He was this amazing athlete, brilliant baseball player, college graduate, officer in the Army, incredibly talented guy and as children we idolized him, we looked up to him," said Silber. "When we would play our make-believe games in the

street and one team would be the Brooklyn Dodgers, one team would be the New York Yankees and we would make believe that we were different players—we all wanted to be Jackie Robinson."

In honor of Silber's birthday, his children, Seth and Lani Silber Weiss, worked with the city to name the traffic circle by the stadium after Jackie Robinson, making the address of the ballpark 42 Jackie Robinson Way.

"To the city and everybody else who made this possible, I cannot tell you how grateful I

See **FRED NATS**, Page A3

Culpeper panel peppers Florida firm with solar questions

BY CLINT SCHEMNER

CULPEPER STAR-EXONENT

Culpeper's first utility-scale solar plant is getting a close look from county planning commissioners as the project moves closer to construction.

Commissioners devoted more than an hour, in a work session last week, to peppering the developer's representatives with detailed questions about the 1,093-acre, 100-megawatt facility that county supervisors approved in late 2018 off Blackjack Road in the Stevensburg District.

Most members of the advisory panel asked specifics of Greenwood Solar LLC's attorney and consultants, inquiring about truck traffic, visibility, landscap-

ing, site access, drainage and more.

The Board of Supervisors approved the project on Oct. 2, 2018, and extended the usual one-year conditional-use permit for an extra year. So Greenwood, a subsidiary of FLORIDA, wants to start building its facility this fall.

Culpeper Planning Director Sam McLearn urged speed in the commissioners' review, telling the panel that "time is of the essence."

Proposed to feed Northern Virginia's hungry, rapidly growing data centers, proposals for large solar farms have been controversial in Culpeper, with residents expressing worry

See **GREENWOOD**, Page A5

Culpeper to streamline new business license process with online option

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION

CULPEPER STAR-EXONENT

After talking about it for many years, Culpeper government leaders are finally working to streamline the six-step process for obtaining a new business license.

Most recently discussed at the July 10 meeting of the Town & County Interaction Committee, the yet-to-be-unveiled regulatory improvement would eliminate physical, multiple office visits to town planning & zoning, the building official, commissioner of revenue, health department (if operating a restaurant or childcare center), county environmental services and town treasurer (if using town utilities).

Visiting all of those places to complete required paperwork is currently what those seeking to start a new business in Culpeper have to do. Not everyone thinks that's a negative.

"Each office on this list enjoys the face-to-face interaction with the business owner," Town Clerk Ashley Clatterbuck told the interaction committee last week. "It helps them understand everything that goes on at the local level to operating a business."

But some people don't have time to visit six offices to get their license. So the new optional online process would eliminate the physical back and forth through a single-digital portal.

See **LICENSE**, Page A6

DCCC sues state elections board over Freitas, Good

BY JUSTIN MATTINGLY

RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

A national organization that seeks to elect Democrats to the U.S. House of Representatives is suing Virginia's Board of Elections after the panel allowed congressional candidates, including five in swing districts, to qualify for the November ballot despite not filing paperwork on time.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee filed the lawsuit Tuesday in Richmond Circuit Court, a week after the state elections board's split decision. The Board of Elections, which has a Democratic majority, gave leniency to eight candidates who did not meet the June 9 deadline to file a form with the Department of Elections to qualify for the general election ballot.

Bob Good, who is the Republican nominee in the 5th District, received an exception. So did four of the six Republicans vying to challenge Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D-7th, come November, including Del. Nick Freitas, R-Culpeper, who has raised more money than his opponents and also neglected to send the paperwork in on time last year. Democrat Nicholas Betts, who is running against Rep. Ben Cline, R-6th, also received an extension.

The DCCC is asking that the candidates not be allowed to appear on the November ballot, which would substantially benefit Democrats in the 5th and 7th district races.

"Virginia's election law is clear: to appear on the ballot, you must file before the deadline, or request an extension in a timely fashion. But Bob

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Del. Nick Freitas, R-Culpeper (right) shakes hands with a member of the crowd at a gun rights rally Jan. 20 as he enters the state Capitol.

INSIDE

ORANGE COUNTY COUPLE

» James and Dolley Madison make Trump's list for "National Garden." A2

CLASSIFIEDS	B5	OBITUARIES	A3
COMMUNITY	A3	SCOREBOARD	B2
COMICS	B6	SPORTS	B1
EDITORIAL	A4	TELEVISION	A6
LOTTERY	A2	VIRGINIA&BEYOND	A2



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Greenwood

From Page A1

about their impact on roads, agricultural soils, historic sites and waterways.

Stevensburg-area landowners' legal challenge to Greenwood failed, losing in the county Circuit Court and the Virginia Supreme Court.

Thomas Klein, an attorney with the law firm of Troutman Pepper, told planning commissioners July 8 that Greenwood's site plan conforms with state law and the 35 conditions that Culpeper supervisors put on the county permit.

Klein promised a speedy reply to the commissioners' many questions. "We'll make sure you receive a written answer to every question, and have experts available to drill down further."

Commission Chairman Sanford Reaves thanked Klein for the effort, saying his members appreciate getting detailed information when they ask a question.

"Let's get this right the first time, so the time we've spent tonight is not for nothing, ... so the staff is truly informed," Reaves said. "... Our constituents are holding us accountable as we advise our Board of Supervisors."

Lance Kilby, a new commissioner who is a professional engineer, pressed on many issues posed by his careful review of Greenwood's plans.

He expressed doubt about the developer's method for screening the thousands of solar panels from view, given the site's undulating topography.

Kilby asked if Greenwood had done any viewshed analysis that would help officials understand how the project would appear from adjoining areas.

He said Greenwood had not submitted a plan to prevent spills from its stormwater retention plans, nor an agreement on who would maintain them so that responsibility doesn't fall on the county.

Commissioner Laura Rogers asked where trucks carrying solar panels and other construction materials to the site will come from.

Klein couldn't answer, but said the trucks would enter Batna Road from State Route 3, coming from the east. He said he would ask Greenwood's design team and traffic engineer to address her point after the developer receives its occupancy permit from Culpeper.

Rogers also asked how Culpeper will be notified when the plant's solar panels are going to be replaced, and how Greenwood will avoid traffic issues there on the narrow roads near the site.

Greenwood's representatives said the company will use an access road, on its land, that Dominion is using to access its Stevensburg-area high-voltage transmission line. It will create staging areas there for its trucks, trying to keep bigger deliveries off Batna Road, they



Clark's Mountain looms in the distance beyond part of the site where Greenwood Solar plans its 100-megawatt solar farm. Dominion's transmission line is at right.

said. But it will be up to the Virginia Department of Transportation to notify local officials of construction deliveries.

Commissioner Raymond Zegley asked if Greenwood will have to blast bedrock to develop its sprawling site, saying "that's a big deal."

"This is a lot to look at," Zegley told Klein about Greenwood's hundreds of pages of plans. "When you give us your final plan, we need at least two weeks to review it, and maybe more than that."

In conclusion, Reaves urged Greenwood to make every effort to hire local people for the project. He noted that other businesses have come to Culpeper, promising employment opportunities, but then said they couldn't find any qualified people.

Klein said Greenwood will hold a job fair.

A local historic-preservation group is asking the planning commissioners and supervisors to delay

the county's consideration of the site plan until it can finish a historical study of the area proposed for solar development. The U.S. of the Interior is funding a study by the all-volunteer Friends of Cedar Mountain Battlefield of Culpeper County's "Rapidan Front" area of Civil War battlefields and historic sites.

The friends are researching Culpeper's Raccoon Ford, Morton's Ford and Sommerville Ford battlefields, sites that were fought over in 1863 and 1864 during the American Civil War. The three battlefields and related historic sites lie along the Rapidan River, which separated the Confederate and Union armies during that period. The study area includes the Greenwood Solar project land.

The friends group has written the Planning Commission to implore it not to approve the solar developer's plan until it can complete its study.

The leader of Culpeper critics of industrial-scale solar plants welcomed the commissioners' scrutiny.

"I'm glad the planning commissioners are conducting their due diligence, but there's no guarantee that Greenwood Solar will abide by any agreed-upon conditions, as the county has demonstrated its inability to enforce the conditions of a use permit," said Culpeper County resident Susan Ralston, president of Citizens for Responsible Solar.

"Look at the disaster with SPower's (solar plant) site in Spotsylvania,"

nation," Ralston added. "That county has a larger staff than Culpeper, and yet the solar developer is not being held accountable to its site plan while neighboring properties have had stormwater runoff and erosion problems.

"At the end of the day, the best outcome would be for Culpeper to let this conditional-use permit expire in October before Greenwood can destroy this historic, agricultural-zoned land," she said.

Greenwood Solar LLC of Juno Beach, Fla., won county supervisors' 3-2 vote in 2018 to grant a conditional-use permit.

Greenwood proposes to build its project on land owned by Stevensburg District Supervisor William Chase Jr., Belle Meade Farms, the estate of Manuel DaSilva, Stanley Hawkins, Sherwood Limited Partnership, and William A. Spillman III, according to its application.

Timmons Group of Richmond, an engineering firm, submitted the application for its client, Florida-based Next Era Energy Resources, which bought the venture from Greenwood Energy of Texas. NextEra, affiliated with Florida Power & Light, describes itself as the world's largest operator of wind and solar projects.

The solar plant would have an expected lifespan of at least 20 years, and could operate 30 years or more if equipment were replaced, Timmons Group said.

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Opioids

From Page A1

the suit would go into the town's general fund unless the judge presiding in the national case assigns it for specific uses.

"It could be 40 cents, \$4,000 or \$4 million," Hively said. "It would be something."

Councilman Keith Price called it "a huge big ac-

tion," saying the litigation launched last year: "(PurduePharma) made OxyContin," he added of the highly addictive opioid whose danger was downplayed by the company.

Councilwoman Jamie Clancey made a motion to move forward with filing a claim on behalf of the town and Councilman Frank Reaves Jr. offered a second.

Since the local onset of COVID-19 in March, focus

has shifted from the local opioid epidemic, previously a major concern, especially for Culpeper, which had a higher than average per capita death rate for overdoses.

But Dr. Wade Kartchner, Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District Director, said it continues to be an issue nationwide.

"The consumption of resources to combat COVID-19 has not helped keep a sustained focus on drug over-

doses," he said on Wednesday to the Star-Exponent.

According to the most recent data from the state medical examiner's office, nine people died of opiate overdoses in Culpeper County last year. Since 2010 in Culpeper, 93 people have died of opiate overdoses, peaking in 2017 with 19 deaths.

In the first two months of 2020 in the five-county area, two died of heroin overdoses, according to the Culpeper

Police Department.

Statewide last year, 1,617 people died from fatal overdoses, the most ever in Virginia. Of those, fentanyl contributed to nearly 60 percent of deaths, according to VDH.

A new organization, Groups Recover Together, will be starting drug treatment in August in the Warrenton area, Kartchner said.

The Health Director said reps from the group met with

him and Community Services Director Jim LaGraffe in February to discuss area needs.

Groups Recover Together will accept Medicaid and most commercial insurance and have a discounted self-pay program for the uninsured population, Kartchner said: "This is exciting news for the area."

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2020

COVID response earns Nonprofit of Year honor for Aging Together

BY DEVIN PAYNE

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S. earlier this year, its effects were immediately felt through lockdowns and the forced isolation that resulted from them.

Perhaps no organization found itself riding the razor's edge more than Aging Together, which relies on a network of com-

munity outreach teams in Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties to connect older adults with resources that help them improve their quality of life.

Aging Together's response to the pandemic was swift. And so effective that the Culpeper Chamber of Commerce

See NONPROFIT, Page A6



AGING TOGETHER

A resident of Dogwood Village assisted living facility in Orange County FaceTimes with a family member using an iPad presented to her through Aging Together's iPads for Seniors' program.

Madison County churchmen revive suit against Northam

BY TYLER HAMMEL

CHARLOTTESVILLE DAILY PROGRESS

Four Madison County churchmen have revived a lawsuit against Gov. Ralph Northam following a new executive order intended to slow the spread of COVID-19, which they argue limits their religious liberties.

An earlier version of the lawsuit was filed in July in Madison County Circuit Court on behalf of four Madison County church members: Brian Hermsmeier, Joe Sansone, Culpeper attorney Mike Sharman and Charlie Sheads.

In that complaint, the plaintiffs wrote that they believed Northam had disregarded their religious liberties and undermined churches.

The case was dismissed by an agreed order in September during Phase 3 of Virginia's reopening after



STAR-EXPONENT FILE

A lawsuit dismissed earlier this year was filed again in Madison County Courthouse (right) by church members.

A Madison County Circuit Court judge found that the only remaining state restriction in place over church attendance was Executive Order 63, which requires people to wear face coverings indoors.

However, according to a news release from the churchmen, the lawsuit was revived this week in response to Northam's Executive Order 67, which was issued last month in response to surging COVID-19 case numbers.

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» HOMETOWN LIVING: Gordonsville burnishes the Christmas spirit. C1



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and long-term-care residents.
That's according to new information from federal officials the Virginia Department of Health shared on Friday. Earlier this week VDH said it had only been promised

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» FREE RIDE: Orange County firefighters have the truck ready for Santa. A2

Before the close of 2020, Virginia is slated to receive 480,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccines developed by manufacturers Pfizer and Moderna, enough to inject nearly all of the state's 500,000 health care workers

and long-term-care residents.

That's according to new

information from federal officials the Virginia Department of Health

shared on Friday. Earlier this week VDH said it

had only been promised

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Hulchers

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Fighting for life

Also sick with COVID-19, though not requiring hospitalization, she found herself alone in their beautiful new home and living in a new community with few local friends.

Don Hulcher was transported to Novant Health UVA Health System Culpeper Medical Center. He would not return home to his wife until June 22, after an intense fight for his life and times when doctors didn't think he was going to make it.

"They had set up a specialized pathogen ICU—that's where he was," Mary Ellen said. "He ended up on a ventilator ... until they had to transfer him to (University of Virginia Medical Center in) Charlottesville to do a tracheotomy ... They had him semi-comatose and paralyzed while the ventilator was working with him. It's kind of like this disease was so new that he was probably a guinea pig for them."

Don Hulcher interrupted, "Not probably. I was the first."

He doesn't recall the early days of being sick.

"If she had waited another day (to call 911), I don't think I would be sitting here talking to you today," he said. "I had slept in the new house one night before being taken away in an ambulance."

The couple agreed to talk about their difficult journey, at times through tears, to thank all the medical staff for their professional, compassionate care during some of their darkest days.

"A big shout-out to the medical workers," Don Hulcher said. Nearly nine months later, he is still in recovery, albeit much stronger than he was earlier. "I'm a survivor," he said.

The virus attacked his lungs, kidneys and liver.

"The doctors were walking a fine line because they're trying to get rid of the fluid on his lungs, but the kidneys need the fluid. And then they would do all kinds of blood work and find they had to change something because the liver is coming into play," Mary Ellen said, noting that multiple doctors from various departments treated her husband.

The Culpeper community should be thankful for the level of hospital care it has available, she added.

"The medical teams that worked on him—from the doctors to the nurses, you name it—are phenomenal," she said. "That's the reason for this story, for the community to understand what they have."

The Hulchers' sons, Don Jr. and Dave, also aided in their father's survival by staying as connected to him as they could, and by supporting their mom. In addition, a



Culpeper resident Don Hulcher (left) wipes away tears as local homebuilder Jim Gearing recounts the couple's difficult journey. Hulcher, along with his wife, Mary Ellen Hulcher, were the first to people in Culpeper County to test positive for COVID-19.

ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION/CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT



ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION/CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT
The Hulcher's newly built custom home enjoys a rural view from its backyard in Culpeper County.

cussed the idea of comfort management instead of active treatment because we were not convinced that he would survive this," Sullivan said. "But with the support of his wife and family, he fought through each day, despite his lab results and prognosis."

Sullivan knew the couple had just moved to Culpeper and didn't have local support from loved ones.

"That's why I made it my mission to check with Mrs. Hulcher by phone every day during her quarantine to provide any resources and local support while she was home dealing with her own and her husband's illness from afar," she said.

Heroic nurses, doctors

Like their mother, sons Don Jr. and Dave were not able to physically visit their dad during his months in the hospital. But the family, after working through initial communication challenges in the early stages of the pandemic, was able to coordinate twice daily conference calls with Don, oftentimes using a hospital staff member's personal cell phone held up to his ear, Dave Hulcher said in a conversation Friday from his home in Kansas.

In the ICU in Culpeper for two months, Don was transferred to Charlottesville in May for the tracheotomy. Shortly after the transfer, he suffered a stroke.

"COVID doesn't cause the typical stroke," he said. "I'll just call it a COVID stroke."

He recalled being lifted

into a wheelchair and taken for physical therapy while at UVA Charlottesville. Hulcher could barely stand from the seated position, but he did, and then he did again the next day, twice. Doing more than what was asked of him on the road to recovery has been a mantra since.

"I wanted to get out of bed and get back to living," he said.

Nurse practitioner Elizabeth Sullivan, of UVA Primary Care Commonwealth Medical Center in Culpeper, helped facilitate testing availability for the Hulchers and stayed involved through the ensuing months.

"Mr. Hulcher suffered many side effects throughout his journey with COVID-19, but he had a will to live and was determined to overcome this virus," she said.

"At one point, we dis-

He said Jim and his wife, Shannon, are now like family to his parents. The Gatings jumped in as needed, developing meal plans with Mary Ellen, helping with banking needs, post office runs, grocery store trips and facilitating communication with the hospital and others.

Don Jr., who lives in Northern Virginia, also brought groceries for his mom and later went with her to the rehab center in Charlottesville where his dad spent his final weeks before coming home to Culpeper. The family communicated with Don through a window.

Don Hulcher said the support meant everything to his wife.

"It's what kept Mary Ellen going when I was ... didn't even know what was what because I was trying to keep myself going," he said.

Lines of communication

Those were dark days, not being able to communicate with his dad when he was on the ventilator for weeks and weeks, Don Jr. said in a phone call Friday. Working out conference calls in which he, his brother and mom could all participate, interacting with doctors, happened eventually.

It was important for Don's sons and wife to speak with him even when he could not talk back.

"We would tell him to be strong and explain how much we loved him, are there for him and that he will get through," Don Jr. said. "A lot of it was banter and encouraging words so he could hear our voices and get updates on the grandkids."

Family connection, whether bedside or virtual, is vital to a person's mental and physical recovery, nurse practitioner Sullivan said.

She recounted the phone being put up to Hulcher's ear while a respirator was helping him breath.

"His heart rate would improve and his eyes would flicker every time he heard his family speak," she said.

"There was so little they knew about it and he was so sick so fast," Dave said. "My reaction was this is just a tragic story, I hope it doesn't end like this. You feel so helpless ... I am so thankful to Jim Gearing and his wife for the kindness they showed my mom. We couldn't have done it without them."

See **HULCHERS**, Page A5

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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2020

Culpeper gets CARES grant to expand broadband

BY CLINT SCHEMMER

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Culpeper has been awarded \$921,466 to improve high-speed internet access to underserved parts of the county.

Laura Loveday, the county's special projects and grants administrator, secured the state grant. The funding came from the CARES Act relief bill passed by Congress in response to 2020's novel coronavirus pandemic.

"I am encouraged by the

public awareness that the COVID-19 pandemic has provided regarding rural broadband access," Loveday said in a statement Thursday. "My hope is that in the very near future we achieve internet connectivity for all the rural residents of Culpeper County and Virginia."

In early October, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam urged localities to apply for CARES Act funding to fast-track broadband projects across Virginia amid the COVID-19

millions of the commonwealth's students, businesses and households to seek more internet access.

"Broadband is to today's economy like electricity was generations ago—when you have it, you can get ahead," Northam said on Oct. 7 in announcing the grants' availability. "That's why we are directing \$30 million in CARES Act funding to fast-track broadband projects across

pandemic."

Northam encouraged projects that would increase broadband connectivity for distance learning and telework as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

Virginia urged local governments to collaborate with public and private partners to address people's needs during the public health emergency, Loveday said. The commonwealth priorities

See GRANT, Page A7



STEVE HELBER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Verizon utility worker Steve Hammond installs fiber-optic cable in Richmond in 2006 as phone companies spent billions of dollars to build networks for broadband internet access.

'CHARTERS OF FREEDOM' ISLAND APPEARS AFTER RAIN



PHOTO BY CHARLES JAMESON

Mountain Run floods Yowell Meadow Park in the town of Culpeper following heavy rains on Oct. 30, creating an island of the recently installed Charters of Freedom and Culpeper Minutemen Monument. DEQ has listed Mountain Run, including this section in the park, as impaired and unhealthy for recreational use due to high levels of fecal bacteria, especially after heavy rains.

Clean-up plan in the works for Culpeper's Mountain Run

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Human activity and agricultural uses both contribute to pollution in Culpeper County's Mountain Run, identified by the Virginia Dept. of Environmental Quality as having levels of fecal bacteria unhealthy for recreational use.

The situation has landed the local watershed on the Environmental Protection Agency's "dirty waters list," according to state officials.

DEQ Nonsource Point Coordinator Dave Evans recently led back-to-back virtual

public meetings on the water health issue that includes popular Mountain Run Lake, a back-up reservoir for the town of Culpeper drinking water supply.

Dozens of interested stakeholders including local environmentalists, an extension office agriculture expert, town and county officials, soil & water conservation district staffers, water stewards and citizens living along the local waterways listened and gave feedback during the meetings Oct. 28 and 29.

It was the beginning of public participation in a year-

long process that will create an "Implementation Plan" to address unhealthy bacteria and poor benthic health in Mountain Run as well as the interconnected waters of Muddy Run and the Lower Hazel River.

Some work has already been done

The plan will build on many years and millions of dollars in conservation and environmental efforts by Culpeper Soil & Water Conservation District and other groups like Friends of the Rappahannock and

Piedmont Environmental Council.

This has included installing miles of exclusion fencing along waterways to keep animals out, cost share septic system improvements, plantings of trees and other water buffers, improving pasture fertility and conditions with portable shade buffers, for example, and ensuring adequate water supply for livestock. Connecting aging septic systems to municipal sewer also helps reduce pollution.

Continued focused See BACTERIA, Page A6



A 2010 aerial view shows Coffewood Correctional Center off Rapidan Road (Rt. 615) in the Mitchells area of Culpeper County.

COVID cases double among inmates at Culpeper's Coffewood prison

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Reported COVID-19 positive cases jumped within days among inmates at Coffewood Correctional Center in Culpeper County.

There were 82 active cases as of Thursday, Nov. 6 among those incarcerated in the state prison run by Virginia Dept. of Corrections, compared to 40 cases on Monday.

One Coffewood prisoner was in the hospital with the novel coronavirus and 115 total inmates had tested

positive for the infectious illness. Six employees of the Mitchells facility were also listed as actively positive, one more than on Monday.

Coffewood remained the facility with the biggest COVID-19 outbreak across the state prison system.

"The response plan remains the same," said VDOC spokesman Greg Carter on Thursday. "Offenders testing positive are placed in medical isolation so they don't infect others. Treatment follows CDC and VDH medical guidelines. The medical profession-

als treat symptoms as they arise. They can provide many things, including oxygen, on-site. If inmates require an inpatient level of care, they are transported to a hospital."

VDH reported 1,466 virus cases in Culpeper County as of Thursday, 56 more than on Monday, due largely in part to the prison outbreak. Deaths of Culpeper residents due to the respiratory illness remained unchanged at 18 people.

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Kellie Acors, Spotsylvania County registrar, processes absentee ballots at the Spotsylvania Office of Elections in Southpoint on Wednesday.

INSIDE

RIDE FOR RECOGNITION

» Veteran's Day ride to convoy Nov. 11 through Culpeper, A2

CLASSIFIEDS	B6	REAL ESTATE	B4
COMMUNITY	A3	SCOREBOARD	B2
COMICS	B8	SPORTS	B1
FAITH & VALUES	A4	TELEVISION	A7/A8
LOTTERY	A2	VIRGINIA&BEYOND	A2



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Bacteria

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measures to keep pet, residential and livestock runoff from the waters will be impactful not just locally, but for health of the Chesapeake Bay that includes Mountain Run in its Rappahannock River watershed.

DEQ, at some level, has noted bacteria impairment in Mountain Run—which meanders through well-visited Yowell Meadow Park—and its approximate 100,000-acre watershed in reports since the early to mid-2000s. According to Evans, some 60,000 people live in the Mountain Run watershed with many homes on septic fields—a top cause contributing to the bacteria.

Livestock and pet waste getting into streams is another contributor as well urban stormwater runoff, which brings various surface materials into the water and at especially higher levels in extreme weather events as has been commonplace in recent years, months and weeks.

"Fecal bacteria is the primary focus of this project," Evans said during the Oct. 28 meeting. "E. coli—it originates in the feces of warm-blooded animals."

Long-term exposure to high levels of fecal bacteria can lead to chronic illness like ulcers and arthritis, the environmentalist said as well as diarrhea and infections for short-term exposure.

Addressing poor benthic health in the waterways, Evans said healthy fish need healthy bottom dwellers. The Environmental Protection Agency considers Mountain Run among "impaired waters" and put on the "dirty waters list," Evans said. EPA will be final review agent for the upcoming plan to clean it up.

Mountain Run Lake: How healthy is it?

A series of especially rainy recent years has increased bacteria levels in Mountain Run. In 2018, for example, Culpeper County got 73 inches of rain. Mountain Run in Yowell Meadow, as it regularly does, flooded just the other day, creating an island of the newly installed Charters of Freedom and Culpeper Minutemen Monument.

"We clearly need to be proactive to take action to reduce bacteria (in the watershed) to be protective of recreational use standards," Evans said.

A draft Implementation Plan will be in the works for the next six to eight months and once approved by the EPA will make Culpeper County eligible for grants for remediation, possibly by January of 2022.

Questions posed during the recent public meeting focused on Mountain Run Lake including how its recent drain-down for construction of the new town dam might have impacted the bacteria level. Evans said impairment in the reservoir is fairly recent, occurring in the past two years. He added that a higher bacteria concentration in testing could be associated with lower levels of water for the drain-down.

Another question was how does the bacteria impact the town's drinking water supply. Evans said high levels of bacteria are not typically seen in lakes and are usually associated with heavy rains and when the lake is muddy. He added the town treats the surface water so the



Bacteria levels in Mountain Run Lake prevent people from swimming safely, as posted on signs at the lake's fishing pier.

bacteria issue would not impact the drinking water supply.

Mountain Run gets an 'F' from FOR

Recently, Fredericksburg-based Friends of the Rappahannock scored Mountain Run lowest in the region on its Upper Rappahannock Report Card, said Bryan Hoffman with the grassroots conservation group. While the Culpeper County waterway got an A for public access, Mountain Run failed for bacterial impairment, especially at Yowell Meadow Park.

The Report Card stated 32 percent of stream miles in Mountain Run are listed as impaired, including at Yowell, located in a floodplain that often floods.

Yet, Friends of the Rappahannock noted, there are no signs educating visitors of potential exposure risk or health precautions. Virginia Dept. of Health is the agency with domain over posted health advisories, according to Evans.

FOR listed cattle farming and urban runoff as major contributors to Mountain Run bacteria.

The town of Culpeper, which is participating in the Implementation Plan process, owns Mountain Run Lake and does not accommodate or allow for public swimming in it or Lake Pelham, the town's primary source of drinking water. Both are posted as no swimming allowed, said Town Manager Chris Hively.

The town also does not have any public swimming facilities on Mountain Run, he said. Consequently, neither the DEQ nor VDH require the Town to monitor or post signage regarding ambient bacteria levels in these surface water bodies, said Hively.

"There is always a potential health risk when in contact with water from any natural water body, especially if ingested. I am not aware of any abnormal health risks associated with recreational contact with water from Mountain Run but I would have to defer to DEQ for clarification and guidance on this subject," he said.

Friends of the Rappahannock also gave Mountain Run an F for open space protection. According to the group, only 4.4 percent of undeveloped lands in the watershed are in conservation easement. Culpeper County grew its population by nearly 10 percent in the past decade, Friends noted.

The group has been actively addressing the waterway's health through tree plantings and giveaways, river clean ups, outreach and a new upcoming project called, Mountain Run Initiative, according to October Greenfield, an Upper Rappahannock River Steward, who also participated in the recent DEQ meetings.

The human factor & Culpeper growth

A lot of work has been done, Evans said in the Oct. 29 follow-up discussion, yet levels of exceedance of bacteria standards in the Mountain Run Watershed

has been much higher in the past five years due to heavy rain.

Culpeper Extension Senior Agent Carl Stafford said increased human activity and residential growth is the biggest change in the watershed and his "overarching concern."

"It might be the tip of the spear of the big part of what we are looking at," he said. "The pets come with the people."

Stafford observed that when land is developed, many people believe it pushes water fowl and wildlife out. He said development creates new opportunities and habitat for wildlife like small mammals, a factor important to recognize as sources of the watershed bacteria.

"They're all creeping outside and maybe tend to move toward water," Stafford said.

He also mentioned the effect of overuse of fertilizers and outdoor household and construction waste flowing into curb and gutters in developed neighborhoods.

"And then one part we really don't want to talk about is the human waste deposited outdoors. You would really underestimate how much of that is going on and we can easily miss the effect those are having on water quality in that watershed," Stafford said.

David Massie with Culpeper Soil & Water said the agency has seen lots of success in getting livestock fencing installed along portions of the upper Hazel River as well as Rapidan and Robinson rivers, along with other measures. Having generational relationships with local agricultural producers, as CWSWCD does, facilitates greater conservation, Massie said.

The effected watershed area is 50 percent forested, said Joe Rossetti with Virginia Dept. of Forestry. Adding more trees along streams reduces runoff, he said.

Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission has also been involved in water health planning in the region's urban areas through installing pet waste stations and encouraging practices such as rain gardens, filter strips and wet ponds.

Bryan Hoffman with Friends of the Rappahannock said it should be high priority to install more pet waste stations in housing developments in the Mountain Run Watershed especially as "the human footprint grows."

The next steps in the process for cleaning up Mountain Run, Muddy Run and the Lower Hazel River will be continued discussion with stakeholders, enhanced data analysis and more work group meetings by the end of this year or early next year focused on the agricultural sector, residential septic and developed land/stormwater issues, including pet waste, Evans said.

The final Implementation Plan will be ready by later in 2021 prior to its federal review.

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Officials say all ballots were counted, social media wrong

BY MELLEONOR
RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

RICHMOND—Voters who cast their ballots on Election Day won't see their voting records updated until next week. However, they can rest assured their votes were counted when the slip was run through the ballot scanner, the Virginia Department of Elections said Thursday.

The department sought to dispel concerns circulating on social media by voters who said that their votes weren't reflected on their state's online portal that tracks in-person and absentee ballots.

The posts have prompted hundreds of calls to local registrars, including threats, said Virginia Elections Commissioner Chris Piper. Similar social posts have cropped up in other states, including California and Wisconsin under the hashtag "#whereismyvote."

"They're getting hammered with calls and complaints," Piper said. "If you went to a polling place on Election Day, and you put your ballot through the machine, it was counted. That's it. It will be a week or so before the voter credit is applied on your voter record."

"The key piece of information is that getting your vote counted and the voter credit being updated with your record is very different," Piper added.

Concerns over the accuracy and security of the election have run rampant this election season, prompted largely by comments from President Donald Trump that go back months. In the early hours of Wednesday,



Voters cast their ballots under a giant mural at Robious Elementary school on Election Day, in Midlothian. Poll workers said that traffic was slow due to early voting in the precinct.

the president called the election "a fraud on the American public," without citing specific evidence or concerns, and as several states were still counting ballots.

Election experts have for months said that voter fraud is extremely rare. Meanwhile, election officials in Virginia and elsewhere have said they are confident in the systems they have in place to ensure that every vote is counted.

In Virginia, former Vice President Joe Biden claimed an early night victory in the contest for the White House. He topped Trump by 9 percentage points or 400,000 votes, according to unofficial returns.

Roughly 2.8 million Virginians cast early ballots in the election, either by mail or in person. An additional 4.3 million voted in person on election day.

Megan St. Lawrence, 29, cast her ballot on Election Day in Powhatan and said the missing mark on her voting record prompted concern that her vote wasn't counted. She posted a screenshot of the voter record on Facebook, in a post that now has nearly 200

comments and 125 shares.

"How could we know if our vote was included in the count if they don't update it as the votes are counted?" St. Lawrence said in an interview. "It is all done electronically.... It should update immediately."

St. Lawrence noted that some voters she's spoken to have seen their records updated while others have not.

"I didn't expect my post to get so much attention and so many shares," she said.

Piper said voters who cast absentee ballots or voted early in person would see their voting records updated first because their ballots were likely processed before Election Day.

The records of people who voted in person on election day will be updated starting on Tuesday, when local election officials have to finalize their vote counts. In the following days, voters should expect to see their records updated.

"Anybody who's concerned about their ballot not having been counted, I want to assure them that if they put the ballot to the machine, it was counted," Piper said.

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