



Amherst high school baseball coach, player win Seminole District awards, SPORTS



AMHERST NEW ERA~ PROGRESS

Amherst County's only hometown newspaper | THURSDAY, JULY 1, 2021 | NewEraProgress.com | Amherst, Va.

Council mulls spending measures for ARPA money

Town of Amherst receives first half of \$2.2M from stimulus, eyes vehicle fleet replacement, utility infrastructure upgrades

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

Looking for ways to spend \$2.2 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act money, Amherst town officials are targeting water and sewer infrastructure upgrades and vehicle fleet needs.

Town Council held a retreat June 24 for the purpose of discussing ways to spend the stimulus package that President Joe Biden signed into law in March. The town was set to receive its first half of the money June 28 and is

set to get the other portion next year, Town Manager Sara Carter said.

The expenses must be incurred by Dec. 31, 2024 and completely spent by Dec. 31, 2026, Carter said. The money can cover responses to the public health emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic, essential workers, revenue loss and infrastructure and is much targeted toward the effects of the coronavirus and the economy, she said.

Premium pay for workers who performed essential services

during the pandemic, which may be retrospective to when the crisis started in early 2020, is a potential use for some of the money.

The town's estimated revenue loss from the pandemic is in the ballpark of \$400,000, Carter said. Meals taxes and other revenue associated with economic activity is performing better than expected, she added.

"We don't actually think we're going to have significant losses in the coming years," Carter said.

The money can't be used for debt service, pensions or es-

tablishing reserves, she said. During the meeting she recommended taking the approximately \$400,000 in revenue loss, whatever the final figure is, and doing a "salary switch" where the federal money is used to pay salaries as was done with some of the previous Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Stability Act (CARES) money.

The money from the switch can be used by council in other ways deemed necessary, according to Carter. Councilman Kenneth Bunch said that potential move

would not encumber the money set aside to the same spending restrictions as those of the federal government.

Carter said purchasing a new police vehicle is an option, noting none had been bought from 2018 to 2020. The town plans to buy a new vehicle for the police department, which Carter said has three in its fleet exceeding 100,000 miles.

"We're going to be paying the piper now," Carter said. "In my

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PHOTO BY LEE LUTHER JR., FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

MAKING HISTORY

Amherst catcher Maddie Jennings gives the state championship trophy a kiss after her team defeated Hanover, 2-0, Saturday. The win clinched the first state title for Amherst County High School's varsity softball program.

ACPS: Block schedule gives more class time

Set to take effect in 2021-22 year for secondary schools, allows for more hands-on instruction

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

As part of the recently approved 2021-22 school year plan, Amherst County High School and the county's two middle schools will have a block schedule format that school officials said will allow more time for hands-on projects and meaningful engagement.

The 90-minute class time will be structured on an A/B yearlong rotation and not a semester rotation, according to the plan the Amherst County School Board approved at its June meeting. Under the format, secondary students will have four "A" blocks Mondays and Thursdays, four "B" blocks Tuesdays and Fridays and all blocks together on Wednesdays.

The format allows teachers to better support students in recovering foundational skills that may have been either missed or not fully mastered because of the unusual conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, a description of the measure in the plan states.

The move also allows the over-all secondary curriculum to not be compressed, puts Standard of Learning testing and Advanced Placement testing at the end of the year and grows programs such as AP, career and technical education, internships and dual enrollment, the plan's language states.

"We're trying to have more hands-on projects, deeper learning. It gives more time," Amherst County Public Schools Superintendent Rob Arnold said of the block schedule format at the June meeting. "When you have 45 to 50 minute classes, it really becomes compressed."

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Water, sewer code changes approved

Service Authority director: New measures friendly to business, promote economic development

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

Amherst County officials recently passed an ordinance amending water and sewer regulations in a measure to improve business friendliness and promote economic development.

The Amherst County Service Authority prioritized multiple action items to address recommendations from the county's Economic Development Authority, according to ACSA executive director Bob Hopkins. The board of supervisors approved the ordinance at its June 15 meeting following a public hearing which drew no comments.

Hopkins said an important change in the definition of avail-

ability fees, or a one-time charge paid prior to connection to the ACSA's water or sewer facilities, changes the way those fees are determined. The code previously said the fee is based on system capacity, the maximum amount of water that can pass through the service connection line and meter.

"This can be onerous to developers, since the amount of water they plan to use might be much less, meaning they would be paying an excessive fee," Hopkins said.

He explained basing the fee on estimated average daily water volume, part of the code changes, is more beneficial to developers. An example, he said, is a current development project where a wa-

ter purification/reuse system will be used to save money on water bills.

The range of water use is 2,125 gallons per day, when the system is operational, which will be the vast majority of the time, to 12,750 gallons per day when the system is completely down and based on the previous code the availability free would have to be based on the higher figure, or maybe more, whichever is the system capacity, according to Hopkins.

"I don't think that was reasonable and could have driven away the developer. But this will be a major water user for ACSA, even with the system, and I wanted the water sales," Hopkins said of moving ahead with basing the fee

on estimated average daily water use. "Addressing availability fees to promote economic development is an ACSA business friendliness action item and the [EDA board] also liked the code change."

Another change for connection fees includes a new requirement that new development within 250 feet of a public water main line be required to connect, Hopkins said. The requirement previously only pertained to sewer connections in regard to new development, he said.

Another important change, according to Hopkins, was codifying several ways the ACSA determines availability fees and

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Rosie's emporium proposal draws debate

Voters will decide on pari-mutuel wagering; county says it is not bringing 'untoward influences' into Amherst culture by supporting operation

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

In Amherst County the past several months, residents have not been split into two camps on

a matter aside from the usual Republican versus Democrat, vaccinated and unvaccinated or UVa football versus Virginia Tech.

A major topic that has county residents talking is the possibility

of a Rosie's Gaming Emporium setting up operations in Madison Heights and whether or not they stand for it or against it.

A referendum on pari-mutuel wagering, which if passed would

allow a new Rosie's emporium to be constructed in the Seminole Plaza shopping center, is on the ballot for the Nov. 2 election. About 2,000 registered voters in the county petitioned to have the referendum move forward and the Amherst County Board of Supervisors voted 3-0, with Chair Jennifer Moore absent and Supervisor David Pugh

abstaining, at its Sept. 7 meeting to pass a resolution in support of Rosie's locating in the county.

Pugh said he abstained because he didn't want the board to influence a decision he said is best left up to the voters. Proponents of a Rosie's in Madison Heights have

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Lancer Stadium rocking once again with return of Friday night football



BY LEE LUTHER JR., FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Amherst football fans reach for free footballs tossed to the crowd by the Lancer cheerleaders.



LEE LUTHER JR.

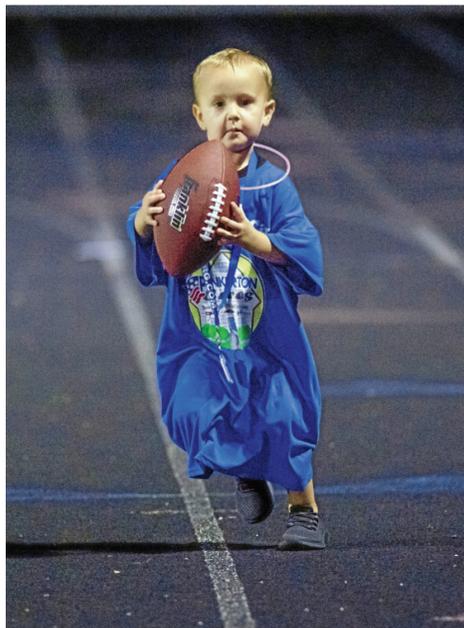
Friday night football at Lancer Stadium resumed on Sept. 17, a welcome sight after the season's first games were called off because of COVID-19.

The band played, the fans cheered and many other festive sights were back as Lancer Nation celebrated a shutout victory over Liberty High School. **For more on the game, see Sports.**

Amherst County High School marching band drum major Elora Burchette leads the band during halftime.



ACHS horn section players from left, Anne Marie Hughes, Mary Moore and Samiah Rose perform on the field.



A pint-sized football player got to get in some running with the ball on the track during halftime.

Educators to address learning loss in SOL results

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

Amherst County Public Schools saw a large regression in math and science scores during the 2020-21 school year, a reflection of the highly challenging learning environment greatly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was a very difficult year," Chief Academic Officer Dana Norman recently told the Amherst County School Board in reviewing Standards of Learning data for 2020-21.

The division's pass rates were reading, 64%; math, 40%, and science, 47%. Two years ago, pass rates in the division were 78% in reading, 82% in math and 79% in science.

All remote tests administered during that period did not factor into the overall pass rate but was still required, according to Norman's report. Just more than 260 parents opted their kids out of the SOL tests last school year, she said.

"We were definitely in a unique position last year because of our schedule," Norman said.

Elementary schools were open four days a week in person and one day remote in the 2020-21 year while the high school and two middle schools had students in school two days a week. The Amherst Remote Academy had 1,414 students enrolled in the first semester and 1,312 in the second semester with an "enormous amount" trying to learn remotely 100% of the time, Norman said.

"And we know best instruction is in-person instruction," Norman said.

Last school year, 1,585 students were quarantined at various times as a result of the virus.

The division's action plan includes using data to redirect instruction to meet students where they are. Norman said students did much better when provided with a performance-based assessment.

"We just want to teach," Norman said. "We want to be able to have our teachers in the classroom working with students and not be quarantined." ACPS also is using some of its federal stimulus money to address learning loss.

The division uses MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) testing, a practice aimed at creating a personalized assessment experience and helping teachers with determining where students are performing.

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Amherst school board OKs emergency sick leave policy

Gives employees 10 days of paid leave in emergency COVID situations, could be adjusted later

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

Amherst County Public Schools employees are granted up to 10 days of emergency sick

leave during the current school year following the county school board's recent approval.

The measure will be effective if an employee has exhausted all emergency sick leave days un-

der the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which expires Sept. 30, and the employee has been placed on quarantine for additional instances due to being identified as in close contact

to COVID-19 in the workplace. Jim Gallagher, the division's chief human resource officer, said the policy the board

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On the right path

Amherst Mountain Biking Club outlines future goals A2



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AMHERST COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Officials target \$13.8M first phase in expansion project

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

The desire for a new auditorium and addition to Amherst County High School among county public school officials has been made clear in a string of recent meetings on concept plans for the large-scale project.

Now the question is: How will the county and school division

pay for it?

The Amherst County School Board received a presentation from Josh Bower, an architect representing a Charlottesville firm working with Amherst County Public Schools on the project, during its Nov. 11 meeting. The addition is broken into the following phases:

■ Phase 1a, a new 1,100-seat auditorium in the rear of the

school adjacent to the gymnasiums where a driver's education course has been used, as well as a new additional parking lot that includes the extension of Lancer Lane. This phase also includes a commons area for the auditorium and two gyms with concessions, restrooms and space to display the school's athletic accomplishments. The estimated cost is \$11,576,241.

■ Phase 1b, renovation of the cafeteria kitchen, a new food court and conversion of the existing dining room into classrooms, for a price tag of \$2,259,163.

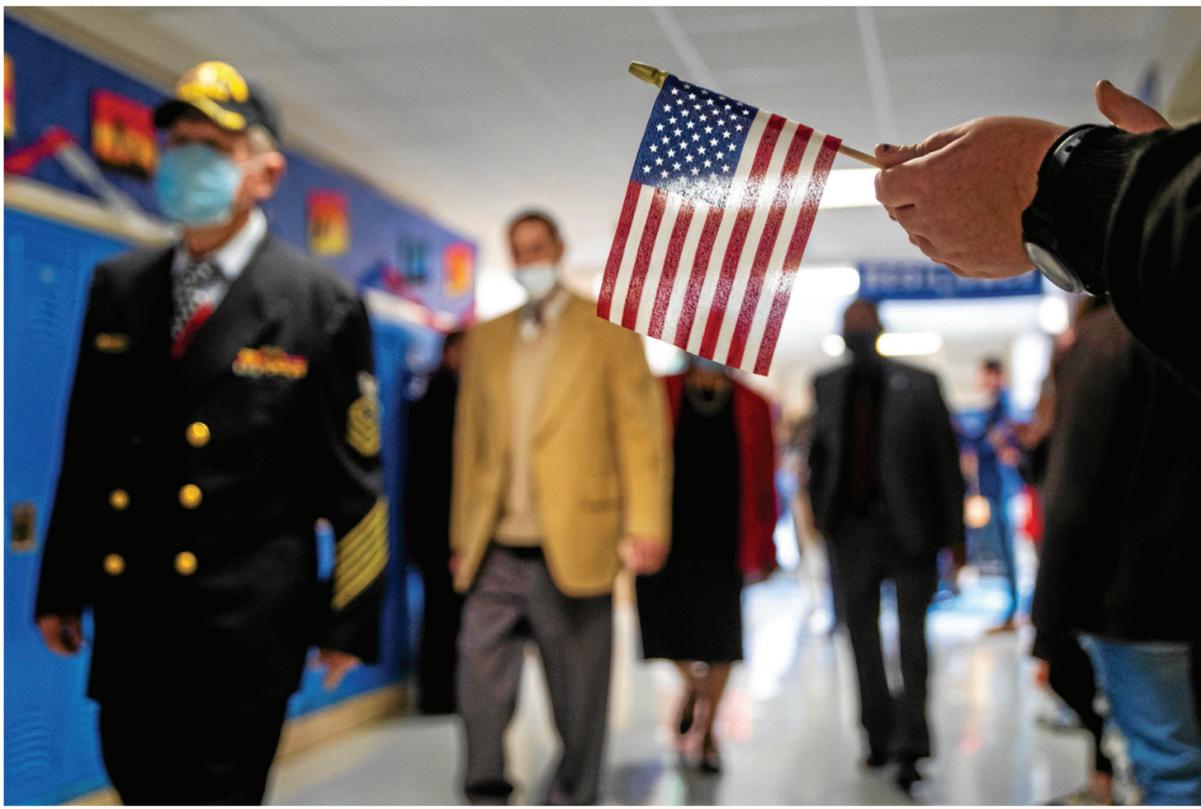
■ Phase 2, conversion of the existing 400-plus seat auditorium into education space and renovation of career and technical education (CTE) labs. Cost estimates are \$3,275,778.

■ Phase 3, upgrades to Lancer

Stadium to make it more handicapped-accessible and a new fieldhouse adjacent to baseball field to serve the school's baseball and softball teams as well as provide public restrooms. The estimated price tag is \$2,023,218.

The total project cost combined is \$19.1 million. Superintendent Rob Arnold said the project is

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KENDALL WARNER PHOTOS, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Students line the hallways and clap for veterans as they take a "walk of honor" during a Veterans Day celebration at Amherst Middle School on Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021.

Council taps former vice mayor to fill vacant seat

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

A familiar face is returning to Amherst Town Council to fill a vacancy.

Andrá Higginbotham, who previously served on council from January 2015 to December 2018, was unanimously appointed Wednesday to the seat

left vacant by the resignation of Kenneth Bunch.

Higginbotham served two previous two-year terms and was vice mayor in 2017 and 2018.

He opted not to run for a third time in late 2018 prior to council terms becoming four years rather than two.

Owner of Andra's Car Care on Depot Street, a local minister and 1973 graduate of Amherst County High School, Higginbotham said in a 2018 interview he would consider running again.

The opportunity to rejoin the town's leadership emerged when Bunch resigned following council's October meeting. Attempts to reach Bunch for comment on the reason for vacating the seat have been not successful.

Higginbotham, pastor of Everlasting Salvation Church of God, a virtual ministry, said in a previous interview he prays for more growth and industry to come into Amherst and for the town to have good quality of life for residents.

In an interview following his

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Eighth-grader Samiah Rose performs taps during a Veterans Day celebration at Amherst Middle School on Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021. Rose's grandfather is a U.S. Navy veteran and was present to see her perform.

AMHERST MIDDLE HONORS VETERANS WITH CELEBRATION

Students at Amherst Middle School honored veterans on Thursday, Nov. 11 with a celebration to say thank you for their service.

The celebration kicked off with student speakers outlining the history of veterans day and three students from each grade level were chosen to share essays they had written centered around veterans-day prompts.

Two veterans, captain Mike Henderson and master sergeant Raymond Johnson, were recognized for their service by being inducted into the Amherst Middle School Veterans Garden, which is maintained by students.

Following the presentation in the school auditorium, veterans were ushered into the hallway where they were greeted with students lining the hallways, clapping and waving flags of each of the military branches as guests made their way to check out the veterans garden.

To conclude the celebration, eighth-grader Samiah Rose performed taps in front of the school under the flagpole.

Educators work to address teacher morale, student needs

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

A range of measures Amherst County Public Schools educators are taking to respond to pandemic-driven issues such as mental health, teacher morale and a rise in student behavior concerns was addressed during the county school board's Nov. 11 meeting.

Superintendent Rob Arnold recently announced the formation of a superintendent's

advisory committee to work on division-wide issues and develop solutions. After identifying four key issues — communication, instructional expectations, mitigation strategies and teacher morale — the committee on Nov. 3 submitted recommendations, Arnold said.

Arnold addressed instructional expectations for the current school year in a Nov. 11 letter

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School official on COVID-19 cases: 'We're not out of the woods yet'

JUSTIN FAULCONER
jfaulconer@newsadvance.com
(434) 385-5551

Amherst County Public Schools is noticing a post-Halloween uptick in positive COVID-19 cases and is bracing for more surges as the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays approach.

William Wells, assistant superintendent of Amherst County Public Schools, said as of Nov. 11

the division had five employees test positive and eight quarantined while 19 students tested positive and 218 were quarantined.

"They're not at a point we can't function," Wells said during the Amherst County School Board's Nov. 11 meeting.

Since the pandemic began, Amherst County has had 4,440 cases of coronavirus and 60 deaths as of Nov. 12, according

to the Virginia Department of Health's website.

Wells said a handful of positive cases on the Amherst B-Team football squad led to a recent game's cancellation. He urged the community to stay vigilant in preventing the virus's spread, noted at this same time last year cases began to rise.

"We do need to understand

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