

# Rappahannock News

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144th Year • No. 49

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2021

\$1

## BIG LEAP FOR BROADBAND

### State awards county critical funding for universal service

#### BY THE NUMBERS

**\$5.9 MILLION**

Total cost of the project to Rappahannock County

**\$3.5 MILLION**

Resident Chuck Akre's donation

**\$715,768**

Federal funds allocated by county to broadband

**\$1.7 MILLION**

Remaining cost the county is on the line for

**\$199**

What residents can expect to pay for a fiber installation during All Points' first 12 months of service

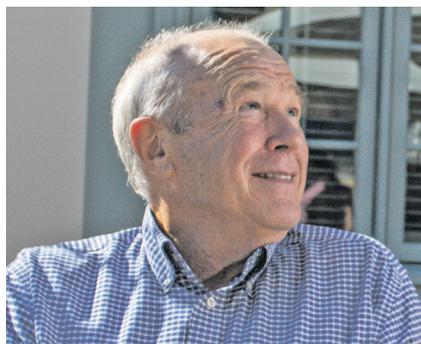
## Town's longtime attorney unexpectedly resigns

By BEN PETERS

Rappahannock News staff

Longtime Washington Town Attorney John Bennett suddenly resigned Monday after more than 25 years of service, saying in an interview Thursday afternoon that felt it was an appropriate time to exit.

Bennett, who also served as Washington's zoning administrator, was



FILE PHOTO BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

**Public, private characterizations of the terms surrounding John Bennett's departure differ.**

not present at Washington Town Council's Monday night meeting where he usually presides. "I've been reading on the internet actually in

See **TOWN**, Page 12

## Board of Supervisors must decide whether to enter into a contract

By JULIA SHANAHAN  
Rappahannock News Staff

Rappahannock County on Monday was awarded funding from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) to build a universal fiber-to-home broadband network in the county.

For the project to become reality, the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors must decide whether to enter into a formal contract with private internet provider All Points Broadband and commit \$5.9 million in county funds toward internet expansion. If the Board of Supervisors votes to leave the regional partnership with Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission (NSVRC), seven other counties and All Points, then the county will not receive any VATI funds to expand broadband.

The NSVRC and All Points received \$95.3 million from VATI — just below the requested \$97.2 million — to build a fiber-to-home network across eight counties in the region. It is not immediately clear precisely how much of that funding Rappahannock County received. NSVRC and All Points received the largest award out of all the VATI applications.

The project will provide a fiber network to 37,357 unserved locations and work to achieve universal coverage in Augusta, Clarke, Fauquier, Frederick, Page, Rappahannock, Rockingham and Warren Counties, according to a press release from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Develop-

See **BROADBAND**, Page 12

## Proposed new map places county in new Congressional district

The 10th District is currently represented by Rep. Jennifer Wexton, a Democrat from Loudoun County. 6



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*Merry Christmas!*

*Sperryville celebrates the season*

► Pages 10-11

Tom Lewis has been lighting up Woodward Road for nearly 30 years.

BY RAY BOC

# Rappahannock News

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2021

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## Next broadband hurdle: Finding \$1.4 million

If county approves participation in regional project, it must get more funds to avoid using taxpayer dollars

BY JULIA SHANAHAN  
Rappahannock News staff

As the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors await taking a vote that will determine if the county finalizes a universal broadband project, members are trying to procure funding to avoid using tax dollars to pay for it.

The supervisors still lack the funding needed to cover the outstanding cost of the project. The Board of Supervisors is hedging its bets on obtaining funds from outside sources such as local nonprofits, additional federal stimulus dollars and other local grants to avoid reaching into its general fund — but where the money might come from remains uncertain.

See **BROADBAND**, Page 13

### OUR ANNUAL HOLIDAY BREAK

► The Rappahannock News will not publish an edition next week (Dec. 30). We'll return in print on Jan. 6, 2022. In the meantime, follow breaking news at [rappnews.com](http://rappnews.com). Happy holidays — and thank you for reading and advertising!

## CITIZEN OF THE YEAR 2021

Chuck Akre, for his preservation of Eldon Farms



FILE PHOTO BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

BY BEN PETERS  
Rappahannock News staff

In Rappahannock County this year, one citizen dominated the conversation.

Chuck Akre, a nationally recognized asset manager by career, first made waves with his ongoing efforts in the Town of Washington to build Rush River Commons, which is expected to become Rappahannock's first mixed-use development featuring more affordable housing and space for community organizations. More recently, he's

pledged a \$3.5 million donation to help bring universal broadband to the county.

Both of those sweeping initiatives aren't without controversy. But his mid-year "conservation purchase" of what's one of Rappahannock's most treasured pastoral landscapes, the 7,100-acre Eldon Farms that for years many feared would fall into the hands of real estate developers, can hardly be questioned.

See **CITIZEN**, Page 12

### Clevenger's Corner scheduled to begin construction in spring

More than 700 homes closer to becoming reality near county line. 6

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# Rappahannock News

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

\$1

## Supervisors back big broadband expansion plan

▶ County may contribute \$5.9 million as part of regional project ▶ Akre family pledges \$3.5 million

BY JULIA SHANAHAN  
Rappahannock News Staff

The Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors and Broadband Authority voted to continue forward into phase 2 of their agreement with All Points Broadband that could greatly expand internet service in the county.

The bodies (made up of the same people) could not reach a decision at their meeting on Sept. 1, and held a continuation of the meeting on Tuesday.

Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson, Stone-wall-Hawthorne Supervisor Chris Parrish, and Wakefield Supervisor Debbie Donehey voted in favor

of moving forward with the agreement, Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier voted against the agreement and Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith abstained.

All Points is estimating the project to cost \$19.5

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## County real estate taxes are inequitable and comparatively high, yet vital to preserving Rappahannock's identity

BY TIM CARRINGTON  
For Foothills Forum

Rappahannock County property taxes are a financial lifeline, a tool for preservation and an algebra of minute calibrations, some of which benefit large properties over small.

For all its complexities, it's the indispensable tax, raising money from what everyone values – real estate – which gets converted into the services Rappahannock residents need.

But the taxes involve trade-offs which go to the heart of the Rappahannock identity,

including its stresses and contradictions. The county's land-use valuations give large landowners a significant tax break that isn't available to owners of small properties, unfairly saddling these residents with a higher rate of taxation. The tax breaks also cut into local county revenue, meaning there's less money available for the county's largest single investment— its schools.

At the same time, however, the land-use tax breaks are crucial to Rappahannock's defining commitment to protect an unequalled rural

See **TAXES**, Page 20

### ANALYSIS

**A look at the lifeline: For richer, for poorer, property taxes fund the county**

A Foothills Forum - Rappahannock News special report

At the county park, good fences make good neighbors

▶ Page 6

Another brewery in Sperryville OK'd — with conditions

▶ Page 8

Supervisors approve paid fire & rescue department

▶ Page 10

### 9-11: 20 years later, memories endure

"I felt it was my duty to make the children feel safe," said Deborah Flinchum, who was teaching at the elementary school. Four residents reflect on their Sept. 11 experiences. 12



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