

happy

NEW YEAR

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Still no vote on solar farm expansion

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Isle of Wight County supervisors have again postponed voting on a developer's request to add acreage to a planned solar farm.

SolarGen of Virginia LLC, a subsidiary of Colorado-based

Aquasan, had received the supervisors' approval in 2019 to build a 55-megawatt, roughly 300-acre project named the Ho-Fel solar farm on Lees Mill Road near International Paper's Franklin mill. Asheville, North Carolina-based Pine Gate Renewables has since purchased the project - which has yet to break

ground - and is proposing to expand the facility by 18 acres.

According to Matt Boerger, Pine Gate's project permitting manager, the 2022 proposal calls for the solar panels to be spaced further apart, which is why the extra acreage is needed. The project is now estimated to generate 40 megawatts rather

than 55.

In 2020, Virginia's General Assembly passed legislation allowing localities to assess a \$1,400 per megawatt per year payment in lieu of traditional machinery and tools taxes. Pine Gate has offered such a payment, which will escalate by 10% every five years for the

estimated 40-year life of the project.

A proposed siting agreement specifies that Pine Gate will pay either the traditional M&T rate or the \$1,400 per megawatt payment, depending on which is higher. For the project's first seven years in operation, the M&T rate is project-

• See SOLAR, p. 6



ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER BODY

A new state law requires Virginia State Police to maintain a publicly accessible online database of unsolved homicides, unidentified bodies and missing-person cases. Three of the database's 60 cases are from Isle of Wight County. This is the last in a multi-part series.

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

It must have felt like déjà vu. Fourteen months earlier, on the morning of Wednesday, June 5, 1991, Dee Dee Darden's late husband, Tommy, had come speeding back home from the couple's wheat field on Bowling Green Road, shouting, "Get in the truck! ... You gotta see it!" — and had shown her the burned and mutilated body of Thomas Daryle Williams lying face down at the end of a dirt path.

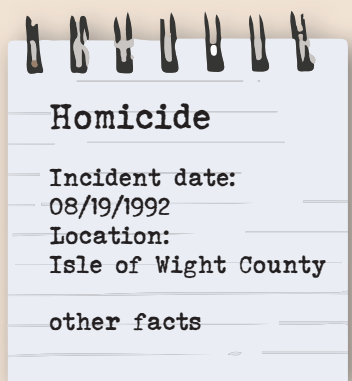
Dee Dee was again in her home the afternoon of Aug. 19, 1992 — another Wednesday —

when two people came running up to her door, stuttering and stammering about having found another body.

According to Aug. 26, 1992, reporting by the Smithfield Times, the two passers-by had discovered the body of 27-year-old Desmond Anthony Fergus of Norfolk in a ditch along Carroll Bridge Road, about a quarter of a mile south of Bowling Green Road, where Williams' body had been found.

Fergus' murder remains unsolved and is the most recent of three decades-old Isle of Wight County crimes listed in an on-

• See COLD CASE, p. 6



Who will be Smithfield's next mayor?

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

None of Smithfield's Town Council members have gone on record as to who they'll back as the town's next mayor, but some say they don't want the job.

Mayor Carter Williams, who's held the position since 2012, received the fewest votes out of five candidates seeking four available council seats in the Nov. 8 election, and as such, will be leaving office on Dec. 31.

At the Jan. 3 Town Council meeting, the remaining five sitting members and two newcomers who won seats in November will be tasked with naming Williams' successor. In Smithfield, the mayor is not elected directly by voters, but by a majority vote of sitting council members.

Former Smithfield Police Chief Steve Bowman, who was the highest vote-getter in November among the council candidates, said he is "not actively seeking the office" and would "respect and support the council's decision."

Council member Wayne Hall, who was reelected to a new four-year term in November and secured the highest vote total among the three incumbent candidates, told The Smithfield Times on Dec. 26 that he's "thought about" becoming a candidate for mayor, but hadn't

• See MAYOR, p. 4

Study: Changing IW zoning, tax laws could spur affordable housing

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Isle of Wight County's zoning laws and tax methodology may be contributing to a lack of affordable housing, according to a study funded by a grant from the Peninsula Realtors' Association.

Isle of Wight supervisors directed county staff in 2021 to apply for the grant, which was to provide an independent housing analysis. The association tasked Thomas Hall, a Christopher Newport University professor of finance and economics, with completing the study.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines "affordable" housing to mean no more than 30% of an occupant's gross income is going toward housing costs, including utilities. According to Hall's findings, which he presented at the supervisors' Dec. 8 meeting, roughly a third of Isle of Wight renters are paying 35% or more. To fall below the 30% threshold, a household would need to earn \$75,000 a year or more.

Homeownership is likewise out of reach for many. According to Hall, there were just over 1,100

• See ZONING, p. 4

'Share the Isle' plan for seniors approved

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Isle of Wight County supervisors voted unanimously Dec. 8 to adopt a senior-citizen-focused addition to the county's 2020 "Envisioning the Isle" comprehensive plan.

The new section, titled "Share the Isle," is intended to serve as a decision-making guide for the county to remain livable for residents of all ages and abilities, particularly senior citizens.

According to 2020 Census data, just under 20% of Isle of Wight's roughly 39,000 residents

were age 65 or older as of that year. According to the "Share the Isle" plan, the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center projects this figure will rise to just under 27% by 2030.

County staff began developing the plan in 2021. The plan identifies five focus areas: "healthy and active lifestyle," "quality healthcare," "transportation access," "housing choices" and "education, employment and engagement."

According to the document, Isle of Wight has an above-average number of adults with "frequent mental distress," diabetes and obesity, as well as

an above-average population served by unsafe drinking water and who lack access to a large grocery store. The plan further contends Isle of Wight has an "equity" problem, with a higher-than-average racial disparity in educational attainment and poverty rates.

As a remedy, the plan proposes Isle of Wight encourage mixed-use zoning, in which commercial and residential units are combined on a single parcel, often within walking distance. It further proposes the county adopt an "affordable dwelling unit ordinance," to "increase

• See PLAN, p. 6



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SECOND FRONT

The Smithfield High School band was without a director to start the school year, but thanks to the leadership of some determined students, marched on.

— See page 7



QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“They improved in every part of the game and every match score was better than last year’s. We have five returning players from the district and region championships, and we have a couple of younger athletes who can contribute next fall.”

— Smithfield High School golf coach Larry McKee
Reacting to fourth-place finish in the Region 4A championship

Area avoids major flooding from Ian

Staff report

The region dodged a bullet Monday, Oct. 3, when remnants of Hurricane Ian failed to bring historic flooding that forecasters had predicted.

High tide topped out at

5.21 feet Monday afternoon at Sewell’s Point at Norfolk Naval Station, some 2 feet lower than National Weather Service meteorologists had predicted just 24 hours earlier. The projected flooding would have been the region’s sixth highest on re-

cord, rivaling Ash Wednesday in 1962 and Hurricane Isabel in 2003.

Normal trouble spots like South Church Street and Commerce Street in Smithfield and Rescue Road at Battery Park were under water and closed

to vehicular traffic at high tide Saturday and again Monday evening, but no structures were threatened.

Meteorologists credited a slight change in wind direction Monday to the north-northwest for the significant reduction in

tidal flooding.

Isle of Wight County Schools canceled Monday classes in anticipation of unsafe travel conditions for buses and cars.

Saturday’s Bacon & Bour-

• See IAN, p. 6



South Church Street at the Cypress Creek Bridge was closed to vehicular traffic during Saturday’s high tide. (Photo courtesy of Joe Lupton)

Planners OK ‘salvage service’ at Isle of Wight Industrial Park

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

A nationwide automotive auction business eyeing the Isle of Wight Industrial Park for its seventh Virginia branch has received a unanimous favorable recommendation from the county’s Planning Commission.

Advanced Construction Development LLC has applied for a zoning amendment to create a

“scrap and salvage service” on two parcels totaling 75 acres. The application is on behalf of Insurance Auto Auctions, an internet-based auctioneer of vehicles involved in collisions, floods or repossessions. IAA is proposing to store roughly 3,500 vehicles on consignment from insurers at the proposed site, accessible from Benns Church Boulevard via IWIP Road.

• See SALVAGE, p. 5

Here’s how to purchase a Hardy Elementary ‘legacy’ brick

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Isle of Wight County Schools has created an order form for those interested in purchasing an engraved brick for the new Hardy Elementary School’s “legacy wall.”

IWCS announced plans in July to include the wall in the school’s construction – affording those who’ve passed through the doors of the existing Hardy Elementary through the decades the oppor-

tunity to literally leave their mark on the 1960s-era school’s replacement.

Each brick is \$50. The money raised will fund books and resources for the new Hardy Elementary’s library. Those who purchase a brick will have up to 36 characters – two 18-character lines of text – to leave a dedication message to future generations.

The order form can be downloaded at <https://www.iwcs.k12.va.us/apps/pages/newHardyElementary>. Email the completed

form to bcage@iwcs.k12.va.us or fax the form to 757-365-0236.

Credit cards, Venmo, cash or money orders are among the accepted forms of payment. Personal checks will not be accepted.

The bricks will be added to several brick columns in the new school’s lobby. The new two-story school, modeled after Florence Bowser Elementary in Suffolk, will house nearly 900 students in grades K-4. Construction is underway, with the new school slated to open in mid-2023.

IWCS to hold community meetings on five-year plan

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Isle of Wight County Schools will hold community meetings at Smithfield and Windsor high schools ahead of making a decision on proposed five-year capital improvement plan changes.

The first meeting was scheduled for Oct. 3, but canceled due to expected flooding and high winds from the remnants of Hurricane

Ian. A new date has not been finalized yet.

The Windsor High session is still on schedule for Oct. 5 from 6-7 p.m., at 24 Church St., Windsor. Those unable to attend either meeting can comment online at <https://forms.gle/wnVGB8UQz4tzDTVAA>.

According to Assistant Superintendent Dr. Christopher

• See MEETINGS, p. 6

Carrollton apartment developer seeks landscaping exception

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Developers who’d received after-the-fact permission to build a taller-than-allowed Carrollton apartment building now say a condition of that approval is unworkable.

Jerry and Lucy Kooiman got Isle of Wight County’s approval in 2018 for urban residential zoning to permit the construction of Heritage Apartments, a three-story, 12-unit multifamily building on Sugar Hill Road. Though they’d submitted plans calling for a 34.5-foot-tall building, putting them just under



The three-story Heritage Apartments building in Carrollton is now complete but its developers are now seeking a change to a landscaping requirement Isle of Wight County imposed in March as a condition of allowing the building to exceed 35 feet in height.



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TOWN NEWSLETTER

Town of Smithfield residents can get the scoop on fall happenings with the semiannual town newsletter inserted in today's edition, which was mailed to every home in the town limits. Non-subscribers who enjoy this complimentary copy of the Times are encouraged to subscribe by calling us at 757-357-3288 or emailing info@smithfieldtimes.com.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The world has changed – gun violence, active shooters, mass shootings – it's relevant now.”

— Isle of Wight County Sheriff James Clarke Jr.
Addressing county supervisors on the need for resource officers in every school

Smithfield commits \$1 million for Luter Sports Complex expansion

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Smithfield's Town Council has authorized up to \$1 million to expand and upgrade the Joseph W.

Luter Jr. Sports Complex on West Main Street.

The vote followed a closed session to discuss “contract negotiations” on Oct. 5.

According to Mayor Carter

Williams, the work will entail adding three to four new baseball or softball fields and additional bathrooms and concession stands.

The \$4 million athletic park

opened in 2018. It already has a concession stand and bathrooms located central to an existing baseball field and three softball fields, but the building is 750 feet away from the park's football

field. The new concession stands and bathrooms would be located closer to the football field and would serve the new baseball

• See COMPLEX, p. 8



Homecoming

Reggie Jetton and Marisabel Condit were crowned homecoming king and queen, respectively, during halftime at Smithfield High School's Oct. 21 game against York High School. York ultimately defeated Smithfield 36-14. In front are Hardy Elementary first-grader Luke Wilson and Chloe Williams. See more Homecoming photos from all the local high schools on page 11.

Elementary resource officers to return

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

School resource officers will be returning to Isle of Wight County's elementary schools for the first time in a decade.

The Isle of Wight County Sheriff's Office has received a 45-month, \$267,743 grant from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, which will

pay nine months of salaries and fringe benefits for four new sheriff's deputies for five years. Isle of Wight supervisors plan to combine the grant funds with roughly \$220,000 in unspent money Isle of Wight County Schools returned to the county at the end of the 2021-22 school year to fund the officers' uniforms, vehicles

• See OFFICERS, p. 7

'The model's broken:' County leaders say state school funding isn't enough

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Isle of Wight and Surry county officials say Virginia funds an insufficient number of public school teachers – leaving locali-

ties with little choice but to make up the difference with local tax dollars.

According to data Deputy Superintendent Susan Goetz

• See FUNDING, p. 6

Supervisors add \$1 million to Isle of Wight schools budget

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Two weeks after meeting with the county's School Board, Isle of Wight supervisors voted unanimously on Oct. 5 to add

just over \$1 million in local funding to Isle of Wight County Schools' 2022-23 budget.

The funding includes the remaining \$812,507 the supervi-

• See BUDGET, p. 8

Death certificate: Prime suspect in Ragged Island murders hanged himself

By Stephen Faleski
Staff Writer

Samuel “Sammy” Rieder, who'd been retired Isle of Wight County Sheriff Charlie Phelps' prime suspect in a September 1987 double murder, was himself discovered dead roughly three

years later.

The Smithfield Times has obtained a copy of Rieder's death certificate, which states the 31-year-old was found in his Chesapeake mobile home the morning of Aug. 8, 1990, hanging from a

• See DEATH, p. 8



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