

## The 'local stuff' matters

The old man showed off his finger to everybody at the market. It had indelible ink on it, which Indian election officials use to mark that a person has voted. That's what made him so happy. It was 2015 and at the same time I was in the country, the state of Delhi was holding an election for their Legislative Assembly.

He was so excited over that fact. This was the first time he had voted and he wanted everyone to know, even the American who had dropped by the market to pick up some fruit. Despite the fact my Hindi was (and is) severely limited, we managed to carry on a pretty good conversation.

"My first time," he said, pointing at his finger. "I got to vote."

"I got to vote". He didn't roll his eyes, sigh or show any of the signs we typically do when the topic of voting comes up. He was happy. This was something he was proud

to do, something enjoyable. He wanted to see a change in government, the man said, as the current majority had been in "too long." And so, he got out to vote.

That's about as far away from how we handle elections as you can get. Nine times out of 10, if I'm in a conversation about voting here in Virginia or any of the other states I've traveled to, there's no joy. Nobody's excited to take part in the event. Instead, it's a chore, something we have to be practically shamed into doing. Despite having more than a month of early voting and every possible rule to make the process easier, it's something we'll come up with every excuse not to do.

By the time you read this, Election Day in the Heart of Virginia will have come and gone. The Town of Farmville will have a new mayor. There will be some new faces sitting on multiple local councils, both in nearby towns and on



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK  
BRIAN CARLTON

county boards. As for who those people are, you can go to FarmvilleHerald.com and read up on all the results, as well as discussions with some of the winners. But what we haven't seen, at least so far, is anything that comes close to what I experienced in India.

I'm not suggesting everyone has to be excited at the thought of casting a ballot. But when it comes to elections and local governance as a whole, we do need to care. A couple

weeks ago in this column, I talked about how we move forward, how we make progress. If nobody cares enough to get involved, that doesn't happen. I've run into several people, both in Prince Edward and Cumberland counties, over the last two weeks who weren't interested in voting. One said he didn't have time. Another said it just wasn't important.

"I'll vote for the president when that comes around," she said. "But this local stuff, it doesn't really matter to me."

Now this is something I can't stress enough. The "local stuff" matters more than anything else. If we want to move forward, be it as a town, as a county or as a region, that's all "local stuff." Concerned about the water you drink? Want more affordable housing? Maybe you're worried about the job opportunities in town? Or hey, you could be wondering what can be done to keep younger residents here. All of that comes down to the town councils and the county boards. This "local stuff" affects each of us on a day-to-

day basis.

And even post-election, we can play a part in that. Time and again, towns and counties have seats routinely come open on their advisory boards and committees, but we're often lucky if one person expresses interest. The announcements go up weeks ahead of time, and we see plenty of comments online, but very few people actually show up to speak and go on the record during public hearings.

I'm not saying it'll be easy. It'll likely be months or even years before you see results. I'm not even saying it'll be successful. I don't know if that old man in Delhi lived long enough to see his effort pay off. But he wanted to see something happen, so he took a step forward. The same goes here. If we want change, if we want growth, we'll never know if it's possible unless we try to make it happen.

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## A time to honor our veterans

This Friday is the day that has been set aside to honor our veterans. It is a noble thing to recognize those that have served our nation in uniform. It should not, however, be a thing we do only once a year. Rather, in some way or another, honor them more frequently by the way that we treat and show our respect to them.

Some entered the service because they were willing to risk their lives for their country; others believed it a worthy career. Some saw service as a means to learn a skill, others did so because they saw limited opportunities within their communities. Finally, others entered military duty simply because of the luck of the draw during the periods of war when the draft was in effect.

For whatever reason that folks have served in the military, it changed them. It created bonds with those they served with, often those relationships have lasted for years. Their service changed kids into men and women that

friends, family, and communities should admire and respect.

### THE SERVICES HAVE CHANGED

The military has always evolved. From periods when many of our recruits were drafted, to the present where new challenges are offered that require far more skills than in years past.

When I was in basic training at Fort Knox, several of those there had been given a choice, they could either join the army or they could go to jail. When my son, David, was enlisting to go into the Navy, there were hurdles to cross. You had to have a diploma, you had to pass tests that not only showed one understood math and science but physical tests to ensure one's ability to go through training without washing out in basic training.

Today's military is far more dependent on weaponry that relies on educated servicemen and women that understand how to guide missiles and other armament to enemy

posts that they cannot see but can detect. This is good. For ages, the foot soldiers were nicknamed 'cannon fodder' because they were ordered to advance on enemy positions, running and crawling directly into live fire.

### GRIMMER CHANGES

Most of the changes in the last decades have been positive, but not all. We still get involved in wars without a clear understanding of why. Decision makers in Washington decide to send troops into dangerous situations with little or no direction of what the outcome should be.

As an example, when then candidate Obama was running for president, he stated that we were fighting the wrong war in the wrong place. He believed that we should ramp up the fight in Afghanistan. Twenty years after we entered Afghanistan, we left, showing nothing for the loss of life and limb. We simply flew away, leaving allies and armaments for the Taliban. Leaders in Washington



YOUR TURN  
FRANK RUFF JR.

never allowed military leaders to fight the war to win.

Another sad reality of today's military is that the Biden Administration has installed military officers who are less focused on being prepared for war. Orders have come down that have demoralized our servicemen and women. In doing so, they have left all branches of service short of personnel needed to maintain a strong military.

It started with President Biden's horrid rush to get out of Afghanistan that resulted in the needless deaths of our personnel and Afghans who had assisted us. Another demoralizing decision was to kick out personnel who refused to receive Covid shots.

The brass has fallen in line with the President's 'woke' ideology. The military that had prided itself on racial integration for decades. Members were once promoted on their ability, now the focus is quotas. Every personnel decision is now focused on checking the right boxes rather than promoting the best, most qualified.

### MY ASK OF YOU

Commit to speak to a veteran who fought overseas. If possible, record their story of the challenges they faced. My father-in-law never revealed what he experienced going ashore on D-Day. Do not let that happen with your loved ones.

This Friday, mostly at 11 a.m., there will be programs throughout the region to honor our veterans. I hope that you will attend one of these events. Your show of support would mean much to those who have served our nation.

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## Virginia report card not up to state standards

The National Assessment of Educational Progress for 2022 is in, and for the Commonwealth, it is an unmitigated disaster. Also known as "The Nation's Report Card," the tests are a common, objective measure of student achievement nationwide.

This year's results are awful, representing a loss of more than 20 years of progress in Virginia. The NAEP scores are abysmal. Fourth grade reading dropped by 13 points. Fourth grade math dropped by 12 points – the largest declines in the nation.

For the first time in 40 years, Virginia 4th Grade students are now at or below the national average. Accreditation changes in 2017 gave schools credit not only for the proficiency of stu-

dents, but also for the 'growth' exhibited by students.

In other words, a school could still have a significant number of students perform at a level below proficiency, but still be accredited if those students showed significant movement in the right direction.

Parents are angry, and rightly so. The previous two administrations lowered standards to hide the failure they created in our education system.

COVID closures made the problem worse. But the declines began before schools were shut down.

The governor's plan to fix this disaster calls to not only raise the ceiling on our expectations, but to also raise the floor. Schools that expect more from students produce better results.



YOUR TURN  
TOMMY WRIGHT

What's worse, not only was this predictable, but also happened despite Republicans sounding the alarm in 2020-21.

We pushed to open schools as early as possible, only to be stymied by Democrats.

We tried mightily to get \$100 million set aside to help parents pay for tutoring, pandemic pods, curricula, technol-

ogy and other needs to keep students learning. Democrats blocked it.

Now that the damage is done, fixing it won't be easy. But it is possible. Governor Youngkin laid out his plan to do just that, including the following actions:

- Direct the Board of Education to raise Virginia's expectations for students from the lowest in the nation.
- Invest \$30 million in K-12 learning recovery grants to empower parents to get their children back on track.
- Establish a new partnership with the non-profits Khan Academy and Schoolhouse World, both schools started by Sal Kahn, to provide every high school student in the Commonwealth free, small-group math tutoring and homework support. Our partnership

will expand as we add middle school students soon.

- Direct the Board of Education to overhaul our broken school accreditation system, which currently masks the fact that too many students are being failed across the Commonwealth.
- Invest over \$70 million in the bipartisan Virginia Literacy Act to leverage the Science of Reading to transform reading instruction so that every child can read on grade level.
- Provide every grade 4-12 teacher and family direct access to individualized, comprehensive student success reports beginning in February 2023.

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## YOUR VIEWS

### Eggleston win would be historic

Dear Editor,

The election of Carl U. Eggleston will be a historic event for Farmville. This will be the first time that an African-American, who was denied an education in

our local schools and yet succeeded in college, will become mayor. I am sure his election will shine a positive light on local, state and national media. What is more important is that Mr. Carl

Eggleston has been a citizen of Farmville for 70 years and a business owner on Main Street 40 years. His experience will benefit all in our community. Carl Eggleston's foundation has given free

school supplies to our children and has provided toys to our children on Christmas Eve for more than 20 years. I believe he has served and is well qualified to become mayor and will be fair to all.

I urge you to vote for Carl Eggleston as mayor of Farmville on Nov. 8.

**Mattie P. Wiley**  
Former member, Farmville Town Council

### What will it take?

It started with a conversation earlier this month at Three Roads Brewing. What began as a welcome to Prince Edward County switched gears after the folks involved heard where I was from. I'm a Wilkes County boy, having grown up in the mountains of western North Carolina. And Wilkes has been in the headlines this fall for a major success, getting their NASCAR track reopened nearly 30 years after it closed its doors. That newly reopened track will now host the 2023 NASCAR All-Star Race, as well as a race for the truck series next year, bringing a significant injection into the local economy. And as we talked about NASCAR and the North Carolina mountains, one question kept popping up. What would it take for something like that to happen in Prince Edward County?

The question popped up again after a series of announcements this month. On Oct. 12, Hitachi Energy agreed to invest \$37 million and add 165 jobs to its facility in Halifax County. Eight additional projects popped up in Southwest Virginia one week later, adding up to more than 200 jobs and \$5 million invested. And then there's the city of Danville. Known as "Comeback City", within a few

months a \$450 million casino will be operational there, just one of several economic development projects to become reality over the last year. In each case, we got emails here at *The Herald* asking why not here? People asked what it would take for something like this to happen in Prince Edward County. To answer that, I have to share a story.

#### BUILDING A BRAND

When NASCAR shut down the North Wilkesboro Speedway in 1996, my hometown suffered. Hotels, restaurants, even nonprofits planned for the revenue the yearly races brought. Without that, businesses closed, tax revenue dropped and things like school repairs were put off. There were times growing up that Boomer-Ferguson Elementary, where I attended, wasn't much different from Prince Edward Elementary, leaky roof and all. Add that to several factories closing and there wasn't much left. Naturally, plenty of families picked up and moved on, looking for something better.

To actually move forward, it took something more than just politicians making promises. It took a majority of residents agreeing on a direction and then actively getting involved to make it happen. I can't underline this part enough. It



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BRIAN CARLTON

sounds simple, but it's not. For Wilkes, this took decades, to cut through the arguing and infighting, to get the different groups to agree not just on a path forward but what that path would cost.

In order to build and grow, communities need a shared vision. I'm not saying something generic like "we'll make it better". I mean a brand, something that when you say it, you automatically think of that area. Before you even think about Prince Edward County's future, what is its brand? How do you market it to people? Wilkes County is NASCAR country. Danville is the "Comeback City". When people think of Prince Edward, what do you want them to think about?

#### PUT IN THE WORK

But a brand alone isn't

enough. Only a handful of people will even look at a crumbling house for sale. You can talk up the house's history, explain what a great location it is and recite the brand, but still get no reaction. It's the same with towns and counties.

For Wilkes to move forward, county residents had to realize things like roads, high-speed internet and functional schools were critical. Repairs and upgrades just couldn't keep getting put off. After all, it's hard to sell NASCAR on all the benefits of coming back when roads are crumbling and other buildings are empty.

I've covered businesses ranging from small to worldwide operations. They're all the same in one category. If a city, town or county lacks the needed infrastructure, that's it. They cross it off the list. No amount of tax incentives or other promises will make up for a decaying sewer system, damaged roads and shaky at best internet. Wilkes had to put millions of dollars into needed repairs to fix all of that over the last decade, work that's still going on, to be honest. Just Google the Wilkesboro Taco Bell sinkhole. You'll see what I mean.

And Wilkes is a rural area, just like Prince Edward, so it's not like they had buckets of money to address all of these needs. That meant applying for grants, asking for private partners to help and raising

taxes to speed up the process. It also meant pushing ahead even after being told no more times than I can count.

And it meant being prepared to hurry up and wait.

#### WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers had it right. Waiting truly is the hardest part. After all, we want action immediately. Once a vote happens or a decision is reached, there seems to be this belief that you snap fingers and everything appears in place. In truth, it can take months, if not years, to see work completed.

That's the biggest thing. Change doesn't happen overnight. Even if you've done everything I mentioned above, it will take time to see new businesses move in. It'll definitely take time to change how people perceive a town or county. For Wilkes and Danville, both efforts took more than a decade. The same will be true here in Prince Edward. There is no shortcut, no quick fix.

If you want to move forward, you have to be prepared to look down the road and see what today's efforts will bring in 10 or 20 years. It can be frustrating at times, but the end result is worth the work.

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### Blind mice

Most everyone understands that the big media outlets choose what stories they consider most newsworthy enough to report. They often ignore stories such as the ones regarding Hunter Biden's laptop, both before the 2020 elections and after. Meantime, they ran full speed with stories that associated Donald Trump with Russian connections before the 2016 election and throughout much of his term in office. Consider the following.

Last week, Rolling Stone magazine, a liberal icon publication, ran a story that the New York Times, Washington Post, ABC, CBS, and NBC have completely missed or ignored. On April 27, James Meek, an Emmy-winning producer and a highly respected national-security-focused investigative journalist whose colleagues

and friends say was at the pinnacle of his career, seemingly dropped off the face of the planet after his apartment was reportedly raided by the feds in April.

#### FACTS

What we know, from the Rolling Stone story, was that an eyewitness saw a black SUV with deeply tinted glass block traffic on the street approaching Meek's apartment. Additionally, a green tactical vehicle, similar looking to a tank that the FBI sometimes uses because of the ease of getting people in and out of quickly, was present. There were also local police vehicles in the area. Since that time, no one has seen or heard from Meeks. According to the Rolling Stone story on Meek's seeming disappearance, his neighbor, John Antonelli, described the scene he



#### YOUR TURN

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witnessed outside of Meek's Arlington, Virginia apartment building in the early morning hours of April 27. According to the neighbor, the incident was over in about 10 minutes. A follow-up story in the New York Post discovered that the Justice Department had gotten a search warrant from a judge one day earlier. The FBI has not confirmed a raid on Meek. They did state that agents had conducted a court authorized law-enforcement activity on Meek's block on the day in question. They declined further comment citing 'an ongoing investigation'.

When contacted, ABC said he did not return to work after that date. They had no further comment other than that he was no longer an employee and he had been working on a book. The 52-year-old was finishing up a book about

President Joe Biden's botched U.S. troop and ally withdrawal from Afghanistan last year, Rolling Stone reported.

Last year, the Biden administration put in place a policy prohibiting federal investigators from seizing journalists' records without authorization from a deputy attorney general. To get Meek's notes and records, it would have had to have been approved by U.S. Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. Meek had not only vanished from the public, according to Rolling Stone, but he also left his presumably lucrative job at ABC News before the end of his contract, raising even more suspicion. His ABC colleagues told the outlet they have no earthly idea where he went.

"He fell off the face of the Earth," one of his colleagues said. "And people asked, but no one knew the answer." One would think that someone in management or those he worked with would be concerned enough to try to determine what happened and why he is missing.

#### THE ROLE OF AN INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Since before our nation was created, we have had news media that has prided them-

selves on their independence. That independence has given them the opportunity to explore the facts to determine if the government is doing what is expected of them.

The role of reporters and the news media is to ask questions and talk to sources to verify that the official story is accurate. The Meek case is a perfect example of what goes wrong when roles are not clear. Why has the Attorney General's office not clarified why a reporter's home was raided?

Why is no one trying to determine if Meek was tipped off and slipped out before the raid? If so, was he able to take his notes and manuscript? If not, does the FBI have him or his material?

Why did a deputy to the Attorney General approve a raid on a reporter? Why did a judge agree to a raid on a reporter's home and why has no one asked on what grounds?

Why has no reporter followed up on Meek's case? What else are we not being told or being misled?

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\*All individual columns and letters published on the opinion page are not the opinion of the newspaper. The only piece that is ever the opinion of the paper would be an editorial.



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## I YOUR VIEWS I

### Supervisors need to adopt two ordinances

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the excellent coverage that *The Farmville Herald* has been giving to the gold mining issue in Buckingham County. As reported on Friday, Sept. 30, the State Agency Committee (of the study on the impacts of gold mining) invited Joe Lerch from the VA Association of Counties (VACO) to speak on local governance at the last meeting on Monday, Sept. 26.

At the meeting, Chairman Miles asked: "Does a county, city or town have the independent authority of their own to ban gold mining in their locality?"

Mr. Lerch responded: "In a zoning ordinance, you can say that this is not allowed activity. Or you could

say it is allowed in (a certain) type of district, like an industrial district, with a special use permit. If you want to say we don't even want to consider it, that could be in your ordinance too."

He also said that there are very few instances where the state can preempt local authority in the case of mining and that he knew of no pre-emptions of local land use authority.

This sounds really good: the Board could pass an ordinance to ban gold mining based on land use and zoning.

Article 7, Section 15.2-2280 of the Virginia Code seems to confirm what Mr Lerch says:

"Any locality may, by ordinance, ... regulate, restrict, permit, prohibit, and determine ...The excavation

or mining of soil or other natural resources."

This sounds like a strong support in prohibiting - or in Mr. Lerch's words, "banning mining."

I respectfully ask the supervisors to consider a local ordinance to ban metallic mining based on Mr. Lerch's comments and the VA code cited above before the General Assembly meets in January. Adopting an ordinance like this would set a strong example and send a strong message to the General Assembly about the needs of our rural community.

I also ask them to consider adopting the ban and the rights-based ordinance that they were given in August. The intentions of both these ordinances complement each other.

I am happy to hear from the County Administrator that he has agreed to invite Mr. Lerch from VACO and Ben Price from CELDF (who helped craft the rights-based ordinance) to the next Board of Supervisors meeting on Nov. 15. Mr. Lerch will be able to present his analysis of a ban based on zoning and land use and confirm the VA Code above. Mr. Price will be able to explain the power, security and complementary nature of a rights-based ordinance to an ordinance based on zoning and land use. The Supervisors will have an opportunity to ask questions of both.

It should be an interesting meeting.

Mindy Zlotnick  
Buckingham County

### Divided and defeated, part II

Dear Editor,

I caught some serious flack for Part I of this series but that's okay, reality is difficult to face, especially when we created it. And to save the two-party zealots the cost of postage, the hate mail, which I truly, thoroughly enjoy, may be forwarded to tomnoehren@yahoo.com. To the main point though, tis the season for voting! And the only thing standing in the way of progress is in fact your vote!

I get it. I really get it. Most of you believe there's no point in voting independent because you believe there's no hope of victory. That's one of those self-imposed realities which only changes with your actions. But the biggest obstacle to a better world isn't the incorrectly assumed impractical nature of independent voting, it's your fear.

You're afraid of each other. You're afraid of the unknown. You're afraid of a world without the current system. Again, I get it. The party machines spend hundreds of billions cultivating that fear. And, because of the obvious idiocy and hypocrisy inherent in both parties, it's extraordinarily easy to surrender your would-be principles to the lesser of two evils fear. I was afraid too. And now I'm not.

Call me naïve but if everyone who votes went to the polls one time, just one time, and wrote in people they know personally to be the most dependable, honorable and ethical person in town, the system of greed and hypocrisy would be irreversibly crippled and by the following election cycle the transformation would be complete. There would be no more D's

or R's, only Americans without party loyalties standing in the way of legitimate solutions to the tremendous problems we face.

Every survey or poll known to mankind shows most Americans agree on most of the issues. The only thing which divides us is the two-party system. Replacing that system with a government of 435 independent representatives, 50 independent senators and an independent president; all elected without spending hundreds of millions of campaign dollars and chosen on merits, not on party politics and propaganda, would change the world forever. Yes, there would be thousands of candidates. But they would be teachers, doctors, steel workers and loggers, not these corporate-owned, elitist, caricature politicians you love so much.

Do you think for one moment that such an independent government would allow corporate purchasing of elections? Do you think the Supreme Court would be allowed to own stocks in the companies for or against which they're supposed to rule impartially? Such a government would become truly beholden to the people. But the people must realize that reality before it can exist. The people must be educated enough and honorable enough to know how to even chose such a government. It all starts with you and your vote. Stop existing as a sheep, which only perpetuates the problem and be the solution. Destroy the system and create a better world one vote and one election at a time.

Tom Noehren  
Farmville

### Who's scheduling these state meetings?

As soon as the date and time were announced, the emails started coming in. Buckingham County residents were disappointed. The next meeting of the state's gold mining workgroup will be on Thursday, Nov. 3 at 9 a.m.

This group, set up by the General Assembly, is currently working on a report to determine if gold mining should be allowed in the Commonwealth and if so, under what conditions. In Buckingham, that's a personal cause for some of the residents, seeing as a Canadian company is currently prospecting near their homes. Residents wanted to hear the discussions in person. They wanted to see everything going on. They wanted to be involved. But there is just one problem. The meetings happen while they're at work.

Every meeting of the state gold mining workgroup has been the same. They run from 9 a.m. to noon on a weekday. Sometimes it's a Monday. One I covered in person was on a Friday. Now this next one will be on a Thursday morning. Not even one of the meetings has been on a weeknight or on the weekend. For everyone who reached out to talk with me, that's a problem, because they're at a job during that period. And unless you're willing

to give up a day of vacation time, it's hard to explain to a boss that you're coming in late because you had to go talk at a hearing.

Why are they always at the same time? That question has been asked at every meeting I've covered so far, by one of the few residents who can show up. And the answer each time, from the Virginia Department of Energy (VDOE) staff, is the same. This is the best time for members of the workgroup to attend. However, seeing as most of the workgroup members only attend via Zoom, some from a conference room at their actual jobs, I have to question how true that is. No other time would be a better fit?

There's also another issue. Nobody seemed to ask local residents when the best time for them would be.

#### THEY DON'T MAKE IT EASY

It's a problem I've encountered quite a bit over the years. We're always asking people to get involved with government. You see the "be an informed voter" signs all over at this time of year. Everyone from town council members to state officials say they want input from the public, from the people who these decisions will affect. But how often do they actually mean that?



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On the local level, they put action behind those words. The Farmville Town Council, for example, holds public hearings during their 7 p.m. meetings, giving people plenty of time to get off work and drop by council chambers. The same is true in Buckingham, Cumberland and Prince Edward counties, where supervisors also hold their discussions about gold mining at night.

But when it comes down to state meetings, it's a different story. From presentations to a "time to ask questions", two things are usually true. First, those meetings will be during the work week. Be it an Assembly hearing, workgroup meeting or time for testimony. Second, they'll either be in the morning hours or early afternoon.

This time, it was a series of gold mining meetings. In 2014,

I saw the same thing happen over a discussion on eminent domain in Augusta County. In 2017, residents experienced the same issue when state officials wanted input over a proposed interstate highway to run alongside the city of Martinsville. Each time, I walked into mainly empty rooms, with officials saying "I guess nobody cares about this stuff" as they packed up unused handouts and folded up maps. But that's not the case at all. People actively care about these things. Unless you're retired, however, the state doesn't make it easy to physically be there. That needs to change.

#### IT'S NOT ABOUT A GUARANTEE

Now, to be clear, I'm not promising you'd be speaking to a packed house if the time changes. The gold mining meeting could shift to 5 p.m. on a Saturday and receive the same level of attendance. You can't guarantee anyone will show up. Even for those

public hearings I mentioned in Farmville and Buckingham, where everything from tax rates to school budgets were up for discussion, there were plenty of empty seats.

And yes, there are multiple ways outside of the meeting to make your voice heard in these cases. Residents can see the documents online, watch videos from the meetings and post comments. But for many residents, that's not enough.

Some people need to see things firsthand in order to understand or trust the process. They need to be able to ask questions face to face and get answers the same way, rather than in an email. And those people deserve to have that opportunity, without having to choose between coming to a hearing or showing up to work.

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\*All individual columns and letters published on the opinion page are not the opinion of the newspaper. The only piece that is ever the opinion of the paper would be an editorial.



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Everything that runs on the opinion page is subject to approval by either the editor and/or the publisher before publication. No offensive language or slanderous content. Letters to the editor are 500 words or less, limited to twice a month, can be signed by no more than three people and we must have consent from all three. Columns can only be signed by one person, must include a headshot and a way for readers to contact you. All online and emailed submissions must include a phone number for verification.