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FUN-FILLED FOURTH



Celebrating country & community in Dale City



The Dale City Moose Lodge riders were among the thousands of participants and spectators during the Dale City Independence Day Parade on Monday. Bottom right: Ernestine Jenkins, a longtime community supporter and parade-goer, waves to the crowd. Bottom left: Dale City Sports Club cheerleaders make their way down Dale Boulevard.

PAUL LARA | INSIDENOVA

STORY AND MORE PHOTOS, PAGE 19

Manassas Park makeover taking shape

City to hold celebration for new facility next week

» BY JARED FORETEK
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Manassas Park's city government will have fresh digs starting next week with the opening of a new city hall building that will ultimately feature a city library, a coffee shop and restaurant space.

Built through a public-private partnership, the \$46 million city hall is the first component of a massive plan – known as Phase Three – to remake the city's downtown area and draw new tax revenue to a debt-strapped city government.



MAYOR
JEANETTE
RISHELL

And city officials hope the effort that's delivering the new facility can help the municipality overcome decisions made inside the previous building.

On July 16, the city will hold a ribbon-cutting for its offices, after which the government will begin moving into its new home. The city hall plaza, complete with a splash pad for kids, should also be fully open by the end of the week, officials said. The first-floor library should be open by mid-August, and with it a second location for the Old Town Manassas staple Jirani's Coffeehouse as well as La Finca

MANASSAS PARK » PAGE 14

INSIDE

New initiatives, new staff for commonwealth's attorney

» PAGE 3

Battlefield's Gallant gears up for his next stop: State College

» SPORTS, PAGE 16

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ROY ALTHER

Roy Alther, 94, of Sperryville, Va., went to be with his Lord and Savior on July 3, 2022. He was born December 12, 1927 in Rappahannock County and was the son of the late George and Lillian Clatterbuck Alther. He is also preceded in death by one son, Steve Alther; three brothers, Levi Alther, George William Alther and Johnny Alther; and two sisters, Alice Ralls and Irene Frazier.

On July 24, 1948, he married Josephine Atkins Alther, his devoted and loving wife.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by one sister, Nellie Alther of Sperryville, Va.; one son, Roy A. Alther (Janet) of Sperryville, Va.; one daughter, Ann Pullen (Duane) of Boston, Va.; one daughter-in-law, Judy Alther of Washington, Va.; six grandchildren, Roy A. Alther, Jr. (Karen) of Virginia Beach, Va., Melissa Geer (Matthew) of Lignum, Va., Stacey Campbell (Nick) of Jeffersonson, Va., Joshua Alther (Amanda) of Washington, Va., Joy Alther of Culpeper, Va. and Amanda Pullen of Boston, Va.; six great-grandchildren, Daniel Alther, Emily Alther, Jacob Geer, Caleb Alther, Nathan Alther and Kaylee Campbell; numerous loved nieces and nephews, extended family and friends. Also surviving, a very special neighbor and best friend for many years, Lillie Corbin.

Mr. Alther retired from Old Dominion Manufacturing Company. Known as Pop-Pop to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, he dedicated his life to providing for his family through his job and in tending to his home and garden in Sperryville, Virginia. His wife, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and many other family members and friends meant the world to him and they were the lights of his life. He could be known as a do it yourself type of guy; if a project had to be completed, he would try his best to do it himself and if a certain tool was needed for the job that he did not have, he never hesitated to make the tool he needed to complete the job. Roy could often be found outside the home in the garden, on the porch, or in the yard; here he always wore a smile on his face and had a song in his heart, he could constantly be heard singing or whistling. He had a bright sense of humor, a beautiful laugh, and a loving heart.

Roy had a strong Christian faith and was a member of Thornton's Gap Regular Baptist Church in Sperryville for over sixty years. His many years in the church were spent serving the Lord as a trustee and assisting in the cleaning and upkeep of the church. He, along with his wife Josie, were honored and recognized in 2019 for fifty-four years of dedication and stewardship in the church.

A funeral service will be held on Saturday July 9, 2022 at 11:00 a.m. at Found and Sons Funeral Chapel, 850 Sperryville Pike,

Culpeper, Va. with Pastor John Boyd officiating. The family will receive friends one hour prior to the service. Interment will follow at the Sperryville Cemetery. Pallbearers will be Roy Alther, Jr., Nick Campbell, Joshua Alther, Matthew Geer, Daniel Alther and Jacob Geer.

The family invites those unable to attend to watch via livestream at <https://view.oneromstreaming.com/authorise.php?k=1657063378194205>

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Mill Creek Bible Church, c/o Darlene Sours, 243 Sours Drive, Luray, VA. 22835.

An online guestbook and tribute wall are available at www.foundandsons.com.

Found and Sons Funeral Chapel of Culpeper is serving the family.



SARAH ANN EVANS LUEKING

Sarah Ann Evans Lueking died peacefully in her sleep on Friday, June 24, 2022. She is now with her Savior in heaven, whom she loved and trusted since becoming a Christian at age 50.

Born in Tennessee, she moved to Virginia as a child. Sarah was the second of four children. Later, she met and married Francis Lueking, eventually landing in Northern Virginia, where they had four children in seven years. Most important in her life were her faith in Christ and her family.

Sarah's strong character was admired by all who knew her, and was exemplified by her generosity, thoughtfulness, kindness, dignity, and forgiving nature. Her words and advice were treasured by all.

Sarah is survived by three of her four children, 10 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren, and countless other family and friends.

Her Celebration of Life Service will be: Saturday, July 9, 11:00 a.m. Crossway Fellowship 8601 Plantation Lane Manassas, VA.

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Mexican restaurant.

Once the city government is out of its current building, City Manager Laszlo Palko said, that building will be demolished to make way for more restaurant space, a Cinema Café theater complex and a second public plaza that – together with the new plaza – can be used for outdoor events. Palko said officials hope the theater component and a new parking garage will be open by spring 2024.

Before that happens, the first wave of 300 new residential units built by Stanley Martin are expected to be complete and generating new tax revenue.

The full plan was approved by the City Council in 2020. For city officials, the idea is this: Developers Norton Scott and Stanley Martin will build the city hall structure, entertainment complex and homes. Manassas Park will then enter into a 30-year lease-to-buy agreement with Norton Scott to essentially rent the city hall complex. Lease payments begin at \$535,000 in fiscal 2024 and increase to \$1.6 million by fiscal 2026, near where they'll stay for the duration.

At the same time, the plan moves what was a capital liability – the dilapidated city hall building – off the books to make way for something residents will actually enjoy.

"It's an important step from a capital standpoint, where city hall itself was a long-term capital liability on our taxpayers that we're essentially addressing through this development deal so they're not burdened with that," Palko said. "So we're resolving a major capital liability through this development, and we'll have a nice plaza for our residents to enjoy with a splash pad for the kids to play in the fountains during the summer time."

Officials say the sale of city-owned land to the developers will cover early lease payments until the residential component is fully built out and generating more than enough new revenue to pay for the city hall lease. So far, Palko says, what new homes have been sold have gone for well more than the city projected, meaning the new revenues should be higher than what he'd initially hoped for.

Still, for some it may sound like yet another grand Manassas Park plan that won't pay off. Years of financial mismanagement and a slew of new public facilities built or refurbished ahead of the 2008 financial collapse left the small city's government with debt it couldn't soon repay.

The city's annual debt service – which reached a peak of almost \$10.75 million, or 24% of its non-school-related budget in fiscal 2019 – has tied the small government's hands financially. As a result, salaries for teachers and other government workers have stayed at the bottom of all Northern Virginia jurisdictions despite the highest real estate tax rates in the commonwealth.

Previous iterations of downtown redevelopment plans have also failed to deliver on their promises, most notably Park 170 that opened in 2009. While new homes mostly filled up and remained full, store-



A rendering of the new city hall and plaza in Manassas Park.

fronts intended to enliven the downtown area and draw shoppers almost all sat empty well before the COVID-19 pandemic.

City officials have said the plan currently underway learns from previous mistakes, building more housing – which the market has shown a demand for – rather than commercial space, activating the downtown area with new entertainment options as opposed to the shopping-oriented developments of the past, and building more parking next to the Virginia Railway Express station. And importantly, the city issues no additional debt as part of the plan, though it does commit to yearly payments of over \$1 million for 30 years.

"The success of this project is based on a high standard of careful decision-making and the analysis of real data, and on what will bring maximum benefit to the city and all its residents," Mayor Jeanette Rishell told InsideNoVa in a statement. "This project corrects past mistakes and challenges such as: improving the parking situation, providing an anchor business for the downtown to draw in more businesses, and moving the VRE parking garage to the original recommended location."

And the city is finally out of the worst of its debt woes. A refinancing years ago has dropped debt payments to \$9.4 million last fiscal year and just over \$8 million on a \$122.5 million total budget (including school spending) this fiscal year, which just began. Those debt savings allowed Rishell and the City Council to drop the real estate tax rate this year from \$1.53 per \$100 of assessed value to \$1.45. Though that rate is still the highest in the state, it's getting closer to some peer localities.

Plans are also in the works for the fourth phase of the city center development, which will add two residential high-rises and more parking to the vacant storefronts at Park 170, the 2009 commercial development that fizzled out.

For now, though, the long-embattled city government hopes to turn a new leaf inside its new building.

"We inherited a lot of issues and then we got hit by COVID, and inflation, so there's a lot of things that have been happening, but we continue to move forward with these successes. So next Saturday's just kind of a celebration," Palko told InsideNoVa. "We're not fully celebrating, and I'm not going to be happy until everything's complete and fully occupied and the economy's going. But it's an important step."



The Fall Jubilee in Manassas is one of the annual events organized by Historic Manassas. Pictured is this year's jubilee, held Oct. 8. DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

New director sought for Historic Manassas

Tourism agency in transition mode

» BY JARED FORETEK
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Historic Manassas Inc. is looking for a new executive director and some new direction.

The organization – a Main Street America organization focused on drawing economic development and tourism to the city's historic downtown – has been in a transitional phase for more than three months since its previous director, Debbie Haight, resigned. For the past three months it's been run on an interim basis by a familiar face in the Old Town area: former Manassas Community Development Director Liz Via-Gossman.

But the organization is now ready to start its search for a new leader, and some popular annual events run by Historic Manassas could be on the chopping block. Last week, the organization posted a job posting for a new executive director “who combines collaborative, strategic, and entrepreneurial skills with a sense of humor and creativity.”

According to the posting, the next director will work closely with the city government in Manassas “to recruit and assist new businesses,” “help businesses to expand” and “develop and implement a strong business retention program.”

Via-Gossman told InsideNoVa that she's otherwise happily retired – she retired from the city role in 2021 after more than 17 years – and doesn't want the job long-term. But she said the next director will have a real opportunity to make their mark on the organization and won't be boxed in by the way things have run, which has ultimately left it with just a few full-time staffers.

She said that it's an “exciting time” for the organization and that Historic Manassas' board of directors is “extremely energized ... to roll up their sleeves and just really see where they can take the organization over the next year.”

“I've been working with the board of directors to assess the state of the organization,” Via-Gossman said. “I think, com-

ing out of COVID, every organization is taking a deep look at itself and where it goes from here. In particular, I think [Historic Manassas] would be well served to get back to basics, to really focus on the core mission of the organization, which is historic preservation-based economic development. So really focus on helping the businesses, the restaurants, the services that are in downtown.”

The new focus may, however, mean a pivot away from a pair of annual downtown festivals.

According to Via-Gossman, the organization is also soliciting input on that new direction informally right now, but will likely take up a more formal public input process once a new director is in place.

Funded through private sponsors and the city's budget, Historic Manassas is currently responsible for the Harris Pavilion farmer's market, the city's visitors center, Manassas Fall Jubilee, the Manassas Railway Festival and the city's Fourth of July celebration. Those three festivals, Via-Gossman said, will likely remain on the docket.

But the organization's board of directors is “taking a hard look at” other events like the city's Bands, Brews & Barbecue festival and the Wine & Jazz fest.

“It's kind of interesting. Those festivals started 10, 15, 20 years ago before you had 2 Silos [Brewing Company], before you had Bull Run Winery, and the breweries and the wineries needed a location, they needed festivals. And they don't need that as much now,” Via-Gossman said. “So we're really rethinking those two.”

Mark Olsen, the chair of the Historic Manassas Board of Directors, said in a statement the body is pleased to be starting the search process.

“Coming out of Covid, the work that [Historic Manassas] does to promote the downtown and support our small businesses is more important than ever,” he said. “We are seeking a highly energetic and creative individual with a passion for main street. As one of the most established of Virginia's Main Street organizations, we expect this position to attract a great deal of interest.”

Two-way tolling on I-95 picks up steam

But not all legislators are on board with idea

» BY JARED FORETEK
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Momentum is picking up in certain corners for expanding the tolled express lanes on Interstate 95 to allow for all-day, bidirectional access. But some in Richmond and around the region are saying “not so fast” and calling the idea undercooked or even wrong-headed at present.

The most recent burst of energy behind the long-banded idea started when Jeff McKay and Ann Wheeler, chairs of the Fairfax and Prince William boards of supervisors, respectively, threw their support behind the idea of making the current express lanes bidirectional around-the-clock.

“We’re pressing hard to reconsider the express lanes on 95 and build them properly so that they’re not reversible,” McKay told NBC4’s Adam Tuss during a Dulles Area Transportation Association roundtable. “We’re looking at some design elements where that might be able to fit in, but frankly, they should’ve never been built that way in the first place. They should’ve been built like the Beltway and [Interstate] 66, and to me the first thing that we should be doing is pressing to get those express lanes going in both directions.”

Days later, the Prince William Board of County Supervisors adopted a new addition to the new county Comprehensive Plan endorsing the “examination” of two-way express lanes.

Wheeler was joined by Occoquan’s Kenny Boddye, Woodbridge’s Margaret Franklin, Neabsco’s Victor Angry and Potomac’s Andrea Bailey – all of whose districts the interstate runs through – in voicing support for the idea. Ultimately, the decision to make changes on 95 wouldn’t be up to the county, but the Commonwealth Transportation Board, and VDOT would seek support from the county if the decision to expand the express lanes ever came to fruition.

“Those lanes going in one direction is the most bizarre thing I have ever seen, and it’s the most frustrating on the weekends if you’re trying to either get into D.C. or come home, and if the lanes are going in the opposite way of where you’re going, it’s almost a nightmare,” Franklin said. “Understood that we don’t manage the interstate of course, but I don’t see why in the future why there can’t be advocacy from this board supporting that.”

VDOT, meanwhile, has opened a study on the feasibility of implementing bidirectional tolling in the express lanes from Franconia/Springfield Parkway to Opitz Boulevard “to better meet travel demands and provide new choices for more travelers,” the agency said in a statement. The current reversible lanes span about 30 miles from 395 to Route 610 in Stafford County and will soon extend another 10 miles into Fredericksburg.

PUSHBACK IN RICHMOND

But some in the General Assembly are already pushing back on the idea



Traffic backs up along I-95 in this InsideNoVa file photo.

of making the lanes permanently bidirectional. Speaking at the roundtable, McKay had suggested that much of the two-way toll lanes could be implemented within the existing right-of-way, but Sen. Jeremy McPike, D-29th, told InsideNoVa he doubts it would be possible to convert the current lanes without taking space from the free general purpose lanes or expanding the entire footprint of the interstate, a very expensive proposition.

“I don’t know how you can add additional lanes without then stealing from the main lines, which then exacerbates our existing commuters on the main lines. And I don’t think anyone’s going to put up with that,” McPike said.

The current contract between Virginia and TransUrban, which operates the toll lanes, includes a “non-compete” stating that the commonwealth would have to pay the Australia-based company damages if the state decides to expand 95’s general lanes or U.S. 1, or if VDOT makes any “Occoquan Bridge improvements” and doesn’t hire TransUrban to do so. That provision lasts until 2085.

“There’s still that compensation event that hangs over our head. You can’t do anything or else you’ve got to pay,” said McPike, whose district encompasses stretches of I-95. “It’s a horrible deal, and there wasn’t a whole lot of land expansion in the original deal to get that”

State Sen. Scott Surovell, D-36th, whose current district includes stretches of the highway all the way from the Fairfax County Parkway to Aquia Creek, panned the idea of converting the toll lanes to accommodate traffic both ways.

Long a proponent of bringing Metro-rail into Prince William, Surovell said he wasn’t buying the idea that the conversion could be done within the current right-of-way. If not, he said, the project would cost billions and net the highway just a couple of additional lanes that wouldn’t be

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“I don’t know how you can add additional lanes without then stealing from the main lines, which then exacerbates our existing commuters on the main lines. And I don’t think anyone’s going to put up with that.”

— JEREMY MCPIKE, STATE SENATOR

enough to keep up with the ever-increasing traffic demands on the road.

Instead, he told InsideNoVa, the county leaders who are now talking up bidirectional tolling should be working to find mass transit solutions to the bottlenecks on I-95. One or two more additional lanes, he said, won’t make a dent in the increasing traffic as the region continues to grow.

“I hit the same backups every day today that I hit 20 years ago. Widening our roads is insanely expensive and just seems to attract more cars,” Surovell told InsideNoVa.

SENATOR: EXTEND METRO TO PRINCE WILLIAM

Surovell said the most impactful thing county and state leaders could do to alleviate the congestion on I-95 is to figure out how to get Metro to Potomac Mills, something that was studied by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation in 2021.

That study found that extending the Yellow Line to Triangle would generate over 20,000 new daily transit trips in the area by 2045, with stations at Potomac Mills and North Woodbridge drawing between 1,500 and 2,000 daily boardings. It also estimated that any such expansion would cost somewhere between \$13.8 billion and \$27.5 billion, depending on how far into Prince William it went.

The new Comprehensive Plan in Prince William does make changes aimed at increasing density along U.S. 1 in anticipation of future transit options, be that Metro or a bus rapid transit line.

But Surovell said Fairfax needs to be doing more to move the ball forward.

“The study showed that extending the Yellow line ... to Potomac Mills has the best ridership,” Surovell said. “The state has now done two studies on this, and it’s time for local governments to step up and act on it.”

Metro leadership has said that any further system expansions into Virginia or Maryland would first require major improvements within D.C. aimed at expanding the system’s core capacity, which new Metro General Manager Randy Clarke pushed for in a Blue Line loop proposal. Clarke said WMATA and the region needs to work now to attract new infrastructure money from the Federal Transit Administration for the project.

“Without federal money, we probably have no chance of ever doing this,” he said during a Dec. 8 Metro board meeting. “If we’re going to do this, we have the biggest generational amount of money ever at the FTA.”