



As part of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, families with children age birth to five can have free books sent to their homes each month.

Library offers free book program

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

With a vision to create a lifelong love of reading, prepare children for school and inspire them to dream, the Ripberger Library in Kenbridge has partnered with The Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

This new program will offer free books to children from birth until they reach their 5th birthday no matter their family's income.

"It is hoped that this will encourage reading by the family members to the children and the children themselves as they grow up," said Library Director J.B. Crenshaw. "Hopefully, this will instill a sense of the importance of reading and a love for reading in those involved."

See PROGRAM, Page 2

County takes part in economic study

By Brian Carlton
The K-V Dispatch

They all said no. Over the last two years, Buckingham, Cumberland and Prince Edward counties joined a growing list pulling out of Virginia's Growth Alliance (VGA), arguing the cost to be in the economic development group was not worth the return on investment. Now they, along with several other counties and Longwood University, want to form a new regional economic development organization, one focusing just on this part of Central Virginia. But first, they need to see if such a project is feasible. That's where the Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC) comes in.

The CRC is a planning organization, working with Amelia, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Lunenburg, Nottoway and Prince Edward counties. They do everything from helping a county write a grant to providing research on a local proposal, to see if it's viable. That's what's happening here. When five of the CRC's seven counties, excluding Charlotte and Lunenburg, left VGA in 2021, they asked for help. The group of five wanted to see what it would take to create an economic development operation of their own. Otherwise, it would be harder to work on projects with the state.

"The state really likes to work with regional organizations," said Prince Edward County Administrator Doug Stanley. "They like having just one call to make with a prospect. Also, it just really makes sense to coordinate the marketing of your region together. I look at a regional

See STUDY, Page 2



While it may still look like Mildred's Meal, the interior has been revamped for the Prince of Peace Church.

Church works to keep memory of building alive

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

A building with a long history of serving up warm meals is now serving up the Lord on Sunday mornings.

Earlier this year, Mildred's Meals in Kenbridge closed its doors for a final time leaving behind a legacy spanning back to the 1960s when Mildred Carter bought the restaurant and changed the name to Mildred's Meals.

Over the years, the restaurant became widely known as a place for good home cooking and a place to meet with friends.

Today, friends are still meeting in the building but joining together to worship since the building was purchased by the Prince of Peace



Pastor Ancelmo Ramirez stands in what is now the sanctuary of Prince of Peace Church with his children Christian, Meylin and Ricky.

See CHURCH, Page 3



Cheerleading Squad win competition

Central Lunenburg Charger Cheerleading Squad won the Class 1A West Regional Cheer Competition on Saturday, Oct. 22. They are advancing to the State Class 2 Tournament that will be held on Nov. 5. The Auburn Eagles finished as Runners-Up.

Chargers head towards showdown
Page 5

Advertising and news deadline:
Friday at noon



THE KENBRIDGE VICTORIA DISPATCH
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2022
Devoted To The Interests Of Lunenburg County

Third solar facility looks for green light

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

A third solar development company is looking at Lunenburg as a home for its next project.

A project that could net the county over \$5 million.

Palladium Energy, LLC, a Florida-based renewable energy developer and investment company, has submitted a Conditional Use Permit application to the County for a 130 MW solar facility on the site of the former Mildred's Meals restaurant in Kenbridge.

The project is located on approximately 67½ acres between Foxfield Rd. and Coaches Creek Rd. in the Meherrin River District of the county.

Of these 67½ acres, approximately 207 acres will be inside the fence line.

According to Palladium officials, the company has partnered with Renewable Energy Services, LLC, to develop the project.

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THE KENBRIDGE VICTORIA DISPATCH

THE GARDEN MUSE

The Chrysanthemum

The Chrysanthemum, a flowering herb, was first cultivated in China. It was used as a culinary herb for medicinal purposes. The petals and young shoots were often added to salads. The flowers and leaves were brewed into tea and wine was made from fermented petals.

The plant is listed as edible; however, I caution that it does belong to the daisy family. Also, most chrysanthemums today are cultivated by commercial growers for decorative purposes and may have been chemically treated. That being said, I would not ever consume any part of a plant that I did not grow or know the plant's provenance 100% and neither should you.

As a Chinese herb it is believed to harbor the power of life and is often offered to the elderly as a symbol of long life. It is also the symbol of Friendship, Happiness, & Well being in China where the colors gold and yellow are considered especially lucky. Here in the U.S., it symbolizes the arrival of Fall. It is the official flower of Mother's Day in Australia due to its nick-



Dawn Conrad

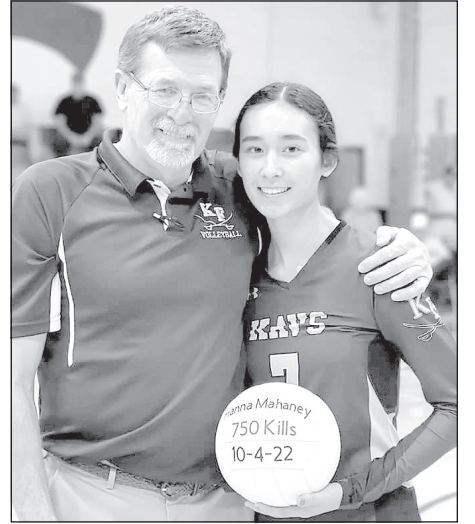
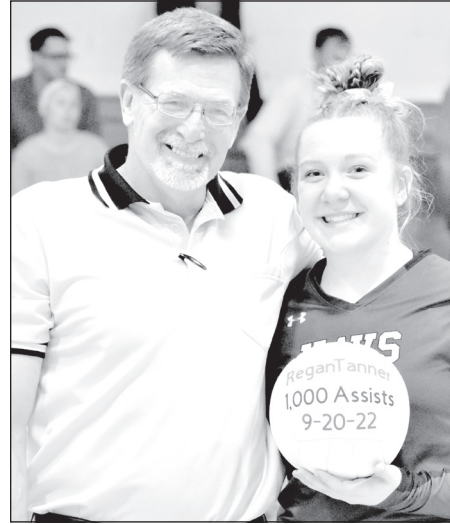
name 'Mum.' In many European cultures it is widely associated with death because of its widespread use in graveside floral decoration. In Spain, France, Poland, and Hungary it is solely used as a funeral flower.

Chrysanthemums grow best in a sunny location that provides some protection from afternoon sun. This plant prefers well drained soil that has been amended with compost or other rich organic matter. Most varieties will bloom for four to eight weeks with proper care and attention.

Mums can be overwintered in pots indoors, but it is a process and requires space in an unheated building. There are

many articles on this process online. I much prefer planting them in the ground out of doors and hoping they survive in the location I choose. Instruction on how to plant potted mums outdoors can also be found online. I have had success doing so and believe a high survival rate depends more on the variety of the plant than gardening skill.

Dawn Conrad is a Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener, Herbal enthusiast, Writer and Fiber Artist. She can be contacted at dawn@mygardenmuse.com.



Kenston volleyball players reach milestones

Two Kenston Forest volleyball players reached personal milestones recently. As of Tuesday, Oct. 4, Kenston senior Hanna Mahaney had surpassed 750 kills. Hanna, the daughter of John B. and Patricia Gulmatico Mahaney of Kenbridge, was recognized by Kenston Athletic Director Joe Maione for her achievements. Kenston Forest sophomore Regan Tanner was also recognized for her efforts on the court, as she surpassed 1,000 assists as of Tuesday, Sept. 20. Tanner, the daughter of Steve and Michelle Tanner of South Hill, was also recognized by Maione in a prematch tribute.

Watch out for jumping worms

While many gardeners welcome worms in their soil, there's one wriggling fiend that is unwanted.

The Virginia Cooperative Extension is asking Virginia residents to keep an eye out for the invasive jumping worm. Recently spotted in Chesterfield County, the worms are becoming widespread across the state. Since 2019, they've been seen in Albemarle, Bedford,

Chesterfield, Frederick, Goochland, Loudoun, Louisa, Montgomery, Northumberland, Prince William and Wise counties, as well as in the cities of Fairfax, Lynchburg and Virginia Beach, according to the Virginia Tech Department of Entomology.

Also known as Alabama jumpers, crazy worms, Jersey wrigglers and snake worms, they're recognized by their erratic jumping

and thrashing behavior when handled or disturbed.

Ranging from red to brownish purple in color, they're identifiable by a smooth, milky-colored band of tissue that encircles the worm's body. Measuring 3 to 6 inches long, they sometimes have a glossy, iridescent sheen but are not slimy to the touch.

While many worms are thought to be beneficial to the soil, the jumping worm is an exception. They feed on leaf litter and mulch at the soil's surface, removing an important organic layer and changing the soil structure underneath — leaving it bare, with a uniformly dry,

granular appearance resembling coffee grounds.

This leaf litter consumption also removes beneficial nutrients that plants need and changes the moisture level of the underlying soil — increasing the potential for erosion. Additionally, animals that live and feed on the leaf litter and topsoil may be affected by habitat loss.

Extension cautions people to be aware when sharing plants that may contain jumping worms, and avoid introducing organic mulch or soil from outside sources unless it's been heat-treated. Thoroughly clean items with soil on them, such as gardening tools and shoes, before going into another yard.

CHURCH: 'We can do so much more here in this building

FROM PAGE ONE

Church.

On July 16, the Prince of Peace Church held its first service in its new home.

According to Pastor Ancelmo Ramirez it took two years of planning and saving to purchase the building.

Before that, services were held adjacent to Milreads in a space the church rented for seven years.

"We can do so much more here in this building now that we own a place," Pastor Ramirez said.

Pastor Ramirez and his wife wanted to do something special to keep the memory of Milread and the building alive, so when their fourth child was born a month ago, they named her Mildred.

"We liked the name, and we didn't want people to forget about Milread," Ramirez said.

The history of Milread Meals is a long one.

"A picture of Mildred hung in the restaurant for

as long as I can remember," said Lunenburg Board of Supervisors member Mike Hankins. If you needed to talk with someone in the community, you would know if they would be at Mildred's for breakfast, lunch, or dinner."

Hankins said it became the hot place to carry out business deals and talk about things happening in the county and even the country,

"Topics included everything from what the Board of supervisors should be doing in Lunenburg to what the President should do," Hankins said. "Farming, local business, the weather, and hunting and fishing were all covered at the back table at Mildred's."

Hankins recalled a story of how Mildred's became a go place for anyone running for office starting back around 2007.

"At the time, Tom Parillo was the Congressman in the 5th District and had met with him at his office in Washington,"

Hankins recalls. "The purpose of the meeting was to talk about health-care. The only thing we agreed on 100% was that Mildred's had the best Brown Sugar Pie we both had ever tasted. When Robert Hurt ran against him for Congress, I met with Robert at Mildred's. He also agreed that the Brown Sugar Pie was the best he had ever had. He purchased a whole pie to take home with him. I told Robert Hurt that Tom Parillo and I had talked and could only agree on the Brown Sugar Pie. Later at a Congressional Debate, Robert Hurt stated that he agreed with Parillo on the Brown Sugar Pie and that was the only thing. After the debate, Mildred's came to go to a place in Lunenburg County for everyone running for office."

Hankins said some of the candidates who stopped at Mildred's include Sen. Mark Obenshain, Del. Rob Bell, former Governor George Allen, and State Attorney General. Ken Cuccinelli,

Pete Snyder, Ed Gillespie, Sen. Bill Stanley, Congressman Tom Garrett, Sen Bryce Reeves, Chuck Smith, Sen Frank Wagner, and Sen Amanda Chase, Congressman Denver Riggleman, and Congressman Bob Good, just to name a few. Sen. Frank Ruff, Del Tommy Wright and Del Otto Wachsmann were regulars at Mildred's.

Now working to make a history of their own in the former restaurant building, Pastor Ramirez and the congregation have removed all remains of what made up the restaurant and replaced it with pews and a pulpit.

One thing the church is looking to add is a full kitchen so that it can better serve the community and its members during church events.

"Right now, we are saving for that and taking donations to make that a reality. Ramirez said.

Donations to the church kitchen fund can be made by calling Pastor Ramirez at (757) 755-7552.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

The Town of Kenbridge will be flushing fire hydrants within the Kenbridge service area **beginning the week of October 31, 2022.** It is necessary to clean the line of any sedimentation and to assure all lines and fire hydrants are operating properly. After the hydrants in the area have been flushed and water turned back on, customers may notice some cloudiness in the water. Allow the water in each faucet to run a few minutes and the cloudiness should disappear. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation. If you have any questions, contact Kenbridge Town Office at 676-2452.

Tony Matthews, Town Manager



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Devoted To The Interests Of Lunenburg County

School break-in prompts search



By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

The school administration wants parents and the community to know that students at Kenbridge Elementary School are safe following a break-in to the building over the

weekend.

On Tuesday, Sept. 6, students were held on school buses while the building was searched, according to Lunenburg County Public School Superintendent Charles Berkley Jr.

“Upon arrival at school this morning,

the school administration realized that the school had been compromised.” Berkley said, “Administration has done a thorough search of the building, and currently, they are making sure that the premises are secure.”

Berkley said stu-

dents would be admitted to the building as soon as the administration has cleared them to do so.

School administration did not say when the break-in may have occurred or if any damage was done or items taken.

Boosters targeting two COVID strains

On Aug. 31, the FDA authorized the use of a bivalent mRNA vaccine for booster doses for those 12 years and older.

According to Piedmont Health District Director Dr. Maria Almond, these updated vaccines now are targeting the original Covid vaccine strain and the most recent omicron variants BA.4/BA.5 that are currently in high circulation.

In addition, on Sept. 1 the CDC recommended the updated bivalent vaccines as a booster: Pfizer-BioNTech for people ages 12 years and older and from Moderna for people ages 18 years and older.

“These updated boosters are authorized for use 2 months after completion of any primary vaccine series or 2 months after receipt of any prior booster.” Dr. Almond said.

HOW DO THE NEW VACCINES WORK

According to a press release from the FDA the bivalent vaccines, contain two messenger RNA (mRNA) components of SARS-CoV-2 virus, one of the original strain of SARS-CoV-2 and the other one in common between the BA.4 and BA.5 lineages of the omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2.

The Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine, Bivalent, is authorized for use as a single booster dose in individuals 18 years of age and older. The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, Bivalent, is authorized for use as a single booster dose in individuals 12 years of age and older. The monovalent COVID-19 vaccines that are authorized or approved by the FDA and have been administered to millions of people in the United States since December 2020 contain a component from the original strain of SARS-

CoV-2.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

The authorized bivalent COVID-19 vaccines, or updated boosters, include an mRNA component of the original strain to provide an immune response that is broadly protective against COVID-19 and an mRNA component in common between the omicron variant BA.4 and BA.5 lineages to provide better protection against COVID-19 caused by the omicron variant.

The BA.4 and BA.5 lineages of the omicron variant are currently causing most cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. and are predicted to circulate this fall and winter. In June, the agency’s Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee voted overwhelmingly to include an omicron component in COVID-19 booster vaccines.

For each bivalent COVID-19 vaccine, the FDA based its decision on the totality of available evidence, including extensive safety and effectiveness data for each of the monovalent mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, safety and immunogenicity data obtained from a clinical study of a bivalent COVID-19 vaccine that contained mRNA from omicron variant BA.1 lineage that is similar to each of the vaccines being authorized, and non-clinical data obtained using a bivalent COVID-19 vaccine that contained mRNA of the original strain and mRNA in common between the BA.4 and BA.5 lineages of the omicron variant.

Based on the data supporting each of these authorizations, the bivalent COVID-19 vaccines are expected to provide increased protection against

See **BOOSTERS**, Page 2



Early voting: What you need to know

By James Robinson
The K-V Dispatch

Election season is here again. Starting later this month, residents of Lunenburg County will be able to cast a ballot for their preferred candidates in the general elections. But early voting can be confusing. Over the last few weeks, The Dispatch received several questions about where to go and what voters need to do if they want to cast a ballot early. Here’s how it works.

WHEN DOES EARLY VOTING START?

In Virginia, this year’s general election will be held on Tuesday, Nov. 8. As a result, early voting begins on Sept. 23. Why? That’s because early voting starts 45 days prior to the election.

To be clear, however, that doesn’t mean you head to the same precinct as you do in November.

Early voting is limited to one location in each county. In Lunenburg, that means going to the registrar’s office, located at 160 Courthouse Square. Starting on Sept. 23, citizens will be able to vote at the location from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. This continues up until Nov. 4, the Friday before the general election.

WHAT SHOULD I BRING FOR EARLY VOTING?

To vote early, you will need to do a few things. First, you’ll need to provide your name and address. Second, you have to show an ID. Acceptable IDs include a driver’s license, DMV-issued ID card, employee ID card with a photo, US Military ID or government-issued ID card. You can also use a recent utility bill, bank statement, government check, or paycheck containing your name and

See **VOTING**, Page 2

Student loan forgiveness: It’s not for everyone

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

Late last month, President Joe Biden announced a student loan forgiveness plan that could lessen the payback burden for millions of Americans faced with high college debt.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government has paused the repayment of student loans, but that is set to expire on Dec. 31, with payments

resuming in January.

Biden’s plan calls for thousands of dollars of debt to be wiped away from borrowers.

Up to \$20,000 to Pell Grant recipients and up to \$10,000 to non-Pell Grant recipients will be forgiven according to the plan.

Borrowers are eligible if their individual income is less than \$125,000 or \$250,000 for households.

According to a Department of Education analysis, the

typical undergraduate student with loans now graduates with nearly \$25,000 in debt.

RESIDENTS WEIGH IN

The thought of borrowers receiving debt forgiveness and other taxpayers possibly faced with carrying the burden is not something one Victoria woman, who did not want her name mentioned, agrees with.

“Personally, I never took out a student loan, and I don’t believe I should have to pay

for one,” she said. “Not only is it not fair for those who have never taken out a student loan (by either choosing not to go to school or choosing to jump into their career. But now, they will raise taxes on everyone to cover the debt. If you make too much money? Sorry, no luck for you. If you were responsible for the loan and made payments and paid everything off? Nope, not you either.”

For Charlotte County

resident Monique Williams she says this debate is why Financial Planning and Education are so vital and that Economics and Personal Finance should be a focus on postsecondary education costs and taken during senior year of high school.

“I pay my student loans faithfully each month ... a little over \$586,” Williams said. “And that’s on an

See **FORGIVENESS**, Page 2

Will Assembly vote on abortion next week?
Page 3

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Man escapes burning home

One occupant of a home in the 550 block of North Broad Road jumped from a window to escape a fire that engulfed his home on Saturday, Aug. 27. The Kenbridge Volunteer Fire Department and Victoria Fire and Rescue responded to the two-story house fire around 4:48 a.m., and the home was fully involved upon arrival. The fire is believed to have started in the home's kitchen area.



Sen. Warner visits with community leaders at SVCC

Sen. Mark Warner spent Wednesday afternoon Aug. 25 meeting with community leaders from Charlotte, Lunenburg and Mecklenburg counties at Southside Virginia Community College in Keysville. As part of the discussion, Sen. Warner heard about a number of local issues, including workforce development, economic development, and inflation. Sen. Warner's visit was part of a three-day tour through Southwest and Southside Virginia.

Pilot program could help solve housing problem

By Brian Carlton
The K-V Dispatch

You may have already seen the sites being marked off. Homes will be going up over the next year, both in the

town of Blackston and two nearby counties. The goal here isn't just new construction. This project, a joint partnership organized by the Commonwealth Regional Council, is designed to help

with the problem of affordable housing.

It's an issue we see both here locally and across the state. Based on a Dec. 2021

See **PROBLEM**, Page 2

LCPS students outperform on Math SOL

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

Despite school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, Central High School (CHS) students at Lunenburg County Public Schools (LCPS) outperformed the state SOL average pass rates in Math for 2021-22 with a rate of 90%

The same couldn't be said, however, statewide. Across Virginia, only 66% of students passed math, compared to 82% pre-pandemic. Only 65% of students in the state passed science, compared to 81% in the 2018-19 school year. There were also problems with history, as just 66% of Virginia students passed, compared to 80% two years ago.

Now in each case, the statewide numbers were better than last year, when the majority of tests saw 60% or fewer pass. But state officials say it's clear there's work to do.

"The bottom line is that in-person instruction matters," said Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Ballow. "We can see the difference our teachers made once they

See **SOL**, Page 2



Exterior painting is set to begin on the Kenbridge Town Hall in September.

Repair project to Town Hall scheduled

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

Following several delays, an exterior painting and repair project to the Kenbridge Town Hall is set to begin next month.

"The project has been backlogged due to paint supply issues with the contractor's paint supplier and weather delays due to rain," said Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC) Regional Planner Lauren Jones.

WHAT IS THE PROJECT?

The Town of Kenbridge was awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Department of Historical Resources (DHR) Emergency Supplemental Historic Preservation Fund (ESHPPF) to help restore and repair the historic building that sustained damage from Hurricane Michael in 2018.

The DHR grant request for funding includes exterior painting, as well as window glazing and caulking.

According to Kenbridge Town Manager Tony Matthews, problems include interior and exterior water damage during Hurricane Michael.

Matthews said that the interior repairs have been completed, and the building still remains very active with daily use, and there are still several rooms that are available as rental spaces.

According to the CRC who is assisting the Town with grant administration of the funded project, Harris and Sons signed a Contract of Service in June and is hoping to begin

See **PROJECT**, Page 2

Need for blood grows across the region
Page 4

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 **VCU Health**
Community Memorial Hospital

SOL: Superintendent says growth will continue

FROM PAGE ONE

were reunited with their students in their classrooms. I want to thank all of our teachers for everything they did last year to begin what will be a multiyear recovery effort.”

LEARNING LOSS APPARENT

When it came to LCPS across the board, School Superintendent Charles Berkley Jr. said the learning loss that students experienced during the 2020-21 school year was apparent in students.

“The decline in scores can be attributed to the loss of learning and the instructional time lost from the classroom among teachers and students due to protocols followed during the pandemic.” Berkley said. “We are working hard in Lunenburg County Public Schools to help our students overcome the learning loss that occurred during the Coronavirus Pandemic where face to face instruction and

education was not available for students.”

ASSESSING INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

Berkley said LCPS will be focusing on addressing the achievement gaps for all students and utilizing data as a tool in its efforts to get every child where they need to be.

Additionally, reading and math support personnel have been employed to provide additional support during the school day to work on deficit skills with students in the areas of Reading and Math.

According to Berkley CHS student Math scores were increased due to remediation during summer school, afterschool, and during school. “Moving forward students will continue to receive targeted

remediation during school hours, after-school programs, and summer programs.” Berkley said. “We believe with students back in the schools, we will continue to see growth this school year as we did last year which eventually we will have all students reaching and meeting the standards and showing growth in reading and math as well as science and history. When the state accreditation process factors in student growth from the beginning of last school year to now, we are confident that the scores will show growth and improvement.”

The 2021-2022 school year marked the return to in-person learning for all 132 Virginia school divisions and the return to normal levels of student participation in the state testing program.

PROJECT: Work to begin next month

FROM PAGE ONE

work on the project in September.

HISTORY OF THE TOWN HALL

The Kenbridge Town Hall built in 1922, a historic site that was formerly Kenbridge High School contains an auditorium, class-

room spaces, and currently serves as the site for the Kenbridge Community Center, the Kenbridge Police Department and the town hall, where monthly council meetings are held.

The National Park Service (NPS) awarded Virginia Department of Historic Resources

(DHR) \$4.7 million in funding to provide recovery assistance to historic resources damaged by hurricanes Florence and/or Michael in September and October 2018 that are listed or are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The award from the

Emergency Supplemental Historic Preservation Fund (ESHPPF) administered by the NPS enables DHR to make sub-awards to historic resources.

The property is on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register as Kenbridge High School.

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September 8, 2022 Meeting

1. Call to Order – 6:00 PM
2. Invocation/Pledge of Allegiance: Supervisor Zava
3. Requests for Additions to the Agenda
4. Conflict of Interest Statements & Organizational Matters
5. Citizen Comment Period
 - A) Resolution of Retirement – Richard Harris
6. Consent Agenda:
 - A) Minutes – August 11, 2022 Meeting
 - B) Warrants for Approval June 2022 – 3rd edition and August 2022
 - C) Treasurer’s Report June (1st draft FYE) 2022
7. County Offices and Departments
 - A) Lunenburg County School Board
 - B) VA Dept. of Transportation
 - C) Courthouse Building Projects Update
8. Juvenile Detention Center – Capital Improvement Projects – ABM
9. Crossroads Community Services Update – Dr. Moore
10. Planning and Economic Development Update
11. Administrator’s Update
12. County Attorney Update
13. Closed Session Items (if necessary)
14. Other Business (per Board approval)
15. Adjournment

— Advance inquiries about agenda items can be directed to the County Administrator prior to the meeting at tgee@lunenburgva.net or by phone at 434-696-2142.

— It is the intention of the Lunenburg County Board of Supervisors to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Should you need special accommodations, please contact the County Administrator’s Office at 434-696-2142 prior to the meeting date.

— Tracy M. Gee, County Administrator

PROBLEM: Help for residents

FROM PAGE ONE

report by Virginia’s Joint Legislative and Audit Review Commission, 29% of households in the state struggle with housing costs. Nearly half of those spent more than 50% of their income on housing, both rental and owned. And as mentioned, it’s a problem here locally. The study found 67% of households struggling with housing costs either lived in this region or in Northern Virginia.

So what’s causing this problem? Housing prices keep rising. The median home sales price here in Virginia climbed 28% over the last five years, to \$270,000 at the end of 2021. The key part is in the last three years alone, Virginia’s supply of “starter” homes, those usually more affordable to low-and-middle-income households, has dropped by 40%, according to the Virginia Realtors Association.

That’s where Virginia Housing comes in.

BUILDING A BETTER PARTNERSHIP

Created in 1972 by the Virginia General Assembly, the Virginia Housing Development Authority is a self-supporting nonprofit. Their goal is to help

people get into affordable housing through a number of different programs. In July 2021, five months before the JLARC study came out, Virginia Housing launched a new type of program. Instead of working with individuals, they gave \$40 million total to planning districts across the state. Each one received a specific amount and a deadline, when they needed to have construction finished.

The Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC), which includes Charlotte, Prince Edward, Buckingham, Amelia and Lunenburg counties, received \$2 million. That money was meant to build 20 homes, a project that needs to be finished by June 2024.

“We have a close working relationship with these organizations,” said Virginia Housing CEO Susan Dewey. “This grant program will build upon that partnership by promoting regional approaches to housing development.”

For the CRC, that meant putting out a call for partners.

“We did some research,” said Melody Foster, CRC’s executive director. “We didn’t want to recreate the wheel. We had some discussions with our

localities and put out a (request for proposals).”

The group received six applications and ended up awarding money to three projects, partnering with Piedmont Habitat for Humanity, the town of Blackstone and Smyth Properties LLC. Piedmont will build 11 homes, the town of Blackstone will help build three and Smyth will build six.

BUILDING ACROSS THE REGION

Piedmont Habitat’s project will stretch across three counties. The group is building four homes here in Charlotte County, plus four in Prince Edward and three in Nottoway.

Up first is Prince Edward, mainly because it’s the furthest along in the process.

“We’re doing three builds at once in Farmville, over off Andrews Drive,” said Sam Rabon. He works as Piedmont’s director of resource development and marketing.

Rabon said the land’s already been cleared and construction will get underway soon, with a goal of being finished by early spring.

“Three at a time is the most we can do,” Rabon said. “We’re structuring them in a block, doing three in one location, instead of

doing one here and one there.”

Once these homes in Farmville are finished, then Piedmont staff will turn their attention to the builds in Charlotte and Nottoway counties.

“Those are further down the pipeline in development,” Rabon said. “There’s still plenty of preliminary work that needs to be done.”

In Blackstone, meanwhile, the goal is to do some renovation, to take some existing structures in and around the downtown area and turn them into housing. That work is ongoing, but there’s no current deadline.

MORE TO COME?

Building these 20 homes won’t use up the full \$2 million in grant funding, but that’s by design, Foster explained.

“We wanted to make sure we didn’t run into any issues,” Foster said. “If they need extra, we wanted some on hand. But if things go well, we may put out an additional request for bids and add a few more houses.”

As for the future, Foster said if this succeeds, she’s hopeful Virginia Housing will do it again.

“This was a trial run, a pilot program,” Foster said. “The hope is to go back and get more.”

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