

The Daily Progress

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Tuesday, August 29, 2023

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FACING HOMELESSNESS

'I'M GOING TO DIE OUT HERE'



CAL CARY, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Severino Lividini, a former mason and now homeless, walks with crutches down the Downtown Mall in Charlottesville, Friday, Aug. 11, 2023.

In a city known for its charm, hospitality and wealth, the homeless population has increased 25% in just 5 years

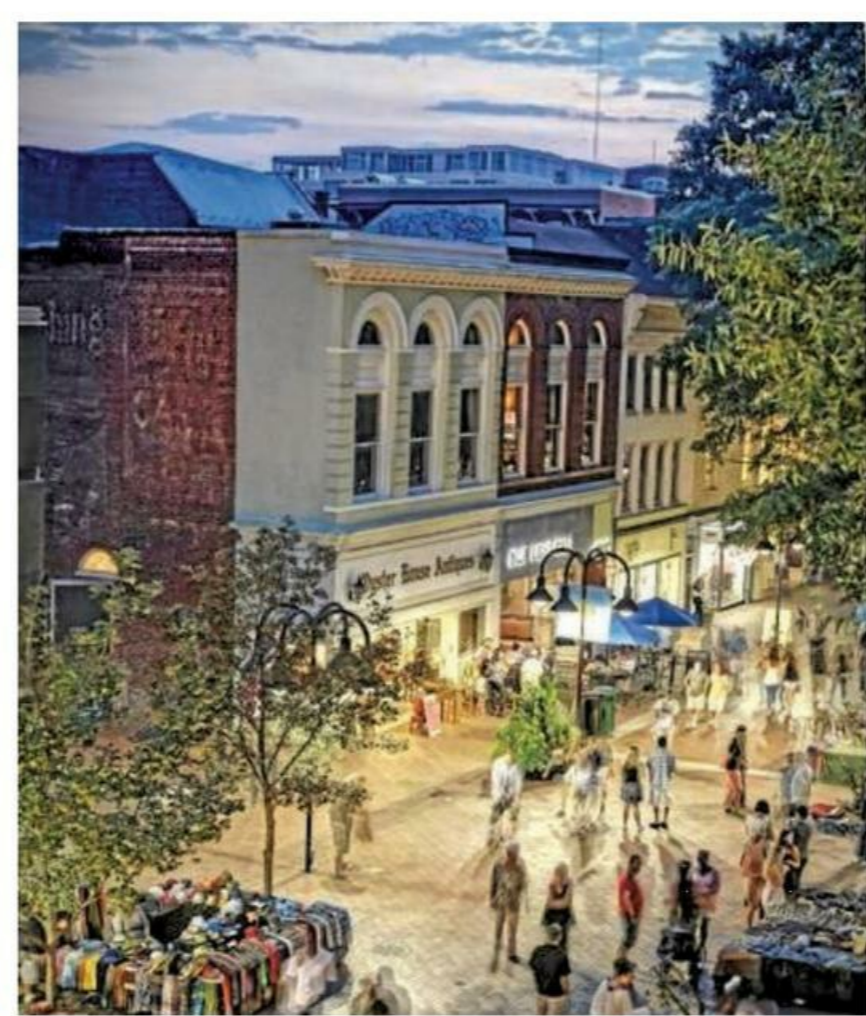
HALEY SANDLOW
The Daily Progress

Severino Lividini is in pain. He's been in pain for years, and the past two months have been especially bad. From the top of his knees down his legs are swollen and purple. He is waiting for a double knee replacement that he can't afford.

Lividini is homeless. For over four decades, up until this year, he owned a masonry business — Lividini Masonry — and worked on properties in Charlottesville for 20 years. He said he neglected his body to put his daughters through college; he had neck and back surgery and kept going. When his knees became so bad he couldn't work, he shut down his business.

In January, the bank foreclosed on his duplex on Commonwealth Drive, with

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ANDREW SHURTLEFF, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Charlottesville's Downtown Mall is a popular destination for the homeless. The reason is simple. "It's because you can eat here," Severino Lividini told The Daily Progress.

ZONING

Leaders, residents split over new draft

JASON ARMESTO
The Daily Progress

Charlottesville has unveiled the latest draft of a revised zoning ordinance, a 400-page document that will help determine where and what type of buildings can be developed in the city for years to come.

The draft, which for better or worse promises to boost density in a number of neighborhoods, will not be the final version of the zoning proposal.

Please see **ZONING**, Page A7

GARRETT DIVORCE

Video of tow truck incident now available

JASON ARMESTO
The Daily Progress

Among the claims lodged in Tom Garrett and Flanna Sheridan's bitter divorce is an accusation that the former congressman maliciously attempted to have his wife's car towed away while she and her young daughter were still inside.

The attempted repossession resulted in accusations of false imprisonment, trespassing and assault — all of which Garrett's counsel denies.

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Charlottesville COVID cases on the rise again. But should you worry?
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AMERICAN-MADE STEEL

Homeless

From A1

\$36,000 left of his \$380,000 mortgage. His trucks were repossessed with eight payments left out of 60. And for the past eight months, he's been sleeping in downtown Charlottesville.

"I lost my home, I lost my two trucks, I lost everything by not being able to work," Lividini told The Daily Progress one Friday afternoon, sitting with his back against the Freedom of Speech Wall on the Downtown Mall, his swollen legs stretched out on the bricks, a pair of crutches beside him. "I've worked hard all of my life, and this is the end result. It's horrible."

"If you've worked all of your life and you can prove it, there should be some sort of system that helps you," Lividini said. "Not one that just throws you in the streets."

Volunteers, business owners and the homeless themselves have all noted the recent rise in homelessness in Charlottesville. With high operating costs and pandemic funding running out for the area's overnight shelters and nonprofit organizations, groups are looking for new sources of funding for projects to help the homeless.

That funding is largely coming from the city, which has expressed support for expanded shelter services across Charlottesville. But even with extensive shelter services, the solution to homelessness — housing — remains out of reach for many.

"There's a fine line, and once you cross over that line, there's no coming back," Lividini said. "It just swallows you up."

The recent rise in homelessness

The Haven, a day shelter on West Market Street downtown that provides breakfast, showers and case management to the homeless, has historically seen a dip in demand for those services over the summer months, according to Executive Director Anna Mendez.

This summer, it's been the opposite.

"We have had multiple days where we have had more than 100 unique individuals come into the Haven, which is something that has not happened before," Mendez told The Daily Progress. "It's very concerning to us."

The number of people in Charlottesville who remain homeless for more than a year has increased by about 25% since 2018, according to Anthony Haro, executive director of Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless, which coordinates and leads collaborative efforts to address homelessness.

In addition to the uptick in people using the Haven's



Severino Lividini, a former mason now homeless, pets a dog while sitting on a bench on the Downtown Mall in Charlottesville, Friday, August 11, 2023.

services, the shelter has recently served people it had not before, Mendez said.

"That likely means there are people who have previously not experienced homelessness, or at least haven't experienced homelessness in Charlottesville," Mendez said.

Lividini and Thomas Sloan, a Charlottesville resident who is close friends with many of the city's homeless, both noted the increase as well. And the uptick is not necessarily homegrown. Over the summer, Sloan said, Charlottesville has attracted a number of homeless people from places as far off as Kentucky and New York. They take a Greyhound bus or ride an Amtrak train into town, Sloan said.

"It's because you can eat here," Lividini said, referring to the robust system of soup kitchens and food pantries in the Charlottesville area. "There's food everywhere. They give you food. They don't give you housing."

There's no one answer to the "why homelessness" question, but a variety of factors create a "perfect storm" for a rise in homelessness, Mendez said.

For one, the pandemic's eviction bans have run out. That happened about a year ago, but the "pent-up demand" in eviction created a backlog for landlords planning to evict tenants.

"It's taken about a year for the eviction process to kick in," Mendez said. "So it's like this is a lagging indicator of those eviction protections being removed."

Another explanation is something that many Charlottesville residents know well: The city is expensive.

"Charlottesville is one of the communities in Virginia with the highest cost of living rates," Mendez said. "So as we've seen rents increase, wages have not risen in a way that keeps up with rental costs, and that contributes to people losing their housing."

Residents of Charlottesville and business owners downtown have noticed. Social media posts suggesting a ban on panhan-

dling have garnered dozens of comments and likes supporting the proposal.

In one comment, the owner of the restaurant Tonic described being "shouted at, threatened physically and verbally, pushed, masturbated at."

Lividini described being on the street at night, surrounded by frequent fights. He said he's had money stolen off of him.

Liz Nyberg, operations manager at People and Congregations Engaged in Ministry, or PACEM, acknowledged the lack of support for mental illness on the streets and the limited availability of hospital beds allocated for the mentally ill.

There has to be a better response to the rise in the homeless population than banning panhandling or outright removing the homeless — both of which risk violating the Constitution, the Code of Virginia, city ordinances or all three.

"If you vilify [homeless people,] they're just going to dig deeper into themselves, and they're not going to come back to the resources that can help," Nyberg said. One of the goals of PACEM, a low-barrier overnight shelter organization that operates in the winter, is to build homeless peoples' trust in organizations like theirs.

Mendez agreed. "It's something that is incredibly sad to hear as a staff team, particularly when what we're hearing sounds more like outrage at the experience of having to observe people who are experiencing homelessness," she said. "Rather than outrage at the fact that in one of the wealthiest cities in Virginia, people are experiencing homelessness."

The city's solutions

While the Haven provides shelter during the day, the nights are a different story. According to Lividini, at night, West Market Street is lined with people sleeping in doorways, often on cardboard beds.

"Last night? I slept under the bridge," Lividini said.

At night, there's nowhere

to use the bathroom. The streets also become dangerous.

"We need a place to go at night, not in the daytime," Lividini said. "You could get killed out here at night and nobody would know."

Two nonprofit groups in Charlottesville provide overnight shelter: PACEM, a roaming winter shelter, and the Salvation Army on Ridge Street, which offers year-round shelter.

The Salvation Army, which has had to start turning people away, is in the midst of expanding its 58-bed facility to 114 beds.

In June, PACEM ended its hotel-style shelter project called Premier Circle, a product of the pandemic



One of the bedrooms in the Salvation Army shelter on Ridge Street in Charlottesville on Wednesday, July 12, 2023.

that provided three years of full-time shelter at a renovated Red Carpet Inn. In total, Premier Circle served 177 unique individuals. The project's numbers peaked at 95 individuals in one night.

Now, PACEM is turning its efforts to a year-round women's shelter. The city has been incredibly supportive of their efforts, Nyberg said.

Mendez agreed. Last year, Charlottesville carved out specific funding for nonprofit organizations focused on housing and shelter, Mendez said. This year, for the first time since the Haven's establishment, Charlottesville provided funding for its day shelter operations, along with the regular funding for its housing department.

The city has also expressed support to the Haven's staff for future project to provide year-round overnight shelter, such as

through funding a feasibility study.

"Just the fact that the city is now engaging in that conversation is a sea change that we are incredibly grateful for," Mendez said.

Charlottesville is looking to identify "gaps" in resources available to its homeless population and has frequent conversations with the local organization working to address the issue, according to recently appointed City Manager Sam Sanders.

"The entire two years that I've been here, I've been on this issue," Sanders, previously deputy city manager for operations, told The Daily Progress. "I'm very concerned about it and trying to think of ways that we can do something."

One of those things is a year-round overnight shelter with no barrier to entry,

Please see **HOMELESS**, Page A4

ALBEMARLE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2024

The County Executive's recommended amendments to the FY 2023-24 Budget are prepared and published in synopsis form solely for the purposes of fiscal planning and public information. Publication of these proposed amendments does not constitute an appropriation of funds for those purposes by the Board of Supervisors. The amendments consist of estimates and are requests submitted to the County Executive with his recommendation concerning the requests.

A PUBLIC HEARING will be held by the Board of Supervisors of Albemarle County, Virginia at **6:00 P.M. on WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2023**, in the Lane Auditorium of the County Office Bldg, 401 McIntire Road, Charlottesville, Virginia, on these recommended amendments to the County Budget. This public hearing will be held pursuant to Virginia Code Section 15.2-2507 and is for the purpose of allowing the public to question and comment on the recommended budget amendments.

At the WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2023 meeting, after the public hearing, the Board of Supervisors will consider approving the amendment to the FY 2023-24 budget and appropriating funds as applicable for FY 2023-24.

PROPOSED FY 2023-24 BUDGET AMENDMENT

ESTIMATED REVENUES	
Local Revenues	\$ 36,881
State Revenues	\$ 3,000,000
Federal Revenues	\$ 222,000
Loan Proceeds	\$ 60,921,500
Other Fund Balances	\$ 16,887,284
TOTAL ESTIMATED REVENUES	\$ 81,067,665

ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES	
Special Revenue Funds	\$ 20,097,665
Capital Funds	\$ 60,970,000
TOTAL ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES	\$ 81,067,665

The public hearing is also being conducted through electronic communication means, and the opportunities for the public to access and participate in the public hearing are posted on the Albemarle County website at <https://www.albemarle.org/government/board-of-supervisors/public-meeting-participation-guide>, including access by telephone at 888-788-0099 (Toll Free), Webinar ID: 874 8880 8653.

Claudette K. Borgersen, CMC, Clerk
Board of County Supervisors

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Homeless

From A3

which includes breathalyzers and drug tests.

“That is a very expensive proposition,” Sanders said. “But it is one that seems to be the very minimum of what we can and should do.”

Funding for a year-round shelter would come from the city’s affordable housing fund, to which new funding was recently added. Projects could also be supported by federal, regional and state grants and philanthropic resources.

“Our affordable housing plan identifies zero to 29% AMI [area median income] as a priority. That would include the unhoused,” Sanders said.

The ‘simple’ housing solution

When Lividini came to Charlottesville in 2004, he said it was “wonderful.”

“I loved it out here,” Lividini said. “The people, everything. It’s beautiful, but it’s mean.”

When The Daily Progress spoke to Lividini on July 27, he said the same thing. But even sitting on a bench in Market Street Park, under the shade of an oak tree in 95 degree heat, Lividini added one additional phrase: “I’m going to get out of it.”

Two weeks later, Lividini put things differently.

“I’ll die here. I guarantee it,” he said. “I’m going to die out here.”

The solution to homelessness is housing.

“It does seem simple, that’s a good thing,” said Haro from the Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless. “That doesn’t mean it’s easy to accomplish. But it is simple.”

The barrier to housing in Charlottesville is a lack of space and rental units.

“There simply were not enough rentals available to help people move out of homelessness and into a home,” Haro said. While funds for both rental assistance and homeless service assistance jumped during the pandemic, the



CAL CARY, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Severino Lividini, a former mason now homeless, walks with crutches down East Market Street in Charlottesville on Friday, Aug. 11, 2023.

coalition could not find places to use all of it.

“We’ve never faced that before,” Haro said. “The pandemic offered us an opportunity to see clearly that we can have all the money we want for rental assistance, but if we don’t have enough places for people to move into, that’s the constraining factor.”

Adding affordable housing units and increasing density are two of the motivations for the city’s zoning rewrite, which Haro pointed out. Bringing more units online and continuing to provide rental assistance should be priorities in working to end homelessness, alongside the city’s efforts to provide year-round emergency shelter, Haro said.

“There’s no emergency solution, but there should be,” Lividini said. “I know it’s oversaturated

and there’s a lot to do, but there should be a safety net for people like me.”

In the meantime, Lividini said he just hopes to be acknowledged.

“I run into people I knew that I did work for, here on the Downtown Mall,” Lividini said. “It’s embarrassing. How can a human being live like this? You could be here, dying and they walk over you.”

Nyberg from PACEM said where she grew up, the homeless population was “shipped off.” But that didn’t make the problem go away.

“I would much rather have a conversation with someone for what they need than to not see them at all,” Nyberg said.

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@haleysandlow on Twitter



ERIN EDGERTON, THE DAILY PROGRESS

The Haven is a former church in downtown Charlottesville converted into a day shelter serving the city’s homeless population.

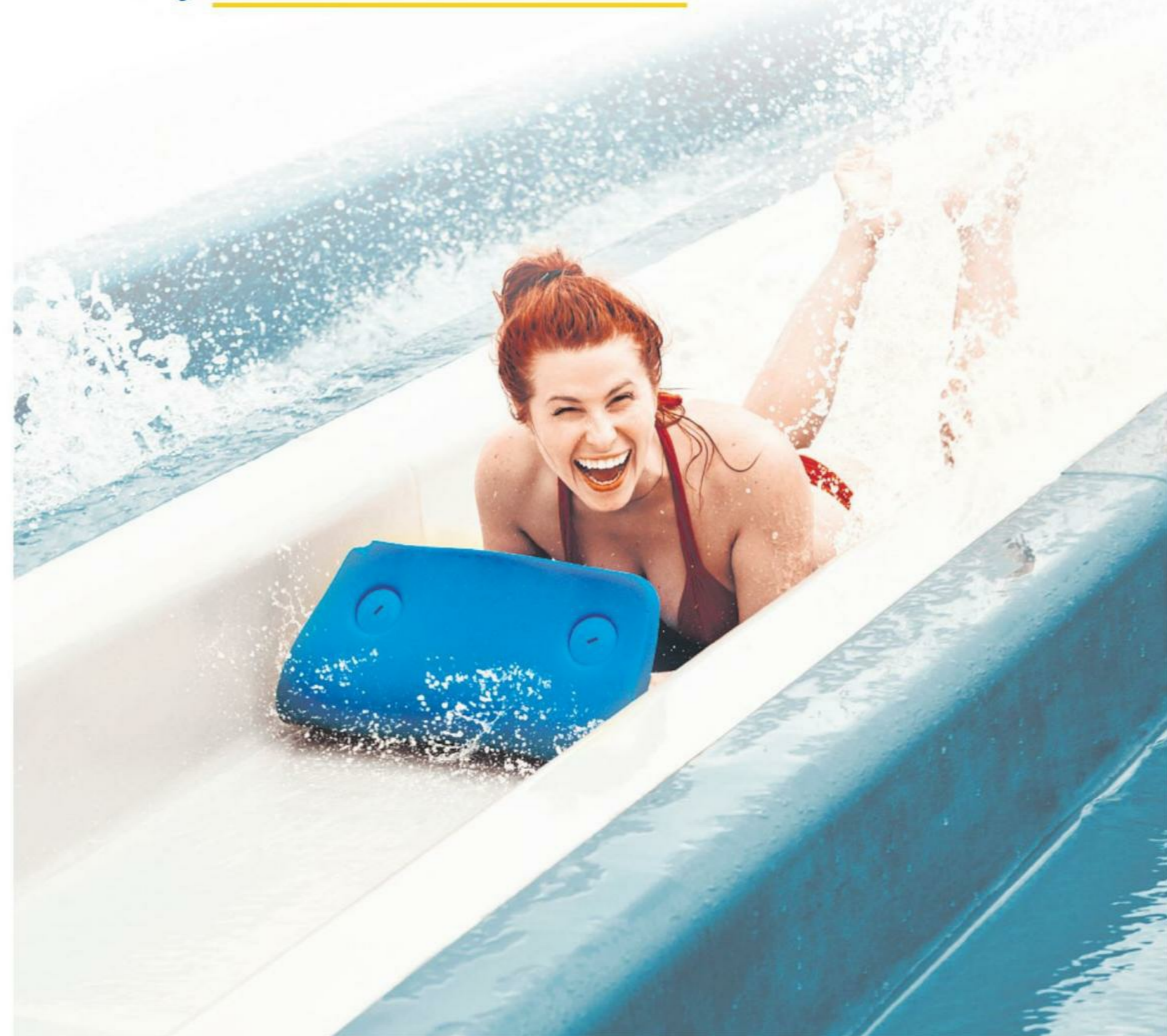
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