

## TENNIS ANYONE?

# Win or lose council seat, Scooby Doodle is St. Paul's top dog

**S**cooby Doodle wants your vote in St. Paul, Virginia.

This designer dog — a Golden Retriever mixed with a poodle — lives each day at Clinch Life Out-

fitters. He resides beneath the front desk but goes out to greet each customer, says his owner, Mel-lason Gordon Clark.



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“We haven’t told him he’s a dog. And he does identify as a person,” said Clark, co-owner of the outdoors store.

Scooby watches as the store rents tubes, kayaks and canoes to float the nearby Clinch River. Out on

the street at 3022 Fifth Avenue, Scooby captured the eyes of last year’s Christmas parade participants with nearly everyone waving, Clark said.

“Scooby is one of the most popular persons in town. He is two years old, but it’s the most chill, laid-back character ever,” Clark said.

“We have people come into the store on a regular basis just to see Scooby,” Clark said. “They bring him toys. They bring him snacks. They want Scooby to like them.”

Now, Clark says, Scooby is looking for your write-in support on Election Day, Nov. 7.

“Because he’s so popular, people have joked that he ought to be mayor,” Clark said.

Nah, he should simply start on town council, Clark says.

By Clark’s calculation, Scooby’s dog years make him around 24, since dogs mature so much in their first two years. “He has the experience of a young-20s person. It’s time to get involved,” she said.

“And this year is an excellent year to run.”

Three seats on the council are up for grabs. The names on the ballot are Harry Kelly, Jeffrey Langley and William Bob Salyers.

Yet all of the town council incumbents for those seats — Carey Watkins, Greg Bailey and Geoffrey Hensley — are running write-in campaigns.

And so is Scooby Doodle. Heck, he even has campaign signs perched around

town.

“He gets his mail here,” Clark said. “He eats, sleeps and drinks here.”

Scooby showed up to work as a store greeter when he was 12 weeks old in 2021. Clark also owns his mother, Daisy, and father, Barkley.

Some folks have challenged whether Scooby could actually take a seat on town council since he’s not actually eligible to vote.

“But who’s to say that you can’t identify as a person?” Clark asked.

Posing this challenge to Wise County’s director of elections Allison Robbins, the answer was more direct.

“I would consider a write-in for an animal the same way we see a write-in for Mickey Mouse,” Robbins said.



## TENNIS ANYONE?

# Remembering and saying goodbye to one sweet Cookie

On that final morning, I could only hug and hold Cookie and tell him that everything that he was seeing — the birds, the grass, and the trees — would become even more magnificent. Life would begin again. And there would be no more

cancer.

Cookie could again run like a puppy. Free. He could eat all that he wanted and no longer bleed.

The growth that came upon that beautiful Jack Russell terrier — what



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perplexed three veterinarians in Virginia, from Abingdon to Dublin — would disappear into dreamland. And, yet, so would my favorite dog.

Cookie came along in 2017 as one of two strays found at Meadowview, Virginia. We meant to keep them only until we could find them a home. But, we fell in love with this scrappy pair.

I, for one, was not sold on Cookie at first. He was a rascal. He got into the cabinets when we brought him in the house. He yelped like he wanted to bite you when you touched a part of his back. And he would try to escape.

You see, I could build a Berlin Wall with cinder blocks or boards to block a small gap in the fence. But Cookie almost always found a way to move stuff and go.

But, he would just go right back to the door and appear to knock, like he wanted to see me again. He did that even after the cancer came, though I saw that then as healthy. It was like he ignoring the mess that grew in his nose and mouth — what the steroid shots and pills could not hold back.

Cookie became my best friend. By the summer of 2020, he would follow me from room to room. If I



**Cookie is now an angel running free.**

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fell asleep on the couch or the bed, I would wake up — and he would be right there next to me.

He still longed to be with me, even after he grew sick this year, which made the finality of that dreadful decision devastating.

But, you can't feed a dog and watch him bleed after every meal for long. You have to let them go and let them run free.

So, on that final morning, I wrapped my favorite dog in my favorite flannel shirt, one that my late mother-in-law had given me in the '90s. It was comfy. But, Like Cookie, that shirt was raggedy. I wore it, but my daughter said I looked homeless even when I was at home.

Cookie loved that shirt, too, and would sometimes use it to make a nest for a nap.

Still, I knew it was time to let go of that shirt, just like I knew it was time to let go of Cookie.

I brought it to the vet on that final morning. And it went home in the box, where it was wrapped around Cookie's body, like I could keep hugging and holding him forever.

It would be more than a couple

of days before I finally mustered the nerve and strength to dig for hours and put that box in the ground. Then, on a dark Friday night, I said my final goodbye.

I crouched. And I cried.

I was transported emotionally out of that sad scene and into a higher plane. I lost track or where I was in the midst of my grief.

I suddenly felt a brush at my right leg, like something was touching me in the dark.

I jerked, afraid but awake, and stuttered something like I was speaking in tongues.

"You know what that was?" a friend said later. "That was that dog's spirit coming to be with you."

I know. It had to be Cookie, escaping that grave to be with me once more.

But I also believe he heard my words:

"Go! Go and run from here! And run on into eternity. But remember your daddy. And wait for me. I want to see you again ..."

[jtennis@bristolnews.com](mailto:jtennis@bristolnews.com)  
276-791-0709  
@BHC\_Tennis



## TENNIS ANYONE?

# Great Chicken Chatter continues in Washington County

Chickens would seem natural to be roaming among the green farmlands of Friendship, Virginia.

This place in Washington County, Virginia, took its name from its friendly folks.

But, in 2023, it's being

seen as the origin of the Great Backyard Chicken Chatter of Washington County.

You see, two residents of greater Friendship

whose property is zoned residential requested that they be placed in an agricultural zone so they could have chickens.

But the Washington County Board of Supervisors said no, explaining that zoning agriculture could also ultimately allow pigs and cows and horses and — oh, my! — all kinds of creatures.

Still, the Chicken Chatter did not die.

Lawmakers, instead, hatched a plan that some fear could put a chicken in every lot.

Now, an ordinance is out there, trying to allow chickens in residential neighborhoods by special exception on a case-by-case basis.

Some folks fear chickens could soon be among the better homes and gardens of Washington County — and ruining property values, erasing bucks with clucks.

Some see only chicken poop — not chicken salad — with a backyard chicken coop. Yet others advocate having chickens for fresh eggs — and maybe to build a nest egg against another soaring price of store-bought eggs.

The Board of Supervisors could allow this ordinance to pass on Oct. 10.

But, already, the planning commission has both voted it down — and said that it should be rewritten and made even more restrictive.

Possibly, it appears that there are not enough kinds of zones in Washington County.

You see, the folks in Friendship could not have

had chickens because jumping from a cats-and-dogs district (“residential”) to the potentially smelly hog zone (“agricultural”) was just too much of a leap.

So why don't we have something in between?

Dub it “C1” for Chickens or “RC” (residential with chickens, but also in honor of RC Cola, which goes great with fried chicken).

You might call it A-R (Agricultural Restricted) or LACO (Light agricultural chickens only).

I like “LACO.”

I can already hear the county officials say, “We have another LACO request” at their government meetings, since they love to speak in abbreviated code words

like ARPA COLA, RFP and RFQ.

That way, folks can just go to their planning commission and ask to be in a chicken zone, so long as the planning commission agrees that their rare and highly-restricted zoning designation fits with any neighbor.

Then, if approved, make any backyard chicken farmer follow all the rules that are dictated by the county.

Give them a warning: If they do not follow rules, fix them with a ticket of at least \$50, which, by the way, is how much you now need to get a decent dozen-piece meal deal at KFC.

If they mess up the second time, take away all their eggs

— and tell them to be a good egg. Take away half their chickens, too.

If anything happens after that, revoke their chicken charter and rezone them back to where they came from: purely residential.

In other words, make them give a cluck about being in the chicken zone — getting in and staying in. Some things in life need to be tough.

For now, stay tuned.

It's certainly tough seeing a solution to the Great Chicken Chatter of Washington County.

jtennis@bristolnews.com  
276-791-0709  
@BHC\_Tennis