

# Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

FEBRUARY 8, 2024

## Rapid Bus System Central to U.S. 1 Revitalization

Planners envision a 7.5-mile section as an urbanized Main Street centered around six mixed-use business centers.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH  
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

U.S. 1 in southeastern Fairfax County, largely a hodge-podge of strip malls, fast food joints and gas stations today, will be transformed, according to the county's redevelopment plan called "EMBARK Richmond Highway" and a new bus rapid transit system is key. Planners envision a 7.5-mile section as an urbanized "Main Street," a series of gleaming high-rise condominiums, apartments and commercial buildings centered around six mixed-use business centers.

To some, it's a forward-looking smart growth step toward mixed-use, 21st century living. To others, it's "Ballstonization," a pejorative jab at Arlington's hip high-rise corridor. To others, it's a plan to displace low- and middle-income people and the corridor's small businesses.

On Jan. 31, Fairfax County officials held an open house at Bryant High School to update the community on the proposed bus rapid transit system (BRT), a central feature of the redevelopment. County documents describe BRT as "a high-quality, public transportation system designed to be fast, reliable and more convenient than traditional bus routes. It operates much like rail service, with a dedicated transitway, but uses bus vehicles." County branders have dubbed it "The One," because buses will run up and down U.S. 1.

Franconia Supervisor Rodney Lusk said, "I was glad to see so many residents join us at the open house to learn more about the BRT project. 'The One' is going to be transformational for the Richmond Highway corridor. The BRT is a key piece to the long-term plans for the corridor set out by the EMBARK Richmond Highway plan. The BRT and EMBARK plan aim to address traffic congestion, provide excellent public transit, jumpstart economic interest, reduce housing costs and improve safety."

**"The BRT system will bring Richmond Highway into the 21st century by improving the look and feel of the corridor."**

— Holly Hicks Dougherty, Mount Vernon Springfield Chamber of Commerce

Supervisor Dan Storck said he too was "thrilled to see well over 100 residents and impacted property owners turn out to hear more about the reconstruction and widening of the highway to bring modern transportation options, including pedestrian sidewalks, a cycleway, traffic lanes and

SEE BUS RAPID TRANSIT, PAGE 6



MAP PROVIDED BY FAIRFAX COUNTY

The bus rapid transit map of US 1 showing stations and business centers.

## Placemaking is the Centerpiece of Recent Corridor Event

Planners gathered for two-day session to map out possible improvement ideas.

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

The placemaking initiatives took a step forward recently when local officials got together with some urban planners to look at opportunities along Richmond Highway in Mount Vernon and come up with suggestions for improvements.

This included a bus tour on Wednesday, Jan. 31 followed by the presentation of a report that was compiled by a panel that included landscape design engineers and architects. The panel consisted of officials from Marriott, Georgetown University, Amtrak, Urban Land Institute and others that

came up with suggestions. They toured and came up with suggestions including tree cover, small business survival and art along the corridor, to name a few.

One suggestion was to look at what is in Mount Vernon now and expand on that. The presence of thrift stores was highlighted, and part of the plan could be to name a portion of the corridor the "Thrift Store Trail." There were other suggestions of similar nature and the Urban Land Institute used past successes to show what spots could look like. These spots were in Richmond or several locations around Washington, D.C.

In Mount Vernon they identified places for placemaking efforts that included the Gum

Springs Gateway and Wetlands, a VDOT Acquired Site that was a former 7-Eleven; Mount Vernon High School & Recreation Site; Bridges/Stream Valleys; the Aldi Site; Mount Vernon Crossroads; the Residences at North Hills and the South County Government Center.

Evan Kauffman, executive director at the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation, was one of the facilitators of this event, and was happy with the outcome. "They identified a bunch of places for new placemaking opportunities," he said. Although they are not breaking ground on any of these ideas in the near future, "it was good to give us a plan to work with," he said.

Placemaking activities have already taken place in Mount Vernon in Hybla Valley. In July 2023, the Mount Vernon parklet was unveiled as a placemaking feature to an area dominated by retail and parking lots. BCT

Design Group was hired to decorate this 3,200 square-foot parklet with outdoor seating, green space and landscaping.

### Art is a Start

The presence of artwork to brighten places was mentioned more than once by the panel, and this has already happened in a few places around Mount Vernon. One of these was unveiled in November 2023 when they unveiled the "Fabric of the Community" mural, located on the side of Zips Dry Cleaning at 6216 North Kings Highway. It is described as "a visually captivating homage to the rich cultural and historical tapestry of the Richmond Hwy Corridor." It was commissioned by the SFDC and crafted by the acclaimed muralist Nico Cathcart as a public art piece to unveil part of SFDC's placemaking initiatives.

SEE PLACEMAKING EVENT, PAGE 3

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## Old Town | \$2,495,000

Located on a picturesque street in the SE Quadrant, this exquisite home was completely gutted and expanded in 2020. All new top to bottom, including electrical, plumbing, roof, HVAC and 3-story addition with no detail overlooked. The main level features a stunning gourmet kitchen with French doors to a side patio with pergola and built-in gas grill with storage and refrigerator drawers. The front of the home showcases a lovely formal dining room and living room with woodburning fireplace, while the back of the home offers a sought-after family room and mudroom both with access to the outdoors. The upper level provides 5 stylish bedrooms, 3 full baths, and a magnificent laundry center. The full basement – dug out to 9-ft ceiling height – features radiant heated floors, an egress window, and plumbing for a full bath. 405 S Fairfax Street

**Lauren Bishop 202.361.5079**  
[www.LaurenBishopHomes.com](http://www.LaurenBishopHomes.com)



## Bishop's Crest | \$1,549,000

Originally a model home, it shows with custom features including gorgeous flooring & lighting, copious trimwork, oversized windows, and exquisite curb appeal. 5 bedrooms, 4.5 baths, finished lower level with second kitchen & bedroom suite. 1409 Dade Ln  
**Tracy Dunn 571.212.3658**  
[www.tracybdunn.com](http://www.tracybdunn.com)



## Fords Landing | \$1,499,000

Spacious and light-filled townhouse in Old Town's premier waterfront community. 3 bedrooms + den, 3.5 baths, and 2-car garage. Main level living area with built-ins and a gas fireplace, dining room, and kitchen with breakfast room and balcony. 3 Franklin Street  
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OPEN SAT 2/10, 2-4

## Groveton Woods | \$515,000

This lovely 3-bedroom, 2.5-bath home was the former model and features custom finishes that add style throughout. The primary suite with sitting area, custom closet, and spa-like bath doesn't disappoint. Single car garage & fenced side yard. 7109 Mason Grove Ct #2  
**Sandy McMaster 571.259.2673**  
[www.sandymcmaster.realestate](http://www.sandymcmaster.realestate)



OPEN 2/8, 5-7; 2/10 & 2/11, 1-4

## Majesty West \$1,599,900

The epitome of sophisticated modern design! End unit with elegant finishes, an open layout great for entertaining, tons of natural light, dream kitchen, gracious bedrooms, and spa-like baths. 4 bedrooms, 4.5 baths, 2-car garage, 2,858 square feet. 1305 Wilkes Street

**Lisa Groover 703.919.4426**  
[www.LisaGroover.com](http://www.LisaGroover.com)



OPEN SAT 2/10, 12-2

## Cambria Square \$975,000

This 4-level, 4-bedroom, 3.5-bath townhome with a 2-car garage has been meticulously well maintained. Sunlit main living level with 10-ft ceilings. Gourmet kitchen with large island and pantry. Family room boasts a wet bar and 2-sided fireplace shared with the rooftop terrace. 132 Cambria Walk

**Judy Radvanyi McVey 703.405.9456**  
[www.judyandbarbara.com](http://www.judyandbarbara.com)



OPEN SAT 2/10, 2-4

## Duke Gardens \$575,000

Tucked away on a quiet street off Duke, this well maintained, 3-bedroom, 1.5-bath, end unit townhome offers the best of city accessibility with the tranquility of a suburban neighborhood. 3 levels including a fully finished basement. Expansive corner lot with mature trees. 57 S French St

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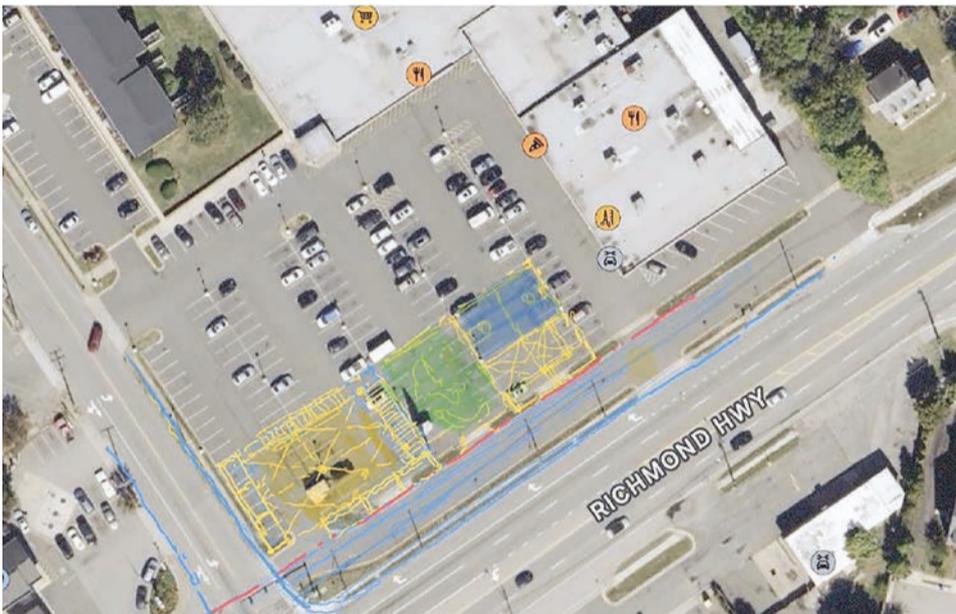
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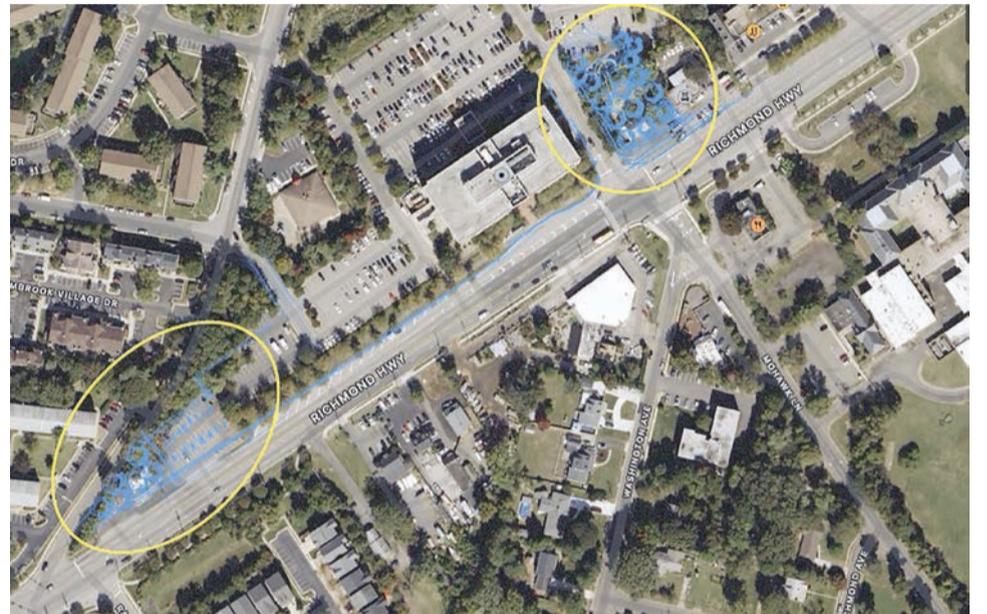


PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION

The "Fabric of the Community" mural by Nico Cathcart.



Possible placemaking efforts near the Aldi store in Hybla Valley.



Two spots near the South County Government Center could be improved.

## Placemaking is the Centerpiece of Recent Corridor Event

FROM PAGE 1

At the heart of the mural is a pair of eagles, inspired by a real-life nesting pair on the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The mural's backdrop, depicting the scenic Mount Vernon trail and the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge, emphasizes the community's connection to nature and the continuity of its landscape.

"I wanted this piece to highlight the local environment, and the ongoing conservation efforts with the bald eagles that live in the surrounding trees," Nico said.



PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION

Evan Kauffman, executive director at the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation, addresses the panel.

She included the faces of local women who are "moms and nurses and hardworking souls in the area, done to celebrate the people who live here," she said. They are together in conversation, showing a strength in community.

In the past, Nico has done projects in the Richmond area, working with Henrico County on a mural at the Cultural Art Center where she inspired youth from the James River Detention Center who helped on the project. Nico Cathcart @nicocathcart is from Toronto, Ontario, and currently living in Richmond.

## Local Audubon Chapter Votes to Change Its Name

**John James Audubon claimed ownership of enslaved people.**

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
THE GAZETTE

Libby Lyons, current president of the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia (ASNV), has already seen 41 different

species of birds this morning at Nags Head, North Carolina. She has arrived ahead of the weekend trip organized with the Virginia Society of Ornithology to get a head start. "I saw hundreds of pintails at the Bodie Island Lighthouse and hooded mergansers flying over the water. The avocets were a treat."

But she has taken a 10 a.m. break to discuss the announcement in the Potomac Flyer released Feb. 1 of the recent decision by the ASNV Board to change the name to remove the reference to John James Audubon.

John Audubon is widely known for his "Birds of America," painted in the 1800s when he was 35 and containing 435 life-

sized watercolors of North American birds. But in recent years it has come to light that Audubon also had a less favorable side.

The newsletter explained, "Many concerns were raised by both supporters and opponents of a name change. These include the need for the organization to be inclusive and welcoming to all Virginians, the potential loss of name recognition and connection with the national Audubon Society and other Audubon chapters and not erasing the many positive contributions that James James Audubon made to American ornithology, while also not honoring Audubon's ownership of enslaved people, collaboration

with eugenics research, and scientific dishonesty."

Tom Blackburn of McLean, past president of ASNV, had a big part in the effort to consider renaming the ASNV. "We started about a year ago when the National Audubon Society decided to look at the issue of renaming the national organization." He says he thinks a lot of other things came together on the timing of the decision including Black Lives Matter and the incident in Central Park when a white female dog walker called the police and falsely claimed a Black bird-watcher, Christian Cooper, was threatening

SEE LOCAL AUDUBON, PAGE 8

# OPINION

## Win Some, Lose Some

12 out of 23 is not so bad.

BY DEL. PAUL KRIZEK

**B**ills are on the move this fourth week of session here in Richmond! I have had several “losses” this week with my legislation, but they are outweighed by my “wins”.

This is the last full week before Crossover Day, when House bills must be sent to the Senate and vice versa. Subcommittee dockets are multiple hours long to account for the dozens of bills we must hear and long lines of public testimony from citizens who travel to the Capitol from all corners of Virginia to share their positions on legislation. Floor sessions are starting to stretch out too as we debate and vote on final passage for all of those bills that survive and make it to the Floor.

So far this week, I have had four bills come up for their first subcommittee hearings. Two were heard in Finance Subcommittee #1: HB 197, which sought to create a modest solar installation tax credit, and HB 518 which I reintroduced from last year to give retired Foreign Service Officers an income tax subtraction on their retirement pensions. Unfortunately, both of these bills failed to report from the subcommittee.

My HB 531, heard in the Compensation and Retirement Subcommittee of Appropriations, was continued to the 2025 session and thus will not continue on this year. This bill would have added injuries or diseases from conditions resulting from repetitive and sustained physical stressors to the definition of “occupational

Subcommittee #5 Report, Chair: Paul Krizek H.B. 698 (Krizek) Cannabis control; retail market, penalties. REPORT WITH SUBSTITUTE Yea 10   Nay 8   Abs 1				
Y Bulova	Y Simon	Y McClure	N Fowler	N Campbell
Y Carr	Y Delaney	Y Thomas	X Coyner	N Arnold
X Torian	X Bennett-Parker	N Knight	N Austin	
Y Price	Y Seibold	N Lefwich	N Blossom	
Y Krizek	Y Cole	A Morefield	N Wiley	

Krizek bill on cannabis passes out of subcommittee.

disease” under the Virginia Workers’ Compensation Act. The bill was one of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) recommendations from their 2018 study of Virginia’s Workers’ Compensation.

HB 1273 requires public bodies to include responsible bidder criteria in their invitations to bid for all non-transportation construction projects above \$250,000 and at least 12.5% of labor from approved apprenticeship programs. This bill passed out of subcommittee by a vote of 5-2 and awaits its hearing in full General Laws.

I have four bills that will be voted on final passage on the House Floor today: the first is HB 201 which requires that our region’s transportation entities Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, and the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission include elected members of the House of Delegates as appoint-

ed members.

HB 523 is a continuation of my charitable gaming cleanup from past sessions.

HB 525 restricts the frequency of voter referendums to establish a casino in an eligible host city to only every three years. This three year-limit is precedent for referendums to establish new historical horse racing gaming emporiums.

And finally, HB 527 authorizes 50/50 charitable raffles to be conducted by electronic means.

On 2nd read (and up for debate) today will be my multi-year effort to create a policy of consultation between Virginia’s federally recognized Tribal Nations and certain state agencies when evaluating permits relating to environmental, cultural, or historic re-

sources that have the potential to impact said Tribal Nations. This legislation remains one of the top legislative priorities of our tribal nations here in Virginia.

Headed to the Floor later this week will be HB 698, which establishes a retail adult-use market for cannabis, HJ 10, which extends the Joint Subcommittee to Study the Feasibility of Establishing the Virginia Gaming Commission for two additional years, and HB 199, which allows state funds to be used for the Virginia Brownfield and Coal Mine Renewable Energy Grant Fund and Program. Current law prohibits allocating funds to the program unless federal funds are utilized.

If all of these bills are voted on favorably by my House colleagues, by the end of this week I will have sent 12 of my 23 pieces of legislation over to the Senate with more on the way by Crossover Day.

## Funding for Metro

BY SENATOR ADAM EBBIN

**A**s we near the midpoint of the session, I wanted to update you on one of my major priorities: finding solutions for immediate, and long-term funding for Metro.

With 32 Virginia rail stations and 31 bus lines on our side of the Potomac, Metro plays a vital role in the Commonwealth’s economy and serves as a critical component of Northern Virginia’s transit network. The entire system generates \$1.5 billion in annual revenue from personal income and sales taxes, which goes to support programs and services across the Commonwealth.

Metro is funded by a complex arrangement of federal, state and local sources spread across the capital and operating budgets. The capital budget, which is used mainly to keep existing stations, tracks and buses in a state of good repair, is funded by federal sources, state and local funds from Vir-

ginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, including funding secured by legislation signed into law in Virginia in 2018. The operating budget, which is used to keep the buses and trains running, is funded by fare revenue and other sources (like advertising), federal pandemic relief funds, and state tax dollars from Virginia, Maryland, and the District. In Virginia, the local governments in Northern Virginia are responsible for paying Metro and they use a mixture of funds from the regional gas tax, state aid and other local sources to meet this obligation.

The pandemic aid that has sustained Metro since 2020 will be exhausted soon, contributing to a \$750 million operating gap in the FY 2025 budget. Major transit agencies across the country face similar fiscal cliffs. Metro’s gap has been driven by lower fare revenue due to the rapid expansion in working from home, coupled with a slow return to the office for the federal government and private

sector. Inflation and a subsidy credit to state and local governments to help them with anticipated revenue declines during the height of the pandemic also play a role.

In 2018, we came together with the rest of the DMV region and secured \$500 million a year in capital funding for Metro, which includ-

ed \$154.5 million from Virginia, \$167 million from Maryland, and \$178.5 million from the District of Columbia. This capital funding has been crucial in ramping up repairs to stations, tunnels and bridges. It has also been vital to the comple-

SEE EBBIN, PAGE 10

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A Connection Newspaper





Mohannad Yousef Abura



The man drove her to a park in Lorton in a blue Volkswagen Jetta and sexually assaulted her.

## Man Possibly Posing as Ride-Share Driver Arrested for Sexual Assault

Detectives from FCPD Major Crimes Bureau are seeking possible additional victims after arresting a man who drove a woman home from Washington D.C. and sexually assaulted her on New Year's Day.

The victim was leaving a location in Dupont Circle, Washington D.C., after midnight when a man offered to drive her home and was possibly posing as a rideshare service. The man drove her to a park in Lorton in a blue Volkswagen Jetta and sexually assaulted her.

Police say that through their investigation, detectives identified the man as Mohannad Yousef Abura, 39. Detectives are concerned there may be additional victims and are seeking information from the community who may have had contact with the driver.

Mohannad Yousef Abura, 39,

was charged with Rape and Abduction with the Intent to Defile. He is being held at the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center on no bond.

Detectives are asking anyone with information regarding this incident, or may have had unlawful contact with Abura, to call FCPD Major Crimes Bureau at 703-246-7800, option 3. Tips can also be submitted anonymously through Crime Solvers by phone – 1-866-411-TIPS (866-411-8477). Please leave contact information if you wish for a detective to follow up with you.

Victim specialists from our Major Crimes Bureau's Victim Services Division have been assigned to ensure the victim is receiving appropriate resources and assistance.



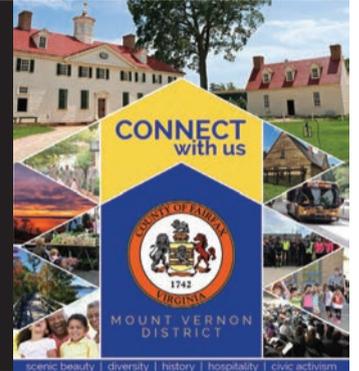
## 37th Annual Mount Vernon Town Meeting

Join us in person or virtually to learn more about why we are "The One"!

**Saturday, February 10, 2024**  
7:45 a.m. – Exhibit Hall Open  
9:30 a.m. – Speakers, Q&A's and Virtual Tour  
12:15 p.m. – Taste of Mount Vernon

**Mount Vernon High School**  
8515 Old Mount Vernon Road  
Mount Vernon, VA 22309

**Live on Channel 16, Facebook**  
More details: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mountvernon](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mountvernon)



**Join Supervisor Dan Storck for the 37th Annual Town Meeting! Meet your Supervisor and many County, state and federal leaders. Have your questions answered, learn about issues important to you, connect with County agencies and service providers and mingle with your neighbors. The highlight of the morning will be taking a "virtual tour" of the changing Mount Vernon District from Lorton to Huntington.**

**Speakers:** Board of Supervisors Chairman **Jeff McKay**, County Executive **Bryan Hill**, Mount Vernon District School Board Member **Mateo Dunne**, Special Guest Congressman **Gerry Connolly**, Senate Majority Leader **Scott Surovell**, Delegate **Paul Krizek** and other community leaders.

**New this Year:** Lifelong Learning, Education Funding and Q&A with NVCC Provost **Dr. Diane Mucci**, Former School Board Member **Karen Corbett Sanders**, Former Delegate and School Member and Education Author **Kris Amundson**.

**For more information**, call the Mount Vernon District Office at 703-780-7518, TTY 711, visit the office at 2511 Parkers Lane, or send your questions/comments to [mtvernon@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:mtvernon@fairfaxcounty.gov).



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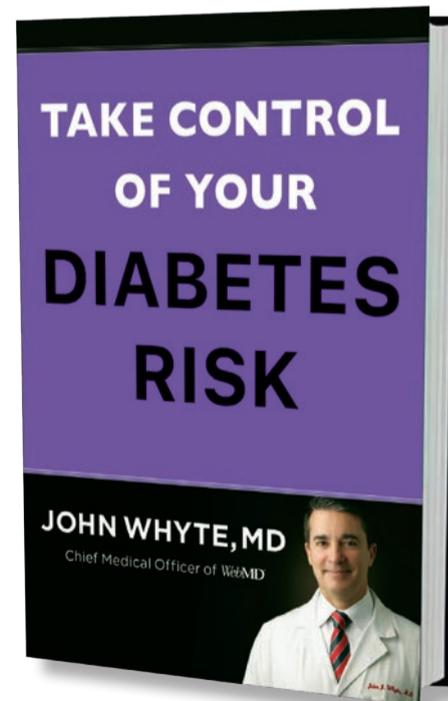
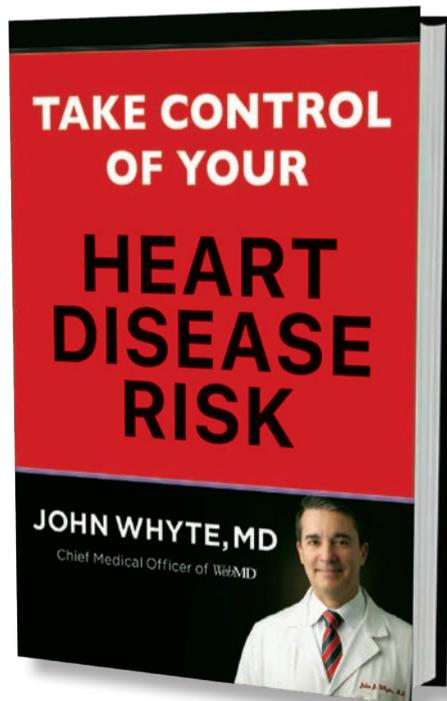
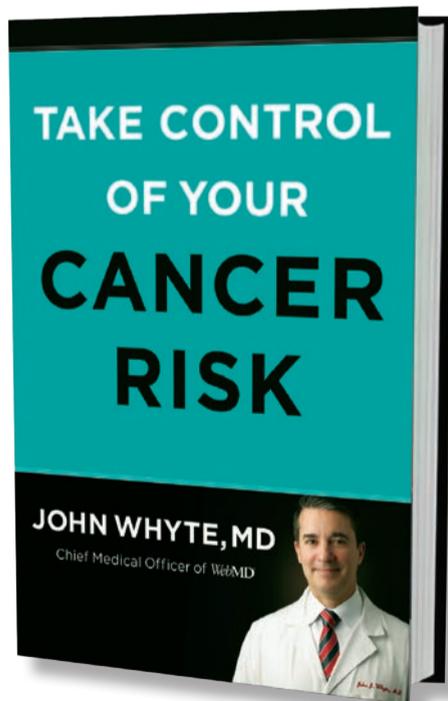
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Connect with **TEAM MVD** and your Mount Vernon neighbors at the 37th Annual Town Meeting! #ConnectMVD

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People studied the maps, posters and conceptual drawings at the Jan. 31 open house.



Mount Vernon Supervisor Dan Storck answered questions.



Franconia Supervisor Rodney Lusk discussed the project.

# Rapid Bus System Central to U.S. 1 Revitalization

FROM PAGE 1

a dedicated transitway. This project is driving the revitalization of the highway, supporting 21st century urbanization and providing a variety of faster transit opportunities for residents to get to jobs, education, shopping, entertainment and more.”

**“There is no space in this plan for the return of the small, often ethnic, shops that many people enjoy.”**  
 — Mary Paden, Chair, South County Task Force

### EMBARK's Redevelopment Plan

A 2015 study recommended a BRT system for the short term and eventually a three-mile extension of the Metrorail Yellow Line to Hybla Valley, concluding that existing transit service is insufficient for both current and future residents, citing long travel times, infrequent service and delays at traffic

signals and during rush hour congestion.

The EMBARK project has three elements: road widening, including bicycle/pedestrian improvements; land use changes; and BRT. The land use changes identify six potential mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, “community-business centers”: North Gateway, Penn

SEE BUS RAPID TRANSIT, PAGE 7

## Existing Conditions



A poster showing one of the existing shopping centers on US 1.

## Example Development Potential



A poster showing an example of potential new development on US 1.



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

Examples of current small businesses on US 1 that could be displaced by the EMBARK redevelopment project.

# Rapid Bus System Central to U.S. 1 Revitalization

FROM PAGE 6

Daw, Beacon/Groveton, Hybla Valley/Gum Springs, South County Center and Woodlawn.

At the Wednesday meeting, people studied conceptual drawings stretching 12 feet or so across two tables and on posters around the room as staff answered questions. From North Kings Highway to Sherwood Hall Lane, 80 percent of the design is completed, with the remaining segment, Sherwood Hall Lane to Belvoir Road, expected this spring.

Plans call for building nine bus stations of the same design featuring art developed by local students. A "Community Charm" initiative has chosen student art for wind-screen designs for four of the nine stations.

"The BRT system will bring Richmond Highway into the 21st century by improving the look and feel of the corridor," said Holly Hicks Dougherty, President, Mount Vernon Springfield Chamber of Commerce. "This new system will make a dramatic visual difference while improving connections to job centers, retail and historic destinations."

## Some Displacement

Widening the highway will require the acquisition of up to 21 residential parcels, one community parcel and up to 40 business properties between Sherwood Hall Lane and Huntington Metro station, a process already underway. The county's Department of Transportation will conduct the right-of-way process until 2026. This includes appraisal valuation, negotiation, relocation and dem-

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



A poster showing "The One," the name of the bus system.



A rendering of the BRT bus stations.

olition. The county's website outlines possible relocation assistance for displaced owners or tenants.

Some locals expressed concerns. Mary Paden, Chair, South County Task Force, anticipates several possible adverse impacts to low- and middle-income people. The Task Force, founded in 1975, is an advocacy group of organizations and individuals focused on housing, health and equity in the Route 1 corridor.

Since EMBARK encourages land consolidation and high-density residential development, many small businesses could be uprooted, she predicts. "There is no space in this plan for the return of the small, often ethnic, shops that many people enjoy," she offers.

Today, pedestrians cross U.S. 1 between the intersections, creating one of the most

dangerous streets in the county. Five intersections are almost a half mile or 2,640 feet apart. "Smart growth" urban planning guidelines recommend about 500 feet between crosswalks, Paden notes, so at least three more crosswalks are needed. Those distances and a road so wide that it will take two lights to cross, will likely put pedestrians at risk, she believes.

Paden believes that the proposed Penn Daw BRT station "threatens about 90 families in mobile homes. If that land is developed, there is currently no provision in state, federal or county law to compensate these families for the loss of their homes, many of which cannot be moved," she maintains.

Her group is working with officials to address these concerns and asks that "everyone be at the table."

## Cost

The county's preliminary cost estimate for the BRT project is approximately \$730 million. VDOT's estimate to widen Richmond Highway from Route 235 to Napper Road for the BRT lanes is another \$372 million. On Dec. 5, 2023, the Board of Supervisors voted to accept just over \$22.5 million in Federal Transit Administration grants to purchase rights of way. The Northern Virginia Transportation Authority will provide \$5.6 million in local dollars.

The county anticipates road construction from 2025 to 2030, to widen the road from four to six lanes.

Information: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/richmond-hwy-brt/background>; <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/results?q=Embark>

# Local Audubon Chapter Votes to Change Its Name

FROM PAGE 3

her after he asked her to leash her dog.

Blackburn says he would have been quite happy if the national Audubon Society had decided to rename itself and the local chapters could have just followed. The national chapter decided not to rename but indicated the local chapters were free to make their own

decision.

Blackburn says that as the largest independent chapter of the 610 chapters around the country, it was important for the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia to evaluate the issue. "I felt that we needed to begin by doing extensive research. I felt some of the things that had been published around the national decision were a little bit too excit-

ed, and some turned out to be incorrect."

The deliberation on whether to change the name included over six months of exploration, including a survey filled out by 481 members and reaching out to a dozen or so other chapters who have already changed their name.

Lyons says, "The survey responses totaled over 25,000 words. It



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

**Libby Lyons, President of the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, which will now choose a new name.**

was like a small novel. People were so passionate."

Lyons says they discovered a survey that had been used by a chapter in Alabama and modified it. She says the ASNV survey found 43 percent of the respondents said a name change would have no effect on their decision to join, 23 percent said it would have some impact one way or the other but 29 percent said it would make them somewhat or much more likely to join.

"The younger and minority respondents felt more strongly about changing the name and we need all hands on deck as we look to the future," Lyons says. "We need to build an intergenerational and intercultural bridge. Nature belongs to everyone."

Blackburn says the current membership of Audubon is old and white. "If the average age of an Audubon member is 70, we need other people to support it. We need to look forward five-to-10 years to how we continue to thrive. The demographics of Northern Virginia has changed dramatically in the last few years."

Connie Ericson, a ASNV Board Member from Arlington says, "I've been an Audubon member for a lot of years, and I'm sad to see the name go. It was synonymous with conservation. But all of the information that has come out in the last few years about James Audubon and with so many people in favor of changing the name, it was inevitable."

She says there were some pretty strong opinions in both directions. She speculates that we live in a diverse area, very urbanized, and it might be a different decision in some of the smaller rural chapters.

Bill Young, a well-known local bird watcher from Arlington who has co-created an extensive website of Monticello Park in Alexandria says, "I actually was indifferent and it wouldn't upset me to leave the

name. But of the two arguments, changing it was a little stronger. I don't understand how young people think but if they are upset by the name I understand." He says, "Perhaps I've been hardened. It's not a hot button issue for me. There is so much anger all over that I think people are looking for outlets. I'm not sure it translates into action."

Lyons says, "The most important thing that everyone had in common was they were all on board about the best thing that would help us in protecting birds. With climate change and the rate of development we need all the help we can get to protect birds."

As they move forward, the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia will reach out to determine a new name for the ASNV chapter which encompasses all of Arlington, Fairfax, Prince William and Stafford counties, and portions of Fauquier, Loudoun, Rappahannock and Spotsylvania counties. Lyons said they had already received suggestions for a new name from 100 people, and there is a link in the newsletter for further suggestions.

Lyons says, "We plan to move forward in the next several months. We need to make sure we have a strategy for branding and connecting with people to make this a success. One of the serious concerns is lack of name recognition when we choose a new name for our organization." She says a number of chapters have chosen a name which combines their geographical location with the words Bird Alliance. The first was Golden Gate Bird Alliance; others include Detroit Bird Alliance and Chicago Bird Alliance. "If we choose one name and galvanize around it, it will be more recognizable."

She speculates the new name should probably contain the word bird and many people believe that the word society has an unfavorable connotation and should be dropped.

On the other hand, Blackburn says, "We do a whole lot more than watch birds. The name needs to reflect more of our mission." He says, "There may be another incredibly good name out there we haven't thought of."

Lyons says a number of people thought the name change issue was just a nuisance and distracting from other more important work. "But our local chapter is moving forward with a number of exciting initiatives. We are hiring a volunteer coordinator and will continue our Stretch the Parks activities, expanding the number and variety of nature outings and putting up a Spanish channel on our website. I think we're changing, which is great."

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# ENTERTAINMENT

## NOW THRU APRIL 15

**Exhibit:** "Searching for Truth in the Garden" at Freedom House Museum. At Freedom House Museum, 1315 Duke Street, Alexandria. Gonzaga High School's groundbreaking research on slavery, "Searching for Truth in the Garden," found new life at the Freedom House Museum. The traveling exhibition, on view through April 15, 2024, delves into the life of Gabriel, a teenager enslaved at Washington Seminary (now Gonzaga) in 1829. Gabriel's story offers a poignant lens through which to examine the complexities of slavery and its lasting impact.

## WEDNESDAYS

### THROUGH SATURDAYS

**Tours Aboard Tall Ship Providence and Sen. John Warner Maritime Heritage Center.** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Alexandria's Waterfront Park, 1A Prince Street, Alexandria. Guests of all ages are recruited into the Continental Navy aboard Tall Ship Providence with legendary Captain John Paul Jones. Recruits are assigned jobs on the ship, learn where they will work and live, how to load a cannon, etc... Tours conclude in the Naval History Theatre with a film about the ship. The Heritage center is a floating museum on the Alexandria waterfront. Visit <https://tallshipprovidence.org/>

## JAN. 11 TO FEB. 18

**A Delicate Balance Sculpture.** At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. Curated by Jackie Hoysted and produced by Veronica Szalus, A Delicate Balance is an all-sculpture show that explores the idea of achieving equilibrium. Perhaps more than ever, today we have a greater awareness of how everything operates in such a delicate balance - be it ecosystems, politics, relationships or personal well-being. We must navigate life without tipping too much in one direction so that we can strive for harmony, but at times something radical is required to achieve it.

## FEB. 2-24

**The "Visible Touch:** A Look at Texture" exhibit features art that explores texture through physical form or visual illusion. Visitors will be allowed to touch some of the art (pieces are marked). Enjoy the visual and the tactile experience! View at Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Opening Reception: Friday, February 2, 7-9 p.m. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. (Closed February 25). DelRay-Artisans.org/exhibits

## THURSDAY/FEB. 8

**African American Film Series:** "Banker" 2-4 p.m. At Ellen Coolidge Burke Branch Library, 4701 Seminary Road, Suite 104, Alexandria. Free admission. In honor of Black History Month, the library will be showing a series of films throughout the month.

## FRIDAY/FEB. 9

**The Thirteen Presents "Path of Miracles."** 7:30 p.m. At St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 8009 Ft. Hunt Road, Alexandria. In Path of Miracles, British composer Joby Talbot takes the listener on a musical journey on the mystical Camino de Santiago de Compostela. The contemplative progression of the



The Love Is In the Air Exhibit takes place now thru Feb. 29, 2024 at Van Landingham Gallery at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria.

## Love Is In the Air Exhibit.

At Van Landingham Gallery, Torpedo Factory, Gallery 311, 105 North Union Street, Alexandria. The Torpedo Factory Artists' Association presents a group exhibition including jewelry, paintings, photography, mixed media work, hand pulled prints, and more during the month of February. Visit <https://www.torpedofactoryartists.com/> to learn more about the Torpedo Factory Artists' Association.

Camino is built into the structure of the work, with the four movements of the work titled after the four main posts along the Camino. Talbot incorporates various medieval texts in many languages and musical styles as diverse as those of Taiwanese Bunun people and medieval chant. Paired with projected images of the cosmos by renowned Italian virtual designer Camilla Tassi, The Thirteen's performances of Path of Miracles promise to be replete with beauty and wonder.

## FEB. 10 AND 17

**Manumission Tour Company Black History Bus Tour.** Feb. 10, 2024, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. and Feb. 17, 2024, from 1:30 to 3 p.m. and 3 to 5 p.m. Tour meets at the Alexandria Black History Museum, 902 Wythe Street, Alexandria. Ride with Manumission Tour Company on a 90-minute guided bus tour to visit various African American historic sites in Alexandria. You will hear stories of both enslaved and free African Americans prior to the Civil War as well as understand the stories behind some of Alexandria's most well-known African American historic sites. Sites will include the Alexandria National Cemetery, Alfred Street Baptist Church, Shiloh Baptist Church, Church Alley, the African American Heritage Park, the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery, Barrett Library and more.

## SATURDAY/FEB. 10

**Mount Vernon District Town Meeting.** 7:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. At Mount Vernon High School, 8515 Old Mount Vernon Road, Mount Vernon. This year's event will be filled with important District

information, delicious food and engaging activities for the whole family. Engage and learn about the County budget, public safety and other issues important to you. The popular Exhibit Hall runs from 7:45 - 9:30 a.m. featuring many County agencies and local service providers. Take a moment to check out the KidBiz Young Entrepreneurs Expo which features many "small" business owners. The Fairfax County Health Department will have flu vaccines available and Public Health Nurses will be onsite to answer your questions about childhood and adult vaccines. The program runs from 9:30 a.m. - noon featuring a "virtual tour" of the District with updates on recently completed, current and future projects, followed by Q&A panels with local leaders and special recognitions. You will hear from Congressman Gerry Connolly, Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay, County Executive Bryan Hill, Mount Vernon School Board Representative Mateo Dunne and other local elected leaders who will be speaking and answering questions from residents. Special this year we will hear about the state of education funding in the Commonwealth. After the program from 12:15 - 1:30 p.m., join in a Taste of Mount Vernon. Sample dishes from local restaurants such as Dishes of India, Della J's Delectables, Grandma's Famous Kitchen, 2 Jefes Tex-Mex, Domino's, Ruby's Jamaican Kitchen and many more. Join us in-person or stream from your home on Facebook @SupervisorDanStorck and Channel 16 <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/channel-16/stream>.

## SATURDAY/FEB. 10

**African American Waterfront Heritage Trail Signs Ribbon Cutting.** 11 a.m. At the New Fishtown sign on the river side of Founders Park, 351 N. Union Street, Alexandria. The African American Heritage Trail Committee invites the public to join in a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the installation of new interpretive signs along Alexandria's historic waterfront. The 11 signs and two orientation panels illuminate the history of the African American community in Alexandria over the span of several centuries. A reception following the ribbon cutting will be held in the Overlook Room (#325) on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory, 105 N. Union Street.

## FEB. 10-11

### Alexandria Symphony Announces ASO at 80 Project

Saturday, February 10, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. at Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center; Sunday, February 11, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. at George Washington Masonic Memorial.

Four original pieces, commissioned in honor of the 80th anniversary of the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra (ASO), will be presented as part of the ASO at 80 Project. Led by Music Director James Ross, the commissions will premiere throughout the 2023-2024 season as introductions to four of the five performances.

On February 10 and 11, 2024, the program entitled "Do Not Go Gentle" opens with Milad Yousofi's Aurora, drawn from his experience as an Afghan refugee and inspired by a poem dedicated to his mother. His works express both his pride in his country of birth and his longing to return. Visit [www.alexsym.org](http://www.alexsym.org).

## SUNDAY/FEB. 25

### Finding the Family of Joseph McCoy.

2 p.m. At Alexandria Black History Museum, 902 Wythe Street, Alexandria. Genealogist Char McCargo Bah will lecture on "Finding the Family of Alexandria's Lynching Victim Joseph McCoy." Join the Black History Museum staff in learning how Ms. Bah, the official genealogist for the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project, discovered the family of the first of Alexandria's lynching victims, Joseph McCoy, who was lynched in Alexandria on April 23, 1897. Learn the secrets to investigating a family tree that does not have many leads. The lecture is suited for beginners or established genealogists. The lecture is free, but space is limited, so register to attend. Registration At: Finding the Family of Joseph McCoy - [shop.alexandriava.gov](http://shop.alexandriava.gov).

## FRIDAY/MARCH 8

**Women's Leadership Forum.** 7:45-10:30 a.m. At The Westin Alexandria Old Town, 400 Courthouse Square, Alexandria. The forum will bring together women (and men) at all stages of their careers for an interactive, "straight talk" panel discussion filled with inspiration and insight. Cost is \$80 for Members | \$105 for Prospective Members.

## Chamber Business Scholarships for High School Seniors

Applications are now open for business scholarships for graduating high school seniors provided by Mount Vernon Springfield Chamber of Commerce. Scholarships of \$2,000 will be awarded to graduating seniors pursuing further education in a business related field.

Students may apply online at <https://mountvernonsspringfield.com/business-scholarship-application/> or email [info@mountvernonsspringfield.com](mailto:info@mountvernonsspringfield.com) to request more information. The application deadline is Monday, April 29. Scholarships will be awarded on May 23, at a special reception at the National Museum of the United States Army.

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**OPINION**

**Ebbin**  
FROM PAGE 4

tion of the Yellow Line Bridge Tunnel Rehabilitation project, as well as the rebuilding of 11 Metrorail station platforms in Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax County.

Unfortunately, the legislative compromise reached in 2018 placed a 3% annual growth cap on how much Metro could ask Virginia's local governments to contribute in operating assistance. Without further action by the General Assembly to lift that 3% cap, along with a significant cash infusion, Metro will be forced to make severe service cuts to close the budget deficit, which would be devastating for Northern Virginia. This would mean the closure of the 10 lowest-ridership stations across the system, and service cutbacks like the closing of stations at 10 p.m. For Metrobus, this would eliminate 67 of 135 routes; and 41 of the remaining 68 routes would see reduced service.

Metro has dug deep and found additional, one time and recurring savings to help close the gap, but regional partners need to do their part. The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC), where I serve as a Commissioner, put forward recommendations on Metro funding, accountability and reform, and is studying options for long-term dedicated funding. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) has also brought together staff and elected officials from across the region to find short and long-term solutions.

I am disappointed that Gov. Glenn Youngkin did not include any additional funding for Metro in his proposed Fiscal Year 2025 - 2026 budget. If we can't solve this budget gap, we won't have a working Metro system to serve the new Potomac Yard-VT station — and the governor's proposed new arena for the Washington Capitals and Washington Wizards.

I want to extend my appreciation to Sen. David Marsden and Del. Mark Sickles for their proposed amendments to the state budget that would address the operating cap and provide additional state aid to Metro, which would be matched by Northern Virginia local governments. Because these solutions are short-term, I have also introduced SJ 28 to study and develop long-term sustainable funding solutions for Metro and other Northern Virginia transit systems.

It is my continued honor to represent the people of the 39th Senate District. My legislative email address is SenatorEbbin@senate.virginia.gov.

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## STREAMING

# Local Film Takes a Step Forward In the Streaming World

**“There is a Monster,” premiered on Apple TV and Prime Video January 30.**

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

Local filmmaker Michael Taylor spent the last few years honing his film “There is a Monster,” down to perfection but then took it to the next step promoting it and now the film is on the schedule at Apple TV, Amazon Prime Video and Vudu so everyone can see it.

When the film was ready, he reached out to distributors and was recommended to get in touch with Scott Moesta, a producer’s representative who specializes in distribution for filmmakers. Taylor signed a deal and now has “Gravitas Ventures,” behind the process and he’s on his way up in the movie world. On Jan. 30, his film launched on several platforms so now the checks will start rolling in, right?

Not so fast.

“That’s the big mystery. This is my first feature film. I don’t know what to expect, but I’m hoping we can all make our money back and perhaps turn a profit. The movie business is very tough to predict,” he said. Running to the mailbox every day like a kid waiting for his sea monkey kit is not out of the question.

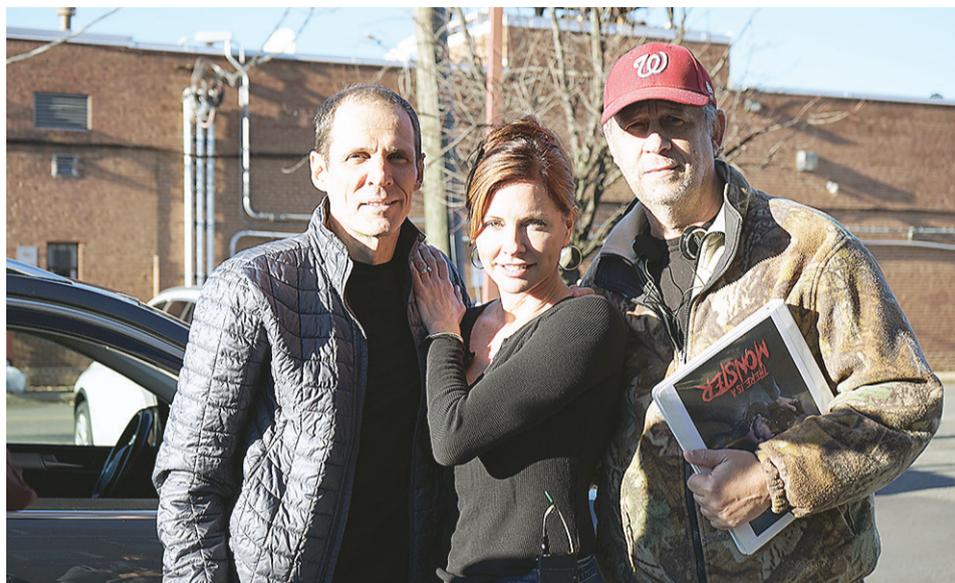
It’s a start though, and he’s happy it’s going this way. In fact, Taylor is working on his next film, which is something he wrote a few years ago and he’s updating it for today’s audiences. This film has a bigger budget and he’s hoping to have more famous faces in it.

“I will shoot that either again in Northern Virginia or Richmond,” he said.

It all started with filming “There is a Monster,” in and around Alexandria a few years ago. In Taylor’s horror film, scenes were filmed around Alexandria and Mount Vernon, where he’s lived in the past. In December 2021 into 2022, there were scenes at the Southside 815 restaurant, Bradlee Medical Center, and a house in Great Falls to tell a story that is indirectly about a real-life disease that haunts many including his sister, who died of the disease.

Locally “There is a Monster,” premiered on March 20, 2023 at the AMC Shirlington 7.

**Director Michael Taylor’s film was finished last winter but will be seen by many once it gets to professional film platforms Apple TV and Prime Video.**



Local filmmaker Michael Taylor, in the red hat, taking a break on the set of “There is a Monster,” with Joey Collins from Arlington and Ena O’Rourke who plays Carol in the movie.



There is a Monster’ is available on cable or streaming.



## Not Dying to Find Out



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Now that The Connection, most of the editions anyhow, are back on their weekly track, I’ll be better able to keep you regular readers interested in Kenny-with-cancer’s status. For the current moment, I am living between a rock and hard place. On the one hand I am a cancer patient who is unable, due to some predictable side effects of treatment: kidney damage, to continue to take the prescribed papillary thyroid cancer medicine that has presumably kept me going for the past three and a half years – when my original non-small cell lung cancer stage IV diagnosis was changed/corrected. Since the medicine was never a cure, I remember asking my oncologist about the timeline for the medicine’s effectiveness. I was told three years, give, or take. I am now four months into year four. Hardly reassuring then that here I am, in year four, having side-effect issues which has led to a cessation of my cancer medicine. And so far as my thyroid cancer is affected, I can’t imagine no medicine will stem the tide. On the other hand, diagnosis to date, to quote my late brother, medically speaking, I have been “the exception that proves the rule.” Meaning, I have survived the ordeal of chemotherapy/cancer treatment better than most, according to my oncologist. However, surviving kidney damage caused by the years of treatment might be another risk/problem entirely. And unfortunately, kidneys don’t get better if I stop the medicine. They just won’t get worse. Which I don’t imagine will be the case with my thyroid cancer. If there’s no medicine to keep the cancer in check, the kidney damage might be the least of my problems. Either way, I may be damned if I do and/or damned if I don’t.

Nevertheless, I’m trying not to focus too much on this reality and my three-year window of effectiveness slamming shut. Throughout my 14-plus years of treatment, often I was not presenting how my oncologist was expecting. I wasn’t reacting as he had anticipated. I was doing much better than he expected then when he “prognosed” a “13 month to two years” life expectancy – at age 54 and a half for me at the initial Team Lourie meeting. As such, the experience has helped me manage my expectations – and fears. I can roll with the punches as I go from one lab result to the next, one scan result to the next. Because so far, due to a possible misdiagnosis (and/or an extremely slow-moving thyroid cancer at that) or a better-than-expected patient reaction to most treatments, I’ve survived nearly 15 years (Feb. 20, 2024, will be my diagnosis anniversary). What this better-than-expected patient experience has taught me is to wait and see, rather than presume the worst. In short, I’m able to wait and see rather than preemptively spend time finalizing my arrangements. However, a side effect with the word kidney in it is somewhat different compared to many of the garden variety (hair loss, fatigue, nausea, et cetera) side effects some of you may be familiar with as often characteristic of chemotherapy. It will be about the time this column publishes on Feb. 7 that I will have received the results of my most recent lab work from Feb. 5th. It’s likely that my column on Wed. Feb.12 will address the potential elephant in the room: dialysis – or the avoidance thereof, brought about by an ever-increasing creatinine level (a direct result of years of chemotherapy for a lung cancer that didn’t exist, apparently) that is likely confirming irreparable damage to my kidneys (so much so that I’m now being monitored by a nephrologist who has likewise ordered monthly lab work, approximately a half dozen tests or so unique to the kidneys that previously have never been measured). And though I don’t like the sound of any of it, I must keep my powder dry and wait until I see the whites of my doctor’s eyes (if you know what I mean). If I don’t, it means I shouldn’t put my cart before my horse (which I don’t even own) and wait for actual medical confirmation that my ship has sailed. So, until further notice/clarification that I am in some semi-expected medical trouble, that will most likely affect my life expectancy (and not extending it, I’m afraid), I will stay in port and deal with this health storm as I have going back 15 years: underreaction and calm in the face of potentially really bad news. But until it’s really happening, I’m not ‘really’ worried. Nor am I about to woe is me (and I wouldn’t anyway, as you regular readers know). I will keep to my routine, remain positive about the negative and consider that very little of what my oncologist had predicted/anticipated health-wise originally for me has come to fruition (and 15 years of fruition is a long track record). But until it’s a definite, as far as I’m concerned, it’s a maybe. And I can live with maybe.

And I certainly have experience living with ‘maybe.’ When my oncologist first met Team Lourie and reviewed with us my previous eight weeks of diagnostic testing with a pulmonologist, thoracic surgeon, general surgeon and pathologist (X-Ray, CT scan, PET Scan, surgical biopsy) with the results all indicating/confirming non-small cell lung cancer stage IV, I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. When we asked the oncologist about my chances of survival, he was very discouraging: “2% live beyond two years.” Mind you, I was 54 and a half, had never spent a day in hospital; was a lifelong non-smoker with no cancer in my immediate family; and yet I’m receiving this doomsday scenario: living 30 years less than my recently deceased parents (my father died at 87 and my mother died at 86).

I had always figured I would at least live as long as they did. Then I was being told statistically that I’ll be lucky to make it to age 57. Now, I’m hearing similarly ominous words. On my next birthday, I’ll be age 70. I believed the doctors then as I believe them now. Still, I’ll try not to take it personally and presume facts not in evidence. Life is for living, not anticipating dying.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.



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- ★★★★★ Process expertise
- ★★★★★ Responsiveness
- ★★★★★ Negotiation skills



"Chris and his sons were outstanding in marketing and selling our home. They made the process easy and timely for my wife and I to be able to find a truly magnificent family who appreciated what made our home so special. Chris and his firm are truly the gold standard for Realtors in the Northern Virginia area. We would recommend them to anyone without hesitation. Not only are they skilled professionals, but they are honest and decent people." - Dority Family at 4325 Tarpon Ln



9387 Warburton Ct | \$1,899,000



3104 Battersea Ln | \$775,000



8832 Fort Hunt Rd | \$1,195,000



8909 Dogue Dr | \$683,800



1904 Mallinson Way | \$1,800,000



9308 Allwood Dr | \$815,000



4008 Old Mill Rd | \$780,000



8524 Wagon Wheel | \$850,000



9334 Mount Vernon Cir | \$989,000

***78 homes sold in 2023!***

**703.283.9028**

**LONG & FOSTER**  
 REAL ESTATE

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