

The WV INDEPENDENT Observer

JEFFERSON COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

APRIL 2024

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Ruby Hendrickson, an art student at Shepherd University, works on a mural that will be installed in downtown Shepherdstown later this month.

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Shalini R. Reddy, MD

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WELCOME DR. REDDY

Dr. Reddy received her medical degree from Mahadevappa Rampure Medical College in Karnataka, India. She completed a general surgery internship at Montefiore Medical Center in Bronx, NY followed by a general surgery residency at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, NY.

Dr. Reddy completed two fellowships, one in cardiothoracic surgery at SUNY Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse, NY and the other in minimally invasive thoracic surgery at Roswell Park Hospital in Buffalo, NY. She has practiced thoracic surgery in the region for over 8 years.

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Mark August 18 – 24 on your calendars for the 2024 Jefferson County Fair. You can find all the details on the updated website (JeffersonCountyFairWV.org), including lots of contests — eating contests (marshmallows, pudding and watermelons), tossing contests (water balloons, hay bales and eggs), and of course, the greased pig contest!

TO OUR READERS — “Do we have any other members of the audience that have an extra million dollars laying around that might help us out?” A Jefferson County commissioner posed that question at the end of the March 14 budget work session, just after the Commission had spent several hours cutting the budget.

I had been trying to follow the somewhat chaotic budget discussions all morning. Towards the end of the session, I realized that the budget documents in front of the commissioners were undercounting next year’s projected revenues by over \$1 million. I shared my suspicion about the missing revenue with the County Clerk, who interrupted the meeting to suggest I share what I found. Steve Stolipher, the Commission president, remarked that if I had something to say I should step up to the microphone and say it. So I did. About 10 minutes later the county’s accountant announced the budget had swung from an \$800,000 deficit to a \$300,000 surplus.

One item the commissioners skipped over several times was the lack of any cost-of-living-allowance (COLA) or merit pay increases for any of the county’s employees. They continued to avoid the pay raise issue at the next meetings where they added a few more expense items back into the budget. When they voted to approve the budget on March 21, employee pay raises were still set to zero, but the commissioners seemed quite pleased that they had “balanced” the budget. I couldn’t help but recall author George Orwell’s words in the novel *Animal Farm* — “all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”



Steve Pearson
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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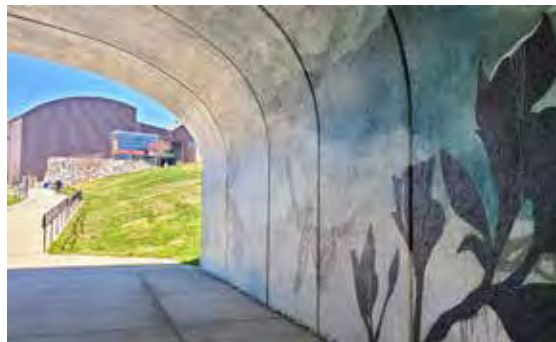


Attorneys: Stephen Skinner, Andrew Skinner, & Bryan Ogilvie | Stephen Skinner is responsible for the content of this ad.

// COMMUNITY

NEW MURAL WILL CELEBRATE SHEPHERDSTOWN

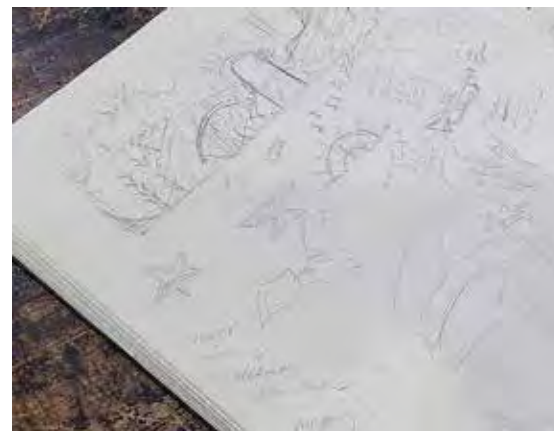
Shepherd Students Learn How To Create Public Art



IT TOOK ABOUT A YEAR for the team of Shepherd University student volunteers to create the mural on the walls of the campus walkway below Duke Street back in 2016-17 (image, above). Professor Sonya Evanisko, who led that team (also as a volunteer), recalled that it was a lot of work but also very rewarding and a great learning experience for the students. She thought about the project over the next few years, and when she heard about the opportunity to create a mural at the University's Tabler Farm facility, she decided to build a course around the project.

The Tabler Farm mural was completed in the summer of 2023 and that project led to ROCS commissioning a mural for its store just west of Shepherdstown. Evanisko expected the ROCS mural to be the focus of her 2023-24 courses, but an unexpected offer from the Lewis family to host a mural on the side of the Betty's Restaurant building in downtown Shepherdstown was just too good of an opportunity to pass up.

Evanisko worked with her students to ideate the concept, ultimately focusing on the themes of arts, crafts, and invention related to the town's history set in the context of the town's natural surroundings. Evanisko and the students worked with the Town's Historic Landmark Commission, which approved the downtown mural with the restriction that it be created on panels that could be attached (and removed) from the building surface, to preserve the historic integrity of the structure. The team expects to begin installation of the mural panels in April. 📍



According to Prof. Sonya Evanisko, research for the mural project included lots of discussions with local residents about what elements could be included to represent Shepherdstown. Shepherd University student Charlotte Puttock worked out the initial design for the mural by hand in her sketchbook. The group then created mood boards to work out specific elements. The goal of the project is to create a memorable space that encourages visitors to interact with the artwork.



Prof. Sonya Evanisko and student Charlotte Puttock discuss details of the mural. The mural is being painted on MDO panels which will be hung from the side of the Betty's Restaurant building. Most of the mural will be painted in the campus studio, but a significant amount of detail painting and secondary elements will be added once the panels are installed on site later this spring.

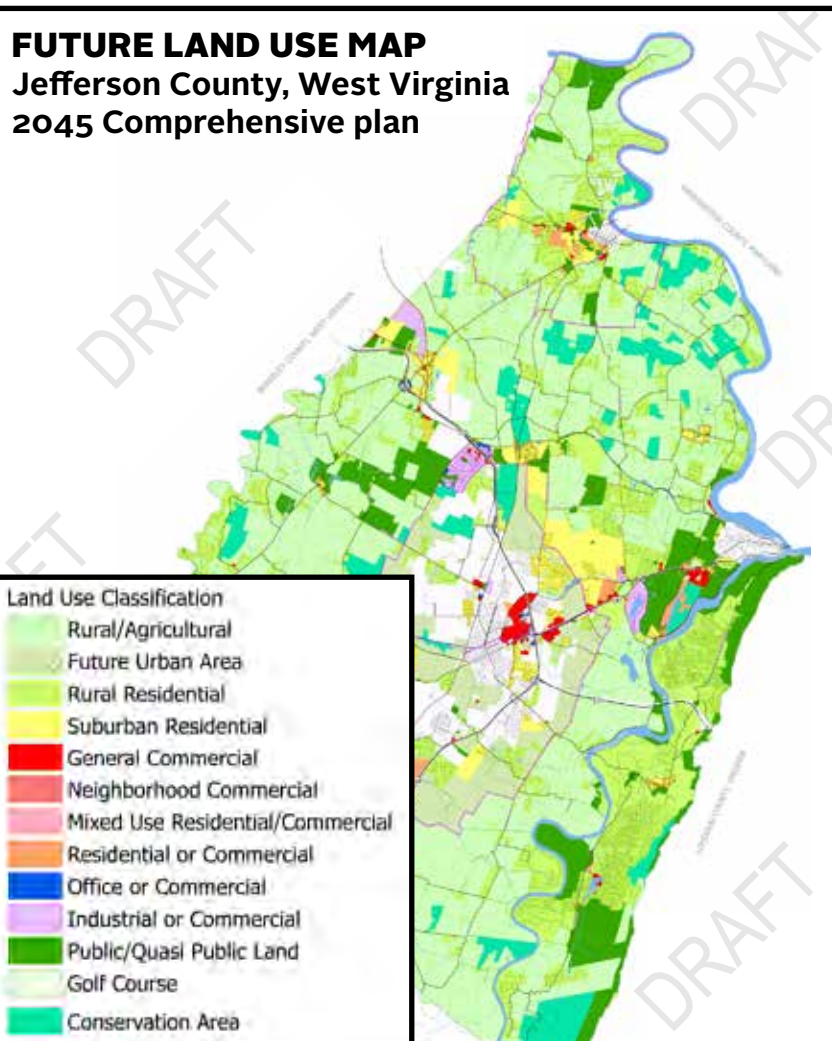
// LAND USE

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

Critical Time For Public Input

THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP is a key guide to how development in Jefferson County will unfold over the next ten years. The next few public meetings (see dates below) are the best opportunities for community members to weigh in on the specific details of the map. After June, the Planning Commission has a tight schedule to create a final draft by August. 🗳️

FUTURE LAND USE MAP Jefferson County, West Virginia 2045 Comprehensive plan



KEY DATES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

APR 9 (TUE) – Planning Commission regular meeting. 7:00 pm at Charles Town Library (lower level meeting room). The commissioners will review the proposed Future Land Use Map to be presented at the final public input meeting. Email comments by April 2 to be included in the meeting packet provided to commissioners.

MAY 7 (TUE) – Planning Commission regular meeting. 7:00 pm at Charles Town Library (lower level meeting room). Regular agenda. Email comments by April 30.


MAY 13 (MON) – Final Public Input Meeting. 7:00 pm at Jefferson High School (4141 Flowing Springs Rd, Shenandoah Junction). The commission will take public comment on the proposed Future Land Use Map and the comprehensive plan action items.

JUNE 25 (TUE) – Planning Commission workshop. 7:00 pm at Charles Town Library (lower level meeting room). The commissioners and staff will review the plan text and maps. Email comments by June 18 to be included in the meeting packet.



Comments can be emailed to Luke Seigfried at CompPlan2045@JeffersonCountyWV.org. Visit ObserverWV.com/jefferson-comp-plan-2024 (QR code) for full size maps and links.

April 17
8am to 6pm




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Questions? emily@jccvb.com or annette.gavin@jccvb.com



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// LOCAL BUSINESS

CRAFT BREWS AROUND JEFFERSON COUNTY

Family Business Sees Growing Market For Local Beer



AARON BLESSING, WHO RECENTLY JOINED Bavarian Brothers Brewing as the head brewmaster, recounted the origin of his “beer journey” — “I started home brewing for off-campus parties when I was a student at Shepherd University in the late 1990s. I was renting a house in Harpers Ferry with a roommate who was from England. He introduced me to a whole different world of English and European style beers.”

Blessing found work as a carpenter after graduation but he continued with his brewing hobby. The housing recession that hit bottom in 2008 changed his path when he took a job with Mountaineer Brewing in Morgantown. Starting off on the packaging line, “pushing a broom” as he described it, his home brewing experience paid off and he

was promoted to assistant brewer after a year. In the late 2010s, experienced brewers were in high demand. Blessing ended up at Vanish Brewery in Lucketts by 2017, and was soon recruited by Antietam Brewing to run the brewing operation there.

Blessing noted that it’s a big change moving from the large production environment to the Bavarian’s single-barrel system, but he says the tap room experience allows for a lot more creativity and customization. “It’s an opportunity to create a curated experience” for the customers who appreciate good beer. 🍺

Bavarian Brothers Brewing, 164 Shepherd Grade Road, Shepherdstown (at the Bavarian Inn Resort). Open daily. Web: BavarianInnWV.com

WHAT’S BREWING NEARBY

Rippon Brewing Company

A farmhouse brewer using hops, barley, wheat & rye grown and malted locally on Rippon Lodge Farm. Taproom open Fri & Sat (starting April 1), 4-7 pm. 2153 Berryville Pike, Rippon WV. Web: RipponBrewing.com.

Amani Brewing Company

Small craft brewer with taproom and kitchen. Regular schedule of events, kid & dog friendly. 654 Ropp Drive, Martinsburg WV. See website for hours: Amani-co.com. Tel: 301-842-4406.

Cacapon Mountain Brewing

Cacapon Mountain calls itself a family-friendly brewpub. Located at 42 Williams St, Berkeley Springs WV (in the old sock mill), the on-site brewery takes advantage of the famous spring waters. The taproom hosts live music and kids are welcome if accompanied by a parent. Outdoor seating is available (dogs welcome outside, but not in the taproom). See website for hours: CacaponBrewing.com.





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Farmhouse Brewer In Charles Town



MICHAEL VANCE, THE BREWMASTER at Abolitionist Ale Works, considers himself a beer geek. He's always experimenting, which is part of the reason why his lineup of 20 brews on tap changes every week. Vance considers himself a farmhouse style brewer, using wild yeasts in his beer. Some of his experiments include mixing multiple strains of yeast in a single batch to create tastes not typically found in production-style brewing.

Vance doesn't have a large space for his brewing system, so of necessity he does a lot of his fermenting in barrels. Unlike stainless steel fermenters, the barrels are not temperature controlled, so Vance will be sampling each barrel over the course of several weeks to get it to where he wants it. As he describes it, "I let the yeast do its own thing, and give the beer more

time to mature. Time is one of the ingredients that's missing from a lot of beer."

Michael's brother Josh handles the tavern side of the business. Their goal was to create a friendly neighborhood pub for locals — and welcome visitors who appreciate their hand-crafted beer. The tavern will fit 100 comfortably, with a small outdoor garden in the rear. Josh says he plans to host live music this summer, restarting a tradition that has been on pause for a few years. Abolitionist will also be hosting a beer garden at WV Fest (Jun 15, downtown Charles Town).

Abolitionist Ale Works, 129 West Washington St, Charles Town (downtown). See website for hours: AbolitionistAleWorks.com. Tel: 681-252-1548.

New Brewpub Just Across The River

AS THE SAYING GOES, if Jeff and Dorrie Pilot had a nickel for every time they were asked when their craft brewery on Shepherdstown Pike would open, they would be rich. Four years after the couple purchased the Sharpsburg property where a VFW Post had once operated, Potomac Ridge Brewing has officially opened its doors.



Potomac Ridge Brewing's on-tap offerings include their own recipes as well as a rotation of beers from other craft breweries in the region. A dozen distinctive pizzas are on the menu including the Forager, with locally grown mushrooms, the Pickle Pie, and the Mountain Mama with pink 'shine sauce. An assortment of other food items and full-serve bar service rounds out the menu.

On opening day last month, unseasonably warm weather drew visitors out to enjoy the new establishment's covered outdoor pavilion and firepit. On the same 8-acre property, the Pilots offer a different type of beverage at Little Brick Coffee which opened in December 2022.

Potomac Ridge Brewing, 16609 Shepherdstown Pike, Sharpsburg MD (just over the river). See website for hours: PotomacRidgeBrewing.com. Tel: 240-200-9832.

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// BUDGET

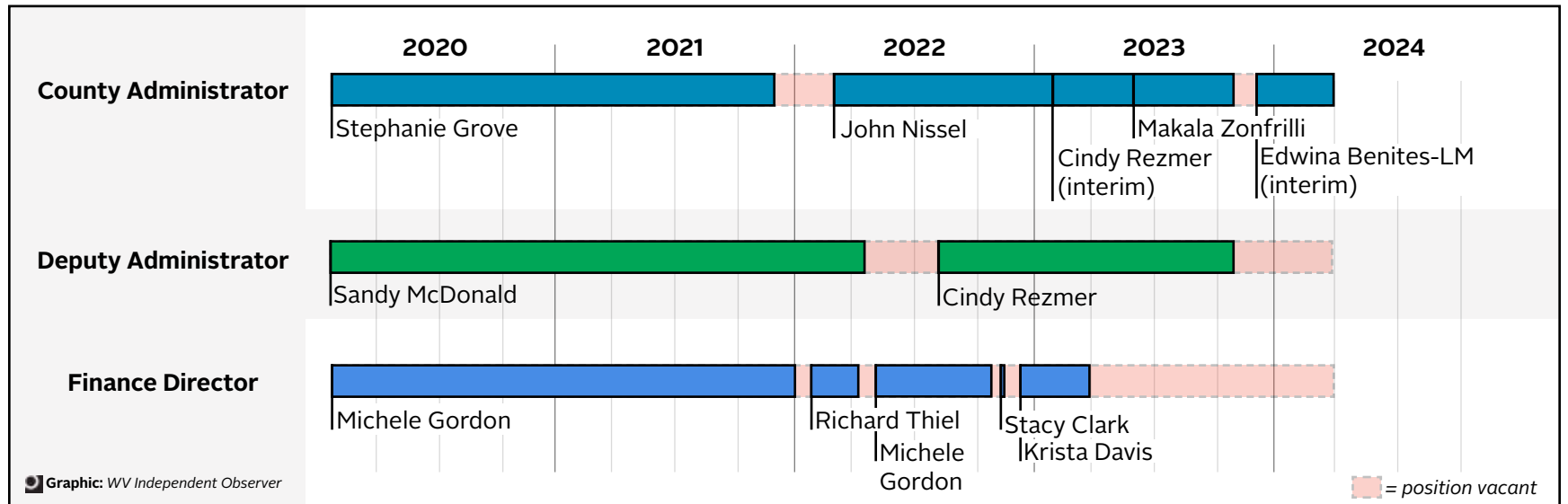
CONFUSION DISRUPTS COUNTY BUDGET PROCESS

Commissioners Fail To Hire Key Staff To Prepare Budget

AFTER A MONTH OF DISCUSSION, the Jefferson County Commission voted on March 21 to approve the county budget for Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1 2024 to June 30 2025). There were several questions left unresolved even as the commissioners voted. Facing a deadline to submit the budget the next morning so it could be published and then forwarded to the state, the commissioners approved the budget anyway.

The commissioners appeared very confused about the numbers throughout the budget meetings and even asked the State Auditor’s Office to provide assistance — a request which was quickly declined by the state. At the root of the confusion is the ongoing vacancy in the Finance Director position, a role that the Commission has repeatedly declined to fill for almost a year. Looking

further back, there have been 5 different individuals in the Finance Director role since late 2021. Both the County Administrator and Deputy Administrator roles have also had high turnover (chart below). The current County Administrator is performing that role on a temporary “interim” basis and the Deputy Administrator position (responsible for human resources) is also currently vacant.



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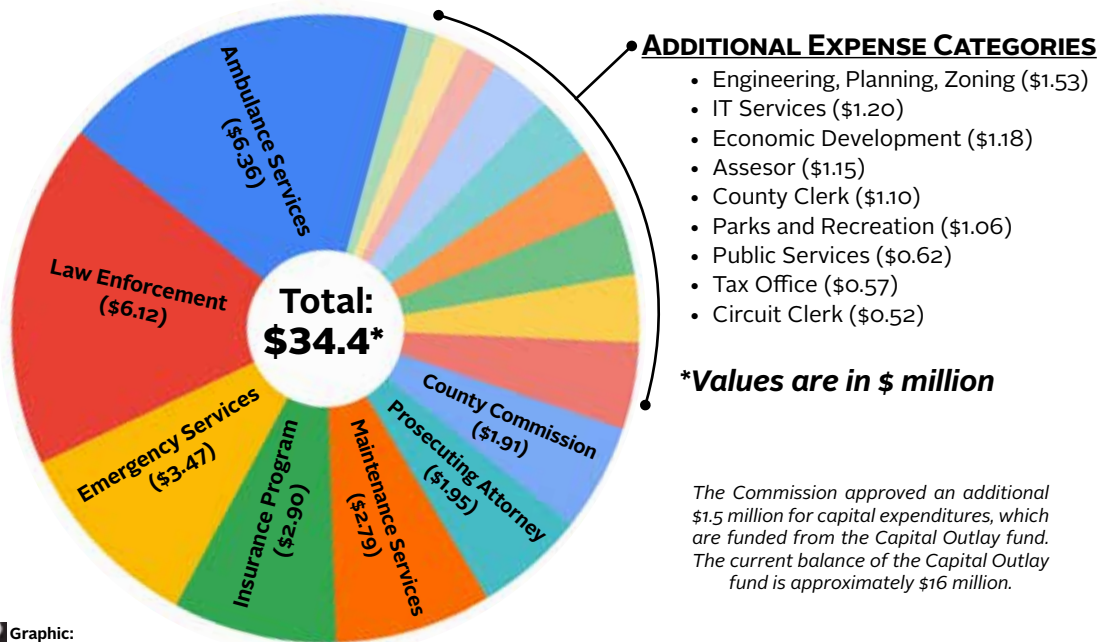
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JEFFERSON COUNTY FY25 OPERATING EXPENSE BUDGET



The County Commission approved \$34.4 million in operating expenses (chart above) in the FY2025 budget. The budget submitted to the state is actually several components nested together (chart below). The operating budget (red box) includes the expenses of running the county’s offices (including payroll). Property taxes provide the largest portion of operating revenues, followed by building permit fees, video lottery, phone taxes, cable franchise fees, and numerous minor taxes and fees. Transfers from other sources and ambulance service fees add about \$2 million to the revenues.

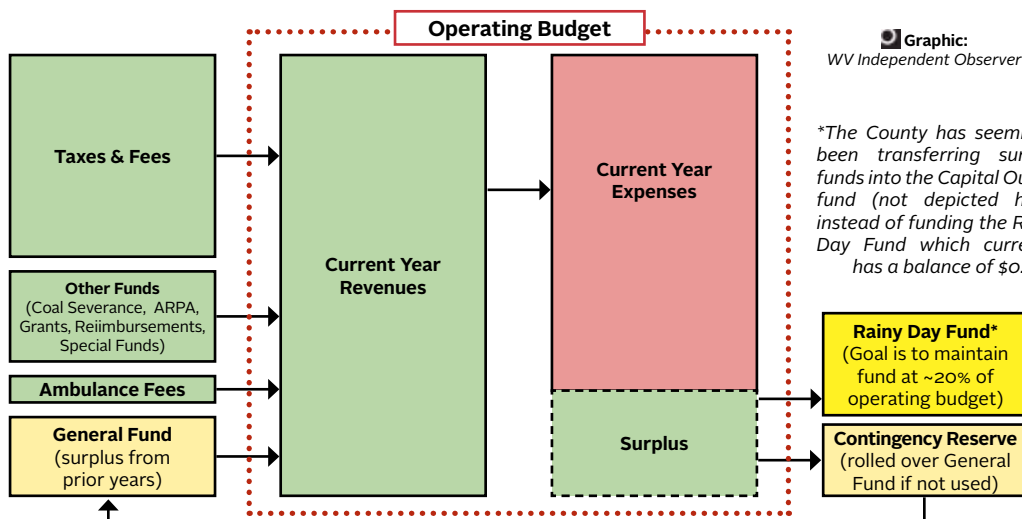
To calculate the extended budget submitted to the state, the county includes the general (unrestricted) fund balance on the revenue side and reserves a “contingency” amount on

the expense side. If the operating budget is in balance and there are no emergency expenses, that “contingency” amount plus any operating surplus (projected to be \$38,000 in the March 21 budget) rolls forward into the general fund to be included in the extended budget for the following year.

The County has a policy goal to hold 20 percent of the operating expenses in a “rainy day fund.” Each year the County should be topping up that fund as the operating expense budget increases. Prior year budgets do show a transfer to the rainy day fund each year, but that money has never been deposited into the designated fund, which currently has a zero balance. 🚩

More at ObserverWV.com/JCC-budget.

JEFFERSON COUNTY BUDGET STRUCTURE



“Whatever is rejected from the self appears in the world as an event.”

—Attributed to C.G. Jung



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CANADA GEESE STAY CLOSE TO HOME

By Doug Pifer

Doug Pifer is an artist, naturalist, and writer. He has a Master's Degree in Journalism from Penn State and has been an editor and art educator. His illustrations have appeared in various books and magazines and he has been a contributor to The Observer for several years. He lives with his wife and assorted animals on 5.7 acres in a historic farmhouse near Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

MY EARS CAUGHT the high-pitched calls of wild geese. I spied three V-shaped strings of tiny dots crossing the March sky. Doubting whether the geese would show up in a photo, I snapped a picture with my phone anyway. After enlarging the picture, I counted 220 individual geese.

Headed due north, they were following the migration path of their ancestors. I guessed they had spent most of the winter in the vicinity of Chesapeake Bay, or possibly as far south as the coastal Carolinas. Later in the day, a low-flying pair of Canada geese crossed our field toward the creek beside our house, honking loudly. These were locals, very possibly the same pair whose nest I pass on my way to town.

Looking back in time, Canada geese ranged across the North American continent in the winter, with most migrating north to their breeding grounds in spring. Only one regional subspecies, the giant Canada goose, nested in the continental United States, in the Midwest. During their 1804 expedition, Lewis and Clark reported seeing big geese nesting along the Missouri River, but by 1900, these giant Canada geese were believed to be extinct. By then, it was also rare to see a big flock of Canada geese flying

northward in the spring. A locally breeding pair of geese was unheard of. Unregulated hunting, plus the destruction of habitat, were the main reasons for their scarceness.

Then in 1963, a waterfowl biologist named Dr. Harold Hanson discovered a population of giant Canada Geese around Silver Lake, near Rochester, Minnesota. Much larger than a typical Canada goose, these weighed over 12 pounds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service placed the population under federal protection. State fish and game departments started breeding programs to build up populations of the rediscovered giant Canada geese.

Thus begins one of the most dramatic wildlife success stories in history.

By not migrating, giant Canada geese fare much better in many ways than their relatives by staying in a more moderate climate the year round. By contrast, geese that nest in the high arctic and across northern Canada are highly migratory because their food sources disappear in the harsh winters. And after they return in the spring to their nesting grounds, they have only three months to raise their young. Should the weather be unfavorable, their nesting attempts may fail during that season.

By the 1970s, giant Canada geese had spread across the country with great success. Delighted with the hunting opportunities the "local" geese provided, most states opened special resident goose hunting seasons in September before migratory Canada geese arrived.

Soon it became clear that hunting hardly made a dent in the resident goose population, which kept increasing. Local geese made themselves at home on golf courses, private estates, athletic fields, corporate or college campuses, and city parks. The big birds



Canada goose at nest. Illustration by D. Pifer, courtesy of the PA Game Commission.

aggressively protected their young, attacking anyone who got too close. They loafed and pooped on public beaches, bike trails, airports, golf greens, sidewalks, and picnic grounds. Pairs of geese, with their young in tow, grazed boldly on swaths of closely mowed grass or sauntered across roads and parking lots, as if they owned the place. Low flying flocks interfered with airline traffic and caused accidents.

Human conflicts and health and safety hazards aside, these circumstances weren't good for the geese either. When people fed the local geese, the birds lost their fear and became more aggressive. What's more, as some >>>

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// LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CITY MANAGER WELCOMES PUBLIC TO CHAT



“THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY for open conversation,” says John Nissel, the City Manager for Charles Town, speaking about why he’s sitting in the council chambers waiting for people to walk in and talk to him. “If it’s good or bad, I want to listen. I walk the city, visit merchants, asking how we can make the city more friendly, a more enjoyable place.”

Nissel launched the “meet the city manager” open-door events earlier this year, and he’s planning to hold them regularly on the second Wednesday of each month. He expects to have both a morning session (9-10:30 am) and an afternoon session (4:30-6 pm) each day. He says “there’s no real agenda — it’s about providing more access to city hall. People can come in without an appointment and just chat. I can’t promise I’ll have an answer to every question, but it will help me get a finger on the pulse of the citizens’ concerns.”

Nissel noted that he’s already heard about several issues and remarked that these

sessions are the “opposite of public comment at city meetings, which are very formal” and where citizens often don’t get immediate feedback. In contrast, he sees these informal sessions as an opportunity for back and forth conversations and idea sharing.

When *The Observer* stopped by in March, Nissel was just finishing up a conversation with a local engineer who was sharing some thoughts on stormwater management. Nissel commented that this was an opportunity to have a very informative conversation about a complex issue that crosses multiple departments and gave him some new ideas about how to approach upcoming projects. 📌

The next “meet the city manager” sessions will be on Wednesday, April 10 in the Charles Town City Hall (101 East Washington St, Charles Town). The public can enter the council chambers using the glass door at the corner of Washington and George Streets.

PERSPECTIVE // NATURE CONT.

➤➤➤ geese became partial to an unnatural diet of bread, poor nutrition caused their wings to become deformed, inhibiting their ability to fly.

Between the end of June and the end of July, all Canada geese replace their wing feathers and become “grounded” for a few weeks until the wing quills all grow back and harden. Just before this happens, they make a short retreat or “molt migration” to a safe spot where there is plenty of food and they can swim away from ground predators. Because geese are chiefly grazers, they prefer places with easy access to short grass. Riverbeds with flood plains, golf courses, industrial complexes with reservoirs, and parks are favored hangouts at this vulnerable time.

For several years some localities took advantage of this vulnerability, organizing “goose roundups” during the molting period.

Designated folks herded the local adult and young geese into enclosures where they were destroyed. This practice was widely condemned and mostly discontinued. Now, more humane, alternative control methods prevent geese from nesting or staying in unwanted places. These include using dogs trained to bark and chase, but not to kill, the geese. And, planting tall vegetation, shrubs and trees near ponds or streams where geese gather will keep them away. It creates a situation where geese feel uneasy about being ambushed by predators.

Local Canada goose populations seem to have moderated over the past decade. While I miss watching flocks of geese passing low overhead all year round, I welcome the sight of a high-flying V of Canada geese as they migrate to and from their northern nesting grounds each year.

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GALLERY CELEBRATES LOCAL ARTIST WAYNE SKINNER



"Tree" by Wayne Skinner
(courtesy photo)

the cultural scene by buying and renovating the building now housing The Bridge Gallery. The building was formerly Colston's Garage, a gas station and car repair shop. Skinner performed another transformation, this time creating AIIA (Arts to Antiques), which he ran for 12 years.

Skinner used the gallery to showcase some of the best local artists of the time, including Diana Suttentfield, Don Rees, Ben Summerford, James Kline, and Michael Davis. He also filled the gallery space with a unique selection of fine antiques and exhibited collections of prints and work by renown international artists including Honore Daumier, Pierre Bonnard, and Jacques Villon. Skinner retired in 2008 and sold the business to Kathryn Burns, who renamed it The Bridge Gallery. Burns strives to carry on the tradition of featuring original local art and the task of connecting art and community.

Skinner used his retirement to find his own voice in the art world, pursuing what he described as "the perfect structure and balance needed to create good composition and ultimately a good painting." In a shift from his earlier work with ceramics, pastels became his medium of choice, replaced more recently by oils. The Skinner exhibit at The Bridge Gallery titled "Nature in Balance" opens on April 3 with a reception on Saturday, April 6 from 6-8 pm. The exhibit will showcase Skinner's pastels and celebrate this artist and his contributions to the culture and history that is Shepherdstown.

Skinner's "Nature in Balance" exhibit runs from April 3 to May 1 at The Bridge Gallery, 8566 Shepherdstown Pike, Shepherdstown WV. Details online at BridgeGalleryAndFraming.com. Tel: 304-876-2300.

IT TOOK THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MANY creative and ambitious people to weave the dynamic culture of Shepherdstown — and Wayne Skinner is one of those contributors. Moving to Shepherdstown at age 24 after studying art with a focus on ceramics at Penn State, Skinner took the job of Chairman (and only) member of the Shepherd College Art Department where he began to build the Department with just the bare essentials and personally taught every art course offered.

After six years of teaching, Skinner moved to Washington DC to open Eastern Market Pottery. He soon returned to Shepherdstown and bought the building currently known as the Mecklenburg Inn. Skinner operated a gift store for several years

before he decided to re-fashion the building into a traditional English pub that would provide a gathering spot for students and residents of the town. He enjoyed working with his hands — he did much of the construction work himself and laid the foundations for what is now the wonderful Meck garden area. Skinner named it the "Penney Postcard Pub" — a reference to the building's earlier use (until 1923) as the local Post Office.

After seven years of being a pub owner, Skinner sold the bar to former Shepherdstown resident Sue Knott, who changed the name to the Mecklenburg Inn. Skinner settled down on the Potomac River for a deserved sabbatical and reflective period before coming back into

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EXPLORE // LOCAL ART

LOCAL MILL INSPIRES ART



Shannon Thomas (courtesy photo)

AFTER SERVING IN THE AIR FORCE for more than thirty years and traveling around the world, Shannon Thomas and her husband Adam (also recently retired from military service) found a house in Shepherdstown in need of a little TLC. Actually, to call it a house would be stretching things a bit. Likewise, a little TLC understated the work that needed to be done.

The Thomas' new home started its life as a small grist mill over two centuries earlier. Expanded over the years, the Shepherd's Mill building is large, drafty, creaky — and being in Shepherdstown, surely haunted. Thanks to Shannon's artistic bent, and Adam's willingness to take on any handyman task (or call in the experts when needed), the mill has been revitalized. Even the 40-foot diameter, 12-ton iron water wheel is turning again.

Like the wheel, Shannon's attention kept turning to creative pursuits, which soon led her to enroll in Shepherd University to pursue an art degree. Naturally, the mill itself has been a focus of her early work.

Thomas will be hosting an open house and exhibit of her work, titled "A View to a Mill," on Saturday and Sunday, April 13-14, from 10 am to 5 pm. Email ShanPur@gmail.com for more information about the event or artwork.



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EXPLORE // EVENTS & ACTIVITIES







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CONCERT AT HAPPY RETREAT

HAPPY RETREAT WILL HOST a delightful afternoon of music for two violas on Saturday, Apr 7 at 2 pm. Violamore Duo will perform a variety of well-known classical favorites arranged for two violas as well as original works by American composers Kenji Bunch and a premier by Paul Schiavo.

In addition to performing as the husband-wife Violamore Duo, violists Leah Kovach and Koko Dyulgierski both enjoy varied careers as orchestral and chamber musicians. Koko and Leah are based in Denver, where they perform regularly with the Colorado Symphony, Central City Opera, and Opera Colorado Orchestras. They can also be seen with the Utah Symphony, Houston Symphony, and Philadelphia Orchestras. Leah and Koko believe passionately in the importance of music education and maintain a private teaching studio in Denver.



Tickets are \$30 (seating capacity is 50 – advance purchase recommended). Information and online ticket sales at HappyRetreat.org.

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A TALE OF THE MALAGA SHIP



SPEAK STORY SERIES IS HOSTING story artist Antonio Rocha at the War Memorial Building (102 East German St, Shepherdstown) on Tuesday, April 9 at 7:30 pm. Rocha's program will be "The Malaga Ship: A Story of Maine and the Middle Passage." Using his entire body and voice, Antonio sings, narrates, and mimes his way through this poetically toned historical tale told mostly from the perspective of the ship that became part of the illegal trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Rocha, originally from Brazil, began his career in the performing arts in 1985. His unique and award winning fusion of mime and spoken word has been performed from Singapore to South Africa and many places in between, including 20 countries on 6 continents as well as 44 US states. His vast repertoire ranges from folktales to personal stories to pure mime. When telling verbally, Antonio weaves eloquent movement where words are not necessary creating a unique fusion of verbal and body language.

Tickets are \$20, available at the door or online at SpeakStorySeries.com. Recommended for age 13 and older.

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EXPLORE // EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

CHARLES TOWN SPRINGS TO LIFE

DOWNTOWN CHARLES TOWN will welcome the return of warm weather with its 4th annual Blooms & Blossoms event on Saturday, April 13. The festivities begin at 9 am with the opening of the Charles Town Farmers Market. Look for the tents in the 100 block of South Samuel Street (next to Fuzzy Dog Books & Music). The main event opens at noon and runs until 4 pm in the 100 block of North Charles Street (by the mural wall), with music, vendors, and kids activities. Stop by the Charles Town Now table to pick up a Bingo Board that will guide you to the various activities sponsored by many of the downtown businesses.

The pub crawl starts at 5 pm with nine participating locations (this event is for adults only). You can find a map at any of the locations, but you'll need a password or an invitation card to get into the 1786 pop-up speakeasy in Charles Washington Hall. "Mr. Washington" (image, right) will be manning the door and he has a reputation to uphold. Look for Mike George, Ryan Baker, or Jeremiah Rickard and ask for a password (they will be dressed like Mr. Washington).

More info on Facebook: [Charles Town Now](#) & [Charles Town Farmers Market, WV](#).



CONCERT SUPPORTS COMMUNITY WORK



JEFFERSON COUNTY COMMUNITY Ministries (JCCM) invites local residents for a night of dancing, neighborly fellowship, and prize drawings at its annual Love Thy Neighbor Community Concert on Saturday, April 13, 6-8:30 pm at the Ranson Civic Center. America's Got Talent winner Landau Eugene Murphy Jr. will headline the concert, alongside "Voices of Classic Soul", saluting the music of the Temptations, Drifters, Four Tops, and other classic performers. Proceeds from the concert will support JCCM's current operations and programs.

Concert ticket includes five food tickets ("stadium fare"), two soft drink/water tickets, and one drawing ticket. Additional food, soft drink/water, and drawing tickets will be available for purchase at the event. Must be 16 to attend.

Jefferson County Community Ministries is a faith-based organization focused on providing assistance to the needy within Jefferson County since 1983. A cooperative ministry of local churches and faith-based organizations, it assists individuals in need by providing assistance that includes a food pantry, a cold weather shelter, job & life skills counseling, health clinic assistance, clothing closet, and other social support services. JCCM devotes resources to emergency assistance, as well as to services geared towards helping clients access long-term solutions.

More information and ticket links online at [JCCM.us](#) (community concert).

ENGAGE // COUNTY COMMISSION

COMMISSION PASSES COUNTY BUDGET Many Questions Remain Unanswered

BEFORE THE JEFFERSON COUNTY COMMISSION VOTED to approve a \$34.4 million operating budget for next year (related story, page 8), the commissioners were already making plans for more budget discussions over the next couple of months. Even though the vote to approve the budget was unanimous, the commissioners expressed an explicit lack of confidence in the numbers, both for the budget they just approved for the next fiscal year (FY25), and the budget for the current year (FY24, which ends on June 30).

Much of the uncertainty comes from the current year (FY24) budget. On March 12, the day of the first budget work session, the Commission staff reported that the current year budget had a gap of \$4.875 million, mainly from budgeted transfers that were not completed in prior years. By the March 19 work session, they were projecting a \$2.6 million surplus in the FY24 operating budget. The Commission staff also reported that the current year budget had been set up incorrectly in the county’s system, so the operating surplus projection might change over the next month.

The issue is not that the County is running out of money. *The Observer* was able to review the balances in the county’s bank accounts. Across all of the various funds, the County’s reserves in its bank accounts added up to approximately \$40 million at the beginning of 2024. Much of that total is designated (or “earmarked”) for specific purposes, but still, the “unencumbered” general fund sits at roughly \$10 million.

The biggest chunk of the County’s money is in the capital outlay fund (\$16 million), followed by the Impact Fee fund (\$4 million), and the unspent balance in the ARPA fund (\$3.9 million). The funds held in the Emergency Services Agency (ESA) account do not appear to be included in the \$40 million total. Formerly an independent agency, the ESA had a separate bank account to accumulate the ambulance transport billing revenue and handle the ESA payroll. That account remains outside of the county’s system, part of the unfinished reorganization of the ambulance services into a county department.

The county’s “rainy day fund” is also included in the \$40 million total, but that fund currently has a zero balance. The County has a specific policy to transfer a portion of any surpluses from the general fund into this financial stabilization fund — and the FY23 and FY24 budgets submitted to the State Auditor’s Office (WVSAO) for approval have included \$2.4 and \$2.6 million for this line item respectively. Staff at the WVSAO told *The Observer* that they review the initial budgets submitted by the County, but they don’t see the end-of-year numbers. Looking at the financial records of the past several years, it appears that the County has been transferring its surplus funds into the Capital Outlay fund instead of funding the “rainy day fund” each year.

The next County Commission meeting is on April 4 (9:30 am). More at ObserverWV.com/JCC-budget.

APRIL 9 PUBLIC HEARING IN RANSON

The April 9 special meeting of the Ranson City Council (7pm, City Hall) will be the final opportunity to comment on both the Ranson Plan 2035 comprehensive plan and a proposed revision to the “light industrial” provisions of the zoning ordinance.



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