

# The WV INDEPENDENT Observer

JEFFERSON COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

FEBRUARY 2023

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THIS PAPER WANTS TO BE RECYCLED. 



A view eastward from the Aspen Green subdivision in May 2022.



A view eastward from the Aspen Green subdivision in January 2023.

**TO OUR READERS** — It's easy to see signs of construction around Jefferson County, but harder to know how it all adds up. Last year, when *The Observer* looked at the numbers for 2021, the pace of construction had gone up significantly compared to previous years. The spike in mortgage interest rates last summer might have caused a slowdown in sales but it was only temporary as the new numbers by the end of 2022 were even higher than the year before (story on page 4).

The County Commission is looking ahead to more big changes in 2023 when it starts its budget discussions in February. As of March 1, the county's ambulance service is scheduled to reorganize into a county department with an expanded staff. Along with all of the existing county departments and agencies, this new department will need to support cost of living increases for staff to address inflation and ensure the county is able to recruit and retain qualified people. Property taxes from new development will add some funding to the budget, but the overall growth in property tax revenues are capped by state law, so the Commission may have some tough choices to make.

As the Commission looks to its staff to assist in budget planning, they will see a lot of new faces, having cycled through a second County Administrator in less than a year (story on page 6) and a Deputy Administrator and Finance Director who were both hired within the past six months. We'll see soon how all this change works out.



**Steve Pearson**  
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// COMMUNITY

# NEW CONSTRUCTION EXPANDS IN 2022

## More Residents Call Jefferson County Home



By Steve Pearson

**NEW HOME CONSTRUCTION** in Jefferson County continued at a rapid pace for the second year in a row in 2022 and shows no signs of slowing down in 2023. County-wide, 452 new homes were permitted in 2022, up from 427 in 2021 according to data provided by the county's Office of Impact Fees, which tracks the permit applications made to start construction on individual housing units across the county. Compared to the decade following the 2008 recession, twice as many houses are now being built each year in Jefferson County (see chart).

### A Growing Inventory Of Buildable Lots

The number of approved building lots also continues to grow. The county's Office of Planning and Zoning processes applications to approve preliminary plats, concept plans, and new subdivision applications for land in the unincorporated areas of Jefferson County (outside of the municipal boundaries of Charles Town, Ranson, Bolivar, Harpers Ferry and Shepherdstown). In 2022, this office processed requests to allow 1,296 new housing units to be built.

In Ranson, construction applications are processed by the Community & Economic Development Department and in Charles Town, the applications go through the Department of Community Development. Both departments experienced significant staff retirements in 2022, and the newly-hired staff were unable to

provide specific details to *The Observer* on new projects approved in the past year, other than to note a general increase in permit requests. The three smaller municipalities in the county (Bolivar, Harpers Ferry, and Shepherdstown) do not have any new major residential construction projects underway within their boundaries.

A year ago, *The Observer* estimated there were over 10,000 parcels in subdivisions approved for new home construction in Jefferson County. Even without specific numbers from Charles Town and Ranson, it's clear that in the past year this number has increased to over 11,000. While many of the lots approved years ago may not be under active construction anytime soon, the more recent approvals suggest the robust pace of new home construction will continue for the next several years.

### What's The Attraction?

The Presidents Pointe development in Ranson will have 1,100 townhomes and 200 single family detached homes when it is completed, according to Brett Keefer, the local manager with Stanley Martin Homes, the developer of the project. With prices starting at \$260,000, the townhomes are designed to serve first-time home buyers. Keefer says he is seeing a mix of buyers who are already living in the area as well as buyers who are moving into the county in search of housing. Keefer said that construction began in 2019 and the company projects full completion in approximately 15 years. Keefer reports that 70 units are currently occupied and 60 percent of those units had one resident who is working remotely at least three

days a week, with a fifth of the residents working remotely full-time.

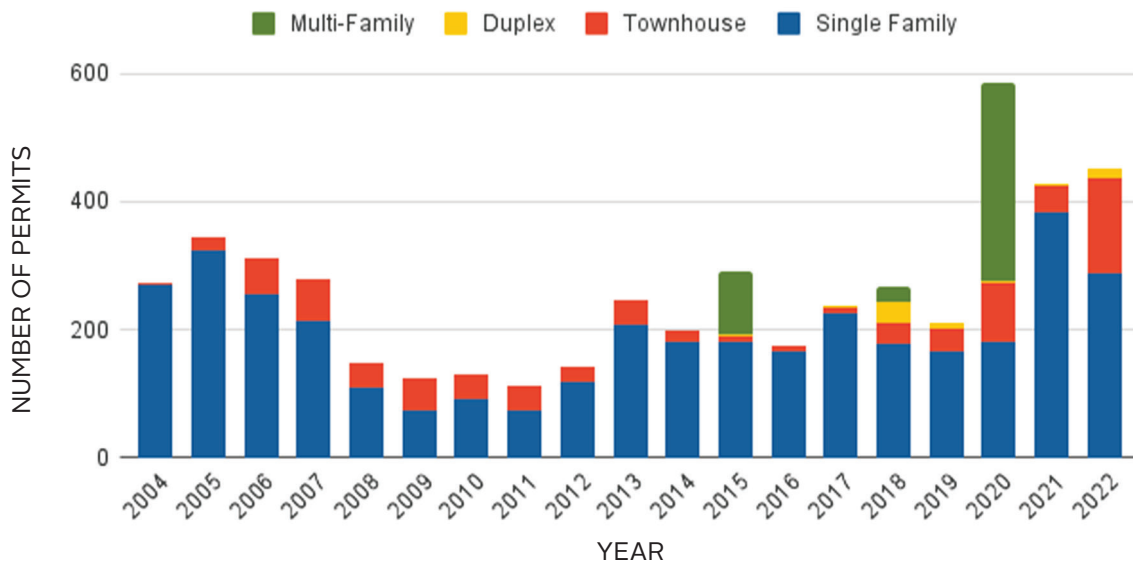
The Beallair development, being built by The Wormald Companies between Charles Town and Harpers Ferry, aims to attract move-up buyers with base prices from \$460,000 to \$600,000 for single-family detached homes. Courtney Poland, the sales manager for the project, reports that the project has 132 homes currently occupied, out of a total of 428 planned for the entire project. Poland reports a similar experience in attracting remote workers relocating from Northern Virginia and Maryland — many with families who are looking for what she described as a tranquil lifestyle in a friendly community.



(Above) The Presidents Pointe Development is expected to have 1,100 townhomes and 200 single family detached homes when construction is completed in 2035.



### NEW HOUSING PERMITS IN JEFFERSON COUNTY



#### Incentives Influence Demand

Patricia Sherwood, Associate Broker with Long & Foster Real Estate, provided her insights on the state of the local resale market and what makes a new home attractive — particularly for first-time buyers. “Jefferson is still a rural area with many modest homes on large lots. The pre-existing housing stock doesn’t offer as many choices that fit the budgets of first time buyers, particularly as interest rates have increased over the past year.”

Both Sherwood and Keefer noted that USDA and other government-sponsored loan programs are very attractive to buyers who don’t have a lot of cash for a down payment, but these programs are restrictive about the condition of the property. A newly-constructed house is almost guaranteed to meet the criteria, but an older house may require significant repairs to qualify for these programs. Poland observed that many buyers are looking for a low-hassle, low-maintenance residence — a “lock & go lifestyle” that allows them to travel and enjoy other activities, which makes new construction and low-maintenance options attractive to younger generations of buyers.

#### Demand Dips And Rebounds

Keefer says the typical sales pace in Presidents Pointe for 2022 was 4 to 6 homes a month. In October, coinciding with the spike in mortgage interest rates, he saw that number drop to zero, but it’s since rebounded to the earlier pace. Poland reported approximately 30 sales at Beallair in 2022, with a significant drop at the end of the year. She too has seen a substantial increase in potential buyer traffic since December.

Sherwood looked at the local real estate market over the past two years and suggested

that it’s not clear what a return to “normal” will look like. Prices for existing homes have definitely plateaued but are drifting down only slowly which she attributes to the disincentives for sellers to put houses on the market. As she described it, “if you have a low interest rate on your house, you don’t want to give that up. Plus, unless you are moving away, you have the same problem of finding another house to buy.”

#### Tax Revenue Impacts

The Assessor’s office tracks the value of real estate in the county, with assessments calculated at 60 percent of the fair market value as of July of each year. For Jefferson County’s next budget year (running from July 2023 through June 2024), the tax base is calculated from the values assessed in July of 2022. According to the Assessor’s office, those numbers show an increase in assessments of roughly \$600 million for existing owner-occupied residential property and an additional \$88 million in new residential property value. State law requires that the county adjust its levy rate downward as property values increase to mostly offset the increase that would otherwise occur above a certain limit. The same levy rate applies to all residential real estate, but the county is allowed to treat property taxes from new construction as additional revenue without regard to the state limits, which would generate an additional \$250,000 in tax revenue for the general fund.

The July 2022 assessments include many of the new construction projects with permits issued in 2021, but only a few of the projects permitted in 2022, so the assessments for next year (which fund the budget for the fiscal year running from July 2024 through June 2025) could see a similar increase.



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>>> PAGE 8 <<<



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// GOVERNMENT

# CONTENTIOUS START FOR COUNTY COMMISSION

## Ambulance Questions And Conflicting Agendas Set Tone For 2023

By Steve Pearson

The Jefferson County Commission started off 2023 with a disagreement at its January 5 meeting among the five members (4 Republicans and 1 independent) over who would lead the Commission for the next year. Jennifer Krouse nominated Tricia Jackson to be president, and Clare Ath nominated Steve Stolipher for the role. Stolipher was elected president with the support of Jane Tabb (the lone independent commissioner).

### Ambulance Service Reorganization Updates

During the January 5 meeting, Bob Burner, Director of the Jefferson County Emergency Services Agency (JCESA), provided an update on the ambulance service reorganization. While there was some good news about progress on key operational and billing issues, his report on staffing was not so optimistic. The proposed reorganization requires 12 additional paramedic positions to fully staff the proposed operations and Burner indicated that the county has not been able to attract qualified recruits to fill even half that number.

Burner also reported that a key senior staff person had resigned from JCESA and asked for guidance on prioritizing deliverables to meet the March 1 deadline set by the Commission last summer. There was noticeable tension in the meeting room when County Administrator John Nissel reiterated the Commission's desire to complete the transition on schedule. Since the January 5 meeting, both Burner and Nissel have resigned (see image caption).



**Staff Turnover** — Jefferson County Administrator John Nissel (left) announced his resignation (effective January 27) at the January 19 meeting of the County Commission. Asked about Nissel's service, Commission President Steve Stolipher commented, "John Nissel was truly a remarkable Administrator for the County. He successfully managed an array of tasks and took on many complicated projects in his time with us. He will be missed." The week prior to Nissel's resignation announcement, Bob Burner, Director of the Jefferson County Emergency Services Agency (JCESA), submitted his own resignation. Commissioner Stolipher expressed confidence that the ambulance system restructuring will continue: "There was a team tasked with making the EMS transition. That team will still be able to complete the task and meet the March 1 goal." Members of the JCESA's board, meeting on January 17, did not express the same level of confidence that the ambulance transition could be completed successfully by March 1.

### Commission Weighs In On School Issues

The first new business taken up by the Commission in 2023 was a motion from Commissioner Krouse to draft a letter of no confidence in the Jefferson County Board of Education's recent decision to reduce the weighting of semester exams. Commissioner Tabb commented that she didn't fully understand the school board's action but that it seemed to be a difficult decision taken in the context of multiple issues, and her advice to her fellow Commissioners was to "focus on our own statutory duties." Commissioner Stolipher said he agreed with Tabb, suggesting that the Commission "needs to stay in its own lane." Nonetheless, the other 3 Commissioners voted

to proceed with drafting a letter. Commissioner Krouse provided a draft at the January 19 meeting and Tabb again raised concerns, focusing on the potential legal liability from unsubstantiated claims made in the letter, which was not reviewed by the Commission's legal counsel before it was presented. The Commission voted 4-1 to send the letter, which requests an investigation of the county BOE, to the State Board of Education.

You can read the full text of the Commission's letter and the response from Kathy Skinner, president of the Jefferson County Board of Education at [WeAreTheObserver.com](http://WeAreTheObserver.com).

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### Announcements Coming Soon



// GOVERNMENT

# WATCHING THE STATE LEGISLATURE

By Susan Benzinger

*Susan Benzinger is a retired tax attorney and active volunteer in Jefferson County. During her 2022 campaign for WV State Delegate campaign she became very familiar with the issues facing West Virginia and offered to share updates on the state legislature during the 2023 session with The Observer.*

**THE STATE LEGISLATURE IS BACK** in session in Charleston and it looks like we may be in for a wild ride.

On the first day of the session, the Senate suspended its rules and passed 23 bills without public comment, review by a committee, or debate. Senate President Craig Blair justified this action by saying these were bills that would have passed last session but for the fact the session ended before they were voted on. As it has been nearly a year since the last legislative session, one might wonder if there are any circumstances that might have arisen during this time that should have been considered before the vote. The 23 bills now head to the House where there may be an opportunity for committee review, public comment, and debate.

On the House side of things, a change to the House rules was passed that took away the right of members to speak more than once on a bill. Prior to this time, members had the opportunity to speak twice. While it is not clear



Photo: Carol M. Highsmith - Library of Congress

why this rule change was necessary, it seems to track the Senate thinking that debate on bills should be restricted or dispensed with. The House also acted on a bill to reduce the personal income taxes of individuals by 50 percent — a 30 percent cut this year, and an additional 10 percent in both 2024 and 2025. This is what the Governor requested during his State of the State speech on January 11. Cutting personal income taxes has come up before in the legislature. But the assumptions underlying the justifications for the cuts do not reflect our State's true financial health.

When it gets down to the bare facts, our budget is lean and flat. As a result, we find ourselves without resources to adequately fund Child Protective Services, increase pay for our state workers (who can earn much more by crossing into another state), provide locality pay, address infrastructure needs, etc. At the same time, we have budget surpluses (taxes collected over the approved budget) that are used outside of the normal budgeting process for items chosen by individual legislators.

The governor has suggested that we use surpluses to permanently replace personal income taxes. This would give all of us a boost but only until surpluses are no longer collected. At that point, additional taxes would need to be imposed to keep the State running. Over half of our 2023 surplus is from the severance tax (imposed on extracting or producing coal, limestone, oil, gas, timber, and other natural resources). While current collections are wildly in excess of budget estimates, future collections are not guaranteed and are as likely to fall as to continue. Legislators could decide to use the surplus to replace personal income taxes knowing the risk of having to reimpose them in

the future. They could also use the surpluses to fund needed items that are currently needed but not in our lean budget.

Republicans currently hold a mega-majority in the legislature. In the Senate there are 31 Republicans and 3 Democrats. In the House, there are 88 Republicans and 12 Democrats. This gives one party the ability to suspend rules and pass bills without constituent input or debate with those who have opposing views.

Our legislators are expected to represent all of us, regardless of political party. It is incumbent on all of us to let them know when we have a concern or issue that we want them to act on. Our Jefferson County representatives are:

**Senator Jason Barrett (Republican-Dist. 16)**  
jason.barrett@wvsenate.gov

**Senator Patricia Rucker (Republican -Dist. 16)**  
patricia.rucker@wvsenate.gov

**Delegate John Hardy (Republican-Dist. 97)**  
john.hardy@wvhouse.gov

**Delegate Paul Espinosa (Republican - Dist. 98)**  
paul.espinosa@wvhouse.gov

**Delegate Wayne Clark (Republican - Dist. 99)**  
wayne.clark@wvhouse.gov

**Delegate Bill Ridenour (Republican - Dist. 100)**  
bill.ridenour@wvhouse.gov

February 14 is the last day for bills to be introduced in the House and February 20 is the last day for bills to be introduced in the Senate, so we'll know in a few weeks what bills are moving forward in both chambers.

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**SUNDAY, JANUARY 29**  
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Advance Tickets: eventbrite.com  
*Admission fees will be donated to CASA.*

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2pm Frozen Movie Matinee at Charles Washington Hall, Tickets: eventbrite.com  
*Admission fees will be donated to Jefferson County Parks and Recreation.*

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## BANKING ON THE COMMUNITY

### Free Programs Focus On Financial Literacy

A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS' 2023 RESOLUTIONS include financial goals, according to a recent survey. Many people are trying to save more money and with good reason — 49% of Americans cannot cover a \$400 emergency expense without going into debt. Across the country, 18 percent of those earning more than \$100,000 report living paycheck-to-paycheck. Despite a median household income in Jefferson County of \$86,711, many in our community likely have no emergency savings.

Locally, free educational resources are available to help individuals and families manage their money. Almost all include content for children and young adults. With almost 80 percent of millennials using online banking, compared to 48 percent of baby boomers, many of the training resources for kids and young adults are online. While giant financial firms such as Fidelity and Vanguard also have such resources, local-based businesses and their employees know the community and can personally engage.

#### Community Banks Assist With Resources

For example, in 2022 Jefferson Security Bank (JSB) supported over 80 community and non-profit organizations through sponsorships and volunteer time. "As a local community bank, our financial literacy initiatives align with our mission and our leadership's passion and commitment to supporting lifelong financial wellness," says Jenna Kesecker, JSB's Executive Vice President and CFO. "That commitment is why we partner with local schools and organizations to provide financial education that will positively impact and strengthen our community."

#### Examples of free, local resources available include:

**"GET A LIFE" BUDGET TRAINING** — Students practice living within a budget in hands-on training sponsored by the West Virginia Treasurer's Office. Download the free program to do at home or look for a future in-person class through Jefferson County Schools with support from community volunteers.

**GAME-BASED EDUCATION** — Jefferson Security Bank offers Zogo, a free mobile app with bite-sized modules on financial topics such as how to open a bank account and how to protect your investments. For each module completed, users earn points in the form of virtual pineapples that can be redeemed for gift cards at Starbucks, Target, Amazon, and other shops. So far JSB has enrolled over 500 users with more than \$800 rewarded. Centsables, another free mobile app, is available from the Bank of Charles Town.

**ONLINE TRAINING** — Dollars + Sense is City National Bank's online financial education program for adults and children. In the classroom, Jefferson Security Bank supports teachers to use Banzai, financial literacy software. Shepherd University also provides personal finance information designed for students and prospective students on its "Be Legit and Financially Fit" website.

**In-person education** — JSB employees, including Mary Álvaro, Community Impact Coordinator, volunteer to conduct in-person training. A recent classroom experience made a big impression, says Álvaro. "I had the privilege of going to James Rumsey and doing a presentation on banking services, loan options, and how to build/maintain credit." At the end, she said, "I had one gentleman tell me I changed his life."

This year, inflation and recession pressures have made personal finances a higher priority for many if not most of us. Investing some time to learn (or brush up on) the fundamentals of personal finance is likely to return benefits. 📌

*Links to the various programs mentioned above are included in the online version of this story at [WeAreTheObserver.com](https://www.wvaobserver.com).*

COUNTY SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENT

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// TECHNOLOGY

# INTERNET UPGRADES FOR JEFFERSON COUNTY

## GigReady Program To Fund High-Speed Access To Most Addresses

By Daniel Bennett

*Daniel Bennett is the Executive Director of Homeowners Voice, a 501(c)4 nonprofit organization. His career has focused on the intersection of technology, government and civic engagement.*

JEFFERSON COUNTY IS HOME to some of the most iconic scenes in the country, from historic Harpers Ferry, to the courthouse in Charlestown, and to beautiful views of the Shenandoah, Potomac and Opequon rivers. Unfortunately, for many residents, internet connectivity is antiquated or just nonexistent. Many homes situated along the rivers, near farmland, and scattered throughout the county, have been stuck with slow internet for decades.

But change is coming. Just this last week, homeowners all over Jefferson County got some hopeful news. At the Jefferson County Commission meeting on Thursday, January 19, the Commission voted to accept the recommendation of the Jefferson County Development Authority to select Comcast as the county's partner to expand high speed internet to most of the addresses in the county. With this vote, the county has access to approximately \$18 million of grant dollars through the West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council and Comcast has committed to deploy, within the next 24 months, a fiber network that can deliver 1 Gigabit/sec of download speed to 2,100 homes currently underserved by the internet. The network upgrades to support the new services will extend throughout the county, to benefit all residents.

Homeowners Voice, a WV nonprofit advocacy group, has been monitoring the GigReady program for over a year. This program is designed to build out high speed internet access for West Virginians and is funded by hundreds of millions of dollars from federal and local funds. Homeowners Voice has knocked on doors across the county and held open houses to hear from our neighbors about their interest in finally getting reliable and adequate internet access. The nearly unanimous response was both frustration over the poor service so far and the hope that their neighborhood would finally be in line to get on line.

Over 2,000 addresses in Jefferson County have been identified as not having adequate internet bandwidth to work from home, use telemedicine, or attend school



remotely (see the online version of this article at [WeAreTheObserver.com](http://WeAreTheObserver.com) for a map where you can lookup the quality of service available at any address). During COVID, that lack of connectivity hit many residents hard as they found themselves isolated. Lack of internet is also a financial hit for homeowners looking to sell — savvy buyers are reluctant to purchase homes without access to high speed internet.

The money is available to do the work and the County and the vendor are getting ready to start the work — but homeowners need to be

vigilant in following the progress to ensure the connectivity actually reaches their house. A great deal is at stake, and Homeowners Voice is committed to keeping homeowners aware of the progress and obstacles ahead.

*To report to us your interest in our Stuck with Slow Internet effort or any issue that you have as a West Virginia homeowner, please visit our website ([HomeownersVoice.com](http://HomeownersVoice.com)) or email [advocate@homeownersvoice.com](mailto:advocate@homeownersvoice.com), or call 304-207-0710.*



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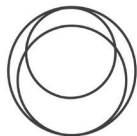


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**CONSERVATION FILM FEST**

>>> **PAGE 13** <<<

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# PREVENTING BIRD WINDOW STRIKES

**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.*

**IT CAN HAPPEN ANYTIME, ANY SEASON.** You hear a loud thump against a window of your house, look outside and see nothing. Later you may notice a bird on the ground just outside the window. It isn't dead, just sitting quietly. What should you do?

Bird enthusiasts used to recommend that you gently pick the bird up and place it in a safe, dark spot, like an empty shoe box with a few holes punched in the lid, and leave it alone in the dark to rest quietly overnight. Then next morning take the box outside, remove the lid and the bird flies out good as new.

This is no longer the best thing to do, according to a recent “patient of the week” email from the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center in Millwood, VA. Their early December edition features a pair of American goldfinches, now in gray winter plumage. Both birds had struck the same window at the same time. A kind individual brought them to the Wildlife Center where they were treated for minor head trauma and injuries and are expected to recover and to be returned to the wild. The male of the goldfinch pair had been bleeding from his left ear.

According to the email, research has now shown that simply letting the bird rest for a few hours before release is inadequate. Damage to the bird may not show up until more than a day after the window strike, long after the bird can fly off.

Well-meaning bird lovers naturally position bird feeders next to a window where they can be viewed easily. But if a flock of birds is feeding there and a hawk or other predator suddenly appears, the birds' survival responses take over and they scatter in all directions. Some of them are likely to fly smack into nearby windowpanes and injure themselves.

Wildlife rehabilitators now say if you see a bird hit a window, contain the bird right away. Do not release it but take it to the nearest wildlife rehabilitation facility as soon as possible. There professional rehabilitators can examine the bird and monitor it for a few days. Its injuries can be treated and further complications such as damaged air sacs or breathing difficulty can be resolved. Additionally, the bird receives the proper diet it needs to recover quickly so it can be released as soon as possible.

A flying bird usually sees window glass as sky or as open space it can fly through rather than as a hard surface. You can break up the reflections on your windows with tape, paint, or decals spaced no more than two feet apart. Putting a single decal of a flying hawk or perched owl on your window isn't enough.

A quick search of the internet will reveal many types of decals, tape, or other material that you can easily apply to your windows without damaging the glass. Patterns or stripes of translucent dots or squares allow you to see out the window, while birds outside now recognize the glass as a barrier to avoid.

Like all wild creatures, birds need every advantage to survive. While lucky and healthy individuals can live for many years, their survival from minute to minute is balanced on a razor's edge. One minor accident, such as a window strike, could place them in danger of losing their lives.

Window strikes can be deadly, and prevention is better than treatment!



A pair of American goldfinches recovering at Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, where they were brought after they struck the same window at the same time. The male shows signs of bleeding out of one ear. Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Wildlife Center



## PERSPECTIVE // HISTORY

## RECOGNITION FOR FAIRVIEW CEMETERY

By Addison Reese

*Addison Reese is one of five commissioners serving on the Jefferson County Historic Landmark Commission (JCHLC). The Commission plays a key role in highlighting the county's diverse history through preservation of structures and historic landscapes as well as documenting the oral history of the people who live in these places. If you have any records, photographs, or stories you would like to share about historic sites throughout the county, you can contact Reese at AddisonReeseJCHLC@gmail.com*

AT ITS DECEMBER 7, 2022 MEETING, the Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission (JCHLC) voted unanimously to add Fairview Cemetery of Gibsontown to the rolls of registered Jefferson County Historic Landmarks based on its ability to provide insight into the people, events, and patterns of life that are part of this county's rich and diverse history.

Established nearly 150 years ago, Fairview Cemetery of Gibsontown is the largest black cemetery in Jefferson County. Fairview has been the burial ground for generations of black families, some of whom can be traced to the area as early as the late 1700s. Through vital records, newspaper archives, and extant grave markers, more than 1,500 names of those interred at Fairview have been identified — although the actual number of burials is far greater. Notably, Fairview is the final resting place of more than

one hundred military veterans, representing service in every major conflict that occurred over the past two centuries — including a recently discovered military marker for a veteran of the War of 1812.

In 1873, the Spirit of Jefferson began discussing the need for a new burial ground for people of color in Charles Town because the existing burial ground on the east side of town was full. As a temporary solution, the Charles Town City Council allowed burials in the alley beside the old cemetery. A group of black citizens quickly organized and began soliciting funds from the community to secure land for the new burial ground. In early 1875, the Fairview Cemetery Company was incorporated and land was purchased just outside of Charles Town in a community referred to as Gibsontown.

The charter members of the cemetery board were John H. Talbot, Edward P. Talbot [Tolbert], Philip Jackson, George W. Jackson, Joseph Walker, Robert Ford, and Richard Jackson. These men were some of the most prominent black citizens of their time, dedicated to serving and bettering their community. In December 1884, Edward P. Talbot provided land for the Grand Order of the Galilean Fishermen to erect their building; he also served as the first president of this black benevolent society that provided mutual aid, including covering burial costs for members in need. After emancipation, Robert Ford became a hearse driver for the Sadler Brothers undertaking business in Charles Town for 40 years and then for their successors, Strider and Ramey until his death. On June 29,

1905, the Shepherdstown Register estimated that “about 3,000 bodies were conveyed by him to cemeteries in the hearse which on Tuesday conveyed his own remains to their final resting place” — that final resting place being Fairview. Ford was also one of the original trustees of the Queen of the Valley Lodge No. 1558, Independent Order of the Odd Fellows of Charles Town. John Henry Talbot was one of the original trustees of Mt. Zion M.E. church in Charles Town; he and Philip Jackson were also leaders of St. Phillips Episcopal Church. These are just a few examples of how these men, and many others buried at Fairview, shaped the history of Charles Town and beyond.

Without perpetual care, Fairview has had periods of time without regular maintenance. During these times, many gravestones toppled and were swallowed by wild growth and covered by soil. Additionally, there was a period of time when a portion of the cemetery was used as a dump for the city. The clean-up and restoration of Fairview has been ongoing for more than a decade. The JCHLC and Fairview Cemetery Association are currently seeking grants and other funding sources to complete the restoration, a process that will include surveying and mapping burial locations, working to reset and repair headstones, and stabilizing soil. Both groups will also be recording the site's history and developing a more accurate and complete list of those interred in Fairview.

*Donations can be sent to: Fairview Cemetery Association, PO Box 411, Ranson, WV 25438.*

Photo credit. A. Reese.





EXPLORE // ARTS & CULTURE



# A NEW YEAR OF STORYTELLING



Priscilla Howe

As she travels, she continues to search for the best restaurant fruit pie on earth.

Howe's performance is scheduled for February 14 and 15 in the newly-renovated Shepherdstown Opera House. Showtime is at 7:30 both nights. The February 14 performance will also be available online.

Tuesday's program will be *The Story of Tristan and Iseult: A Medieval Classic* (85 minutes plus intermission). Perfect for Valentine's Day! Come hear an epic tale of good luck, bad choices, giants, dragons, fools, betrayal and, of course, romance. Wednesday's program will be *The Trickster Show: A Mishmash of Bulgarian Stories*. In 2015, Priscilla went to Bulgaria on a Fulbright Scholarship, intending to search for trickster tales and animal stories. She came home with so much more! She'll tell her favorite stories mixed with jokes, sly commentary and travelogue.

**STORY ARTIST PRISCILLA HOWE** is the first performer in the 2023 Speak Story Series, presented by Speak Storytelling, Inc. of Shepherdstown. Howe has been a full-time storyteller since 1993, telling a mix of folktales, tales from books, and original stories, most with a generous dollop of humor. She travels the world — fourteen countries and counting — with a bag of puppets.

*Tickets are \$15, available online at [SpeakStorySeries.com](http://SpeakStorySeries.com). Season tickets are also available. Speak Story Series is for adult audiences. Mature youth allowed at guardian's discretion. Email [info@speakstoryseries.com](mailto:info@speakstoryseries.com) for additional information.*

## Speak Story Series

*The 2023 Speak Story Series is scheduled for the 2nd Tuesday and the following Wednesday of each month. Performances start at 7:30 pm, at the Shepherdstown Opera House (131 West German St).*

*The 2023 season lineup presents Connie Regan-Blake (Mar 14 & 15), Carmen Deedy (Apr 11 & 12), Andrew Aghapour (May 9 & 10), Reverend Robert Jones (Jun 13 & 14), Adam Booth (Jul 11 & 12), Elisabeth Rose (Aug 8 & 9), Diane Macklin (Sep 12 & 13), Lyn Ford (Oct 10 & 11), Bill Harley (Nov 14 & 15).*



  
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EXPLORE // ARTS & CULTURE

# AMERICAN CONSERVATION FILM FESTIVAL



Photo courtesy of Amy Vitale

THE 2023 AMERICAN CONSERVATION Film Festival (ACFF) will light up the screen at the intimate and historic Shepherdstown Opera House for three days, (March 10, 11 & 12 — Fri, Sat & Sun) and will spotlight short films that are 40 minutes or less. From among the 300 films submitted from 44 countries, the ACFF selection committee has chosen 12 — including animation, narrative, and documentary films.

In addition to the shorts, ACFF is excited to present a few feature films, including Path of the Panther (Winner of the Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature at the 2022 Naples International Film Festival) and All That Breathes (winner of the Golden Eye Award for Best Documentary at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival, winner of the Grand Jury Prize in World Cinema Documentary at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival, and currently short-listed for an Academy Award for Documentary Feature Film).

The festival will begin Friday evening, March 10 with a reception at Evolve in Shepherdstown (106 W German Street). Additional events will be held at Evolve throughout the weekend featuring West Virginia artists, environmental organizations, leaders, and entrepreneurs. Following the Friday reception, guests can walk over to the Shepherdstown Opera House for a screening of Path of the Panther at 7 pm. Saturday morning, March 11, the festival continues with a pay-what-you-can/donation screening of National Geographic's Super/Natural, and then the

blocks of festival-selected shorts will run on both Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Sunday evening, March 12, the festival will conclude with a viewing of All That Breathes at 4:30 pm followed by a dinner and discussion at the Shepherdstown Community Club (102 West German St) featuring Indian-inspired cuisine.

*Tickets are \$15 per screening and will go on sale February 1st. Tickets to the community dinner on March 12th are \$25. Details at ConservationFilmFest.org.*

### About The Festival

The American Conservation Film Festival is a 501(c)3 non-profit with a mission to use the power of film to engage, inform, and inspire audiences to conserve our natural world. In addition to the annual film festival in Shepherdstown, ACFF presents festival selections at venues and in communities around the region, along with hosting student filmmaking workshops and youth-oriented, interactive programming. ACFF considers submitted non-fiction and fiction films, provided the theme is driven by environmental or cultural conservation. Of special interest to the selection committee are the myriad ways humans interact with wildlife and wild places, issues driven by natural resource conservation, humans as part of the environment, living in a continuum of cultural tradition, and how young people encounter and understand nature.



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### MORE EVENTS

>>> PAGES 14 & 15 <<<



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EXPLORE // EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT

**SCIENCE WORKSHOPS FOR STUDENTS**

SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY IS OFFERING a series of workshops designed to offer middle school and high school students of all genders a hands-on introduction to various science disciplines. The program aims to increase students' interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines. The next workshop is "Optics & Sight" on Tuesday, Feb 21 (Tue). This workshop will explore the optics associated with sight, how images are formed, and how glasses work for common vision problems. The workshops scheduled for the rest of 2023 are "Mineral, Mineral, Rock!" an exploration of geology (Tuesday, Mar 21) and "Leuwenhoek's Little Beasties" an exploration of microbes in pond water (Tuesday, April 18).



All workshops run from 5:30 to 7 pm at the Robert C. Byrd Science and Technology Center (205 N Princess St, parking available in lot A adjacent to the building). Pre-registration is required for all workshops. Web: [Shepherd.edu/workshop-series](http://Shepherd.edu/workshop-series) (registration link for each workshop is live on the 1st of each month).

**LIBRARY ART SHOW AND AUCTION**

LOOKING FOR A FUN WINTER PROJECT that will also benefit our community? The Friends of Shepherdstown Library (FOSL) is sponsoring an All Arts Auction & Art Show. This year's auction will incorporate all forms of art, from paintings and pottery to music and dance. Proceeds will benefit the Shepherdstown Public Library.

Artists and creators of all ages and skill levels are invited to submit an original work of art, print, or gift certificate for a custom work of art for this online auction. Submissions will be accepted until March 3. The BiddingOwl auction will be accessible via the Library and FOSL websites from March 9-14. For details and entry forms, visit [FOSLWV.org](http://FOSLWV.org) or stop by the Shepherdstown Public Library (145 Higbee Lane). A limited number of 8"x8" canvases are available free of charge at the Library for participants who would like to create paintings.



**SMALL-SCALE AGRICULTURE WORKSHOPS**



SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY HAS PARTNERED with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture Veterans & Heroes to Agriculture program to offer a monthly series of workshops that will focus on small-scale, intensive vegetable production techniques. The next workshop is "Seeding and Transplanting: Best Practices" on Feb 23 (Sat), 6 - 8 pm. Dr. Brooke Comer, visiting assistant professor of environmental science, and Madison Hale, Tabler Farm coordinator, will discuss the tools needed to make seeding and transplanting simpler and more efficient, including a review of common and innovative tools and materials, recommended seed-starting soils and fertilizers, and useful tips for ensuring crop success.

The program schedule for the rest of 2023 is "High Tunnel Growing 101" (Mar 25, 10 am - 4 pm); "Intro to Culinary Mushroom Cultivation" (Apr 27, 6 - 8 pm); "Advanced Beekeeping" (May 27, 10 am - 4 pm); "Soil Health on the Farm" (Sep 30, 10 am - 4 pm); "Perennials and Permaculture" (Oct 28, 10 am - 4 pm); "Winter Farming: Season Extension" (Nov 18, 10 am - 4 pm); and "Intro to Indoor Aquaponics Growing" (Dec 14, 6 - 8 pm).

Pre-registration is required for all workshops (location & parking details provided at registration). Fees: \$10 for the 2 hour workshops, \$20 for the 6 hour workshops (All workshops are \$5 for students, free for veterans), pay cash or check at the door only. Location details provided with registration. Web: [Shepherd.edu/suaic-2023-workshop-series](http://Shepherd.edu/suaic-2023-workshop-series).

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—C.G. Jung (Collected Works, Vol. 8, par 180)

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EXPLORE // EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT

**JAN 27 (FRI) – FROSTY FEST COMEDY NIGHT** – Dinner & laughter with Jon Yeager & Winston Hodges, proceeds to benefit Boys & Girls Club of Charles Town · 6 - 9 pm · 100 West Washington St, Charles Town · \$50/person · FB: Visit Jefferson County WV (events) > See Ad page 9

**JAN 28-29 (SAT & SUN) – FROSTY FEST ICE SKATING** – Take a spin on the outdoor ice rink, skate rental, snacks, and beverages available, proceeds to benefit CASA-EP · 10 am - 4 pm · Parking Lot H (off University Drive) on the Shepherd University Campus · \$10/person for 1 hour session (includes skate rental) · FB: Visit Jefferson County WV (events) > See Ad page 9

**JAN 29 (SUN) – PARLOR CONCERT** – Violinists Chris Jusell & Hannah Rose Nicholas, presented by Appalachian Chamber Music Festival · 3 pm · Happy Retreat, 600 Mordington Ave, Charles Town · \$25 · Web: HappyRetreat.org

**FEB 2 (TUE) – SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY MUSIC** – Soprano Jennifer Wilson joins Shepherd faculty Dr. Bobb Robinson, accompanied by pianist Steven Gathman, to perform duets and arias from German romantic opera (program includes works of Beethoven, Wagner, and Richard Strauss) · 7:30 pm · Frank Center (Shipley Recital Hall) 260 W Campus Dr, Shepherdstown · FREE · Web: Shepherd.edu/music

**FEB 2 TO FEB 12 – KODACHROME** – A small town photographer captures her neighbors' lives in this stage play about romance and love · Multiple performances · Apollo Civic Theater, 128 East Martin St, Martinsburg · \$22/adult, discounts for veterans, seniors, students · Web: ApolloCivicTheatre.org

**FEB 10 (FRI) – THE FATHER** – (2020, directed by Florian Zeller) Presented by the Shepherdstown Film Society · 6:00 pm · Robert C. Byrd Center CHE (auditorium), 213 North King St, Shepherdstown · FREE · Web: Shepherd.edu/lifelonglearning

**FEB 11 (SAT) – VALENTINE “PURR”FECT DINNER & AUCTION** – Fundraiser for the Animal Welfare Society of Jefferson County, proceeds to benefit AWSJC operations · 5:30 - 10 pm · Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races (Skyline Ballroom), 750 Hollywood Dr, Charles Town · \$65, advance reservation required · Web: AWSJC.org (events)



**FEB 14 & 15 (TUE & WED) – STORYTELLER**

– Priscilla Howe, hosted by Speak Storytelling · 7:30 pm · Shepherdstown Opera House, 131 West German St, Shepherdstown · \$15 · Web: SpeakStorySeries.com > See article, page 12

**FEB 24 (FRI) – STORER COLLEGE HISTORY** – Presentations by NPS park ranger Melinda Day and Lynn Pechuekonis, author of Man of Sterling Worth, a history of Professor William A. Saunders of Storer College · 6:00 pm · Bolivar-Harpers Ferry Library, 151 Polk St, Bolivar · FREE · Web: BolivarHarpersFerryLibrary.com

**FEB 24 (FRI) – SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY MUSIC** – Wind Ensemble performs a variety of works featuring: Alex Shapiro, Percy Grainger, James Reese Europe, Carter Pann and “The Divine Comedy” by Robert W. Smith (based on Dante Alighieri’s literary classic) · 7:30 pm · Frank Center (Theater) 260 W Campus Dr, Shepherdstown · \$15 (\$10 senior/youth, free for SU student/faculty) · Web: Shepherd.edu/music

**FEB 26 (SUN) – PUZZLEMANIA** – Fundraiser for the Friends of Music and the Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra; family-friendly event with teams competing to finish a puzzle · 1 - 4 pm · Shepherd University Wellness Center, 164 University Dr, Shepherdstown · \$100/team (1-4 members) · Web: FriendsWV.org

CHEERFUL COLORS

Thanks to everyone who participated in decorating a 2022 Holiday Bear, sponsored by Jefferson Security Bank!



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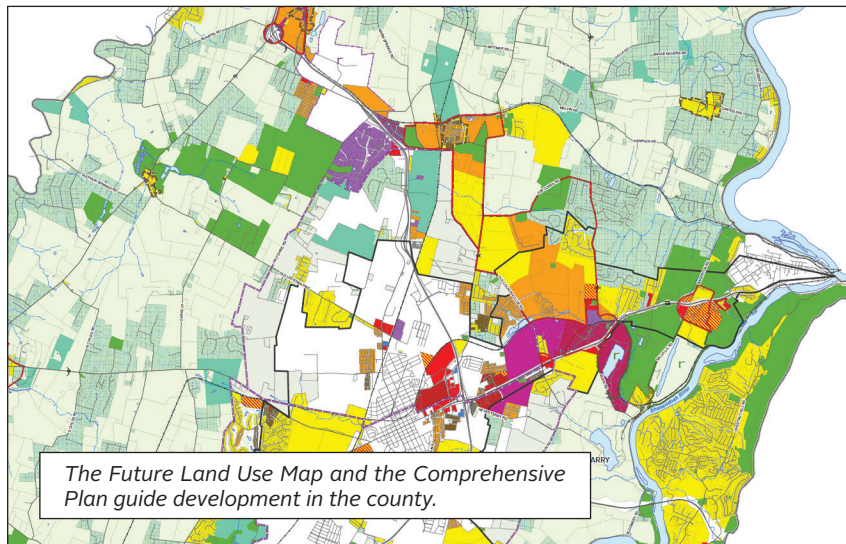


ENGAGE // COUNTY ISSUES

## COUNTY ASKS FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS ON LAND PLAN

JEFFERSON COUNTY IS REQUIRED TO UPDATE its comprehensive plan every 10 years. This plan acts as a vision statement for the county to guide land use for future growth and development. Each iteration of the plan looks ahead 20 years. The current plan is titled “Envision 2035” and the update will extend the scope to 2045. The Planning Commission takes the lead role in preparing the updates to the comprehensive plan and has scheduled a joint meeting to review the update process and goals with the County Commissioners on February 2 at 1 pm in the lower level meeting room of the Charles Town Library (200 East Washington St).

The Planning Commission is also asking for the public input via a survey on its website. The survey link is <https://arcg.is/ou05S80> (the survey link is also available online at [WeAreTheObserver.com/Envision2045](http://WeAreTheObserver.com/Envision2045)). The Planning Commission expects to hold a public input meeting in early June.



## WATER & SEWER CHALLENGE

THE WV PUBLIC SERVICES COMMISSION (PSC) will be holding a public hearing on Monday, February 6 at 6:30 pm in the Jefferson County Courthouse (100 East Washington St, Charles Town). All county residents are invited to comment on the proposed acquisition of the locally-owned Jefferson Utilities by the WV subsidiary of American Water, a publicly-traded company listed on the NY Stock Exchange (symbol: AWK). PSC staff have raised concerns about the average rate increases calculated by American Water that could be as “high as 47.44% for water customers and 56.03% for sewer customers...” The PSC staff also raised objections to including the value of depreciated-assets in the rate base calculations (which would essentially be charging customers twice for the same capital investment costs). The public can also submit comments online at the PSC website ([www.psc.state.wv.us](http://www.psc.state.wv.us) – the “submit a comment” link is in the left side menu). The case number is 22-0796-WS-PC.



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