

The WV INDEPENDENT Observer

JEFFERSON COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

SUMMER 2025

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The WVU Mountaineer Fifes and Drums led a march from Morgan's Grove Park to Elmwood Cemetery in Shepherdstown during the Bee Line March 250th Anniversary celebration on June 14.



FOR MORE FEATURES, COMMUNITY NEWS, AND LOCAL EVENTS, VISIT **OBSERVERWV.COM**

// COMMUNITY

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

A sampling of cultural, recreational, and community events happening in and around Jefferson County (more events on pages 8-12).

Kids Movie: Harold & the Purple Crayon — Movie night indoors at Shepherdstown Public Library (145 Higbee Lane, Shepherdstown). Friday, June 20, 6:30 pm. Free.

Jordan Siwek in Concert — New York City-born pianist, singer, and songwriter whose music blends soulful melodies with jazz and blues influences at Shepherdstown Opera House (131 West German St., Shepherdstown). Friday, June 20, 7 pm. \$

AWS Bark in the Park — Animal Welfare Society fundraiser and adoption event at Jefferson Memorial Park (801 South Mildred St., Charles Town). Saturday, June 21, 10 am–1 pm. Free.

X of the Potomac in Concert — Alt-folk band live at Shepherdstown Opera House (131 West German St., Shepherdstown). Saturday, June 21, 7 pm. \$

Rainbow Rock Band — Family-friendly music show at Sam Michaels Park as part of “Let’s Play at the AMP” (235 Sam Michael Lane, Shenandoah Junction). Tuesday, June 24, 7 pm. Free.

Freedom and the Freedmen’s Bureau in West Virginia — Book launch by historian Dr. John Stealey at the Byrd Center for Congressional History and Education, Shepherd University (213 North King St., Shepherdstown). Thursday, June 26, 6–8 pm.



Puppet Show with Kevin Sherry — Family-friendly puppet performance by author of the popular Scholastic series “The Yeti Files” at Shepherdstown Public Library (145 Higbee Lane, Shepherdstown). Saturday, June 28, 11 am. Free.

Pop-Up Book Fair — Featuring authors, artists, bakers, and crafters at The Train Station in Shepherdstown (111 Audrey Egle Drive, Shepherdstown). Saturday, June 28, 10 am–4 pm.

Rocknocerous — Family-friendly concert, part of the “Let’s Play at the AMP” series at Sam Michaels Park (235 Sam Michaels Lane, Shenandoah Junction). Tuesday, July 1, 7 pm (doors open 6 pm). Free.

Steve Kish Magic — Family magic show at Sam Michaels Park, part of the “Let’s Play at the AMP” series at Sam Michaels Park (235 Sam Michaels Lane, Shenandoah Junction). Tuesday, July 8, 7 pm. Free.

For up-to-date listings and links each week, sign up for the free Observer Weekly email newsletter at ObserverWV.news.

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STAFF

EDITOR IN CHIEF

STEVE PEARSON

Editor@ObserverWV.com

PUBLISHER

HARRIET PEARSON

BUSINESS MANAGER

LESLIE F. DAVISSON

FOR ADVERTISING

Email: **SALES@ObserverWV.com**

Phone: 304-249-8968

CONTACT US

Email your photos, story ideas, questions, and comments.

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Frederick, MD.

THIS PAPER WANTS TO BE RECYCLED.



There were lots of flags, home-made signs, and more than 1,000 participants at the "No Kings" rally in Shepherdstown on June 14.

TO OUR READERS — There is a history of local residents volunteering and being involved with the issues of the day. The events of the Bee Line March 250th Anniversary this weekend paid tribute to the 98 local volunteers who marched up to Massachusetts in 1775 to serve under George Washington (scan the QR code on cover for the story).

The anniversary events themselves were organized by volunteers, chief among them Shepherdstown resident Peter Smith, who led the anniversary committee and has been relentless in publicizing the events. Organizing events seems to come naturally for him, perhaps from his many years of volunteer work with other activities, including the Fourth of July and Christmas parades in Shepherdstown. As the reenactors shouted as they set off on their march up Kearneysville Pike — huzzah!

The 1775 volunteers would end up fighting for liberties — rights that they would debate as inalienable, not granted by any earthly authority. It seems that the same issue of liberty still animates the discussions and demonstrations of today.

Bringing it back to Jefferson County today, the same urge to get involved is evident in residents' engagement with our local governments. Shutting out debate and rushing decisions doesn't make the tough questions go away, it just makes it more likely we'll end up with the wrong answers and more problems to fix later on.

Steve Pearson
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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// GOVERNMENT

COUNTY BUDGET SHIFTS FROM SURPLUS TO DEFICIT

Costs Add Up For Ambulance Service, Insurance, Payroll Expenses

By Steve Pearson

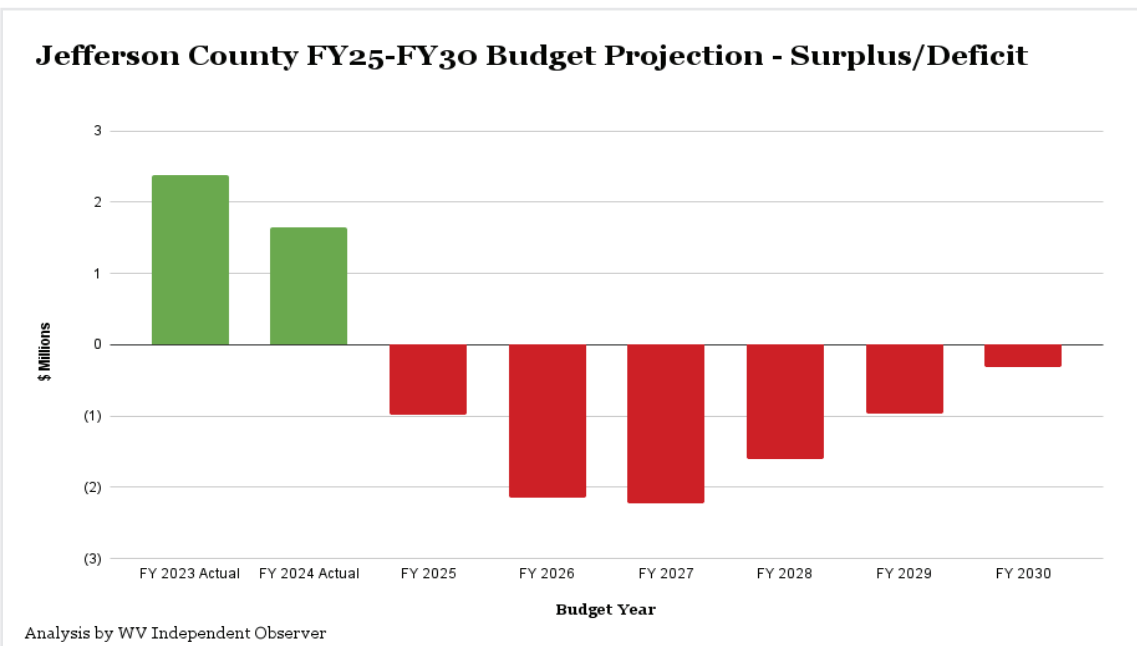
AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF SURPLUS, the County looks as if it will run a deficit for the next several years. The Commission can use the savings accumulated from prior years to offset these projected future deficits, but the Commission’s ability to expand services, fund new initiatives, or replenish its reserve funds will be constrained until the county budget returns to surplus.

EMS Expenses Added To Budget

There are several key drivers for the shift from operating surplus to deficit. Four years ago, the County spent \$4.1 million per year on ambulance services. After bringing all of the EMS services in-house, that expense is currently almost \$6.5 million per year. The \$2.5 million from ARPA funds used to offset the EMS expense for the past three years has been used up. So far, the additional revenue collected by the county for EMS services has offset only a portion of this added expense.

Personnel Costs Rise

Salaries, wages, benefits, and other related expenses account for approximately 55 percent of the county budget. In the past two years, the compensation costs have increased by around \$2 million to keep pace with inflation and retain employees. The county had been lucky with its health insurance costs for several years, but had to add \$350,000 to the budget to cover the rate increase for next year.



According to the information reported by the County Commission to the WV State Auditor, Jefferson County’s regular operating expenses (which exclude capital expenditures and internal transfers) are projected to exceed its regular revenues for the current fiscal year that ends June 30. Next year’s budget shows a larger gap between expenses and revenues. The Observer’s analysis projects that it will take several years before the growth in tax revenues catches up to the current spending baseline.

Comparing the prior three years with the FY26 budget submitted to the state, the county’s operating expenses were \$27.8 million in FY23 and are projected to be \$37.6 million for FY26 — a \$9.8 million increase. Over the same period, the operating revenues were \$30.1 million in FY23 and are projected to be \$35.5 million in FY26 — only a \$5.4 million increase.

READ MORE >>>

Scan the QR code for more news & analysis of the County Commission, the county budget, and what’s ahead as the county moves into its new buildings.



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



// GOVERNMENT

A BIG MOVE FOR THE COUNTY

New Buildings Offer Many Improvements

ALMOST 25 YEARS AGO, the County Commission hired an architect to study its future space needs. From a baseline of 89 employees in 2001, the architect projected the county would have 170 employees by 2011 and would need to expand its office space from 42,000 square feet to 79,000 square feet.

As of 2025, the county reports that it uses 67,000 square feet of space to house 158 employees in several downtown buildings and at the Bardane health department building. The 2001 study projected 441 sq-ft per employee, compared to the current 424 sq-ft per employee. The per-employee space numbers are a rough metric, but it gives a sense for how the storage, meeting rooms, and other space needs scale up with growth.

The population growth that was anticipated in the early 2000s was cut short by the 2008 “great recession” — but it certainly seems to have arrived now. We can speculate on whether the county population grows by 10,000 or 20,000 (or more) over the next decade — but it is clear that the existing facilities are beyond capacity to support any additional staff growth.

In addition to quantity, the county reports significant issues with the quality of the existing office space. The words “old, non-functional, and decrepit” were used during the a County Commission meeting last year following a presentation on the county’s existing buildings by Laura Kuhn, the county’s Director of Fleet & Facilities Management.

Parking also factored into the county’s analysis. Even if the existing buildings could be renovated to modern standards, the current parking lot can’t be expanded beyond the 110 spaces reported by Kuhn. The new facilities together will provide almost 500 on-site parking spaces to serve both employees and visitors.



The Lawrence Street building (above) will be more efficient, both in terms of space efficiency and operating costs, compared to the existing office spaces (below).



The county health department, currently located in an outdated 1970s era building in Bardane (below), will also be moving to Lawrence Street.



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Jefferson County
West Virginia

NOTICE OF FILINGS DUE

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION
as of
JULY 1 2025

DATES TO FILE:

JEFFERSON COUNTY DOG TAGS
File by July 1st

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// GOVERNMENT

PLANNING COMMISSION WILL EXPLORE ZONING CHANGES THIS SUMMER

By Steve Pearson



WITH THE COUNTY'S UPDATED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IN PLACE, the Jefferson County Planning Commission is now turning to the task of updating the county's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations.

The County Comprehensive Plan (which includes the Future Land Use Guide) provides broad guidance for future growth throughout the county. The Zoning Ordinance provides the rules that apply to each specific parcel. The Subdivision Regulations govern the process and approvals required for development projects.

During its last several meetings, the Planning Commission has discussed proposals to add restrictions to the industrial solar zoning rules. The Commission is also considering adding zoning rules for the development of large data centers. During its June 10 meeting, the Commission added a review of the residential zoning rules to its workplan for the July 8 and August 12 meetings.

Rural Residential Zoning

The Comprehensive Plan defines rural, rural residential, and suburban residential land use categories. The Plan also identifies the need to update the Zoning Ordinance to better align with these land use categories.

The current options for residential zoning include "rural" which allows for one-acre building lots, "residential growth" which allows for



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high-density development when public water and sewer are available, and “residential-light industrial-commercial” which is the only mixed-use residential option available in the county’s ordinance.

The planning staff has proposed a new “rural residential” zone. As currently written, the draft amendment to create this new zone appears to focus on several objectives, including allowing cluster development in rural areas. The memo that introduces the draft amendment also discusses other new zones for “residential commercial” and “office/commercial mixed use,” so some of the references in the document go beyond the focus of low-density residential to include what could be considered medium and high-density development. During the June meeting, the commissioners heard staff suggestions to include tri-plex and quad-plex development in the “rural residential” zone.

The first version of the draft amendment is available at ObserverWV.com.

Commission Considers Limits On Public Comment

While it tackles these topics, the Planning Commission also continues to debate how much public comment it wants to hear. At its June 10 meeting, the Commission asked the Planning staff to update the policies that govern how the Commission conducts public hearings. Along with consolidating several policies into a single document, the Commission asked the staff to include a 90 minute overall limit per agenda item for public comment. The proposed policy change proposal will likely be on the agenda for the July 8 Planning Commission, but it is unclear whether the public will be allowed to comment on the topic at that meeting.

Read more at ObserverWV.com >>>

Scan the QR code to read more coverage of the Jefferson County Planning Commission. The next commission meetings are scheduled for July 8 and August 12 at 7 pm, in the basement meeting room of the Charles Town Library (200 East Washington St, in downtown Charles Town).





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What if they were considering:

Proposed Preferred Growth Area in Rural Area



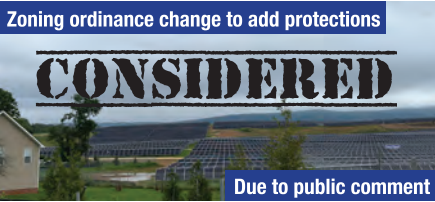
REMOVED

Due to public comment

A preferred growth area next to your farm?

A solar facility next to your house?

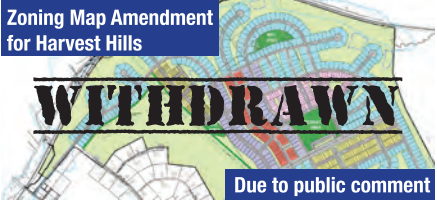
Zoning ordinance change to add protections



CONSIDERED

Due to public comment

Zoning Map Amendment for Harvest Hills



WITHDRAWN

Due to public comment

A zoning map amendment for a high-density housing development on your country road?

An industrial plant or groundwater bottling facility next to your farm well or community?

Water Bottling Plant



DENIED

Due to public comment

[NOW, what if they didn't let YOU speak at the public hearing?]

The Jefferson County Planning Commission is working to place a time limit on public participation in public hearings and workshops depriving some the opportunity to speak.

is cutting the public hearing and the Jefferson County Commission out of the process.

By making this change through policy rather than through the bylaws or ordinance, the Planning Commission

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EXPLORE // THEATER

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN THEATER FESTIVAL

From July 11 to August 3, the Contemporary American Theater Festival (CATF) returns to Shepherdstown with a lineup of five new plays. The plays run in repertory, rotating throughout each week so audiences can see multiple shows in a single visit — and join in post-show discussions and special events that deepen the experience.

This summer's plays are:

Did My Grandfather Kill My Grandfather? by Cody LeRoy Wilson

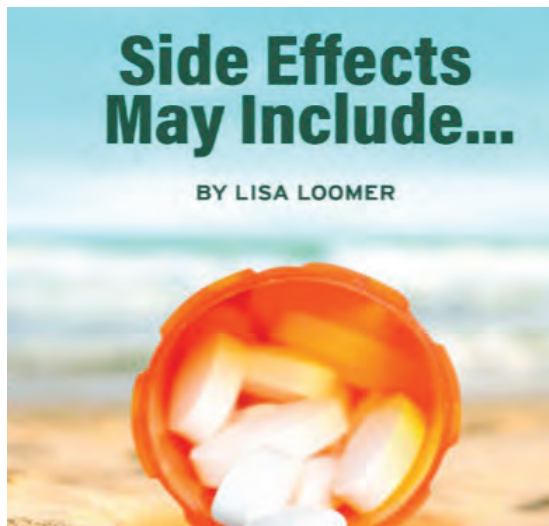
Wilson, the first West Virginia native playwright to be produced at CATF, explores themes of inheritance and personal reckoning through a story rooted in both local and global histories.

Magdalene by Mark St. Germain

Set 18 years after the Crucifixion, a dialogue between Peter and Mary Magdalene delves into interpretations of faith and memory. Playwright St. Germain is familiar to CATF audiences; he wrote last year's *The Happiest Man on Earth*.

Kevin Kling: Unraveled by Kevin Kling

A memoir-in-the-making, this play weaves humor and resilience as Kling, an NPR commentator, reflects on life with a disability and a life-changing accident.



Happy Fall: A Queer Stunt Spectacular by Lisa Sanaye Dring

A theatrical stunt show blending puppetry, illusion, and LGBTQ+ romance, spotlighting two Hollywood stuntmen navigating both love and career.

Side Effects May Include... by Lisa Loomer

A portrait of a mother and son navigating mental health, trust, and the complexities of psychiatric care. This is Loomer's first return to the CATF stage since 1991.

Around The Festival

Beyond the stage, CATF offers lectures, panel discussions, and backstage tours. According to Artistic Director Peggy McKowen, "CATF offers other events outside of the plays because we want to create a rich, immersive experience for our audiences. The events offer engagement and conversation about the ideas within the stories and how our shared experience shapes the way we think and feel."

This year's events reflect both continuity and experimentation, says McKowen. "This year we share a bit of our past and future in the events.... We'll be screening a documentary that was filmed last year during the making of **Tornado Tastes Like Aluminum Sting**. CATF will also also share a concert version excerpt of a new musical in development for production in 2026."

CATF audiences often pair playgoing with dining, shopping, or simply spending time in familiar surroundings. This summer, the renovation and reopening of the Quality Inn in Maddex Square expands lodging options for those planning an overnight stay in Shepherdstown to catch multiple performances.

Tickets and additional information are available at CATF.org.



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EXPLORE // CHARLES TOWN

ART SHOWS, PLAYS, HISTORY

LOOKING FOR THINGS TO DO IN CHARLES TOWN this summer? Here's some ideas:

Catch a play at the **Charles Town Old Opera House**. This community theater produces several shows each year, plus dance and other events. This summer's production is *Wizard of Oz*, a musical based on the classic 1939 motion picture. The play will be directed by Steven Brewer with musical direction by Paul Cabell. Performance dates are July 25, 26, 27 and August 1, 2, 3. *Web: OldOperaHouse.org.*

Find a unique piece of locally-created art at the **Firehouse Gallery**. Located in the old fire hall building at 108 North George St., the Gallery is run by the member artists. The current show runs until June 29. Open Thur & Fri 11-5, Sat 10-4, Sun 11-5. Admission is free, most of the art is for sale. *Web: FireHouseGalleryWV.org.*

Explore local history at the **Jefferson County Museum**. Located below the Charles Town Library at 200 East Washington Street, the museum gallery was completely renovated last year and has been adding new exhibits. Open Tue-Fri 10-4 and Sat 9-1. Free for Jefferson County residents. *Web: JeffCoMuseum.org.*



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HARPERS FERRY IS WELL KNOWN as a place to connect with nature. Here’s a few events that offer an expanded connection to our local national park.

Story Adventures For Kids

The Harpers Ferry Park Association’s “Stories in the Park” program for kids are built around age-appropriate books with hands-on activities and engaging discussions. Registration, fees, and event details are available at HarpersFerryHistory.org (under “experiences”). The remaining programs are on July 2 (monarch butterflies), July 16 (mushrooms), July 30 (Appalachian Trail), and August 6 (animal houses — beaver dams, bird nests, spider webs).



Appalachian Chamber Music Festival

When The Observer interviewed Katie Tertell in the summer of 2021, she remarked that she was enchanted by Harpers Ferry and had a “dream is to bring world class artists and music together, to celebrate the history and culture of the area.” With the fifth season of the Appalachian



Chamber Music Festival set to run from August 8 to 17, the program that Tertell saw in her mind only a few years ago has expanded to feature classes, original compositions, and musicians from around the world.

This year’s program kicks off with a free concert on the lawn of Storer College in Harpers Ferry on Friday, Aug 8 at 7 pm. The concert will feature the music of jazz legend and Storer College alumnus, Don Redman. The ACMF musicians will collaborate with the Howard Burns jazz quartet to present original arrangements of some of Redman’s most celebrated jazz works.

The festival finale will be at Happy Retreat on Sunday, Aug 17 at 3 pm. In between, there will be concerts in Charles Town, Harpers Ferry, Shepherdstown, and Berryville (VA). Tickets range from \$12 to \$35 for adults, \$10 for students. Under 18 free at select events. *Web: AppalachianChamber.org.*



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It may even be assumed that just as
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— C.G. Jung (Memories, Dreams and Reflections, Page 326)



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//SHEPHERDSTOWN

PLAY TIME IN SHEPHERDSTOWN

THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN THEATER FESTIVAL comes to Shepherdstown in July, and there’s a full schedule of other events in town as well.

Music Around Town

To finish out June, the **Shepherdstown Opera House** will host local musician Jordan Siwek on Friday, June 20 and local band X of the Potomac on Saturday, June 21 (tickets at *OperaHouseLive.com*). On Saturday, June 28, the **Shepherdstown Street Fest** will be an all-day music, food and vendor event that closes German Street (*ShepherdstownStreetFest.org*).

The town’s “**First Friday**” program is off for July, but resumes on August 1 at 5pm with a concert on McMurrin lawn. The **Opera House** will host Mama Said String Band on August 8 at 7 pm.



A 4th Of July Parade

The town’s Independence Day parade, organized by the Rotary Club of Shepherdstown, will march down German Street at 11:00 am on July 4. A community picnic organized by the Community Club will follow at Morgan’s Grove Park.



Bee Line March Festivities

The Beeline March 250th Anniversary committee has two upcoming events: Sunday, June 22 — Music of the Regiment musicians playing period instruments perform and explain martial music from the Revolutionary War period. 3 pm at Trinity Episcopal Church in Shepherdstown. Saturday, July 19 — Encampment of Revolutionary War reenactors. 10 am to 5:30 pm at Morgan’s Grove Park. Details are on the committee’s Facebook page (search on the name).

TalkTheater At CATF

Beyond the plays (see page 6), CATF also offers lectures, talks and other performances. Highlights include a sneak peek screening of the “Tornado Tastes Like Aluminum Sting” documentary film at the Shepherdstown Opera House (July 15), a look into the development process with a special staged reading event (July 22), and a performance by storyteller Adam Booth (July 29). *CATF.org*.





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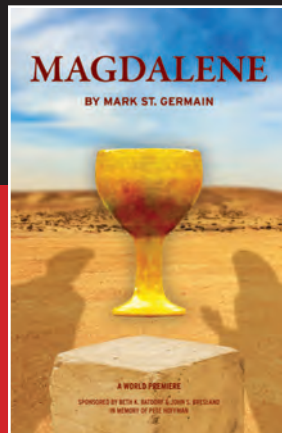
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