October 21, 2026

To the Jefferson County Commission:

Please accept this letter as my formal resignation from the position of county administrator, with my last day in the office being Thursday, December 3, 2026, following the Commission meeting. Thank you for your time, your trust, and the opportunity to serve the Jefferson County Commission.

Together, we have made significant progress in modernizing processes, advancing critical building projects, and helping shape State and federal laws and regulations. These are accomplishments of which I am immensely proud. When I reflect on my time with Jefferson County, however, I am most proud of the people.

The staff of the Jefferson County Commission are talented beyond measure. I am humbled that they trusted me to be their conduit for ideas, their advocate, and sometimes simply the person who believed that what they envisioned was possible. They have challenged me, inspired me, and made me a better leader.

I want to recognize a few of the extraordinary people who have shaped my experience. In alphabetical order, because I could never choose a favorite.

Gabriel Areizaga
Gabriel is one of those rare individuals who sees a problem that others have accepted as inevitable and simply refuses to accept that it cannot be solved.

When I arrived at Jefferson County, our technology infrastructure was, in many ways, still living in the 1990s. Gabriel took on the enormous responsibility of bringing it into the modern era, leading a small team responsible for supporting hundreds of employees while simultaneously transforming the systems upon which the entire County depends.

But Gabriel's greatest strength is not simply his technical expertise. It is his ability to lead through change, navigate resistance, solve seemingly impossible problems, and recognize the potential in the people around him. He invests in his staff, encourages their professional development, and builds the kind of team capable of accomplishing far more than its size would suggest.

Modernizing technology is difficult. An organization's willingness to embrace technology is an entirely different challenge. Gabriel has taken on both with extraordinary resilience, creativity, and determination.

There is no greater measure of a leader than whether they leave an organization stronger than they found it. By that measure, Gabriel has been an extraordinary success.

Lynn Dillow

Lynn drove me absolutely bonkers from the moment I hired her. She was always in my business, always asking what I needed, always trying to help me get things done. Eventually, I learned to let go and discovered Lynn's extraordinary gift: she is the person who turns chaos into order and makes everyone around her better at what they do.

Lynn is the quiet force behind the County's operation. She ensures every box is checked, professionalism is maintained, distractions are intercepted, and no one in the Commission is overlooked. She sees what needs to happen before anyone else realizes it needs to happen. And she does it all with an extraordinary commitment to the people she serves.

Without Lynn, I would be toast. I am grateful every single day for this remarkable woman.

Roger Goodwin

Roger has been the perfect wingman.

I can be all gas, eager to tackle every challenge, solve every problem, and charge toward the next opportunity. Roger is my constant measure of caution, wisdom, and calm. He reminds me to slow down, think things through, and recognize that the best decisions are not always the fastest ones.

His extraordinary depth of institutional knowledge, his commitment to reasoned and measured thought, and his unwavering dedication to Jefferson County make him an irreplaceable asset. Every ambitious leader needs a Roger Goodwin. I have been incredibly fortunate to have mine. My one great disappointment in leaving is that, at Ryan Milburn's next legendary WVU-versus-Virginia employee chili cook-off, I won't get to go head-to-head with Roger.

I have a confession for Roger: I was all bark and no bite. I am a terrible cook. He would have destroyed me.

Todd Gorham

When we began searching for a Fire and EMS Chief, we weren't simply looking for someone to lead a department. We were looking for someone with the experience, courage, and dedication to

help write the rules for a profession still taking shape in Jefferson County and across West Virginia.

We found that leader in Todd Gorham.

Todd arrived with professionalism, tact, an exceptionally dry sense of humor, and an immediate willingness to become part of the team. Through firm but thoughtful leadership, he has earned the respect of everyone around him. He understands that leadership is about earning trust, establishing standards, and giving people the confidence to accomplish difficult things together.

The roles of Fire and EMS Chief and County Administrator are very different, but in Jefferson County, where so much of the framework is still being built, those roles must work hand in hand. Todd has been an extraordinary partner, not only to me, but to his staff and the broader fire and rescue community.

His impact will extend far beyond the department he leads today. He is helping establish the foundation upon which future generations of fire and EMS professionals will build. That is a remarkable legacy, and one that is only beginning.

I hope he teaches the next county administrator as much about NFPA Standard 2352 as he has taught me.

Jess James

Jess began working with me in an administrative role, but I saw something in her that I knew was capable of much more.

So I made an enormous ask: With virtually no budget, limited resources, and little more than the training and support I could provide, would she become our Chief Human Resources Officer?

What Jess has accomplished since then has transformed Jefferson County.

The processes employees now take for granted exist because Jess imagined, developed, and implemented them. Tuition reduction agreements with Shepherd University and American Public University. Annual and quarterly performance reviews. Evaluations tied to key performance indicators. Dozens upon dozens of free or low-cost professional development opportunities. Because of Jess, employees are learning everything from basic Excel skills to supervisory leadership through Blue Ridge, pursuing associate degrees in accounting, and discovering educational opportunities they may never have imagined for themselves.

And her influence is reaching far beyond Jefferson County.

Recently, during a discussion with county leaders from across the country, one leader described a recurring challenge: employees who respond negatively after being passed over for promotion. My eyes lit up. We had a solution! And, it's because of Jess.

Jess had developed what we call an Expectations Memo, a thoughtful tool designed to turn a potentially difficult moment into an opportunity for professional growth and a setting of clear expectations. It thanks employees for seeking advancement, identifies the skills and training that could strengthen their candidacy next time, recognizes that there is often bad behavior after being passed over for a promotion, and establishes clear expectations for continued professionalism. It also explains how negative behavior or undermining colleagues can affect that employee's future leadership opportunities.

Instead of waiting for a problem, Jess developed a way to address it before it begins.
Other county leaders immediately wanted copies. I have been delighted to share her work nationally.

My only failure with Jess is that I have never quite managed to convince her of how extraordinarily capable, talented, and remarkable she truly is.

I hope one day she sees herself as the rest of us see her.

Laura Kuhn

Laura is the very definition of inspiration.

More than 30 years ago, Laura began her career with the Commission in an entry level position. She advanced not because someone handed her an opportunity, but because she continually learned, grew, and proved what she could accomplish.

Today, she is helping deliver projects that have been envisioned for three decades. She helped advance State legislation to provide alternatives to auctioning the Washington Street properties, creating an opportunity for stronger returns to the Charles Town community. She is overseeing the future of our historic courthouse and has traveled to Capitol Hill to advocate for federal investment in the County's courthouse needs.

Through it all, she has been an extraordinary ambassador to elected officials, community partners, and stakeholders. No matter how complicated the challenge, everyone knows Laura will find a way.

One of my favorite memories perfectly captures who she is.

Parks and Recreation called me in a panic. Rain threatened to cancel an event representing thousands of dollars in investment, and they desperately needed an indoor location. Could they use the Commission meeting room?

I said, “Yes!”

Oopse, I forgot to ask Laura.

As I explained the situation to Laura, I realized I had probably committed us to something without fully appreciating the logistics. The room, the sound, the setup, the cleanup, the schedule. Laura listened quietly.

Finally, I asked sheepishly, "Do you think we can do it?"

I was almost certain the answer would be no.

Instead, I could hear her smile through the phone.

"I think that's a fantastic idea."

That is Laura. Where others see obstacles, she sees possibilities.

But what inspires me most about Laura is how she leads people. She recognizes potential in her staff, usually long before they recognize it themselves. She finds out what they want to become, advocates for them, locates the training, identifies the funding, and makes the time for their growth. She believes in the goodness and possibilities within every person.

She is an example of what a leader should be, and after more than three decades of service, Laura went back to school as a nontraditional student. This May, she is expected to graduate from Shepherd University.

Laura reminds me that there is no ceiling on growth, and no point at which we should stop becoming better versions of ourselves.

Because of Laura, I believe there is hope for me yet.

I will always aspire to be a little more like her.

Dick Myers

Some of the most valuable leaders are those who quietly connect people, departments, and ideas that might otherwise never come together. Dick Myers is one of those leaders.

With decades of experience in homeland security and emergency management, Dick brings an extraordinary understanding of how organizations function together, particularly when the stakes are high.

Almost immediately after I became County Administrator, a significant winter storm required me to make the decision to close County operations. Dick, then also serving in an interim capacity, calmly walked me through the process. His knowledge, steady guidance, and ability to coordinate across departments gave me confidence when I needed it.

But what I value most about Dick is his understanding that collaboration is not simply something we talk about. It is something we must intentionally build.

When Dick learned of my vision for One Jefferson, One County, he brought me an idea: What if every employee spent two hours each year working alongside one department every year?

Imagine an employee learning about ambulance operations, accompanying a department on a ride-along, helping run wiring for our .gov infrastructure to strengthen cybersecurity, observing GIS staff develop new maps, or walking through County buildings alongside our custodial team. Each experience adds another tool to an employee's toolbox and opens their eyes to what becomes possible when departments understand and support one another.

That kind of vision comes from someone who has spent a career understanding the power of cross-disciplinary collaboration.

I thank Dick for seeing not just the departments we have, but the stronger, more connected County we can become.

Jennifer Myers

Great leaders don't simply manage what exists. They see what could be, bring people together, and find a way to make it happen.

Jennifer Myers has done exactly that for Jefferson County Parks and Recreation. Under her leadership, our parks, programs, and recreational opportunities have grown tremendously, creating new ways for residents to connect with their community.

But what I appreciate most about Jennifer is her willingness to dream with me. Some of our best ideas have started with a simple conversation about what we could do if we thought a little differently. Our annual employee kickball game and picnic are perfect examples. With almost no budget for employee events, Jennifer has helped us turn the resources we already have into opportunities to celebrate our employees, build relationships, and have a little fun.

Through her partnership with the Commission, Jennifer has helped us become more than an organization that provides services. She has helped us become an organization that brings people together.

Jennifer reminds me that sometimes the greatest things we accomplish don't require more money or more resources. They simply require two people willing to ask, "Why not?" and then figure out how to make it happen.

Tara Vann

Tara Vann is the definition of grit and grace.

She stepped into leadership during an extraordinarily difficult period. A “leader” in her profession told her she lacked the experience and skills to succeed. They encouraged her to go to Administration and throw in the towel.

Lord, were they wrong.

Tara didn't just succeed. She transformed what was possible.

She rebuilt critical relationships with the Fire and Rescue Association. She helped finalize a groundbreaking, first-in-the-nation cloud-based routing initiative through Motorola for 911 operations. She developed and executed an innovative partnership with Jefferson County Schools to establish a high school training program so remarkable that she now joins school representatives at national conferences to explain how Jefferson County created and implemented a high school 911 training program.

And she accomplished these things while demonstrating a level of competence, grace, and professionalism that continues to amaze me.

Sometimes I am almost tempted to tell Tara she can't do something, just to watch the extraordinary determination, ingenuity, and talent that would be unleashed upon the world.

Tara is proof that other people's doubts do not define our capabilities. She is a leader who has turned adversity into achievement and skepticism into national recognition.

I hope she never allows anyone else's limited imagination to constrain her own.

Our Elected Officials, Community Partners, and Colleagues

While I have shared only a few stories about the staff who have helped me grow as a leader, my gratitude extends far beyond these individuals.

Jefferson County is fortunate to have elected officials and leadership teams who understand the value of collaboration, including Sheriff Tom Hansen and Debbie Lowe; Angie Banks and Rhonda Willingham; Tina Renner and Sam Combs; Adam Ward and Nathan Cochran; and Jacki Shadle and Nikki Painter.

That same spirit extends to community partners, including Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Heather McIntyre; Shepherd University President Mary Hendrix; Kim Moss of Blue Ridge; Dr. Chuck Bishop of Jefferson County Schools; the Jefferson County Fire and Rescue Association; and the many mayors, city managers, delegates, and senators who work to make our region stronger.

Public service is never the work of one individual or one office. Its greatest accomplishments emerge when people choose to work together, believe in one another, and pursue something larger than themselves.

I will leave Jefferson County with enormous pride in what we have accomplished, but even greater gratitude for the people who made it possible.

Thank you for allowing me to be part of their story. They will forever be part of mine.

Respectfully,
Edwina Benites-LM
County Administrator
Jefferson County Commission