

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

DOGS OF THE WEEK: Nala and her pup, Chanel, are loving, resilient



COMMUNITY, A3



Town Manager Chris Hively named among 250 Champions of Public Service

LOCAL, A5

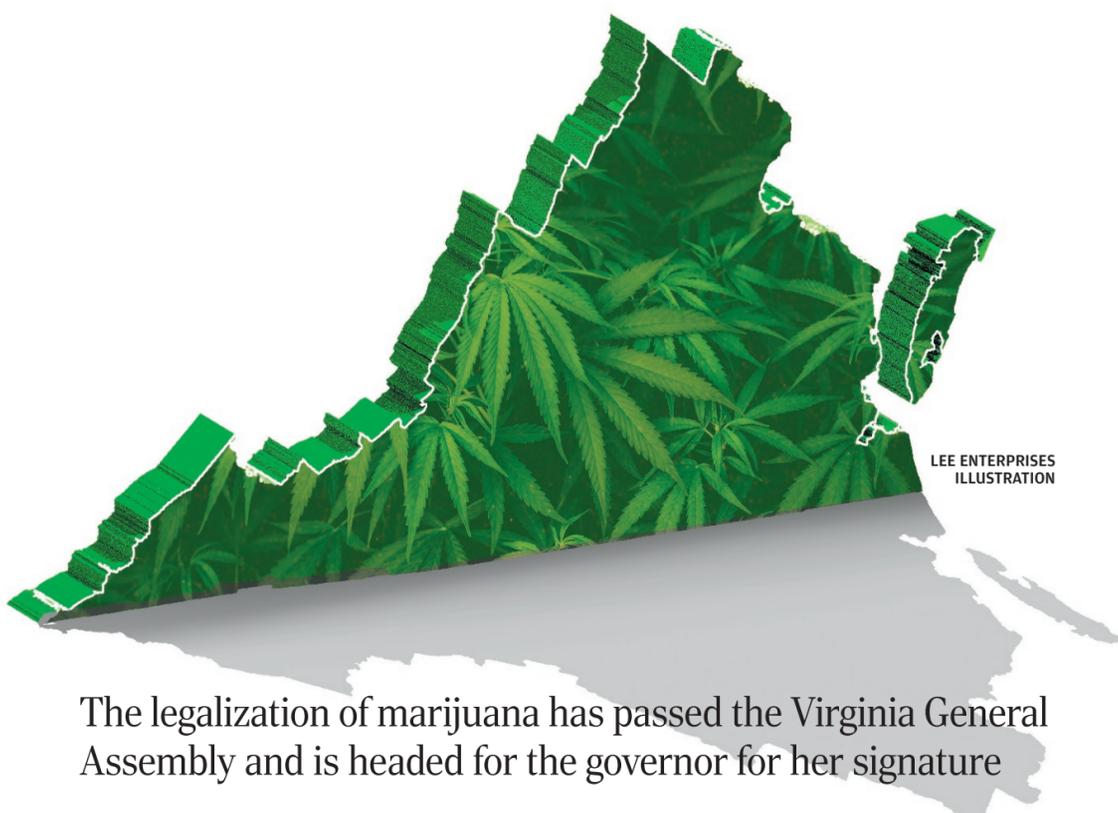
Thursday, March 26, 2026

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LEGALIZING MARIJUANA

5 THINGS TO KNOW



LEE ENTERPRISES ILLUSTRATION

The legalization of marijuana has passed the Virginia General Assembly and is headed for the governor for her signature

ERIC KOLENICH
Richmond Times-Dispatch

By this time next year, Virginia adults might be able to legally buy and sell recreational cannabis.

Lawmakers have come to agreement on an extensive bill to create a lawful marketplace and sent it to Gov. Abigail Spanberger for approval.

"This is an important bill, and this is the culmination of like five years of work," Del. Paul Krizek, D-Fairfax, who sponsored the House version of the legislation, told the General Assembly.

While it's been legal to possess recreational marijuana in Virginia since 2021, residents could not lawfully buy it or sell it. A large black market has emerged, and Democrats say the new legislation, which mandates testing and proper labeling, will ensure customers purchase cleaner and safer products.

The legislation "moves beyond the chaos of the unregulated system we have today," Krizek said.

Most Republicans voted against the measure. In each of the past two years, then-Gov. Glenn Youngkin vetoed similar bills, saying states that already greenlit cannabis sales experienced worse health outcomes for children, increased gang activity, deteriorated mental health and diminished road safety.

Here are five things to know about where the legislation stands:

1. It's now Spanberger's decision

Spanberger has until April 13 to sign the bill, veto it or propose amendments. Although the governor has said she supports a legal marketplace for cannabis, it's unclear if she will support every detail in the 131-page bill that creates a licensing structure, quality standards and a tax framework.

Asked Monday if Spanberger will sign, a spokesperson for the governor said she is considering the legislation.

2. Green light set for Jan. 1, 2027

Under the latest version of the bill, marijuana sales would become legal starting Jan. 1, 2027. Krizek had proposed an earlier start date of Nov. 1, 2026, but members of the Senate proposed a later date to give small businesses more time to prepare.

3. Medical marijuana providers will have to cut a big check

Lawmakers and other advocates worry that large manufacturers will muscle out small growers.

In an effort to balance the market, the state will charge current providers of medical marijuana a conversion fee of \$10 million for a license to sell recreational cannabis.

In greater Richmond, Curaleaf Holdings Inc. has the exclusive right to sell medical marijuana under the Cannabist and gLeaf brands. Earlier this year, Curaleaf bought five retail locations, a sixth potential site and a production facility from The Cannabist Company Holdings Inc. for \$110 million.

The law also gives special licenses to small businesses whose owners come from communities disproportionately policed for marijuana crimes or who have been convicted of marijuana crimes in the past. The latest version of the bill makes it easier for businesses to obtain these "impact licenses."

4. Punishment for selling illegally would increase

Lawmakers have toughened the punishment for illegally selling marijuana. A person convicted of illegally selling cannabis would be charged with a misdemeanor for the first and second offenses. If the person commits a third offense, the person would face a Class 6 felony, punishable by up to five years in jail.

Richmond police Chief Rick Edwards said many of the vape shops that have sprung up around town sell marijuana illegally. The city has worked to shut down many of these shops. The bill also would create a tip line operated by the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority in which people can report people and businesses illegally selling cannabis.

The legislation also would make more hemp products illegal. Sen. Lashrecse Aird, D-Petersburg, said there's currently a "loophole" that allows hemp products to circumvent existing THC limits and that the new law would ensure those products don't undercut the regulated market. Though Virginia currently has its own standard for hemp, the bill would redefine hemp to match a new federal definition that would heavily regulate or ban most intoxicating hemp products.

Del. Tom Garrett, R-Buckingham, opposed this provision, saying it will put Virginia employers out of business.

"It creates an unfair market advantage for the multibillion-dollar international corporations who are trafficking marijuana," Garrett said.

5. Tax rate is moderated

One significant question lawmakers faced is how much to tax cannabis. If the current language is implemented, buyers will pay a tax rate between 12% and 16.5%, depending on the locality.

Please see CANNABIS, Page A6



Board grapples with \$6m shortfall

County tapping reserves, trying to hold line on taxes for balanced budget

ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION
Culpeper Star-Exponent

The Board of Supervisors does not appear inclined to raise taxes this year, even though the county is short about \$6 million to balance the budget due to new school debt and other impacts of increased growth.

Longtime County Finance Director Valerie Lamb gave a presentation on the proposed \$264.3 million FY27 operating budget at a rescheduled meeting on March 19. Of that, \$15.5 million is for capital projects.

The proposed new fiscal year budget is less than the current year budget of \$286.8 million, which includes \$49.079 million in capital projects, Lamb said. That's a nearly 8% decrease year-over-year in the operating budget for FY27.

Please see TAXES, Page A6

More shops, offices slated at Braggs Corner

Legacy Markets, UVA medical could be getting neighbors

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

A new mixed-use development is on the horizon at Braggs Corner in Culpeper.

Charlottesville-based MacKenzie Commercial Real Estate Services is targeting a diverse array of uses for "Culpeper Corner" at the intersection of Bennett Road and Braggs Corner Road, near U.S. 29, to complement the existing Legacy Markets convenience store, gas station, and car wash, according to a March 18 business release.

Options could include quick-service, fast-casual, and sit-down restaurant concepts; boutiques, healthcare and medical uses, entertainment/fitness uses, and a brewery, according to the

Please see BRAGGS, Page A6

Piedmont Community Band becomes Culpeper Community Band, partners with Jewell Tone

LOCAL, A4

Weather

Partly sunny and warmer
High 77 • Low 63
Forecast • A8

Inside

CLASSIFIEDS	B5-6	LOCAL	A2 & A4	STATE/REGION	A2
COMMUNITY	A3	OBITUARIES	A3	SPORTS	B1
LIVELY	INSIDE	OPINION	A7	WEATHER	A8

