

# CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

3rd Thursday  
Summer Concerts  
gearing up in May  
for 23rd season  
downtown

LOCAL, A2



Trump visits  
Charlottesville  
namesake winery  
for meeting with  
MAGA PAC

STATE, A4

Tuesday, April 14, 2026

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## APRIL 21 REFERENDUM

# Rural Votes Matter rally held

Republicans say vote no to Democrats  
gerrymandering; Dems say vote yes

ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION  
Culpeper Star-Exponent

Local and state Republicans turned out for a “Rural Votes Matter” rally on Main Street on Saturday, hosted by Culpeper

Republicans. Attendees held signs and spoke out against the congressional redistricting referendum. The protest across from the registrar’s office pushed back against Democrats’ attempted temporary

gerrymandering ahead of the mid-term, a process that plays out every few years depending on the party in charge.

Early voting for the political initiative started on March 6; this Saturday, April 18, is the last day to vote early in person. The statewide referendum is April 21—polls will be open 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Culpeper County Republican Committee Chairwoman Lynne Richman Bell said about 30 people attended their rally.

“Lots of honking cars and thumbs up,” she said on Sunday.

“Stand with your neighbors and defend fair representation in

Please see RALLY, Page A6

## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

# WALK FOR HOPE LIVES ON



CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT, FILE

A group begins the first Walk for Hope 5K in Yowell Meadow Park in 2016. Living the Dream Foundation started the fundraiser for support and education of suicide, substance use and depression. CARS is the new sponsor of the event, taking place this Saturday, April 18.

## CARS, Team Jordan taking over Living the Dream Foundation annual event

ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION  
Culpeper Star-Exponent

Allied nonprofits are partnering to continue an annual tradition that brought together community members impacted by depression, substance use and suicide. There is still time to sign up for the 5K Walk and Run for Hope taking place at 8 a.m. this Saturday, April 18 at Yowell Meadow Park in Culpeper.

Christ-Centered Addiction Restoration Services (CARS) is partnering with Team Jordan to hold the annual gathering previously held every April by the recently dissolved Living the Dream Foundation. The April date coincides with the death of Culpeper County High School

Marching Band Blue Devil Ben Long.

He died at his home on April 12, 2015 from suicide following a battle with substance use and depression. Ben was 24.

After graduating from college, Long sustained a work injury and became dependent on heroin. His catchphrase, when people would ask how he was doing, was, “Living the dream.”

### First Walk for Hope, group sunsets

Long’s parents, Ed and Gloria and his younger brother Marshall, founded the Living the Dream Foundation in his memory that year, raising awareness

Please see HOPE, Page A6

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## Strata Solar retracts application for project

Company has tried to build in Culpeper 4 times

ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION  
Culpeper Star-Exponent

A large solar project on agriculturally zoned timber tracts in Culpeper County is once again off the table.

North Carolina-based Strata Solar last week pulled its application for a conditional use permit to build the 65 megawatt Maroon Solar project and substation in the Stevensburg District.

The utility-scale project covered about 291 acres between Raccoon Ford Road and Mount Pony Road, connecting to the Dominion transmission line.

The project, scaled down from the original in 2020, failed to receive planning commission support through the years through four CUP processes involving multiple meetings and work sessions, public hearings, deferrals and countless studies. The latest denial last month was definitive, with the same issues surfacing and the majority of public comment against it.

### Planners say no; Payne: residents don’t want it

County planners once again found the proposal not substantially in accord with the comprehensive plan and did not promote the public necessity, convenience, general welfare, and good zoning practice, according to the commission’s letter to the board of supervisors.

Concerns heard from neighbors over the years included: the project was too big and industrial for the rural area; loss of farmland; environmental impacts; stormwater management on the poorly draining soil; noise during construction and operation; construction traffic and impacts to cultural and natural resources, among others.

The CUP was likely destined for another denial from the board of supervisors following the planned public hearing on April 7, when Strata Solar withdrew the request. Board Chairman Tom Underwood made the announcement at the morning meeting last Tuesday.

Supervisor Dewayne Payne said in a message last week, “The Stevensburg District has made it clear to me that they do not support utility-scale solar. It seems to me that we should revisit our solar ordinance.”

The current ordinance, adopted in 2023, limits individual solar projects to 300 acres, with 100 acres of exposed land at a time, and sets an overall county-wide utility-scale solar limit of 2,400 acres.

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Orianna Gonzalez and Eman Tanweer are in this week’s Academic Spotlight

COMMUNITY, A3

## Weather

Hot  
High 91 • Low 56  
Forecast • A8

## Inside

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COMMUNITY	A3	OBITUARIES	A3	STATE	A4
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