

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Virginia State Police solves 1973 cold case in murder of D.C. woman

A2, LOCAL



“Bison Standing Strong” new America250 exhibit at Natural History Museum in D.C.

A4, REGION

Tuesday, April 28, 2026

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Real estate tax rate set to increase

ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION
Culpeper Star-Exponent

Like with last year’s budget, residents can expect a 2-cent increase in the real estate tax rate for the coming fiscal year, starting July 1 — to 47 cents per every \$100 of assessed value.

Culpeper County would still have the lowest tax rate in the region.

“Conventional wisdom, you want to raise taxes in a non-assessment year,” Shane McCrum, the

new clerk to the board and interim county administrator, told the board of supervisors at its April 21 budget meeting and public hearing.

Homes will not be reassessed in FY27, but they will be in FY28, he said.

The average home value in Culpeper is \$445,000, according to McCrum’s presentation, and the average current real estate tax bill is \$1,913. Raising taxes would increase that to \$2,002, an increase of \$89.

Last year’s reassessment resulted in an average 17% increase in real estate values.

The \$237.7 million operating budget is about 5% higher than the current year’s and draws on \$14.6 million from the county’s fund balance. Main drivers of general government cost growth are cost of living increases (average 2.8% plus potential merit raises), IT expenses, debt, new employees in the sheriff’s office (three new deputies), parks

and recreation (public pool staff), human services and EMS, according to McCrum’s presentation. The county will pay an additional \$3 million in FY27 for employee health insurance.

“This budget process is inherited from the previous county administrator,” McCrum told the board. “I have inherited those recommendations. I have not looked in-depth

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VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

PLANT SALE BENEFITS MASTER GARDENERS



ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION, CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Anne Marie Pfaff, of Madison, (left), a Rapidan River Chapter Master Gardener, helps Della Edrington (center) of Culpeper make selections at Saturday’s annual plant sale at the Carver Center in Rapidan. Check out the online photo gallery at starexponent.com.

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Hundreds turned out to peruse a wide selection of locally cultivated plants, along with homemade plant-inspired items like earrings, stationery, pottery, gourd creations and worm castings for fertilizer.

The Virginia Cooperative Extension Culpeper Office annual plant sale benefitted the many projects of its Rapidan Master Gardeners, trained through Virginia Tech in botany, produce, herbs and woody plants, water quality, soil and landscape design. The local master gardeners serve the residents of Culpeper, Greene, Madison and Orange.

Anne Marie Pfaff, of Madison, has been an extension master gardener for five years and a gardener her whole life, she said Saturday, manning one of the plant sale tables. Their mission is outreach and education to the public about gardening through information and programs, she said.

Ashley Appling, Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent, Horticulture in the local office, recently planted 120 blueberry bushes on the farmlands behind the Carver Center, overlooking Cedar Mountain along James Madison Highway.

The blueberries will be used to make delicious frozen pops at the Carver Food Enterprise Center as a healthy treat for local schoolchildren, Pfaff said, as an example of a Master Gardener project benefiting the community.

The collaboration is just one example of the partnerships between the various groups occupying the historic African-American regional high school.

Appling manned another plant booth at the sale alongside Carver Center volunteer Doug Boomer of Culpeper.

He said he helps out with various groups occupying the first floor in the circa 1940s school. Boomer, enjoying lunch from

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Like ODEC, REC power bills on rise

Fredericksburg-based electric cooperative says they’re paying more to purchase power

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Rappahannock Electric Cooperative is advising customers to brace for an increase in their power bill due to higher purchased power rates.

Beginning with bills being issued on or after May 1, REC users will see an increase in the power cost adjustment by around \$9.81 for every 1,000 kilowatt-hours used.

The billing item reflects the cost of electricity the Fredericksburg-based utility purchases from Old Dominion Electric Cooperative, according to a release.

REC, like the Town of Culpeper Light & Power, delivers electricity to homes and businesses but does not generate it. The town purchases its power from Dominion, which has also implemented recent rate increases.

The increase is primarily being driven by higher energy demand during the winter, rising wholesale energy costs, driven by fuel markets and regional demand, and projected compliance costs tied to state energy policies, according to REC.

REC stated it worked to reduce the impact on customers by passing through \$4.5 million in margin stabilization funds received from ODEC in January. This lowered the overall increase by approximately 4%, the utility said.

“We know that any increase in costs can place added strain on our members, and we take that seriously,” said REC spokesperson Casey Hollins. “Many families are already facing difficult decisions when it comes to managing monthly expenses. At REC, we’re here to help, whether that’s through programs, tools or one-on-one support, while continuing to provide safe, reliable service our members can count on.”

REC connects customers with local groups and statewide programs that may be able to help with energy costs. See myrec.coop/heretohelp for guidance.

State regulators approved phased rate increases for Dominion Energy late last year citing inflation and the rising cost of maintaining and upgrading the electric grid. An additional Dominion increase is planned for 2027.

According to industry experts, volatile fossil fuel prices and skyrocketing utility investment in power system infrastructure are the primary drivers behind surging electricity costs for Virginia households. Data centers, with several under construction in Culpeper, represent a significant element of the need for new power system infrastructure.

Katie Baker and Davis Crosley are in this week’s Academic Spotlight

A3, COMMUNITY

Weather

Showers around in the p.m.
High 61 • Low 47
Forecast • A6

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