

VLGMA Newsletter – December 2017
Civic Engagement – *If I Were Mayor & Other Acts of Youthful Leaders*
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The 2016 elections in Warsaw had a voter participation rate of under 12% of registered voters. This per cent was higher than the two previous municipal elections. The mayor of Warsaw is elected every two years by the members of council. The Council members by a divided vote elected a new mayor with a transformative vision for Warsaw, the county seat of Richmond County and the Northern Neck's third largest community by population.

That vision supported by Council and staff focused on a re-awakening of citizen leadership, commitment and investment into the community. Successful main street, stormwater and commercial revitalization grants have lead the way for other commercial expansions, new businesses opening and private investment in Warsaw. Providing an intention foundation for this Warsaw resurgence is a commitment to youth and visible youthful leadership and engagement in community life.

Three vibrant partnerships demonstrate the *Warsaw Model* which is emerging and available as a 'kick-start' method for creating active youthful voices in a community with the demographics of an aging population. First, in partnership with the YMCA's summer "CILT – Campers in Leadership Training" Program for middle schoolers, the town piloted "Civic Thursday's" for youth which introduced water treatment, fire and public safety services via 'hands on' activities. The program highlight included an election of a youth town council – AND – the youth town council elected youth 'mayor for a day'. The youth council conducted a council meeting and the youth mayor held a press conference with actual members of the press photographing and asking the questions and publishing a front page article.

This year, Mayor Randall Phelps has highly encouraged seventh graders in Warsaw to participate in the VML sponsored, "If I Were Mayor" contest. The contest provides the second noticeable outreach for Warsaw's elected leadership to reach out for the engagement, ideals and civic commitment for the 'next person up' generation to be active now in making Warsaw their dynamic home town.

The third partnership of Council, town staff with youth to be visible in the community involved the partnership with the **VilDon**Edutainment, Inc. (501©3) arts organization. Entitled ‘Mission-Focus’ middle schoolers identified the resources and capacities of the community. Fourteen civic groups, schools and public agencies were contacted over the summer to have their contributions to Warsaw depicted on painted canvas through the art work of the youth. A communitywide unveiling and reception for the agencies, town council and young artist was held in the town park. The ‘Mission-Focus’ artwork remained on public exhibit during the summer.

The next civic engagement project with the town and youth partnered with **VilDon**Edutainment, Inc. is the construction of the community “LOVE” sign. The sign is being built and designed principally by youth. It will be placed in the center of Warsaw’s revitalized business district in the Spring of 2018.

*For Follow-up: On Warsaw’s overall civic/youth engagements contact town manager, Joseph Quesenberry, jquesenberry@town.warsaw.va.us or VLGMA Civic Engagement Committee Member, Lee Hood Capps, lhcapps@town.warsaw.va.us or for **VilDon**Edutainment, Inc. , ‘uplifting youth using arts’, contact Donna Jackson, www.vidonedu.org or donna.jackson@vildonedu.org.*