



How do you measure a “big” accomplishment?

By Rob Bullington

ON JUNE 6, 1944, THE TOWN of Bedford, VA had a population of 3,600. On that day, in Normandy, France, 19 young men from Bedford were killed in the D-Day invasion. According to many historians, this sacrifice represents the highest per capita loss of any American community on that fateful day of the war. And, of course, that is why 57 years later President George W. Bush was in Bedford – not New York, Los Angeles, Washington D.C. or some other American metropolis – to dedicate the national D-Day Memorial.

It is fitting that the nation’s memorial to one of its most painful, yet proudest days should reside in a small, rural community. The drive to fulfill one’s civic duty, to do big things for one’s country, is not exclusive to big cities. Quite often, the biggest things are done by people from the smallest communities. It is also fitting that a big national memorial to one of its most consequential achievements should be situated in a community where per capita the sacrifices of that day were felt the hardest. Which is to say, accomplishments should not be measured just by their magnitude but also in consideration of the

people and resources available to achieve them.

To put it all in a more prosaic frame: A city of hundreds of thousands of people might be expected to have a downtown revitalization plan, or a Fourth of July fireworks display, or an annual marathon, or any number of big civic initiatives. However, for a town of a few thousand or even a few hundred souls to accomplish a similar feat is more than noteworthy...it’s a big deal! So, in this issue of VTC we are pleased to feature the “big” deals going down in some of Virginia’s small towns.

Finally, it’s worth noting that as this issue goes to print, events in Europe remind us that the circumstances that made it necessary for so many small-town residents – like those young men from Bedford – to get swept up in big events are still all too relevant today. Thankfully, here at home the opportunities for small towns to accomplish “big” things remain for the most part healthy, local, and positive. Here’s hoping that the small-town achievements outlined herein remain the types of “big” things we continue to hear about and are pleased to feature.



The Town of Boones Mill

Working together for our town's future

THE TOWN OF BOONES Mill, a “Virginia’s Blue Ridge Community,” is located in Franklin County. It developed around a mill along Maggodee Creek built by the Boon family in 1786. In 1927, the town was incorporated and became “Boones Mill” encompassing approximately 525 acres. The Town of Boones Mill is one of only two municipalities located in Franklin County.

Boones Mill is one of the smallest towns in Virginia with a current population of 259 people (2020 U.S. Census), up from 239 (2010 U.S. Census). It uses the Council-Manager form of local government. Seven members of council, including a mayor, are elected in November to four-year staggered terms. The council appoints a town manager who leads the implementation of policy and a town clerk/treasurer who manages records and finances.

The Boones Mill town council, staff, residents, and business owners are proud of the accomplishments our little community has made in recent years. We are pleased to have this opportunity to share them with you.

Water and sewer system reimagined

The town’s water and sewer system consists of 205 active water customers served by a water treatment and distribution system that includes a spring and associated distribution piping. The treatment plant was renovated less than 10 years ago and is in good condition. The wastewater system includes a treatment pond permitted for 30,000 gpd and the associated collection system. There are 63 active sewer accounts.

Over the years, the town’s water and sewer system fell into disrepair. This was ironic given that Franklin County had become a member of the Western Virginia Water Authority (WVWA) with a water main passing through Boones Mill that did not connect to the town’s water system.

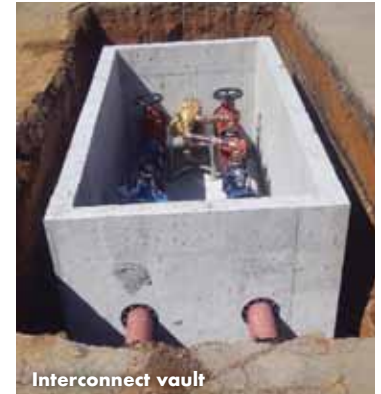
In July 2018, town council entered into a three-year management and operations contract with the WVWA because the town



no longer had the trained personnel and equipment necessary to efficiently operate its own water system. Between July 2018 and November 2021, the WVWA made great strides in returning the town’s water and sewer system to its designed operating capacity. Since then, council and staff have received numerous compliments from residents on the improved quality and dependability of the water system.

Water system interconnect installed

In September 2019, the WVWA, working closely with the town, installed a water system interconnect which provided the town access to abundant water sources at Carvins Cove Reservoir, Crystal Spring, and Spring Hollow Reservoir in Roanoke. Aside from ensuring a constant source of water for residents, this was a major win for public safety as the town’s old 250,000 gallon tank emptied very quickly during firefighting operations. The interconnect has lowered fire insurance rates for local businesses and residents and is a major benefit for companies looking to locate to Boones Mill.



Interconnect vault

Sewer pipe realignment completed

After damage caused by Tropical Storm Michael in October 2018, Boones Mill was included in a disaster declaration for Franklin County. The town applied for disaster funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) totaling \$94,000 which funded a sewer pipe realignment project along Maggodee Creek. Storm flooding had caused the creek bank to erode and exposed the town’s main sewer collector. The sewer pipe realignment project relocated the pipe out of the creek and restored the creek bank.



Damage and exposure of the town’s sewer collector from Tropical Storm Michael - Oct. 2018.



Completed sewer collector realignment and stream bank restoration - March 2020.

Boones Mill

Return to compliance achieved!

With WVWA managing its system, Boones Mill achieved full state wastewater regulation compliance after various wastewater-related violations in 2016 and 2017. This was made possible in part thanks to the repair of four major collapsed sewer line which reduced stormwater inflow to the system. This, in turn, reduced chemical treatment costs as well as electrical costs for pumps at the sewer plant.

The WVWA digitally mapped the town's water and sewer system which was made available online for the first time. The digital map ensures that system information will be available for years to come. Two-thirds of the Town's plans had been destroyed previously which makes the digital mapping even more important.

The town also applied for, and was awarded, funding from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to cover the cost of a new six-inch water main on Winding Way Road. This project, the last completed under town ownership, allowed the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to start work on sorely needed planned stormwater and road improvements. The project also included the installation of a much-needed fire hydrant.

Sale of the system

In May 2021, town council sold the town's water and sewer system to the WVWA as part of an agreement that included a cash payment and elimination of all debt on the system. The sale, which was effective November 1, 2021, allowed the town to eliminate some debt services and resulted in reduced rates for its former utility customers who saw their monthly water rates decrease an average of 40 percent and their sewer rates decrease by an average of 25 percent.

Debt reduction for financial stability

In the past two years, Boones Mill has eliminated just over a million dollars in debt service. This is especially remarkable given that the adopted FY 2021-2022 town budget is only \$602,910. Vice Mayor Dale Fisher has reported that the town is in the best financial position it has been during his thirty years on council.

Various projects contributed to the town's relatively quick and substantial debt reduction. These include:

1. In 2019, council approved sale of a building that had become a major liability for the town. The seven hundred-foot-long structure had been a mobile home manufacturing company but was now vacant. Proceeds from the sale allowed the town to pay off three loans thereby reducing a large amount of town debt. Private investment has returned the property to productivity and has created fifteen new jobs with more growth expected soon.
2. In 2020, council approved sale of a poorly located half-acre parcel and another one-acre parcel of property both of which lacked development potential. Proceeds from these sales were applied to the loan on the property.
3. In 2021, council approved sale of the water and sewer system to WVWA eliminating tremendous financial debt and liability.



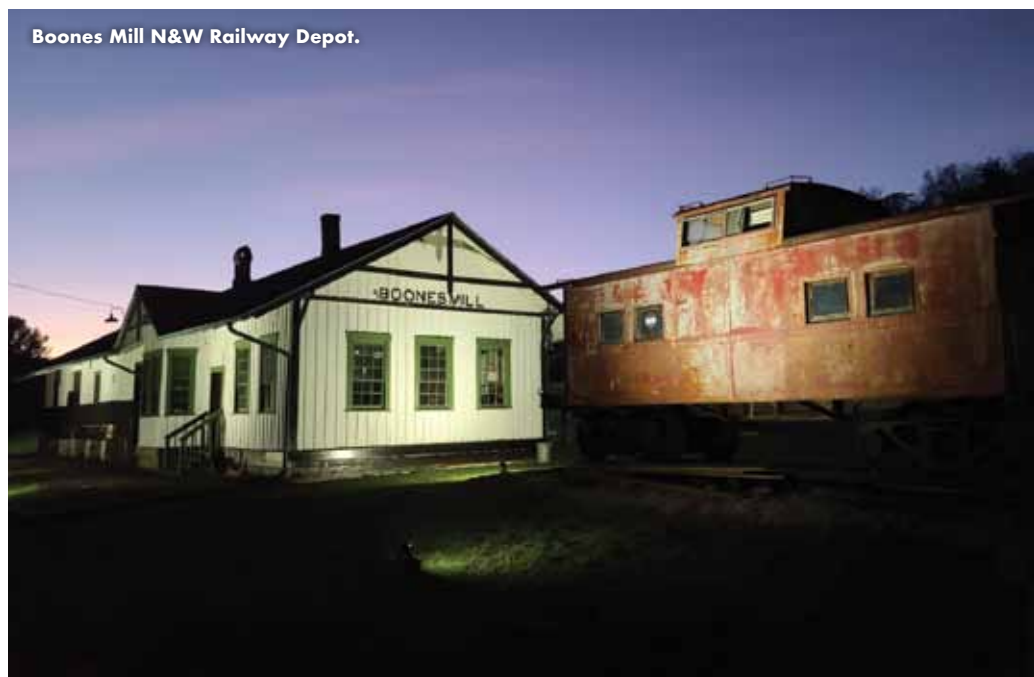
The new owner of the once vacant seven hundred-foot-long structure has put the property to productive use.

How will the Boones Mill continue to pay down its remaining debt? Options include the sale of additional town-owned land and structures. The town has sixty-five acres – approximately one-quarter the town's land area – available for future sale and development. As these properties do not produce any revenue for the town, developers are being encouraged to explore opportunities.

Improvement projects underway and completed

Boones Mill N&W Railway Depot

The Boones Mill N&W Railway Depot Restoration Project continues to move forward. In 2019, VDOT Transportation Alternatives Funding was used to stabilize the structure and address stormwater issues. Work has begun on outdoor decks to be used for entertainment and community events. Lowes Home Improvement recently donated materials for the project and various fundraising events continue to provide financial support. The Depot is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Boones Mill N&W Railway Depot.



LOVE sign

The Town of Boones Mill unveiled its LOVE sign just in time for the 43rd Annual Boones Mill Apple Festival in October 2021. Councilmember Sarah Eames designed the iconic sign with images that evoke local traditions and landmarks such as the annual Apple Festival and the Boones Mill N&W Railway Depot. Several local businesses and volunteers offered their support to make the LOVE sign project a success. Carter Bank and Trust provided the location for the sign which can be seen by anyone traveling along U.S. Highway 220. Titan Trains cut the aluminium letters; PostScript Art Studios created the graphics; and, Boone Dominion Process Company provided the structural components and helped install the sign. The Boones Mill Volunteer Fire Department also assisted in erecting the sign.

The LOVEWORKS program provided Boones Mill a wonderful opportunity to share its LOVE for our town with residents and visitors alike. The LOVE sign project was made possible through a grant from the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

Plans for success!

Downtown revitalization plans

In the fall of 2021, Boones Mill was awarded its first \$50,000 CDBG Planning Grant from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD). The town will use the grant to assemble the components of a successful downtown revitalization plan. This means achieving the following goals:

1. Create an Economic Restructuring Plan for smart growth and development strategies. This plan will address the national objective of Slum/Blight Elimination by creating a building and blight inventory. The Economic Restructuring plan will also evaluate community improvements that could spur business and entrepreneurial growth while supporting current business community needs. These improvements may include streetscape improvements, pedestrian pathways for enhanced public safety and connectivity to local businesses, and other similar enhancements.
2. Create a Preliminary Engineering Report for flood mitigation along Maggodee Creek including an environmentally-friendly parking lot along the creek to allow additional parking within the town. It is hoped that this report will be completed in tandem with a hazard mitigation plan utilizing VDEM funding. The town has completed the pre-approval application phase and has been invited to apply for funding.
3. Develop a Prioritized Improvement Plan to create façade guidelines and outline ways to build on the progress made during the planning grant phase.

To ensure that town council is able to adopt a downtown revitalization plan before the end of the year, town staff will be working with a consultant over the summer to gather additional public input and finalize the plan. After adoption, the town will use the plan to apply for additional funding through VDHCD in 2023 and, ultimately, implement the project.

For more information on this project visit: www.townofboonesmill.org/boones-mill-downtown-revitalization-project.

Updates to the Comprehensive Plan

Boones Mill is currently conducting a required update to its comprehensive plan. While it will adhere to the requirements of the state code, the updated plan will be written in a more straightforward manner and will include more visual elements. Work on the updated plan began in January 2022 and will be completed in July 2022 with adoption anticipated in late July or early August 2022.

Town Code modernization

Boones Mill is in the process of drafting its first Town Code to collect and modernize existing town ordinances into one document. When completed, the code will serve as a foundation for future enforcement programs and make it easier for citizens to access and understand town laws.

Working together for our town's future

Boones Mill is moving forward in a very positive manner. As council and staff look to the future they see new opportunities to build on the great accomplishments of the past. In doing our work we always remember the most important thing is to make progress as a TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More!

About the author: *B.T. Fitzpatrick, III* has served as the town manager of Boones Mill since February 2018.

