

# METRO<sup>2</sup>

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# East End forum seeks solutions to area's woes

BY ALI ROCKETT  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

A community forum organized by local activists and faith leaders raised issues of crime, poverty and racism.

James J. Minor, president of the Richmond chapter of the NAACP, asked: "Now what?" He and other organizers challenged about 50 community members who attended the forum at Mt. Olivet Church in Richmond's East End on Tuesday night to come up with solutions to some of the issues that are plaguing the city's most downtrodden residents.

Lakeisha James said there are community centers in and around some of the public hous-

ing communities that have closed since she was a child. "Open up the community centers," James said. "I'll volunteer."

Bishop Darryl Husband, pastor of Mt. Olivet, said the solutions need to be focused on children. "If they don't have sports or arts to do in the summer, they will kill each other," Husband said.

Many agreed, saying that if they could reach the children before they turn to crime and violence, it would take some of the onus off the police to deal with them later in life.

Maurice Tyler, founder of Coaches Against Violence Everywhere, said he has been pushing to get football into Richmond's public schools for years.



ALI ROCKETT/TIMES-DISPATCH

A forum Tuesday focused on Richmond's low-income communities.

"If you could suit up 30 kids at seven schools, that's 210 kids you're immediately impacting," Tyler said.

He added that adults and parents also have to take responsi-

bility for the example they are setting for their children.

Charles Willis, the executive director of United Communities Against Crime, said he would like to organize field trips for

children to see and explore the city around them.

"When I grew up in Mosby Court, I never saw anything outside of Mosby until I was grown," he said. "I thought New York City was downtown because I had never been there and on television it was just a place with tall buildings. But there is so much for our kids to see right here in their own community so they can start to dream and see beyond their neighborhood."

The group plans to hold another meeting in March to start implementing some of the suggestions posed Tuesday night.

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## RICHMOND

# Planners OK pasta maker's bid for distillery in Fan storefront

BY NED OLIVER  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Richmond's Planning Commission unanimously advanced Bombolini Pasta's request to open a distillery and tasting room in its Fan District storefront.

As planned, it would not be a large venture: Only a 512-square-foot portion of the building would be dedicated to distilling, along with another small retail area for tastings, according to the company's application for a special-use permit.

No one spoke at Tuesday's public hearing, but Bombolini submitted a petition of support signed by more than 200 people. Additionally, the Uptown Association, the neighborhood's civic group, provided a letter of support.

One person submitted a letter opposing the distillery, citing the possibility of explosions and fumes.

Jeff Geiger, a lawyer representing Bombolini, said the pasta company plans to operate "a state-of-the-art steam distillery system" monitored by a computer with safety features.

In other action, the commission declined to weigh in on a dispute over the unexpected removal of about a dozen trees in the ongoing renovation of Monroe Park. The panel's chairman took a similar stance to the position voiced by the city's Urban Design Committee this month when it was faced with similar concerns: that enforcement issues are outside the commission's purview.

Richmond City Councilman Parker C. Agelasto and several residents of nearby Oregon Hill have asked the committees to take a stand against a new tree-removal plan that was put for-



2012, ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH

Bombolini Pasta applied for a special-use permit to open a 512-square-foot distillery in its storefront in the Fan District. There also would be another small retail area for tastings.

ward only after trees not slated for removal in the initial plan had already been cut down.

Architects working on the project have said the plan was changed because of the amount of time that elapsed between its 2009 approval and the beginning of construction last year.

"This commission does not have the purview to deal with anything related to the tree issue," said Planning Commission Chairman Rodney Poole. "This is something that needs to be dealt with by City Council. ... That does not mean the commission condones this in any way, shape or form. This is just not the right place to apply this pressure."

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BY NED OLIVER/TIMES-DISPATCH

Bombolini Pasta's lawyer said the Richmond shop plans to run a steam distillery monitored by a computer with safety features.

# Ashland council votes to defer action on Wawa proposal for 'challenging site'

BY MICHAEL THOMPSON  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Ashland isn't quite ready for the big gulp of economic development proposed for its downtown gateway.

On Tuesday night, the Ashland Town Council voted 4-1 to defer action on a Wawa proposed to be built at the intersection of England Street and U.S. 1. The development is being backed by Rebkee Co., a Chesterfield County-based development company, and the project requires approval of a conditional use permit.

The deferral of Rebkee's plans comes after Ashland's Planning Commission deferred the proposal before voting 3-2 to recommend its approval.

Vice Mayor James D. Murray said that Rebkee's plans have been a conundrum ever since

they were proposed. Murray supports a Wawa being at the site but thinks the design needs to be improved.

"I feel like we're holding ourselves to the standards of what's there now," Murray said. "I don't think we're making great steps on the building."

Council member George Spagna disagreed with Murray. Spagna said great strides have been made on the design of the proposal.

"We should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good," Spagna said.

In a staff report, Ashland's planning department recommended that the Town Council defer deciding on the project to allow time to get more information on the project's connection to England Street and amenities for pedestrians.

Nora Amos, Ashland's director of planning and community development, said in a presentation that the site is one that has been hard to fill over the years.

"We're looking at a property that has been underutilized for years," Amos said, adding that the proposal should not be taken lightly. "This is such a huge application."

The Wawa is proposed to be built on a 1.7-acre site that spans U.S. 1 and Louisiana Street along England Street. The land is currently home to the former Kangaroo gas station, Virginia Barbeque and other buildings.

Rebkee has held two community meetings on its plans. Rebkee representative Andy Condlin said the proposal would turn an eyesore into a lure for passing highway traffic

into Ashland's downtown.

"It's a challenging site," Condlin said. "This is an opportunity to really have the very best user for this type of use."

The Wawa is the second substantial economic development project in Ashland's pipeline. Two upscale hotels have been approved to be built at 101 and 103 N. Carter Road, about a mile away from where the Wawa would go.

Comments made during a lengthy public hearing touched on trees, building materials, limiting Wawa's hours of operation so college students can't visit it in the wee hours of the morning, Wawa being an improvement for the site, increased tax revenue, and concerns about heavier traffic.

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# DesPortes new leader of forensics association

BY FRANK GREEN  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Richmond lawyer Betty Layne DesPortes has taken office as president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the first criminal defense lawyer to ever hold the position.

DesPortes, who has a master's degree in forensic science, was sworn in at the academy's annual meeting in New Orleans last week. She is the seventh woman to serve as president of the 6,700-member, 70-year-old organization.

A fellow in the academy, she has served on the AAFS board of directors since 2007 and on the Forensic Science Foundation since 2009, including serving as chairwoman from 2013-16.

Among the honors she has received are the Kenneth S. Field Award of Appreciation for Outstanding Service to the AAFS Staff and the Harold A. Feder Award, AAFS Jurisprudence Section, in 2014.

DesPortes is a fellow of the American Board of Criminal Lawyers as well as a member of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and the Virginia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

She has been an adjunct professor at the University of Richmond School of Law and is the managing author of Scientific Evidence in Civil and Criminal Cases (seventh edition in production) with Andre A. Moenssens and her law partner, Steven D. Benjamin.

She served on the American Bar Association's Task Force on Biological Evidence as a representative of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and on the ABA Task Force on the Presentation of Forensic Science Evidence.

She is the managing partner of the Richmond law firm, Benjamin & DesPortes, P.C., and was named one of Virginia Lawyers Media's "Influential Women of Virginia" for 2014.

DesPortes has also worked for reform of Virginia's indigent defense system and is committed to improving indigent defense forensic resources.

In 1996, she obtained a landmark Virginia Supreme Court decision recognizing the constitutional right of an indigent criminal defendant to expert forensic assistance.

DesPortes received Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees with honors from the University of South Carolina Honors College in 1989, a law degree from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1992, and a master of science degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1993.

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