

Dan Hoffman ([00:05](#)):

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Rouss Review. I'm your City Manager, Dan Hoffman. And with me is Amy Simmons, Communications Director. Hello, Amy.

Amy Simmons ([00:12](#)):

Hello, Dan.

Dan Hoffman ([00:12](#)):

How are you?

Amy Simmons ([00:13](#)):

It's great. I'm great.

Dan Hoffman ([00:15](#)):

Yep. Did your kids go back? When did they go back?

Amy Simmons ([00:18](#)):

They went back today.

Dan Hoffman ([00:19](#)):

Oh, okay.

Amy Simmons ([00:20](#)):

Frederick County went back on the 23rd. Today.

Dan Hoffman ([00:22](#)):

Got it, got it. Yeah, mine went back last week. Sad summer's over, but we're pretty excited to have five days a week in person. That's great. If I can have them five days a week in person, gladly will accept whatever mask requirement. I think the most important thing is they're they're getting in-person education. The virtual stuff was fine as a stop gap.

Amy Simmons ([00:50](#)):

It's never the same.

Dan Hoffman ([00:51](#)):

Never the same. And you know, if we have to do it from time to time so be it. But, man, I hope we can stick with the current five day a week schedule. I think it's important.

Amy Simmons ([01:01](#)):

I hope so too. And this year is a special year for my kids because it's my son's senior year and my daughter's freshman year. So, I hate for that to be ruined.

Dan Hoffman ([01:12](#)):

For all the seniors last year that basically had their final year by COVID that's rough.

Amy Simmons ([01:19](#)):

It was horrible. Yeah. No prom, no senior sports at the end of the year.

Dan Hoffman ([01:26](#)):

Yeah. So, everybody get vaccinated, get masked up and hopefully...

Amy Simmons ([01:30](#)):

It stays under control control.

Dan Hoffman ([01:34](#)):

Speaking of that, we do have a meeting tomorrow. Only three things on the agenda. Come provide your input on those items. We are requiring masks at City Hall again. Vaccinated, unvaccinated doesn't matter. If you're a visitor, we're asking you to mask up in order to be in chambers where we'll do the meeting. City staff, council will also be masked up. Trust me, I do not like wearing a mask.

Amy Simmons ([02:05](#)):

Ugh. It's miserable.

Dan Hoffman ([02:06](#)):

Like most of the population, it is just the worst thing. But it's necessary. If it means I keep one person from getting sick that's totally worth it. That's why we're wearing a mask in City Hall. We are doing some things folks might've noticed in the paper, we are doing some things to incentivize vaccinations among our City staff. We're doing our best. We do have pretty good numbers overall. City employees, we're about 71%. We've been there for, for a bit, you know, my hope is that we can at least break 80. And if that happens, we'll start looking at peeling back some of these mask rules. So, if you're out there, get vaccinated, wear a mask. Now, for the meeting tomorrow, the three items I mentioned, one of them is a little land use issue related to the development project which we call Cameron Square. It's the big, empty lot at Cameron and Piccadilly that a lot of folks are, I'm sure, very aware of because it's been there for years.

Amy Simmons ([03:17](#)):

It's right in the middle of everything.

Dan Hoffman ([03:19](#)):

Yeah. So there's a little land use thing we got to take care of related to Fairfax Lane. That's on the agenda. It's just a discussion item, so we're not taking a vote tomorrow. And we'll also talk about the strategic plan. Provided it's ready and I can get it out, that's going to be a topic of discussion. We've been working on this for a while and because we only have a few things on the agenda, it is going to give the Council an opportunity to discuss it and give us a lot of feedback. If you residents want to weigh in on that as well, you've had plenty of lots of opportunities, and this is just going to be one more for you to weigh in on the strategic plan.

Amy Simmons ([04:06](#)):

And no Work Session this week.

Dan Hoffman ([04:08](#)):

No Work Session. We will have one Executive Session item. After the strategic plan, we'll go into an Executive Session to discuss some real estate issues. But then, no Work Session. So, very reasonable agenda. But I won't jinx us by saying it will be quick.

Dan Hoffman ([04:27](#)):

Today, we are talking with Amber Dopkowski our Director of Social Services for the City of Winchester. Now, for those of you who aren't aware, and I think if you've lived in the city for any number of time, you realize we're an independent city. We are not part of any county, which means we do a lot of the same services that a county would do. We're kind of a consolidated government in that regard. The City has its own Department of Social Services. So, we're about to have Amber come in, she's going to walk through some things with us related to the services. They do want people to be aware of what DSS does and you know, also they have some openings. So if people are interested in that line of work and helping kids and those in need, it's a great place to work.

Amy Simmons ([05:16](#)):

Yep. Come our way.

Dan Hoffman ([05:17](#)):

Let's go ahead and get Amber in here. All right. Welcome Amber Dopkowski. It took me a little while to get that name right when I first got here.

Amber Dopkowski ([05:27](#)):

It's Polish.

Dan Hoffman ([05:30](#)):

You are our Director of Social Services, but we call it DSS around here. You've been with the City a while, though.

Amber Dopkowski ([05:37](#)):

16 years.

Dan Hoffman ([05:37](#)):

16 years. Good Lord.

Amber Dopkowski ([05:39](#)):

Yeah. I started out doing frontline child welfare and then moved into foster care supervision. And I've been director about nine years now.

Dan Hoffman ([05:46](#)):

So tell us, for folks that don't know the scope of what DSS does here in Winchester, tell them a little bit about the department.

Amber Dopkowski ([05:55](#)):

Sure. I don't think most people know everything that we do.

Dan Hoffman ([05:59](#)):

That's why I asked you. [Laughs]

Speaker 4 ([06:00](#)):

Yeah. Thanks Dan. And we really have two sides of our shop. We have family service programming, which really focuses on family strengthening, and then we have our benefit programs that focus on income, stability and self-sufficiency. So where would you like to start family services or benefit programs?

Dan Hoffman ([06:18](#)):

Let's start with benefit programs because I think that's probably an area most folks don't have a lot of exposure to.

Amber Dopkowski ([06:27](#)):

Okay. We provide a core set of services. We are a Department of Social Services in Virginia, and there's 120 Departments of Social Services across Virginia. We all provide a same set of core services. We provide Medicaid, which has medical assistance, SNAP: Supplemental, Nutritional Assistance Program, TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, childcare subsidy, low income home energy assistance.

Dan Hoffman ([06:56](#)):

Good grief. You remembered all the stuff.

Amy Simmons ([06:56](#)):

We provide a lot. General relief and as well as housing services. So we have a wide variety of programs that we provide our citizens.

Dan Hoffman ([07:08](#)):

That's a lot of stuff. Now, back over to family services side.

Amber Dopkowski ([07:12](#)):

Right. We provide Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, and foster care. So three primary areas of programming.

Dan Hoffman ([07:19](#)):

So adult protective services. It's not the police.

Amber Dopkowski ([07:22](#)):

It is not the police.

Dan Hoffman ([07:23](#)):

Who's that for?

Amber Dopkowski ([07:24](#)):

It's very different than Child Protective Services.

Dan Hoffman ([07:26](#)):

Because it's adults.

Amber Dopkowski ([07:27](#)):

Because it is adults and adults have rights to make their decisions and a right to self-determination. And so that population really focuses on folks that are 60 years of age or older or persons who are 18 and older with an incapacity. And really we look at is there a neglect? Is there abuse? Is there financial exploitation? But really supporting that adult living in the community and supporting their right to self-determination and helping to provide services and supports in order for them to do that. It's very different than Child Protective Services. A lot of people think we can remove adults from their homes and we can't unless a court determines them to not have capacity, not be able to make their own decisions. And that's a judicial determination and really rare.

Dan Hoffman ([08:21](#)):

Okay. So we've got family services, benefits, then what else you got? That's the two big sides.

Amber Dopkowski ([08:28](#)):

Yeah. Two big sides. That's really where we focus and also we have a great administrative team that supports us as well.

Dan Hoffman ([08:36](#)):

If someone wanted, let's say, someone was in need of some form of assistance how would they interact with DSS? Do they just show up, where are you guys at?

Amber Dopkowski ([08:45](#)):

You absolutely can just show up at our office, but it really depends on what your needs are. Benefits is different than a child or adult welfare. So let's talk about benefits.

Dan Hoffman ([08:54](#)):

Yes, let's do.

Amber Dopkowski ([08:54](#)):

There were changes to the way we provide services to our residents after the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. And so what that required us to do was to create ways to access services 24/7. To apply for one of those programs you can use our online portal, which is called Common Help and it's www.commonhelp.virginia.gov. And you can access that 24/7/365. Apply online from your phone or computer at home. We have a call center that's operated by the State of Virginia. That number is 855-635-4370. Or you can stop in our office, pick up an application or call and ask us to mail you an application.

Dan Hoffman ([09:47](#)):

You've got a great commercial voice.

Amber Dopkowski ([09:48](#)):

I know.

Amy Simmons ([09:49](#)):

Sign her up.

Dan Hoffman ([09:50](#)):

She was basically just doing that right off the cuff, too. We should have do other advertisements with Amber.

Amy Simmons ([09:57](#)):

We should.

Dan Hoffman ([09:57](#)):

She should voice like commercials for Rec programs or...

Amber Dopkowski ([10:00](#)):

My next career.

Amy Simmons ([10:01](#)):

Yeah, the next voiceover we need for a video I'm calling her.

Dan Hoffman ([10:03](#)):

Trash cans.

Amy Simmons ([10:04](#)):

Yes. [Laughs]

Amber Dopkowski ([10:04](#)):

Let's not.

Dan Hoffman ([10:06](#)):

Try this. Pick out your trash can now. Try that.

Amber Dopkowski ([10:10](#)):

Pick out your trash can now.

Dan Hoffman ([10:12](#)):

There we go.

Amy Simmons ([10:13](#)):

She's hired.

Dan Hoffman ([10:13](#)):

She's hired. You're gonna voice some videos. Amy and Caitlin love doing videos.

Amy Simmons ([10:18](#)):

Oh yeah.

Dan Hoffman ([10:19](#)):

What are some things that you and the team have had to overcome with the pandemic?

Amber Dopkowski ([10:25](#)):

Well, let me get back to...Just before we move on.

Dan Hoffman ([10:29](#)):

Yeah. Do what you gotta do. Ignore my question. Fine.

Amber Dopkowski ([10:29](#)):

[Laughs] Child and Adult Protective Services and how to make a report. So during work hours, you call our office at [540] 662-3807. We have an intake social worker that will answer your call, hear your concern, and we will assess that report and respond accordingly.

Dan Hoffman ([10:49](#)):

What's the most common kind of report you get? Is it, 'Hey, I went to visit grandma at the elder care facility and I saw something that was wrong?'

Amber Dopkowski ([10:58](#)):

For adults, it's really self-neglect. That's the majority of concerns and child welfare, it's physical neglect and adequate supervision. So those are the two top types of allegations that we see in adult and child welfare.

Dan Hoffman ([11:15](#)):

Now, a lot of times people hear social services and historically like, 'oh, they're going to call DSS on you'. It's like the running joke. If you see some parent doing something slightly amiss, there's no reason to be afraid of DSS.

Amber Dopkowski ([11:31](#)):

No.

Dan Hoffman ([11:31](#)):

Talk about the process. Let's say there's a report, you guys go out to the home? What happens?

Amber Dopkowski ([11:40](#)):

Yeah. Well, let's start with the report because anyone can call in and report, but not all reports are responded to. So child welfare our duties are in the Code of Virginia, in the law, and it guides us and tells us what families we can respond to. In order for a report to be valid, has to allege that abuse and neglect occurred. The alleged maltreater has to be a caretaker. The child has to be in our jurisdiction, where the child resides, and the child has to be under the age of 18. So, anytime someone makes a call, we look at the report against that criteria and we determine is it appropriate for a child protective services response? If it is, our job is to respond to the family, determine what's happening, why is it happening, and what services and supports that family would need? I think a lot of people think Child Protective Services and child removal. It's absolutely rare for us to remove children. Our job is to work with families and keep them together because children should be with their families and they do best when they're with their family. Folks should not be worried about a Child Protective Services response because we really just want to help. And we want to make sure kids are safe and families have what they need.

Dan Hoffman ([13:06](#)):

Well, that's awesome. So, I call up and I make a complaint. I say, Amy's a bad mom. She's not taking her kids to church and she smells and she doesn't mow her grass a lot. I can tell that she's just a bad mom. What do you guys do?

Amber Dopkowski ([13:26](#)):

Based on the information, that would not be valid for a Child Protective Services response.

Dan Hoffman ([13:31](#)):

There you go.

Amy Simmons ([13:32](#)):

Good news. [Laughs]

Dan Hoffman ([13:32](#)):

Now you can relax, Amy.

Amy Simmons ([13:35](#)):

[Laughs]

Dan Hoffman ([13:36](#)):

But if I say, and I won't use this time.

Amy Simmons ([13:40](#)):

Thank you.

Dan Hoffman ([13:41](#)):

[Laughs] You're welcome. You know, I saw Jane down the street striking her children in the front yard and I have reason to believe that they're not being fed what happens then?

Amber Dopkowski ([13:57](#)):

If Jane is a caretaker of the children and they're under the age of 18, that would be something that we would most likely respond to. That it sounds like that there's children not being fed and you know, physical discipline, you know, that's an area of...

Dan Hoffman ([14:15](#)):

Spanking your kids is not illegal.

Amber Dopkowski ([14:17](#)):

We look at...I don't want to get...

Dan Hoffman ([14:20](#)):

Ah, this is a tough one.

Amber Dopkowski ([14:20](#)):

Yeah, it is a tough one and I don't want to get into the law and parents rights to use physical discipline. It gets too complex for us today.

Dan Hoffman ([14:32](#)):

Good way to dodge it. Go ahead.

Amber Dopkowski ([14:32](#)):

Yeah. But we're looking at that physical discipline, did it cause injury, did it cause harm, was there risk of harm? And so those are the things we look at when we get reports about physical discipline. We really look at each report individually. What was alleged? What occurred and we make decisions accordingly. So it's kind of hard to say, physical discipline in general, what do you do with that because it really depends on the specific event and situation.

Dan Hoffman ([15:04](#)):

Gotcha. All right. So, now you want to go back to the COVID question?

Amber Dopkowski ([15:07](#)):

Yeah.

Dan Hoffman ([15:08](#)):

Go ahead.

Amber Dopkowski ([15:09](#)):

So you asked how we respond to...

Dan Hoffman ([15:12](#)):

Do you remember the question?

Amber Dopkowski ([15:13](#)):

Vaguely. So you asked how we fared as an agency during COVID?,

Speaker 4 ([15:19](#)):

What kind of things did you have to overcome during COVID?

Amber Dopkowski ([15:21](#)):

Ultimately, we're required to provide our services to our residents. So, it was figuring out how to do that safely, how to keep staff safe, how to keep our resident safe while still fulfilling our mandates. We were really well-prepared to move into the pandemic. Some of the things that we had been planning for in terms of making sure our staff had laptops and virtual connections and all those things. I think we did really well. We have a really adaptable team and I think we protected our staff and still fulfilled our mandate.

Dan Hoffman ([15:56](#)):

What did you see in terms of call volume reports? Did you see more or less? What did you see?

Amber Dopkowski ([16:01](#)):

Our benefit services really stayed pretty stable. We did see a peak as we went into the pandemic with an increase in applications, but after July, we started leveling off on to pretty historical numbers. In child welfare, we did see a decrease in reports. When you look at child welfare, the majority of our reports come from mandated reporters. With children going virtually to school, they did have less contact with mandated reporters. That's what I would attribute a decrease in reports to. But once we got into July, August, September, our reports really leveled out as well. They returned to historical trends.

Dan Hoffman ([16:43](#)):

What do you see? Moving forward, granted, we're kind of taking a few steps back because of the Delta variant, but as we hopefully soon emerge from the pandemic, how's that going to change DSS in the future? Where there'll be things that never quite go back to the way they were, or do you see a full return to the old operation?

Amber Dopkowski ([17:03](#)):

There's some things that are out of our control and benefit programs, those are Federally-driven programs. There were changes made at a Federal level to how we administer those programs. So some of those changes were really good in that we have programs where our residents don't have to come into our office to do an interview. We can do that over the phone. I think there's some really good things that are going to continue and benefit programs that allow us to serve our residents more easily, and that it's not going to require them to come into the office. In terms of, I think the overall change for us is really for our staff. I think they're going to have a greater ability to telework. We did that. We transitioned to some telework, did that well and showed that we can continue doing business without decreasing our customer service.

Dan Hoffman ([17:58](#)):

Cool. Summer is wrapping up, kids started back to school last week. What are some things you're looking for or that parents really should be aware of going into the fall?

Amber Dopkowski ([18:14](#)):

I think one of the changes that we saw in our childcare program, there was a change that expanded access to childcare services. It allowed us to at families making up to 85% of the median income for children under the age of five. It's going to give families greater access to childcare services.

Dan Hoffman ([18:34](#)):

Cool.

Amber Dopkowski ([18:34](#)):

Yeah, that is really cool. If someone's in need of childcare and having difficulty paying for it, complete an application. We have our low-income home energy assistance program, and there's three components to that. There's fuel crisis and cooling. Last week we ended our cooling program.

Dan Hoffman ([19:01](#)):

You're not helping people be cool anymore? We joked about that.

Amy Simmons ([19:01](#)):

We did. [Laughs]

Dan Hoffman ([19:04](#)):

A couple times ago.

Dan Hoffman ([19:04](#)):

Amber helps people be cool.

Amber Dopkowski ([19:06](#)):

Yeah. So we do have a cooling program. It ran June to August. We help with air conditioning units, electrical bills, security deposits. We start our full fuel program in October. That's runs through October, November. We look at helping with heating costs, delivery charges, reconnect fees. And then we run our crisis program November to March, which helps with heating costs, equipment, repairs, and deposit. It's a really helpful program to our residents.

Dan Hoffman ([19:35](#)):

That's cool. Yeah.

Dan Hoffman ([19:37](#)):

You've been director for nine years now. Been with the City for 16, you said, so what's your overall impression? I'm going up on my 12th month, now. I've been here a year. What would you tell a new resident, a new city manager in terms of Winchester as a place to nurture and raise a family?

Amber Dopkowski ([20:07](#)):

Well, Winchester was really welcoming to me and my family. I've really enjoyed being here and I don't see myself any other place. Winchester is where I want to be. In being a social worker, living in Winchester, one of the things I appreciate, we're really service rich. We have a lot of helping

organizations. Social services, you know, we can't do everything alone and we rely on our partnerships. One of the things I love about the City of Winchester is the strong community services, nonprofits, and supports that exists here for families and especially families that might be struggling.

Dan Hoffman ([20:44](#)):

Your answers are so like fluid and succinct. I don't even have like another question ready at the end of it. It's like, wow.

Amy Simmons ([20:50](#)):

Spoken from the heart.

Dan Hoffman ([20:51](#)):

Exactly. Yeah. I'm blown away with the direct information and she didn't even crack when I was making faces at her earlier. Completely kept it together.

Amy Simmons ([20:58](#)):

No, completely professional.

Dan Hoffman ([21:00](#)):

Very professional. That's what she's known for...professionalism.

Amber Dopkowski ([21:03](#)):

Yeah.

Dan Hoffman ([21:06](#)):

So wrapping up, talk a little bit about, I know you're always touting your staff in your team over there. We're starting to look at ways to improve their facilities, their day-to-day. Tell me a little bit about the team there, morale, how does it function over there? Give us a sense of the day in the life. Cause you're hiring.

Amber Dopkowski ([21:38](#)):

We are.

Dan Hoffman ([21:39](#)):

That's where I'm going with this.

Amber Dopkowski ([21:39](#)):

Yes, we are hiring.

Dan Hoffman ([21:40](#)):

You're hiring. Tell us a little bit about what it means to work at DSS.

Amber Dopkowski ([21:45](#)):

We have a great team. They support each other well. There's a lot of comradery and support that they give each other. Their jobs are really hard. They really are, and that's probably not the thing to say with hiring. Our benefit program staff, they're seeing people in need every day, people that need medical assistance, food assistance, are having trouble making ends meet. And that's really hard to see day in, day out. They do a great job making sure our residents' needs are met on the child welfare side of the shop. That is a place we're absolutely hiring.

Dan Hoffman ([22:22](#)):

You're not touching on one of the most important things over there.

Amber Dopkowski ([22:26](#)):

What's that?

Dan Hoffman ([22:27](#)):

Every time I visit there, everyone seems to love working with each other.

Amber Dopkowski ([22:31](#)):

They do.

Dan Hoffman ([22:32](#)):

There you go. The atmosphere, the team environment over there is probably one of the strongest in city government. Right?

Amber Dopkowski ([22:39](#)):

I think so. They really do enjoy each other. They're there to support each other personally and professionally. And I think that's one of the greatest things that we have at social services.

Dan Hoffman ([22:50](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Amy Simmons ([22:51](#)):

We did a video about the culture there.

Dan Hoffman ([22:53](#)):

That's right. It was a great video.

Amy Simmons ([22:55](#)):

Why WDSS.

Dan Hoffman ([22:56](#)):

Were you in it, Amber?

Amy Simmons ([22:58](#)):

Nope.

Amber Dopkowski ([22:58](#)):

I don't think I was.

Dan Hoffman ([23:00](#)):

What a shame.

Amy Simmons ([23:00](#)):

We used all the people.

Dan Hoffman ([23:02](#)):

She's also people.

Amy Simmons ([23:04](#)):

Yes. But she likes to showcase her team. She like to be in the forefront.

Dan Hoffman ([23:08](#)):

I know, but you're the leader of that team.

Amy Simmons ([23:11](#)):

So encourage people to go to your website and watch that Why WDSS video.

Dan Hoffman ([23:19](#)):

Yes. Where can they find that, Amy?

Amy Simmons ([23:21](#)):

It's on the social services web page under "Careers", I believe.

Amber Dopkowski ([23:25](#)):

Careers and internships. That's another thing that we're always looking for is people that think they may want to work in child welfare, foster care, or Adult Protective Services. If they are currently at a college or university that has internship requirements that they can fulfill those at Winchester Social Services go online and complete an application.

Dan Hoffman ([23:48](#)):

Awesome. All right. Well, Amber, it's been very nice chatting with you as always. I always look forward to our conversations. Everybody, if you do happen to find yourself in need of one of the forms of assistance that we talked about today, please visit the City's website. And as you heard from Amber, a lot of 24/7 opportunities to get help. And for those of you who are maybe not in need of services, but would like to help out in some way, shape or form. Like Amber said, there's a very large non-profit community in Winchester. Tons of different opportunities to help out to volunteer, whether it's with non-profits that do childcare, whether it's with organizations like the Children's Advocacy Center. There's plenty of different things that you can do to help out, even if you're not in need of services.

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Amy Simmons ([24:45](#)):

And we have the Social Services Advisory Board we do.

Amber Dopkowski ([24:48](#)):

Yeah, we do.

Dan Hoffman ([24:48](#)):

If you want to help out and play a role in guiding some of the policy and decisions and providing the perspective of residents, that's another way to help out.

Amber Dopkowski ([24:58](#)):

Also, you could become a foster parent. Winchester homes for Winchester kids leave.

Dan Hoffman ([25:05](#)):

I totally didn't even mention foster parenting. Ugh. That's my bad.

Amber Dopkowski ([25:07](#)):

We have our own local foster care program. It's a tri-locality program with Frederick, Clark and the City of Winchester. If you're just interested in having a conversation about becoming a foster parent, you can call Katie or Denise at [540] 665-5688.

Dan Hoffman ([25:26](#)):

That's awesome. Amber, thank you very much for coming in. I'll see you around.

Amber Dopkowski ([25:31](#)):

Thank you.

Dan Hoffman ([25:31](#)):

That was Amber. Amber's delightful. I know I sound like a broken record every time I have one of the senior staff in here, but they're just such a good group. I am always so pleased with that group. And Amber, to have somebody with her energy, someone that is mid-career, to have been with us as a director for such a long time. She spent easily the vast majority of her career with the City of Winchester and she's still got the same energy, the same passion that she has had for a long time. Folks like Amber, we're so lucky to have folks like her in positions like that. Positions that are really difficult. I know we joked a little bit about the work and how hard it is. But it absolutely is, a position like hers, is a 24/7 position. And she's often dealing with some of the most difficult situations you can imagine.

Amy Simmons ([26:44](#)):

You have to have the right frame of mind to be in that. That's why they have so much turnover because people have preconceived notions on what it would be like and it's hard.

Dan Hoffman ([26:54](#)):

It takes a special breed. When I worked for the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency a while back in my career, it was really the first local government I worked for. The things you see on a daily basis, it's really

hard not to bring them home with you. So, it's a great place to work. And if you've got that kind of heart and commitment you can really make a difference there. I encourage everybody to go to the website and check out the opportunities there. All right. Onto some announcements and things, Amy, what you got?

Amy Simmons ([27:28](#)):

OK. Few things. Excited that we just launched an audio tour for the Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve. It was the work of a lot of volunteers and a special grant that a local garden club received and they wanted to create an auto audio tour of our beautiful wetlands. And so all you do is just take your smartphone, hit a button as you're walking through the trail, along the wetlands.

Dan Hoffman ([27:52](#)):

Where is that?

Amy Simmons ([27:52](#)):

That is off Meadow Branch Avenue.

Dan Hoffman ([27:57](#)):

Okay.

Amy Simmons ([27:57](#)):

It's Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve.

Dan Hoffman ([27:59](#)):

Give me a landmark.

Amy Simmons ([28:02](#)):

Gosh. Jubal Early turns into Meadow Branch. Near Handley Avenue. It'll be across from Handley Avenue, the entrance to the wetlands.

Dan Hoffman ([28:11](#)):

Got it.

Amy Simmons ([28:12](#)):

Past Children of America going towards Meadow Branch, toward John Kerr.

Dan Hoffman ([28:18](#)):

Okay. Okay. So kind of near the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley.

Amy Simmons ([28:25](#)):

No, not really.

Dan Hoffman ([28:27](#)):

In the other direction? Oh, the new John Kerr.

Amy Simmons ([28:29](#)):

The new John Kerr.

Dan Hoffman ([28:30](#)):

Oh, okay. I think I know where you're talking about.

Amy Simmons ([28:33](#)):

Right. So that four lane highway going through the neighborhood that now connects from Amherst to Valley.

Dan Hoffman ([28:38](#)):

Well, how about this? If someone wanted to find it, where would they go to find directions to it?

Amy Simmons ([28:43](#)):

On our website. [Laughs]

Dan Hoffman ([28:44](#)):

Very good. Just go to the website. Do not listen to anything that I just said.

Amy Simmons ([28:47](#)):

Yeah. On the Park's web page, there's a button for Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve. It tells you where to park and tells you all about the Preserve and why it's special to a city like us. Then, once you figure out where it is you can follow the tour or just go for a walk, ride your bike, whenever you want. It's beautiful over there.

Dan Hoffman ([29:07](#)):

Very nice.

Amy Simmons ([29:08](#)):

You can learn all about all the rare plants and birds. Apparently, there's a lot of plants and birds that you wouldn't find anywhere else in Virginia.

Dan Hoffman ([29:15](#)):

Wow.

Amy Simmons ([29:16](#)):

In our little town here. And it's also the first section of the Green Circle Trail that was ever designated.

Dan Hoffman ([29:21](#)):

I was about to ask if it was part of that.

Amy Simmons ([29:22](#)):

Oh yeah. It's a major section on the Green Circle. So, go check that out. It's very awesome. You can park on Meadow Branch Avenue or at the parking lot where that little strip mall is, it's not really strip mall, but where Children of America is, you can park there, walk away from Valley and you'll see it on the left. Winchester Parks and Recreation, speaking of them, is offering a bus trip to the Nationals game on Sunday, September 5th. You can hop on the bus and they're going to play New York Mets on September 5th.

Dan Hoffman ([29:54](#)):

It's a Sunday game. You'll be back in plenty of time. You won't be out late on a school night.

Amy Simmons ([30:00](#)):

I think it's a 1:15 game. Yeah.

Dan Hoffman ([30:01](#)):

Normally, the Sunday games are one o'clock games.

Amy Simmons ([30:03](#)):

Yeah. They're leave around nine, travel there.

Dan Hoffman ([30:07](#)):

You'll definitely get to see some new Nats cause they're basically all new at this point. But you'll still see Juan Soto and Ryan Zimmerman. But maybe you'll get a chance to see Gray pitch or one of the new guys who have been called up. It's been a rough stretch since the trade deadline, but...

Amy Simmons ([30:25](#)):

It happens.

Dan Hoffman ([30:26](#)):

It happens. It's part of the natural cycle of baseball. So you get to see the future of the franchise.

Amy Simmons ([30:33](#)):

Yep. I got a little soft spot for Zimmerman because when we had the 10-year-old World Series he came.

Dan Hoffman ([30:38](#)):

Yeah. You got a picture of him in your office.

Amy Simmons ([30:39](#)):

I sure do. And so does my daughter when she was tiny. So he came and met all the kids, had pictures taken with them. So that was really nice.

Dan Hoffman ([30:45](#)):

Mr. National. And who knows if he'll be back next season. So see him while you can people.

Amy Simmons ([30:50](#)):

Well, tickets are \$80 and that includes the admission to the game, the transportation, and a \$15 concessions credits.

Dan Hoffman ([30:56](#)):

Which is a great deal. I mean, getting transportation an hour and a half in, parking. You can just relax, have a good time on the bus. The ticket itself and \$15, I mean, that's a great deal.

Amy Simmons ([31:10](#)):

Yep. Just call the park or visit their website to register online for that. We just need to reserve it before the fifth. Okay. And they deliver the new roll-off trash carts that we've been talking about forever. We'll begin September 6th. As soon as you receive your new cart, just start using it immediately for trash only.

Dan Hoffman ([31:28](#)):

I cannot wait.

Amy Simmons ([31:30](#)):

And then something that was kind of special earlier this month, you and a group of councilors and City staff conducted your first walking audit in the North End.

Dan Hoffman ([31:39](#)):

Yeah. Walking audit. Some people might call them a neighborhood audit, walking audit, they're called different things. The word audit has a bad connotation. It's like we're coming out and trying to find problems with stuff, but that's kind of our job is to go find problems to fix. And sometimes those are bushes or trees that have overgrown and are blocking the sidewalk. Sometimes they are homes that are abandoned that are creating a problem for the neighborhood.

Amy Simmons ([32:18](#)):

You found one that was behind a bunch of shrubbery that nobody knew was even back there.

Dan Hoffman ([32:23](#)):

Oh yeah. There was one, man! One that was in bad shape. We go out, we walk a particular stretch of a neighborhood, and we really bring all of the people from the City government that can help play a role. We were out there walking with the Fire Marshall who installed a few smoke detectors for a few people. We had code enforcement out there looking for abandoned vehicles that need to be removed. We had a police officer out there with us walking, talking to neighbors. We had two councilors with us: Vice-Mayor Hill and Councilor Herbstritt talking to a lot of residents. It's really an opportunity for City staff to just be out, engaging with residents. They're really the ones that tell us, 'Hey, we've got this problem with a pothole over here' or 'this dead tree in the city right of way and we need it removed'. A lot of that stuff. It's hard for us to be everywhere all the time, so it's a good opportunity for us to get out, talk to the community members, hear from them what's important. What would they like to see fixed? So we did one, it was a great opportunity to talk to a lot of folks. We've got another one coming up, I believe on the 27th. It's a Friday afternoon. And both of these are in Ward 2 over in the North End. But we'll be doing these all over the City in the coming months. If you see us out and about, feel free to stop and say hi.

Amy Simmons ([33:58](#)):

Yeah, you also didn't mention Public Services was there as well.

Dan Hoffman ([34:02](#)):

Oh yeah. That's great. I think they got the most to do. Perry Eisenach and some of his folks. Really a lot of it, you know, sidewalks, streets. Thank you for the reminder. I think out of that audit, they got definitely the longest list of stuff to deal with.

Amy Simmons ([34:25](#)):

I think you even found a pole, some kind of utility pole that wasn't being used any more.

Dan Hoffman ([34:28](#)):

Yeah. It was just a random poll sticking out of the sidewalk.

Amy Simmons ([34:31](#)):

Get rid of that.

Dan Hoffman ([34:31](#)):

There's a lot of stuff like that we want to make sure it gets addressed. After these audits, it's not just for us to get out and stretch our legs, I have those people that were on the walking audit, they send me a list of stuff afterwards and we follow up, make sure it gets done.

Amy Simmons ([34:48](#)):

Yep. And you had one department say it's already been taking care of.

Dan Hoffman ([34:51](#)):

Oh yeah. I think at this point, everybody has done most of the stuff on the list. Yeah.

Amy Simmons ([34:57](#)):

That's awesome. Okay. Well last but not least, I had wearing masks in City buildings on my list. You've already taken care of that, but for those who don't want to come in because of spreading germs or don't want to wear a mask, we do have many ways they can save the trip and do business with us online or by phone or email. We encourage that big time. Don't go out if you don't have to.

Dan Hoffman ([35:17](#)):

Absolutely.

Dan Hoffman ([35:18](#)):

That's all I have

Dan Hoffman ([35:19](#)):

One thing to mention on August 31st, we've got an open house here. The Comp Plan, I think we've talked a little bit before about what the Comp Plan is.

Amy Simmons ([35:30](#)):

Last podcast.

Dan Hoffman ([35:30](#)):

That's right. It's kind of a general guiding document for how the city is going to develop and grow. Open house for the update to the Comp Plan here in Council Chambers after, I think it starts at 5:30.

Amy Simmons ([35:47](#)):

It does, yes.

Dan Hoffman ([35:47](#)):

August 31st good chance to ask questions, talk to planners. The planning commission will be there. The action right now sits with the planning commission. So this is the public hearing. They'll eventually vote on it in September. One of the things that people might have noticed in the paper, one of the changes to the Comp Plan, is that we are identifying a couple of areas in the North End for redevelopment. The North end is an area where, as I said before, we're going to be focusing a lot of time and energy and resources to revitalize that particular portion of town. There is one, Friendship Park, which for those of you who don't realize it's a park because it's really just a field at this point, that's not used as much as it could be. It's the field right next to the Friendship Fire Station. So, the City is considering the idea or proposal to put some affordable senior housing there. In exchange for that, a new community center, a pool and some improvements. We would move the soccer field down just kind of across the street in essence. The community up there wouldn't be losing any amenities. But I think the biggest thing, we want to hear from the community up there. We want to hear is putting some affordable senior housing, and it would all be affordable, is putting some of that there worth a community center and a pool. I think a community center and a pool for that neighborhood would really go a long way. Great opportunity for the kids up there. Great opportunity for senior programs. So, you know, all these things are a trade off.

Amy Simmons ([37:31](#)):

Is it an indoor pool or an outdoor pool?

Dan Hoffman ([37:33](#)):

We don't know quite yet. I mean, the idea is a community pool. It's not going to be something as massive as in Jim Barnett Park. It's going to be something where people can go for leisure, swim lessons. It's kind of one of those types of community pools. So, 31st, come tell us what you'd like. If you'd like the status quo up there, more power to you. We want to hear that, too. But we would like to know if the community would like us to take advantage of this opportunity.

Amy Simmons ([38:00](#)):

Okay. Yeah. Come out 8 30, 8 31, 5 30, 8 31. [Laughs]

Dan Hoffman ([38:06](#)):

August 31st at 5:30 PM in Council Chambers.

Amy Simmons ([38:09](#)):

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That's so what I meant. But then at 6:30, they're going to do their public hearing.

Dan Hoffman ([38:13](#)):

Yeah. They switch into a public hearing. Residents will get a chance to speak their mind on it. North End folks, come out. We don't hear enough from you. There's nobody from that neighborhood on the planning commission. And that's no one's fault. All the Planning Commission, they all volunteer their time. So, we're appreciative of that. But, we also have to be aware that they don't...

Amy Simmons ([38:45](#)):

They have a voice on there.

Dan Hoffman ([38:46](#)):

Yeah. The North End does not have a voice on there. So we want to hear from the North End: is this something that you want? So, I think that's it. We have anything else, Amy?

Amy Simmons ([38:55](#)):

No, that's it.

Dan Hoffman ([38:56](#)):

Alrighty. Well with that, thank you very much for...I think this probably is going to end up being a slightly longer one than normal. If you stuck with us the entire way, thank you so much.

Amy Simmons ([39:04](#)):

Thank you. [Laughs]

Dan Hoffman ([39:06](#)):

And we look forward to talking to you in a couple of weeks, so thanks. See you around City Hall.

Outro ([39:23](#)):

[Light music]