

The Plot Thickens

by Purcellville Vice Mayor Carl “Ben” Nett

I was elected to Purcellville Town Council in November 2024 alongside Chris Bertaut, as Mayor, and Susan Khalil, allied with incumbent Councilwoman Carol Luke as part of a governing majority dedicated to reforming town government operations, to include a police department rife with allegations of waste, fraud, and abuse. We also opposed annexations into the Town for commercial and industrial development, which would bring increased traffic, crime, and further strain our limited water resources. We set out to fulfill our campaign promises, to include lowering utility rates and stabilizing property taxes by adopting the equalized tax rate. The Council Minority (Kevin Wright, Caleb Stought, and Erin Rayner) are currently suing us over the definition of the term “imposition” as it relates to property tax rates. State code requires a super majority vote by a governing body for the imposition of any new taxes. However, simply voting to lower or raise an existing tax is not considered an imposition of a new tax. That is the opinion of our current and previous town attorneys, whose advice we have always followed.

The Council Minority, frustrated by their electoral defeat and the reforms we are advancing, is leading a campaign of orchestrated chaos. I have long been the target of that effort, due to my dual roles as a Town Police Officer and Town Councilman – an exercise of my rights under existing Virginia state law and confirmed by the Executive Director of the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council.

After a distinguished national security career, I embarked on a second career as a Purcellville Police Officer in 2022 – graduating first in class from the academy in December of that year, receiving the Sheriff’s Meritorious Action Award in 2023, and being named Officer of the Year in 2024. Yet, within weeks of taking office, I was fired from the police department by newcomers who had been hired into positions I was openly campaigning to eliminate, improperly and prematurely Brady listed, and ultimately decertified – only to then be fully exonerated by unanimous decision of an independent Grievance Panel. That Grievance Panel decision is personally and professionally devastating to the individuals who framed me with eight phony administrative charges and, because of that, resulted in retaliatory criminal charges (the “Special Prosecutor in these matters is Eric Olsen, a friend of Bob Anderson, whose actions gave rise to the grievance and who personally selected Olsen to act in his stead). The lack of evidence to support those criminal charges against me – charges brought for the purpose of pressuring me into resigning from Town Council – have now resulted in the recall effort against me alone.

As reported, I have sought federal intervention in this matter. I have nothing to hide. Tellingly, Councilmember Erin Rayner voiced her opposition to a proposed non-binding resolution by the Town Council endorsing an official call for a DOJ investigation. What does she have to hide? Well, consider the following:

- 1) Rayner was revealed to be the sole source of the abuse of sick leave allegations against me, upon which the phony Internal Affairs investigation into me, with its pre-determined outcome, was based.

- 2) Rayner was the sole source of allegations upon which Loudoun County Commonwealth's Attorney Bob Anderson's Brady listing of me was based. I was Brady listed by Anderson, a Town of Purcellville resident, for non-Brady alleged offenses. He took this action two days before the expiration of my due process rights for maximum political effect – in time for the February 25, 2025 Town Council meeting so that I could be openly mocked for being Brady listed.
- 3) Rayner has been revealed to have a close personal friendship with Anderson's Deputy Commonwealth Attorney, Nicole Wittmann, for whom she served as campaign manager during Wittman's failed bid for Commonwealth Attorney in 2019 amidst a scandal related to Wittmann allegedly lying about meeting the Loudoun County residency requirements.
- 4) Rayner has been revealed to have been the source of false allegations against me, to include an outlandish claim of assault, upon which the State Police Investigation into me was based. None of her false claims to State Police could be validated, so "investigators" instead invented other false charges based purely on politics and optics and never once sought to interview me.

Nothing has worked for them, and they know that I am as innocent as I proclaim and unlikely to either be removed from office or convicted of crimes I did not commit. So, there has been a shocking escalation in lawfare, now involving Richmond.

On January 20, 2025, I issued a letter to Delegate John McAuliff, voicing my opposition to his proposed HB 505 which, if enacted, would effectively disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of Virginians – police officers, firefighters, emergency medical service personnel, and other officers and employees – of their right to fully participate in local governance. I noted that the language for HB 505 was first circulated in 2025 by Councilmember Rayner, now a candidate for Purcellville Mayor. Delegate McAuliff denies any influence from Rayner. That denial doesn't change the fact that the bill's language was previously circulated by Rayner. Think what you will.

Regardless, I have now learned of Senate Bill 648, an oddly specific piece of proposed legislation that states, among other things, "In the event of a criminal proceeding against an officer of any town in Planning District 8 with a population between 8,000 and 10,000 according to the latest United States decennial census alleging the commission of a felony offense, the court having jurisdiction over such offense shall enter an order suspending such officer pending the resolution of such proceeding and any related proceeding." More curiously, "The provisions of this act shall expire on July 1, 2028."

If you don't think HB 505 is the "Ben Nett Bill," then tell me with a straight face that SB 648 isn't the "Ben Nett Bill." State law already provides for the removal of elected officials convicted of felonies. But, now, we're going to remove elected official *charged* with felonies? Any felonies? Even those brought forth by political opponents for purely political reasons? And what happened to innocent until proven guilty?

Russett Perry, the sponsor of SB 648, if you didn't know, is a former prosecutor in the Loudoun County Commonwealth's Attorney's Office. Is it making sense, yet? Are you starting to connect the dots?

For those who are sick and tired of seeing my face and reading the same recycled news about me over and over again, and who think this is getting ridiculous, I agree with you. This is insanity. All of it. Serial killers have gotten less ink.

I have no choice, however, but to fight to the end and clear my name. These people have taken my job, my livelihood, destroyed my reputation, hurt my family, and are now threatening my very freedom – all because they lost an election and are desperate to regain power and deliver for their developer backers.

That's what this entire drama is about – power and money. If they get rid of me and flip the council, then annexations into the town are coming and, with that, rapid development and big city problems. Purcellville will be "Loudoun's rural destination" no more. If you want that, then by all means vote for that. That's why we have elections in this country – not lawfare.