



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Gloucester County

Program Title: Modernizing The Beehive

Program Category: Communications

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Steven R. Wright

Title: Deputy County Administrator

Signature: *Steven R. Wright*



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## **Executive Summary**

Gloucester County boasts 288 square miles of some of the most breathtaking natural landscape on the Chesapeake Bay. However, the spacious natural beauty of the County has also, historically, posed challenges in the realm of communicating with citizens who choose to live a more rural lifestyle. Even in 2024, some residents don't have access to reliable internet.

For decades, Gloucester County has mailed out a print publication called "The Beehive" to every household on a quarterly basis. The pamphlet – formatted on newsprint and distributed by the local newspaper – used to be a reliable way to get Parks and Recreation offerings, tax deadlines, election updates and mosquito control information to Gloucester's residents, along with other important news. As the digital era progressed, many people started throwing out The Beehive without ever opening it. The pamphlet looked and felt like junk mail, and that's how people treated it.

In 2023, the Community Engagement & Public Information Department decided to revamp the publication. Staff members crafted a glossy, full-colored magazine with the same information. The magazine is primarily a digital product, but we do print a limited number of copies for people who cannot access it online. By employing a strong digital marketing strategy, the County reinforced its new brand, increased Beehive readership, established quantifiable analytics and cut taxpayer costs associated with the publication by \$21,000 per year.

# Modernizing The Beehive

## The Problem: When “Status Quo” Becomes Stagnant

While Gloucester County is large in area (288 square miles) and rich in natural beauty, with options for people to live a more peaceful lifestyle while commuting to work in any number of nearby cities, there are challenges that come with maintaining a rural landscape. High-speed internet cables have still not reached the farthest edges of the County. People who live in the northernmost areas of Gloucester work, shop and convene at different places than people who live in our southernmost “Gloucester Point” neighborhoods. That leaves the Gloucester County Government with a challenging communications infrastructure: we have neither a central hub where people regularly mingle, nor any assurance that our residents can equally access our website and social media pages.

While online communication woes are relatively new, reaching a wide range of people who choose to live in Gloucester to achieve a more private lifestyle has long been a concern. Starting as early as 1980, Gloucester County attempted to bridge the communication gap by mailing out a paper pamphlet called The Beehive on a quarterly basis. This publication was formatted into 16 large pages, and the County outsourced its printing and distribution to our local newspaper, the Gloucester-Mathews Gazette Journal.

For a time, this worked wonderfully. Each household got a copy, and they could find out how to contact their Board of Supervisors representatives, sign up for classes with Parks and Recreation, register to vote, get details about paying taxes and find nonprofit information by reading the

pamphlet. It became a community staple. The County still has some residents who have lived here for decades, who anticipate each printing of The Beehive, and who always read every page.

However, the role of paper mail has shifted since the dawn of the computer. The Beehive used to achieve its goal because families would at least scan each piece of mail that appeared in their mailboxes; important notifications were expected to arrive on paper, at the end of your driveway. In the 2020s, with many people signed up to receive bill notifications via email, a higher percentage of the average mailbox is filled with unsolicited junk advertisements than they used to be. Many of those junk advertisements arrive on newsprint – they naturally have the same texture, smell, and text-box format that The Beehive did.



Gloucester has had many new residents move to the area in the past decade, and with these people not used to The Beehive and already mentally predisposed to weed out junk mail, an untold percentage of our publication was ending up in the garbage can before people even opened the first page. Many people admitted this to the Community Engagement & Public Information staff. Even

residents who had lived here for years, but whose children had aged out of Parks and Rec programs, would regularly choose to toss out the unsightly pamphlet without a second glance, because without that entertainment aspect, The Beehive “wasn’t useful” to them.

This means that by about 2020, without the Gloucester County Government making any conscious changes, one of our most tried and true ways of communicating news to the community had become ineffective.

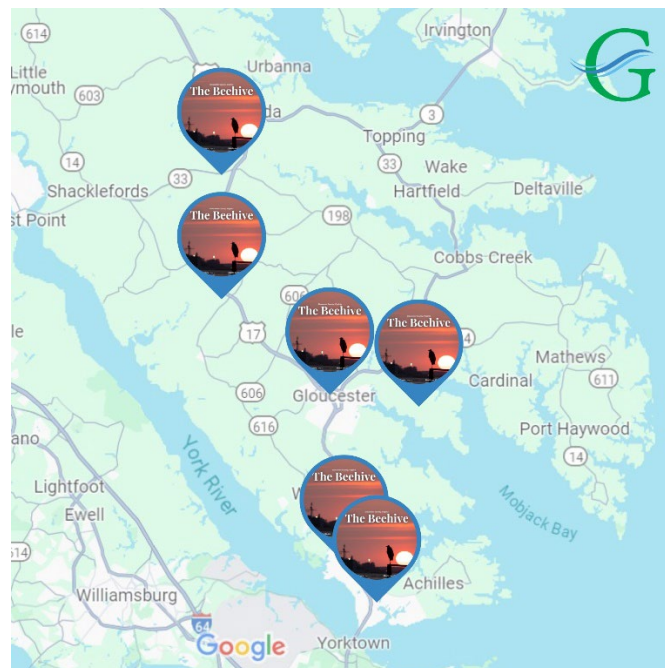
## **The Project: Turning “The Beehive” into a Coffee Table Staple**

In April 2023, the Community Engagement & Public Information Department hired a new employee who had formerly worked as a journalist. There are only three people in this department who are dedicated to Public Information on a day-to-day basis: a manager, a media specialist and an administrative assistant. With the fully team assembled, Manager Quinton Sheppard introduced the idea of turning The Beehive into something more modern for the residents of Gloucester County.

After polling nearby localities (York County, James City County, Mathews County, Hampton, Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Chesapeake and Virginia Beach) to learn how they reached their communities with important news, the team decided to test The Beehive in a digital magazine format. However, since we knew some people wouldn’t be able to access it online, we decided to order a specific number of physical copies, and to make those available at strategic community hubs throughout Gloucester.

It was important to us that we innovate within the reasonable constraints of our small department. None of our employees had done magazine layout before. Our only real resources were staff hours,

an existing Canva pro account, and a new subscription to Issuu, a platform that hosts digital magazines. In terms of delivery, we couldn't easily maintain a list of the addresses of the people who wanted print copies. Even if that had been possible, the magazine is heavier than the newsprint pamphlet, and would have cost more money to ship. We needed the delivery to our strategic hubs to be achievable for one employee, borrowing a County vehicle for one day.



The work was assigned primarily to Media Specialist Savannah Haugdahl, so that the County could strive for the cohesion of a professional magazine. Although she accepted content submissions from other departments, the public school system, the library, the agricultural extension office, and local nonprofits, having one lead designer ensured that all fonts, margins, and color schemes would be uniform. Canva had customizable magazine templates already in the system, and in instances where those didn't meet our needs, the team could pull layout inspiration from professional magazines.

The clean, colorful design would match Gloucester’s rebranding initiative, and we expected it to be a longer-lasting product than delicate newsprint. We opened a photography contest to the community for the front and back covers of the magazine. The only criteria was that the contestants must have taken the photo themselves, and the image had to be of a location in Gloucester. By inviting the community to have a hand in the publication, and prominently highlighting images of our County that everyone so loves, we gave people a reason to share the link on their social media accounts (or keep the paper magazines on their coffee tables, even after reading them).

With a couple weeks of formatting and editing per quarter, Gloucester County Community Engagement & Public Information produced a glossy, 36-page magazine that looked as organized as any you could pick up in a grocery store. It had all the information we needed to communicate to our residents. The Beehive was reborn – and after a successful year, the department is about to produce its fifth edition of the newly modernized magazine. Each edition is a little easier for the team to produce, and incorporates new, creative page designs.



## **Cost breakdown: Trimming Waste and Supporting Local Partners**

Gloucester County prides itself on sourcing products and services from local businesses, and seeking out competitive bids, whenever possible. This led to the County's original partnership with the Gloucester-Mathews Gazette Journal, when they would print and disseminate The Beehive on newsprint. In 2020-2023, the County spent (on average) \$28,000 per year for those services.

When the department decided we would need some printed copies of The Beehive for people who did not have internet access, we checked with several printing companies to see what rates people could offer us. The Gazette-Journal was once again the most affordable. We could get 1,000 copies for \$1,600. We also now pay for Issuu, at \$132 per quarter. That means if we keep ordering the same number of prints, and deliver those magazines ourselves, that we'd spend less than \$7,000 per year on the newer, nicer design – a \$21,000 savings for our taxpayers.

Additionally, since we keep track of how many copies we print and where we drop them off, we can keep track of how many copies are needed and downsize printing operations as appropriate. For example, we drop off about 200 copies at three locations in Gloucester Point when we make deliveries. If we check back at our drop-off locations two months later, and there are 50 copies still sitting there, we know we can probably decrease our print order by 50 magazines next time.

With the Summer edition, we began printing flyers with QR codes that direct people to the digital magazine and displaying those flyers in all the same places that we have print copies available for pickup. People who had been getting the print copies because they found themselves coincidentally



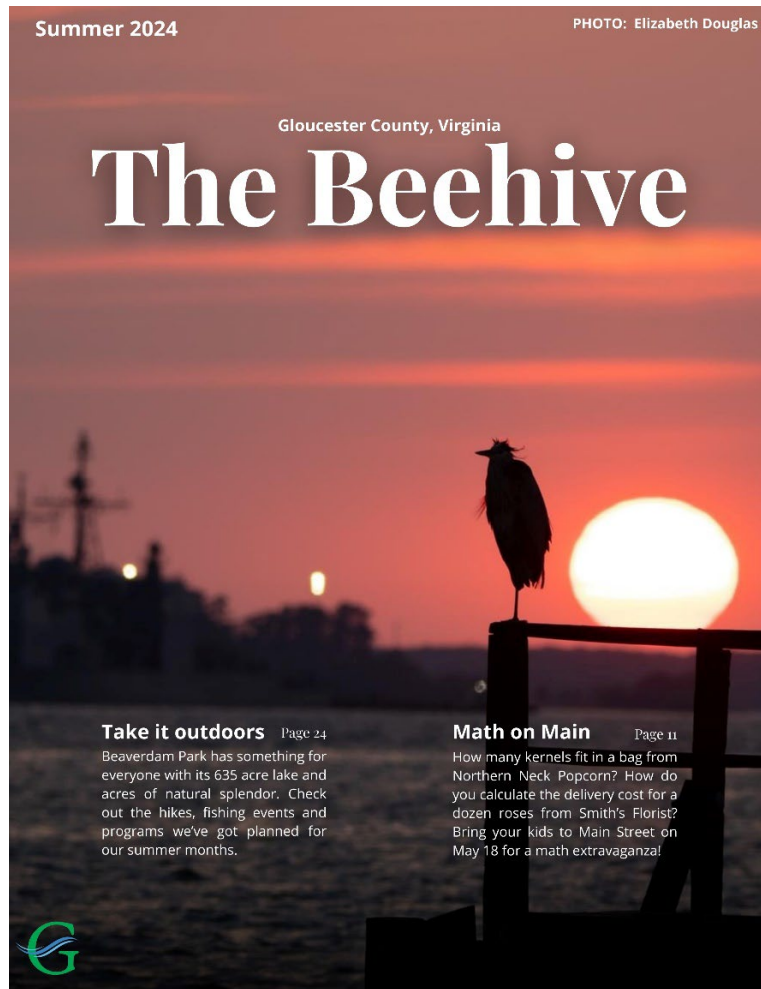
in front of those magazines can now consciously choose to get The Beehive on their phones, instead.

## **Community response: Becoming the Buzz Around Town**

Now that we have a set number of printed copies and a digital platform that allows us to review analytics, we can tell exactly how many people are absorbing information through The Beehive. On average, over the last year, The Beehive got about 3,200 impressions and 700 reads on its digital platform (per quarter). For three of the four quarters, all 750 print copies were claimed as well. Although those numbers are small for a county of 38,000 people, we had no way to track who was reading The Beehive before this transition, so data – any tangible data – is a step in the right direction, and it allows us to see how specific marketing choices in each quarter impact our reach in the community.

Anecdotally, we've received many compliments on the changes to The Beehive. We were anticipating some pushback from community members who were used to getting this information mailed to their homes, but that never materialized. Some of the people who called the Community Engagement & Public Information office to ask where they could pick up a print copy said they needed to find four or five magazines, because they wanted to share it with their friends. With each cover reveal, the community photographer (and their friends) get excited to come get copies of the magazine. Community Engagement & Public Information employees have been invited into homes where several copies of The Beehive, even past their relevant dates, were indeed displayed on coffee tables. Even our Board of Supervisors was shocked that the County could have this nicer publication alongside such a dramatic reduction in costs.

Although there is trial and error with every transition, the glowing support from community members has encouraged us that modernizing The Beehive was an important decision in our communications plan.



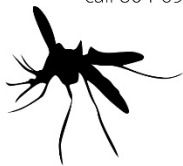
## Mosquito control

Spring is the perfect time for Gloucester County residents to prepare for mosquito season. By following these steps, you can help eliminate mosquito breeding grounds.

- **Containers:** Remove any type of container that will hold water, such as flowerpots, old tires, bird baths, etc. Such items could become a mosquito breeding site. It only takes a teaspoon of water to become a mosquito larvae hatchery.
- **Grass/shrubbery:** Mosquitoes love resting in overgrown shrubbery and in tall grasses. Trimming your shrubs and cutting your lawn encourages mosquitoes to rest elsewhere.

Gloucester County utilizes a limited Integrated Mosquito Control Program to provide surveillance and treatment for designated Gloucester County mosquito control districts. A special mosquito control tax is paid by the residents that reside within the designated districts to fund these services. The detailed program is on the County website: [gloucesterva.gov/mosquito-control](http://gloucesterva.gov/mosquito-control).

If you have any questions, or would like to report a mosquito problem in a mosquito control district, please call 804-693-6269 or email [mosquito@gloucesterva.info](mailto:mosquito@gloucesterva.info).



### During mosquito control season:

1

In spring, our staff distributes mosquito control release forms to residents whose homes are more than 150 feet from a public road within designated mosquito control districts. **The release forms must be completed and returned each year to allow the County to come onto private property and apply adulticide.**

2

Mosquito control staff initiates larval control by placing larvicide briquettes into roadside ditches. Larval control is considered the most effective way to manage the mosquito population by killing mosquitoes before they become flying adult mosquitoes.

3

Following larvicide distribution, surveillance determines the presence of larvae. Mosquito control drivers take water samples from roadside ditches to see if larvae are present, and conduct landing counts of adult mosquitoes.

4

If a landing counts warrant, mosquito control trucks will initiate adulticide fogging. This is considered the control method of last resort since it dissipates quickly and is only effective until the next day. Adulticide fogging cannot be applied when it's raining or the wind speed is over 10 mph.



# *Flooding preparedness*

Floods are the most common natural disasters in the United States. The Department of Homeland Security says about 90 percent of disasters involve flooding.

Here in Gloucester, it's safe to say we love our rivers and creeks. However, we have to balance our appreciation for the water with respect for safety. Here are some precautions to learn, especially as we head into hurricane season:

- Determine your flood zone by going to [gloucesterva.gov/flood-management](http://gloucesterva.gov/flood-management) or calling 804-693-2744.
- Know your evacuation zone! Go to [vaemergency.gov](http://vaemergency.gov) to determine your evacuation zone.
- NEVER drive through flooded roads. You can't tell what's under that moving water, and it only takes a few inches to stall a passenger car. Remember: "Turn around, don't drown."
- Keep your insurance documents and other personal information in a watertight container.
- Obtain building permits before you build. Call 804-693-2744.
- Keep your ditches and storm water features clean for free-flowing rainwater and receding storm surges.
- Floodwaters don't care where FEMA draws a line. Low-cost flood protection policies are available for homes outside the 1% floodplain.
- Gloucester has many endangered plants and animals. Preserve the floodplain's natural features and keep our Bay clean to protect our remaining natural species.
- Spread the word. We should all protect this community from physical/financial devastation by insuring our risks.

## *More:*



[gloucesterva.gov/flood-management](http://gloucesterva.gov/flood-management)

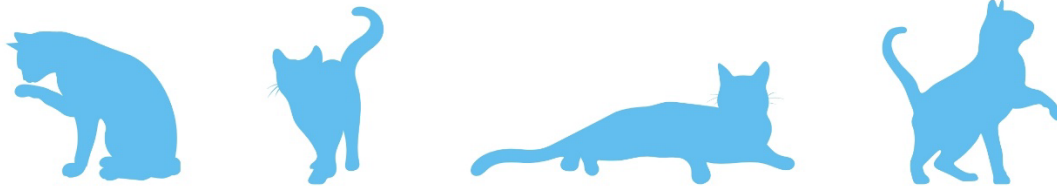
## ***Animal control: Prevent heartworms this season***

Heartworm Disease is serious and potentially fatal for pets in the United States, especially in our area. Heartworms are foot-long worms that live in the heart, lungs, and blood vessels of affected pets. These worms cause severe lung disease, heart failure, and damage to organs in the body. The effects of Heartworm Disease can cause lasting damage that can affect your pet's health and quality of life even after treatment. Heartworm Disease not only affect dogs and cats, but also wildlife.

The mosquito plays an essential role in the life cycle of heartworms. Mosquitos can transfer them from an infected animal to your pet when they bite.

Early symptoms can appear to be a mild persistent cough, reluctance to exercise, fatigue after moderate activity, decreased appetite and weight loss. If left untreated, the symptoms could develop into fluid in the abdomen, labored breathing, pale gums, bloody or coffee-colored urine, and potentially death.

It's important for your pets to be regularly tested. Most infected dogs and cats can be successfully treated, but it can be costly and hard on your pet. If your animal tests positive, your veterinarian will develop a treatment plan based on the stage of the disease and condition of your pet.



The best way to protect your animals is to make sure they get monthly heartworm, flea and tick preventatives. Annual testing ensures the preventives are working. Both steps are important, since heartworm medications are highly effective, but not perfect. These treatments help your pets live long, healthy and happy lives.

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## ***Filing income taxes***

The Gloucester County Commissioner of the Revenue's office would like to remind all county citizens that all income tax filing deadlines remain the same, including the May 1, 2024 individual income tax filing date.

Virginia already has an automatic six-month extension to file (seven months for certain corporations). Our office is also available to any citizen in Gloucester who needs assistance in preparing their Virginia State Tax Return during normal business hours, by phone, mail or by using the Treasurer's Office drop box.

Get more information or assistance by:

- Visiting our website, [gloucesterva.gov/cor](http://gloucesterva.gov/cor)
- Calling the COR's office at 804-693-3451 any Monday-Friday between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.
- Calling the Virginia Department of Taxation at 804-367-8031

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## ***Personal property and real estate tax bills***

The Gloucester County Treasurer's Office would like to remind all county citizens that the first installment of personal property and real estate tax bills will be mailed in late May or early June, with a due date of June 30.

However, since June 30 falls on a weekend, payments made in office, postmarked or online will be accepted as on-time through July 1, 2024.

Get more information or assistance by:

- Visiting our website, [gloucesterva.gov/treasurer](http://gloucesterva.gov/treasurer)
- Calling our office at 804-693-2141 any Monday-Friday between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.
- Emailing us at [treasurer@gloucesterva.info](mailto:treasurer@gloucesterva.info)