

Citizens for Purcellville Candidate Survey

Candidate Name (As listed on Ballot): Erin K. Rayner

Candidate Age: 44

Occupation / Employer (Employer Optional): Member of Purcellville Town Council;
Mother; Community Volunteer

Education:

- BA History –University of Alaska, Anchorage
- BA Psychology –University of Alaska, Anchorage
- MA Global Security –Keele University, UK
- Four more years of post-graduate research in International Relations and Energy Security –Keele University, UK

How long have you been a resident of the Town of Purcellville?

9 years

Please provide a short biography of your experience and qualifications for the office that you seek.

I have served on the Purcellville Town Council since 2021 and was re-elected to a full four-year term in 2022. In January 2024, my colleagues selected me to serve as Vice Mayor by a 6-1 vote. During my time on Council, I have worked to protect our police department, strengthen the Town's financial position, address long-deferred infrastructure needs, support local businesses, and bring greater transparency and public participation to Town decisions. Throughout my service, I have believed the best decisions are made when residents are informed, heard, and included before important decisions are made.

My professional and volunteer experience has consistently centered on public service, leadership, and bringing people together. I have served in leadership roles with the Purcellville Business Association, Purcellville Main Street, Virginia Regional Transit and Virginia Rides, the Purcellville Rescue Squad, the Committee for Dulles, and the Virginia Council on Women, and for Mountain View Elementary School's PTA. I also previously led programs focused on women's leadership and veterans' advocacy.

Through my service in Purcellville and my work across Loudoun County and the Commonwealth of Virginia, I have been fortunate to build strong relationships and earn the trust of leaders at every level. Those connections are not just personal, they are an asset for our community; they help Purcellville compete for partnerships, funding opportunities, and regional support that directly benefit our residents.

When Purcellville needs the support of county, state, or regional partners, I know who to call and how to bring people together to get results. I look forward to using these relationships to advocate for our town, strengthen partnerships, and ensure Purcellville has a respected voice wherever decisions affecting our community are made. This year, the Virginia Municipal League appointed me the Vice-Chair of their infrastructure policy committee which furthers my ability to engage and support critical state policy that affects our town. As Mayor, I would bring experience, preparation, independence, and a practical commitment to governing in the best interests of the entire community. Most importantly, I will continue to lead by listening first, bringing people together, and making thoughtful decisions that put Purcellville's long-term interests ahead of politics.

Please describe some of the ways or organizations in which you have been involved within our community outside of elected public service (Please include relevant dates):

- Former President and current board member, Purcellville Business Association (2017–present)
- Treasurer and board member, Virginia Regional Transit and Virginia Rides (2018–present)
- Former President and board member, Mountain View Elementary School PTA (2021–2025)
- Appointed by the Governor of Virginia to the Virginia Council on Women (2022–present)
- Founding member and current board member, Purcellville Main Street (2024–present)
- Board member, Committee for Dulles (2024–present)
- Board member, Purcellville Rescue Squad (2026–present)
- Vice-Chair, Virginia Municipal League infrastructure policy committee (appointed 2026), examining state legislation affecting critical infrastructure and utilities across the Commonwealth—insight and influence that can help lobby for policies supporting our town

Before joining Town Council, I also served as Executive Director of the Barbara Comstock Program for Women in Leadership at George Mason University's Schar School and as Director of VeteransAgainstAlzheimer's, advocating for veterans affected by brain injuries.

Citizens for Purcellville Question: Describe your personal vision for the town over the next 5-10 years?

My vision is for Purcellville to remain a safe, welcoming, financially stable small town where families and businesses can thrive without sacrificing the character that makes our community special.

Over the next five to ten years, the Town must responsibly repair and replace aging water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure; rebuild trust in local government; protect public safety; support a vibrant historic downtown; and make growth decisions based on infrastructure capacity, water resources, fiscal impact, and meaningful community input.

I want residents to have confidence in a Town government that plans ahead rather than lurches from crisis to crisis. That means setting clear priorities, listening before decisions are made,

following sound professional advice, and measuring whether Town spending is producing real value for residents and businesses.

Success isn't measured simply by balanced budgets or completed projects. It's measured by whether families, businesses, and future generations believe Purcellville remains one of the very best places to call home.

Citizens for Purcellville Question: Looking back at the previous 5-10 years of town history and governance by the town council, if you could change one significant action or decision by town council, what would it be?

I would change the pattern of major personnel, budget, and policy decisions being made without adequate public notice, deliberation, or long-term planning. The clearest example was the January 2025 decision to abruptly remove the Town Manager without a transparent public process or discussing it with the entire council. This was then followed by the appointment of a political ally without interviewing any of the more than 80 other applicants for the position. This action led to a domino effect of egregious lapses in proper governance including the second most significant action which occurred on April 8th when the council majority attempted to defund the police without prior public notice, discussion and debate, or any research of the implications.

Regardless of personalities or politics, decisions of that magnitude should be made through a professional, transparent process that protects the Town's operations, employees, finances, and public trust. Purcellville needs stable leadership and consistent standards of governance, not sudden decisions that create disruption and uncertainty. Residents deserve confidence that important decisions are made thoughtfully, transparently, and for the right reasons.

Citizens for Purcellville Question: What do you consider the most important issue for the new Town Council to address at their first meeting in January?

The first priority should be to stabilize our town government. We need to hire an experienced town manager who will bring a disciplined, clear roadmap on how to move our town forward. The new Council needs a transparent plan for the Town's finances and aging infrastructure, staffing levels, department capabilities, and economic development. The new Council should begin with a clear review of the utility funds, capital needs, debt obligations, available reserves, and the status of major water and sewer projects.

That work should produce an understandable public roadmap showing what must be repaired, when it must be completed, how it will be funded, and how the Town will protect residents and businesses from avoidable financial shocks. Good government begins with an honest assessment of where we are and a responsible plan for where we are going. That work should begin immediately so residents can see measurable progress during the Council's first year, not simply hear promises about future improvements.

Resident Question: In 2025, the Town Council took initial actions to defund and disband the town's police department. What is your position regarding the town's police department and will you affirm to voters in your answer to this question

that you will not support or empower any future attempts to eliminate the Purcellville Police Department?

I will NOT support any effort to eliminate the Purcellville Police Department. As Mayor, protecting public safety will remain one of my highest profiles. Furthermore, I would empower the leadership we have in place now, our new Police Chief, our new Police Chief, to lead her department, independent of political pressures, as it should be.

I publicly opposed the 2025 action to defund and disband the department, and I introduced the successful motion that fully funded the Purcellville Police Department through Fiscal Year 2026. I have also advocated at the state level for restored funding for local police departments.

A professional, community-based police department is essential to Purcellville's safety and quality of life. The Mayor and Council should provide responsible oversight, support strong leadership and accountability, and ensure the department has the staffing and resources required to serve the community effectively. Purcellville has repeatedly been named one of the safest towns in Virginia for a reason.

Resident Question: The cost of improvements to aging infrastructure, particularly the town's water system has been a big topic during the current term. Actions by previous town councils in the form of maintenance deferrals, utility rates not rising in conjunction with rising costs, and not following recommendations by staff or independent consultants, has resulted in the prospect of significant financial burden to both the town and to residents. What are your plans to address the issue of infrastructure and utility rates?

Purcellville's aging water and sewer infrastructure is one of the most serious responsibilities facing the next Mayor and Council. The Town must stop treating utility policy as an election-year political tool and instead follow a long-term plan grounded in engineering, financial analysis, and the actual cost of maintaining reliable systems.

The Town was lucky enough to receive approximately \$10 million in the COVID era American Rescue Plan funds and I supported directing it towards necessary infrastructure and capital projects. I have consistently advocated for addressing aging pipes, water-main improvements, reducing utility debt, and deferred maintenance. Going forward, I would support a prioritized capital plan, regular public reporting on project costs and schedules, aggressive pursuit of grants and outside funding, and rate decisions based on independent analysis.

Rates should be fair, predictable, and phased responsibly whenever possible. But artificially lowering rates without a sustainable funding plan only postpones the cost and risks larger increases, system failures, or greater debt later. Public transparency of the true cost of running our town's utility is paramount to understand how we can move forward sustainably.

Residents deserve honest conversation about difficult issues. My commitment is that decisions affecting household budgets will always be explained clearly, supported by facts, and made with the community—not presented as surprises.

Business Question: The matter of water and sewer rates seems to be a regular topic for the Town. As I understand, current budget policy is to divert funds from the general fund as well as part of the meals tax revenue to subsidize water rates.

Do you feel that this is fair and in the best interest of businesses/restaurants in town who already pay proportionally more for water per month than the majority of households?

No, I don't think the current approach is fair or sustainable. Here's why that matters.

The town runs its finances like a business with two separate accounts: the general fund and the utility fund. Best practice is that these funds stand on their own. The utility fund should cover the true cost of water and sewer service through utility rates. When we instead pull from the general fund and meals tax revenue to keep water bills artificially low, we're papering over a problem, not solving it.

That approach hurts the town in two ways. First, every dollar we divert to subsidize water rates is a dollar not spent on public safety, roads, parks, and the core services that residents and businesses count on. Second, it hides the real cost of service, which means we never make the honest decisions we need to make.

To your specific point about restaurants and businesses: you're right that they already pay proportionally more per month. That's exactly why we owe them transparency about what they're paying for and why. Business owners can plan around costs they understand. What they can't plan around is a system that looks stable until it isn't.

And it isn't. In May, S&P downgraded our bond rating with a negative outlook, meaning further downgrades are possible. They pointed directly at the ongoing imbalance in our water and sewer funds and the fact that we've been using general fund money to prop them up. Our financial team and consultants warned us this would happen for years. It did.

So here's where I stand. Utility policy should be built on a complete, independently reviewed financial model, not short-term subsidies adopted without a long-term plan. Before we set rates, the Council should publicly lay out the effect on households, on businesses, on the general fund, and on the infrastructure, we still have to pay for. Any plan has to be fair, it has to be sustainable, and it has to be explained clearly to the people paying the bills.

Nobody wants higher water rates, including me. But residents and business owners deserve honesty over easy promises. We can't hope that grants will bail us out. We have to plan for the worst and work toward the best. That's the only way we get the town back on solid ground.

Real leadership means making responsible decisions before they become emergencies.

Resident Question: One of the first split decisions of the current town council regarded the annexation of the property upon which the Valley Commerce Center is now approved to occupy. Can you speak to your opinion about future annexation, if such action may ever be warranted, or what might have been done differently with regards to the VCC project?

Purcellville should approach any future annexation cautiously and evaluate every proposal based on its long-term impact on residents, infrastructure, finances, traffic, water resources, and our small-town character. Annexation should never be viewed simply as a way to grow the tax base.

I did not vote to approve the annexation of Valley Commerce Center project. I voted to ensure Purcellville had every opportunity to protect its interests before any final decision was made.

My concern was that ending the Town's review early would shift the decision entirely to Loudoun County. That ultimately happened. The County approved the project, and the Town lost the opportunity to influence the final design, negotiate community benefits, or secure infrastructure improvements that could have benefited Purcellville.

Whether a future annexation should be approved will always depend on the facts of that proposal. My commitment as Mayor is that every application will receive a transparent, thorough review, with meaningful public input and decisions based on what is in the long-term best interest of Purcellville.

Business Question: The Town of Purcellville requires businesses to pay a business license tax. This tax amount is directly tied to the annual gross income that a business conducts, as such, larger businesses pay larger taxes to the town. What value or services does the town provide for these fees and what do you believe that the town should be doing to support local businesses or economic development?

I have been active in the Town's business community for almost ten years now, as the former President of the Purcellville Business Association, the Town's economic development committee liaison, and now a founding member of the Purcellville Main Street organization. Businesses should see clear value from the taxes and fees they pay to the Town. Local businesses are partners in building the kind of community residents want to live in, and the Town government should treat them that way. That value includes dependable police and emergency services, well-maintained streets and utilities, efficient permitting and inspections, attractive public spaces, thoughtful planning, and a Town government that actively helps businesses open, remain, and grow.

Purcellville should make it easier to navigate Town processes, improve communication with business owners, reduce unnecessary delays, fill vacant storefronts with businesses that fit the Town's character, and pursue downtown improvements that increase foot traffic and strengthen the local economy. I also support regular, structured engagement with business owners so the Town is solving actual problems rather than assuming what businesses need. The best economic development strategies begin by listening to the businesses already invested in Purcellville.

Business Question: In 2025, the Town Council removed support for the Purcellville Main Street Program. Do you believe that this action was appropriate / in the best interest of the town and why? What is your personal position on Economic Development within the Town of Purcellville?

No, I do not believe removing the Town's support for the Purcellville Main Street Program was in our best interest, and I voted against doing so.

I was a founding member of Purcellville Main Street because a strong, locally led organization can do real work for our downtown. It can help revitalize our historic core, support small businesses, improve the visitor experience, and pursue partnerships and grant funding the Town cannot always secure on its own. And here is the part that frustrated me most about the decision: supporting the program cost the Town nothing financially, yet it opened doors to grants, partnerships, and resources that could have directly benefited Purcellville. Losing that opportunity was a mistake.

Main Street organizations across the country were developed in the 1970s and 80s when historic downtowns were being abandoned in favor of new development malls and strip malls. Almost 50 years later, Purcellville is still dealing with a partially abandoned downtown. Communities around us saw this value 10-20 years ago and started their own Main Street programs; Leesburg, Berryville, Warrenton, and Winchester have all seen significant restorations of their historic downtowns while ours sits largely blighted.

Let me be clear about how I see economic development, because that is really what this question is about.

Economic development should be intentional and true to Purcellville's character. To me it means filling vacant storefronts, helping the businesses we already have succeed, attracting compatible local and independent businesses, improving the downtown experience, and making sure Town processes are responsive and predictable. It is not simply approving more development. It is creating the conditions for a healthy local economy that serves residents and strengthens the community.

I have watched other small towns face the exact problems we face. Empty storefronts. Dilapidated buildings. Revitalization that stalls out. And I have watched what the successful ones did about it. They invested in themselves. Middleburg. Lovettsville. Warrenton. Abingdon. Towns that hit an economic wall and chose to move forward instead of standing still, and in doing so saved their downtowns and their business communities. They became places people want to visit, want to live in, want to be part of. Purcellville can be that too. And I will tell you plainly, it will cost us far more in the long run not to invest in our town than to do it now. That belief is exactly why a group of engaged citizens, business owners, and I started Purcellville Main Street, a 501(c)(3) focused on supporting our historic downtown businesses and making that community vibrant and successful. Purcellville doesn't need to become another town. We simply need to invest thoughtfully in the qualities that already make our community special.

But there are limits. A local nonprofit cannot revitalize a downtown on its own. It can only support the effort. The Town has to be an active partner with property owners in that work. We need to invest in a new downtown master plan and design guidelines that lay out a clear vision for what our downtown should be. Property owners we are asking to invest in revitalization deserve that roadmap. And that vision should not be dictated by politicians. It needs to be citizen led. Once we have a clear, shared vision, property owners can get to work bringing it to life.

Economic development isn't about growing for growth's sake. It's about creating a stronger future while preserving everything people already love about Purcellville.

Resident Question: What steps will you take to improve working relationships between town council members and/or town council and town staff?

The Mayor sets the tone. I would establish clear expectations for civility, preparation, communication, and respect for the distinct roles of elected officials and professional staff. People can disagree without becoming divided. My responsibility as Mayor will be to create an environment where productive debate leads to better decisions, not unnecessary conflict. Council members should receive information early enough to review it, ask questions through appropriate channels, and avoid surprising one another or staff with major motions at the last minute.

I would support regular goal-setting sessions, clear annual priorities, consistent meeting procedures, and direct but respectful resolution of disagreements. Staff should be able to provide professional advice without being drawn into political conflict, and Council members should be able to disagree without personal attacks. Healthy working relationships do not require unanimous votes. When trust exists, better decisions follow and residents' benefit. That is the culture I want to build as Mayor.

Resident Question: Do you feel that tourism is important to our town? If so, what steps will you take to grow or encourage tourism within the town limits?

Yes, tourism matters to Purcellville. When it is done right, it strengthens our small businesses, our restaurants, our arts and cultural organizations, and our historic downtown. The key is encouraging visitors to spend time and money here in Town, not just pass through on their way somewhere else.

To grow it, the Town should work hand in hand with local businesses and community organizations. That means promoting our events, improving wayfinding and visitor information, strengthening the connections between our downtown destinations, and making our public spaces more welcoming. I have already delivered on this kind of practical improvement. I secured free public Wi-Fi for the downtown corridor, Fireman's Field, and the Tabernacle. That is one small example of something that benefits residents, visitors, and businesses all at once.

Loudoun County brings in more tourism revenue each year than historic Williamsburg. Purcellville needs to be a real part of that, and we have every reason to be. We host wonderful community events like the Wine and Food Festival and the Music and Arts Festival. We are surrounded by wineries and breweries, and we are home to Catoctin Creek Distillery, an internationally acclaimed distillery right in our downtown. We sit at the end of the W&OD Trail, where cyclists and walkers can finish their ride with coffee, a meal, and some shopping in our historic downtown. And we are home to historic Fireman's Field, one of Virginia's treasured old ballparks. We need to capitalize on all of it.

There are also free county resources we are not using to their full potential. Visit Loudoun, the tourism arm of the county government, is right there to help us. What the Town needs is to be more deliberate and focused about what we want to attract and why. Good tourism drives secondary spending, like a family grabbing dinner at a local restaurant after an event. Creating a place that both visitors and locals want to enjoy should be a priority. So should protecting the balance between tourism and the quality of life of the people who live here.

Tourism efforts should be locally driven, fiscally responsible, and designed to fit Purcellville's character rather than overwhelm it. Done thoughtfully, tourism strengthens our economy while preserving the small-town character that makes Purcellville special in the first place.

Resident Question: “Slow growth” is a phrase often used in campaign literature. Define the term, provide examples of “slow growth” or where we have NOT seen “slow growth”, and explain what initiatives you will establish to achieve it.

For years, we have been told that Purcellville is pursuing "slow growth." I believe there is an important difference between slow growth and stagnation, and unfortunately, we have crossed that line.

Slow growth means making thoughtful decisions about development while continuing to support local businesses, invest in infrastructure, and create opportunities for families and entrepreneurs. Stagnation is something very different. It means projects stall, businesses struggle, infrastructure continues to age, and opportunities pass us by.

I believe Purcellville has moved beyond carefully managed growth and into a period of stagnation. Too many opportunities have been missed because we have become so focused on avoiding change that we have stopped asking how to embrace the right opportunities. That approach is not serving our residents, our businesses, or our future.

As your Mayor, I will lead with a balanced approach. I will protect the small-town character that makes Purcellville such a special place to call home while also ensuring we continue to move forward. We can support our local businesses, strengthen our tax base, invest in our roads, parks, water infrastructure, and public safety, and preserve the values that define our community. I would insist on early public engagement, complete impact analyses, adherence to the Comprehensive Plan, clear development conditions, and regular public reporting on infrastructure capacity. I would also oppose data-center or other intensive development that threatens Purcellville's water resources, infrastructure, or quality of life.

Good leadership doesn't force residents to choose between preserving our character and planning for our future. We can do both. Responsible, measured growth is not a threat to our town. It is how we ensure Purcellville remains financially strong, economically vibrant, and a wonderful place to live for generations to come.

Resident Question: “Transparency” is another phrase used in this election’s campaign literature. Define the term, provide examples of “transparency” or examples of actions where we have NOT seen “transparency”, and explain what initiatives you will establish to achieve it.

Transparency means residents can understand what their government is considering, why it is considering it, what information is being used, and how elected officials reach their decisions. It requires more than technically complying with notice requirements. Information must be timely, accessible, and presented before decisions are effectively made.

Purcellville has not met that standard when major motions are introduced without meaningful notice, agenda items change at the last minute, significant personnel actions occur without a

clear public process, or residents are asked to react after a decision is already underway such as when the council majority hired multiple new interim town managers without interviews or attempted to defund the police.

As Mayor, I would support earlier publication of materials, plain-language summaries of major proposals, clear explanations of fiscal impacts, consistent opportunities for public input, and follow-up reporting on major votes and projects. I would also work to make Council meetings more orderly and understandable so residents can follow both the decision and the reasoning behind it. Citizens deserve access to their town leadership. I love the idea of hosting *Coffee with the Mayor* meet ups, citizen input sessions for important changes to town policies or new projects, and citizen information and listening forums. The town needs to do a better job of bi-directional engagement whether through social media, or in-depth informational newsletters on a more regular basis. Residents shouldn't have to wonder how to reach their Mayor. Open communication should be a normal part of local government, not the exception.

The government should be transparent and clear, especially in small towns. Policy decisions here impact our citizens day to day life, property tax, utility rates, trash collection. All decisions should be made thoughtfully, explained in full to our citizens on the why, and implemented with long term sustainability being the goal. Citizen engagement and clear communication will help bring back public trust in our town's government and that is paramount for us to heal from the turmoil of the last few years. Transparency isn't simply about sharing information. It's about earning and keeping the public's trust every single day

Resident Question: Data centers and high voltage transmission lines are a hot topic in Loudoun County right now. Please provide any commentary you may have on the issue.

I oppose data-center development in Purcellville and Western Loudoun period. They threaten Purcellville's water resources, infrastructure, environment, or quality of life. Data centers and the transmission infrastructure that serves them can create impacts far beyond the boundaries of an individual project, including demands on power and water, industrial-scale land use, noise, visual impacts, and pressure for major transmission lines.

Although many siting decisions occur at the county, regional, or state level, Purcellville must actively advocate for the interests of Town residents. The Town should evaluate potential impacts on our water supply and utility systems, coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions, participate early in relevant public processes, and communicate clearly with residents. Purcellville should not accept risks to its long-term water security or small-town character in exchange for benefits that primarily accrue elsewhere.

Please feel free to add any additional comments or discussion you would like to include:

Purcellville is an extraordinary community, and I am optimistic about what we can accomplish together. The next Mayor and Town Council will face important challenges, including strengthening public safety, investing in aging infrastructure, supporting our local businesses, restoring fiscal responsibility, and rebuilding trust in our local government.

I am running for Mayor because I believe Purcellville deserves experienced, steady leadership that listens, prepares, and brings people together. I will always do my homework, make decisions based on facts, explain my reasoning, and welcome meaningful input from residents. While not every decision will be easy or unanimous, every decision should be made with transparency, respect, and the long-term interests of our community at heart.

Our town needs stability and balance. After five Town Managers in five years, costly turnover, wasted taxpayer dollars, and decisions that have created long-term financial and operational challenges, it is time to restore a culture of collaboration and professionalism. As Mayor, I will work with every member of Council, our dedicated staff, and our community to lower the temperature, rebuild relationships, and create a positive environment where good ideas can succeed regardless of who brings them forward.

My family chose Purcellville because of its unique character, its strong sense of community, and the exceptional quality of life it offers. I want future generations to have those same opportunities. We can preserve what makes Purcellville special while embracing responsible progress that strengthens our economy, protects our small-town character, and ensures our town remains a place where families thrive, businesses succeed, and people are proud to live, work, visit, and invest.

That is the future I am committed to building, and I would be honored to earn your trust and your vote for Mayor.