



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

## 2025 DRAFT Community & Economic Development Policy Statement

Community and economic development are essential elements for the vitality of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Diverse communities and neighborhoods are critically important to the health of Virginia’s local governments. VML supports legislation to encourage state and local cooperation efforts that promote the diversity of and safety of all populations, that encourage the maintenance and protection of property in neighborhoods, and that improve the livability of Virginia’s cities, towns, and counties. This includes improving the environment and quality of life in our localities.

VML urges the state to partner with localities to develop, share, and carry out the state economic development strategic plan. Local governments are also encouraged to work together in regional efforts to improve the quality of life and take advantage of economic development opportunities. State support should be included in regional efforts in collaboration with local elected officials.

Incentive programs, such as GO Virginia, Opportunity Zones, the Commonwealth’s Opportunity Fund, and the Virginia Enterprise Zone Program are important economic development tools, particularly in a challenging economy. All parties benefit when the state works cohesively with local governments to ensure that economic development efforts focus on improving opportunities and sustainability. This cooperation includes technical assistance from the state and coordination on site acquisition and development. VML supports clarification on criteria for grant programs especially regarding fiscal health and/or economically distressed localities. Grant programs must consider the totality of the circumstance of a local government’s fiscal health.

Efforts that we deem appropriate include grants and state tax incentives and efforts to assist minority, veteran-owned and women-owned businesses. The state should strive to fully fund programs that strengthen local governments’ commercial and industrial tax bases to reduce pressure on the residential real estate tax base.

VML encourages the state to engage localities very early in the process when assisting with economic development prospects so that localities can better prepare for potential impacts. Site Readiness and Certified Economic Development Sites are important to localities and assistance from the State is encouraged to prepare these sites.

### PLANNING AND LAND USE

39 VML encourages the Governor and General Assembly to expand local authority and land use  
40 management tools provided in the state code to ensure that the policies of the Commonwealth  
41 and localities encourage and support healthy cities and towns. Localities should have the  
42 flexibility to encourage mixed use and inclusive communities along with varying densities. The  
43 policies of the Commonwealth should support sustainable growth in and around urban centers to  
44 help local governments create more livable, environmentally responsible communities, thus  
45 reducing the environmental impact of growth. In addition, policies should alleviate  
46 transportation funding problems for the Commonwealth and should promote transportation  
47 priorities to promote public transportation modes as well as pedestrian and bicycle  
48 transportation. VML supports multi-modal transportation options for regions and localities with  
49 local input on access to multi-modal facilities.

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51 Planning and land use control are two of local government's most important functions.  
52 Localities must maintain control of local land use decisions. Neither the state nor federal  
53 governments should usurp or pre-empt a locality's power to make such decisions or impose  
54 processes that weaken planning and land use functions. This includes home businesses and other  
55 activities that may put one individual's property rights into conflict with another's. The General  
56 Assembly should allow local governments to exercise land use authority in the manner that the  
57 local government deems appropriate for its circumstances. Coordination of local land use  
58 planning, [the availability of public water and wastewater](#) and transportation planning improves  
59 the ability of all levels of government to deal with and manage growth-related issues the  
60 Commonwealth faces in the long-term.

61  
62 All localities should be guided by their comprehensive plan for future development. However,  
63 VML encourages a review of the components of the comprehensive plan to ensure that they are  
64 both necessary and include only essential functions of local government. State agencies should  
65 be required to comply with local comprehensive plans and local land use regulations and  
66 policies. VML opposes any additional legislation that would exempt religious organizations or  
67 provide special entitlements to individuals and industries from neutral, generally applicable local  
68 ordinances, and in particular, local zoning and public safety ordinances.

69  
70 The General Assembly should enhance local government's ability to plan for future growth by  
71 authorizing a complete spectrum of land use and growth management tools and should allow and  
72 provide localities more creative, locally initiated planning and land use mechanisms.

73  
74 When a county's transfer of development rights program includes lands adjacent to a city or  
75 town, the General Assembly should provide the municipality with the authority necessary to  
76 fully participate in the decisions on transferring such rights when it is determined by the  
77 municipality that the land-use change will impact its citizens.

78  
79 VML supports the state's exploration of sustainable development, provided there is not an effort  
80 to supplant the authority of local governments to determine their own land use policies and  
81 encourages the consideration of incentives for localities to implement sustainable development  
82 approaches.

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84 VML supports enhanced redevelopment opportunities through the adoption of an urban policy  
85 for the commonwealth, and implementation of growth management policies that encourage  
86 growth and economic development in urban areas.

87

88 VML supports the position that the vested rights law is prospective only and that local  
89 governments have the authority to amend zoning ordinances in the future.

90

91 The law on nonconforming uses and structures must be maintained. The desires of a single  
92 property owner should not outweigh the interests of the neighbors, who benefit from properties  
93 coming into conformance with the zoning ordinance over time through the effects of the law on  
94 nonconformity.

95

96 The General Assembly should not enact any legislation, under the name of private property  
97 protection law, that seeks to weaken local powers to regulate land uses or that requires additional  
98 compensation beyond judicial interpretation of the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution  
99 and Article I, section II of the Virginia Constitution.

100

#### 101 **ZONING INCENTIVES FOR IN-FILL DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT**

102 The state code should continue to ensure that local governments have a full range of authority to  
103 promote affordable and mixed income housing, including authority to facilitate in-fill  
104 development, redevelopment, and mixing of uses in redevelopment projects. Therefore, the Code  
105 of Virginia must not be changed to limit local governments' authority to enact land use  
106 regulations for the benefit of all citizens of a locality. ~~VML supports all localities having the  
107 authority to establish a community revitalization fund for the purpose of preventing  
108 neighborhood deterioration.~~

109

#### 110 **VARIANCES, SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS & CONDITIONAL USE PERMITS**

111 VML maintains that the law on variances should be retained in its current form. Because land  
112 use is controlled at the local level, the General Assembly should not require or dictate any  
113 specific procedures for special exceptions, conditional use permits or similar land use decisions.

114

#### 115 **HOUSING**

116 VML urges state and local governing bodies to develop and maintain a balanced housing mix,  
117 including affordable and workforce housing. This balance should be determined by a locality, as  
118 local officials are in the best position to determine that mixture. Local governments must be  
119 fully involved in the decisions on the placement of affordable and workforce housing in their  
120 jurisdictions. Procedures involving the granting of tax credits for projects must involve local  
121 governing bodies. VML supports state funding for affordable and workforce housing while  
122 working with local governments to encourage the development of mixed income development  
123 and redevelopment, coupled with support for mixed use projects. In addition, all affordable  
124 housing tools in the Virginia Code should be available to all localities.

125

126 Any locality that issues a Section 8 housing certificate should have housing available in the  
127 jurisdiction for the certificate's holder, to prevent persons who are granted Section 8 certificates  
128 from having to leave their home jurisdiction in order to find housing.

129

130 VML supports the Commonwealth enacting policies that allow persons with a prior felony  
131 conviction to have the ability to acquire housing. This could include a model criminal history  
132 screening policy or other methods that would support the reduction of homelessness.

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134 **SHORT TERM RENTALS**

135 The authority to regulate short term rentals should be maintained at the local level. VML  
136 supports ensuring that there is no erosion of local authority and that there are robust registry rules  
137 for enforcement and tax collection purposes.

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139 **HOUSING OPTIONS TO INCLUDE MANUFACTURED HOUSING, TINY HOUSES,  
140 ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS, ETC.**

141 Local governments must retain the authority to plan for the appropriate mix of residential  
142 structures in their communities and must retain full authority to regulate the placement of all  
143 types of housing without state intervention. New housing options must be explored in our efforts  
144 to increase the housing stock.

145  
146 Accessory dwelling units should not be mandated; local governments must retain the authority to  
147 regulate them.

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149 **BLIGHT AND NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION**

150 The General Assembly should strengthen the authority of localities along with providing  
151 funding opportunities to manage and reduce blight. This could be done through empowering  
152 localities' flexibility with building permits issued for repairs or renovation. There are many  
153 methods that could be considered to empower local governments including but not limited to:

- 154  
155 a) the requirement of timely completion of the work,  
156 b) filing a legitimate plan by the owner, diligently pursued, to complete the work,  
157 c) authorizing local government action to correct the health and public safety problems  
158 created by incomplete work and to either seize available assets of the owner and use them  
159 to fund corrective action or impose high fees that would recover the locality's costs on a  
160 priority basis.

161  
162 This would be similar to the localities' powers for retrieving unpaid taxes.

163  
164 Further, we would like the definition of derelict building to be expanded to include buildings that  
165 are not completed to the Code of Virginia Sec. 15-2.907.1. ~~VML supports additional authority to~~  
166 ~~deal with blight in both residential and commercial properties including the authority for all~~  
167 ~~localities to create a vacant building registry~~

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169 VML supports strengthening the minimum property maintenance code which is optional for local  
170 governments to adopt.

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172 **RESPONSIBLE GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

173 Current state land use authority is often inadequate to allow local governments to provide the  
174 infrastructure and services for growth in a manner that protects and improves the quality of life  
175 in our communities. The General Assembly should authorize local governments to implement

176 growth management policies including impact fees in order to enable localities to facilitate  
177 orderly, rational growth in a manner appropriate to their communities. The authority to impose  
178 impact fees should include calculations for the cost of all public infrastructure, including local  
179 transportation, transit, and school construction costs, caused by growth. Until a comprehensive  
180 impact fee system is authorized, all localities should retain full authority for conditional zoning  
181 to meet the needs of new citizens for public infrastructure.

182  
183 The General Assembly should take all steps needed to assist towns and cities to work with the  
184 surrounding counties to promote growth in patterns that help the vitality of the municipalities.  
185 Any change must not shift the burden of paying for new infrastructure to existing citizens  
186 through increased real estate taxes.

187  
188 VML supports the ability of localities to prepare for the closure of state facilities and supports  
189 the state providing ample notice to localities of proposed closures and the loss of jobs. Further,  
190 facilities being closed should not be left in a state of disrepair or blight, further impacting the  
191 surrounding community.

### 192 **DESIGN FOR ALL CITIZENS**

194 As life expectancy rises and as the number of citizens with significant physical disabilities and  
195 limitations is increasing, Virginia's local governments recognize that man-made environments  
196 must be made accessible to and inclusive of all citizens, whether aging, disabled, homeless or  
197 facing other limitations. Therefore, the state's laws, regulations and policies must serve to  
198 increase accessibility for the aged, disabled, and homeless populations. Such laws, regulations  
199 and policies that do not assist in reaching these goals should be amended or repealed.

200  
201 Building codes should be amended to help achieve these goals in new and existing construction.  
202 Further, state laws, regulations and policies must be amended, to give local governments full  
203 authority to provide accessible private and public infrastructure.

### 204 **EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

206 VML supports institutes of higher education complying with local land use and being a good  
207 neighbor. For localities to have a strong and diversified economic base, education of all types is  
208 desired, including two-year and four-year programs. In addition, VML supports all programs  
209 which encourage persons to enter the workforce such as apprenticeship programs, certificate  
210 programs or on-the-job training. Encouraging all types of education will attract new business  
211 and allow existing businesses to compete effectively.

### 212 **TRANSPORTATION**

214 Localities need greater input on how changes to VDOT managed infrastructure affect localities  
215 as well as input on priorities for addressing infrastructure issues.

### 216 **PRESERVATION OF RIGHTS-OF-WAY**

218 Road projects take many years from the planning stage to construction. Often localities need to  
219 reserve miles of rights-of-way years in advance of any funding availability for these projects, or  
220 risk development in the path of these road projects. Localities need tools to enable them to  
221 reserve rights-of-way for longer periods of time. While current law allows reservation, localities

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222 are often unable to provide the upfront funding needed to purchase these rights-of-way in the  
223 allotted timeframe.

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