

VIRGINIA

TOWN & CITY

The magazine of the
Virginia Municipal League

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What's the buzz?

Historic downtown Bristol

Also inside: 2014 VML Achievement Awards



Driving Distracted?

Driving distracted means you're missing half of the picture. Even drivers using hands-free cellphones are cognitively distracted. April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month. Are your drivers informed in the dangers of driving distracted?

VML Insurance Programs is dedicated to creating safer drivers in Virginia through the Where the Rubber Meets the Road (WTRMTR) campaign. More than 22,000 VMLIP member drivers have been trained in defensive driving through this program. Learn more at www.vmlins.org or by calling 800-963-6800.





About the cover

When it comes to providing an exemplary downtown experience, it's going to be hard to beat what Bristol has in store for visitors. Photograph by Malcolm J. Wilson.

Features

What's the buzz about Bristol?

Within the next 18 months, the opening of both a museum and a boutique hotel will increase the number of visitors to Bristol's historic downtown district, adding to what can best be described as a burgeoning buzz about the city.

By Jennifer Molley Wilson

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A little secret worth remembering: The image of a community is fundamentally important to its economic well-being



There are more than 25,000 incorporated communities in America, but how many of them are truly successful? How is it that some small towns and rust belt cities are prospering, while many others are suffering disinvestment, loss of identity and even abandonment? How can communities, both big and small, grow without losing their heart and soul? One of the country's leading experts on the topic has some answers.

By Edward T. McMahon

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Turning your organization into a talent magnet

The composition of today's workforce is changing dramatically, with seasoned, talented professionals leaving their jobs, taking significant amounts of institutional knowledge with them. At the same time, the public sector's traditional ways of attracting and retaining top-flight talent are not always effective, and can be seen as antiquated by younger job seekers. As a result, jurisdictions are increasingly pursuing a more focused approach to strengthening their employer brand, working to entice and retain talent.

By Patrick Ibarra

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Call for entries: 2014 VML Achievement Awards

VML is soliciting entries for its 2014 Achievement Awards program. The deadline for submittals is Friday, May 30. The winners will be featured in the September issue of *Virginia Town & City*. The awards will be presented at the 2014 VML Annual Conference in Roanoke on Tuesday evening, Oct. 7.



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I-64 East: Next stop, Fort Monroe

ON A RECENT sunny Sunday afternoon, the Winn family looked at the map and decided to head out of Richmond toward the water. Now, being from land-locked Kansas, my kids had never seen the ocean or a beach of any kind. They were absolutely giddy as we took off toward Fort Monroe in Hampton.

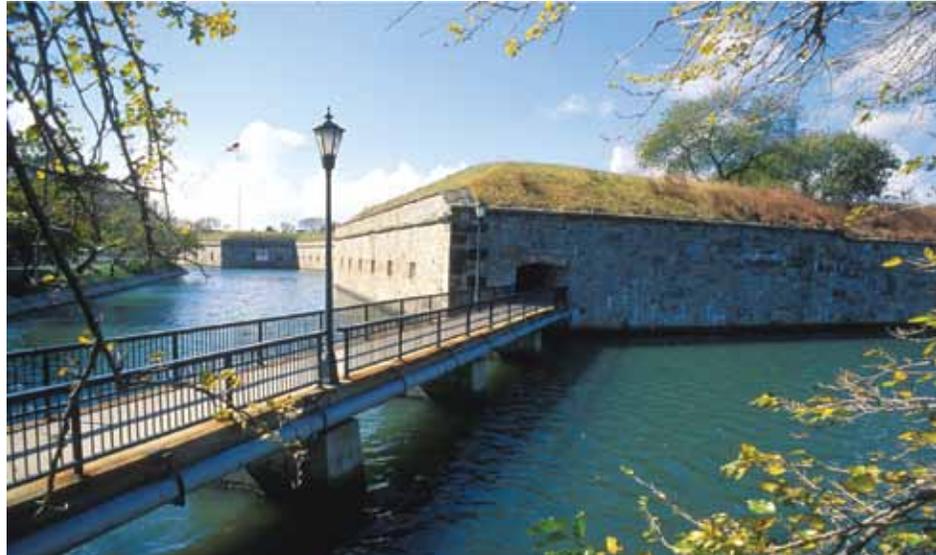
Upon arrival, we stopped at the historic Chamberlain Hotel for a lovely brunch. Quinton, my youngest, gasped and giggled with delight when the waitress pulled back the curtains on the ceiling-to-floor windows. There in front of us was Hampton Roads harbor, a gateway to the Atlantic Ocean, with giant cargo ships, Navy ships of all sizes and sailboats out on the water. Christopher, my oldest, was most excited by the all-you-can-eat fresh seafood. He slurped oysters and ate mussels until he couldn't possibly eat any more.

Founded in 1820 as the Hygeia, the Chamberlain is a historic hotel with a rich history. Perhaps the most famous guest was Edgar Allen Poe, who is said to have recited "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee" on the porch just one month before he died in 1849. The beautiful structure that is the Chamberlain was built on this location in 1920.

Following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the increased security around military bases – including Fort Monroe – ended the Chamberlain's history as a hotel. After significant renovations, the hotel reopened in 2008 as a

senior living community. The two restaurants are open to the public.

After our amazing brunch, we headed out to the beach. Technically speaking, I know that we were not looking at the ocean, but the kids had a ball exploring the sand



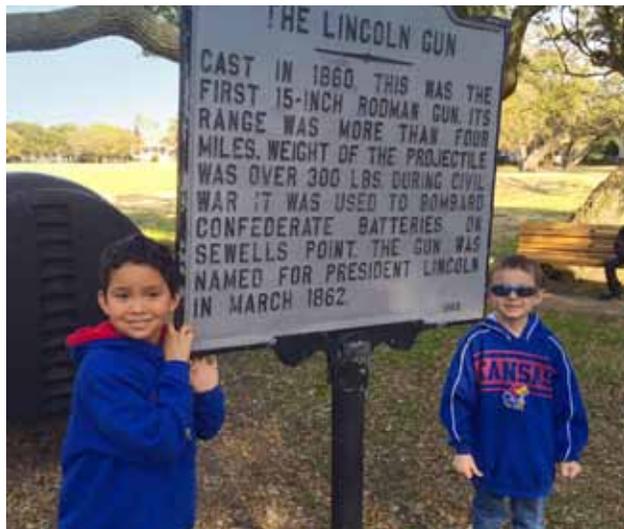
Fort Monroe was constructed of stone following the War of 1812 as part of the United States' coastal defenses.

and picking up a bag full of seashells. They jumped and laughed each time a tiny wave came up over their feet.

After exploring the beach, we headed over to the old fortress, the largest stone fort built in the United States. Fort Monroe was constructed following the War of 1812 and was designed as a critical part of coastal defenses. The fort is situated at Point Comfort, at the mouths of the James and Elizabeth rivers. Its moated walls are as impressive as the large parade ground. Below a large oak stands the 15-inch "Lincoln Gun" that was used to defend the Hampton Roads Channel during the Civil War.

Decommissioned in 2011, Fort Monroe now enjoys national monument status. It is operated by the National Park Service and is home to the Casemate Museum. As you walk through the museum, you walk through the history of Fort Monroe. You will also see the room where Jefferson Davis was held prisoner following the Civil War. It also has an impressive collection related to the Artillery Corps. Fort Monroe and the Casemate Museum are free and open to the public. For more information, go to <http://www.nps.gov/fomr/index.htm>

What started out as an uncertain trip guided by a point on the map turned into a lovely Sunday afternoon filled with great food, amazing history and even some seashells! 



Christopher (l) and Quinton admired the 15-inch "Lincoln Gun" that was used to defend the Hampton Roads Channel during the Civil War

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2 former VML presidents die

TWO FORMER PRESIDENTS of the Virginia Municipal League, Sam Adams and Bill Hartz, died recently.

Samuel Webster Adams III, who served 38½ years on Emporia City Council, 20 of them as mayor, died March 19 of prostate cancer. He was 64.



Samuel Webster Adams III

When Mr. Adams took the oath of office to serve on City Council on July 1, 1974, he was only 24 years old, the youngest council member ever elected in the city. When he learned of the seriousness of his illness, he chose not to run for re-election in 2012.

During his tenure on City Council, Mr. Adams became involved in the affairs of VML. He was active in the league's policy process and served on the Executive Committee. He was president of VML in 1985-1986.

"I don't know of anything that happened here that didn't have his fingerprints on it in some way," said F. Woodrow Harris, the longtime Emporia council member and a former president of VML himself. "He had a huge impact on our little corner of the world."

In addition to his time on the Executive Committee, Mr. Adams also served on the Members Supervisory Board of VML Insurance Programs beginning in the late 1980s.

Mr. Adams was a banker and businessman with substantial real estate holdings in and around Emporia. He was a leader in Emporia-Greensville County economic development.

William "Bill" Rogers Hartz, 77, mayor of the Town of Waverly in Sussex County from 1970-2000, died March 18. He served as VML president in 1991-1992, culminating seven years of service on the Executive Committee. He remained a fixture at the VML Annual Conference, even after his service as mayor and chief executive officer of the town.



William "Bill" Rogers Hartz

As league president, Mr. Hartz stressed the importance of local elected officials communicating with the Executive Committee, VML staff and with each other. His presidency coincided with a shifting of power in the General Assembly.

"There will be new faces and new philosophies. A significant element of the old guard, familiar with us and our work, whom we have come to know over the years, will have departed," Mr. Hartz said in an address to the league membership after becoming president. "If we don't all hang together during this crucial transition, we will most assuredly all hang separately."

Mr. Hartz was a lifelong resident of Waverly. He attended Culver Military Academy, the University of Virginia and served in the U.S. Army.

In addition to his service in local government, Mr. Hartz was a vital member of the Jaycees, serving as president of the Waverly Jaycees, the Virginia Jaycees and as vice president of the United States Jaycees. His was active in civic affairs in and around Waverly throughout his life. 

Jane Seeman dies; was mayor of Vienna



- Seeman -

Longtime Vienna Mayor **M. Jane Seeman** died Feb. 23 of lung cancer. She was diagnosed with the disease last June and had been receiving treatment while continuing to serve as

mayor.

Mrs. Seeman, 76, was first appointed to serve on Town Council in 1996 to fill the unexpired term of her late husband. She was then elected to council for two consecutive terms in 1997 and

1999, and had served as mayor since being elected to the seat in 2000. In December, she announced that she would not seek re-election this May.

In an interview with a local newspaper in January, Mrs. Seeman said that the development of the Town Green, a project hatched by Town Council, was the highlight of her tenure as mayor. Throughout her time on council, she was active in the workings of VML.

Staunton fills development post

Courtland Robinson was hired as assistant director of economic development in Staunton. He worked most re-



- Robinson -

cently for the Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport.

As a graduate assistant with James Madison University, Robinson also served with Harrisonburg - Downtown Renaissance, the Shenandoah Valley Partnership, James Madison University and the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission. He provided research, web and social media support, marketing assistance, policy analysis and grant writing in those positions.

Norfolk taps Homewood for planning position



George Homewood, AICP CFM, was promoted to director of planning and community development in Norfolk Recently. He had served as acting director since November.

- Homewood - Homewood joined the city in 2011 as assistant director of planning and community development. He has more than 20 years in the planning field.

Castrilli accepts Fairfax County post



Tony Castrilli, director of communications and public information for Alexandria since 2008, was named director of the Office of Public Affairs and the chief spokesperson for Fairfax County recently.

Castrilli has nearly two decades of media and public affairs experience in the National Capital Region. In Alexandria, he served as the city's chief spokesperson and led communications strategy for all citywide public information, crisis communications, media relations, digital/social media, customer service, employee communications and community engagement.

Prior to his tenure in Alexandria, Castrilli worked for nine years at WUSA-TV 9 as executive producer of news coverage and managing editor. He also spent two years as managing editor at the NBC affiliate in Buffalo, N.Y. He started his local TV career in the D.C. area in 1992 at NewsChannel 8.

Barr named manager in Town of Occoquan



Kirstyn Barr has been selected as town manager of Occoquan in Prince William County effective April 14. Barr, 31, served for the past four years as the public in-

- Barr -

formation officer for the Town of Vienna in Fairfax County.

Prior to her time in Vienna, Barr served as the community relations and communications specialist for the City of Newport News. She holds a master's degree in public administration from Old Dominion University and is a graduate of the Senior Executive Institute of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia.

Loudoun's Pastor elected AICP Fellow



Loudoun County Director of Planning **Julie Pastor** has been elected to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), one of the highest honors the institute can bestow upon a member.

- Pastor - Pastor was recognized as an exemplary planner who has made significant contributions to the planning community and the profession. As an AICP fellow, she will be involved with mentoring and future advancement of the planning profession.

Pastor has served as planning director in Loudoun County since 1992, during a period of extraordinary growth and change in one of the fastest growing counties in the United States.

Alexandria fills human services position



Alexandria hired **Kate A. Garvey** as director of the Department of Community and Human Services effective Feb. 18. She has more than 20 years of local government experience in the field of health and human services.

- Garvey - Garvey served most recently in Montgomery County, Md., as chief of Youth and Family Services/Social Services director. Prior to her tenure in Montgomery County, she served as executive deputy director for the Allegheny County (Pa.) Department of Human Services. Garvey has extensive skill in community development, early

childhood initiatives, service integration and change management.

Martinsville's Knox is assistant manager now

Martinsville Director of Community Development **Wayne Knox** was promoted to assistant city manager recently.

He will continue overseeing city planning, zoning and housing programs while taking on additional duties. His new combined job title is assistant city manager/director of community development.

Knox, who has managed the community development department since 1995, has overseen community revitalization projects, housing and rental assistance programs and the city zoning and subdivision ordinances. In addition, he has been responsible for numerous special projects.

Bowers names to board of National Civic League



Roanoke Mayor **David Bowers** was appointed to the Board of Directors of the National Civic League recently.

- Bowers - NCL, best known for its All-America City program, has promoted efficient and effective local government since 1894.

Manassas emergency planner honored



Amelia Gagnon, emergency management planner for the City of Manassas, has been named Outstanding New Emergency Management Professional for 2014 by the Virginia Emergency Management Association.

- Gagnon - The award recognizes an emergency management professional who at the time of the annual VEMA conference has served 24 months or less in their position and who during that time has displayed enthusiasm and made specific accomplishments or improvements to the local program.

Manassas cited for social responsibility

The City of Manassas has been awarded a 2014 Communitas Award for Corporate Social Responsibility. The awards are an international effort to recognize exceptional businesses, organizations and individuals who are changing how they do business to benefit their communities.

The City of Manassas Neighborhood Services Division won the award for its work with Manassas City Public Schools with support from the AmeriCorps Vista program. For this program, Kisha Wilson-Sogunro, neighborhood services manager, arranged for business community leaders to volunteer their time at Osbourn High School to mentor students.

The participants addressed issues such as tardiness and absenteeism, the challenges of maintaining a schedule, and the devastating effect that poor decision-making has as it relates to career opportunities. The business leaders shared stories about what helped them move up in life. Over the past year, several teens have landed internships or jobs through the program.

Richmond consolidates permitting process

The City of Richmond has streamlined its building permit process.

The departments of Planning and Development Review, Public Utilities and Public Works have created a “one stop shop” for all permitting needs. The departments have rearranged a room on the first floor of City Hall to better assist customers. Representatives from all three departments can now assist with permits, including gas, water, sewer, encroachment, tree removal, etc. In addition, gas and residential water permits will be processed in a nearby room instead at a facility across town.

Chesapeake debuts new alert system

The City of Chesapeake has launched an upgraded and redesigned system for alerting citizens in cases of emergency and for providing non-emergency information about programs and services on an opt-in basis. The system, called

“Chesapeake Alert,” went live in early February.

Chesapeake Alert registrants will be among the first notified during emergencies. Currently, the system uses publicly-available telephone numbers to deliver messages; however, this does not provide complete coverage nor allow for alternative delivery methods. By registering, citizens can ensure that the city uses their preferred method of communications, including cell, text, home telephone and e-mail. Citizens can also include the preferred order of contact methods and choose to receive alerts for any location in Chesapeake.

A variety of non-emergency notifications related to specific areas, such as road closures, schedule changes, etc., can be requested using the opt-in registration. These allow citizens to select both the types of messages and the methods of delivery they prefer.

The new Chesapeake Alert is powered by Everbridge, a recognized leader in incident notification systems. Everbridge customers include Virginia Tech and the City of Boston.

Chesapeake receives AAA bond rating

Standard & Poor’s (S&P) has raised the City of Chesapeake rating on general obligation bonds to AAA from AA+. This is the city’s second Triple-A rating from a nationally-recognized rating

agency; Fitch has rated the City’s bonds AAA since 2010. Chesapeake also holds a rating of Aa1 from Moody’s.

Standard & Poor’s also raised its rating on the Chesapeake Economic Development Authority’s appropriation debt, supported by the city, to AA+ from AA. In addition, the firm assigned its AAA rating and “stable” outlook to the city’s series 2014A General Obligation Public Improvement refunding bonds and series 2014B taxable General Obligation Water and Sewer refunding bonds.

Newport News cameras catch illegal dumping

The strategic use of Flashcams in Newport News is helping the departments of Public Works and Police crack down on illegal dumping in the city.

Most recently, the city arrested a violator caught on video illegally dumping near a pump station in the north end of the city. The crackdown on illegal dumping is in line with the one of the city’s strategic priorities dealing with community maintenance and renewal.

ELSEWHERE ...

Leesburg Town Council voted unanimously Feb. 25 to name the town’s newest park after former Vice Mayor Mervin Jackson, who died in 2009.

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Culpeper opens dog park



Two years in the making, the dog park will be maintained by the town.

ALMOST TWO YEARS in the making, a new dog park in Culpeper stands as a collaborative success story written by the town and a group of citizens seeking a safe recreational area to allow their dogs to play.

“The Culpeper Dog Park is a great example of local citizens and the town working together to implement a project,” said town Principal Planner Charles Rapp, who played an integral role helping to create the facility.

About two years ago, a group of dog-loving citizens approached the town’s Parks and Recreation Commission about creating the park. While the commission acknowledged the value of having such a park, no money was available to build it. The commission formed a subcommittee to work with the citizens, who were responsible for raising the money necessary to construct the dog park.

In 18 months, a non-profit citizens group – the Culpeper Dog Park – raised about \$12,000. The money was used to pay contractors to install a fence, trash receptacles and nine benches within the park, which is located on one acre donated by the town at Mountain Run Lake. In addition, a resident donated nine trees that were planted inside the fence. The town will maintain the park. 

A large graphic advertisement for the 2014 VML Annual Conference in Roanoke. The background is a night-time aerial view of Roanoke, Virginia, with city lights and light trails from traffic. In the foreground, there is a large blue star with a white center and a red outline. Above the star are the numbers '2 0 1 4'. Below the star is a red banner with the text 'V.M.L.' in white. Underneath the banner, the words 'ANNUAL CONFERENCE' are written in blue, and 'ROANOKE' is written in red. At the bottom left, the text 'Save the dates' is in white, and 'Oct. 5-7' is in a larger white font.

The annual Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion makes Bristol the host city for nationally-known bands who are eager to perform in the city where the "big bang of country music" took place. The three-day festival attracts attendees from all over the country, and abroad, and has been lauded as a top music event by a variety of regional and national sources.



What's the buzz about Bristol?

Musical arts, visual arts and the art of preservation pervade downtown

EMBEDDED WITH BRASS markers and anchored by the historic century-old Bristol sign on one end of town and an iconic 20-foot guitar on the other, the official state line of Virginia and Tennessee runs down the middle of State Street in downtown Bristol.

Within the next 18 months, the opening of both a museum and a boutique hotel will only increase the magnetic pull of visitors through the city's historic downtown district, and will further add to what can best be described as a burgeoning buzz about Bristol.

As twin cities, both Bristols often seem like partners in a three-legged race. If one staggers, both fall. But when it comes to providing an exemplary downtown experience, both sides of the city have displayed an unwavering commitment.

Last December, officials with the City of Bristol, Virginia, and the partners of Creative Boutique Hotels (CBH), announced transformation of an entire city block into a destination hospitality complex centered around a 70-room boutique hotel, The Sessions Hotel.

CBH is a Virginia-based partnership focused on the development of boutique hotels in small markets, and on the repurposing of historic buildings as well as new construction. In addition to the Sessions Hotel, other current boutique hotel projects include the expansion of their existing Craddock Terry Hotel in Lynchburg, and the revitalization and expansion



In preparation of the Mumford & Sons Gentlemen of The Road Stopover, nearly all downtown Bristol businesses rallied behind the Union Jack and welcomed the onslaught of visitors with all things British.



Dozens of events throughout the year provide the opportunity for the community to gather and celebrate as a group. One of those is the much-beloved easter egg hunt that takes place in Cumberland Square Park.

of The John Randolph Hotel in South Boston, among others.

“At one time in America’s history, almost every small town or city had a popular and successful hotel in their downtown,” said Kimberly Christner, a partner with CBH and president and CEO of Cornerstone Hospitality. “We want to bring that dynamic back to life in Bristol. Sessions Hotel will serve as a welcome mat for Bristol, as well as add another layer of interest to the vibrant, downtown community.”

The complex will encompass three historic properties, including an old mill and candy factory. Additional details will dramatically transform the downtown streetscape, such as a courtyard and an arched entry to the hotel parking lot, as well as proposed new retail and residential buildings.

The Sessions Hotel will be a destination hospitality complex, blurring the line between old and new with architectural design and detail relevant to Bristol’s history. In addition to the rooms, amenities include a 2,000-square-foot, full-service spa, restaurant, music stage and green space venues, a roof top garden café and roof top bar.

“The rooftop bar will provide a view of Bristol few have

Points of interest

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, the historic Bristol sign has been a glowing bridge that has served as a visible icon of a city separated by geography, but united in spirit. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is considered one of the earliest and largest electric signs promoting a city slogan. The sign contains 1,332 bulbs and rises 53 feet above the street.

Brass markers (right) are placed all along State Street, designating the Virginia/Tennessee state line. The markers are a popular stop for visitors, who enjoy bragging about standing in two states at once.

Also on the National Register of Historic Places, the historic Train Station was built in 1902. While a group of interested citizens have been working to see the station become a passenger hub once again, it currently serves as a popular venue space for business meetings, weddings and community events.



In 2012, the iconic Bristol Sign went pink for breast cancer awareness. Members of the community were able to sponsor a bulb in memory or support of family members and friends who either battled, or survived breast cancer. Funds raised benefitted cancer research and support in the region. The Pick Pink event marked the first, and only time the bulb colors have ever changed in the century-long history of the sign, and, fittingly, the event culminated with a concert by an all-female line-up of performers.



Bristol was born from the rails. Through the doors of the Bristol Train Station passed visitors, business people, immigrants ... some passing through and taking a portion of Bristol with them to share with the world. Others staying and bringing the ideas, products and workforce to the city that would truly become "A Good Place to Live." Built in 1902, today the Train Station is a popular venue for weddings, meetings and receptions.

seen," Christner said. "The first time we visited, and as we came back for events like Bristol Rhythm and Roots, we all agreed a rooftop bar had to be included in our plans."

It was purely happenstance that first made Bristol a blip on the CBH radar. Partner Hal Craddock visited as a consultant to look at work that was needed at Virginia Intermont College, located a few blocks from downtown.

"Hal came back and said, 'Bristol is a cool city. We need to look at it,'" remembers Christner.

CBH was then hired to conduct a study on another large property in downtown Bristol to determine if it could be developed through a downtown development grant that had been pursued by Believe in Bristol through the Virginia Main Street Program. While that property didn't pan out, Christner feels that their vision can best be built on the property they chose to develop.

"We feel like we do believe in Bristol. We are passionate about the city, and have been since the first time we came," she said. "There is no doubt we got the

best piece of property. Once we develop that end of State Street, we hope some cool residential development will come in and follow our lead."

While demolition at the site is set to begin soon, the goal is to use as much of the historic buildings as possible. According to Christner, this will require some creative thinking. The largest portion of the granary at the mill will be transformed into four guest rooms per floor. The original floor will be kept, and the equipment will be incorporated into the design, including a grain bin in the

ceiling of one of the rooms. All of this is an effort to keep everything authentic to the building. Christner also likes the possibility of having ironworkers convert some of the equipment in the building to repurposed art for the hotel.

“We believe that the history of Bristol should be preserved through the adaptive reuse of buildings,” she added. “We are going to do our best to preserve as much history as we can, by putting some of it to work.”

True to its name, and in honor of its namesake, Christner said The Sessions will be a music-centric facility.

“We plan to have music on both indoor and outside stages,” she said. “Traveling musicians will feel right at home in the music room, which will be soundproof so bands can come in and practice without worrying about disturbing other guests.”

Once the project gets underway, nearly every detail, dream and component in the finished building will be a result of some form of community input. Christner says the project team will include Bristol citizens who will be asked to participate on committees for marketing, services and grounds. Much of the skilled detail work will be done at the hands of local artists and tradespeople.

Additionally, the developers have asked the locals to scour their attics, basements and photo albums for any items that can be linked back to any of the three historic buildings.

“While we most likely won’t be able to make everyone happy, we’ll do our best. We want to be the destination hotel for downtown Bristol and a good community partner,” Christner said. “We want to get as much input as we can, so it will be something everyone is proud of. This is Bristol’s hotel. We are just the stewards of the process.”

The Sessions Hotel is scheduled to open in the summer of 2015.

Just listen to the music of the traffic in the city...

A community’s downtown is its heartbeat and there is a palpable pulse in historic downtown Bristol. It spills out onto the streets from the vibrant live music venues. It is charged from the palette of the extensive art galleries. It’s found on the menu of some of the best locally-owned restaurants in the region, and it’s stocked on the shelves of the unique shops and boutiques that define the city.

Bristol is easily the most walkable

downtown in the region. So much so, that two separate walking tours – one that leads to all the historic landmarks, and the other, the Bristol Sculpture Walking Tour of public art – help direct visitors down State Street and along some interesting side streets.

According to Christina Blevins, executive director of Believe in Bristol, there are 40-plus residential lofts in downtown, varying in both size and amenities. Several are home to downtown business owners who run their retail business on the first floor. Demand is high to live downtown, and there are seldom vacancies. While the waiting list can be long, there is a wide range in price point, so Bristol loft-living is appealing to everyone from college students to business professionals.

In a city where time is measured by musical beats, you would expect to encounter an array of culturally-rich activities. Hundreds of community events throughout the year harness the magic of the stage, the grace of the dance, the twist of a tale or the stroke of an artist’s brush to serve as introduction to Bristol’s multi-dimensional arts environment.

In 2010, the City of Bristol Virginia officially designated Downtown Bristol as an Arts and Entertainment District.



In August 2012, British super group Mumford & Sons chose Bristol as one of its Gentlemen of the Road Stopover Tours, largely based on the city’s unique geography and its importance in musical history as the Birthplace of Country music. Some 17,500 people attended the concert headlined by the British group. Tickets were purchased from all across the U.S. and at least four countries, and the event sold out in a matter of hours. Photo by Capt. Maynard Ratcliff, Bristol, Va., Police Department.

Buzz about Bristol

The district strives to connect people *and the arts* by connecting people *with the arts* through encouraging a lively and healthy social, cultural and economic environment.

The district is home to more than two dozen arts-related businesses and organizations, representing a broad spectrum of all art forms and cultural heritage, including seven art galleries, two theaters, various craft-related stores and numerous places that offer live music. One of the most popular events of the Arts & Entertainment District is the monthly Art D'Vine Gallery Hop, which pairs wine sampling and art throughout each of the featured galleries.

Musicians, scholars and fans worldwide visit Bristol to pay homage to country music's past. The familiar melodies of the historic Bristol Sessions in 1927 still echo through the only city that can celebrate its unique provenance as the official "Birthplace of Country Music" as designated by Congress. Lauded as the "big bang of country music," the sessions launched the careers of Jimmie Rodgers

and the Carter Family, among others.

This August, the Birthplace of Country Music® will tell its story in a new, engaging and interactive way: the Birthplace of Country Music® Museum. This 24,000-square-foot repurposed historic space will tell Bristol's story as the home of the Bristol Sessions through permanent, technology-infused exhibits, a special exhibits gallery, educational programs, multiple film experiences and a theater dedicated exclusively for live, year-round music performances – advancing the story of the living

High above State Street is a community comprised of more than 40 city lofts. These urban dwellers range from college students, to business professionals, to downtown shop owners who enjoy their short commute to work, one flight down.

musical heritage of the Appalachian Mountains and the cultural traditions that sustain it.

During the third weekend in September, the annual Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion brings the celebration of country music back to the street of its



Downtown Bristol is home to seven art galleries, each one imparting its own personality on the city's art scene. The edgy blowfish emporium is noted for its unique collection of eclectic artists, and for its popular Grape Easel painting parties where everyone can channel their inner Dali.

Readin', writin' and another successful adaptive use project

Buzz about Bristol

IN 2012, THE BRISTOL (VA.) SCHOOL Administration launched operations in a new building, a century-old structure that had once been home to Bristol Builder's Supply – Central Warehouse.

The city had acquired the property in the hopes of in hopes of bringing about improvement as an economic development project. Timing and the economy stopped that idea in its tracks, and the building had been languishing in disuse for several years, with no alternative plan for its use.

Realizing that the school administration was into a months-long search for solution to a dire need for operational space, the City of Bristol (Va.) offered to lease the warehouse to the school system for \$1 a year, and then found an interest-free way to finance the renovation so taxpayers saved as well.

In addition to office space, the 36,000 square foot facility features a 240-seat auditorium available for public use, and a technology-forward conference room that can accommodate 20.

The décor in the facility is nearly museum-quality, and is a point of interest to visitors to the city who are interested in learning more about the building itself, or the history of education in Bristol. Lining the walls are glimpses into decades of school life in Bristol.

The remodeled building now forms part of the downtown municipal campus, making a real statement about what can be done with such structures.



A partnership between the city and the school system allowed leaders to use creative solutions to parlay a once-blighted building into an impressive community-use facility.

birth. The nationally-recognized event commands an audience of more than 40,000 for the three-day festival, and features top-tier performers, as well as provides a showcase for up and coming regional talent. Countless musicians – on stages, on side streets or gathered in corners – help welcome the music-hungry crowds that arrive from across the country and around the globe to revel in country music's past, as a portal to its future.

In warmer months, live music can be found virtually any night of the week. From informal gatherings to summer concert series, to an abundance of stages in parks, restaurants and pubs, pick a genre, and then allow your ears to lead you. Bristol is one of seven major venues along Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, The Crooked Road.

Heads in beds

But when exactly was the Bristol buzz born? Matt Bolas, executive director of the Bristol Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the Bristol "buzz" became audible in the late 1990s, and was directly related to a combination of events and dining.

"We began seeing people coming in from out of town to eat in our restaurants. On weekends and nights it was impossible to get a table," Bolas said. The next wave of development, he said, was the arrival of eclectic retail shops, which helped to further bolster the city's status as a retail destination.

Over the passing decades, the city has embraced more shops, restaurants and entertainment events, all of which has been added to the big melting pot of the Bristol experience. And it is precisely that experience people want to

add to their travel portfolio.

"More than 300,000 people visit downtown annually," Bolas said. "Outside of Bristol Motor Speedway, downtown is the number one visited attraction during Bristol's two NASCAR races. Above that, we expect the Birthplace of Country music museum to bring in an additional 75,000 each year. That's significant," he added.

According to Bolas, he is seeing a growing interest in Bristol from travel writers and tour operators from the United States and abroad. The Bristol Convention and Visitors Bureau actively courts these two key audiences. And, "courts" is the appropriate terminology, because it's all about relationship building.

"We may host a travel writer, or a tour operator, and not see any result from the visit for maybe a year or so," he explained.

Nonetheless, the bureau brings dozens of these influential travel experts to the city annually, and the result has been positive press and blog posts from coast to coast, and around the world.

And it's not all about the tourism. The Bristol Chamber of Commerce reports an increase in calls requesting information about opening businesses in Bristol.

"Everybody wants to be downtown," Bolas said. "The fact that there are very few vacancies in downtown lofts is a great gauge. People want to be a part of that dynamic 24/7."

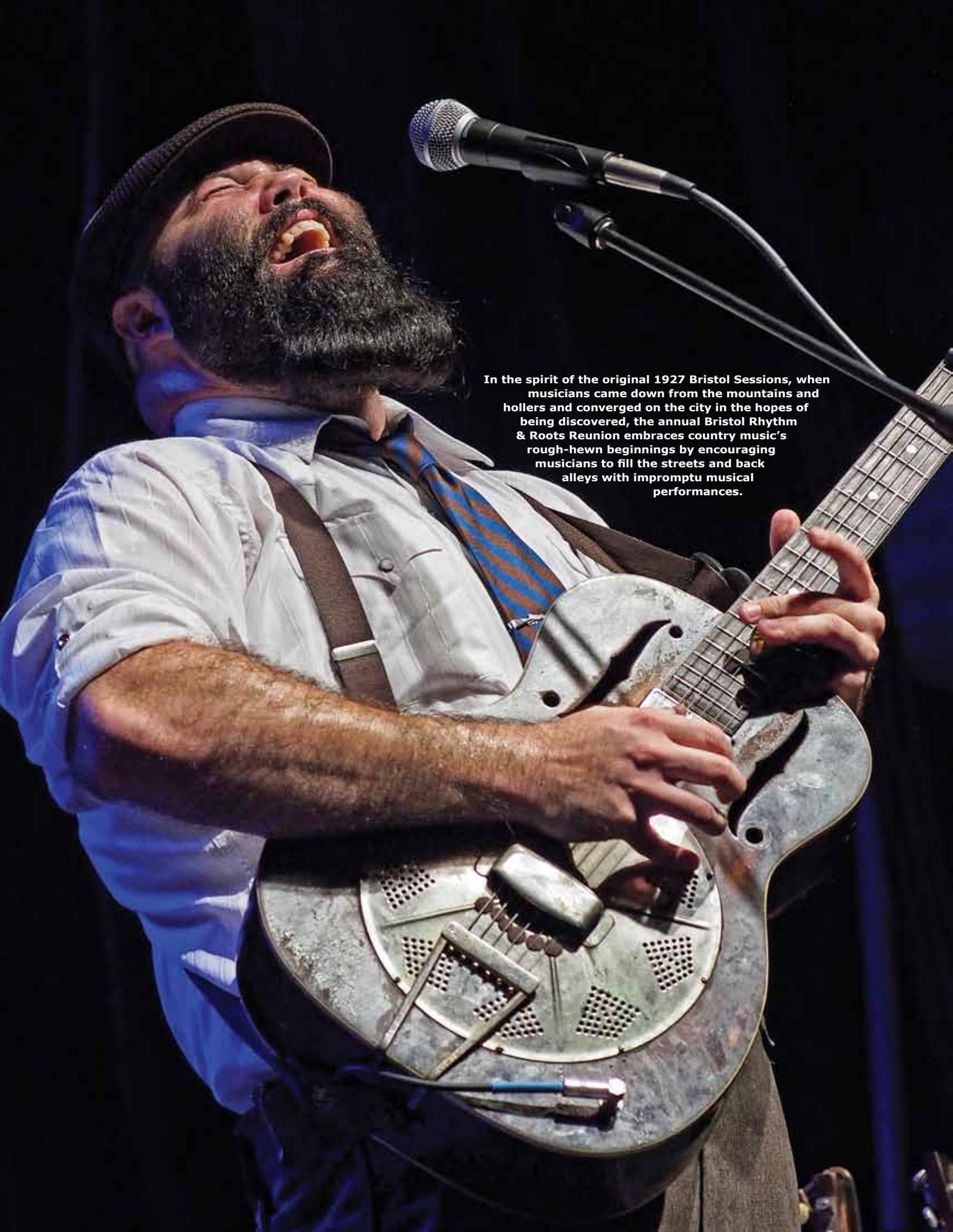
With the addition of the Sessions Hotel, it seems the one piece that was preventing downtown Bristol from being whole has finally fallen into place.

"For years the number one request we heard was the need for a downtown hotel. It's especially important for the lucrative corporate travel market," Bolas said.

"The next three to five years, tourism in Bristol is going to be very interesting," Bolas added. "We have the groundwork, we have infrastructure and we definitely have the product. Now, it's just a matter of our community coming together to offer a very live tourism experience." 

About the author

Jennifer Molley Wilson is the public information official for the City of Bristol.



In the spirit of the original 1927 Bristol Sessions, when musicians came down from the mountains and hollers and converged on the city in the hopes of being discovered, the annual Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion embraces country music's rough-hewn beginnings by encouraging musicians to fill the streets and back alleys with impromptu musical performances.



Where time is measured by musical beats ...

Classic cars and a good burger are a dynamic combination. In Bristol, the Burger Bar claims the distinction of being the last known location where country music giant Hank Williams was last seen alive. Legend says he and his driver stopped at the Bristol restaurant on their way to that fateful West Virginia concert date in 1953, where the singer was dead upon arrival. It is important to note he didn't eat there, so you should feel comfortable ordering anything off their nostalgic menu.



During special events in Bristol, the streets are filled with an array of arts and artists, creating a vibrant and colorful streetscape.



Final preparations are being made in advance of the August opening of the Smithsonian-affiliated Birthplace of Country Music Museum. Tourism officials predict this attraction will draw an additional 75,000 visitors to the city annually.

A little secret worth remembering

The image of a community is fundamentally important to its economic well-being

THERE ARE MORE than 25,000 incorporated communities in America. How many of these are truly successful? How is it that some small towns and rust belt cities are prospering, while many others are suffering disinvestment, loss of identity and even abandonment? Why are some communities able to maintain their historic character and quality of life in the face of a rapidly changing world, while others have lost the very features that once gave them distinction and appeal? How can communities, both big and small, grow without losing their heart and soul?

From coast to coast, communities are struggling to answer these questions. After working in hundreds of communities in all regions of the country, I have come to some conclusions about why some communities succeed and others fail. There are many communities that have found ways to retain their small town values, historic character, scenic beauty and sense of community, yet sustain a prosperous economy. And they've done it without accepting the kind of

cookie-cutter development that has turned many communities into faceless places that young people flee, tourists avoid and which no longer instill a sense of pride in residents.

Every "successful" community has its own strengths and weaknesses, but they all share some common characteristics. It's clear for instance that successful communities involve a broad cross-section of residents in determining and planning the future.

They also capitalize on their distinctive assets – their architecture, history, natural surroundings, and home grown businesses – rather than trying to adopt a new and different identity.

Most successful communities also utilize a variety of private sector and market incentives to influence their development, instead of relying solely on government regulations. Not every, successful community displays all of the following characteristics, but most have made use of at least three or four:

- Have a vision for the future.

- Inventory community assets.
- Use education and incentives, not just regulation.
- Pick and choose among development projects.
- Cooperate with neighbors for mutual benefit.
- Pay attention to community aesthetics.
- Have strong leaders and committed citizens.

Have a vision for the future

Successful communities always have a plan for the future. Unfortunately, "planning" is a dirty word in some communities, especially in small towns and rural areas. In some places, this is the result of today's highly polarized political culture. In other places, it results from a misunderstanding of planning and its value. The truth is, failing to plan simply means planning to fail. It is difficult to name any successful individual, organization, corporation or community that doesn't plan for the future.



Rendering of a Walmart in Washington, D.C., is proof that retailers and developers will adapt to community standards.

Try to imagine a company that didn't have a business plan. It would have a very hard time attracting investors or staying competitive in the marketplace. The same is true of communities. A community plan is simply a blueprint for the future. People may differ on how to achieve the community's vision, but without a blueprint, a community will flounder.

Understandably, people in small towns don't like change. But change is inevitable. Technology, the economy, demographics, population growth, market trends and consumer attitudes are always changing, and they will affect a community whether people like it or not.

There are really only two kinds of change in the world today: planned change and unplanned change. Communities can grow by choice or chance. Abraham Lincoln used to say that "the best way to predict the future is to create it yourself." Communities with a vision for the future will always be more successful than communities that just accept whatever comes along.

Inventory community assets

Creating a vision for the future begins by inventorying a community's assets: natural, architectural, human, educational, economic and so on.

Twenty-first century economic development focuses on what a community has, rather than what it doesn't have. Too many cities and towns spend all their time and money on business recruitment. They build an industrial park out by the airport and then they try like crazy to attract a plant, factory or distribution center to move there. The few communities that are "successful" at this strategy usually accomplish it by giving away the store.

The old economic development paradigm was about cheap land, cheap gas and cheap labor. It was about shotgun recruitment and low cost positioning. In the old economy, the most important infrastructure investment was roads. Today, successful economic development is about laser recruitment and high value positioning. Today, highly trained talent is more important than cheap labor and investing in education is far more valuable than widening the highway.

American communities are littered with projects that were sold as a "silver bullet" solution to a city's economic woes: the New Jersey State Aquarium in Cam-

den, New Jersey; Vision Land Amusement Park in Birmingham, Alabama; the Galleria Mall in Worcester, Massachusetts; the Winter Garden in Niagara Falls, New York – to name just a few.

Too many communities think that economic revival is about the one big thing. Whether it is a convention center, a casino, a festival marketplace, a sports arena, or an aquarium, city after city has followed the copycat logic of competition. If your city has a big convention center, my city needs an even bigger one. Festival marketplaces worked fine in cities like Boston and Baltimore, but similar projects went bankrupt in Toledo, Richmond and a dozen other communities [including Norfolk].

Successful economic development is rarely about the one big thing. More likely, it is about lots of little things working synergistically together in a plan that makes sense. In her award winning book – *The Living City* – author Roberta Brandes Gratz says that "successful cities think small in a big way."

Two examples of this are Silver Spring, Md., and Cleveland. Cleveland had an aging, undersized convention center. Civic boosters argued for a huge new convention center that could compete with much bigger cities like Chicago, Atlanta or Minneapolis. But small cities like Cleveland will never win in an arms race to build the biggest convention center.

Instead, Cleveland took a look at its assets, one of which is the Cleveland Clinic – a world renowned medical center located a short distance from downtown. Instead of trying to compete with every other convention city, Cleveland decided to build a smaller, less expensive meeting facility – the Cleveland Medical Mart and Global Center for Health Innovation – focused on medical conventions, and which would have an attached medical mart affiliated with the Cleveland Clinic.

Another example of asset-based economic development is Silver Spring, Md. For many years, Silver Spring was among the largest suburban commercial centers in the Mid-Atlantic region. But, by the early 1990's, Silver Spring had fallen on hard times. In 1996, a story in the *Economist* said, "You can see America wilting in downtown Silver

Spring. Old office blocks stand empty. A grand art deco theater is frequented only by ghosts. Glitzy department stores have decamped to out-of-town shopping malls. Tattoo parlors, pawnbrokers and discounters remain."

To combat this decline, local officials and an out-of-town developer proposed to build a second Mall of America (like the one in Bloomington, Minn.). The proposed mega-mall would have 800 stores and it would cover 27 acres. The projected cost was \$800 million and it would require a \$200 million public subsidy. It would also mean the demolition of most of downtown Silver Spring's existing buildings.

So what happened? The county rejected the massive American Dream Mall and set its sights on a succession of more modest developments. First, they realized that despite its decline, Silver Spring had some important assets that were probably more valuable than a giant mega-mall. First, Silver Spring was adjacent to Washington, D.C., the nation's capital. Second, it was served by transit (i.e. the Washington Metro system), and third, it was surrounded by stable middle-class neighborhoods.

Rather than spending \$200 million subsidizing a giant mall, county and state officials collaborated to find a site for the new headquarters for the Discovery Communications Corp, which was then housed in several different locations around the Washington area.

The site where Discovery Communications decided to build its new headquarters was adjacent to the Silver Spring Metro Station. Bringing 1,500 employees to downtown Silver Spring was a huge boost to the community, but what really synergized the renewal was Discovery Corp's agreement not to build a cafeteria in its new headquarters building. This meant employees would have to patronize local restaurants.

Use education and incentives – not just regulation

Successful communities use education, incentives, partnerships and voluntary initiatives – not just regulation. To be sure, land use regulations and ordinances are essential to protecting public health and to setting minimum

standards of conduct in a community.

Regulations prevent the worst in development, but they rarely bring out the best. Regulations are also subject to shifting political winds. Often one county commission or town council will enact tough regulations only to see them repealed or weakened by a future town council or commission with a different ideology or viewpoint.

If regulations aren't the entire answer, how can a community encourage new development that is in harmony with local aspirations and values?

Communities need to use carrots, not just sticks. They also need to use education, partnerships and voluntary initiatives. Successful communities have identified a variety of creative ways to influence the development process outside of the regulatory process. Some of the incentives they use include: conservation easements; purchase of development rights; expedited permit review; tax abatements that promote the rehabilitation of historic buildings; award and recognition programs; density bonuses for saving open space; and other techniques.

In Staunton, Virginia, the Historic Staunton Foundation offered free design assistance to any downtown business owner who would restore the façade of their building. They did this after the city council had rejected a measure to create an historic district in downtown Staunton. At first, only one business owner took advantage of the incentive, but then a second business owner restored his building facade, and then a third, and then many more. Today, there are five historic districts in Staunton, including the entire downtown, but it all began with an incentive.

Successful communities also use education to encourage voluntary action by citizens. Why do cities and towns need to use education? Because education reduces the need for regulation.

Also, because people and businesses will not embrace what they don't understand. Finally, community education is important because, citizens have a right to choose the future, but they need to know what the choices are.

Pick and choose among development projects

All development is not created equal. Some development projects will make a

community a better place to live, work and visit. Other development projects will not.

The biggest impediment to better development in many communities is a fear of saying "no" to anything. In my experience, communities that will not say no to anything will get the worst of everything.

The proof is everywhere – communities that set low standards or no standards will compete to the bottom. On the other hand, communities that set high standards will compete to the top. This is because they know that if they say no to bad development they will always get better development in its place.

Too many elected officials have an "it'll do" attitude toward new development. Worse yet, they'll accept anything that comes down the pike, even if the proposed project is completely at odds with the community's well thought out vision for the future.

They are simply afraid to place any demands on a developer for fear that the developer will walk away if the community asks for too much. This is especially true when dealing with out of town developers or with national chain stores and franchises.

The bottom line for most developers, especially chain stores and franchises, is securing access to profitable trade areas.

They evaluate locations based on their economic potential. If they are asked to address local design, historic preservation, site planning or architectural concerns they will usually do so.

Bob Gibbs, one of America's leading development consultants, says that "when a chain store developer comes to town they generally have three designs (A, B, or C) ranging from "Anywhere, USA" to Unique (sensitive to local character). Which one gets built depends heavily upon how much push back the company gets from local residents and officials about design and its importance."

One community that has asked chain stores and franchises to fit-in is Davidson, N.C. Chain drugstores, like CVS, Rite Aid and Walgreens are proliferating across the country. They like to build featureless, single-story buildings on downtown corners, usually surrounded by parking – often after one or more historic buildings have been de-

molished. This is what CVS proposed in Davidson.

The town could have easily accepted the cookie cutter design (Plan A), but instead it insisted on a two-story brick building, pulled to the corner with parking in the rear. CVS protested, but at the end of the day they built what the town wanted because they recognized the economic value of being in a profitable location.

The lesson learned is that successful communities have high expectations. They know that community identity is more important than corporate design policy.

Cooperate with neighbors for mutual benefit

Historically, elected officials have tended to view neighboring communities, the county government, and even the managers of adjacent national parks or other public lands as adversaries rather than allies. Some community leaders see economic development as a "zero-sum" game: if you win, I lose.

Successful communities know that today's world requires cooperation for mutual benefit. They know that the real competition today is between regions. They also understand that very few small towns have the resources, by themselves, to attract tourists or to compete with larger communities.

Regional cooperation does not mean giving up your autonomy. It simply recognizes that problems like air pollution, water pollution, traffic congestion and loss of green space do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. Regional problems require regional solutions.

There are numerous examples of communities working together for mutual benefit. In the Denver region, 41 communities cooperated to support funding for a regional transit system (i.e. FasTracks). Cleveland area communities cooperated to build a Metro parks system. Metro Minneapolis and St. Paul collaborate on tax base sharing.

Even small rural communities can cooperate for mutual benefit. Small towns in Mississippi have worked together to organize and promote U.S. Route 61 as "the Blues Highway." Similarly, five rural counties on Maryland's Eastern Shore collaborated with



This Walmart on H Street in Washington, D.C., near Union Station features a multi-story design and underground parking.

the Eastern Shore [MD] Land Conservancy to create a regional agreement to preserve farmland and open space.

Pay attention to community aesthetics

During the development boom of the 1980s, *Time Magazine* published a cover story article about what they called “America’s growing slow-growth movement.” The article began with a quote from a civic activist in Southern California, who said “we were in favor of progress, until we saw what it looked like.”

Looks count! Aesthetics matter!

Mark Twain put it this way, “We take stock of a city like we take stock of a man. The clothes or appearance are the externals by which we judge.”

More than 80 percent of everything ever built in America has been built since about 1950 and a lot of what we have built is just plain ugly. There are still many beautiful places in America, but to get to these places we must often drive through mile after mile of billboards, strip malls, junk yards, used car lots, fry pits, and endless clutter that has been termed “the geography of nowhere.”

The problem is not development per se; rather the problem is the patterns of development. Successful communities pay attention to where they put development, how it is arranged, and what it looks like.

The image of a community is fundamentally important to its economic well-being. Every single day in America people make decisions about where to live, where to invest, where to vacation

and where to retire based on what communities look like. Consider tourism, for example. The more any community in America comes to look just like every other community the less reason there is to visit. On the other hand, the more a community does to protect and enhance its uniqueness whether natural or architectural, the more people will want to visit.

Tourism is about visiting places that are different, unusual and unique. If everyplace was just like everyplace else, there would be no reason to go anyplace.

Successful communities pay attention to aesthetics. Typically they control signs, they plant street trees, they protect scenic views and historic buildings, and they encourage new construction that fits in with the existing community.

Have strong leaders and committed citizens

Successful communities have strong leaders and committed citizens. A small number of committed people can make a big difference in a community. Sometime these people are longtime residents upset with how unmanaged growth has changed what they love about their hometown. Others times, the leaders might be newcomers who want to make sure that their adopted hometown doesn’t develop the same ugliness or congestion as the one they left. More often than not, they’re simply citizens who care a great deal about their community.

An example of a citizen who made a big difference is Jerry Adelman. Jerry grew up in the small town of Lockport, Illinois. Almost single-handedly Jerry

created the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, which helped restore an abandoned canal linking Lockport with Chicago. Adelman’s success at building local support for the canal convinced Congress to add the canal corridor to the national park system.

What about the naysayers? Every community has naysayers. Whatever the civic or community leaders propose to do, some people will always say things like: “you can’t do it,” “it won’t work,” “it costs too much,” “we tried that already.” And, “no” is a very powerful word in a small community, but leaders of successful communities know that “yes” is a more powerful word. Yes, we can make this town a better place to live in, to look at, to work in, to visit. A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.

Summing up

We live in a rapidly changing world. In his new book, *The Great Reset*, author Richard Florida says that “the post-recession economy is reshaping the way we live, work, shop and move around.” He goes on to predict that “communities that embrace the future will prosper. Those that do not will decline.”

One big change is that people and businesses can now choose where to live or operate a business. In today’s world, communities that cannot differentiate themselves will have no competitive advantage. This means that quality of life is more important than ever.

Successful communities know that sameness is not a plus. It is minus. Successful communities set themselves apart. They know that communities that choose their future are always more successful than those that leave their future to chance. 

About the author

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Turning your organization into a talent magnet

Jurisdictions are increasingly pursuing a more focused approach to strengthening their employer brand, working to entice and retain talent.

Reprinted from the February issue of *Government Finance Review* magazine.

THE COMPOSITION OF today's workforce is changing dramatically, with seasoned, talented professionals leaving their jobs, taking significant amounts of institutional knowledge with them. Replacing that knowledge capital – especially the ability to solve problems, make decisions, exercise prudent judgment, and ensure that services and programs are executed in a timely and effective manner – is difficult. At the same time, the public sector's traditional ways of attracting and retaining top-flight talent are not always effective, and can be seen as antiquated by younger job seekers. As a result, jurisdictions are increasingly pursuing a more focused approach to strengthening their employer brand, working to entice and retain talent. The fundamental difference between ordinary and extraordinary organizations is the collective ability of their workforce.

Consider your organization's attributes. If you were to choose one that would have the greatest influence on recruiting efforts in today's competitive markets, what would it be? Do you know the population of candidates who would find that attribute attractive? Do you know how to appeal to them so they will consider working for your organization? Understanding the answers to these and related questions is a dividing line between organizations that are able to hire and keep great talent and those that cannot.

Understanding branding

Branding is a buzzword today, but the business practice behind it isn't new. Many organizations are adopting what they call brand-building strategies, but often these are merely adopting new logos. This isn't even close. Essentially, brands influence perceptions in

the mind of the public; they are living concepts that change with the organization's climate and culture. Externally, candidates perceive your employer brand as an indication of the type of employment experience they can expect. Internally, employees perceive your employer brand as how well you deliver on promises and how well they fit within your organizational culture. In short, your employer brand is your identity and reputation as an employer.

Branding is gaining so much attention today for many reasons, but one of the most important is the struggle of organizations that are losing seasoned employees to "brain drain" while also generating insufficient pools of qualified candidates. Organizations that have invested time, effort and energy in developing their brand are finding that the advantage of building a reputation for cultivating talent is greater than they may have originally thought. In other words, these organizations are getting a "first-pick advantage" because they have the reputation for getting a "first-pick advantage." Organizations that provide people with opportunities to learn and grow become talent magnets. By continually attracting the most promising candidates and developing them once they're hired, these organizations become higher-performing and, in turn, continue to attract the best — it's a self-renewing cycle that expands the capacity of the organization to tackle tougher and more demanding challenges.

The eight touchstones

There are eight touchstones that influence an employer's brand: website and social media,

hiring process, job announcements, new employee orientation, the first day at work, learning and development, career development, and organizational culture. Each of these is an organizational practice that, when well designed and implemented, strengthens an organization's brand. Working well independently and in combination with the others, each touchstone communicates a powerful message about your brand.

Website and social media. The organization's website should offer job seekers a comprehensive view of the



organization and its culture in an attractive layout with easy navigation. The site should include testimonials from existing employees about why the organization is a great place to work. Use images and video, if possible, as they elicit stronger emotional responses than text alone and help candidates who are considering your organization connect their goals to the organization's mission. Organizations are using well-produced videos to tell their story and entice candidates. In fact, if you want a more appealing, modern-looking web with high-quality multimedia (such as videos and podcasts), you should consider hiring a creative design firm to update your site.

Many employers still rely on traditional methods for attracting the attention of potential recruits (e.g., advertising in newspapers' print and online editions). But consider social media channels — notably Facebook and Twitter — to get noticed. A Facebook add-

on application will automate the process of posting jobs listed on your organization's website onto its Facebook page. Target specific types of candidates by joining specialized Facebook groups; this allows the recruiters to engage directly with people who have the ideal skills. Use LinkedIn not only to promote your employer brand, but also to recruit potential employees — in fact, the site should be a significant part of the organization's recruitment strategy. LinkedIn profiles tend to include much more detailed work and educational histories than Facebook profiles.

Hiring process. What does your hiring process say about you? First impressions are critical, and bad impressions during the hiring process lead to negative perceptions of your employer brand, which can drive your best candidates away. Having a web-based job application is important; candidates from all walks of life want ease and convenience when applying for positions. Timeliness is also crucial when recruiting. While many public-sector agencies require a series of written exams and performance tests as part of their hiring process, these often labor-intensive assessments need to be administered quickly if candidates are to remain interested.

Job announcements. The world is teeming with smart, skilled, passionate people who are blue-chip prospects. However, these types of people won't be remotely interested in your organization if your posted job announcement is an utterly boring job description. Replace such announcements with more of a social marketing approach. Send a powerful message: Join our organization and be a part of something truly outstanding as you make your mark!

New employee orientation. Speaking of outdated practices, stop the monthly or quarterly new employee orientation programs in which the organization administrator shows up to offer some good tidings. These reflect good intentions but often generate little, if any, positive dividends. New employees size up their new surroundings quickly,

well before the compulsory meeting with the top administrator, so whatever is expressed during that meeting will have minimal effect, if any, on shaping that employee's perspective. Bringing new employees on board is a process, not an event, comprising a series of planned activities to help ease them into the organization so they can quickly contribute at a high level. For instance, give new employees a tour of all the organization's departments, stopping in each one to meet other employees. This will help them get to know their co-workers and the functions of other departments. Too often, employees are "dropped in" to their own department and left to figure out the rest on their own. Is it any wonder that many employees lack the big picture perspective so many leaders are looking for?

The first day of work. Nothing turns off new employees more than showing up for their first day of work and finding that no one is expecting them. It can send a disheartening message that they're not valued, and they may regret their decision in choosing to work for you. This kind of low morale right off the bat can quickly derail performance. Your organization's brand relies on that first day for the new employee to create the necessary traction for high performance and to ensure all the terrific comments expressed by the organization's hiring team about their employer are actually true.

Beyond the basics of having the workspace prepared, business cards printed, e-mail accounts set up, uniforms available, and so on, your organization should assign buddies or mentors to show new employees the ropes, introduce them around, take them to lunch, and acquaint them with the workplace and their co-workers. The buddy or mentor doesn't have to be their immediate supervisor, but someone who will have the time, enthusiasm, approachability and credibility to help the new employee become more familiar with their workplace, including articulating expectations about performance. Equally vital for the new employee to contribute their talent quickly is crafting a customized work plan that outlines goals and objectives to be met within the first 30 days, 90 days and six months. Creating a clear and compelling work plan will give new employees



Talent magnet

vision, which will lead them down the road to success.

Learning and development.

Progressive organizations realize that in today's workplace, candidates and employees alike are seeking (and usually expecting) an employer that chooses to invest in developing their skills and capabilities as a strategy for elevating employee performance and improving organizational effectiveness. Again, the employer's reputation of being an organization that makes strategic decisions to invest in its own workforce, even through tough economic times, is important because it helps attract, retain and develop talented people. Gone are the days when training was first on the chopping block when budgets tightened. Your organization should begin linking precious training dollars with the desires of those employees who are seriously interested and committed to improving their performance trajectory. It's time to discard the idea of training as a budget expense and lean toward viewing it as an investment in the future of both employees and the organization.

Career development. Clear and well-defined career development plans are rare. A good example can often be found in public safety departments, which have a hierarchical structure predicated on command and rank and are thus well suited for employees who are interested in pursuing the next rung on the ladder. On the other hand, many other departments do not have a structure that lends itself to such clear career paths. Consequently, it is imperative, regardless of the organization's size, to create a process involving department directors, human resource department staff members, and interested employees in co-creating a customized career development plan for those employees. Be careful not to assume classification levels are career paths – they aren't. Instead, they're tools for compensation purposes. While at a glance this process may seem particularly onerous, it will generate positive results that benefit both the employees who participate and the organization itself.

Organizational culture. In addition to the formal mechanisms available for building an employer's brand,

another factor is hugely influential – the organization's culture. Organizational culture consists of shared beliefs and values established by leaders and then communicated and reinforced, ultimately shaping employee perceptions, behaviors and understanding. The classic example of a dysfunctional organizational culture is one in which leaders say one thing, but do another.

Conclusions

Making a conscious decision to strengthen an employer's brand has less to do with spending dollars and more to do with creating a strategic plan toward being a modern, credible and principled organization. 

About the author

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CALL FOR ENTRIES

VML IS SOLICITING ENTRIES for its 2014 Achievement Awards program. The deadline for submittals is Friday, May 30. Please take a few minutes to look over the rules and guidelines that follow. The winners of the five Population Categories, the Communications Award and the President's Award will be featured in the September issue of *Virginia Town & City*. The awards will be presented at the 2014 VML Annual Conference in Roanoke on Tuesday evening, Oct. 7.

THE 2014 VML ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS recognize the accomplishments of member local governments for innovative problem-solving, excellence in management, increasing citizen participation and striving toward higher service levels.

Population awards

The VML Achievement Awards competition includes five categories based on population so that local governments compete with other local governments of comparable size. The population categories are: (1) under 5,000; (2) 5,000-10,000; (3) 10,001-35,000; (4) 35,001-90,000; and (5) more than 90,000.

A local government may submit up to three entries in its population category. One winner will be selected from each population category to receive an Achievement Award. The winner of the President's Award – the entry that does the best job of fulfilling the criteria set forth below – will be chosen from the five population category winners.

Entries in the five population categories will be evaluated on the following criteria, which emphasize innovation, efficiency and entrepreneurship:

- Generally speaking, accomplishing projects and implementing programs that enhance the vitality and quality of life in cities, towns or counties;
- developing more innovative ways of delivering government services;
- implementing new or improved approaches in addressing a significant community need, or significantly improving an existing program;
- reflecting excellence in management;
- increasing citizen participation;
- striving toward higher service levels;
- possessing ideas and approaches that make a project or program relevant to other local governments;
- having a long-term value to the community; and
- showing a documented record of effectiveness that illustrates how a project or program has achieved its goals.

NOTE: All submittals in a population category must list one of the five population brackets on the cover page of the entry. For entries that represent significant improvements to existing programs, the improvements must have been made between Jan. 1, 2013 and May 2, 2014.

President's award

The winner of the President's Award – the entry that does the best job of fulfilling the criteria set forth above – will be chosen from the five population category winners. The winning entry will, in effect, be the equivalent of a best-in-show selection.

Communications award

The Communications Award recognizes the best in local government communications programs. Local governments of all sizes may submit one entry for this award.

Projects may include publications, audio-visual productions, special events, speeches, crisis plans, Web sites, social media initiatives, etc. CDs and DVDs also may be submitted.

NOTE: All submittals in this category must list the entry as "Communications Award" on the cover page of the entry.

The judging

Entries will be screened by the VML staff and judged by a panel selected for its expertise in local government.

The winners

All winning entries will be featured in the September issue of Virginia Town & City. The Population Category winners, the winner of the President's Award and the winner of the Communications Award will be recognized and presented with their awards at the 2014 VML Annual Conference in Roanoke on Tuesday, Oct. 7.



Rules for entering ...

The competition is open to all Virginia Municipal League local government members.

Entries must describe programs or projects brought to conclusion or showing significant results between Jan. 1, 2013 and May 2, 2014.

Each entry must include a cover page bearing the title of the entry, the category of entry, the name of the locality submitting the entry, and the signature of the local government's chief administrative or elected official.

2014 VML ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS CALL FOR ENTRIES

All entries must be typed double-spaced, and the body of the entry, which does not include the cover page, appendices or any supplemental materials, must be at least two pages and not more than eight pages.

All entries must be bound or submitted in a notebook or presentation folder.

Submit one complete bound copy of your entry, including the cover page, all appendices and supplemental materials, videotapes, etc.

Entries may be accompanied by photographs, artwork, CDs or DVDs.

A local government may submit up to four entries: three in its population category and one in the Communications category.

An entry that is entered in a population category may not be entered in the Communications category.

Entries must be postmarked by May 30, 2014.

The 4 possibilities

Each VML local government has the opportunity to submit up to four entries in this year's competition: three in its population category, plus one entry for the Communications Award. The winner of the President's Award will be selected from the winners of the five population categories.

Writing & presentation

Although the presentation of your entry will not be the most important consideration of the judges, it will be taken into account. Therefore your entries should have a neat appearance and should be well-written. Photographs or artwork are encouraged.

In writing your entry, be succinct and clear. State the program's goals and objectives; explain how the project or program was accomplished; and provide as much relevant information about quantifiable results as possible.

Write your entry so that it progresses in a logical manner and tells a story. Your introduction should include background information, such as the need for the project, how it originated, and the goals and objectives. Clearly explain how the project or program was carried out or how a program operates. Also include how the project or program is financed and staffed. Your conclusion should state the results of the project or program.

Helpful reminders

The staff person who assembles an entry should read all of these instructions in their entirety.

The entry must be signed on the cover page by the chief administrative officer or the chief elected official.

The cover page must show the category of entry, (e.g. Achievement Award - Population 35,001-90,000; or Communications Award.)

Only one copy of each entry needs to be submitted.

Final checklist

Does each entry have a cover page showing:

The title of the entry? The category of the entry? The name of the locality? The signature of the chief administrative officer or elected official?

Are your entries neatly and securely bound?

Entries will not be returned. If you have any questions, contact David Parsons at the Virginia Municipal League or by telephone at 804/523-8527.

Deadline & address

All entries must be postmarked by May 30, 2014 and mailed to:

VML Achievement Awards
P.O. Box 12164
Richmond, VA 23241

or shipped (UPS, FedEx, etc.) to:

VML Achievement Awards
13 E. Franklin St.
Richmond, VA 23219

Entries will not be returned. If you have any questions, contact David Parsons at dparsons@vml.org or by telephone at 804/523-8527.



2014 VML ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS CALL FOR ENTRIES

VML maintains a detailed listing of local government job openings on its website at www.vml.org/JOBS/JObs.html.

Zoning Administrator, Fredericksburg

SALARY: \$52,904-\$64,216 start range DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Performs intermediate professional level technical and plan review work for the city's land development process, with specific emphasis on interpreting and ensuring compliance with land use regulations. Reqs. relevant bachelor's degree supplemented by 3-5 yrs. exper. performing zoning, land use, and land development work, specifically including: permit and plan reviews and conducting on-site zoning inspections and planning studies. Submit city application with resume to: Human Resources Department, 715 Princess Anne St., Room 217, Fredericksburg, VA 22401. More info, including city application, at www.fredericksburgva.gov or call 540-372-1028. Open until filled. EOE.

Chief of Revenue / Revenue Administrator, Richmond

SALARY: \$ 68,696-\$123,971 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Plan, organize, manage and direct the work of the Revenue Administration and Tax Division. Reqs. bachelor's degree in business admin., business management, accounting or related field, or an equivalent of 4 yrs. of college. Prefer MBA, MPA or CPA with min. 5 yrs. of relevant exper. with min. 3 of those yrs. in a supervisory/management capacity. More info and apply at www.richmondgov.com. Open until filled. EOE.

Director of Parks, Recreation & Community Services, Loudoun County

SALARY: \$140,000-\$150,000 hiring range (+) benefits. (Dept. has 500 FTEs, \$37 million bdtg.) Reqs. any comb. of educ. and exper. equiv. to a master's degree in recreation management, leisure services, public admin. or related field with min. 10 yrs. exper. managing a major recreation or leisure service program and supervising staff. Confidential applications accepted online at www.thenovakconsultinggroup.com/jobs. This includes a cover letter to: Catherine Tuck Parrish at The Novak Consulting Group, resume, and 3-5 professional references. Download full recruitment brochure at www.thenovakconsultinggroup.com/jobs. Deadline: May 12. EOE.

Human Resources Training and Development Coordinator, Newport News

SALARY: \$44,651-\$53,582 anticipated hiring range DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Responsible for coordinating, designing, developing and facilitating a variety of human resources and organizational development training programs for management and employees. Reqs. bachelor's degree in organizational development, human resources or a related field and

2-3 yrs. relevant exper., or an equiv. comb. of educ. and exper. Professional certification preferred. To apply, visit: www.jobs-nngov.com. Open until filled. EOE.

Commercial Combination Inspector, Falls Church

SALARY: \$65,000-\$90,000 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Perform construction inspection of all trades (building, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fuel-gas, energy conservation, accessibility, fire alarm and fire suppression) as technical assistant to the Building Official in the enforcement of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code. Send city application or resume to: City of Falls Church, Human Resources Division, 300 Park Ave., Falls Church, VA 22046 or via e-mail at hr@fallschurchva.gov. More info at www.fallschurchva.gov. Open until filled. EOE.

Executive Director, Albemarle Commission (N.C.)

SALARY: \$85,578-\$128,367 negotiable DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. The commission is a regional planning organization serving the municipalities and counties of Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Hyde, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell, and Washington in Northeastern North Carolina. Prefer advanced degree in public admin., regional planning or related degree with min. 10 yrs. service. Application and full job description at www.albemarlecommission.org. Submit application and resume to: Ruth Mengel, Clerk to the Board, P.O. Box 646, Hertford, N.C. 27944; (252)426-5753 or rmengel@albemarlecommission.org. Initial interviews will begin after May 15. Open until filled. EOE.

Director of Operations, Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority (Charlottesville)

SALARY: Negotiable to \$122,517 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Reqs. bachelor's degree in civil, environmental or sanitary engineering or a related field and/or a degree in business or public admin., with min. 10 yrs. exper. of progressing responsibility in the operation of a water and wastewater utility, including considerable exper. in supervising technical and operating staff. More info and req'd application at www.rivanna.org. Open until filled. EOE.

Director (Danville Utilities), Danville

SALARY: \$102,824-\$120,000 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Manage Danville Utilities, a municipal provider of electric, gas, water, wastewater and telecommunications services in a 500-square mile territory. Reqs. bachelor's degree (master's preferred) in engineering, public administration, business or related field. Also reqs. extensive exper. in utilities,

public works or local govt. management. More info and apply online at www.danville-va.gov. Additional info on Danville Utilities at www.danvilleutilities.com. Attach cover letter; detailed resume, credentials and salary history. City residency req'd. All submissions confidential. Open until filled. EOE.

Director of Public Works, Elkton

SALARY: DOQ/DOE (+) benefits, including VRS. Oversees operation, administration and maintenance of town's systems, which include electric, streets, water and sewer infrastructure and refuse. Prefer min. 5 yrs. exper. in a managerial or public works-related position. No telephone calls please. Send resume and salary requirement to: Kevin Whitfield, Town Manager, 173 West Spotswood Ave., Elkton, VA. Open until filled. EOE.

Town Manager, New Market

SALARY: \$60,000-\$80,000 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. (Pop. 2,200; 19 FT employees plus seasonal staff). Reqs. min. of a relevant bachelor's degree supplemented by 3-5 yrs. of progressively responsible exper. in local govt. administration. Position profile available at <http://bit.ly/1fvvfeU>. Submit a cover letter, detailed resume, salary history and references to: Evan L. Vass, Town Manager, Town of New Market, P.O. Box 58, New Market, VA. 22844. Deadline: April 25. EOE.

Combination Plans Reviewer / Inspector, Manassas

SALARY: \$49,795-\$82,160 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Review and inspect residential and commercial projects for all trades, including architectural, structural, electrical, mechanical, plumbing for conformance with applicable codes and policies. Reqs. associate's degree in architecture, engineering, construction or closely-related field, 3-5 yrs. of progressively responsible related exper. Must possess and maintain the following certifications: Combination Commercial and Residential Plan Reviewer and Inspector; may be required to possess additional certifications as deemed necessary. To apply, complete city application at www.manassascity.org/hr/jobs. Open until filled. EOE.

Program and Project Coordinator (Public Works Department / Engineering Division), Herndon

SALARY: \$54,841-\$71,555 hiring range DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Full range to \$90,378. Provide contract and project management, support and coordination on

a variety of neighborhood and capital improvement projects. Reqs. bachelor's degree with coursework emphasis in engineering or construction management, supplemented by 3-5 yrs. exper. or training that includes engineering, construction management, inspections and regulatory standards; or an equiv. comb. of educ., training and exper. Possession of Erosion and Sediment Control certificate desired. Town application req'd. For detailed job duties and requirements, visit www.herdon-va.gov or call 703-481-1185. Open until filled. EOE.

Plans Examiner (Building Safety and Permits Division), James City County

SALARY: \$40,612 or higher DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Serve as technical assistant to the county building official. Reviews residential and commercial plans and specifications for general conformance with the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (VUSBC) and pertinent laws and ordinances. More info and apply at <https://jobs.jamescitycountyva.gov>. Open until filled. EOE.

Plumbing & Mechanical Inspector I (Community Development Department / Construction Inspections Division), Hampton

SALARY: \$36,073-\$39,680 hiring range DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. For details and to apply, visit www.hampton.gov/HIRE. Open until filled. EOE.

Zoning Official (Community Development Department / Planning & Zoning Administration Division)

SALARY: \$39,962-\$43,958 hiring range DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. For details and to apply, visit www.hampton.gov/HIRE. Open until filled. EOE.

Vehicle Maintenance Superintendent, Vienna

SALARY: DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Oversees fleet maintenance and repair operations for all cars, trucks, police cruisers and other on road equipment. Must be able to obtain a CDL, state inspector license and A/C freon license within 12 mos. View complete position description and apply online at www.viennava.gov. Deadline: April 21. EOE.

Site Development Technician (Community Planning/Development), Harrisonburg

SALARY: \$33,259-\$39,041 preferred hiring range. DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Performs field engineering and technical work, coordinating site plan review and permitting process; enters attributes and data into GIS system; tracks project schedules and bonds; develops and maintains databases. Apply

online at: www.harrisonburgva.gov/jobs. Job #3252. Open until filled. EOE.

Tourism Marketing Specialist, Harrisonburg

SALARY: \$27,476-\$32,260 preferred hiring range DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Develops editorial plan to coincide with manager's marketing plan in select print or online publications; works with local partners to create and develop unique story ideas that market Harrisonburg as a tourism destination to send out to both local and national media outlets. Must submit a City of Harrisonburg application online at www.harrisonburgva.gov/jobs. Deadline: April 15. EOE.

Trainee Operator (Night Shift), Upper Occoquan Service Authority (Centreville)

SALARY: \$34,116-\$56,347 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Perform work on a rotating shift and perform a range of tasks of one section (liquid or solids). Responsibilities include operating and monitoring treatment equipment that may include pumps, motors, rake arms, the use of process equipment for assigned sections, collect samples for lab analysis, etc. More info and req'd application at www.uosa.org. Open until filled. EOE.

Director of Human Resources, Petersburg

SALARY: DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Plan, coordinate and direct activities of the Department of Human Resources. Oversees all HR operations, programs and services. Reqs. bachelor's degree in HR management, public human resource management (some govt. exper. a plus), including min. 5 yrs. in a supervisory/leadership capacity, or an equiv. comb. of training and exper. Submit confidential resume with cover letter (must include salary requirements) to: Mary Martin Selby, Director of HR Services, Chesterfield County Human Resource Management, P.O. Box 40, Chesterfield, VA 23832; e-mail: executivesearch@chesterfield.gov. Contact: 804-748-1551. Full job description and apply at <http://bit.ly/1gLqSNT>. Deadline: April 28. EOE.

Transit Program Coordinator/Transportation Planner, Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission

SALARY: \$48,000-\$56,500 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Primarily responsible for the planning and administration of a regional transit service program and performing transit planning work for the rural transportation program and two metropolitan planning organizations within the district. To apply, send resume with references to: Bonnie S. Riedesel, Executive Director, Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission, 112 Mac-

Tanly Place, Staunton, VA 24401 or bonnie@cpsdc.org. Open until filled. EOE.

Codes Inspector I (Planning & Inspections), Staunton

SALARY: \$29,048 to start (+) benefits. Perform responsible technical work in compliance with zoning, property maintenance and building codes. Reqs. H.S. diploma/GED with exper. in a related field and a demonstrated ability to manage multiple projects, meet deadlines and communicate effectively. Apply at www.staunton.va.us. Deadline: April 20. EOE.

Deputy Director of Finance, Herndon

SALARY: \$70,288-\$112,460 DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. May under fill at \$67,712-\$111,592 if selected candidate does not possess a CPA license. Reqs. bachelor's degree in accounting, finance or business administration; CPA or ability obtain within 2 yrs.; 3-5 yrs. supervisory exper., including payroll functions, 4-7 yrs. exper. in financial operations. More info: Call 703-481-1185, e-mail jobs@herndon-va.gov or visit www.herdon-va.gov. Open until filled. EOE.

Senior Accountant (Finance Department), Roanoke

SALARY: \$41,184-\$53,000 start range DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Maintain complex financial records. Reqs. bachelor's degree from 4-yr. college in accounting or a related field; 3-5 yrs. relevant exper. and/or training in accounting and/or auditing, preferably in a public accounting firm or through specialization in the govt. sector; or equiv. comb. of educ. and exper. CPA preferred. Download application or apply online at www.roanokeva.gov. Applications may be mailed to: Human Resources, City of Roanoke, 215 Church Ave., Roanoke, VA 24011. Open until filled. EOE.

City Clerk, Falls Church

SALARY: \$83,930-plus DOQ/DOE (+) benefits. Reqs. graduation from accredited college with major course work in government/political science, business administration, paralegal, or related field, plus completion of Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) requirements; considerable exper. in municipal govt. or the office of an executive; thorough knowledge of technology; standard office practices, procedures, equipment, Microsoft Word and Outlook 2010. More info at www.fallschurchva.gov. To apply, send resume to: City of Falls Church, HR Division, 300 Park Ave., Falls Church, VA 22046 or e-mail to hr@fallschurchva.gov. Deadline May 15.



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