VIRGINIA
TOWN & CITY

Mixing it up
Mixed-use / mixed-income loans spark revitalization projects

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VIRGINIA
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About the cover

VHDA's Dale Wittie and developer Buddy Gadams stand in front of The Law Building in Norfolk. Due to a recent expansion of VHDA's mixed-use/mixed-income loan program, local governments and developers have more options when it comes to financing rental properties – enabling them to serve a broader range of income levels. Photo by Doug Buerlein.

Departments

Features

Mixing it up

Local governments and developers now have more options for serving more Virginians thanks to new mixed use/mixed income loans from VHDA. These loan programs help to create communities that serve a broad range of incomes.

Nine myths about redistricting – busted!

The Commonwealth and the country are waking up to the problem of gerrymandering. For localities, it can dilute their voice in state and national politics. But a recent Supreme Court case and three lawsuits in Virginia are signs that change is in the air.

By Brian Canon

Transportation Trend: Are you prepared for a car-lite society?

Americans of all generations are moving toward the 15-minute community where they can live, work and play in the same place. Localities will need to shift their focus from planning around cars to preparing for more public transportation, ride sharing, biking and walkable streets.

By Matt Thornhill and John Martin

Please don't put me on hold!

Chesapeake's Customer Contact Center is a revealing case study of a municipal call center. Can one group really field calls and answer questions for all departments? Learn how Chesapeake put its call center to work for customers and the city government.

By Heath Covey

On the Road Again

I SET OUT ON a journey to Southwest Virginia for the most recent of our regional suppers. These events have been a great way for VML to facilitate regional communication while conducting trainings. These particular events were held in Abingdon and Roanoke and they were very well attended.

To say that the mountains were beautiful on this fall day would be a serious understatement. Nature was on display in a stunning way. The trees looked just like a quilt made of red, orange, and yellow. There was fog covering the tops of the mountains and it was raining steadily. I know most folks wouldn't think that a rainy day could be beautiful, but I was really in awe as I drove through the mountains. (It still is very special for this girl from Kansas to live in a state with mountains!)

My first stop was in Wytheville. There, I enjoyed a lovely lunch with former VML President and Wytheville Mayor Trent Crewe. Town Manager Wayne Sutherland joined us and I was treated to terrific conversation about the history of the town.

Our lunch spot was the Log House. Built originally as a log cabin in 1776, this charming eatery has a great history and unique atmosphere. Various additions, including an eclectic bar area, make this a perfect place to stop in Wytheville. For more information on the Log House, check out their Facebook page.

After lunch, I moved on to Abingdon, the site for the first of our fall regional suppers. Nearly 50 local officials from the area attended the dinner where we discussed the upcoming 2016 legislative session and the VML legislative priorities. The meeting itself was held at the Heartwood. This is a lovely venue that promotes Virginia arts, crafts, music, and food. For more information about the Heartwood, go to www.myswva.org/heartwood.

Heartwood is known as "Southwest Virginia's artisan gateway." It showcases crafts by artists throughout the region. Artists provide regular demonstrations in painting and other media. The facility has a popular restaurant and hosts community events for youth and families.

I was pleased to have the opportunity to stay at "The Martha" while I was in Abingdon. The Martha Washington Inn & Spa is a historic hotel with tremendous charm and outstanding service. I had heard rumors that The Martha is haunted, but no ghosts visited me while I was there. For more information about The Martha, go to www.themartha.com.

Once again, we have been joined on the road by representatives from VML Insurance. Jeff Cole, Director of Member Services, has joined us to talk about VML Insurance and key legislative priorities as well. VML Insurance provides an important service for our members and we value our partnership. If you have questions about VML Insurance, please contact Jeff at jcole@vmlins.org or (800) 963-6800. VTC

Heartwood is also a major music venue of the Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail. In addition to regular concerts, Heartwood exhibits a wide variety of traditional American handmade musical instruments.

Flynn moves from VML to private practice

- Flynn -

After nearly 18 years of service as General Counsel, Mark Flynn has resigned from the Virginia Municipal League. During his tenure, Flynn was a trusted source of legal advice for VML members, especially small towns that do not have full time staff attorneys. Flynn

also developed a stellar reputation with members of the General Assembly as a knowledgeable spokesperson for local governments. Flynn departs the League to join the Richmond-based lobbying and law firm of Advantus strategies. There, he will serve an attorney and lobbyist specializing in local government issues.

Suffolk names city manager

The City Council of Suffolk appointed Patrick Roberts as City Manager in Sep-

- Roberts -

tember. Roberts served in the interim position since May 2015. He had served as Deputy City Manager since June 2008. Roberts previously worked for the City of Suffolk as Assistant Director in the Department of Planning and Community Development. Prior to that, he was Senior Assistant to the Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Richmond, Virginia. Roberts is a native of Portsmouth.

Warrenton selects Godfrey as town manager

The town of Warrenton has hired J. Brannon Godfrey Jr., former Portsmouth Deputy City Manager, to serve as Town Manager. Godfrey served the city of Portsmouth from 2009 to 2015. He served as Winchester's City Manager from 2008 to 2009, after six years as the Town Manager in Culpeper. Godfrey will succeed Ken McLawhon, who left Warrenton in December.

Leesburg promotes Hauer to HR manager

- Hauer -

The Town of Leesburg has named Mark Hauer as Human Resources Manager. Hauer has served as Human Resources Analyst since 2014. Before coming to Leesburg, Mark was the Human Resources Manager for BizFlow Corporation, a business process management software company. Previously, he worked for Lockheed Martin in various human resources roles.

Lynchburg appoints new police chief

- Diaz -

The City of Lynchburg has appointed Raul Diaz at its new Chief of Police. Diaz was previously Assistant Chief of Police in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Diaz replaces former Chief Parks Snead

who retired October 1 after 31 years with the Lynchburg Police Department. Diaz comes to the position with over 26 years of experience in local and federal law enforcement. He began his service with Fort Lauderdale in 1989 and was promoted to the position of Assistant Chief in 2013. His federal experience was as a special agent with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

Herndon fills two key posts

The Town of Herndon has promoted Cynthia Hoftiezer to Deputy Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation. Hoftiezer has been a leader in the department since 1996. She replaces Ann Marie Heiser, who resigned in July.

John Cassella has been named to the newly-established position of Budget and Special Projects Manager. Cassella comes to Herndon from the City of Goodyear, AZ, where he served as Budget and Financial Planning Analyst.

Fields named Alexandria's top code administrator

The City of Alexandria has appointed Gregg Fields as Director of Code Administration. Fields served as Acting Director since December, 2014.

Fields joined the city staff in 2001 as

- Fields -

the first trade combination plans examiner, responsible for assisting homeowners and small businesses with the permit review process. Fields is Second Vice President for the Virginia Building and Code Officials Association (a chapter of the International Code Council) and is slated to serve as president of the organization in 2018. Previously, he served as chairman and public information officer of the Northern Virginia region of the association.

VBCOA supports Grayson County's High School Technical Training Program

IN SEPTEMBER, VBCOA reached out across the state to support and develop code administration leadership for the future. Pete Mensinger, Chair of VBCOA's High School Technical Training Program and Robert Sales of ICC met with Grayson, Carroll, and Galax County Administrators and Wytheville Community College representatives about the benefits of the High School Technical Training Program to students and the industry. Jimmy Moss, Grayson County Building Official, announced that his office would donate the funding necessary to get Grayson County and all its current building trades students signed up for the ICC High School Technical Training Program. ICC's high school training "Certification of Achievement" program demonstrates to students the importance of building codes and how they positively affect our built environment. Most importantly, it will give them the fundamental tools necessary to secure a strong foundation for a career in the building industry and code administration.

Localities hope to replicate success of Pop-Up Marion

MARION IS RECEIVING lots of visitors from across Virginia, North Carolina and Ohio as other localities look to replicate the success of Pop-Up Marion. Thanks to this creative economic development program, the downtown vacancy rate in Marion has dropped from 17% to 4%. The program's small business boot camp has helped local entrepreneurs open more than 20 new businesses and created nearly 100 new jobs in the small town.

The Town of Monticello, Va., has launched a Monticello Bootcamp based on the Marion model.

Marion Economic Development Director Ken Heath is anxious to share the program with other Virginia localities. Heath most recently welcomed visitors from Narrows and Bedford who hope to recreate the Marion success in their towns.

Pop-Up Marion is the winner of the 2015 VML Achievement Award in the 5,000-10,000 population category (see page 16).

The grand opening of Sisters Cafe & Gifts in Marion.

Alexandria named Number 1 Digital City
Four other Virginia cities make top ten

THE CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT has named Alexandria the top "digital city" of its size in the United States, based on the 2015 Digital Cities Survey. The annual program evaluates cities' approaches to information technology, community engagement, policy and operations. This is the 11th consecutive year Alexandria has been ranked in the top 10 of cities in the population category 125,000 to 250,000. It is the second time the City has earned first place recognition. Councilman John Taylor Chapman represented the City to formally receive the award at the National League of Cities conference in Nashville on November 5.

Judges in the Digital Cities Survey credited Alexandria with a variety of public-facing and internal improvements. A new computer aided dispatch (CAD) system improves the City's 911 services and provides enhanced communications services for first responders. The new ParkLink feature of the City's website lets the public leverage the city's geographic information system (GIS) to locate parks and other open spaces based on location and amenities. The city's institutional network, or I-NET, has been upgraded from 1-gigabit speed to 10-gigabit to keep pace with greater data use and modern applications. Network security features have been upgraded to reduce exposure to cyber attacks.

More Virginia cities recognized as top Digital Cities

Population 250,000+
5th Place – Virginia Beach

Population 75,000 – 125,000
2nd Place – Roanoke
6th Place – Lynchburg

Population under 75,000
7th Place - Manassas

Richmond is top three place to start a small business

IN A 2015 SURVEY of 18,000 small businesses nationwide, Richmond, Va., was named the third friendliest city for small businesses. The survey also put Richmond on top for businesses looking to add employees.

The report, from Thumbtack's 2015 small-business friendliness survey, was based on responses from small local businesses that use Thumbtack to market their professional services online. Users are largely sole proprietorships.

What makes for a great place to start a business?

1. Higher-ranked cities have lower costs and fewer steps in place for a potential new company to launch.

2. Positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship in general.

3. In top ranking cities, professional licenses are easy to obtain, startup costs were low, and resources were available to help promote new businesses.

Overall, the survey showed that southern states tend to perform well – perhaps because the governments are doing more to attract businesses, or perhaps because the governments are less aggressive about things like consumer protection policies.

Other key findings about business-friendly local governments

The survey also found that:

- State and city governments that promote local business training and focus on ease of regulatory compliance are consistently perceived as being friendliest to small business.

- Entrepreneurs' perceptions of their tax burdens were among the least important factors in judging governments.

- Investing in a high quality, easy-to-use website that provides useful information and decreases the costs of regulatory compliance improves overall perceptions of a local or state government.

Harrisonburg graduates 17 from Citizen Academy

THE CITY OF HARRISONBURG hosts an annual Citizen Academy for residents to have an in-depth opportunity to learn more about their local government. Starting in August, 17 individuals committed every Thursday evening to the Citizen Academy program. The participants learn in a hands-on environment and experience how each department operates. Each class of the Citizen Academy brings unique backgrounds and ideas. This program also serves as a catalyst to get citizens more involved in local government.

Past Citizen Academy graduates currently serve on City Council, Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, and volunteer at the information desk in City Hall.

Citizen Academy graduates and members of City Council.

The rules have changed

New flexibility in mixed-use/mixed-income loans sparks revitalization efforts statewide

FOR THOSE WHO develop mixed-income and mixed-use properties, there's cause to celebrate. New, flexible financing options are allowing local governments and developers to better serve the unique housing needs, demographics and preferences of their communities. The days of limited, one-size-fits-all financing are over.

An enhanced mixed-use/mixed-income loan program, launched earlier this year by the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA), is changing the way local governments and developers look at revitalization and housing opportunities. That's because the properties they finance under the new program can serve a broader range of incomes than ever before. In fact, all of VHDA's mixed-income options now allow for a significant percentage of units to be rented to households with unrestricted income levels; the balance can serve low- to moderate-income households (in most cases, those with 80 to 100 percent of the area median income). This increased flexibility allows for more income diversity, which is vital for addressing local economic development and revitalization objectives.

To take advantage of the new program, local governments must designate areas or specific properties as revitalization areas, in accordance with the VHDA Act.* If such a designation already exists, then no additional action is needed. Local governments across the state have already taken this first step toward enhancing housing opportunities in their communities.

"Seeing so many towns and cities take on this important revitalization really is a story worth telling," said VHDA's Director of Rental Housing Dale Wittie. "These new financing options are creating possibilities for developers all over the state. Our goal is to work closely with those developers and localities, and help them make their vision a reality — as well as a beautiful, welcome addition to the community."

There are communities throughout Virginia that illustrate the transformation that is possible with the right mix of financing and resources. Following are some of their stories, including the redevelopment of a brownfield site, repurposing a historic downtown office building, adaptive reuse of an industrial building, and a new commuter-oriented development.

Virginia Code 36-55.30:2.

In this article, we look at how new financing options from VHDA are providing new possibilities for rental communities throughout the state. While the new options allow for more income diversity in financed rental properties, VHDA's core mission is focused on housing for Virginians with low-to-moderate incomes.

An overview of housing income ranges

Low to moderate income housing – generally serves households earning 80 percent or less of the area median income (AMI).
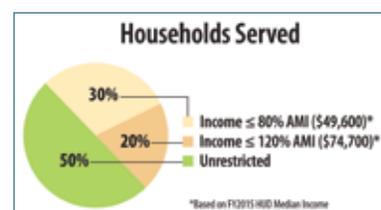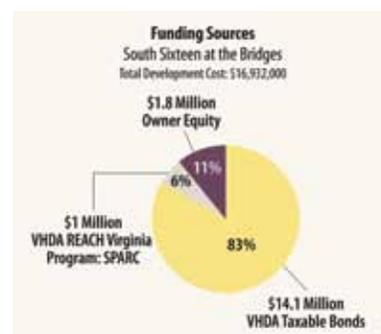
Workforce housing – generally serves households earning 80 to 120 percent of the area median income (although some expanded definitions include households earning between 60 and 150 percent AMI).

Market-rate housing – generally serves households earning more than 120 to 150 percent of the area median income.

South Sixteen at the Bridges
Roanoke, Va.

On a site where a mill and scrap yard once stood, there is now a vibrant community known as South Sixteen. This mixed-used development is home to hip hangouts like Starbucks and Moe's Southwest Grill and 157 mixed-income apartments with rents ranging from $730 to $1,200.

Funding Sources
South Sixteen at the Bridges
Total Development Cost: $16,937,000

$1.8 Million Owner Equity

11%

6%

$1 Million VHDA REACH Virginia Program: SPARC

83%

$14.1 Million VHDA Taxable Bonds

Households Served

30%

20%

50%

Income ≤ 80% AMI ($49,600)*
Income ≤ 120% AMI ($74,700)*
Unrestricted

*Based on FY2015 HUD Median Income

"I think a mix of incomes in an apartment community is healthy," said Richard Souter, a developer with WVS Companies and Roanoke River Associates. "That's one reason we have a mixed-income component as part of our VHDA financing. I also think including mixed-use is a great idea, because it gives apartment residents the nearby amenities they're looking for."

Located across Jef-

South Sixteen at the Bridges is located across from the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.

ferson Street from the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, South Sixteen features a public promenade and a kayak launch area. And, there is more to come – South Sixteen is part of a 10-year brownfield redevelopment, which will eventually include the rehabilitation of two historic buildings, and a second phase with additional housing, retail and entertainment spaces. As the community grows, the developer is working with local businesses and others to capture and maintain the neighborhood's unique history.

The Law Building
Norfolk, Va.

"Most of the people renting our apartments are of the Millennial generation. It seems like every time we show a unit, they ask about light rail and public transportation. Downtown Norfolk is in a perfect position to benefit from what these folks are looking for," said Buddy Gadams, a developer with Marathon Development Group.

The City's Perspective

Marc Nelson

Interview with Marc Nelson, Special Projects Coordinator for the City of Roanoke Department of Economic Development

What was the city's initial response to the South Sixteen project, when first approached by the developer?

The City was very pleased when the WVS Companies informed us that mixed-use housing would be among their first undertakings on the site. South Sixteen is part of a larger redevelopment project called "The Bridges," an ambitious repurposing of a 22-acre former industrial site.

Did the city find their part of the process (issuing permits, etc.) to be easy to manage?

Every project has its challenges, for the developer as well as for the municipality. In the case of South Sixteen, that challenge was to ensure a portion of the building was safe and inhabitable for tenants arriving in late August to enroll in Virginia Tech Carilion's academic programs. The City's various permitting entities, including the building inspections division and the fire marshall's office, made every effort to help the developer meet that challenge while ensuring compliance with all applicable codes and ordinances.

Now that South Sixteen is complete, would the city like to see more mixed-income housing?

Diverse housing options play a key role in fostering a livable and vibrant community. We would certainly welcome more mixed-income housing developments within the City of Roanoke.

Is there anything you would like to share to encourage other municipalities to work with developers on these types of developments?
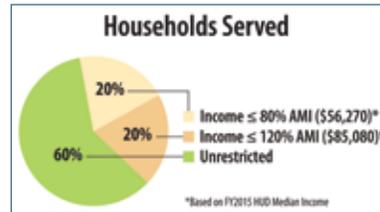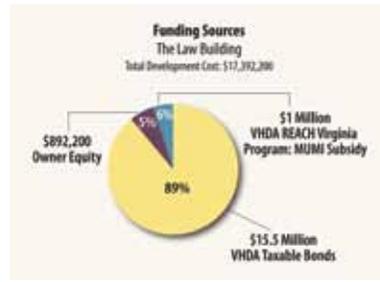
My advice would be to make sure the developer has experience doing these kinds of projects, especially if performance incentives will be involved.

Once filled with the offices of lawyers and bankers, today this 100+ year-old building is home to 136 of the most modern apartments in Hampton Roads, with rents ranging from $905 to $1,700 a month.

Funding Sources
The Law Building
Total Development Cost: $17,392,200

$1 Million
VHDA REACH Virginia
Program: MUMI Subsidy

$892,200
Owner Equity

5% 6%

89%

$15.5 Million
VHDA Taxable Bonds

Households Served

20%

20%

60%

Income ≤ 80% AMI ($56,270)*
Income ≤ 120% AMI ($85,080)*
Unrestricted
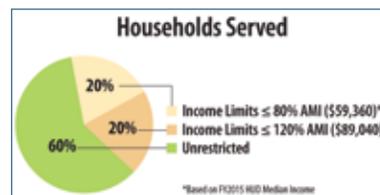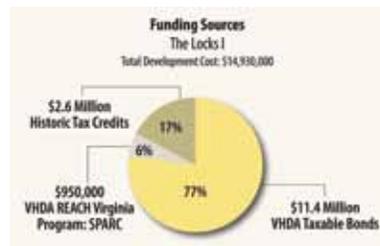
*Based on FY2015 HUD Median Income

Apartment options in The Law Building include studio and one- and two-bedroom floor plans that are popular with Norfolk's young professionals. The monthly rent includes one parking space per unit. Renters love the location – a short walk from the light rail stop, Town Point Park, MacArthur Center and Nauticus. Commercial tenants include The Vineyards and Smoothie King, and, coming soon, the largest Starbucks on the East Coast.

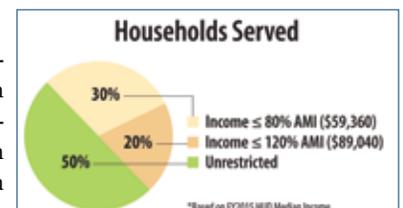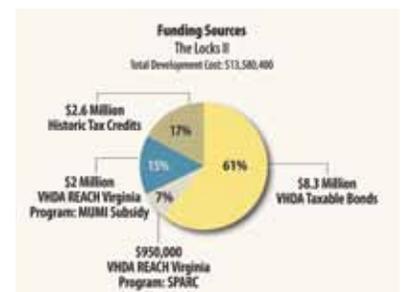## The Locks I and II
Richmond, Va.

This $33 million mixed-income development involved the historic rehabilitation of four industrial buildings used for manufacturing from 1895 to 2011. Today, The Locks I and II contain 174 apartments located on the newly developed Haxall and Kanawha canals, close to downtown shopping, restaurants and offices. The property leased up quickly, with rents beginning at $874.

Funding Sources
The Locks I
Total Development Cost: $34,930,000

$2.6 Million
Historic Tax Credits

17%

6%

77%

$950,000
VHDA REACH Virginia
Program: SPARC

$11.4 Million
VHDA Taxable Bonds

Households Served

20%

20%

60%

Income Limits ≤ 80% AMI ($59,360)*
Income Limits ≤ 120% AMI ($89,040)*
Unrestricted

*Based on FY2015 HUD Median Income

"Developed appropriately, a property like this is a sure thing just based on the trends. People ages 25 to 30 prefer renting to buying. City populations, including Richmond's, are growing. There's a chronic shortage of apartments in the Richmond area, and living downtown is just plain hip," said Rick Gregory, managing partner of Fountainhead Properties and co-developer with WVS Companies.

This successful transformation from 19th century factory buildings to ultra-modern apartments has been

Funding Sources
The Locks II
Total Development Cost: $13,580,400

$2.6 Million
Historic Tax Credits

17%

15%

61%

$2 Million
VHDA REACH Virginia
Program: MUMI Subsidy

7%

$8.3 Million
VHDA Taxable Bonds

$950,000
VHDA REACH Virginia
Program: SPARC

Households Served

30%

20%

50%

Income ≤ 80% AMI ($59,360)
Income ≤ 120% AMI ($89,040)
Unrestricted

*Based on FY2015 HUD Median Income

Young professionals like the Law Building's proximity to the light rail, the waterfront and Town Point Park.

The Locks I and II received a national Timmy Award for historic preservation and innovative redesign.

recognized with a 2014 Timmy Award. The Timmy Awards honor the preservation and restoration of historic properties, and celebrate innovative redesign and usage of great buildings from America's past. Entries are judged on the basis of overall design and quality, interpretation and respect of historic elements, as well as market success.

The Villages at Goose Pond
Marshall, Va.

Located in Fauquier County, this 71-townhouse complex is a mixed-income community that fits well into its small town surroundings. Current residents earn, on average, 80 percent of the area median income. The first tenant moved into the $15 million property last November.

"Goose Pond provides nice housing people can rent un-til they're ready to buy," said Brian Selfe, president of Wellworth Properties, Inc., the developer and property manager of The Villages at Goose Pond. "Some tenants, especially millennials, are renters by choice, who may never buy a house but still want a great place to live that's perfectly located and priced right."

Three- and four-bedroom apartments are available, each with a two-car garage. According to Selfe, some Goose Pond tenants who have lower-paying jobs receive Housing Choice Vouchers for tenant-based rental assistance.

"I love VHDA loan programs, because as a developer, they give me the ability to get a rental complex going, fully develop it and then hold on to it for the long term — 20 to 30 years," said Selfe.
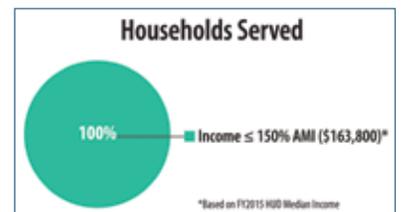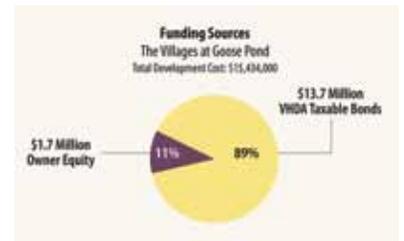
One size does not fit all localities

Every locality has its own unique population characteristics and housing needs. Whether it's creating new uses for old places – or building something from the ground up – financing needs to be flexible enough to match the community's needs. The new loan options available through

At the Villages at Goose Pond, some tenants with lower paying jobs receive rental assistance in the form of Housing Choice Vouchers.

VHDA are causing developers to take note, and local governments to take action. More flexibility in lending has led to new opportunities for development and revitalization throughout the state.

"VHDA is excited to be a part of a transformation that's helping ensure that housing infrastructure is ready for Virginia's new economy," said Wittie. "We look forward to financing more attractive, comfortable places that Virginians can call home, in communities all across the state."

Local governments and developers who want to learn more about the new financing options can contact Dale Wittie at 804-343-5876 or Dale.Wittie@vhda.com. More information is also available at vhda.com/SuccessStories. **VTC**

More than mortgages

VHDA's rental programs

Perhaps best known for affordable mortgages for first-time homebuyers, VHDA has also financed more than 152,600 rental units since its inception. The organization plays an active role in housing education, providing thousands of first-time homebuyer classes each year, and online educational resources for renters and homebuyers. VHDA also offers programs and grants to help people with disabilities and the elderly make their homes more livable.

Since its inception, VHDA's lending investment in communities has supported more than 370,000 local jobs and contributed more than $27 billion to Virginia's economy through local tax revenues and jobs.*

*Source: *VHDA data; calculations based on formula developed by the National Association of Homebuilders.*

Housing search site and e-book for renters
Resources for local governments

VirginiaHousingSearch.com is a free online housing locator service, sponsored by the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA). The website contains detailed information about more than 108,300 rental properties throughout Virginia, and helps people find the housing that best fits their needs. More than 2,500 landlords, property managers and owners use the site as well, to promote their properties at no cost to them. For information about Virginia Housing Search, contact Community Outreach Specialist Mario Wells at 804-343-5541 or mario.wells@vhda.com.

VHDA also recently published a free eBook for renters. How to be a Successful Renter covers the ins and outs of finding, leasing and living well in an apartment or rental home. The eBook is available for download on VHDA's website at vhda.com/RenterEd. Localities are encouraged to promote the eBook and link to it on their websites. For more information on renter education, please contact Kelly Gill-Gordon at 804-343-5534 or Kelly.Gill-Gordon@vhda.com.

How to be a Successful RENTER

Your guide to understanding all there is to know about renting | Click to start

VHDA.

Nine arguments against redistricting reform and why they're wrong

By Brian Cannon

A S THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of OneVirginia2021, I speak around the state on the issue of redistricting reform, usually several times a week. While the reception to this issue is always welcoming, I've heard most every reason for why we shouldn't have reform from legislators who oppose this or from the occasional skeptical audience member. Given VML's strong stance in favor of ending gerrymandering, I thought I'd pass along these common objections and how to respond. It'll make us all better advocates for fixing this broken system.

1 We like our representative, so how does this impact us?

While Virginia has been the best managed state and the best state for business in the past decade, we are falling from those lofty perches. Just recently, it came out that our state's job growth has flat lined. While we are a low tax, business friendly state, we need a General Assembly empowered to keep up with the changing economy. Gerrymandering causes gridlock and paralyzes such efforts. Further, if you are a citizen who might

OneVirginia2021 has filed a non-partisan lawsuit challenging eleven districts in both chambers of the General Assembly based on their lack of compactness.

Latest Legal Action on Redistricting

THROUGH EFFORTS IN BOTH the legislative and legal realms, the Commonwealth and the country are waking up to the real problem of gerrymandering. Legislatively, in the 2015 General Assembly session, there was broad bi-partisan support for reform in the Senate and budding support in the House. Reform movements are picking up steam in Maryland, North Carolina, and Congress. Pressure on Virginia's General Assembly is coming from new sources, too, including support from local Tea Parties. This is truly a multi-partisan effort.

Legally, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Arizona case and the three lawsuits pending in Virginia have drastically changed the landscape. This June, the Supreme Court upheld Arizona's independent redistricting commission – debunking the legal myth that redistricting is the sole responsibility of state legislatures. Additionally, two lawsuits filed by the National Democratic Redistricting Trust against the 3rdCongressional District and the majority-minority districts in the House of Delegates are forcing the redistricting conversation to happen mid-decade. The U.S. Supreme Court currently has the former on appeal and the latter is likely to be appealed as well. These cases and the chaos of the August 17th special session underscore the need for reform.

On top of all of this, OneVirginia2021 has filed a lawsuit challenging eleven districts in both chambers of the General Assembly based on their lack of compactness. This is the first non-partisan, non-racial redistricting lawsuit in Virginia's history. It targets districts drawn by both parties and a positive finding by the court would be a win for all citizens, not just one party or another. For more information on the lawsuit you can visit www.onevirginia2021.org/compact.

Redistricting reform is no longer an issue on the backburner.

be willing to serve your community by running for Congress or the General Assembly, you will likely think twice because the lines are likely drawn with the explicit purpose of protecting the incumbent politician.

But more specific to localities, the odds are high your city or town has been carved up by gerrymandering. Split precincts in Virginia increased from 75 splits after the 2001 redistricting to an astounding 224 splits from the 2011 redistricting. That costs Virginia taxpayers approximately $10 million – much of which is handled by the local governments. Newport News even has a precinct that's split three ways for the House of Delegates.

2 The Founding Fathers built the system so state legislatures would control the process.

Virginia Governor Patrick Henry holds the record for the oldest gerrymander in American history when he put his political enemy, James Madison, into Virginia's 5th Congressional District so he'd have to run against the formidable James Monroe. It didn't work – Madison won – but this proves that the shenanigans that happen when politicians are in charge of redistricting are long-standing.

Leaving aside the 27 amendments to the constitution that prove we must continually work to perfect our republic, the most obvious response to this is that the Founding Fathers could never have contemplated the hyper-gerrymandering we have today. When gerrymandering consultants can use political and consumer data to calculate exactly how many voters of one party are in the proposed district, we have a problem that's gotten out of hand.

3 As a legislator, it's my constitutional duty to redistrict.

The Supreme Court's decision this year regarding the Arizona redistricting commission put the nail in the coffin on this argument against independent commissions. Commissions approved by the legislature or by a citizens' referendum (not available in Virginia) are equally empowered by the U.S. Constitution to handle redistricting.
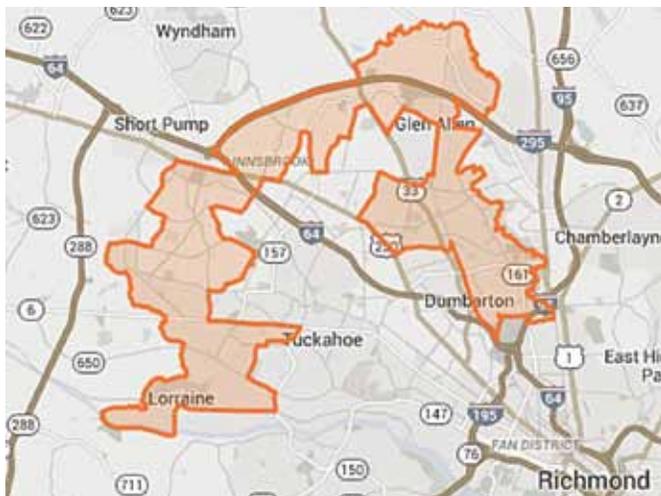
Virginia House District 72 is a prime example of a district that lacks compactness.
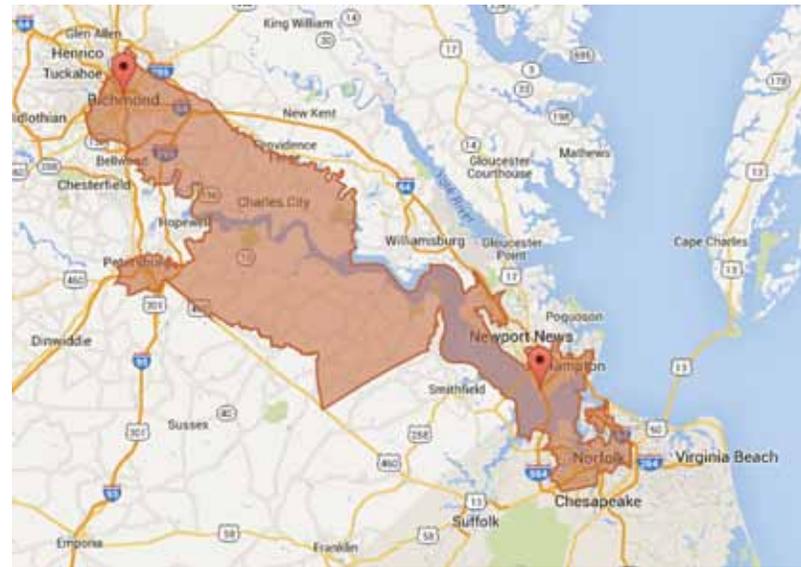
Virginia's 3rd congressional district, represented by Bobby Scott since 1992, is the target of a lawsuit filed by the National Democratic Redistricting Trust. A three-judge panel ruled for the plaintiff 2-1, stating that the lines drawn amounted to racial gerrymandering. The U.S. Supreme Court will hear the case this session.

4 Legislators are accountable to the voters for their redistricting decisions.

Over 80% of Virginians want redistricting reform. We have dozens of unchallenged incumbents and even more non-competitive races for the House and Senate. Legislators even use the redistricting power to carve out potential opponents from their district. Sadly, a citizen's ability to hold a legislator accountable for gerrymandering is directly inhibited by the gerrymandering itself.

5 Keeping the process in the General Assembly ensures transparency.

The current system sorely lacks transparency. It's the classic smoky back room. Those who draw the maps don't like to share who drew them or what changes were made for what reasons. In fact, the Speaker of the House spent about $225,000 of taxpayer money in legal fees this summer to keep the gerrymandering consultant he hired in 2011 from having to turn over documents and testify before the court that was hearing a redistricting case.

These maps were drawn in secrecy and then passed by the General Assembly with minimal community input.

Clearly we have plenty of room for improvement when it comes to transparency. Governor McDonnell's 2011 advisory redistricting commission held numerous public hearings, publicized their criteria, and thoroughly explained their maps. While these recommendations were ignored by the General Assembly, their process stands in stark contrast to the maps we currently have. These maps were drawn in secrecy and then passed by the General Assembly with minimal community input. We stand only to gain transparency from an independent commission.

6 You can't make competitive districts everywhere.

While competitive elections in November would be a positive result, it's not necessarily the best way to achieve fair redistricting. The two things we are looking to either eliminate or at least minimize through OneVirginia2021's reform legislation are (1) the conflict of interest politicians have when drawing their own districts and (2) political gerrymandering.

When consultants can use data to calculate exactly how many voters of one party are in the proposed district, we have a problem.

One of the main ways to do this is to keep communities, cities, counties, and towns together so they have a chance to have their voices heard rather than be fragmented by gerrymandered districts. Though some municipal boundaries were once political, they have generally lost that political baggage and constitute the oldest man-made lines in the Commonwealth. If a community is naturally red or naturally blue, it shouldn't be carved up to make it artificially purple.

7 Redistricting commissions in other states have problems, too.

We agree, but we can learn from those states. Often commissions are structured so that there are an equal number of Republican and Democratic legislators on it and they all agree on a 5th or a 13th person to be "independent." That tie-breaker appointment may just turn out to be a partisan in disguise and the result is still a partisan gerrymander. There are a number of easy fixes to this and Virginia can do better.

Legislation that passed the Senate (SJ 284) last session would have created a seven-member independent commission that addresses the two most cited complaints about commissions. First, it would be made up of two Republican and two Democratic political appointments by the General Assembly and three state office holders who are explicitly non-partisan in their jobs. And second, it would also require a super majority vote of five members to pass a map and the two potential "no" votes could not be the two R's or two D's on the commission. As an added protection, the commission would be prohibited from using political data. Reminder: the reformed system doesn't have to be perfect to be significantly better than the current system.

See more information about this legislation at onevirginia2021.org.

8 This is just Democrats trying to win more seats.

Genuine reform won't ever happen if that's the case. Luckily, it's not. Republicans have been upset about this for years, too. In fact, their nominee for governor in 2013, Ken Cuccinelli, is a major reform supporter. Democrats are partly to blame as well – and not just for their historic role in gerrymandering, but because they gerrymandered the Senate in 2011.

Both parties are to blame and both parties have heroes who

champion reform. All of Virginia's statewide elected officials support reform; Virginia Governors going back for decades have, too (with the exception of Gilmore), and plenty of legislators and local officials. Presidents Reagan, Kennedy, Clinton, both Bushes and Obama have all supported independent redistricting commissions. Pretty much the only people who genuinely oppose reform are those who benefit from the current system the most.

It's really just a matter of whether or not politicians can rise above their own self interest.

9 It'll never happen because politicians would have to give up power.

That argument makes so much sense until you look at history. Rewind the clock back one hundred years…why would men give women the right to vote? Or fifty years…why would a white-dominated Congress pass the Voting Rights Act? No one runs for office because they want to gerrymander. They run for office because they're patriots who want to make their country better.

Perhaps the more instructive historical lesson is from the campaign finance reform movement in the late 90s. Supporters of reform took a boring, insider issue and turned it into the hallmark ethical issue of their time. Reform passed Congress over the objections of an anti-reform-minded Speaker of the House. Plenty of legislators voted for the bill because it was the right thing to do, but others also voted for it because they didn't want to be seen as unethical. Either way, through a mix of patriotism and shaming politicians into doing the right thing, it passed.

So, can redistricting reform win? Absolutely, but it's up to you. VTC

About the author

Brian Canon is the Executive Director of OneVirginia2021: Virginians for Fair Redistricting.

What your locality can do

EVERY LOCALITY, civic or neighborhood organization can pass a resolution supporting redistricting reform. For specific help, email director@onevirginia2021.org. Brian Cannon is also available to make presentations to organizations around Virginia. For the latest information, follow OneVirginia 2021 at www.facebook.com/OneVirginia2021 or go to www.onevirginia2021.org/petition.

2015 THE FUTURE OF VIRGINIA 324 PLACES
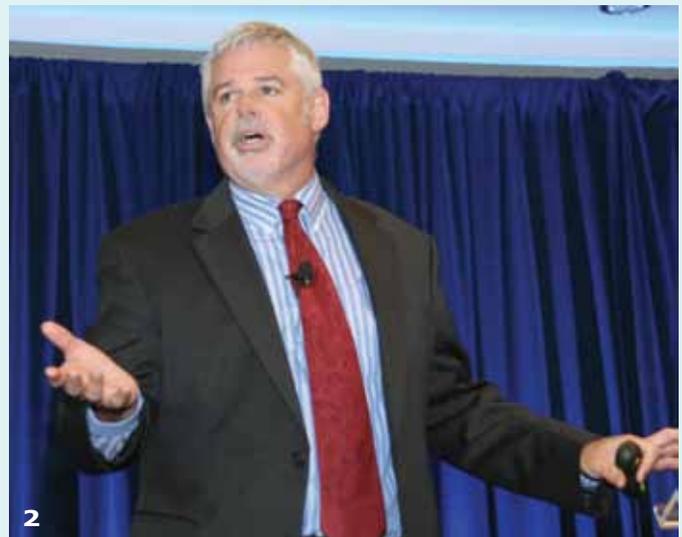OCTOBER 4-6
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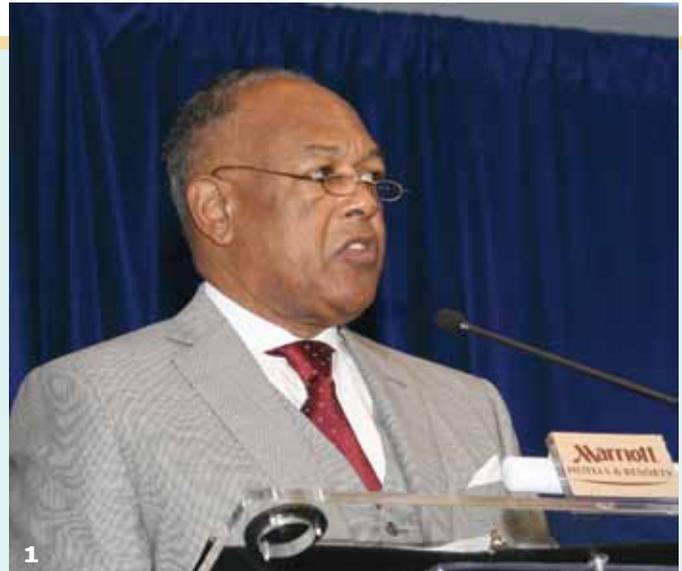
Engage, Enlighten, Inspire

## Highlights of the 2015 VML Annual Conference in Richmond

For the 669 attendees from around the Commonwealth, the VML Annual Conference in Richmond was an incredible learning and networking opportunity. More than 40 speakers gave insight and expertise on hot button issues in education, workforce development, economic development, law enforcement, sharing economy, transportation, and more. Pictured clockwise from top right: **1.** Mayor Dwight Jones welcomed conference attendees to the City of Richmond. **2.** Matt

3

Thornhill, founder of GenerationsMatter, explained how the Millennial generation is redefining the way local governments interact with the public. **3.** Andy Boenau, urban planner for the Timmons Group, led a roundtable discussion on planning and engineering for bikes and pedestrians. **4.** John Martin, president of SIR Research, led a session on transportation and mobility, focusing on the car-lite lifestyles of the future. **5.** Wendell Selden, former president of VLGMA and former city manager of Winchester, enjoyed a lighthearted moment in the opening session. **6.** Ashland Police Chief Doug Goodman led a discussion about the issues surrounding long-term residency in hotels and motels.

1. Governor Terry McAuliffe provided a rousing keynote address at the Public Service Awards Luncheon. **2.** Ken Heath, economic development director for Marion, snaps a shot of the Governor's speech. **3.** Exhibitors from CGI: Kevin Riley and Cristy Sherementa. **4.** Exhibitor from TIPS: Charlie Martin and his wife. **5.** Exhibitor from NLC: Gail Remy King. **6.** Samuel Parham (right), Vice Mayor of Petersburg, accepts his Virginia Mayors Institute certificate from incoming VML President Ron Rordam, Mayor of Blacksburg.
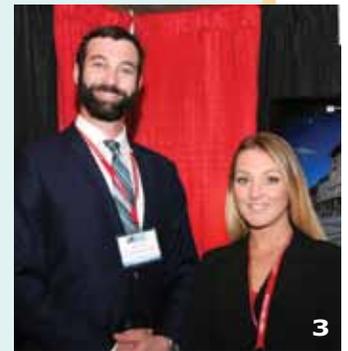
What are Millennials thinking?

7. Dr. Ed Ayers, former president of University of Richmond, moderated a panel discussion with Millennial leaders (L to R) Jay Ell Alexander, public information officer of Petersburg; Nathalia Artus, VP and government loan manager for EVB; and Charles Merritt, partner, 80Amps.

**LEESBURG –
Population 35,001-90,000**

The Town of Leesburg won an achievement award for the Department of Utilities customer service enhancements. (L to R) Katie Sheldon Hammler, Councilmember; Keith Markel, Deputy Town Manager; Betsy Arnett, Public Information Officer; Tom Mason, Assistant Town Manager; Kaj Dentler, Town Manager; Lesley McClaughry, Dept. of Utilities; Amy Wyks, Director of Utilities; Kelly Burk, Vice Mayor; Sherri Jackson, Dept. of Utilities; and Fernando "Marty" Martinez, Councilmember.

MARION – Population 5,001-10,000

The Town of Marion was honored for its Pop-Up Marion economic revitalization program. (L to R) Bill Weaver, Councilmember; Samantha White, Economic Development Administrative Assistant; Ken Heath, Economic Development Director; Bill Rush, Town Manager.

**VIRGINIA BEACH –
Communications Award**

Virginia Beach received the Communications Award for the rebranding of its Landfill and Resource Recovery Center. John Barnes, Waste Management Administrator and Rosemary Wilson, City Councilmember.

**PORTSMOUTH –
Population 90,000 +**

The City of Portsmouth was honored for its Area Report Card. (L to R) Donna Corbus, Sherri Neil, Fred Brusso, Councilman Paige Cherry, Judy Luffman, and Meg Pittenger.

Dedication, Service, Excellence

The 2015 Achievement Award Winners

**SHENANDOAH –
Population Under 5,000**
The Town of Shenandoah was recognized for the Shenandoah Community Computer Center. Joyce Fluharty, Supervisor of the Computer Center, accepted the award.

HALIFAX – President's Award
Town of Halifax received the President's Award for the Banister River Gateway. (L to R) Denise Barksdale, Assistant Manager; Carl Espy, Town Manager; Kristy Johnson, Acting Mayor; Dennis Witt, Vice-Mayor.

FREDERICKSBURG – Population 10,001–35,000
The City of Fredericksburg was honored for its Gun Give-Back Program. (front row, L to R) Laura Mahaney, City Manager Bev Cameron, City Attorney Kathleen Dooley, Police Chief David Nye, Mayor Mary Katherine Greenlaw, Councilor Kerry Devine. (back row, L to R) Captain Brian Layton, Vice Mayor Billy Withers, Jr., Lieutenant H.D. Jones, Sergeant Jim Kuebler, Councilor Charlie Frye.

Two Beautiful Nights

At Host City Night, Richmond entertained conferees at Center Stage and hosted a food truck court outside the performing arts center. Inside the theatre, musicians from all genres performed for VML members and guests. At a dessert reception the following evening, guests enjoyed dancing to classic tunes by the Kings of Swing.

Join VML for next year's annual conference which will be held October 9-11 in Virginia Beach!

Host City Night Sponsors

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By John Martin and Matt Thornhill
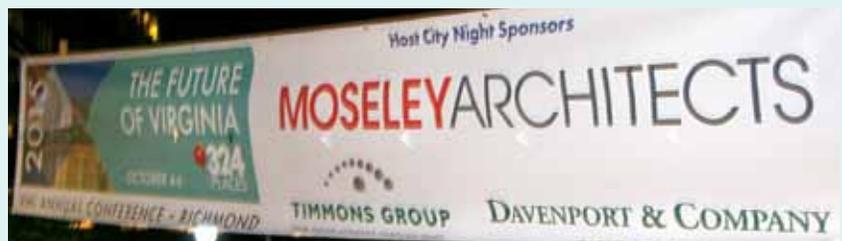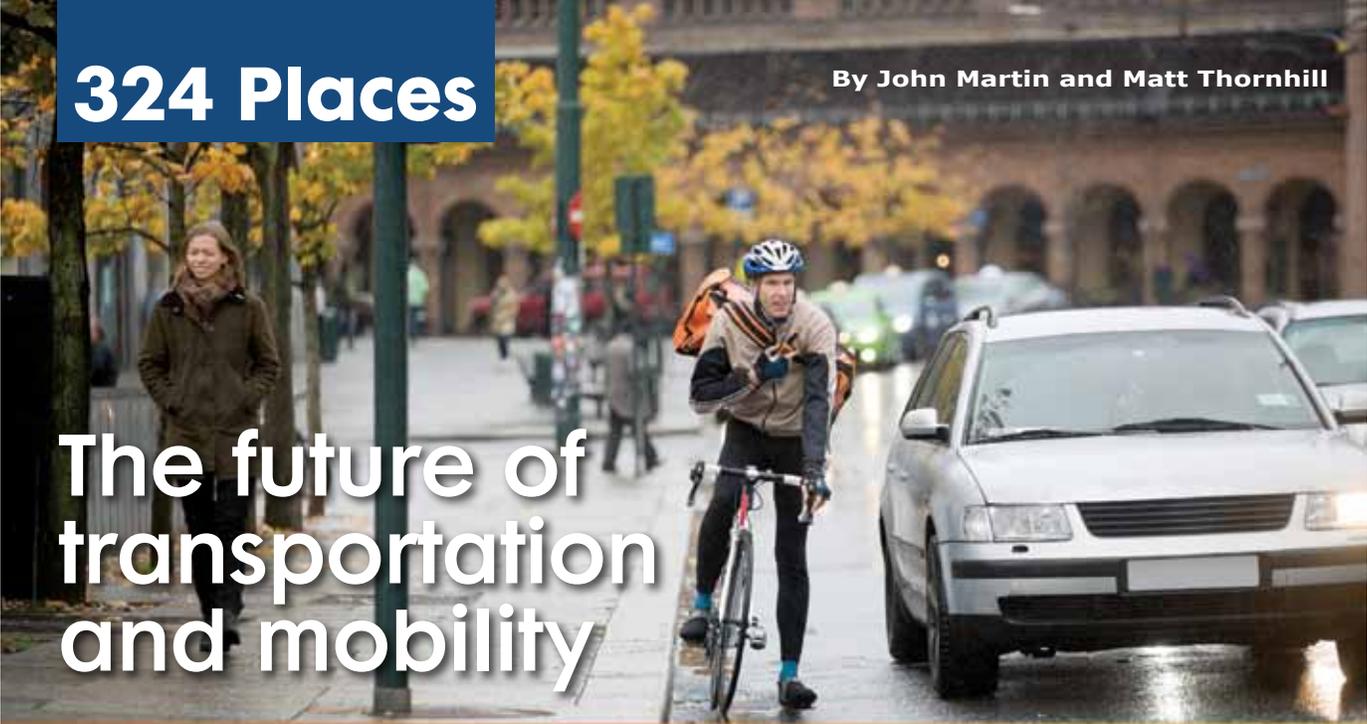
The future of transportation and mobility

An accelerating rate of change

OF THE TRENDS IMPACTING local government today, nothing is changing more rapidly than transportation and mobility. There are strong tailwinds creating a new future for how citizens and travelers move in Virginia, and there are strong headwinds for community planners and leaders that will make managing that new future even more challenging.

Top five trends shaping the future of transportation and mobility

1. Generational preferences will drive mobility needs and transportation planning

Change is being driven by the different generational attitudes and preferences around transportation and mobility. All ages and all generations today are moving towards what is called the "15-minute community." That is, a place where they can live, work and play all within about a 15-minute radius. The 15-minute conceptual "time limit" is really just an easy way to express personal convenience. It can be 15 or 30 minutes. The "15-minute community" can be an extremely high density downtown area or relatively less dense, but still concentrated activity center. Transportation-related mobility comes into play as walking, biking, taking public transit happen more and driving happens less.

> **All ages and all generations today are moving towards what is called the "15-minute community," a place where they can live, work and play all within about a 15-minute radius.**

- **Many older Boomers** (ages 51-69) are downsizing from their larger homes in the suburbs to low-maintenance living in activity centers, often in more urban settings, or near healthcare-related services. They are not typically relocating to "senior living" enclaves in sunny climates, but staying in or near their communities, close to their real-world network of family, friends and associates. More and more, they are transitioning from success to significance, looking for ways to leave their mark. What better place to do so than in the community they are part of today?

- **Generation Xers** (34-50) are the "latchkey kids" who grew up in an era where the neighborhood essentially raised them. As Gen Xers are now at the family stage of life, they prefer settings where they can safely send their children to neighborhood schools and their workplace is close enough they can attend every school play, sporting event, and activity. For many, this includes the growing trend of distributed workplaces where the home replaces the traditional inner city office 45 minutes away.

- **Millennials** (14-32) prefer to live in community with each other, ideally in close proximity to urban settings or activity centers. In a recent Urban Land Institute study, 63 percent report they would prefer to live where a car is not even necessary.

This migration towards urban areas or activity centers is already at play in Virginia's Golden Population Crescent running from Northern Virginia through Richmond and over to Hampton Roads. But this migration is also impacting rural counties in the western half of the Commonwealth. The desire to spend less time traveling and more time living will influence personal and corporate location decisions. The growth of Charlottesville's downtown area and the renaissance of Staunton's downtown are prime examples.

2. Driverless technology and the sharing economy

A second trend impacting long-term transportation planning is the emergence of disruptive technologies like Uber and other car-sharing services. With Google as a major financial

supporter of Uber, and investing heavily in the driverless car, it's not hard to imagine a future where one simply tells their mobile phone that they need a ride from point A to point B. Almost instantly a driverless Google/Uber car appears and whisks you on your way. In such a future, why own a car?

Really? Driverless cars everywhere? Yes. All of the major automobile manufacturers are investing in this eventuality. This future is not that far off. By 2040, much of our driver controlled fleet will have been replaced by a network of driverless cars roaming around waiting for that next call. And many of these cars most likely will be electric.

The impact of the driverless future is huge. Our old formula of generating transportation-related revenue from gas taxes will change. The need for parking lots and garages in downtown areas will fall. So, too, will licenses and related fees. Sure, it will take time to replace a large installed base of automobiles requiring drivers, but that day will arrive. Even with a growing population in Virginia, the actual number of cars will ultimately peak.

Some communities, like Arlington County, have been intentional in their efforts for years to get cars off the roads and to focus more on moving people and goods, not vehicles. Over the years Arlington County Commuter Services, the local transportation demand management agency, has successfully reduced the level of traffic on the County's roadways despite a growing population and an increasing number of jobs located in the county.

In denser population areas across the state, we are starting to see the advent of car and bike sharing programs, which are also reducing the need to own a car. This is happening even in traditional suburban counties. Chesterfield County, in the Richmond region, has developed a comprehensive master plan for adding more bike lanes, bike paths, and trails to support residents' rising expectations to get around on their own power.

3. Planes, trains and automobiles - The future is multimodal

The Secretariat of Transportation and the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) are responsible for all of

About this series

THIS ARTICLE IS THE EIGHTH in a series on the future of Virginia's cities, towns, and counties, called 324 Places. VML has partnered with our organizations, the Southeastern Institute of Research, Inc., and GenerationsMatter, to bring this program to the VML membership. Our goal is to provide leaders in municipalities across Virginia with the information, insights, and tools they need to understand and respond to what's coming.

Virginia's transportation agencies and assets, from roads to airports to rail to ports. This responsibility includes planning for the Commonwealth's long-range transportation needs. Historically, long-range planning has all too often defaulted to one solution – "build more roads." Now, based on many of the trends mentioned above, Secretary Aubrey Layne and the CTB are planning a future transportation system that will drive Virginia's new economy through a more seamless integration of all modes of transportation (cars, transit, commuter trains and buses, light rail, biking trails, walking paths, etc.). Visit the VTrans2040 web site at vtrans.org/vtrans2040.asp to learn about the latest thinking behind Virginia's long-range planning efforts.

4. Funding is changing

With the passage of House Bill 2 (HB2) in 2014, the Commonwealth is taking politics out of transportation planning and funding. As the new website (virginiahb2.org) says, HB2 is "about investing limited tax dollars in the right projects that meet the most critical transportation needs in Virginia."

At the heart of the new law is "scoring" transportation projects based on an objective process that involves public engagement and input. Projects are being scored based on an objective analysis applied statewide. The law is designed to improve transparency and accountability. Once projects are scored, the CTB will use that information to allocate funding.

In addition, funding sources for transporta-

Cities across the U.S. are launching bike-sharing services. Some are run exclusively by the municipalities while others are public/private partnerships with corporate sponsors.

Localities should focus on creating activity centers to meet the growing demand for a 15-minute community where people can live, work and play.

tion infrastructure will continue to evolve. One example is the revenue earned from gasoline taxes in Virginia. Unfortunately for this old funding model, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) are down since the Great Recession. Car fuel economy averages are increasing. Combined, there is less gas consumption and therefore fewer tax dollars being collected to generate the needed investment in transportation. Something will have to change. The future model will most likely involve a VMT (vehicle miles traveled) tax based on usage. Residents and commercial divers will pay their fair share based on their usage of the roadways.

5. The transportation system will drive Virginia's new economy

There is no question that sequestration has cast an economic shadow across Virginia. But for most of Virginia's governmental and business leaders, we know this is only temporary. The Administration is leading the charge in creating the new Virginia economy, fueled by entrepreneurship, innovation and a well-trained workforce. One of the key enablers of this new economy will be our transportation system – a growing network of seamless mobility connections that not only helps move business (freight and workers) but also helps create great places that attract and retain the highest quality workforce.

In an earlier article about economic development, we talked about the growing importance of creating great places to live, work, and play in order to attract people, then employers. Called "placemaking," Virginia's towns, cities, and counties can attract people and companies by investing in improvements to roads, creating walkable and bike-friendly neighborhoods and communities, and developing new events and activities to enhance quality of life.

By some estimations, 80 percent of public space is made up of roads and transportation infrastructure. That land use creates opportunities for localities to get involved in placemaking activities by doing simple things like naming an intersection to create a sense of place or creating bike and walking trails as part of all road improvement efforts. This isn't all that's needed, but every step can make a difference.

5 ways local leaders should hit the accelerator

Given these important trends in transportation and mobility in Virginia, what should local government officials be doing now? We recommend these specific steps:

1. **Make sure your elected officials and government staff understand the impact of transportation on your area's economic development efforts.** They need to understand that transportation is more than highways and moving cars. It's about moving people and goods and creating a great place, which drive Virginia's new economy.

2. **Know how HB2 works** and what it means for future transportation projects. Visit virginiahb2.org.

3. **Create and encourage "activity center" development**, even for smaller, more rural counties. Engage your land use planners, developers, and your transportation people to hold joint meetings and discussions about how to build, improve, enhance, or retrofit specific areas to make them more appealing to all generations interested in the 15-minute living concept. And, yes, keep some areas zoned for more rural settings.

Car-sharing services are especially popular in university towns and cities.

4. **Learn about VTrans2040 by inviting Virginia's Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment (OIPI) to speak to your community** about what they are planning and the implications for your stakeholders. Visit VTrans.org.

5. **Use existing transportation assets to serve placemaking activities.** Even basic steps like naming intersections can help create more of defined "place" where people want to live, work, and play. What originally was a funny sign at a gas station way out West Broad Street in western Henrico County in Richmond evolved to become Short Pump, home to businesses, hotels, retailers, and thousands of tax-paying citizens.

Overall, remember that this is a fast-changing category. How people get around your community today will be different tomorrow, thanks in part to technology, but also to the smart planning by Virginia's transportation leaders and the local actions you take today.

Change is coming. You'll be better off by pressing on the accelerator instead of slamming on the brakes. VTC

About the authors

John W. Martin is president and CEO of the Southeastern Institute of Research, Inc., a 50-year-old full-service marketing research firm headquartered in Richmond. Matt Thornhill, founder and president of GenerationsMatter, is a leading national authority on understanding and marketing to each generation.

By Heath Covey

Please don't put me on hold!
Chesapeake Call Center gives residents answers, not transfers

PEOPLE OFTEN SAY calling their local government for service is akin to a game of ping-pong in which they are the ball. Bouncing around among departments and seemingly endless hold times do not lead to happy customers. For callers to the city of Chesapeake, however, the past 10 years have been game-free, thanks to the city's Customer Contact Center, better known as 382-CITY. The center provides a one-stop shop for residents, businesses, visitors and others seeking information, assistance or services from the city.

Before the Customer Contact Center came online in 2005, calls went to customer service agents in some departments, and to frontline staff or administrative personnel in others. Callers needing service from multiple departments would be forwarded about like those ping-pong balls, and there was no centralized starting point for those who knew what they needed, but not whom to ask for help.

Former City Manager, the late Dr. Clarence Cuffee, led the effort to bring order and efficiency to the process, and the Customer Contact Center was born. "Improving access to government is an important goal for city staff," Cuffee said. "Our citizens don't always know how the city government is organized, and as a result, don't always know who to call when service is needed. A single point of contact for city services and information simplifies the process greatly for our citizens."

Now, a decade later, the proof of Cuffee's vision is in the numbers. More than 2.6 million service requests have been processed, both by the city's staff members and using the online portal on the city's website, CityOfChesapeake.net. Ninety-five percent of calls are answered within 30 seconds, with the average call lasting just over one and one-half minutes. Adding an additional 90 seconds post-call for follow-up and each call taker is handling about 20 calls per hour.

Call Center Manager Patricia Morrow has been with the Chesapeake Customer Contact Center since its inception. She and her staff of nine have handled more than 1.5 million calls during the Center's first decade of operation.

A city with answers

✔ **Nearly 8 out of 10 calls remain in the Contact Center for service.**

✔ **95% of calls are answered within 30 seconds.**

✔ **The average call lasting just over a minute-and-a-half.**

It's true that not every call can be handled completely by the Customer Contact Center staff. For example, a caller seeking information about a specific facet of the building code would be transferred to that office. But nearly eight out of ten calls remain in the Contact Center for service. Lest a caller think they've reached some great electronic black hole, every call is assigned a number which the citizen can use if they need to call back to check on something, or if they have a complaint (or compliment) about the service received. Departments receive immediate notice of service requests, and must meet specific goals for timely response, including documenting the actions taken, in the Customer Contact Center database.

Is a call center right for your town?

When asked what she believes are the key elements a locality considering a contact center should review, Center Manager Patricia Morrow said, "You must have support from management and municipal staff for the contact center concept. That includes not only getting one started, but as on-going support in keeping center staff up to date on new programs, services and regulations, as well as changes to existing items. If the call takers don't have up-to-date information, the system quickly becomes useless." To foster this interaction, Morrow actively pursues cross-training opportunities with all operating departments. This allows Contact Center staff to meet and interact

Team Leader Terri Miller trains Janet Wenger from the Parks, Recreation & Tourism Department. Wenger is one of many employees from throughout the city who are trained to supplement the regular call-takers during times of emergency.

with employees of other departments and presents an opportunity to review current procedures, leading to updates and process improvements.

Morrow went on to say that staffing a new center with current municipal employees goes a long way toward a fast, effective start, since they will have an invaluable amount of institutional knowledge. In many cases, this can be accomplished naturally, as the new operation absorbs the roles filled by current staff, with the best being transferred to the new center. Fully staffing with current employees, however, is not the best course; having about 20% of staff from "the outside" helps to bring a citizen perspective which longtime staff may lack. Chesapeake's Center followed the 80% internal, 20% external rule in hiring, to great success.

In its first decade, Chesapeake's Contact Center has become a standard for residents, but it wasn't always that way. The Center opened as one component of Chesapeake's "The City That Cares" campaign, and much of the marketing effort for the Contact Center came under that campaign's umbrella. Ten years later, center staff remain proactive in educating residents about their offerings, attending civic league meetings and city-sponsored events on a regular basis. They even provide training sessions on the use of the online portal, which have proven popular with those less familiar with technology and the internet.

Chesapeake's Center participates in studies conducted by Benchmark Portal, a well-recognized call center benchmarking company that maintains a record of metrics and performance standards on thousands of call centers in North America. Several times over the past decade the Chesapeake Center scored in the Top 20 of the small-sized (under 100 employees) call centers, including one Top 10 finish.

By far, the most popular service request Chesapeake call takers receive is to schedule bulk trash collections, and this is a perfect example of the center's automation. The call taker obtains the resident's address, along with the type of material to be collected. A collection date is set for the next regular trash day. The information, entered into the Contact Center's customer service request database, is then saved automatically in the system's server, which generates a report, by address, for the waste administrator. These reports, printed at 5:00 a.m. each collection day, allow supervisors to plan truck routes for the most efficient, timely pick-ups of the resident's items.

While most calls are fairly routine – bulk trash, inspection requests, information about city programs – some can best be termed as "unusual." The center has had its share of Unidenti-

fied Flying Object reports, mostly coinciding with launches from NASA's Wallops Island facility on Virginia's Eastern Shore. There are also the annual calls around holiday time, seeking help with cooking turkeys, and staff can refer the caller to a number of web links readily available in the knowledge base that list the proper cooking times for any size bird.

It's that knowledge base, in fact, which Morrow feels is critical to the Contact Center's success. "We don't know everything, of course," said Morrow. "But once we answer a question the first time, it goes into the database for all the call takers to access, so the next time it comes up, we will know." That applies equally to facts and information about the city, along with those more obscure answers to questions like, "Where can I land a helicopter?" or "How old is the Great Dismal Swamp?"

Bolstering Emergency Response

The Contact Center also plays a key role in the city's emergency response functions, with call takers relocating to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and ramping up their efforts to a 24/7 operation. Staff from other city departments, pre-trained during calm periods, augment Contact Center staff during this time.

Storm-related requests take priority, and the center also serves as an intelligence source, helping operations staff react to community needs more quickly. When Chesapeake's new Public Safety Operations Building comes online in 2017, the Contact Center and EOC will be permanently co-located in the new facility, eliminating the need to move for an activation.

Clearly, Chesapeake's Customer Contact Center is a concept that works. In a recent survey of residents, more than ninety-four percent of respondents described themselves as "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with 382-CITY. Reaching this level takes commitment – from the call takers, from the other city departments, and from city leadership. With an organization focused on common goals of enhanced customer experiences and more efficient service delivery, the addition of a Customer Contact Center can be a true game-changer, eliminating caller ping-pong, once and for all. ⓋⓉⒸ

About the author
Heath Covey is Public Information Officer for the City of Chesapeake.

Most unusual questions

Was that a UFO I saw last night?
(usually coinciding with a launch from NASA's Wallops Island facility.)

Where can I land a helicopter?

How old is the Great Dismal Swamp?

How long should I cook my turkey?
(usually in November)

Most popular question

How do I arrange a bulk trash pick-up?

A: I can schedule that for you now!

By Emily Griffey

Virginia's wake-up call in early childhood education

OVER THE PAST eight years, Virginia has fought its way back from the Great Recession. Although the economy has started to turn around, conditions have not improved for kids in Virginia. Our child poverty rate in Virginia has increased to 15.7% of all kids in Virginia. Young children, infants, toddlers and preschoolers are most impacted by the stresses of child poverty during these early years of explosive brain development. At Voices for Virginia's Children, our Kids Count data shows that one in three young children in Virginia lives in a poor or near-poor family.

In recent years, childhood development researchers and economists have teamed up to investigate how early childhood education can produce short-term savings and long-term returns on investment. They have found that quality early childhood education could produce a $7-10 return on investment to society in avoided retention and incarceration and in improved graduation and employment rates.

Despite difficult state and local budget scenarios, enrollment in the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) has steadily increased to serve more than 18,000 four-year-olds. Localities and school systems have identified a priority to include local matching funds, often over and above what the state requires, to ensure that at-risk children have access to high quality preschool. The reason why localities keep investing is because Superintendents and local Supervisors/Council members see the results. Their students are better prepared for kindergarten and for success in school when they attend preschool.

Some localities leave VPI opportunities for at-risk students on the table and do not pull down state funding. They cite local match requirements, space within school buildings and overall state funding as barriers to participation.

Yet not all at-risk children in Virginia get the opportunity to attend VPI – over a quarter of the students identified as at-risk are not offered the opportunity. Thirteen localities leave more than 100 VPI opportunities for at-risk students on the table and do not pull down all of the

Fairfax partners with Main Street Child Development Center, a private community-based child care center, to offer a VPI classroom for children who are also eligible to receive child care assistance.

state funding. Localities have cited their local match requirements, space within school buildings and overall state funding as the barriers to their full participation.

The right timing

The good news is that policymakers are paying more attention to VPI than ever before. Over this past summer, ten members of House Appropriations and Senate Finance have been meeting as the Joint Subcommittee on Reforming the Virginia Preschool Initiative. They have heard substantive presentations from national researchers, models from other states and testimony from VPI coordinators and superintendents. These appropriators have the final say over VPI as a budget issue.

In other good news, this coming year will bring the signature budget proposal for Governor McAuliffe. He has promised to make education his top priority and is on the record as a strong supporter of pre-k programs.

All of these factors come together for what could be the first significant investments in Virginia's early childhood education system and public pre-school in quite some time. The bulk of state support for early learning flows to VPI, but it is only a part of the continuum of early learning. Also along the continuum are publicly and privately funded initiatives for home visitation for new parents, high quality child care, early intervention and special education.

Four ways to invest in quality

To produce a return on investment for early childhood education, Virginia must ensure that we have an effective early childhood system and provide the opportunity for at-risk children to attend high-quality pre-school. How can we ensure that the early childhood opportunities we provide are high quality? Here are some ideas.

1. **Fund VPI to support the true cost of quality.** VPI's $6,000 per pupil rate has not changed since 2008. School divisions report that true costs range from $8,000 per pupil to $14,000 per pupil. This means that localities end up footing far more than their required match to support the true cost of provid-

ing high quality services. If the per pupil rate was increased, local school divisions would shoulder less of the burden for the true costs and could potentially serve more students.

2. **Support continuous quality improvement in the classroom.** Research shows that teacher-student interactions are the best indicator of quality in the classroom. To ensure that early childhood educators are prepared to work with young students, Virginia needs workforce preparation programs linked to appropriate skills and on-site support for teachers in the classroom. Early childhood has pioneered methods of continuous quality improvement in education. These efforts, through Virginia Quality and the Quality Rating and Improvement System, among others, should be strengthened throughout the state.

3. **Establish state-level systems to monitor progress and improve results.** School readiness relies on a strong "collective impact" across health services, education, family support and community support. To strengthen their collective impact, the Governor's Children's Cabinet and the Commonwealth Council for Childhood Success should be made permanent and given specific responsibilities, establish goals and formal relationships with the legislature. There should be a high-level point person within state government with the job of managing the interagency work and collaboration.

4. **Target the students who could benefit most from VPI by adopting research-based, but flexible, eligibility criteria**. Research shows that economically disadvantaged young children are less likely to participate in pre-school. Children with risk factors, such as low parental education, unstable housing and English language learners, also benefit greatly from pre-school. Given this research, Virginia should adopt eligibility policies in line with our neighbors in Tennessee and North Carolina. These states establish standard criteria for statewide eligibility, including income level. They promote local flexibility and encourage mixed-income settings by

Early childhood education

By the Numbers

One in three

children in Virginia
live in a poor or near poor family

18,000
four-year-olds
are enrolled in the
Virginia Preschool Initiative

$6,000
current per pupil rate funded by VPI
This rate has not been
increased since 2008

$8,000-$14,000
true costs per pupil
as reported by
Virginia school divisions

$7-$10
return on investment in early childhood education

Economists base this estimate
on improved graduation and
employment rates and reduced
incarceration rates.

Source: *Voices for Virginia's Children, KIDS COUNT Data Center*

Children at the Main Street Child Development Center pick their jobs for the week.

prioritizing enrollment based on risk factors or setting aside a percentage of slots for children above the income criteria.

If Virginia policymakers move forward with some of these policy changes, we will hopefully see more economically disadvantaged young children participate in early childhood education, leading to better results in K-12 and, eventually, the future workforce. We have patiently and prudently waited to spend our limited resources in this economic recovery effectively. While we were waiting, the economic picture for children in Virginia worsened. The investments we could have made in early childhood education could have generated savings and returns on investment. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

Early childhood innovators in local government

Fairfax County's one-stop-shop approach

Fairfax County has taken an approach to align most of the county's early childhood services through one agency, the Office for Children. This entity serves as an administrative hub for child care assistance funds, local licensing, quality improvement initiatives, neighborhood teams and the Virginia Preschool Initiative. By aligning these efforts under one administrative hub, the county is able to partner with a va-

riety of child care providers efficiently and effectively. They even administer a mixed-delivery model for the Virginia Preschool Initiative, offering opportunities to attend public pre-school in private child care centers. By creating this one-stop-shop approach, Fairfax is able to identify the needs of a diverse array of early childhood providers and develop strategies that improve the quality of care and the access to care for low-income children.

Alexandria creates formal routes to community coordination

The City of Alexandria has established formal methods of coordination and community participation in the development of local early childhood

strategies. One of these methods is the creation of a "city and schools" team. It is a monthly meeting of city council members, school board members and local administrators from the school division and human services to review needs and progress towards early childhood education goals. This forum allows for cross-agency, cross-sector coordination and the opportunity to continually refine plans and tactics. In addition, the community-led Alexandria Children, Youth and Families Collaboration Commission has involved community stakeholders to create a master plan for Alexandria identifying strategies to improve early childhood education.

For more information visit www.vakids.org to read our "Pre-school Profiles" on Fairfax and Alexandria. ⬥

About the author

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If I Were Mayor Essay Contest deadline
December 1

The deadline for receipt of entries in VML's annual "If I Were Mayor" Essay Contest is December 1. The essay contest is open to all seventh graders in Virginia. For the full contest rules, go to vml.org or contact Sherall Dementi at sdementi@vml.org.

See local ornaments at Governor's Mansion
December 3 – 18

More than 125 localities have submitted ornaments for the holiday tree at the Governor's Mansion. The Executive Mansion and the tree are open to the public December 3-18. The Capitol tree lighting and open house is December 3rd, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Tours are available Tuesdays, Wednesday, and Thursdays (Dec. 7-17), Friday, December 11th and 18th. Sunday, December 13th. Visit executivemansion.virginia.gov for the most up-to-date schedule and details.

VEPGA board meeting
December 11

The Virginia Energy Purchasing Governmental Association will hold its quarterly board meeting Friday, December 11, 9:30 a.m. at the Henrico County Administration Building. Contact: Joe Lerch jlerch@vml.org.

COIA Training – A Webinar
December 11

This year, VML is providing its Conflict of Interests Act training via webinar. The training helps local government officials understand their responsibilities under the Virginia Conflict of Interests Act. Webinar Presenter: Christopher Piper, Executive Director, Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council. Friday, December 11, 11:00-11:45 a.m. Register at vml.org.

VML Finance Forum
January 6, 2016

The Finance Forum lets local officials know what's on the horizon for localities and the state budget as we head into the 2016 General Assembly session. Topics will include: state revenues and 2016 budget; local finance trends and perspectives; VRS local budget pressures; assessment of local revenues; and education. Wednesday, January 6, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Hilton in Richmond. Cost is $55. Register at vml.org.

Want to see more events?

For details on these and many more local government events across the state, visit VML's extensive events calendar at www.vml.org/events.

VML Day at the Capitol
January 27, 2016

This is your opportunity to meet with your legislators and share your concerns about proposed legislation that will affect local governments. VML will provide talking points in advance of VML Day. Plan to meet with your legislators prior to our 3:00 p.m. briefing or at the reception following the briefing. A briefing by VML staff will be held 3:00 to 5:30 p.m. A quality reception for legislators and local officials will follow from 5:30 to 7:30. All legislators from both chambers will be invited by VML to attend the reception, which will be held in the foyer of the Library of Virginia adjacent to Capitol Square. Cost of reception is $50. For more information and to register, go to vml.org.

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