

## Transportation issues continued...

- Mixed use parking decks that blend with the surrounding area and may include built-in street-level retail;
- Delivery truck regulation to coordinate motor vehicle travel and business deliveries on narrow primary roadways in a small town setting;
- Enticing commuters to become members of the local workforce;
- Offering incentives to local insurance companies that offer lower use-based insurance costs to drivers who drive less;
- Location efficient mortgages that offer more favorable mortgages to people who live near or tend to rely more on public transportation; and
- Transit-oriented development that encourages mixed use centers near transportation centers.

A few months after the summit, executive directors from the Main Street organizations in the six communities met to discuss next steps to build on the information shared during the summit. These next steps include: the development and distribution of a summary of the summit proceedings; cooperating with one another during the other's comprehensive planning processes; hosting a mini-*Reality Check* similar to those being conducted by the Urban Land Institute throughout the Washington metropolitan region; and development of a regional marketing plan. This plan would both emphasize their identity as a group and as part of a larger coalition of small rural and exurban communities located along a corridor of important historic sites from Gettysburg to Monticello known as the Journey Through Hallowed Ground corridor.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Stella Tarnay. Reality Check: Envisioning Our Region's Growth. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 2005, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Exurb refers to prosperous rural communities beyond the suburbs that, due to high-speed and/or limited-access highways act as dormitory communities for an urban area.

<sup>3</sup> Tarnay, 24.



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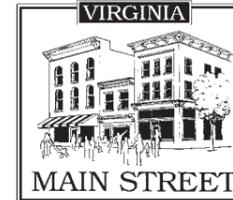
The full, 52-page version of this document may be accessed at [www.dhcd.virginia.gov/mainstreet/Resource%20Publications.htm](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/mainstreet/Resource%20Publications.htm). The document includes the proceedings of the summit and a brief explanation about each of the policy strategies outlined in this summary.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## RETAINING A UNIQUE SENSE OF PLACE AT THE EDGES OF METROPOLITAN GROWTH



## Proceedings from the Regional Summit of Northern Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Main Street Communities

*Forty leaders from six Northern Virginia and Piedmont communities including Berryville, Culpeper, Manassas, Orange, Warrenton, and Winchester met in March of 2005 to discuss ways to accommodate growth in the wake of Washington, D.C. metropolitan area expansion while retaining the unique character of their respective communities. It is estimated that over 800,000 new housing units will be required to accommodate the two million new residents expected to live in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area by 2030.<sup>1</sup> These six communities lie at the edges of the metropolitan area and now experience new challenges stemming from metropolitan expansion. The leaders of these six exurban communities shared ideas about ways that they might have a more active role in shaping the future of their communities in the face of regional change.<sup>2</sup> The discussion about best practices and solutions centered on three primary issues of concern: property development; changes in the retail business climate; and transportation.*

*property development  
changes in the retail  
business climate  
transportation*



# Executive Summary



## Property development...

Property development emerged as the primary issue of concern for the summit participants. With the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area growing at a rate of 46 to 76 acres per day, the amount of land developed annually equates in size to roughly two-thirds of the District of Columbia.<sup>3</sup> Related to development, leaders from the exurban communities mentioned ideas such as encouraging a mix of uses in the downtown, including housing in upper stories, retail at the street level, and redevelopment that promotes investment while minimizing demolition. Officials discussed the following tools for guiding property development:

- Local comprehensive plans that spell out the goals of the community and include the objectives and policies that will support these goals;
- Historic rehabilitation tax credits to encourage developers to rehabilitate older structures, minimizing the need for demolition;
- Advocacy and education initiatives to help increase public awareness of development issues;
- Revitalization of deteriorating neighborhoods near downtown commercial districts to bolster revitalization of the historic commercial core;
- Using proffers to guide development by attaching conditions to rezoning requests by developers;
- Certified Local Government (CLG) Programs that give local governments access to special grants for planning and educational activities related to historic preservation;
- Local historic districts which enable a jurisdiction to impose urban design guidelines on renovation, remodeling and sometimes new development in order to ensure that the existing character of a neighborhood is respected;
- Conservation easements (legal agreements between local governments or land trusts and property owners) to restrict the use of the land and preserve rural landscapes;
- Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) as an alternative clustered form of subdivision development that reduces infrastructure costs;

- Master planning that details specific elements and tools for directing investment and revitalization activity in the historic commercial area of a community;
- Overlay zoning to promote compact, mixed-use development;
- Enforcement of the existing building maintenance code within the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code;
- Sliding-scale zoning to reduce allowable residential density permitted during subdivision or development with the increasing size of a parent parcel;
- Brownfield assessments to provide actual data about the environmental conditions of brownfield and to help determine the feasibility of various infill development uses;
- Affordable housing set-aside ordinances that require affordable housing be made available in new developments so as to help mitigate the effects of rising housing costs;
- Application of the forthcoming Virginia building rehabilitation subcode for existing buildings that allows flexibility for rehabilitating historic properties while complying with the spirit of current development standards outlined in the Uniform Statewide Building Code;
- Innovative zoning codes which allow for easier development of mixed-use and pedestrian friendly neighborhoods;
- Regional cooperation where public leaders meet for a mutually beneficial exchange of ideas;
- Split-rate property tax assessments to discourage benign neglect of properties while encouraging infill development in existing residential and commercial areas that are already served by existing infrastructure; and
- Visualization and build-out studies to allow public officials to see what their community would look like if it were built out under current zoning ordinances.



## Changes in the retail business climate....

The changing climate for independent and locally owned retail business also generated concerns among local leaders. The summit participants wonder if the proliferation of big box stores and lifestyle centers, which mimic authentic downtown shopping areas, will erode the overall sense of place and history of their communities. Community leaders would prefer to encourage local independent businesses in their historic commercial areas because they tend to generate a higher economic impact than big box retailers. Participants identified the following tools for encouraging a healthy retail business climate:

- Building a community of merchants to encourage communication among people with a vested interest in the health of the retail district;
- Promotional events to attract visitors to the retail district;
- Cooperative advertising which merchants can purchase jointly;
- Street trees that make a commercial district attractive and encourage shoppers to stay longer;
- Façade improvement incentives for property owners to improve the exteriors of their buildings;
- Street flower and landscaping programs that attract customers and contribute to higher storefront occupancy rates;
- Commercial building size caps to discourage the development of large buildings which may be hard to lease once the original tenant vacates;
- Virginia Enterprise Zones in which qualifying businesses may receive financial incentives from the local and state governments jointly;
- Lease-back programs where a local Main Street organization signs a long-term lease and rehabilitates a deteriorating building and sublets to another tenant;
- Retail preservation ordinances to preserve retail in downtown areas so as to maintain pedestrian traffic and retail vitality;
- Revolving funds to purchase and resell buildings on the condition that money from the selling of buildings is returned to the fund;
- Mystery shopping at local retailers in order to assess and improve existing levels of customer service in the district;
- Coordination of downtown store hours to encourage shops and restaurants to remain open during times when more people can browse and generate cross-sales; and
- Economic and community impact review requirements for developers to show what kind of economic impact a large new development would have on the community.

## Transportation issues...

Finally, summit members identified transportation issues as their third most pressing regional concern. At present, the majority of residents in these communities have daily commutes of 30 minutes or less. Officials recognize, however, that as the number of residents commuting long distances grows, transportation networks and options will have to adapt. Summit participants discussed the following policy tools:

- Local-oriented, not just commuter, transit systems to and from community destinations to help reduce road congestion;
- Non-motorized transportation networks to enhance movement and access for pedestrians, cyclists, etc.;