



Virginia Community Foundation 2015 – 2019 Strategic Plan

Adopted by the Board of Directors:
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PLANNING PROCESS

This document summarizes the results of a comprehensive strategic planning effort undertaken by the Virginia Community Foundation. The Plan was developed in order to *establish a future direction that focuses on addressing a limited set of priorities which are linked to community needs*. In other words, the Foundation wishes to strengthen its impact by allocating resources to making a visible difference on a few key issues, rather than spreading itself thin in an attempt to be everything for everybody.

The strategic planning process was designed to include broad participation and input from the Foundation's stakeholders. This community-based process took place between November 2014 and February 2015, and included the following major steps:

Contextual Scan – Substantial demographic, economic, and social indicator data was gathered and analyzed to reveal current conditions and trends in the Virginia community. In addition to review of existing data sources, focus groups with community leaders were also conducted during this preparatory phase. Focus group participants represented a broad cross-section of the community including local business, financial institutions, municipal services, youth and senior services, early childhood – post-secondary education, health care, elected officials, legal services, the arts, and the faith community. These sessions generated rich qualitative data about a vision for our community's future, compelling local needs, and desired roles for the Foundation in addressing these issues.

Planning Retreats – Three planning retreats were held to review information collected in the contextual scan, to develop consensus on a future community vision and organizational mission; to establish priority goals based on community needs, and to develop effective strategies for addressing each of these goals. Composition of the Planning Team included the Foundation's board of directors and staff.

Action Planning – Small teams of board and staff were formed to develop detailed action plans for the first year of implementation. Due to the timing of the planning process, the definition of "Year 1" was extended through 2016. This will allow sufficient time for implementation to progress before completing the first action plan update.

Successful strategic plans are those that are incorporated into daily operations and organizational decision-making. With this understanding, the Foundation's new Strategic Plan is a living document which is intended to be used as a management and decision-making tool, to guide resource allocation, and to keep the organization focused on established priorities. The Plan incorporates regular monitoring at the staff and board levels throughout the five-year implementation phase, including the collection and analysis of data to measure progress toward achievement of the Foundation's goals. Action plans will be updated annually for the duration of the plan, taking into consideration any significant changes that occur in the community.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The contextual scan phase of the planning process shed light on several important and inter-related community themes. These include the condition of Virginia's neighborhoods, fear of rising crime, economic opportunity, and the need for local leadership and collaboration.

Focus group participants expressed concerns about both the physical and social deterioration of Virginia's neighborhoods. Examples given of physical decline include poor community aesthetics, blighted residences and businesses, and absentee property owners. Given that over two-thirds of homes in Virginia were built before 1960, many older properties have not been adequately maintained. The lack of available, quality housing for all income levels was also noted. Census data confirmed the City's tight housing market with extremely low vacancy rates for both homeownership and rental opportunities. The data also showed that Virginia has a disproportionately high amount of rental property. Much of this is still not affordable to its occupants however, with over half of renters spending above HUD's affordability guideline to cover their monthly rent.

Neighborhood decline was also described in human terms. Examples cited include that neighbors don't know one another, isolation and disconnection of different groups (youth, seniors, communities of color), and community pride that has gone dormant. There is also a perception of high crime rates and focus group members reported not feeling the same level of safety in the community as they had in the past.

The need for greater economic opportunity was also highlighted by the focus groups. A lack of sufficient diversification and core jobs that provide a primary household income and attract families to the area was identified. Although rates of workforce participation are very high (including the majority of all parents), Census data showed that median household income is significantly lower in Virginia than the rest of St. Louis County and the state. The data also confirmed that the poverty rate has taken a disturbing upward turn in Virginia. Unfortunately the greatest impact is falling on the youngest members of our community.

The Planning Team's task was to determine what roles the Foundation can best play in addressing these issues, and the result is outlined in the remainder of this Plan. In addition to raising funds and giving grants, community foundations can also make an impact through leadership – by facilitating collaboration, convening resources, serving as a catalyst, or leading initiatives to make the community stronger and more vibrant. Focus group participants echoed the need for such leadership locally, and the Virginia Community Foundation has re-dedicated itself to embracing this function.

Summaries from the contextual scan are included as an appendix to this document. The Foundation encourages other local entities to examine this information and consider how, given their respective missions, they can be part of resolving these pressing community needs.

VISION STATEMENT

A vision statement paints a picture of our desired future state of the community. After listening to local stakeholders, the Virginia Community Foundation has articulated the following vision toward which it is committed to helping the community achieve:

We envision Virginia as a vibrant place where people feel welcome and share a strong sense of community pride. The revitalization of our city center showcases how entrepreneurship and locally owned businesses can thrive, and features active venues for art and cultural experiences. Investment is visible in both our business districts and neighborhoods through the restoration and beautification of vintage properties, and sustainable construction of new ones. Families are drawn to Virginia as a long-term place to settle and raise their children due to our safe attractive neighborhoods, parks and recreational opportunities, strong schools, and other amenities. Public, nonprofit, and private organizations work collaboratively across sectors to achieve these improvements that matter most to the people living and working in our community.

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION

Our new mission statement describes the social purpose or “common good” that the Foundation exists to fulfill:

The Virginia Community Foundation is a catalyst for investment of charitable giving through grantmaking and leadership initiatives that strengthen and revitalize our community.

PRIORITY GOALS

Given the Foundation’s mission and current community needs, two strategic priorities have been established. These are the areas toward which the organization’s resources will be focused over the next five years. In addition, the Foundation identified an important operational goal to be addressed during the first year of this Strategic Plan.

STRATEGIC GOAL #1:

Community members and visitors experience a revitalized and beautiful city.

STRATEGIC GOAL #2:

Virginia neighborhoods are safe, affordable, and share a strong sense of community.

OPERATIONAL GOAL #3:

The Foundation will establish a long-term asset development and disbursement policy.

ANNUAL PROGRESS INDICATORS

Goal 1: Community members and visitors experience a revitalized and beautiful city.

- ❖ Number of community members participating as “Step Up” volunteers.
- ❖ Number of participants in community events celebrating each visible revitalization/beautification accomplishment.
- ❖ Total funds generated (outside and local) toward projects in each zone.
- ❖ Community surveys or focus groups to collect feedback on progress toward revitalization and beautification.

Goal 2: Virginia neighborhoods are safe, affordable, and share a strong sense of community.

- ❖ Number and % of neighborhoods that establish/activate Neighborhood Watch.
- ❖ Number of participants in National Night Out kick-off and annual events.
- ❖ Number of participants in community-wide safety forums & participant feedback evals.
- ❖ Number and % of neighborhoods holding block parties & number of participants.
- ❖ Number and % of neighborhoods participating in parade float contest.
- ❖ Number of welcome packets distributed.
- ❖ Community surveys or focus groups to collect feedback on progress toward safe neighborhoods and fostering a sense of community.

Goal 3: Long-term asset development and disbursement policy.

- ❖ Number of organizations participating in direct meetings to learn about the Foundation’s new grant priorities and guidelines.
- ❖ Number and % of grant requests that address new priority goals.
- ❖ Amount and % of grants awarded that address new priority goals.

IMPLEMENTATION MANAGEMENT ~ Using, Monitoring & Updating the Plan

Implementation Steps	Timeline
1. Present Strategic Plan to full board for adoption.	March 2015
2. Communicate adopted Plan to stakeholders and the public: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Distribute copies to stakeholders ➢ Post documents on website. ➢ Issue press release. 	April – May 2015
3. Discuss Strategic Plan progress as a regular agenda item at staff meetings.	Monthly
4. Discuss Strategic Plan progress as a regular agenda item at each board meeting.	Monthly
5. Compile progress indicator data for annual review.	October (Annually 2016 – 2019)
6. Hold annual “Strategic Plan Review” session to review implementation successes and challenges (including progress indicator data), revise strategies, develop action plans for the next year of implementation, and project budget needs.	November (Annually 2016 – 2018)
7. Approve annual budget to support the Strategic Plan.	December (Annually 2015 – 2019)
8. Report on strategic plan progress and present new action plan highlights to donors and the public.	December (Annually 2015 – 2019)
9. Complete full round of strategic planning.	Fall 2019

Appendix A:

“Year 1” Action Plans

April 1, 2015 – December 31, 2016

GOAL 1: Community members and visitors experience a revitalized and beautiful city.

Strategy A: Develop a phased plan to beautify and revitalize all areas of the city.		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
1. Participate in development of City of Virginia’s Comprehensive Plan.	Executive Director	April – December 2015
2. Gather information to educate board members on blight ordinance language, proposed rental code language, and feedback from public forums held on rental code issue.	Executive Director	May 31, 2015
3. Collaborative Task Force: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop Task Force name, statement of the group’s purpose, anticipated length of service, etc. ▪ Board members provide input on sectors and representatives to include. ▪ Invite and obtain commitment of collaborative partners to participate on the Task Force, including City and Chamber decision-makers. 	Executive Director Board President Executive Director	April 16, 2015 April 16, 2015 May 1, 2015
4. Plan development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Set a meeting schedule for the Task Force. ▪ Develop an overall plan that identifies zones of the city, an order and timeframe for addressing each zone, finalize a list of core items to be covered in each zone (i.e. signage, storefront improvements, clean-up, public art). ▪ Develop specific plan for the first zone with the input of local leaders in that area; define scope of Foundation-sponsored elements. 	Executive Director Task Force Chair (Task Force Members) Task Force Chair (Task Force & local representatives)	May 1, 2015 June 30, 2015 August 31, 2015
5. Funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research grant opportunities that match activities in the plan. ▪ Submit applications to fund specific components of first zone project. 	Executive Director Executive Director	June 30, 2015 December 31, 2015
6. Implement work plan for the first zone.	Executive Director (Task Force)	Per Task Force Plan (through December 31, 2016)
7. Public relations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a community public relations campaign around this project (“Step Up”) ▪ Promote each accomplishment by organizing a community event for people to gather, celebrate, and enjoy the visible results. 	Executive Director Executive Director	August 31, 2015 Per Task Force Plan (through December 31, 2016)

GOAL 2: Virginia neighborhoods are safe, affordable, and share a strong sense of community.

Strategy B: Organize residents through Neighborhood Watch.		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
1. Research what the Foundation has done in the past to support Neighborhood Watch.	Executive Director	April 1, 2015
2. Meet with Virginia Police Chief Benz to invite collaborative effort on Neighborhood Watch, and to determine local and national resources.	Executive Director (Kerry, Andy, Bernie)	April 1, 2015
3. Obtain reliable crime data to better understand the types, frequency, and trends in the Virginia community; share this information with the board.	Executive Director	April 30, 2015
4. Develop a specific plan to collaborate in organizing Neighborhood Watch groups in all neighborhoods.	Executive Director (Chief Benz, Kerry, Andy, Bernie)	June 1, 2015
5. Begin implementation with a National Night Out kick-off event in each neighborhood; collect names of residents interested in forming Neighborhood Watch groups.	Executive Director (VPD & retirees, Volunteers)	August 4, 2015
6. Conduct organizing and training activities in each neighborhood, per collaborative plan.	Executive Director (VPD, Volunteers)	October 31, 2015

Strategy C: Community-wide forums.		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
1. Foundation representative participate as a member of the County Attorney's local Community Crime Forum.	Executive Director	April 2015 - TBD
2. Determine community-wide forum topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research what existing programs like DARE and Safety Town are already covering. ▪ Collect topics of interest from Neighborhood Watch groups. 	Executive Director Executive Director	September 1, 2015 October 31, 2015
3. Plan and conduct 2-3 community-wide forums on personal safety topics utilizing outside presenters.	Executive Director (Collaborative partners based on topic or audience)	November 1, 2015 – June 1, 2016

Strategy D: Neighborhood block parties.		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
1. Facilitate 'get-to-know-your-neighbors' block parties in each neighborhood during the summer.	Executive Director (Community Watch group leaders)	August 31, 2016
2. Hold a community-wide National Night Out event.	Executive Director (Community Watch group leaders)	August TBD 2016

Strategy E: Neighborhood Watch contest.		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
1. Conduct a contest with prizes for the best neighborhood float in the Land of the Loon parade.	Executive Director	June 19, 2016

Strategy F: Welcome new residents to the community.		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
1. Develop a welcome packet in collaboration with the City and Chamber.	Executive Director	December 31, 2016
2. Engage neighborhood groups to distribute welcome packets to new residents.	Executive Director	December 31, 2016

GOAL 3: The Foundation will establish a long-term asset development and disbursement policy.

Strategy G: Long-term asset development policy.		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
1. Gather background information needed for policy development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assess current policy and practices regarding endowment /investment and Fund agreements, including administrative fees charged; chart elements/differences in a matrix. ▪ Research practices of other community foundations and collect sample policies (e.g. Northland, Grand Rapids Community Fnd). ▪ Research best practices and sample policies nationally from the National Standards Board and National Council on Foundations. 	Executive Director	April 1, 2015
	Executive Director	April 1, 2015
	Executive Director	April 1, 2015
2. Determine legal rules / responsibilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confirm and maintain ongoing relationship with an attorney who has specific expertise in foundation and nonprofit issues (Michael Cowles). ▪ Obtain state and/or federal legal language governing asset & disbursement policy and practice. ▪ Develop clear list of questions to be addressed in attorney's presentation and forward these in advance. ▪ Attorney present to full board on issues of legal relationship between the Foundation and component Funds. 	Executive Director	April 1, 2015
	Executive Director (Counsel)	April 1, 2015
	Asset & Disbursement Policy Cmte Chair (Executive Director)	April 1, 2015
	Executive Director (Counsel)	April 16, 2015

<p>3. Policy development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Form an ad hoc committee on Asset & Disbursement Policy comprised of board members and staff. ▪ Develop a draft policy, including any uniform requirements for component Funds (e.g. bylaws, grant guidelines) and admin fees. ▪ Present draft policy to full board for discussion and adoption or revision. ▪ Develop procedures for implementation of adopted policy, as needed. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Board President</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Asset & Disbursement Policy Cmte Chair</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Asset & Disbursement Policy Cmte Chair</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Asset & Disbursement Policy Cmte Chair</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">February 25, 2015</p> <p style="text-align: center;">June 1, 2015</p> <p style="text-align: center;">June 18, 2015</p> <p style="text-align: center;">July 16, 2015</p>
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<u>Strategy H: Disbursement / grantmaking policy.</u>		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
<p>1. Gather background information needed for policy development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assess current policy and practice for the Foundation and each component Fund; chart in a matrix. ▪ Research local and national best practices and gather sample policies. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">April 1, 2015</p> <p style="text-align: center;">April 1, 2015</p>
<p>2. Policy development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a draft policy, including what organizations are eligible to apply. ▪ Present draft policy to full board for discussion and adoption or revision. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Asset & Disbursement Policy Cmte Chair</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Asset & Disbursement Policy Cmte Chair</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">August 12, 2015</p> <p style="text-align: center;">August 20, 2015</p>

<u>Strategy I: Rolling out new policies.</u>		
ACTION STEPS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE
<p>1. Hold meetings with directors of component Funds to explain new policies.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">October 1, 2015</p>
<p>2. Post new policies on the Foundation website.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">October 1, 2015</p>
<p>3. Develop new Foundation grant guidance document for applicants.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">October 1, 2015</p>
<p>4. Public relations activities to raise awareness of new grantmaking priorities and procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop “2-minute elevator message” for all board and staff to devote to memory; utilize at local functions. ▪ Obtain list of nonprofits in the Foundation’s target area. ▪ Targeted mailing to nonprofits on grant program with invitation to coffee ‘an presentations. ▪ Hold coffee ‘an sessions. ▪ Submit press release/work with local media to get story coverage on grant program. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Fund Development Committee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Executive Director</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">October 1, 2015</p>

Appendix B:

Contextual Scan Documents

Virginia Community Profile: Social & Economic Indicators (December 2014)

The City of Virginia has experienced a 7.4% decrease in population since 1990. The key indicators below give a picture of current community demographics (*data taken from the U.S. Census Bureau unless otherwise noted*).

Total Population

Time of Count	Number of Residents	Change from Previous Period
1990 Census	9,410	
2000 Census	9,157	- 253
2010 Census	8,712	- 445

Race

The community is becoming more racially diverse. Although the vast majority (92%) of residents are Caucasian, the 2010 Census counted 753 persons of color living in Virginia - a 64% increase from the previous Census. By far the most prevalent minority heritage is American Indian (54%) followed by Black (31%). In addition, 128 individuals across all races identified themselves as Hispanic – a 75% increase from 2000. This greater diversity is also associated with youth. Of the student population in Virginia’s public schools, 17% are children of color.

Age

Contrary to popular perception, the local senior population has actually decreased slightly since the 2000 Census. According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center, overall population in St. Louis County is projected to increase slightly (+2%) over the next ten years. This growth will occur at both ends of the age spectrum with children and seniors each accounting for about one-quarter of the total population by 2025. Working age adults make up the group expected to decline during this time.

Population by Age Group

Age Group	Number of Residents	Percentage of Total Population
Children 0 – 17	1,649	19 %
Adults 18 – 64	5,144	59 %
Seniors 65 +	1,919	22 %

Education

In 2013, the Virginia Public School District’s on-time graduation rate was 88.1% [*Source: Minnesota Department of Education*]. Only 17% of the city’s adult population (age 25 and over) has obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher education – significantly lower than the state’s overall rate of 33%.

Employment, Income & Poverty

Unemployment has been declining at all levels – national to local – since 2009. Recent unemployment figures indicate that Virginia has benefitted from this overall economic upturn. For October 2014, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development reported unemployment at 4% in Virginia, 3.8% in St. Louis County, and 3.9% for the state overall. In the majority of families with children, all parents are in the paid labor force – 81% of families with children ages 6-17, and 65% of those with children under age 6.

Despite these high rates of workforce participation, Virginia area residents have lower than average incomes. In 2013, the city's median household income of \$32,850 was 30% (or \$13,667) below the county average, and 45% (or \$26,986) below the state average. Poverty has also climbed dramatically in the past 15 years, from an overall rate of 16% in 2000 to 24% in 2013. As shown in the table below, these rates are far higher than the rest of the county and state. In addition, there is significant variation between age groups, with the greatest impact of poverty falling on the youngest members of the community.

Poverty Rates by Age

Location	Children 0-5	Children 5-17	Adults 18-64	Seniors 65+
City of Virginia	45 %	27 %	26 %	10 %
St. Louis County	24 %	18 %	17 %	8 %
Minnesota	17 %	13 %	11 %	8 %

Housing

There are an estimated 4,182 occupied housing units in the City of Virginia. Of those, 59% are occupied by homeowners and 41% are occupied by renters. The city's housing market is very tight. Estimates of available homes for sale in 2013 consisted of just 5.1% of the total owner-occupied housing stock. Available rental units are even scarcer, with a vacancy rate of just 1.6%.

These residential properties are also quite old – more than two-thirds (67%) of homes in Virginia were built before 1960. In 2013, the median value of owner-occupied housing was \$87,300.

Approximately half of the city's homeowners have a mortgage. For one in every four of those homeowners (26%), that mortgage payment consumes more than 30% of their monthly income. The median mortgage payment is \$904 per month. Housing costs are an even greater economic strain on renters. Although the median rent of \$503 is considerably lower than the average mortgage payment, more than half of renters (56%) spend in excess of 30% of their monthly income on rent.

Community Focus Groups – SUMMARY of Responses Virginia Community Foundation (December 2014)

A total of 33 community leaders participated in two focus groups as part of the Foundation’s strategic planning contextual scan process. A broad cross-section was represented including local business, financial institutions, municipal services, youth and senior services, education (early childhood – post-secondary), health care, elected officials, legal services, the arts, and the faith community. In addition, participants indicated volunteerism in a wide range of community organizations and events.

ELEMENTS OF A COMMUNITY VISION

Participants first imagined a time in the future when the community has achieved its full potential and everyone is proud to call it home. They then answered the question: *What does that success look like, and for whom?*

Who	Result
Tourists	Pleasant aesthetics and fun things to do make Virginia a desirable destination that draws visitors in.
Everyone	The local economy is diversified (retail, manufacturing, industry) and benefits from technology infrastructure.
Young adults	Experience an environment where new businesses can succeed and economic diversity is supported.
Entrepreneurs	Small businesses with a cultural element thrive (“crafty shops”).
Everyone	A revitalized main street and town center (lakes area) is a hub of activity.
Downtown businesses	Downtown is a vibrant place where people shop frequently and new businesses want to locate.
Residents	People are proud to shop locally and support local businesses.
All residents	Incentives have led to residential and downtown blight being cleaned up and properties are occupied.
Young professionals / downsizers / everyone	Affordable, nicer housing is available including condominiums. Funky downtown lofts are situated above the renewed space occupied by street-level businesses.
Homeowners, renters, business owners	Residential and commercial buildings are energy efficient which results in lower utility costs.
Residents (professionals & retirees)	Higher end rental and condominium housing is available that is not exclusively for seniors.
Residents	The city’s neighborhoods are well kept and safe.
Families	Neighborhood environments are conducive to families, safe, and offer good housing.
Recruited professionals & spouses / Everyone	The community is rich in cultural amenities that draw people here and retain them (nice neighborhoods, good schools, aesthetics).
Residents	The community strongly supports the arts and a venue to showcase and experience them (e.g. Reif Center model).

Children	Can walk anywhere in town without parents having to worry.
American Indian and other communities of color	The community is characterized by a healthy, supportive environment that is inclusive of all cultures.
Everyone / Newcomers	The community feels welcoming and inclusive.
Everyone	New possibilities are embraced as the community mindset looks to the future rather than focusing on the past.
All residents	A collaborative, centralized source of news about what is going on in the community is available through both technology-based and old school methods.
Nonprofits	There is good networking and communication between organizations and silos are eliminated.
All residents	Municipal government is run more efficiently and effectively, resulting in the provision of more core services at a lower cost.
Everyone	There is strong public support for the local schools.
Families & children	Enough affordable childcare options are available to meet the need.
Young families	There is enough quality childcare available to meet the need.
Families with young children	Move their bodies in an indoor play park during the cold winter months.
Teens	Teens are healthy and happy in a safe environment where they feel real involvement in the community.
Young adults	Can pursue expanded post-secondary programs right here; those who go away to college can return to good job opportunities in our community.
Young adults	Know how to budget and save from early on, and are not afraid to ask questions/build their financial literacy.
Seniors	A new model is available where seniors are cared for in their own homes and can be monitored with smart technology.
Area residents	Effective medical services are available locally so people do not have to travel to get care.

STATE OF THE COMMUNITY TODAY

Considering the community's current situation, participants were asked to identify: 1) conditions that could help the community move toward the vision outlined above (strengths & opportunities), and 2) conditions that might impede progress toward that vision (weaknesses & threats).

Strengths/Opportunities

- + People know each other.
- + Government officials are "out and about" in the community – visible.
- + Strong sense of community.
- + People want to help the community/volunteer.

- + Core group of people with great pride/passion for the community.
- + Many active service organizations that are doing good work, and businesses that allow employees to volunteer for community projects.
- + Churches that care for all ages.
- + Strong sense of patriotism/value on freedom and support for military/vets.
- + Community celebrations like Land of the Loon.
- + Located on a major highway.
- + Location.
- + Green space including parks and two lakes.
- + Beautiful setting and recreation opportunities.
- + Public land access nearby such as Superior National Forest.
- + Close to Tribal Nations which have cultural and historic value.
- + Public art including sculptures and murals.
- + The Foundation's mural projects.
- + Beautiful architecture of old buildings.
- + Beautiful downtown under the surface – potential for ambience that people like.
- + Potential of the Lyric Center as a downtown destination.
- + Renewal/development around the lakes and bike path completion.
- + Many good projects are underway and we just need to support them.
- + Do have economic opportunities and some recent new businesses.
- + The Shop.
- + Commerce center for the quad-cities and outlying area; 30,000 cars enter Virginia daily.
- + Highway 53 relocation is an opportunity for business and residential development along the pit.
- + Many facilities (tennis courts, Miners, golf course, music and theater performances).
- + Emergency services.
- + Medical hub for the area.
- + County services hub.
- + Public library.
- + Community-based YMCA.
- + The Community Foundation is an asset.
- + Strong community financial institutions to support businesses with capital.
- + Strong schools, athletics, and clubs.
- + Great education (schools and college).

Weaknesses/Threats

- Feeling of hopelessness and lack of community pride.
- Local media sometimes gives a negative portrayal of what is going on in our community.
- Negative image of the community externally (frozen tundra, only mining, prevalence of bars).
- Lack of housing, including condominiums and townhouses.
- Lack of quality, safe rental property; nearly half of the city's housing stock is rental but almost no vacancy.
- Slumlord practices – substandard housing with high rents.

- Absentee building owners.
- Blight.
- Market value does not match cost to bring buildings up to code.
- Steam heat system is expensive for homeowners to operate, lowers market value, and makes these homes more difficult to sell.
- Utility costs.
- Poor condition of roads - giant potholes.
- Lack of strong core jobs (household income #1); and difficulty filling available service jobs which pay lower wages (supplemental-level wages).
- Lack of variety in jobs.
- High rates of poverty and reliance on social welfare programs.
- Lack of childcare.
- Overall transportation issues, including that the city is not very walkable/bikeable (crime, snow, crumbling sidewalks).
- Crime rate (#1 concern of businesses).
- High crime rate.
- The Smokeshop.
- Isolationism of different groups (youth, seniors, communities of color, 4 cities each with separate systems).
- Aging population.
- Challenge of communicating between the elder population and the younger generation.
- Labor union resistance to allowing volunteerism as a way to get things done in the community.
- Lack of arts and cultural events.
- Lack of restaurant variety.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

Given where we are today, and where we want to go, participants responded to the question: *What needs to be done to make progress toward the vision?*

- Develop a long-range plan (new City Comprehensive Plan) with participation of the broader community in the process, and dissemination of the final plan to the public.
- Provide leadership in the formation of “committees/task forces” to work on addressing the community’s top issues.
- Identify visionaries (including young people) and cultivate “thinking outside the box”.
- Develop more effective, two-way channels of communication between the public and city officials.
- Connect the senior population to be part of moving the community forward rather than resisting it; tap their skills in meaningful ways.
- Create a way to mobilize willing volunteers – share a vision and give them specific action to take working collaboratively. Make sure there is a plan to follow up after projects are completed to ensure the results are maintained.
- Develop an incubator program and facilitate investment in downtown buildings (e.g. Duluth model).
- Support initiatives that help people gain skills that will move them out of poverty.
- Develop better ways to communicate where resources can be found.
- Public transportation (inter- and intra-city) to get young and low-income residents to all the opportunities and activities available in the community.

- Attack the crime rate – collaborate with law enforcement to build Neighborhood Watch.
- Establish a rental code in Virginia that requires landlords to take responsibility for what happens on their property and that stabilizes neighborhoods.
- Increase the availability of drug prevention and treatment services.
- Establish a regional EMS system that includes financial participation of other communities and can respond in a timely manner.

FOUNDATION ROLES

Finally, participants were asked to provide input on what the Foundation can do to make a difference by answering: *What roles should the Foundation play in addressing these community needs?*

- ❖ Make sure the Foundation and its work are inclusive of the whole community.
- ❖ Include the greater Virginia area (school district territory).
- ❖ Help to prioritize our community's needs – sponsor processes such as this one.
- ❖ Be a catalyst for leadership development across the community – sponsor local efforts.
- ❖ Create excitement – help release dormant community pride.
- ❖ Be a catalyst for strengthening and expanding neighborhood watch initiatives.
- ❖ Sponsor neighborhood block parties for people to gather and get to know each other.
- ❖ Organize a couple of summer weekends when volunteers work together Habitat-style making needed improvements to properties in the community (e.g. house painting); possible business donation of materials.
- ❖ Sponsor a bond/insurance to cover risk of landlords renting to independent teens in need of housing.
- ❖ Dedicate a fund to specifically address blight reduction, revitalization, beautification; hold a contest to select businesses and residences showing the greatest improvement (prize = property tax relief?).
- ❖ Improve aesthetics of entrances to the city.
- ❖ Create events that involve the community (e.g. event at the park, Turn on Your Lights).
- ❖ Select a focus project/initiative that will have a visible result to rally people and increase the Foundation's presence in the community.
- ❖ Organize social events that are expanded to be more inclusive of the whole community.
- ❖ Organize events for teens.
- ❖ Create a central, simple, technology-based focal point for residents and visitors to find out what is going on in the community.
- ❖ Create a database of community offerings to promote the city (county covers services; chamber covers businesses; events/activities is piecemeal).
- ❖ Be a hub for matching volunteers with organizations.
- ❖ Collaborate with other entities in the community (e.g. Chamber).
- ❖ Be a resource to connect entities and promote collaboration toward a common goal.
- ❖ Be a resource to nonprofit organizations (re: growth, how to get a project going, etc.).
- ❖ Strengthen ability to provide assistance, referral, and connection to help organizations find alternative resources if their request cannot be fulfilled by the Foundation.
- ❖ Increase support of the arts.
- ❖ Increase support of projects that address the needs of children, especially the large number who live in poverty.
- ❖ Encourage the hospital to add services that will keep people in the community.
- ❖ Work with IRRRB ReGen project to learn what the community can do to attract and keep young people.
- ❖ Provide a variety of ways for people to donate money.